

ASSESSMENT OF UNIVERSITY SENATE CONTRIBUTIONS TO EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed university senate contributions to effective governance in public universities in Rivers State. The study was guided by three objectives from which three objectives and three research questions were derived. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 1,318 members of senate in the three public universities in Rivers State, which are University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The sample size of the study was 497 members of senate. This comprised 247 members of senate in federal university (University of Port Harcourt) and 250 members of senate in state universities. The instrument for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire titled 'Assessment of the University Senate Contributions to Effective University Governance Questionnaire'. The research instrument was validated by three experts, two in the field of Educational Management and one in Measurement and Evaluation in Rivers State University. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach's alpha method. Reliability coefficients of 0.81, 0.86 and 0.77 were obtained for the various clusters of the instrument. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed among others that university Senate formulates policies that promote quality teaching and learning and sets standards for safeguarding the integrity of degrees and diplomas awarded in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that Vice-Chancellors and university management of public universities in Rivers State should institute systematic and regular curriculum review processes through the University Senate, ensuring that academic programmes are periodically updated to reflect emerging knowledge, professional requirements, and the evolving needs of the labour market.

Keywords: University Senate, Governance, Research, Teaching, Learning.

Introduction

Education in its various forms remains one of the most indispensable instruments for driving national development, social transformation, and economic progress. Universities, as the apex institutions of formal learning, bear a distinctive responsibility in producing the high-level manpower, generating the knowledge and fostering the innovations that sustain modern economies and democratic societies. The quality and integrity of university education are, however, not self-sustaining; they depend critically on the strength and effectiveness of the governance structures through which universities manage their academic activities, deploy their resources and remain accountable to their diverse stakeholders. Governance in higher education has been broadly defined as the structures, processes, and mechanisms through which universities exercise authority, make decisions and are held accountable to the communities they serve (Shattock, 2017). In the contemporary global higher education environment, the drive toward effective university governance has intensified considerably due to globalization, dwindling public funding, demands for accountability and transparency, and the growing complexities of institutional management. At the center of the governance architecture in most universities worldwide is the University Senate a collegial body of academics vested with primary authority over the institution's academic affairs, including curriculum development, academic standards, research governance, degree certification, and the promotion of institutional integrity.

The principle that universities must be governed through shared authority in which the faculty, through the University Senate, participates meaningfully in institutional decision-making alongside governing boards and administrative leadership has deep historical and normative roots in higher education. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2000 cited in Jones 2019), in its landmark Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, affirmed that effective governance of an academic institution requires the joint effort of the governing board, the administration, and the faculty, with the faculty holding primary responsibility for curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, and the standards for the granting of student degrees. The University Senate is the primary institutional mechanism through which this faculty governance responsibility is collectively exercised. McNaughtan et al. (2024) identified the University Senate as a foundational body of shared governance whose effectiveness in representing faculty perspectives, managing academic policy and holding institutional leadership accountable is a critical determinant of the overall quality of university governance. Their study underscored that in contexts where senate presidents perceived limited access to decision-making at the highest institutional levels, governance

quality suffered correspondingly, with important negative consequences for academic integrity, staff morale and institutional effectiveness.

Despite the centrality of the University Senate in institutional governance, its effectiveness has been increasingly challenged across the globe by the rise of managerial governance models, the erosion of collegial authority by executive management and the growing pressures of market-driven higher education. Shattock (2017), in the revised edition of *Managing Good Governance in Higher Education*, documented how the proliferation of new public management approaches has systematically concentrated decision-making authority in executive management structures at the expense of collegial academic governance bodies such as the senate, generating governance cultures in which the senate functions more as a formal ratification mechanism than a genuine deliberative authority. Pennock et al. (2016), in a study published in the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, similarly found evidence of growing ambiguity about the respective roles of the board, the senate, university administration and continuing controversy about the proper role of the senate in strategic planning, financial decision-making and research governance a finding that reflects a broader international pattern of senate marginalization. Rowlands (2017), in a study of academic board functions published in *Higher Education Research and Development*, found that academic governance bodies across Australian universities were exercising substantially less influence over academic policy than their formal terms of reference would suggest, owing to the dominance of executive management in agenda-setting and decision-making processes. These international findings have important implications for university systems in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, where similar patterns of governance dysfunction have been compounded by additional structural, political, and financial challenges.

In Nigeria, the university system has experienced rapid and frequently turbulent expansion since independence, with the National Universities Commission (NUC) reporting that the country operated over 271 universities by 2023, comprising federal, state and private institutions. The governance of Nigerian universities is primarily anchored in the provisions of the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act Cap U5 LFN 2004, which establishes the legal framework for the governing council, the university senate, and other statutory governance bodies. The University Senate, presided over by the Vice-Chancellor, is established by this legislation as the highest academic governance body of each university, with statutory responsibility for curriculum approval, academic standards, degree certification, examination governance, research policy and the maintenance of academic integrity.

Despite these formal statutory provisions, the actual practice of senate-driven academic governance in Nigerian public universities has attracted significant and growing scholarly concern. Ogunode (2020) identified weak governance structures as a central challenge undermining institutional effectiveness,

noting that issues of inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, declining institutional autonomy, political interference, and the erosion of collegial governance have collectively weakened the ability of academic governance bodies, including the senate, to fulfil their statutory mandates. Ogunode and Ibrahim (2023) found that Nigerian universities suffer from multiple constraints on their governance autonomy, including the centralisation of staff recruitment through the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), NUC control over curriculum development, the centralization of student admissions and the political appointment of governing boards, all of which limit the effective authority of the senate over the very domains that the Universities Act assigns to it.

Political interference in the governance of Nigerian public universities has been identified in the recent literature as one of the most persistent and damaging structural challenges to effective senate-led governance. Ogunode et al. (2023) documented how politicians at both federal and state levels routinely interfere in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors, the composition of governing councils, staff recruitment, and other academic governance decisions, generating a pattern of governance by political patronage rather than by academic merit and collegial deliberation. This pattern directly undermines the authority and integrity of the University Senate, because decisions that formally require senate endorsement are in practice predetermined by political actors who operate outside the senate's deliberative framework. Ogunode (2023), in a study on problems faced by academic leaders in Nigerian public higher institutions, found that political interference was among the most frequently cited challenges by institutional leaders, ranging from direct government intrusion in Vice-Chancellor appointments to the diversion of institutional resources for political purposes. The consequences for academic governance are severe: when the senate's authority is systematically circumvented by political actors, its capacity to fulfil its statutory responsibilities for teaching quality, academic standards, research governance, and degree integrity is correspondingly diminished, with direct negative implications for the quality of graduates produced by these institutions.

Rivers State, located in the Niger Delta region of southern Nigeria, hosts several public universities that play a critical role in human capital development for a state whose economic fortunes are closely tied to the oil and gas sector and whose social development indices, while improving, continue to reflect significant governance challenges. The public universities in Rivers State include the University of Port Harcourt (a federal institution), Rivers State University (historically notable as the first state university established in Nigeria in 1979), and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. These institutions collectively serve a large student population and are major employers of academic and professional staff in the state. However, governance challenges confronting these institutions include political interference in leadership appointments, chronic underfunding, erosion of institutional autonomy and weakened collegial governance structures have been consistently

identified as factors limiting their effectiveness in fulfilling their academic missions. Ogunode (2023) noted that problems hindering smooth administration of Nigerian public universities disproportionately affect state universities, which typically have smaller resource bases, are more directly exposed to political interference from state governments and have less institutional independence than their federal counterparts. Against this backdrop, the question of how effectively the university Senate exercises its statutory governance functions in Rivers State public universities is one of considerable practical significance for the quality, integrity and developmental relevance of higher education in the state and the wider Niger Delta region. This concern is reinforced by Aleru and Isi (2022), whose study of higher education institutions in Rivers State found that chronic underfunding underlies most of the challenges confronting these universities, including deteriorating infrastructure, brain drain and constrained research capacity, and recommended sustained government funding as central to improving institutional governance and performance.

One of the primary governance responsibilities of the University Senate is the formulation and oversight of policies that promote quality teaching and learning. The quality of teaching in universities is directly shaped by the institutional policies governing curriculum design, pedagogical standards, programme review, faculty performance evaluation, and the conditions of academic work, all of which fall within the senate's statutory domain. Kezar and Eckel (2004) argued that senate-driven curriculum governance produces policies that are more academically rigorous and pedagogically sound than those produced through administrative processes alone, because they draw on the collective disciplinary expertise of faculty members who understand the substantive and methodological requirements of their fields. In Nigerian universities, concerns about the quality of teaching and learning have been persistently linked to governance weaknesses, including the erosion of senate authority over curriculum and academic standards. Ogunode (2021), in a study on the problems facing academic staff of Nigerian universities, found that inadequate faculty capacity development, overcrowded classrooms, and poorly enforced teaching standards all areas where senate policy plays a critical governance role have significantly degraded the quality of teaching and learning in Nigerian public universities, with direct consequences for graduate quality and institutional reputation. A complementary body of Rivers State evidence indicates that the professional development standards which senates are expected to set do produce measurable gains where they are sustained. LongJohn and LongJohn (2026), studying 381 teachers in public secondary schools across the three senatorial districts of Rivers State, found that continuous professional learning and reflective practice significantly strengthened teachers' pedagogical competence and instructional effectiveness, and recommended that such programmes be institutionalised rather than left to individual initiative.

Although conducted at the secondary level, the finding lends weight to the proposition that senate policy on faculty development is a governance lever with direct consequences for teaching quality.

The integrity of the degrees and diplomas awarded by public universities is another critical variable in this study, and one whose protection falls squarely within the statutory mandate of the University Senate. Degree integrity encompasses the rigour and consistency of academic standards, the fairness and transparency of examination and assessment processes, the effectiveness of anti-malpractice mechanisms, and the credibility of the certification process through which degrees are formally conferred. In Nigerian universities, concerns about the integrity of academic awards have been extensively documented. Ogunode and Abubakar (2021), writing on challenges facing academic staff in Nigerian universities, noted that inconsistent application of academic standards, weak external examination systems, and the growing incidence of academic malpractice represent serious threats to the credibility of Nigerian university degrees in national and international labour markets. When the University Senate does not effectively exercise its authority over examination governance, degree standards, and academic integrity enforcement, the certificates produced by the institution lose the credibility that gives them value to graduates, employers, and society. The supervisory dimension of this governance function has also been examined in the Rivers State context. Nwuke and Yellowe (2025) investigated the utilisation of artificial intelligence in school supervision for effective administration in Rivers State, and argued that supervision is the mechanism through which formally stated standards are actually enforced in practice. Their argument is instructive for senate governance, since standards for examinations and degree certification remain declaratory unless the institution maintains a functioning apparatus for monitoring compliance with them.

The promotion of research and innovation represents a third critical governance function of the University Senate. Universities are universally expected to be not only institutions of teaching but engines of knowledge production, technological innovation, and evidence-based solutions to societal challenges. The senate bears responsibility for developing and enforcing the research policies, ethical frameworks, intellectual property guidelines, and academic workload arrangements that create the institutional conditions within which research flourishes. Altbach et al. (2019), in the third edition of *Trends in Global Higher Education* published by Brill, observed that universities in the global South, including Nigerian institutions, face significant structural challenges in building robust research cultures and that weak internal governance of research including limited senate authority over research policy is among the key factors that constrain research productivity and innovation in African universities. In the specific context of Rivers State universities, chronic underfunding of research activities, limited laboratory, library infrastructure and the absence of coherent research governance frameworks have been identified as major barriers to research output and innovation, challenges that

effective senate governance of research policy could significantly address if the senate is empowered to exercise its authority in this domain. Evidence from Rivers State suggests that the constraint is not only financial. Taylor et al. (2025), studying the entire population of adult educators in Rivers State-owned universities, found that academic staff were only moderately aware of artificial intelligence tools, that actual utilisation was low, and that respondents were concerned about the ethical implications of using such tools. The finding points to a governance gap as well as an infrastructural one, since awareness, utilisation and research ethics are precisely the domains in which senate research policy is expected to provide direction.

It is against the foregoing backdrop that this study sought to assess the contributions of the University Senate to effective university governance in public universities in Rivers State. Despite the legal framework that establishes the senate as the highest academic authority within Nigerian universities, empirical evidence of how effectively the senate exercises its governance functions particularly in relation to the seven variables identified above is limited in the Rivers State context. The absence of robust, empirical, context-specific evidence on senate governance effectiveness leaves institutional managers, policymakers, and regulatory bodies without the evidence base needed to design targeted interventions that would strengthen collegiate academic governance and thereby improve the quality and integrity of university education in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

University governance remains at the heart of higher education delivery, shaping the quality of teaching, research, and community service. In Nigeria, and particularly in Rivers State, the University Senate stands as the highest academic body within the university system, entrusted with making critical decisions on matters such as academic standards, programme approvals, examinations, student progression and the maintenance of quality assurance. Ideally, the Senate should provide leadership that guarantees institutional stability, academic credibility, and responsiveness to the needs of society. However, in recent years, concerns have been mounting over how effectively University Senates in public universities discharge these responsibilities. Instances of policy inconsistency, prolonged academic disruptions, declining quality of graduates and several lapses in maintaining global best practices in teaching and research suggest that university governance may not be functioning optimally. In some cases, the Senate's decisions are perceived as being influenced more by internal politics and external pressures than by evidence-based reasoning or the pursuit of academic excellence. This has raised questions about how Senate is fulfilling its mandate as the custodian of academic integrity and the engine room of university governance (Ewa & Eze, 2023).

Furthermore, stakeholders students, staff, employers of labour, and the larger society have increasingly expressed dissatisfaction with issues such as poor programme accreditation outcomes,

delays in decision-making, inadequate curriculum reforms, and weak quality control mechanisms. These challenges not only affect the credibility of public universities in Rivers State but also undermine their ability to contribute effectively to national development.

Despite the centrality of the University Senate in the university governance structure, empirical studies assessing its contributions to effective governance are limited, particularly within the context of Rivers State universities. This study, therefore, sought to assess the University Senate's contributions to effective university governance in public universities in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess university Senate contributions to effective governance in public universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Determine the extent to which university Senate formulate policies that promote quality teaching and learning in public universities in Rivers State.
2. Assess the extent to which university Senate set standards for safeguarding the integrity of degrees awarded in public universities in Rivers State.
3. Ascertain the extent to which university Senate promote research in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does university Senate formulate policies that promote quality teaching and learning in public universities in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does university Senate set standards for safeguarding the integrity of degrees and diplomas awarded in public universities in Rivers State?
3. To what extent does university Senate promote research in public universities in Rivers State?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 1,318 members of senate in the three public universities in Rivers State which are University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The sample size of the study was 497 members of senate. This comprised 247 members of senate in federal university (University of Port Harcourt) and 250 members of senate in state universities. The instrument for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire titled 'Assessment of the University Senate's Contributions to Effective University Governance Questionnaire'. The research instrument was validated by three experts, two in the field of Educational Management and one in Measurement and Evaluation in Rivers State University. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha

method. Reliability coefficients of 0.81, 0.86 and 0.77 were obtained for the various clusters of the instrument. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does university Senate formulate policies that promote quality teaching and learning in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Senate Members in State and Federal Universities on the Extent to which University Senate Formulates Policies that Promote Quality Teaching and Learning

S/N	Items	Federal Univ. (N=244)			State Univ. (N=246)		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1	The university Senate periodically reviews and updates curriculum to reflect current academic and professional standards	3.21	0.78	High Extent	3.15	0.82	High Extent
2	The university Senate establishes clear policies for teaching load, contact hours, and instructional standards	3.18	0.84	High Extent	3.09	0.79	High Extent
3	The university Senate sets standards for the professional development and continuous training of academic staff	3.08	0.91	High Extent	2.97	0.88	High Extent
4	The university Senate approves policies for peer review of teaching and assessment quality	2.96	0.85	High Extent	2.88	0.93	High Extent
5	The university Senate formulates guidelines for the adoption of new teaching methodologies and technologies	2.89	0.90	High Extent	2.83	0.86	High Extent
6	The university Senate ensures that learning outcomes are clearly defined for all approved programmes	3.14	0.77	High Extent	3.06	0.81	High Extent

7	The university Senate establishes frameworks for student academic support and learning assistance	2.92	0.88	High Extent	2.85	0.91	High Extent
8	The university Senate promotes policies that encourage academic freedom and innovation in teaching	3.05	0.83	High Extent	2.94	0.87	High Extent
Grand Mean		3.05		High Extent	2.97		High Extent

Table 1 shows that senate members in both federal and state universities rated the extent to which the university Senate formulates policies that promote quality teaching and learning as high. The items had mean values ranging from 2.89 to 3.21 for federal university senate members and 2.83 to 3.15 for state university senate members. With grand mean scores of 3.05 and 2.97 for federal and state university respondents, respectively, both being above the decision criterion of 2.50, the answer to research question one is that university Senate formulates policies that promote quality teaching and learning in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent.

Research Question 2: To what extent does university Senate set standards for safeguarding the integrity of degrees and diplomas awarded in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Senate Members in State and Federal Universities on the Extent to which University Senate Sets Standards for Safeguarding the Integrity of Degrees Awarded

S/N	Items	Federal Univ. (N=244)			State Univ. (N=246)		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1	The university Senate establishes clear and consistent criteria for the award of all academic degrees	3.32	0.75	High Extent	3.24	0.80	High Extent
2	The university Senate formulates policies that govern the conduct of examinations and assessments	3.45	0.68	High Extent	3.37	0.74	High Extent
3	The university Senate enforces measures to prevent and address academic malpractice in the	3.18	0.82	High Extent	3.1	0.85	High Extent

	universities						
4	The university Senate establishes frameworks for external examination and moderation of academic awards	3.02	0.89	High Extent	2.94	0.91	High Extent
5	The university Senate reviews and maintains minimum academic standards for degree programmes	3.28	0.77	High Extent	3.19	0.81	High Extent
6	The university Senate oversees the process of certifying and conferring degrees on graduating students	3.41	0.71	High Extent	3.33	0.76	High Extent
7	The university Senate establishes procedures for academic appeals and the review of examination results	2.98	0.93	High Extent	2.9	0.97	High Extent
8	The university Senate ensures equivalence of academic standards across all faculties and departments	3.08	0.86	High Extent	2.99	0.90	High Extent
Grand Mean		3.22		High Extent	3.13		High Extent

Table 2 shows that senate members in both federal and state universities rated the extent to which the university Senate sets standards for safeguarding the integrity of degrees awarded as high. The items had mean values ranging from 2.98 to 3.45 for federal university respondents and 2.90 to 3.37 for state university respondents. With grand mean scores of 3.22 and 3.13 respectively, the answer to research question two is that university Senate sets standards for safeguarding the integrity of degrees and diplomas awarded in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent.

Research Question 3: To what extent does university Senate promote research in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean Ratings of Senate Members in State and Federal Universities on the Extent to which University Senate Promotes Research in Public Universities

S/N	Items	Federal Univ. (N=244)			State Univ. (N=246)		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1	The university Senate formulates and approves research policies that guide academic enquiry	2.88	0.95	High Extent	2.8	0.98	High Extent
2	The university Senate establishes ethical frameworks governing research conduct and publication	2.95	0.89	High Extent	2.87	0.93	High Extent
3	The university Senate promotes policies that allocate time and resources for faculty research activities	2.72	0.99	High Extent	2.65	1.02	High Extent
4	The university Senate provides oversight for research grants, funding and intellectual property management	2.68	1.01	High Extent	2.61	0.99	High Extent
5	The university Senate encourages interdisciplinary and collaborative research across faculties	2.83	0.92	High Extent	2.76	0.95	High Extent
6	The university Senate approves the establishment of research centres and institutes within the university	2.9	0.88	High Extent	2.82	0.91	High Extent
7	The university Senate establishes policies for the dissemination and publication of research findings	2.78	0.97	High Extent	2.71	0.99	High Extent
8	The university Senate recognises and rewards academic staff for outstanding research contributions	2.65	1.04	High Extent	2.58	1.06	High Extent
Grand Mean		2.8		High Extent	2.73		High Extent

Table 3 shows that senate members in both federal and state universities rated the extent to which the university Senate promotes research as high, with item mean values ranging from 2.65 to 2.95 for

federal university respondents and 2.58 to 2.87 for state university respondents. With grand mean scores of 2.80 and 2.73 respectively, both above the 2.50 decision criterion, the answer to research question three is that university Senate promotes research in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the finding for research question one revealed that university Senate formulates policies that promote quality teaching and learning in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent. From the analysed tables, it was revealed that the university Senate periodically reviews and updates curricula, establishes clear policies for teaching loads and contact hours, sets standards for faculty professional development, approves policies for peer review of teaching, and ensures that learning outcomes are clearly defined for all approved programmes. This finding is consistent with the findings of Raza et al. (2024), who in their systematic review of shared governance conceptualisation and implementation across forty-eight empirical studies, found that the university Senate exercises governance authority in policy formulation because of its embodiment of what scholars have termed professional authority, and that faculty participation in curriculum development and the assessment of student learning was among the most consistently reported and positively valued dimensions of shared governance. Similarly, Atanaw et al. (2025) found that the governance principle of academic freedom, which is institutionally expressed through the senate's authority over teaching policies and pedagogical standards, had a significant positive relationship with the quality of teaching and learning, demonstrating that teaching quality policies are most effective when formulated by the academic community through its collegial governance bodies. The finding is also consistent with the finding of Pennock et al. (2015), who confirmed that curriculum oversight and review were among the most stable and widely recognised governance functions of university Senates, even as other governance domains had become contested. The finding is further supported by LongJohn and LongJohn (2026), whose study in Rivers State established that continuous professional learning and reflective practice significantly build teachers' capacity, and who found no significant difference in perceptions across the three senatorial districts of the state. That result reinforces the present finding in two respects. It confirms that professional development standards, which senate members in this study rated highly, are associated with measurable improvements in instructional practice, and its own pattern of cross-group agreement parallels the convergence recorded here between senate members in federal and state universities.

The result of the finding for research question two revealed that university Senate sets standards for safeguarding the integrity of degrees and diplomas awarded in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent. The analyses showed that the university Senate establishes clear and consistent criteria

for the award of degrees, formulates policies governing examinations and assessments, enforces measures to prevent academic malpractice, oversees the process of certifying and conferring degrees, and ensures equivalence of academic standards across faculties. This finding aligns with the findings of Gerber (2014), who documented that the senate's authority over degree requirements and academic standards was understood from the outset as an expression of professional authority, and that faculty governance of the conferral of degrees was the most consistently retained governance function of university Senates. The finding is also corroborated by Raza et al. (2024), who confirmed across their systematic review that faculty governance of degree conferral and the maintenance of academic standards was the most consistently retained senate function, even in contexts where senate authority had been substantially eroded. Ogunode (2021) further supported this finding by identifying the growing incidence of academic malpractice in Nigerian public universities as a direct consequence of weakened senate governance of academic standards, arguing that the senate's capacity to set rigorous assessment criteria and enforce examination standards was a critical institutional safeguard. The corresponding hypothesis was not significant, implying that senate members in both federal and state universities in Rivers State share a common perception of the senate's role in protecting the integrity of academic awards. This position is reinforced by Nwuke and Yellowe (2025), who found in the Rivers State context that structured supervision is central to effective administration, since it is through supervisory monitoring that declared academic standards are actually enforced. Read alongside the present finding, this suggests that the senate's highly rated authority over examination policy and degree certification is sustained not by the existence of the standards alone but by the supervisory machinery through which the institution verifies compliance with them.

The result of the finding for research question three revealed that university Senate promotes research in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent. The analyses revealed that the university Senate formulates and approves research policies that guide academic enquiry, establishes ethical frameworks governing research conduct and publication, promotes policies for the allocation of time and resources for faculty research, and provides oversight for research grants and intellectual property management. This finding is in line with the finding of Altbach et al. (2019), who observed in their comprehensive global survey of trends in higher education that the governance of the multi-dimensional research role of universities is a critical institutional challenge that requires academic governance bodies with the expertise, authority, and normative legitimacy to balance competing demands while protecting the integrity of the scholarly enterprise. The finding is also consistent with the finding of Raza et al. (2024), who confirmed in their systematic review that faculty governance of research policy was among the most consistently and positively valued dimensions of senate authority across diverse institutional contexts. The finding should nonetheless be read alongside Taylor et al.

(2025), who reported that academic staff in Rivers State-owned universities were only moderately aware of artificial intelligence tools and utilised them to a low extent, while expressing concern about the associated ethical questions. Taken together with the present finding, this indicates that senate research policy in these universities is well established at the level of formulation, but that its translation into research practice, particularly in the adoption of emerging research technologies and the enforcement of research ethics frameworks, remains uneven.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the University Senate formulates policies that promote quality teaching and learning, sets standards for safeguarding the integrity of degrees and diplomas awarded in public universities and promotes research in public universities in Rivers State. All three contributions were rated at a high extent by senate members in both the federal and state universities studied, indicating that the Senate is making meaningful governance contributions across its statutory mandate.

Recommendations

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

1. Vice-Chancellors and university management of public universities in Rivers State should institute systematic and regular curriculum review processes through the University Senate, ensuring that academic programmes are periodically updated to reflect emerging knowledge, professional requirements, and the evolving needs of the labour market. This should be accompanied by adequate administrative support for Senate curriculum committees.
2. University governing councils and management should strengthen the institutional mechanisms through which the University Senate governs examination processes and degree standards. This should include the systematic deployment of external examination systems, the resourcing of Senate examination committees, and the development of robust academic integrity frameworks that are owned and enforced by the academic community through the Senate.
3. The National Universities Commission (NUC) and the federal and state governments should increase research funding allocations to public universities in Rivers State, and university management should work with the Senate to develop coherent institutional research governance frameworks that protect faculty time for research, provide equitable access to research funding, and establish clear policies for research ethics and intellectual property management.

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The author(s) declare that it is not applicable.

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Competing interests

The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

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