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DEMONSTRATING CARING BEHAVIOUR AND CITIZENSHIP AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS' TRAITS AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of instructional leaders' demonstration of caring behavior and citizenship traits on students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The research explored how the modeling of empathy, fairness, and ethical leadership by instructional leaders fosters a positive academic environment. A descriptive and correlational survey design was employed, with data collected from 615 principals and teachers using a structured questionnaire. Results indicate a significant positive relationship between caring leadership and students' academic performance, as well as between citizenship-oriented leadership and improved student engagement. The findings highlighted that when instructional leaders display genuine care, students feel valued, which enhances motivation, attendance, and participation. Additionally, citizenship traits, such as promoting inclusivity and ethical decision-making, contribute to academic integrity and community involvement. The study concluded and recommended the need for policymakers to integrate leadership training programs focusing on these character traits. Strengthening the implementation of character-based leadership principles can lead to improved educational outcomes and holistic student development.

Keyword: Demonstration, Caring Behaviour, Citizenship, Instructional Leaders' Character Counts, Traits, Students', Academic Performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Instructional leaders who exhibit a caring attitude foster a nurturing environment that promotes both the academic and emotional well-being of students and staff, thereby enhancing overall

school performance. Caring leaders demonstrate empathy, support, and a genuine concern for the needs and challenges of their teachers and students, which creates a positive and inclusive school culture (Adewuyi, 2020). This supportive atmosphere encourages teachers to invest more in their teaching practices, knowing that their efforts are recognized and valued. As a result, they are more motivated to employ innovative teaching methods and provide individualized attention to students, leading to improved academic outcomes. When students perceive their instructional leaders as caring, they are more likely to attend school regularly, participate actively in class, and strive to meet academic expectations. This heightened engagement and motivation translate into better academic performance and higher achievement levels (Eze, 2020). Additionally, caring leaders are adept at creating a safe and supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns. This open communication fosters a sense of belonging and community, which is essential for academic success.

Okafor (2018) asserted that leaders who consistently show care and support for their students and staff can help mitigate these challenges by providing encouragement and resources necessary for academic success. Furthermore, caring instructional leaders often go beyond the academic needs of their students by addressing their social and emotional needs, which is crucial for holistic development. This holistic approach ensures that students are not only academically proficient but also emotionally resilient and capable of overcoming personal and academic challenges. Fostering a caring attitude among instructional leaders is essential for improving academic performance in Nigerian secondary schools, as it enhances teacher-student relationships, promotes a positive school climate, and supports the overall development of students.

Citizenship as a character trait of instructional leaders significantly correlates with academic performance. Eze (2017) posited that citizenship-oriented leaders are likely to implement curricular and extracurricular programs that emphasize civic education, ethical decision-making, and community service, thereby integrating academic learning with real-world applications that prepare students for active participation in society. Such leaders also prioritize inclusivity, ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to participate in school activities and contribute to the school community, which fosters a sense of belonging and motivation to succeed academically.

Furthermore, citizenship-driven leadership enhances the ethical climate of the school, reducing incidences of academic dishonesty and promoting integrity in both teaching and learning processes (Adebayo, 2018). Citizenship-oriented leaders consistently report higher levels of student engagement, academic achievement, and community involvement. Therefore, implementing these character traits of instructional leaders is essential for improving students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized importance of instructional leadership in shaping students' academic performance, there is a growing concern about the extent to which instructional leaders in secondary schools demonstrate caring behaviors and citizenship traits. Many schools continue to face challenges related to student disengagement, poor academic motivation, and low performance, which may stem from a lack of supportive leadership. The absence of a nurturing school climate, where students feel valued and included, can negatively impact their willingness to participate in academic activities. Moreover, limited attention to citizenship traits, such as

ethical decision-making and inclusivity, may hinder the development of a responsible and engaged student body.

In the context of Rivers State, where schools operate in diverse socio-economic environments, the role of instructional leaders in establishing a culture of care and civic responsibility becomes even more crucial. However, empirical studies examining the direct relationship between these leadership traits and students' academic performance remain scarce. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how the demonstration of caring behaviors and citizenship by instructional leaders influences student engagement 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 the demonstration of caring behaviour and citizenship as instructional leaders' traits and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The study specifically sought to:

- Evaluate the extent instructional leaders' demonstration of caring behaviour enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- Determine the extent instructional leaders' demonstration of citizenship 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' demonstration of caring behaviours enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
- To what extent does instructional leaders' demonstration of citizenship enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to further guide the study:

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

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Instructional Leaders' Traits

The character of instructional leaders is a special aspect that determines their effectiveness and influence within educational settings. Character, in this context, encompasses a range of attributes and values that define the ethical and moral framework within which leaders operate.

Ibrahim (2017) noted that the integrity, honesty, and ethical behaviour of instructional leaders are paramount in establishing trust and credibility among teachers, students, and the broader school community. Instructional leaders who exhibit strong character are more likely to inspire confidence and respect, thereby encouraging a positive and productive educational environment (Eze, 2018).

However, the character of instructional leaders is reflected in their commitment to fairness, equity, and inclusivity, ensuring that all students have access to quality education and opportunities for success. The alignment of personal values with professional responsibilities enables instructional leaders to navigate complex challenges and make decisions that are in the best interest of the students and the institution as a whole. Thus, the character of instructional leaders is a critical determinant of their ability to lead effectively, promote ethical standards, and cultivate a culture of trust and mutual respect within educational settings (Ololube, 2024).

Adegboye (2018) noted that instructional leaders serve as the linchpin in creating a positive school climate, which directly correlates with improved student outcomes. Their character traits, such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship are integral in building a supportive and motivating educational environment. The character of instructional leaders profoundly influences student academic performance through the cultivation of trust, respect, fairness, caring, and responsibility. These traits create a positive and supportive school climate that fosters student engagement, motivation, and ultimately, academic success.

The instructional leadership character manifests in various forms, each contributing uniquely to the effectiveness and impact of educational leaders. One prominent form is transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision, inspiration, and the capacity to drive significant changes within the educational framework. Ololube (2024) noted that transformational instructional leaders are known for their ability to articulate a compelling vision, motivate and inspire their teams, and foster an environment of innovation and continuous improvement. Another form is transactional leadership, which focuses on structured processes, clear expectations, and accountability mechanisms to achieve educational goals. Transactional instructional leaders are effective in establishing clear guidelines, monitoring performance, and providing constructive feedback to ensure that educational objectives are met (Eze, 2018).

Additionally, servant leadership characterized by a commitment to serving others, empathy, and community-building, is another form that has gained prominence in educational settings. Servant instructional leaders prioritize the needs of their students and staff, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes personal and professional growth. Furthermore, moral leadership is characterized by the leader's commitment to ethical principles and values. This form of leadership is rooted in honesty, integrity, and a strong sense of justice. Adegboye (2018) opined that moral leaders act as role models, demonstrating ethical behaviours and decision-making processes that align with the school's values and goals. Moral leaders foster an environment of trust and respect, which is essential for cultivating a positive school climate by prioritizing ethical standards. This ethical foundation encourages students and staff to adhere to high moral standards, promoting a culture of honesty and responsibility that positively impacts academic performance.

Transformational leadership involves inspiring and motivating others to achieve their highest potential. Transformational leaders are visionary, charismatic, and committed to fostering a sense of purpose among their followers. Oluwaseun (2019) argued that transformational leaders in educational settings create a shared vision for academic excellence and inspire teachers and students to strive for continuous improvement. These leaders use their

charisma and enthusiasm to engage and motivate their staff, leading to higher levels of commitment and performance. Transformational leaders drive innovation and academic success by creating a compelling vision and fostering a collaborative culture, Servant leadership is centred on the leader's desire to serve others and prioritize their needs. This form of leadership emphasizes empathy, compassion, and a strong commitment to the growth and well-being of students and staff.

Distributed leadership involves the sharing of leadership responsibilities among various members of the school community. This form of leadership recognizes the collective expertise and contributions of teachers, staff, and students. Oladipo (2021) pointed out that distributed leadership promotes collaboration, innovation, and shared decision-making, which are essential for addressing the complex challenges in education. Instructional leaders tap into the diverse skills and perspectives of their team, leading to more effective problem-solving and improved educational practices, by distributing leadership roles. This collaborative approach enhances the overall school climate and positively impacts student academic performance.

Instructional leaders' integrity refers to the consistency and alignment of a leader's actions with their stated values and educational goals. Leaders with instructional integrity demonstrate authenticity and transparency in their practices, ensuring that their decisions and behaviours reflect their commitment to student learning and success. In conclusion, the forms of instructional leadership character, including moral leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership, distributed leadership, and instructional integrity, each contribute uniquely to the effectiveness of instructional leaders. These forms of leadership character shape the educational environment, influence the behaviours and attitudes of teachers and students, and ultimately impact academic performance. The integration of these diverse forms of leadership character is essential for creating a positive and supportive school climate that fosters student engagement, motivation, and success (Adegboye, 2018).

Instructional Leaders' Caring and Students Academic Performance

The attribute of instructional leadership in caring reflects a genuine concern for the well-being and development of students and staff. It involves creating a nurturing and supportive environment where individuals feel valued, respected, and motivated to achieve their full potential (Ojo, 2017). Instructional leaders who demonstrate caring are attentive to the needs and concerns of their community, providing emotional support and fostering a sense of belonging (Obafemi, 2018). However, Ekenna (2019) clearly stated it that instructional leaders' caring attitude is characterized by empathy, compassion, and a commitment to creating a positive and inclusive school culture. Instructional leaders who prioritize caring are more likely to build strong relationships with their students and staff, enhancing their engagement and motivation. Furthermore, instructional leaders' caring behaviours involves recognizing and addressing the diverse needs of students, ensuring that they receive the support and resources necessary to succeed academically (Anyanwu, 2021). Embodying caring, instructional leaders can create a safe and nurturing environment that promotes holistic development of all stakeholders in the school community.

One significant aspect of instructional leaders' caring attitudes in education is the establishment of a nurturing and supportive classroom environment. Adegboye (2018) posited that when educators exhibit genuine concern for their students' well-being, it creates a safe space where students feel valued and respected. This sense of belonging and security encourages

students to engage more actively in the learning process, thereby enhancing their academic performance. Furthermore, Oluwaseun (2019) emphasized that teachers who demonstrate empathy and understanding towards their students can effectively address the diverse needs of their learners, providing personalized support that caters to individual learning styles and challenges.

Moreover, caring relationships between teachers and students can lead to increased motivation and self-esteem among students. Chukwuemeka (2020) opined that when students perceive their teachers as caring and supportive, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards their studies. This positive attitude is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation, which is a key driver of academic success. Additionally, Oladipo (2021) suggested that students who feel cared for by their teachers are more likely to set higher academic goals and put forth the effort required to achieve them, thereby improving their academic performance.

Caring in education also extends to the provision of emotional support, which is essential for students' overall well-being and academic success. Adegboye (2018) stated that students often face various emotional challenges that can hinder their academic progress, such as stress, anxiety, and low self-confidence. Teachers who show care by providing emotional support and encouragement can help students navigate these challenges, enabling them to stay focused and perform better academically. This support can take many forms, including active listening, offering words of encouragement, and providing constructive feedback.

Furthermore, the role of caring in fostering a positive school culture cannot be overlooked. Oluwaseun (2019) asserted that a school culture characterized by mutual respect and caring relationships among students, teachers, and administrators promotes a collaborative and supportive learning environment. In such an environment, students are more likely to exhibit prosocial behaviours, such as cooperation and empathy, which can enhance their academic performance. Oladipo (2021) pointed out that caring educators advocate for their students by ensuring they have access to necessary learning materials, extracurricular opportunities, and academic support services. This advocacy is particularly important in the Nigerian context, where resource constraints can pose significant barriers to students' academic achievement. Caring educators can help level the playing field and enable all students to reach their full potential by addressing these barriers and providing holistic support. Through nurturing relationships, emotional support, and the provision of necessary resources, caring educators can create an environment that fosters academic success and personal growth.

Challenges and Solution of Instructional Leaders' Caring

The concept of caring is fundamental to the role of instructional leaders, as it forms the basis of fostering trust, motivation, and a supportive learning environment for both students and teachers. However, demonstrating consistent and effective care comes with challenges, including balancing professional boundaries, addressing diverse needs, and managing emotional labour. These challenges often arise from the complexities of modern educational environments, which are shaped by cultural diversity, systemic inequities, and high-stakes accountability. To address these challenges, instructional leaders must adopt intentional strategies that integrate empathy, equity, and self-care.

One major challenge in demonstrating caring as an instructional leader is the difficulty of balancing professional boundaries while addressing the emotional and personal needs of students and staff. Leaders are expected to show empathy and provide support, yet excessive emotional

involvement can blur boundaries and lead to burnout. According to Fullan (2011), instructional leaders must find a balance between demonstrating care and maintaining professional detachment to ensure that their decision-making remains objective and aligned with institutional goals.

Another challenge is meeting the diverse and often conflicting needs of students and staff. In multicultural and socioeconomically diverse school settings, caring requires an understanding of cultural competence and responsiveness to individual circumstances. Padilla-Diaz (2015) noted that instructional leaders often struggle to accommodate these differences effectively, particularly when resources are limited. For example, providing equitable support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds may necessitate reallocating resources, which can lead to perceptions of favoritism among other stakeholders.

The emotional labour involved in caring is another significant obstacle. Instructional leaders are frequently called upon to address crises, mediate conflicts, and provide emotional support, which can take a toll on their mental well-being. Research by Cohen et al. (2013) emphasized that the emotional demands of caring can lead to stress and fatigue, ultimately diminishing leaders' effectiveness. Without adequate support systems, leaders may struggle to sustain the level of care needed to foster a positive school culture.

Accountability pressures and systemic constraints also hinder the ability of instructional leaders to prioritize caring. High-stakes testing, rigid policies, and resource limitations often force leaders to focus on measurable outcomes rather than relational aspects of leadership. This shift can create an environment where care is perceived as secondary to performance metrics. Fiore (2014) argued that instructional leaders must navigate these systemic pressures while advocating for policies that prioritize the holistic development of students and staff.

To address these challenges, instructional leaders must adopt intentional strategies that integrate caring into their leadership practices. Building strong relationships based on trust and respect is a foundational step. Leaders should actively listen to the concerns of students and staff, validate their experiences, and collaborate on solutions. Fullan (2011) highlighted that fostering open communication channels and engaging in regular, meaningful interactions with stakeholders enhances trust and demonstrates genuine care.

Professional development in cultural competence and emotional intelligence is another essential solution. Instructional leaders should seek training in understanding diverse perspectives and managing emotions effectively. This equips them to provide culturally responsive care and navigate the emotional complexities of their roles. Padilla-Diaz (2015) suggested that such training not only improves leaders' ability to address diverse needs but also strengthens their capacity to model empathy and inclusivity.

Implementing systems of support for instructional leaders is critical for managing the emotional labour of caring. Schools and districts should provide access to counseling services, peer support networks, and leadership coaching to help leaders cope with the demands of their roles. Cohen et al. (2013) emphasized that self-care is equally important, as leaders who prioritize their own well-being are better equipped to care for others effectively.

Instructional Leaders' Citizenship and Students' Academic Performance

Citizenship in the context of instructional leadership encompasses the moral and ethical responsibilities that leaders have toward their students, staff, and the community. It reflects a commitment to fostering a culture of engagement, inclusivity, and social responsibility.

Instructional leaders play important role in cultivating a sense of citizenship within schools by modelling and promoting ethical behaviour and social responsibility. Effective instructional leaders understand that their influence extends beyond the classroom; they are role models who shape the values, attitudes, and behaviours of both students and staff. This role necessitates a deep commitment to creating a school environment that not only prioritizes academic achievement but also emphasizes the importance of civic engagement and moral responsibility. The concept of citizenship in instructional leadership is closely linked to the idea of civic education. Civic education involves teaching students the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for informed and active participation in a democratic society (Levine, 2007). Instructional leaders who embrace this concept prioritize the integration of civic education into the curriculum, thereby equipping students with the tools they need to engage meaningfully with their communities. This approach not only enhances students' understanding of democratic processes but also fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility toward their school and community.

Moreover, instructional leaders can promote citizenship by encouraging students to take an active role in their education and the broader community. This involves creating opportunities for students to engage in service-learning projects, community service, and other activities that foster civic engagement. Service-learning, in particular, is an educational approach that combines learning objectives with community service, allowing students to apply their academic knowledge to real-world issues. According to Bringle and Hatcher (1996), service-learning enhances students' civic responsibility and academic achievement while fostering a sense of connection to their community. Instructional leaders who prioritize service-learning initiatives not only support students' academic growth but also help cultivate a generation of socially responsible citizens.

Instructional leaders must also cultivate a school climate that values diversity and inclusivity. Citizenship in a school context is not merely about the rights and responsibilities of students; it also involves recognizing and respecting the diverse backgrounds and experiences of all members of the school community. Instructional leaders who embrace diversity create an environment where all students feel valued and included, which is essential for fostering positive relationships and encouraging active participation in school and community life. According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive leadership involves understanding and addressing the cultural needs of diverse students, thereby enhancing their engagement and academic success. Instructional leaders can help students develop a sense of belonging and connectedness, which is crucial for fostering responsible citizenship by promoting inclusivity.

Furthermore, instructional leadership citizenship extends to the relationships that leaders cultivate with families and the community. Engaging families in the educational process is vital for creating a supportive learning environment that fosters student success. Instructional leaders who prioritize family engagement understand that parents and guardians play a crucial role in shaping their children's attitudes toward education and citizenship. Leaders can create a collaborative environment that enhances the educational experience for all students by involving families in school activities and decision-making processes. According to Epstein (2011), effective school-family partnerships contribute to improved student achievement and foster a sense of shared responsibility for student success. Instructional leaders who embrace this partnership model demonstrate a commitment to citizenship by acknowledging the importance of community involvement in the educational process.

Moreover, instructional leaders must also engage with the wider community to foster citizenship and social responsibility. This involves building partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and government agencies to create opportunities for students to engage in community service and civic activities. Connecting students with community resources, instructional leaders can help them develop a sense of responsibility and agency in addressing social issues. This engagement not only benefits students but also strengthens the ties between the school and the community, fostering a collective commitment to social responsibility. Research has shown that schools that actively engage with their communities experience improved student outcomes and enhanced community support (Sanders, 2001).

In addition to promoting citizenship among students, instructional leaders must also prioritize the development of citizenship among teachers and staff. Leaders who model ethical behaviour and social responsibility set a standard for their colleagues, creating a culture of accountability and integrity within the school. Professional development opportunities focused on ethical leadership and civic responsibility can equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to promote citizenship in their classrooms. According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 2010), school leaders play a crucial role in shaping the professional culture of their institutions, emphasizing the importance of ethical conduct and community engagement. Instructional leaders can enhance the overall climate of the school, contributing to a positive and supportive learning environment, by fostering a culture of citizenship among staff.

Challenges and Solutions of Instructional Leaders' Citizenship

Instructional leaders' citizenship, characterized by ethical behaviour, community involvement, inclusivity and accountability is fundamental to positive school environments. However, the path to practicing effective citizenship in leadership roles is fraught with challenges. These obstacles can hinder leaders from fully engaging in activities that foster trust, respect, and shared responsibility within the school and community. The challenges associated with instructional leaders' citizenship include balancing competing demands, managing stakeholder expectations, addressing systemic inequities, and maintaining personal well-being.

One significant challenge that instructional leaders face in practicing citizenship is balancing the competing demands of leadership. These leaders must juggle administrative duties, curriculum development, teacher evaluations, and maintaining student performance while simultaneously striving to engage with their communities, foster inclusivity, and promote ethical behaviour. According to Fiore (2014), the multifaceted nature of the instructional leadership role often results in leaders being overwhelmed by administrative tasks, leaving little time to focus on building meaningful relationships or advocating for community involvement. The pressure to achieve academic results further intensifies this challenge, as leaders are often expected to meet performance targets while upholding values of fairness and inclusivity.

A solution to this challenge involves prioritizing time management and delegating responsibilities effectively. Fullan (2011) suggested that instructional leaders should focus on setting clear goals and fostering a culture of shared leadership, where teachers and staff contribute to decision-making processes. Instructional leaders can free up time to focus on citizenship-related activities such as engaging with the community and ensuring equitable opportunities for all students by delegating certain tasks to other school leaders or team

members. Additionally, leaders can adopt collaborative leadership models that encourage collective responsibility, reducing the burden on any one individual.

Another challenge of instructional leaders' citizenship is managing the varied expectations of different stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students, and the wider community. Each group may have distinct perspectives on what constitutes effective leadership and how leaders should demonstrate care and ethical behaviour. Instructional leaders must navigate these diverse expectations while remaining true to their core values of fairness, respect, and inclusivity. Padilla-Diaz (2015) pointed out that instructional leaders are often faced with conflicting interests, particularly when the community or parents demand practices that do not align with equitable educational principles. For example, parents may pressure leaders to prioritize academic achievement over inclusivity, while teachers may advocate for more autonomy in the classroom.

To address this challenge, instructional leaders must engage in open, transparent communication with all stakeholders. According to Cohen et al. (2013), establishing regular channels of communication, such as town hall meetings, newsletters, and parent-teacher conferences, allows leaders to listen to concerns, clarify expectations, and foster collaboration. Furthermore, instructional leaders must be prepared to make difficult decisions that balance these competing interests, always ensuring that their actions align with the school's overarching mission of providing an equitable and high-quality education for all students.

Addressing systemic inequities is another key challenge in instructional leaders' citizenship. Schools are often plagued by broader societal issues such as poverty, discrimination, and unequal access to resources, which can impede the full participation of all students in the educational process. Leaders who are committed to promoting fairness and inclusivity must tackle these inequities head-on, which can be particularly difficult in underfunded or marginalized communities. Smith and Osborn (2012) emphasized that instructional leaders must be advocates for systemic change, working to ensure that resources, support, and opportunities are distributed equitably, especially for disadvantaged students.

One solution to this challenge is to develop partnerships with local organizations, community groups, and businesses to provide additional resources and support for students. Instructional leaders can create opportunities that reduce disparities and promote equity, by leveraging community assets. Additionally, instructional leaders should advocate for policy changes at the district or state level that address inequities in funding, curriculum access, and student support services. Leading through policy change requires a combination of advocacy, networking, and public engagement, which may involve mobilizing the school community and working with local government officials to address issues of access and equity.

A final challenge of instructional leaders' citizenship is maintaining personal well-being while fulfilling the demanding responsibilities of leadership. The emotional labour associated with caring for students, managing staff, and engaging with the community can be overwhelming, particularly when leaders face high levels of stress and burnout. Fullan (2011) noted that the emotional toll of leadership can erode a leader's ability to effectively demonstrate care and citizenship. Without proper self-care and support systems, instructional leaders risk losing the energy and commitment needed to model ethical behaviour and foster a positive school culture.

The solution to this challenge lies in creating systems of support for instructional leaders. Padilla-Diaz (2015) recommended that leaders prioritize their own well-being by seeking professional development, mentoring, and coaching. Peer support networks and leadership

communities can also provide a safe space for instructional leaders to share challenges, receive advice, and find emotional support. Additionally, schools and districts should implement wellness programs that address the mental health and emotional needs of leaders, ensuring that they have the resilience and capacity to lead effectively.

METHODS

The study adopted descriptive and correlational survey designs. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. Correlational design was used to examine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables—Instructional leaders' character traits and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

The population for this study comprised the entire 320 principals and 5,833 teachers (6,153) in 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 drawn from the 320 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The sampling technique employed was stratified random sampling, ensuring equitable representation of the targeted sample from urban and rural public senior secondary schools in the 23 Local Government Areas in Rivers State.

The instrument for data collection was a close-form self-designed questionnaire. Section 1 contains the demographic data of the respondents. Section 2 contains 6 closed items questions elicited information from the instructional leaders (principals). The instrument was titled "Demonstrating Caring Behaviour and Citizenship as Instructional Leaders' Character Traits and Students' Academic Performance Questionnaire" (DCBCILCTSAPQ). 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.

The instrument was validated three experts who scrutinize the items in terms of relevance, clarity, appropriateness of language, and response pattern as they relate to the research questions and problem of the study. In the light of feedback received from their observations and corrections the questionnaire was finalized.

The reliability of the study was established using Cronbach Alpha Reliability method. The reliability coefficient alpha for each item was gotten from the statistical data analysis, and reliability index of value of .927 was realised.

The researcher got approval in the form of letter of introduction from her institution of study. The researcher along with two trained research assistants assisted in administering the questionnaire directly to the selected teachers and principals (face-to-face method). Permission from school administrator was sought by explaining to them the purpose for this study and the need to collect data from their schools. Adequate guidance on completing the questionnaire was provided to ensure that the questionnaires distributed were properly filled out. The respondents filled and returned the questionnaire instantly to achieve high retrieval rate.

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' demonstration of caring behaviours enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of instructional leaders' demonstration of caring behaviours enhance students' academic performance

S/N	Instructional leaders' demonstration of caring traits and students' academic performance	Mean	SD.	Remarks
1	Instructional leaders caring attitude creates a nurturing environment that promotes both the academic and emotional well-being of students, thereby enhancing overall students' performance.	3.4130	.93004	High extent
2	There is the tendency that when students perceive their instructional leaders as caring, they will attend school regularly, participate actively in class, and strive to improve their academic expectations.	3.2764	.96941	High extent
3	Developing a caring attitude among instructional leaders is not essential for improving academic performance.	2.9398	1.19498	High extent
Grand mean and SD.		3.2097	1.03147	High extent

Information in Table 1 examined the extent instructional leaders' demonstration of caring behaviours enhance students' academic performance, and the resulted as presented revealed that instructional leaders caring attitude creates a nurturing environment that promotes both the academic and emotional well-being of students, thereby enhancing overall students' performance ($M = 3.4130$; $SD = .93004$), and that there is the tendency that when students perceive their instructional leaders as caring, they will attend school regularly, participate actively in class, and strive to improve their academic expectations ($M = 3.2764$; $SD = .96941$). The respondents similarly agreed to a high extent that developing a caring attitude among instructional leaders is not essential for improving academic performance ($M = 2.9398$; $SD = 1.19498$). In the same way, the grand mean (3.2097) and standard deviation (1.03147) revealed that instructional leaders' demonstration of caring behaviours enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: To what extent does instructional leaders' demonstration of citizenship influence students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 2 below presented the data that explored instructional leaders' demonstration of citizenship influence students' academic performance, and they exposed to view that instructional leader's support for students-led community service project enhances students' academic engagement ($M = 2.8829$; $SD = 1.21578$). In the same stratum, the respondents agree to a high extent that when instructional leaders encourage active participation in school leadership activities and delegate responsibilities where and when necessary, this improves students' academic motivation ($M = 3.4016$; $SD = .93066$), and equally agreed to a high extent that instructional leaders who model civic responsibility by upholding school rules and policies, participation in extracurricular activities promotes student's academic outcomes ($M = 3.3350$; $SD = .98606$). On the whole, the

respondents were of the opinion that instructional leaders' demonstration of citizenship influence students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State with a grand mean of 3.2065 and standard deviation of 1.04383.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of instructional leaders' demonstration of citizenship influence students' academic performance

S/N	Instructional leaders' demonstration of citizenship traits and students' academic performance	Mean	SD.	Remarks
4	Instructional leader's support for students-led community service project enhances students' academic engagement.	2.8829	1.21578	High extent
5	When instructional leaders encourage active participation in school leadership activities and delegate responsibilities where and when necessary, this improves students' academic motivation.	3.4016	.93066	High extent
6	Instructional leaders who model civic responsibility by upholding school rules and policies, participation in extracurricular activities promotes student's academic outcomes.	3.3350	.98606	High extent
Grand mean and SD.		3.2065	1.04383	High extent

Test of Hypotheses

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

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

		Instructional leaders caring behaviour	Students' academic performance
Instructional leaders caring behaviour	Pearson Correlation	1	.477**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	615	615
Students' academic performance	Pearson Correlation	.477**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	615	615

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

Data in Table 3 was aim at ascertaining if significant relationship exists between instructional leaders caring behaviour and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The results revealed that there is significant relationship between instructional leaders caring behaviour and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State ($r = .477^{**}$, Sig (2-tailed) = .000, and $N = 615$). Therefore, hypothesis five was rejected.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between instructional leaders' citizenship and academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 4: PPMC analysis of relationship between instructional leaders' citizenship and academic performance

		Instructional leaders' citizenship	Students' academic performance
Instructional leaders' citizenship	Pearson Correlation	1	.291**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	615	615
Students' academic performance	Pearson Correlation	.291**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	615	615

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

The information in Table 4 was aimed to evaluate if significant relationship exist between instructional leaders' citizenship and academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The results found that there is significant relationship between instructional leaders' citizenship and academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State ($r = .291^{**}$, Sig (2-tailed) = .000, and N = 615). As a result, hypothesis six was rejected.

DISCUSSION

Instructional Leaders' Caring and Students Academic Performance

Data from research question one and hypothesis one found to a high extent that instructional leaders' demonstration of caring behaviours enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, and significant relationship exist between instructional leaders caring behaviour and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

These results align with the findings of Ojo (2017) and Obafemi (2018) who stated that the attribute of instructional leadership in caring reflects a genuine concern for the well-being and development of students and staff. It involves creating a nurturing and supportive environment where individuals feel valued, respected, and motivated to achieve their full potential. Instructional leaders who demonstrate caring are attentive to the needs and concerns of their community, providing emotional support and fostering a sense of belonging. However, Ekenna (2019) clearly stated it that instructional leaders' caring attitude is characterized by empathy, compassion, and a commitment to creating a positive and inclusive school culture. Instructional leaders who prioritize caring are more likely to build strong relationships with their students and staff, enhancing their engagement and motivation. While Anyanwu (2021) furthermore articulated that instructional leaders' caring behaviours involves recognizing and addressing the diverse needs of students, ensuring that they receive the support and resources necessary to succeed academically.

In the same way, Adegboye (2018) posited that when educators exhibit genuine concern for their students' well-being, it creates a safe space where students feel valued and respected. This sense of belonging and security encourages students to engage more actively in the learning

process, thereby enhancing their academic performance. Furthermore, Oluwaseun (2019) emphasized that teachers who demonstrate empathy and understanding towards their students can effectively address the diverse needs of their learners, providing personalized support that caters to individual learning styles and challenges.

Chukwuemeka (2020) opined that when students perceive their teachers as caring and supportive, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards their studies. This positive attitude is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation, which is a key driver of academic success. Additionally, Oladipo (2021) suggested that students who feel cared for by their teachers are more likely to set higher academic goals and put forth the effort required to achieve them, thereby improving their academic performance.

Adegboye (2018) and Oluwaseun (2019) respectively found that students often face various emotional challenges that can hinder their academic progress, such as stress, anxiety, and low self-confidence. Teachers' who show care by providing emotional support and encouragement can help students navigate these challenges, enabling them to stay focused and perform better academically. This support can take many forms, including active listening, offering words of encouragement, and providing constructive feedback. School culture characterized by mutual respect and caring relationships among students, teachers, and administrators promotes a collaborative and supportive learning environment. In such an environment, students are more likely to exhibit prosocial behaviours, such as cooperation and empathy, which can enhance their academic performance. While Oladipo (2021) pointed out that caring educators advocate for their students by ensuring they have access to necessary learning materials, extracurricular opportunities, and academic support services. This advocacy is particularly important in the Nigerian context, where resource constraints can pose significant barriers to students' academic achievement. Caring educators can help level the playing field and enable all students to reach their full potential by addressing these barriers and providing holistic support. Through nurturing relationships, emotional support, and the provision of necessary resources, caring educators can create an environment that fosters academic success and personal growth.

Instructional Leaders' Citizenship and Students' Academic Performance

Results from the findings in research question two and hypothesis two revealed to a high extent that instructional leaders' demonstration of citizenship improve students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, and significant relationship exist between instructional leaders' citizenship and academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

These findings exposed that instructional leadership is a critical aspect of effective school management, focused primarily on improving teaching and learning processes. Among its many dimensions, the concept of citizenship stands out as a vital element that shapes not only the educational environment but also the broader community in which schools operate. Citizenship in the context of instructional leadership encompasses the moral and ethical responsibilities that leaders have toward their students, staff, and the community. It reflects a commitment to foster a culture of engagement, inclusivity, and social responsibility. This role necessitates a deep commitment to creating a school environment that not only prioritizes academic achievement but also emphasizes the importance of civic engagement and moral responsibility.

These findings are in line with Sergiovanni (1992) who noted that moral leadership is fundamental in guiding schools towards improvement, suggesting that leaders should embody the principles of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. These principles are essential in nurturing a school culture that encourages active participation in community life. To Levine (2007) citizenship in instructional leadership is closely linked to the idea of civic education. Civic education involves teaching students the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for informed and active participation in a democratic society.

Moreover, Gay (2010) stated that culturally responsive leadership involves understanding and addressing the cultural needs of diverse students, thereby enhancing their engagement and academic success. Instructional leaders can help students develop a sense of belonging and connectedness, which is crucial for fostering responsible citizenship by promoting inclusivity. Furthermore, instructional leadership citizenship extends to the relationships that leaders cultivate with families and the community. Engaging families in the educational process is vital for creating a supportive learning environment that fosters student success. Instructional leaders who prioritize family engagement understand that parents and guardians play a crucial role in shaping their children's attitudes toward education and citizenship. Leaders can create a collaborative environment that enhances the educational experience for all students by involving families in school activities and decision-making processes.

According to Epstein (2011), effective school-family partnerships contribute to improved student achievement and foster a sense of shared responsibility for student success. Instructional leaders who embrace this partnership model demonstrate a commitment to citizenship by acknowledging the importance of community involvement in the educational process. In addition to fostering citizenship among students, instructional leaders must also prioritize the development of citizenship among teachers and staff. Leaders who model ethical behaviour and social responsibility set a standard for their colleagues, creating a culture of accountability and integrity within the school. Professional development opportunities focused on ethical leadership and civic responsibility can equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to promote citizenship in their classrooms.

Adebayo (2018) found that citizenship as a character trait of instructional leaders, profoundly impacts academic performance, particularly in the context of educational systems. Instructional leaders who demonstrate strong citizenship values do more than just manage; they serve as role models who cultivate a culture of responsibility, ethical conduct, and community engagement within the school environment. Such leaders understand that their influence extends beyond the walls of the classroom or the administrative office; they are charged with the task of shaping not only students' academic achievements but also their moral compasses and civic identities.

Similarly, Adewuyi (2021) and Ololube (2024) respectively argued that instructional leaders who exhibit strong citizenship are those who actively participate in the communal life of the school, taking an interest in the well-being of both students and staff, and engaging with the wider community to bridge the gaps that exist due to systemic inequities. Such leaders are committed to creating an inclusive environment where every student, regardless of background, is given the opportunity to succeed academically and develop a sense of belonging. This commitment to inclusivity and equity is a hallmark of citizenship and is essential for improving academic outcomes, particularly in under-resourced schools where students may face additional barriers to learning (Chukwu, 2019).

Ololube (2024) further noted that instructional leaders who prioritize citizenship are more likely to implement practices that foster a supportive and collaborative school culture, which research has shown is directly linked to improved student engagement and academic performance. Leaders will be able to help students understand the importance of contributing to the collective well-being, both within the school and in the broader society, thus preparing them not only for academic success but also for active and responsible citizenship in their adult lives.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirmed that instructional leaders' caring behavior and citizenship play a critical role in enhancing students' academic performance in secondary schools in Rivers State. Demonstrating care fosters a supportive and motivating learning environment, increasing student engagement and performance. Similarly, citizenship-oriented leadership promotes ethical behavior, inclusivity, and a sense of responsibility among students, positively influencing their academic outcomes. The significant relationship between these leadership traits and student performance suggests the necessity of leadership training initiatives emphasizing empathy, integrity, and civic responsibility.

Recommendations

The study recommends:

- The Ministry of Education should further hearten instructional leaders' on how to demonstrate caring behaviours to enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- The Ministry of Education should further encourage instructional leaders' on how to demonstrate citizenship to influence students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Future Research Direction

Future research should explore longitudinal effects of character-based leadership on student success, ensuring that leadership development remains a cornerstone of educational improvement strategies. Schools can create an environment conducive to both academic excellence and personal growth by promoting instructional leadership grounded in care and citizenship.

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