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## IMPEDIMENTS TO EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS IN TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

This article discussed the challenges to achieving effective School Public Relations in technical vocational education and training programs in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It revealed the obstacles to effectively harness the vast benefits of SPR in Nigerian schools, especially in the technical and vocational education institutions tertiary institutions. If not checked the challenges could endanger delivery of quality SPR in our technical tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** School, Public, Relation, Challenges, Strategies, Technical Vocational Education And Training (TVET).

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### I. INTRODUCTION

School is a training centre that helps develop people into efficient social being and train them to further educate the backward members of their society. The school is a special environment where certain quality of life types of activities and occupations are provided with the objective of securing child's development along desirable lines (Mishra, 2007). School interacts with people of the public and is linked with the larger society. The modern sociological view of education lay down that school constantly draw upon social life and activities for its subject matter, its methods of teaching and its methods of work. The school serves as watch dog against social degeneration in the society and as a miniature society - that is a small but ideal community; model for the society around, peoples' school; at the same time give new direction to the people and community.

Therefore, when school enhances its own status and contribution it in-turn enhances the status of the community as a whole (Sidhu, 2007). Hence there must be a conscious and continuous intercourse, a free give and take between the little world of the school and bigger one outside. The school has to arrange for the students opportunities to participate in social services, health campaigns, development plans, and other public activities.

Public is a group of people with common interest. In essence is the owners, colleagues in management, employees, community, neighbours, competitors, customers, public officials, donor agencies, distributors and users, electors, the other citizens, depending on the kind of organization (Ebinga as cited in Titus, 2016). The education institutions, has the professional obligation to inform the public through proper administration or channel when aspects of the programmes show diminishing need or effectiveness and to make recommendations for change and modernizations (Bokona, 2013).

Public relation is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain understanding between an organization and its public. It is a management function that establishes and maintains two-way, mutual relationships and communications between an organization and its publics and stakeholders (i.e. those who have a stake, such as employees, shareholders, etc.) that often determine their success or failure (Bokona, 2013). In other words public relations is summarized as the bridge builder for an organization between it and her publics in terms of interest, sympathy, acceptance, knowledge, ignorance, apathy, prejudice, hostility and other connotations and impressions (Igbaka as cited in Titus, 2016). So, efforts should be made by teachers and school authorities to sell all vocations to students, more so, technical education which prepares people for self-employment should be greatly considered.

School Public Relations (SPR) is an aspect of the school system that is responsible for building the image of the school, and increasing the confidence of the public in the school system. In other words, SPR is aimed at winning the goodwill of the public towards an education system.

According to the National School Public Relations Association (2002) educational public relations is a planned and systematic management function to help improve the programmes and services of an educational organization. This indicates that activities of educational public relations are a two-way affair involving communication between the institution and its audiences (publics). Higher education institutions are becoming increasingly aggressive in their marketing activities to convey an image that is favourable and in all aspects beneficial to their public, be they prospective students, employers, funders, etc. the educational institutes try their best to create and maintain a very positive image amongst the minds of the public's.

In Nigeria, though SPR is relatively new trend in the education system. Public relations play vital part in almost every educational institution. Both the Universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, they frequently employ in-house public relations officers to assist the news media and to work with internal and external publics in achieving the institutions' goals and boost their image. However, lot still need to be done to rebuilding the image of our programs, especially the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes that were poorly perceived and relegated to those who cannot do well in professional courses, but needed to acquire higher education (Adewale et al, 2017).

This wrong perception of this very important area of study is seriously affecting the development of the programme in our schools and in-turn affecting the development of the technological economy of the country. Also, the shift of interest from this form of education that produces skilled and semi-skilled manpower for the nations industries to classic and liberal education means shortfall in manpower development for our industries. However, the technical and vocational education institutions are doing great job in educating youths in different relevant skills that enables them to contribute meaningfully to the development of the society, but no one really cares to know about it (Thomas and Amaechi, 2021).

Though, there are obstacles to effectively harness the vast benefits of SPR in Nigerian schools, especially in the technical and vocational education institutions tertiary institutions. Hence, this study was designed to discuss the challenges that could endanger delivery of quality SPR in our technical tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

### **Challenges to Effective School Public Relations in TVET Programs in Nigeria**

Implementing good school public relations in TVET programs is timely. According to Amujo & Melewar (2011) contemporary institutions in Nigeria needs to surmount specific challenges affecting the practice of public relations in the country. The following are pitfalls that do hamper implementation of public relations in schools and the technical and vocational education institutions may also have to experience.

#### **1. Convincing Staff and Teachers**

Technical and Vocational Education Schools may experience resentment from teachers and administrators that all these outside publics are having a say in the educational process, and making demands on their already overworked schedules. But if they don't listen and respond, schools will deteriorate, their working conditions will become less favorable, and in the long run, they will be hurt by the public's lack of engagement.

It is in everyone's best interests to open the doors and let the public in as meaningful partners. As long as schools can convey that the best interests of children are at the core of their activities, and that they have the will and capacity to successfully implement their strategies, the public will be satisfied. The public does not want or need to be involved in the minutiae of school management. When people feel schools are run capably they are happy to let administrators administrate and teachers teach.

#### **2. Balking at the cost**

The perception is widespread that a public relations activity is not a legitimate expense for a public entity. Yet, frequently there is concurrent demand for schools to communicate better and more openly. May be this problem would have been solved by funding public relations activities creatively sometimes through grants from local businesses or targeted federal and state support. Also, to involve parents and recruit students, are able to draw on federal funds marked for desegregation efforts to fund public relations strategies such as parent information centers.

### **3. Giving lip service**

Relegating the public relations function to a person or committee without the skills, time, and resources to perform constructively is a mistake. Without a plan, and training and resources to back it up, public relations efforts will be scattershot and ineffective.

### **4. Forgetting the audience**

Educational jargon is off-putting to a reader. It implies exclusivity, the very image schools want to avoid. As every good writing teacher stresses, "remember your audience." Most people are annoyed by others' use of jargon.

### **5. Doing too much**

Define goals narrowly, then choose no more than three to accomplish in a given year. Then, as those goals are accomplished, establish additional goals. When you say you will do something, be sure to take action and do it.

### **6. Administration's values and support for educational PR**

Considering the fierce competition for student recruitment, the increasing conflicts between the public and schools, and more and more criticism and pressure from the representatives of educational communities and the media, school administrators need to appropriately utilize PR to build a good image for their institutions, ease the conflicts, and build a collaborative atmosphere. In a setting of higher educational institutions, the university/college administrators generally were deemed by educational PR practitioners as key people who manage the earlier issues for their universities/colleges. Furthermore, the university/college president's value and support for PR were indicated as influential, to some extent, on the existence, the primary functions and the working process of the PR organization.

### **7. School Administrators' perceptions of PR**

School administrators' perceptions have an impact on the practice of PR in their schools. They were also identified as primary users of PR as a communication tool. This conception of PR is similar to the misconception that PR is just another term for communication. Based upon this misconception of PR possessed by some school administrators, the practice of PR in their institutions was directed to focus on, and limited to, such areas. Also, the Practitioners and management frequently disagree as to its function and objectives. Public Relations practitioners complain that management did not inform them on important matters or consult them in policy-making plans and significant public relations aspects. Hence, it also hinders the development of PR in their schools.

### **8. The stability of a university/college**

The PR practice is influenced by the stability of a university/college as the frequency of being attacked by public opinions or being negatively covered by news reporters. Also if a university/college is often threatened by the public's criticism or often negatively covered by the news media, the stability of the university/college is low. PR practitioners of this university/college then have to put much more effort into running PR than those whose university/college is less threatened.

### **9. The Inadequacy of New Information and Communication Technologies (NCTs)**

In modern Public Relations practice, traditional communication devices like files, index cards, paper pencils, pens, telephone, typewriter, news-letters, group and interpersonal forums or meeting are increasingly being replaced or supplemented by NCT input, storage and communication devices like intelligent typewriters, computer terminals, optical disk, intelligent circuitry, word processors, electronic mailing system, teleconferencing, computer conferencing, satellite, electronic fund transfer system and computer management information system. The lack or short supply of these gadgets means ineffectiveness in PR services in our institutions of learning.

### **10. Inadequate Number of Qualified or Competent Public Relations Practitioners**

This also tends to militate against the effective practice of Public Relations in Technical and vocational education institutions. Another is education and training of practitioners in Nigeria for instance, the Nigeria Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) determines the nature and scope of knowledge required to practice the profession. "What such bodies usually prescribe is considered to be basic. A true professional or successful practitioner of Public Relations must therefore endeavour to go beyond this basic prescription." Some

practitioners are intellectually lazy and not upright in the course of discharging their professional duties. What they fail to realize is that the body of knowledge and skills required to survive in Public Relations is rather wide and the industry's scope or area of coverage is always expanding.

#### **11. Lack of Specialization in the PR**

Many people or professionals do not consider this as an area that needs much expertise. Many would rather major in science disciplines or business and still finds themselves in a public relations job. Most of those who occupy the positions of public relations in both government and private organization are not public relations major. Some claims to be practitioners simply because they are practicing journalist. Come to think of it, even those who eventually had training in public relations refuse to specialize in a particular aspect of public relations, just because they wants to keep every account that comes their way. E.g : Consultancy, Media Relations, Event management, PR Education, Reputation Management, Community Relations, Research and so on. Also, they want to do everything so they could make much money from practice. Money is a drive why so many people dive into public relations profession.

#### **12. Language Barrier**

Even with specialized courses, Nigeria is a country with many tribes that speak in native languages; hence, it is hard to define a common or national language to pass the information to the masses. It is just of recent that the country is trying to settle down with one official language that will be suitable for everyone to communicate with. That is the English language is adopted as her official language, this was possible because the bid to settle for one of Nigerian three major languages; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba has proved abortive.

#### **13. Lack of Technological Skill**

The world is developing many machinery like Computers, Scanners, Printers, Faxes, iPods, Tablets, Midgets, Recorder, Blackberries, etc to fasten both the field and office work, but it is a sad news that many Nigerian are not learned, they cannot effectively and efficiently operate these technologies. This is at the disadvantage of the PR in this nation. Those, who eventually can use them, rather preferred to flaunt them lieu of maximizing their technological potentials.

#### **14. Infrastructural Limitations**

These are majorly communication problems and lack of proper equipment to finance or fasten public relations duties. In case of a public relations function like sponsorship, such issues like bad or inaccessible roads can make your work a disappointment. Emma and Akua (2015) noted the challenges militating against PR operations are scarce telecommunication equipment, lack of official means of transportation and lack of trained personnel. Also public relations position is neither accorded the same status as other senior management positions nor involved adequately in decision making in our tertiary institutions. Sometimes, you may want to convey your sponsors to the venue where a project is to be established, but if the road to the site is sick, then be sure that that campaign will surely be sick. Sometimes it could be power issues, in the case of Nigeria, power problem is inevitable. If you have packaged a media campaign that you want to get across to your targets at a particular belt of the broadcast schedule, when the time to disseminate the information reaches, and power is interrupted, be sure that the effort on that programme will be useless, as well as turning futile.

#### **15. Negative Cultural Habits, Attitudes and Taboos**

Cultural practices cum religious beliefs are held in high esteem in Nigeria and in fact Africa. If you prepare a campaign that tread negatively on this tenacious testaments you may fail to reach a mutual understanding with them. This also goes with diverse ethnic groups and their various tribes which are characterized by the different states in the country. Hence, as you plan a campaign or advertising method you have to ensure not to go against particular groups' believes.

#### **16. Poor funding**

In Nigeria and other developing countries where Public Relations management is relatively young, Public Relations programmes are under-funded, thus, this inadequate funding has grossly affected the effective practice of the profession. The present situation by which foreign Public Relations firms are contracted for Nigeria will not give room for Public Relations practice in Nigeria to grow into a powerful tool of rural and national development

### **Remedies towards Enhancing School Public Relations in TVET Programs in Nigeria**

In other to improve school public relations in our TVET institutions some of the strategies will be to address feelings of the public's: How welcome does a parent feel in the school? Some address knowledge: How informed are people in the community? What do they know about the school's accomplishments? Some address power: How much influence do parents feel they have over their child's education?

The result of these efforts should be parents who feel, as one put it, "My voice matters here." A parent with that attitude is a satisfied partner, one who is loyal and supportive. Every citizen, whether public school parents, members of the business and religious communities, politicians, private school parents, and voters without school-age children has a need for public schools.

The challenge is to determine what that need is, and then provide value. For example, every citizen needs to know that their tax money is being well spent; every business needs to know that its employment requirements are being addressed; every concerned citizen wants to be proud of their community, and that includes public schools. Hence the following strategies may provide value to various stakeholders in public education.

#### **1. Cutbacks in Financial Subsidization**

Every institution needs a clearly defined sense of self and image. That this is becoming increasingly important to the institutions' development in the area of fund-raising. Simply invoking Alma Mater is likely still to draw gifts from alumni, but other potential donors, for example corporate donors, need much more persuasive reasons. Corporate donors look for a well-managed institution whose identity and purpose fit with the corporation's own identity.

#### **2. Building a Reputable Public Image**

In attempting to retain an image of the institution as 'responsible', public relations officers should be cautioned of not trying to build an image of what their institutions are not. The academy is becoming increasingly dependent on business grants and for this reason it is necessary to present an image of the university as being beneficial to capital in an often hostile business community.

Technical and vocational education institutions are contradictory institutions which relate to society sometimes in contradictory and confusing ways. Because the public view the image of technical and vocational education institutions as fragmented one, it becomes an exceptionally difficult task for the PR officer to present a positive, whole image of the institution to the public.

Public relations should be able to present a clear image of the technical and vocational education institutions while it tries to define the institution in terms and produce an image which can be sold like any other package.

#### **3. Attracting Donors: to Market or not to Market**

The organizational or philosophical culture within technical and vocational education institutions has historically been staid and reserved rather than innovative and entrepreneurial. Marketing under these conditions was generally eschewed as being too commercial or tolerated as a necessary evil. This is changing; there has been a commensurate drive to a market (student and community) orientation that realizes they exist because of, and for, the benefit of students, and not the administrators, faculty, and staff. In Nigeria, such a course needs to be adopted out of necessity to compete with other organizations in society for funding and survival.

#### **4. Attracting Media Coverage as part of a Marketing Venture**

Technical and vocational educational institutions usually fail to get good media coverage. Other rivals for media coverage are sports, politics, entertainment, big business, religion and employment, and they are formidable opponents. Private enterprise has greater latitude in the types of products it can develop and promote.

Technical and vocational education institutions are permitted to market only one product - education: Limited funds require us to subsidize only the essentials, and an active public relations effort frequently ranks somewhere between 'nice, but incidental' and 'totally unnecessary'. Technical and vocational education institutions don't have money and innumerable public information specialists as do private enterprise. Educators' primary mission is to provide solid research and sound instruction at low cost. Unfortunately, this

mission is seldom newsworthy when competing with political scandal, plane crashes, movie stars' sex appeal, and rugby matches.

### 5. Demonstrating its Usefulness

PR's task is to prove that it can be more active than reactive, that it can provide for the long-term and not just the short one, and that it is as important before as after a crisis. Technical and vocational education institutions are facing retrenchment in terms of student enrolment and in the financial operation of its myriad institutions across the country.

The causes of this situation are both demographic and economic, but the consequences are manifest in a certain climate on campuses for adjustment and compromise of the traditional balance of goals. The technical institution tends to be tilting toward a form of consumerism in education, a catering to demand for the purpose of maintaining demand. The technical institution is sensitive to student ambitions and desires as never before, and those wants are being shaped by practical considerations in the light of the generally uncertain economic future.

## II. CONCLUSION

School Public Relations in Technical and Vocational Education Programmes in Nigeria is a function that our tertiary institutions cannot afford to ignore. No longer is the "back fence" the primary source of news for people. For TVET institutions to get out their message, they must make a coordinated and concerted effort to counteract other sources of information people receive that may be untrue or unfair.

TVET institutions must provide people with the services and information they desire. In the sense of attracting community support and drawing in parents, especially those who shy away from school involvement, school public relations is less about transmitting information, and more about listening and responding to the expectations and concerns of all citizens. Schools cannot operate as independently as they once did: the public demands more accountability and more participation, and parents have more school choices than in the past.

The goal of school public relations should be a community of citizens that believes the motto, "public schools, there is no better place to learn." When that happens, schools will have the resources and community support they'll need in the always-changing educational environment.

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