

# **EDUCATION FOR ECONOMIC REHABILITATION AND RELIANCE: A PUBLIC RELATIONS APPROACH**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the plight of teachers. It seeks to answer why they have suddenly turned to a bundle of cheats soiling the otherwise glorious reputation of their profession. It examines why so-called graduates cannot defend the certificates they claimed to have bagged. It probes into why students have turned to truants and the standard of education has fallen so drastically. It was observed that the ugly situation in our educational system has many facets starting from the government down to the teachers and the students: It is a chain reaction kind of a phenomenon. The paper addresses this situation using the public relations approach: focusing on reputation building, revamping reputation and preventing damage to reputation (especially of teachers). Reputation is the big giant pivot on which Public Relations revolves. This paper relates the above to teachers, students and government, as well as, discussing the role they have played and should henceforth play in making our education have economic rehabilitation and reliance.

## **Introduction**

There is no gain saying that our educational system needs a kind of healing because it has been ill for a long time. It is high time we (as teachers) combate-- the damage already done to the teaching profession. We have to go the extra mile through the weapon of image making (reputation revamping and building) through mutual understanding (under the auspices of Public Relations) to make people consider teachers good or acceptable again after a long period during which the profession had been maligned. To do this is not a lazy man's job or a one-man show. The government and the students (apart from the lecturers also) have their own quotas. Definitely, there are clogs in the wheel of attaining economic rehabilitation and reliance (especially as they relate to education). We want to use Public Relations as a powerful tool to pierce through these impediments or clogs as well as to proffer solutions to them. For a thorough understanding of the subject of this paper, there is the need to give the definitions and explanation of certain terms.

## **Definition of Certain Terms What is Public Relations?**

More than two hundred and fifty (250) definitions abound for Public Relations. One wonders why this profession is so much saddled with numerous definitions. The reason is not far-fetched; it is the only profession that cuts across several disciplines. Public relations is not propaganda, journalism, advertising and marketing. For our discussion now, we shall focus on only one of the several definitions as it affects teachers, students and the government regarding education for economic rehabilitation and reliance. Ajala (1993:9) quoting Danny Moss (1990) gave a definition of Public Relations that is very relevant to our discussion as it hinges on reputation thus: "Public relations is reputation management, reinforcing reputation, and combating damage to reputation".

The key word in the above definition is reputation. What then is reputation? Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary (1975:1537) defines reputation as: "The estimation in which a person, thing, or action is held by others; character in public or popular opinion, whether favourable or unfavourable".

The above definitions make it clear that reputation connotes the worth or value one places on a person, thing or an action. Relating this to teachers in this nation especially by the government and then the populace at large? The answer to this we shall be answered later in this paper. But then who are the teachers? This comes up later.

## **What is Education?**

Education is a household word. Definitely a lot of scholars have written on education. We shall, however, limit ourselves to the dictionary meaning given by Hornby (1948) in this paper as a:

- (1) Systematic training and instruction (especially of the young, in school, college, etc).
- (2) Knowledge and abilities, development of character and mental powers, resulting from such training.

A discussion of this type presupposes that a good, solid education provides for a good economic status. This is very much akin to high standards (morally, physically, mentally, socially, etc).

The two meanings given above of education are very relevant to our discussion since we are considering how Public Relations as a tool can be used to foster knowledge, abilities as well as development of character and mental powers being the resultant effects of good training (or education) by our teachers. The question is what kind of training do our teachers give to students nowadays? Do they teach or cheat students? Do they not turn them to cheats by their example-extorting money from them and selling illegal handouts (making quick money and training them to become the dupes of tomorrow)? Are they developing or destroying character in students?

### **What is Economic?**

This an adjective from a noun "economies". Hornby (2002) defines it as:

- (1) Something relating to economics;
- (2) Designed to give profit and;
- (3) Connected with industrial arts.

In essence, we are concerned in this paper with a kind of education that will yield profit in our nation, Nigeria i.e that which is related to industry (quality of being hard-working and diligent); that is to say, being industrious. Now the question is can we as teachers say we have this quality of industriousness inculcated into our products from our schools and colleges? Do we blight rather than brighten their future? This question we seek Public Relations as a tool to resolve as we proceed in this paper.

### **What is Rehabilitation?**

This is a key word in the title of this paper. Hornby (2002:986) gives its definition as:

(1) To help to have a normal, useful life again after they have been very ill/sick or in prison for a long time. (2) To begin to consider that somebody is good or acceptable for a long period during which they were considered bad or unacceptable. (3) To return a building to its previous good condition.

From the foregoing definitions as we relate rehabilitation to our educational system, one sees clearly the need to restore the lost glory back into our sick or fallen educational system. The necessity to rebuild lost reputation can never be over-emphasised in the light of our teachers.

The reputation (both of the teachers and students) needs rehabilitation because the general opinion about their character and qualities is nothing to write home about. Reputation building, revamping reputation, and preventing damage to reputation is majorly what Public Relations is all about. In fact, reputation is the big giant pivot on which Public Relations revolves. This we seek to relate to teachers, students, government and the role they play and should play in making our education have economic rehabilitation and reliance.

### **What is Reliance?**

According to Hornby (2002) it is the state of needing somebody or something in order to survive and be successful.

From this definition, how do we not only change the deplorable condition of our education to a glorious one (like what it was many decades ago) but also to make it so solid and strong that it gives survival and success to us in this nation? This needs collective effort of the citizens of this nation that are directly involved vis-a-vis: the teachers, government and students.

### **Who are the Teachers?**

The teaching profession is a very common one; it is known even by a kid; its impact is felt right from cradle because every parent teaches (though informally) the children. Teachers abound always everywhere in the nooks and crannies of cities, towns and villages. They are the most populous of the civil servants but definitely not popular at all socially. The reverse is even the case as far as reputation estimation or favourable public opinion is concerned—they are at the lowest ebb in the hierarchy of esteem, value or worth in this nation. This is our bane. Let us stop (for space) further discussion on this and have what Webster (1975:1871) has to say about teachers: "One who teaches or instructs; an instructor; a preceptor; a tutor; one whose occupation is to instruct others".

It is deducible from the above definition that a teacher gives or imparts knowledge, skill, and wisdom to people. Right from the kindergarten up to the university, this impartation of knowledge is power. It suffices to say for now that a nation that is knowledgeable should be powerful and definitely have economic rehabilitation and reliance. How then can the teachers help in the said economic rehabilitation and reliance especially in our educational sector? This takes us to the next section.

### **The Teachers' Quota (in Education for Economic Rehabilitation and Reliance)**

It is important for every teacher to know that students are to teachers what customers are to bankers; what clients are to lawyers; what patients are to doctors; etc. It is enough to say that there must be good rapport or mutual understanding between pupils or students and teachers. Salu (1994:17) quoting the British Institute of Public Relations has this definition of Public Relations that is very relevant to us: "It is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its public(s)".

It is high time teachers knew that students are our targeted publics. Teachers must make them to be interested in the 'goods' we have got to 'sell' to them i.e. the knowledge we ought to impart. Rather than being lions or hyenas in the classes and turning pupils or students to truants, we (as lambs) must through mutual understanding (i.e. an understanding that is shared by both parties) relate to them. We cannot have time and space to give this mutual understanding a full blown treatment in this paper. This is why a recommendation of the knowledge or a course in Public Relations is hereby recommended for every teacher.

Teachers ought to see the success of students as theirs. According to the Public Relations definition above, teachers must make deliberate and planned efforts to achieve mutual understanding between them and their publics (i.e. the students). With this approach, teachers can uplift the so-called fallen standard of education when with planned and deliberate efforts they see to it that uninterested students as well as truants become interested; the dullards' problems are looked into because you as teachers are interested in your pupils' (students') well-being through mutual understanding.

As a result of mutual understanding, teachers must see pupils/students as friends and even future colleagues. The way we relate and communicate with them matters a great deal. Teachers must know that students are not only academically sick but there are times they are emotionally sick and, like nurses tend patients, we ought to. As teachers, we must notice and show concern when they are bereaved, sad or even ill etc. to create good environment for dissemination of knowledge. You may even need to send them gifts to create rapport and mutual understanding. Can you have this mutual understanding with students you curse at the slightest offence or you coax to buy illegal handouts at exorbitant prices? How can there be mutual understanding between teachers and students that you handle in a master-servant relationship? Teachers, as parents, must not be hostile or students all in the name that they are bad beyond repair. We ought to look inward (i.e. what teachers can do to improve the standard of education especially in their relationship with students, as a result of mutual understanding rather than outward e.g. pointing accusing finger at students).

It is high time teachers stood up to combat damage done to the reputation of teachers e.g. people say "teachers are bad; they are money-crazy; all they do is just give handouts; exploit students: asking for tyres, bails of guinea materials, fridges, television sets etc. before they can pass examinations? Let us stop this ugly, parasitism and start operating mutualism or commensalism. This will help to revamp our image and change our name from "cheats" to "teachers" in deed. The floor is already precipitated with these and lots of disgusting and nauseating statements by our supposed "clients" and targeted publics-the students/parents or even the entire populace. Let us vacuum-clean and evacuate them all with this powerful weapon of Public Relations (the gap bridger).

### **The Government's Quota (in Education for Economic Rehabilitation and Reliance)**

Webster (1975:789) defines government thus: "All the people who administer or control the affairs of a state, institution etc. administration". This definition above refers to government as the people who are at the helm of the affairs of a given state or nation.

The part or quota of the government in education for economic rehabilitation and reliance is very vital regarding the plight of the teachers. How can you imagine how an ill-fed child or a kwashiorkored child will rush at the slightest crumb falling by the dining table of a rich neighbour? What do we mean? Have you forgotten that all civil servants (especially teachers) are government children? It is expected that these "government children" ought to be well fed. An adage in Yoruba

says "A ki ire omo oba, ki a ma ri lyun l'orun re" which the rendition in English is "you can never see a king's child without having jewels on his neck" i.e. a king's son or daughter ought to be decked or decorated with precious jewels. Why then should government workers be stricken with poverty? Government children (civil servants and specifically teachers) ought to be healthier, good looking, more comfortable and better off than even those working in private organisations. The condition of teachers must be bettered or improved if we want economic rehabilitation and reliance in our educational system.

What image, public opinion, or reputation have the teachers in this country? They are addressed as "the church mice"-poor, stingy, ill-fed, ill-dressed, second class citizens. No wonder some stoop so low as to beg students to give them gifts and force students to buy illegal handouts. Today, many landlords will refuse to give accommodation to teachers because they will not pay house rent. Even some parents will refuse to give daughters in marriage to male teachers because they stand for poverty. Many students are vouching never to become teachers. Oh! What a bad reputation! No matter where you get to in life, a teacher must have taught you yet the young ones are not enthusiastic about picking a teaching job. What will happen to our posterity?

It was earlier on said that teachers ought to even give things to students as parents who want to create good atmosphere for learning through mutual understanding. How can that be possible unless the government helps to revamp the poor image of teachers? Can you imagine a situation where a student who came back for his/her Higher National Diploma (HND), parking his Mercedes Benz car beside his lecturer's jalopy or a ram-shackled Volkswagen car? This is just after working for a few years. How will the lecturer not beg for bread from him?

Imagine!, who would like to entrust his or her money in the hands of a slouchy, shabby, unkempt banker? In the same vein, many of our students feel insecure in the hands of these poverty-stricken teachers. So, by way of a polite protest, they dodge classes not wanting to be tutored by these "second class" or even "third class" citizens called teachers. In the good old days, teachers were usually well dressed. However now, probably because they are in the majority of the civil servants, the reverse is the case. If bankers and corporate bodies give wardrobe allowances to their staff, why can't the government do the same for teachers? The fact is that our appearance speaks volumes. A well dressed teacher communicates that he is dependable and trust worthy, therefore, his publics (the students) will listen to him and like a chain reaction, the performance of students will be positively affected. The graduates we turn out into the labour market will be qualitative ones thus bringing about economic rehabilitation and reliance.

Do we even have the labour market to absorb these graduates or we just turn them out to become men of the under-world after roaming the streets fruitlessly for years? At last, what they find is "solace" in armed-robbery. Thus, we turn them to brutes and monsters! What a nation?

Teachers are the 'groomers', 'moulders' and 'shapers' of tomorrow's leaders. They must not continue to "break" the students they are to "build". If the government has prepared and is giving a good package to the lawyers and judges so that they will not sell their conscience or pervert justice, the onus lies on it to do likewise for the teachers so that students even parents (of students) will not be able to buy them over. If corruption is halted in the four walls of schools, colleges and universities, then we are on the right track to achieving economic rehabilitation and reliance. We cannot afford to demoralize teachers by "amputating" their salaries. Do you not know that a hungry man is an angry man? There will be transferred aggression on the students by lecturers who have had one third of their salary cut off or who have not received payment for the past six months. Rather, we must improve the plight of lecturers and also improve the learning environment of students which like a chain reaction will give rise to an economic rehabilitation and reliance in our educational system.

### **Students' Quota (in Education for Economic Rehabilitation and Reliance)**

Regarding the students<sup>1</sup> quota in education for economic rehabilitation and reliance, since students are not the focus or organisers of this conference, another forum will be good to take care of that. Time and space will not permit us to give it a full blown treatment. However, it suffices us to say that students must not have biases against teachers. It is natural for you not to gain anything from a lecturer (no matter how talented he/she is) once you have something against him or her. Rather, students must relate to teachers as parents by operating

on the platform of mutual understanding-the golden tool of Public Relations.

Students should be concerned about the public image or reputation the citizens have about them. In fact, conscious efforts must be made by them to desist from actions that brought and can bring them to dis-repute such as cultism, sexual pervasion and prostitution, examination malpractices (which will make them not to defend the certificates they have bought or cheated to possess), disrespect for constituted authorities, nudity and indecent dressing, corruption and unethical job practices etc.

### **Conclusion**

We have seen how on the part of the government, the tool of public relations can be used to revamp and boost the reputation of teachers which will in turn, like a chain reaction, halt teachers from being "cheats" or "hawkers" or even "beggars" of bread from their supposed pupils (student). Teachers as government children cannot afford to be kwashiorkored children. They must have a taste of what Public Relations is all about and thus through mutual understanding handle their students well. Students on their part should never be biased against teacher else nothing taught them will be assimilated. The intrinsic bond between teachers and students is revealed. Nevertheless, students must see teachers as parents thereby operating on the yardstick of mutual understanding 'he wonderful and powerful tool of Public Relations. The end result will be an economy endowed with an educational system for economic rehabilitation and reliance. Hence, Public Relations will help us to have a normal, useful life again; our educational system will then be restored or rebuilt to its previous good condition.

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