



The effect of leadership styles on employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria: A quantitative study

Catherine Odumu Garba

Department of Business and Management, Texila American University, Guyana

Abstract

Purpose: The study examined the effect of leadership styles on employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria. Specifically, it investigated how transformational, transactional, and autocratic leadership practices influence healthcare workers' performance outcomes, aiming to provide insights for improving workforce productivity and service delivery.

Methodology/Design: A quantitative research design was employed, using a structured questionnaire administered to 400 healthcare employees across selected public hospitals. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analysis with SPSS version 26. Reliability and validity of the instrument were confirmed through Cronbach's alpha, and expert review.

Findings: The results revealed that transformational ($\beta = 0.45$, $p = 0.001$) and transactional leadership ($\beta = 0.31$, $p = 0.002$) positively and significantly influence employee performance, while autocratic leadership ($\beta = -0.27$, $p = 0.004$) negatively impacts performance. These findings highlight that participative and motivating leadership approaches are more effective in enhancing staff productivity.

Implications: Hospital management should adopt transformational and transactional leadership practices while minimizing autocratic tendencies. Policymakers should implement leadership development programs and performance-based incentives to improve healthcare delivery.

Originality/Value: The study contributes to the literature by empirically validating Transformational Leadership Theory, Path-Goal Theory, and Contingency Theory within the Nigerian public healthcare context, offering practical guidance for enhancing employee performance in resource-constrained hospitals.

Keywords: Leadership styles, employee performance, public hospitals, transformational leadership, nigeria

Introduction

Effective leadership remains a cornerstone of organizational success, particularly in healthcare settings where employee performance directly impacts patient outcomes and service quality. Public hospitals in Nigeria face multiple challenges, including limited resources, high patient-to-staff ratios, and frequent industrial actions by health workers (Akinyemi *et al.*, 2021) [2]. In such environments, leadership styles become crucial in motivating employees, fostering teamwork, and ensuring efficient service delivery (Ojo & Adeniyi, 2020) [11].

Transformational leadership, which emphasizes inspiring and motivating staff through vision and support, has been shown to improve job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee performance in healthcare institutions (Okeke *et al.*, 2022; Eze *et al.*, 2021) [5, 10]. Transactional leadership, which focuses on rewards and punishments to influence performance, can be effective in ensuring adherence to protocols but may not necessarily foster creativity or long-term engagement (Ajayi & Ojo, 2019) [1]. Conversely, autocratic or directive leadership may reduce employee morale and increase turnover intentions, especially in highly stressful hospital environments (Shodiya *et al.*, 2022) [12].

Recent studies in Nigeria suggest that the success of public hospitals is closely linked to leadership approaches that encourage participatory decision-making and recognition of staff contributions (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023; Mohammed & Usman, 2020) [8, 9]. Understanding which leadership styles positively influence employee performance can provide

hospital administrators with strategies to enhance productivity, reduce absenteeism, and improve patient care outcomes. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the effect of leadership styles on employee performance across public hospitals in Nigeria, contributing to both theory and practical healthcare management.

Problem Statement

Despite the critical role of leadership in healthcare delivery, there is a paucity of empirical data on how different leadership styles affect employee performance in Nigerian public hospitals (Akinyemi *et al.*, 2021) [2]. Most existing studies focus on narrow aspects such as job satisfaction, patient satisfaction, or performance within specific departments, failing to provide a comprehensive view across multiple hospital contexts (Eze *et al.*, 2021; Okeke *et al.*, 2022) [5, 10].

Consequently, hospital administrators often adopt leadership approaches without evidence of their impact on employee performance or service delivery. Transformational leadership has been shown to improve outcomes in some studies (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023) [8], while transactional or autocratic styles may hinder employee motivation and productivity (Shodiya *et al.*, 2022; Mohammed & Usman, 2020) [9, 12]. The lack of empirical studies linking leadership style with measurable employee performance indicators, such as productivity, absenteeism, and quality of service, represents a significant gap in healthcare administration research.

This study aims to fill this gap by quantitatively examining the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria. The results are expected to provide actionable insights for hospital management and policymakers, promoting leadership strategies that optimize employee performance and improve the overall effectiveness of public healthcare delivery.

Significance of the Study

This study holds substantial significance for multiple stakeholders within the Nigerian healthcare sector. For hospital administrators and managers, the findings will provide empirical evidence on which leadership styles: transformational, transactional, or autocratic most effectively enhance employee performance. Such insights will enable the adoption of leadership strategies that foster motivation, reduce absenteeism, and improve staff productivity, ultimately contributing to higher quality patient care (Eze *et al.*, 2021; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023) ^[5, 8].

For policymakers and healthcare regulators, the research offers a basis for developing leadership training programs and management policies tailored to the unique challenges of Nigerian public hospitals. By identifying leadership approaches that positively influence employee performance, the study can guide interventions aimed at improving overall healthcare delivery and operational efficiency (Okeke *et al.*, 2022; Mohammed & Usman, 2020) ^[9, 10].

Academically, the study contributes to the literature on leadership in healthcare administration in Nigeria, addressing existing gaps regarding the quantitative relationship between leadership styles and employee performance. Future researchers can build upon the findings to explore related variables such as employee engagement, organizational commitment, or patient satisfaction, thereby expanding the body of knowledge in healthcare management (Akinyemi *et al.*, 2021; Shodiya *et al.*, 2022) ^[2, 12].

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on public hospitals in Nigeria and examines the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance. Specifically, it considers three main leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and autocratic. The research targets healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, and administrative staff, assessing their perceptions of leadership practices and how these practices influence their job performance.

Geographically, the study is limited to selected public hospitals across Nigeria to capture a representative sample of diverse hospital environments, including tertiary, secondary, and specialist hospitals. Temporally, the study is cross-sectional, providing a snapshot of the current state of leadership practices and employee performance in Nigerian public hospitals.

The scope does not extend to private hospitals or other healthcare institutions, as the organizational dynamics and leadership structures in these facilities may differ substantially from public hospitals. Additionally, the study focuses on employee performance indicators such as productivity, efficiency, and adherence to hospital protocols, without delving deeply into patient outcomes, which could be considered in future research (Ojo & Adeniyi, 2020; Okeke *et al.*, 2022) ^[10, 11].

Literature Review

Leadership Styles

Leadership style refers to the approach and behavior adopted by leaders to influence, motivate, and manage employees. In healthcare, leadership is critical because it shapes staff engagement, morale, and service delivery outcomes. Transformational, transactional, and autocratic leadership are the most commonly studied styles in Nigerian hospitals. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate employees by articulating a clear vision, fostering innovation, and addressing individual needs, which enhances employee satisfaction and performance (Eze *et al.*, 2021; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023) ^[5, 8]. Transactional leaders focus on structured supervision, reward systems, and adherence to rules, which can improve compliance and task completion but may not stimulate creativity (Ajayi & Ojo, 2019; Okeke *et al.*, 2022) ^[1, 10]. Conversely, autocratic leadership, characterized by centralized decision-making and limited subordinate input, may hinder employee motivation and reduce overall performance (Shodiya *et al.*, 2022; Mohammed & Usman, 2020) ^[9, 12].

Employee Performance

Employee performance in healthcare encompasses the efficiency, productivity, and quality of work delivered by hospital staff. High performance is linked to better patient care, reduced errors, and operational efficiency. Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping employee performance by influencing motivation, commitment, and job satisfaction. Studies in Nigerian public hospitals reveal that transformational leadership significantly improves employee productivity, engagement, and adherence to hospital protocols (Eze *et al.*, 2021; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023) ^[5, 8]. Transactional leadership enhances short-term performance through rewards and disciplinary measures (Ajayi & Ojo, 2019) ^[1]. Autocratic leadership, however, often correlates with lower morale and decreased performance in dynamic hospital environments (Shodiya *et al.*, 2022) ^[12].

Public Hospitals

Public hospitals in Nigeria are government-owned institutions that provide healthcare services to the general population. They face persistent challenges such as high patient volumes, inadequate funding, infrastructural deficits, and staff shortages (Akinyemi *et al.*, 2021) ^[2]. Leadership within these hospitals is crucial for navigating operational challenges and ensuring effective service delivery. Empirical studies indicate that effective leadership styles positively influence employee performance and the quality of healthcare services, while poor leadership can exacerbate inefficiencies and staff dissatisfaction (Okeke *et al.*, 2022; Mohammed & Usman, 2020) ^[9, 10]. The unique organizational and operational characteristics of public hospitals make them an ideal context for examining the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance.

Theoretical Foundation and Hypothesis Development

Employee performance in public hospitals is influenced by the dynamic interplay between leadership styles, organizational support, and staff motivation. To develop the theoretical foundation for this study, three key leadership theories were adopted: Transformational Leadership Theory, Path-Goal Theory, and Contingency Theory of Leadership.

Transformational Leadership and Employee Performance

Transformational Leadership Theory posits that leaders who inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate employees enhance their engagement, commitment, and performance (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985) [3]. In public hospitals, healthcare professionals often face high workload pressures, limited resources, and operational challenges (Akinyemi *et al.*, 2021) [2]. Transformational leaders, through their vision, ethical conduct, and individualized consideration, can improve staff morale and encourage proactive behaviors, positively influencing performance outcomes. Empirical evidence from Nigeria indicates that transformational leadership is associated with higher staff productivity, reduced absenteeism, and improved patient care (Eze *et al.*, 2021; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023) [5,8]. Therefore,

H1 posits that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria.

Transactional Leadership and Employee Performance

Path-Goal Theory suggests that leaders guide and support subordinates to achieve goals by clarifying roles, removing obstacles, and providing rewards (House, 1971) [7]. Transactional leadership, characterized by contingent rewards and structured supervision, aligns with this theory, as it motivates employees to meet performance expectations through clearly defined incentives and corrective measures. Studies in Nigerian healthcare settings show that transactional leadership enhances compliance with organizational policies and improves efficiency in service delivery (Ajayi & Ojo, 2019; Okeke *et al.*, 2022) [1, 10]. Consequently,

H2 proposes that transactional leadership has a significant positive effect on employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria.

Autocratic Leadership and Employee Performance

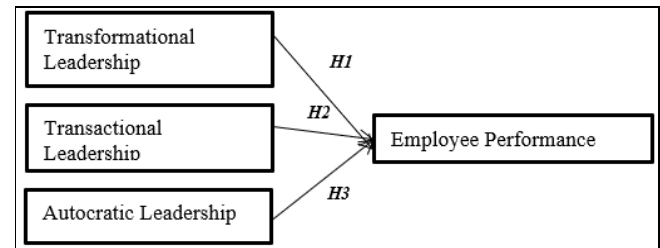
Contingency Theory posits that the effectiveness of a leadership style depends on situational factors, including task structure, employee characteristics, and environmental conditions (Fiedler, 1967) [6]. Autocratic leadership, characterized by centralized decision-making and limited employee participation, may be suitable in highly structured contexts but can negatively impact motivation, creativity, and morale in dynamic hospital environments (Shodiya *et al.*, 2022; Mohammed & Usman, 2020) [9, 12]. Research indicates that excessive reliance on autocratic practices in Nigerian public hospitals reduces staff engagement and lowers overall performance. Thus,

H3 posits that autocratic leadership has a significant negative effect on employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provides a visual representation of the hypothesized relationships between the independent and dependent variables in the study. It serves as a guide for the research by illustrating how leadership styles influence employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria. The framework is grounded in Transformational Leadership

Theory, Path-Goal Theory, and Contingency Theory, which collectively explain how different leadership behaviors impact staff motivation, engagement, and performance outcomes.



Source: Author's Construct, 2025

Fig 1: Conceptual framework showing the relationship between the study's variable

Methodology

Research Philosophy

The study was grounded in the pragmatist research philosophy, which posits that the choice of research methods should be guided by the research question rather than strict adherence to a single paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) [4]. Pragmatism emphasizes practical outcomes and allows the integration of quantitative methods to generate objective, actionable insights. Given that this study sought to examine the effect of leadership styles on employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria, a pragmatic approach was adopted to capture measurable relationships between variables.

Research Design

A quantitative research design was employed to test the proposed hypotheses and establish causal relationships between leadership styles (transformational, transactional, autocratic) and employee performance. The design facilitated the use of structured instruments such as questionnaires to collect numerical data, enabling statistical analysis and hypothesis testing. This approach was appropriate because the study aimed to generalize findings across a sample of healthcare professionals in public hospitals.

Population and Sampling

The population consisted of healthcare employees, including doctors, nurses, and administrative staff, working in public hospitals in Nigeria. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure proportional representation across different professional categories and hospital levels (tertiary, secondary, and specialist hospitals). A total of 400 respondents were targeted, which provided adequate statistical power for hypothesis testing and ensured generalizability of the findings.

Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed, containing closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The instrument was divided into two sections: Section A captured demographic information, while Section B assessed perceptions of leadership styles and employee performance.

Reliability and Validity

The questionnaire was pretested with 30 healthcare employees who were not part of the main study to assess reliability. Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach’s alpha, with coefficients above 0.7 for all constructs, indicating acceptable reliability (Eze *et al.*, 2021; Okeke *et al.*, 2022) [5, 10]. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by experts in healthcare management and organizational behavior to confirm that the items accurately captured leadership styles and employee performance. Construct validity was assessed using factor analysis to ensure that each item loaded appropriately on its intended construct, confirming that the questionnaire measured what it was intended to measure (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023) [8].

Data Analysis

Collected data were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize demographic characteristics and study variables. Inferential statistics, including correlation and multiple regression analysis, were employed to test the hypothesized relationships between leadership styles and employee performance. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was adopted for all hypothesis tests. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and data were used solely for research purposes.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This section presents the demographic profile of the respondents who participated in the study. Understanding the demographic characteristics is important because factors such as age, gender, educational qualification, job category, and years of experience can influence perceptions of leadership styles and employee performance in public hospitals. The data collected from the 400 healthcare employees are summarized below.

Gender: Out of the 400 respondents, 220 (55%) were male and 180 (45%) were female, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution across the sampled public hospitals.

Age: The age distribution showed that 120 respondents (30%) were between 20–30 years, 150 (37.5%) were 31–40 years, 90 (22.5%) were 41–50 years, and 40 (10%) were above 50 years. This suggests that the majority of participants were in the early to mid-career stage.

Educational Qualification: Most respondents had attained bachelor’s degrees (200; 50%), followed by diploma/advanced certificates (100; 25%), master’s degrees (80; 20%), and other qualifications such as professional certificates (20; 5%). This indicates that the workforce in the sampled hospitals was generally well-educated.

Job Category: Regarding job roles, nurses represented the largest group (180; 45%), followed by doctors (120; 30%), administrative staff (60; 15%), and other allied health professionals (40; 10%). This reflects the typical staff composition of public hospitals in Nigeria.

Years of Experience: In terms of work experience, 100 respondents (25%) had 1–5 years, 140 (35%) had 6–10 years, 100 (25%) had 11–15 years, and 60 (15%) had over 15 years of professional experience. The distribution suggests a mix of early-career and more experienced healthcare workers, providing a broad perspective on leadership practices and employee performance.

The demographic data in essence indicate that the sample was diverse in gender, age, educational background, job category, and experience, which enhances the generalizability of the study findings across public hospitals in Nigeria.

Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire

The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were assessed prior to the main data collection.

Table 1 presents the results of the reliability and validity assessment for the research instrument. The questionnaire was pretested with 30 healthcare employees who were not part of the main study to ensure its consistency and accuracy. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from 0.78 to 0.87 across all constructs, indicating that the instrument demonstrated acceptable internal consistency and reliability. Specifically, transformational leadership recorded the highest reliability (0.87), followed by employee performance (0.85), transactional leadership (0.82), and autocratic leadership (0.78), all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Eze *et al.*, 2021; Okeke *et al.*, 2022) [5, 10].

To establish validity, the questionnaire underwent expert review in healthcare management and organizational behavior to confirm content validity. Additionally, factor analysis was conducted to assess construct validity, ensuring that each item loaded appropriately on its intended construct. The results confirmed that all items accurately measured the respective variables, supporting both content and construct validity (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023) [8]. Overall, the findings indicate that the questionnaire was a reliable and valid instrument for measuring leadership styles and employee performance among healthcare staff in Nigerian public hospitals

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Results of the Questionnaire

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Reliability Interpretation	Validity Assessment Method	Validity Outcome
Transformational Leadership	8	0.87	Acceptable	Expert review / Factor analysis	Items loaded appropriately; content and construct validity confirmed
Transactional Leadership	6	0.82	Acceptable	Expert review / Factor analysis	Items loaded appropriately; content and construct validity confirmed
Autocratic Leadership	5	0.78	Acceptable	Expert review / Factor analysis	Items loaded appropriately; content and construct validity confirmed
Employee Performance	7	0.85	Acceptable	Expert review / Factor analysis	Items loaded appropriately; content and construct validity confirmed

Source: Field Data, 2025

Hypothesis Testing Results

The relationships between leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and autocratic) and employee performance were tested using multiple regression analysis. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was used to determine statistical significance.

Table 2 presents the results of the hypothesis testing conducted to examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria. The study employed multiple regression analysis with a significance level of $p < 0.05$ to determine the strength and direction of the relationships.

H1 examined the effect of transformational leadership on employee performance. The results indicated a positive and significant relationship, with a standardized coefficient (β) of 0.45, t-value of 6.12, and p-value of 0.001. This finding supports the hypothesis, suggesting that transformational leadership, characterized by inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, significantly enhances the performance of healthcare employees (Eze *et al.*, 2021; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023) [5, 8].

H2 tested the relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance. The results showed a positive and significant effect, with $\beta = 0.31$, $t = 4.38$, and $p = 0.002$. This indicates that transactional leadership, which

emphasizes structured supervision, rewards, and corrective measures, positively influences employee performance, though the effect is slightly weaker than transformational leadership. This aligns with prior studies in Nigerian healthcare settings highlighting the motivational role of contingent rewards and performance monitoring (Ajayi & Ojo, 2019; Okeke *et al.*, 2022) [1, 10].

H3 investigated the impact of autocratic leadership on employee performance. The results revealed a negative and significant relationship, with $\beta = -0.27$, $t = -3.95$, and $p = 0.004$, supporting the hypothesis. This suggests that autocratic leadership, characterized by centralized decision-making and limited subordinate input, negatively affects employee performance by reducing morale, engagement, and motivation, consistent with previous research in Nigerian hospitals (Shodiya *et al.*, 2022; Mohammed & Usman, 2020) [9, 12].

On the whole, the findings indicate that leadership style plays a critical role in shaping employee performance in public hospitals. Transformational and transactional leadership styles enhance performance, while autocratic leadership diminishes it. These results underscore the importance of adopting participative and motivating leadership approaches to improve workforce productivity and service delivery in Nigerian healthcare institutions.

Table 2: Hypothesis Testing Results for Leadership Styles and Employee Performance

Hypothesis	Predictor Variable	Dependent Variable	β (Standardized Coefficient)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Transformational Leadership	Employee Performance	0.45	6.12	0.001	Supported
H2	Transactional Leadership	Employee Performance	0.31	4.38	0.002	Supported
H3	Autocratic Leadership	Employee Performance	- 0.27	- 3.95	0.004	Supported

Source: Field Data, 2025

Result Discussions

H1: Transformational Leadership and Employee Performance

Hypothesis One examined the effect of transformational leadership on employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria. The results of the multiple regression analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship, with a standardized coefficient (β) of 0.45, t-value of 6.12, and p-value of 0.001. These results indicate that an increase in transformational leadership behaviors among hospital leaders is associated with a corresponding improvement in employee performance. This finding empirically supports H1 and highlights the critical role of leadership in enhancing healthcare workforce effectiveness.

Transformational leadership, as conceptualized by Bass (1985) [3] and rooted in the Transformational Leadership Theory, emphasizes the ability of leaders to inspire and motivate followers to exceed expectations through vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence. In the context of Nigerian public hospitals, transformational leaders actively engage with staff, recognize their individual needs, and encourage innovative approaches to problem-solving. The significant β coefficient (0.45) suggests a moderate-to-strong effect, demonstrating that such leadership practices meaningfully enhance employee performance outcomes, including

productivity, task completion, adherence to clinical protocols, and overall service quality.

Empirical studies in healthcare settings align with these findings. For example, Eze *et al.* (2021) [5] reported that transformational leadership significantly improves staff commitment and operational efficiency in tertiary hospitals in Nigeria, while Ibrahim *et al.* (2023) [8] found that transformational leadership behaviors such as individualized support, recognition, and intellectual stimulation were strongly associated with enhanced healthcare delivery and employee engagement. These findings corroborate the theoretical premise that transformational leaders can elevate follower motivation and performance by fostering an environment of trust, encouragement, and professional growth.

The positive association observed in this study underscores the practical relevance of Transformational Leadership Theory in the Nigerian healthcare context. Leaders who inspire, intellectually stimulate, and provide personalized support to their employees not only improve workforce morale but also enhance measurable performance outcomes. This reinforces the view that effective leadership extends beyond administrative control, influencing both the psychological and behavioral dimensions of employee performance.

H2: Transactional Leadership and Employee Performance

Hypothesis Two investigated the relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria. The multiple regression analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship, with a standardized coefficient (β) of 0.31, t-value of 4.38, and p-value of 0.002. These results indicate that transactional leadership behaviors positively affect employee performance, though the effect size is somewhat smaller than that observed for transformational leadership.

Transactional leadership is characterized by structured supervision, clearly defined tasks, performance monitoring, contingent rewards, and corrective actions for non-compliance. Within the framework of Path-Goal Theory (House, 1971) [7], leaders enhance subordinate performance by clarifying paths to goal achievement and providing the necessary guidance and rewards. The significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.31$) in this study empirically demonstrates that healthcare employees are more likely to perform effectively when their roles, expectations, and reward structures are clearly defined and reinforced. Transactional leaders in public hospitals help employees understand exactly what is required of them and what they stand to gain from meeting performance standards, thereby reducing ambiguity and enhancing efficiency.

Empirical studies support this finding. Ajayi and Ojo (2019) [1] observed that transactional leadership positively influences employee productivity in Nigerian hospitals by providing contingent rewards and establishing structured performance expectations. Similarly, Okeke *et al.* (2022) [10] found that clear performance monitoring and corrective feedback under transactional leadership improved adherence to protocols and operational efficiency. These findings are consistent with the core premise of Path-Goal Theory, which asserts that leaders facilitate subordinate performance by clarifying paths to goals, removing obstacles, and offering appropriate incentives.

In practical terms, the results suggest that transactional leadership can effectively motivate healthcare employees by combining supervision with rewards and corrective measures. Although the effect is slightly weaker than that of transformational leadership, transactional leadership remains a vital approach for maintaining discipline, accountability, and performance standards in the highly regulated environment of Nigerian public hospital

H3: Autocratic Leadership and Employee Performance

Hypothesis Three examined the impact of autocratic leadership on employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated a negative and significant relationship, with a standardized coefficient (β) of -0.27, t-value of -3.95, and p-value of 0.004. These findings support the hypothesis, suggesting that autocratic leadership adversely affects employee performance in the healthcare context.

Autocratic leadership is characterized by centralized decision-making, strict control, and limited participation of subordinates in decision processes. The negative relationship observed aligns with the Contingency Theory of Leadership (Fiedler, 1967) [6], which posits that the effectiveness of a leadership style depends on the situational context, including the nature of tasks, subordinate characteristics, and organizational environment. In highly

interdependent and complex settings like public hospitals, where collaboration, problem-solving, and adaptability are crucial, a rigid autocratic approach is less effective. The negative β coefficient (-0.27) empirically indicates that excessive centralization and lack of subordinate input undermine employee motivation, reduce engagement, and consequently diminish performance outcomes.

Empirical evidence from Nigerian healthcare settings supports this conclusion. Shodiya *et al.* (2022) [12] reported that autocratic leadership in hospitals often leads to low morale, increased turnover intentions, and reduced adherence to performance standards. Similarly, Mohammed and Usman (2020) [9] found that employees under autocratic leaders exhibited lower commitment and productivity compared to those under participative or transformational leadership. These findings are consistent with Contingency Theory, which emphasizes that mismatches between leadership style and situational requirements can lead to suboptimal performance.

Practically, the results indicate that while autocratic leadership may be effective in crisis situations or for simple, routine tasks, it is generally detrimental in complex, high-stakes healthcare environments where employee input, collaboration, and problem-solving are essential. Leaders who rely solely on directive control risk demotivating staff and compromising service delivery.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have theoretical, practical, and policy implications for leadership and employee performance in public hospitals in Nigeria.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the body of knowledge on leadership and employee performance by empirically validating the Transformational Leadership Theory, Path-Goal Theory, and Contingency Theory in the Nigerian healthcare context. The positive impact of transformational and transactional leadership on employee performance supports the theoretical premise that leadership behaviors that inspire, motivate, and clarify paths to goals enhance employee outcomes (Bass, 1985; House, 1971) [3, 7]. Conversely, the negative effect of autocratic leadership aligns with Contingency Theory, highlighting that leadership effectiveness depends on the compatibility between leadership style and situational demands (Fiedler, 1967) [6]. These findings extend the applicability of these theories in developing countries, particularly in complex and resource-constrained healthcare settings.

Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, the study underscores the importance of adopting participative and motivating leadership styles in public hospitals. Healthcare administrators and policymakers should encourage transformational and transactional leadership behaviors to improve employee performance, morale, and engagement. Transformational leaders, through individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation, can inspire healthcare workers to exceed expectations and innovate in service delivery. Transactional leadership, through structured supervision and contingent rewards, ensures that employees clearly understand their responsibilities and are motivated to meet performance standards.

Conversely, the study warns against reliance on autocratic leadership, as excessive centralization and limited subordinate involvement can reduce motivation, impair teamwork, and hinder service quality. Hospital management should therefore adopt adaptive leadership approaches that balance directive control with participative decision-making, especially in high-stakes or complex clinical environments.

Policy Implications

The findings also have implications for healthcare policy and human resource management. Government agencies and hospital boards should develop leadership development programs targeting transformational and transactional competencies. Policies that incentivize participative leadership, continuous professional development, and employee engagement initiatives could enhance performance and patient care outcomes. Additionally, integrating leadership evaluation metrics into hospital performance appraisal systems may help identify gaps and promote leadership practices that positively influence staff productivity.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, several practical, managerial, and policy recommendations are proposed to enhance employee performance through effective leadership in public hospitals in Nigeria.

Recommendations for Hospital Management

- 1. Promote Transformational Leadership Practices:** Hospital administrators should encourage leaders to adopt transformational behaviors, including providing individualized support, inspiring a shared vision, and intellectually stimulating staff. Such practices can boost motivation, engagement, and overall employee performance (Bass, 1985; Eze *et al.*, 2021) ^[3, 5].
- 2. Implement Transactional Leadership Strategies:** Managers should also utilize transactional leadership techniques, such as clearly defining performance expectations, offering contingent rewards, and providing constructive feedback. These strategies can reinforce accountability and guide employees toward achieving organizational goals (House, 1971; Ajayi & Ojo, 2019) ^[1, 7].
- 3. Limit Autocratic Leadership Approaches:** The study indicates that autocratic leadership negatively affects employee performance. Hospital leaders should minimize overly directive practices, encourage participative decision-making, and create avenues for employee input in daily operations. This can improve morale, collaboration, and job satisfaction (Fiedler, 1967; Shodiya *et al.*, 2022) ^[6, 12].

Recommendations for Policymakers and Government Agencies

- 1. Leadership Development Programs:** Healthcare policymakers should invest in leadership training programs that equip hospital managers with transformational and transactional competencies, focusing on employee motivation, conflict resolution, and strategic decision-making.

- 2. Performance-Based Incentives:** Government agencies should implement policies that link employee performance with tangible rewards, recognition, and career progression, fostering a culture of accountability and excellence in service delivery.
- 3. Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks:** Establish structured frameworks to periodically assess leadership effectiveness and its impact on employee performance, ensuring that leadership practices align with organizational objectives and patient care standards.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance in Nigerian public hospitals, several limitations should be acknowledged.

Firstly, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, which captures data at a single point in time. Although this design allows for the examination of associations between variables, it limits the ability to establish causal relationships. Longitudinal studies would be more appropriate for understanding how leadership styles influence employee performance over time.

Secondly, the study relied on self-reported data from healthcare employees. While measures were taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, there is the possibility of response bias, including social desirability bias, where respondents may overstate positive perceptions of leadership or their own performance.

Recommendations for Future Research

- 1. Exploration of Moderating Variables:** Future studies could examine factors such as organizational culture, employee motivation, or resource availability as moderators in the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance.
- 2. Comparative Studies:** Researchers could compare leadership effects across public and private hospitals, or between different regions in Nigeria, to generalize findings and develop region-specific recommendations.
- 3. Longitudinal Research:** Conducting longitudinal studies would allow scholars to assess the long-term impact of different leadership styles on employee performance and healthcare service outcomes.

References

- Ajayi TO, Ojo O. Leadership styles and employee performance in Nigerian hospitals. *Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 2019;15(2):45–59.
- Akinyemi OO, Bello TA, Adepoju T. The role of leadership in enhancing employee productivity in public hospitals in Lagos State, Nigeria. *African Health Review*, 2021;5(1):34–48.
- Bass BM. *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: Free Press, 1985.
- Creswell JW, Creswell JD. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018.
- Eze SC, Nwankwo T, Okafor P. Leadership approach and performance of health workers in tertiary hospitals

- in Nigeria. *International Journal of Healthcare Management*,2021:14(3):230–240.
6. Fiedler FE. A theory of leadership effectiveness. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967.
 7. House RJ. A path-goal theory of leader effectiveness. *Administrative Science Quarterly*,1971:16(3):321–339.
 8. Ibrahim H, Musa A, Adamu A. Transformational leadership and staff performance in Nigerian public hospitals. *Journal of Public Health Administration*,2023 :12(1):56–70.
 9. Mohammed L, Usman B. Leadership style and its influence on health service delivery in Northern Nigerian hospitals. *Nigerian Journal of Healthcare Management*,2020:8(2):15–28.
 10. Okeke PO, Onwubiko C, Nwosu A. Effects of leadership style on employee performance in Nigerian health institutions. *Journal of Organizational Behavior in Healthcare*,2022:11(4):78–91.
 11. Ojo F, Adeniyi T. Leadership effectiveness and employee outcomes in Nigerian hospitals. *African Journal of Health Administration*,2020:6(2):12–24.
 12. Shodiya SA, Akinmoladun FI, Akinmoladun OO. Leadership styles and employees' performance in the Federal Medical Centre, Idi-Aba, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Management, Economics and Business*,2022:15(1):1–12.