

# Autocratic Leadership and Employee Performance in Public Universities of South Sudan: Implications for Fragile States

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## Abstract

This study examines the impact of autocratic leadership on employee performance in three public universities in the Republic of South Sudan. Beyond contributing to the development of higher education locally, the study aims to provide insights into leadership practices in fragile states and their implications for organizational performance globally. Findings indicate that autocratic leadership is the dominant style, with 48.2% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing, while 25% were uncertain and 26.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The prevalence of this style is influenced by ongoing socio-economic crises and conflict, which limit leaders' capacity to fully exercise their roles. Key challenges identified include delays and inconsistencies in staff promotions, inadequate investment in training and professional development, poor infrastructural development, and insufficient motivation packages for employees. These factors hinder staff performance, reduce institutional growth, and affect the quality of graduates produced. Overall, the study concludes that while autocratic leadership is prevalent, it does not significantly enhance employee performance or institutional development. The restrictive nature of this style, compounded by external challenges, limits management efficiency and organizational progress. The research recommends adopting more participatory or transformational leadership approaches to improve staff performance and the overall quality of higher education in South Sudan.

**Keywords:** Autocratic, Leadership, Employees, performance, public Universities.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background:

The higher education system in South Sudan faces significant challenges, largely driven by leadership practices, low investment, and limited institutional capacity despite high demand (Bond et al., 2018). Although the government has made efforts to build a robust human resource base to strengthen management in public universities, these initiatives were repeatedly interrupted by the conflicts of 2013 and 2016, triggered by divisions among SPLM party leaders (Buny & Apet, 2022). South Sudan currently has five government-supported public universities,

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established at different intervals. For example, the University of Juba was founded in 1975, while the University of Bahr El Ghazel and the University of Upper Nile were established in the early 1990s following President Al Bashir's coup in 1989 as part of his policies to build trust with southern communities. Dr. John Garang Memorial University and Rumbek University of Science and Technology were later promoted to full public universities in 2007 and 2010, respectively, as part of a national unity initiative. Before independence, 73% of the workforce in southern Sudan were northern Sudanese (Akec, 2021), and after independence, South Sudanese universities lost an average of 65% of their teaching staff (Akec, 2021), leaving institutions in severe leadership and staffing dilemmas. Despite these constraints, university leaders have made efforts to manage resources, develop human capital, and promote quality education to meet global performance standards.

Prior research highlights the critical impact of leadership style on employee performance, motivation, and organizational outcomes. Hassnain (2023) found that in Pakistan, democratic leadership positively influences employee motivation and performance, whereas autocratic leadership tends to intimidate subordinates, limiting their potential. Ali Larik and Karim Lashari (2022) similarly emphasized that while autocratic leadership can enforce control, participative and democratic approaches are more effective for sustained performance improvement. Khudhair et al. (2022) reported that democratic and laissez-faire styles were positively correlated with employee performance, while autocratic leadership exhibited a negative impact. Collectively, these studies indicate that autocratic leadership, though sometimes effective in high-pressure decision-making, often diminishes engagement, creativity, and overall performance when applied in isolation.

In higher education, these patterns are particularly evident. Amegayibor (2021) and Mahdayanthi and Astuti (2020) found that autocratic leadership may improve task compliance and error reduction but often at the expense of staff satisfaction and innovation. Acquah (2020) reported that while autocratic leadership in Ghanaian universities had a small, statistically insignificant effect on faculty performance, democratic and authentic leadership had stronger, significant impacts. These findings underscore the limitations of a purely autocratic approach in knowledge-intensive and complex environments, emphasizing the need for adaptive leadership strategies that blend directive, participatory, transformational, and employee-oriented practices to enhance institutional effectiveness in resource-constrained contexts like South Sudan.

Autocratic leadership, also called authoritarian leadership, centralizes decision-making authority with minimal input from team members (Chukwusa, 2018). Leaders relying on this style make most decisions independently, enforce strict adherence to rules, and maintain a rigid hierarchical structure. While this approach can facilitate efficiency and swift decision-making, it may stifle creativity and reduce employee morale if applied excessively. In South Sudan, Koyok (2022) and Akec (2021) noted similar challenges, including insufficient teaching staff development, inadequate facilities, limited student admissions, and high staff turnover—all influenced by leadership behaviors in public universities. Effective leadership requires orienting staff to the institution's mission, developing strategic plans, and motivating personnel to maximize their potential (Benade, 2019). Human resource development is a key aspect of leadership responsibility, encompassing training, skill-building, and effective deployment of personnel (Buny, 2017). Public university leaders must address these challenges, particularly given the severe shortage of trained staff in South Sudan's higher education system.

In many developed countries, teaching assistants and master's degree holders are provided with ongoing professional development to ensure knowledge transfer and faculty preparedness. In South Sudan, however, teaching assistants and master's graduates may go more than a decade without access to further education unless they independently secure scholarships. Alarming, some teaching assistants are assigned to teach third-year students, a practice generally

considered inappropriate in academic contexts. This situation reflects the failure of the South Sudan Council of Higher Education to provide effective leadership, policy oversight, and institutional governance, leaving universities to operate in isolation. Investing in staff development can significantly improve workforce effectiveness. For example, from 2011 to 2022, 38,746 students were enrolled across 14 national tertiary institutions, with 75% male and 26% female students, indicating significant gender disparity and capacity constraints (Akec, 2022).

Following independence, South Sudanese universities faced severe staff shortages, with an average loss of 65% of teaching personnel, forcing closures of some departments (Akec, 2022). Consequently, lecture halls, laboratories, and equipment were insufficient, and as of 2020, only 2,575 full-time academic staff served five public universities (Akec, 2021). University of Juba alone enrolled 72% of students, while the remaining four universities shared just 28%, highlighting the urgent need for innovative leadership to expand capacity and accommodate more learners. Graduation statistics further underscore these challenges; from 2011 to 2022, public universities conducted few ceremonies and graduated a limited number of students, with Dr. John Garang Memorial University graduating fewer than 2,000 students since its 2008 establishment. These figures raise concerns about the effectiveness of leadership practices in South Sudan's public universities.

Despite these challenges, the University of Juba has made notable efforts to graduate students regularly. Nevertheless, the sector remains constrained by lingering effects of the 2013 and 2016 conflicts, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and economic instability. The 2021 lockdown imposed by the World Health Organization and the government further stalled progress, including infrastructure development. Currently, no substantial government initiatives aim to modernize higher education facilities to global standards. Many universities still rely on temporary classrooms, outdated buildings from the 1950s, or shipping containers. Given the critical role of higher education in promoting social mobility and equal opportunity, urgent interventions in leadership, infrastructure, and staff development are essential to transform South Sudan's universities into globally competitive institutions.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The lack of understanding and effective execution of leadership roles in South Sudan's public universities has contributed to persistent performance deficiencies (Kuyok, 2021). These deficiencies are evidenced by poor-quality graduates, inadequate learning facilities, high turnover rates among teaching staff, low annual graduation numbers, staff dissatisfaction, stagnant promotions, unfriendly work environments, and widespread inequalities. The irregular closures of public universities, often caused by food shortages, rising tuition fees, insufficient accommodation, delayed salaries, and exacerbated by wars and poverty, further compound these issues (Johnson, 2019). This situation reflects a deeper, structural problem: the failure to align leadership practices with the needs of both employees and institutions. Consequently, there is a critical need to examine leadership styles, particularly autocratic leadership, and their effects on employee performance.

Empirical evidence from prior studies reinforces the importance of leadership in shaping employee outcomes. Hassnain (2023) demonstrated that autocratic leadership creates a sense of intimidation among subordinates, reducing motivation and performance, whereas democratic leadership positively influences employee engagement and productivity. Similarly, Ali Larik and Karim Lashari (2022) highlighted that while autocratic leadership can impose control, participative and democratic styles are more effective for long-term performance enhancement. Khudhair et al. (2022) also reported that democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles have stronger positive correlations with employee performance compared to autocratic leadership, which negatively affects outcomes. These findings emphasize that an overreliance on

authoritarian practices can hinder employee engagement, innovation, and institutional effectiveness.

In practical terms, autocratic leadership in organizational settings, including higher education, may achieve short-term compliance and error reduction, but often at the expense of employee satisfaction and creativity (Amegayibor, 2021; Mahdayanthi & Astuti, 2020). Acquah (2020) further observed that in Ghanaian universities, autocratic leadership exhibits a positive yet statistically insignificant effect on faculty performance, whereas authentic and democratic leadership styles significantly improve staff outcomes. These findings indicate that in knowledge-intensive institutions like universities, rigid, top-down leadership approaches fail to fully harness employee potential and can undermine institutional growth.

Given these insights, the problem in South Sudan's public universities is not merely the presence of autocratic leadership but the absence of a strategic, adaptive approach that integrates employee needs, motivation, and professional development into the leadership framework. Addressing this gap is essential to improving staff performance, reducing turnover, enhancing graduate quality, and fostering sustainable institutional development. This study, therefore, investigates the impact of autocratic leadership on employee performance within South Sudan's public universities, providing empirical evidence to guide the adoption of more effective, context-appropriate leadership strategies.

## **2. Literature Review:**

### **2.1 Gaps Identification and Critical Review of Leadership Theories with Focus on Autocratic Leadership**

Leadership theories have long aimed to explain the traits, behaviors, and contexts that contribute to effective leadership. Among these, Trait Leadership Theory posits that successful leadership originates from certain inborn personality traits and characteristics, which produce consistent behavioral patterns. Key traits commonly associated with effective leadership include drive, the desire to lead, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, and intelligence (Berkel et al., 2023). Trait theory further distinguishes between emergent traits, which influence a person's rise to leadership positions—such as height, intelligence, attractiveness, and self-confidence—and effectiveness traits, which determine a leader's success in guiding and influencing followers, with charisma considered a fundamental component (Ekvall & Arvonen, 1991). Charisma, in particular, has been recognized as a transformative force; Burns (2003) notes that Max Weber regarded charisma as the greatest revolutionary force, portraying leaders with extraordinary qualities capable of inspiring exceptional performance and devotion among followers. Despite the insights provided by Trait Leadership Theory, several gaps remain, particularly regarding its applicability to contemporary organizational contexts and autocratic leadership. While traits like drive and self-confidence may enable decisive action, the theory does not fully account for contextual and environmental factors that can moderate the effectiveness of these traits. In higher education institutions operating in fragile or resource-constrained environments, such as public universities in South Sudan, the presence of leadership traits alone may not translate into enhanced employee performance or institutional effectiveness. Specifically, under autocratic leadership, the reliance on a leader's inherent traits without adequate consideration of employee participation, motivation, and organizational culture may limit overall performance outcomes. This gap highlights the need for empirical research to examine how autocratic leaders utilize—or fail to utilize—their traits to influence employee performance, engagement, and institutional development in challenging settings.

### **2.2 Fiedler's Contingency Theory (1960s) Fiedler's Contingency Theory**

Emphasizes the importance of the specific context a leader encounters, typically focusing on short-term scenarios. The theory is based on the interplay between situational factors and individual traits, which together affect group performance and member satisfaction. A leader's

effectiveness is contingent upon the circumstances they face; for instance (Kara 2016) a positive relationship between the leader and the group facilitates smoother leadership dynamics. Thus, the theory asserts that the success or failure of a leadership approach hinges on the compatibility between the leader and the situation.

### **2.3 Path Goal Theories**

Martine Evans and Robert House in 1972 The Path goal theory is based on the behaviors that the leader demonstrates for the subordinates to attain their goals. A leader influence follower by removing obstacles from paths to desired goals, rewarding them for attain in their goals and classifying paths to valued goals(John R 2018). A leader must be able to demonstrate four different behavior styles. This theory is linked to objective two and objective four. The differences between situational leadership theory and contingency theory: Situational approach believes a leader should adapt to the situation at hand, while contingency Theory believes that the leader right leader should match the right situation. Contingency leadership focusses on the specific situation that the leader is facing while situational leadership takes a more general approach. Contingency leaders are more likely to be concerned with short-term goals while situational leaders may take a longer-term view. The situational theory focuses on the behavior of the leader and the contingency theory focuses on the contingent factors The Situational theory helps you identify which type of leadership styles to use based off the individual or group, while the contingency theory helps you identify your natural leadership style and which would be most effective in situation. In conclusion, all these four theories, are considerably crucial for this study for they had revealed on how leaders are either nurtured or nature A Success or failure of a leadership style cannot be attributed to one leadership style rather than behaviors of a leader; this was the main reason for taking autocratic leadership style survey across the three public universities.

### **2.4 Leadership Associate terms (Management and Administration)**

Leadership does not stand alone, however its work better with administration and management. Sometimes it very difficult to distinguish and separate the three. As. Leadership define as inspiring, motivating, and sets example for people to accomplish positive change in an organization while management is assigned to a more of supportive function that involves planning and systemic procedures to ensure that activities resulting from leadership activities are actually happen (HunHua Z. 20012) This argument is agreement with (Dimnock,2002) view ‘ taken Leadership as higher order set of abilities ,visioning, and motivating while he viewed management as the lower order of the group of activities concern with managing performance though supervision and administration as involves overseeing an organization day to day routines. 2.5.1 Learning infrastructure development The role of a country to attain sustainable development is to focus on the two significant domains, Human resource development and infrastructural development. The theory of infrastructural led development by Freshman; s in 1700 demonstrated on open access to infrastructure resources generate significant value for consumers and society. His Theory suggest that the benefit of open access and corresponding costs of restricted access are significantly greater than reflected in current debate (Constantine, 2012) This Theory is an engine to accelerating and promotion of quality education of higher education Digital integration in universities has undoubtedly propelled higher education into an era of increased accessibility, adaptability, and efficiency. Primarily, democratizing education has been one of the most profound benefits. With the advent of digital platforms, particularly MOOCs, quality education is no longer bound by geographical constraints; a student in a remote village can access courses from prestigious institutions, levelling the playing field and fostering a more inclusive global learning (Kumar, 2014).

Digital platforms provide remarkable flexibility that accommodates various learning styles and speeds. Students have the ability to revisit lectures, interact with engaging content, and customize their educational paths according to their unique requirements. Furthermore, these digital tools

enable immediate feedback, adaptive learning routes, and personalized content delivery, significantly improving the overall educational experience and outcomes (Muñoz et al., 2022). Similarly, (Shah and Shah, 2023) highlight the potential for enhanced learning results and increased student engagement. (Popova et al. 2020) and (Kovaleva et al. 2022) delve into the benefits of digitalization, such as broader learning opportunities and the consolidation of information processes onto a single digital platform. (Alenezi et al. 2023) examine how digital education can boost the competitiveness and quality of higher education. The transformation of university infrastructures, with a focus on digital integration, carries significant economic implications. On a local scale, the development of these infrastructures often leads to job creation across various sectors, from construction to IT support, thereby fostering regional economic growth.

Furthermore, the influx of students, researchers, and faculty, attracted by state-of-the-art facilities and tools, boosts local businesses, housing markets, and ancillary services. Therefore, there is a serious mismatch between the existence higher learning facilities and the expectation reality in the lens of the 21st world class Universities. The status of lecture halls, laboratories, libraries, accommodation facilities, assessment instruments, recreational and sport centers and instructional aids facilities are crucially matter. Employees' promotion: Staff rewards is strategic approach leadership achievers commonly used as vehicle to realize organizational goal. Why promotion reward importance? Career advancement opportunities such as promotions and trainings can affect employee motivation considerably. The desire for promotion can generally be strong among employees as it involves change in job content, pay, responsibility and job enlargement, independence and status among others. It is no surprise that employees take promotion as the ultimate achievement in their career and when it is realized, he/she feels extremely satisfied (Turk Yilmaz et al., 2011). If an organization provides employees, the necessary factors for promotion such as facilities, trainings, tools and skill development, then employees will be automatically motivated and satisfied. Promotion and satisfaction have a direct relationship. (Naveed and Bashara2011) indicated that Maslow's hierarchy of need theory also described that when esteem needs (autonomy, power, recognition and status) of people are fulfilled, they will be more satisfied with their job. The need theory indicates that there is a need of achievement and need for power in people. People will be more satisfied and motivated when their needs are fulfilled (Ramasodi, 2010).

## **2.5 Graduation:**

Consistently, University of Juba maintains its roles to graduates students yearly but the other public Universities for example, university of Upper Nile, Rumbek University and Dr. John John Garang University of Science and Technology do rarely graduate students. For instance, University of Upper have only conducted three graduation ceremonies, while Rumbek University and Dr. John Garang memorial University of science and Technology conducted two and one graduation ceremonies respectively (South Sudan ministry higher report; website 2026). Based on the reality on the theory of production as emphasized by (Godfrey 2014) a functional produces good results and good number while less functional produced less products. The same context can be an evidence of either good performance or bad performance institution, which graduate less or reasonable number of students 'yearly. Quality education activities yield benefits that exceed value of resources involves and changes undertaken to enhance putative benefits of educational system. In organizing education, the leaders take into account on how changes can maximize value benefits relative to any additional cost. (Odhiambo 2014); Cutler& Lemony 2008). These benefits can be substantial to educated individuals, their families and the community or the nation that individuals belong. The Quality of the Productive, or efficiency of the product; refers to obtaining a maximum result for any given resource constraints placed upon the school (Hennery M. Levin 2010). Employees' turnover: In fact, there is high core- relationship between employees' turnover, retention and Leadership application modality. Employees when they are not satisfied with working environment of an institution. They look for an alternative.

This was evidence in the case of South Sudan public universities when South Sudan pounds start losing values in 2013 and worsen in 2019. Most of the teaching staff at public universities left teaching job and when the government adjust salaries of higher education after a boiling argumentative that involves strike, they return to teaching profession ( Kuyak, 2022)

However, there are five distinctive effect of high turnover on employee performances according to (Paul H 2013): a) Disruption to workflow, b) low workplace moral, c) financial losses, d) negative workplace reputation and e) loss of competence employees. The turnover rate on the other hand define the total number of workers leaving within ascertain period. (Thomas Mupashi, 2021) stresses that excessive turnover can be a very costly problem and can have a major impact on productivity. Cost is however not the only purpose turnover is significant. Intermittent schedules, extra overtime, errors and not having well-informed employees in place are some of the frustrations associated with excessive turnover (Westover, 2010). High employee turnover is of substantial concern for employers since its disturb ordinary operations, creating morale problems and increases the cost involved in selecting and training replacements. The institutional goal is to try as much as possible to minimize turnover by making employees feel motivated on their jobs. The withdrawal conduct of employees is modified by certain factors. That is trust and Loyalty to the organization (Van and Adonis, 2008) pointed out that some employees cannot imagine themselves working elsewhere, however demotivated they are in their present job. Availability of other places of employment

Employee satisfaction; Job satisfaction, Satisfaction mean being contented with or go well with the culture and tradition aspect of the organization. It means being at comfort zone. Satisfaction is a result of fulfillment of various working arena such as environment contingencies i.e. task structure, team dynamics, motivation, and leader acceptance that portray leadership appropriate behavior. Whereas dissatisfaction is all about lack of appreciation, seeking for a new field of work, conflict and wicked leadership among others could lead to reasons for quitting one organization for another institution. Any institution-experiencing employees' high turnover rate is a reflection of unfavorable working environments all accorded to leadership understanding. The level of motivation provided influenced the working environment. While a comfortable physical environment is correlated with employee motivation, the relationship is not merely as strong as the relationship between motivation and managerial behavior (Yokota 2020) Employees are concerned with a comfortable physical work environment that will ultimately provide extra optimistic level of motivation. Lack of favorable working conditions, amongst other things, can affect badly on the employee's mental and physical well-being. Poor working conditions since employee's job demand mentally and physical tranquility (Irons and Buskist, 2013) can provoke negative performance. Furthermore, when employees feel that management does not appreciate or acknowledge their efforts or work done, they may use poor working conditions as an excuse to get back at management (Whittaker, 2014).

## **2.6 Empirical Literature Review**

Autocratic Leadership Style approach presents both significant advantages and notable drawbacks. A centralized authority defines it where one individual exerts control over all decisions, with minimal input from group members (Riakgol M. 2020). This style embodies absolute and dictatorial governance over a team (Chukwusa 2018). A leader, who dictates strategies and objectives, overseeing and directing all activities without meaningful contributions from subordinates (Northouse 2015), characterizes autocratic leadership. Harry S. Truman, the 33rd President of the United States, famously remarked, "A leader is a man who can influence people to do what they do not want to do, or do what they are too lazy to do." While autocratic leadership can be effective in certain situations, such as when swift decisions are necessary without extensive consultation, it can also hinder significant achievements. However, (Maqsood and Bilal 2013) argued that during military conflicts, team members might actually prefer an autocratic approach. This style enables employees to concentrate on executing specific tasks

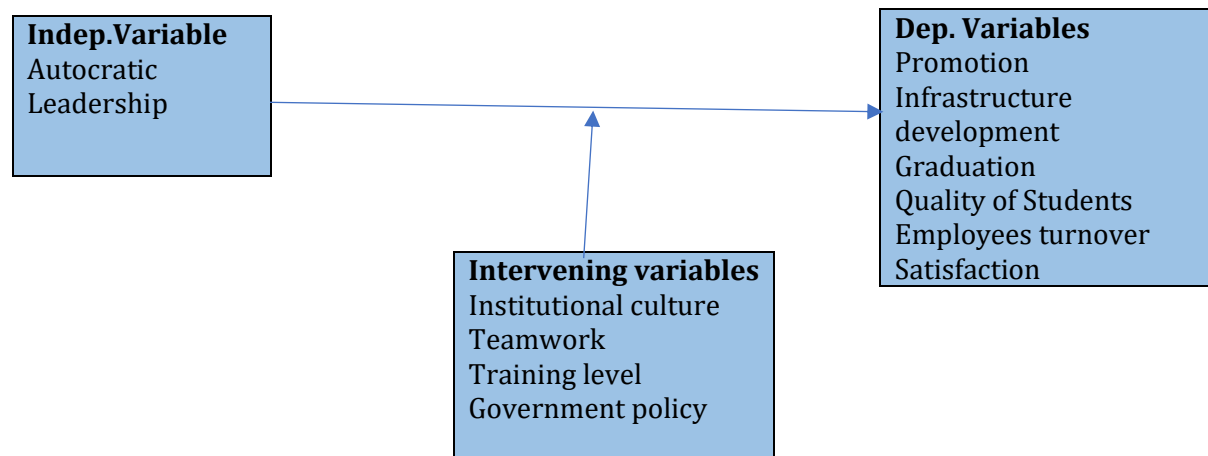
without the burden of complex decision-making, allowing them to develop expertise in particular areas, which can ultimately benefit the organization. These types of leaders, do not trust any decision from the followers, the followers had to follow rules and orders from the leader, the advantageous of this style are so many as: It allow quick decision-making in stress filled condition, offer a clear chain of command, confidential matters can be kept secretly since there are no consultations made with subordinates' strict supervision of subordinates can be achieved easily, and it work well where strong directive leadership is needed.

However, the disadvantageous parts are also noted with this type of leadership as it discourages group contribution, hurts morale and lead to resentment, ignore creative solutions and expertise from subordinates, with this style ,subordinates are not guide as to why they are asked to do a particular work, Jobs are designed, facilities provided, instructions issued without consulting the person who to perform the job as well as giving subordinates orders to follow blindly though the direction given may not be the right decision. Riakgol (2020) distinguished seven primary characteristics of this styles of leadership as Little or no input from the group members are needed. The leader Dictate everything, leave group feelings, create highly structured and very rigid environment, discourage creativity, these arguments on this type of leadership conformed to Komude (2006) who believed that autocratic leaders determines policy and plans by themselves. He/or she tells others what to do and how to do it.

A Theory X leader typically exhibits autocratic leadership style and permits little, if any, staff involvement in decisions (Shahzad, al et 2010). They repeatedly require staff to discuss in addition to involving them in resolution making when in actual face commitment have been made for a line of action. This implies that they have the ability to give rewards and punishments. They demand strict Obedience. His/or her subordinates must act as he /or she directs and does not allow them to influence his decisions and plans. Autocratic leaders rely on fears, threats, suspicions, and authority and once get his way at whatever cost. Based on the analysis on this leadership style share most of its characteristics with Situational leadership, Task Oriented Leadership and Individualistic leadership. They share many things: the chain of command and division of work is undoubtedly spelled and understood by all. However, their common negative aspects are the principles of top down communication, which is done without feedback expectation. It is typically lead to misunderstanding, communication breakdown and consequently leading to costly errors. Leaders receive little information or any idea from subordinates. Leaders nature treated rumors as true as they believe in gossiping or firsthand information received from their closers alliance and the main features of autocratic Leaders in summary: Punishing, Fault finding, Demeaning, Commanding, Critical, Pressuring, Sharp voiced, Imposing, Dominating, cruel, Fear, suspicious, concealment. Time focus, objective focus. Treated rumors as facts The example Hitler (1889-1945} Best fit for uncivilized societies



## 2.4 Conceptual framework



## 3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach that integrated both quantitative and qualitative principles. The researcher favored this combination as it facilitated the collection of comprehensive data. By leveraging the strengths of each method, the mixed approach enabled a thorough investigation into the effects of autocratic leadership on employee performance across three selected public universities: The University of Juba (UoJ), Dr. John Garang Memorial University of Science and Technology (Dr. JGMUST), and the University of Upper Nile (UoU) in the Republic of South Sudan. For data collection, the research utilized a variety of tools, including questionnaires, interview guides, focus group discussions, observation checklists, and document analysis.

## 4. Results and Discussions

### 4.1 Evaluating Relationship between Autocratic leadership style and employee performance of public universities in South Sudan.

**Table 4.1:** Showing relationships between autocratic leadership styles and employee performance

University name	UoJ										Dr.JMUST										UUN												
Statement	1	2	3	4	5						1	2	3	4	5						1	2	3	4	5								
	F %	F %	F %	F %	F %	Mean	STD	CV			F %	F %	F %	F %	F %	Mean	STD	CV			F %	F %	F %	F %	F %	Mean	STD	CV					
Staff promotion is based on input and meritocratic	3	3.4	5	5.7	16	18.4	32	36.8	31	35.6	3.95	1.044	0.26	11	18.3	6	10	8	13.3	20	33.3	15	25	3.37	1.438	0.43	14	19.2	8	11	10		
Leaders always Initiate Programs, provide action plans to be executed, and that is why the university experience became infrastructure development	7	8	5	5.7	26	29.9	35	40.2	14	16.1	3.51	1.088	0.31	3	5	11	18.3	12	20	17	28.3	17	28.3	3.57	1.226	0.34	3	4.1	18	24.7	15		
Employees are demoralized by coercive leadership styles, and therefore the graduation rates of students are verylow	9	10.3	14	16.1	25	28.7	24	27.6	15	17.2	3.25	1.222	0.38	13	21.7	13	21.7	10	16.7	10	16.7	14	23.3	2.98	1.49	0.5	15	20.5	16	21.9	12		
Less well-being for employees, and staff performance negatively affects the quality of graduates	9	10.3	8	9.2	19	21.8	24	27.6	27	31	3.6	1.298	0.36	9	15	7	11.7	7	11.7	18	30	19	31.7	3.52	1.432	0.41	10	13.7	9	12.8	8		
Many employees perform better under the forceful leadership style and they felt satisfied	14	16.1	18	20.7	22	25.3	18	20.7	15	17.2	3.02	1.329	0.44	15	25	13	21.7	10	16.7	11	18.3	11	18.3	2.83	1.463	0.01	19	26	14	19.2	14		
Many employees do not like pressure and therefore, work less or quit the job	4	4.6	7	8	16	18.4	28	32.2	28	32.2	3.89	1.135	0.29	5	8.3	5	8.3	12	20	19	31.7	19	31.7	3.7	1.239	0.33	8	11	8	11	14		
The leadership style available in our Organization is authoritarian	8	9.2	14	16.1	21	24.1	16	18.4	28	32.2	3.48	1.332	0.38	2	3.3	14	23.3	16	26.7	15	25	13	21.7	3.38	1.166	0.34	4	5.5	17	23.3	12		
	Total	3.51.337.2.094										Total	3.341.2077.2.068										Total	3.281.362.3									

Source: Primary data

The study analyzed responses from staff at three public universities in South Sudan—University of Juba (UoJ), Dr. John Garang Memorial University, and University of Upper Nile—focusing on perceptions of leadership style and its impact on employee performance. The findings (table 4.1) indicate that 58.6% of respondents from UoJ either agreed or strongly agreed that the prevailing leadership style at their institution is largely autocratic. Comparatively, 46.7% of participants from Dr. John Garang University and 46.6% from University of Upper Nile shared the same perception, suggesting a moderately consistent application of autocratic leadership across the institutions.

Regarding staff promotion practices, 72.4% of respondents from UoJ agreed or strongly agreed that promotions are based on merit and input. This perception was slightly lower at Dr. John Garang University (58.3%) and University of Upper Nile (56.1%), reflecting some variation in staff experiences and confidence in the fairness of promotion processes. In terms of program initiation and infrastructural development, 56.3% of respondents from UoJ reported that leaders actively initiate programs and provide action plans that contribute to noticeable institutional development. In contrast, 56.6% and 50.7% of respondents from Dr. John Garang University and University of Upper Nile observed only minor infrastructural improvements, indicating disparities in leadership effectiveness and resource mobilization.

When examining the impact of leadership on graduation rates, 44.8% of UoJ respondents agreed or strongly agreed that coercive leadership demoralizes employees, contributing to low graduation outcomes. Similar views were held by 43.4% of Dr. John Garang University staff and 41.1% of University of Upper Nile staff, highlighting the negative consequences of forceful leadership on academic performance. Regarding graduate quality, 58.6% of UoJ respondents believed that low employee well-being directly affects graduate outcomes, with slightly higher percentages at Dr. John Garang University (61.7%) and University of Upper Nile (63%). Staff satisfaction under forceful leadership was generally low. At UoJ, 36.8% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that employees perform better under autocratic leadership. Higher disagreement rates were observed at Dr. John Garang University (49.7%) and University of Upper Nile (46.9%), indicating widespread dissatisfaction with coercive leadership. Finally, regarding employee turnover, 64.8% of UoJ staff, 63.4% of Dr. John Garang University staff, and 59.0% of University of Upper Nile staff agreed or strongly agreed that many employees dislike high-pressure environments, which leads to reduced productivity or resignation. Overall, these statistics demonstrate that while autocratic leadership is prevalent across the three universities, it produces mixed outcomes, with benefits in areas such as promotions and program initiation but notable negative effects on employee satisfaction, retention, and graduate quality.

#### 4.2 Correlation, Regression, and ANOVA Analysis of Autocratic leadership style against employees' performance.

**Table 4.2:** Showing correlation analysis

Correlations				
Evaluating the Relationship between Autocratic leadership style and Employee Performance for the University of Juba	Pearson Correlation	1	.891**	.886**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	87	60	73
Evaluating the Relationship between Autocratic, Leadership styles and Employee Performance of Dr. John Garang Memorial University	Pearson Correlation	.891**	1	.957**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	60	60	60
Evaluating the Relationship between Autocratic leadership style and Employee Performance of University of Upper Nile	Pearson Correlation	.886**	.957**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	73	60	73
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

**Source:** Primary data

The correlation and regression analysis, as detailed in Table 4.2, investigates the relationship between autocratic leadership styles and employee performance across three public universities in South Sudan. The findings reveal a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.891, significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), indicating a strong positive relationship between autocratic leadership and employee performance. This suggests that as the degree of autocratic leadership increases, employee performance also tends to rise. The sample sizes for each university were 87 for the University of Juba, 60 for Dr. John Garang Memorial University, and 73 for the University of Upper Nile, all contributing to a comprehensive assessment of the impact of autocratic leadership on staff performance.

While some initiatives in these universities seek to build on existing structures, others aim to challenge outdated practices inherited from post-colonial systems that have proven ineffective. These findings underscore the need for strategic leadership reforms to optimize institutional outcomes. University leaders are encouraged to leverage the skills and engagement of their staff in decision-making processes to achieve organizational goals. In the highly competitive environment of higher education, human capital remains one of the most critical resources. Leaders' ability to motivate, guide, and support their employees significantly influences productivity and the quality of outcomes delivered. Overall, the regression analysis indicates that autocratic leadership, when applied effectively, can be positively associated with employee performance in public universities. However, the results also imply that incorporating complementary leadership approaches—such as participative, supportive, and adaptable styles—could further enhance employee engagement, performance, and institutional effectiveness, suggesting that a blended leadership strategy may be more beneficial in complex academic environments.

## **5. Discussion**

The findings provide a clear depiction of leadership dynamics within public universities in South Sudan, highlighting the prevalence and effects of autocratic leadership. Nearly half of the respondents (48.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that autocratic leadership is universally applied across these institutions, while 25.0% were unsure and 26.9% disagreed. Despite this dominance, 63.1% of participants indicated that promotions are largely based on merit under autocratic leaders, suggesting that such leadership is perceived as effective in recognizing and advancing competent staff. Additionally, 54.6% of respondents felt that autocratic leaders excel at initiating activities and implementing action plans, which can contribute positively to infrastructural and institutional development. These findings indicate that, while autocratic leadership is rigid and directive, it can produce tangible organizational outputs, particularly in terms of staff promotion and program execution.

Regarding the impact of leadership on graduation rates, 42.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that coercive leadership demoralizes employees, contributing to low graduation rates, while 21.4% were uncertain, and 36.3% disagreed. In terms of graduate quality, 61% of respondents acknowledged that diminished employee well-being negatively affects staff performance, ultimately reducing the caliber of graduates produced. Employee satisfaction under autocratic leadership was also mixed: 42.3% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that employees thrive under forceful leadership, while 36.8% agreed or strongly agreed, and 20% were uncertain. These statistics suggest that although autocratic leadership may ensure compliance and program delivery, it often negatively affects employee morale and satisfaction, limiting the potential for high-quality, motivated performance.

Employee turnover was another critical concern. Approximately 64.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that many employees dislike high-pressure environments under autocratic leadership, leading them to reduce productivity or leave their positions. This aligns with findings

from Komude (2006) and Riakgol (2020), which describe autocratic leadership as including minimal team input, rigid control, and a stifling of creativity. However, the current study challenges the notion that autocratic leaders entirely disregard group sentiment, as evidence shows that such leaders are still effective in promoting staff and executing institutional programs. Overall, the discussion underscores the dual nature of autocratic leadership in South Sudanese universities: it is capable of driving institutional development and enforcing merit-based promotions, yet it can negatively impact employee well-being, satisfaction, and retention.

## **6. Applications**

The findings of this study have practical implications for leadership and human resource management in public universities, particularly within fragile states like South Sudan. First, the research highlights the need for university administrators and policymakers to critically assess the prevalent autocratic leadership style and its effects on employee performance, motivation, and retention. While autocratic leadership may facilitate efficiency in decision-making and program implementation, the study demonstrates that excessive reliance on this style can undermine staff morale, reduce productivity, and contribute to high turnover rates. Consequently, university leaders can use these insights to design leadership development programs that incorporate participatory or transformational elements, thereby fostering a more inclusive decision-making culture and improving employee satisfaction.

Second, the study underscores the importance of linking promotions and professional development opportunities to merit-based systems. By aligning leadership practices with transparent promotion criteria, institutions can enhance staff motivation, increase retention, and ultimately improve the quality of graduates. Furthermore, infrastructure development, digital integration, and targeted program initiatives are identified as critical areas where leadership can directly influence institutional performance. Leaders can apply these findings to prioritize resource allocation, implement action plans effectively, and monitor progress to ensure that employees have the tools and support needed to perform optimally.

Finally, this research has broader implications for higher education leadership in post-conflict and low-resource environments. Universities in similar contexts can learn from the South Sudanese experience by recognizing the limitations of rigid, centralized leadership structures and exploring hybrid approaches that balance directive decision-making with staff engagement. Overall, the study provides actionable insights for university administrators, policymakers, and leadership trainers seeking to improve institutional efficiency, employee performance, and the overall quality of higher education outcomes.

## **7. Conclusion:**

This study examined the impact of autocratic leadership on employee performance in three public universities in South Sudan, revealing that autocratic leadership is the predominant style across these institutions. While this approach offers certain operational benefits, such as efficiency in decision-making, clear guidance, and structured program implementation, the overall findings indicate that it is insufficient for fostering sustained employee performance and institutional growth. Employees working under purely autocratic leadership experience lower morale, reduced job satisfaction, and a higher likelihood of turnover. These factors contribute to persistent challenges such as low graduation rates, limited improvements in graduate quality, and slower institutional development. Nonetheless, autocratic leaders were perceived as effective in areas such as staff promotion and initiating programs, highlighting that this leadership style can produce positive outcomes when applied strategically. Overall, the study concludes that while autocratic leadership has some operational advantages, it is not fully conducive to long-term institutional success or employee well-being in the context of South Sudan's public universities. To enhance performance and organizational growth, the research suggests that integrating participatory, transformational, or hybrid leadership approaches could better address employees' needs, improve morale, and promote higher quality education

outcomes. These insights have significant implications for policymakers, university administrators, and leadership trainers seeking to strengthen higher education systems in fragile and post-conflict environments.

## **8. Recommendations**

In the context of the Republic of South Sudan and the broader African landscape, this study offers several recommendations aimed at strengthening public universities and improving employee performance. Firstly, university administrators should adopt data-driven performance evaluations for staff promotions to ensure fairness, transparency, and merit-based advancement. Such an approach would enhance motivation, reinforce accountability, and improve staff retention. Secondly, leaders must prioritize infrastructure development, ensuring that universities are equipped with modern facilities that meet international standards, including lecture halls, laboratories, libraries, and digital learning platforms. Adequate infrastructure is crucial for delivering high-quality education and supporting academic and research activities.

Thirdly, universities should balance the quantity and quality of graduates, optimizing the use of available resources while upholding rigorous academic standards. Ensuring that graduates are both numerous and competent is critical for national development. Fourthly, employee satisfaction and retention should be key priorities; institutions must create supportive and inclusive work environments, recognizing the direct link between staff well-being, productivity, and organizational performance. Fifthly, universities should actively recruit highly qualified professors and allocate sufficient research funding to encourage scholarly activity and publications, which can contribute meaningfully to South Sudan's socio-economic development and regional academic advancement.

Furthermore, leadership practices should evolve to adopt a blended or "TAED" approach—integrating Transformational, Autocratic, Employee-oriented, and Democratic leadership styles. This hybrid model would allow leaders to balance efficiency with inclusivity, adapting to varying institutional needs and improving staff morale. The process of appointing Vice Chancellors should also be reformed, moving away from traditional lobbying methods toward a transparent vetting process to ensure capable and visionary leadership. Additionally, modernization of institutional facilities, libraries, laboratories, and teaching tools is essential, requiring leaders with digital and innovative mindsets rather than rigid or conservative approaches. Finally, staff development should be a continuous priority. Universities must adopt contemporary strategies for professional growth, fostering competitiveness and enabling employees to adapt to modern educational trends, while mitigating the potential drawbacks of traditional autocratic approaches. Collectively, these recommendations aim to enhance leadership effectiveness, employee performance, and the overall quality of higher education in South Sudan.

## **9. Limitations and Future Research Directions**

While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of autocratic leadership on employee performance in South Sudan's public universities, it has several limitations. First, the research focused on only three public universities, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to all higher education institutions in the country. Second, the study relied largely on self-reported data from employees, which could be influenced by biases such as social desirability or recall inaccuracies. Third, the research examined only autocratic leadership, without considering other leadership styles—such as transformational, democratic, or laissez-faire—that may differently affect employee performance. Additionally, external factors, including ongoing socio-economic crises, political instability, and limited resources, may have influenced both leadership behavior and staff outcomes, making it challenging to isolate the effect of leadership style alone.

Future research should address these limitations by expanding the scope to include all public and private universities in South Sudan, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of

leadership practices in the higher education sector. Comparative studies exploring multiple leadership styles could identify which approaches are most effective under varying institutional and socio-economic conditions. Longitudinal studies would be valuable to assess how leadership styles and their impacts on employee performance evolve over time, particularly in fragile or post-conflict contexts. Additionally, incorporating objective performance metrics—such as graduation rates, research output, and infrastructure development—alongside employee perceptions would strengthen the validity of findings. Finally, future research could examine the influence of organizational culture, government policy, and socio-political factors on leadership effectiveness, offering actionable guidance for higher education leadership and policy development in challenging environments.

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