



# Instructional Leaders' Character Counts Traits and Students' Academic Performance in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

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## Abstract

This study is part of a wide research that explored the relationship between instructional leaders' character traits, specifically trustworthiness and responsibility, and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. With increasing concerns over students' underperformance and examination malpractice, there is a growing need to examine the role of school leadership in fostering academic success. Rooted in Transformational Leadership Theory, this study investigated how trustworthiness and responsibility among instructional leaders contribute to a positive learning environment, ethical school culture, and improved student engagement. Employing a descriptive and correlational survey design, data were collected from 615 principals and teachers across various secondary schools in Rivers state. Stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure equitable representation of the targeted sample from urban and rural public senior secondary schools in the 23 Local Government Areas in Rivers State. The reliability of the study was established using Cronbach Alpha Reliability method. The study's findings revealed a significant positive correlation between instructional leaders' trustworthiness and students' academic performance. When leaders demonstrate integrity and reliability, students feel more secure and motivated to excel academically. Similarly, responsible instructional leadership fosters accountability, discipline, and commitment among students, leading to enhanced academic outcomes. The study featured the importance of character-based leadership training for school administrators and recommends integrating character education into leadership development programs. Strengthening the ethical foundation of instructional leadership can contribute to long-term educational improvement and students' holistic development in Rivers State.

**Keywords:** Trustworthiness, Responsibility, Instructional Leaders, Character Counts, Traits, Students' Academic Performance, Public, Senior, Secondary Schools, Rivers State, Nigeria.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education exists in societies to develop learners' intelligence and abilities to match society's expectations of good morals standards. This is usually seen as the true goal of education. In recent years, the role of instructional leaders in enhancing students' academic performance in public secondary schools has garnered significant attention from educators due to students underperforming in national exams like NECO, WAEC and JAMB. As well as increased rate of examination malpractice which are supported by some school leaders and school owners.

Stakeholders in education are currently burdened about issues of students' underperformance and what could be the factor responsible. Many have shifted attention to the moral values of school leaders. The school leaders are also the instructional leaders of schools who play a major role in the nature of teaching and learning that go on in the schools. Thus, many individuals believe they should be held more accountable for low students' performance and questions about the impact of their personal character traits and accountability about the instructional process have come more to question.

Instructional leaders are responsible for managing the curriculum, monitoring and evaluating teachers, fostering a positive ethical school culture, building safe learning environment to enhance the academic success of students. The target of every instructional leader is to improve students' academic performance and behaviours in order to make students more successful. Student's intellectual ability must be supported by a strong character-building program which helps them to cultivate confidence, compassion, contribute to their community and serve as ethical citizens.

A nation's greatest asset is its people, whose character forms the backbone of its culture. The big hole in the moral ozone which is character deficit crises has to be restored using CHARACTER COUNTS! programme. It a national initiative in the United States aimed at promoting good character and ethical behaviour. It is also a program that provides educational resources, materials and training to helps schools. Adken (2001) stated that the goal of character count is to integrate trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship purposely, pervasively, repetitively, concretely, consistently and creatively into the school culture, families and community.

Education inherently fosters character development through the exemplary actions and responses of instructional leaders. As role models, instructional leaders must be the change they want to see in their learners. It is therefore important to have efficient and effective school leaders with good character traits.

Trustworthiness, as a foundational element of effective instructional leadership, instils confidence and reliability within the school community. When instructional leaders are perceived as trustworthy, they establish a stable and secure environment where students and staff feel safe and supported. This trust is built through consistent actions, transparent decision-making, and ethical behaviour. Trustworthy instructional leaders are seen as dependable and honest, which fosters a sense of security and predictability among students. Furthermore, instructional leaders display of trust encourages open communication and collaboration, as students and teachers feel more comfortable sharing their concerns and ideas, knowing that their input will be valued and respected (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Instructional leadership involves guiding and managing educational institutions to foster an environment conducive to teaching and learning. Hallinger and Murphy (2015) asserted that instructional leaders are responsible for setting clear educational goals, managing the curriculum,

monitoring lesson plans, and promoting an atmosphere of learning and professional development. Instructional leaders are expected to pose some positive behaviours that will enhance adequate academic performance of the students whom are their subjects.

The leadership style and character of instructional leaders are key in shaping the school climate and culture, which in turn affects student motivation and engagement. Akomolafe (2017) and Ekundayo (2019), underscored the correlation between the character of school leaders and student achievement. Leaders who exhibit strong moral values, consistency, and dedication tend to inspire similar qualities in their staff and students, creating a positive learning environment that nurtures academic success. For instance, a principal who consistently demonstrates a commitment to professional development not only enhances their own skills but also encourages teachers to pursue continuous improvement, leading to more effective teaching practices and better student performance (Akomolafe, 2017). Instructional leaders with a strong character also encourages effective communication within the school. Their ability to communicate clearly, listen actively, and respond constructively to feedback creates a collaborative atmosphere where teachers feel valued and supported. This, in turn, enhances teacher morale and job satisfaction, reducing turnover rates and ensuring that experienced and dedicated teachers remain in the classroom.

Furthermore, the character of instructional leaders influences their decision-making processes, which are essential in resource allocation, curriculum development, and policy implementation. Leaders who prioritize transparency, inclusiveness, and fairness in their decision-making are more likely to make choices that benefit the entire school community. This inclusive approach not only fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among staff and students but also ensures that the needs of all stakeholders are considered, leading to more effective and sustainable educational practices (Nwosu, 2022). In the context of Rivers State, where educational challenges are prevalent, the role of instructional leaders becomes even more essential. This is because the character of instructional leaders impacts their ability to build and maintain relationships with external stakeholders, including parents, community members, and educational authorities (Ololube, 2024). But in Rivers State, good character institutional leaders seems to be poor and as such this study sought to determine if trustworthiness and responsibility among leaders leads to improved student outcome.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The educational system in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State is faced with poor academic performance of students, indiscipline, and negative school culture. The persistent low academic achievement and involvement in exam malpractice of students has been a subject of considerable concern. Despite various reforms and interventions aimed at improving educational outcomes, many students continue to underperform, which poses a significant challenge to the overall educational development of the region.

A critical examination of these challenges revealed that there are character deficiencies among instructional leaders, because instructional leaders with good and respectable character shape the school culture, improving teachers' morale and influencing students' outcomes. The notion that "if character is lost, all is lost" underscores the gravity of this issue. The absence of character development programs in public secondary schools in Rivers State has exacerbated the problem.

Addressing the character deficit crises of instructional leaders gave rise to this study which sought to fill the gap by investigating the relationships between instructional leaders' character counts traits (trustworthiness and responsibility) and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

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

- Assess the extent instructional leaders' demonstration of trustworthiness enhance students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- Determine the extent instructional leaders' responsibility enhances students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were designed to guide the Study:

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

### **Hypotheses**

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

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

## **CONCEPTUALIZATION**

### **Instructional Leaders**

The essence of instructional leadership lies in its capacity to influence, inspire, and guide educators and students, ensuring that teaching practices are not only effective but also aligned with the overarching goals of the educational establishment. Instructional leaders are instrumental in promoting a culture of continuous improvement, leveraging on data-driven decision-making to enhance instructional strategies and outcomes. These leaders are characterized by their ability to articulate a clear vision, provide strategic direction, and support the professional development of teachers, thereby creating a robust framework for academic

success (Oluwaseun, 2019). Leadership styles adopted by instructional leaders significantly impacts the morale and motivation of both teachers and students, fostering a collaborative and supportive learning environment that encourages innovation and creativity (Chukwuemeka, 2020).

Instructional leaders are not merely administrative figures but are pivotal in driving educational reforms, championing pedagogical advancements, and nurturing a culture of excellence within academic institutions (Oladipo, 2021). These leaders are characterized by their ability to articulate a clear vision, provide strategic direction, and support the professional development of teachers, thereby creating a robust framework for academic success. The role of instructional leaders extends beyond administrative tasks, encompassing a deep commitment to educational values and the pursuit of academic excellence. As noted by Oluwaseun (2019), effective instructional leaders cultivate a learning environment where both teachers and students feel valued and supported. This is achieved through the implementation of professional development programs that equip educators with the latest pedagogical skills and knowledge, enabling them to deliver high-quality instruction. Instructional leaders ensure that educators remain responsive to the evolving needs of their students and the broader educational landscape by fostering a culture of continuous learning. Such leaders prioritize open communication, actively seeking input from teachers and students to inform their decision-making processes. This inclusive approach not only enhances the overall educational experience but also empowers educators to take ownership of their professional growth and development.

Oladipo (2021) noted that these leaders are essential in initiating and sustaining changes that improve teaching and learning outcomes. Instructional leaders can implement evidence-based strategies that enhance student achievement by staying abreast of the latest research and best practices in education. Moreover, they serve as advocates for policies and practices that promote equity and inclusivity within the educational system, ensuring that all students have access to high-quality learning opportunities. They engage in regular classroom observations, providing constructive feedback to teachers and identifying areas for improvement. This hands-on approach allows instructional leaders to maintain a direct connection with the teaching and learning processes, ensuring that their strategic initiatives are effectively translated into practice.

Moreover, instructional leaders are adept at navigating the complex challenges that arise within the educational landscape. Oluwaseun (2019) pointed out that effective leaders possess strong problem-solving skills and are able to address issues such as resource allocation, student behaviour, and curriculum alignment with a high degree of competence and confidence. Instructional leaders model the behaviours and attitudes they wish to instil in their educators and students by demonstrating resilience and adaptability.

Adegboye (2018) identified that instructional leaders play essential role in structuring the educational landscape, steering the vision and mission of academic institutions towards achieving excellence and fostering an environment conducive to learning and growth.

### **Institutional Leaders' Character**

Character refers to the combination of moral, ethical and personal traits that define an individual's personality and behaviour. According to Ololube (2024) character (values, morals, principles and ethics) of institutional leaders are perhaps the most narrowly used approach in assessing institutional effectiveness. However, with the increasing pressure on institutions to do more, character of institutional leaders can help to maintain or improve the quality of products

and service delivery, at the same significantly reduce the cost of ruining organisations and institutions (see Figure 1).

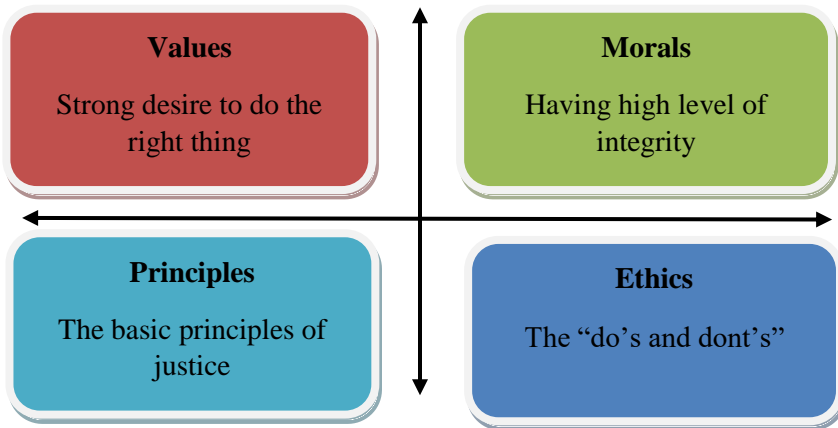


Figure 1: Character of Institutional Leaders. Source: (Ololube, 2024)

### Character Counts

The concept of character counts emphasizes the significance of character development as a cornerstone of personal and societal growth. It reflects the belief that an individual’s moral and ethical qualities influence their interactions, decision-making processes, and contributions to the community. Rooted in ethical and moral philosophy, the concept underscores the value of cultivating virtues such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, and respect as essential traits for personal success and social harmony. Educational systems, organizational cultures, and leadership frameworks have increasingly recognized the relevance of character counts as a critical aspect of human development and community well-being.

Character counts focus on promoting core ethical values that guide individual behaviour and foster trust, collaboration, and accountability within groups. Lickona et al. (2012) highlighted that character education, which aims to instil these values in individuals, is a proactive approach to preparing individuals to navigate complex social and ethical challenges. Character traits are often considered the foundation for building positive relationships and achieving long-term success in personal and professional domains. These traits are not innate but rather cultivated through consistent exposure to ethical standards, role models, and moral reasoning.

In educational contexts, character counts have been a focal point for fostering holistic development among students. According to Berkowitz and Bier (2014), schools play a crucial role in teaching and reinforcing values that contribute to character building. Through formal curricula, extracurricular activities, and informal interactions, students are encouraged to practice empathy, fairness, and accountability. These character traits, when nurtured, not only improve interpersonal relationships but also positively influence academic outcomes. For instance, a study by Seider et al. (2013) found that students with higher levels of moral character exhibited better engagement and performance in their studies, demonstrating a clear link between ethical behaviour and educational achievement.

The concept also extends to leadership and organizational settings, where character counts are crucial for effective governance and decision-making. Leaders who embody strong

moral principles set the tone for organizational culture, promoting trust and integrity within their teams. Ciulla (2014) emphasized that leaders with a character-driven approach are more likely to inspire loyalty and foster a sense of purpose among their followers. In contrast, the absence of ethical leadership can lead to organizational dysfunction, mistrust, and reduced productivity. This underscores the importance of prioritizing character in leadership development programs.

Community and societal well-being are also tied to the principle of character counts. When individuals and institutions adhere to ethical standards, they contribute to the collective good and ensure equitable opportunities for all members of society. Ryan and Bohlin (2016) argued that character is integral to creating just and inclusive communities, where mutual respect and shared responsibility prevail. Societies can address issues such as corruption, discrimination, and social inequality, thereby fostering sustainable progress through emphasis on character development.

Despite its importance, the cultivation of character requires intentional effort and consistency. Character development is not limited to formal education or leadership training but is an ongoing process shaped by everyday experiences and interactions. Nucci et al. (2021) noted that moral reasoning and ethical behaviour evolve over time, influenced by cultural norms, familial upbringing, and personal reflection. This dynamic nature of character development highlights the need for continuous reinforcement of ethical values in various life domains.

The concept of character counts remains relevant in contemporary discussions on personal growth, leadership, and societal advancement. It underscores the enduring importance of ethical values in shaping individuals and communities, advocating for a holistic approach to development that integrates moral and intellectual capacities. Individuals and institutions can contribute to a more just, empathetic, and prosperous world by prioritizing character development,

## **Students' Academic Performance**

Students' academic performance refers to the measurable outcomes of students' learning processes, typically evaluated through grades, test scores, and other assessments that reflect their understanding and mastery of educational content. It is a crucial indicator of educational success and is influenced by a multitude of factors, including individual, institutional, familial, and societal dimensions.

Academic performance is often tied to students' cognitive abilities, motivation, and study habits. Students who demonstrate strong intrinsic motivation and effective time management skills tend to perform better academically. Motivation plays a pivotal role, as it drives students' engagement and perseverance in the face of challenges. Similarly, Adesoji and Olatunbosun (2018) highlighted that study habits such as regular revision, structured study schedules, and goal setting significantly impact students' academic outcomes.

The quality of teaching is another critical factor influencing students' academic performance. Teachers' subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, and ability to foster a supportive learning environment directly affect how students absorb and retain information. Aluko and Adeyemi (2017) found that interactive teaching methods that encourage student participation and critical thinking yield better academic results than rote learning techniques. Moreover, Adeyanju et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of teacher-student relationships, noting that teachers who build positive, respectful relationships with their students foster higher levels of academic engagement and achievement.

Parental involvement is also a significant determinant of students' academic success. Parents who actively participate in their children's education by attending school meetings, assisting with homework, and providing emotional support create an enabling environment for learning. Olatoye and Agbatogun (2014) argued that parental support, especially in low-income households, mitigates the effects of socioeconomic disadvantages on academic performance. Additionally, Sanni and Olukoya (2020) noted that students whose parents set high academic expectations tend to achieve better results due to the motivational impact of these expectations.

School infrastructure and resources contribute significantly to academic outcomes. Adequate classroom facilities, access to learning materials, and the integration of technology in teaching processes enhance students' ability to learn effectively. For instance, Babalola et al. (2019) reported that schools with well-equipped libraries and laboratories record higher academic performance among students compared to those with limited resources. The study also noted that schools with robust ICT integration enable students to explore diverse learning tools, thereby broadening their understanding and enhancing their academic capabilities.

The psychological well-being of students plays a crucial role in their academic performance. Stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges can significantly hinder concentration, memory retention, and problem-solving abilities. According to Eze et al. (2020), schools that implement counselling services and stress management programs report improved academic outcomes among students. Furthermore, emotional resilience, fostered through supportive relationships with teachers, peers, and family members, enables students to navigate academic pressures effectively.

### **Instructional Leaders' Trustworthiness and Students' Academic Performance**

Trustworthiness is an essential quality in instructional leadership that profoundly influences student academic performance. This character trait encompasses honesty, reliability, and integrity, and is essential for building a positive school climate and fostering effective relationships between leaders, teachers, students, and parents. Trustworthy instructional leaders create environments where students feel safe, respected, and motivated to achieve their academic potential.

Trustworthy instructional leaders enhance student engagement by creating a supportive and inclusive environment. When students trust their principals and teachers, they are more likely to feel valued and respected, which increases their motivation to participate actively in their education. Oladipo (2021) noted that trust between principals, teachers and students is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging within the school community. This sense of belonging is associated with higher levels of student engagement, which is a key predictor of academic performance. Engaged students are more likely to attend classes regularly, complete assignments, and participate in extracurricular activities, all of which contribute to their overall academic success.

Trustworthy instructional leaders also positively influence the relationships between teachers and students. When principals model trustworthiness, they encourage teachers to build trusting relationships with their students. Oluwaseun (2019) highlighted that strong teacher-student relationships are critical for creating a supportive learning environment. Trusting relationships between teachers and students promote open communication, mutual respect, and a positive classroom atmosphere. These relationships are essential for addressing individual student needs and providing personalized support, which enhances student learning and



performance. The broader impact of instructional leaders' trustworthiness extends to the overall school stakeholders. Instructional leaders who prioritize trustworthiness create a culture where trust is a shared value among all members of the school community.

Trustworthiness within the educational context is a foundation that not only influences students' academic performance but also shapes the entire educational experience. Trustworthiness is built through consistent, ethical behaviour from educators and administrators, fostering a reliable environment where students feel secure to express themselves and engage fully in their learning. As noted by Okonkwo (2018), the perception of teachers as trustworthy significantly enhances students' willingness to participate in classroom activities, seek help when needed, and take academic risks. This trust is rooted in the consistent delivery of promises, transparent communication, and a genuine concern for students' academic and personal well-being. It allows students to engage more deeply with learning materials, participate actively in classroom activities, and seek help when needed, knowing that their efforts will be met with consistent and fair responses from their teachers (Emeka, 2020).

Moreover, trustworthiness extends beyond individual teacher-student interactions to encompass the entire educational institution. Schools that maintain transparent communication, adhere to ethical standards, and consistently uphold policies foster a culture of trust that permeates every aspect of the student experience, thereby enhancing academic performance and overall satisfaction by building trust, educators and institutions not only improve academic outcomes but also nurture resilient, confident learners who are better prepared for future challenges. Also, the impact of trustworthiness extends beyond the individual classroom to the broader school environment. When school policies are implemented consistently and fairly, it reinforces the perception of an institution that values integrity and reliability.

Nwosu (2020) highlighted that schools where trust is ingrained in the culture tend to see higher levels of student engagement and lower incidences of disciplinary issues. This environment of trust encourages students to take ownership of their learning, participate actively in collaborative projects, and contribute positively to the school community. The role of trustworthiness in education can be seen through the lens of various theoretical frameworks. Social learning theory, for instance, posits that students are more likely to emulate behaviours they perceive as trustworthy and reliable. When educators model trustworthy behaviour, students are likely to adopt similar behaviours, which can lead to enhanced academic outcomes. According to Adewale (2019), trustworthiness also intersects with students' sense of belonging and identity within the school. When students trust their educators and the institution, they are more likely to develop a strong sense of belonging, which is crucial for academic success.

This also play a crucial role in mitigating academic anxiety and promoting mental well-being among students. Academic environments that are perceived as trustworthy help alleviate stress and anxiety, enabling students to focus more on their studies. Chinedu (2020) revealed that trust between students and teachers reduce academic-related stress and create a supportive atmosphere where students can thrive academically and emotionally. The implications of trustworthiness extend to the effectiveness of school leadership as well. Effective leaders who demonstrate trustworthiness through transparency, ethical decision-making and consistent support can cultivate a school culture that prioritizes trust at all levels. Trust in school leadership correlates with increased teacher satisfaction and retention, which in turn impacts student achievement positively. Teachers who feel trusted by their leaders are more likely to be committed to their roles and to go the extra mile to support their students (Ifeanyi, 2019).

## **Instructional Leaders' Responsibility and its Impact on Students' Academic Performance**

Responsibility as a character trait of instructional leaders ensures accountability by fostering a culture of integrity and excellence. It also involves accepting ownership of decisions and actions, being accountable for outcomes, and demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement (Eze, 2018). Instructional leaders who demonstrated responsibility are proactive in addressing challenges, seeking solutions, and learning from experiences to enhance their leadership effectiveness. Taking responsibility also involves setting high standards for oneself and other team mates ensuring that all members of the school community are held accountable for their roles and contributions (Olawale, 2020).

Instructional leaders who embrace responsibility lead by example, demonstrating a strong work ethic, resilience, and a commitment to the success of the educational institutions. Taking responsibility entails being transparent and honest in communication, acknowledging mistakes, and taking corrective actions to address issues and improve outcomes. Instructional leaders can build a culture of trust, accountability, and continuous improvement by fostering a positive and productive educational environment (Oladipo, 2021). Taking responsibility is a critical factor in student academic performance, influencing both the immediate outcomes and long-term educational trajectories of students. This concept involves students being accountable for their actions, decisions, and academic duties, leading to a more engaged and proactive approach to learning.

Adegboye (2018) outlined the importance of instilling a sense of responsibility in students from an early age, suggesting that this fosters independence and self-regulation. When students take responsibility for their learning, they are more likely to set personal academic goals, plan effectively, and manage their time wisely. This self-regulation is pivotal in navigating the academic demands of schools, as it encourages students to engage actively with their coursework and seek help when needed. Moreover, responsible students are better equipped to cope with academic challenges, as they adopt a problem-solving mindset and take ownership of their learning process. Teachers can model responsible behaviours by demonstrating commitment, punctuality, and a strong work ethic. Educators create an environment where responsibility is valued and encouraged by setting clear expectations and holding students accountable for meeting them. For instance, assigning tasks that require independent research and critical thinking can help students develop a sense of ownership over their work.

Chukwuemeka (2020) explored the relationship between responsibility and academic integrity, noting that students who take responsibility for their actions are less likely to engage in dishonest behaviours such as cheating and plagiarism. Students can build a foundation of integrity that supports their academic and personal development by understanding the ethical implications of their actions and the importance of academic honesty. Educators can reinforce this by incorporating discussions on ethics and responsibility into the curriculum, emphasizing the long-term benefits of maintaining academic integrity. The impact of taking responsibility extends beyond individual academic performance to influence broader educational outcomes. Oladipo (2021) argued that a culture of responsibility within the school community can enhance overall student achievement. When students collectively embrace responsibility, it creates a positive and supportive learning environment where peers motivate each other to excel. This collaborative atmosphere can lead to improved academic outcomes, as students are more likely to engage in productive study habits, participate actively in class, and support each other's learning.

Moreover, taking responsibility is linked to the development of essential life skills that are crucial for success beyond the classroom. Adegboye (2018) asserted that students who learn to take responsibility for their academic performance are better prepared for the demands of higher education and the workforce. Skills such as time management, goal-setting, and self-discipline are transferable to various aspects of life, enabling students to navigate future challenges with confidence and resilience. Educators can help students develop a strong sense of agency and autonomy, which are vital for lifelong learning and personal growth.

Oluwaseun (2019) emphasized the need for supportive policies and resources that empower students to take responsibility. This includes providing access to quality educational materials, creating a conducive learning environment, and offering guidance and mentorship programs. Educators and policymakers can create conditions that enable all students to exercise responsibility and achieve their academic potential by addressing these structural barriers. Educators can help students develop the skills and mindset necessary for academic success and personal growth by fostering a sense of accountability.

Adebayo (2018) opined that fostering a sense of responsibility in students can significantly enhance their intrinsic motivation and drive to succeed academically. This essential motivation is vital as it fuels students' engagement and persistence in their educational pursuits. Educators play a critical role in promoting responsibility among students. They can achieve this by providing opportunities for students to make meaningful choices regarding their learning activities, take on leadership roles within the classroom, and reflect on their learning experiences. Bello (2019) posited that such opportunities not only cultivate a sense of ownership in students but also empower them to take charge of their learning journey. This empowerment is crucial as it leads to a more active and engaged learning process, where students are not merely passive recipients of information but active participants in their education.

Moreover, encouraging a growth mind-set is another effective strategy for promoting responsible behaviours among students. A growth mind-set, as explained by Okeke (2020), is the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication and hard work. This perspective helps students view challenges as opportunities for learning and development rather than as insurmountable obstacles. When students adopt a growth mindset, they are more likely to embrace difficult tasks, persist in the face of setbacks, and see effort as a path to mastery. This mindset shift is instrumental in fostering a sense of responsibility as it encourages students to take control of their learning outcomes and continually strive for improvement.

Therefore, taking responsibility is a key factor in students' academic performance, influencing their motivation, engagement, and skill development. Educators can help students set goals, manage their time effectively, and develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills by fostering a sense of responsibility. Encouraging a growth mindset further reinforces responsible behaviours, enabling students to view challenges as opportunities for growth. The integration of these strategies within the educational setting is essential for empowering students to take charge of their academic journey and realize their full potentials.

## **METHODS**

### **Design of the Study**

The study adopted a descriptive and correlational survey designs. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. Correlational design was used to examine the

relationship between the independent and dependent variables - Instructional leaders' character counts traits and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

### **Population of the Study**

The population for this study comprised the entire 320 principals and 5,833 teachers resulting to 6,153 in 320 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State (Rivers State Universal Basic Education Board, 2024).

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The sample size for the study comprised of principals and teachers (615 respondents) which is 10% of the population drawn from the 320 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure equitable representation of the targeted sample from urban and rural public senior secondary schools in the 23 Local Government Areas in Rivers State.

### **Instrument for Data Collection**

The instrument for data collection was a close-form self-designed questionnaire. Section 1 contains the demographic bio data of the respondents. Section 2 contains 6 closed items questions elicited information from the instructional leaders (principals). Titled "Instructional Leaders' Character Counts Trait and Students Academic Performance Questionnaire" (ILCCTSAPQ). The respondents will be required to indicate their opinions on a 4-point Likert scale in the form of very high extent (VHE), high extent (HE), low extent (LE), very low extent (VLE) in scores of 4, 3, 2, and 1 point respectively.

### **Validation of the Instrument**

In order to validate the instrument, the questionnaire alongside the research questions and hypothesis was given to two experts in the faculty of educational management. The experts scrutinize the items in terms of relevance, clarity, appropriateness of language, and response pattern as they relate to the research questions and problem of the study. In the light of feedback received from their observations and corrections the questionnaire was finalized.

### **Reliability of the Instrument**

The reliability of the study was established using Cronbach Alpha Reliability method. Cronbach Alpha measures the internal consistency of an instrument. Internal consistency describes the extent to which all the items within the test are inter-related. Internal consistency was determined by conducting a pilot test. 20 copies of the instrument were administered to 20 respondents that are not part of the sample size but are within the population of the study. Thereafter, the completed instruments were collected and missing or incomplete data checked for. Data was entered into a statistical software package (SPSS). Thereafter, the reliability coefficient alpha for

each item was gotten from the statistical data analysis. The closer Cronbach Alpha coefficient is between 0 and 1, the closer to 1.0 the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale. A reliability index of value of .927 and 831 was realised.

### Method of Data Collection

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

### Method of Data Analysis

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

## RESULTS

### Answer to Research Questions

**Research Question 1:** To what extent does instructional leaders’ demonstration of trustworthiness enhance students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of instructional leaders’ demonstration of trustworthiness enhance students’ academic performance

S/N	Instructional leaders’ demonstration of trustworthiness and students’ academic performance	Mean	SD.	Remarks
1	When a leader is trustworthy it facilitates effective communication, which is essential for addressing the diverse needs of students’ performance.	3.5610	.99793	High extent
2	Instructional leader’s transparency and integrity in decision-making improves students’ academic engagement and also reduce students’ academic stress.	3.4553	.87353	High extent
3	Instructional leaders who are perceived as trustworthy create a safe and supportive learning environment that promotes student engagement and motivation.	3.3561	1.07004	High extent
<b>Grand mean and SD.</b>		<b>3.4574</b>	<b>.98050</b>	<b>High extent</b>

Data in Table 1 examined the extent instructional leaders’ demonstration of trustworthiness enhance students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in Rivers State and the results revealed that when a leader is trustworthy it facilitates effective communication, which is

essential for addressing the diverse needs of students' performance ( $M = 3.5610$ ;  $SD = .99793$ ), the respondents agreed to a high extent that instructional leader's transparency and integrity in decision-making improves students' academic engagement and also reduce students' academic stress ( $M = 3.4553$ ;  $SD = .87353$ ), and they also agreed to a high extent that instructional leaders who are perceived as trustworthy create a safe and supportive learning environment that promotes student engagement and motivation ( $M = 3.3561$ ;  $SD = 1.07004$ ). On the whole, the respondents agreed to a high extent that extent does instructional leaders' demonstration of trustworthiness enhance students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Rivers State. This is as shown in the grand mean of 3.4574 and standard deviation of .98050.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent does instructional leaders' responsibility impact on students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of instructional leaders' responsibility impact on students' academic performance

S/N	Instructional leaders' responsibility and students' academic performance	Mean	SD.	Remarks
4	When instructional leaders are punctual to school, students are more likely to attend school regularly, participate actively in class, which enhances the academic performance of students.	3.3545	.85106	High extent
5	A strong sense of instructional leaders' responsibility establishes a culture of accountability and commitment that saturates throughout the school, leading to enhanced students' academic outcomes.	2.9610	1.16061	High extent
6	Students benefit from seeing their instructional leaders take responsibility, as it encourages them to adopt a similar attitude towards their own learning, leading to increased engagement and improved academic performance.	3.2634	.83034	High extent
<b>Grand mean and SD.</b>		<b>3.1929</b>	<b>.94733</b>	<b>High extent</b>

The information in Table 2 investigated the extent instructional leaders' responsibility impact on students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State and the results showed that when instructional leaders are punctual to school, students are more likely to attend school regularly, participate actively in class, which enhances the academic performance of students ( $M = 3.3545$ ;  $SD = .85106$ ). The respondents equally agreed to a high extent that a strong sense of instructional leaders' responsibility establishes a culture of accountability and commitment that saturates throughout the school, leading to enhanced students' academic outcomes ( $M = 2.9610$ ;  $SD = 1.16061$ ), and they similarly agreed to a high extent that students benefit from seeing their instructional leaders take responsibility, as it encourages them to adopt a similar attitude towards their own learning, leading to increased engagement and improved academic performance ( $M = 3.2634$ ;  $SD = .83034$ ). Consequently, the respondents (Grand  $M = 3.1929$ ;  $SD = .94733$ ) depicted that instructional leaders' responsibility impact on students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

### Test of Hypotheses

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between instructional leader's trustworthiness and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 3: PPMC analysis of relationship between instructional leader's trustworthiness and students' academic performance

		Instructional leader's trustworthiness	Students' academic performance
<b>Instructional leader's trustworthiness</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.618**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	615	615
<b>Students' academic performance</b>	Pearson Correlation	.618**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	615	615

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

Data from the PPMC analysis in Table 3 was computed to determine whether significant relationship exist between instructional leader's trustworthiness and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The revealed that actually there is significant relationship between instructional leader's trustworthiness and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State ( $r = .618^{**}$ , Sig (2-tailed) = .000, and  $N = 615$ ). Thus, hypothesis one was rejected.

**H0<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between instructional leader's responsibility and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

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

		Instructional leader's responsibility	Students' academic performance
<b>Instructional leader's responsibility</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.653**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	615	615
<b>Students' academic performance</b>	Pearson Correlation	.653**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	615	615

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

Information in table 4 was aimed to evaluate if significant relationship exist between instructional leader's responsibility and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The analysis revealed significant relationship between instructional leader's responsibility and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State ( $r = .653^{**}$ , Sig (2-tailed) = .000, and  $N = 615$ ). Consequently, hypothesis two was rejected.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Instructional Leaders' Trustworthiness and Students' Academic Performance**

The findings of research question one revealed to a high extent that instructional leaders' demonstration of trustworthiness enhance students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Also, the results for hypothesis one showed that there is significant relationship between instructional leader's trustworthiness and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

The findings showed that trustworthy instructional leaders enhance student engagement by creating a supportive and inclusive environment. When students trust their principals and teachers, they are more likely to feel valued and respected, which increases their motivation to participate actively in their education. This finding further collaborates the study of Oladipo (2021) when he noted that trust between principals, teachers and students is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging within the school community. This sense of belonging is associated with higher levels of student engagement, which is a key predictor of academic performance. Engaged students are more likely to attend classes regularly, complete assignments, and participate in extracurricular activities, all of which contribute to their overall academic success.

Same is true when Oluwaseun (2019) highlighted that strong teacher-student relationships are critical for creating a supportive learning environment. Trusting relationships between teachers and students promote open communication, mutual respect, and a positive classroom atmosphere. Okonkwo (2018) also observed that the perception of teachers as trustworthy significantly enhances students' willingness to participate in classroom activities, seek help when needed, and take academic risks. This trust is rooted in the consistent delivery of promises, transparent communication, and a genuine concern for students' academic and personal well-being. It allows students to engage more deeply with learning materials, participate actively in classroom activities, and seeks help when needed, knowing that their efforts will be met with consistent and fair responses from their teachers (Emeka, 2020).

Adewale (2019) and Nwosu (2020) studies equally highlighted that schools where trust is ingrained in the culture tend to see higher levels of student engagement and lower incidences of disciplinary issues. This environment of trust encourages students to take ownership of their learning, participate actively in collaborative projects, and contribute positively to the school community. Trustworthiness also intersects with students' sense of belonging and identity within the school. When students trust their educators and the institution, they are more likely to develop a strong sense of belonging, which is crucial for academic success.

In the same vein, Ifeanyi (2019) and Chinedu (2020) revealed that trust between students and teachers reduces academic-related stress and creates a supportive atmosphere where students can thrive academically and emotionally. The implications of trustworthiness extend to the effectiveness of school leadership as well. Effective leaders who demonstrate trustworthiness through transparency, ethical decision-making, and consistent support can cultivate a school culture that prioritizes trust at all levels. Trust in school leadership correlates with increased teacher satisfaction and retention, which in turn impacts student achievement positively. Teachers who feel trusted by their leaders are more likely to be committed to their roles and to go the extra mile to support their students.



## **Instructional Leaders' Responsibility and its Impact on Students' Academic Performance**

The findings from the results that research question two depicted to a high extent, instructional leaders' responsibility impact on students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Results for hypothesis two publicized that there is significant relationship between instructional leader's responsibility and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

These results are in line with the studies of Eze (2018) and Olawale (2020), when they found that instructional leaders who demonstrated responsibility are proactive in addressing challenges, seeking solutions, and learning from experiences to enhance their leadership effectiveness. Taking responsibility also involves setting high standards for oneself and other team mates ensuring that all members of the school community are held accountable for their roles and contributions. They further exposed that those instructional leaders' who embrace responsibility lead by example, demonstrating a strong work ethic, resilience, and a commitment to the success of the educational institutions. Taking responsibility entails being transparent and honest in communication, acknowledging mistakes, and taking corrective actions to address issues and improve outcomes. Instructional leaders can build a culture of trust, accountability, and continuous improvement by fostering a positive and productive educational environment (Oladipo, 2021).

Adegboye (2018) in the same stratum outlined the importance of instilling a sense of responsibility in students from an early age, suggesting that this fosters independence and self-regulation. When students take responsibility for their learning, they are more likely to set personal academic goals, plan effectively, and manage their time wisely. This self-regulation is pivotal in navigating the academic demands of schools, as it encourages students to engage actively with their coursework and seek help when needed. Moreover, responsible students are better equipped to cope with academic challenges, as they adopt a problem-solving mindset and take ownership of their learning process. Teachers can model responsible behaviours by demonstrating commitment, punctuality, and a strong work ethic. Educators create an environment where responsibility is valued and encouraged by setting clear expectations and holding students accountable for meeting them. For instance, assigning tasks that require independent research and critical thinking can help students develop a sense of ownership over their work.

Chukwuemeka (2020) study explored the relationship between responsibility and academic integrity, noting that students who take responsibility for their actions are less likely to engage in dishonest behaviours such as cheating and plagiarism. However, in Oladipo (2021) study, he argued that a culture of responsibility within the school community can enhance overall student achievement. When students collectively embrace responsibility, it creates a positive and supportive learning environment where peers motivate each other to excel. This collaborative atmosphere can lead to improved academic outcomes, as students are more likely to engage in productive study habits, participate actively in class, and support each other's learning.

Adegboye (2018) further asserted that students who learn to take responsibility for their academic performance are better prepared for the demands of higher education and the workforce. Skills such as time management, goal-setting, and self-discipline are transferable to various aspects of life, enabling students to navigate future challenges with confidence and resilience. Educators can help students develop a strong sense of agency and autonomy, which are vital for lifelong learning and personal growth, while Oluwaseun (2019) emphasized the need

for supportive policies and resources that empower students to take responsibility. This includes providing access to quality educational materials, creating a conducive learning environment, and offering guidance and mentorship programs. Educators and policymakers can create conditions that enable all students to exercise responsibility and achieve their academic potential by addressing these structural barriers. Educators can help students develop the skills and mindset necessary for academic success and personal growth by fostering a sense of accountability.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study successfully examined the relationship between instructional leaders' character counts traits and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The study highlighted the profound impact of leadership qualities on educational outcomes. The study emphasized that instructional leaders who demonstrates good character traits such as trustworthiness and responsibility, contribute significantly to creating a positive learning environment. These character counts traits foster a culture of trust, discipline, and motivation among students and teachers, which in turn enhances students' academic performance.

Instructional leaders with these character counts traits model desirable behaviours for students, reinforcing values that promote academic success and personal development. When leaders are empathetic, they understand the challenges students face and provide the necessary support. The findings suggested that character-driven leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering a supportive school climate, which is critical for improving academic outcomes. The ability of instructional leaders to build strong relationships with both students and teachers influences the overall school culture, creating an environment where students are motivated to achieve their academic potential.

Therefore, to improve students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, it is essential to prioritize the development of instructional leaders with strong character traits using effective character education programmes like character counts. Investing in school leadership character does not only improve academic performance but also nurtures the holistic development of students, preparing them to become global lifelong learners with good character values.

## **Recommendations**

Two recommendations for instructional leaders' character counts traits and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State is proffered:

- The Ministry of Education should further encourage instructional leaders' on how to demonstrate trustworthiness to enhance students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Rivers State.
- The Ministry of Education should train instructional leaders' on how to shoulder responsibility and its impact on students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

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