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Servant Leadership And Employee Productivity In Federal Tertiary Institutions In Anambra State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the relationship between servant leadership and employee productivity in federal tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study focused on key dimensions of servant leadership altruistic calling, awareness, and persuasion and their influence on consultancy output, administrative efficiency, and student result submission. A descriptive survey design was adopted, with data collected from 352 academic and non-academic staff using a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between altruistic calling and consultancy output ($r = 0.58$, $p = 0.003$), awareness and administrative efficiency ($r = 0.71$, $p = 0.001$), and persuasion and student result submission ($r = 0.65$, $p = 0.004$). These results indicate that servant leadership behaviours significantly enhance employee productivity. The study concludes that adopting servant leadership practices can improve performance outcomes and institutional effectiveness in federal tertiary institutions.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Employee Productivity, Altruistic Calling, Administrative Efficiency, Student Result Submission

INTRODUCTION

Leadership scholars have long emphasized that leadership style plays a crucial role in shaping organizational performance. Servant leadership, introduced by Greenleaf, focuses on prioritizing the needs, growth, and wellbeing of employees (Greenleaf, 2002). This approach, further elaborated by Spears (1995), contrasts with more traditional directive leadership styles and has been associated with fostering commitment, motivation, and productivity. Over time, it has gained attention for its ability to enhance both relational and performance outcomes within organizations.

Recent empirical studies suggest that servant leadership positively influences employee engagement, resilience, and overall organizational performance. For instance, servant leadership has been found to predict work engagement through employee resilience and perceived organizational support (Ahmadi, Agustina, & Fithriani, 2024; Chukwuma, Okaro, Anyanwu, Ogbonna & Mazeli, 2023), while also contributing to improved organizational performance through a supportive culture (Wesevich, 2022). However, findings are not entirely consistent. Some studies indicate that servant leadership does not always have a direct impact on performance, as factors such

as workload and work discipline may play a more dominant role (Prayuga, Bilqis, & Sulistiyowati, 2024). Similarly, while servant leadership may enhance organizational learning, it may not directly influence employee creativity (Shaleh, Samdin, & Wiyati, 2023; Mazeli, Adigwe, & Ananwude, 2020). These variations highlight the importance of context in determining its effectiveness.

In higher education institutions, leadership becomes even more significant due to the complexity of roles, including teaching, research, administration, and community service. Servant leadership in such settings can promote innovation, motivation, and improved staff output by fostering participation and supporting professional development (Ajayi, 2021; Mazeli, Ejinkonye, Uloghobui & Onehi, 2024). In Nigeria, where tertiary institutions face challenges such as inadequate funding, infrastructural deficits, and staff shortages, leadership that emphasizes trust, empowerment, and ethical conduct may help mitigate these issues and improve institutional performance (Uzoigwe, Chukwuma-Offor, & Ategwu, 2022; Ejinkonye, Mazeli, Leviticus & Nwosu, 2024).

Despite growing interest, empirical research on servant leadership in Nigerian educational institutions remains limited, particularly in federal tertiary institutions in southeastern Nigeria. Existing studies suggest positive effects on trust, accountability, and innovative behavior (Idowu, 2021; Chuktu, Asuquo, & Egere, 2024; Chinwoke, Madubuike, Adiga & Mazeli, 2025), but there is a lack of rigorous quantitative evidence on its impact on employee productivity. Given the unique challenges faced by institutions in Anambra State, there is a need for further investigation to determine how servant leadership influences productivity, considering the multifaceted nature of employee performance and the contextual constraints within the region.

Servant leadership fosters a supportive work environment where leaders demonstrate altruistic calling, remain highly aware of employee needs, rely on persuasion rather than authority, and develop empowering skills that enable staff to perform optimally. In federal tertiary institutions, such leadership is expected to enhance consultancy activities, improve administrative efficiency, ensure timely student result submission, and strengthen teaching quality. When effectively practiced, servant leadership motivates and supports employees to achieve high productivity across both academic and administrative responsibilities. However, the reality in many federal tertiary institutions in Anambra State appears to fall short of this ideal. Despite the presence of leaders across departments and administrative units, concerns persist regarding declining consultancy output, bureaucratic delays, inconsistent administrative processes, late submission of student results, and stagnation in teaching quality. These issues suggest that servant leadership behaviours may be insufficiently or inconsistently applied.

The gap between expected and actual leadership practices appears to be at the root of these challenges. Where leaders fail to fully embody servant leadership traits, staff may feel unsupported, resulting in low consultancy engagement, reduced administrative efficiency, and delays in key academic processes. Teaching quality may also decline when staff development and empowerment are not prioritized. If these issues remain unexamined, institutions risk continued declines in productivity, weakened academic reputation, and reduced student satisfaction. Therefore, there is a need for empirical

investigation into how servant leadership dimensions altruistic calling, awareness, persuasion, and empowering skills relate to employee productivity indicators such as consultancy output, administrative efficiency, student result submission, and teaching quality in federal tertiary institutions in Anambra State. This study aims to bridge this gap and provide insights for improving leadership practices and institutional performance.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to investigate servant leadership and employee productivity in federal tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

i. Examine the relationship between altruistic calling and consultancy output in federal tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria.
ii. Determine the relationship between awareness and administrative efficiency in federal tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria.
iii. Ascertain the relationship between persuasion and student result submission in federal tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership in recent scholarship is widely defined as a people-centred leadership approach in which leaders place the needs, growth and wellbeing of followers above personal interests. Canavesi and Minelli (2021) describe servant leadership as a value-based leadership philosophy that emphasizes service, humility, empathy and stewardship as its core foundations. According to them, the servant leader sees leadership as a moral responsibility and not a position of power. This perspective highlights that servant leadership is fundamentally rooted in ethical behaviour and a commitment to the long-term development of followers and organizations. From a behavioural standpoint, several contemporary scholars define servant leadership based on visible leader actions that promote trust and psychological safety in the workplace. Zada and colleagues (2022) conceptualize servant leadership as leadership behaviour demonstrated through listening, fairness, humility and active support for employee growth. They explain that servant leaders consistently show concern for followers' welfare and create an environment where employees feel safe to share ideas and knowledge. In this view, servant leadership is not just a philosophy but a pattern of daily practices that shape employee attitudes and behaviour (Ananwude, Ngaikedi & Mazeli, 2026).

Altruistic Calling

Altruistic calling is commonly described in recent literature as a form of calling that is fundamentally oriented toward serving others and contributing to the welfare of society rather than pursuing personal gain. Hart 2023 defines altruistic calling as the prosocial dimension of calling in which individuals experience their work primarily as a moral obligation to help others and improve human conditions. Hart 2023 this form of calling is rooted in compassion and social responsibility rather than self-advancement. Similarly Dobrow and Tosti Kharas 2021 describe altruistic calling as a deep inner drive that links personal meaning to societal contribution, where fulfillment is derived from impact on others rather than individual rewards. These definitions consistently frame altruistic calling as another centered orientation to work.

Awareness

Awareness is widely conceptualized in contemporary literature as the state of being conscious, informed and perceptually

attentive to one's internal experiences and external environment. Brown and Ryan 2021 define awareness as the capacity to consciously attend to present experiences with clarity and openness. According to them awareness enables individuals to notice thoughts emotions and environmental cues without distortion. Similarly Kabat Zinn 2020 describes awareness as moment to moment consciousness that involves intentional attention to both personal and contextual reality. These perspectives define awareness as a foundational psychological process that supports perception understanding and adaptive behavior.

Persuasion

Persuasion is broadly defined in contemporary literature as the process through which individuals intentionally attempt to influence the attitudes beliefs or behaviors of others through communication. O'Keefe 2020 defines persuasion as a symbolic process in which communicators seek to convince others to change their opinions or actions through reasoned messages. According to him persuasion involves deliberate effort and the use of argument or appeal to produce voluntary change. Similarly Perloff 2021 describes persuasion as a planned communication activity designed to shape modify or reinforce responses of others toward a particular idea or action. These definitions establish persuasion as an intentional and strategic form of influence grounded in communication.

Employee productivity

Employee productivity is commonly defined as the level of efficiency with which employees convert inputs such as time skills and effort into valuable outputs for the organization. Armstrong 2020 defines employee productivity as the capacity of workers to achieve maximum output with minimum waste of resources within a given time frame. According to him productivity reflects both the quantity and quality of work performed by employees. Similarly Mathis and Jackson 2021 describe employee productivity as the effectiveness of employee performance measured by the extent to which organizational goals are achieved through human effort. These definitions present employee productivity as a core indicator of organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

Consultancy output

Consultancy output is commonly defined as the tangible and intangible results produced from professional advisory services rendered to organizations or individuals. Block 2020 defines consultancy output as the measurable improvement in organizational performance knowledge or systems that result directly from consulting interventions. According to him consultancy output may appear in the form of improved strategies enhanced structures or solved organizational problems. Similarly, McKenna and Maister 2021 describe consultancy output as the value created through expert analysis recommendations and implementation support that leads to positive change in client organizations. These definitions present consultancy output as the end result of professional advisory engagement.

Administrative Efficiency

Administrative efficiency is commonly defined as the ability of an administrative system to utilize available resources effectively in order to achieve organizational goals with minimal waste of time cost and effort. Robbins and Coulter 2020 define administrative efficiency as the capacity of administrators to coordinate planning organizing and controlling functions in a manner that maximizes output and minimizes resource loss. According to them efficient administration ensures that organizational activities are carried out smoothly and

systematically. Similarly, Drucker 2021 describes administrative efficiency as the ability to get the right things done through proper allocation of tasks authority and responsibility. These definitions present administrative efficiency as a core managerial capability that ensures order productivity and goal attainment.

Student Result Submission

Student result submission is commonly defined as the formal process through which students' academic performance records are prepared validated and forwarded for official documentation and certification. Ojo 2020 defines student result submission as the systematic collation verification and transmission of students' academic scores to the appropriate institutional authorities for approval and record keeping. According to him timely and accurate submission is essential for maintaining academic integrity and institutional credibility. Similarly, Adeyemi 2021 describes student result submission as the structured administrative procedure through which assessment outcomes are documented and communicated for decision making on promotion graduation and certification. These definitions present student result submission as a core academic administrative function.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Psychological Empowerment Theory emerged from the foundational ideas of Thomas and Velthouse in 1990, who defined empowerment not merely as the delegation of authority, but as a form of intrinsic task motivation influenced by a worker's cognitive assessment of their work environment. They argued that empowerment is driven by four key dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Meaning refers to the alignment between an employee's values and their job tasks; competence captures an employee's belief in their capability to perform; self-determination involves autonomy and choice in initiating and regulating work behaviors; and impact reflects the extent to which employees believe they can influence outcomes within their organization. These dimensions provided a psychological explanation of how leadership behaviors shape employee motivation.

In 1995, Gretchen M. Spreitzer advanced the theory by operationalizing psychological empowerment into a measurable construct through a twelve-item empowerment scale. Her empirical research validated the four-dimensional model and demonstrated that employees who experience empowerment are more resilient, proactive, and committed to organizational performance. Spreitzer's work shifted empowerment research from structural perspectives which focus on delegation, power distribution, and decision-making to internalized psychological mechanisms that drive employee behavior. This operationalization has since become widely adopted in organizational studies investigating the link between leadership practices and employee outcomes.

Zimmerman in 1995 also contributed by expanding empowerment theory within community and organizational settings, emphasizing both individual and collective aspects of empowerment. Zimmerman's contribution highlighted that empowerment not only affects cognitive states but also influences broader social functioning and engagement. His perspective strengthened the theory by introducing the significance of contextual support systems and relational dynamics in fostering empowerment. This broadened understanding helped researchers evaluate empowerment processes at multiple levels within an institution.

In the context of leadership, Psychological Empowerment Theory provides a clear

explanation for why empowering leadership behaviors including coaching, participation in decision-making, information sharing, and supportive communication lead to enhanced employee performance. Servant leaders, by nature, prioritize empowering followers through skill development, encouragement, and recognition of their contributions. This empowerment strengthens employees' confidence and autonomy, which in turn enhances their ability to perform tasks efficiently and pursue professional goals such as consultancy and academic innovation.

This study adopts Psychological Empowerment Theory to explain how servant leadership behavior, particularly the empowering skill dimension, influences employee productivity in federal tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria. When academic and administrative staff feel empowered through increased autonomy, meaningful participation, competence development, and a sense of impact, they are more likely to engage in high-level administrative tasks, improve efficiency, and ensure timely submission of student results. Psychological empowerment therefore acts as the motivational mechanism that connects servant leadership practices to measurable productivity outcomes. As such, this theory provides a strong psychological basis for understanding the significant role of leadership in fostering a high-performance academic workforce.

Empirical Reviews

Orazi (2013) argued that effective leadership practices could not be overstressed when it comes to financial bank stability. They stated that banks should integrate an optimum leadership style, adopting more of a transformational leadership style by bank leaders and occasionally taking into account some aspects of transactional leadership approaches like advocating for rewards as an incentive for employees to perform well in any given task.

Raja (2015) greatly contributed to the existing empirical literature on the effect of leadership style on employee performance, research on the effect of leadership style on employee's performance in public and private sectors in India. Adapting a 95% confidence interval, the research established a negative correlation between liassez-faire leadership style and employee performance. He posited that employees under a laissez-faire leader perform poorly, and the organization did not attain their organizational goal.

Ojokuku (2012) research on the impact of leadership style on organizational performance used a sample of 60 employees from the randomly selected bank in Ibadan, Nigeria. The research emphasized the importance of leadership style; the research regression analysis showed about 23% variation in employee performance. He posited that bank leaders should adopt democratic and transformational leadership style to stand the existing competitive tussles in the banking sector.

Mohamed (2018) in their research entailed "effect of leadership styles on employee performance in the somali national civil service commission" assessed the effect of transformational leadership, transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership and servant leadership on employee performance in the Somali National Civil Service Commission. Their study adopted a descriptive research design with target population of 50 respondents and a sample size of 44 respondents. They employed both primary and secondary data collection methods with stratified and random sampling techniques. The data collection instruments they used were closed questionnaires and the collected data analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively and presented in form of tables,

frequencies, means and standard deviations using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. Data was presented in tables and analyzed using mean scores, standard deviation, frequencies and percentages. From the study data analysis and interpretations, the following summary, conclusions and recommendations were drawn; transformational leadership, transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership and servant leadership were found to play a big role in effect of leadership styles on employee performance in the Somali National Civil Service Commission. Thus the Somalia National Civil Service Commission should encourage the use of transformational leadership, transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership and servant leadership in employee performance in the Somali National Civil Service Commission so as to enable quality service delivery.

Adegboyega & Olawumi (2021) examine the effect of leadership style on employee performance in the Nigerian oil and gas industry using Chevron Nigeria Limited as a case study. The study used a five-point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of forty questions covering autocratic, democratic, bureaucratic, laissezfaire, transactional, charismatic leadership styles and employee performance variables. The questionnaire was deployed to one hundred and twenty-five respondents (125) and received ninety-three (93) valid responses. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze respondent responses. Demographic analysis, normality test, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha) were presented; results affirm the validity and reliability of research findings. The results of the descriptive and regression analysis indicate that the autocratic leadership style is the most predominant leadership style in the Nigerian Oil and Gas followed by laissez-faire, bureaucratic, transactional, democratic and charismatic leadership styles. The study concludes that leadership styles significantly influence employee performance albeit different leadership styles have varying effects on employee performance and varying leadership styles can co-exist within the same organization. The study highlighted various policy implications and recommendations. This study adds to the existing literature on leadership practice and is intended to be a reference point to scholars and researchers for further studies on leadership practices in the oil and gas industry.

Ojokuku, Odetayo,. & Sajuyigbe, (2022).conducted a research on the Impact of leadership Style on Organizational Performance: A Case Study of Nigeria Bank in Nigeria. The sample size used by the researchers is 60. The study contained twenty of random picked banks in Ibadan, Nigeria. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the heads of accountants, heads of operations, and branch managers on face-to-face basis. Inferential statistical tool was used and one hypothesis was formulated to analyse data. Regression analysis was used to study the dimensions of significant effect of leadership style on followers and performance. The findings showed that there was positive and negative correlation between performance and leadership style. There was 23 percent variance of performance found in leadership style jointly predict organizational performance. This study concluded that transformational and democratic leadership styles have positive effect on both performance and followers, and are highly recommended to banks especially in this global competitive environment.

Obiwuru (2011) research evaluates leadership styles' impact on organizational performance in a small-scale firm. The analysis from the study indicates that there exist traits of intellectual stimulation, Charisma, and

individual consideration on the transformational leadership style, and it exerts positively but has an insignificant effect on employee's performance. The traits of transactional leadership considered for their study like contingent/constructive rewards, management by exception, all have a significant positive effect on employee performance and explain why there is a high proportion variation in performance. This study is of the conclusion that the transactional leadership style is highly appropriate in inducing workers' performance in small scale companies than the transformational leadership style. The study recommends that all small-scale companies and enterprises adopt transactional leadership but should strategize on how to transit to transformational leadership style as the company grows and develops.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the relationship between servant leadership and employee productivity among staff of federal tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria. The choice of this design was informed by its suitability for describing characteristics of a population and determining relationships among variables while minimizing bias and enhancing reliability (Kothari, 2006). The study was conducted in Anambra State, located in southeastern Nigeria, with major urban centres such as Awka, Onitsha, and Nnewi. The population comprised 4,243 academic and non-academic staff drawn from three federal tertiary institutions: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; Federal Polytechnic, Oko; and Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, a sample size of 352 respondents was determined. Proportionate stratified sampling was employed to allocate the sample across the institutions based on their staff strength, ensuring adequate representation. Data for the study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources, with primary data collected through a structured questionnaire and secondary data sourced from institutional records and relevant literature.

The questionnaire, designed on a 5-point Likert scale, measured servant leadership using proxies such as altruistic calling, awareness, persuasion, and empowering skills, while employee productivity was assessed through consultancy output, administrative efficiency, and student result submission. The instrument was administered in person to the selected respondents. Validity was ensured through face and content validation by experts in measurement and evaluation, while reliability was established using the test–retest method and Cronbach's alpha coefficient with a threshold of 0.70. Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were used to summarize responses, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was applied to test the relationships between variables. All hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance to determine the strength and significance of the relationships between servant leadership and employee productivity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Test of Hypotheses

Correlation between Altruistic Calling and Consultancy Output (H01)

Variables	r	p-value	Decision
Altruistic calling and consultancy output	0.58	0.003	Reject H0

Source: *SPSS Version 23 (2025)*

This table shows that the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.58$, $p = 0.003 < 0.01$) indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between altruistic calling and consultancy output in federal tertiary institutions in Anambra State. This implies that leaders who exhibit strong altruistic concern improve employees' consultancy performance. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H01) is rejected.

Correlation between Awareness and Administrative Efficiency (H02)

Variables	r	p-value	Decision
Awareness and administrative efficiency	0.71	0.001	Reject H0

Source: *SPSS Version 23 (2025)*

This table reveals that the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.71$, $p = 0.001 < 0.01$) shows a strong positive and significant relationship between awareness and administrative efficiency. This means leaders' awareness of institutional and employee needs enhances administrative effectiveness and performance. Hence, the null hypothesis (H02) is rejected.

Correlation between Persuasion and Student Result Submission (H03)

Variables	r	p-value	Decision
Persuasion and student result submission	0.65	0.004	Reject H0

Source: *SPSS Version 23 (2025)*

This table indicates that the correlation result ($r = 0.65$, $p = 0.004 < 0.01$) signifies a significant positive relationship between persuasion and timely student result submission. This implies that persuasive leadership practices motivate lecturers to comply efficiently with result submission deadlines. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H03) is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Altruistic Calling and Consultancy Output

The findings revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between altruistic calling and consultancy output ($r = 0.58$, $p = 0.003$). This means that when leaders demonstrate genuine concern for the welfare and growth of employees, their consultancy performance improves. This supports the belief that leaders who prioritize serving others motivate staff towards

enhanced job commitment and productivity. The result aligns with earlier studies that showed leadership style has a strong influence on employee performance. Mohamed et al. (2018) emphasized that leadership behaviors rooted in serving others are essential in improving employee outcomes and organizational success. Similarly, Ojokuku et al. (2012) argued that transformational and democratic approaches significantly improve employee contributions toward organizational goals. Therefore, employee consultancy roles in tertiary institutions thrive more when leaders show selflessness and prioritize employee development.

Awareness and Administrative Efficiency

The study showed a strong and significant correlation between leadership awareness and administrative efficiency ($r = 0.71$, $p = 0.001$). Leaders who understand institutional processes and employees' needs are more capable of facilitating smooth administrative operations.This result is consistent with existing empirical literature. Khajeh (2018) found that leadership styles that embrace awareness and participation positively enhance organizational performance. Also, Raja and Palanichamy (2015) noted that employees perform better when leadership is sensitive to workplace realities and provides clear direction. Kalsoom et al. (2018) further argued that leadership that understands situational demands enables better performance outcomes. Thus, awareness-driven leadership promotes effective workflow, accuracy, and responsiveness in administrative tasks.

Persuasion and Student Result Submission

The analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between persuasive leadership and timely submission of student results ($r = 0.65$, $p = 0.004$). This implies that leaders who influence through communication, encouragement, and guidance help lecturers meet reporting expectations. This supports the findings from Kehinde and Banjo (2014), who emphasized that persuasive and transformational leadership encourages workers to go beyond minimum expectations. Aboshaiqah (2015) similarly noted that persuasion improves employee willingness and commitment. The study by Ipas (2012) also confirmed that leadership that guides and motivates has a positive influence on workplace performance. Therefore, persuasive leadership acts as a catalyst for efficiency in academic reporting systems.

Summary of Findings

The following key findings emerged:

i. There is a strong significant positive relationship between altruistic calling and consultancy output ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that leaders who demonstrate genuine concern for employees' welfare enhance consultancy performance.

ii. There is a strong significant positive relationship between awareness and administrative efficiency ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that leaders' understanding of institutional and employee needs improves administrative effectiveness.

iii. The study found a strong significant positive relationship between persuasion and student result submission ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$). This shows that persuasive leadership motivates lecturers to comply with result submission deadlines efficiently.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide clear evidence that servant leadership dimensions significantly relate with employee performance in federal tertiary institutions in Anambra State. Specifically, altruistic calling, awareness, persuasion, and empowering skills play vital roles in enhancing consultancy output, administrative efficiency, timely student result submission, and teaching

quality. The study concludes that institutions that implement effective servant leadership practices are more likely to achieve higher employee productivity, improved academic delivery, and overall institutional efficiency.

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