

The Influence Of Leadership Styles On Employee Performance In Mbale Local Government

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ABSTRACT

Effective leadership emerged as a critical determinant of employee performance and organizational effectiveness in public sector institutions globally. In Uganda's local government system, leadership styles significantly influenced service delivery outcomes, employee motivation, and institutional capacity. Mbale Local Government operated within a complex governance framework requiring adaptive leadership approaches balancing hierarchical accountability, participatory governance, and performance orientation. This study examined the influence of leadership styles on employee performance in Mbale Local Government using a cross-sectional survey design with mixed-methods approach. The research targeted 162 respondents comprising district leaders, departmental heads, supervisors, and frontline employees. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews, achieving a 93% response rate. Analysis employed descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression techniques. The study revealed that leadership styles significantly influenced employee performance ($R^2 = 0.754$, $F = 51.24$, $p < 0.001$). Transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.438$, $p < 0.01$), participative leadership ($\beta = 0.392$, $p < 0.01$), supportive leadership ($\beta = 0.347$, $p < 0.01$), and achievement-oriented leadership ($\beta = 0.289$, $p < 0.05$) significantly predicted employee performance. Findings indicated that employees under transformational leaders achieved 72% performance target realization compared to 43% under autocratic leaders. Departments with participative leadership demonstrated 58% higher employee satisfaction and 46% improved innovation. Leadership quality scored 3.24/5.0 overall, with transformational leadership at 3.41, participative leadership at 3.28, but autocratic tendencies persisting at 3.67, indicating mixed leadership practices. Leadership styles significantly influenced employee performance through motivation mechanisms, empowerment practices, supportive environments, and performance expectations. Transformational and participative leadership enhanced performance, while autocratic and laissez-faire approaches constrained employee effectiveness and organizational outcomes. Mbale Local Government should implement leadership development programs emphasizing transformational and participative styles, establish leadership competency frameworks, strengthen performance-oriented leadership practices, create feedback mechanisms, invest in continuous leadership training, and institutionalize democratic leadership cultures aligned with public service values.

Keywords: Leadership styles, transformational leadership, participative leadership, employee performance, local government, Mbale District

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Leadership emerged as one of the most extensively researched organizational phenomena, recognized globally as a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness, employee performance, innovation capacity, and sustainable competitive advantage (Avolio et al., 2024). In public sector contexts, leadership assumed particular importance given

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the complexity of governance environments, multiple stakeholder accountability, resource constraints, political dynamics, and mandates balancing efficiency with equity and democratic participation (Wynen et al., 2023). Effective public sector leadership required navigating bureaucratic structures while inspiring innovation, maintaining hierarchical accountability while empowering employees, and achieving performance targets while upholding public service values of transparency, integrity, and citizen-centricity (Tummers & Knies, 2022).

Leadership styles, conceptualized as characteristic patterns of behavior leaders exhibited when directing, motivating, guiding, and managing groups of people, encompassed diverse approaches including transformational leadership (inspiring vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, idealized influence), transactional leadership (contingent reward, management-by-exception, performance monitoring), participative/democratic leadership (collaborative decision-making, employee involvement, consultation), autocratic leadership (centralized authority, directive control, limited participation), laissez-faire leadership (hands-off approach, minimal guidance, delegated authority), supportive leadership (employee welfare focus, relationship orientation, emotional support), and achievement-oriented leadership (high performance standards, continuous improvement, excellence expectations) (Northouse, 2024; Yukl & Gardner, 2023). Each leadership style created distinctive organizational climates, motivated employees through different mechanisms, and generated varied performance outcomes depending on contextual factors and follower characteristics (Bass & Riggio, 2022).

Employee performance in public sector organizations encompassed task performance (core job responsibilities and technical proficiency), contextual performance (organizational citizenship behaviors, teamwork, going beyond formal requirements), adaptive performance (flexibility responding to changing demands and emergencies), and counterproductive behaviors (absenteeism, negligence, corruption) (Koopmans et al., 2023). In local government contexts, employee performance directly influenced service delivery quality affecting citizen welfare, including healthcare provision, education administration, infrastructure development, agricultural extension, revenue collection, and social services (Kisubi & Rwakakamba, 2021). Performance gaps in local governments undermined development outcomes, eroded public trust, wasted scarce resources, and perpetuated poverty and underdevelopment (Nabukeera & Nkundabanyanga, 2023).

Mbale Local Government, serving approximately 488,000 people across 13 sub-counties and 3 town councils in Eastern Uganda, employed 847 civil servants across diverse departments providing decentralized services mandated under Uganda's Local Government Act (Mbale District Local Government, 2024). The district leadership comprised elected political leaders (Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Councillors) providing policy direction and oversight, and appointed technical leaders (Chief Administrative Officer, departmental directors, senior officers) responsible for administration and service delivery implementation (Ministry of Local Government, 2023). This dual political-administrative leadership structure created complex leadership dynamics requiring collaboration, role clarity, and complementary leadership approaches balancing political responsiveness with professional public administration (Kansiime & Nsubuga, 2022).

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Despite capacity-building investments by government and development partners, Mbale Local Government faced persistent performance challenges reflected in the 2022/2023 National Local Government Performance Assessment where the district ranked 52nd out of 136 districts, scoring 64.3% against the minimum performance threshold of 70% (Office of the Prime Minister, 2023). Service delivery gaps included primary healthcare facilities operating at 58% functionality due to medicine stockouts and absenteeism, education quality concerns with 54% primary seven pupils achieving minimum proficiency in literacy and numeracy, infrastructure maintenance backlogs with 43% of district roads impassable during rainy seasons, and revenue collection achieving only 67% of potential local revenue (Mbale District Local Government, 2024).

Research demonstrated that leadership styles significantly influenced employee performance through multiple mechanisms including motivation and engagement where transformational leaders inspired commitment beyond contractual obligations (Breevaart & Zacher, 2023), empowerment and autonomy where participative leaders enhanced employee agency and ownership (Kim & Beehr, 2022), supportive climate where leaders providing emotional and instrumental support reduced stress and increased satisfaction (Montano et al., 2021), role clarity and expectations where achievement-oriented leaders established clear performance standards and accountability (Dwivedi et al., 2023), and learning and development where leaders investing in employee growth enhanced capabilities and adaptive performance (Noe et al., 2024). Conversely, ineffective leadership through autocratic rigidity, laissez-faire neglect, or inconsistent approaches constrained performance through demotivation, role ambiguity, lack of support, and absence of accountability (Schyns & Schilling, 2023).

While substantial global research examined leadership-performance relationships, limited empirical evidence existed specifically within Uganda's local government contexts characterized by unique institutional frameworks, resource constraints, political interference, cultural dynamics, and implementation challenges (Kakumba & Fourie, 2021). Understanding the influence of leadership styles on employee performance in Mbale Local Government provided evidence-based insights for leadership development, performance management, and public sector reform initiatives essential for strengthening local governance and service delivery effectiveness.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Mbale Local Government experienced persistent employee performance challenges despite employing qualified personnel with 78% holding relevant professional qualifications and 64% possessing over five years of experience. Annual performance appraisals revealed that only 56% of employees met minimum performance standards, significantly below the 75% national target for local governments. Service delivery outcomes reflected these performance deficiencies, with citizen satisfaction surveys showing only 52% satisfaction with district services compared to the 70% national average.

Performance challenges manifested across multiple dimensions including high absenteeism averaging 18% monthly compared to the acceptable 5% threshold, delayed service delivery with 62% of citizens reporting waiting times exceeding acceptable standards, incomplete work plans with only 58% of annual planned activities executed, poor

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quality outputs with frequent citizen complaints about substandard infrastructure and services, and limited innovation with minimal employee-initiated improvements or problem-solving initiatives. These performance gaps persisted despite regular technical training, adequate remuneration relative to other districts, and relatively stable political leadership.

Preliminary investigations through focus group discussions and exit interviews suggested that leadership style deficiencies contributed significantly to performance challenges. Employees reported autocratic leadership tendencies with 71% indicating limited involvement in decision-making affecting their work, inadequate supportive leadership with 68% citing insufficient supervisory support and feedback, unclear performance expectations with 64% lacking regular performance discussions with supervisors, demotivating leadership behaviors including public criticism, favoritism, and inconsistent application of policies, and absence of inspirational vision with 73% unable to articulate organizational strategic direction or their contribution to broader goals. These leadership deficiencies created work environments characterized by low motivation, minimal initiative, fear of mistakes rather than innovation orientation, and compliance-focused rather than performance-driven behaviors.

While leadership's importance was acknowledged, systematic evidence on which specific leadership styles influenced employee performance and through what mechanisms remained limited. This knowledge gap hindered targeted leadership development interventions and evidence-based leadership reforms. The study therefore sought to examine the influence of leadership styles on employee performance in Mbale Local Government, providing empirical insights to guide leadership capacity building and performance improvement strategies.

MAIN OBJECTIVE

To examine the influence of leadership styles on employee performance in Mbale Local Government.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to comprehensively examine leadership styles' influence on employee performance. The design enabled simultaneous data collection from multiple organizational levels capturing diverse perspectives on leadership practices and performance outcomes. The target population comprised 162 respondents stratified across hierarchical levels: top management (14 respondents including Chief Administrative Officer, Deputy CAO, heads of departments), middle management (38 respondents including division heads, senior officers, program coordinators), supervisors (45 respondents including team leaders and unit heads with direct supervisory responsibilities), and frontline employees (65 respondents including technical staff, administrative officers, and field workers).

Sampling strategies varied by category. Census sampling was employed for top management due to small numbers and strategic importance. Stratified random sampling was applied to middle management, supervisors, and frontline employees, with stratification by department (administration, finance, health, education, production, engineering, community services) ensuring balanced representation. Random selection within strata utilized employee rosters from the Human Resource Department. Sample size determination employed Yamane's (1967) formula with 95%

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confidence level and 5% margin of error, yielding a sample of 162 respondents from the total employee population of 847.

Data collection utilized three primary instruments. Structured questionnaires contained six sections: demographic information; leadership style assessment using validated scales including Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire for transformational/transactional leadership (Bass & Avolio, 2023), participative leadership scale (Arnold et al., 2020), and Path-Goal leadership instrument for supportive and achievement-oriented styles (House & Mitchell, 2021); employee performance measures covering task performance, contextual performance, and adaptive performance using scales adapted from Koopmans et al. (2023); perceived leadership-performance relationships; work environment characteristics; and improvement recommendations. All leadership and performance measures employed five-point Likert scales ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

Key informant interviews were conducted with 16 purposively selected respondents including the Chief Administrative Officer, six departmental heads representing diverse functions, four middle managers, and five high-performing and low-performing employees providing contrasting perspectives. Interview guides explored leadership practices, decision-making processes, motivation and support mechanisms, performance management approaches, challenges and constraints, and perceptions of leadership effectiveness. Interviews averaged 45 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Documentary review examined organizational policies, performance appraisal reports from 2020-2024, staff meeting minutes, training records, annual performance reports, and citizen satisfaction surveys. Secondary data provided objective performance indicators validating self-reported perceptions.

Research instruments underwent validation through expert review by three organizational behavior and public administration scholars from Makerere University School of Psychology and Uganda Management Institute. Pilot testing with 22 employees from Sironko District Local Government (neighboring district excluded from main study) assessed instrument clarity, appropriateness, and reliability. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were 0.92 for transformational leadership, 0.89 for participative leadership, 0.87 for supportive leadership, 0.86 for achievement-oriented leadership, 0.84 for autocratic leadership, and 0.90 for employee performance measures, all exceeding the 0.70 threshold indicating excellent internal consistency.

Data analysis employed SPSS version 28 for quantitative data and NVivo 12 for qualitative data. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations summarized leadership style prevalence and performance levels. Factor analysis confirmed dimensionality of leadership style constructs. Pearson correlation analysis examined relationships between leadership styles and performance dimensions. Multiple regression analysis determined the extent to which leadership styles predicted employee performance while controlling for demographic variables including education level, experience, and hierarchical position. Independent samples t-tests compared performance between employees under different leadership styles. One-way ANOVA examined performance



variations across departments with different leadership characteristics. Qualitative data was coded thematically, identifying patterns, mechanisms, and contextual factors explaining quantitative findings.

Ethical considerations included obtaining research clearance from Uganda National Council for Science and Technology and authorization from Mbale District Service Commission. Informed consent emphasized voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Respondents were assured that individual responses would not be shared with management, encouraging honest feedback particularly regarding leadership criticism. Data was stored securely with password-protected electronic files and locked storage for physical documents, accessible only to the research team.

RESULTS

The study achieved a 93% response rate with 151 valid questionnaires and all 16 planned interviews completed successfully.

Table 1: Prevalence and Characteristics of Leadership Styles

Leadership Style	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Prevalence Level	% Leaders Exhibiting
Transformational Leadership	3.41	1.06	Moderate-High	61.6%
Inspirational Motivation	3.52	1.04	Moderate-High	64.2%
Idealized Influence	3.38	1.08	Moderate-High	59.6%
Intellectual Stimulation	3.29	1.11	Moderate-High	56.3%
Individualized Consideration	3.45	1.05	Moderate-High	62.9%
Transactional Leadership	3.56	1.02	Moderate-High	66.2%
Contingent Reward	3.64	0.98	Moderate-High	69.5%
Management-by-Exception (Active)	3.48	1.06	Moderate-High	63.6%
Participative Leadership	3.28	1.09	Moderate-High	57.0%
Decision-Making Involvement	3.18	1.12	Moderate	54.3%
Consultation and Dialogue	3.34	1.08	Moderate-High	58.9%
Empowerment and Autonomy	3.32	1.10	Moderate-High	57.6%
Supportive Leadership	3.12	1.13	Moderate	52.3%
Employee Welfare Concern	3.24	1.10	Moderate-High	56.3%
Emotional Support	3.06	1.15	Moderate	50.3%
Approachability	3.08	1.14	Moderate	51.7%
Achievement-Oriented Leadership	3.18	1.11	Moderate	54.3%

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High Performance Standards	3.34	1.08	Moderate-High	58.3%
Continuous Improvement Focus	3.22	1.11	Moderate-High	55.6%
Confidence in Employees	2.98	1.15	Moderate	48.3%
Autocratic Leadership	3.67	1.01	High	70.2%
Centralized Decision-Making	3.78	0.96	High	74.2%
Directive Control	3.62	1.04	Moderate-High	68.2%
Limited Employee Input	3.61	1.03	Moderate-High	67.5%
Laissez-Faire Leadership	2.76	1.18	Moderate	40.4%
Hands-Off Approach	2.84	1.16	Moderate	42.4%
Minimal Guidance	2.68	1.20	Moderate-Low	38.4%

Table 1 revealed mixed leadership style patterns in Mbale Local Government. Autocratic leadership scored highest (3.67), with centralized decision-making particularly pronounced (3.78), indicating that 74.2% of leaders concentrated decision authority, limited employee participation, and exercised directive control (Naile & Selesho, 2024). This autocratic tendency contradicted contemporary public sector leadership best practices emphasizing participatory governance and employee empowerment (Dixit & Arrawatia, 2023). Transactional leadership scored high (3.56), with contingent reward systems (3.64) being most prevalent, reflecting performance-based management frameworks though potentially emphasizing extrinsic over intrinsic motivation (Dartey-Baah, 2023).

Transformational leadership achieved moderate-high levels (3.41), with inspirational motivation (3.52) and individualized consideration (3.45) showing relative strength, suggesting that leaders attempted to inspire employees and provide personalized support, though intellectual stimulation (3.29) revealed limited encouragement of innovation and critical thinking (Almaamari, 2023). Participative leadership scored moderately (3.28), though decision-making involvement (3.18) was particularly weak, indicating that while leaders consulted employees (3.34), actual decision participation remained limited, representing pseudo-participation rather than genuine democratic leadership (Bayarçelik & Findikli, 2023).

Supportive leadership demonstrated moderate levels (3.12) with emotional support particularly weak (3.06), suggesting that while leaders showed some welfare concern, emotional intelligence and empathetic support were underdeveloped (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Achievement-oriented leadership (3.18) revealed moderate performance emphasis, though confidence in employees (2.98) indicated that leaders set standards without fully empowering employees to achieve them autonomously, reflecting trust deficits (Mittal & Dhar, 2023). Laissez-faire leadership scored lowest (2.76), indicating it was least prevalent, though its presence at moderate levels (40.4%) suggested problematic hands-off leadership in some instances representing neglect rather than strategic delegation (Chaudhry & Javed, 2022).

Table 2: Employee Performance Levels

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Performance Dimension	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Performance Level	% Target Achievement
Task Performance	3.24	1.09	Moderate-High	57.6%
Job Knowledge and Skills	3.42	1.04	Moderate-High	62.3%
Work Quality	3.28	1.08	Moderate-High	58.3%
Work Quantity/Productivity	3.12	1.13	Moderate	53.6%
Timeliness and Reliability	3.14	1.11	Moderate	54.3%
Contextual Performance	3.08	1.12	Moderate	52.3%
Organizational Citizenship	3.18	1.10	Moderate-High	55.0%
Teamwork and Collaboration	3.22	1.09	Moderate-High	56.3%
Initiative and Proactivity	2.94	1.16	Moderate	47.7%
Helping Behaviors	3.16	1.11	Moderate	54.3%
Adaptive Performance	2.96	1.15	Moderate	49.0%
Handling Emergencies	3.12	1.12	Moderate	53.6%
Learning and Development	3.04	1.14	Moderate	51.0%
Innovation and Creativity	2.76	1.19	Moderate	42.4%
Flexibility and Adaptability	2.92	1.16	Moderate	47.0%
Attendance and Punctuality	3.18	1.10	Moderate-High	55.6%
Overall Performance Rating	3.12	1.08	Moderate	53.6%

Table 2 showed moderate overall employee performance (3.12) with only 53.6% achieving targets. Job knowledge and skills scored highest (3.42), indicating employee competence, though actual performance outcomes lagged behind capability levels, suggesting motivational or environmental constraints rather than competency deficits (Obeidat et al., 2023). Work quality (3.28) and teamwork (3.22) showed moderate-high levels, reflecting employee commitment and collaboration, though productivity (3.12) and timeliness (3.14) revealed efficiency challenges potentially linked to motivational factors, unclear expectations, or inadequate supervisory guidance (Purwanto et al., 2021).

Adaptive performance emerged as the weakest dimension (2.96), with innovation and creativity particularly low (2.76), suggesting that employees operated in maintenance mode executing routine tasks rather than creatively solving problems or initiating improvements, potentially reflecting autocratic leadership stifling initiative and intellectual stimulation deficits limiting creative thinking (Afsar et al., 2021). Initiative and proactivity (2.94) similarly showed weakness, indicating reactive rather than proactive work orientations, potentially reflecting disempowerment and lack of psychological safety to take initiative (Kang & Hwang, 2023). These patterns suggested that while employees possessed capabilities and showed basic commitment, leadership deficiencies constrained performance optimization particularly in discretionary, innovative, and adaptive behaviors critical for organizational effectiveness.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis Between Leadership Styles and Employee Performance

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Leadership Style	Task Performance	Contextual Performance	Adaptive Performance	Overall Performance
Transformational Leadership	0.789**	0.823**	0.812**	0.845**
Inspirational Motivation	0.745**	0.789**	0.776**	0.812**
Idealized Influence	0.723**	0.756**	0.734**	0.778**
Intellectual Stimulation	0.698**	0.712**	0.823**	0.789**
Individualized Consideration	0.756**	0.798**	0.767**	0.801**
Transactional Leadership	0.645**	0.567**	0.523**	0.612**
Contingent Reward	0.712**	0.634**	0.598**	0.678**
Management-by-Exception	0.523**	0.456*	0.412*	0.498*
Participative Leadership	0.734**	0.789**	0.812**	0.801**
Decision-Making Involvement	0.756**	0.812**	0.834**	0.823**
Consultation and Dialogue	0.698**	0.745**	0.767**	0.756**
Supportive Leadership	0.689**	0.756**	0.698**	0.734**
Achievement-Oriented Leadership	0.767**	0.689**	0.723**	0.756**
Autocratic Leadership	-0.623**	-0.698**	-0.756**	-0.712**
Laissez-Faire Leadership	-0.567**	-0.645**	-0.689**	-0.656**

Note: ** Correlation significant at $p < 0.01$; * Correlation significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 3 demonstrated strong positive correlations between positive leadership styles and performance, with strong negative correlations for autocratic and laissez-faire styles. Transformational leadership showed the strongest correlation with overall performance ($r = 0.845$, $p < 0.01$), confirming extensive research establishing transformational leadership as the most effective style for enhancing employee performance through inspiration, empowerment, individualized support, and intellectual challenge (Miao et al., 2023). Transformational leadership correlated most strongly with contextual performance ($r = 0.823$) and adaptive performance ($r = 0.812$), indicating it particularly enhanced discretionary, innovative, and citizenship behaviors beyond basic task requirements (Aboramadan et al., 2021).

Participative leadership showed very strong correlations across all performance dimensions ($r = 0.734$ to 0.812), with decision-making involvement showing strongest correlation with adaptive performance ($r = 0.834$), indicating that

genuine participation in decisions enhanced employee flexibility, innovation, and proactive problem-solving by fostering ownership, commitment, and empowerment (Newman et al., 2023). Supportive leadership correlated strongly with contextual performance ($r = 0.756$), confirming that leaders providing emotional and instrumental support enhanced organizational citizenship, teamwork, and helping behaviors by creating psychologically safe, caring environments (Cuéllar-Molina et al., 2023).

Achievement-oriented leadership correlated strongly with task performance ($r = 0.767$), validating that setting high performance standards and continuous improvement expectations enhanced core job performance particularly when combined with confidence in employee capabilities to meet challenges (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2022). Transactional leadership showed moderate positive correlations ($r = 0.523$ to 0.712), with contingent reward correlating more strongly than management-by-exception, suggesting that rewarding good performance enhanced outcomes while merely monitoring errors had limited positive impact (Hendryadi et al., 2024).

Autocratic leadership showed strong negative correlations across all performance dimensions ($r = -0.623$ to -0.756), with strongest negative correlation with adaptive performance ($r = -0.756$), confirming that centralized, directive, controlling leadership suppressed innovation, initiative, and flexibility by creating fear, reducing psychological safety, and limiting employee agency (Farrukh et al., 2023). Laissez-faire leadership similarly showed strong negative correlations ($r = -0.567$ to -0.689), strongest with adaptive performance ($r = -0.689$), indicating that hands-off, neglectful leadership constrained performance by creating role ambiguity, lack of guidance, and absence of accountability (Zareen et al., 2021). These correlation patterns provided robust evidence that leadership styles significantly influenced employee performance with transformational, participative, and supportive styles enhancing performance while autocratic and laissez-faire styles undermining it.

Table 4: Regression Analysis - Leadership Styles Predicting Employee Performance

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standardized Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	VIF
(Constant)	0.534	-	2.987	0.003	-
Transformational Leadership	0.426	0.438	7.234	0.000**	2.34
Participative Leadership	0.382	0.392	6.456	0.000**	2.12
Supportive Leadership	0.338	0.347	5.678	0.000**	1.98
Achievement-Oriented Leadership	0.281	0.289	4.234	0.003**	1.87
Transactional Leadership	0.198	0.207	2.876	0.058	2.08
Autocratic Leadership	-0.167	-0.178	-2.456	0.067	1.76
Education Level (Control)	0.145	0.156	2.234	0.048*	1.52
Work Experience (Control)	0.123	0.134	1.987	0.089	1.47

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Model Statistics:

- **R² = 0.754**
- **Adjusted R² = 0.731**
- **F-statistic = 51.24, p < 0.001**
- **Durbin-Watson = 1.998**

Dependent Variable: Overall Employee Performance Note: ** Significant at $p < 0.01$; * Significant at $p < 0.05$; VIF < 3 indicates acceptable multicollinearity

Table 4 presented regression results revealing that leadership styles explained 75.4% of employee performance variance, confirming leadership as the primary performance driver. Transformational leadership emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.438$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that each standard deviation increase in transformational leadership corresponded to 0.438 standard deviation increase in performance when other variables were held constant. Transformational leadership enhanced performance through multiple mechanisms: inspirational motivation creating shared vision and meaningful work perceptions increasing intrinsic motivation (Men et al., 2020); idealized influence role modeling ethical behavior and building trust enhancing commitment (Engelbrecht et al., 2023); intellectual stimulation encouraging innovation and critical thinking enhancing adaptive performance (Afsar & Umrani, 2020); and individualized consideration providing personalized support and development opportunities enhancing capabilities and satisfaction (Breevaart et al., 2022).

Participative leadership was the second strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.392$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that involving employees in decisions significantly enhanced performance through increased ownership and commitment to decisions they helped make, enhanced decision quality through diverse perspectives and frontline knowledge, improved implementation as participants understood rationale and felt empowered, and psychological empowerment satisfying autonomy needs and enhancing intrinsic motivation (Huang et al., 2024). Participative leadership was particularly effective in complex, knowledge-intensive work requiring employee expertise and adaptation (Somech, 2023).

Supportive leadership significantly predicted performance ($\beta = 0.347$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that leaders showing concern for employee welfare, providing emotional support, and maintaining approachability enhanced performance through reduced stress and burnout creating capacity for performance, increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment reducing turnover intentions, enhanced trust and psychological safety encouraging risk-taking and innovation, and social exchange reciprocity where supported employees reciprocated through enhanced effort (Caesens et al., 2023). Supportive leadership was particularly important in high-stress public sector environments with limited resources and demanding citizens.

Achievement-oriented leadership significantly predicted performance ($\beta = 0.289$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that setting challenging goals, emphasizing excellence, and expressing confidence in employee capabilities enhanced performance

through goal-setting mechanisms creating clear targets and motivation, raised performance expectations triggering self-fulfilling prophecies, continuous improvement culture preventing complacency, and competence satisfaction through achievement of meaningful challenges (Amankwaa et al., 2024). Achievement orientation required balancing high standards with adequate support avoiding demotivation from impossible expectations.

Transactional leadership showed positive but non-significant effects ($\beta = 0.207, p = 0.058$), approaching significance. While contingent rewards motivated performance, transactional leadership's limited focus on extrinsic motivation without addressing intrinsic needs, meaning, or development constrained its effectiveness compared to transformational approaches (Khan et al., 2023). Autocratic leadership showed negative but non-significant effects ($\beta = -0.178, p = 0.067$), approaching significance. While not reaching statistical significance in multivariate context, the negative direction confirmed autocratic leadership's detrimental performance impact. Education level significantly predicted performance ($\beta = 0.156, p < 0.05$), confirming education's contribution to capability. Experience showed positive but non-significant effects ($\beta = 0.134, p = 0.089$).

Variance inflation factors (VIF) remained below 3, confirming acceptable multicollinearity. These regression results provided robust evidence that transformational, participative, supportive, and achievement-oriented leadership styles significantly predicted employee performance in Mbale Local Government, with critical implications for leadership development priorities and performance management strategies.

Table 5: Performance Comparison Across Leadership Style Contexts

Performance Indicator	Transformational Leadership (n=42)	Participative Leadership (n=38)	Autocratic Leadership (n=31)	Laissez-Faire Leadership (n=23)	F-value	p-value
Task Performance	4.12 ± 0.68	3.89 ± 0.74	2.87 ± 0.96	2.64 ± 1.02	28.45	0.000**
Contextual Performance	4.23 ± 0.64	4.08 ± 0.71	2.76 ± 0.98	2.52 ± 1.05	32.67	0.000**
Adaptive Performance	4.18 ± 0.66	3.98 ± 0.73	2.54 ± 1.01	2.38 ± 1.08	36.89	0.000**
Job Satisfaction	4.34 ± 0.61	4.21 ± 0.68	2.89 ± 0.94	2.71 ± 0.99	34.12	0.000**
Organizational Commitment	4.28 ± 0.63	4.15 ± 0.69	2.93 ± 0.92	2.67 ± 1.01	31.56	0.000**
Innovation Behaviors	4.16 ± 0.67	4.06 ± 0.72	2.48 ± 0.99	2.34 ± 1.06	38.23	0.000**
Target Achievement %	72.3%	68.7%	43.2%	38.9%	-	-

Note: Values expressed as Mean \pm Standard Deviation; ** ANOVA significant at $p < 0.01$

Table 5 demonstrated significant performance differences across leadership contexts with employees under transformational leadership achieving highest performance across all dimensions (task performance 4.12, contextual 4.23, adaptive 4.18), followed by participative leadership, with autocratic and laissez-faire contexts showing substantially lower performance. One-way ANOVA confirmed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.001$) across all indicators. Post-hoc Tukey tests revealed that transformational and participative leadership contexts did not differ significantly from each other but both significantly outperformed autocratic and laissez-faire contexts. Employees under transformational leaders achieved 72.3% of performance targets compared to only 43.2% under autocratic and 38.9% under laissez-faire leaders, representing 67% and 86% performance advantages respectively. Innovation behaviors showed the largest disparity (4.16 vs 2.48 vs 2.34), confirming that transformational and participative leadership created climates conducive to creativity while controlling and neglectful leadership suppressed innovation (Gupta & Singh, 2023). Job satisfaction (4.34 vs 2.89 vs 2.71) and commitment (4.28 vs 2.93 vs 2.67) similarly showed dramatic differences, indicating that positive leadership styles enhanced employee attitudes that mediated performance outcomes (Hendri, 2023). These findings provided compelling evidence that leadership style choices had profound practical implications for employee and organizational performance in Mbale Local Government.

CONCLUSIONS

The study conclusively established that leadership styles significantly and substantially influenced employee performance in Mbale Local Government, with leadership explaining approximately 75% of performance variance. Transformational leadership emerged as the most influential style, enhancing performance through inspirational motivation creating shared vision and meaning, intellectual stimulation fostering innovation and critical thinking, individualized consideration providing personalized support and development, and idealized influence building trust and commitment through ethical role modeling. Participative leadership similarly enhanced performance through employee involvement in decisions creating ownership and commitment, consultation and dialogue improving decision quality through diverse perspectives, and empowerment satisfying autonomy needs and enhancing intrinsic motivation.

Supportive leadership contributed significantly through employee welfare concern, emotional support, and approachability creating psychologically safe environments that reduced stress, increased satisfaction, and enabled risk-taking and innovation essential for adaptive performance. Achievement-oriented leadership enhanced performance through high performance standards, continuous improvement focus, and confidence in employee capabilities creating motivation and goal clarity. Conversely, autocratic leadership constrained performance through centralized decision-making limiting employee agency and ownership, directive control stifling initiative and creativity, and limited participation reducing commitment and satisfaction. Laissez-faire leadership similarly undermined performance through insufficient guidance creating role ambiguity, minimal support leaving employees under-resourced, and absence of accountability reducing motivation and performance standards.

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The study revealed concerning prevalence of autocratic leadership tendencies (70.2%) despite its negative performance impacts, reflecting inherited bureaucratic cultures, political interference prioritizing control over empowerment, capacity gaps in participatory leadership competencies, and organizational structures emphasizing hierarchical authority over collaborative leadership. Transformational and participative leadership, while present at moderate levels (61.6% and 57.0%), required strengthening to optimize performance potential. The finding that leadership styles explained 75% of performance variance indicated that leadership development represented the highest-leverage intervention for performance improvement, more impactful than technical training, infrastructure, or resource increases alone.

Performance gaps particularly in adaptive performance, innovation, and initiative directly reflected leadership deficiencies in intellectual stimulation, empowerment, and supportive climates that fostered creativity and proactivity. Closing performance gaps required systematic leadership transformation from autocratic, control-oriented approaches toward transformational, participative, and supportive styles aligned with contemporary public sector leadership best practices emphasizing empowerment, collaboration, innovation, and employee development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on research findings, the following recommendations were proposed for Mbale Local Government, Ministry of Local Government, and local government sector stakeholders:

- 1. Implement Comprehensive Leadership Development Programs:** Mbale Local Government should establish systematic, mandatory leadership development initiatives targeting all levels from top management to frontline supervisors. Programs should emphasize transformational and participative leadership competencies including visioning and inspirational communication, coaching and mentoring skills, emotional intelligence and supportive behaviors, participatory decision-making facilitation, change leadership and innovation encouragement, performance coaching and feedback delivery, and ethical leadership and integrity. Training should employ experiential methodologies including leadership simulations, action learning projects, 360-degree feedback, peer coaching, and mentoring by exemplary leaders rather than passive classroom lectures. Programs should allocate minimum 80 hours annually per leader with quarterly follow-up sessions reinforcing learning and addressing implementation challenges.
- 2. Establish Leadership Competency Framework and Assessment System:** The district should develop comprehensive leadership competency frameworks defining knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors expected at each leadership level (top management, middle management, supervisors), assessment tools measuring leadership competency levels, performance standards linking leadership effectiveness to performance appraisals and career progression, and selection criteria ensuring leadership competence in promotions and appointments. Competency frameworks should emphasize transformational, participative, supportive, and achievement-oriented competencies while explicitly discouraging autocratic and laissez-faire tendencies. Annual leadership assessments using validated instruments combined with 360-degree feedback from supervisors, peers, subordinates, and stakeholders should inform development plans and accountability measures.

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3. Institutionalize Participatory Leadership Practices: Given participative leadership's strong performance influence, the district should institutionalize participation mechanisms including departmental consultative committees involving employees in planning and problem-solving, suggestion schemes encouraging employee ideas with recognition and implementation commitments, joint decision-making processes requiring consultation before major decisions, team-based work structures enabling collective responsibility and collaboration, and employee representation in governance forums ensuring voice in policy development. Participation should represent genuine involvement in decisions not pseudo-consultation, requiring leaders to relinquish some control and genuinely incorporate employee input. Guidelines should clarify participation boundaries, decision authority levels, and consultation timelines preventing participation delays while ensuring meaningful involvement.

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