



INTEGRITY-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL INNOVATION IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN TANZANIA

**¹*Apaisaria Nyange, ²Dr. Susan Wekesa (PhD), ³Dr. Wallace Atambo (PhD) & ⁴Dr.
Eshiteti Nyikuli (PhD)**

**¹School of Business, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya,
Mzumbe University, Tanzania**

^{2,3&4} Lecturer, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya

***Email of the Corresponding Author: apaisarianyange@gmail.com**

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study investigates how integrity-driven leadership influences social innovation in Tanzanian public universities, addressing a clear lack of empirical evidence on this relationship.

Methodology: A concurrent mixed-methods research design was employed. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to academic staff and students, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews with key university stakeholders. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation, regression analysis, and thematic analysis.

Findings: The findings reveal a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between integrity-driven leadership and social innovation ($r = 0.759$, $p < 0.001$). Regression results indicate that integrity-driven leadership explains 57.6% of the variance in social innovation in public universities in Tanzania ($R^2 = 0.576$). Qualitative findings further demonstrate that transparency, accountability, and ethical consistency enhance trust, stakeholder collaboration, and community-oriented innovation.

Conclusion: Integrity-driven leadership is a critical enabler of social innovation in Tanzanian public universities. By fostering trust, ethical governance, and stakeholder engagement, such leadership aligns institutional innovation efforts with national development priorities

Recommendations: Public universities should institutionalize integrity-based leadership training, strengthen accountability and transparency mechanisms.

Keywords: *Integrity-Driven Leadership; Social Innovation; Value-Based Leadership*

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Integrity-driven leadership, anchored in honesty, transparency, accountability, and consistency in decision-making, is widely recognised as a core dimension of values-based leadership and an essential foundation for ethical governance (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Tirmizi et al., 2023). Empirical research across global and African contexts shows that integrity-oriented leadership strengthens institutional trust, credibility, and sustainable organisational outcomes, though its practice is shaped by cultural and institutional settings (Purnomo & Ausat, 2024; Tirmizi et al., 2023).

In higher education, integrity-driven leadership supports effective governance and ethical institutional cultures. Evidence from educational settings indicates that leaders who uphold ethical standards promote trust, collaboration, and professional accountability, thereby strengthening institutional legitimacy and stakeholder engagement (Sambu et al., 2021; Tadesse et al., 2024; Thien et al., 2023). These conditions are important for socially responsive innovation, enabling universities to develop solutions that address societal challenges through collaboration and knowledge co-creation (Müller & Drescher, 2022).

In Tanzania, public universities operate in resource-constrained and institutionally complex environments characterised by weak accountability mechanisms, limited transparency, and inconsistent implementation of policies (Mascarenhas & Ngowi, 2022). Such governance challenges reduce stakeholder confidence and constrain universities' capacity to mobilise resources and partnerships for social innovation. In this context, integrity-driven leadership is particularly important for strengthening governance, ensuring responsible resource use, and repositioning universities as agents of sustainable social transformation aligned with national development priorities.

Statement of the Problem

Public universities in Tanzania continue to face persistent governance challenges, including weak accountability mechanisms, limited transparency, inconsistent leadership practices, and constrained funding for research and innovation (Kadikilo et al., 2024; Fussy, 2024; Mascarenhas & Ngowi, 2022). These challenges have undermined stakeholder confidence and reduced universities' capacity to initiate and sustain social innovation initiatives that address pressing societal challenges. Although integrity-driven leadership is widely acknowledged as a critical foundation for ethical governance and institutional effectiveness, empirical evidence explaining how such leadership influences social innovation outcomes within Tanzanian public universities remains limited. Existing leadership studies largely emphasise organisational performance and employee-related outcomes, with insufficient attention given to social

innovation within higher education contexts. This gap restricts evidence-based policy and leadership reforms aimed at strengthening universities' societal contribution. Consequently, this study examines the influence of integrity-driven leadership on social innovation in Tanzanian public universities.

Research Objective

To determine the influence of integrity-driven leadership on social innovation in public universities in Tanzania.

Research Hypothesis

H₀: Integrity-driven leadership has no significant influence on social innovation in public universities in Tanzania.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is informed by Ethical Leadership Theory (Brown & Treviño, 2006), which views leadership as the consistent practice and reinforcement of morally appropriate behavior through leaders' actions, interactions, and decisions. In this research, ethical leadership is conceptualized as integrity-driven or values-based leadership, characterized by honesty, fairness, accountability, and transparency. Drawing on social learning theory, leaders influence organizational members by modelling ethical conduct that followers observe and emulate. In parallel, social exchange theory explains how ethical treatment generates reciprocal trust, commitment, and responsible behavior within institutions.

Within public universities, values-based leadership enhances governance by strengthening transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making processes. These governance practices foster institutional trust, collaboration, and stakeholder engagement, which are essential conditions for social innovation, understood as the development of socially responsive and context-specific solutions to societal challenges.

The framework is particularly relevant to Tanzanian public universities, where governance limitations and resource constraints may impede innovation. Integrity-driven leadership mitigates these challenges by embedding ethical values within institutional practices, motivating staff commitment, and enabling collaborative creativity aligned with national development priorities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Integrity-driven leadership, characterized by transparency, accountability and ethical consistency, constitutes the independent variable. Social innovation, measured through community-engaged solutions, collaborative innovation outputs, and university-driven social initiatives, is the dependent variable. The framework proposes that integrity-driven leadership

creates an enabling environment that fosters trust, collaboration, and ethical innovation within public universities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a concurrent mixed-methods research design to examine the influence of integrity-driven leadership on social innovation in Tanzanian public universities. The design enabled the simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of both measurable relationships and contextual leadership dynamics. The target population comprised academic staff and students from selected public universities, as well as key university stakeholders for qualitative inquiry. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires to assess perceptions of integrity-driven leadership and social innovation outcomes, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with university leaders and administrators to capture governance experiences and institutional practices. Stratified sampling was used to ensure proportional representation of academic staff and students, while purposive sampling guided the selection of interview participants with relevant leadership and innovation roles.

The mixed-methods approach was justified by the complexity of the study's research focus, which required both statistical examination and in-depth explanation. Quantitative analysis enabled the study to determine the strength and significance of the relationship between integrity-driven leadership and social innovation, while qualitative analysis provided insight into how and why leadership integrity influences governance and innovation processes. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, whereas qualitative data were transcribed and thematically analysed. Integrating both strands during interpretation enhanced triangulation, strengthened validity, and generated nuanced findings relevant to leadership practice and higher education policy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study results are presented and analyzed in separate sections to enable a thorough examination of the findings. This organized approach allows for a systematic assessment of the relationship between integrity-driven leadership and social innovation in public universities in Tanzania.

Descriptive Analysis

Respondents rated seven statements measuring integrity-driven leadership. Overall perceptions were strongly positive ($M = 4.221$, $SD = 0.480$), with all item means above 4.0, indicating high agreement that integrity-related practices are evident in the universities studied. The highest-rated items related to truthful communication ($M = 4.362$, $SD = 0.813$), accountability for mistakes ($M = 4.321$, $SD = 0.705$), and ethical decision-making ($M = 4.279$, $SD = 0.703$). The low dispersion across items ($SD < 1.0$) suggests substantial agreement among respondents, supporting the view that integrity-driven leadership is perceived as a prominent governance attribute.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Integrity Driven Leadership

Statement	SD	D n	Nn	An	SA n	Mean	Std. Dev
	n	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		
	(%)						
The university consistently communicates truthfully in its interactions with faculty and staff.	4 (0.6)	13 (1.9)	100 (14.3)	260 (37.2)	321 (46.0)	4.3622	0.81329
The university ensures that all students are treated fairly and equitably in decisions.	–	13 (1.9)	80 (11.5)	378 (54.2)	225 (32.2)	4.2619	0.71538
The university relies upon fulfilling its commitment to improving the institution.	1 (0.1)	9 (1.3)	102 (14.7)	304 (43.7)	280 (40.2)	4.2256	0.75062
The university makes decisions guided by ethical principles.	–	4	109	343	242	4.2791	0.70315
The university maintains consistency between its actions and values.	1 (0.1)	10 (1.4)	106 (15.2)	322 (46.1)	259 (37.1)	4.1862	0.74782
The university admits its mistakes and takes responsibility for them.	–	7 (1.0)	92 (13.2)	339 (48.6)	260 (37.2)	4.3206	0.70459

Statement	SD n (%)	D n (%)	Nn (%)	An (%)	SA n (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
The university strives to be transparent in communication regarding university policies and procedures.	–	19 (2.7)	71 (10.2)	330 (47.3)	278 (39.8)	4.2421	0.74233
Average						4.2211	0.47967

Note. SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree.

Correlation Analysis

Integrity-driven leadership was strongly and significantly associated with social innovation ($r = .759, p < .001$). This suggests that higher perceived integrity in leadership is linked with higher levels of social innovation within public universities. The result is consistent with values-based leadership literature which emphasizes integrity as a basis for trust, accountability, and collaboration required for innovation in educational settings (Thien et al., 2023; Tirmizi et al., 2023)

Regression Analysis

The regression model assessed whether integrity-driven leadership predicts social innovation in public universities in Tanzania. The results indicate a strong relationship ($R = .759$). Integrity-driven leadership explained 57.6% of the variance in social innovation ($R^2 = .576$; Adjusted $R^2 = .575$), while the remaining 42.4% is attributable to other factors not captured in the model. The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 680) = 923.614, p < .001$, indicating that integrity-driven leadership is a strong predictor of social innovation

Table 2: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.759	.576	.575	.33682

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model explaining the relationship between integrity-driven leadership and social innovation is statistically significant. The regression component accounted for a sum of squares of 169.714 with 1 degree of freedom, while the residual component recorded a sum of squares of 124.929 with 680 degrees of freedom. The corresponding mean square values were 169.714 for the regression and 0.184 for the residual.

The resulting F-statistic of 923.614 was statistically significant at $p < .001$, indicating that the model provides a significantly better fit than a model with no predictors. This confirms that integrity-driven leadership makes a meaningful contribution to explaining variations in social innovation within Tanzanian public universities. Overall, the ANOVA results demonstrate that the regression model is strong and suitable for predicting social innovation outcomes based on integrity-driven leadership.

Table 3: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	169.714	1	169.714	923.614	.000
Residual	124.929	680	.184		
Total	294.643	681			

The regression results show that integrity-driven leadership has a positive and statistically significant effect on social innovation in Tanzanian public universities. The unstandardised coefficient ($B = 0.804$) indicates that increases in integrity-driven leadership lead to corresponding increases in social innovation, while the standardised beta ($\beta = 0.759$) reflects a strong predictive effect. The relationship is statistically significant ($t = 13.76, p < .001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. These findings confirm that integrity-driven leadership is a key driver of social innovation in public universities.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Unstandardized		Standardized		T	Sig.	
Coefficients		Coefficients				
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.624	.056	11.205	.000	
	Integrity-driven leadership	.804	.18	.759	13.76	.000

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Qualitative findings reinforce the statistical results by highlighting integrity as a central driver of credible innovation within public universities. Participants emphasized that transparent communication, ethical consistency, and accountability strengthen trust and cooperation among internal and external stakeholders, which supports collaborative and community-

responsive innovation. However, some respondents reported challenges linked to political and financial pressures and uneven enforcement of ethical standards across units, which can weaken integrity-based governance and limit innovation outcomes

CONCLUSION

Integrity-driven leadership is a key predictor of social innovation in Tanzanian public universities. By strengthening transparency, ethical decision-making, accountability, and stakeholder collaboration, integrity-oriented leadership creates governance conditions that support community-responsive innovation. Despite these benefits, universities continue to face contextual constraints such as political and financial pressures and inconsistencies between stated values and institutional practices. Strengthening integrity-driven leadership alongside proactive governance practices can enhance universities' contribution to national development priorities, including Tanzania's Vision 2025, and position public universities as drivers of sustainable societal transformation change.

Implications for policy and practice

The findings highlight integrity-driven leadership as a practical governance mechanism for strengthening social innovation in public universities. At the policy level, embedding ethical leadership standards within higher education governance frameworks can strengthen accountability and transparency. In practice, university leaders can leverage integrity-based leadership to build stakeholder trust, improve responsible resource management, and support collaborative innovation. Integrating ethical leadership with innovation-oriented practices may further enhance universities' capacity to respond effectively to societal challenges while maintaining institutional legitimacy and alignment with national priorities.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen integrity-driven leadership and enhance social innovation in Tanzanian public universities. The recommendations are structured at the policy, managerial, and institutional levels to support effective implementation and relevance for diverse stakeholders.

Policy-Level Recommendations

Higher education authorities should integrate integrity-driven leadership standards into governance frameworks and leadership development policies to strengthen accountability and transparency across public universities. Policies that enhance transparent allocation and monitoring of research and innovation resources should be reinforced to promote socially responsive innovation aligned with national priorities

Managerial-Level Recommendations

University management should institutionalise continuous leadership development programmes focusing on ethical governance, transparent decision-making, and accountable leadership practices. Leaders should also cultivate innovation-oriented practices such as proactivity and responsible risk-taking to strengthen the effect of integrity-driven leadership on social innovation outcomes.

Institutional-Level Recommendations

Public universities should establish strong accountability and transparency systems, including ethical guidelines, performance evaluation mechanisms, audits, and regular reporting to strengthen consistency between institutional values and practice. Universities should also promote partnerships with government, industry, and community actors through transparent management of research and innovation resources to expand funding opportunities and support community-driven social innovation initiatives

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest in the conduct and publication of this research.

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