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# Precarious Working Conditions in Nigeria's Higher Education: The Role of Psychological Ownership and Servant Leadership

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**SOMMARIO - ABSTRACT**

Despite concerns about the persistent Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike and deteriorating working conditions in Nigerian universities, limited empirical attention has been given to the potential of psychological ownership (PO) and servant leadership (SL) mechanisms to mitigate their effects. This study examines whether SL promotes a sense of ownership that buffers the negative effects of precarious work on organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB) towards academics (OCB-A) and the university (OCB-U). This study employed a multidimensional measure of SL and PO to describe and explain their relationships with the OCB-A/U in the academic population across six geopolitical zones of the Nigerian Federation. The cluster sample was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, employing PLS-SEM. The findings indicate that when academics (subordinates) feel a sense of ownership, they are motivated to support the organisation's vision. The study further affirms that when a leader demonstrates genuine care for their followers' wellbeing, followers respond strongly by assisting colleagues or even superiors in completing tasks or resolving issues. However, the leader conducts (community interest) that prioritises taking the community's interests outside of the immediate organisation into consideration, which does not significantly affect OCB-A. It was discovered that if academics internalise their sense of "mine-ness" toward their university, they will exhibit increased discretionary engagement (altruism, courtesy, conscientiousness, civic virtue, and sportsmanship) beyond their formal job expectations.

Nonostante le preoccupazioni per il persistente sciopero dell'Unione del Personale Accademico (ASUU, Academic Staff Union of Universities) e il deterioramento delle condizioni di lavoro nelle università nigeriane, è stata data poca attenzione empirica al potenziale dei meccanismi di proprietà psicologica (PO, psychological ownership) e di Leadership di Servizio (SL, servant leadership) per mitigarne gli effetti. Questo studio esamina se SL promuova un senso di proprietà che mitighi gli effetti negativi del lavoro precario sui comportamenti di cittadinanza organizzativa (OCB, organisational citizenship behaviours) verso accademici (OCB-A, OCB academics) e università (OCB-U, OCB university). Questo studio ha utilizzato una misura multidimensionale di SL e PO per descrivere e spiegare le loro relazioni con l'OCB-A/U nella

popolazione accademica in sei zone geopolitiche della Federazione Nigeriana. Il campione di cluster è stato analizzato utilizzando sia statistiche descrittive che inferenziali, impiegando il tool PLS-SEM. I risultati indicano che quando gli accademici (subordinati) sentono un senso di appartenenza, sono motivati a sostenere la visione dell'organizzazione. Lo studio afferma inoltre che quando un leader dimostra una genuina cura per il benessere dei propri follower, questi rispondono con forza aiutando colleghi o addirittura i superiori a portare a termine compiti o risolvere problemi. Tuttavia, le condotte del leader (interesse comunitario) che dà priorità a considerare gli interessi della comunità al di fuori dell'organizzazione immediata, il che non influisce in modo significativo sull'OCB-A. È stato scoperto che se gli accademici interiorizzano il loro senso di "meno" verso la loro università, mostreranno un maggiore coinvolgimento discrezionale (altruismo, cortesia, coscienziosità, virtù civica e sportività) oltre le aspettative formali del lavoro.

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**Keywords:** Psychological ownership, Servant leaders, subordinate welfare, community interest, OCB-Academics, OCB-University.

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## 1 – Introduction

The modern workplace is becoming increasingly insecure, with discontinuous contracts and diminished labour rights, as set out in the International Labour Organisation's Biological Hazards in the Working Environment Convention, 2025 (No. 192) (ILO, 2025, p. 51). This implies that in both developed and developing economies, transformations have institutionalised a work environment characterised by uncertainty, a lack of social protection, and increased vulnerability, frequently summarised as employment precarity (ILO, 2025). Although the phenomenon of precarity may differ across specific national and regional factors, the general picture is that economic and psychosocial risks are systematically transferred by institutions to workers, with serious consequences for employees' discretionary behaviour (Cubelo, 2023; Lee & Di Ruggiero, 2025; Lemme Ribeiro, 2024). These conditions are characterised by temporary, employment agency, casual, part-time, or seasonal contracts, pseudo-self-employment, unclear or absent employer-employee relationships, and limited access for workers to exercise their rights in the workplace (ILO, 2025).

Globally, higher education has not escaped the impact of precarisation. Universities, historically seen as pillars of knowledge sharing, have been characterised by casualisation, contractual working arrangements, slow pay, reduced research funding, and worsening working conditions.

These issues are especially acute in Nigeria; for example, Aliyu (2024, p. 56) reported that universities play a strategic role in the development of nations, academic staff members have to work under the status of constant job insecurity, insufficient infrastructural utilisation and labour relations, which is supported by frequent industrial actions by ASUU (Aliyu, 2024; Tamin et al., 2021). However, Aliyu (2024) confirms that the casualisation and contractualization of academic work, as well as the politicisation of university administration, have exacerbated the precarity of both teaching and non-teaching staff.

This precariousness is not limited to economic instability but also includes psychosocial stress, professional stagnation, and a weaker sense of institutional commitment (Dawodu & Okonji, 2022; Dumbili & Nelson, 2023). Instead of addressing the structural causes of academic dissatisfaction, the Federal Government has always resorted to coercive labour control

strategies, typified by the “no work, no pay” threat. This dire state of precarity is therefore exacerbated by the inability to stabilise academic industrial relations (Aliyu, 2024; Aliyu & Ambali, 2022).

Contrary to some reports that academics in Nigerian universities are in high demand for one or the other, Rani et al. (2025) affirmed that academic and professional staff members most often work in a context of underestimating professional input and a loss of sense of belonging, which results in intentions to leave. Although work engagement is a construct that has traditionally been used to explain employee attachment and extra-role behaviour, it may lack explanatory power in the context of prolonged precarity (Mella, 2021).

In conditions where employment relations are unreliable and the psychological contract is perceived as breached, engagement will be weakened. PO, on the other hand, reflects a more intense, more internalised feeling of mine-ness towards the organisation that may endure even when the terms of employment are weak (Chan, 2025). In uncertain academic situations, PO provides a more context-sensitive description of extra-role behaviour than neighbouring attitudinal bounds.

Unfortunately, the phenomenon of precarity has placed leaders under greater pressure, forcing them to reestablish a sense of meaning and dignity in the workplace (Azila-Gbettor et al., 2025; Jiang et al., 2024).

For example, conventional hierarchical leadership models have proven ineffective in situations where employees are disposable. In its place, servant leadership, based on empathy, humility, and a genuine spirit of service to others, has emerged as a moral and strategic response to these issues (Farao & Riolli, 2023). This is because servant leaders build trust, demonstrate concern for employees' welfare, and create working environments where workers feel appreciated, even in the face of uncertainty (Benchakhan et al., 2025; van Dierendonck et al., 2024).

However, the findings have not always been consistent over time; for instance, research by Avagianou et al. (2025) suggests that omitted factors may explain prior findings. They indicated that psychological ownership is one of the factors that could predict organisational citizenship behaviour (towards academics and universities) (i.e., OCB-A and OCB-U) and exclude deviant workplace behaviour (DWB) (Avagianou et al., 2025; Escudero-Castillo et al., 2023). Can one imagine how PO can be needed to enhance OCB despite persistent precarity? This suggests that gaps have been identified; previous studies have not fully observed PO and employee discretionary behaviour across all cultures using the OCB and DWB. This study, therefore, attempts to accomplish this by testing the concept in the Nigerian academic context. Second, the literature review shows that no study has examined the effect of servant leaders (SL) on the discretionary behaviour of academic staff in Nigeria.

Therefore, this study examines the combined effects of PO and servant leadership as explanatory factors in OCB among academics operating under precarious conditions in federal universities in Nigeria. Combining the two perspectives, i.e. psychological and leadership perspectives and considering the context of a job that is fraught with employment uncertainty, the study adds to the body of knowledge on the extra-role behaviour in weak institutional environments. However, the study is organised as follows: SECTION 2 reviews the related literature and formulates the hypotheses; SECTION 3 describes the methodology and analysis strategy; SECTION 4 presents and discusses the empirical findings; and SECTION 5 provides the conclusion, implications, and future research directions.

## 2 – Literature Review

### 2.1 – Precarious Working Conditions

The concept of precarious working conditions has been a topic of discussion for decades, yet there is no unified definition of the term. However, it was observed that proponents and opponents of precarious work agree that its multidimensionality and definition vary, depending on factors such as country, region, economic and social structure, political systems, and labour markets (Badarin et al., 2024; Cain & Reid, 2021; Padrosa et al., 2021). Meanwhile, ILO (2025, p. 51) defines precarious work as a means by which employers can transfer risks and responsibilities to employees. It is work done in both the formal and informal economies, characterised by the fluctuating magnitude and extent of both objective (legal status) and subjective (feeling) dimensions of uncertainty and insecurity (Biaback Anong, 2024; Chan et al., 2024). From this definition, it can be established that the term is characterised by unstable, insecure, and low-paid work that lacks social protection and stability. This may entail temporary agreements, part-time employment, and the absence of benefits such as sick leave allowances, medical coverage, and pension plans (Badarin et al., 2024). In such cases, workers are vulnerable to economic recession, unable to rely on regular working hours, and denied many rights, often facing inferior working conditions that compromise their wellbeing and financial stability (Chan et al., 2024; Reuschke & Zhang, 2022; Rihm et al., 2025).

### 2.2 – Psychological Ownership

The literature conceptualises PO as a multidimensional psychological state reflecting individuals' feelings of possession toward a target, even in the absence of legal ownership. First, ownership can lead to feelings of efficiency and power, fostering the notion that it is the source of something that can transform the surrounding environment (Azila-Gbettor et al., 2025; Chan, 2025; Park & Kim, 2025). Second, ownership helps individuals to convey part of their inner selves to others and maintain a sense of self-continuity (El-Gazar et al., 2024; C. Wang et al., 2025). For instance, a person's sense of self and identity can be preserved to some degree through their real or perceived possessions (Pierce et al., 2009; Su & Wong, 2025). Third, the demands for territoriality, sense of security, and sense of place could be fulfilled through ownership sensations (Koklic et al., 2025; Pierce et al., 2009). Meanwhile, Pierce et al. (2009) differentiated between the variants of PO, which are promotion-focused and prevention-based, and were guided by the Theory of Reasoned Action.

Park and Kim (2025) found that the capacity for self-investment, control, and in-depth knowledge significantly increases psychological ownership of avatars, a phenomenon that also applies to virtual goods. However, Liu et al. (2025) revealed that self-uncertainty moderates the link between psychological ownership and self-disclosure, thereby contributing to the body of knowledge on virtual communities and psychological ownership and having essential implications for administrators and users.

The social identity viewpoint offers the opportunity to integrate and empirically examine the concept of collective psychological ownership; however, these implications have not been fully explored in the literature (Chan, 2025; Verkuyten, 2025). This has implications for academics who wish to understand the advantages and possible drawbacks of reciprocating with choice, while also expanding theoretical knowledge of the effects of doing so beyond precarity.

### 2.3 – *Servant Leadership*

Servant leadership (SL) is an ideology coined by Greenleaf, which reverses the traditional hierarchy of leadership, with leaders focusing on empowering their team, supporting them, and helping them improve their abilities and potential (Song et al., 2025; van Dierendonck et al., 2024). It is characterised by modesty and compassion, and by a leader who serves first and foremost by prioritising the wellbeing and development of others to achieve a higher vision. The concept challenges the notion that leadership is hierarchical, patriarchal, and tied to wealth or status. Instead, other-centred, as the title suggests, it aims to serve others, helping them develop without the title or recognition that often accompany leadership positions (Hotta et al., 2025).

For example, in the findings by Hotta et al. (2025), under SL, followers believe that perceived supervisor support difference (PSSD) is reasonable. Contrary to Kim et al. (2024), who discovered that job stress has a mediating function in the link between employee depression and servant leadership, emphasising that the benefit of servant leadership on lowering depression is mainly mediated through its effect on reducing job stress.

However, other studies clearly linked SL to citizenship behaviour among members of the organisations (Benchakhan et al., 2025; Kim & Liden, 2025; Setiawan et al., 2024; Wang & Zhao, 2025). Nevertheless, this study provides evidence of the superiority of differentiated leadership over supporting leadership, which is the standard strategy for ensuring citizenship behaviour in higher education.

### 2.4 – *Background to Nigeria's Labour Market and Higher Education Sector*

The labour market in Nigeria is typified by persistent underemployment, high rates of contract staffing, recurrent wage payment defaults, and inadequate application of employment protection laws (Dawodu & Okonji, 2022, p. 101). A large percentage of employees work under non-standard, insecure labour contracts, which expose them to income instability, reduced social security, and weaker collective bargaining power. In the public sector, these structural weaknesses are most visible, as fiscal uncertainty and administrative discretion often compromise employment security.

The discontinuation of federal universities within the higher education sector has been largely imbalanced due to poor funding stability, the politicised nature of governance, and long-term industrial squabbles (Aliyu, 2024). Frequent strikes, staged by the ASUU) demonstrate the lack of a solution to tensions over staff welfare, proliferation of universities, infrastructure degradation, and service conditions.

In response to financial pressures, universities have also increased the use of casualised and contractual academic work, further eroding job security and intensifying precarity among academic employees (Tamin et al., 2021, p. 7).

These circumstances prolong the long-lasting psychosocial stress and defy the classic demands of professional dedication to the academic profession. Aside from that, scholars will frequently be asked to perform discretionary actions beyond their professional assignments to support teaching, research, and community services. This hypocritical co-occurrence will further increase extra-role demand, making the federal university system in Nigeria a critical setting for examining how leadership practices and PO affect OCB under conditions of precarity.

## 2.5 – Theoretical Integration and Hypotheses Development

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) posits that an individual's behaviour is primarily determined by their behavioural intention, which is influenced by workers' attitudes toward the organisation or job, which may be shaped by perceptions of exploitation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Their expectations from peers, leaders, or society influence whether they remain committed or disengage from the task, and their behavioural intentions (intention to stay or withdraw) depend on these cognitive appraisals (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Benchakhan et al. (2025) suggest that SL can positively shape these antecedents: by providing care and ethical support, leaders can improve employees' attitudes toward the organisation. Similarly, El-Gazar et al. (2024) confirm that PO can strengthen the attitude–intention link, as employees who feel a sense of “mine-ness” toward their work are more likely to form positive attitudes and intentions that lead to responsible, committed behaviours, even in precarious situations. According to the Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), workplace behaviour can be defined as a chain of mutual relationships in which employees are expected to reciprocate in exchange for organisational performance.

Unfortunately, several studies have debated that the psychological contract may be weakened in precarious employment, as employees may experience a sense of low reciprocity from their employers (inequity) (Aliyu & Ambali, 2022). In this case, SL can restore these exchanges by being caring and ethically behaving (Kim & Liden, 2025; Uslukaya et al., 2024). In its turn, employees reward it with engagement, identification, or extra-role behaviours, or manifestations of psychological ownership (Hermann, 2025; Hingston et al., 2025).

However, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) postulates that a job has demands (situations that require constant effort, such as a high workload) and resources (situations that assist in reaching work objectives or coping with needs, such as social and leadership support). In precarious situations, when demands exceed resources, strain will ensue; when resources are adequate, engagement will increase (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Studies have shown that imbalance may result in exhaustion, disengagement and psychological withdrawal (Amoako et al., 2024; Avagianou et al., 2025; Charlesworth & Malone, 2024). In this case, leaders who are interested in employees' wellbeing and development can mitigate the impact of precariousness by providing socio-emotional resources, thereby balancing the JD-R theory (Benchakhan et al., 2025; Xie et al., 2025). Similarly, in the stress-resource-outcome relationship, it requires being supplemented with PO to understand internalised engagement despite precarity. Thus, it becomes very applicable for TRA to complement other theories (JD-R, SET) by explaining how perceptions (from servant leadership), affective states (psychological ownership), and contextual pressures (precarity) culminate in intentional behaviours such as engagement or withdrawal. However, its rational assumptions and limited attention to structural constraints make it more suitable when combined with socio-psychological and contextual theories (JD-R, SET).

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Psychological ownership does not significantly relate to citizenship behaviours towards the academics, despite perceived precarity.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Psychological ownership does not significantly relate to citizenship behaviours towards the university, despite perceived precarity.

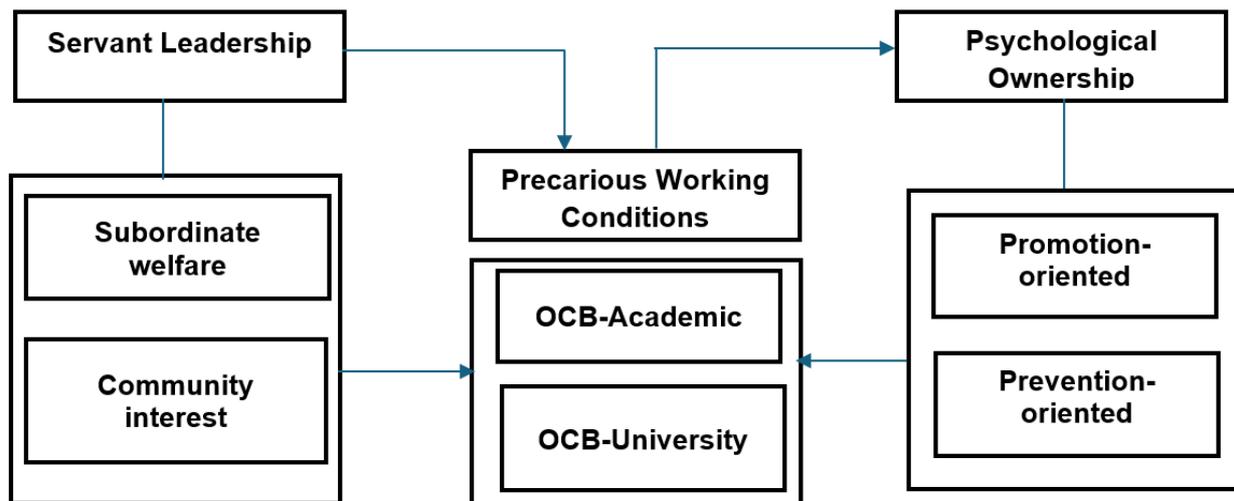
**H<sub>03</sub>:** Subordinate welfare does not significantly relate to citizenship behaviours towards the academics, despite perceived precarity.

**H<sub>04</sub>:** Subordinate welfare does not significantly relate to citizenship behaviours towards the university, despite perceived precarity

**H<sub>05</sub>:** Community interest does not significantly relate to citizenship behaviours towards the academics, despite perceived precarity

**H<sub>06</sub>:** Community interest does not significantly relate to citizenship behaviours towards the university, despite perceived precarity

However, Figure 1 presents a conceptual model linking servant leadership and OCB in the context of precarity through both direct and indirect pathways. It is assumed that the supportive environment created by prosocial behaviour through SL, which provides emotional support and empathy, alleviates the adverse effects of prevarication. In this way, leaders promote OCB-Academic (behaviours that benefit the academic environment) and OCB-University (behaviours that benefit the institution). Moreover, SL contributes to the increase in PO that is presented as promotion-oriented (growth-driven) and prevention-oriented (security-driven) mindsets. PO, in turn, inspires employees to do much more than their job descriptions alone would justify, developing positive behaviours in the face of a changing environment. The model, therefore, highlights the dual nature of SL: it both positively influences OCB as a direct result of empathy and, indirectly, through the PO, helps mitigate the negative outcomes of precarious employment.



**Fig. 1 – Conceptual Model** (Source: Authors’ 2025)

### 3 – Methodology

This study employed a multidimensional measure of SL and PO to describe and explain the relationships with the OCB-A/U. The survey research method was employed because it can be used to determine the distribution and interrelationships among sociological and psychological variables, such as respondents’ opinions and attitudes (Barba et al., 2025; Rodelo et al., 2024). The study’s valid population comprises all academic staff members employed by Nigerian Federal universities. As of 2024, when this study commenced, there were forty-three (43) Federal universities in the six geopolitical zones of the Nigerian Federation (Table 1). The research focused on federal universities, as they are Nigeria’s largest government-funded postsecondary institutions. Therefore, it is expected that these universities will have more access to materials.

**Table 1 – Selection of a Proportional Sample**

Zones	No. of Federal Universities	No. of Universities Selected	Universities	Population	% of Population	Sample	% of Sample
North Central	7	2	UNILORIN	1018	13%	51	13%
			Federal University, Lokoja	118	2%	6	2%
North East	7	2	UNIMAID	886	11%	44	11%
			FUGA	125	2%	6	2%
North West	10	2	BUK	834	10%	42	10%
			Federal University, Birnin Kebbi	208	3%	10	3%
South East	5	2	UNN	1511	19%	75	19%
			Federal University, Ndifu-Alike	189	2%	9	2%
South South	7	2	UNIPOINT	1098	14%	55	14%
			FUOtuoke	187	2%	9	2%
South West	7	2	UNILAG	1504	19%	75	19%
			Federal University, Oye-Ekiti	203	3%	10	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>12</b>		<b>7881</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100%</b>

To achieve the study's objectives, a cluster sample was adopted, which facilitates understanding of a dispersed research sample because it doesn't require a sample frame (Barba et al., 2025; Bartoll-Roca & Julià, 2021). The universities were first divided into Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Then, universities from each zone were randomly chosen (one from an old traditional university and one from a newly founded university), resulting in twelve (12) universities (Mukherjee & Mukhopadhyay, 2022; Ntuli, 2020).

However, only academic staff accounted for 7,881 of the study's population. Third, 392 (5% of the total) were selected as the proportionate sample of academics at each university. This study employs the RaoSoft sample size calculator for online calculations (Mukherjee & Mukhopadhyay, 2022).

Finally, it will surely be expensive and time-consuming to cover every cluster. Due to the difficulties in obtaining a sample frame for administering the study's instrument to select respondents from the quota assigned to each faculty, a simple random sampling approach becomes a viable alternative.

### 3.1 – Validation and Data Collection

The pilot study began with the development of valid measurement scales for the construct variables. 11 scales for SL were identified (Jiang et al., 2024; Setiawan et al., 2024), 9 scales for PO were identified (Park & Kim, 2025; X. Wang et al., 2025), and 9 scales for OCB-A/U were identified (Aliyu & Ambali, 2022; Badarin et al., 2024). Validation exercise showing results of reliability and validity of Cronbach Alpha (SL constructs = 0.870), (PO constructs = 0.941) and (OCB-A/U = 0.825). Upon obtaining ethical approval, researchers engaged the Chairmen of ASUU for each of the 12 selected universities for data collection. Once data collection or analysis was complete, descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Frequency and response percentages were used to calculate response rates, which were then compared to the sample size chosen before data collection. To examine the associations between construct variables, bivariate correlation analysis was used.

### 3.2 – The Measurement Model

Since the research has a predictive and theory-building nature, the main analytical method was PLS-SEM (Saunders et al. 2019). This method is applicable to the multi-latent constructs, non-normal data distributions, and exploratory relationships (Saunders et al., 2019). Standard criteria were used to determine the measurement model, including indicator reliability (factor loadings  $\geq 0.70$ ), internal consistency reliability (composite reliability  $\geq 0.70$ ), and convergent validity (average variance extracted  $\geq 0.50$ ). The heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio was used in assessing discriminant validity. The structural model was determined by bootstrapping to estimate t-values, path coefficients, and significance, and by measuring explained variance ( $R^2$ ), effect sizes ( $f^2$ ), and collinearity (VIF) diagnostics (Wang et al., 2025).

## 4 – Results

Out of the target sample size of 392 respondents from six geopolitical zones in Nigerian Federal Universities. From this figure, only a sample of 335 respondents could be retrieved and used for this analysis, yielding an actual response rate of 85% and covering a wide range of faculty members at Nigerian higher institutions. Gender, age, industrial practice, and educational attainment were among the attributes examined. Measurements of individual traits have been made using both numerical and categorical scales.

Table 2 reveals that most respondents were male (72.6%), while females accounted for only 27.4%. The respondents' age distribution shows that those aged 31-40 constitute the majority (35.4%), while participants aged 51 and above constitute 7.7%.

These descriptive statistics indicate that the sample used in this study is representative of respondents across different age brackets. Most of the sample population has been there for quite some time.

The statistics reveal that 41.8% of the respondents are experienced members of their organisation with more than 10 years of working experience. Only a few of them, constituting 9.5% of all the respondents, have less than 1 year of working experience. The gender composition of respondents is 27.4 per cent women. Such disproportion indicates larger structural trends in the higher education sector in Nigeria: female scholars are still under-represented. Women are still not as active or advanced in academia due to cultural norms and institutional barriers (Aliyu & Ambali, 2022, p. 18).

**Table 2 – Socio-demographic Characteristics**

Item	Count	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	236	72.6
Female	89	27.4
<b>Age</b>		
21-30 years	103	31.7
31-40 years	115	35.4
41-50 years	82	25.2
51 years and above	25	7.7
<b>Practice</b>		
Less 5 year	108	33.2
6 - 10 years	81	24.9
11 years/above	136	41.8
<b>Education</b>		
PhD	126	38.8
Master equivalent	134	40.8
Bachelor equivalent	59	18.2
Others	6	1.8

#### 4.1 – Psychological Ownership and OCB-A and OCB-U

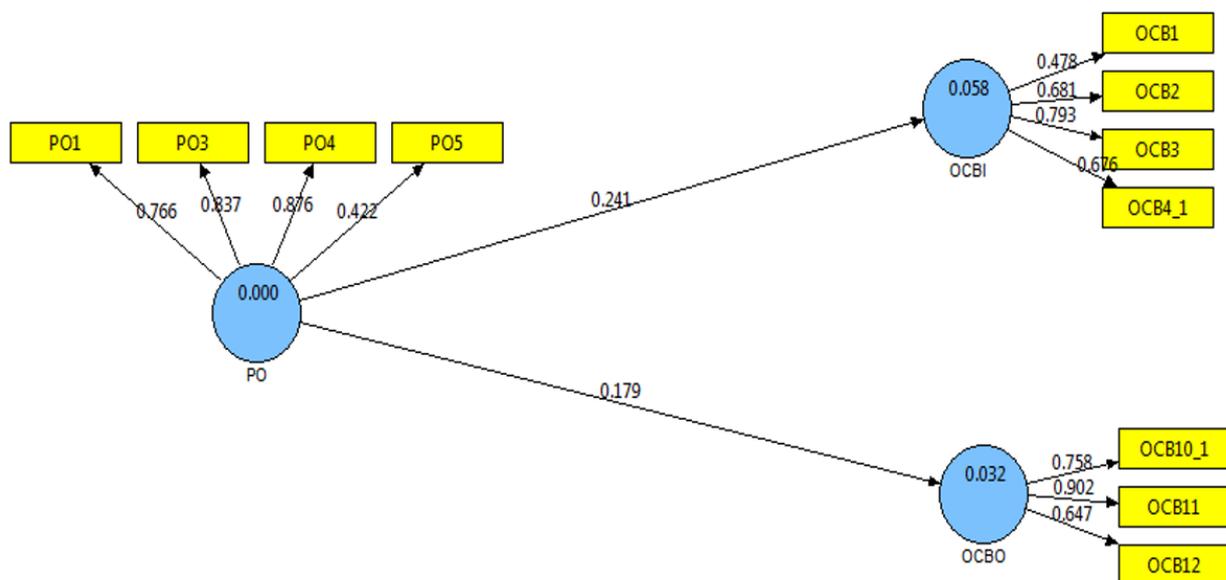
Psychological ownership, along with the two OCB constructs (OCB-A and OCB-U). As indicated in Table 3 and Figure 2, the PLS results show that PO has a significant and positive effect on both OCB-A ( $\beta = 0.345$ ;  $t = 6.084$ ,  $p < .000$ ) and CB-U ( $\beta = 0.345$ ;  $t = 6.084$ ,  $p < .000$ ). Regarding the PO and OCB-A relationship, the findings indicate that when workers or subordinates perceive their university as their own, they are more inclined to act in a manner that facilitates their colleagues' resolution of professional and personal issues. Similar findings apply to PO and OCB-U, indicating that when staff members or subordinates feel a psychological ownership of their university, they are motivated to act in support of its objectives. Stated differently, workers experience a sense of euphoria when they see their workplace as "their own," leading them to go above and beyond the call of duty.

Previous studies have consistently revealed favourable correlations between PO and OCB: Understanding the interaction effects of PO and agency system, Chan (2025) identifies that the choice increases the chooser's PO of the chosen option, a premise derived from prior conceptualisations of choice as fostering control. El-Gazar et al. (2024) indicate that PO increases with higher person-organisation fit, which correlates highly with OCB.

**Table 3 – PLS Results from PO, OCB-A and OCB-U**

Path	Standardised Path Coefficient $\beta$	Standard Error	T Statistics	P Value
PO -> OCB-A	0.241	0.050	4.859	0.000
PO -> OCB-U	0.179	0.048	3.693	0.000

Additionally, PO in the hotel industry has been found to increase OCB and, in some cases, even more than job satisfaction (Gupta & Dhar, 2025). However, many studies distinguish between OCB that targets individuals (OCB-I or helping, altruism) and that which targets the organisation (OCB-O).



**Fig. 2 – PLS for Psychological Ownership and OCB-A and OCB-U**

Most loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating good indicator reliability, except PO5 (0.422), which is marginal but still acceptable if composite reliability and AVE are within limits (Barba et al., 2025). Thus, PO is a reliable construct. However, OCB-A1 (0.478) is below 0.50, suggesting it may not adequately represent the construct. Meanwhile, both path coefficients are positive, indicating that higher levels of PO are associated with higher levels of OCB (both toward Academics and the University). The effect is stronger for OCB-A (0.241) than for OCB-U (0.179). This suggests that employees with strong PO tend to show more interpersonal OCB (helping coworkers, being considerate, etc.) than University-directed behaviours (defending the organisation, conserving resources). This finding indicates that PO positively influences both OCB-A and OCB-U, confirming its extra-role behaviours. However, contrary to the above finding, some literature has explicitly tested the differences in the effect of PO on the disposition to help colleagues, beyond supporting the organisation’s goals (Gustina et al., 2025).

#### 4.2 – Servant Leader and Citizenship Behaviour towards Academics and University (OCB-A and OCB-U)

Table 4 shows the standardised path coefficient ( $\beta$ ), standard error, t-values, and p-values of path coefficients. Fig. 3, indicates path directions and their standardised path coefficient ( $\beta$ ), and t-values. Therefore, only three paths have demonstrated non-significant effects.

**Table 4 – PLS Results for Servant Leader and OCB-A and OCB-U**

Path	Standardised Path Coefficient $\beta$	Standard Error	T Statistics	P-Value
SW -> OCB-A	0.280	0.059	4.761	0.000
SW -> OCB-U	0.101	0.056	1.790	0.037
CI -> OCB-A	-0.126	0.081	1.546	0.061
CI -> OCB-U	0.051	0.060	0.852	0.197

The three significant positive relationships include: (1) subordinate welfare (SW) and OCB-A ( $\beta = 0.280$ ;  $t = 4.761$ ,  $p < .000$ ); (2) subordinate welfare (SW) and CB-U ( $\beta = 0.101$ ;  $t = 1.790$ ,  $p < .037$ ); and community interest (CI) and CB-U ( $\beta = 0.345$ ;  $t = 6.084$ ,  $p < .000$ ); (3) community interest and OCB-A ( $\beta = 0.141$ ;  $t = 1.890$ ,  $p < .029$ ). First, the data demonstrate that followers exhibit significant civic behaviours towards academics when they see subordinate welfare leader conduct ( $\beta = 0.280$ ;  $t = 4.761$ ,  $p < .000$ ).

Put another way, when a leader shows genuine care for the wellbeing of his or her followers, those followers strongly respond by assisting colleagues or even superiors in completing duties or resolving issues (van Dierendonck et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2025). Similarly, the results demonstrate that when a leader exhibits genuine concern for their followers' welfare, followers reciprocate with moderate strength ( $\beta = 0.101$ ;  $t = 1.790$ ,  $p < .037$ ) by behaving in ways that benefit the university.

Concerning the SL, OCB-A and OCB-U, the following are the non-significant paths: (1) OCB-A and community interest ( $\beta = -0.126$ ;  $t = 1.546$ ,  $p < .061$ ); (2) OCB-U and community interest ( $\beta = 0.051$ ;  $t = 0.852$ ,  $p < .197$ ) (Figure 3).

In further detail, the non-significant findings show that: leader conduct (community interest) that prioritises taking the community's interests outside of the immediate organisation into consideration does not significantly affect OCB-A. The community's interest and OCB-U did not show a significant correlation. Since community interest activity has no direct benefit or influence on individual workers or the organisation, the outcomes of these two negligible correlations are not unexpected. Therefore, it may be difficult for the two OCB constructs (OCB-A and OCB-U) and the leader's community-interest conduct to have any meaningful impact.

Contrary to some studies, when community activity does not produce visible returns to individual employees or the organisation, it is not surprising that it does not foster reciprocity-based OCB among followers.

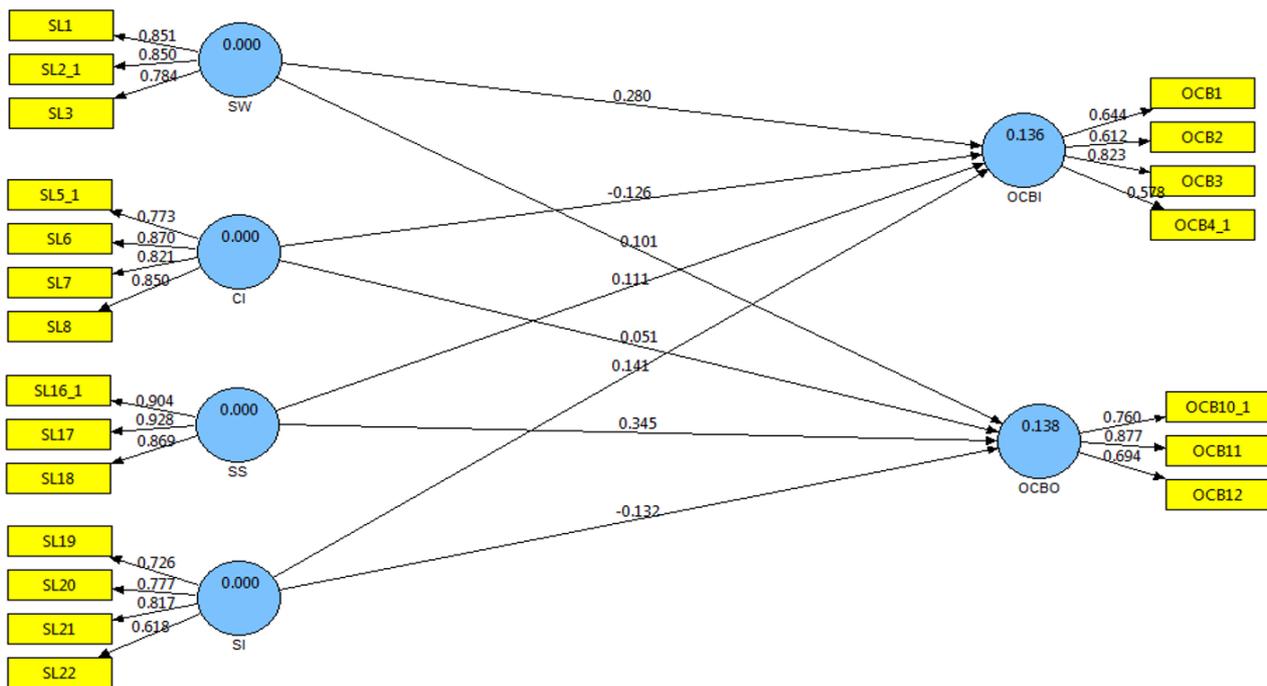


Fig. 3 – PLS Algorithm Graph for SERVANT LEADER and OCB-A and OCB-U

### 4.3 – Discussion

The findings show that OCB-A and OCB-U are positively related to psychological ownership, though OCB-A has a stronger impact and outweighs OCB-U. This trend indicates that when academics internalise a sense of mine-ness towards the institute they work at, they are more likely to engage in discretionary behaviour without expecting anything in return. The correlation between PO and OCB-A is stronger than that between OCB-U and OCB-A, as theoretically justified by the nature of academic work as a relationship (Azila-Gbettor et al. 2025; Wu et al., 2025). In this case, interpersonal reciprocity will come to the fore relative to institutional attachment. Hence, the emotional investment will arise with PO, which is easier to display in helping OCB-A than in OCB-U, which may be perceived as less reciprocated (Benchakhan et al., 2025). This observation aligns with van Dierendonck et al.'s (2024, p. 98) argument that PO is an internal motivational resource that supports discretionary behaviour in the face of weakened formal organisational support. Notably, the results extend previous studies by showing that PO persists even when attitudinal processes might be compromised by perceived job insecurity. This substantiates the position that PO reflects a more self-definitional attachment, firm in precarious circumstances.

The findings also indicate that SL is not a unitary construct with respect to its behavioural implications. For instance, the subordinate welfare dimension shows strong positive correlations with OCB-A and OCB-U, but the community interest dimension does not have any significant prediction on either type of OCB. The strong impact of subordinate welfare on OCB-A suggests that leadership behaviours focused on follower wellbeing while maintaining interpersonal OCB in a precarious academic situation. This will strengthen social exchange processes: when leaders are sincere and care about the wellbeing of academics, followers are more likely to reciprocate by helping their colleagues (Kim & Liden, 2025; Uslukaya et al., 2024).

The significance of subordinate welfare for OCB-U is less, suggesting that institution-directed OCB may require additional structural cues beyond interpersonal care, especially where institutional government is weak (Gustina et al., 2025, p. 45). Although SL has the potential to mitigate the negative impacts of precarity, it does not necessarily overcome systemic problems that affect organisational attachment (van Dierendonck et al., 2024).

The non-significant effects of the community interest dimension on both OCB-A and OCB-U constitute a significant boundary condition for the SL theory. This observation implies that servant leadership behaviours operate in a top-down manner within precarious environments, with greater certainty than an overarching community-based practice, rather than follower-focused ones (Farao & Riolli, 2023, p. 610). Similarly, community interest can affect outcomes at the institutional rather than the individual level (Azila-Gbetor et al., 2025).

#### **4.4 – Theoretical Contributions and Policy Implications**

There are three major theoretical contributions of this study.

– *First*, it builds on the PO theory by showing that it can be applied to discretionary behaviour in structural insecurity conditions, thus leaving behind the stable employment conditions that underpin the literature.

– *Second*, it contributes to the body of SL research by demonstrating that its dimensions do not affect precarity in the same way as was presumed in leadership research.

– *Third*, the study combines PO and SL in precarious academic labour, thereby filling the gap between micro-level psychological processes and macro-level labour-market factors and enhancing understanding of theories of work behaviour in the context of weak institutional factors.

Meanwhile, the findings have significant implications for higher education governance and administrators. University leaders should prioritise follower-oriented leadership practices that directly relate to the wellbeing of academics, as they are more likely to support discretionary effort in precarious conditions. Although POs can mitigate the impact of precarity, they cannot be used in lieu of structural changes that address unfair labour practices in the university system. Hence, higher education leadership development programmes should then focus on empathy.

### **5 – Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study discussed the critical role of PO and SL in promoting OCB at individual (OCB-A) and organisational (OCB-U) levels despite perceived precarious working conditions in Nigeria's higher education sector. It was discovered that if academics internalise their sense of "mine-ness" toward their university, they will exhibit increased discretionary engagement (altruism, courtesy, conscientiousness, civic virtue, and sportsmanship) beyond their formal job expectations. Although the increase in prosociality may have led to confusion between personal and university identities, it may also predispose academics to excessive commitment or exploitation in precarious working environments. Therefore, PO development can be an effective motivational tool; nevertheless, it is necessary to harmonise this tool with SL, such as by supporting organisational practices, to avoid burnout and ensure actual wellbeing.

The study concludes that SL behaviour, which focuses on subordinate welfare, has a significant impact on followers' OCB towards individuals (OCB-A) and the organisation (OCB-

U). This highlights the psychological give-and-take nature of the relationships between leaders and followers: when leaders genuinely care about employees' wellbeing, employees will reciprocate voluntarily, engaging in prosocial behaviour that can sustain collective performance. However, the insignificant effect of community interest on both OCB-A and OCB-U could imply that outward-oriented SL behaviours are perceived as peripheral or unrelated to followers' realities within an organisation. This difference suggests that, although SL is based on care and empathy as the source of organisational citizenship, the external, community-oriented component may not lead to actual behaviour in followers unless workers feel that it has a direct impact on their workplace or a connection to the overall purpose.

### **5.1 – Gaps, Limitations and Suggestions for Future Directions**

Contrary to some studies, when community activity does not produce visible returns to individual employees or the organisation, it is not surprising that it does not create reciprocity-based OCB among followers. The present study found that leader conduct (community interest) that prioritises taking the community's interests outside of the immediate organisation into consideration does not significantly affect OCB-A. This implies that community's interest and OCB-U did not show a significant correlation. Since community interest activity has no direct benefit or influence on individual workers or the organisation, the outcomes of these two negligible correlations are not unexpected. Therefore, it may be difficult for the two OCB constructs (OCB-A and OCB-U) and the leader's community-interest conduct to have any meaningful impact.

Most studies have positive results of connecting PO and SL to OCB-A/U (Aliyu & Ambali, 2022; Hotta et al., 2025). Kim and Liden (2025) have negative side effects or ambivalent behaviours (where a sense of entitlement accompanies ownership) unless well-managed. However, it is essential to recognise that universities across nations differ, with varying norms regarding extra-role behaviour, power distance, collectivism versus individualism, job security, and academic norms that may affect the translation of PO into OCB-U or OCB-A. Therefore, the composition of the present study's sample is essential because it is closely tied to academic concepts and the university, as well as the opportunities available for OCB. Future direction might incorporate multi-source data (peer-rated OCB) to mitigate social desirability bias inherent in self-report measures.

Most of the literature is cross-sectional, which limits causal inferences about individuals who tend to be helpful or loyal and may opt to take PO rather than the other way around. In this case, the longitudinal or experimental designs are required (Barba et al., 2025; Bartoll-Roca & Julià, 2021). Future research should adopt a longitudinal approach to verify causal pathways between SL, PO, and OCB across different institutional settings. Similarly, previous studies have included moderators such as occupational self-efficacy and PO (Azila-Gbetor et al., 2025), alternative employment (Gupta & Dhar, 2025), individual resilience (Wang & Zhao, 2025), and work engagement (Uslukaya et al., 2024). These studies have reported lower rates in cases of low organisational support towards the influence of PO on OCB-U. Lee and Di Ruggiero (2025) suggest that formal mechanisms for worker participation were either absent or structurally weakened, and that confrontational demands for criminalisation gained traction as an alternative strategy to contest entrenched power asymmetries, thereby undermining rather than enhancing the PO-OCB relationship.

Future studies may reduce common-method bias by using multiple sources or a time-lagged design (e.g., leader behaviour at T1, OCB rated by peers or supervisors at T2). The inculcation of moderators and mediators with perceived organisational support, affective commitment with respect to promotion-oriented and preventive-orientation PO. Likewise, leader-member exchange (LMX), cultural dimensions, academic rank, and tenure will make effective moderators. When testing the community interest dimension, testing community-level outcomes (external outreach, community partnerships, public engagement) will be crucial.

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