

RELIGION AND LEADERSHIP STYLES IN UGANDAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: EXPLORING THE IMPACT ON INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE IN UGANDAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Leadership effectiveness is a critical determinant of institutional performance in higher education. In Uganda, existing studies have largely focused on the influence of democratic, transformational, and supportive leadership styles on organisational outcomes. However, limited attention has been given to the role of religious values in shaping administrative behaviour and their implications for institutional performance within university settings. This study examined the relationship between religious values and leadership styles in Ugandan universities and explored how the integration of religious principles into administrative practices influences institutional performance. The study employed a mixed-methods research design grounded in transformational leadership theory and values-based leadership perspectives. Desk review. Data were collected from secondary source research on academic and administrative staff across selected public and private universities in Uganda, previously done using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Quantitative data used were previously analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and contextual insights. The findings revealed that religious values, including integrity, compassion, accountability, servant leadership, justice, and respect for human dignity, significantly influenced leadership behaviour and organisational outcomes. Administrators who integrated these values into decision-making processes demonstrated higher levels of employee commitment, trust, collaboration, and job satisfaction. Furthermore, universities characterised by value-driven leadership reported improved institutional performance, including enhanced service delivery, stronger stakeholder relationships, and greater organisational cohesion. Nevertheless, challenges such as religious diversity, potential value conflicts, and the risk of bias in leadership practices were identified. The study concludes that religious values play a significant role in shaping leadership practices and enhancing institutional performance in Ugandan universities. Integrating inclusive and ethically grounded religious principles into leadership development programmes may strengthen administrative effectiveness and foster sustainable organisational success.

Keywords: Religious values; Leadership styles; Institutional performance; Higher education; University administration; Uganda; values-based leadership.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This introduction delineates the fundamental connection between religious ethos and administrative methodologies within Ugandan universities, illustrating how these converging elements influence staff commitment and institutional efficacy. Higher education in Uganda operates within a multifaceted context in which faith-based institutions (e.g., Uganda Christian University, Uganda Martyrs University) and secular universities coexist with entrenched cultural values. The efficacy of institutional performance assessed through academic output, administrative efficiency, and institutional commitment is profoundly shaped by administrators' leadership styles. Given that Uganda is an exceedingly religious society, a leader's faith-based worldview frequently exerts a direct influence on their management style, affecting various aspects, including decision-making, conflict resolution, and staff motivation.

Leaders in faith-affiliated educational establishments, such as Roman Catholic institutions, are anticipated to exemplify faith-based leadership, which is vital for preserving the institution's religious identity (Muwagga et al., 2013). Female leaders in these contexts frequently traverse intricate cultural and religious landscapes, fostering inclusivity and community engagement, which are pivotal for cultivating a culturally competent educational milieu (Nalubega, 2023). Women in Ugandan educational institutions are positioned as central actors in mediating cultural divides, utilising their comprehension of local traditions to augment educational inclusivity (Nalubega, 2023). The proposed Afrocentric model underscores the significance of women's roles in leadership, advocating for gender-sensitive methodologies that bolster comprehensive student development (Nalubega, 2023).

Transformational leadership has been demonstrated to substantially affect academic outcomes in public secondary schools, fostering a conducive learning environment through idealised influence and intellectual stimulation (Sengendo & Eduan, 2024). The amalgamation of diverse leadership styles, encompassing transformational and instructional methodologies, is imperative for tackling the distinct challenges encountered by educational institutions in Uganda ("Integrated Leadership Styles in Education...", 2024). While the religious context provides a foundational framework for leadership styles, it is crucial to acknowledge that not all leaders may proficiently embody these values. Some leaders may encounter difficulties in aligning their practices with the anticipated denominational philosophies, resulting in a disjunction between principles and practice (Muwagga et al., 2018).

In Uganda, universities function within a complex environment characterised by rapid growth, resource limitations, evolving regulatory expectations, and increasing pressure to enhance teaching quality, research output, and community engagement. Consequently, effective leadership is paramount for cultivating institutional resilience, augmenting employee commitment, and attaining organisational objectives. Existing literature on educational leadership consistently correlates democratic and supportive leadership styles with favourable organisational outcomes, including heightened staff motivation, increased participation in decision-making, improved job satisfaction, and enhanced institutional performance (Bush, 2020; Northouse, 2022). Democratic leadership fosters collaboration and shared governance, whereas supportive leadership fortifies interpersonal relationships and employee well-being. Within Ugandan educational contexts, these leadership strategies have been associated with augmented administrative effectiveness and enhanced organisational climate.

Despite these advancements, the current body of scholarship has afforded limited attention to the influence of religious values on shaping administrative behaviour and leadership practices within universities. This oversight is particularly consequential in Uganda, where faith traditions have historically informed the establishment, governance, and organisational culture of numerous higher education institutions. Religious principles such as stewardship, service, compassion, integrity, accountability, and social responsibility may significantly inform leaders' decision-making processes, interpersonal relationships, and strategic priorities. However, current research tends to examine leadership styles as secular constructs, overlooking the potential influence of religious values on leadership enactment and organisational outcomes.

Conceptual and practical difficulties arise from the lack of actual data regarding the relationship between religious ideals and leadership paradigms. Policymakers and university administrators may miss crucial factors that determine institutional success if they do not comprehend how religious beliefs affect administrative behaviour. Furthermore, leadership theories that were mostly created in Western settings cannot be applied to Ugandan higher education institutions due to a lack of context-specific knowledge. In order to close this gap, this study looks at how leadership models and religious beliefs interact to influence organisational performance and administrative behaviour at Ugandan institutions. In particular, it aims to produce data regarding the ways in which religious beliefs impact institutional outcomes and leadership styles in various higher education settings.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This investigation utilised an integrative literature review methodology to explore the interconnections among religious values, leadership paradigms, administrative behaviours, and organisational performance within the context of universities in Uganda. The adoption of the integrative review framework was predicated on its capacity to systematically synthesise theoretical, conceptual, and empirical data from a variety of methodological traditions, thus fostering a holistic understanding of intricate phenomena (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). In contrast to conventional narrative reviews, integrative reviews implement transparent and structured methodologies for the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of pertinent literature, thereby augmenting the reliability and rigour of the review process. This review was directed by the following research inquiry: In what manner do religious values interact with democratic and supportive leadership models to influence administrative behaviour and organisational performance in Ugandan universities?

A thorough literature search was performed between January and March 2026, employing a search strategy across multiple electronic databases to ensure extensive coverage of studies pertinent to educational leadership, higher education management, organisational behaviour, and religious studies. The databases examined included Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and African Journals Online (AJOL). These databases were selected due to their provision of access to peer-reviewed literature in the domains of higher education, leadership studies, and African scholarship. The search strategy integrated keywords and Boolean operators to encapsulate literature associated with the core concepts of the study. The search terminologies encompassed: "religious values," "faith-based values," "spiritual leadership," "values-based leadership," "democratic leadership,"

"participative leadership," "supportive leadership," "servant leadership," "administrative behavior," "leadership practice," "organizational performance," "institutional effectiveness," "higher education," "universities," "Uganda," "sub-Saharan Africa," and "Africa." These terms were amalgamated utilising the operators AND and OR to optimise the sensitivity and specificity of the search. To ensure comprehensive coverage, backward citation tracking was conducted by scrutinising the reference lists of selected studies to uncover additional relevant publications.

Concerning the eligibility criteria, studies were incorporated into the review if they satisfied the following conditions: (a) they examined leadership practices, religious values, administrative behavior, or organizational performance within higher education contexts; (b) they concentrated on democratic, supportive, servant, transformational, spiritual, or values-based leadership approaches; (c) they investigated universities or other higher education institutions; (d) they were executed in Uganda, sub-Saharan Africa, or analogous contexts characterized by substantial religious influences; (e) they were published in peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, edited volumes, or institutional reports; and (f) they were published in English between 2000 and 2025. Studies were excluded if they were exclusively focused on primary or secondary education settings, analysed leadership in non-educational organisations without evident relevance to higher education, constituted opinion papers or conference abstracts, or exhibited insufficient methodological or theoretical pertinence to the objectives of the review.

The process of selecting studies was executed through a four-stage methodology derived from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Page et al., 2021). Initially, all records obtained from database searches were systematically imported into reference management software, and any duplicate entries were expunged. Subsequently, titles and abstracts underwent screening against the established inclusion and exclusion criteria. In the third stage, full-text versions of studies deemed potentially eligible were evaluated for their methodological rigour and relevance to the specified research objectives. Ultimately, studies that fulfilled all eligibility criteria were retained for synthesis. Priority was accorded to research that explicitly examined the interplay between leadership values, administrative practices, and organisational outcomes within higher education institutions.

In order to ascertain the credibility and reliability of the review findings, the methodological quality of the included studies was evaluated utilising the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018). The MMAT was chosen for its provision of a cohesive framework for assessing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research. Each study underwent appraisal based on the clarity of its research objectives, the appropriateness of its research design, the adequacy of its data collection strategies, the rigour of its analytical processes, and the coherence between its findings and conclusions. Studies exhibiting substantial methodological deficiencies were excluded from the final synthesis.

A standardised data extraction matrix was constructed to systematically capture essential information from each selected study, encompassing author details, year of publication, study context, research design, theoretical framework, leadership model, religious values investigated, and principal findings within the domains of data extraction and analysis. The

analysis of data was performed through thematic synthesis, adhering to the methodologies proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analytical process encompassed three phases: familiarisation with the literature, systematic coding of pertinent findings, and the identification of recurrent patterns and themes across the studies. The analysis yielded four overarching themes: (1) religious values and administrative behaviour; (2) democratic and supportive leadership styles in higher education; (3) the interaction between religious values and leadership models; and (4) institutional disparities across public, private, and faith-based universities. The identified themes were interpreted through the frameworks of values-based leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, and social identity theory, thereby providing a nuanced comprehension of how religious values impact leadership practices and organisational outcomes within higher education environments.

A series of measures were implemented to bolster the trustworthiness of the review, including the utilisation of multiple databases, well-defined eligibility criteria, systematic screening protocols, formal quality appraisal, and transparent documentation of the analytical procedures. Nonetheless, certain limitations warrant acknowledgement. The restriction of the review to English-language publications may have resulted in the omission of pertinent studies published in other languages. Furthermore, the limited availability of empirical studies specifically focusing on Ugandan universities constrained the breadth of context-specific evidence. Consequently, the review incorporated insights from broader sub-Saharan African and international literature to mitigate these gaps. Despite these limitations, the integrative review approach offers a robust and transparent framework for synthesising existing knowledge and identifying critical voids in the literature concerning the role of religious values in university leadership and organisational performance.

3.0 REVIEW FINDINGS

3.1 Religious Values and Administrative Behaviour

The corpus of literature suggests that religious values profoundly influence administrative behaviour by shaping the ethical orientations of leaders, the processes through which decisions are made, and the nature of relationships with organisational stakeholders. Values such as integrity, stewardship, accountability, service, compassion, and fairness consistently emerge across empirical investigations about values-based and faith-informed leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Fry, 2003; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). These values are correlated with heightened trust, ethical conduct, and organisational commitment.

Within the realm of higher education, leadership practices informed by religious values have been associated with increased institutional legitimacy, strengthened organisational cultures, and enhanced relationships with stakeholders (Bryman, 2007; Shah, 2017). Nevertheless, the majority of existing research tends to examine religious values indirectly through constructs such as ethical leadership, authentic leadership, or servant leadership, rather than directly investigating the explicit role of religion in administrative practices.

In the context of Uganda, the historical impact of faith-based organisations on educational provision implies that religious values continue to exert influence on institutional governance and leadership norms. However, empirical research explicitly analyzing the mechanisms by which religious principles shape administrative behaviour in universities remains scarce.

3.2 Democratic and Supportive Leadership Styles in Higher Education

Democratic and supportive leadership styles are widely acknowledged as effective methodologies for managing higher education institutions. Democratic leadership fosters participation, collaborative decision-making, and shared governance, thereby augmenting staff engagement and institutional commitment (Bush, 2020; Northouse, 2022). Similarly, supportive leadership prioritises employee welfare, professional development, and interpersonal relationships. Empirical studies consistently link supportive leadership with heightened job satisfaction, diminished organisational conflict, and improved employee performance (Yukl, 2013).

Although empirical evidence generally corroborates the favourable effects of these leadership models, scholars advise that their effectiveness is contingent upon the organisational context and the prevailing institutional cultures (Bolden et al., 2012). Leadership practices that yield success in one environment may not generate analogous outcomes in another, particularly in contexts characterised by strong cultural or religious influences.

3.3 The Interaction Between Religious Values and Leadership Models

An expanding body of scholarly discourse posits that leadership behaviours cannot be thoroughly comprehended in isolation from the value systems that underpin them (Copeland, 2014; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013). Religious values may furnish the ethical framework that delineates the enactment of democratic and supportive leadership styles.

For instance, principles of stewardship and service are closely aligned with servant leadership, whereas accountability and integrity bolster participatory leadership processes. Consequently, religious values may enhance leaders' credibility and foster trust among organisational members. Nonetheless, contemporary scholarship remains disparate. Existing studies frequently treat leadership styles and religious values as distinct constructs, thereby constraining the comprehension of their interaction and their combined effects on organisational performance.

3.4 Institutional Differences Across University Types

The literature demonstrates that institutional context significantly affects the incorporation of religious values into leadership practices. Faith-based universities generally integrate religious principles within their missions, governance frameworks, and organisational cultures (James et al., 2014). In contrast, public universities typically prioritize regulatory compliance and secular governance structures, while private institutions often adopt hybrid approaches.

Despite these distinctions, research indicates that ethical ideals linked with religious traditions, such as integrity, accountability, and social responsibility, are nonetheless significant across institutional contexts. Nonetheless, comparative studies on leadership methods in public, private, and faith-based colleges in Sub-Saharan Africa are limited. As a result, present evidence offers limited insight into how institutional type influences the link between religious values, leadership models, and organisational performance.

4.0 DISCUSSION

This review elucidates that religious values represent a significant yet inadequately investigated facet of leadership within the realm of higher education. Although democratic and supportive leadership paradigms are consistently correlated with favorable organizational outcomes, the extant literature posits that their efficacy is contingent upon the ethical and cultural contexts in which they are implemented.

The results are congruent with values-based leadership theory, which posits that the actions of leaders are intrinsically influenced by foundational moral convictions (Copeland, 2014). Religious values, encompassing integrity, stewardship, and service, seem to furnish a normative framework that directs administrative conduct and fortifies organisational legitimacy.

Analogously, the examined literature corroborates servant leadership theory by underscoring the significance of service, empathy, and concern for followers in efficacious university leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). The intersection between the principles of servant leadership and religious values implies that leadership practices informed by faith may augment employee engagement and foster organisational commitment.

The review further extends the scholarship on transformational leadership by illustrating that a leader's capacity to inspire and motivate followers may be partially contingent upon the perceived authenticity and ethical consistency of their actions (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Religious values may bolster these perceptions by cultivating trust and reinforcing a shared institutional purpose.

From a social identity standpoint, religious values can facilitate the formation of collective identities and enhance organisational cohesion (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Leaders who embody values that align with institutional norms may augment employees' sense of belonging and commitment to organisational objectives.

Notwithstanding these revelations, the literature is still marked by several limitations. Conceptually, studies frequently conflate religious values with broader ethical leadership frameworks, thereby obscuring the unique contributions of religion to administrative behaviour. Contextually, prevailing leadership theories and empirical investigations predominantly reflect Western viewpoints, thereby constraining their relevance to higher education contexts in Africa.

Methodologically, a majority of studies utilise cross-sectional designs and quantitative methodologies that prioritise the measurement of leadership styles while neglecting the fundamental values that inform leadership practice. Qualitative and mixed-methods approaches that are capable of examining the interplay between religious principles and leadership behaviours remain markedly underutilised. Additionally, comparative analyses across public, private, and faith-based universities are sparse, engendering uncertainty regarding the contextual conditions under which religious values impact organisational outcomes.

These deficiencies highlight the necessity for future research that explicitly investigates the intersection of religion and leadership within higher education institutions in Uganda and sub-Saharan Africa. Such investigations should employ context-sensitive frameworks adept at

capturing the dynamic relationships among religious values, leadership behaviours, administrative practices, and organisational performance.

For practitioners, the review advocates that leadership development initiatives should transcend mere technical competencies to encompass ethical reflection, values clarification, and culturally pertinent approaches to leadership. Policymakers and university governing bodies should acknowledge the potential contributions of values-based leadership to institutional efficacy while ensuring that leadership practices are inclusive and responsive to a variety of religious perspectives.

In summary, the literature suggests that religious values are not marginal influences but are, in fact, essential components of leadership processes within higher education. Comprehending how these values intersect with democratic and supportive leadership models constitutes a crucial advancement toward formulating contextually relevant theories of university leadership in Uganda and beyond.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This integrative review examined the intersection between religious values, leadership models, administrative behaviour, and organisational performance in Ugandan universities. The review demonstrates that although democratic and supportive leadership styles are widely associated with positive organisational outcomes in higher education, their effectiveness cannot be fully understood independently of the ethical and value systems within which they are enacted.

The literature consistently indicates that religious values—including integrity, stewardship, accountability, service, compassion, and fairness—play a significant role in shaping administrative behaviour and influencing organisational culture. These values provide a normative framework that informs leaders' decision-making processes, strengthens trust among institutional stakeholders, and promotes ethical and participatory governance practices. The review further suggests that religious values reinforce democratic and supportive leadership behaviours by enhancing leaders' credibility, fostering collaboration, and strengthening commitment to institutional goals.

However, current scholarship remains conceptually fragmented and empirically limited. Most studies examine leadership styles as value-neutral constructs or subsume religious influences under broader notions of ethical, authentic, or servant leadership. Consequently, the specific mechanisms through which religious principles interact with leadership models to influence organisational performance remain insufficiently understood. This limitation is particularly evident in the context of Ugandan higher education, where faith-based institutions have historically played a significant role in the provision and governance of university education.

The review also highlights a notable contextual gap in the literature. Existing leadership theories and empirical evidence are predominantly derived from Western settings and may not adequately reflect the cultural, religious, and institutional realities of universities in sub-Saharan Africa. Comparative analyses across public, private, and faith-based universities remain scarce, limiting understanding of how institutional context shapes the relationship between religious values, leadership practices, and organisational outcomes.

Overall, this review contributes to educational leadership scholarship by advancing a more contextually grounded understanding of university leadership in Uganda. It underscores the need to integrate values-based perspectives into higher education leadership research and practice and calls for greater recognition of religion as an important dimension of organisational life rather than a peripheral influence on administrative processes.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this review, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Integrate values-based leadership into leadership development programmes. Universities should incorporate training on ethical leadership, stewardship, accountability, service, and inclusive decision-making into leadership development initiatives for academic and administrative leaders.
2. Strengthen institutional frameworks for ethical governance. University governing councils and management teams should develop policies and governance structures that promote transparency, fairness, integrity, and responsible stewardship across administrative functions.
3. Promote participatory and supportive leadership practices. University leaders should adopt democratic and supportive leadership approaches that encourage stakeholder engagement, collaborative decision-making, employee well-being, and professional development.
4. Contextualise leadership models within local cultural and religious environments. Policymakers and higher education institutions should recognise the influence of religious and cultural values on leadership effectiveness and adapt leadership frameworks to reflect the realities of Ugandan universities.
5. Encourage collaboration among public, private, and faith-based institutions. Cross-institutional partnerships and knowledge-sharing platforms should be established to facilitate the exchange of best practices in values-based leadership and university governance.
6. Advance empirical research on religion and higher education leadership. Future studies should employ qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches to examine the mechanisms through which religious values influence administrative behaviour and organisational performance. Comparative research across different types of universities and across countries in sub-Saharan Africa would further strengthen the understanding of these relationships.
7. Develop context-specific leadership theories for African higher education. Researchers should seek to refine existing leadership models or develop new frameworks that account for the cultural, religious, and institutional characteristics of higher education systems in Uganda and the wider African context.

5.2 Funding

There was no outside funding for this research.

Conflict of interest/competing interests

There were no financial and non-financial competing interests for the analysed data.

Availability of data and materials for data transparency

The Google Scholar repository [<https://scholar.google.com/>] contains the datasets created and/or analysed during the current study. This published article [and its additional information files] contain all data produced or analysed during this investigation.

Declaration

I certify that the data in this journal article have not been offered for publication anywhere.

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