






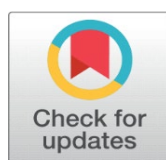
THE AFTERMATHS OF UNMANAGED TEACHER-TEACHER PROFESSIONAL RELATIONS IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE TAMALE EDUCATION METROPOLIS, GHANA

Mohammed, I  , Abdulai, N  , Suhiyini, B. H. Adam 

¹ Head of Department of Business Education, Faculty of Education, University for Development Studies, P. O. Box TL 1350, Tamale, Ghana-Africa, Ghana

² Lecturer, Center for Educational Innovation and Leadership, Faculty of Education, University for Development Studies, P. O. Box TL 1350, Tamale, Ghana-Africa, Ghana

³ Teacher, UDS Basic School, Faculty of Education, University for Development Studies, P. O. Box TL 1350, Tamale, Ghana-Africa, Ghana



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Corresponding Author

Mohammed, I, imohammed@uds.edu.gh

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ABSTRACT

The study adopted the qualitative research approach to understand the lived experiences of teachers with regard to the aftermaths of unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations in senior high schools in the Tamale Education Metropolis. A purposive sampling technique was used to select fifteen (15) secondary school teachers. Face-to-face in-depth individual interviews were conducted. Data were collected through the use of the Pen-and-Paper Personal method. Thematic analytical method was used to analyse collected data. Findings were that the aftermaths of unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations in schools include teacher stress and burnout, teacher inadequate belongingness and motivation, chaos and conflict, inadequate team spirit and collaboration among teachers, uncooperative teacher behaviours and inadequate knowledge and information sharing among teachers. Recommendations made were that school management in meetings should create rooms where there is open communication and adequate interactions among all teachers and where all teachers are encouraged to develop strong love, care and concern for the well-being and happiness of colleague teachers. The school management should work with the Ghana Education Service to train and equip all teachers on strategies to deal and cope with stress as a result of poor teacher-teacher relations. Team-building exercises should be organized by school management where experts in Team Building are invited to educate and instill in all teachers the need for them to have a high level of team spirit.

Keywords: Relations, Conflict, Stress



1. INTRODUCTION

Positive Teacher-teacher relations in schools have recently been placed as an important requirement for the achievement of a conducive school environment, the realisation of collegial working relations and the achievement of effective teaching and learning [Amit-Kumar \(2014\)](#), [Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe \(2019\)](#). In schools, the interactions among teachers and between teachers and their managers are inevitable components [Abe & Mason \(2016\)](#), this is because the school environment brings teachers and their managers who share similar goals and objectives to socially interact in the quest of achieving effective teaching and learning [Abe & Mason \(2016\)](#), [Cortina & Magley \(2003\)](#).

Teacher-teacher relations refer to a strong professional association that exists among individual teachers on a daily basis and who work together in the same school or office towards achieving similar goals [Asongo et al. \(2018\)](#). It focuses on the management of group relations and teacher-teacher relations in schools [Prachi \(2015\)](#), [Stoetzer \(2010\)](#). Teacher-teacher professional relations are the day-to-day professional interactions among teachers which are a natural part of the schoolworking life as they produce pleasant and creative moments but are sometimes sources of misunderstanding [De Dreu et al. \(2003\)](#).

It is a belief that teacher-teacher professional relations are important elements to the functioning of a school system, as such, managing these interactions and relations has attracted the attention of school managers, teachers and human resource specialists [Amit-Kumar \(2014\)](#), [Abe & Mason \(2016\)](#). Schools that are able to establish strong principles and professional ethics for the realisation of strong and effective teacher-teacher relations have earned themselves good names such as functional schools, effective schools and schools as learning organisation [Naumovski et al. \(2016\)](#).

In Nigeria, [Obakpolo \(2015\)](#) states that effective teaching and learning are heavily dependent on the kinds of professional relations that exist among teachers. The effects of teacher-teacher professional relations affect everyone in the school system [Bowling & Beehr \(2006\)](#). Through positive professional relations in schools, teachers find a social purpose to belong and to be accepted [Cortina & Magley \(2003\)](#). This is why [Amstrong \(2009\)](#) in the United States of America, states that a school social system where teachers feel belong and are accepted always paves the way for teacher empowerment and information and knowledge sharing among themselves.

With reference to the relations that exist among teachers in schools, [Srivalli & Vijayalakshmi \(2015\)](#) highlight that positive teacher-teacher professional relations in schools significantly impact greatly on their job satisfaction and performance. Also, [Nigari & Agusioma \(2013\)](#) mentioned that positive teacher-teacher professional relation is a key factor in enhancing teachers' job satisfaction, performance and total school functionality. Furthermore, positive interpersonal relations among teachers do contribute to their cooperation, job satisfaction, performance and effective teaching and learning [Heaphy & Dutton \(2008\)](#).

Based on this backdrop, it is important to state that there are studies on interpersonal relationships in industries, organisations and schools in the international world, Africa and Ghana, but there has never been a study on the aftermaths of unmanaged teacher-teacher relations in senior high schools in the

Tamale Metropolis, Ghana. Therefore, this paper examines the aftermaths of unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations in senior high schools in the Tamale Education Metropolis.

Regardless of the huge benefits accrued to teachers practicing and embracing positive professional relations among themselves, senior high school teachers in the Tamale Education Metropolis are otherwise adamant about practicing and encouraging positive teacher-teacher professional relations among themselves. As such, there are signs of disunity among the teachers, insubordination and inadequate concern for colleague teachers' well-being and professional growth. Therefore, this study was designed to look at the aftermaths of unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations in senior high schools in the Tamale Education Metropolis.

This paper is organized as follows: Section one deals with the theoretical framework. Section two discusses the effects and consequences of poor teacher-teacher professional relations. The research method and design employed are presented in section three while the findings of the study and discussions of the findings are presented in section four. The last section comprises conclusions and recommendations.

1.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by Social Exchange Theory (SET) proposed by George Casper Homans in the year 1958 as a Behavioural Sociologist [Cherry \(2023\)](#). The Social Exchange Theory helps educational managers and experts to understand the behaviours in terms of the quality and kinds of professional interactions that exist among teachers in schools [Ahmad et al. \(2023\)](#), [Cropanzano & Mitchell \(2005\)](#). The theory also explains that teachers only engage in professional interactions where they can receive huge rewards and minimize the cost associated with the interactions [Blackbyrn \(2023\)](#).

Social exchange theory regards the professional behaviours of teachers as citizens in schools [Elstad et al. \(2011\)](#), that these relationships should not be one-sided but reciprocity in the exchange of information, knowledge and resources [Cropanzano et al. \(2017\)](#). Teachers in professional relations in schools are obliged to return or reciprocate favours gained or received from a colleague teacher [Aselage & Eisenberger \(2003\)](#). They are expected to be open and supportive to colleague teachers in carrying out their daily tasks [Marin & Miller \(2013\)](#) and they have to take the benefits of their interactions and relations with colleagues and subtract the cost in order to determine the worthiness of their relations [Cherry \(2023\)](#).

1.1.1. THE EFFECTS OF POOR TEACHER-TEACHER PROFESSIONAL RELATIONS

It is important to highlight that one of the greatest obstacles to schools attaining the status of learning organizations and to ensuring effective teaching and learning is the absence of effective teacher-teacher professional relations [Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe \(2019\)](#). In the United States of America, [Wallace et al. \(2009\)](#) revealed in a study conducted at the Louisiana Office of Motor Vehicles that negative employee-employee relations constitute a stressor among employees. [Lim & Cortina \(2005\)](#), [Wallace et al. \(2009\)](#), [Bowling & Beehr \(2006\)](#), [Cortina & Magley \(2003\)](#) have further explained that workplace stress significantly contributes to employee poor job performance and employee turnover.

Still in the United States of America, [Cynkar \(2007\)](#), [Lim & Cortina \(2005\)](#), on workplace health note that unhealthful employee interpersonal relations which as a result of stress have financial implications for schools. According to [Lim & Cortina \(2005\)](#), workplace poor interpersonal relations have to be managed to avoid

employee depression, reduction in quality of life, physical restlessness and anxiety. Also, [Heaphy & Dutton \(2008\)](#) contend that negative interactions among teachers do affect their health and physiological resourcefulness.

In Nigeria, [Asongo et al. \(2018\)](#) claimed that low-performance levels and job dissatisfaction of employees are attributed to the existence of poor interpersonal relations in organisations. Again, in Nigeria, a study by [Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe \(2019\)](#) in one of the banks in Port Harcourt revealed how employees were dissatisfied because of poor workplace interpersonal relationships among themselves. In the United States of America, [Lim & Cortina \(2005\)](#) highlight that workplace poor interpersonal relations have to be managed to avoid impaired employee performance. In Poland, [Lackowski et al. \(2018\)](#) are of the view that low level of relations of among teachers do contribute to low performance and job satisfaction.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the qualitative research tradition to understand the lived experiences of teachers with regard to the aftermaths of unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations in senior high schools in the Tamale Education Metropolis [Mohammed et al. \(2023\)](#). The study selected fifteen (15) secondary school teachers through the use of a purposive sampling technique. The sampling technique was used with the aim of identifying the cases and individual teachers best suited to answering the research question [Nikolopoulou \(2022\)](#). To gain informed consent, participants were empowered through the provision of essential information about the study so they could make rational and informed decisions to either participate or not participate [Kadam \(2017\)](#).

Face-to-face in-depth individual interviews were conducted [Neuman \(2006\)](#) where data were collected through the use of the Pen-and-Paper Personal method. To ensure the collection of rich information and the free expression of teachers and school heads, the study used open-ended questions [McMillan & Schumacher \(2006\)](#). Data were analysed using a thematic analytical method [Caulfield \(2022\)](#).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the study are: (i) stress and burnout (ii) inadequate belongingness and demotivation (iii) chaos and conflict (iv) inadequate team spirit and collaboration (v) uncooperative behaviours and (vi) inadequate knowledge sharing. These findings are discussed below:

3.1. STRESS AND BURNOUT

It was found in the study that poor teacher-teacher professional relations in schools do contribute to teacher stress and burnout because some of the teachers do not care for their colleagues' well-being as such, teachers feel lonely, dejected and are not able to share their personal and professional challenges with colleagues. Some words from a teacher were: *In schools where teachers do not have feelings for each other well-being and happiness can lead to their stress, boredom, and lack of sound mind to teach.* This is why [Lim & Cortina \(2005\)](#) warn that poor teacher-teacher professional relations can lead to the decline of teachers' total well-being. A head teacher mentioned that: *A teacher who is not related well with other teachers in school can feel lonely, dejected and that causes him or her to feel stress and burnout.* In support of the above findings, in the United States of America, [Wallace et al.](#)

(2009) revealed that poor workplace relations among employees can cause stress and can result in employee absenteeism and poor performance.

It was also revealed that poor teacher-teacher professional relations in schools can breed grounds for teachers' psychological issues, stress, burnout, and boredom. A school head said the following: *Poor teacher relations can cause stress and burnout on individual teachers.* Another teacher laments that: *A Teacher can develop psychological issues if he or she is not in good talks with other teachers.* To corroborate these findings, Prachi (2015) laments that teachers who work in isolation are more prone to stress and anxiety than those who build good interpersonal relations with colleagues.

3.2. INADEQUATE BELONGINGNESS AND MOTIVATION

The study revealed that unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations in schools can make teachers feel unhappy, demotivated and rejected in a school system. It was uncovered that teachers who lack belongingness among fellow teachers do not feel welcome and motivated to ensure effective teaching and learning. What a school head was: *You know very well that as humans we are supposed to feel happy and motivated by people around us, I will feel rejected when other teachers in a school avoid me or do not relate well with me because of some misunderstanding.* To collaborate on the above findings, Bowling & Beehr (2006), Cortina & Magley (2003) have explained that teachers who are socially excluded and rejected in a school environment always suffer from physical and mental health. Again, Bjorklund Jr & Daly (2021), Walton and Brady (2017) have explained that the need for teachers to belong and to have positive relations among themselves is a fundamental human motivation.

It was also found that the dangers of poor teacher-teacher professional relations in schools include teachers' lack of peace of mind, poor self-confidence and lack of commitment toward effective teaching and learning. A teacher expressed that: *Poor teacher relations in schools will always lead to a lack of peace of mind, demotivation and apathy among teachers and will slow down teachers' effectiveness in classroom delivery.* Another teacher claimed that: *Poor teacher-teacher relations can lead to teachers losing their levels of motivation, feeling rejected and lacking confidence in carrying out school activities.* In support of the above findings, Theisen (2021) contends that teachers who lack belongingness and good interpersonal relations among their colleagues are faced with depression, anxiety and loss of hope, while Kelly-Ann et al. (2021) are of the view that teachers who lack belongingness and motivation in schools are socially isolated, ostracised and rejected.

3.3. CHAOS AND CONFLICT

The study revealed that a lack of good teacher-teacher professional relations can contribute to chaos, misunderstanding and conflict among teachers. Another teacher claims that: *Negative interpersonal relations among teachers do lead to fights, chaos and unnecessary rivalry among teachers.* To confirm these findings Malikeh & Elham (2013) claim though teachers do share common goals of ensuring effective teaching and learning as well as achieving higher educational outcomes, conflict among them is certain to happen.

It was revealed that unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations may lead to power struggles among teachers and may lead to unnecessary rivalry and hostility among teachers. Feelings expressed by a teacher were: *Because of these poor relations, we sometimes have to deal with misunderstanding and conflict issues*

among the teachers in this school. [Muthoka \(2017\)](#) is of the view that poor teacher-teacher relations have the potency to create tension, conflict and chaos thus, having an influence on teachers' performance. A school head lamented in the following ways: *A situation where my teachers are not in good relations with each other can lead to a hostile school environment and can cause misunderstanding, ineffective teaching and sometimes power struggle among them.* To confirm these findings, [Prachi \(2015\)](#) states that poor interpersonal personal relationships in schools breed ground for misunderstanding, conflict, confusion and chaos. While [Arafat et al. \(2018\)](#) in Egypt opined that conflict as a result of poor interpersonal relations among employees decreases job satisfaction levels in schools.

3.4. INADEQUATE TEAM SPIRIT AND COLLABORATION

It was uncovered that a weak team spirit, weak solidarity, inadequate support, weak collaboration and lack of trust among teachers in a school environment where there are poor teacher-teacher professional relations. It was revealed that teachers will not have the desire and zeal to assist each other and to team up in carrying out school activities if there are inadequate relations among themselves. A head teacher's views were that: *Poor teacher-teacher relations can create bad blood between teachers which in turn will eliminate any iota of solidarity, support and care that might have existed previously.* Views from a teacher were: *There will be a weaker team spirit in a school where teachers show signs of poor relations with each other, and there will be poor team attitudes and disunity (unity they say is strength). So the teachers should build good professional relations among themselves.* To concur with these findings, [Nwinyokpugi & Omunakwe \(2019\)](#) explained that poor teacher-teacher relations will adversely affect the team spirit among them. Another teacher lamented that: *Negative relations among teachers in schools can contribute to a lack of trust and can cause division and a weak team spirit.* This is why [Obakpolo \(2015\)](#) in Nigeria claimed that poor interpersonal relations at the workplace can lead to a weaker team spirit, trust and respect among employees.

The study again revealed that a school environment characterized by poor teacher-teacher professional relations is bound to suffer from poor teacher collaboration in achieving effective teaching and learning, the implementation of projects and the desire from all teachers to participate in school professional learning communities. What a teacher said was that: *Poor relations lead to a lack of cooperation and collaboration in achieving school goals.* [Lane \(2023\)](#) concurs with these findings by stating that poor teacher-teacher professional relations can result in poor teamwork, mutual respect, honesty, and lack of commitment to achieving team goals. A head teacher lamented that: *Poor teacher-teacher relations would greatly make the realization of the school's goals highly impossible.* Views from a teacher were: *A school where teachers show signs of poor relations with each other will lead to poor professional learning community implementation in schools.* In relation to these findings [Padmasiri \(2018\)](#) in Sri Lanka states that poor teacher-teacher relations can result in poor collaboration and weak team spirit in schools.

3.5. UNCOOPERATIVE BEHAVIOURS

The study found teachers' uncooperative behaviours in the forms of disjointed members, ill-disciplined, poor co-existence and insubordination to be a result of poor teacher-teacher professional relations in schools. It was also revealed that poor teacher-teacher professional relations can unduly put a daunting task on management where they spend lots of time fixing disjointed staff and trying to

ensure peaceful co-existence among teachers. A teacher claimed that: *A school with unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations will be like a disjointed unit in which management will spend lots of time trying to fix problems and disagreements among teachers who do not work towards achieving school goals.* Voices from a teacher were: *poor teacher-teacher relations affect discipline in the school. Management will find it difficult to maintain discipline as they might not have the support of some teachers.* This is why Lawrence (2019) and Ahmed (2012) reiterate the need for the management of teacher-teacher relations in schools so as to avoid teacher-negative behaviours which include a lack of cooperation, criticism, insubordination and lack of general discipline.

The study revealed that unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations can result in teachers' uncooperating, disunity, lack of interest in participatory and collaborative decision-making processes and ultimately a collapse in school effectiveness. A teacher was heard expressing herself in the following ways: *When teachers practice poor relations with each other, the school head will surely have a difficult task in dealing with staff disunity and uncooperative behaviours.* A school head explained that: *If our schools experienced such poor relations it would lead to poor teacher-manager relationships which would finally collapse the effectiveness of school administration.* To confirm these findings, Randolfi (1996), Ahmed (2012) have stated that the organizational effects of poor teacher-teacher relations include reductions in total school effectiveness, low teacher productivity, low morale, poor work relations and poor organisational climate. Maslack (1997), LaMarco (2019) further elaborate that poor teacher-teacher relations in schools do lead to poor cooperation, disunity, conflict and organizational politics.

3.6. INADEQUATE KNOWLEDGE SHARING

The study found unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations in schools to have impacted negatively on the need for teachers to share knowledge and best practices to enhance their practices. As a result of poor interpersonal relations among teachers, there are tendencies where certain teachers feel reluctant to seek pedagogy assistance and information from colleague teachers to improve teaching and learning. A teacher had the following to say: *Teachers are not able to seek assistance from colleagues in terms of pedagogy and content knowledge when there are no good relations among them.* Nadeem et al. (2011) Corroborate this finding by stating that one of the factors that affects teachers' performance is poor teacher working relations with colleague teachers. This is why Hans et al. (2020). claimed that poor teacher-teacher professional relations impact negatively on teachers sharing of information, knowledge and achievement of school goals.

It was also found that as a result of poor teacher-teacher professional relations, teachers in a given department are held back in terms of the sharing of knowledge and best practices. Another teacher claimed that: *Poor teacher-teacher relations mean colleague teachers are not able to depend on each other in times of knowledge sharing with regards to academic-related activities.* To concur with these findings, Wang & Chang (2015), Yang & Wu (2008) mentioned that school factors such as poor interpersonal relations has resulted in school managers' difficulties in facilitating effective interpersonal knowledge and information sharing and transfers. A school head lamented that: *If such exists in a school, teaching and learning would surely be badly affected for no co-teacher would be willing to help another whenever the need be. The school, like any other organization needs people to work together towards a common goal. Poor teacher-teacher relations would therefore make the attainment of set goals impossible.* To prevent this undesirable

behaviour in schools, [Merminod et al. \(2012\)](#) mentioned that effective mechanisms should be put in place to help prevent interpersonal conflicts that hinder individuals from sharing information and knowledge. [Heaphy & Dutton \(2008\)](#) contend that a high level of teacher-teacher relations positively contributes to knowledge sharing among teachers.

4. CONCLUSION

Poor and unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations in schools have devastating effects on the collegial treatment teachers expect to receive from one another as professional teachers. Unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations have led to teachers experiencing some levels of stress, burnout, loneliness, isolation, alienation and being detached from one another in the course of their professional engagements. Concerns over teachers' lived experiences of inadequate belongingness and lack of motivation in schools have all been attributed to unmanaged poor teacher-teacher professional relations. Chaos, conflict, misunderstanding, power struggles and unnecessary rivalry among teachers are the products of poor teacher-teacher professional relations which on a daily basis directly affect the culture of teaching and learning in schools.

It is important to mention that the phenomena of inadequate team spirit and lack of collaboration by individual teachers in schools can be attributed to the kind of professional relations that exist among teachers, as such, have to be managed to get the best out of all teachers. Uncooperative behaviours of individual teachers and their tendency not to share knowledge and information among themselves can be attribute to the existence of poor and unmanaged teacher-teacher professional relations in school environments. These poor teacher-teacher professional relations that exist in schools have to be managed so as to achieve the features and characteristics of schools as learning organizations.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

School management in their staff meetings should create rooms for open communication and adequate interactions among all teachers so as to achieve sound and healthy interpersonal relations. School management should also create rooms for teachers to discuss issues that affect their professional relations and the culture of teaching and learning. All discussions and contributions in meetings should be fairly handled.

The school managements should work with the Ghana Education Service and Counselling Agencies to train and equip all teachers on strategies to cope with stress and burnout as a result of poor professional relations at the workplace. Schools should institute some kind of counselling services to listen and support all teachers who might be going through stressful situations due to poor relations at the workplace. School managers should instruct all their Heads of Departments to always create opportunities for all teachers to socialize and to seek emotional support from colleague teachers.

To enhance the level of teachers' motivation and belongingness through adequate teacher-teacher professional relations in schools, school managers should create an environment of openness and friendship where teachers will express concerns, strong love and care for the well-being and happiness of colleague teachers. School management should work with motivational speakers to educate teachers on the need to treat each other well and to let all teachers have a sense of belonging to the school community.

Team-building exercises should be organized by the school management where experts in Team Building and contemporary management and leadership styles are invited to educate and instill in all teachers the need to work as members of a team, to have a high level of team spirit, to bury all their differences and to collaborate with all other teachers to work towards achieving school goals. These experts should allow teachers to brainstorm on the best ways to achieve adequate teacher-teacher professional relations in schools. It is also recommended that teachers should be asked by management to voice out their concerns and frustrations with regard to colleague teachers' unprofessional treatments and poor relations that affect the spirit of togetherness.

For sound professional relations among teachers, it is recommended that school management should create a peaceful and harmonious school environment where teachers are honest with each other, co-exist adequately and are disciplined and willing to take up responsibilities, carry out delegated tasks and be part of any decision-making processes. The head of schools should also work with experts in teacher collaboration and continuing professional learning to encourage all teachers to always form professional learning groups to share knowledge and information among themselves for the betterment of their professional practices.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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