



Transformational Leadership, Inclusivity and Equity in Tertiary Institutions in Delta State

Dr (Mrs) Asuzu Lois

Institute of Education, Delta State University, Abraka

revasuzu@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study investigated transformational leadership, inclusivity and equity in tertiary institutions in Delta State. The study adopted correlational research design. The target population for this study consisted of 2,737 lecturers from the tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria. The sample size for this study was 1,589 lecturers in the twelve tertiary institutions in Delta State. Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ) and Inclusivity and Equity Questionnaire (IEQ) were the instruments used for data collection. TLQ and IEQ were validated by three experts and had a reliability coefficient of 0.80 and 0.78, respectively. Data obtained with the aid of the two instruments were analysed using coefficient of determination and regression analysis. The results revealed significant relationship between transformational leadership and inclusivity, and significant relationship between transformational leadership and equity. The study concludes that transformational leadership not only fosters an inclusive environment but also promotes equitable practices that benefit all stakeholders. It was therefore recommended among others that tertiary institutions should implement leadership development programmes that focus on transformational leadership skills, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and equity. In addition, tertiary institutions should conduct regular reviews of their policies and practices to ensure they promote inclusivity and equity.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership; Inclusivity; Equity; Tertiary Institutions.



Introduction

Tertiary institutions play a crucial role in the education system by providing advanced education and training. They are essential for fostering research, innovation, and the development of a skilled workforce. The importance of these institutions has been underscored by the increasing demand for higher education globally, driven by economic changes and technological advancements (Bok, 2022). Tertiary institutions are responsible for equipping students with specialized knowledge and skills necessary for various professions. They offer a range of programs from undergraduate to postgraduate levels, catering to diverse fields such as science, technology, arts, and humanities. Many tertiary institutions are at the forefront of research and development. They contribute to scientific advancements and technological innovations that can address societal challenges, such as climate change and public health crises (Dinh et al., 2024). Tertiary institutions contribute significantly to economic development by producing a skilled workforce that meets the needs of the labor market. They also engage in partnerships with industries to foster entrepreneurship and innovation. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and socio-cultural disparities often hinder the achievement of inclusivity and equity in these institutions.

Several leadership strategies have been recommended for academic administrators in the tertiary institutions in the state in an attempt to mitigate the above challenges. One of the leadership strategies recommended for academic administrators is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes inspiration, motivation, and the development of followers (Wang et al., 2022). In the context of academic institutions, transformational leaders are those who seek to create a shared vision, foster a positive organizational culture, and encourage personal and professional growth among faculty and students. This leadership style is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where educational institutions are striving to improve their performance and adapt to changing societal needs. Research has shown that transformational leadership can lead to increased job satisfaction, enhanced organizational commitment, and improved academic performance among faculty and students (Wang et al., 2022). The adoption of transformational leadership practices by academic administrators could play a significant role in addressing the challenges inclusivity and equity faced by tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

The act of fostering an atmosphere where everyone, regardless of background, feels appreciated, respected, and supported is known as inclusivity. Contrarily, equity entails making sure that everyone has access to the same opportunities and resources while taking into account each person's particular situation (Bensimon et al., 2016). In higher education, diversity promotion, increased student engagement, and improved academic performance all depend on inclusivity and equity. In tertiary institutions, transformational leaders may be essential in creating a welcoming and equal environment. Transformational leaders inspire people to strive towards this shared objective by articulating a compelling and distinct vision for equity and inclusivity. By encouraging participation and collaboration, transformational leaders empower faculty, staff, and students to take ownership of initiatives aimed at promoting inclusivity and equity. Transformational leaders set the tone for inclusivity by modeling respectful and equitable behavior, thereby influencing the organizational culture. They advocate for the allocation of resources and support systems that facilitate inclusivity and equity, such as mentorship programs, scholarships, and training. Transformational leaders actively promote diversity within the institution, recognizing the value of different perspectives and experiences (Dinh et al., 2014). Hence, transformational leadership has the potency to enhance inclusivity and equity in tertiary institutions.



Delta State is a Nigerian state situated in the Niger Delta region rich in cultural richness and with great economic potentials. However, it also faces significant challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and educational disparities (Ogunyemi, 2020). The state's tertiary institutions play a crucial role in addressing these challenges by providing quality education and fostering social mobility. However, the effectiveness of these institutions in promoting inclusivity and equity is often influenced by the leadership styles adopted by their administrators. Research has shown that transformational leadership can positively impact organizational culture, employee satisfaction, and overall institutional performance. Transformational leaders are more likely to put into effect practices and policies that support fairness and diversity in higher education. Through the establishment of a nurturing and enabling atmosphere, these leaders can facilitate the integration of diverse student populations and guarantee that every person has the chance to achieve success. The literature on transformational leadership and its impact on equality and inclusivity is expanding, but there is a dearth of studies that particularly address the Delta State setting. In light of this, the study's focus is on transformational leadership, inclusivity and equity in Delta State's tertiary institutions.

Social justice theory and transformational leadership theory serve as the foundation for this study's theoretical framework. These frameworks offer a prism through which to view the influence of transformative leadership on inclusivity and equity in Delta State's tertiary institutions. According to Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory, leaders have the power to uplift and encourage subordinates to reach greater performance and personal growth goals. The vision that transformative leaders present is compelling and in line with the goals and values of their followers. They foster an atmosphere that encourages cooperation and teamwork by making everyone feel appreciated and included. They put a lot of emphasis on their followers' professional and personal development, offering them tools and encouragement to assist them reach their objectives. Transformational leaders are prepared to challenge accepted wisdom and push for reforms that advance equity and inclusivity.

Social justice theory propounded by Theoharis (2017) emphasizes the importance of fairness, equity, and inclusivity in society. It advocates for the recognition and addressing of systemic inequalities that affect marginalized groups. In the context of education, social justice theory underscores the need for equitable access to resources and opportunities for all students, regardless of their background.

The integration of transformational leadership theory and social justice theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the influence of leadership on inclusivity and equity in tertiary institutions. Transformational leaders can serve as agents of change, advocating for social justice and promoting practices that foster an inclusive environment. By aligning their leadership practices with the principles of social justice, they can effectively address the challenges faced by marginalized groups within the educational system.

Numerous empirical studies have examined the connection between transformative leadership and equity and inclusivity in educational contexts. The impact of transformational leadership on faculty members' organisational commitment in higher education institutions was investigated by Wang et al. (2022). The results showed that faculty dedication was positively impacted by transformational leadership, and this improved inclusivity and collaboration within the organisation. The report underlined how crucial leadership is in creating a welcoming atmosphere that celebrates diversity and advances equity. In a study published in 2018, Korkmaz investigated the connection between student engagement and leadership styles at Turkish colleges. The findings showed that transformative leadership—a crucial element of



inclusivity—was substantially correlated with better levels of student involvement. The study emphasised how transformational leaders may foster an inclusive atmosphere that promotes involvement and teamwork among students.

Bensimon et al. (2016) examined the leadership's role in advancing equity in higher education institutions. The researchers discovered that transformative leaders had a higher propensity to put into effect laws and procedures that addressed structural injustices and encouraged fair resource distribution. The research emphasised the significance of leadership in propelling institutional transformation and cultivating a welcoming learning atmosphere. Dinh et al. (2014) looked at the connection between diversity and transformational leadership in organisations. The results showed that transformative leaders were more successful in encouraging inclusivity and diversity within their teams. The authors made the case that transformational leadership techniques, like promoting candid dialogue and teamwork, are necessary to establish a welcoming atmosphere that appreciates a range of viewpoints. Theoharis (2017) investigated transformational leaders' experiences in advancing social justice in schools using a qualitative study. According to the research, transformative leaders aggressively promoted diversity and equity while opposing structural obstacles that disadvantaged particular groups. The study emphasised how important it is for leaders to cultivate an inclusive and equitable culture in educational environments.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of inclusivity and equity in tertiary education, many institutions in Delta State continue to grapple with challenges that hinder the realization of these ideals. Tertiary institutions in Delta State face numerous challenges that impede the promotion of inclusivity and equity. The diverse socio-cultural backgrounds of students can lead to disparities in access to resources and opportunities. Some groups may feel marginalized or excluded from the academic community, which can negatively impact their educational experience. Many institutions struggle with inadequate facilities and resources, which can disproportionately affect students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This lack of support can hinder their academic performance and overall success. There is often a lack of awareness and training among leaders and staff regarding the importance of inclusivity and equity. This can result in unintentional biases and practices that perpetuate inequality. Transformational leadership requires a willingness to embrace change and challenge the status quo. However, resistance from faculty, staff, and even students can impede efforts to promote inclusivity and equity.

The leadership within tertiary institutions could play a crucial role in shaping the organizational culture and determining the extent to which inclusivity and equity are prioritized. Transformational leaders have the potential to inspire and motivate others to prioritize inclusivity and equity. However, the extent to which transformational leadership is practiced and its influence on inclusivity and equity in tertiary institutions in Delta State remains unclear. Therefore, the problem of the study, is: What is the relationship between transformational leadership, inclusivity and equity in tertiary institutions in Delta State?

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between transformational leadership and inclusivity in tertiary institutions in Delta State?
2. What is the relationship between transformational leadership and equity in tertiary institutions in Delta State?



Hypotheses

The was further guided by two hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between transformational leadership and inclusivity in tertiary institutions in Delta State.
2. There is no significant relationship between transformational leadership and equity in tertiary institutions in Delta State.

Methods

Correlational research design was used in the study, which is suitable for investigating the associations between several dependent variables (equity and inclusivity) and an independent variable (transformational leadership). When patterns and relationships can be found without changing the variables, correlational investigations are especially helpful (Field, 2018). 2,737 lecturers from tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria, were the study's target population. 1,589 lecturers from Delta State's twelve tertiary schools made up the study's sample. The sample size for the study was calculated as a percentage of the total population using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table for limited populations. Data were gathered using two instruments: Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ) and Inclusivity and Equity Questionnaire (IEQ). A four-point scoring system with four weights—Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD)—was used for each item in the two questionnaires.

Face and content validation were used to determine the validity of TLQs and IEQs. In order to accomplish this, the researcher gave three experts the two instruments, research questions, and hypotheses guiding the study. The experts (lecturers) from Delta State University, Abraka's Department of Educational Management and Foundations validated the instruments. The final draft of the instrument took the experts' recommendations into account. These modifications were considered in order to improve the validity of the instrument. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was utilised to evaluate the instruments' reliability. Thirty lecturers from a tertiary institution in Anambra State who were not part of the main study's sample were used in a pilot study. Reliability coefficients for TLQ and IEQ, after analysis of the pilot research data, were 0.80 and 0.78, respectively. Regarding the study itself, the researcher, with the assistance of three research assistants, gathered data by giving structured questionnaires to a sample of lecturers in Delta State's higher institutions. Regression analysis and the coefficient of determination were used to compile and assess the responses from the instructors who were sampled. Regression analysis and the coefficient of determination were used to quantify the relationship between transformational leadership and inclusivity/equity in tertiary institutions, determining the extent to which leadership influences these variables. The analysis provided statistical significance (F-test) and explanatory power (r), that were used to make valid conclusion.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between transformational leadership and inclusivity in tertiary institutions in Delta State?

Table 1: Coefficient of Determination of the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Inclusivity in Tertiary Institutions in Delta State

Variable	N	r	r ²	r ² %	Decision
Transformational leadership	1589	.398	.158	15.8	Positive
Inclusivity	1589				

Table 1 shows a correlation coefficient (r-value) of 0.398, indicating positive low relationship between transformational leadership and inclusivity. The analysis also showed that, the coefficient of determination (R^2) associated with the correlation coefficient of 0.398 was 0.158. This implies that transformational leadership accounted for 15.8% of inclusivity in tertiary institutions in Delta State. This is an indication that 84.2% of the variation in inclusivity in tertiary institutions in Delta State is attributed to extraneous factors other than transformational leadership of academic administrators.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between transformational leadership and equity in tertiary institutions in Delta State?

Table 2: Coefficient of Determination of the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Equity in Tertiary Institutions in Delta State

Variable	N	r	r ²	r ² %	Decision
Transformational leadership	1589	.372	.138	13.8	Positive
Equity	1589				

Table 2 shows a correlation coefficient (r-value) of 0.372, indicating a positive low relationship between transformational leadership and equity. The analysis also showed that, the coefficient of determination (R^2) associated with the correlation coefficient of 0.372 was 0.138. This implies that transformational leadership accounted for 13.8% of equity in tertiary institutions in Delta State. This is an indication that 86.2% of the variation in equity in tertiary institutions in Delta State is attributed to other factors other than transformational leadership.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between transformational leadership and inclusivity in tertiary institutions in Delta State.

Table 3: Regression Analysis on Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Inclusivity in Tertiary Institutions in Delta State

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	361.847	1	180.924	7.248	.001 ^b
	Residual	1922.140	1588	24.963		
	Total	2283.988	1589			

Table 3 shows a substantial correlation ($F(1, 1588) = 7.248, P(0.001) < 0.05$) between transformative leadership and inclusivity. The null hypothesis is thus rejected. Thus, the researcher comes to the conclusion that transformational leadership and inclusivity in Delta State's tertiary institutions are significantly correlated.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between transformational leadership and equity in tertiary institutions in Delta State

Table 4: Regression Analysis on Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Equity in Tertiary Institutions in Delta State

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	361.847	1	157.896	6.177	.003 ^b
	Residual	1922.140	1588	25.561		
	Total	2283.988	1589			

Transformational leadership and equity have a substantial link ($F(1, 1588) = 6.177$, $P(0.003) < 0.05$) as seen in Table 4. The null hypothesis is thus rejected. Thus, the researcher comes to the conclusion that transformative leadership and equity in Delta State's tertiary institutions are significantly correlated.

Discussions

The study revealed significant relationship between transformational leadership and inclusivity in tertiary institutions in Delta State. This implies that transformational leadership positively influences equity in tertiary institutions in Delta State. This could be attributed to the fact that transformational leaders often articulate a compelling vision that emphasizes the importance of inclusivity. They inspire their followers to embrace diverse perspectives and foster an environment where all voices are heard. In addition, transformational leaders empower individuals by providing support and resources, which encourages participation from all members of the institution. This empowerment fosters a culture of inclusivity where everyone feels valued and engaged. Transformational leaders promote collaboration and teamwork, which naturally leads to inclusivity. By encouraging diverse groups to work together, they create an environment where different ideas and backgrounds are integrated into decision-making processes. Transformational leaders often prioritize diversity as a core value. Their commitment to creating an inclusive environment can lead to policies and practices that actively promote inclusivity within the institution. This finding lends credence to that of Wang et al. (2022) and Korkmaz (2018). Wang et al. (2019) reported that transformational leadership positively influenced faculty commitment, which in turn enhanced collaboration and inclusivity within the institution. In the same vein, Korkmaz (2018) reported that transformational leadership was significantly associated with higher levels of student engagement, which is a critical component of inclusivity.

Another finding of the study revealed that significant relationship between transformational leadership and equity in tertiary institutions in Delta State. This implies that transformational leadership positively influence equity in tertiary institutions in Delta State. This is predicated on the fact that transformational leaders advocate for fairness and justice, ensuring that all individuals have equal access to opportunities and resources. This commitment to equity aligns with their transformational goals of fostering a supportive and just environment. Transformational leaders practice individualized consideration, recognizing the unique needs and challenges of each member of the institution. This approach helps to address disparities and promotes equitable treatment. Transformational leaders often act as change agents, challenging existing inequities and advocating for systemic changes that promote equity. Their proactive stance can lead to the implementation of policies that address inequities within the institution. This finding corroborates that of Bensimon et al. (2016) and Theoharis (2017). Bensimon et al. (2016) reported that transformational leaders were more likely to implement policies and practices that addressed systemic inequalities and promoted equitable access to resources. Similarly, Theoharis (2017) reported that transformational leaders actively



advocated for equity and inclusivity, challenging systemic barriers that marginalized certain groups.

Conclusion

The study has illuminated the significant relationships between transformational leadership, inclusivity, and equity within tertiary institutions in Delta State. The findings suggest that transformational leadership not only fosters an inclusive environment but also promotes equitable practices that benefit all stakeholders. By inspiring and empowering individuals, transformational leaders create a culture that values diversity and ensures fair access to opportunities. As educational institutions strive to meet the challenges of a diverse and dynamic society, the role of transformational leadership becomes increasingly critical in shaping inclusive and equitable environments. The implications of this study underscore the necessity for educational leaders to adopt transformational leadership styles to enhance inclusivity and equity, ultimately contributing to the overall success and sustainability of tertiary institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. Institutions should implement leadership development programmes that focus on transformational leadership skills, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and equity.
2. Tertiary institutions should conduct regular reviews of their policies and practices to ensure they promote inclusivity and equity.



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