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## **Relative importance index of ethical leadership practices among academic staff in public higher learning institutions in Tanzania**

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### **Abstract**

*The pinnacle of every country's literacy and the foundation of knowledge creation and management are Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs). Widespread ethical problems are threatening HLIs. Accepting payment or presents in return for grades, utilizing other forms of academic fraud, harassing faculty, staff, and students in a sexual manner both inside and outside of the classroom, abusing power, and plagiarizing are all examples of academic fraud. These moral issues put HLIs in danger and result in the hiring of students who lack the necessary skills. Tanzania's public HLIs were the subject of this study's investigation of ethical leadership practices. The study's target population consisted of 4863 academic staff members at public HLIs in Tanzania. A sample of 350 respondents was drawn from this group using a stratified simple random sampling technique. The input provided by the respondents was examined using the Microsoft Excel application. Relative index analysis was used in this study to order the criteria according to their relative importance. The calculation of the Relative Relevance Index (RII) is important to this study because the outcome shows the ranking level of relevance. It is especially useful for surveys using a Likert scale. The overall findings demonstrate that ethical leadership behaviours in all areas (role clarity, power sharing, integrity, ethical guidance, and fairness) scored Medium-High (M-H), with the highest overall ranking of 0.7 and above. None of the moral behavior received a Higher (0.8) or higher rating. Seven (7) factors received a Medium (0.6) ranking.*

**keywords:** Ethical Leadership; Higher Learning Institutions; Academic Staff

### **1. Introduction**

A growing number of unethical incidents and cases that occurred in our society occasionally come to our attention. Scandals involving unethical behavior might take the form of fraud, bribery, or corruption (Heyneman, 2015). Although the severity may vary from one area to another, these three widespread malpractices can occur in any industry. Previous research has shown that one of the issues facing higher education around the world is academic dishonesty or unethical behavior (Ishak et al., 2019). Numerous types of academic dishonesty and cheating behavior in education have been examined in prior studies (James & Keenan, 2019; Denisova-Schmidt, 2018; Chapman, & Lindner, 2016; Ishak et al., 2019). A number of issues with higher education around the world, including academic dishonesty or unethical behavior have been revealed. Examples include receiving cash or gifts in exchange for grades, engaging in various forms of cheating, sexually harassing faculty, staff, and students in and outside of the classroom, abusing power, and plagiarizing (Robie & Keeping 2004). In order to promote global citizenship and a sustainable world, Poff (2010) suggested that ethical leadership and values in higher education institutions are essential for the development of ethical leaders. Universities also have a role in educating the next generation of leaders in moral principles. The duty of the professors and academic staff in this situation is crucial in order to overcoming academic dishonesty.

The importance of ethical leadership has been emphasized more recently, according to academics, as a way for leaders to capitalize on their workforce's positive attitudes toward their work, including excellent academic performance, job satisfaction, and good work performance (Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). According to earlier studies (Brown



et al., 2005; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Zhang et al., 2013; Kalshoven et al., 2011; Mayer et al., 2010), ethical leadership is a significant predictor of decreased deviant behavior, reduced job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, improved leaders-follower relationships, innovation, and organizational optimism.

Human values like compassion, sharing, and respect for life and one another are some of those connected to ethical leadership. Along with these values, academic institutions should uphold integrity and justice for all people. When considering ethical leadership in African colleges, both private and public, commitment and accountability are other desirable characteristics of any leader, and these cannot be left out. Academic institutions may only provide students and other stakeholders with high-quality services based on moral principles and good moral judgment when making decisions that have an impact on their lives by applying ethical principles.

In the United Republic of Tanzania's public sector, the words honesty, ethics, righteousness, morality, fairness, uprightness, principle, sincerity, integrity, and reliability have all been used interchangeably with the concept of ethics. The United Republic of Tanzania (URT) has been implementing public sector reforms since the 1990s. Improved public service efficiency, effectiveness, quality, timeliness, and integrity were the goals of the Civil Service Reform Programme (CSR) of 1991–1999, the Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP) of 1997, and the Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP) of 2000–2012. As part of public reforms aimed at enhancing integrity in the conduct of public service, the government of the United Republic of Tanzania passed the Public Service Act (Cap 298 R.E, 2019), the Public Leadership Code of Ethics Act (CAP 398 R.E, 2020), and the Code of Ethics and Conduct for Public Servants of 2005. As part of the integrity assessment process, public sector executives (including higher education leaders) sign a statement of property ownership in their individual positions.

To enhance the ethical leadership of persons in positions of responsibility in Tanzanian public universities, a lot of work has been done. These include the adoption of the Public Leadership Code of Ethics Cap 398 and the Code of Ethics and Conduct 2005, both of which were passed by the government of the United Republic of Tanzania. Other initiatives taken by the government of the United Republic of Tanzania include encouraging ethics education and establishing commitments to ethics in government leadership. However, there is a lack of sufficient factual information regarding the moral conduct of government employees in public higher learning institutions. Therefore, this study looked at ethical leadership practices in Tanzanian public higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

## **2. Methodology**

This study investigated the ethical leadership practices of academic staff in public Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania. Quantitative methodologies were adopted in this study. Specifically, the study adopted a quantitative survey. Quantitative methodology was used to test the applicability of ethical leadership in public HLIs in Tanzania. For the study, eleven (11) fully operational, accredited public HLIs were used. The institutions are; the University of Dodoma (UDOM), Mzumbe University (MU), University of Dar-es-Salaam (UDSM), Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), The Open University of Tanzania (OUT), State University of Zanzibar (SUZA), Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST), Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS), Ardhi University (ARU), Mbeya University of Science and Technology (MUST), Moshi Cooperative University (MoCU). The researcher requested a list of every member of the academic staff at each HLI in order to obtain a representative sample of the population. Three hundred and fifty (350) members of the academic staff were collected using stratified simple random sampling. To gather primary data, closed-ended questionnaires were employed. A 5-point Likert scale was utilized in conjunction with the closed-ended survey that included an attitude scale. The Ethical Leadership Work (ELW) Questionnaire by Kalshoven et al. (2011) was used by the researcher as the ethical leadership questionnaire.

## **3. Data Analysis**

Using the Microsoft Excel tool, the respondents' feedback was analyzed. Two portions of the analysis—demographic and relative importance index analysis were created based on the information provided in the questionnaires. In order to rank the criteria according to their relative importance, relative index analysis was chosen for this study. Last but not least, the Relative Relevance Index (RII) calculation is significant to this study because its result indicates the ranked degree of relevance. It is particularly beneficial for surveys that employ a Likert scale. To calculate the relative index, the researcher applied the formula below.



$$RI = \sum \frac{W}{A \times N}$$

Where w represents the weighting that each respondent assigned, using a scale of one to five, with five representing the highest weighting. A carries the most weight and the sample's overall count is N. The weighted average for the two groups was established using the ranking (R) of relative indices (RI). Five significant levels are derived from RI values, according to Akadiri (2011): high (H) (0.8 RI 1), high-medium (H-M) (0.6 RI 0.8), medium (M) (0.4 RI 0.6), medium-low (M-L) (0.2 RI 0.4), and low (L) (0 RI 0.2).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The distribution of the sampled academic staff, by working experience and title, is shown in Table 1. In public HLIs, 40.9% of the academic staff had worked there for more than ten (10) years, 22% had worked there for between four and six years, and 21.7% had worked there for between seven and nine years. With only 15.4% of the overall sample, academic staff with three (3) years of job experience was comparatively low. Additionally, Table 1 demonstrates that the sample was primarily made up of academic personnel with ten or more years of professional experience. Additionally, the sampled respondents' percentage of academic staff with three years of experience in the workforce was quite low.

The distribution of the sampled academic personnel by designation is also shown in Table 1. Full professors and associate professors make up around 3% and 6% of the academic personnel, respectively. Table 1 also reveals that lecturers and assistant lecturers, who made up about 30.9% and 37.6% of the sampled academic personnel, had higher proportions. Additionally, the sample of academic staff members showed that just 10.3% of them were tutorial assistants.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics**

Working Experience in Years	Frequency	Percentage
3 years	54	15.4
4-6 years	77	22.0
7-9 years	76	21.7
10 and above	143	40.9
Total	350	100
<b>Designation</b>		
Tutorial Assistants	36	10.3
Assistant Lecturer	129	36.9
Lecturer	108	30.9
Senior Lecturer	48	13.7
Associate Professor	20	5.7
Full Professor	9	2.6
Total	350	100

### 4.2 Relative Importance Index Analysis

All ethical leadership factors (power sharing, role clarity, ethical advice, integrity, and fairness) were evaluated for Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients. All variables have internal consistency values of at least 0.7, according to Table 2. This demonstrates that the data have strong internal consistency reliability and that every variable was suited for analysis and none of the variables were discarded. As defined by Cronbach's alpha, the variable is only acceptable if more significant than 0.7, making = 0.7 and above in this circumstance reliable (Siswaningsih, 2017). The internal consistency reliability is determined by Cronbach's alpha, which uses the following criteria: Excellent (>0.9), Good (0.70.9), Acceptable (0.60.7), Acceptable (0.60.7), Poor (0.50.6), and Unacceptable (0.5).

**Table 2: Cronbach Alpha Reliability Table**

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Power Sharing	6	0.830
Role Clarification	7	0.934



Integrity	4	0.937
Ethical Guidance	7	0.923
Fairness	6	0.874

A relative index analysis was used to estimate the relative significance of ethical leadership behaviors among HLIs leaders. According to the analysis of the relative index, Table 3 shows the rankings for each category. The overall findings demonstrate that ethical leadership behaviors in all areas (role clarity, power sharing, integrity, ethical guidance, and fairness) scored Medium-High (M-H), with the highest overall ranking of 0.7 and above. None of the moral behavior received a Higher (0.8) or higher rating. Seven (7) factors received a Medium (0.6) ranking. Multiple significant theoretical implications are made by this study's findings. Given that the ethical leadership standards used in public HLIs rely on the nature of the university, information can have an impact on the personality of HLI leaders. Assessing the ethical leadership behavior of public figures in HLIs in Tanzania could give HLIs insight into how to raise their ethical standards.

**Table 3: Ranking of ethical leadership practices in public HLIs in Tanzania**

Ethical Leadership	RII	Rank	Importance Level
<b>Role Clarification</b>			
Explains responsibilities and his expectation to the employees'	0.762	1	H-M
Clarifies priorities.	0.761	2	H-M
Explains what is expected of each group member	0.759	3	H-M
Clarifies who is responsible for what	0.759	4	H-M
Indicates what the performance expectations of each employee	0.753	5	H-M
Indicates performance expectations of each group member	0.751	6	H-M
Explains what is expected of me and my fellow staff members	0.750	7	H-M
<b>Power Sharing</b>			
Allow others to participate in decision making	0.787	1	H-M
Permits me to set my own performance goals	0.753	2	H-M
Will reconsider decisions on the basis of recommendations given	0.727	3	H-M
Seeks advice from subordinates concerning organizational strategy	0.711	4	H-M
Allows subordinates to influence critical decisions	0.698	5	M
Delegates challenging responsibilities to subordinates	0.645	6	M
<b>Integrity</b>			
Can be trusted to do the things he/she says	0.783	1	H-M
Keeps his/her words	0.775	2	H-M
Can be relied on to honor his/her commitments	0.774	3	H-M
Keeps his/her promises	0.750	4	H-M
<b>Ethical guidance</b>			
Explains what is expected from employees in terms of behaving with ethics	0.758	1	H-M
Clearly explains ethical-related codes of conduct	0.739	2	H-M
Clarifies ethical guidelines	0.737	3	H-M
Ensures that employees follow codes of conduct	0.737	4	H-M
Clarifies the likely consequences of possible unethical behavior to subordinates	0.735	5	H-M
Stimulates the discussion of code of conduct issues among employees	0.689	6	M
Compliments employees who behave according to the ethical guideline	0.685	7	M
<b>Fairness</b>			
Does not hold me responsible for work that I have no control over	0.772	1	H-M
Does not manipulate subordinates	0.745	2	H-M
Does not pursue his/her own success at the expense of others	0.725	3	H-M
Does not hold me responsible for things that are not my fault	0.693	4	M
Does not hold me accountable for problems over which I have no control	0.680	5	M
Is focused mainly on reaching the organizational own goals	0.645	6	M



## 5. Conclusion

This study describes the ethical leadership practices in public HLIs in Tanzania. A total of 30 ethical leadership behavior under five ethical leadership dimensions were identified. The item questionnaire was adopted from Kalshoven et al. (2011). The relative ranking of ethical leadership behavior was calculated using a relative index analysis, which transformed all of the discovered ethical behaviors' numerical scores. These rankings allowed the researcher to compare how respondents viewed the relative relevance of ethical behavior. According to a ranking analysis, all moral behavior in Tanzania's public HLIs was emphasized at "high-medium" or medium-important levels. There were seven ethical behaviors emphasized at the "medium" important level and a total of 23 ethical behaviors marked at the "high-medium" important level. The results from this study can be used by education experts and higher education leaders to improve ethical leadership practices for better HLI service delivery.

## 6. Recommendations

The goal of ethical leadership is to develop leadership skills that enable university leaders to manage the institution while also caring for the welfare of the academic staff. This is accomplished through positive interpersonal interactions and personal activities like decision-making, role clarification, power sharing, integrity and fairness, and modelling behaviour. Vice-chancellors and deputy vice-chancellors in particular must employ a leadership style that fosters trust, maintains that trust, and fosters a belief system that can morally inspire academic staff to produce high-quality work, respect organizational decisions, and collaborate toward a common objective. As a result, including ethical leadership practices is thought to aid university leaders in balancing these various duties in their day-to-day job activities, which in turn benefits academic staff. An ethical and trustworthy work environment will probably be created by university leaders' ethical leadership style, which will be able to encourage academic staff members' positive work behaviors. Future research on the effects of ethical leadership among academic personnel is encouraged by the findings. This study backs up suggestions for future research to emphasize the advantages of ethical leadership in the context of higher learning institutions as well.

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