

Headteachers' Monitoring Approaches and Students' Academic Performance in Seed Secondary Schools in Rukungiri District, Uganda: Establishing the Relationship

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Article history: Published: October 2026 Keywords: Headteachers' Monitoring Approaches Academic Performance Seed Secondary Schools Goal-Setting Theory Uganda	Seed secondary schools in Rukungiri District, Uganda, continue to record weak examination performance despite substantial government investment, and weak supervision by school leaders has been identified as a contributing factor. This paper established the relationship between headteachers' monitoring approaches and students' academic performance in seed secondary schools in the district. Guided by Goal-Setting Theory, the study adopted a cross-sectional, mixed-methods design. A sample of 174 respondents (63 teachers, 3 headteachers, and 108 Senior Four students) was drawn from three seed secondary schools using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, with stratified random sampling for teachers and students and purposive sampling for headteachers. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, with a response rate of 94.8% (n = 165), and analysed using Pearson's product-moment correlation and thematic analysis. Headteachers' monitoring approaches had a statistically significant positive relationship with students' academic performance among both students ($r = .682, p < .001$) and teachers ($r = .813, p < .001$), accounting for 46.5% and 66.1% of the variance in performance, respectively, and the null hypothesis was rejected. Headteachers described attendance monitoring as a direct driver of examination performance and reported that the expectation of classroom observation improved teachers' lesson preparation, accountability, and feedback to learners. The paper concludes that headteachers' monitoring is a meaningful, relatively low-cost lever for improving academic performance, exerted primarily through teachers, and recommends structured, data-driven monitoring supported by district supervision, digital tools, and action on staffing constraints.

1. Introduction

Effective school leadership is widely recognised as a key driver of learning outcomes. Reforms that expanded access to schooling, from compulsory education laws to accountability frameworks such as the No Child Left Behind Act in the United States, have shown that access alone does not guarantee achievement, and that the quality of supervision and monitoring within schools shapes whether learners succeed (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Linn, 2005; Bush, 2011). In sub-Saharan Africa, the expansion of public education has been accompanied by persistent concerns about overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, and uneven quality, placing renewed emphasis on the supervisory role of headteachers (World Bank, 2022).

In Uganda, seed secondary schools were introduced to extend government-sponsored free day secondary education to rural and under-served communities. Many of these schools, however, continue to record persistently low academic outcomes (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2023). In Rukungiri District, 18 of 48 secondary schools failed to produce a single student at the expected competency level in the 2023 Senior Four mock examinations, with particularly weak results in science and mathematics (New Vision, 2023), and Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) pass rates in some seed schools fell as low as 2.3% (Abet, 2023). These outcomes have been linked to irregular lesson observation, limited feedback to teachers, and the failure to track students' attendance and progress systematically (New Vision, 2023; Akatuhurira, 2023), compounded by student-teacher ratios as high as 140:1 and a lack of digital tools for tracking performance (Daily Monitor, 2023; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2023).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Headteachers in seed secondary schools are expected to monitor teaching and learning consistently through classroom observation, performance appraisal, data-driven monitoring, and the tracking of attendance and punctuality, and this monitoring should translate into strong academic performance, with most Senior Four candidates attaining the expected competency level in UCE examinations (Mwansa, 2022). In Rukungiri District, however, monitoring has been inconsistent (New Vision, 2023; Akatuhurira, 2023), and academic performance has remained critically low (Abet, 2023). Although weak supervision has been linked to poorer teaching and learning outcomes in Uganda (Akantorana, Amumpaire, & Adyeri, 2024; Musiimenta et al., 2020), it remains unclear whether, and how strongly, headteachers' monitoring approaches are related to students' academic performance in seed secondary schools. This paper addresses that question.

1.2 Purpose and Hypothesis

The purpose of this paper is to establish the relationship between headteachers' monitoring approaches and students' academic

performance in seed secondary schools in Rukungiri District. The study tested the null hypothesis (H_0) that there is no statistically significant relationship between headteachers' monitoring approaches and students' academic performance in seed secondary schools in Rukungiri District.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was guided by Goal-Setting Theory, developed by Edwin A. Locke and later expanded with Gary P. Latham (Locke & Latham, 1990). The theory holds that specific and challenging goals improve performance by directing attention, mobilising effort, increasing persistence, and encouraging the development of strategies, and that goals are achieved only when progress is monitored and timely feedback is provided (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Applied to school leadership, the theory explains how headteachers' monitoring can influence academic performance. By setting academic targets at the start of each term, observing lessons, appraising teachers, reviewing performance data, and tracking teacher and student attendance, headteachers clarify what is expected and create feedback loops through which teachers and learners can adjust their efforts. The theory therefore predicts a positive relationship between the strength of headteachers' monitoring and students' academic performance, the proposition tested in this paper.

2.2 Empirical Review

Monitoring in education refers to the systematic processes used to track academic progress, teaching effectiveness, and other factors that affect learning (Freeman et al., 2020). It commonly includes classroom observation, feedback to teachers, review of lesson plans, appraisal of teacher performance, attendance tracking, and the use of student information to guide decisions (Albreiki, Zaki, & Alashwal, 2021; Almufarreh, Noaman, & Saeed, 2023; Zenda, 2021). Several studies link these practices to academic outcomes. Structured classroom observation, constructive feedback, and targeted professional development have been associated with gains in student achievement (Almufarreh et al., 2023), and in Uganda, schools with frequent teacher evaluations recorded higher national examination pass rates (Musiimenta et al., 2020).

Evidence from elsewhere in East Africa points in the same direction. Curriculum audits were associated with higher scores in science and mathematics in Tanzania (Changwe & Mwanza, 2022), and annual school audits in Kenya reduced teacher absenteeism and improved examination performance (Oketch et al., 2020). Monitoring of teacher and student attendance has also been identified as essential for reducing absenteeism and promoting accountability (Zenda, 2021). However, monitoring is not uniformly beneficial: intensive monitoring under high-stakes testing can push teachers toward test-focused content (Pham, 2020), and frequent, unannounced inspections have been associated with teacher stress and rote teaching (Carmichael, 2022), suggesting that monitoring is most effective when it is supportive and accompanied by feedback.

2.3 Research Gap

Much of the existing evidence concerns monitoring by external inspectors, parents, or national bodies rather than by headteachers, comes from contexts with institutional capacity very different from that of Uganda's seed secondary schools, or examines a single dimension of monitoring, such as the frequency of teacher evaluation. No reviewed study has tested the relationship between a composite of headteachers' classroom observation, performance appraisal, data-driven monitoring, and attendance tracking and students' academic performance in Uganda's seed secondary schools, or explored, from headteachers' own perspectives, how such a relationship operates. This paper addresses that gap.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design with a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were used to test the relationship between headteachers' monitoring approaches and students' academic performance, while qualitative data from headteachers explained how the relationship operated in practice (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

3.2 Population, Sample, and Sampling

The study targeted 228 respondents from three seed secondary schools in Rukungiri District, referred to as Schools A, B, and C: 75 teachers, 3 headteachers, and 150 Senior Four students (Rukungiri District Human Resource Manual, 2024). A sample of 174 was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. Teachers and students were selected through stratified random sampling, and all three headteachers were selected purposively as the principal implementers of monitoring in their schools (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). Table 1 summarises the population and sample.

Table 1: Target Population and Sample Size

Category	Population	Sample	Sampling technique
Teachers	75	63	Stratified random sampling
Headteachers	3	3	Purposive sampling
Senior Four students	150	108	Stratified random sampling
Total	228	174	

Source: Rukungiri District Human Resource Manual, 2024.

3.3 Instruments and Measurement of Variables

Structured, self-administered questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from teachers and students, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Headteachers' monitoring approaches were measured with 10

items for teachers and 12 for students, covering classroom observation and feedback, performance appraisals and data-driven monitoring, and attendance and punctuality tracking. Students' academic performance was measured with 10 items for each group, covering academic grades and examination results, completion of syllabus and classwork, and attendance and class participation. Composite scores for each variable were computed as the mean of its items. A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect qualitative data from the three headteachers on how their monitoring related to students' attendance, grades, and pass rates (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.4 Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Content validity was established through review by the research supervisors and two experts in educational management and research methodology, yielding a Content Validity Index of 0.95, above the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Amin, 2005). A pilot test with 10 respondents outside the main sample yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.81 for monitoring approaches and 0.85 for academic performance, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Taber, 2018). The trustworthiness of the qualitative data was supported through triangulation with questionnaire data and school records, member checking, an audit trail, and reflexive journaling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017; Birt et al., 2016).

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires were administered in person with the support of trained research assistants, and face-to-face interviews were conducted with the headteachers. Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS version 29. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was computed separately for students' and teachers' responses to establish the strength and direction of the relationship between the composite scores, with the null hypothesis tested at the 0.01 significance level, and the coefficient of determination (r^2) was used to estimate the proportion of shared variance (Field, 2018). Qualitative data were analysed thematically through repeated reading of transcripts, coding, the organisation of codes into themes, and interpretation supported by verbatim quotations (Neuman, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Bishop Stuart University Research Ethics Committee (BSU-REC-2026-2085), and permission was obtained from the Rukungiri District Education Office and the headteachers of participating schools. Written informed consent was obtained from teachers and headteachers, and assent was obtained from students, with all participants informed of the study's purpose and of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Schools and interviewees were anonymised using codes (Schools A, B, and C and Headteachers A, B, and C), no personal identifiers were reported, and data were stored in password-protected files accessible only to the research team and used solely for academic purposes.

4. Findings

4.1 Response Rate and Respondents' Characteristics

Of the 171 questionnaires administered to teachers and students, 162 were completed and returned (94.7%), comprising 57 teachers and 105 students, and all three headteachers were interviewed, giving an overall response rate of 94.8% (165 of 174), well above the 70% threshold recommended for survey research (Babbie, 2010; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Male respondents slightly outnumbered female respondents (84, 51.9% against 78, 48.1%). Most teachers were aged 30–39 years (31, 54.4%), held a bachelor's degree (37, 64.9%), and had served for five years or more (39, 68.4%), while most students were aged 17–18 years (70, 66.7%).

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Table 2 presents the composite mean scores for the two study variables by respondent category.

Table 2: Composite Mean Scores of the Study Variables by Respondent Category

Variable	Students (n = 105) Mean (SD)	Teachers (n = 57) Mean (SD)
Headteachers' monitoring approaches	3.96 (1.207)	4.46 (0.748)
Students' academic performance	3.93 (1.172)	4.47 (0.710)

Note. Means are averages of item means on a five-point scale; 3.41–4.20 = high; 4.21–5.00 = very high. Source: Field data, 2026. Table 2 shows that both variables were rated highly by students and very highly by teachers. Teachers, as the direct recipients of headteachers' monitoring, rated both monitoring approaches and students' academic performance more favourably than students did.

4.3 Correlation Between Monitoring Approaches and Academic Performance

To test the null hypothesis, Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted separately for students' and teachers' responses. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3: Correlation Between Headteachers' Monitoring Approaches and Students' Academic Performance

Respondent category	Pearson correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	r^2
Students	0.682**	0.000	105	0.465
Teachers	0.813**	0.000	57	0.661

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Field data, 2026.

Table 3 shows that headteachers' monitoring approaches had a statistically significant positive relationship with students' academic performance among both students ($r = 0.682$, $p < .001$) and teachers ($r = 0.813$, $p < .001$). Because both p-values were below the 0.01 significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming a statistically significant positive relationship between headteachers' monitoring approaches and students' academic performance in seed secondary schools in Rukungiri District.

The relationship was strong among teachers and moderate to strong among students. Using the coefficient of determination, monitoring approaches accounted for approximately 66.1% of the variance in academic performance as perceived by teachers and 46.5% as perceived by students. The stronger relationship among teachers is consistent with their position as the direct recipients of classroom observation, appraisal, and attendance monitoring, whereas students observe these practices more indirectly through their effects in the classroom.

4.4 Qualitative Findings on the Relationship

Two subthemes emerged from the headteacher interviews on how monitoring related to students' academic performance.

4.4.1 Attendance Monitoring as a Direct Driver of Examination Performance

All three headteachers linked closely monitored attendance to stronger results. Headteacher A stated that "students who attend classes regularly perform better in tests and examinations. Improved attendance in Senior Four was followed by better results in English and Geography" (Headteacher A, July 2026). Headteacher B observed that "absenteeism negatively affects academic performance because students miss lessons and coursework. Students with good attendance records generally obtain higher grades" (Headteacher B, July 2026). In School C, attendance monitoring was reinforced by parents: "attendance monitoring, together with follow-up by parents, has helped reduce absenteeism. Students who attend remedial lessons regularly have shown improvement in examination performance" (Headteacher C, July 2026).

4.4.2 Structured Monitoring as a Catalyst for Teacher Accountability and Learner Effort

Headteachers also described how monitoring shaped teachers' behaviour. Headteacher A noted an anticipatory effect: "teachers prepare lessons more carefully when they know classroom observations will be conducted. This has improved student discipline and academic performance" (Headteacher A, July 2026). Headteacher B reported that "regular monitoring has increased teacher accountability. Students receive assignments on time and are given feedback more frequently, which has supported better learning outcomes" (Headteacher B, July 2026), while Headteacher C explained that "continuous monitoring of teaching and student progress has encouraged both teachers and learners to work harder. This has contributed to gradual improvement in grades and pass rates" (Headteacher C, July 2026). These accounts corroborate the quantitative relationship and indicate that monitoring operated mainly through two mechanisms: securing regular attendance, so that learners received consistent lessons, and raising teachers' preparation, accountability, and feedback to learners.

5. Discussion

The finding that headteachers' monitoring approaches were significantly and positively related to students' academic performance is consistent with evidence from Uganda that more frequent teacher evaluation is associated with higher examination pass rates (Musiimenta et al., 2020), and with findings that structured observation and constructive feedback translate into measurable gains in student achievement (Almufarreh et al., 2023). It also aligns with evidence from East Africa that curriculum audits improve science and mathematics scores (Changwe & Mwanza, 2022) and that audits that reduce teacher absenteeism improve examination performance (Oketch et al., 2020).

The strength of the relationship differed between respondent groups. The stronger correlation among teachers, together with headteachers' accounts of more careful lesson preparation, greater accountability, and more frequent feedback, suggests that monitoring influences learning primarily through its effect on teachers' classroom practice. That the relationship remained strong and significant among students, the intended beneficiaries of monitoring, indicates that its effects were felt in the classroom and not only in staff-level interactions. Headteachers' emphasis on attendance is consistent with Zenda (2021), who found attendance monitoring essential for reducing absenteeism and promoting accountability, and suggests that, in resource-constrained schools, ensuring that lessons take place regularly is one of the most direct ways in which monitoring supports learning.

These findings support Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 1990, 2002). By setting academic targets, observing lessons, reviewing performance data, and tracking attendance, headteachers created the goal clarity and feedback loops that the theory identifies as prerequisites for improved performance, and the positive correlations across both respondent groups provide empirical support for this proposition in Uganda's seed secondary schools. At the same time, monitoring did not operate in isolation: headteachers acknowledged continuing challenges, such as weak performance in Mathematics, which are consistent with the staffing and resource constraints documented in seed schools (Daily Monitor, 2023; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2023). Monitoring can therefore strengthen performance, but its effects are likely to be limited where shortages of teachers and resources persist, and the cautions raised by Pham (2020) and Carmichael (2022) indicate that it should remain supportive rather than punitive.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The paper concludes that headteachers' monitoring approaches are a statistically significant and practically meaningful driver of students' academic performance in seed secondary schools in Rukungiri District. This influence is exerted primarily through teachers, who respond to classroom observation, appraisal, and attendance monitoring by preparing lessons more carefully, teaching more consistently, and giving learners more frequent feedback, and through the regular attendance that monitoring secures. Strengthening headteachers' monitoring capacity is therefore a substantive and relatively low-cost lever for improving academic outcomes in resource-constrained secondary schools, consistent with the goal-clarity and feedback mechanisms proposed by Goal-Setting Theory.

6.2 Recommendations

Headteachers should institutionalise structured monitoring that combines regular classroom observation and constructive feedback with the systematic use of student performance data and close tracking of teacher and student attendance, and should make the resulting support visible to learners through regular feedback and remedial programmes. Teachers should use feedback from observations and appraisals to refine their teaching and to support learners who are falling behind.

The Rukungiri District Education Office should complement headteachers' internal monitoring with regular support supervision and provide schools with simple digital tools and training for data-driven monitoring. The Ministry of Education and Sports should strengthen headteachers' training in instructional supervision and address the staffing and resource constraints in seed secondary schools that limit how far monitoring can translate into improved examination performance.

6.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The study was limited to three seed secondary schools in one district and used a cross-sectional design and perception-based measures of academic performance, which limit generalisation and causal inference; correlation does not establish that monitoring causes improved performance. Future research should use larger, district-wide or national samples, examine the independent effects of individual monitoring approaches using regression or similar techniques, employ longitudinal designs linked to students' actual examination results, and include the perspectives of District Education Officers and school inspectors.

7. Declarations

Consent for Publication: All authors consented to and approved the submission of this manuscript for publication.

Availability of Data and Materials: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to the confidentiality undertakings made to participants.

Competing Interests: The authors declare no competing interests.

Funding: This study received no external funding.

Authors' Contributions: Mugabe Athanasius conceptualised the study, collected and analysed the data, and prepared the original draft of the manuscript. Dr. Basil Tibanyendera and Rev. Canon Asaph Kabakyenga supervised the study and reviewed and edited the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Acknowledgments: The authors thank the Directorate of Graduate Studies, Research and Innovations at Bishop Stuart University and the faculty of the Master of Education Management, Planning and Administration programme for their academic support. We are grateful to the headteachers, teachers, and Senior Four students of the participating seed secondary schools for their time and willingness to share their experiences, to the Rukungiri District Education Office for granting access to schools and records, and to the research assistants who supported data collection.

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