



Contribution of Awareness Creation in the Promotion of Teachers' Work Environment in Public Primary Schools in Rongo Sub-County, Migori County, Kenya

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Abstract

The physical, social, and cultural aspects of the setting in which services are provided make up the work environment. It is a crucial factor in determining how well employees perform in any given firm. The mission of the legally recognized Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) is to defend the rights of primary school teachers. In carrying out its duties, it, among other things, offers welfare services, raises awareness, represents teachers' concerns, and takes part in conflict resolution. Even with this important function, there isn't much actual data to support the claim that KNUT participation in these events improves the working environment for teachers. The study's goal was to determine how KNUT engagement in raising awareness helped to improve the working conditions for teachers in public primary schools in Rongo Sub County. The Theory of Work Adjustment served as the study's guidance. Research designs that used correlation and descriptive surveys were used. 756 teachers, 69 head teachers, 5 CSOs, and 11 members of the KNUT Branch Executive Committee made up the research population. 254 teachers were chosen by simple random sample, while 5 head teachers, 5 CSOs, and 11 members of the KNUT branch executive committee were chosen via selective sampling. Supervisors' expert opinions were used to assess the validity of the instruments, and the test-retest approach was used to determine reliability. According to the study, KNUT participation in awareness-raising through seminars and induction greatly ($F(5,239) = 48.736, P < .05$) fosters a pleasant work environment in public elementary schools. The study concluded that KNUT's collaborative engagement in creating awareness on professional training opportunities, clarifying code of ethics and code of conduct to members, and interpreting new policy reforms in education, inspire a sense of community and professional commitment in the work environment; necessary for integration and fulfillment of teachers, learners and other stakeholders needs. The findings from this study may enhance future collaboration between Ministry of Education, Head teachers, Teachers Service Commission, and KNUT in reviewing policies to promote teachers' work environment.

Keywords: *Contribution, Awareness Creation, Promotion, Teachers' Work Environment, Public Primary Schools Rongo Sub County, Migori County, Kenya*

INTRODUCTION

Work environment comprise of physical, social and cultural features and conditions where services are offered (Makhbul, 2013). An example is a school environment. It has significant relationship with workers' satisfaction and performance. It affects how employees feel, their well-being, work-efficiency, workplace relationships, health, collaboration, and overall growth and development trajectory (Makhbul, 2013). Aspects of workplace environment include physical, social and cultural environments. Physical environment entails location, size, and layout of the workplace and affect how employees interact, perform tasks and are



led (Makhbul, 2013). It affects human relationships and interpersonal interactions directly, hence influencing productivity and satisfaction levels of employees. Studies on physical work environment have shown that workers are satisfied with specific work-place features; lighting, ergonomic furniture, ventilation rates, access to natural light and acoustic environment (Humphries, 2005).

According to Ushakov and Shatila (2021), workplace culture is the mode of operation in a work environment and addresses how employees are supposed to operate, ranging from communication, leadership, values, and goals. Culture as an element of workplace environment, determines how certain things are done within a given workplace. On the other hand, working conditions consists of terms under which employees are hired and made to work (Makhbul, Idrus & Rani, 2007). These include rate of remuneration, contractual terms, and working hours. They also cover recreational activities, employee development strategies, and initiatives that foster a good working environment.

A good workplace environment encourages workers to have positive mind-set, which in turn, triggers the need to grow career wise. In such an environment, workers are always focused on developing their skills and improving to attain a better competitive edge. Employees thus, are always positive about utilizing tools like mentorship and development seminars to ensure that they become better at what they do. This prepares them for more challenging tasks and widens their opportunities for professional growth (Rodríguez, 2022). This ensures that employees are happy at all times and feel motivated to show up to work and do more to achieve their targets, hence, boosting productivity. In such an environment, workers can freely make friends, build professional relationships, support each other better and collaborate to achieve organizational goals with their colleagues and employers which foster trust (Hussin & Paino, 2012). Collaboration between employees and their employers is guaranteed when there is good work environment.

As revealed by Makhbul (2013), there is a significant relationship between workplace ergonomics and health complaints from employees. In which case, lower emotional and physical health negatively impact on employee and organizational performance. Further, Akiyele (2010) and Hussin and Paino (2012), stated that a good work environment with a positive work atmosphere promotes professional growth and development of employees while improving their attitude and mind-set. Highly performing workplaces have continuous training and skill upgrading, stimulates worker creativity and worker participation, job security, merit-based motivation, worker management partnership and supportive work environment.

Hodder and Edwards (2015), and Meardi (2011) describes a trade union as a member-based association of same skilled occupation who act together to secure for all members' favourable wages, hours, and job security, better socio-political status of members, and better and safe working conditions. Additionally, trade unions ensure that legal rights of its members are enforced alongside offering personal legal and financial services through a collective bargaining strategy. They offer a platform where employers or employees can have a dialogue and communicate on issues facing the workforce and help employers and employees to identify and solve problems amicably before they escalate to crises (Mader, 2012; Mannrich 2022)



Therefore, workers represented by trade unions do not need to fear reprisal when raising concerns about non-compliance with labour standards because they feel empowered and protected against poor labour standards.

The history of Trade Unions globally is associated to bad working conditions. In the United States of America (USA), labour unions were established to aid workers in identifying, airing and solving work related grievances such as low wages and salaries, unsafe working conditions, and long hours. These issues set the stage for the formation of labour unions, as well as shaping and implementing education policies across the globe (Han, 2012; Mader, 2012). In India, a study by Gupta (2013) noted that trade unions had been successful in opposing unfavorable educational reforms, advocated for improvement of deplorable infrastructure in Indian schools and lobbied to almost double salaries of primary teachers over the last decade.

Willis and Ingle (2015), however, noted that adverse impact of teacher's strikes in Africa have rippled through the education sector thereby disrupting teaching programs and culminating to numerous school closures. Teacher trade unionism in Africa can be traced to the 18th century when it was established in 1879 in South Africa. The Native Education Association became the first black teachers union. It dealt with educational, social and political issues focusing on the discriminatory nature of salaries paid to white teachers as opposed to those of their black counterparts who held same positions (Heystek & Lethoko cited in De Wet, 2014).

In Lusaka, Zambia, a study by Kakunta (2020) on the role of trade unions in promoting teachers' welfare and sustained livelihoods, found that trade unions were instrumental in providing legal representation and collective bargaining. It was further noted that it succeeded in conducting workers' education, increasing cooperation and wellbeing, establishing dialogue between workers and employer, advocating for career progression, safeguarding interests of workers and provision of labour welfare.

In Tanzania, Shaibu (2017) found that good working conditions and good relation between leaders of trade unions and employees positively influenced performance of workers, hence creating a good work environment. However, Kitundu (2015) noted that unions in Tanzania face obstacles while seeking working conditions of employees. Akinyele (2010) and Shaibu (2017) posit that there is a relationship between work environment and productivity. However, the studies do not address the aspect of trade unions' involvement in the promotion of work place environment in schools.

In Kenya, teacher trade unions represent different categories of teachers and such include; University Academic Staff Union (UASU), Kenya Union of Post Primary Education Teachers (KUPPET), Kenya Union of Special Needs Education Teachers (KUSNET) and KNUT. KNUT was registered in 1957 under trade union Act Cap 233 of the laws of Kenya to represent primary school teachers. The formation of KNUT was compelled by; blatant racial discrimination in housing and duty allocation, in salary payment between Kenyan and European teachers teaching at the same level, harassment by inspectors and denial of certain basic rights like pension, leave, medical allowances. It was aimed at uniting teachers, fighting for improved and unified terms and conditions of service, promoting programmes aimed at improving teachers' welfare and socio-economic status, contributing to professional work in teaching and development of education services (KNUT, 2022).



In undertaking its responsibility, KNUT has participated in education reforms, advocated for better health insurance schemes, employment of more teachers to reduce workload and has constantly agitated for better terms and conditions of service for teachers. It has also launched several socioeconomic programs in its 110 branches across the nation and has encouraged capital formation by supporting small saving schemes to economically uplift its members through Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies and cooperatives (2022).

Mulima (2017) while conducting a study of Trade Unions activities on improving teachers' welfare in Kakamega County, Kenya; established that KNUT is involved in creation of members' awareness on human rights, International Labour Laws and encourages capital formation by supporting small saving schemes that empowers them and improves their living standards. The study found that KNUT has established education schemes that provide affordable loans to members and in cases of disputes KNUT has participated as an advocate to ensure the teacher is not sacked without a just cause. While this study focused on the effect of KNUT activities on improving teachers' welfare in Kakamega County, the current study sought to investigate the contribution of KNUT involvement in promotion of teachers' work environment in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-County, Migori County, Kenya. Also, Kajo (2021) observed that there was significant influence of psychological contract on employee commitment in a good work environment. This is because effective workplace environment results in achievement of organizational expectations.

In Migori County, statistics from Rongo Sub County KNUT office indicated that between the year 2017 and 2021, that the teachers Union organized a total of 157 awareness creation campaigns. Despite this significant involvement in teachers' activities, little is known about how this involvement contributes to promotion of teachers work environment in public primary schools in Rongo Sub County. The study, therefore, envisaged establishing the contribution of KNUT's involvement in promotion of teachers work environment in public primary schools in Rongo Sub County, Migori County, Kenya.

Research Objective

The objective of the study was to establish the contribution of KNUT awareness creation in the promotion of work environment in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-County, Migori County, Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey and correlational research designs were employed. The study population included 756 teachers, 69 Head teachers, 5 Curriculum Support Officers and 11 KNUT Branch Executive Committee (BEC) members. Krejcie and Morgan table (1970) was used to determine the sample size of 254 teachers from the population of teachers. Simple random sampling technique guided by random number table was employed to select 254 teachers to ensure the sample was representative. Conversely, data saturation technique was adopted to determine the sample size for interview respondents and purposive sampling used to select 5 Head teachers, 3 Curriculum Support Officers and 11 KNUT Branch Executive Committee members. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) define data saturation in broader context as the point in data collection when no additional issues or insights are identified and data begin to repeat so that further data collection is redundant, thus signifying that an adequate data sample size is reached. Questionnaire consisting of close ended question items on a five point rating scale

was used to collect data from teachers, whereas interviews were used to collect qualitative data from Head teachers and Curriculum Support Officers, and Focus Group Discussion to collect data from KNUT Branch Executive Committee members. Face and content validity of the research instruments was ascertained based on judgement of supervisors and experts in the Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Rongo University. However, reliability of the questionnaire was determined using test retest method and computed based on data collected from a pilot study; a Pearson's Moment Correlation coefficient of 0.74 was obtained and considered sufficiently reliable (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics in form of frequency counts, percentages and standard deviation, and inferential statistics in form of multiple linear regression analysis. On the other hand, qualitative data was analyzed thematically using deductive approach to corroborate the quantitative findings. Thereafter, data was summarized and presented in tables and narratives form. Relevant ethical considerations were observed; confidentiality, anonymity, and respect to respondent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Work Environment in Public Primary Schools in Rongo Sub- County

In order to establish the contribution of KNUT's involvement in the promotion of work environment in public primary schools, an analysis of aspects of work environment was first carried out and result on the status of work environment presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Status of Work Environment

Aspects of work environment	VL	L	M	H	VH	Mean	SD
Enhances open communication	6 (2.4)	23 (9.4)	89 (36.3)	86 (35.1)	41 (16.7)	3.54	.96
Creates warm working relationship (collegial)	3 (1.2)	18 (7.3)	76 (31.0)	102 (41.6)	46 (18.8)	3.69	.91
Has clearly defined goals	2 (0.8)	18 (7.3)	66 (26.9)	109 (44.5)	50 (20.4)	3.76	.89
Encouraging respect for individual values	1 (0.4)	20 (8.2)	44 (18.0)	121 (49.4)	59 (24.1)	3.89	.80
Facilitates employee professional development	2 (0.8)	41 (16.7)	76 (31.0)	73 (29.8)	53 (21.6)	3.55	1.03
Advocating for merit based motivation	12 (4.9)	53 (21.6)	82 (33.5)	71 (29.0)	27 (11.0)	3.20	1.05
Encourages members' participation in decision making processes	12 (4.9)	31 (12.7)	77 (31.4)	68 (27.8)	57 (23.3)	3.52	1.13
Facilitates school - community relations	5 (2.0)	45 (18.4)	65 (26.5)	81 (33.1)	49 (20.0)	3.51	1.07

Interpretation Key:

1.00 – 1.44 = Very Low: 1.45 – 2.44 = Low: 2.45 – 3.44 = Moderate: 3.45 – 4.44 = High: 4.45 – 5.00 = Very High

* Percentage rounded to 1 decimal place in parenthesis () SD = Standard Deviation



From Table 1, it can be noted that the work environment enhance open communication ($M=3.54$, $SD=.96$), creates warm working relationship ($M=3.69$, $SD=.91$), clearly defines goals ($M=3.76$, $SD=.89$), encourages respect for individual values ($M=3.89$, $SD=.80$), facilitates teachers' professional development ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.03$), encourages teachers' participation in decision making processes ($M=3.52$, $SD=1.13$), facilitates school-community relationship ($M=3.51$, $SD=.79$), and advocates merit based motivation ($M= 3.20$, $SD=1.05$). The result suggests positive work environment that foster collegiality, open communication, collaboration, accountability, and inculcates respect for professional values.

A similar theme emerged, in which one of the focus group participants highlighted the feeling of a pleasant work environment by saying that:

“The work environment in our public primary schools, especially in Rongo Sub-county, has provided a sense of purpose and psychological safety to teachers. This we attribute to KNUT's sensitization on TSC code of ethics and code of conduct, and welfare programmes. We remember that when goals are clear and everyone knows what is expected from them, it becomes easier to focus our effort and as a result unnecessary work is eliminated.” (KNUT-BEC member, 04)

The passage highlights the good working conditions seen in Kenya's public elementary schools in Rongo Sub-county, Migori County. The results are in line with Rodriguez's (2022) observation that a positive work environment broadens prospects for career advancement and readies employees for increasingly difficult jobs. This meant that teachers would develop a feeling of community and psychological safety as a result of their pleasant work environment, which would support their professional dedication. Thus, maintaining such an environment would be crucial for integrating students and instructors and meeting their requirements.

Additionally, instructors were asked to appraise the level of KNUT awareness creation in the promotion of work environment based on their knowledge and experience in a questionnaire. The research concentrated on workshops conducted through education days and yearly general meetings, as well as on induction programs, professional training possibilities, educational changes, and the TSC code of ethics and behavior. Table 2 presents the results of a descriptive analysis of the replies.

Table 2: Status of Awareness Creation in Promotion of Work Environment

Aspects of Awareness Creation	VL	L	M	H	VH	Mean	SD
Induction programs	9 (3.7)	47 (19.2)	95 (38.8)	67 (27.3)	27 (11.0)	3.23	1.00
Professional training opportunities	11 (4.5)	54 (22.0)	93 (38.0)	71 (29.0)	16 (6.5)	3.11	.98
Educational reforms	15 (6.1)	20 (8.2)	108 (44.1)	69 (28.2)	33 (13.5)	3.35	1.02



Aspects of Awareness Creation	VL	L	M	H	VH	Mean	SD
Teachers Service Commission Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct	4 (1.6)	30 (12.2)	65 (26.5)	104 (42.4)	42 (17.1)	3.61	.96
Workshops through Education days and AGM	17 (6.9)	28 (11.4)	67 (27.3)	80 (32.7)	53 (21.6)	3.51	1.16

Interpretation Key:

1.00 – 1.44 = Very Low: 1.45 – 2.44 = Low: 2.45 – 3.44 = Moderate: 3.45 – 4.44 = High: 4.45 – 5.00 = Very High

* Percentage rounded to 1 decimal place in parenthesis () SD = Standard Deviation

Table 1 indicates that majority of the teachers considered awareness creation in induction programs (M=3.23, SD=1.00), professional training (M=3.11, SD=.98), and education reforms (M=3.35, SD=1.02) to have promoted moderate work environment while awareness creation on code of ethics and code of conduct (M=3.61, SD=.96), and workshops through education days and annual general meetings (M=3.51, SD=1.16) highly promoted work environment. This indicates that KNUT is moderately involved in awareness creation on induction programs, professional development training, and educational reforms in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county, Migori County, Kenya.

Focus group discussion finding revealed that KNUT uses professional development training organized by the employer to reinforce and reiterate on the demands of teaching as a profession. A participant had this to say:

“As a trade union and professional body we have always used meetings organized by the employer to emphasize on professional knowledge and skills. This has enabled teachers to remain within teaching scope and deliver quality professional service that meet the needs of learners. Also, it has enabled teachers to acquire expertise required to enhance teaching practice.” (KNUT-BEC member, 02)

Similarly, interview result of head teachers noted that KNUT utilizes fora organized by Teachers Service Commission to induct teachers on interpretation of educational reforms and policy. A head teacher said:

“Last month newly employed teachers were invited by the sub county education director to be inducted on work ethics and code of regulations. This prepares teachers to take precaution as they perform their professional duties and responsibilities. Without induction, teachers out of ignorance may fall victims by failing to abide to the code of ethics and code of conduct.” (Head teacher, 006)

The sentiments demonstrate that there is need for KNUT as a union in collaboration with the government to have more interactive sessions with teachers to help make them well informed and updated with the new trends in education and to enable them adapt to the work environment in public primary schools. The results are consistent with those of Tinus and



Iramba (2022), who suggested that trade unions and governments work together to promote the professional development of teachers and create a special strategic plan that outlines all the procedures required for the training, workshops, and seminars to be effective and beneficial for educators. The TSC code of ethics and behavior, professional training opportunities, educational reforms, induction programs, seminars through education days and yearly general meetings are some of the elements of creating awareness.

To estimate the contribution of KNUT's awareness creation in the promotion of work environment, regression analysis was computed and the results were as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Influence of Awareness Creation in the Promotion of Work Environment

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.711 ^a	.505	.494	.69720	.505	48.736	5	239	.000

Table 3 shows that initiatives aimed at raising awareness significantly aided in the advancement of the workplace environment. Additionally, as indicated by the Adjusted R Square coefficient of .494, it is evident that KNUT engagement in awareness creation explained 49.4% of the variation in the promotion of work environment. This indicated that 49.4% of the variance in the promotion of the work environment was explained by engagement in awareness creation, whereas 50.6% was attributable to variables beyond the scope of this study.

An analysis of variance was performed to ascertain if awareness creation considerably aided in the promotion of the work environment. The findings are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance: Kenya National Union of Teacher's Awareness Creation and Promotion of Work Environment

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	118.449	5	23.690	48.736	.000 ^a
	Residual	116.174	239	.486		
	Total	234.623	244			

From Table 4 it can be noted that programs on awareness creation significantly contributes in promotion of work environment ($F(5,239) = 48.736, p < .05$). This suggests that at least one aspect of KNUT's involvement in awareness creation significantly contribute in the promotion of teachers' work environment. The aspects of awareness creation include; induction programs, professional training opportunities, educational reforms, Teachers Service Commission code of ethics and code of conduct, and on workshops through education days and annual general meetings.

In order to ascertain the precise role that awareness creation plays in enhancing the work environment in public elementary schools, a linear regression analysis was conducted, with the results displayed in Table 5.

**Table 5: Contribution of Awareness Creation in the Promotion of Work Environment**

Aspects of Awareness creation	Unstandardized		Standardize	<i>t</i>	Sig.
	Coefficients		d		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.280	.156		8.194	.000
Induction programs	.243	.049	.314	4.911	.000
Professional development training	-.018	.052	-.022	-.344	.731
Educational reforms	.093	.052	.120	1.766	.079
Teachers Service Commission Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct	.165	.049	.205	3.345	.001
Workshops through Education days and Annual General Meeting	.186	.039	.272	4.767	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Work environment

The result in Table 5 shows that induction programs had the highest statistical significant contribution ($B=.243$, $t=4.91$, $p<.05$) in the promotion of work environment, followed by workshops programs through education days and annual general meetings ($B=.186$, $t=4.77$, $p<.05$), and lastly, TSC code of ethics and code of conduct ($B=.165$, $t=3.35$, $p<.05$) whereas awareness creation in professional development training ($B= -.018$, $t= -.344$, $p>.05$) and educational reforms ($B=.093$, $t=1.766$, $p>.05$) had no statistical significant contribution. This indicates that there is sufficient statistical evidence to suggest that KNUT's awareness creation in induction programs and workshops on TSC code of ethics and code of conduct significantly contribute in promotion of work environment whereas awareness creation in professional development training and educational reforms did not significantly contribute in promotion of work environment. This finding is partially consistent with Murrilo (2022) finding that teachers' trade union conducted capacity building in form of workshops and seminars to keep them abreast with information that builds their skills. This makes teachers more effective in classroom delivery and enable them conform to the employer's requirements.

The finding of focus group discussion corroborates the finding. A discussant agreed that induction of new members of KNUT on code of ethics and code of conduct prevent teachers from engaging in undesirable behavior. The discussant said;

"KNUT equips teachers educationally and professionally. This enriches teachers' positive behavior change. Once readily informed, reduces absenteeism, misconduct and infamous conduct. Induction is important since it realigns the expectation of teachers to reality." (KNUT-BEC member, 04)

In addition, a participant in an interview explained that;

"KNUT as a union has always played a crucial role in interpretation of new reforms, such as TPD."

DISCUSSIONS



From the findings, it is clear that KNUT's involvement in interpretation of new reforms in education plays a significant role in promotion of positive work environment in public primary schools. Similarly, the findings concur with the theory of work adjustment in that KNUT plays pivotal role in creating an adjusted work environment in public primary schools through interpretation of new policy reforms, awareness creation on professional training opportunities, and clarification of code of ethics and code of conduct. Ballou (2011) stated that teachers' trade unions have been increasingly involved in socioeconomic matters. It has become paramount for the same trade unions to continually expand their awareness creation for their members and leaders through training activities. The finding concur with Tinus and Iramba (2022) recommendation that trade unions should collaborate to advance teachers' professional development and produce unique strategic plan that details all necessary steps for the programs to be successful and useful to teachers. The programs including trainings, workshops and seminars should be designed to promote teachers' professional development.

CONCLUSION

The results indicates that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that KNUT's involvement in awareness creation through induction, workshops, and Teachers code of ethics and code of conduct contribute in promotion of work environment in public primary schools. This makes teachers more effective in classroom delivery and enable them conform to the employer's requirements. Therefore, the study concluded that trade unions collaborative engagement in creating awareness on professional training opportunities, clarifying code of ethics and code of conduct, and interpreting new reforms in education, inspires a positive sense of community, professional commitment, and promotes mental health necessary for integration and fulfillment of teachers, learners and other stakeholders needs.

RECOMMENDATION

The gains made by involvement in awareness creation should be sustained and improved on by the Teachers Service Commission and Kenya National Union of Teachers with more emphasis made on professional development training so as to contribute more significantly to the promotion of positive work environment in public primary schools in Kenya.

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