GOMBE SAVANNAH

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES (GOSAJOLLCOS)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
GOMBE STATE UNIVERSITY

SAVANNAH JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES (SAJOLLCOS)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH GOMBE STATE UNIVERSITY

A Publication of   Department of English Gombe State University, Gombe State

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The Journal

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An Assessment of the Two-Way Communication Model of Public Relations Used During the University of Jos School Fees Increase in 2023

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Abstract
The efficacy of the two-way communication model implemented by the University of Jos during the 2023 announcement of the school fees increase was evaluated in this study. The study implemented the dialogic theory, which encourages open dialogue, by employing a descriptive survey design and quantitative methodology. The sample selection was guided by the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination method, which utilized a multistage sampling technique that integrated cluster, simple random, quota, and available techniques. Simple percentage and frequency tables were employed to analyze the data that was collected through a self-administered, face-to-face questionnaire. The University of Jos primarily utilized digital channels, including its website (36.7%), student Facebook/WhatsApp groups (25%), and university social media accounts (14.2%), to communicate the fee increase. Nevertheless, 24.2% of students did not receive these updates, suggesting a communication gap. Students predominantly responded through social media and organized protests, which underscored their active but uneven involvement. Furthermore, the fear of reprisals, ambiguous feedback channels, and perceived administrative indifference were significant obstacles to effective communication. The study determined that the university's reliance on digital channels, while somewhat successful in reaching a portion of the student body, ultimately failed to ensure widespread and inclusive communication. Consequently, a substantial number of students were unaware of the fee increase or lacked clear information about its rationale. In order to enhance dialogue and trust, the study suggested the implementation of inclusive and transparent communication strategies, including anonymous feedback mechanisms and student-administration forums, in accordance with contemporary public relations practices.

Keywords: Public relations (PR), Dialogue, Crisis communication, Corporate communication, Communication strategies*.*

Introduction

Public relations serve as a link between an organization and its constituents, focusing on the establishment of mutual understanding between organizations and their constituents (Stoldt, Dittmore, Ross, & Branvold, 2020). Therefore, public relation is defined as a process or action that attempts to create a contact between an organization and third parties, reflecting the concept of public relations as an interactive, two-way form of communication (Zimal & Aysar, 2021). According to Aikins & Adu-Oppong (2016), the purpose of public relations in university administration is to advance the objectives of universities as formal organizations. Thus, the university's administration must direct its public relations towards achieving its established organizational goals.

Over the years, universities have adopted professional public relations practices owing to the rapid expansion of their stakeholders, increase in staff and student popularity, and the complex social issues that they grapple with. Owing to the expansion in the staff-student population, communication effectiveness and efficiency have also become formidable tasks for most universities. For example, issues such as overcrowding on campuses, inadequate housing, rising fees, and restricted facilities have plagued all parties involved, necessitating an explanation that meets their expectations. In the same vein, adequate and satisfying explanations for such problems certainly require a well-coordinated system of information service delivery, for which effective public relations are required. This suggests that there is the need to look for effective ways of sharing or exchanging information with students, taxpayers, alumni, and other interested parties in the university system (Eniola, 2011).

The UniJos School Fees Increase Saga

On July 29, 2023, the University of Jos administration made a public announcement regarding a substantial hike in school fees, impacting both incoming and returning students. The initial fee structure mandated N213, 000 for fresh students and N160, 000 for returning students (Osuwo, 2023). Understandably, this sudden increase from the previous N40, 000 fee prompted dissatisfaction among the student body, ultimately leading to protests (Abraham, 2023). Recognizing the gravity of the situation, the university management swiftly reconsidered their decision, subsequently revising the fees to N110, 000 for fresh and N140, 000 for returning students (Ogwo, 2023). However, by this point, protests had already ensued, highlighting a breakdown in communication and lack of proactive engagement between the university administration and the student community (Farouk, 2023, paras. 2–3).

The above scenario revealed a top-down approach to communication, using public relations tools such as press releases to communicate the University of Jos management's decisions on the school fees

increment. However, there was a feedback via protest and other forms to elicit a fee deduction. In hindsight, the effective utilization of public relations tools and proactive outreach efforts might have played a pivotal role in managing the university's reputation and mitigating the negative perceptions that fueled the protests. It is against this background that this study examines students' perceptions of the University of Jos' public relations management during the school fees saga.

Statement of the Problem

As alluded to in this study, public relations play a vital role between an organization and the general public. Today, organizations have understood the importance of building dependable relationships with the public. Nwachi (1997) highlights that despite their best efforts to project a positive image, crises can arise and threaten the organization's reputation or image. To put it succinctly, when an organization ignores or opposes the interests of its stakeholders, the stakeholders typically organize into activist groups to confront and challenge what they consider an unpopular position of the organization, which can result in a conflict. Regardless, as much as a crisis is an inevitable situation, there is always the need to develop a pre-emptive strategic method to prevent its occurrence.

In light of the foregoing, the University of Jos recently faced a contentious issue surrounding a significant increase in school fees, leading to widespread student-disorganized protests. This episode underscores a critical breakdown in communication between the university's administration and the students' body. Despite the financial rationale for the fee hike, the university's public relations team's communication, or lack thereof, raised serious concerns. The absence of proactive and transparent communication strategies left students feeling alienated and aggrieved, fueling the protests and exacerbating tensions on the university campus. This raises pertinent questions about the university's public relations management's effectiveness in handling such sensitive matters in light of these events.

Could the university have used alternative communication approaches to effectively explain the rationale and implications of the fee adjustment? Were there missed opportunities for dialogue and consultation with students and other stakeholders? As a result, this study aims to investigate students' perceptions of the University of Jos' public relations management during the school fees scandal. By assessing students' experiences and perspectives, this study seeks to identify areas of improvement in the university's communication strategies, with findings that will ultimately contribute to the development of more effective and inclusive public relations practices that foster transparency, engagement, and trust between the university and its diverse constituencies.

Objectives of the Study

This study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To investigate the methods used to communicate the school fees increase by the University of Jos to students.
2. To find out the channels used by students of University of Jos in responding to the school fees increase.
3. To assess the perceived challenges of the two-way communication model of public relations on the school fees increase by the management of the University of Jos and the students.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the methods used by the University of Jos to communicate the school fees increase to students?
2. What are the channels through which students at the University of Jos responded to the increase in school fees?
3. What perceived challenges do the management of the University of Jos and the students have with the two-way communication model of public relations regarding the increased school fees?

Literature Review
Public Relations and Two-Way Communication in Educational Institutions

Public relations (PR) is a management tool used to maintain effective communication between an organization and its publics. According to Lawless (2018), PR practitioners manage this process to support the organization's goals by creating strategic relationships, impacting cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors. Doyle (2011) adds that PR helps organizations develop long-term relationships with both internal and external stakeholders, enhancing mission accomplishment. Coombs & Holladay (2010) describe PR's function in fostering positive relationships and goodwill as essential for an organization's growth. PR is particularly valuable in educational institutions, where it can enhance communication and stakeholder engagement, thus building a positive image (Veena, Dayaneethie, & Zukiswo, 2012; Igben, 2022). PR in these institutions involves strategic communication management, crisis response, and consistent assessment to maintain their reputation (Botan & Hazleton, 2006; Coombs, 2007; Rawlins, 2008).

One of the most essential forms of communication is the two-way communication, which involves a reciprocal exchange between parties, characterized by both sending and receiving messages, along with feedback. Unlike one-way communication, which is linear and lacks interactive feedback, two-way communication is dynamic and participatory, fostering a more comprehensive understanding and collaboration (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). According to Berlo (1960), two-way communication is a process of exchanging information and feedback between a sender and a receiver with the aim of reaching a

shared meaning and outcome. It involves listening, responding, and adapting to the needs and expectations of the other party, rather than just transmitting a one-sided message.

The two-way communication can be symmetrical or asymmetrical, depending on the degree of balance and reciprocity in the relationship. Two-way communication is integral to various fields, including business, education, healthcare, and personal relationships. According to Postelnyak (2024), two-way communication involves the sharing of information back and forth between two parties, further buttressing the discourse. In other words, it is a conversation in which both the sender and the receiver invite and offer feedback. Most importantly, two-way communication is never a monologue. To maximize the benefits of two-way communication in workplaces, dialogue should be continuous. In essence, the flow of information between the sender and the receiver should be consistent, which is why effective internal communication tools, methods, and channels are vital in facilitating this process. Public relations in educational institutions is essential for building a positive image and maintaining effective communication with stakeholders.

According to Veena, Dayaneethie, & Zukiswo (2012), public relations can be advantageous in school management, enhancing communication and engagement with stakeholders, especially in tertiary institutions, as recognized by Igben (2022). One of the main objectives of PR is to present an institution's achievements, values, and societal contributions positively, which can help attract students and funding (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Schools and universities use diverse communication channels, including press releases, social media, and events, to reach out to their audience. The rise of the digital media has further enabled these institutions to interact directly and instantly with the public. Strategic communication management is another important component of PR, ensuring that institutions convey relevant messages that support their goals.

Theoretical Framework

The dialogic theory, developed by scholars like Kent and Taylor in the late 1990s, provides the theoretical foundation for effective PR in educational settings. This theory, drawing from Buber (1958), Gadamer (1989), and Habermas (1984), stresses two-way, genuine communication for fostering sustainable relationships. Unlike the one-way communication models, dialogic theory emphasizes mutual engagement and ethical interactions. For example, if the University of Jos had employed dialogic communication when increasing school fees, it could have helped manage tensions by acknowledging students' concerns and fostering transparent interactions. Using social media, emails, and forums, the university could have facilitated an open dialogue, showing empathy and providing explanations for the fee hike. This ongoing communication, including feedback mechanisms like

surveys, could build trust by considering student input, potentially reducing dissatisfaction and protests.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive research design, incorporating a survey among University of Jos students. The population included 55,000 students for the 2023–2024 session, with a sample size of 382 determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula. A multistage sampling approach was used, involving cluster, simple random, quota, and availability sampling techniques. Data was collected via a self-administered questionnaire and analyzed using simple percentage methods, with results displayed in frequency percentage tables.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of 382 distributed questionnaires, 360 were returned and found fit for analysis, yielding a response rate of 94.2%. The analysis of this data focused on the PR practices and effectiveness of communication strategies at the University of Jos, based on responses from a sample across six randomly selected faculties, namely: Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Law, and Faculty of Management Sciences.

Table 1: Official Channels Used by the University of Jos to Announce the School Fees Increment

Channel	Frequency	Percentage
Official University Website	204	56.7%
Unofficial Means/Hearsay	69	19.2%
Campus Notice Boards	30	8.3%
University Official Events	3	0.8%
University Social Media Accounts	51	14.2%
No Information Received	180	50.0%
Total	**360**	**100%**

The University of Jos utilised official channels to announce the school fees increment, with the majority (56.7%) relying on the official university website, followed by unofficial means/hearsay (19.2%), notices posted on campus notice boards (8.3%), announcement during university official events (0.8%) and university social media accounts (14.2%). However, a number of the respondents (50.0%) reported not receiving information about the fee increase through any of these channels, suggesting a potential communication gap or lack of effective dissemination of information, which may have contributed to students' dissatisfaction and lack of awareness about the fee hike.

Table 2: Digital Channels Used by the University of Jos to Announce the School Fees Increment

Channel	Frequency	Percentage
University Website	132	36.7%
Student Facebook/WhatsApp Groups	90	25%
University Social Media Accounts	51	14.2%
No Digital Channels Used	87	24.2%
Total	**360**	**100%**

The University of Jos utilised digital channels to announce the school fees increment, with the majority (36.7%) relying on the university website, followed by student Facebook/WhatsApp groups (25%), and university social media accounts (14.2%), while a significant proportion (24.2%) claimed the University did not use any of these digital channels, indicating a varied use of online platforms for communication among students and the university administration.

Table 3: University In-Person Meetings or Forums to Discuss the Rationale behind the Fee Hike

Meeting/Forum	Frequency	Percentage
Town Hall Meetings	72	20.0%
Student Council Meetings/Assemblies	57	15.8%
Faculty-Specific Forums/Discussions	15	4.2%
Informal Gatherings with Student Representatives	45	12.5%
No Meetings/Forums Held	171	47.5%
Total	**360**	**100%**

The data above showed that the University of Jos organised various in-person meetings or forums to discuss the rationale behind the fee hike, including town hall meetings with university administrators (20.0%), student council meetings or assemblies (15.8%), faculty-specific forums or discussions (4.2%), and informal gatherings with student representatives (12.5%). However, a significant proportion of the respondents (47.5%) said these meetings did not hold, indicating a lack of engagement or awareness about these opportunities for discussion and potentially limiting the university's efforts to address students' concerns.

Table 4: Social Media Platforms Students Used to Primarily Express Their Reactions to the School Fees Increment

Social Media Platform	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	138	38.3%
WhatsApp Groups	114	31.7%
Twitter	21	5.8%
Instagram	6	1.7%
No Social Media Platform Used	81	22.5%
Total	**360**	**100%**

The data above suggested that students primarily expressed their reactions to the school fees increment on social media platforms, with Facebook (38.3%) being the most frequently used, followed by WhatsApp groups (31.7%), Twitter (5.8%), and Instagram (1.7%), allowing them to share their thoughts, concerns, and opinions on the issue, while a significant proportion (22.5%) did not use any of these platforms, potentially indicating a lack of engagement or awareness about the fee increase.

Table 5: Student-Led Publications or Forums Utilised to Discuss the Concerns about the Fee Adjustment

Platform	Frequency	Percentage
Student Organization Meetings/Gatherings	120	33.3%
Online Student Forums (Facebook/WhatsApp Groups)	93	25.8%
University Radio (UNIJOS ICE FM)	39	10.8%
Student-Run Newspapers/Magazines	6	1.7%
No Platform Used	102	28.3%
Total	**360**	**100%**

The data above reported that students utilised various student-led publications and forums to discuss concerns about the fee adjustment, with student organisation meetings or gatherings being the most popular platform (33.3%), followed by online student forums such as Facebook and WhatsApp groups (25.8%), University radio - UNIJOS ICE FM (10.8%), and student-run newspapers or magazines (1.7%). However, a significant proportion (28.3%) did not utilise any of these platforms, indicating a potential lack of engagement or awareness about the issue, or possibly the need for

more inclusive and accessible forums
for student discussion and debate.

Table 6: Student-Led Organised Protests or Demonstrations on Campus in Response to the Fee Hike

Form of Protest	Frequency	Percentage
Peaceful Marches/Rallies	264	73.3%
Online Campaigns/Hashtags	27	7.5%
Petitions Circulated Among Students	18	5.0%
Sit-ins/Occupation of University Buildings	24	6.7%
No Participation in Protest	27	7.5%
Total	**360**	**100%**

The data above showed that students responded to the fee hike with various forms of protest, with peaceful marches and rallies being the most prevalent (73.3%), followed by online campaigns and hashtags (7.5%), petitions circulated among students (5.0%), and sit-ins or occupation of university buildings (6.7%), demonstrating a range of organised and creative efforts to express their dissatisfaction. However, notable proportion (7.5%) did not participate in any of these forms of protest, potentially indicating a lack of engagement or alternative forms of expression.

Table 7: Obstacles Students Faced in Providing Feedback or Input to the University Regarding the Fee Increment

Obstacle	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of Clear Channels for Submitting Feedback	93	25.8%
Fear of Reprisal or Academic Repercussions	99	27.5%
Perception of Administrative Indifference	60	16.7%
Difficulty Accessing University Decision-Makers	93	25.8%
No Obstacles Faced	15	4.2%
Total	**360**	**100%**

The data above showed that students faced significant obstacles in providing feedback or input to the University regarding the fee increment, with the majority citing lack of clear channels for submitting

feedback (25.8%) and fear of reprisal or academic repercussions (27.5%) as major barriers. These were followed by perception of administrative indifference towards students' concerns (16.7%) and difficulty accessing university decision makers (25.8%), indicating a sense of disconnection and powerlessness among students. However, a small proportion (4.2%) did not face any of these obstacles, potentially due to their proactive efforts or privileged positions.

Table 8: Respondents' Perception of the University's Response to Student Feedback or Concerns about the Fee Adjustment

Perception	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of Clear Channels for Submitting Feedback	93	25.8%
Fear of Reprisal or Academic Repercussions	99	27.5%
Difficulty Accessing University Decision-Makers	93	25.8%
Administrative Indifference towards Concerns	60	16.7%
Positive and Responsive Engagement	15	4.2%
Total	**360**	**100%**

Based on the data above, the respondents perceived the University's response to students' feedback or concerns about the fee adjustment as inadequate, with the majority feeling that their voices were not heard due to lack of clear channels for submitting feedback (25.8%), fear of reprisal or academic repercussions (27.5%), and difficulty accessing the university decision makers (25.8%). Additionally, many students perceived administrative indifference towards their concerns (16.7%), indicating a significant disconnect between the University administration and the student body, with only a small proportion (4.2%) experiencing a more positive and responsive engagement with the University.

Table 9: Strategies Implemented to Enhance Dialogue and Collaboration between University Management and Students during the Decision-Making Process Regarding the Fee Adjustment That Were Not Considered

Overlooked Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Regular Student-Administration Forums	144	40%
Student Advisory Committees	75	20.8%
Comprehensive Surveys	63	17.5%
Transparent Communication Channels	69	19.2%
None of the above	9	2.5%
Total	**360**	**100%**

The data revealed that the university management failed to consider several strategies aimed at fostering dialogue and collaboration with students during the fee adjustment decision-making process. These strategies included regular student-administration forums (40.0%), student advisory committees (20.8%), comprehensive surveys (17.5%), and transparent communication channels (19.2%). The failure to consider these strategies led to the lack of inclusive and participatory decision making, potentially contributing to students' dissatisfaction and feelings of disenfranchisement. However, only a small proportion (2.5%) did not identify any of these strategies as overlooked.

Discussion of Findings

This section critically discussed the study's findings, connecting them to the research questions and integrating relevant studies to corroborate the findings.

RQ1: What are the methods used by the University of Jos to communicate the school fees increment?

In terms of the communication methods used by the university, the University of Jos used various digital channels to announce the school fee increment, with the university website being the most frequently used medium (36.7%). This was followed by students' Facebook/WhatsApp groups (25%), and university social media accounts (14.2%). Despite these efforts, 24.2% of respondents reported not using any of these channels, indicating a communication gap. While the university attempted to leverage digital platforms to reach students, the approach was not comprehensive enough to ensure adequate student information. The reliance on digital communication points to a modern approach consistent with contemporary public relations practices, which emphasize online engagement. Nevertheless, the significant proportion of students who did not use these channels

indicates a gap in the university's communication strategy.

An effective two-way communication in public relations requires not only the dissemination of information, but also ensuring that the audience receives and understands the message. The University's approach, while innovative, lacked inclusivity and failed to engage a substantial segment of the student body. This is consistent with the findings of Manca & Ranieri (2016), who observes that while universities increasingly utilize digital platforms, the effectiveness of these channels depends on their integration into students' daily routines. Additionally, Barnes & Lescault (2011) highlight that universities often face challenges in reaching a diverse student body through digital means alone, as students may miss critical updates due to inconsistencies in information dissemination. Vonderwell & Zachariah (2005) also conclude that other forms of communication must support online communication methods to ensure inclusivity. These studies collectively emphasize the need for a comprehensive communication strategy that not only uses digital platforms but also incorporates other methods to ensure that all students are adequately informed.

RQ2: What are the channels through which students at the University of Jos responded to the increase in school fees?

Regarding the channels used by the students to respond, the students primarily used social media platforms to express their reactions to the fee increment. Facebook (38.3%) and WhatsApp groups (31.7%) were the most popular, followed by Twitter (5.8%) and Instagram (1.7%). Additionally, students engaged in student-led publications and forums, with 33.3% participating in meetings and 25.8% in online forums. Organized protests were also a significant medium of reaction, with 73.3% of the students participating in peaceful marches. This diverse array of mediums highlights the students' active engagement and their preference for platforms that facilitate immediate and collective expression of concerns. The use of social media and organized protests aligns with the characteristics of digital natives, who are accustomed to leveraging on these tools for advocacy and communication. However, the varied engagement levels and the significant proportion of students (22.5%) who did not use these platforms indicate that while students are active communicators, not all of them are engaged or aware of the available channels.

In line with the findings, Bosch (2009) discovers that students predominantly use social media platforms to organize and express their reactions to university policies, highlighting the role of these platforms in facilitating immediate and collective responses. Boulianne (2015) demonstrates that social media is a critical tool for students to mobilize and express dissent, providing a sense of community and collective identity. Vie (2014) also emphasizes how digital platforms enable students to voice their concerns and organize protests

effectively. However, the varied levels of engagement, with 22.5% of the students not using these platforms, indicate that while the students are proactive communicators, not all of them are engaged or aware of the available channels. This points to the need for the University to diversify its communication strategies to ensure broader student engagement.

RQ3: What perceived challenges do the management of the University of Jos and the students have with the two-way communication model of public relations regarding the increase in school fees?

Pertaining to the perceived challenges in two-way communication, the study identified several barriers that have hindered effective two-way communication between the university administration and students. The primary obstacles included lack of clear channels for submitting feedback (25.8%), fear of reprisal or academic repercussions (27.5%), perceptions of administrative indifference towards students' concerns (16.7%), and difficulty accessing the University decision makers (25.8%). The fear of reprisals, in particular, underscores a significant mistrust between the students and the administration. This mistrust is detrimental to the two-way communication model, which relies on mutual respect and openness. Perceived administrative indifference intensifies this issue, causing students to perceive their concerns as unconsidered, potentially leading to apathy and disengagement.

Thus, these challenges exacerbate a sense of disconnection and frustration among the students, who perceive their voices as inadequately heard or undervalued.

Corroborating the above findings, the study conducted by Quinn, Amer, & Gremler (2009) stresses the necessity of transparent and inclusive communication to overcome student dissatisfaction and disengagement. This aligns with the identified barriers in the University of Jos. For all intents and purposes, the importance of clear communication and the role of faculty in shaping students' perceptions and engagement, emphasizing the need for universities to adopt transparent communication practices, cannot be understated. Therefore, the insights drawn from these references support the findings of the current study by highlighting common themes and challenges in communication practices within higher education institutions.

Conclusion

The findings of this study paint a clear picture of the University of Jos' communication practices during the 2023 school fees increase. The University of Jos' communication efforts during the 2023 school fee increase were largely digital, which reached some students but failed to engage a significant portion, reflecting gaps in inclusivity and trust. This reliance on digital channels, coupled with limited feedback mechanisms and mistrust between the students and the administration, hindered open, transparent, and effective two-way communication.

Additionally, the perception of administrative indifference further exacerbates the situation. Students feeling their voices are unheard or disregarded can lead to disengagement, frustration, and ultimately, a breakdown in communication.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the University of Jos' communication practices and to foster a more effective two-way communication model:

1. The University of Jos management should adopt a multi-channel strategy that combines digital, traditional, and in-person methods, including printed notices, campus radio, and student publications, to increase reach and inclusivity.

2. The University of Jos management should establish a structured communication framework with regular town hall meetings, student representation in decision-making, and accessible feedback channels to enhance a two-way engagement.

3. The University of Jos management should develop a transparent and responsive communication system that ensures confidentiality, protects students from reprisals, demonstrates administrative empathy, and facilitates access to decision makers, thereby fostering trust and participation.

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