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Abstract

This study investigated Public Relations Practices for enhanced Service Delivery and Librarians' image in School Libraries in Abia State, South East Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population was 135 teacher librarians in the selected secondary schools in the state. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. Data generated was analysed using descriptive statistics consisting of frequency tables and mean scores. The findings of the study show that the services offered to school library users are lending services to teachers and students, provision of seating and study facilities and user education. Also the dominant public relations practices in school libraries in the state include readers 'services, use of library's notice board, book talks, library displays and exhibitions. It was also revealed that the requisite competences of teacher librarians as public relations officers are good communication skills, professional experience, knowledge of ICT, and good marketing skills. The recommended strategies to enhance service delivery and librarians' image include reorientation of users and the society at large on the relevance of the library, provision of adequate infrastructure, provision of materials that are relevant to school library users, provision of user education and organisation of library week to enlighten new or potential users and training and retraining of teacher librarians, among others.

Key Words: Public Relations, Service Delivery, Librarians' image, School libraries

Introduction

Good public relations are essential for the survival and continuous relevance of the library in today's world of competitive economy. Public relations is both poly-sectorial and multi- disciplinary. This means that it manifest in every activity of life. This is because individuals, associations, institutions and cultures always aim at building positive image and strong relationships with members of the society within which it operates. Nnadozie (2016) posited that public relations is the promotion of good rapport and beneficial collaboration between the library and the public that populate its operational community. This is achieved through deliberate policies and services, distribution of interpretative and promotional materials, development of neighbourly interaction and the assessment of public opinion cum reaction. It is the art by which organisations achieve social harmony and mutual understanding with the people which it interfaces .Irrespective of the methods, practice, or strategies used by the public relations officer, it is always , aimed at building a positive image and strong relationship with the organisation's publics. This facts corresponds with the preposition of Nnadozie and Okeke (2015) that despite noticeable variations in the methods, strategies and tools, the aim of public relations has always been anchored on the need to maintain good social standing, communicate activities effectively and facilitate mutual understanding amongst members of the community. Every organisation no matter how large or small, ultimately depends on its reputation for survival and success. In today's competitive market, reputation can be a company's biggest asset. Public relations activities and practices always aim at protecting the reputation of an organisation. Public relations is therefore, defined as a planned, deliberate and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an   organisation and its

publics. (Epstein, 2003 and Aghadinuno, 2013). This definition was amplified by Nnadozie (2016) who highlighted some of the salient issues on which public relations is based. The first of these points is that public relations is not a haphazard undertaking as it is organised and implemented on a continuous or cyclic base with the intention of projecting a positive public image. Public relations aims at maintaining mutual understanding between the organisation and the various publics from which it draws support, goodwill and patronage. The third issue is that public relations is a veritable change agent through which poor perception and other negative attitudes can be converted into mutual understanding and cooperation.

School libraries are conceived as libraries found in pre-tertiary institutions such as nursery, primary and secondary schools. Aliyu (2007) defined school library as a collection of relevant learning, teaching ,viewing, reference books housed in each school reasonably and suitably organised by trained staff to supply materials for teachers and pupils at relevant level to enrich the subject and the teaching methods and resources. A school library is useful in literacy work from the earliest stage because it encourages good reading habits to be formed when children are young. Nothing is as important as to the quality of library services provided to library patrons whether academic public, special, or school library as the quality and range of resources selected, acquired, and retained by a library. A school library may be seen by some to be small and inconsequential, but the fact that it is part of the overall school system is critically looked at, it becomes obvious that as much as the collection of a university library is to its community, so also is the collection of a school library to its pupils and staff. (Badawi, 2004)

The objectives of school libraries is to acquire, process, and make available to its users, a wide range of books and audio visual materials to supplement and enrich the teaching and learning situation in schools. Other objectives of school libraries are:

. To encourage the development of skills

. To promote reading habits to some literacy appreciation

. To source for subject information centre and support the school curriculum

. To inculcate intellectual development

According to Fayose (2003), owing to the expected academic gains in the use of school library resources and the changing nature of the resources themselves, print, non-print, and electronic, the term school libraries has changed over the years. The literature of library and information science today refers to school library as "Institutional Repository Centre", "Media Resource Centre", "Information Resource Centre", "Learning Resource Centre", and "School Library Media Centre" (SLMC). The narrow concept of libraries as store house, repositories or shrines is no longer tenable in our globalized world of information explosion. To cope with the changing realities and uncertainties of human life, present teaching and learning environment in schools have proved inadequate. Children need to be exposed to more effective learning strategies and resources as a means of acquiring relevant knowledge, skills, and habits for survival in the modern world. The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge –based society. The school library equips students with life-long learning skills and develops their imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens. This is achievable through the provision of functional school libraries and availability of professional librarian. The school librarian is a professionally qualified trained staff member responsible for planning and managing the school library, supported by an adequate staffing as possible working together with all members of the school community and liaising with the public library and others. As a collaborator, change agent and leader, the school /teacher librarian develops, promotes, and implements programmes which definitely becomes a lifelong skill.

However, school libraries over the years have projected a negative image due to the inadequate services and poor resources provided to its users. This is as a result of the problems discussed by Ajegbomogun and Salaam (2001) facing school libraries in Nigeria, they include declining financial support ,inadequate infrastructure and equipment, employment of unqualified personnel, emptiness of book shelves and low level of information technology and also the misconception of the place of the library in the society (Egbunike,2008). In an attempt to solve these problems, correct this misconception, project a positive image for the library and facilitate understanding and support the concept of the public relations was introduced in the practice of librarianship.

Public relations is not exactly new in the practice of the librarianship. This claim is on the understanding that that library practitioners and administrators have always designed policies and implemented services to satisfy the users and project a good image of the library and information centres. Public relations is also a means by which the library gain support from government and their parent organisations. Effective public relations can help manage the library's image by communicating and building good relationship with all the organisation's stakeholders. Public relations in the library or library public relations tries to shape the way the average citizen perceives the library. As such, it corrects the attitude of the general public towards the library (as a profession). The primary objective of library public relation is to create, maintain and protect the reputation of librarianship, enhance its prestige and present a favourable image for the library profession and its practitioners.

Public relations practices are essential for the survival and continued relevance of the library in today's world of competition. It is important to note that public relations is not done haphazardly; it involves carefully planned and coordinated practices and programmes to communicate a positive image of the library. Public relation practices are therefore, those planned activities, tools, methods, and programmes put in place by organisations (libraries) to

ensure that they remain relevant and communicate a positive image of the library itself and the services it provides. Some public relations practices used by library practitioners includes improved readers services, library week, library displays and exhibitions, use of directional guides, refreshment/relaxation corners, lounge for light reading ,etc. Public relations practices will be more effective when plans are made for specific users that the library serves. The users of a particular refers to those group of people who are affected (in one way or the other) by the existence, service and policies of the library and who exert certain influence on the activities of the library. From the above, we can say that the users of school library include school administrators, teachers, students and pupils, parents and members of the whole community.

The study covers school libraries in secondary schools in Abia state, south east Nigeria. Some of the selected schools for the study which were visited by the researcher were found to be in a sorry state as most of the facilities and resources are in poor condition and the services poorly offered to users. In most of the schools visited, the libraries are used for other purposes that are not the main purpose of the libraries in secondary schools. The libraries are used as business centres, relaxation centres, staff rooms, and discussion centres. Teacher librarians are not employed and deployed to many of the school libraries visited. The researcher noticed that the school libraries experience low patronage because they don't have comfortable sitting and study facilities, resources required by students. Some users are not aware of the resources available in the library's holdings like books, and other information materials and those available are not classified and arranged in ways to make retrieval easy and quick. Directional guides are not used to direct users in the use of the library and this makes library use burdensome and time consuming. Computers and other electronic media are absent and the library surrounding and structure don't look attractive.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of public relations to the services and patronage of school libraries cannot be over emphasized. Public relations is essential to school libraries because it enables them remain relevant in today's competitive environment. Also public libraries create better understanding of the role of the library among the library users. There is tendencies for library users especially students to lose focus, become dull and lazy or develop a nonchalant attitude to their academic work. A public relations programme that is properly conceived and effectively implemented can help correct such negative tendencies and engage users to harness their talents and learning for the good of the general public. Good public relations programmes/practices can help libraries gain continued goodwill as well as patronage, financial and emotional support because public relations builds a positive social image for the library.

It is no longer news that libraries especially school libraries are neglected in the scheme of things in Nigeria. Public relations is an avenue to salvage the situation and correct the misconceptions about the libraries as a store house of old books and the librarian whose role is unknown to some users of the library. Perhaps, some scholars have undertaken similar studies on other types of libraries and in other parts of the world. However, there is no such study to the best of the knowledge of this researcher any study done on this same subject and area of the current investigation. This study is therefore, intended to investigate into the public relations practices for enhanced services delivery and librarians' image in secondary school libraries in Abia state, south east Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

School Library Services

Services in the library are defined as a set of activities that the library perform in order to satisfy the information needs of users. Tella, *et al.,* (2009) stated that libraries should provide facilities

and services necessary for the success of all formal programmes of instruction, open the door of the world of knowledge that lies beyond the boundaries of one field of study and bring information materials and students together under conditions which encourages reading for pleasure, self- discovery, personal growth and sharpening of intellectual curiosity. Each library function is achieved by several services; however, the nature and efficiency of services provided may vary from library to library. These services are provided to ensure that the users of the school libraries make maximum use of the information resources and also their information needs are satisfied.

Aina (2004) and Popoola (2008) identified the following services that are peculiar to most libraries which if implemented by school libraries would help it fulfil its functions. They include but not limited to the following, lending services, inter-library loan, reservation service, provision of seating and study facilities, reference service, exhibition and display, library publications, user education, selective dissemination of information referral service, abstracting and indexing services and consultation services.

Public Relations Practices in School Libraries

Public relations practices are those planned activities, tools, methods, and programmes put in place by libraries to ensure that they remain relevant and communicate a positive image of themselves and the services they provide. Nnadozie (2016) defines public relations practices as those functions/activities used by the library to build a bridge between the library and its users. These programmes and practices are meant to attract people to the library. Public relations practices would be more effective if plans are for the specific users the library serve, which in the case of the school library are; school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the members of the whole community. He further posited that there are three categories of public relations practices which includes internal public relations practice, external public

relations practice and media public relations practice. **Internal public relations practice are those** PR programmes and activities that take place within or around the library complex to attract users to the library. External public relations practices are on the other hand those programmes and activities that are organized outside the immediate environment or physical facilities of the library. Media public relations practices are PR programmes used by the library to reach its target audience through the use of media platforms.

The following are public relations practices that are predominant in school libraries; readers' services, library display and exhibitions, organized events, use of library notice boards, directional guides, lounge for light reading materials, refreshment/relaxation corners, and library publications.(Nnadozie,(2016), Evans, Amodeo, and Carter (1999), Ifodon (2000) & Nworgu (2012)

Competences Required for Teacher Librarians as PR Officers.

Chandra (2011) observed that in every work of life competency is the key to face the developmental challenges in the corporate world. The success or failure of an individual or institution largely depends on the level and the type of competency that exists with particular institution or individual. According to European Parliament Council (2008), competency is defined as the set of knowledge and skills that enable an employee to orient easily in a working field and to solve particular problems that are linked with their professional roles. Chandra (2011) views competency as the characteristics of individuals, which affect his performance and behaviour at work.

For a successful planning and effective implementation of library public relations programme, Ossai-Onah, Onuoha, and Udo-Anyanwu (2015) insists that library public relations is best suited for someone that has the following attributes; an interest in communication, a methodical approach of gathering and editing information and a high capacity to manage stress. Nnadozie

(2016) also gave a list of the prerequisite needed from a PR officer for successful implementation of PR programme. They include the following; possession of relevant qualifications, ability to carry out the duties and functions of a public relations officer, possession of certain personal traits, skills and competences and skills needed to effectively plan and implement public relations programmes.

Furthermore, Noel and Waugh (2002) noted that libraries need to hire computer literate people. Librarians who are knowledgeable in computers can be very effective in applying their skills in the practice of public relations. Rowley (1997) suggested that librarians need to be competent in the areas of resource knowledge, subject knowledge, and process knowledge. Equipped with this knowledge, librarians should apply the public relations to library service. They must begin with aligning the mission statement and the subsequent goals and objectives of their services towards a strong customer orientation by developing strategies that will aid in accomplishing their mission.

Strategies for Enhanced Public Relations Practice for Effective Service Delivery and Librarians' Image

The success of any library is getting users to use the library. This is achieved by creating awareness and educating users on benefits of using the library's resources and services. Libraries should endeavour to provide effective and efficient services to users. When users are satisfied they can now refer their friends and acquaintances to the library. However, school libraries have over the years rendered services that paint a very negative image of the library and the librarians. But because of recent researches and findings by proactive librarians, public relations practices and programmes can now be used as avenue to enhance service delivery and librarian's image. Some of the public relations practices as stipulated by Nnadozie (2016) are; integrated readers' services, library displays and exhibitions, library week, use of notice boards,

directional guides, film shows, book talks, library publications, story hours, etc. To effectively improve library's image, librarians should provide quite environment for reading and study. Westwood (2011) noted that it is very necessary more than ever before, for librarians to provide quite study spaces which should serve as a retreat from noise and bluster from the voices of the commercial world. He noted that sometimes the greatest leisure one can enjoy is to enjoy silence for a while.

Another strategy for enhance service delivery is through user education. Das and Kam (2008) emphasises that new users do not know about library rules and regulations. Therefore, it is the duty of librarians to give library orientation for maximum utility of the library.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to investigate the public relations practices for enhanced service delivery and librarians 'image in school libraries in secondary schools in Abia state, south east Nigeria. The specific objectives are to;

1 Identify the services offered to users of the school libraries in Abia state, south east Nigeria.

2 Determine the public relations practices in the school libraries in Abia state.

3 Ascertain the competences required of teacher librarians to perform the duties of a public relations officer

4 Recommend strategies that could be employed to enhance public relations practices for better service delivery and librarians' image in Abia state, south east Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study is intended to provide answers to the following research questions.

1. What are the services offered to users of the school libraries in Abia state, South east Nigeria?

2. What are the public relations practices in school libraries in Abia state?

3. What are the competences required of teacher librarians to perform the duties of a public relations officer?

4. What strategies could be employed to enhance public relations practices for better service delivery and librarians' image in Abia state, south east Nigeria?

Methodology

The design of the study is descriptive survey and the population is comprised of all the teacher librarians and other library staff of the school libraries in secondary schools in Abia state, south east, Nigeria. The sample size is one hundred and thirty five teacher librarians/library staff which was selected using purposive sampling technique. This is because only secondary schools with school libraries were selected and used for the study. Other secondary schools without school libraries were not included in the study. The instrument for data collection is the researcher's designed questionnaire titled Public Relations for Enhanced Serviced Delivery and Librarians' Image Questionnaire (PRESDLIQ). The 39 item questionnaire has three clusters developed to elicit relevant data for the study and it validated through expert opinion. The questionnaire was administered to the teacher librarians/library staff of the schools selected for the study by the researcher with the help of research assistants. The researcher selected one research assistant each from each of the selected schools. They were properly briefed on how to administer and collect back the completed copies of the questionnaire. The researcher distributed copies of the questionnaire to the respondents through the research assistants. After

one week, the researcher started visiting the schools again to collect the completed copies of the questionnaire from the research assistants. It took the researcher a period of six weeks to visit the schools and to retrieve the completed copies of the questionnaire .Out of the one hundred and thirty five copies of the questionnaire distributed, one hundred and twenty eight of them eventually collected back. The data generated was analysed using frequency distribution tables and mean scores. Using a four point rating scale, any mean score that is equal to or above the criterion point of 2.50 is accepted while any mean score that is below the criterion point is rejected.

Results/Discussions

Research Question 1. What are the services offered to users in school libraries in Abia state, south east Nigeria?

Table 1. Mean responses on the services offered to users in school libraries in Abia state, south east Nigeria.

S/N	School library services	Mean	Remark
1.	Lending services to students	1.8	Reject
2.	Lending services to teachers and other users	3.6	Reject
3.	Inter-library loan services	1.8	Reject
4.	Reservation service	1.9	Reject
5.	Provision of seating and study facilities	3.3	Accept
6.	Reference services	2.7	Accept
7.	Exhibitions display	2.3	Reject
8.	User education	3.3	Accept
9.	Library publication	2.4	Reject
10.	Referral service	3.0	Accept
11.	Selective dissemination of information	2.2	Reject
12.	Translation service	2.1	Reject
13.	Abstracting and indexing services	2.1	Reject
14.	Consultancy services	2.3	Reject

It is evident from this table that lending services to teachers and student users, provision of seating and study facilities, user education and referral services are the services provided to users in school libraries in Abia state. The other services are not available to users in the school libraries in the state.

Research Question 2. What the public relations practices are in school libraries in Abia state, South east Nigeria?

Table 2. Mean responses on the public relations practices in school libraries in Abia state, South east Nigeria

S/N	Public relations practices in school libraries	Mean	Remark
1.	Readers services	3.8	Accept
2.	Library display and exhibitions	2.6	Accept
3.	Use of library notice boards	3.3	Accept
4.	Library week	2.1	Reject
5.	Directional guides	3.0	Accept
6.	Lounge for light reading materials	2.7	Accept
7.	Refreshment/relaxation corners	1.7	Reject
8.	Tory hours	2.1	Reject
9.	Film hours	1.7	Reject
10.	Book talks	2.7	Accept
11.	Book fairs	2.1	Reject
12.	Media activities	1.4	Reject
13.	Voluntary services	3.0	Accept
14.	Library publications	2.7	Accept
15.	Special events	2.3	Reject

The table show the public relations practice that are available in school libraries in Abia state south east Nigeria. The practices that are available include; readers' services, use of library notice boards, directional guides, voluntary services, lounge for light reading materials, book talks, library publications, and library display and exhibitions.   The other items whose mean scores are below 2.50 are rejected and therefore considered practices not available in the school libraries.

Research Question 3. What are the competences required of teacher librarians to perform the

duties of public relations officer?

Table 3. Mean responses on the competences required of teacher librarian as a public relations officer.

S/N	Competences required of a teacher Librarian as a PR Officer	Mean	Remark
1.	Good communication skills	3.8	Accept
2.	Interpersonal skills	3.4	Accept
3.	Professional experience	3.7	Accept
4.	Fluency of speech	3.7	Accept
5.	Ability to answer users questions	3.4	Accept
6.	Knowledge of ICT	3.4	Accept
7.	Good reporting/writing skills	3.6	Accept
8.	Good marketing skills	3.3	Accept

The table revealed that the major competences required by teacher librarians as PR officers are

good communication skills, professional competences, and fluency of speech. Other

competences required are good reporting/writing skills, interpersonal skills, ability to answer

users query, knowledge of ICT, and good marketing skills.

Research Question 4. What strategies could be employed to enhance public relations practice for enhanced service delivery and librarians' image in school libraries in Abia state, south east, Nigeria?

Table 4. Mean responses on the strategies that could be employed to enhance public relations practice for enhanced service delivery and librarians' image.

S/N	Strategies	Mean	Remark
1.	Reorientation of users and the society at large on the relevance of the library	3.9	Accept
2.	Government should enact relevant policies that will guide the development and Services of the libraries	3.9	Accept
3.	Adequate funds should be allocated to school libraries	3.6	Accept
4.	Rehabilitation of school library buildings to make them attractive	3.7	Accept
5.	Provision of adequate infrastructure	3.8	Accept
6.	Employing competent staff	3.7	Accept
7.	Introduction of attractive services	3.6	Accept
8.	Provision of user education and organisation of library week to enlighten new students and users	3.7	Accept
9.	Use of library notice boards	3.4	Accept
10.	Use of directional guides	3.7	Accept
11.	Provision of materials that are relevant to school library users	3.8	Accept
12.	Introduction of lounge for light reading materials	3.0	Accept
13.	Provision of comfortable seating and study facilities	3.6	Accept
14.	Provision of refreshment/relaxation corners	2.9	Accept
15.	Organizing media activities	3.0	Accept
16.	Lending services to all users	3.8	Accept

It is evident that all the strategies were recommended by the respondents as the public relations practices that could be employed to enhance service delivery as well as librarians' image. All the strategies has mean scores which is above the criterion mean of 2.50 and were therefore accepted.

Discussion

The results indicated that few library services are offered to the users of the school libraries. They are lending services to teachers and students, provision of seating and study facilities, user education and referral services. Lending services to teachers and students had the highest rating. This agrees with Aina (2004) who argues that lending service is a very essential service that should be provided by libraries. This is because it promotes equal and fair access to information materials. In providing an excellent lending service, information resources provided must be current, relevant in meeting the information needs of users.

Provision of seating and study facilities and user education are the other services offered in school libraries. This finding supports Nwalo and Oyedum (2007) who stated that the reading environment of libraries should be improved. There should be adequate reading space, chairs and tables. It is very necessary that library users should be comfortable as much as possible when accessing information materials in the library .Library environment should be very attractive and the reading and study areas should not be overcrowded. However it was observed that in some school libraries, the environment was dirty and the library materials unorganised. Any library that unattractive and does not have adequate seating and study facilities is sending to her users a wrong message about the library.

Popoola (2008) in Eze (2017) posited that libraries are expected to provide user education to users. This to enable them equip users with enough knowledge on the use of the library. When users are enlightened on the use of library, they will be able to use the library effectively. Through user education, the user is able to get any information he/she desires as well as developing the skills to use the resources of the library independently. This could be done by library orientation tours and through classroom instructions.

The study revealed public relations practices viewed by the respondents to be available in school libraries. They include readers services, use of library's notice boards, directional guides, voluntary services, lounge for light reading materials, book talks, library publications and library display and exhibitions. Those that are not available include special events, library week, story hours, book fairs, refreshment/relaxation corners, and film shows and media activities.

The study affirmed that all the eight competences identified by the respondents are required by the teacher librarians to perform their duties as public relations officers. This supports the view of Schmidt (2011) who noted that all staff who publicises the library services must be able to communicate effectively with their clients. Other competences of teacher librarians as PR officers according to Eze (2017), which are similar to the findings of this study include ability to answer users query, knowledge of ICT, professional skills, good reporting/writing skills, fluency of speech and interpersonal skills.

The results of the study revealed that reorientation of users and the society at large on the relevance of the library, enactment of relevant policies that guide the development and services of the library, provision of adequate funds to the school libraries, provision of adequate infrastructure are some the recommended strategies that could be employed to enhance service delivery as well as improve librarians' image. This findings corroborate the finding of Eze (2017), who stated that these are essential to enhance service delivery in school libraries. Other strategies include employing of competent librarians/staff, provision of materials that are relevant to school library users, provision of seating and study facilities and lending services to all users.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn. It was the opinion of the respondents that the services offered by the school libraries are lending services to teachers and students, user education and referral services, as well as provision of seating and study facilities. The public relations practices available in the school libraries are readers' services, use of library's notice boards, directional guides and library display and exhibitions among others. The various strategies that could enhance service delivery and librarians' image include reorientation of users and the society at large on the relevance of the school libraries, provision of adequate infrastructure, employing competent librarians/staff, enactment of relevant policies that will guide the development of school libraries, etc. It is hoped that service delivery in school libraries and the librarian's image will tremendously improve if the recommended strategies enunciated by this study are implemented by the various stake holders. The misconception and negative tendencies about the school libraries and the image of the librarians will seriously be corrected as well.

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