PROLIFERATION OF GRAPEVINE COMMUNICATION IN SOME TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE SOUTHEASTERN PART OF NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CAUSES.

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ABSTRACT
This research takes a look at the concept of grapevine communication which describes an informal multidirectional flow of information between administration, staff and students of educational institutions. It seeks to x-ray the need not to discard grapevine in organizations as there can be facts which if used appropriately can contribute to the growth and development of such organizations. A survey was carried out in 10 different tertiary educational institutions in the south eastern part of Nigeria. The result was critically analyzed to determine the effect grapevine can have to an institution and it was observed that grapevine occurs because of ambiguity, lack of clarity and or when there are loopholes in the formal communication channel of an institution hence the need for educational institutions or organizations to checkmate grapevine by providing credible and easily accessible sources of important information, engaging the staff and students in a face-to-face discussion and as well use their formal channels to address issues raised through grapevine. Although grapevine has its cons such that it can: affect employment or students recruitment activities, soil the image or reputation of an education institution, provoke disintegration and the abuse of power. Its pros which include its ability to spread faster, as multidirectional communication, to improve teamwork and social relationship, if positively and effectively harnessed, can be of a great benefit to educational institutions.

Key Words: Grapevine, Educational Institutions, Communication, Growth and Development.

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

Grapevine communication is an informal person-to-person means of circulating information, ideas, gossip, or rumor (meririam-webster online dictionary). Grapevine communication is amongst the popular forms of oral communication and has also been seen in written forms too. With the advent of the social media, grapevine has been spread widely through platforms such as facebook (meta) and whatsapp which are familiar to students and staffers of an institution. (Miharaini *et al*, 2019)

Although grapevine communication is informal, it is an important source of information in an organization or academic environment. A survey found that 70 to 75% of organizations and employees get access to information first through the grapevine (Goman 2019, Forbes 1997). Many researchers have argued that grapevine has more negative impact to

organizations as it can affect employment activities, reputation or the image of the organization productivity and can as well provoke disintegration, abuse of power, internal political problems, embezzlement, dissatisfaction, leadership crisis and scandals (Mishra 1990), Difinzo, and Bordia, 2000, Abd Rahim, and Rid.Rashid, 2004).

Worthy of note is three major characteristics of grapevine communication; it is not controlled by the management, it is perceived by most employees as being more reliable than formal communiqués issued by top management and, it is largely used to serve the self-interests of the people within it. (Newston *et al*., 1989). Now the question is, is the information that flows through grapevine communication accurate? The evidence indicates that about 75% of what is carried through grapevine is accurate (Davis 1979).

Moreso, it is believed that rumors emerge as a response to situations that are important to us, when there is ambiguity, and or when under conditions that arouses anxiety (Rosnow and Fine, 1776). Since work situations frequently involves these three elements, that explains what gets rumor mill rolling in organizations like educations institutions.

Since this form of communication has come to stay as organizations cannot have total control over informal communication, this research seeks to investigate on how best to utilize grapevine for the growth and development of organizations especially, education institutions while proffering solutions on how it can be mitigated.

An education institution includes; Colleges, Universities, Technical schools or specialized institutes where learning take place,(academic institution definition - Lawinsider Dictionary). Considering an educational institution as a place where professionals such as academic professors, doctorate degree holders, master of disciplines and graduates of all levels are fully involved in academic activities, one may tend to wonder how grapevine can thrive in such an environment. Nevertheless, the effective

information communication to employees is important to the functioning of any organization particularly schools (Thomas and Glender 1993).

1.1 Statement of the Problem
In order to address the uninclusive communication loopholes between education institution, staff and students, this research is therefore interested on unveiling the need for organizations to not look down on grapevine communication. An organization has no greater responsibility than to develop effective communication hence the need to surmount any form of communication bareer be it environmental or personal as classified by (Akua *et al* 2014).

Grapevine as an informal form of communication that it is, most times are not taken as seriously as it should and its effect on organizations cannot be overemphasized as (Quantilope 2021), has proven that people prefer talking to writing and tend to believe easily what they hear or see hence this research which seeks to motivate organizations to utilize grapevine ability to spread faster than formal means of communication by reaching out to their students and staff, hear the news or rumor on ground and then counter or support the information timely and when necessary for the benefit of the educational institution or organizations since written communication is typically more formal but less effective than oral communication. (indeed 2023).

1.2 Research Questions
   i) What is grapevine communication?
   ii) Despite its cons, how can it be utilized for the development of educational institutions?

1.3 Scope of the Study
This research was limited in several aspects. The time frame for data collection was too short because we had to sample several education institutions in the south eastern part of Nigeria both federal and private owned schools. A total number of 100 questionnaires were administered but the usable ones were 80. Therefore, the

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result may not reflect the real situation for the whole population.

There are many tertiary education institutions in the sampled area, but we were only able to visit approximately 10 out of the rest so, the result may not reflect the real situation in the rest of the schools not sampled.

More so, this research did not consider the psychological state of our respondents. This research has unveiled that the students of institutions play a major role in the promotion, de-marketing and recruitment of new students through grapevine. Therefore, grapevine should not only create awareness among education institutions to be more serious in the dissemination and reception of information but should as well enhance efficient and effective communication at all levels for growth and development.

2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
Grapevine communication is pertinent when it comes to work place communication as it passes on information concerning an organization's specific procedures and experiences where formal communication might come up short although research has shown that 92.4% of institutions surveyed have no policy to checkmate grapevine (Giovanna, 2019).

When grapevine is out of control in an education institution, the parties should try to find a way to manage the situation ethically in order to enhance professionalism and quality of work since more communication barriers in terms of status where the management adopts autocratic leadership style hence make the situation worse because the lower class are not carried along in the real situation of things. (Miharaini, *et al.* 2015).

Grapevine is a global phenomenon which can affect an education institution. Because an individual is very easy to believe and spread rumor or gossip to their nearest friend since it is the combination of facts and perception as it was noted by Miharaini, *et al* (2015) that 80-90% of information gotten through the grapevine are certified, correct, and factual.

In addition, Crampton *et al*(1998) stated that the factors that lead to grapevine are but not limited to;
i) The desire and interest of interaction among staffers.
ii) The sense of insecurity at work environment
iii) The degree of vagueness conveyed through formal channels and
iv) The atmosphere of threat that makes students and staff to not trust the formal communication channels.

The spread of grapevine has been made easier due to the ability of social media to enhance connectivity. Students can now utilize them for academic assistance and support and as well explore their interest or problems with similar individuals while strengthening online communication skills and knowledge in their platform such as; facebook, whatsapp, youtube and twitter . This occurs mostly amongst those who may be reluctant to peak up in class (Qingya, *et al* 2011).

3.0 RESEARCH METHOD
The study used qualitative and descriptive method. The essence of collecting data was to perform a group research on how education institutions administration can bridge the communication gap between the leaders and the led while maintaining a mutual relationship amongst all. In this research, an anonymous questionnaire was distributed to some students, and staff of education institution in the South eastern part of Nigeria which is the standard survey collection method. The total number of questionnaires administered was 100. However, the useable questionnaires were 80.

The respondents among those who are about to or have taken the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME) organized by the Joint Admission and Matriculations Board (JAMB). These category of respondents popularly called Jambites were 30 in number. Undergraduates of various institutions both male and female were 35 and the staffers of various academic institutions were 15.

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The participants were randomly selected regardless of their gender or academic level and the questions focused more on the feeling of students about their schools and what the Jambites know or feel about their choice of school, why they chose the schools and schools they will never really attend even if the admission is given to them for free and their reasons. Deductions were made from the data using simple statistical analysis

4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION
According to the result gotten, 70% of participants were against the communication gap between schools administration, student and staff hence the grapevine. Table 1 shows the percentage of the respondents' perception on grapevine communication. It is believed from the findings that the spread of grapevine is as a result of incomplete information from formal sources.

Table1: Causes of Grapevine Communication According to the Respondents

S/N	Causes of Grapevine	SD (%)	D(%)	SLA(%)	A(%)	SA(%)
1	I spread grapevine because of information gap From formal sources.	3	2	5	10	70
2	I spread grapevine because of institution culture Itself.	1	60	20	4	10
3	I spread spread information without any information check.	62	24	2	7	5
4	I like to hear something negative rather than positive about my school.	43	17	30	8	2
5	I easily believe any information presented to me	25	5	11	9	50
6	I spread grapevine to help others not to make same mistake I made.	4	6	10	10	70
7	I spread information for my own advantage	75	15	7	3	0

Agreed (A), strongly agreed (SA), disagreed (D), strongly disagreed (SD), slightly agree (SLA)

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According to the data collected from our respondents through the questionnaire displayed in the table above, 70% strongly agree (SA) that they share grapevine due to the information gap in things of their interest or concern such as public holidays, new policies, introduction of new members and so on, caused by the formal source or channel of information, while 10, 5, 3, and 2% agree (A), slightly agree (SLA), strongly disagree (SD) and disagree (D) to the above notion respectively.

Nevertheless, there is this idea that there are some environments where rumor and gossip thrive naturally without any germane reason, so we decided to sample people's opinion as regards that. 60% of the respondents disagreed to the above opinion stating that in every rumor, there is an atom of truth and that there is absolutely no smoke without fire while 10, 4, 20 and 1% strongly agree (SA), agree (A), slightly agree (SLA) and strongly disagree (SD) respectively to the notion.

62% of the respondents strongly disagreed (SD) to another idea of spreading information without checking how factual it is stating that any information they are not sure of that they usually use "I heard" or "they said" which automatically notifies the listener that the information is still under check or verification while 24, 2, 7, and 5%, disagree (D), slightly agree (SLA) agree (A) strongly agree (SA) respectively to the above idea.

Moreso, 43% of the respondents strongly disagree (SD) to the idea that they prefer getting negative information about their school stating that none will like to always hear bad news about his institution rather will love brag it while 30% slightly agreed (SLA) because the institution's channel of communication will always be used to promote the positive aspect of the institutions dealings therefore will prefer to here that aspect which is unsaid. But 17, 8, and 2% disagreed (D) agreed (A) and slightly agreed (SLA) to the notion respectively.

50% strongly agree (SA) to the idea that they easily believe any information presented to them most especially when it comes from a friend, a relative or a loved one while 9, 11, 5, and 25% agree (A), slightly agree (SLA) disagree and strongly disagree to this idea.

People also share grapevine to prevent their friends, loved ones or relative from making the same mistake they had made in the time past as 70% of the respondent strongly agreed (SD) to this fact. In this case, this research provided that people prefer to get information about their would be education institution from those they know that have passed through those schools to get the appropriate direction to avoid making mistakes while 10, 10, 6, and 4% agree (A), slightly agree (SLA) disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) to the above notion respectively.

Nevertheless, the spread of information be it grapevine or formal, is usually for the benefit of the receiver as shown in the table above that 75% of the respondents strongly disagreed (SD) to the notion that they spread information for their own good. 15, 7, 3, and 0% disagreed (D), slightly agreed (SLA), agreed (A), and strongly agreed (SA) to this idea.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has revealed that although grapevine is an informal form of communication that has disadvantages that can affect an institution ranging from non-verification of information, misleading, distortion of the message etc, it has some advantages such as its ability to:
i) spread fast
ii) improve social relationship
iii) act as a multidirectional communication
iv) improve teamwork etc should all be harnessed for the growth and development of education institutions not to forget that if the students and staff welfare is taken as seriously and important as it should, the institutions will profit from it as non can tell when anyone could be asked or giving information about an education institution hence, the need for clarity, staff and student inclusiveness in the information

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flow from the formal communication channels.

However, in order to checkmate grapevine in education institutions, there is the need to;

i)   always keep staff and students informed by providing credible and easily accessible source of important information so as to avoid the wastage of time while in search of information.

ii) engage the student and staff in a meeting or discussion so as to know their feelings, and ideas towards certain issues or policies.

iii) Even, there is the need for the institution to gather the institution's public especially when grapevine has filtered and address swiftly the points gathered by filtered grapevine while giving out the formal version of the information.

If the afore stated recommendations are implemented, educational institutions' communication system will be effective and balanced.

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