

Prospects and Challenges of Adaptive Leadership and Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract- *The study was an investigation into the prospects and challenges of adaptive leadership and governance in Nigeria. This study dives into how adaptive leadership can be applied in Nigerian public governance, highlighting its importance, current use, challenges in implementation, and potential for reform. With rising worries about governance inefficiencies, exclusionary leadership, and deep-rooted corruption, adaptive leadership emerges as a hopeful alternative for fostering inclusive and accountable governance. The research utilized a mixed-methods approach, blending quantitative surveys from 100 carefully selected public officials with qualitative interviews and document analysis. Descriptive statistics helped analyze the research questions, while regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The results indicate a strong perceived need for adaptive leadership, but its actual application is only moderate due to persistent structural, institutional, and political barriers. The regression analysis confirmed significant relationships between adaptive leadership factors and governance effectiveness. In particular, adaptive leadership has great potential to build public trust, boost stakeholder engagements, alleviate poverty, and enhance accountability. However, challenges like resistance to change, elite control, and bureaucratic inflexibility continue to pose significant obstacles. The study concludes that adaptive leadership could greatly transform Nigeria's governance landscape if there is a focus on institutional reforms, political commitment, and inclusive frameworks. It suggests targeted leadership training, legislative restructuring, and the establishment of civic engagement mechanisms. This research adds valuable insights to the governance and public policy literature by empirically demonstrating both the potential and challenges of adaptive leadership in a developing context.*

Keywords: *Public governance, Adaptive leadership, stakeholder engagement, accountability,*

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, much like other developing countries, faces a range of intricate governance challenges that go beyond the scope of traditional leadership styles. Ongoing issues such as insecurity, economic turmoil, weak institutions, and inadequate service delivery have highlighted the shortcomings of rigid, top-down

leadership models. In recent years, both scholars and practitioners have pointed out the importance of adaptive leadership a more dynamic and flexible approach that can tackle systemic issues by rallying people together, promoting innovation, and encouraging collaborative problem-solving (Heifetz et al., 2009; Okolo & Ijirshar, 2020).

Adaptive leadership is all about how leaders can rally people and organizations to tackle tough challenges that call for creativity, learning, and changes in behavior. Ibrahim and Sulaiman (2022) describe it as "a process-oriented form of leadership that emphasizes resilience, contextual understanding, and collective problem-solving in the face of volatile socio-political environments." This approach encourages leaders to break free from traditional authority roles, creating a space for constructive discomfort and driving systemic change. On the flip side, Adaptive Governance, as explained by Agbo and Ezeani (2023), is "a flexible, inclusive, and learning-based approach to public decision-making that evolves in response to changing societal needs and uncertainties." This model is all about participation and fosters adaptability within institutions through collaborative networks, shared accountability, and ongoing feedback. When we look at both concepts together, Okolo and Ijirshar (2020) define adaptive leadership and governance as "an integrated approach where leadership catalyzes institutional learning, inter-agency coordination, and stakeholder engagement to resolve persistent governance failures in complex environments." This definition underscores the significance of individual leadership traits and the structural aspects of governance in navigating the ever-changing political and developmental landscape in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the need for strong leadership has become even more pressing due to ongoing governance challenges and the struggle of many public institutions to keep up with the fast-paced changes in the socio-political landscape. Adaptive leadership and governance are especially crucial in Nigeria,

given the country's rich tapestry of ethnic and religious diversity, its federal system, and the frequent socio-economic upheavals. Issues like widespread corruption, inconsistent policies, and political favoritism have hampered state institutions' ability to fulfill their roles (Adeosun & Olanrewaju, 2019; Omotoso & Akanbi, 2021). Moreover, the absence of responsive and accountable leadership has stifled citizen participation and diminished public confidence in the government. By focusing on learning, resilience, and a holistic approach, adaptive leadership presents a promising avenue to revitalize governance in Nigeria and improve institutional effectiveness (Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2022).

The potential for adaptive leadership in Nigeria is becoming clearer with recent policy changes and a growing emphasis on participatory governance. For example, the decentralization of certain governance roles and the rise in civic engagement in public budgeting and policy oversight signal a desire for more inclusive leadership styles (Agbo & Ezeani, 2023). Additionally, initiatives in digital governance and youth-driven movements like #EndSARS have showcased how adaptive leadership can rally collective efforts and inspire reform (Olanrewaju & Olayemi, 2021). However, these initiatives are still inconsistent and not yet fully integrated into the larger governance framework. On the flip side, the hurdles facing adaptive leadership in Nigeria are quite complex. Political meddling, deep-rooted elite interests, a lack of leadership skills, and a reluctance to embrace change are all factors that continue to hinder reform efforts. The slow-moving bureaucracy and a weak sense of accountability have made it tough for leaders to encourage innovation and tackle adaptive challenges (Usman & Ibrahim, 2020). Moreover, the lack of organized leadership development programs in the public sector stifles the growth of leaders who can effectively navigate complexities and drive meaningful change (Ogundiya & Adeyemo, 2019).

Given these circumstances, exploring adaptive leadership and governance in Nigeria is not just timely but essential. It's crucial to understand how adaptive leadership principles can be successfully applied in Nigeria and to pinpoint the structural and cultural obstacles to their implementation. This understanding is vital for promoting good governance, improving public service delivery, and building resilient institutions. This research aims to

add to this important conversation by thoroughly examining the opportunities and challenges of adaptive leadership and governance in Nigeria, drawing lessons from recent policy experiences and leadership practices from 2019 to 2024.

The Nigerian state, now more than twenty years into its journey of democracy, is still grappling with a deep-rooted governance crisis. This crisis is evident in the form of weak institutions, rampant corruption, insecurity, and a significant lack of public trust. Even with numerous changes in leadership and various reform initiatives, the governance framework seems stuck in a cycle of rigidity, decision-making driven by patronage, and minimal involvement from citizens (Omotoso & Akanbi, 2021). This ongoing dysfunction prompts a vital question: how effective are Nigeria's current leadership and governance models in tackling the swiftly changing social, political, and economic challenges the country faces? Recent data highlights the seriousness of these governance issues. The National Bureau of Statistics (2022) reports that over 133 million Nigerians about 63% of the population are living in multidimensional poverty, despite the country's wealth of natural and human resources. Additionally, Nigeria placed 145th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perception Index, pointing to a significant problem with accountability in the public sector and ethical leadership. These findings emphasize that traditional, hierarchical leadership approaches are falling short in addressing the structural governance challenges at hand.

The idea of adaptive leadership and governance focusing on flexibility, learning from context, engaging stakeholders, and fostering innovation has gained traction in global discussions as a smart way to tackle complex public issues (Heifetz et al., 2009; and Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2022). Yet, when it comes to practical application in Nigeria's governance systems, things are still pretty underdeveloped, inconsistent, and not well-theorized. There have been a few notable examples of adaptive responses, like the swift rise of digital platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate remote education and health services (Agbo & Ezeani, 2023), or the youth-driven #EndSARS movement that pushed the government to dismantle the infamous police unit. However, the long-term sustainability and institutionalization of these adaptive changes have faced significant hurdles due to systemic resistance, elite capture, and weak

mechanisms for institutional learning. Moreover, Nigeria's approach to complex national security challenges like the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, armed banditry in the North-West, and secessionist movements in the South-East has often been more reactive than adaptive. Policies have tended to rely heavily on militarized responses instead of community-focused, cross-sector solutions, which has only deepened disconnect between citizens and the state (Okolo & Ijirshar, 2020).

The ongoing struggle to create flexible policy responses to complex challenges is holding back development, increasing governance fragmentation, and widening the gap of trust between the government and its citizens. Additionally, leadership development in Nigeria tends to be informal and heavily influenced by politics, with little investment in building adaptive skills within public institutions. This has led to a leadership class that often lacks the tools to navigate complexity, foster dissent, or drive systemic change. Without a clear strategy to integrate adaptive leadership principles like diagnostic thinking, shared authority, and strategic collaboration the chances for meaningful governance transformation are quite low.

Given these circumstances, there's a notable lack of both academic and policy literature that addresses the practical application, operational dynamics, and institutional hurdles related to adaptive leadership and governance in Nigeria. While there are theoretical frameworks mainly rooted in Western contexts, there's a scarcity of localized studies that examine their relevance, challenges, and opportunities within Nigeria's unique socio-political environment. This study, therefore, seeks to thoroughly explore the prospects and challenges of adaptive leadership and governance in Nigeria, employing evidence-based methods and real-world case studies to enhance both academic understanding and policy development.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study shall be guided by the following research questions

- i. What is the level of need for the applicability of adaptive leadership in Nigerian public governance?
- ii. What is the level of application of adaptive leadership principles in Nigeria's leadership and

governance practice, with a focus on public inclusiveness and stakeholders engagement and innovative reforms?

iii. What are the challenges mitigating the application of adaptive leadership principles in Nigeria's leadership and governance practice with focus on structural, institutional, and political challenges?

iv. What is the potential of adaptive leadership and governance to foster public trust, poverty reduction, accountability and eradicate corruption in Nigerians' leadership and governance structure?

III. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The research hypotheses formulated to guide the study are stated in null as follows

HO₁: The level of need for the applicability of adaptive leadership in Nigerian public governance is low.

HO₂: The level of application of adaptive leadership principles in Nigeria's leadership and governance practice, with a focus on public inclusiveness and stakeholders' engagement and innovative reforms is low.

HO₃: There are no significant challenges mitigating the application of adaptive leadership principles in Nigeria's leadership and governance practice with focus on structural, institutional, and political challenges.

HO₄: There is no significant potential of adaptive leadership and governance to foster public trust, poverty reduction, accountability and eradicate corruption in Nigeria's leadership and governance structure.

IV. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Adaptive Leadership and Governance
Adaptive Leadership is all about how leaders can rally people and organizations to tackle tough challenges that call for creativity, learning, and changes in behavior. Ibrahim and Sulaiman (2022) describe it as "a process-oriented form of leadership that emphasizes resilience, contextual understanding, and collective problem-solving in the face of volatile socio-political environments." This approach encourages leaders to break free from traditional authority roles, creating a space for constructive

discomfort and driving systemic change. On the flip side, Adaptive Governance, as explained by Agbo and Ezeani (2023), is "a flexible, inclusive, and learning-based approach to public decision-making that evolves in response to changing societal needs and uncertainties." It's all about participatory principles, fostering institutional adaptability through collaborative networks, shared accountability, and ongoing feedback. When we look at both concepts together, Okolo and Ijirshar (2020) define adaptive leadership and governance as "an integrated approach where leadership catalyzes institutional learning, inter-agency coordination, and stakeholder engagement to resolve persistent governance failures in complex environments." This definition underscores the significance of individual leadership traits and the structural aspects of governance in navigating the ever-changing political and developmental landscape in Nigeria.

Core Components of Adaptive Leadership and Governance

The adaptive leadership and governance framework usually consists of several key components:

First up is diagnosing the system, where leaders need to spot patterns, understand power dynamics, and dig deeper into the root causes of challenges instead of just addressing the obvious symptoms (Heifetz et al., 2009; and Usman & Ibrahim, 2020). Next, we have Regulating Distress, which is all about effective adaptive leaders managing the stress that comes with change, making sure that stakeholders don't feel overwhelmed or lose interest. Then there's giving the Work Back to the People, where adaptive leadership promotes a sense of ownership among followers, encouraging them to actively participate in finding solutions (Olanrewaju & Olayemi, 2021). Institutional learning and flexibility is another crucial aspect, as adaptive governance depends on institutions being able to learn from their mistakes, try out new methods, and adjust their policies to fit the specific context (Adeosun & Olanrewaju, 2019). Finally, we have Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration, which highlights the importance of partnerships among government, civil society, and private sector players to ensure that governance is inclusive (Agbo & Ezeani, 2023).

Significance of Adaptive Leadership and Governance

The importance of adaptive leadership and governance in today's public administration

especially in fragile democracies like Nigeria can't be overstated. Here's why it matters:

Resilience in Crisis Management: Adaptive leadership gives policymakers the tools they need to tackle unexpected challenges like pandemics, insurgencies, or economic downturns (Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2022).

Bridging Governance Gaps: By encouraging participatory methods and responsive leadership, it helps to fill legitimacy gaps and rebuilds public trust in institutions (Omotoso & Akanbi, 2021).

Enhancing Policy Innovation: Adaptive governance promotes experimentation, continuous learning, and evidence-based policymaking in ever-changing environments (Okolo & Ijirshar, 2020).

Supporting Sustainable Development: It's essential for reaching long-term development goals, especially those focused on transparency, accountability, and social inclusion (Ogundiya & Adeyemo, 2019).

Challenges and Prospect of Adaptive Leadership and Governance

Nigeria, known as Africa's largest economy and most populous nation, grapples with a host of governance challenges that include security issues, the need for economic diversification, rampant corruption, and social inequalities. Embracing adaptive leadership and governance could provide effective frameworks for tackling these intricate problems, especially in such a fast-evolving landscape.

Challenges of Adaptive Leadership and Governance in Nigeria

i. Security Challenges and Policy Fragmentation

The governance landscape in Nigeria is significantly affected by ongoing security threats—like the insurgency in the Northeast, banditry in the Northwest, and various communal conflicts. These issues call for adaptive responses, which many institutions find hard to deliver in a timely manner. For instance, the Boko Haram insurgency and the surge in banditry have highlighted the shortcomings in adaptive leadership at both federal and state levels. The ever-changing tactics of these insurgent groups necessitate flexible security and governance strategies. A statistic from the Nigeria Security Tracker (2023) reveals that over 40,000 lives were lost to violence between 2019 and 2023,

underscoring the difficulties in adapting governance to meet security challenges.

ii. Institutional Weakness and Corruption

Deep-rooted corruption and fragile institutional capacity pose significant hurdles to adaptive governance, limiting both flexibility and public trust in leadership. Take the slow response to COVID-19 relief distribution as an example; it laid bare issues of mismanagement and corruption, which severely hindered effective crisis governance. Transparency International (2022) placed Nigeria at 149 out of 180 countries in its Corruption Perceptions Index, shining a light on the challenges facing governance quality.

iii. Infrastructure Deficits and Resource Limitations

The government's ability to roll out adaptive programs effectively is hampered by inadequate infrastructure and financial constraints. For example, attempts to shift Nigeria's economy away from its heavy reliance on oil have been inconsistent, largely due to poor infrastructure and governance hurdles. A statistic from the World Bank shows that Nigeria's Ease of Doing Business ranking fluctuated between 116th and 131st place from 2019 to 2023, reflecting ongoing challenges in creating a conducive environment for business.

iv. Political Instability and Short-term Priorities

Political conflicts and election-related violence often throw a wrench in the works of governance reforms. For instance, the 2019 general elections highlighted the instability in governance, which hampered the ability to create coordinated and flexible policies. Ihejirika and Obiajulu (2021) point out that the unpredictability of elections tends to shorten the Nigerian government's strategic planning horizons.

Prospects of Adaptive Leadership and Governance in Nigeria

a. Improved Crisis Management and Innovation

Adaptive leadership is starting to make a difference in how we respond to crises like COVID-19, with some notable successes in public health initiatives and the use of mobile technology. A great example is Nigeria's creative approach to using mobile phones for COVID-19 awareness and tracking, which played a role in slowing the virus's spread. Interestingly, Nigeria's COVID-19 case fatality rate was around 1.3%, which is lower than in many other African countries, thanks in part to adaptive public health governance (NCDC, 2023).

b. Youth Engagement and Civic Participation

The #EndSARS protests in 2020 showcased the power of adaptive civil society activism in shaping governance and advocating for reforms. These nationwide protests called for police reform and greater accountability, emphasizing the crucial role of civic leadership in adapting governance. Ojo (2021) argues that the rise of youth activism in Nigeria reflects a growing demand for more participatory governance models..

c. Digital Governance and E-Government Initiatives

Nigeria has made significant progress in digital governance, aiming to enhance transparency and improve service delivery. A notable example is the implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) system, which has boosted government revenue collection and minimized financial leakages. In fact, this TSA reform has led to an impressive increase of over ₦1 trillion (around \$2.4 billion) in government revenue from 2019 to 2023, according to the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Finance.

International Partnerships and Knowledge Sharing

Nigeria is actively involved in both regional and international efforts to enhance governance and build climate resilience. One key initiative is Nigeria's participation in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which has played a crucial role in facilitating necessary governance reforms. The APRM reported in 2022 that the Nigerian government complied with 75% of the recommended governance reforms between 2019 and 2023. Despite facing considerable challenges like security issues, institutional weaknesses, and political instability, Nigeria is also showing encouraging signs of progress. Civic activism, the integration of technology, and international collaboration are paving the way forward. To truly build resilient and adaptive governance systems, it's vital to strengthen institutional capacity and promote inclusivity throughout the country.

V. THEORETICAL REVIEW

The Theory of Adaptive Leadership, crafted by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky in 1994, first came to life in their book, *Leadership without Easy Answers*. Since then, Heifetz has expanded on these ideas in his 2009 work, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. So, what's the gist of this theory? Well,

it draws a clear line between technical problems and adaptive challenges. Technical problems are those that can be tackled with the knowledge and skills we already have. On the other hand, adaptive challenges push us to rethink our priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties they call for learning and innovation that go beyond the usual playbook.

The theory highlights a few key roles for leaders which include:

They need to rally people to face tough challenges that require a shift in mindset and practices. They should promote experimentation and learning, especially when things get uncertain. Instead of trying to control every outcome, they must manage the conflicts and resistance that come with change. They also need to foster collaboration among various stakeholders and levels. At its core, adaptive leadership is all about steering through change in complex environments where quick fixes just won't cut it.

VI. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

Understanding the ins and outs of adaptive leadership and governance in Nigeria's intricate socio-political landscape calls for some serious empirical digging. In this section, we take a look at ten recent studies that dive deep into different aspects of adaptive leadership. We'll explore why adaptability is crucial, how core principles are applied, the challenges that come with it, the potential benefits for society, and the policy frameworks that could drive effective governance reform. Similarly, Agbamu and Ibrahim (2021) tackled the topic in their study, "The Need for Adaptive Leadership in Nigerian Public Governance: A Critical Assessment." They set out to evaluate the increasing demand for adaptive leadership in Nigeria's public sector. Through qualitative interviews with government officials and policy experts, they examined the complexities and unpredictability of governance processes. Their findings pointed out significant shortcomings in traditional leadership styles when faced with rapid socio-political shifts, ultimately concluding that adaptive leadership is essential for improving flexibility and responsiveness. They suggested that institutional reforms should focus on fostering learning and innovation in governance to better tackle Nigeria's evolving challenges.

On the topic of public participation, Ojo and Adebayo (2020) explored "Public Inclusiveness as a Core Principle of Adaptive Governance: Evidence from Nigerian Local Governments." Their goal was to assess how inclusive practices and stakeholder engagement fit into the principles of adaptive governance at the local level. Using a mix of methods surveys of local communities and interviews with local government officials they found that while participatory governance is still somewhat limited, certain Nigerian states have started to embrace innovative reforms that boost inclusivity. They recommended enhancing participatory mechanisms and building capacity within local governments to strengthen adaptive governance. In their exploration of institutional challenges, Eze and Umeh (2019) set out to pinpoint the structural hurdles that are holding back adaptive governance in Nigeria's federal system, as detailed in their work "Institutional Barriers to Adaptive Leadership in Nigeria's Federal System." They conducted case studies across various Nigerian states and analyzed documents to reveal that bureaucratic inertia and overlapping agency responsibilities are significant barriers. Their findings highlighted the urgent need for institutional reform and clearer role definitions to enable more adaptive responses. They suggested that streamlining bureaucratic processes and encouraging cooperation between agencies could help break down these structural obstacles.

On the political front, Chukwu (2022) examined the "Political Challenges in Implementing Adaptive Leadership: A Study of Nigerian Democratic Transitions," aiming to understand how electoral instability and partisan politics impede governance adaptability. Through a longitudinal analysis of governance reforms and interviews with political figures, the study revealed that political cycles often disrupt the continuity of reforms due to resistance from elites. Chukwu recommended fostering bipartisan agreement and establishing institutional safeguards to ensure that adaptive reforms can endure through political changes. Shifting focus to governance outcomes, Nkwocha and Alozie (2023) carried out a nationwide survey, presented in "Adaptive Leadership and Public Trust: Survey Evidence from Nigerian Citizens," to investigate how adaptive governance affects public trust in government. Their empirical findings indicated a strong positive link between government transparency, citizen engagement, and levels of trust.

The authors advocated for policies that promote transparency and regular consultations with stakeholders to bolster public confidence in governance.

In their work “Eradicating Corruption through Adaptive Leadership: An Empirical Review of Nigerian Governance Reforms,” Bello and Lawal (2021) took a deep dive into how adaptive leadership can tackle corruption. By analyzing policies and conducting interviews with anti-corruption agencies, they discovered that when adaptive reforms are paired with accountability measures, there are notable improvements in anti-corruption efforts in certain states. They strongly recommended that these adaptive strategies, along with tech tools, be more widely embraced to boost accountability and curb corruption. Shifting gears to innovation, Salihu and Yusuf (2020) examined “Innovation and Adaptive Reforms in Nigerian Public Sector: Case of Digital Governance.” Their goal was to understand how digital technologies can support adaptive governance reforms. Through a case study of initiatives like the Treasury Single Account (TSA), they found that while digitalization has enhanced flexibility and transparency, challenges like infrastructure and capacity gaps still hold back its full potential. They suggested that investing in ICT infrastructure and training staff is crucial to fully harness the benefits of digital governance.

On the socio-economic front, Adamu and Enwere (2024) looked into “Poverty Reduction and Adaptive Governance: Evidence from Community-driven Development Projects in Nigeria.” Their aim was to see how adaptive governance influences poverty reduction. Using a mix of project evaluations and interviews with beneficiaries, they concluded that governance approaches that are adaptive and inclusive at the local level significantly boost poverty reduction efforts. Their recommendations highlighted the need to strengthen community capacities and decentralize governance to enhance adaptability and inclusiveness at the grassroots level..

In the realm of policy analysis, Okorie (2023) took a deep dive into “Challenges and Opportunities in Policy Frameworks for Adaptive Governance in Nigeria.” The goal was to figure out how current policies either support or obstruct adaptive leadership. By analyzing both federal and state governance policies, the study pinpointed major

hurdles like incoherence and a lack of clear implementation guidelines. To tackle these issues, the paper suggested that policy frameworks should be harmonized and that clear roadmaps for implementing adaptive governance need to be developed.

On a similar note, Ezeani and Olatunji (2019) explored “A Roadmap for Institutionalizing Adaptive Leadership: Lessons from Nigeria’s Public Sector Reforms.” Their aim was to put forward practical strategies for embedding adaptive leadership principles. Through comparative analysis and expert panels, they highlighted the importance of comprehensive capacity building, decentralized decision-making, and ongoing collaboration with stakeholders as essential for making adaptive governance a reality. Together, these studies paint a picture of Nigeria’s governance landscape, which desperately needs adaptive leadership to navigate its complexities and challenges. However, the application of such leadership is inconsistent, hampered by institutional, political, and infrastructural barriers. Still, the evidence from various reforms, innovations, and civic engagement points to promising opportunities for adaptive governance to enhance transparency, build trust, reduces poverty, and combat corruption. The empirical research lays the groundwork for targeted policy recommendations aimed at fostering a more adaptive, inclusive, and effective governance system in Nigeria..

VII. SUMMARY OF THE REVIEWED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH GAP

The role of adaptive leadership in tackling Nigeria’s complex governance challenges is crucial. Scholars like Agbamu and Ibrahim (2021) emphasize the urgent need for building adaptive leadership skills to effectively address the country’s shifting security, economic, and political landscapes. Research from both local and federal governance (Ojo & Adebayo, 2020; Salihu & Yusuf, 2020) indicates that while concepts such as public inclusiveness and stakeholder engagement are gaining traction, their implementation is often inconsistent and fragmented.

Various structural and institutional hurdles like bureaucratic inertia and overlapping authorities along with political factors, including resistance from elites and electoral instability, significantly hinder the

adoption of adaptive leadership (Chukwu, 2022; Eze & Umeh, 2019; Okorie, 2023). On a brighter note, adaptive governance has shown promise in building public trust, reducing poverty, enhancing transparency, and fighting corruption, especially when paired with civic activism and digital innovations (Nkwocha & Alozie, 2023; Bello & Lawal, 2021; Adamu & Enwere, 2024). Additionally, there are strong calls for bolstering policy frameworks and building institutions, which underscores the need for coherent governance strategies that are specifically tailored to Nigeria's unique context (Okorie, 2023; Ezeani & Olatunji, 2019). However, many of these studies tend to be narrow in focus, lack long-term insights, or fail to adequately consider the political economy and cultural nuances that shape governance in Nigeria.

From the review there are some valuable insights, there are still significant gaps that hinder a full understanding of adaptive leadership and governance in Nigeria. There aren't enough studies that take a comprehensive look at how adaptive leadership functions and interacts across federal, state, and local government levels. Only a handful of studies examine the medium- or long-term effects of adaptive leadership practices on governance outcomes, such as accountability and poverty reduction. There is need to dive deeper into the complex roles that political leaders and power structures play in either facilitating or hindering adaptive governance. Although the study recognize the existence of policy gaps, the underlying mechanisms and socio-political factors that lead to implementation failures haven't been thoroughly explored. Lastly, the theories and models of adaptive leadership often don't take into account Nigeria's unique socio-cultural, ethnic, and political contexts, which limits their effectiveness in explaining the situation.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive research design through primary sources. The data from primary sources include the structured questions. The study administered survey questionnaires to both citizens and officials, concentrating on their views regarding leadership inclusivity, the effectiveness of governance, and public trust. Additionally, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with key informants to delve into their experiences with adaptive governance, political barriers, and institutional challenges. Also, the study performed document analysis on relevant policy papers, reform reports, and governance frameworks. The research is set within Nigeria's federal framework, drawing on examples from the federal government, selected state governments like Lagos and Kaduna, and local government areas that are recognized for their innovative governance or notable challenges. The population of the study consists of 500 individuals, including public officials, political leaders, civil servants, community leaders, and citizens who are actively involved in governance processes. These set of individuals occupying knowledgeable positions formed the population for the study. A stratified random sampling method was used to select 100 public officials as the sample size across different tiers. For quantitative data, we utilized descriptive statistics to address the research questions and regression analysis to test our hypotheses. For qualitative data, we employed thematic analysis to uncover recurring themes related to the challenges and opportunities of adaptive leadership.

IX. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Demographic Information of Respondents

We gathered demographic data from our respondents to give a clearer picture of our sample. In total, we received 100 valid responses from public officials, chosen through stratified random sampling across federal, state, and local government levels. The key variables we looked at included gender, age, position, years of service, and sectoral engagement.

Table 1 Demographic Information

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	63	63%
	Female	37	37%
Age	25–34	22	22%
	35–44	45	45%
	45–54	25	25%

Role	55 years and above	8	8%
	Civil Servants	40	40%
	Political Leaders	25	25%
	Community Leaders	15	15%
	Policy Experts	20	20%
Years of Service	0–5 yrs	18	18%
	6–10 yrs	30	30%
	11–20 yrs	32	32%
	21+ yrs	20	20%

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents, providing insights into gender, age, professional role, and years of service. The sample comprised 63% males and 37% females, indicating a male-dominated respondent pool. The age distribution shows that the majority (45%) were between 35–44 years, followed by 25% aged 45–54, 22% aged 25–34, and only 8% aged 55 and above. Regarding professional roles, civil servants formed the largest group (40%), followed by political leaders (25%), policy experts (20%), and community leaders (15%). In terms of years of service, the majority had

11–20 years of experience (32%), with 30% having served 6–10 years, 20% over 21 years, and 18% with 0–5 years of service. This distribution suggests a well-experienced and professionally diverse sample, enhancing the reliability and depth of the study's findings.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the level of need for the applicability of adaptive leadership in Nigerian public governance?

Table 2 There's a need for adaptive leadership

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	55	55%
Agree	30	30%
Neutral	10	10%
Disagree	3	3%
Strongly Disagree	2	2%
Total	100	100%

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

The results in Table 2 show that an overwhelming majority of respondents believe adaptive leadership is needed in Nigerian public governance. Specifically, 85% (55% strongly agree and 30% agree) affirmed the need for adaptive leadership, while only 5% (3% disagree and 2% strongly disagree) opposed it, and 10% remained neutral. This indicates a strong consensus that adaptive leadership is highly relevant and essential for addressing

governance challenges in Nigeria, reflecting widespread recognition of its potential to improve flexibility, responsiveness, and problem-solving in the public sector.

Research Question 2: What is the level of application of adaptive leadership principles in Nigeria's governance (public inclusiveness, stakeholder engagement, and reforms)?

Table 3 Application of Adaptive Leadership Principles

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	10	10%
Agree	22	22%
Neutral	15	15%
Disagree	30	30%

Strongly Disagree	23	23%
Total	100	100%

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

The findings reveal that the application of adaptive leadership principles in Nigeria's governance is relatively low. Only 32% of respondents (10% strongly agree and 22% agree) acknowledged that such principles are being applied, while a larger proportion, 53% (30% disagree and 23% strongly disagree), felt they are not being implemented. Additionally, 15% remained neutral, suggesting some uncertainty. Overall, this indicates that

although the need for adaptive leadership in governance is widely recognized, its practical application in areas like public inclusiveness, stakeholder engagement, and reforms is still limited and faces significant challenges.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges mitigating the application of adaptive leadership?

Table 4 Perceived Challenges to Adaptive Leadership

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	40	40%
Agree	38	38%
Neutral	10	10%
Disagree	7	7%
Strongly Disagree	5	5%
Total	100	100%

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

The results indicate that there is a strong consensus that significant challenges hinder the application of adaptive leadership in Nigeria. A combined 78% of respondents (40% strongly agree and 38% agree) affirmed the existence of such challenges, while only 12% (7% disagree and 5% strongly disagree) downplayed their impact, and 10% remained neutral. This suggests that although adaptive leadership is considered vital for governance, its effective

implementation is constrained by substantial obstacles likely including institutional weaknesses, resistance to change, limited capacity, and entrenched leadership practices.

Research Question 4: What is the potential of adaptive leadership to foster public trust, reduce poverty, enhance accountability, and eradicate corruption?

Table 5 Perceived Potential of Adaptive Leadership

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	45	45%
Agree	33	33%
Neutral	10	10%
Disagree	8	8%
Strongly Disagree	4	4%
Total	100	100%

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

The data in Table 5 illustrates respondents' perceptions of the potential of adaptive leadership to foster public trust, reduce poverty, enhance accountability, and eradicate corruption. A significant majority of participants expressed positive views, with 45% strongly agreeing and 33% agreeing amounting to a combined 78% endorsement of adaptive leadership's potential to drive these

positive societal outcomes. Meanwhile, 10% remained neutral, indicating uncertainty or ambivalence, and only a minority expressed dissenting views, with 8% disagreeing and 4% strongly disagreeing. These findings suggest a broadly favorable perception of adaptive leadership among respondents, highlighting its perceived

effectiveness as a transformative governance approach.

Hypotheses Testing Using Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 1: The need for adaptive leadership in Nigerian public governance is considered to be low.

Table 6 Need for Adaptive Leadership

Variable	Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	R ²
Need for Adaptive Leadership	0.68	8.50	0.000	0.462

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Table 6 presents the regression analysis results assessing the need for adaptive leadership. The coefficient (β) value of 0.68 indicates a strong positive relationship between the independent variable and the perceived need for adaptive leadership. The t-value of 8.50, coupled with a highly significant p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$), confirms that this relationship is statistically significant. Furthermore, the R² value of 0.462 suggests that approximately 46.2% of the variance in the need for

adaptive leadership can be explained by the model. These results collectively underscore a substantial and statistically significant demand for adaptive leadership within the context studied. Hence, hypothesis one is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: Application of adaptive leadership principles in Nigeria's governance is currently quite low.

Table 7: Application of Adaptive Leadership

Variable	Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	R ²
Application of Adaptive Leadership	0.42	4.92	0.001	0.332

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

The results indicate that the application of adaptive leadership principles in Nigeria's governance is significantly low, as evidenced by the positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.42$) and a highly significant p-value ($p = 0.001$). The t-value of 4.92 further supports the strength of this relationship. The R-squared value of 0.332 suggests that approximately 33.2% of the variation in the application of adaptive leadership can be explained by the variables included in the model.

Overall, these findings imply that there is a meaningful but currently limited application of adaptive leadership principles within Nigeria's governance context. Hence, hypothesis two is rejected.

Hypothesis 3: There aren't any major obstacles hindering the use of adaptive leadership.

Table 8: Institutional & Political Challenges

Variable	Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	R ²
Institutional & Political Challenges	-0.51	-6.10	0.000	0.410

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

The results reveal a significant negative relationship between institutional and political challenges and the use of adaptive leadership, with a coefficient (β) of -0.51 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating high statistical significance. The t-value of -6.10 further confirms the strength of this relationship. The R-squared value of 0.410 suggests that about 41.0% of the variability in the use of adaptive leadership is explained by these challenges. These findings imply that institutional and political obstacles are substantial barriers to the

adoption of adaptive leadership in Nigeria, contradicting the hypothesis that there are no major obstacles hindering its use. The negative and significant relationship indicates that there are indeed considerable challenges present. Therefore, hypothesis three is rejected.

Hypothesis 4: It appears that adaptive leadership doesn't significantly contribute to building public trust, reducing poverty, ensuring accountability, or eliminating corruption.

Table 9: Reform Potential of Adaptive Leadership

Variable	Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	R ²
Reform Potential of Adaptive Leadership	0.74	9.11	0.000	0.525

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

The results in Table 9 indicate that the reform potential of adaptive leadership has a strong and statistically significant positive relationship with the outcome variable, as evidenced by a high coefficient ($\beta = 0.74$) and a t-value of 9.11, with a p-value of 0.000. This suggests that increases in adaptive leadership are associated with substantial improvements in reform potential. Furthermore, the R² value of 0.525 indicates that approximately 52.5% of the variance in reform potential can be explained by adaptive leadership, highlighting its considerable influence. However, this does not necessarily imply that adaptive leadership significantly impacts other critical areas such as public trust, poverty reduction, accountability, or corruption elimination, as hypothesized. This shows a strong and significant positive impact, accounting for over 52% of the variance.

X. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study aligns with the work of Heifetz et al. (2009), who pointed out that adaptive leadership is essential in complex socio-political settings. In Nigeria, where governance is plagued by corruption, exclusion, and weak institutions, we need a leadership style that prioritizes learning, collaboration, and adaptability (Adebayo, 2019). The 85% agreement rate supports findings from Ezeani (2020), which showed that Nigerian public officials are aware of the pressing need for transformative leadership. Similarly, the low score for implementation (only 32% agreement) reflects certain stagnation in governance. Even with all the talk of reform, the reality is that practices remain largely top-down and based on patronage. As noted by Agbaje and Roberts (2021), many public officials lack the motivation and the necessary institutional support to adopt adaptive leadership. This highlights the “implementation gap” that’s often seen in Nigeria’s public sector reforms.

The regression results pointed to some significant institutional and political hurdles. Insights from interviews also brought to light: The influence of patronage and elite control, echoing the findings of Olowu and Sako (2002). Bureaucracies that are rigid and resistant to change and innovation is needed.

Political meddling that undermines leadership autonomy. These challenges reflect the situation seen in Nigeria’s 2009 Civil Service Reform failure (Ejumudo, 2018), where political influences and a lack of support derailed the intended reforms. Lastly, one of the most striking discoveries is the promise of adaptive leadership to: Boost public trust (Bamidele & Eze, 2020). Foster a culture of accountability and high performance. Tackle poverty and inequality through inclusive policies. This aligns with global case studies: Rwanda’s reconstruction after the genocide highlighted the importance of adaptive leadership, engaging stakeholders, and reforming institutions (Chemouni, 2018). Singapore’s remarkable transformation under Lee Kuan Yew, where adaptive leadership and institutional reforms paved the way for inclusive growth (Quah, 2013).

XI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study delved into how adaptive leadership can be applied within Nigerian public governance. It highlighted the importance of adopting this approach, assessed how it's currently being used, identified the challenges faced, and explored its potential to build public trust, alleviate poverty, and fight corruption. The study wraps up by pointing out that, although there's a strong belief in the need for adaptive leadership in Nigeria, putting it into practice is still quite limited. This is mainly due to deep-rooted institutional and political hurdles. Still, many recognize the powerful role adaptive leadership could play in tackling ongoing governance issues. For Nigeria to truly move forward towards a more inclusive and accountable governance system, it's essential to develop targeted strategies that can break down these barriers and integrate adaptive leadership into the governance framework.

The study recommends that:

- i. It's essential to restructure government institutions to foster flexibility, innovation, and responsiveness key traits of adaptive leadership.
- ii. Public sector leaders and civil servants should receive training in adaptive leadership principles to encourage proactive and inclusive governance.

- iii. We need to revise policy frameworks to embed adaptive governance practices and minimize bureaucratic resistance to change.
- iv. There is need to create formal channels for civic engagement and participation in policy decision-making at every level.
- v. Political leaders should show their commitment to reform by breaking down patronage systems, promoting transparency, and leading by example.

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