

PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES AS STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING ENROLMENT IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS TECHNICAL SUBJECTS FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

BY

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Abstract

This paper considered the perception of technical teachers on the importance of identified 'public relations activities as strategies for improving enrolment into senior secondary schools (SSS) technical subjects. Male and female technical teachers in Enugu education zone were used as the population. Analysis of the responses show that the identified strategies are important and that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female technical teachers on the issue. It was recommended that the strategies, which hinge on publicity should be explored and exploited to sell the subjects to the students and the public as they are subjects that prepare students for entrepreneurship.

Introduction

Technical Education is a course that offers knowledge and competencies required for entry into any type of technical occupation and prospering in it. (Okwor, 2000). It is a means that allows one to plan, organize, budget, control, invest and save in any type of economy. One that receives training in technical subjects can easily develop potentials for entrepreneurship pursuit especially in this era of Nigerian economic recession and unemployment.

Many national education policies have been going on in Nigeria to take care of national educational aspirations. The one of 1977 that was revised up to 2004 and further 2013 provided for acquisition of appropriate knowledge abilities, skills and competencies for self-reliance at both the

individual and national levels. Thus, two tiers of secondary education emerged-the basic and senior secondary. At basic education level pre-vocational subjects are integrated as Basic Technology. At senior secondary school (SSS), the students choose two or three from a range of technical subjects like Electrical Installation and Maintenance works, Basic Electronics, Building Construction, Block Laying and Concreting, Radio, Television and Electronics Works, Refrigeration and Air-conditioning etc, in addition to other areas to make up for West African School Certificate Examination (WASC). However, the number of students that are offering technical subjects at SSS is dwindling at an alarming rate that the researcher moved into finding out the perception of technical teachers as regards public relations activities as strategies for encouraging enrolment into them. This is in view of the fact that technical subjects are vocational and help one to venture into opportunities that make one become an entrepreneur and even create jobs instead of seeking for one that is farfetched.

Casual observation by the researcher from West African Examination Council (WAEC) list of candidates that have about 200 to 300 candidates show just about five candidates for special centres mapped out for Electrical Installation and Maintenance Works and metal works examinations. The schools that offer electronics are few but technical drawing is common. These are core technical subjects in SSS. Computer studies is not yet seriously taught in schools. Something needs to be done to improve the number of students that offer SSS technical subjects because the national policies confirm that technical studies is a very important vocational study that equips students for entry level jobs. (FRN, 2013).

Hornby (2002) defined public relations as the business of giving the public information about a particular organization or person in order to create a good impression. This is an important aspect of any technical and a dictum has it that if you don't say that I am, nobody will say that you are'.

Kindred (1963), Awoke (2012) gave analysis of the duties and responsibilities carried on by public relations officers in technical education as;

1. Preparing newspaper releases.
2. Serving as consultants to authority.
3. Taking part in community improvement projects.
4. Organizing and directing technical education day programmes
5. Giving lectures to parents-teachers and groups
6. Collecting news within the school system
7. Preparing or editing special leaflets, booklets or brochures
8. Supervising press releases on school board meetings.
9. Taking photograph for publicity purposes
10. Organizing total school public relations programmes
11. Organizing and directing radio and television programme
12. Directing fund raising campaigns in schools for philanthropic organizations.
13. Dealing with criticism and attacks on technical subjects

These are enlightenment activities that can help motivate interests. They should be directed towards the right public. Ebinga (2003) defined a public as:

“A group of people with common interest. The basic public in essence are 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”.

In secondary schools, the target public is the government, the community, the students, the Chief executive officers and directors of industries, the employees, employers and alumni associations. Ebinga further pointed out that enrolment into technical education programmes in secondary schools over the years, is dwindling because of poor public relations programmes. Bokona (2013) pointed out that “Education has a 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”.

Igbaka (2009) summarized public relations 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. 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.

The importance of technical education can never be over emphasized. National Policy on Education (2013) recommended it as a strong vocational area. The objectives as identified by Okwor (2000) includes among others:

1. To educate individuals for and about business
2. To use the result of production as customers.

3. To provide career information that will enable students relate their interests, needs and abilities to occupational opportunities in technical trades. These show that the nation will benefit when students who have acquired technical education for self-employment are graduated.

The graduates may become self-employed or employers of labour in this era of economic crises with attendant problems that is manifesting more on unemployment.

Problem of the Study

Despite national programmes and aspirations for technical education in secondary schools, the enrolment into its subjects is dwindling. After the introduction of 6-3-3-4 and now basic education curriculum systems of education, technical Studies at basic education level, few technical subjects started existing there at senior secondary school level (SSS). Now, SSS have only a few technical subjects. Computer training is being gradually introduced in these schools. The problem of this study, therefore, is that few students after completing basic education, enroll into SSS technical subjects. This has resulted in few candidates being available for further studies, entry level jobs or enterprising in technical fields.

Research Question

How important do technical teachers perceive identified public relations activities as strategies to encourage enrolment into SSS technical subjects?

Research Hypothesis (Ho)

There is no significant difference between the perception of male and female technical teachers as regards the importance of identified public relations activities for technical studies in secondary schools as strategies for improving enrolment into SSS technical subjects.

Method

The study adopted simple survey design. The population of the study was the entire 103 technical teachers in Enugu zone of Post Primary Schools Management Board (PPSMB) comprising 38 males and 65 female teachers. The area comprises Enugu North and Enugu South, Local Government Areas of Enugu State.

The questionnaire method of data collection was used. It adopted the Likert-type scale with five response categories varying from very important to not important. The instrument was validated by experts to ascertain face and construct validity. Pilot testing was done through test-retest reliability method and a reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained. It was considered high enough to regard the instrument as reliable. Analysis of the data was done using the mean to answer the research questions and t-test for independent samples was used for the hypothesis. Using the five-point scale, the following real limits of numbers were used for answering the research question:

Response		Real limits	Rating
Very Important	(VI)	4.50-5.00	5
Important	(I)	3.50-4.49	4
Undecided	(U)	3.00-4.49	3
Little Importance	(LI)	2.00-2.99	2
Not Important	(NI)	1.00-1.99	1

Any item with mean of 3.50 and above was regarded as indispensable strategy for encouraging enrolment into SSS technical subjects. Any below 3.00 was said to be as little or not important for such encouragement. Again, if t-critical (table) value exceeds the calculated t-value, the effect is not significant and so, the null hypothesis will be upheld. If on the other hand, the calculated value exceeds the critical value the null hypothesis will be rejected.

Results

Table 1: Mean (X), Standard Deviation (SD) and Degree of Importance Perceived by Technical Teachers on Public Relations Activities.

S/NO	Public Relations Activities	X	Remarks
1.	Technical department prepares newspaper releases about technical department	3.97	Important
2.	Technical department organizes social programmes	3.72	Important
3.	Technical department holds enlightenment meeting with parents	3.94	Important
4.	The technical teachers organize radio and television technical quizzes	4.00	Important
5.	The technical department take photographs for publicity purposes	3.37	Undecided
6.	The technical department take part in community improvement projects	3.56	Important
7.	The technical department direct fund raising campaign for philanthropic organizations	3.67	Important
8.	The technical teachers direct formation of clubs eg technical etc	4.07	Important
9.	The technical club activities compete with Science clubs already in schools	3.73	Important
10.	The technical club aids needy students	3.6	Important
11.	The technical club organizes inter-school technical studies debates	4.08	Important
12.	The technical department organizes career conventions	3.87	Important

Table 2:**The t-test Analysis of Mean Responses of Male and Female Technical Teachers on the Importance of Public Relations Activities**

Groups	No	Mean (x)	S.D.	Calculated t-value	Df	fL	Critical t-value	Decision
Male	37	3.55	1.24	1.29	99	0.05	1.960	HO
Female	64	3.86	1.14					Accepted

Discussions

From the data in **table 1**, it was observed that technical teachers mean scores for all items except for item five fell between 3.50 and 4.08. This means that all the identified activities were considered important and indispensable for encouraging enrolment into SSS technical subjects. For item 5, they were undecided.

These important strategies agreed with Kindred (1963), Awoke (2012) on his listing of the following as public relations activities that should be done occasionally: preparing a column in school's newspaper, writing home contact letters, preparing report cards with enclosures on technical studies activities, preparing calendars, organizing exhibitions and fairs, arranging student performances before community groups, advising parents/teachers association meetings, excursion to industries and small-scale entrepreneurs. These will stir up positive feelings in students and help them convince parents of their career choices in technical education as against other loud-speaking subjects such as the sciences.

Table 2 on the hypothesis testing shows that a total of 37 male and 64 female technical teachers responded. They had mean of 3.35 and 3.86 on one hand, standard deviation of 1.24 and 1.44 on the other hand respectively. Tested at 0.05 level of significance and at 99 degrees of freedom, the t-critical value came to 1.29. The critical value is greater than the calculated value and so, the Ho was upheld. This shows that the perception of male and female technical teachers do not differ significantly as regards public relations activities as strategies for improving enrolment into SSS technical subjects.

So, this supports Igbaka (2009) that public relations activities are bridge builders that connect interest groups.

Conclusions

It has been seen that students' enrolment into core technical subjects is thinning down. Much of public relations activities have not been utilized to enlighten the relevant public. Bokona (2013) states that schools public relations is a highly technical aspect of educational activities which if utilized fully will yield dividends. Education for and about entrepreneurship should be encouraged through identified activities of public relations. When graduates are produced, the technical potentials they acquired will not only equip them for entrepreneurship or self employment, they will also employ and manage human capital for the development of the entire nation.

Recommendations

The followings are recommended for improving enrolment into SSS technical subjects:

1. Technical teachers should explore and exploit more public relations activities in addition to identified ones to sell their departments to the students and public.
2. Relevant authorities should be involved in encouraging teachers, this they can do by organizing seminars and workshop for technical teachers so as to motivate them to use the identified activities or more to attract interest into their areas.
3. Students should be used to carry out some of these activities as peers can easily be lured.
4. Funds should be made available by relevant authorities for organizing some of the activities. This may attract more funds from the public for improving the teaching and learning of technical subjects.

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