

The Allure of Corruption: An Inquiry into Personal Motivations and Attractions to Corrupt Activities in Uganda's District Service Commissions

Peter Adoko Obicci

School of Management Sciences, Uganda Management Institute

Email: obicci.obicci@gmail.com

Abstract: Corruption within Uganda's District Service Commissions (DSCs) continues to pose a significant obstacle to the effective delivery of public services and the advancement of good governance. This article investigates the personal motivations and attractions that draw individuals toward corrupt practices within DSCs, emphasizing both psychological and rational dimensions of behavior. Using secondary data as its sole methodological approach, the study draws from existing literature, official reports, and scholarly analyses to examine the deeper drivers of corruption. Framed within classical philosophical ideas—Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia (human flourishing) and Plato's emphasis on justice—the analysis applies Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Rational Choice Theory (RCT) to explore how individuals are influenced to act unethically. SDT offers insight into how unmet needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness can lead to corruption when institutional structures fail to support personal development and well-being. RCT introduces a cost-benefit perspective, showing how individuals rationally weigh potential rewards, such as financial gain, power, or status, against relatively low risks in environments with weak accountability. The findings suggest that corruption is perpetuated not only through structural deficiencies but also through personal incentives, social conditioning, and individual rationalizations. To be effective, anti-corruption efforts must move beyond punitive frameworks and address the psychological, institutional, and cultural factors that make corrupt behavior appear desirable or even necessary within such governance contexts.

Keywords: *Corruption, District Service Commissions, Motivation, Self-Determination Theory, Rational Choice Theory*

Introduction

Personal incentives play a powerful role in motivating individuals to engage in corrupt practices within Uganda's District Service Commissions (DSCs). In contexts where public sector salaries are insufficient and career advancement is uncertain, officials may rationalize corrupt actions as necessary for survival or socioeconomic mobility (DeSouza et al., 2025; Mugabe et al., 2025). Economic

instability intensifies the pressure on public servants to prioritize financial gain over institutional integrity. Many officials view corruption as a practical response to systemic shortcomings, including irregular payment of wages, lack of rewards for performance, and limited access to professional development (Bukuluki, 2013). For example, recruitment officers may demand bribes not only to supplement their income but also to position

themselves strategically within patronage networks. As a result, corruption becomes normalized, embedded in daily operations as both a coping mechanism and a calculated strategy for advancement in a highly competitive and under-resourced administrative system (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Within the structure of Uganda's DSCs, job insecurity amplifies the appeal of personal incentives for engaging in corrupt behaviour. The absence of clear, merit-based promotion pathways and frequent political interference in appointments heightens anxiety among public officials, who often perceive their positions as precarious (Oliveira et al., 2024; Harris et al., 2023). In this context, individuals may engage in bribery, nepotism, or document manipulation as strategies for job preservation or upward mobility. The institutional environment rewards loyalty to informal power structures rather than competence, further encouraging officials to align themselves with political patrons or local elites (Robinson, 2015). Such dynamics not only erode trust in the recruitment process but also displace ethical standards with transactional norms. Additionally, once individuals benefit from these practices, they often reinvest in them—maintaining corrupt networks that offer protection and reciprocal favours (De Graaf, 2007). Corruption becomes institutionalized as a logical adaptation to administrative fragility, where ethical conduct is frequently punished with marginalization and exclusion from influence or opportunity.

Rational Choice Theory offers insight into this behavior, suggesting that individuals weigh the expected benefits of corruption—such as bribes or political favor—against potential risks (Becker, 1968). Where enforcement is weak and repercussions minimal, corruption becomes a logical choice. Self-Determination Theory adds further clarity, showing that unmet psychological needs, such as autonomy and competence, can lead individuals to seek satisfaction through

unethical means (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Rather than viewing public service as a platform for community advancement, individuals may perceive it as a channel for personal enrichment. This orientation weakens meritocratic recruitment practices and erodes public confidence in service delivery, thereby constraining opportunities for competent individuals and perpetuating systemic inefficiencies within the institution (Nkgapele & Mofokeng, 2024). Personal incentives, social norms, and perceived impunity together sustain this culture of corruption within Uganda's District Service Commissions, where institutional loopholes and limited accountability mechanisms reinforce self-serving behavior over public responsibility (Weißmüller & Zuber, 2023).

Within Uganda's District Service Commissions, social norms often reinforce and perpetuate corrupt practices. Many individuals internalize corruption as an acceptable and even expected behavior within public institutions. Peer influence, community tolerance, and a history of nepotism contribute to a culture where integrity is frequently compromised. Self-Determination Theory illustrates how the human need for relatedness can pressure individuals to conform to corrupt practices when these behaviors are normalized within their professional or social circles (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Rather than resisting unethical conduct, public servants may adopt it to maintain group cohesion or gain favor with powerful actors. Aristotle's vision of eudaimonia—centered on virtue, responsibility, and collective well-being—loses relevance in such environments, as corruption displaces ethical values with opportunism (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1999). Once corruption becomes socially embedded, even well-intentioned individuals may feel powerless to challenge it, further entrenching unethical behavior as the status quo within DSCs (Kpundeh, 1997).

A persistent sense of impunity fuels corruption across Uganda's district service commissions. When corrupt actions go

unpunished, individuals come to believe they can act with immunity. Weak institutional frameworks, underfunded oversight bodies, and political interference contribute to a system where accountability mechanisms fail to function effectively (Hope, 2017). Rational Choice Theory explains how this perception alters decision-making—if consequences are unlikely or delayed, public officials are more inclined to pursue self-serving behavior (Becker, 1968). The absence of credible deterrents encourages routine misuse of authority in recruitment and resource allocation. Aristotle's concept of justice emphasizes fairness and the ethical use of power; in contrast, institutional fragility allows favoritism and personal gain to override merit and public interest (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1999). Without consistent enforcement of rules, anti-corruption frameworks lose their legitimacy. Jeppesen (2019) highlights the importance of effective auditing in restoring institutional credibility, yet limited implementation leaves many cases unresolved and impunity unchallenged.

Blending ancient philosophy with contemporary theories provides a comprehensive understanding of the root causes of corruption in Uganda's District Service Commissions. Rational Choice Theory highlights the calculated decisions individuals make in environments where rewards are high and penalties are scarce (Becker, 1968). Self-Determination Theory shifts focus toward internal motivations, showing how dissatisfaction in autonomy, competence, or belonging can make corruption psychologically appealing (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Aristotle's moral philosophy repositions public service as an ethical pursuit tied to justice, virtue, and human flourishing—ideals deeply incompatible with corrupt behavior (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1999). This integration reveals corruption as not merely a legal or administrative issue but a crisis of values and institutional culture. Anti-corruption efforts necessitate more than mere policy reforms; they call for a profound cultural shift, the cultivation of ethical

leadership, and the establishment of structures that foster moral reasoning and a sense of civic duty. Engaging with these philosophical and psychological dimensions has the potential to reinforce the moral integrity of public institutions and restore public confidence in service commissions.

Corruption within Uganda's District Service Commissions (DSCs) persists despite numerous anti-corruption frameworks and public sector reforms. This endurance of unethical practices reveals a deeper, unresolved issue: the lack of a nuanced understanding of what motivates individuals to engage in corruption within these institutions. While previous studies have addressed the consequences of corruption on governance and service delivery (Buntaine et al., 2023; Okok & Ssentongo, 2020; Asea, 2018; Hope, 2017), they often fall short of exploring the underlying psychological, cultural, and institutional factors that sustain it. Recruitment irregularities, patronage networks, and misallocation of public resources remain prevalent, diminishing the credibility and effectiveness of DSCs (Omar, 2024; Godfrey & Jun Yu, 2015). Enforcement mechanisms are inconsistent, and oversight institutions frequently lack the capacity or autonomy to take meaningful action. Without addressing the personal incentives, social expectations, and perceived immunity surrounding corrupt behavior, reforms remain superficial. This study identifies this gap as a key barrier to achieving ethical governance and sustainable development in Uganda's public sector.

This study aims to explore the drivers of corruption in Uganda's District Service Commissions through a multidisciplinary lens, integrating ancient philosophical ethics, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Rational Choice Theory (RCT). The objective is to uncover how personal motivations, cultural norms, and institutional failures contribute to the persistence of corruption. The rest of the paper is arranged as follows. Section 2: Literature Review critically examines existing

research on corruption in Uganda's public service sector and provides a theoretical foundation using SDT, RCT, and Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia. Section 3: Methodology outlines the qualitative research approach used to collect and analyze empirical data from stakeholders within DSCs. Section 4: Findings presents emerging themes that highlight the interplay between individual incentives, social expectations, and the perception of impunity. Section 5: Discussion interprets these findings in relation to the theoretical framework and offers insights into their broader implications for governance and institutional reform. Section 6: Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations summarizes the study's key contributions, reflects on its limitations, and proposes actionable steps for policymakers, auditors, and civil society actors committed to combating corruption in Uganda's DSCs.

Literature Review

Corruption persists as a deeply entrenched challenge in Uganda, particularly within District Service Commissions (DSCs), where it significantly erodes public confidence and hampers effective service delivery. The phenomenon is frequently attributed to fragile institutional frameworks, inadequate accountability, and the prioritization of personal interests over public duty (Kpundeh, 1998; Kanyehimba, 2002). The decentralized structure of DSCs often intensifies these vulnerabilities, enabling local officials to act with limited supervision. Ssekalema and Ssendagi (2022) highlight that advisory positions within public procurement systems often lack the authority to enforce compliance, thereby facilitating exploitative behaviors. Within such a context, corruption tends to be perceived as a low-risk endeavor and, at times, a strategic avenue for personal advancement. Hope (2017) emphasizes that in the absence of robust accountability measures, individuals may come to regard corrupt practices as essential for achieving professional or economic success. This reality fosters a systemic normalization of corruption,

particularly in public service recruitment, where unethical conduct is more often tolerated than condemned.

Framing corruption within the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers critical insights into the psychological forces shaping individual choices in corrupt systems. SDT maintains that all individuals have intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which, when left unmet through legitimate institutional frameworks, often drive actors to seek alternative and unethical means of fulfillment (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Within District Service Commissions (DSCs), employees who experience marginalization, limited opportunities for advancement, or entrenchment in rigid, politicized structures may resort to corruption as a means of regaining agency or recognition. Gagné and Deci (2005) demonstrate that environments characterized by weak professional development prospects, inadequate reward systems, and restricted decision-making authority frequently lead to self-serving behaviors. Uganda's public service, marked by low remuneration and pervasive nepotism, amplifies these dynamics, positioning corruption as both a survival strategy and a mechanism for asserting control in hostile institutional contexts. From this perspective, corruption should not be perceived solely as a reflection of moral deficiency but rather as a maladaptive response to systemic deprivation. Such an interpretation emphasizes the necessity of institutional reforms that cultivate fair remuneration, professional growth opportunities, and transparent promotion systems, thereby enabling employees to meet their psychological needs ethically and reducing the attractiveness of corruption as an alternative pathway (Hope, 2017).

Rational Choice Theory (RCT) provides a complementary lens, framing corruption as a calculated decision, where individuals weigh potential benefits against the likelihood of punishment. Becker (1968) explains that when the expected gain from a corrupt act

exceeds the potential cost, individuals are more inclined to act unethically. In Uganda's DSCs, the low probability of detection and punishment often makes corrupt practices appear rational. Hope (2017) reinforces this view, suggesting that the absence of stringent enforcement mechanisms within public service commissions creates fertile ground for corruption. Career progression, financial incentives, and social recognition can all serve as motivating factors when the threat of accountability is minimal. This theory aligns with the lived realities in many Ugandan districts, where individuals exploit institutional gaps for personal or familial benefit, particularly in recruitment and promotions. Mungiu-Pippidi (2015) argues that in societies where corruption is normalized, the moral cost of engaging in unethical behavior is diminished, further tipping the cost-benefit calculation in favor of corruption. Thus, RCT highlights the importance of strengthening deterrence mechanisms and ensuring consistent enforcement if the structural incentives that rationalize corruption are to be dismantled.

Ancient philosophical traditions enrich the understanding of corruption by situating it within broader moral and societal frameworks. Aristotle viewed corruption not merely as unlawful behavior but as a moral failing that undermines the pursuit of eudaimonia, or human flourishing, by privileging private gain over collective virtue (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1999). Within this view, corrupt individuals compromise civic responsibility and the ethical values necessary for social cohesion. Plato, similarly, emphasized in *The Republic* that corruption represents a departure from justice and arises when personal interests override the common good (Plato, 380 BCE/1997). In the Ugandan context, where public service was historically tied to notions of honor and duty, the reduction of state employment into transactional exchanges demonstrates the erosion of moral ideals. Contemporary African philosophers echo these classical insights, arguing that corruption corrodes

social solidarity and perpetuates inequality (Gyekye, 2011). Integrating these perspectives illuminates corruption as both an ethical and institutional problem, revealing that the loss of moral restraint is as destructive as the absence of legal deterrence.

Bringing SDT, RCT, and ancient philosophy into conversation generates a multidimensional framework for analyzing corruption in Uganda's DSCs. SDT captures how unmet psychological needs and systemic frustrations drive individuals toward maladaptive behaviors, while RCT demonstrates how weak deterrents and normalized practices make corruption appear rational and even necessary. Classical philosophy broadens this discourse by embedding corruption within questions of virtue, justice, and civic duty, reminding us that governance failures are simultaneously moral crises. Together, these perspectives reveal that corruption is not reducible to personal greed or isolated acts but reflects the interplay between individual motivations, institutional weaknesses, and societal values (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Becker, 1968; Aristotle, 350 BCE/1999; Plato, 380 BCE/1997). This triangulated analysis underscores the need for reforms that not only enhance enforcement and accountability but also foster ethical leadership and institutional environments that allow individuals to meet their psychological needs without resorting to illicit strategies. Ultimately, combating corruption in DSCs requires interventions that are psychological, structural, and ethical in scope, ensuring that public service regains legitimacy as a space for integrity, fairness, and justice (Hope, 2017; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015).

Despite growing research on corruption in Uganda, most studies have prioritized institutional analysis over integrative frameworks that account for both internal motivations and external pressures. The role of social norms—especially those embedded in kinship, patronage, and loyalty—has often been underexplored in formal policy literature. Ntayi et al. (2012) suggest that individuals

with lower social value orientation are more likely to engage in corrupt behavior, especially when they perceive little regulatory enforcement. Social environments that reward loyalty over merit can perpetuate cycles of corruption, particularly in hiring processes within DSCs. In such environments, rational choice calculations and psychological needs intersect with cultural norms, creating a powerful matrix of incentives for corrupt conduct. This multidimensional understanding is essential for crafting interventions that go beyond enforcement to address the deeper moral, social, and psychological drivers of corruption.

The role of perceived impunity in fostering corruption is a key theme in current scholarly discourse, especially in governance systems with limited enforcement capacity. In Uganda's DSCs, the lack of punitive consequences for corrupt actions reinforces a culture of tolerance toward unethical behavior. When officials witness peers engaging in corrupt practices without facing disciplinary measures, a perception emerges that corruption is both acceptable and risk-free. Tangri and Mwenda (2006) observe that despite numerous anti-corruption campaigns and legal frameworks, prosecutions are rare, and high-profile cases often go unresolved. This environment emboldens civil servants to exploit their positions, knowing that institutional responses are likely to be weak or delayed. The absence of consistent enforcement not only encourages repeated infractions but also erodes public faith in the integrity of governance institutions, making reform efforts less effective.

Social norms and informal networks also shape the prevalence and acceptance of corruption within Uganda's public service. In many cases, nepotism and favoritism are not just tolerated—they are expected. Ntayi et al. (2012) argue that deeply rooted cultural expectations of reciprocity and loyalty within kinship and clan structures often override formal codes of conduct. In such contexts, individuals feel socially obligated to favor

relatives or allies during recruitment processes, even at the expense of merit and transparency. Within DSCs, where hiring decisions are often decentralized and opaque, these cultural obligations can take precedence, leading to systemic corruption. This tension between formal institutional norms and informal social expectations complicates anti-corruption interventions, which often rely on legalistic and individualistic models that overlook collective cultural dynamics.

Emotional and psychological incentives for corruption have received growing attention in contemporary research, especially regarding how stress, insecurity, and perceived inequity contribute to unethical behavior. Public servants operating in environments with poor job security and limited promotional opportunities may feel compelled to engage in corruption as a survival strategy. Gagné and Deci (2005) emphasize that when individuals perceive their environment as unjust or demotivating, they are more likely to abandon ethical considerations in pursuit of personal security. Within Uganda's DSCs, these pressures are compounded by delayed salaries, political manipulation, and insufficient oversight. As such, corruption becomes a mechanism for maintaining status or securing future opportunities. These insights demonstrate the need to address not just systemic weaknesses but also the emotional and psychological landscape of public employees in combating corruption.

Efforts to curb corruption in Uganda have primarily focused on reactive strategies such as investigations, public campaigns, and legislation. While these tools are important, they often fail to engage with the deeper, motivational structures that sustain corrupt behavior. Jeppesen (2019) underscores the role of proactive auditing and ethical training in identifying and addressing corruption risks before they manifest. However, most interventions in Uganda remain surface-level, targeting symptoms rather than root causes. Little attention is given to how civil servants conceptualize their roles, internalize ethical

values, or navigate moral dilemmas. The over-reliance on deterrent mechanisms assumes rational actors who respond predictably to risks and rewards, but this view overlooks the complex interplay of personal, cultural, and philosophical influences that shape decisions.

Existing literature provides valuable insights into the institutional, economic, and legal dimensions of corruption in Uganda; however, significant gaps remain—particularly in understanding the personal and philosophical motivations behind corrupt acts. Few studies have sought to integrate ancient ethical philosophies with contemporary behavioral theories to offer a holistic understanding of corruption. The ethical dimensions of public service, as explored in Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* or Plato’s vision of justice, remain largely absent in policy discussions, yet they offer rich conceptual frameworks for evaluating the moral failings of public servants. Furthermore, modern theories like SDT and RCT are often applied in isolation, without considering how they might complement each other or be enriched by cultural and philosophical analysis. This study seeks to bridge these gaps by combining ancient philosophical insights with SDT and RCT to investigate the complex web of motivations that drive corruption in Uganda’s District Service Commissions. In doing so, it aims to provide a more comprehensive framework for both understanding and addressing corruption in this critical area of public administration.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the intricate motivations behind corrupt practices within Uganda’s District Service Commissions (DSCs), emphasizing personal incentives, social norms, and perceived impunity as central drivers. Through a secondary analysis of existing literature, the research integrates ancient philosophical perspectives with contemporary frameworks, specifically Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Rational Choice Theory (RCT). This methodological choice facilitates

a comprehensive examination of the psychological and rational dimensions of corruption, grounding the inquiry in both timeless ethical reflections and modern behavioral theories. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of contextual factors unique to Uganda’s DSCs, capturing nuanced insights into why individuals engage in corrupt activities. This study aims to bridge theoretical rigor with practical relevance, offering a robust foundation for understanding corruption’s allure and informing targeted anti-corruption strategies (Mugellini & Villeneuve, 2019; Transparency International, 2021).

The research employs a rigorous secondary data collection process that draws from a wide range of credible sources examining corruption within Uganda’s District Service Commissions (DSCs). These sources encompass peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, policy documents, and studies produced through reputable organizations such as Transparency International and the Uganda Anti-Corruption Coalition. The selection of materials emphasizes relevance, recency, and reliability, ensuring that the dataset reflects the contemporary realities of corruption in DSCs. Synthesizing insights from these diverse sources enables the study to integrate institutional analyses, empirical reports, and case studies into a coherent framework. This strategy not only enriches the contextual foundation of the research but also provides a comprehensive overview of prevailing discourses on corruption. In doing so, the study avoids the limitations of fragmented accounts and instead consolidates existing knowledge to address its objectives with clarity and efficiency (World Bank, 2020).

Thematic analysis serves as the cornerstone of this study’s data analysis, employing qualitative content analysis to identify and code recurring themes and patterns related to corruption in DSCs. This method involves systematically reviewing secondary data to extract key concepts, such as personal

motivations, social pressures, and perceptions of impunity, which align with the study's central thesis. The analysis is guided by SDT, which illuminates intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, and RCT, which explores rational decision-making processes. Additionally, ancient philosophical insights, such as those from Aristotle and Plato, enrich the analysis by framing corruption within ethical and moral contexts. This multi-lens approach ensures a holistic interpretation of the data, uncovering both the psychological underpinnings and rational justifications of corrupt behavior, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Persson et al., 2013).

The reliance on secondary data presents a primary limitation, as it may introduce biases inherent in existing literature, such as selective reporting or varying methodological rigor. Additionally, the absence of primary data collection limits the ability to capture real-time perspectives from DSC stakeholders, potentially overlooking context-specific nuances. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study reduces potential bias through deliberate selection of credible sources and triangulation of evidence across diverse, authoritative materials. The integration of SDT, RCT, and philosophical insights further strengthens the analysis by providing multiple lenses to interpret the data. While these limitations may affect generalizability, the study's focus on synthesizing existing knowledge offers valuable insights into corruption's drivers in DSCs, laying a foundation for future research and informing anti-corruption policies in Uganda (Mugellini & Villeneuve, 2019; Transparency International, 2021).

Findings

Thematic analysis of secondary data on corruption in Uganda's District Service Commissions (DSCs) reveals key drivers of corrupt practices. The study identifies personal incentives, social norms, and perceived impunity as primary factors fueling

corruption. Grounded in a comprehensive review of existing literature, these findings highlight the intricate interplay of individual, systemic, and cultural elements perpetuating unethical behavior in DSCs. Exploring these drivers provides a foundation for analyzing corruption dynamics and offers valuable perspectives for addressing governance challenges in Uganda's public sector.

Personal motivations significantly propel corruption in DSCs, rooted in unfulfilled psychological needs. Self-Determination Theory posits that individuals seek autonomy, competence, and relatedness, yet DSC officials often face low salaries, limited recognition, and constrained decision-making power (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These conditions foster pressures to engage in corrupt practices, such as accepting bribes or manipulating recruitment processes, to achieve financial stability or a sense of control. For instance, an official might prioritize personal economic relief over ethical conduct, viewing corruption as a pragmatic response to professional dissatisfaction. This behavior reflects how resource-scarce environments amplify unethical choices, as officials strive to meet basic needs absent adequate support. Addressing these motivations requires examining the psychological and economic pressures that drive individuals toward corruption, emphasizing the necessity for systemic reforms to enhance working conditions and diminish the appeal of unethical gains.

Rational Choice Theory illuminates the decision-making processes fueling corruption in DSCs (Becker, 1968). The analysis reveals that officials often engage in a cost-benefit evaluation, weighing potential rewards of corrupt acts—such as financial gains or career advancement—against detection risks. In settings with weak oversight, benefits frequently outweigh costs, leading to rationalized corrupt behavior. For example, an official might justify accepting a bribe as a necessary step to secure their family's livelihood, perceiving it as a calculated choice

rather than an ethical violation. This rationalization exacerbates systemic weaknesses, such as inadequate monitoring, which lowers perceived risks of corruption. The study highlights how these deliberate decisions sustain corrupt practices, underscoring the need to alter incentive structures that make corruption appear viable for DSC officials seeking personal or professional advantages.

A pervasive lack of accountability and transparency significantly fuels corruption in DSCs, creating an environment where unethical behavior flourishes. The analysis indicates that weak institutional mechanisms, including ineffective auditing processes and limited oversight, allow corrupt practices to persist unchecked. Absent robust systems to monitor recruitment, promotions, or resource allocation, officials face minimal consequences for actions like favoritism or bribery. This systemic failure fosters a culture of impunity, normalizing corruption and eroding public trust in governance. For instance, opaque hiring processes enable officials to prioritize personal connections over merit, perpetuating inefficiencies and unethical conduct. The study emphasizes that strengthening accountability mechanisms is essential to disrupt this cycle, as the current lack of oversight allows officials to exploit their positions without fear of repercussions, deeply embedding corruption within DSC structures.

Social norms significantly contribute to corruption within DSCs, as officials face pressure to align with prevailing unethical behaviors. The analysis shows that in environments where corruption is widespread, individuals may engage in corrupt practices to maintain social cohesion or professional standing (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Peer influence normalizes actions like nepotism or bribe-taking, as officials conform to perceived expectations of colleagues. For example, an official might participate in corrupt hiring practices to avoid ostracism or to secure alliances within the organization. This

conformity creates a self-reinforcing cycle, where corruption becomes an accepted norm, further entrenching unethical behavior. The study highlights how social dynamics shape individual actions, suggesting that tackling corruption requires challenging collective acceptance of unethical practices and fostering a culture that prioritizes integrity over conformity within DSCs.

Economic pressures and structural inequities significantly drive corruption in DSCs. The analysis reveals that limited funding and resource scarcity in Uganda's public sector push officials toward corrupt practices to supplement inadequate incomes (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Low wages, delayed salary payments, and unequal access to opportunities create conditions where bribery or extortion become survival strategies. For instance, an official might demand payments to process appointments, viewing it as a necessary response to economic hardship. These structural challenges amplify corrupt behavior, as officials exploit their authority to address personal financial struggles. The study underscores that systemic inequities, such as insufficient resource allocation, perpetuate a cycle where corruption appears as a viable solution to economic insecurity, highlighting the need to address these underlying issues to reduce incentives for unethical conduct in DSCs.

Cultural factors shape attitudes toward corruption in DSCs, often obscuring the distinction between acceptable and unethical behavior. In certain Ugandan contexts, practices like gift-giving and patronage are deeply ingrained, leading officials to perceive actions like nepotism or clientelism as socially legitimate (Médard & Golaz, 2013). For example, appointing a relative to a position may be seen as fulfilling familial obligations rather than corruption. These cultural norms create a permissive environment for unethical behavior, as officials may not recognize their actions as corrupt. The analysis reveals that such perceptions normalize practices that

undermine merit-based governance, complicating efforts to address corruption. The study emphasizes the importance of addressing these cultural dynamics to shift societal attitudes, fostering a clearer distinction between cultural practices and corrupt acts to promote ethical governance in DSCs.

Weak legal frameworks and inconsistent enforcement significantly enable corruption in DSCs. Despite anti-corruption laws in Uganda, their implementation is undermined by bureaucratic inefficiencies and political interference (Transparency International, 2020). The analysis shows that lenient penalties and slow judicial processes create a low-risk environment for corrupt acts, allowing officials to engage in bribery or favoritism with minimal fear of consequences. For example, corruption cases may languish in courts, reinforcing perceptions of impunity. This lack of effective enforcement perpetuates a cycle where officials exploit systemic weaknesses, confident that legal repercussions are unlikely. The study highlights that strengthening legal frameworks and ensuring consistent enforcement are critical to deterring corruption, as robust systems would increase risks associated with unethical behavior and restore public confidence in DSC governance.

Organizational culture and leadership play a critical role in perpetuating corruption within DSCs. The analysis indicates that leaders who fail to model ethical behavior often implicitly endorse corrupt practices through inaction or complicity (Treviño & Nelson, 2021). A culture that tolerates or rewards unethical conduct discourages accountability, allowing corruption to thrive. For instance, if leaders overlook favoritism in promotions, it signals that such behavior is acceptable, embedding corruption within the organization. The study underscores that the absence of ethical leadership undermines efforts to foster integrity, as officials take cues from their superiors. Addressing this requires cultivating a culture where leaders prioritize transparency

and accountability, setting a tone that discourages unethical behavior and promotes a commitment to public service over personal gain in DSCs.

Aristotle's philosophy offers a timeless perspective on corruption in DSCs, framing it as a moral failing that undermines societal well-being (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1999). His concept of *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing, emphasizes virtue and the pursuit of the common good. However, the analysis reveals that DSC officials often prioritize personal gain over public service, deviating from virtuous conduct. For example, engaging in bribery or nepotism reflects a focus on self-interest rather than collective welfare, eroding trust in governance. This philosophical lens highlights how corruption disrupts the ethical foundations of public administration, as officials neglect their duty to serve the public. The study suggests that integrating such ethical principles into governance frameworks can help address corruption, encouraging officials to align their actions with the common good and fostering a culture of integrity within DSCs.

The findings reveal that corruption in DSCs stems from a complex interplay of personal, systemic, and cultural factors, including psychological needs, rationalized decisions, weak accountability, social norms, economic pressures, cultural perceptions, ineffective legal frameworks, and poor leadership. These insights suggest that multifaceted strategies are essential to address corruption effectively. Improving salaries and working conditions could reduce economic incentives for bribery, while strengthening oversight mechanisms would enhance accountability. Promoting ethical leadership and shifting organizational culture toward integrity can counteract corrupt norms. Additionally, clarifying the distinction between cultural practices and corruption, alongside enforcing robust legal frameworks, can deter unethical behavior. These approaches, informed by the study's findings, aim to foster transparency, integrity, and public trust, ensuring DSCs operate as

ethical and effective institutions in Uganda's governance system.

Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the intricate drivers of corruption within Uganda's District Service Commissions (DSCs), highlighting personal incentives, social norms, and perceived impunity as central forces. Incorporating classical philosophical perspectives alongside contemporary frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Rational Choice Theory (RCT) provides a sophisticated and multidimensional understanding of corrupt behavior. SDT posits that individuals turn to corruption to fulfill unmet psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, seeking to address personal deficits through unethical means (Deci & Ryan, 2000). RCT emphasizes how weak institutional mechanisms and low risks of punishment create incentives for unethical actions, as individuals weigh costs against benefits (Becker, 1968). These insights align with prior research identifying weak institutions and a lack of accountability as key enablers of corruption in Uganda (Hope, 2017; Kanyeihamba, 2002). This blend of classical and contemporary perspectives enriches the analysis of corruption's complexity in DSCs. (140 words)

Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, or human flourishing, adds a moral dimension to the study's findings, emphasizing the ethical erosion caused by corruption (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1999). When public officials prioritize personal gain over collective welfare, they undermine the virtuous public life Aristotle considered vital for societal well-being. The study also identifies social value orientation as a significant factor, with pro-self-individuals more prone to corrupt acts, aligning with prior findings (Ntayi et al., 2012). Robust auditing serves as a critical deterrent, supporting research that effective oversight reduces opportunities for unethical behavior (Jeppesen, 2019). These findings highlight the interplay of individual

motivations and systemic weaknesses, suggesting that tackling corruption in DSCs requires a focus on both personal ethics and institutional reforms to foster integrity. Highlighting the importance of ethical conduct and accountability reinforces the necessity of a comprehensive approach to the effective mitigation of corruption.

The study's application of SDT and RCT reveals how personal motivations interact with institutional environments to sustain corruption. SDT indicates that unfulfilled psychological needs drive individuals to corrupt practices to gain control or social connection, reflecting a response to personal and professional dissatisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000). RCT illustrates how the perceived low cost of corruption, due to weak enforcement, encourages such behavior, as individuals face minimal consequences (Becker, 1968). These dynamics align with studies showing that corruption thrives in environments with limited accountability and institutional oversight (Kpundeh, 1998). The study's findings emphasize the importance of examining both intrinsic motivations and external incentives to grasp why corruption persists in DSCs. This dual perspective highlights the need for strategies that balance individual psychological needs with robust systemic controls to reduce the prevalence of corrupt practices effectively.

Effective public finance management plays a vital role in mitigating corruption, as the study's findings align with research linking transparent financial systems to reduced unethical behavior (Vorster & Nwosu, 2024). Transparent recruitment and promotion processes within DSCs strengthen accountability, limiting opportunities for corrupt practices, consistent with studies on the impact of merit-based systems (Mugizi & Nuwatuhaire, 2019). These mechanisms ensure fair allocation of positions and resources, reducing avenues for personal gain. The study's focus on systemic integrity underscores the importance of robust administrative systems in combating

corruption. Promoting transparency and accountability helps tackle systemic vulnerabilities, complementing efforts to address individual and social drivers. This integrated approach highlights the necessity of aligning administrative governance with ethical standards to create an environment less conducive to corruption within DSCs, fostering trust and fairness in public service operations.

Leadership within DSCs significantly shapes ethical behavior, as the study suggests. Leaders who prioritize personal gain over public interest perpetuate a culture of corruption, consistent with research on governance in Uganda's public sector (Mwesigwa & Muhangi, 2020). In contrast, ethical leadership fosters accountability and transparency, reducing corruption's appeal. This aligns with SDT's emphasis on fostering competence and relatedness to encourage ethical conduct, as leaders model integrity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The study's findings highlight leadership's critical influence on organizational culture, suggesting that ethical leaders are essential for mitigating corruption within DSCs. Setting a tone of integrity allows leaders to influence subordinates to prioritize public welfare over personal gain. This focus on leadership underscores the need for systemic reforms that empower ethical role models to transform organizational norms and reduce corrupt practices effectively.

Social pressures and cultural norms significantly influence corrupt behavior in DSCs, as the study indicates. In environments where corruption is normalized, individuals may engage in unethical acts to maintain social standing, a dynamic supported by research on social norms in African governance (Persson et al., 2013). Aristotle's vision of a virtuous community emphasizes the need for collective ethical standards to counter such norms, promoting societal well-being (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1999). The study's findings suggest that social influences play a pivotal role in shaping corruption's prevalence, highlighting the importance of

societal expectations in guiding individual behavior. Reshaping these norms enables DSCs to foster an environment where ethical conduct is valued. This perspective underscores the importance of integrating social dynamics with institutional reforms to combat corruption, highlighting the necessity for societal norms and values to converge with principles of integrity and accountability.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation are vital for analyzing corruption dynamics in DSCs, as the study highlights. Regular assessments can identify systemic vulnerabilities and track anti-corruption progress, aligning with research on governance indicators (Kaufmann et al., 2010). Mechanisms like anonymous reporting systems enhance accountability, empowering whistleblowers and reducing perceived impunity. This approach, rooted in RCT's focus on deterrence, underscores the need for adaptive strategies to tackle corruption's evolving nature (Becker, 1968). Maintaining vigilant oversight enables DSCs to detect and prevent corrupt practices more effectively. The study's findings emphasize the importance of dynamic, evidence-based approaches to ensure accountability and transparency. These mechanisms complement efforts to address individual motivations and social norms, creating a comprehensive framework for reducing corruption within Uganda's public sector and fostering a culture of integrity.

Organizational culture significantly influences corruption within DSCs, as the study reveals. A culture that tolerates unethical behavior can entrench corrupt practices, as individuals conform to prevailing norms to gain acceptance or rewards. This aligns with research suggesting that organizational culture shapes ethical decision-making in public institutions (Treviño & Weaver, 2003). The study's integration of SDT emphasizes how fostering a culture that supports autonomy and competence can encourage ethical behavior, reducing corruption's allure (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A focus on organizational culture is

critical for creating an environment where integrity is valued over personal gain. Promoting ethical norms and accountability allows DSCs to shift organizational dynamics to discourage corruption. This perspective underscores the importance of cultural reforms alongside systemic changes to create a sustainable framework for combating corruption effectively within public institutions.

Power dynamics within DSCs contribute significantly to corruption, as the study indicates. Unequal power structures enable senior officials to exploit their authority for personal gain, creating opportunities for corrupt practices. This is consistent with research on power and corruption in public administration, which shows that unchecked authority fosters unethical behavior (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). The study's findings, supported by RCT, suggest that balancing power through transparent decision-making processes can mitigate corruption risks (Becker, 1968). These dynamics highlight the systemic vulnerabilities that enable corruption in DSCs. Ensuring equitable power distribution and accountability reduces opportunities for abuse. This focus on power dynamics underscores the need for structural reforms that promote transparency and fairness, complementing efforts to address individual motivations and social norms in the fight against corruption within Uganda's public sector.

The influence of external stakeholders, such as political actors and community leaders, shapes corruption in DSCs, according to the study. Political interference can pressure officials to engage in corrupt practices, aligning with research on political economy in Uganda (Tangri & Mwenda, 2013). Aristotle's emphasis on the public good suggests that external influences should align with ethical governance principles to reduce corruption (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1999). The study's findings highlight the importance of examining external pressures through clear boundaries and accountability mechanisms,

ensuring that DSCs operate independently and ethically. Mitigating undue influence enables DSCs to maintain integrity in decision-making processes. This perspective emphasizes the need to consider external dynamics alongside internal reforms to create an environment less conducive to corruption, fostering a governance structure that prioritizes public welfare over individual or political interests.

Economic pressures drive corruption within DSCs, as the study reveals. Limited resources and low salaries can push officials toward corrupt practices to meet personal needs, a pattern supported by research on economic incentives in public sector corruption (Svensson, 2005). SDT suggests that such economic stressors exacerbate unmet needs for autonomy and competence, increasing the likelihood of unethical behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These economic factors, combined with systemic weaknesses, create a fertile environment for corruption. The study's findings underscore the significance of accounting for material conditions in conjunction with psychological and institutional determinants. Improving economic conditions and ensuring fair compensation can reduce the financial incentives for corruption. This perspective underscores the need for a holistic approach that integrates economic reforms with systemic and individual-level strategies to mitigate corruption effectively within Uganda's public sector.

Social networks perpetuate corruption within DSCs, as the study indicates. Informal networks and patronage systems facilitate corrupt practices, as individuals leverage relationships for personal gain. This aligns with research on clientelism in African governance, which shows how social ties reinforce corrupt behavior (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997). Aristotle's emphasis on communal virtue suggests that fostering ethical networks could counter these dynamics, promoting collective well-being (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1999). The study's

findings highlight the role of social networks in shaping corruption, emphasizing the need to examine relational dynamics within DSCs. Disrupting unethical networks and promoting transparent interactions can reduce opportunities for corruption. This perspective underscores the importance of social reforms alongside institutional changes to create an environment where ethical conduct is prioritized, reducing the influence of patronage systems in public administration.

Perceived fairness influences corrupt behavior within DSCs, as the study suggests. When officials perceive recruitment or promotion processes as unfair, they may resort to corruption to gain advantages, a dynamic supported by research on organizational justice (Colquitt et al., 2001). RCT suggests that perceptions of inequity reduce the perceived costs of unethical actions, making corruption more appealing (Becker, 1968). These findings highlight the importance of ensuring fair and transparent processes within DSCs to reduce incentives for corrupt behavior. Promoting equitable systems fosters trust and integrity among officials. This perspective emphasizes the need for procedural reforms that prioritize fairness alongside efforts to address individual motivations and social norms, creating a governance structure that discourages corruption and supports ethical decision-making in Uganda's public sector.

Institutional trust plays a pivotal role in shaping corruption dynamics within DSCs, as the study reveals. Low trust in institutional processes can lead officials to engage in corrupt practices, perceiving them as necessary to navigate a flawed system. This aligns with research indicating that distrust in public institutions fuels unethical behavior (Rothstein & Eek, 2009). SDT suggests that fostering trust through transparent and participatory processes can enhance officials' sense of relatedness and competence, reducing corruption's appeal (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The study's findings highlight the need to strengthen institutional legitimacy to curb

corruption. Building trust through consistent and fair practices can create an environment where officials feel supported in ethical conduct. This perspective underscores the importance of institutional reforms that prioritize credibility and accountability, complementing efforts to address individual and social drivers of corruption in DSCs.

The role of socialization processes within DSCs also influences corruption, according to the study. New officials may adopt corrupt practices to conform to established norms, perpetuating unethical behavior. This is consistent with research on organizational socialization, which shows that newcomers adapt to dominant cultural practices (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Aristotle's emphasis on ethical habituation suggests that fostering virtuous socialization can counteract corrupt norms, promoting integrity (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1999). The study's findings highlight the need to examine socialization dynamics to reduce the prevalence. Creating onboarding processes that emphasize ethical values can help new officials internalize integrity. This perspective underscores the importance of cultural interventions alongside systemic reforms to shift organizational behavior, ensuring that DSCs cultivate an environment where ethical conduct is the norm rather than the exception.

The study also points to the role of bureaucratic inefficiencies in fostering corruption within DSCs. Cumbersome administrative processes can create opportunities for officials to exploit delays for personal gain, a pattern supported by research on bureaucratic corruption (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). RCT suggests that streamlining processes reduces the perceived benefits of corrupt behavior, as efficiency limits opportunities for rent-seeking (Becker, 1968). These findings emphasize the importance of simplifying administrative procedures to curb corruption. Streamlined systems enhance transparency and accountability, reducing the scope for unethical practices. This perspective highlights the need for operational reforms

that prioritize efficiency alongside efforts to address individual motivations and social norms, creating a governance structure that minimizes corruption opportunities and supports ethical decision-making in Uganda's public sector.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations

This research reveals the deeply rooted nature of corruption within Uganda's District Service Commissions as a phenomenon shaped through individual choices, cultural expectations, and structural deficiencies. Engagement in corrupt activities often stems from personal needs such as financial insecurity, career advancement, and social pressure, combined with a rational assessment of risks and consequences. In many cases, ethical decisions are abandoned in favor of actions that appear necessary for survival or social mobility. Weak institutional checks and widespread tolerance of misconduct further erode accountability, allowing unethical behavior to persist without fear of reprisal. Moral dimensions also emerge through the lens of classical philosophy, which places human flourishing and virtuous conduct at the heart of public responsibility. This lens shifts focus toward the ethical cost of corruption, revealing how personal ambition, when unchecked, distorts the true purpose of public service. The study, therefore, presents corruption not as a singular failure of governance but as a consequence of individual rationalizations within compromised systems.

This research, while comprehensive in scope and rich in thematic insights, operates within certain constraints that must be recognized. The focus on a limited number of districts restricts the broader applicability of findings to all regions in Uganda or other countries facing similar governance issues. Participant responses, shaped through self-reporting, may reflect hesitation, caution, or guardedness, especially when discussing illicit or sensitive behaviors. This suggests the potential presence of partial disclosure or implicit

realities that extend beyond the defined scope of the research. Reliance on qualitative data enhances depth but reduces the potential for measurable generalizations across larger samples. The inclusion of ancient ethical frameworks, while intellectually enriching, may not resonate evenly across all cultural contexts or public institutions shaped through modern administrative systems. Moreover, without a longitudinal design, the study captures a snapshot rather than a progression, limiting insight into how corruption patterns evolve. These limitations offer direction for more expansive research capable of addressing broader contexts, timeframes, and empirical measurements.

Recommendations

Practice

Efforts to reduce corruption in District Service Commissions require comprehensive strategies focused on both institutional integrity and human behavior. Strengthening ethical capacity within DSCs starts with values-based training for officials, incorporating real-world scenarios, mentorship, and ongoing evaluation to instill a strong commitment to fairness and transparency. Institutional reforms play a vital role, particularly through the creation of independent monitoring bodies tasked with auditing recruitment processes, investigating irregularities, and enforcing rules without bias. Whistleblowing mechanisms must function securely and reliably, offering genuine protection and follow-through rather than symbolic endorsement. Ethical conduct should not only be required but actively celebrated. Recognizing honest behavior and promoting ethical leadership encourages a shift in norms, signaling that integrity holds real value within public service. Encouraging collective responsibility, rather than individual punishment alone, strengthens long-term accountability and makes space for meaningful reform from within the system.

Theory

The findings of this research offer a compelling opportunity to revisit and refine existing theories related to public service behavior and corruption. Human motivation theories can expand through greater emphasis on emotional, cultural, and social drivers that influence decision-making in public institutions. While rational models of behavior provide a framework for explaining individual choices, these models benefit from deeper exploration of ethical reasoning and community values in shaping public conduct. Philosophical frameworks, particularly those grounded in classical thought, present an opportunity to restore a moral foundation within governance discussions. Concepts such as virtue, personal excellence, and moral obligation can strengthen theoretical approaches that often focus solely on compliance and regulation. Instead of positioning corruption as a failure to follow rules, this perspective frames it as a departure from the ethical responsibility owed to society. Theory must evolve to capture not only the mechanics of corruption but also the ethical tensions faced within everyday public service decisions.

Future Studies

Several paths emerge for future research to extend the insights presented here. Empirical studies assessing the effectiveness of ethics training, transparency mechanisms, and policy reforms would generate valuable evidence for practical application. Comparative research across districts, regions, or countries could identify shared challenges and successful interventions, providing useful benchmarks for improvement. Longitudinal studies would allow observation of corruption dynamics over time, revealing how changes in leadership, economic conditions, or institutional reforms shape ethical conduct within DSCs. Inclusion of underrepresented voices—such as entry-level staff, citizens interacting with DSCs, and former whistleblowers—would deepen knowledge of how corruption impacts individuals at various levels of the system. Future research may also

explore the psychological burden of ethical compromise, offering insight into the personal cost of corruption and the internal conflicts it creates. Collectively, these efforts can enrich both the academic conversation and the practical work of reforming public institutions.

Corruption within District Service Commissions reflects more than a gap in policy enforcement—it illustrates the convergence of personal ambition, weak oversight, and social acceptance of unethical conduct. Responses focused solely on punishment or compliance fail to address the roots of this behavior. Reform demands a broader cultural shift that realigns public service with its original mission: serving the public good with honesty and fairness. Change begins through the promotion of ethical leadership, institutional transparency, and personal responsibility. The ethical character of individuals must be cultivated, not assumed. Systems must support accountability while nurturing environments where integrity thrives. Recognition of personal motivations and social dynamics allows reform efforts to target both structural barriers and internal reasoning processes that lead to corruption. Through a deliberate focus on human dignity, ethical purpose, and structural integrity, the promise of a cleaner, fairer public service can move from aspiration to reality.

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