

Importance of Employee Welfare and Performance: The Case of the UASU at Egerton University, Kenya

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Abstract

Trade unions play a key role in enhancing employee welfare and performance in organizations. In Kenya, the Universities' Academic Staff Union (UASU) is a trade union for academic staff in all the public universities, with a Chapter in every university and whose objects include ensuring better welfare for its members. Through a cross-sectional survey, this study examined the contribution of the UASU to employee welfare and the extent of its effects on employee performance. The study was undertaken at UASU Egerton University Chapter, Njoro, Kenya. A representative group of 82 respondents was obtained by simple random sampling from a sample frame of the 435 general members of the UASU. The respondents provided information regarding the contribution of the activities of the UASU to employee welfare and their influence on employee performance. Results indicated that the UASU had different but positive impacts on the variables affecting employee welfare and, consequently, employee performance. In descending order of importance, maternity, pension, housing and medical schemes were some of the benefits from the activities of the UASU. However, availability of recreational facilities received least attention from the UASU. The UASU should, therefore, be maintained and strengthened to further improve on quality delivery of products and services in the University by its members.

Keywords: Employee welfare; Employee performance; UASU; Egerton University, Kenya

1. Introduction

Trade unions play a key role in enhancing employee welfare and performance in organizations. In Kenya, the Universities' Academic Staff Union (UASU) is a trade union for academic staff in all the public universities, with a Chapter in every university (UASU Constitution 1993). Formed in 1993, the Union functions to, *inter alia*, ensure better welfare, terms and conditions of service and a favourable working environment for its members, and protect its members from harassment and firing by the employers (UASU Constitution 2006). These objects are crucial to assure and enhance quality of higher education in the country. For instance, motivation and incentives in a supportive working environment lead to responsibility, ownership, creativity and innovation (Lagat 2012). Nonetheless, the UASU faces challenges in the process of its activities, which include how to ensure and sustain employee welfare and performance. This study examined the contribution of the UASU to employee welfare and the extent of its effects on employee performance at Egerton University in Kenya.

2. Research Methodology

A cross-sectional survey was undertaken at Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya in which primary data was collected from a sample frame of the 435 general UASU members using sets of pre-tested structured and unstructured questionnaires. A representative group was obtained by simple random sampling using the formula of Israel (1992) as shown in the equation below,

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where n is the optimum sample size, N the number of registered UASU members and e the probability of error (i.e., the desired precision, e.g., 0.1 for 90% confidence level).

Records and documents (e.g., collective bargaining agreements, the UASU Constitutions, publications and reports) from the Union's Offices formed the source of secondary data. Both quantitative and qualitative data

were collected. The respondents provided information on employee welfare and its influence on employee performance. General statistics were used to describe the results. Non-parametric analyses were done using Friedman ranking test to examine if there were differences on the impact of the activities of the UASU on various aspects explaining employee welfare. Further, correlation analyses were done to determine the effect of improved employee welfare on their performance. The results were then presented in tabular summaries.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 General Characteristics of the UASU Members

Table 1 presents the general characteristics of the members of the UASU at Egerton University Chapter. Males (72%) dominated the UASU membership. It was apparent that, compared to males, women were less attached to the labour market and tended to accumulate less specific human capital. Besides, trade union services have traditionally been directed to the needs of male members. Women were, therefore, less likely to be union members. This observation concurs with that of Tadić (2005) in Croatia, who found a larger proportion of employees that possessed masters or doctorate qualifications being male. Jack (2004) found professional women being more committed to their careers than their male counterparts while Akinyemi (2001) observed no significant relationship between gender and career commitment.

Married respondents were the majority (89%) of the UASU members followed by the singles (7.3%), and least were the widowed (1.2%). The married members were responsible not only for themselves but also for their families, a situation that would increase the propensity to be union members, especially when one had children or when being the only bread earner for the family. The findings agree with those of Popoola & Oluwole (2007) that majority of the personnel in records management in the registries of Osun State Civil Service in Nigeria were married.

The age category of 46-55 years was the majority (50%) of the membership to the UASU followed by the age bracket 36-45 (29.3%) then 56-65 (15.9%) (Table 1). It was, therefore, apparent that majority of the UASU members were relatively old. This can be attributed to the fact that many organizations have reduced investment in younger employees, probably due to lack of funds and the longer time the existing employees took to retire from the service. However, Robert (2005) noted that in any organisation older workers were more likely to be committed to their careers than younger employees. Other studies have shown that younger employees were more willing and eager to learn, develop themselves, and had more opportunities for career development than older employees (e.g., Meyer *et al.* 1993).

Table 8. General characteristics of the members of the UASU at Egerton University

Variable	Aspect	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	59	72
	Female	23	28
	Total	82	100
Marital status of respondent	Single	6	7.3
	Married	73	89
	Widowed	1	1.2
	No response	2	2.4
	Total	82	100
Age of respondent (years)	≤ 30	0	0
	31-35	4	4.9
	36-45	24	29.3
	46-55	41	50
	56-65	13	15.9
	Total	82	100

3.2 Contribution of the Activities of the UASU on Employee Welfare at Egerton University

Improved welfare motivates employees to work hard. This increases their performance and the attainment of organization's goals. Studies have found that unionized employees had superior performance due to improved welfare negotiated by their unions (e.g., Tachibanaki & Noda 2000). Table 2 depicts the contribution of the

activities of the UASU on employee welfare and performance at Egerton University. The activities of the UASU contributed positively to the employees' maternity scheme. This was confirmed by, correspondingly, 38% and 35% of the respondents who believed that the UASU contributed moderately or to a large extent to the scheme. Respectively, only 4% and 7% of the respondents confirmed that the activities of the UASU had no or had a small contribution. Staff housing scheme was also positively affected by the activities of the UASU. Correspondingly, 43% and 26% of the respondents agreed that the effect of the activities of the UASU on the staff housing scheme was moderate to large. Conversely, only 10% and 9% of the respondents believed the activities of the UASU had no or had a small effect on the staff housing scheme, respectively.

Table 2. Contribution of the activities of the UASU on employee welfare at Egerton University

Variable	Frequency (<i>f</i>)/ percentage (%)	Extent of the contribution of the UASU							
		None	Small	Moderate	Large	Very large	Not negotiated	Unsure	Total
Employee maternity scheme	<i>f</i>	3	6	31	29	8	1	4	82
	%	4	7	38	35	10	1	5	100
Staff housing scheme	<i>f</i>	8	7	35	21	8	1	2	82
	%	10	9	43	26	10	1	2	100
Employee medical scheme	<i>f</i>	3	16	29	27	4	1	2	82
	%	4	20	35	33	5	1	2	100
Employee pension scheme	<i>f</i>	4	8	33	27	9	1	0	82
	%	5	10	40	33	11	1	0	100
Staff transport arrangement	<i>f</i>	6	23	29	19	4	1	0	82
	%	7	28	35	23	5	1	0	100
Availability of recreational facilities	<i>f</i>	18	17	30	14	2	1	0	82
	%	22	21	37	17	2	1	0	100

The activities of the UASU positively affected the medical scheme of the members. Correspondingly, about 35% and 33% of the respondents agreed that the activities of the UASU had a moderate and large effect on the medical scheme. Respectively, only 4% and 20% of the respondents believed that the activities of the UASU had no or had a small effect on the staff medical scheme (Table 2). These findings agree with those of Weil (2003) that unions played an important role in the establishment of labour laws and regulations that covered aspects like health and leave for care of new-borns and sick family members. The pension scheme was also positively affected by the activities of the UASU. The impact of the activities of the UASU on the pension scheme was reported to be moderate (40%) or large (33%). About 5% of the respondents believed that the activities of the UASU had no impact on the pension scheme while 10% believed the impact was small (Table 2). Similar observations were made by Forth & Millward (2000) that employee unions improved pension schemes, and that unionisation was positively linked to the provision of occupational pensions and of sick pay above the statutory level.

On the impact of the activities of the UASU on transport arrangements of members, correspondingly, 35% and 23% of the respondents agreed that it was moderate or large. However, a sizeable number of the respondents (28%) confirmed there was little impact of the activities of the UASU on transport arrangements of the members (Table 2). Majority of the respondents (37%) believed that the UASU contributed moderately to the availability of recreational facilities. Those who felt no impact of the activities of the UASU on recreational activities were also relatively many (22%).

Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations for the aspects explaining employee welfare as contributed by the activities of the UASU. Averagely, the mean response for each of the variables was 3 or 4 when rounded off,

implying that respondents agreed that the activities of the UASU moderately improved medical, maternity, housing and pension schemes, transport arrangements and recreational welfare of the members. Consequently, the improved performance of the members of the UASU may be attributed to the improvement of the foregoing amenities. Black & Lynch (1997) observed that unionized workplaces with high performance work practices, like voice and self-managed teams, had higher productivity than the more traditional unionized workplaces like the unionized plywood mills.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for the aspects explaining employee welfare as contributed by the activities of the UASU at Egerton University (n=82)

Parameter	Scheme/ Facility					
	Maternity	Housing	Medical	Pension	Transport	Recreational
Mean	3.63	3.30	3.29	3.39	2.94	2.61
SE	0.13	0.14	0.13	0.11	0.12	0.13
SD	1.21	1.24	1.14	1.02	1.06	1.15

SE = standard error of the mean; SD = standard deviation.

3.3 Mean Ranks for the Factors Explaining Employee Welfare

Table 4 presents the means and ranks of the variables explaining employee welfare as contributed by the activities of the UASU. Maternity scheme was ranked high at a mean of 4.12, indicating that the maternity scheme experienced greater positive impact on employee performance. The least was availability of recreational activities at a mean of 2.47. These results imply that the activities of the UASU played a key role in promoting employee welfare. Furthermore, it was apparent that the activities of the UASU had different but positive impacts on the variables explaining employee welfare as indicated by Friedman test ($\chi^2 = 67.98$, $df = 5$, $P = 0.00$) shown in Table 5.

Table 4. Means and ranks for the aspects explaining employee welfare as contributed by the activities of the UASU at Egerton University (n=82)

Employee welfare	Mean	Rank
Employee maternity scheme	4.12	1
Staff housing scheme	3.80	3
Employee medical scheme	3.62	4
Employee pension scheme	3.87	2
Staff transport arrangements	3.11	5
Availability of recreational facilities	2.47	6

Table 5. Friedman test for the aspects explaining employee welfare as contributed by the activities of the UASU at Egerton University (n=82)

Chi-Square	67.98
df	5
Asymp. Sig.	0.00

Level of significance used– 5%

3.4 The Effect of Improved Welfare on Employee Performance

Table 6 presents the results of the effect of improved employee welfare on the factors affecting employee performance. Friedman test ($\chi^2 = 12.97$, $df = 4$, $P = 0.01$) shows that the activities of the UASU impacted positively and differently on the factors affecting employee performance (Table 7). Availability of favourable employment/ contract terms and conditions (e.g., frequency of salary increase) ranked top followed by improved morale, motivation and cooperation towards productivity and, least, was availability of high occupational health and safety standards. Effective mix of wages and personnel policies, and improved morale, motivation and cooperation towards productivity ranked high among the factors affecting employee performance that were influenced by the activities of the UASU. According to Kearney & Carnevale (2001), workers with collective

bargaining rights earned more (5-8%) wages than those without such rights. However, even if unions bargained for the wage increases for their members, public sector wages were often limited by budgets and by public opinion (Shapiro 1978; Mitchell 1988). The collective voice improves morale, motivation and cooperation between employees, and between employees and management. For instance, firm specific skills learned on the job require cooperation, and this may be forthcoming if unions lessen rivalry among individuals. Likewise, unions may provide greater security against arbitrary decisions on matters like dismissal or redundancy by the employers.

Table 6. The effect of the activities of the UASU on factors affecting employee performance at Egerton University (n=82)

Aspects	Mean	Rank
Effective mix of wages and personnel policies	3.08	3
Improved morale, motivation and cooperation towards productivity	3.09	2
Better organizational layout or improved working practices	2.70	5
Improved employment/ contract terms and conditions of service	3.31	1
Increased employee commitment to achieving organizational goals	2.82	4

Table 7: Friedman test for the factors affecting employee performance as contributed by the activities of the UASU at Egerton University (n=82)

Chi-Square	12.97
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	0.01

Level of significance used = 5%

If employees do not trust management over job security, then they are unlikely to commit themselves to achieving organisational goals (Stuart & Lucio 2001). Without security, workers will fear that they may innovate themselves out of their jobs (ILO 2004). Conversely, the more a trade union addresses job security issues, the more trust is built up between management and employees, and the more likely employees were willing to adopt new ways of working (Ashton & Sung 2002). Increased employee commitment to achieving organizational goals was least influenced by the activities of the UASU. A good working environment, attractive salary package, participative management and regular promotion are the main factors influencing workers to exhibit high commitment in their assigned activities (Olatunji 2004). Low salary growth and irregular promotions are, therefore, deemed to be responsible for the low commitment in achieving organizational goals.

3.5 Correlations Between Employee Welfare and Performance

Improved maternity scheme of the employees, as attributed to the activities of the UASU, significantly and positively affected the morale, motivation and cooperation of the UASU members towards productivity ($r=0.23$, $P<0.05$). A positive and significant association between unions and employee productivity has been reported by Doucouliagos & Laroche (2003). For instance, heart attack recovery rates were higher in hospitals where nurses were unionized than in non-union hospitals. Nurse unions improved care of patients by raising staff-to-patient ratios, limiting excessive overtime, and improving training of nurses (Michael & Seago 2004). Employment/ contract terms and conditions also significantly and positively ($r=0.27$, $P<0.05$) affected employee productivity. The collective voice is an information source on preferences of workers that should result in an effective mix of wages and personnel policies. Unions negotiated for employees' contracts and layoff recall procedures, and protected employees against firing for other than a just cause as well as help them build files in case of a disputed claim (Budd & McHall 1997). Availability of recreational facilities correlated positively and significantly with increased commitment to achieving organizational goals ($r=0.23$, $P<0.05$). Similarly, the employee pension scheme significantly and positively affected employment/ contract terms and conditions ($r=0.24$, $P<0.05$). Unions play a prominent role in the enactment of a broad range of labour laws and regulations covering aspects as diverse as overtime pay, minimum wage, the treatment of immigrant workers, health and retirement coverage, civil rights, unemployment insurance and workers' compensation, and leave for care of new-borns and sick family members. Common to all of these rules is a desire to provide protections for workers (Davis 1986; Amberg 1998) and enhance their performance.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The activities of the UASU contributed positively to the general welfare of employees at Egerton University. In descending order of importance, maternity, pension, housing and medical schemes were some of the benefits of the activities of the UASU. However, availability of recreational facilities received least attention from the UASU. It was clear that the UASU should ensure employee commitment to achieving organizational goals in order to create a win-win situation between it and University management. Besides, the UASU should engage in negotiating for staff recreational facilities, and occupational health and safety standards. Since the presence of the UASU improved the welfare and performance of employees, it should, therefore, be maintained and strengthened to further improve on quality delivery of products and services in the University by its members.

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