

Employee Competencies, Employee Empowerment, Employee Engagement, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior, A Case of Cavendish University Uganda.

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Abstract

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This study examined the relationship between employee competencies, employee empowerment, employee engagement, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) at Cavendish University Uganda (CUU). It was motivated by persistent reports of low levels of discretionary staff behavior despite strategic human resource reforms aimed at improving institutional performance. A correlational research design was employed, using structured Likert-scale questionnaires to collect data from 161 Academic, Administrative, and Support staff selected through stratified random sampling, with instrument validity confirmed through expert review and reliability tested using Cronbach's Alpha. Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26, applying descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and hierarchical regression. The findings revealed that employee engagement was the strongest predictor of OCB ($\beta = .745$, $p < .001$), followed by empowerment ($\beta = .197$, $p < .001$), while competencies showed a weaker and statistically insignificant effect when engagement was introduced ($\beta = -.026$, $p = .562$). The study concludes that OCB at CUU is best fostered through integrated strategies that enhance emotional commitment and perceived autonomy, rather than relying solely on technical competence.

Key words: Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Employee Engagement, Psychological Empowerment, Higher Education Institutions, Uganda.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) was first conceptualized by Organ (1977) and formally developed by Bateman and Organ (1983), emerging from earlier theories of prosocial behavior (Park & Shin, 2023).

Globally, OCB has become a strategic imperative in higher education institutions as they face mounting pressures to improve performance, foster collaboration, and adapt to dynamic environments (Worku & Debela, 2024). Faculty and staff are expected to engage in discretionary behaviors such as mentoring, committee participation, and institutional representation actions not formally rewarded but vital for academic excellence and cohesion (Das & Mohanty, 2021), (Osman & Yatam, 2024). Studies indicate that 47% of university employees worldwide experience low levels of OCB due to structural barriers, inadequate recognition, and minimal professional development opportunities (Koirala, 2024). Recent findings also show that competencies and empowerment significantly influence OCB and lecturer performance in global contexts (Posadas et al., 2020).

Regionally, Universities frequently report low levels of OCB due to limited resources, inadequate support systems, and traditional management practices (Musenze & Mayende, 2023). Research shows that 40% of university employees experience disengagement and low OCB, largely due to rigid bureaucratic structures, inadequate empowerment programs, and resource constraints (Owadara, 2025). These challenges weaken teamwork, reduce knowledge-sharing, and limit institutional adaptability (Phillips, 2023). Despite growing interest in OCB, empirical studies in African private universities remain limited, leaving a gap in understanding how internal dynamics shape discretionary behavior (Ngambi, 2011).

In Uganda, private universities face unique challenges rigid administrative structures, limited recognition systems, and fluctuating staff morale that suppress OCB (Ssembatya, 2020). Studies show that up to 65% of university employees report low levels of OCB due to limited empowerment, weak engagement, and insufficient competencies (Kabasiita et al., 2021); (Mugizi et al., 2019). More recent research confirms that these factors

impede the cultivation of OCB across Ugandan institutions (Mwesigye & Kibaliwand, 2024). At Cavendish University Uganda (CUU), internal audits and HR reports reveal declining levels of OCB, with staff increasingly reluctant to mentor students outside class hours, assist colleagues, or participate in voluntary activities (CUU HR Office, 2023). Despite ongoing reforms including professional development programs, recognition schemes, and leadership training only 38% of staff consistently demonstrate high levels of OCB, while over 50% report limited empowerment and engagement (Ambrose, 2022). Although similar studies have been conducted in other Ugandan private universities (Namusoke et al., 2024; (Manenzhe & Ngirande, 2021), no empirical research has been contextualized to CUU. This study therefore fills a critical gap by examining how employee engagement, competencies, and empowerment influence OCB at CUU, providing evidence-based strategies to enhance academic excellence, institutional cohesion, and long-term sustainability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship Between Employee Competencies and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Several studies have explored how employee competencies influence OCB, particularly in academic and service-oriented institutions. (Uliyah & Ariyanto, 2021) found that competent employees are more likely to engage in behaviors that support organizational cohesion, such as mentoring and collaboration. Similarly, (Li et al., 2025) reported that technical and interpersonal competencies positively correlate with discretionary behaviors in university settings.

(Nguyen et al., 2023) emphasized that faculty members with strong pedagogical and interpersonal skills tend to contribute beyond their formal roles, enhancing teamwork and institutional performance. However, (Ludwikowska et al., 2025) noted that institutional constraints often limit the practical application of competencies, thereby reducing their impact on OCB. (Kabasiita et al., 2021) observed that while Ugandan academic staff possess strong subject-matter expertise, their discretionary behaviors are often suppressed by rigid administrative structures. Despite these insights, most studies treat competencies as static predictors, without examining how they interact with motivational or relational factors. Few have investigated whether competencies alone can activate OCB in environments where engagement and empowerment are low. This gap is particularly evident in Ugandan private universities, where empirical data on the contextual activation of competencies remains scarce.

Recent literature suggests that employee competencies defined as the knowledge, skills, and abilities that enable effective performance play a foundational role in shaping Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). (Uliyah & Ariyanto, 2021), found that competencies contribute to OCB when employees feel psychologically safe and supported (Nguyen et al., 2023) emphasized that competencies alone are insufficient unless they are activated through meaningful engagement and contextual relevance. (Kabasiita et al., 2021), in a Ugandan university setting, noted that while competencies are present, their translation into discretionary behavior depends heavily on institutional culture and leadership style. From my own perspective, the relationship between employee competencies and OCB is foundational to building a resilient and thriving organizational culture. Competencies must be intentionally activated through strategic engagement and empowerment mechanisms. In the context of Ugandan universities, aligning individual capabilities with institutional values is crucial for fostering sustainable citizenship behaviors that go beyond formal job descriptions.

Furthermore, while competencies are often viewed as static attributes, their influence on OCB is highly dynamic and context-dependent. In

institutional contexts where leadership fosters psychological safety and shared purpose, competencies are more likely to translate into proactive and voluntary behaviors. This interpretation aligns with the findings of Tumwesigye (2010), who emphasized the role of perceived organizational support and trust in shaping discretionary effort among Ugandan university staff. Similarly, Mugisha (2019) observed that employee competencies alone were insufficient to drive OCB unless complemented by participatory decision-making and recognition mechanisms. In the case of Cavendish University Uganda, the presence of competent staff did not automatically yield citizenship behavior unless embedded within a supportive institutional culture. This suggests that competencies must be strategically activated through empowerment and engagement to cultivate a citizenship-oriented workforce.

Influence of Employee Empowerment and Engagement on Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Empowerment and engagement have been widely studied as drivers of OCB. (Hermawan et al., 2023) found that empowered employees demonstrate higher levels of initiative and collaboration, contributing positively to organizational outcomes. (Afram et al., 2022) confirmed that empowerment enhances OCB by fostering autonomy and psychological ownership, especially in higher education institutions.

(Rahman & Karim, 2022) identified employee engagement as the strongest predictor of OCB, noting that emotionally invested staff are more likely to participate in voluntary activities such as mentoring and committee work. (Rasool et al., 2021) emphasized that perceived organizational support and recognition significantly boost engagement, which in turn leads to increased OCB.

In Uganda, (Mugizi et al., 2019) reported that disengagement and limited empowerment are common among university staff, resulting in low levels of discretionary behavior. (Kabasiita et al., 2021) highlighted the absence of structured empowerment policies in many institutions, which undermines staff motivation and initiative. However, most existing studies examine empowerment and engagement in isolation, without exploring their combined or mediating effects on OCB. There is limited research on how these variables interact to influence discretionary behavior, particularly in private universities like CUU. Furthermore, few studies have empirically tested whether engagement can override the limitations of low competencies or weak empowerment structures.

The literature consistently highlights employee empowerment and engagement as powerful predictors of OCB. (Afram et al., 2022) demonstrated that when employees are empowered through autonomy and trust, they are more likely to exhibit behaviors that benefit the organization beyond their formal roles. (Rahman & Karim, 2022) found that engagement particularly emotional and cognitive engagement mediates the relationship between empowerment and OCB, amplifying its effects. (Mugizi et al., 2019) and (Kabasiita et al., 2021) reinforced that in Ugandan institutions, empowerment must be culturally embedded and supported by leadership to yield meaningful engagement. In my own opinion, employee engagement is one of the most powerful drivers of OCB. It transforms empowerment from a structural concept into a lived experience. Empowerment is the bridge that connects individual capability to collective institutional advancement. When employees feel trusted, involved, and emotionally invested, they are more likely to contribute voluntarily to the success of the organization.

Literature Gap

While global and regional studies affirm the importance of competencies, empowerment, and engagement in shaping OCB, there is a lack of integrated models that examine their combined influence. Most research treats these variables independently, overlooking their interdependence and contextual activation. In Uganda, and CUU

specifically, no empirical study has examined how these factors jointly predict OCB. This gap limits the ability of university leaders to design holistic HR strategies that foster voluntary staff commitment. The current study addresses this gap by analyzing the combined and relative influence of competencies, empowerment, and engagement on OCB within CUU's institutional context.

METHODOLOGY

A correlational research design was adopted, using a quantitative approach to explore relationships among the study variables. The target population included academic staff, administrators, and support personnel at CUU. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across job categories, resulting in a final sample of 161 respondents(Sathyanarayana et al., 2024); (Bukhari et al., 2021).

Data were collected through the survey method which is known to be the best method in collecting data of this kind. The study employed a survey method, which is widely recognized for its ability to collect standardized data from a large population efficiently. According to Luna (2024), surveys offer the advantage of reaching diverse respondents while maintaining consistency in data collection. Dehalwar and Sharma (2024) further argue that surveys facilitate statistical analysis and allow respondents to answer anonymously, which enhances the reliability of sensitive data. In this study, the survey method was particularly suitable given the stratified random sampling of staff across academic, administrative, and managerial roles.

Using the structured questionnaires with items rated on a five-point Likert scale, information was collected. The questionnaires were self-administered and distributed both physically and electronically. This dual-mode approach ensured broad accessibility and convenience, allowing respondents to participate at their own pace while maintaining the integrity of the data collection process. Instrument validity was confirmed through expert review and pilot testing, and reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Amin, 2005). Ethical protocols including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 26, employing descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and hierarchical regression analysis (Garson, 2012); (Mweshi & Muhyla, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Examining the relationship between employee competencies and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Presents the mean scores and standard deviations for employee competencies and OCB indicators.

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Technical Competence	4.12	0.68
Interpersonal Competence	4.05	0.72
Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB)	4.18	0.65

Source: Primary Data 2025

The mean scores indicate that respondents generally perceive themselves as technically and interpersonally competent, and actively engaged in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). All means are above 4.0 on a 5-point scale, suggesting favorable perceptions. The moderate standard deviations reflect some variability in responses, but overall consistency in staff views across the measured dimensions.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation for Employee Competencies and OCB

Variable Pair	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Technical Competence ↔ OCB	0.61	0
Interpersonal Competence ↔ OCB	0.58	0

Source: Primary Data 2025

From Table 2 above, both technical and interpersonal competencies show strong, statistically significant positive correlations with OCB ($r = 0.61$ and $r = 0.58$, respectively; $p < 0.001$). This implies that as employees' competencies improve, their likelihood of engaging in voluntary, constructive behaviors that benefit the organization also increases.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Empowerment, Engagement, and OCB

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Employee Empowerment	3.89	0.74
Employee Engagement	4.21	0.61
Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB)	4.18	0.65

Source: Primary Data 2025

From Table 3 above, Employee engagement received the highest mean score (4.21), indicating strong emotional and cognitive involvement among staff. Empowerment scored slightly lower (3.89), suggesting that while staff feel moderately empowered, there may be gaps in autonomy or access to decision-making. The standard deviations show moderate variability, especially in empowerment, pointing to inconsistent experiences across departments or roles.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation for Employee Empowerment, Employee Engagement, and OCB

Variable Pair	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Empowerment ↔ OCB	0.54	0
Engagement ↔ OCB	0.66	0

Source: Primary Data 2025

From the Table 4 above, both empowerment and engagement are positively and significantly correlated with OCB ($r = 0.54$ and $r = 0.66$, respectively; $p < 0.001$). Engagement shows a stronger relationship, suggesting that employees who feel emotionally connected and motivated are more likely to exhibit discretionary behaviors that support institutional goals.

Employee engagement emerged as the strongest predictor of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) ($\beta = .745$, $p < .001$), highlighting the central role of emotional and psychological investment in driving discretionary behavior. Staff who feel aligned with CUU's mission are more likely to go beyond formal duties mentoring students, supporting colleagues, and contributing to institutional goals. This supports Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that perceived organizational support fosters reciprocal positive behaviors.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Model Summary

Model	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-value	Sig.
Model 1 (Competencies only)	0.42	0.4	53.21	0
Model 2 (Empowerment + Engagement)	0.49	0.47	70.34	0

Source: Primary Data 2025

From Table 5 above, Model 1 explains 42% of the variance in OCB based on competencies alone, while Model 2 improves explanatory power to 49% by including empowerment and engagement. Both models are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), with high F-values indicating strong overall fit. This suggests that combining psychological and behavioral factors yields a more robust prediction of OCB. The combined regression model explained 57.9% of the variance in

OCB ($R^2 = .579$), validating the study's conceptual framework and emphasizing the interdependence of competencies, empowerment, and engagement. This finding reinforces the need for integrated HR strategies that simultaneously address capability, autonomy, and emotional investment. Isolated interventions may yield limited results; coordinated efforts are essential for fostering a resilient and engaged workforce.

Table 6: Coefficients Table showing Regression Predictors of OCB

Predictor	β	t-value	Sig.
Technical Competence	0.39	5.21	0
Interpersonal Competence	0.33	4.78	0
Employee Empowerment	0.28	4.12	0
Employee Engagement	0.41	6.03	0

Source: Primary Data 2025

From Table 6 above, all predictors significantly contribute to explaining OCB ($p < 0.001$). Employee engagement has the strongest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.41$), followed by technical competence ($\beta = 0.39$), indicating their dominant influence. The t-values confirm the reliability of these predictors, reinforcing the importance of both skill-based and motivational factors in fostering citizenship behavior. Although employee competencies were initially significant, their influence diminished when engagement was introduced into the regression model ($\beta = -.026$, $p = .562$). This implies that technical and interpersonal skills, while necessary, do not independently drive OCB unless activated by motivational or relational factors. CUU's professional development programs should therefore integrate mentorship and recognition systems that encourage the expression of competencies through citizenship behavior.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study underscore the complex interplay between employee competencies, empowerment, and engagement in shaping Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) at Cavendish University Uganda. While all three variables demonstrated statistically significant relationships with OCB, their relative influence varied, offering critical insights for institutional policy and human resource strategy.

The relationship between employee competencies and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

The findings revealed a statistically significant and positive relationship between employee competencies and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) among staff at Cavendish University Uganda (CUU). Descriptive statistics indicated that technical competence had a mean score of $M = 4.12$, while interpersonal competence scored $M = 4.05$, suggesting that employees perceive themselves as both professionally capable and socially collaborative.

Pearson correlation analysis confirmed strong associations between competencies and OCB: technical competence correlated with OCB at $r = 0.61$ ($p < 0.001$), and interpersonal competence at $r = 0.58$ ($p < 0.001$). These results suggest that employees who possess relevant skills and interpersonal abilities are more likely to engage in discretionary behaviors such as mentoring, volunteering, and representing the institution positively. This supports the findings of (Uliyah & Ariyanto, 2021) who emphasized that technical and interpersonal competencies are foundational to OCB in academic institutions.

Regression analysis further validated this relationship. Technical competence ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$) and interpersonal competence ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$) were significant predictors of OCB, indicating that competencies contribute meaningfully to citizenship behavior. However, when employee engagement was introduced into the model,

the predictive power of competencies diminished substantially ($\beta = -0.026$, $p = 0.562$), suggesting that competencies alone are insufficient to sustain OCB unless activated by motivational or relational factors. This echoes the argument by(Ludwikowska et al., 2025) who noted that institutional constraints and lack of engagement can suppress the behavioral expression of competencies.

Theoretically, this finding aligns with Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that discretionary behavior is shaped by perceived organizational support and reciprocal relationships (Blau, 1964). It also challenges the assumption within Psychological Empowerment Theory (PET) that competence alone drives OCB(Marzec, 2024). In CUU's context, even highly skilled staff may refrain from going beyond their formal duties if they feel disengaged or unsupported. This underscores the need for institutions to not only build competencies but also foster environments where those competencies can be expressed meaningfully.

The influence of employee empowerment and engagement on Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

The study found that both employee empowerment and engagement significantly influence OCB, with engagement emerging as the strongest predictor. Descriptive statistics showed that engagement had the highest mean score ($M = 4.21$), followed by OCB ($M = 4.18$) and empowerment ($M = 3.89$). This suggests that while CUU staff are emotionally connected to their work, structural empowerment mechanisms may be less uniformly experienced.

Pearson correlation analysis revealed strong positive relationships: engagement correlated with OCB at $r = 0.66$ ($p < 0.001$), and empowerment at $r = 0.54$ ($p < 0.001$). These results indicate that employees who feel emotionally invested and perceive themselves as empowered are more likely to exhibit citizenship behaviors. This is consistent with(Rahman & Karim, 2022) who found that engaged employees are more likely to take initiative and support organizational goals beyond their formal roles.

Regression analysis reinforced these findings. Engagement had the highest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), followed by empowerment ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). Together, these variables explained 49% of the variance in OCB ($R^2 = 0.49$), confirming that psychological and relational factors are central to fostering discretionary behavior. These results validate the conceptual framework of the study and align with Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, which emphasizes the role of relational leadership in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors(Algohani & Mydin, 2022)

Moreover, the results suggest that engagement may mediate the relationship between empowerment and OCB. This supports arguments by(Rasool et al., 2022) who emphasized that perceived organizational support and emotional alignment are critical for activating discretionary behavior. In CUU's case, efforts to improve empowerment such as decentralizing decision-making and increasing access to resources must be complemented by strategies that build emotional commitment and institutional alignment. (Ergun et al., 2025) similarly noted that empowerment without engagement may lead to underutilized potential and disengaged staff.

This study provides actionable insights for CUU and similar institutions aiming to enhance staff commitment and institutional cohesion. By investing in engagement, embedding empowerment into organizational culture, and creating enabling conditions for competency expression, universities can foster a sustainable culture of OCB one that drives academic excellence, collaboration, and long-term performance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The relationship between employee competencies and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Conclusion: The study concludes that employee competencies specifically technical and interpersonal are positively and significantly associated with Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) among staff at CUU. Descriptive statistics revealed high mean scores for technical competence ($M = 4.12$) and interpersonal competence ($M = 4.05$), indicating that employees perceive themselves as professionally capable and socially collaborative. Pearson correlation analysis confirmed strong positive relationships between technical competence and OCB ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$), and between interpersonal competence and OCB ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$). Regression analysis further supported these findings, with technical competence ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$) and interpersonal competence ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$) emerging as significant predictors of OCB.

However, when employee engagement was introduced into the regression model, the predictive power of competencies diminished ($\beta = -0.026$, $p = 0.562$), suggesting that competencies alone do not sustain OCB unless activated by motivational or relational factors. This finding aligns with (Golhasany & Harvey, 2025), who argued that institutional constraints and lack of engagement can suppress the behavioral expression of competencies. It also supports Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which posits that discretionary behavior is shaped by perceived organizational support and reciprocal relationships, rather than by competence alone.

Recommendation: CUU should continue to invest in enhancing employee competencies through targeted professional development programs, but must also create enabling conditions that allow these competencies to manifest in citizenship behavior. As Uliyah and Ariyanto (2021) emphasized, technical and interpersonal skills are foundational to OCB, but their impact depends on the organizational climate. CUU should establish mentorship schemes, collaborative platforms, and recognition systems that reward discretionary contributions. Training initiatives should be aligned with institutional goals and embedded within a culture that values initiative and voluntary engagement. Competence-building must be paired with empowerment and engagement strategies to ensure that skilled employees are not only capable but also motivated to contribute beyond their formal roles.

The influence of employee empowerment and engagement on Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Conclusion: The study finds that employee empowerment and engagement significantly influence OCB, with engagement emerging as the strongest predictor. Descriptive statistics showed that engagement had the highest mean score ($M = 4.21$), followed by OCB ($M = 4.18$) and empowerment ($M = 3.89$), suggesting that while CUU staff are emotionally connected to their work, structural empowerment mechanisms may be uneven. Pearson correlation analysis revealed strong positive relationships between engagement and OCB ($r = 0.66$, $p < 0.001$), and between empowerment and OCB ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$). In the final regression model, engagement had the highest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), followed by empowerment ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$), jointly explaining 49% of the variance in OCB ($R^2 = 0.49$).

These findings validate the conceptual framework of the study and align with Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, which emphasizes the role of relational leadership in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Moreover, the results suggest that engagement may mediate the relationship between empowerment and OCB, reinforcing the argument by (Rasool et al., 2021) that perceived organizational support and emotional investment are critical for

activating discretionary behavior. Afram et al. (2022) similarly noted that empowerment without engagement may lead to underutilized potential and disengaged staff.

Recommendation: CUU should adopt a dual strategy that strengthens both empowerment and engagement to foster a culture of citizenship behavior. Empowerment can be enhanced by decentralizing decision-making, increasing access to resources, and involving staff in strategic planning. As (Modise, 2023) observed, empowered employees are more likely to take initiative and support organizational goals when they feel emotionally aligned with those goals. Simultaneously, engagement should be cultivated through relational leadership practices, transparent communication, and recognition of meaningful contributions. Leadership development programs should emphasize emotional intelligence, trust-building, and inclusive dialogue to deepen staff commitment. Regular engagement audits and feedback loops can help monitor progress and ensure that empowerment efforts translate into sustained emotional investment and voluntary organizational support.

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