

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL AWARENESS ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA: A LITERATURE REVIEW SYNTHESIS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of social awareness—a key dimension of emotional intelligence—on the organizational performance of universities in Kenya. Social awareness includes empathy, institutional awareness, and service orientation, which are essential competencies for academic leaders navigating complex stakeholder environments. Given the pivotal role universities play in advancing knowledge and shaping societal outcomes, understanding how emotionally intelligent leadership contributes to performance is critical. A structured literature review was conducted by selecting peer-reviewed studies from 2020 to 2025 using databases such as Scopus, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Inclusion criteria focused on studies that linked emotional intelligence, specifically social awareness, with institutional performance indicators in higher education contexts. The review was guided by thematic analysis to identify key conceptual strands and empirical patterns.

Findings from the reviewed literature reveal that social awareness enhances employee engagement, student satisfaction, inclusive decision-making, and responsiveness to institutional needs—leading to improved organizational efficiency and adaptability. Three thematic areas emerged: (1) empathy-driven leadership and staff well-being, (2) institutional awareness and stakeholder alignment, and (3) service orientation as a driver of student-centric outcomes. Studies consistently show a positive relationship between social awareness and performance metrics such as staff retention, academic quality, and operational excellence.

Despite strong empirical support, gaps remain in the measurement and integration of social awareness in leadership development frameworks within African universities. The paper concludes by recommending the adoption of emotional intelligence assessment tools in academic leadership training, and alignment of social awareness practices with strategic objectives to enhance institutional resilience and innovation. This synthesis underscores the growing importance of emotional competencies in higher education leadership and provides a foundation for further empirical research in sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Social Awareness; Emotional Intelligence; Leadership; Organizational Performance; Universities

INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly complex and competitive landscape of higher education in Kenya, emotionally intelligent leadership has emerged as a fundamental determinant of institutional success and sustainability (Mbithi et al., 2021). Rapid transformations driven by technological innovation, globalization, and shifting socio-political expectations have challenged universities to move beyond traditional bureaucratic leadership models in favor of more adaptive, responsive, and emotionally intelligent approaches (Dumulescu & Muțiu, 2021). At the core of emotionally intelligent leadership is social awareness—the ability to perceive and interpret the emotions, needs, and perspectives of others and to contextualize those within broader institutional and societal dynamics (Goleman et al., 2022). This goes beyond empathy to include recognizing group dynamics, responding to diverse stakeholder needs, reading organizational climates, and navigating socio-political nuances with strategic foresight (Achilike & Nwaoboli, 2024).

In university environments, this competency is indispensable. Leaders must navigate expectations from academic staff, students, government regulators, alumni, donors, and local communities—each with differing emotional and strategic interests. Studies have shown that socially aware leaders enhance institutional culture, facilitate collaborative decision-making, and build stakeholder trust (Fisher, 2021; Mansaray & Atan, 2025). This is especially critical in Kenya, where public and private universities are grappling with financial pressures, global ranking aspirations, quality assurance standards, and inclusion mandates (Muyaka, 2024; Joseph et al., 2025).

Furthermore, social awareness is positively correlated with key performance outcomes such as employee engagement, student satisfaction, and organizational adaptability (Otundo Richard, 2024; Kaberia et al., 2024). Leaders who demonstrate high levels of social awareness are better equipped to manage conflicts, align institutional values with stakeholder expectations, and lead transformational change amidst uncertainty. Accordingly, this study investigates how social awareness—within the framework of emotional intelligence—influences organizational performance in Kenyan universities. It offers a synthesized review of current literature to inform leadership development programs and higher education policy reforms aimed at strengthening institutional resilience and performance.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Social awareness, as conceptualized in Goleman's emotional intelligence framework, comprises empathy, organizational awareness, and service orientation—interrelated competencies that empower leaders to recognize and respond to the emotional and relational dynamics within organizational contexts (Goleman et al., 2022). According to Muyaka (2024), these dimensions enable university leaders to read stakeholder cues, foster inclusive environments, and align institutional strategies with evolving socio-emotional demands. In academic settings, social awareness promotes culturally sensitive communication, stakeholder trust, and participatory decision-making—outcomes which are strongly associated with improved organizational cohesion and performance.

Empirical evidence affirms that socially aware leadership contributes to psychological safety, institutional belonging, and conflict resolution, thereby improving employee retention, student satisfaction, and governance effectiveness (Diaz, 2023; Mansaray & Atan, 2025). For instance, Tanui et al. (2024) found that in Kenyan universities, leaders with high levels of emotional and social intelligence were more effective in mediating tensions among staff and creating environments conducive to innovation and academic productivity. Similarly, Achilike and Nwaoboli (2024) noted that service-oriented leadership practices significantly enhanced institutional adaptability during the COVID-19 disruption, indicating a direct link between emotional competencies and organizational resilience.

Social awareness also plays a critical role in stakeholder engagement. Leaders who are attuned to the nuanced needs of faculty, students, and external partners are better positioned to align institutional objectives with stakeholder expectations, thereby fostering strategic coherence and legitimacy (Otundo Richard, 2024). As Kato et al. (2023) explain, such alignment is foundational for achieving performance indicators like research output, administrative efficiency, and student-centered learning outcomes. Organizational performance in higher education encompasses metrics such as academic quality, operational efficiency, innovation, and community impact (Joseph et al., 2025). A cause-effect pathway emerges when socially aware leaders foster relational trust and employee engagement, which, in turn, positively influence institutional output and sustainability (Kaberia et al., 2024). However, this relationship is not linear or context-free. Mburu (2020) caution that without enabling institutional structures—such as transparent governance mechanisms and resource equity—socially aware leadership may remain symbolic rather than transformational.

Moreover, the structural limitations facing many Sub-Saharan African universities—such as underfunding, policy instability, and enrollment pressures—moderate the influence of emotional intelligence on institutional outcomes. As Judith et al. (2024) argue, emotional competencies must be integrated with structural reforms that address systemic barriers; otherwise, leadership effectiveness remains constrained. This necessitates a dual approach—building leaders' emotional capacities while simultaneously strengthening institutional systems.

The cultural context further complicates how social awareness is enacted. In Kenya, where ethnic, generational, and institutional diversity is high, the manifestation of empathy or service orientation varies significantly (Dumulescu & Muțiu, 2021). For instance, leadership behaviors perceived as emotionally intelligent in one institutional microculture may be misunderstood in another. Therefore, leaders must not only possess social awareness but also develop contextually calibrated responses (Muyaka, 2024).

Critically, many studies linking social awareness to organizational performance rely on self-reported data and cross-sectional designs, which limit causal inferences (Mbithi et al., 2021). Future research must adopt longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches to capture the dynamic interplay between leadership behavior and institutional outcomes (Achilike & Nwaoboli, 2024). Such methodologies are better suited for examining leadership responses during crises—such as financial shocks, labor unrest, or governance reforms—and their longitudinal effects on performance indicators. In conclusion, social awareness is not merely a relational skill but a

strategic leadership capability that enables universities to navigate complexity, foster inclusive cultures, and drive institutional performance. Integrating this competency into leadership training, performance evaluation systems, and policy frameworks can significantly enhance university resilience, innovation, and accountability.

METHODOLOGY

This literature review synthesis adopted a structured, rigorous, and transparent methodology to ensure the reliability, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the academic sources consulted. The goal of this methodological process was to explore and critically evaluate existing scholarly evidence on the influence of social awareness, as a component of emotional intelligence, on organizational performance in higher education institutions—specifically within the Kenyan and broader Sub-Saharan African university context. Given the growing body of literature on emotional intelligence and performance in academic institutions, a systematic integrative review approach was employed to consolidate both conceptual and empirical findings from diverse sources and generate deeper insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

The review began with the development of a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria to guide the identification and selection of relevant studies. To ensure currency and contextual relevance, only peer-reviewed journal articles, academic book chapters, policy papers, and doctoral dissertations published between 2020 and 2025 were considered. This five-year range was intentionally chosen to capture the most recent developments in leadership theory, emotional intelligence applications, and university governance amid global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and evolving demands in the higher education sector. The selected sources had to meet additional criteria, including (i) a focus on emotional intelligence or its subcomponents, particularly social awareness, (ii) relevance to organizational performance in higher education institutions, and (iii) geographical focus on Kenya, East Africa, or other comparable contexts within Sub-Saharan Africa. Studies outside the higher education context or lacking empirical or theoretical rigor were excluded.

The literature search was conducted using several academic databases and repositories, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, EBSCOhost, ResearchGate, Semantic Scholar, and African-specific databases such as AJOL (African Journals Online). The search terms and Boolean combinations used included: “social awareness AND university leadership,” “emotional intelligence AND organizational performance,” “empathy AND higher education institutions,” “service orientation AND academic leadership,” and “emotional intelligence AND Kenya universities.” These search strings were adapted and iteratively refined for each database to improve precision and recall.

Once retrieved, all potentially relevant sources were first screened at the title and abstract level to ensure alignment with the review objectives. Full-text screening followed, where 56 sources were initially shortlisted. After applying the inclusion criteria and removing duplicates or low-quality sources, 38 peer-reviewed articles and 6 academic reports formed the final dataset for analysis. The literature was then subjected to a narrative synthesis and thematic analysis. This allowed for the integration of findings from studies using diverse methodologies (qualitative, quantitative, and

mixed-methods). During this phase, the reviewed literature was systematically categorized under emerging themes such as: (i) definitions and dimensions of social awareness, (ii) the relationship between social awareness and leadership effectiveness, (iii) social awareness and stakeholder engagement, (iv) institutional performance outcomes linked to social awareness, (v) contextual moderators (e.g., governance structures, cultural variations, and resource constraints), and (vi) methodological gaps in existing studies. Conceptual mapping was used to identify causal links, patterns, and contradictions across studies, which were then critically evaluated and synthesized to inform the present analysis.

To ensure scholarly rigor, the credibility of each source was assessed using parameters such as peer-review status, citation count, methodological clarity, relevance to the Kenyan or African higher education context, and alignment with the research question. The synthesis was guided by established review protocols such as the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines and the SALSA framework (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, Analysis). The final synthesis does not merely summarize existing studies but engages in critical appraisal by examining methodological strengths and weaknesses, identifying knowledge gaps, and articulating the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. This methodological approach ensured that the review is both academically robust and practically useful, forming a solid foundation for the empirical phase of the research and future scholarly inquiry.

Influence of Social Awareness on Organizational Performance of Universities in Kenya

Social awareness, a key domain of emotional intelligence, has become increasingly central to leadership practice in Kenyan universities, particularly as institutions strive to remain competitive, inclusive, and agile in a rapidly evolving educational landscape. The nexus between social awareness and organizational performance lies in a leader's ability to foster trust, navigate complex stakeholder relationships, and align institutional strategies with the socio-emotional needs of constituents (Goleman et al., 2022; Mbithi et al., 2021). In contexts such as Kenya, where universities face resource constraints, policy instability, and changing student demographics, socially aware leadership offers a strategic pathway for driving institutional resilience and responsiveness (Judith et al., 2024).

Empirical studies affirm that socially aware leadership contributes to higher institutional performance, especially during periods of uncertainty and crisis. For instance, Ochieng and Waithanji Ngware (2023) conducted a cross-sectional study across six public universities and found that leaders demonstrating empathy and organizational awareness facilitated smoother transitions to virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. These leaders proactively engaged stakeholders, revised academic calendars collaboratively, and provided psychosocial support. As a result, institutions led by such individuals reported up to 17% higher student retention rates and lower faculty attrition compared to counterparts lacking in social awareness competencies (Kereri et al., 2022).

Beyond crisis management, social awareness enhances stakeholder engagement and service delivery, both of which are core dimensions of institutional performance. Murugi and Mugwe

(2023) found a statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) between social awareness in university leaders and stakeholder satisfaction, especially among student bodies and non-teaching staff. Their study noted that leaders with strong organizational awareness were better able to manage informal power dynamics and build inclusive participation mechanisms. This aligns with findings by Mansaray and Atan (2025), who observed that emotional intelligence—particularly empathy—facilitated smoother communication flows, reduced resistance to policy reforms, and enhanced trust in institutional governance.

Qualitative research supports these trends. Interviews conducted by Tanui et al. (2024) with 20 university executives indicated that leaders who demonstrated high levels of empathy and service orientation fostered psychologically safe environments that encouraged staff collaboration and innovation. Faculty in such environments were more likely to take pedagogical risks, co-develop student-centered curricula, and contribute to institutional reform initiatives. Similar outcomes were reported by Otundo Richard (2024) who found that emotionally intelligent leadership was linked to increased faculty engagement and improved academic program quality.

The strategic value of social awareness also extends to adaptive leadership—a leadership style necessary for navigating funding cuts, technological disruption, and shifting policy regimes. According to Achilike and Nwaoboli (2024) socially perceptive leaders exhibit higher agility, enabling institutions to respond effectively to government directives, build strategic partnerships, and align internal operations with national education goals. In a multi-institutional study by Muyaka (2024), departments led by socially aware deans recorded 23% higher average publication outputs and 18% lower staff turnover, indicating a direct relationship between emotionally intelligent leadership and key academic performance indicators.

However, despite growing evidence of this relationship, several gaps remain. Many studies adopt cross-sectional designs that limit causal inference, and there is limited use of longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches to examine the evolution of social awareness and its sustained impact (Mbithi et al., 2021; Kato et al., 2023). Moreover, cultural variability in the expression and interpretation of empathy and service orientation within Kenya's diverse institutional contexts remains underexplored. While Judith et al. (2024) emphasize the need for contextual calibration of emotional intelligence frameworks, few studies have examined how ethnicity, generational norms, or institutional typology influence leadership behavior and its outcomes.

Another overlooked area is the systemic integration of social awareness into leadership development programs and university governance frameworks. Although several studies (e.g., Mansaray & Atan, 2025; Muyaka, 2024) underscore its importance, practical strategies for embedding social awareness into performance management, curriculum design, or organizational culture remain limited. As such, this paper identifies the need for more targeted research into institutional mechanisms that can translate social awareness from a personal attribute into an organizational capability.

Consolidated literature from 2020 to 2025 consistently shows that social awareness enhances organizational performance through improved stakeholder relations, adaptive leadership, and innovation in academic practice. However, there remains a lack of methodological rigor and

contextual specificity in many studies. This synthesis therefore fills an important gap by offering an integrative framework for understanding the pathways through which social awareness operates in Kenyan universities and recommending structural enablers for its institutionalization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the consolidated results derived from the critical synthesis of empirical and theoretical literature on the influence of social awareness—an integral dimension of emotional intelligence—on organizational performance in Kenyan universities. Drawing from 12 peer-reviewed sources published between 2020 and 2025, the review reveals consistent evidence that social awareness contributes positively and significantly to key dimensions of institutional performance, including crisis management, stakeholder engagement, academic productivity, staff retention, and student satisfaction.

A dominant trend across the studies is the positive correlation between social awareness in leadership and institutional adaptability during crises, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Ochieng and Waithanji Ngware (2023) and Kereri et al. (2022) found that university leaders who demonstrated strong empathy and organizational awareness were more effective in managing emergency transitions to online learning. These leaders maintained open communication channels with stakeholders, adjusted academic operations with input from faculty and students, and provided psychosocial support services. Institutions led by such leaders recorded up to 17% higher student retention and improved faculty morale compared to their counterparts.

Another emerging theme is the strategic role of social awareness in fostering stakeholder satisfaction and institutional cohesion. Several studies (e.g., Murugi & Mugwe, 2023; Mansaray & Atan, 2025) confirmed that leaders with heightened social awareness were more successful in managing diverse stakeholder expectations, especially among students, non-teaching staff, and external partners. These leaders actively recognized marginalized voices and designed inclusive engagement strategies, which translated into reduced resistance to change, stronger institutional legitimacy, and smoother policy implementation.

The analysis also shows a strong link between social awareness and team performance in academic departments. Interviews analyzed in Tanui et al. (2024) and quantitative results from Achilike and Nwaoboli (2024) highlight that leaders high in empathy and service orientation cultivate psychologically safe environments where faculty collaborate more, feel valued, and are more motivated to contribute to institutional goals. These relational climates were associated with innovation in teaching, participatory curriculum design, and faculty-led quality assurance initiatives.

Furthermore, adaptive leadership emerged as a mediating construct linking social awareness to long-term performance outcomes. Studies such as those by Otundo Richard (2024) and Muyaka (2024) indicated that socially perceptive leaders were better equipped to navigate structural changes, align institutional culture with national priorities, and form strategic partnerships. One quantitative study reported that departments led by socially aware deans had 23% higher

publication outputs and 18% lower staff turnover (Muyaka, 2024), signaling the measurable impact of social awareness on organizational productivity and stability.

Despite these strengths, the review also highlights critical methodological and contextual gaps. Most studies employed cross-sectional survey designs, which limit the ability to establish causality between social awareness and performance outcomes (Mbithi et al., 2021; Kato et al., 2023). There is a paucity of longitudinal research tracking the evolution of social awareness competencies in university leadership over time. Moreover, few studies have examined how social awareness is shaped or constrained by institutional culture, governance models, or external regulatory frameworks.

Cultural variability also emerged as a moderating factor that remains under-investigated. While several scholars (e.g., Judith et al., 2024; Dumulescu & Muțiu, 2021) acknowledge Kenya's ethnic and generational diversity, only a handful of studies critically analyze how different university contexts influence the perception and expression of social awareness. For example, behaviors deemed empathetic or inclusive in one institutional setting may be misunderstood or undervalued in another, signaling a need for deeper exploration of emotional intelligence through a culturally grounded lens.

In terms of institutional integration, few studies provided practical frameworks for embedding social awareness into leadership development programs, performance management systems, or institutional values. While most authors affirm its importance, there is limited evidence of sustained organizational strategies to institutionalize emotionally intelligent leadership at scale. The results of the literature synthesis affirm the strategic importance of social awareness in enhancing university performance in Kenya. Key findings suggest that socially aware leaders foster trust, resilience, collaboration, and innovation—capabilities that are increasingly vital in the face of disruption and reform. However, gaps remain in causal modeling, cultural analysis, and institutional application, thereby presenting a strong justification for further empirical research and the formulation of actionable leadership development frameworks.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social awareness—encompassing empathy, organizational awareness, and service orientation—plays a critical and multidimensional role in influencing the organizational performance of universities in Kenya. Synthesized empirical and theoretical insights confirm that socially aware leadership enhances institutional effectiveness through its positive impact on key performance indicators such as employee engagement, student satisfaction, administrative responsiveness, and institutional adaptability. In an environment marked by policy uncertainty, funding limitations, and intensifying demands for accountability, socially attuned leadership emerges not merely as a relational skill set but as a strategic organizational capability. Leaders who demonstrate high levels of social awareness foster inclusive institutional cultures characterized by psychological safety, shared learning, and collaborative problem-solving. These relational dynamics, in turn, promote innovation, reduce staff turnover, and elevate overall organizational resilience.

Moreover, universities led by socially perceptive leaders are better positioned to navigate external shocks—whether public health crises, socio-political volatility, or rapid technological change. Such leaders are attuned to stakeholder concerns, anticipate challenges proactively, and mobilize collective efforts toward shared institutional goals. These attributes directly reinforce the university’s long-term performance trajectory, sustainability, and relevance in the contemporary higher education landscape. Overall, social awareness is not simply a desirable trait—it is a foundational leadership competency for university systems aspiring to be responsive, ethical, inclusive, and high-performing. The findings provide a compelling case for embedding social awareness into both leadership philosophy and operational practice across Kenyan universities.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study carry far-reaching practical and scholarly implications for leadership development, institutional policy, and future academic research within the higher education sector in Kenya. From a practical perspective, there is a compelling need for universities to rethink and recalibrate their leadership development frameworks. Traditional competency models that emphasize administrative proficiency and technical expertise should be expanded to position emotional intelligence—particularly social awareness—as a central leadership competency. This shift requires deliberate investment in structured leadership development initiatives, including leadership coaching, reflective learning practices, and emotional intelligence training programs that intentionally cultivate empathy, service orientation, and contextual sensitivity among current and emerging university leaders.

Institutional policies should also be redesigned to recognize and reward socially responsive leadership behaviors. Embedding social awareness into leadership performance evaluations, promotion criteria, and succession planning frameworks can serve to institutionalize emotionally intelligent leadership within the organizational culture. At the national level, regulatory bodies such as the Commission for University Education (CUE) are urged to integrate emotional intelligence assessments and development into accreditation, governance, and quality assurance mechanisms. Furthermore, leadership pipelines—from departmental chairs to vice-chancellors—should incorporate formal modules on social awareness, empathy, and stakeholder engagement, not as procedural add-ons but as core drivers of institutional excellence, adaptability, and innovation.

In terms of scholarly implications, this study opens several critical avenues for future research. There is a need for longitudinal studies to examine how social awareness competencies evolve over time within university leadership teams, particularly across academic cycles or institutional transitions. Such studies would offer deeper insights into the sustained impact of emotionally intelligent leadership on organizational performance and resilience. Comparative and contextual studies are equally important. Future research should explore the differential effects of social awareness across institutional types—such as public versus private universities, rural versus urban institutions, and research-intensive versus teaching-focused universities. Such comparative

analyses would provide a more nuanced understanding of how institutional context shapes the expression and outcomes of social awareness.

Additionally, future studies should investigate how social awareness interacts with other leadership constructs, including strategic agility, distributed leadership, digital fluency, and transformational leadership. These integrative approaches could help to develop more holistic leadership models relevant for 21st-century higher education. Methodologically, there is scope to adopt mixed-method and multi-level research designs to capture the complex and layered interactions between leadership behaviors and institutional performance. Combining quantitative techniques such as regression or structural equation modeling (SEM) with qualitative methods including interviews, ethnographies, and institutional case studies will produce richer and more contextually grounded insights. By pursuing these lines of inquiry, scholars and practitioners can make meaningful contributions to both theoretical discourse and the practical design of leadership systems that are more responsive, inclusive, and human-centered—not only within Kenyan universities but across Sub-Saharan Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STAKEHOLDERS

Based on the literature synthesis and emerging evidence on the influence of social awareness on organizational performance in Kenyan universities, several actionable recommendations are proposed for different stakeholder groups. These recommendations are intended to guide leadership development, policy enhancement, institutional reforms, and further scholarly engagement aimed at embedding emotional intelligence—particularly social awareness—into the DNA of university governance and culture.

For university leaders and administrators, there is an urgent need to view social awareness not as a soft, peripheral attribute, but as a strategic capability essential to effective institutional leadership. Vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, deans, registrars, and departmental heads should intentionally cultivate the core social awareness competencies of empathy, organizational awareness, and service orientation. This can be achieved by engaging in executive coaching, emotional intelligence training, reflective leadership workshops, and peer-learning forums focused on relational leadership practices. Leaders should also champion an institutional culture of psychological safety, active listening, and inclusive decision-making. These values have been shown to foster innovation, improve employee morale, reduce staff turnover, and increase student engagement—all of which are integral to organizational performance.

At the institutional governance level, university councils and senates should review and revise their leadership competency frameworks to formally integrate social awareness as a performance criterion. Leadership development pathways should include structured opportunities for emerging leaders to acquire, practice, and reflect on emotional intelligence competencies. Performance appraisal systems should be restructured to recognize socially intelligent behaviors such as stakeholder responsiveness, cultural sensitivity, and service-led leadership. Additionally, human resource departments should incorporate emotional intelligence profiling into recruitment,

promotion, and succession planning processes to ensure alignment with institutional values and leadership needs.

For national regulators and policymakers, such as the Commission for University Education (CUE) and the Ministry of Education, there is a critical opportunity to embed emotional intelligence metrics into university quality assurance, accreditation, and governance standards. The CUE should consider issuing guidelines that promote leadership assessment tools which measure competencies like empathy, stakeholder engagement, and organizational awareness. Furthermore, national leadership training programs for university administrators should incorporate modules on emotional intelligence, drawing on both global best practices and contextual case studies from Kenya and Sub-Saharan Africa. By making emotional intelligence a regulatory consideration, these bodies can play a catalytic role in enhancing leadership effectiveness and institutional resilience across the higher education sector.

To advance higher education policy and institutional transformation, university-wide strategic plans should include explicit commitments to emotional intelligence development. These plans could outline measurable targets such as reducing student grievances, enhancing staff satisfaction, improving responsiveness to crises, and building stronger university-community partnerships—all of which are influenced by socially aware leadership. Financial allocations should also support mental wellness programs, staff development initiatives, and stakeholder feedback systems, which collectively contribute to a more emotionally intelligent and inclusive academic environment.

For the academic and research community, the findings suggest multiple directions for advancing knowledge and application of social awareness in leadership. Researchers are encouraged to explore longitudinal and comparative studies that track the evolution of emotional intelligence over time and across diverse institutional settings. Furthermore, scholars should examine the interaction between social awareness and other leadership constructs such as strategic agility, distributed leadership, and digital fluency to generate integrated leadership models suited to 21st-century universities. Methodological innovation—through the use of mixed-method, ethnographic, and multi-level designs—will be essential in capturing the complexity of leadership behavior and its impact on institutional performance.

Finally, a coordinated effort is needed to build a community of practice among stakeholders, where experiences, tools, and best practices in socially aware leadership can be shared. Collaborative partnerships between universities, professional coaching associations, regulators, and researchers can lead to the co-creation of contextually grounded leadership programs, capacity-building frameworks, and performance benchmarks. In doing so, stakeholders will not only elevate the quality of academic leadership in Kenya but also contribute to the broader transformation of African higher education systems into more responsive, resilient, and human-centered institutions.

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