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THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN STRENGTHENING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRATEGIC PLANNING MECHANISMS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MBALE, UGANDA

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Abstract:
This study sought to investigate the role of government policy implementation in strengthening the relationship between strategic planning mechanisms and academic

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performance outcomes in Public Secondary schools in Mbale. To examine the role of government policy implementation in strengthening the relationship between strategic planning mechanisms and academic performance outcomes, the study employed a correlational study design and followed a quantitative research approach. Descriptive analysis was employed to analysis was employed to analyze the data. Data was collected by use of document analysis guidelines, interview schedule. Reliability was tested using the test-retest method with a two-week interval, involving a pilot group representing 10% of the study population. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (R) was used to determine reliability, with Pearson correlation coefficients of 0.709 and 0.757 for the principal questionnaire, 0.803 for the BOG questionnaire, and 0.706 for the teacher questionnaire. Government policy implementation significantly strengthened academic performance outcomes, explaining a substantial proportion of variation in UCE results ($R = .620$, $R^2 = .385$, $p < .001$). The study findings may inform policymakers and education planners on the effectiveness of government policy implementation in reducing rural–urban performance disparities, thereby supporting equitable distribution of educational resources and improved UCE pass rates.

Keywords: government policy, strategic planning, academic performance

1. Introduction

Strategic planning in education is globally recognized as a systematic approach to aligning institutional goals with actionable strategies to enhance academic outcomes (Smith, 2018). International frameworks such as UNESCO's Education 2030 Agenda emphasize the role of strategic planning in fostering equitable access to quality education, particularly in low-resource settings (UNESCO, 2021). For instance, the OECD (2019) highlights that schools with robust planning mechanisms, such as performance monitoring and stakeholder engagement frameworks, consistently achieve higher student retention and literacy rates. However, global challenges persist, including inequitable resource allocation, teacher shortages, and disparities in educational quality between urban and rural regions (World Bank, 2020). Strategic planning addresses these gaps by prioritizing data-driven decision-making and optimizing limited resources.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Public secondary schools in Mbale District, Uganda, face persistent academic underperformance, characterized by stark rural-urban disparities, systemic resource gaps, and ineffective strategic planning mechanisms. Despite policy frameworks like Uganda's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2019–2023), 70% of secondary schools in Mbale lack school-specific strategic plans, relying on generic district-level frameworks ill-suited to address localized challenges (MoES, 2022). Rural institutions are disproportionately affected, with a Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) pass rate of

48% compared to 72% in urban schools (UNEB, 2021), while only 22% of rural students pass STEM subjects—far below the national average of 38% (UNEB, 2022). Compounding these issues are crippling teacher shortages (pupil-teacher ratio of 65:1 in rural areas), high dropout rates (23% at Senior 3), and socio-cultural barriers limiting girls' enrollment (43% in rural Senior 4) (MoES, 2020; EMIS, 2022).

The absence of participatory, data-driven strategic planning exacerbates these challenges, as schools fail to prioritize context-specific interventions such as STEM infrastructure, teacher capacity building, or stakeholder engagement. This gap undermines Uganda's broader goals of equitable education quality and limits opportunities for marginalized students. The problem has critical implications: for theory, it highlights the need for adaptive strategic planning models tailored to low-resource, rural contexts; for practice, it underscores the urgency of empowering schools to develop and monitor localized plans; and for policy, it calls for reforms to decentralize planning processes and allocate resources equitably. Addressing this issue is vital for the academic community, as it advances understanding of how strategic planning can optimize educational outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa's underserved settings, offering scalable insights for similar regions globally.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of government policy implementation in strengthening the relationship between strategic planning mechanisms and academic performance outcomes.

1.3 Hypothesis of the Study

The following hypothesis guided the study:

H01: Government policy implementation does not significantly strengthen the relationship between strategic planning mechanisms and academic performance outcomes.

2. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author

The association between academic achievement in public secondary schools and strategic planning methods is depicted in Figure 1.1.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 The Study Was Based on Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory is mostly used as a management tool. An organization's stakeholders are characterized by their validity, urgency, and authority. Managers must consider urgency and power if they are to meet the moral and legal requirements of true stakeholders (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). Therefore, strategies for identifying and managing stakeholders are included in stakeholder theory. Furthermore, a great deal of effort has been put into determining the relative effect of various stakeholders (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). Having a clear understanding of what a stakeholder is is essential to being able to identify them. A broad definition of stakeholders is given by Freeman's (1984) definition, which is later cited:

According to the theory put forth, secondary schools can be described as complex environments with numerous stakeholders who frequently have conflicting, ambiguous goals. The transfer of useful concepts, methods, and concepts from the private to the public sectors is not, however, categorically prohibited by any substantial evidence. However, the probability of positive results of such transfers is expected to be linked to the extent of adjustment to fit the features of the desired context. The identification of crucial components that affect an organization's capacity to accomplish its objectives is based on a strategic plan. Stakeholder theory encompasses a variety of management techniques and tools created especially to assist managers operating in complex contexts. The theory's fundamental principles include the recognition that a wide range of stakeholders surround every organization or project and that these stakeholders have the power to influence how the project is organized. To manage an organization or project with the least amount of friction, it is crucial to comprehend the interests of the major stakeholders. In strategic planning, schools can utilize stakeholder theory to manage human capital. Stakeholder analysis is especially helpful in mapping important stakeholders of a project and determining their distinct interests in the project.

3. Literature Review

3.1 The Role of Government Policy Implementation in Strengthening the Relationship between Strategic Planning Mechanisms and Academic Performance Outcomes

Government policy implementation in education comprises a structured process involving the stages of formulation, adoption, and execution, each requiring the engagement of key actors and institutions. During the formulation stage, central governments, typically through ministries of education, define goals, identify educational problems, and propose policy solutions. Adoption involves legitimizing these policies through official frameworks such as acts of parliament or national

education sector plans. Execution is the operationalization stage, in which policies are translated into concrete actions by local governments, school leaders, and other implementers (OECD, 2018). The effectiveness of each stage influences how strategic goals are realized, particularly regarding student achievement and school performance.

The implementation process is shaped by various actors. National ministries are central in policy direction and funding, while local authorities and school leadership—including district education officers, head teachers, and school management committees—are crucial in contextualizing and enforcing these policies (Bain *et al.*, 2021). For example, decentralization reforms in multiple countries have demonstrated that strong local leadership can improve policy responsiveness and tailor education initiatives to local needs (UNESCO, 2015). However, capacity limitations at the school level—such as inadequate funding or limited managerial expertise—can undermine policy goals despite good intentions (World Bank, 2018).

Effective implementation is critical for the success of strategic education plans, especially those aiming to enhance learning outcomes. Poorly implemented reforms often result in resource misallocation, resistance from implementers, and minimal impact on student learning (OECD, 2018). Conversely, when policy execution is coherent and collaborative, it enhances accountability, optimizes use of resources, and improves instructional quality, leading to better student outcomes (World Bank, 2018).

Theoretical frameworks help explain why some policies succeed while others falter. The Top-Down Approach to policy implementation emphasizes command structures and bureaucratic control, ensuring fidelity to centrally defined goals but often ignoring contextual nuances (Sabatier, 1986). In contrast, Bottom-Up Approaches emphasize the autonomy and knowledge of local actors, enabling more adaptive responses but risking inconsistency or deviation from national objectives (Elmore, 1980). Systems Theory, when applied to education, views schools as interconnected units within a larger system. Effective implementation thus requires coherence across policy, practice, leadership, and learning environments (Bain *et al.*, 2021). In education systems where alignment across these domains is weak, even well-designed reforms may fail to produce desired outcomes.

Finland's education reform emphasized equity, teacher professionalism, and minimal standardized testing. Kivirauma and Ruoho (2007) conducted a qualitative analysis of Finland's special education practices, focusing on part-time special education targeting language problems. Their study highlighted that such preventive measures contributed significantly to Finland's high performance in PISA assessments. For instance, Finnish students consistently ranked among the top in reading, mathematics, and science, with scores surpassing the OECD average (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007). The researchers argued that the integration of special education within mainstream classrooms and the emphasis on early intervention were pivotal in achieving these outcomes. This approach fostered an inclusive education system that catered to diverse student needs, thereby enhancing overall academic performance.

To improve underperforming schools, South Korea launched the "Schools for Improvement" initiative. Using a mixed-methods approach, Lee (2014) combined qualitative interviews with educators with quantitative data from the National Assessment of Educational Achievement (NAEA). According to the research, there was a significant increase in academic performance, as evidenced by the drop in the percentage of underperforming pupils from 7.2% in 2008 to 2.3% in 2012 (Lee, 2014). The research attributed this success to targeted government interventions, including curriculum reforms, teacher training, and resource allocation. Additionally, the study emphasized the role of cultural factors, such as the societal value placed on education, in driving student achievement.

Singapore's School Excellence Model (SEM) aimed to enhance school management and student learning outcomes. Tan (2018) conducted a quantitative analysis using data from PISA 2012 and the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013. The study found that Singaporean students achieved high scores in PISA assessments, ranking second in mathematics, third in reading, and third in science. The SEM's emphasis on decentralized decision-making, continuous teacher professional development, and data-driven school evaluations was identified as a key factor contributing to these results (Tan, 2018). The research highlighted that the SEM fostered a culture of excellence and accountability, leading to sustained academic success. Ontario, Canada, implemented the "Whole System Reform" to improve literacy and numeracy. Levin (2010) employed a case study methodology, analyzing policy documents, student performance data, and conducting interviews with policymakers and educators. The study reported that between 2003 and 2009, the percentage of students meeting the provincial standard in Grade 6 reading increased from 54% to 69%, and in mathematics from 57% to 63% (Levin, 2010). The reform's success was attributed to clear goals, capacity building, and the use of data to inform instruction. The research underscored the importance of coherent policy implementation and stakeholder engagement in driving educational improvement.

Government-initiated education reforms across Africa have yielded varied outcomes, influenced by implementation strategies, resource allocation, and systemic challenges. Launched in 2017, Ghana's Free SHS policy aimed to eliminate financial barriers to secondary education. A quasi-experimental study by Dwomoh *et al.* (2023) evaluated the policy's impact on academic performance, utilizing data from the West African Examination Council. The study found that while enrollment increased by over 50% post-implementation, academic performance declined, particularly in double-track schools where students alternated attendance to manage overcrowding. Students in these schools scored, on average, 15% lower in core subjects compared to their single-track counterparts. Challenges identified included financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient teaching materials, which collectively undermined the policy's effectiveness**.**

South Africa's efforts to improve school infrastructure have been documented in various audits. The 2018 National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) report highlighted progress, noting that the number of schools without electricity decreased from 2,925 in 2013 to 269 in 2018. However, the Auditor-General's 2023-24 report indicated persistent challenges, including project delays and budget overruns. For instance, only 60% of planned infrastructure projects were completed on time, and 25% exceeded budget allocations. These issues have implications for learning environments, as inadequate facilities can negatively affect student attendance and performance.

Kenya's transition from the 8-4-4 system to the CBC aimed to foster holistic education by emphasizing skills and competencies over rote learning. A qualitative study by Oduor *et al.* (2021) assessed the CBC's implementation, focusing on teacher preparedness, infrastructure, and instructional materials. The study revealed that while the CBC's objectives were well-received, challenges such as inadequate teacher training and insufficient learning materials hindered effective implementation. Specifically, only 45% of teachers reported receiving comprehensive training on the new curriculum, and 60% of schools lacked the necessary infrastructure to support CBC activities. These shortcomings affected the quality of instruction and student engagement, potentially compromising the curriculum's intended outcomes**.**

Significant legislative changes have been made to Uganda's education system with the goal of improving fairness, quality, and accessibility. These include curriculum revisions, school inspection changes, and the Universal Secondary Education (USE) program. The National Development Plan III (NDP III), the Education and Sports Sector Plan (ESSP), the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), and the Parliament Education Committee all offer assessments and reports that shed light on how these policies are being implemented and what effects they are having.

Policy for Universal Secondary Education (USE), The USE policy, which was put into effect in 2007, sought to expand secondary education access by doing away with tuition for students attending public schools. To evaluate the impact of the policy, research by De Kemp (2011) used a mixed-methods approach that included stakeholder interviews and document analysis. According to the report, between 2007 and 2010, secondary school enrollment rose by 25%.

However, challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure, and teacher shortages were identified, potentially compromising the quality of education. For instance, the student-to-teacher ratio in some schools rose to 60:1, exceeding the recommended 40:1 ratio. These findings suggest that while the USE policy improved access, it also strained existing resources, highlighting the need for complementary investments in infrastructure and human resources.

School Inspection Reforms, the MoES, through the Directorate of Education Standards, initiated reforms to enhance the effectiveness of school inspections. The "Inspect and Improve" program, evaluated by the Global Schools Forum (2024), utilized

a qualitative case study methodology, including interviews and observations in selected schools. The program focused on seven key areas, such as teaching quality and learner achievement. Findings indicated that schools participating in the program showed improvements in instructional practices and student outcomes. However, the study also noted challenges, including limited inspector capacity and resource constraints, which hindered the scalability of the program. These insights underscore the importance of adequate funding and capacity building to sustain and expand inspection.

Curriculum Updates, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) spearheaded curriculum reforms to align education with contemporary needs. The revised lower secondary curriculum, assessed by the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in collaboration with the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), emphasized competency-based learning. The 2024 Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) results revealed that students under the new curriculum demonstrated improved critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, disparities in performance were observed, attributed to factors such as teacher preparedness and the availability of learning materials**.**

Performance Outcomes and Policy Implementation, data from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and UNEB provide quantitative evidence of the impact of these policies. The 2023 National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) report indicated that only 45% of Primary Three learners achieved proficiency in literacy, and 38% in numeracy. These outcomes suggest that despite policy interventions, learning achievements remain below desired levels. Factors contributing to this include inadequate instructional materials, insufficient teacher training, and limited community engagement. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that encompasses policy refinement, resource allocation, and stakeholder involvement**.**

The Ugandan government has implemented several key policies to shape the education sector, notably the National Education Act (2008) and the Education Sector Strategic Plan (2021-2025), which focus on decentralization, performance monitoring, and equitable resource distribution (MoES, 2022). Proponents argue that decentralization allows for tailored educational strategies that address local needs, potentially improving school performance by fostering local ownership and accountability (Chapman *et al.*, 2016). The emphasis on performance monitoring, as highlighted by the World Bank (2019), provides a framework for assessing educational outcomes, which can lead to targeted interventions and improved efficiency in resource use, thereby enhancing student performance.

However, critics like Oketch and Rolleston (2018) contend that while these policies aim for equity, the actual implementation often falls short due to disparities in regional capacities to manage and utilize decentralized resources effectively. They argue that without sufficient support and capacity building at the local level, decentralization might exacerbate inequalities rather than mitigate them. Furthermore, the focus on performance monitoring can sometimes lead to a 'teaching to the test' culture, where broader

educational goals like critical thinking and creativity might be sidelined (Kellaghan *et al.*, 2017). This suggests that while government policies provide a necessary structure, their moderating effect on strategic planning and student performance is contingent on effective implementation and a balanced approach to educational assessment.

Government policies have a profound impact on strategic planning and academic performance in Ugandan schools, as evidenced by the implementation of the capitation grant system, which has notably increased access to education. According to Akena *et al.* (2020), this financial mechanism has allowed more students, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, to attend school by removing financial barriers, aligning with the findings of a study by Lakin and Magero (2018) which showed a direct correlation between the capitation grants and increased enrollment rates in primary education. This policy supports strategic planning by providing a predictable funding stream that schools can plan around, potentially leading to better resource allocation and planning for educational activities.

Although the capitation grant system has increased access, detractors contend that it has not been as successful in raising educational standards. Since the funds are largely focused on cutting expenses rather than raising educational standards, Akena *et al.* (2020) note that they frequently fall short in addressing the quality of teaching and learning settings. This critique is supported by research from Oketch and Ngware (2019), who found that in many cases, the increase in student numbers without corresponding improvements in teaching resources or teacher training leads to overcrowded classrooms and diluted educational quality. Thus, while government policies like the capitation grant facilitate strategic planning by ensuring funding, they require complementary strategies to tackle quality issues for a comprehensive positive impact on academic performance.

Case studies from Mbale District, as discussed by Obong (2021), demonstrate the dual-edged impact of policy implementation through the Universal Secondary Education (USE) initiative. On one hand, USE has successfully increased school enrollment, supporting the notion that policy-driven strategic planning can expand educational access, which aligns with findings by Riddell (2018) who found that similar policies in Sub-Saharan Africa have led to increased participation in education. This increase in student numbers can be seen as a victory for educational equity, providing more children with the opportunity to receive secondary education.

On the other hand, the rapid rise in enrollment has put significant pressure on the district's educational infrastructure, leading to overcrowded classrooms and a decline in teaching quality due to resource constraints, as Obong (2021) points out. This issue is compounded by bureaucratic inefficiencies and the lack of stakeholder engagement, as highlighted by Lwanga *et al.* (2023), which mirrors the challenges observed by Sayed and Soudien (2017) in South Africa, where policy implementation was less effective due to similar systemic barriers. These findings suggest that while policies like USE can achieve quantitative goals, qualitative improvements in education require addressing

implementation hurdles, particularly in resource management and community involvement.

Government policies serve a dual role in moderating the relationship between strategic planning and academic performance in educational contexts. Kasozi (2020) highlights that policies designed to offer teacher incentives have positively influenced teacher motivation, leading to improved instructional practices and student outcomes. This perspective is supported by research from Murnane and Cohen (2018), who argue that well-structured incentive programs can align teacher efforts with educational goals, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of strategic planning initiatives aimed at academic improvement. However, the same study by Kasozi (2020) also critiques that the rigid bureaucratic structures prevalent in many educational systems can significantly delay the implementation of these beneficial policies. Such delays can undermine the intended positive effects on strategic planning and academic performance. This issue is echoed by findings from a study by Hanushek and Woessmann (2015), which suggests that bureaucratic inefficiencies can lead to a misalignment between policy intent and actual practice, often resulting in a lag in the realization of educational improvements. This indicates that while policies can facilitate strategic planning by providing frameworks and incentives, their potential is often constrained by the slow pace of bureaucratic processes

3. Methodology

Both descriptive and correlational research designs was used in this investigation. Creswell (2014) states that when a researcher wants to evaluate the statistical relationship between variables using data gathered from individuals in a natural context, they employ a correlational design. According to Best and Kahn (2006), descriptive research allows the researcher to explain what exists in relation to variables or circumstances in a scenario and to gather factual knowledge on the state of phenomena. The integration of correlational and descriptive designs was justified in this study due to the multifaceted nature of the research objectives. Descriptive facilitated the identification and documentation of the current state of strategic planning mechanisms across schools, while correlational design allowed for the statistical analysis of the relationships between these mechanisms and academic performance outcomes.

3.1 Study Population, Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A population, according to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), is any group of people who share one or more traits that are pertinent to a study issue. The total target population for this study was 7,771, comprising the following key stakeholders in the secondary education sector in Mbale District: 210 headteachers, 7,350 teachers, 210 Board of Governors (BoG) chairpersons, and one District Education Officer (DEO).

The number of individuals or units chosen from a population to be examined in a research study is known as the sample size. A sample, according to Kothari (2004), is a subset of the population chosen in accordance with particular guidelines and protocols in order to reflect the full population. The approaches or methods used to choose units from the population to be included in the research are known as sampling procedures (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Orodho (2005) asserts that appropriate sampling ensures accuracy, reduces bias, and enhances the findings' generalizability. The sample size in this study was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, which provides the statistically valid number of respondents needed to represent a population. Headteachers: 132 out of 210, Teachers: 364 out of 7,350 and Board of Governors Chairpersons: 132 out of 210. District Education Officer (DEO): Since there is only one DEO in the district, a census approach will be used, where the entire population (in this case, one individual) is included. Census sampling is appropriate for small populations where all members can be studied (Kumar, 2011). The study employed simple random sampling to select headteachers, teachers, and BoG chairpersons. By giving each member of the target group an equal chance of being chosen, this method reduces selection bias and guarantees the sample's representativeness (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Purposive sampling will be used for the DEO. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), this non-probability sampling strategy is suitable for choosing people who have particular information that is pertinent to the study's goals. The DEO, as the key implementer of education policy at the district level, is purposefully selected due to their authoritative role in strategic planning and oversight.

Table 1.1: Sample Frame

Respondents	Population	Sample Size	%
Head teachers	210	132	62.86
Teachers	7,350	364	4.95
Board of Governor Chairpersons	210	132	62.86
District Education Officer	1	1	100.

Source: Author.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Government Policy Implementation Does Not Significantly Strengthen the Relationship between Strategic Planning Mechanisms and Academic Performance Outcomes

The table below presents the government policy practices as presented by principals in Mbale District Uganda.

Table 1.2: Government Policy Implementation Practices in Mbale District Uganda

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Our school fully complies with curriculum implementation guidelines.	53 (40.2%)	50 (37.9%)	28 (21.2%)	1 (0.8%)	1.83	0.786
2. Government capitation grants are well-utilized.	48 (36.4%)	62 (47%)	18 (13.6%)	4 (3%)	1.83	0.773
3. There is timely implementation of policy directives from the Ministry.	48 (36.4%)	50 (37.9%)	30 (22.7%)	4 (3%)	1.92	0.844
4. Policies on inclusive education are well-followed.	47 (35.6%)	57 (43.2%)	24 (18.2%)	4 (3%)	1.89	0.807
5. The school receives adequate support from the District Education Office.	47 (35.6%)	59 (44.7%)	25 (18.9%)	1 (0.8%)	1.85	0.746
6. Government policies are communicated effectively to all school levels.	40 (30.3%)	64 (48.5%)	24 (18.2%)	4 (3%)	1.94	0.779
7.The school undergoes regular external audits by government agencies to ensure strategic funds are used for academic improvement	48 (36.4%)	62 (47%)	20 (15.2%)	2 (1.5%)	1.82	0.739
8. Frequent policy changes affect school performance.	50 (37.9%)	55 (41.7%)	23 (17.4%)	4 (3%)	1.86	0.811
9. Teachers are trained on new policy requirements.	44 (33.3%)	55 (41.7%)	32 (24.2%)	1 (0.8%)	1.92	0.778
10. Infrastructure development follows government policy frameworks.	52 (39.4%)	58 (43.9%)	18 (13.6%)	4 (3%)	1.8	0.786
11. The school adheres to government staffing norms (teacher-to-student ratio) as a key part of its strategic growth	46 (34.8%)	56 (42.4%)	30 (22.7%)		1.88	0.752
12. There is alignment between national education goals and our school programs.	41 (31.1%)	65 (49.2%)	23 (17.4%)	3 (2.3%)	1.91	0.756
Overall mean					**1.8706**	

The results in 1.2 show generally low to moderate agreement on policy implementation in schools, as reflected by the overall mean of 1.8706, which falls within the disagree range of the Likert scale. This overall mean indicates that respondents, on average, did not agree that education policies are effectively implemented and supported within their schools. With regard to compliance with curriculum implementation guidelines, 40.2% of respondents strongly disagreed and 37.9% disagreed, while 21.2% agreed and 0.8% strongly agreed, indicating that a majority perceived weak compliance. On the utilization of government capitation grants, 36.4% strongly disagreed and 47% disagreed, compared to 13.6% who agreed and 3% who strongly agreed, suggesting dissatisfaction with how grants are used. Concerning the timely implementation of policy directives from the Ministry, 36.4% strongly disagreed and 37.9% disagreed, while 22.7% agreed and 3% strongly agreed, showing that delays in implementation are widely perceived. Regarding

adherence to inclusive education policies, 35.6% strongly disagreed and 43.2% disagreed, compared to 18.2% who agreed and 3% who strongly agreed, indicating limited compliance. On whether schools receive adequate support from the District Education Office, 35.6% strongly disagreed and 44.7% disagreed, while 18.9% agreed and 0.8% strongly agreed, reflecting perceptions of insufficient support. In terms of communication of government policies to all school levels, 30.3% strongly disagreed and 48.5% disagreed, compared to 18.2% who agreed and 3% who strongly agreed, suggesting ineffective policy communication. Concerning whether the school undergoes regular external audits by government agencies to ensure strategic funds are used for academic improvement, 36.4% strongly disagreed and 47% disagreed, while 15.2% agreed and 1.5% strongly agreed, indicating that most respondents did not perceive a positive academic impact. On the effect of frequent policy changes on school performance, 37.9% strongly disagreed and 41.7% disagreed, compared to 17.4% who agreed and 3% who strongly agreed, showing that respondents largely did not associate policy changes with improved performance. Regarding teacher training on new policy requirements, 33.3% strongly disagreed and 41.7% disagreed, while 24.2% agreed and 0.8% strongly agreed, indicating that a majority felt training was inadequate. With respect to infrastructure development following government policy frameworks, 39.4% strongly disagreed and 43.9% disagreed, compared to 13.6% who agreed and 3% strongly agreed, suggesting weak policy-guided development. On the effect of whether the school adheres to government staffing norms (teacher-to-student ratio) as a key part of its strategic growth, 34.8% strongly disagreed and 42.4% disagreed, while 22.7% agreed, indicating that most respondents did not strongly acknowledge the impact of policy failure on learning outcomes. Finally, regarding alignment between national education goals and school programs, 31.1% strongly disagreed and 49.2% disagreed, compared to 17.4% who agreed and 2.3% strongly agreed, reflecting perceived misalignment between national goals and school-level practices.

Table 1.3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.620[a]	.385	.380	.75905
a. Predictors: (Constant), HEAD_2				

The model summary in table 4.6.2 shows that the independent variable HEAD_2 has a strong relationship with the dependent variable UCE. The correlation coefficient (R = .620) indicates a moderately strong positive relationship between the two variables. The R Square value of .385 means that 38.5% of the variation in UCE is explained by HEAD_2. After adjusting for the sample size, the Adjusted R Square is .380, showing that the model remains stable and reliable. The standard error of the estimate (.75905) indicates a

relatively small prediction error, suggesting that the model predicts UCE reasonably well.

Table 1.4: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	46.799	1	46.799	81.227	.000[b]
	Residual	74.900	130	.576		
	Total	121.699	131			
a. Dependent Variable: UCE						
b. Predictors: (Constant), HEAD_2						

The ANOVA table in Table 1.4 results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant. The model produced an F value of 81.227 with a significance level of $p < .001$, meaning that HEAD_2 significantly predicts UCE. This confirms that the regression model fits the data well and that the relationship between HEAD_2 and UCE is not due to chance.

Table 1.5: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.270	.250		1.081	.282
	HEAD_2	1.160	.129	.620	9.013	.000
a. Dependent Variable: UCE						

The coefficients table shows that HEAD_2 is a significant predictor of UCE. The unstandardized coefficient (B = 1.160) implies that a one-unit increase in HEAD_2 leads to an increase of 1.160 units in UCE, holding other factors constant. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = .620$) indicates a strong positive effect of HEAD_2 on UCE. The predictor is statistically significant ($t = 9.013$, $p < .001$).

Based on the unstandardized coefficients, the regression equation is expressed as:

$$UCE = 0.270 + 1.160(HEAD\_2)$$

The interview indicated that government education policies play a critical mediating role in linking strategic planning mechanisms to academic outcomes. The respondent described Uganda's current reforms as a shift toward quality and relevance:

> *"Education policies are undergoing a major transition as the government shifts focus from expanding access to improving quality and relevance of learning."*

At the school level, implementation includes curriculum reform, monitoring systems, and operational regulations:

"The new Lower Secondary Curriculum replaces theory-based learning with a competency-based approach."

"TELA has been rolled out to track teacher attendance and performance electronically."

These policies have yielded mixed academic outcomes. While instructional time and accountability have improved:

"TELA has improved instructional time by curbing teacher absenteeism."

Challenges such as overcrowding and assessment misalignment persist:

"Overall academic performance in government-aided schools has recently been described as declining or stagnant."

"Some teachers struggle to assess creative projects compared to traditional exams."

The respondent further noted that increased access has not been matched by adequate resources:

"High pupil-teacher ratios, sometimes exceeding 1:57, continue to undermine individual learner achievement."

The document review showed that schools demonstrated clear awareness of government policies, as evidenced by the availability and proper filing of government circulars and policy documents. These directives are effectively communicated through official channels, including printed circulars, digital platforms, gazette notices, and formal correspondence. However, compliance with government directives, particularly regarding capitation grants and inclusive education, is only partial. While schools do receive capitation funding, the amounts disbursed consistently fall below government-stipulated thresholds, limiting schools' capacity to implement strategic plans effectively. The funding shortfalls lead to delayed procurement of instructional resources and increased reliance on parental and community contributions, which undermines equitable access to education.

The study findings are similar to Thajane & Masitsa (2021) whose study investigated how primary school principals in the Free State province of South Africa implemented school policies. Sixty principals were randomly selected and completed a questionnaire measuring policy implementation practices. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.909 confirmed high reliability of the instrument. The analysis revealed that while *some* policies were reasonably implemented, many policies were poorly implemented, pointing to uneven compliance within schools. The authors emphasize ineffective

enforcement, inconsistent practice, and leadership challenges as key barriers to policy enactment in school environments.

Similarly, Muhamad & Rajab (2025) study Used a mixed-methods design with 250 respondents (students, teachers, parents, school leaders), to assess how the Inclusive Education Policy is implemented in Central Uganda. Quantitative data showed low mean scores on key measures of policy awareness (M = 2.77), school management practices (M = 2.67), and inclusive education implementation (M = 2.91), all indicating weak implementation (on a common 1–5 scale). A significant negative correlation between school management and teaching methods (r = –.218, p = .001) suggested that misaligned instructional approaches further undermine policy enactment. Regression analysis found that teaching methods were the only significant predictor of management practices (B = –0.225, p < .001), though the model explained only a small portion of variance (R^2 = .064).

Alhassan (2025) examined how teachers understand and implement inclusive education policies in Ghanaian primary and junior secondary schools. The research found that teachers had varied and often limited understandings of inclusive policy goals, which hindered effective enactment in classrooms. Many educators still relied on traditional deficit-based teaching models rather than progressive inclusion approaches. Although not reported with specific mean scores in the abstract, the study highlights systemic misunderstandings and practice gaps that translate policy intentions poorly into school practice.

Zikalala & Ntshangase (2025) conducted a systematic literature review, their study synthesised evidence on curriculum implementation practices and challenges in South African rural primary schools. It showed that the use of official curriculum pacesetters, designed to guide and monitor lesson coverage, often resulted in undifferentiated, teacher-centered instruction rather than meaningful curriculum engagement. Resource limitations and pressure to cover content negatively affected how policies were enacted in practice, suggesting that even well-intended policy tools may be executed superficially without supportive infrastructure and teacher capacity.

Based on the findings, the null hypothesis that government policy implementation does not significantly strengthen the relationship between strategic planning mechanisms and academic performance outcomes is rejected. Descriptive results showed generally low to moderate perceptions of education policy implementation in schools, inferential analysis demonstrated that government policy implementation (HEAD_2) had a statistically significant influence on academic performance outcomes. The regression results revealed a moderately strong positive relationship between policy implementation and UCE performance (R = .620), with 38.5% of the variation in academic outcomes explained by the model (R^2 = .385). The model was statistically significant (F = 81.227, p < .001), and the regression coefficient (B = 1.160, β = .620, p < .001) indicated that improvements in policy implementation were associated with substantial gains in academic performance.

5. Findings

5.1 Government Policy Implementation Does Not Significantly Strengthen the Relationship between Strategic Planning Mechanisms and Academic Performance Outcomes

The findings indicate that government policy implementation in public secondary schools remains weak, thereby limiting its role in strengthening the relationship between strategic planning mechanisms and academic performance outcomes. Analysis of questionnaire data revealed generally low to moderate agreement on policy implementation, as reflected by an overall mean score of 1.8706, which falls within the disagree range of the Likert scale. This overall mean suggests that respondents largely perceived education policies as inadequately implemented, poorly communicated, and insufficiently supported at the school level. Across most items, a majority of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that schools complied with curriculum implementation guidelines, utilized government capitation grants effectively, implemented Ministry directives in a timely manner, adhered to inclusive education policies, or received adequate support from the District Education Office. Similarly, respondents reported weak communication of government policies to all school levels, infrequent external audits to ensure strategic use of funds for academic improvement, inadequate teacher training on new policy requirements, poor policy-guided infrastructure development, non-adherence to staffing norms, and misalignment between national education goals and school programs. Regression analysis revealed a moderately strong and statistically significant relationship between government policy implementation and students' academic performance (UCE). The model summary showed a correlation coefficient of $R = .620$, indicating a strong positive association between policy implementation and academic outcomes.

The R Square value of .385 indicates that 38.5% of the variation in UCE performance is explained by government policy implementation, while the adjusted R Square of .380 confirms the reliability and stability of the model. The ANOVA results further demonstrated that the regression model was statistically significant ($F = 81.227$, $p < .001$), confirming that policy implementation significantly predicts students' academic performance. Coefficients results showed that HEAD_2 had a strong positive and statistically significant effect on UCE ($B = 1.160$, $\beta = .620$, $t = 9.013$, $p < .001$), implying that improvements in policy implementation are associated with meaningful gains in academic performance. The regression equation, UCE = 0.270 + 1.160(HEAD_2), underscores the predictive role of government policy implementation in academic outcomes. Qualitative findings from the interviews further highlighted the mediating role of government policies in linking strategic planning mechanisms to academic performance. The respondent noted that current education reforms in Uganda emphasize quality and relevance, particularly through curriculum reforms and strengthened monitoring systems. Initiatives such as the competency-based Lower Secondary

Curriculum and the Teacher Effectiveness and Learner Achievement (TELA) system were cited as key policy interventions aimed at improving accountability and instructional time. While these reforms have contributed to reduced teacher absenteeism and improved monitoring, the respondent emphasized that academic performance in many government-aided schools remains stagnant or declining due to persistent challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, assessment difficulties associated with competency-based approaches, and high pupil-teacher ratios that undermine individualized learning. Document analysis revealed that schools demonstrated strong awareness of government education policies, as evidenced by the availability and proper filing of policy documents, circulars, and official directives communicated through formal channels. However, actual compliance with these policies was only partial. In particular, capitation grants were consistently disbursed below government-recommended levels, constraining schools' ability to implement strategic plans effectively.

6. Recommendations

6.1 To Examine the Role of Government Policy Implementation in Strengthening the Relationship between Strategic Planning Mechanisms and Academic Performance Outcomes

The Ministry of Education and school leadership should establish robust monitoring systems to ensure the timely and effective implementation of education policies, including compliance with curriculum guidelines, capitation grant utilization, and inclusive education directives, thereby enhancing the impact of strategic planning on academic performance.

Schools should provide continuous professional development and targeted training programs to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge required to implement new policies effectively, particularly regarding competency-based curricula and performance monitoring systems.

Government and school leadership should ensure that education policies are communicated clearly and consistently to all levels of school stakeholders, using multiple channels such as circulars, digital platforms, and formal meetings, to foster understanding, compliance, and effective participation in strategic planning.

To realize the intended benefits of government policies, schools should receive sufficient financial, material, and human resources, particularly for rural areas, to implement policy directives effectively, reduce gaps in instructional capacity, and enhance student academic outcomes.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes that government policy implementation in public secondary schools plays a critical but uneven role in strengthening the relationship between strategic planning mechanisms and academic performance outcomes. The overall mean of 1.8706 and the predominance of strongly disagree and disagree responses indicate that respondents perceive policy implementation, communication, and support mechanisms as largely inadequate, with weak compliance to curriculum guidelines, delayed policy directives, limited training for teachers, and insufficient utilization of capitation grants. Regression analysis demonstrated a moderately strong positive relationship between policy implementation and student performance, with 38.5% of the variation in UCE results explained by government policy measures, highlighting that effective implementation has the potential to enhance academic outcomes. Interview findings further revealed that government reforms, such as the competency-based curriculum and electronic monitoring systems, have improved instructional accountability but are constrained by challenges including overcrowding, high pupil-teacher ratios, and limited assessment capacity. Document review corroborated these findings, showing that while schools are aware of policy directives, compliance is often partial due to insufficient resources.

7.1 Areas for Further Study

1) Assessing the Role of Teacher Retention and Professional Development Programs in Reducing Rural Teacher Shortages and Improving Academic Performance.
2) Evaluating the Influence of Equitable Resource Allocation on Bridging Rural–Urban Academic Performance Gaps in Secondary Education.
3) The Interaction Between Strategic Planning, Human Capital Management, and Resource Allocation in Improving Student Performance in Rural Schools.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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