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## Application of Public Relations in the Management of Secondary Schools: An Appraisal of Selected Schools in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State

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**Abstract:** *Public relations has become too relevant in this 21<sup>st</sup> century that almost all organisations or institutions both public and private seek to employ its services. That is to say, almost all organisations tend to depend so much on the peculiar contributions of public relations, especially in the area of image enhancement, building of mutual understanding between the organisation and its public and so on. That is why this study is set to find out if post primary schools in Yakurr Local Government of Cross River State are equally employing the services of public relations in the management of her schools. The work is hinged on the Excellence Theory by James E. Grunig, which specifies how public relations makes organisations more effective. The theory explained that the value of public relations lies on the importance an organisation attaches to it. The methodological approach was the use of qualitative research- Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and intensive interviews. Out of the 63 secondary schools in the LGA, 10 were purposively selected. The principals of these schools constituted the FGD. While 20 staff, students and stakeholders of each of these institutions were interviewed. Findings showed that the application of public relations in the management of secondary school in the area is zero percent. Respondents also embraced the idea of engaging public relations experts in the running of these schools in view of its enormous contributions to the well-being of organisations. The study concluded that public relations experts are very necessary in organisations like secondary schools, and therefore, recommended strongly among others, the application of public relations and its experts in the management of secondary schools in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State.*

**Keywords:** *Application, Public Relations, Management, Appraisal, Selected.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The role of Public Relations is pivotal in the day-to-day running or management of any organisation. That is why Dominick (2011, p.325), said "Public relations is a management function designed to help a company/organisation set its goals and adapt to a changing environment". It is that arm of an organisation that helps to package the image and frontiers of the organisation to its publics. Hasan (2013, p.517) voiced that public relations involves "formulation and implementation of an organisation's procedures and policy regarding communication with its publics". He went further to state that public relations also helps in "fostering a positive relationship between an organisation and its public constituents". According to Bittner (1989, p.228), "public relations is concerned with creating a favourable image for the company or organisation..." he stated further that "effective public relations prevents problems before they start" (p.242). This shows that public relations can help an organisation to have a favourable image as well as prevent problems that are likely to besiege it. From the fore-going, public relations plays a key role in the life of any organisation in terms of establishing relationships with the public, and in implementing policies. In helping to define and implement policy, "the public relations practitioner utilizes a variety of professional communication skills and plays an integrative role both within the organisation and between the organisation, and the external environment" (Hendrix 2001,



p.5). For an organisation to progress internally and externally, it needs expert counseling. That is why it is imperative for a conscious organisation to employ the services of public relations practitioner(s) in its daily operations. The duty of this expert counselor(s), is to ensure that such organisation is properly midwife regarding its relationship with its publics, information dissemination, communication and extension of the goodwill of the organisation to its publics. This is because the purpose of public relations communication is bringing about a change in attitude. That is why Sambe (2008, p.2) opines that "communication is the medium through which relationships are established, extended and maintained". It is therefore necessary for organisations like secondary schools to recognize the good role public relations plays in the management of any given organisation, and engage it in her everyday operations.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The role of public relations in the management of an organisation cannot be over-stressed. Its function is as crucial as that of the media to the society. But the problem is whether secondary school administrators are using public relations experts in managing their schools. This is because, for any organisation to function properly and efficiently, in areas of image management, effective communication with its publics (internal and external), living up to its corporate social responsibility, and having goodwill with its hosts, public relations experts must be on ground to offer such professional guidance. The study therefore seeks to investigate the level of public relations application in the management of secondary schools in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to find out if secondary school administrators are engaging public relations in the management of their schools. So the study is set to achieve the following: Whether public relations departments or units exist in secondary schools in the area. To what extent secondary school administrators are engaging public relations experts in the management of their schools. The extent to which public relations can contribute to the management of secondary schools in the area. Research Questions. As stated in the objectives of this study, the underlisted research questions are set to moderate the work. Do public relations departments or units exist in secondary schools in the area? What is the extent of engagement of public relations experts in the management of secondary schools in the area? How can public relations contribute to the management of secondary schools in the area?

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is to showcase the relevance of public relations application in the management of any organisation or establishment. According to Effiom and Nyong (2017), "without public relations, there can be no effective co-ordination of an organisation and the achievement of its set objectives". Therefore, this work is very important to all secondary school administrators, as it will help them in the management of their schools. It



will serve as a road-map in relating well with both their internal as well as their external publics. It will also serve as a platform for creating goodwill and mutual understanding between their schools and their host communities. The study will also benefit managers of organisations outside the school environment, as the application of public relations in the management of their establishments will place them at very advantageous positions. According to Bittner (1989), "public relations helps to bridge the communication gap between an organisation and its publics". Therefore, this study will be of great importance to communicators of all ages to engage public relations principles in their communication bid. The research work is also intended to serve as a spring board that would spur scholars of similar disciplines to carry out more investigations on the application of public relations in the management of any given organisation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theory according to Severin and Tankand (1982, p.35), can be defined as "a set of systematic generalisation based on scientific observation and leading to further empirical observation". Okunna (1999, p.160), defined it as "a set of interrelated principles or observations put together to explain or clarify an aspect of reality or a phenomenon". Ennis (1999) has this to say about theoretical framework: *It is a structure that describes the major elements, variables or constructs that organises your scholarship. It is used to hypothesize, understand or give meaning to relationships among the elements that influence, affect or predict the event or outcome that you specify. The theoretical framework grows out of the research focus, guide the design of individual studies and structure your research presentation or publication.* From the understanding of what a theory is, as well as theoretical framework, this study shall be hinged on the Excellence Theory. The Excellence Theory is a general theory of public relations that specifies how public relations makes organisations more effective, how it is organised, managed and what it contributes most to organisational effectiveness. It was propounded by James E. Grunig in 1985, and funded by the foundation of the International Association of Business Communicators (ABC). The Excellence Theory explained that the value of public relations lies on the importance an organisation attaches to it. Good relations with both internal and external publics is helpful for an organisation to develop and achieve its desired goals. The theory also observed that public relations can maximize its value by identifying strategies of building long-term relationships with organisations through symmetrical communication programmes.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

This study adopted qualitative research approach to obtain information from respondents. That is, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interviews were the methods used to collect details and actual information relating to the study. One focus group discussion, comprising of the 10 principals of the selected secondary schools in the study area, and several oral interviews of staff, students and some stakeholders purposively selected from these schools, were conducted to illicit responses to the study. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p.132), "focus group, or group interviewing, is a research strategy for



understanding people's attitudes...." So the purpose for adopting the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), is to ensure that authentic information is gotten from these key administrators of the selected secondary schools; and also giving equal opportunity to bear their minds on the matter under consideration. The interview approach was also to give the staff, students, and stakeholders of these schools the privilege to share their views on the application of public relations in the management of post primary schools in the area.

### **Population of Study**

The study intended to cover all the 63 secondary schools (both government and private owned) spread across the local government area.

### **Sample Size Selection**

According to Owuanmalam (2012), it is difficult to deal with an entire population in a research study. More so, where the population is large and scattered across a large expanse of territory. It means a manageable number of subjects has to be selected to represent the population studied. This fraction is what is known as a sample. Edim and Effiom (2018), define sample size as a process of selecting an appropriate amount of units from the population interest to provide accurate information about the entire population of a particular study. Therefore, a population of 10 schools and their principals were purposively selected for the focus group discussion. Also 20 persons including staff, students and stakeholders from each of these secondary schools were engaged in intensive interviews. The process of the selection of this 200 respondents was still through the purposive sampling approach. From these respondents, the researcher was able to gather data/information that shall be discussed in the subsequent section of the study.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This section critically examined the findings and other implications, as well as answers to the research questions. It is necessary therefore to give analysis to the questions posed in this study from the data so gathered. Question one: Do public relations departments or units exist in secondary schools in the area? From the findings, it is discovered that public relations departments or units do not at all exist in secondary schools in the area under study. While other administrative and academic departments or units are existing, public relations has no trace in the schools. Some of the respondents even denied ever knowing if such exists and that the day-to-day running of the administration of the schools lie solely on the principals and their deputies. Question two: What is the extent of engagement of public relations experts in the management of secondary schools in the area? Responses to this question equally showed that public relations experts are not in any way part of the management of secondary schools in the area. The functional role of public relations practitioners in managing secondary schools is of no relevance to the administrators of these institutions. This runs contrary to the views of Dominick (2011, p.325) who opines that: *Public relations is a management function. It is designed to help a company set its goals and adapt to a changing environment. Public relations practitioners regularly counsel top*



management. Inherent in the specification of public relations is a planned activity. It is organised and directed toward specific goals and objectives. The impact of public relations in secondary schools in the area is not there. While other structures like: administrative, academic and even social clubs like Debating Club, Young Farmers' Club etc, are holding sway, the beauty and impact of public relations is not in sight. Question three: How can public relations contribute to the management of secondary schools in the area? Respondents are of the views that public relations departments or units should be established in secondary schools in the area. This is in line with its enormous contributions to the growth of any given organisation or institution. Their responses are supported by the views of Baran (2010, p.299), who stated that:

*Public relations, at its best, not only tells an organisation's "story" to its publics (communication), but also helps shape the organisation and the way it performs (management). Through research, measurement and evaluation, public relations professionals determine the concerns and expectations of the organisation's publics and explain them to management. A responsible and effective public relations programme is based on the understanding and support of its publics.*

This is also supported by the views of Sambe (2008, p.243), that "public relations people are also responsible for presenting their companies or institutions in the best possible posture". No organisation or institution can function and achieve its set mission or vision without the mediation of a functional public relations outfit. It is a very powerful tool for effective communication both within and outside the organisation. It knows and determines any target audience; and can strategically plan its message. Agba and Effiom (2015), state that, "in planning a communication message, the worth of its target audience must be given consideration". Public relations is in the vanguard of ensuring that an organisation knows its audience and communicates effectively with/or to it.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study: The Application of Public Relations in the Management of Secondary Schools: An Appraisal of Selected Schools in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, show that secondary school administrators do not involve the services of public relations experts in the management of their schools. That is, public relations departments or units are not operational in their institutions in the area. The findings have also shown the willingness of most of these administrators to establish, or to engage public relations experts in their institutions; admitting that lack of proper knowledge of the usefulness of public relations experts in the management of their schools, has been one of the reasons for the non-existence of such departments or units in their institutions. In concluding this study, it is necessary to reiterate the fact that, no organisation can function effectively in this 21st century, without a functional public relations department or outfit. It therefore becomes necessary for the study to make these recommendations.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made: Secondary school administrators should establish and incorporate public relations experts in the management of their schools, to enhance community relationship with their host communities. Wilson (1997, p.191), says thus: "any company or corporation desirous to expand its business should set up a community relations...." This is an off shoot of public relations. According to Benson-Eluwa (2003, p.47), public relations seeks to "secure and maintain acceptance of an organisation by its publics". It is of great importance for organisations like secondary schools to have public relations outfits, to assist in the management of these schools. Owners of secondary schools: government or proprietors should ensure that their schools have functional public relations departments or units. The existence of this department or unit in schools, will not only be of benefit to the schools, but also to the owners, as it will help to smoothen the management process as well as the image of both the institutions and her owners. It will also aid them to "acquire and retain a good reputation" (Nkwocha, 2016, p.50). Every organisation needs to communicate effectively with her publics. This is because, effective communication will help an organisation to grow and expand her frontiers. It is for this reason that the presence of public relations in the life or any organisation or institution becomes very eminent. It will help the schools to communicate effectively and efficiently with all her publics. An organisation without a public relations outfit is just like a house without walls. Therefore, I strongly recommend public relations outfits in the management of secondary schools in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State.

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