

Full Length Research Paper

Promotion of academic relationship leadership practice and productivity of lecturers in public universities in Delta and Edo states, Nigeria

Patience OKORO*, Nelson Ejiro AKPOTU and Romina Ifeoma ASIYAI

Department of Educational Management and Foundations, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria.

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The study investigated the promotion of academic relationship leadership practice and productivity of lecturers in public universities in Delta and Edo states, Nigeria. Adopting an ex-post-facto design, it encompassed a population of 3,492 academic staff in four government-owned universities located in Delta and Edo States, Nigeria. A sample of 676 academic staff was selected through stratified random sampling techniques. The primary data collection instrument was a questionnaire with a high reliability coefficient of 0.97 achieved through the split-half method. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using correlation analysis. The findings revealed the existence of a positive and significant relationship between academic relationship leadership practice and the productivity of lecturers. Based on this result, the study recommended that academic leaders should create a friendly and warm environment that will engender and enhance the promotion of academic relationships to positively affect the productivity of academics.

Key words: Leadership, leadership practice, academic leadership, academic relationship, productivity, academic staff.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerian public universities are vital institutions that drive the nation's educational development and its progress in various academic fields. The academic staff in these universities serves as the bedrock of knowledge creation, dissemination, and application, and contributes to the intellectual, cultural, and socio-economic growth of the country. Given the importance of these institutions, it is essential to promote academic relationship for the enhancing job commitment, and productivity among the academic staff to ensure the continued success and

growth of higher education in Nigeria. Job commitment among academic staff is a cornerstone of the stability and effectiveness of Nigerian public universities. A committed academic workforce is more likely to invest their time, energy, and expertise into their teaching and research responsibilities. High job commitment not only improves the quality of education and research but also contributes to faculty retention, reducing the adverse effects of brain drain on Nigerian higher education (Otache and Inekwe, 2022). Furthermore, the productivity of academic staff,

*Corresponding author. E-mail: okoro.patience@delsu.edu.ng.

encompassing their research, teaching, and service activities, is vital for the progress of Nigerian public universities. Productive academic staff elevates the universities' standing in the international academic community, attracting students, researchers, and funding from around the world. Improved productivity contributes to the development of a more engaging and stimulating learning environment (Awan and Tahir, 2015).

Academic relationships are distinctive interpersonal connections that hold significant consequences for the individuals involved and the institutions where these relationships exist. The promotion of academic relationships constitutes a fundamental aspect of academic leadership practices (Okoye and Ukwuoma, 2020). Establishing academic relationships between academic leaders and younger lecturers is crucial for effective academic leadership (Berk, 2010). Both academic leaders and younger lecturers must strive to cultivate these relationships, clarifying expectations as they evolve. According to Nick et al. (2012), the development of academic relationships involves four methods: fostering collegiality, establishing an effective communication network, facilitating the exchange of continuous feedback between academic leaders and young lecturers, and creating an encouraging environment.

In the university, collegiality is broadly seen as the demonstration of collaboration and cooperation among faculty members (Nick et al., 2012). A major way of encouraging collegial relationships is through building trust and mutual respect without which there will be no existence of collaborative or cooperative relationships (Pololi and Knight, 2005; Berk, 2010; Danish et al., 2013; Asiyai and Okoro, 2019). Trust and mutual respect are essential for academic leaders and young lecturers in the various departments of the universities to fully enjoy the benefits of a cooperative relationship.

Lecturers may be attracted to join a particular university due to the financial and promotional benefits but this alone may not keep them in the system for a long time. Studies revealed that an academic environment lacking trust and respect where lecturers experience discourtesy is mostly the likely reason for lecturers quitting their institution (Salau et al., 2020; Akpotu and Nwadiani, 2003; Azeem and Mataruna, 2019; Okoro, 2023). One effective way to retain lecturers is to improve the academic environment by creating collegial and mutual relationships (Salau et al., 2020). The study by Azeem and Mataruna (2019) showed that common vision, the lecturer's commitment to attaining the institutional goal, and mutual aid are important factors, while lecturer commitment is the most significant factor of collaborative leadership.

To strengthen the academic relationship, a regular connection is very important. The connection between the academic leader and younger lecturers improves when the pattern of communication is set and formalized. It is important to establish a negotiable time for regular communication that suits the personalities of the academic

leader and the young lecturer. What seems more important is the regularity of communication and not necessarily the method adopted. The key component in any relationship is communication and the academic relationship is not excluded either (Lee et al., 2015). Academic leaders can be successful resources in the universities when they and the younger lecturer are prepared for academic relationships, not only by reflecting on and defining goals but by being able to identify challenges and ask for feedback to enable evaluation of the effectiveness of the relationship (Nick et al., 2012; Rosemary et al., 2015). As revealed in the study of Nick et al. (2012), young lecturers who request and accept feedback from their academic leaders are more productive.

Building an environment where young lecturers feel supported cannot be overstressed, as it has a direct effect on strengthening academic relationships (Mathipa and Matlabe, 2016). When young lecturers experience support, they gain the freedom to independently think, exercise creativity, offer ideas for consideration, and confirm lines of reasoning with their academic leaders. Conversely, in an unsupportive environment, the willingness of younger lecturers to be open, take risks, and cooperate is hindered. Jones et al. (2009) revealed that the presence or absence of a supportive academic environment can directly impact the ability to build collegiality. Rosemary et al. (2015) concluded in their study that creating a productive academic environment for the empowerment and improvement of high-quality lecturers is one way of enhancing quality in education, achievable through effective academic leadership.

Universities can improve and develop the capabilities and qualities of lecturers through academic leadership. A supportive academic environment is characterized by an academic leader who demonstrates positive concern and sincere care, pays attention, shows empathy and dependability, encourages, provides accurate feedback, and fosters a helpful academic environment (Mathipa and Matlabe, 2016; Jones et al., 2009; Rosemary et al., 2015). Strengthening the academic relationship between the academic leader and the young lecturer enables the academic leader to demonstrate self-confidence in their ability to support and lead the younger lecturer. Consequently, the younger lecturer becomes more willing to trust the academic leader's suggested actions. Academic leaders should be considerate, collegial, and supportive, and listen to others' ideas. According to Day and Sammons (2016), recognizing and rewarding a job well done and providing feedback to younger lecturers regarding their work encourages favorable working conditions for them.

In promoting academic relationships, academic leaders are to be egalitarian, that is, people-centered or democratic, relying on the participation and contribution of group members (Okoye and Ukwuoma, 2020; Omeke and Onah, 2012).

According to Omeke and Onah (2012), the perspective of egalitarian leadership practice focuses on valuing people and emphasizes the collaborative involvement of subordinates. When examining leadership in schools, it was revealed that an egalitarian practice of leadership, typical of transformational and collaborative leadership practices, resulted in higher job commitment than dictatorial or the give-and-take practice of leadership (Gross and Shapiro, 2015; Olakitan et al., 2017). The egalitarian leadership practice is open, shared, and collegial, allowing group members to participate in decision-making (Ukaidi, 2016; Nasereddin and Sharabati, 2016; Ogbah, 2013; Akparep et al., 2019; Okoro, 2022).

Similarly, consultation and allowing academics to participate in decision-making increase their sense of belonging and give them the feeling of being part of the results of those decisions (Tettey, 2006). Young lecturers are likely to be more encouraged and decide to continue in the university when their academic leaders give them more attention, understand what is required of them, assign roles that commensurate with their capabilities, get feedback regularly from them, and recognize their effort (Choi, 2007; Ogbah, 2013; Danish et al., 2013; Longe, 2014). The promotion of academic relationships involves processes such as discussion, equal involvement, and participation of group members. A relationship-focused academic leader provides younger lecturers with a sufficient chance to grow by involving them in partaking in decision-making. As acknowledged by Choi (2007), academic leadership practice is considered to have the feature of mutual approval between academic leaders and younger lecturers leading to cooperation, collaboration, and high ethical value within the university. Logically, universities with academic leaders who are egalitarian in their practices will ultimately produce followers and individuals who are more inspired to create and provide innovative solutions. An egalitarian academic leader conscientiously encourages and inspires group deliberations and influences group members to contribute to their quota (Ray and Ray, 2012; Akparep et al., 2019; Ismail and Yasin, 2020). This leadership practice is characterized by three features including assigning duties among group members, empowering the members of the group, and assisting the decision-making process of the group (Nasereddin and Sharabati, 2016). In general, egalitarian leadership practice prioritizes people's concerns and is a major predictor of the responsiveness of followers.

Ogbah (2013) stated that egalitarian academic leadership is centered on the idea of including others in the administration of the university. Others are included in the decision-making of the university; they decide on actions to take and how the actions are taken. Adopting this leadership practice of ensuring mutual relationships does not imply weakness on the part of the leader but encourages innovation and resourcefulness, as the leader is not seen as "Mr. knows it all". This is one of the basic

reasons it is essential to employ the knowledge, ideas, and skills of different individuals for the attainment of the goals of the university. Though the academic leader upholds ultimate authority, the input and discussion of the younger lecturers are extremely valued because it includes collective decision-making and open dialogue (Ogbah, 2013; Akparobore and Omosekejim, 2020). Ogbah (2013) findings showed that most followers preferred the egalitarian leadership practice where academic relationships are promoted. The wishes of group members are considered in congruence with the leader's opinion. The leader always creates an avenue for fresh ideas, approvals, and disapprovals. The main target of the leader is to achieve the goal of the group through the use of interpersonal relationships where everyone is regarded as important in contributing to the overall decision and its execution. This leader has confidence in the group members and thus is highly optimistic. The leader with group members sets the goals but allows the members of the group to carry on with their job. He builds a cordial working environment and demonstrates care, affection, and empathy towards the subordinate who then willingly contributes with enthusiasm (Idahosa, 2000). Oketch and Ainembabazi (2021) studies carried out in Uganda's private universities showed that lecturers were not involved in the making of decisions and their opinions were not considered. As a result, lecturers became irresponsible in the aftermath of decisions. They also found out that lecturers were unhappy with the policy of the institution irrespective of their determination to work under unfavorable conditions. The above is an indication that the academic leadership practice exhibited centered more on dictatorial academic leadership than on egalitarian academic leadership. Academic leaders are to consider some of these aspects when trying to encourage faculty members to work through creating situations that activate the self-direction of staff's effort on areas thought to be more critical and not about being pressed or pushed. The study advocated for the use of egalitarian academic leadership practice as it is the key to helping staff persist in exhibiting behavior needed for job achievement. Lecturers' views and ideas should be respected in the decision-making process, and they should be included in policymaking that concerns their work to stay inspired.

In another study carried out by Chinyere et al. (2016) on academic leadership practices of leaders in the management of a State University in Nigeria, using Ebonyi State University as a case study, it was discovered that the adopted academic leadership practice was in response to the problem of the university. The major adopted academic leadership practice was dictatorial and egalitarian. However, dictatorial and hands-off academic leadership practices were found to be ineffective in the management and development of the university. Their result further showed that a non-egalitarian academic leadership practice poses a challenge to the management of Ebonyi State University as it affects the drive and productivity of

the staff, encourages a lack of competence and sightless loyalty, brings about distrust, and may as well lead to coalitions.

Mohammed et al. (2020), in their study while analyzing leadership practices in public universities in Nigeria, suggested three leadership practices (situational leadership practice for top management, transformational leadership practice for academicians, and egalitarian leadership practice for other staff who perform routine jobs) as the minimum leadership practice suitable for managing public universities in Nigeria effectively and efficiently. Supporting Nasereddin and Sharabati (2016) in their study suggested shared leadership practice for upper management, transformational practice for academicians and middle management level and finally give-and-take practice for other employees.

The lack of consistent and effective academic leadership practices in Nigerian public universities might be the reason behind the low level of productivity among lecturers. There are interpersonal challenges within academic departments, hindering collaboration and teamwork among academic staff. Issues such as communication breakdowns, lack of trust, and limited collaborative opportunities inhibit the exchange of ideas and best practices, impeding overall academic growth and innovation within the university environment and resulting in low productivity. This study is purposely geared towards finding out the relationship between the academic leadership practice of promoting academic relationships and productivity of academic staff in Nigerian public universities mainly in Delta and Edo States.

Research question

- 1) How is academic relationship leadership practice promoted in state and federal universities in Delta and Edo States?
- 2) What is level of the productivity of lecturers in public universities in Delta and Edo States?
- 3) What is the relationship between the promotion of academic relationships and the productivity of lecturers in public universities in Delta and Edo States?

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between the promotion of academic relationship leadership practice and the productivity of lecturers in public universities in Delta and Edo States.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed an ex-post-facto design, with a population comprising 1535 senior academic staff, who were also considered academic leaders, and 1957 junior academic staff from five public universities in Delta and Edo States. The sample size consisted of

301 senior lecturers (academic leaders) and 375 junior lecturers, representing 20% of the entire population. The stratified random sampling technique was used to determine the sample size, ensuring that all faculty members had an equal chance of being selected.

The research instrument utilized was a researcher-created questionnaire called the "Promotion of Academic Relationship Leadership Practices and Productivity (PARLPPQ)", structured into two distinct sections. The first section, "Promotion of Academic Relationship Leadership Practices (PARLP)", was responded to by junior academics, while the second section focused on "Level of Productivity", to be completed by all academics, irrespective of their cadre. The questionnaire underwent a rigorous review process by two study supervisors and an additional expert in measurement and evaluation. Feedback and comments from these experts were incorporated into the instrument, resulting in the final approved version.

Consequently, the research instrument demonstrated both face and content validity, as the experts thoroughly checked the content to ensure clarity and alignment with the study objectives. To assess reliability, the split-half method was employed, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.97. The researcher, along with four well-trained assistants, distributed the questionnaire to the participants. A total of 676 instruments were distributed, and 494 were successfully retrieved and analyzed using SPSS. Mean and standard deviation were employed to address the research questions, with the acceptable benchmark for the mean score set at 2.50. Mean scores below the acceptable benchmark were rejected.

RESULTS

Research question one: What is the level of the promotion of academic relationship leadership practice in public universities in Delta and Edo States?

Hypothesis

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between the promotion of academic relationships, job commitment, and the productivity of lecturers in public universities in Delta and Edo States.

DISCUSSION

The result in Table 1 showed that the promotion of academic relationship leadership practice was exhibited in state-owned universities with a total mean of 2.97, while federally-owned universities had a total mean of 2.92. This indicates that academic leaders in public universities in Delta and Edo States are relationship-focused in their leadership practices, as the obtained mean is above the benchmark of 2.50. Relationship-based leadership practice is democratic in nature, encompassing encouraging group deliberation, creating an enabling environment of trust, and providing an avenue for effective communication. Such academic leaders are approachable.

This result aligns with the study of Nick et al. (2012), which suggests that collegiality, effective communication, and creating a conducive environment are methods used

Table 1. The level of the promotion of academic relationship leadership practice in state and federal universities in Delta and Edo States.

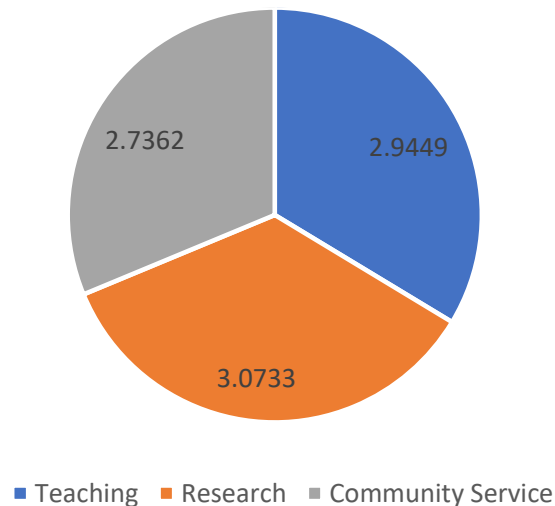
Promotion of academic relationship leadership practice						
Federal Universities in Delta and Edo states		State Universities in Delta and Edo states		Public Universities in Delta and Edo states		Remark
Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
2.9199	71829	2.9705	0.70431	2.9452	0.71013	Agree

Source: Fieldwork (2022).

Table 2. The level of the productivity of lecturers in public universities in Delta and Edo States?

Level of the productivity of lecturers			
	Teaching	Research	Community service
Mean	2.9449	3.0733	2.7362
SD	0.62396	1.4376	0.6193
Remark	High	High	High

Source: Fieldwork (2022).

**Figure 1.** Level of Productivity of Academics in public universities in Delta and Edo States
Source: Fieldwork (2022).

to develop and promote academic relationships. Similarly, the result in Table 1 is consistent with the findings of Ogbah (2013), who reported that most followers preferred an institutional environment where academic relationships are promoted. Ogbah further stated that in the promotion of academic relationships, subordinates are encouraged to participate in decision-making. Additionally, Okoye and Ukwuoma (2020) emphasized that academic leaders who are people-centered promote academic relationships through democratic practices, relying on the participation and contribution of group members. This leadership approach is open, shared, and collegial, allowing group

members to participate in decision-making, thereby valuing people and emphasizing collaborative involvement.

Universities with academic leaders who practice egalitarianism are likely to foster followers and individuals who are inspired to create and provide innovative solutions. An egalitarian academic leader conscientiously encourages and inspires group deliberations, influencing group members to contribute to their quota.

The results presented in Table 2 and Figure 1 depicts the level of productivity of academics in public (federal and state) universities in Delta and Edo States. The findings revealed mean scores of 2.9449 for teaching, 2.7362 for

Table 3. Significant relationship between the promotion of academic relationship leadership practice and productivity of lecturers in public universities in Delta and Edo States.

Variable	N	r	r ²	r ² %	P-Value	Remark
Promotion of academic relationship leadership practice Productivity	494	0.1312	0.0330	3.3	0.108	Significant

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Source: Fieldwork (2022).

community service, and 3.0733 for research. This suggests that academics in state and federal universities in Delta and Edo States demonstrated high levels of productivity, with research being the highest, followed by teaching, and then community service.

Table 3 displayed the significant relationship between the promotion of academic relationship leadership practice and productivity, with a p-value of 0.108, which is less than .05. This indicates a positive relationship between the promotion of academic relationship leadership practice and productivity in public universities in Delta and Edo States. The strength of the relationship was calculated to be 3.3%, signifying that academic relationship leadership practice contributed 3.3% to the job productivity of academics in these universities. Thus, academic leaders who prioritize providing academic relationships have a positive impact on the productivity level of their subordinates, suggesting that lecturers under the academic leadership of relationship-focused leaders are more committed and productive.

This result aligns with the findings of Akhtar and Iqbal (2017), who suggested that promoting interactive relationships with colleagues leads to a tension-free environment and increased commitment and productivity. Similarly, Nasereddin and Sharabati (2016) stated that building academic relationships and involving everyone in a group is an effective way to enhance productivity. Iheme and Owmondah (2020) concluded that productivity increases when team members are included. Corroborating these findings, Offem (2021) revealed that relationship-based leadership positively impacts the productivity of staff in Nigerian federal universities, while noted that relationship-based leadership is widely embraced in federally-owned universities in Nigeria.

However, a contrary view was presented by Mathipa and Matlabe (2016), who found that academic leaders and their followers were dissatisfied with their academic relationship, viewing it as exploitative. Junior academics expressed feeling used to publish papers without acknowledgment of their efforts, leading to discouragement and unwillingness to stay in such relationships. Consequently, Mathipa and Matlabe (2016) suggested that the academic relationship promoted by academic leaders may not significantly contribute to the productivity of junior academics. Similarly, Idubor and Adekunle (2021) identified challenges such as unfair treatment, disrespect, and gender-based bias, which negatively affect the

productivity of staff members.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main focus of this research centered on the ability of academic leadership to enhance the job productivity of lecturers through the promotion of academic relationships. Therefore, academic leaders are encouraged to build strong academic relationships that foster mutuality and collegiality. This involves ensuring a tension-free environment by building trust and respect, maintaining personal relationships with group members, and providing socio-emotional support. Thus, the study revealed a positive and significant relationship between academic relationship leadership practice and the productivity of lecturers in Nigerian universities in Delta and Edo States. As a recommendation, the study suggests that academic leaders should create a friendly and warm environment that will foster and enhance the promotion of academic relationships, ultimately positively affecting the productivity of academics.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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