



PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP DECISIONS ON ACADEMIC STAFF CAREER PROGRESSION IN RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY



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Abstract

This study investigated the perceived influence of ethical leadership decisions on academic staff career progression at Rivers State University. The study revealed fairness, transparency, and respect for human dignity as dimensions for ethical leadership. Three objectives, three research questions and three corresponding hypotheses guided the study. The research employed a descriptive survey design, with a population of 1,705 comprising of 120-line leaders (Deans and HOD's) and 1585 academic staff in Rivers State University. A sample of 398 individuals (92-line leaders and 306 academic staff) was derived through Krejcie Morgan table of sample size determination. The Cronbach Alpha statistics method was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument which yielded reliability indexes of 0.83, 0.89 and 0.78. Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire, and the analysis was performed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and z-tests to test the hypotheses. Findings from the study revealed among ethical leadership decisions impacts on academic staff career progression in Rivers State University to a high extent, and fairness, transparency and respect for human dignity in leadership decisions significantly impacts on academic staff career progression, to a high extent. Based on the findings, it was recommended that Line leaders should prioritize merit-based decisions when assigning responsibilities and promoting staff. This includes ensuring that all academic staff, regardless of their social or tribal affiliations, have equal opportunities for professional development and career advancement. Also, the study advocates for leadership training to ensure fair and inclusive decision-making processes in academic institutions.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, fairness, transparency, respect for human dignity and Academic Staff Career Progression

Introduction

Institutional leaders are administrators in charge of ensuring that all components of an organization function effectively. In an academic environment, they are not just responsible to oversee the day-to-day activities, they make critical decisions that makes or mar the institution. Decision making in any sphere has a significant impact in motivating and demotivating employees. Rivers State University as an academic hub has line leaders who are saddled with task of ensuring that its goals and objectives are optimally achieved. These leaders play significant roles in strengthening ethical decisions that requires creating and maintaining a positive school culture that supports ethical standard. By this, line leaders are expected to make intentional decisions that upholds integrity, honesty and accountability. These behaviours would help facilitate acceptable standard for every would-be staff to emulate when risen to the rank of headship. This statement corroborates to Kazeem and Abudulkareem (2023) who affirms that ethical leaders in the public sector are meant to set exemplary lifestyle for their

followers by acting in a way that upholds morality which can result in an enthusiastic team, and great level of job satisfaction leading to enhanced performance in services delivery. Supportably, Eutychus (2023) opined that ethical leaders should model the behaviours they expect from their staff and students. As studies have demonstrated that workplace fairness justice significantly impacts employees' ethical perceptions and behaviors (Goergen, Pauli, Cerutti, & Perin, 2018).

The term ethical leadership according to Brown, Trevino and Harrison (2005) is a way of promoting ethical standards in terms of integrity, fairness as well as ensuring power sharing in dealing with staff with the aim of achieving organizational goals. It encompasses a wide array of components which include fairness, transparency and respect for human dignity in decision making (Huang, Qiu, Yang, & Deng, 2021). Fairness is the act of making sound judgement that is free from resentment and discrimination. It entails treating individuals in the workplace equally without being partial and ensuring that decisions for staff administrative duties, appraisal requirement and professional opportunities meet the basis criterion for a merit-based assessment and not swayed by either tribal affiliations, social status or personal affiliation. Doing this, equal opportunities for growth, promotions, and recognition should be based on meeting institutional benchmarks. A study by Jo and Shin (2025) observed that institutional leaders that uphold fairness as a behavior often translate into employees going beyond their formal job requirements, contributing to organizational success. This aligns with Adams's Equity Theory that posits that fairness perceptions in the workplace directly influence employee motivation and satisfaction which lays groundwork for higher organizational commitment and performance (Adam in Jo & Shin, 2025).

Transparency is the act of being open to every member of the school at all levels, it requires communicating school decisions, such as programs, policies and laws using appropriate and approved channels of communication in schools. It points out the relevance of clear communication, participatory decision making and accountability to all assigned responsibilities in leadership practice. Han, Hao, Yang and Liu (2017) disclosed that leaders transparent behavior provides information for employees to deal with work related issue and give feedback which may reduce the time and effort they put in to seek information elsewhere. Owing to this, transparency in the workplace is the basis of ethical decision making that requires leaders to be trustworthy and responsive in the school, this behavior helps employee to have a better feeling of staying committed in achieving organizational goals. School leaders who do not compromise the place of transparency create a robust workplace relationship with colleagues that triggers trust, integrity, loyalty, and productivity. According to Shobaki, Naser, and Ammar (2017) transparency facilitates the creation of a desired environment where information on current circumstances, decisions and actions is available and well understood by members of the organization who are also involved in decision making process. Han, et al., (2017) opined that leaders' transparent behavior was found to be positively related to employee psychological safety, which in turn affected employee ability to focus attention and remain creative.

Respect for human dignity is the recognition of the integral worth of every employee regardless of their socio-economic background and conditions. Having respect for human dignity emphasize that all humans irrespective of their tribe, age, religion, status etc., deserves to be honored, and allowed to express their feeling without fear or favor. In this article, respect to human dignity in accordance to Baertsch (2014) refers to what we suffer sometimes especially when we are not treated as we deserve to be treated by experiencing a feeling of indignity. Adam and Mark (2022) stated that based on organizational structure, some people deserve greater respect than others by virtue of their superior position, abilities, accomplishments, virtuous character however, all human beings deserve equal respect for their dignity. In schools, it is evident that during meetings, some persons would prefer to remain mute even when their right is infringed upon, sometimes when they speak out their concerns, unjust treatment and worries, they are being talked down by senior colleagues thereby denying their basic right to participation. According Adam and Mark (2022) using derogatory language that belittle others relating to race, gender, sexual identity, religion, socio-economic background, physical or intellectual abilities can be detrimental. This can lure employees to can become disaffected and alienated when they perceive a lack of dignity in their work environment (Groves, Margolis & Gibson,



2024). These actions undermine respect for human dignity. To manage this behavior, Akademia (2018) suggested that leaders are meant to design solutions in an organization that protect the well-being of their employees which, in consequence, may have a positive impact on the organization's development. And treating employees with dignity fosters workplace respect and feelings of inclusion (Groves, Margolis & Gibson, 2024). These attributes are expedients in shaping institutional culture and influencing academic staff motivation, performance and career progression. Moreso, it is critical for fostering trust, accountability and promoting ethical decision-making through advancing the mission of education and knowledge dissemination (Eutychus, 2023). By this, Cabrera (2019) emphasized that ethical leaders should seek to remove prejudice and foster a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for all campus community members.

The lack of fairness and professionalism might have led to frustration, unmotivated workforce, non-compliance with the code of conduct and overall decline in productivity in job outcomes by the staff (Sanjay & Malik, 2022). In this article, ethical leaders can adopt fairness, transparency and respect for human dignity to maintain standard in enhancing academic staff progression. Academic staff career progression is the degree of advancement tailored at empowering academic staff through capacity building programs to make them more relevant, knowledgeable and skillful in their profession. By so doing, they can actualize their career ambitions through constant involvement in training and development. It is advantageous to help them take charge of their career trajectory in the long run. The importance of career progression over time is highly beneficial not just to academic staff however, to the institution at large.

In Nigerian universities, particularly in Rivers State University, career progression is naturally designed around these criteria's; years of service, research publications, academic qualification, teaching performance, community service, and involvement in university administration which is well assigned with marks for each criterion as enshrined in the revised criteria for appointment and promotions of academic staff. This document provides the basic for appraising staff into the next cadre, because it is a guard that explicitly guide line leaders to provide meticulous judgement for institutional growth and sustainability. However, there seen to be growing concerns about allegations of favoritism, political interference, tribalism, and administrative bottlenecks among these leaders who are meant to uphold ethical standards. As their actions and behavior seems to have altered the ground of fairness, transparency and respect for human dignity on the process of academic staff assessment. This action no doubt undermines not only the morale of academic staff however, the quality and reputation of the institutions involved. Due to these happenings where favoritism, political interference, tribalism, and administrative bottlenecks have cast doubt on the credibility of career progression mechanisms due to unethical practices. Empirically, Anik (2024) conducted a study to ascertain the influence of ethical leadership and ethical culture on ethical behavior in higher institution in Indonesia, findings from the study revealed that fostering ethical leadership and culture within educational institutions to promote ethical behavior and cultivating an ethical culture in higher education can significantly contribute to forming ethical attitudes and behaviors as leaders who demonstrate ethical leadership effectively shape their organization values and norms.

Statement of the problem

The fundamental principles of ethical leadership decision; fairness, transparency, and respect for human dignity in recent times is increasingly being compromised in academic staff appointment and progression processes despite the laid down criteria embedded in staff appointment and promotions criteria. In Rivers State university, it has been observed that Deans of faculties and Heads of departments who are assigned to uphold institutional image appear to involve in resentment and perceived injustice within departments and faculty level, thereby breeding disunity as well as weakening institutional loyalty. In most cases, they assign critical academic and administrative responsibilities to newly employed lecturers who may not be competent and experienced to handle administrative duties based on personal connection, tribal affiliations, or social status. Again, it is glaring that some of these institutional leaders seem to engage in the practice of

recommending academic staff who came into the institution through transfer of service for appraisal. Who they know by record, these fellows have not attained the required number of years (residency) to clinch to the next level. Such fellows, instead of entering at Lecturer II with Doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) which is the appropriate rank based on entry requirements are sometimes appointed at the higher rank of Lecturer I, at times some of these fellows are promoted to the rank of a senior lecturer.

This practice may not only distort established procedures but also places these individuals ahead of longstanding academic staff who have diligently followed the standard appraisal pathway. These acts of preferential treatments have wider implications as it appears to demoralize dedicated academic staff who have invested time, effort, and academic productivity to earn progression through laid-down criteria. These decisions appear to violate the ethical leadership standards that are essential in promoting a functional and credible academic system as well as erode confidence in leadership structures and diminish motivation among qualified staff members who are overlooked despite meeting institutional benchmarks. A study conducted by Atiya, Naser and Shebaib (2015) disclosed that, this act makes employees become exposed to negative influences and generally becomes affected by losing trust in their leader. It is against this backdrop that the study investigated the perceived influence of ethical leadership decisions on academic staff career progression in Rivers State University.

Aim & Objectives of the study

The study aimed to investigate perceived influence of ethical leadership decisions on academic staff career progression in Rivers State University. Specifically, the objectives sought to

1. ascertain the extent to which fairness ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University
2. examine the extent to which transparency ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University
3. determine the extent to which respect ethical leadership decision for human dignity influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University

Research Questions:

The following research questions guided the study;

1. To what extent does fairness in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University?
2. To what extent does transparency in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University?
3. To what extent does respect for staff dignity in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University?

Hypotheses:

The following hypotheses were formulated at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on the extent to which fairness in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on the extent to which transparency in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University.
3. There is no significant difference between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on the extent to which respect for staff dignity in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 1,705 consisting of 16 Deans, 104 Heads of Departments, and 1,585 Academic staff of Rivers State University. A sample size of 398 was derived through Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. A simple random sampling technique was used to elicit 92 institutional leaders who are categorized as line leaders (deans and HOD's) and 306 academic staff across the faculties. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled: "Perceived Influence of Ethical Leadership Decision on Academic Staff Career Progression in Rivers State University Questionnaire (PIELDASCPQ)" with 21 questionnaire items based on the research questions. The instrument was structured in line with the modified rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE)= 4 points, High Extent (HE)=3 Points, Low Extent (LE)= 2 Points and Very Low Extent (VLE)= 1 point respectively. The face and content validity test were carried out by experts in Measurement and Evaluation and the Department of Educational Management all in Rivers State University. The Cronbach Alpha statistics method was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument which yielded reliability indexes of 0.83, 0.89 and 0.78 respectively. The researchers and two trained research assistants distributed the copies of 398 questionnaires. The questionnaires were retrieved immediately after it was well filled. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions with a criterion mean of 2.50. Items between 3.00 and above were considered Very High Extent, 2.50 – 2.99 were considered High Extent, 1.50 – 2.49 were regarded as Low Extent while 0.50 – 1.49 were Very Low Extent. The z-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The analyzed data therefore with calculated z-value that is greater than the z-critical value of ± 1.96 was rejected and below was accepted.

Research Question 1: To what extent does fairness in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University?

Table 1: Mean Responses of Line leaders and Academic staff on the Extent to which Fairness in Ethical Leadership Decision Influence Academic Staff Career Progression in Rivers State University

S/N	Item	LINE LEADER S N=92			ACADEMIC STAFF N=306		
		$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1	Appraisal criterion is mostly based on merit rather than sentiment	3.85	0.48	VHE	2.96	0.91	HE
2	All academic staff are given equal opportunities for professional development.	2.04	0.91	LE	2.59	0.80	HE
3	There is consistency in applying promotion criteria across departments	2.48	1.14	HE	1.79	0.80	LE
4	Heads of departments treat junior and senior staff equitably.	3.51	0.71	VHE	1.62	0.70	LE
5	Academic staff who meet criteria always receive due promotions	3.72	0.66	VHE	3.92	0.41	VHE
6	Transfer of service cases are treated fairly during promotion compared to existing staff	2.29	1.07	HE	3.44	0.80	HE
7	Assignment of critical academic responsibilities is done based on fairness not affiliation	3.97	0.18	VHE	2.01	0.79	HE
Grand Mean/SD		3.28	0.95		2.61	0.88	

Table 1 for research question 1, revealed that items 1, 4, 5, and 7 had mean scores of 3.85, 3.51, 3.72 and 3.97 with standard deviation 0.48, 0.71, 0.66 and 0.18 for line leaders and mean scores 3.92, with

standard deviation of 0.41 for academic staff were rated very high extent; while items 3, and 6 had mean scores of 2.48, and 2.29 with standard deviation 1.14, and 1.07 for line leaders and mean scores 2.96, 2.59, 3.44 and 2.01 with standard deviation 0.91, 0.80, 0.80 and 0.79 for academic staff were rated high extent, whereas items 2 had a mean score of 2.04 with standard deviation of 0.91 for line leaders and mean scores of 1.79 and 1.62 for academic staff with standard deviation of 0.80 and 0.70 for academic staff were rated as low extent. In summary, with grand mean 3.28 and 2.61 which are above the criterion mean of 2.50, this indicated that fairness in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University to a high extent.

Research Question 2: To what extent does transparency in leadership ethical decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University?

Table 2: Mean Responses of Line leaders and Academic staff on the Extent to which Transparency in Ethical Leadership Decision Influence Academic Staff Career Progression in Rivers State University

S/N	Item	LINE LEADER S			ACADEMC STAFF		
		N=92	Decision		=306	Decision	
		$\bar{X}$ 1SD	n		$\bar{X}$ 2SD	n	
8	Promotion criteria and processes are clearly communicated to staff	3.96	0.25	VHE	3.89	0.43	VHE
9	Decisions on staff appointments and advancements are transparent and well communicated.	2.01	0.49	LE	1.95	0.93	LE
10	Staff opinions involve in decision making are not altered	3.23	1.27	HE	2.57	1.17	HE
11	Reasons for not promoting a staff is clearly stated.	3.42	0.83	HE	3.50	0.70	VHE
12	The panel members selected for promotion exercises are free from bias.	3.53	0.78	VHE	3.61	0.69	VHE
13	Academic staff have avenue to report unethical behavior exhibited by school leaders	2.34	0.91	LE	2.29	1.07	LE
14	Transparent leaders motivate academic staff to have confidence in their institution,	3.39	0.96	HE	3.84	0.50	VHE
	Grand Mean/SD	3.12	0.78		3.09	0.79	

Table 2 for research question 2, revealed that items 8, and 12 had means scores of 3.96 and 3.53 with standard deviation 0.25 and 0.78 for line leaders and mean scores 3.89, 3.50, 3.61 and 3.84 with standard deviation of 0.43, 0.70, 0.69 and 0.50 for academic staff were rated very high extent; while items 10, 11 and 14 had mean scores of 3.23, 3.42 and 3.39 with standard deviation 1.27, 0.83 and 0.96 for line leaders and mean scores 2.57 with standard deviation 1.17 for academic staff were rated high extent, whereas items 9 and 13 had a mean score of 2.01 and 2.34 with standard deviation of 0.49 and 0.91 for line leaders and mean scores of 1.95 and 2.29 for academic staff with standard deviation of 0.93 and 1.07 for academic staff were rated as low extent. In summary, with grand mean 3.12 and 3.09 which are above the criterion mean of 2.50, this indicated that transparency in leadership ethical decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University to a high extent.

Research Question 3: To what extent does respect for human dignity in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University?

Table 3: Mean Responses of Line leaders and Academic staff on the Extent to which Respect for Human Dignity in Ethical Leadership Decision Influence Academic Staff Career Progression in Rivers State University

S/N	Item	LINE LEADER S			ACADEMIC STAFF		
		N=92	Decision		=306	Decision	
		$\bar{X}_1$	SD		$\bar{X}_2$	SD	
15	Staff are treated with respect regardless of their socio-economic ranking	2.07	0.86	LE	2.41	0.53	LE
16	Constructive criticism is used to correct a staff instead of public embarrassment.	3.34	0.75	HE	3.16	0.96	HE
17	Line leaders attach more value to the opinion of academic staff they are closely related.	2.05	0.85	LE	2.02	0.36	LE
18	Promotion of staff are sometimes abysmally done to create upper circles.	3.79	0.53	VHE	3.90	0.49	VHE
19	Line leaders demonstrate some sense of empathy towards the challengers confronting academic staff.	2.32	0.88	LE	2.05	0.64	LE
20	Academic staff are always encouraged to freely express their concerns and worries on element of victimizations	2.66	1.02	HE	2.18	0.56	LE
21	disrespectful leaders reduce academic staff morale and commitment.	3.32	0.78	HE	3.07	0.95	HE
	Grand Mean/SD	3.31	0.95		2.68	0.64	

Table 3 for research question 2, revealed that items 19 had a mean score of 3.79 with standard deviation 0.53 for line leaders and a mean score of 3.90 with standard deviation of 0.49 for academic staff were rated very high extent; while items 16, 20 and 21 had mean scores of 3.34, 2.66 and 3.32 with standard deviation 0.75, 1.02, and 0.78 for line leaders and mean scores 3.16 and 3.07 with standard deviation 0.96 and 0.95 for academic staff were rated high extent, whereas items 15, 17 and 19 had mean scores of 2.07, 2.05 and 2.33 with standard deviation of 0.86, 0.85 and 0.88 for line leaders and mean scores of 2.41, 2.02, 2.05 and 2.18 for academic staff with standard deviation of 0.53, 0.36, 0.64 and 0.56 for academic staff were rated as low extent. In summary, with grand mean 3.31 and 2.68 which are above the criterion mean of 2.50, this indicated that respect in human dignity in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University to a high extent.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean responses between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on the extent to which fairness in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University

Table 4: z-test Analysis of Difference Between the Mean Responses of Line leaders and Academic Staff on the extent to which Fairness in Ethical Leadership Decision Influence Academic Staff Career Progression in Rivers State University

Respondents	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	SL	z-cal.	z-crit.	Decision
Line leaders	92	3.28	0.95					
				396	0.05	6.03	±1.96	Significant
Academic Staff	306	2.61	0.88					

Table 4 shows a summary of mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on extent to which fairness in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University. The z-calculated value was 6.03 while the z-critical value of ± 1.96 using 396 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the z-calculated value was greater than the z-critical value, the null hypothesis was rejected which indicated that there is a significant difference between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on the extent to which fairness in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean responses between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on the extent to which transparency in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University

Table 5: z-test Analysis of Difference Between the Mean Responses of line leaders and Academic Staff on the Extent to which Transparency in Ethical Leadership Decision Influence Academic Staff Career Progression in Rivers State University

Respondents	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	SL	z-cal.	z-crit.	Decision
Line leaders	92	3.12	0.78	396	0.05	0.32	± 1.96	Not Significant
Academic Staff	306	3.09	0.79					

Table 5 shows a summary of mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on extent to which transparency in leadership ethical decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University. The z-calculated value was 0.32 while the z-critical value of ± 1.96 using 396 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the z-calculated value was less than the z-critical value, the null hypothesis was accepted which indicated that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on the extent to which transparency in leadership ethical decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between the mean responses between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on the extent to which respect for human dignity in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University

Table 6: z-test Analysis of Difference Between the Mean Responses of Line leaders and Academic Staff on the Extent to which respect for Human Dignity in Ethical Leadership Decision Influence Academic Staff Career Progression in Rivers State University

Respondents	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	SL	z-cal.	z-crit.	Decision
Line leaders	92	3.31	0.95	396	0.05	5.97	± 1.96	Significant
Academic Staff	306	2.68	0.64					

Table 6 shows a summary of mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on extent to which respect for human dignity in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University. The z-calculated value was 5.97 while the z-critical value of ± 1.96 using 396 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the z-calculated value was greater than the z-critical value, the null hypothesis was rejected which indicated that there is a significant difference between the mean responses of line

leaders and academic staff on the extent to which respect for human dignity in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Findings on Research Question 1 on Table 1 revealed that fairness in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State to a high extent with grand mean scores of 3.28 and 2.61. Hypothesis 1 on Table 1 revealed that there was a significant difference between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on the extent to which fairness in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University with z-calculated value of 5.97 which was greater than the z-critical value of ± 1.96 . The finding is in agreement with Jo and Shin (2025) who observed that institutional leaders that uphold fairness as a behavior often translate into employees going beyond their formal job requirements, contributing to organizational success.

Findings on Research Question 2 on Table 2 revealed that transparency in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State to a high extent with grand mean scores of 3.12 and 3.09. Hypothesis 2 on Table 5 revealed that there was no significant difference between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on the extent to which transparency in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University with z-calculated value of 0.32 which was less than the z-critical value of ± 1.96 . The finding is in agreement with Han, et al., (2017) who opined that leaders' transparent behavior was found to be positively related to employee psychological safety, which in turn affected employee ability to focus attention and creativity.

Findings on Research Question 3 on Table 3 revealed that respect for human dignity in ethical leadership decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State to a high extent with grand mean scores of 3.31 and 2.68. Hypothesis 3 on Table 6 revealed that there was a significant difference between the mean responses of line leaders and academic staff on the extent to which respect for human dignity in leadership ethical decision influence academic staff career progression in Rivers State University with z-calculated value of 5.97 which was greater than the z-critical value of ± 1.96 . The finding is in agreement with Groves, et al., (2024) who pointed that treating employees with dignity fosters workplace respect and feelings of inclusion.

Conclusion:

The study examines the vital role of ethical leadership in fostering academic staff career progression at Rivers State University. Fairness in leadership decisions emerged as the most impactful factor, with academic staff expressing that merit-based promotions and equal opportunities for development significantly motivated them. However, the study also disclosed areas where ethical leadership decisions were compromised, particularly in the areas of transparency and respect for human dignity. There was a notable gap in the clarity of promotional criteria and the consistent application of these criteria across departments, contributing to staff dissatisfaction and perceptions of injustice. Additionally, some instances of favoritism, particularly in assigning responsibilities and promoting staff, were found to negatively affect staff morale and institutional loyalty. The findings also suggest that academic staff felt their dignity was often overlooked, with instances of public criticism and lack of empathy from some leaders undermining their confidence in the system.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendation were:

1. Line leaders should prioritize merit-based decisions when assigning responsibilities and promoting staff. This includes ensuring that all academic staff, regardless of their social or tribal affiliations, have equal opportunities for professional development and career advancement.
2. Line leaders should engage in open discussions with staff about their career progression and ensure that all decisions are made in a transparent and unbiased manner, this would help



enhance transparency in decision-making as regard to clear communication of promotional criteria, policies, and the reasons for decisions affecting academic staff.

3. Line leaders should implement leadership training programs that emphasize the importance of treating staff with respect and dignity whereby, leaders would be trained to engage with staff in a manner that promotes inclusivity and empathy. Thereby, ensuring that all academic staff feel valued and respected. So as to reduce workplace dissatisfaction and improve overall institutional culture.

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