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Original Article

The impact of planning of Universal Secondary Education on students' performance among rural secondary schools in Masindi district, Uganda. A cross-sectional study.

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Abstract.

Background:
Planning is a step-by-step process with objectives and end products that can be evaluated. Planning positively influences firm performance, and measurement methods and contingency factors are primarily responsible for the inconsistencies. Strategic planning could lead to a loss of innovativeness and authenticity, as well as inflexible and time-consuming plans being equated to strategy. There is an inherent knowledge gap in the relationship between planning and firm performance. This study intends to assess the impact of planning Universal Secondary education on students' performance in rural secondary schools in the Masindi district.

Methodology:
The research was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, using a survey and a descriptive cross-sectional research design. Data was collected and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, where conclusions were drawn from tables and figures from the Package.

Results:
58.7% of the respondents were males, and the majority (58.0%) were aged 15-20 years. 42.7% of the respondents disagree that school planning is done concurrently between the administration and ministry, with a mean of 2.1. 57.3% of the respondents disagreed that the government provides boarding facilities in USE schools, with a mean of 1.7, and 34.7% of the respondents disagreed that the national budgeting and planning gives USE higher consideration, with a mean of

Conclusion:
Planning of USE influences students' performance in rural secondary schools in Masindi district. Use Schools whose planning is done by the ministry, and more generalized as opposed to those schools that are planned for by the administrators and managers who implement policies perform poorly than those that have an established local planning unit or committee.

Recommendation:
The ministry should allow schools to get genuinely involved in planning since they are the direct program implementers.

Keywords: *Universal Secondary Education, Student performance, Rural secondary schools, Masindi district.*
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Background.
Planning is a step-by-step process with clear objectives and measurable outcomes. Performance, which represents the outcome of activities, is at the core of every organization. Strategic planning seeks to enhance the quality of these results and can be assessed through both quantitative measures, such as net or gross profit, return on investment, and return on equity, and qualitative measures, such as job satisfaction, teamwork, industrial relations, Corporate Social Responsibility, new product development, operational efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction. Over the years, researchers have extensively examined the relationship between strategic planning and organizational performance, but the debate about the extent of this correlation remains unresolved (Singh et al., 2016). Some argue that there is little to no link between planning and tudents' performance, while others contend that schools with well-developed and effectively executed plans are more likely to achieve superior performance.

Research suggests that planning positively influences organizational performance, but inconsistencies in findings may arise due to differences in measurement methods and contextual factors. For instance, Armstrong (2012) emphasizes that without a clear description of planning techniques, it is impossible to scientifically assess the value of planning. Planning, when approached as a systematic, chronological process for developing or coordinating a strategy, introduces the concept of formality in planning (B, 2019). Formality refers to the degree to which a strategy is deliberate, documented, communicated, and involves time allocation, participant involvement, and clear specifications of process, resources, and responsibilities (George et al., 2019a). Higher levels of formality are generally associated

with improved organizational performance, although excessive formalization may sometimes result in diminished outcomes (Dibrell et al., 2014). Kipley et al. (2012) note that deliberate and systematic pre-planning of strategies yields better financial results compared to opportunistic and adaptive approaches.

It would be simplistic to attribute an organization's success solely to formal planning, as other management practices, such as organizational design, human resource strategies, and corporate culture, also contribute to high performance (Schwenk & Shrader, 1993). Similarly, Pearce and Robinson (2010) argue that formal strategic planning is effective for both large and small firms, although small firms tend to rely less on formal market positioning and more on innovative, unstructured approaches to resource generation and sales. Nevertheless, Verreynne (2006) asserts that despite the informal and opportunistic nature of strategy-making in small firms, strategic management processes are essential for both small and large enterprises, particularly when planning is seen as the reflective activity that informs decision-making.

As a general principle, planning should be practiced in organizations of all sizes, as it minimizes operational distractions and promotes strategic thinking (George et al., 2019b). Ideally, the strategy should begin informally as strategic thinking before being formalized through strategic analysis. However, formal planning systems come with potential drawbacks. They may lead to a misunderstanding of planning's purpose, issues in designing and implementing planning systems, and a lack of ownership of the strategy. Overly elaborate planning processes can stifle creativity and flexibility, reduce authenticity, and result in rigid, time-consuming plans that are mistaken for the strategy itself.

Given the knowledge gap in understanding the relationship between planning and organizational performance, this study seeks to examine whether the practice of planning in Universal Secondary Schools influences students' performance in the Masindi District of Uganda.

Methodology.

Research Design.

A descriptive design was adopted because the study intended to limit itself to the performance of USE. The above design was adopted to allow for the sampling of the study population. A cross-sectional survey design was used to select a small sample of people from a bigger population to act as an inference. Surveys were designed to show how things would be at a specific time. In survey research, independent and dependent variables were used to define the scope of the study. In this study, a survey design helped measure variables and examine relationships. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted because it helped the researcher gather data from a small sample to make inferences about the wider population. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used because they allowed a thorough investigation of the independent variable in relation to the dependent variable. Thus, the study gathered opinions, perceptions, and viewpoints, as well as figures and rates, respectively, to have a balanced representation of findings. The unit of analysis of the study was a combination of four senior candidates, other students, parents, and the communities and school staff.

Study Population.

Sekaran (2003) defines population as the entire group /events that a researcher wishes to investigate. The target population incorporated selected students, teachers, and head teachers in the selected secondary schools in the Masindi district.

Determination of Sample Size, Population Sample, and Sampling Techniques.

From the elements of the population that included students, teachers, and the head teacher, an appropriate sample was selected using Krejcie & Morgan Tables (1970).

Sampling Techniques / Procedures.

To achieve the study objective, probabilistic (simple random) and non-probability (purposive) sampling techniques were used in this study. The students were categorized into senior four students and student representatives from other classes. The school teachers were categorized into senior teachers, senior four-class teachers, and head teachers. From each of the categories described, a sample size was determined by use of Krejcie & Morgan Tables (1970). Probabilistic and non-probability sampling methods were used because they led to the selection of resourceful respondents in all the categories.

Data Collection Methods.

Interview.

The interviews were semi-structured, where a list of questions and issues to be discussed had been prepared before the interview. Semi-structured interviewing gave room for probing for clarification and further discussion of important and relevant issues that arose during the interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted among the respondents in the selected secondary schools which included the students, teachers, and head teachers in the selected secondary schools. This enabled the researcher to read the non-verbal communication and reactions, which were predicted to be helpful in the analysis of data (Amin, 2005). The advantage of using an interview was that it allowed on-the-spot explanations. Adjustments and variation were introduced during the data collection process and through respondents' incidental comments, use of facial and body expressions, tone of voice, gestures, feelings, and attitudes (Amin, 2005). The study adopted this method because it gave opportunities to probe further in-depth information, especially where the questions were not all understood.

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Self-Administered Questionnaire (SAQ).

Questionnaires were self-administered and guided. The method was chosen because it was less time-consuming and allowed the respondents the freedom to answer the way they felt most comfortable. The study used questionnaires because of the nature of the data, which sought feelings and perceptions of respondents, given the time available and the objective of the study (Amin, 2005). Questionnaires were used to avoid subjectivity that would result from close contact between the researcher and the respondents. The questionnaire was preferred because it collected much information over a short time and was less expensive (Amin, 2005).

Data Collection Instruments.

The study used appropriate instruments for each method. To the Key informants (teachers and head teachers), the researcher used an interview guide. In the questionnaire survey, the researcher used a questionnaire to get information from students, and in the documentary review, the study used books, reports, journals, newspapers, websites, and many others.

Interview guides.

The interview guide contained the key interview questions developed from the main research questions and was intended to meet the objectives of the study (Sekaran, 2003). This involved interviewing strategic respondents like teachers and head teachers, key BOG members, and parents. The purpose of the study was to access sensitive and critical information that other respondents did not have access to.

Questionnaires.

Questionnaires were self-administered and guided (Kothari, 2013). These were selected because they consumed less time and allowed the respondent the freedom to answer the way they felt most comfortable. It also ensured a high response rate as they were administered on the spot.

Validity and Reliability of Data Collection Instruments.

Validity

This is the degree to which any measurement approach or instrument succeeds in describing or quantifying what it is designed to measure. An instrument is valid if it measures what it is intended to measure and accurately achieves the purpose for which it is designed. (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001) Identified two types of validity, i.e., content and construct validity.

The researcher was assured that the instrument used would result in accurate conclusions: Use of a broad sample of content rather than a narrow one, and emphasis on important material and writing questions to measure appropriate skill. These three principles were addressed while formulating the questions for this study. The researcher engaged the supervisors to validate the questions set for both the questionnaire and the interview guide to ensure that they measured exactly what they intended to measure. All questionnaires were subjected to factor analysis, and the Content Validity Index (CVI) was computed. The following formula will be applied;

Content Validity Index (CVI) = Agreed items by all judges as suitable

Total number of items judged.

In case the Content Validity Index (CVI) of the instrument is equal to the average acceptable Index of 0.7 or above, then the instrument will be acceptable as valid (Amin 2005).

Reliability.

Reliability is the consistency of measurement or the stability of measurement over a variety of conditions in which the same results should be obtained. The collection instrument was tested to rectify the inadequacies in the instruments before administering them to the respondent. The interview questions and questionnaire were first issued to random students in the selected secondary school to ensure that the questions were clear to the respondents. The same was done with the interview. Some students in the selected secondary schools were subjected to the interview before it was conducted to the school management committees and administration to determine how vivid the questions would be to the respondent. The questionnaire was tested using ten (10) respondents within Masindi District rural USE schools, and the reliability results were computed using the established package for social scientists (SPSS). The scores were evaluated as follows:

Overall = Total number of alpha outputs divided by the number of variables.

Total number of items = Summation of the number of items for the entire variable.

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was computed to determine how items correlate among themselves. A pretest was conducted for all the questions until the minimum reliability index was 0.7 as recommended by Amin (2005).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was done over one month. A team of research assistants was led by the researcher in data collection. In the first week of data collection, instruments were developed and pre-tested for validity and reliability before full application. Still in the first week, contacting and making appointments with respondents was done. In the second week, questionnaires were administered to selected respondents. This was done with the help of two research assistants whose minimum qualification was a university degree. In the second week, interviews with key respondents were administered. All possible interactions were done, and all the responses were recorded using paper and tele-

recorders. In the third week, all collected data was organized and sorted for correctness.

Data Analysis

Qualitative

In qualitative analysis, the researcher used the content analysis technique to analyze data (Amin, 2005). This technique involved, first, the use of information collected from conducting face-to-face sessions between key informants. Thereafter, all interview content was reviewed, and only extracts with relevance to the study were presented in a narrative statement or themes, placed in quotes, and used to supplement the quantitative data that had been obtained from the questionnaires. The analysis was done manually, and responses were summarized in a narrative form of presentation of the major findings of the study.

Quantitative

Quantitative data were coded, edited, and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) data editor. Data was analyzed using version 16 of SPSS. Descriptive statistics, particularly measures of central tendency, were used to describe and summarize data. These included the mean, mode, and median, which aimed at establishing the rational statistics relationship between the correlation coefficient and regression analysis, and the quantitative method was used to establish the strength of the relationship between the variables, though other data was presented using frequency tables and graphs.

Measurement of Variables.

Both the nominal scale and the ordinal scale were used in the measurement of data variables. A nominal scale was used in capturing gender, age, occupation, etc., while an ordinal scale was used in ranking the data. The researcher also used a Likert scale rating system to rate the opinions of respondents. For example, Strongly Agree is (5), Agree (4), Not Sure (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a moral philosophy that deals with one's conduct and serves as a guide to one's behavior (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). This study considered the following ethical issues: plagiarism and fraud, acknowledging all the work of other writers who were consulted or reviewed about this study. Fraud refers to a situation where the researcher fakes data (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The study tried to protect the identity of the respondent to avoid being misquoted by others. It ensured the confidentiality of all data and the privacy of individuals contacted in this study. The researcher also took into account physical or psychological damage that would arise due to inappropriate questions or conduct to the research respondents (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The researcher sought informed consent from the respondents before gathering data so that there was harmonious interaction and the correct data with limited bias and interference.

Limitations of the study.

There was a challenge for the respondents who first hid information as they feared that it would expose their weaknesses.

There was also the limitation of funds as needed for the researcher to camp in Masindi for days to collect data, which was rather expensive.

Results.

Demographic characteristics of Respondents.

Table 1: Background information of respondents.

Category	Attributes	Frequency n=150	Percentage
Sex of the respondents	Male	88	58.7
	Female	62	41.3
Age of the respondents	15-20years	87	58.0
	21-25years	47	31.3
	26 and above	16	10.7
Level of education	'O' Level	87	58.0
	'A 'level	40	26.7
	Above	23	15.3

Table 1: Indicates that of the student respondents, 88 were males, and 62 were females. It can be seen that the low participation of females among students and teachers was due to the fact that the number of students and female teachers employed for teaching in secondary schools located in rural areas (Masindi district) is low. Generally, about 58.7% of the respondents were males, whereas about 41.3% respondents were females. The student respondents whose age ranged from 15-20 years were three-quarters (58.0%), and those of age ranging from 21-25 years were more than a quarter (31.3%). This indicates that the majority of the respondents were students 20 years and below. The findings of this study revealed that the qualifications of respondents were as follows: 58% of the respondents were '0'level, 26.7% were on 'A-level' level, and 15.3% were above 'O' and 'A-level', that is, had diploma, certificate, degree, and postgraduate qualification. The findings of this study indicated that the majority (58%) of the respondents were in

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'O' level (Students). This clearly describes the group that is directly affected, even though others also indirectly feel the pinch. Students after senior four fail to get placement, and this has resulted in a high dropout rate. Even those who complete S.4, the majority already have plans for finding ways to survive in the field.

The impact of planning of USE on students' performance in rural schools in Masindi district.

Table 2: Influence of planning of USE on students' performance in rural schools in Masindi district.

		SA		A		N		D		SD		Mean	Std. dev.
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	School planning is done concurrently between the administration and the ministry	33	(22.0)	64	(42.7)	29	(19.3)	12	(8.0)	12	(8.0)	2.1667	1.28186
2	There is a limit on the number of students in USE schools.	51	(34.0)	65	(43.3)	23	(15.3)	6	(4.0)	5	(3.3)	1.9933	.97964
3	The government provides boarding facilities in USE schools.	33	(22.0)		(57.3)	19	(12.7)	5	(4.7)	5	(3.3)	1.7467	1.06303
4	The National budgeting and planning give USE higher consideration.	51	(34.0)	52	(34.7)	24	(16.0)	21	(14.0)	2	(1.3)	2.1333	1.08477
	Grand mean											1.6260	

Source: field research 2016.

Table 2 consisted of 4 questions, which were aimed at examining the influence of planning on students' performance in rural schools in Masindi district. The responses were given in relation to five linkert scale ranking of 11=strongly disagree (SD),2=Disagree (D).3 Not sure (N),4 Agree(A) and)5= Strongly Agree (SA).

School planning is done concurrently between the administration and the ministry.

The study indicates that, 42.7% of the respondents disagree that; school planning is done concurrently between the administration and ministry with the mean of 2.1 which indicates that the respondents disagreed with the fact as revealed in the five linkert scale ranking, it was also revealed that, 8% strongly agreed, 19.3% were Not sure and 22% and 8% represents the strongly disagreed and agreed respectively. Hence, since planning is the focal point of every activity, they ought to do it concurrently.

There is a limit on the number of students in USE schools.

From the study, the majority, 43.3% of the respondents, disagreed that there is little information on the number of students in USE schools, with a mean of 1.9, which indicates that the respondents disagreed with the fact. Still, 34% strongly disagreed, 15.3% were not sure 4% and 3.3% representing agreed and strongly disagreed correspondingly. However, some students cannot join USE because of the government's preset conditions.

The government provides boarding facilities in USE schools.

The result in Table 4.4 indicates that 57.3% of the respondents disagreed that the government provides boarding facilities in USE schools, with a mean of 1.7 following the response on the five-point Likert scale ranking; others were 3.3% strongly agreed. 4.7% agreed, 12.7% were not sure, and 22% strongly disagreed

The National budgeting and planning give USE higher consideration.

The result still indicates that 34.7% of the respondents disagreed that the national budgeting and planning gives USE higher consideration, with a mean of 2.1. The study finally revealed that 1.3% strongly agreed, 14% agreed, 16% were not sure, and 34% strongly disagreed.

From the study, the results indicate that the influence of planning of USE on academic performance in rural schools in Masindi district is poor evidenced with a grand (mean =1.6), this signify that respondents disagreed that school planning is done concurrently between the administration and the ministry, there is a limit on the number of students in USE schools, the government provides boarding facilities in use schools and national budgeting and planning gives use higher consideration in the selected secondary schools.

Qualitative results.

Do head teachers participate in the planning of USE at all levels?

The respondents believe that head teachers participate in the planning of USE, but indirectly. They gave reasons for indirect participation. Normally, they do this at lower levels through submitting their local plans, the no of students, attached budgets, etc. They also brought out another issue of submission of the total number of students in their schools, which sometimes creates an impression that they participate, although they might not influence the final decisions. They also proposed that the communication between them and the Ministry of Education and Sports, and the Ministry of Finance, be constant to effect some improvement desired in this relationship. This meant that the amount of income received is directly as a result of the information submitted by the head teacher.

How do you think the surrounding environment influences the academic performance of students?

The respondents seemed to have mixed opinions regarding the surrounding environment and how it influences the performance of students. Others believe that the surrounding environment has nothing concerned with performance since the schools in study have quiet and cool surroundings while others think the surrounding environment is not any better (lack of motivating attitude to copy from, isolation, remoteness, ignorance and primitivity of the people and more so the primary core economic activities such as farming affect children and they have less interest as far as schooling is concerned. Similarly, Head teachers also fail to ask for regular reports regarding children's behavior at home and outside school. This meant that both the school and home play a part in the student's performance.

Discussion of results.

Planning of USE on students' performance in rural schools in Masindi district.

From the study findings, the majority agree that planning was vital for the rural schools, but rash to say that all the activities are done at the ministry rather than at the school level. The school management just implements the planned activities from above. On the other hand, other authors argue that it would be naïve to conclude that formal planning is the sole cause of success in firms because firms may be using other management practices, such as organization design, good human resource practice, or corporate culture, to steer high performance.(George et al., 2019b). However, this was not applicable to rural area schools since they are faced with different problems, while the planning authority just looks at generalized issues, thus affecting the students' performance.

School planning is done concurrently between the administration and the ministry. The majority of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Head teachers are there to implement what has been decided on from above. For them, they emphasized being kept as decision takers, not makers. One of the head teachers commented that the system has made them puppets. However, successful leadership is associated with the strength of purpose, staff involvement in decision making, and professional authority, which should be addressed by the USE system if it's to be properly planned.

It was also found out that students were too many against the facilities that had been provided, like classrooms, laboratory equipment, and teachers as well. These have hindered proper teaching and learning activities. Common causes of quality failure in education arise from a variety of sources, including poor curriculum design, unsuitable and poorly maintained buildings, poor working environment, unstable systems and procedures, timetabling, lack of necessary resources, and insufficient staff development. (Burke & Sass, 2008) Thus, school planning should be more involved, and facilities should be provided to suit the increasing number of students.

In some of the schools, however, documentary analysis provided exceptions to the above findings. Schools that have established a good planning unit or committee have good results. Their Uganda Certificate of Education results were impressive, thus establishing that participatory planning alone guarantees excellence in students' performance, especially academics. There are other factors to consider, such as aptitude, parental guidance, administrators, and academic foundation. (*Factors Affecting Academic Performance of Students*, n.d.) For example established that variables that affect students' performance are inside and outside of school. These could therefore be factors such as parental level of education, availability of study time, study habits, or even the discipline of the students themselves. (Waseka & Simatwa, 2016) Both identified discipline as a factor that contributed to students' performance.

From the interview with some of the deputy head teachers, they asserted that schools that had a weak planning culture faced unique challenges that contributed to their low performance, as did students who lived with terminally ill parents. Students in the Focus Group Discussion also told of challenges such as alcoholic parents and a lack of basic necessities such as soap and sanitary pads, which minimized their concentration in class, causing them to perform poorly, and this was attributed to poor planning at schools. These

findings are in agreement with those of (Atanda & Jaiyeoba, 2011) In a study on "School Quality Factors and Secondary School Students' achievements in Mathematics in South-Western and North -Central Nigeria," who established that good planning for the school is essential if they are to fully participate in education services being offered and if they are to concentrate and have students perform better at school. They are further consistent with those of (Latino & Tafuri, 2023) In a study titled 'Physical Activity and Performance in Children,' researchers showed that there is growing evidence that regular physical activity enhances learning and school achievement.

Conclusions.

From the results attained, it is evident that the planning of USE Influences students' performance in rural secondary schools in Masindi district. USE Schools whose planning is done by the ministry, and more generalized as opposed to those schools that are planned for by the administrators and managers who implement policies perform poorly than those that have an established local planning unit or committee. This was possible because they planned for their scarce resources and got the best out of them.

Recommendations

The ministry should allow schools to get genuinely involved in planning since they are the direct program implementers.

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Availability of data.

Data used in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author**.**

List Abbreviation

BOG Board of Governors
MOES Ministry of Education and Sport
MUSE Management of Universal Secondary Education
PLE Primary Leaving Examinations
SS Secondary School
UCE Uganda Certificate of Education
UNATU Uganda National Teachers Union
UNEB Uganda National Examination Board
USE Universal Secondary Education
UPE Universal Primary Education
FAQs: Frequently Asked Questions

Authors contribution.

MGM designed the study, conducted data collection, cleaned and analyzed data, and drafted the manuscript
HN supervised all stages of the study from conceptualization of the topic to manuscript writing and submission.

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Conflict of interest.

The authors declare no conflicting interests.

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