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An Analysis of the Trade Union's Efficacy in Promoting the Profession of Teachers as Civil Servants: A Case Study of the Malawi Teachers' Union

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of the Teachers Union of Malawi in promoting the welfare and professional development of teachers in Malawi. Teachers in Malawi face numerous challenges including poor working conditions and low pay. The study focuses on analyzing the problems encountered by the union in promoting the profession, exploring the support it provides, and evaluating its mechanism for working with the government to promote teachers' welfare. The target population for the study is primary and secondary school teachers who are members of the union, and the study was conducted in the Lilongwe district. Data was collected from 27 teachers using questionnaires and analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative measures. The findings reveal that the Teachers Union of Malawi is not effective in fulfilling its role of advocating for the welfare of teachers. The study highlights ongoing challenges with working conditions, salary, and allowances that persist within the teaching profession. The results are presented using tables and figures alongside descriptive written statements.

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1. Introduction

Trade unions have a long history as institutions of civil society that represent and promote the interests of employees while regulating their relations with employers. Over the years, trade unions have been actively involved in collective bargaining, organizing industrial action, and providing services such as legal advice to their members. In many cases, they have acted as the voice of the collective through federations and national trade unions. In South Africa, trade unions played a vital role in dealing with apartheid. In Malawi, several trade unions exist, including the agriculture union, the consultative association of Malawi, the Malawi Congress of Trade Union, the Transport and General Workers Union, and the Water Employees Trade Union of Malawi. All these unions share the common goal of promoting employee relations in organizations.

This study focuses on the Teachers Union of Malawi, which aims to safeguard teachers from discrimination in the workplace and school environment. Teachers have a primary responsibility to represent the interests of their students.

However, problems inevitably arise in the course of their public service, which can lower their morale and reduce their productivity. The Teachers Union of Malawi plays a crucial role in mitigating these problems and advocating for the welfare of teachers. In a recent case, the civil servants' trade union gave the government a 14-day ultimatum to promote mainstream civil services, claiming that some civil servants had not been promoted for over a decade, despite meeting the requirements.

2. Statement of The Problem

Despite the Teacher's union of Malawi's efforts to promote the profession of teachers, there is still a lack of recognition and support for teachers in Malawi. Some of the problems that teachers face are low pay and little recognition for the goals that they are trying to reach. This has led to low morale, poor working conditions and a high teacher turnover rate which ultimately affect the quality of education. There is a need to investigate the efficacy/effectiveness of the Teacher's Union of Malawi in promoting the profession of Teachers and

to identify the challenges that hinder the union's effort to improve the working conditions and status of teachers in Malawi.

Globally, no other profession has undergone as much rigorous deliberation and analysis as the teaching profession has in recent times (Kayuni & Tambulasi, 2007) ^[51]. Previous studies have investigated the role of trade unions in various industries and professions including education. Some studies have found that teachers' unions have a positive impact on teachers' salaries (Kakunta *et al.*, 2020) ^[26], working conditions and Job security (e.g. Aldeman & Rogers, 2018; Farrelly, 2017) ^[10-50]. Teachers' unions were also found to enhance professional competency (Khanal, 2021), Provide legal representation for members and in collective bargaining (Kakunta *et al.*, 2020) ^[26], protection of workers' rights and minimise trade disputes (Moeti-Lysson, 2011) ^[34].

Other studies have examined the challenges that teacher unions face including declining membership, no elections for leaders, Gaps between objectives and practices, polarization and communication gaps (Mehmood & Farooqi, 2020) ^[36]. However, there appears to be a gap in the literature on the specific context of Malawi and the Teachers' union of Malawi. While there have been studies on teachers' unions in Africa (Mafisa, 2017) ^[50]. There is limited research on the effectiveness of teacher unions in Malawi specifically.

3. Literature Review

Problems Encountered by Teachers

There are a number of studies related to problems of teachers in promoting their profession that has been conducted across the globe. One of the problems addressed by Derrick Meador (2019) ^[1], for instance, the report on issues that teachers face in their service. Poor public perception, in this case, we have all heard the old saying "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach." Unfortunately, a stigma is attached to teachers within the United States. In some countries, public school teachers are highly regarded and revered for the service that they provide. Today, teachers continue to be in the public spotlight because of their direct impact on the nation's youth. There's the added challenge that the media often focuses on negative stories dealing with teachers, which pulls attention away from their positive impact. According to this report, this problem hinders the promotion of teachers (Burns, 2019) ^[8] difficult working conditions are among the problems teachers face that kill teachers' development (Burns, 2019) ^[8]. It is no surprise that the biggest problem in the professional promotion of teachers is the difficulty in the conditions in which teachers work. Overcrowding classrooms, sexual harassment or abuse and lack of teaching materials all contribute to poor working conditions.

The Mechanism Used in Working with the Government toward Promoting Teachers' Profession

Teachers unions are found almost everywhere across the globe. The bargaining bodies are important education stakeholders. They enhance the rise of teacher development through the different ways of efforts they put in place in developing the teachers' profession. There are a number of studies that show how bargaining bodies fight for teachers and the common mechanism is collective bargaining. Burns (2018) ^[9] According to Burns (2018) ^[9] professional development opportunities must be created. She argued that teachers should collaborate with colleagues. The collaboration exists in the form of unions formed by union-member teachers. The essence of cooperation is to work together

towards the fight for their concerns. The culture of trust and knowledge sharing induces teacher effectiveness and development. The proximity of teachers makes them share the challenges they face. Through the union, they discuss the challenges amicably and eventually present them to the right officials.

According to Evans (2017), Columbia teachers used the collective bargaining policy for teachers and school employees. The body of collective bargaining was formulated to act as the voice of teachers and other employees. Bargaining is a common tool or mechanism union's use in dealing with teachers' concerns. The members of the union are the ones with the responsibility to speak on behalf of the entire members. He argued that the policy came four years after the Missouri Supreme Court ruling allowed public employees to collectively bargain with employers. However, Aaron Churchill (2019) ^[15] claimed that collective bargaining results in a few hours of work. The act of bargaining results in the misuse of time according to his findings. In his study, he highlighted that the hours spent on bargaining lower the productivity of the management at the workplace. The schedule of duties and responsibilities is disturbed eventually slowing the organisation activities, particularly teachers' duties.

Larry Sand defined collective bargaining as a process of negotiations between employees and employers who aim at reaching an agreement that regulates working conditions (2019). Similarly, she argued that collective bargaining does not help teachers and students. She went on to say collective bargaining demands standardisation. In her research, she found out that teachers who were not part of the teachers' unions earned more money than those in unions.

According to Joy (2020, citing Fullan, 2018). One potential source of teacher professional development is a collaborative effort among the teachers and other bodies. The teachers need to be in collaboration to successfully develop professionally. There is a saying that states "united we stand, divided we fall", the teachers need to collaborate and work together. The togetherness among the profession of teachers will promote and develop their profession. When the teachers collaborate on a number of issues concerning them they will develop professionally.

According to Maclaugh (2017) ^[49] successful collaboration, practising teachers have the opportunity to work with diverse stakeholders. Some of the stakeholders include university faculty and district leaders. The idea is to explore the subject matter that will support the teachers. Practising teachers are teachers who are still in school. For them to be successful they need to collaborate with university faculty. Generally, the help of the university faculty and other stakeholders will improve their profession. Practising teachers need to show interest to work in partnership with other stakeholders who develop the teachers' profession.

The Role of Teachers' Unions in Collective Bargaining

The article "The Long-Run Effects of Teacher Collective Bargaining" by Michael Lovenheim explores the impact of collective bargaining agreements for teachers on student achievement, teacher salaries and educational spending. In the article the author argues that collective bargaining agreements have had a significant impact on the education system, shaping policies on teacher hiring, promotion, evaluation and compensation. Collective bargaining also led to higher salaries.

Another study done by Joshua Cowen and Katherine Strunk titled "How do teachers unions influence education policy? What we know and what we need to learn" discusses the role of teachers' unions in collective bargaining. The paper discusses how teachers' unions use collective bargaining to negotiate with school districts over issues such as teacher salaries, benefits and working conditions. The authors argue that collective bargaining can lead to policies that benefit teachers' unions but may not be in the best interests of students.

4. Significance of the Study

The teaching profession is vital to the existence of all other professions worldwide, and the Teachers Union of Malawi plays a significant role in promoting the welfare and productivity of teachers. This study aims to provide insights into the role of trade unions in promoting the interests of teachers, focusing on the Teachers Union of Malawi as a case study. By examining the effectiveness of the union in advocating for better pay, working conditions, and professional development opportunities, the study provides valuable information that can be used by the union and the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of education in the country. The study's findings can also inform policy and practice related to the promotion of the teaching profession in Malawi and similar contexts, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers' unions in advancing the interests of teachers. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the critical role of trade unions in promoting the profession of teachers and improving the overall quality of education in Malawi.

5. Scope of the Study

The study was conducted in Lilongwe district, Malawi. The target population were teachers from both secondary and primary schools of the Teachers Union of Malawi.

6. Objectives of the Study

Main Objective

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Teachers union of Malawi in promoting the teachers' profession

Specific Objectives

- To study the socio-economic conditions of the teachers in Malawi.
- To analyse the challenges faced by the teacher's union in promoting their profession
- To identify the supportive system for the teacher's union for their promotion
- To know the influence of socio-demographic variables on the efficacy of the teacher's union

Research Questions

The study had the following research questions in trying to achieve the objectives.

1. What social economic conditions are faced by teachers in Malawi
2. What challenges are faced by teachers' unions in promoting their profession
3. What support system is there for the Teacher's union of Malawi in their role of promoting their profession
4. What is the influence of social-demographic variables in the efficacy of the teachers' union

7. Research Methodology

This study used empirical evidence from different studies

relating to teachers' unions, as well as studies that were done on the Teachers Union of Malawi; to create a theoretical overview and identify the apparent research gap relating to the topic of study. This study used a blend of both positivism and interpretivism research philosophies as it uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This study mainly requires an inductive research approach that uses both qualitative and quantitative data analyses. The time horizon for this study was cross-sectional as it used data from different sources at a single point in time, or related but isolated points in time.

The sample is defined as a subset of the target population that the researcher intends to generalize the results of. The probability sampling technique was used to select institutions from which teachers could be selected to respond to the questionnaire, and purposive sampling was used to select the teachers and Teachers Union of Malawi officials who could provide insight into the study. The target population of the study was members of the Teachers Union of Lilongwe, which consists of 500 registered primary and secondary school teachers.

The study area for this particular research is identified as Lilongwe, Malawi and includes both primary and secondary schools. The study area comprises three primary schools (Kalonga, Mvama, and Nkwichi) and three secondary schools (Bwaila, Chilambula, and Nkwichi), each with Teachers Union of Malawi representatives. The population in this particular research consists of teachers from both primary and secondary schools who are members of the Teachers Union of Malawi. Defining the population is essential in determining the eligibility of sample cases for the survey.

The researcher used a probability sampling process which is a simple random sampling lottery method to choose the 108 respondents from the study population of 500 as per Kothari formulae. The sample size was determined using Kothari (2015) [27] sampling design formula;

$$n = \frac{(Z)^2 * p * q * N}{e^2 (N - 1) + Z^2 * p * q}$$

Where

n=sample size

N=total population of the sample (500),

z=95% confidence interval level under the normal curve, (1.96)

e=marginal error 5% that means 0.05

P & q is an estimate of the proportion of the population to sample.

P is the estimate of the proportion of the population improved by 90% which is p-value.

Then q is equal to 1-0.9 = .1

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 * 0.9 * 0.1 * 500}{0.05^2 (500 - 1) + (1.96)^2 * 0.9 * 0.1}$$

$$n = \frac{172.872}{0.5932}$$

$$n = 108$$

Therefore, assuming 95% confidence level and 5% precision level, and given the total population, the sample size of the study was found to be 108.

The study used interviews and key informant interviews to collect primary data and a wide range of resources for secondary data.

8. Results and Discussion

The study was carried out to analyse the efficacy of the Teachers Union of Malawi in promoting the teachers' profession. The study was conducted in the Lilongwe district. The target population were teachers from both secondary and primary schools. A sample of 30 participants was planned, however, only 27 participants had their answers written down. A shortfall of three participants was not successfully met because of unforeseen circumstances. The schools where the research was conducted include; Bwaila secondary, Chilambula secondary, Kalonga primary, Mvama primary as well as both Nkwichi primary and secondary schools respectively. The questionnaire branched questions guided by the objectives of the study. Data was collected using questionnaires that had a set of questions for the participants. The findings of the study indicate that gender discrimination exists in the Malawian education system, with the majority of primary school teachers being female and most secondary school teachers being male. The study also highlights the issue of inadequate funds in the education sector, resulting in poor working conditions, lack of teaching materials, delayed payments, and corruption. Teachers in Malawi use negotiation, go-slow, sit-in, and demonstration mechanisms to advocate for change, but some teachers fear joining the protests and may oppose their colleagues. The Teachers Union of Malawi faces a significant challenge in representing the needs of its large membership and dealing with unprofessionalism, lack of transparency, and corruption among government officials. While some teachers receive support in furthering their studies, many are not receiving any assistance.

9. Suggestions and Recommendations

This study has drawn recommendations on many areas in the education sector; from individual teachers, the Associations of teachers, the community of the teaching profession, social welfare and the Government. All of which have been outlined below.

For the Individual Teachers

- Male teachers should take advantage of their degree qualifications to take up more opportunities in teaching positions, especially in primary schools where there is a shortage of male teachers.
- Female teachers should aim to further their education by acquiring degrees to increase their chances of obtaining teaching positions in secondary schools.
- Teachers should pursue additional training to improve their skills and competencies to meet the demands of their profession.

For the Association of Teachers

- The Teachers Union of Malawi should continue advocating for the increment of teachers' salaries and allowances.
- The Teachers Union of Malawi should also address issues of corruption and work towards transparency and accountability in their duties.
- The Teachers Union of Malawi should advocate for improved working conditions, housing schemes, and health insurance for all teachers.

For the Community on the Teaching Profession

- Communities should support and encourage males to take up teaching as a profession, especially in primary schools.
- Communities should be aware of the challenges teachers face, such as lack of teaching facilities, and work towards addressing them.
- Communities should recognize and appreciate the important role teachers play in shaping the future of children.

Social Welfare Administration Recommendations

- The government of Malawi, through the Ministry of Education, should prioritise the education sector by providing enough funds to cater to the needs of teachers and students.
- The government should provide teachers with transparent and accountable payment processes to reduce delays and improve the trust between teachers and the Teachers Union of Malawi.

Social Change Recommendations

- The government of Malawi should work towards addressing gender discrimination in the education sector by encouraging more males to take up teaching roles in primary schools.
- The government should also work towards improving the working conditions and facilities in primary schools, including access to tap water and adequate furniture.
- The government should create opportunities for teachers to further their education, especially female teachers.

Social Work Research-based Recommendations

- Researchers should continue investigating the challenges and issues affecting the education sector in Malawi, particularly those affecting teachers.
- Researchers should also identify the most effective ways to support and improve the lives of teachers in Malawi.

Conclusion

The education sector plays a critical role in shaping the future of Malawi, and the teaching profession is at the heart of this process. To enhance the quality of education and improve the lives of teachers, it is essential to consider the recommendations for individual teachers, the Teachers Union of Malawi, the community, social welfare administration, social change, and social work research. Male teachers should leverage their degree qualifications to take up more opportunities in primary schools, while female teachers should pursue higher education to increase their chances of securing positions in secondary schools. Teachers should also seek additional training to enhance their competencies and meet the demands of their profession. The Teachers Union of Malawi should advocate for better salaries, housing schemes, and healthcare, as well as address corruption and promote transparency. The community should support male teachers in primary schools, recognize the vital role teachers play in shaping the future of children, and address the challenges teachers face. Finally, the government should prioritize funding for the education sector, improve working conditions, and address gender discrimination in the sector. Researchers should continue to investigate the issues affecting teachers and identify the most effective ways to support and improve their lives.

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