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# LEADERSHIP STYLES AND THE IMPLICATIONS ON LABOUR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS IN NIGERIA FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES

**EJIATA, Godbless Chukwudi**

Department of Public Administration,  
Faculty of Administration,  
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.  
Email: mailgodbless@yahoo.com  
Tel: 234-8033365336

&

**OGBOGU, Christiana O.**

Department of Public Administration,  
Faculty of Administration,  
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.  
Email: tinaogbogu@yahoo.com  
Tel: 234-8034265522

## **Abstract**

*The study identified the leadership styles adopted by Managements of selected Federal Universities in southwestern Nigeria and examined their effects on labour-management relations climate. 659 respondents consisting of 281 academic and 371 non-academic staff, from three Federal Universities in Southwestern Nigeria constituted the study participants. The retrieved data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of simple percentages, mean and standard deviation. The study revealed that although the university management adopted the different leadership style that were investigated, namely, transactional ( $x = 3.99$ ), autocratic ( $x = 3.94$ ), transformational ( $x = 3.89$ ), democratic ( $x = 3.62$ ), and laissez-faire ( $x = 3.59$ ), the transactional leadership style was found to be the most adopted by staff in university management positions. The result further showed that the transformational ( $t = 6.51, \beta = 1.053$ ), laissez faire ( $t = 6.18, \beta = 1.130$ ), autocratic ( $t = 4.11, \beta = 0.703$ ), and transactional ( $t = 3.97, \beta = 0.767$ ), leadership styles had significant effect on labour-management relations. The study concluded that contextual and situational variables, including, leader personality trait, employee attitudes, task context and organizational characteristics could be responsible for leaders adopting different leadership styles. This is because different leadership styles are appropriately required in different circumstances and employees react differently to various leadership approaches.*

**Keywords:** Leadership, Leadership Style, Labour, Management, Universities

## **Introduction**

The major functions of universities are teaching, research, knowledge generation and dissemination, and development of the human capital needed for a

modern economy (Amirault & Visser 2009; Ogbogu 2011; Suong, Thanh & Dao 2019; Ofor-Douglas 2020). How well this goal is realised is determined by a myriad of factors; typical among them is the quality of leadership provided by staffs in management positions in the university (Jameel & Ahmed 2019; Peretomode 2021) and a cooperative labour-management relations climate. Indeed, leadership is an inevitable functional element in social and formal organisations, including, academic institutions. Consequently, the success or failure of universities to discharge their functions can be explained among other variables by the quality of its leaders. This depends to a large extent, on the character, personality, behavior and previous experience of the leaders (Oke, Okunola, Oni & Adetoro 2010). In view of this, effective leadership is a key factor in achieving the goals and objectives of universities (Akanji, Mordi, Ajonbadi, & Mojeed-Sanni 2018; Andoh & Ghansah 2019). For the purpose of this study, university management refers to individuals in formal hierarchical leadership positions within the university governance framework and includes Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Registrar, Bursar and the University Librarian. They are referred to as principal officers and constitute the core of university management. They play critical role in determining the labour-management relations climate.

Research on leadership has mostly concerned itself with influence and the relationship between leaders and the led (Aransi 2009:120), and particularly with leadership as a process and not as a position (Rosenbloom, Kravchuk & Clerkin 2015:158), which involves initiating change that result in desired organisational outcome. Yet, others use a combination of variables to describe leadership, including power, authority and influence. These three ways help to alter the actions of other members of the organisation presumably for the achievement of set goals. Leadership in universities involves taking effective action to influence the character and direction of an institution, presumably for the better. This leadership function can be expressed in different forms, approaches and styles. Leadership styles of staff in university management positions have significant effect on the manner in which employees relate with the management. Leaders adopt a variety of ways including the use of their preferred leadership style to influence the actions of employees for the attainment of organizational goals (Rollinson & Dundon 2007:77). Therefore, effective management of the university is predicated on cooperative and collaborative relationship between the management and labour (workers). It is expected that both the leaders and other workers of the institution work together to achieve objectives that are set for the institution.

Harmonious labour-management relation is critical to effective functioning of organisations, particularly in the university system with structures and processes that allows multiple stakeholders (administrators, management, staffs, students among others) to work together toward achieving set goals. Labour-management relations can be characterized by a number of possible variables or dimensions such as the extent of labour-management cooperation, aggression/resistance, mutual regard, joint participation, trust/fairness hostility, power balance among others.

Labour-management relation is an important issue for academic institutions globally. This is because organizational success requires good working relationship between top level management and employees for improved performance. Therefore, leadership approach of university management must be such that encourage collaborative and cooperative labour-management relations and align employee expectations with the strategic objectives of the institution for improved productivity and overall success of the university (Ukeje, Abraham & Chinyere 2015). Furthermore, the work environment in the university is a collection of varying individuals and groups from diverse cultural, social, political and economic backgrounds with varying interests and expectations. Consequently, the interests and expectations of workers in the institution are bound to differ (Mbah & Ifeanyi 2012). In view of these, the leadership style adopted by staff in university management positions should be that which encourages harmonious working relationship between management and its employees.

Leaders and the manner in which they exercise leadership have significant implications for organizational outcomes (Cahyono et al. 2020), especially in the university system. This is because, to a large extent, the leadership style adopted by university management may determine the quality of the labour-management relationship. The university is a complex organization; hence, leaders of universities adopt different leadership styles in directing the affairs of their institutions as well as in executing the policy and governance priorities of the university. This has become imperative because the university work environment is a collection of workers with different goals and competing priorities that determine how they perform their function for achieving the institution's goals. Conflict arises between university management and their staff in the process of utilizing various leadership approaches. The leadership style of university management could have significant effect on the nature of the relationship between them and other workers hence determine the extent to which set goals can be achieved.

Labour-management relation is characterised by various variables including workplace governance, the advancement of efficiency, equity and voice in the employment relationship among others. The Vice-Chancellor in conjunction with other principal officers has the primary responsibility to organize, allocate and distribute available resources in a way that optimizes performance for achieving the policy and governance objectives of the university, thus determine the direction of the university and influences the nature of governance at the institution, thereby setting the tone of relationship between university management and workers. In this respect, Onwuli and Agbo (2004) averred that the Vice-Chancellor who doubles as the chairman of the university senate and all other committees of the senate is responsible for providing leadership within the institution and executing the policies of the senate and council. In undertaking their leadership role, university management in many institutions has often been at loggerheads with their workers.

Research has shown that leadership style of university management could have significant effect on the nature of the relationship with workers, thereby

determining the extent to which set goals can be achieved (Brown & Moshavi 2002). Previous studies have highlighted the role of effective leadership style in promoting positive organizational outcomes, including labour-management relation. The result of a study by Kebede and Demeke (2017) reveal that transformational leadership style adopted by managers of public universities in Ethiopia show significant positive effect on job satisfaction of academic staff. In their study, Sakiru et al. (2014) explored the relationship between heads of departments (HODs) leadership style (transformational, transactional and laissez-faire) and academic staffs' job satisfaction in Nigerian public universities. The findings of the study indicated that the transformational leadership style ranked highest and the laissez-faire scored the least. The results also revealed that HODs leadership styles have significant relationship with academic staffs' job satisfaction. Similarly, Opigo (2021) investigated the effect of HODs leadership style (transformational, transactional and laissez-faire) in Federal University, Otuoke. The results of the study showed that the adoption of a preferred leadership style by the HODs varied across the different departments in the university. The result also indicated varying levels of relationship between leadership styles of the HODs and employees' job satisfaction in the different departments. These results suggest that department-specific prevailing situations determine the leadership style adopted by the HODs. For example, Ogbogu and Ademola (2018) identified ten factors that influence leadership styles of HODs in universities and includes, attitudes of subordinates, cultural environment, job stress, availability of working facilities, goals to be attained, leadership pattern of colleague in other units, religion, personal temperament/personality, gender, and past leadership experience.

In Nigeria-specific context, there is a dearth of empirical research on the association between leadership style and labour-management relations in universities. The study by Ukeje et al. (2015) and Arikewuyo (2013) reflect a significant interest in both leadership style and labour-management relations. In their study, Ukeje et al. (2015) investigated the effects of leadership influence on labour-management relations in Ebonyi State University, Nigeria. The results revealed that staff in management positions adopts both democratic and autocratic leadership styles in managing the affairs of the institution. The study also indicates that there is a significant relationship between the leadership styles adopted and labour-management relationship. Democratic practices give employees a sense of involvement in the day-to-day affairs of the institution, while autocratic leadership style limits the participation of employees in decision-making process of the institution. Arikewuyo (2013) reported that autocratic leadership style of university administrators leads to adversarial labour-management relations in campuses.

Onwuli and Agho (2004) examined the level of academic staff participation in university governance and the extent to which academic staff is consulted on key personnel issues. The study found that academic staff members believed they are consulted on academic matters through their representatives in the faculty senate, while their participation in decisions related to non-academic matters is very limited.

Furthermore, the study revealed that administrators make administrative decisions with very limited input from academic staff and academic decisions related to admissions criteria and accreditation standards are made by external bodies. In addition, the study indicates that academic staff members are dissatisfied with the general working conditions and the governance process. These results have implications for labour-management relations. This is because when workers perceive that they are alienated from all decision-making process, it often results in strained relationship between management and employees with significant negative implications for institutional growth and development. The results of the study by Onwuli and Agho (2004) suggest a strong need for improvement in the consultation process, and more involvement of the academic staff in other governance issues especially issues that concern their welfare. Participation in decision-making process is an important characteristic of good labour-management relations climate. It enables employees take ownership of policy of the institution.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the role of universities as agents for the advancement of knowledge through teaching, research and public service, problems of varying dimensions have impacted on Nigeria's universities' capacity to deliver their mandate. It is evident that the persistent labour-management relations crisis in Nigeria's public tertiary institutions in general and in the universities in particular is among the problems facing university administration in Nigeria. While the universities have been in crisis for many years, however, in recent time, the situation has been made worse by incessant breakdown in labour-management relations. Much of the difficulties have been attributed to the manner in which staff in university management positions direct the affairs of administration in the campuses (Fatile&Adejuwon 2011). Research has provided evidence that academic and non-teaching staff of universities have been involved in series of disagreements with the university management and government both at the national and sub-national levels over a broad range of issues such as poor working conditions of workers, inadequate funding, workers' demands for improved welfare, non-implementation of agreements, payment of outstanding allowances and salaries, poor learning environment among others (Ingwuet *al.* 2007; Arikewuyo 2013). The disagreements often arose because of the manner in which university management exercise leadership in dealing with the issues as they arose.

In addition, intermittent disruptions of academic and administrative activities have been a regular feature in the universities as a result of disagreements between workers and university management as well as the leadership approach adopted in dealing with conflict situations (Ugoani, 2019). For instance, in 2016, workers under different unions including Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT) and Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) at the University of Ibadan protested non-payment of 'earned allowance' leading to face-off between the university management and the workers as well as grounding administrative activities. Also, in

2016, workers in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, under the aegis of NASU and SSANU protested over non-payment of allowances and alleged imposition of a new Vice-Chancellor by the university management, which led to the closure of the institution. Several other strikes and protests by various university workers are often responses to the manner in which university managements exercise leadership in the institutions.

Universities are governed by set rules and processes; however, there have been reported abuse of rules and regulations governing official conduct (Ndum & Okey, 2013). This situation often creates adversarial labour-management relationship which can result in escalation of tensions between staff members in leadership positions and other workers. For example, Asiyai (2013) noted that most staff disputes in the universities in Nigeria have been attributed to high-handedness and arbitrary leadership style of university management. Consequently, the relative roles of university management in promoting harmonious labour-management relations in universities have emerged as one of the most important topics of open and vigorous debate in Nigeria. Despite the plethora of studies that have focused on assessing leadership and the impacts of its various dimensions on organisational and work outcome such as employee engagement (Suong, Thanh & Dao 2019), job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Alonderiene & Majauskaite 2016; Kebede & Demeke 2017; Mwesiga, Tusiime & Ssekiziyivu 2020; Cahyono *et al.* 2020), job performance (Andoh & Ghansah 2019), employee wellbeing (Samad *et al.* 2015) among others, very little research has sought to reveal how the leadership styles of university management impact on labour-management relation in universities (Ukejeet al. 2015). There is the need therefore for leadership styles of university staff in management positions to be assessed in the light of widespread labour-management relations crisis in the university campuses.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The nature of governance of any institution is principally impacted by the behavior and personality attributes of staff members in management positions and it influences the attitude, climate, progress, cooperation and direction of efforts in the institution. This paper, therefore, examined the leadership style adopted by university management and interrogated how they impact on labour-management relations. Consequently, the specific objectives of the study are to:

- (I) identify the leadership styles adopted by managements of selected Federal Universities in southwestern Nigeria; and
- (ii) examine the effect of leadership styles on labour-management relations in the selected Federal Universities in southwestern Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

This study provides answers to the following research questions:

- (I) What is the leadership style adopted by university management in selected Federal Universities in southwestern Nigeria; and

- (ii) To what extent do the leadership styles adopted by university management influence labour-management relations in selected Federal Universities in southwestern Nigeria?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was predicated on both the Hershey and Blanchard (1988) situational and Fiedler (1967) contingency theories of leadership. These theories provide models for analysing current situation and the characteristics that affect the organisation (Alajmi, 2022). Situational theory recognizes that leaders operate in a constantly changing workplace environment and therefore require leaders to adapt their leadership style to match the prevailing circumstances (Harrison et al. 2020). On the other hand, contingency theory is based on the notion that the success of leaders is dependent upon their control of the situation. According to this theory, leadership style is quite inflexible (Reams, 2023) and is underpinned by three key factors, namely: (i) leader-member relation: how the leader interacts with team members; (ii) task Structure: how the tasks are set up by the leader; and (iii) positional power: how much power the leader has over the group. The main difference between situational leadership and contingency theory is that situational leadership follows the idea that leadership style can be changed and adapted, while contingency theory does not (Peretomode, 2021).

Academic organisations such as the universities are complex organisations, operating in an open system with its own subsystems. Generally, the sub-systems of an organisation can be categorized into (i) task structure; (ii) technology; and (iii) people, each maintaining some degree of differentiation and integration. The university system maintains many such systems, including, academic affairs, faculty affairs, personnel, information management, research management, learning and instruction, maintenance and evaluation among others. In university systems where management of people and processes is the responsibility of a university management, situational and contingency theories can be useful tools for the principal officers. They can choose the best course of action based upon the current circumstances. Flexible response to conditions of uncertainty is crucial in managing an organisation effectively.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the survey research design, supplemented by interviews and was carried out in three purposively selected federal universities located in south-western Nigeria, namely, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Ibadan and University of Lagos. The choice of the universities selected was based on the fact that they are the oldest in the region and among the first-generation universities in Nigeria. Furthermore, they have witnessed more periods of leadership and labour-management relations crisis and have experience in dealing with such crises situations. Both primary and secondary data were utilized for the study. Primary data were generated through the administration of questionnaire and the use

of structured interview. Items for the questionnaire were drawn from the multifactor leadership questionnaire (Bass & Avalorio 1997) to elicit and measure the employees' opinions on leadership style of staff in university management positions. The study sample consisted of 652 randomly selected academic (281) and non-teaching (371) staff cutting across the rungs of the academic and administrative career structure as well as leaders of staff unions. These two groups (academic and non-teaching staff) constitute the labour force of the university. The retrieved data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of simple percentages, mean and standard deviation. An average mean score of 2.5 or above indicates that the respondent perceive staff in management position to adopt a particular leadership style. In-depth interviews were conducted with employees' union leaders using an interview guide. The interview guide was structured topically in such a way as to enable it to serve as a checklist. Questions relating to the stated objectives were explored and mostly open-ended, including, questions about the leadership style of staff in management positions, nature of labour-management relations and how leadership style of staff in management positions impact on labour-management relations. The president and secretary of the unions were purposively selected because they are considered to possess sufficient knowledge of the subject. A total of 5 participants cutting across ASUU, SSANU and NASU agreed to hold interview sessions. Interviews were audio recorded with consent of the interviewees. All interviews were transcribed and subjected to content analysis. Secondary data were derived from textbooks and journals.

## Results

Results in Table 1 reveal that generally more males (58.9%) participated than female (41.1%). However, it was observed that more female (52%) than males participated (48%) in the study at the University of Lagos. Figures in the table show that majority of the participants (32.7%) were between 41 – 50 years old. Those between 31 – 40 years of age constituted 32.1% of the study population. Those who were 51 years and above constituted 27.6% of the study, while those that were 30 years of age and below were the least (7.7%). This is an indication that the respondents cuts across several generations and thus able to offer different perspectives for the study. Furthermore, results in the table indicate that more of the participants (49.8%) were employed between 2001 and 2010, while a significant number (27.6%) were employed in the year 2000 and the least number (22.5%) started work in 2011. This shows that majority of the respondents have over 9 years of service at the university. Both academic (46.7%) and the various categories of non-teaching staff, including senior non-teaching (32.1%) and junior non-teaching (24.8%) staff participated in the study. This indicates that the participants for this study cuts across the entire categories of staff in the universities.

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics**

| Variables                  | Institutions |             |                |               |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|
|                            | OAU<br>f(%)  | UI<br>f(%)  | UNILAG<br>f(%) | Total<br>f(%) |
| <b>Gender</b>              |              |             |                |               |
| Male                       | 150 (76.1%)  | 127 (54.7%) | 107 (48%)      | 384 (58.9%)   |
| Female                     | 47 (23.9%)   | 105 (45.3%) | 116 (52%)      | 268 (41.1%)   |
| <b>Age</b>                 |              |             |                |               |
| 30 years & below           | 6 (3%)       | 5 (2.2%)    | 39 (17.5%)     | 50 (7.7%)     |
| 31-40 years                | 30 (15.2%)   | 84 (36.2%)  | 95 (42.6)      | 209 (32.1%)   |
| 41-50 years                | 88 (44.7%)   | 73 (31.5%)  | 52 (23.3%)     | 213 (32.7%)   |
| 51 years +                 | 73 (37.1%)   | 70 (30.2%)  | 37 (16.6%)     | 180 (27.6%)   |
| <b>Years of Employment</b> |              |             |                |               |
| 2000                       | 73 (37.1%)   | 79 (34.1%)  | 28 (12.6%)     | 180 (27.6%)   |
| 2001-2010                  | 82 (41.6%)   | 86 (37.1%)  | 157 (70.4%)    | 325 (49.8%)   |
| 2011-till date             | 42 (21.3%)   | 67 (28.9%)  | 38 (17%)       | 147 (22.5%)   |
| <b>Category of Staff</b>   |              |             |                |               |
| Academic                   | 92 (46.7%)   | 80 (34.5%)  | 109 (48.9%)    | 281 (43.1%)   |
| Senior Non-Teaching        | 84 (42.6%)   | 61 (26.3%)  | 64 (28.7%)     | 209 (32.1%)   |
| Junior Non-Teaching        | 21 (10.7%)   | 91(39.2%)   | 50 (22.4)      | 162 (24.8%)   |
| <b>Total</b>               | 223 (100%)   | 232 (100%)  | 197 (100%)     | 652 (100%)    |

Table 2 shows the mean values of responses of respondents' perception of the leadership styles of staff in management position. An average mean score of 2.5 or above indicates that the respondent perceive staff in management position to adopt a particular leadership style. Figures in the table indicate that respondents perceived staff in university management position demonstrated transactional leadership style more because it has the highest mean score of 3.99. This is followed by autocratic (3.94), transformational (3.82), democratic (3.62) and laissez-faire (3.59) leadership styles.

**Table 2: Respondent perception of the leadership Style of staff in University Management Positions**

| Leadership Style | OAU  | UI   | UNILAG | Aggregate |
|------------------|------|------|--------|-----------|
|                  | x    | x    | x      | x         |
| Transactional    | 3.89 | 4.20 | 3.88   | 3.99      |
| Autocratic       | 3.90 | 4.18 | 3.73   | 3.94      |
| Transformational | 3.73 | 3.89 | 3.85   | 3.82      |
| Democratic       | 3.64 | 3.50 | 3.73   | 3.62      |
| Laissez-faire    | 3.39 | 3.71 | 3.67   | 3.59      |

Table 3 shows the results of the regression analysis to determine the effects of leadership style on labour-management relations.

**Table 3: Effects of Leadership Style on Labour-Management Relations**

| Leadership Style | Unstandardised Coefficient ( $\beta$ ) | T    | p-value |
|------------------|----------------------------------------|------|---------|
| Transformational | 1.053                                  | 6.51 | 0.000   |
| Transactional    | 0.767                                  | 3.97 | 0.000   |
| Authoritarian    | 0.703                                  | 4.11 | 0.000   |
| Laissez-faire    | 1.130                                  | 6.18 | 0.000   |

R-squared =0.5942, F= 189.16;  $p < 0.05$ ; Democratic leadership was not significant and excluded

### Discussion of Findings

The results in Table 2 had transactional leadership style with highest mean score of 3.99 which show that staff in university management positions involves other workers in a relationship of reciprocal dependence in which the contributions of both sides are acknowledged and rewarded. Transactional leadership style emphasise reward for efforts, enhance workers commitment to fulfilling assigned tasks and responsibilities in order to realise the goals of the institution. Furthermore, when workers perceive that their efforts would be rewarded, it creates a positive labour-management relationship. This finding corroborate the work of Othman et al. (2013) which revealed that university managers utilize transactional leadership style because it encourage workers to contribute their best in expectation for rewards. It is important to note that transactional leadership emphasises a stick and carrot approach to managing workers which may not go down well with workers. An important reason for this is that their psychological needs in terms of how they think, how they feel, what they desire and who they are as individuals among others are discounted (Bass & Avolio 1990:21), with the result that it limit how much effort workers are willing to invest in their tasks.

Furthermore, the table revealed that autocratic leadership style was rated the second most preferred leadership style. This is consistent with the outcome of a study by Arikewuyo (2013) which reported that many university administrators behave in dictatorial manner on policy issues in their institution. Autocratic leadership style breeds resentment from workers and create an adversarial work environment (Asiyai, 2013). Transformational leadership style was the next style that respondents perceive university managers adopted. This indicates that staff in university management positions motivates other workers to accept and accomplish stated goals. They contribute to the growth and development of their workers. The democratic and the laissez-faire are the least adopted leadership styles. This implies that there is limited participation of employees in decisions that are made by staff in university management positions. This is consistent with the findings of a study by

Onwuli and Agho (2004) which reported that academic staff members are dissatisfied with university administrators because they are not involved in the decision making. The laissez-faire is the least adopted style because leaders refrain from taking responsibility and only intervene when goals are not met.

It can be observed from the foregoing that staff in university management positions utilized all styles of leadership under study. Rosenbloom, Kravchuk and Clerkin (2015:158) noted that the most suitable styles in any given context would depend on the managers, the subordinates and the organizational situation. In other words, leadership style is determined by a combination of forces in the leader, employee and situational variables. Oc (2017) identified that contextual and situational variables that could be responsible for leaders adopting different leadership styles and includes employee attitudes (for example satisfaction, commitment), task context, organizational characteristics among others. Further reinforcing these findings, Kalargyrou and Woods (2009) reported that different leadership styles are appropriately required in different circumstances, thereby producing transformational leaders in some situations and transactional leaders in some other situation.

The results of the regression analysis in Table 3 indicated that transformational, transactional, autocratic and laissez-faire leadership are significant predictors of overall labour-management relations climate and explained 59% of variance in labour-management relation. Transformational leadership is the dominant predictor (t-value 6.51;  $\beta = 1.05$ ), followed by laissez-faire (t-value = 6.18,  $\beta = 1.13$ ). Autocratic and transactional leadership are the least predictors of labour-management relations. The findings demonstrated positive correlation between transformational leadership style and labour-management relations. This suggest that when staff in university management positions concentrate on workers' needs and expectation and then clarifies how those needs and expectation could be aligned to the goals of the institution, labour-management relations climate is improved. Transformational leadership style enable workers to be creatively engaged, improve their performance, enhance collaborative and cooperative labour-management relations as well as enhance the overall success and productivity of the institution (Brown & Moshavi 2002).

The results revealed positive significant relationship between laissez-faire leadership and labour-management relations. It may mean that staff in Nigerian universities wants to be given the freedom to exercise their judgment in performing their responsibilities. Although this leadership approach may improve labour-management relations, it can contribute to poor organizational performance (Pihie et al. 2011). Also, autocratic leadership shows a significant relationship with labour-management relations. This implies that when staff in university management positions adopts autocratic leadership for the purpose of ensuring order and compliance with laid down rules and regulations; it has significant impact on labour-management relations climate. The use of autocratic leadership style may create animosity between university management and workers and often results to

perpetual conflict, tension and as low employee productivity leading to poor outcomes. The notion that management can act alone to determine the policy priorities of universities conflicts with the traditional collegiate decision-making framework that operate in many academic institutions (Scott, 2011). This suggests that staff in university management positions should avoid autocratic leadership. In connection with transactional leadership style and labour-management relations, the findings demonstrated a significant relationship. This means that staffs in university management positions determine reward in exchange of employees' efforts, and compliance through the use of punishments to ensure staff performance.

The findings of the quantitative data were also complimented by the qualitative data gathered from the interview sessions with some officials of the various staff unions in the university. The unions include Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT) and Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU). It was gathered from the cross-section of interviews with the respondents that university management adopts different styles of leadership in directing the day-to-day operations of the university.

The result of the content analysis of the interview indicates that leadership and its various dimensions have significant impact on labour-management relations. A particular union official who sought anonymity alluded to this in the following submissions:

*If a university is going to be peaceful, it is the leadership of the university that would point to that direction. If you have a university administrator that is rigid, dictatorial, authoritarian, unyielding, fixated, certainly there would be industrial disharmony in such institution. But when you have a leadership that respond to criticisms in an objective manner and is willing to bow to superior argument and is also democratic, consultative in handling the affairs of the institution, certainly there would be cordial relationship between labour and that leadership*

The preceding statements indicate the adoption of a leadership style anchored on democratic principles. This suggests that successful management is those that adopt leadership style that involve employees in decision making that affect them. This view is in agreement with the submission by Ogbogu (2013) that a leadership style that seeks to involve staff members within the university community in respect of specific tasks is the most conducive to the achievement of intended outputs and outcomes. It can be averred that leadership style such as autocratic style that permit limited involvement and participation of employee in decision making can strain the relationship between workers and management.

Yet another union official noted that staffs in university management positions uses a combination of styles when relating with workers and proceeded to

submit as follows:

*Different administrations in the university use various leadership approaches in managing the affairs of their institution. Some are secretive and does not allow workers to participate in the affairs of the university as it concerns them. While some university administrators communicate their activities to their workers and by so doing carry workers along. In fact, some university administrators have arrogated to themselves the power of the divine, dishing out orders and expecting everyone to fall in line. This kind of approach cause disharmony in the relationship between workers and management*

The above describe fully the type of leadership styles adopted by different administrations in the university and demonstrate significant implications of the various leadership approaches on labour-management relations climate. Leadership style that demonstrates a sense of fairness by management improves cooperation. The absence of this will promote a sense of collective action by workers. Consequently, the leadership style of university management should accommodate the concerns and opinions of other stakeholders in running the affairs of the institution. This result in harmonious labour-management relations climate within the institution and create a sense of belonging in the university work environment (Ugoani, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

The study examined the leadership styles adopted by university management and their implication for labour-management relations in Nigerian public universities. The findings revealed that staff in university management positions adopted a combination of transactional, autocratic, transformational, democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles in managing the day-to-day affairs of the university. Consequently, this paper argues that leadership style is a function of prevailing circumstances or contextual conditions. Situational variables such as employee attitude, task context and organizational characteristics among others could be responsible for the adoption of different leadership styles. Transformational leadership style had a greater predictive effect on labour-management relations climate. This study has shown that good labour-management relations can be improved when staffs in university management positions adopt transformational leadership style. To be effective leaders, staff in university management positions should possess knowledge about transformational leadership to demonstrate this leadership style to create a cooperative labour-management relations climate. However, it is imperative for staff in university management positions to recognize prevailing situations when interacting with other employees. This is because

different leadership styles are appropriately required in different circumstances and employees react differently to various leadership approaches.

### Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that although university managements are invested with the responsibility of directing the affairs of their institutions, workers react in certain ways to the style of leadership adopted. Consequently, the following recommendations are made:

1. The establishment of leadership training programmes for leaders in higher education institutions, particularly universities, should include emphasis on leadership styles such as those in the instrument used for this study in order to create an awareness of leadership styles and facilitate harmonious labour-management relations
2. The Styles of Leadership Survey should be administered to candidates aspiring to leadership position before they are hired by the university in order to determine their dominant leadership styles (candidates who score highest on transformational leadership style should be considered first for employment).
3. Higher educational institutions (especially universities) should encourage top management and workers to find opportunities to develop administrative leadership skills and should encourage continued growth in leadership skills through professional organizations, seminars and workshops, and meetings periodically.

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