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STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLORS' PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC RELATION TRAINING IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to determine strategies for promoting guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation training in Anambra State vocational training centres. The study was conducted in Anambra State Nigeria. This study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 4,200 respondents. A sample size of 300 trainees was selected using a simple random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was on four (4) point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The validity and reliability of the instrument were duly established. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. Findings indicated that the strategies for promoting effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relations at vocational training centres in Anambra State and concluded that addressing the challenges identified in the study will enable vocational centers to achieve their goals and foster greater success in trainee's development. Based on the findings of the study, it was among others recommended that vocational school administrators should provide the needed policies that would encourage effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation in vocational centres and that motivational packages should be provided by the government and vocational school administrators to support the effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation.

Keywords: Public Relations, Participation Vocational Training; Guidance and Counselling.

Introduction

Education builds human capacity, equipping individuals to manage and coordinate other sectors for sustainability and intellectual development. Education exists in multiple forms, with formal and informal education being the most recognized. Formal education is typically provided in structured settings such as schools, where learners engage in organized activities like teaching, training, discussions, and guided research. This form of education is usually overseen by educators, but learners also have the opportunity to self-educate. Formal education is divided into various progressive stages, including preschool, primary school, secondary school, and tertiary education. Additionally, vocational centers offer

education that focuses on providing specific skill sets essential for vocational proficiency. In vocational training, the emphasis is on developing trainees' skills, attitudes, and values that enable them to translate knowledge into economic gains. Vocational institutions present opportunities for trainees to develop independence and explore future careers. Achieving effective public relations within these centers requires a variety of strategies, including engaging trainees in activities such as inter-house sports competitions, career fairs, prize-giving ceremonies, alumni days, vocational training weeks, and talent shows (Okeke, 2017). These activities foster a conducive environment for personal growth and skill development, which are essential for economic survival and community engagement. Vocational training is a significant aspect of guidance and counselling.

Guidance and counselling play an essential role in effective teaching and learning in schools. It provides support and assistance to students, helping them develop their academic, social, emotional and personal skills, leading to improved academic achievement, personal development and overall wellbeing. As noted by Darakhshan and Shameem (2023), guidance and counselling programs help identify and address issues that can affect a student's learning, such as anxiety, stress, depression, or behavioral problems. It helps students develop problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, and coping strategies to manage challenging situations, thereby enhancing their academic performance.

The term “guidance and counselling” have emerged as an essential element of personal, social, academic and professional life (Lai-Yeung, 2014; Mutie & Ndambuki, 2000). Various organisations now provide guidance and counselling as a part of their mission to help in individuals’ broader development beyond their personal interests. Thus, guidance and counselling is an important resource in educational institutions, nursing, life coaching and many other fields for developing life and career directions. Guidance and counselors are professionals, often working in schools or educational institutions, who provide students with support and guidance to navigate their academic, career, and personal lives, helping them develop skills and make informed decisions.

The roles of guidance and counsellors include:
Academic Planning: They assist students with course selection, college applications, and developing study skills.
Career Exploration: They help students explore different career paths, identify their interests and aptitudes, and prepare for the future.
Personal and Social Development: They offer support for students facing personal challenges, social difficulties, or mental health concerns.
Collaboration: They work with teachers, parents, and administrators to create a supportive environment for student success.
Resource Provision: They provide students with information about scholarships,

financial aid, and other resources that can help them succeed.

There are many ways in which guidance and counsellors can utilize and develop public relations skills in the workplace. According to Darakhshan and Shameem (2023); Lai-Yeung (2014); Mutie and Ndambuki (2000), here are some common public relations skills needed by guidance and counsellors:

- Flexibility: Being a public relations specialist requires that counsellors adapt quickly to changing circumstances. Being flexible and able to adapt to new situations can help counsellors become more effective in their counselling roles.

- Initiative: Self-motivation is an important aspect of public relations work. This can help counsellors quickly figure out how they can benefit their client, whether it involves learning about new strategies or techniques.

- Teamwork: Counsellors as public relations professionals rarely work alone. Being about to work well with others in high-pressure situations can help them lead more effective campaigns.

- Behaviour modification: One major role of guidance counsellor is behaviour modification (Akinade, 2012). Public relations work in the context of guidance and counselling, often involves modifying the behaviours of their clients. This requires relevant human relations skill. This skill allows counsellor to leverage the strengths of knowledge and wealth of experience to positively influence the clients.

Vocational trainings are provided in vocational centres. Vocational centers are institutions focused on equipping individuals with practical skills aimed at fostering self-employment and enhancing employability. According to Mbah (2016), these centers provide competency-based education across various fields, ensuring that trainees develop both the technical abilities required in their trade and the entrepreneurial skills needed to succeed independently. The training provided is designed to be relevant, not only in terms of current industry needs but also adaptable to changing economic or environmental conditions. The instruction in these centers is learner-focused, meaning it tailors to the specific needs of students, ensuring they are not only job-ready but also capable of navigating the complexities of self-employment and managing their businesses successfully. Vocational centers also emphasize the importance of public relations skills, preparing trainees to engage effectively with clients and the broader public.

Public relations (PR) refer to the management of communication between an organization and its audiences. Mbah and Onoh (2016) assert that effective public relations are essential for maintaining favourable relationships with media and interest groups. In vocational training, public

relations skills play a crucial role in enhancing entrepreneurial goals and fostering economic growth. Alio, Obingene and Alio (2018) argue that public relations activities allow educational institutions to engage with the public, improving understanding of the institution's objectives and goals. The objectives of public relations in schools, according to Alio, Obingene and Alio (2018) and Mbah and Onoh (2016) include:

- Promoting a sense of responsibility among citizens, encouraging thoughtful participation in school affairs.
- Building public confidence in the school system.
- Encouraging partnership in school administration through active parental participation.
- Raising public awareness about the importance of education in a democratic society.

The development of public relations skills among trainees can be facilitated through vocational school administration and government strategies. Vocational School administrators play a key role in creating an enabling environment for trainees to participate in extracurricular activities that foster interpersonal and public relations development. Effective leadership and management of teachers and trainees in these activities are crucial for success. In addition to administrative efforts, government strategies are essential for promoting trainee engagement in public relations. As the primary funder of public vocational centers, the government is responsible for providing the resources needed for these institutions to function effectively. Mbah, Nnadi, Nwachukwu, and Onoh (2017) note that government funding for vocational programs has declined in recent years, forcing institutions to rely on tuition fees and donations to meet financial needs. This lack of funding limits the ability of vocational schools to invest in public relations training and activities, which require time, energy, and financial resources.

The decline in guidance and counsellors' participation in public relations activities has negatively impacted their value systems and norms. Many young people who graduate from vocational centers lack the passion for engaging in public relations activities, which poses a serious challenge to the nation's economy and human capital development. Without effective strategies for promoting public relations, individuals may fail to appreciate its importance, leading to a lack of interest in fostering relationships within their professional and social environments. As a result, it has become difficult to identify clear strategies to promote the participation of trainees in public relations activities at vocational centers. This challenge underscores the need to develop and implement strategies that will enhance trainees' involvement in public relations, particularly in vocational centers in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

Individuals are encouraged to pursue vocations that not only benefit society but also contribute to personal growth and development. Respect for labour is a

significant achievement, offering recognition, independence, and contributing to the overall advancement of society. Public relations strategies play a crucial role in shaping a culture of decency, promoting societal values, and fostering respect within communities. However, the training of trainees in vocational centers has not yielded the desired results, particularly in the area of public relations. Many individuals acquire vocational skills without a corresponding understanding or appreciation for societal values, ethics, or humanism. This gap has led to a rise in anti-social behavior and a lack of regard for community norms, which public relations could help mitigate. Public relations serve as a remedy for negative behaviours such as laziness, idleness, and other anti-social activities that are detrimental to society. The core issue of this study is the increasing prevalence of anti-social behaviour among youths, who display little respect for societal values. This situation, as observed in vocational centers, calls for a re-evaluation of the training programs and a stronger emphasis on public relations as part of the curriculum. Incorporating public relations activities into vocational training would enhance trainees' social skills, humanism, and ethical awareness, thereby better preparing them for the labour market. The specific problem addressed in this study is the lack of effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relations activities within vocational centers in Anambra State. Hence the study on strategies for promoting meaningful trainees' involvement in public relations as a way to improve vocational training and social integration in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to determine strategies for promoting guidance and counsellors' participation in public relations training in Anambra State vocational training centres. Specifically, the study determined:

1. Administrative strategies for promoting guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation training in Anambra State vocational training centres.
2. Government strategies for promoting guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation training in Anambra State vocational training centres.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What are the administrative strategies for promoting guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation training in Anambra State vocational training centres?
2. What are the government strategies for promoting guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation training in Anambra State vocational training centres?

Research Method

This study adopted descriptive survey design. The study was conducted in Anambra State Nigeria. Anambra State is located in the south-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The study was carried out in 21 Local government area used by Anambra State government for

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vocational training. The population of the study comprised 4,200 trainees from the 21 Local Government Areas in Anambra State. A sample size of 300 trainees was selected using a simple random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire with 18 items altogether in two clusters was used for data collection. The instrument was on four (4) point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). It was administered to 10 respondents who were not part of the population of the study in Enugu State Vocational training centre. The scores obtained were subjected to internal consistency reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha method. The reliability yielded 0.82 which was considered adequate for the study. A total of 300 copies of the questionnaire were personally administered to the respondents and collected by the researcher with the help of 10 research assistants who were briefed on the purpose of the study. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation 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.

Presentation of Results

The results of the study were presented below:

Research Question 1: What are the administrative strategies for promoting guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation training in Anambra State vocational training centres?

Table 1: Mean ratings of the respondents on the administrative strategies for promoting guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation in Anambra State vocational training centres. **N=300**

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remarks
1	Providing inclusive leadership for trainees and teachers	3.09	0.64	Agree
2	Increasing administrative interest to public relation activities	3.12	0.64	Agree
3	Partnering with the community in order to promote public relation	3.16	0.62	Agree
4	Proper management of fund	3.13	0.61	Agree
5	Making proper requisition to the government on public relation matters	3.07	0.68	Agree
6	Collaborating with other vocational centres on public relation	3.08	0.67	Agree
7	Developing programmes that would facilitate public relation	3.07	0.66	Agree
8	Providing quality administrative policies for public relation	3.08	0.65	Agree
9	Motivating the human resources for the implementation of public relation	3.15	0.57	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**3.11**	**0.64**	Agree

$\bar{X}$=mean; SD=Standard Deviation

The results in Table 1 show that all the respondents agreed with all the items as the administrative strategies to promote effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation in Anambra State vocational training centres.

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Furthermore, the standard deviation which ranged from 0.57 to 0.68 indicates closeness in the opinions of respondents.

Research Question 2: What are the government strategies for promoting guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation training in Anambra State vocational training centres?

Table 2: Mean ratings of the respondents on the government strategies for promoting guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation in Anambra State vocational training centres.

N=300

S/N	Items	$\overline{X}$	SD	Remarks
10	Providing enabling environment for trainees	3.14	0.54	Agree
11	Providing fund for public relation activities	3.13	0.53	Agree
12	Encouraging the community to partner with the vocational centres	3.07	0.65	Agree
13	Supplying of electrical power to the vocational schools	3.06	0.66	Agree
14	Supplying facilities for improve extra curricula activities	3.05	0.65	Agree
15	Providing motivational packages for trainees	3.04	0.66	Agree
16	Employment of teachers that would encourage public relation activities for guidance and counsellors' participation	3.00	0.69	Agree
17	Proper supervision of vocational centres through the ministries	3.06	0.60	Agree
18	Provision of fund for the maintenance of facilities in vocational centres	3.08	0.61	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**3.07**	**0.62**	Agree

$\overline{X}$=mean; SD=Standard Deviation

The results in Table 2 show that all the respondents agreed with all the items as the government strategies to promote effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation in Anambra State vocational training centres. Furthermore, the standard deviation which ranged from 0.53 to 0.69 indicates closeness in the opinions of respondents.

Discussion of Findings

The study identified administrative strategies aimed at enhancing effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relations at vocational training centres in Anambra State. The findings revealed several key strategies employed by school administrators to promote this participation. These include: fostering inclusive leadership for both trainees and teachers, heightening administrative engagement in public relations activities, collaborating with the local community to boost public relations, effectively managing funds, and making proper requisitions to the government regarding public relations matters. The implication of these findings is that the identified strategies can be employed to improve student involvement in public relations at vocational centres. These results are consistent with the study by Alio, Obingene, and Alio (2018), which emphasized that school administration plays a pivotal role in developing public relations within schools. The authors noted that fostering collaboration and ensuring proper

fund management can significantly enhance public relations activities, enabling greater participation from both trainees and teachers. Thus, the administrative strategies identified in this study can be leveraged to promote more effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relations in vocational training centres in Anambra State. Furthermore, the study's findings indicated that the gender of the trainees did not influence the administrative strategies used to encourage effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relations. In other words, both male and female trainees agreed on the effectiveness of the identified strategies, highlighting the universal applicability of these approaches irrespective of gender.

The study also explored the role of government strategies in fostering effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relations, as addressed in the second research question. The findings showed that the government's strategies include creating a conducive learning environment, providing adequate funding for public relations activities, encouraging community partnerships with vocational centers, supplying electrical power to schools, providing facilities for extracurricular activities, and ensuring the maintenance of these facilities through regular funding. The implication of these findings is that if the government implements the identified strategies, guidance and counsellors' participation in public relations at vocational centres could significantly improve. These results align with Okeke (2017) assertion that the government bears the primary responsibility for promoting trainees' involvement in public relations through policy implementation and the provision of necessary funds and resources. In addition, the study found that the gender of the respondents did not significantly impact their views on the government's strategies for promoting guidance and counsellors' participation in public relations. This suggests that the identified government strategies are equally effective across different gender groups.

Conclusion

This study investigated strategies for promoting effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relations at vocational training centres in Anambra State. These strategies are critical for addressing the current challenges and creating sustainable solutions for trainees' involvement in public relations. It is crucial for vocational school administrators and government officials, as key stakeholders, to adopt and implement these strategies to ensure the successful participation of trainees in public relations activities. The study concludes that addressing these challenges will enable vocational centers to achieve their goals and foster greater success in trainee's development.

Recommendations

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

1. Vocational school administrators should provide the needed policies that would encourage effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation in vocational centres.

2. Motivational packages should be provided by the government and vocational school administrators to support the effective guidance and counsellors' participation in public relation.
3. Government should increase funding and supervision of vocational centres for the effective participation of trainees in public relation.
4. Public relation officers should ensure that they carry trainees' along during public relations activities/programmes of the vocational centres.

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