Teacher Unions’ Strategies Enhancing Welfare Benefits for Teachers in Kenya. A Case of Kenya National Union of Teachers

Dr. Gideon M. Kasiu
Lecturer, Department of Educational Administration and Planning, School of Education, South Eastern Kenya University

Abstract:- Teacher unions seek through collective negotiation and bargaining with employers to improve benefits of their members. It is the desire of teachers to benefit from their unions as well as secure protection against unfair labour practices. This study was carried to investigate Teacher unions’ strategies enhancing welfare benefits for teachers in Kenya taking the case of Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT). The study used descriptive survey design. The target population was 8320 primary school teachers and nine KNUT branch officials. Stratified sampling and simple random sampling were used to select a sample 830 teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select nine KNUT officials. The study used questionnaire for teachers and interview guide for KNUT officials as the instruments for the study. Content validity of the research instruments was ascertained through piloting of the test items while reliability of the questionnaires and the interviews was ascertained by a test-re-test technique. The data was analyzed by use of SPSS programme. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data and presented in frequency tables. Interview guide responses were reported in verbatim. The conclusion of the study was that KNUT was highly involved in enhancing issues concerning the welfare of teachers. The study recommends that the union should diversify motivational programs for teachers to continue promoting the welfare benefits for teachers in Kenya

Key words:- Teacher union, Welfare benefits, Motivational programmes, Collective bargaining, Collective bargaining agreement

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Trade unions also referred to as labour unions are organizations of workers that promote the interests of their members through collective action. Flanders (2001) defines a trade union as an agency developed to protect, promote and improve the social and economic interests of workers in their workplace. Teacher unions represent and defend the interests of teachers in matters of salary, working and other social welfare benefits (Vaillant, 2005). They fight for the protection and improvement of economic interests and the security of teachers’ job at work place by protecting them from unfair labour practices. The instrument that is used by teacher unions in this venture is collective bargaining. The desire for teachers to form or join unions and engage in collective bargaining is, to equalize or level the power alignment between their employer and the teacher. Through this gesture, teacher unions encourage equality, equity, fairness and respect for teachers’ social and economic rights both at workplace and in the wider society. The recognition by teachers that there is strength in unity and that individually, they are weak and not able to agitate for their rights at the workplace has motivated them to join teacher trade unions.

In Kenya, teachers are represented by three teacher unions in the education sector namely, the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT), Kenya Union of Post Primary Education Teachers (KUPPET) and University Academic Staff Union (UASU) for lecturers in public universities. The Kenya National Union of Teacher (KNUT) is a teachers’ trade union registered under the trade unions act Cap 233 of the Laws of Kenya. It represents both primary school and secondary school teachers. The mandate of KNUT is to secure, protect, and enhance the welfare of their members and to advocate for education professionalism and development in the Country (KNUT 2015). It also aims to secure and maintain unified and better terms and conditions of employment and service for all teachers in Kenya (KNUT 2015).

According to the outline in KNUT’s strategic Plan (2015-2019) the aims and objectives of the Union are contained in Article II of its Constitution. They are summarized into five functional areas, namely: to unite teachers of all grades, to secure improved terms and condition of service for teachers and to protect their interests as workers. Other functions include promoting programmes that are aimed at improving teachers’ welfare and socio-economic well-being, to contribute to professional work in teaching and development of education services in Kenya (KNUT 2015). This study delves to explore the teacher welfare benefits provided by the KNUT.

Statement of the Problem

Provision of welfare benefits for teachers is an important element for improving the commitment of the teacher in teaching. Welfare benefits entails providing personal needs of the teacher that can motivate the teacher to actively participate in the process of teaching. For a long time, teachers in Kenya have been disadvantaged when they face their employers as individuals. Over the years teachers in Kenya have come up together in seeking for solution to their common welfare challenges by forming teacher unions through which they can pull their efforts and develop themselves through the union and also task the union to fight for securing welfare benefits
from their employer. Through such concerted efforts teacher unions have been able to negotiate for better salaries, allowances, promotions and other conditions of service. Despite these positive efforts of the teacher unions, the teacher employer in Kenya has sometimes accused teacher unions of making the work of the employer difficult by their demand for higher remuneration and other benefits. Teachers have persistently been frustrated by the employer by not honouring their collective bargaining agreements. As a remedy the unions have come up with strategies within the union itself and through collective bargaining which can benefit their members. This study explores these benefits provided by the unions to teachers.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate Teacher Union strategies enhancing welfare benefits for teachers in Kenya in reference to Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT).

Research objective

To investigate KNUT strategies enhancing welfare benefits for teachers in Kenya

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher unions are formed for reasons of advancing the cause of teachers. Donaldo (2010) says that teacher unions seek through collective negotiation and bargaining with employers to protect and improve the real incomes of their members, provide or improve job security, protect workers against unfair dismissal and other issues relating to employment and also lobby and advocate for better working conditions. Unions seek to improve wages and the conditions under which their members are employed and work. Galor (2002), argues that teacher unions ensure that salaries, wages and benefits for teachers are standardized and that the union negotiates for better terms of services. The formation of teacher unions was necessitated by the desire for the improvement of terms and conditions of service for teachers and to protect their interests (Kerchner, 2004).

The role of teacher unions in providing welfare needs of the teachers enhance their motivation and also promotes the status of the teacher has borne great success. The commitment by teacher unions in maintaining a motivated human resource in the teaching service aims at raising an effective workforce that can be used as a resource in provision of quality education in institutions of learning (Mutuku, 2015). Teacher unions motivate teachers in their work through their ability to mobilize and fight for teachers’ interests. Murillo (2006) and valiant (2005) posit that teacher unions in bid to promote welfare benefits for their members have established social welfare benefit programmes for teachers like credit societies, grants to help teachers pay school fees for their children and a burial revolving fund to help teachers during bereavement. These programmes according Reimers and Reimmers (2006) have a profound effect on teacher’s morale and their performance in their duty. Johnson and Donaldson (2006) similarly says that teacher unions secure welfare benefits for teachers like better pay, good working conditions and protection of rights of teachers which influence their motivation and commitment to duty.

Teachers both in primary schools and secondary schools in Kenya are represented by the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT). KNUT is both a trade and a professional organization for teachers. The mandate of KNUT is to enhance the welfare benefits of its members (KNUT 2008). The Kenya National Union of teachers has enacted strategies and programmes to enhance the welfare of its members. It has implemented economic support schemes in collaboration with other strategic partners through Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization (SACCO), Burial and Benevolent Funds (BBF) and Education fund (EF) (KNUT 2005). The SACCOs are monetary organizations through which members can secure financial support, the BBF helps members when they are bereaved and EF is a monetary scheme that helps members in educating their family members. These programmes impact directly on the morale of the teachers thus improving their commitment to duty.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive survey design. The targeted population was 8320 teachers and 9 KNUT officials in Machakos County. Stratified sampling and simple random sampling were used to select a sample 830 teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select nine KNUT officials. The study used questionnaire for teachers and interview guide for KNUT officials as the instruments for the study. Content validity of the research instruments was ascertained by a through piloting of the test items while reliability of the questionnaires and the interviews was ascertained by a test-re-test technique. The data was analyzed by use of SPSS programme. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data and presented in frequency tables. Interview guide responses were reported in verbatim.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

KNUT being a teacher union involved in meeting the welfare needs of teachers was looked into in this study which sought to investigate the strategies the union had put in place in enhancing teachers’ welfare benefits in Machakos Kenya. The Teachers were asked to rate the extent of involvement of KNUT in enhancing issues concerning the welfare benefits of teachers. The study used a Likert scale to get the views of the teachers on the extent to which they agreed that KNUT was involved in enhancing their welfare benefits. The teachers were asked to indicate their responses as; (SA) Strongly Agree, (A) Agree, (D) Disagree, and (SD) Strongly Disagree. The findings were presented in table 1.1
Table 1.1 Teachers’ perception on the involvement of KNUT in enhancing teachers’ welfare benefits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased pay</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational programmes</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of teachers</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase allowances</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data presented in table 1.1 indicates that teachers felt that KNUT was overwhelmingly involved in securing welfare benefits for teachers. The results indicate that 81.9 percent of teachers strongly agreed that KNUT fights for increased pay for teachers while only 18.1 percent of teachers agreed that KNUT fights for their increased pay. None of the teachers either strongly disagreed or disagreed with that view. A high percentage of teachers representing 96.4%, 72.3% and 60.2% respectively strongly agreed that the union has established motivational programmes for teachers and involved in the promotion of teachers and fighting for increase in allowances for teachers. On the same views, 3.6%, 27.7% and 38.8% of teacher respectively agreed to the sentiments. No teacher negated these statements by either strongly disagreeing of disagreeing.

These results reflect the core functions of KNUT as spelt in Article II of its 67 constitution section (viii) which aims at raising the status and standards of the teaching profession and section (ix) which aims to secure and maintain unified and better terms and conditions of employment and services for all teachers (KNUT, 2015). The findings concur with Johnson and Donaldson (2006) that teacher unions secure welfare benefits for teachers like better pay, good working conditions and protection of rights of teachers which influence their motivation and commitment to duty.

KNUT officials interviewed confirmed that the union was involved in fighting for teachers increased pay. One official said;

As a union we normally enter to pay negotiation with the teachers’ employer, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC). Manytimes, we have successfully negotiated for pay increment. Recently we have signed a Collective bargaining agreement (CBA) with the TSC which has already been implemented.

Another official expressed satisfaction with the way the union had succeeded in securing benefits for teachers. One of branch executive secretary remarked;

KNUT fights for increased pay for teachers, better working conditions for teachers, runs motivational programmes for teachers, secures promotion for teachers, fights for teachers’ allowances and fights for recognition of teaching as a profession.

Probed to explain the motivational programmes run by KNUT another official said;

KNUT has established motivational programmes like savings and credit cooperative societies (SACCOS), where teachers can save and secure loan, teacher invested companies and enterprises for wealth accumulation, Burial Benevolent Funds (BBFs) to help bereaved families with urgent money, and Children’s Education schemes which help members settle school fees for their children or relatives.

This view concur with KNUT strategic plan 2009-2013 (KNUT 2008) which says that KNUT implements economic support schemes in collaboration with other strategic partners through Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization (SACCO), Burial and Benevolent Funds (BBF) and Education fund (EF) (KNUT 2005).

These findings all confirm that KNUT is fully involved in enhancing teacher’s welfare benefits in Kenya.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusion of the study was that KNUT was highly involved in enhancing issues concerning the welfare of teachers. A large proportion of the teachers agreed that KNUT had largely succeeded in securing welfare benefits for teachers such as increased pay, better working conditions, increased allowances, promotions and running motivational programmes which are largely achieved through collective bargaining. The study recommends for further diversification of motivational programs to continue promoting the welfare benefits of teachers in Kenya.

REFERENCES