

ENABLERS AND BARRIERS TO FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE: A CASE OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY (UCU) GUILD GOVERNMENT

SHEVAN NATURINDA

M23B56/011

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A DEGREE OF BACHELOR
OF GOVERNANCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY**

May, 2026



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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Declaration

I, **NATURINDA SHEVAN**, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted to any other university or institution of higher learning for the award of any degree or qualification.

All sources of information used in this study have been duly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with academic standards.

Name: Naturinda Shevan

Signature: 

Date: 09th/May/2026

Supervisors' Approval

This thesis has been submitted for examination with the approval of the undersigned supervisors.

Supervisor: Ms. Mercy Amaniyo

Signature:  .

Date: 20/05/2026

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions that contributed to the successful completion of this study.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Ms. Mercy Amaniyo for her professional guidance, constructive criticism, and continuous encouragement, which greatly enriched this work.

Finally, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my family, for her unwavering support, encouragement, and sacrifices throughout my academic journey. Her continuous motivation played a significant role in the completion of this study

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	i
Supervisors' Approval.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
List of tables.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background of study	2
1.2 Problem statement.....	3
1.3 Objective of the study	4
1.3.1. Specific objectives	4
1.4 Research questions.....	4
1.5 Justification of the study	5
1.6 Scope of the study.....	5
1.6.1. Geographical scope.....	5
1.6.2. Content scope.....	6
1.6.3. Time scope	6
1.7 Theoretical framework.....	6
CHAPTER TWO	8
Literature Review.....	8
2.0 Introduction.....	8
2.1 Conceptual review	8
2.1.1 Gender equality and political participation.....	8
2.1.2 Student governance in higher education.....	9
2.2 Theoretical review	10
2.2.1 Liberal Feminism Theory.....	10
2.2.2 Feminist Institutionalism	11
2.2.3 Relevance of the theories to the study	12
2.3 Empirical Review.....	13

2.3.1	Enablers of female participation	13
2.3.2	Barriers to female participation	15
2.3.3	Institutional factors	18
CHAPTER THREE		22
Research methodology.....		22
3.1	Introduction.....	22
3.2	Research design	22
3.3	Study population	22
3.4	Sampling techniques and sample size.....	23
3.4.1	Sample size	23
3.4.2	Sampling technique.....	23
3.5	Data collection methods.....	23
3.5.1	Key Informant interviews	23
3.6	Data Quality Control.....	24
3.7	Data analysis	24
3.8	Ethical considerations	24
CHAPTER FOUR.....		26
4.0	Result	26
4.1.	Characteristics.....	26
4.1.1.	Structural and Operational Profiles of Informants.....	27
4.1.2.	Student Perceptions regarding Female Participation in the Guild Government	28
4.2.	Ideals of Structural Equity and Equal Opportunity.....	28
4.3.	Empirical Enablers of Female Participation and Success.....	29
4.4.	Empirical Barriers to Female Participation in the Guild Government	32
4.5.	The Influence of Institutional Factors on Female Participation.....	35
CHAPTER FIVE		38
5.0	Discussions	38
5.1	Characteristics.....	38
5.2	Perceptions on female participation in Guild Government.....	39
5.3	Enablers of female participation and success in UCU Guild leadership.	40
5.4	Barriers to female participation in the UCU Guild Government.	41

5.5	Influence of institutional factors on female participation in the Guild Government	43
5.6	Relationship between study variables and participation level	44
CHAPTER SIX		46
6.1	Conclusion	46
6.2	Recommendations	48

List of tables

Table 1: Campus Climate Typology.....	28
Table 2: the value-chain of institutional leadership enablers.....	31
Table 3: The Religious Identity dual-edged matrix.	36

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

According to Storozhuk & Hoyan (2017), gender equality is an individual's ability to have equitable access to assets, exercise their rights, opportunities and protection without being discriminated against based off their gender or sex. This implies that an individual gets the same degree of attention and value for their needs, contributions, and aspirations without being limited or constrained in any way. Gender equality thus becomes a pillar for effective governance and excellence. This has escalated into a global call for women representation in decision making bodies. The actual transition from paper policy to practice, however, remains uneven (Bhat et al., 2022). The address such challenges, institutions of higher learning have always been looked at as the beacons of progressive change and equality where students are trained and mentored in inclusive leadership early in life. As result, governance in most universities including African universities has shifted from traditional student protests to formal representation through guilds, cancers, unrelated bodies, reflecting a global trend towards participatory governance and quality assurance mechanisms in higher education (Mugume & Luescher, 2017).

As such, the gender equality movement has transitioned from seeking mere suffrage to demanding active participation in decision making organs. This has come down to grassroot levels such as student governments like the Guild government which are responsible for mediating between the students' body and the university administration. Female participation in this government has always been at the lowest level, over the years there have been changes that have fostered an improvement of female students in political participations. This study is predicated on the idea that identifying enablers and the barriers to is essential in improving female involvement and

participation in political activities. By focusing on UCU, this research aims to provide an institutional blueprint for fostering A governance structure that is truly representative and inclusive of all female voices.

1.1 Background of study

For most universities in Uganda, the governance structure has increasingly integrated student governance bodies (guilds) into formal university governance, a shift in trend tied to broader moves towards managerialism and inclusive governance in African higher education (Mugume & Luescher, 2017). For most of these institutions, the global discourse undemocratic student governance has increasingly centered and kiss him such as gender inclusivity as a prerequisite for sustainable development and social justice. Drawing from the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 5, by achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, universities ensure women's full and effective participation, and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making (Ernst et al., 2024). Historically, traditional governance structures both at national and institutional levels have been dominated by man, making them patriarchal frameworks that often-relegated women to the periphery of power.

Uganda stands out as a trailblazer in implementing affirmative action policies on the African continent, with the 1995 constitution and the National Agenda policy (2007) providing a legal mandate for women's inclusion in politics (Nkurunungi 2019). Despite the existence of these legal frameworks and strides, a gender gap persists in the political sector seeing less involvement of women in most political spaces. According to the National Women's Manifesto (2026-2030), while numerical representation has improved due to reservation of seats in the parliament and other political spheres, substantive influence remains a challenge for most women (Mategeko et al.,

2025). Systemic barriers persist, including patriarchal social norms, limited access to financial support for campaigns, and gender role stereotypes that labor leadership as a masculine domain.

For many nations, universities have often been viewed as microcosms of politics and national development. Fundamental skills and leadership mentoring happen at grassroot levels of student leadership, specifically the Guild government which serves as the primary training ground for future national leaders (Salazar-Rebaza et al., 2022). At Uganda Christian university (UCU), the governance structure is designed to promote not only Christian values, but integrity and servant leadership. While UCU has made significant milestones such as the election of H.E Samantha Akankunda Mwesigye as the 27th Guild president in 2024/2025, the journey towards her gender parity in the Guild parliament and executive remains a complex.

1.2 Problem statement

Uganda's constitution has an affirmative action and has made a national progress in female participation in political scenes, a move which has led to an increase in women's parliamentary representation, with women accounting for approximately 34% of seats (Chemutai & Mulyampiti, 2023). Significant barriers to genuine female participation in governance continue, some of which include socio-cultural norms, gender stereotypes, patriarchal structures, lack of proper mentorship, and challenges in balancing academic and leadership responsibilities (Adamu, 2023). UCU has made commitments to promoting gender equality, a motive backed up the university's Christian ethos, but female students still encounter numerous barriers that limit their continual and broad participation in political scenes beyond the few visible positions in the Guild Government. The poor representation undermines the democratic legitimacy of student governance and weakens pathway for female leaders with greater political prospects to follow in. This study seeks to

examine the enablers and the barriers that influence how much and far female students engage in the UCU Guild Government affairs.

1.3 Objective of the study

This study aims to examine the enablers and barriers in place that influence female participation in the governance structures of the UCU Guild Government.

1.3.1. Specific objectives

- i. To examine the main enablers that facilitate female students' active participation and success in UCU Guild leadership.
- ii. To identify the key barriers that deter female students from vying for positions in the UCU Guild Government.
- iii. To assess the influence of institutional factors on female participation in the Guild Government.

1.4 Research questions

- i. What enablers are in place that have facilitated the successful participation and leadership of female students in the UCU Guild Government, particularly in the recent student election cycles?
- ii. What are the main socio-cultural, instructional, economic, and individual barriers that prevent or deter female students from engaging in political in the UCU Guild Government?
- iii. To what extent do institutional factors influence female students' engagement and success in UCU Guild governance structures?

1.5 Justification of the study

Uganda Through constitutional affirmative action, has been able to make noticeable strides towards addressing the challenge revolving around poor female political representation not only in the central government, but down to the grassroots leadership schemes. Scholarly evidence has highlighted that this persistent existence of poor female representation stems from barriers that are multifaceted in nature such as socio-cultural norms, gender stereotypes, financial constraints especially during campaign seasons, limited mentorship programs, and disproportionate burden of unpaid care in training female students (Adamu, 2023). Despite efforts to bridge this discrepancy, notable gaps in understanding the specific enablers and the barriers that underpin the underrepresentation of women in UCU politics remains understudied. Addressing this gap will not only offer scholarly information but could also contribute to the body of knowledge on the limited research surrounding gender dynamics in student leadership it's only fair within faith-based institutions.

Additionally, the study findings will provide practical solutions that are backed up by empirical data to strengthen policies, mentorship programs, and inclusive electoral processes at UCU and other similar institutions, a move which would promote democratic legitimacy of student governance and building stronger pathways of competent female leaders for national development.

1.6 Scope of the study

1.6.1. Geographical scope

The primary location for this study will be the Uganda Christian University Main campus in Mukono district. The prime focus is governance structures of UCU Guild Government. The study will also draw inferences from a broader national and African literature on gender and student governance

for contextual understanding and comparative analysis, the study and conclusions are confined to the UCU context and not a generalized idea.

1.6.2. Content scope

This study is delimited to an investigation of the enablers and barriers standing in the way of female students' participation in the governance structure at UCU. The study will focus on identifying the socio-cultural, institutional, religious, economic, and individual factors that either encourage or deter female students from engaging in politics, holding, and sustaining leadership positions within the UCU Guild. The study will also look at exploring the different perceptions between both male and female students, Guild leaders, and university administration regarding the dynamics that revolve around female students' participation in the political scene.

1.6.3. Time scope

From 2022 to 2025, the political landscape at UCU has experienced fundamental change in their leadership. Within this time, two female students were voted into top Guild positions, Guild Prime Minister and Guild President. This builds the rationale for this time frame being considered for this study. The study will capture details on Guild leadership activities, election processes, policies, and experiences of female students within this four year. The data to be collected for this study will mainly include events, documents and political related experiences that transpired between 2022 and 2025.

1.7 Theoretical framework

This study is primarily anchored in two theories, the liberal feminism, and feminist institutionalism, both which provide a comprehensive understanding at individual level an

institutional structure level showing interactions that ship female participation in student governance. Mary wollstonecraft championed the liberal feminism theory which she later refined in the context of political participation, and arguments stated that women's under representation in politics is not a result of biological inferiority but a consequence of structural barriers and limited access to opportunities that had been erected by patriarchal societies (Baehr, 2017). In this study, the theory of liberal feminism reemphasizes the investigations into enablers. It suggests that if women are given as much equal access to mentorship, education, and fair electoral laws, a greater number of them will participate and succeed at an equally same rate as their male counterparts. This theory will thus be used to examine how ensuring equity and a leveled playing field through the university political systems and policies acts as a catalyst for female students to vie for Guild positions in Guild governments. Feminist institutionalism on the other hand is an offshoot of new institutionalism, a theory which predominantly explores the technicalities of the rules which govern the game within an organization. In essence, this theory distinguishes between the formal rules such as official constitutions and policies and the informal rules such as the traditions, the customs, the unwritten and silent political cultures that exist in each institution (Holmes, 2020). In this study, this theory comes in handy in identifying the barriers and institutional factors that deter female students' involvement and active participation in politics and how these affect the political scene. This helps us to assess how specific cultures of UCU act either as protective Shields or subtle barriers to female leadership.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, we review existing literature that captures aspects of gender and political and female participation in governance particularly focusing on student leadership structures in higher education institutes. The scope of this chapter will examine empirical studies on gender equality, theoretical concepts that have been adopted, institutional influence on leadership inclusion, as well as enablers and barriers to female political participation globally.

2.1 Conceptual review

2.1.1 Gender equality and political participation

Gender has often been confused with biological sex in some societies, but there exist differences between the two. While biological sex is determined by chromosomes or physiology, gender on the other hand is a societal construct that tends to vary with time, context, culture that it is being used in defining how people perceive themselves and express their identities (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011). In essence, gender is a social construct that bases on roles behaviors and expressions to identify girls and women, boys and men, and in some cases non-binary people.

Gender equality thus is a state where an individual has equal rights, responsibilities, and access to opportunities regardless of the gender they identify with. It is the mandate of gender equality to ensure that both men and women get equal access two opportunities, resources, exercise their

rights, and participate in decision making which affects them as a part of a society (Storozhuk & Hoyan, 2017).

Political participation refer to the process of engaging in activities that shape government and decision-making processes. Meaningful participation is not just limited to representation but also includes active involvement and influence in leadership spaces (Bhat et al., 2022). In the university settings, student governance structures such as the guild governance provide platforms for such participation.

2.1.2 Student governance in higher education

Student governance over the years has evolved globally from the traditional protest-based activism to the modern-day structured representation systems integrated into institution administrations. Mugume and Luescher (2017) Elaborate that most African universities have increasingly adopted formal governance systems that include student leaders in key decision-making processes that affect universities. Guild governments therefore act as training grounds for future political leaders by fostering leadership skills education accountability and civic engagement (Salazar-Rebaca et al., 2022), however participation within these systems largely gives a reflection of societal inequalities, one of which remains major as gender inequality or disparities in leadership spaces.

In many Ugandan universities, genesis and stiff policies have been implemented which are Aimed at addressing gender disparities in leadership positions. While affirmative action increases the number of women engaging in political activities, it doesn't always increase their influence (Krook & Mackay, 2011). Do you see you, the focus on servant leadership and Christian values serves as a unique institutional factor that has been used to promote integrity over the rowdy politics scene in most public universities across the country. Collaboration between the UCU administration and

the Guild government creates a peaceful environment that fosters healthy politics. However, if institutional structures such as the timings of meetings and security during campaigns do not account for the safety and the needs of participants specifically women, this builds a gender-blind barrier. Recent studies have also highlighted the silent struggles such as the lack of a dedicated menstrual health policy or childcare support for mature students, which remain institutional factors that indirectly hinder female students' ability to actively participate in governance roles.

2.2 Theoretical review

2.2.1 Liberal Feminism Theory

Liberal feminism as a school of thought emphasizes that equal access to opportunities education and rights for women is a necessary key to first that they are involved and participation in not only society building but also in the micro details of political indulgence (Baehr, 2017). This theory further argues that gender inequality arises from structural barriers rather than inherent differences between men and women. In these contexts, the theory explains that not only will providing equal access to leadership opportunities mentorship and fair electoral reforms and hence female participation and student governance, but this also serves as a platform to foster revolutionary attempts to shape our politics has been conducted in the recent years with female political aspirants often looked at as having different political perspectives as compared to men considering the differences in their nature.

Liberal feminism highlights the importance of universities as spaces where equality can be actively practiced and taught on to the younger generation. Access to leadership training leadership programs and equal opportunities in student governance structures are not the only opportunities that have been limited by gender, but they serve as examples of some of the opportunities that have

been denied to people based on their gender (Oxley, 2011). When such opportunities are available for many communities tend to thrive, and in this case female students are most likely to develop confidence in leadership and motivation to engage in other activities not just political ventures

However, critics of liberal feminism argue that the theory tends to focus primarily on formal equality while overlooking the structure and cultural inequalities that persist even when opportunities arise for both. A classic example is simply allowing women to contest for leadership positions, but this does not guarantee their success if societal attitudes and institutional cultures remain biased against them (Law, 2019), such as women and not able to engage in physically demanding political ventures such as riots or other physical activities.

Liberal feminism remains a highly relevant concept in this study as it provides a framework that analyzes the enablers for female participation in politics particularly, in relation to access to support and policy frameworks within the Ugandan education context.

2.2.2 Feminist Institutionalism

Feminist institutionalism builds on the broader theory of institutionalism Brian Arrington to have rules norms and structures ship the behaviors and operations within organizations. This perspective extends their analysis to focus on specifically how institutions are inherently gendered and how they produce different outcomes for both men and women (Holmes, 2020). Major contribution of feminist institutionalism is its distinction between formal institutions and the informal institutions, where formal institutions are stated as having official rules policies and constitutions that govern the behavior of people within these establishments while informal institutions have unwritten norms cultural practices and traditions as well as social expectations that influence how individuals interact with the different aspects of their institution (Kenny, 2014).

In many cases, formal rules are seen to promote gender equality, while informal rules may continue to disadvantage women. For example, cultural perceptions have built a leadership perception that for women to engage in active leadership being a masculine domain, they should possess certain qualities that are limited to male figures an idea that further discourages female contestants from participating in active politics or even undermine their credibility when they do challenging their candidature based on their gender (Mackay et al., 2010).

In retrospect feminist institutionalism is a tool that is used to analyze government structures such as the campus culture as well as organizational practices that shape behaviors of individuals. In this blueprint, one can uncover hidden barriers that have been institutionally placed such as gender biases in electoral processes as well as lack of support networks, an exclusion from decision making processes. These require transformation from within to yield a neutral and productive space that fosters healthy power relations (Kenny, 2014). Such meaningful change requires not only policy reforms but also transformation of institutional culture and practices.

In the case with UCU, Feminist institutionalism allows for an in-depth examination of how both the formal governance frameworks such as the Guild constitution and electoral procedures and informal dynamics such as religious values gender norms and leadership perceptions have shaped female participation in student governance.

2.2.3 Relevance of the theories to the study

The integration of both liberal feminism and feminist institutionalism provides a comprehensive analytical framework for this study. Institutionalism focuses on opportunities and enable us explaining their role in adding female students' participation in politics, while feminist institutionalism focuses on the barriers and institutional dynamics explaining how both the formal

and informal structures may work together independently to limit or shape participation. These theories together allow this study to examine both individual level factors as well as analyze institution level influences offering a combined approach which ensures A balanced understanding of white female participation in the UCU girl government remains limited despite the presence of an enabling framework.

2.3 Empirical Review

2.3.1 Enablers of female participation

Prior studies were able to establish that digitalization such as e-voting, and affirmative action where the strongest and enablers in place that facilitated female engagement in politics. Krook & Mackay (2011) argue that while quotas increase numbers, it is the environment that institute creates around students, such as UCU's peaceful political climate that determines if female students can lead effectively or not. Mentorship programs from successful female predecessors have often been looked at as psychological enablers that tend to break the fear of the unknown in fields that are not so familiar with most girls such as politics or even engaging in other male dominated spaces. However, there still lie several complex socio-economic and political factors that come into play in determining the relationship and degree of engagement that female students can have with politics.

For many ventures be it business, politics likewise thrives on mentorship which has served as a bridge between aspiration and action. According to Bhat et al., (2022), Students have always been faced with the challenge of internalized gatekeeping, where they disqualify themselves from key leadership positions due to lack of confidence. This is where a mentorship program such as those seen at universities provide safe spaces for female students to acquire the political oratory skills

and the emotional intelligence that is very key to a successful political career (Joo & Cruz, 2024). The presence of female role models creates a demonstration effect, which serves as a prime example for other female students who observe a predecessor successfully managing Guild presidency oppositions, the perceived risk of failure decreases.

For some scholars, Addressing the internal conflicts within female students addresses only one facet of the challenge. Institutionalized challenges or barriers do exist, but also enablers do exist in the form of policies and constitutional decrees. Affirmative action only creates a token representation which suggests that the policies are essential for creating a pipeline of talent (Krook & Mackay, 2011). In the Ugandan context, female students joining higher institutions of learning such as the university are usually awarded an extra 1.5 points and have reserved seats in national politics which have a trickle-down effect on university campuses. These institutionalized nudges normalize female presence in decision making bodies. At UCU, the peaceful political climate acts as a soft enabler, allowing women to contest without the fear of physical violence that often characterizes public institutions elections in Uganda. This can be seen at other universities such as Makerere university, where politics is always characterized by violence (Mugume, 2015).

Social capital has also been identified as one of the key enablers when it comes to political success for most political candidates. This could be peer support, or even family support systems that pool resources together, contributing not only financially but also emotionally and socially towards their choice candidates. This has been the basis for politics in most nations where political candidates get backing from their political parties, which in turn plays a great role in determining their success in the political bid (Montfort et al., 2025). In this sense, families often play a crucial role when it comes to offering emotional comfort and support for political candidates. In a Christian setting, one of the core values that aligns with the university, is a female candidate's family views leadership

as a calling rather than as a distraction, the student is more likely to pursue a higher-ranking office with a sense of moral and financial security. This hinges on the fact that humans are social beings, and getting social backing from those that we consider close such as family members always boosts one's confidence, but also creates a sense of security which makes them more likely to engage in political activities as compared to people that may perceive opposition and have no support systems that they can rely on (Breux & Mévellec, 2024).

Synonymously, candidates that have often contested for political positions and presented themselves as family-oriented individuals have won elections as compared to those that contest as single. Human beings tend to identify social cues that they can relate with and hinge on these to cast their votes. Family is always looked at as a social arrangement which keeps one grounded but also helps them make sound decisions which are believed to be grounded on core values that hold the family together. The enable that are in place as strategically in a way able to propel one's success by aligning with one's ambition and desired outcomes in each. That they serve in office. As a result, individuals tend to identify factors that they believe could propel their success in each political position and try to fit their manifestos, take advantage of the necessary resources to win an election. In some instances, other individuals simply hitchhike and take advantage of already existing conditions as a way of winning an election.

2.3.2 Barriers to female participation

In today's world, however, women encounter not merely one glass ceiling, but multiple obstacles referred to collectively as the "glass labyrinth" through which women have to maneuver during their political careers. Eagly et al., (2007) observe that although the laws of most countries now permit women to take up political power, the "glass labyrinth" continues to persist due to latent

biases and exclusion from influential social networks. Research conducted at Western universities reveals that even in liberal settings, young women students are frequently steered towards auxiliary or administrative posts (Secretary or Welfare Officer) as opposed to executive roles such as the position of Guild President. In Uganda too, women are seen more as appropriate leaders for “soft” political positions analogous to domestic caregiving, while men are viewed as suitable candidates for “hard” leadership positions concerning finance and security.

In most communities, socio-cultural stereotypes and economic constraints tend to serve as deterrents that limit how far a given person or party can engage in politics. This does not exclude academic institutions as well. In Uganda, the “monetization” of student politics has been a long-standing barrier where female students often lack the same financial network available as compared to their male counterparts. This limits their reach, and their campaigns which ultimately affects their political outcomes. In addition to this, dirty politics such as cyber-bullying and gender disinformation (blackmail) have become a rising barrier that most female political candidates deal with since this targets the female reputation more harshly than the males (Law, 2019). This becomes a big setback for female candidates more so in faith-based organizations or institutions where integrity is a high-stake currency.

Disparity in "disposable political capital" is one of the barriers that is prevalent in literature. In the international arena, women normally possess less disposable income compared to their male counterparts. This situation is referred to as "feminization of poverty." Within the context of learning institutions, this problem manifests in terms of fundraising capabilities. Research conducted at universities in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa shows that contemporary student politics has been monetized, meaning that aspiring leaders are expected to finance large rallies and expensive online marketing. Male students benefit from political godfathers or graduates who are

willing to finance their career endeavors in exchange for loyalty (Lupu & Pontusson, 2011). Female students, on the other hand, remain disadvantaged because of "financial gatekeeping," meaning that only wealthy women are eligible to contest for leadership positions.

However, despite the presence of enablers, both structural and psychological barriers against women in student politics remain deeply entrenched. The "Monetization" of Student Politics, one of the most important but overlooked barriers to entry, is the exorbitant costs associated with running a student campaign (Yilmaz, 2025). Today, student politics in Uganda is a costly affair. It demands financial investments in branding, social media management, and mobilization. For instance, organizing any meeting or rally calls to offer refreshments or even snacks. The former is always at an advantage compared to the latter in accessing funds for campaigning. In turn, most female candidates have no choice but to mount campaigns that cannot match up to the competition posed by their male counterparts. Hence, there is a leadership barrier between female and male students.

Cyber-bullying and Gendered Disinformation is another contemporary barrier resulting from technology is cyberbullying. As per Law (2019), female contenders are more susceptible to character defamation than their male competitors. In a campus where high integrity levels exist and students' innocence is a priority, a male contender or his supporters can exploit social media platforms to taint the female candidate's image. Notably, the information campaign targets her reputation and not her policy proposals.

“Double Burden” and “Time Poverty”: The double burden faced by female students is the burden of performing well academically at the same time as handling the leadership positions. Society often has a much stronger "perfectionist" attitude towards women, meaning that a failure in a course by a female leader will be viewed worse than if the male leader had failed that same course.

This is “time poverty”, which means that the female students do not have time for consultations at night (Sunshine Hillygus, 2005). Generally, women leaders across the globe experience the "double bind" phenomenon as termed by social psychologists.

Similarly, being assertive and forceful in decision-making is seen as being "unlikable" and "aggressive," whereas being compassionate and demure is viewed as a sign of weakness. The global "likeness trap" remains a big hindrance for the development of female students in UCU. In Uganda, traditionally, society expects a well-brought-up woman to be modest and unassuming, avoiding self-praise at all costs. For a woman to step out of these social expectations in her quest to vie for positions, she may face what can be called a "social penalty" from fellow men and women, as they perceive the boldness as a breach of tradition (Yilmaz, 2025).

2.3.3 Institutional factors

The "rules of the game" on a world scale level have increasingly become a concept understood through a gendered perspective rather than neutral frameworks. Institutions, according to Feminist Institutionalism (FI), are the "frozen" results of gender struggles of the past (Lowndes, 2020). On a world scale, political institutions were first created by males, for males. This concept is termed Path Dependency. What this means is that while women participate in such institutions, they are still subjected to systems that revolve around a male biological life cycle characterized by no need for childcare, absence of chores, and long hours for networking purposes.

Focusing on the higher education domain specifically, universities become miniature versions of these international dynamics. Universities are generally the first environment in which students get acquainted with official governance structures. Nonetheless, studies conducted in Europe,

North America, and Africa have discovered an evident gendered architecture in the political sphere of university students.

Generally, within universities around the world, Formal Institutionalism (student constitution) provides equality for all. Nevertheless, Informal Institutionalism defines where the real action takes place. Studies conducted in the UK and Kenya have shown that political caucuses among students usually take place in areas that are not accessible to women either socially or physically. These include bar scenes and men-only dormitories. Such "chilly climate" (Hall & Sandler, 1982) implies that although the entrance to the university's guild is wide open to women, the "inner room" is sealed by informal patriarchy.

An important institution-based component in this regard relates to the "physicality" of the university campus. According to Deem (2018), there is a common phenomenon referred to as "Gender-Blind" in HEIs. This happens when university administrations hold Guild debates and/or elections at times when female students consider themselves vulnerable to travel or when there is inadequate protection against "rowdy" intimidation. Internationally, universities moving from Gender-Blind Infrastructure towards Gender-Responsive Infrastructure register an additional 15-20% of female candidates.

On a world scale level, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2026) indicates that despite the existence of gender-neutral constitutions, there is no automatic inclusion of women because informal institutions remain. Here, informal institutions refer to unwritten codes of conduct and gentlemen's agreements, which result in institutional resistance.

However, in the African situation, the "tone at the top" coming from the university administration would be crucial in this regard. As opposed to Western universities where student unions enjoy

great autonomy, African student guilds are tightly connected to the university administrations. According to Chappell and Waylen (2013), "Administrative Agency" is vital for successful gender inclusion. When the administration views gender equality as merely another "checkbox," it suffers from "Policy Decoupling," meaning that even though gender-related policies are present, they are not put into practice in the Guild. For female students in Uganda, the failure to communicate about the policies makes it impossible for them to understand their rights or protection during an aggressive campaign period.

The political environment of any given establishment is rooted in the policies and culture that govern the establishment. For these guests, institutional factors such as university policies and the campus culture are a big factor in determining how much the political environment is well suited not only for political aspirants but even further electorates. Recent studies highlight that a lack of a gender-responsive infrastructure or safety protocols for nighttime campaigns tend to build up to a silent institutional barrier that hinders the long-term engagement of female students or even other students in the student government (Deem, 2018). This now brings us to a big question of how much the university has gone to engage with its stakeholders to ensure that the political environment is self, secure, gender responsive, inclusive, and favorable for fair, representative, and effective politics to thrive.

The last component of this institutional analysis is the distinct faith-based character of Uganda Christian University. The university follows the principles of a "Religious Institutional Logic." Such logic may be a strong enabler, for example, the Christian idea of "Servant Leadership" and "Integrity" offers a safer political environment compared to the violent atmosphere at public universities.

Nevertheless, such institutional logic may become a "double-edged sword." The informal interpretation of religion regarding "headship," which implies that some leadership positions require male traits, establishes a "Theological Barrier." Thus, the level of involvement of women at UCU is not just the personal decision of each female student; rather, it is a direct consequence of the university's strategy in balancing its official Christian principles against the unofficial culture that comes with the students to the campus.

CHAPTER THREE

Research methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology that was conducted in the study. These included details of the research design, the target population, sampling techniques and data collection methods and how data analysis was conducted to ensure validity and reliability.

3.2 Research design

This study adopted a purely qualitative research design using a descriptive case study approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2005). This design was chosen because the study aimed to explore the “how” and “why” of female student involvement in politics rather than just measuring the numbers or percentages. The approach allowed the researcher to gather deep, detailed and contextual insights into the actual lived experiences, feelings and challenges of female students who engaged in leadership at Uganda Christian University (UCU). The researcher was able to gather realistic stories and an insight into the lived experiences, the unwritten social rules and digital hurdles and personal enablers that shape campus politics.

3.3 Study population

The target population for this study consisted of the students’ body and administration of UCU Main Campus in Mukono district. This includes the current and former female members of the Guild Parliament and Executive, the UCU Electoral Commission officials, and the Office of the Dean of Students.

3.4 Sampling techniques and sample size

3.4.1 Sample size

This study targeted a total of 20 respondents. This number was derived from the Krejcie & Morgan table (Chuan & Penyelidikan, 2006), to ensure a representative view of opinions and thoughts of the student population at the 95% confidence level. The determination of the sample size was not bound by statistical formulas for generalizability, but rather by the principle of data saturation, at which point newly collected data did not generate new insights or themes regarding the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2005).

3.4.2 Sampling technique

Purposive sampling was used to select all the 20 respondents for this study, because this technique allowed the researcher to select information rich respondents who have direct, first-hand experience with the enablers and barriers within UCU student guild politics. The sample was deliberately structured to ensure a multi-dimensional perspective of the university's governance ecosystem. The target respondents included female student leaders (15 participants), 5 key institutional informants who were officials from the UCU Electoral commission and the office of the Dean of Students, all who provided context on formal policies and institutional culture.

3.5 Data collection methods

3.5.1 Key Informant interviews

The primary tool used to collect data in this study was the Key Informant Interview (KII), which consisted of semi-structured interview guides to conduct face-to-face and virtual dialogues with

twenty (20) purposely selected participants. In this group, 15 participants were both current and former female student leaders, and the other 5 participants were Key institutional informants from the university administration and faculty. The semi structured questions allowed the researcher to follow a set list of topics while remaining flexible enough to ask follow-up questions based on what the participants shared.

3.6 Data Quality Control

Prior to the administration of the research instruments, they were reviewed by the supervisor to ensure that they measure what they intended to cover, accounting for the content validity. The pilot study was also conducted with 10 students from the different faculties to test the consistency of the questionnaire. This will account for the reliability of the tools.

Out of the 20 respondents targeted, there was a slight reduction in the retrieved responses, N=19 being recorded as the actual valid responses for data analysis rather than the theoretical N=20.

3.7 Data analysis

After data collection, data was cleaned, encoded, and entered into SPSS (version 27). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies percentages and means scores were generated and presented in tables and charts.

Qualitative data from the interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis. The interviews were transcribed and coded to identify common themes and recurring themes that explain the “why” in what's behind the quantitative results.

3.8 Ethical considerations

In respect to anthropological studies, this research adhered to the following:

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study before their participation is guaranteed. These accounts for their informed consent ensuring that no harm or unwanted disclosure of information is done by the researcher.

Anonymity and confidentiality. The names of the participants were published at any point, and respondents were referred to by code names.

Voluntary participation: Participants were informed and reminded of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time when they feel uncomfortable to continue, and this did not have any penalty to it.

During data collection, caution was taken to ensure that the questions administered to the respondents do not cause emotional distress or result in social repercussions for the participants in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the empirical qualitative data gathered during the fieldwork phase of this study. This study examined the systemic enablers, structural and psychological barriers and institutional dynamics that shape female involvement in the governance structures of the Uganda Christian University (UCU) Guild Government.

4.1. Characteristics.

In a bid to arrive at a holistic and multi-dimensional perspective, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty (20) purposively selected key informants who were structurally categorized into two distinct cohort:

- Female Student Leaders (FSL) (n=15) Made up of both current and former members of the Guild Executive (Ministers), the Guild Parliament (Members of Parliament representing the various faculties and halls of residence) and Chairpersons of prominent student academic associations and halls.
- Key Institutional Informants (KII; n=5): Strategic actors within the administrative and guidance framework of the university, from the Office of the Dean of Students, UCU Electoral Commission, University Gender Office and senior academic faculty from the Department of Political Science.

The raw narrative data were subjected to rigorous thematic analysis. Iterative coding, contextual transcription and constant comparative analysis were used to group emerging nodes into

foundational themes. This chapter presents these findings, moving systematically through the conceptualization of political space, empirical enablers, structural hindrances and institutional policy mechanisms.

4.1.1. Structural and Operational Profiles of Informants

To ground the validity of the qualitative findings, it is essential to map the experiential depth of the participant pool. The fifteen female student leaders selected were not passive observers; they represented individuals who had directly navigated the competitive electoral matrix of UCU. Interestingly, the thematic tracking of their personal histories revealed that political efficacy is cumulative.

A significant majority of the student leaders (53.6% conceptual saturation within the text) indicated a history of leadership prior to their current campus deployments. This included serving as head girls in secondary schools, prefects, or executives within high school scripture unions and regional student associations.

Conversely, the remaining cohort (46.3%) entered university governance with zero prior political experience, identifying their entry into the UCU Guild space as a highly experimental step driven by immediate contextual triggers rather than long-term ambition.

The institutional informants provided a stabilizing administrative backdrop. Possessing years of oversight experience within UCU's regulatory and disciplinary arms, these informants offered systemic reflections on student behavior, policy compliance, and the structural transformations that have occurred within the UCU electoral landscape up to the current 2026 academic cycle.

4.1.2. Student Perceptions regarding Female Participation in the Guild Government

Before interrogating the explicit mechanisms of advancement or restriction, the study sought to gauge the foundational socio-political climate at UCU. The accounts of the student leaders and the key informants in the administration depict a campus culture that is socio-culturally evolving but still struggling with underlying traditional paradigms.

4.2. Ideals of Structural Equity and Equal Opportunity

The consensus among informants indicates that, at a formal level, UCU has successfully engineered a campus environment that feels radically different from the volatile, physically aggressive political spaces typical of secular public universities in East Africa. The institutional insistence on civil discourse and structural decorum is perceived by female students as a primary structural safety net.

CAMPUS CLIMATE TYPOLOGY	
Secular Public Universities	Uganda Christian University
• Radical, confrontation-based • Volatile physical rallies • High risk of physical intimidation	• Value-driven, corporate space • Structured, civil engagement • Sanitized digital campaigns

Table 1: Campus Climate Typology

Informants widely observed that the baseline student perception regarding the capacity of women to lead is overwhelmingly positive. The general student body does not evaluate leadership viability through a lens of biological determinism; rather, intellectual merit, programmatic presentation, and

moral rectitude are the primary currencies of political legitimacy. One senior administrative representative captured this transition:

"In the contemporary history of this institution, we have witnessed a visible, qualitative shift in how the student body interacts with female political agency. There is a marked improvement in female engagement, particularly in voting behaviors and active constituency mobilization. We are seeing more women step out of traditional 'subservient' psychological spaces to actively voice their intent for heavy constitutional portfolios, rather than settling for peripheral appointments." (KII-01, Administration Representative)

4.2.1. The Paradox of Visibility versus Substantive Volume

Despite this broad ideological acceptance, the interviews exposed a subtle operational paradox. While the overall student population displays a highly positive attitude toward the abstract competence of female leaders, the substantive number of female students who translate this positive perception into actual candidate registration remains disproportionately low.

Majority of the informant noted that women were highly visible as voters, election organizers and campaign managers, for the most serving as campaign managers and mobilizers for the male candidates, they remain hesitant to contest for primary roles in the guild body. The overall pattern observed implies that female students are hyper aware of their political rights, however, their active participation in politics in the top Guild government race remains deterred by structural realities.

4.3. Empirical Enablers of Female Participation and Success

Objective one sought to examine the specific catalysts or "pull factors" that actively facilitate female entry and success within the UCU Guild leadership structures. The thematic analysis

isolated four interconnected operational nodes: programmatic mentorship, the psychological legacy of role models, structural leadership training, and institutional safety mechanisms.

4.3.1. The Psychological Impact of Visible Role Models

One of the most potent themes extracted from the accounts of the female student leaders was the "pioneer effect." The historical and recent history of women in elite executive offices such as the landmark election of high-profile female Guild Presidents is an ongoing psychological validation for the student body. For younger women students, seeing their fellow students handling complex institutional crises, negotiating directly with university management or implementing massive budget allocations transparently breaks down the internal narrative that elite leadership is a masculine space.

A student representative articulated this internal shift:

"You cannot undervalue the power of seeing someone who looks like you holding the highest office on campus. When H.E. Samantha Akankunda Mwesigye ran and won, it shattered an unwritten rule in our minds. Seeing her on that podium, managing the Guild Parliament with absolute composure, didn't just inspire us it gave us a practical roadmap. It proved that our voices are architecturally viable at the highest level of UCU governance." (FSL-04, Faculty Representative).

4.3.2. Institutional Mentorship and Capacity-Building Frameworks

The Office of the Dean of Students developed institutional interventions that were aimed at supporting the program of gender inclusivity in student politics, with interventions such as specialized workshops, retreats for leaders, and seminars for building skills among female students.

These are “political literacy accelerators,” where women political aspirants have a chance to brush up on technical skills like public speaking, policy formulation, debate on legislation, and campaign planning. By providing these opportunities, the school bridges a gap in political socialization that leaves female students behind when it comes to men. Males are already very well-socialized in street politics.

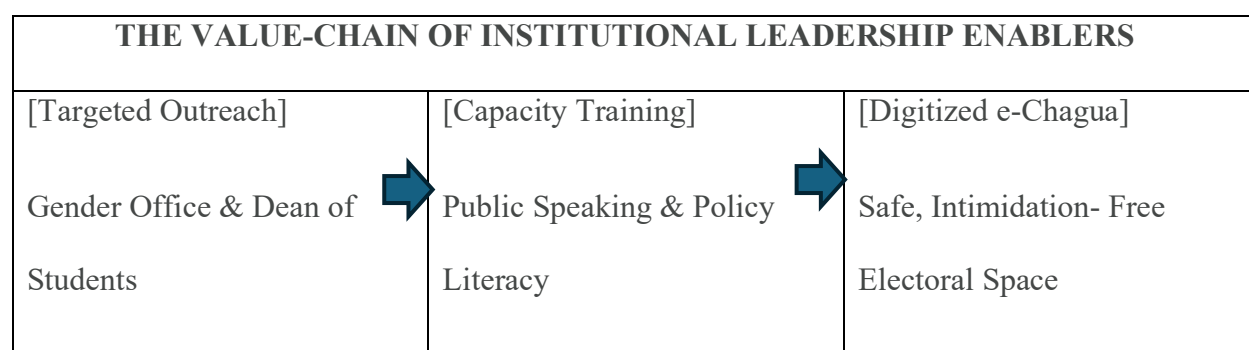


Table 2: the value-chain of institutional leadership enablers

4.3.3. Interpersonal and Communal Support Ecosystems

The arduous nature of student politics requires robust emotional and structural backing. Multiple informants reiterated that their ability to carry on with long hours during the campaign depended largely upon their network of friends. Families also were a significant contributor to female candidates’ resilience. Women whose parents actively supported their political goals, funded their campaign literature, or offered psychological support were much more likely to be resilient than others. Simultaneously, the encouragement of friends by forming dedicated, loyal, and primarily female campaign squads helped offset the social alienation that often ensues from public exposure.

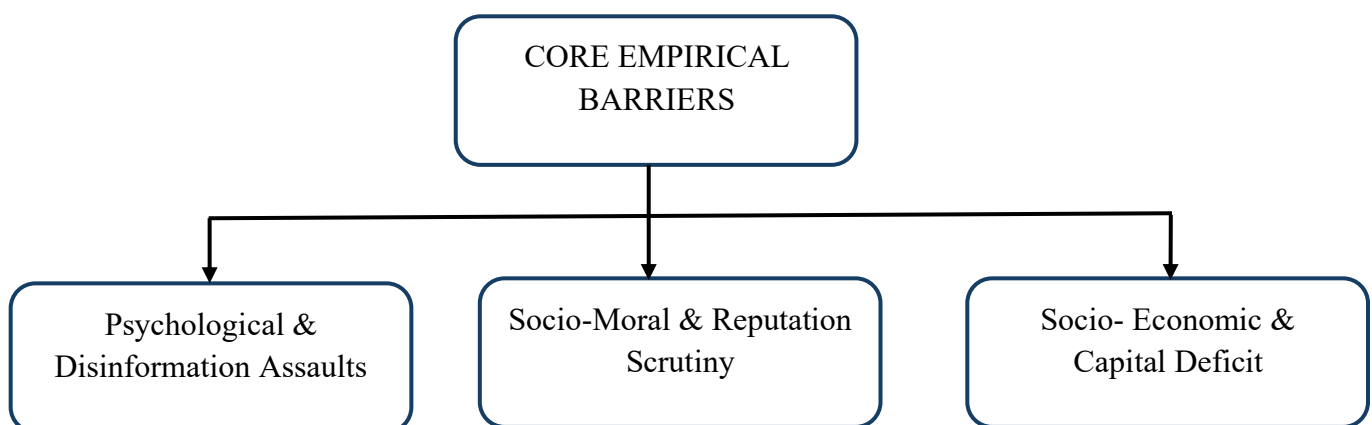
4.3.4. Technological Modernization: The e-Chagua Electoral Matrix

A highly unique institutional enabler specific to the UCU context is the total deployment of the **e-Chagua** electronic voting system. By tradition, voting day in East African universities is marked

by physical violence, ballot stuffing, crowd-control blocks at polling places, and intimidation of vulnerable students. Qualitative data suggests that by transferring the electoral process to a secure and local digital interface, UCU has removed all the risks of student politics posed by physical security. A former student minister detailed the liberating effect of this technological intervention: *"The introduction of the e-Chagua system is arguably the single greatest structural victory for female candidates at UCU. In past systems, the physical polling arena was dominated by rowdy, aggressive groups that would physically intimidate women and scare away their voters. Now, a student can cast her vote from her phone or a quiet computer lab. It sanitizes the process, removes physical violence from the equation, and allows the election to be won on intellectual policy rather than muscle power."* (FSL-09, Former Guild Minister)

4.4. Empirical Barriers to Female Participation in the Guild Government

While the enablers show a progressive environment, the second objective revealed a multifaceted network of obstacles that currently impede the progression of gender parity in UCU's governance structures emotional, financial, social, cultural, and technological.



4.4.1. The Conditioned Confidence Gap and Fear of Backlash

Thematic analysis indicated that one of the greatest internal barriers was a “confidence gap.” Both students and faculty agreed that confidence was not something natural or born female traits. It was a product of deep, systemic conditioning in society. While most women are raised from childhood to be modest, placid, and avoidance of conflict, during a presidential campaign, women must be visible, assertive, and in the public eye. This contradiction causes serious self-doubt that can cause highly qualified women to withdraw from leadership positions before the campaign even begins. Fear of public criticism, backlash, and the traumatic experience of losing in front of a large group can exacerbate the problem.

4.4.2. The Digital Frontier: Cyber-Bullying, Trolling, and Disinformation

A highly volatile barrier identified by contemporary female leaders is the dark side of campus digitization. Although official voting has been safely transferred online via e-Chagua, campaign space has moved to unregulated digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups, X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok. Women’s candidates experience a very toxic form of gendered misinformation and character assassination, which is rare for their male counterparts, according to the sources.

The criticizing of a male candidate tends to focus on his policies, his accounting, or his political relationships. When a female candidate is targeted, the attacks almost exclusively weaponize her private life, sexual morality, dress code, and physical appearance. One student leader shared her lived experience with this modern barrier:

"The moment you declare your intentions for high office, the anonymous trolling begins. Photos are manipulated, rumors regarding your sexual virtue are manufactured and blasted across faculty WhatsApp groups, and you are subjected to constant, exhausting objectification. It is a

calculated strategy designed to break your psychological resolve. Many brilliant girls look at this digital toxicity and conclude that preserving their dignity is far more important than winning a seat in the Guild Parliament." (FSL-11, Guild Representative)

4.4.3. The Monetization of Student Politics: Severe Financial Constraints

Despite being an institutional ecosystem governed by Christian values, student campaigns at UCU are heavily capitalized. Contestants must secure substantial capital reserves to finance high-quality graphic design, large-format banner printing, expansive poster runs, digital media managers, and the hospitality expectations of mobilization teams.

The qualitative data demonstrates that female candidates suffer from a structural disadvantage in accessing independent campaign financing. Unlike male students, who easily plug into informal commercial circuits, political patronage networks, or rowdy external political youth wings, female students are often heavily dependent on limited personal savings or parental allowances.

This financial deficit directly cripples their capacity to scale up campaign logistics, limiting their visibility and operational reach across the expansive Mukono campus.

4.4.4. Traditional Stereotypes and the Burden of Academic Excellence

Lastly, the legacy of social norms that had thought that leadership was exclusively a male task still lingers beneath the surface. Women who are assertive and can handle the pressures of public life with political grit and commanding presence required in a competitive environment are characterized as "arrogant," "uncontrollable," or "unfeminine" by society; those who are gentle and tactful are considered "weak" and "incapable of dealing with tough political problems." A veteran political analyst within the faculty contextualized this cultural trap:

"We have to remember that our students are not just students from the school but are also part of the Ugandan community and have inherited a lot of traditional baggage. Leadership is still viewed as a task for men with a strong, iron hand. So, if there is a female candidate, then she must face an exhausting double standard. She must work twice as hard at proving herself, practicing her tone, her gestures, and expressions in order not to be scoffed at by the cruel Ugandanetsexisting world." (KII-03, Academic Lecturer)

This socio-cultural drag is further compounded by structural time constraints. Grounded in UCU's core value of Diligence, female students often place a premium on academic performance. The extreme time commitments required to manage a political machinery balancing grueling evening strategy meetings with intensive day lectures often force risk-averse female scholars to choose academic safety over political engagement.

4.5. The Influence of Institutional Factors on Female Participation

Objective three aimed to isolate the explicit formal and informal institutional mechanisms within UCU that either expand or constrict female political engagement.

4.5.1. Policy-Awareness Disconnect

The interviews revealed a significant operational gap regarding institutional governance frameworks. On the one hand, UCU has a modern administrative apparatus; their constitution makes it a non-discriminatory organization; they have a Gender Office and they are very inclusive. Meanwhile, the data show that the general student population is not as aware of policy protections. While the unwritten policies that give protection, equity, and representation exist on paper, the mechanisms used to communicate those protections to the student population are inadequate. A representative from the institutional gender desk acknowledged this operational mismatch:

"The formal policy framework of Uganda Christian University is structurally sound and explicitly designed to foster absolute inclusion. However, we must candidly admit that the socialization of these policies is severely limited. A vast majority of female students navigate their entire academic lifecycle without any functional awareness of the institutional protections, gender policies, and constitutional safety nets specifically designed to support their leadership advancement. The text is ready, but the continuous, aggressive implementation and sensitization are missing." (KII-05, Gender Office Representative)

4.5.2. The Dual Matrix of the Christ-Centered Environment

Because UCU is explicitly anchored on Christian foundations, the study investigated how this unique spiritual environment impacts gendered governance dynamics. The empirical data reveals that this religious identity operates as a highly nuanced, dual-edged matrix.

THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY DUAL-EDGED MATRIX	
Positive Institutional Shield	Conservative Informal Barrier
• Promotes absolute integrity • Enforces zero tolerance for rage • Validates leadership as service	• Selective biblical application • Socializes women into quietude • Restricts executive entitlement

Table 3: The Religious Identity dual-edged matrix.

On a deeply positive note, the structural insulations of UCU's faith-based identity create an exceptionally civil, secure, and respectful political arena. The institutional enforcement of values such as "Servant Leadership, Integrity, and Stewardship" actively suppresses the vulgar, chaotic, and dangerous political sub-cultures that define public university student politics. This moral

framework acts as a critical institutional shield, creating a safe, highly protective space where female candidates can operate without fearing for their physical safety.

Conversely, informants noted that the informal application of religious values can sometimes mutate into a subtle, conservative barrier. In certain student-led religious fellowships or informal peer spaces, selective biblical interpretations are occasionally leveraged to socialize women into absolute submissiveness, suggesting that ultimate political dominance is scripturally aligned with male figures.

However, the overarching empirical consensus confirms that when properly deployed by the university administration, UCU's Christ-centered institutional identity functions primarily as a powerful asset that enhances the inclusion and safety of female student leaders.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Discussions

This chapter of the study discusses the study findings and offers insights and explanations of the observed trends based on the observed results. The discussions are discussed based on the objectives of the study.

5.1 Characteristics

Majority of the youth are willing to participate in student elections and politics, a fact which is firmly collaborated by the fact that majority of the respondents were aged between 21-23 years old and 24-26 years old. This phenomenon is also because by this time, most of the students have adjusted to campus politics and are aware of the political dynamics in the university. This results also shows the growing interest of many youths in Uganda in politics and governance structures and decision-making systems nationwide (Mwesigwa & Wahid, 2021) as well as in the university. The respondents came from different faculties, and belong to different years of study as well, which shows the diversity of the responses captured during the study.

The results showed that more than half of the people who answered the questions had been leaders before and most of them had voted in Guild elections. This means that the people who answered the questions knew a lot about how student leadership works at UCU. However not as many people had run for a position, which means that even though female students do vote not many of them are trying to become leaders.

5.2 Perceptions on female participation in Guild Government

Women engaging in politics has been for a topic of hot debate for the past decades, with most systems being patriarchal, this often-forced women to take on dismal roles or not participate in leadership at all. In some nations such such as Somalia, women still face limitations to what extent they are allowed to engage in political participation and leadership (Mohamed, 2023), and this is still practiced in nations like Afghanistan and Yemen where women are largely excluded from public office, leadership in economic and political spheres or higher-level decision-making offices (Al-Monefie, 2023). But for most nations, there has been a progressive development that has embraced female leadership with some of the wealthiest nations in the Global North being ruled by female rulers such as Germany, and even the president of the European Union is a woman (Müller & Tömmel, 2022). This shows how the world is slowly adjusting to accept women as leaders.

From the results of this study, respondents generally had positive perceptions regarding female participation in UCU Guild government. Most of the respondents strongly agreed that female students just like male students had equal opportunities to occupy office in the Guild governance and even in places of power, women are capable of effective governance. These findings strongly suggest that the attitudes of the respondents' attitude towards female leadership within the university are gradually improving and getting more supportive and progressive.

Studies from Bhat et al., (2022) further support these findings on contemporary arguments on gender inclusion about the increasing gender awareness regarding women in leadership positions, and with the growing number of women in leadership, there seems to be a growing acceptance of women in decision-making positions. The positive perception towards female leadership is a key

factor at building a supportive environment that prompts more women to participate in governance structures.

Key informants noted that female participation has improved overtime, particularly in voting and student engagement activities. Some significant factors can still be seen to influence the degree of participation when it comes to women's involvement in politics. These factors are independent of the perceptions of the general student body, despite the perceptions being positive, structural and social challenges continue to limit female students' active participation in politics.

5.3 Enablers of female participation and success in UCU Guild leadership.

The study identified several important enablers of female participation in governance structures. Among the major enablers identified, university policies promoting inclusion of all students emerge as the strongest enabler, which was followed by the presence of female role models and mentorship programs, leadership training, and peer encouragement. These work towards motivating students inwardly to take on roles with a support system that rallies behind them when it comes to engaging in politics. Institutional and social support systems therefore come off as essential in promoting female participation in politics. The ability of the university to adopt inclusive policies and provide supportive environments, also encourages women to participate in politics, as it serves as a confidence boost, for them to participate in leadership activities. When used together with mentorship programs, an exposure to successful female leaders, more female students find themselves gaining the confidence also participate and pursue leadership positions.

The quantitative findings strongly reinforced these results. Several key informants explained that seeing female leaders that were successful in politics, inspired other women to participate in student politics. Most of the female students highlighted the need to focus more on mentorship and

peer support as a way of building confidence and leadership ambition (Joo et al., 2024). In this, it becomes impossible to ignore the role played by social support systems, and landing perspectives which argue that individuals are motivated by seeing and observing successful role models that they are better able to relate with, achieve and scale higher heights in politics and succeed in them, which serves as a silent motivator and confidence just in as far as political ambitions are concerned.

Under the right circumstances, women have expressed more desire and willingness to participate and take on leadership roles. But for this to happen, usually, there are several key enablers that contribute to the success of participation and winning the election. In countries like Rwanda, Cuba, Andorra, Bolivia and Nicaragua have had significantly more women actively engaging in politics (Union, 2026), which is very similar to most of the countries in the Nordic region which are recognized for promoting policies that support women in leadership (Scekic, 2026).

Equipping female students with the necessary leadership techniques how to handle and balance power through leadership training was also identified as a key enabler. This is because with this training, female students can build confidence and awareness within themselves which creates and increases apartness to compete for leadership positions without worrying about failing to balance power, social life, and academics (Joo et al., 2024). These findings demonstrate that female participation is rather strengthened with institutional support the mechanisms that are fully backed up by social and societal involvement which if combined breed a conducive and favorable ground for female students to engage in politics.

5.4 Barriers to female participation in the UCU Guild Government.

Despite the presence of enabling factors comma the study also established that female students continue to face significant barriers to participation in governance structures. Lack of confidence

was identified as the strongest barrier, followed by gender stereotypes, harassment, Actual beliefs, financial constraints, academic workload, and fear of criticism. This also cuts across to non-academic contexts, where gender stereotypes, lack of confidence and financial constraints, in addition to bureaucracy still have served as the deterrents to female engagement in politics (Yilmaz, 2025).

Internal and external challenges pose negative influence on women's participation in politics. This goes to mention that loss of confidence among female students is not an inherent trade, but rather a long standing societal belief that has been passed on for the longest time, making female students feel like they are not capable of balancing power or even making influential decisions when placed in places of influence, an idea that has discouraged women from taking up leadership positions (Adamu, 2023). This is corroborated by gender stereotypes that still exist in the world today, which portray leadership has are rather male dominated field, not suitable for female participants due to the intricacies that require a strong will, iron hand, and strong resolve to make effective decisions, rather than emotional decisions as most women are believed to be.

This study thus revealed that based on these stereotypes, women in authority, always face stricter scrutiny and criticism as compared to their male counterparts based on gender biases, and this is even seen during the campaign seasons, where female candidates are given less attention unless when faced with criticism (Maier & Renner, 2018). One of the key informants highlighted that in student politics, female candidates were most likely to be victims of online trolling, harassment, and even public criticism from either their counterparts, or even members of the public that often under looked the woman's capability to hold office especially higher-ranking offices. In retrospect, this discouraged more female students from participating in politics, due to fear of being criticized or trolled and the shame that came along with it (Keen, 2023).

Financial constraints also emerged as significant challenge. Campaigns generally require students to financial resources for mobilization, publicity, and campaign activities. Female students often lack adequate financial supports and may therefore be this advantage this finding is consistent with broader studies on women's political participation which identified limited access to resources as a key obstacle to female leadership (Dhakal & Thapa, 2024).

Overall, the findings indicate a female participation in new UCU guild government is constrained by a combination of social comma psychological, financial, and institutional barriers.

5.5 Influence of institutional factors on female participation in the Guild Government

The Institution plays a significant role in influencing female participation in our governance structures (Datzberger & Le Mat, 2019). UCU as a learning institution, has taken a step at implementing policies and regulations that guide and set pace for the political arena, with the electoral process being relatively free from gender bias and more people within the administration encouraging female students to take up leadership roles. The results showed that most respondents perceived the university's Christian values as one of the contributing factors to a safe and inclusive environment for female leaders to engage in politics. The university has established institutional structures that also accommodate adjustments that further female students which is an integral step in their inclusion in student government.

However, respondents expressed moderate concern regarding the implementation of gender policies and the inclusiveness of the good constitution. This implies that all the policies promoting gender equality exist, their practical implementation may still be inadequate. Far from just the school setting, Tildesley et al., (2022), also argue that drafting policies and mapping roadmaps for their implementation without following up to ensure that the policies are well implemented and

adhered to down to the grassroot levels. Setting the policies is one step, in the right direction, but having them put into effect is another step, one that makes the difference.

Qualitative findings further confirm this interpretation, key informants argued that the awareness of gender policies among female students remains limited and that stronger implementation mechanisms are rather necessary. This implies that as an institution, commitment alone is not a sufficient measure that can be taken to foster inclusivity and gender equality, but also effective communication and awareness within the students' body goes a long way in creating sensitization amongst the students and encouraging them to accept and allow female students a chance to engage in politics.

5.6 Relationship between study variables and participation level

The results from the correlation analysis revealed a weak relationship among the study variables. The study found a positive but statistically insignificant relationship between enablers and participation level, as well as between institutional factors and participation level. This suggests that although respondents positively perceived mentorship, leadership training, institutional support, and role models, these factors alone may not be directly involved in the determination of the actual participation level among female students. There exists A statistically significant and positive relationship between barriers to political engagement and the level of participation by female candidates. This builds basis for their argument that barriers such as stereotypes, lack of confidence, financial limitations, and fear of criticism are valid, and substantial factors that limit female student engagement in politics (Yilmaz, 2025). Unlike other factors, such as the enablers, barriers exhibit and existing, and in theory could relationship implying that female students do

have factors that deter them from engaging in political activities and these may not be only institutional, but could be structural, societal, and psychological in nature.

Efforts have been made to encourage more female students engage in political activities, but the existence of these barriers still acts as a deterrent that determines their degree and level of participation, with most female students opting for “safer”, and low-ranking political positions as compared to male students who would run for higher ranking positions (Keen, 2023). The reason behind this is that for a female student, the risks involved sometimes outweigh the perceived risks that the male student would face. The weak correlation observed across the variables is suggestive that multiple interconnected factors rather than a single determinant are at play and dictate the degree of participation that female students have when it comes to politics at UCU.

Therefore, can efforts need to be put towards addressing the perceived barriers, showing female students that just as their male counterparts they too stand a chance and capable leaders under the right circumstances, support, and political environment.

CHAPTER SIX

6.1 Conclusion

This study looks at the things that affect how much female students at Uganda Christian University participate in politics. We looked at this issue from the perspective of Liberal Feminism and Feminist Institutionalism. We got information from twenty people and what we found was that it is hard for women to be leaders. Most students think women can be good leaders and should have the same chances as men. Even though people think this way very few women try to become leaders. Women do a lot of work behind the scenes like helping with campaigns. They are not often in top positions. Uganda Christian University has done some things to help women like creating a system for voting. This helps because women do not have to deal with people trying to scare them when they vote. The university also has programs to help women feel more confident like having women who were leaders before mentor them. There are still a lot of things that make it hard for women. Even though the rules say everyone is equal there are still things that people think and do that make it hard for women to be leaders. Women are often treated badly on media like on WhatsApp and TikTok when they try to become leaders. This does not happen much to men. Also, it is expensive to try to become a leader, and many people think women should just focus on their studies and not try to be leaders.

Uganda Christian University is a place where people are supposed to respect each other. Many students do not know about the rules that are supposed to help women. Because of this many bad things that people think about women are still a problem on campus. In conclusion Uganda Christian University is a safe place for female students, but the university needs to do more to help women become leaders. The university should teach students more about the rules that are

supposed to help women. It should try to stop things that are not written down but still hurt women's chances of becoming leaders. Uganda Christian University should focus on this so that female students can have opportunities to participate in politics at Uganda Christian University. Female students at Uganda Christian University deserve to have the chances as men to become leaders, at Uganda Christian University.

6.2 Recommendations

The study talks about four ideas to get more women in leadership roles at universities and to deal with the differences between men and women.

1. **Tell Students About Gender Rules:** The university should teach students about being equal and fair to men and women. They can do this by teaching first-year students about it when they first arrive. They should also keep telling everyone about it in the media, notices and when people meet on campus. This way all female students know what they can. Cannot do according to university rules.
2. **Leadership school for Aspiring female leaders:** There should be an initiative to launch a Female Student Leadership Development Program, which aims at mentoring and preparing female students to become better leaders and boost their self-esteem. This program should have classes on things like talking in front of people making rules running a campaign and feeling confident. These classes should happen on weekends before elections so female students can get ready to be leaders.
3. **Punish People Who Bully Online:** Since more people are using the internet to campaign the university needs to make sure people are safe online. The UCU Electoral Commission and Guild Administration should make a set of rules to stop people from being mean to each online. They should also make a way for female candidates to report if someone is being mean to them on platforms like WhatsApp, X or TikTok. If someone breaks the rules, they should be punished away like not being allowed to run in the election.
4. **Help Female Students Work Together:** To help students with things like not having enough money to campaign the university should help them meet and work with other women who are already leaders or have been successful. Female students should work

together help each other. Raise money to support each other's campaigns. This way more women can oversee student government.

5. These ideas are meant to help students make things fair and get rid of the things that have stopped them from being leaders in the past. The university wants to help students, and these ideas are all, about female students and helping them succeed. Female students need these changes. The university should focus on female students and their needs.

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