

## **Socio-Psychological Variables and Leadership Styles of Employees in Leadership Positions at the Federal Polytechnic, Idah, Kogi State, Nigeria**

**Adekunle, Morufu Abiodun**

*Department of Social Sciences and Humanities,  
The Federal Polytechnic Idah, Kogi State - Nigeria  
Email: adekunlemarroof@yahoo.com*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigated the influence of socio-psychological variables (gender, age, level of education, marital status, length of service, and nature of job) on leadership styles among teaching and non-teaching employees who occupied leadership positions at the Federal Polytechnic Idah, Kogi State, Nigeria. The study explored three leadership styles (autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire). The data were collected randomly from a sample of 133 (one hundred and thirty-three) senior teaching and non-teaching staff. The 18-item standardised leadership questionnaire of the Sage publication was used as a tool. Data were analysed using the t-test statistical analysis. Results revealed, among others, a significant influence of gender, age, length of service and nature of job on the leadership styles. Consequently, the level of education, years in service and nature of the job influenced leadership styles. Consequently, polytechnic management should enhance organisational effectiveness by promoting effective leadership styles and practices.*

**Keywords:** *Social-Psychological, Leadership Style, Autocratic, Democratic, Laissez-faire*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Leaders and groups vary in their functions. Sometimes, one person in charge of the task directs the work of subordinates. Sometimes, no one person is in charge, but the group proceeds based on the previously formalised rules. However, at other times, neither the leader nor the rule book is present to determine group action. Whether a leader is appointed or elected, the person's behaviour influences the group's performance or effectiveness (Balogun, 1994). This aspect reflects the leadership pattern or style. A leader follows a set of regulations that form his unique leadership style that reflects the leader's personality and character (George, 2004). A leader is a person leading a group of people towards a

predefined goal, collectively agreed upon (Andrew, 2009). Yuw (2002) viewed leadership as influencing subordinates to accomplish organisational goals through authority. Based on different leadership theories, there are many leadership styles. However, Trampenaars (1993) observed that leadership styles vary between cultures and countries depending upon life patterns, beliefs, value systems and knowledge and experience of the people. The leadership styles chosen for this study are Autocratic (authoritative), Democratic and Laissez-faire. Bass (1990) earlier observed that the three chosen leadership styles fell at the top, middle and bottom in terms of exerting authority in the spectrum of the leadership styles, particularly in an educational institution.

According to Pess (2003), autocratic leadership entails a leader who controls all the members and what they do. The style emphasised that the leader is in charge and exerts influence and control over group members. Autocratic leaders prefer communication to be directed. In a democratic leadership, leaders treat members as fully capable of doing their work. The leader works with group members, treats everyone fairly, and is not above others. Their main goal is to help group members reach their personal goals. Communication is interactive between the leader and the members. A leader with a laissez-faire style does not control members and does not nurture and guide members either; instead, this leader engages in minimal influence and has a “hand-off” approach. Transformational and transactional leaders have been extensively studied (Bhargava & Anbazhagan, 2014). Hence, these other leadership styles were not considered for this study.

There has been little or no research on the influence of socio-psychological variables on employees’ leadership styles, particularly in Nigerian polytechnics. This study aimed to investigate and explore this issue. The objectives of this study are; to examine the inherent leadership styles of senior teaching and non-teaching employees who occupied leadership positions, to investigate the influence of socio-psychological variables on the leadership styles of senior teaching and non-teaching employees who occupied leadership positions and lastly to suggest practical recommendations based on the findings of the present study.

Against this background, the following hypotheses were formulated for empirical testing.

1. There is no significant difference between the gender and the three leadership styles of employees who occupied leadership positions at the Federal Polytechnic, Idah.
2. There is no significant difference between the age and the three leadership styles of employees who occupied leadership positions at the Federal Polytechnic, Idah.
3. There is no significant difference between the marital status and the three leadership styles of employees who occupied leadership positions at the Federal Polytechnic, Idah.
4. There is no significant difference in the influence of the level of education on the three leadership styles at the Federal Polytechnic, Idah.

5. There is no significant difference between the years of service and the three leadership styles of employees who occupied leadership positions at the Federal Polytechnic, Idah.
6. There is no significant difference between the nature of the job and the three leadership styles of teaching and non-teaching employees who occupied leadership positions at the Federal Polytechnic, Idah.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Fiedler Contingency Model of Leadership**

The study adopts the Fiedler Contingency Model of Leadership. According to Bass (1990), leadership effectiveness depends on the proper match between the leader's style and the features of his situation. This theory emphasised that certain leadership styles are more effective in some situations than others (Udegbe, 2000). The contingency model has implications for leadership training.

## **METHOD**

This study uses an ex-post facto design. One hundred and thirty-three (133) employees were randomly selected from the general population of both teaching and non-teaching staff of the Federal Polytechnic, Idah, Kogi State, Nigeria. The sample comprised 74 males and 59 females, 54 young and 79 old staff, 99 married and 34 unmarried staff, 57 Master's Degree holders and 76 Doctorate Degree holders, 40 with short job tenure and 93 with long job tenure, and 92 senior teaching and 41 senior non-teaching staff. All the subjects were employees who occupied leadership positions such as academic and non-academic heads of departments, academic and non-academic directors and the Dean of staff in various schools within the Federal Polytechnic, Idah.

The research instrument used in this study was a standardised eighteen (18) items Sage Leadership Style Questionnaire (LSQ) (Pess 2003), designed to measure three different leadership styles (autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire) among selected employees who occupied leadership positions in the Federal Polytechnic, Idah, Kogi State. The first section of the questionnaire tapped information on gender, age, marital status, level of education, length of service (job tenure) and nature of job. The second section tapped information meant to measure the three leadership styles. That is six questionnaire items that measure each of the three leadership styles. Response choices on this section were prepared in a 5-point Likert scale format, ranging from strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), Undecided (UD), agree (SA) and strongly agree (SA). These response options were assigned a scale value of 1 = SD, 2 = D, 3 = UD, 4 = A and 5 = SA. This research instrument had an

overall Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.60, while each sub-scale for measuring autocratic leadership style had a reliability coefficient of 0.60, democratic style had a reliability coefficient of 0.61 and laissez faire style had a reliability coefficient of 0.30, respectively. In this study, 135 copies of questionnaires (i.e. LSQ) were administered to the respondents in their various offices during working hours. All questionnaires were correctly filled, and only two (2) were never returned. The respondents were allowed to complete the questionnaire at their convenience. However, their participation was voluntary, confidentiality was maintained, and anonymity was ensured because they were not required to provide their names. Upon completion, all filled and returned questionnaire copies were scored and subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS t-test for independent group samples.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1:** Summary table for T-test result of gender and leadership styles

Leadership styles	Gender type	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Df	P
Autocratic	Male	74	2.22	3.39	2.04	131	0.04
	Female	59	21.2	2.06			
Democratic	Male	74	24.7	3.05	0.002	131	0.99
	Female	59	24.7	2.52			
Laissez-faire	Male	47	16.6	3.06	-1.03	131	0.31
	Female	59	17.1	1.80			

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the result in Table 1, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the influence of gender on the three leadership styles of male and female employees who occupied leadership positions was not confirmed ( $t = 2.04$ ;  $t = -1.03$ ,  $df = 131$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). It indicates a significant difference in the influence of gender on democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles, except for the autocratic style.

**Table 2:** Summary table for T-test result of age and leadership styles.

Leadership styles	Age	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Df	P
Autocratic	Young	54	21.3	2.05	-1.50	131	0.14
	Old	79	22.1	2.35			
Democratic	Young	54	25.1	1.88	1.53	131	0.13
	Old	79	24.1	3.28			
Laissez-faire	Young	54	17.6	1.43	3.06	131	0.00
	Old	79	16.3	3.02			

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the result of statistical analysis in table 2, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the influence of age on the three leadership styles of young

and old employees who occupied leadership position was not confirmed ( $t = -1.50$ ;  $t = 1.53$ ,  $t = 3.06$ ,  $df = 131$   $P > 0.05$ ). This result indicates a significant difference in the influence of age on autocratic and democratic leadership styles, except for the laissez-faire style, which is the least dominant in their leadership style.

**Table 3:** Summary table for T-test result of marital status and leadership styles

Leadership styles	Marital status	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Df	P
Autocratic	Married	99	22.01	3.33	1.85	131	0.07
	Unmarried	34	21.00	0.00			
Democratic	Married	99	24.20	3.14	-3.33	131	0.00
	Unmarried	34	26.00	0.00			
Laissez-faire	Married	99	16.42	2.89	-3.18	131	0.00
	Unmarried	34	18.00	0.00			

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025

From the result in Table 3, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the influence of marital status on the three leadership styles of married and unmarried employees who occupied leadership positions was confirmed ( $t = -3.33$ ;  $t = -3.18$ ,  $df = 131$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). This result indicates an insignificant difference in the influence of marital status on democratic and laissez-faire style, except for the autocratic style.

**Table 4:** Summary table for T-test result of level of education and leadership styles.

Leadership styles	Level of Education	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Df	P
Autocratic	Master	57	21.6	3.06	-0.72	131	0.47
	Ph.D	76	22.9	2.79			
Democratic	Master	57	23.7	2.85	-3.62	131	0.00
	Ph.D	76	25.4	2.57			
Laissez-faire	Master	57	16.3	2.51	-2.07	13	0.04
	Ph.D	76	17.2	2.57			

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025

From the result in Table 4, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the influence of level of education on the three leadership styles was confirmed ( $t = -3.62$ ;  $t = -2.07$ ,  $df = 131$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). This result indicates an insignificant difference in the influence of the level of education on democratic and laissez-faire styles, except for the autocratic style.

**Table 5:** Summary table for T-test result of length of service and leadership styles.

Leadership styles	Length of service	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Df	P
Autocratic	Short	40	22.1	2.69	0.87	131	0.39
	Long	93	21.6	2.99			
Democratic	Short	40	24.5	2.04	0.37	131	0.72
	Long	93	24.7	3.09			
Laissez-faire	Short	40	17.3	1.79	1.24	13	0.22
	Long	93	16.6	2.84			

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025

From the result of statistical analysis in Table 5, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the influence of length of service (job tenure) on the three leadership styles was not confirmed ( $t = 0.87$ ,  $t = 0.37$ ;  $t = 1.24$ ,  $df = 131$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). This result indicates a significant difference in the influence of length of service on the three leadership styles.

**Table 6:** Summary table for T-test result of nature of job and leadership styles

Leadership styles	Nature of job	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Df	P
Autocratic	Teaching	92	21.99	3.35	1.19	131	0.24
	Non-Teaching	41	21.34	1.44			
Democratic	Teaching	92	24.92	2.80	1.62	131	0.11
	Non-Teaching	41	24.07	2.78			
Laissez-faire	Teaching	92	16.93	2.76	0.72	13	0.47
	Non-Teaching	41	16.58	2.14			

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025

From the result in Table 6, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the influence of the nature of the job on the three leadership styles was not confirmed ( $t = 1.19$ ,  $t = 1.62$ ;  $t = 0.72$ ,  $df = 131$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). It indicates a significant difference in the influence of job tenure on the three leadership styles.

The findings statistically showed a significant difference in the influence of gender, age, length of service and nature of job on the leadership styles of sampled employees who occupied leadership positions. These findings support earlier research on the impact of qualification, age and experience on the principals' leadership styles (Javed et al., 2013). Also, the works of Ahiazu (1989) and Van Vagt (2006) make it clear that with increasing experience in the workplace, employees tend to change their leadership styles. Indeed, research has indicated that men and women do not differ markedly in their leadership styles (Ogundaisi, 1998). However, some studies found no significant relationship between age and leadership styles. For instance, Teodora et al. (2024) reported that laissez-faire style does not show a significant difference in leadership styles and age influence between age

groups, as was confirmed in this study. The result indicated no significant difference in the influence of marital status and level of education on the leadership styles of employees in leadership positions. The findings are incongruent with the work of Javed et al. (2013), which found that educated and less educated employees differ in exhibiting their leadership styles. In the same vein, research suggests that psycho-demographic variables (e.g. marital status) can influence leadership styles (Yukl, 2010), contrary to the present finding.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, socio-psychological variables influenced leadership styles. Specifically, gender, age, length of service, and nature of the job significantly influence the leadership styles of the employees investigated. More importantly, all the inherent leadership styles are unequally present in the employees who occupy leadership positions. The democratic leadership style is more dominant among the employees, the autocratic style comes next, and the laissez-faire style is the least dominant in the present study.

The following recommendations were proffered:

- i. Management of tertiary educational institutions should enhance their organisational effectiveness by promoting effective leadership styles and practices.
- ii. Further studies on other situational factors that can affect leadership styles should be conducted to provide more insight into leadership effectiveness in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
- iii. The Polytechnic's management should organise periodic workshops on effective leadership for those in management positions to understand its impact on performance, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and productivity.



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