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## **Public Relations Practices in Ghanaian Polytechnics**

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### ***Abstract:***

*The important role Public Relations (PR) plays in the life of every modern institution cannot be downplayed. It has become extremely relevant that every institution sets up a unit to run its PR activities. Ghanaian polytechnics have been in existence since 1992 and have established units responsible for public relations activities but they have not really tapped immensely and positively into the benefits of public relations. The study randomly selected PR officers and clients of the polytechnics to find out how the functions of public relations units of the polytechnics are contributing to the management of the polytechnics. Survey data was gathered using questionnaires and they were analyzed using the Predictive Analytics Software (PASW). The study found out that apart from the provision of appropriate media for information dissemination, the PR officer is not included in the decision making process. As such, it recommended that great importance should be attached to these specific Public Relations functions in decision making by public institutions like the polytechnics.*

### **1. Background of the Study**

Public relations is said to be the practice of conveying messages to the public through the media on behalf of a client with the intention of changing the public's actions by influencing their opinions. Merton (1988) gave one of the classic definitions of public relations. He stated that "Public Relations is the management function primarily responsible for shaping and implementing policies of mediation among social, political, and economic interests capable of influencing the growth and/or survival of an organization's basic franchise (p.339).

In recent times organizations, institutions and companies have given more prominence to public relations departments or units due to the important role they play in the management of such institutions. Changing social attitudes have forced a new responsiveness and sense of responsibility in official and commercial life. It is in this social climate that an appreciation of public relations as a management and advisory function is now recognized.

In a changing global economy where there is keen competition among educational institutions and organizations for their relevant publics, management increasingly sees public relations as not only performing the activity of negotiating and compromising with its publics but also a necessary component for helping to build the image of the organization to the level where the key publics will see the organization or institution as having advantage over others.

According to Murphy and Dee (1992), Public Relations make organizations more effective by building relationships with stakeholders in the environment that have the potential to disturb or enhance the mission of the organization. This role also includes dissemination of information to the publics and seeking information as well. This information or feedback often provides the public relations practitioner and the organization with insight as to how the publics perceive the organization. Often, organizations forget or ignore the importance of the Public Relations practitioner's role in the organizational structure. As a result, the organization's publics become dissatisfied and often react in a way that is harmful to the organization. This conflict can be characterized as activism which, if not dealt with correctly, can end in harsh consequences such as decrease in profits or a tarnished image.

The purpose of this study is to find out how the functions of public relations units of the polytechnics are contributing to the management of the polytechnics. Secondly, the study hopes to find the extent to which public relations officers are involved in decision-making in the polytechnics.

#### ***1.1. Background of the Polytechnics***

The way these afore-mentioned managerial functions are performed is essential to the sustenance of emerging tertiary institutions. In the case of the polytechnics, a proper way of performing managerial functions is even more important since they are trying to make an impact and attain a fully-fledged tertiary status, especially in the wake of the intended conversion in Ghana of Polytechnics into technical universities.

The polytechnics in Ghana were established by the PNDC Law 321 of 1992 (now repealed) to provide tertiary education in the professional, vocational and technical fields to the public. Between 1963 and 2003 most technical schools in the country were

converted into polytechnics. With the upgrading, the polytechnics started offering Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes. As tertiary institutions, they have been mandated to provide career-focused education and skills training to the highest level possible for the development of all sectors of the economy. They are also expected to contribute to the development of the industrial and technological base of the economy.

Afeti (2005) stated that “there are still a few people at decision-making levels in the country today who do not understand the philosophy and orientation of polytechnic education. There are also many well-meaning citizens who still regard the polytechnics as junior universities and majority of the polytechnic students also hold this opinion” (p17). Since their inception, the polytechnics have been in a state of flux, searching for their true identity and place in tertiary education.

### *1.2. Statement of the Problem*

The polytechnics in Ghana are expected to contribute to the development of the industrial and technological base of the economy (Republic of Ghana, 2002). The thrust of polytechnic education or training is, therefore, on the acquisition of the relevant skills required to perform specific professional tasks. Afeti (2005, p.17) again stated that “the public seems not to have understood the role and mission of the polytechnics and for that matter keeps on seeing the polytechnics as competing with the universities”. Some members of the general public also have the belief that students who go to the polytechnics are those who do not pass well in their examinations or make the entry requirement to the university. Consequently, there is the need for the polytechnics to reorient the minds of the public.

For the polytechnics to make a significant impact and inform the public of the philosophy and orientation of the institutions, the public relations units must be made to function at the managerial level. It has to undertake research and provide counseling, and identify the needs of its relevant public both within and external to the organization, planning and implementing the organization’s efforts to influence or change public perception. It also has to establish channels for effective communication flow in and out of the institution and maintaining harmonious relations with the relevant public.

The Public Relations unit will, therefore, help create a better understanding of polytechnic education necessary for a greater stakeholder support. Despite these important functional roles the Public Relations unit needs to play, Public Relations units in emerging tertiary institutions like the polytechnics have been found to be under-performing their managerial functions effectively to contribute to the management of the polytechnics and ensure their sustenance. This is the problem this study seeks to delve into to find appropriate solutions to remedy the situation.

### *1.3. Research Questions*

1. Which public relations responsibilities do the polytechnics’ publics consider to be most important for effective public relations in the polytechnics?
2. Which public relations functions do the polytechnics’ public rate as relatively important in decision-making in the polytechnics?

## **2. Relevant Literature**

### *2.1. The Role and Nature of Public Relations*

Many authors such as Carthy (1992), Jefkins (2001) and Grunig (2003) feel the industry is viewed poorly by the general public. Most of the authors take great pains when defining the profession to dismiss what they see as the misunderstanding of the layperson. At its most basic level the term ‘public relations’ is exactly that, the relations that exist between publics; yet, the first problem this phrase encounters is in the breakdown of the term ‘publics’.

In the view of Carthy (1992) the term public is made up of various units of clients including employees, the community, customers, consumers, suppliers, distributors, politicians, public servants, financial institutions, stockbrokers, shareholders, financial analysts and opinion leaders. According to her, to engage or relate to each public a different relative approach is needed.

### *2.2. The General Role of Public Relations Specialists*

When organizations or institutions make decisions, there must be interactions with stakeholders because the decisions may affect the publics who may in turn attempt setting the agenda for an organizational decision. Also, the organization needs supportive relationships with the relevant publics to implement decisions and achieve organizational goals (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002).

According to AcKoff (1967), the function of the public relations practitioner as an information gatherer or processor is called “boundary scanning” and this provides decision makers with information needed to make decisions. Also Public Relations has value in terms of internal communication within an organization (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Knights, 1992). Public relations specialists help strategic decision makers to determine which stakeholder publics are relatively consequential to the decisions by enabling an organization to enact the environment that managers with other management disciplines do not recognize (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002).

### *2.3. Publics of the Polytechnics*

Cutlip and Center (1971) concluded that the best way publicity officer could win the cooperation of the school members is to have patience and to identify their needs whenever they are facing problems. Surely, patience and researching are hallmarks of a public relations practitioner. The publics of the polytechnics include students, alumni, government agencies, parents and guardians.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design and Population

The study is a descriptive survey that sought to find out the status of public relations with respect to the management of the polytechnics in Ghana. The study was descriptive because the researcher described the situation as it was practised. The design of the study involved eliciting the views of respondents regarding the status of public relations as a management function in the polytechnics in Ghana using a questionnaire and an interview schedule. Staff members at the public relations units and the business partners were interviewed using structured and unstructured interview schedule, respectively.

The population for the study consisted of all the 10 polytechnics in Ghana namely Cape Coast Polytechnic, Takoradi Polytechnic, Accra Polytechnic, Kumasi Polytechnic, Ho Polytechnic, Tamale Polytechnic, Sunyani Polytechnic, Wa Polytechnic, Koforidua Polytechnic and Bolgatanga Polytechnic. The components of the population for the study were staff, students and the business partners who deal with the polytechnics on a regular basis either providing certain services to or receiving services from them. The involvement of business partners by the researcher was to find out the views of the polytechnics' customers in respect of public relations practices of the polytechnics.

The population size was 1,634. All the 10 polytechnics have Schools and Departments namely School of Applied Sciences & Arts, School of Business and Management Studies and School of Engineering. The ages of the students of these institutions range from 18 to 45.

#### 3.2. Sample

A sample of six polytechnics comprising Cape Coast Polytechnic, Takoradi Polytechnic, Kumasi Polytechnic Ho Polytechnic, Sunyani Polytechnic and Koforidua Polytechnic were selected out of the 10 polytechnics in Ghana using simple random sampling technique. Out of the overall total respondents of staff, students' executives and business partners of the 10 polytechnics of 1,634, the researcher selected 330 respondents comprising 150 teaching staff, 120 non-teaching staff (senior members and senior staff), 42 SRC Executives and 18 business partners. From the chart of Kreicic and Morgan (1970) for a population size (N) of 1600 the sample size must be 310.

Polytechnics	Teaching Staff	Non-Teaching Staff	Students Executives	Business Partners	Total
Cape Coast	25	20	7	3	55
Takoradi	25	20	7	3	55
Ho	25	20	7	3	55
Kumasi	25	20	7	3	55
Sunyani	25	20	7	3	55
Koforidua	25	20	7	3	55
<i>Total</i>	150	120	42	18	330

Table 1: Distribution of Sample by Polytechnics and Category

Source: Field Data, 2014

#### 3.3. Data Analysis Procedure

The Predictive Analytics Software (PASW) was the main statistical tool used in analyzing the data. Furthermore, the interview results were also grouped based on the similarity of responses for the detailed analysis of the data. Again, mean values, frequencies and percentages were computed from the data obtained for the detailed analysis of the study.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The data on Research Question 1 is presented and discussed followed by data on research question 2 which is also analyzed. Both research questions were woven into the framing of the questionnaire.

#### 4.1. Research Question 1: Which Public Relations Responsibilities Do the Polytechnics' Publics Consider to be Most Important for Effective Public Relations in the Polytechnics?

To determine the degree of importance of these responsibilities, respondents were requested to tick the items they consider to be important or not important using the scale provided. The scale given was as follows: Most important (5), Important (4), Undecided (3), Unimportant (2) and Not important at all (1).

The data obtained from the study were converted into mean values and used as the basis for ranking the public relations responsibilities considered to be most important for effective public relations practices in the polytechnics studied. The researcher calculated the mean value for each item, by dividing the total number of responses by the respondents (f) and the total number of respondents (N).

The perceptions of the various levels of qualifications, schools, central administration and 'Others' as well as the polytechnics studied were determined regarding public relations responsibilities considered to be most important for effective practices. Table 2 shows the mean ratings and their corresponding ranking values of the public relations responsibilities considered to be most important for

effective practices by the various levels of qualifications and 'Others' involved in the study. The interpretations of the abbreviated levels of qualifications as indicated in table 2 are as follows:

Responsibilities of the Public Relations Unit	DDH (N1 =9 )		MDH (N2=125 )		BDH (N3 =77 )		DH (N4 =85 )		OTHERS (N5 =14 )		Total (N= 310)	
	M	Rk	M	Rk	M	Rk	M	Rk	M	Rk	M	Rk
Handling of complaints from the polytechnics publics	3.55	8	3.96	7	4.26	7	4.06	7	3.14	8	3.79	8
Identifying problems in the community and assisting	4.0	7	3.56	8	3.68	9	3.52	10	3.07	9	3.57	9
Supplying newsworthy information to the media	5.0	1	4.46	1	4.78	1	4.40	2	4.21	2	4.68	1
Satisfying employees that the polytechnic is a good place	3.33	9	3.51	9	3.53	10	3.76	9	3.43	6	3.51	10
Giving advice on polytechnic's commercial activities	4.33	6	3.47	10	3.78	8	3.84	8	3.57	5	3.80	7
Handling of publications/communication programme	4.67	4	4.37	3	4.62	3	4.29	5	4.71	1	4.53	3
Invitations to news conferences, ceremonies, meetings etc.	4.56	5	4.33	5	4.57	4	4.13	6	3.86	3	4.29	5
Organizing representatives for appearance on electronic media	5.0	1	4.41	2	4.53	5	4.32	4	3.71	4	4.39	4
Map Mapping out strategies to attract prospective students	4.78	3	4.20	6	4.40	6	4.34	3	3.36	7	4.22	6
Disseminate information to the polytechnic publics	4.90	2	4.34	4	4.68	2	4.46	1	4.71	1	4.62	2

Table 2: Distribution of Ranking of Most Important Responsibilities of Public Relations Units by Type of Qualification and Others

\*\* N means number of respondents \*\* M denotes means of responses \*\* Rk denotes ranking

Source: Field data, 2014

DDH means (Doctorate Degree Holders) MDH means (Master's Degree Holders), BDH means (Bachelor's Degree Holders), DH means (Diploma Holders). The table shows that while Doctorate Degree holders (DDH) ranked supplying newsworthy information to the media and organizing representatives to appear on electronic media as the most important responsibilities for effective public relations practices, Master Degree holders (MDH) and Bachelor Degree holders (BDH) ranked supplying of newsworthy information to the media as only the most important responsibility to be performed by the public relations unit for effective public relations practices.

Furthermore, Diploma holders (DH) and 'Others' ranked the public relations responsibility of disseminating information to the polytechnic public as most important while 'Others' again ranked handling of publications/communication programmes as also most important responsibility for effective public relations in the polytechnics studied. From the table, even though there were variations in the rankings of the responsibilities by the respective levels of qualifications, the overall perception was that supplying newsworthy information to the media was the most important responsibility to be performed by public relations officers in the polytechnics for effective public relations practices. The mean values of the respective responsibilities for the various schools, central administration and 'Others' were also calculated for the analysis.

The results clearly revealed disagreement in the ranking of the importance of the responsibilities of the public relations by the six polytechnics. The data showed that there are significant differences in the ranking of the responsibilities across the various levels of qualifications, schools, administration and 'Others' and the respective polytechnics studied. For instance, while supplying newsworthy information to the media had the highest mean rating of 3.86, identifying problems in the community and assisting, satisfying employees that the polytechnic is a good place and giving advice on polytechnic's commercial activities had the lowest mean ratings of 2.94, 2.91 and 3.08 respectively. This, to a very large extent, shows that there were serious disagreements in terms of the ranking of the importance of the responsibilities. To determine the degree of disagreement in the ranking of the responsibilities, Kendall's co-efficient of concordance, W, which measures the degree of agreement in rankings, was conducted. The disagreements in the ranking of the responsibilities across the six polytechnics were confirmed by the Kendall's co-efficient of concordance, W, score of 0.338 representing 34%. This depicts that there was agreement in the rankings of the responsibilities in just about one-third of the cases.

From the foregoing, it could be seen that the level of performance of public relations responsibilities explains why the polytechnics are not making the desired impact with respect to image building and re-orienting the minds of the populace in connection with polytechnic education. Even though it was evident that these responsibilities should be performed by the public relations unit of the polytechnics, the differences in rankings presuppose that the responsibilities are not being executed by professional public relations officers in each of the polytechnic studied. This is because if the responsibilities had been performed by public relations specialist, the researcher believed that there would have been strong agreement in the rankings. The results corroborate with what the respondents' indicated in table 38 that qualified public relations personnel must be employed to handle the public relations units of all the six polytechnics.

To enable the researcher make an informed decision concerning the rankings of the importance of the enumerated responsibilities of the public relations unit, the view of a public relations practitioner was sought in terms of the rankings. Table 3 shows the ranking of the enumerated responsibilities in terms of importance by a public relations practitioner.

Responsibilities of the Public Relations Unit	Ranking
Handling of complaints	1
Identifying problems in the community and assisting	3
Supplying newsworthy information to the media	5
Satisfying employees that the polytechnic is a good place	8
Giving advice on polytechnic's commercial activities	10
Handling of publications / communication programme	4
Invitations to news conferences, ceremonies, meetings etc.	7
Organizing representatives for appearance on electronic media	9
Mapping out strategies to attract prospective students	6
Disseminate information to the polytechnic publics	2

Table 3: Ranking of Responsibilities of Public Relations by a Public Relations Practitioner  
Source: Field survey, 2014

The differences in the ranking of the responsibilities in terms of importance by the practitioner and the polytechnics confirm the non-availability of professional public relations officers in the polytechnics studied. This was evidenced by the public relations staffs who responded to the questionnaire.

In response to Research Question 1, the study showed that the most important responsibility considered for effective public relations practices from the perspective of the type of qualifications, schools, central administration, 'Others' and the respective polytechnics was that of supplying newsworthy information to the media. The study further showed that even though there were variations in the rankings of the importance of the responsibilities by the polytechnics public, Kendall's co-efficient of concordance, W, score indicated that there were some form of agreement in the rankings but was very weak.

On the question that sought to find out about the public relations officer's participation in decision making at the management level, the data obtained from the categories of respondents regarding the public relations officer's participation in decision making at the respective polytechnics are presented in table 4. About 91% of the staff and 100% of the students in Cape Coast Polytechnic were of the opinion that the public relations officer should participate in decision making. Takoradi Polytechnic had about 79% and about 68% of the staff and students, respectively, stating that the public relations officer should be part of decision making team while in Ho Polytechnic over 67% of the staff and 100% of the students said that the public relations officer should participate in decision making. Again, about 82% of the staff and 33% of the students in Kumasi Polytechnic indicated that the public relations officer should participate in decision making. About 76% and over 71% of staff and students in Sunyani Polytechnic indicated that the public relations officer should participate in decision making while for Koforidua Polytechnic; it was over 83% for staff and 100% for students.

Other views expressed by categories of respondents in the polytechnics studied indicated that in Cape Coast Polytechnic, about 5% of the staff stated that the public relations officer should not participate in decision making while in Takoradi Polytechnic it was over 14% and 33% for staff and students, respectively. Others were Ho Polytechnic, over 23% for staff, Kumasi Polytechnic, about 5% for staff and over 57% for students, Sunyani Polytechnic, 17% for staff.

However, about 5% of the staff in Cape Coast Polytechnic was not sure of the public relations officer's participation in decision making. Also, over 7% of staff in Takoradi Polytechnic, over 9% of staff in Ho Polytechnic and about 14% of staff in Kumasi Polytechnic indicated that they were not sure of the participation of the public relations officer in decision making. Again, Sunyani Polytechnic had over 7% of the staff and about 29% of the students stating that they were not sure of the public relations officer participating in decision making. Over 17% of the staff in Koforidua Polytechnic also indicated that they were not sure of the participation of the public relations officer in decision making.

Polytechnics & Respondents		Responses							
		Yes		No		Not Sure		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Cape Coast	Staff	39	90.6	2	4.7	2	4.7	43	100.0
	Students	7	100.0	-	-	-	-	7	100.0
Takoradi	Staff	33	78.6	6	14.3	3	7.1	42	100.0
	Students	4	66.7	2	33.3	-	-	6	100.0
Ho	Staff	29	67.4	10	23.3	4	9.3	43	100.0
	Students	6	100.0	-	-	-	-	6	100.0
Kumasi	Staff	36	81.8	2	4.5	6	13.6	44	100.0
	Students	3	32.9	4	57.1	-	-	7	100.0
Sunyani	Staff	31	75.6	7	17.0	3	7.3	41	100.0
	Students	5	71.4	-	-	2	28.6	7	100.0
Koforidua	Staff	35	83.3	-	-	7	16.7	42	100.0
	Students	6	100.0	-	-	-	-	6	100.0

Source: Field data, 2014

Table 4: Distribution of Responses Regarding the Participation of Public Relations Officer in Decision Making by Categories of Respondents

Table 4 shows the distribution of responses by the polytechnics studied on the participation of the public relations officer in decision making. The table reveals that in all the six polytechnics studied majority of the respondents indicated that the public relations officer should participate in decision making. In Cape Coast Polytechnic, 92% of the respondents indicated “Yes”; that the public relations officer should participate in decision making while Takoradi Polytechnic had over 77% of the respondents affirming to the participation of the public relations officer in decision making. Over 71% of the respondents in Ho Polytechnic affirmed that the public relations officer should participate in decision making while in Kumasi Polytechnic about 77% of the respondents indicated that public relations officer should participate in decision making. In Sunyani Polytechnic, it was indicated that public relations officer should participate in decision making by 75% of the respondents while for Koforidua Polytechnic it was over 85%.

However, 4%, about 17%, over 20%, about 12% and 15% of the respondents in Cape Coast, Takoradi, Ho, Kumasi, Sunyani and Koforidua Polytechnics, respectively, indicated that the public relations officer should not participate in decision making. Moreover, in Cape Coast and Takoradi Polytechnics, 4% and over 6% of the respondents were not sure of the public relations officer’s participation in decision making. Ho Polytechnic had over 8% of the respondents stating that they were not sure of the participation of the public relations officer in decision making, while for Kumasi Polytechnic it was about 12%. In the case of Sunyani and Koforidua Polytechnics over 10% and about 15% of the respondents, respectively, stated that they were not sure of the public relations officer participating in decision making.

Overall, about 80% of the respondents from the six polytechnics indicated “Yes”; that the public relations officer should participate in decision making. On the other hand, over 11% of the respondents indicated that the public relations officer should not participate in decision making while over 9% of the respondents also indicated that they were not sure of the public relations officer’s participation in decision making. The findings show that the public relations officer should be involved in decision making so that he/she could direct issues being discussed to be in line with the objectives of the organization.

Item 22 on the questionnaire requested respondents’ to tick as many as they apply the specific issues that public relations officer should be involved during decision making at the management level. Data obtained from the categories of respondents are shown in table 24. From the table, 14% of the staff and about 3% of the students in Cape Coast Polytechnic indicated that the public relations officer should be involved in formulation of policies during decision making at the management level. In the case of Takoradi Polytechnic about 15% of the staff affirmed that the public relations officer should be involved in decision making during formulation of policies while in Ho Polytechnic over 16% and about 1% of the staff and students, respectively, were of the opinion that the public relations officer should participate in decision making at the management level during formulation of policies. Other polytechnics were; Kumasi Polytechnic, staff about 18% and students 1% , Sunyani Polytechnic, staff over 16% and students about 1%, Koforidua Polytechnic, staff 14% and students 1% .

Furthermore, it was revealed that in Cape Coast Polytechnic about 16% and 1% of the staff and students, respectively, reported that during planning and policy implementation and decision making, the public relations officer should be involved. The proportions of staff and students in the other polytechnics were; Takoradi Polytechnic, staff over 16% and students over 1%, Ho Polytechnic, staff over 15% and students 2%, Kumasi Polytechnic, staff 13% and students over 1%, Sunyani Polytechnic, staff over 15%; students about 2%; and Koforidua, staff about 16%; and students, 2%. The findings show that with the exception of students in Kumasi Polytechnic, the rest of the polytechnics had majority of the staff and students indicating that the public relations officer should participate in decision making. The researcher believed that when the public relations officer is involved in decision making process he/she would bring its expertise to bear on the decisions made to achieve its desired impact.

Polytechnics & Respondents		Issues									
		Formulation of Policies		Planning and Policy Implementation		Identifying Strategic Constituents		Image Building		Sourcing for Donor Agencies	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Cape Coast	Staff	31	14.0	40	15.7	41	15.4	43	14.7	37	13.2
	Students	6	2.7	2	0.8	7	2.6	7	2.4	7	2.5
Takoradi	Staff	33	14.9	41	16.1	40	15.0	42	14.4	42	15.0
	Students	-	-	3	1.2	6	2.2	6	2.1	5	1.8
Ho	Staff	36	16.3	39	15.4	40	15.0	43	14.7	41	14.6
	Students	2	0.9	5	2.0	4	1.5	6	2.1	6	2.1
Kumasi	Staff	39	17.6	33	13.0	40	15.0	44	15.1	43	15.4
	Students	1	0.5	3	1.2	5	1.9	7	2.4	7	2.5
Sunyani	Staff	36	16.3	39	15.4	35	13.1	40	13.7	41	14.6
	Students	2	0.9	4	1.6	7	2.6	7	2.4	3	1.1
Koforidua	Staff	31	14.0	40	15.7	38	14.2	41	14.0	42	15.0
	Students	4	1.0	5	2.0	4	1.5	6	2.1	6	2.1
Total		221	100.0	254	100.0	267	100.0	292	100.0	280	100.0

Table 5: Distribution of Responses Concerning Issues which Public Relations Officer should be involved during Decision Making by Categories of Respondents

## 5. Summary

The study was conducted to find out the extent to which public relations officers were involved in decision-making in the polytechnics studied and also how the functions of public relations units of the polytechnics studied were contributing to the management of the polytechnics. It, therefore, sought to examine the relative importance of some of the public relations roles in decision-making in the polytechnics, and also find out ways in which public relations units in the polytechnics undertake to maintain effective community relations.

The researcher adopted and modified the research instrument (questionnaire) used by Okae-Anti (1996) for a similar study conducted at the University of Cape Coast. The modification was done to suite the new geographical area of study. A sample of 330 respondents comprising senior members and senior staff (teaching and non-teaching), students' leadership executives and business partners of the polytechnics were involved in the study. Out of the sample, 310 representing (93.7%), 288 responded by answering the items in the questionnaire and 22 were interviewed. The questionnaire was made up of two sections consisting of closed and open-end questions. Furthermore, the instrument sought to find out ways in which the polytechnics undertake to maintain effective community relations by asking the respondents to indicate by ticking the appropriate responses.

The Predictive Analytics Software (PASW) was the main statistical tool used to analyze the data for the study. Descriptive statistics were employed to obtain the frequencies, means and percentages for the interpretation of the data collected. From the analysis and discussions presented in the study, the following were the major findings:

### 5.1. Major Findings

1. The study showed that the specific public relations responsibility considered to be most important by the respondents for effective public relations in the polytechnics studied was that of supplying newsworthy information to the media. It was observed that even though, there were variations in the rankings of the importance of the responsibilities by the polytechnics public, Kendall's coefficient of concordance,  $W$ , indicated that there was agreement in the ranking but was very weak.
2. Cape Coast Polytechnic did not have public relations unit in place while Kumasi, Takoradi, Ho, Sunyani and Koforidua Polytechnics have Public Relations units in place but were also not being manned by public relations professionals. Furthermore, public relations officers were not part of decision-making team at the polytechnics studied as evidenced by the responses given.
3. The study also revealed that the public relations units in the polytechnics studied were not adequately resourced in terms of staff and logistics to enable them perform effectively.
4. Some of the respondents from all the polytechnics studied indicated that voluntary work, donation of items, provision of grant for community development and seminars on topical issues were some of the means of community support activities undertaken to maintain effective community relations. However, the percentages of the responses show that these means of community support activities were not given the needed attention by the public relations unit. With the exception of Sunyani Polytechnic which had 50% of the respondents saying that their public relations unit maintains effective community relations through organization of seminars to educate the masses on sensitive issues, percentages obtained for all the other items for all the polytechnics studied show values less than 50% which presupposes that this function of public relations was not given the needed attention.

### 5.2. Conclusions

One of the conclusions that could be drawn from the study is that the most important responsibility of the public relations unit indicated by the respondents in the polytechnics studied for effective public relations practices was that of supplying newsworthy information to the media. Furthermore, there were disparities in the views reported by respondents of the importance of the responsibilities to be performed by the public relations units in the polytechnics.

Secondly, it could also be concluded that apart from the provision of feedback information for management's action and the provision of the appropriate media of communication for the dissemination of management's decision to the polytechnic's public, the rest of the enumerated public relations functions which are equally important are not given the necessary attention they deserve in decision-making. The findings revealed that Cape Coast Polytechnic did not have public relations units while Kumasi, Ho, Sunyani, Koforidua and Takoradi Polytechnics have public relations units in place but were not being manned by public relations professionals.

Again, it could be concluded that the practices of public relations in the polytechnics studied could be improved by employing qualified public relations personnel and also adequately resourcing the public relations units regarding staffing and logistics. In addition, it could be concluded that public relations officers in the polytechnic studied were not part of decision making team.

### 5.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, the researcher has put forward the following recommendations to help in the management of the polytechnics studied regarding the role of public relations.

1. Since the responsibilities of the public relations are varied and many, to enable the polytechnics public relations units effectively perform these responsibilities and achieve their desired impact, it is recommended that professional public relations officers with in-depth knowledge and requisite experience should be employed to steer the affairs of the units.
2. Again, since all the specific public relations functions presented are equally important in decision making, it is recommended that great importance should be attached to these specific public relations functions in decision making by the public relations officers in the polytechnics studied. The researcher believes that when this is done it would go along way to help the polytechnics studied achieved their desired objectives.

3. Again, it is recommended that the public relations officer should be part of decision-making team at the management level. This, the researcher believes would help Management to strategically manage and present the information communicated to the public who are strategic to the existence and survival of the institutions in an acceptable form in order to achieve desired publicity.

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