

VALIDATION OF STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Abstract. The study validated strategies for effective vocational school public relations. Six purposes and six research questions guided the study. The design for this study was a descriptive survey. The area of the study was Taraba state and the population of the study comprises of eight Technical college principals and 24 Vice-Principals thereby making a population size of 32. No sampling was used. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The instrument was validated by three experts one from the department of technology education, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, one technical college principal, and one public relations practitioner. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability, and a reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained. The 32 copies of the instrument administered were properly filled and returned. Mean and Standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions. Findings from the study indicated that the use of media, school outreach, improved school facilities, promoting excellence, networking, “open-doors” are valid strategies that vocational school administrators could use for effective public relations. Recommendations were made among which were that Vocational school administrators should make effective use of media (Press Release, Radio programmes, paid advert, etc.) in

their school public relations, and vocational school administrators should make telephone response lines available for the members of the community to call-in when the need arises.

Keywords: strategies, vocational, school, public, relations

Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) are those aspect of the educational process involving the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic life in addition to general education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2013). One of the medium for the actualization of this is the technical college. Students attending technical college are expected to at the end or mid-term of their programs be able to secure employment or set up their own businesses as self-employed and be able to employ others, or pursue further education in advanced craft/technical program in post-secondary technical institutions such as polytechnics, colleges of education (technical) and universities. Technical colleges are usually located within the community so as to serve the purpose for which they were establishment, and its relationship with the community is one of its key success factors. This gave birth to school public relations.

School public relations are concepts designed to get positive messages out to the public in order to showcase the best of a school so as to gain community support. According to Kowalski (2009), the process is intended to produce and maintain: (a) positive relationships; (b) a constructive organizational image; (c) collaboration (especially between school employees and other stakeholders) and (d) organizational effectiveness. An effective school public relations plan therefore, provides value by giving people information they can use, not just information that the school needs to convey about process or what goes around

the school environment (Carlsmith & Railsback, 2001). Every member of the community has the ability to contribute in making a positive impact on the educational development of the community, and that would translate into the overall wellbeing of their community.

Though, most people within the community may not be experts in the field of education, Schools do not have to yield to every whim of the members of the community, whether they are parents, legislators, or the business community. In fact, the idea behind it is not just about letting everyone make decisions; it is about letting the members of the community feel that their input is valued and considered seriously, and they are wanted in decisions and policymaking since as they rightly perceive, public schools are their schools. The administrator as the Chief Public Relations Officer of the school is therefore duty bound to sincerely accept and welcome public input, and to lose the narrow-minded tendency to deny the community a voice while still maintaining the integrity of his ability to be the final arbiter in any decision. Good public relations programs have the potential to show the reciprocal value for the community's support.

However, in Nigeria, the authors observed that, today, in the field of vocational education where there is an urgent need to change the stereotypes that have become deeply rooted in the minds of some people about this vital aspect of education, and the need to justify its role as an essential component in the education of all students, public relations programs are nearly absent. In the few places where they actually exist, school public relations are more or less about conveying information instead of establishing and promoting partnerships within the community where those schools are located. In fact, according to Sergiovanni (2006), one of the biggest mistake school public relations staff often make is talking at the people instead of meeting them. According to the author, "If the message is not getting across, the answer is not to buy a bigger megaphone" The answer is proactive interactive engagement even on areas that are usually the sole jurisdiction of administrators. The question is: how can that be

achieved? This study validated strategies that could be adopted for effective vocational school public relations.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to validate strategies that could be adopted for effective vocational school public relations. In specific term, the study sought to validate the following vocational school public relations strategies: (1) use of media; (2) school outreach; (3) improved school facilities; (4) promoting excellence; (5) networking; (6) “open-doors”.

Research questions

The study answered the following questions: what is the validity of the following vocational school public relations strategies: (1) use of media; (2) school outreach; (3) improved school facilities; (4) promoting excellence; (6) networking; (6) “open-doors”.

Method

The design for this study is a descriptive survey. The area of the study was Taraba state and the population of the study comprises of eight Technical college principals and 24 Vice-Principals thereby making a population size of 32. No sampling was used; thus, the entire population was studied. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The instrument was validated by three experts one from the department of technology education, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, one technical college principal, and one public relations practitioner. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, and a reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained. All the 32 copies of the instrument administered were properly filled and returned. Mean and Standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions and a cut-off point of 2.5 which is

the lower limit of “Moderately Agree” of the cluster mean was chosen an index for acceptance of the individual strategy’s validity.

Results

Research question 1

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation on the use of media as a strategy for effective vocational school public relations

| S/N | Statements | Mean | SD | Remark |
|---------------------|--|-------------|------|------------------|
| 1 | Issuance of Press Release backed with statistics to education reporters regularly | 4.21 | 0.72 | Agree |
| 2 | Paid advertisement in National dailies | 3.62 | 1.01 | Agree |
| 3 | Bill boards located at strategic locations around the community | 3.33 | 0.83 | Moderately Agree |
| 4 | Emailing parents before “Press Release” is released to the press | 4.01 | 0.34 | Agree |
| 5 | Designing a website with interactive platforms | 4.71 | 1.14 | Strongly Agree |
| 6 | Developing radio programs kitted with phone-in sessions | 3.86 | 1.03 | Agree |
| 7 | Establishing proactive communication mechanisms between the school and the media particularly during crisis | 3.95 | 0.92 | Agree |
| 8 | Creative use of materials such as creating a high quality colour calendar that shows students actively participating in workshop exercises | 3.99 | 0.63 | Agree |
| Cluster Mean | | 3.96 | | Agree |

Table 1 reveals that the mean response of the vocational school administrators ranges from 3.33-4.71 with a cluster mean of 3.96. This shows that all the respondents agree on the use of media as a valid strategy for effective vocational school public relations. The standard deviation ranged from 0.34-1.14 indicating that there is a level of homogeneity in their responses.

Research question 2

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation on the use of school outreach as a strategy for effective vocational school public relations

| S/N | Statements | Mean | SD | Remark |
|---------------------|---|-------------|-----------|----------------|
| 9 | Release of weekly Newsletter to share students success | 3.86 | 0.81 | Agree |
| 10 | Inviting parents to Assembly for frank discussion | 4.10 | 0.76 | Agree |
| 11 | Making the community to realize that problems are not swept under the rug, instead constructive action is being taken | 4.44 | 0.61 | Agree |
| 12 | A friendly visit to parents who may have failed to attend school events at home | 4.58 | 1.18 | Strongly Agree |
| 13 | Sending a congratulatory flyer when a new child is born in the community | 4.12 | 0.83 | Agree |
| 14 | Sending birthday messages to both members of staff and students | 4.66 | 1.09 | Strongly Agree |
| 15 | When a child is performing well in a class, the Principal should write a quick note behind his business card and give to the child to pass to his parents | 3.92 | 0.62 | Agree |
| 16 | Making telephone response lines available for the members of the community to call-in when the need arises | 4.16 | 0.81 | Agree |
| Cluster Mean | | 4.23 | | Agree |

Table 2 shows that all the mean response of the vocational school administrators are above 2.5 with a cluster mean of 4.23. This shows that all the respondents agree on the use of School outreach as a valid strategy for effective vocational school public relations. The standard deviation ranged from 0.62-1.18 indicating that there is a level of homogeneity in their responses.

Research question 3

Table 3 reveals that the respondents agree on the use of improved school facilities as a valid strategy for effective vocational school public relations. Their mean response ranges from 3.21-4.72 with a cluster mean of 3.98. The

standard deviation ranged from 0.61-1.48 indicating that there is a certain level of dispersion in their responses.

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation on the use of improved school facilities as a strategy for effective vocational school public relations

| S/N | Statements | Mean | SD | Remark |
|---------------------|--|-------------|------|------------------|
| 17 | Have comfortable adult-sized chair, magazine and some evidence of students accomplishment in the visitors waiting area | 4.03 | 0.61 | Agree |
| 18 | Make visitors feel welcomed and give them the image of children learning the moment they step into the school | 4.44 | 1.23 | Agree |
| 19 | Seek for community's input when new buildings are to be constructed or old ones are to be renovated | 4.52 | 1.48 | Strongly Agree |
| 20 | Plant flowers and install students arts outside the front door | 3.71 | 0.92 | Agree |
| 21 | Keep rest rooms clean and free from scrawls | 3.21 | 0.83 | Moderately Agree |
| 22 | Teachers should be encouraged to keep their classroom doors open so that the school atmosphere is open and inviting | 4.72 | 1.07 | Strongly Agree |
| 23 | Cover freshly painted wall with samples of students art work | 3.21 | 1.10 | Moderately Agree |
| Cluster Mean | | 3.98 | | Agree |

Research question 4

Table 4 indicated that vocational school administrators agree on promoting excellence as a valid strategy for effective vocational school public relations. The mean of their responses ranges from 2.71-4.56 with a cluster mean of 3.78. The standard deviation ranged from 0.16-1.09 indicating that there is a level of homogeneity in their responses.

Table 4. Mean and standard deviation on promoting excellence as a strategy for effective vocational school public relation

| S/N | Statements | Mean | SD | Remark |
|-----|--|-------------|------|------------------|
| 24 | Establishing academic buster club to bring both school and non-school parents together to review accomplishments and reward merits | 3.42 | 0.16 | Moderately Agree |
| 25 | Inaugurating Student of the year award | 4.56 | 0.63 | Strongly Agree |
| 26 | Holding Gala night to show that students are being challenged and are acquiring good skills | 2.71 | 1.09 | Moderately Agree |
| 27 | Establishing staff recognition program to honour the great work some staff are doing | 4.42 | 0.81 | Agree |
| | Cluster Mean | 3.78 | | Agree |

Research question 5

Table 5. Mean and standard deviation on networking as a strategy for effective vocational school public relation

| S/N | Statements | Mean | SD | Remark |
|-----|---|-------------|------|------------------|
| 28 | Cultivating relationship with the neighborhood religious leaders | 4.32 | 0.92 | Agree |
| 29 | Creating a good rapport with business leaders around the community | 4.11 | 1.06 | Agree |
| 30 | Set up a coalition of community agencies | 3.32 | 1.02 | Moderately Agree |
| 31 | PTA members, MSSN, FCS should be included in the as active participants in the school affairs | 4.42 | 0.72 | Agree |
| | Cluster Mean | 4.04 | | Agree |

Table 5 shows that all the mean response of the vocational school administrators is above 2.5 with a cluster mean of 4.04. This shows that all the respondents agree on Networking as a valid strategy for effective vocational school public relations. The standard deviation ranged from 0.72-1.06 indicating that there is a level of homogeneity in their responses.

Research question 6

Table 6. Mean and standard deviation on “open-door” as a strategy for effective vocational school public relation

| S/N | Statements | Mean | SD | Remark |
|---------------------|---|-------------|-----------|------------------|
| 32 | Developing a creative ways of luring parents to attend school events | 2.92 | 0.52 | Moderately Agree |
| 33 | Providing professional development opportunities for parents to eliminate some of the perceived secrecy that surround the education profession | 3.25 | 0.99 | Moderately Agree |
| 34 | Opening the school to community events such as performing arts space and conference room that welcome meetings of the public and local businesses | 4.10 | 1.10 | Agree |
| 35 | Bringing legislators into the school and make sure that they stay a bit longer so that they can have the opportunity to see something positive | 4.62 | 0.82 | Strongly Agree |
| Cluster Mean | | 3.72 | | Agree |

Table 6 reveals that the respondents agree on “Open-Door” as a valid strategy for effective vocational school public relations. Their mean response ranges from 2.92-4.62 with a cluster mean of 3.72. The standard deviation ranged from 0.55-1.10 indicating that there is a certain level of dispersion in their responses.

Findings

Findings from the study indicated that the use of media, school outreach, improved school facilities, promoting excellence, networking, “open-doors” are valid strategies that vocational school administrators and managers could use for effective public relations.

Discussion

Findings from the study indicated that all the six strategies for effective vocational school public relations are valid. That shows that, the use of media,

school outreach, improved school facilities, promoting excellence, networking, “open-doors” are valid strategies that vocational school administrators and managers could use for effective public relations. This findings are in agreement with Carlsmith & Railsback (2001) who are of the view that in the current dispensation, school public relations is not just about conveying information, rather, it is about establishing and promoting partnerships within the community. According to the author, an effective school public relations plan provides value by giving people information they can use, not just information that the school needs to convey about process or what goes around the school environment. It is also in consistence with the suggestions made by Bradley (1996). According to Bradley (1996), schools must promote themselves because in the absence of the facts, “people will create their own information and it won’t be right”. The author also advised that schools must take it upon themselves to tell their own stories, and to listen with rapt attention to their partners, the public, so that at the end, they can be able to provide the value the public wants from them.

Conclusions

Based on the foregoing, it is safe to conclude that the realization of the goal of every vocational school depends largely on the strong ties that exist between the school and the community. The use of media, school outreach, improved school facilities, promoting excellence, networking, “open-doors” are some of the valid strategies that could be deployed to achieve that.

Recommendations

- (1) Vocational school administrators should make effective use of media (Press Release, Radio programmes, Paid advert etc) in their school public relations;
- (2) Vocational school administrators should make telephone response lines available for the members of the community to call-in when the need arises.

- (3) Government should seek for community's input when new buildings are to be constructed or old ones are to be renovated.
- (4) Vocational school administrators should establish staff recognition program to honour the great work some staff are doing;
- (5) Vocational school administrators should cultivate relationship with the neighborhood religious leaders;
- (6) Vocational school administrators should make conscious effort to bring in legislators into the school and make sure that they stay a bit longer so that they can have the opportunity to see something positive going on around the school.

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