Influence of Deans' and Heads of Department's Management Style on Students' Academic Performance in Public Universities in Rivers State

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Abstract
The study investigated the influence of Deans' and Heads of Departments' management style on students' academic performance in public universities. The focus was on three areas of management style: leadership communication, decision-making approach, and student academic monitoring. The study was guided by three research questions and three null hypotheses tested at a 0.05 level of significance. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population consisted of 267 academic administrators, comprising all Deans and Heads of Departments in the public universities under study. Due to the manageable size, the entire population was used without sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Influence of Deans' and Heads of Department's Management Style and Student Academic Performance Questionnaire (IDHDMSSAPQ)", consisting of 20 items arranged into four clusters. The instrument was validated by three experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation. Reliability was established using the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding coefficients of 0.84, 0.86, 0.85, and 0.87 for the respective clusters, and an overall reliability of 0.86. The researcher personally distributed and retrieved the questionnaires to ensure a high return rate, resulting in 261 valid responses. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, and independent sample t-tests were used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. Findings showed that leadership communication, decision-making approaches, and student academic monitoring were seen to positively influence students' academic performance. The highest influence was observed in academic monitoring, which was strongly supported by the respondents. However, there was no significant difference between the responses of Deans and Heads of Departments, leading to the retention of all three null hypotheses. Based on the findings, it was recommended that universities improve feedback systems for academic guidance, provide training on transparent decision-making, and adopt early monitoring strategies to support students who are at risk academically.

Keywords: Deans, Heads of Departments, Management Style, Academic Performance, Public Universities

Introduction
Management style refers to the approach adopted by leaders in directing, motivating, and overseeing the activities of their subordinates to achieve organisational goals. Management style in the context of public universities in Nigeria refers to the approach adopted by academic leaders, such as Deans and Heads of Departments (HODs), in directing, motivating, and overseeing faculty and students to achieve institutional goals (Okafor, 2020). These goals include creating a supportive academic environment, enhancing teaching and learning processes, and promoting student success in academic pursuits (Eze, 2021). Management style encompasses specific practices, such as leadership communication, decision-making approaches, and student academic monitoring, which significantly influence students' academic performance (Ogbonna, 2022). Academic performance is defined as the measurable outcomes of students' learning, typically assessed through grades, examination results, continuous assessments, or other academic indicators, such as project scores or graduation rates (Ibe, 2020). Leadership communication influences academic performance by shaping a supportive learning environment that fosters clarity, motivation, and student engagement. Leadership communication is defined as the process by which Deans and HODs convey information, expectations, and feedback to students, staff, and other stakeholders to foster a supportive academic environment. Effective communication involves clarity, openness, and responsiveness, enabling students to understand academic requirements and feel supported in their studies. In public universities, leadership communication includes activities such as addressing students during orientations, providing updates

on academic policies, or offering guidance through departmental interactions. Clear and consistent communication from academic leaders enhances students' engagement and motivation, leading to improved academic outcomes (Okeke & Nwachukwu, 2021). Poor communication, however, can create confusion and disengagement, negatively affecting students' performance. Leadership communication shapes the decision-making approach by guiding how information is shared, interpreted, and acted upon within an organisation or team.

Decision-making approach refers to the method used by Deans and HODs to make choices that affect academic processes, resource allocation, and student welfare. This can range from participative approaches, where input from students and staff is sought, to directive approaches, where decisions are made unilaterally. In public universities, decisions related to curriculum implementation, examination scheduling, or resource distribution directly influence the learning experience. Studies show that inclusive and transparent decision-making fosters trust and cooperation among students, contributing to better academic performance (Adewale & Eze, 2022). Conversely, autocratic or inconsistent decision-making may lead to dissatisfaction and reduced student motivation. The decision-making approach influences student academic monitoring by determining the strategies and priorities used to track and support students' academic progress. Student academic monitoring is defined as the systematic process of tracking and evaluating students' academic progress to provide timely support and interventions. This includes activities such as reviewing attendance, assessing coursework, and offering academic advising to address performance challenges. In public universities, Deans and HODs oversee monitoring systems through departmental policies, progress reports, or direct engagement with students. Effective academic monitoring helps identify at-risk students early, enabling targeted interventions that improve academic outcomes (Ojo & Amadi, 2020). Inadequate monitoring, however, may result in unnoticed academic struggles, leading to poor performance or dropout.

In Nigeria, public universities face challenges such as large student populations, limited resources, and administrative inefficiencies, which place significant demands on academic leaders. The management style of Deans and HODs is critical in addressing these challenges and creating an environment conducive to learning. Recent studies emphasise the need for effective leadership practices in Nigerian universities to enhance student performance and institutional quality (Ibrahim & Chukwu, 2023). For instance, clear communication, inclusive decision-making, and proactive monitoring are identified as key factors in supporting students' academic success. However, there is limited research on how specific aspects of management style, such as leadership communication, decision-making approach, and student academic monitoring, directly influence students' academic performance in the Nigerian context. The significance of these management practices lies in their ability to shape the academic experience and support students' learning outcomes. Leadership communication ensures that students are well-informed and motivated, decision-making approach creates a fair and supportive academic environment, and student academic monitoring provides the necessary guidance to achieve academic goals. This study seeks to define and assess the influence of these management practices on students' academic performance, contributing to a better understanding of effective leadership in public universities.

Statement of the Problem
In public universities, the academic performance of students is often shaped by various factors, including how the institutions are managed. Among those who play a key role in student outcomes are the Deans and Heads of Departments, whose leadership practices influence the academic direction and learning environment of their faculties. Their style of communication, decision-making, and student monitoring can either support or hinder students' academic success. In Rivers State, concerns have been raised about student performance in public universities. While much attention has been given to curriculum development and teaching methods, less focus has been placed on the way Deans and Heads of Departments carry out their leadership responsibilities. There is growing interest in how their approach to communication, their methods of making decisions, and their involvement in tracking student progress may affect learning outcomes. Leadership communication, when done properly, helps students understand expectations and feel engaged. A good decision-making approach that includes staff input may improve academic planning, while regular student monitoring helps identify those who need support early enough. However, it is not clear to what extent these practices are being implemented or how much they truly affect student academic performance in universities across Rivers State. This study, therefore, seeks to determine the influence of Deans' and Heads of Departments' management style on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study
The aim of the study was to determine the influence of Deans' and Heads of Department's management style on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to: Portfolio

1. Determine the influence of leadership communication by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.
2. Determine the influence of decision-making Approach by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.
3. Determine the influence of student academic monitoring by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions
The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the influence of leadership communication by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State?
2. What is the influence of decision-making approach by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State?
3. What is the influence of student academic monitoring by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses
The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of leadership communication on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of decision-making approach on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

3. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of student academic monitoring on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Material and Methods
The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to obtain data from a specific population to determine the influence of Deans' and Heads of Department's management style, specifically leadership communication, decision-making approach, and student academic monitoring, on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State. The population of the study is 267, which comprises all Deans and Heads of Departments in the public universities in Rivers State. A census population was adopted due to the manageable size of the population, thereby allowing the researcher to include all 210 Deans and Heads of Departments in the study. This approach ensured comprehensive coverage and enhanced the reliability of the findings by reducing sampling error. The instrument used for data collection was a researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Influence of Deans' and Heads of Department's Management Style and Student Academic Performance Questionnaire (IDHDMSSAPQ)". The instrument was divided into four clusters: Cluster 1: Leadership Communication (5 items), Cluster 2: Decision-Making Approach (5 items), Cluster 3: Student Academic Monitoring (5 items), Cluster 4: Students' Academic Performance (5 items), Each item was measured on a 4-point rating scale, ranging from: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). To ensure the validity of the instrument, it was subjected to face and content validation by three experts, two from Educational Managers and one Measurement and Evaluation expert at Rivers State University. Their comments were used to refine the questionnaire before its final administration. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach's Alpha method. The instrument was pilot-tested on 20 academic administrators from a university outside the main study area. The following reliability coefficients were obtained: Cluster 1 (Leadership Communication): 0.84, Cluster 2 (Decision-Making Approach): 0.86, Cluster 3 (Student Academic Monitoring): 0.85, Cluster 4 (Student Academic Performance): 0.87, The overall reliability coefficient was 0.86, indicating a high level of internal consistency of the instrument. The researcher administered the questionnaires personally to ensure accuracy in responses and a high return rate. Of the 267 questionnaires distributed, 261 were successfully retrieved and found suitable for data analysis. The data collected were analysed using Mean and Standard Deviation to answer the research questions, and an Independent Sample t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule was that a criterion mean score of 2.50 served as the benchmark: items with a mean score of 2.50 and above were interpreted as agreed, while those below 2.50 were considered disagreed, and to reject a null hypothesis if the p-value was ≤ 0.05, and retain it if the p-value was > 0.05.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the influence of leadership communication by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Summary of mean and standard deviation on the influence of leadership communication by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

S/N	Items	Deans (n=34)			HODs (n=227)			Aggregate (n=261)		
		Mean	SD	RMK	Mean	SD	RMK	Mean	SD	RMK
1	I provide effective channels for academic feedback.	3.03	0.80	A	3.01	0.78	A	3.02	0.78	A
2	I communicate academic expectations clearly to students.	3.03	0.90	A	3.03	0.88	A	3.03	0.88	A
3	I regularly share important academic information with students.	3.35	0.92	A	3.31	0.91	A	3.31	0.91	A
4	I encourage students to participate in academic discussions.	2.79	1.01	A	2.72	1.04	A	2.73	1.03	A
5	Open communication from me improves students' academic engagement.	2.74	1.05	A	2.69	1.07	A	2.69	1.07	A
	Grand mean	**2.99**	**0.58**	**A**	**2.95**	**0.60**	**A**	**2.96**	**0.60**	**A**

Key: SD=Standard Deviation, RMK=Remark, A=Agreed.

The result from Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation on the influence of leadership communication by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State. The grand mean for Deans was 2.99, SD=0.58, while for Heads of Departments it was 2.95, SD=0.60. The combined grand mean across all items was 2.96, SD=0.60. The grand mean, reflecting an overall average across all items, indicates that respondents agreed on the influence of leadership communication on students' academic performance. The result further shows that the highest-rated item was "I regularly share important academic information with students," which was rated 3.35, SD=0.92 by Deans, 3.31, SD=0.91 by Heads of Departments, and had a combined mean of 3.31, SD=0.91. This was followed by the statement "I communicate academic expectations clearly to students," rated 3.03, SD=0.90 by Deans, 3.03, SD=0.88 by Heads of Departments, with a combined mean of 3.03, SD=0.88. The item "I provide effective channels for academic feedback" was rated 3.03, SD=0.80 by Deans, 3.01, SD=0.78 by Heads of Departments, and had a combined mean of 3.02, SD=0.78. The statement "I encourage students to participate in academic discussions" received a rating of 2.79, SD=1.01 from Deans, 2.72, SD=1.04 from Heads of Departments, with a combined mean of 2.73, SD=1.03. The lowest mean rating was from the item "Open communication from me improves students' academic engagement," which was rated 2.74, SD=1.05 by Deans, 2.69, SD=1.07 by Heads of Departments, and had a combined mean of 2.69, SD=1.07. These results suggest that both groups agreed that leadership communication has an influence on students' academic performance, though some areas may benefit from stronger practices.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of decision-making approach by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Summary of mean and standard deviation on the influence of decision-making approach by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

S/N	Items	Deans (n=34)			HODs (n=227)			Aggregate (n=261)		
		Mean	SD	RMK	Mean	SD	RMK	Mean	SD	RMK
6	I involve academic staff in decision-making processes that affect student learning.	3.24	0.89	A	2.78	1.03	A	2.84	1.03	A
7	Decisions regarding curriculum delivery are made in consultation with teaching staff.	3.12	0.95	A	2.94	0.97	A	2.96	0.96	A
8	I make informed decisions that support teaching quality.	3.12	1.04	A	3.04	1.05	A	3.05	1.05	A
9	There is transparency in the decision-making process concerning student issues.	2.91	1.06	A	2.88	1.09	A	2.88	1.08	A
10	Timely decisions by me help address student academic challenges effectively.	3.21	0.88	A	3.19	0.87	A	3.20	0.87	A
	Grand mean	**3.12**	**0.50**	**A**	**2.96**	**0.55**	**A**	**2.98**	**0.55**	**A**

Key: SD=Standard Deviation, RMK=Remark, A=Agreed.

The result from Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation on the influence of the decision-making approach by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State. The grand mean for Deans was 3.12, SD=0.50, while for Heads of Departments it was 2.96, SD=0.55. The combined grand mean across all items was 2.98, SD=0.55. The grand mean, reflecting an overall average across all items, indicates that respondents agreed on the influence of decision-making approaches on academic performance. The highest-rated item was "Timely decisions by me help address student academic challenges effectively," rated 3.21, SD=0.88 by Deans, 3.19, SD=0.87 by Heads of Departments, and a combined mean of 3.20, SD=0.87. This was followed by "I involve academic staff in decision-making processes that affect student learning," which received 3.24, SD=0.89 from Deans, 2.78, SD=1.03 from Heads of Departments, and a combined mean of 2.84, SD=1.03. The item "I make informed decisions that support teaching quality" had a rating of 3.12, SD=1.04 by Deans, 3.04, SD=1.05 by Heads of Departments, and a combined mean of 3.05, SD=1.05. The statement "Decisions regarding curriculum delivery are made in consultation with teaching staff" was rated 3.12, SD=0.95 by Deans, 2.94, SD=0.97 by Heads of Departments, with a combined mean of 2.96, SD=0.96. The lowest mean was recorded on the item "There is transparency in the decision-making process concerning student issues," with a mean of 2.91, SD=1.06 by Deans, 2.88, SD=1.09 by Heads of Departments, and a combined mean of 2.88, SD=1.08. These results suggest general agreement that collaborative and informed decision-making contributes to improved academic outcomes.

Research Question 3: What is the influence of student academic monitoring by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 3: Summary of mean and standard deviation on the influence of student academic monitoring by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

S/N	Items	Deans (n=34)			HODs (n=227)			Aggregate (n=261)		
		Mean	SD	RMK	Mean	SD	RMK	Mean	SD	RMK
11	I regularly monitor students' academic progress through course assessments.	3.38	0.89	A	3.34	0.89	A	3.35	0.89	A
12	I promote a culture of tracking students to improve academic outcomes.	3.26	1.08	A	3.28	1.02	A	3.28	1.03	A
13	I encourage regular academic counseling sessions to monitor student progress.	3.18	1.00	A	3.25	0.96	A	3.24	0.97	A
14	I provide timely feedback on students' academic issues.	3.44	0.93	A	3.41	0.91	A	3.41	0.91	A
15	There are effective systems in place to monitor students at risk of academic failure.	3.35	0.81	A	3.38	0.77	A	3.38	0.77	A
	Grand mean	**3.32**	**0.43**	**A**	**3.33**	**0.40**	**A**	**3.33**	**0.41**	**A**

Key: SD=Standard Deviation, RMK=Remark, A=Agreed.

The result from Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation on the influence of student academic monitoring by Deans and Heads of Departments on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State. The grand mean for Deans was 3.32, SD=0.43, while for Heads of Departments it was 3.33, SD=0.40. The combined grand mean across all items was 3.33, SD=0.41. The grand mean, reflecting an overall average across all items, indicates that respondents agreed on the positive influence of academic monitoring on student performance. The highest-rated item was "I provide timely feedback on students' academic issues," rated 3.44, SD=0.93 by Deans, 3.41, SD=0.91 by Heads of Departments, and a combined mean of 3.41, SD=0.91. This was followed by "There are effective systems in place to monitor students at risk of academic failure," rated 3.35, SD=0.81 by Deans, 3.38, SD=0.77 by Heads of Departments, and a combined mean of 3.38, SD=0.77. The item "I regularly monitor students' academic progress through course assessments" had a mean of 3.38, SD=0.89 by Deans, 3.34, SD=0.89 by Heads of Departments, and a combined mean of 3.35, SD=0.89. The statement "I promote a culture of tracking students to improve academic outcomes" was rated 3.26, SD=1.08 by Deans, 3.28, SD=1.02 by Heads of Departments, and had a combined mean of 3.28, SD=1.03. The lowest mean was from the item "I encourage regular academic counseling sessions to monitor student progress," with a mean of 3.18, SD=1.00 by Deans, 3.25, SD=0.96 by Heads of Departments, and a combined mean of 3.24, SD=0.97. These results show strong agreement among respondents that monitoring systems and practices support student success.

Testing of Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of leadership communication on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: Summary of independent sample t-test on the difference in the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of leadership communication on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Portfolio	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t	df	p-value	Decision
Deans	34	2.99	0.58	0.10				
					0.334	259	0.738	Retained
HODs	227	2.95	0.60	0.04				

The result from Table 4 shows the summary of the independent sample t-test on the difference in the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of leadership communication on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State. The calculated t-value was 0.334, with a degree of freedom of 259 and a p-value of 0.738. This result indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of leadership communication. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) is retained at the 0.05 level of significance.

2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of decision-making approach on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 5: Summary of independent sample t-test on the difference in the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of decision-making approach on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Portfolio	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t	df	p-value	Decision
Deans	34	3.12	0.50	0.09				
					1.522	259	0.129	Retained
HODs	227	2.96	0.55	0.04				

The result from Table 5 shows the summary of the independent sample t-test on the difference in the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of decision-making approach on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State. The calculated t-value was 1.522, with a degree of freedom of 259 and a p-value of 0.129. This result indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of decision-making approach. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Hypothesis 2) is retained at the 0.05 level of significance.

3. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of student academic monitoring on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 6: Summary of independent sample t-test on the difference in the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of student academic monitoring on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Portfolio	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t	df	p-value	Decision
Deans	34	3.32	0.43	0.07				
					-0.115	259	0.908	Retained

HODs	227	3.33	0.40	0.03

The result from Table 6 shows the summary of the independent sample t-test on the difference in the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of student academic monitoring on students' academic performance in public universities in Rivers State. The calculated t-value was -0.115, with a degree of freedom of 259 and a p-value of 0.908. This result indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments on the influence of student academic monitoring. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Hypothesis 3) is retained at the 0.05 level of significance.

Discussion

The findings reveal that both Deans (mean = 2.99, SD = 0.58) and Heads of Department (mean = 2.95, SD = 0.60) view their communication as influential to students' academic performance, yielding an overall mean of 2.96 (SD = 0.60). Notably, the most strongly endorsed practice was "sharing important academic information," with a combined mean of 3.31, while "communicating academic expectations clearly" and "providing effective feedback channels" scored means of 3.03 and 3.02 respectively. Less emphasis was placed on encouraging academic discussion (mean = 2.73) and improving engagement through open communication (mean = 2.69). The independent samples t-test (t = 0.334, df = 259, p = 0.738) showed no significant difference between Deans and Heads of Department, indicating that both groups share the same perspective on leadership communication.

These results align with those of Okon (2022), who found that when university leaders regularly share academic policies and expectations, students gain clarity and perform better. The current study's high mean scores for clear information sharing and expectation-setting reflect this relationship. Nwankwo (2021) discovered that structured feedback systems, such as office hours and academic forums, were associated with improved student grades. The combined mean of 3.02 for "providing effective channels for academic feedback" in this study supports Nwankwo's observations, confirming that such feedback mechanisms enhance academic performance. The agreement between Deans and Heads of Department suggests strong shared recognition of the role of leadership communication in students' academic success. Joint training initiatives on communication strategies could ensure consistency across leadership roles. Furthermore, enhancing areas with lower emphasis, such as fostering student participation in discussions and promoting open communication to boost engagement, could further strengthen the impact of leadership communication on academic outcomes.

The finding shows that both Deans and Heads of Department agree that their decision-making approach influences student academic performance. Deans reported a mean of 3.12 (SD = 0.50), while Heads of Department gave a mean of 2.96 (SD = 0.55), with a combined mean of 2.98 (SD = 0.55). This indicates general agreement that decision-making has a positive effect. The highest agreement was on the statement, "Timely decisions by me help address student academic challenges effectively," with a combined mean of 3.20 (SD = 0.87). Slightly lower support was found for involving academic staff in decision-making, with a combined mean of 2.84 (SD = 1.03). The independent samples t-test (t = 1.522, df = 259, p = 0.129) shows no statistically significant difference between Deans and Heads of Department, confirming that both groups share this view.

These findings align well with the results from Omorobi et al. (2020), who reported that participation in decision-making by academic leaders in Nigerian universities is significantly related to the achievement of institutional goals. They found that when Deans and Heads include academic staff in decision-making, staff morale, commitment, and enthusiasm increase, which in turn supports improved student outcomes (Omorobi et al., 2020). Ebunu (2020) observed in a study of secondary schools that participatory management, including timely decisions and staff input, enhances students' performance. While the study focused on secondary education, the principles hold true: timely and inclusive decisions are seen by leaders as contributing to better student results (Ebunu, 2020). The consensus among academic leaders suggests that effective decision-making matters for student success. Training programmes that reinforce inclusive decision-making practices and streamline timeliness could enhance academic support. Furthermore, increasing dimensions such as transparency and staff collaboration may strengthen these outcomes even further.

The result shows that both Deans and Heads of Department strongly agree that student academic monitoring positively influences performance. Deans reported a mean score of 3.32 (SD = 0.43), and Heads of Department scored 3.33 (SD = 0.40), with a combined mean of 3.33 (SD = 0.41) across all items. The highest-rated practice was "providing timely feedback on students' academic issues" (mean = 3.41, SD = 0.91), followed closely by the presence of "effective systems to monitor students at risk" (mean = 3.38, SD = 0.77). Regular monitoring through

course assessments also scored highly (mean = 3.35, SD = 0.89). Even practices with slightly lower agreement, such as promoting a tracking culture (mean = 3.28) and encouraging academic counselling (mean = 3.24), were rated positively. The independent t-test (t = –0.115, df = 259, p = 0.908) showed no difference between Deans and Heads, confirming they share a similar view on monitoring's influence.

These findings align with Dada (2020), who found that academic mentoring and structured monitoring at a Nigerian university led to improved student performance. Dada's study showed that when faculty and administrators provided regular feedback and tracked academic progress, students responded with better outcomes (Dada, 2020). Aniegwu et al. (2022) reported that a web-based system for teacher–parent collaboration significantly enhanced monitoring efforts in Nigerian schools. They found that where monitoring systems were in place, educators were better able to identify students at risk and offer timely intervention, correlating with improvements in academic records (Aniegwu et al., 2022). The strong consensus and high mean scores suggest that both Deans and Heads recognise monitoring, especially timely feedback and risk tracking, as key to supporting student success. Since both groups share similar views, collaborative training in academic monitoring could reinforce these strengths. Further emphasis on slightly lower-scoring areas, like expanding counselling sessions, may help deepen the impact on student performance.

Conclusion
The findings indicate that leadership communication, decision-making approaches, and student academic monitoring positively influence students' academic performance in public universities. Leadership communication, with a combined grand mean of 2.96, shows agreement on its role, particularly in sharing important academic information and setting clear expectations, though areas like encouraging student engagement could be strengthened. Decision-making approaches, with a combined grand mean of 2.98, highlight the value of timely and collaborative decisions, yet transparency in addressing student issues needs improvement. Student academic monitoring, with the highest combined grand mean of 3.33, demonstrates strong agreement on the effectiveness of timely feedback and systems to track at-risk students, though academic counselling could be enhanced. The t-test results, with p-values of 0.738, 0.129, and 0.908 for leadership communication, decision-making, and academic monitoring respectively, show no significant differences between the mean ratings of Deans and Heads of Departments, leading to the retention of all three null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

Recommendations
Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Universities should implement structured feedback systems, like online portals, to ensure students can easily access and respond to academic guidance, improving communication effectiveness.
2. Universities should introduce training programmes for Deans and Heads of Departments on transparent decision-making processes, helping to build trust and clarity in addressing student challenges.
3. Universities should strengthen systems for tracking at-risk students, such as early warning alerts in course management platforms, to provide timely support and improve academic outcomes.

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