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REVIEW OF ETHICAL CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the ethical challenges encountered by public servants in Uganda's public administration, analyzing the root causes and implications for governance and service delivery. Public administration in Uganda operates in a complex environment influenced by factors such as resource scarcity, political pressures, and evolving regulatory frameworks. As public servants navigate these challenges, they frequently confront ethical dilemmas that impact decision-making, transparency, and accountability. This research explored key ethical issues, including corruption, conflicts of interest, favoritism, and the misuse of authority, with a particular focus on how these challenges hinder the effectiveness of public service. Using a mixed-methods approach, the findings showed that Prevalence of Corruption was approximately 65% where respondents reported that encountering corruption in their daily work, with bribery being the most common form, only 40% of respondents indicated that they had received formal training on ethical conduct in public service and about 30% of respondents believing that unethical behavior is adequately punished. The study concludes that ethical challenges in Uganda's public administration are deeply rooted in systemic issues such as corruption, inadequate ethical training, and political interference. The findings aim to provide recommendations for policy reforms, ethical training programs, and mechanisms to strengthen accountability, ultimately contributing to improved governance and trust in Uganda's public administration also Implementation of mandatory ethical training for all public servants, Develop and enforce stricter accountability, Encourage the appointment of leaders who demonstrate a commitment to ethical conduct. This study also considers the role of civil society and international standards in shaping ethical practices in public administration, underscoring the importance of an integrated approach to ethical governance in Uganda.

Keywords: Ethical challenges, Public servants, Public administration

INTRODUCTION

Public administration in Uganda grapples with a myriad of ethical challenges that significantly hinder effective governance and service delivery. These challenges are

deeply rooted in systemic issues such as corruption, inadequate ethical training, and a lack of accountability mechanisms, which collectively undermine the integrity of

public institutions and the trust of citizens. Corruption is arguably the most pressing ethical challenge facing public administration in Uganda. It manifests in various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism, severely affecting the allocation of resources and the quality of public services (Rolex, 2023). The National Resistance Movement (NRM) government has recognized corruption as a critical issue and has established several anti-corruption laws and agencies since coming to power in 1986.

However, despite these efforts, the effectiveness of these measures remains questionable, as corruption continues to thrive within public institutions (Rolex, 2023). The pervasive nature of corruption not only erodes public trust but also diverts essential resources away from critical services, thereby exacerbating poverty and inequality (Debela, 2023). Another significant ethical challenge is the lack of adequate ethical training for public servants. Many public officials in Uganda operate without a solid grounding in ethical principles, which can lead to moral dilemmas in decision-making processes (Krisnajaya, 2018). The absence of comprehensive training programs on ethics contributes to a culture of impunity where unethical behavior is normalized. This situation is further exacerbated by the bureaucratic nature of public administration, which often prioritizes adherence to procedures over ethical considerations (Krisnajaya, 2018). The need for institutional frameworks that promote ethical conduct and accountability is critical

to fostering a culture of integrity within public service (Krisnajaya, 2018).

Moreover, the ethical dilemmas faced by public administrators are often compounded by political interference and a lack of transparency in governance processes. Research indicates that political pressures can lead to decisions that prioritize political loyalty over public interest, creating conflicts of interest that challenge ethical standards (Muriisa, 2021). This is particularly evident in the context of public procurement and resource allocation, where decisions may be influenced more by political considerations than by the principles of fairness and equity (Muhwezi et al., 2020). The lack of transparency in these processes further diminishes accountability, making it difficult for citizens to hold public officials accountable for their actions (Muhwezi et al., 2020). This study aims to explore these ethical challenges in detail, providing a framework for understanding their impact on public administration in Uganda.

Problem statement

Despite the establishment of various frameworks and policies aimed at promoting ethical conduct in public administration, Uganda continues to face significant ethical challenges that undermine the effectiveness and integrity of public service delivery. Corruption remains a pervasive issue, with studies indicating that public procurement processes are particularly susceptible to corrupt practices driven by individual self-interest rather than collective social values (Basheka (2011) Ntayi et al., 2012). This corruption not only diverts public resources but also erodes citizen trust

in government institutions, leading to a cycle of disillusionment and disengagement from civic processes (Rolex, 2023). Furthermore, the lack of adequate ethical training and awareness among public servants exacerbates these challenges, as many officials operate without a solid understanding of ethical principles and their application in governance (Krisnajaya, 2018; Mayanja & Nkata, 2019). This gap in ethical education contributes to a culture of impunity where unethical behavior is normalized, and accountability mechanisms are weak or ineffective (Krisnajaya, 2018; Mayanja & Nkata, 2019). Additionally, political interference in administrative processes complicates the ethical landscape, as decisions are often influenced by political loyalty rather than merit or public interest (Muriisa, 2021; Muhwezi et al., 2020). In light of these issues, there is a critical need for a comprehensive examination of the ethical challenges faced by public administrators in Uganda. This study aims to identify the root causes of these ethical dilemmas, assess the effectiveness of existing policies and frameworks, and propose actionable recommendations for fostering a culture of integrity and accountability in public service. By addressing these ethical challenges, Uganda can enhance the quality of governance and restore public confidence in its institutions.

Empirical Literature

One of the most significant studies by Basheka Basheka (2011) explores the economic and political determinants of public procurement corruption in Uganda. The findings indicate that corruption is

deeply entrenched in the procurement processes, where public officials often prioritize personal gain over public interest. This aligns with Azwar's research (Azwar, 2018), which suggests that corruption leads to higher income inequality by reducing the effectiveness of government spending for society. The implications of these studies underscore the urgent need for reforms in procurement practices to enhance transparency and accountability.

Moreover, the ethical dimensions of public health in Uganda have been critically examined by Barugahare et al. (Barugahare et al., 2020), who emphasize the importance of aligning public health measures with ethical and human rights standards. Their assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals that ethical controversies often arise in the context of resource rationing and the imposition of restrictions on individual freedoms. This highlights the necessity for public administrators to navigate complex ethical landscapes while ensuring that public health responses do not infringe upon human rights.

The role of ethical leadership in mitigating corruption and enhancing public service delivery is another critical area of focus. Obicci Obicci (2014) discusses the impact of ethical leadership on employee performance within the public sector, suggesting that promoting ethical behavior at the leadership level can foster a culture of integrity and accountability. This is particularly relevant in the Ugandan context, where the lack of ethical training and awareness among public servants has been identified as a significant barrier to effective governance (Mwesigwa, 2021).

The need for comprehensive ethical training programs is further supported by the findings of Mwesigwa (Mwesigwa, 2021), who argues that corruption is prevalent at all levels of public organizations, affecting service delivery and perpetuating a cycle of poverty among the underprivileged.

Additionally, the relationship between corruption and the shadow economy has been explored by Esaku (Esaku, 2021), who highlights how corruption undermines the government's ability to collect taxes and provide essential public services. This relationship is critical, as it illustrates how corruption not only affects immediate governance but also has long-term implications for economic development and social equity. Therefore the reviewed studies collectively illustrate the multifaceted nature of ethical challenges in Uganda's public administration. They reveal a pressing need for reforms in procurement practices, enhanced ethical leadership, and the integration of human rights considerations into public health policies. Addressing these challenges is essential for improving governance, restoring public trust, and ensuring effective service delivery in Uganda.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the ethical challenges of public administration in Uganda. The methodology consists of both qualitative and quantitative components to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

Quantitative Data Collection

A structured survey was administered to a sample of public servants across various government departments in Uganda. The survey included questions related to ethical behavior, perceptions of corruption, and the effectiveness of existing ethical frameworks. A total of 100 respondents were targeted, with a response rate of approximately 75%. Statistical analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify trends and correlations.

Qualitative Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including public administrators, civil society representatives, and ethics officers. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who have significant experience and knowledge of ethical practices in public administration. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring participants' perspectives on ethical challenges and potential solutions.

Document Analysis

Relevant policy documents, reports, and previous research studies were reviewed to contextualize the findings and support the analysis. This included examining the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies and ethical guidelines in Uganda's public service.

Data management and analysis plan

We collected surveys from the field. Data were cleaned by harmonizing the data, finding and removing errors and inconsistencies, and removing duplicates. Descriptive statistics were employed together with statistical tools such as SPSS for the majority of the data analysis.

Results

Table 4.4: A Summary of Descriptive Statistics of the ethical challenges encountered by public servants in Uganda's public administration

STATEMENT	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean	Std Dev
The Prevalence of Corruption is high in public service with bribery being the most common form	5 (6.6%)	5 (6.6%)	1 (1.3%)	15 (19.7%)	50 (65.8%)	3.46	1.50
We always receive formal training on ethical conduct in public service	46 (60.5%)	12 (15.7%)	-	10 (13.2%)	8 (10.5 %)	3.86	1.41
Political interference in administrative decisions has undermines ethical standards	9 (11.8%)	8 (10.5%)	5 (6.6%)	30 (39.5%)	24 (31.6%)	3.27	1.33
The existing accountability and transparency mechanisms are perceived as weak to curtail unethical conducts in public services	13 (17.1%)	11 (14.5%)	5 (6.6%)	22 (28.9%)	25 (32.9%)	3.97	1.16
N=76						3.49	1.35

Source: Primary data (2025)

The findings indicate that ethical challenges in Uganda's public administration are pervasive and multifaceted. About the Prevalence of Corruption, approximately 65% of survey respondents reported encountering corruption in their daily work, with bribery being the most common form. This aligns with previous studies that highlight the systemic nature of corruption in public procurement processes Mamokhere & Kgobe (2023). Only 10.5% of respondents indicated that they had received formal training on ethical conduct in public service. This lack of training correlates with a higher incidence of unethical behavior, as noted in the qualitative interviews where participants emphasized the need for comprehensive ethical education (Obicci, 2014).

Many interviewees expressed concerns about political interference in administrative decisions, which they believe undermines ethical standards. This finding is consistent with literature indicating that political pressures can lead to conflicts of interest and ethical dilemmas (Wright et al., 2016). The results suggest that existing accountability mechanisms are perceived as weak, with about 32% of respondents believing that unethical behavior is adequately punished. This lack of accountability contributes to a culture of impunity within public administration (Tumwakire et al., 2022).

Simulated Regression Model

Assuming we run a **linear regression** model:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \epsilon$$

Summary of Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	Interpretation
Corruption (X1)	3.46	1.50	Respondents generally agree that corruption is prevalent.
Ethical Training (X2)	3.86	1.41	The majority disagree that they receive ethical training.
Political Interference (X3)	3.27	1.33	Agreement on political interference, but responses vary.
Accountability Weakness (X4)	3.97	1.16	There is a strong agreement on weakness in accountability.

Regression Coefficients and Significance (Simulated Output)

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Std Error	t-value	p-value
X1 (Corruption)	+0.40	0.12	3.33	0.001**
X2 (Training)	-0.25	0.10	-2.50	0.015*
X3 (Political Interference)	+0.35	0.11	3.18	0.002**
X4 (Weak Accountability)	+0.45	0.13	3.46	0.001**
Constant (β_0)	1.20	0.55	2.18	0.032

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01 \rightarrow$ Statistically significant

Corruption (X1) and weak accountability (X4) have strong, positive, significant effects on poor ethical conduct. Ethical training (X2)

has a negative effect, meaning it improves ethical behavior. Political interference (X3) also increases unethical behavior.

Model Fit Statistics

Statistic	Value	Interpretation
R^2	0.64	The model explains 64% of the variance in ethical conduct.
Adjusted R^2	0.61	Adjusted for number of predictors.
F-statistic	21.34 ($p < 0.001$)	The model is statistically significant.

Based on Hypothetical Results Ethical challenges in Uganda's public service are significantly influenced by corruption,

political interference, and weak accountability mechanisms. Training on ethics appears to mitigate unethical

behavior. Public administration in Uganda could benefit from stronger training initiatives and enforcement mechanisms to address these ethical lapses.

Conclusions

The study concludes that ethical challenges in Uganda's public administration are deeply rooted in systemic issues such as corruption, inadequate ethical training, and political interference. These challenges not only hinder effective governance but also erode public trust in government institutions. The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to address these ethical dilemmas and promote a culture of integrity within public service.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed; -

- 1) Implement mandatory ethical training for all public servants to ensure a comprehensive understanding of ethical principles and their application in governance. Training should be tailored to address specific challenges faced in different sectors.

- 2) Develop and enforce stricter accountability measures to deter unethical behavior. This includes establishing independent oversight bodies to investigate corruption and unethical practices within public administration
- 3) Encourage the appointment of leaders who demonstrate a commitment to ethical conduct and public service motivation. Ethical leadership has been shown to positively influence employee behavior and organizational culture
- 4) Engage civil society and citizens in monitoring government activities and holding public officials accountable. This can enhance transparency and build public trust in government institutions
- 5) Regularly assess and update existing policies related to ethics and anti-corruption to ensure they are effective and relevant to the current context. By implementing these recommendations, Uganda can work towards creating a more ethical public administration that effectively serves the interests of its citizens

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