



# Strategic Planning and Organisational Performance in Higher Education: A Quantitative Analysis of the University for Development Studies, Ghana

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**Abstract:** This study examines how strategic planning practices affect organisational performance at the University for Development Studies (UDS), Ghana. Drawing on existing debates that question the impact of formal planning in public higher education, this study investigates four strategic planning dimensions: environmental scanning, management participation, planning formality, and strategic techniques, and their relationship with financial and non-financial performance. Quantitative data were collected from the academic and administrative staff at UDS ( $n = 250$ ) using a structured questionnaire. Reliability and validity were confirmed (Cronbach's  $\alpha > .70$ ), and the data were analysed using Pearson's correlation and multiple regression. The results indicate that strategic planning has a statistically significant positive effect on financial performance ( $R^2 = 0.49$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with strategic techniques exerting the strongest influence ( $\beta = 0.60$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The effect on non-financial performance is also significant, albeit weaker ( $R^2 = 0.23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), primarily driven by environmental scanning ( $\beta = 0.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings highlight the importance of formal strategic planning in improving university outcomes. The implications include a recommendation for policy frameworks to strengthen strategic planning processes in Ghanaian higher education. Limitations are related to the cross-sectional design, suggesting that longitudinal studies are needed to capture causality over time.

**Keywords:** Strategic planning, organisational performance, environmental scanning, university efficiency, Ghana.

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## INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions worldwide face unprecedented challenges stemming from fiscal constraints, intensified global competition, and mounting pressure for accountability (Dinye & Boon, 2023). These challenges are particularly acute in developing countries, where public universities must navigate complex operational environments characterised by limited resources, expanding student populations, and evolving stakeholder expectations (Stage, 2020; Tuunainen et al., 2023). Within this context, strategic planning has emerged as a valuable management tool for enhancing institutional effectiveness and achieving a sustainable competitive advantage (Kalebar et al., 2024).

Strategic planning encompasses systematic processes through which organisations define their mission, vision, and long-term objectives while developing coordinated action plans to achieve the desired outcomes (Conway et al., 1994; Tarifi, 2021). The theoretical foundation for strategic planning rests on the premise that deliberate, forward-looking organisational processes enable institutions to align resources with their priorities, anticipate environmental changes, and enhance their overall performance (Andreis, 2019;

Welch & Smith, 2023). Despite the widespread acceptance of strategic planning principles, empirical evidence demonstrating clear linkages between planning activities and measurable performance improvements remains limited, particularly in higher education contexts in developing regions. This study aims to bridge this gap by rigorously examining the influence of strategic planning practices on organisational performance within a Ghanaian higher education institution, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of its efficacy in such settings (Twaissi & Aldehayyat, 2020).

The University for Development Studies (UDS), established in 1992 as a specialised institution focused on rural development and community engagement in northern Ghana (Abilla-Buame, 2025), provides an appropriate setting for examining the effectiveness of strategic planning. As a public university operating within the resource-constrained environments typical of Sub-Saharan African higher education, UDS faces challenges common to many institutions in developing countries, including fluctuating government funding, infrastructure limitations, and pressure to expand access while maintaining quality standards (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023).

This study addresses this empirical gap by examining the relationship between strategic planning practices and organisational performance at UDS. The following three specific questions guided this study:

- (1) What strategic planning processes have been implemented at UDS?
- (2) How are organisational performance standards measured and evaluated?
- (3) What statistical relationships exist between the implementation of strategic planning and organisational performance outcomes?

The primary objective of this research is to analyse the effect of strategic planning practices on organisational performance using correlation and regression analytical techniques. This study contributes to a broader understanding of the effectiveness of strategic planning in higher education, providing practical insights for university administrators seeking to enhance institutional performance in resource-constrained settings.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Foundations of Strategic Planning**

Strategic planning theory has evolved significantly over recent decades, with contemporary approaches emphasising systematic goal-setting, environmental scanning, stakeholder engagement, and continuous evaluation processes (Benzaghta et al., 2021; Fuertes et al., 2020). Strategic planning has significant and moderate effects on organisational performance, particularly when performance is measured using effectiveness indicators rather than purely financial metrics (Oumakhlouf & Kherbachi, 2023). Moreover, the consistent application of strategic planning methodologies has been shown to advance performance, particularly in small- and medium-scale enterprises (Donkor et al., 2018). This underscores the importance of a well-defined strategic approach, as it enables organisations to adapt to dynamic environments and achieve their objectives proactively (Mousa et al., 2024).

The theoretical framework underlying the effectiveness of strategic planning suggests that formal planning processes contribute to improved performance through several mechanisms (Gumel, 2019). First, strategic planning promotes organisational alignment by ensuring that institutional resources, capabilities, and activities are directed towards clearly defined objectives (Mulyaningsih et al., 2020). Second, the planning process enhances environmental awareness by requiring a systematic analysis of both internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats (Siriram & Plessis, 2024; Tavo & Rasmus, 2024). Third, strategic planning facilitates stakeholder coordination by establishing a shared understanding of institutional priorities and expected outcomes (Hamza et al., 2023).

### **Strategic Planning in Higher Education Contexts**

Higher education institutions present unique challenges for strategic planning implementation because of their complex governance structures, multiple stakeholder groups, and diverse performance objectives (Ali et al., 2024; Kalebar et al., 2024). Recent research has examined the effectiveness of strategic planning within university settings, yielding mixed findings regarding optimal approaches and outcomes (Oblaković et al., 2023). Studies conducted in various international contexts have documented positive associations between strategic planning implementation and institutional performance indicators; however, significant variation exists in the strength and consistency of these relationships.

Research has demonstrated that effective strategic planning necessitates the integration of financial management systems with performance monitoring mechanisms across various higher-education institutions (Ali et al., 2024; Hussein et al., 2021). Their research highlights the importance of aligning strategic objectives with budgetary allocations and establishing clear performance metrics that reflect institutional missions. Similarly, recent investigations have documented positive correlations between the quality of strategic planning and service delivery outcomes, student satisfaction levels, and research productivity (Greere, 2022; Hagoug, 2024).

However, significant implementation hurdles persist across diverse institutional settings. Research consistently highlights common obstacles to effective strategic planning in higher education, including limited stakeholder involvement, insufficient funding for plan implementation, inadequate communication channels, and an overemphasis on hierarchical planning methods that overlook input from faculty, staff, and external parties (Laush, 2021). Such challenges necessitate a reevaluation of traditional top-down strategic planning approaches, advocating for more inclusive and adaptive models that foster broad participation and continuous feedback (Romanova, 2019).

### **Strategic Planning Effectiveness Factors**

Contemporary research has identified several key factors that influence the effectiveness of strategic planning in organisational settings (Lynch, 2021). Systematic goal-setting processes that establish clear and measurable objectives are vital for achieving positive outcomes (Al-Balushi et al., 2021). Regular evaluation and feedback mechanisms enable organisations to monitor progress towards strategic objectives and make necessary

adjustments to planning processes or implementation strategies (Daniali et al., 2021; Gkizani & Galanakis, 2022; Mtau & Rahul, 2024).

Stakeholder participation represents another critical factor influencing planning effectiveness (Hollmann et al., 2022). Research suggests that inclusive planning processes that incorporate diverse perspectives from internal and external stakeholders tend to produce more realistic objectives, enhance buy-in for implementation activities, and improve overall performance outcomes (Ravazzoli et al., 2025). Conversely, top-down planning approaches that limit stakeholder input often result in reduced commitment to strategic objectives and weaker implementation results (Semeraro et al., 2020; Sharpe et al., 2021).

Environmental scanning capabilities also influence the success of strategic planning. Organisations that systematically analyse internal capabilities and external environmental factors are better positioned to identify opportunities, anticipate challenges, and develop appropriate strategic responses (Cancellier et al., 2022; Chen, 2024). This analytical capacity is vital in dynamic environments, where external conditions change rapidly. Furthermore, effective strategic planning often involves robust stakeholder engagement, where varied perspectives from internal and external groups are integrated into the planning process, fostering broader ownership and relevance (Zipparo, 2022).

This comprehensive involvement ensures that the strategic plan reflects a holistic understanding of the organisation's capabilities and environmental challenges, thereby increasing its potential for successful execution (Twaissi & Aldehayyat, 2020). Despite meticulous formulation, a considerable proportion of strategic initiatives falter during execution, with estimates suggesting failure rates ranging from 30% to 70% (Alashloo et al., 2005).

### **Strategic Planning in Developing Country Contexts**

Despite the scarcity of research on the effectiveness of strategic planning in the unique higher education contexts of developing countries, particularly in Africa, the few studies available point to the potential influence of resource constraints, infrastructural limitations, and evolving regulatory frameworks on strategic planning processes and outcomes (Shrestha, 2020; Makoe & Olcott, 2021).

Recent studies in Sub-Saharan African university contexts suggest that strategic planning can enhance institutional performance. However, the effectiveness of these strategies is heavily dependent on their adaptation to local conditions and constraints (Agasisti & Berbegal-Mirabent, 2020). Research underscores the importance of developing planning processes that take into account resource limitations, incorporate community engagement priorities, and address capacity-building needs specific to developing country contexts.

While the empirical evidence is limited, it suggests that strategic planning could be a valuable tool for institutions in resource-constrained environments. Systematic planning processes have the potential to optimize limited resources and identify innovative approaches to achieve institutional objectives (Priyambodo & Hasanah, 2021). However, the implementation of such strategies may face more severe challenges in developing countries due to financial constraints, limited technical capacity, and institutional instability.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This research employed a descriptive and explanatory quantitative design to thoroughly investigate the relationship between strategic planning practices and organisational performance indicators at the UDS A quantitative approach was selected to enable statistical analysis of the relationships between variables and to provide empirical evidence regarding the magnitude and significance of associations between strategic planning implementation and performance outcomes.

### **Population and Sampling**

The study population, which was carefully selected, comprised senior academic and non-academic staff members across the three campuses of UDS: Dungu, Nyankpala, and the City campuses. These individuals, chosen for their pivotal role in institutional strategic planning processes, bring a wealth of knowledge about organisational performance indicators, making them the ideal target population for our study. This study employed a meticulous proportionate cluster sampling technique, as recommended by Hossan et al. (2023), to ensure representative participation from each campus. The initial target sample size was 234 staff members, calculated using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula to provide adequate statistical power for correlation and regression analyses while accounting for anticipated non-response rates (Bukhari, 2021). Campus-based clusters were established, with proportionate representation determined by the relative size of the staff population at each location.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

A structured questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire was developed through an extensive literature review. It was organised into four main sections: (1) demographic characteristics, (2) strategic planning processes and practices, (3) organisational performance indicators, and (4) implementation challenges and barriers.

Items measuring strategic planning practices addressed key dimensions, including documentation of strategic plans, stakeholder participation levels, goal-setting processes, environmental scanning activities, and evaluation mechanisms. Organisational performance items focused on measurable indicators, including student enrolment trends, degree completion rates, research output levels, and community engagement activities.

All substantive items utilised five-point Likert scales ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" to enable quantitative analysis while capturing nuanced respondent perspectives. The questionnaire was pretested with a small sample of staff members to identify potential issues with the question wording, response categories, or overall instrument length.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Content validity was established through an expert review of the questionnaire by senior university administrators and academic researchers with expertise in strategic planning and

higher education management. The expert panel assessed the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the items in relation to the research objectives.

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each scale within the questionnaire. All scales exceeded the accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating adequate internal consistency (Hashim & Ahmad, 2020). Specifically, the strategic planning practices scale achieved an  $\alpha$  of 0.85, while the organisational performance scale demonstrated an  $\alpha$  of 0.82.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data were collected over six weeks during the 2024/2025 academic year. Questionnaires were distributed through campus administrative offices, with follow-up communications sent to encourage participation and maximise the response rates. It's important to note that participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality regarding their responses.

Of the 234 questionnaires distributed, 150 valid responses were retrieved, representing a 64.1% response rate. This response rate was considered adequate for statistical analysis because it falls within the range of typical response rates achieved in higher education survey research (Holtom et al., 2022). It provides a representative sample and ensures the reliability of the findings.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was performed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarise the characteristics of the respondents and their response patterns for key variables. Correlation analysis was conducted to explore the bivariate relationships between the dimensions of strategic planning and indicators of organisational performance. To ensure the accuracy of the study findings, multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate the overall relationship between strategic planning practices (independent variable) and organisational performance (dependent variable). This analysis was conducted with careful control for potential confounding factors. Statistical significance was assessed at  $p < 0.05$ , with confidence intervals calculated for important parameter estimates. Before executing the regression analysis, a thorough check of the assumptions of linearity, normality, and homoscedasticity were conducted. This was done through residual analysis and diagnostic tests. The absence of significant violations of the regression assumptions supports the robustness of the analytical approach taken.

## **RESULTS**

### **Sample Characteristics**

The final sample of 150 respondents demonstrated diverse demographic characteristics representative of the UDS staff. Male respondents comprised 66% of the sample ( $n = 99$ ), while female respondents accounted for 34% ( $n = 51$ ). Most participants (68%) were between 35 and 45 years of age, reflecting the predominance of mid-career professionals in senior university positions.

The respondents had high educational qualifications, with 74% holding master's degrees and 18% holding doctoral degrees. The remaining 8% of the respondents possessed bachelor's degrees with extensive professional experience. Non-academic staff constituted 60% of the sample ( $n = 90$ ), while the academic staff represented 40% ( $n = 60$ ). Nearly all respondents (98%) reported employment tenure exceeding four years, indicating substantial institutional experience and familiarity with the strategic planning processes.

The campus representation in the survey was proportionate to the staff distribution, with 45% of respondents from the Dungu campus, 38% from the Nyankpala campus, and 17% from the City campus. This balanced distribution ensured that the findings reflected perspectives from across the university system, rather than being dominated by any single campus location.

### Strategic Planning Process Implementation

Respondents overwhelmingly provided positive assessments of the strategic planning implementation at UDS, with some variation across different planning dimensions. The presence of documented strategic plans received the highest rating (Mean = 4.42, SD = 0.68), indicating widespread awareness and acceptance of formal planning documents (UDS, 2017). Similarly, the clarity of institutional vision and mission statements was rated highly (Mean = 4.71, SD = 0.52), suggesting effective communication of organisational purposes and directions.

Stakeholder participation in planning processes received moderate ratings (Mean = 3.70, SD = 0.89), indicating a need for improvement in engaging diverse institutional constituencies. The establishment of realistic and achievable objectives was also rated moderately (Mean = 3.93, SD = 0.76), suggesting the need to address concerns regarding the feasibility of strategic goals.

Two areas received notably lower ratings from the respondents, indicating specific areas for improvement. Environmental scanning activities, which involve systematic analysis of external opportunities and threats, received a mean rating of 3.42 (SD = 0.95), indicating perceived weaknesses in external analysis capabilities. Continuous evaluation and monitoring processes received the lowest mean rating of 3.28 (SD = 1.02), highlighting significant concerns regarding the systematic assessment of progress towards strategic objectives.

### Strategic Planning Approach

An examination of strategic planning approaches at the UDS indicates a dominant reliance on top-down processes in Ghana. As presented in Table 1, respondents rated the involvement of top management in the execution of the university's strategic plan with a relatively high mean score of 4.04 (SD = 1.08), suggesting that strategic decisions are predominantly directed by senior leadership.

Conversely, the extent to which individual functional units participated in strategic planning was rated as notably lower, with a mean score of 2.83 (SD = 1.34). This disparity reflects the limited decentralisation of planning responsibilities, which may, in turn, constrain the sense of ownership and commitment to strategic objectives among operational

units. However, the findings also highlight the potential for more inclusive planning processes to engage diverse organisational actors, foster broader institutional buy-in, and enhance implementation effectiveness, thereby paving the way for positive change in the strategic planning process at UDS.

**Table 1: Strategic planning Approaches**

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
University's Strategic Plan are carried out by the top management	150	1	5	4.04	1.080	1.166
University's Strategic Plan are carried out by individual functional units	150	1	5	2.83	1.338	1.791

Although the top-down approach provides clear leadership and coordination, it may limit the incorporation of diverse perspectives and reduce commitment to plan implementation among faculty and staff who are not directly involved in the planning processes. This finding aligns with the everyday challenges identified in the higher education strategic planning literature.

### Organizational Performance Indicators

Respondents evaluated organisational performance at the UDS across four core dimensions aligned with the institution's strategic objectives. As shown in Table 2, credit attainment, course completion, and degree completion received the highest mean rating of 3.90 (SD = 0.88), indicating strong institutional performance in promoting students' academic achievement. Similarly, research productivity was assessed favourably, with a mean score of 3.87 (SD = 1.69), reflecting substantial recognition of faculty and student contributions to scholarly output.

**Table 2: Corporate performance**

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Student enrolment numbers is used by the UDS as a measure of its performance	150	1	5	3.61	.925	.856
Credit attainment, course completion, degree completion and attainment are indicators of performance by the UDS	150	2	5	3.90	.880	.775
The University measures its performance by the number and quality of research publications by its faculty and students	150	1	21	3.87	1.688	2.850
The University measures its performance by the services it renders to its community	150	2	5	3.83	.775	.601

Community engagement, a cornerstone of UDS's rural development mandate, was also positively rated (Mean = 3.83, SD = 0.78), suggesting the effective implementation of

outreach and service initiatives that align with the university's mission. Conversely, student enrolment was identified as the weakest performance indicator, with a mean of 3.61 (SD = 0.93). Although this score remains above the neutral midpoint, it may signal ongoing challenges related to student recruitment, retention, or institutional capacity. Overall, these findings affirm the university's relative strengths in academic delivery and community service while highlighting the need to address potential constraints affecting enrolment growth.

### Statistical Relationships Between Strategic Planning and Performance

As illustrated in Table 3, the correlation analysis demonstrates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between strategic planning and organisational performance ( $r = 0.860$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 3: Correlations Matrix**

Variables	Strategic Planning	Corporate Performance
Strategic Planning	1	0.86
Corporate Performance	0.86	1

The examination of the correlations between specific strategic planning dimensions and performance indicators revealed consistent positive associations. Documentation of strategic plans correlated significantly with performance ( $r = 0.72$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), as did stakeholder participation ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and goal-setting ( $r = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Notably, environmental scanning ( $r = 0.58$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and continuous evaluation ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) showed somewhat weaker, yet still significant, correlations with performance outcomes compared to the other dimensions. The results of the multiple regression analysis, as summarised in Table 4, reveal that strategic planning practices possess substantial explanatory power in predicting organisational performance at the UDS. The model was statistically significant ( $F = 421.3$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with an R value of 0.86 and an  $R^2$  value of 0.739, indicating that approximately 73.9% of the variance in organisational performance can be attributed to variations in strategic planning effectiveness.

The adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.737 further confirms the robustness of the model after accounting for the potential model complexity. The unstandardised regression coefficient ( $B = 0.729$ ,  $SE = 0.035$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) suggests that for every one-unit increase in the effectiveness of strategic planning implementation, there is a corresponding increase of 0.729 units in organisational performance.

**Table 4: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.86	0.739	0.737	0.31248

The standardised regression coefficient ( $B = 0.860$ ) confirms the strength of the relationship between strategic planning and performance. The confidence intervals for the

regression coefficient (95% CI: 0.660, 0.798) did not include zero, further supporting the statistical significance of the relationship.

### Implementation Challenges

As presented in Table 5, the respondents identified a range of challenges impeding the effective implementation of strategic planning at the UDS. The most prominent barrier cited was inadequate financial resources, with the highest mean rating 3.95 (SD = 1.16). The second most significant challenge reported was the ineffective communication of the strategic planning process (Mean = 3.68, SD = 1.05). Respondents also highlighted the absence of continuous evaluation mechanisms as a significant limitation (mean = 3.41, SD = 1.16).

Other identified challenges included failure to adhere to the strategic plan (mean = 3.32, SD = 1.20), inadequate support for the strategic plan (mean = 3.25, SD = 1.19), and general resistance to change. However, these findings also point to a potential solution—the need for integrated interventions. This approach, which addresses financial, organisational, and communication-related limitations, offers a promising and inspiring vision for the future of higher education strategic planning.

**Table 5: Summary Statistics Challenges**

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Inadequate financial resources	150	1	5	3.95	1.163	1.353
Inadequate support for the Strategic Plan	150	1	5	3.25	1.188	1.412
Ineffective communication of the Strategic Planning process	150	1	5	3.68	1.051	1.105
Failure to adhere to the Strategic Plan	150	1	5	3.32	1.195	1.427
Failure to carry out continuous evaluation in the Strategic Planning	150	1	5	3.41	1.159	1.344

## DISCUSSION

### Interpretation of Main Findings

The results of this study provide substantial empirical support for the strong positive relationship between the implementation of strategic planning and organisational performance in higher education contexts (Hussein et al., 2021). The correlation coefficient of 0.860, which exceeds the typical effect sizes reported in organisational research, suggests that strategic planning may be particularly valuable for institutions operating in challenging environments, such as those characterising developing country higher education systems.

The finding that strategic planning practices account for 73.9% of the variance in organisational performance is notable for its statistical significance and practical importance (Mousa et al., 2024). This high explanatory power not only suggests that the implementation of strategic planning is a significant factor influencing institutional effectiveness but also keeps the audience engaged and interested. The strength of this

relationship suggests that investing in improving strategic planning processes may yield substantial returns in terms of enhanced institutional performance.

The regression coefficient of 0.729 provides insight into the practical magnitude of the effects of strategic planning. This coefficient suggests that comprehensive improvements in strategic planning implementation could result in substantial performance gains, offering university administrators a clear and convincing rationale for investing resources in enhancing the planning process (Donkor et al., 2018). However, the coefficient also indicates that strategic planning improvements must be substantial to generate meaningful changes in performance.

### Comparison with Previous Studies

These findings align closely with recent research conducted by Oumakhlouf and Kherbachi (2023), who documented the moderate to strong positive effects of strategic planning on organisational performance across diverse sectoral contexts. The explanatory power identified in this study ( $R^2 = 0.739$ ) is consistent with the upper ranges reported in their synthesis, suggesting that strategic planning may be particularly effective in higher education settings, inspiring a new wave of strategic thinking and action.

The positive correlations identified between specific planning dimensions and performance outcomes are consistent with recent research in higher-education contexts (Kalebar et al., 2024). Studies conducted in similar university settings have reported similar associations between formal planning processes and institutional effectiveness. However, the strength of the relationships identified in this study exceeds those typically reported in developed country contexts, potentially reflecting the greater marginal value of strategic planning in resource-limited environments, and thus, its potential impact on such settings.

The predominance of top-down planning approaches observed in the UDS reflects patterns documented in other developing country institutional contexts (Dinye & Boon, 2023). Research in Sub-Saharan African universities has noted similar tendencies towards centralised planning processes, often attributed to hierarchical governance structures and limited experience with participatory management. However, the moderate ratings for stakeholder participation suggest an awareness of the importance of broader engagement, even if implementation remains limited.

### Implementation Challenges and Organisational Context

The identification of inadequate financial resources as the primary implementation challenge aligns with the broader literature on higher-education management in developing countries (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023). Financial constraints appear to represent a fundamental barrier to strategic plan implementation, limiting institutions' ability to invest in new initiatives. This limitation hampers the potential for growth and development, infrastructure improvements, or capacity-building activities necessary to achieve strategic objectives. The prominence of communication challenges reflects the common implementation barriers identified in the strategic planning literature. Effective communication systems are essential for ensuring that strategic objectives are understood throughout the organisation and that coordination occurs among different units and levels

of the organisation. The identification of this challenge at UDS not only points out a current issue but also suggests promising opportunities for improving planning effectiveness through enhanced communication strategies and systems in the future.

The weak ratings for continuous evaluation processes highlight a critical gap in the implementation of strategic planning (Mtau & Rahul, 2024). The absence of systematic monitoring and assessment mechanisms is a pressing issue, as it prevents organisations from determining whether their strategic plans are achieving the intended outcomes or identifying the necessary adjustments. This finding suggests that UDS, like many other higher education institutions, has focused more on plan development than on implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

### **Implications for Theory and Practice**

From a theoretical perspective, these findings contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the resource-based and dynamic capabilities theories of organisational effectiveness. The strong relationship between strategic planning and performance suggests that planning capabilities represent valuable organizational resources that can contribute to competitive advantages, particularly in challenging operational environments.

The results offer several important insights for practitioners. First, the strong association between strategic planning and performance provides a compelling justification for investing in planning process improvement. University administrators can use these findings to advocate for resources and attention directed towards strategic planning.

Second, identifying specific implementation challenges provides direction for planning process improvements. Addressing financial resource constraints may require innovative funding approaches, including partnerships with external organisations, revenue diversification strategies, or improved efficiency in resource utilisation. Improvements in communication systems may involve technological investments, training programs, or structural changes to facilitate information flow.

Third, the predominance of top-down planning approaches suggests opportunities to enhance planning effectiveness through increased stakeholder participation. Research consistently indicates that participatory planning processes generate greater commitment to implementation and more realistic objective-setting. UDS and similar institutions might benefit from exploring approaches to broaden stakeholder engagement while maintaining the necessary coordination and leadership.

### **Limitations and Methodological Considerations**

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, reliance on self-reported data introduces potential bias, as respondents may overstate their institution's strategic planning effectiveness or performance outcomes (Holtom et al., 2022). Future research may benefit from incorporating objective performance measures or multiple respondent perspectives to triangulate findings.

Second, the cross-sectional research design limits the ability to make causal inferences about the relationship between strategic planning and performance. While the

correlation is strong and statistically significant, the possibility remains that high-performing institutions are more likely to implement effective strategic planning processes rather than strategic planning causing improved performance. Longitudinal research designs can strengthen causal inference capabilities.

Third, focusing on a single institution limits the generalisability of the findings to other higher-education contexts. While UDS shares characteristics with many other developing country universities, institution-specific factors may influence the relationship between strategic planning and performance. Multi-institutional studies provide more substantial evidence for the broader applicability of these findings.

Fourth, the measurement of organisational performance relied on perceptual assessments rather than objective indicators, such as graduation rates, research publication counts, or financial performance measures. Future research incorporating objective performance data would strengthen the validity of the findings regarding the effectiveness of strategic planning.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study presents compelling empirical evidence that underscores the crucial link between strategic planning implementation and organisational performance in higher education contexts. The investigation at the UDS revealed that strategic planning practices are strongly associated with institutional effectiveness measures, with planning processes accounting for nearly three-quarters of the variance in performance outcomes. These findings are significant and enlightening for our understanding of strategic planning in higher education. The findings of this study, which add to the limited body of research examining the effectiveness of strategic planning, particularly within the context of higher education in developing countries, have the potential to inspire and motivate. The strength of the relationships identified suggests that strategic planning may be particularly valuable for institutions operating in resource-constrained environments, where systematic approaches to goal-setting, resource allocation, and performance monitoring provide substantial benefits relative to less formal management approaches.

## **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

This study has several practical implications emerge from this research for university administrators and policymakers. First, the strong association between strategic planning and performance provides a compelling justification for investing institutional resources in the development and improvement of the planning process. Universities should prioritise the establishment of comprehensive strategic planning systems to enhance overall institutional effectiveness.

Second, identifying specific implementation challenges offers direction for planning process improvements. Addressing financial resource constraints requires creative approaches to funding and resource mobilisation, including partnerships with external organisations, revenue diversification strategies, and improved resource utilisation efficiency. Communication system enhancements may involve technological investments, staff training programs, or structural modifications to facilitate information sharing.

Third, the predominance of top-down planning approaches suggests opportunities to enhance planning effectiveness through increased stakeholder participation. Universities should explore mechanisms to broaden engagement in planning processes while maintaining the necessary coordination and leadership oversight. This might involve establishing planning committees with diverse representation, conducting stakeholder consultation sessions, or implementing feedback mechanisms to incorporate multiple perspectives into the decision-making process.

Fourth, the weak performance in continuous evaluation highlights the need for systematic monitoring and assessment. Universities should develop comprehensive evaluation systems that track progress towards strategic objectives, identify implementation challenges, and facilitate the necessary adjustments to planning approaches. This requires investment in data collection systems, analytical capabilities and reporting mechanisms.

### **THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the strategic management literature by providing empirical evidence regarding planning effectiveness in higher education contexts. The strength of the identified relationships supports resource-based theories, suggesting that planning capabilities represent valuable organisational resources that can contribute to competitive advantage. The findings also contribute to the understanding of the effectiveness of strategic planning in developing country institutional contexts. The strong associations observed suggest that strategic planning may provide greater relative value in resource-constrained environments, where systematic approaches to management offer substantial advantages over informal or ad hoc decision-making processes.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Several avenues for future research emerge from this study. First, longitudinal studies examining changes in strategic planning implementation and performance outcomes over time would strengthen causal inference capabilities and provide insights into the sustainability of the planning effects.

Multi-institutional comparative studies, another crucial area for future research, can significantly enhance our understanding of the contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of strategic planning. By examining planning processes and outcomes across different types of higher-education institutions, countries, or regional contexts, these studies can contribute to a broader theoretical understanding of strategic planning.

Qualitative research, a valuable avenue for future exploration, can provide in-depth insights into the implementation processes of strategic planning. By exploring the mechanisms through which strategic planning influences organisational performance, these studies can offer valuable insights that can be used to improve planning practices.

Fourth, research incorporating objective performance measures would not only strengthen the validity of the findings regarding the impact of strategic planning but also provide reassurance. Studies utilising financial performance data, graduation rates,

research productivity measures, or other objective indicators would provide more robust evidence of the effectiveness of planning, giving the audience confidence in the research outcomes.

Fifth, investigating optimal planning approaches for different institutional contexts would not only advance theoretical understanding but also provide practical guidance for administrators. Research examining the relative effectiveness of various planning models, stakeholder engagement strategies, and evaluation mechanisms would inform planning process design decisions, empowering administrators with the knowledge to make informed choices.

### **FINAL OBSERVATIONS**

The evidence presented in this study underscores the potential of strategic planning as a potent tool for enhancing organisational performance in higher-education contexts, even in the face of challenging operational environment. However, it's important to acknowledge that realising these benefits is not without its hurdles, such as resource constraints, communication barriers, and limited evaluation capabilities.

Universities aiming to bolster the effectiveness of their strategic planning should place a strong emphasis on developing comprehensive planning systems that actively involve stakeholders, employ systematic evaluation, and ensure adequate resource allocation for implementation activities. The significant performance benefits linked with effective strategic planning validate the investment needed to cultivate these organisational capabilities.

For the broader higher education community, these findings underscore the need for strategic planning to receive more attention as a mechanism for enhancing institutional effectiveness and tackling the intricate challenges that universities in developing countries confront. The evidence strongly advocates for ongoing research and practice development in this area to amplify the role of higher education in achieving social and economic development objectives.

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