

## LEVEL OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF ALEBTONG DISTRICT. A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY.

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### Abstract

#### Background

In Uganda, there is an overall concern over the generally poor academic performance of students learning in government-aided schools. The study aims to assess the level of academic performance of students in secondary schools of Alebtong District.

**Methodology** A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted and quantitative data collected from 115 respondents was obtained.

#### Results

The level of academic performance of students in secondary schools of Alebtong District was relatively low. The mean response of 2.6 suggested that students' performance in standardized exams, particularly UCE and UACE, is not very high. A mean response of 2.2 indicated that the pass rate of students in Alebtong District was not very high and only 25% of students obtained a second-grade result. The mean response was 1.8 indicating that a high percentage of students in lower secondary do not obtain a first-grade result. A mean response of 2.8 indicated that there might be some challenges regarding dropout rates and student retention in secondary schools. The mean response was 3.2 indicating that students in Alebtong District generally experience a relatively smooth transition and progression through their secondary education.

#### Conclusion

Generally, schools in Alebtong District have not yet archived their desired potential with the majority of the students unable to score a minimum of second-grade result. There is still a need for greater improvement in the level of academic performance of students in secondary schools in Alebtong District

#### Recommendation

Strategies should be implemented to enhance students' performance in standardized exams, increase the pass rate, improve grade distribution, reduce dropout rates, and ensure the smooth transition and completion of secondary education. Encouraging students' active involvement in extra-curricular activities could also be explored as a potential avenue for supporting academic excellence.

**Keywords:** *Government-Aided Schools, Performance in Standardized Exams, Completion of Secondary Education.*

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#### Background of the study

In Uganda, there is an overall concern over the generally poor academic performance of students learning in government-aided schools in comparison with their counterparts in Private schools. This has been attributed to different factors ranging from student, teacher, and government policy-related factors. It is speculated that the academic performance of government-aided secondary schools has been low with the average pass rate for the secondary schools in Alebtong district in Uganda Certificate of Education in 2020 at 2.7% with Amugu Secondary School with the highest pass rate of 9.2% and the worst performance was by Akii Bua secondary school with 0% pass rate (Kawa, 2022).

Different interventions can be put in place aimed at individuals, classes, and schools that are effective in increasing attendance and helping improve academic

performance (Temple, Reynolds & White (2007). Sizable sections of the variance in academic achievement are accounted for by absenteeism. Student absences could have a larger impact on academic performance in maths than in language arts (Baker, Wang & Walberg, 1999). Differences in student academic performance can be attributed to differences in the ways different groups of students and schools exploit absenteeism drawing upon social psychological theories to examine the dynamics of absenteeism among three different student groups (high-performing, low-performing, and at-risk) and suggest the implications of these dynamics for school-level interventions on academic performance (Stroot, C. & Knifsend, C, 2015). The study aims to assess the level of academic performance of students in secondary schools of Alebtong District.

**Methodology**  
**Research Design**

A descriptive, cross-sectional study was done at where appropriate point in time with no follow-ups. A quantitative approach was used to collect data.

**Study Population**

The study population consisted of students of senior four, all secondary teachers of the selected schools, Board of Governors of the selected secondary schools in the Alebtong district. Two schools were included because

they were listed among the poorest performing districts in Alebtong District.

**Sample size**

To determine the sample size, the Morgan & Krejcie (1970) table of determining the sample size was adopted. A sample size of 115 respondents was obtained for this study including 87 students in candidate class (s.4), 24 teachers, and 4 members of the Board of Governors as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Determination of Sample Size**

School	Population		Sample size		Sampling method
	Amugu	Akii bua	Amugu	Akii bua	
Students	64	56	46	41	Simple random
Teachers	15	10	14	10	Purposive sampling
Board of Governors members	10	10	2	2	Convenience sampling
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>53</b>	
<b>Total</b>				<b>115</b>	

*Source: Alebtong Inspector of Schools Report (2022).*

**Sampling Techniques**

Simple random sampling, purposive sampling, and Convenience sampling techniques were used. Students were selected using a simple random sampling technique and the method was used to avoid bias on the findings since each student had the same chance of participating in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select teachers to participate in this study since they had key information relating to student absenteeism and the academic performance of students. The convenience sampling method was also used to select members of the school committee to give their views on school performances and policies on absenteeism.

**Data Collection Methods**

For this study, both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data was collected using questionnaires while secondary data was collected using the documentary review method.

**Questionnaire Method**

Questionnaires were used and designed carefully for collecting data according to the specifications of the research questions and hypotheses for the intended respondents (Amin, 2005).

**Data Collection Instruments**

A questionnaire with Questions that were designed in sections that fully corresponded with the research objectives, questions, and hypotheses for this study. The questions were both open-ended and close-ended to allow

respondents to fill in additional information about the study variables.

**Validity**

To ensure the accuracy of the research instruments, the Content Validity Index was calculated using  $(CVI = n/N)$ . The research supervisor as the expert to rank the accuracy of the research instrument in collecting data for the study was consulted. 17 questions were identified as relevant and only 3 as irrelevant hence the number of relevant questions (n) was divided by the total number of questions in the research instrument  $(17/20 = 0.85)$ . The Content Validity Index was greater than 0.7 hence a good measure of validity and the instrument was valid to collect data for this study. The 3 irrelevant questions were eliminated from the instrument with the guidance of the supervisor.

**Reliability**

The Cronbach's Alpha reliability Coefficient (a) was calculated by running a statistical test using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) computer program using the formula stated below.

Cronbach's is defined

Where; is

K number of components (K-items or test lets), the variance of the observed total test scores, and the variance of component I for the current sample of persons. The coefficient ranges between  $a=0.00$  for no reliability and  $a=1.00$  for perfect reliability. The closer alpha gets to 1.0 the better. Then if the results of Cronbach's Alpha were 0.78 and above 0.7 as proposed

by Amin (2205) hence then the research instruments were reliable.

- Citation and extending gratitude to all previous researchers whose literature has contributed to this study.

**Ethical Consideration**

- Permission was sought from the School of Graduate Studies and Research and obtained an introductory letter to go within the field.
- Consent was sought from the respondents to participate in the study and brief them to feel free to provide relevant information for the study. The purpose of the research project and the expected outcome of the study were explained to the respondents.
- Respondents were assured that the information provided was to be treated with maximum confidentiality and was to only be used for academic purposes.

**Data Analysis**

Before data was analyzed, it was carefully classified, edited, and coded based on clarity, completeness, accuracy, and consistency to ensure reliability. This was done using Microsoft Excel. Data was then exported to SPSS version 23 for analysis.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between the study variables. Multiple regression models were also used for the analysis of the relationship between student absenteeism and academic performance in Alebtong District.

**Results**

**Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	76	58.9%
Female	24	41.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Age (years)</b>		
5-18 (Students)	75	75%
19-45	20	20%
46+	5	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single (Students)	75	75%
Married	22	22%
Separated	1	1%
Widowed	2	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Level of education</b>		
Secondary	75	75%
Diploma	8	8%
Bachelors	17	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

According to findings in Table 2, the majority of the participants were male, accounting for 58.9% of the total sample and females represented 41.1% of the sample. Therefore, gender significantly affects. Further findings showed that the largest age group of the respondents was students aged 5-18, constituting 75% of the participants, the age group of 19-45 years accounted for 20% of the respondents and the age group of 46+ years represented the smallest proportion, with only 5% of the participants. The majority of the participants were single (students), making up 75%, followed by married individuals accounting for 22% 1% for separated, and 2% for widowed. On the level of education, the majority of the

participants were secondary students, accounting for 75%, 8% of the participants had a Diploma of education while 17% of the respondents had a Bachelor of Education.

**Level of academic performance of students in secondary schools of Alebtong District**

To explore the level of academic performance of students in secondary schools of Alebtong District., the researcher used descriptive analysis of responses that were captured using a Likert 5-point scale where 1- Strongly Disagree (SA), 2- Disagree (A), 3-Not sure (NS), 4-Aagree (A), 5- Strongly Agree (SA).

**Table 3: Level of academic performance of students in secondary schools of Alebtong District**

	Mean	Standard deviation
Students perform well in standardized examinations particularly the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) and the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE).	2.6	0.4
The pass rate of students is high hence 75% of the students obtain second grade in the Alebtong district	2.2	0.3
A high percentage of students in lower secondary earn first grade in Alebtong district	1.8	0.2
There are low dropout rates and high rates of student retention of students in secondary schools of Alebtong District	2.8	0.6
Students smoothly transition and progressively complete their secondary level of education in Alebtong District.	3.2	0.2
Students are usually actively involved in extra-curricular activities, such as sports, clubs, and cultural events, for academic excellence		

Based on the descriptive analysis of the Likert 5-point scale responses, the study findings in Table 3 show that the level of academic performance of students in secondary schools of Alebtong District was relatively low.

On the statement “Students perform well in standardized examinations”. The mean response was 2.6 suggesting that students’ performance in standardized exams, particularly UCE and UACE, is not very high. This indicates that there is room for improvement in their academic performance in these exams.

On the pass rate and grade distribution, the mean response was 2.2 indicating that the pass rate of students in Alebtong District was not very high and only 25% of students obtained a second-grade result. This suggests that there is a need to focus on improving students’ performance to increase the pass rate and move towards better academic outcomes.

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On the first-grade attainment in lower secondary, the mean response was 1.8 indicating that a high percentage of students in lower secondary do not obtain a first-grade result. This implies that there are lower levels of achievement in lower secondary education, with scope for improvement.

On Dropout rates and student retention, the response was 2.8 which indicates that there might be some challenges regarding dropout rates and student retention in secondary schools. This implies that some students may leave school before completing their education, which can negatively

impact the overall academic performance and success of students in the Alebtong District.

On smooth transition and completion of secondary education: The mean response was 3.2 indicating that students in Alebtong District generally experience a relatively smooth transition and progression through their secondary education. This suggests that there is a positive aspect in terms of academic performance regarding the completion of secondary education.

Overall, the study findings indicate that there is room for improvement in the level of academic performance of students in secondary schools in the Alebtong District. Strategies should be implemented to enhance students’ performance in standardized exams, increase the pass rate, improve grade distribution, reduce dropout rates, and ensure the smooth transition and completion of secondary education. Encouraging students’ active involvement in extra-curricular activities could also be explored as a potential avenue for supporting academic excellence.

### Discussion

The findings suggest that the academic performance of students in secondary schools in Alebtong District is not very high. The pass rate of students is low, with only 25% obtaining a second-grade result. Additionally, a high percentage of students in lower secondary do not achieve a first-grade result. There may also be challenges with dropout rates and student retention, potentially impacting overall academic success. However, there is a positive aspect in terms of the smooth transition and completion of secondary education. The low pass rate is probably attributed to various factors like student and teacher absenteeism, inadequate resources to use by both the teachers and students to achieve their maximum potential, and low motivation among learners and teachers.

Their findings are related to those of a study conducted among public secondary schools in Yumbe District in Northern Uganda by Galukande-Kiganda where one of the respondents agreed that the performance of their school was not that interesting for the reasons like the

timetable table the way it is organized, has a lot of free spaces for the candidates and the semi candidates. Lessons begin at 8:00 am and yet in other schools lessons begin at 6:00 am and their lessons begin at 8:00 am and end at 4:00 pm further adding that Students have a lot of free time to relax making them not to concentrate on their book leading to failure (Galukande-Kiganda, 2022).

### Conclusion

Schools in Alebtong District have not yet archived their desired potential with the majority of the students unable to score a minimum of second grade result. There is still a need for greater improvement in the level of academic performance of students in secondary schools in the Alebtong District

### Recommendation

Strategies should be implemented to enhance students' performance in standardized exams, increase the pass rate, improve grade distribution, reduce dropout rates, and ensure the smooth transition and completion of secondary education. Encouraging students' active involvement in extra-curricular activities could also be explored as a potential avenue for supporting academic excellence.

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### List of Abbreviations

SPSS: Special Package for Social Sciences  
UCE: Uganda Certificate of Education.  
UACE: Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education.

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### Author Biography

Dorcus Ejang is a student of a master's in educational planning and management at Team University.

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