



## **Salary Disparity and Teacher Demotivation: Experiences of Non-STEM Teachers in Uganda's Secondary School System**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores how the salary disparity between STEM and non-STEM teachers in Uganda's secondary school system demotivates the latter group. Guided by Equity Theory by John Stacey Adams (1963), updated by Aisa et al. (2024), which asserts that individuals are motivated by fairness in the distribution of rewards and outcomes, this study employed a qualitative exploratory research design to examine the experiences of non-STEM teachers regarding salary disparity (Creswell, 2013). It relied exclusively on secondary data sources which included newspaper articles, official Ministry of Education and Sports documents, budget speeches, government commission reports and Uganda National Teachers Union (UNATU) reports among others. Data was analyzed using thematic content analysis based on ethical considerations to emphasize credibility, relevance and currency. The findings reveal diminished morale, career decisions for early retirement, increasing levels of inferiority complex and a sharp divide and weakened interpersonal relations between STEM and non-STEM teachers among others. The study recommends an urgent harmonization of the salaries of STEM and non-STEM teachers by the Government of Uganda to undo the demoralization of the latter group.

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### **Introduction**

The term "salary disparity" is used to describe systematic, institutionalized and structured pay differences where Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) teachers, usually called Science teachers in Uganda, earn higher pay than non-STEM teachers, usually called Arts teachers, despite having the same qualifications and doing the same work (Kamwada, 2022). In the context of Uganda's secondary school system, the term is used to describe the substantial pay differences between science teachers, who received significant salary top-ups, and arts/humanities teachers, who did not benefit from equivalent increases (Monitor, 2022; Nile Post, 2024). This selective remuneration fosters professional stratification, undermines morale, and incentivizes teachers to shift towards higher-paying subjects, leading to staff shortages in neglected areas and potential imbalances in curriculum delivery (Global Press Journal, 2024; Gustafsson et al., 2022). Scholars highlight that while targeted salary enhancements may

aim to attract talent in priority areas, they can inadvertently institutionalize inequities unless paired with transparent, system-wide pay reforms (Gustafsson et al., 2022; Makerere University, 2024). The study therefore focused on the short-term effects of salary disparity between STEM and non-STEM teachers on the motivation of the latter group.

### **Background of the Study**

Poor remuneration for teachers has been a long-standing issue within Uganda's secondary school system. For decades, public secondary school teachers in Uganda have operated under heavy workloads and minimal pay, leading to widespread dissatisfaction. Over the years, salary improvements for teachers were mostly reactionary, typically achieved after prolonged strikes by teacher unions. For example, in 2011 and 2013, the Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU) organized national strikes demanding a salary increment, leading to temporary government concessions.

In an effort to bolster Science education and align the education sector with national development priorities under Vision 2040, the Government of Uganda made a strategic decision to increase the salaries of teachers handling STEM subjects. Initially, STEM teachers were granted a 30% salary increase in 2012 (Ministry of Public Service, 2012), followed by a controversial 300% increment in Financial Year 2022/2023, which elevated their earnings far beyond those of their non-STEM counterparts. This was the outcome of a Cabinet meeting chaired by President Yoweri Museveni on August 23, 2022 that approved UGX 495 billion (\$135,616,438) for the segregated salary enhancement of employees categorized as scientists including science teachers (Business Focus, 2022). Beginning with the 2022/2023 financial year, graduate secondary science teachers started earning Uganda Shillings (UGX) 4,000,000 (\$1,096) per month, up from about UGX 1,200,000 (\$329), while diploma holders in science subjects received UGX 3,000,000 (\$822) (Ministry of Public Service, 2022). In contrast, their counterparts in the arts continued to earn between UGX 796,000 (\$218) and UGX 1,100,000 (\$301) per month, depending on qualifications. This disparity has since sparked public debate and industrial action among arts teachers and teacher unions, arguing that the inequality undermines morale and unity within the teaching profession (*Daily Monitor*, 2025).

The legal foundation for this salary increment was laid in the Appropriation Act, 2022, which approved the national budget allocations for the Financial Year 2022/2023. This law, pushed for by President Yoweri Museveni who has repeatedly emphasized science-led development as key to Uganda's socio-economic transformation, effectively institutionalized the salary gap between STEM and non-STEM teachers (Museveni, 2022). The salary disparity has fueled a growing sense of injustice, undermining the unity between STEM and non-STEM teachers and the collaboration necessary for a thriving education system.

### **Problem Statement**

Teachers across all subject areas should receive equitable compensation for their contributions to education, as all subjects are integral to the holistic development of learners (UNESCO, 2017). In Uganda's secondary school system, there exists a pronounced salary disparity between STEM and non-STEM teachers, with the former earning 300% more than the latter (*Daily Monitor*, 2022; MoES, 2022). While this intervention improved STEM teachers' morale, it created frustration, resentment, and a

sense of exclusion among non-STEM teachers who now feel undervalued, demotivated, and professionally segregated within the same institutions (*New Vision*, 2023). If the salary disparity persists, it could lead to low commitment, increased absenteeism, deteriorating instructional quality in arts and humanities subjects, and a rise in teacher attrition among non-STEM staff, thereby undermining the overall quality of secondary education in Uganda (NAPE, 2023). This study explored the short-term effects of the salary disparity on non-STEM teachers' motivation within Uganda's public secondary schools as a basis for informed policy reform on teacher remuneration.

### **The Value and Significance of the Study**

This study aims at formulating actionable strategies to address the discriminative salary structure. The study is significant in advancing knowledge of teacher motivation by examining salary disparity as a critical source of demotivation among arts teachers in government aided secondary schools. Grounded in motivation theories such as Equity Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the study moves beyond generalized analyses of teacher motivation to focus on discipline-based remuneration differences.

By generating empirical evidences on how institutionalized inequitable pay affects morale, job satisfaction, professional commitment and instructional engagement, the study addresses a notable gap in literature particularly within low-income education systems where differentiated pay policies are increasingly adopted.

The study further holds strong policy relevance by providing evidence-based insights to inform salary and human resource reforms in the education sector. Its findings are valuable to policy makers, including the Ministry of Education and Sports and the Ministry of Public Service, by highlighting the unintended consequences of salary disparity on arts teachers' motivation, retention and productivity. The study thus supports the development of more equitable and sustainable remuneration frameworks that balance the incentive provision with fairness, cohesion and long-term workforce stability.

At the institutional level, the study benefits school leaders and education managers by enhancing understanding of how salary-related inequalities influence staff morale, collegial relationships and school climate. The policy recommendations derived from the study offer practical guidance for mitigating demotivation through both financial and non-financial strategies. Ultimately, the study contributes to national and global education priorities, including Uganda's commitment to quality education and Sustainable Development Goal 4, by emphasizing that motivated teachers across all disciplines are essential for effective teaching and holistic learner development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by the Equity Theory as proposed by John Stacey Adams (1963), updated by Aisa et al (2024), which asserts that individuals are motivated by fairness in the distribution of rewards and outcomes. Adams (1963) posits that employees compare their input-output ratios with those of their peers, and any established inequity can lead to demotivation or dissatisfaction. Recent studies in Uganda by Aisa et al (2024) reaffirm that monetary rewards with substantial fairness strongly influence teacher motivation and performance. In the context of salary disparity, non-STEM teachers regard their efforts as undervalued compared to STEM colleagues

who receive higher pay for similar or equal loads. This substantial inequality results in demotivation, withdrawal behavior and, in some cases, turnover intentions. This theory directly explains the link between pay disparity and teacher demotivation.

Complementing Equity Theory is Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation (1959), revised by Gimpi (2024), which distinguishes between hygiene factors (salary, work conditions) and motivators (recognition, advancement). Herzberg (1959) viewed salary as a hygiene factor whose absence can cause dissatisfaction, even though its presence does not necessarily motivate the employees. But the recent reinterpretations by Gimpi (2024) argue that pay can act as a motivator in modern contexts where financial equity symbolizes recognition and respect. In Uganda the 2022 selective pay rise for science teachers improved hygiene conditions for one group, but generated dissatisfaction among others, showing that salary when not equably distributed, becomes a demotivating force. Therefore, the updated theory helps explain why salary disparity not only causes dissatisfaction but also undermines intrinsic motivation among non-STEM teachers.

Additionally, Relative Deprivation Theory by Runciman (1966), updated by Lilly (2025), provides a sociological lens for understanding the feelings of exclusion and frustration among non-STEM teachers. Runciman explained that relative deprivation occurs when individuals feel deprived not because of absolute conditions, but in comparison to others they view as similar. Non-STEM teachers, witnessing their STEM colleagues receive preferential financial treatment despite equivalent professional obligations, may experience a subjective sense of deprivation. This theory emphasizes the psychological impact of policy-driven inequality, reinforcing how institutional decisions can breed discontent and disengagement in educational settings (Lilly, 2025).

Integrating these three theories provides a comprehensive conceptual framework to explore how salary disparity between STEM and non-STEM teachers affects the motivation, autonomy, interpersonal relations, staff retention, and professional commitment of non-STEM teachers in Uganda's secondary school system. Each theory contributes uniquely: Equity theory emphasizes fairness in the compensation of STEM and non-STEM teachers. The Herzberg Two-Factor Motivational theory argues that unfair pay can cause dissatisfaction, while the Relative Deprivation theory emphasizes the psychological impact of policy-driven inequality, reinforcing how institutional decisions can breed discontent and disengagement in educational settings. Together, these frameworks offer a nuanced understanding of harmonized teacher pay that promotes fairness, reduces dissatisfaction and improves psychological feeling, self-esteem, and autonomy essential for enhanced motivation to reap sustainable educational outcomes.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative exploratory research design to examine the experiences and perceptions of non-STEM teachers regarding salary disparity in Uganda's secondary school system (Creswell, 2013). The exploratory approach is appropriate for unpacking complex, under-researched phenomena such as "salary disparity" and its demotivating effects on teachers who are excluded from targeted salary enhancements. As Creswell (2013) notes, exploratory qualitative designs enable

researchers to develop an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences and the socio-cultural contexts in which they occur.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The study relied exclusively on secondary data sources, employing documentary review as the main method of data collection. Relevant documents were purposively selected for their content related to teacher salaries, motivation and professional experiences. These sources included: newspaper articles and opinion pieces from prominent Ugandan dailies such as *Daily Monitor*, *New Vision* and *Weekly Observer*, especially those covering education sector developments, protests, or salary debates. The researchers also drew on television reports and interviews, including recorded segments from national broadcasters like UBC, NTV Uganda, Spark TV and NBS TV, focusing on news related to salary enhancement, industrial actions, and teacher grievances. The researchers referred to official documents such as budget speeches, salary structure documents and Ministry of Education and Sports press statements, outlining government policies on salary reforms and UNATU Policy reports. Each source was closely read and assessed for credibility, relevance, and currency, ensuring that only authentic and reliable materials from 2020 to 2025 were included to reflect recent experiences and trends. The researchers explicitly carried out triangulation of the secondary data sources by comparing across multiple sources to identify convergences and divergences for internal validity and trustworthiness.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using thematic content analysis. Key ideas and patterns related to salary disparity and teacher demotivation were identified, coded, and grouped into major themes. These themes were then interpreted in light of the broader socio-political and economic context of Uganda's education sector. The analysis paid special attention to; narratives of inequality and exclusion, expressions of emotional and professional demotivation and government responses to salary-related protests.

Since this study relied on publicly available documents and secondary data, there was minimal ethical risk to individuals. All data sources were cited appropriately. The study maintained academic integrity by avoiding manipulation of original content and ensuring balanced representation of viewpoints. The study upheld principles of ethical scholarship by ensuring accurate attribution, proper citation, and adherence to the APA Referencing Style. Only publicly available or institutionally accessible documents were used, ensuring compliance with copyright laws and ethical standards of academic integrity.

## **Results and Discussion**

The short-term effects of salary disparity are categorized under the following sub-themes: diminished morale, career decisions for early retirement, deepening inferiority complex, a sharp divide and weakened inter-personal relations between STEM and non-STEM teachers, discrimination of non-STEM teachers, institutional disunity as well as increased and heightened strikes and industrial actions.

### **Diminished Morale**

The study revealed that salary disparity between STEM and non-STEM teachers have a profound impact on teacher morale, affecting both their financial security and

intrinsic motivation to teach. Several participants expressed frustration over inequitable pay, noting that it undermines their professional identity and enthusiasm for teaching. Kagolo (2023) reported in *The Daily Monitor* that one teacher lamented, “When you know you earn less just because you teach literature or history, it’s hard to stay motivated. You start questioning why you chose this profession.” Such sentiments highlight the psychological burden borne by non-STEM teachers who perceive their contributions as undervalued, creating a sense of professional marginalization. Mwanga and Nakato (2025) further observe that diminished morale is linked to increased absenteeism, reluctance to participate in school governance, and disengagement from co-curricular responsibilities, illustrating how pay inequities extend beyond individual frustration to affect overall school functioning. Oketch (2023) emphasized that low job satisfaction among non-STEM teachers negatively impacts classroom performance, collaboration, and the general learning environment.

Findings indicate that this morale decline is widespread, reflecting a structural challenge rather than isolated dissatisfaction. Several sources reported that unequal remuneration erodes motivation and diminishes teachers’ sense of professional worth. National newspapers, school reports, and policy documents corroborate these accounts, indicating that salary inequality consistently undermines teacher commitment and engagement in educational initiatives. Moreover, union statements, such as those from the Uganda National Teachers’ Union (UNATU, 2025), link prolonged industrial actions to three years of fruitless negotiations with the government, highlighting that unresolved salary disparity has prompted collective demotivation and reduced participation in school duties. UNATU asserts that unfair salary enhancement for secondary school science teachers at the expense of arts and humanities teachers is the biggest challenge in Uganda’s education sector today. This unfairness implemented by Government beginning the financial year 2022/2023 has continued to demotivate all the teachers who were left out in the salary enhancement scheme (UNATU, 2025a).

The emotional toll of pay inequity is further reflected in operational outcomes within schools. Editorials and policy analyses in *The Observer* and *The Daily Monitor* describe increases in absenteeism, incomplete lesson preparation, and hesitancy among teachers to lead clubs, supervise extracurricular activities, or mentor students (*The Observer*, 2025). Coverage of the 2025 industrial action in *The Daily Monitor* reported students “left in despair” as lessons stalled, demonstrating that the effects of demoralization extend from teacher demotivation to tangible disruptions in school operations (Kagolo, 2025). These findings highlight that low morale is not only an emotional issue but a systemic factor that can compromise teaching quality, student outcomes, and institutional efficiency.

Television reporting has also illuminated the human dimension of this crisis. NTV Uganda (2025) aired an investigative segment titled *Demotivated Teachers: The Silent Crisis in Classrooms*, which documented teachers’ expressions of frustration, fatigue, and emotional exhaustion. The broadcast showed footage of empty classrooms and teachers lamenting that unequal pay had “killed the passion for teaching,” visually reinforcing the narrative of diminished morale. This coverage underscores that the consequences of salary disparity are both visible and pervasive, manifesting as emotional stress, professional disengagement, and operational inefficiencies across schools nationwide. This implies that dwindling teacher morale is a systemic threat to

institutional stability as it poses management challenges in implementing school programs. Sometimes it may necessitate the fairly resourced schools to make budgetary re-allocations to cater for non-STEM teachers' top-up allowances in attempt to promote a positive learning environment thereby causing resource constraints.

### **Career Decisions for Early Retirement**

The increasing incidence of early retirement among non-STEM teachers represents a significant outcome of persistent salary disparity in Uganda's secondary education sector. Kintu (2025) observes that a growing number of teachers are voluntarily exiting the profession, citing inadequate remuneration, lack of recognition, and limited professional incentives. These departures not only drain the sector of experienced human capital crucial for holistic student development but also disproportionately affect the arts and humanities, weakening the breadth and depth of curriculum offerings. The resulting imbalance in subject representation threatens both the quality and diversity of secondary education.

Empirical evidence underscores the severity of this trend. Kasozi (2024) reported in *The Daily Monitor* that numerous non-STEM teachers are seriously considering early retirement, expressing that persistent pay inequities combined with rising workload demands have rendered continued service unsustainable. He quotes one teacher lamenting, "We're demoralized by persistent pay disparity and rising demands without matching pay; many of us are seriously considering early retirement so we can access pension packages and start sustainable businesses to support our families." This aligns with the survey findings of Nankinga (2019), which indicate that financial dissatisfaction is a primary driver of early retirement decisions and career shifts among non-STEM educators.

Published quantitative data corroborates these qualitative observations. Public Service human-resource summaries indicate that early-retirement cases rose sharply from 382 in Financial Year 2020/21 to 690 in Financial Year 2022/23, with teachers comprising the largest share of those leaving government service (Oketch, 2025). Media reports attribute this escalation to persistent salary disparity that has "demoralized the majority" of non-STEM teachers, reflecting the operational consequences of systemic inequities.

At an institutional level, both the Ministry of Public Service (2025) and the Parliament of Uganda (2025) have recognized that pay imbalances exacerbate workforce instability. Parliamentary records and union petitions explicitly warn that inequitable remuneration policies "deplete the education sector of experienced human capital," prompting continuous legislative inquiries and calls for salary harmonization to enhance teacher retention and professional sustainability.

Television coverage further illustrates the human impact of these trends. In its feature "Teachers Leaving Classrooms for Business," NBS Television (2025) highlighted district officials and teachers confirming rising attrition rates directly linked to pay disparity. One teacher noted, "Retirement seems more profitable than continuing to serve," encapsulating the rationale for early exits. Such broadcasts play a critical role in publicizing the attrition crisis, reinforcing the notion that unresolved salary inequities threaten both teacher welfare and the broader educational system. Some seasoned secondary school arts teachers are pursuing further studies, some at doctoral level, to

seek opportunities elsewhere, suggesting that they see their days in secondary schools as numbered.

### **Increasing / Heightened Inferiority Complex**

A pronounced sense of inferiority and professional uncertainty is evident among non-STEM teachers who frequently experience self-doubt and diminished confidence in their roles due to the perception that their contributions are undervalued. Mugisha (2022) contends that this erosion of professional identity restricts teachers' willingness to engage in leadership roles, innovation, and mentorship activities within schools. Similarly, Nsubuga (2024) notes that many non-STEM teachers deliberately avoid participation in school development initiatives, citing feelings of under appreciation and marginalization.

Birungi (2024) lamented that arts teachers are increasingly disrespected by learners and colleagues, with many expressing a decline in morale and contemplating early retirement as a coping mechanism. Reports from *The Daily Monitor* and *The Observer* also reveal that arts, humanities and social science teachers perceive their work as consistently undervalued compared to their STEM counterparts, which contributes to reduced engagement and professional withdrawal (Oketch, 2025).

Union communications and televised statements further illustrate that this issue extends beyond financial inequities to perceived professional discrimination. The Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU, 2025) has repeatedly described the current pay policy as "discriminatory and injurious to teachers' dignity," a concern echoed in televised media coverage. For instance, UBC Television (2025) aired a segment titled "*Unequal Pay, Unequal Pride*", which captured the emotional experiences of non-STEM teachers, highlighting feelings of marginalization and diminished self-worth. The broadcast showed classroom interactions in which arts teachers admitted feeling "looked down upon," vividly demonstrating how salary-based hierarchies have undermined professional identity and self-esteem, ultimately affecting teacher motivation, engagement, and overall school performance.

### **Sharp Divide Between STEM and Non-STEM Teachers and Weakened Interpersonal Relations**

Salary disparity between STEM and non-STEM teachers in Uganda has significantly strained inter-teacher relationships, contributing to a fractured professional culture within schools. Mwesigye (2023) notes that the resentment arising from unequal pay often fosters tension and reduces collaboration between staff in different subject streams, undermining interdisciplinary teamwork essential for holistic student learning. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES, 2024) has acknowledged these growing rifts, warning that persistent pay inequality poses a serious threat to institutional cohesion and overall school harmony.

Namara and Kagolo (2023) observe that when teachers perceive themselves as unfairly treated, cultivating a collegial atmosphere becomes difficult, which negatively affects classroom instruction and student outcomes. Baguma (2025) highlights that in some schools, this divide has manifested physically through the creation of separate staffrooms for science and arts teachers, symbolizing a deeper social and professional segmentation. Media investigations further corroborate these findings: *The Daily Monitor* and *The Observer* report on a "fractured teaching culture" characterized by



reduced cooperation, minimal sharing of resources and declining collegiality (Oketch, 2025).

These divisions have prompted institutional attention and responses. UNATU (2025) petitions and parliamentary debates (Parliament of Uganda, 2025) identify salary policy as a structural factor undermining teamwork, collaboration, and staff morale. Television coverage has also documented these challenges: Spark TV (2025), in its programme “The Divided Staffroom,” interviewed head teachers and district inspectors who confirmed that collaboration had weakened due to pay disparity, showing segregated seating arrangements and unequal allocation of resources. Collectively, these observations demonstrate that the divide between STEM and non-STEM teachers is not merely a financial issue but a complex social and professional problem that jeopardizes both teacher unity and the quality of education delivered to students.

### **Professional Discrimination among Non-STEM Teachers**

Salary imbalances in Uganda’s secondary schools extend beyond financial inequity, resulting in profound professional discrimination that affects teachers’ psychological well-being and work performance. Non-STEM teachers frequently experience stress, anxiety, and feelings of neglect due to persistent pay disparity, which undermines their sense of professional worth and identity. Kasozi (2021) highlights that demotivated teachers often withdraw from extracurricular engagements, mentorship roles, and other voluntary responsibilities, reducing their overall contribution to school development. Similarly, Okee, Namuyonga, and Kirwisa (2024) found that “many public school teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their working conditions and remuneration, leading to decreased motivation and a higher likelihood of turnover,” illustrating how systemic salary inequities directly threaten teacher retention.

The social and behavioral consequences of salary disparity are equally significant. Baguma (2025) observed that some arts and humanities teachers face overt disrespect from students, who mock them as “comedians” or “entertainers,” further diminishing self-esteem and professional pride. Such experiences reinforce feelings of marginalization and inequity, creating a work environment where non-STEM teachers feel undervalued despite their vital contributions to student development and holistic education. The cumulative effect of these experiences is a decline in motivation, engagement, and willingness to participate in collaborative or leadership activities, which undermines both individual and institutional performance.

Media investigations further illuminate the lived realities of affected teachers. NTV Uganda (2025) aired an episode of *Education Spotlight* that examined teacher welfare, highlighting professional discrimination as a direct consequence of pay disparity. During the broadcast, teachers described feeling “professionally sidelined,” expressing frustration at being consistently overlooked for recognition, incentives, and career advancement opportunities afforded to STEM colleagues. Analysts in the program emphasized that persistent professional discrimination risks “crippling the morale of Uganda’s teaching workforce,” potentially triggering absenteeism, part-time employment, and even attrition. Collectively, these findings underscore that salary disparity functions not only as an economic issue but also as a systemic form of professional marginalization with wide-ranging consequences for teacher well-being, institutional cohesion, and the quality of education delivery. This professional

discrimination violates the principle of natural justice and indeed the principle of ‘leaving no one behind’ as enshrined in SDG 2030 which is detrimental to the holistic development of education in Uganda.

### **Institutional Disunity**

The persistent salary disparity between STEM and non-STEM teachers have contributed significantly to institutional disunity within Uganda’s secondary schools. Multiple sources, including *The Observer* and union communiqués, document that pay inequities have fragmented school communities, fostering tension among staff and undermining collaborative culture. *The Daily Monitor* (2025) reported that during the 2025 nationwide strike, some schools lost up to 32 days of instruction, leaving learners “in despair” and illustrating the tangible consequences of fractured staff relations. Parliamentary reports (Parliament of Uganda, 2025) further confirm that this disunity is not merely perceptual but has measurable impacts on institutional functioning, including decreased staff cooperation, weakened mentorship, and disruption of school governance structures.

Television coverage has provided additional visual evidence of this phenomenon. NBS Television (2025), in its prime-time broadcast titled “*Broken Schools: How Salary Gaps Divide Teachers*”, documented instances of teachers holding separate departmental meetings and parallel strikes, highlighting the deep divisions created by salary inequities. Interviews with school administrators revealed that professional unity had effectively collapsed in numerous institutions, with teachers’ demotivation and inter-staff tensions directly affecting classroom management, co-curricular supervision and student performance. The broadcast emphasized that learners bear the ultimate cost of institutional disunity, experiencing reduced instructional time, inconsistent academic guidance, and a decline in the overall quality of education. This signifies that the fractured institutional capacity is unable to hold the aspirations, dreams and careers of the learners high due to impeded learning outcomes.

### **Non-STEM teachers’ Part-Timing**

The findings indicate that part-time employment among non-STEM teachers has become a widespread coping strategy in response to persistent salary disparity. Evidence from national media illustrates that teachers across multiple districts are engaging in secondary income-generating activities to meet basic living expenses. For instance, Oketch (2025) reported in *The Daily Monitor* that teachers have increasingly taken on private tutoring, retail work, and boda-boda transport services to supplement their earnings. Similarly, Lumu (2025) observed that many humanities teachers dedicate their afternoons to coaching students or lecturing part-time, reflecting a growing dependence on off-campus work to sustain livelihoods.

The Uganda National Teachers’ Union (UNATU, 2025) explicitly highlighted the educational consequences of part-time work, noting that such activities compromise lesson quality, reduce classroom supervision, and contribute to absenteeism. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES, 2024) corroborated these concerns, linking increased absenteeism among non-STEM teachers directly to off-campus employment obligations. This relationship illustrates a structural challenge within Uganda’s education system, where inadequate and unequal remuneration not only diminishes teacher well-being but also adversely affects school operations, instructional continuity, and student

learning outcomes. The pervasive reliance on part-time work reflects a broader systemic failure to provide equitable financial and professional support for non-STEM educators.

Beyond operational impacts, part-timing has also reshaped teacher identity and professional culture. Interviews reported by *The Weekly Observer* (2025) revealed teachers considering teaching as a side-hustle since their pay cannot sustain a family, signaling a cultural shift where the teaching profession is increasingly perceived as insufficient for full-time livelihood. NTV Uganda (2025) further documented this trend in a segment titled “*Teaching by Day, hustling by Night*”, showing teachers running small businesses or working secondary jobs after school hours. One history teacher recounted, “I also drive a boda-boda [motorcycle taxi] in the evening to pay rent,” highlighting the dual pressures of professional and personal obligations. The broadcast concluded that while part-timing functions as a necessary coping mechanism, it simultaneously serves as a stark indicator of declining morale, reduced institutional loyalty, and a potential long-term threat to the quality and stability of Uganda’s secondary education workforce. This does not mean that STEM teachers do not moonlight. They too do but much infrequently as compared to non-STEM teachers who are doing it rampantly as one of the ways of venting their frustrations at the state of things.

### **Strikes and Industrial Actions**

Ugandan teachers have increasingly resorted to industrial actions as a response to persistent salary disparity between STEM and non-STEM educators, reflecting deep-seated frustration with the inequities in pay and delayed implementation of promised salary enhancements. Three major strikes occurred when the government announced the selective 300% pay raise for STEM teachers; the first in June-July 2022, the second in June-July 2025 and the third in September-October 2025. The Uganda National Teachers’ Union (UNATU, 2023, 2024, 2025) consistently identified unequal remuneration as the primary driver of these strikes, emphasizing that the prolonged neglect of teacher grievances has left staff with limited avenues for redress. The third strike (the one that commenced on 15 September 2025) was nationwide and it lasted 32 days, disrupting learning for thousands of students across the country before it was suspended on 16 October 2025 (Kasozi, 2025; NBS Television, 2025).

Television coverage by NTV Uganda (2025) provided visual evidence of teachers assembling in major towns, peacefully demonstrating outside district education offices, and expressing anger over the government’s failure to fulfill salary promises. During these broadcasts, educators articulated how the persistent pay gap demotivated them and compelled collective action, portraying strikes as both a coping mechanism and a public appeal for systemic change. Analysts and parliamentary records underscore that the recurring nature of such industrial actions signals a structural failure in addressing teacher welfare and remuneration inequities (Parliament of Uganda, 2025; Uganda Budget Information, 2025). Beyond disrupting academic schedules, these strikes have broader implications, including delayed examinations, lost instructional time, and strained relationships between educators, administrators, and policymakers, highlighting the urgent need for policy interventions to harmonize salaries and restore institutional stability. However, these strikes tend to be fruitless because teachers’ trade unions are disunited, fragmented, and unable to push for a common cause. In order to reap big,

teachers must form a vibrant, robust and inclusive trade union to collectively bargain for salary harmonization in Uganda's education system.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that the salary disparity between STEM and non-STEM teachers in Uganda has profound effects on teacher motivation, professional identity, and institutional cohesion, manifesting in diminished morale, early retirements, heightened inferiority complexes, weakened interpersonal relations, and professional discrimination. Non-STEM teachers experience both psychological and operational demotivation, evidenced by reduced engagement in leadership, innovation, extracurricular activities, and widespread part-time employment to supplement inadequate income. These trends, corroborated by media reports, union statements, and televised investigations, indicate systemic challenges that extend beyond individual grievances. Industrial actions and strikes highlight the failure to address these inequities, while institutional disunity and segregated staffrooms further compromise school operations, negatively impacting student learning. Without policy interventions focused on equitable remuneration, transparent pay reforms, and targeted support for non-STEM teachers, the education system risks long-term instability, persistent unrest, and erosion of institutional cohesion, ultimately undermining teacher retention and national educational development.

### Recommendations

The study recommends that the Government of Uganda should harmonize the salaries of STEM and non-STEM teachers in order to do away with what one commentator has called "salary apartheid" (Okello, 2022). It also recommends that the Uganda National Teachers Union (UNATU) should be strengthened to position it better to bargain for improved pay, conduct periodic surveys and assessments focused on teachers' motivation levels, and design targeted interventions to continuously improve teachers' working conditions and welfare. This is important given the fact that UNATU has been weakened by the formation of parallel bodies like the Uganda Professional Humanities Teachers Union (UPHTU) and the Uganda Professional Science Teachers' Union (UPSTU).

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