



**Perception of Non-academic Staff on the use of Public Relations Strategies for TETFund
Intervention Programmes in Select Universities in Nigeria**

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Abstract

This paper explores the perception of non-academic staff on the use of Public Relations Strategies for TETFund interventions in selected universities in Nigeria. Three research questions were formulated to guide and direct the study. The researcher adopted the survey design method. The paper was anchored on diffusion of innovation theory with data drawn from structured questionnaires for quantitative analysis. The paper had a population of 313, and was administered with a nine-item questionnaire aimed at investigating the research questions. However, a total of 289 (92%) copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and 24 (8%) were not retrieved. The data gathered were analysed using tables, frequencies, percentages and mean scores to answer the research questions using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. The findings revealed that there are various public relations strategies used by non-academic staff in the select universities in accessing and managing TETFund interventions. It disclosed that lobbying and good rapport with TETFund officials was the most important strategy used by staff in accessing and managing interventions. The paper amongst others, recommends that the managements of the select Universities in Nigeria should scale up the use of other public relations strategies in establishing and cementing ties between nonacademic staff of universities and TETFund.

Keywords: Perception, Public relations, Public Relations Strategies.



Introduction

Education has remained a veritable instrument for promotion and sustenance of national transformation. To this singular fact, there cannot be any realistic national transformation in the absence of relevant and functional educational revolutions and practices. Buttressing further, Onyeche (2018, p.67) stated that universities all over the world are respected and seen as the highest educational institutions for development of intellect, skill and character. In the light of the above, Nigerian universities in the quest to strive for quality education are faced with the daunting teaching, research and infrastructure challenges, and tertiary institution managements have consistently identified funding issues as the critical challenge to discharging their mandate effectively. Collaborating, Akpan, et al., (2010) opined that the Nigerian tertiary institutions, Universities inclusive, have three statutory functions to perform and these include teaching, research and community service. While much attention is given to teaching, not much effort is committed to research. The Nigerian Universities which should exist as centres for knowledge dissemination, research and knowledge creation have not maintained their full savour. They further describe them as teaching centres due to their focus on knowledge dissemination and insignificant contribution to knowledge creation through research.

Relatively, Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) was established by the Federal Government to cushion these effects. The Fund is specifically for provision and maintenance of essential physical infrastructure, teaching and learning, instructional materials and equipment, research and publication, academic staff training and development. The agency was established specifically to revamp the poor funding malady experienced by public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In this vein, TETFund was established to fill in the lacuna created by the former agency in funding education at all levels with special focus on the tertiary institutions to meet the global standard. As such, the agency's main objective is to improve the quality of education in Nigerian universities by providing funding for research, and staff training.

Thus, effective communication, engagement, and collaboration between staff and TETFund officials are key to achieving the desired outcomes of the interventions. However, the effectiveness of public relations strategies in improving access to and management of TETFund intervention programmes in Nigerian universities has been explored through a perception study among non-academic staff. Factors that may influence the perception of these strategies may include their relevance to the needs of the non-academic staff, clarity of communication, and level of engagement with the staff. So, it is important for the public relations strategies to be planned and implemented effectively to ensure that non-academic staff are aware of and can effectively access and manage TETFund intervention programmes. In fact, public relations is a collection of techniques performed via press relations or press agency, product publicity, public affairs, lobbying, investor relations, development for gaining financial or volunteer support, used to optimise the relation between a company and the public (Gürel & Aydin, 2016).

In the light of the above, the perception of public relations strategies among non-academic staff can have a positive impact in the access to and management of intervention programmes in



numerous ways. First, a positive perception can help non-academic staff to understand the importance of building good relationships with TETFund officials, which can increase their chances of accessing the interventions. Collaborating, Mathew and Ogedebe (2012, p. 204) opined that “public relations help our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions.” It serves to bring private and public policies into harmony. They may also be more likely to follow the guidelines and requirements for accessing the funds, ensuring that they have all the necessary documentation and information to submit their proposals. Secondly, a negative perception of these strategies may make non-academic staff feel that using the strategies is manipulative or deceitful, which may lead to a lack of trust in the process. They may avoid using the strategies, thinking they will be judged negatively by their colleagues or TETFund officials. This may result in missed opportunities for funding, as they may not be aware of the importance of building positive relationships or may not have the necessary skills to do so effectively. Thus, it has been worrisome that many Universities have not been accessing funds allocated to them due to their inability in fulfilling the conditions required and in turn depriving staff of the opportunities of accessing government funds for academic development (Onyeizugbe, Obiageli & Igbodo, 2016). Lastly, non-academic staff who understand the importance of public relations strategies may be better equipped to manage the TETFund interventions. Overall, this can lead to continued funding opportunities and positive relationships in the future.

Literature Review

The paper reviews the concept of effectiveness, management and public relations as well as Public Relations Strategies. Perception may be considered as a process by which individuals organise and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment. In the words of Qiong (2017, p 18-28) it is the way you think about and your idea of what it is like, the natural ability to understand or notice things quickly, and the way that you notice things with your senses of sight and hearing. Relatively, in philosophy, psychology, and cognitive sciences, perception is the process of attaining awareness or understanding of sensory information. Put differently, the word originates from the Latin words perceptio, percipio, and means “receiving, collecting, action of taking possession, and apprehension with the mind or senses.”

Public relations have so many definitions as presented by many scholars, researchers and communication experts. This is due to the fact that it cuts across all fields and each person tries to define it from his own perspective.

Norman (2015) considered public relations as that of establishing and maintaining mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics for the purpose of communicating a company’s views and objectives while at the same time correcting public relations. Iyadi, et al., (2017) offers a number of public relations definitions to include winning friends, keeping them and influencing them among others. In regards to these definitions, one thing that comes to mind is that public relations are all about creating and maintaining goodwill as well as mutual



understanding between an organisation and its publics. Thus, this will help to establish and maintain cordial relationships between nonacademic staff of Nigerian universities and TETFund officials to improve access and management of intervention programmes. Public relations strategies to the views of Chukwu (2015), the task of building public relations can only be achieved with the use of appropriate tools. These tools include publicity, public relations advertising and special events. However, this study limits discussion to publicity and special events.

Publicity is the tool of mass communication which can be defined as the generation of news about a person, product or service that appears in a broadcast or print media. Put differently, it is the information about an organisation and its products that is conveyed to the public by the mass media because such information is newsworthy (Iyadi & Okolie, 2017). Publicity is always in the form of editorials, news releases or news in print and electronic media. Publicity unlike advertising is not paid for and has no identified sponsor. An organisation must have good press relations or media relations in order to have good publicity. Succinctly, opportunities for publicity include the introduction of a new product, award ceremony, company sales and earnings, etc.

Special often practised in public relations include the following: 1) *Courtesy call/visit*: the use of courtesy call/visit is to create good rapport between an organisation and its relevant publics. To Ugbaja (2014), when such a call/visit is made, the organisation uses the support, cooperation and understanding of the organisation. *Facility visits*: to Ugbaja (2014), an organisation can organise facility visits for members of the public to its premises for the purpose of seeking their support, understanding and cooperation for a programme. This strategy is used to enhance the image of the organisation. 2) *Sponsorship*: according to Iyadi, et al., (2017), is the provision of financial and material resources to an organisation for the production or execution of a programme from which the public of the organisation will desire some benefit. 3) *Talk show/media link*: this usually an interactive session between representatives of the organisation and the general public either on television or radio. The aim is to win the sympathy, understanding, goodwill and support of the general public.

Ocholi & Tanko (2019) conducted a study titled “public relations strategies and Access to TETFund Intervention Programmes in Nigerian Universities”. Their study examined the effectiveness of public relations strategies in creating awareness and promoting access to TETFund intervention programmes among academic and non-academic staff in six Nigerian universities. The survey research design was used to collect data from 240 respondents. Their findings suggested that public relations strategies, such as, media relations, personal selling, and events management, have a significant impact on the awareness and utilisation of TETFund intervention programmes. This study is relevant to the present study in that it will create more awareness in improving the access to and management of TETFund intervention programmes in Nigerian universities.

In another research conducted by Adekunle in 2018 titled “Media Influence on Perception of Academic Staff towards Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) Intervention Programmes in Nigerian Universities” examined the role of the media in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of



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academic staff towards TETFund intervention programmes in Nigerian universities. The researcher used a mixed-methods approach and collected data from interviews, focus groups, and online surveys. His findings show that media coverage and exposure have a significant influence on the awareness, understanding, and evaluation of TETFund intervention programmes, and that media relations and publicity can be effective public relations strategies to improve access and management of intervention programmes. Hence its relevance to the present study.

Other researchers, Adeyemi & Joseph carried out a study in 2018 titled “Assessing the impact of public relations strategies on the management of Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) in Nigerian universities” examined the impact of public relations strategies on the management of TETFund intervention programmes in Nigerian universities. The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews to collect data from university administrators, TETFund officials, and other stakeholders. The study revealed the impeding factors that hinder the effectiveness of public relations strategies in improving access to and management of TETFund intervention programmes, such as budget constraints, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and lack of coordination among stakeholders. It is relevant to this study hence it outlines the impediments this study is concerned with.

The paper is anchored on Diffusion of innovation theory. The theory elucidates how new ideas or technologies spread through society, and suggests that the adoption of innovations is influenced by several factors such as innovation characteristics, communication channels, social networks, and perceived benefits. Collaborating Dearing and Cox (2018) opined that diffusion is a social process that occurs among people in response to learning about an innovation such as a new evidence-based approach for extending or improving health (in the case of this article, access and management of TETFund intervention programmes). In its classical formulation, diffusion involves an innovation that is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system, in regards this article non-academic staff of select universities in northeast Nigeria. Thus, in the background of TETFund intervention programmes, the theory can be used to analyse how public relations strategies can effectively communicate the benefits and advantages of these programmes to non-academic staff, and however networks and how peer networks and word-of-mouth communication can facilitate their adoption and implementation.

In this regard, perception of these strategies among non-academic staff can significantly impact their access to and management of TETFund intervention programmes in Nigerian universities. Relatively, a positive perception can lead to increased funding opportunities, while a negative perception can result in missed opportunities and lack of trust in the process. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to investigate the perception of non-academic staff on the use of public relations strategies in the access to and management of TETFund intervention programmes in Federal University Wukari and Taraba State University, Jalingo.



Purpose of the Study

Amid the broad objective of this study is to explore the effectiveness of public relations strategies in improving access to and management of TETFund intervention programmes in Nigerian universities: a perception study among nonacademic staff. However, the specific objectives are:

1. To identify the public relations strategies used in accessing TETFund Intervention programmes as perceived by non-academic staff in select Universities in North-East Nigeria.
2. To assess the extent of the usage of public relations strategies has gone in support of management of TETFund interventions by non-academic staff in select Universities in North-East Nigeria.
3. To explore the impeding factors against the use of public relations strategies in the access and management of TETFund intervention programmes in select Universities in north-east Nigeria.

Research Questions

In the light of this, the following research questions have been chosen to guide this study based on the research objectives:

1. What are the current public relations strategies used by Nigerian universities to access TETFund intervention programmes, as perceived by non-academic staff in select Universities in North-East Nigeria?
2. To what extent has the use of public relations strategies gone in support of management of TETFund interventions by non-academic staff in universities in North-East Nigeria?
3. What are the impeding factors against the use of public relations strategies in the access and management of TETFund interventions in selected Universities in North-East Nigeria?

Methodology

The research design adopted in the study was the survey method. The paramount objective of the study is to explore the effectiveness of public relations strategies in improving access to and management of TETFund intervention programmes in select universities in Nigeria from the perspective of non-academic staff of Federal University Wukari and Taraba State University, Jalingo in the North-East. Questionnaires were administered to staff of the selected universities. The population comprised 1,751 non-academic staff from two select public universities in north-east Nigeria. The sample size was 313 Non-academic staff. This sample agrees with Krejcie & Morgan (1970), table for determining an infinite sample from a given population. The study employed purposive and accidental sampling techniques. The researcher purposely selected five Departments from Federal University, Wukari and Taraba State University, Jalingo for equal representation. The instrument used for collection of data was a questionnaire. It had two sections: one and two. Section one sought to obtain information on demographic characteristics of the respondents, viz, age, sex, marital status, educational qualification and location. section two was meant to elicit information from respondents in relation to the variables in the research questions and objectives of the study. Also, it was structured on Likert of using the five-point rating scale



with a response mode: Strongly Agree-(SA) =5, Agree(A) =4, Undecided (UD) =3, Disagree (DA) =2 and Strongly Disagree (SDA) =1. Total copies of 313 questionnaires were administered to the respondents (313) and 289 copies were returned without damage which represent 92% and 24 copies were not returned and damaged representing 8%. The data gathered were analysed using tables, frequencies, percentages and mean scores to answer the research questions using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. The decision was that any item mean 3.00 was agreed and any item that scored less 3.00 was considered disagreed.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the current public relations strategies used by Nigerian universities to access TETFund intervention programmes, as perceived by non-academic staff in select Universities in North-East Nigeria?

Table 1: Current Public Relations Strategies used by select Universities in northeast Nigeria to Access and Manage TETFund Intervention Programmes as Perceived by Non-Academic Staff

<u>Items</u>	<u>SA%</u>	<u>A%</u>	<u>UD%</u>	<u>DA%</u>	<u>SDA%</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Decision</u>
Lobbing and good rapport with TETFund officials are the medium through which nonacademic staff select universities has been using in accessing TETFund interventions.	21(9)	19(66)	53(18)	6(2)	13(5)	3.73	Agree
The University has a special team/use frequent meetings with non-academic staff and stakeholders responsible for the access of TETFund interventions available for the institution.	78(27)		47(16)	5(2)	4(1)	4.03	Agree
The University has produced a clear budgetary procedure to be followed in accessing TETFund intervention	28(10)		31(11)	16(6)	11(4)	3.76	Agree
Cluster Mean						3.84	Agree

Note. Table 1 reveals the cluster mean of 3.84 of item 1-3 which is above threshold of 3.00. The respondents agreed that lobbying and good rapport with TETFund officials are the medium through which non-academic staff are selected and have been accessing TETFund interventions. The respondents agreed that universities have special teams/use frequent meetings with non-academic staff and stakeholders are responsible for accessing TETFund interventions that are available in



the institution. They also agreed that the university has produced a clear budgetary procedure to be followed in accessing TETFund intervention programmes by non-academic staff of the select universities in northeast Nigeria.

Research Question 2

To what extent has the use of public relations strategies gone in support of management of TETFund interventions by non-academic staff in universities in North-East Nigeria?

Table 2: How Effective Non-Academic Staff of Select Universities in North-East Nigeria Perceive these Public Relations Strategies to be in Improving Their Access to and Management of TETFund Interventions

<u>Items</u>	<u>SA%</u>	<u>A%</u>	<u>UD%</u>	<u>DA%</u>	<u>SDA%</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Decision</u>
The university’s PR strategies have improved the ability of non-academic staff of the selected universities to access and manage TETFund intervention programmes effectively.	26(9)	203(71)	28(11)	8(3)	23(8)	3.70	Agree
The universities PR strategies encourage collaboration and cooperation between non-academic staff of the selected universities in utilising TETFund intervention programmes.	132(46)	119(41)	23 (8)	10(4)	15(6)	3.47	Agree
Non-academic staff of select universities receive sufficient communication from the university regarding TETFund intervention programmes	26(9)	28(11)	203(71)	8(3)	23(8)	3.68	Agree
<u>Cluster Mean</u>						<u>3.62</u>	<u>Agree</u>



Note. table 2 shows cluster mean of 3.84 of item 1-3 which is above threshold of 3.00. The implication is that that non-academic staff agreed that the university’s PR strategies have improved the ability of non-academic staff to the access and management of TETFund intervention programmes effectively and that the universities PR strategies encourage collaboration and cooperation between non-academic staff in utilising TETFund intervention programmes. They were undecided with the strategies put in place, on whether they receive sufficient communication from the university regarding TETFund intervention programmes.

Research Question 3

What are the impeding factors against the use of public relations strategies in the access and management of TETFund interventions in selected Universities in North-East Nigeria?

Table 3: *Factors that Hinder Effectiveness of Public Relations Strategies in Improving Access to and Management of TETFund Intervention Programmes in Select Universities.*

<u>Items</u>	<u>SA%</u>	<u>A%</u>	<u>UD%</u>	<u>DA%</u>	<u>SDA%</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Decision</u>
Lack of	34(12)	178(62)		22(8)	14(5)	3.68	Agree
	41(14)						

professional skills among the public relations officials has greatly hindered ease to the access and management of TETFund intervention programmes by non- academic staff in select Nigerian Universities.

Insufficient financing in public relations technology has 30(10) 198(69) 20(7) 19(7) 3.59
22(8) negatively affected easy access and management of TETFund intervention programmes Agree

The university lacks supportive personnel to enhance 18(6) 203(70) 49(17) 3.57
6(2) performance of public relations units in the access and 13(5) Agree
management TETFund
intervention programmes in the select Nigerian
Universities.

Numerous communication and consultation channels 107(37) 135(48) 18(6) 11(4) 4.07
18(6) in the university have affected the use of public relations strategies Agree
in the access and management TETFund
Intervention

Cluster Mean 3.73
Agree



Note. table 3 indicates the cluster mean of item 1-3 as 2.60 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. The implication is that lack of professional skills among the public relations officials has greatly hindered ease to the access and management of TETFund intervention programmes by non-academic staff of select Universities in northeast Nigeria. More so, insufficient financing in public relations technology has negatively affected easy access and management of TETFund intervention programmes. They agreed that the university lacked supportive personnel to enhance performance of public relations units in the access and management TETFund intervention programmes in the select Universities in northeast Nigeria. Also, inadequate funding of research and stringent conditions attached to research grants were identified as two major constraints to accessing research funds by lecturers.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of this study indicated that the current public relations strategies used by the select universities in North-East Nigeria to access and manage TETFund intervention programmes, as perceived by non-academic staff are lobbying and good rapport with TETFund officials and considered the medium through which these staff has been using in accessing TETFund interventions. The respondents also agreed that universities have special teams/use frequent meetings with non-academic staff and stakeholders are responsible for accessing TETFund interventions that are available in the institution. They added that the university has produced a clear budgetary procedure to be followed in accessing TETFund intervention programmes by non-academic staff of the select universities in northeast Nigeria. This finding is in consonance with the result of Ocholi and Tanko (2019) in their study titled public relations strategies and Access to TETFund Intervention Programmes in Nigerian Universities in which they reported that public relations strategies, such as, media relations, personal selling, and events management, have a significant impact on the awareness and utilisation of TETFund intervention programmes.

Intimating further, this article revealed that non-academic staff of select universities in north-east Nigeria perceive these public relations strategies in improving their access to TETFund intervention programmes in a good light that has been effective. This is because university's PR strategies have improved their ability to access and manage TETFund intervention programmes effectively and that the universities PR strategies encourage collaboration and cooperation between non-academic staff in utilising TETFund intervention programmes. They also agreed that with the strategies put in place, they received sufficient communication from the university regarding TETFund intervention programmes.

This study supports the findings by Adekunle, 2018 in a study titled media influence on perception of academic staff towards Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) intervention programmes in Nigerian universities which showed that media coverage and exposure have a significant influence on the awareness, understanding, and evaluation of TETFund intervention



programmes, and that media relations and publicity can be effective public relations strategies to improve access and management of intervention programmes.

Furthermore, this study showed that there are impediments that hinder the effectiveness of public relations strategies in improving access to and management of TETFund intervention programmes by non-academic staff of the select Universities in North-East Nigeria. These hindrances include lack of professional skills among the public relations officials has greatly hindered ease to the access and management of TETFund intervention programmes by non-academic staff of the select Universities in northeast Nigeria. More so, insufficient financing in public relations technology has negatively affected easy access and management of TETFund intervention programmes. They agreed that the university lack of supportive personnel to enhance performance of public relations units in the access and management TETFund intervention programmes in the select Universities to ensure access to these interventions as well as inadequate funding of research and stringent conditions attached to research grants were identified as two major constraints to accessing research funds by lecturers.

This finding led credence to a study by Adeyemi & Joseph (2018) titled *Assessing the impact of public relations strategies on the management of Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund)*. The study revealed the impeding factors that hinder the effectiveness of public relations strategies in improving access to and management of TETFund intervention programmes, such as budget constraints, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and lack of coordination among stakeholders.

Conclusion

The study concludes that there has been a good perception and an increased involvement of public relations strategies in establishing and cementing ties between non-academic staff of the select universities in north-east Nigeria and TETFund, in accessing and management of TETFund intervention programmes. It added that though much was achieved with public relations strategies in the access to and management of TETFund interventions, there are some impediments that hinder its full use/application by non-academic staff of the select Universities in North-East Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the recommended that:

1. University managements of the selected universities should employ other public relations strategies, such as, media relations, personal selling, and events management, to have a significant impact on the awareness and utilisation of TETFund intervention programmes.
2. The universities PR strategies are stepped up to encourage collaboration and cooperation between non-academic staff in utilising TETFund intervention programmes. This it is believed will cause a significant influence on the awareness, understanding, and evaluation of TETFund intervention programmes.



3. The government should increase the funding of universities and research substantially, and management of universities should develop modalities for identifying and disseminating information to lecturers on research funding opportunities and the requirements for accessing them. In a nutshell, the government should remove all budget constraints, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and provide smooth cordial relationships among stakeholders to ensure non-academic staff of the select Universities in North-East Nigeria have access to and better ideals of managing these interventions.

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