

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING FEMALE STUDENTS' ENROLMENT IN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES THROUGH PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to determine the strategies for improving female students' enrolment in technical and vocational education and training programmes in Nigeria through students' involvement in public relations activities. Descriptive survey design approach was adopted for the study. Three research questions and three null hypotheses were generated and formulated respectively to guide the study. A 28 item questionnaire structured in a four point rating scale was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was face validated by six experts and the reliability coefficient of 0.80 was obtained with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient method. The population consists of 365 final year technical education students and 68 technology education lecturers in the three tertiary institutions in Rivers State that offer programmes in technical education. The sample comprised 120 technical education final year students while all the 68 technology education lecturers were used in the study without sample because they are few. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while t-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study revealed among other things, that the following strategies among others were identified for improving female students enrolment in TVET programmes through female students involvement in public relations; effective supervision of students on industrial training and teaching practice, introducing public relations activities into the school curriculum and sponsoring and participating in students organizations and programmes. Consequently, it was recommended among others that institutions should establish and fund public relation unit without wasting time, school public relation officers should ensure that they carry their TVE students along during public relation activities.

Keywords: Strategies, female, enrolment, public relations, activities, technology

INTRODUCTION

Technical vocational education and training (TVET) implies life-long learning and preparation for responsible citizenship (Okwelle & 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, Okeke (as cited in Okwelle, 2010), Okolocha (2006) noted that since the introduction of TVET in Nigeria education system some years ago, enrolment in TVET programme in Nigeria has remain low. This development according to Agwi & Puyate (2017) is more disturbing on female students' participation in TVET programme in Nigeria. Ukachukwu (2015) also stated that this development has posed inherent danger to technology education and national development. In line with this view, Uzougwu (2014) reported that the total enrolment figure into TVET programme in Nigeria as at 2014 was less than five percent. He noted that this figure, in comparison with countries seeking to have rapid socio-economic development is negligible as these countries target about fifty percent enrolment annually.

Past researches (Durujae, Ajie & Aiyegbusi, 2014, Blosor, 201) have identified major factors responsible for how enrolment 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 how status occupation as well as lack of career awareness in TVET. The effect of this low enrolment of students especially the female students as observed by researchers in technical vocational education and training programmes in particular, is that many post primary schools in the country lack the quality and quantity of technical teachers for implementing the technology education programmes at this level of education relevant to national development (Okwelle, 2011).

The current reform of technical vocational education and training (TVET) system in Nigeria seems to have not fully addressed the impediments to technology education development in the country till date. There is therefore the need to further intensity efforts geared towards repositioning (TVET) institutions with a view to making them attractive to prospective students. It is in line with this fact that several studies (Agwi, 2016, Okwelle & Ibeneme, 2008, Okwori, 2011), have identified some sustainable strategies of enhancing students enrolment in TVET programmes. Some of these strategies according to these authors are organizing regular excursion for TVE students, recognizing/rewarding outstanding student achievement through awards, commendation and introducing public relations activities into the school curriculum.

Public relations in the contest of educational process are 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 two-way mutual relationships and communication between the school and the community. A careful look at the above definitions 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 & Okwelle, 2008) includes:

- a. Selling the educational programme to the people of the community so that they will take pride in and support the schools
- b. 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 are doing and will support the school programme
- c. Encourage the community interest and participation in the school programme

Students of TVET programmes, by virtue of their role as the most direct beneficiaries of the focal point of the educational process are considered as good public relations agents. They are the most significant and important force in the public evaluation of the school programme. After graduation, the experiences of the students reflect their former experience within the school and thereby colour the schools reputation. Students after graduation entering the labour market model public attitudes towards the school by their dressing, manner of speech, general conduct and job performance (Uzougwu, 2014),

Since TVET programmes provide beneficiaries with skills for many job opportunities, students' skills in the programme can be involved in the school public relations activities for the purpose of educating the community as to what the programme does and how it will benefit graduates. This type of campaign as stressed by Abdulahi (2016), may result in greater public awareness and acceptance as well as in increased enrolments into TVET programmes. Evidence (Ibeneme & Okwelle, 2008) showed that there is no proper organized public relations programme in Nigeria TVET institutions. The problem of this study therefore was that female students seem not to be involved in school public relation activities.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to find out the strategies for improving female students' enrolment in technical and vocational education programmes through female students' involvement in public relations activities in Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the roles expected of technical and vocational education female students' in school public relations activities in Rivers State.
2. Find out whether appropriate steps have been taken to involve female students' in school public relations activities in Rivers State.

3. Determine appropriate strategies to be adopted in students' school public relations activities for improving female students' enrolment in TVET programmes in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed in the study:

1. What are the roles expected of technical and vocational education female students' in school public relations activities for improving female students enrolment in TVET programmes in Rivers State?
2. What are the appropriate steps taken to involve female students' in school public relations activities in Rivers State?
3. What are the appropriate strategies to be adopted in students' school public relations activities for improving female students' enrolment in TVET programmes in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant difference between the opinions of TVET female students and educators on the roles expected of technical and vocational education female students in school public relations activities.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant difference between the opinions of TVET female students and educators on the appropriate steps taken to involve female students in school public relations activities.
- H₀₃:** There is no significant difference between the opinions of TVET female students and educators on those strategies to be adopted in students' school public relations activities in improving female students' enrolment in TVE programmes

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study was a descriptive survey research design and was carried out in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The population of the study comprised 365 final year technical education female students' and 68 technology education lecturers in the three higher institutions in Rivers State that offer technology education courses, namely, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt and Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku. A total of 120 final year technical education female students were purposively sampled, while all the 68 technology education lecturers were used without sample because their number was few.

A-28 item structured questionnaire titled "Female Students' Enrolment in Technical and Vocational Education Public Relations Questionnaire" (FSETVETPRQ) was the instrument used to collect data for the study. The FSETVETPRQ had four sections A to D. Section A sought information on selected personal data of the respondents, Section B to D consisted of 28 – items relevant for answering research posed in the study. The response format of FSETVETPRQ was a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with corresponding values of 4, 3, 3, and 1 respectively.

The FSETVETPRQ instrument was validated by four experts in Vocational and Technology Education and two experts in Measurement and Evaluation from Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt. It was administered to fifteen (15) students who were not part of the sample of the study. The scores obtained were subjected to internal consistency reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha method. The reliability yielded 0.80 which was considered adequate for the study.

A total of 188 copies of the instrument were distributed to the respondents directly by the researchers with the help of three research assistants. The total number of copies retrieved was 176 (108 female students' and 68 educators) representing 98 percent return. This number was considered adequate and was used for analysis of the study. Mean was used to answer the research questions. Real limit of number of 3.50-4.00 (Strongly Agree), 2.50-3.49 (Agree), 1.50-2.49 (Disagree), 0.50-1.49 (Strongly Disagree) were used. Standard deviation values were used to determine the level of homogeneity among the respondents. T-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. In testing the hypotheses, the null hypotheses were accepted if the calculated t-value is less and equal to the critical t-value. On the other hand, where the calculated t-value is greater than the critical t-value the null hypotheses were rejected.

RESULTS

The analysis of data in relation to each of the research questions are presented in Tables 1-6:

Research Question 1

What are the roles expected of technical and vocational education female students' in school public relations activities for improving female students' enrolment in TVET programmes in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on roles expected of TVET female students' in school public relations activities

S/N	ITEMS	Educators! Responses N = 68		Remarks	Students! Responses N = 108		Remarks
		\bar{X}	SD		\bar{X}	SD	
1.	Supporting fund raising for TVET development programmes	2.93	0.90	Agree	2.72	0.89	Agree
2	Participating in activities that will correct the poor image of TVET programmes to the public	2.35	0.89	Agree	2.66	0.87	Agree
3	Creating of awareness within and outside the school environment	3.01	0.93	Agree	2.73	0.84	Agree

	regarding the importance of TVET in national development						
4	Taking part in TVET exhibition programme	3.04	0.94	Agree	2.76	0.85	Agree
5	Engaging in sensitization of the public about the activities of TVET programmes	2.94	0.91	Agree	3.28	0.91	Agree
6	Showing good character in and outside the school environment	2.66	0.88	Agree	2.71	0.89	Agree
7	Assisting the school management to advertise TVET programmes to the public	2.63	0.84	Agree	2.68	0.85	Agree
8	Granting audience to the press on TVET programmes	2.55	0.83	Agree	2.50	0.82	Agree
	Grand Mean /SD	2.83	0.89		2.75	0.86	

The results in Table 1 show that all the respondents agreed with all the items as expected roles of female students in school public relations activities for improving female students' enrolment in TVET programmes in Rivers State. Furthermore, the standard deviation which ranged from 0.82 to 0.94 indicates closeness in the opinions of both categories of respondents.

Research Questions 2

What are the appropriate steps taken to involve female students' in school public relations activities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard deviation on appropriate steps taken to involve female students' in school public relations activities

S/N	ITEMS	Educators! Responses N = 68		Remarks	Students! Responses N = 108		Remarks
		\bar{X}	SD		\bar{X}	SD	
9	Organizing orientation programmes for TVET students on public relations activities	2.22	0.84	Disagree	2.26	0.84	Disagree
10	Sponsoring students programmes (e..g TVET week, exhibition)	2.40	0.85	Disagree	2.32	0.85	Disagree
11	Training students on public relations activities programmes	2.88	0.89	Agree	2.73	0.86	Agree
12	Sponsoring TVET students' visit to media houses for press conference	2.19	0.82	Disagree	2.32	0.85	Disagree
13	Rewarding outstanding TVET students achievement through awards	2.75	0.87	Agree	2.76	0.84	Agree
14	Rendering financial support to students to carry out projects for exhibition	2.01	0.30	Disagree	2.25	0.83	Disagree
15	Supporting students to carry out sensitization programme to the public on issues concerning TVET programmes	1.97	0.78	Disagree	2.08	0.70	Disagree
16	Organizing effective TVET instruction to the students	2.36	0.86	Disagree	2.24	0.71	Disagree
17	Integrating public relations activities in the school curriculum	2.75	0.87	Agree	2.78	0.85	Agree
Grand Mean /SD		2.39	0.84		2.41	0.81	

Data in Table 2 indicate that the respondents agreed with items 11, 13 and 17, while they disagreed with items 9, 10, 12, 14, 15 and 16 as appropriate steps which have not been taken to involve female students in school public relations activities in Rivers State. The standard deviation which ranged from 0.85 to 0.89 indicates closeness in the opinions of both categories of respondents.

Research Questions 3

What are the appropriate strategies to be adopted in students' school public relations activities for improving female students' enrolment in TVET programmes in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard deviation on sustainable strategies for students' school public relations activities

S/N	ITEMS	Educators! Responses N = 68		Remarks	Students! Responses N = 108		Remarks
		\bar{X}	SD		\bar{X}	SD	
18	Effective supervision of students on industrial training and teaching practice exercise	2.58	0.83	Agree	3.00	0.93	Agree
19	Provision of standard facilities and materials for effective teaching of practical skills	2.51	0.80	Agree	2.81	0.89	Agree
20	Right placement of students to industries for industrial attachment programme	2.59	0.84	Agree	3.02	0.90	Agree
21	Supporting and encouraging the establishment of students TVET club	2.60	0.85	Agree	2.57	0.86	Agree
22	Organizing regular excursion for TVET students	2.59	0.83	Agree	3.05	0.91	Agree
23	Effective TVET instruction	3.02	0.92	Agree	2.78	0.88	Agree
24	Recognizing/rewarding outstanding student achievement through awards, commendation etc	2.53	0.81	Agree	2.61	0.86	Agree
25	Engaging public relations activities into the school curriculum	2.70	0.84	Agree	3.02	0.90	Agree
26	Assuming students to work at the public relation unit of the school	2.81	0.86	Agree	2.55	0.87	Agree
27	Sponsoring and participating in students organization and programmes (E.g. TVET week, career talks, exhibitions)	3.01	0.90	Agree	2.81	0.89	Agree
28	Motivating students to show interest in public relations activities	2.54	0.82	Agree	3.01	0.91	Agree
Grand Mean /SD		2.68	0.85		2.88	0.89	

Data in Table 3 indicate that the respondents agreed with all the items as appropriate strategies to be adopted in students' school public relations activities for improving female

students' enrolment in TVET programmes in Rivers State . The standard deviation which ranged from 0.85 to 0.89 indicates closeness in the opinions of both educators and students.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between the opinions of TVET students and educators on the roles expected of TVET female students in school public relations activities.

Table 4: T-test of difference between the opinions of TVET students and educators on the roles expected of TVET students in school public relations activities

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	P	t-cal	t-cri	Decision
Educators	68	2.83	0.89	174	0.05	2.82	1.96	Ho ₁ Rejected
Students	108	2.75	0.86					

Table 4 reveals that the calculated t-value of (2.82) is greater than the critical t-value of (1.96) at $df = 174$ and 0.05 level of significance, implying that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of educators and students regarding the roles expected of TVET female students' in school public relations activities in Rivers State. The first null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between the opinions of TVET female students and educators on the appropriate steps taken to involve students in school public relations activities.

Table 5: T-test of difference between the opinions of TVET students and educators on the appropriate steps taken to involve students in school public relations activities

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	P	t-cal	t-cri	Decision
Educators	68	2.39	0.84	174	0.05	1.93	1.96	Ho ₂ Accepted
Students	108	2.41	0.81					

The result in Table 5 shows that the calculated t-value of (1.93) is less than the critical t-value of (1.96) at $df = 174$ and 0.05 level of significance; an indication that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of educators and students on the appropriate steps taken to involve female students in school public relations activities in Rivers State. The second null hypothesis was therefore accepted.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference between the opinions of TVET female students and educators on those strategies to be adopted in students' school public relations activities.

Table 6: T-test of difference between the opinions of TVET female students and educators on those strategies for students in school public relations activities

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	P	t-cal	t-cri	Decision
Educators	68	2.68	0.85	174	0.05	4.25	1.96	Ho ₃ Rejected
Students	108	2.88	0.89					

The result in Table 6 shows that the calculated t-value (4.25) is greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at $df = 174$ and 0.05 level of significance, implying that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of educators and students regarding those sustainable strategies to be adopted in students' school public relations activities for improving female students' enrolment in TVET programmes in Rivers State. The third null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

DISCUSSION

Data presented in Table 1 revealed that female students' have major roles to play in school public relations activities in order to attract other students such as their female counterparts into technical vocational education and training programmes. This is in line with the view of Calhoun and Finch (as cited by Okwelle, 2011) that technical and vocational education students' by virtue of their roles as the most direct beneficiaries of education are the most significant and important force in the public evaluation of a school programme because they are the focal point of education process. There is therefore, the need to make female students to realize that they have a part to play in improving enrolment to technical vocational education and training programme through their enrolment in public relations activities.

The results in Table 2 showed that appropriate steps have not been taken to involve female students in school public relations activities in Rivers State. These findings contradict the report of Greg (2012) that school public relations is a management function that establishes and maintain two-way mutual relationships and communication between the school and the community that must involve both internal publics (students and staff) and external public (parents and government). The result of these findings is worrisome as no meaningful progress will be made to improve enrolment figure of female students' in TVET programmes if female students' are not involved in school public relations activities. The reason been that the students are the direct beneficiary of education programmes in the society.

The results in Table 3 indicate that in the opinions of respondents all the listed strategies are such that can be adopted by training institutions students' public relations activities for improving enrolment in female students' in technical vocational education and training programmes. These findings are consistent with those of Agwi (2016), Okwelle & Ibeneme (2008), Okwori (2011) who identified some sustainable strategies of enhancing students enrolment in TVET programmes to include organizing regular excursion for TVET students, recognizing/rewarding outstanding student achievement through awards, commendation and introducing public relation activities into the school curriculum. Educators and students do not differ in their opinions on the identified strategies to be adopted in students' school public

relations activities for improving female students' enrolment in TVET programmes in Rivers State.

The results of the three hypotheses tested showed that one null hypothesis was accepted, while the other two were rejected. These further shows in the opinion of the respondents there were not divergent opinion on the raised issues in this research bothering on strategies to be adopted in students' school public relations activities for improving female students' enrolment in TVET programmes in Rivers State.

CONCLUSION

The programme of school public relations activities in institutions offering technical education programmes are needed to be effective in other to communicate the missions, goals, accomplishment, challenges and accountability to the public. This is important as to correct the poor societal attitude concerning technical and vocational education programmes which have female students enrolment in TVE programmes in Nigeria. The involvement of female students in the programme in other to reach out to the public is a welcome strategy that should be considered. The researchers strongly believe that the application of strategies determined by the study is a potential force in improving female students' enrolment in TVET programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Schools with TVET programmes should as a mater of urgency have in place well coordinated public relations unit with responsibilities of female students' well defined.
2. School public relation officers should ensure that they carry students' along during public relations activities/programmes of the school
3. Effective supervision of students on industrial training and teaching practice should be encouraged
4. School public relations activities should be included in the school curriculum.
5. Recognizing/rewarding outstanding students' achievement through awards and commendation should be given urgent attention by TVE institutions.

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