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Re-imagining Academic Leadership through Transformative Coaching: A Reflective Account from Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how transformative coaching can enhance academic leadership development in Sub-Saharan Africa, using Uganda as a case study. The study responds to persistent challenges in higher education leadership, such as institutional complexity, gender inequities, emotional burnout, and weak succession planning that hinder systemic reform and inclusive leadership. The main objective was to explore the role of coaching in fostering strategic clarity, emotional resilience, and institutional transformation. Methodologically, the paper draws on reflective analysis and qualitative data from eight academic leaders in private Universities (five women and three men) who underwent structured coaching sessions. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and reflective journals, and thematically analyzed. Findings reveal that coaching enabled participants to reconnect with personal well-being, navigate gendered leadership barriers, adopt systems thinking, and commit to legacy planning. Women leaders especially valued the coaching space for affirming their voice, processing exclusion, and building confidence. The study concludes that coaching offers more than personal development. It is a powerful, context-sensitive model of leadership education. It recommends integrating coaching into leadership programs across African universities, with emphasis on feminist values, wellness, and intergenerational mentorship. Such integration can cultivate resilient, strategic, and visionary leaders aligned with Uganda's Vision 2040, NDP III, and the SDGs.

Keywords: Transformative Coaching; Academic Leadership; Gender Equity; Systems Thinking; Uganda; Higher Education

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership in higher education across Sub-Saharan Africa faces persistent and multi-dimensional challenges ranging from resource constraints and institutional complexity to policy unpredictability,

gender inequity, and limited systems-thinking capacity. In Uganda, university leaders operate within environments that demand excellence in teaching, research, administration, and public engagement, yet provide minimal structural or emotional support for these roles.¹² These challenges are further compounded

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¹ Teferra, D., and Altbach, P.G. "African Higher Education: Challenges for the 21st Century." *Higher Education* 47, no. 1 (2004): 21-50.

² Sifuna, D.N. "Challenges of Quality and Relevance in African Higher Education: The Example of Kenya and Uganda." *International Journal of Higher Education* 3, no. 3 (2014): 49-61.

for women leaders, who often encounter patriarchal institutional cultures, underrepresentation in decision-making bodies, and limited mentorship opportunities.³

Despite ongoing efforts to build leadership capacity through workshops and administrative training, few initiatives offer sustained, reflective, and individualized approaches that attend to both personal and systemic transformation. Coaching, unlike workshops or administrative trainings, is a personalized, goal-oriented process that focuses on facilitating individual reflection, growth, and capacity building through one-on-one or small group interactions rather than broad skill transmission.⁴ It highlights ongoing dialogue and tailored support to develop self-awareness and strategic thinking, rather than delivering standardized content or procedural knowledge. Coaching particularly when grounded in feminist and systems leadership theories offers an emerging pathway for rethinking academic leadership as a holistic practice of self-awareness, care, and strategic influence.⁵

This paper presents both a personal and empirical reflection on the value of transformative leadership coaching in Ugandan higher education. It draws from the author's own 15-year leadership journey having served as Head of Department, Dean of Faculty, and top management official alongside experiences of eight other senior academic leaders (five women and three men) who underwent a structured coaching process. The paper argues that coaching fosters emotional resilience, systems thinking, and a renewed sense of purpose particularly critical for women navigating gendered and institutional barriers. It offers evidence that coaching can play a critical role in shifting institutional leadership cultures toward inclusion, sustainability, and transformational impact.

Following this introduction, the paper is organized into four subsequent sections. Section two, below, presents a

brief literature review and outlines the study's main purpose and methodology. Section three discusses the study findings, focusing on pathways to leadership growth and renewal. Section four provides a discussion of these findings, interpreting the pathways to leadership renewal, and offers resultant recommendations that highlight pathways to sustainable leadership impact. The final section presents the conclusions, charting the future of leadership practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Literature review

The current leadership development models in higher education in Uganda and much of Sub-Saharan Africa are often fragmented, impersonal, and focused primarily on administrative or compliance-based training. These models frequently neglect the inner dimensions of leadership, such as identity, purpose, emotional intelligence, and self-care. As a result, academic leaders, especially women, continue to face burnout, disempowerment, and role conflict, with limited tools to reflect critically or lead adaptively within complex institutional ecosystems.⁶ Furthermore, strategic goals like Uganda's Vision 2040⁷ and the National Development Plan III emphasize transformative leadership for sustainable development, yet few universities have embedded coaching or holistic development into their leadership pipelines.⁸

There is an urgent need to explore alternative forms of leadership education that can empower academic leaders particularly those in senior roles to think systemically, act ethically, and lead with emotional resilience. Coaching, as both a developmental and reflective practice, remains underutilized and poorly documented in academic leadership literature in Africa.

³ Mama, A. "Restore, Reform but Do Not Transform: The Gender Politics of Higher Education in Africa." *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* 1, no. 1 (2003): 101-125; Morley, L. *Women and Higher Education Leadership: Absences and Aspirations*. London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, 2013; Ahikire, J. "Gender and Higher Education in Africa: Contemporary Issues and Debates." In *Power, Gender and Social Change in Africa*, edited by M.B. Ndulo and M. Grieco, 103-120. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021

⁴ Grant, A.M. "The Third 'Generation' of Workplace Coaching: Creating a Culture of Quality Conversations." *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice* 10, no. 1

(2017): 37-53; Jones, R.J. "Understanding the Differences Between Training and Coaching." *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring* 17, no. 1 (2019): 83-97

⁵ Senge, P., Hamilton, H., and Kania, J. "The Dawn of System Leadership." *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 13, no. 1 (2015): 27-33.

⁶ Morley, L. *Women and Higher Education Leadership: Absences and Aspirations*.

⁷ National Planning Authority. *Uganda Vision 2040*. Kampala: Government of Uganda, 2013.

⁸ Government of Uganda. *Third National Development Plan (NDP III) 2020/21-2024/25*. Kampala: Government of Uganda, 2020.

This gap necessitates inquiry into how coaching can not only improve individual well-being but also drive institutional change. While the concept of coaching is widely documented in Western academic contexts, often applied in business, executive leadership, or organizational development,⁹ its application in African higher education institutions, especially within academic leadership, is sparse. Coaching in Western literature is typically framed as a performance-enhancing tool, grounded in individualistic, goal-driven models, and rarely tailored to the collective, relational, and historically complex realities of African academic institutions.¹⁰ As such, these models often fail to account for the social, political, and cultural nuances shaping leadership in African universities, particularly in postcolonial settings like Uganda.

Within African scholarship on academic leadership, the emphasis has largely been placed on capacity-building workshops, administrative training, or donor-funded leadership programmes that tend to follow a technocratic approach to leadership development.¹¹ These interventions, while important, often focus on skills acquisition, strategic planning, or management competencies, with limited attention paid to the inner work of leadership, emotional intelligence, or self-reflection. Moreover, these trainings tend to be one-off events and lack sustained follow-up or individualized support. African scholars such as Oduaran and Lekoko have critiqued the absence of holistic models of leadership development in African universities and advocate for approaches that nurture ethical, context-sensitive, and values-based leadership.¹² However, even within these critical works, coaching as a distinct and transformative method of leadership development is either absent or only marginally referenced.

This lacuna underscores the originality and contribution of the present study, that addresses this oversight by centring coaching as a feminist and systems-based practice with the potential to reshape academic leadership in African contexts. Unlike dominant training models, transformative coaching emphasises

relational accountability, self-inquiry, and the redefinition of power, approaches that resonate deeply with the challenges and possibilities of academic leadership in Uganda. By grounding the inquiry in lived experience and reflective praxis, this study not only fills a critical gap in the literature but also provides a context-specific, theoretically grounded, and practice-oriented contribution to African higher education scholarship. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the role of transformative coaching in enhancing academic leadership within Uganda's higher education industry, with particular attention to personal growth, systems thinking, and institutional transformation. The paper seeks to understand how coaching, as a reflective and developmental practice, can contribute to more responsive, resilient, and values-driven leadership in a context marked by complex challenges and evolving institutional demands.

The central research question guiding this inquiry is: *How can transformative coaching reimagine and strengthen academic leadership in Ugandan universities?* In order to answer this question, the paper critically examines the personal and professional transformations experienced by senior academic leaders who participated in a structured coaching process. It investigates how coaching shaped the capacity of these senior academic leaders for emotional resilience, strategic clarity, and adaptive leadership. It also assesses how these internal shifts influenced their broader institutional engagement. In doing so, the study explores coaching's potential as a model for leadership education in higher education, particularly within the Ugandan context.

Additionally, the inquiry considers how gender dynamics intersect with leadership development, drawing attention to the unique challenges and opportunities encountered by women leaders during their coaching journeys. Finally, the paper reflects on the practical implications of these findings, offering recommendations for integrating coaching into leadership development frameworks across Uganda's higher education institutions. Noteworthy, the study

⁹ Jones, R.J., Woods, S.A., and Guillaume, Y.R.F. "The Effectiveness of Workplace Coaching: A Meta-Analysis of Learning and Performance Outcomes from Coaching." *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 89, no. 2 (2016): 249–277.

¹⁰ Ely, K., et al. "Evaluating Leadership Coaching: A Review and Integrated Framework." *The Leadership Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (2010): 585–599.

¹¹ Louw, G.E., and Zuber-Skerritt, O. "Reflective Leadership by Academic Women at South African Universities." *SA Journal of Higher Education* 23, no. 2 (2009): 373–390; Tibarimbasa, A.K.

"Factors Affecting the Management of Private Universities in Uganda." Doctoral thesis, University of South Africa, 2010

¹² Oduaran, A. "Leadership Capacity Building for Sustainable Development in African Universities: Reflections and Directions." *Journal of Education and Practice* 10, no. 3 (2019): 66–72; Lekoko, R.N., and Modise, O.M. "Exploring a Transformative Framework for Developing Academic Leadership in Higher Education." *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies* 3, no. 10 (2011): 147–154.

seeks to generate recommendations for integrating coaching into leadership development frameworks in higher education institutions.

Contextualising the Ugandan Higher Education Landscape

Uganda's higher education system operates within a complex socio-political landscape marked by significant challenges, particularly for women aspiring to leadership roles. Although there has been notable progress in gender parity in enrolment, women remain underrepresented in senior academic positions, often holding only a fraction of leadership roles compared to their male counterparts.¹³ For example, Makerere University, one of Uganda's oldest and largest universities, has less than 29% of women in leadership positions, including Deans, Heads of Departments, and Directors of units.

Cultural norms and systemic biases continue to hinder women's advancement, resulting in emotional burnout and a pervasive sense of exclusion among female academic leaders.¹⁴ These biases manifest in various forms, including stereotypes, unequal pay, and limited opportunities for promotion. As Mulyampiti et al. note, despite numerous interventions, the gender gap at universities continues to expand, requiring critical interventions that address techniques and strategies of inclusion/exclusion.¹⁵ Women in higher education frequently navigate a host of gendered barriers that affect their confidence, decision-making capabilities, and overall leadership effectiveness. These barriers include societal expectations that prioritize traditional roles, limited access to mentorship opportunities, and a lack of institutional support for work-life balance.¹⁶ The lack of flexible working arrangements and the dual responsibilities of work and family further exacerbate these difficulties.¹⁷

Moreover, the institutional complexity in Uganda complicates leadership dynamics, with inadequate succession planning exacerbating the difficulties faced by emerging leaders. This complexity often leads to stagnation in leadership development and hampers the implementation of systemic reforms necessary for

promoting inclusive leadership.¹⁸ In this challenging context, transformative coaching potentially emerges as a vital intervention, offering tailored support that fosters emotional resilience and strategic clarity. By equipping women leaders with the tools to effectively navigate these barriers, coaching can contribute significantly to their professional growth and institutional transformation.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, interpretive approach to explore the impact of transformative coaching on academic leadership in Uganda. The aim was to generate rich, contextual insights into how coaching supports personal development, emotional resilience, and systems thinking among senior academic leaders. A purposive sample of eight participants was selected, all of whom held or had held leadership positions such as Head of Department, Dean, Director, or members of top university management teams in public and private institutions.

From 2024 to 2025, a structured six-month mentorship program brought together academic leaders and certified leadership coaches trained in feminist and systems thinking. The mentorship phase followed a series of theory sessions, some of which continued online once a month, providing foundational knowledge that mentees could immediately apply in practice. Individual coaching sessions were held every three weeks, each lasting 1.5 to 2 hours, with a clear schedule provided at the outset.

At the start, mentees identified a major goal and specific objectives, agreed upon with their mentor. Sessions were conducted in a confidential, trust-based environment, a key factor in fostering psychological safety and openness in mentoring relationships.¹⁹ The program aimed to strengthen leadership capacity, strategic thinking, communication, negotiation, executive presence, decision-making, team management, confidence, and career development competencies widely recognized as essential for effective leadership in academic and organizational

¹³ Nabatte, R. "Bridging the Gender Gap: Analyzing Women's Participation and Leadership Representation in University Governance." 2019.

¹⁴ WOUGNET. "Understanding Key Challenges Surrounding Women's Leadership in Uganda and Practical Recommendations," 2024.

¹⁵ Mulyampiti, T., Kabeba, R.M., and Kanabahita, C. *It Is a Long Way to the Top: Increasing Women's Leadership in Ugandan Public Universities*. CODESRIA, 2018.

¹⁶ WOUGNET. 2024.

¹⁷ WOUGNET. 2024.

¹⁸ Namasasu, N. "Institutional Complexity in Uganda." 2021.

¹⁹ Allen, T.D., and Eby, L.T. *The Blackwell Handbook of Mentoring: A Multiple Perspectives Approach*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010.

contexts.²⁰ The approach emphasized deep listening, including paraphrasing to demonstrate understanding, and the use of comprehensive, powerful questions—what, why, who, when, and where—that inspired reflection and insight.²¹ Mentees spoke for over 80% of the time, with mentors engaging mainly through targeted probing questions, enabling rich discovery on self-leadership, collaboration, and team mentoring for collective success.²²

Between sessions, mentees undertook reflective assignments, such as crafting a “90th birthday speech” envisioning major life achievements, then questioning why those accomplishments should be delayed when they could begin pursuing them immediately. Such reflective storytelling has been shown to deepen self-awareness, goal clarity, and motivation.²³ Group meetings, held in person or online, created a collaborative learning environment where participants shared successes, challenges, and lessons learned, a practice consistent with peer learning theory and communities of practice.²⁴ Online sessions upheld professional standards, with official dress and cameras on to enhance presence and engagement, aligning with best practices for virtual leadership development.²⁵ At the program’s close, each mentee submitted a report on lessons learned, challenges encountered, and future plans, which was discussed with their mentor to co-create a post-mentorship growth plan - an approach that supports sustained leadership development beyond formal training.

Unlike conventional leadership or administrative trainings that are often short-term and content-heavy, this program integrated ongoing theoretical learning with sustained, individualized mentorship, allowing for continuous reflection, practical application, and context-specific guidance. By emphasizing deep listening, powerful questioning, and reflective exercises, it fostered transformative and enduring leadership growth rather than one-off skill acquisition.²⁶

Data were collected through three primary qualitative methods. First, narrative interviews were conducted

with eight academic leaders both before and after the coaching process to explore their leadership challenges, aspirations, and perceived transformations. These in-depth interviews provided insight into how participants made sense of their leadership journeys and the role of coaching in shaping their experiences.

Second, several participants voluntarily maintained reflective journals throughout the coaching period. While reflective journaling is well established in professional training for teachers and health workers, its systematic application to examine leadership decision-making in Ugandan higher education remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by employing daily reflective journaling in combination with thematic analysis to capture authentic, temporally grounded insights into leaders’ cognitive and emotional processes. By moving beyond its conventional role as a personal growth exercise, the study positions reflective journaling as a rigorous, replicable research method capable of documenting micro-level leadership dynamics in real time, particularly valuable in contexts where direct observation of practice is not feasible.

Methodologically, participants were guided to record entries at the end of each working day, responding to prompts tailored to the study objectives. These prompts encouraged them to document key events, decisions made, lessons learned, emotional shifts, recurring dilemmas, emerging self-awareness, and evolving strategic thinking habits. The resulting journals provided a contemporaneous record of breakthrough moments and inner transformation as they unfolded. Consistent with Gibbs’ approach is grounded in the view that journaling, while personal, constitutes a legitimate qualitative method for capturing lived experience in depth.²⁷ It also aligns with action research principles by documenting iterative cycles of change, enabling a nuanced understanding of leadership development processes within the study context.

Third, as a culminating exercise, participants were asked to articulate post-coaching strategic goal statements. These written reflections not only highlighted their

²⁰ Northouse, P.G. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. 9th ed. London: SAGE, 2021.

²¹ Whitmore, J. *Coaching for Performance: The Principles and Practice of Coaching and Leadership*. 5th ed. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2017.

²² Garvey, B., Stokes, P., and Megginson, D. *Coaching and Mentoring: Theory and Practice*. 3rd ed. London: SAGE, 2018.

²³ Drake, D., Brennan, D., and Gibb, J. "Narrative Coaching." *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring* 6, no. 2 (2008): 1–16.

²⁴ Wenger, E. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

²⁵ Brown, A., and Green, T. *The Essentials of Instructional Design: Connecting Fundamental Principles with Process and Practice*. London: Routledge, 2020.

²⁶ Allen, T.D., and Eby, L.T. *The Blackwell Handbook of Mentoring, 2010*

²⁷ Gibbs, G. *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Oxford: Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic, 1988.

future leadership intentions but also offered concrete plans for applying insights gained from the coaching process to influence institutional culture and promote inclusive leadership. Unlike standard qualitative interviews -which, while valuable, often capture retrospective accounts - this method of eliciting strategic goal statements provided prospective, action-oriented data that illuminated participants' evolving leadership mindsets and commitments. Such reflective goal articulation aligns with approaches in transformational and action research methodologies where participants actively co-construct knowledge through planned future actions.²⁸ By integrating this exercise, the study added a unique layer of original insight into leadership development, moving beyond conventional descriptive data to capture the aspirational and practical dimensions of leadership transformation in real time.

Together, these data sources provided a holistic, layered understanding of the participants' development and the broader implications of coaching as a model of transformative leadership education. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, following Brown's six-step approach to identify patterns and insights.²⁹ Anonymity was maintained by using pseudonyms and removing identifying institutional references. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee prior to data collection, and all participants signed informed consent forms. It is important to note that this study is a short-term case study, which limit the depth of insights regarding the long-term impact of transformative coaching on academic leadership to some extent. Future research could benefit from a longitudinal design to explore how the effects of coaching evolve overtime to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its sustained influence on leadership practices, which was outside the scope of this work.

3. STUDY FINDINGS: PATHWAYS TO LEADERSHIP GROWTH AND RENEWAL

This section presents the core findings of the study, offering an in-depth exploration of how participants experienced meaningful personal and professional transformation throughout the coaching process. It illuminates the key shifts in thinking, behaviour, and leadership practice, highlighting the enablers and barriers to effective leadership within the Ugandan higher education context. Through analysis of reflective

journals, coaching records, and participant narratives, five interrelated themes emerged, revealing multifaceted pathways by which leadership capacity was strengthened, challenges navigated, and new possibilities for both personal and institutional renewal realized.

The first theme, Reconnection with Self and Emotional Resilience, captures participants' renewed self-awareness, strengthened sense of purpose, and enhanced capacity to manage stress and setbacks constructively. The second theme, Systems Thinking and Strategic Clarity, reflects their growing ability to approach organizational challenges holistically, anticipate interdependencies, and align actions with long-term goals. The third theme, Gendered Leadership Barriers, exposes the persistent cultural, institutional, and societal constraints, particularly those affecting women that shape leadership opportunities and decision-making. The fourth theme, Legacy and Succession Planning, underscores the importance participants placed on mentoring, talent development, and safeguarding institutional continuity. The fifth and final theme, Coaching as a Model of Leadership Education, demonstrates how the coaching process itself was perceived as a transformative, practical, and sustainable approach to leadership capacity building. Together, these themes form a critical foundation for understanding the cognitive, emotional, and strategic dimensions of leadership in this context and set the stage for the detailed thematic analysis that follows.

These themes are significant because they directly address the study's objectives of examining how coaching interventions influence leadership development, decision-making, and resilience in Ugandan higher education. They also resonate with the literature on transformative leadership, emotional intelligence, and gender equity, while offering context-specific insights that extend existing knowledge. By situating the lived experiences of participants within both local realities and global leadership discourse, the findings bridge theory and practice, demonstrating how reflective, person-centred approaches such as coaching can address systemic leadership challenges. This alignment between the empirical evidence and the theoretical foundations strengthens the study's contribution to both scholarly understanding and practical application.

²⁸ Coghlan, D., and Brannick, T. *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*. 4th ed. London: SAGE, 2014.

²⁹ Brown, B. *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts*. New York: Random House, 2018.

Reconnection with Self and Emotional Resilience

This theme explores how participants re-established a deeper connection with their personal values, leadership identity, and sense of purpose. Through reflective practice and coaching dialogue, they developed greater emotional resilience, enabling them to manage stress, navigate conflict, and maintain composure during challenging situations. These shifts were not only internal but also visibly influenced how they engaged with colleagues and made decisions under pressure. This directly aligns with the study's objective of examining how coaching strengthens leaders' capacity for self-awareness and adaptive decision-making.

A powerful insight shared by nearly all participants was the profound emotional depletion they experienced in their leadership roles often hidden beneath layers of responsibility, academic rigor, and public performance. The demands of academic leadership, coupled with limited institutional support for well-being, had left many leaders operating on autopilot. The coaching process created a space for emotional reconnection and self-awareness, enabling leaders to acknowledge the cost of neglecting their inner lives.

Participants, especially women juggling caregiving roles alongside professional duties, spoke of carrying invisible burdens: managing team conflicts, responding to student crises, and bearing the pressure to excel in a male-dominated leadership environment. These burdens often went unacknowledged by peers and institutions. During an interview, a female Dean, with over a decade in leadership, shared: *"I didn't realise how disconnected I had become from myself. Coaching gave me permission to pause and ask, 'What do I need to be whole?'"* (Participant 3, Female Dean) Through coaching, many participants identified symptoms of burnout, emotional fatigue, and chronic self-doubt often masked as professionalism. Coaching offered a rare moment of introspection and validation, helping participants see the connection between self-care and effective leadership. One female Head of Department expressed during an interview: *"Before coaching, I was reactive, trying to meet everyone's expectations. Now I am intentional."*

I choose what aligns with my values and energy." (Participant 4, Female HOD).

For women leaders, the reconnection to emotional resilience was also tied to navigating gendered spaces where emotional control and performance were routinely expected but rarely supported. The coaching relationship offered a non-judgmental and confidential space where they could speak openly about feeling overextended, undervalued, or alone in their roles. A Director reflected during daily journaling: *"Coaching didn't fix everything, but it gave me permission to be human. That alone changed how I now approach leadership with more compassion for myself and others."* (Participant 7, Female Director).

These experiences align with Palmer's call for leaders to examine their "inner landscape," arguing that effective leadership begins with self-knowledge and wholeness.³⁰ Similarly, Brown and Green highlight the importance of vulnerability and emotional literacy in creating courageous leadership cultures.³¹ For the participants in this study, emotional resilience was not a personal luxury, but a leadership necessity critical to managing complexity, sustaining motivation, and leading with authenticity.

Systems Thinking and Strategic Clarity

Here, the findings illustrate how participants began to view their institutions as interconnected systems rather than isolated units or departments. This broader perspective allowed them to anticipate the ripple effects of decisions, recognise linkages between operational and strategic priorities, and communicate a clearer organisational vision. The coaching process played a central role in helping participants sharpen their analytical thinking and align short-term actions with long-term institutional goals. This connects to the study's goal of exploring how coaching supports strategic leadership in complex higher education environments.

In tandem with emotional renewal, Coaching, with its focus on reflective inquiry, goal alignment, and leadership capacity building, also fostered a shift in cognitive orientation from reactive management to strategic systems thinking. Initially, many leaders

³⁰ Palmer, P.J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. 10th Anniversary ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

³¹ Brown, A., and Green, T. *The Essentials of Instructional Design: Connecting Fundamental Principles with Process and Practice*. London: Routledge, 2020.

approached their roles from a task-oriented, siloed perspective, often overwhelmed by day-to-day challenges. Coaching helped them zoom out and view leadership through a systems lens, enabling a deeper understanding of the institutional structures, relationships, and power dynamics that shape outcomes.

Participants described how coaching empowered them to diagnose root causes, anticipate institutional dynamics, and map interdependencies across departments. This cognitive reframing not only improved their decision-making but also helped reduce burnout by shifting their focus from reactive problem-solving to proactive leadership. One male Director captured this transformation succinctly during his journaling: *“Coaching helped me step back and look at the system, not just my role. I now approach challenges more strategically rather than reactively.”* (Participant 6, Male Director). This quote illustrates the broader pattern observed among participants: coaching facilitated the development of systemic awareness, allowing leaders to see their influence not in isolation, but within a broader network of academic, administrative, and policy-related dynamics. One female Deputy Dean remarked: *“I used to see other departments as competitors. Now I see them as partners in a bigger system. We’re all part of the same ecosystem, and collaboration is no longer optional.”* (Participant 2, Female Deputy Dean during final reflections).

For some, this system thinking also translated into more strategic engagement with institutional planning processes, such as aligning departmental goals with university strategic plans and national development frameworks. One Head of Department noted: *“Coaching helped me realise that real leadership is not about solving every problem. It’s about knowing which levers to pull and when.”* (Participant 1, Male HOD). These insights align with Senge et al. who argue that effective leadership in complex systems requires the ability to see interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains, and to surface underlying patterns rather than reacting to events.³² In this study, coaching served as a developmental mechanism for cultivating such system leadership capabilities transforming leaders into adaptive thinkers and strategic collaborators, capable of navigating complexity with vision and purpose.

Gendered Leadership Barriers

This theme captures the persistent gender-related challenges participants encountered in their leadership roles. These barriers, rooted in cultural norms, institutional structures, and societal expectations, often shaped perceptions of authority, access to opportunities, and career progression. Women leaders, in particular, shared experiences of bias and underestimation, but also strategies they employed to navigate and challenge these constraints. This links to the study’s focus on understanding contextual leadership barriers and how coaching can empower leaders to address them.

A compelling theme that emerged from the coaching journeys of the five women participants was the deeply gendered nature of academic leadership in Ugandan universities. Coaching became a vital, even rare, space where they could name, process, and challenge the implicit and explicit gender biases they experienced in their roles. Participants described how patriarchal cultures, micro-aggressions, and institutional gatekeeping shaped their leadership trajectories, often leaving them emotionally fatigued and professionally sidelined.

For many, coaching served as a form of feminist consciousness-raising, enabling them to reframe personal frustrations as part of broader structural inequalities. One female Head of Department candidly shared:

“I used to think I was the problem. That I wasn’t aggressive enough, not ambitious enough. Coaching helped me realise it was not just me, it was the system that made me invisible.”

Several women reflected on the invisibility and emotional labour they performed in their departments taking on student welfare, conflict resolution, or committee coordination without recognition or corresponding advancement opportunities. During an interview, a senior lecturer with acting responsibilities for a leadership post described how she had been in an “acting” position for over two years, despite consistently performing beyond expectations:

“When a man is acting, it’s a temporary phase. When a woman is acting, it becomes permanent. I felt stuck.”

³² Senge, P., Hamilton, H., and Kania, J. "The Dawn of System Leadership, 2025

Coaching helped me find the words and the courage to finally demand clarity."

Microaggressions, often subtle but persistent, were another source of distress. Women reported being interrupted in meetings, having their ideas rephrased and attributed to male colleagues, or being labelled as "emotional" or "difficult" when they voiced dissent. Coaching allowed them to process these experiences without fear of retaliation, and to practice strategies for boundary-setting, reframing narratives, and reclaiming authority. One participant noted during the final reflections:

"There was one time I presented a proposal, and the Vice Chancellor asked if I had consulted my male colleagues. Coaching gave me language to assert my expertise without sounding combative."

Another female Director shared how coaching empowered her to shift her leadership stance from self-doubt to assertive clarity:

"For years, I would over-prepare, triple-check everything because I felt I had to earn my place. Coaching taught me that my place is already mine. I don't have to apologise for being in the room."

The emotional cost of constantly proving competence, especially in male-dominated management teams, was a recurring theme. Participants revealed that the coaching space offered them psychological relief, affirmation, and a chance to be vulnerable; something rarely possible in their everyday institutional roles. It became a site not only of healing but also of re-energizing feminist leadership values.

It should be noted, however, that while the coaching intervention was generally well-received, participants encountered several challenges. Some leaders struggled to balance the demands of their coaching sessions with their existing workload, leading to occasional scheduling conflicts and feelings of time pressure. Additionally, a few participants initially found it difficult to fully embrace the reflective exercises, expressing discomfort with the level of self-disclosure required. These challenges highlight the importance of providing adequate support and flexibility to participants to ensure their full engagement in the coaching process:

"At first, I felt like I was adding another task to my already overflowing plate. It was hard to find the time to really focus on the coaching sessions when I had so many other pressing issues to deal with."

Crucially, nonetheless, overall coaching helped participants move from internalizing gender-based barriers to strategizing around them. They reported gaining skills in power analysis, negotiation, and alliance-building. Some spoke about taking bolder steps to mentor other women, speak up in Senate meetings, or challenge unfair recruitment practices. "I have stopped playing small. Coaching helped me see that being diplomatic doesn't mean being silent," said one participant who had recently applied for a Deputy Vice Chancellor position—her first-ever executive leadership bid.

These reflections mirror broader scholarship on feminist leadership in Africa, which argues that women in leadership roles are often burdened with not only institutional responsibilities but also the task of challenging, surviving, and transforming patriarchal systems.³³ Coaching provided a much-needed pause in this ongoing struggle offering tools for clarity, confidence, and collective empowerment. For the men, coaching seems to have fostered not only self-awareness but also strategic thinking, and inclusive practices. It was clear that some men recognised their privileges, were able to confront biases, and became aware on how to lead more equitably:

"Before the coaching sessions, I often focused on solving immediate problems without considering the bigger picture. Now, I find myself stepping back to connect daily decisions with long-term institutional goals. This shift has not only sharpened my strategic thinking but also helped me to engage colleagues more inclusively, making sure different voices are considered in shaping our direction." (Male participant, Leadership Coaching Study during final reflections)

Addressing the gendered barriers identified in the study requires deliberate prioritization of coaching tailored for women leaders. Such interventions should be embedded within broader institutional commitments to dismantle systemic gender biases and foster inclusive leadership cultures. This aligns with calls from Balitwala for transformative feminist leadership that empowers

³³ Morley, L. *Women and Higher Education Leadership*, 2013

women to navigate socio-cultural dynamics and assert agency within academic hierarchies.³⁴

Legacy and Succession Planning

The findings here reveal a strong commitment among participants to building a leadership pipeline and ensuring institutional continuity. Participants recognised the importance of mentoring emerging leaders, documenting institutional knowledge, and creating systems that would outlast individual tenures. The emphasis on legacy was framed not only as a professional responsibility but also as a moral obligation to the future of their institutions. This supports the study's objective of examining how coaching influences leaders' approaches to sustainability and institutional resilience.

A prominent theme that emerged across both male and female participants was the growing realization that sustainable leadership requires intentional thinking about legacy, institutional culture, and succession planning. The coaching process functioned as a reflective mirror, helping leaders move beyond immediate outputs and managerial firefighting to consider what values, systems, and people they were shaping for the future.

Participants expressed that prior to coaching, much of their leadership was driven by daily administrative demands, compliance pressures, and short-term institutional performance indicators. However, through coaching, many began to reframe their roles from being mere stewards of the present to architects of the future. As one senior female academic, a Dean nearing retirement, explained: *"Coaching challenged me to ask questions I had avoided: Who will continue this work when I am gone? What systems am I strengthening or weakening by how I lead today?"*

Several participants reflected on how their own leadership journeys had been marked by the absence of supportive mentors or visible role models, particularly for women and younger scholars. This recognition sparked a commitment to intentionally nurture the next generation of leaders within their departments and faculties. A male Head of Department noted in an interview:

"No one really mentored me when I started. It was a trial-and-error journey. Through coaching, I realised I don't have to let the next person suffer the same way. Mentorship has to be structured and deliberate."

During the interview and in their reflective journal, a number of participants emphasized that succession planning was not only about identifying a replacement but about shaping institutional cultures that value continuity, equity, and ethical leadership. One participant, a female Director in a public university, put it powerfully: *"We need to stop hoarding leadership. Coaching taught me that true legacy is not in staying forever, but in preparing others to lead with integrity and courage."*

The emphasis on intergenerational leadership aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education and lifelong learning, as well as SDG 5 on gender equality. Coaching made it evident that institutional development cannot be divorced from personal transformation. Leaders must reflect on what they are modelling, whom they are empowering, and how they are creating space for diverse and inclusive succession pathways. For women participants, this often meant not only mentoring junior women scholars but also advocating for structural reforms such as fair promotion criteria, leadership rotation, and leadership incubation programs that could institutionalize succession beyond individual goodwill. Ultimately, legacy was framed not as an individual achievement but as a collective investment in sustainable, values-driven leadership cultures.

Coaching as a Model of Leadership Education

This final theme highlights how participants perceived coaching itself as a transformative and sustainable approach to leadership development. Beyond skill acquisition, coaching fostered self-reflection, accountability, and adaptive thinking. Many participants indicated that they intended to integrate coaching principles into their own leadership practice, thereby extending its benefits to colleagues and mentees. This theme reinforces the study's overall argument that coaching is both a developmental tool and a replicable model for leadership education.

Majority of the participants agreed that compared to conventional training workshops that are characterized

³⁴ Balitwala, S. "Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation, 2011

by limited individual follow-up, which may result in less personalized growth, coaching provides a more holistic, impactful, and sustained form of leadership learning. The coaching process was not only customized to their real-time leadership dilemmas but also created a confidential, non-judgmental space to unpack emotional burdens, reflect on ethical dilemmas, and align their leadership with personal and institutional values.

A female participant who had attended several donor-funded leadership workshops before her coaching engagement reflected: *"Trainings were useful for information, but coaching was transformative. I didn't just learn leadership concepts but I became a different kind of leader."* Participants highlighted three distinct elements that made coaching effective as a leadership education model. Firstly, relational *Trust and Psychological Safety*. The one-on-one relationship with the coach created a trusting environment that enabled deep vulnerability something participants rarely experienced in their institutional settings. As one participant noted during the interview: *"It was the first time I could say I was overwhelmed without being judged. That alone helped me breathe again."*

Secondly, *Personalization and Reflection*. Unlike generalized workshops, coaching sessions were highly contextual. Leaders were encouraged to reflect on their own histories, triggers, and leadership values. This personalized learning deepened self-awareness and leadership authenticity. A participant explained: *"In workshops, we are told what good leadership looks like. In coaching, I was asked: what does good leadership mean to you?"*

Thirdly, *Integration of Inner and Outer Leadership Work*. Participants observed that coaching helped them move from performative leadership focused on titles and outputs to integrated leadership grounded in clarity, integrity, and resilience. In an interview, one male Dean described this shift as: *"I stopped performing leadership and started practicing it from within."* Several participants expressed a strong desire for universities to adopt coaching as part of their leadership development frameworks especially for new appointees, women leaders, and those in transition phases. Many advocated for a hybrid approach that combines technical

leadership training with ongoing coaching support. As one Director stated during the final reflections: *"Leadership is not a one-time certificate. It is a journey. Coaching should be part of that journey like a compass we return to."*

These reflections resonate with broader literature that critiques the transactional nature of many leadership training programs in Africa, and call for more transformational, reflective, and relational approaches.³⁵ Coaching, with its emphasis on individualized development and reflective practice, has been shown to strengthen student self-efficacy, GPA, and retention while fostering a culture of coaching across faculty and staff at the University of Kentucky.³⁶ Executive education providers from Oxford Saïd to HEC Paris are increasingly embedding coaching into curricula to nurture self-awareness, reflection-in-action, and leadership learning that extends beyond the classroom. Meanwhile, in contexts like Saudi Arabian higher education, succession planning remains informal and opaque, relying on networking and top-down decisions that often exclude women from leadership trajectories.³⁷ Research also points to pervasive obstacles such as stereotypes, institutional culture, and lack of mentoring the "glass ceiling" barriers that hinder women's advancement. Organizations that integrate succession planning with leadership pipelines, mentorship, and diversity-focused development strategies are more likely to cultivate a sustainable and inclusive cadre of future leaders.

Universities are increasingly recognizing coaching not just as a developmental add-on but as a core component of leadership education especially for new appointees because it offers personalization, reflection, emotional resilience, systems thinking, and strategic clarity. While its value in legacy building and succession planning is increasingly apparent, limitations persist particularly in individual follow-up and ensuring equitable access across gender. Coaching thus represents more than a method; it is a pedagogical shift that reframes leadership development as a deeply reflective, socially aware, and institutionally transformative process.

³⁵ Balitwala, S. "Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation, 2011; Mezirow, J., ed. *Learning as Transformation*, 2000

³⁶ Balitwala, S. "Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation

³⁷ Ely, K., et al. "Evaluating Leadership Coaching

These findings are neatly summarised and grouped in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of Key Themes and Illustrative Participant Voices

Theme	Description	Illustrative Quotes
Emotional Resilience & Reconnection with Self	Coaching supported emotional healing, restored confidence, and fostered self-awareness, especially for overburdened leaders.	"I didn't realise how disconnected I had become from myself. Coaching gave me permission to pause and ask, 'What do I need to be whole?'" (Female Dean)
Systems Thinking and Strategic Clarity	Participants shifted from reactive problem-solving to broader institutional and systemic thinking.	"Coaching helped me step back and look at the system not just my role. I now approach challenges more strategically." (Male Director)
Gendered Leadership Barriers	Women used coaching to name and navigate institutional sexism, microaggressions, and self-doubt	"I used to think I was the problem. Coaching helped me realise it was not just me it was the system that made me invisible." (Female Head of Department) I have stopped playing small. Coaching helped me see that being diplomatic doesn't mean being silent." (Female Director)
Legacy and Succession Planning	Coaching ignited a concern for preparing future leaders, mentoring successors, and building inclusive leadership cultures	"It is no longer just about how I lead now. It is about who I am preparing to take over, and what culture I am leaving behind." (Male Dean) "We need to stop hoarding leadership. True legacy is preparing others to lead with integrity." (Female Director)
Coaching as Leadership Education	Coaching was seen as a deeper, more transformational form of learning compared to standard workshops or trainings.	"Trainings were useful for information, but coaching was transformative. I didn't just learn leadership concepts I became a different kind of leader." (Female Senior Lecturer) "Leadership is not a one-time certificate. It is a journey. Coaching should be part of that journey like a compass we return to." (Male Director)

The themes presented collectively deepen our understanding of leadership development within Ugandan higher education by revealing the complex interplay of personal growth, systemic awareness, and contextual challenges. They demonstrate how coaching acts as both a catalyst and a framework for transformative leadership practice. The following discussion builds on these insights to critically examine their implications for theory, policy, and practice, highlighting opportunities for advancing leadership education in similar contexts.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: INTERPRETING PATHWAYS TO LEADERSHIP RENEWAL

This section aims to critically engage with the study's core findings by situating them within existing leadership theories and broader scholarly discourse. It seeks to interpret how coaching influences leadership

development, highlights the significance of emergent themes, and examines their implications for practice and policy in higher education leadership. Through this analysis, the discussion bridges empirical insights with conceptual frameworks, offering a nuanced understanding of leadership transformation in the Ugandan context.

As findings are discussed, it should be again noted and reiterated that this study relied primarily on self-reported data from participants, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability and recall bias. While efforts were made to mitigate these biases through the use of reflective journals and in-depth interviews, it is possible that participants presented a more positive view of their experiences than was fully warranted. Future research could incorporate observational data or objective measures of leadership behaviour to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the impact of coaching.

Nonetheless, the findings of this study overwhelmingly underscore that coaching can be a transformative form of leadership education that extends far beyond the conventional scope of technical training. Rather than focusing solely on managerial tasks or policy compliance, coaching creates a relational, confidential space that enables academic leaders to explore the deeper dimensions of leadership including identity, emotional resilience, gendered experiences, power dynamics, and long-term institutional vision. This aligns with Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, which emphasizes critical reflection as essential for reshaping meaning-making frameworks and promoting lasting change.³⁸

One of the most significant outcomes from the study was the way in which coaching facilitated personal and institutional re-alignment. Several participants began their coaching journeys feeling overwhelmed, reactive, or disconnected from their purpose. Through guided reflection, emotional validation, and strategic inquiry, they were able to reposition themselves as intentional, value-driven leaders. This process mirrors what Mezirow refers to as the "inner work of leadership," which supports self-authorship and moral clarity in high-pressure environments.³⁹

These findings resonate deeply with the author's own experience of over 15 years in academic leadership progressing from Head of Department to Dean to top university management. Like several participants, the author encountered systemic resistance, emotional exhaustion, and gendered exclusion. Coaching served as a reflective and empowering tool to disrupt these patterns, offering a way to reclaim leadership as a space of purpose, clarity, and contribution.

Coaching and Gender: A Catalyst for Feminist Leadership

The gendered leadership experiences revealed in this study reinforce prior critiques that African universities, while expanding, remain steeped in patriarchal cultures.⁴⁰ It is worth noting that a number of men defined the term coaching as a relational process of guiding colleagues to unlock their potential and engage into strategic decision-making. A majority of the women leaders in this study termed it as one of the few safe and affirming spaces where they could reflect on their

invisibility, confront internalized doubt, and reimagine their leadership identities. This affirms Balitwala's argument that feminist leadership must begin with personal consciousness and challenge oppressive structures from within.⁴¹

What distinguishes coaching from other interventions is its ability to make invisible burdens visible. The emotional labor, performative over-preparation, and "acting" status that women carried for years without recognition were finally acknowledged. Through this validation, coaching enabled participants to move from survival to strategy from silence to voice. Importantly, this form of self-work did not isolate women from institutional engagement. Rather, it strengthened their resolve to mentor, challenge inequities, and advocate for structural reform.

Systems Thinking and Institutional Transformation

A second major insight is that coaching nurtured systems thinking: the ability to see beyond immediate tasks and analyze complex institutional relationships, power flows, and long-term implications of leadership choices. This aligns with the work of Lekoko and Modise, who describe system leadership as an emergent form of leadership required to solve adaptive challenges within complex social systems.⁴²

Participants reported moving from siloed or reactive thinking to broader perspectives that allowed them to anticipate resistance, build cross-departmental alliances, and strategically align their personal values with institutional missions. Coaching, in this sense, functioned as a laboratory for adaptive leadership where participants could experiment with different lenses, mindsets, and change strategies. This is vivid as one female participant voiced: "*The coaching helped me a lot personally, but I still face the same institutional barriers. It's like I'm better equipped to fight the battles, but the war is still ongoing.*"

Thus, despite the positive outcomes reported by participants, it is important to acknowledge that transformative coaching is not a panacea for all leadership challenges. The intervention primarily focused on individual development and may not fully address systemic issues within the higher education institutions. Factors such as organizational culture,

³⁸ Mezirow, J., ed. *Learning as Transformation*, 2000.

³⁹ Ely, K., et al, 2020

⁴⁰ Mama, A. "Restore, Reform but Do Not Transform, 2003.

⁴¹ Balitwala, S. "Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation, 2011.

⁴² Lekoko, R.N., and Modise, O.M. "Exploring a Transformative Framework for Developing Academic Leadership in Higher Education, 2011

resource constraints, and power dynamics can significantly influence the effectiveness of coaching interventions. Future research should explore how coaching can be integrated with broader organizational development initiatives to create more sustainable and systemic change.

Legacy, Succession, and Intergenerational Thinking

Another transformative outcome was the reorientation toward legacy thinking and succession planning. Coaching prompted participants to view leadership not merely as a role they held, but as a culture they were shaping and passing on. This was especially important in a Ugandan context where leadership transitions are often informal, opaque, or overly politicized. Participants expressed a renewed commitment to mentorship, talent development, and equity in leadership pipelines.

This aligns with national and global priorities, including Uganda's Vision 2040 and Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5, which call for inclusive, quality education and gender equality. Coaching, in this context, became a tool not only for personal transformation but for intergenerational justice challenging leaders to invest in others and institutional continuity.

Reimagining Leadership Education

Collectively, these findings call for a reimagining of leadership education in higher education. Traditional workshops and administrative inductions remain valuable but are insufficient for preparing leaders to navigate the emotional, ethical, and systemic dimensions of their roles. Coaching offers an experiential, individualized, and sustained approach that equips leaders with the resilience, clarity, and ethical grounding necessary to lead through complexity.

As the experiences of the participants and the author show, coaching is not an add-on but a foundational practice for transformational leadership. It challenges the dominant discourse of leadership as control, compliance, or charisma, and reframes it as a practice of care, self-awareness, relationship-building, and strategic foresight. If universities in Uganda and the wider Sub-Saharan region are to thrive in the face of inequality, generational shifts, and global uncertainty, then leadership development must move beyond superficial

interventions and embrace coaching as a strategic, feminist, and transformational model of leadership education.

Recommendations: Pathways to Sustainable Leadership Impact

Building on the rich insights from this study, several strategic recommendations emerge to support the sustainable development of transformative leadership through coaching in Ugandan higher education. The findings highlight coaching's capacity to foster reflective, resilient, and strategic leaders who can navigate complex institutional challenges.

To harness this potential effectively, universities are encouraged to formally integrate coaching into leadership development programs targeting department heads, deans, and senior executives. Embedding coaching within institutional frameworks can be strengthened through partnerships with certified coaches, professional bodies, and donor-funded initiatives, ensuring both sustainability and alignment with institutional goals. This approach aligns with Garvey's emphasis on the role of coaching in nurturing reflective and strategic leadership capacities.⁴³

Moreover, leadership curricula and coaching programs must incorporate systems thinking as a core competency. Equipping leaders with the ability to diagnose root causes, anticipate interdependencies, and foster collaboration across departments enhances strategic clarity and organizational coherence, as outlined by Senge.⁴⁴

To amplify coaching's impact beyond individuals, senior academics who have benefited from coaching should be supported to mentor emerging leaders. This intergenerational knowledge transfer supports succession planning and institutional resilience, reflecting insights on developmental relationships as key to organizational growth.

Finally, coaching initiatives should be designed with clear, measurable outcomes that align with Uganda's Vision 2040,⁴⁵ and the Third National Development Plan III.⁴⁶ This alignment will enhance the strategic relevance of coaching and facilitate institutional buy-in. Despite

⁴³ Garvey, B., Stokes, P., and Megginson, D. *Coaching and Mentoring*, 2018

⁴⁴ Senge, P., Hamilton, H., and Kania, J. "The Dawn of System Leadership", 2015

⁴⁵ National Planning Authority, 2023.

⁴⁶ Government of Uganda, 2020

offering a roadmap for sustainable leadership development, these recommendations face challenges including resource limitations, cultural resistance, and institutional inertia. However, the demonstrated transformative impact of coaching supports continued investment and innovation despite such barriers.

5. CONCLUSION: CHARTING THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

This study provides valuable insights into leadership development through coaching. The study contributes valuable and original insights to the field of leadership development by framing coaching as a deeply transformative educational model. It moves beyond traditional skill acquisition to encompass the reconstruction of leadership identity, the cultivation of emotional resilience, and the development of strategic thinking. By employing reflective journaling as a systematic data collection method, the study accessed authentic, in-situ leadership reflections, thereby introducing methodological innovation to leadership research. This approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of the micro-processes that underpin leadership growth within the specific context of Ugandan higher education. Overall, this work demonstrates coaching's unique ability to cultivate leaders who are reflective, resilient, and strategically astute qualities essential for navigating the complexities of higher education leadership. It offers both theoretical and practical contributions that will benefit scholars, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to advance leadership development in similar contexts.

As a short-term case study, its depth of understanding regarding the sustained impact of coaching on leadership practices is, as already acknowledged, potentially limited. The reliance on participants' self-reported reflections means the data primarily capture intentions and perceptions rather than verified behavioural changes or measurable institutional outcomes. As a result, questions remain about the long-term sustainability of these transformations and their translation into enduring organizational impact. Therefore, future longitudinal studies that revisit these leaders and their institutions over periods of one, two, and five years would be valuable in assessing the lasting effects of coaching interventions.

Moreover, despite its promise, the study highlights the broader implementation of coaching faces contextual

challenges, including resource constraints and cultural resistance to reflective practices. These factors must be addressed thoughtfully to scale coaching initiatives effectively and ensure their relevance and acceptance within institutional cultures. How to address these wider, important socio-cultural and structural challenges was beyond the ambitions of this research; but it has contributed to understanding the importance of coaching and leadership training within whatever institutions and practices emerge within those wider changes.

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