

INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP STYLES ON EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE IN IMO STATE UNIVERSITY, OWERRI

Obianuju J. Anumba^{1*}, Oluchi U. Ogunedo² & Onyekachi B. Onyemene³

^{1,2,3}Department of Public Administration, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria

*whiteyjosy@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: This study examined the influence of leadership on employees' performance with a focus on Imo State University (IMSU), Owerri. The specific objectives of the study are to: ascertain how democratic leadership style influences employees' performance at Imo State University; verify the extent autocratic leadership style influences employees' performance at Imo State University; and examine how transformational leadership style influences employees' performance at Imo State University. The study adopted the path-goal theory of leadership as the framework for analysis. The survey research design was utilized. The population of the study consists of 1,667 IMSU staff, and the sample size of 323 was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. The multi-stage sampling technique was utilized for the study. Data were collected using a questionnaire instrument, and descriptive statistics (mean) were used for analysis. The study revealed that the democratic leadership style has a considerable positive influence on employees' performance, and the transformational leadership style has a notable positive influence on employees' performance. However, the autocratic leadership style does not have a considerable positive influence on employees' performance in Imo State University, Owerri. The study recommended less emphasis on autocratic leadership styles, more emphasis on workers' participation, innovation and creativity; and effective training on the issue of leadership.

Keywords: Leadership, Democratic Leadership, Autocratic Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Employee Performance

INTRODUCTION

The success of any organization depends on the level of employees' performance, and the effectiveness of such performance can be determined by the influence of the leadership. Leadership is an essential factor for the realization of organizational goals and progress. Leadership is necessary for direction, control, maintenance, and motivation of employees to realize organizational goals. Ariussanto et al. (2020, p.1) argued that "managing human resources with good leadership and work environment will result in good human resource performance." In addition, Makanbe and Moeng (2019, p. 40) stated that "it is vital that an organization places unbridled focus on its leadership because it is the leader's decision that may decide the difference between the success and failure of an organization." In this contemporary era, where digital transformation is shaping public service delivery, the role of leadership has become a strong force in facilitating innovation, managing resistance, and realizing organizational goals (Adeleye et al., 2025).

Leadership deals with the ability to influence, inspire and motivate employees to take a course of action towards the realization of organizational goals. In the current business world, leadership is recognised not only as management of tasks but also as inspiring and helping employees to realize higher levels of performance (Adilan et al., 2025). Leadership is not only seen as authority but also as a relational and behavioural process that influences employee behaviours, commitment, and productivity. Applying the right leadership style enables top organizational leaders or managers to establish cordial relationships, achieve respect, motivate their subordinates and ensure a conducive task environment, while a wrong and unpopular leadership may lead to dissatisfaction, disengagement, demotivation and high employee turnover (Akpu et al., 2021; Njoku, 2022).

Empirical studies have indicated a significant relationship between leadership and employees' performance in an organization. Daramola (2025) revealed democratic leadership style has a significant effect on employees' performance. Afolayan et al. (2025) indicated a significant positive impact of strategic leadership on organizational performance, and the study of Adilan et al. (2025) shows a significant positive relationship between leadership style and employees' performance. Studies have indicated that leadership styles significantly affect employee productivity, service delivery, and organizational efficiency. Studies in Nigerian tertiary education show that leadership styles directly influence employee productivity, such as service quality and timeliness (Akwaowo & Amah, 2025). According to Akwaowo and Amah (2025, p. 2), "in the context of tertiary education, leadership styles have far-reaching implications on employee motivation, service delivery, and overall institutional performance."

Imo State University (IMSU), Owerri, is one of the state-owned universities in Nigeria charged with the responsibility for promoting educational development in tertiary education. IMSU, like other universities, is a complex organization with an increasing student population, academic and non-academic staff charged with different responsibilities and several departments and Faculties/directorates. To successfully realize educational goals and progress requires effective leadership. Imo State University is managed by several leaders at different levels. At the top management, IMSU is headed by the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellors and other organizational leaders. At the middle management level, organizational leaders involve the Deans in charge of Faculties and the Directors heading several Directorates, while at the lower managerial level, there are Heads of Department and other organizational leaders. The effectiveness of the leadership in IMSU determines the level of employees' performance. Therefore, this study examines the leadership styles and their effect on the performance of employees.

Statement of the Problem

Leadership is crucial to enhancing employees' performance and organizational success. However, most public universities in Nigeria, including Imo State University in particular, face challenges related to job satisfaction, commitment, and motivation, which undermine employees' performance and organizational productivity (Akwaowo & Amah, 2025; Udu et al., 2021). These problems can be associated with the issue of ineffective application of leadership styles, where top administrators or leaders failed to provide a conducive environment for effective work performance and harmonious relationships (Yusuf-Habeeb & Ibrahim, 2017). This also contributed to low staff productivity, delayed services, and complaints about service quality, bureaucratic delays,

inadequate supervision, and inconsistent reward systems. These challenges have raised questions about the adequacy of leadership approaches in these institutions (Akwaowo & Amah, 2025).

Although management has made efforts to organise training and development programmes (seminars, workshops, conferences, etc.) to improve staff leadership, it appears that poor application of leadership styles has not significantly affected employees' performance. Also, there are limited studies on leadership styles and employees' performance in public tertiary education institutions, such as Imo State University, Owerri. Therefore, this study examines how leadership styles affect employees' performance in Imo State University, Owerri.

Objectives of the Study

The study examined the influence of leadership on employees' performance in Imo State University, Owerri. The specific objectives are to:

- i. ascertain how democratic leadership style influences employees' performance in Imo State University.
- ii. verify the extent autocratic leadership style influences employees' performance in Imo State University; and
- iii. examine how transformational leadership style influences employees' performance in Imo State University.

Research Questions

- i. How does the democratic leadership style influence employees' performance in Imo State University?
- ii. To what extent does the autocratic leadership style influence employees' performance in Imo State University?
- iii. How does the transformational leadership style influence employees' performance in Imo State University?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review of this study comprises the conceptual review and empirical review

Conceptual Review

Concept of Leadership

The concept of leadership has been defined in several ways. Akanwa (2019, as cited in Nwapi, 2024) defined leadership as "a process of influence on a group in a particular situation at a given point in time and a specific set of circumstances that stimulate people to strive willingly to attain organisational objectives." (p. 51). According to Ogbeidi (2022 as cited in Nwapi, 2024, p. 52), "leadership is a process of social influence by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs a country in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent." Leadership is

the process of influencing individuals to realise common objectives through a combination of vision, strategic direction and mutual engagement (Adeleye et al., 2025). The Center for Creative Leadership (2023, as cited in Adeleye et al., 2025) noted that leadership goes beyond the confines of formal authority or positional power and instead emphasizes the ability to mobilize others towards a common purpose by fostering alignment, trust and commitment within teams or organizations. Furthermore, Nwankwo and Ibiye-Benson (2025, p. 173) see leadership as “a process of social influence that maximizes the efforts of others toward the achievement of a goal.”

According to Yukl (2006, as cited in Dembele & Unsal, 2025), leadership is defined as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about the needs and how to satisfy them, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish objectives.” Leadership is the ability to train, coach, and guide a group towards the actualization of objectives (Dembele & Unsal, 2025). Furthermore, Yukl (2017, as cited in Daramola, 2025) “leadership entails not only guiding but also enabling and inspiring individuals to contribute effectively to organizational objectives.” Therefore, leadership goes beyond the exercise of authority to encompass the capacity to mobilize people toward a common goal (Daramola, 2025). The concept of leadership can be viewed as both a process and a relationship. As a process, leadership means the application of influence to align organizational members to realize collective purpose; and as a relationship, leadership thrives on trust, communication, and mutual respect between leaders and followers (Daramola, 2025).

Leadership Style

Leadership style involves different approaches that leaders use to inspire, influence, and motivate; guide and encourage; and help their team realise organisational goals (Iqra & Tahir, 2025). Du Brin (2001, as cited in Udovita, 2020, p. 17) defined leadership style as “a relatively consistent pattern of behaviour that characterizes a leader.” This means that leadership styles are the behaviour regularly or consistently exhibited by organization leader. According to Ojokuku et al (2012, as cited in Otieno & Njoroge, 2019), leadership style is viewed as the net display of traits, skills and behaviours that leaders use when interrelating with their inferiors” (p. 117). In addition, Akpa et al (2021) elaborated on the concept of leadership style as:

The ways during which managers set about exercising their powers and spending orders in their units, departments and sections so as to accomplish their set objectives. It considers the world of designing, organizing and coordinating of labour and therefore the workforce as far as their roles are concerned, and above all, about how the managers relate to and affect other co-workers at an equivalent level and team members.

They further stated that the subsets of leadership styles include attitudes and behaviours, such as the knowledge the manager passes, how he passes it, the instance they set, their body language, and their general conduct (Akpa et al., 2021, p. 47). Leadership style embodies the behavioural patterns leaders exhibit to communicate expectations, exercise authority, and inspire employees towards organizational objectives (Daramola, 2025).

Performance

Pradeep and Prabhu (2011, as cited in Daramola, 2025, p. 2285) defined performance as “the measurable outcomes of employee effort, shaped by knowledge, skills, and contextual factors.” According to Brumbach (2018, as cited in Nwapi, 2024), performance can be seen as both behaviour and results. Behaviour comes from the performer and transforms performance from abstraction to action. Not just the instrument for results, behaviour also involves outcomes in their own right – the product of mental and physical effort applied to tasks and can be judged apart from results. Rotundo and Sackett (2002 as cited in Dembele & Unsal, 2025) noted that “job performance is considered as actions and behaviours which contribute to the achievement of an organization’s objectives and which contribute to the achievement and which are under an individual’s control” (p. 271). In addition, Dembele and Unsal (2025, p. 271) defined performance “as the qualifications of an employee, his level of productivity, his effectiveness, , and effort he does to achieve goals in the workplace.” Islami et al. (2018, as cited in Nwankwo & Ibiye-Benson, 2025) see performance as a mix of employees’ efficiency and effectiveness in their day-to-day activities that enables them to satisfy the expectations of their stakeholders. Work performance is the acts exhibited by employees in the course of their tasks that are meant to either improve or accomplish the organization’s aim (Nwankwo & Ibiye-Benson, 2025).

Empirical Review of Literature

In this study, we reviewed some of the related studies. Adilan et al. (2025) studied leadership style and employee performance using regression analysis. The specific objectives of the study were to ascertain the relationship between leadership style and employees’ performance and identify the most preferred leadership style for improving employees’ performance. The study adopted a descriptive-correlational research design, and the questionnaire instrument was utilised. The mean, Pearson Correlation Coefficient, and multiple linear regression were used to analyse the collected data. The study revealed that there is a positive correlation between all leadership styles (transformational, laissez-faire, authoritarian, and transactional) and employees’ performance. The study also revealed that transformational leadership is the most preferred leadership style by employees. The study suggested that for effective training for transformational leadership, the introduction of autonomy and encouragement of a positive work environment are necessary.

The research conducted by Filani et al. (2025) examined transformational leadership style and employee performance in selected hotels in Lagos metropolis. The study aimed to examine the effect of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and employee recognition on employee performance in the selected hotels in Lagos metropolis. With the utilization of a questionnaire for data collection and multiple regression for data analysis, the study found that all the dimensions of transformational leadership style (idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualised consideration and employee recognition) have a significant positive effect on employee performance in the selected hotels in Lagos Metropolis. The research recommended adequate investment in training for the development of transformational leadership. Other recommendations are encouragement of creativity, employee recognition and a supportive and collaborative work environment. The above study indicated that transformational leadership style is vital for the success of any organization.

In another study, Nwapi (2024) looked at the relationship between leadership styles and organizational performance in the Abia State Oil Producing Area Development Commission. The objectives of this study were to examine the relationship between democratic leadership style and employee discipline, and verify the relationship between autocratic leadership style and employee retention. The questionnaire was used to gather data from 73 respondents, and the analysis was done using the percentage method. The research found that the democratic leadership style has a significant relationship with employee discipline, and there is a significant relationship between the autocratic leadership style and employee retention in the organisation under study.

Afolayan et al. (2025) studied strategic leadership and organizational performance in selected multinational corporations (MNCs) in Nigeria. The descriptive survey was utilized for sampling the population of 2707 senior employees. The structured questionnaire was adopted to collect data for the study, and the inferential statistics, specifically the simple regression analysis, were used for data analysis. The study revealed that coaching effectiveness has a significant positive impact on organizational performance, and team productivity has a significant positive effect on organisational performance. The study suggested for institutionalization of structured training programmes for skill and knowledge development and the prioritization of team productivity in order to facilitate the culture of collaboration, innovation and accountability.

In another study, Dastane (2020) investigated the effect of leadership styles on employees' performance with a moderating role of gender. The specific objectives of the study were to: find out the effect of transformational, laissez-faire, democratic and autocratic leadership styles on employees' performance in Malaysia; and verify if gender moderates the impact of transformational, laissez-faire, autocratic and democratic leadership styles on employees' performance in selected multi-national companies in Malaysia. Data were collected through a questionnaire instrument. The confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling and moderation analysis were utilized for data analysis. The study revealed that transformational, laissez-faire, and democratic leadership styles have a significant positive impact on employees' performance in selected multinational corporations, and autocratic leadership style has a negative and insignificant impact on employees' performance. In addition, the study shows that the impact of transformational and laissez-faire leadership styles on employees' performance was fully moderated by gender, while the impact of democratic leadership was partially moderated by gender and the effect of autocratic leadership style on employees' performance was not moderated by gender.

In addition, Otieno and Njoroge (2019) studied the effect of leadership styles on employees' performance at the Technical University of Kenya. Specifically, the study aimed to ascertain the impact of transformational, transactional, laissez-faire and autocratic leadership styles on employees' performance in the Technical University of Kenya. The stratified random sampling and survey design were utilized and data were collected through a questionnaire instrument. The study revealed that transformational and transactional leadership styles have a significant positive effect on employees' performance in the Technical University of Kenya. In addition, the study revealed that authoritative and laissez-faire leadership have a negative effect on employees' performance at the Technical University of Kenya. They recommended that leaders need to possess an inspiring

vision that will change employees towards bringing innovation and contribute effectively to organizational success.

The research conducted by Makambe and Moeng (2019) examined the influence of leadership styles on employees' performance in selected commercial banks in Botswana. The objectives of the study were to examine the effects of transactional, transformational, and participative leadership styles on employees' performance. The survey research design was adopted and the questionnaire instrument was used for data collection. Factor analysis, regression analysis, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to analyse the data. The study revealed that transactional and participative leadership styles had a positive and significant effect on employees' performance, and the transformational leadership styles had an insignificant and positive effect on employees' performance.

In another research, Daramola (2025) investigated the impact of leadership styles on employee performance in selected tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study aimed to verify the impact of autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles on staff performance. The structured questionnaire was adopted for data collection. The descriptive (mean and percentage) and inferential (regression and correlation analysis) statistics were utilized for data analysis. The study found that autocratic leadership style has a negative influence on employee performance; democratic leadership style has a significant positive effect on employee performance; and laissez-faire leadership has no significant effect on employee performance. The study recommended the promotion of participatory management and less emphasis on the autocratic leadership style.

Furthermore, Nwankwo and Ibiye-Benson (2025) looked at leadership styles and employees' performance in Rivers State Ministry of Health. The structured questionnaire was used to gather data. The mean and chi-square were adopted for data analysis. The research indicated that bureaucratic, democratic, transformational, strategic, transactional, laissez-faire, visionary, etc. leadership styles are observed in the organisation; and leadership styles have a significant positive effect on employees' performance. Also, the study revealed that strong negative emotions, ethical issues, lack of motivation, inefficiency, leadership instability, ambiguous roles and conflicts among staff are challenges to leadership styles for improvement of employees' performance in Rivers State Ministry of Health.

Gap in Literature

A careful review of the empirical studies reveals that, despite extensive scholarly attention to leadership styles and employee performance, some gaps persist in the literature, thereby justifying the present study on Imo State University (IMSU), Owerri. These gaps are based on contextual, geographical and conceptual or variable-specific gap.

First, there is a contextual gap in existing studies. Most of the studies reviewed were concentrated in non-academic or mixed organizational settings such as multinational corporations, commercial banks, hotels, and public agencies. While a few studies examined tertiary institutions, which are either conducted outside Nigeria or lacked a specific focus on state-owned universities. Nigerian public universities, particularly state-owned institutions like IMSU, operate within unique

administrative, political, and resource-constrained environments. These peculiarities influence leadership dynamics and employee performance differently from private or federal institutions. Therefore, the limited empirical focus on leadership styles within Nigerian state universities constitutes a significant gap that this study aims to fill.

Second, based on the geographical gap, it shows that eventhough some studies were conducted within Nigeria, they are largely concentrated in other regions and states. There is a noticeable absence of empirical evidence from Imo State, particularly regarding IMSU. Therefore, findings from other regions cannot be generalized without caution. This study therefore contributes by providing location-specific evidence from Imo State University Owerri.

Third, a conceptual and variable-specific gap is evident. This study narrows its focus to three key leadership styles—democratic, autocratic, and transformational—and specifically examines their direct effects on employees' performance, thereby offering a more precise analytical framework.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Path-Goal theory of leadership as the framework for analysis. The theory was first introduced by Martins Evans in 1970 and reinterpreted by Robert House in 1971. The theory was further expanded by House and Mitchell in 1974 (Nwankwo & Ibiye-Benson, 2025). This theory explains how leaders influence employees' or subordinates' motivation and performance. The theory is based on the premise that effective leaders define clear paths to goal attainment, eliminate barriers that hinder progress, and provide both encouragement and resources to support their followers (Daramola, 2025). Therefore, leaders influence subordinate performance by clarifying the behaviours that will lead to desired rewards (goals) (Griffin & Moorhead, 2007). The theory shows how leaders motivate subordinates to realize goals by clarifying the "path" to those goals and removing obstacles along the way.

The theory argued that the level of leadership effectiveness is based on the interaction between four leadership styles and several situational factors that can make one leadership style more relevant than others. Theory identified four types of leadership style which include: Directive leadership, supportive leadership, participative leadership and achievement-oriented leadership. Directive leadership involves letting the subordinates know exactly what they are expected to do, the work to be done, specific direction and guidance to be followed and how to achieve the task. Supportive leadership shows concern for the needs and interests of subordinates and creates a friendly environment. Participative leadership encourages the involvement of subordinates in decision making, get their inputs and share responsibility. Achievement-oriented leadership set challenging goals for subordinate in order to achieve outstanding performance towards achieving organizational goal.

This theory further stated that leadership behaviour is moderated by two main situational variables or factors that will lead to subordinates' motivation and satisfaction. These are: Personal characteristics of subordinates and environmental factor. The personal characteristics of subordinates include locus of control, experience, perceived ability, need for achievement, and need for clarity. Environmental factor involves task structure, formal authority system and work group.

Application of the Theory to the Study

This theory is relevant to this study because it enabled us to explain how the situational factors affect the application of leadership styles for the enhancement of employees' performance in Imo State University. In applying this theory, Imo State University as one of the tertiary education in Nigeria is a highly hierarchically structured and bureaucratic organization that cannot succeed without leadership at different levels or positions of authority. Adoption of directive leadership is needed for situation where compliance with regulations and academic standards is relevant. Supportive leadership style is relevant to enhance employees' level of motivation, and participative leadership style is suitable for when the input of staff of the university is needed for improvement of academic development. The achievement-oriented leadership sets high performance standards and motivates staff to pursue excellence in research and teaching. Therefore, the extent to which the democratic (participative), transformational (supportive and achievement-oriented) and autocratic (directive) leadership styles are applied will affect the performance of employees in Imo State University, Owerri.

Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for this study, where the researchers asked questions to a sample of the population of staff in Imo State University, Owerri. The population of the study is 1667 of the staff of Imo State University. It consists of seven hundred and fifty (750) academic staff and nine hundred and seventeen (917) non-academic staff. The sample size was 323 which were determined using the Taro Yamene formula. The formula is represented as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Population under study

e = Error margin

I = Constant figure

$$n = \frac{1667}{1 + 1667(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1667}{1 + 1667(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{1667}{1 + 4.167}$$

$$n = \frac{1667}{5.167}$$

$$n = 322.62 = 323$$

Therefore, the sample size is 323.

The multi-stage sampling technique was utilized for this study. In the first stage, the study adopted stratified sampling, grouping respondents into two strata: academic and non-academic. After the categorization of the respondents into two groups, the second stage was simple random sampling, where the study randomly selected Faculties and departments or units. In the third stage, the quota staging was adopted. The study set quotas to select respondents from each department and faculty. The researchers allocated the number of respondents to be sampled in each of the selected faculties and departments. In the fourth stage, the study used convenience sampling to select respondents. The researchers distributed the questionnaire to IMSU staff who were available in the selected faculties and departments.

Data were collected using the questionnaire instrument as the primary source. The questionnaire was designed in two sections. Section A, which deals with the demographic information, and Section B involves questions meant to measure the objectives of the study. The five-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UN), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) was utilised. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive methods, specifically the mean. The questionnaire was validated by two experts, and necessary corrections were made to ensure that the questionnaire items really measure the objectives of the study. The reliability test was conducted using the test-retest method. The result indicated a Pearson correlation coefficient of $(r) = 0.87$, which shows a highly reliable research instrument.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data collected in the field were presented and analyzed to address the research questions posed in this study. 323 questionnaires were distributed, and 291 were successfully retrieved.

Research Question One: How does the democratic leadership style influence employees' performance in Imo State University?

Table 1: Respondents' Views on Democratic Leadership Style and Employees' Performance

S/N	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	\bar{x}	Remarks
1	Employees perform better when their opinions are considered by management in your workplace	85	131	21	28	26	3.75	Agreed
2	Open communication between management and employees improves the employees' job performance	62	141	43	31	14	3.75	Agreed
3	Employees' involvement in decision-making increases their commitment to organizational goals in your workplace	71	145	29	30	16	3.77	Agreed
4.	The inclusive decision-making approach by the supervisors or heads helps workers complete tasks more efficiently in your organization	54	156	38	30	13	3.71	Agreed
5.	Employees produce higher quality work when their opinions are considered by their supervisor / superiors in your organization	66	124	27	40	34	3.50	Agreed
6.	Open communication with my supervisor / superior reduces delays in completing assignments in your work place.	49	101	53	59	29	3.28	Agreed
7	I am more creative when I am involved in decision-making processes.	89	151	14	25	12	3.92	Agreed
Average Mean =							3.66	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Key: \bar{x} = Mean, C = Cut-off Point (3.00), N = Number of Respondents. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree, N = Neutral, S = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, $C \geq 3.00$ – Agreed; $C \leq 3.00$ – Disagreed; R = remark

From the above table, item 1 indicates that the majority of the respondents agreed that employees perform better when their opinions are considered by management ($\bar{x} = 3.75$), while item 2 shows that open communication between management and employees improves the employees' job performance ($\bar{x} = 3.75$). In addition, item 3 indicates that employees' involvement in decision-making increases their commitment to organisational goals ($\bar{x} = 3.77$), and item 4 shows that an inclusive decision-making approach by the supervisors or heads helps workers complete tasks more efficiently ($\bar{x} = 3.71$). Furthermore, item 5 shows that employees produce higher quality work when their opinions are considered by their supervisor/superiors ($\bar{x} = 3.50$), while item 6 indicated that open communication with supervisor / superior reduces delays in completion of assignments ($\bar{x} = 3.28$); and item 7 indicated that employees are more creative when they are involved in decision-making processes ($\bar{x} = 3.92$). In addition, the average was 3.66. Since the average mean ($\bar{x} = 3.66$) is greater than the decision rule of 3.00, we conclude that the democratic leadership style has a considerable positive effect on employees' performance in Imo State University, Owerri.

Research Question Two: To what extent does the autocratic leadership style influence employees' performance in Imo State University?

Table 2: Respondents' Views on Autocratic Leadership Style and Employees' Performance

S/N	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	\bar{x}	Remarks
1	Supervisor / superior that make decisions without consulting employees improves their work efficiency in your workplace	33	50	41	108	59	2.62	Disagreed
2	You perform better when your superior closely monitors your work	41	56	47	110	37	2.84	Disagreed
3	Employees achieve better results when their superior / leader gives direct orders rather than suggestions in your organization	35	44	51	120	41	2.69	Disagreed
4.	Centralized decision-making in my organization contributes to improved performance	22	60	35	107	67	2.52	Disagreed
5.	Autocratic leadership in your organization helps reduce errors in task execution	16	39	53	124	59	2.41	Disagreed
6.	Strict supervision improves employees' productivity in your organization	32	55	42	92	70	2.61	Disagreed
7	Centralized decision-making without employees' participation improves the quality of employees' work in your workplace	19	34	41	114	53	2.18	Disagreed
Average Mean =							2.55	Disagreed

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Key: \bar{x} = Mean, C = Cut-off Point (3.00), N = Number of Respondents. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree, N = Neutral, S = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, $C \geq 3.00$ – Agreed; $C \leq 3.00$ – Disagreed; R = remark

From the above table, item 1, shows disagreement that supervisors/superior that make decisions without consulting employees improve their work efficiency in your workplace ($\bar{x} = 2.62$), while item 3 indicated wide disagreement that employees perform better when their superior closely monitors their work ($\bar{x} = 2.84$), and items show where the majority of the respondents disagreed that employees achieve better results when their superior / leader gives direct orders rather than suggestions in your organization ($\bar{x} = 2.69$). In addition, item 4 indicated that centralized decision-making has not contributed to improved performance ($\bar{x} = 2.52$); and item 5 shows where the majority of the respondents disagreed that autocratic leadership in your organization helps reduce errors in task execution ($\bar{x} = 2.41$). Furthermore, item 6 shows wide disagreement that strict supervision improves employees' productivity ($\bar{x} = 2.61$); and item 7 indicating the majority view that disagreed with the statement: centralized decision-making without employees' participation improves the quality of employees' work in your workplace ($\bar{x} = 2.18$). The average was 2.55. Therefore, since the average mean ($\bar{x} = 2.55$) is less than the decision rule of 3.00, we conclude that the autocratic leadership style has a negligible positive influence on employees' performance at Imo State University, Owerri.

Research Question Three: How does the transformational leadership style influences employees' performance in Imo State University?

Table 3: Respondents' views on transformational leadership style and Employees' Performance

S/N	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	\bar{x}	Remarks
1	You perform better when your leader inspires and motivates you in your workplace	95	132	16	37	11	3.90	Agreed
2	Employees will improve their level of creativity towards improving their work performance when they receive encouragement from their superiors	77	131	38	30	15	3.77	Agreed
3	Employees take better initiative in their job responsibilities when they are empowered by their superiors in your organization	74	140	29	32	16	3.76	Agreed
4.	My supervisor / superior acts as a role model, positively influencing my work attitude and performance.	44	136	48	50	13	3.50	Agreed
5.	The quality of my work output improves when my superior inspires me in my organization	84	116	37	30	24	3.70	Agreed
6.	Employees are more productive when their leaders/superiors motivate and inspire them to carry out their tasks in your organization.	95	121	12	34	29	3.75	Agreed
7	Employees think creatively in solving work-related problems when there is encouragement and support from their leaders/superiors in the organization	69	135	26	38	23	3.64	Agreed
8	I feel empowered to introduce new ideas because of my leader's support in my workplace	64	129	40	36	22	3.60	Agreed
Average Mean =							3.70	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Key: \bar{x} = Mean, C = Cut-off Point (3.00), N = Number of Respondents. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree, N = Neutral, S = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, $C \geq 3.00$ – Agreed; $C \leq 3.00$ – Disagreed; R = remark

From the above table, item 1 shows that employees perform better when their leader inspires and motivates them ($\bar{x} = 3.90$); while item 2 indicated majority view that employees will improve their level of creativity towards improving their work performance when they receive encouragement by their superiors ($\bar{x} = 3.77$); and item 3 shows that employees take better initiative in their job responsibilities when they are empowered by their superior in your organization ($\bar{x} = 3.76$). In addition, item 4 shows that employees' supervisor/superior that acts as a role model, positively influencing their work attitude and performance ($\bar{x} = 3.50$), while item 5 shows wide majority view that the quality of employees' work output improves when their superior inspires them ($\bar{x} = 3.70$);

and item 6 indicated that employees are more productive when their leaders/superiors motivate and inspire them to carry out their task ($\bar{x} = 3.75$) Furthermore, item 7, indicated majority of the respondents that agreed that employees think creatively in solving work-related problems when there is encouragement and support by their leaders / superior in your organization($\bar{x} = 3.64$); and item 8 shows that employees feel empowered to introduce new ideas because of their leader's support ($\bar{x} = 3.60$). The average was 3.70. Therefore, since the mean ($\bar{x} = 3.70$) exceeds the decision rule of 2.50, we conclude that transformational leadership style has a considerable positive influence on employees' performance at Imo State University, Owerri.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the above analysis, this study made the following findings:

First, the study revealed that the democratic leadership style has a considerable positive influence on employees' performance in Imo State University, Owerri. This is evident in the result of the average mean ($\bar{x} = 3.66$) in Table 1. This shows that there is a positive relationship between the democratic leadership style and employees' performance. Therefore, the application of democratic leadership style that emphasizes workers' participation in decision making, consultation, delegation of authority, open communication, etc. improves employees' performance. This finding is consistent with Nwapi's (2024) study, which found a significant relationship between democratic leadership style and employee discipline. Also, the study conducted by Dastane (2025) revealed a significant positive impact of democratic leadership style on employees' performance. In addition, studies by Daramola (2025) and Makambe and Moeng (2019) indicated a positive and significant effect of democratic/participatory leadership style on employees' performance.

Secondly, the study found that the autocratic leadership style does not have a considerable positive effect on employees' performance in Imo State University, Owerri. Therefore, autocratic leadership has a negative influence on employees' performance. This is evident in the result of Table 2, where the average mean ($\bar{x} = 2.55$) is below the decision rule of 3.00. This finding corresponds with the research conducted by Dastane (2020) that revealed a negative and insignificant effect of autocratic leadership style on employees' performance; and the results of the studies of Otieno and Njoroge (2019) and Daramola (2025) indicated that authoritarian leadership style has a negative effect on employees' performance.

Third, the study observed that transformational leadership style has a considerable positive influence on employees' performance in Imo State University, Owerri. Therefore, there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership style and employees' performance. This result is evident in result of Table 3, where the average mean ($\bar{x} = 3.70$) is greater than the decision of 3.00. So, the high level of motivation, inspiration, and encouragement by leaders in organisations significantly enhances employees' performance. This result is in line with the study conducted by Adilan et al. (2025), Filani et al. (2025) and Dastane (2020). Adilan et al. (2025) revealed a positive correlation between transformational leadership style and employees' performance, and the study of Filani et al. (2025) indicated that all dimensions of transformational leadership style have a significant positive effect on employee performance in the selected hotels in Lagos Metropolis. However, this study contradicts the result of the study conducted by Makambe and Moeng (2019)

that despite the positive effect of transformational leadership styles on employees' performance; the transformational leadership styles had insignificant effect on employees' performance.

Conclusion

The behaviour exhibited by organizational leaders largely affects the performance of their employees in any organization. Effective application of leadership styles determines the ability of employees to carry out their assigned tasks. This study examined leadership and employees' performance and observed that democratic and transformational leadership styles to large extent positively influence employees' performance at Imo State University, Owerri. However, it revealed that the application of an autocratic leadership style has not guaranteed effective performance in Imo State University, Owerri. The implication of these findings indicates that employees of IMSU perform well when exposed to leadership that supports workers' involvement in decision making, emphasizes motivation and inspiration of workers towards carrying out tasks, promotes creativity and innovation, rather than leadership that supports centralised decision making, strict supervision and close communication. Therefore, the management of IMSU and other relevant stakeholders should adopt strategies that will promote leadership styles that will enhance employees' performance and organizational productivity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, this research made the following recommendations

- i. There should be less emphasis on the application of autocratic leadership styles in dealing with employees. Autocratic leadership should be applied when other leadership styles cannot resolve certain issues, such as in emergencies, the presence of incompetent personnel on a task, etc.
- ii. There should be more emphasis by the management to adopt leadership styles that will encourage employees' participation in decision making, innovation and creativity; and delegation of duties. This can be done by encouraging employees' active participation in curriculum development, course allocation, the planning and implementation of the school calendar, and issues related to staff welfare, etc. This will create a sense of belonging among the staff and make them give their best in the discharge of their duties.
- iii. There should be continuous training of staff and leaders in IMSU on issues of leadership and organisational productivity. This training can be in the form of seminars, workshops, conferences, etc. This approach will enable them to understand the relevance of leadership, when and how to apply leadership styles to enhance employees' performance.

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