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**Assessment of Leadership Styles and Employees Work Performance
in South-East Nigerian Private Universities**^{1*}Chukwujekwu Charles Onwuka²Sunday Evaristus Abonyi**Authors Affiliations:**

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Abstract

This study examined the assessment of leadership styles and employees' work performance at Godfrey Okoye University, Ugwuomu-Nike, Enugu State and Paul University Awka, Anambra State. The study adopted the descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. Four research questions guided the study. The situational theory was adopted as the theoretical framework of the study. The population of this research work was drawn from the academic and non-academic staff of Godfrey Okoye and Paul universities. The population is made up of 222 academic and 67 non-academic staff of Godfrey Okoye University and 117 academic and 31 non-academic staff of Paul University. The sample size of 208 was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. The questionnaire is the major instrument used for data collection and was self-administered. Data collected were processed using the SPSS software package version 21. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics like simple percentages, and frequency tables. The hypotheses were tested using chi-square (χ^2) statistical inference. The findings of the study show that there is a relationship between leadership style and employees' work performance. The study recommended that leaders should try to create a good working relationship between the subordinate and the team head for improved performance. Finally, leaders should endeavour to find the best leadership style that suits the smooth running of the organization.

Introduction

A leader is an art of impacting people so that they will compete willingly and exuberantly towards the attainment of organizational goals (Mojekeh, Obikeze & Anah, 2019). Leadership is therefore a process of social influence in which people attempt to assist and support others to perform a task or tasks (Roger, 2015). Every organization prefers a leader who can manage, predict future occurrences and layout strategies to assuage uncertainties. Each leader formulates a unique leadership style to fit the talents, maturity, and mastery of their followers (Landis, 2011). On the other hand, leadership styles are deliberate measures put up by leaders to see that subordinates are encouraged to perform their ideas in an organization (Okoye & Emeghebo, 2020). Also, Kiboss and Jemiryott (2014) defined leadership styles as ways of behaviour employed by leaders to control group members considering the task, strategy, and functions of an organization.

Leadership style and employees' work performance have attracted a good number of researches globally, especially in the southeast region. This situation is alarming because it is a widespread experience that employees often involve in soured relationships with their various organizational leaders which sometimes lead to industrial action, low productivity and interruption in the academic calendar as a result of their inability to meet up with employees' work demands. As a result of this, no desired coalition would enable such institutions to fulfill their laid down objective hence dissension becomes a recurrent issue in the place of work.

Universities in Nigeria today especially private universities need effective and coordinated leaders who understand the challenges of the global educational system. For there to be effective management and improved employee work performance, organizations need leaders who can juggle various leadership styles that can fit in every situation at any given time (Idowu, 2019). Using a suitable style for a university organization is an essential requirement that should be comprehended by a leader which will go a long way in boosting employees' work performance. University as a modern organization has its distinct peculiarities, order to organizations such as business and government organizations (Asmawi, 2017).

The success and negligence of any organization depend on the leadership style exercised by the leaders of such an organization. In order words, recognizing a suitable leadership style is an outstanding choice to make (Asmawi, 2017).

Leadership is a crucial aspect that bestows greatly to the general well-being of organizations (Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013). In line with the above description, it is evident that referring to a leadership style, not by followers' response and desired goals can stimulate unfavourable consequences, such as the probability that the university will not be able to withstand the global competition thereby reducing employees' work performance.

The problem

Universities contribute greatly to the education, teaching, research, and management of the institution. But today, the reverse is the case. Management of Nigerian university leaders plays a laissez-faire attitude in the universities. Most of the well-to-do send their children or wards to the best colleges and universities abroad and then use misappropriate revenues to establish private universities. Regrettably, none of these private universities makes the list of the best universities in the world's latest global rankings (Robert & Ari, 2021).

The Nigerian university system has been accused of poor implementation of the best leadership style in managing the universities for their physical and human development. Odunlami, Awosusi and Awolusi (2017) observed that a large part of the capital fund in some universities in Nigeria is linked to good-for-nothing and uncompleted projects that litter the campuses. Experience has revealed that the conspiracy within the university system is a fallout of the politics of the external environment. Also, the appointment of some principal officers and vice-chancellors in most Nigerian universities seems to be a major source of dispute due to the habit of imposing them on the university system by the government for political expediency (Ibiam, 2014).

Several studies have been conducted on leadership styles and employee performance but none exist in private universities in the south-east, Nigeria. This study will therefore fill the gap in knowledge by assessing the leadership styles and employees' work performance in south-east Nigerian private universities.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. Is there a relationship between leadership style and employees' work performance?
2. Is there a relationship between leadership style and organizational success?

3. What is the leadership style that best suits the smooth running of the organization?
4. Does the leadership style adopted by your leaders have little or no influence on organizational productivity?

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated in this study:

1. There is a relationship between leadership style and employees' work performance.
2. There is a relationship between leadership style and organizational success

Review of related literature

Leadership style is a fundamental determinant of the accomplishment or downfall of any organization. A leader is a person who impacts, directs, and motivates others to execute certain tasks and also encourages his subordinates for efficient performance towards the success of the stated corporate goals (Odunlami, Awosusi & Awolusi, 2017). Leadership style is the attitude and strategy of giving direction, executing plans, and encouraging people. The relationships between the leader and employee, as well as the nature of employees' performance, are considerably impacted by the leadership style adopted by the leader (Odetayo, Ojokuku & Sajuyigbe, 2012). There are innumerable kinds of leadership styles but the leadership styles applicable to this study include autocratic, democratic, transactional and transformational leadership styles.

The autocratic leadership style appears to be self-centred and equally allows minimal participation of subordinates in decision-making (Omeke & Onah, 2012). In the opinion of Nasereddin and Sharabati (2016), autocratic leadership style, all decision-making strengths are concentrated in the leader, as with dictators. The autocratic management has been thriving as it provides a substantial incentive to the manager; it allows quick decision-making. According to Segun-Adeniran (2015), the autocratic leadership style is based on personal control over every decision and contribution of members of the group. According to Boehm, Dwertmann, Bruch and Shamir (2015), the autocratic leadership style depicts all those leaders who make decisions without the consent of team members and applied when a quick decision is to be taken and team consensus is not vital for the acquisition of successful results.

The democratic leadership style encourages subordinates to participate and offer ideas. New ideas are welcomed while a feeling of belonging

and commitment is cultivated within the group. A democratic leader explores the opinion of his subordinates and holds cognizance of their advice and recommendations before taking a decision. The leadership style has a tremendous influence on the products of the organization with other variables combined (Mohammed, 2012). The democratic leadership style is one of the most effective and increases performance, better contributions from group members and increased group morale (Martindal, 2011). The democratic leadership style is a very clear and collegial style of running an organization (Nasereddin & Sharabati, 2016).

The transactional leadership style focuses on the role of supervision, organization and group performance. It equally emphasizes the exchange that takes place among leaders, colleagues and followers. This exchange is established by the leader talking about what is required of others and determining the conditions and rewards these others will obtain if they fulfill those requirements (Zaidatol, Amira & Habibah, 2011). Transactional leadership is a style of leadership in which the leader promotes and facilitates compliance with his followers through both rewards and retributions (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013). According to Mottoh (2015), transactional leadership is based on the precept of the exchange of rewards between leaders and subordinates. The transactional leadership style also focuses on the role of supervision, organization, and group performance (Akhigbe, Finelady & Felix, 2014).

Transformational leadership style is a process that arises when one or more individuals engage with others in such a manner that leaders and followers lift one another to higher categories of motivation and morality (Idowu, 2019). Transformational leaders facilitate intellectual advancement, enthusiasm, team spirit and confidence among the followers, thereby enabling followers to be more focused on collective well-being and fulfilling organizational goals (Aydin, Sarier, and Uysal, 2013). Transformational leaders are socially, emotionally, intelligently and inspiring with charismatic disposition. They understand how emotions affect them and how they should wield their emotions and their vision to heighten excitement, optimism and inspiration among employees (Idowu, 2019). Employee performance in an organization is an important building block which lays a foundation for improved work performance. No organization can survive in isolation, hence collective effort of all the members of the organization is required.

According to Pihie, Sadeghi and Elias (2011), leadership style as a fundamental aspect affects employees' performance which in turn is necessary for the success of each organization. Asmawi (2017) believes that a leadership style that is proven to be successfully implemented in an academic environment is transformational because it is capable of transforming the culture through inspiration, group work and by stimulating the thought in solving problems. Ogbonna and Harris (2000) believe that the style of a leader affects employees' performance. They also confirmed that certain types of culture are linked to improved performance. It is therefore understood that leadership styles correlate to the outcome of the performance. This study is needed to identify, explore and explain the character and relationship patterns among the organizational cultures, leadership styles and performances. Executing a suitable leadership style should embrace the organizational culture to earn the anticipated performance (Asmawi, 2017).

Theoretical framework

To drive this study theoretically, the situational theory was adopted as the theoretical framework. This theory was propounded by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in the year 1969. The theory suggests that no single leadership style is best rather it depends on the type of leadership and strategies that best suited the task. Abefe-Balogun (2015) opines that situational theory is based on effective leadership which employs a person to use a style of behaviour that fulfils the conditions in which leadership is utilized. Situational leadership theory assumes that leaders behave according to the situation (Parveen & Tariq, 2014). In applying this theory to the subject of study, it is evident that management and employees in Godfrey Okoye and Paul universities depend on leadership style for the maintenance and improved employee performance of the organisations. Leaders should carefully study

the current situation of the organisation before deciding on the style of leadership to adopt and implement. Management should be able to adopt their style of leadership style to the situation and look at cues such as the type of task, the nature of the group, and other factors that might enhance employees' performance. Odunlami, Awosusi & Awolusi (2017), observed that there is not one best leadership style that is suited for all situations. In other words, leaders should demonstrate the behaviour that will have the optimum positive effect on employees' performance.

Methods

The study employed the descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. The study areas are Godfrey Okoye University, Ugwuomu-Nike, Enugu State and Paul University Awka, Anambra State. A sample size of 140 was selected using the Taro Yamane (1964) formula with a 5% error limit of 437 staff randomly selected for the study. 32% was the percentage of the sample size of the population of this study used to select respondents from the two institutions. A total of 93 staff of Godfrey Okoye were randomly selected in proportion to the total number of both academic and non-academic staff while 47 staff of Paul University was randomly selected in proportion to the total number of both academic and non-academic staff. Copies of the questionnaire were self-administered to the respondents with the help of three research assistants to ensure a high return rate. Data collected were coded into the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software version 21, which was used in processing all the relevant statistical data. The descriptive aspect of the analysis like percentages, frequency tables, etc. was used to describe and interpret the data collected from the field. Chi-square (χ^2) statistical inference was used to determine the relationship between variables in the study.

Findings

Table 1

Distribution of socio-demographic variables of the respondents

Socio-Demographic Variables	Godfrey Okoye University	Paul University	Total
Gender			
Male	53(55.9%)	25(53.2%)	77(55%)
Female	41(44.1%)	22(46.8%)	63(45%)
Total	93(100%)	47(100%)	140(100%)
Marital status			
Single	15(16.1%)	14(29.8%)	29(20.7%)
Married	68(73.1%)	26(55.3%)	94(67.1%)
Widowed	1(1.1%)	2(4.3%)	3(2.1%)
Divorced/ Separated	9(9.7%)	5(10.6%)	14(10%)
Total	93(100%)	47(100%)	140(100%)
Job Designation			
Academic staff	64(68.8%)	31(66%)	95(67.9%)
Non academic Staff	29(31.2%)	16(34%)	16(34%)
Total	93(100%)	47(100%)	140(32.1)
Age categories			
20 – 29 years	10(10.8%)	6(12.8%)	16(11.4%)
30 – 39 years	27(29%)	12(25.5%)	39(27.9%)
40 – 49 years	31(33.3%)	17(36.2%)	48(34.3%)
50 year and above	25(26.9%)	12(25.5%)	37(26.4%)
Total	93(100%)	47(100%)	140(100%)

Table 1 above contains data on the analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The information therein showed that 52(55.9%) respondents of Godfrey Okoye University were male, while 41(44.1%) respondents were female. On the other hand, 25(53.2%) respondents of Paul University were male, while 22(46.8%) respondents were female. With regards to the marital status of the respondents, the data showed that 15(16.1%) respondents of Godfrey Okoye University were single, 68(73.1%) were married, 1(1.1%) were widowed while 9(9.7%) were divorced/separated. On the other hand, 14(29.8%) respondents of Paul University were single, 26(55.3%) were married, 2(4.3%) were widowed and 5(10.6%) were divorced/separated.

Concerning the job designation of the respondents, the data analysis showed that 64(68.8%) respondents of Godfrey Okoye University were academic staff while 29(31.2%) were non-academic staff. On the other hand, 31(66%) respondents of Paul University were

academic staff while 16(34%) were the non-academic staff. The age distribution of the respondents showed that 10(10.8%) respondents of Godfrey Okoye University aged between 20 – 29 years old, 27(29%) aged between 30 – 39 years old, 31(33.3%) aged between 40 – 49 years old while 25(26.9%) aged between 50 – 59 years old. On the other hand, 6(12.8%) respondents of Paul University aged between 20 – 29 years old, 12(25.5%) aged between 30 – 39 years old, 17(36.2%) aged between 40 – 49 years old while 12(25.5%) aged between 50 – 59 years old.

Perception of leadership styles and employees work performance

The respondents were obliged to describe their perception of the relationship between leadership style and employees' work performance, using three distinct questionnaire items. The analysis conducted on their responses was presented in table 2.

Table 2 Respondents' views on whether there is a relationship between leadership style and employees work performance

Response	Godfrey Okoye University	Paul University	Total
Yes	62(66.7%)	26(55.3%)	88(62.9%)
No	21(22.6%)	15(31.9%)	36(25.7%)
Don't know	10(10.8%)	6(12.8%)	16(11.4%)
Total	93(100%)	47(100%)	140(100%)

Table 2 depicts the respondents' views on whether there is a relationship between leadership style and employees' work performance at Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu and Paul University Awka. It was observed from the above table that 62(66.7%) respondents of Godfrey Okoye University believed that there is a relationship between leadership style and employees' work performance, 21(22.6%) respondents said there is no relationship while 10(10.8%) said that they don't know. On the other hand, 26(55.3%) respondents of Paul University are of the view that there is a relationship between leadership style and employees' work performance, 15(31.9%) respondents said there is no relationship

while 6(12.8%) said that they don't know. This indicates that the proportion of employees of both universities believed that there is a relationship between leadership style and employees' work performance.

Relationship between leadership style and organizational success

The respondents were asked to indicate whether there is a relationship between leadership style and organizational success. Three distinct questionnaire items were used. The analysis conducted on the responses was presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Respondents' views on whether there is a relationship between leadership style and organisational success

Response	Godfrey Okoye University	Paul University	Total
Yes	67(72%)	28(59.6%)	95(67.9%)
No	18(19.4%)	14(29.89%)	32(22.9%)
Don't know	8(8.68%)	5(10.6%)	13(9.3%)
Total	93(100%)	47(100%)	140(100%)

Table 3 above depicts respondents' views on whether there is a relationship between leadership style and organizational success at Godfrey Okoye and Paul Universities. As indicated in the above table, 67(72%) respondents of Godfrey Okoye University are of the view that there is a relationship between leadership style and organizational success 18(19.4%) respondents said there is no relationship while 8(8.6%) said that they don't know. On the other hand, 28(59.6%) respondents of Paul University are of the view that there is a relationship between leadership style and organizational success, 14(29.8%) respondents said there is no relationship while 5(10.6%) said that

they don't know. This indicates that the proportion of employees of both universities believed that there is a relationship between leadership style and organizational success.

Forms of leadership style used in running the organisation

Four items were introduced to help identify the leadership style that best suits the smooth running of the organisation. The questionnaire item reads what is the leadership style that best suits the smooth running of the organization? The analysis conducted on the responses gathered is shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Respondents' views on forms of leadership style

Response	Godfrey Okoye University	Paul University	Total
Autocratic	9(9.7%)	3(6.4%)	12(8.6%)
Democratic	14(15.1%)	9(19.1%)	23(16.4%)
Transactional	19(20.4%)	12(25.5%)	31(22.1%)
Transformational	51(54.8%)	23(48.9)	74(52.9%)
Total	93(100%)	47(100%)	140(100%)

Table 4 above depicts respondents' views on the forms of leadership style that best suit the smooth running of the organization. As indicated in the above table, 9(9.7%) respondents of Godfrey Okoye University are of the view that autocratic leadership style best suits the smooth running of the organization, 14(15.1%) said democratic, 19(20.4%) said transactional while 51(54.8%) said transformational. On the other hand, 3(6.4%) respondents of Paul University are of the view that autocratic leadership style best suits the smooth running of the organization, 9(19.1%) said democratic, 12(25.5%) said transactional while 23(48.9%) said transformational. This indicates that

Table 5 Respondents' views on whether leadership style has any influence on organisational productivity

Response	Godfrey Okoye University	Paul University	Total
Yes	49(52.7%)	21(44.7%)	70(50%)
No	34(36.6%)	18(38.3%)	52(37.1%)
Don't know	10(10.8%)	8(17%)	18(12.9%)
Total	93(100%)	47(100%)	140(100%)

Table 5 above depicts respondents' views on whether leadership style has any influence on organizational productivity. As indicated in the

the proportion of employees of both universities believed that the transformational leadership style best suits the smooth running of the organization.

Influence of leadership style on organizational productivity

The respondents were asked whether leadership style has an influence on organizational productivity. The questionnaire item reads does the leadership style adopted by your leaders have little or no influence on organizational productivity? The analysis conducted on the responses gathered is shown in Table 5.

above table, 49(52.7%) respondents of Godfrey Okoye University believed that leadership style influences organizational productivity, 34(36.6%) respondents said that leadership style does not influence while 10(10.8%) said that they don't know. On the other hand, 21(44.7%) respondents of Paul University are of the view that leadership style influences organizational productivity, 18(38.3%) respondents said that leadership style does not influence while 8(17%) said that they don't know. This indicates that the proportion of employees of both universities believed that leadership style has an influence on organizational productivity.

Test of hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

Hypothesis one

H₁: There is a relationship between leadership style and employees' work performance

H₀: There is no relationship between leadership style and employees' work performance

Table 6 Distribution of respondents on leadership style and employees’ work

Response	Godfrey Okoye University	Paul University	Total
Yes	62(66.7%)	26(55.3%)	88(62.9%)
No	21(22.6%)	15(31.9%)	36(25.7%)
Don’t know	10(10.8%)	6(12.8%)	16(11.4%)
Total	93(100%)	47(100%)	140(100%)

$\chi^2 = 89.4$; $df = 2$; $p = .000$

To test the above hypothesis, responses on employees’ work performance were cross-tabulated with the leadership styles. The table reveals that the majority 62(66.7%) and 26(55.3%) of the respondents of both Godfrey Okoye and Paul Universities believed that there is a relationship between leadership style and employees’ work performance (Table 2). The hypothesis was tested with the use of the chi-square (χ^2) statistic at a .05 significant level.

The data were subjected to a chi-square test and with $\chi^2 = 89.4$; $df = 2$; $p = .000$, there appears to

be an association between leadership style and employees’ work performance. Thus, the substantive hypothesis is accepted thereby implying that there is a relationship between leadership style and employees’ work performance.

Hypothesis two

H₁: There is a relationship between leadership style and organizational success

H₀: There is no relationship between leadership style and organizational success

Table 7 Distribution of respondents on leadership style and organizational success

Response	Godfrey Okoye University	Paul University	Total
Yes	67(72%)	28(59.6%)	95(67.9%)
No	18(19.4%)	14(29.8%)	32(22.9%)
Don’t know	8(8.6%)	5(10.6%)	13(9.3%)
Total	93(100%)	47(100%)	140(100%)

$\chi^2 = 122.5$; $df = 2$; $p = .000$

To test the above hypothesis, responses on organizational success were cross-tabulated with the leadership styles. The table reveals that the majority 67(72%) and 28(59.6%) of the respondents of both Godfrey Okoye and Paul Universities believed that there is a relationship between leadership style and organizational success (Table 3). The hypothesis was tested with the use of the chi-square (χ^2) statistic at a .05 significant level.

The data were subjected to a chi-square test and with $\chi^2 = 122.5$; $df = 2$; $p = .000$, there appears to be an association between leadership style and organisational success. Thus, the substantive hypothesis is accepted thereby implying that there is a relationship between leadership style and organisational success.

Discussion of findings

From the analysis of the generated data on leadership style and employees’ work performance; it was observed that more of the respondents (Table 2) in both Godfrey Okoye and Paul Universities believed that there is a relationship between leadership style and employees’ work performance. This finding confirms the view of Odetayo, Ojokuku and Sajuyigbe (2012) that the relationship between the leaders and employees, as well as the nature of employees’ performance, is considerably impacted by the leadership style adopted by the leaders.

The findings of the study in Table 3 revealed that there is a relationship between leadership style and organizational success. The findings of this study are in agreement with the works of Pihie,

Sadephi and Elias (2011), that leadership style as a fundamental aspect affects employees' performance which in turn is necessary for the success of each organisation.

Findings emanating from the study in Table 4 however revealed the leadership style that best suits the smooth running of the organization at Godfrey Okoye and Paul Universities. This finding confirms the views of Asmawi (2017) that a leadership style that is proven to be successfully implemented in an academic environment is transformational leadership style because it is capable of transforming the culture through information, group work and by stimulating the thought in solving problems.

The findings of the study also revealed whether leadership style has any influence on organizational productivity (Table 5). The majority of 49(52.7%) respondents of Godfrey Okoye and 21(44.7%) of Paul Universities indicated that leadership style influences organizational productivity. The finding of the study is in agreement with the works of Mohammed (2012) that leadership style has a tremendous influence on the products of the organization with other variables combined.

Furthermore, the two hypotheses that guided the study were all tested. Findings from the test of hypothesis one as presented in Table 6 on leadership style shows that majority of the respondents were mostly in the affirmative. Thus, the substantive hypothesis (H1) is accepted thereby implying that there appears to be an association between leadership style and employees' work performance.

Finally, the result of hypothesis two as presented in Table 7 on organizational success, shows that the majority of the respondents were mostly those who said yes to leadership style and organizational success. Thus, the substantive hypothesis (H1) is accepted thereby implying that there is a relationship between leadership style and organizational success.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The study focused on leadership styles and employees' work performance in southeast Nigerian private universities. Leadership is the method of providing an enabling environment and encouraging people to strive selflessly towards fulfilling organisational success. The findings of the study showed that leadership style influences employees' work performance. It is then the responsibility of the leaders to find the best

leadership style that best suits the organisation and adopt it to improve employees' work performance. Organisations, therefore, need leaders who will strive amid difficult tasks and situations and be able to deliver without giving excuses. In other words, carefulness is paramount in the selection of leaders. Against this backdrop, the following recommendations were articulated:

1. Leaders should find the best leadership style that best suits the smooth running of the organisation.
2. Leaders should try to create a good working relationship between the subordinate and the team head for improved performance.
3. Appointment into leadership positions in private universities should be purely on merit, expertise and transparency to checkmate mediocrity, favouritism, impersonality etc.
4. Leaders should have a way of motivating employees so that they can always give their best.
5. Leaders should lead by example and must be faithful, committed and pragmatic in their dealings.

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