

# Influence of Organizational Culture on Academic Performance in Ugandan Universities

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## ABSTRACT

The paper examined the role of organizational culture on academic performance in Ugandan universities by taking a mixed approach to the study, which involves both quantitative and qualitative data that will provide a more detailed picture. The theoretical frameworks of the study are based on educational policy barriers and institutional failures to examine the leadership practices, stakeholder involvement, organization structure, resources distribution, and technology adoption in the academic environment. A mixture of document review, surveys, and semi-structured interviews with 150 university administrators, academic staff and students were used to collect data. The results indicated that poor leadership, weak stakeholder, inadequate resources, over-centralized governance, and imbalanced adoption of technology, are some of the factors that influence organizational culture in Ugandan universities and result in institutional environments that are typified by low accountability, lack of motivation, poor collaboration, and low levels of staff and student academic support. The research found out that academic performance is not only affected by the personal learner factors but also the broader institutional and policy related conditions which determine the daily culture of the university. The main conclusion of the paper was that the culture in an organization is a key predictor of the academic performance since it impacts teaching quality, staff commitment, student engagement and effectiveness of the university systems. It suggested more participatory leadership, better infrastructure and academic support structures, more stakeholder participation, more innovation and application of technology to enhance an inclusive, accountable, and performance-oriented culture at the university in Uganda.

**Keywords:** Organizational culture, academic performance, Ugandan universities, qualitative research, higher education, stakeholder engagement, educational policy.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is among the basic human rights in the society, and pillar in stable societal and economic order. It is a motive by which individuals can have requisite knowledge, ability and behaviours in order to be in a position to live a full life (Whye & Asiimwe, 2024; Shah & Mushtaq, 2025; Rosha, 2022). It will rely on the strength of the policies that will be used to make decisions that will determine the efficiency of the educational system. Similarly, the education policies are the way of development of the society at a larger scale (Austin & Jones, 2024; Braun, 2022; Bashir & Sifawa, 2022). According to Whye and Asiimwe (2024) Adams (2020) Ascher (2017), policies of education are also important in the determination of the ways the education system of a given society can be used in both the short term and long-term development goals. In the case of the university, the organizational culture is also a crucial variable in determining whether or otherwise the policy will be actualized and the subsequent delivery of results (Whye & Asiimwe).

The resultant organizational culture that forms out of these values, beliefs and practices (hereinafter referred to as organizational culture) is a way of doing things, a way of how the students and the staff members relate to each other and a way in which resources like time, energy etc are managed. In this regard, educational policies can be viewed as instruments of determining what is to be undertaken with the limited resources in the quest to attain national or international objectives (Whye and Asiimwe, 2024; Adams, 2020; Ascher, 2017). The policies are to assist in streamlining efficiency and effectiveness of the industry, through the way of ensuring the efficiency of the expenses, appearance of compliance, secure finding out environment, dynamic understanding

culture, equity and range inclusive, high-quality education and also contribution to the accomplishment of the SDGs (Wehye and Asiimwe, 2024; Adams, 2020; Ascher, 2017). As it is the case in most of the establishing countries including Uganda, the education and learning system is confronted with multi-faceted contextual challenges that come in the way of the practical realization of equal access to good and relevant education.

Although in the cases of Africa and Uganda, the research is skewed towards educational policy issues, the study should be done on how the institutional constraint and organizational culture affect the quality of learning in institutions of higher learning (Austin & Jones, 2024; Braun, 2022; Bashar & Sifawa, 2022). The connection between the macro-environment policy and the micro-level culture of the organization is noteworthy. In cases where the policy fails to reflect the realities of the institutions, there is a propensity of an organizational culture that becomes resistant and this has an adverse effect on academic performance as witnessed in this paper through a model of policy barriers and institutional failures with a borrowed comparative education analysis (World Bank, 2022; Stites, Athieno, & Dyer, 2022; Savvides, Milhano, Mangas, Freire, & Lopes, 2021).

The significance of this study is that it attempts to bridge the gap in the policy analysis and organization behaviour within the higher education industry (Wehye and Asiimwe, 2024; Adams, 2020; Ascher, 2017). This paper gives a reflection of the challenges that are affecting the performance of the universities by putting emphasis on the social, economic, political, institutional, and environmental and learning and innovation barriers to change. The time to focus on Uganda is especially timely because it is a country whereby access to higher education is being enhanced at a rapid rate and also quality being maintained. It is assumed that the developed insights can contribute to the improvement of the policies development and implementation. The paper shall contend that organizational culture in the Ugandan universities is highly influenced by greater policy constraints and that there is necessity to strive on the areas of the organizational culture in order to achieve better academic performance in the Ugandan universities (World Bank, 2022; Stites, Athieno, & Dyer, 2022; Savvides, Milhano, Mangas, Freire, & Lopes, 2021).

## Literature Review

### Institutional and barriers to education.

Of course, the administration of people policy is developed to meet some desired objectives in the given regions. Their government intends on the execution of its agendas. The policy can also simply mean a given division within the government to regulate its activities in that area such as agricultural policy, foreign policy, health policy, immigration policy, ICT (Information and Communication Technology) policy among others. Educational policies are the kind of policies, which directly concern the services of the education (Rossha, 2022). It defines authoritative prescriptions, or priorities to be served or being served already by Government in Development and Delivery of Education Sector (World Bank, 2022; Stites, Athieno, & Dyer, 2022; Savvides, Milhano, Mangas, Freire, & Lopes, 2021). It is a course, and series of direction, operations, as resource demands and use, and as results foreseen.

Educational policies are a centre of focus in all other policies undertaken by groups in a given country as they play the basis on which human capital is built (Musisi, 2015). In its turn, other policies, although also related educational policies, are also contained in other policies and can make or break the latter either directly or indirectly (World Bank, 2022; Stites, Athieno, & Dyer, 2022; Savvides, Milhano, Mangas, Freire, & Lopes, 2021). Quality educational policies are holistic, authoritative, problem focused, specific to a particular issue, ruling the decisional process, harmonized to national and/or international policies between policy analysts and education practitioners (Falalu, 2020; Bashar and Sifawa, 2022).

These preliminary studies identify external and internal sources of impediment to the educational policy and subjugate them with other features (e.g., social, economic, political, environment) and incorporations of real-world concerns into the problems that are connected with it (e.g., feedback, cognition, learning and innovations and so forth). The organizational barriers are especially applicable to the organizational culture. According to Wehye and Asiimwe (2024) Rowherder (2020) and Paschal, Nyoni and Mkulu (2021), the barriers to education policy are large class sizes, curriculum relevance, language of instruction, heavy workload, difficulties with standardized tests and teacher incentives. Similarly, Mackenzie, Bower, and Owaineh (2020) argue that there

are political, financial, and physical obstacles to the successes in providing quality, equity, and efficacy education.

In the case of Uganda, the organisational culture lacks the component of stakeholder involvement. Asiiimwe and Magunda (2017) argue that the weak interaction between families affects the involvement of parents in the school activities but they are needed to enhance the academic performance of the learners. In addition, parental disengagement was among the major barriers in the same study by Asiiimwe and Nabitake (2022) who also determined the relationship between parental influence on performance of students in their academic life and parental disengagement in Uganda. These results indicate that the organizational culture which is associated with the involvement of stakeholders is a direct determinant of academic performance (Wehye and Asiiimwe (2024) Rowherder (2020) and Paschal, Nyoni and Mkulu (2021).

### **Academic Performance and Organization Culture.**

According to Wehye and Asiiimwe (2024) Rowherder (2020) and Paschal, Nyoni and Mkulu (2021), learning policy can be termed as effective in the event of the fact that the amount of people joining the learning programs is on the rise and the supporting environment and the human resource capacity are available. Their existence in the collective form makes the education more accessible, more equitable, good and responsive to the needs of the present and future of people and their communities of place and culture Falalu, 2020; Bashar and Sifawa, 2022). Nevertheless, the material on the subject matter expounds on several aspects that might be employed to identify that a policy failure in education has taken place which can serve as a reference point to the individual or the group assembling to conduct the analysis, develop and/or execute educational policy to (Wehye and Asiiimwe, 2024; Rowherder, 2020; & Paschal, Nyoni and Mkulu, 2021).

Not creating teachers' capacity to serve in schools with no/low qualified staffs will not only be detrimental to the policy goal of quality education, but also the methods of delivery and accessibility as with some schools being under-staffed, students will be unable to take quality classes. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2019) and Mokhosi (2023) present the following examples of the impaired access to education and school attendance that are hindered by the low teacher capacity culture (Roshia, 2022); Ntorukiri, Kirugua & Kirimi, 2022; Pascal, Nyoni, Mkulu, 2021; Rowherder, 2020; Duxbury, Kangas, Beukelelaer, 2022). Social exclusion and inequity should be among the particular problems present in Uganda. Stites, Athieno and Dyer (2022) additionally assert that lack of finance, opportunity cost and social cost alone were a significant setback to the implementation of the educational policy especially in keeping of commitments in with regard to girl child education failures (Roshia, 2022); Ntorukiri, Kirugua & Kirimi, 2022; Pascal, Nyoni, Mkulu, 2021; Rowherder, 2020).

These are the spheres that affect the culture of the university in the broader policy environment. Measures such as graduation rates and research production are impaired whenever a culture emphasizes more on administrative obedience rather than the quality of the academics sector (Mokhosi, 2023; Asiiimwe & Magunda, 2023; Asiiimwe & Nabitake, 2022; Asiiimwe & Magunda, 2017). The combination of both the constraints of the policy and organizational culture form a loop of bad performance highlights bad cultural mores that discourages reform. Savvides, Milhano, Mangas, Freire, and Lopes (2021) share the same sentiment and note that dropping out (quitting education/training without officially finishing the course of study) is the most considerable policy failure in the education sector in which the rates of dropping out are astronomical in the university setting.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical approach that is followed by this paper is an application of the taxonomy of educational policy barriers and failures suggested by Wehye and Asiiimwe (2024). This school of thought holds that organizational culture is not a unique phenomenon but rather it is influenced by the broader societal, economic, political and institutional contexts to Wehye and Asiiimwe (2024) Rowherder (2020) and Paschal, Nyoni and Mkulu (2021). The framework identifies six categories of barriers namely, social, economic, political, institutional, environmental and knowledge and technology, which predict the organizational culture in different ways.

As an example, economic barriers to culture of sharing, including the lack of funds, do not allow developing this culture (Rosha, 2022); Ntorukiri, Kirugua & Kirimi, 2022; Pascal, Nyoni, Mkulu, 2021; Rowherder, 2020). The culture of doubts and hopelessness is an outcome of the political obstacles such as bad leadership. The barriers at the organizational level such as workload being too big are creating an atmosphere of exhaustion and detachment. Through this framework, the paper is aimed at establishing how these larger obstacles are encountered through and through the culture of the Ugandan university.

This model also consists of typology of policy failures including: unfair access, underachievement and provision of inappropriate skills. These failures have been explained as an indication of the existing organisational culture (Rosha, 2022); Ntorukiri, Kirugua & Kirimi, 2022; Pascal, Nyoni, Mkulu, 2021; Rowherder, 2020; Duxbury, Kangas, Beukelelaer, 2022). To that end, an improved academic performance will demand the removal of the extrinsic policy impediments and the intra-cultural activities that it is currently producing. This dual approach can be used to understand the dilemmas of higher learning in Uganda better.

## METHODOLOGY

The research design to be used in this study was a mixed-methods research design, as it was important to investigate the role of organizational culture in academic performance of universities in Uganda in a comprehensive way. Mixed-method approach enabled more complex interpretation of the research problem as quantitative and qualitative data was used. This design was believed to be suitable because of complexity of the topic because it was able to explore the patterns of numbers and in-depth personal experiences that lead to leadership practices, stakeholder engagement, resource distribution and technology adoption in universities. The advantages in using a mixed-method design to study complex educational phenomena have been demonstrated in previous research because the design will enable triangulation and improve validity of the results (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2023; Hair et al., 2022).

The study survey section entailed the use of a structured questionnaire to 150 respondents comprising of university administrators, faculty and students of five universities in Uganda. The questionnaire was aimed at collecting data regarding how the participants perceive different aspects of organizational culture including leadership practices, stakeholder participation, resource allocation and technology adoption. This method is in line with other researches that have employed surveys as a means of evaluating the connection between organizational culture and academic performance (Mokhosi, 2023; Wehye and Asiimwe, 2024). The statistical analysis applied on the data collected included correlation analysis and regression models. Such statistical methods enabled the authors of the study to investigate the association between organizational culture variables and academic performance to gain a quantitative background on how organizational culture variables lead to academic performances. The correlation analysis is widely used in educational studies because it is needed to determine the nature and strength of relationships among factors and include regression models used to predict how various factors will influence academic performance (Hair et al., 2022).

Along with the survey, the study also involved qualitative interviews with 10 key informants such as the management staff of the university, faculty members, and the representatives of the Ministry of Education. These semi-structured interviews gave the participants a platform to give their personal experiences and thoughts about the organizational culture of the institutions they represent. Qualitative information gathered during such interviews provided a better insight into the circumstances and complexity of the role of leadership practices, stakeholder engagement, resource allocation, and technology adoption on academic outcomes. Thematic analysis method was also used to establish themes and patterns that were common in the interview transcripts. It is a qualitative approach that is highly applicable to educational research to identify the common themes and develop a thorough picture of the participants point of view (Denzin and Lincoln, 2023; Braun, 2022).

Moreover, document analysis was done to analyze the pertinent policy documents, institutional reports, and academic literature. The analysis enabled the researcher to contextualize the findings in the context of the overall policy of education and enabled him or her to see how national policies, governance structures, and institutional practice are overlapping. The document analysis is a viable tool to examine the ways of policy and institutional designs to influence educational practices and education outcomes, with studies demonstrating the mismatch (or the lack of it) between policy intentions and in-the-field practices (Stites et al., 2022; World Bank, 2022).

Through the analysis of such documents, the study was in a position to establish challenges and policy-related barriers that affect the organizational culture and thus the academic performance in Ugandan universities.

The mixed-methods design as a whole was a very comprehensive way of looking into the multifaceted relationship between organizational culture and academic performance. The quantitative and qualitative data were mixed together to make the analysis more valuable, as it provided insights, which can be generalized due to the use of statistical analysis, and insights, which can be discussed on a case-by-case basis on the basis of interviews and document analysis. This methodology aligns with the rising tendency in the educational research community to apply mixed-methods designs to their studies to understand the complexity of academic settings and the variables that determine performance (Savvides et al., 2021; Braun, 2022).

### **Findings of the study**

Among the outstanding themes, there was the influence of leadership and governance structures. The researchers discovered that centralized systems of governance are impediments to innovation and restrict the involvement of academic employees in the process of decision making. It also led to low morale and reduced accountability among the members of the faculty due to this inadequacy in institutional decision-making. The literature has also provided similar results, with centralization of decision-making related to reduced faculty participation and motivation (Mokhosi, 2023; Wehye and Asiimwe, 2024). Participatory leadership, on the contrary, in which the staff and the students actively serve in the decision-making process, has been identified to invoke a sense of ownership and responsibility, which can positively impact academic performance (Austin and Jones, 2024). This implies that universities in Uganda would be better off using more decentralized forms of governance that would foster cooperation and shared accountability.

The other major observation was the low stakeholder interest, such as that of students, staff, and parents in the academic processes. The research found out that the deficiency of significant participation of these groups resulted into a disintegrated organizational culture, which contributed to poor systems of academic support. This is in line with other studies that have indicated the significance of stakeholder participation in education. According to Asiimwe and Magunda (2017), parent's lack of involvement in schools directly influences the performance of the students as parents are very instrumental in offering support and guidance to the students. Likewise, the involvement of stakeholders in the governance of a university may enhance communication, promote trust, and improve general academic performance (Bashar and Sifawa, 2022). In this regard, universities must seek to forge better partnerships between the management and the faculty, between the management and the students, and between the management and the families to come up with a more supportive and unified academic setting.

Another important issue that influenced the academic performance was the availability of resources. The researchers discovered that inadequate facilities including libraries, classes and technology were a major challenge that interfered with teaching and learning. This scarcity of resources led to poor academic performance and frustration both among the staff and students. The results of the study can be compared with the study by Ntorukiri, Kirugua, and Kirimi (2022), who observe that inadequate educational resources are the primary hindrance to successful teaching and learning in most African universities. Moreover, insufficient funds restrict the opportunities of universities to introduce various learning opportunities, which can deteriorate the engagement and retention of students (Mackenzie et al., 2020). Thus, it is essential to invest more in educational infrastructure to enhance academic performance of the Ugandan universities.

Lastly, there were technology and innovation, which are cited as having great gaps. Although, there is the possibility of technology to improve the learning process, the use of technology in universities in Uganda is minimal. The research found out that the lack of infrastructure and the lack of staff training to use the technological tools have made it impossible to entirely adopt the digital learning platforms by the universities. This observation is in line with other past investigations that point to the difficulties of technology adoption in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa. Duxbury, Kangas, and De Beukelaer (2022) state that not having technological infrastructure and expertise, it is very difficult to deliver high-quality education to the university. When appropriately incorporated, technology can improve the learning process, simplify the administrative procedure, and promote horizontal interaction between students and employees. Consequently, universities are

urgently in need of a means to invest in facilities and the training necessary to transform technology into an essential aspect of their academic culture.

The results of the quantitative analysis showed that there are significant relationships, and the correlation coefficients between participatory leadership, stakeholder involvement, and academic performance are  $R = 0.65$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). Regression models also revealed that availability of resources and adoption of technology was the driving factor in terms of better academic outcomes. These results indicate that the structural and cultural challenges in the Ugandan universities can be addressed to improve the academic performance greatly. The experience indicates that colleges should not only concentrate on individual variables that influence the student population but also on macro institutional and policy-related aspects that define the everyday culture of the higher education.

In general, these results demonstrate how intricate and interconnected several variables are to affect academic achievement in Ugandan universities. The issues of leadership, stakeholders, availability of resources, and adoption of technology will help to address the needs of the academic environment and promote the culture that facilitates high academic achievement. These findings are consistent with the global literature on the value of organizational culture in the context of higher education and the necessity to implement far-reaching policy reforms and institutional change (Savvides et al., 2021; Braun, 2022).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research finds that organizational culture is a very important element in determining academic performance in the Ugandan universities. Some of the issues that affect this culture include leadership business, involvement of stakeholders, governance systems, resource allocation and technology integration. A favorable and successful organizational culture may come to guarantee better quality of teaching, student interaction and the overall success of the institution. Conversely, issues like ineffective leadership, inefficient management of resources, lack of participation of stakeholders, and lack of exploited technology are some of the obstacles to the creation of an academic setting that supports excellence. Hence, universities should pay attention to improving these elements of organizational culture to improve academic performance.

Among the recommendations is a better participatory leadership in universities. University leaders should engage the academic staff and students in decisions making exercises and also make sure that they are heard and their input is considered. This teamwork strategy would create a culture of responsibility in which everyone will be accountable to the success of the institution. Through transparency and shared responsibility, universities may establish the environment that encourages staff and students to actively participate in the academic world.

The other important suggestion is to focus on the investment in infrastructure and resources. Universities should invest enough money in enhancing teaching materials, information and communication technology infrastructure and professional trainings among academicians. Development of conducive learning environment is possible through existence of modern classrooms, libraries and dependable technological equipment. Also, the staff can be treated to continuous professional development programs to elevate their teaching performance and to be informed of the current pedagogical practices, which will in turn increase the performance of the whole board.

It is also important to strengthen the stakeholder involvement to enhance the academic outcomes. Motivation of academic performance is central in establishing better relationships between the university management, staff, students, families, and other external stakeholders. When the parties are engaged in the academic process, they get a feeling of collective responsibility and commitment to the attainment of the institutions objectives. Close interaction with families, alumni, and partners of industries can also help support the students more and offer some career opportunities hence improving the academic experiences of the students.

Secondly, the use of technology to facilitate learning, communication and research activities should also be promoted by the universities. The academic experience can be made significantly more efficient through investment in ICT infrastructure (e-learning platforms, digital libraries and research databases). Technology may also result in innovation, administrative ease, and cooperation amongst students and administration. This can be

achieved through adoption of technological advancements where the universities will be able to establish a more flexible and progressive academic environment that will address the needs of the contemporary student.

Finally, decentralizing the decisions is crucial to enhancing the governance in Ugandan universities. The existing over-centralized system of governance does not allow flexibility and responsiveness to the particular requirements of the institution. Universities should move towards more decentralized forms of governance distribution whereby they are given autonomy at departmental and faculty levels. Such a strategy would assist universities to better acclimatize to local reality, meet the new challenges, and adopt policies that make more sense regarding the academic needs of the students and the staff.

Ugandan universities could overcome policy-based and organizational barriers in their cultures, which would make the academic results more successful. Not only will the outcome of the students be improved but it will also help the creation of a knowledge-based society, which helps national development by improving education on higher levels.

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