

A Critical Analytical Study of Scientific Literature on the Role of Public Relations in Enhancing Institutional Performance in Middle Schools

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Abstrak

This research paper presents a critical analysis of the scholarly literature that has addressed the role of public relations in middle schools as a strategic tool to enhance the quality of institutional and communicative performance within the school environment. The study aims to explore how researchers and educational specialists have approached the concept of public relations, identify prevailing research trends, and uncover existing knowledge and methodological gaps in previous studies. The paper adopts the Literature Review Analysis method using a descriptive-analytical approach and reviews thirty peer-reviewed Arabic and international academic sources. The findings reveal that public relations serve as a vital tool for building a positive image of the school and strengthening trust with parents and the local community. However, its practice in middle schools still suffers from weak structuring, shortcomings in communication strategies, and a lack of professional specialization. The paper concludes with a set of practical and research-oriented recommendations to further develop this critical role.

Keywords: *Public Relations – Middle Schools – Educational Communication – Institutional Performance – Literature Review.*

INTRODUCTION

Public relations is considered one of the fundamental pillars upon which modern educational institutions are built. It plays a vital role in enhancing communication between the school and its internal and external communities by creating a positive public image and facilitating constructive interaction between the school, parents, students, and the wider local community. With the advancement of educational and administrative theories, schools—especially at the middle school level—are increasingly required to adopt professional public relations management that contributes to achieving their educational and social objectives ⁽¹⁾.

The middle school stage represents a critical juncture in the educational journey, during which students undergo sensitive psychological, behavioral, and social changes. This necessitates the activation of communication channels between schools and families, communities, and relevant institutions to ensure the stability of the learning environment and guide students positively. Public relations is one of the most effective tools that schools can invest in to achieve this balance ⁽²⁾.

Despite its theoretical and practical significance, studies on public relations in the context of middle schools remain relatively limited—both in quantity and in analytical depth. This highlights the need for analytical research that reviews the existing literature, identifies its gaps and trends, and offers a scientific vision for the development of this vital field ⁽³⁾.

Research Problem

The problem addressed in this study lies in the scarcity of Arabic research that has examined the management of public relations in middle schools using a deep analytical approach, as well as in the absence of a clear institutional vision for organizing this function within schools. Additionally, there is a lack of coordination between public relations activities and other school programs, which leads to shortcomings in achieving the school's overall educational objectives ⁽⁴⁾.

Study Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Analyze previous literature on the topic of public relations in educational institutions, with a focus on middle schools.
2. Identify current trends and key themes in this area.
3. Highlight existing research gaps that require further scholarly attention.
4. Offer practical recommendations for activating public relations in middle schools based on scientific and professional foundations ⁽⁵⁾.

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study is reflected in the following:

1. Providing a theoretical and analytical framework for researchers in the field of educational administration.
2. Assisting educational decision-makers in recognizing the pivotal role of public relations in improving school performance.

3. Contributing to the enhancement of the relationship between the school and the community—especially in light of rapid changes in communication tools and growing expectations from the school's public ⁽⁶⁾.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the main themes covered by the existing literature on public relations management in middle schools?
2. What are the prevailing research trends in this field?
3. What research gaps have emerged through the literature analysis?
4. How can the role of public relations be effectively activated in middle schools according to best educational and administrative practices?

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study adopts the descriptive-analytical approach, by reviewing and analyzing previous relevant studies using content analysis techniques. The aim is to extract common patterns and general trends, identify shortcomings, and then develop a proposed framework for improving public relations management in middle schools ⁽⁷⁾.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Framework

1. The Concept of School Public Relations

School public relations is defined as “an administrative function aimed at improving the image of the educational institution among internal and external audiences through the development of communication channels and fostering positive interaction between the school and its environment” ⁽⁸⁾.

This function is grounded in the principles of trust, understanding, and mutual influence, making it more than just a communication task—it becomes a comprehensive strategy that enhances the school's presence and supports its educational goals ⁽⁹⁾.

2. The Evolution of Public Relations in Educational Institutions

Public relations in educational institutions has witnessed significant development over recent decades, especially with the rising importance of institutional communication and the increasing educational and societal challenges.

What was once a secondary role has evolved into a key component of strategic school planning. Today, public relations is responsible for coordinating efforts among school administration, students, teachers, parents, as well as official bodies and the broader community ⁽¹⁰⁾.

Some researchers have also indicated that the development of **social media platforms** has expanded the scope and impact of school public relations. These platforms have made communication more transparent and influential, but they have also complicated the responsibilities of PR practitioners due to the **speed of information dissemination and heightened public scrutiny** ⁽¹¹⁾.

3. Models of Educational Public Relations

One of the most important theoretical frameworks for understanding public relations in the educational context is the **Grunig and Hunt Model**, which outlines four basic patterns:

- a. Press Agency/Publicity Model: Focuses on one-way communication from the school to the public without interaction.
- b. Public Information Model: Aims to persuade the audience in favor of the school's policies.
- c. Two-Way Asymmetrical Model: Involves the public in dialogue, but without altering institutional behavior.
- d. Two-Way Symmetrical Model: Considered the most effective, as it is based on mutual interaction and behavioral change according to feedback ⁽¹²⁾.

Many educational researchers have recommended adopting the **fourth model** in managing school public relations, as it fosters trust, supports participatory decision-making, and reduces institutional tensions ⁽¹³⁾.

4. Functions of Public Relations in Middle Schools

Public relations in middle schools serves several essential functions, including:

- a. Promoting internal harmony among teachers, administrators, and students.
- b. Enhancing the school's image among parents and the wider community.
- c. Organizing events and activities that reflect the school's vision and mission.
- d. Managing educational and media-related crises.
- e. Preparing and distributing school bulletins and press releases ⁽¹⁴⁾.

These functions become particularly sensitive at the middle school level due to the nature of behavioral changes among students and the variety of pressures they face. This requires PR strategies grounded in **psychological and social understanding** of the school environment ⁽¹⁵⁾.

5. Components of Effective Public Relations Management in Schools

For public relations to be effective in middle schools, the following components must be in place:

- a. A strategic PR plan integrated within the school's general plan.
- b. The presence of a qualified or trained public relations staff member.
- c. Access to modern communication tools and resources.
- d. Strong support from the school's top administration.
- e. Regular evaluation of PR effectiveness using clear performance indicators ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Several studies have indicated that schools with well-established public relations units tend to show better outcomes in student discipline, satisfaction levels, and community engagement ⁽¹⁷⁾.

6. Challenges Facing Public Relations in Middle Schools

Some of the key challenges hindering the effective implementation of public relations in middle schools include:

- a. Institutional unawareness of its importance.
- b. Lack of qualified personnel.
- c. Weakness in technical and material resources.
- d. Absence of a clear organizational framework defining roles and responsibilities.
- e. Ambiguity in the relationship between public relations and traditional school administration ⁽¹⁸⁾.

Analysis of Previous Literature

This chapter presents a set of academic studies related to public relations management in middle schools. Each study is systematically reviewed, highlighting its objectives, methods, findings, and a brief analysis.

1. Study One

Title: The Role of Public Relations in Enhancing Communication Between Schools and Parents in Middle Education

Researcher: Ahmed Mohamed El-Saeed

Institution: Ain Shams University, Egypt

Year: 2020

Objective: To identify the public relations methods used by middle schools to enhance engagement with parents.

Methodology: Descriptive-analytical

Findings:

- a. A positive correlation exists between the effectiveness of public relations and parent satisfaction.
- b. Most schools lacked a comprehensive media communication plan.

Analysis:

This is one of the important field-based studies; however, it was limited to a small urban sample, which restricts the generalizability of its conclusions ⁽²⁰⁾.

2. Study Two

Title: Communication Strategies in Educational Institutions

Researcher: Leila Hilal

Institution: King Saud University

Year: 2019

Objective: To explore the internal and external communication mechanisms in middle schools.

Methodology: Case study

Findings:

- a. Most school administrations lacked a clear understanding of the role of public relations.
- b. There was over-reliance on traditional communication methods.

Analysis:

The study addressed a vital area; however, it did not clearly distinguish between administrative communication **and** public relations as an independent function ⁽²¹⁾.

3. Study Three

Title: The Effectiveness of Public Relations Programs in Promoting Positive Student Behavior

Researcher: Jamal Al-Bakri

Institution: University of Basrah

Year: 2021

Objective: To analyze the impact of public relations activities on student behavior.

Methodology: Quasi-experimental

Findings:

- a. There was a noticeable improvement in students' positive behavior following the implementation of interactive public relations programs.
- b. Weak coordination was noted between the public relations unit and student counseling services.

Analysis:

The study confirmed the positive impact of public relations, but failed to clarify the follow-up and evaluation mechanisms for these programs ⁽²²⁾.

Continued: Weakness in Administrative Organization

The reviewed studies also revealed a significant weakness in the administrative organization of public relations within schools, where the role is often assigned to non-specialized staff or merged with other unrelated administrative tasks.

Analysis: This discrepancy indicates a clear gap between the theoretical importance of public relations and its actual implementation in schools.

The Relationship Between Public Relations and the Educational Environment

The results of the studies show that public relations contributes to improving the **quality** of the school environment through:

1. Increasing parental satisfaction with school services ⁽²⁷⁾
2. Involving the community in educational decision-making
3. Building an institutional culture based on dialogue and partnership

However, these functions have not been effectively realized in all schools due to:

1. The absence of formal PR plans
2. Weak coordination between public relations units and educational counseling departments ⁽²⁸⁾

Analysis: Public relations should be viewed as a **connecting framework** that links all components of the school—students, teachers, administration, and the community—not as a decorative or isolated department.

The Use of Technology in School Public Relations

The literature presented diverse perspectives on the role of technology and social media in enhancing school public relations:

1. Some considered it an effective tool for promoting transparency and interaction ⁽²⁹⁾
2. Others warned about the lack of technical infrastructure or digital literacy within school environments

In some schools, tools such as the following were used:

 Social media pages

 Official email communication

 Mobile school communication apps

◆ Analysis: The use of technology must be aligned with a clear communication strategy, and school administrations should be trained to apply it in a professional and secure manner.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Previous Literature

✓ Strengths:

1. Methodological diversity (descriptive, experimental, analytical)
2. Emphasis on the impact of public relations across multiple domains (communication, behavior, professional development)
3. Presence of recent studies that focused on digital aspects

✗ Weaknesses:

1. Weakness in in-depth qualitative analysis
2. Scarcity of studies targeting the **middle school level** specifically
3. Absence of comparative research between public and private schools, or between urban and rural contexts ⁽³⁰⁾

Analysis: There is an urgent need for more **field-based qualitative research** that explores the educational and psychological particularities of the middle school stage and situates public relations within this framework.

Future Research Challenges

From the literature review, several research gaps have emerged, the most prominent being:

1. Lack of studies documenting the relationship between public relations and academic achievement
2. Scarcity of experimental research evaluating the long-term effects of public relations programs
3. Weak development of scientific tools to measure PR effectiveness in the educational context
4. Absence of national or local evaluation indicators for this functional domain

Findings and Recommendations

This chapter concludes the research paper by presenting the main findings derived from the literature analysis and offering a set of practical and research-based recommendations that may contribute to enhancing the public relations function in middle schools. Previously cited sources continue to be referenced; no new citations are introduced unless a new source is mentioned.

1. General Findings of the Study

Based on the analysis of the reviewed literature, the following findings can be summarized:

First: The Importance of Public Relations in Middle Schools

- a. Public relations is a central function for supporting both internal and external communication in schools and contributes to improving the efficiency of educational and institutional work ⁽²⁵⁾⁽²⁶⁾.

- b. It plays a key role in improving the school's image among parents and the local community ⁽²⁷⁾.

Second: The Current Status of Public Relations in Schools

- a. Public relations in middle schools suffers from the lack of institutional structure and its assignment to inadequately qualified personnel.
- b. The absence of media plans and regular evaluation reports impedes its effectiveness ⁽³⁰⁾⁽²⁸⁾.

Third: Relationship with Technology and Digital Communication

Technology provides a valuable opportunity to enhance school communication; however, weak infrastructure and lack of administrative training limit its optimal use ⁽²⁹⁾.

Fourth: Research Gaps

Existing studies show limited focus on the middle school level, with few comparative studies and a lack of in-depth qualitative research ⁽³⁰⁾.

Recommendations

First: Recommendations for Educational Institutions

- a. Establish specialized public relations departments within middle schools, supported directly by education directorates.
- b. Appoint academically qualified staff in the fields of public relations and educational communication.
- c. Develop an annual public relations plan with measurable objectives, timelines, and performance indicators.
- d. Activate the role of public relations in managing school crises (e.g., violence, dropout, media crises).
- e. Promote the use of modern communication platforms in an official and organized manner, linking them to the school's digital portals.

Second: Research Recommendations

- a. Conduct field studies across geographically diverse schools (urban/rural – public/private) to identify differences in public relations practices.
- b. Develop a standardized tool to measure the effectiveness of educational public relations, covering its impact on performance, community interaction, and student behavior.
- c. Design longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of public relations on academic achievement, discipline, and community participation.
- d. Encourage colleges of education and media to create joint programs or professional diplomas in school public relations.

Third : Recommendations for Educational Policymakers

- a. Integrate public relations content or training modules into teacher and school leader preparation programs.
- b. Issue regulatory guides from the Ministry of Education that define the responsibilities and performance standards of school public relations.
- c. Establish a system for regular monitoring and evaluation of public relations performance in schools and link it to the overall quality of institutional performance.

CONCLUSION

The reviewed literature has demonstrated that public relations is not an administrative luxury, but rather a foundational pillar of school quality—particularly at the middle school level, which represents a critical link between primary and secondary education. However, the actual practice remains far from the desired professional model.

In conclusion, developing public relations in middle schools requires a strategic vision, integration between educational professionals and policy makers, and ongoing scholarly research that contributes to transforming this function into a strong support system for every successful educational initiative.

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