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EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study discussed effective leadership and quality management of higher education in Rivers State. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The design is correlational. 171 heads of department in both universities of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) (86), Rivers State University (RSU) (85) formed its population. Stratified random sampling method was used to choose 100 heads of department as its sample. Effective Leadership and Quality Management Questionnaire (ELQMQ) were used for data collection. The instrument was vetted by two doctors and a professor in the department of educational management. A test-retest procedure confirmed its reliability. The reliability index of 0.87 and 0.79 were determined through Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to answer the research questions, while regression statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. According to the results, there is a link between open lines of communication and other TQM practices. Quality management at Rivers State's universities was also discovered to have a close connection to students' ability to communicate effectively. The research found that strong leadership in universities brings about quality administration of higher education in Rivers State.

Keywords: Leadership, Effectiveness, Quality Management, Communication Skills, Decision-Making Skills, Interpersonal Skills.

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INTRODUCTION

All nations utilise their educational infrastructure to strive for greater greatness. Every country aspires to a high position in the global rankings. In this way, no country can afford to play about with literacy. Globally, governments at all levels have been making tremendous efforts to ensure that their citizens have access to the education they need, starting at the most fundamental levels of society. According to Ezeofor (2019), for youngsters from low-income families and those who

aren't currently enrolled in school, the government is providing free meals and a place to study. This includes the young women, the nomads, the fishermen, the adults, and the students with special needs. In order to keep up with global competitiveness on the eradication of mass illiteracy on a global level by the year 2030, the government provides the groups with various learning opportunities, such as part-time, Distance learning system, online education, and Blended learning system. Therefore, no country wants to feel like a victim on a global scale. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014), opined that the sole tool for long-term, systemic change and improvement at the national level is education.

No country that plays fast and loose with educational opportunities for its population can expect to rank well among the world's industrialised countries. Nonetheless, all countries have been making loud calls for universal access to education from kindergarten through college. The government of Nigeria frowns upon those who cannot read or write. According to Ogundele (2017), widespread illiteracy hinders a country's progress and output. Stakeholders must thus oversee all levels of Nigeria's educational system, from elementary school to university. It's important to remember that leaders with character will help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Nigeria's educational system administration.

The capacity to effect change in the organisation in a variety of methods is essential for any leader's worth. Excellent leadership is the result of harmony between personal characteristics, skills, actions, authority, and context. These therefore become the deciding variables in the leader's capacity to sway the group's members and achieve its goals. The group's dynamics and the ways in which its members interact with one another may serve as a variety of leadership roles. The first step of leadership is to create a vision, which may be thought of as a wish or an image of the organization's ideal future. Being confident in one's own abilities is the first step towards being an effective leader. The sense of maturity, principle, and competence it conveys ultimately manifests as focus and purpose. When leaders have a clear vision, they are better able to inspire their teams to work together and believe in themselves. They have the self-assurance and logical focus necessary to be considered visionaries. Effective leaders are those that make an effort to learn as much as they can about their surroundings (Ololube, 2019). They need to make sure the surroundings are conducive to carry out the desired actions. The leaders have the knowledge and expertise to pave the way for change that will ultimately result in optimal development and expansion.

Effective leaders may be recognised by their actions and personality quirks, which can help shed light on what makes them successful. Energy level, physical stamina, and stress tolerance are just few of the inborn qualities to keep in mind. Leaders with these traits are better equipped to handle pressure and other trying circumstances. There are other definitions of leadership, but the one provided by van Schalkwyk (2011) will serve our purposes here. Leadership, as he saw it, was getting people to work together, despite the presence of danger and uncertainty, by the cultivation of interpersonal connections and the rejection of convention. According to Kouzes and Posner (2007), leaders may do this by using the following leadership practises: through setting an example, inspiring a common goal, questioning the status quo, giving subordinates responsibility, and motivating them from within.

Tertiary education is another term for higher education. A tertiary education is "the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotchnics, and including those institutions offering correspondence courses" (FRN, 2014, p. 30).

It is generally agreed that higher education is beneficial to any growing culture. Higher education is becoming more crucial to national development as a result of knowledge-based economy and greater globalisation (Muhammed et al., 2011). The most critical problem facing higher education today is the need to enhance its quality (Sallis, 2002). Massification, decreased funding, new public management ideals with an emphasis on accountability and efficiency brought about by the taxpayer backlash (Alexander, 2000), the explosion of the Internet, the growing internationalisation of higher education, new relationships and forms of relations with the state, and the adoption of market mechanisms and competition have all contributed to a greater emphasis on the importance of quality in higher education.

Weese (1996) and Lim and Cromartie (2001) found a correlation between leadership and organisational success. Several researches (e.g. Goetsch & Davis, 2006; Hellriegel et al., 2006; Evans, 2011) suggested that strong institutional leadership is essential for enhancing quality. Excellent leadership is critical for maintaining and enhancing the quality and efficacy of institutions (Gibbs et al., 2009; Murphy, 2005). High standards and quality in educational provision means that university management should be at alert to and prepared to respond to emerging challenges, such as the new regulatory requirements provided by quality assurance authorities. According to Shahmandi et al. (2011), universities and colleges cannot thrive and grow without strong leadership. Leadership, communication, persuasiveness, and professionalism are all necessary components of this competency set. For Yang (2005), there are four types of leadership qualities: character and attitude, information and ability, management and organisation, and moral and ethical compass. Academic qualifications, accomplishments, and experience are highly valued by universities, as shown by the fact that vice chancellors are often well-known academics with at least some degree of formal education (Ololube, 2017).

The current state of higher education necessitates a paradigm change and the appointment of a new generation of university leaders capable of navigating our increasingly complicated academic world. Effective university leadership is linked to visible signs and behaviours (Bryman, 2009; Gibbs et al., 2009). All of this emphasise the need for strong leadership on the part of university administrators in ensuring that students get a top-notch university education.

Effective Leadership

Communication skills: Possessing strong communication skills is being able to express oneself clearly and convincingly. The ability to communicate well opens up a world of possibilities for sharing and receiving information. Although, the ability to communicate clearly, effectively, and efficiently may feel like second nature, it is a very valuable skill. Effective communication requires all four senses—listening, speaking, seeing, and feeling. To bring out the best in people who have different experiences, perspectives, and personalities, leaders need to have strong communication skills (Towler, 2003; Awamleh & Gardener, 1999). Okorie (2000) identified communication as a key element of leadership, defining it as the process of transmitting one's thoughts, ideas, wishes, attitudes, and emotions to another person.

In a similar vein, Ejimaji and Ahiawe (2011) argued that communication is the key to the success of every organisation, it serves as the medium to save the most fundamental managerial and administrative tasks. Proper etiquette, attentive listening, enthusiastic participation, and appropriate body language are the cornerstones of successful business communication. Leaders are seen as the conduit via which the organization's vision is communicated in both the transactional and transformational leadership models. Since leaders play a crucial role in

enabling organisational progress, both internally and externally, they must carefully manage these relationships (Zerfass & Huck, 2007).

Active Listening skills: While listening is the process of receiving, comprehending and responding actively to spoken words or messages or information, active listening means paying attention to information; clarifying, reflecting, summarizing and sharing the information among group members. It means that one of the best ways of improving quality service delivery in an organization through effective communication is when leaders listen to others very actively and devoid of distraction.

Decision-making skills: The capacity to decide between potential outcomes that are unknown requires the development of decision-making abilities. Short-term practical decision-making involves things like picking one alternative out of many with an end goal in mind. A choice is a technique of selecting one alternative among many possible courses of action in order to accomplish a desired outcome. When all available choices amount to dead ends, there's nothing to be done now that will alter the final result. Making a decision, then, includes looking into the future and selecting one result from a set of alternatives. The leadership of educational institutions benefits greatly from the ability to make sound decisions, it is a consensus among personnel and management practitioners. However, the point of divergence is what really constitute the true meaning of decision-making. This suggests that, there is no universally acceptable definition of decision-making. Different scholars have tried to put forward their own perspective or view of decision-making.

Decision-making also refer to making choice out of different contending alternatives in order to achieve set objective(s) and resolve a problem. It has also been defined as a process of making choices by setting goals, gathering information and assessing alternatives. It was further resolved as a cognitive process, which results in the selection of a belief or a course of action among several alternatives. The import of the foregoing is that decision-making is a conscious effort to choose a particular line of action in order to achieve a set objective(s). The process of arriving at a decision varies from one model of decision-making to another, however, all the different school of thoughts agrees on a fundamental process of arriving at a decision. The fundamental process of decision-making as enunciated by Ololube (2019) includes:

Identification of a particular problem: This is the major crux of decision-making. There has to be a 'problem' before a solution is proffered and a decision taken so as to effectively deal with that issue or problem. This involves the definition of the problem, getting to know the problem in-depth causes, factors that have led to the non-resolution of the problem, the environment and social content of the problem before proffering solution.

Analyzing the problem: This involves systematically analyzing available data to know the nature of the problem and the best course towards a total resolution of the problem. In analyzing the problem as well as proffering alternatives and solution, it is important to take cognizance of the timing of the decision on other areas of the organization, that is, will a particular time of action or decision lead to a sort of crisis in other areas of the school system?

Developing solutions: This process involves critically analyzing the problem as well as proffering solutions. Very many solutions are proffered and examined viz-a-viz the objective of

resolving the problem. Will a particular solution effectively take care of the problem or does it simply answer a few questions and not wholly? Thus, solutions are presented and whichever wholly or satisfactorily provides an answer is chosen as the best course of action.

Selecting the best alternative: Having clearly analyzed all the proffered options and alternatives towards solving a problem. The best is then selected but this is done while taking into consideration.

Interpersonal leadership skills: Interpersonal leadership presupposes interpersonal relationships, and emphasizes the importance of collaboration with all levels of people and employee relations in an organization, such as the school, for effective pursuance and actualization of predetermined goals. The emphasis on employee relations is worthwhile due to the necessity to get leaders and other members of the school live and worked together for the purpose of collectively meeting the expectation of the school (Bush, 2008). Armstrong (2012) considered employee relations as a medium through which employees work and live in harmony in order to achieve the goals of an organization. It therefore, means that in higher institutions, the leadership is urged to create such an atmosphere through, which various members of the school, including teaching and non-teaching staff as well as the students work harmoniously together.

The success of this situation is ensured, when there is common understanding among school members, the principal and members of the community. For Ololube (2019), interpersonal leadership in education is more effective under a conducive learning environment and a situation where teamwork and human relations are given prominence. This can be achieved when leadership is effective.

In any successful organization, like the institutions, interpersonal leaders are expected to develop such skills that will enhance togetherness and exchange of ideas that will bring about the growth in such institutions. That is why Ololube (2017) opined that any person deemed qualified to be an interpersonal leader must have interpersonal intelligence as this will propel such a leader to involve others in the affairs of the organization. Institutional leadership with enormous skills, wisdom and intelligence, orientates and socializes the people into the way of life or the culture of the school through interaction and without the use of force. Thus, leaders reserve the function of interacting with staff and other members of the school through the desirable skills possessed.

Hoppey and Mcleskey (2013) found that the leader with interpersonal skills build teamwork spirit among his staff and support to increase their morale in discharging their duties to the students. As interpersonal skills become the traits school leaders rely on when interacting and communicating with others, it is exceptionally necessary for effective communication and cooperation to be strengthened by everyone wishing to provide quality and effective leadership in school. Without gainsaying, interpersonal relationship is imperative for interpersonal leaders, who do not see any individual as a mere subordinate but as a colleague in any workplace. This, in most cases provides the opportunity for leaders to secure the obedience of others and succeed in dealing with employees to be committed to goal achievement.

Statement of the Problem

The standard of contemporary leadership owes a great deal to the influence of universities. University administrators are required to do more than just spend money wisely; they must also contribute to society via initiatives like research and community service. Achieving academic

excellence and making major contributions to the national economy via activities like problem-solving research and community service are key to a university's success. Leadership effectiveness involves taking the right decision, ensuring effective communication and effective interpersonal relationships to achieve quality management of higher education in Rivers State. The essence of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of leadership in the management of higher education in Rivers State. This study therefore, intends to fill in the gap in this regard.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

- Determine how communication skills enhances quality management of higher education in Rivers State.
- Examine how decision-making skills enhances quality management of higher education in Rivers State.
- Investigate how interpersonal skills enhances quality management of higher education in Rivers State.

Research Questions

- How does communication skill enhance quality management of higher education in Rivers State?
- How does decision-making skill enhance quality management of higher education in Rivers State?
- How does interpersonal skill enhance quality management of higher education in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

- There is no significant relationship between communication skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State.
- There is no significant relationship between decision-making skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State.
- There is no significant relationship between interpersonal skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

This research used a correlational methodology. Its population of 171 was made up of deans and department heads from the University of Portharcourt (UNIPORT) (86) and the University of Rivers State (RSU) (85), both located in the state of Rivers. One hundred department heads were selected at random using a stratified selection technique. The data was gathered using the Effective Leadership and Quality Management Questionnaire (ELQMQ). The instrument was vetted by two doctors and a professor in the department of educational management. A test-retest procedure confirmed its reliability. Its index of 0.87 and 0.79 were determined through Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), while regression statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: How does communication skill enhance quality management of higher education in Rivers State?

Table 1: Relationship between Communication Skills enhance Quality Management of Higher Education in Rivers State

A. Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.678	.460	.172	1.64157

a. Predictors: (Constant), Communication Skills

According to the data presented above, there is a positive relationship between effective communication skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State, as indicated by the R-squared value of 0.460 and the coefficient of 0.678. Quality management in higher education in Rivers State is only 46% (0.460x100) contributed to by practises including communication skills, as seen in the table. That other factors not included in the model accounts for the remaining 54% of the variance in quality management of higher education in Rivers State.

Research Question Two: How does decision-making skills enhance quality management of higher education in Rivers State?

Table 2: Relationship between Decision-Making Skills enhance Quality Management of Higher Education in Rivers State

A. Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.693	.480	.269	1.54231

a. Predictors: (Constant), Decision-Making Skills

According to the data presented above, there is a positive relationship between decision-making skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State. The R-squared value is 0.480, and the coefficient of relationship is 0.693. In addition, the table demonstrated that the contribution of decision-making abilities to the quality management of higher education in Rivers State is only 48% (0.480x100). What this means is that the model accounts for just 48% of the variation in quality management in higher education in Rivers State.

Research Question Three: How does interpersonal skill enhance quality management of higher education in Rivers State?

Table 3: Relationship between Interpersonal Skills enhance Quality Management of Higher Education in Rivers State

A. Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.746 ^a	.557	.063	1.74627

a. Predictors: (Constant), Interpersonal Skills

According to the data in the table above, there is a positive relationship between interpersonal skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State, with a coefficient of 0.746 and an R-squared value of 0.557. The data also revealed that only 55.7% (0.557x100) of the contributions to quality management of higher education in Rivers State come from interpersonal skills. That additional factors not included in the model explain 44.3% of the variance in quality management of higher education in Rivers State.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between communication skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State.

Table 4: Summary of Regression on the Relationship between Communication Skills and Quality Management of Higher Education in Rivers State

A. ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	207.783	1	207.783	77.107	.000
	Residual	983.580	98	2.695		
	Total	1191.362	99			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality Management of Higher Education
b. Predictors: (Constant), Communication Skills

The F-statistic on table A above shows that there is a significant relationship between communication skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State $F_{1, 98}=77.107, p<.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis one was rejected at 0.05 alpha level.

B. Coefficients								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	42.183	1.606		26.267	.000	39.025	45.341
	Communication Skills	1.353	.040	.718	33.825	.000	.274	.432

a. Dependent Variable: Quality Management of Higher Education

Table B showed the regression equation $y=42.183+1.353x$ indicating that an increase in communication skills will lead to an increase in quality management of higher education in

Rivers State. Also, the column label t under Communication Skills (33.825) confirmed the significance of F-statistics with Sig<0.05.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between decision-making skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State.

Table 5: Summary of Regression on the Relationship between Decision-Making Skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State

A. ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	323.131	1	323.131	135.843	.000
	Residual	868.231	98	2.379		
	Total	1191.362	99			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality Management of Higher Education
b. Predictors: (Constant), Decision-Making Skills

The F-statistic on table A above shows that there is a significant relationship between decision-making skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State $F_{1, 98}=135.843$, $p<.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis two was rejected at 0.05 alpha level.

B. Coefficients								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	42.143	1.214		34.706	.000	39.755	44.531
	Decision-Making Skills	1.716	.061	.793	28.131	.000	.595	.837

a. Dependent Variable: Quality Management of Higher Education

Table B showed the regression equation $y=42.143+1.717x$ indicating that an increase in decision-making skills will lead to an increase in quality management of higher education in Rivers State. Also, the column label t under decision-making skills (28.131) confirmed the significance of F-statistics with Sig<0.05.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between interpersonal skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State.

Table 6: Summary of Regression on the Relationship between Interpersonal Skills and Quality Management of Higher Education in Rivers State

A. ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	78.307	1	78.307	25.679	.000
	Residual	1113.055	1348	3.049		
	Total	1191.362	1349			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality Management of Higher Education
b. Predictors: (Constant), Interpersonal Skills

B. Coefficients								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	49.112	1.414		34.723	.000	46.330	51.893
	Interpersonal Skills	1.432	.085	.557	16.847	.000	.265	.600

a. Dependent Variable: Teachers' Performance

The F-statistic on table A above shows that there is a significant relationship between interpersonal skills and quality management of higher education in Rivers State $F(1, 98)=25.679$, $p<.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis three was rejected at 0.05 alpha level.

Table B showed the regression equation $y=49.112+1.432x$ indicating that an increase in interpersonal skills will lead to an increase in quality management of higher education in Rivers State. Also, the column label t under decision-making skills (16.847) confirmed the significance of F-statistics with $\text{Sig}<0.05$.

Discussion of Findings

The initial goal was to learn how better communication may improve the administration of higher education in Rivers State. The research found a favourable relationship ($r=0.46$) between effective communication and the effective administration of higher education in Rivers State. Quality management in higher education in Rivers State was also shown to have a significant link with communication abilities ($F(1, 98)=77.107$; sig. val. = 0.00).

The result aligns with several existing studies that highlight the crucial role of effective communication skills in quality management within the education sector. Firstly, the finding is supported by the work of Hasan et al. (2016), who found in their study on Pakistani higher education institutions that efficient communication positively impacts the quality management of these institutions. They explained that effective communication, which includes clarity, timeliness, and relevance of information shared, facilitates coordination, reduces misunderstanding, and fosters a culture of mutual respect and cooperation. These are all elements essential for quality management.

Secondly, a study conducted by Alharbi and Yusoff (2012) on Saudi Arabian higher education institutions also provides empirical support to our findings. Their research demonstrated a positive correlation between communication and the implementation of total quality management practices. They noted that clear and consistent communication is crucial for the proper dissemination and understanding of institutional goals, expectations, and strategies, thereby enhancing the quality of management.

In summary, this study's findings on the relationship between communication skills and quality management in higher education in Rivers State are consistent with empirical findings from different cultural and geographical contexts, reinforcing the universal importance of effective communication in quality management practices.

The second goal looked at how better management of higher education in Rivers State may be achieved via better decision making. Quality management of higher education in Rivers

State was shown to be positively correlated with decision-making abilities ($r=0.48$). Corresponding hypotheses demonstrated a statistically significant connection between sound judgement and the effective administration of colleges and universities in Rivers State ($F_{1, 98}=135.843$; sig. val.=0.00).

The present finding is supported by numerous empirical studies. For instance, a study by Bonnici (2011) observed that decision-making skills were pivotal in driving quality improvement in higher education institutions in the United States. The research demonstrated that administrators with effective decision-making skills could critically analyze situations, consider alternative solutions, and make decisions that improve institutional performance and quality. These findings suggest that effective decision-making skills are essential for managing complex higher education environments. Similarly, a study by Thuy and Hau (2019) on Vietnamese higher education institutions found a positive correlation between decision-making skills and quality management. The study revealed that decision-making skills, particularly those involved in strategic planning and resource allocation, significantly influenced the institutions' ability to meet quality standards and improve academic performance.

Therefore, this study's finding that decision-making skills enhance quality management of higher education in Rivers State aligns with empirical evidence from different cultural and geographical settings, underscoring the importance of decision-making skills in higher education quality management.

The final goal looked for a good correlation between interpersonal skills and the administration of higher education in Rivers. Results demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship between interpersonal skills and quality management in higher education institutions in Rivers State ($r=0.557$). The study also confirmed the hypothesised link between interpersonal competence and quality management in Rivers State's institutions of higher learning ($F_{1, 98}=25.679$; sig. val. = 0.00).

The study's finding aligns with previous research on the relationship between interpersonal skills and the quality management of higher education. For instance, Aghdasi et al. (2011) studied the soft skills of academic administrators and its relation to the effective management of higher education institutions. They found that interpersonal skills significantly contribute to the effectiveness of academic management and the quality of educational services.

In another study, Mustamil et al. (2017) analyzed soft skills (including interpersonal skills) of university administrators in Malaysia. They found a significant correlation between these skills and quality management. According to them, interpersonal skills improve mutual understanding, collaboration, and effective communication, all of which are necessary for the effective management of higher education institutions. In conclusion, your study reinforces the importance of interpersonal skills in the quality management of higher education, corroborating the findings from previous research.

CONCLUSION

Having researched the role of leadership in improving the administration of universities in Rivers State. The study's author concludes that strong institutional leadership improves university administration in Rivers State. In particular, strong communication skills, the ability to make sound decisions, and the ability to interact effectively with others all contribute to improved higher education administration in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- That higher education institution in Rivers State put a stronger emphasis on enhancing communication skills among staff and faculty. This could be facilitated through comprehensive training programs, workshops, or integrating communication-focused modules in staff development initiatives.
- That institutions of higher education in Rivers State, as well as other regions, invest more heavily in the development of decision-making skills among their administrative and academic staff. This could be achieved through targeted training programs, workshops, or seminars.
- That higher educational institutions in Rivers State focus on enhancing the interpersonal skills of their staff and faculty. This could involve implementing professional development programs that include interpersonal skills training, or providing resources and workshops aimed at fostering better relationships and team dynamics.

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