

SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATION: A TOOL FOR ENHANCING STUDENTS' ENROLLMENT INTO TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Federal Government of Nigeria through its national policy on education gave prominence to education for self-reliance in its educational structure. This policy can best be achieved through Technical Education programme. Technical Education is an aspect of the education whose main objective is to prepare its recipients for employment in a recognized occupation through the acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitude required for utilization of natural resources needed for economic development of the nation and for their own personal betterment. Although Technical Education contributes significantly to the development of the nation's economy, it has been observed that there is persistent low enrolment into the programme. The paper therefore, aims to examine the strategies for enhancing students' enrollment in technical education programme through school public relations with the view of highlighting factors responsible for low enrolment into technical education programme. The paper recommended among others, regular meetings with guardians, regular orientation programme for both guardians and students, organization of career guidance and occupational awareness programme, public private partnership programme, voluntary and collaborative relationship between various participants in education industry, sharing of workshop and physical facilities with host community, provision of scholarships programme, participation of school management in community development service and carrying out intensive awareness campaign in the media as suitable measures of enhancing students' enrolment in technical education programme.

Keywords: School Public Relation, Enrollment and Technical Education

Introduction

Education is one of the greatest tools for national development. It is the strongest force that could be used to achieve desirable change of a nation's economic, political and sociological development. Shomirzayev (2020) stated that education is the greatest

force for bringing about positive changes in the society. It involves a learning environment with teachers and students at the centre of the activity. The interaction between the teachers, students and curriculum content brings about permanent change in behavior gained through learning

activities. However, the current educational system needed in this new age especially in Nigeria, is the educational system that trains its recipient to acquire skills to earn a living. In line with this direction, Agwi(2016) stated that the educational programme that provide this kind of training is regarded as Technical Education.

Technical Education also known as Industrial Technology Education, Technology Education or Industrial Technical Education is one of the vocational education programme. The main objective is to prepare its recipient for the acquisition of practical skills, attitude, understanding and knowledge that lead to occupational field for effective participation in the world of work. It is a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related science, the acquisition of knowledge, practical skills and attitudes relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (UNESCO, 2016). In essence, Technical Education is meant to prepare beneficiaries for employment in recognized occupation through acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitude required for utilization of natural resources needed for economic development of the nation. It is designed to prepare individual learner to be self-reliant and increase earnings (Adetola, 2021). Corroborating his view, Abdulahi (2016) stated that technical education is a planned programme of learning experiences that begins with exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills, and enables achievement of high academic standards, leadership, preparation for industry-defined work and advanced and continuing education.

The objectives of the programme as obtained in the national policy on education, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), is aimed at preparing the recipient to become craftsmen, master craftsmen, technicians and technologist's in different occupational trade for employment in the world of work, to prepare the recipients become teachers of technical subjects and effectively occupies leadership positions in secondary schools, technical colleges and trade centres. It also prepares the recipients for employment in training schemes of technical and industrial establishments and cooperative colleges, as well as in the various government rural development schemes including an opportunity for advanced studies such as Masters and Doctoral degrees. In order to achieve this goal, Technical Education curriculum was split into different trades with corresponding modules so as to enable learners choose and accomplish trade of their interest successfully. The programme according to Auta (2022), is therefore concerned with the acquisition of skills and knowledge for sustainable livelihood and employment through the production of skilled workforce to revitalize and sustain the economy and reduce unemployment. It is a veritable tool for national development strategies in many societies because of the impact on human resource development, productivity and economic growth (Wordu et al., 2018).

Although, Technical Education contributes significantly to the development of the nation's economy, it has been revealed by many researchers that there is persistent low enrolment of students into the programme. For instance, a study by Oviawe (2017) revealed that technical education has remained detested to a greater extent by the

majority of Nigerian parents and even students which resulted to low enrollment rate of students into Technical Education programme. In line with this, Smith (2021) noted that lack of qualified skilled manpower in Nigeria society today is evidence of the decreasing enrolment rate of

s tudents into Technical Education programme. Moreso, Auta, et al. (2023) revealed that an intermitted negative fluctuation in enrolment rate of students in Technical Education programme as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Enrolment Trend into Technical Education Programme in Relation to the Approved Carrying Capacity

Session	N	NUC approved Carrying Capacity	% of Carrying Capacity (X)	% of Enrollment (Y)	Ratio of X & Y
2013/2014	44	100	100	44	100:44
2014/2015	36	100	100	36	100:36
2015/2016	16	100	100	16	100:16
2016/2017	41	100	100	41	100:41
2017/2018	14	100	100	14	100:14
2018/2019	19	100	100	19	100:19
2019/2020	6	100	100	6	100:6
2020/2021	29	100	100	29	100:29
2021/2022	23	100	100	23	100:23
2022/2023	93	100	100	93	100:93
Total	321	1000	1000	32.1	100:32.1

Source: Auta et al. (2023)

From Table 1, it can be clearly seen that there is relatively empirical evidence to support the visible inconsistent enrollment trends into Technical Education programmes in relation to the approved carrying capacity especially at the university level which indicated that the enrollment trends into Technical Education programmes have witness an intermitted negative fluctuation in the last ten years to the extent that only 6% enrollment quota was filled in a particular academic year (2019/2020).

Some of the obvious reasons of the low enrolment of students into Technical Education programme according to Adeosun (2015), is that Nigeria does not seem to accord Technical Education programme the attention it deserves despite

its proven contributions in national development. This could be attributed to many factors such as misconceived notion that Technical Education is meant for the academic weaklings, societal perception of the programme as being exclusively for men folks (Auta, 2023, Dokubo & Deebom,2017). The average Nigerian parent will prefer professions like Medicine, Law, and Engineering, etc. to Technical Education for their children and wards (Auta, 2023). This negative stigma which society places on Technical Education programme might have contributed in no small measure to the low enrollment of students into the programme. There is need for schools to create awareness to the public on the importance of enrolling their wards in technical education programme. School

public relations is a business of creating and maintaining public understanding and support through effective communication.

In addition, Abiodun-Oyebanji and Michael (2016) revealed that many other factors such as school location, family background, social economic status, peer influence, environmental factors, economic factors and government/political factors also influence enrolment rate of students into Technical Education programme. The effects of this low enrolment of students in Technical Education programme according to Smith (2021), is that most primary, post-primary, technical and vocational schools in Nigeria now lack the quality and quantity of technical teachers for implementing the Technical Education curriculum at all levels of Education. If this trend of low enrolment is not checked, the dream of having more trained craftsmen, technicians, technologist's or technical educators to meet manpower needed for science and technological growth and development of the nation may not be achieved. It is in line with this that the study seeks to address the strategies of enhancing the enrolment rate of students into Technical Education programme through the school public relation programme.

School Public Relations

School public relation has been widely identified as one of the best ways to increase awareness in schools. Therefore, the need for effective school public relation has become increasingly important for Technical Education programme. In order to understand the role public relation plays in improving students' enrolment in Technical Education programmes, it is first important

to understand the concept of public relations.

In a broad sense, Omorodion et al. (2022) defined public relations as management functions which evaluate public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures for an organization with the public interests. Public relation is also viewed as the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its public (Ibeneme & Okwelle, 2008). According to Onwumere and Modebelu (2020), public relations is a management function that seeks to identify, build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and all of the public on whom its success or failure depends. These definitions project public relations as systematic efforts by an organization to gain public supports which are found on evaluative data, planned activities and public interest. Public relation therefore helps an organization and its public adapt mutually to one another.

School public relations can therefore be referred to as public information, community relations, or communications that enhance school management. Gowon et al. (2019) defined school public relations as a planned, systematic management function, designed to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. It relies on a comprehensive, two-way communication process involving both internal and external public with the goal of stimulating better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the organization.

School public relations programs assist in interpreting public attitudes, identify and help shape policies and procedures in school in the interest of public and carry on

involvement and information activities which earn public support and understanding in school (Çoruk, 2018). School public relation encompasses all interactions and communications with the public by everyone in your school district, from school secretaries to maintenance workers to teachers, principals, board members, and students. Good public relation is something everyone involved with a school should be practicing every day (Çoruk, 2018). A cursory look at the above definitions show that school public relations rely on a comprehensive two-way communication process involving both internal public (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. Today, school public relations are not all about conveying information to the public rather, it is about establishing and promoting partnerships within the community.

Role of Internal Public in Enhancing Students' Enrolment into Technical Education Programmes

The internal public in a school public relation programme refers to the students and staff (school secretaries to maintenance workers to teachers, principals, board members, and students) in the school. Gowon et al. (2019) revealed that one of the best ways of increasing students' enrolment in technical schools is through the teachers and the students. The school is an environment with staff and students from various social cultural and ethnic background. Some of the staff and students live inside the school during the school

session for schools with hostel facilities while others come from their various home for schools without hostel facilities. Irrespective of their residence, they share information with other people who are not in their school either during the school session or during the holidays. Therefore, as they meet with people who are not part of their internal public relation, they should take up the responsibilities of advertising the school programme. As they tell their school stories by sharing the mission, vision as well as the objectives of the school programmes to the people they meet, they are advertising the school. This will in no small measure enhance the enrolment rate of students into the school programme especially in Technical Education programme.

Also, sharing success stories and testimonials of alumni who have excelled in their career after completing technical education programme can inspire prospective students. Testimonials can serve as real-life example of a successful education programme. National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium (NASDCTEC) (2019) stated that students testimonials can be an effective marketing tool for technical education programme. Teachers can serve as ambassadors for technical education, sharing their own experiences and the benefits of technical education with students. To this, Okwelle (2011) stated that teachers of technology education in tertiary institutions have major roles to play in school public relation's activities in order to attract students into TVET programmes.

The school management which is a core aspect of the internal school public relation could as well enhance the enrolment of students into Technical Education

programme. According to Çoruk (2018), some of the ways the school management could enhance the enrolment of students into Technical Education programme are stated as follows:

- i. Regular orientation programme for both guardians and students.
- ii. Organizing of career guidance and occupational awareness programme in schools.
- iii. Public private partnership between schools and private organizations.
- iv. Voluntary and collaborative relationship between various participants in education industry.
- v. Sharing of physical and instructional facilities with host community.
- vi. Active participation of school management in community development service.
- vii. Creation of website to tell own story, about the mission and vision of the programme as well opportunities that about for recipient of the programme.
- viii. Link website to other national and international organization such as AVTEN, UNESCO, UNEVOC and ILO e-platform to access opportunities.
- ix. Regular exhibitions programme of products from schools.
- x. Regular awareness campaign programme in the media for public awareness on school programme

Role of External Public in Enhancing Students' Enrolment into Technical Education Programmes

The external public in a school public relation programme refers to those people who are outside the school or who have an indirect relationship with the school. Such people include: the parents, government, agencies and companies/businesses. This group of people plays a significant role in enhancing the enrolment of students into Technical Education programmes. Brown (2022) stated that some of the ways to enhance the enrolment of students in school programme is through funding. The general Public especially the government is supposed to take the major responsibility of funding schools. Funding could be in form of the following among others, intervention programmes, provisions of physical and instructional facilities, provision of scholarship, training and retraining of teachers, provisions of funds for workshop and seminars for staff training programmes, recruitment of adequately qualified manpower. Once these things are continuously done for Technical Education programme, the programme will become more viable and the quality of the graduates from the programme will be improved. This will attract more applicants and in turn increase the enrolment rate of students into the programme.

Conclusion and Suggestions

There is no doubt that school public relation is a good alternative to improving student enrolment in Technical Education programme. School public relation activities are needed in every level of Technical Education programme to

effectively communicate the missions, goals, vision, accomplishments and challenges of the school to the public. This is important to correct the poor societal attitude about Technical and Vocational Education programme which has not encouraged enrolment into the programme. However, for Vocational and Technical Education institutions to initiate, develop and engage in public relation's activities successfully, a lot of sensitization, advocacies and capacity development among the stakeholders are required. A collective involvement will make a difference.

Based on the issues discussed in the preceding paragraphs, the study therefore, suggests the following:

- a. School management should as a matter of urgency have in place a well-coordinated public relation unit with responsibilities of both staff and students well defined.
- b. Budgetary provision should be made for public relation unit in Technical Education programmes by school

management.

- c. School public relation should be included in the curriculum of Technical Education programmes by curriculum planners.
- d. School management with Technical Education programmes should be actively involved in community development service.
- e. Schools should create website to tell their own story and also link to other national and international organizations such as AVTEN UNESCO, UNEVOC and ILO e-platform to access opportunities.
- f. Schools should endeavor to share facilities with the host community to enhance mutual relationship between the school and the general public.
- g. Government should also encourage stability in educational policies by introducing and maintaining a curriculum which will cater for learners' interest and make them self-employed after school.

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