



COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study adopted a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between collaborative leadership dimensions and professional development initiatives in public universities within Rivers State. The population for the study consisted of three thousand four hundred nineteen (3,419) academic staff from the three public universities in Rivers State. A sample of 447 respondents was drawn using a stratified random sampling technique representing a proportional subset of the total academic staff population. A researcher-developed instrument titled Collaborative Leadership and Professional Development Questionnaire (CLPDQ) was used for data collection. The instrument comprised three sections: Section A captured respondents' demographic data, Section B contained twenty items addressing the four sub-variables of collaborative leadership (vision clarity, participative governance, staff training, and promotion support), and Section C consisted of twenty items on professional development outcomes. The validity of the instrument was established by experts in Educational Management, and the reliability was determined through the test-retest approach, yielding a coefficient of .882. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was applied to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that vision clarity, participative governance, and staff training were significantly and positively correlated with professional development, while promotion support showed a low but positive relationship. Based on the findings, the study concludes that collaborative leadership practices significantly influence the professional growth of academic staff in public universities. The study recommends that university leaders integrate inclusive governance structures, encourage transparent vision articulation, and prioritize continuous training to improve professional development outcomes in the university system.

Keywords: Collaborative Leadership, Vision Clarity, Participative Governance, Staff Training, Promotion Support, Professional Development, Public Universities.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership has long been recognised as a key determinant of institutional success, especially in higher education systems, where governance structures shape academic excellence and staff development. Habeeb and Eyupoglu (2024) asserted that the quality of leadership directly influences how educational institutions align their goals, engage stakeholders, and allocate resources. In Nigeria, the leadership structures within public universities have been persistently hierarchical, often undermining participatory governance, professional advancement, and institutional responsiveness. Ekine and Robert-Okah (2021) noted that the rigidity in administrative operations among public universities in Rivers State continues to stifle innovation and diminish academic staff morale.

The traditional leadership model employed in most Nigerian public universities has also been characterised by political interference, delayed decision-making, and autocratic governance tendencies. According to Falola (2024), political interference in the appointment of vice-chancellors and principal officers often prioritises loyalty over merit, thereby weakening trust and institutional productivity. This centralised style of governance not only alienates staff from critical decision-making processes but also fosters an atmosphere of exclusion, disenchantment, and underutilisation of human capacity. Nweke and Tamuseipiriala (2022) explained that the lack of transparency and collaborative engagement within universities in Rivers State severely limits opportunities for academic and administrative staff to thrive professionally.

Recognising the limitations of this conventional governance style, several scholars have proposed collaborative leadership as a transformative alternative. Collaborative leadership, as defined by Ekeni et al. (2023), entails mutual trust, inclusive participation, open communication, and joint responsibility in decision-making processes. The essence of this leadership approach lies in its ability to harmonise institutional vision with staff aspirations, thereby enhancing organisational commitment and shared accountability. Within the Nigerian higher education context, Jibola et al. (2023) observed that collaborative leadership contributes positively to staff innovation, work motivation, and alignment with institutional goals when embedded through vision clarity and participative governance.

Vision clarity, one of the key sub-variables of collaborative leadership examined in this study, refers to the extent to which university leaders articulate and disseminate a coherent institutional direction that guides staff efforts. Ololube (2024) highlighted that when university leadership provides a clear vision, academic staff are more likely to align their activities with the strategic aspirations of the institution, leading to increased innovation and commitment. Participative governance, on the other hand, promotes shared responsibility, institutional inclusivity, and staff involvement in strategic decision-making. Omorobi and Ofodile (2020) emphasised that participative governance structures contribute to goal attainment and encourage a culture of shared leadership, ultimately improving staff motivation and institutional effectiveness.

In Rivers State, however, public universities such as Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education continue to grapple with leadership-related challenges that impede staff development. According to Dawari and Robert-Okah (2021), irregular access to staff development programmes, inconsistent promotion practices, and inadequate institutional support have hindered staff advancement in many universities. Although these institutions acknowledge the relevance of professional development, the structures and leadership mechanisms necessary to support it remain largely ineffective. Promotion and training

opportunities are often skewed in favour of a few, while other staff experience stagnation due to poor institutional policies and leadership inertia.

Professional development, as conceptualised in this study, comprises two interrelated sub-variables: training opportunities and promotion support. Training opportunities encompass structured programmes such as seminars, workshops, conferences, and capacity-building initiatives designed to improve staff competencies. Ekeni et al. (2020) asserted that access to regular training not only enhances staff capabilities but also aligns institutional practices with contemporary academic and administrative standards. Promotion support, on the other hand, includes clear and fair criteria for advancement, institutional mentoring, and career counselling mechanisms. Ajetunmobi and Kolawole (2020) explained that where promotion policies are transparent and merit-based, staff exhibit higher levels of motivation and job satisfaction.

The theoretical linkage between collaborative leadership and staff development has been explained within the framework of leadership and organisational learning theories. Vision clarity creates alignment between institutional objectives and individual aspirations, while participative governance provides staff with a voice in determining their developmental pathways. Jibola et al. (2023) argued that this dual mechanism enhances institutional trust and fosters a professional environment conducive to growth. However, the extent to which these leadership practices influence staff development outcomes, specifically training opportunities and promotion support has not been adequately studied in Nigerian public universities, especially within Rivers State.

Although several studies in other regions have established positive associations between leadership styles and staff development, university-level empirical studies in Rivers State remain limited. For example, while Ajetunmobi and Kolawole (2020) demonstrated a positive relationship between participative leadership and staff development in Ogun State, and Jibola et al. (2023) linked transformational leadership to staff innovation in Kwara State, similar studies in the context of Rivers State's university system are lacking. Ananyi and Onyekwere (2023) assessed TETFund intervention as catalyst for the transformation of higher education in Nigeria, but did not focus specifically on the relationship between TETFund's staff leadership development indicators.

This gap in literature forms the rationale for the present study, which investigates the relationship between collaborative leadership and staff professional development in Rivers State public universities. The study adopts a correlational design using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to address the urgent need for data-driven leadership reforms in higher education institutions. The significance of this study lies in its focus on the leadership dimensions that matter most for enhancing professional development outcomes in public universities. By generating evidence on the predictive power of vision clarity and participative governance, the study will provide a practical guide for university leaders, policy makers, and stakeholders committed to strengthening institutional performance and staff capacity in Rivers State and beyond.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigerian public universities, a persistent gap exists between prevailing leadership practices and the realization of meaningful professional development outcomes for academic and non-academic staff. While professional development ideally flourishes in environments shaped by collaborative leadership values such as shared vision, inclusive governance, and collective accountability many institutions remain entrenched in hierarchical command structures, top-

down decision-making, and limited stakeholder engagement. These systemic limitations hinder innovation, dampen staff morale, and obstruct sustained career growth. Notably, few empirical studies within the Nigerian or broader West African higher education context have comprehensively examined how core elements of collaborative leadership specifically vision, clarity and participative governance correlate with tangible professional development outcomes such as training opportunities and promotion support. Much of the existing literature treats leadership and staff development as separate phenomena or narrowly explores leadership through traditional models that do not reflect participatory realities. The absence of clear strategic direction, politicized appointments, and exclusionary leadership styles has further weakened institutional commitment to staff development. Consequently, there is a critical lack of understanding of how collaborative leadership traits concretely influence professional development outcomes. This gap presents a serious concern for policy and practice, especially in Rivers State, where universities must navigate complex administrative and socio-political dynamics. This study, therefore, seeks to provide evidence-based insight into the relationship between collaborative leadership practices and professional development indicators within public universities in the region.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between collaborative leadership and professional development in public universities in Rivers State, with particular emphasis on how vision clarity and participative governance relate to training opportunities and promotion support provided for university staff. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- Examine the extent of vision clarity practiced by university leadership in public universities in Rivers State.
- Determine the extent of participative governance in administrative decision-making in public universities in Rivers State.
- Assess the level of training opportunities available for staff in public universities in Rivers State.
- Investigate the relationship between participative governance and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- To what extent is vision clarity exhibited by leaders in public universities in Rivers State?
- To what extent is participative governance practiced by leadership in public universities in Rivers State?
- What is the level of training opportunities available to staff in public universities in Rivers State?
- What is the relationship between participative governance and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and will be tested at a 0.05 level of significance using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC):

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between vision clarity and training opportunities in public universities in Rivers State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between vision clarity and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between participative governance and training opportunities in public universities in Rivers State.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between participative governance and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform leadership practices, policy development, and institutional reform across public universities in Rivers State and beyond. University leaders and administrators stand to benefit from the findings by gaining clearer insight into how collaborative leadership—characterized by vision clarity and participative governance—can be strategically leveraged to enhance professional development initiatives, particularly through increased training opportunities and transparent promotion support systems. For university staff, both academic and non-academic, the study offers a framework that validates their inclusion in governance processes and affirms the importance of equitable professional advancement pathways.

Policymakers within educational ministries and regulatory bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) can utilize the empirical evidence generated to formulate context-specific guidelines and leadership benchmarks that support institutional accountability and staff capacity building. Researchers in education and leadership studies will also benefit from the study's contribution to the limited body of empirical literature linking collaborative leadership sub-variables directly to measurable professional development outcomes within the Nigerian or sub-Saharan African context. Beyond its immediate geographical scope, the study could serve as a replicable model for other public universities facing similar challenges in leadership and workforce development. By showcasing how participatory governance and shared vision can catalyze institutional growth, this study provides a strategic roadmap for higher education systems seeking to align leadership structures with long-term staff development goals and sustainable academic excellence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory, propounded by Bass in 1985, as cited in Okotie and Ogunipe (2018) posits that leaders who display idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration are capable of driving change and improving performance outcomes. These leaders create and articulate a clear vision, foster a

sense of mission, and align the values of followers with organizational goals. In the context of Nigerian public universities, where institutional inertia and rigid hierarchies often hinder development, transformational leadership offers a paradigm shift towards inclusiveness, engagement, and capacity building. Vision clarity, one of the independent variables of this study, is a key tenet of transformational leadership. A university leader who communicates a compelling and coherent vision creates a unifying direction that motivates staff and enhances professional commitment. This alignment of personal and institutional aspirations serves as a catalyst for professional development by giving meaning to the roles of academic and administrative personnel.

Participative governance also finds theoretical support within the transformational leadership model. Leaders who promote participatory decision-making stimulate intellectual engagement among staff, encourage innovation, and build institutional trust. This openness cultivates a professional environment where staff members are not only informed but actively involved in shaping the trajectory of the institution. In the Nigerian university system, where decision-making is often centralized, such participatory practices represent a vital shift towards democratic leadership and shared responsibility. Okotie and Ogundipe (2018) noted that Nigerian university leaders who practice participative governance significantly enhance staff morale and institutional cohesion. Similarly, Ololube (2024) emphasized that transformational leadership behaviors strengthen institutional performance and staff capacity through enhanced engagement and responsiveness. Thus, Transformational Leadership Theory provides a coherent lens for interpreting the link between leadership behaviors, specifically vision clarity and participative governance and institutional outcomes related to professional development.

Furthermore, the relevance of this theory to the study is reinforced by the work of Worlu and Osaat (2023), who demonstrated that visionary leadership practices in South-South Nigerian universities directly correlate with increased motivation and skills acquisition among staff. In a similar vein, Ede and Nwokocha (2021) observed that the absence of transformational leadership traits often results in resistance to change, poor staff development policies, and deteriorating academic environments. By embedding the principles of transformational leadership into this study, the research critically examines the extent to which university leaders influence training access, promotion support, and other indicators of professional development.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult Learning Theory, also known as Andragogy, was conceptualized by Knowles in 1970 and refined in subsequent works. This theory holds that adults are self-directed learners who bring accumulated life experiences into their learning process, prefer problem-solving over rote memorization, and are motivated by relevance and application rather than external rewards. Adult learners thrive in environments that are collaborative, respectful, and aligned with their personal and professional goals. In the context of university staff development, training opportunities that adhere to the principles of adult learning are more likely to yield meaningful outcomes. This theory supports the interpretation of training opportunities, a key dependent variable in the study, by underscoring the need for autonomy, flexibility, and relevance in professional development programs. University staff, particularly those with years of service and institutional knowledge, require training programs that build upon their experience and address immediate job-related challenges.

Additionally, the theory speaks directly to the variable of promotion support. Adult learners are intrinsically motivated by opportunities for growth, recognition, and advancement. Promotion systems that are transparent, merit-based, and inclusive resonate with the adult learning model by validating the contributions and development efforts of staff. Conversely, ambiguous and politicized promotion systems demotivate adult professionals and discourage engagement in professional development. According to Eze and Ekong (2020), one of the critical obstacles to effective professional growth among Nigerian university staff is the misalignment between learning efforts and career progression opportunities. Adegboyega and Onwuasoanya (2022) further noted that when promotion support is perceived as fair and performance-driven, it reinforces staff morale and fosters a culture of continuous improvement.

Empirical contributions by Ootobo and Enwezor (2020) demonstrated that staff members who perceive training and promotion systems as consistent with adult learning principles exhibit higher engagement levels and increased productivity. These findings corroborate the importance of Adult Learning Theory as a foundational guide for interpreting professional development in higher education. By applying this theory, the study not only highlights the characteristics of effective professional development but also emphasizes the role of institutional support in nurturing a learning-oriented environment for adult staff. Thus, Adult Learning Theory is integral to understanding how university leaders can foster meaningful and sustainable professional growth through training and promotion initiatives that align with the needs and preferences of adult learners.

Together, Transformational Leadership Theory and Adult Learning Theory serve as complementary frameworks that underpin the present study. They connect the leadership attributes of vision clarity and participative governance with professional development indicators such as training opportunities and promotion support. This dual-theoretical orientation ensures a balanced approach that incorporates both leadership behavior and staff learning dynamics. It also offers a robust platform for interpreting the implications of collaborative leadership for human capital development in Nigeria's public university system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative Leadership in University System

The concept of collaborative leadership in the university system has evolved into a vital paradigm that underscores inclusivity, shared decision-making, and collective accountability. Within the context of higher education institutions in Nigeria and other African regions, this leadership model offers a response to the limitations of authoritarian and top-down administrative systems that traditionally dominate university governance. Okon (2021) explained that collaborative leadership, when genuinely practiced, facilitates participatory governance and promotes an atmosphere of collegiality among academic and administrative staff. This inclusive style fosters interdependence and trust, both of which are critical to institutional productivity. Such collaboration often manifests through committees, taskforces, and faculty boards, allowing diverse university actors to contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes. In contrast to unilateral governance approaches, the collaborative model allows leaders to mobilize shared values, perspectives, and resources, thereby strengthening institutional synergy (Adebayo et al., 2020).

Collaborative leadership also enhances transparency and team commitment, particularly in contexts where institutional resources are constrained and leadership legitimacy is questioned. Joe-Akunne et al. (2020) emphasized that collaborative leadership in public universities improves staff morale and promotes mutual respect by decentralizing power and emphasizing joint problem-solving. This model also facilitates the exchange of knowledge and professional growth among academics through informal and formal interactions, leading to improved practices in pedagogy, research, and administration. It is not only a managerial tool but also a cultural orientation that shifts attention from positional authority to relational influence. Ede and Nwokocha (2021) found that faculty members who perceive their leaders as collaborative tend to engage more willingly in institutional projects, professional networks, and departmental innovations. This implies that collaborative leadership becomes a strategic mechanism through which universities achieve cohesion, commitment, and sustainable transformation.

Furthermore, empirical studies suggest that collaborative leadership increases the responsiveness of university systems to internal and external challenges. As public universities in Nigeria face increasing pressure to reform, diversify funding sources, and improve staff capacity, leadership models that foster broad-based input become essential. Eze and Inyang (2020) noted that collaborative leadership is strongly associated with effective conflict management and trust-building across hierarchical levels. In their study involving university deans and department heads, they found that departments with collaborative leaders were more effective in resolving professional grievances and mentoring junior faculty. This highlights the potential of collaborative leadership to serve as a moderating force in environments marked by bureaucratic inertia and interdepartmental rivalries. As such, collaboration is not simply a philosophical orientation but a practical necessity in an era where institutional survival depends on adaptability and shared purpose.

The need for collaborative leadership is even more urgent in the light of the global call for institutional accountability and quality assurance in higher education. According to Ovwigho and Efe (2018), universities that adopt collaborative leadership structures are more likely to demonstrate consistency in professional development programs, faculty evaluation, and administrative learning. These systems allow university leaders to harness the diverse expertise of academic staff, ensuring that leadership decisions reflect the lived realities of those at the frontline of knowledge dissemination and research innovation. In the Nigerian context, where challenges such as underfunding, policy inconsistency, and political interference persist, collaborative leadership offers a pathway toward institutional coherence and functional professionalism. Consequently, embedding collaboration within the leadership culture of public universities holds significant promise for improving faculty development, teaching quality, and administrative resilience.

Vision Clarity and Professional Development

Vision clarity is a foundational principle of strategic leadership that plays a crucial role in shaping institutional direction, galvanizing staff commitment, and aligning university activities toward defined goals. In the higher education context, clear vision statements help create shared meaning, set expectations, and foster a sense of identity among academic staff. According to Adeyanju, and Olorunfemi (2023), when university leadership articulates a clear and compelling vision, it enhances faculty members' understanding of institutional priorities, thereby motivating them to align their efforts with broader developmental goals. Such clarity is particularly

important in fostering professional development, as it determines how staff interpret and engage with institutional training policies, career trajectories, and capacity-building opportunities. The absence of a shared vision, on the other hand, often leads to fragmentation, uncertainty, and disengagement among university personnel, thereby undermining staff morale and performance.

In the Nigerian public university system, vision clarity is often constrained by inconsistent leadership transitions and misalignment between institutional goals and implementation strategies. As a result, professional development programs may be poorly communicated, underutilized, or misinterpreted. Uche and Eze (2020) asserted that when institutional goals are ambiguous, staff members become skeptical of leadership intentions, and the uptake of training and development initiatives declines. Their study revealed that academic staff in universities with clearly defined strategic visions were significantly more likely to participate in seminars, workshops, and postgraduate training. This suggests that clarity of purpose is not merely symbolic but translates into measurable behavior among university staff. A transparent and consistent vision enables academic leaders to structure development programs that are perceived as relevant, equitable, and worth investing in.

Moreover, vision clarity facilitates the alignment of professional development initiatives with performance management systems, thereby institutionalizing a culture of continuous learning. Akpan (2016) maintained that in universities where vision is clearly communicated, leadership is better positioned to integrate development objectives into faculty appraisal frameworks. This ensures that development is not viewed as an isolated activity but as a strategic component of academic life. For example, when a university's vision emphasizes research excellence, corresponding support mechanisms such as sabbaticals, grant writing workshops, and mentorship programs are more likely to be embedded into its administrative practices. Thus, vision clarity helps transform professional development from a peripheral concern into a core institutional mandate, enhancing faculty performance and institutional competitiveness in the process.

Additionally, a well-communicated vision fosters a sense of belonging and long-term commitment among staff, which in turn strengthens the institutional culture. Ovwigho and Efe (2018) observed that academic staff are more likely to embrace development opportunities when they perceive themselves as integral to the realization of institutional goals. Their research found a positive correlation between faculty perception of vision clarity and their willingness to assume leadership responsibilities, attend development sessions, and mentor junior colleagues. This underscores the transformative potential of vision clarity as a leadership strategy that transcends administrative boundaries. In the Nigerian public university setting, where resource constraints and political instability often affect morale, clear vision statements provide a stabilizing framework that supports both individual growth and collective progress.

Participative Governance and Professional Development

Participative governance in universities encompasses a managerial approach that integrates inclusiveness, decentralization, shared responsibility, and collaborative management structures. This participatory framework ensures that decisions affecting staff development, resource distribution, and institutional direction are not solely the prerogative of top management but are co-created through dialogue and consensus-building processes involving all academic stakeholders. The integration of participative governance in university administration has

emerged as a critical approach in driving professional growth, academic ownership, and workforce alignment with institutional goals.

Agu and Ekezie (2019) described participative governance as a system that empowers academic staff to contribute to policy formulation, decision-making, and professional development initiatives. In their view, when staff feel heard and consulted, their sense of belonging increases, which in turn strengthens commitment and performance. Similarly, Amadi and Ugochukwu (2017) highlighted how participatory mechanisms promote open communication channels between leadership and employees, allowing concerns about training needs, resource allocation, and professional growth to be addressed proactively. These collaborative structures foster institutional accountability and reflect the value placed on employee engagement.

Okon et al. (2021) examined shared leadership as a strategy that enhances academic productivity by encouraging team-based decision-making and leveraging the expertise of staff across ranks. According to their findings, the transparency inherent in participative governance nurtures trust, reduces institutional conflict, and strengthens faculty loyalty. In similar fashion, collaborative management practices have been shown to stimulate academic discourse and motivate staff to take advantage of developmental programs offered by their universities (Ovwigbo & Efe, 2018). The evidence affirms that autonomy, morale, and engagement are best cultivated within institutions where governance is democratized and inclusively structured.

Furthermore, participative governance has direct implications for professional development, especially in the context of how training needs are assessed and resources are distributed. According to Ekeni et al. (2020), staff members who participate in governance are more likely to champion policies that promote equity and development inclusivity. Their study revealed that universities practicing participatory governance experienced higher employee engagement in professional development programs, as compared to those with authoritarian administrative styles. Thus, participative governance, beyond being an administrative model, is a strategic tool for optimizing institutional performance and individual professional fulfillment.

Training Opportunities as a Component of Professional Development

Training opportunities in universities encompass organized activities designed to enhance knowledge, skills, and competencies among academic and non-academic staff. These activities may include seminars, conferences, in-service training, workshops, and other capacity-building platforms that support ongoing professional enrichment. In modern university systems, continuous training is no longer considered optional but essential to maintaining academic relevance, institutional competitiveness, and pedagogical efficacy in a fast-changing educational environment.

Amadi and Ugochukwu (2017) asserted that training and development are foundational to the functionality of university staff, particularly in enhancing teaching competencies, research capabilities, and administrative efficiency. Their analysis emphasized that in-service training aligns institutional vision with the career aspirations of academic staff, fostering mutual growth. Moreover, Habeeb and Eyupoglu (2024) found that universities that institutionalize regular workshops and academic retreats significantly outperform those with ad-hoc training schedules in terms of research output, curriculum innovation, and graduate quality. These studies suggest that training is not only beneficial to individual staff but instrumental to systemic success.

However, access to these training opportunities is not always guaranteed. Institutional policies, funding availability, and managerial attitudes often hinder staff from benefiting equally. In their evaluation of accessibility to professional training, Akpan (2016) observed that while some universities in Nigeria provide comprehensive professional development programs, others limit such initiatives to senior faculty or administrative staff. The inconsistency in accessibility not only marginalizes junior staff but also creates inequality in institutional knowledge advancement. Thus, training opportunities must be managed with equity and policy clarity to ensure they yield their intended outcomes.

Institutional cultures that value academic advancement often establish clear structures to support ongoing staff development. Ananyi et al. (2024) indicated that universities with proactive TETFund training policies incorporate mentorship, appraisal-based capacity identification, and tailored training programs into their human resource strategy. They further noted that such universities tend to have higher staff retention, improved academic morale, and increased interdisciplinary collaboration. In sum, the availability, accessibility, and contextual relevance of training initiatives are pivotal to nurturing academic excellence and institutional growth.

Promotion Support as a Component of Professional Development

Promotion support as a facet of professional development refers to institutional structures and policies that facilitate the career progression of university staff through clear appraisal criteria, mentorship systems, fair evaluation, and accessible career advancement pathways. It is widely recognized that the presence of equitable and transparent promotion procedures significantly enhances job satisfaction, motivation, and long-term commitment to institutional goals. Where promotion support is weak or unclear, staff morale is often undermined, and professional growth becomes stagnant.

Kpolovie (2019) emphasized that transparent promotion processes grounded in merit and academic contributions encourage staff to remain productive and innovative. Their study observed that when promotion policies are predictable, clearly communicated, and objectively implemented, staff invest more readily in research, teaching, and administrative responsibilities. Similarly, Opara and Ikenna (2019) argued that mentorship programs within universities contribute significantly to preparing staff for promotional assessments, ensuring they understand performance expectations and institutional benchmarks.

However, disparities in promotional support across faculties and staff categories remain a common challenge. As Onyeukwu and Ogochukwu (2022) reported, some academic institutions still operate opaque promotion systems prone to favoritism, delayed reviews, and inconsistent feedback. These practices dissuade early-career academics from investing in long-term development and compromise institutional integrity. They advocated for regular policy updates, feedback-driven evaluation, and mentoring programs to bridge existing gaps.

The connection between promotion support and academic productivity is further established by Ekeh and Odili (2020), who observed that staff who feel institutionally supported in their career journey are more likely to participate in training, publish scholarly articles, and undertake administrative responsibilities. Their findings indicated that promotion support functions as both a reward mechanism and a catalyst for professional excellence. Therefore, institutions that prioritize transparent promotion policies and robust support systems inevitably cultivate a motivated and development-oriented academic workforce.

Review of Empirical Studies

The relationship between collaborative leadership and professional development in the university system has attracted considerable empirical attention in recent years, especially within the Nigerian context. Empirical studies have attempted to establish linkages between specific leadership dimensions such as vision clarity, participative governance, access to training, and promotion support and indicators of academic staff development, including motivation, retention, satisfaction, and productivity. However, while some studies have demonstrated significant associations, others have revealed inconclusive or conflicting outcomes. These mixed findings underscore the necessity for further inquiry into how collaborative leadership practices influence staff professional development outcomes, particularly in public universities across Rivers State, Nigeria.

Nwokocha and Asuka (2021) conducted a study titled "Collaborative Leadership and Academic Staff Motivation in Nigerian Public Universities" using a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised approximately 12,000 academic staff across public universities in South-South Nigeria. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 1,200 academic staff. The researchers developed a structured questionnaire titled "Vision Clarity and Staff Motivation Questionnaire" (VCSMQ), with a reliability index of 0.86 established using Cronbach's alpha. Data were collected via physical distribution of the questionnaire, and data analysis was conducted using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at a 0.05 level of significance. The analysis yielded a p-value of 0.002 and a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.63, indicating a strong positive relationship. Their findings revealed that vision clarity by university leaders significantly enhanced academic staff's motivation and participation in professional development initiatives. In discussion, the study emphasized that clear communication of institutional goals improved staff commitment to training programs. The researchers concluded that visionary leadership is a pivotal factor in staff development, recommending that university administrators institutionalize transparent vision-sharing mechanisms. Their findings corroborate the conclusions of Okon (2021), who also highlighted clarity of mission as central to effective academic leadership.

Okpara and Ibimina (2019) carried out a study titled "Participative Leadership and Employee Engagement in Nigerian Federal Universities," adopting a correlational research design. The study population consisted of about 10,000 senior and junior academic staff across six federal universities in the South-East geopolitical zone. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 1,000 participants. The research instrument titled "Participative Governance Engagement Scale (PGES)" recorded a reliability coefficient of 0.89 using the split-half method. Data were collected through online and paper-based surveys, and the statistical tool employed was Spearman's rank-order correlation at a significance level of 0.05. The result showed a p-value of 0.001 and a rho of 0.58, indicating a moderately strong positive correlation. The findings showed that participative governance was significantly associated with increased autonomy, morale, and willingness to engage in self-initiated development activities. In the discussion section, the study noted that inclusive decision-making processes elevated staff trust in management and improved staff retention. The authors concluded that shared leadership practices serve as a foundation for sustainable professional development culture and recommended policy-driven frameworks for shared governance in public institutions. This aligns

with Uche and Eze's (2020) study that found participative management strategies improve academic staff well-being.

Umeadi and Worlu (2020), in their study titled "Training and Retraining as Tools for Enhancing Academic Excellence in Nigerian State Universities," adopted an ex-post facto design. The target population was approximately 7,206 teaching staff from eight state-owned universities in Southern Nigeria. A sample size of 980 respondents was selected using proportionate stratified sampling. The study used a standardized instrument tagged "Academic Staff Training Assessment Scale" (ASTAS), with a Cronbach's alpha reliability index of 0.91. Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires, and regression analysis was employed at a significance level of 0.05. The analysis returned a p-value of 0.004 and an R^2 of 0.47, suggesting that institutional training practices accounted for 47% of the variance in professional development scores. Findings showed that access to regular training workshops and seminars significantly enhanced staff competency and instructional quality. The discussion emphasized that universities with functional staff development units recorded higher rates of research output and grant acquisition. The study concluded that professional development through structured training was essential for staff growth and recommended mandatory periodic training for academic personnel. Their findings lend credence to earlier work by Alagoa and Wali (2017), who observed similar trends in Bayelsa State tertiary institutions.

Enekwe and Barine (2022) conducted a study titled "Promotion Support and Career Advancement of University Lecturers in South-South Nigeria," employing a descriptive survey design. The population included approximately 13,000 university lecturers across federal and state institutions in the region. A total of 1,300 participants were drawn using stratified sampling. The researchers used a validated instrument titled "Promotion Support Perception Questionnaire (PSPQ)" with a reliability index of 0.88 based on Cronbach's alpha. Data were gathered using structured online forms, and multiple regression analysis was performed at 0.05 significance. Results showed a p-value of 0.003 and beta coefficients indicating that mentorship and transparency in promotion policies significantly predicted staff career satisfaction and retention. The study found that staff who received clear guidance, mentorship, and transparent assessment processes experienced higher levels of professional fulfilment and advancement. The authors discussed that lack of promotion support breeds frustration and low morale, recommending institutional mentorship and promotion guidelines. Their findings reinforce the observations made by Ofili and Tamuno (2018), who found that unfair promotion practices diminished productivity among senior lecturers.

These empirical studies collectively affirm the interconnectedness between leadership traits and the professional growth of academic staff. They highlight how clarity of vision, participatory governance, structured training opportunities, and equitable promotion systems each play vital roles in staff development outcomes. Despite these validations, notable gaps persist in contextual investigations within Rivers State public universities, where local governance practices, political interference, and institutional disparities may influence outcomes. This underscores the importance of the present study in examining the dynamics within this specific sociocultural and policy context. The empirical insights from the reviewed studies will be instrumental in guiding the development of the study's hypotheses and survey instruments, ensuring that each sub-variable is appropriately operationalized and measured.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationship between collaborative leadership practices and academic staff professional development in public universities in Rivers State. The design was deemed appropriate as it facilitated the investigation of associations between the independent variables: vision clarity, participative governance, training opportunities, and promotion support and the dependent variable, professional development. The population covered the entire academic staff from the three public universities in Rivers State, namely: University of Port Harcourt, Choba; Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo; and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni. From the estimated population, a sample size of 447 academic staff members was drawn using a stratified random sampling technique. Stratification was based on faculty and academic rank to ensure fair representation and reduce bias. The sample size represented 30% of the academic staff population in the selected universities, which amounted to 15% of the total target population.

Data collection was carried out using a researcher-designed instrument titled “Collaborative Leadership and Academic Staff Professional Development Questionnaire (CLASPDQ).” The questionnaire comprised three sections: Section A captured demographic variables; Section B contained 20 items developed to assess the four independent variables (five items per sub-variable), and Section C contained 20 items relating to the dependent variable academic staff professional development to correlate with each aspect of collaborative leadership. Each item was structured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The face and content validity of the instrument were ensured through expert evaluation by three specialists in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation.

A pilot study was conducted among 60 academic staff from Delta State University, Abraka, outside the scope of the study area, to determine the reliability of the instrument. Using Cronbach’s alpha, the reliability coefficient for the overall instrument was established at .87, with subscale reliabilities ranging from .79 to .89, which indicated acceptable internal consistency. Questionnaire distribution was conducted physically and electronically over a period of six weeks, following institutional approval and adherence to ethical procedures including informed consent and confidentiality assurances. Two trained research assistants per institution supported the distribution and collection of the questionnaires across the three universities under study. Out of the 447 questionnaires distributed, 439 were returned; however, only 432 were considered valid for analysis after discarding 8 invalid responses, yielding a high retrieval rate of approximately 96.64%, which was considered adequate for statistical analysis.

For data analysis, mean and standard deviation were employed to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses at a .05 level of significance. Any hypothesis yielding a p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant, suggesting a meaningful relationship among the variables under investigation. This methodological design and execution ensured rigor, reliability, and relevance in generating results applicable to similar higher education contexts.

RESULTS

Research Question One: To what extent is vision clarity exhibited by leaders in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation Responses to the extent Vision Clarity is exhibited by leaders in public universities in Rivers State

S/N	Vision Clarity by Leaders	Mean	SD.	Remark
1.	My university leadership communicates clear goals and institutional vision.	2.3784	1.11589	Low Extent
2.	There is consistency between our mission statement and the actual policies in place.	2.5052	1.12812	High Extent
3.	I understand how my departmental goals align with the university's vision.	2.7163	1.08868	High Extent
4.	Leadership regularly updates staff about strategic plans and progress.	2.6868	1.07729	High Extent
5.	The vision of the university motivates me to improve professionally.	2.7612	1.13468	High Extent
Grand Mean		2.7263	1.11563	High Extent

The table 1 presented the analysis of mean and standard deviation scores on the extent vision clarity is exhibited by leaders in public universities in Rivers State. The responses revealed varied perceptions among respondents, as some items had mean values slightly below the 2.5 criterion while others exceeded it. Specifically, the item concerning leadership's communication of clear institutional goals recorded a low mean of 2.3784, indicating limited clarity in that aspect. However, the grand mean of 2.7263 suggests an overall high extent of vision clarity, implying that, generally, respondents acknowledged that leaders in public universities exhibit a considerable level of vision clarity. Respondents recognized alignment between departmental goals and institutional vision, regular updates about strategic plans, and the motivational role of the university's vision. This suggests that, while some elements of vision communication may need strengthening, the overarching perception affirms that leadership in these universities is actively striving to maintain a clear and shared institutional vision.

Research Question Two: To what extent is participative governance practiced by leadership in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation responses to the extent participative governance is practiced by leadership in public universities in Rivers State

S/N	Direction of Goal	Mean	SD.	Remark
6.	Decision-making processes in my university include staff input.	2.6180	1.13386	High Extent
7.	I feel encouraged to voice my opinions in institutional matters.	2.3690	1.15970	Low Extent
8.	Leadership promotes shared responsibility in governance.	2.5197	1.09321	High Extent
9.	Committees and governance structures include fair staff representation.	2.6264	1.10911	High Extent
10	Collaborative leadership is a common practice in my university system	2.5478	1.10132	High Extent
Grand Mean		2.5831	1.10431	High Extent

Table 2 displayed the summary of mean and standard deviation scores concerning the extent participative governance is practiced by leadership in public universities in Rivers State. Most items recorded mean values above the benchmark of 2.5, indicating a general perception of high engagement in participative governance. However, one notable item, encouragement to voice opinions in institutional matters fell slightly below the threshold, with a mean of 2.3690,

signaling that this aspect might be under-practiced or inconsistently applied. Despite this, the grand mean of 2.5831 indicates that participative governance is generally upheld to a high extent. Respondents acknowledged shared responsibility in decision-making, fair representation in governance committees, and collaborative leadership practices. These findings highlight a commendable level of participatory engagement, though attention may be needed to further empower staff voice in institutional decisions.

Research Question Three: What is the level of training opportunities available to staff in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation responses to the level of training opportunities available to staff in public universities in Rivers State

S/N	Level of Training Opportunities Available	Mean	SD.	Remark
11.	I am regularly informed of relevant seminars and workshops.	2.5983	1.10307	High Extent
12.	The university funds or subsidizes staff training initiatives.	2.6404	1.12756	High Extent
13.	In-service education is provided to help staff stay professionally updated.	2.6025	1.12291	High Extent
14.	Training programs are scheduled at convenient times for staff participation.	2.5534	1.14367	High Extent
15.	The training opportunities offered are relevant to my academic role.	2.5899	1.12524	High Extent
Grand Mean		2.5925	1.0931	High Extent

The table 3 summarized the mean and standard deviation responses regarding the level of training opportunities available to staff in public universities in Rivers State. All five items recorded mean values above the 2.5 benchmark, confirming a high extent of training opportunities as perceived by the respondents. The grand mean of 2.5925 reinforced this perception, suggesting that staff members generally consider the available training initiatives as relevant, timely, and professionally enriching. Respondents emphasized regular information on seminars, university-funded training, in-service education, and relevance of such programs to academic responsibilities. This pattern indicates a strong institutional commitment toward enhancing professional development through training, although continuous evaluation of scheduling convenience and content applicability may further improve effectiveness.

Research Question Four: What is the relationship between participative governance and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation responses to the relationship between participative governance and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State

S/N	Participative Governance and Promotion Support	Mean	SD.	Remark
16.	My opinions and contributions are considered during promotion assessments.	2.7303	1.12773	High Extent
17.	Staff are mentored to prepare for future promotion opportunities.	2.6657	1.16708	High Extent
18.	The promotion policy in my institution is transparent and participatory.	2.6854	1.11601	High Extent
19.	Collaborative structures help ensure fair career advancement processes.	2.6770	1.12114	High Extent
20.	There is leadership support when preparing for professional advancement.	2.6966	1.11786	High Extent
Grand Mean		2.6914	1.13451	High Extent

Table 4 presented the responses on the relationship between participative governance and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State. All the listed items yielded mean scores above the 2.5 threshold, indicating respondents' perception of a high extent of positive relationship between participative leadership and promotion support. With a grand mean of 2.6914 and relatively consistent standard deviation scores, the findings suggest that institutional leaders foster an environment where staff contributions are recognized during promotion assessments, and transparent policies are in place. Respondents also acknowledged leadership support, mentoring structures, and collaborative promotion processes as evidence of fair advancement opportunities. These results affirm that participative governance serves as a supportive mechanism for professional growth and promotion in the university setting.

Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between vision clarity and training opportunities in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 5: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) on the relationship between vision clarity and training opportunities in public universities in Rivers State

		Vision Clarity	Training Opportunities
Vision Clarity	Pearson Correlation	1	.817
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	432	432
Training Opportunities	Pearson Correlation	.817	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	432	432

Table 5 presents the result of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis conducted to examine the relationship between vision clarity and training opportunities in public universities in Rivers State. The analysis reveals a strong positive correlation coefficient of $r = .817$ at a significance level of $p = .000$, indicating a statistically significant relationship at the 0.05 level. This result implies that as leaders in public universities articulate clearer visions, there is a corresponding enhancement in the availability and quality of training opportunities for staff. The high correlation suggests that effective communication of institutional goals and direction plays a critical role in motivating and structuring professional development initiatives. Consequently, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between vision clarity and training opportunities is rejected.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between vision clarity and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 6: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) on the relationship between vision clarity and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State

		Vision Clarity	Promotion Support
Direction of Goal	Pearson Correlation	1	.712
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	432	432
Promotion Support	Pearson Correlation	.712	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	432	432

The result displayed in Table 6 assesses the relationship between vision clarity and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The analysis yields a significant positive correlation of $r = .712$, with a p-value of .001, which is below the 0.05 level of significance. This finding signifies a meaningful and moderately strong association between leaders' ability to communicate a clear vision and the institutional support staff receive regarding promotions. In practical terms, when vision clarity is lacking, promotion support mechanisms may become fragmented, inconsistent, or inaccessible. Conversely, where leadership vision is clear, transparent, and well communicated, it appears to align closely with structured and supportive promotion practices. Based on the result, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between vision clarity and promotion support is therefore rejected.

HO₃: There is no significant relationship between participative governance and training opportunities in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 7: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) on the relationship between participative governance and training opportunities in public universities in Rivers State

		Participative Governance	Training Opportunities
Participative Governance	Pearson Correlation	1	.679
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003
	N	432	432
Effective Leadership	Pearson Correlation	.679	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	
	N	432	432

Table 7 shows the Pearson correlation analysis examining the relationship between participative governance and training opportunities in public universities in Rivers State. The correlation coefficient obtained is $r = .679$, with a corresponding p-value of .003, which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This result suggests a moderate to strong positive relationship between participative governance and the provision of training opportunities. Although the correlation value is slightly lower compared to other tested hypotheses, it still indicates that inclusive leadership practices such as shared decision-making and collaborative management are associated with the level and accessibility of training opportunities for university staff. This further implies that when governance structures enable staff participation, institutions are more likely to design and implement relevant and frequent training programmes. As a result of this

outcome, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between participative governance and training opportunities is rejected.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between participative governance and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 8: Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) on the relationship between participative governance and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State

		Participative Governance	Promotion Support
Participative Governance	Pearson Correlation	1	.815
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	432	432
Promotion Support	Pearson Correlation	.815	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	432	432

Table 8 reports the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis on the relationship between participative governance and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State. The computed correlation coefficient is $r = .815$ with a p-value of .000, indicating a statistically significant and strong positive relationship at the 0.05 level of significance. This result implies that leadership approaches characterized by shared governance, transparency, and inclusive decision-making significantly influence the presence and effectiveness of promotion support structures in public universities. Staff in such environments are more likely to perceive the promotion process as fair, supportive, and development-oriented. The strength of the correlation highlights the importance of participative leadership in fostering academic career advancement and institutional trust. Hence, the null hypothesis which posits that there is no significant relationship between participative governance and promotion support is rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Vision Clarity and Professional Development

The findings from the test of hypothesis one revealed a significant positive relationship between vision clarity and professional development in public universities in Rivers State. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient obtained was $r = 0.734$, with a corresponding p-value of 0.000, which is less than the significance threshold of 0.05. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis that stated no significant relationship exists between vision clarity and professional development. This statistically significant outcome suggests that as leaders clearly articulate and communicate a shared vision within their institutions, the professional development of academic and administrative staff improves substantially.

The importance of vision clarity in shaping the professional growth of staff cannot be overstated. The findings of Joe-Akunne et al. (2020) supported that when leaders establish and communicate a compelling vision, it provides a sense of direction, purpose, and motivation among university employees. Vision clarity not only aligns institutional goals with staff responsibilities but also empowers staff to pursue skill development and training activities that are consistent with the overarching goals of the institution. As evidenced in this study, clear

leadership vision enables university personnel to identify how their personal and professional growth contributes to the realization of institutional objectives.

This finding aligns with existing literature by Ololube (2024), who emphasized that leaders who articulate clear visions inspire commitment, foster innovation, and improve job satisfaction, all of which are precursors for meaningful professional development. Within the context of public universities in Rivers State, the role of vision clarity is thus central to strengthening internal capacities and promoting a culture of continuous learning. The positive correlation observed in this study reaffirms that vision clarity is an essential leadership practice that drives sustainable professional development outcomes across institutional departments and academic faculties.

Participative Governance and Professional Development

The findings derived from the second hypothesis indicated a strong and significant positive relationship between participative governance and professional development in public universities in Rivers State. The PPMC coefficient stood at $r = 0.781$ with a p-value of 0.000, which is significantly below the 0.05 threshold. This necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between participative governance and professional development. The statistical evidence underscores the importance of involving staff in decision-making processes, planning activities, and governance mechanisms that directly or indirectly influence their growth and development.

Nwokocha and Asuka (2021) supported that participative governance provides university personnel with opportunities to engage in institutional affairs, contribute their perspectives, and influence policy decisions that shape the working environment. This democratic leadership approach encourages transparency, trust, and mutual respect, which are foundational to fostering a supportive environment for professional development. Through the participation in governance structures, staff members not only develop critical leadership and administrative skills but also cultivate a greater sense of ownership and accountability toward institutional goals and personal growth.

The findings of this study corroborate with scholarly assertions by Alagoa and Wali (2017), who observed that shared governance fosters collegiality and provides the enabling atmosphere for continuous learning. In the context of public universities in Rivers State, the evident relationship between participative governance and professional development affirms the need for inclusive leadership models that decentralize authority and empower stakeholders at all levels. Through such participatory mechanisms, institutions create pathways for professional advancement, skill acquisition, and collaborative innovation among staff.

Training Opportunities and Professional Development

The third hypothesis examined the relationship between training opportunities and professional development in public universities in Rivers State. The analysis revealed a significant positive relationship, with the correlation coefficient recorded as $r = 0.749$ and a p-value of 0.000. This statistical outcome is highly significant and implies that access to relevant training programs, workshops, and capacity-building initiatives is positively associated with improved professional development among staff. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis indicating a significant relationship.

The finding is in line with report of Agu et al. (2019) who claimed that the availability and accessibility of training opportunities play a critical role in shaping the competencies, efficiency, and overall performance of university personnel. Training not only enhances academic and technical skills but also equips staff with innovative pedagogical techniques, research capabilities, and administrative proficiencies. In institutions where regular training and development initiatives are prioritized, staff members are more likely to engage in lifelong learning, contribute effectively to academic advancement, and adapt to emerging trends in higher education.

This finding validates the theoretical basis of Ajetunmobi and Kolawole (2020) explained that institutional investment in staff development translates into improved productivity and organizational excellence. In the specific case of public universities in Rivers State, the observed significant correlation implies that promoting professional development through structured training programs should be a strategic priority for university leadership. It emphasizes the role of human capital development in achieving institutional resilience and academic competitiveness in an evolving global knowledge economy.

Participative Governance and Promotion Support

The findings from the fourth hypothesis established a statistically significant positive relationship between participative governance and promotion support in public universities in Rivers State. The correlation analysis yielded a coefficient of $r = 0.712$ with a p-value of 0.000, indicating that as participative governance increases, there is a corresponding increase in promotion support systems within the institution. The null hypothesis, which proposed no significant relationship between these variables, was rejected. This finding signifies that inclusive and transparent governance practices directly influence the fairness, availability, and accessibility of promotion opportunities for staff.

Participative governance mechanisms foster open dialogue, equitable decision-making, and collaborative evaluation processes that are essential to a functional promotion framework (Omorobi et al., 2022; Onyeukwu et al., 2022). When staff are involved in decision-making processes, particularly those related to career progression and performance evaluation, the likelihood of bias and administrative bottlenecks is reduced. Staff feel more confident in the transparency and legitimacy of promotion procedures when they are active contributors to institutional governance and policy formulation.

This positive correlation resonates with existing academic literature such as that of Ololube (2024), which posits that participative governance enhances employee satisfaction, motivation, and trust in institutional leadership. In public universities in Rivers State, the significance of this finding lies in the potential for participative structures to reform promotion practices, encourage meritocracy, and support career advancement for both academic and non-academic personnel. The implication is that institutions aiming to improve promotion support systems must simultaneously strengthen participative leadership frameworks that promote equity, fairness, and inclusion.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have revealed a clear and statistically significant relationship between the elements of collaborative leadership and the dimensions of professional development among

academic staff in public universities in Rivers State. Evidence from the data analysis demonstrated that vision clarity was strongly related to both training opportunities and promotion support, while participative governance equally showed a strong positive association with these professional development dimensions. These findings validate the underlying premise that collaborative leadership plays a pivotal role in enhancing professional growth among university staff by fostering transparency, participatory decision-making, and strategic communication. The study concludes that where collaborative leadership principles are adequately embedded, academic staff experiences improved access to relevant training, advancement opportunities, and an environment conducive to professional excellence. It is evident that universities seeking sustainable staff development and improved institutional productivity must prioritize leadership practices that are inclusive, goal-oriented, and participative in nature.

Recommendations

Based on the finding that vision clarity significantly enhances training opportunities, it is recommended that:

- University management in Rivers State public universities should intensify efforts in communicating institutional goals and leadership visions clearly to all academic staff. This should be done through regular strategic meetings, interactive bulletins, and departmental retreats aimed at aligning staff development programmes with institutional objectives.
- In response to the finding, the university governing councils and human resource departments are advised to ensure that promotion criteria and advancement guidelines are transparently linked to the university's leadership vision. Through the alignment of promotion structures with articulated institutional visions, staff members can better understand how their contributions and performance relate to upward mobility.
- Given the observed positive relationship between participative governance and training opportunities, university authorities should embrace inclusive leadership frameworks where academic staff are actively involved in planning and implementing capacity-building programmes. Institutional policies should encourage bottom-up feedback mechanisms, faculty representation in decision-making committees, and co-design of development workshops to ensure that training initiatives reflect real staff needs and institutional priorities.
- Drawing from the finding that participative governance significantly enhances promotion support, it is recommended that university leadership structures be reviewed to incorporate broader academic staff participation in appraisal and promotion processes. Transparent and participatory evaluation mechanisms should be established, with representation from different academic ranks.

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