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Head teachers` strategic planning and pupils` academic performance in Masindi district, Uganda. A cross-sectional study.

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Abstract

Background:
Effective headteacher strategic planning encompassing vision setting, resource allocation, stakeholder involvement, and monitoring has been linked in the literature to improved academic outcomes. This study assessed the association between headteachers' strategic planning and pupils' academic performance in public primary schools in Masindi District.

Methodology:
A cross-sectional research design was used, drawing from a target population of head teachers, deputy head teachers, teachers, School Management Committee chairpersons, and district education officials. Ninety teachers were surveyed using a self-administered, closed-ended Likert-scale questionnaire covering dimensions of strategic planning and perceived academic performance. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 20, with descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and Pearson correlation used to test the relationship between strategic planning and academic performance.

Results:
All 90 questionnaires were returned (100% response rate). Respondents were predominantly female (60.0%, n=54), aged 25–34 years (61.1%, n=5). Strategic planning practices were rated low to moderate vision/mission clarity (mean=1.31, SD=0.744), goal setting (mean=1.76, SD=0.975), stakeholder involvement in planning (mean=1.79, SD=0.828), and resource allocation (mean=1.96, SD=1.498). Conversely, perceived academic performance was rated high to very high by pupils performing well in PLE (mean=4.24, SD=1.193) and achieving Division One/Two (mean=4.24, SD=1.063). A strong, statistically significant positive correlation was found between strategic planning and academic performance ($r=0.737$, $p<0.001$, $n=90$).

Conclusion:
Strategic planning is significantly associated with pupils' academic performance in Masindi District, despite headteachers currently demonstrating weak practices in vision setting, stakeholder engagement, and resource allocation.

Recommendation:
Headteachers should strengthen school vision/mission articulation, set SMART goals, actively involve parents and community stakeholders in planning and budgeting, and improve transparent resource allocation and communication to enhance pupil academic outcomes.

Keywords: *Strategic planning, Headteachers, academic performance, Primary Leaving Examinations, District, Uganda*
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Background.
The ideal position for public primary school pupils in the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) is achieving high proficiency levels (Grade 1 or 2) through a supportive, resource-rich environment. This requires effective, democratic leadership, active, learner-centered teaching methods, consistent teacher supervision, and adequate instructional materials to foster critical thinking and high academic competence. However, the real position at primary schools in Masindi district is different! The performance of students at PLE for the last four years is unpleasant getting few grades of 1 and 2. In the year 2020 the district presented 3062 candidates and the percentage of grade one passes was 4.6% and grade 2 passes was 50%, in the year 2022, the district presented 3582 candidates and the percentage pass in Division one was 8.0% while that of division 2 was 44%, in 2023, the district presented 3076 candidates whereby the percentage pass in division one was 7.2 % while that of division 2 was 49% and in 2024, the district presented 3065 candidates whereby the percentage pass in division one was 5.8% while the percentage pass in division 2 was 56.7% showing poor performance. If this trend persists, many candidates in the district will be unable to access good post-primary institutions, resulting in them stopping at the

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primary seven level, thus becoming half-baked. In order to address this problem, all stakeholders, including parents and the district officials, should be vigilant in each category to play their roles effectively and sufficiently to raise the academic standards of the public primary schools in the district.

According to Kooti & Nalukwago (2023), headteachers' strategic planning, encompassing goal setting, resource allocation, and curriculum guidance, significantly drives academic performance by fostering a conducive, motivated environment for staff and students. Effective, collaborative, and visionary leadership leads to higher student success through improved teaching practices, active monitoring, and positive teacher-pupil interactions, Key elements connecting strategic planning to performance include goal setting and Vision: Developing and communicating a clear school vision improves school quality and performance; Resource Allocation: Proactively securing and distributing teaching materials is directly linked to better student results; Supportive Environment: Planning for the "total" school environment, including psychosocial support, enhances learning outcomes; Teacher Collaboration: Involving staff in strategic planning increases ownership of school goals and improves pedagogical approaches; Monitoring and Supervision: Regular staff meetings and monitoring curriculum implementation ensures learning standards are met Uwambajimana, 2022 and (Mose & Chui, 2025). Also, Kwalema and Onyango (2025) assert that Strategic planning positively impacts academic performance by defining clear goals, aligning resources, and improving instructional quality. Effective planning involves stakeholder engagement, regular monitoring, and teacher development, which directly lead to higher student achievement, whereas the absence of strategic action often results in poor academic outcomes. (Mugambi & Kirima,2024). This study assessed the association between headteachers' strategic planning and pupils' academic performance in public primary schools in Masindi District.

Methodology.

Research Design.

The study utilized a cross-sectional research strategy. According to Miller, Smith, and Pugatch (2020), a cross-sectional study design is one that gathers data from a large number of distinct people at one time.

Study population

The population of the study included 40 administrative staff (head teachers and their deputies) randomly selected, 200 teachers (an average of 10 teachers per school from 20 public primary schools) randomly selected, 20 Chairpersons of the School Management Committees (One chairperson from each school) randomly selected, 10 District officials purposively selected altogether, totaling 270 respondents.

Sample Size

Table 1: Sample size distribution

Category of Respondents	Population	Sample Size	Sampling Techniques
Administrative Staff Head teachers & 20 Deputies.	40	36	Random sampling
10 Teachers from each school.	200	132	Random sampling
District officials	10	10	Purposive sampling
Chairpersons of each School Management Committee Members	20	19	Random sampling
Total	270	197	

Source: District Education Office

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Sampling Procedure.

To guarantee representative participation of individuals from different categories within the chosen secondary schools, the study used a random sampling approach. To remove selection bias, simple random sampling picked head teachers, teachers, deputy head teachers, and representatives from the district officials and chairpersons of School Management Committees.

The investigator took into account 120 responders. Head teachers, deputy head teachers, teachers, and the education office were all taken into account by the researcher. Ninety (90) teachers from the chosen primary schools, ten (10) head teachers, ten (10) deputy head teachers, and ten (10) education office responders were all taken into account by the researcher.

Sampling Techniques.

Simple random sampling and purposive sampling methods were employed in this study.

Data Collection Instruments.

Questionnaire.

The structured questionnaire was used to obtain quantitative data from the participants. Respondents were able to offer standardized, readily evaluated responses to a series of closed-ended questions arranged logically. Teachers were surveyed using a Likert scale questionnaire with the following options: SA (strongly agree), A (agree), N (not sure), D (disagree), and SD (strongly disagree). This tool made it possible to quickly get data from a broad population.

Validation of Instruments

Validation of instruments in research ensures that tools/instruments (questionnaires, tests) accurately measure intended constructs, producing reliable and content-rich results. It involves theoretical alignment, expert review of content validity, and pilot testing to verify clarity, relevance, and reliability, ultimately ensuring the data addresses research objectives. In this study, validity focused include content validity to evaluate if the instrument comprehensively covers the intended content area. Validation of instruments also focused on the reliability of the instruments. This referred to the consistency, stability, and reproducibility of results produced by an instrument (e.g. surveys, tests, equipment), over multiple administrations. A reliable instrument yields the same outcomes when applied to the same subjects under identical conditions. It is crucial for ensuring accuracy, often defined by Cronbach's Alpha, which should be o.7 and above.

Validity

The degree to which a research study or measurement tool accurately measures or evaluates what it is intended to measure is known as validity. It is an essential component of research since it guarantees the validity and significance of the findings and conclusions obtained from the investigation. The degree to which the items or questions in a measurement tool accurately capture the breadth and depth of the construct being tested is known as content validity. It guarantees that the instrument's content is thorough, pertinent, and suitable for the goals of the study. Expert review and evaluation were used to establish content validity. The tools were constructed by the researcher as per the requirements of the study, and they were tested. Respondents who did not participate in the study during piloting were not blamed. Content validity was calculated using the content validity index formula. The researcher got an overall content validity index of 0.85 or above, which was considered valid for collecting data.

$$\text{Content validity index} = \frac{\text{Number of relevant items}}{\text{Total number of items}}$$

$$\frac{24}{28} = 0.85$$

A Validity Index (or Content Validity Index - CVI) value of 0.8 or higher is generally considered acceptable, indicating a high, clear, and relevant level of content validity for newly developed instruments.

Reliability.

The consistency, stability, and repetition of measurements or research project results are referred to as reliability. It is a crucial component of research since it guarantees that the findings of a study are reliable and reproducible. The degree to which a measurement tool or process yields accurate and consistent results across many contexts, time periods, or observers is known as reliability. Test-retest reliability, which evaluates measurement consistency over time, was used. It entailed giving the same test or measurement tool to the same group of participants twice and analyzing the degree of correlation between the outcomes. High test-retest reliability indicated that the measurements were stable and produced consistent results over time. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.984, which is higher than 0.70 generally considered the standard accepted threshold for good internal consistency reliability.

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Table 2: Showing Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
.984	28

SOURCE: Primary data 2026

Data Management and Processing.

To guarantee correctness and dependability, data management and processing entail the methodical arrangement, purification, coding, and analysis of the gathered data. After being verified for completeness, quantitative data from surveys were coded and imported into statistical software SPSS version 20 for analysis. The data was summarized using descriptive statistics, such as in the form of mean and standard deviations, Pearson, and the correlations between head teachers' management functions and pupils' academic performance were tested using inferential statistics. To extract valuable insights, qualitative data from interviews were transcribed, grouped into themes, and subjected to content analysis methods. Throughout the process, confidentiality and data integrity were maintained.

Quantitative Data Analysis.

In order to ascertain whether there was a significant correlation or difference between categorical variables, quantitative data from self-administered structured questionnaires were coded and input into a computer. SPSS software was used to generate descriptive statistics in the form of means and standard deviations, Pearson.

Ethical Considerations

There was informed consent to ensure that participants were completely aware of the study's objectives, methods, possible risks and benefits, their rights as participants, and the fact that participation was voluntary; the researcher acquired their informed consent. Written or clearly and transparently documented.

Privacy and secrecy were guaranteed. The privacy and confidentiality of the information provided by participants. This entailed keeping participant data safe and secure, employing de-identification or anonymization methods as needed, and refraining from disclosing sensitive or identifiable data without express agreement.

Results.

Response rate.

The researcher issued 90 self-administered questionnaires, and all were received back fully completed, making 100%.

Demographic data of respondents.

In the study, the researcher made a choice of various respondents with varying characteristics because the interest was in their gender, age, years of experience in the current school, and education level.

Gender of respondents

Table 3: Showing Gender of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Male	36	40.0
Female	54	60.0
Total	90	100.0

Respondents Source: Primary Data 2026

Findings as per Table 3 revealed that more females participated in the study (n = 54)60% as compared to male respondents (n =36), 40%.

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Age of Respondents

Table 4: Showing Age of Respondents

variable	Frequency	Percent
Below 25 years	2	2.2
25-34 years	55	61.1
35-44 years	17	18.9
45-54 years	10	11.1
55 years and above	6	6.7
Total	90	100.0

Source: Primary Data 2026

From the table 4, the majority of the respondents who participated were between the age of 35-45 years reflecting (n =17)18.9%, followed by the age of 25-34 years (n =55)61.1 whereas others were between 45-54 years (n = 10)11.1%, below 25 years (n =2)2.2% and 55 years and above (n =6)6.7%.

Years of experience in the current school

Table 5: Showing years of Experience in the current school

variable	Frequency	Percent
1-5 years	12	13.3
6-10 years	20	22.2
11-15 years	52	57.8
Above 15 years	6	6.7
Total	90	100.

Source: Primary Data 2026

Table 5 indicates that the majority of the teachers (n=52)57.8% had enough experience and had stayed in school for 11-15 years, followed by those who had stayed in school for 6-10 years (n =20), 22.2%, those above 15 years (n =6), 6.7%, and 1-5 years (n =12), 13.3%.

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Education Level

Table 6: Showing Education Level of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Certificate	23	25.6
Diploma	40	44.4
Bachelor‘s Degree	25	27.8
Total	90	100

Source: Primary Data 2026

Table 6 indicates the education level of respondents with the corresponding frequencies and percentages. The findings obtained revealed that the majority of the teachers are diploma holders (n =40), 44.4% (n =23)25.6% certificate holders, and (n =25)27.8% who hold bachelor‘s degrees.

Headteachers’ Strategic Planning in Masindi District, Uganda.

Table 7: Showing Mean and Standard deviation of Headteachers' strategic planning

Statement	Mean	Interpretation (Level of Satisfaction)	Standard Deviation
My headteacher formulates clear school vision/mission statements	1.31	Low	.744
My school sets clear SMART goals	1.76	Slightly low	.975
My headteacher always involves teachers, parents, and community members in planning/budgeting processes	1.79	Slightly low	.828
My school supports stakeholder involvement (active participation of staff, parents, and community) in the school decision-making	2.57	Moderate	1.272
My headteacher makes resource allocation for improvements	1.96	Slightly low	1.498
My headteacher establishes communication and aligns the school‘s mission and long-term goals	1.87	Slightly low	1.051

SOURCE: Primary data 2026

The table 7, shows the teachers‘ satisfaction was very low or strongly negative opinion that my headteacher formulates clear school vision/mission statements with a mean of 1.31 and standard deviation of .744, slightly low satisfaction that my school sets clear school smart goals with a mean of 1.76 and standard deviation of .975, slightly low satisfaction that my headteacher always involves teachers, parents, and community members in planning/budgeting processes with a mean of 1.79 and standard deviation of .828, moderate satisfaction that my school supports stakeholder involvement (active participation of staff, parents and community) in school decision-making with a mean of 2.57

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and standard deviation of 1.272, slightly low satisfaction that my headteacher makes resource allocation for improvements with a mean of 1.96 and standard deviation of 1.498 and my headteacher establishes communication and aligns the school's mission and long-term goals with a mean of 1.87 and standard deviation of 1.051.

Pupils Academic Performance in Public Primary Schools in Masindi District, Uganda.

Table 8: Showing mean and standard deviation of pupils' academic performance

Statement	Mean	Interpretation (Level of satisfaction)	Standard Deviation
Pupils in this school perform well in Primary Leaving Examinations	4.24	Very high	1.193
The school has consistently good PLE pass rates	3.83	High	.951
Many pupils achieve Division One and Two in PLE	4.24	Very high	1.063
My headteacher always provides transparent reporting to stakeholders (parents/government) and conducts regular audits	2.60	Slightly high	1.428
My headteacher properly manages tracking and auditing expenditures to prevent mismanagement or misuse	1.81	Slightly low	1.016
My headteacher periodically conducts fundraising through diverse means, including government grants and parent contributions	1.68	Slightly low	.872

SOURCE: Primary data 2026

From the table 8 , teachers' satisfaction was; very high that Pupils in this school perform well in Primary Leaving Examinations with a mean of 4.24 and standard deviation of 1.193, high that the school has consistently good PLE pass rates with a mean of 3.83 and standard deviation of .951, very high that many pupils achieve Division One and Two in PLE with a mean of 4.24 and standard deviation of 1.063, slightly high that my headteacher always provides transparent reporting to stakeholders (parents/government) and conducting regular audits with a mean of 2.60 and standard deviation of 1.428, slightly low that my headteacher properly manages tracking, auditing expenditures to prevent mismanaging or misuse with a mean of 1.81 and standard deviation of 1.016 and slightly low that my headteacher periodically conducts fundraising through diverse, including government grants and parent contributions with a mean of 1.68 and standard deviation of .872.

Correlation between headteachers' strategic planning and pupils' academic performance in selected public primary schools in Masindi District, Uganda.

Table 9: Correlation results for strategic planning and academic performance of pupils

		Academic performance of pupils
Headteachers strategic planning	Pearson Correlation	.737**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	90

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

In Table 9, correlation coefficient results show r= .737**, sig= .000 (p<0.05), and n= 90, which suggests a significant positive relationship between headteachers' strategic planning and academic performance of pupils in Masindi District, Uganda.

Discussion of Findings

Strategic Planning and Academic Performance of Pupils.

Correlation coefficient results show r =.737**, Sig = .000(p>0.05), and n =90, which suggests a significant positive relationship between strategic planning and academic performance of pupils in Masindi District. In the study, Planning was done strategically to enhance academic

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performance. Gibbon (2003) found that schools with a well-defined strategic plan showed improved academic outcomes, particularly in student achievement and teachers' effectiveness. Strategic planning was linked to better resource allocation, teacher development, and the student engagement which entailed; the headteacher coming up with the school strategic plan, the headteacher effectively communicating the strategic school plan, the headteacher involving himself in setting academic goals, the headteacher regularly monitoring the implementation of the strategic plan, the headteacher reviewing and updating the strategic plan annually, the headteacher ensuring that the academic targets set in the strategic plan are achievable, the headteacher allocating school resources based on the strategic plan priorities and the headteacher involving other stakeholders in setting goals this is in agreement with stake (1995) who highlights the role of strategic planning in aligning educational goals with the needs of teachers, students and the community. Some educators and administrators may resist strategic planning due to a lack of understanding or fear of H, OO-constraints in rural areas may struggle to implement effective strategic planning due to limited resources (Gibbon,2003). Academic Performance was measured in terms of standardized National Exams (PLE) continuous Assessment outcomes competition Rates and pass rates whereby teachers' satisfaction levels were;, very high that pupils in the school performed well in Primary Leaving Examination with a mean of 4.24 and standard deviation of 1.193, high satisfaction rate that the school had consistently good PLE pass rates with a mean of 3.83 and standard deviation of .951, very high that many pupils achieved division one and two in PLE with a mean of 4.24 and a standard deviation of 1.063, slightly high that the headteacher provided transparent reporting to stakeholders (parents and government) and conducted regular audits with a mean of 2.60 and a standard deviation of 1.428, slightly low that the headteacher properly managed tracking, auditing expenditures to prevent mismanagement or misuse with a mean of 1.81 and a standard deviation of 1.016, and slightly low that the headteacher periodically conducted fundraising through diverse, including government grants and parent contributions with a mean of 1.68 and standard deviation of .872.

Conclusions

Strategic planning is essential for the success of primary schools in Masindi District, where much Emphasis should be put on the vision, Mission, and long-term goals in guiding decision-making (Bennis and McClelland 1994). Much emphasis should be put on resource allocation, Teacher Development, student engagement, and data-driven decision-making. This is in line with (Coombs,2004, G23, Sewyer,2006 & Liu and Chen,2010.

Limitations of the study

Limited access to some schools in the Masindi district.
Potential bias in self-reported data from headteachers and teachers.
Time constraints in accessing and analyzing data.

Recommendations.

The headteachers in Masindi District should be urged to set proper vision/mission statements with smart goals and involve parents and community members with the support of the school to make proper resource allocation with proper communication channels if they are to achieve better results in PLE, hence enhancing good pupils'academic performance.

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List of abbreviations.

PLE - Primary Leaving Examinations
SPSS-Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
CVI- Content Validity Index
SMC-School Management Committee
r-Pearson correlation coefficient
p-p-value
n-sample size

Informed Consent.

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their inclusion in the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, procedures involved, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Source of funding.

The study was not funded.

Conflict of interest.

There is no conflict of interest.

Availability of data.

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

Author's contribution.

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

Author's biography.

Monica Kiiza is a student of master's degree in educational planning and management at School of Graduate Studies and Research, Team University.
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