

# Servant Leadership's Impact On Employee Engagement Of Academic Staff In Nigerian Universities (A Survey Of Selected Federal Universities In The South East)

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**Abstract:** *This study examined the effect of servant leadership style on employee engagement of academic staff of federal universities in Nigeria. Four research questions and four hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The descriptive-correlation research design was used to conduct the study. The population of this study consisted of all academic staff of federal universities in Nigeria. Two (2) federal schools were randomly selected by simple random from the study population. The study sample was made up of 200 respondents (both male and female workers). A structured questionnaire was used for the data collection. The bio-data of the respondents were analyzed using simple percentage and frequency counts, z-test, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical tool, which were used to analyze the hypotheses raised at 0.05 level of significance. Two null hypotheses were rejected, and two alternative hypotheses were accepted. The findings revealed that the Promotion of academic staff when due does not affect their commitment to work. There is a positive relationship between academic staff's conducive working environment and their job engagement. There is no relationship between giving admission slot and other fringe benefits to academic staff and their loyalty to the school management, and Academic staff work-life balance considerations do affect their creativity/professionalism. Based on the findings of this study, some recommendations were stated, among which are: Federal universities should ensure that promotion is given based on merit and also as at when due, not by who is loyal to the system or management. The management should also ensure that admission slots and other fringe benefits be given to academic staff as incentives to motivate them on their engagement, but this should be checked frequently, as it could also lead to academic staff misusing the opportunity or exploiting students looking for admission.*

**Keywords:** Leadership, Employee Engagement, Academic Staff, University, Eastern Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

The moment an institution starts experiencing continued hitches in their operations, lack of commitment to the job which will in turn brew poor performance in teaching and learning as well as research and community services. The question that will be continuously posed in such circumstance is, "What went wrong within the institution?" This could ultimately point to the fact that the staff are not committed to the ideals of the institution.

Leadership is not simply the actions of the leader but the relationship and interactions between the leaders and the followers (Spears, 2010). Greenleaf (1977) has been recognized as the founder of servant leadership. Following his exploration of human motivation to lead rather than be led, this form of leadership has been further developed and expanded over the last several decades (Bowman, 2015). According to Bowman (2015), servant leadership is as old as the scriptures; as the scriptures contain references to human motivation to care for and serve fellow human beings. This form of leadership emphasizes the necessity for servant leadership to include communication and collaboration amongst leaders and servants (Dierendonck, 2021) and requires a person to make a conscious choice to lead and serve.

Servant leaders are self-motivated and internally driven to implement the behaviours and exhibit the characteristics of servant leadership. Robbins and Coulter (2017) studied servant leadership at the academic level and across organizational disciplines. Through their research, they concluded that specific situations dictate the leadership style necessary to address the needs of the followers. This has led researchers to continue identifying servant leadership as an appropriate and effective tool in influencing religious organizations including educational settings (Thompson, 2019). Traditional leadership styles notoriously emphasize a top-down hierarchical structure and have been the mainstream style of leadership for centuries (Goldman Schuyler & Branigan, 2003). Contrary to hierarchical leadership models, servant leadership requires shared values, mutual trust, and an intrinsic desire to transit from self-serving to serving others (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leadership has been identified as a shared leadership model that

researchers advocate for in organizations, including educational institutions (Thompson, 2014). Van Dierendonck (2018) cited a need for exploration on servant leadership, as perceived by stakeholders through multiple forms of research and analyses. As such, this study was designed to implement the recommendation of Van Dierendonck (2018) through a qualitative single case study design which explores how servant leadership influences the perceptions of students at two private Christian denominational campuses. While leadership has been well documented within the literature, further exploration of leadership resulted in the development of several leadership styles and models (Choi, 2014). Leadership affects individuals and groups directly and/or indirectly. In making the attempt to understand how ordinary people become great leaders, Bateman and Snell (2022) studied both good and bad managers in relation to leadership influence on work performance and job satisfaction. Results of their study concluded that the influence of a leader is central to followers in goal identification and attainment and that each leader influences his or her followers based on their individual management style (Bateman & Snell, 2022).

The University is the peak of an educational system where high level manpower is trained for socio-economic and political growth of the nation, hence, there is need for high level of commitment and employee satisfaction among the academic staff of the institution.

The administration and leadership of universities should be enthusiastic about using research and teaching in tandem with education to address the myriad issues endangering humanity's ability to live in peace. These issues or difficulties include political unpredictability, religious intolerance, global insecurity, poverty, illnesses, unemployment, and climate change. These difficulties may be lessened if university administrators are committed to promoting academic excellence in their institutions. It is worthy to note the influence of servant leadership as a means to stimulate academic excellence in teaching and learning, research and community services. These will further foster in the students a sense of creativity, inventiveness, and the development of self-reliance as well as professional and economic abilities that have the power to change the course of a country. There seems to be a decline in confidence regarding universities' ability to foster economic growth and development, though, if the servant leadership style is ignored. This is because unmotivated academic and non-academic staff will result in subpar academic performance and, of course, a high rate of graduates who are unemployed. Government and university leadership face a significant challenge from the epidemic of unemployed university graduates. These difficulties prompted research into the impact of servant leadership on academic staff members' work satisfaction in Nigerian institutions.

This study was conducted with the purpose to investigate the relationship between servant leadership, job satisfaction and organizational commitment of employees and the administrators of universities.

#### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Servant Leadership as a subject matter has attracted a great deal of consideration in research pertaining to the work environment. It has been deliberated and conceptualized in several dissimilar ways. Nevertheless, it still remains a difficult and challenging construct as it relates to tertiary institution. The degree of relationship subsisting between employees job satisfaction, engagement, institutional commitment and servant leadership style, that is to say, the effect that this kind of leadership style as autonomous (independent) variable, actually have on job satisfaction and employee organizational commitment as a dependent variables in tertiary institutions have not been given adequate attention in the body of theoretical frameworks that abound in this area. In any given assignment, the accomplishment of the utmost plan can almost at all times rely unswervingly on the vision and the will of the leadership within the institution. As a result, having effectual and potent leadership (servant) style in tertiary institutions is so essential to keep hold of experienced and capable staff with the right attitude to work for its sustenance. The concern as presented by other researches that the ability of an institution to successfully and productively accomplish its objective, optimize human capital and have a competitive advantage is largely contingent among other things, is the type of leadership style and the leaders' capacity to increase employees' engagement and commitment to the organization. The dangers of adopting other traditional leadership styles as against the servant leadership style is that other leadership styles foster on the followers to follow effectively, while the servant leadership style focuses on the leader's capacity to lead by example. Numerous researchers have pointed towards a positive relationship subsisting between servant leadership style, employees' engagement, job satisfaction, commitment, and the kind of leadership style a leader consistently displays can go a long way to determining the actual dimensions of employees' commitment.

Consequently, this study proposes to develop a theoretical framework that would show the influence of servant leadership in the growth of tertiary institutions which ultimately boils down to employee engagement, job satisfaction and commitment towards the achievement of the ultimate goal of the institution.

#### **AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main aim of this study is to examine the effect of servant leadership style on employee engagement of academic staff of federal universities in Nigeria. While the specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the effect of promotion of academic staff as at when due on their commitment to work.
2. Ascertain the relationship between conducive working environment and their job engagement.
3. Examine the relationship between giving admission slot and other fringe benefits to academic staff and their loyalty to the school management.
4. Determine the effect of academic staff work-life balance consideration on their creativity/professionalism.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions have been designed for the purpose of this study.

1. How does promotion of academic staff as at when due affect their commitment to work?
2. What is the relationship between academic staff conducive working environment and their job engagement?
3. What is the relationship between giving admission slot and other fringe benefits to academic staff and their loyalty to the school management?
4. How does academic staff work-life balance consideration affect their creativity/professionalism?

### RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Underneath is stated the study hypothesis formulated for this study from the research questions.

1. Ho: Promotion of academic staff as at when due does not affect their commitment to work.
2. Ho: There is no relationship between academic staff conducive working environment and their job engagement.
3. Ho: There is no relationship between giving admission slot and other fringe benefits to academic staff and their loyalty to the school management.
4. Ho: Academic staff work-life balance consideration does not affect their creativity/professionalism.

### SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The conceptual scope of the study is to determine the influence of servant leadership style on employee engagement of just academic staff of federal universities in Nigeria, while the geographical scope is limited to just some selected federal universities in the southeast region, as the researcher could not reach out to all federal universities in the country. The study is limited to just the southeast region as a result of time and financial constraints on the part of the researcher.

In spite of the above limitations, the results of the research could be said to be valid and reliable at the time of the study.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This research will meet the needs of people who are passionate about knowing more as regards being competent in implementing every aspect of servant leadership measures, which will give rise to more productive performance in their different institutions. The work force is consisting of men and women who have various degrees of needs in addition to personal behaviour/distinctiveness. As a result, this research is to a large extent of immense essence in the ways highlighted hereunder:

First of all, the management of tertiary institutions will be able to adopt the strategic nature of servant style of leadership as well as the right and appropriate measures of employee job satisfaction in addition to organizational commitment to be actualized at the highest level, which will ultimately foster excellent corporate performance. The above stated scenario is achieved and the benefits will comprise of the following:

- a. The employer or the institution will have a dependable, dedicated, commendable and satisfied in addition to happy workforce which are all fall out of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.
- b. A superior built-up fit at work will be somewhat guaranteed. The institution and the society as a whole, will continue to benefit from the knowledge of the elements that can produce qualified and employable graduate owing to servant leadership style.

Secondly, this research is of great essence owing to the fact that it will aid the employees of the institution prepare, proffer timely and accurate formal solutions to institutional challenges that can be successfully coordinated in order to facilitate the level of work performance, and for this reason, organizational productivity.

On a third and final note, it will serve as a very essential referral material or tool. In addition, it will make available its own input to the servant leadership and its remote effect on employee engagement which will ultimately result in enhanced corporate performance. The idea is to foster the understanding of the aforementioned in Nigerian institutions and as a medium of transmitting knowledge to strategic administrators other persons who might be interested in adding to their knowledge on the subject matter.

The study is as well particularly important in the following ways:

- a. Understand servant leadership style to improve employee engagement, job satisfaction and organizational commitment and put forward an occasion to achieve set targets through the instrumentality of improved organizational performance.
- b. It will make available an occasion to advantageously improve the operational performance of institution by providing a clear and concise framework that will promote the understanding of servant leadership style and its implications.
- c. In point of fact, engaging in servant leadership functions will contribute its quarter in guaranteeing better performance from members of staff at all levels within the institution. This study will foster continual public awareness relating to the impact of servant leadership on the performance of administrators in tertiary institutions sector of the Nigerian economy through sustained employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment.
- d. At the same time, the study will assist administrators put together sound policies on organizational leadership styles.

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## CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

### Historical Background and Definitions of Leadership

Leadership is a term that is associated with everyday life. It has been widely investigated from historical and contextual perspectives. According to Bass and Stogdill (1990), the study of history and philosophy over the centuries led to the development of principles of leadership. There have also been written philosophical evidences revealed over 5000 years ago through the Egyptian hieroglyphics that indicate that there has been a constant quest in an attempt to understand the phenomenon of leadership. In Egypt as at that time, the hieroglyphics for leadership indicated directions as to how the leader (seshemu) should interact with the follower (shemsu).

Moreover, in carrying out a study of Chinese business leaders, McDonald (2012) emphasized the foundation of leadership to Confucian teachings which had spanned over 2000 years. The Confucian views on leadership embraced harmony and loyalty (Cheung and Chan, 2005), vision and a sense of purpose (Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008) and morality (Chen and Kao, 2009). Furthermore, there are also Greek epistemological considerations to leadership. Avery (2004) made reference to Plato who characterized leaders as men of 'gold', and followers as men of 'bronze.' Likewise, Van Vugt (2006) expressed the views of Plato who stated that leadership should only be handled by a philosopher-king. While Singh (2016), put forward the point that the knowledge of leadership in India is traceable to the 4th century BC. He confirmed his opinion by expressing the views of an Indian legend Kautilya who he argued had developed schools of thought on leadership that led to a strong economy in India (Singh, 2016). There are not only philosophical roots to leadership, but also considerations from an anthropological perspective. Researchers such as Wilson (1975); Boyd and Richerson (2005) proposed that leadership had been in existence since when humans were organized in small hunter-gatherer societies. Despite the absence of established rule or officially elected leadership among the hunting society, there were always people who were likely to take a dominant role in the decision-making of the group. There have been a number of longitudinal studies on anthropological perspectives to leadership and followership. For example, Lewis (1974) reported that leadership by its nature symbolizes a unique and unpredictable relationship between leaders and followers. He further argued that human society would always consist of natural groups who would always be involved in the phenomena of a leader-follower interaction known as leadership within every culture. Similarly, Boehm and Boehm (1999) pointed to the fact that even in the forest; there is hierarchy which arguably reflects the foundation of an egalitarian society and the evolution of democratic politics. Although, the background of leadership has been explored thus far, it is important to note that this is not an exhaustive reflection of the foundations of leadership. However, at this point, this research would examine the leadership concept from a current perspective. Barrow (1977) argued that leadership is one of the most broadly researched social influence processes in behavioural science because the success of economic, political and organizational systems is dependent upon the effective direction and action of leaders. Similarly, Burns (1978) stated that the concept of leadership is one of the most observed, yet least understood phenomena on earth. This statement was made upon the premise that the growing focus of literature on leadership is a reflection of its complexity. Therefore, leadership cannot be understood from one perspective. Moreover, according to Avery (2004), leadership is a subject of interest in complex civilizations. Likewise, Bass (2008) suggested that leadership is an investigated phenomenon in social sciences and an activity that is evident in both human and animal species. This suggestion agrees with the research previously carried out by De Waal (1996) who identified a display of leadership when studying chimpanzee behaviour in a captive colony in Arnhem Zoo, and observed that:

*"a quarrel between Mama and Spin got out of hand and ended in fighting and biting. Numerous apes rushed up to the two warring females and joined in the fray. A huge knot of fighting, screaming apes rolled around in the sand, until Luit (the alpha male) leapt in literally beat them apart. He did not choose sides in the conflict, like others; instead anyone who continued to act received a blow from him".*

Van Vugt (2006) stated that the Handbook of Leadership by Bass and Stogdill (1990) had acknowledged no fewer than 7,500 references to original articles on leadership. A number of researchers have attempted to define leadership. For example, Nash (1929), leadership can be defined as a process which involves influencing change in the conduct of people. Similarly, Stogdill (1950) stated that leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an organized set of individuals towards goal setting and achievement. Also, in a study attempting to create a basis for measuring morale and leadership, Cattell (1951) argued that leadership represents whoever contributes to a group's syntality resulting from its members and the relationships among them. Also, Cattell's (1951) definition sees leadership through the viewpoint of collective efforts rather than a single individual leading the process.

Leadership is not simply the actions of the leader but the relationship and interactions between the leaders and the followers (Spears, 2010). While Greenleaf (1977) has been recognized as the founder of servant leadership, following exploration of human motivation to lead rather than be led, this form of leadership has been further developed and expanded upon over the last several decades (Bowman, 2005). According to Bowman (2005), servant leadership is as old as the scriptures; as the scriptures contain references to human motivation to care for and serve fellow human beings. This form of leadership emphasizes the necessity for servant leadership to include communication and collaboration amongst leaders and servants (van Dierendonck, 2011) and requires a person to make a conscious choice to lead and serve (Spears, 2010).

Servant leaders are self-motivated and internally driven to implement the behaviors and exhibit the characteristics of servant leadership (Spears, 2010). Robbins and Coulter (2005) studied servant leadership at the academic level and across organizational disciplines. Through their research, they concluded that specific situations dictate the leadership style necessary to address the needs

of the followers. However, researchers continue to identify servant leadership as appropriate and effective in religious organizations including educational settings (Thompson, 2014).

Over time, Leadership has been seen from different perspectives. The quest to understand the nature of leadership has brought about the emergence of new concepts and the reappraisal of old ones on leadership such as classical leadership, autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership, spiritual leadership, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, charismatic leadership, transactional leadership, collective leadership, cross-cultural leadership, transformational leadership and servant leadership. While Grint (1997) suggested that the transition of leadership approaches from classical to contemporary and critical perspectives only echo the unending quest for understanding how and the manner in which individuals are chosen to lead and the approach in which they lead, Daft (2014) proposed that there has been a shift in leadership perspectives in which the leader is seen as a facilitator, not a controller, a collaborator and not a competitor. This research would now define these concepts that have evolved in leadership.

#### TYPES OF LEADERSHIP

##### - *Classical Leadership*

In understanding the paradigms and cases that evolved around leadership, Avery (2004) described classical leadership as a form of leadership that promoted the dominance of an individual over a collective group of people. He further argued that practical examples of leaders in history who exemplified this leadership style included European feudal lords and US slave owners, just to mention a few. Similarly, Wheatley (2005) observed that the use of command and control methods are an example of classical leadership and claimed that there is a tendency of organizations falling back to the use of command and control. However, Groysberg and Slind (2012), argued that the prevalence of globalization and usage of technology is limiting the effectiveness of command and control leadership in organizations. Scholars such as Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939); Bond (2015) pointed out that the three main forms of leadership which can be classified under Classical or Traditional Leadership are namely: Autocratic; Democratic; and Laissez-faire Leadership.

##### - *Autocratic Leadership*

According to De Hoogh, Greer and Den Hartog (2015), autocratic leadership can be defined as a leadership process in which decision making and is exemplified where the power to direct is centralized to an individual dominant leader. Similarly, Bass and Bass (2009) described autocratic leadership as an approach in which the core qualities of the leader imply that all essential decisions are made by the leaders. Also, an autocratic leader's primary concern is the accomplishment of task and not follower motivation nor job satisfaction. A distinguishing element with autocratic leadership is the prevalence of social distance between the leader and the follower. While incentives and rewards mechanism could be used in other leadership styles to drive performance, the autocratic leader utilizes the enforcement of threats and punishments. Adair (2009) described autocratic leaders as bureaucrats who have a "hire and fire" mentality and assumed that employees who work under autocratic leadership are most likely to experience feelings of insecurity and fear. In the same way, Iqbal, Anwar and Haider (2015) observed that the autocratic leadership style is depicted by an "I tell" philosophy where leaders give clear directions to followers on what to do and create no opportunity for followers' contributions. This representation of the autocratic leader takes into account a leader who does not share his or her locus of control and decision making function.

##### - *Democratic Leadership*

Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939) suggested that democratic leadership is a leadership approach that is dependent upon group decision-making and active involvement of followers. A leadership style with a high indication of partnership between leaders and followers. However, Kariel (1956) claimed that Lewin's ideology of democratic leadership was Machiavellian and intended to satisfy the 'elitist' in that it masked coercion by reflecting follower participation. Correspondingly, Grint (1997) extended this argument by suggesting that Lewin's notion of democratic leadership could be used for undemocratic purposes and was simply used to condition attitudes of followers in a practical sense. In attempting to define democratic leadership, Bhatti et al., (2012) described it as a leadership style which encourages followers to be involved in decision making processes. As a result, the participation of followers informs the final decision making of the leader. Yet, the democratic leader makes the final decision. Minier (2001) illustrated on the origins of democratic leadership by reporting that between 1980s and 1990s, a democratic movement in the entire world was promoted as an opposition to dictatorial leadership and the enforcement of one man power. As a result, Chima et al., (2017) argue that this opposition to dictatorship leadership led to the demand for the establishment of democracy in governments and in organizations. Furthermore, Amanchukwu, Stanley and Ololube (2015) explained that even though the final decision-making is dependent upon the democratic leader, he or she includes the followers in the decision-making process.

##### - *Collective Leadership*

The ideology of collective leadership can be drawn from early studies undertaken in the 1920s when Mary Follett (1924) proposed that leadership evolves from dynamic interactions among organizational actors (Mainemelis, Kark and Epitropaki, 2015). Also, there has been a development of different models of collective leadership such as team leadership, network leadership, shared leadership and the complexity leadership theory. Traditional perspectives on leadership have majorly focused on the attributes brought to a team by an individual without paying much attention to the leadership that emanates within a team. Zaccaro, Rittman and Marks

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(2001) describe collective leadership individuals who take on whatever role function required. This is followed by the view of O'Connor and Quinn (2004, p. 48) that "when leadership is viewed as a property of whole systems, as opposed to solely the property of individual, effectiveness in leadership becomes more a product of those connections or relationships among the parts than the result of any one part of that system (such as the leader)". Therefore, Morgeson, DeRue and Karam (2010) describe collective leadership as the process of team need satisfaction in the service of enhancing team effectiveness. Furthermore, the model of collective leadership demonstrates how social network approaches have led to leadership emergence and effectiveness. These elements of collective leadership are represented through patterns of interpersonal relationships among people (Wasserman and Faust, 1994). It is also argued that social networks provide the theoretical foundation for identifying and explaining leadership as a relational phenomenon (Borgatti et al., 2009).

- ***Laissez-faire Leadership***

The origin of the word Laissez-faire relates to a French phrase translated as "Let it be" and this provides the contextual background for what laissez-faire leadership style represents. Furthermore, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) describe laissez-faire leadership as a leadership of clear avoidance of responsibilities by leaders. Also, Goodnight (2011) stated that laissez-faire leadership style reflects the worst leadership style because of the absolute lack of influence from the leader. Moreover, Chaudhry and Javed (2012) provided a practical illustration of what laissez-faire leadership looks like in an organization as one in which subordinates make the decisions for the organization while the laissez-faire leader is conspicuously not in control. This view was extended by Bhatti et al., (2013) who argued that the application of laissez-faire leadership in an organization would be clearly seen through the existence of a policy of non-interference between leaders and followers. They further argued that laissez-faire leadership promotes uncontrolled freedom within the organization as well as an unstructured pattern of attaining organizational objectives. Similarly, Hackman and Johnson (2013) explained laissez-faire leadership as an approach that is characterized by the leader's avoidance of interaction and conflicts with followers and the absence of frequent feedback to followers.

- ***Charismatic Leadership***

Early research on charismatic leadership has been attributed to Max Weber who asserted that charismatic leaders are individuals who "... reveal a transcendent mission or course of action which may be in itself appealing to the potential followers, but which is acted on because the followers believe their leader is extra-ordinarily gifted" (Dow, 1969, p. 308). Similarly, House (1976) traced the origin of charismatic leadership by connoting that the term charisma represents leaders who use their personal abilities to derive loyalty and devotion from followers who see them as inspiring. Since then, recent developments on charismatic leadership have emerged. For example, Conger and Kanungo (1998); Oreg and Berson (2015) have described charismatic leadership as the process in which leaders stimulate followers by expressing their resilient convictions, positive emotions and creative vision. Other views tend to look at charismatic leadership from an emotional perspective. According to Erez et al., (2008), charismatic leadership is characterized by the charismatic leaders consistent use of self-excitement and enthusiasm to appeal to followers' emotions. This view was supported by Gebert, Heinitz and Buengeler (2016) who observed that because the charismatic leader is perceived to be a role model, there is a tendency for followers to adopt the leader's vision, mission and innate values into their self-concepts.

- ***Transactional Leadership***

Lowe, Kroeck and Sivasubramaniam (1996) pointed out that the origin of transactional leadership can be traced to Burns (1978) who after examining the literature on leadership styles and traits, especially on leader-member exchange, developed the concept of transactional leadership. Burns (1978) defined transactional leadership as a leadership approach in which the leader initiates contact with subordinates for the purpose of exchanging something of value which could include mutual support, certain rewards for performance and shared disclosure. Furthermore, Burns (1978) and Emery and Barker (2007) described transactional leadership as a leadership style which comprehensively relies upon emphasis on tasks, assignments and standards to achieve certain objectives. However, Yukl (2002) observed that even though transactional leadership may possibly involve values, these values must be applicable to the exchange process. Therefore, transactional leadership is a leadership approach that motivates followers by appealing to their self-interests. The nature of transactional leadership was further appraised by Avery (2004) who differentiated transactional leadership from classical leadership with the argument that the transactional leader views followers as individuals, unlike the classical leader whose outlook of the follower is as a tool for exercising command and control. In addition, Breevart et al., (2014) defined transactional leadership as an exchange form of interaction which satisfies the leader's expectations and still inspires employees' engagement by meeting those components such as contingency rewards in order to drive their efficiency levels. Prior research by Bass (1998) described contingent rewards as a transactional leadership behaviour in which leaders clarify role and task requirements and provide followers with material or psychological rewards contingent upon achieving certain contractual obligations. In similar terms, Zeb et al., (2015) pointed out that transactional leadership is a leadership approach that is contingent based upon reward based performance and management by expectation. Correspondingly, Shah and Hamid (2015) stated that two key behaviours of the transactional leadership style are contingent reward and management by exception.

- ***Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)***

This leadership approach is also known as the leader exchange. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) argued that there was a growing interest in the investigation of elements of the Leader-Member Exchange style in organizations. This view was supported by Tordera and Gonzalez-Roma (2013) who stated that many studies have investigated the LMX style to understand the effects of leadership on organizational behaviour. According to Bauer and Erdogan (2015), LMX is a leadership style which observes the dual association between leaders and members (followers) as important in understanding the effects of the leader on members, teams, and organizations. They also suggest that under the LMX approach, leaders form high-quality exchanges with their direct teams which would promote trust, care and mutual respect. However, leaders form low-quality exchanges with teams that are indirectly related to them. The term ‘exchange’ here refers to levels of relationships. Similarly, Luo et al., (2016) described leader-member exchange (LMX) as a relationship-based leadership approach which represents the quality of exchange relationships that exist between employees and their superiors. In addition, they refer to the LMX approach as one that promotes high levels of interactions between leaders and followers.

#### - ***Transformational Leadership***

Early research on transformational leadership is attributed to Burns (1978) who contended that for leadership to be effectively explored, it must be in alignment with a collective purpose and an appraisal of effective leaders should be dependent upon their ability to make social changes. Unlike the transactional leadership which focuses on exchange relations between the leader and the follower, transformational leadership postulates that the leader is seeking for potential motives in followers so as to satisfy their higher needs and develop the full person of the follower. He suggests that transformational leadership reflects an approach with an outcome in which followers become leaders and leaders become moral agents. Burns (1978) described transformational leadership as a leadership that expresses high value on morality. He attributed the basis for developing transformational as an elixir to misunderstanding of the role of power in relation to leadership, which he argued tends to undermine the importance of relationships. As a follow up to the research by Burns, Bass (1998) carried out an extensive research on transformational leadership. After observing how educational, business and military organizations functioned, he described transformational leadership as a very effective leadership style in motivating followers and increasing their levels of commitment. He formulated four characteristics of a transformational leadership as follows:

- i. Idealized Influence- This indicates that the transformational leaders are role models because they are respected and admired by followers who like to become like them. At the same time, these leaders demonstrate a clear sense of vision, a strong purpose and are risk takers.
- ii. Inspirational Motivation: This signifies that the activities of transformational leaders motivate, challenge and make their followers more zealous towards their tasks.
- iii. Intellectual Stimulation: This represents the consistent practice of the transformational leaders in developing new ideas and perspectives that would instill a sense of creativity on followers.
- iv. Individualized Consideration: This relies on the premise that transformational leaders are concerned about developing the potential of their followers and establish a work culture that supports followers to meet organizational objectives.

According to Yukl (2002), transformational leadership is a leadership style that attends to the moral values of followers in an attempt to raise their consciousness about ethical issues and assemble their drive to reform organizations. He takes into account the significance of authenticity in leadership.

#### - ***Ethical Leadership***

According to Brown and Trevino (2006), ethical leadership is a contemporary leadership ideology that responds to recent challenges that organizations face regarding ethics. For example, scandals involving Enron, World Com and other organizations in business, non-profits, government and even religious organizations have compelled people’s interest in seeking the kind of leadership that addresses the significance of ethics in leadership. Brown, Trevino and Harrison (2005) described ethical leadership as:

*“the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through twoway communication, reinforcement and decision-making”.*

For this reason, Brown and Trevino (2006) argue that organizations today are in high demand of the kind of leadership that are considerate, fair and promote moral values. They describe ethical leadership as: “The demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision-making” (p. 120). In addition, Brown and Trevino (2006), maintain that ethical leaders interact with followers in ways that depict honesty, fairness and care which gives the leader credibility for the leadership role. In addition, Paharia and Singh (2016) describe the ethical leader as a leader who is first a moral individual and then a moral leader. Moral individuals in the sense that their personal conduct is dictated by moral principles. Moral leadership is based on the premise that decision-making is taken within ethical considerations that benefits the followers and the organization. Moreover, Ciulla (2014)

suggested that ethical values form the core of ethical leadership and identified its connection to transactional and transformational leadership styles. The attributes of an ethical leader include trustworthiness, honesty, being approachable, showing care and fairness in decision making (Brown and Trevino, 2006; Zhu et al., 2015). Therefore, they point out that ethical leaders exemplify themselves as ethical role models for their subordinates and establish ethical standards in their organizations framework.

- *Spiritual Leadership*

Fry (2003) pointed out that a leadership type which is now been closely associated to the workplace is Spiritual Leadership. He further explained that spiritual leadership is a leadership principle which is established through a model of motivation that is innate to the leader and expressed through the use of vision, faith, altruistic love and spiritual survival in order to achieve organizational outcomes. However, in relation to the spiritual leadership theory, Kriger and Seng (2005) reflected on the term “spirituality” as the quest for self-transcendence and the associated feeling of interconnectedness with all things in the universe. Fry et al., (2017) argued that even though spirituality is manifested in groups and organizations. It is commonly seen as inherently personal. They base their argument upon the standpoint that evolution of religion as an institution would always centre on spiritual experiences of individuals. Reave (2005) argued that a key element of workplace spirituality is an inner life that it nourishes and is nourished by transcendence of the self within the context of a community based on the values of altruistic love. Because of this, Fry and Nisiewicz (2013) advanced by explaining the term “altruistic love” in the definition of spiritual leadership as an impression of friendship, peace and security created through care, concern and recognition that exist between leaders and followers. However, Krishnakumar et al., (2015) observed that there are gaps in the understanding of spiritual leadership because a lot of research over the past two decades has not clearly investigated the situational characteristics of the leader. They further argue that little focus has been given to factors as the leader’s and follower’s feelings of interconnectedness, religious or existential faith as well as the charisma of the leader, which define spiritual leadership better.

- *Authentic Leadership*

Shamir and Eilam (2005) defined authentic leadership by investigating what makes up an authentic leader. They described the authentic leader in the following dimensions:

- i. Genuineness: The authentic leader is portrayed to be a leader who is sincere in his/her leadership capabilities and actions. A leader who is transparent about his/her abilities and limitations and as such does not create a false personality in order to fit into the leadership position. For this reason, the authentic leader expresses his/her real self without seeking to conform to follower’s expectations.
- ii. Conviction: The authentic leader is symbolized as a leader who leads based on conviction rather than the quest for recognition. The authentic leader is described as a leader whose main focus is to achieve organizational objectives and is a conviction-driven leader.
- iii. Originality: The authentic leader’s consistent use of convictions enables a display of originality in decision making. In addition, they place high emphasis on personal experiences which tend to dictate their value system.

Furthermore, authentic leaders are portrayed as leaders who have personal perspectives and are clear about their convictions and values. However, Luthans et al., (2006) argued that the term ‘authentic leadership’ is a foundation that serves as a point of departure for other types of leadership such as transactional and transformational leadership. They further suggested that a transactional or transformational leader tends to be authentic, and the authentic leader should not be a particular type of leader in a practical sense. It can be seen from above that conceptual analysis of the literature on classical and contemporary definitions of leadership have paid attention to leadership by describing the leader from divergent perspectives. However, another significant contemporary concept of leadership is one which identifies the follower as the leader and the leader as a servant first, known as servant leadership. It is also upon this concept of servant leadership, that this research is based. The concept of servant leadership was postulated by Greenleaf in 1970, and has since generated a lot interest among researchers of leadership not only because of the name “Servant” and the ideology behind it, but also because it represents a twist of the leadership paradigm, and therefore genuinely places the interest of the followers as the principal concern of the leader.

- *Servant Leadership*

The origin of the term “Servant Leadership” is accredited to Greenleaf who in 1970 published an essay called, “The servant as leader”, after his review of a novel, ‘Journey to the East’ by Herman Hesse in 1960. According to Spears (1996), the interpretation of Greenleaf’s understanding of the novel led to the formulation of an ideology that a great leader must firstly become a servant and get the experience as the servant, which is central to his/her greatness. Moreover, Spears (1996) described Journey to the East as a novel that depicted a collection of travelers on a mission to achieve spiritual needs. On their voyage, these travelers had a servant by the name of Leo who supported them through acts of service and provided direction when needed in the course of the journey. However, at some point in the journey, Leo goes missing and his importance is only most realized at that point, for the sojourners



needed him to complete their journey. He was needed because of his awareness of their final destination. After years of searching, the narrator comes in contact with Leo who takes him into the religious order (the essence of their quest). Eventually, the narrator is shocked to realize that the servant Leo is actually the Head of the spiritual order, its guiding spirit and a gallant leader. According to Dwyer (2016), Greenleaf's idea of servant leadership have ignited the scope of leadership researchers to view leadership not only from the standpoint of the individual who leads but also from the follower who is empowered by the servant leader.

### SERVANT LEADERSHIP DEFINED

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2016), the term "Servant" can be defined from three (3) dimensions:

- i. a person who performs duties for others, especially one employed on domestic duties: e.g., a personal attendant;
- ii. a person employed in the service of government who is normally referred to as a public or civil servant; and
- iii. a devoted and helpful follower or supporter. Several authors have attempted to define servant leadership after Greenleaf's (1977) famous definition of servant leadership as follows:

*"The Servant-Leader is servant first....It begins with a natural feeling that one wants to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead...The best test, and difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in the society? Will they benefit, or at least not further be harmed?" (p. 4).*

Greenleaf (1977) further proposed that Servant Leadership is a leadership process in which there is a genuine concern of the leader towards the follower. This concern therefore, brings about serving and leading the followers at the same time. In Greenleaf's (1977) investigation of the nature of legitimate power and greatness, he pointed out that Servant Leadership should be observed beyond its application as a management technique but also a way of life which commences with "the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" (pp. 13-14).

According to Spears (1996), Servant Leadership can be defined as a new leadership model that places serving others as dominant priority. This view is supported by Patterson (2003) who argued that Servant Leadership is an emergent leadership style that has high emphasis on service to followers, a holistic approach to work and one that upholds a sense of alliance and participation in decision-making processes.

Choi (2014) contended servant leadership emerged as a global phenomenon by the early 1970's. Greenleaf, as the theorist credited for introducing the concept of servant leadership to the mainstream though of leadership theory, stated that great leaders result from leaders that see themselves as servants (Greenleaf, 1977). Therefore, the primary motive of a servant leader is to serve rather than lead. Greenleaf further suggested that the best test on the effectiveness of a servant leader is on whether they can build and maintain common good within an organization and society (Greenleaf, 1977). It should also be noted that it is not only the leader who has to serve but also the organization in order for servant leadership to be effective (Greenleaf, 1997). Through ongoing research into servant leadership and exploring its application in multiple settings including organizations and businesses, Gandolfi, Stone, and Deno (2017) contended that servant leadership is becoming more widely accepted in organizations and institutions.

### SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION AND TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Basham (2012) noted the growth consensus among various constituents in education that educational leadership and education in general must change dramatically in terms of leadership. A differing approach must be implemented to further education and allow its leaders (teachers) and followers (students) to be more innovative and work more collaboratively. Further, Basham (2012) found that the theory of a highly centralized management was ineffective and not relevant today, especially as modern world advances and becomes more inclusive and global. As such, this section was dedicated to presenting research and findings specific to the implementation of servant leadership in the field of education. Van Dierendonck (2011) suggested furthering the research into servant leadership through exploring the perceptions of multiple stakeholders. As servant leadership gains recognition in the field of leadership, Van Dierendonck (2011) acknowledged its limitations with respect to its place in businesses, organizations, and education. Additionally, at the time of Van Dierendonck's (2011) work, researchers were still determining the influence servant leadership has on performance and how servant leadership relates to other leadership styles and models. Further, Basham (2012) acknowledged the growing consensus among a number of educators that educational leadership within academic institutions is in need of reform. Basham (2012) contended that centralized management leadership styles are ineffective and irrelevant in today's society considering ongoing societal evolution. Dyer and Dyer (2017) noted the significance of higher education on shaping and influencing the behaviors of leaders and professionals and suggested higher education also influences societal sustainability, which rationalizes the need to extend servant leadership research to higher educational institutions. Extending the work by Van Dierendonck (2011), Satyaputra (2013) stipulated that higher education emphasizes the notion of "serving" and recommended institutes of higher education shift towards a servant model since it is considerably more viable. Further, Satyaputra (2013) suggested that servant

leadership be incorporated into higher education due to its ability to promote, motivate, and positively influence students to become servants. Moreover, Saglam and Alpaydin (2017) emphasized the notion that servant leadership provides a modern approach to leadership within the educational sector. Research by Saglam and Alpaydin (2017) investigated the relationship between school administrators' personalities and their behavior consistent with servant leadership, thus furthering the current literature about servant leadership in higher educational institutions.

Further, the implementation of servant leadership, as suggested by Satyaputra (2013), was found in a study by Lambert (2015). It was noted that the servant leader, or servant teacher, implements an alternative approach to teaching that emphasizes the needs of the learners through providing supports according to the needs of the students. Teachers, utilizing the servant leadership model and becoming servant teachers in educational settings were found to positively influence the academic performance of the students as well as foster personal and academic growth (Lambert, 2015). Additionally, these students were also found to serve their peers. This study also relied on Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership and utilized the qualitative methodology to explore how teachers incorporated servant leadership into their practices (Lambert, 2015).

### SERVANT LEADERSHIP DIMENSIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Russell & Stone (2002) argued that if servant leadership is different from other approaches to leadership, it would be important to identify the characteristics that distinguish the servant leader from other leaders. Similarly, Van Dierendonck (2011) suggested that since Spears, was the former director of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership and a close associate to Greenleaf, he was highly suitable to interpret Greenleaf's ideas of what characterizes the Servant Leader. To support this observation, it would be appropriate to look at the characteristics of servant leadership by Spears (1995) so as to evaluate the interpretations made by other scholars. Spears (1995) extended the work of Greenleaf by suggesting 10 characteristics of a servant leader. They are:

**Listening:** Greenleaf (1977) argued that the first response of a genuine servant leader is to listen to the followers. This view was extended by Spears (1995) who defined listening as the active approval of followers' views, recommendations and ideas which enable the servant leader to reflect more effectively. Similarly, Bass and Avolio (1995) argued that followers have an intrinsic yearning to be heard and that the practice of listening exemplified by the servant leader would allow followers to become freer, wiser and more independent. Moreover, in support of the need for listening in effective servant leadership, Bechler and Johnson (1998); Barbuto and Wheeler, (2006) observed that there is a positive relationship between listening skills and effectiveness in servant leadership. Also, Fracaro (2001) stated that listening is one of the most significant components in the interactive process between leaders and followers, and that the practice of listening is more effective than speaking in the process of servant leadership. It is also argued that listening enhances open communication and could lead to employee's increased motivation, high trust, more care, lower absenteeism and the reduction of vices within the organization (Stone, Russell and Patterson, 2004; Flynn, Smither and Walker, 2008). Furthermore, more recent studies by (Sipe and Frick, 2015; Le Ng, Choi and Soehod, 2016; Flynn, Smither and Walker, 2016) have provided empirical evidence of the importance of listening in servant leadership. For example, a study by Le Ng, Choi and Soehod, (2016) investigated the relationship between servant leadership and employees' job withdrawal intention and found that certain characteristics of servant leadership, especially listening, could reduce employees' withdrawal intention. They argued that employees felt valued when they were listened to and felt free to share their concerns with their leaders. Therefore, it can be confirmed that listening is a key characteristic of servant leadership.

**Empathy:** Spears (1995) views empathy as a characteristic which servant leaders utilize to understand and empathize with followers. According to George (2000) and Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), empathy is the ability of a leader to align with a follower's situation in order to comprehend their position and perspective. It is also seen as a behaviour that stresses the importance of listening to followers and being thoughtful of their emotions and necessities (Kayworth and Leidner, 2002; Mittal and Dorfman, 2012), and as a skill of understanding others' emotional state and difficulties more effectively (Voss et al., 2010). In this respect, many studies of servant leadership have concluded that empathy is a key characteristic of leadership. For example, a study by Butler and Chinowsky (2006) found that empathy was a significant emotional intelligence behaviour for effective leadership within organizations. Another study by Snyder, Lopez and Pedrotti (2010) found empathy to reflect an individual's emotional response to the perceived plights of another. Correspondingly, Holt and Marquez (2012) defined empathy as the skill of understanding others' emotional state and difficulties more effectively. He further identified this behavioural trait as a skill exemplified by servant leaders. An earlier study by Kayworth and Leidner (2002) reported that it is vital for organizational leaders in competitive business environments to have empathy skills because they will allow such leaders interact effectively with team members in order to achieve organizational goals. Similarly, Voss, Gruber and Reppel (2010) posited that the application of empathy skills would enable corporate leaders to understand subordinates' viewpoints more effectively and thus make the workplace more inspiring and result-oriented. Also, Van Dierendonck (2011) identified empathy as critical for leaders who intend to practice servant leadership. Holt and Marquez (2012) in an empirical study found that empathy received the lowest rating when compared to other leadership characteristics because they argued, young people are less capable to reveal empathy-based emotions than mature people. Recently, Humphrey and Adams (2016) stated that empathy is a key attribute to effective leadership because it creates a stronger bond between leaders and followers. They

also argued that leaders who display empathy are more likely to build leader trust, organizational trust, team spirit and an increased motivation towards work from their followers. Moreover, having investigated the impact of empathy on leadership effectiveness in the United States and Malaysia, Rahman and Castelli (2016) found that increased levels of empathy skills were fundamental to attaining leadership effectiveness. Therefore, it can be concluded that empathy is a key characteristic of servant leadership.

Also, having investigated the impact of empathy on leadership effectiveness in United States and Malaysia, Rahman and Castelli (2016) put forward the point that increased levels of empathy skills are fundamental to attain the servant leader's effectiveness.

**Emotional Healing:** Since Spears (1995) introduced the characteristic of emotional healing which he explained to be the process where the servant leader consistently heals personal and follower emotions, further suggestions have emerged. For example, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), described emotional healing to signify a leader's ability and zeal to encourage followers' recovery from difficulties. Liden et al., (2008) defined emotional healing as the act of expressing sensitivity to the concerns of others. This element of emotional healing was revisited when Spears (2010) described emotional healing as an active tool for workplace integration and transformation. He stressed this notion based on his assumption that people in the workplace tend to become victims of emotional challenges and the need for healing should not be ignored. Moreover, Dennis, Kinzler-Norheim and Bocarnea (2010) argued that a great strength of servant leadership is the ability of a servant leader to heal self and followers. They explained that although the visibility of emotional sufferings is part of human nature, servant leaders would always embrace avenues where they can heal followers in order to make them more effective on their job functions. They also argued that their assumption supports the earlier view of Greenleaf (1970, p. 24) that:

*"There is something that subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between servant-leader and led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share".*

Furthermore, McCann, Grave and Cox (2014) found that within organizations, there would always be the need for followers and even leaders to recover from personal hardships or trauma. They stated that the servant leader's use of effective listening and empathy facilitates the healing process and enhances the relationship between the servant leader and the follower. Therefore it can be confirmed that emotional healing as a characteristic demonstrated by servant leaders improves the servant leaders' ability to listen, show empathy and build relationships with followers.

**Persuasion:** Spears (2004) described persuasion as a characteristic that the servant leader depends upon in decision-making, rather than exerting the use of authority. He argued that the servant leader seeks to convince and obtain commitment from followers rather than force compliance. Similarly, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) pointed out that persuasion denotes the ability of a leader to influence followers through methods that may not relate to the use of formal authority. According to Liden et al., (2008) and Sun (2013), the characteristic of persuasion is comparable to visioning because it reflects the degree to which a servant leader deploys sound reasoning to identify and solve issues in order to visualize better possibilities for the future. Likewise, Beck (2014) argued that servant leaders must have the capability to encourage followers towards accomplishing greater possibilities. He suggested that this would only be possible through the influence that originates from persuasion. Moreover, in an investigation of the impact of servant leadership on employee empowerment, Gupta (2015) argued that persuasion by the servant leader had positive impact on employee engagement and job satisfaction which could influence an organization to achieve its objectives. This view is supported by Tischler et al., (2015) who suggested that persuasion is one of the components that influences an employee's self- efficacy which in turn could bring about job satisfaction. Therefore it can be concluded that persuasion is a characteristic servant leaders employ in increasing job satisfaction and empower followers in decision making.

**Awareness:** According to Spears (1995), awareness is the ability of servant leaders to be conscious of self and general activities around them. He further argued that awareness would strengthen the leader's interaction with followers in an ethical manner. Similarly, Jackson and Morgan (2007) stated that awareness involves the capacity of a leader to read and interpret signals within working environment. He explained that the practice of awareness would help develop a sense of trust from employees within the organization. Van Dierendonck (2011) sees awareness as the act of servant leaders being awake to the realities before them. Although this view is supported by Pavlovich and Corner (2015), they extend further by categorizing the awareness of a servant leader into two types:

- i. Self- awareness: This connotes a sense that the servant leader is conscious of self as an individual entity within the environment, and is still mindful of their interrelationship with the environment.
- ii. External-awareness: This extends the view of self-awareness and indicates that the servant leader's conscious awareness of self now equips them with the ability to connect their awareness with those of followers.

Furthermore, Staats (2016) pointed out that awareness is a critical component that makes the servant leader easily adapt to the followers and the workplace environment. This view is supported by Sousa and Van Dierendonck (2017) who found awareness to

be a significant element in balancing the relationship between humble service and action that symbolizes servant leadership. Therefore, many studies have confirmed that awareness is a key characteristic of servant leadership.

**Foresight:** Spears (1995) described foresight as the catalyst which allows servant leaders to benefit from past experiences to adapt to present realities. He argued that foresight was imbedded in the intuitive minds of servant leaders. Barbuto and Wheeler (2002) stated that the use of foresight by servant leaders is to prepare for the future of the followers. In a study investigating perceptions of leadership and the level of trust between employees and supervisors, Reinke (2004), explained a strong relationship between foresight and conceptualization. She argued that it is impossible to conceive of a situation where a servant leader builds a vision (conceptualize) without the ability to place situations within their context and anticipate future possibilities (foresight). Also, in studying the role of servant leadership in the Bedouin Arab culture, Sarayrah (2004) asserted that foresight helped the servant leaders to understand the lessons of the past, the realities of the present and the likely consequences of the future. Therefore, it can be stated that foresight is an important characteristic of servant leadership.

**Conceptualization:** Spears (1995) viewed conceptualization as the ability of the servant leader to “dream great dreams”, and think beyond the status quo for effective leadership. This view is supported by Towler (2003) who pointed out that the ability of a servant leader to visualize and conceptualize would stimulate leadership performance. Moreover, a few studies of servant leadership have provided empirical evidence on the significance of conceptualization in leadership. For example, a study by Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) found that it was vital for leaders within the teaching profession to consistently conceptualize. They concluded that conceptualization would make the leaders more effective in decision-making and promote followers’ trust. Moreover, Van Eeden, Cilliers and Van Deventer (2008) reported that a leader’s ability to conceptualize leads to positive short-term changes and long-term growth that would transform the organization. Therefore, it can be confirmed that conceptualization is an essential characteristic of servant leadership. **Stewardship:** Spears (1995, p.6) defined stewardship as “*holding something in trust for another*”. He argued that servant leaders have a characteristic of stewardship in that their primary commitment is to serve the followers. Also, Van Dierendonck (2011) described stewardship as the process of keeping something in trust for others in order to meet their needs. He stated that stewardship is a characteristic of servant leadership that influences the leaders’ zeal to contribute to society. Moreover, Barbuto, Gottfredson and Searle (2014) pointed out that stewardship represents a leader’s desire to construct a positive legacy by taking responsibility for the wellbeing of the followers. A study by Peterson, Galvin and Lange (2012) investigated the characteristics and performance of firms with CEOs who practice servant leadership and reported that a common servant leadership characteristic the CEOs exemplified was stewardship, which they argued, had helped to develop mutual bonds within their organizations. Similarly, in a study of servant leadership in the Chinese public sector, Liu, Hu and Cheng (2015) found that the display of stewardship by servant leaders encouraged followers to do the same. Therefore, it can be asserted that stewardship is a key characteristic of servant leadership. **Growth:** Spears (1995) asserted that servant leaders are committed to the growth of their followers because they see their followers as having an intrinsic value. He argued that a great outcome of the practice of servant leadership is the development of followers in a positive way, which he identified as growth. Also, Hale and Fields (2007) identified servant leadership as a leadership approach that is so concerned about the growth of followers to the extent that the leaders place the welfare of their followers before that of themselves. In this respect, Cerit (2009) stated that growth is an action process in which the servant leader provides opportunities for subordinates to learn and develop personally and professionally. Also, Trastek, Hamilton and Niles (2014) in a study of servant leadership in the health sector in the USA found that the servant leaders’ concern for the growth of followers had been positively related to the followers’ trust and a high level of employee performance. Therefore, it can be concluded that growth is an essential characteristic of servant leadership.

**Community Building:** According to Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), community building signifies the leader’s capacity to encourage a sense of community spirit within the organization. They further argued that community building would enhance employer commitment and organizational identity due to the high levels of interpersonal relationships that it generates. Liden et al., (2008) observed that community building is one factor which differentiates the servant leader from other types of leaders. According to Spears (2010), servant leaders have a sense of duty to build community among those who work within the organization, yet also the larger society. Spears (2010) cited the views of Greenleaf (1991) who stated:

*“All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a specific community-related group”* (p.30).

It should be noted that Spears (1998) pointed out that the characteristics of servant leadership that he identified earlier in 1995, were not all-inclusive and he called for the need for further research.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

Penny, Kelloway & O’Keefe (2015) stated that the foremost views on leadership theory were based on a trait perspective, leading to what was known as the **Trait Theory or Great Man Theory**. Due to the extensiveness of leadership research, this study will not

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explore all the leadership theories that exist. However, the next sections would review a number of leadership theories in consecutive order in order to identify the notions of the theories, their application and limitations.

### ***Leadership Theory- Trait Perspective***

Bass and Stogdill (1990) found that early reports on the great man theory is drawn from sociologist Jerome Dowd whose perspective upheld that in any given society, individuals possessed different levels of intelligence, moral force and energy. He pointed out that the conclusion of Jerome Dowd indicates that the superior few would always lead the majority of society. Also, in exploring the foundations of the Great Man theory, Organ (1996) pointed out that the cliché; “Leaders are born and not made” has brought about numerous debates among researchers who question it as a myth and not a reality (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). He argued that this debate reflects traditional and the mainstream of current thoughts on leadership. However, he provides several reasons for the emergence of the Great Man trait perspective. For instance, the assertions by Aristotle who emphasized on the rank system of any society and concluded that rank is determined through the superior power revealed as virtues, knowledge, wisdom, talent and ability. Following this assertion, Aristotle stated that certain individuals are born with these virtues. Organ (1996) also maintained that political thoughts in America in the mid-twentieth century shared the same thoughts as Aristotle.

This view was supported by Gregoire and Arendt (2014) who, on one hand, argued that the early 1900s brought about the earliest works on leadership and on the other hand suggested that the trait approach was driven by an identification of the personal characteristics of leaders who were perceived to be effective by followers. Therefore, the great man theory as a theory which saw the leader as an individual with inherited traits for a leadership role (Northouse, 2014).

### ***Leadership Theory- Behavioural Perspective***

The need to distinguish between the leader and the behaviour of the leader had led to several studies. Unlike the trait theory of leadership which focuses on the personality characteristics of the leader, the behavioural approach looks at leadership from a different dimension. According to Northouse (2018), the primary focus of the behavioural approach is on leader’s actions. Therefore, the behavioural approach investigates the actions of leaders by classifying their behaviours into task behaviours and relationship behaviours. While the task behaviours enable goal accomplishment by the leader helping followers achieve objectives, relationship behaviours focus on ensuring that followers feel comfortable with themselves, other members of the group and the situation at hand.

### ***The Autocratic or Directive Leadership Approach***

Autocratic leadership is a leadership approach categorized by the centralization and control of decision-making and directive power in an individual dominant leader (Lippitt, 1940). Moreover, Cremer (2006) explained that autocratic leadership symbolizes how dominant and controlling a leader is in the process of discussing opinions and ideas leading to the actual decision taken in the group. Furthermore, Bass and Bass (2009) support and extend this view by emphasizing that autocratic leadership enables the leader to establish a well-defined intra-team hierarchy even as the leader’s behaviour indicates the zeal to centralize authority and dictate work patterns with restricted involvement of employees. Vann, Coleman and Simpson (2014) argued that the collective notion of autocratic leadership is that it represents the natural embodiment of Machiavelli’s well-known dictum: it is better to be feared than loved, if one cannot be both (Machiavelli, 1998.p. 67). However, Bass and Bass (2009) maintain that all autocratic leaders are not dictators despite the fact their leadership style could be seen as controlling, power-oriented, arbitrary, punitive and close-minded.

### ***The Democratic or Participative Leadership Approach***

Gastil (1994) argued that early definitions of democratic leadership could be attributed to Kurt Lewin who in 1969 described the democratic leader as the kind of leader whose behaviour demonstrates willingness to encourage employee participation, empowers employees’ and utilizes feedback as an instrument in coaching employees. More than two decades later, Gastil (1994) extends the school of thought regarding the definition of democratic leadership by seeing democratic leadership as the outcome of three functions namely:

- a) **Distribution of Responsibility.** Whitehead (1936) argued that since a democratic society is categorized by a distribution of personal responsibility, it could be suggested that the central aim of democratic leadership is to drive opportunities that make it possible for team members to initiate ideas and develop a sense of responsibility to contribute towards the overall agenda of the group. Similarly, Krech et al., (1962) proposed that the democratic leader is determined to promote maximum involvement and the participation of every team member in group tasks and in evaluating group objectives.
- b) **Empowerment of Team Members** Lewin et al., (1939) drew attention that a distinguishing function of the democratic leader is that he or she is directly involved in providing new responsibilities to team members to enable them develop their skills. Correspondingly, Starhawk (1986) stress that the democratic leader reflects genuine concern for team members even as they empower them to achieve set objectives. Theilen and Poole (1986) argue that the overall aim of empowering team members by the democratic leader is to make team members learn to become leaders.

- c) Aiding Deliberation Yankelovich (1991) asserted that deliberation is at the centre of democracy. He further stated that after the democratic leader has distributed responsibility and empowered team members, it then becomes imperative for such leader to drive a process that leads to effective and democratic decision-making. This view was supported by Morse (1991) who stressed that for democratic leadership to be productive, there must be a high quality deliberation within the group.

### *The Laissez-Faire Leadership Theory*

Bradford and Lippitt (1945) defined a laissez-faire leader as one exemplified by a neglect of supervisory functions and lack of guidance to subordinates. They emphasized that a typical laissez-faire leader is such a leader whose behaviour encourages almost absolute freedom to subordinates in undertaking their job functions as well as in decision-making processes. Similarly, Bass (1998) argued that the paradox of laissez faire leadership is that it indicates the absence of leadership and a behaviour of a leader who abdicates his or her authority. Furthermore, Louw and Venter, (2011) simply describes laissez faire leadership as a non-description leadership approach that avoids leading. A growing number of studies that have examined the application of laissez-faire leadership within organizations.

## EMPIRICAL REVIEW

It is almost common knowledge that the organization that is notable for practical application of servant leadership is Southwest Airlines in the United States of America. Gittell (2003) presented results from an extensive exploratory study on Southwest Airlines. The overarching rationale behind the study was to determine how Southwest Airlines uses the power of relationships to attain high performance. The study identified some major milestones of Southwest Airlines which included standing out as a profitable airline since 1972 even at periods of uncertainty within the airline industry. Remarkably, in 2002, Southwest Airlines achieved a market capitalization of \$9 billion which surpassed the market capitalization of every other US airline combined. Also, Southwest Airlines had consistently being rated among the “100 Best Companies to Work for in America” by Fortune Magazine.

Gittell’s (2003) study attributed the leadership approach within the aviation industry as critical to its overall success. The source of the organization’s high level performance is the leadership style that initiated shared goals between leadership and followers, shared knowledge which promotes work coordination and promotes innovation, mutual respect within the entire organization, consistent and appropriate communication; and huge investment in frontline leaders. Therefore, Gittell (2003) argued that since Southwest Airlines saw their leaders and supervisors as important to their growth, one of their major goals is to develop effective frontline leaders and have enough leaders to work alongside other employees. Southwest airlines also had a culture of teaching their leaders on how to provide coaching and feedback to the employees. The practices above are core elements of servant leadership. Further studies of servant leadership have covered cases from all continents of the globe. For example, Anderson (2005) presented a correlational analysis of servant-leadership and job satisfaction in a religious educational institution owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the USA. The aim of the research was to find parallels of the relationship between high and low cadre perceptions of servant-leadership principles practiced in the institution and their influence on job satisfaction. It deployed the use of a mixed research method, thereby using the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) quantitative instrument for a randomly selected sample of teachers and qualitative interviews for administrators. The findings of the study showed a significant relationship between self-perceptions of servant-leadership and employee job satisfaction.

Similarly, Van Tassell (2006) examined the perceptions of servant-leadership in relation to job satisfaction at a Franciscan-owned university in the USA. This study was crucial to the university considering the fact that it had just changed its president of 27 years. It served as an avenue to appraise the new leadership style at the university and to find out, if it was servant leadership. The findings showed that attributes of servant-leadership such as awareness, listening, commitment to the growth of people and foresight, and empathy were perceivable in the university. As a result, employees related these servant leadership attributes exemplified by the president as significant factors that have increased their perceived job satisfaction. The new president of the university was a community builder who honestly desired that employees obtained a high job satisfaction. He created more avenues within the University for Employees to express themselves and be more innovative in their job functions. Even though, the past president was successful in the effective management of the university and was a democratic leader, Van Tassell (2006) pointed out that his lack of servant leadership attributes such as foresight and commitment to the growth of employees may have been the reason why, employees perceived him more as a functional manager than a leader.

Similarly, Salie (2008) carried an analysis of the relationship between servant leadership and work satisfaction in Islamic organizations in South Michigan, USA. He debated that there was limited research on the area of leadership within Muslim institutions in the USA, and that there was a necessity to provide the Muslim community with techniques on how to sustain their institutions. As a result, upon collecting data from over 271 participants, the results showed that specific elements of servant-leadership which include: effective communication, delegation and empowerment, leader trust and motivation were crucial to job satisfaction. Therefore, Sallie (2008) argued that Muslim administrators and managers were not exempt from developing effective leadership traits.

Conclusively, the literature identifies the significant effects and influence of servant leadership on the growth of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. However, in the case of the leadership theories aforementioned, the servant-leadership theory has also faced criticisms based on diverse reasoning. This study will tentatively look at how servant leadership affect employee engagement of academic staff of federal universities in Nigeria. When workers are motivated and satisfied with their job, and they have the feeling that the organization they work for is committed towards their welfare, they tend to be more productive at their workplace and the students tend to benefit from it more.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This study's research design is a descriptive- correlation type research. The main tertiary institutions for the study are 2 selected federal schools from the southeast region (University of Nigeria, Nsukka in Enugu State and, Nnamdi Azikwe University (UNIZIK) in Anambra State) respectively.

A total of 100 workers each were taken as a sample size of the study from the 2 selected tertiary institutions, totaling 200 workers. A well-structured and comprehensive questionnaire was developed to collect the data from the respondents. The questionnaire was pre-tested so that it rectifies any error. The steps taken to conduct the research are (1) questionnaire design, (2) large-sample data collection, and (3) presentation and analysis of the final results. The first two steps are described in this section, and the last one step will be covered in the following sections.

### SOURCES OF DATA

The sources of data are of two different types. The researcher made use of both primary and secondary data.

The researcher conducted oral interviews and discussion was held in some relevant issues such as how servant-leadership issue influences employee engagement of academic staff of federal universities in Nigeria. For the primary data: a survey of 2 federal schools were selected from the southeast region (University of Nigeria, Nsukka in Enugu State and Nnamdi Azikwe University (UNIZIK) in Anambra State). Questionnaire was used in covering the tertiary institutions in the southeast region.

The secondary data used in these research work covers past research which include textbooks, newspapers, bulleting, journals, internet, delivered lecturers and handouts.

### SAMPLING AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The sample size was selected for this study using the random sampling procedure. This is because it does not only give each element in the population an equal chance of being included in the sample, but also makes the selection equally likely. The desired sample size is 200 workers. The number of questionnaire distributed was 250, but it was just 200 questionnaires that were returned. This is 80% return rate which is still good.

### METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The main research instrument used was the questionnaire, and questionnaire items were formed to address the research questions. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents from the two (2) selected tertiary institutions in the southeast region. Thereafter, the questionnaires were retrieved from the respondents after they had indicated their responses.

### METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

For a brief and accurate presentation of data collected, the researcher used percentages, averages, and frequency distributions of the various variables. The study was analyzed with the SPSS statistical tool and the hypotheses formulated were tested using z-test and Pearson Product Moment correlation (PPMC) statistical tool at 0.05 level of significance.

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The data used in this study was from a total of Two hundred (200) questionnaires, which were randomly distributed to the respondents and were collected for data analysis. The results of the analysis are presented in tabular format for interpreting them and to review the major findings in conformity with the null hypotheses earlier generated. The bio-data of the respondents were analyzed using simple percentage. The hypotheses formulated were tested using z-test and Pearson Product Moment correlation (PPMC) statistical tool at 0.05 level of significance.

### PRESENTATION OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

This section presents the respondents' demographic information with the use of frequency distribution tables:

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender**

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Male   | 160       | 80         |
| Female | 40        | 20         |

|              |            |            |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>200</b> | <b>100</b> |
|--------------|------------|------------|

Source: Field survey 2023

The table above reveals that 160 (80%) of the respondents are male, while the remaining 40 (20%) are female.

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Duration worked in the tertiary institution**

| <b>Duration</b>     | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 5 yrs old and below | 40               | 20                |
| 6-10yrs             | 30               | 15                |
| 10-15yrs            | 37               | 18.5              |
| 15-20yrs            | 54               | 27                |
| 20-25yrs            | 26               | 13                |
| 25yrs and above     | 13               | 6.5               |
| <b>TOTAL</b>        | <b>200</b>       | <b>100</b>        |

Source: Field survey 2023

The table above shows that 54 (27%) of the respondents, representing the highest number of respondents have worked for 15-20yrs, while 13 (6.5%) of the respondents representing the lowest have worked for 25yrs & above.

**Table 3: Respondents' Marital Status**

| <b>Marital Status</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Single                | 60               | 30                |
| Married               | 100              | 50                |
| Others                | 40               | 20                |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>200</b>       | <b>100</b>        |

Source: Field survey 2023

Table 3 shows that 60 (30%) of the respondents are single, 100 (50%) of the respondents, representing the highest are married, while 40 (20%) are widowed or divorced.

**Table 4: Respondents' Educational Qualification**

| <b>Educational Qualification</b>           | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| Junior college & below                     | 40               | 20                |
| University                                 | 84               | 42                |
| Above University (Masters, PhD, Professor) | 76               | 38                |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                               | <b>200</b>       | <b>100</b>        |

Source: Field survey 2023

The table above shows that 84 (42%) of the respondents' educational qualification was at University level; 76 (38%) had above University level; while 40 (20%) had Junior college level and below.

**Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by Management Level**

| <b>Management level</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Senior management       | 46               | 23                |
| Middle management       | 74               | 37                |
| Junior management       | 80               | 40                |
| <b>TOTAL</b>            | <b>200</b>       | <b>100</b>        |

Source: Field survey 2023

Table 5 shows that 46 (23%) of the respondents are in senior management level; 74 (37%) belong to middle management; while 80 (40%) representing the highest number of respondents are in junior management.



**DATA ANALYSIS**

**Testing of Hypotheses**

There were four (4) hypotheses formulated during this research to find the relationship between selected and measured variables. These hypotheses are tested using the z-test and Pearson Product Moment correlation (PPMC) statistical tool, at 0.05 level of significance.

**Hypothesis One:**

Ho: Promotion of academic staff as at when due does not affect their commitment to work.

Using 5% level of significance

**Decision Rule:** Reject  $H_0$ , if P – value is lesser than level of significant (0.05)

**Table 6: z-test statistics on promotions of academic staff**

| S/N | ITEMS  | Mean  | N   | Critical Value | P– value | Decision                      |
|-----|--|-------|-----|----------------|----------|-------------------------------|
| 1   | I think that staying in the same organization will make me have better career development. | 3.095 | 200 | 1.645          | 0.067    | Do not reject null hypothesis |
| 2   | The management of the organization is concerned about the welfare of its workers           | 3.245 | 200 |                |          |                               |

Source: Field Survey 2023

**Interpretation:** The z-test of independence at 5% level of significance reveals that the P value of 0.067 is greater than level of significance 0.05, therefore, we accept the null hypothesis that states that “Promotion of academic staff as at when due does not affect their commitment to work”.

**Hypothesis Two:**

Ho: There is no relationship between academic staff conducive working environment and their job engagement.

Using 5% level of significance

**Decision Rule:** Reject  $H_0$ , if P – value is lesser than level of significant (0.05)

**Table 7: z-test statistics on conducive working environment for academic staff**

| S/N | ITEMS  | Mean | N   | Critical Value | P– value | Decision               |
|-----|--|------|-----|----------------|----------|------------------------|
| 1   | I can say that I am very much satisfied with my work in this organization. | 3.01 | 200 | 1.645          | 0.036    | Reject null hypothesis |
| 2   | The management promotes cooperation among staff                            | 2.83 | 200 |                |          |                        |

Source: Field Survey 2023

**Interpretation:** The z-test of independence at 5% level of significance reveals that the P value of 0.036 is lesser than level of significance 0.05, therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that states that “There is no relationship between academic staff conducive working environment and their job engagement”. The result above shows that academic staff enjoy a conducive working environment as it relates to their engagement with the institution.

**Hypothesis Three:**

Ho: There is no relationship between giving admission slot and other fringe benefits to academic staff and their loyalty to the school management.

Using 5% level of significance

**Decision Rule:** Reject  $H_0$ , if P – value is lesser than level of significant (0.05)

**Table 8: z-test statistics on admission slots for academic staff during admission process.**

| S/N | ITEMS  | Mean  | N   | Critical Value | P– value | Decision                      |
|-----|--|-------|-----|----------------|----------|-------------------------------|
| 1   | I am glad that I am able to devote my future career life to this organization. | 2.925 | 200 | 1.645          | 0.480    | Do not reject null hypothesis |
| 2   | The management gives me admission slots during the admission process.          | 2.93  | 200 |                |          |                               |

Source: Field Survey 2023

**Interpretation:** The z-test of independence at 5% level of significance reveals that the P value of 0.480 is greater than level of significance 0.05, therefore, we accept the null hypothesis that states that “There is no relationship between giving admission slot and other fringe benefits to academic staff and their loyalty to the school management”.

**Hypothesis Four:**

Ho: Academic staff work-life balance consideration does not affect their creativity/professionalism.

Using 5% level of significance

**Decision Rule:** Reject  $H_0$ , if P – value is lesser than level of significant (0.05)

**Table 9: Correlation analysis on the relationship between academic staff work-life balance consideration and their creativity/professionalism.**

| S/N | Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation  | Var 1 | Var 2 | N   | Decision               |
|-----|---|-------|-------|-----|------------------------|
| 1   | I am very convinced that my organization listens to my complaints.                        | 1     | 0.003 | 200 | Reject null hypothesis |
| 2   | The management of the organization takes into consideration our input in decision making. | 0.003 | 1     | 200 |                        |

Source: Field Survey 2023

**Interpretation:** The Pearson’s product moment correlation of independence at 5% level of significance reveals that the P value of 0.003 is lesser than level of significance 0.05, therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that states that “Academic staff work-life balance consideration does not affect their creativity/professionalism”. From the result of the correlation, we can see that there is a weak, but positive relationship between academic staff work-life balance consideration and their creativity/professionalism.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Hypothesis one states, "Promotion of academic staff as at when due does not affect their commitment to work." This hypothesis was accepted as findings indicate that promotions are being delayed in institutions, some were not given promotion when due for it. This finding is in line with Bass and Bass (2009) who observed that promotion issue is one of the most challenging issues for academic staff in the higher institution as senior academic staff tend to deal with their junior colleagues or measure their loyalty before awarded promotion.

Hypothesis two states that "There is no relationship between academic staff conducive working environment and their job engagement". This hypothesis was rejected as findings indicate that academic staff do enjoy conducive working environment which makes their engagement productive. This finding is in line with Anderson (2005) who observed that working environment for academic staff are very conducive as it encourages research and growth in their respective fields of study.

Hypothesis three states that "There is no relationship between giving admission slot and other fringe benefits to academic staff and their loyalty to the school management". This hypothesis was accepted as findings indicate that admission slots and other fringe benefits are not given to academic staff during admission as inclusion of their engagement at work. This finding is in line with Van Tassell (2006) who observed that admission slots and other fringe benefits are given to only a few senior academic staff in some higher institutions as benefits for their loyalty to the system or to the management.

Hypothesis four states that "Academic staff work-life balance consideration does not affect their creativity/professionalism". This hypothesis was rejected as findings indicate that academic staff work-life balance consideration do affect their creativity/professionalism. This finding is in line with Gittel (2003) who observed that Southwest Airlines saw their leaders and supervisors as important to their growth, one of their major goals is to develop effective frontline leaders and have enough leaders to work alongside other employees. It is worthy to note that a good Servant leadership style implemented, would go a long way to increase the productivity of employee engagement in any organization.

### **SUMMARY**

This study examines the effect of servant leadership style on employee engagement of academic staff of federal universities in Nigeria. Four research questions and four hypotheses were formulated to guide in the study. This study's research design is a descriptive- correlation type research. The main tertiary institutions for the study are two (2) selected federal schools from the southeast region (University of Nigeria, Nsukka in Enugu State and Nnamdi Azikwe University (UNIZIK) in Anambra State) respectively. A total of 100 workers each were taken as a sample size of the study from the two (2) selected tertiary institutions, totaling 200 workers for the study. A structured questionnaire was used for the data collection. The bio-data of the respondents were analyzed using simple percentage and frequency counts, z-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical tools were used for analyzing the hypotheses raised at 0.05 level of significance.

The findings of the study revealed that:

1. Promotion of academic staff as at when due does not affect their commitment to work.
2. There is a positive relationship between academic staff conducive working environment and their job engagement.
3. There is no relationship between giving admission slot and other fringe benefits to academic staff and their loyalty to the school management.
4. Academic staff work-life balance consideration do affect their creativity/professionalism.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of this study, it has been established that there is a positive effect of servant leadership style on employee engagement of academic staff of federal universities in Nigeria. The study also concluded that the demographic variables of academic staff investigated in this study determines the level of employee engagement as it relates to servant leadership style in federal universities in Nigeria.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study and the conclusions reached above, this paper offers the following recommendations:

1. Federal Universities should ensure that promotion should be given based on merit and also as at when due, not by who is loyal to the system or management.

2. The management should also ensure that admission slots and other fringe benefits be given to academic staff as incentives to motivate them on their engagement, but this should be checked frequently, as it could also lead to academic staff misusing the opportunity or exploiting students looking for admission.
3. Federal Universities should continue making the working environment very much conducive for academic staff to improve productivity of their employees' engagement. When academic staff are happy, adhered to and treated well, then the institution will produce happy students as well, as this would reflect in the lives of the students.
4. Federal Universities should always encourage the Servant leadership style approach, as it has been proven that it affects employees' engagement positively in carrying out their duties. Leaders and employees should work cordially and promote team work.
5. The management should always learn to listen to its employees and also be concerned about the welfare of its employees during its decision-making processes.

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