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Original Article

Shaping University Organisational Culture in Uganda: A Systematic Review of Visible and Invisible Leadership Actions and Values in Public Universities

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ABSTRACT

Public universities in Uganda face significant pressure to improve organisational effectiveness, foster staff commitment, and meet rising societal expectations. Leadership actions and values, both visible and invisible, play a key role in shaping university organisational culture, yet existing evidence remains scattered and fragmented. **Methods:** This study employed a systematic literature review to synthesise knowledge on how leadership actions and values influence organisational culture in Ugandan public universities and similar higher education contexts. Electronic databases and institutional repositories were searched using predefined keywords related to leadership styles, organisational culture, institutional culture, values, and Ugandan public universities. Inclusion criteria targeted empirical and conceptual studies examining leadership practices, cultural dimensions, and organisational outcomes. Data were extracted into a matrix and analysed thematically. **Results:** The review indicates that visible leadership actions, such as communication patterns, decision-making processes, structural arrangements, and performance management, significantly affect organisational climate, communication, and perceived effectiveness. Espoused beliefs and values, alongside fundamental assumptions, are positively associated with organisational effectiveness and staff engagement. Adaptive, participatory, servant, transformational, and socially responsible leadership styles are linked to more inclusive, collaborative, and committed cultures, whereas bureaucratic, top-down, and passive-avoidant approaches hinder engagement and innovation. Misalignment between official values and everyday leadership behaviour can erode trust and weaken culture-building efforts. **Conclusion:** Leadership actions and values fundamentally shape the culture of Ugandan public universities. When visible practices align with shared values and deeper cultural assumptions, they promote commitment, effectiveness, and innovation; misalignment, however, can lead to dysfunction and low morale. **Recommendations:** University leaders should intentionally align structures, communication channels, human resource systems, and governance processes with clearly defined institutional values. Leadership development should focus on adaptive, participatory, servant, and socially responsible approaches. Governance frameworks must foster collaboration,

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transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. **Areas for further research:** Future studies should adopt longitudinal and mixed-method designs to explore how visible and invisible leadership actions embed or transform culture over time, compare institutions with varying leadership profiles, and investigate the links among culture, academic quality, and student outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

Organisational culture is widely recognised as a key factor influencing effectiveness, staff commitment, innovation, and service quality in higher education. In Ugandan public universities, ongoing challenges, including low organisational effectiveness, limited staff morale, leadership instability, and bureaucratic rigidity, have raised concerns about the cultural foundations of these institutions (Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Mwesigwa *et al.,* 2020; Kasule, 2025). Schein's theory of organisational culture emphasises three interconnected levels: visible artefacts, espoused beliefs and values, and core underlying assumptions, which collectively shape how institutions operate and adapt (Turyahikayo, 2025; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024).

Leadership is a key mechanism through which culture is created, preserved, or altered. Research in African and other developing-country universities demonstrates that leadership styles and values greatly influence organisational communication, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and effectiveness (Mwesigwa *et al.,* 2020; Akanji *et al.,* 2019; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Amtu *et al.,* 2021). In Uganda, studies show that institutional culture dimensions such as espoused beliefs, values, and basic assumptions significantly predict organisational effectiveness in public universities (Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024). Meanwhile, evidence from research on adaptive, participatory, servant, and socially responsible leadership indicates that more inclusive and values-driven leadership practices are either underdeveloped or inconsistently implemented (Kasule, 2025; Mikando *et al.,* 2025; Kyambade *et al.,* 2024).

Despite this emerging body of work, there is a limited, comprehensive analysis of how visible and invisible leadership actions and values interact to shape the organisational culture of Ugandan public universities. Existing studies tend to focus on specific leadership styles, distinct cultural dimensions, or selected outcomes such as commitment or communication (Mwesigwa *et al.,*

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2020; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024). This fragmentation obscures the broader patterns through which leadership practices embed cultural norms, align or misalign espoused values and behaviours, and influence institutional effectiveness.

This systematic review addresses this gap by synthesising empirical and conceptual literature on leadership and organisational culture in Ugandan public universities and related contexts. The focus is on visible leadership actions (such as communication, decision-making, structural design, and performance management) and invisible elements (values, assumptions, and norms) that collectively shape organisational culture. The review aims to clarify how different leadership approaches influence culture, identify enabling and constraining factors, and propose implications for leadership practice and policy in Ugandan higher education.

The objectives of the study are to: (a) map the existing evidence on leadership and organisational culture in Ugandan public universities; (b) analyse how visible and invisible leadership actions and values influence cultural configurations; and (c) develop recommendations for enhancing culture-shaping leadership practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organisational Culture in Universities

Organisational culture in universities includes shared meanings, norms, values, and underlying assumptions that influence behaviour and decision-making. Schein's framework, confirmed in the Ugandan public university context, identifies artefacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions as key cultural aspects (Turyahikayo, 2025). Empirical research in Ugandan universities demonstrates that espoused beliefs and values, along with underlying assumptions, significantly and positively affect organisational effectiveness, including teamwork, openness to learning, adherence to rules, mutual responsibility, shared goals, and participation in decision-making (Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024).

Similar findings arise from broader higher education contexts. Organisational culture influences how leadership and organisational commitment affect the implementation of quality assurance systems and the overall quality of higher education in Indonesia (Amtu *et al.,* 2021). Case studies from South African universities show that misalignment between formal values and everyday practices, lack of value integration into human resource systems, and low awareness of institutional values weaken culture and impede efforts to develop inclusive and positive organisational climates (Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025). In Nigerian universities, hierarchical, patriarchal, and servile cultural norms shape leadership styles and interactions, reinforcing positional and paternalistic approaches as well as gendered responses to leadership (Akanji et al., 2019). These findings underscore the importance of understanding both visible and invisible aspects of culture within university environments.

In Uganda, institutional culture has been identified as a key factor influencing organisational effectiveness in public universities. Espoused beliefs and values such as openness, teamwork, and adherence to rules, along with basic assumptions of mutual responsibility and participation in decision-making, positively predict organisational effectiveness (Turyahikayo *et al*., 2024). This indicates that visible practices embodying these values, like inclusive governance and participatory processes, are likely to enhance institutional performance.

Leadership Styles, Values, and Organisational Outcomes

Leadership styles in universities have been widely connected to staff attitudes and organisational outcomes. In Ugandan public universities, leadership styles strongly influence organisational commitment among academic staff, with job satisfaction serving as a partial mediator

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(Mwesigwa *et al.,* 2020). A combination of leadership styles that promotes satisfaction seems necessary to enhance commitment. Servant leadership in Ugandan public universities is positively associated with staff commitment, suggesting that leader behaviours focused on serving staff needs and supporting their development can boost loyalty and attachment to the institution (Kyambade *et al.,* 2024).

Transformational and transactional leadership also play important roles. Evidence from public universities in Uganda shows that both transformational and transactional leadership styles positively and significantly influence organisational communication, while passive-avoidant leadership has an insignificant impact (Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024). Effective communication is a crucial visible artefact of culture; therefore, leadership styles that foster clear, frequent, and participatory communication can contribute to a more open and cohesive culture.

Beyond Uganda, studies at higher education institutions in Indonesia show that leadership, organisational commitment, and organisational culture collectively contribute to the implementation of internal quality assurance systems and to enhancing the quality of higher education (Amtu *et al.,* 2021). Leadership that fosters collective commitment and a culture of continuous improvement is linked to better institutional performance. In South African universities, high leadership turnover, male-dominated leadership, misalignment between leadership structures, and weak information sharing are recognised as cultural and leadership issues that undermine a positive organisational culture (Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025).

The literature on socially responsible leadership in Ugandan public universities shows that leaders are willing to act in accordance with social norms but often fail to consistently demonstrate qualities such as moral excellence, stakeholder collaboration, personal abilities, and moral direction (Kyambade *et al*., 2024). This partial implementation highlights a gap between declared values and actual leadership behaviour, leading to cultural confusion and eroding trust.

Inclusive and adaptive leadership research further highlights the significance of leadership that values individuality and belonging, manages diversity, and encourages collaboration. A global systematic review of leadership mechanisms shaping academic culture in diverse universities identifies a four-dimensional framework—pre-organisational, operational, output, and feedback—focusing on leaders' backgrounds, practices, outcomes, and feedback loops in culture development (Peyravinejad *et al.,* 2025). These mechanisms include understanding existing norms and values, aligning messages with aspirational values, and employing symbols and rituals to influence culture.

A systematic review of adaptive leadership in Ugandan public universities shows that it is largely missing, as demonstrated by ongoing institutional problems and operational inefficiencies (Kasule, 2025). Adaptive leadership is seen as crucial for managing complexity and uncertainty, improving effectiveness, and encouraging collaborative and inclusive cultures. Obstacles to adopting adaptive leadership include limited resources, overly bureaucratic systems, and resistance to change.

Participatory leadership in Ugandan higher education institutions is linked to better education quality, higher staff engagement, increased productivity, and greater student participation in learning. However, entrenched top-down customs and cultural attitudes towards authority obstruct the adoption of participatory leadership (Mikando *et al.,* 2025).

Taken together, these studies suggest that leadership styles and values are crucial to university culture. Transformational, servant, participatory, socially responsible, and adaptive leadership approaches generally foster more positive cultures characterised by collaboration, inclusivity, trust, and commitment, whereas

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authoritarian, paternalistic, or passive-avoidant tendencies tend to restrict these outcomes (Mwesigwa *et al.,* 2020; Kasule, 2025; Mikando *et al*., 2025; Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Kyambade *et al.,* 2024; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Kyambade *et al*., 2024).

Visible and Invisible Leadership Actions

Visible leadership actions encompass communication patterns, decision-making processes, deployment of structures, resource allocation, performance monitoring, and symbolic acts. These are observable expressions of leadership and organisational culture. Research in Ugandan public universities indicates that transformational and transactional leadership behaviours are positively associated with effective organisational communication, a key visible aspect of culture (Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024). Organisational structures and governance frameworks, when designed to promote collaboration, establish clear authority lines, and facilitate efficient resource management, foster a positive culture (Kasule, 2025; Amtu *et al.*, 2021; Turyamureeba *et al*., 2025).

Invisible leadership actions and elements include leaders' values, basic assumptions about people and work, moral commitments, and implicit expectations. Research in Ugandan universities on institutional culture demonstrates that espoused beliefs and values, along with basic underlying assumptions, underpin organisational effectiveness, suggesting that invisible cultural elements strongly influence how institutions function (Turyahikayo, 2025; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024). Socially responsible leadership research in Uganda reveals tensions between leaders' expressed moral commitments and their limited operationalisation of moral excellence, stakeholder collaboration, and moral direction (Kyambade *et al.,* 2024). Similarly, in South African higher education, employees' limited knowledge of organisational values and the absence of values from human resource systems indicate a disconnect between espoused and lived values (Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025).

The connection between visible and invisible leadership actions is shown in the alignment (or misalignment) between formal value statements and everyday practice. When leaders' behaviours, structures, and communication support declared values like openness, collaboration, and ethical behaviour, culture becomes more consistent and encourages positive outcomes (Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Amtu *et al.,* 2021; Turyahikayo *et al*., 2024). Conversely, when leaders promote certain values but behave in ways that contradict them through authoritarian decision-making, poor communication, or the ignoring of staff concerns, trust diminishes, and negative or cynical cultures may form (Akanji *et al.,* 2019; Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Kyambade *et al.,* 2024).

Organisational Culture, Effectiveness, and Quality

A consistent theme throughout the literature is the connection between culture and organisational effectiveness. In Ugandan public universities, espoused beliefs and values, along with fundamental underlying assumptions, positively predict organisational effectiveness. This suggests that cultures characterised by openness, learning, teamwork, mutual responsibility, and participatory decision-making foster stronger performance (Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024). Leadership styles also affect staff commitment and organisational communication, which are crucial drivers of effectiveness and quality (Mwesigwa *et al.,* 2020; Kyambade *et al*., 2024; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024).

International evidence supports these conclusions. In Indonesian public universities, leadership and organisational commitment, mediated by organisational culture, contribute to the implementation of internal quality assurance systems and to improvements in the quality of higher education (Amtu *et al.,* 2021). Leadership that promotes a dynamic, creative, and innovative academic culture is linked to enhanced institutional competitiveness. An organisational culture that encourages collaboration and clear

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quality frameworks is essential for sustaining improvements.

The literature thus indicates that shaping university organisational culture through aligned leadership actions and values is essential for Ugandan public universities seeking to improve effectiveness, commitment, and educational quality.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a systematic literature review design to synthesise evidence on how visible and invisible leadership actions and values shape organisational culture in Ugandan public universities. A systematic review approach was suitable for capturing the breadth of empirical and conceptual work across leadership, organisational culture, and higher education domains, and for identifying recurring themes, mechanisms, and gaps.

Search Strategy

Electronic databases and relevant journals in education, management, and organisational studies were searched using combinations of keywords related to leadership and organisational culture in higher education and Ugandan public universities. Search terms included "leadership styles public universities Uganda", "institutional culture organisational effectiveness Uganda", "Schein organisational culture public universities Uganda", "servant leadership public universities Uganda", "socially responsible leadership Uganda universities", "participatory leadership Uganda higher education", and broader terms such as "leadership academic culture systematic review" and "organisational culture higher education Africa" (Mwesigwa et al., 2020; Kasule, 2025; Akanji *et al*., 2019; Peyravinejad *et al.,* 2025; Mikando *et al.,* 2025; Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Kyambade *et al.,* 2024; Turyahikayo, 2025; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Amtu *et al.,* 2021; Turyahikayo *et al*., 2024; Kyambade *et al.,* 2024). Reference lists of key articles were also screened to identify additional relevant publications.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they: (a) focused on higher education institutions, with a preference for public universities; (b) examined leadership practices, styles, or values in relation to organisational culture, institutional culture, communication, commitment, effectiveness, or quality; and (c) involved Ugandan public universities or offered transferable insights from comparable African and developing-country contexts. Both empirical (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method) and conceptual/theoretical studies were eligible.

Studies were excluded if they: (a) did not address leadership or organisational culture; (b) focused on non-university sectors without clear transferability; (c) were purely methodological or protocol papers without substantive findings; or (d) were not available in English.

Study Selection and Data Extraction

Titles and abstracts identified from the searches were screened to ensure they met the inclusion criteria. The full texts of potentially relevant studies were then obtained and carefully evaluated. Data were systematically extracted into a structured table covering: context (such as country and type of institution), study design and methods, leadership emphasis (style, values, behaviors), dimensions of organisational culture (artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, basic assumptions, or similar concepts), main findings on how leadership relates to culture, and reported organisational outcomes (like effectiveness, commitment, communication, and quality).

Data Analysis

Data were analysed through thematic synthesis. Initially, descriptive themes were identified regarding types of leadership (e.g.,

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transformational, transactional, servant, participatory, adaptive, socially responsible), cultural dimensions (artefacts, values, assumptions), and organisational outcomes. Subsequently, analytical themes were developed that illustrated how visible leadership actions and invisible values and assumptions interact to shape organisational culture in Ugandan and comparable university contexts. Particular emphasis was placed on studies explicitly involving Ugandan public universities to situate the review within the target context (Mwesigwa *et al.,* 2020; Kasule, 2025; Mikando *et al.,* 2025; Kyambade *et al*., 2024; Turyahikayo, 2025; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Kyambade *et al.,* 2024). Conceptual and international studies were employed to extend and refine these themes.

RESULTS

The synthesis of the selected literature identified four main thematic areas: (1) the validation and significance of culture dimensions in Ugandan public universities; (2) leadership styles and their impact on communication, commitment, and effectiveness; (3) the alignment and misalignment between espoused values and implemented practices; and (4) the constraints and facilitators of culture-shaping leadership.

Culture Dimensions in Ugandan Public Universities

Empirical research in Ugandan public universities supports Schein's three-level model of organisational culture, demonstrating that artefacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions are valid and significant constructs for understanding institutional culture (Turyahikayo, 2025). Descriptive findings indicate high scores across all three constructs among administrative and academic leaders, and structural modelling confirms that these measures are suitable indicators of culture in this context.

Further research on institutional culture and organisational effectiveness indicates that espoused beliefs and values, along with basic underlying assumptions, have a positive and significant influence on effectiveness, while artefacts alone are less predictive (Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024). Values related to openness, learning, teamwork, rule adherence, mutual responsibility, and shared objectives, as well as assumptions that highlight participation in decision-making and mutual obligation, contribute to organisational effectiveness in public universities. This highlights the importance of invisible cultural elements—values and assumptions—in shaping institutional performance.

Leadership Styles, Communication, and Commitment

Several studies highlight the role of leadership styles in influencing staff attitudes and organisational processes in Ugandan public universities. Leadership styles are significantly associated with organisational commitment among academic staff, with job satisfaction operating as a partial mediator; age, tenure, and position also play a role (Mwesigwa *et al.,* 2020). Leaders who employ a blend of styles that foster satisfaction and recognition tend to elicit stronger commitment.

Servant leadership is identified as a strong predictor of staff commitment in Ugandan public universities. Leaders who prioritise fulfilling staff needs, supporting their development, and adopting a service-oriented approach positively influence employees' attachment to the institution (Kyambade *et al.,* 2024). This suggests that leadership values centred on service, humility, and empowerment can reinforce the underlying foundations of organisational culture.

Regarding observable organisational processes, transformational and transactional leadership styles in Ugandan public universities positively and significantly influence organisational communication, while passive-avoidant leadership has a positive but statistically insignificant effect (Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024). Transformational and transactional behaviours foster effective communication environments,

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indicating that leaders who articulate vision, offer contingent rewards, and actively engage with staff contribute to fostering open and efficient communication as a visible aspect of organisational culture.

Alignment and Misalignment between Values and Practices

Evidence from African higher education settings shows both consistency and gaps between stated values and actual leadership behaviours. In South African universities, frequent leadership changes, male-dominated leadership, poor communication, and misalignment in leadership structures reveal cultural and leadership issues that undermine organisational culture. Staff often are unaware of organisational values, and these values are not integrated into human resource systems, highlighting a disconnect between formal value statements and daily practices (Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025).

In Ugandan public universities, research on socially responsible leadership indicates that leaders express intentions to act in accordance with social norms and moral expectations but find it challenging to operationalise aspects such as moral excellence, stakeholder collaboration, personal abilities, and moral direction (Kyambade *et al.,* 2024). This partial implementation highlights gaps between intangible leadership values and visible actions, which may undermine trust and hinder the development of a strong, socially responsible culture.

Simultaneously, research on participatory leadership in Ugandan higher education institutions indicates that when leaders adopt participatory approaches, staff ownership, engagement, productivity, and student involvement in learning are improved (Mikando *et al.,* 2025). Nonetheless, longstanding top-down management traditions and deeply ingrained cultural attitudes towards authority obstruct wider adoption of participatory leadership, once again revealing tensions between declared aspirations for inclusion and hierarchical practices.

Constraints and Enablers of Culture-shaping Leadership

The literature highlights several structural and cultural barriers that hinder the development of adaptive and culture-shaping leadership in Ugandan public universities. A systematic review of adaptive leadership in these universities shows that such leadership is virtually absent, as evidenced by their failure to address ongoing challenges and enhance operational efficiency (Kasule, 2025). Key obstacles include limited financial, human, and material resources, excessive bureaucratic procedures, and staff resistance to change. These conditions not only restrict leaders' ability to introduce new practices but also reinforce cultures of inertia and compliance.

Conversely, some leadership approaches are seen as promising enablers of positive cultural change. Adaptive leadership is suggested as a way to address complexity, promote collaboration and inclusivity, and build resilience in public universities (Kasule, 2025). Participatory leadership is linked to improved educational quality, greater engagement, and enhanced research and innovation, highlighting its potential to shift cultures away from top-down traditions (Mikando *et al.,* 2025). International evidence shows that leadership fostering organisational commitment and a culture of continuous improvement plays a significant role in quality assurance and educational excellence (Amtu *et al.,* 2021).

Systematic reviews on leadership in diverse academic cultures and on inclusive leadership highlight mechanisms through which leaders can shape culture, including understanding the social and normative past, probing existing norms and values, aligning change messages with aspirational values, and using symbols and rituals to reframe culture (Korkmaz *et al.,* 2022; Peyravinejad *et al.,* 2025). These mechanisms align with Schein's emphasis on leaders as primary culture creators and suggest concrete

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strategies that could be adapted to Ugandan public universities.

DISCUSSION

This systematic review emphasises that leadership actions and values are vital in shaping the organisational culture of Ugandan public universities. Validating Schein's culture dimensions in these contexts confirms that artefacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions provide a strong framework for understanding institutional culture (Turyahikayo, 2025; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024). Evidence that espoused values and core underlying assumptions are the main predictors of organisational effectiveness supports the view that invisible cultural elements should be a central focus for leadership efforts, with openness, teamwork, adherence to rules, mutual responsibility, and shared objectives emerging as particularly significant value clusters (Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024). Similar findings from South African and Indonesian universities, where shared values and organisational culture mediate the relationship between leadership and quality assurance, further reinforce the strategic importance of values and assumptions in higher education performance (Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Amtu *et al.,* 2021).

Leadership studies in Ugandan public universities indicate that leadership styles significantly impact staff commitment, job satisfaction, organisational communication, and effectiveness, each both a result of and a driver of culture (Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2023; Kyambade *et al.,* 2024; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Mwesigwa *et al*., 2020). Transformational and transactional leadership are positively associated with organisational effectiveness and communication, while passive-avoidant or laissez-faire styles show weak or insignificant effects (Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2023; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024). Servant leadership strongly predicts staff commitment, particularly when leaders value people, develop staff, and demonstrate authenticity, thereby fostering a culture of respect and cooperation (Kyambade *et al.,* 2024). Research on servant leadership, psychological safety, and socially responsible leadership reveals that servant leadership and a safe climate notably endorse socially responsible leadership, connecting relational leadership values with ethical and community-oriented cultures (Kyambade *et al.,* 2023).

Findings on participatory and socially responsible leadership suggest that inclusive, ethically grounded approaches have significant potential to foster cultures of collaboration, ownership, and moral responsibility, but they remain underdeveloped in Ugandan higher education (Kyambade *et al.,* 2024; Kasule, 2025; Mikando *et al.,* 2025; Kyambade *et al.,* 2023). Participatory leadership improves staff engagement, research productivity, and student involvement, but is limited by entrenched top-down traditions, cultural deference to authority, and regulatory frameworks that centralise power within councils and external actors (Kasule, 2025). Socially responsible leadership in Ugandan public universities is characterised by leaders' willingness to act in accordance with social norms, but implementation of moral excellence, stakeholder collaboration, and moral direction is weak, exposing gaps between declared ethical commitments and operational practices (Kyambade *et al.,* 2024; Kyambade *et al.,* 2023).

The tension between espoused values and enacted practices remains a significant issue. Although institutions often proclaim values such as openness, inclusivity, excellence, and social responsibility, leadership behaviours and structural arrangements frequently clash with these aims, as evidenced by poor information sharing, high turnover of leadership, male-dominated leadership, limited integration of values into human resource systems, and partial adoption of socially responsible leadership (Kyambade *et al*., 2024; Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Alamri, 2025). Case evidence from universities in South Africa and Nigeria demonstrates that when values are not incorporated into HR policies, promotion procedures, and everyday decisions, staff have

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limited awareness of institutional values, and paternalistic or authoritarian norms persist, undermining trust and inclusion (Akanji *et al.,* 2019; Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Alamri, 2025; Godbless, 2021). In Ugandan universities, similar misalignments appear in undemocratic governance, maladministration, governance decline, and neglect of staff development, contradicting formal commitments to participation, fairness, and merit (Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2023; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Turyahikayo & Mugizi, 2025). These contradictions damage trust, foster cynicism, and hinder cultural change by signalling that value statements are merely symbolic rather than binding.

Constraints such as bureaucratic rigidity, resource scarcity, and resistance to change further hinder the adoption of adaptive and participatory leadership, reinforcing cultures of compliance, risk aversion, and low innovation. A systematic review of adaptive leadership in Ugandan public universities concludes that it is nearly nonexistent, contributing to persistent ineffectiveness and the failure to resolve recurring institutional problems (Kasule, 2025). Excessive bureaucracy, limited financial, human, and material resources, and entrenched cultural and political influences impede experimentation, collaborative decision-making, and rapid responses to complexity (Kasule, 2025; Mikando *et al.,* 2025; Mubarok *et al.,* 2023). Comparative work on complex systems and culturally driven strategic agility similarly shows that rigid, centralised governance and bureaucratic pathologies weaken adaptive capacity and slow organisational responses, even when leaders recognise the need for change (Mihajlov & Mihajlov, 2025; Mubarok *et al.,* 2023; Alamri, 2025).

The literature also highlights practical mechanisms and strategies for leaders to shape culture more effectively. These include aligning policies, structures, and communication systems with institutional values; modelling desired behaviours; embedding values into HR and quality assurance systems; engaging staff and students meaningfully in decision-making; and employing feedback loops to refine leadership practices over time (Kasule, 2025; Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Amtu *et al*., 2021; John & Kipasika, 2024; Turyahikayo & Mugizi, 2025). Evidence from Indonesia and South Africa indicates that when leadership, organisational commitment, and culture are collectively mobilised—through clear mission and value articulation, participatory governance, and ongoing quality assurance—universities are better positioned to improve quality and competitiveness (Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Amtu *et al.,* 2021). Studies on mission, vision, and value expression in Tanzanian and Nigerian institutions demonstrate that a clear, shared understanding of organisational elements, combined with moral and inclusive leadership, enhances alignment, employee engagement, and performance (John & Kipasika, 2024; Godbless, 2021).

For Ugandan public universities, the key implication is that leadership development and governance reforms must prioritise not only technical skills but also value alignment and cultural literacy. Leaders at all levels need to recognise how their visible actions—such as communication structures, decision-making rules, and resource distribution—and their invisible assumptions about authority, ethics, and participation interact to influence culture (Akanji *et al.,* 2019; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Turyahikayo, 2025). Creating cultures that foster effectiveness, commitment, and educational quality requires intentional cultivation of servant, transformational, participatory, adaptive, and socially responsible leadership; systematic integration of espoused values into institutional systems; and sustained efforts to minimise bureaucratic rigidities and create spaces for authentic stakeholder voice (Kyambade *et al.,* 2024; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Kasule, 2025; Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Amtu *et al.,* 2021; Turyahikayo & Mugizi, 2025).

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CONCLUSION

This systematic review shows that leadership actions and values, both visible and hidden, are crucial for shaping organisational culture in Ugandan public universities. Evidence confirms that cultural elements such as espoused beliefs, values, and core assumptions greatly influence organisational effectiveness, while leadership styles impact commitment and communication. Positive cultures are linked to servant-oriented, transformational, participatory, adaptable, and socially responsible leadership. Conversely, cultures characterised by misalignment between espoused values and practices, deeply rooted hierarchies, and passive-avoidant leadership tend to weaken effectiveness and morale.

The lack or fragility of adaptive and participatory leadership, combined with structural barriers and resistance to change, is especially concerning given the complexity and dynamism of modern higher education. However, there are still clear opportunities for leaders to leverage values, structures, and practices to cultivate more coherent, inclusive, and high-performing cultures.

Recommendations

- **Align leadership behaviour with institutional values:** University leaders should ensure that their daily actions, such as communication, decision-making, resource allocation, and performance management, consistently reflect formally stated values like openness, teamwork, integrity, and mutual responsibility (Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Kyambade *et al*., 2024).
- **Integrate values into systems and structures:** Institutional values should be incorporated into recruitment, induction, performance appraisal, promotion criteria, and reward systems, ensuring that values are genuinely embraced rather than just proclaimed (Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Turyahikayo, 2025; Amtu *et al.,* 2021).
- **Enhance adaptive and participatory leadership:** Leadership development programs should focus on cultivating adaptive, participatory, and servant leadership skills, empowering leaders to involve stakeholders, navigate complexity, and promote collaboration (Kasule, 2025; Mikando et al., 2025; Kyambade *et al.,* 2024).
- **Enhance organisational communication:** Leaders should utilise transformational and transactional behaviours that encourage clear, consistent, and two-way communication, thereby reinforcing the communication climate as a visible indicator of a positive culture (Mwesigwa *et al.,* 2020; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024).
- **Reform governance frameworks:** Governance structures should be reviewed to minimise unnecessary bureaucracy, clarify lines of authority and decision-making, and institutionalise participatory mechanisms for staff and student involvement (Kasule, 2025; Mikando *et al.,* 2025; Amtu *et al.,* 2021).
- **Foster cultures of learning and quality:** Leadership should actively nurture environments that value continuous learning, innovation, and internal quality assurance, aligning cultural initiatives with strategic goals and performance indicators (Amtu *et al*., 2021; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024).
- **Support middle-level leaders:** Departmental and faculty leaders should receive targeted assistance to become effective culture carriers, as they bridge top-level decisions and everyday academic life (Kasule, 2025; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024; Amtu *et al*., 2021).

Areas for Further Research

- **Longitudinal studies of culture change:** Future research should monitor how leadership interventions and governance reforms influence culture and organisational outcomes over time in Ugandan public universities (Kasule, 2025; Amtu *et al.,* 2021; Turyahikayo *et al*., 2024).

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- **Micro-processes of culture embedding:** Qualitative and mixed-method studies are necessary to examine how specific leadership practices in meetings, communication, and decision-making reinforce or challenge institutional values and assumptions (Peyravinejad *et al.,* 2025; Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Turyahikayo, 2025; Kyambade *et al.,* 2024).
- **Comparative institutional analyses** involving various Ugandan public universities can reveal how differences in leadership approaches, resource settings, and governance structures correlate with diverse cultural identities and performance outcomes (Mwesigwa *et al.,* 2020; Kasule, 2025; Turyahikayo *et al.,* 2024).
- **Student perspectives on culture and leadership:** Research involving student experiences and perceptions could offer insights into how leadership and culture influence learning environments, engagement, and academic results (Mikando *et al.,* 2025; Van Der Walt & Wiese, 2025; Debele, 2025).
- **Intersection of digital transformation and culture:** As universities progress towards university 4.0, studies should explore how digital transformation interacts with leadership and culture in Ugandan contexts, including opportunities and challenges for adaptive leadership (Rocha *et al.,* 2021).
- **Gender and inclusivity in leadership and culture:** Exploring how gender dynamics, inclusive leadership, and initiatives to promote women in leadership positions influence organisational culture in Ugandan universities would address a significant gap (Korkmaz *et al.,* 2022; Akanji *et al*., 2019; Mousa *et al.,* 2021).
- **Impact of socially responsible leadership:** Further empirical research is required to evaluate the effects of socially responsible leadership practices on stakeholder trust, community engagement, and institutional legitimacy in Ugandan public universities (Kyambade *et al*., 2024).

Limitations of the Study

This review relied on published English-language literature, which may have excluded relevant local or unpublished studies. The synthesis also incorporated evidence from comparable African and international contexts to enrich insights, which may limit direct generalisability to all Ugandan public universities. Nevertheless, the convergence of findings across different contexts offers a strong basis for the conclusions and recommendations presented.

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