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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP STYLES AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE OF PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN JIGAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
There is a noticeable gap in research on leadership styles within service industries, particularly among private secondary schools in Jigawa State, Nigeria. Grounded in Fiedler's Contingency Theory, this study aims to address this gap by examining the relationship between leadership styles and employee work performance. Data were collected through a self-reported survey of 277 employees and school administrators from leading private secondary schools. The proposed hypotheses were analyzed using SPSS and Smart PLS-SEM. Findings reveal that transformational, democratic, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles significantly predict employee work performance. These results support Fiedler's Contingency Theory, which posits that leadership effectiveness is contingent upon situational variables and organizational context. Based on these findings, the study recommends that private secondary schools adopt transformational and democratic leadership styles, while also applying transactional and laissez-faire approaches strategically to enhance employee performance and overall organizational success. Theoretical implications, practical applications, and study limitations are also discussed.
Keywords: Autocratic, Democratic, laissez-faire, Transactional and Transformational Leadership styles, Employee performance

1. INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of employees plays a pivotal role in determining the success of any organization, influencing key outcomes such as productivity, profitability, and competitiveness. Contemporary research highlights that well-structured performance management systems significantly contribute to improving employee commitment and reducing staff turnover. Recent studies underscore the importance of effective performance management systems in enhancing employee engagement and retention. For instance, organizations that prioritize their employees' performance are likely to outperform their peers; achieving an average 30% higher revenue growth and experiencing attrition five percentage points lower (McKinsey 2023). Additionally, Studies suggest that a positive and supportive work setting fosters stronger employee dedication and goal-oriented behavior, ultimately leading to enhanced performance (Yating, 2024). Additionally, acknowledging employees' efforts through formal recognition systems has been linked to lower turnover and better organizational results (Yating, 2024). Furthermore, employee recognition plays a pivotal role in boosting performance. Organizations with formal recognition programs experience 31% less voluntary turnover and are 12 times more likely to achieve strong business outcomes compared to those without such programs (Quantum Workplace, 2023). In summary, understanding and enhancing employee performance through effective management practices, a supportive work environment and recognition programs are essential for organizations aiming to achieve sustainable success and competitive advantage.

Employee performance in private secondary schools within the Hadejia and Gumel education zones of Jigawa State, Nigeria, faces several challenges that impact educational quality. A significant issue is the mismanagement of service delivery, which adversely affects students' welfare and academic outcomes. This mismanagement often stems from inadequate training and support for teachers, leading to ineffective teaching methods and low student engagement (Kubanni, 2023). To address these challenges, various stakeholders have implemented initiatives aimed at improving employee performance. The Jigawa State Ministry of Education, Science and Technology have developed strategic plans focusing on enhancing the quality of education. These plans emphasize the need for continuous professional development for teachers aiming to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to improve classroom instruction (Jigawa State Government, 2023). Despite these efforts, issues related to employee performance persist. Factors such as inadequate training, lack of motivation and insufficient resources continue to hinder the effectiveness of teachers in the region.

Addressing employee performance issues in private secondary schools within Hadejia and Gumel education zones of Jigawa State requires the strategic application of various leadership styles. Each leadership style has unique strengths that can contribute to improving the performance of teachers and the overall educational outcomes.

Autocratic leadership, characterized by centralized decision-making where leaders make decisions without consulting their team, can provide quick direction in times of crisis. However, in the context of private secondary schools, this approach may lead to low morale and hinder teachers' professional growth, as it limits their input in the decision-making process. While effective in some situations, autocratic leadership may not foster the collaborative atmosphere necessary for long-term improvements in employee performance(Kubanni, 2023).

In contrast, participative leadership or democratic leadership encourages collaboration and input from team members, which can enhance job satisfaction and engagement among teachers. This style is known to promote a sense of ownership and responsibility among employees. In Nigerian schools, including those in Jigawa State, democratic leadership has been associated with improved teacher satisfaction and overall performance, as teachers feel more involved and valued in decision-making processes (Granthaalayah, 2023). By fostering a participative environment, school leaders can address performance issues by aligning teachers' goals with the school's vision.

On the other hand, laissez-faire leadership, which grants employees significant autonomy in decision-making, can also play a role in improving performance in private schools. Teachers are given the freedom to make decisions and innovate in their teaching practices, which can foster creativity and a sense of professional responsibility. However, without proper guidance or structure, laissez-faire leadership may result in a lack of accountability and direction, which could further exacerbate performance issues if not managed effectively (Kubanni, 2023). Thus, a balance between autonomy and oversight is necessary to ensure that teachers' independence does not lead to disorganization.

Transactional leadership focuses on task-oriented goals and rewards for achieving them. This style provides clear expectations and incentivizes teachers based on their performance, which can motivate staff to meet academic and administrative goals. In environments where clear guidelines and rewards are essential, transactional leadership can boost performance by aligning teachers' efforts with the school's objectives. Research indicates that transactional leadership has a positive effect on employee performance, particularly when teachers understand the direct rewards or consequences tied to their actions (Jaqua and Jaqua, 2022).

Lastly, transformational leadership is often regarded as the most effective approach for improving employee performance in schools. This leadership style emphasizes inspiring and motivating employees by creating a shared vision and encouraging professional growth. Transformational leaders focus on the long-term development of their staff, which can lead to improved morale and performance. Studies have shown that transformational leadership positively affects teacher performance, especially in private educational institutions, by promoting a supportive environment that fosters both personal and professional development (Henty and Chukwunalu, 2024).

The adoption of a combination of these leadership styles tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of private secondary schools in the Hadejia and Gumel education zones can significantly improve employee performance. A balanced approach that incorporates elements of autocratic, participative, laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational leadership can create an environment conducive to teacher satisfaction, innovation and ultimately improved educational outcomes.

In conclusion, the objective of this study is to explore how different leadership styles autocratic, participative, laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational can address the employee performance issues of private secondary schools within the Hadejia and Gumel education zones in Jigawa State. By analyzing the impact of these leadership styles, the study aims to provide insights into how school leaders can enhance teacher effectiveness, improve job satisfaction and foster a conducive learning environment. The relevance of this study lies in its potential to guide educational policymakers and school administrators in adopting the most appropriate leadership approaches to address the persistent performance challenges in the region. Understanding and applying the right leadership style is crucial for creating a motivated and productive workforce, which ultimately contributes to the overall improvement of educational outcomes in Jigawa State. Thus, the research objectives are:

i. To examine the relationship between autocratic leadership styles and employee work performance.
ii. To examine the relationship between Participative Leadership styles and employee work performance.
iii. To evaluate the relationship between Laissez-Faire Leadership style and employee work performance.
iv. To evaluate the relationship between Transactional Leadership style and employee work performance.
v. To evaluate the relationship between Transformational Leadership style and employee work performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Employee Performance

Performance is associated with quantity of output, quality of output, timeliness of output, presence/ attendance on the job, efficiency of the work completed and effectiveness of work completed Mathis (2019). Tandoh (2021)asserted that employee performance leads to the organization's survival and success. Jason *et al*. (2022) defined job performance as behaviour and the term results to describe the outcome of those behaviours. This is similar to an earlier definition by Dwivedi et al., (2020) which states that employee performance is defined by the qualitative or quantitative improvement in the number of tasks completed the quality of the output and the efficiency in achieving organizational objectives. Leadership influences employee performance by setting guidelines and expectations for the employees to follow, encouraging them and promoting their work.

The literature suggests a strong correlation between leadership styles and employee performance with different leadership approaches yielding varying outcomes. However, a critical gap remains in understanding how specific leadership styles influence employee performance of Private Secondary Schools in Hadejia and Gumel education zones.

Autocratic Leadership

The autocratic leadership style is characterized by centralized control, where the leader independently sets policies and directs actions without engaging the team in decision-making processes. Subordinates are expected to comply without necessarily understanding the rationale behind directives (Shen et al., 2019). Autocratic leadership represents all those leaders who make decisions without the consent of team members and is usually applied when quick decision is taken and team agreement is not important for the acquisition of successful results (Erdem, 2022).

This style gives the leader complete control and power over policies and all other organizational activities and goals, often with little input or activeness from the other organizational members(Chukwusa, 2018). However, this style leads to low morale, low job satisfaction and low creativity among employees, and this style is instrumental here when there is a need to make many decisions and where there is a need for tight control (Schaubroeck et al., 2017). Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced in this study:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant positive relationship between autocratic leadership styles and employee work performance.

Democratic Leadership Style

Democratic leadership involves encouraging team input and collaborative decision-making. Rather than issuing direct instructions, leaders in this style seek the perspectives of their team members and facilitate consensus-driven outcomes (Hilton et al., 2021). The group is left to make its own decisions democratically, which are then endorsed by the leader.

Democratic Leaders may involve subordinates in decision-making processes, thus promoting satisfaction with jobs, higher motivation, and enhanced performance due to the delegation of responsibilities and accountability among the employees (Oh, et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2005) The underpinning theoretical framework for democratic leadership aligns with the principles of shared leadership theory, where leadership is distributed among team members, fostering a collaborative environment (Hilton et al., 2021).This approach is particularly relevant in knowledge-intensive industries, where innovation and creativity are paramount. Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced in this study:

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant positive relationship between democratic leadership styles and employee work performance.

Laissez-Faire Leadership

The laissez-faire leadership style is often associated with a hands-off approach, where leaders provide minimal direction and allow employees to make their own decisions. While this can empower skilled and self-motivated individuals to act independently, it can also result in ambiguity and a lack of accountability if not managed carefully (Ahsan & Khalid, 2023). Therefore, it could be concluded that laissez-faire leaders are hesitant in decision-making, reluctant to take action and absent where and where needed. Under this leadership approach, the group members are delegated the authority to make their own decisions (Ahsan & Khalid, 2023). This style of leadership abdicates responsibilities and avoids making decisions. It is effective when subordinates are experts in their areas of operation and/or highly motivated specialists (Ahsan and Khalid 2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced in this study:

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant positive relationship between Laissez-faire leadership styles and employee work performance.

Transactional Leadership Style

Transformational leadership centers on inspiring followers to exceed ordinary expectations by aligning personal goals with a shared organizational vision. These leaders cultivate change by motivating staff, fostering innovation, and nurturing both professional and personal development (Effiyanti et al., 2021; Bakker et al., 2023). This style emphasizes clear organizational roles, hierarchy, and performance-based outcomes (Azim & Islam, 2020; Abd Rahman, 2021). Mamsa, et al (2019) described TLS as a 'give and take' leadership relationship, where exchange is a way of interaction between leaders and subordinates. In the context of organizational setting, Transactional leadership style (TLS) ensure that employees' allegiance relies on rational values and rules together

with laid-down agreement (Azim & Islam, 2020). Also, transactional leaders ensure that remuneration is fixed on hierarchical arrangement and organization's bureaucracy. According to Abd Rahman (2021), transactional leaders clarify and put more emphasis on organizational goals and consequence of negligence. Thus, they dominate the personal interests of employees. Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced in this study:

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant positive relationship between Transactional leadership styles and employee work performance.

Transformational Leadership

Ammar et al. (2018) define transformational leadership as the art of influencing and guiding followers to achieve common goals that contribute to organizational success. Transformational leadership focuses on achieving changes in values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, emotions and the needs of subordinates for a better change in the future Effiyanti et al. (2021). Through posting a mission to improve the future organizational environment, transformational leaders convey this vision knowledgeably and persuasively and encourage performers to do their best to achieve organizational goals(Bakker et al., 2023).Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced in this study:

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant positive relationship between Transactional leadership styles and employee work performance.

Underpinning Theory

Fiedler's Contingency Theory posits that the effectiveness of leadership is dependent on how well a leader's style matches the situation at hand. The theory emphasizes the leader's ability to inspire change and work collaboratively with committed employees to achieve organizational goals (Fiedler, 1964). Fiedler identified **three key situational factors** that influence leadership success:

i. **Leader-Member Relations** – This refers to the degree of trust, respect, and confidence that exists between the leader and their team. Fiedler viewed this as the most crucial factor, as strong, supportive relationships often lead to better performance.
ii. **Task Structure** – This involves how clearly tasks are defined and organized. Leaders are more effective when tasks have specific goals, procedures, and expectations, as this structure allows them to better manage and guide their teams.
iii. **Position Power** – This is the extent of formal authority a leader holds to reward or discipline employees. Leaders with strong positional power are more likely to gain compliance and influence performance positively (Nyaribo & Kariuki, 2022).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study targeted all private secondary schools in the Hadeja district of Jigawa State, Nigeria, with the individual employees and school proprietors or managers serving as the unit of analysis. Jigawa State was selected because it epitomizes Nigeria's ethnic diversity and hosts a large proportion of privately owned secondary schools. Data were gathered via a simple random sampling procedure to ensure that every eligible participant had an equal chance of selection (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Of the 346 questionnaires distributed, 277 were completed and returned, representing an 80.1% response rate well above the 50–60% threshold recommended for survey research (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). The researcher and an assistant administered and collected all surveys in person, and respondents were assured that their information would remain confidential and used solely for academic purposes. dT screening and analysis were done with SPSS and PLS.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The characteristics of the participant consists of 277 out of which 233 are male while 44 are female. Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of the respondents.

Measurement Model

The first step in Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis is to evaluate the measurement model, which assesses how well the constructs are measured. According to Hair et al. (2014), this involves checking both the validity and reliability of the model. To do this, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out to assess key indicators such as individual item reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Ringle et al., 2020).

Individual Items Reliability

Individual item reliability is determined by examining the factor loadings of each item on its corresponding construct. Typically, a loading of 0.7 or higher is considered acceptable, as it indicates that over 50% of the item's variance is explained by the construct (Hulland, 1999). However, items with slightly lower loadings may still be retained if the other items measuring the same construct have strong loadings, ensuring overall measurement quality (Chin, 2000). Therefore, though items with factor loadings below.

Table: 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	233	84.1
	Female	44	15.9
	Total	277	100.0
Age	Below 25 years	7	2.5
	25-35 years	115	41.5
	36-45 years	79	28.5
	above 46	76	27.4
	Total	277	100.0
Highest educational qualification	NCE/OND	63	22.7
	HND/Bachelor	211	76.2
	Master/PhD	3	1.1
	Total	277	100.0
Year of experience	1 – 5 Years	55	19.9
	6 – 10 Years	125	45.1
	11 – 15 Years	48	17.3
	More than 16 years	49	17.7
	Total	277	100.0

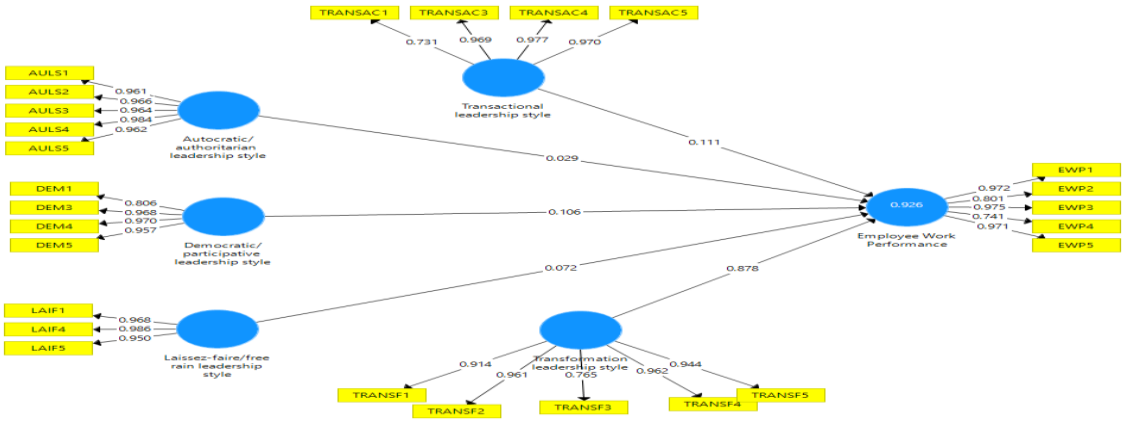

Figure 1. Measurement Model

Items with factor loadings below 0.4 should be removed, while those below 0.7 are not automatically excluded unless their removal significantly improves internal consistency metrics beyond acceptable thresholds (Hulland, 1999). In this study, all items with loadings above 0.7 were retained under their respective constructs (see Figure 1).

Internal consistency reliability

Several studies (e.g., Chin, 2000; Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009) recommend using composite reliability to assess a variable's internal consistency, with a minimum threshold of 0.7. All the variables in this study meet or exceed this standard, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Convergent validity

According to Hair et al. (2014), convergent validity can be assessed using composite reliability (CR), factor loadings, and the average variance extracted (AVE). All constructs od this study meet the required standards: CR values exceed 0.7, loadings are above 0.6 (Nunnally, 1978), and AVE values surpass 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was confirmed using two approaches. First, based on the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with other constructs. Additionally, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, which is considered a more robust method (Henseler et al., 2014; 2015), was assessed.

The highest HTMT value 0.765 between voluntary turnover intention and coworker support is below the recommended threshold of 0.85 indicating satisfactory

discriminant validity. Thus, both convergent and discriminant validity were established in this study.

Analysis of the structural model

To assess the significance of the path coefficients, the study employed a bootstrapping technique with 5,000 subsamples, following Hair et al. (2014). This nonparametric resampling method is used in PLS to generate standard errors and t-values for the estimated parameters. Prior to testing the hypothesized relationships, multicollinearity was checked using the variance inflation factor (VIF). The highest VIF value, 1.21 (between organizational reward and organizational job embeddedness), was well below the recommended threshold of 10, confirming no multicollinearity issues. Regarding model fit, the R^2 value indicates that 43% of the variance in employee performance is explained by the model. Therefore, democratic/participatory, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles were found to significantly predict employee performance.

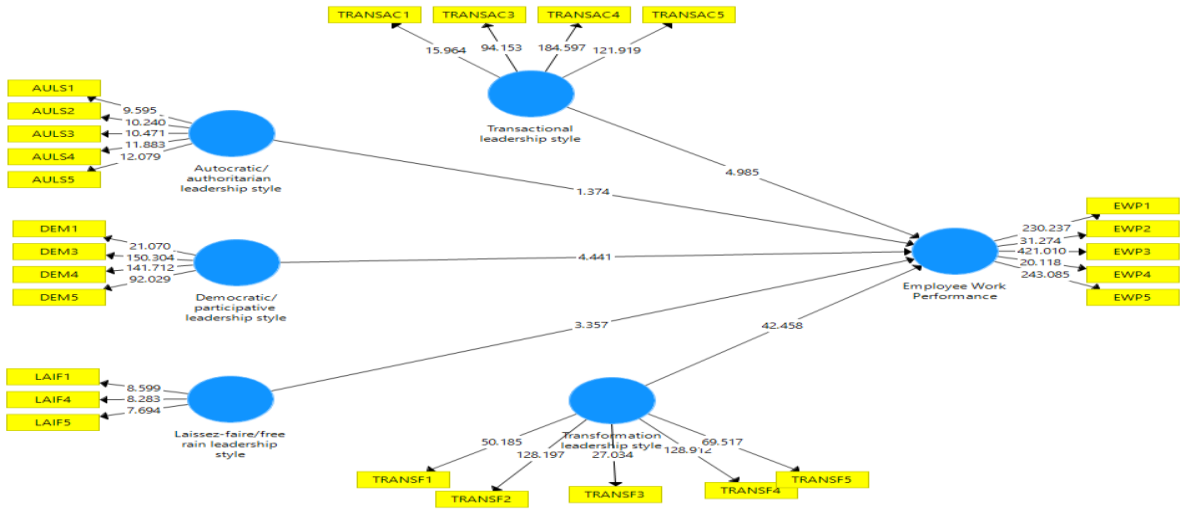

Figure 2

Table 2. Results of the structural model

Relationship	Beta	t-value	p-value	Decision
Autocratic/authoritarian leadership style -> Employee Work Performance	0.029	1.374	0.170	Not Supported
Democratic/participative leadership style -> Employee Work Performance	0.106	4.441	0.000	Supported
Laissez-faire/free rain leadership style -> Employee Work Performance	0.072	3.357	0.001	Supported
Transactional leadership style -> Employee Work Performance	0.111	4.985	0.000	Supported
Transformation leadership style -> Employee Work Performance	0.878	42.458	0.000	Supported

The predictive relevance of the model was evaluated using the Stone-Geisser Q^2 test (Geisser, 1974), where values greater than zero indicate satisfactory predictive capability. The results revealed acceptable Q^2 values for the dependent variables employee work performance (EWP = 0.31) and voluntary turnover intention (0.20) suggesting good predictive relevance. Additionally, the effect size (f^2) was assessed. Following Cohen's (1988) guidelines, f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are interpreted as small, medium, and large, respectively. The effect sizes in this study fell within acceptable ranges, predominantly small and large.

Hypothesis 1: proposed that there is no significant positive relationship between autocratic leadership style and employee work performance. The analysis confirmed this assumption, as the relationship was found to be statistically insignificant ($\beta = 0.029$, $t = 1.374$, $p = 0.170$). This suggests that autocratic leadership does not have a meaningful influence on employee performance. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted, affirming the absence of a significant positive relationship *(see Table 2 and Figure 2).*

Hypothesis 2: posited that there is no significant positive relationship between democratic leadership style and employee work performance. However, the findings revealed a significant positive relationship between democratic leadership and work performance ($\beta = 0.106$, $t = 4.441$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that employees who perceived a higher level of democratic

leadership also reported better performance. Consequently, Hypothesis 2 is rejected, confirming the existence of a positive association between democratic leadership style and employee work performance *(see Table 2 and Figure 2).*

Hypothesis 3: proposed that there is no significant positive relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee work performance. The results reject this null hypothesis, revealing a significant positive relationship between laissez-faire leadership and work performance ($\beta = 0.072$, $t = 3.357$, $p = 0.001$). This indicates that employees who perceived higher levels of laissez-faire leadership also reported improved work performance, thereby confirming the existence of a positive relationship *(see Table 2 and Figure 2).*

Hypothesis 4: posited that there is no significant positive relationship between transactional leadership style and employee work performance. However, the findings reject this null hypothesis, revealing a significant positive relationship between transactional leadership and work performance ($\beta = 0.111$, $t = 4.985$, $p < 0.001$). This result indicates that employees who perceived higher levels of transactional leadership also reported enhanced work performance, thus confirming that transactional leadership style is a significant predictor of employee performance *(see Table 2 and Figure 2).*

Hypothesis 5: stated that there is no significant positive relationship between transactional leadership style and employee work performance. However, the results rejected this null hypothesis, revealing a strong positive relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance ($\beta = 0.878$, $t = 42.458$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that employees who perceived higher levels of transactional leadership also reported higher work performance, confirming that transactional leadership significantly predicts employee performance *(see Table 2 and Figure 2).*

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between various leadership styles and employee performance in private secondary schools in Jigawa State, Nigeria, drawing on Fiedler's Contingency Theory. The findings revealed that transformational, transactional, democratic (participative), and laissez-faire leadership styles significantly and positively influenced employee performance, while autocratic leadership style did not show a significant effect.

Transformational leadership emerged as the strongest predictor of employee performance ($\beta = 0.878$, $p < 0.001$). This is consistent with the findings of Bass and Avolio (1994), who noted that transformational leaders enhance motivation and performance by fostering an inspiring vision and encouraging innovation. Transformational leadership has been widely supported in educational contexts, where empowerment, inspiration, and shared goals are vital for success (Leithwood& Jantzi, 2005).

Transactional leadership ($\beta = 0.111$, $p < 0.001$) also had a significant positive impact on performance, aligning with Burns (1978) and Podsakoff et al. (1990), who emphasized the effectiveness of structured reward systems and clear role expectations in motivating employee behavior. Similarly, democratic or participative leadership ($\beta = 0.106$, $p < 0.001$) positively influenced performance, affirming the findings of Somech (2005), who found that participatory decision-making boosts morale and job satisfaction among teachers.

Laissez-faire leadership ($\beta = 0.072$, $p = 0.001$), while often criticized, showed a modest but significant positive impact. This supports the nuanced findings of Skogstad et al. (2007), suggesting that in some contexts, autonomy granted through laissez-faire approaches can empower competent staff to perform better.

On the other hand, autocratic leadership ($\beta = 0.029$, $p = 1.374$, $p = 0.170$) was not a significant predictor of employee performance. This aligns with the conclusions of Goleman (2000) and Omolayo (2007), who argued that authoritarian leadership can demotivate employees, reduce job satisfaction, and ultimately hinder performance in environments requiring creativity and collaboration.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that leadership style significantly affects employee performance in private secondary schools in Jigawa State. Transformational leadership proved to be the most effective, followed by democratic, transactional, and laissez-faire styles. Autocratic leadership, however, showed no meaningful influence on performance. These findings reinforce Fiedler's (1964) assertion that leadership effectiveness is contingent upon contextual alignment between leadership style and situational variables.

Theoretical Implications

This study extends the applicability of Fiedler's Contingency Theory in the Nigerian educational sector. It validates the theory's core proposition that the success of a leadership style depends on contextual factors such as the leader-follower relationship, task structure, and position power (Fiedler, 1964). Similar findings by Yukl (2013) and House et al. (1999) also emphasize the contextual nature of leadership effectiveness. The study contributes to existing literature by demonstrating that the impact of leadership styles varies significantly in different cultural and organizational contexts.

Practical Implications

For school administrators and policymakers, these results suggest the need to prioritize transformational

and democratic leadership development. Leadership training programs should focus on enhancing communication, collaboration, vision-setting, and motivational strategies (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Additionally, transactional methods can be incorporated to maintain structure and accountability, while cautious application of laissez-faire leadership may benefit competent and self-driven employees (Northouse, 2016). Given the ineffectiveness of autocratic leadership, its use in educational settings should be minimized or eliminated.

Limitations

While the study offers valuable insights, it has several limitations. The use of self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The sample was limited to private secondary schools in Jigawa State, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the study did not examine possible mediators or moderators such as organizational culture, employee engagement, or motivation, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of leadership effects (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Directions for Future Research

Future research should consider a broader geographic scope, including public schools and institutions across multiple Nigerian states. Longitudinal studies would be useful for capturing the long-term impact of leadership styles on performance (Antonakis et al., 2003). Incorporating mediating or moderating variables, such as job satisfaction, organizational culture, or emotional intelligence, could offer deeper insights. Finally, mixed-method approaches combining quantitative and qualitative data could help contextualize the findings within the lived experiences of educators and school leaders (Creswell, 2014).

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