

Research Article

Impact of Employees' Oriented Leadership Style on Employee Performance: A Survey of Three Public Universities in South Sudan

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of employee-oriented leadership style on employee performance in three selected public universities in South Sudan. The study was motivated by persistent operational and socioeconomic challenges affecting the higher education sector, including staff and student strikes, delayed salary payments, inadequate infrastructure and accommodation, rising tuition costs, food shortages, armed conflict, poverty, and other disruptions associated with a fragile and post-conflict environment. These conditions have raised concerns regarding the capacity of university leadership to sustain institutional effectiveness, employee motivation, and performance. The study adopted a quantitative research approach. Data were collected using structured questionnaires distributed to academic and administrative staff across the three selected public universities. Of the 325 questionnaires distributed, 220 were successfully returned, yielding a response rate of 73%. The measurement instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.973 to 0.986. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed to examine the relationship between leadership style and employee performance. The findings demonstrated a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between employee-oriented leadership style and employee performance. Regression analysis indicated that a one-unit increase in the Leadership Styles Index was associated with a 0.605-unit increase in employee performance ($\beta = 0.886$, $p < 0.001$; 95% CI = 0.530-0.680). The findings also revealed institutional variations in leadership practices. The University of Juba and Dr. John Garang Memorial University of Science and Technology exhibited comparatively lower levels of employee-oriented leadership practices than the University of Upper Nile. The study further established that university leaders employed combinations of leadership styles, with their effectiveness varying according to institutional contexts and prevailing challenges. Several institutional constraints were identified, including weak promotion systems, inadequate infrastructure, and limited opportunities for staff development, low employee motivation, ineffective resource utilization, declining student outcomes, and high staff turnover. The study also revealed a substantial gender imbalance among academic and administrative staff, with males constituting 84.1% and females 15.9% of the study population. It recommends strengthening transparent governance and merit-based appointment systems, improving infrastructure and employee welfare, expanding professional development opportunities, enhancing academic quality, research and innovation, and accelerating digital transformation. The study further proposes the TEAD Hybrid Leadership Model, which integrates transformational, autocratic, employee-oriented, and democratic leadership approaches, as a context-sensitive framework for strengthening institutional resilience, enhancing employee performance, and supporting the long-term sustainability of public universities in South Sudan.

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Keywords

Employees, Oriented, Leadership, Style, Employee, Performance, Survey, Public, Universities, South Sudan

1. Introduction

South Sudan's higher education system has developed within a challenging historical and political context marked by conflict, limited investment, weak institutional structures, and state-building difficulties. Before independence in 2011, the University of Juba, University of Bahr El Ghazal, and University of Upper Nile were the mainly institutions serving the southern region of Sudan, followed by the establishment of other public universities, including, Dr. John Garang Memorial University, and Rumbek University of Science and Technology. Although these institutions expanded access to higher education, their growth was constrained by inadequate infrastructure, limited funding, weak governance systems, and shortages of qualified academic and administrative staff. Following independence, the departure of experienced personnel further weakened institutional capacity, particularly in academic administration, planning, research management, quality assurance, and policy implementation [1].

Contemporary public universities in South Sudan continue to face challenges related to infrastructure, financial resources, research capacity, staff development, increasing student enrolment, and institutional systems. Effective governance is therefore essential for improving university performance and sustainability. Key areas include strategic planning, policy formulation, quality assurance, transparent financial management, accountability, and stakeholder participation [21]. National and international initiatives, including those supported by UNESCO and UNDP, have sought to strengthen institutional capacity, research, policy coordination, and quality improvement. Strong governance requires universities to connect national higher education priorities with institutional strategies while ensuring that resources are managed transparently and that students, staff, government, communities, employers, and development partners participate meaningfully in institutional development.

The literature generally emphasizes that effective leadership and management are central to transforming higher education institutions in South Sudan. [1] highlights higher education reform and institutional development, while [10] identifies structural challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and limited resources. [19] emphasizes strategic leadership, accountability, and effective management, [11] highlights visionary leadership in university development, [9] focuses on human resource management and organizational capacity, and [16] emphasizes the role of universities in knowledge production, post-conflict state-building and national development.

Collectively, these studies suggest that university effectiveness depends on capable leadership, good governance, strategic planning, resource management, innovation, and institutional capacity. However, limited empirical research has specifically examined the relationship between leadership practices and institutional effectiveness in South Sudan's public universities, creating a gap that the present study seeks to address.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The inadequate understanding of leadership roles and their influence on employee performance remains a significant concern in South Sudanese public universities. Weak leadership practices have been associated with poor institutional outcomes, including low-quality graduate output, inadequate and unstable learning facilities, high teaching-staff turnover, employee dissatisfaction, delayed promotion, unfavorable working conditions, and perceived workplace inequalities [10]. These challenges are further compounded by recurring disruptions and closures of public universities resulting from socio-economic and institutional constraints, such as food shortages, rising tuition fees, inadequate accommodation, and delayed salary payments. Armed conflict, widespread poverty, and the destruction of lives and property have also undermined the continuity, stability, and effectiveness of higher education institutions in the country.

Although leadership plays an important role in shaping employee motivation, attitudes, and performance, limited empirical attention has been devoted to examining how specific leadership styles affect employee performance in South Sudanese public universities. This knowledge gap is particularly important given the challenging institutional and socio-economic environment in which these universities operate. Therefore, this study examines the influence of employees' oriented leadership on employee performance in selected public universities in South Sudan, with the aim of generating empirical evidence that can inform leadership practices, enhance employee performance, and contribute to improved institutional effectiveness.

1.2. Objective of the Study

To examine the impact of employees' oriented leadership styles on employees' performances.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Robert House developed 2Path-Goal Theory of leadership in the early 1970s, building on earlier work by Martin Evans [23]. The theory represents an important contribution to the contingency perspective of leadership because it explains leadership effectiveness primarily in terms of employee motivation. Its theoretical foundation is derived from Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation, which proposes that individuals are motivated when they perceive a clear relationship between their effort, performance, and valued outcomes. Accordingly, Path-Goal Theory proposes that a fundamental responsibility of leaders is to clarify the means through which employees can achieve desired goals, provide the necessary support, and remove obstacles that may hinder their performance [14]. In contrast to Fiedler's Contingency Theory, which largely views leadership style as relatively stable, Path-Goal Theory assumes that leaders can adjust their behaviours in response to the characteristics of employees and the demands of the work environment [17]. House identified four major leadership behaviours: directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership. Directive leadership provides clear instructions, expectations, and procedures; supportive leadership emphasizes concern for employees' welfare and creates a friendly work environment; participative leadership involves employees in decision-making; and achievement-oriented leadership emphasizes challenging goals and confidence in employees' capabilities. The central proposition is that leaders should select or combine behaviours that complement employees' needs and the characteristics of their tasks in order to enhance motivation, satisfaction, and performance.

The effectiveness of these leadership behaviours is contingent upon both follower and task characteristics. Follower characteristics include employees' preferences for structure, need for affiliation, desire for control, and perceptions of their own competence [5]. For example, employees who have a strong desire for autonomy and control may respond positively to participative leadership, whereas employees facing uncertainty regarding their roles or abilities may benefit from directive leadership. Similarly, task characteristics, including task structure, organizational authority systems, and work-group dynamics, influence the appropriateness of particular leadership behaviours. Directive leadership may be particularly useful when tasks are ambiguous or poorly structured because it provides clarity regarding responsibilities and procedures. Conversely, supportive leadership may be more appropriate where employees perform repetitive, stressful, or monotonous tasks because it can enhance satisfaction and reduce the negative effects of demanding working conditions [6].

A substantial body of empirical research has examined Path-Goal Theory, with findings providing considerable, although not uniform, support for its central propositions. Research has particularly supported the relationship between

supportive leadership and employee satisfaction, especially in stressful, demanding, or frustrating work environments. Supportive leadership is therefore important because leaders' concern for employee welfare may reduce the negative effects associated with difficult working conditions and contribute to more positive employee attitudes. Similarly, participative leadership has been associated with employee involvement, engagement, and performance, particularly where tasks are ambiguous and employees value autonomy and participation in decision-making. Employee participation can improve understanding of organizational objectives, strengthen perceptions of control and ownership, and increase commitment to decisions and organizational goals. Evidence has also supported the use of directive leadership in situations characterized by role ambiguity and complex or poorly structured tasks. However, directive behaviour may become less beneficial when tasks are already clearly defined and routine [12].

Further evidence was provided by [19], whose meta-analysis of 120 studies identified general support for several of the fundamental propositions of Path-Goal Theory, while also acknowledging inconsistencies across individual studies. Overall, the evidence suggests that leadership behaviours can influence employee motivation, satisfaction, and performance when they are appropriately aligned with situational requirements. The theory consequently emphasizes the leader's ability to diagnose employee and task characteristics and to provide the appropriate combination of direction, support, participation, or challenge needed to facilitate goal attainment [23]. Thus, Path-Goal Theory provides a useful framework for understanding leadership as a dynamic process in which leadership behaviour is adjusted according to the needs of employees and the circumstances in which they perform their work.

Despite its theoretical and empirical contributions, Path-Goal Theory has several limitations. One major criticism concerns its complexity. The theory requires leaders to evaluate multiple follower and environmental characteristics before selecting an appropriate leadership behaviour. Such continuous assessment may place considerable cognitive demands on leaders and may be difficult to implement consistently in complex organizational environments. A second limitation is the inconsistency of empirical findings. Although supportive and participative leadership have received considerable support, evidence concerning the relationship between particular leadership behaviours and employee performance has been less consistent. These inconsistencies suggest that additional contextual and individual variables may influence the relationship between leadership behaviour and employee outcomes. Consequently, some scholars have argued that the theory is conceptually comprehensive but difficult to operationalize and empirically test in its entirety.

Another limitation is the theory's relatively strong emphasis on the leader as the primary source of employee motivation. The model gives comparatively less attention to the proactive role of employees in seeking information, requesting feedback,

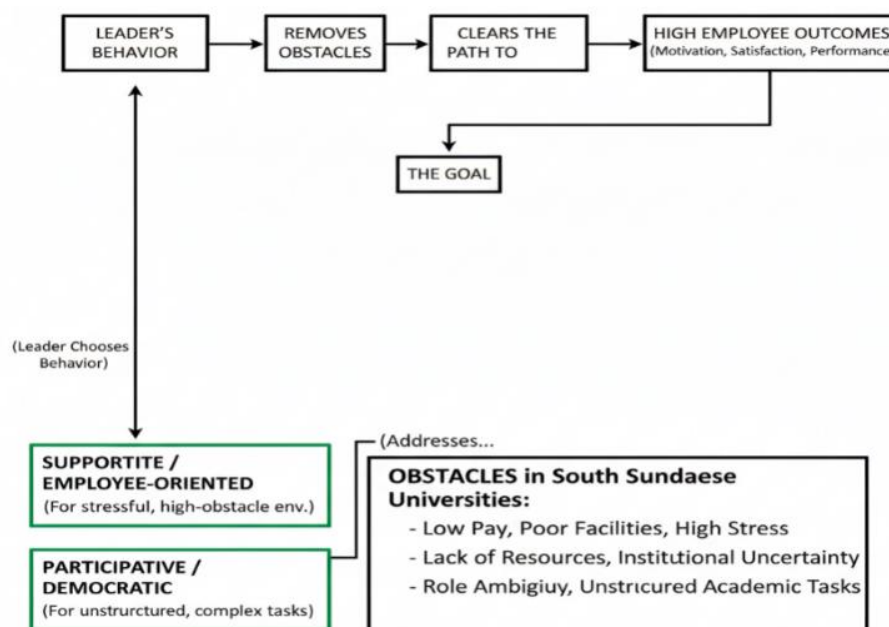
clarifying expectations, and influencing their own work environments [18]. In addition, the theory does not fully explain the psychological mechanisms through which leadership behaviours translate into employee motivation and performance. Although it proposes a relationship between leader behaviour and employee motivation, factors such as self-efficacy, psychological safety, and other psychological processes may mediate this relationship [15]. More recent leadership research has therefore sought to provide greater insight into these underlying mechanisms.

Path-Goal Theory is particularly relevant to the present study because it provides a theoretical framework for examining how leadership behaviours can influence employee motivation and performance under challenging organizational conditions. Public universities in South Sudan operate within an environment characterized by institutional and socioeconomic constraints, including inadequate infrastructure, delayed or insufficient salaries, limited professional development opportunities, high levels of uncertainty, and stressful working conditions [20]. These conditions represent barriers that may affect employees' ability and motivation to perform effectively. The central proposition of Path-Goal Theory that leaders can enhance employee outcomes by clarifying goals, providing support, and removing obstacles is therefore particularly applicable to this institutional context.

The theory provides an important theoretical foundation for

examining employee-oriented leadership in the present study. Its supportive leadership dimension closely corresponds with employee-oriented leadership because both emphasize concern for employees' welfare, needs, and working conditions. Path-Goal Theory suggests that supportive leadership is particularly valuable when employees operate in stressful, frustrating, or demanding environments [13]. Accordingly, within the context of South Sudanese public universities, employee-oriented leadership may be important for addressing employee concerns, strengthening motivation, improving satisfaction, and facilitating effective performance. The theory therefore provides a basis for examining whether leadership practices that emphasize employee welfare and support are associated with improved employee performance under conditions of institutional adversity.

Overall, Path Goal Theory provides a strong conceptual foundation for examining the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance in South Sudanese public universities. Its emphasis on adapting leadership behavior to employee needs and environmental conditions is particularly relevant to institutions operating within fragile and resource constrained contexts. The theory consequently enables the study to examine how employee-oriented leadership behaviors may facilitate or constrain employee motivation and performance under varying institutional circumstances.



Source: Constructed by authors (2026)

Figure 1. Application of Path Goal Theory in the South Sudanese three selected Universities.

This horizontal model operationalizes Path-Goal Theory within the specific, high-obstacle context of South Sudanese public universities. The model's logic flows from left to right. It begins with the Leader's Behavior, which, according to the

theory, is selected based on the specific contextual and follower needs. The model visually isolates the two leader behaviors most relevant to this study: Supportive/Employee-Oriented and Participative/Democratic. The model then shows

how each of these behaviors is designed to address a specific set of Obstacles prevalent in the South Sudanese university system. Supportive/Employee-Oriented leadership directly confronts the psychological and environmental obstacles of low pay, high stress, and institutional uncertainty. Participative/Democratic leadership, in turn, addresses the task-related obstacles of role ambiguity and the unstructured nature of many academic and administrative duties. By targeting these specific challenges, the leader's behavior serves its primary function: to Remove Obstacles. Once the obstacles are removed or mitigated, the model shows the path to the goal becomes clearer for the employee. This leads to the final stage: High Employee Outcomes. The theory predicts that by clearing the path, the leader will successfully boost employees' motivation, satisfaction, and ultimately, performance. This visual representation provides a clear, theory-driven framework for investigating this study's key objective.

2.1. A Critical Review on Employee-oriented Leadership and Employees' Performance

A significant body of literature establishes employee-oriented leadership, often termed supportive or relationship-oriented leadership, as one of the most consistent and powerful positive predictors of employee well-being and job satisfaction. The foundational research for this style can be traced back to the Ohio State Leadership Studies in the 1950s, which identified consideration as a key leadership dimension, defined by behaviors that show concern, respect, and trust for followers [7]. A more recent and highly influential meta-analysis by Judge, [2] synthesized the results of 130 studies to examine the relationship between the Ohio State dimensions and various outcomes. The meta-analysis, using advanced correlational and regression techniques on a massive aggregated dataset, found a strong and significant positive correlation between consideration (employee-oriented) behaviors and follower job satisfaction ($r = 0.46$) and motivation ($r = 0.50$). The findings from this large-scale analysis provide a robust and generalizable conclusion that leaders who prioritize the well-being and needs of their employees cultivate a more satisfied and motivated workforce. However, the vast majority of studies included in the meta-analysis were conducted in Western, corporate contexts. There is a critical gap in understanding the strength and mechanisms of this relationship in a non-western, public sector, and post-conflict environment like South Sudan, where the fundamental drivers of job satisfaction may be different and more complex. This work is strongly supported by [4] Path-Goal Theory, which posits that supportive leadership is most impact in stressful environments, and by the work of [18] in Irish healthcare, which directly linked supportive leadership to reduced burnout [17].

The literature consistently demonstrates that employee-oriented leadership is a critical factor in reducing employee stress and mitigating the negative effects of high-pressure work en-

vironments. A quantitative study by [12] explored how employee-oriented leadership impacts engagement and well-being among healthcare professionals in Spain. The researchers conducted a mixed-methods study, with a quantitative phase that surveyed 250 doctors, nurses, and administrative staff using established scales like the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The hierarchical regression analysis was statistically significant, revealing that perceptions of supportive leadership (defined by active listening, empathy, and support for work-life balance) explained a substantial portion of the variance in employee engagement scores ($\Delta R^2 = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$) and was negatively correlated with burnout. The findings from [7] provide strong evidence that a caring and supportive leadership style acts as a crucial buffer against workplace stress, particularly in demanding professions like healthcare. However, the study is situated in a well-resourced European healthcare system. It does not address whether employee-oriented leadership can have the same powerful buffering effect in a severely resource-scarce and chronically high-stress environment like a South Sudanese university, where the sources of stress are often systemic and beyond the leader's immediate control. This highlights a gap for research on the limits of supportive leadership in the face of overwhelming structural obstacles. This finding is consistent with the Job Demands Resources (JDR) model, which posits that job resources like supervisor support can buffer the negative impact of high job demands [15].

Employee-oriented leadership is strongly linked to a reduction in employee turnover intentions and an increase in organizational loyalty. A quantitative survey by [25] analyzed the influence of employee-oriented leadership on turnover intentions among 350 employees in various Chinese manufacturing companies. The study utilized multiple regression analyses to test the relationships between supportive leadership behaviors (supportive communication, recognition, work-life balance promotion) and employees' intentions to leave. The results were statistically significant, showing a strong negative correlation between employee-oriented leadership and turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.39$, $p < 0.01$). The analysis further revealed that psychological safety served as a key mediating variable in this relationship. The findings from [25] provide clear evidence that leaders who show genuine concern for their employees' welfare create a secure and valued environment that makes employees want to stay. However, the study's focus on the manufacturing sector in China, a context with high labor mobility, may not be directly transferable to the academic sector in South Sudan, where alternative employment opportunities for highly specialized staff are scarce. There is a critical gap in understanding whether supportive leadership reduces turnover in such a context because it fosters genuine loyalty (affective commitment) or simply because employees have nowhere else to go (continuance commitment). This distinction is vital for understanding the true health of the organization. The study's findings are supported by a vast body of research on the antecedents of turnover, including the meta-

analysis by [12], which identified supervisor support as a key predictor of retention [8].

2.2. Positive Impact of Employee-Oriented Leadership

The literature suggests that the positive impact of employee-oriented leadership extends beyond individual feelings to foster a more collaborative and supportive organizational climate. A quantitative study by [11] investigated how employee-oriented leadership promotes organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) among 300 employees in Brazilian service organizations. Using a combination of surveys and validated scales, their analysis revealed that leaders who demonstrated genuine concern, provided developmental support, and fostered a participative environment had a significant positive impact on the prevalence of OCBs. The regression results indicated that supportive leadership was a strong predictor of both interpersonal OCBs (e.g., helping colleagues) and organizational OCBs (e.g., promoting the organization). The study identified trust and perceived fairness as critical mediating variables. The findings from [20] are important as they show that a caring leadership style does not just benefit the individual employee but also contributes to a more cooperative and helpful organizational culture. However, the study notes that cultural dimensions such as collectivism and power distance can influence how supportive leadership is perceived and enacted. There is a significant gap for research that explores how the unique cultural and ethnic dynamics of South Sudan might shape the relationship between supportive leadership and cooperative behaviors within a university setting, where interdepartmental collaboration is crucial for success. This finding is consistent with the principles of social exchange theory, which posits that when leaders care for employees, employees reciprocate with positive behaviors that benefit the organization [19].

2.3. Challenges of Employee-Oriented Leadership

A key challenge of employee-oriented leadership is the potential disconnect between a leader's caring intentions and their ability to provide tangible developmental opportunities. While a leader may be supportive emotionally, this does not always translate into structured support for career advancement. A study by [13] in their comprehensive review of leadership and motivation highlighted this potential implementation gap. They argued, based on a synthesis of numerous studies, that while relationship-oriented behaviors are excellent for building trust and morale, they are insufficient on their own for driving performance if not paired with task-oriented behaviors that provide structure and opportunities for growth. A quantitative study by [6] in the South Korean banking sector provided empirical evidence for this. Their survey of 400 employees found that while supportive leadership was strongly

linked to job satisfaction, its impact on performance was significantly amplified when combined with transformational leadership behaviors that provided individualized consideration and developmental challenges. The findings from this body of literature suggest that simply being nice is not enough; effective employee-oriented leadership must also be developmentally focused. This is a critical insight for the context of South Sudan, where the need for staff development and capacity building is immense. There is a clear gap for research that explores whether the employee-oriented leaders in South Sudanese universities are successfully bridging this gap between caring and tangible development. This is supported by the work of [14] on transformational leadership, which emphasizes the importance of the individualized consideration component [16].

The effectiveness of employee-oriented leadership is deeply rooted in its ability to build strong, high-quality leader-member relationships, a concept formalized in Leader Member Exchange (LME) theory. This theory posits that leaders develop unique exchange relationships with each of their subordinates, and the quality of these relationships is a primary predictor of employee outcomes [11]. A meta-analysis synthesized the results of 79 studies and found a strong and significant correlation between LME quality and a range of positive outcomes, including higher performance ratings, greater organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions. The behaviors that define a high-quality LME relationship—mutual trust, respect, and obligation are the very same behaviors that characterize an employee-oriented leadership style. The findings from LME research provide a powerful theoretical mechanism for explaining why employee-oriented leadership is so effective: it focuses on building the high-quality dyadic relationships that are the conduits for influence and support. However, a significant criticism and gap in LMX theory is its potential to create in-groups and out-groups within a team, leading to perceptions of favoritism. This is a critical issue for the South Sudanese context, where ethnic and political affiliations are highly salient. There is a profound gap in research that explores whether an employee-oriented style in such a context can lead to inclusive, high-quality relationships with all staff, or whether it risks devolving into favoritism along pre-existing social fault lines. This is a crucial question for understanding the practical application of this style in a diverse and fragmented society [20].

Employee-oriented leadership has been shown to be a powerful driver of psychological capital (PsyCap), which consists of the positive psychological resources of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. A study by [24], in their foundational work on PsyCap, proposed a model where supportive leadership would be a key antecedent. A subsequent empirical study by [22] tested this relationship in a sample of 345 employees and their supervisors in a financial services organization in the US. Using structural equation modeling, the study found a significant positive relationship between authentic leadership

(which has a strong employee-oriented component) and follower PsyCap ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$), which in turn was a significant predictor of job performance. The findings from this research are important as they suggest that supportive leadership does not just make employees feel good; it actively builds their psychological resources, making them more resilient and capable of high performance. However, this research is still relatively new and has been conducted primarily in Western corporate settings. There is a major gap in the literature that explores the role of leadership in building PsyCap in a high-trauma, post-conflict workforce, such as that in South Sudanese universities. The question of whether supportive leadership can help to foster hope and resilience in employees who have experienced significant hardship is a critical and under-researched area. This work is supported by the broader field of positive psychology, pioneered by [3].

3. Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research approach, whereby data were collected using structured questionnaires. According to [1], the five public universities in South Sudan had a total population of 2,574 teaching staff. However, the

present study focused on three selected public universities, which collectively had a population of 1,724 academic staff. A combination of purposive and stratified random sampling techniques was employed to enhance the relevance and representativeness of the sample. Purposive sampling was used to select the three universities based on their relevance to the study objectives and accessibility, while stratified random sampling was employed to ensure adequate representation of the relevant categories of academic staff within the selected institutions. This sampling procedure enhanced the representativeness of the study sample and strengthened the reliability, validity, and generalization of the findings.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne2!}$$

$$n = \frac{1724}{1 + 1724 * (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1724}{5.31}$$

$n = 324.670 = 325$ respondents
Questionnaires targeted 325 respondents.

4. Results and Discussions

Table 1. Questionnaire Distribution and Return Rates by Institution.

Institution(s)	Distributed	Returned	Return Rate (%)
University of Juba	125	84	67.2
Dr. John Garang Memorial University of Science and Technology	100	68	68.0
University of Upper Nile	100	68	68.0
Total	325	220	67.7

Source: Primary Data, (2026)

Table 1 presents the distribution and response rates of questionnaires across the three selected public universities. A total of 325 questionnaires were distributed, comprising 125 questionnaires to the University of Juba, of which 84 were returned, representing a response rate of 67.2%; 100 questionnaires to Dr. John Garang Memorial University of Science and Technology, of which 68 were returned, representing a response

rate of 68.0%; and 100 questionnaires to the University of Upper Nile, of which 68 were returned, also representing a response rate of 68.0%. Overall, 220 questionnaires were returned out of the 325 distributed, yielding an aggregate response rate of 67.7%. The relatively consistent response rates across the three institutions indicate a comparable level of participation among respondents.

Table 2. Descriptive statistic of employee-oriented leadership predicting employees' performance of University of Juba.

Statement	1		2		3		4		5	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Our leaders make employees feel valued, which is demonstrated in the promotion culture	5	5.7	8	9.2	17	19.5	33	37.9	24	27.6
Our leaders focuses much on building relationship with employees, avoiding making major decisions by themselves which has been the source of improper development of the university facilities	10	11.5	13	14.9	24	27.6	26	29.9	14	16.1
Leaders have improved the university learning environment. As a good number of teaching staff are sent off yearly to further studies, this is reflected in the number of graduates yearly	6	6.9	17	19.5	28	32.2	23	26.4	13	14.9
Leadership creates a passionate working environment that is liked by everyone, which results in the quality of university graduates	5	5.7	9	10.3	19	21.8	39	44.8	15	17.2
Leaders are deeply able to understand and feel concerned about employee welfare as leaders focus on building relationships with team members and that makes our university strong	3	3.4	19	21.8	18	20.7	20	23.0	27	31.0
Employee-Oriented leadership styles motivate and inspire employees to independently work, reducing the rate of turnover at our university	9	10.3	11	12.6	21	24.1	30	34.5	16	18.4
The leadership style available is employee-oriented leadership style	6	6.9	15	17.2	15	17.2	36	41.4	15	17.2

Source: Primary Data (2026)

The findings indicate that employee-oriented leadership is widely practiced at the university, with 58.6% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that it constitutes the dominant leadership style, while 17.5% remained uncertain and 24.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Furthermore, 65.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that university leaders make employees feel valued through the promotion process, suggesting that promotion practices are generally perceived as supportive and reflective of employees' contributions. In relation to institutional performance, 46% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that employee-oriented leadership has contributed to improvements in university infrastructure, although 27.6% were uncertain and 26.4% disagreed. Similarly, 41.3% agreed that leadership has enhanced the learning environment by supporting teaching staff to pursue further studies, which may have contributed to an increase in the number of graduates produced annually. In addition, 62% of respondents

agreed or strongly agreed that employee-oriented leadership fosters a positive and motivating work environment, thereby contributing to the quality of graduates. The findings further demonstrate the perceived contribution of employee-oriented leadership to staff welfare and retention, as 54% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that leaders genuinely care about employee welfare and maintain strong relationships with staff, thereby strengthening the institution. Moreover, 52.9% agreed or strongly agreed that employee-oriented leadership motivates and inspires employees to work independently, which may contribute to reduced staff turnover, although 24.1% were uncertain and 22.9% disagreed. Overall, the findings suggest that employee-oriented leadership is associated with enhanced employee satisfaction, improved staff welfare, a supportive learning environment, higher perceived graduate quality, and strengthened employee retention within the university.

Table 3. Statistical description of Employee Oriented leadership predicting employee's performance at Dr. John Garang University.

Statement	1		2		3		4		5	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
leaders make employees feel valued, which is demonstrated in the promotion process	12	20.0	11	18.3	13	21.7	13	21.7	11	18.3

Statement	1		2		3		4		5	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
leadership focuses much on relationship with employees, avoiding making major decisions by themselves which is the source of improper facility development in our university	6	10.0	12	20.0	14	23.3	14	23.3	14	23.3
Leaders have improved university learning environment. As good number of teaching staff are sent off yearly for further studies, this is reflected in the number of graduates yearly	7	11.7	15	25.0	6	10.0	19	31.7	13	21.7
Leadership creates a passionate working environment liked by everyone, which promote graduates' quality.	3	5.0	9	15.0	8	13.3	25	41.7	15	25.0
Leaders are deeply able to understand and feel concerned about employee welfare while focus on building relationships with team members and that makes our university strong	2	3.3	9	15.0	8	13.3	20	33.3	21	35.0
Employee-Oriented leadership styles motivate and inspire employees to independently work, reducing the rate of turnover in the university	3	5.0	11	18.3	9	15.0	23	38.3	14	23.3
The leadership style available is employee-oriented leadership style	6	10.0	13	21.7	15	25.0	17	28.3	9	15.0

Source: Primary Data, (2026)

The findings indicate that respondents generally held positive perceptions of the employee-oriented leadership style at Dr. John Garang University. Overall, 43.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the leadership style practiced at the university is employee-oriented, while 25.0% were uncertain and 21.0% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Regarding promotion practices, 40.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that university leaders make employees feel valued, as reflected in the promotion culture. In comparison, 38.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while 21.7% remained neutral. These findings suggest that although many respondents perceive the leadership as employee-centered, opinions on the fairness and effectiveness of promotion practices remain divided.

With respect to institutional development and academic performance, 46.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the leadership's strong emphasis on employee relationships, sometimes at the expense of decisive action, has contributed to inadequate development of university facilities. Meanwhile, 30.0% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this view, and 23.3% were uncertain. The study also revealed that

53.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that university leaders have improved the learning environment by sponsoring teaching staff for further studies, which has positively influenced the number of graduates produced annually. Furthermore, 66.7% agreed or strongly agreed that leadership creates a supportive and motivating work environment, thereby contributing to the production of high-quality graduates. Regarding employee welfare and staff retention, the findings were predominantly positive. A substantial majority (68.3%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that university leaders demonstrate concern for employee welfare by fostering strong relationships with staff, thereby strengthening the institution. Similarly, 61.6% agreed or strongly agreed that the employee-oriented leadership style motivates and inspires employees to work independently, leading to reduced staff turnover. Overall, these findings suggest that an employee-oriented leadership style promotes employee satisfaction, enhances organizational commitment, and contributes positively to institutional performance and graduate quality at Dr. John Garang University.

Table 4. Descriptive statistic of employee oriented leadership predicting Employee Performances of University of Upper Nile.

Statement	1		2		3		4		5	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Our leaders make employees feel valued, which is demonstrate in the promotion culture	14	19.2	17	23.3	15	20.5	15	20.5	12	16.4

Statement	1		2		3		4		5	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
The leadership focuses too much on relationship with employees, avoiding making major decisions by herself, which has been the source of improper development of the university facilities	7	9.6	14	19.2	17	23.3	19	26.0	16	21.9
Leaders have improved the university learning environment. As a good number of teaching staff are sent off yearly to further studies, this is reflected in the number of graduates yearly	12	16.4	18	24.7	7	9.6	21	28.8	15	20.5
Leadership creates a passionate working environment that is liked by everyone, which results in the quality of university graduates	5	6.8	12	16.4	10	13.7	28	38.4	18	24.7
Leaders are deeply able to understand and feel concerned about employee welfare as leaders focus on building relationships with team members and that makes our university strong	3	4.1	12	16.4	11	15.1	23	31.5	24	32.9
Employee-Oriented leadership styles motivate and inspire employees to independently work, reducing the rate of turnover at our university	4	5.5	10	13.7	14	19.2	30	41.1	15	20.5
The leadership style available is employee-oriented leadership style	11	15.1	15	20.5	15	20.5	21	28.8	11	15.1

Source: Primary Data (2026)

The findings from Upper Nile University show mixed perceptions regarding employee-oriented leadership, with 43.9% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that this leadership style is practiced, while 35.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 20.5% remained neutral. Regarding staff promotion, only 36.9% agreed that leaders make employees feel valued through promotion practices, whereas 42.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating concerns about fairness and recognition. Concerning university facility development, 47.9% of respondents believed that leaders focus heavily on maintaining relationships with employees at the expense of making major decisions, which may contribute to inadequate infrastructure development. However, 49.3% agreed that leadership has improved the learning environment through staff development initiatives, including supporting teaching staff to pursue further studies, which has positively influenced graduate output.

The results also highlight the positive influence of employee-oriented leadership on staff satisfaction and organizational performance. A majority of respondents (63.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that leaders create a supportive and motivating work environment that contributes to the quality of graduates produced. Similarly, 64.4% indicated that leaders demonstrate concern for employee welfare by building strong relationships with staff, which enhances employee satisfaction and institutional strength. Furthermore, 61.6% agreed or strongly agreed that employee-oriented leadership motivates staff to work independently and contributes to reducing employee turnover. Overall, the findings suggest that while employee-oriented leadership has strengthened staff relations and motivation, improvements are needed in areas such as promotion practices and strategic decision-making for institutional

development.

5. Discussions of the Finding

Employee-oriented leadership was consistently associated with positive employee performance across the three universities. Respondents perceived that leaders who demonstrate concern for employee welfare, professional development, and supportive working relationships create a motivating work environment that enhances employee commitment, job satisfaction, staff retention, and graduate quality. Staff development initiatives and supportive leadership practices were also viewed as contributing to improvements in the teaching and learning environment. These findings support behavioral leadership theory, which emphasizes that leaders who prioritize employee welfare and interpersonal relationships promote higher employee motivation and organizational performance [19], similarly argue that supportive leadership enhances employee engagement, commitment, and productivity. However, respondents also cautioned that excessive emphasis on interpersonal relationships might delay strategic decisions and infrastructure development, highlighting the need to balance employee support with organizational effectiveness.

6. Conclusions

The study concludes that employee-oriented leadership has a consistently positive influence on employee performance across the selected public universities. Among the leadership styles examined, employee-oriented leadership emerged as one of the most effective approaches for improving employee

motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and staff retention.

The findings demonstrate that employees perform better when they feel valued, supported, and recognized by institutional leaders. Leadership practices that emphasize staff welfare, professional development, mentoring, communication, and supportive working relationships contribute to a positive organizational climate. In higher education institutions, where academic staff require continuous professional growth and research opportunities, employee-oriented leadership plays an important role in strengthening institutional capacity.

The study further concludes that supportive leadership contributes indirectly to educational outcomes by improving employee commitment and effectiveness. Motivated academic and administrative staff are more likely to contribute positively to teaching quality, research productivity, student support, and institutional development. Therefore, universities seeking to improve performance should prioritize leadership practices that recognize employees as key institutional assets rather than merely administrative resources.

However, the study also concludes that employee-oriented leadership must be balanced with strategic management. While maintaining positive relationships with employees is important, leaders must also make timely decisions, enforce institutional standards, and prioritize long-term development objectives. Excessive emphasis on maintaining harmony without addressing performance challenges may limit institutional progress. Therefore, effective employee-oriented leadership requires a balance between compassion, accountability, and strategic direction.

6.1. Recommendations for Government and Higher Education Authorities

- 1) The study recommends that the Government of South Sudan, particularly the Ministry responsible for higher education, should prioritize strengthening the financial sustainability of public universities. The findings revealed that inadequate funding remains one of the major constraints affecting institutional performance, infrastructure development, employee motivation, and the quality of teaching and research. Therefore, the government should establish sustainable financing mechanisms that enable universities to meet operational requirements, improve staff welfare, and invest in academic development.
- 2) The government should also develop and implement a comprehensive higher education governance framework that promotes transparency, accountability, and institutional autonomy. The findings indicated that inconsistent decision-making, unclear administrative processes and weaknesses in governance systems affect employee confidence and institutional effectiveness. Clear national policies on university governance, leadership accountability, staff promotion procedures, and performance

management should therefore be developed to guide public universities.

- 3) Furthermore, the Ministry responsible for higher education should establish leadership development programmes for university administrators. Since leadership style significantly influences employee performance, university leaders require continuous professional development in areas such as strategic leadership, participatory management, conflict resolution, change management, and human resource management. Such programmes would enable leaders to adopt balanced leadership approaches that combine authority with employee involvement and institutional accountability.
- 4) The government should also prioritize investment in higher education infrastructure, including lecture halls, laboratories, libraries, student accommodation, and ICT facilities. The study demonstrated that leadership effectiveness alone couldn't improve university performance when institutions operate under severe resource limitations. Improving the physical and technological environment is therefore essential for enhancing teaching quality, research productivity, innovation, and graduate competitiveness.
- 5) In addition, national higher education policies should promote research development and academic collaboration. Public universities require stronger support for research funding, international partnerships, digital academic resources, and scholarly publication opportunities. Such interventions would strengthen knowledge production and improve the global visibility of South Sudanese universities.

6.2. Recommendations for University Leadership and Management

- 1) The study recommends that university leaders should adopt more balanced leadership approaches that integrate democratic and employee-oriented leadership practices while maintaining appropriate levels of authority and accountability. The findings demonstrated that leadership styles characterized by participation, fairness, communication, and employee support have stronger positive effects on employee motivation and institutional performance.
- 2) University leaders should establish mechanisms that promote meaningful employee participation in institutional decision-making. These mechanisms may include regular staff consultation forums, academic committees, departmental meetings, and transparent communication platforms. Increased participation would strengthen employee ownership of institutional goals and improve organizational commitment.
- 3) The study also recommends that university management strengthen transparency and fairness in human resource practices, particularly staff promotion and professional

advancement. The findings revealed concerns regarding inconsistent promotion practices and perceptions of limited fairness in some institutions. Universities should therefore establish clear promotion criteria based on academic qualifications, professional performance, research contribution, teaching effectiveness, and institutional service.

- 4) University leaders should strengthen accountability systems while maintaining employee autonomy. The findings showed that excessive laissez-faire leadership might create challenges related to unclear responsibilities, weak coordination, and inconsistent performance. Therefore, delegation of responsibilities should be accompanied by clear role descriptions, performance expectations, monitoring mechanisms, and regular feedback.
- 5) Furthermore, university management should develop institutional strategies for staff retention. The study found that many academic and administrative staff leave universities when better opportunities become available. Universities should therefore improve staff motivation through competitive remuneration where possible; recognition programmes, professional development opportunities, research support, and improved working conditions.
- 6) University leaders should also strengthen strategic planning practices. The findings indicated that inconsistent leadership approaches and short-term planning negatively affect infrastructure development and institutional progress. Universities should adopt long-term strategic plans that are developed through inclusive processes and regularly evaluated to ensure effective implementation.

6.3. Recommendations for Human Resource Management

- 1) The study recommends that university human resource departments strengthen professional and transparent human resource management systems. Since employee performance is strongly influenced by motivation, satisfaction, and organizational commitment, universities should develop policies that support employee welfare and professional growth.
- 2) Human resource departments should establish clear performance management systems that link employee responsibilities with institutional objectives. Regular performance evaluation should not only identify weaknesses but also provide opportunities for professional development, mentoring, and improvement.
- 3) The study recommends the introduction of continuous professional development programmes for academic and administrative staff. Such programmes should include leadership training, teaching improvement initiatives, research capacity development, ICT skills training, and administrative management skills. Improving employee

capacity would contribute directly to teaching quality, research productivity, and institutional performance.

- 4) Universities should also develop employee recognition and reward systems. The findings indicated that employees are more motivated when they feel valued and supported by institutional leaders. Recognition of outstanding teaching, research, innovation, and administrative contributions can strengthen employee commitment and reduce turnover.
- 5) Human resource departments should further improve communication between management and employees. Transparent communication regarding institutional decisions, promotion procedures, policies, and organizational changes can reduce uncertainty and strengthen trust between employees and leadership.

6.4. Recommendations for Improving Teaching, Learning, and Research Environment

- 1) Universities should prioritize improvement of teaching and learning facilities. Observation findings revealed significant weaknesses in lecture halls, laboratories, libraries, student accommodation, and ICT infrastructure. These challenges directly affect employee effectiveness and educational quality.
- 2) Universities should develop infrastructure improvement plans that prioritize essential academic facilities. Expansion and rehabilitation of lecture halls should be undertaken to address overcrowding and improve lecturer-student interaction. Laboratories should be equipped with modern materials and equipment to support practical learning, particularly in science, engineering, agriculture, and health-related programs.
- 3) University libraries should be strengthened through the acquisition of updated textbooks, academic journals, electronic databases, and digital learning resources. Access to current academic information is essential for improving teaching quality, research productivity, and student learning outcomes.
- 4) The study also recommends significant investment in ICT infrastructure. Universities should improve internet connectivity, expand campus wireless networks, and establish functional digital learning platforms, including learning management systems, virtual libraries, and online research databases. Strengthening digital infrastructure will improve access to knowledge and support technology-enhanced learning.
- 5) Universities should also strengthen research support systems by providing research grants, supporting academic publication, encouraging collaboration, and creating environments that promote innovation. Improved research capacity will contribute to institutional reputation and graduate quality.

7. Areas for Further Research Include

Future research should expand the geographical scope by including additional public and private universities across South Sudan. This would provide broader evidence regarding leadership practices and institutional challenges within the national higher education system.

Abbreviations

ICT	Information Communication Technology
JDR	Job Demand Resources
LME	Leader Member Exchange
OCBS	Organization Citizenship Behaviours
TEAD	Technical Evaluation Action for Dynamic
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UWES	Utretch Work Engagement Scale

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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