Research Article

The influence of ethical leadership on the research performance of academic staff in public institutions of higher education in Tanzania

Elias Mseti, [iD][1]*, Wilfred Uronu Lameck[iD][2] and Stella Kinemo[iD][1]

Abstract

This study looks at how research performance is affected by ethical leadership in Tanzania's public Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs). The study specifically looks at how role clarification and integrity impact employee performance in research. The study's target group consists of 4863 academic staff members of Tanzania's public higher learning institutions, from which 350 respondents were selected using a simple random selection procedure. A self-administered questionnaire with closed-ended questions was used to collect the data. With the use of SPSS software, regression analysis was used to analyse the data quantitatively. The results demonstrate that role clarity and integrity have a favourable impact on staff members' research performance at Tanzanian public higher learning institutions. This study recommends that HLIs leadership should be on the forefront in building ethical leadership among its staff by conforming to rules and regulation (codes of ethics).

[1] The Open University of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

[2] Mzumbe University, Morogoro, Tanzania.

*Corresponding author: msetielias@gmail.com

Introduction

Any country's ability to develop rests on its educational system, and academic staff are expected to be key players in doing so (Shaheen et al., 2013). The importance of academic staff in helping a country advance, flourish, and develop cannot be overstated. This is because the academic employees are in charge of performing research and consulting, academic advising and counseling of students, ongoing curriculum development, and successful classroom instruction (Palamarchuk, 2018). To accomplish its strategic goals of research, research, and consulting, universities, like any other company, rely on the performance of their academic employees (Ali et al., 2014). Therefore, academic staff are the primary resource in universities and are essential to attaining the aims of the institutions (Alfagira et al., 2017).

Academic staff are considered nation builders and are always accorded great importance in educated and dignified societies. However, low academic staff performance remains a significant challenge throughout Africa (Arinaitwe et al., 2021). In recent years, stakeholders have been complaining about the academic performance of academic staff in universities, and people believe that academic staff are no longer dedicated and devoted (Arinaitwe et al., 2021). The research performance of internationally renowned African educational institutions lags substantially behind comparable institutions in the rest of the world, despite the presence of several highly prolific researchers and academic departments (Maassen, 2015). Research output worldwide is demonstrated to be significantly lower than in other African nations (Confraria & Godinho, 2015; Onyancha, 2016; Raphael & Edda, 2017). One of the most important elements that influence employees' performance, according to the current literature, is ethical leadership (Alshehhi et al., 2020; Kelidbari, 2016; Khokhar, 2017). According to popular belief, when university administrators treat everyone equally and with honesty, let participants in decision-making, clearly explain roles, duties, and performance standards, they are upholding moral principles and promoting appropriate behaviour. Workers' commitment to executing their duties will increase, which will improve performance (Katundano, 2019).

In Tanzania, national policy papers including the Public Sector Reform Programme, the Five Years Plan, and the National Strategy for Growth and Poverty Reduction I and II (MKUKUTA I & II) have continuously emphasized ethical concerns. Additionally, several steps have been taken, including the following, to address Tanzanian government personnel's rising difficulties with ethical leadership: To promote and coordinate the combined anti-corruption efforts of civil society, the government, and the commercial sector, a Triangulation Partnership Programme was established in 2005. The year 2007 saw the introduction of an Explanatory Manual on the Code of Ethics and Conduct for the Public Service. The Code of Ethics and Conduct of the Public Service is supported by this Explanatory Manual, which should be read in conjunction with the laws, rules, and policies of other nations (URT, 2007). According to several studies (Katundano,

2019; Kelidbari, 2016), ethical leadership may be able to boost employee performance in universities. Tanzanian universities are expected to uphold a high standard of responsiveness and integrity in the management of institutional affairs and resources, as well as in the promotion and demonstration of honesty and non-discriminatory engagement with staff, students, and members of the public (TCU, 2019). Despite the significance of ethical leadership presented in previous studies, it is not clear in literature how ethical leadership influences academic staff in HLIs. This study examined the impact of ethical leadership (role clarification and integrity) on academic staff members' research performance in Tanzanian public universities.

Theoretical background and hypothesis

The foundation for comprehending the connection between ethics, leaders, and their efficacy is provided by Social Learning Theory (SLT). SLT emphasizes learning through observation. SLT holds that in addition to first-hand experience, people also learn by seeing the deeds of others and the results of those deeds. Learning without first-hand experience is the term used to describe this vicarious activity (Walumbwa, 2011). SLT holds that modelling, or acting out behaviours, is how leaders influence followers' moral behaviour. According to the theory, people or leaders who hold positions of authority within an organization have the power to regulate rewards, which has a considerable impact on their ability to manipulate modeling efficacy (Brown et al., 2005). According to this idea, people can pick up new skills and behaviours by observing others; this process is called observational learning, or modelling. As a result of learning, workers will be more inclined to act morally and perform better (Walumbwa, 2011).

Integrity

Integrity is the state of being consistent in one's behaviour, beliefs, approaches, organizational principles, standards, and output. It is being truthful and honest (Brown et al., 2005; Caza et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2020). According to SLT, it is presumed that when leaders treat their subordinates fairly and with integrity, they would be more receptive to positive behaviour (Brown et al., 2005). Employees with high integrity are thought to be more autonomous, logical, honest, and just than those with lower integrity. Workers who believe their managers are morally upright, are more likely to be committed to them and their work, and they may feel obliged to reciprocate by going above and beyond in their performance (Friedland, 2009; Ng & Feldman, 2015).

Previous research has indicated a strong correlation between employees' performance and the integrity of their leaders. According to a 2020 study by Choi and colleagues on the impact of leaders' emotional sincerity on followers' trust, workers who have faith in their leaders are more likely to embrace and dedicate themselves to the aims and vision of the leader, which in turn improves performance. According to Simons et al. (2015), when workers have faith in their leaders, they focus entirely on their work, which enhances

their productivity. According to Caza et al. (2015), when workers have faith in their leader, they are happier with them. A 2011 study by Palanski and Yammarino discovered a strong correlation between behavioural integrity and workers' performance because it fosters workers' faith in their managers, which in turn boosts workers' productivity in the workplace. According to a 2012 study by Kannan-Narasimhan and Lawrence, employees who believe their leaders have high integrity report clearer communication from them, which helps them grasp what is expected of them and enhances in-role performance. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Integrity has no positive relationship with employee performance in public HLIs in Tanzania.

Role clarification

According to Onuoha et al. (2016), role clarification is the process of defining the roles that employees' range of activities are associated with. In this aspect, it is the leader's responsibility to make performance objectives and expectations clear to staff members and to outline their roles. Based on this dimension, De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) confirmed that role clarification is a crucial component of ethical leadership since it makes a distinction between the responsibilities of employees and clarifies performance goals and expectations (open communications between leaders and employees). Based on SLT ethical leaders will impact positive behaviour and ethics-related results if they make a distinction between the roles of employees and clearly define performance goals and expectations (open communication between leaders and employees). An ethical leader makes sure that their team members understand their roles, performance objectives, and expectations by clearly outlining them. Additionally, open lines of communication between managers and staff members educate staff members on how they can make a big difference in achieving objectives, which enhances both individual and organizational performance.

An ethical leader sets clear expectations, performance goals, and responsibilities so that workers know what is expected of them and can adjust their performance level accordingly. Furthermore, workers are not overly concerned with ambiguous expectations because they understand how they may make a big difference in achieving personal objectives. When workers understand what is expected of them and what is needed of them, role clarification aids in their awareness of their obligations. Workers must be aware of the duties, tasks, and procedures that make up their work. Ethical leaders should communicate openly and transparently about performance goals, duties, and expectations to ensure that staff members understand their roles (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Yukl et al., 2013). Ethical leaders ought to make clear what is expected of each person and what their performance expectations are.

Employee roles need to be made clear when tasks are assigned to them. This is important because it will help employees commit fully to completing the tasks at hand. It should also be explained to employees on a regular basis to keep them reminded of their responsibilities. Role ambiguity arises when workers are unclear about the work priorities, methods, and content and is caused by employees not understanding their roles and duties. Incomplete tasks and task failure may arise when personnel lack clear knowledge about how to fulfill their responsibilities and are unaware of their roles. Employees in any kind of organization should have their performance goals and expectations made clear to them, along with their responsibilities and goals, so that they know what is expected of them and what they need to do (McEnrue, 2013).

Employee performance has been related to making performance goals and expectations clear as well as outlining roles to staff members. It is thought that a worker who understands their role will be better ready to carry out the designated tasks (Kalay, 2016). Research has indicated a favorable correlation between employee performance and the clarity of goals and expectations (Allemeh et al., 2013; Samie et al., 2015). High degrees of job clarification allow employees to offer methods and solutions to complete the assigned duties more effectively, and as a result, they make more effective judgments (Samie et al., 2015). It has been demonstrated that role clarification greatly improves employee engagement and job happiness in addition to boosting employee performance (Kalay, 2016). Thus, the following hypothesis is put forth:

> **Hypothesis 2:** Role clarification has no positive relationship with employee performance in public HLIs in Tanzania.

Methods

Research design and approach

This study used a quantitative cross-sectional approach as this study sought to explore some relationship among variables of interest to the researchers. Further, we utilized standardized scales to collect numeric data on our main variables in the study. Consistent with our research approach, we adopted a correlational research design to examine relationships. This design allows us to provide explanation to our hypothesized relationships with no attempt at drawing cause-effect relationship.

Sample

This study used the academic staff population. To get a representative sample from the population, the researcher enquired about the list of all academic staff in each of the 11 accredited and fully-fledged public Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania. A total of 350 respondents were sampled using a stratified simple random sampling technique. In achieving this, the researchers had access to the list of academic staff in each of the HLIs.

There were 35.2% female academic staff and 64.9% male academic staff. A total of 22% of academic employees had 4-6 years of job experience, 21% of academic employees at public HLIs had 7-9 years of work experience, and 41% of academic employees had more than ten years of work experience. At 15.4% of the sample, the performance of academic employees with three years of work experience was marginally low. Full professors and associate professors respectively make up 3% and 6% of the academic staff sampled. The proportions of lecturers and assistant lecturers among the sampled academic staff were relatively higher, at 31% and 37% respectively. Additionally, it was noted that the sample of academic personnel included a relatively small percentage of tutorial assistants (10.3%).

Procedure

The faculties, schools, and colleges were chosen using a two-stage sampling procedure. Out of 11 HLIs, or a total of 22 faculties, schools, or colleges, two were chosen at random to participate in stage one. In step two, two departments were randomly chosen, for a total of 44 departments, from each of the faculties, schools, or colleges that were chosen. The population was divided into five strata, which included professors, assistant lecturers, lecturers, tutorial assistants, and senior lecturers in each department. After that, a number between 1 and a specific number was assigned to each academic staff in each stratum. It ended with five lists from each group, one for each category of the designation. One academic staff member from each stratum was selected utilizing the fishbowl technique in conjunction with simple random sampling. A self-administered questionnaire was utilized in the study, and 350 academic staff members from 11 public HLIs in Tanzania answered it. The chosen academic staff members received the questionnaire. Academic staff members were informed about the study's goal, confidentiality of the questionnaire, and information about voluntary participation. Participants could read and sign the informed consent statement that preceded the self-administered questionnaire. Lastly, participants received notice that their personal information would not be included in the publication of the research findings. It took roughly 25 to 30 minutes to finish the questionnaire.

Measures
Role clarification and Integrity

The academic staff at Tanzanian public HLIs provided data for this study by responding to standardized questionnaires. To measure role clarification, the Ethical Leadership Work (ELW) Questionnaire developed by Kalshoven et al. (2011) was utilized and modified. The language of the questionnaire was changed to make it appropriate for Tanzania. Each of the seven items in the role clarification had a 5-point Likert scale response format (1 being never, 2 being seldom, 3 being occasionally, 4 being often, and 5 being very often). According to John (2010), as the number of scale points goes below

or exceeds five, data from Likert items (and those with related rating scales) becomes significantly less accurate. Wu (2010) also asserted that when there are more than five options, respondents' ability to distinguish between them deteriorates. As a result, the researcher's choice of a 5-point Likert scale over a 7-point Likert scale proved critical. Therefore, a*lways* and *not applicable* were not included in the scale.

Integrity

Integrity was assessed by means of the ELW questionnaire (Kalshoven et al., 2011). To make the questionnaire more appropriate for Tanzania, its wording was changed. There were four questions on the questionnaire, and the answers were on a 5-point Likert scale (1 being *never*, 2 being *rarely*, 3 being *sometimes*, 4 being *frequently*, and 5 being *very frequently*). John (2010) states that data from Likert questions (and those with similar rating scales) become significantly less accurate as the number of scale points drops below or surpasses five. Wu (2010) further claimed that respondents' capacity to discriminate between options decreases when there are more than five available. The researchers' decision to use a 5-point Likert scale rather than a 7-point Likert scale therefore proved crucial. As a result, the scale did not contain always or not applicable.

Research Performance

In measuring performance in research, the researcher adopted a measure which was previously used by Zhang (2014). Respondents were required to write the appropriate number of published articles, books, research, chapters in referred books, technical reports cases, software and other publications, pre-prints, translations, abstract or conference presentation, book review or technical report, manuscripts accepted for presentations of written research proposal, creative scientific works and genetic materials, design and breeds (patented or unpatented), articles in learned journal or referred proceedings, monographs (annotated or unannotated) and books (edited, annotated or unannotated). The numbers represented; one (1) being poor and 5 and above being excellent. The measure contained a 5-point Likert scale response format (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). These metrics were chosen because they more explicitly quantify research than other metrics.

Analysis

We employed the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 21 for IBM) to perform the data analysis. Three types of analysis were conducted: 1) descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to help describe the data and generate frequencies; 2) the Pearson r was used to examine the relationship between the key variables in the study, and 3) standard multiple regression was conducted to ascertain the key predictors of research performance. Prior to the analysis, we ensured that the assumption of

multicollinearity, necessary for the conducting regression analysis was met. The statistical significance of our hypothesis testing was set at the 0.05 level of significance.

Ethics

We ensured that our study adhered to critical ethical principles. First, the ethical aspects of the research were approved by the Research and Consultancy Centre of the University. Second, we ensured anonymity and confidentiality of participants. To assure them of anonymity, participants were requested not to write their names or initials on the survey packet, this was strictly adhered to by all the participants. With respect to confidentiality, we provided envelops, and participants were instructed to put their completed survey into the envelop, seal and sign across before submitting the completed survey to their class representatives, to the general office of the Faculty of Management of the University or directly to the office of a member of the research team in the university. Furthermore, the responses of participants were aggregated for statistical analysis, which enabled us to draw broad conclusions. Consequently, the results were not personalized. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the completion of the survey was an indication of consent. Instructions were provided to guide participants to complete the survey without a difficulty.

Results

Correlation analysis between predictor variables and performance in research

We explored the relationship between the predictor variables (i.e., role clarification and integrity) and the outcome variable (performance in research) as shown in Table 1 below. It was found that performance in research was positively correlated with both role clarification ($r = .664$ p < .001) and integrity ($r = .552$ p < 0.001). These results suggest that higher levels of integrity and role clarification were independently related to higher levels of performance in research.

Table 1: Correlation Analysis between predictor variables and performance in research

Variables	1	2	3
1. Role clarification	1	--------	--------
2. Integrity	.587[***]	1	--------
3. Research performance	.664[***]	.552[***]	--------

Predictors of teachers' performance in research

To determine the predictive effect of role clarification and integrity on teachers' performance in research, standard multiple regression analyses were conducted. The results of the multiple regression analysis are shown in Table 2. An observation of Table 2 reveals that role clarification has a significant direct effect on employee research performance ($\beta = 0.519$, $p < 0.001$) and integrity ($\beta = 0.247$, $p < 0.005$).

Table 2: Predictors of employee performance in research

Predictors	Collinearity Statistics					
	B	SEB	β	T	R^2	F
Integrity	.166	.032	.247	5.164***	.480	160.457***
Role Clarification	.335	.031	.519	10.848***		

$^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$
Note: B = Unstandardized coefficient beta; $SE\,B$ = Standard error of B; β = Standardized coefficients beta

Discussion

Role Clarification

Role clarification is important because it aids in the development of clarity among team members and leaders regarding the duties and tasks within the team (Samie et al., 2015). To ensure that workers understand their tasks, moral leaders should be clear about performance objectives, duties, and expectations through open communication (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Yukl et al., 2013). A leader has to communicate to their team members their roles, performance objectives, and expectations. Additionally, open lines of communication between managers and staff members educate staff members on how they can make a big difference in achieving objectives, which enhances both individual and organizational performance. As the introduction section explains, previous research has attempted to comprehend the connection between job clarity and worker performance; however, the findings of these studies were conducted in business sectors as opposed to HLIs. The current study looked at the relationship between academic staff performance in Tanzanian public HLIs and role clarification to better comprehend the two.

The study's first significant finding is that academic staff members' effectiveness in research is directly improved by role clarity. Employee performance typically improves when they have a clear understanding of their job responsibilities. The results of this study are consistent with those of earlier studies (Kalay, 2016; Onuoha et al., 2016). According to Samie et al. (2015), workers who regard their roles as having high levels

of clarity are more productive. Dalal (2018) suggests that when workers are unclear about their responsibilities, they spend more energy being confused than actually doing their jobs. The current study's conclusions support the idea that, even in HLIs, there is a clear correlation between role clarity and academic employee performance in research. This suggests that academic staff members will conduct more research if they are aware of their responsibilities. The study's findings can be understood in light of the Social Learning Theory (Men, 2015). According to the theory, moral leaders who clearly define performance goals and expectations, foster open communication between them and their staff, and differentiate between employee positions will affect positive behaviour and ethics-related outcomes. An ethical leader makes sure that their team members understand their roles, performance objectives, and expectations by clearly outlining them. Additionally, open lines of communication between managers and staff members educate staff members on how they can make a big difference in achieving objectives, which enhances both individual and organizational performance. Ethical leaders should communicate openly and transparently about performance goals, duties, and expectations to ensure that staff members understand their roles (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Yukl et al., 2013).

Goal clarity helps employees understand their responsibilities and the behaviours that would help them achieve their goals and reduce job ambiguity (Davis & Stazyk, 2015). To enhance the learning environment in HLIs all academic staff members must support the institutional mission through teaching, scholarly work, applied research, and service. All academic staff members should always be held accountable for competently and effectively carrying out their assigned responsibilities and workload and fostering cooperative relationships with peers, supervisors, students, and the university community. This is a fundamental tenet, regardless of position. This is not feasible until the Head of Department (HoD) defines the roles. Department heads at HLIs are in charge of defining the specifics of the workload schedule and deciding how much time is set aside for research activities. When HLI academic employees are aware of what is expected of them in terms of research, as well as when their work techniques, priorities, and tasks are all clearly defined. Employee performance is a result of employees' increased ability to complete tasks as assigned. The results of the current study demonstrated that HLI leaders clearly define priorities and performance objectives in addition to outlining duties and expectations for employees' performance. Academic staff members are thus made aware of the expectations about their success in research. This enhances their output.

By regularly outlining job goals and role expectations, management can help employees understand their roles more clearly (Hassan, 2013). With good reason, Jada et al. (2019) stated that managers had to inform staff members of expectations in addition to concentrating on creating precise job descriptions. According to van der Hoek et al. (2016), team performance and goal clarity are related in the public sectors of the Netherlands. The results of the study demonstrated that having clear goals improved team performance. When Kim (2016) looked at the relationship between work performance,

public service motivation, and job characteristics in Korea, the findings showed that goal clarity was positively correlated with work performance. Performance and quality were higher when the goal was more defined.

Integrity

Concerns about academic integrity are persistent in higher education. It is among the four guiding principles of the university. A dedication to the values of truthfulness, decency, fairness, and trust is known as academic integrity. It demands that you follow professional and ethical standards in studying, teaching, research, and scholarship, as well as be conscious of your obligations. Although there have been studies on academic integrity since the 1950s and 1960s (Marques et al., 2019), the effects of academic integrity on research performance in HLIs have yielded conflicting findings. According to this study, academic professionals' performance in research activities is influenced by their sense of academic integrity. The results of the study support SLT. SLT assumes that when leaders behave honorably toward their subordinates, they will be more open to positive conduct (Su et al., 2021).

Employees are more inclined to imitate their employers' integrity-driven behaviour if they regard them as moral role models (Ng & Feldman, 2015). The results of this investigation support earlier findings that integrity and worker performance are related (Caza et al., 2015; Dineen et al., 2006; Kannan-Narasimhan & Lawrence, 2012; Palanski & Yammarino., 2011; Simons et al., 2007; Tomlinson et al., 2014). Research on the behavioural integrity of leaders has demonstrated that role clarity and trust might account for the process. Similar to the claim by Choi et al. (2020), for instance, earlier research has shown that leader behavioural integrity boosts workers' in-role performance by cultivating workers' trust in their supervisor, which in turn energizes workers' in-role performance (e.g., Caza et al., 2015). To be more precise, confidence in leadership can be used to make leader behaviours more predictable and dependable (e.g., Caza et al., 2015; Palanski & Yammarino., 2011). Wetik (2018) asserts that an employee must possess integrity by being brave, wise, honest, and responsible in the performance of their duties. An employee's performance improves with their level of integrity. Further, Mangkunegara (2016) posits that maintaining the values of honesty and other moral principles would help ensure that a performance or work product is good.

Employees will perform better if they are held accountable for their work. The current study's findings show that when HLI leaders are dependable and keep their word, workers perform better because they take accountability for their actions. The leadership of HLI is responsible for guiding the organization and its employees toward the achievement of HLI goals. For HLIs to perform these duties, they need to be trustworthy and treat each worker fairly. Leaders in HLI should also supervise all departments, handle each worker fairly and impartially, and resolve conflicts in an unbiased and non-favoritism way. This study suggests that in order for HLI staff members to produce excellent research

performance. HLI leaders must be responsible, dependable, sincere, compassionate, open, courteous of other employees, and thoughtful. Research by Tasi and Syamsir (2020) and Rosmi and Syamsir (2020) showed that integrity has a significant influence on worker performance. The impact of honesty on employee performance was also shown by the following studies: Sujiyanto (2017), Salwa et al. (2018), Yolanda and Syamsir (2020), Simponi Rahmadani (2020), Nur Jayanti and Syamsir (2019), and Stanislaus Wembli Wetik et al (2018).

Implication for research and practice

The study makes a theoretical contribution to the fields of ethical leadership, integrity, and role clarification because, as this is one of the few studies to explore such relationships. Thus, nothing was understood about how role clarity and integrity related to the output of research. This study has attempted to provide evidence contributing to addressing this knowledge gap. The key findings suggest that for employees in public HLIs to improve their performance it is imperative that ethical leadership is put in place.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to address the knowledge gap regarding the impact of ethical leadership (particularly, role clarity and integrity) on research output by academic staff in Tanzanian public higher learning institutions. The impact of role definition and integrity on academic staff performance in public HLIs has received minimal attention from scholars thus far. The study finds that employee performance in HLIs is more significantly impacted by role clarification. When goals are clear, defining targets for staff members boosts staff performance.

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ORCID

Elias Mseti ⓘ ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1838-8835
Wilfred Uronu Lameck ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4363-6175
Stella Kinemo ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4738-3750

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