

Democratic and Autocratic Leadership Styles and Staff Productivity in Federal University Libraries in South-South, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is an essential factor for the progress of any organisation. It has gained the attention of researchers worldwide. It be perceived to have an overarching impact on the achievement of organizational objectives, policies, programmes and strategic plans. The leadership style adopted by the leader is of great significance to the overall growth and productivity of staff. This study seeks to determine the relationship between Autocratic and Democratic leadership style and staff productivity in University Libraries in South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. The population of the study consist of 358 library staff that are working in Federal University libraries in South-South, Nigeria in the 2025/2026 Academic session. A purposive sampling technique was used and data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire. Data obtained was analysed using PPMC. The findings of the study revealed that democratic leadership style promotes and increases staff productivity in Federal University libraries in South-South, Nigeria. The findings also revealed that librarian autocratic leadership style has a weak significant relationship with staff productivity. The study concluded that democratic leadership style adopted by librarians motivates staff to put in their best to achieve set goals in Federal universities in South-South Nigeria, while autocratic leadership style adopted decreases staff productivity.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in university libraries is headed by a professional referred to as the University Librarian, whose duties span from motivation to creating an enabling environment for staff to contribute meaningfully towards the attainment of the library goals and objectives. They oversee and ensure that the library operations in university libraries satisfies the intended users. Under the University Librarian are other librarians who serve as divisional heads, heads of departments and units; who are also librarians. Librarians as leaders apply various forms of influence – from subtle persuasion to direct application of power to ensure that other library staff have the motivation and role clarity to achieve set goals. They arrange the work environment by allocating resources and altering communication patterns to ensure that employees can achieve corporate objectives more easily. Borkowski et al. (2011) posited that this entails the ability to communicate the values, vision and mission of the organization in order to motivate the subordinate for higher productivity.

Librarians specifically use their leadership style to persuade and coordinate all activities of subordinates and lead them to contribute to meeting the goals of the library in accordance with their maximum capabilities. Nwaigwe (2015) claimed that no organisation or group of any size exists without leaders and followers. According to Udom (2022), someone has to organise meetings, determine and implement policies and make the countless small contributions that are necessary to carry out organisational aims. Leadership according to Jerome (2018) is a process or an act of inspiring people so as to get the best out of them and at the same time achieve expected results. Segun-Adeniran (2015) suggested that leadership could be viewed as community mobilisation, initiation, motivation and involvement of personnel towards development. Significantly, a leader is a person that leads, directs, and oversees the affairs/activities of a group of people. Northouse (2015: p348) quoting Harris S. Truman, the 33rd President of the United States stated, "A leader is a man who can persuade people to do what they do not want to do, or do what they are too lazy to do". In effect, the success of any library is highly rested upon the leadership style of the librarians. There are many leadership styles that can be adopted by a librarian;

however, this work will focus on two outstanding leadership styles: democratic and autocratic leadership style and how they influence staff productivity in academic libraries.

Leadership style

Leadership style refers to a leader's method of providing direction implementing plans and motivating people. A leader is person who influences, directs, and motivates others to perform specific tasks and also inspire his subordinates for efficient performance towards the accomplishment of the stated corporate objectives (Abodunde, Ayo-Oyebiyi & Unachukwu, 2017). To achieve these responsibilities, the leaders will employ a certain leadership style. Cherry (2021) asserted that leadership style refers to a leader's characteristic behaviours when directing, motivating, guiding and managing groups of people. It describes the way a leader decides to direct his/her own subordinate in order to achieve set goals. For Gonos and Gallo (2013) leadership style is how leaders use their power and competence to influence their subordinates. Leadership style is concerned with the initiation, management, organisation and direction of the actions of the members of a group in a specific situation towards achieving the objectives of the group (Adegbesan, 2013; Clark, 2015; Hamze & Abdulkhaliq, 2025). In the library context, leadership style is a process whereby a librarian influences other library staff to achieve the library's set goals. Leadership styles stand to measure the relationship that exists between the leaders and the subordinates. It translates into the process of leading effectively and the leader fulfilling his/her fundamental responsibilities as a leader to the subordinates (Akidi and Chukwueke, 2020).

Leadership is a process in which a person or persons inspire(s) and motivate(s) the people to meet the shared goals or objectives which may be changed or added as per the needs and challenges (Malik, 2019). Leadership is also about listening to people, supporting and encouraging them and involving them in the decision-making and problem-solving processing. It is about building teams and developing their ability to make skillful decisions (Akparobore, 2025; Owera, 2019). The way and manner a leader lead his/her subordinate will determine the level of productivity of the subordinates and the organization at large. Suffice it to say that the leadership style exhibited by a leader is important for the smooth running of the organization as the major obstacle associated with the attainment of the organizational goals is poor leadership or wrong style of leadership (Udom, 2022). However, there is no known universally accepted style of leadership since an appropriate style depends on situations and circumstances. Different organisations including the library vary in their styles of leadership. Hence, a librarian may adopt the autocratic, democratic, laissez –faire, transformational and transactional leadership styles, some explore a combination of these styles to achieve their set goals. It is pertinent to note that the appropriate leadership style must be practiced by leaders in the university libraries in order to achieve productivity. However, a combination of styles could be used depending on the subordinate or subordinates in question and the situation at hand. The responsibility therefore lies in the hand of the university librarian or any member of the management team in the library to use his/her discretion in such situation.

Autocratic Leadership

The autocratic leadership style is the authoritarian style. Authoritarian in the sense that an autocratic leader is a no-nonsense leader that leads followers without paying attention to their feelings (Adeyemi, 2010; Arumuru, 2019; Phearom Yea, et.al, 2024). This style involves a scenario where absolute power lies in the hands of the leader. There is little or no input from members of his team or subordinates. It is a “do it my way” type of leadership. He takes decisions without consultation from members of his team; that is, there is little or no synergy. In his view, Segun-Adeniran (2015) noted that it is a highly non-participatory leadership style because there is no expected input or feedback from employees. The leader is seen as the all in all when it comes to making decisions even on matters concerning his employees; he has the final say. Maqsood et al., (2013) viewed an autocratic leader as one who takes control over all decisions with little input from staff. Typically, autocratic leaders make choices based on their own ideas and judgments and rarely accept advice from followers. Autocratic leaders employ absolute, authoritarian control over staff. Some features of autocratic leadership as observed by Leadership for Communities (2015) included little or no input from group members; leaders make the decisions; group leaders dictate all the work methods; group members are rarely trusted with decisions or important tasks

Furthermore, Tom and Stilwell (2018), confirmed that in autocratic leadership, the leader makes most, or all, of the important decisions without involving the subordinates; directs the subordinates as to what must be done and how, without regard to their own opinions; and generally, ignores any suggestions made by other members of staff. This system of leadership controls the subordinates with unrestricted power; a centralized system of administration whose nature is always forceful on the employers; it is highly non-participative; little or no input or feedback is required from other members of the organization (Adams, 2020; Cherry, 2018; Nayab, 2011; Osabiya & Ikenga, 2015). An autocratic leader sees the subordinates to be lazy; therefore, he concludes they need to be totally controlled strictly to achieve high productivity.



Image of an autocratic leadership (SOURCE: <https://www.teamly.com/blog/autocratic-leadership-examples/>)

Autocratic leadership style in a library set up will give absolute power to the University Librarian in charge of other librarians who alone call the shots in the running of the library. This leadership could be beneficial in some instances such as when decisions need to be made quickly without consulting with a large group of people (Chukwusa, 2019b). However, in a situation in which autocratic leadership fails to lead to productivity, democratic leadership style could be adopted.

Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership is a leadership style where the leader and the followers work hand in hand to meet the goals and objectives of the organization. It is also known as participative leadership style (Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, 2015). This style emphasizes group and leader participation in formulation of policies that serves as guidelines for organizational operations more so, the leader derives power and authority from his followers and it is more of team building and developing the ability to make skillful and useful decision(s) among the team members (Akidi & Chukwueke, 2020; Chukwusa, 2019). The democratic leadership style is a direct opposite of the autocratic leadership style; it allows for contributions and inputs from employees in the organisations. It encourages creativity and innovation in their routine operations. This leadership style gives subordinate staff high sense of belonging thereby getting the best inputs from them. It brings about higher level of productivity because the subordinate staff participation level in decision making processes is considerably high.

According to Chukwusa, (2019a), a democratic leadership style encourages associates to participate in setting goals, determining processes, providing ideas and suggestions for solving necessary problems as well as indulge in decision-making process. Arumuru (2019) opined that democratic leadership style involves shared decision-making, open communication and realisation that conflict is inevitable and must be managed. Although, the leader maintains final authority, subordinates' input and consultation is highly valued. The leader attempts as much as possible to make each individual feel that he is an important member of the organization which enhances staff participation leading to the growth of the organization. As best argued in Leadership for Communities (2015), the democratic leader encourages ideas and input from all team members and motivates teams toward

success and at worst, the democratic leader can leave out input from less aggressive team members and override feedback from members once a decision is made.

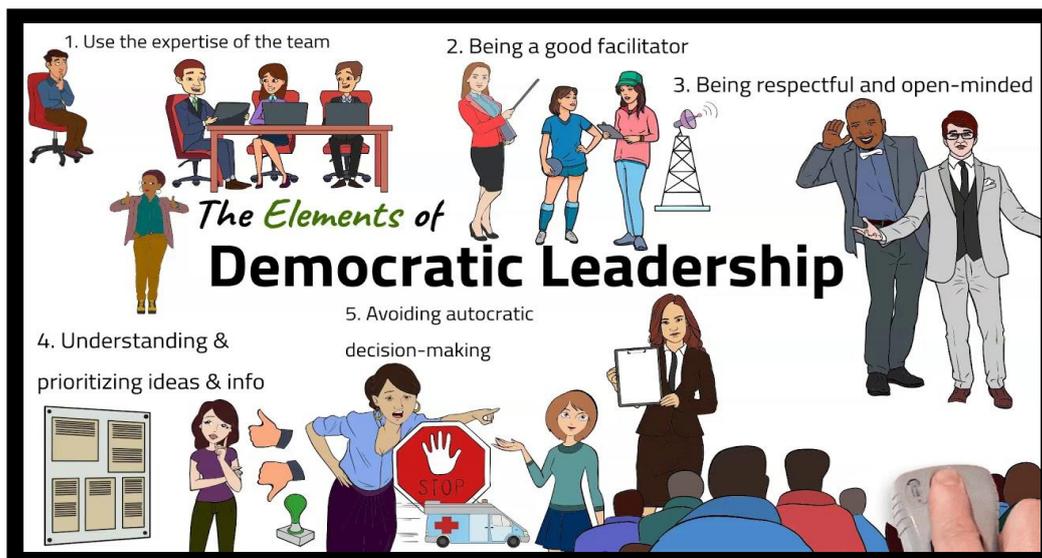


Image of Democratic Leadership Style (SOURCE: Leadershipahoy! Youtube Channel, 2025)

In democratic leadership style, according to Dolly and Okpokwasili (2018), the leader maintains final authority but the subordinates' input and consultation is highly valued and that enhances staff morale. Nyamato-Kwenda and Kwanya (2017) explained that staff members working under a democratic leader feel more wanted as a result of the additional responsibility which is vested in them and the fact that their opinions matter. This in turn, he argues, promotes a higher level of motivation and productivity. He, however, cautioned that democratic leadership delays decisions and may in turn lead to missed deadlines and opportunities. Chiyem and Adeogun (2016) also disagrees with using democratic leadership style when there is not enough time to get everyone's input and rather suggested that it is easier and more cost-effective for the manager to make the decision. However, democratic leaders demonstrate the elixir of human understanding and if applied with integrity, could reform organizations, create an environment where staff are empowered to fulfill their highest needs and become members of a productive community (Omole, 2020; Udom, 2022).

Concept of Staff Productivity

Productivity refers to the ability or all the efforts that an individual employee put forth towards the overall production of goods and services of the organisation with the minimum contribution of skills, talent, motivation, machines and material. It can be considered to be the amount of work achieved within a certain number of hours and it is typically understood to be an output–input-ratio (Abba, Anumaka, & Gate, 2016). In other words, it is the efficiency of a worker or groups of workers. In the same vein, Ogunsanwo (2012) defined productivity as the rate at which a worker, an organisation, or a country produces goods and services. Productivity is also described as the relationship between the quantity of output and the quantity of input used to generate that outcome according to Bárcenas (2020). It is a measure of the effectiveness and efficiency of an organization in generating output with the available resources. Productivity is termed as the ratio of output to input and it is regarded as the level of an individual's work achievement as reported by Gikonyo (2017) after having exerted effort. Staff productivity is defined as value added per employee and this is the most common measure of productivity. Staff productivity as defined in the context of the work is the output of job performed by a staff to achieve set goals and this productivity is measured by the input they put into the job. It indicates the effectiveness and efficiency of job labor in the production and sale of the output, on the overall impact on organization. Job productivity as defined by Hanaysha (2016) refers to the measured output of an employee within a specified period. Similarly, job productivity can be explained as 'the ratio between output and total factors required to achieve it (Owizy, 2015). From these definitions, it is clear that efficiency and effectiveness are the core of productivity of any organisation, including libraries.

In the context of an academic library, productivity denotes the ability of a librarian/library staff to provide efficient and effective services that are capable of promoting the image and standard of the parent institution. This includes providing current and relevant educational resources in the library that would encourage increase in paper publications among faculty/school members and librarians themselves and innovative research works in the institution that would attract grants from both local as well as international organisations and the likes (Yaya et al, 2016). Every organization have set goals and objectives and the achievement of these goals is reflected in the level of productivity through job performance. Academic libraries in Nigerian universities have been making significant contribution to the mandate of their parent institution, which are, teaching, research and community services geared towards social, political and economic development of the country (Ikonne & Fajonyomi, 2019). Productivity stands out as a vital factor that facilitates the growth and development of the library. It is believed that individual staff possesses some skills, talents, strength, etc., that if applied properly can contribute greatly to the library’s growth and development. However, some subordinate staff may or may not give their best because of the leadership style adopted by their superior.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted in this study was correlational research design and the study was carried out in seven Federal University libraries in South-South, Nigeria. The federal universities are; University of Benin Library, University of Uyo Library, University of Calabar Library, University of Port Harcourt Library, Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun Library, Federal University, Otuoke Library, Nigerian Maritime University, Library. The population of the study consisted 358 respondents (128 professionals and 230 para-professional librarians) drawn from the seven federal university libraries in south-south Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was adopted and researchers structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was subjected to face validation and reliability test. Out of 358 copies of questionnaire served, only 324 were useful for analysis and data obtained were statistically treated with Pearson Product Moment Correlation for the research questions. The research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significance level.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between librarians’ autocratic leadership style and staff productivity in Federal university libraries of South-South Nigeria?

Table 1: Summary of relationship between librarians’ autocratic leadership style and staff productivity in Federal University Libraries of South-South Nigeria

Variables	N	$\sum X \sum Y$	$\sum X^2 \sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r	remarks
Autocratic leadership	108	415	172225			Weak negative relationship
				273485	.033	
Staff productivity	216	659	434281			

Table 1, showed the correlation coefficient value of .033. This value is found to be weak negative relationship. This indicates that librarians’ autocratic leadership style has a weak negative relationship with staff productivity. Thus, the result implies that there exists no relationship between librarians’ autocratic leadership style and staff productivity.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between librarians’ democratic leadership style and staff productivity in Federal university libraries of South-South Nigeria?

Table 2: Summary of relationship between librarians’ democratic leadership style and staff productivity in Federal University libraries of South-South Nigeria

Variables	N	$\sum X \sum Y$	$\sum X^2 \sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	R	Remarks
Democratic leadership	108	700	490000			High positive

				461300	0.67	relationship
Staff productivity	216	659	434281			

The result in Table 2 shows the correlation coefficient value of 0.67. This value is found to be high positive relationship. This indicates that librarians’ democratic leadership style has a high positive relationship with staff productivity. Thus, the result implies that there exists a relationship between librarians’ democratic leadership style and staff productivity.

Hypothesis

H₁: There is no significant relationship between librarians’ democratic leadership style and staff productivity in Federal university libraries of South-South Nigeria.

Table 3: The Result of PPMC analysis of the relationship between librarians’ democratic leadership style and staff productivity in Federal University Libraries of South-South Nigeria

Variables	N	$\sum X \sum Y$	$\sum X^2 \sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	R	p-value	Decision
Democratic leadership	108	700	490000				S
				461300	0.67	0.015	
Staff productivity	216	659	434281				

S= significant, df=322

The result in Table 3 showed a calculated r-value of 0.67 and a p-value of 0.015 when compared with at a significant level of 0.05. Since the p-value is less than the acceptable level of significance, the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between librarians’ democratic leadership style and staff productivity in Federal university Libraries of South-South Nigeria, is rejected. The implication is that democratic leadership style has a significant relationship with staff productivity in Federal university libraries of South-South Nigeria.

H₂: There is no significant relationship between librarians’ autocratic leadership style and staff productivity in Federal University libraries of South-South Nigeria.

Table 4: The Result of PPMC analysis of the relationship between librarians’ autocratic leadership style and staff productivity in Federal university libraries of South-South Nigeria.

Variables	N	$\sum X \sum Y$	$\sum X^2 \sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r	p-value	Decision
Autocratic leadership	108	415	172225			0.051	NS
				273485	0.033		
Staff productivity	216	659	434281				

NS= Not significant, df=322

The result in Table 4 showed a calculated r-value of .033 and a p-value of .051 when compared with at a significant level of 0.05. Since the p-value is less than the acceptable level of significance 0.05, the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between librarians’ autocratic leadership style and staff productivity in Federal university libraries of South-South Nigeria, is retained. Thus, this implies that autocratic leadership style has no significant relationship with staff productivity.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Relationship between Librarians' Autocratic Leadership Style and Staff Productivity

The analysis of data and the result finding revealed that librarian's autocratic leadership style has a weak negative relationship with staff productivity and no significant relationship between librarians' autocratic leadership style and staff productivity in Federal University libraries of South-South Nigeria. The finding is in consonance with the findings of Jony et al., (2019) who also found that the factors of autocratic leadership have significant negative impact on the organization, as the style does not affect the organizational outcomes positively. Findings of Idiegbeyan-ose (2018) also agrees with the present study as it revealed that in autocratic leadership style, the level of job satisfaction of library staff was low. The findings of Akor (2014) is in line with the present study as it noted that autocratic leadership style does not significantly influence the job performance of academic libraries and that the level of academic libraries was low. In disagreement, the findings negates that of Adeyemi as reported by Offem (2021), who found that teachers' job performance was better in schools having principals using autocratic leadership style. The present study however agrees with Awan, et al (2014) study that there was no significant relationship between autocratic leadership and employees' commitment. Hence, the finding of this study stems from the research hypothesis, which concludes that librarian autocratic leadership style has a weak significant relationship with staff productivity.

Relationship between Librarians' Democratic Leadership Style and Staff Productivity

The findings revealed that librarians' democratic leadership style has a high positive relationship with staff productivity and there exists a significance between librarians' democratic leadership style and staff productivity in Federal University libraries of South-South Nigeria. The result is evident in the positive perception of the librarians' use of democratic style, which has exhibited positive work attitude and job productivity in the library. The finding supports Munir and Iqbal (2018) finding that democratic leadership style is the most practiced leadership style in women colleges and this style has a positive and significant correlation with job satisfaction. More so, it enhances job satisfaction. Arumuru (2019) also corroborated the findings that leadership style adopted by university librarians are democratic leadership style and this has a lot of influence on how dedicated, devoted and committed the library staff are to their work-related activities in the library. Based on the result, the findings of this study holds that democratic leadership style by librarians promotes and increases staff productivity of Federal universities in South-South Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Leadership involves influence, entails working with people and is concerned with effective goal accomplishment depending on the style adopted. The best leadership will however depend on how much the leader pay attention to the environment. In some cases, it may be appropriate to compine both styles treated in this study, to get absolute result. Above all the subordinate perception of the style adopted and the outcome is the determining factor whether that leadership styles is effective. Paying attention to how both leadership style has enhanced subordinate staff productivity, this study therefore concluded that democratic leadership style adopted by librarians motivates staff to put in their best to achieve set goals in Federal universities in South-South Nigeria, while autocratic leadership style adopted decreases staff productivity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations made in the light of the findings of the study:

- i. Librarians in leadership positions should avoid the use of autocratic leadership style and only use it when it is most necessary.
- ii. Librarians' who are the leaders should be democratic in their leadership positions which will enhance quality service delivery and at the same time will motivate the staff to work and attain greater productivity.

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