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## **UPSIDE-DOWN LEADERS AND TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the relationship between upside-down leaders and the transformation of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Three objectives, research questions and corresponding null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted a correlational design. The population of the study consisted all the academic staff of three public universities, which are: University of Port Harcourt (1,387), Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (571), Rivers State University (424), summing up to 2382 (Establishment units of universities). The sample was 600 lecturers arrived at through purposive sampling technique which represents 25.2% of the total population. Two questionnaires were developed and administered, titled, “Upside-down Leader Questionnaire” (ULQ) and “Transformation of public universities in Rivers State Questionnaire” (TPURSQQ) were designed as the instrument to obtain necessary information from the respondents. The instrument was validated by the supervisor and two experts in measurement and evaluation from the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counseling, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method. Reliability coefficients of .79 and .67 were obtained for the instrument respectively. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the null hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Statistics at 0.05 level of significance with the aid of SPSS version 21. The result form the findings revealed that upside down leaders who possess strong character, accept opposition and solve problems have a very significant relationship with the transformation of public universities in Rivers State. The study concluded that the basic conventional leadership skills are not enough to bring about rapid changes in public universities; hence, for standard education to be achieved, university leadership must take new dimensions and approaches. Among others, the study recommended that; the appointment of vice chancellors by the state or federal governments should be based on merit, laced with strong character and conviction rather than grounds of political affiliation. Also, the national university commission should be strict in quality assurance policies and programs in order to increase the quality of university leadership through adequate training and development.

**Keywords:** Upside-Down Leader, Transformation, Public, Universities, Rivers State.

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## INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Leadership is one concept that has been defined, explained and described by many authors; the different definitions are based on their experiences, situation and/or organization. The crux of leadership exegesis as gathered from different sources borders on impact, influence, inspiration and motivation initiated by a leader on the followers. The leader is often perceived as the pathfinder, goal setter and road map to achieving pre-determined goals. The outcome of any functional organization is largely dependent on the leadership prowess, tenacity and proficiency of the leader (Anelel & Ogonna, 2021, 2022). In other words, if an organization succeeds, we hail the leader, but if it fails, we blame leader, hence, the place of a leader in any given organization cannot be undermined. Leaders are pace setters, they are expected to give the pathway and roadmap by providing clear vision and direction to all other members of the organization (Ogonna & Ololube, 2022).

Leadership is one of the basic and most important needs in a university. It is often considered to be the solution to most organizational problems (Daft & Marcic, 2006). It can direct human resources toward the strategic objectives of an institution and ensure that organizational functions are aligned with the external environment. In educational institutions, leaders are expected to evaluate to what extent the goals of education are achieved in various levels of education. Take for instance, tertiary institutions, specifically universities that are led by vice chancellors. Considering the goals stipulated in the national policy of education about universities, are these institutions achieving the said goals?

According to the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014), the goals of tertiary education that is necessary for system performance include to:

- Contribute to national development through high-level relevant manpower training;
- Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate the local and external environment;
- Acquire both physical and intellectual skills for self-reliance;
- Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- Forge and cement national unity; and
- Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

However, given these goals expected from these institutions, to what extent have they fared? According to Abdul (2013, p. 13) who conducted a study on the evaluation of the Universities education goals in Nigeria, “the goals of Universities' education is moderately been achieved”, he opined. If this be the case, then leadership is paramount to goal attainment in public universities. It is pertinent to consider some definitions of leadership.

Leadership is the ability to cope with change, to establish a new direction, and to get institutions and individuals to move in that direction (Bennis, 2009; Githiari, 2017). This definition emphasizes on the leaders an agent of change. Leadership therefore should be such that introduces changes to already ailing systems.

Vice-Chancellor's job involves both management and leadership, but the latter is more important than the former. A Vice-Chancellor (VC) does not successfully run a university primarily by crunching the numbers, redrawing organizational charts or applying the latest business school concepts and techniques. The key function of a Vice-Chancellor is to lead the

university: to harness the social forces within it, to shape and guide its values, to build a management team, and to inspire it and others working in the university to take initiatives around a shared vision and a strategy to implement it. In short, a Vice-Chancellor should be an enabler rather than a controller (Bain, 2004; Daramola & Amos, 2016; Ogonu & Ololube, 2022).

Ogunode et al. (2019) has attributed the problem facing the Nigerian Universities to the poor leadership style of Vice-Chancellor. Many Nigerian University leaders emerged without due process. They are appointed by politicians. They are less qualified to handle the Academic institutions like the universities set up. They lack competence, leadership skills, and managerial skills to transform the Universities for sustainability. Udida et al. (2009) in Ogonu and Ololube (2022) supported this claim when they said “University system is faced with a lot of drawbacks and these problems that affect system performance include inadequate funding, inadequate coordination of curriculum, leadership problems, lack of infrastructural facilities, to mention but a few. Some Universities administrators are dictatorial, corrupt and not flexible in school governance. Everyday people may not see themselves as successful, influential leaders; and there are plenty of stale human expectations to discourage. Yet the lives and words of biblical persons, other historic servant leaders, great missionaries, and contemporary witnesses boost us with fresh perspectives. These lives with unique points of view bind the cynicism that might paralyze us and release hope that fuels our individual ability to have true impact.

University leadership, therefore, must manage knowledge production, knowledge impartation and knowledge dissemination or transfer by way of research, teaching and services respectively, as well as the resources and facilities to ensure adequate flow of their operations. Management in the university system involves leading and directing the “knowledge drivers”. This, therefore, requires that the management provides a high level of leadership for two reasons: one is to win the respect of the rest for adequate followership and the other is to keep the knowledge development flow. Poor management of the knowledge drivers can hamper development because quality academic programmes, quality teaching and research would be affected leading to poor quality and low quantity of knowledge that can aid the development of the nation. The Nigerian university system has been beset by a staggering number of challenges, the effects of which are readily observable in our society. Some important leadership and management issues affecting Nigerian universities include poor leadership and governance resulting in ineffectiveness and incompetence at all levels, non-realization of national cohesiveness, incessant crime and insecurity, inadequate funding, and poor quality of products turned over (World Bank, 2000, Babalola, 2008; Anele & Ogonu, 2022a).

Downplaying performance evaluation and subsequent implementation of reactionary measures based on the outcome of evaluation exercises by university leaderships and decision makers are the reasons these problems are not only still in existence but growing in magnitude by the day. The challenges enumerated above call for good leadership in universities to ensure speedy development of the economy and the entire nation at large. In order to lead a university effectively, it is incumbent on the VC to have a clear vision of his direction and to possess the ability to rally the others. He likewise needs the ability to recognize correct choices and bring out the best in others, emotional intelligence, the ability to facilitate communication and mediate conflict, a sense of fairness and also, the kind of authenticity and integrity that creates trust (Bain, 2004; Bennis, 2009; Ogonu & Ololube, 2022a, Anele & Ogonu, 2022b).

A strong moral compass is required, though not necessarily belonging to a religious faith. Character counts in the position of the VC more than any other single quality, it is more important than how much the VC knows of foreign policy or economics, or even of politics.

Hereafter, we shall try to do justice to the topic by providing clues as to how our universities should be managed and led towards achieving world class status. The points raised here are not exhaustive of the managerial and leadership issues that should be addressed in our universities, but they would go a long way in providing basic information on the requirements for good leadership in Nigerian universities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The growth and development of a country is largely dependent on the quality of university education, hence, the persons at the helm of affairs in the leadership of universities have enormous roles to play to revitalize the higher institutions. Records abound that Nigerian universities just like the country itself have been plunged into a state of perpetual falling standards due to poor leadership. Despite the fact that several leadership strategies have been applied by different university leaders to arrest the situation, it has not yielded significant positive outcome, leaving public universities in dire need of genuinely different leadership approach that defy the odds and attract total transformation to public universities.

This is evident by the assertion made by Prof. Sule Emmanuel Egya in an exclusive interview that “half of the university problems are caused by the vice chancellors”... this statement proves the obvious with the present state of public universities in Nigeria and Rivers state particularly. This state of comatose and redundancy has resulted in the constant recycling of poor human capital, evident in the standard of graduates been produced from Nigerian universities annually. We have cases of graduates who cannot write a simple application letter, lack expression and self-confidence in defending the certificate they carry. Issues of corruption occasioned by mismanagement of school funds, poorly maintained school plant, incessant rivalry between academic and non-academic staff alike among other issues have made universities look like there is no leader at the head. Post graduate students spend years of unending stress in universities, staying longer than their estimated graduation time compared to their foreign counterparts is also an issue of concern (Egya, 2020).

As the popular saying goes, when a team fails, the coach will be held responsible; hence, this unsightly situation in university education in Rivers State has called for urgent attention on the quality of leadership in our public universities. Since we have leaders at the universities and tangible success is not achieved, the researcher was moved to investigate if there are other new approaches to leadership that can create a drastic revolution, flip conventional ideas and bring about transformation in our universities, what other new form of leadership can be introduced to reverse the status quo by combining the features of problem solving, team spirit, exemplary leadership, accept opposition, desire to serve, passion and commitment, vision / goal setting and strong character to bring about a paradigm shift in universities in Rivers state? Hence, this study seeks to investigate how an upside-down leader can stimulate transformation in public universities in Rivers state.

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

The aim of this study is to investigate the upside-down leader and transformation of public universities in Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study include the following:

- To investigate the extent leaders who accept opposition could transform public universities in Rivers State.
- To investigate the extent leaders who solve problems could transform public universities in Rivers State.
- To investigate the extent leaders with strong character could transform public universities in Rivers State.

## Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- To what extent do leaders who accept opposition transform public universities in Rivers State?
- To what extent do leaders who solve problems transform public universities in Rivers State?
- To what extent do leaders with strong character transform public universities in Rivers State?

## Hypotheses

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

- Leaders who accept opposition are not significantly related with the transformation of public universities in Rivers State.
- Leaders who solve problems are not significantly related with the transformation of public universities in Rivers State?
- Leaders with strong character are not significantly related with the transformation of public universities in Rivers State.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical framework

**Upside-Down Leadership Approach by Robert Greenleaf (1970):** Upside Down Leadership is another way of saying servant leadership. Robert Greenleaf coined the term Servant Leadership in his book by that title. Greenleaf wrote: “The Servant-Leader is servant first”. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. The conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead (Kelleher, 2015). Management guru Kenneth Blanchard in his book Leadership and the One Minute Manager pointed toward this kind of leadership by having the One Minute Manager state: “When you think in a pyramid, the assumption is that everyone works for the person above them on the organizational ladder. As a result, managers are thought to be ‘responsible’ for planning, organizing, and evaluating everything that happens in the organization while their people are supposed to be ‘responsive to the directives of management (Kelleher, 2015). Therefore, turning the pyramid upside down so that top managers are at the bottom, this appears subtle, but powerful, twist in who is responsible and who should be

responsive to whom.” Greenleaf summarized the upside leader as one who reverse the values and conduct of nearly every other leader, combining the qualities and features of other successful leadership approaches of problem solving, team spirit, exemplary leadership, accept opposition, desire to serve, passion and commitment, vision / goal setting and strong character all geared towards creating visible change and innovation in organizations (Ogona & Ololube, 2022).

The vice chancellors by their training are expected to have learned some psychology, philosophy, sociology and others necessary for a more effective performance of their duties. Since the crux of the theory focuses on leaders and their jobs, the VCs as school administrators should adopt the variables outlined by Greenleaf that makes for an upside-down leader, especially developing strong character, accepting opposition and always willing to serve. Practical application of these qualities will enthrone transformed universities in Nigeria.

### **Concept of Leadership**

The word ‘leader’ comes from old English *leden*’ which means ‘cause to go with one’. It was first appeared in around 1125. It appeared in English in about 1300 as ‘*ledere*’, which was formed from Middle English *leden*’ with the meaning ‘to lead’. The meaning ‘person in front’ is first recorded in 1570 (Ololube, 2018, 2019). Leadership can be defined as the ability to inspire other people to accomplish things. Webster’s new word dictionary of the English language defines the word ‘leadership’ as ‘the position or guidance of a leader, the ability to lead’, which doesn’t help much in understanding the concept. It may be understood that a leader is the one who uses inborn and developed abilities to convert vision into reality through not only own effort, but also those of other people. A leader should be able to assess where the people are and then proceed with the step-by-step movement of the people towards the fulfillment of the vision in the best interest of the people. Leadership may also be referred to as the use of influence, inspiration, motivation to spur, shape and transform the behaviour of groups of people to achieve their desired goals and aspirations (Agbor et al., 2023). There is no common definition of a concept like leadership, perhaps the best definition of leadership can be framed by the reader himself based on his/her own understanding, maturity and experience. Ultimately, it is the ability of a person to influence a group of people towards the achievement of goals, which are in the interest of public good and organizational interest.

### **Upside-down Leadership**

This is a new concept of leadership that introduces the leader as one who does things entirely different from the expectations of onlookers. This concept was first introduced by John Maxwell, a foremost multi award winning leadership author and motivational speaker. Graffiti Church (New York City) pastor and leader Taylor Field creatively challenges us to flip conventional ideas upside down, escape clichés on leadership, and to see real leadership principles revealed as right side up. Everyday readers involved in community service, church, and missions will find current, practical, realistic, and diverse illustrations—simple, short, biblical, and cross-cultural—that help people to transcend barriers and powerfully influence their faith. This upside down leadership can also be likened to servant or service leadership (Smith, 2018 in Ogona & Ololube, 2022).

By turning the hierarchical pyramid upside down, the needs of the organization, clients, and business partners become the focus. The service leader approach promotes a group-oriented

approach to analysis and decision reaching as a means of strengthening institutions and improving society. It also emphasizes the power of persuasion and seeking consensus over the old “top-down” leadership. The new service leadership model advocates that the leader who resides at the top of the organization works for those in its lower part. First advocated by Robert Greenleaf, founder of the modern Servant Leadership movement and the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, it is a dramatic shift from earlier management and leadership thinking. Smith (2018) outlined nine qualities of a service leader, which are:

- Values diverse opinions;
- Cultivates a culture of trust;
- Develops other leaders;
- Helps people with life issues;
- Encourages;
- Sells instead of tells;
- Thinks you, not me;
- Thinks long-term;
- Acts with humility.

All service leaders share two fundamental beliefs about the people they lead. First, every person has value and deserves civility, trust, and respect; second, people can accomplish much when inspired by a purpose beyond them. The following are some dimensions of upside down leadership as put forward by Ogona and Ololube (2022):

### **Upside down Leaders are Problem Solvers**

“How can we allow people to die and remain poor when the science to change their lives still exists”... Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Nweala. Problem solving is the essence of what leaders exist to do. As leaders, the goal is to minimize the occurrence of problems – which means we must be courageous enough to tackle them head-on before circumstances force our hand. We must be resilient in our quest to create and sustain momentum for the organization and people we serve (Anele & Ogona, 2022b). But the reality of the workplace finds us dealing with people that complicate matters with their corporate politicking, self-promotion, power-plays and ploys, and envy (Llopis, 2013; Agbor et al., 3023).

Lack of budgets and resources, and many other random acts or circumstances also make it harder for people to be productive. Leaders who lack this wisdom approach problems with linear vision – thus only seeing the problem that lies directly in front of them and blocking the possibilities that lie within the problem. As such, they never see the totality of what the problem represents; that it can actually serve as an enabler to improve existing best practices, protocols and standard operating procedures for growing and competing in the marketplace. Leadership must be innovative in such a way as to enthrone changes from time to time (Onyekwere et al., 2023). They never realize that, in the end, all problems are the same – just packaged differently. A leader must never view a problem as a distraction, but rather as a strategic enabler for continuous improvement and opportunities previously unseen.

## **Upside Leaders Accept Opposition**

Leadership is not a bed of roses, not everyone will support or like the leader's style. Leaders must be able to deal with criticism and opposition. Since they are expected to lead people with diverse opinions and backgrounds, often in difficult circumstances, they cannot expect everyone to always go along with them (Akinkugbe, 2021). All leaders will face opposition at some point. It comes with the territory. Everyone cannot always agree with you or be happy with what you are doing even if you think what you are doing is good or is in the interest of others. Here are four things to help us better handle opposition and criticism: First, you require inner strength and conviction about your purpose and goals, because opposition can destabilise you. Sometimes opposition can be relentless and even abusive.

A leader with inner strength and conviction about his or her purpose will not easily be distracted from it. Baroness Margaret Thatcher during her political career faced opposition. As Britain's Education Secretary, she was labelled by a newspaper as the most unpopular woman in Britain. But she did not let it deter her, rather she continued working to gain people's respect. She was eventually elected the first British female prime minister, and as Prime Minister she continued to face criticism for her policies and decisions but remained secure in her convictions. She was elected to three consecutive terms as prime minister and was the longest serving in the 20th Century. Leadership in the face of opposition is for those who are strong (Akinkugbe, 2021).

## **Upside Leaders and Strong Character**

Character is a necessity for school leadership and management to grow. Good character in leadership commands respect. Besides being trusted, these leaders have the respect of their teams and even the competition. A person with good character is courteous, never demeaning. He is accepting of others and appreciates hearing opposing viewpoints. As a result of his willingness to listen and accept, his respect increases. People with poor character aren't respected because they have shown that they will not make good choices or make decisions that are in the interest of the team (Patrick, 2022).

Leadership with good character brings a spirit of excellence to a school leadership. These leaders expect more than the status quo from themselves and the people they lead. This character attribute encourages team members to learn more and do more. With excellence comes responsibility. This leader takes responsibility for their actions, even when it means owning up to mistakes. They have a strong sense of accountability and expect the same from their team members. People with good character genuinely care about the people they work with. While a respectful distance must be maintained in working relationships, genuine concern for others is important for small business. Teams are often smaller than groups in large companies, commanding a greater need for stronger inner-company ties. This character attribute may manifest as caring concern, helpfulness and compassion (Patrick, 2022).

## **Leadership and Transformation of University Education**

The concept of managerial approach to university governance, an aspect relating to the centralisation of decision-making to create efficiencies and bring about effective decision making is fairly recent globally and even more recent in Nigeria. University managers are the



few people that have the economic rights, authority, moral responsibility, and high motivation to manage the university to achieve high-quality education though they have a principal that they are subject to. Ultimately, leadership is provided at the very top to impact on the adopted organizational design by the university and its effective governance. It should be noted in any case that good governance should not be impersonal, opaque, alienating and autocratic; rather it should be collegial, transparent and responsible (Bain, 2004 in Daramola & Amos, 2016).

Leadership is one of the basic and most important needs in a university. It is often considered to be the solution to most organizational problems (Daft & Marcic, 2006). It can direct human resources toward the strategic objectives of an institution and ensure that organizational functions are aligned with the external environment. Moreover, effective leaders are able to predict the future probabilities and design choice strategies to satisfy uncertainties (Riaz & Haider, 2010).

Management and leadership in universities are as important as the need to have universities at all; a society or nation with ill-managed universities has no advantage over one without any, especially in the face of heightened universal conventions in standards and expectations. It follows, therefore, that the government and society at large cannot earn the full reward of putting university systems in place unless optimized management and leadership are ensured. The quality of leadership and management provided by a university can only be ascertained by how well an institution or body fulfills its roles and objectives. Succinctly put, Nigerian universities, like all its foreign counterparts are established to teach, research, build capacity and provide community services to engender dynamic social, technological and economic development. The question to ask is how well Nigerian universities are performing these obligations.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study investigated the relationship between upside-down leader and transformation of public universities in Rivers State. Three objectives, research questions and corresponding null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted a correlational design. The population of the study consisted all the academic staff of three public universities, which are: University of Port Harcourt (1,387), Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (571), Rivers State University (424), summing up to 2,382 (Establishment units of universities). The sample was 600 lecturers arrived at through purposive sampling technique which represents 25.2% of the total population. Two questionnaires were developed and administered, titled, “Upside-down Leader Questionnaire” (ULQ) and “Transformation of public universities in Rivers State Questionnaire” (TPURSQ) were designed as the instrument to obtain necessary information from the respondents.

To validate the research instrument, copies were presented to the experts in measurement and evaluation from the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counseling, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education to scrutinize and make corrections. The corrections were effected to enable the instrument capture the objective of the study.

The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method. Reliability coefficients of .79 and .67 were obtained for the instrument respectively. The Likert Scale of Very High Extent, (VHE) = 4, High Extent (HE) = 3, Low Extent (LE) = 2, and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1, respectively were used in scoring the items in the questionnaire. With the help of two research assistants who were properly educated on their roles, the instrument were

administered and duly completed copies were used to analyze the data. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the null hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Statistics at 0.05 level of significance with the aid of SPSS version 21.

## Results

**Research Question One:** To what extent do leaders who accept opposition transform public universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation responses to the extent leaders who accept opposition transform public universities in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D.	Remarks
1	Vice Chancellors whose leadership starts on constantly attacked become more effective	2.51	1.06	High Extent
2	Opposition is a spring board to university success	2.62	1.11	High Extent
3	Vice chancellor gets destabilized when their projects and policies are being criticized	2.53	1.10	High Extent
4	Exceptional vice chancellors perform better after strong citizens and oppositions	2.52	1.23	High Extent
5	Vice chancellors who accept opposition are bound to fail with their leadership	2.49	1.10	Low Extent
6	Changes and transformation take place in universities where vice chancellors perceive oppositions as distractions	2.53	1.12	High Extent
7	The best universities in Rivers State are run by Vice Chancellors who accept opposition	2.59	1.21	High Extent
8	Accepting opposition should be adopted as a leadership strength for universities to thrive	2.54	1.10	High Extent
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.54</b>		<b>High Extent</b>

The table 1 above shows the mean and standard deviation of respondents in response to the extent leaders who accept opposition transform public universities in Rivers State. From the results of analysis, all the items raised were rated above 2.50, thereby indicating that leaders who accept opposition can transform public universities. However, the respondents differed in their views on item 4, where they disagreed that Vice chancellors who accept opposition are bound to fail with their leadership. Thus, with a grand mean of 2.54, majority of the respondents answered the question that to a high extent, leaders who accept opposition have the capacity to transform public universities in Rivers State.

**Research Question Two:** To what extent do leaders who solve problems transform public universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation responses to the extent leaders who solve problems transform public universities in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D.	Remarks
9	University problems are solved when vice chancellors are proactive rather than reactive	2.64	1.12	High Extent
10	Reactive leaders do not get the best out of school leadership.	2.73	1.11	High Extent
11	Good leaders solve problems rather than complain	2.55	1.06	High Extent

12	Unsolved problems constitute hindrance to school success	2.55	1.10	High Extent
13	VCs who apply problem solving approach to leadership are highly effective and instill change	2.63	1.06	High Extent
14	A leader who cannot solve problems is already a failure	2.58	1.05	High Extent
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.62</b>		<b>High Extent</b>

The table 2 above shows the mean and standard deviation of respondents in response to the extent leaders who solve problems transform public universities in Rivers State. From the results of analysis, all the items raised were rated above 2.50, thereby indicating that problem solving approach to leadership transforms public universities. Thus, with a grand mean of 2.62, majority of the respondents answered the question that to a high extent, leaders who solve problems have the capacity to transform public universities in Rivers State.

**Research Question Three:** To what extent do leaders with strong character transform public universities in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation responses to the extent leaders with strong character transform public universities in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D.	Remarks
15	Leaders with character command trust	2.53	1.10	High Extent
16	Vice Chancellors with strong character possess high moral standards that attracts productivity	2.73	1.13	High Extent
17	Vice Chancellors with strong character performs excellently with the job of school leadership	2.63	1.04	High Extent
18	Strong character breeds team work and genuine care among followers	2.93	1.11	High Extent
19	Vice chancellors with strong character has integrity derived of scandals and bad reports which influences school leadership positively	2.84	1.15	High Extent
20	Respects, care, compassion and mutual trust are key ingredients of leaders with strong character.	2.83	1.09	High Extent
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.75</b>		<b>High Extent</b>

The table 3 above shows the mean and standard deviation of respondents in response to the extent leaders with strong character transform public universities in Rivers State. From the results of analysis, all the items raised were rated above 2.50, thereby indicating that leaders with strong character, command trust, respect and courtesy, thereby can transforms public universities. Thus, with a grand mean of 2.75, majority of the respondents answered the question raise, that to a high extent, leaders who have strong character also have the capacity to transform public universities in Rivers State.

### Testing of Hypotheses

**Hypothesis One:** Leaders who accept opposition are not significantly related with the transformation of public universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Coefficient of Respondents' Answer

		<b>Leaders who accept opposition</b>	<b>Transformation of public universities</b>	<b>Decision</b>
<b>Leaders who accept opposition</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.043	<b>Significant</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009	
	N	566	566	
<b>Transformation of public universities</b>	Pearson Correlation	.043	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009		
	N	566	566	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)

The results from the table of analysis for hypothesis one stated above showed that there is a significant relationship between leaders who accept opposition and the transformation of public universities in Rivers State, because p-value .009 is less than 0.05 level of significance indicating a significant relationship (correlation value  $r=.043$ ,  $p<.009$ ). The implication of this result is that the respondents agreed that leaders who accept opposition have the capacity to transform public universities in Rivers State. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected.

**Hypothesis Two:** Leaders who solve problems are not significantly related with the transformation of public universities in Rivers State.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Coefficient of Respondents' Answer

		<b>Leaders who solve problems</b>	<b>Transformation of public universities</b>	<b>Decision</b>
<b>Leaders who solve problems</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	-.184	<b>Significant</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	
	N	566	566	
<b>Transformation of public universities</b>	Pearson Correlation	-.184	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		
	N	566	566	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)

The results from the table of analysis for hypothesis one stated above showed that leaders who solve problems are significantly related with the transformation of public universities in Rivers State, because p-value .001 is less than 0.05 level of significance indicating a significant relationship (correlation value  $r=.184$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The implication of this result is that the respondents agreed that leaders who solve problems have the capacity to transform public universities in Rivers State. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected.

**Hypothesis Three:** Leaders with strong character are not significantly related with the transformation of public universities in Rivers State

Table 6: Pearson Correlation Coefficient of Respondents' Answer

		<b>Leaders with strong character</b>	<b>Transformation of public universities</b>	<b>Decision</b>
	Pearson Correlation	1	-.019	
<b>Leaders with strong character</b>	Sig. (2-tailed)		.031	<b>Significant</b>
	N	566	566	
	Pearson Correlation	-.019	1	
<b>Transformation of public universities</b>	Sig. (2-tailed)	.031		
	N	566	566	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)

The results from the table of analysis for hypothesis one stated above showed that leaders with strong character are significantly related with the transformation of public universities in Rivers State, because p-value .031 is less than 0.05 level of significance indicating a significant relationship (correlation value  $r=.019$ ,  $p<.031$ ). The implication of this result is that the respondents agreed that leaders with strong character have the capacity to transform public universities in Rivers State. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected.

## DISCUSSIONS

### Leaders Who Accept Opposition and Transformation of Universities

The results from of analysis for hypothesis one showed that there is a significant relationship between leaders who accept opposition and the transformation of public universities in Rivers State, because p-value .009 is less than 0.05 level of significance indicating a significant relationship (correlation value  $r=.043$ ,  $p<.009$ ). The implication of this result is that the respondents agreed that leaders who accept opposition have the capacity to transform public universities in Rivers State. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected. This finding is in consonance with the views of Akinkugbe (2021), who opined that since leaders are expected to lead people with diverse opinions and backgrounds, often in difficult circumstances, they cannot expect everyone to always go along with them.

All leaders will face opposition at some point. It comes with the territory. Everyone cannot always agree with you or be happy with what you are doing even if you think what you are doing is good or is in the interest of others. It rarely possible for any leader at any level of education to make progress without any internal or external opposition, however, the ability of the leader to forge ahead regardless of this opposition is key to effective leadership. Our universities are in dire need of genuine change and transformation, hence, leaders who accept opposition or perceive opposition as distraction will ultimately go far and bring about the needed changes in our university system.

## **Leaders Who Solve Problem and Transformation of Universities**

The results from the table of analysis for hypothesis two showed that leaders who solve problems are significantly related with the transformation of public universities in Rivers State, because p-value .001 is less than 0.05 level of significance indicating a significant relationship (correlation value  $r=.184$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The implication of this result is that the respondents agreed that leaders who solve problems have the capacity to transform public universities in Rivers State. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected. The Director-General of world trade organization, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Nweala said during the convocation ceremony of her Alma Mata in the United states of America, that educational leaders primarily should focus on solving problems and it should be designed in the curriculum, research works and discoveries in order to reduce the suffering of humanity and create change. Problem solving is the essence of what leaders exist to do. As leaders, the goal is to minimize the occurrence of problems – which means we must be courageous enough to tackle them head-on before circumstances force our hand. Similarly, Llopis (2013) believes that leaders who lack this wisdom approach problems with linear vision – thus only seeing the problem that lies directly in front of them and blocking the possibilities that lie within the problem.

## **Leaders with Strong Character and Transformation of Universities**

The results from the table of analysis for hypothesis three showed that leaders with strong character are significantly related with the transformation of public universities in Rivers State, because p-value .031 is less than 0.05 level of significance indicating a significant relationship (correlation value  $r=.019$ ,  $p<.031$ ). The implication of this result is that the respondents agreed that leaders with strong character have the capacity to transform public universities in Rivers State. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected. This finding aligns with the opinion of Patrick (2022), who believes that without good character of the leaders, no higher institution of learning can achieve genuine change. Character is a necessity for school leadership and management to grow. A person with good character is courteous, never demeaning. He is accepting of others and appreciates hearing opposing viewpoints. As a result of his willingness to listen and accept, his respect increases. The importance of character is evident on the basis for which certificates in universities are being issued, it must be based on character and learning, which suggests the value of strong character of leaders, students and all the human resources within the school, cannot be over looked.

## **CONCLUSION**

The result from the findings revealed that upside down leaders who possess strong character, accept opposition and solve problems have a very significant relationship with the transformation of public universities in Rivers State. The study concluded that the basic conventional leadership skills are not enough to bring about rapid changes in public universities; hence, for standard education to be achieved, university leadership must take new dimensions and approaches. Records abound that Nigerian universities just like the country itself have been plunged into a state of perpetual falling standards, evident in the latest Webometrics ranking of top universities, where no single Nigerian university made the list of 1<sup>st</sup> 1000 universities in the world. The

unceasing decline of public universities in Nigeria has called for urgent attention; as spotlight has been beamed on vice chancellors who are the leaders of these institutions. Hence, this study introduced a novel approach to leadership referred to as the upside-down leadership approach. This approach to leadership is profound due to its quality, content and tenacity to defy the odds, accepts oppositions and reverse the status quo by combining the features of problem solving, team spirit, exemplary leadership, accept opposition, desire to serve, passion and commitment, vision / goal setting and strong character to bring about a paradigm shift in leadership, management and administration of universities in Nigeria

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- The appointment of vice chancellors by the state or federal governments should be based on merit, laced with strong character and conviction rather than grounds of political affiliation.
- Also, the national university commission should be strict in quality assurance policies and programs in order to increase the quality of university leadership through adequate training and development.
- Vice chancellors should see opposition as distractions, accept when necessary and face the business of school leadership head on, because leaders are not liked but judged by their effectiveness and competence.

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