

Professional Culture as a Bridge: Examining Community Support, Diversity and School Leadership in Collegial Relationships Between Social Studies Teachers

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∞ This study examines how school leadership, diversity and community support shape collegial relationships between social studies teachers in Delta State, Nigeria, with professional culture as a mediating factor. Drawing on data from 500 teachers across public, private and faith-based schools, the study employs a correlational design and mediation analysis to reveal three key findings: (1) school leadership is the strongest predictor of collegiality, both directly and indirectly through professional culture; (2) diversity enhances collegial relationships primarily by fostering an inclusive professional culture; and (3) community support plays a modest, indirect role. The study's novel contribution lies in demonstrating how Nigeria's unique educational context – marked by resource constraints and ethnolinguistic diversity – amplifies the mediating role of professional culture. Practically, the findings suggest that interventions targeting transformational leadership and inclusive practices can significantly strengthen teacher collaboration, even in resource-limited settings. For policymakers, the results underscore the need to prioritise leadership development and cultural competency training in order to improve educational outcomes. By bridging organisational and interpersonal factors, the research offers a framework for enhancing collegiality in similar multicultural education systems.

Keywords: community support, diversity and inclusion, professional culture, school leadership, collegial relationships, social studies teachers, educational collaboration

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Profesionalna kultura kot most: preučevanje podpore skupnosti, raznolikosti in vodenja šol v kolegialnih odnosih med učitelji družboslovja

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≈ Ta študija preučuje, kako vodenje šole, raznolikost in podpora skupnosti oblikujejo kolegialne odnose med učitelji družboslovja v zvezni državi Delta v Nigeriji, pri čemer profesionalna kultura deluje kot posredniški dejavnik. Na podlagi podatkov 500 učiteljev iz javnih, zasebnih in iz verskih šol smo v študiji uporabili korelacijski načrt in mediacijsko analizo, oblikovali pa smo tri ključne ugotovitve: 1) vodenje šole je najmočnejši napovednik kolegialnosti – neposredno in posredno prek profesionalne kulture; 2) raznolikost izboljšuje kolegialne odnose, predvsem s spodbujanjem inkluzivne profesionalne kulture; 3) podpora skupnosti ima skromno, posredno vlogo. Novost študije je v prikazu, kako edinstveni izobraževalni kontekst Nigerije, zaznamovan z omejenimi viri in etnolingvistično raznolikostjo, krepi posredniško vlogo profesionalne kulture. V praksi ugotovitve kažejo, da lahko ukrepi, usmerjeni v transformativno vodenje in inkluzivne prakse, znatno okrepijo sodelovanje učiteljev, tudi v okoljih z omejenimi viri. Za oblikovalce politik izsledki poudarjajo potrebo po prednostni obravnavi razvoja vodstvenih sposobnosti in usposabljanja za kulturno kompetenco, da bi se izboljšali izobraževalni dosežki. Z združevanjem organizacijskih in medosebnih dejavnikov raziskava ponuja okvir za izboljšanje kolegialnosti v podobnih večkulturnih izobraževalnih sistemih.

Ključne besede: podpora skupnosti, raznolikost in inkluzija, profesionalna kultura, vodenje šole, kolegialni odnosi, učitelji družboslovja, izobraževalno sodelovanje

Introduction

Establishing collegial ties between educators is essential to fostering a cooperative and productive learning environment. These connections improve student outcomes, promote the exchange of best practices and increase professional satisfaction (Şimşek et al., 2021; Wang, 2014). Since social studies is an interdisciplinary and dynamic subject that necessitates collaboration and common teaching approaches, teachers need to cultivate collegiality (Ossai & Alordiah, 2024; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Howell, 2015). The present study focuses on how school leadership, diversity and inclusion, professional culture, and community support and involvement all play interrelated roles in fostering collegial relationships between social studies teachers in Delta State, Nigeria. Collegial relationships are defined as professional interactions between teachers characterised by trust, mutual support and shared responsibilities (Wang, 2016). Diversity refers to the inclusion and appreciation of differences in ethnicity, religion, gender and professional backgrounds (Altinkaş, 2023). Professional culture encompasses the shared norms, values and practices that guide collaboration and communication between educators (Gelman, 2022; Ivon & Kuscevic, 2013). In Delta State, Nigeria, social studies teachers face unique challenges, including limited access to professional development opportunities and diverse classroom demographics influenced by ethnic and cultural complexities (Aliu & Kaçaniku, 2023; Birabil & Nwadibia, 2023; Muhammad, 2023; Okobia, 2013). These factors underline the importance of fostering collegial relationships in order to address shared challenges and promote collaborative teaching practices.

The importance of collaborative practices in promoting successful teaching, job satisfaction and enhanced student outcomes is emphasised in the literature on collegial ties between educators. Even though collegiality is generally accepted as a fundamental component of professional behaviour in education, research on its causes and mediating factors is still ongoing (Wang, 2014). Support from the community has long been seen as essential to successful education. Research highlights the fact that a positive school atmosphere is created via the active participation of parents, neighbourhood associations and other stakeholders. This in turn promotes teacher collaboration and morale (Gray et al., 2016). Researchers have discovered that teachers are more likely to feel appreciated and motivated when they sense significant community support, which fosters a collegial atmosphere (Alordiah, 2018; Liu, 2020; Vanblaere, 2016). In poor nations like Nigeria, community support frequently takes several forms, such as monetary gifts, donation of resources and moral support (Wang, 2016). Studies on its direct effect on collegial relationships, however,

have produced conflicting findings, indicating that its effects may be indirect and mediated through other factors like professional culture or school atmosphere (Ojeleye et al., 2023; Ismail et al., 2019).

A range of experiences, viewpoints and cultural insights brought about by diversity in the educational workforce can enhance teacher relationships. Diversity encourages inclusivity and creativity, which helps teachers work together to solve challenging problems in the classroom. However, unmanaged diversity can result in conflicts and miscommunications, underscoring the necessity of capable leadership and a positive workplace culture (Knežević, 2024; Kalkan et al., 2019). When diversity is combined with inclusive behaviours and honest communication, team effectiveness increases (Musadad et al., 2022). Diversity is a special factor in forming collegial dynamics in Nigeria, as it encompasses not just ethnicity and religion but also language and professional distinctions (Miled, 2019). Despite its significance, little is known about how diversity fosters collegial connections, especially when it comes to how it interacts with other elements like professional culture and leadership.

Possibly the most well-researched indicator of collegial relationships is school leadership. In order to foster strong professional relationships between teachers, leaders must establish clear goals, cultivate an atmosphere of trust and encourage open communication (Carpenter, 2015). Enhanced teacher collaboration and collective efficacy have been linked to transformational leadership in particular (Schipper et al., 2019). Studies conducted in Nigeria have shown how crucial leadership is in tackling issues like teacher motivation and resource limitations. These studies highlight how school administrators foster professional collaboration by resolving conflicts, fostering teamwork and advancing shared values. However, more research is necessary to fully understand how leadership affects collegial interactions, particularly with regard to the mediating function of professional culture (Woods, 2018; Musadad et al., 2022).

The common standards, beliefs and behaviours that characterise how educators communicate, work together and carry out their professional responsibilities are collectively referred to as professional culture (Szeto, 2020). Collegial relationships require trust, mutual respect and a sense of shared responsibility, all of which are fostered by a strong professional culture. According to research, student achievement and teacher collaboration are greater in schools with a positive professional culture (Parlar et al., 2017). Additionally, professional culture serves as a mediating variable, establishing a connection between teacher outcomes and more general organisational elements like community support and leadership (Kavenuke & Kihwele, 2024). One study, for example, discovered that transformative leadership has a greater effect on teacher collaboration and morale when it

is accompanied by a supportive professional culture. Similarly, by encouraging inclusivity and common goals, professional culture reduces the likelihood of conflict in heterogeneous environments (Wang, 2016).

Numerous studies have investigated how professional culture, diversity, school leadership and community support interact. Some studies contend that by integrating these factors into a unified workplace culture, leadership enhances the benefits of diversity and community support. Studies also emphasise that schools with inclusive policies and close relationships with the community typically have more collaborative and collegial teachers (Carpenter, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016). Studies in Nigeria have highlighted the influence of community support on teacher morale and collaboration, emphasising the need for strong professional cultures in resource-constrained environments (Khalifa et al., 2016). Similarly, Lambrecht et al. (2020) underscore the role of transformational leadership in fostering collegial ties in culturally diverse schools. Despite these realisations, very little research has been done on these factors taken together, especially in the Nigerian setting. This is a crucial field of study due to the intricate interactions between institutional, social and cultural elements. A more thorough foundation for enhancing teacher collaboration and job satisfaction may be offered by comprehending how these factors combine to affect collegial relationships. Literature now in publication emphasises the role of crucial school leadership, diversity, professional culture and community support in fostering collegial relationships between educators. Although each component has been examined separately, their combined impacts, as well as the mediating function of professional culture, still needs be investigated. By examining the impact of these factors on collegial relationships between social studies teachers in Delta State, Nigeria, the present study fills these gaps, offering a comprehensive picture of the dynamics at work. The study specifically targets social studies teachers due to the interdisciplinary and dynamic nature of the subject, which necessitates collaboration and shared teaching strategies. Social studies encompasses diverse topics such as history, geography, government and citizenship education, requiring educators to work closely together to design effective interdisciplinary instructional approaches. Moreover, in the Nigerian context, social studies serves as a critical tool for fostering unity and addressing the challenges of a multicultural society. By focusing on social studies teachers, the study aims to explore how collegial relationships can be enhanced to address the unique challenges of delivering a subject that inherently promotes collaboration and understanding in diverse classrooms. This focus provides a deeper insight into the interplay of community support, diversity, school leadership and professional culture within a specific yet impactful educational domain.

The Nigerian education system is characterised by significant regional disparities, resource constraints and varying levels of teacher preparedness. Social studies teachers, like their counterparts in other disciplines, often face challenges stemming from inadequate infrastructure, large class sizes and limited access to teaching materials (Birabil & Nwadibia, 2023). Teacher education in Nigeria typically involves obtaining a National Certificate of Education (NCE) or a bachelor's degree in education, followed by mandatory registration with the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN). However, professional development opportunities remain uneven, with rural areas particularly underserved (Okobia, 2013; Muhammad, 2023).

Working conditions for teachers in Nigeria are further complicated by socioeconomic factors, including delayed salaries in some public schools and reliance on community support for basic resources (Aliu & Kaçaniku, 2023). Faith-based and private schools often operate with greater autonomy, but they face their own challenges, such as funding instability and parental expectations. These systemic issues underscore the importance of collegial relationships and professional culture as mechanisms for mitigating isolation and fostering resilience among teachers. By examining these dynamics, the present study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how collaboration can thrive despite structural constraints.

The study is grounded in two key theoretical frameworks: social exchange theory and transformational leadership theory. Social exchange theory posits that relationships are governed by principles of reciprocity, where individuals engage in exchanges that are built on trust, mutual support and the expectation of fair treatment. In the context of education, this theory suggests that when teachers perceive support from their community, leaders and colleagues, they are more likely to reciprocate by exhibiting discretionary behaviours that contribute to organisational effectiveness. Such behaviours, referred to as organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), are not formally mandated but are critical for fostering a collaborative and thriving school environment. The present study leverages this theory to understand how external factors, such as community support and diversity, influence teachers' willingness to contribute beyond their formal roles (Sun & Sun, 2024; Ahmed et al., 2023; Deng et al., 2020). Transformational leadership theory (Avolio & Bass, 1994) underpins the analysis of the role of leadership in shaping professional culture and collegiality within schools. This theory emphasises the ability of leaders to inspire and motivate their teams by articulating a compelling vision, fostering trust and creating an inclusive and empowering environment. Transformational leaders build strong professional cultures by encouraging innovation, recognising individual contributions and promoting

collective goals. In the present study, the theory is applied to explore how effective leadership not only directly influences OCB, but also indirectly enhances it by cultivating a professional culture that values collaboration, trust and shared purpose (Lamčja, 2024; Peng et al., 2020).

Even though these elements are becoming more widely acknowledged, very little research has been done on how they interact to affect collegial relationships, particularly in Nigeria. Studying the dynamics of these interactions among social studies teachers is made possible by the cultural and educational diversity of Delta State (Anwar et al., 2024). By investigating the ways in which school leadership, professional culture, diversity and inclusion, and community support and involvement all contribute to collegial relationships, the present study seeks to close this gap. Teachers, school officials and legislators can all benefit from the study's practical conclusions. Stakeholders may put initiatives into place to promote collaborative settings that strengthen teacher relationships and increase educational outcomes by comprehending how these elements interact. By offering insights into the distinctive dynamics of social studies teachers in Delta State, Nigeria, the study adds to the expanding corpus of literature on teacher collaboration.

Despite growing recognition that collegial relationships are vital for teacher effectiveness, little is known about how school leadership, diversity and community support interact to foster these relationships in Nigeria's resource-constrained, culturally diverse schools. Existing studies predominantly examine these factors in isolation, leaving a critical gap in understanding their combined effects, particularly through the mediating role of professional culture. The present study addresses three key questions:

1. To what extent do school leadership, diversity and community support predict collegial relationships between social studies teachers in Delta State?
2. How does professional culture mediate these relationships?
3. What contextual factors shape these dynamics in Nigerian schools?

Method

In order to investigate the connections between school leadership, diversity, professional culture, collegial relationships and community support, the study used a correlational research approach. With professional culture acting as a mediating variable, the design was selected to determine the direct and indirect effects of the predictor factors (diversity, school leadership and community support) on collegial relationships. A structured questionnaire was

used to gather data from the participants using a quantitative method. This work is part of a major study investigating how school leadership, diversity and community support interact to shape professional culture and collegial relationships in schools. It aims to develop and validate a theoretical model that explains the direct and indirect pathways through which these organisational factors influence internal collaboration and overall school effectiveness.

Participants

Using a multistage sampling procedure, 500 social studies teachers from Delta State, Nigeria, made up the study sample. In order to guarantee representation across various institutional types, the first step was to divide schools into public, private and faith-based groups. Teachers from primary, secondary and tertiary institutions within each stratum were chosen in the second stage using simple random sampling. The respondents' demographic profile shows a gender distribution that is biased in favour of women, who make up 61.4% (307 respondents) of the sample, while men make up 38.6% (193 respondents). Public schools account for the majority of the respondents' employment type (66.8%, 334 respondents), followed by private schools (30%, 150 respondents) and faith-based schools (3.2%, 16 respondents). With regard to the school level, 58.4% (292 respondents) of the respondents are associated with secondary schools. Teachers from tertiary institutions make up a minority at 11.4% (57 respondents), whereas primary school teachers make up 30.2% (151 respondents).

Instrument

The questionnaire was developed through an extensive literature review of existing studies on school leadership, professional culture and collegial relationships. Based on this review, we generated original items that capture key dimensions of these constructs while being specifically relevant to the Nigerian educational context. The initial item pool was refined through discussions with five experts in educational research and Nigerian school administration, who evaluated the items for content validity and cultural appropriateness. Following their feedback, we adjusted the wording and removed ambiguous items. The final instrument contained 35 items divided equally across five constructs: community support, diversity and inclusion, professional culture, school leadership and collegial relationships.

Each construct was measured on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 denoting strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral,

somewhat agree, agree and strongly agree, respectively. The subscales are as follows:

- Community Support and Involvement (7 items). This subscale assessed the extent of parental, community and stakeholder engagement in school activities. Sample items included “The community provides moral support to teachers” and “Parents actively participate in school programmes”.
- Diversity and Inclusion (7 items). This subscale measured the inclusivity of diverse perspectives and practices within the school environment. Sample items included “Teachers from diverse backgrounds feel included” and “Cultural differences are respected in decision-making”.
- Professional Culture (7 items). This subscale captured the shared norms, values and collaborative practices among teachers. Sample items included “Teachers openly share ideas and strategies” and “There is mutual respect among staff members”.
- School Leadership (7 items). This subscale evaluated the leadership style and practices of school administrators. Sample items included “School leaders foster collaboration among teachers” and “The leadership encourages professional development”.
- Collegial Relationships (7 items). This subscale assessed the quality of interpersonal relationships and collaboration between teachers. Sample items included “Teachers support each other in achieving common goals” and “There is a high level of trust among staff members”.
- Experts in educational research validated the questionnaire, and a pilot study confirmed its reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values for the subscales ranging from 0.82 to 0.89.

Design

Data collection was undertaken in October 2024 over a period of approximately four weeks. After obtaining approval from school officials, the researcher distributed paper-written copies of the surveys to the participants during staff briefings or planned meetings. The goal of the study was explained to the respondents, who received comprehensive instructions on how to fill out the questionnaire. After completing the anonymous questionnaire, the participants sent it back to the researcher either right away or within a week. Some 500 of the 520 distributed questionnaires were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 96.2%.

In order to protect the participants’ rights and welfare, the study complied with ethical research guidelines and was approved by the ethical research

board of the University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria. All of the participants gave their informed consent and data anonymisation ensured confidentiality. The researcher ensured that all information was stored safely and utilised only for scholarly studies.

Data Analysis

The demographic features of the subjects were compiled using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations and frequencies). In order to investigate the connections between the variables and evaluate the mediating function of professional culture, a generalised linear model (GLM) mediation analysis was used. The bootstrapping approach was used to estimate confidence intervals and calculate indirect, direct and total effects. For every analysis, the threshold for statistical significance was established at $p < 0.05$. The results were presented using path coefficients and standardised effect sizes (β), offering a thorough grasp of the interrelated ways that professional culture, diversity, school leadership and community support all influence collegial relationships. SPSS version 25 and Jamovi 2.2.5 software were used for the data analysis.

Results

The results of the study are presented in a structured sequence in order to address the research questions effectively. The findings are organised into mediation analysis, path modelling and correlational analysis. Table 1 presents the mediation model using GLM mediation analysis to explore the mediating role of professional culture between school leadership, community support, diversity and collegial relationships. Figure 1 illustrates the path model of the relationships between the study variables. Table 2 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients between the constructs, while Tables 3–6 report the specific indirect, direct and total effects identified in the mediation analysis, the total effects predating collegial relationship, the prediction of professional culture, and the full model predicting collegial relationship, respectively.

A generalised linear model on the mediating role of professional culture in the relationships between school leadership, diversity, community support and collegial relationships

In order to address the mediating role of professional culture in the relationships between school leadership, diversity, community support and

collegial relationships, a GLM mediation analysis was conducted. This section presents the results of two core models: one predicting professional culture from the three independent variables, and the other predicting collegial relationships from both the independent variables and the mediator. The models provide insights into how each factor contributes both directly and indirectly to fostering collegial relationships between teachers.

Table 1

GLM Mediation Model Information on Professional Culture as a Mediator Between Contextual Factors and Collegial Relationships

Mediators Models	
m1	Professional Culture ~ Community Support + Diversity + School Leadership
Full Model	
m2	Collegial Relationships ~ Professional Culture + Community Support + Diversity + School Leadership
Indirect Effects	
IE 1	Community Support \Rightarrow Professional Culture \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships
IE 2	Diversity \Rightarrow Professional Culture \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships
IE 3	School Leadership \Rightarrow Professional Culture \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships

Table 1 investigates the connections between school leadership, diversity, professional culture, collegial relationships and community support using a GLM mediation approach. The two primary parts of the analysis are indirect effects and mediator models.

There are two models in the first section: Mediator Models. Model 1 (m1) examines the combined effects of the predictors – diversity, school leadership and community support – on professional culture. It demonstrates how these factors combine to create a cooperative and welcoming professional culture in educational institutions. According to Model 2 (m2), which assesses how professional culture mediates the links between predictors and collegial relationships, professional culture is crucial for improving teacher interactions. In order to explain how collegial relationships are influenced, both the direct effects of the predictors and the mediating role of professional culture are taken into consideration.

The second component, indirect effects, identifies three main ways that the variables affect collegial relationships through professional culture. The first indirect consequence, Community Support \rightarrow Professional Culture \rightarrow Collegial connections, emphasises how community support shapes professional culture,

which in turn fortifies teacher-collegial connections. The second indirect effect, Diversity → Professional Culture → Collegial Relationships, shows that diversity positively impacts professional culture, which enhances collegial relationships by fostering inclusivity and collaboration. Effective school leadership enhances professional culture, which in turn enhances collegial relationships, according to the third indirect impact, School Leadership → Professional Culture → Collegial Relationships.

Visualising the Mediating Role of Professional Culture in Collegial Dynamics

In order to visualise the structural relationships and mediating pathways more clearly, a path model was constructed. This diagram graphically illustrates the direct and indirect effects of school leadership, diversity and community support on collegial relationships, mediated through professional culture. It serves to complement the numerical findings by offering a conceptual overview of how the study variables interact.

Figure 1
Path Model

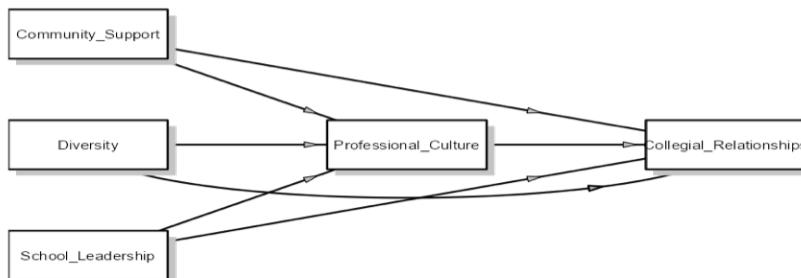


Figure 1 shows a path model that demonstrates the connections between collegial relationships, professional culture, school leadership, diversity and community support. The figure highlights the mediating function of professional culture by giving a visual depiction of the interactions between various variables. The model demonstrates clear links between professional culture and school leadership, diversity and community support, suggesting that these three elements have a major impact on the formation of a professional culture in educational environments. The findings go into more depth regarding these

connections, showing that school leadership and diversity are two factors that significantly predict professional culture.

Collegial connections are linked to professional culture, indicating its mediation function within the broader framework. This implies that the predictors – community support, diversity and school leadership – improve collegial relationships between social studies teachers through the crucial process of cultivating a positive professional culture. Additionally, the design shows clear routes to collegial relationships from school leadership, diversity and community support. The direct benefits of diversity and community support on collegial relationships are less pronounced and less statistically significant than the direct influence of school leadership, which is both substantial and significant. This supports the notion that professional culture is the main way in which these factors affect collegial interactions.

Interrelationships Between School Environment Variables

In order to establish foundational relationships between the key constructs, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed. The correlation analysis provides preliminary evidence of associations between community support, diversity, school leadership, professional culture and collegial relationships. These correlations help to clarify the strength and direction of bivariate relationships prior to mediation and regression analyses.

Table 2
Correlations Between School Environment Variables

		Community Support and Involvement	Diversity and Inclusion	Professional Culture	School Leadership and Organisational Practices	Collegial Relationships
Community Support and Involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.558**	.478**	.418**	.288**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	500	500	500	500	500
Diversity and Inclusion	Pearson Correlation	.558**	1	.612**	.467**	.327**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	500	500	500	500	500

		Community Support and Involvement	Diversity and Inclusion	Professional Culture	School Leadership and Organisational Practices	Collegial Relationships
Professional Culture	Pearson Correlation	.478**	.612**	1	.545**	.408**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	500	500	500	500	500
School Leadership and Organisational Practices	Pearson Correlation	.418**	.467**	.545**	1	.501**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	500	500	500	500	500
Collegial Relationships	Pearson Correlation	.288**	.327**	.408**	.501**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	500	500	500	500	500

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The analysis presented in Table 2 reveals positive correlations between various aspects of a school's environment. Diversity and Inclusion is strongly correlated with Professional Culture, with a coefficient of 0.612, indicating that schools that prioritise diversity and inclusion tend to have a more positive professional culture. Additionally, Diversity and Inclusion is moderately correlated with Community Support and Involvement, with a coefficient of 0.558.

School Leadership and Organisational Practices is also interconnected with other aspects, showing moderate correlations with Professional Culture (0.545), Collegial Relationships (0.501) and Diversity and Inclusion (0.467). Community Support and Involvement is moderately correlated with Professional Culture (0.478) and School Leadership and Organisational Practices (0.418), but has a relatively weaker correlation with Collegial Relationships (0.288). Furthermore, Professional Culture is moderately correlated with Collegial Relationships, with a coefficient of 0.408. These correlations suggest that the different aspects of a school's environment are interconnected, and improvements in one area can have a positive impact on others.

The Indirect Influence of Leadership, Diversity and Community Support on Collegial Relationships

The following mediation analysis examines both the indirect and total effects of school leadership, diversity and community support on collegial relationships, as mediated by professional culture. Table 3 provides estimates of

the magnitude and significance of these effects, revealing the degree to which the influence of each predictor is transmitted through the mediating variable.

Table 3

Quantifying the Indirect Influence of Leadership, Diversity and Community Support on Collegial Relationships

Type	Effect	Estimate	SE	95% C.I. (a)		β	z	p
				Lower	Upper			
Indirect	Community Support \Rightarrow Professional Culture \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships	0.02	0.01	0	0.04	0.02	2.26	0.024
	Diversity \Rightarrow Professional Culture \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.1	0.07	3.01	0.003
	School Leadership \Rightarrow Professional Culture \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.08	0.05	2.96	0.003
Component	Community Support \Rightarrow Professional Culture	0.13	0.04	0.05	0.21	0.13	3.22	0.001
	Professional Culture \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships	0.15	0.05	0.06	0.25	0.17	3.17	0.002
	Diversity \Rightarrow Professional Culture	0.38	0.04	0.3	0.45	0.4	9.62	<.001
	School Leadership \Rightarrow Professional Culture	0.31	0.04	0.23	0.38	0.31	8.13	<.001
Direct	Community Support \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships	0.03	0.05	-0.06	0.12	0.03	0.7	0.483
	Diversity \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships	0.02	0.05	-0.07	0.12	0.03	0.53	0.594
	School Leadership \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships	0.36	0.04	0.27	0.44	0.38	8.19	<.001
Total	Community Support \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships	0.05	0.05	-0.04	0.14	0.05	1.15	0.249
	Diversity \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships	0.08	0.04	0	0.17	0.09	1.92	0.054
	School Leadership \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships	0.41	0.04	0.32	0.49	0.43	9.76	<.001

Notes. Confidence intervals computed with method: Standard (Delta method).

Betas are completely standardised effect sizes.

SE – Standard Error, 95% C.I. – 95% Confidence Interval, β (Beta) – Standardised coefficient,

z – z-score, p – p-value, indicating statistical significance (e.g., $p < 0.05$ is typically significant).

The table explains the findings of the mediation analysis, offering comprehensive insights into how professional culture mediates the indirect, direct and overall effects of diversity, school leadership and community support on collegial relationships. This analysis assesses the strength and importance of each relationship while highlighting the ways in which these variables impact collegial ties.

Indirect Effects

Through professional culture acting as a mediator, the indirect impacts show how school leadership, diversity and community support affect collegial relationships. The findings show the following:

Community Support \Rightarrow Professional Culture \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. With a standard error (SE) of 0.01, the indirect impact estimate for this pathway is 0.02. The effect is statistically significant ($p = 0.02$) and the confidence interval (CI) spans from 0.00 to 0.04. This suggests that by first improving professional culture, community support has a favourable indirect impact on collegial relationships. Despite the relatively moderate effect size ($\beta = 0.02$), it emphasises how community support shapes collegial relationships by enhancing professional culture.

Diversity \Rightarrow Professional Culture \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. With an SE of 0.02, the indirect effect estimate is 0.06. The effect is extremely significant ($p = 0.00$) and the CI spans from 0.02 to 0.10. This implies that, in comparison to community support, diversity has a more indirect impact on collegial relationships. The standardised impact size ($\beta = 0.07$) emphasises how crucial diversity is to fostering an inclusive workplace atmosphere, which in turn strengthens teacher-collegial ties.

School Leadership \Rightarrow Professional Culture \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. This pathway has an indirect impact of 0.05 and an SE of 0.02. The effect is statistically significant ($p = 0.00$) and the CI falls between 0.02 and 0.08. This suggests that by cultivating a strong professional culture, school leadership has a positive impact on collegial relationships. The effect size ($\beta = 0.05$) indicates that school leadership has a significant influence on professional culture, which in turn improves collegial relationships.

Direct Effects

Without taking into account the mediating function of professional culture, the direct impacts measure the connections between collegial ties and the predictors (community support, diversity and school leadership):

Community Support \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. With an SE of 0.05, the direct effect estimate is 0.03. The effect is not significant ($p = 0.48$) and the CI spans from -0.06 to 0.12. This suggests that professional culture is the main way that community support influences collegial relationships rather than directly influencing them.

Diversity \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. With an SE of 0.05, the direct

effect estimate is 0.02. The effect is nonsignificant ($p = 0.59$) and the *CI* spans from -0.07 to 0.12. This implies that diversity primarily influences professional culture indirectly, with little direct impact on collegial relationships.

School Leadership \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. The direct effect estimate is 0.36, with an *SE* of 0.04. The *CI* ranges from 0.27 to 0.44 and the effect is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). This demonstrates that school leadership has a strong and direct positive impact on collegial relationships, independent of professional culture. The standardised effect size ($\beta = 0.38$) indicates that school leadership is a key driver of collegiality among teachers.

Total Effects

The total effects combine the direct and indirect effects to provide an overall measure of the influence of each predictor on collegial relationships:

Community Support \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. With an *SE* of 0.05, the overall effect estimate is 0.05. The effect is not significant ($p = 0.25$) and the *CI* spans from -0.04 to 0.14. This illustrates how community support plays a very small part in forming collegial connections, with professional culture acting as the primary mediating factor.

Diversity \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. The total effect estimate is 0.08, with an *SE* of 0.04. The *CI* ranges from -0.00 to 0.17 and the effect approaches significance ($p = 0.05$). This suggests that diversity has a meaningful influence on collegial relationships, primarily through its indirect pathway via professional culture, although its direct impact remains minimal.

School Leadership \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. The total effect estimate is 0.41, with an *SE* of 0.04. The *CI* ranges from 0.32 to 0.49 and the effect is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The dominant significance of school leadership in cultivating collegial relationships, both directly and indirectly through professional culture, is highlighted by the standardised impact size ($\beta = 0.43$).

Predictors of Collegial Relationships in a Professional Culture Context

In order to further quantify the total impact of each predictor variable on collegial relationships, a regression analysis was performed. This model consolidates both direct and indirect effects to assess the overall contribution of school leadership, diversity and community support in shaping collegial dynamics.

Table 4
Total effects predicting Collegial Relationships

Names	Effect	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	β	df	t	p
Community Support	Community Support	0.05	0.05	-0.04	0.14	0.05	496	1.15	0.251
Diversity	Diversity	0.08	0.04	0.00	0.17	0.09	496	1.92	0.056
School Leadership	School Leadership	0.41	0.04	0.32	0.49	0.43	496	9.73	<0.001

Table 4 describes how school leadership, diversity and community support all affect collegial relationships. A holistic picture of how each predictor affects collegial connections is provided by these total effects, which incorporate both direct and indirect paths.

Community Support \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. The total effect estimate is 0.05, with an SE of 0.05. The confidence interval (CI) ranges from -0.04 to 0.14 and the effect is statistically nonsignificant ($p = 0.25$). This indicates that community support has a limited overall influence on collegial relationships, probably due to its primary reliance on the mediated pathway through professional culture. The effect size ($\beta = 0.05$) further supports its modest role in fostering collegiality.

Diversity \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. With an SE of 0.04, the overall effect estimate is 0.08. The effect is approaching statistical significance ($p = 0.06$), while the CI spans from -0.00 to 0.17. This implies that collegial relationships are significantly impacted by diversity, albeit in a small way. With a weaker direct conduit, its main influence seems to come from its contribution to professional culture.

School Leadership \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. The total effect estimate is 0.41, with an SE of 0.04. The CI ranges from 0.32 to 0.49 and the effect is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The effect size ($\beta = 0.43$) indicates that school leadership has the strongest total influence on collegial relationships. This substantial effect highlights the importance of effective leadership in shaping the professional and interpersonal dynamics between teachers.

Mediator Model: Predicting Professional Culture

This section examines how each of the three independent variables – community support, diversity and school leadership – individually contributes to the development of professional culture. Understanding these influences is

crucial, as professional culture is positioned as the key mediating factor in the theoretical framework of this study.

Table 5
Predicting Professional Culture

Names	Effect	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	β	df	t	p
Community Support	Community Support	0.13	0.04	0.05	0.21	0.13	496	3.2	0.001
Diversity	Diversity	0.38	0.04	0.3	0.45	0.4	496	9.59	<.001
School Leadership	School Leadership	0.31	0.04	0.23	0.38	0.31	496	8.1	<.001

Table 5 presents regression data demonstrating how school leadership, diversity and community support affect professional culture. The importance of these variables in forming the professional culture of educational institutions is shown in this table.

Community Support \Rightarrow Professional Culture. With an *SE* of 0.04, the effect estimate is 0.13. The effect is statistically significant ($p = 0.00$) and the *CI* spans from 0.05 to 0.21. This suggests that, although the effect magnitude is smaller ($\beta = 0.13$), community support has a favourable impact on professional culture. While it is not the best indicator, it implies that encouraging community involvement can help build a stronger workplace culture.

Diversity \Rightarrow Professional Culture. With an *SE* of 0.04, the effect estimate is 0.38. The effect is extremely significant ($p < 0.001$) and the *CI* spans from 0.30 to 0.45. The significant effect size ($\beta = 0.40$) suggests that diversity is essential in forming workplace culture. This research emphasises how crucial diversity programmes are to creating a welcoming and cooperative workplace.

School Leadership \Rightarrow Professional Culture. The effect estimate is 0.31, with an *SE* of 0.04. The *CI* ranges from 0.23 to 0.38 and the effect is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The standardised effect size ($\beta = 0.31$) demonstrates that school leadership significantly contributes to the development of professional culture. This reinforces the importance of leadership practices in establishing a cohesive and supportive professional environment.

Full Model Predicting Collegial Relationships

A comprehensive model was estimated to determine the combined and direct effects of school leadership, community support, diversity and

professional culture on collegial relationships. This final model provides a holistic view of the predictors' relative influence and affirms the mediating role of professional culture.

Table 6

Full Model Predicting Collegial Relationships

Names	Effect	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	β	df	t	p
Professional Culture	Professional Culture	0.15	0.05	0.06	0.25	0.17	495	3.16	0.002
Community Support	Community Support	0.03	0.05	-0.06	0.12	0.03	495	0.7	0.485
Diversity	Diversity	0.02	0.05	-0.07	0.12	0.03	495	0.53	0.596
School Leadership	School Leadership	0.36	0.04	0.27	0.44	0.38	495	8.15	<.001

Table 6 displays the findings of the whole model, which assesses how collegial relationships are directly impacted by diversity, professional culture, community support and school leadership. The relative contributions of these variables to the prediction of collegial connections are shown in the table.

Professional Culture \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. With an SE of 0.05, the effect estimate is 0.15. The effect is statistically significant, with a CI between 0.06 and 0.25 ($p = 0.00$). Collegial relationships are positively impacted by professional culture in a relatively substantial way, according to the standardised effect size ($\beta = 0.17$). This finding supports the idea that professional culture has a moderating role in fostering teacher collegiality.

Community Support \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. The effect estimate is 0.03, with an SE of 0.05. The CI ranges from -0.06 to 0.12 and the effect is non-significant ($p = 0.49$). This suggests that community support does not directly influence collegial relationships, aligning with earlier findings that its impact is primarily mediated through professional culture.

Diversity \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. With an SE of 0.05, the effect estimate is 0.02. The effect is not significant ($p = 0.60$) and the CI spans from -0.07 to 0.12. The impact of diversity on collegial relationships functions mostly through its impact on professional culture rather than directly, much like community support does.

School Leadership \Rightarrow Collegial Relationships. The effect estimate is 0.36, with an SE of 0.04. The CI ranges from 0.27 to 0.44 and the effect is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The standardised effect size ($\beta = 0.38$) confirms that school leadership is the strongest direct predictor of collegial relationships. This

underscores the critical role of leadership in fostering collaboration and strong interpersonal relationships between teachers.

Discussion

With an emphasis on the mediating function of professional culture, the present study examined the effects of school leadership, diversity and community support on collegial relationships between social studies teachers in Delta State, Nigeria. In order to shed light on the dynamics of teacher cooperation and professional engagement, the study sought to understand how these factors interact and support collaborative partnerships in educational contexts.

The results show that all of the variables are significantly correlated and that the linkages between school leadership, diversity, community support and collegial relationships are significantly mediated by professional culture. Through their impact on professional culture, diversity and school leadership both had significant indirect effects on collegial relationships, with diversity having the most pronounced effect on professional culture. With the greatest direct and overall influence on collegial relationships, school leadership stood out as the most significant predictor. Community support, on the other hand, had a minor impact, while professional culture acted as a mediating factor. These findings highlight how crucial professional culture is in bridging the gap between interpersonal and organisational elements in learning environments.

The results are consistent with earlier studies that highlight how important school leadership is in encouraging teacher cooperation and camaraderie. For instance, some research has shown how important transformational leadership is for fostering harmonious and cooperative work cultures (Wang, 2014; Vanblaere, 2016). These findings are supported by the current study, which shows that, in the Nigerian context, school leadership is the best indicator of collegial ties. In a similar vein, the study backs up previous research on the value of diversity in improving workplace culture (Karacabey et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2020).

Although earlier research has emphasised the direct benefits of diversity for team dynamics, the present study shows that its main impact is seen indirectly through workplace culture. This discovery deepens our understanding of how diversity promotes collegial connections. The very small impact of community support on collegial relationships, on the other hand, differs from previous research that has indicated a greater correlation between teacher collaboration and community engagement (Lambrecht et al., 2020). This disparity may be the result of contextual variations in the structure and perception of community involvement in Nigerian schools, where organisational culture and leadership may be

more important considerations. The findings illustrate how important professional culture is in educational settings and how it can mitigate the impacts of diversity, school leadership and community support on collegial relationships. Strong collegial relationships require open communication, trust and respect, all of which are fostered by a professional culture. The present study demonstrates the bridging role of professional culture in promoting collaboration by amplifying the positive effects of diversity and school leadership.

The most important predictor turned out to be school leadership, which both directly and indirectly shapes collegial relationships through professional culture. The present research supports the notion that good leadership fosters a supportive atmosphere where educators feel appreciated and supported, which in turn fosters cooperative partnerships. Furthermore, the significant influence of diversity on workplace culture indicates that cultivating a collegial atmosphere requires inclusive practices and an understanding of different viewpoints.

The small impact of community support emphasises how little direct influence it has on collegial relationships. Nonetheless, its noteworthy influence on professional culture implies that community involvement does indirectly foster teacher cooperation by improving the atmosphere within the organisation. The present research emphasises how important it is for educational institutions to direct community engagement into projects that enhance professional culture. The significant impact of school leadership on collegial relationships aligns with prior findings on transformational leadership (Schipper et al., 2019). However, the present study uniquely demonstrates the mediating role of professional culture in the Nigerian context, offering novel insights into how inclusive practices can amplify these effects.

The findings of the present study must be interpreted within the broader realities of Nigerian education, where systemic challenges and cultural dynamics shape how collegiality operates. For instance, the prominence of school leadership as the strongest predictor of collegial relationships aligns with Nigeria's hierarchical organisational structures, where principals often wield significant influence over resource allocation, professional development and conflict resolution (Aliu & Kaçaniku, 2023; Khalifa et al., 2016). In contexts where teachers face overcrowded classrooms and scarce materials, transformational leadership – emphasising shared goals and morale – may compensate for structural deficiencies by fostering solidarity.

Similarly, the indirect role of diversity through professional culture reflects Nigeria's ethnolinguistic complexity. While diversity is often a source of tension in other settings, its positive association with collegiality in Nigeria may stem from social studies teachers' explicit training in multicultural education,

which equips them to navigate differences collaboratively (Ossai & Alordiah, 2024). Conversely, the modest impact of community support could be attributed to the uneven involvement of local stakeholders in Nigerian schools. In rural areas, communities may contribute labour or moral support (e.g., parent-teacher associations), whereas urban schools often rely more on government or private funding, thus diluting community influence (Ismail et al., 2019).

These nuances highlight how Nigeria's resource-constrained, yet culturally rich environment amplifies certain pathways (e.g., leadership → culture → collegiality) while attenuating others (e.g., community support → collegiality). Policymakers and administrators must therefore tailor interventions to local realities; for example, by pairing leadership training with incentives for community engagement in underserved regions.

Despite its contributions, the study has a number of shortcomings. First, the capacity to infer causality is limited by the cross-sectional design. Longitudinal research is required to validate the causal relationships between the variables. Second, because self-reported data is used, the participants may have exaggerated how they feel about professional culture or collegial ties. Third, the results may not be as applicable to other areas, subjects or educational contexts due to the study's concentration on social studies teachers in Delta State, Nigeria. In order to improve the external validity of the findings, future studies should consider a larger and more varied sample. The sample for faith-based schools was small because there are fewer faith-based schools than public and private schools. The limited representation of faith-based schools (3.2%) should therefore not restrict the generalisability of the findings across school types.

Future studies should examine the dynamics of these connections in various settings, such as schools in rural and urban areas or various cultural and educational contexts. Furthermore, longitudinal research can shed light on how these factors change over time and how they affect teacher cooperation and academic achievement in the long run. Studying the interaction of other factors, such as student outcomes, work satisfaction and teacher motivation, could improve our comprehension of collegial relationships. Lastly, qualitative research could support these findings by providing a more in-depth understanding of teachers' real-world experiences with diversity, leadership and community support.

Implications of the Study

The present study underscores the pivotal role of professional culture as a mediating factor in fostering collegial relationships between social studies

teachers. For social studies teachers, the findings highlight the importance of embracing diversity and actively participating in collaborative practices to strengthen collegial relationships. Teachers are encouraged to adopt inclusive strategies, engage in shared planning and mentor peers to enhance professional relationships.

For school administrators, the study suggests the implementation of leadership practices that promote trust, respect and collaboration. Administrators should prioritise transformational leadership approaches, provide team-building opportunities and foster inclusive policies in order to create a supportive professional environment. Policymakers are advised to integrate leadership training and diversity-enhancing programmes into educational frameworks, while also strengthening community engagement policies. Assessment experts are encouraged to develop tools that accurately capture the interplay of leadership, diversity and professional culture in collegial dynamics. These tools can guide school improvement strategies and inform evidence-based policies to enhance teacher collaboration.

Conclusion

The present research explored the interconnections between school leadership, diversity, community support and professional culture in shaping collegial relationships between social studies teachers in Delta State, Nigeria. The findings emphasise the critical role of professional culture as a mediator, with school leadership emerging as the most significant predictor of collegial ties. While diversity contributes substantially through its impact on professional culture, community support has a more limited direct effect but indirectly fosters collegiality via professional culture.

By focusing on the unique dynamics within the Nigerian context, the study provides actionable insights for educators, administrators and policymakers to enhance teacher collaboration and overall school effectiveness. Strengthening professional culture is essential for fostering inclusive, collaborative and supportive environments that benefit both teachers and students.

Ethical statement

This study was approved by the ethical research board of the University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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