

The impact of strategic planning on the performance of Rwandan secondary schools: A Systematic review

Albert Rugaba*

Faculty of Education, Bishop Stuart University, Mbarara-Uganda

Page | 1

Abstract

Introduction

This systematic review looks at how strategic planning influences the performance of secondary schools in Rwanda.

Methodology

Searches were conducted in Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, UNESCO, World Bank, OECD, and Government of Rwanda databases using predefined search terms that included strategic planning, educational leadership, school performance, and Rwanda. Studies published in English that discuss strategic planning and secondary school performance were selected. Starting with a total of 190 articles, all duplicate and irrelevant studies were excluded using title, abstract, and full-text screening, leaving 51 for thematic synthesis. The methodological quality of the included studies has been evaluated using CASP and AMSTAR frameworks.

Results

It has been found out from this systematic review that strategic planning positively influences school performance in terms of goal setting, effective instructional leadership, proper resource allocation, participation of all stakeholders, policy coherence, accountability, and school improvement. Leadership capability turned out to be the most important factor mediating strategic planning implementation, and flexible strategic planning increases the resilience of institutions. Also, some additional positive relationships have been found between strategic planning and organizational effectiveness, teacher commitment, and student performance. Strategic planning considerably improves the performance of Rwandan secondary schools with good leadership, an implementation process, and continuous monitoring and alignment with national education policies. It is necessary to develop strong leadership development programs, implement evidence-based strategic planning practices, and continuously monitor and evaluate to improve secondary school performance.

Conclusion

Secondary school performance can be significantly improved through strategic planning due to effective leadership, an implementation system, and school effectiveness principles.

Need for future research.

Future research needs to focus on longitudinal, mixed-methods, and comparative research that will analyze the long-term effects of strategic planning on students' learning outcomes, teachers' effectiveness, and institutional performance in Rwanda and similar education systems.

Keywords: *Strategic planning; School performance; Secondary schools; Educational leadership; Rwanda*

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Corresponding author: Albert Rugaba*

Email: rugaabalbert7@gmail.com

Faculty of Education, Bishop Stuart University, Mbarara, Uganda

Introduction

Strategic planning is considered to be a crucial element of organizational management and performance enhancement, both in public and private spheres (Drucker, 1954; Steiner, 1979; Mintzberg, 1994). Nowadays, strategic planning has become more important in the education sector as a tool to promote institutional performance and school development (Fidler, 2002; Bryson, 2011; Bryson, 2018). Traditionally,

strategic planning is viewed as a rational process aimed at goal setting and resource allocation (Ansoff, 1965; Steiner, 1979). Modern approaches, however, consider strategic planning to be a dynamic and participative process (Mintzberg, 1994; Bryson, 2018).

In the educational sphere, especially at the secondary level, strategic planning is directly related to school leadership and

performance (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2006). Efficient school leaders should implement the ideas presented in strategic plans to enhance the quality of education (Bush & Coleman, 2000; Robinson, 2011). Moreover, the research shows that schools having a good strategic plan demonstrate better organizational performance and student achievement (Davies, 2003; Hallinger, 2011).

In Africa and in Rwanda, strategic planning has become topical since new educational policies emphasizing decentralization, school-based management, and performance assessment have been adopted (Caldwell, 2005; UNESCO, 2015; Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2017). In its Education Sector Strategic Plan (2018–2024; 2024–2029), Rwanda prioritizes quality improvement, equity, and institutional development (Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2017; Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2024). Nevertheless, challenges associated with the implementation process of strategic plans and the lack of leadership skills still exist (World Bank, 2018; UNICEF, 2021).

Although there is a huge body of literature on strategic planning in organizations and education systems (Porter, 1985; Wheelen et al., 2018), the evidence on the impact of strategic planning on the performance of Rwandan secondary schools is poorly developed. This evidence gap requires conducting a systematic review aimed at examining existing empirical and theoretical studies and revealing the influence of strategic planning on school performance.

Thus, the purpose of this systematic review is to critically assess the literature on the impact of strategic planning on the performance of Rwandan secondary schools with particular attention to leadership, resource management, school development, and student achievement.

Theoretical framework

The study is based on the theoretical concepts of strategic management, educational leadership, and school effectiveness. All these theories explain how strategic planning influences secondary school performance.

Strategic planning theory

Strategic Planning Theory, as stated by Steiner (1979), is seen as a process of setting up organizational objectives and analyzing internal and external environments. According to Steiner, planning is not a single event but a managerial function that includes decision making, forecasting, and performance evaluation. The theory explains how schools organize development plans in accordance with their mission and national education objectives. In Rwanda, strategic planning in secondary schools is tightly connected

with national policy frameworks such as Education Sector Strategic Plans aimed at promoting quality and accountability (Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2017; Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2024). Therefore, the theory by Steiner allows for explaining how strategic planning impacts school performance.

Strategic management theory

Strategic Management Theory, suggested by Ansoff (1965) and developed further by such scholars as David (2020) and Wheelen et al. (2018), focuses on the process of attaining competitive advantage through efficient strategy development, implementation, and evaluation. Ansoff (1965) considers it very important to align organizational capabilities and the opportunities of the external environment through strategic decisions. David (2020) emphasizes the significance of such steps as strategic analysis, formulation, and implementation. Wheelen et al. (2018) argue about the importance of feedback and control mechanisms. Strategic Management Theory is appropriate for explaining how school leaders use strategic planning to enhance academic performance and manage resources, as well as meet policy requirements. It is consistent with such findings that leadership and strategic planning influence the school effectiveness (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Bush & Glover, 2014).

Emergent strategy theory

As opposed to the traditional rational approach to strategic planning, Mintzberg (1994) suggests Emergent Strategy Theory. He states that not all strategies arise from deliberate planning but rather are the result of certain actions, experience, and adaptation. Mintzberg asserts that the effective strategy is a combination of planned actions and emergent learning, especially in complex and uncertain environments. Emergent Strategy Theory is suitable for explaining school situations since schools regularly face unexpected problems such as resource shortages, policy changes, and new demands of learners. In Rwandan secondary schools, the theory allows for revealing the reason why strategic plans are changed during the process of implementation (Davies, 2003; Hallinger, 2011).

Educational leadership theory

Educational Leadership Theory considers the role of school leaders in creating an adequate instructional climate and promoting student achievement. According to Bush & Coleman (2000), leadership plays an important role in the process of strategic management in schools, especially in setting up the directions and implementing changes. Leithwood et al. (2006) list such fundamental practices of leaders as setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization. Robinson (2011) also maintains that leadership based on student-centered

practices greatly affects learning outcomes. This theory helps to understand how principals and school administrators transform strategic plans into school improvement projects. Effective leadership enables planning not only to be developed but also to be implemented to improve the performance of secondary schools (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020).

School effectiveness theory

According to the School Effectiveness Theory by Edmonds (1979), developed further by Sammons (1999), Scheerens (2015), and Hattie (2009), there are factors contributing to the success of schools independent of socioeconomic status. Among them, there are strong instructional leadership, a clear school mission, high expectations of learners, regular performance monitoring, and a safe and supportive learning environment. Sammons (1999) emphasizes the importance of school-level processes as a determinant of student achievement, while Scheerens (2015) provides measurable indicators of effectiveness. Hattie (2009) provides empirical evidence proving the significant influence of leadership and school organization on students' achievement. Concerning the impact of strategic planning on school performance, this theory helps to clarify how strategic planning promotes coordination, accountability, and instructional quality.

Integrated theoretical perspective

This study uses Strategic Planning Theory (Steiner, 1979), Strategic Management Theory (Ansoff, 1965; David, 2020; Wheelen et al., 2018), Emergent Strategy Theory (Mintzberg, 1994), Educational Leadership Theory (Bush & Coleman, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson, 2011), and School Effectiveness Theory (Edmonds, 1979; Sammons, 1999; Scheerens, 2015; Hattie, 2009). All these theories provide a holistic explanation of how strategic planning influences the performance of secondary schools. While strategic management and planning theories explain the strategy formation process, leadership theory deals with implementation, and school effectiveness theory with educational outcomes. This integrated theoretical perspective is very relevant for the understanding of school performance in Rwanda, where policy-driven planning and leadership competencies are very important for educational outcomes (Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2017; World Bank, 2022).

Research methodology

Eligibility criteria

This systematic review, conducted over 21 days starting from June 7, 2026, involves peer-reviewed articles, books, policy documents, and institutional reports dedicated to strategic planning and school performance in education systems. Such studies were selected that discussed the issues

of secondary education, strategic planning, leadership, or school performance (Bryson, 2018; Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Articles that did not cover the issues related to secondary education were rejected, as well as those that were not related to strategic planning or organizational performance.

Information sources and search strategy

Literature search included Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and institutional databases (UNESCO, World Bank, OECD). The keywords used for searching were "strategic planning in schools," "school performance," "educational leadership," "secondary education Rwanda," and "school improvement strategies" (Bush & Glover, 2014; Hallinger, 2011; Wheelen et al., 2018). Literature search included the papers published in English and devoted to the issues of education systems worldwide. Besides, the policy papers from the Government of Rwanda and other international organizations were used as information sources (Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2024; UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2023). The search process made use of Boolean logic ("AND" and "OR") together with pre-selected key terms to improve efficiency. The search strings used combinations like "strategic planning" AND "secondary schools," "school performance" AND Rwanda, "educational leadership" AND "strategic management," and "school improvement" OR "education policy." In addition, the reference lists of relevant sources were manually reviewed to uncover additional studies that would be included in the review despite not appearing in the databases searched (Page et al., 2021).

Study selection and data collection

Standardized data extraction sheets were developed for recording information on authors, year of publication, methodology, country of origin, aim(s), elements of strategic planning, leadership factors, resource management practices, performance of schools, results, and methodological soundness. Data extraction was done by two independent reviewers, and differences were reconciled through discussion. During the process of selecting studies, 190 sources were screened for relevance based on titles and abstracts. The process of screening was independently done by two reviewers. Titles and abstracts of all 190 documents that were identified were independently screened for relevance based on the previously defined inclusion criteria. Full-text documents that met the inclusion criteria were independently screened by the same two reviewers. Differences between the two reviewers about study inclusion were sorted out through discussion and consensus before the final choice of the studies to be analyzed through thematic synthesis. This approach ensured a reduction in bias in the process of selection (Page et al., 2021; Higgins et al., 2022). Then, duplicates were removed, and full texts were checked independently to be eligible for inclusion.

Data collection involved such aspects as the design of the study, its context, dimensions of strategic planning, leadership aspects, and school performance (Hallinger,

2011; Leithwood et al., 2020). The number of included studies that met the requirements for the systematic review is 51, as shown in Figure 1.

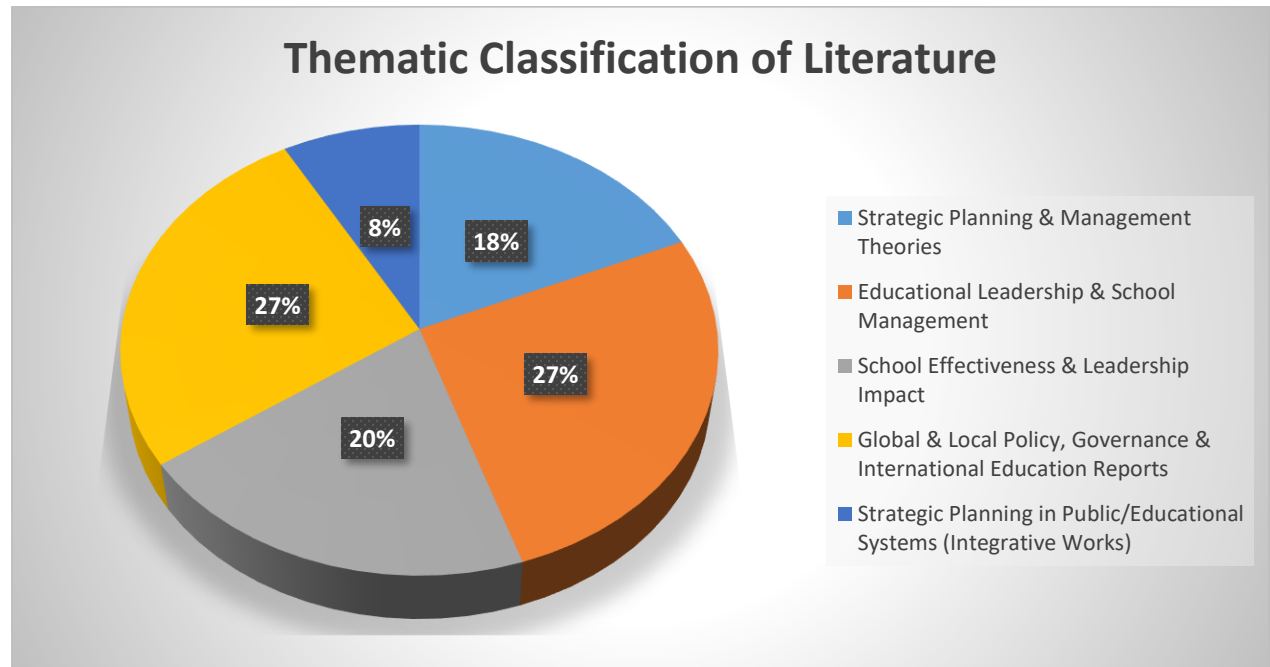


Figure 1 shows how the literature has been distributed into the six thematic categories.

Risk of bias evaluation

The quality of methodologies used in the selected literature has been assessed through known frameworks that include CASP and AMSTAR (Scheerens, 2015). This process has provided insights into the level of rigour, objectivity, and possible biases inherent in the reported information. Despite having obvious limitations in methodology, all the studies have been included with care taken in interpreting their findings. Quality assessment revealed that most of the studies reviewed had a low to moderate risk of bias. Policy reports by UNESCO, the World Bank, OECD, and the Ministry of Education of Rwanda were characterized by high methodological quality due to the application of comprehensive data sets and clear methodology (UNESCO, 2020; World Bank, 2023; Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2024). Most empirical articles published in peer-reviewed journals revealed a low risk of bias in the areas of selection and reporting. However, a few case studies revealed moderate risks attributed to small sample size, contextual nature of the results, and lack of generalizability (Hallinger, 2011; Bush & Glover, 2014). Theoretical and conceptual papers were not assessed for methodological biases but were evaluated for their theoretical contribution. In total, none of the studies were rejected due to the presence of any

methodological issues, but rather were considered during interpretation of the synthesis results (Scheerens, 2015). The publication bias was reduced through searching several databases along with reports from various organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, OECD, and the Ministry of Education, Rwanda. Grey literature was used to reduce publication bias as well. However, the review might still be affected by publication and language bias due to the inclusion of English literature only (Page et al., 2021). In light of the heterogeneous and conceptual nature of the selected studies, the quality of evidence has been determined through a narrative review instead of quantitative methods like GRADE (Page et al., 2021).

Data analysis

Thematic analysis has been used as the basis for the synthesis of findings in this systematic review. Themes have been developed concerning strategic planning processes, the role of leadership, resource management, and student performance. Attention has also been paid to contextual issues that affect the implementation of strategic planning, including countries trying to establish an education system like Rwanda (Davies & Ellison, 2005; Caldwell & Spinks, 2013).

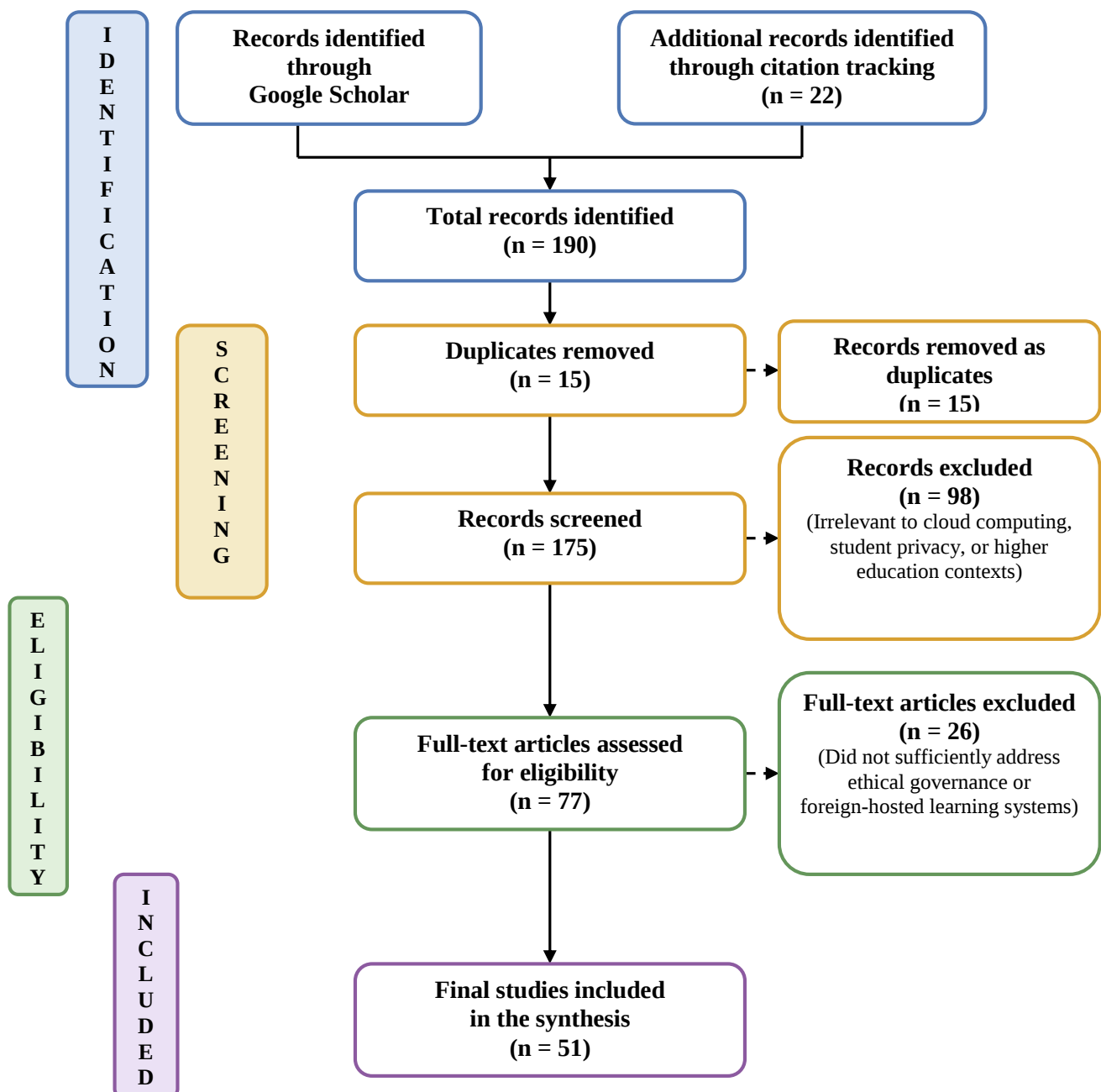
Ethical issues

As all the data is secondary, there are no ethical concerns regarding the use of human participants. Ethical issues have

focused on correct citation and academic integrity (Bush et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2020).

Research findings

Figure 1: PRISMA-Based Study Selection Summary



These papers include theoretical studies, empirical research, policy reports, and systematic reviews concerning strategic planning, leadership, school effectiveness, and education policy. They cover global, regional, and African contexts

and include a considerable number of papers representing OECD countries and developing education systems (Rwanda).

Table 1: The strongest included studies

Author (Year)	Topic	Design	Contribution
Steiner (1979)	Theory of strategic planning	Conceptual	Structured strategic planning process
Mintzberg (1994)	Emergent strategy	Conceptual	Adaptive nature of strategy formulation
Ansoff (1965)	Strategic management	Conceptual	Basis of the theory of strategic alignment
Bryson (2011)	Public-sector planning	Book	Strategic planning in public organizations
Bryson (2018)	Strategic planning research	Review	Advanced evaluation frameworks for planning
Porter (1985)	Competitive strategy	Book	Framework of competitive advantage
Wheelen et al. (2018)	Strategic management	Textbook	Strategic formulation and control systems
David (2020)	Strategic management	Textbook	Strategic analysis and implementation model
Bush & Coleman (2000)	Educational leadership	Book	Leadership in strategic management of schools
Bush et al. (2019)	Principles of leadership	Book	School leadership frameworks
Leithwood et al. (2006)	School leadership	Policy synthesis	Impact of leadership on students' achievements
Leithwood et al. (2020)	School leadership	Review	Update on evidence of leadership effectiveness
Hallinger (2011)	Leadership for learning	Review	Relationship of instructional leadership and outcomes
Hallinger & Heck (1998)	School effectiveness	Empirical	Influence of the principal on school effectiveness
Hallinger & Murphy (1985)	Instructional leadership	Empirical	Framework of leadership behavior
Hattie (2009)	Visible learning	Meta-analysis	Factors affecting school performance
Sammons (1999)	School effectiveness	Review	Important effectiveness indicators
Scheerens (2015)	Educational effectiveness	Book	Models of school performance
Hoy & Miskel (2013)	Educational administration	Book	Organizational theory in schools
Robinson (2011)	Student-centered leadership	Book	Leadership impact on learning outcomes

These prior works are viewed as being the most reliable because they provide the building blocks of theory on strategy and educational leadership through empirical evidence (Porter 1985; Hattie 2009; Leithwood 2006).

Theme 1: Strategic planning and school performance

Strategic planning is considered a crucial factor of organizational performance in education systems. It was

initially addressed by Ansoff (1965) and Steiner (1979), who highlighted the importance of goal setting, environmental analysis, and implementation control in the planning process. Later on, the notion of emergent strategy was raised by Mintzberg (1994) and has been proven particularly relevant in education systems because schools face a dynamically changing, resource-constrained environment.

Strategic planning in education management is strongly associated with increased coordination, accountability, and improved performance outcomes (Bryson, 2011; Bryson, 2018). Empirical studies reveal that schools with structured planning systems show increased organizational coherence and better academic results (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Scheerens, 2015; Hattie, 2009). In Rwanda, strategic

planning is included in national education reform aimed at improving the quality and equity of secondary schools (Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2017; Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2024). It involves results-based management and accountability (World Bank, 2023; UNESCO, 2020).

Table 2: Strategic planning mechanisms

Domain	Mechanisms	Main References
Structured Planning	Goal setting, analysis, control	Steiner (1979); Ansoff (1965)
Adaptive Strategy	Emergent decisions	Mintzberg (1994)
Policy Alignment	National education frameworks	UNESCO (2015); MoE Rwanda (2024)

Theme 2: Educational leadership and implementation

Leadership is an essential element of strategic plan implementation in schools. Bush & Coleman (2000) and Bush et al. (2019) highlight leadership as a major driver of school development and strategic planning. Leithwood et al. (2006; 2020) prove that leadership influences student performance indirectly via changes in organization, teacher motivation, and learning environment. Similarly, Hallinger (2011) and Hallinger & Murphy (1985) point out that instructional leadership is important for aligning teaching activities with the strategic objectives of the school. Empirical evidence shows that increased leadership capacity facilitates successful implementation of strategic plans in schools (Robinson, 2011; Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Leadership capacity is one of the main determinants of differences in school performance in Rwanda (UNICEF, 2021; World Bank, 2022).

Theme 3: School effectiveness and performance outcomes

School effectiveness literature provides strong empirical evidence of the impact of strategic planning on educational outcomes. The basis for school effectiveness research was created by Edmonds (1979), who was followed by Sammons (1999) and Scheerens (2015), who identified leadership, mission clarity, and monitoring systems as the key factors of school performance. Hattie (2009) presents a meta-analysis of the effect of school organization and leadership on student performance. Similar relationships are highlighted in OECD reports (OECD, 2016; OECD, 2019). In developing countries like Rwanda, school effectiveness strongly depends on planning capacity, leadership quality, and policy implementation (World Bank, 2018; UNICEF, 2021).

Theme 4: Resource management and policy alignment

Strategic planning also increases the efficiency of resource allocation and policy alignment. Porter (1985) and Wheelen et al. (2018) state that strategic management provides alignment of resources with strategic goals. In education systems, this implies the alignment of financial, human, and instructional resources with organizational needs (David, 2020; Bryson, 2018). UNESCO and World Bank reports confirm this effect of efficient planning (UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2023). Rwandan reforms in the education sector involve similar alignment through sector-wide planning (Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2017; Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2024).

Synthesis of findings

The literature shows that strategic planning contributes to secondary school performance due to structured planning systems, leadership effectiveness, and school effectiveness mechanisms. Classical approaches emphasize structured processes of goal setting, environmental analysis, and implementation control (Steiner, 1979; Ansoff, 1965; Wheelen et al., 2018); strategic management highlights alignment of institutional capacity and external environment (Porter, 1985; David, 2020). However, more contemporary perspectives emphasize flexibility and emergent strategy in a complicated environment (Mintzberg, 1994; Bryson, 2018). Moreover, empirical findings also confirm that schools with strong strategic planning systems have improved coordination, accountability, and student performance outcomes (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Scheerens, 2015; Hattie, 2009), with leadership playing a significant role in the translation of plans into performance (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Discussion

This review's results provide strong support for the consistent association between strategic planning and improved performance of secondary schools based on

strengthened leadership, efficient resource management, accountability, and school improvement. The results are consistent with the findings from previous systematic reviews and evidence syntheses that have identified leadership and strategic management as essential factors of school effectiveness (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020; Scheerens, 2015). Also, Bryson (2018) and Bush (2020) argued that strategic planning provides maximum effectiveness if organizational goals and objectives are formulated as implementation strategies that are monitored by stakeholders. Hence, the current review confirms existing evidence and proves its applicability to the educational context in Rwanda.

Nonetheless, the selected studies suffer from certain weaknesses. First, many empirical studies used a cross-sectional design that limited the possibility of making any causal claims concerning the impact of strategic planning on the performance of secondary schools. In addition, most studies were conceptual and related to policy rather than based on empirical analysis. Finally, there are relatively few empirical studies focusing on Rwandan secondary schools; therefore, it is necessary to use some international evidence.

There are limitations inherent in the process of conducting the review. Even though multiple databases and repositories were searched, only articles published in English were included, thus leading to the potential language bias. Also, because of the heterogeneity of selected studies, it was impossible to conduct a meta-analysis and make a direct comparison of studies.

Implications for practice, policy, and future research can be derived from this review. Evidence-based strategic planning, monitoring, and stakeholder involvement should be promoted by school leaders in order to improve institutional performance. In addition, policymakers are expected to invest in leadership development programs and promote the implementation of school strategic plans within the context of Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan. Future research needs to focus on longitudinal, mixed-methods, and comparative research that will analyze the long-term effects of strategic planning on students' learning outcomes, teachers' effectiveness, and institutional performance in Rwanda and similar education systems (Leithwood et al., 2020; OECD, 2019; World Bank, 2023).

Conclusion

The study shows that secondary school performance can be significantly improved through strategic planning due to effective leadership, an implementation system, and school effectiveness principles. Although the literature on planning emphasizes the importance of structure and rationality (Steiner, 1979; Ansoff, 1965), the literature on leadership highlights implementation capacity in schools (Bush &

Coleman, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2006), while school effectiveness literature supports the role of leadership, clear goals, and monitoring systems in the increase of student performance outcomes (Sammons, 1999; Scheerens, 2015; Hattie, 2009). In the case of Rwanda, this relationship is strengthened by national education policies that promote strategic planning and accountability in secondary education (Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2017; World Bank, 2023).

There is a need to enhance leadership capacity and facilitate flexible implementation of strategic plans globally and in Rwanda, along with alignment of resources with strategic priorities (Mintzberg, 1994; UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF, 2021). Future research should focus on longitudinal and comparative studies aimed at understanding the evolution of strategic planning and its influence in secondary schools (OECD, 2019; Scheerens, 2015).

List of abbreviations

AMSTAR: A Measurement Tool to Assess Systematic Reviews

CASP Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

ESSP Education Sector Strategic Plan

MoE Ministry of Education

NISR National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

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This research is self-sponsored and conducted for academic purposes.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no competing interests.

Protocol for registration

This systematic review is not registered in advance in any international database for systematic reviews, such as PROSPERO or OSF. However, this review complies with the existing principles of systematic review research and reporting, including defining the inclusion criteria, systematic literature search, study selection, quality

assessment, and thematic synthesis, following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

Author contributions

The author conceived of, conducted the study, analysed the data, and authored the manuscript.

Availability of data

Data supporting these findings are available from the author upon reasonable request.

Author's biography

Albert Rugaba is a professional and passionate teacher of secondary level in Rwanda in Geography and History subjects in upper secondary education. He is a holder of a BSc. in Geography and History with Education, an MSc. in Educational Planning and Administration at Mount Kenya University, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Theology and Religion at East African Christian University. He is presently doing his Doctor of Philosophy studies at Bishop Stuart University, Uganda, in the field of Educational Planning, Management, and Administration. His academic interests include educational planning, institution management, and the digital revolution in education. He is proficient in English, French, Swahili, and Kinyarwanda.

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