

RESPECT AND FAIRNESS AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS' CHARACTER COUNT TRAITS AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of respect and fairness demonstrated by instructional leaders on students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The research explored how instructional leaders' ethical behavior fosters an inclusive and equitable learning environment. A descriptive and correlational survey design was adopted, with data collected from 615 principals and teachers through a structured questionnaire. The study's instrument was validated by experts in educational management and leadership. Cronbach Alpha was employed to test for reliability of the instrument. The findings revealed a strong positive relationship between instructional leaders' respect and students' engagement, motivation, and academic success. Similarly, the demonstration of fairness in decision-making, discipline, and resource allocation fosters trust and inclusivity, leading to improved student performance. The study underlined the need for policymakers to prioritize leadership development programs that emphasized respect and fairness in educational settings. Strengthening instructional leaders' ethical practices will contribute to an improved school culture, fostering students' academic success and holistic development.

Keywords: Respect, Demonstration of Fairness, Instructional Leaders', Character Counts, Traits, Students, Academic Performance, Secondary Schools, Rivers State, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Instructional leaders' respect significantly impacts the school culture and students' academic performance. Leaders who demonstrate respect for their students, staff, and the broader school community create an environment where everyone feels valued and appreciated. Respectful

leaders listen to others' perspectives, acknowledge their contributions, and treat everyone with dignity and consideration. Between leaders, teachers, and students also promote a sense of belonging and inclusivity, which is essential for creating a supportive learning environment. In such an environment, students are more motivated to participate actively in their education, resulting in better academic outcomes. Instructional leaders who demonstrate respect in their interactions with staff and students set a standard for behaviour that promotes mutual respect and collaboration, key elements for effective learning and teaching (Akinola, 2019).

When leaders treat teachers with respect, it enhances their professional self-esteem and job satisfaction, leading to greater commitment and effort in their teaching roles. This commitment directly impacts the quality of instruction that students receive, thereby improving their academic performance (Okeke, 2020). Furthermore, when students observe their leaders' treating teachers and peers with respect, it models positive behaviour that they are likely to emulate, fostering a respectful and supportive school environment. Olowe (2018) opined that respectful leaders facilitate open communication and trust, which are essential for addressing issues promptly and effectively. This open communication ensures that the voices of teachers and students are heard and considered in decision-making processes, leading to a more inclusive and responsive educational environment, when students feel respected by their leaders, they are more likely to engage actively in their studies, participate in school activities, and exhibit positive attitudes towards learning. This engagement and positive attitude significantly enhance their academic performance. Ibukun (2019) asserted that Leaders who consistently demonstrate respect are better positioned to build strong, cohesive school communities that are focused on achieving academic excellence. Respectful leaders consistently report higher levels of student achievement and teacher effectiveness.

Instructional leaders' fairness ensures that all students are given equal opportunities to succeed, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities. Fairness involves impartial decision-making, equitable distribution of resources, and consistent application of rules and policies (Fullan, 2014). Leaders who exhibit fairness create an environment where students feel valued and supported, knowing that their efforts will be recognized and rewarded based on merit. When students perceive their leaders as fair, they are more likely to trust the system and engage in their educational activities. Moreover, caring is a vital trait of instructional leaders that significantly impacts students' academic performance. Fair leaders ensure that policies and decisions are transparent, impartial, and based on merit, which builds trust and credibility within the school community (Akinola, 2019). When leaders consistently apply fair practices in discipline, grading, and resource allocation, they create a level playing field that allows all students to thrive academically, regardless of background or circumstance. This commitment to fairness also extends to teacher evaluations and professional development opportunities, ensuring that educators receive equitable support and recognition for their contributions to student achievement.

Onyeka (2018) opined that fair instructional leaders are also adept at resolving conflicts impartially and fostering inclusive decision-making processes that consider diverse perspectives, which contributes to a harmonious school environment conducive to academic success. Students who perceive their leaders as fair are more likely to feel motivated and respected, leading to increased attendance, participation, and academic performance. Moreover, fair leadership enhances accountability and reduces instances of misconduct or dissatisfaction among students and staff, thereby promoting a positive school culture that supports continuous improvement and excellence. Cultivating fairness as a core characteristic of instructional leaders is essential for

improving academic performance in secondary schools, as it promotes trust, accountability, and inclusivity, ultimately contributing to the holistic development and success of students.

Statement of the Problem

In spite the crucial role of instructional leaders in shaping students' academic success; concerns persist regarding the extent to which respect and fairness are embedded in instructional leadership practices. Many schools continue to struggle with student disengagement, lack of trust in the education system, low motivation, and deficiency in fairness and inclusivity among instructional leaders negatively impact students' willingness to engage in learning and trust the educational system.

In Rivers State, where schools operate in diverse socio-economic environments, the need for instructional leaders to demonstrate respect and fairness is even more critical. While studies highlight the importance of ethical leadership, there remains a gap in empirical research linking respect and fairness in instructional leadership to students' academic performance. This study sought to fill this gap by examining how these leadership traits influence students' engagement, motivation, and academic achievement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between respect and demonstration of fairness as instructional leaders' character counts and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The study specifically sought to:

- Evaluate the extent instructional leaders respect enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools, Rivers State.
- Assess the extent instructional leaders' demonstration of fairness enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to guide the Study:

- To what extent does instructional leaders' respect enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
- To what extent does instructional leaders' demonstration of fairness enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary school in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at .05 level of significance:

- There is no significant relationship between instructional leaders' respect and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

- There is no significant relationship between instructional leader's fairness and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

CONCEPTUAL DEBATE

Values are traits or qualities of leadership that are considered worthwhile; they represent highest priorities and deeply held driving forces in the management of institutions (Mohammed, 2013). Effective leaderships are based on values, which means doing the right thing for the right reasons without compromising core principles (Ololube, 2013). Values guide leaders in a way of living that feels good and right after the fact. Value-based leaders expect good consequences if they embrace and live on the values and bad consequences if they reject and do not follow them.

Leaders of good moral character are clearly directed and guided not only by self-interest, but also by what is best for the institutions and organisation (Bangari & Prasad, 2012). Moral leadership involves leading in a manner which considers the rights and respects to their employees; they do not victimize their subordinates. Moral leaders have a high level of integrity, which is crucial in creating a bond and trust in the minds and feelings of their subordinates. It is very important for subordinates to see leadership vision that would make sense and why they are following such leader. The main character that guides leaders' morals is their beliefs, values, and decisions (Andria, 2013).

The principles of leaders determine their character and the character of such leaders determines the character of employees in their institution (Ololube, 2013). The principle of being honest refers to diverse aspects of a leader's character. It depicts the positive and worthy characteristics of a leader, such as uprightness, sincerity, truthfulness and straightforwardness. According to Bryant (2015), principles in the character of leadership are rooted in personal doctrine or institutional values, and are specific source for management. It requires determination, belief and great self-discipline to stick to a course when leaders are faced with temptation to compromise principles.

Ethics deals with what is good and bad in the management of institutions. According to Ololube (2024), ethical leaders think about the long-term consequences, drawbacks and benefits of their decisions. They are humbled, concerned about the greater good of the institution, strive for fairness on issues that concerns employees, take responsibilities and show respect for every individual in the organisation. Ethical leaders serve as role models to employees and show them behavioural boundaries set within the institutions. Leaders who follow ethical principles are perceived to be honest and trustworthy, as much as possible demonstrate integrity (Mihelic et al., 2010).

Instructional Leaders' Respect and Students Academic Performance

Right from inception respect has been an essential attribute of instructional leadership, crucial for fostering a positive and inclusive educational environment. It involves recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals, treating them with consideration and valuing their contributions (Ajayi, 2020).

Although respect is closely linked to fairness and equity, as it involves treating all individuals with impartiality and providing equal opportunities for success. Instructional leaders who embody respect set a positive example for their community, promoting a culture of inclusivity and collaboration that enhances the overall educational experience (Adekunle, 2022).

Respect is a fundamental attribute of effective instructional leadership and significantly influences student academic performance. This trait encompasses recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of every individual within the educational environment, including students, teachers, and parents. Respectful principals create a positive school climate that fosters mutual trust, collaboration, and a sense of belonging, all of which are critical for enhancing academic outcomes.

Respectful instructional leaders contribute to creating a positive learning environment by treating all members of the school community with dignity and consideration. Oluwaseun (2019) argued that when instructional leaders show respect towards teachers and students, it establishes a foundation of mutual respect and trust. This positive atmosphere encourages students to express themselves freely, engage in classroom activities, and take bold steps to overcome educational obstacles. A respectful environment reduces fear and anxiety, allowing students to focus on their studies and perform better academically. Student engagement is closely linked to the level of respect they perceive from their instructional leaders and teachers. When instructional leaders exhibit respect, they validate students' opinions, ideas, and efforts. This validation enhances students' self-esteem and motivation to participate actively in their education.

Adegboye (2018) emphasized that students who feel respected are more likely to engage in learning activities, attend classes regularly, and show interest in schoolwork. Engagement is a critical factor in academic success, as it drives students to put forth their best efforts and achieve their academic goals. Respectful leaders promote inclusivity by valuing diversity and ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, abilities, or needs, receive equitable treatment and opportunities. Chukwuemeka (2020) highlighted that inclusivity in education is vital for addressing the diverse needs of the student population. Respectful leaders ensure that all students have access to quality education and the necessary support to succeed academically by fostering an inclusive environment. Inclusive practices, such as differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching, help close achievement gaps and improve overall student performance.

Respectful instructional leaders' model positive behaviours and set the tone for respectful interactions within the school. This modelling influences the relationships between teachers and students, promoting a culture of mutual respect and understanding. Oladipo (2021) noted that strong teacher-student relationships are crucial for creating a supportive learning environment. When teachers show respect towards their students, it fosters a positive classroom climate where students feel valued and understood. These positive relationships encourage students to seek help when needed, participate in discussions, and collaborate with their peers, all of which contribute to better academic outcomes.

Respectful principals and teachers help reduce behavioural issues and create a disciplined learning environment. When students feel respected, they are less likely to engage in disruptive behaviours and more likely to follow school rules and expectations. Oluwaseun (2019) pointed out that respect from principals and teachers leads to a decrease in disciplinary incidents, which allows for more effective teaching and learning. A well-managed classroom environment, free from frequent disruptions, enables students to focus on their studies and achieve higher academic performance.

Respectful instructional leaders inspire positive attitudes towards students by recognizing and celebrating their academic performance, achievements and efforts. Adegboye (2018) argued that acknowledging students' hard work and accomplishments fosters a sense of pride and motivation. When students feel that their efforts are appreciated and respected, they develop a

positive attitude towards learning and are more likely to set and pursue academic goals. This positive attitude is essential for sustaining long-term academic success and personal growth.

Respect within the educational sphere is not merely a social nicety but a fundamental element that deeply influences students' academic performance and overall school experience. Respect involves acknowledging the inherent worth of every individual, valuing diverse perspectives, and fostering an inclusive environment where all students feel heard and appreciated. This sense of respect can significantly enhance students' engagement, motivation, and ultimately, their academic achievements. At the core of education respect is the recognition of students as active participants in the learning process. Chukwudi (2017) argued that when students feel respected by their teachers, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards learning and exhibit higher levels of academic engagement. Respectful interactions create a classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas, asking questions, and participating in discussions. This open exchange of ideas not only enriches the learning experience but also helps students develop critical thinking and communication skills.

The concept of respect involves recognizing and valuing the unique perspectives, backgrounds, and contributions of each student, which can significantly enhance their self-esteem and motivation. This inclusive approach ensures that all students feel valued and understood, leading to increased participation and collaboration in the classroom (Gbenga, 2022). Furthermore, respectful interactions between teachers and students help to establish a classroom environment where students feel safe to express their ideas and take academic risks, which is essential for intellectual growth and innovation (Femi, 2021). When respect is embedded in the educational culture, it fosters a sense of belonging and community among students, which is crucial for their academic and social development. The emphasis on respect not only enhances academic performance but also prepares students to become respectful and empathetic individuals in society.

Respect also plays a crucial role in the development of a positive classroom culture. Eze (2020) posited that classrooms characterized by mutual respect between teachers and students tend to be more collaborative and supportive. In such environments, students are more likely to work together, support each other, and engage in cooperative learning activities. This collaborative spirit can lead to improved academic outcomes as students learn from their peers and benefit from diverse perspectives. Respect within the educational context extends to acknowledging and valuing the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and learning styles of all students. In the view of Ogunleye (2020), culturally responsive teaching practices that respect and incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum can significantly improve academic outcomes by making learning more relevant and meaningful.

When students see their identities and experiences reflected in the curriculum, they are more likely to engage with the material and feel a sense of belonging in the classroom. The concept of respect also intersects with educational equity and fairness. Afolabi (2020) highlighted that respectful treatment involves providing all students with equal opportunities to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances. This includes fair grading practices, equitable access to resources, and support for students with diverse needs. When students perceive that they are being treated fairly and respectfully, their trust in the educational system increases, leading to enhanced academic motivation and performance.

Moreover, respect is a crucial component in building strong teacher-student relationships. Oluwaseun (2019) argued that students who feel respected by their teachers are more likely to develop positive relationships with them, which can significantly impact their academic

performance. Strong teacher-student relationships characterized by mutual respect and trust can lead to increased student engagement, motivation, and academic success. These relationships also provide students with a sense of stability and support, which is crucial for their overall well-being. Respect within the educational context is a multifaceted construct that significantly impacts students' academic performance and overall school experience. Educators can create a supportive and inclusive environment that enhances academic engagement and success, by fostering a culture of respect through acknowledging students' worth, valuing diverse perspectives, and promoting equitable practices. The benefits of respect extend beyond academic performance, contributing to students' sense of belonging, overall well-being, and satisfaction with their educational journey.

Instructional Leaders' Fairness and Students Academic Performance

Fairness is a crucial character trait of instructional leaders, essential for ensuring that all students and staff are treated equitably and justly. It involves making impartial decisions, providing equal opportunities, and addressing the needs and concerns of all members of the school community. In the view of Nwachukwu (2019), instructional leaders' fairness is demonstrated through transparent decision-making processes, consistent application of rules and policies, and a commitment to addressing issues of bias and discrimination. Instructional leaders who prioritize fairness create a supportive and equitable learning environment where all students have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances. Moreover, fairness extends to the professional development and evaluation of teachers, ensuring that they receive constructive feedback and opportunities for growth based on objective criteria (Adesina, 2021).

Instructional leaders can build a culture of trust and respect, fostering positive relationships and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the educational institution, by promoting fairness. One of the primary ways instructional leaders' fairness impacts student academic performances is through the equitable distribution of resources. Instructional leaders who practice fairness ensure that all students have access to the necessary materials, support, and opportunities to succeed academically. Oladipo (2021) emphasized that fair distribution of resources helps to bridge the gap between students from different socio-economic backgrounds, providing them with equal opportunities to learn and excel. Fairness demonstrated by principals and teachers create a level playing field that enables all students to perform to the best of their abilities, by addressing disparities in resource allocation.

Instructional leaders' fairness is also reflected in impartial decision-making processes. Instructional leaders who are fair in making decisions based on objective criteria and consistent standards, rather than favouritism or bias. This impartiality fosters a sense of justice and trust among students, which is crucial for creating a positive school climate. It is necessary to point out that when students perceive decisions as fair, they are more likely to accept and abide by all school rules and laws, reducing instances of conflict, bullying and promoting a harmonious learning environment. Impartial decision-making also ensures that disciplinary actions are administered consistently, which helps maintain order and discipline in the school (Chukwuemeka, 2020).

Inclusive policies and practices are another important aspect of instructional leaders' fairness. Fair leaders implement policies that cater to the diverse needs of all students, including those with special educational needs and disabilities. Oluwaseun (2019) highlighted those inclusive practices, such as differentiated instruction and personalized learning plans, help ensure

that every student receives the support they need to succeed. Instructional leaders create an environment where all students feel valued and included, which enhances their academic motivation and performance, by promoting inclusivity. However, instructional leadership fairness involves promoting equity in opportunities for all students. This includes providing equal access to advanced courses, extracurricular activities, and enrichment programs. Oladipo (2021) noted that by ensuring equitable opportunities, instructional leaders help students develop their talents and interests, which contributes to their overall academic success. Equity in opportunities also helps to identify and nurture potential in students who might otherwise be overlooked, fostering a diverse and dynamic learning environment.

Chukwuemeka (2020) noted that instructional leaders' fairness builds trust and respect between teachers and students. When students perceive their leaders as fair, they are more likely to trust their intentions and decisions. He also emphasized that this trust is essential for creating a positive school climate where students feel safe and supported. Trustworthy relationships between leaders and students enhance communication, cooperation, and mutual respect, all of which are critical for academic success. Fairness in leadership also promotes a culture of respect and integrity, encouraging students to adopt these values in their own interactions. Instructional leaders' fairness is instrumental in reducing achievement gaps among students. Fair leaders help to close the gap between high-achieving and low-achieving students, by addressing inequalities and providing targeted support to disadvantaged students.

How Instructional Leaders' Fairness Enhance Students Academic Performance

Fairness in education is an essential element that significantly influences students' academic performance by ensuring equal opportunities for success and impartial assessments and evaluations. Fairness in educational contexts entails equitable treatment of all students, unbiased administration of academic policies, and provision of appropriate support to meet diverse student needs. This comprehensive approach fosters an inclusive environment where students feel valued and supported, ultimately enhancing their academic experiences and outcomes. Adeyemi (2016) underscores that students' perceptions of fairness in their academic environment are closely linked to their trust in the educational system and their motivation to achieve academically. When students believe they are treated fairly, they are more likely to engage fully in their educational activities and strive to reach their academic potential. This sense of fairness bolsters their confidence in the system, leading to increased effort and better academic performance.

Akinwumi (2019) highlighted the importance of fairness in reducing instances of academic misconduct and promoting a culture of integrity and responsibility among students. Fairness in education not only affects students' academic performance but also their ethical behaviour. When students perceive the system as fair, they are less likely to engage in dishonest practices, such as cheating or plagiarism, because they trust that their efforts will be justly rewarded. Onyekachi (2023) added that fair treatment and unbiased evaluations contribute to a positive academic experience, fostering a sense of justice and equity that encourages students to perform to the best of their abilities. When students feel that their efforts are recognized and rewarded fairly, they are more motivated to excel. This positive reinforcement not only enhances their academic performance but also their overall satisfaction with the educational experience.

The concept of fairness in education also extends to the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, ensuring that all students have access to the necessary resources, such as quality teaching, learning materials, and support services, is crucial for promoting

fairness. Adedoyin (2017) argued that disparities in resource allocation can lead to unequal educational outcomes, with disadvantaged students being left behind. Therefore, educational institutions must strive to bridge these gaps by providing adequate support to all students, regardless of their background or circumstances. Fairness in education requires the implementation of unbiased assessment methods. As noted by Obinna (2020), traditional assessment methods often fail to capture the diverse abilities and strengths of students, leading to biased outcomes. Promoting fairness within the educational framework is essential for enhancing students' academic performance and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed and thrive in their academic pursuits. Fairness in education encompasses equitable treatment, unbiased administration of academic policies, and the provision of appropriate support to meet diverse student needs.

Fairness also impacts how instructional leaders address student discipline, which has a significant bearing on academic outcomes. Instructional leaders who implement consistent, transparent, and equitable disciplinary practices reduce the likelihood of bias and foster a supportive learning environment (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Such approaches enable students to feel valued and respected, which enhances their willingness to participate actively in their education.

Another way fairness enhances academic performance is through the promotion of teacher effectiveness. When instructional leaders fairly evaluate and support teachers, it leads to professional growth and improved instructional quality. Smith and Osborn (2012) argued that fair teacher evaluations based on objective criteria and constructive feedback encourage teachers to adopt best practices, ultimately benefiting student learning. Furthermore, teachers who perceive their leaders as fair are more likely to feel motivated and committed to their roles, which positively affects classroom dynamics and student achievement.

Fairness in curriculum implementation also plays a significant role in fostering academic success. Instructional leaders who ensure that curricula are inclusive, culturally responsive, and reflective of diverse student needs create a more engaging and equitable learning experience. Fiore (2014) emphasized that such inclusivity not only improves students' academic performance but also promotes critical thinking and empathy, essential skills for future success.

The relational aspect of fairness is equally important. Students who perceive their instructional leaders as fair are more likely to trust them and feel supported in their academic journeys. Fullan (2011) posited that fairness fosters a sense of belonging, which is directly linked to higher levels of academic motivation and performance. Students who feel that their efforts are recognized and their challenges understood are more likely to invest in their education and strive for excellence.

Moreover, fairness in instructional leadership encourages the development of an inclusive school culture that values diversity and equity. This culture reduces instances of bullying, discrimination, and marginalization, creating a safe and supportive environment conducive to learning. Cohen et al. (2013) suggested that inclusive school climates lead to better attendance, reduced dropout rates, and higher academic achievement.

Resource allocation is another area where fairness is frequently contested. Instructional leaders must make difficult decisions about how to distribute limited resources such as funding, technology, and teaching staff. These decisions can create perceptions of favoritism or inequity, particularly when certain groups feel underserved. Fiore (2014) suggested that transparency and stakeholder involvement in resource allocation processes are essential for mitigating these perceptions and fostering a sense of fairness.

Solutions to these challenges begin with self-awareness and ethical leadership. Instructional leaders must critically examine their own biases and actively seek to understand the diverse perspectives within their school communities. Ongoing professional development focused on equity, cultural competence, and implicit bias is essential for building the skills necessary to lead fairly. Fullan (2011) emphasized the importance of modelling fairness in decision-making and communication, which sets a standard for the entire school.

Transparent and inclusive decision-making processes are another key solution. Leaders should involve teachers, students, and parents in discussions about policies, evaluations, and resource distribution. Collaborative decision-making fosters trust and ensures that diverse viewpoints are considered, reducing the likelihood of perceived bias. Cohen et al. (2013) argued that stakeholder engagement not only enhances perceptions of fairness but also strengthens the overall effectiveness of leadership decisions.

Addressing systemic inequities requires instructional leaders to advocate for policy changes while implementing targeted interventions at the school level. For example, allocating additional resources to underserved classrooms or providing professional development for teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy can help reduce disparities. Smith and Osborn (2012) highlighted the role of data-driven decision-making in identifying and addressing inequities, ensuring that resources and opportunities are distributed based on actual needs rather than assumptions.

METHODS

The study adopted mix-method designs. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to test the null hypothesis at .05 level of significance. The population for this study comprised the entire 320 principals and 5,833 teachers resulting to 6,153 in 320 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State (Rivers State Universal Basic Education Board, 2024). The sample size for the study comprised of principals and teachers (615 respondents) which is 10% of the population.

The instrument for data collection was a close-form self-designed questionnaire. The respondents were required to indicate their opinions on a 4-point Likert scale in the form of very high extent (VHE), high extent (HE), low extent (LE), very low extent (VLE) in scores of 4, 3, 2, and 1 point respectively.

In order to validate the instrument, the questionnaire alongside the research questions and hypothesis was given to three experts in the Faculty of Education for scrutiny. The reliability of the study was established using Cronbach Alpha Reliability method and reliability index of value of .927 and 831 was realised.

The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistic of mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The null hypotheses were tested using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) at .05 level of significance. The data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences Software (SPSS version 28).

RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent does instructional leaders' respect influence students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of instructional leaders' respect influence students' academic performance

S/N	Instructional leaders' respect and students' academic performance	Mean	SD.	Remarks
1	Instructional leader's respect for students' opinions enhances their academic participation.	3.3837	.86691	High Extent
2	When students feel respected by their instructional leaders, they are more likely to engage actively in their studies, participate in school activities, and exhibit positive attitudes towards learning thereby enhancing their academic performance.	3.3610	.91305	High Extent
3	Instructional leaders' demonstration of courtesy reduces students' academic anxiety and improves academic engagement.	3.4016	.95142	High Extent
Grand mean and SD.		3.3821	.91046	High Extent

Table 1 presented the data that examined instructional leaders' respect influence students' academic performance and the results revealed that instructional leader's respect for students' opinions enhances their academic participation ($M = 3.3837$; $SD = .86691$), and respondents agreed to a high extent that when students feel respected by their instructional leaders, they are more likely to engage actively in their studies, participate in school activities, and exhibit positive attitudes towards learning thereby enhancing their academic performance ($M = 3.3610$; $SD = .91305$). The respondents went further to note that instructional leaders' demonstration of courtesy reduces students' academic anxiety and improves academic engagement ($M = 3.4016$; $SD = .95142$). Overall, the results as presented revealed those instructional leaders' respect influence students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This is as reflected in the grand mean and standard deviation of 3.3821 and .91046 respectively.

Research Question 2: To what extent does instructional leaders' demonstration of fairness enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary school in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of instructional leaders' demonstration of fairness enhance students' academic performance

S/N	Instructional leaders' demonstration of fairness and students' academic performance	Mean	SD.	Remarks
4	Instructional leaders who consistently apply fair practices in discipline, grading, and resource allocation, creates a conducive environment that allows students to thrive academically and enhance students' academic trust.	3.1333	1.16760	High Extent
5	Instructional leaders' fairness at resolving conflicts impartially contributes to a harmonious school environment conducive to students' academic improvement and success.	3.4211	.93774	High Extent
6	Instructional leaders' demonstration of justice improves students' academic satisfaction and complaints.	2.8520	1.25660	High Extent
Grand mean and SD.		3.1354	1.12064	High Extent

The data in Table 2 evaluated instructional leaders' demonstration of fairness enhance students' academic performance and the results exposed to a high extent that instructional leaders who consistently apply fair practices in discipline, grading, and resource allocation, creates a conducive environment that allows students to thrive academically and enhance students' academic trust ($M = 3.1333$; $SD = 1.16760$). The respondents similarly agreed to a high extent that instructional leaders' fairness at resolving conflicts impartially contributes to a harmonious school environment conducive to students' academic improvement and success ($M = 3.4211$; $SD = .93774$), and also agreed to a high extent that instructional leaders' demonstration of justice improves students' academic satisfaction and complaints ($M = 2.8520$; $SD = 1.25660$). Largely, respondents agreed to a high extent that instructional leaders' demonstration of fairness enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary school in Rivers State, this is reflected in the grand mean and standard deviation of 3.1354 and 1.12064 respectively.

Test of Hypotheses

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between instructional leaders' respect and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 3: PPMC analysis of relationship between instructional leaders' respect and students' academic performance

		Instructional leaders' respect	Students' academic performance
Instructional leaders' respect	Pearson Correlation	1	.484**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	615	615
Students' academic performance	Pearson Correlation	.484**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	615	615

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 determined if significant relationship exist between instructional leaders' respect and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The PPMC analysis conducted showed that significant relationship between instructional leaders' respect and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State ($r = .484^{**}$, Sig (2-tailed) = .000, and $N = 615$). Therefore, hypothesis one was rejected.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between instructional leader's fairness and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 4: PPMC analysis of relationship between instructional leader's fairness and students' academic performance

		Instructional leaders' respect	Students' academic performance
Instructional leaders' respect	Pearson Correlation	1	.699**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	615	615
Students' academic performance	Pearson Correlation	.699**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	615	615

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 validated if significant relationship exist between instructional leader's fairness and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, and the results obtained exposed to view that there is significant relationship between instructional leader's fairness and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State ($r = .699^{**}$, Sig (2-tailed) = .000, and $N = 615$). Hence, hypothesis two was rejected.

DISCUSSION

Instructional Leaders' Respect and Students Academic Performance

Findings from research question one and hypothesis two showed that respondents agreed to a high extent, instructional leaders' respect influence students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, and that there is significant relationship between instructional leaders' respect and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

These findings are in line with the study of Ajayi (2020) who distinguished that right from inception; respect has been an essential attribute of instructional leadership, crucial for fostering a positive and inclusive educational environment. It involves recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals, treating them with consideration and valuing their contributions. Although Adekunle (2022) found that respect is closely linked to fairness and equity because it involves treating all individuals with impartiality and providing equal opportunities for success. Instructional leaders who embody respect set a positive example for their community, promoting a culture of inclusivity and collaboration that enhances the overall educational experience. Respect is a fundamental attribute of effective instructional leadership and significantly influences student academic performance. This trait encompasses recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of every individual within the educational environment, including students, teachers, and parents. Thus, respectful principals and teachers create a positive school climate that fosters mutual trust, collaboration, and a sense of belonging, all of which are critical for enhancing academic outcomes.

Nonetheless, Oluwaseun (2019) argued that when instructional leaders show respect towards teachers and students, it establishes a foundation of mutual respect and trust. This positive atmosphere encourages students to express themselves freely, engage in classroom activities, and take bold steps to overcome educational obstacles. A respectful environment reduces fear and anxiety, allowing students to focus on their studies and perform better

academically. Student engagement is closely linked to the level of respect they perceive from their instructional leaders and teachers. When instructional leaders exhibit respect, they validate students' opinions, ideas, and efforts. This validation enhances students' self-esteem and motivation to participate actively in their education, and Adegboye (2018) emphasized that students who feel respected are more likely to engage in learning activities, attend classes regularly, and show interest in schoolwork. Engagement is a critical factor in academic success, as it drives students to put forth their best efforts and achieve their academic goals. Respectful leaders promote inclusivity by valuing diversity and ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, abilities, or needs, receive equitable treatment and opportunities.

In the same way, Chukwuemeka (2020) and Oladipo (2021) highlighted that respectful leaders ensure that all students have access to quality education and the necessary support to succeed academically by fostering an inclusive environment. Inclusive practices, such as differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching, help close achievement gaps and improve overall student performance. They further noted that strong teacher-student relationships are crucial for creating a supportive learning environment. When teachers show respect towards their students, it fosters a positive classroom climate where students feel valued and understood. These positive relationships encourage students to seek help when needed, participate in discussions, and collaborate with their peers, all of which contribute to better academic outcomes.

Oluwaseun (2019) pointed out in his study that respect from principals and teachers leads to a decrease in disciplinary incidents, which allows for more effective teaching and learning. A well-managed classroom environment, free from frequent disruptions, enables students to focus on their studies and achieve higher academic performance. In addition, Adegboye (2018) argued that acknowledging students' hard work and accomplishments fosters a sense of pride and motivation. When students feel that their efforts are appreciated and respected, they develop a positive attitude towards learning and are more likely to set and pursue academic goals. This positive attitude is essential for sustaining long-term academic success and personal growth.

Instructional Leaders' Fairness and Students Academic Performance

The findings from research question two and hypothesis two revealed to a high extent that instructional leaders' demonstration of fairness enhances students' academic performance in public senior secondary school in Rivers State, and that there is significant relationship between instructional leader's fairness and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

These finding are in line with the view of Nwachukwu (2019) who expressed that instructional leaders' fairness is demonstrated through transparent decision-making processes, consistent application of rules and policies, and a commitment to addressing issues of bias and discrimination. Instructional leaders who prioritize fairness create a supportive and equitable learning environment where all students have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances. Moreover, Adesina (2021) conveyed that fairness extends to the professional development and evaluation of teachers, ensuring that they receive constructive feedback and opportunities for growth based on objective criteria. Likewise, Oladipo (2021) emphasized that fair distribution of resources helps to bridge the gap between students from different socio-economic backgrounds, providing them with equal opportunities to learn and excel. He further noted that fairness demonstrated by principals and teachers create a level

playing field that enables all students to perform to the best of their abilities, by addressing disparities in resource allocation.

In addition, Chukwuemeka (2020) found that instructional leaders' fairness is also reflected in impartial decision-making processes. That is, instructional leaders who are fair in making decisions based on objective criteria and consistent standards, rather than favouritism or bias. This impartiality fosters a sense of justice and trust among students, which is crucial for creating a positive school climate. It is necessary to point out that when students perceive decisions as fair, they are more likely to accept and abide by all school rules and laws, reducing instances of conflict, bullying and promoting a harmonious learning environment. Impartial decision-making also ensures that disciplinary actions are administered consistently, which helps maintain order and discipline in the school.

Oluwaseun (2019) and Oladipo (2021) highlighted that the inclusive practices, such as differentiated instruction and personalized learning plans, help ensure that every student receives the support they need to succeed. Instructional leaders create an environment where all students feel valued and included, which enhances their academic motivation and performance, by promoting inclusivity. However, instructional leadership fairness involves promoting equity in opportunities for all students. This includes providing equal access to advanced courses, extracurricular activities, and enrichment programs. Instructional leaders help students develop their talents and interests, which contributes to their overall academic success. Equity in opportunities also helps to identify and nurture potential in students who might otherwise be overlooked, fostering a diverse and dynamic learning environment.

Furthermore, Chukwuemeka (2020) noted that instructional leaders' fairness builds trust and respect between teachers and students. When students perceive their leaders as fair, they are more likely to trust their intentions and decisions. He also emphasized that this trust is essential for creating a positive school climate where students feel safe and supported. Trustworthy relationships between leaders and students enhance communication, cooperation, and mutual respect, all of which are critical for academic success. Fairness in leadership also promotes a culture of respect and integrity, encouraging students to adopt these values in their own interactions. Instructional leaders' fairness is instrumental in reducing achievement gaps among students. Fair leaders help to close the gap between high-achieving and low-achieving students, by addressing inequalities and providing targeted support to disadvantaged students.

CONCLUSION

The study evaluated the influence of respect and demonstration of fairness as instructional leaders' character counts traits promotes students' academic performance in secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings of the study confirmed that respect and fairness demonstrated by instructional leaders significantly enhance students' academic performance in secondary schools in Rivers State. Respectful leadership promotes positive and inclusive learning environment, increasing student motivation, participation, and engagement. Fair leadership promotes trust, reduces conflicts, and ensures equal opportunities for all students, contributing to improved academic outcomes. The study emphasized the need for continuous professional development programs for instructional leaders, focusing on ethical leadership principles. Educational policymakers should integrate respect and fairness training into leadership development programs to create a more inclusive and equitable school system.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, it is recommended:

- The Ministry of Education should further inspire instructional leaders' on how respect influence students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- The Ministry of Education should motivate instructional leaders' on how to demonstrate fairness to enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary school in Rivers State.

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