

Mediating Effect of Job Engagement on the Relationship between Servant Leadership and Employee Performance

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Abstract

This study examined whether job engagement in the Nigerian workplace mediates the link between servant leadership and employee performance. Using a cross sectional survey design, participants were 344 employees of Local Government Councils in Edo and Delta States selected by a convenience sampling technique. Copies of questionnaires administered on a face-to-face basis were used in data collection, while the formulated hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modeling. The results obtained from the path coefficients indicated that servant leadership was negative and significantly related to employee performance, while it was positive and significantly related to job engagement. Job engagement was also found to be positive and significantly related to employee performance. Furthermore, job engagement was found to partially mediate the relationship between servant leadership and employee performance. The study suggests that in order to improve performance, Local Government Council management should support high levels of job engagement among employees.

Keywords: Employee Performance, Job Engagement, Servant Leadership, Local Government Council Employees.

1.0 Introduction

Most organizational studies research conducted in the past few years has focused on the servant leader's responsibility to put others' needs before their own, which has led to more successful organizational results. As it helps people to perform productively and efficiently, organizational leadership is a crucial aspect of organizational life (Aruoren & Erhuen, 2023; Aruoren & Tarurhor, 2023). It has been shown that servant leadership (SL) has a major impact on both organizational and individual performance (Muller, Smith, & Lillah, 2018). Organizations want leaders who value the needs and demands of their stakeholders and fulfill their requirements to accomplish stated goals. Hence, SL has attracted researchers' attention in recent times, emphasizing the role of a leader as being a servant for better outcomes in organizations (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018; Liu, 2019). Although, SL is a relatively new idea compared to other leadership philosophies, there is lack of theoretical and empirical evidences available in support of this philosophy (Saleem, Zhang, Gopinath, & Adeel, 2020).

Furthermore, in recent years there has been a surge in research concerning job engagement (JE) among employees from consultants, and management experts (Zeeshan, Ng, Ho, & Jantan, 2021). According to a survey, only 25% of employees are highly engaged world-wide, while disengaged employees amounted to 37% (Hewitt, 2017). Leadership behavior can motivate employees and thus enhance their JE in order to optimize business objectives. If supervisors meet the needs and interest of employees, they tend to be more highly engaged in their work duties or jobs (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Thus, a leadership style that is focused on followers' needs will provide them with the resources to work which increases their psychological safety and well-being. This will in turn increase their JE.

Given the importance and consequences of employee performance (EP) to the organization in the realization of corporate goals, evaluating the predictors of this variable in organizations is of utmost importance. Research to date has explored the predictors of EP, but most of these studies were carried out in the North American and Asian context, with few studies in the African context. Despite the fact that numerous studies have been done, research on understanding the effect of SL on EP need further investigation especially in developing countries, particularly in the Nigerian setting (Rashid, Tasmin, Qureshi, & Shafiq, 2019). Furthermore, the mediating effect of JE on the relationship between SL and EP has not been studied. In order to better understand how JE influences the link between SL and EP, this study aims to look at its mediating role.

2.0 Conceptual Review

Servant Leadership

Leadership is the process by which an individual uses his or her power of influence with a group of individuals to reach a common set of goals of the institution. While there are several theories of leadership, SL is contradictory to prior beliefs of leadership in that the focus is on the follower, and the success of the follower is a priority (Northouse, 2013). Robert K. Greenleaf popularized the concept of SL in 1970, noting that a different form of leadership was needed in an organization that was not autocratic and hierarchical. Instead, a form of leadership that was based on working together, building relationships, involving others in the decision-making process, and enhancing the personal growth of followers while improving institutional quality seemed to be desirable (Spears, 2005). Greenleaf (1977) described SL as leaders helping followers in reaching their potential and achieving career success. SL is therefore an approach that emphasizes how the leader responds to and interacts with followers, reiterates increased service to others, promotes a sense of community, and promotes sharing in decision making. Northouse (2013) describes servant leaders as leaders that “put followers first, empower them, and help them develop their full personal capacities” (p. 219). Servant leaders thus focus on the development of their followers. Some characteristics of SL include: integrity, listening, developing others, empathy, authenticity, healing, caring for others, awareness, empowering, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment, community building etc.

Employee Performance

The concept of EP has been regarded as one of the most important and widely researched variables within the domain of work and organizational studies (Omar, Hussein, and Azli, 2016), this can be attributed to the role of employees as being imperative to the success of any organizational establishment (Alessandri, Borgogni, and Latham, 2017). EP can be described as the extent to which an employee completes their required job roles and executing relevant actions and behaviors that align with the set goals of an organization (Petsri, 2014). They are regarded as those quantifiable roles and outcomes of an employee that contributes to organizational goals. It is the totality of the quality and quantity of job outcomes by either an individual employee or a team of employees (Schermerhorn, Hunt & Osborn, 2005). Na-Nan, Chaiprasit, and Pukkeeree (2018) described EP within the context of “job time, job quality and job quantity” (p. 2437). The time factor looks into measuring and comparing the allotted time to the total duration it takes employee’s to produce certain outputs, while the quality aspect focuses on the ability of an employee to carry out tasks and their job roles according to the set guidelines and standards of their respective organization, finally the quantity dimension focuses on how much output an employee is able to produce given available resources within the workplace such as time, machineries etc.

According to Borman and Motowidlo (1993) EP can be categorized into task performance and contextual performance. Task performance (or in-role performance) comprises of the behaviors that are directly or specifically related to the job tasks which can either contribute directly or indirectly to the core of an organization (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). It is the extent at which an employee carries out their job roles as specified in their job description (Williams & Anderson, 1991) and an employee simply doing what they have been “hired to do” (van Knippenberg, 2000, p.361). Contextual performance can also be referred to as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), citizenship performance, organizational spontaneity, extra role performance, or prosocial organizational behavior. All these terms can be summarized as an employee simply going the extra-mile for their organization that is, voluntarily carrying out tasks outside their formal job requirements but known to be beneficial to their institution. It is likewise defined as that aspect of an employee’s performance that involves activities which are not directly or formally related to job tasks, but which solely assist the social and psychological core of an organization (Li, Sanders & Frenkel, 2012). Examples of this include an employee working extra hours, making useful suggestions to improve one’s organization, relating with others courteously, offering help to colleagues when necessary. These extra-role behaviors have been linked to leadership behavior (Aruoren, 2018).

Job Engagement

Researchers and practitioners have recently become interested in JE due to its growing popularity and effective results (Aruoren & Oisamoje, 2023). JE, or discretionary effort, is obtained through putting forth physical, mental, and emotional effort in one's job (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Kahn, 1990). As a result, it entails giving "hands, head, and heart" to an active, full-time performance (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995, p. 110). The ethnographic study of an architecture firm conducted by Kahn (1990) served as the conceptual foundation for JE. This researcher defined JE as, “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work role by which they employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during work performances” (Kahn, 1990, p. 694).

According to Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Roma, and Bakker (2002, p. 465) JE is, "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." Vigor is defined as having a lot of energy and mental fortitude when working, being willing to put in effort in one's work and persevering even in the face of challenges. A sense of relevance, passion, inspiration, confidence, and challenge are all manifestations of dedication. Being completely focused and immersed in one's task, during which time goes swiftly and one finds it difficult to disengage from it, is characterized as absorption. The degree to which people fully devote themselves to their work is often referred to as JE (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). Thaliath and Thomas (2012) described JE as "a heightened connection between employees and their work, their organization, or the people they work for or with" (p. 1). JE is described by Harter, et al., (2002) as an individual's involvement and contentment with as well as excitement for work. Within the literature, JE is also referred to as work engagement or workplace engagement or employee engagement. Figure 2.0 shows the conceptual framework for this study.

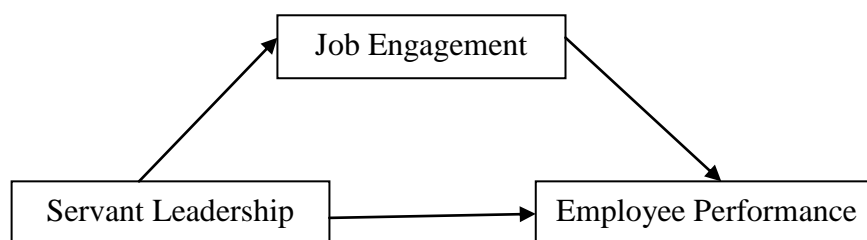


Figure 2.0: Conceptual Framework

3.0 Empirical Review

Servant Leadership and Employee Performance

The application of SL has immersed implication for EP in today's global organizations (Setyaningrum, Setiawan, Surachman, & Irawanto, 2020). Some studies have linked SL to the performance of employees in organizations. Sholikhah, and Prastiwi (2020) study examined the influence of SL and organizational commitment on EP with OCB as a mediating variable. 100 public servants in Indonesia participated in the study. Data collected were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling – Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS), and findings indicate that SL had a significant influence on EP. Adelekan, and Erigbe, (2020) investigated the role of leadership (transformational and SL) on banks' EP in Nigeria. 379 employees selected from three big banks (GT Bank, First Bank and UBA) participated in this research. Findings from regression analysis concluded that transformational leadership and SL both have individual as well as combined positive and significant effect on EP. Bayram, and Zoubi, (2020) addressed the association between SL, public service motivation, and EP among staff in the context of Jordanian Civil Servants. Data was collected from 270 participants, while path analysis was used in testing the hypothesis. Findings indicate that SL significantly influences EP, while public service motivation equally mediates this relationship. Wanta, and Augustine, (2021) study examined the effect of SL, job satisfaction and organizational culture on EP moderated by good governance in women's cooperative institutions in Indonesia. Data was collected from 248 employees and analyzed using SEM -PLS. The results show that SL has a negative effect on EP. In Ethiopia, Xiongying, and Boku, (2021) explored the linkage between SL and EP. Data were collected from 363 top-leaders, middle-leaders as well as employees in the Ministry of Revenue (a public sector organization). Using SEM, the results showed that SL affects EP positively. From these studies, we pose that:

H1: SL is positive and significantly related to EP.

Job Engagement and Employee Performance

In recent research, some scholars have established a strong association between JE and EP. Ismail, Iqbal, and Nasr (2019) hypothesized that a strong positive association existed between JE and EP. Data was collected from 186 respondents who were employees working in Lebanese firms. Using regression analysis confirmed the hypothesized relationship. Qodarian., Akbar, and Mauluddin (2019) study examined the influence of JE, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment on EP. Participants were 120 employees of BTN Bank Makassar, Indonesia. The results obtained from multiple regression analysis indicated that all the three variables had a direct effect on employee EP. Sittar (2020) study confirmed that JE of teachers in universities in Central Punjab were positively correlated with their performance. Using a sample of 190 employees drawn from PT. World Innovative Telecommunication Indonesia, Christi, Murwani, and Sophia, (2020) investigated the effects of self-efficacy on JE and EP as well as the effects of job resources on JE and EP. The results of path analysis indicated that JE was confirmed to have a direct and significant positive effect on the performance of employees. Sungmala, and Verawat (2021) explored the link between employee JE and individual performance dimension (growth, achievement, contribution, and customer satisfaction). Participants in the study were 423 employees of a large multinational firm in Thailand.

Results from regression analysis indicate that the association between JE and EP were significant and positive. Hendrik, Fanggidae, and Timuneno (2021) study aimed at exploring the impact of JE on EP. Participants were 35 employees of Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI). The findings from a regression analysis indicated that the higher the JE of RRI employees, the higher the EP; while the lower the JE, the lower the EP. From these studies, we pose that:

H2: JE is positive and significantly related to EP.

Servant Leadership and Job Engagement

Several studies have empirically examined the association between SL and JE. In South Africa, Muller, Smith, and Lillah, (2019) confirmed that leadership was a key determinant of JE among employees. These researchers performed regression analysis on data collected from 428 employees in private organizations in Eastern Cape. Results indicate that Ubuntu and SL were positive and significantly related to JE. In China, Song, Tian, and Kwan, (2022) explored the link between SL, JE, proactive personality, promotive and prohibitive voice behavior among 239 employees of two commercial banks. Findings obtained from a regression model indicated that JE was predicted by SL. Aboramadan, Dahleez, and Hamad (2020) investigated the impact of SL on JE and affective commitment, as well as the role of job satisfaction as an intervening mechanism among the variables. The sample consisted of academics in higher education in the Palestinian higher education sector. The result obtained from SEM indicates that JE was not significantly related to SL. However, job satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between these variables. More recently, Decuypere, and Schaufeli, (2021) sought to establish the positive influence that several positive leadership behavior on JE, using meta-analytic methods and systematic reviews. Results confirm that transformational, authentic, empowering, ethical, and SL have positive effect on JE. Yagil and Oren (2021) tested a moderation-mediation model consisting of moderators (proactivity, and job autonomy) which mediates the effects of JE on the association linking SL to job performance and lateness. Data were collected from 50 managers and 165 employees of a bank in Israel. The results from performing hierarchical linear modeling showed that SL predicted employee's JE. In Italy, Canavesi, and Minelli, (2021) conducted a qualitative research aimed at exploring the link associated with SL and JE. Data was collected from 159 employees of a large consulting company. Finding obtained from data triangulation confirmed that SL positively predicted engagement among employees through mediators such as empowerment, team cohesion, positive organizational climate, challenging tasks, and proactive personality. From these studies, we pose that:

H3: SL is positive and significantly related to JE.

Mediating Effects of Job Engagement

Some studies have highlighted the mediating role JE play in several organizational studies in recent times. Abdullahi, Raman, and Solarin, (2021) examined the mediating role that JE played in the relation between succession planning and EP using 10,473 responses from academic staff of Malaysian Private Academic Institutions. Adopting a survey research design and PLS-SEM, findings indicate that succession planning was significantly related to EP while JE mediated this relationship. Siswanto, Maulidiyah, and Masyhuri (2021) studied the relation between reward and EP using motivation and JE as mediating variables. Participants were 150 employees of Cigarette Production Partner Pasuruan, in Indonesia. Using SEM - PLS with Sobel test, findings indicate that there was a significant positive effect of reward on EP through JE, while motivation did not mediate the association between reward and EP. The study by Sahni (2021) explored the mediating effect of JE on antecedents (such as: job characteristics, and job satisfaction) and consequences (such as organizational commitment and intentions to quit). Participants were 408 employees drawn from Private Companies in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Using SEM, the results affirmed that JE significantly and partially mediated the linkage among job characteristics, job satisfaction, and organization commitment. However, the relationship with intention to quit was not significant. In a Non-Western country of Islamic Uzbekistan, Khusanova, Kang, and Choi, (2021) investigated the mediating role that JE played in the relationship between job meaningfulness and performance. Participants were 183 Uzbek employees drawn from public organizations and their 47 supervisors. Results of regression analyses indicated that JE explained the influence of job meaningfulness on EP. Although, most of these studies affirm the mediating effect of JE, the researchers could not find any study that examined the mediating effect of JE on the relationship between SL and EP, especially in the Nigerian context. From these studies, we pose that:

H4: JE mediate the relationship between SL and EP.

4.0 Methods

4.1 Population and Sample

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design, in which a questionnaire was used in data collection. The research population consists of 21,094 employees working at the Local Government Areas (LGA) in Edo and Delta States in South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.

The sample size was determined using Yamane (1973) formula which yielded a size of 393. Out of 393 copies of questionnaire distributed to a convenience sample of respondents across the LGA, 370 were retrieved however, 26 were incomplete leaving the researchers with 344 usable questionnaires. This amounts to a response rate of 87.5 percent.

4.2 Measures

The structured questionnaire consisted of items adopted from prior studies. SL (independent variable) was measured by seven items adopted from Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008). Respondents were asked to describe the behavior of their immediate supervisor using a 7- point likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The dependent variable EP was measured by five items adopted from Ramos-Villagrasa, Barrada, Fernandez-del-Rio, & Koopmans (2019). Respondents were asked to rate their level of performance using 5 – point rating scale ranging from 'seldom' to 'always'. Finally, JE (mediating variable) was measured by eighteen items adopted from Rich, Lepine, & Crawford (2010). Respondents were asked to describe the extent to which they were engaged in their job, using a 5 point likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Finally, socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, marital status, highest educational level, and duration of working in their present organization (tenure) were measured.

5.0 Results

5.1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants indicated that majority of the respondents were female (N = 203) representing 59%, while 141 were male representing 41%. Regarding age distribution, 84 respondents representing 24% are between 20 – 29 years, 134 respondents representing 39% are within the ages of 30 – 39 years, 105 respondents representing 31% are within the ages of 40 – 49 years, while respondents above 50 years are 21 representing just 6%. Regarding marital status, 108 (31%) and 199 (58%) of the respondents were single and married respectively, while 18 (5%) and 19 (6%) of the respondents were separated and widowed respectively. Regarding Highest Educational Level, 142 (41%) of the respondents have certificate that were below Bachelor's degree, while 163 (47%) have Bachelor's Degree. Furthermore, 39 (11%) of the respondents have Postgraduate Degrees. Finally, regarding job tenure, 247 (72%) and 78 (23%) of the respondents had spent between 1 – 10 years and 11 – 20 years respectively in their organizations, while 13 (4%) and 6 (2%) of the respondents had spent between 21 – 30 years and above 30 years respectively.

5.2 Average, Dispersion, Minimum and Maximum values of Variables

Table 5.1 presents the variables' minimum and maximum values as well as their average (mean), standard deviation, and dispersion estimates. The result shows that SL had a mean of 4.09, which was more than the cut-off point of 3.50 on a seven point likert scale. On the other hand JE, and EP had means of 4.00, and 4.04 respectively, thus beating the cut-off point of 2.50 on a five point likert scale. The standard deviation for SL, JE, and EP were 0.91, 0.83, and 0.88 respectively. The above results imply that the questionnaire items were good indicators for evaluating the connection between SL, JE, and EP.

Table 5.1: Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, and Maximum values

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
SL	4.09	0.91	1	7
JE	4.00	0.83	1	5
EP	4.04	0.88	1	5

Source: Researcher's compilation, 2022

5.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis

The results from exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for the indicators of the three variables in this study are shown in Tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5. As indicated Cronbach alpha for SL, EP and JE were 0.90, 0.89 and 0.89 respectively and these met the cut-off point of 0.70, indicating acceptable internal reliability as recommended by Hair, Black., Babin., Anderson, and Tatham (2006). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values for SL, EP, and JE were 0.86, 0.86, 0.89 and these met the cut-off point of 0.60 as recommended by Pallant (2013). Also, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity for all three variable were significant at $p < 0.05$, thus these results suggest that EFA can be conducted with the study data.

The seven items which described SL (sl1, sl2, sl3, sl4, sl5, sl6, sl7) as well as the five items which defined EP (ep1, ep2, ep3, ep4, ep5) had factor loadings greater than 0.40 and were retained for further analysis, as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2006) and Pallant (2013). In Tables 5.3 and 5.4, an eigenvalue of 10.64, or 35.35% of the entire variance, is shown for SL, whereas an eigenvalue of 4.17, or 23.47% of the total variance, is shown for EP.

Therefore, sufficient evidence of convergent validity was provided for these construct. Furthermore, eighteen items measured JE. However, only ten items had factor loadings greater than 0.4, hence these were retained for further analysis (Hair *et al.*,2006; Pallant, 2013). An Eigenvalue of 1.72 was established in this factor; this explained 13.25% of the variance in JE. It can, therefore, be indicated that the items measuring SL, EP and JE were reliable and valid. Figure 5.0 shows the Scree plot of the extracted factors from the EFA. The point where the slope of the curve levels off indicated the number of factors that should be retained in the study. As can be confirmed from the Scree plot, three factors were retained in the study which accounted for 75.07% of the total variance in the study.

Table 5.3: EFA Result for Servant Leadership

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value = 0.86		Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value	
Eigenvalue of 10.64 amounting to 35.35% of total variance		Chi-square = 1453.827	
		Degree of freedom = 21; $p = 0.000$	
Item	Measures	Factor Loadings	α
sl1	My manager/supervisor can tell if something work-related is going wrong.	0.85	0.90
sl2	My manager/supervisor makes my career development a priority.	0.82	
sl3	I would seek help from my manager/supervisor if I had a personal problem.	0.77	
sl4	My manager/supervisor emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community.	0.74	
sl5	My manager/supervisor puts my best interests ahead his/her own.	0.71	
sl6	My manager/supervisor gives me the freedom to handle difficult situation in the way that I feel is best.	0.69	
sl7	My manager/supervisor would NOT compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success.	0.67	

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2022; α = Cronbach Alpha

Table 5.4: EFA Result for Employee Performance

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value = 0.86		Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value	
Eigenvalue of 4.17 amounting to 23.47% of total variance		Chi-square = 971.318	
		Degree of freedom = 10; $p = 0.000$	
Item	Measures	Factor Loadings	α
ep1	I managed to plan my work so that I finished it on time.	0.78	0.89
ep2	I kept in mind the work result I needed to achieve.	0.75	
ep3	I was able to set priorities.	0.70	
ep4	I was able to carry out my work efficiently.	0.67	
ep5	I managed my time well.	0.65	

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2022; α = Cronbach Alpha

Table 5.5: EFA Result for Job Engagement

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value = 0.89		Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value	
Eigenvalue of 1.72 amounting to 13.25% of total variance		Chi-square = 1967.968	
		Degree of freedom = 45; $p = 0.000$	
Item	Measures	Factor Loadings	α
je16	At work, I focus a great deal of attention on my job.	0.97	0.89
je18	At work, I devote a lot of attention on my job.	0.90	
je12	I am excited about my job.	0.89	
je11	I feel positive about my job.	0.86	
je13	At work, my mind is focused on my job.	0.82	
je9	I am interested in my job.	0.80	
je10	I am proud of my job.	0.78	
je2	I exert my full effort to my job.	0.76	
je14	At work, I pay a lot of attention to my job.	0.72	
je5	I strive as hard as I can to complete my job	0.69	

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2022; α = Cronbach Alpha

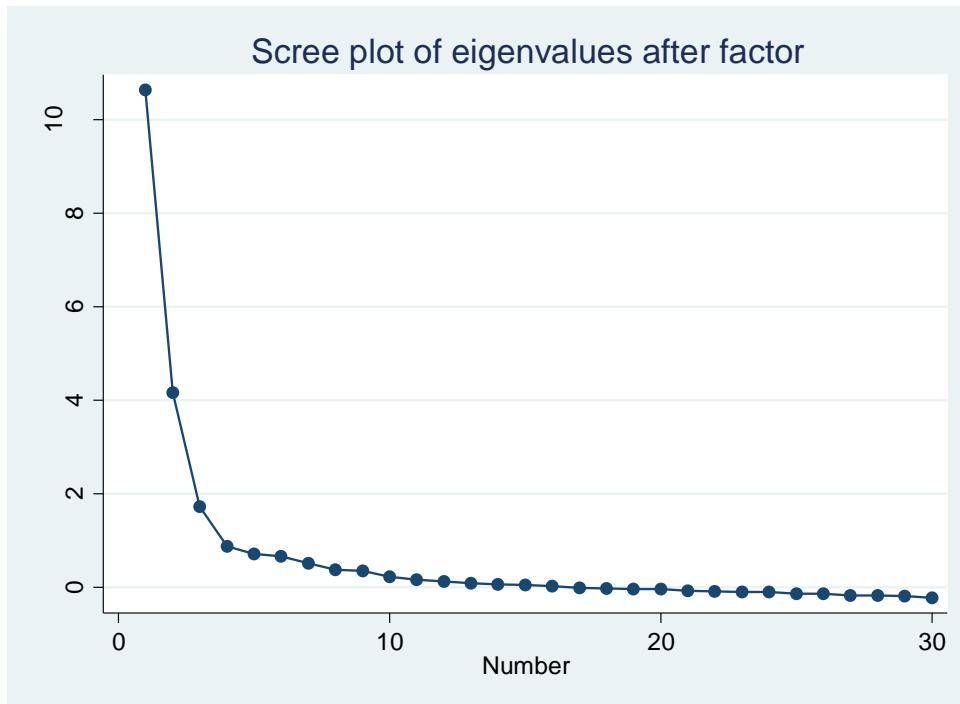


Fig. 5.0: Scree Plot of Eigenvalues
Source: Stata Result

5.4 Test of Normality

The test of normality was carried out using the ‘sktest’ command in Stata 13.0 and the result is shown in Table 5.6. As indicated in Table 5.6, the probabilities of skewness for SL, JE, and EP are given as 0.0672, 0.0742, and 0.0575 respectively. This implies that skewness was asymptotically normally distributed (since the p – value of skewness > 0.05). Similarly, the probabilities of kurtosis for SL, JE, and EP are given as 0.0562, 0.0823, and 0.0851 respectively. This indicates that kurtosis is also asymptotically distributed (since the p – value of kurtosis > 0.05). Furthermore, probabilities of Chi (2) for SL, JE, EP were 0.0721, 0.1341, and 0.3572 respectively, which were greater than 0.05 implying their significance at 0.05 level. Therefore the variables in this study were normally distributed.

Table 5.6: Result of Normality test of Variables

Variable	Obs	Pr(Skewness)	Pr(Kurtosis)	adj chi2(2)	Prob > chi2
SL	344	0.0672	0.0562	12.64	0.0721
JE	344	0.0742	0.0823	28.06	0.1341
EP	344	0.0575	0.0851	15.23	0.3572

Source: Researcher’s compilation, 2022

5.5 Measurement model

This study adopted Herman’s single factor test to assess whether common method variance was a problem in the study (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). As reported in the EFA (Tables 5.3, 5.4, 5.5), three factors whose eigenvalues were greater than 1 were extracted. These three factors explained 75.07% variance collectively. Also, none of the factors accounted for more than fifty percent of the total variance. This indicates the absence of common method variance. The validity and reliability of the measuring instrument were assessed using Cronbach alpha coefficient (α), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) (Table 5.7). Cronbach alpha coefficients for each of the variables, SL, JE, and EP were 0.90, 0.89, and 0.89 respectively. These values exceeded the threshold of 0.70 as recommended by Lance, Butts, and Michels, (2006). The composite reliability for the study variables were 0.90, 0.95, and 0.84 which were greater than the cutoff point of 0.6 as recommended by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010). Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) for the study variables were 0.57, 0.68, and 0.51 which were greater than the cutoff point of 0.5 as recommended by Fornell and Larcker, (1981).

The correlation among the study variables is shown in Table 5.8. As shown in Table 5.8, the correlation coefficient between SL and EP was $r = -0.126$, $p < 0.05$, while the correlation coefficient between JE and EP was $r = 0.328$, $p < 0.05$. On the other hand, the correlation coefficient between SL and JE was $r = 0.375$, $p < 0.05$. These results indicated that the correlation between SL and EP was negative and significant at $p < 0.05$, while the correlation between EP and JE was positive and significant at $p < 0.05$. Furthermore, the correlation between JE and SL was positive and significant at $p < 0.05$.

According to Fornell and Larcker, (1981), discriminant validity can be performed by comparing the square root of the AVE with the correlation coefficients of other variables. As reported in Table 5.8, the square root of the AVE (diagonal entries) was greater than the correlation coefficients (off-diagonal entries) of other variables. This confirms discriminant validity among the study variables. The reliability and validity of the measures were assured by these results.

Table 5.7: Factor loadings, Cronbach Alpha (α), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR)

	Servant Leadership	Job Engagement	Employee Performance	α	AVE	CR
sl1	0.85			0.90	0.57	0.90
sl2	0.82					
sl3	0.77					
sl4	0.74					
sl5	0.71					
sl6	0.69					
sl7	0.67					
je16		0.97		0.89	0.68	0.95
je18		0.90				
je12		0.89				
je11		0.86				
je13		0.82				
je9		0.80				
je10		0.78				
je2		0.76				
je14		0.72				
je5		0.69				
ep1			0.78	0.89	0.51	0.84
ep2			0.75			
ep3			0.70			
ep4			0.67			
ep5			0.65			

Source: Researchers' compilation, 2022.

Table 5.8: Correlation and Discriminant Validity among variables

Variables	sl	je	ep
SL	(0.75)		
JE	0.375*	(0.82)	
EP	-0.126*	0.328*	(0.71)

Source: Researchers' compilation, 2022 * $p < 0.05$

5.6 Structural model and Hypotheses testing

The hypothesized relationships in this study were tested using SEM. Several fit indices were used to assess the data's compatibility with the model before looking at the path diagram. These include Chi-square/Degree of freedom (χ^2/df); Comparative Fit Index (CFI); Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI); Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA); Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR). In this investigation, the Kline (2005) recommended threshold values of ($\chi^2/df < 3$; CFI > 0.95 ; TLI > 0.95 ; SRMR < 0.05 ; and RMSEA < 0.08) were applied. The Goodness-of-Fit indices' results showed an excellent model fit with values of $\chi^2/df = 2.315$; CFI = 0.965; TLI = 0.972; SRMR = 0.037; and RMSEA = 0.064.

SEM was used in assessing the path coefficients (Figure 5.1) and the testing of hypotheses (Table 5.9). H1 proposes that 'SL is positive and significantly related to EP'. As shown in Table 5.9, this hypothesis was rejected, since a negative and significant relationship was established with $\beta = -0.212$, $z = -6.15$, $p = 0.000$. H2 proposes that 'JE is positive and significantly related to EP'. As shown in Table 5.9, H2 cannot be rejected since a positive and significant relationship was confirmed with $\beta = 0.639$, $z = 8.34$, $p = 0.000$. H3 proposes that 'SL is positive and significantly related to JE'. H3 cannot be rejected since as shown in Table 5.9, a positive and significant relationship exist between SL and JE with $\beta = 0.207$, $z = 7.66$, $p = 0.000$.

Baron and Kenny (1986) identified a three - step process for establishing mediating effects. Step 1 must establish that SL (independent variable) is significantly related to EP (dependent variable). Step 2 must establish that SL (independent variable) is significantly related to JE (mediating variable). Step 3 must establish that JE (mediating variable) is significantly related to EP (dependent variable) when controlling for SL on EP.

If SL is no longer significantly related to EP, then full mediation occurred. On the other hand, if the relationship between SL and EP is reduced, then partial mediation occurred. H4 states that 'JE mediate the relationship between SL and EP'. Using Baron and Kenny (1986) approach, step 1, step 2, and step 3 were confirmed in hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. Furthermore, Table 5.10 shows the results of Sobel test of the statistical significance of the indirect effects. Since, step 1, step 2, step 3, as well as the Sobel's test were significant, the mediation was partial. Thus, hypothesis 4 cannot be rejected. JE partially mediates the relationship between SL and EP.

Table 5.9: Path Coefficients for Direct, Indirect and Total Effect

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Std Err	z	p > /z/	[95% Conf. Interval]
SL → EP	-0.212*	-	-0.212*	0.034	-6.15	0.000	-0.280 -0.145
SL → JE	0.207*	-	0.207*	0.027	7.66	0.000	0.154 0.260
JE → EP	0.639*	-	0.639*	0.077	8.34	0.000	0.489 0.789
SL → JE → EP	-0.212*	0.132*	-0.080*	0.032	-2.49	0.013	-0.143 -0.017

Source: Researchers' compilation, 2022. * $p < 0.05$

Table 5.10: Significance Testing of Indirect Effect (Unstandardized)

Estimates	Delta	Sobel	Monte Carlo
Indirect effect	0.132	0.132	0.132
Std. Err.	0.023	0.023	0.025
z – value	5.733	5.640	5.338
p – value	0.000	0.000	0.000
Conf. Interval	0.087, 0.177	0.086, 0.178	0.084, 0.185

Source: Researchers' compilation, 2022.

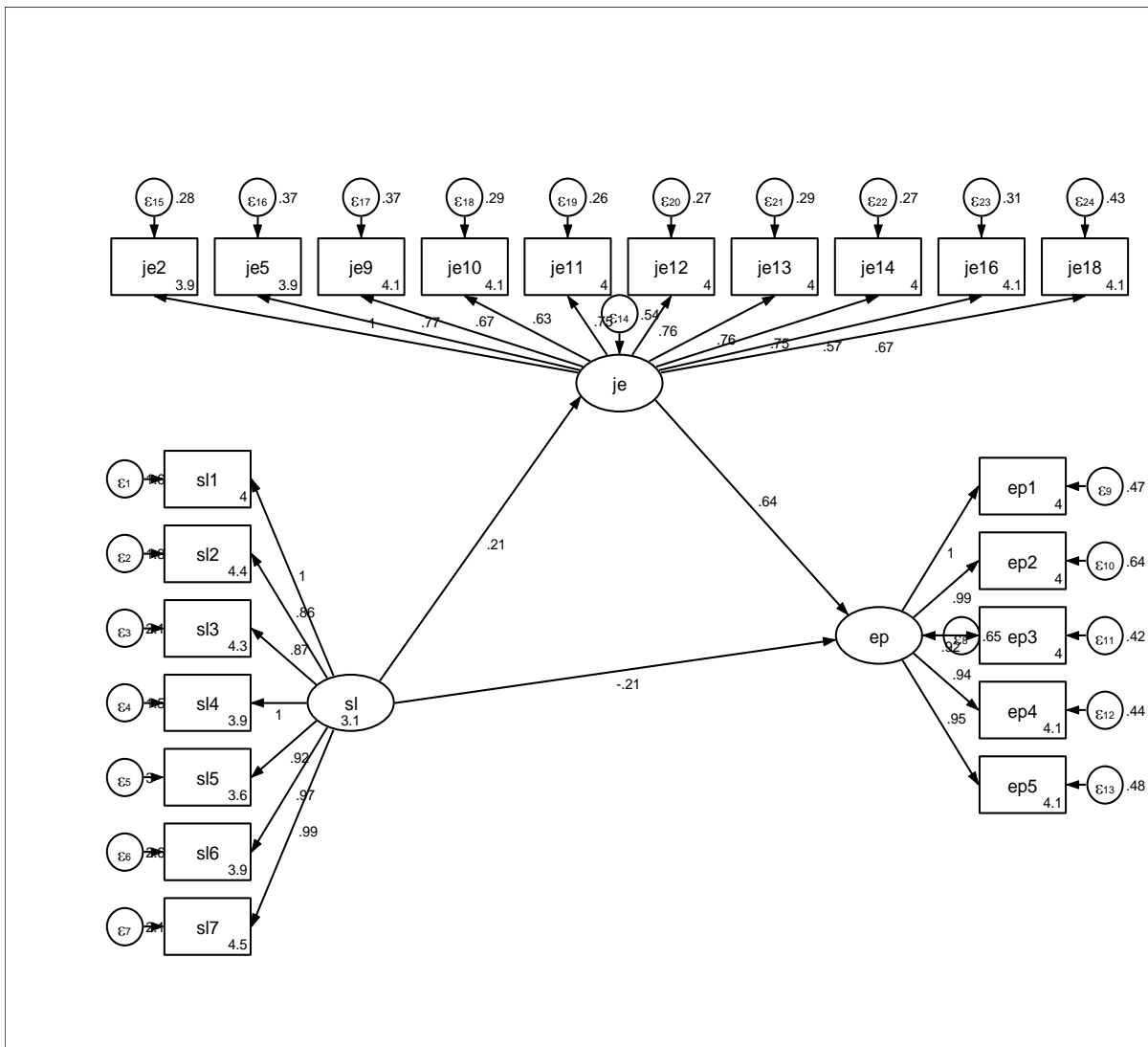


Figure 5.1: Path Diagram
Source: Stata Result

6.0 Discussion of Findings

The outcomes of this study contradict certain earlier research findings while confirming others. First, SL was found to be negative and significantly related to EP, and this result corroborates the findings of Wanta, and Augustine (2021) who found a negative, but significant association between SL and EP. Furthermore, this finding was in conflict with Xiongying and Boku (2021), Bayram and Zoubi (2020), who found that SL was positive and significantly related to EP. The negative relationship between SL and EP may be due to cultural effects. Nigeria being a high power distance culture may not support leaders being seen as servants (Aruoren & Arubayi, 2014). This reason was supported by the GLOBE project that found that some leadership behaviors were culturally specific (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, Gupta, & GLOBE Associates, 2004). This study also found that SL was positively and significantly associated with JE. This finding concurs with that of Muller, et al. (2019), Canavesi, and Minelli, (2021), and Yagil and Oren (2021). Because servant leaders place employee interests over their own through empowering them and developing their skills, employees feel the obligation to reciprocate (Ling, Liu, & Wu, 2017) through displaying higher levels JE. Concerns about the actions of their leaders within the organization are expressed by employees at the workplace (Aruoren, 2020). Therefore, for these employees to fully commit to their work and organizations, the SL approach to guiding, supporting, and helping employees is crucial. Employees will reciprocate these supporting actions by demonstrating higher degrees of reciprocity. Accordingly, our findings imply that servant leaders offer an efficient leadership style in the public sector, lending empirical credence to the claim that servant leaders are required in local government councils.

Another finding of the study was that JE was positive and significantly associated with EP. This finding is compatible with those of Hendrik, et al. (2021), Sungmala, and Verawat (2021), as well as Qodarian, et al. (2019) who reported that JE significantly predicted EP across several indicators of performance.

Since turnover and the intention to quit an organization are lower in organizations with engaged personnel, there is a better rate of stakeholder satisfaction, productivity, profitability, and growth. Moreover, businesses with disengaged staff lose time and energy, have less commitment from the workforce, deal with more absenteeism, have worse customer satisfaction, lower productivity, and lower operating and net profit margins (Markos & Sridevi, 2010).

Finally, this study found that JE mediates the relationship between SL and EP. Although there is lack of empirical evidence on the mediating role played by JE on the linkage between SL and EP, evidence abound within the literature showing that JE acts as a mediator in several organizational studies (Abdullahi, et al., 2021; Christi, et al., 2020; Khusanova, et al., 2021; and Siswanto, et al., 2021). The study has shown that because SL can increase JE, employees can improve their performance through JE.

7.0 Conclusion/Recommendations

Based on the research results obtained from the hypotheses tested in this study, this study concludes that SL was negatively related to EP. This relationship may be as a result of the hierarchical nature of Local Government Administration in Nigeria as well as a cultural orientation that is high in power distance in which leaders are not seen as servants. The study also concludes that SL was positively related to JE, while JE was positively associated with EP. Furthermore, the relationship between SL and EP was partially mediated by JE.

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The management of Local Government Councils should encourage high levels of JE among employees as this will enhance their performance, which will in turn lead to improvement in organizational performance.
- ii. The management of Local Government Councils should also encourage leadership behaviors that emphasize the development of employees as this will lead to higher levels of JE among employees.
- iii. Local Government Council Administrators should be trained on the concept of job engagement (its antecedents and consequences) as this will lead to their understanding of the concept.

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