



# Accountability as a Mediator between Deontological Ethical Orientations and Public Interest in Ugandan Public Primary Schools

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## Abstract

The study explains the mediating role of accountability in the relationship between deontological ethical orientations and public interest using the stewardship theory. Data were collected from a sample of 361 UPE schools in Central and Western Uganda. Data were analyzed using SPSS and SEM. Existing studies focused on the direct relationship between deontological ethical orientations and public interest. Therefore, this study examines the mediating role of accountability in the relationship between deontological ethical orientations and public interest using data from government primary schools. The findings reveal that accountability partially mediates the relationship between deontological ethical orientations and public interest.

**Keywords** Deontological ethical orientations · Accountability · Public interest · Universal primary education (UPE) · Uganda

## Introduction

Individualism dominates today's public life at the expense of common benefit (Kwemarira et al. 2019). Some people prefer to work in public offices to gain

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opportunities to pursue personal needs instead of promoting what is good for an entire community (e.g. common preferences, citizens' will and equality) (Leif 1991). In Uganda, citizens are not satisfied with the services of government officers and keep questioning whether their interests are put first Whereas in the education sector, schools are expected to be responsible for the provision of quality education to pupils (Saeed et al. 2005), this rises public dissatisfaction. The public is dissatisfied that 68% of children who enroll in primary schools drop out before completing primary education (UNESCO 2018). Additionally 80% of the pupils in Uganda's lower primary level cannot work out a two - digit subtraction sum and 61% cannot comprehend a simple short sentence (Kwemarira et al. 2019).

Some of the cited public concerns in Ugandan education system are: many pupils in UPE schools study under trees, they are hungry and these children are taught by poorly remunerated teachers (World Bank Development Report 2018). The ministry of education received only 8% of the total national budget in 2019 that cannot provide the valued education that meets the public desire of quality education for a literate society. Again, the citizenry is concerned that the lower schooling sector is facing other shortcomings such as enforcing a uniform curriculum across all schools, learners lack scholastic materials and inequality exists in teaching load allocation and administrative responsibilities. As a rule, public primary education is assumed to be free. However, some public schools throughout the country levy money for meals, development projects, teachers' allowances among others. The 2008 Education Act prohibits the payment of fees at any government aided primary school. The exception is allowed to cater for the aforementioned; surprisingly, this is not adhered to. There are also cases of head teachers not conducting effective supervision of teachers with a view to streamline their service delivery. Teacher absenteeism, failure to cover the syllabus and breakdown in pupil counseling and guidance are some of the other factors that need to be corrected. In the event of non-compliance, teachers are not tasked to explain. This is to the detriment of parents and the community who deserve wellbeing of their pupils (Inspectorate of the Government of Uganda Report 2018).

Further, current theoretical and empirical studies on public interest have largely concentrated on the direct relationship between accountability and public interest (Rasmussen et al. 2014; Denhardt and Denhardt 2007; Bozeman 2007; Lewis 2006; Soroka and Wlezien 2005; Leif 1991; Olson 1971; Schattschneider 1960) Theoretically, previous studies have largely used public choice theory (Buchanan and Tullock 1962) and agency theory (Jensen and Meckling 1976) to inform public interest. Public choice theory perspective arguments collectivism which fosters common good (Buchanan and Tullock 1962) Again scholars like Bozeman (2007), Denhardt and Denhardt (2007) and Soroka and Wlezien (2005) studied public interest using Agency theory (Jensen and Meckling 1976) because it explains and resolves issues between government officers and citizens. Public choice theory does not explain how to combine individual and group interests in decision making. It also neglects constitutionalism, legal frameworks and rules in fostering public benefit. Agency theory focuses on roles and responsibilities of public officers and is silent on how these government employees act in the best interest of the whole societal benefit.

This study contributes to knowledge by using stewardship theory in explaining public interest in a Sub Saharan setting. This is the behaviors of the public officers, particularly teachers are aligned with the interests of the citizens-specifically parents

who take their children in government schools. Empirically, the mediating role of accountability on the association between deontological ethical orientations and public interest has been ignored.

## Theoretical Review

### Stewardship Theory

Stewardship theory seeks to understand the conditions under which agents are less likely to base their actions on self-interests but rather take pleasure in serving collective goals or act as stewards to the interests of their principals (Donaldson and Davis 1991, 1993). This theory assumes that stewards are motivated by collective or social goals and not (primarily) by their self-interest. Therefore, stewardship theory is based on the concept of ensuring that the behaviors of the managers are aligned with the interests of the principals. It is mainly concerned with identifying the situations in which the interests of the principal and the steward are aligned (Donaldson and Davis 1991, 1993). The theory argues that stewards do their best to foster the benefits of the greater society. Public officers do not compromise with their selfish interests to the detriment of the greater society (Kakabadse 2009). This theory demonstrates how the motivations of learners are aligned with the interests of teachers in government schools.

## Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

### Deontological Ethical Orientations and Public Interest

According to deontologists, the decision-maker is to adhere to a set of rules and guidelines (Macdonald and Dudley 1994). Deontology is further classified into ethics of duty, ethics of rights and justice. The issue of deontology has the dimension of duty which is free of the concept of good and that actions are not justified by the consequences of the actions but still insist on the importance of the motives and character of the public officer rather than the consequences actually produced by the public officer (Beauchamp and Bowie 1983). Justice orientation is where a public officer is fair in his or her ethical decisions and makes decisions by paying attention to concepts such as honesty, rightness and equity (Aupperle 2008). Justice as an act is determined by the notion that “equals ought to be treated equally” and “un-equals ought to be treated unequally” with an emphasis on fairness (Reidenbach and Robin 1988). Deontological ethical orientation ensures that rulers do not stray from that path (Potter et al. 2014). This implies that public officers have to behave in a just way while executing public tasks and duties to promote citizenry interests.

Public interest has multiple meanings and appears not to be specific (Zrinjka 2009). It is explained in terms of common interest, public significance or common good or anything of interest to the public (Moyers 2007). It is about the outcomes best serving the long-run survival and well-being of a social collective construed as a public (Bozeman 2007). It is what happens when citizens discharge their obligations and successfully claim their rights (Denhardt and Denhardt 2007). It is achieved when

citizens get the sense that public institutions provide them quality services (Bozeman 2007). In order to achieve the common good, civil leaders and individuals alike must seek what is good for the whole society rather than what promotes individual or minority interests by following the stipulated laws. Public interest is about the transcendent ideas and concerns for the good of society, rather than self-interest that motivate political action (Reich 1988). It also brings with it a basic concern of following scripts that are designed to benefit the majority of citizens. However, matters that are of public benefit are not necessarily the same thing as matters which the public finds interesting (Herman 2007). This means that rules and regulations ought to be crafted in the interests of common people and thus government workers are obliged to follow the law as they execute their tasks.

Deontology is premised on the assumption that the best means of achieving consistent, universal and impartial decisions that protect the rights of citizens is anchored on rules (Campbell 2002). It is the responsibility of leaders to have ethics that are imparted in different state actors (Vigoda 2002). Therefore citizens have a role to determine the ethical direction of the society in which they live. The following hypothesis is set forth:

*H<sub>1</sub>: There is a relationship between Deontological ethical orientation and Public interest*

### **Deontological Ethical Orientations and Accountability**

According to Farazmand (2002), the current worldwide concern for accountability and ethics is critical in public service. This is largely due to many factors including the concern for common good and common interests. It has been valued as a major feature of human civilization. This involves citizens, policy makers, governing political actors and administrative elites across the globe fostering universal benefit. Relatedly, the essence of the legal framework boils to imposing in advance, legal restrictions that public officials are obliged to observe in performing their functions and duties. It is generally believed that public employees are motivated by a sense of service not found among private employees. Public employees in government organizations are seen as motivated by a concern for the community and a desire to serve the common good, and are more likely to be characterized by an ethic that prioritizes intrinsic rewards over extrinsic rewards (Nikolay and Bulgaria 2014). Deontology is premised on the assumption that the best means of achieving consistent, universal and impartial decisions that protect the rights of citizens is anchored on rules. Citizens have a role to determine the ethical direction of the society in which they live. They participate in the running of the state and ensure that morality of the public is safeguarded. The public and government officers act responsibly in knowing what values are in society and defend them (Isaac 2009). Leaders with ethical standards are held responsible for enforcing and obeying rules among public officers which is crucial for quality performance in public institutions. Such leaders are held accountable for public decisions made which deter them from collusion and corruption (Mostovicz et al. 2009). Holding public officers answerable for their decisions and actions captures the essence of the stewardship theory (Hansson and Longva 2014). Following the reviewed literature, it is hypothesized that:

*H<sub>2</sub>: There is a relationship between Deontological ethical orientation and Accountability*

### **Accountability and Public Interest**

Accountability is the leader's willingness to accept the responsibilities inherent in the leadership position to serve the wellbeing of the citizens; the implicit or explicit expectation that he or she will be publicly linked to his or her actions, words or reactions. It entails the expectation that the leader may be called on to explain his or her beliefs, decisions, commitments or actions to the citizens (Hansson and Longva 2014). Darling–Hammond (2006) note that such leaders show concern for the welfare of others, and commit themselves to efficacy, independent of incentives. Accountability has promoted the worthiness of public resources spent on public utilities, such that offering accountabilities minimizes on the levels of corruption and fraud in public institutions. Leaders who are accountable to the public spend resources on worthwhile ventures that cater for the interests of the majority. According to Evenett (2005), communities with such leaders have registered substantial improvements in the wellbeing of their citizens since their public expenditure systems and policies are dependable and resonate with public interests. In view of the literature analysed, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H<sub>3</sub>: There is a relationship between Accountability and Public interest*

### **Deontological Ethical Orientations, Accountability and Public Interest**

Leaders with high moral ethical standards exercise professionalism, transparency and make decisions on developmental projects that improve welfare of the citizens (Nsiah-Asare et al. 2016). This means that they follow the law in the utilization of public resources for the good of the citizens. As a result, public resources are ventured into projects of public interest that add value and improve on the welfare of the led (Kee and Forre 2008). In the same vein, accountability emphasizes holding an individual or an organization fully responsible for actions and functions they are engaged in and over which they have a duty to exercise authority (Mihai et al. 2010). Leaders who willingly accept the responsibility to lead the community make decision that benefit the public and commit themselves to own the results of their decisions and actions (Kraines 2001). Such leaders acknowledge potential dangers that would befall their intended good programmes, policies, decisions for the public and take corrective action to avert such occurrences (James et al. 2007). They provide guidance as a means of assessing remedial steps taken following a breach of trust in order to gain, maintain credibility which is cherished by the masses. The following hypothesis is therefore set forth:

*H<sub>4</sub>: There is a mediating effect of Accountability on the relationship between Deontological ethical orientation and Public interest*

## Research Methodology

### Approach

This study employed a cross-sectional design and quantitative approach to examine the mediating role of accountability on the relationship between deontological ethical orientation and public interest. This approach is the most appropriate method of data collection because cross sectional studies are perceived to be relatively inexpensive, faster and easier to conduct, useful for generating and clarifying hypotheses and can lay the groundwork for decisions about follow-up studies (Sekaran 2000). The researchers incorporated standardized measures and statistical techniques associated with the positivism paradigm to obtain in depth responses on the three study variables. Previous research supports the reliability and validity of the self-report measures (Lechner et al. 2006). The population of the study was 6776 public primary schools (Ministry of Education and Sports Report of Uganda 2017). The sample size of 361 UPE schools was determined according to Krejcie and Morgan table of sample size determination (Krejcie and Morgan 1970). The unit of analysis was a public primary school while that unit of inquiry consisted of public teachers and parents that benefit from the schools. One thousand and eighty (1080) respondents (2 teachers and 2 parents per school from 270 schools) were responsive which gave a response rate of 75%. The 2 teachers represent the view point of public interest from government perspective while the 2 parents give the critical area of common good based on the position of the citizenry per school. This allowed detailed reporting in regard to the study and gave room for divergent views from the two categories of respondents. Respondents were public teachers and parents with pupils in government primary schools, randomly selected from central and western Uganda's government primary schools. These two regions were selected because of the high number of government schools in the regions (Uganda National Examinations Reports 2015, 2016, 2017). Data were collected with the help of three research assistants after they were trained by the lead researcher in the period between July 2018 and September 2018.

### Measurement of Variables

A self-administered questionnaire was the main instrument to elicit responses. All item scales were adopted from previous research studies, Okafor and Osuagwu (2006), recommend adapting item scales used in previous studies because of their wide item scales reliability and validity. Accountability was operationalised to include the dimensions of; responsibility, openness and answerability. This measured using developed by James et al. (2007). Deontological ethical orientation was conceptualized to include the dimensions; Ethics of Duty and Ethics of Rights & Justice. The items to measure this construct were adopted from Reidenbach and Robin (1988); Carmen et al. (2007) and Ntayi et al. (2012). Public interest was unpacked to include citizens' will, egalitarianism and common preferences which were measured based on scales developed by Dutzik et al. (2009) and David (2002).

The measurement items for the three constructs were anchored on a six-point Likert scale ranging from Since these studies were conducted in other countries, the researchers adopted, modified and localized these items to suit the context of this study.

The six-point Likert scale is supported by Chomeya (2007) who argues that it avoids the mid-point of no sure that many respondents tend to tick under a three or five or seven point likert scale. The study had two questionnaires; one for the parents (citizens) and another for teachers (public servants). The questionnaire items that survived after CFA are appended at the end of the article.

The study tested the reliability and validity of the research instruments. The Cronbach alpha coefficients of the research instruments were found to be 0.869, 0.920 and 0.904 for deontological ethical orientation, accountability and public interest respectively (Cronbach 1987). These exceeded the minimum acceptance value of 0.70 as recommended by Nunnally (1978). This signified a high reliability of the instrument to be based on in the testing of our research hypotheses (Sarantokos 2005). The content validity index (CVI) for deontological ethical orientation, accountability and public interest were 0.789, 0.864 and 0.860 respectively. These were in line with the recommended 0.70, hence appropriate for the study (Amin 2005) (Tables 1 and 2).

### Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

EFA was performed to test factor loadings on each of the study constructs (Hair et al. 2010), by running principal component analysis as the extraction method using Varimax with Kaiser Normalization to explore factor structure of deontological ethical orientation, accountability and public interest. This was necessary to help summarize variables from the constructs with multiple questions into more meaningful and interpretable factors. The EFA results of the study indicated the factor items that loaded well on the three constructs with communality values above 0.5 that are higher than the suggested minimum estimate of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker 1981), demonstrating evidence for convergent validity.

Next, CFA was conducted after performing EFA on our data using AMOS 20 to test whether the dimensions of a theoretically grounded model of variables fitted in the study data based on model fit indices (Hair et al. 2017), to confirm whether the factors extracted converged as manifest variables. CFA was carried out following guidelines by Anderson and Gerbing (1998) to construct the CFA and SEM models. Only those dimensions and respective items that were retained at EFA for each variable (Deontological ethical orientation, accountability and public interest) were used to carry out a CFA using Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS). The items for each respective construct were further reduced after conducting CFA (Figs. 1, 2 and 3).

The model fit indices were all above the required threshold of .95 for the fit indices and the RMSEA were less than .060 cutoff points. This therefore means that the

**Table 1** Reliability and Validity of the instrument

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Content Validity Index
Deontological ethical orientation	.869	.789
Accountability	.920	.864
Public interest	.904	.860

Source: Primary data

**Table 2** Regression weights of the unmediated and the mediated Paths

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
PUBLICINTEREST	<--	ACCOUNTABILITY	.382	.060	5.216	***	Supported
PUBLICINTEREST	<--	DEONTOLOGICAL	.264	.049	2.386	.017	Supported
ACCOUNTABILITY	<--	DEONTOLOGICAL	.132	.056	2.448	***	Supported
PUBLICINTEREST	<--	ACCOUNT<--					

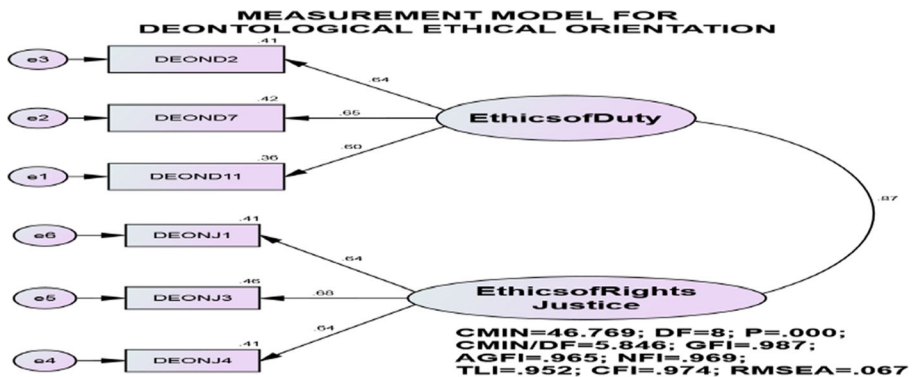
DEONTOLOGICAL.197.0484.223\*\*\*Supported\*\*\* Results are significant at 0.001, \*\* results are significant at 0.01, \* results are significant at 0.05

measurement model yielded acceptable fit indices (Hu and Bentler 2009), suggesting a good representation of deontological ethical orientations, accountability and public interest items respectively retained after CFA.

### Structural Equation Modeling

Structural equation modelling using Amos 20 was applied to test the research hypotheses. A two-stage SEM recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1998) was employed. The first stage involved estimating a measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and the second stage involved estimating the structural model. In the first step, the manifest indicators (survey scale items) were subjected to CFA, allowing each construct to correlate with every other construct in the model. This step examines the measurement model for fit. If the measurement model provides good fit, then the researcher can proceed to step two which examines the hybrid model comprising both the measurement parameters and the structural paths between the latent constructs. The measurement model provides the baseline of fit to which a hybrid model is compared in step two. The same fit index cutoffs from CFA apply to SEM. If, and only if, good fit is ascertained in step two, an examination of path coefficients as tests of the hypotheses is undertaken. In the current study, two sets of alternative models were analysed, one without mediation and the other with mediation.

Additionally, SEM was selected because it provides more accurate and proper results for mediation analyses. It is superior to the approach proposed by Baron and



**Fig. 1** CFA for Deontological ethical orientations

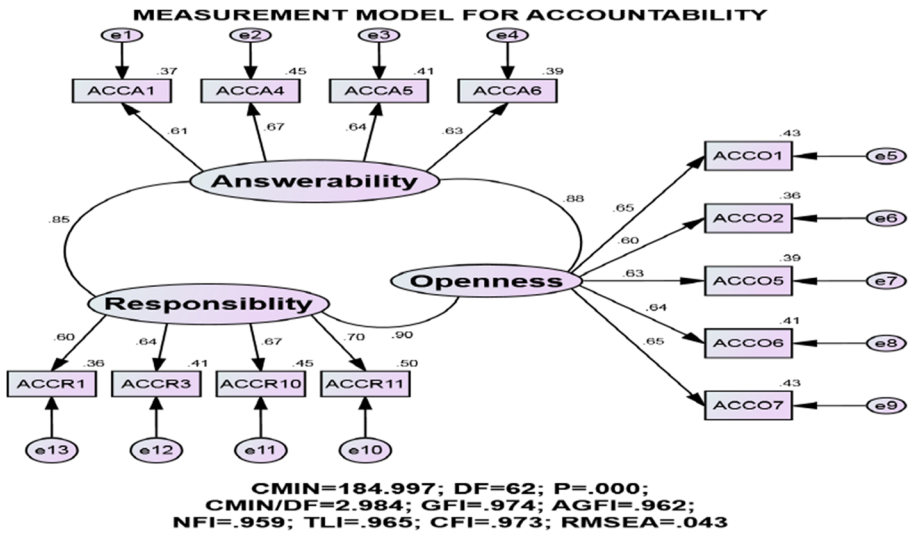


Fig. 2 CFA for Accountability

Kenny (1986) which relies on using four separate regression equations. Regression models define each variable as either a cause or an effect, while variables in a causal framework can be causes and effects at the same time (MacKinnon and Fairchild 2007; Kraemer 2001); therefore regression analyses are inaccurate in estimating the mediating effect. Additionally, SEM allows for the simultaneous estimation of a series of independent regression equations (Hair et al. 2017) (Fig. 4).

The estimates of the standardized regression weights ( $\beta$  value) were significant. Therefore, all the hypotheses both the direct and indirect were supported-which indicates the positive effect of the unmediated and mediated associations.

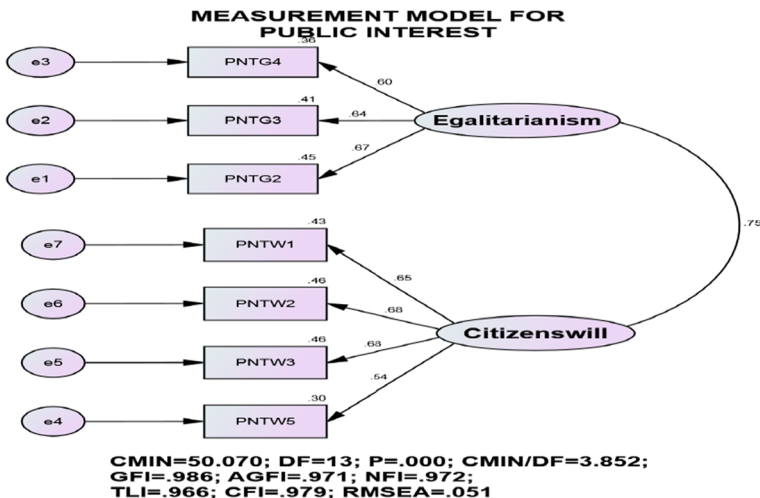


Fig. 3 CFA for Public interest

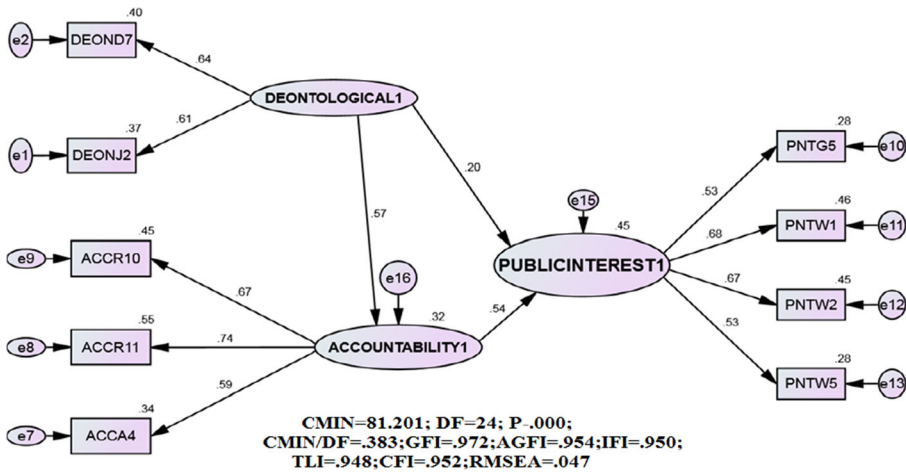


Fig. 4 Structural model for Public interest

## Results

### Demographics

A response rate of 75% was obtained, corresponding to 1080 respondents from 270 public primary schools. There was no difference between the perceptions of the study constructs amongst the teachers and parents. This is evidenced by the ANOVA results, Mean and Standard deviation results appended at the end of this article. The descriptive statistics show that the majority (51.4%) were males while females constituted 48.6%. Most of the respondents were born between 1981 and 2000 and constituted 39.9%. Those born between 1965 and 1980 constituted 35.7%; 20.0% were born between 1946 and 1964, and the least number of respondents, constituting 4.3%, were born between 2001 to date. The majority of the respondents, constituting 39.4%, were Diploma holders. This was followed by Certificate holders at 32.4%; Degree holders at 15.4%; those below Certificate constituted 9.1%; Master's at 2.6%, while the least number of respondents at 1.2% had PhDs. Most of the respondents were married with 52.9%. This was followed by the single ones with 35.5%, divorced 5.5%, widows 4.4% and the least category of respondents were widowers with 1.9%. Most of the respondents were civil servants as evidenced by 52.0%, the self-employed were at 40.3% and corporates 7.7% of the respondents.

### Hypotheses Testing

*H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive relationship between Deontological ethical orientations and Public interest*

Results confirm that *H<sub>1</sub>* was supported ( $\beta=.264$ ,  $t\text{-value}=2.386$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This means that a positive change in deontological ethical orientation (ethics of duty and ethics of rights & justice) is related to a positive change in public interest among UPE schools in Uganda.

*H<sub>2</sub>: There is a positive relationship between Deontological ethical orientation and Accountability*

The findings upheld and confirmed H<sub>2</sub> that Deontological ethical orientations is significantly positively related to Accountability ( $\beta=.132$ ,  $t\text{-value}=2.448$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This means that a positive change in deontological ethical orientation is associated with a positive change in accountability in Ugandan UPE schools.

*H<sub>3</sub>: There is a positive relationship between Accountability and public interest*

The research results confirm that H<sub>2</sub> was accepted ( $\beta=.382$ ,  $t\text{-value}=5.216$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The results imply that a significant positive change in accountability brings in a positive change in public interest in Ugandan UPE schools.

*H<sub>4</sub>: There is a mediating effect of Accountability on the relationship between Deontological ethical orientation and Public interest*

Bootstrapping was selected over other methods like Sobel tests and the casual steps approach to test for mediation mainly because despite the complex and existence of multiple paths within a model, its extrapolation is based on the indirect effect between the predictor and dependent variable respectively (Preacher et al. 2007). Mediation is assumed to exist if there is a difference between Standardized Total Effects and Standardized Direct Effects. In this study mediation exists for the hypothesized relation because there was a difference between Standardized Total Effects and Standardized Direct Effects for Accountability as a mediator in the relationship between deontological ethical orientation and public interest (.360), Table 3.

The study predicted and confirmed that accountability mediates the relationship between deontological ethical orientation and public interest (partial mediation) ( $\beta=.197$ ,  $t\text{-value}=4.223$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This implies that accountability acts as a conduit in the association between deontological ethical orientations and public interest. This mediated hypothesis was confirmed through Bootstrap Significance Testing of Mediation.

## Discussion

*H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive relationship between Deontological ethical orientations and Public interest*

Hypothesis one results indicated that deontological ethical orientations is one of the drivers of public interest in Uganda. As a general rule, primary education is free, although private schools do exist and are permitted to charge tuition fees. Public schools are to abide by the Constitution, putting into practice the Education Commission's Teachers' code of conduct, following school rules and regulations that guide school administrators, teachers and pupils in the day-to-day affairs of UPE schools. When UPE staff abide by the school laws, it is likely that pupils will learn and perform well at primary leaving examinations. Additionally, UPE schools are compelled to

**Table 3** Total, Direct and Indirect Effects

Standardized Total Effects			
	Deontological	Accountability	Public interest
Accountability	.439	.540	.000
Public interest	.500	.548	.000
Standardized Direct Effects			
	Deontological	Accountability	Public interest
Accountability	.133	.540	.000
Public interest	.140	.351	.000
Standardized Indirect Effects			
	Deontological	Accountability	Public interest
Accountability	.306	.000	.000
Public interest	.360	.197	.000

design and submit lesson plans and schemes of work that they will follow before the beginning of the new term. This assists in the completion of the syllabi on time and even teaching pupils the required content being guided by the syllabi books. To improve the quality of learning, public primary school teachers and pupils are expected to be punctual at the arrival time and departure from schools, attend classes, administer tests, examinations, seminars and any other scheduled school activity. While pupils are in school premises, they are required to be in classrooms during learning hours and attend other school activities that may fall over the weekend. In this way, teachers are positioned to offer quality education to learners with ease.

The researchers note that UPE teachers who are treated equally in terms of teaching load, administrative responsibilities, roles especially load allocation are committed to UPE tasks and perform satisfactorily. These research findings are consistent with the works of Nolte et al. (2016); Chamberlain (2016) and Inayet and Karaman-Kepeneci (2007) who argue that following laws, being fair and demonstrating justice enhances public interest. The findings are supported by Becker's (1968) criminal law model which asserts that individuals and firms are unwilling to take the necessary actions to comply with regulations and therefore must be compelled to do so, is substantiated. The Divine Command provides an explanation for the above study findings. It argues that being good is equivalent to doing whatever the Bible, Quran, Buddhist, Sacred scriptures or some other sacred text or source of revelation tells you to do. This foregoing viewpoint is in line with historical perspectives in regard to protecting the interests of the greater society. In the eighteenth century when the USA was established, comparable people-based powers were established. The founding fathers created a Republican Constitution which represented the will of people at the time (Constitution of USA 1788). In England, the Habeas Corpus is the oldest English law in force. The law means literally "you have the body", in practice allows any court of law to demand that any person is brought before it. This demonstrates the power of deontological ethical orientation in promoting public interest.

*H<sub>2</sub>: There is a positive relationship between Deontological ethical orientation and Accountability*

The findings upheld and confirmed H<sub>2</sub> that Deontological ethical orientation is significantly positively related to Accountability. This implies that when public schools execute their duties by following set laws, including constructing appropriate classrooms, providing scholastic materials, instructing learners as and when required in addition to other co-curricular activities, they are not only following the law, but accountable to the citizenry as well. In support of these findings, the stewardship theory argues that stewards are motivated by collective or social goals and not (primarily) self-interest (Davis et al. 1997; Van Slyke 2006). Stewards act in the interests of their principals, hence they possess collectivistic interests as opposed to individualistic ones that lead to personal benefit.

*H<sub>3</sub>: There is a positive relationship between Accountability and public interest*

The results tested and confirmed that there is a significant positive relationship between accountability and public interest. This implies that a positive change in accountability in form of responsibility and answerability promotes public interest through UPE schools benefiting parents by showing pleasure in attending to pupils' welfare and taking care of all pupils equally. Accountable government schools justify or explain the reasons for doing an act or providing an account for avoiding that action. In keeping with the aim of this hypothesis, whenever learning does not take place and pupils perform poorly, schools explain as to why learners failed. It is evident that when teachers and administrators execute tasks and responsibilities allotted to them, learners get good grades. As stewards of these schools, when teachers accept to undertake tasks and responsibilities in their respective schools, public interest is achieved by having a literate Ugandan society through quality education given to pupils. This is in line with Rubin (2015), Vladislav (2011) and Herman (2007) who established that holding public officers accountable enhances the greater good in different government sectors. However, Robinson and Jonathan (2012) argue that there are several factors that lead to a denial of taking responsibility. There are situations in which a person or institution may avoid to take responsibility for an action or response to another because they do not care about the other. They are simply more concerned about their own good. It is often argued that this focus on self-care to the exclusion of others is based in vices such as greed.

*H<sub>4</sub>: There is a mediating effect of Accountability on the relationship between Deontological ethical orientation and Public interest*

Before discussing the issues related to our mediation findings, we outline a basic mediation model that we will refer to as we discuss hypothesis 4. A mediator (Accountability) is a third variable that explains how or why two other variables (deontological ethical orientation and public interest) are related. Our mediation model consists of three variables: one independent variable (*Deontological ethical orientation*), one mediator (*Accountability*) and the outcome variable (*Public interest*). This is illustrated in the following model (Fig. 5). The model depicts the impact of deontological ethical orientations on accountability and public interest. The model also considers the impact of accountability on public interest. Besides direct

effects, deontological ethical orientations can also have indirect effects on public interest through accountability.

This means that as teachers carry out their obligations by following laws, procedures, rules and regulations, they will be capable of considering the welfare of the greater society. This is partly done through teachers accepting the responsibilities for their actions/inactions. Parents will be happy as learners are taught to completion of the curricula in the stipulated time. When teachers follow the stipulated school laws and are fair, they will inculcate discipline in learners, the safety of students will be assured and teachers will engage pupils in extra activities like sports and debates which improve performance in public primary schools. This can be better attained by staff in government schools following time tables, coming up with schemes of work and lesson plans prior to teaching so as to better execute their tasks and duties. This is premised in the thinking that UPE administrators if paid their salaries on time, give back to parents and learners by teaching what they ought to teach them timely; schools be kept clean; buy enough quality scholastic materials worth the money given to these public schools; facilities in schools should be enough; and pupils' security being assured to the parents. In this way, the performance of learners will improve and pupils will get good grades at the end of year and even at the completion of primary seven.

In approval of these research findings, Adje (2010) established that leaders that abide by ethical standards minimize possibilities of corruption and reduce wastage of public resources. In this regard, leaders with ethical behaviour exercise professionalism in the execution of their duties which promotes welfare of citizenry (Global Fund Audit 2016). This is equally supported by the stewardship theory (Donaldson and Davis 1991), as a relevant framework for understanding public interest. The concept of stewardship is traditionally grounded in a principal-agent dichotomy (Hernandez 2007). Hernandez (2007) advancement of the stewardship theory as an alternative theory to align the interests of the principal and those of the agent is also substantiated. This is seen by teachers using public resources for the benefit of UPE schools on top of following the school laws.

## Study Conclusion and Implications

The study tested and confirmed that  $H_1$  was supported. This means that a positive change in deontological ethical orientations enables a positive change in public

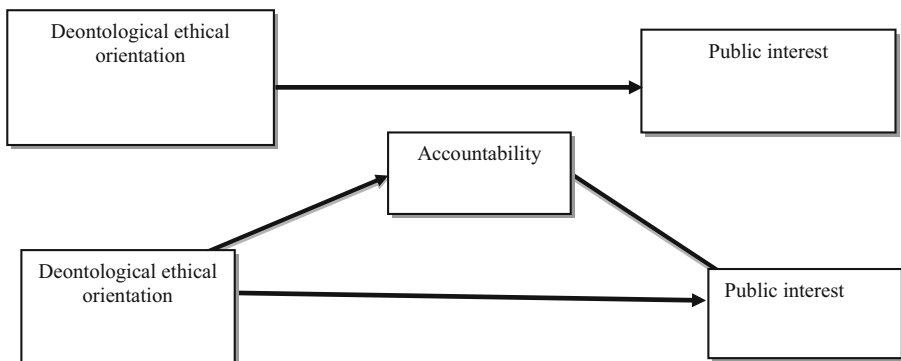


Fig. 5 Mediation: Direct and Indirect Path Diagram for Public interest

interest. Further, the results show that  $H_2$  was accepted. This means that a positive change in deontological ethical orientation is associated with a change in accountability. Again,  $H_3$  was accepted implying that a significant positive change in deontological ethical orientation warrants positive change accountability in Ugandan UPE schools. The study's lead intent  $H_4$  which was an indirect hypothesis was supported. This means that accountability acts as a conduit in the association between deontological ethical orientations and public interest. Based on these findings, the following conclusions and implications are put forward;

This study focuses on how stewardship theory contributes to theory development in the field of public interest. The study brings out the understanding of how accountability mediates the relationship between deontological ethical orientations and public interest. The theoretical implication of this study is its contribution to the ongoing public interest debate. It is upon this background that emphasis ought to be placed on public officers to follow the stipulated laws so as to be answerable and responsible which improves the well-being of citizenry. There are other theories that may inform public interest that were not part of this study that may be investigated.

Methodologically, this study was purely quantitative; therefore a qualitative survey through interviews may be conducted in future. The study adopted a cross-sectional approach to collect data and test the set hypotheses in a short period of time. This implies that the views of individuals that change over time were not considered. The same study should be conducted using the longitudinal approach. The study adopted and modified the measurement instruments which resulted in an alternative better explanation of public interest in the Ugandan context. In addition, although the sample was large enough, the study ignored other sectors like health, water, roads and electricity that relate a lot to common benefit.

The accountability of UPE schools should be regularly monitored. Teachers that show outstanding accountability should be rewarded and those whose accountabilities are questionable should be brought to notice and punished. Government school teachers should behave according to scripts that are tied to public roles. In the absence of these written laws, individual behaviour is difficult to define. Staff in UPE have responsibilities and considerable authority which should be used – albeit wisely. Head teachers need to regularly and methodically appraise and analyse the various aspects in schools inclusive of the teachers and learners. School administrators have legal responsibilities and obligations apropos the stewardship theory. Public officers in government schools as the servants of citizens need to be mindful of the interests of Ugandans. Teachers need to be attentive to the past, present and prospective future apropos the school: for instance, to take account (where appropriate) of the schools' roots, founders' wishes and long-term obligations for parents and learners of the future.

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