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Abstract

Private chartered universities in Kenya have continued to record weak performance in student retention, financial stability, and research allocation. In 2024, they enrolled only 144,236 students, representing 23.0 percent of university enrolment, while government-sponsored placements in these institutions declined by 66 percent between 2021 and 2023. These challenges have been attributed to deficiencies in the communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence of university leaders. Thus, study established the influence of leadership competencies on the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya. The study adopted a positivist philosophy and a cross-sectional explanatory survey design. The target population comprised the 32 private chartered universities in Kenya, with 775 institutional leaders as the unit of observation. A combination of census and proportionate stratified random sampling yielded a sample of 369 leaders, of whom 302 returned usable questionnaires, representing a response rate of 81.8 percent. Data were analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation, and simple linear regression analysis. The findings revealed that leadership competencies had a positive and statistically significant influence on the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya, explaining 62.3 percent of the variance in performance ($R = 0.789$, $R^2 = 0.623$) and the model was statistically significant, $F(1, 300) = 494.851$, $p < 0.05$. The regression coefficients indicated that a one-unit increase in leadership competencies was associated with a 1.194-unit increase in performance ($B = 1.194$, $\beta = 0.789$, $t = 22.245$, $p < 0.05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{01}). The study concludes that leadership competencies are a primary determinant of the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya. The study recommends that university councils and management establish structured leadership development programmes covering communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, include these competencies in the appointment and appraisal of leaders, and strengthen feedback mechanisms, participative governance, and staff satisfaction.

Keywords: *Leadership competencies, communication, collaboration, adaptability, emotional intelligence, performance, private chartered universities, Kenya*

1.0 Introduction

Organizational performance is a critical indicator of institutional effectiveness and sustainability. In higher education, it encompasses academic excellence, operational efficiency, financial viability, and stakeholder satisfaction, which collectively determine institutional success and competitiveness (Fossatti *et al*., 2020). The performance of private universities denotes the extent to which these institutions achieve their strategic objectives and fulfil their core mandates of teaching, research, and community service (Agasisti *et al*., 2020). Performance assessment has become increasingly important owing to growing demands for accountability, quality assurance, operational efficiency, and value creation in a competitive and globalized higher education environment (Rana *et al*., 2021). Private university performance can be evaluated through student retention, financial stability, and research allocation (Avedi & Anyieni, 2023), which jointly capture performance from academic, financial, and research perspectives.

Universities worldwide face persistent challenges related to student retention, financial sustainability, research productivity, and technological transformation. Student retention is influenced by the study environment and institutional support systems (Qvortrup & Lykkegaard, 2022), while financial sustainability increasingly requires universities to diversify their revenue sources (Ngcobo *et al*., 2024). Research productivity, in turn, depends on effective institutional management and the organizational conditions that support academic work (Ryazanova & Jaskiene, 2022). Increasing regulatory scrutiny reinforces the need for leadership competencies that enable institutions to navigate regulatory environments, manage organizational risks, and implement strategic change. Leadership competencies have therefore become essential for achieving sustainable performance in a highly regulated higher education sector (Northouse, 2025; Fullan, 2023).

Leadership competencies refer to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behavioral attributes that enable leaders to direct organizations toward strategic goals (Tyminski & Owens, 2024). In higher education institutions, communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence have been identified as particularly important competencies (Ye, 2024; Mugambi *et al*., 2024; Ntarangwe *et al*., 2021; Nzioki & Wanjiku, 2024). Effective communication allows leaders to articulate strategic visions and strengthen stakeholder engagement (Alzghoul *et al*., 2023; Reyes, 2024). Collaboration facilitates partnerships that enhance resource acquisition and research productivity (Abendaño, 2024). Adaptability enables institutions to respond to technological advancements, market demands, and regulatory changes (Kwiotkowska *et al*., 2022; Alenezi, 2023), while emotional intelligence fosters trust, teamwork, and conflict management (Osuya & Cheta-Maclean, 2024).

Private chartered universities play a central role in expanding access to higher education and developing human capital in Kenya. According to the Commission for University Education (CUE, 2025), private chartered universities enrolled 144,007 students in 2024, representing approximately 23 percent of total university enrolment. As of 2026, Kenya had 32 private chartered universities with diverse ownership, missions, and operational focus (Commission for University Education, 2026). Empirical evidence from Kenyan universities indicates that strategic leadership is positively associated with organizational performance (Lengingiro *et al*., 2024), while managerial capabilities have been identified as important performance related factors in private universities (Avedi & Anyieni, 2023). Existing Kenyan studies, however, have largely examined leadership styles or isolated leadership behaviors. This paper therefore presents empirical findings on the influence of communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, conceptualized jointly as leadership competencies, on the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya, anchored on Strategic Leadership Theory.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Private chartered universities constitute a substantial proportion of the university sector in Kenya, yet they continue to record weak performance in student retention, financial stability, and research allocation. According to the Commission for University Education (2024), public chartered universities enrolled 469,688 students (74.7 percent), while private chartered universities enrolled only 144,236 students (23.0 percent). Government-sponsored student placements in private universities declined from 28,063 in 2021 to 9,662 in 2023, a decline of 66 percent (Nyaundi, 2023), while unpaid government sponsorship funds owed to private universities were estimated at between KSh 48.8 billion and KSh 50 billion (Kinyanjui, 2025). Heavy dependence on tuition fees, limited revenue diversification, and low research productivity further undermine the sustainability of these institutions (Chumba, 2020; Lio, 2021).

These performance challenges have been attributed to deficiencies in university leadership. Leaders who lack communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence competencies are less able to attract and retain students, mobilize financial resources, and support research (Maisiba *et al*., 2025; Mugambi *et al*., 2024). Existing studies in Kenya have examined leadership styles (Kathula, 2024), managerial capabilities and sponsorship (Mbithi *et al*., 2024), leadership practices and competitiveness (Mugambi *et al*., 2024), and employee development (Nzioki & Wanjiku, 2024), largely treating leadership variables in isolation. None of these studies, however, examined communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence together as leadership competencies across all private chartered universities in Kenya. The present study addresses this gap.

1.2 Research Objective

To establish the influence of leadership competencies on the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

The literature review is presented in sections.

2.1 Theoretical Review

Strategic Leadership Theory provides the theoretical foundation for explaining how leadership competencies influence strategic decision making, organizational change, and performance. The theory draws on the upper echelons perspective developed by Hambrick and Mason (1984), who proposed that organizational outcomes, including strategic choices and performance, partly reflect the values, experiences, and cognitive bases of senior executives. Leaders interpret internal and external conditions through their experiences, knowledge, and beliefs, which influence the strategic decisions they make. Differences in leadership capabilities can therefore produce different strategic responses and performance outcomes among organizations operating under similar conditions. Lengingiro *et al*. (2024) reported a strong positive correlation between strategic leadership and organizational performance in Kenyan universities and emphasized clear vision, strategic direction, planning, and communication. The present study adopts Strategic Leadership Theory as its anchor theory because it directly explains how leadership competencies shape the performance of private chartered universities.

Ireland and Hitt (1999) conceptualized strategic leadership as the ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, think strategically, and work with others to initiate changes that create a viable future for an organization. They identified six components of effective strategic leadership, namely, determining strategic direction, exploiting core competencies, developing

human capital, sustaining an effective organizational culture, emphasizing ethical practices, and establishing balanced organizational controls. Boal and Hooijberg (2000) additionally identified the capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom as central elements of strategic leadership. The capacity to learn enables leaders to interpret experience and adjust decisions, the capacity to change concerns initiating and managing transformation, while managerial wisdom entails sound judgment and an understanding of social relationships.

The theory offers an explanation for each of the four competencies examined in this study. Communication reflects the responsibility of strategic leaders to determine and articulate organizational direction, and is operationalized through stakeholder meetings, vision clarity, and feedback response (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Ireland & Hitt, 1999). Collaboration reflects the ability of strategic leaders to work with others to initiate change, and is measured through joint projects, partnership agreements, and decision participation. Adaptability is explained by the emphasis that the theory places on anticipating environmental changes and maintaining flexibility, and is measured through policy adoption, technology uptake, and curriculum updates. Emotional intelligence aligns with the emphasis that the theory places on managerial wisdom, social intelligence, and an effective organizational culture, and is measured through conflict resolution, staff satisfaction, and empathy.

Strategic Leadership Theory, notwithstanding its explanatory value, has certain limitations. Hambrick and Mason (1984) relied on observable characteristics of senior executives, such as age, career experiences, and education, as proxies for their cognitive bases, and such proxies do not directly reveal the behaviors through which leaders influence outcomes. Organizational performance is also shaped by factors beyond leadership, including institutional resources, competitive conditions, and government regulations. While Lengingiro *et al*. (2024) reported a strong relationship between strategic leadership and performance, their study covered only six universities and did not establish how communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence jointly influence performance. These limitations notwithstanding, the theory provides a suitable basis for testing the hypothesis that leadership competencies significantly influence the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya.

2.2 Empirical Review

From a global perspective, Rony *et al*. (2023) examined leadership competence at ABC University in Indonesia using a qualitative case study design, with interviews and thematic analysis involving former deans and vice deans. The study treated adaptive leadership, managerial proficiency, communication, and collaboration as independent variables and university progression toward excellent performance as the dependent variable. The study found that competency standards for rectorate leaders were insufficient, particularly in adaptive leadership and communication, which affected university progression. However, the study examined leadership at the institutional level without establishing how specific competencies translate into student retention, financial stability, or research allocation. The present study addresses this gap by examining how communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence influence these performance indicators in private chartered universities in Kenya.

Other global studies have similarly linked leadership competencies to university outcomes. In Iraq, Mahdi *et al*. (2021) established a strong relationship between strategic leadership capabilities and sustainable competitive advantage in private universities, emphasizing the development of human and social capital. In Poland, Kwiotkowska *et al*. (2022) found that gaps in strategic perspective, critical analysis, communication, and self-awareness negatively affected leadership effectiveness. In India, Al Gharsi *et al*. (2024) demonstrated that strategic

planning capability mediated the relationship between financial autonomy and the organizational performance of private universities. These studies, however, were conducted outside Africa and did not examine the four leadership competencies together in relation to the performance of private chartered universities, a gap that the current study addresses within the Kenyan regulatory context.

Within Africa, Osuya and Cheta-Maclean (2024) examined the emotional intelligence of leaders and strategic planning in public universities in Nigeria through a literature review of emotional intelligence dimensions and strategic planning components. Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills were the independent variables, while strategic planning effectiveness was the dependent variable. The study found that emotionally intelligent leaders created inclusive environments, handled conflicts effectively, and built cohesive teams that foster collaboration and innovation. The study, however, focused on public universities and relied on a literature review without empirically testing the relationship between emotional intelligence and student retention, financial stability, and research allocation. The current study addresses this gap by empirically testing these relationships in private chartered universities in Kenya.

In Tanzania, Nnko (2024) investigated emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness among student organization leaders using a descriptive design involving 140 respondents from 35 universities and analysed the data using linear regression. Self-awareness, management of emotions, empathy, and social awareness were the independent variables, while leadership effectiveness was the dependent variable. The study found that all four dimensions significantly predicted leadership effectiveness. However, the study focused on student organization leaders rather than institutional leaders, such as Vice-Chancellors, deans, and heads of departments, who influence institutional performance. The current study addresses this gap by examining the competencies of institutional leaders and their influence on student retention, financial stability, and research allocation.

In Ethiopia, Degebas (2023) examined emotional intelligence as a predictor of leadership competence in higher education using a correlational design across seven universities selected through cluster sampling. Data were collected using 360-degree self and observer rating questionnaires and analysed using factor analysis, correlation, and multiple regression while controlling for demographic and personality variables. The study found a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership competence, with emotional intelligence emerging as a significant predictor. However, the study treated leadership competence as the outcome rather than examining its effect on institutional performance. The present study addresses this gap by examining the effect of emotional intelligence, together with communication, collaboration, and adaptability, on the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya.

In Nigeria, Habeeb and Eyupoglu (2024) examined strategic planning, transformational leadership, and organizational performance in higher education using a survey of 388 staff from 48 state universities, with data analysed through a mediation model. Strategic planning was the independent variable, transformational leadership was the mediating variable, and organizational performance the dependent variable. The study found that strategic planning positively influenced transformational leadership and organizational performance, and that transformational leadership mediated the relationship between strategic planning and performance. However, the study focused on state universities and treated leadership as a general style rather than as specific competencies. The current study addresses this gap by examining specific leadership competencies in private chartered universities in Kenya.

In Kenya, Kathula (2024) examined political staff promotions, the leadership style of vice chancellors, and the performance of private universities using a cross-sectional survey of administrative and academic staff. Political influences and leadership style, including transformational and situational approaches, were the independent variables, while university performance, including academic quality and operational efficiency, was the dependent variable. The study found that political influences and leadership style significantly affected performance. However, the study did not examine leadership competencies such as communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. The present study addresses this gap by examining the influence of these competencies on student retention, financial stability, and research allocation.

Kioko *et al*. (2024) examined the influence of intellectual stimulation on the organizational performance of private universities in Nairobi County using a mixed-methods design, with questionnaires administered to 288 lecturers and interviews held with seven Deans of Academic Affairs. The study found a positive and significant relationship between intellectual stimulation and organizational performance ($\beta = .552$, $p < .05$). Similarly, Muthusi *et al*. (2024) drew on data from 288 lecturers and seven Deans of Academic Affairs and found that individualized consideration, measured through leadership support, mentorship, and career development, had a positive and significant relationship with organizational performance ($\beta = .370$, $p < .05$). However, both studies examined a single leadership behaviour, focused on universities in Nairobi County, and relied on lecturers as respondents. The current study addresses these gaps by examining four leadership competencies using data from institutional leaders across all 32 private chartered universities in Kenya.

Avedi and Anyieni (2023) examined strategic capabilities and the performance of selected chartered private universities in Nairobi City County using a descriptive design involving 125 employees from six universities drawn from planning, finance, administration, and academic leadership. Managerial, technological, marketing, and research and development capabilities were the independent variables, and analysed the data using correlation and regression analysis. The study found that managerial capabilities ($\beta = 1.078$), technological capabilities ($\beta = 0.732$), and marketing capabilities ($\beta = 1.302$) had positive and significant effects on performance, while research and development had no significant effect. However, the study examined organizational capabilities rather than leadership competencies and covered only six universities. The current study addresses this gap by examining leadership competencies across all 32 private chartered universities in Kenya.

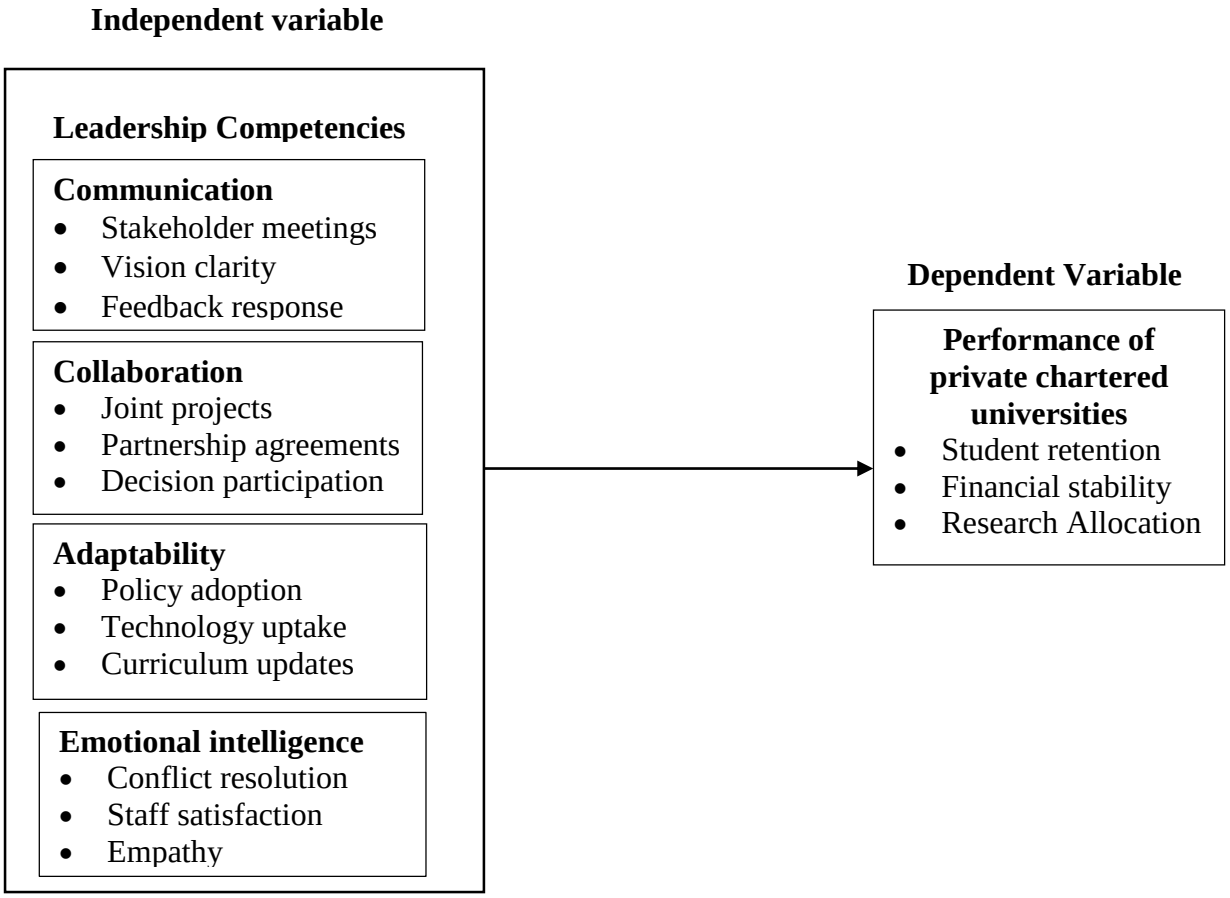
The reviewed studies collectively indicate that communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence are important for leadership effectiveness and organizational performance in higher education. Rony *et al*. (2023) highlighted weaknesses in adaptive leadership and communication, while Osuya and Cheta-Maclean (2024), Nnko (2024), and Degebas (2023) emphasized the contribution of emotional intelligence. In Kenya, Kioko *et al*. (2024) and Muthusi *et al*. (2024) established positive relationships between specific leadership behaviors and private university performance, while Avedi and Anyieni (2023) demonstrated the importance of managerial capabilities. However, these studies largely examined individual leadership behaviors, general leadership styles, or organizational capabilities, which provides the basis for examining how the four leadership competencies jointly influence the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 positions leadership competencies, comprising communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, as the independent

variable, and the performance of private chartered universities, measured through student retention, financial stability, and research allocation, as the dependent variable.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



3.0 Research Methodology

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

A census was used to include all Vice-Chancellors, ICT Directors, Human Resource Managers, and Finance Managers, yielding 128 respondents. For Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Research and Innovation Directors, Deans, and Heads of Departments, the sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula with finite population correction, which produced 241 respondents selected through proportionate stratified random sampling. The overall sample was therefore 369 respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with five-

point Likert scale items ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Leadership competencies were measured using 42 items and performance using nine items.

The questionnaire was pretested on 37 respondents drawn from private university constituent colleges and institutions with Letters of Interim Authority, which were excluded from the main study. Content and face validity were established through expert review by the research supervisors and feedback from the pretest respondents, while construct validity was assessed using principal component analysis, with all items recording communalities above 0.50. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients of .814 for communication, .886 for collaboration, .764 for adaptability, .809 for emotional intelligence, and .939 for performance, all of which exceeded the 0.70 threshold. The composite score for leadership competencies was computed as the mean of the four competencies. Data were analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation, and simple linear regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance.

4.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents the study findings and discusses them in relation to the research objectives and existing literature. The results are presented in four subsections, namely response rate, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. Each subsection provides an analysis and interpretation of the findings to establish their implications for the study.

4.1 Response Rate

The study targeted a sample of 369 respondents drawn from the 32 private chartered universities in Kenya, comprising 128 respondents selected through census and 241 respondents selected through proportionate stratified random sampling. Of the 369 questionnaires distributed, 302 were returned fully completed and used for analysis, representing a response rate of 81.8 percent, while 67 questionnaires (18.2 percent) were not returned. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) regard a response rate of 70 percent and above as very good for analysis and reporting; the response rate was therefore adequate for descriptive, correlation, and regression analysis. The high response rate was attributed to follow-up by trained research assistants, the option of completing the questionnaire either in hard copy or through Google Forms, and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality given to all respondents.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

4.2.1 Leadership Competencies

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

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Communication

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

Source: Research Data (2026)

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

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Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Collaboration

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

Source: Research Data (2026)

The composite mean for collaboration was 3.99 (SD = 0.45), indicating that respondents agreed that university leaders fostered collaboration through joint projects, partnerships, and participative decision making. Cross-functional collaboration among organizational units recorded the highest mean of 4.23 (SD = 0.68), followed by strategic alliances with industry stakeholders (M = 4.19, SD = 0.69). Stakeholder participation in institutional governance recorded the lowest mean of 3.78 (SD = 0.89) and the highest variability, implying that participative governance was less developed than other aspects of collaboration. This finding supports the proposition of Strategic Leadership Theory that strategic leaders work with others to initiate the changes that create a viable future for the organization (Ireland & Hitt, 1999), and is consistent with Nzioki and Wanjiku (2024), who identified team building and participative decision making as competencies that improve service delivery in private universities. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for adaptability.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Adaptability

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

Source: Research Data (2026)

The composite mean for adaptability was 3.99 (SD = 0.42), indicating that respondents agreed that university leaders responded effectively to regulatory, technological, and market changes. The prompt modification of policies in response to government regulations recorded the highest mean of 4.19 (SD = 0.64), followed by regular curriculum updates in response to market demands (M = 4.17, SD = 0.64). The adoption of digital technologies to enhance teaching and learning recorded the lowest mean of 3.75 (SD = 0.64), and the implementation of institutional reforms recorded a mean of 3.77 (SD = 0.77), suggesting that universities adapted faster to regulatory demands than to internally driven reforms and that digital adoption in academic delivery was uneven. This finding is consistent with Strategic Leadership Theory, which treats the capacity to change as a core attribute of strategic leaders (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for emotional intelligence.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Intelligence

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

Source: Research Data (2026)

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

4.2.2 Performance of Private Chartered Universities

The dependent variable was the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya, measured through student retention (items 1 to 3), financial stability (items 4 to 6), and research allocation (items 7 to 9). Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for performance.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Performance of Private Chartered Universities

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

Source: Research Data (2026)

A total of 79.1% of respondents agreed that high student completion rates serve as a primary indicator of strong student retention within the university, 3.0% disagreed, and 17.9% were neutral (M = 3.96, SD = 0.75). Regarding the statement that high-quality instruction serves as a key driver of student persistence toward degree completion, 84.4% agreed, 2.0% disagreed, and 13.6% were neutral, with a mean of 4.16 (SD = 0.73). The results further show that 76.5%

agreed that comprehensive institutional support services significantly bolster student retention rates within the university, while 1.3% disagreed and 22.2% were neutral (M = 3.92, SD = 0.67). High-quality instruction recorded the highest mean in the performance scale, indicating that respondents regarded teaching quality as the main driver of student retention.

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

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

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

4.3 Correlation Analysis

This section presents the Spearman rank-order correlation analysis, which examined the strength and direction of the relationships between leadership competencies and the performance of private chartered universities. Spearman correlation was used because the normality test results showed that performance departed significantly from a normal distribution. The coefficients were computed using a two-tailed test of significance and interpreted following Field (2013), who treats coefficients of .10, .30, and .50 as small, medium, and large effects, which in this study were described as weak, moderate, and strong relationships respectively. Table 6 presents the correlation matrix.

Table 6: Spearman Correlation Matrix

Variable	Statistic	Performance	Leadership Competencies
Performance	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	302	
Leadership Competencies	Correlation Coefficient	.799**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	302	302

Note. Source: Research Data (2026)

Leadership competencies recorded a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship with the performance of private chartered universities ($r_s = .799$, $p < .01$). This result implies that universities whose leaders demonstrated higher levels of communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence recorded higher performance in student retention, financial stability, and research allocation. The strong relationship is consistent with Kipngetich *et al*. (2025), who reported a strong association between innovative leadership and performance ($r = 0.800$, $p < .01$) in the domestic aviation sector in Kenya, and with Rubera and Ngui (2023), who established significant positive correlations between leadership practices and the performance of chartered universities in Kenya.

4.4 Regression Analysis

The study sought to establish the influence of leadership competencies on the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya. The corresponding null hypothesis (H_{01}) stated that there is no statistically significant influence of leadership competencies on the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya. Simple linear regression analysis was conducted using the composite score of leadership competencies, computed as the mean of communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, to test this hypothesis. Table 7 presents the model summary results.

Table 7: Model Summary for Leadership Competencies and Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.789	.623	.621	.3066745

Note. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Competencies.

Source: Research Data (2026)

The model summary results show that leadership competencies explained 62.3 percent of the variance in the performance of private chartered universities, as indicated by an R Square value of 0.623. The R value of 0.789 denotes a strong linear relationship between leadership competencies and performance. The adjusted R Square of 0.621 confirms that leadership competencies contribute substantially to explaining variations in institutional performance. The remaining 37.7 percent of the variance is attributable to factors not captured in the model. Table 8 presents the ANOVA results.

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Table 8: ANOVA for Leadership Competencies and Performance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	46.540	1	46.540	494.851	.000
	Residual	28.215	300	.094		
	Total	74.755	301			

Note. Dependent variable: Performance. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Competencies.

Source: Research Data (2026)

The ANOVA results confirm that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 300) = 494.851$, $p < 0.05$. This indicates that leadership competencies significantly predict the performance of private chartered universities and that the model fitted the data well. Table 9 presents the regression coefficients.

Table 9: Regression Coefficients for Leadership Competencies and Performance

Model		Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-.794	.214		-3.712	.000
	Leadership Competencies	1.194	.054	.789	22.245	.000

Note. Dependent variable: Performance.

Source: Research Data (2026)

The fitted simple linear regression model for leadership competencies and performance is expressed as follows:

$Y = -0.794 + 1.194X$

Where Y represents the performance of private chartered universities and X represents leadership competencies.

The regression coefficients demonstrate that leadership competencies had a statistically significant positive effect on performance. The unstandardized coefficient B was 1.194, indicating that a one-unit increase in leadership competencies is associated with a 1.194-unit increase in the performance of private chartered universities. The standardised coefficient Beta of 0.789 confirms the strong relative contribution of leadership competencies to performance. Based on these results, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) that there is no statistically significant influence of leadership competencies on the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya was rejected. This finding is consistent with Kathula (2024), who found that leadership style significantly affected academic quality and operational efficiency in private universities, and with Avedi and Anyieni (2023), who found that managerial capabilities had a positive and significant effect on the performance of chartered private universities in Nairobi City County ($\beta = 1.078$). The finding further agrees with Mbithi *et al*. (2024), who established strong interconnections among managerial capabilities in strategic decision making and resource mobilization, sponsorship, and the performance of private chartered universities.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that leadership competencies are a primary determinant of the performance of private chartered universities in Kenya. Communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, conceptualized jointly as leadership competencies, contribute to student retention, financial stability, and research allocation, which shows that performance depends on a combination of competencies rather than on a single leadership attribute. While leaders were rated favorably on conflict resolution and on the communication of vision, the lower ratings on feedback mechanisms, stakeholder participation in governance, staff satisfaction, and employee morale show that the internal and people-centred aspects of leadership remain less developed than its strategic and external aspects.

6.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that university councils and the management of private chartered universities prioritize the development of leadership competencies, based on the finding that leadership competencies significantly predicted performance ($B = 1.194$, $\beta = 0.789$, $p < .05$) and explained 62.3 percent of its variance. Universities should establish structured leadership development programmes covering communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence for Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Heads of Departments, and functional directors, and should include these competencies in the criteria for the recruitment, appointment, appraisal, and promotion of leaders. Management should strengthen feedback mechanisms through regular staff forums and scheduled stakeholder consultations with clear timelines for responding to stakeholder input. Management should also widen stakeholder participation in institutional governance by including staff, students, alumni, and industry representatives in governance and planning committees, and should expand partnership agreements with external organizations and other universities to support joint research, resource sharing, and programme development. In addition, universities should strengthen the emotional intelligence of leaders through training in conflict management, empathy, and staff engagement, and should conduct periodic staff satisfaction surveys whose results inform action plans for improving employee morale and job satisfaction.

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