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PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES AND STUDENTS' ENROLMENT IN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION (TVET) PROGRAMMES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at determining implementable strategies for improving students' enrollment into TVET programmes in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State. Two research questions guided the study while two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a descriptive survey design using a population of 38 Technical education lecturers and technologists in the Department of Industrial Technology Education, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osura, and College of Education, Afaha Nsit, Akwa Ibom State. There was no sampling for the study because of manageable size of the population. Instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire which was validated by experts. Data collected from pilot test were analysed using Cronbach Alpha Method. The over-all mean reliability value of 0.84 was obtained. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts, mean, standard deviation and t-test. The findings of the study revealed among others that administrators, technical teachers and students should embark on rigorous publicity for TVET programme using different media outlets to create awareness in the society. More so, there is no significant difference in the mean response of technical teachers and technologists on the public relation strategies that can be adopted by TVET teachers for improving students' enrollment into TVET programmes in tertiary institutions. It was found that public relations strategies were determinant for the students 'enrollment in TVET programmes at tertiary institutions. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that school public relations is the significant awareness tool for enhancing students' enrollment in TVET programmes.

Keywords*: Public Relations, Enrollment, TVET*

Introduction

Public relation is simply any form of communication aimed at bringing about goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its public. It is the art and science of dissecting patterns and issues of the organization, anticipating their result, guiding all the general populations of the association and actualizing arranged program of activity which will serve both the association and its publics. Newsome (2004) stated that the use of public relations

is to persuade internal publics that the organization is "right" for them and make people feel good about working in, or with or for an organization and persuade them to do their best. Every organization needs to create a favourable image for itself before its internal and external publics for successful operation. The success of any organization, especially the institutions of higher learning even departments or units or faculty, depends on how information is handled in that organization. The efficiency and effectiveness with which information is managed determines to a large extent whether the institution will consistently be in crisis or not. Therefore, no institution or department of higher learning can survive without the activities of the public relations department.

Public relations in the context of educational process is defined as a planned and systematic management function to help improve the programmes and services of an education system (Okwelle, 2010). In the same vein, Greg (2012) described school public relations as a management function that establishes and maintains a two-way mutual relationships and communication between the school and the community. A careful look at the above definition shows that school public relations relies on a comprehensive two-way communication process involving both internal publics (students and staff) and external public (parents, government and general public) with a common goal of stimulating a better understanding of the roles, objectives, accomplishments and needs of the school. The purpose of a school public relations programme according to Gorton (as cited by Ibeneme and Okwelle, 2008) includes:

i. Selling the educational programme to the people of the community so that they will take pride in and support the schools
ii. Interpreting to the people of the community the educational programme that is in operation so that the people will have a better understanding of what the school is doing and will support the school programme
iii. Encourage the community interest and participation in the school programme.

Technical vocational education and training (TVET) implies life-long learning and preparation for responsible citizenship (Okwelle and Okeke, 2016). This form of education is perceived as one of the crucial elements in enhancing economic productivity (Abudulahi, 2014). TVET is regarded as an integral part of education that provides a means of preparing individuals for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work (Okwelle, 2010). In this new economic environment as observed in most developed countries in the world today, TVET is expected to produce and supply intermediate craftsmen, technicians, semi-skilled and skilled manpower that will be capable to function very well in all sectors in the industry critical to national development. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has been characterized and indeed

often looked down upon as being for the more disadvantaged members of society in one hand, in another hand, student's enrollment into technical and vocational education and training has become an issue of concern to all educational stakeholders. This is because of its potentials in the reduction of employment rate in every nation through skilled training that leads to self-reliance. According to Tika (2015), formal system of education places less emphasis on vocational and technical skills and the knowledge falls short of the developmental needs of Nigeria. The nation has no option but to embrace technical and vocational education owing to the current economic atmosphere as observed in most developed countries in the world today. Okwelle (2010) and Okolocha (2006) noted that since the introduction of TVET in Nigeria education system some decades ago, enrollment in TVET programme in Nigeria has remain squat. This ugly situation can be attributed to bad stereotype on TVET among other poor or rather wrong public perceptions. This development according to Agwi and Puyate (2017) is more disturbing on students' participation in TVET programme in Nigeria. Ukachukwu (2015) also stated that this development has posed inherent danger to technology education and national development.

Enrollment simply means to insert or register name(s) into a list. Student's enrollment into technical and vocational education and training has become an issue of concern to all educational stakeholders. This is because of its potentials in the reduction of employment rate in every nation through skilled training that leads to self-reliance. Yakubu (2006) identified major factors responsible for low enrollment of students in TVET to include among others: low societal estimation of TVET as education for lowest class people; education for the last resort; for people of low intelligent-quotient; low achievers and low status occupation as well as lack of career awareness in TVE. The cause of this low enrollment of students in TVET programmes in particular could as well be that many post-primary schools in Nigeria lack the quality and quantity of technical teachers for implementing the technology education curriculum at this level of education.

The current reform of TVE systems in Nigeria does not seems to have fully addressed the impediments to technology education development in the country. There is therefore the need to further intensify efforts geared towards repositioning TVE institutions with a view to making them attractive to prospective students. It is in line with this that several studies such as (Okeke, 2005; Okwori, 2006; Owolabi, 2006) identified many strategies of enhancing student's enrolment in TVE programmes; one of which could be the establishment of school public relations units to liaise between the TVE departments and the public. It is on the backdrop of alarming poor enrollment on the part of students into TVET programmes that motivated the researcher to determine feasible and adoptable strategies for improving students' enrollment in TVET programmes in Akwa Ibom state.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to determine adoptable strategies for improving students' enrolment in TVET programmes in Akwa Ibom state. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

i. Determine the public relations strategies that can be adopted by TVET teachers for improving students' enrolment into TVET programmes in Akwa Ibom state
ii. Determine the public relation strategies that can be adopted by management of TVET institutions for improving students' enrolment into TVET programmes in Akwa Ibom state.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the conduct of this study:

i. What are the public relations strategies that can be adopted by TVET teachers for improving students' enrollment into TVET programme in Akwa Ibom state?
ii. What are the public relations strategies that can be adopted by management of TVET institutions for improving students' enrollment into TVET programmes in Akwa Ibom state?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the conduct of the study:

i. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of lecturers and technologists on the public relation strategies that can be adopted by TVET teachers for improving students' enrollment into TVET programmes in Akwa Ibom state.
ii. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of lecturers and technologists on the public relation strategies that can be adopted by management of TVET institutions for improvimg students' enrollment into TVET programmes in Akwa Ibom state.

Research Method

The design for this study was descriptive survey. Descriptive survey is one in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group using questionnaire or interview (Nworgu, 2015). The population of the study consisted of all the 38 lecturers and technologists drawn from Technical Education unit Industrial Technology Education Department, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osura and College of Education, Afaha Nsit, Akwa Ibom state. The entire population was used because the size was manageable. The researchers developed a structured questionnaire titled "Public Relation Strategies for Students Enrollment Questionnaire (PRSSEQ)" for data collection. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while t-test statistic was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Mean values less than 2.50 were disagree, while Mean

values equal or greater than 2.50 were agree. The data was analyzed with SPSS.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What are the public relations strategies that can be adopted by TVET teachers for improving students' enrollment into TVET programme in Akwa Ibom state?

Data collected in respect of research question 1 were analyzed and presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean responses of Lecturers and Technologists on public relations strategies that can be adopted by teachers for improving students' enrolment into TVET programmes

S/N	Public Relations strategies adopted by TVET teachers	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Technical teachers should embark on open talk-show with basic school pupils	3.65	0.48	Agreed
2	Technical teachers should embark on rigorous publicity for TVET using different media outlets	3.68	0.52	Agreed
3	Technical teachers should organise TVET exhibition programmes during speech and prize giving days	3.57	0.50	Agreed
4	Technical teachers should reach out to parents through newsletters	3.68	0.52	Agreed
5	Technical teachers should Grant audience to the press on TVET programmes	3.71	0.45	Agreed
6	Technical teachers can encourage school guidance personnel to improve enrollment in TVET programmes	3.78	0.41	Agreed
7	Technical teachers can engage in awareness campaign of TVET to the community	3.39	0.63	Agreed
8	Technical teachers should maintain Public relation contacts with alumni	3.42	0.50	Agreed
9	Improving enrollment in TVET programmes using school guidance personnel	3.50	0.72	Agreed
10	Sensitizing the public about the activities of TVET programmes through newsletters	3.55	0.50	Agreed
11	Public relations contact of technical teachers with business and industry	3.21	0.74	Agreed
	Cluster Mean	**3.56**		**Agreed**

Table 1 indicates that the Mean responses of lecturers and technologists ranged between 3.21 and 3.78 with a cluster Mean of 3.56. These results show that Technical education lecturers and technologists agreed that all the listed items in Table 1 are strategies that can be adopted by TVET teachers for improving enrollment into TVET programmes.

Research Question 2: What are the public relations strategies that can be adopted by management of TVET institutions for improving students' enrollment into TVET programmes in Akwa Ibom state?

Data collected in respect of research question 1 were analyzed and presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean responses of Lecturers and Technologists on public relations strategies that can be adopted by management of TVET institutions for improving students' enrolment into TVET programmes

S/N	PR strategies adopted by management of TVET Institutions	Mean	SD	Remark
12	Provision of funds for public relations activities.	3.73	0.44	Agreed
13	Recognizing outstanding students' achievement through awards, commendation, news releases and honour roll	3.73	0.50	Agreed
14	Provision of standard facilities and material for teaching practical skills	3.13	0.70	Agreed
15	Motivating students to show interest in public relations activities.	2.86	0.70	Agreed
16	Granting press release to various media outlets	3.45	0.55	Agreed
17	Setting out time for students' exhibitions and job fairs	3.24	0.59	Agreed
18	Communicating school image through social media	3.40	0.68	Agreed
19	Organizing regular field trips for students.	3.56	0.50	Agreed
20	Partnering with both government and private sector to provide starter packs for TVET graduating students	3.32	0.62	Agreed
	Cluster Mean	**3.38**		Agreed

Table 2 indicates that the Mean responses of lecturers and technologists ranged between 2.86 and 3.73 with a cluster Mean of 3.38. These results show that both Technical education lecturers and technologists agreed that all the listed items in Table 2 are strategies that can be adopted by TVET teachers for improving enrollment into TVET programmes

Table 3: t-test analysis of the mean responses of Lecturers and Technologists on public relations strategies that can be adopted by teachers for improving students' enrolment into TVET programmes

S/N	Teachers' Public Relation Strategies	Respondents	X	SD	t	p-val	Decision
1	Technical teachers should embark on open talk-show with basic school pupils	Lecturers Technologists	3.62 3.72	0.49 0.46	0.56	0.57	N S
2	Technical teachers should embark on rigorous publicity for TVET using different media outlets	Lecturers Technologists	3.70 3.63	0.54 0.50	0.35	0.72	N S
3	Technical teachers should organise TVET exhibition programmes during speech and prize giving days	Lecturers Technologists	3.59 3.54	0.50 0.52	0.26	0.79	N S
4	Technical teachers should reach out to parents through newsletters	Lecturers Technologists	3.62 3.81	0.56 0.40	0.31	0.32	N S
5	Technical teachers should Grant audience to the press on TVET programmes	Lecturers Technologists	3.66 3.81	0.48 0.40	0.92	0.36	N S
6	Technical teachers can encourage school guidance personnel to improve enrollment in TVET programmes	Lecturers Technologists	3.77 3.81	0.42 0.40	0.27	0.78	N S
7	Technical teachers can create awareness of TVET to the community organizations	Lecturers Technologists	3.44 3.27	0.64 0.64	0.74	0.46	N S
8	Technical teachers should maintain Public relation contacts	Lecturers	3.37	0.49	0.97	0.33	N S

	with alumni	Technologists	3.54	0.52			
9	Improving enrollment in TVET programmes using school guidance personnel	Lecturers Technologists	3.48 3.54	0.80 0.52	0.24	0.81	N S
10	Sensitizing the public about the activities of TVET programmes through newsletters	Lecturers Technologists	3.48 3.72	0.50 0.46	1.30	0.17	N S
11	Public relations contact of technical teachers with business and industry	Lecturers Technologists	3.14 3.36	0.76 0.67	0.80	0.42	N S

The t-test analysis on table 3 reveals that there is no significant difference between the opinions of technical education lecturers and technologists on all the listed items of public relation strategies to be adopted by teachers. This indicates that there is a no significant difference between the opinions of technical education lecturers and technologists on teachers' public relation strategies.

Table 4: t-test analysis of the mean responses of Lecturers and Technologists on Public relations strategies that can be adopted by TVET institutions management for improving students' enrolment into TVET programmes

S/N	PR strategies adopted by management of TVET Institutions	Respondents	X	SD	t	p-val	Decision
12	Provision of funds for public relations activities	Lecturers Technologies	3.74 3.73	0.45 0.47	0.83	0.93	N S
13	Recognizing outstanding students' achievement through awards, commendation, news releases and honour roll	Lecturers Technologists	3.74 3.73	0.53 0.47	0.74	0.94	N S
14	Provision of standard facilities and material for teaching practical skills	Lecturers Technologists	3.07 3.27	0.72 0.65	0.78	0.43	N S
15	Motivating students to show interest in public relations activities	Lecturers Technologists	2.85 2.91	0.72 0.70	0.22	0.82	N S
16	Granting press release to various media outlets	Lecturers Technologists	3.52 3.30	0.57 0.48	1.06	0.29	N S
17	Setting out time for students' exhibitions and job fairs	Lecturers Technologists	3.15 3.50	0.60 0.53	1.63	0.11	N S
18	Communicating school image through social media	Lecturers Technologists	3.25 3.80	0.71 0.42	0.22	0.03	N S
19	Organizing regular field trips for students.	Lecturers Technologists	3.48 3.80	0.51 0.42	1.76	0.08	N S
20	Partnering with both government and private sector to provide starter packs for TVET graduating students	Lecturers Technologists	3.15 3.80	0.60 0.42	0.31	0.12	N S

The t-test analysis on table 3 reveals that there is no significant difference between the opinions of technical education lecturers and technologists on all the listed items of public relation strategies to be adopted by TVET management. This indicates that there is a no significant difference between the opinions of technical

education lecturers and technologists on public relation strategies to be adopted by TVET management.

Discussions

This study reveals two strategies that can be adopted by TVET teachers to improve students' enrolment into TVET programmes. These strategies are: Technical teachers should embark on open talk-show with basic school pupils, Technical teachers should embark on rigorous publicity for TVET using different media outlets, Technical teachers should organise TVET exhibition programmes during speech and prize giving days, Technical teachers should reach out to parents through newsletters, Technical teachers should Grant audience to the press on TVET programmes, Technical teachers can create awareness of TVET to the community organizations, Technical teachers can create awareness of TVET to the community organizations, Technical teachers should maintain Public relation contacts with alumni, Improving enrollment in TVET programmes using school guidance personnel, Sensitizing the public about the activities of TVET programmes through newsletters and Public relations contact of technical teachers with business and industry. The finding of this study reveals that Technical education students should be involved in school public relations' activities as a way of creating awareness on the importance of TVET programmes. This finding corroborates an earlier finding of Okwelle (2011) who concluded that teachers of technology education in tertiary institutions in Rivers have major roles to play in school public relations' activities in order to attract students into TVET programmes. Therefore, there is need to make TVET teachers realize that they have a part to play in improving enrolment into TVET programmes through their involvement in public relations' activities.

The study also reveals that the management of TVET institutions can adopt the following strategies to improve students' enrollment into TVET programmes: Provision of funds for public relations activities, Recognizing outstanding students achievement through awards, commendation, news releases and honour roll, Provision of standard facilities and material for teaching practical skills, Motivating students to show interest in public relations activities, Integrating public relations' activities into the school curriculum, Setting out time in the school calendar for students' exhibitions and job fairs, Effective TVE instruction, Organizing regular field trips for students and Partnering with both government and private sector to provide starter packs for TVET graduating students. The finding of this study is in line with that of Aikins and Adu-Oppong (2015) whose finding revealed that management collaborating with the public relations office to maximize their impact on the University's ability to achieve its goals.

Conclusion

The high demand for schools to communicate better and more openly with the public requires adequate funding public relations activities if enrollment to TVET programme is to be improved. School public relations is a significant tool for enhancing

students' enrollment in TVET programmes which in turn will create skilled manpower. With the school public relations, technical teachers can reach out to the stakeholder, parents, community and the larger society to rewrite the wrong perception on TVET programmes. Application of strategies determined by this study is an impetus for improving students' enrolment in TVET programmes in Akwa Ibom and Nigeria at large. It is hereby recommended that TVET teachers, students and all education stakeholders should develop practical and executable strategy for engaging in public relations activities.

Recommendations

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

1. Administrators should make school public relations office a significant tool for awareness creation.
2. Administrators, technical teachers and students should embark on rigorous publicity for TVET programme using different media outlets.
3. Government should provide more support on TVET programmes.
4. Government should provide adequate funds to public relations unit in our tertiary institutions.

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