Review

A Systematic Review of Leadership and Customer Care Service Delivery Practices in Higher Learning Institutions: The Case of Tanzanian Higher Learning Institutions

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Abstract

Across the world, higher education institutions are increasingly judged by the quality of the services they deliver to students, and leadership is widely regarded as a key determinant of that quality. This systematic review, guided by PRISMA 2020 procedures, examines the association between leadership practices and customer care and service delivery in higher education institutions, and the consequential effects of that association, with a specific focus on Tanzania following the 2005 reforms by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU). Through a synthesis of 22 peer-reviewed articles (2005–2025) sourced from Google Scholar, the evidence was analyzed through thematic synthesis rather than meta-analysis, given the heterogeneity of study designs, participants and measures. Findings indicate that transformational, servant, and ethical leadership practices improve service quality by fostering staff motivation, accountability, and effective institutional communication. Globally, such leadership is strongly associated with increased student satisfaction, loyalty, and institutional reputation. Within the Sub-Saharan African context, leadership commitment is vital for implementing quality assurance frameworks and addressing resource constraints. In Tanzania specifically, effective leadership directly enhances responsiveness, transparency, and service accessibility, though challenges such as inadequate resources, digital transition gaps, and weak policy implementation remain. The review concludes that leadership is a key driver for strengthening service delivery and recommends that Tanzanian institutions prioritise developing leadership capacity, aligning practices with TCU quality assurance standards, and adopting student-centred models to improve institutional effectiveness and global competitiveness.

Keywords: leadership; customer care; service quality; higher learning institutions; Tanzania; systematic review

1. Introduction

Higher education has become a key pillar of social and economic development worldwide, yet the sector increasingly operates in a competitive, consumer-focused environment. Universities are now expected to balance their traditional roles of teaching, research, and community service with the provision of customer-focused support systems (Mittal & Jung, 2024). Students, parents, employers, and the broader public expect higher education institutions (HEIs) to demonstrate not

only academic excellence but also efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness in their operations (Maiya & Aithal, 2023; Ul Hassan et al., 2025). This shift has led to a growing body of research examining service delivery in higher education, often framed in the language of customer care. The adoption of models such as SERVQUAL, which measures service quality across dimensions like tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, highlights the recognition of students as customers with legitimate expectations (Magasi et al., 2022). Global studies consistently show that effective service delivery improves student satisfaction, enhances institutional reputation, and can even boost academic outcomes. For instance, recent research in the Middle East and South Asia confirms that high service quality is linked to increased student satisfaction and loyalty, thereby strengthening a university's reputation (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2021; Singh & Jasial, 2021).

In many contexts, the quality of service delivery in higher education is closely linked to the nature of institutional leadership. Transformational leadership, with its focus on vision, inspiration, and individualised support, has been associated with higher academic staff job satisfaction in universities, a precondition for stronger service cultures (Mgaiwa, 2023). Servant leadership, which prioritises meeting stakeholders' needs, aligns well with the ethos of student-centredness (Adams et al., 2025). Ethical leadership, meanwhile, emphasises transparency, accountability, and fairness, all of which are critical to trust and satisfaction in customer care (Brown et al., 2005). Authentic leadership, characterised by self-awareness and relational transparency, has also gained attention in recent years (Coffey, 2025), particularly as digital service delivery requires leaders to inspire confidence in new systems and modes of interaction. Studies in the United States suggest that universities with leaders who model authentic leadership behaviours were better positioned to adopt online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby maintaining service delivery during a time of global crisis (Lalani et al., 2025). The pandemic highlighted the central role of leadership in sustaining service delivery amid uncertainty and disruption. Globally, universities were compelled to move teaching, administration, and student support services online almost overnight. In countries such as the United Kingdom, leaders faced the challenge of integrating hybrid modes of learning while ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all students (Hill & Smith, 2023). Although remote learning expanded opportunities for some groups

(particularly students with disabilities), the return to in-person teaching in many institutions curtailed those gains, raising concerns about equity and the need for more inclusive service strategies. Analyses of academic leadership during the pandemic likewise highlighted the importance of adaptive and distributed leadership, in which decision-making authority is shared across teams to enable rapid responses to technological and logistical challenges (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Similarly, in South Africa, where many universities struggled with inadequate digital infrastructure, leaders who embraced participatory and transformational approaches were better able to mobilise staff and students toward collective problem-solving, thereby mitigating service delivery disruptions (Moonasar & Ngoepe, 2023).

The Sub-Saharan African experience highlights the broader challenges of resource constraints, policy inconsistencies, and rising demand for higher education. In this region, leadership is often seen as a crucial factor in whether institutions can turn limited resources into effective services (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA) explicitly require institutions to demonstrate sound and ethical governance under qualified, competent and experienced leadership, and to provide adequate student support services (HAQAA Initiative, 2018). Similarly, reviews of service quality in higher education have stressed the importance of leadership development for institutional sustainability and service excellence (Maiya & Aithal, 2023). These frameworks recognise that although policies and standards can set expectations, it is ultimately leadership practices that bring service quality to life within universities.

Tanzania offers a compelling example of these dynamics. Since the establishment of the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) in 2005, the higher education sector has seen substantial growth. By 2024, the country had 49 accredited higher learning institutions, comprising 19 public and 30 private universities, with student enrolment rising consistently, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Enrolment in Higher Learning Institutions, Tanzania

Academic Year	**2019/20**	**2020/21**	**2021/22**	**2022/23**	**2023/24**
Students	233,734	259,266	295,919	314,643	334,854

*Source:*URT (2024), Tanzania Commission for Universities, *Vital Statistics 2024*

Table 1 shows a steady rise in student enrolment at Tanzanian higher education institutions, increasing from 233,734 in 2019/20 to 334,854 in 2023/24, representing about 43% growth over five years (URT, 2024). Although this expansion reflects the government's dedication to widening access to higher education, it has not been matched by a proportional rise in academic staff. By 2023/24, there were only 8,625 lecturers available for the 334,854 students (URT, 2024), a significant mismatch that directly affects the quality of teaching and learning. This shortage of faculty limits opportunities for personalised attention, timely feedback, and effective supervision (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). As student numbers grow, lecturers' workloads become heavier, restricting their ability to adopt innovative teaching methods or provide personalised academic support (Altbach et al., 2017). The pressure from increasing enrolments also impacts service delivery and customer care in higher education. Students often face delays in academic advising, overcrowded classes, and decreased access to lecturers, all of which undermine their overall educational experience (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). Additionally, administrative and support services such as registration, finance, and student welfare are similarly overstretched, further compromising service quality (Altbach et al., 2017). This situation demands leadership interventions to balance expansion with quality. Strengthening the recruitment and retention of academic staff, investing in digital learning technologies, and fostering a customer care culture within universities are crucial steps to ensure that service delivery remains efficient, responsive, and student-centred despite rapid enrolment growth.

Local studies consistently show that Tanzanian universities face ongoing challenges in service quality. Magasi et al. (2022) and Msendo (2024) reported that, in Tanzanian higher education institutions, students consistently rated service delivery below expectations on SERVQUAL measures, reflecting substantial quality gaps. For example, an empirical SERVQUAL assessment of a public college cafeteria in Dodoma found that expectations exceeded perceptions across all dimensions: tangibles (facilities), reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance, indicating significant shortfalls in service standards (Msendo, 2024). Similarly, Mashenene (2019) identified negative service quality gaps across multiple departments and support services. Complaint management remains a particular weakness: Mapunda and Mramba (2018) found that nearly 90% of students rated their institution's complaint-handling processes as "poor." Such findings

highlight systemic issues of unresponsiveness and weak accountability in customer care. Meanwhile, other studies have highlighted the positive role of transparency and trust. For example, Bwachele, Chong, and Krishnapillai (2023) showed that leadership practices promoting openness and trust significantly improve student perceptions of service quality, with trust mediating the relationship between perceived transparency and student satisfaction. Research by Mgaiwa (2023) further suggests that leadership indirectly influences service delivery by affecting staff job satisfaction: universities led by transformational and transactional leaders tend to have more motivated staff, which, in turn, enhances the quality of student services. Collectively, these studies underscore the vital role of leadership in mediating between institutional constraints and service delivery outcomes in Tanzanian higher education.

Despite these contributions, a significant gap still exists in the literature. While individual studies have examined aspects of service delivery or leadership in Tanzanian higher education, few have systematically synthesised evidence on how leadership practices directly impact customer care and service quality. This gap is particularly important given the rapid expansion of the sector, ongoing staff shortages, and the increasing complexity of student demands in a digitised environment. Addressing this issue requires a systematic review that draws on Tanzanian evidence and situates these findings within broader global and regional contexts. Such a synthesis can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the leadership and service delivery nexus, providing valuable insights for institutional leaders, policymakers, and regulators such as the TCU.

Against this background, the present systematic review aims to analyse evidence on how leadership practices influence customer care and service delivery in higher education institutions in Tanzania. By examining 22 peer-reviewed articles published since TCU's establishment and engaging with comparative global literature, the review intends to clarify how leadership shapes institutional capacity to meet student expectations and deliver quality services. In doing so, it addresses a significant gap in both research and practice. It offers guidance on strengthening leadership in Tanzanian universities to improve customer care and overall service delivery. Specifically, the review sought to (i) examine how leadership practices are associated with customer care and service delivery in Tanzanian higher learning institutions, and (ii) establish the consequential effects of this association on students and institutions.

2. Methodology

2.1 Review Design

This study adopted a systematic review design, following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). A systematic review was chosen because it offers a structured and transparent approach to identifying, evaluating, and synthesising existing evidence on a specific research problem. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, which often depend on selective citation and subjective synthesis, systematic reviews utilise explicit protocols that minimise bias and improve replicability. Given the dispersed and multidisciplinary nature of studies on leadership and customer care in higher education, a systematic review was well-suited to integrating findings across education, management, psychology, and service quality research.

It should be emphasised that the design adopted is a systematic review with a qualitative (thematic) synthesis, and not a meta-analysis. The two approaches share the systematic procedures of searching, screening and appraisal that PRISMA 2020 requires to be reported (Page et al., 2021), but they differ in how the evidence is synthesised. A meta-analysis is a statistical technique that combines effect sizes from studies that address the same question with comparable designs and measures in order to estimate a pooled effect, whereas a systematic review may synthesise evidence narratively or thematically where such pooling is not appropriate (Gough et al., 2012). A meta-analysis was not feasible in the present review for three reasons. First, the included studies employed heterogeneous designs, ranging from cross-sectional surveys to qualitative interviews, mixed methods and documentary analysis. Second, leadership and service outcomes were measured with different instruments, such as SERVQUAL gap scores, satisfaction indices and job satisfaction scales. Third, the qualitative and documentary studies, by their nature, did not produce effect sizes that could be combined with the quantitative results. Pooling such evidence would have produced a misleading summary estimate. The review therefore followed the guidance on synthesis without meta-analysis (Campbell et al., 2020) and applied thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008), as described in Section 2.7.

2.2 Review Questions and Analytical Framework

The review focused specifically on Tanzanian higher education institutions (HEIs) and drew on regional and global literature to situate the findings within broader discourses on service delivery. The review question guiding the study was: *How do leadership practices influence customer care and service delivery in higher education institutions, with a particular focus on the Tanzanian context since the establishment of the Tanzania Commission for Universities in 2005?* This guiding question informed the selection of search terms, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the synthesis approach.

In line with this question, leadership practices were treated as the independent variable, while customer care and service delivery were treated as the dependent variables. Customer care was understood as the manner in which institutions and their staff attend to students' needs, enquiries and complaints, whereas service delivery referred to the provision of academic, administrative and support services, commonly assessed through the SERVQUAL dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The consequential effects of the association, such as student satisfaction, trust, loyalty, graduate outcomes and institutional reputation, were treated as downstream outcomes. Accordingly, two specific review questions were addressed: (i) How are leadership practices associated with customer care and service delivery in Tanzanian higher learning institutions? (ii) What consequential effects does this association have on students and institutions? This analytical framework guided the data extraction (Section 2.6) and the synthesis (Section 2.7), and it structures the presentation of results in Section 3.3.

2.3 Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted between January and March 2025, using Google Scholar as the primary database. Google Scholar was selected for its extensive coverage of multidisciplinary peer-reviewed literature, including journals not indexed in traditional databases such as Scopus or Web of Science, which is particularly important for capturing regional and local Tanzanian research. To increase comprehensiveness, forward and backward citation tracking was also conducted for the identified key articles.

The search strategy employed Boolean operators to combine key terms in four main clusters:

i. Leadership constructs: "leadership" OR "management" OR "governance."

ii. Service quality/customer care: "customer care" OR "student support" OR "service delivery" OR "student satisfaction."
iii. Higher education context: "higher learning institutions" OR "universities" OR "higher education."
iv. Geographical focus: "Tanzania."

The final search string was:
("leadership" OR "management") AND ("customer care" OR "student support" OR "service delivery" OR "student satisfaction") AND ("higher learning institutions" OR "universities" OR "higher education") AND (Tanzania).

The initial search yielded 56 records. Following screening and eligibility assessments, 22 peer-reviewed journal articles were included in the final synthesis.

2.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure relevance and quality, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Study Selection

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Empirical or theoretical studies focusing on leadership practices in higher education	Studies outside the higher education context (e.g., focusing on primary or secondary education)
Studies examining customer care, student support, or service delivery in higher education	Articles addressing service delivery without reference to leadership or management dimensions
Research conducted within Tanzanian higher learning institutions (universities, colleges, or polytechnics)	Non-peer-reviewed works (e.g., opinions, editorials, policy briefs, unpublished dissertations)

Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2005 and 2025 (aligned with the establishment of TCU)	Duplicate publications retrieved across search iterations (retaining the most comprehensive version)
Full-text articles accessible through Google Scholar (including open access and institutional repositories)	
Studies whose participants were stakeholders of higher learning institutions (students, academic staff, administrative and support staff, institutional leaders, alumni or employers of graduates), or documentary studies of institutional and regulatory data	Studies whose participants were drawn from outside higher learning institutions (e.g., primary or secondary school pupils and teachers)
Studies with a clearly described quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods or documentary methodology, including design, sampling and analysis procedures	Studies without a discernible methodology (e.g., opinion pieces and commentaries)

As shown in Table 2, these criteria helped focus the review on high-quality, contextually relevant evidence that directly addressed the interplay between leadership and service delivery in Tanzanian higher education.

Two further criteria concerned the participants and the methodologies of the studies. Concerning participants, studies were included if their respondents were stakeholders of higher learning institutions, namely students, academic staff, administrative and support staff, institutional leaders, alumni or employers of graduates, while studies of pupils or teachers in primary and secondary schools were excluded. Documentary studies that analysed institutional or regulatory data were also eligible, since they address the higher education context directly. With regard to methodology, quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods and documentary studies were all eligible, provided that

the design, sampling and data analysis procedures were clearly described; studies without a discernible methodology, such as opinion pieces, were excluded. Admitting a range of designs allowed the review to capture both the measurable associations reported in surveys and the explanatory insights generated by qualitative inquiry. The participants and methodologies of the principal included studies are reported in Section 3.2.

2.5 Screening and Selection Process

The screening process unfolded in three stages, consistent with PRISMA protocols:

i. All 56 records were initially screened based on titles. Studies that were clearly unrelated to leadership, customer care, or higher education were excluded at this stage, resulting in the removal of 14 articles.

ii. The remaining 42 abstracts were reviewed against the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Studies that mentioned service delivery in education but without a leadership component (or vice versa) were excluded, reducing the pool by 15 articles.

iii. The 27 articles passing the abstract screening underwent full-text review. After evaluating methodological rigour, contextual relevance, and duplication, 5 were excluded (three were not directly focused on Tanzanian HLIs, and two lacked sufficient empirical or theoretical depth), resulting in a final set of 22 articles.

A PRISMA flow diagram was developed to illustrate this selection process, providing transparency into the number of records identified, screened, excluded, and included (Page et al., 2021; see Figure 1).

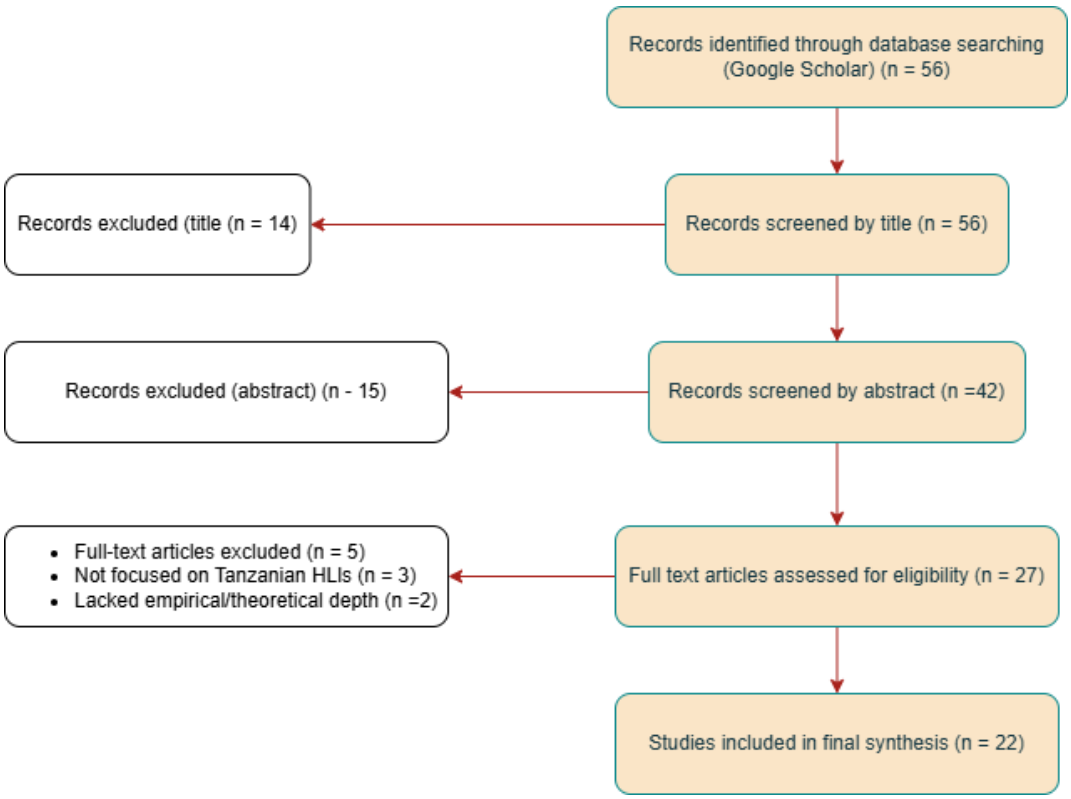


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of Study Identification, Screening and Inclusion

2.6 Data Extraction

A standardized data extraction matrix was created in Microsoft Excel to systematically record key characteristics and findings from each included study. For each article, the following information was documented:

- Bibliographic details: Author(s), year of publication, and full reference.
- Context: Country or institutional setting (including note of multi-country studies or specific universities where relevant).
- Participants: the categories and number of participants (e.g., students, academic staff, administrative staff, institutional leaders, alumni and employers).
- Study design and methodology: (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, or conceptual review; along with specific methods such as surveys, interviews, case studies, etc.).

- Leadership focus: The leadership theory or style examined (e.g., transformational, transactional, servant, ethical, authentic, etc.).
- Service delivery focus: the customer care or service quality aspects covered (e.g., responsiveness, transparency, complaint handling, digital service provision, student satisfaction metrics).
- Key findings: Results pertinent to the leadership–service delivery connection (including statistical relationships, themes, or conclusions about how leadership influenced service outcomes).
- Association and consequential effects: the direction and nature of the reported association between the leadership practice (independent variable) and the customer care or service delivery dimension (dependent variable), any mediating mechanism (e.g., staff motivation or trust), and the consequential effects on students and institutions.
- Implications: Any stated or implied consequences for policy and practice (recommendations, interventions, or frameworks suggested).

This extraction matrix allowed for comparative analysis and helped identify patterns and themes across the included studies.

2.7 Data Analysis and Synthesis

The review used a thematic synthesis approach (Thomas & Harden, 2008) to integrate findings. The data extracted were coded inductively, and the codes were then organised into broader themes that reflected recurring patterns in the evidence. The synthesis process involved three iterative steps:

i. Initial coding of findings from each study involved noting specific leadership practices, service delivery outcomes, and contextual factors. This process produced numerous detailed codes (e.g., "transformational leadership – staff morale," "complaint handling – student dissatisfaction," "digital services – leadership adaptation").

ii. Codes were organised into descriptive themes that appeared across multiple studies. Key themes included: service quality deficits, leadership styles and institutional climate, transparency and trust, policy–practice gaps, and digital service challenges.

iii. The descriptive themes were then understood at a higher level to answer the review question. This step produced overarching insights about how leadership influences customer care in Tanzanian HLIs, extending beyond individual study contexts to a more generalised narrative.

Throughout the synthesis, qualitative findings (e.g., interview-based insights into leadership behaviour) were triangulated with quantitative results (e.g., correlations between leadership style and satisfaction metrics) to ensure a coherent, holistic analysis. This approach enabled the integration of diverse evidence into a cohesive narrative, ensuring that both statistical findings and contextual insights contributed to the conclusions.

2.8 Quality Appraisal

Although Google Scholar was used as the primary search platform, only peer-reviewed journal articles were included to enhance reliability. Each article was assessed using criteria adapted from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists. The assessment focused on the clarity of objectives, methodological rigour (including sample adequacy and validity of measures), transparency in reporting (e.g., whether limitations were acknowledged), and the validity of conclusions (alignment with the data). No study was excluded solely due to low quality, given the exploratory nature of the review, but findings from studies with clear limitations were interpreted cautiously in the synthesis. For example, if a study had a very small sample or lacked a clear methodology, its conclusions were regarded as tentative and cross-verified with other sources before being incorporated into the review's findings.

2.9 Limitations of the Review

While systematic, the review faced several limitations. Firstly, relying on Google Scholar may have led to missing some relevant articles that are only indexed in subscription databases like Scopus or Web of Science. To address this, extensive citation chaining was employed to capture

influential works beyond the initial search. Secondly, only publications in English were included, which might have excluded valuable Swahili-language studies or local reports on Tanzanian universities. Thirdly, despite following PRISMA protocols, the synthesis involved interpretive judgment during coding and theme development, potentially introducing subjectivity. Lastly, the scope was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, excluding policy reports and theses that could provide additional insights into leadership and service delivery in Tanzania. Despite these limitations, the review offers a thorough and contextually grounded summary of the existing evidence, providing useful guidance for institutional leaders, policymakers, and researchers interested in service quality in higher education.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive Analysis

Before conducting thematic analysis, a descriptive review of the 22 included studies was carried out to understand publication trends, impact, and context. Table 3 summarizes key characteristics of the literature, including publication timeline, citation impact, authorship patterns, and journal outlets.

Table 3. Descriptive Characteristics of Included Literature

Metric	Observation	Implication
Publication Timeline	Studies span from 2016 to 2024. 12 out of 22 studies (≈55%) were published in 2022 or later.	Indicates a growing, contemporary academic interest in the topic in the Tanzanian context. The field is rapidly evolving, making this review especially timely.
Citation Impact (Total)	Total citations (Google Scholar) across studies: ~240. Highly skewed distribution.	Identifies*seminal works*(e.g., Mgaiwa & Poncian, 2016) that have shaped discourse on access vs. quality. These foundational

Metric	Observation	Implication
	Top 3 cited:*Mgaiwa & Poncian (2016)*– 78;*Magasi et al. (2022)*– 44;*Mashenene (2019)*– 35.	studies provide important background on systemic challenges.
Citation Rate (Cites/Year)	Top 3 by annualised rate:*Mgaiwa (2023)*– 15.0;*Magasi et al. (2022)*– 14.7;*Bwachele et al. (2023)*– 14.5. Four of the most recent studies (2024) have ≤1 citation (expected given recency).	Highlights the*current high-impact research*driving recent conversations on leadership styles and service quality models. The low cites for 2024 papers simply reflect that their impact is still emerging.
Authorship Patterns	Mix of single-author (27%) and collaborative papers (73%). Team sizes range from 2 to 4 authors, often interdisciplinary (education, business, psychology).	Suggests*healthy collaboration*in this research area, bringing together diverse expertise. Complex topics like educational leadership and service quality benefit from multi-disciplinary perspectives.
Source Journals	Broad range of journals, many regional or emerging outlets (e.g., *Business Education Journal appears* frequently; several have low	Indicates multidisciplinary *interest*, but also that much of this impactful research is published in regional journals with lower global visibility. This underscores the

Metric	Observation	Implication
	Journal Impact or new publishers).	value of the present review in synthesising and elevating these findings.

The descriptive analysis uncovers a dynamic and developing scholarly landscape on leadership and service delivery in Tanzanian higher education. The temporal distribution shows a rise in publications from 2022 onwards, emphasising the topic's current relevance and confirming that this review captures the most recent evidence and discourse. The citation analysis highlights both foundational and emerging work: Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016) stand out as a key early examination of access versus quality tensions, while high citation rates for recent studies (Mgaiwa, 2023; Magasi et al., 2022; Bwachele et al., 2023) demonstrate that new research on leadership styles and service quality is quickly gaining momentum and shaping ongoing debates. Authorship patterns indicate extensive collaboration, reflecting the intersection of education management, public administration, and organisational psychology in these studies. Finally, the diverse range of publication outlets, often in regional journals, suggests that while the research is contextually significant, it may not be widely recognised internationally – a gap this systematic review aims to bridge.

3.2 Participants and Methodologies of the Included Studies

The participants and methodologies of the included studies were examined in order to establish whose experiences the evidence reflects and how it was generated. As Table 4 shows, the principal Tanzanian studies drew on a wide range of higher education stakeholders: students at different levels of study, academic staff, administrative and support staff, senior institutional leaders such as deputy vice-chancellors, and external stakeholders such as alumni and employers. Students were the most frequent respondents, which is consistent with the customer care focus of the review, whereas studies that included institutional leaders as respondents were comparatively few. Methodologically, the studies employed quantitative cross-sectional surveys analysed through

regression and structural equation modelling, qualitative exploratory designs based on interviews and focus group discussions, convergent mixed methods, and documentary analysis of policy and regulatory data. Sample sizes ranged from 43 participants in a single college to 697 participants across eight universities.

Table 4. Participants and Methodologies of the Principal Tanzanian Studies Included in the Review

Study	Setting	Participants (n)	Design and methods	Focus
Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016)	Public and private universities, national level	Not applicable (TCU and institutional data)	Documentary and secondary data analysis	Access and quality under public–private partnership
Mapunda and Mramba (2018)	College of Business Education, Dar es Salaam	43 (21 students; 22 staff, including heads of department, registrar, quality assurance manager and dean of students)	Qualitative exploratory; 19 in-depth interviews and 3 focus group discussions	Complaint management
Magasi et al. (2022)	Higher learning institutions in Dodoma City	326 students	Quantitative cross-sectional survey; logistic regression	SERVQUAL dimensions and student satisfaction
Mbua et al. (2022)	Eight universities, Northern Zone	697 (511 final-year students, 48 lecturers, 4 deputy vice-chancellors, 124 alumni, 10 employers)	Convergent mixed methods; CIPP-based programme evaluation	Higher Education Development Programme and graduates' service delivery
Mgaiwa (2023)	Four universities	411 academic staff	Quantitative cross-sectional survey; regression analysis	Leadership styles and academic staff job satisfaction
Bwachele et al. (2023)	Fourteen higher learning institutions	398 third-year students	Quantitative cross-sectional survey; structural equation modelling	Transparency, trust and student satisfaction
Msendo (2024)	College of Business Education, Dodoma Campus	150 (students, academic and administrative staff)	Quantitative cross-sectional SERVQUAL gap survey	Quality of support (cafeteria) services

This methodological profile has two implications for the synthesis. First, the predominance of cross-sectional surveys means that the evidence speaks to associations between leadership and service outcomes rather than to causal effects. Second, the diversity of designs, participants and outcome measures precluded statistical pooling and supports the thematic synthesis adopted (Section 2.1).

3.3 Association between Leadership Practices and Customer Care and Service Delivery

Consistent with the review question, the evidence was analysed to establish how leadership practices (the independent variable) are associated with customer care and service delivery (the dependent variables), and what consequential effects follow from that association. Table 5 summarises the associations identified.

Table 5. Leadership Practices, Customer Care and Service Delivery, and Consequential Effects

Leadership practice (independent variable)	Customer care and service delivery dimension (dependent variable)	Mechanism	Consequential effect	Supporting evidence
Transformational and transactional leadership by deans and heads of department	Quality of academic and administrative support delivered by staff	Higher academic staff job satisfaction and motivation	More engaged staff and a more responsive service climate for students	Mgaiwa (2023)
Ethical and transparent leadership in service provision	Transparency and reliability of services	Student trust (partial mediator)	Higher student satisfaction	Bwachele et al. (2023)
Weak leadership oversight of feedback and complaint systems	Complaint handling and responsiveness	Unresolved grievances and weak accountability	Student dissatisfaction and erosion of trust	Mapunda and Mramba (2018)
Limited leadership attention to service standards	Tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy	Negative gaps between expectations and perceptions	Service quality perceived as below expectations; lower satisfaction	Magasi et al. (2022); Msendo (2024)
Expansion-oriented leadership and policy without commensurate quality follow-through	Staffing, facilities and quality of provision	Implementation deficit	Quality concerns and graduates' limited preparedness to deliver services	Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016); Mbua et al. (2022)
Adaptive and distributed leadership during digital transition (comparative evidence)	Continuity of teaching and student support services online	Delegation to ICT teams and staff upskilling	Service continuity maintained during disruption	Lalani et al. (2025); Moonasar and Ngoepe (2023)

Three features of the association emerge from Table 5. First, its direction is consistent: leadership practices that motivate staff, communicate openly and attend to student feedback are associated with better customer care, whereas inattentive or expansion-focused leadership is associated with persistent service gaps. Second, the association is largely indirect. Leadership rarely acts on students directly; its influence is transmitted through the job satisfaction and motivation of the staff who deliver services (Mgaiwa, 2023) and through the trust that transparent practices generate among students (Bwachele et al., 2023). Third, the consequential effects extend beyond

satisfaction with a single service to trust in the institution, the capacity of graduates to deliver services in the wider society (Mbua et al., 2022), and institutional reputation, which international evidence links to service quality and student satisfaction (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2021).

These associations should nonetheless be interpreted with caution. Most of the underlying studies were cross-sectional, few measured leadership and service outcomes within the same model, and none tested leadership interventions over time. The evidence therefore establishes a consistent association and a plausible pathway, rather than a demonstrated causal effect. The themes presented in Section 3.4 elaborate these associations and the conditions under which they operate.

3.4 Thematic Findings

Through thematic synthesis, five major themes were identified regarding how leadership practices influence customer care and service delivery in Tanzanian higher education institutions:

i. Pervasive Service Quality Deficits and Systemic Leadership Challenges
ii. Leadership Styles as Mediators of Institutional Climate and Service Quality
iii. Trust and Transparency as Foundational Leadership Responsibilities
iv. The Policy–Implementation Disconnect in Educational Quality
v. Contextual Constraints: Resources, Digital Transition, and Policy Enforcement

Each theme is discussed below, with supporting evidence from the reviewed studies and relevant literature.

3.4.1 Pervasive Service Quality Deficits and Systemic Leadership Challenges

A consistent finding across the literature is the presence of service-quality deficits in Tanzanian higher education, indicating fundamental challenges in institutional leadership's ability to meet student expectations. Multiple studies using the SERVQUAL framework demonstrate negative gaps between expected and perceived service quality in all dimensions. For example, Mashenene (2019), Msendo (2024), and Magasi, Mashenene, & Ndengenesa (2022) each found that students' expectations exceeded their actual service experiences in tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These comprehensive shortfalls suggest system-wide issues rather than isolated problems. Particularly revealing is the statistic from Mapunda and Mramba (2018) that

90% of students felt their complaints were managed ineffectively, with a majority of grievances never resolved to satisfaction. Such a glaring failure in responsive service delivery indicates a breakdown in the feedback loop that leadership is supposed to oversee.

These persistent deficiencies suggest that leadership has struggled to turn formal quality assurance frameworks into practical reality. Despite Tanzania's higher education reforms since 2005 (and TCU's mandates for quality assurance), there remains an "implementation deficit" where policies exist on paper but not in practice. This echoes observations by Altbach et al. (2017) about many developing higher education systems: rapid expansion often exceeds the capacity for quality assurance. In Tanzania's case, university leaders may have been too focused on managing growth (infrastructure, enrolment, new programs) and are less able to prioritise the quality of student services. The result, as shown by recurring SERVQUAL gaps, is a misalignment between what institutions claim (or intend) to deliver and what students actually experience. Leadership teams may also face structural barriers such as bureaucracy, insufficient funding, or lack of training in service management, which worsen these quality gaps. Nonetheless, from a student's perspective, accountability rests with institutional leaders to actively identify and address service failures. The repeated occurrence of similar service problems (e.g., poor responsiveness, inadequate facilities, unhelpful staff attitudes) across studies indicates a need for leadership to fundamentally rethink service delivery models in Tanzanian HEIs. A customer-focused approach, perhaps drawing on frameworks from the business sector (Mittal & Jung, 2024), could help in retraining staff and redesigning processes to close these ongoing quality gaps.

3.4.2 Leadership Styles as Mediators of Institutional Climate and Service Quality

The evidence clearly shows links between leadership methods and service delivery outcomes, especially through their influence on academic and administrative staff. Several studies reveal that leadership style affects staff motivation, commitment, and ultimately the service environment of an institution. For example, Mgaiwa (2023) found that both transformational and transactional leadership styles were significant predictors of academic staff's job satisfaction in Tanzanian universities. Since academic and support staff are the main agents delivering services (teaching, advising, and administrative support), their satisfaction and engagement directly impact the student experience. Leadership that motivates and supports staff usually creates a more positive and

responsive service atmosphere across the campus. Because both transformational and transactional styles predicted job satisfaction in the same study, the evidence also indicates that Tanzanian university leaders often use a mix of styles, such as transformational tactics (vision, inspiration) alongside transactional ones (clear objectives, rewards). While a combined approach can be practical, the ongoing service quality gaps highlighted earlier raise important questions about whether current leadership practices truly result in better service experiences. It may be that the way these styles are implemented is not sufficiently focused on service quality goals. For example, a leader might be transformational in pursuing research excellence or institutional growth, but not prioritise improving student advising or library services.

This reflects what Fullan and Scott (2014) describe as an "implementation dip" in higher education reforms: leadership strategies often fail to penetrate the daily practices that shape student outcomes. A university may have an eloquent strategic plan championed by top management, but if middle managers and frontline staff are not empowered, trained, and motivated to carry out those initiatives, the student experience remains unchanged. The review findings suggest that leadership in Tanzanian HLIs must focus not only on broad vision and policy but also on day-to-day management that supports service excellence. This includes setting clear service quality goals, modelling customer-oriented behaviour, and recognising or rewarding staff for good service delivery. It also means adopting*servant-leadership principles,* as discussed in the higher education literature (Adams et al., 2025), in which leaders see their role as serving the needs of students and staff. When leaders actively help remove obstacles for staff (like bureaucracy or resource bottlenecks) and show concern for student feedback, they create an institutional climate in which service quality can improve. In short, leadership style is a mediating factor: the right style (or combination of styles) can cultivate an organisational culture where continuous improvement in service quality is part of the ethos, whereas a poor leadership approach can lead to disengaged staff and stagnant or declining service standards.

3.4.3 Trust and Transparency as Foundational Leadership Responsibilities

Another key theme is the role of trust and transparency in the leadership–service quality relationship. Several studies highlight that, in addition to implementing processes, effective leadership in higher education must foster an ethical climate that supports customer care.

Bwachele, Chong, and Krishnapillai (2023) demonstrate that trust is a vital predictor of student satisfaction and actually mediates the link between transparency and satisfaction. Their research shows that when students see university processes (such as grading, fee payments, and complaint handling) as transparent and open, it boosts their trust in the institution, which then leads to greater satisfaction with services. Conversely, as Mapunda and Mramba (2018) found, opaque or unresponsive procedures (like unresolved complaints) undermine trust, creating a vicious cycle of cynicism and disengagement among students. This suggests that leadership's role extends beyond technical solutions and involves fostering an organisational culture rooted in integrity and openness.

Leadership can promote transparency in various ways: regularly sharing decisions and their reasons with students and staff, publishing service charters or performance reports, involving student representatives in committees, and implementing easy-to-use systems for feedback and complaints. Ethical leadership, as described by Brown et al. (2005), is marked by consistency between what leaders say and do, fairness in decision-making, and accountability for results. When leaders demonstrate these qualities, they set a tone that influences the entire organisation. For instance, if university leaders openly acknowledge service shortcomings and outline steps for improvement, students are more likely to feel their voices are heard and that the institution is responsible. This can foster patience and goodwill even when issues arise. Conversely, if leadership becomes defensive, secretive, or mainly focused on public relations, students quickly lose trust and may stop engaging with available services or providing feedback, which can exacerbate problems.

Notably, Tanzanian studies emphasising trust (Bwachele et al., 2023) align with global findings on student-institution relationships. Evidence from India similarly shows that students' trust in their institution conditions how service quality translates into satisfaction (Singh & Jasial, 2021). Trust becomes a form of "social capital" that can buffer institutions during changes or resource constraints. For Tanzanian universities, which often manage limited resources and transition to new systems (like digital platforms), trust is especially vital. Leaders should therefore prioritise ethical practices: establishing codes of conduct, ensuring decisions (such as fee changes or policy adjustments) are transparent, and addressing misconduct or corruption that undermines student

trust. In essence, effective leadership must foster not only efficient systems but also an ethical culture where transparency and accountability are fundamental values, not merely compliance checklists.

3.4.4 The Policy–Implementation Disconnect in Educational Quality

A recurring tension in the reviewed literature is the gap between educational quality policies (or goals) and actual implementation outcomes within institutions. Multiple studies highlight cases where well-intentioned initiatives failed to translate into improved service delivery, pointing to leadership challenges at both institutional and national levels. Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016) earlier pointed out that public-private partnerships and rapid expansion policies in Tanzania increased access to higher education but did not commensurately improve quality. More recent evidence, such as Mbua, Salema, and Mandila (2022), indicates that many university graduates were unable to deliver the expected level of service or skills in their communities, suggesting potential shortcomings in the educational process and support systems. These findings suggest that expansion and innovation efforts have sometimes been pursued without adequate attention to maintaining or enhancing quality, a classic case of overextension.

This policy implementation disconnect can be viewed through the lens of change management in higher education. Tanzanian institutional leaders often find themselves navigating between national pressures (expand enrolment, roll out new programmes, meet regulatory benchmarks) and the day-to-day realities of limited faculty, outdated facilities, or bureaucratic inertia. The result, as the studies indicate, is that formal compliance with policies (e.g., creating quality assurance units, writing strategic plans) might be achieved, but substantive change (e.g., smaller class sizes, better academic advising, improved dormitory services) lags. Leadership effectiveness, therefore, must be measured not only by the ability to comply with external standards (like TCU guidelines) but by the ability to bridge these standards into practice on the ground. As Altbach et al. (2017) and others have argued, developing countries' higher education systems often have ambitious policies that are undercut by a lack of capacity or political will in implementation.

For Tanzanian HEIs, a key implication is that university leaders must become translators and negotiators: translating broad quality goals into actionable plans and negotiating for the resources

or policy flexibility needed to carry them out. The evidence also suggests a need for adaptive leadership – leaders who can learn from failures and feedback and adjust strategies accordingly. For example, if a new student information system is introduced to improve registration (policy solution) but students still face long lines and errors, adaptive leadership would involve convening the implementation team, collecting user feedback, and fixing workflow or training gaps rather than declaring the policy a success simply because the system was installed. Some encouraging signs are evident in the ASG-QA, which place student support services and student participation in governance among institutional quality standards (HAQAA Initiative, 2018), which could motivate leaders to focus more on actual service improvements rather than just paper compliance.

In summary, the policy–practice gap in Tanzanian higher education service quality highlights the importance of practical leadership skills: project management, continuous improvement, stakeholder engagement, and a focus on outcomes. It is not enough for leaders to be visionaries or policy experts; they must be*implementers*who ensure that quality assurance is more than just a checklist but a lived reality for students in lecture halls, libraries, and administrative offices.

3.4.5 Contextual Constraints: Resources, Digital Transition, and Policy Enforcement

Finally, the review findings recognise that leadership operates within and is often limited by broader factors such as resource shortages, technological shifts, and policy enforcement issues. Several studies and data points demonstrate these constraints in Tanzania. The student–staff ratios discussed earlier (e.g., 8,625 lecturers for over 334,000 students) exemplify these resource challenges. Even the most capable and dedicated leaders would find it difficult to sustain quality services with such staffing shortages. Effective leadership in this context becomes about doing more with less: finding innovative ways to use technology, build partnerships, and improve processes to maximise limited resources. For example, some universities have adopted e-learning and online student portals to handle large cohorts, which can be effective if well implemented but this again depends on leaders who can lead training and foster a culture of digital adoption.

The digital transition theme is significant. As noted in global contexts (Hill & Smith, 2023; Lalani et al., 2025), the pandemic accelerated the use of online platforms in higher education. Comparative evidence from South Africa (Moonasar & Ngoepe, 2023) and wider analyses of

academic leadership during the pandemic (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020) show how leaders responded to weaknesses in digital infrastructure, and similar pressures confront Tanzanian institutions. Those who practised distributed leadership, delegating authority to ICT teams and quickly upskilling staff, managed to mitigate service disruptions (for example, moving student orientation or library services online). Others who were slow or overly centralised likely experienced greater breakdowns (such as the inability to conduct online exams or to advise students remotely). Thus, a leader's adaptability to technology is now a core component of customer care in education. Students expect reliable online services (registration systems, learning management systems, communication channels) as part of overall service quality, and providing these is a leadership issue as much as a technical one. It involves strategic investment decisions, cross-departmental coordination, and, often, change management to secure staff buy-in.

Policy enforcement (or lack thereof) is another contextual factor. TCU and other bodies set regulations and minimum standards (for quality assurance units, for example), but enforcement can be inconsistent. Some institutions may lag in meeting standards without facing strong repercussions, thereby perpetuating complacency. A shift by regulators from paperwork compliance towards measuring tangible outcomes would therefore be well-founded. Stronger external audits that include student satisfaction surveys or service quality audits could incentivise leaders to prioritise customer care.

Recognising these contextual constraints reveals that leadership is inherently linked to the environment. Tanzanian university leaders often juggle multiple roles, they manage government expectations, student activism, limited budgets, and sometimes political interference. The most effective leaders, based on this review, are those who navigate these challenges while still promoting a student-centred approach. They advocate for additional resources when possible (e.g., lobbying for more faculty positions or better funding), but also find innovative solutions within their means (e.g., engaging volunteer alumni for mentorship programmes to supplement staff advising). They push for digital advancements while remaining conscious of equity (ensuring students with limited internet access are not left behind). They enforce rules fairly but also aim to influence policy where current regulations hinder quality (for example, if strict government enrolment targets compromise standards, a courageous leader will argue this to authorities).

In conclusion, leadership in Tanzanian higher learning institutions involves a balancing act managing expansion with quality, innovation with inclusion, and authority with accountability. The effectiveness of leadership should therefore be assessed by the ability to navigate these systemic challenges while consistently promoting a student-centred culture. As the literature collectively indicates, when leaders successfully balance these elements, even difficult environments can produce positive service delivery outcomes.

4. Conclusions

This systematic review clearly shows that leadership is a key factor influencing service quality and student satisfaction in Tanzanian higher education institutions. Several important conclusions arise: The association between leadership practices and customer care is consistent in direction, operates largely through staff motivation and student trust, and carries consequential effects for student satisfaction, institutional trust and graduate outcomes, although the predominantly cross-sectional evidence does not yet permit causal claims.

First, leadership styles and behaviours are consistently associated with the quality of customer care provided by universities. Transformational, servant, and ethical leadership practices in particular are repeatedly associated with positive outcomes: they boost staff motivation, promote institutional accountability, and improve communication, all of which influence the student experience. Leaders who clearly communicate a vision for service excellence and support their staff in achieving it create an environment where students feel valued and well-cared-for. Conversely, authoritarian or complacent leadership is linked to stagnant service quality and unmet student expectations. In summary, who leads and how they lead are crucial for service delivery in higher education.

Second, a significant and ongoing gap exists between the formal adoption of quality assurance frameworks (as guided by TCU and other bodies) and their effective implementation in daily service delivery. Despite nearly twenty years of reforms and policies aimed at improving higher education quality in Tanzania, institutions continue to fall short of student expectations. This is evidenced by negative SERVQUAL scores across all dimensions and widespread dissatisfaction with key services, such as complaint handling and advising. The findings point to a critical "implementation deficit," where leadership has failed to fully translate policy into practice. Paper compliance (e.g., establishing QA units or writing strategic plans) has not been enough; what is missing is the follow-through and a culture of continuous improvement at the ground level, which ultimately remains a leadership responsibility.

Third, beyond structures and processes, the intangible elements of trust and transparency proved to be vital mediators between leadership actions and student satisfaction. Students care not only about the services they receive but also about how they are treated and how decisions are made. Effective leadership, therefore, is not just about administrative efficiency; it is also about creating an ethical institutional culture based on openness and accountability. When students trust their institution, believing that their concerns will be heard and that policies are applied fairly, they tend to be more satisfied even when faced with occasional service issues. Leadership must deliberately foster this trust through honest communication, involving students in governance, and demonstrating integrity at all levels of management.

Finally, the challenges of inadequate resources, digital transition gaps, and weak policy enforcement persist as external factors that limit service delivery improvements. Leadership practices are therefore highly contextual; they operate within, and are constrained by, these systemic challenges. Leaders cannot immediately hire more faculty or construct new facilities without external support, nor can they single-handedly resolve socioeconomic issues affecting student preparedness. Nevertheless, effective leaders are those who actively seek to reduce these constraints: advocating for resources, intelligently integrating technology, and strengthening internal quality controls even when external enforcement is weak. Essentially, true leadership effectiveness in this context is measured by how well leaders can navigate and ease system-level challenges while keeping the institution focused on serving students' needs.

In summary, the review highlights that leadership is the key element in the complex system of higher education service delivery. Effective policies and ample resources can be wasted without good leadership, while strong leadership can partly overcome even major challenges. Tanzanian higher education institutions aiming to improve customer care must prioritise leadership development and accountability, recognising that lasting improvements in service quality will come from leaders who are competent, ethical, and student-focused.

5. Recommendations

Building on the above conclusions – particularly that leadership is a vital yet under-utilised asset for service quality in Tanzanian higher education – the following recommendations are offered. These proposals aim at various stakeholders and are meant to turn the review's findings into practical strategies to improve institutional effectiveness and student satisfaction.

5.1 For Institutional Leaders (University Administrators and Managers)

- Universities should develop targeted leadership training programmes that focus on transformative, ethical, and student-centred leadership styles. This could involve workshops, mentorship programmes, or collaborations with international leadership institutions. The goal is to prepare current and future academic leaders (such as deans, department heads, registrars, etc.) with skills in change management, communication, and team motivation. Research consistently shows that when leaders enhance these skills, staff engagement and service quality increase accordingly (Mgaiwa, 2021, 2023).
- Make service delivery a visible priority by including student satisfaction and service quality indicators in performance reviews for both academic and administrative units. For example, a dean's annual review could incorporate student feedback on the advising system, or a head of library services could be evaluated based on improvements in library user satisfaction. Linking leadership accountability to these metrics will motivate leaders at all levels to prioritise customer care outcomes, not just academic or financial targets.
- Institutional leaders must advocate for the deployment of integrated, user-friendly digital platforms for essential student services. This includes online admission and registration

systems, learning management systems for academics, and digital feedback and complaint portals. Due to resource limitations, leveraging technology is among the few ways to scale services effectively. Leaders should ensure sufficient training for staff and students to operate these systems and should track their performance (e.g., uptime, user satisfaction). A well-executed digital solution can significantly enhance responsiveness and transparency, as shown during the pandemic, when it facilitated the continuity of services (Lalani et al., 2025; Hill & Smith, 2023).

- Leadership should promote values of customer care throughout the institution. Simple practices such as front-line staff training in customer service, establishing service charters that publicly state the level of service students can expect, and setting up "service excellence" awards for departments can reinforce this culture. Leaders should visibly model this culture, for example, by holding periodic open forums where students can voice concerns directly to the administration and then responding with tangible actions. Over time, these practices can shift the institutional mindset to be more student-focused.

5.2 For the Tanzania Commission for Universities (Regulatory Body)

- TCU should enhance its audit and accreditation processes by including specific service quality and student satisfaction criteria. Instead of focusing only on input metrics (like staff qualifications, facilities, etc.), audits should assess outcomes such as student satisfaction survey results, graduate feedback, and evidence of improvements based on student input. The Commission could require universities to conduct an annual standardised student satisfaction survey and submit the results (and action plans) as part of their accreditation maintenance. By moving beyond policy compliance to measuring tangible service outcomes, TCU will encourage universities to internalise customer care as a key aspect of quality.
- Considering the serious issues identified in complaint handling (e.g., Mapunda & Mramba, 2018), TCU should require each institution to establish a functional, well-publicised complaints management system (such as an ombuds office or online tracking system).

Additionally, TCU could request annual reports from institutions detailing the number of complaints received, resolved, and the average time taken for resolution. These metrics should be reviewed during accreditation visits. Public transparency could be further improved by encouraging universities to publish summary reports on the improvements made in response to student complaints. Such measures ensure that accountability for customer care is embedded within the system.

- The Commission, possibly in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and donors, should launch national programmes for leadership capacity building. This may include leadership conferences, the formation of communities of practice for Vice Chancellors and Principals to share best practices, and the dissemination of guidelines on effective leadership in service quality (possibly adapting international frameworks to the local context). Given TCU's overview of the sector, it is well-positioned to identify common leadership challenges and successes, and to promote peer learning. For instance, if one university has significantly enhanced its library services through innovative leadership, TCU can highlight that case for others to follow.

5.3 For Policy Makers and Government (Ministry of Education and Financing Bodies)

- Government higher education policies and funding formulas should incentivise not only enrolment expansion but also quality enhancements. This could involve providing additional budgets or grants to institutions that demonstrate high or improving student satisfaction and graduate outcomes. Conversely, policy directives should avoid unintentionally encouraging leaders to focus solely on growth at the expense of quality (for instance, by capping student–staff ratios or tying certain funding to meeting service quality benchmarks). A policy environment that rewards quality will empower institutional leaders to prioritise student care without jeopardising their funding or reputation.

- Recognise through policy that some quality enhancements need sector-level resource interventions, such as hiring more academic staff, upgrading ICT infrastructure, or expanding learning facilities. The government should continue increasing investment in higher education, but in a strategic manner by focusing on areas that directly affect service

delivery (e.g., libraries, student support centres, ICT). When immediate hiring isn't feasible, consider innovative solutions like teaching assistant programmes or adjunct faculty pools to ease the burden on existing staff. Leaders can advocate for these supports, but policymakers must be receptive and proactive, recognising that leadership alone can only do so much if essential resources are unavailable.

5.4 For Future Research

- Scholars should move beyond cross-sectional analyses and undertake longitudinal studies that examine the impact of specific leadership interventions on service quality over time. For example, a research project could follow a university implementing a new leadership development programme and evaluate subsequent changes in staff morale and student satisfaction over several years. Rigorous assessments (possibly employing experimental or quasi-experimental designs) of leadership training effects in the Tanzanian context would offer valuable evidence of effective strategies.
- Qualitative research focusing on student experiences with leadership and service delivery could enhance the predominantly quantitative findings. Conducting in-depth interviews or focus groups with students from various institutions might uncover nuanced insights into how leadership decisions are perceived locally. This could include how students interpret transparency efforts, which leadership behaviours they value most, and how institutional culture influences their engagement. Such insights would help tailor leadership development to address areas that students consider most important to their academic experience.
- Comparative studies involving Tanzanian institutions and those in other Sub-Saharan African countries (or other developing nations) could identify which leadership challenges are common and which are specific to certain contexts. Since many nations face similar issues of massification and resource limitations, comparing strategies, such as how a Kenyan or Ghanaian university leader might handle customer care differently, could offer new ideas for Tanzania. International collaboration on research in this field would not only

enhance academic knowledge but also foster a network of practice for higher education leadership across the region.

By implementing these recommendations, higher education institutions in Tanzania and their surrounding ecosystem can make meaningful progress towards bridging the gap between policy and practice in service delivery. The ultimate aim is to ensure that students, as the primary beneficiaries of higher education, receive the quality of care, support, and educational services they deserve. Strengthening leadership at all levels acts as the catalyst to drive this change, transforming Tanzania's investments in higher education into tangible improvements in student satisfaction and success.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest. Furthermore, no funding sponsors had a role in the design of the study, the collection and analysis of data, the writing of the manuscript, or the decision to publish the results.

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