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# LEADERSHIP STYLES AND DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AS DETERMINANTS OF CAREER ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES AMONG UYO LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examined the predictive roles of leadership styles and demographic variables on career advancement among local government employees in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and standardized instruments on leadership styles and career advancement were administered to local government employees. Data were analyzed using multiple regression and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Results revealed that demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, and educational qualification) jointly and significantly predicted career advancement, accounting for 11.8% of the variance. Gender and educational qualification emerged as the strongest independent predictors ( $\beta = 1.21, t = 3.42, p < 0.05$ ;  $\beta = 0.68, t = 2.97, p < 0.05$ ), while religion and years of service did not independently contribute. Furthermore, leadership styles were found to have a significant positive relationship with career advancement ( $r = 0.34, p < 0.01$ ), indicating that employees under democratic and transformational leaders reported higher access to promotions, training, and professional growth. Additional findings showed that demographic variables also significantly predicted leadership styles adopted by managers ( $F(5, 368) = 9.24, p < 0.05$ ), with age and gender serving as the best predictors. The study concludes that both leadership styles and demographic characteristics play significant roles in shaping career advancement within local government administration. It is recommended that managers adopt inclusive leadership approaches and that policies be developed to reduce demographic disparities in order to ensure fairness, equity, and sustainable employee development.*

**Keywords:** Leadership styles, Demographic variables, Career advancement, Local government employees, Uyo Metropolis

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership and career advancement remain critical issues in contemporary organizational settings, particularly within the public sector where employee growth and development are often hindered by bureaucratic structures and rigid administrative practices. Local government administration, being the closest tier of government to the people, is very important in governance and service delivery (Akhakpe, 2014). However, the effectiveness and sustainability of this tier of government depend largely on the leadership styles which had been adopted by its managers and the extent to which employees are provided with fair and equitable opportunities for career advancement (Northouse, 2021).

Leadership style refers to the manner and approach of providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating people. Classical leadership theories distinguish between autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transformational, and transactional styles, each exerting different impacts on employees' experiences and growth (Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939; Bass & Riggio, 2006). In local government systems, leadership styles are crucial because they influence how resources, opportunities, and responsibilities are allocated. A democratic or transformational leader may encourage staff development through training, mentoring, and fair promotion practices, while an autocratic or laissez-faire style may limit career advancement to a privileged few (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015).

Demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, educational qualification, and years of service are also important in determining career advancement. Research across different contexts indicates that demographic characteristics can either facilitate or hinder career progression. For example, in Western contexts, gender differences remain a major factor affecting promotion opportunities, with women often facing barriers to leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Similarly, age and educational qualification have been linked to employees' likelihood of

securing promotions and training opportunities in organizations across Europe and Asia (Ng & Feldman, 2010; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

In Nigeria, demographic characteristics remain strong determinants of access to training, promotion, and leadership grooming within public institutions. Recent research shows that gender, age, educational attainment, and years of service influence how employees perceive career opportunities and advancement prospects (Akinbo & Ogah, 2025). For example, surveys of Nigerian public servants reveal that demographic profiles including gender and years of service shape perceptions of fairness in promotion practices and access to development opportunities. These demographic factors often interact with organizational practices to produce uneven career outcomes (Akinbo & Ogah, 2025). Educational qualification and years of service continue to be central in advancement decisions. A substantial body of recent research in Nigeria indicates that those with higher qualifications and longer tenure are more likely to access promotions and targeted training programs, reflecting a broader emphasis on human capital investment in public service reform (Akinbo & Ogah, 2025).

Gender stereotypes and structural inequalities persist as barriers. Studies in the African context show that women remain underrepresented in senior leadership, and institutional climates often fail to provide equitable pathways to advancement (Olutayo, 2024). Qualitative research in Nigerian and Ghanaian higher education institutions underscores persistent gendered advantage favoring men in leadership roles, linked to cultural norms and organizational climates that limit women's career progression despite comparable qualifications and experience (Olutayo, 2024).

The relationship between leadership style and career advancement has also been updated with recent findings. Transformational and participative (democratic) leadership styles are increasingly associated with inclusive practices that support employee engagement, satisfaction, and equitable access to development opportunities, compared to autocratic or laissez-faire approaches that can stifle voice and inhibit growth (Amah et al., 2025). Likewise, international work on leadership and gender suggests that transformational leadership may help reduce perceived barriers to women's advancement by enhancing fairness and support structures within organizations (Erro-Garcés & Urien, 2024, cited in Burch & Guarana, 2014).

In the public sector specifically, recent empirical studies emphasize the combined influence of leadership style and human resource practices including promotion systems, training access, and performance appraisal on employee motivation and institutional performance. When promotion practices are viewed as transparent and merit-based, employees exhibit higher commitment and responsiveness; where practices are opaque or influenced by favoritism, morale and efficiency decline (Ogah & Akinbo, 2024).

These updated findings highlight a critical concern for local government systems: if leadership practices and demographic variables continue to shape career advancement in ways perceived as inequitable, employees are likely to experience reduced motivation, lower productivity, and weakened institutional performance. Consequently, a systematic examination of leadership styles alongside demographic variables is essential for uncovering the mechanisms that enable or constrain career advancement including the interplay between organizational culture, formal human resource systems, and individual employee characteristics.

In view of the above, the study seeks to achieve the following:

1. Identify the prevalent leadership styles adopted by local government managers in Uyo Metropolis.

2. Examine the relationship between leadership styles and career advancement opportunities of employees.
3. Investigate the influence of demographic variables on employees' career advancement.
4. Assess how the interaction between leadership style and demographic variables shapes employees' access to career advancement.

## Theoretical Review

The study of leadership and career advancement is grounded in several theoretical perspectives that explain how leaders influence employees' growth, as well as how individual demographic characteristics shape workplace outcomes.

### **Trait and Behavioral Theories of Leadership (Stogdill, 1948, 1974; Lewin et al., 1939)**

Trait and Behavioral theories represent some of the earliest systematic attempts to explain leadership. The Trait Theory, advanced by Stogdill (1948, 1974), suggests that effective leaders possess certain inherent qualities such as intelligence, confidence, decisiveness, and integrity. These traits distinguish leaders from non-leaders and increase their capacity to influence subordinates. However, later studies argued that traits alone cannot fully account for leadership success, giving rise to Behavioral Theories such as those of Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939). These emphasized what leaders actually do, their behaviours and interactions with subordinates rather than who they are. Behavioral approaches often differentiate between task-oriented leadership, which focuses on goal achievement and performance monitoring, and people-oriented leadership, which emphasizes interpersonal relations, motivation, and employee development. Within local government settings, these theories are useful for explaining why some leaders may foster environments that support career advancement, while others may stifle growth through rigid control. For example, a people-oriented leader in Uyo Local Government is more likely to mentor subordinates, provide training opportunities, and support promotions, while a purely task-oriented leader may prioritize efficiency over professional development.

### **Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006)**

Transformational leadership expands the discussion by focusing on how leaders inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate followers to achieve beyond ordinary expectations. Bass (1985) identified four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, where leaders act as role models; inspirational motivation, where they communicate a compelling vision; intellectual stimulation, which encourages creativity, and problem-solving; and individualized consideration, where leaders mentor and support employees based on their personal needs. In terms of career advancement, transformational leaders play a pivotal role because they not only set organizational goals but also help employees align their personal aspirations with those goals. Bass and Riggio (2006) emphasize that transformational leaders foster environments where subordinates are challenged, recognized, and encouraged to grow. In the Nigerian civil service, where bureaucratic constraints often slow promotion and career growth, transformational leadership is particularly critical.

By mentoring employees, advocating for training programs, and recognizing potential, transformational leaders in Uyo Local Government can bridge the gap between bureaucratic stagnation and career advancement opportunities.

## **Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964)**

The Human Capital Theory provides an economic perspective on career advancement by viewing individuals' education, training, skills, and experience as investments in capital that increase productivity and future income. Becker (1964) argued that just as businesses invest in machinery and technology, individuals and organizations invest in people. These investments pay off in the form of higher efficiency, innovation, and organizational growth.

From a demographic perspective, variables such as educational qualification, age, years of service, and professional training play a pivotal role in determining career progression. Employees who possess higher academic qualifications and relevant specialized training are generally more competitive for promotions and leadership positions compared to their peers who lack these credentials. This is because educational attainment and professional development not only enhance employees' knowledge and skills but also increase their visibility and perceived value within the organization.

In Nigerian public sector, particularly within Uyo Local Government, promotion and career advancement are often closely linked to formal education and cumulative work experience. Civil servants with higher qualifications and longer tenure are typically considered for leadership roles, reflecting both meritocratic and bureaucratic considerations. Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015) noted that formal qualifications often serve as minimum prerequisites for career advancement, while supplementary skills and continuous professional development further strengthen employees' prospects for higher positions.

Moreover, demographic factors interact with organizational policies and leadership practices to shape career outcomes. For example, employees who combine formal education with mentorship opportunities and on-the-job training are more likely to access developmental roles and advancement opportunities. Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) therefore provides a strong framework for understanding these dynamics, as it emphasizes that investments in human knowledge, skills, and experience increase productivity and, in turn, enhance career trajectories. In essence, the theory highlights that demographic characteristics are not merely descriptive statistics; they constitute critical assets that influence both individual growth and organizational development.

**Career advancement in organizations is not determined by leadership style or demographic characteristics in isolation, but by the interaction between leadership behaviour and employees' human capital attributes.**

Specifically, the theories collectively suggest that while employees possess varying demographic characteristics such as education, years of service, age, and skills which form their human capital base, the extent to which these attributes translate into actual career advancement opportunities depends largely on leadership practices. Trait and Behavioral theories indicate that leaders who demonstrate people-oriented and supportive behaviours are more likely to create enabling environments for employee growth. Transformational Leadership Theory further reinforces this by emphasizing leaders' roles in mentoring, motivating, and developing subordinates, thereby facilitating access to training, promotion, and leadership grooming. In contrast, rigid, autocratic, or purely task-focused leadership approaches may suppress employees' potential regardless of their qualifications or experience.

Human Capital Theory complements this perspective by explaining why employees with higher educational qualifications, longer tenure, and relevant training are often better positioned for advancement. However, the theory also implies that investments in human capital yield optimal outcomes only when organizational leaders recognize, nurture, and equitably reward these investments. Where leadership practices are biased, inconsistent, or influenced by non-merit

factors, the returns on human capital investment may be distorted, resulting in inequitable career outcomes.

Therefore, the general conclusion guiding this study is that **effective and inclusive leadership styles particularly transformational and people-oriented approaches serve as critical mechanisms through which employees' demographic characteristics and human capital investments are translated into meaningful career advancement opportunities.** In the context of Uyo Local Government, this study is guided by the assumption that variations in leadership style, together with employees' demographic profiles, significantly determine the fairness, accessibility, and consistency of career advancement. Understanding this interaction is essential for explaining existing disparities in promotion and development opportunities and for recommending leadership practices that promote equity, motivation, and organizational effectiveness.

## Conceptual Review

**Leadership style is generally defined as the behavioural patterns and strategies leaders use to motivate, direct, and manage people in order to achieve organisational goals** (Avolio & Walumbwa, 2025)

Commonly studied styles include transformational, transactional, autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire (Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939). In the Nigerian local government system, leadership style is central to workforce management because it influences how opportunities for training, promotion, and career growth are distributed. Democratic and transformational leaders promote inclusivity, while autocratic or laissez-faire styles may create favoritism or neglect (Amanchukwu et al., 2015).

### **Demographic Variables and Work Outcomes:**

Demographic variables are the personal characteristics of individuals that influence their behavior, opportunities, and interactions within an organization (Aina, 2012; Lawal, 2014; Robbins & Judge, 2017). In the workplace, key demographic variables include age, gender, marital status, educational qualification, and years of experience. These variables shape important work outcomes, such as career advancement, promotion, leadership opportunities, and job mobility. Age can affect perceptions of competence and eligibility for promotion, with older employees sometimes favored in traditional bureaucratic systems. Gender influences access to leadership positions, as societal norms and organizational stereotypes often disadvantage women. Marital status can impact career mobility, reflecting the balance between personal responsibilities and professional obligations. Educational qualifications and years of experience enhance employees' skills and expertise, thereby increasing their likelihood of promotion and career progression (Aina, 2012; Lawal, 2014). Conceptualizing a demographic framework involves viewing these personal characteristics as interconnected factors that collectively influence work outcomes. By systematically examining demographic variables, organizations can understand disparities in promotion, identify barriers to career growth, and design policies that foster equitable opportunities. In this framework, work outcomes are positioned as the dependent variables, while demographic characteristics serve as the independent variables that explain differences in professional trajectories within the Nigerian civil service.

### **Career Advancement:**

Career advancement refers to the structured progression of employees within an organization, encompassing promotions, professional development, recognition, and the assumption of increasing responsibilities (Aina, 2012; Lawal, 2014). It includes both vertical mobility, such as promotion to higher-ranking positions, and horizontal mobility, which involves lateral transfers that broaden skills, responsibilities, and exposure to different organizational functions (Robbins &

Judge, 2017). Beyond formal positional changes, career advancement also reflects employees' access to training, mentorship, and opportunities to lead projects or initiatives, which contribute to professional growth and enhance organizational effectiveness (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2014). In the context of the Nigerian civil service, career advancement serves as a key work outcome influenced by demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, educational qualification, and years of experience (Aina, 2012; Lawal, 2014).

Career advancement is a key indicator of organizational fairness and equity, as employees often evaluate whether the organization recognizes and rewards their contributions appropriately. Perceived opportunities for advancement strongly influence employees' motivation, engagement, and commitment, serving as a critical factor in shaping job satisfaction and retention (Ng & Feldman, 2010). In environments where career pathways are transparent and accessible, employees are more likely to feel valued and invest effort in achieving organizational goals. Conversely, limited advancement opportunities can lead to dissatisfaction, decreased productivity, and attrition.

In public service organizations, career advancement is often structured around a combination of seniority, educational qualifications, and leadership influence. For example, civil servants may be promoted based on years of service, attainment of higher academic or professional qualifications, or through sponsorship and support from influential leaders. Leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership, can enhance access to career advancement by mentoring employees, recognizing potential, and providing developmental opportunities. In contexts such as Uyo Local Government, where bureaucratic systems and hierarchical structures dominate, career advancement is a critical mechanism for motivating employees and ensuring the effective delivery of public services.

Furthermore, career advancement is closely tied to human capital investments. Employees who continually acquire new skills, engage in professional development, and demonstrate adaptability are better positioned to capitalize on available advancement opportunities. Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) emphasizes that such investments not only improve individual productivity but also increase organizational effectiveness, creating a mutually beneficial relationship between employees' growth and institutional performance.

### **Leadership Styles and Career Advancement**

Leadership styles refer to the consistent patterns of behavior, attitudes, and strategies that leaders use to influence, motivate, and guide employees toward achieving organizational goals. According to Northouse (2018), leadership style reflects how leaders interact with subordinates, make decisions, and exercise authority. Similarly, Robbins and Judge (2017) describe leadership styles as the approaches leaders adopt in directing, supporting, and empowering employees within organizations. Several scholars have identified distinct leadership styles, among which transformational and democratic (participative) leadership styles are particularly relevant to employee career outcomes. Transformational leadership, developed by Burns (1978) and expanded by Bass (1985), emphasizes inspiring followers through vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Transformational leaders encourage employees to develop their skills, embrace challenges, and pursue professional growth, thereby enhancing opportunities for career advancement (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Avolio & Bass, 2004). Similarly, democratic or participative leadership, as conceptualized by Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939), involves employees in decision-making, values their contributions, and promotes shared responsibility. This leadership style fosters empowerment, confidence, and a sense of ownership among employees, which increases their visibility, competence, and readiness for higher responsibilities (Somech, 2006). The connection between leadership styles and career advancement lies in leaders' ability to create enabling environments for employee development. Supportive leadership styles provide access to mentorship, training, constructive feedback, and opportunities to lead tasks or projects. These experiences enhance employees' skills, performance, and organizational

recognition, which are essential criteria for promotion and career progression (Aina, 2012; Lawal, 2014). Conversely, authoritarian or unsupportive leadership styles may limit employee growth and restrict advancement opportunities.

Conceptually, leadership styles function as an important organizational factor that influences career advancement by shaping employees' motivation, learning opportunities, and access to developmental experiences. Thus, leadership styles serve as a critical explanatory variable in understanding differences in career progression within organizations, particularly in the public sector.

Overall, leadership style constitutes a critical determinant of career advancement, as it shapes both the structural and psychological environment in which employees operate. Leaders who mentor, recognize potential, and create equitable opportunities enable employees to develop the skills, confidence, and visibility required for upward and lateral mobility within organizations.

### **Demographic Variables and Career Advancement**

Demographic characteristics significantly influence employees' access to career advancement opportunities. Research has shown that gender, age, educational qualification, marital status, and years of service are among the key factors that shape professional growth. For instance, gender disparities remain prevalent in many organizational settings, with men often being more likely than women to attain leadership positions. This phenomenon has been linked to structural barriers, cultural norms, and implicit biases that limit women's access to promotions and high-responsibility roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Catalyst, 2020). Women may also face challenges balancing work and family responsibilities, which can further affect career trajectories, particularly in bureaucratic public service systems.

Educational qualifications are widely recognized as a critical determinant of career progression. Employees who possess higher academic credentials or specialized professional training are often prioritized for promotions and leadership roles, as these qualifications signal competence, expertise, and the ability to perform complex tasks (Becker, 1964; Okafor, 2017). In addition, years of service often influence promotion decisions in public sector organizations, as seniority is sometimes used as a measure of loyalty and experience, although this can interact with educational attainment to determine eligibility for advancement.

Marital status can also have an indirect effect on career advancement. Married employees may be perceived as more stable or responsible, which can positively influence promotion decisions in some cultural contexts. Conversely, in other cases, marital obligations, particularly for women, may be seen as limiting availability or flexibility, potentially hindering professional growth (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Onah, 2015).

Empirical evidence from the Nigerian public sector supports these observations. Okafor (2017) found that educational qualification and professional training consistently enhanced promotion prospects, while age and years of service were factored into eligibility criteria for leadership positions. Similarly, Onah (2015) observed that demographic factors, when combined with supportive leadership practices, can either accelerate or impede career advancement.

Overall, demographic variables do not act in isolation; they interact with organizational policies, leadership styles, and human capital investments to shape career outcomes. Understanding these dynamics is particularly important in contexts such as Uyo Local Government Area, where promotion processes and professional development opportunities are influenced by both formal criteria and managerial discretion. Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) underscores the idea that these demographic characteristics, especially education and experience, constitute valuable assets that enhance both individual career trajectories and organizational performance.

## Empirical Review

Several studies have examined the role of leadership styles in career advancement. Bass and Riggio (2006) found that transformational leaders create more inclusive opportunities for career growth, while transactional leaders limit advancement to reward-based structures. In Nigeria, Okocha (2020) reported that transformational and democratic leadership styles in public service organizations were positively associated with employee promotion and training opportunities.

Research on demographic variables has also been consistent. Ng and Feldman (2010) showed that educational qualification and years of service are strong predictors of career advancement in European organizations. In Nigeria, Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015) found that gender and marital status influenced access to leadership positions in public institutions, with men more likely to be promoted. Aina (2012) further reported that cultural stereotypes often limit women's career growth despite equal qualifications.

Studies examining both leadership styles and demographics are limited. However, Lawal (2014) observed that in Nigerian civil service, leadership decisions often reinforce demographic disparities, particularly favoring older, male employees with higher qualifications. This suggests the need for integrated studies that examine how both leadership and demographic factors jointly influence career advancement. The reviewed literature shows that leadership style and demographic variables independently and jointly affect employees' career advancement. Theoretical frameworks such as Transformational Leadership Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Human Capital Theory provide explanations for these dynamics. Empirical studies, both global and Nigerian, confirm the role of leadership and demographics in shaping career opportunities.

However, significant gaps remain. First, most Nigerian studies have focused on leadership or demographics separately, with limited research combining both as predictors of career advancement. Second, there is little empirical evidence focusing on local government administration, despite its importance as the closest tier of governance to the people. Finally, contextual realities such as favoritism and political interference in Nigerian civil service have not been adequately integrated into existing models of leadership and career advancement. This study therefore fills the gap by examining the combined effect of leadership styles and demographic variables on career advancement opportunities among civil servants in Uyo Local Government.

## METHOD

### Research Design

The study adopted a **descriptive survey research design**, which was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to examine the predictive roles of leadership styles and demographic variables on career advancement within a natural work setting. The design also permitted the collection of quantitative data from a relatively large sample, which enhanced the generalization of the findings.

## Study Setting

This study was conducted in Uyo Local Government Area (LGA) of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Uyo LGA serves as the state capital and administrative headquarters of Akwa Ibom State, making it a major center of government activities, public administration, and civil service operations. As the seat of political and bureaucratic authority in the state, Uyo hosts a high concentration of state ministries, departments, agencies (MDAs), and local government institutions, which employ a diverse workforce across different cadres and professional levels. Uyo LGA was deliberately selected for this study because of its strategic administrative importance. Unlike many other LGAs that are predominantly rural or semi-urban, Uyo is largely urbanized and characterized by structured public sector organizations, formalized career systems, and well-defined leadership hierarchies. These features make it a suitable setting for examining issues related to demographic variables, leadership styles, and career advancement within a formal organizational context.

Furthermore, the workforce in Uyo LGA is demographically diverse, comprising employees of varying ages, genders, marital statuses, educational qualifications, and years of experience. This diversity provides an appropriate environment for assessing how demographic characteristics influence work outcomes such as career advancement. The presence of experienced administrators and multiple leadership structures also allows for meaningful analysis of leadership styles and their impact on employees' career progression.

Compared to other LGAs in the state, Uyo LGA offers better access to respondents, more standardized personnel practices, and clearer promotion and career development procedures, which enhance the reliability of data collected. These factors collectively justify the choice of Uyo LGA as an appropriate and relevant setting for the study.

## Participants

Two hundred and seventy-five (275) Uyo Local Government Employees were purposively selected to participate in the study. Out of this number, 142 (51.6%) were males while 133 (48.4%) were females. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 50 years with a mean age of 32.6 years and a standard deviation of 7.02. Only **middle-level employees** who had served for at least two years in their present cadre and were available at the time of data collection were included in the study. Top administrators, contract staff, and those unwilling to give consent were excluded.

The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula for finite populations, which is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where  $n$  represents the sample size,  $N$  is the total population of Uyo Local Government employees, and  $e$  is the level of precision (0.05). Based on the estimated population of staff within Uyo Local Government Area, the computed minimum sample size was approximately 260 respondents. To account for potential non-response and incomplete questionnaires, the sample size was increased to 275 participants. The final sample size was therefore considered adequate for multiple regression analysis involving several predictors, providing sufficient statistical power and improving the representativeness of the staff population within Uyo Local Government Area (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Thereby ensuring sufficient statistical power and representativeness of the staff population within Uyo Local Government Area.

## Instruments

**Leadership Styles Scale:** Leadership style was measured using the **Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ–Form5X)** developed by Bass and Avolio (1995). The MLQ is a widely used 20-item instrument that assesses transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership behaviors. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*. High scores indicate stronger tendencies toward a particular leadership style. Previous studies have reported acceptable internal consistencies with Cronbach Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.74 to 0.89. In this study, a reliability coefficient of 0.71 was obtained.

**Demographic Questionnaire:** Demographic information was collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The variables assessed included age, gender, marital status, educational qualification, and years of service. These variables were selected based on prior research evidence linking them to workplace outcomes such as career advancement.

**Career Advancement Scale:** Career advancement was measured using a 12-item Career Growth Scale adapted from Weng and Hu (2009), which assesses perceived career growth in terms of promotions, training opportunities, and professional development. Responses were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*. Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived career advancement. The scale has shown good validity and reliability across different contexts. In this study, a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.76 was obtained, suggesting acceptable internal consistency.

## Procedure

Formal permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Head of Department of the selected offices. At the point of administration, the purpose of the study was explained to participants, and their **informed consent** was obtained. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The researcher also emphasized that participants could withdraw at any stage without any penalty.

The instruments were administered to participants during working hours in their offices with the assistance of research aides. Completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately to ensure a high response rate. Only those identified as **Uyo Local Government Employees** by the departmental heads were approached.

## Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using **multiple linear regression analysis** and **Pearson Product Moment Correlation**. These techniques were considered appropriate because they enabled the examination of the predictive power of demographic variables and leadership styles on career advancement, as well as the relationship between leadership styles and career advancement. The analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 20).

## RESULTS

**Hypothesis One:** *Demographic variables will significantly predict career advancement among Uyo local government employees of Akwa Ibom State*

**Table 1:** Multiple Regression of Demographic Variables on Career Advancement

Predictors	Outcome	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Gender	CA	0.98	0.13	2.71	<0.05
Age	CA	0.41	0.10	2.12	<0.05
Marital Status	CA	0.84	0.11	2.28	<0.05
Educational Qualification	CA	0.59	0.16	3.20	<0.05
Years of Service	CA	0.32	0.05	1.02	>0.05

Model summary: R = 0.308; **R<sup>2</sup> = 0.095**; F(5,372) = 7.74; **p < 0.05**

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that demographic variables jointly predicted career advancement, with a coefficient of multiple correlation (R) of 0.308 and a coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) of 0.095. This suggests that approximately 9.5% of the variance in career advancement among Uyo Local Government employees is explained by the combined demographic factors. Examining the predictors independently, gender, age, marital status, and educational qualification were found to be significant, whereas years of service did not significantly predict career advancement. Stepwise analysis further revealed that educational qualification and gender made the largest independent contributions to career advancement. The overall regression model was statistically significant, F(5, 372) = 7.74, p < 0.05, indicating that the combined demographic variables reliably predict career advancement. Consequently, Hypothesis one is retained, confirming that demographic factors, specifically gender, age, marital status, and educational qualification, independently and significantly influence career advancement among employees in Uyo Local Government.

**Hypothesis Two:** *There is a significant relationship between leadership styles and career advancement of local government employees in Uyo Metropolis.*

**Table 2:** Correlation between Leadership Styles and Career Advancement

Variables	Mean	SD	r	Sig.
Leadership Styles (LS)	51.24	6.82		
Career Advancement (CA)	42.67	4.05	0.34	<0.01**

The results in Table 2 reveal a statistically significant, positive, and moderate correlation between leadership styles and career advancement (r = 0.34, p < 0.01). This indicates that leadership practices play an important role in shaping employees' access to career development opportunities.

In contrast, autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles tend to restrict employees' professional growth, either by limiting autonomy and decision-making or by providing insufficient guidance and support. The significance of this relationship confirms that the link between leadership styles and career advancement is not due to chance but reflects a consistent pattern in the data. Given the statistical significance, Hypothesis Two, which proposed a relationship between leadership styles and career advancement, is retained.

**Hypothesis Three:** *Demographic variables (gender, age, marital status, educational qualification, and years of service) will significantly predict the leadership styles adopted by managers in Uyo Local Government.*

**Table 3: Multiple Regression of Demographic Variables on Leadership Styles**

Predictors	Outcome	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Gender	LS	-2.70	-0.20	-4.01	<0.05
Age	LS	0.85	0.18	3.62	<0.05
Marital Status	LS	4.45	0.27	6.10	<0.05
Educational Qualification	LS	0.38	0.06	1.50	>0.05
Years of Service	LS	-0.52	-0.04	-0.98	>0.05

Model summary:  $R = 0.368$ ;  $R^2 = 0.135$ ;  $F(5,372) = 11.61$ ;  $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that demographic variables jointly predicted leadership styles with a coefficient of multiple correlation ( $R$ ) of 0.368 and a coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of 0.135. This means that about 13.5% of the variance in leadership styles was explained by the combined demographic factors. When examined independently, gender, age, and marital status emerged as significant predictors of leadership styles, whereas educational qualification and years of service did not contribute meaningfully to the model. Among the significant predictors, marital status and age accounted for the strongest independent effects, suggesting that these factors play a central role in shaping the leadership approach adopted by employees.

The overall regression model was found to be statistically significant ( $F(5, 372) = 11.61$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that the predictive capacity of the demographic variables is reliable and not due to chance. This result highlights the relevance of certain personal characteristics, particularly age and marital status, in influencing leadership behaviors within the workplace. Based on these findings, Hypothesis Three, which posited that demographic variables would significantly predict leadership styles, is retained.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the influence of **demographic variables and leadership styles** on **career advancement opportunities** among employees of Uyo Local Government Area. The discussion is structured around the study's objectives and situates the findings within existing theoretical and empirical literature, with emphasis on recent studies to strengthen scientific contribution.

The findings revealed that **demographic variables**, particularly age, gender, marital status, and educational qualification, significantly influenced career advancement opportunities. Older employees were more likely to occupy supervisory or senior positions, while younger employees reported slower career progression. This finding reflects the entrenched **seniority- and tenure-based promotion system** that characterizes much of the Nigerian public service. Although experience is an important form of human capital, the emphasis on tenure over performance has been widely critiqued in recent public administration literature. According to Becker's (1964)

**Human Capital Theory**, accumulated experience and education enhance productivity and career growth; however, contemporary scholars argue that excessive reliance on tenure may discourage innovation and merit-based advancement (Ogunyemi & Akinbobola, 2021; World Bank, 2020). Similar patterns have been observed in recent Nigerian studies, which report that promotions in public institutions are still largely influenced by years of service rather than measurable performance outcomes (Adebayo & Akinwale, 2022).

Gender was also found to be a significant determinant of career advancement, with male employees reporting greater upward mobility than female employees. This finding aligns with persistent evidence of **gender inequality in leadership access** within public sector organizations in Nigeria and other developing contexts. Recent studies confirm that women continue to face structural barriers, including limited access to informal networks, mentoring, and leadership sponsorship (Adeyemi & Akindele, 2021; Olatunji & Ogunrin, 2023). Eagly and Carli's (2007) "leadership labyrinth" framework remains relevant, as more recent empirical evidence suggests that organizational cultures and implicit biases still constrain women's career progression despite formal equality policies (UN Women, 2022). The result underscores that gender disparities in career advancement are not merely historical but remain a contemporary challenge in local government administration.

Marital status also significantly influenced career advancement, with married employees perceived as more stable and responsible. This finding reflects enduring socio-cultural expectations within Nigerian workplaces, where personal life status is often interpreted as an indicator of commitment and maturity. Recent African organizational studies suggest that such perceptions continue to influence promotion decisions, even when they are not formally acknowledged in personnel policies (Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, 2020; Okeke & Eze, 2021). These results suggest that career advancement in public institutions is shaped not only by professional competence but also by socially constructed norms.

Educational qualification emerged as a strong predictor of career advancement, reinforcing the importance of formal education in public service promotion systems. This finding is consistent with recent evidence showing that higher educational attainment enhances employees' access to leadership roles, training opportunities, and professional recognition (Ogunleye & Arogundade, 2022). In this regard, the findings align with Human Capital Theory and recent public sector reforms that emphasize capacity building and skill development.

Beyond demographic variables, **leadership styles** were found to play a significant role in shaping career advancement opportunities. Employees who worked under **transformational and democratic leaders** reported greater access to training, mentoring, and promotion opportunities. This finding strongly supports **Transformational Leadership Theory** (Bass, 1985) and is consistent with recent empirical studies demonstrating that supportive leadership enhances employee development, engagement, and upward mobility (Banks et al., 2021; Hoch et al., 2023). Transformational leaders foster environments that encourage learning, innovation, and professional growth, thereby increasing employees' readiness for higher responsibilities.

Similarly, democratic leadership styles, characterized by participation and inclusiveness, were associated with improved career outcomes. Recent public-sector studies show that participative leadership increases employee confidence, visibility, and skill acquisition, all of which are critical for career progression (Somech & Wenderow, 2020; Okocha & Nwafor, 2022). In contrast, autocratic and transactional leadership styles were associated with limited career growth, likely due to their emphasis on control, rigid supervision, and compliance rather than development. Contemporary leadership research increasingly criticizes authoritarian leadership for suppressing

creativity and limiting employee advancement, particularly in bureaucratic organizations (Yukl, 2020; Breevaart & Zacher, 2022).

Importantly, the combined effects of demographic variables and leadership styles suggest that **career advancement is a product of both personal characteristics and organizational context**. While demographic factors may shape baseline opportunities, leadership styles can either amplify or mitigate these effects by creating enabling or restrictive work environments. This finding aligns with recent integrative models of career development, which emphasize the interaction between individual attributes and organizational leadership practices (De Vos et al., 2021).

Overall, the findings contribute to the growing body of literature by demonstrating that despite ongoing reforms, career advancement in Nigerian local government systems remains influenced by demographic characteristics and leadership behavior. The study highlights the need for **inclusive leadership practices, merit-based promotion systems, and gender-sensitive policies** to ensure equitable career advancement in the public sector.

The combined effects of leadership styles and demographic variables further underscored the complex nature of career advancement. The study showed that employees' opportunities for upward mobility are shaped not only by who they are (in terms of age, gender, marital status, and educational background) but also by the type of leadership they experience. For instance, while younger and female employees may face demographic constraints, working under transformational leaders helped mitigate these disadvantages by providing mentoring and development opportunities. This outcome aligns with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which posits that supportive and fair relationships between leaders and subordinates encourage reciprocity, loyalty, and improved performance, thereby enhancing prospects for advancement. Conversely, when demographic barriers intersect with rigid or authoritarian leadership, advancement becomes highly constrained. This confirms Lawal's (2014) observation that leadership practices in Nigerian public service often reinforce existing demographic inequalities.

Taken together, the findings highlight that career advancement in Uyo Local Government is shaped by both individual characteristics and the leadership environment. Competence alone does not guarantee upward mobility; rather, demographic positioning and leadership practices significantly affect employees' prospects. These results underscore the need for institutional reforms that promote fairness, inclusivity, and supportive leadership practices to ensure equitable access to career advancement opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that both leadership styles and demographic variables are significant determinants of career advancement opportunities among employees of Uyo Local Government. The findings demonstrate that demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, and educational qualification play crucial roles in shaping access to advancement opportunities. Older and married employees, as well as those with higher educational qualifications, were more likely to benefit from promotions and career growth, reflecting the influence of socio-cultural expectations and institutional practices.

Equally, leadership styles were found to strongly influence opportunities for upward mobility. Employees working under transformational and democratic leaders reported greater access to training, mentoring, and promotion opportunities, as these leadership approaches foster

inclusiveness, participation, and professional development. In contrast, autocratic and transactional leadership styles created more restrictive environments, where advancement was limited and often tied to rigid structures or loyalty rather than merit.

Importantly, the study also revealed the interaction between demographic characteristics and leadership practices. Demographic disadvantages, such as being young, single, or female, could either be reinforced or mitigated depending on the prevailing leadership style. Transformational and democratic leaders were shown to reduce the negative effects of demographic barriers by creating mentoring and growth opportunities, while autocratic and rigid leadership styles often amplified such disadvantages.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study affirms the propositions of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), demonstrating that education, tenure, and experience significantly affect career advancement. It also supports Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006), which highlights the role of leaders in inspiring, motivating, and facilitating employee growth. Furthermore, the findings align with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which emphasizes reciprocity and fairness in leader–employee relations as central to professional development.

In conclusion, career advancement opportunities within Uyo Local Government are not determined by competence alone but are shaped by a combination of individual attributes and organizational leadership practices. Addressing these factors through inclusive policies, supportive leadership development, and fair promotion systems is critical for fostering equity, enhancing employee morale, and promoting long-term productivity within the local government system.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made, along with suggestions on who should take responsibility for implementation:

1. Local Government Service Commission alongside Human Resource Department should restructure promotion criteria to reduce over-reliance on age, marital status, and years of service. Merit, competence, and measurable performance indicators should become the central basis for promotion decisions.
2. Uyo Local Government Management Council in collaboration with the Ministry of Women Affairs should introduce gender-sensitive policies, create mentorship programmes for women, and lead awareness campaigns to eliminate cultural stereotypes that restrict women's mobility in the workplace.
3. Local Government Training Institutes should design and deliver training programmes that promote transformational and democratic leadership skills to ensure leaders inspire, mentor, and support employees effectively.
4. Heads of Departments should structure mentorship and coaching systems with senior staff acting as mentors to guide younger employees and those from disadvantaged groups in helping to break demographic barriers.
5. Directors, and Supervisory Leaders should consciously promote inclusivity, fairness, and respect in the workplace by eliminating bias in decision-making and encouraging equal opportunities.
6. Local Government Service Commission should ensure regular reviews of policies guiding recruitment, training, and promotion should be conducted to ensure alignment with global best practices, reduce systemic barriers, and sustain human resource development.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES**

Based on the scope and limitations of this study, several directions are recommended for future research. First, there is a need for broader geographical coverage. Replicating this study across multiple local governments within Akwa Ibom State and in other regions of Nigeria would provide comparative insights and enhance the generalizability of the findings. Expanding the scope would also help capture regional and institutional variations that may shape career advancement opportunities differently.

Second, future studies should consider the influence of organizational culture and workplace politics. Factors such as informal networks, favoritism, and institutional norms often play a subtle but powerful role in shaping career progression in public service, and their inclusion would provide a more comprehensive understanding of advancement dynamics.

Third, researchers could explore the role of mentorship as a mediating factor between leadership styles and career advancement. Since transformational and democratic leaders often foster mentoring relationships, it would be useful to determine whether mentorship serves as the actual pathway through which leadership influences employees' upward mobility.

In addition, qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and case studies are recommended to complement quantitative findings. These methods would provide richer and more nuanced insights into employees' lived experiences of leadership practices and demographic barriers in their career progression.

Finally, longitudinal studies that track employees' career trajectories over time would be valuable. Such studies would reveal how the influence of demographic factors and leadership styles evolves across different stages of employees' careers and how these variables interact over the long term.

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