

The 2<sup>nd</sup> East African Conference of Business Management, Arusha- Tanzania

Hosted on 24<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2021

ISSN: 2714-1993

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*\*\*\*Original Research\*\*\**

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## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TRADE UNION IN HANDLING TEACHER'S GRIEVANCES IN PUBLIC SECTOR

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## **Abstract**

*This study assessed the effectiveness of trade union in handling teacher's grievances in public sector with reference to TTU in Arusha city council specifically examining mechanisms used by TTU to deal with teachers' grievances. The study was guided by conflict management theory to explain teachers' grievance using explanatory research design, mixed research approach, 650 target populations comprising TTU leaders and complaints with 95 sample size (10 TTU leaders and 85 teachers) and simple random sampling techniques. The study involved teachers with complains who filled semi-structured questionnaire and TTU leaders interviewed. Quantitative data collected through questionnaires were analysed using descriptive analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, Version 25.0) whereas qualitative data from the interview were thematically analyzed. The findings revealed that promotion and training and development were the leading factors towards teachers' grievances. Also the TTU leaders were using poor mechanism to solve teachers' grievances such as engagement and dialogue through which were perceived as political oriented not only. For that case TTU leaders failed to curb teachers' grievances which then are still exiting. The study concludes that the continued teachers' grievances result from ineffective of TTU leadership and government budget constraints. The study recommends government to increase the budget for promoting the legible teachers.*

**Key words:** Teachers, Teachers' grievances, Tanzania teacher union, and Public sector.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

Nowadays, grievances especially for teachers have been a growing challenge in public sector and bad enough it has not been attended well (Assewe, 2016). Issues of promotion and termination among other issues have been growing concerns of workers at workplaces; however, these problems have not been properly either handled or given priority in their management. Moreover, the handling of such issues underline in the functionalities of TTU which in nature have to solve the work problems and other related challenges in organizations (Mkuwa and Lelo, 2018). However; there has been dissatisfaction of the staff, communication becomes unmanageable, poor and may lead to a gravel misunderstanding, which is likely to result into loss of morale and productivity of staff, and the organization as a whole (Mwathe, Gachunga & Waiganjo, 2017).

In USA, Stephens, (2017) compared grievance and disciplinary hearings for those with union's representative with non-union representative hearings. They revealed that teachers have a series of grievances that they face at a working place; relevant authorities are not able to solve the issues. In China, labour relations and trade unions have been intensely transformed by a change in the economic system from a planned economy to a free economy or market-driven economy since the launching of a reform and opening-up policy in 1978, (Guo and Laroche, 2020). After some decades of industrial development, China is reputed to be the second-largest economy in the world, yet with a great number of increasing labour disputes contrary to the expectations of promoting workers' interest and economic development in harmonising labour relations (Friedman, 2014; Gunderson et al., 2016; Yao and Zhong, 2013).

In India, Sabiu, et al., (2016), observed that issues and complaints arise in a workplace even where there is a very strong and highly effective management and proficient workforce thus affecting employment relationship. This makes it necessary for a grievance procedure to be in place to address grievances. In Asia, Nurse and Kemp, et al., (2017), argue that the process of handling grievances has been progressively considered both as an institutional tool and a procedure of handling workplace misunderstandings that arise from the employment and labour contract signed between the employer and the teacher and its management has been considered part of trade union in connection with labour relations.

In Nigeria, Isa (2015) reported issues, conflicts, complaints and misunderstandings at workplace which were not handled properly and their effects to teachers' participation and moral thus affecting productivity in many organisations. In South Africa, Mzangwa (2012) provided that still there are cases of teacher's grievances and mismanagement in grievance handling; advocating that where there is absence of union representatives, teachers with grievances are likely to assume an adversarial position. In Kenya, there are still a number of grievances on issues such as promotion and various allowances that the public sector could not manage (Asewe, 2016).

In Tanzania, the situation is worst, whereby a grievance procedure is led by management of the organisation which acts as a judge in such situation; and a complainant is left with no justice because trade unions have no power in negotiations due to the government handling of teachers. As with a recently study, Yamlinga and Mboma (2019), depicted that Tanzanian TTU have not effectively addressed teachers' problems and grievances. The study also reported that trade unions fail on fulfilling their core objectives like struggling to protect benefits for their members. Effectively grievances management is a critical part for fostering productive teacher relations and managing the work place productively. Grievances are natural in any organization and grievance handling procedure is important in employment relationship.

Despite the existence of TTU in Tanzania aiming at protecting teachers' interests and reducing grievances, there are still claims that these myriads of TTU have had little impact in handling teachers' grievances resulting from denial of promotion, denial of teacher rights and unreasonable demotions. For many years, there have been many cases of unpaid leaves, presence of a huge number of teachers who have not been promoted for long time and denial of teachers' rights like sick/health allowances, (Kaminyoge, 2013). It is argued that in Arusha City Council, TTU has a number of registered grievances which have not attended up to the moment. Those grievances issues include; lack of staff promotion, demotion and study leave.

Different studies done by different scholar on the roles and significance of trade unions in solving teacher's problem but grievances relating to denial of teachers interest and rights still exists, it is therefore important for this study to expose the current trend of teachers' grievances and its status in the council.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

Mubezi, (2013), in his study found that majority of supervisors of teacher's union used integrating approach in trying to solve their employees' grievances. In this respect, the study found that supervisors

used collaborative approach in solving employees' grievances through exchanging ideas on how to solve the dissatisfaction, being open and willing to listen to problems faced by their employees and try to settle the differences. Another study by Mwanyenza, (2015) the study depicted that trade unions are very crucial organs in solving teachers' problems and creating conducive working environments which results to organisational better performance. According to the study, inefficient/ineffective TTU leads to underperformance of teachers. According to Conflict theory by Karl Marx, employers have the responsibilities to exercise fairly the distribution of resources to minimize the likelihood for the grievances to occur in the working environment while taking into account on their rights and interests.

Asewe, (2016), in his study he found that there is effective two way communication as far as grievances handling practices in the Kenyan banking sector is concerned given that grievances are tracked and the aggrieved is frequently updated, supervisors handling grievances have human relation skill, there is transparency and continuous flow of feedback throughout the grievance handling process and both aggrieved and the manager/supervisor engage in direct dialogue. Kubai, (2013) worked on the perceived effectiveness of teachers union in addressing teachers' grievances within the public sector in Swaziland among key issues addressed being promotion. The study revealed that Teachers' perceptions were fairly positive about the effectiveness of trade unions regarding grievance handling however, they are in a perception that employers offer little cooperation to trade unions; this greatly influences the teachers' perception of union effectiveness to a great degree. Consequently, teachers see that trade unions are somehow not effective concerning grievance and disciplinary handling. According to Conflict theory by Karl Marx, Those traditionally in charge CEOs, leaders, supervisors and managers often have the most power and access to resources. They control assets like wages and time off, which can encourage their teachers to work productively, depending on how the leaders disperse the resources. If the resources are dispersed on the bases of bias among teachers may result into conflict. It is the responsibilities of the employer to exercise fairly the distribution of resources.

#### Tanzania Teachers Union (TTU)

This is one of the major tools that specifically protect teachers' interests and rights for both primary and secondary schools in Tanzania. The union was registered in 1993 under the trade union ordinance Cap. 381 of 1959 and given its registration number TU.002. The union was formed for the purpose of advocating for and promoting the rights of teachers in Tanzania. It is a voice of teachers in Tanzania where it seeks, not only to inform teachers on their rights but also convey message to policy and decision makers, planners and the entire population on the need for environmental and institutional change towards teachers and inform on the necessity for mainstreaming the constituency's plight in the national agenda. It is responsible for addressing any workplace problem between teachers and the employer.

#### Teachers' grievance

It relates to any dissatisfaction, valid or not valid, specific or vague, coming out of any matter connected to the organization that an teacher considers it unfair to them (Ramlal, et al 2017). In any workplace employees need promotion to increase their morale and reduce likelihood of grievances resulting from it. Need hierarchy theory of motivation suggests that individuals attach very high importance to status and job responsibilities from promotion. When a career promotion occurs, usually not only a title changes, but often a salary bump and promoting someone means showing a welcome sign to further investment in a company, (Long, et el 2018). Once any grievance raise at workplace needs to be handled and managed

to reduce the negative effects for both organization and individual employee. As an employer, it is best to handle grievances in an amicable and supportive way to avoid unnecessary escalation and negative feelings. Grievance handling procedures also allow you to identify and address unacceptable or unlawful practices quickly. Muhere, (2017) Grievances handling may or may not be justified but needs to be tackled very carefully. A considerable amount of time must be invested by the employer and workers' representative to talk to the employees to understand their grievances. During the process of handling and managing grievances, the representative teachers' union may fully engage teachers in the whole process.

### 3.0 Methodology of the Study

This study was carried out at TTU in Arusha City Council in Tanzania involving teachers and leaders of TTU. The study adopted the explanatory research design since it is a scientific method that helped to provide answers to the questions of how variables are associated; while helping to obtain information regarding the current status of the research problem and describe what exists in respect to variables in the study, (Antwi and Hamza, 2015). This study applied mixed research approach in order to collect and analyse data for deeper understanding of the phenomenon as well as determining the relationship among the variables of the study. The target population was 650 and the sample size was 95 where as teachers were 85 given questionnaires and 10 TTU leaders who were interviewed. The researcher adopted simple random sampling technique to select teachers and TTU leaders to be involved in the study. They were analyzed using descriptive analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 whereas qualitative data from the interview were thematically analyzed. In presentation of findings, the researcher used tables.

### 4.0 Results and Discussion

The researcher examined the mechanisms used by TTU to deal with teachers' grievances. Respondents were to respond by ticking most appropriate option on two items in the questionnaire under this section with mean of 3.87 and standard deviation of 1.280 based on teacher's promotion and standard deviation 1.199 for leave payment. The scale of mean interpretation was based on the mean values, mean score of 1 to 1.8 represent Strongly Disagree, 1.81 to 2.60 represent disagree, 2.61 to 3.40 represent undecided, 3.41 to 4.20 represent agree and 4.21 to 5.00 represent strongly agree.

**Table 1. The mechanisms used by TTU Leaders**

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Interpretation
Increase promotion	85	3.87	1.280	Agree
Payment of leave on time	85	3.78	1.199	Agree

**Source: Field Data (2021)**

The results from the findings below shows that all respondents agreed that the increase in promotion, payment of leave on time, training and development for teachers, communicating and sharing information, dialogue and engagement are mechanisms have been used by TTU to deal with teachers' grievances. The study examined the increase in promotion, and payment of leave on time mechanisms used by TTU to deal with teachers' grievances.

**Table 2. The mechanisms used by TTU Leaders**

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Interpretation
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Increase promotion	85	3.87	1.280	Agree
Payment of leave on time	85	3.78	1.199	Agree

**Source: Field Data (2021)**

The findings in the table below shows that TTU have been engaging in addressing teachers' grievances by applying promotion by Mean 3.87 and payment of leave on time by Mean 3.78 which signify that they have all agreed. From this finding all respondents agreed that both increase promotion, and payment of leave on time have been adopted to handle teachers' grievances though considered ineffective in addressing the given problems among teachers. The findings relates to a study by Kubai, (2013) worked on the perceived effectiveness of teachers union in addressing teachers' grievances within the public sector in Swaziland among key issues addressed being promotion. The study revealed that Teachers' perceptions were fairly positive about the effectiveness of trade unions regarding grievance handling through promotion however; they are in a perception that employers offer little cooperation to trade unions. Consequently, teachers see that trade unions are somehow not effective concerning grievance and disciplinary handling.

The study examined training and development for teachers and communicating and sharing information mechanisms used by TTU to deal with teachers' grievances.

**Table 3. The mechanisms used by TTU Leaders**

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Interpretation
Training and development for teachers	85	3.75	1.204	Agree
Communicating and sharing information	85	4.04	1.159	Agree

**Source: Field Data (2021)**

The findings in the table below shows that TTU have been engaging in addressing teachers' grievances by using training and development by Mean 3.75, Std. Dev 1.204 and communicating and sharing information by Mean 4.04, Std. Dev 1.159. From this finding all respondents agreed that both training and development for teachers and communicating and sharing information but communicating and sharing information seem to be the most favorable and inappropriate mechanism used by TTU to handle teachers' grievances which in turn have are politically oriented solutions hence failure to successfully addressing teachers' grievances in the area. The findings relates with "Grievances raised by teachers operating under a labor union can be handled by enhanced cooperation and communication between unions, workers and management. And added that most labor unions have well-structured grievance resolution mechanisms to help mitigate and resolve disputes", (Hagedorn, et al., 2016). Asewe, (2016), in his study he found that there is effective two way communication as far as grievances handling practices in the Kenyan banking sector is concerned given that grievances are tracked and aggrieved. Communication has been used in easing tension between employees in a workplace and improves workplace relationship.

The study examined dialogue and engagement and escalation of grievance allegations mechanisms used by TTU to deal with teachers' grievances.

**Table 3. The mechanisms used by TTU Leaders**

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Interpretation
Dialogue and Engagement	85	4.04	1.159	Agree
Escalation of Grievance Allegations	85	3.80	1.132	Agree

**Source: Field Data (2021)**

The findings in the table below shows that TTU have been engaging in addressing teachers’ grievances by using training and development by Mean 4.04, Std. Dev 1.159 and communicating and sharing information by Mean 3.80, Std. Dev 1.132. From this findings all respondents agreed that both dialogue and engagement and escalation of grievance allegations but dialogue and engagement seem to be the most favorable mechanism used by TTU to handle teachers’ grievances in Arusha city council which in turn have are politically oriented solutions hence failure to successfully addressing teachers’ grievances in the area, since it have been engaging effectively in addressing teachers grievances using inappropriate mechanism that why teachers’ grievances on promotion and training and development still exists.

Furthermore, during the interview 10 TTU leaders were also asked to provide their opinion on the mechanisms adopted by TTU in addressing teacher’s grievances. 07 out of 10 of respondents said that the in many aspects they adopt dialogue engagement mechanisms to solve teachers’ problems. 03 out of 10 of the respondents said that TTU in many cases adopts communication and sharing of information mechanisms to solve teachers’ problems. The results above depict that even TTU leaders themselves have differed perception on the mechanisms adopted to address teachers’ grievances. This indicates that TTU have been using dialogue and engagement as their major mechanism for addressing teachers’ grievance which still considered as politically oriented solution.

**5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

TTU have failed to solve teachers’ grievances due to various reasons such as political interference and reluctant of top management which is always interfering the internal matter of the unions and this has created the rule of divide and rule. Moreover, the study concluded that increase promotion, payment of leave on time, training and development for teachers, communicating and sharing information, effective linkage between the unions needs to be minimized teachers’ grievances. TTU leaders need to adopt proper means of handling teachers’ grievances, since the continued teachers’ grievances result from ineffective of TTU leadership not been successful to curb teachers’ grievances. TTU leaders should be trained on how to deploy proper strategies of managing teachers’ grievances. Also, the study recommends for designing the new teachers’ guidelines to promote teachers’ affairs separate from other employee cadre. TTU leaders can be empowered with the enforcement mechanisms for them to negotiate freely without fear of harm or any attack from either of the parties. They also need to be autonomous in the decisions making on behalf of the represented population and in performing their duties freely without interruptions and hence they will be capable of meeting their members’ needs

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