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LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES, GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS AND PERFORMANCE OF PRIVATE CHARTERED UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The study evaluated the moderating influence of government regulations on the relationship between leadership competencies and the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya.

Statement of the problem: Private chartered universities in Kenya continue to record weak performance in student retention, financial stability, and research allocation. Government-sponsored placements in these institutions declined by 66 percent between 2021 and 2023, while outstanding sponsorship arrears owed to them were estimated at between KSh 48.8 billion and KSh 50 billion. Although university leaders operate within enrolment, research, and funding regulations, whether these regulations strengthen or weaken the contribution of leadership competencies to performance remained unknown.

Method/Methodology: The study adopted a positivist philosophy and a cross-sectional explanatory survey design. The target population comprised 32 private chartered universities in Kenya, with 775 institutional leaders as the unit of observation. Census and proportionate stratified random sampling yielded a sample of 369 leaders, of whom 302 returned usable questionnaires, a response rate of 81.8 percent. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation, and hierarchical moderated regression analysis in SPSS.

Results of the study: Government regulations significantly moderated the relationship between leadership competencies and the performance of private chartered universities in

Kenya. The interaction term was positive and significant ($B = 0.097$, $\beta = 0.434$, $t = 9.121$, $p < 0.05$), the direct effect of government regulations was insignificant ($B = 0.017$, $p = .329$), and the explained variance increased from 62.7 to 70.8 percent. Government regulations therefore acted as a pure moderator, and the null hypothesis (H_{01}) was rejected.

Conclusion: Government regulations do not independently improve the performance of private chartered universities; rather, they determine the extent to which leadership competencies translate into performance.

Recommendations: The Commission for University Education, the Ministry of Education, the Higher Education Loans Board, and the Universities Fund should maintain a consistent and predictable regulatory environment, release government sponsorship funds promptly, and review research regulations to support research productivity.

Keywords: *Government regulations, leadership competencies, moderation, performance, private chartered universities, Commission for University Education, Kenya*

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions operate in a competitive and dynamic environment in which effective management and organizational performance have become critical determinants of institutional success. Universities face mounting pressures from rising operational costs, demographic shifts, intensified competition for students, and increasing demands for accountability and transparency. These pressures are amplified by government regulations, accreditation requirements, and quality assurance frameworks requiring institutions to demonstrate effective governance, financial sustainability, academic quality, and continuous performance improvement. Intensified regulatory scrutiny therefore reinforces the need for leadership competencies that enable institutions to navigate regulatory environments, manage organizational risks, and implement strategic change (Fullan, 2023; Northouse, 2025).

Government regulations comprise the formal rules, policies, legislative frameworks, and oversight mechanisms established by governmental authorities to guide the operations, quality assurance, accountability, and sustainability of higher education institutions (Oketch, 2022; Bello & Chumba, 2025). These regulations influence strategic decisions on academic programmes, student admissions, research activities, and financial management, and thereby shape organizational performance through institutional priorities, resource allocation, and operational practices (Ngware & Wakiaga, 2025). In this study, government regulations are manifested through enrolment policies, research and productivity regulations, and funding

models, which shape university operations and strategic decisions (Ngware & Wakiaga, 2025; Romani-Dias *et al*., 2024).

Enrolment policies comprise the standards and guidelines that govern student admissions, academic qualifications, enrolment quotas, and quality assurance requirements (Commission for University Education [CUE], 2012). Research and productivity regulations encompass the policies governing research activities, ethical approval, intellectual property protection, innovation management, and research dissemination (Kanaabi *et al*., 2021). Funding models denote the mechanisms through which financial resources are allocated to higher education institutions (Ferrero & Salles-Filho, 2025), and include government grants, student loan schemes, performance-based funding, tuition fees, and research grants (Riechi, 2024). Adequate and predictable funding enhances institutional capacity to achieve strategic objectives and maintain academic quality (UNESCO, 2022), while diversified funding reduces overreliance on a single revenue source (Jaafar *et al*., 2023; Kimathi & Irungu, 2024).

In Kenya, private chartered universities operate within the regulatory framework established by the Universities Act, 2012, and the regulations, standards, and guidelines of the Commission for University Education (CUE, 2024). As of 2026, Kenya had 32 private chartered universities (CUE, 2026), which enrolled approximately 23 percent of university students in 2024 (CUE, 2025). The performance of these universities depends not only on the quality of leadership but also on the extent to which leadership competencies translate into outcomes under prevailing regulatory conditions (Muis & Isyanto, 2021; Joseph *et al*., 2024).

Supportive enrolment policies, effective research regulations, and sustainable funding frameworks may enhance the ability of leaders to implement strategic initiatives, while restrictive requirements or inadequate funding may constrain institutional flexibility. This paper therefore reports empirical findings on the moderating influence of government regulations on the relationship between leadership competencies and the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya, anchored in Institutional Theory.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Private chartered universities constitute a substantial segment of the university sector in Kenya, yet they continue to record weak performance in student retention, financial stability, and research allocation. According to CUE (2024), public chartered universities enrolled 469,688 students (74.7 percent), while private chartered universities enrolled only 144,236 students (23.0 percent). Government-sponsored student placements in private universities declined from

28,063 in 2021 to 9,662 in 2023, a reduction of 66 percent (Nyaundi, 2023), while unpaid government sponsorship funds owed to private universities were estimated at between KSh 48.8 billion and KSh 50 billion (Kinyanjui, 2025). Heavy dependence on tuition fees, limited revenue diversification, and low research productivity further threaten the sustainability of these institutions (Chumba, 2020; Lio, 2021).

These challenges have been attributed to weaknesses in university leadership (Maisiba *et al*., 2025; Mugambi *et al*., 2024), although leaders operate within enrolment, research, and funding regulations prescribed by the government. Rubera and Ngui (2023) established significant correlations among leadership practices, the regulatory framework, and the performance of chartered universities in Kenya, but correlation analysis cannot establish moderation. Gollagari *et al*. (2021) found no moderated mediation effect of government regulations in public universities in Ethiopia, while Kivindo *et al*. (2024) and Mungatana *et al*. (2025) tested regulatory moderation in public universities and state corporations, respectively. Consequently, it remained unclear whether government regulations strengthen or weaken the influence of communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence on the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya. The present study addressed this gap.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To evaluate the moderating influence of government regulations on the relationship between leadership competencies and performance of private chartered universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Institutional Theory was advanced by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and extended by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), who explained how institutional pressures influence organizational structures, practices, and strategic decisions. The theory posits that organizations operate within institutional environments characterized by regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that shape their behaviour and pursuit of legitimacy, stability, and survival (Scott, 1995). Regulative elements encompass laws, government policies, and formal rules; normative elements involve professional standards; and cultural-cognitive elements consist of shared beliefs and assumptions. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) distinguished coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism arises from formal regulations, mimetic isomorphism occurs when organizations imitate successful institutions under uncertainty, and normative isomorphism develops through professional education, accreditation, and

occupational standards. The study adopted Institutional Theory as its anchor theory because it explains how the regulatory environment conditions the outcomes of leadership in universities.

Institutional Theory is particularly relevant to higher education because universities operate within highly regulated environments in which government policies and professional standards influence their governance, academic programmes, administrative systems, and resource allocation. In Kenya, private chartered universities operate within the framework of the Universities Act, 2012, and CUE regulations, which govern programme accreditation, quality assurance, student enrolment, staffing, financial accountability, and governance. University leaders must therefore align institutional strategies with regulatory expectations while pursuing academic quality, financial sustainability, and institutional performance. Leadership competencies such as communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence may enable university managers to interpret regulatory requirements, coordinate stakeholders, manage organizational change, and translate institutional expectations into appropriate organizational practices.

The theory further explains the moderating role of government regulations in the relationship between leadership competencies and university performance. Government regulations establish the formal conditions within which leadership competencies are exercised. Clear and consistent regulatory requirements provide university leaders with predictable operating conditions, enabling them to direct resources towards academic quality, innovation, and service delivery. Conversely, complex approval procedures, restrictive requirements, or frequent policy changes may limit managerial discretion, delay strategic implementation, and increase administrative costs. Government regulations may therefore influence the strength or direction of the relationship between leadership competencies and performance, rather than merely exerting an independent effect on university operations. This moderating relationship, however, remains an empirical proposition that requires testing rather than assumption.

Institutional Theory, notwithstanding its relevance, has limitations. Its emphasis on conformity and legitimacy may overstate organizational homogeneity and underestimate differences in managerial discretion, resources, and strategic orientation (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). Organizations may not respond uniformly to institutional pressures because their leaders can select, negotiate, resist, or influence the demands of their environments. Oliver (1991) demonstrated that organizations adopt varied strategic responses to institutional pressures, ranging from acquiescence to compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation. This perspective underscores the agency of organizational leaders and justifies examining whether

the regulatory environment changes the extent to which leadership competencies contribute to the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya.

Empirical Review

Handayani *et al*. (2022) investigated transformational leadership, transparency, accountability, and financial sustainability in private universities using a quantitative survey of 381 purposively sampled respondents, with data analysed through structural equation modelling. Transformational leadership was the independent variable, transparency and accountability the mediating variables, government regulatory compliance the contextual variable, and financial sustainability the dependent variable. The results showed that transformational leadership did not directly affect financial sustainability; instead, its influence was channelled through transparency and accountability. However, the study focused on transformational leadership without examining communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, and did not test government regulations as a moderator. The current study addresses this gap by examining these competencies under the moderating influence of government regulations.

In Africa, Gollagari *et al*. (2021) examined ethical leadership, good governance, and employee commitment in public universities in Ethiopia using a survey of 186 academic staff, with data analysed through structural equation modelling. Ethical leadership was the independent variable, perceived good governance the mediating variable, government regulations the moderating variable, and employee commitment the dependent variable. The results showed that ethical leadership had a positive and significant effect on employee commitment, mediated by perceived good governance, but government regulations exerted no moderated mediation effect. However, the study was conducted in public universities and examined employee commitment rather than institutional performance. The current study addresses this gap by testing government regulations as a moderator of the relationship between leadership competencies and the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya.

In Kenya, Rubera and Ngui (2023) investigated employee motivation as a mediator and the regulatory framework as a moderator in the relationship between leadership practices and the performance of chartered universities, using a positivist cross-sectional design that surveyed management and student representatives from 49 universities, with data analysed through correlation analysis. The analysis revealed significant positive correlations among leadership practices, employee motivation, the regulatory framework, and university performance. However, the study did not specify the competencies of leaders, and correlation analysis could

not establish the moderating effect of specific government regulations. The current study addresses this gap by examining communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, and by testing how enrolment policies, research regulations, and funding models moderate their relationship with performance.

Mbithi *et al*. (2024) investigated managerial capabilities, sponsorship, and the performance of private chartered universities using a triangulation design with quantitative surveys from 12 institutions and qualitative interviews with 50 senior managers. Managerial capabilities and sponsorship were the independent variables, implicit government funding policies the contextual variable, and institutional performance the dependent variable. The results revealed strong interconnections among managerial capabilities in strategic decision making and resource mobilization, sponsorship, and performance. However, the study did not explicitly examine government regulations, including enrolment policies, funding mechanisms, and research standards, as moderating variables. The current study addresses this gap by explicitly testing this moderating role.

Kivindo *et al*. (2024) examined restructuring strategies, the regulatory framework, and the performance of selected public universities in Kenya using a quantitative correlational design with 341 members of university management teams, with data analysed using multiple linear regression. The study found that operations redesign and downsizing significantly improved performance, governance reform had a negative effect, and the regulatory framework significantly moderated the relationship between restructuring strategies and performance. However, the study examined restructuring strategies rather than leadership competencies and focused on public universities. The current study addresses this gap by testing government regulations as a moderator of the relationship between leadership competencies and the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya.

Mungatana *et al*. (2025) examined the moderating role of government regulations in the relationship between integrative leadership style and the organizational performance of commercial state corporations in Kenya using a cross-sectional survey of top management teams in 52 corporations. The study found that integrative leadership ($\beta = 0.602$, $p < .001$) and government regulations ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted performance, jointly explaining 55.9 percent of the variance, and that government regulations significantly moderated the relationship ($\beta = 0.113$, $p < .001$). However, the study focused on commercial state corporations and on a single leadership style. The current study addresses this gap by examining multiple leadership competencies within private chartered universities.

Kipngetich *et al*. (2025) examined the influence of regulatory frameworks on leadership driven performance outcomes in the domestic aviation sector in Kenya using a positivist cross-sectional survey of 170 senior and middle-level managers from all 17 licensed domestic airlines, with data analysed using correlation and hierarchical multiple regression. The study found that innovative leadership was strongly associated with performance ($r = 0.800$, $p < .01$) and that the regulatory framework significantly moderated the leadership and performance relationship ($\beta = 0.031$, $p = .027$), increasing the explained variance from 64.0 to 72.6 percent. However, the study focused on the aviation sector and on innovative leadership. The current study addresses this gap by extending this inquiry to private chartered universities in Kenya.

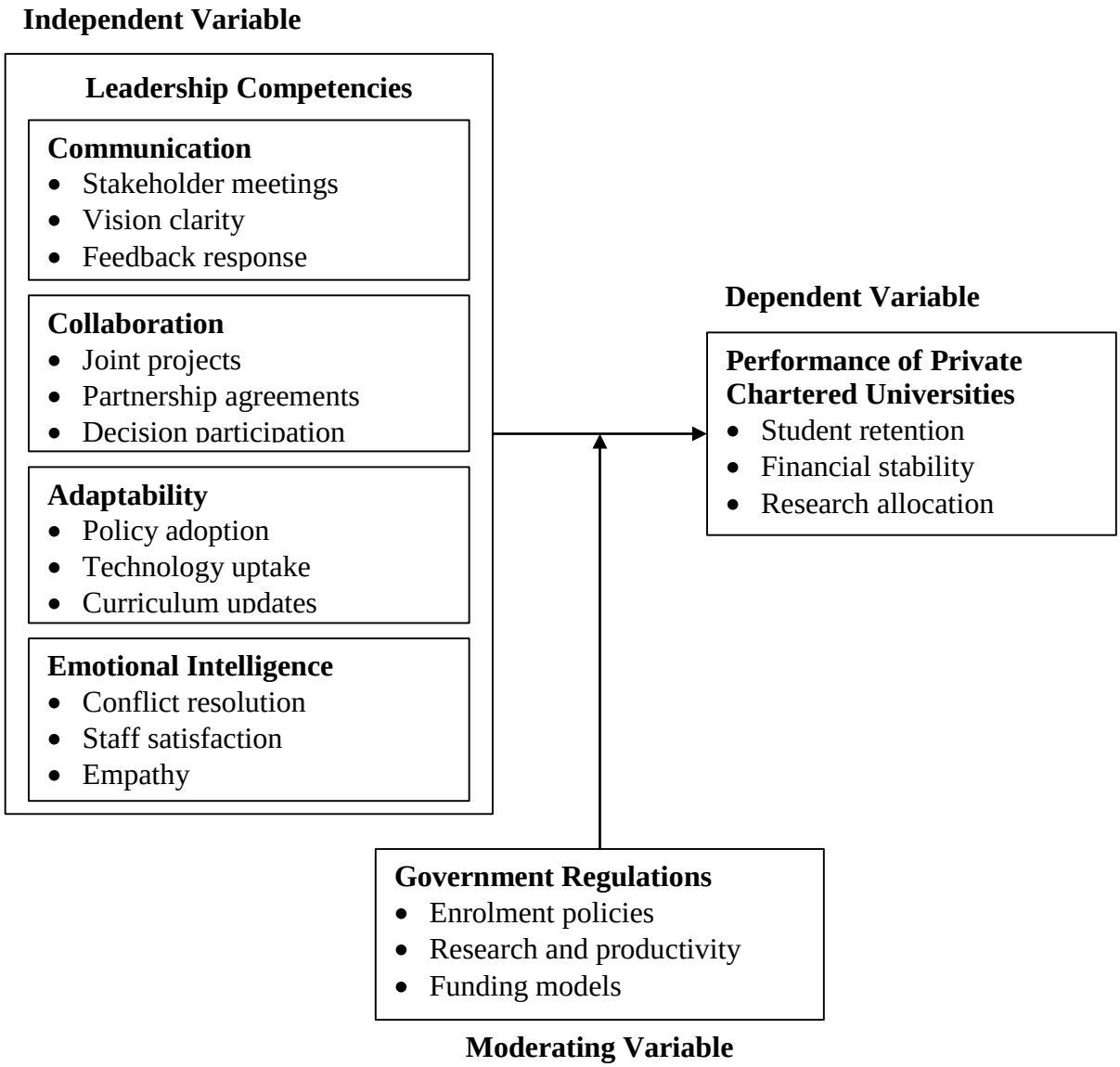
Awino *et al*. (2026) examined leadership development, capacity building, and employee performance in devolved government in Kenya, with government policies as the moderating variable, using data from five counties in the Lake Region Economic Bloc. The study found that leadership development explained 43.7 percent of the variance in employee performance, which increased to 50.7 percent when government policies were added and to 55.0 percent when the interaction term was included. The interaction term was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.194$, $p = .011$), indicating that supportive policies strengthened the effect of leadership development on performance. However, the study focused on county governments and on employee performance. The current study addresses this gap by examining institutional performance in private chartered universities in Kenya.

The reviewed studies collectively demonstrate that leadership practices, managerial capabilities, and regulatory frameworks are important in explaining organizational performance. Handayani *et al*. (2022) and Gollagari *et al*. (2021) highlighted indirect and governance mechanisms linking leadership to outcomes, while Rubera and Ngui (2023) and Mbithi *et al*. (2024) emphasized leadership practices and managerial capabilities in university performance. Kivindo *et al*. (2024), Mungatana *et al*. (2025), Kipngetich *et al*. (2025), and Awino *et al*. (2026) reported significant moderating effects of regulatory frameworks or government policies across public universities, state corporations, aviation, and county governments. However, these studies focused on specific leadership styles, managerial capabilities, or organizations outside private higher education, thereby justifying a test of whether government regulations moderate the influence of leadership competencies on the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 positions leadership competencies, comprising communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, as the independent variable; government regulations, comprising enrolment policies, research and productivity regulations, and funding models, as the moderating variable; and the performance of private chartered universities, measured through student retention, financial stability, and research allocation, as the dependent variable.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a positivist philosophy, which relies on formulating and testing hypotheses to establish relationships between variables through objective measurement and statistical analysis (Saunders *et al*., 2007). A cross-sectional explanatory survey design enabled the simultaneous measurement of leadership competencies, government regulations, and performance across the 32 private chartered universities in Kenya at a single point in time (Taris *et al*., 2021). The target population comprised the 32 private chartered universities authorized by CUE as of March 2026. The unit of analysis was the private chartered university, while the unit of observation comprised 775 institutional leaders, namely Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Research and Innovation Directors, ICT Directors, Registrars, Human Resource Managers, Finance Managers or Directors, Deans, and Heads of Departments.

A census covered all Vice-Chancellors, ICT Directors, Human Resource Managers, and Finance Managers, yielding 128 respondents. For Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Research and Innovation Directors, Deans, and Heads of Departments, the sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula with finite population correction, which produced 241 respondents selected through proportionate stratified random sampling. The overall sample therefore comprised 369 respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with five-point Likert scale items ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Leadership competencies were measured using 42 items, government regulations using nine items, and performance using nine items.

The questionnaire was pretested on 37 respondents drawn from private university constituent colleges and institutions with Letters of Interim Authority, which were excluded from the main study. Content and face validity were established through review by the research supervisors and feedback from the pretest respondents, while construct validity was assessed using principal component analysis, with all items recording communalities above 0.50. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .814 for communication, .886 for collaboration, .764 for adaptability, .809 for emotional intelligence, .818 for government regulations, and .939 for performance, all exceeding the 0.70 threshold. Data were analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation, and hierarchical moderated regression at the 0.05 level of significance, following Baron and Kenny (1986). Leadership competencies and government regulations were entered in Model 1, and their interaction term was added in Model 2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate

The study targeted 369 respondents from the 32 private chartered universities in Kenya. Of the 369 questionnaires distributed, 302 were fully completed and used for analysis, representing a response rate of 81.8 percent, while 67 questionnaires (18.2 percent) were not returned. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) regard a response rate of 70 percent and above as very good for analysis and reporting; the response rate was therefore adequate for descriptive, correlation, and moderated regression analysis. This response rate was attributed to follow-up by trained research assistants, the option of completing the questionnaire in hard copy or through Google Forms, and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality given to all respondents.

Descriptive Statistics

Leadership Competencies

Leadership competencies were measured through communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence on a five-point Likert scale. Mean scores were interpreted as follows: 1.00 to 1.49 strongly disagree, 1.50 to 2.49 disagree, 2.50 to 3.49 neutral, 3.50 to 4.49 agree, and 4.50 to 5.00 strongly agree. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for communication.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Communication

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
In the university, stakeholders participate in institutional decision-making.	3.86	0.75
University leadership regularly organizes consultation forums with different stakeholder groups.	3.82	0.69
In the university, stakeholder engagement sessions promote transparent communication with stakeholders for collaborative decision-making.	3.97	0.66
University leadership clearly communicates the institution's strategic direction across all organizational levels.	4.01	0.69
University leadership clearly communicates the institutional vision across all organizational levels.	4.14	0.68
University leadership communicates strategic priorities clearly across the institution.	4.15	0.77
University leadership communicates organizational goals clearly to all members.	3.91	0.66
University leadership provides timely responses to feedback from stakeholders regarding institutional policies.	3.98	0.70
The university promptly considers stakeholder input when making decisions.	3.99	0.64
The university has effective feedback mechanisms between leadership and organizational members.	3.85	0.80
Composite score	**3.97**	**0.41**

Source: Research Data (2026)

The composite mean for communication was 3.97 (SD = 0.41), indicating that respondents agreed that leaders in private chartered universities communicated effectively with stakeholders. The communication of strategic priorities recorded the highest mean of 4.15 (SD = 0.77), followed by the communication of the institutional vision across all organizational levels (M = 4.14, SD = 0.68), showing that clarity of direction was the strongest aspect of communication. The lowest mean of 3.82 (SD = 0.69) was recorded for the regular organization of consultation forums with stakeholder groups, while effective feedback mechanisms between leadership and organizational members recorded a mean of 3.85 (SD = 0.80). This finding is consistent with Strategic Leadership Theory, which holds that strategic leaders determine and articulate the strategic direction of the organization (Ireland & Hitt, 1999). Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for collaboration.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Collaboration

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
University leadership encourages joint projects across departments.	3.96	0.68
The university promotes interdisciplinary research initiatives.	3.98	0.67
The university promotes cross-functional collaboration among organizational units.	4.23	0.68
The university establishes partnership agreements with external organizations.	3.92	0.78
The university establishes strategic alliances with industry stakeholders.	4.19	0.69
Industry partnerships contribute to the improvement of academic programmes.	4.04	0.76
The university collaborates with other universities.	3.95	0.77
The university engages in resource sharing with other universities.	3.98	0.74
In the university, stakeholders participate in institutional governance.	3.78	0.89
The university involves relevant stakeholders in strategic planning.	4.00	0.68
The university involves organizational members in decision-making processes.	3.89	0.76
The university involves stakeholders in institutional decision-making.	4.00	0.64
Composite score	**3.99**	**0.45**

Source: Research Data (2026)

The composite mean for collaboration was 3.99 (SD = 0.45), indicating that respondents agreed that university leaders fostered collaboration through joint projects, partnerships, and participative decision-making. Cross-functional collaboration among organizational units recorded the highest mean of 4.23 (SD = 0.68), followed by strategic alliances with industry

stakeholders (M = 4.19, SD = 0.69). Stakeholder participation in institutional governance recorded the lowest mean of 3.78 (SD = 0.89) and the highest variability, implying that participative governance was less developed than other aspects of collaboration. This finding supports the view of Strategic Leadership Theory that strategic leaders work with others to initiate changes that create a viable future for the organization (Ireland & Hitt, 1999). Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for adaptability.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Adaptability

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
University leadership quickly adopts new policies in response to regulatory changes.	3.90	0.75
The university effectively implements institutional reforms to address emerging challenges.	3.77	0.77
The university promptly modifies policies in response to government regulations.	4.19	0.64
University leadership integrates digital innovations into university operations.	4.13	0.66
Digital innovations improve operational efficiency in the university.	3.94	0.72
In the university, digital technologies are adopted to enhance teaching and learning.	3.75	0.64
The university uses modern technology to streamline administrative operations.	3.99	0.73
The university regularly updates its curriculum in response to market demands.	4.17	0.64
The university regularly revises its academic programmes.	4.00	0.66
The university regularly updates its course content in response to industry requirements.	4.08	0.71
Composite score	**3.99**	**0.42**

Source: Research Data (2026)

The composite mean for adaptability was 3.99 (SD = 0.42), indicating that respondents agreed that university leaders responded effectively to regulatory, technological, and market changes. The prompt modification of policies in response to government regulations recorded the highest mean of 4.19 (SD = 0.64), followed by regular curriculum updates in response to market demands (M = 4.17, SD = 0.64). The adoption of digital technologies to enhance teaching and learning recorded the lowest mean of 3.75 (SD = 0.64), and the implementation of institutional reforms recorded a mean of 3.77 (SD = 0.77), suggesting that universities adapted faster to regulatory demands than to internally driven reforms and that digital adoption in academic delivery was uneven. This finding is consistent with Strategic Leadership Theory,

which treats the capacity for change as a core attribute of strategic leaders (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for emotional intelligence.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Intelligence

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
University leadership effectively resolves workplace conflicts.	4.27	0.61
The university constructively manages interpersonal disputes to maintain organizational harmony.	4.01	0.70
The university has effective mechanisms for resolving workplace conflicts.	4.13	0.77
The university has high staff satisfaction levels due to supportive leadership practices.	3.74	0.78
The university leadership maintains a positive workplace climate.	4.13	0.71
University leadership promotes positive employee morale.	3.76	0.76
The university leadership creates a work environment that enhances job satisfaction.	3.70	0.86
The university leadership demonstrates empathy in responding to stakeholder concerns.	3.75	0.75
University leadership responds appropriately to the emotional needs of organizational members.	3.82	0.85
University leadership demonstrates empathy toward stakeholders.	4.08	0.75
Composite score	**3.94**	**0.45**

Source: Research Data (2026)

The composite mean for emotional intelligence was 3.94 (SD = 0.45), indicating that respondents agreed that university leaders managed conflicts and demonstrated empathy. The effective resolution of workplace conflicts recorded the highest mean of 4.27 (SD = 0.61), which was also the highest among all leadership competency items. The creation of a work environment that enhances job satisfaction recorded the lowest mean of 3.70 (SD = 0.86), followed by high staff satisfaction levels (M = 3.74, SD = 0.78) and positive employee morale (M = 3.76, SD = 0.76). These results show that although leaders maintained a positive workplace climate, this climate had not fully translated into staff satisfaction. Emotional intelligence recorded the lowest composite mean among the four competencies, which signals a development priority, given that Degebas (2023) established emotional intelligence as a significant predictor of leadership competence in Ethiopian higher education.

Government Regulations

Government regulations were measured through enrolment policies, research and productivity regulations, and funding models on a five-point Likert scale, and mean scores were interpreted using the same scale. Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for government regulations.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Government Regulations

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
The university complies with CUE admission standards.	4.02	0.72
The university complies with government policies on student intake.	3.74	0.70
The university complies with government admission regulations.	4.06	0.76
The university complies with research ethical approval requirements set by national regulatory bodies.	4.00	0.65
The university complies with intellectual property regulations governing innovations.	3.87	0.67
The university research governance regulations support research productivity.	3.79	0.72
Government funding policies for universities support institutional financial sustainability.	3.90	0.66
HELB policies dictate the degree to which leadership decisions influence student enrollment trends.	3.86	0.69
Government funding regulations in higher education underpin institutional financial sustainability.	4.08	0.67
Composite score	**3.92**	**0.43**

Source: Research Data (2026)

The composite mean for government regulations was 3.92 (SD = 0.43), indicating that respondents agreed that their universities complied with enrolment, research, and funding regulations. The statement that government funding regulations underpin institutional financial sustainability recorded the highest mean of 4.08 (SD = 0.67), indicating that respondents recognized the importance of the funding framework for institutional financial sustainability. Compliance with government admission regulations recorded the second highest mean of 4.06 (SD = 0.76), followed by compliance with CUE admission standards (M = 4.02, SD = 0.72), showing that admission requirements were consistently observed.

Compliance with government policies on student intake recorded the lowest mean of 3.74 (SD = 0.70), suggesting that intake quotas were less consistently observed than admission standards. Similarly, the statement that research governance regulations support research productivity recorded a mean of 3.79 (SD = 0.72), indicating that although universities complied with research ethics requirements (M = 4.00, SD = 0.65), fewer respondents agreed that research regulations supported research productivity. This finding is consistent with Institutional Theory, which holds that organizations conform to coercive regulatory pressures to gain legitimacy within their institutional environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995). The finding also agrees with Rubera and Ngui (2023), who established a significant

positive correlation between the regulatory framework and the performance of chartered universities in Kenya.

Performance of Private Chartered Universities

The dependent variable, performance of private chartered universities in Kenya, was measured through student retention (items 1 to 3), financial stability (items 4 to 6), and research allocation (items 7 to 9). Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics for performance.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Performance of Private Chartered Universities

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
High student completion rates serve as a primary indicator of strong student retention within the university.	1.0%	2.0%	17.9%	57.9%	21.2%	3.96	0.75
High-quality instruction serves as a key driver of student persistence toward degree completion.	0.0%	2.0%	13.6%	50.7%	33.8%	4.16	0.73
Comprehensive institutional support services significantly bolster student retention rates within the university.	0.0%	1.3%	22.2%	59.3%	17.2%	3.92	0.67
Balanced university revenue-to-expenditure ratios serve as a clear indicator of sound fiscal governance.	0.0%	3.0%	25.5%	57.0%	14.6%	3.83	0.70
In the university, diversified and sustainable revenue channels are established to maintain long-term institutional operations.	0.0%	3.0%	24.8%	51.3%	20.9%	3.90	0.75
In the university, resources are managed efficiently to maintain fiscal health.	0.0%	1.7%	23.2%	57.3%	17.9%	3.91	0.69
In the university, a high volume of publications per faculty member serves as a primary metric of institutional scholarly productivity.	0.3%	2.0%	20.9%	56.6%	20.2%	3.94	0.72
The volume of research grants secured per faculty member serves as a primary metric of institutional research capability.	0.0%	2.3%	24.2%	56.0%	17.5%	3.89	0.71
In the university, adequate resources are allocated to support research activities.	0.3%	1.7%	19.9%	53.3%	24.8%	4.01	0.74
Composite score						3.95	0.50

Source: Research Data (2026)

A total of 79.1% of respondents agreed that high student completion rates indicate strong student retention, 3.0% disagreed, and 17.9% were neutral (M = 3.96, SD = 0.75). Regarding high-quality instruction as a driver of student persistence, 84.4% agreed, 2.0% disagreed, and 13.6% were neutral, with a mean of 4.16 (SD = 0.73). Further, 76.5% agreed that institutional support services bolster student retention, while 1.3% disagreed and 22.2% were neutral (M = 3.92, SD = 0.67). High-quality instruction recorded the highest mean on the performance scale, indicating that respondents regarded teaching quality as the main driver of student retention.

A total of 71.5% of respondents agreed that balanced revenue-to-expenditure ratios indicate sound fiscal governance, 3.0% disagreed, and 25.5% were neutral (M = 3.83, SD = 0.70). Regarding diversified and sustainable revenue channels, 72.2% agreed, 3.0% disagreed, and 24.8% were neutral, with a mean of 3.90 (SD = 0.75). Further, 75.2% agreed that resources are managed efficiently to maintain fiscal health, while 1.7% disagreed and 23.2% were neutral (M = 3.91, SD = 0.69). Financial stability items recorded the lowest means on the performance scale, with the revenue-to-expenditure ratio recording the lowest mean, which is consistent with the financial pressures facing private universities highlighted in the statement of the problem.

A total of 76.8% of respondents agreed that a high volume of publications per faculty member is a primary metric of scholarly productivity, 2.3% disagreed, and 20.9% were neutral (M = 3.94, SD = 0.72). Regarding research grants secured per faculty member as a metric of research capability, 73.5% agreed, 2.3% disagreed, and 24.2% were neutral, with a mean of 3.89 (SD = 0.71). Further, 78.1% agreed that adequate resources are allocated to support research activities, while 2.0% disagreed and 19.9% were neutral (M = 4.01, SD = 0.74). The allocation of resources to support research recorded a higher mean than the volume of research grants secured, suggesting that institutional investment in research had not fully translated into external research funding.

The composite mean for performance was 3.95 (SD = 0.50), which falls within the agree range, indicating that respondents agreed that their universities performed well in student retention, financial stability, and research allocation. Student retention recorded the strongest ratings, while financial stability recorded the weakest. This finding is consistent with the resource-based view, which holds that organizations achieve superior performance by deploying valuable resources, including human, financial, and intellectual capital (Barney, 1991). The weaker ratings on financial stability are consistent with Handayani *et al*. (2022), who found that the financial sustainability of private universities depended on transparency and

accountability rather than directly on leadership, and with the dependence of private universities on tuition revenue discussed in Chapter One.

Correlation Analysis

Spearman rank-order correlation was used because normality tests showed that the aggregate study variables departed from a normal distribution (Field, 2013). Table 7 presents the Spearman correlation results for leadership competencies, government regulations, and performance.

Table 7: Spearman Correlation among Leadership Competencies, Government Regulations, and Performance

	Performance	Leadership Competencies	Government Regulations
Performance	1.000		
Leadership Competencies	.799**	1.000	
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
Government Regulations	.185**	.099	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.086	
N	302	302	302

Source: Research Data (2026). **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Government regulations recorded a weak, positive, and statistically significant relationship with the performance of private chartered universities ($r_s = .185$, $p < .01$), while leadership competencies recorded a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship with performance ($r_s = .799$, $p < .01$). The relationship between government regulations and leadership competencies was weak, positive, and not statistically significant ($r_s = .099$, $p = .086$). The weak coefficients indicate that government regulations shared limited variance with the other variables, consistent with a moderating variable whose influence is expected to operate mainly through interaction with leadership competencies. The positive relationship between government regulations and performance is consistent with Rubera and Ngui (2023), although the weak coefficient indicates that regulations had a smaller direct association with performance than leadership competencies.

4.4 Moderated Regression Analysis

The objective of the study was to evaluate the moderating influence of government regulations on the relationship between leadership competencies and the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya. The corresponding null hypothesis (H_{01}) stated that there is no statistically significant moderating influence of government regulations on this relationship.

Following Baron and Kenny (1986), step one established the effect of leadership competencies on performance. Step two established that the relationship between government regulations and performance was weak, positive, and statistically significant ($r_s = .185$, $p < .01$). Step three entered leadership competencies and government regulations together (Model 1), and step four added their interaction term (Model 2). Table 8 presents the model summary results.

Table 8: Model Summary for the Moderating Effect of Government Regulations

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.792	.627	.625	.3053793
2	.842	.708	.705	.2704615

Note. Source: Research Data (2026)

In Model 1, leadership competencies and government regulations jointly explained 62.7 percent of the variance in performance ($R = 0.792$, $R^2 = 0.627$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.625$). In Model 2, the interaction term increased the explained variance to 70.8 percent ($R = 0.842$, $R^2 = 0.708$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.705$). The increase of 8.1 percentage points ($\Delta R^2 = 0.081$) indicates that the interaction between leadership competencies and government regulations explained additional variation in performance. Table 9 presents the ANOVA results.

Table 9: ANOVA for the Moderating Effect of Government Regulations

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	46.871	2	23.436	251.304	.000
	Residual	27.884	299	.093		
	Total	74.755	301			
2	Regression	52.957	3	17.652	241.317	.000
	Residual	21.799	298	.073		
	Total	74.755	301			

Note. Dependent variable: Performance.

Source: Research Data (2026)

The ANOVA results confirm that both models were statistically significant. Model 1 recorded $F(2, 299) = 251.304$, $p < 0.05$, while Model 2 recorded $F(3, 298) = 241.317$, $p < 0.05$. The residual sum of squares declined from 27.884 in Model 1 to 21.799 in Model 2, confirming that the interaction term improved model fit. Table 10 presents the regression coefficients.

Table 10: Regression Coefficients for the Moderating Effect of Government Regulations

Model		Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-.908	.221		-4.100	.000
	Leadership Competencies	1.189	.053	.786	22.223	.000
	Government Regulations	.037	.020	.067	1.884	.061
2	(Constant)	-.405	.204		-1.988	.048
	Leadership Competencies	.700	.072	.462	9.777	.000
	Government Regulations	.017	.018	.031	.978	.329
	Leadership Competencies × Government Regulations	.097	.011	.434	9.121	.000

Note. Dependent variable: Performance.

Source: Research Data (2026)

The regression models for the moderating effect of government regulations are expressed as follows:

Model 1: $Y = -0.908 + 1.189X + 0.037Z$

Model 2: $Y = -0.405 + 0.700X + 0.017Z + 0.097(X \times Z)$

Where Y represents the performance of private chartered universities, X represents leadership competencies, Z represents government regulations, and $X \times Z$ represents the interaction term.

In Model 1, leadership competencies had a positive and statistically significant effect on performance ($B = 1.189$, $t = 22.223$, $p < 0.05$), while government regulations had a positive but insignificant effect ($B = 0.037$, $p = .061$). In Model 2, the interaction term was positive and statistically significant ($B = 0.097$, $\beta = 0.434$, $t = 9.121$, $p < 0.05$), while the main effect of government regulations remained insignificant ($B = 0.017$, $p = .329$). The positive interaction coefficient shows that the effect of leadership competencies on performance becomes stronger as the level of government regulations increases. Because government regulations had no significant direct effect on performance but interacted significantly with leadership competencies, they acted as a pure moderator. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) that there is no statistically significant moderating influence of government regulations on the relationship between leadership competencies and the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya was rejected.

The moderating effect is consistent with Kivindo *et al*. (2024), who found that the regulatory framework significantly moderated the relationship between restructuring strategies and the performance of public universities in Kenya, and with Mungatana *et al*. (2025), who found that

government regulations significantly moderated the relationship between integrative leadership and the performance of commercial state corporations in Kenya ($\beta = 0.113$, $p < .001$). The increase in explained variance from 62.7 to 70.8 percent is also comparable to that reported by Kipngetich *et al*. (2025), who reported an increase from 64.0 to 72.6 percent when the regulatory framework moderated the leadership and performance relationship.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that government regulations do not independently improve the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya but determine the extent to which leadership competencies translate into performance. Enrolment policies, research and productivity regulations, and funding models operate as an enabling institutional condition under which the same leadership competencies yield higher performance in a supportive and consistent regulatory environment. Respondents regarded funding regulations as important for financial sustainability, while compliance with student intake policies and the contribution of research governance regulations to research productivity were rated lower. The effectiveness of the regulatory framework therefore depends on its consistency, the timely release of government sponsorship funds, and its alignment with the research mandate of private universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that CUE, the Ministry of Education, the Higher Education Loans Board, and the Universities Fund maintain a consistent, predictable, and supportive regulatory environment, given the finding that government regulations significantly strengthened the effect of leadership competencies on performance ($B = 0.097$, $\beta = 0.434$, $p < .05$) and increased the explained variance from 62.7 to 70.8 percent. Policymakers should ensure the timely disbursement of government sponsorship funds and student loans to private chartered universities and review the placement of government-sponsored students so that private universities can plan their enrolment and finances with greater certainty. CUE should also communicate changes in admission standards, programme accreditation, and student intake policies in good time so that universities can adjust their plans without disrupting operations.

Regulatory bodies should review research and productivity regulations to ensure that research governance supports research productivity by streamlining ethical approval and intellectual property procedures and by widening the access of private universities to competitive national research funds. At the institutional level, the management of private chartered universities

should establish compliance and regulatory affairs units that monitor regulatory changes, coordinate compliance with enrolment, research, and funding requirements, and advise leaders on how regulatory provisions can be used to strengthen strategic decisions. CUE should, in turn, involve leaders of private chartered universities in the review of regulations and quality standards so that regulatory requirements support institutional strategy.

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