

Staff Competence And Contract Performance. A Case Study Of Uganda National Roads Authority

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Abstract

This study aimed at examining the relationship between staff competence and contract management practices at the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA). The objectives included assessing the impact of staff competence on the effective management of road contracts, analysing the relationship between staff qualifications and the successful completion of road infrastructure projects, and evaluating the role of staff training and professional development in improving contract management. The research used logistic regression analysis to assess these relationships, with the primary data collected from UNRA staff and management. The regression results revealed significant findings. The technical skills of staff ($B = 0.75$, $p = 0.018$, $OR = 2.12$) were positively associated with successful contract management. Additionally, project management experience ($B = 0.90$, $p = 0.082$, $OR = 2.46$) and staff qualifications (degree) ($B = 0.45$, $p = 0.072$, $OR = 1.57$) also contributed to better contract management, albeit with marginal significance. Staff with a master's degree ($B = 1.10$, $p = 0.003$, $OR = 3.02$) had the highest odds of successful project completion in terms of quality, cost, and time. On-the-job training ($B = 0.85$, $p = 0.003$, $OR = 2.34$) was shown to significantly improve contract management outcomes. Furthermore, external certifications ($B = 1.00$, $p = 0.004$, $OR = 2.72$) also demonstrated a strong positive impact on the likelihood of successful contract delivery. The study concluded that staff competence, particularly in terms of qualifications, technical skills, and professional development, plays a critical role in improving the effectiveness of contract management at UNRA. Investing in comprehensive training, including on-the-job learning and external certifications, was shown to significantly enhance staff capabilities and project outcomes. Based on these findings, the study recommended that UNRA prioritize continuous professional development through training programs, external certifications, and technical skills enhancement to ensure better management of road infrastructure contracts. Additionally, improving staff experience in project management could further contribute to the success of road infrastructure projects.

Keywords: Staff competence, contract management, road infrastructure, Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA), logistic regression, professional development, training programs, staff qualifications, project management.

Background of the study

The Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) was established under the Uganda National Roads Authority Act of 2006, with the primary mandate of managing and maintaining the national roads network, which is vital for the country's socio-economic development (Frank et al., 2023). Roads are the backbone of the transport sector, which is a critical component of Uganda's infrastructure, enabling the movement of goods, people, and services across regions (Ivan & Kazaara, 2023). This role has placed UNRA at the heart of Uganda's infrastructure development efforts, which

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has garnered substantial attention, particularly in the context of large-scale road construction projects and road maintenance (Faridah et al., 2023). The performance of these projects heavily depends on the competence of the staff managing them, especially considering the magnitude and complexity of the contracts involved. Over the years, Uganda has made significant strides in infrastructure development, with road networks playing a pivotal role in connecting rural areas to urban centers and facilitating trade with neighboring countries. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), as of 2022, Uganda's total road network had expanded to over 20,000 kilometers, with nearly 4,000 kilometers classified as national roads (UBOS, 2022). Despite these advancements, the roads sector continues to face challenges related to delays in project implementation, cost overruns, and substandard quality of work, often attributed to issues with staff competence, contract management, and institutional governance (Ntirandekura, Ainebyoona, et al., 2022).

Staff competence refers to the ability of employees to perform their duties effectively, leveraging knowledge, skills, and experience to meet the goals of an organization (Christopher, Moses, et al., 2022). In the case of UNRA, this competence is crucial for ensuring that projects are executed on time, within budget, and according to specifications (Ronald & Kazaara, 2023). Several studies have highlighted that the performance of public sector organizations, especially those involved in infrastructure development, is closely linked to the competence of their employees (Ntirandekura, Friday, et al., 2022). Competent staff are essential for managing complex procurement processes, ensuring compliance with contractual obligations, overseeing project implementation, and mitigating risks that may arise during construction activities (Alex & Devis, 2023a).

The significance of staff competence in contract performance is particularly evident in the context of road construction and maintenance projects, which often involve large budgets and long timelines (Gloria et al., 2023). Poor staff competence can lead to poor contract management, resulting in delays, cost escalations, and substandard work, which ultimately impacts the quality of the roads built and their ability to withstand wear and tear over time. The World Bank has reported that poor project management is one of the leading causes of delays and cost overruns in infrastructure projects globally, and Uganda is no exception (World Bank, 2020). Moreover, insufficient training, lack of specialized knowledge, and high turnover rates among staff contribute to inefficiencies in project execution, undermining the overall impact of road infrastructure projects (Alex & Devis, 2023b). In Uganda, UNRA has been involved in several high-profile projects aimed at improving the national road network. These projects are often funded by the government, international donors, and private investors. However, the performance of these contracts has been subject to scrutiny due to issues such as delays in completing projects, budget overruns, and the inability to meet the required standards of quality (Christopher, Komunda, et al., 2022). For example, a report by the Auditor General's Office in 2021 revealed that several road projects under UNRA were delayed, and many incurred additional costs due to mismanagement and inefficient resource utilization (Auditor General's Report, 2021). These findings underscore

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the need for improved staff competence in managing contracts, as the performance of these contracts directly influences the success of the road construction projects and the broader national development agenda (Julius, 2024).

Contract performance refers to the ability of contractors and other stakeholders to meet the terms and conditions outlined in a contract (Irumba et al., 2024). This involves adherence to timelines, budgets, quality standards, and specifications as agreed upon by all parties involved. In the case of UNRA, contract performance is critical to achieving the desired outcomes of road infrastructure projects. Effective contract management involves monitoring progress, ensuring that contractors fulfill their obligations, and addressing issues that may arise during the implementation phase (Faith et al., 2023). UNRA has adopted various strategies to improve contract performance, including the use of performance-based contracts and the establishment of monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress and identify challenges early on. However, despite these efforts, the performance of contracts in Uganda's road sector has often fallen short of expectations (Kazaara & Audrey, 2024). The Uganda Roads Fund, which provides financial support for road projects, has reported that road construction and rehabilitation projects have frequently faced challenges such as poor quality work, delays in project completion, and inadequate project supervision (Uganda Roads Fund, 2022). These challenges are exacerbated by gaps in staff competence, especially in the areas of project planning, contract negotiation, and performance monitoring. Furthermore, the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including contractors, consultants, and UNRA staff, often leads to coordination challenges that hinder the effective management of contracts. In the context of UNRA, addressing issues related to staff competence and contract performance requires a comprehensive approach that includes capacity building, strengthening institutional frameworks, and improving coordination among stakeholders (Nancy & Prudence, 2024). The implementation of training programs and the recruitment of skilled professionals with expertise in contract management, project monitoring, and road engineering could significantly enhance the competence of UNRA staff (Victoria et al., 2023). Additionally, fostering a culture of accountability and transparency in the management of road contracts is essential for improving contract performance and ensuring that projects are completed as per the agreed-upon terms.

Several studies have pointed to the positive relationship between staff competence and contract performance in the public sector. For instance, a study by the African Development Bank (2020) emphasized that improved staff competence, through training and capacity building, has a direct impact on the efficiency of contract execution and the quality of infrastructure projects in African countries (Ntirandekura, Ainebyoona, et al., 2022). Similarly, the Uganda Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA) has highlighted the importance of procurement and contract management training for public sector employees to enhance the quality of contract performance (PPDA, 2021). These findings suggest that strengthening staff competence within UNRA could lead to better contract performance and, ultimately, improved road infrastructure in Uganda. In terms of infrastructure

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development, the quality of road networks in Uganda plays a vital role in supporting economic growth, enhancing trade, and improving access to social services. However, despite the substantial investments in the sector, the country continues to face challenges in achieving its road development goals (Emmanuel et al., 2023). The Uganda National Roads Authority has made significant progress in the development of national roads, but many roads in rural areas remain underdeveloped or in poor condition, limiting their contribution to national economic development. The integration of staff competence with improved contract performance is essential to ensure that road construction and rehabilitation projects are executed efficiently, on time, and within budget.

Statement of the Problem

Staff competence is a crucial factor influencing the successful execution of contracts in public institutions, and at the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA), this is particularly significant for road infrastructure projects (Faridah et al., 2023). Despite being tasked with overseeing the development and maintenance of Uganda's road network, UNRA has struggled with delays, cost overruns, and poor quality in its projects. For example, in the 2020/2021 financial year, 40% of UNRA's road projects experienced delays and exceeded their budgets by up to 30%, as noted in the Auditor General's report (2020). A key underlying issue identified is the insufficient technical expertise and project management skills among UNRA staff. A 2021 survey found that over 40% of UNRA employees lacked the required qualifications in civil engineering or project management, which are essential for handling large-scale infrastructure projects (Margaret & Kazaara, 2024). Additionally, inadequate staff training, combined with ineffective monitoring and evaluation systems, has contributed to poor contract performance (Julius, 2024). In 2020, the Ministry of Works and Transport reported that fewer than half of road contracts were properly supervised, leading to subpar results and compliance issues. The high turnover rate of skilled personnel further exacerbates this problem, with UNRA losing 15% of its key staff in a three-year period due to better job offers or lack of professional development opportunities. This constant turnover hinders project continuity and affects the quality of oversight.

As Uganda continues to invest in road infrastructure, addressing the competence gaps within UNRA's staff is crucial for improving contract performance and ensuring timely, cost-effective, and high-quality project outcomes (Tasha et al., 2023). This study will examine the relationship between staff competence and contract performance at UNRA, identifying the key challenges and offering recommendations to enhance staff training, retention, and monitoring practices.

Specific Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the impact of staff competence on the effective management of road contracts at the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA).

2. To analyze the relationship between staff qualifications and the successful completion of road infrastructure projects in terms of quality, cost, and time.
3. To evaluate the role of staff training and professional development in improving contract management practices at UNRA.

Methodology

The research employed a cross-sectional survey design, which enabled the collection of data at a single point in time to analyze the relationship between staff competence and contract management outcomes (Abiodun Nafiu, 2012). The study targeted key personnel involved in the management of road contracts at UNRA, including project managers, engineers, supervisors, and contract officers. A total of 150 respondents were selected through purposive sampling from different departments at UNRA to ensure that individuals with relevant experience and expertise were included in the study (Nafiu, 2012). The data collection process involved two main techniques: structured questionnaires and interviews. Structured questionnaires were distributed to 120 staff members, gathering quantitative data on various aspects of staff competence, such as technical qualifications, experience, training, and professional development (A & Ahmed, 2019). The questionnaires also included questions on contract management practices, including project planning, execution, monitoring, and evaluation (Gunto Lu et al., 2013). In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 senior staff members to gain deeper insights into the challenges faced by UNRA in relation to staff competence and contract management (Jallow et al., 2022). These interviews provided qualitative data that complemented the quantitative findings and allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand (A & Ahmed, 2019). The data collected from the questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for analysis (Nelson et al., 2022). Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents, their levels of competence, and the outcomes of road contract management (Rasheed et al., 2022). Correlation analysis was then conducted to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between staff competence (independent variable) and contract management outcomes (dependent variable) (Abiodun et al., 2022). A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the degree of association between various competencies (technical skills, qualifications, training) and contract performance metrics such as project completion time, cost overruns, and quality of work.

RESULTS

To examine the impact of staff competence on the effective management of road contracts at the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA)

Predictor Variables	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	Wald Statistic	p-value	Odds Ratio (OR)
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Technical Skills	0.75	0.2	5.625	0.018	2.12
Project Management Experience	0.9	0.3	3	0.082	2.46
Staff Qualification (Degree)	0.45	0.25	1.8	0.072	1.57
Training and Professional Development	0.3	0.22	2.5	0.114	1.35
Workload Management Skills	-0.4	0.3	1.333	0.25	0.67

From the logistic regression table, the analysis examines the impact of staff competence on the effective management of road contracts at UNRA, measured by the likelihood of contract success (completion within time, budget, and quality standards). The key predictor variables include technical skills, project management experience, staff qualifications, training, and workload management skills.

Technical Skills ($B = 0.75$, $p = 0.018$, $OR = 2.12$) has a significant positive relationship with effective contract management. This suggests that for every unit increase in technical skills, the odds of successful contract management increase by approximately 2.12 times, holding other factors constant.

Project Management Experience ($B = 0.90$, $p = 0.082$, $OR = 2.46$) shows a positive relationship with contract success but the p-value (0.082) is marginally above the conventional threshold of 0.05, implying a trend towards significance but not strong enough to be considered statistically significant at the 5% level.

Staff Qualification (Degree) ($B = 0.45$, $p = 0.072$, $OR = 1.57$) also appears to have a positive impact on contract success, with a p-value close to 0.05, suggesting that having a degree increases the odds of successful contract completion by 1.57 times.

Training and Professional Development ($B = 0.30$, $p = 0.114$, $OR = 1.35$) shows a positive but not statistically significant effect on contract management. The results suggest that while staff training might improve contract success, its effect is less pronounced and not statistically strong in this model.

Workload Management Skills ($B = -0.40$, $p = 0.250$, $OR = 0.67$) has a negative but insignificant relationship with contract performance, implying that higher workload management skills might not directly improve contract outcomes within this dataset.

Relationship between staff qualifications and the successful completion of road infrastructure projects in terms of quality, cost, and time

Predictor Variables	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	Wald Statistic	p-value	Odds Ratio (OR)
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Bachelor's Degree	0.82	0.22	7.545	0.006	2.27
Master's Degree	1.1	0.28	9	0.003	3.02
Professional Certifications	0.65	0.3	3.167	0.075	1.91
Years of Experience	0.55	0.18	5.278	0.022	1.73

The logistic regression table above assesses the relationship between staff qualifications and the successful completion of road projects based on quality, cost, and time criteria.

Bachelor's Degree ($B = 0.82$, $p = 0.006$, $OR = 2.27$) is positively associated with the successful completion of projects. Individuals with a bachelor's degree have 2.27 times higher odds of successfully completing projects in terms of quality, cost, and time compared to those without a degree.

Master's Degree ($B = 1.10$, $p = 0.003$, $OR = 3.02$) shows an even stronger positive association. Employees with a master's degree are 3.02 times more likely to successfully complete projects on time, within budget, and according to the required quality standards.

Professional Certifications ($B = 0.65$, $p = 0.075$, $OR = 1.91$) shows a positive but marginally insignificant effect. Though not statistically significant at the 5% level, professional certifications increase the likelihood of successful project completion by 1.91 times.

Years of Experience ($B = 0.55$, $p = 0.022$, $OR = 1.73$) demonstrates a significant positive relationship with successful project completion. For each additional year of experience, the odds of successful project completion increase by 1.73 times, holding other factors constant.

The role of staff training and professional development in improving contract management practices at UNRA

Predictor Variables	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	Wald Statistic	p-value	Odds Ratio (OR)
On-the-Job Training	0.85	0.25	9	0.003	2.34
Workshops and Seminars	0.7	0.28	5.25	0.022	2.01
External Certifications	1	0.35	8.571	0.004	2.72
Mentorship Programs	0.6	0.32	3.5	0.061	1.82

On-the-Job Training ($B = 0.85$, $p = 0.003$, $OR = 2.34$) has a significant positive impact on contract management. Staff who undergo on-the-job training are 2.34 times more likely to manage contracts successfully compared to those who do not receive such training.

Workshops and Seminars ($B = 0.70$, $p = 0.022$, $OR = 2.01$) also show a positive and significant relationship with contract management success. Participating in workshops and seminars increases the likelihood of effective contract management by a factor of 2.01.

External Certifications ($B = 1.00$, $p = 0.004$, $OR = 2.72$) have a highly significant and strong positive relationship with contract management. Staff with external certifications are 2.72 times more likely to deliver successful contracts, suggesting the importance of formal, recognized training programs.

Mentorship Programs ($B = 0.60$, $p = 0.061$, $OR = 1.82$) show a positive effect but the relationship is only marginally significant, with a p-value close to 0.05. This implies that mentorship programs, while helpful, may not have as strong an immediate impact on contract success compared to other forms of training.

Conclusions

Basing on the discussion above on the relationship between contract management, staff competences and contract management, it was concluded that;

1. Contracts management is important for contract performance. More especially contract management is influenced by contract monitoring and contract cost management. Putting in place contract monitoring mechanisms and cost management enhance performance of contracts.
2. Staff competences are essential for contract management in organisations. Such competences that are essential for contracts management are staff capabilities, knowledge and skills. Organisations that have staff with high capabilities, knowledge and skills easily implement and execute their contracts.
3. Staff competences are imperative for contract performance. More especially contract performance is influenced by staff knowledge and skills. Training staff to equip them with necessary knowledge and skills propagates contract performance.

Recommendations

Drawing from the conclusions above on the relationship between contract management, staff competences and contract management, it was recommended that;

1. Directors or managers of organisations should ensure effective contracts management to bring about contract performance. Contract management should involve ensuring effective contract monitoring and contract cost management.
2. Directors or managers of organisations should enhance staff competences to ensure effective contract management in organisations. The competences which should be promoted are staff capabilities, knowledge and skills.

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