Evaluating Public Relations Strategies of Ministry of Education on Inclusive Education for People with Special Needs in Select States of Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study was carried out to evaluate the kind of public relations strategies adopted by the Ministry of Education in the promotion of inclusive education and the impact of such strategies on inclusive education among people with special needs in select states of Nigeria. Descriptive survey was adopted in this study with the questionnaire used as the instrument for data collection. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics while findings revealed that to promote Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs the Ministry of Education is engaged in the use of public relations strategies such as meetings, media relations and community relations. Others are Sponsorship, specialized training, counseling, mentorship, awards, advertorials, news releases, press conferences, workshops & seminars, newsletters, and use of social media platforms. It however revealed that even though the Ministry of Education is involved in the use of public relations strategies to promote the Inclusive Education among people with Special Needs, the extent of their involvement is just little. As a result, the application of public relations strategies in doing so has achieved a minimal level of success than achieving very high level of success in Nigeria. The study concluded that the use of public relations in the promotion of programmes among organisations is not in doubt but underutilization and or low commitment in the use of public relations strategies is capable of preventing the organization from achieving desired success in the use of this communication tool as evident in this study.*

Keywords: *Evaluation, Public Relations Strategies, Ministry of Education, Inclusive Education, People with Special Needs*

Introduction

Public Relations is one of the areas that attracts tremendous attention of scholars in media and communication discipline. This is due to its relevance in the coordination and management of modern organizations. In a world that is highly competitive, it has really become important for almost every institution to keep a long term and trustworthy relations with the community or public groups in order to handle upcoming challenges and also to

maintain its survival and success. Public relations activities and practice are necessary in providing a coordinated effort that gears towards promotion of a positive image of the organization (Chukwu, 2012; Emmanuel, Ndolo & Igbara, 2021; Ebere & Okon, 2023; Eniola, 2011; Oyeleke, 2020; Thomas & Omojunikanbi, 2023; Veena, Dayaneethie & Zukiswo, 2012). Public relations practice is "a management philosophy aimed at doing everything possible to create good relationship between an organization and its public" (Chukwu, 2012, p. 169). As stated by Thomas & Omojunikanbi, 2023, p. 50):

> Effective relationship development and communication are crucial for firms to succeed in the dynamic environment of stakeholder involvement and complexity that exists today. Public relations (PR) practice is a crucial area that has a significant impact on how people perceive and engage with businesses and organisations (Thomas & Omojunikanbi, 2023, p. 50).

This communication tool is said to be relevant in helping organizations to achieve their objectives in which they are founded (Buike, 2021; Ejiofo & Udu, 2023; Effiom, 2019). As a result, previous literature has shown the use of public relations in the management of school in different areas and places around the world (Dighobo & Ayara, 2021; Igben & Ugbome, 2021; Igben, 2022; Omorodion, Ibeneme & Ayodele, 2022; Thomas & Omojunikanbi, 2023; Ugwuonah & Okonkwo, 2018). There were indications that the establishment of public relations across the schools, particularly tertiary institutions to enhance effective communication with external public and stakeholders' engagement has received a significant recognition, acceptability and boost over the years (Aikins & Adu-Oppong, 2015; Çoruk, 2018; Dighobo & Ayara, 2021; Igben, 2022; Ojumo, Nikona & Kiroma, 2006; Okwelle, 2010; Okwumba, 2015; Omorodion, Ibeneme, & Ayodele, 2022; Ugoji, Idibia & Thomas, 2022; Veena, Dayaneethie & Zukiswo, 2012). Dighobo & Ayara (2021, pp. 893-89) affirmed that:

> The success of any organization, especially the institutions of higher learning even departments or units or faculty, depends on how information is handled in that organization. The efficiency and effectiveness with which information is managed determines to a large extent whether the institution will consistently be crisis ridden or not. Therefore, no institution or department of … learning can survive without the activities of the public relations department (Dighobo & Ayara, 2021, pp. 893-894).

Therefore, if public relations is an important communication tools that addresses complex relationship and management issues among organisations, including schools or educational institutions, studying the Public Relations Strategies of Ministry of Education on Inclusive education for people with special needs in select states of Nigeria becomes imperative. This is in view of the relevance of inclusive education to the development of the educational system of any nation in the world (Owoh, 2016) on one hand and the need to understand how public relations strategies are also embrace people with special needs ensuring their inclusivity in educational programmes in Nigeria on the other hand.

It is in view of the presumed strategic role of public relations in organisations, including educational institutions that this study is to evaluate public relations strategies of Ministry of Education on inclusive education for people with special needs in select states of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Inarguably, public relations is a tool that modern organisations and experts have realized is effective in achieving the goals and objectives of organisations (Chukwu, 2012; Oyeleke, 2020; Thomas & Omojunikanbi, 2023; Veena, Dayaneethie & Zukiswo, 2012). In schools in particular, previous literature has shown that public relations is also used in management of the policies and programmes of the schools/institutions in different places around the world (Dighobo & Ayara, 2021; Igben & Ugbome, 2021; Igben, 2022; Omorodion, Ibeneme & Ayodele, 2022; Thomas & Omojunikanbi, 2023; Ugwuonah & Okonkwo, 2018).

Inclusive education is one of the policies initiated to ensure that no child or person, irrespective of the status, is not excluded in acquiring education and Nigeria is one of the countries that adopted the policy even though its implementations is said to be marred with a lot of challenges (Ogunbisi, 2023; Ukpabio & Eker, 2022). Therefore, since there are indications of the practice of public relations in schools, it becomes expedient to investigate how Public Relations Strategies are used by the Ministry of Education in the implementation of Inclusive Education and the impact of such strategies on People with Special Needs in Select States of Nigeria.

Research Questions

Based on the problem that this study seeks to solve, the following questions are formulated to guide this study:
   i.   What are public relations strategies employed by the Ministry of Education in promotion of the inclusive education among people with special needs in select states of Nigeria?
   ii. To what extent does the Ministry of Education employs public relations strategies in promotion of the inclusive education among people with special needs in select states of Nigeria?
   iii. How does the Ministry of Education utilize public relations strategies in promotion of the inclusive education among people with special needs in select states of Nigeria?
   iv. What is the level of success of public relations strategies used by Ministry of Education in implementation of the inclusive education among people with special needs in select states of Nigeria?

Objectives of the study

This study is mainly to evaluate public relations strategies of Ministry of Education on Inclusive Education for People with Special Needs in Select States of Nigeria, while the specific objectives are:
   i.   To find out public relations strategies employed by the Ministry of Education in promotion of the inclusive education among people with special needs in select states of Nigeria.

ii. To examine the extent to which the Ministry of Education employs public relations strategies in promotion of the inclusive education among people with special needs in select states of Nigeria?

iii. To ascertain how public relations strategies are used by the Ministry of Education in promotion of the inclusive education among people with special needs in select states of Nigeria.

iv. To determine the level of success of public relations strategies used by Ministry of Education in implementation of the inclusive education among people with special needs in select states of Nigeria.

Review of Literature

Public relations is one of the concepts that attracts a lot of scholarly definitions from different sources. Public Relations (PR) practice is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its public (Chartered Institute of Public Relations, CIPR). PR consists of all forms of planned communication, outwards and inwards, between an organisation and its publics for the purpose of achieving specific objectives concerning mutual understanding (Jefkins, 2006). The literature presents public relations as a management function, which uses the attributes of management (e.g., planning, collaborative decision making, and research) to foster the organization's ability to build mutually beneficial relationships on which the corporate vision and mission depend (Grunig, 2001). The second stream in the literature presents public relations as communication management, which focuses on the flow of communication between an organization and its publics to achieve effective relationships (Grunig, 2001). The third stream of literature presents public relations as relationship management, so that communication is a property of those relationships rather than the conduit between organizations and publics (Ferguson, 2004; Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2007).

Educational inclusion (EI) is a critical concept for achieving justice and equity for students with disabilities in the education system. Inclusive education tends to tailor the environment to the diverse needs and desires of individuals, rather than requiring them to exclusively deal with the challenges of a given context (Edwin *et al.*, 2019; Onyishi, 2022; Sambo & Bwoi, 2015). Several countries have shifted away from the belief that children with disabilities cannot be adequately educated in regular schools and should attend special schools to the belief that practically all children with disabilities should be able to succeed in regular schools (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). However, placing disabled children in regular schools does not constitute inclusion and may be detrimental to the children's development. Inclusion requires the creation of a rich, accessible learning environment that is tailored to the needs of all students (Edwin *et al.*, 2019; Ferguson *et al.*, 2019; Ngwoke *et al.*, 2020). Nigeria has taken steps towards inclusive education (Adetoro, 2014; Fuandai, 2010), following the United Nations Convention on the rights of individuals with disabilities (United Nations, 2006), which states that persons with disabilities have the right to protection against discrimination on all grounds, including education.

Previously, the inclusion of disabled students in general education classrooms was contingent upon their exhibiting demanding behaviours, sensory processing difficulties, anxiety, and adaptive and cognitive deficiencies (Bölte *et al.*, 2021; Fuandai, 2010; Onyishi,

2022). In most cases, inclusive education is defined as instruction delivered as a part of mainstream education and carried out by ordinary school staff, possibly under the supervision of specialists (Ferguson *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, the method is viewed as one that emphasizes enhancing the learning environment, routines, procedures, pedagogy, staff behaviours, and attitudes, rather than exerting influence over pupils, as the term "integration" implies (Bölte *et al.*, 2021; Efthymiou & Kington, 2017).

Inclusive education is a transformative educational philosophy and practice that seeks to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, or differences, have the right to equitable and quality education within mainstream educational settings. It embodies the principles of diversity, equality, and social justice in education. Inclusive education is fundamentally rooted in the belief that every student has unique strengths, needs, and potential for learning. It rejects exclusion and segregation based on disability or other differences and instead promotes the full participation and engagement of all learners in regular classrooms (Ainscow, 2005; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Salend, 2015; UNESCO, 2009). Inclusive education is often underpinned by legal and policy frameworks at the national and international levels. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) calls for the right to inclusive education (United Nations, 2006). Many countries have also developed specific legislation and policies to promote inclusive education, aligning with international standards (UNESCO, 2017), including Nigeria.

Due to the relevant of education to nation building and development, previous scholars believed that public relations is an important tool used in the management and promotion of the sector. This is in view of the perceived impact of public relations in the management of various organisations over the years (Ahrne, Aspers, & Brunsson, 2015; Irwan, Kusen, Andi, & Heri, 2020; Obinna, Ewomazina, & Olley, 2021; Richard & Umor, 2020). Organizations use public relations strategies to increase brand awareness, build trust with the public and improve their reputation. Understanding the different types of public relations strategies available will help you get better results from the strategies you decide to use (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). Public relations strategies are the collection of methods an organization uses to help it move from its current situation to its end goal, which can include gaining publicity, growing its customer base or improving its reputation. These methods help a company organize its public relations efforts to attract its target audience and identify ways to reach its goals during the planning stage. They are similar to marketing strategies because the primary goal is to spread brand awareness. Public relations strategies also can be useful in crisis management situations because it allows organizations to respond to a negative situation and try to develop a possible outcome from it. A good strategy can help companies increase their reputation if they overcome a negative situation (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023).

Public relations activities in educational institutions is not an easy job or just a part-time job. But it must be done professionally and seriously. It relates to the ability of Public Relations staff in technical management and as managerial skills, as well as full concentration on the part of the Public relations practitioner to manage the Public Relations work programme to achieve goals or objectives as planned (Irwan, Kusen, Andi, & Heri, 2020). Having a public relations strategy, according to Bhattacharya (2024), is crucial because it helps businesses maintain a strong public reputation and boosts your overall marketing strategy.

Bhattacharya (2024), therefore, provided the following as the top reasons why having a good public relations strategy is important: reputation management, crisis mitigation: brand awareness, audience engagement: media relations, influence and authority, credibility and trust, strategic messaging, partnerships and collaborations, talent attraction, market differentiation, and business growth

Consequently, a number of previous empirical studies have been conducted from different places and by different scholars which are related to the current study. For instance, Owoh (2016) found in a study that the identified public relations strategies were important and that there was no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female technical teachers on the issue. According to a study by Aikins & Adu-Oppong (2015) the University's public relations department is poorly resourced to perform its functions. Based on the study, among the challenges militating against its operations are scarce telecommunication equipment, lack of official means of transportation and lack of trained personnel. Furthermore, the study revealed that the public relations position is neither accorded the same status as other senior management positions nor involved adequately in decision making.

Similarly, Shimawua & Kusugh (2022) found in their study that the use of public relations strategies was relevant to engage stakeholders in safe schools' reopening plans; target resources to where they are most needed; get children back to school confidently; make school environments safe; and quick recovery of lost learning activities among others. Oluwagbemisola & Oduola (2018) have revealed in their study that compromise or dialogue, collective bargaining, effective communication and confrontation are Public Relations Strategies adopted in conflict management by the University of Lagos management. Also, Public Relations experts are given the chance to take part in decision-making process while management is faithful to the bargain of public relations. The study concluded that Public Relations Strategies such as collective bargaining and effective communication are effective in managing conflict. Adams, Ofordi, Ahmad & Eneje, (2023) also found in a study that despite the challenges posed by resource disparities and institutional weaknesses, the study finds that public relations can play a pivotal role in addressing societal gaps. Strategic communication, advocacy efforts, and crisis management are advanced as effective tools for promoting inclusiveness and shaping a more unified national identity (Adams, Ofordi, Ahmad & Eneje, 2023). Ogbonnaya, Mahmoud & Odinaka (2021) studied and found that equity and inclusive education is necessary sustain objective public relations that will not misguide professional and public on crime statistics in Nigeria.

A study by Nwafor, Omoevah & Umuze (2022) revealed that the Anambra State Government used public relations strategies like press releases, press conferences, announcements, town hall meetings with critical stakeholders like the market unions, transport unions, town unions etc in disseminating appropriate information and behavior that helped in managing the various COVID-19 related crises in Anambra State. It was also found that the state government employed various media platforms like ABS Radio and Television, Newspapers, Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter in doing the same. Oyeleke (2020), similarly found that public relations and crisis management strategies in UNTH and FETHA have significant effects on staff performance. According to a study by Okwumba (2015), public relations strategies are relevant in managing strike actions in Nigerian universities. As a result, it

becomes very imperative for university authorities to apply and utilize these public relations strategies in order to prevent strike actions from taking place in academic environments like universities and where such strike actions have taken place, these public relations strategies can be used to quell them from degenerating into adverse industrial actions.

Ebere & Okon (2023) found in a study that Public Relations practice of Pabod Breweries (108 or 60.7%) are more effective than Daewoo Nigeria Limited (84 or 44%). Findings also revealed that both Pabod Breweries and Daewoo Nigeria Limited maintain their relationship with their host communities. Okwelle (2011) studied and identified the following strategies for improving enrolment in technical teacher education through student's involvement in public relations: integrating public relations in school curriculum; proper funding of the scheme and engaging students regularly in exhibitions and job fairs. Ugoji, Idibia & Thomas (2022) noted in a study that in the sense of attracting community support and drawing in parents, especially those who shy away from school involvement, school public relations is less about transmitting information, and more about listening and responding to the expectations and concerns of all citizens. Schools cannot operate as independently as they once did: the public demands more accountability and more participation, and parents have more school choices than in the past. The goal of school public relations should be a community of citizens that believes the motto, "public schools, there is no better place to learn." When that happens, schools will have the resources and community support they'll need in the always-changing educational environment (Ugoji, Idibia & Thomas, 2022).

Buike's (2021) study has identified PR as a veritable tool of corporate image building and sustenance as it helps shape the way publics of an organization see or perceive the organization. In building or sustaining a corporate image of an organization by the Public Relations Officer, several important tools very can be identified, including press / news release, press / news conference, sponsorships, house organs, Annual General Meeting etc. Furthermore, different types of PR are presented (Buike, 2021). Ejiofo & Udu (2023) found in the study that (a) public relations and social responsibility are modern concepts in Nigeria and require planning based on new social needs and therefore demands new methods and perspectives. (b) No certain conclusion can be made on that training should be included as an indicator on social responsibility in south-south, Nigeria as the opinions of people opposing and agreeing on the issue is almost similar. (c) workers right is not considered as an indicator of social responsibility in south-south, Nigeria. (d) economic development is considered as an indicator of social responsibility in south-south Nigeria. (e) Most studied people agree that effective management of oil spills, pollution and environmental degradation is an indicator of social responsibility. (f) hygiene in the society is considered as an indicator of social responsibility. (g) respecting audience's perception is considered as an indicator of social responsibility.

According to a study by Ibrahim (2020), SMEs in developing counties as Nigeria can use public relations to raise their profile however there is need to educate SME owners on the function and importance of public relations. Furthermore, the unethical practice of paying for media coverage need to be investigated. Iyadi & Okolie (2017) found that public relations programmes have significant effect in resolving conflicts between FMC Asaba and her patients (t=12.312, p =0.0012); adequate information available to management significantly assists in resolving conflicts in FMC (t = 2.692, p = 0.004) and; public relations play a

significant role in resolving conflicts in FMC (chi with 4 degree of freedom 376.36, p 0.000). For a study by Effiom (2019), 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 orgasations. To Bulama & Tika (2011), the Technical and Vocational Education teachers are hardly involved in performing public relations activities. It was also found that teachers with higher educational qualifications were more involved in public relations activities compared to those with lower educational qualifications where the functions were performed.

Thomas & Omojunikanbi (2023) concluded in their study that the fields of public relations practice and community relations hold paramount importance for organizations aiming to foster positive relationships, enhance reputation, and contribute to both their stakeholders and local communities. While public relations practices serve as a strategic tool for managing an organization's reputation and establishing transparent communication channels, community relations play a vital role in establishing connections with local communities. By addressing their concerns, participating in charitable initiatives, and demonstrating social responsibility, organizations can create a positive local reputation and foster trust. Igben (2022) revealed in a study that some higher educational institutions use some of the tools as a matter of custom without establishing whether such tools are relevant to addressing their corporate public relations needs. Others try to allow research to precede their selection of the public relations tools of the schools, while some yet do leave their public relations tools in reckless abandon. The result in a study by Ugwuonah & Okonkwo's (2018) indicated that the international oil corporations operating in Nigeria, have a wide array of public relations tools and strategies for checkmating and managing crises and conflict with their host community publics. That the public relations crisis management tools employed by the IOCs do not have significant effect in maintaining mutual understanding between them and majority of their host community publics. That the public relations crisis management tools of the IOCs have contributed significantly to their corporate performance over the years.

A study conducted by Omorodion, Ibeneme & Ayodele (2022) revealed among others the public relation activities practiced by the School of Secondary Education (Technical), Federal College of Education (Technical) Asaba, Delta State technical such as; having open talk-show with basic school pupils, creating awareness of technical education to the community organizations and visiting religious and social gathering to create public awareness on the need for technical education. It concluded that school public relations are a significant tool for improving students' enrollment in technical education programmes which in turn will create skilled manpower. According to a study by Emmanuel, Ndolo & Igbara (2021), public relations help in uplifting the image of First Bank of Nigeria Plc Calabar. For Dighobo & Ayara (2021), hiring of human resources, use of audience targeting and use of social media marketing enhances the implementation of school public relations programmes in TVET in Rivers State Universities. Based on the findings of the study, it was deduced that technical vocational education and training can be implemented through public relations through social media, audience targeting and hiring of human resources. A study by Igben & Ugbome (2021) revealed that there was heavy use of community relations activities by the college to build healthy relationships with her host community. From the study, the public relations

unit of the college is building the positive image of the college. However, tools that can bring the college face to face with their publics to encourage two-way dialogue to build relationships have not been fully utilized. This has led to a poor image perception of the college with the resultant effect of a progressive drop in the population of students in the past 4-5 years. Each of the college publics needs to have a favourable perception of her corporate image as each public is affected by its own interest.

Findings in a study by Obinna, Ewomazina & Olley (2021) revealed that the University has a public relations office, but does not have public relations department, and that the extent of her public relations activities' effectiveness is average, amongst others. Based on the data, it was concluded that a public relations office exists rather than a Public Relations (PR) department; and that the effectiveness of public relations at Edo State University Uzairue is on the average side. A study by Irwan, Kusen, Andi & Heri (2020) revealed that the following strategies among others were identified for improving enrolment in technical teacher education through students' involvement in public relations: integrating public relations in school curriculum; proper funding of the scheme and engaging students regularly in exhibitions and job fairs. According to Gabriel (2021) public relations practice promotes the librarians' image among the library users by improving job performance of the librarians, librarians and users' interpersonal relationship, creating awareness for the various information services available in the library, increasing library patronage, increasing use of information resources by users, user satisfaction. Furthermore, the study indicated that public relations help identify users' information needs easily and encourages provision of conducive environment for users. The study revealed further that the obstacles to effective application of public relations on information service delivery and librarians' image in federal university libraries studied are; use of ambiguous language terms; frustration due to poor working condition; lack of adequate listening skills; lack of funds; lack of passion for public relations activities; lack of good communication skills and lack of interpersonal skills and so on. The study recommended among others that the library management of the universities studied should organise seminars for librarians and training on work etiquettes, good communication skills and interpersonal relations and should also create platforms where users of the library can express their dissatisfaction with the services rendered by the librarians while monitory motivation should be given to librarians so as to get the best out of them.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Excellent Theory of public relations practice and is supported by the Cognitive Democratic Theory of Education (CDTE).

The Excellence Theory

The excellence theory was propounded in 1985 by James Grunig. This research was funded by the Foundation of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). It is a general theory of public relations which "specifies that organizations perform more effectively, with the help of public relations strategy" (Grunig, 1992 in Ebere & Okon, 2023). It also talks about how public relations is managed and organized in order to meet the goals that have been set out by the organization. Theory was based on a number of middle-range theories, which also tested with surveys and interviews by seasoned professionals and CEOs

in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, and from this, a fact was proven that the Excellence theory provides a theoretical and empirical benchmark for public relations units. Grunig (2003, pp.28-38), in his research titled "Constructing public relations theory and practice", identified the characteristics of effective public relations in four specific categories:

(i)   The aggressive empowerment of the public relations function: Here, an effective and functional organisation should ensure that they empower public relations as a critical management function in order to attain set goals.

(ii)   The communicator roles: It was suggested that public relations executives should be allowed to handle the managerial roles as well as administrative roles in the organisation.

(iii)   The organisation of communication function: Public relations function, should be at the centre of any and every business or organisation. This means that it should be an integrated communication function, and at the same time kept apart instead of being merged with other departments like marketing and other management functions.

(iv)   The public relations models: Every organisation that strives to be effective should focus on its internal and external forms of communication and relationship building by using the two-way symmetrical model.

The relevance of this theory to this study is that it helps organisations to set strategies on already laid out plans that they intend to carry out over a certain period of time. For these strategies to work, the PR unit of the organisation needs to make assessments on the best ways to effectively connect with the publics. This aligns with our study as it talks about PR strategies and how effectively they are being used to attain set goals.

Cognitive Democratic Theory of Education (CDTE)

The CDTE proposed by Knight (1999) merges inclusive education and social inclusion. Knight (1999) postulates that "a classroom is democratic and socially inclusive to the extent to which it welcomes all students as equally valued members of the school community". This theory exposes and brings to the fore issues of separation and exclusion which are everyday occurrences in local communities and cities to be addressed (Okeke & Wenenda, n.d). Perceived differences should not be celebrated or else it could become a barrier and hinder effective communication. Knight opines that the process of preparing subjects for citizenship in a multicultural and diverse society demands that learning be suited to the individual needs of the subjects and the education these individuals receive adequately reflect that society; hence every democratic culture should welcome diversity and a feeling of positive attachment by all. All students should have equal rights which should be allowed, to avoid oppression. As emphasized (Knight, 1999), these rights, among others include:

i.   The right of every student to be equally prepared to exercise their rights;

ii.   The creation of an enabling environment which will encourage risk taking by students through the removal of high stake testing which he asserts are fraudulently defined as standards.

He therefore emphasizes that competence should be developed by nudging students not only to believe in themselves but also in their ability to achieve much more, if they apply themselves to study. From the foregoing, Knight supports that schools should welcome as full-fledged members all students irrespective of their individual differences and accommodate them in school, such that each student is made to understand that he/she is useful, and given reasons why he/she should be hopeful of the future and what it holds, to dream big while keeping existing options open. Creativity is therefore a must to effectively create an interesting and lively atmosphere in the classroom and students positioned to learn without the need to impress anyone (Okeke & Wenenda, n.d).

In addition, a democratic classroom depends on the ability of the teacher to expose and challenge the false belief that certain groups, people, or students are incapable of achieving success in academics as held by the proponents of deficit thinking. This perspective argues that as at present, while the need for absolute equality and fairness in educational practice appears to be beyond reach, progress can be made towards such a goal as it is not only realistic but could be operated as equal encouragement for all. Knight (1999) insists that when students are equally encouraged, much of the differences by class, ethnicity, gender and religion among others disappear. This stand is supported by Nind (2014) who asserts that inclusive education can provide new connections to democracy and social justice in education drawn from the basis that it is concerned with socially just ways of organizing teaching and learning.

Gap in Literature

This chapter reviewed the conceptual, theoretical and empirical literature related to the study. It also reviewed theories that are related to the study and has further reviewed theories that underpinned the study.

After reviewing the related literature in the study, it was observed that although a lot of works have been existed on public relations strategies in the management of different organisations across the globe, there existed a gap in previous knowledge or literature on our current study which is; "*Evaluating Public Relations Strategies of Ministry of Education on Inclusive Education for People with Special Needs in Select States of Nigeria*", hence, this study is to bridge that gap in literature when it is completed.

Methodology

This study adopted descriptive survey design to examine *Public Relations Strategies of Ministry of Education on Inclusive Education for People with Special Needs in Select States of Nigeria*. This design was used in this study because it is a design suitable in the study of human opinion and a study of large population.

The population of the study comprised the publics of the Ministry of Education with special needs across selected states of Nigeria such as Kano (North), Niger (Central) and Lagos (South) States, with a total population of 201,143 people and with the following breakdown: Lagos - 67,813; Niger – 61,751; and Kano – 71,579 (Annual National Disability Report, 2023).

The population of the study therefore is 201143 publics of the Ministry of Education with special needs.

The sample of the study was 599 and it was determined using Online *SurveyMonkey* Sample Size Calculator under the Confidence Level of 95%, Error Margin of 4%; Population Size of 201143 (see https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/).

To sample respondents in the study, multistage sampling was used. Stratified sampling technique was used to group Nigeria into three strata (i.e. North, Central and South) based on already existing stratification. This is to enhance easy further sampling. After which, purposive sampling technique was used to select one state from each stratum and Kano (North), Niger (Central) and Lagos (South) were sampled in the study due to their high number of people with special needs in respective areas. Respondents in each of these states were sampled using proportionate sampling technique through the formula thus:

$$\frac{S}{N} \times \frac{n}{1}$$

Where: S   =   Population of the State

           n   =   Sample Size

           N   =   Population Size

Therefore: Kano - $\frac{71579}{201143} \times \frac{599}{1}$ =   213

                Niger - $\frac{61751}{201143} \times \frac{599}{1}$ =   184

                Lagos - $\frac{67813}{201143} \times \frac{599}{1}$ =   202

The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire, while the data collected was anlysed using descriptive statistics.

Data Analysis

During field survey research work, a total of 599 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the respondents upon which a majority of 574 representing (95.83%) was returned and found usable for analysis while 25 representing (4.17%) was not found to be usable due to multiple completion by the respondents. The breakdown of the rate of questionnaire returned and not returned indicates that out of the 213 copies of the questionnaire administered on the respondents in Kano, 205 representing (96.24%) were returned and found usable because they were properly completed while 8 (3.76) copies were not usable because they were improperly completed; in Niger, 184 copies of the questionnaire were administered but only 176 (95.65%) were returned and found usable while 8 (4.35%) suffered mortality because they were improperly completed; while in Lagos, 202 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the respondents but only 193 (95.54%) were returned and found usable while 9 (4.46%) were not found usable due to wrong completion by the respondents.

Therefore, since the rate of the questionnaire returned usable has achieved 96% success or confidence level and is by far greater than the rate of 4% which suffered mortality, we go ahead with the analysis and it is based on the 574 which is 96%.

Table 1: Public Relations Strategies of the Ministry of Education in the Promotion of Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs in Select States of Nigeria

Response	Number of Respondents						Cumulative Frequency	
	Kano		Niger		Lagos			
Sponsorship	35	17.07	29	16.48	30	15.54	94	**16.38**
Specialized Training	7	3.41	6	3.41	8	4.15	21	**3.66**
Counseling	13	6.34	13	7.39	14	7.25	40	**6.97**
Mentorship	5	2.44	5	2.84	6	3.11	16	**2.79**
Meetings	23	11.22	19	10.80	20	10.36	62	**10.80**
Awards	4	1.95	4	2.27	11	5.70	19	**3.31**
Advertorials	13	6.34	11	6.25	12	6.22	36	**6.27**
News Releases	19	9.27	16	9.09	16	8.29	51	**8.89**
Press Conferences	11	5.37	9	5.11	10	5.18	30	**5.23**
Workshops & Seminars	9	4.39	7	3.98	8	4.15	24	**4.18**
Newsletters	6	2.93	5	2.84	7	3.63	18	**3.14**
Use of Social Media Platforms	16	7.80	15	8.52	17	8.81	48	**8.36**
Community Relations	21	10.24	17	9.66	16	8.29	54	**9.41**
Media Relations	23	11.22	20	11.36	18	9.33	61	**10.63**
Total	**205**	**100**	**176**	**100**	**193**	**100**	**574**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table one which was concerned with the public relations strategies used by the Ministry of Education in the promotion of Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs in select States of Nigeria revealed that the major public relations strategies the Ministry adopted more were meetings (10.80%), media relations (10.63%) and community relations (9.41%), while others included Sponsorship (16.38%), specialized training (3.66%), counseling (6.97%), mentorship (2.79%), awards (3.31%), advertorials (6.27%), news releases (8.89%), press conferences (5.23%), workshops & seminars (4.18%), newsletters (3.14%), use of social media platforms (8.36%).

This implies that in order to promote Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs the Ministry of Education is engaged in the use of public relations strategies such as meetings, media relations and community relations. Others are Sponsorship, specialized training, counseling, mentorship, awards, advertorials, news releases, press conferences, workshops & seminars, newsletters, and use of social media platforms.

Table 2: Extent of the Adoption of Public Relations strategies by Ministry of Education in the promotion of the Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs in Select States of Nigeria

Response	Number of Respondents						Cumulative Frequency	
	Kano		Niger		Lagos			
To a very great extent	25	12.20	19	10.80	27	13.99	71	12.37
To a great extent	37	18.05	25	14.20	39	20.21	101	17.60
To a very little extent	33	16.10	23	13.07	25	12.95	81	14.11
To a little extent	97	47.32	94	53.41	91	47.15	282	49.13
Difficult to say	13	6.34	15	8.52	11	5.70	39	6.79
Total	**205**	**100.00**	**176**	**100.00**	**193**	**100.00**	**574**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table two which is concerned with the Extent to which Public Relations strategies is adopted by the Ministry of Education in the promotion of the Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs in Select States of Nigeria revealed that the Ministry adopts public relations strategies in doing so just to a little extent (49.13%) as compared to doing so to a very great extent (12.37%), to a great extent (17.60%), or to a very little extent (14.11%).

It implies from the above that even though the Ministry of Education is involved in the use of public relations strategies to promote the Inclusive Education among people with Special Needs, the extent of their involvement is just little.

Table 3: How the Ministry of Education Utilize Public Relations Strategies in the Promotion of Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs in Select States of Nigeria

Response	Number of Respondents						Cumulative Frequency	
	Kano		Niger		Lagos			
Very well committed	19	9.27	16	9.09	31	16.06	66	11.50
Well Committed	29	14.15	27	15.34	34	17.62	90	15.68
Committed	107	52.20	90	51.14	96	49.74	293	51.05
Uncommitted	35	17.07	31	17.61	21	10.88	87	15.16
Not sure	15	7.32	12	6.82	11	5.70	38	6.62
Total	**205**	**100.00**	**176**	**100.00**	**193**	**100.00**	**574**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 3 is concerned with how the Ministry of Education utilize public relations strategies in the promotion of Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs in select States of Nigeria. Data revealed that the Ministry was committed (51.05%) but not very well committed (11.50%) in the use of public relations strategies in the promotion of the programme in those states.

The implication of this is that the commitment of the Ministry of Education in applying public relations strategies to promote inclusive education among the People with Special Needs is not much high but low.

Table 4: Level of Success of Public Relations Strategies of the Ministry of Education in the Promotion of the Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs in Select States of Nigeria

Response	Number of Respondents						Cumulative Frequency	
	Kano		Niger		Lagos			
Very high level of success	21	10.24	17	9.66	25	12.95	63	10.98
High level of success	34	16.59	23	13.07	36	18.65	93	16.20
Minimal level of success	101	49.27	87	49.43	92	47.67	280	48.78
Very little level of success	17	8.29	15	8.52	14	7.25	46	8.01
Little level of success	19	9.27	20	11.36	17	8.81	56	9.76
Not sure	13	6.34	14	7.95	9	4.66	36	6.27
Total	205	100.00	176	100.00	193	100.00	574	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Furthermore, table four which is concerned with the Level of success of public relations strategies of the Ministry of Education in the promotion of the Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs in select States of Nigeria revealed that public relations has recorded a minimal level of success (48.78%) in the promotion of Inclusive Education among people with Special Needs than recording very high (10.98%), or high level of success (16.20%).

This implies that the application of public relations strategies in the promotion of Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs has achieved a minimal level of success than achieving very high level of success in Nigeria.

Findings and Discussion

To promote Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs the Ministry of Education is engaged in the use of public relations strategies such as meetings, media relations and community relations. Others are Sponsorship, specialized training, counseling, mentorship, awards, advertorials, news releases, press conferences, workshops & seminars, newsletters, and use of social media platforms. This is evident as majority of the respondents were of the opinion that meetings (10.80%), media relations (10.63%) and community relations (9.41%) were adopted more in the promotion of the Inclusive Education in the Ministry as compared to sponsorship (16.38%), specialized training (3.66%), counseling (6.97%), mentorship (2.79%), awards (3.31%), advertorials (6.27%), news releases (8.89%), press conferences (5.23%), workshops & seminars (4.18%), newsletters (3.14%), and use of social media platforms (8.36%). This finding aligns with the one in a study by Irwan, Kusen, Andi & Heri (2020) which revealed that the following strategies were identified for improving enrolment in technical teacher education through students involvement in public relations:

integrating public relations in school curriculum; proper funding of the scheme and engaging students regularly in exhibitions and job fairs. Same with Omorodion, Ibeneme & Ayodele (2022) who revealed that the public relation activities practiced by the School of Secondary Education (Technical), Federal College of Education (Technical) Asaba, Delta State technical such as; having open talk-show with basic school pupils, creating awareness of technical education to the community organizations and visiting religious and social gathering to create public awareness on the need for technical education.

Another finding is that even though the Ministry of Education is involved in the use of public relations strategies to promote the Inclusive Education among people with Special Needs, the extent of their involvement is just little. This is evident in the majority proportion of 49.13% who were of the opinion that the Ministry adopted public relations strategies to a little extent as compared to 12.37% who said it was to a very great extent, and 17.60% who said it was to a great extent. This finding aligns with a study conducted by Igben (2022) which revealed that some higher educational institutions use some of the tools as a matter of custom without establishing whether such tools are relevant to addressing their corporate public relations needs while others try to allow research to precede their selection of the public relations tools of the schools, while some yet do leave their public relations tools in reckless abandon.

Finding also revealed that the commitment of the Ministry of Education in the application of public relations strategies in the promotion of inclusive education among the People with Special Needs is not much high but low. This is evident in the majority proportion of 51.05% who attested to that fact as compared to 11.50% who said the Ministry was very well committed in the use of public relations strategies in the promotion of the programme in those states.

Furthermore, finding revealed that the application of public relations strategies in the promotion of Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs has achieved a minimal level of success than achieving very high level of success in Nigeria. This is evident in the majority proportion of 48.78% who attested to that fact as compared to 10.98% who regarded the level of success as very high and 16.20% who regarded it as high. This finding corroborates with the ones in a study by Igben & Ugbome (2021) which revealed that there was heavy use of community relations activities by the college to build healthy relationships with her host community. From the study, the public relations unit of the college is building the positive image of the college. However, tools that can bring the college face to face with their publics to encourage two-way dialogue to build relationships have not been fully utilized. This has led to a poor image perception of the college with the resultant effect of a progressive drop in the population of students in the past 4-5 years. Likewise, a study by Obinna, Ewomazina & Olley (2021) which revealed that the Edo State University Uzairue has a public relations office, but does not have public relations department, and that the extent of her public relations activities' effectiveness is on the average and not to a great level.

Conclusion

Public Relations is used as a communication tool by the Ministry of Education in the promotion of the Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs and the most public

relations strategies used in doing so are meetings, media relations and community relations as compared to sponsorship, specialized training, counseling, mentorship, awards, advertorials, news releases, press conferences, workshops & seminars, newsletters, and use of social media platforms. However, the use of public relations strategies to promote the Inclusive Education among people with Special Needs by the Ministry of Education is to a little and not to a great extent.

As a result, the commitment of the Ministry of Education in the application of public relations strategies in the promotion of inclusive education among the People with Special Needs is not very high but low. Nevertheless, the application of public relations strategies in the promotion of Inclusive Education among People with Special Needs has achieved a minimal level of success than achieving very high level of success in Nigeria.

Conclusively, the use of public relations in the promotion of programmes among organisations is not in doubt but underutilization and or low commitment in the use of public relations strategies is capable of preventing the organization from achieving desired success in the use of this communication tool as evident in this study.

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