



## Leadership Styles and Employee Performance in Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Nigerian universities have faced leadership challenges manifesting as organisational politics, and power tussles, resulting in employee dissatisfaction. Understanding how leadership styles influence employee performance is crucial for institutional effectiveness despite extensive research on leadership styles and employee performance, limited studies have examined their relative effects within Nigerian universities, particularly in the Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State. Additionally, existing literature largely overlooks contextual influences on leadership effectiveness. This study addresses these gaps by providing comparative, context-specific evidence from the Federal University of Technology, Minna.

**Objectives:** assess the influence of autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles on employees' performance in Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State.

**Methods:** A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The target population comprises of all employees in the Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State. Data were collected from 356 respondents using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and inferential analysis (ANOVA and correlation coefficient) were used to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance using SPSS.

**Results:** All three leadership styles showed significant positive influence on employees' performance. Laissez-faire leadership emerged as the strongest predictor (Beta = 0.539,  $p < 0.001$ ), followed by autocratic (Beta = 0.335,  $p < 0.001$ ) and democratic (Beta = 0.273,  $p < 0.001$ ). The model explained 22.9% of variance in performance ( $R^2 = 0.229$ ,  $F = 7.977$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**Conclusions:** Leadership styles significantly influence employee performance in the Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State. Granting employees autonomy and independence appears most effective, though a blended approach considering context is recommended.

**Unique Contribution:** This study contributes to organisational practice and scholarship by clarifying how leadership styles influence employee performance in the Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State by identifying practical mediators such as engagement and trust that human resource can target. It also highlights the risks of inconsistent leadership and provides evidence-based guidance for managers and HR professionals in designing effective leadership development strategies aligned with task demands.

**Recommendation:** The Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State, management should promote participative leadership by encouraging staff involvement in decision-making,



open communication, and valuing employees' contributions. Additionally, greater autonomy should be granted to academic and professional staff through laissez-faire leadership, while democratic leadership should guide institutional decisions and autocratic leadership should be applied only when necessary for urgent or highly structured tasks.

**Keywords:** Leadership styles, employee performance, autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership, university management

## INTRODUCTION

Nigerian organisations generally, and particularly universities, have suffered leadership problems that have come to the fore in recent times. These problems manifest themselves in the form of organisational politics, power tussle, insubordination, tribalism, religious dichotomy and suppression (Oyekanmi, Adebajo, and Shittu, 2023; Oginyi et al 2023). For instance, a common practice, predominantly in universities and other academic institutions, when the organisation fails to achieve its objectives, the employees will blame the leaders. In other cases, when an organisation fails, the leader blames the employees. The success or failure of an organisation is typically a shared responsibility amongst leadership, which includes the leader, the followers, and the situational environment. When these three components fail to align, it results in diminished productivity, reduced profitability, high employee turnover, and decreased job satisfaction, ultimately leading to poor institutional performance (Ejimofor and Ogundare, 2023; Nwosu et al., 2018). Key issues include inadequate funding and mismanagement of available resources; nonetheless, the persistent failure in leadership and management where universities operate more according to the personal inclinations of their vice-chancellors rather than established administrative and management practices has a more significant impact on their performance than funding issues alone (Akinduko, 2023).

Globally, human resources of any organisation are strategic and pivotal towards achieving organisational goals. The imperatives of human resource in every organisation have given credence to job performance and satisfaction as a topical concept in exploring issues that affect management and human behaviour in an organisation, which over the decades has been affected by the quality of the leader (Abeki and Ubebe, 2023; Nwafor et al., 2023). A leader is a person who is responsible for trying to influence someone or some of the leaders who follow him to direct them and lead them to a specific goal; the leader must continue to monitor and manage his followers. According to Shatila, Agyei, and Aloulou (2023), the leader must teach in a way that can adapt based on the situation to have a greater impact on the process and try to build trust and respect between himself and his followers so that he can rely on them.

The success of nations, societies, governments, organisations, and employees is fundamentally dependent on effective leadership. As noted by Soeari, Ilhami, and Achmad (2023), leadership plays a pivotal role in virtually every facet of society. Kai (2013) underscores that leadership behaviours and styles have a decisive impact on employees' performance within organisations. The significance of leadership has grown in both public and private sectors due to globalisation and technological advancements, requiring leaders to adopt more strategic approaches to managing their organisations (Arefin, Faroque, Zhang, and Long, 2023). The performance of an



organisation—be it exemplary or subpar—reflects the effectiveness of its leadership. Therefore, leadership styles have a direct influence on employees' performance since leaders cannot dissociate themselves from the outcomes experienced by their organisations.

Leadership is defined as a process where leaders influence employees to direct their behaviour towards achieving organisational goals (Munir and Iqbal, 2018). This definition highlights the uniqueness of each leader, characterised by distinct abilities (Eliyana and Ma'arif, 2019). Numerous leadership styles have been identified based on these unique attributes. However, the overlap among these styles can pose challenges to employees' performance. Employees' performance is defined as the effectiveness and efficiency of an individual to perform their responsibilities, duties, or job and contribute to the growth of an organisation (Cortes, 2023). For employees to perform at their utmost best, organisations need leaders who can adapt to different situations and possess various leadership styles that fit every situation at any given point in time.

Leadership models often categorise leadership behaviours into two primary types: task-oriented, which emphasises goal-setting, close supervision and control over subordinate actions; and relationship-oriented, which focuses on addressing individual and group needs, managing group dynamics and fostering harmonious work relationships (Olanipekun and Oderinde, 2024). These behaviours are also known as directive and supportive leadership, respectively (Wang et al., 2022). Leadership is crucial for any group or organisation, significantly influencing its success or failure. The leadership style adopted by university leaders impacts their human resources and overall effectiveness.

Although leadership is widely acknowledged as a key determinant of employee performance, empirical and practical challenges persist in translating leadership theory into effective organisational outcomes. Leadership effectiveness remains highly context-dependent, yet many organisations adopt standardised leadership models without accounting for task characteristics, workforce diversity, or environmental uncertainty (Deng, 2023; Young, 2021). Many leadership interventions fail because they overlook mediating mechanisms such as work engagement, organisational trust, and emotional exhaustion (Buil et al., 2019; Kader, 2025; Okoro & Nwafor 2015). The issue of leadership inconsistency has been largely ignored in practice, despite compelling recent evidence that intermittent abusive behaviour can be more damaging than consistently negative leadership (Xu et al., 2024). Measurement limitations continue to constrain both research and practice, with many organisations relying on narrow performance indicators. Notwithstanding these contributions, a clear theoretical gap persists in the literature. Existing studies have largely examined leadership styles in isolation or within non-academic and non-Nigerian contexts, with limited comparative analysis of multiple leadership styles within university settings, particularly technology-driven institutions. Furthermore, prior research has insufficiently integrated contextual and institutional dynamics in explaining how leadership styles influence employee performance. Consequently, there remains a paucity of context-specific, empirically grounded evidence that captures the relative effectiveness of leadership styles within Nigerian universities. This study therefore addresses this gap by providing a comparative and contextually situated analysis of leadership styles and employee performance at the Federal University of Technology, Minna.



## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main aim of the study is to examine the effect of leadership styles on employees' performance in the Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the influence of autocratic leadership style on employees' performance in the Federal University of Technology, Minna-Niger State.
2. Determine the influence of democratic leadership style on employees' performance in the Federal University of Technology, Minna-Niger State.
3. Evaluate the influence of laissez-faire leadership style on employees' performance in the Federal University of Technology, Minna-Niger State.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted for this study. This design allows for the collection of data at a single point in time, facilitating the examination of relationships between variables across the study population. The design is appropriate for assessing the influence of leadership styles on employee performance in an organisational setting. The study was anchored on Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory and Path-Goal Leadership Theory, which provide frameworks for understanding how leaders can effectively guide their followers toward achieving organisational goals.

### **Study Area**

The study was conducted at the Federal University of Technology, Minna (FUT Minna), located in Niger State, Nigeria. FUT Minna is a federal government-owned university established in 1983, offering various undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in technology-related fields. The university employs both academic and non-academic staff across various departments and units. The choice of FUT Minna was informed by its status as a premier technology university in Nigeria and the need to understand leadership dynamics in a specialised higher education setting.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population comprises of all 2,383 employees at the Federal University of Technology, Minna, Olamide (2022). A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation across departments and units. This approach ensured that the unique experiences and specific contextual factors of each group were captured in the analysis. Within each stratum, employees were randomly selected for participation, ensuring that every member of the target population had an equal chance of being included in the study.

The target sample size was  $363.7 \sim 364$  employees, determined through power analysis for medium effect sizes at  $\alpha = 0.05$  and  $\text{power} = 0.80$ . To account for potential non-response and invalid entries, this sample size was increased by approximately 10%, resulting in a final distribution of 400 questionnaires. A total of 356 valid responses were obtained, representing a 89% response rate. This high response rate provides a robust basis for the study's findings.



### **Data Collection Instrument**

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled 'Leadership Styles and Employees' Performance Evaluation Questionnaire (LSEPEQ)'. The instrument was organised into sections to capture comprehensive data on demographic characteristics and the three leadership styles: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Respondents rated items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The autocratic leadership section assessed employees' perceptions of directive leadership behaviours, including forced goal-setting and close supervision. The democratic leadership section evaluated participative behaviours such as involvement in decision-making and teamwork encouragement. The laissez-faire section measured perceptions of delegation and autonomy granted to employees.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise respondents' perceptions of leadership styles' influence on employees' performance. Items with mean greater than 3.00 were accepted as having positive influence, while those with mean less than or equal to 3.00 were rejected. Inferential statistical tools, specifically Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and correlation coefficient, were employed to test the research hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the relative influence of each leadership style on employee performance.

## **RESULTS**

A total of 356 questionnaires were completed and returned, representing a 91% response rate. This high response rate provides a robust basis for the study's findings. The presentation of data was organised around the research questions and hypotheses, using descriptive and inferential statistics.

### **Table I: Influence of Autocratic Leadership Style**

Table I presents the descriptive statistics for the influence of autocratic leadership style on employees' performance. The mean response to all six items was below 2.50, indicating a negative response from employees. The grand mean of 2.00 suggests that employees generally perceive autocratic leadership as having a negative influence on their performance. Items related to forced goals and lack of recognition had the lowest means (1.98-1.99), indicating these aspects are particularly detrimental to employee motivation and satisfaction. Specifically, the item 'I feel happier at work when my leader doesn't recognise my efforts' recorded the lowest mean of 1.99, suggesting that employees strongly value recognition from their leaders. Similarly, the item 'My work is sometimes affected when my leader focuses too much on big ideas instead of giving clear goals' also had a low mean of 1.98, indicating that employees prefer clear direction over abstract vision statements.



No.	Item	Mean	SDev	Decision
1	I feel inspired when my leader forces me on goals	2.01	0.99	Rejected
2	My productivity improves when my leader forces me to grow	2.00	0.98	Rejected
3	I feel happier when my leader doesn't recognise my efforts	1.99	0.97	Rejected
4	I feel stressed when my leader expects too much	2.00	0.98	Rejected
5	I find it happy when my leader introduces new ideas	2.01	0.98	Rejected
6	My work is affected when leader focuses on big ideas	1.98	0.97	Rejected
	Mean of Means	2.00		

Table I: Influence of Autocratic Leadership Style on Employees' Performance (N=356)

Table II shows the descriptive statistics for the influence of democratic leadership style on employees' performance. The mean response to all six items was consistently above 2.50, indicating a positive response from employees. The grand mean of 3.26 reinforces this trend, pointing to an overall positive outlook toward democratic leadership practices. Employees perceive democratic leadership as having a favourable impact on their performance, particularly regarding involvement in decision-making and teamwork. The highest-rated item was 'I find it difficult to stay focused when my leader frequently changes plans based on team input' with a mean of 3.31, followed closely by 'My work is sometimes affected when my leader's approach makes goals and responsibilities unclear' with a mean of 3.30. These findings suggest that while employees value participation, they also desire clarity in their roles and responsibilities.

No.	Item	Mean	SDev	Decision
7	I work better when my leader involves me in decision-making	3.27	0.81	Accepted
8	I feel satisfied when my leader encourages teamwork	3.28	0.81	Accepted
9	I am committed when my leader allows participation	3.12	0.88	Accepted
10	I feel less motivated when leader takes too long to decide	3.25	0.82	Accepted
11	I find it difficult when leader changes plans frequently	3.31	0.79	Accepted
12	My work is affected when goals are unclear	3.30	0.80	Accepted
	Mean of Means	3.26		

Table II: Influence of Democratic Leadership Style on Employees' Performance (N=356)



Table III presents the descriptive statistics for the influence of laissez-faire leadership style on employees' performance. The mean response to all six items was consistently above 2.50, reflecting a positive response from employees. The grand mean of 3.30 indicates that employees appreciate having freedom and autonomy to make decisions and work independently. However, items related to lack of guidance and feedback suggest some concerns about this leadership style when taken to extremes.

The highest-rated item was 'My motivation decreases when my leader's lack of direction makes it unclear what is expected' with a mean of 3.35, followed by 'I sometimes feel frustrated when my leader does not give enough guidance or support' with a mean of 3.34. These findings indicate that while employees value autonomy, they also recognise the importance of some level of direction and feedback from their leaders.

No.	Item	Mean	SDev	Decision
13	I feel confident when my leader trusts me to decide	3.25	0.84	Accepted
14	My satisfaction improves with freedom to work	3.30	0.80	Accepted
15	I am committed when allowed to work independently	3.31	0.79	Accepted
16	I feel frustrated without enough guidance	3.34	0.78	Accepted
17	My motivation decreases without clear direction	3.35	0.77	Accepted
18	My work is affected without enough feedback	3.27	0.81	Accepted
	Mean of Means	3.30		

Table III: Influence of Laissez-Faire Leadership Style on Employees' Performance (N=356)

### Regression Analysis

Table IV presents the model summary from the multiple regression analysis. The multiple correlation coefficient (R) was 0.479, showing a moderate positive linear relationship between the combined leadership styles and employees' performance. The R Square value of 0.229 reveals that approximately 22.9% of the variation in employees' performance can be explained by the three leadership styles included in the model. The Adjusted R Square of 0.223 is very close to the R Square value, suggesting that the model is not overly inflated by the number of predictors and remains reasonably stable.



Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error
1	0.479	0.229	0.223		0.320

Table IV: Model Summary

The ANOVA result (Table V) shows that the overall regression model is statistically significant. The F-statistic is 7.977 with a p-value of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that at least one of the independent variables (leadership styles) has a statistically significant influence on the dependent variable (employee performance). The regression sum of squares (355.000) accounts for a substantial portion of the total variability, while the residual sum of squares (18.820) represents the unexplained variation.

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F
Regression	355.000	3	118.333	7.977
Residual	18.820	351	0.057	
Total	373.820	354		

Table V: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Table VI presents the coefficients from the regression analysis, providing detailed insight into the individual contributions of each leadership style to employees' performance. All three leadership styles showed statistically significant positive coefficients ( $p < 0.001$ ). Laissez-faire leadership emerged as the strongest predictor with a standardized Beta coefficient of 0.539, followed by autocratic leadership (Beta = 0.335) and democratic leadership (Beta = 0.273).

The unstandardized coefficients (B) show the expected change in employee performance for a one-unit increase in each leadership style score. Laissez-faire leadership has the highest B value of 0.412, indicating that for every unit increase in laissez-faire leadership score, employee performance increases by 0.412 units, holding other variables constant.

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	Sig.
(Constant)	0.020	0.030	-	0.481
Autocratic	0.333	0.041	0.335	0.000
Democratic	0.281	0.044	0.273	0.000
Laissez-Faire	0.412	0.028	0.539	0.000

Table VI: Coefficients of Correlation



## DISCUSSION

This study examined the effect of leadership styles on employees' performance at the Federal University of Technology, Minna, and found that autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles all have significant positive effects, with laissez-faire emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by autocratic and democratic styles. The strong influence of laissez-faire leadership ( $\beta = 0.539$ ) supports prior studies that emphasize the importance of autonomy in knowledge-based environments. For example, Adegboyega and Olawumi (2021) and recent higher education research highlight its positive impact on productivity, innovation, and job satisfaction among skilled professionals. This finding extends existing literature by showing that in a Nigerian university context, autonomy is a key driver of performance. This may be attributed to the nature of academic work, which requires independence in teaching and research, suggesting that reduced managerial control enhances effectiveness.

Democratic leadership ( $\beta = 0.273$ ) also showed a significant positive effect, consistent with studies such as Sakar et al. (2023) and Anyaegbunam and Anekwe (2021), which link participative leadership to improved job satisfaction and performance. While this confirms the relevance of inclusive decision-making in academic settings, its relatively weaker effect suggests that excessive consultation may limit efficiency, particularly in time-sensitive situations.

Autocratic leadership ( $\beta = 0.335$ ) was also found to positively influence performance despite negative perceptions in descriptive responses. This aligns with findings by Adegboyega and Olawumi (2021) and Amegayibor (2021), who associate directive leadership with improved productivity in structured environments. The result suggests that while extreme authoritarian practices may be resisted, moderate levels of directive leadership remain important for ensuring clarity, compliance, and task execution, especially in technical and administrative roles.

The model explains 22.9% of the variance in employee performance, indicating that leadership styles are important but not sufficient predictors. Other factors such as organizational culture, motivation, and working conditions also play significant roles. Overall, the findings highlight the context-dependent nature of leadership effectiveness and suggest that a balanced approach combining autonomy, participation, and structure is most effective in university settings.

In summary, this study contributes to the growing body of literature by demonstrating that leadership effectiveness is context-dependent. While laissez-faire leadership emerges as the most effective style in the academic environment studied, a balanced combination of autonomy, participation, and structured guidance appears to yield the best performance outcomes. The findings underscore the importance of situational leadership in higher education institutions, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria.



## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that leadership styles play varying roles in influencing employees' performance at the Federal University of Technology, Minna. All three leadership styles—autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire—showed statistically significant positive influences on employee performance, with laissez-faire emerging as the strongest predictor (Beta = 0.539), followed by autocratic (Beta = 0.335) and democratic (Beta = 0.273).

The study concludes that granting employees autonomy and independence is particularly effective in enhancing performance in university settings. However, leadership effectiveness is context-dependent, and a blended approach that incorporates elements of all three styles may be most appropriate. Democratic practices should be institutionalised for decision-making processes, while autocratic approaches should be reserved for structured and urgent tasks requiring clear direction.

University management should prioritise participative and delegate leadership approaches to enhance staff performance, while ensuring adequate guidance and feedback mechanisms are in place. Leaders are advised to combine laissez-faire approaches with occasional feedback and support to prevent frustration while preserving independence. Leadership development programmes should be implemented to help managers adapt their styles to different situations and employee needs. Future research should explore the role of gender, age, and experience level of staff in moderating the relationship between leadership style and performance.

## **Ethical Clearance**

Approval to conduct this research was obtained from the Department of Public Administration, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai. All participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all data were stored securely and used solely for research purposes.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise, related to this research.

### **Authors' Contributions**

Bechila Joan Aishatu Magaji: Conceptualisation, research design, literature review, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation. The author has read and approved the manuscript for publication and confers the rights to make necessary changes required by the editorial team.

### **Availability of Data and Materials**

All data used in this work are readily available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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