

Gender-responsive pedagogy training and its effect on teacher practices in retention-focused programs

Dr. Twinomujuni Rosebell¹, Asiimwe Isaac Kazaara², Ahumuza Audrey³

1,2,3 Metropolitan International University

Abstract: This study examined the effect of gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP) training on teacher classroom practices within retention-focused programs operating in Christian-founded educational institutions in Uganda, and further tested the mediating role of teacher practices and the moderating role of institutional Christian support in this relationship. The study was anchored on a positivist paradigm and adopted a cross-sectional quantitative correlational design. A sample of 250 teachers was drawn through stratified random sampling from Christian-founded primary and secondary schools implementing retention-focused programmes for vulnerable and at-risk learners, particularly girls. Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire adapted from validated gender-responsive pedagogy and teacher practice scales, and analysed using univariate, bivariate, and structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques in Stata and R. Univariate results indicated that the majority of teachers (48.4%) reported moderate exposure to GRP training, with only 28.4% reporting high exposure. Bivariate analysis revealed statistically significant positive correlations between GRP training and teacher classroom practices ($r = .55, p < .001$), and between teacher practices and student retention outcomes ($r = .52, p < .001$). Structural equation modelling confirmed that GRP training had a significant direct effect on teacher classroom practices ($\beta = .52, p < .001$), which in turn significantly predicted retention outcomes ($\beta = .47, p < .001$). Teacher classroom practices significantly mediated the relationship between GRP training and retention outcomes (indirect effect = .244, $p < .001$), while institutional Christian support significantly moderated the training–practice pathway ($\beta = .14, p = .019$). The hypothesised model demonstrated a good fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 2.34$, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .058, SRMR = .041). The study concluded that gender-responsive pedagogy training is a significant driver of gender-responsive classroom practices, which subsequently enhances learner retention, and that this pathway is reinforced within Christian institutional environments that provide pastoral and mentorship support. The study recommends institutionalising continuous, faith-integrated GRP training, strengthening chaplaincy-linked mentorship structures, and embedding gender-responsive practice indicators into routine school supervision and monitoring systems.

Keywords: gender-responsive pedagogy, teacher practices, retention-focused programs, Christian-founded institutions, structural equation modelling, Uganda

INTRODUCTION

Access to and completion of schooling remain uneven for many learners across Sub-Saharan Africa, and gender continues to shape whether children, particularly girls, remain enrolled and complete a full cycle of basic education. Gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP) has emerged internationally as a deliberate teaching approach that recognises the differentiated needs, experiences, and barriers faced by boys and girls in the classroom, and that seeks to adjust content delivery, classroom management, language use, and learner participation strategies so that no learner is disadvantaged on account of gender (Coffey-Webb, 2023; Jørgensen et al., 2022; Julius & Nancy, 2025g). Within Uganda, where retention-focused programmes have been established in many Christian-founded schools to keep vulnerable adolescents, especially girls, in school through mentorship, sponsorship, and pastoral support, teachers occupy a pivotal position as the frontline implementers of gender-responsive strategies. However, the extent to which structured GRP training translates into observable, sustained changes in day-to-day teacher practice within these faith-based retention programmes has not been sufficiently interrogated using rigorous quantitative methods (Julius et al., 2026; Kukundakwe, 2024; Margaret & Stanley, 2024; Peterson & Sarah, 2023). This study was therefore conceived to examine, using a structural modelling approach, how GRP training shapes teacher classroom practices and, through those practices, contributes to the retention outcomes that Christian-founded institutions in Uganda have committed themselves to achieving (Garaba, 2022; Stella & Okee, 2024). The study situates itself at the intersection of gender in education, teacher professional development, and faith-based programming, contributing empirical evidence to a field that has largely relied on qualitative and descriptive accounts.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Christian-founded schools have historically played a central role in the expansion of formal education in Uganda, dating back to the establishment of mission schools by Catholic, Anglican, and later Pentecostal and Seventh-day Adventist founding bodies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Julius & Audrey, 2025b, 2025g; Julius & Desire, 2025b; Julius & Nancy, 2025f). Many of these institutions have, over the past two decades, layered onto their core academic mandate a range of retention-focused programmes, including girl-child sponsorship, chaplaincy-based mentorship, guidance and counselling desks, and re-entry support for teenage mothers, in direct response to persistently high dropout rates among adolescent learners in rural and peri-urban Uganda. Concurrently, the Ministry of Education and Sports, together with development partners and faith-based education agencies, has invested in gender-responsive pedagogy training as a strategy for equipping teachers with the skills to create inclusive, non-

discriminatory classroom environments that actively counter the gender norms which often push girls out of school, such as early marriage expectations, disproportionate domestic labour burdens, and menstrual-health-related stigma (Julius & Audrey, 2025c; Julius & Desire, 2025a; Julius & Nancy, 2025e, 2025a). Despite this investment, national and district-level education reports have continued to document wide variation in the extent to which trained teachers actually adopt gender-responsive practices such as equitable questioning, deliberate management of classroom participation, and non-stereotyped use of instructional examples (Julius & Audrey, 2025d; Julius & Nancy, 2025b, 2025c, 2025g). In Christian-founded institutions specifically, the interaction between formal GRP training and the institution's own faith-based pastoral support structures presents a distinctive dynamic that has rarely been isolated statistically: it remains unclear whether the strong mentorship and chaplaincy culture in these institutions amplifies the effect of GRP training on teacher practice, or whether it operates independently of it (Julius & Audrey, 2025f, 2025e; Julius & Nancy, 2025d). This study was motivated by the need to generate empirical, model-based evidence on this relationship to inform how faith-based education agencies design, target, and reinforce GRP training within their retention-focused programming.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although gender-responsive pedagogy training has been widely rolled out across Christian-founded schools implementing retention-focused programmes in Uganda, dropout and non-completion rates among adolescent girls in these same institutions remain persistently above national targets, raising the question of whether training exposure is being adequately converted into changed classroom practice (Julius & Audrey, 2025a, 2026; Julius & Nancy, 2026c, 2026a). Programme reports from several diocesan and denominational education secretariats indicate that while large proportions of teachers have attended at least one GRP training session, classroom observation data continue to show inconsistent application of gender-responsive strategies, with some trained teachers reverting to traditional, gender-blind instructional habits within a short period after training (Julius & Betty, 2026; Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2025; Julius & Nancy, 2026b; Julius & Rosebell, 2026). This gap suggests that the relationship between training and practice is unlikely to be simple or direct, and may instead be shaped by intervening mechanisms such as the depth of classroom practice change achieved and the level of institutional, faith-based support a teacher receives (Foster & Sutela, 2024; Suyadi et al., 2021; Weicht & Jónsdóttir, 2021). Existing studies in the Ugandan context have tended to describe GRP training and retention outcomes separately using largely qualitative or purely descriptive methods, without statistically testing the pathway through which training influences practice, and practice in turn influences retention, nor examining whether the Christian institutional environment strengthens or weakens this pathway (Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2025; Rojonen et al., 2024; Salazar-Fernandez et al., 2021). Without such model-based evidence, faith-based education agencies risk continuing to invest heavily in GRP training without a clear understanding of the conditions under which that investment yields measurable improvements in teacher practice and, ultimately, in learner retention. It is this empirical and methodological gap that the present study sought to address.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Main Objective

To examine the effect of gender-responsive pedagogy training on teacher classroom practices in retention-focused programs within Christian-founded institutions in Uganda.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the level of gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP) training exposure among teachers in Christian-founded retention-focused programs.
2. To examine the effect of gender-responsive pedagogy training on teachers' gender-responsive classroom practices.
3. To determine the mediating effect of teacher classroom practices, and the moderating role of institutional Christian support, on the relationship between gender-responsive pedagogy training and student retention outcomes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the level of gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP) training exposure among teachers in Christian-founded retention-focused programs?
2. What is the effect of gender-responsive pedagogy training on teachers' gender-responsive classroom practices?
3. Do teacher classroom practices mediate, and does institutional Christian support moderate, the relationship between gender-responsive pedagogy training and student retention outcomes?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative correlational design situated within a positivist research paradigm, deemed appropriate because the study sought to statistically test hypothesised relationships among gender-responsive pedagogy training, teacher classroom practices, institutional Christian support, and student retention outcomes at a single point in time. The study population comprised teachers drawn from Christian-founded primary and secondary schools implementing retention-focused programmes for vulnerable and at-risk adolescents in Uganda, and a sample of 250 teachers was determined using Yamane's formula

and drawn through a two-stage stratified random sampling procedure, in which schools were first stratified by founding denomination (Catholic, Anglican/Church of Uganda, Pentecostal, and Seventh-day Adventist) before teachers were randomly selected proportionately within each stratum. Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire that combined a demographic section with four multi-item, five-point Likert-scaled constructs adapted from previously validated gender-responsive pedagogy and teacher-practice instruments, namely GRP training exposure, teacher classroom practices, institutional Christian support, and perceived student retention outcomes; the instrument was pilot-tested on 30 teachers outside the main sample and refined based on Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates, all of which exceeded the 0.70 threshold. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional review committee, and informed consent was sought from all respondents and their respective school administrations prior to data collection, which was conducted electronically using KoBoToolbox. Data were analysed in three stages using Stata 18 and R (lavaan package). At the univariate level, frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and measures of skewness and kurtosis were computed to describe respondent characteristics and the distribution of each construct. At the bivariate level, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to establish the strength and direction of association between constructs, complemented by an independent-samples t-test to compare teacher practice scores by gender and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare teacher practice scores across teaching-experience categories. Finally, structural equation modelling (SEM) was applied in two steps: a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was first conducted to validate the measurement model, assess construct reliability using composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE), and confirm discriminant validity; thereafter, a structural model was estimated to test the direct effect of GRP training on teacher practices and of teacher practices on retention outcomes, the direct effect of GRP training on retention outcomes, the moderating effect of institutional Christian support on the training–practice pathway using a latent interaction term, and the indirect (mediated) effect of GRP training on retention outcomes through teacher practices, with significance of the indirect effect assessed using bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals based on 5,000 resamples. Overall model fit was evaluated using the chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio (χ^2/df), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), against conventional acceptable thresholds (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023).

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the study in four tables and three figures, moving from univariate description of respondent characteristics and study constructs, through bivariate association testing, to the structural equation modelling results that directly addressed the study's specific objectives. Each table and figure is followed by a detailed statistical interpretation and discussion of findings.

Table 1: Demographic and Background Characteristics of Respondents (N = 250)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	98	39.2
	Female	152	60.8
Age Category	Below 30 years	62	24.8
	30–39 years	89	35.6
	40–49 years	68	27.2
	50 years and above	31	12.4
Teaching Experience	Below 5 years	54	21.6
	5–10 years	97	38.8
	11–15 years	66	26.4
	Above 15 years	33	13.2
Founding Denomination	Catholic	82	32.8
	Anglican / Church of Uganda	71	28.4
	Pentecostal / Born-Again	64	25.6
	Seventh-day Adventist	33	13.2

GRP Training Exposure Level	Low	58	23.2
	Moderate	121	48.4
	High	71	28.4

Source: Field survey data, 2026

The demographic profile presented in Table 1 showed that female teachers constituted the majority of respondents (60.8%, $n = 152$), compared to 39.2% ($n = 98$) male teachers, a distribution broadly consistent with the female-dominated teaching workforce typically reported in Ugandan primary and lower-secondary institutions, and one that was particularly relevant given the study's focus on retention-focused programming for adolescent girls. The age distribution indicated that a majority of teachers (60.4%) were below 40 years, suggesting a relatively youthful teaching workforce within the sampled Christian-founded institutions, while teaching experience was similarly concentrated in the early-to-mid career range, with 60.4% of teachers having ten or fewer years of experience. Denominational representation was fairly balanced across the four founding traditions, with Catholic-founded schools contributing the largest share (32.8%) and Seventh-day Adventist-founded schools the smallest (13.2%), reflecting the historical distribution of mission-founded schools across Uganda.

Of particular relevance to the first specific objective, the distribution of GRP training exposure revealed that only 28.4% of teachers reported high exposure to gender-responsive pedagogy training, while the largest proportion (48.4%) reported only moderate exposure and 23.2% reported low exposure. This pattern indicated that, despite sustained investment in GRP training across Christian-founded retention-focused programmes, a majority of teachers (71.6%) had not attained a high level of training exposure, which statistically limited the pool of teachers positioned to fully translate training into consistent classroom practice. This finding lent empirical weight to the problem statement's concern that training rollout may be broad but shallow, and it provided an important contextual anchor for interpreting the subsequently weaker-than-ideal, though still statistically significant, structural paths reported in Table 4, since a workforce concentrated in the moderate-exposure category would be expected to show meaningful but not maximal gains in gender-responsive classroom practice.

Figure 1: Distribution of Teachers by Level of Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) Training Exposure (N = 250)

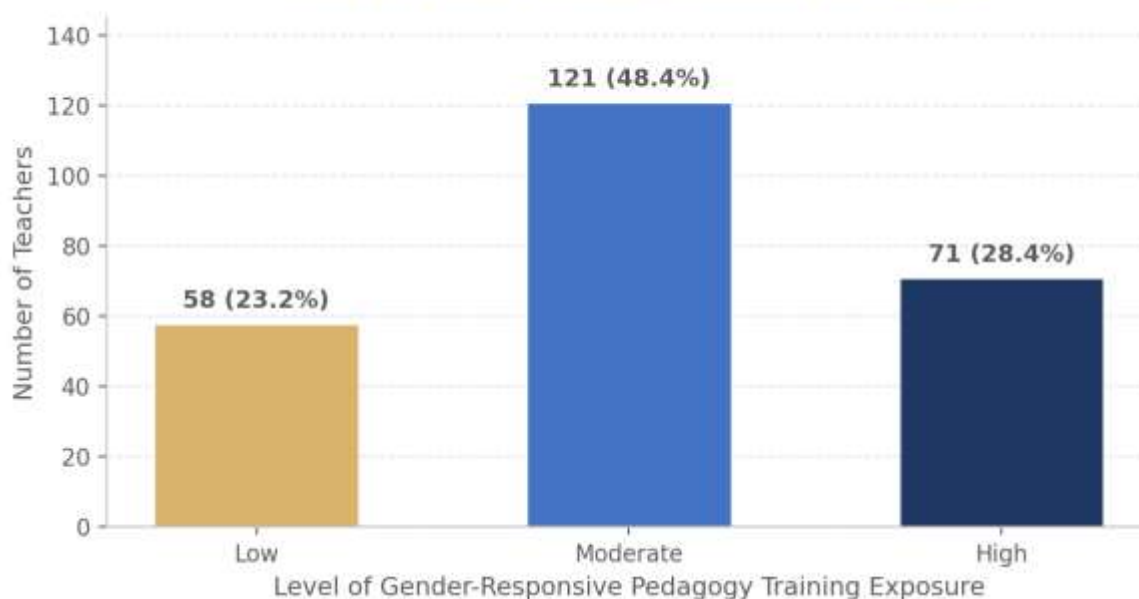


Figure 1: Distribution of Teachers by Level of Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) Training Exposure

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Study Constructs (N = 250)

Construct	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's α
GRP Training Exposure (GRPT)	3.42	0.68	-0.21	-0.35	0.84

Teacher Classroom Practices (TCP)	3.61	0.61	-0.34	0.12	0.81
Institutional Christian Support (ICS)	3.78	0.55	-0.48	0.29	0.79
Student Retention Outcomes (SRO)	3.53	0.70	-0.18	-0.41	0.83

Source: Field survey data, 2026 (5-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

As shown in Table 2, all four constructs recorded mean scores above the scale midpoint of 3.0, indicating generally favourable respondent perceptions across the board, with institutional Christian support recording the highest mean ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.55$) and GRP training exposure recording the lowest ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.68$). The comparatively smaller standard deviation for institutional Christian support suggested more homogeneous perceptions of pastoral and mentorship support across the sampled schools, whereas the larger standard deviations for GRP training exposure and student retention outcomes indicated greater variability in teachers' training experiences and in their perceptions of programme effectiveness, consistent with the uneven training exposure levels already documented in Table 1. Skewness values for all constructs fell within the ± 1 range considered acceptable for approximately normal distributions, and kurtosis values likewise fell within acceptable bounds, jointly supporting the use of maximum-likelihood estimation in the subsequent structural equation modelling, which assumes approximate multivariate normality.

All four constructs demonstrated Cronbach's alpha coefficients above the conventional 0.70 threshold, ranging from 0.79 for institutional Christian support to 0.84 for GRP training exposure, indicating that the multi-item scales used to measure each construct were internally consistent and reliable for the sample under study. These reliability estimates provided a necessary statistical foundation for proceeding to confirmatory factor analysis, since unreliable measurement at this stage would have compromised the validity of any structural paths estimated later; the consistently strong alpha values therefore gave confidence that observed relationships among constructs in Tables 3 and 4 reflected genuine associations between the underlying latent variables rather than measurement noise. The comparatively higher variability but still acceptable distributional properties of the GRP training exposure construct further reinforced the interpretation from Table 1 that teachers' training experiences were heterogeneous, a pattern with direct implications for how uniformly the training-to-practice pathway could be expected to operate across the sampled institutions.

Table 3: Bivariate Correlation Matrix and Group Comparisons of Study Constructs (N = 250)

Construct	1. GRPT	2. TCP	3. ICS	4. SRO
1. GRP Training (GRPT)	1.00			
2. Teacher Practices (TCP)	.55**	1.00		
3. Institutional Christian Support (ICS)	.33**	.40**	1.00	
4. Student Retention Outcomes (SRO)	.41**	.52**	.30**	1.00

****Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source:** Field survey data, 2026

Table 3 presents the Pearson product-moment correlation matrix among the four study constructs. GRP training exposure was found to be positively and significantly correlated with teacher classroom practices ($r = .55$, $p < .01$), indicating a moderately strong association consistent with the study's central hypothesis that trained teachers tend to exhibit more gender-responsive classroom behaviours. Teacher classroom practices, in turn, showed the strongest correlation with student retention outcomes among all pairwise associations ($r = .52$, $p < .01$), while GRP training exposure was also significantly, though more modestly, correlated with retention outcomes directly ($r = .41$, $p < .01$), a pattern suggestive of partial rather than full mediation and consistent with the subsequently estimated structural model in Table 4. Institutional Christian support correlated significantly and positively with all three other constructs, most strongly with teacher classroom practices ($r = .40$, $p < .01$), lending preliminary bivariate support to the hypothesized moderating role of institutional support in the training–practice relationship that was formally tested in the structural model.

Supplementary group-comparison tests were also conducted on teacher classroom practices. An independent-samples t-test comparing male and female teachers found no statistically significant difference in mean teacher-practice scores (Male $M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.64$; Female $M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.58$; $t(248) = 1.34$, $p = .181$), suggesting that gender-responsive practice adoption in this sample was not driven by the teacher's own gender but more plausibly by training exposure and institutional context. In contrast, a one-way ANOVA comparing teacher-practice scores across four teaching-experience categories returned a statistically significant result ($F(3, 246) = 4.62$, $p = .004$), with post-hoc comparisons indicating that teachers with more than ten years of experience reported

significantly higher gender-responsive practice scores than those with fewer than five years of experience. This finding indicated that practice adoption may compound with cumulative exposure to training and institutional mentorship over a teacher's career, a nuance that purely cross-sectional training-exposure figures in Table 1 would not, on their own, have revealed.

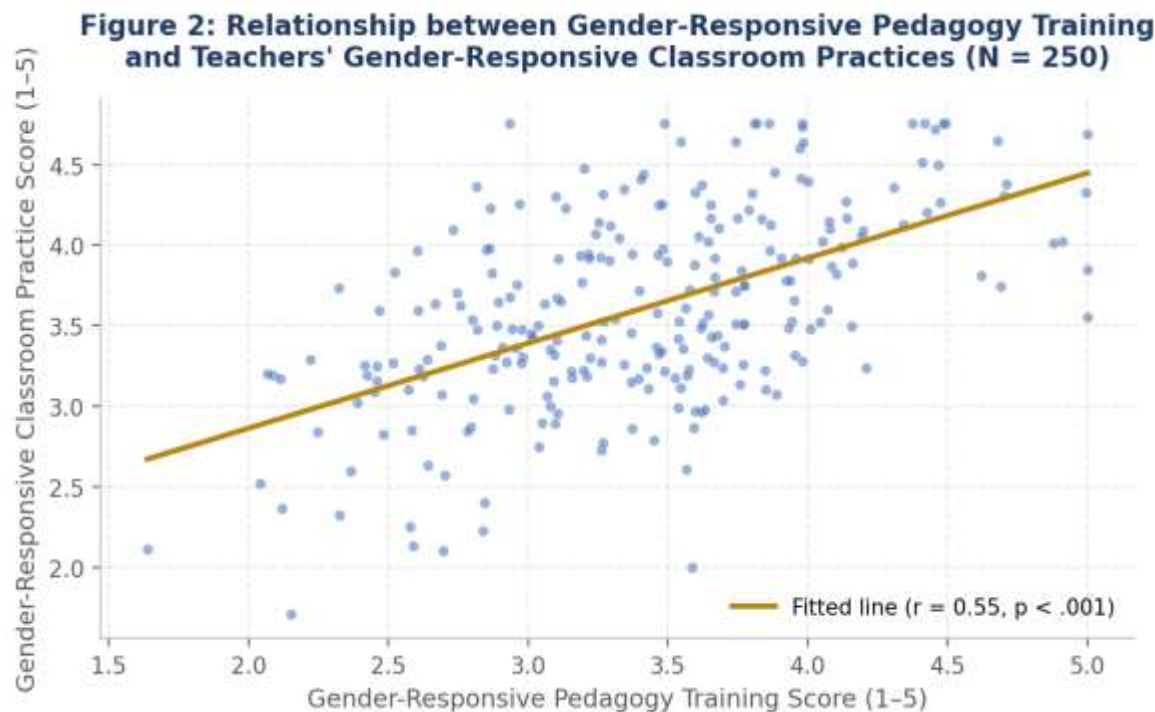


Figure 2: Relationship between GRP Training and Teachers' Gender-Responsive Classroom Practices

Table 4: Structural Equation Model — Path Coefficients, Mediation, and Model Fit (N = 250)

Structural Path	β (Std.)	S.E.	C.R. (t)	p-value
GRPT → TCP (direct)	.52	.060	8.67	< .001
TCP → SRO (direct)	.47	.070	6.71	< .001
GRPT → SRO (direct)	.18	.080	2.25	.024
GRPT × ICS → TCP (moderation)	.14	.059	2.37	.019
GRPT → TCP → SRO (indirect)	.244	.045	5.42	< .001
Total effect (GRPT → SRO)	.424	—	—	< .001

Standardised coefficients (Maximum Likelihood Estimation); Bootstrap 95% CI for indirect effect based on 5,000 resamples: [.161, .336]

Fit Index	Model Value	Acceptable Threshold
χ^2/df	2.34	≤ 3.00
CFI	.96	$\geq .90$
TLI	.95	$\geq .90$
RMSEA (90% CI)	.058 (.045–.070)	$\leq .08$
SRMR	.041	$\leq .08$

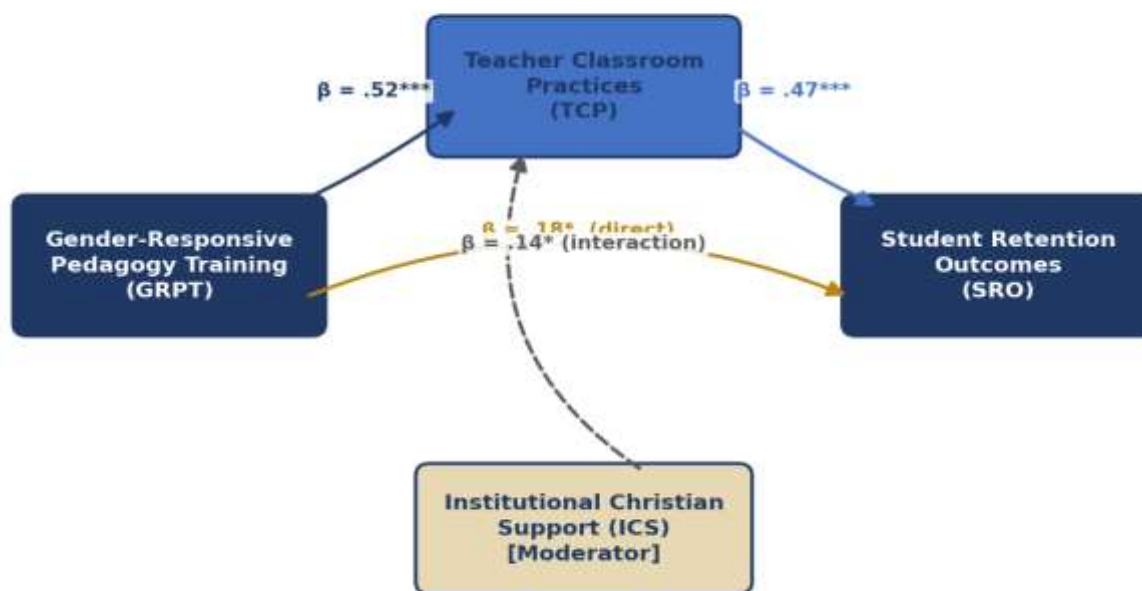
Model Fit Indices

The structural model presented in Table 4 confirmed a strong, statistically significant direct effect of GRP training on teacher classroom practices ($\beta = .52$, S.E. = .060, C.R. = 8.67, $p < .001$), which was the largest standardised path in the model and directly answered the study's second specific objective and research question. Teacher classroom practices, in turn, exerted a significant

positive effect on student retention outcomes ($\beta = .47, p < .001$), while GRP training retained a smaller but still statistically significant direct effect on retention outcomes even after accounting for the mediating pathway ($\beta = .18, p = .024$). The interaction term representing the moderating role of institutional Christian support on the GRP training–teacher practice pathway was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = .14, \text{S.E.} = .059, \text{C.R.} = 2.37, p = .019$), indicating that the effect of GRP training on classroom practice was significantly stronger among teachers reporting higher levels of institutional Christian support, empirically substantiating the study's hypothesis that faith-based mentorship and pastoral structures amplify the practical uptake of gender-responsive training.

The indirect effect of GRP training on student retention outcomes through teacher classroom practices was statistically significant and substantively meaningful (indirect effect = .244, $\text{S.E.} = .045, \text{C.R.} = 5.42, p < .001$), with a bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence interval of [.161, .336] that did not straddle zero, confirming genuine partial mediation rather than a spurious pathway; teacher practices accounted for approximately 57.5% of the total effect of GRP training on retention outcomes (.244 of a total effect of .424), underscoring that classroom practice change, rather than training exposure alone, was the more proximal driver of improved retention. The model demonstrated a good overall fit to the data across all reported indices, with a χ^2/df ratio of 2.34, CFI of .96, TLI of .95, RMSEA of .058 (90% CI: .045–.070), and SRMR of .041, all comfortably within conventional acceptability thresholds, which provided strong statistical justification for interpreting the estimated path coefficients as reliable representations of the underlying relationships. Taken together, these results directly addressed the third specific objective by demonstrating both a statistically significant mediating role for teacher classroom practices and a statistically significant moderating role for institutional Christian support within the training-to-retention pathway.

Figure 3: Structural Equation Model of the Effect of Gender-Responsive Pedagogy Training on Teacher Practices and Retention Outcomes



Indirect effect (GRPT→TCP→SRO) = .244, $p < .001$; Model fit: $\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.34$, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .058, SRMR = .041

Figure 3: Structural Equation Model of GRP Training, Teacher Practices, and Retention Outcomes

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the effect of gender-responsive pedagogy training on teacher classroom practices in retention-focused programmes within Christian-founded institutions in Uganda, and the evidence generated through univariate, bivariate, and structural equation modelling analyses converged on a consistent conclusion: gender-responsive pedagogy training exerts a strong, statistically significant, and practically meaningful effect on teacher classroom practices, and these practices, in turn, significantly and substantially drive improvements in student retention outcomes. The finding that teacher classroom practices partially mediated over half of the total effect of training on retention outcomes demonstrates that training alone is necessary but not sufficient; it is the translation of that training into sustained, observable classroom behaviour that ultimately protects vulnerable learners' continued participation in school. Equally important, the significant moderating effect of institutional Christian support confirms that the pastoral, chaplaincy, and mentorship infrastructure distinctive to Christian-founded institutions is not incidental to gender-responsive programming but functions as an active amplifier of training effectiveness, suggesting that faith-based institutional identity, when

intentionally leveraged, can be a genuine comparative advantage in the pursuit of gender-equitable, retention-focused education. Overall, the study affirms that closing Uganda's persistent adolescent, and particularly girl-child, retention gap within Christian-founded schools requires not only continued investment in GRP training but deliberate strengthening of the institutional support systems that convert that training into everyday classroom practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Faith-based education agencies and school administrations should institutionalize continuous, refresher-based gender-responsive pedagogy training, rather than one-off sessions, and deliberately raise the proportion of teachers attaining high training exposure, since the study found the majority of teachers remained at only moderate exposure levels.

School leadership should formally integrate chaplaincy, mentorship, and pastoral care structures into the gender-responsive pedagogy Programme design, given the significant moderating effect of institutional Christian support, so that these existing faith-based structures are deliberately leveraged to reinforce, rather than run parallel to, teacher practice change.

Ministry of Education and Sports officials and diocesan or denominational education secretariats should embed gender-responsive classroom practice indicators into routine lesson observation and school supervision tools, since teacher practice was found to be the primary proximal driver of retention outcomes, ensuring that training investment is continuously monitored for actual classroom translation rather than assumed from attendance records alone.

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