Available on: https://jmrr.ep-journals.org/ E-ISSN: 3051-3588 P-ISSN: 3051-357X

Journal of Management Research and Review

Volume: 02 Issue: 02 February-2026

Integrity and Youth Employment in Burundi: An Empirical Analysis of Ethical Governance and Labour Market Outcomes

Emmanuel Kwizera
Burundi Shining Star University/ International Leadership University, Bujumbura

Published Date:February 02, 2026 **Article DOI: 10.65150/EP-jmrr/V2E2/2026-01**

ABSTRACT: Youth unemployment remains a critical challenge in Burundi, compounded by weak governance and pervasive corruption. This study examined the relationship between Integrity and youth employment outcomes. Grounded in Social Learning Theory and Cognitive-Developmental Theory, the research adopts a quantitative approach under the positivist paradigm, employing a correlational design with a sample of 60 respondents selected through probability sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82) and analysed via Pearson correlation and regression analysis. Results reveal a positive correlation between integrity and youth employment ($r = 0.633$, $p < 0.01$), with integrity significantly predicting employment outcomes ($\beta = 0.615$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.401$). Findings underscore the critical role of transparency, merit-based practices, and ethical governance in enhancing youth employment opportunities. The study recommends strengthening institutional integrity, promoting ethical leadership, and aligning skills development with labour market demands to address unemployment and foster sustainable socio-economic development.

KEYWORDS: Integrity, Youth Employment, Governance, Corruption, Labour Market, Burundi

INTRODUCTION

Burundi, a landlocked country in East Africa, continues to face complex socio-economic challenges that significantly influence governance, integrity, and employment outcomes. Classified as a low-income country, Burundi's economy is predominantly agrarian, with agriculture contributing a substantial share of the gross domestic product (GDP) and employing the majority of the population (World Bank, 2021). Despite its central role, the agricultural sector remains constrained by limited access to modern farming technologies, land fragmentation, and vulnerability to climate change factors that collectively suppress productivity and restrict employment opportunities (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2019).

Beyond agriculture, Burundi's overall economic performance has remained modest and fragile. Structural constraints such as inadequate infrastructure, limited foreign direct investment, and recurring political instability have contributed to a challenging business environment, thereby limiting private sector development and job creation (African Development Bank Group (AfDB), 2019). These macroeconomic conditions have profound implications for the labour market, particularly for young people, who constitute a large and growing share of the working-age population.

Youth unemployment remains a persistent concern in Burundi. According to the World Bank (2019), the youth unemployment rate was estimated at approximately 21.8%, reflecting the limited availability of formal employment opportunities. A critical driver of this challenge is the mismatch between the skills possessed by young job seekers and those demanded by employers, which stems from weaknesses in the education and training systems (World Bank, 2019). Consequently, many young people are absorbed into the informal sector, engaging in activities such as subsistence agriculture and street vending. While the informal sector provides livelihoods, it is characterized by job insecurity, low incomes, and limited access to social protection and opportunities for career progression (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2018). Gender disparities further exacerbate these challenges, as young women face additional barriers linked to restrictive social norms, discrimination, and unequal access to education and productive resources (World Bank, 2019).

In addition to economic and labour market constraints, corruption poses a major challenge to governance and socio-economic development in Burundi. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) reported a score of 19 out of 100 for Burundi in 2020, indicating a high level of perceived corruption (Transparency International, 2020). Corruption manifests in various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, fraud, and abuse of power, affecting key sectors such as public administration, the judiciary, law enforcement, and business practices (Transparency International, 2020). These practices undermine the rule of law, distort public resource allocation, deter investment, and weaken public trust in public institutions.

The persistence of corruption in Burundi is closely linked to weak governance structures, limited transparency, insufficient enforcement of anti-corruption legislation, and inadequate accountability mechanisms (Freedom House, 2021). In this context, integrity in both public and private institutions becomes a critical determinant of development outcomes, influencing not only economic performance but also employment creation and social cohesion.

Social and cultural factors further shape integrity in Burundi. Traditional values rooted in communal norms emphasize honesty, respect, and moral responsibility. The concept of *Ubuntu* or *Ubumuntu* underscores the interconnectedness of individuals and the importance of ethical conduct for collective well-being (Ngendahimana & Govers, 2020). Strong social cohesion and community pressure can reinforce integrity, as the fear of social sanctions and reputational damage may deter unethical behaviour (Ngendahimana & Govers, 2020). However, entrenched power structures and patronage networks may counteract these values by promoting favouritism and loyalty-based practices, thereby undermining fairness, meritocracy, and transparency (World Bank, 2020).

Education, leadership, and governance play a pivotal role in shaping integrity and employment outcomes. Access to quality education that integrates ethics, civic responsibility, and critical thinking can foster a culture of integrity while enhancing employability (UNDP, 2020). Likewise, ethical leadership and strong governance institutions are essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and trust in public administration and labour market systems (World Bank, 2020).

In response to these challenges, the Burundian government, with support from international organizations, has undertaken initiatives to strengthen governance, combat corruption, and improve employment prospects. These efforts include the establishment of anti-corruption institutions, reforms aimed at improving the business environment, investments in education and skills development, and programs supporting youth entrepreneurship and innovation (UNDP, 2019; AfDB, 2019; World Bank, 2020). Nevertheless, the persistence of structural constraints highlights the need for comprehensive and coordinated strategies that address economic, institutional, and socio-cultural dimensions simultaneously.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Cognitive-Developmental Theory (Kohlberg, 1981), which together explain how integrity in institutions influences youth employment outcomes. Social Learning Theory posits that ethical behaviour is learned through observation and reinforcement within social and organizational environments. In Burundi, institutional practices in recruitment, promotion, and governance serve as models that shape young people's perceptions of fairness, accountability, and acceptable workplace behaviour. Exposure to transparent, merit-based practices fosters ethical conduct, while persistent corruption normalizes unethical strategies for accessing employment.

Cognitive-Developmental Theory emphasizes the internalization of ethical principles through stages of moral reasoning. Youth employment experiences influence moral development, shaping the capacity to uphold integrity and resist corrupt practices. High institutional integrity promotes principled ethical decision-making, whereas exposure to unethical practices may reinforce self-interested or instrumental reasoning. Together, these theories provide a dual lens external institutional influence (Social Learning Theory) and internal moral reasoning (Cognitive-Developmental Theory) to analyse how integrity affects youth employment in Burundi. However, while these theories explain the processes through which integrity is learned and internalized, existing literature largely focuses on organizational settings in developed contexts and on general ethical behaviour rather than on youth employment specifically.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrity is a fundamental pillar of good governance and sustainable labour market development. It encompasses ethical principles such as transparency, accountability, fairness, and honesty in both public and private institutions (OECD, 2017). In the context of employment, integrity influences recruitment practices, access to opportunities, and trust in labour market systems. Weak integrity frameworks often result in corruption, nepotism, and patronage, which distort labour markets and disproportionately disadvantage young people (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Empirical evidence demonstrates a strong negative relationship between corruption and employment outcomes. Corruption raises transaction costs, discourages investment, and constrains private sector growth, thereby limiting job creation (Mauro, 1995; Méon & Sekkat, 2005). For youth, corruption frequently operates as a direct barrier to labour market entry when employment opportunities depend on informal payments or personal connections rather than merit (Transparency International, 2020). As a result, young people are more likely to experience unemployment, underemployment, or engagement in informal and precarious work (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2018).

Youth employment challenges in developing countries are further exacerbated by skills mismatches, weak education labour market linkages, and limited institutional capacity (World Bank, 2019; African Development Bank Group (AfDB), 2019). In Sub-Saharan Africa, these challenges are compounded by governance failures, which undermine the effectiveness of employment policies and labour market interventions (UNDP, 2020). Gender disparities also persist, as young women face structural barriers related to social norms and unequal access to education and economic resources (ILO, 2018; World Bank, 2019). Social and cultural contexts play a dual role in shaping integrity and employment outcomes. Communal values such as *Ubuntu* or *Ubumuntu* emphasize moral responsibility and social accountability, potentially reinforcing ethical behaviour (Ngendahimana & Govers, 2020). However, strong social ties may also facilitate patronage networks that undermine merit-based employment and exclude qualified youth without social or political connections (World Bank, 2020).

However, despite extensive literature on corruption, governance, and youth employment, limited research explicitly examines the intersection between integrity and youth employment, particularly in fragile and low-income contexts such as Burundi. Existing studies often address governance and labour market outcomes separately, overlooking how integrity deficits directly shape youth access to employment and job quality. Moreover, there is a scarcity of context-specific empirical studies assessing how integrity-oriented reforms influence youth employment outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative approach within the positivist paradigm, which assumes that social reality is objective, measurable, and governed by observable relationships. Knowledge is derived from quantifiable data, enabling replicable and generalizable findings. A correlational design was employed to examine the relationship between integrity and youth employment. The study population included 60 youth respondents, selected through probability sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, indicating good reliability.

Pearson correlation and regression analysis were used to test relationships and effects. Ethical standards, including informed consent and confidentiality were strictly observed.

RESULTS

Inferential statistics were based on variable relationship statistics as given by correlation analysis, coefficient of determination, analysis of variance and regression coefficients.

Table 1: Correlation Analysis

		Youth Employment
Integrity	Pearson Correlation	.633**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	60
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).		

Integrity was found to be positively correlated with youth employment ($r = 0.633^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that improvements in institutional integrity are associated with increased employment opportunities for young people in Burundi. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that ethical governance, transparency, and merit-based practices enhance labour market participation and reduce barriers to employment for youth (Rehman & Uddin, 2021). High-integrity institutions promote fair recruitment and equitable access to opportunities, thereby fostering trust in employment systems and enabling youth to transition more effectively from education to work (Sayed, 2018; Verheyden, Decuypere, & Vanderstraeten, 2019).

Table 2. Coefficient of Determination

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.633[a]	.401	.391	.640
a. Predictors: (Constant), Integrity				

The model shows an R^2 of 0.401 (standard error = 0.640), indicating that integrity explains 40.1% of the variance in youth employment, while the remaining 59.9% is attributed to other factors. This underscores the significant role of ethical governance and merit-based practices in enhancing youth employment (Josić & Đula, 2020), although education, skills, and socio-economic conditions also contribute (ILO, 2018; World Bank, 2019).

Table 3. Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.902	1	15.902	38.810	.000[b]
	Residual	23.765	58	.410		
	Total	39.667	59			
a. Dependent Variable: Youth Employment						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Integrity						

Table above presents the ANOVA results for the regression model. The model yielded an F-value of 38.810 (df = 1, 58, $p < 0.001$) at a 95% confidence level, indicating that the overall regression is statistically significant. This confirms that integrity is a significant predictor of youth employment, meaning that changes in institutional integrity meaningfully explain variations in youth employment outcomes in Burundi. The 95% confidence level implies that there is a high degree of certainty that the observed effect of integrity on youth employment is not due to chance.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1.017	.252		4.038	.000	.513	1.522
	Integrity	.615	.099	.633	6.230	.000	.417	.812
a. Dependent Variable: Youth Employment								

The regression results indicate that integrity is a significant positive predictor of youth employment in Burundi. Holding other factors constant, youth employment is 1.017, and a one-unit increase in integrity leads to a 0.615 increase in youth employment. The effect is statistically significant ($t = 6.230$, $p < 0.05$) at the 95% confidence level (CI: 0.417–0.812), highlighting that higher institutional integrity promotes improved youth employment outcomes (Josić & Đula, 2020; Rehman & Uddin, 2021). The regression model can be summarized as follows: $Y=1.017+0.615X$.

Where Y is the dependent variable (Youth employment), X= Integrity. In summary, the level of youth employment in Burundi is contingent upon the degree of integrity practiced within institutions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study demonstrates that integrity plays a significant role in shaping youth employment outcomes in Burundi. Higher levels of institutional integrity characterized by transparency, ethical practices, and merit-based systems are strongly associated with improved youth employment, explaining a substantial portion of the variance in employment outcomes. These findings highlight the importance of fostering ethical governance and reducing corrupt practices to enhance labour market opportunities for young people. From the findings, it is recommended that;

(i) Government agencies, employers, and educational institutions should adopt transparent, merit-based recruitment and promotion practices to ensure fair access to employment for youth.
(ii) Leaders at all levels should model ethical behaviour to reinforce integrity norms within organizations and communities.
(iii) Skills development programs, vocational training, and entrepreneurship initiatives should be aligned with labour market needs to complement integrity-driven employment reforms.
(iv) There is a need for Policies and regulatory frameworks to be strengthened to reduce opportunities for nepotism, favouritism, and other unethical practices that hinder youth employment.

DECLARATION FOR PUBLICATION

I hereby declare that this work is original, has not been published elsewhere, and is not under consideration by any other publication. I take full responsibility for its content and consent to its publication.

REFERENCES

1) African Development Bank Group. (2019). *Burundi economic outlook*. African Development Bank.https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/east-africa/burundi/burundi-economic-outlook
2) American Psychological Association. (2017). *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct*. https://www.apa.org/ethics/code
3) Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall.
4) Barnett, T. (2001). Dimensions of moral intensity and ethical decision making: An empirical study. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 31*(5), 1038–1057.
5) Bjørkelo, B., Einarsen, S., Nielsen, M. B., & Matthiesen, S. B. (2019). Reporting of ethical concerns at work among youth: Demographic and organizational factors. *Journal of Business Ethics, 159*(2), 453–466.
6) Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589–597.
7) Brown, M. E., Treviño, L. K., & Harrison, D. A. (2005). Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective for construct development and testing. *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes, 97*(2), 117–134.
8) Cialdini, R. B., Kallgren, C. A., & Reno, R. R. (1990). A focus theory of normative conduct. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 24*, 201–234.
9) Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
10) Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (4th ed.). Wiley.
11) Dixon, R. B., Elenkov, D. S., & Stumpf, S. A. (2018). Ethical leadership and mentoring relationships. *Journal of Business Ethics, 151*(1), 137–149.
12) Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
13) Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2019). The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. In *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
14) Freedom House. (2021). *Freedom in the world 2021: Burundi*.
15) Groves, K. S., Vance, C., & Choi, D. (2019). Examining the ethical leadership–follower outcomes link. *Journal of Business Ethics, 155*(2), 381–404.
16) Hartog, D. N. D. (2019). Ethical leadership. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behaviour, 6*, 409–434.
17) Hörisch, J., Freeman, R. E., & Schaltegger, S. (2014). Applying stakeholder theory in sustainability management. *Organization & Environment, 27*(4), 328–346.
18) International Labour Organization. (2014). *Guide on promoting good governance in the public service*. ILO.
19) International Labour Organization. (2018). *Decent work for youth in Burundi*. ILO.
20) Josić, I., & Đula, J. (2020). How corruption affects youth employment. *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management, 8*(4), 228–238.
21) Kohlberg, L. (1981). *The philosophy of moral development: Moral stages and the idea of justice*. Harper & Row.
22) Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
23) Lind, G. (2017). Moral development and moral education. In *The Cambridge handbook of moral development*. Cambridge University Press.
24) Ngendahimana, E., & Govers, R. (2020). Culture, values, and ethical behaviour in Burundi. *African Journal of Governance and Development, 9*(1), 45–62.

25) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2019). *Enhancing integrity in public procurement*. OECD Publishing.
26) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2020). *Business integrity in Eastern Africa*. OECD Publishing.
27) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2020). *Integrity in the public sector: A guide for ethical leadership*. OECD Publishing.
28) Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
29) Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.
30) Rehman, S. U., & Uddin, M. (2021). Integrity and organizational performance: A study of ethical practices in human resource management. *Journal of Business Ethics, 171*(3), 565–582.
31) Riggio, R. E. (2017). *Leadership and integrity*. Routledge.
32) Sayed, S. (2018). Ethics and integrity in employment practices. *African Journal of Public Affairs, 11*(2), 45–60.
33) Transparency International. (2018). *Anti-corruption glossary*.
34) Transparency International. (2020). *Corruption perceptions index 2020: Burundi*. https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/results/bdi
35) Treviño, L. K., Weaver, G. R., & Reynolds, S. J. (2014). Behavioural ethics in organizations. *Journal of Management, 40*(1), 123–152.
36) United Nations Development Programme. (2019). *Human development indicators: Burundi*. UNDP.
37) United Nations Development Programme. (2020). *Integrated national financing framework for sustainable development in Burundi*. UNDP.
38) Verheyden, B., Decuypere, L., & Vanderstraeten, A. (2019). Organizational integrity and trust. *Journal of Business Ethics,156*(1),1–15.
39) World Bank. (2016). *Good governance for development*. World Bank.
40) World Bank. (2019). *World development indicators*. World Bank.
41) World Bank. (2020). *Worldwide governance indicators*. World Bank.
42) World Bank. (2021). *World development indicators: Burundi*. World Bank.