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The Advocacy Act of TUs in School Governance and Professional Management: Prospects, Obstacles, and Achievements

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Abstract: This paper examines the effects of the teachers unions (TUs) on governance and professional management in South African schools. Using qualitative research method, sixteen (16) school leaders including management members from four (4) public schools were interviewed. The aim of the study is to make a critical assessment on the advocacy efforts of TUs pertaining to school governance by making analysis on the prospects, obstacles, and potential achievements. The study took place in four (4) public schools in the Sekhukhune region of the Limpopo province in South Africa. The study is underpinned by the democratic governance theory to address the research problem. The study used phenomenological research design for the purpose of gathering valid and reliable in-depth and rich information from the participants. The key findings of the study reveal that TUs contribute positively to school governance by mobilising relevant resources and ensuring equitable policies. However, their influence may also result in bureaucratic deadlocks, conflicts with School Management Teams (SMTs), and resistance to specific policy reforms. Following the findings, the study suggests that a collaborative approach in which TUs, policymakers, and school leaders engage in progressive dialogues to enhance school governance and promote meaningful educational initiatives. The study also recommends that there be synergy among TUs, SMT, and SGB to ensure sustainable improvement in public education.

Keywords: Educational governance; policy reform; professional governance; public reform; school governance; teachers union.

Introduction

TUs have played a critical role in shaping educational policies, fostering positive initiatives in the education sector, and ensuring effective governance in various global educational systems (Bruns et al., 2019). TUs are essential in advocating for fairness and equity by representing the collective interests of teachers (Charney et al., 2021). They focus on protecting the essential rights, professional growth, and well-being of educators, while also impacting the decisions made in the schools they support. The function of TUs extends beyond simple adherence to policies and educational laws relevant to their members (Mafisa, 2017). It encompasses various issues, such as policy development, curriculum formulation, professional standards management, and resource allocation. TUs are seen as key players in improving education, working to balance the interests of educators, students, and policymakers (Msila, 2022; Kwatubana & Borch, 2022).

The role of TUs in professional management and school governance has generated varied responses, including praise and criticism (Carr & Beckett, 2018). TUs are essential in advocating for improved working conditions for their members, advancing teacher training and professional development, and ensuring significant participation in decision-making at various levels of school administration (Sinkala et al., 2022). Critics of TUs argue that these organizations can sometimes create conflicts with SMTs, which are mainly connected to professional management, and with school governing bodies (SGBs), typically involved in the governance of educational institutions (Dhlamini, 2023). TUs are seen as hindering initiatives and playing a substantial role in bureaucratic inefficiencies (Msila, 2021).

The rising tension among TUs, SMT, and SGB raises important questions about the impact of TUs on educational reform, student performance, and social equity (Matos, 2022). Given the complexities and evolving nature of educational environments, a detailed analysis of the achievements, shortcomings, challenges, and future developments related to TUs in school governance and professional management is essential. This article examines the impact of TUs on school governance and professional management. This study will analyse their advocacy efforts, the obstacles faced, failures encountered, and successes achieved. This study aims to elucidate how TUs have shaped school governance and professional management, while also examining their potential future roles in light of upcoming and evolving educational reforms and policy changes.

The role of TUs in school governance and professional management in South African schools presents ongoing challenges related to prospects, obstacles, and achievements. The situation is exacerbated by the perception that TUs hinder initiatives and contribute to bureaucratic inefficiencies. It is important to note that some scholars have examined the prospects and obstacles, including achievements, as central themes in the discourse surrounding school governance and professional management in South African schools. A deeper understanding is required regarding the role of TUs in enhancing and maintaining school governance and professional management within South African schools. This study aims to critically assess the advocacy efforts of trade unions in school governance by analysing their failures, successes, and potential future trajectories.

TUs command respect in many public schools and are recognized as influential entities that have historically championed educators' rights (DeMitchell, 2020). They have significantly influenced policies concerning professional management and governance. TUs originated in response to unfair labour practices, inadequate representation in decision-making, and unjust compensation (Flavin, 2018). Their role has expanded to encompass professional development, involvement in school governance, and advocacy for educational policy. TUs play a vital role in shaping policies within the education sector, working to ensure that educators' perspectives and concerns are effectively represented in governance (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2021).

The influence of TUs on professional management and school governance differs markedly based on the national and regional contexts in which they function (Dobbins & Christ, 2019). In specific educational systems and reforms, unions are seen as having a notable role in the governance structures of schools (Verger et al., 2019). This participation allows for active engagement in leadership decisions, policy formulation, and resource allocation. In various educational contexts, their influence is often limited, leading to tensions among union representatives, government officials, and educational leaders, such as school principals (Msila, 2022). The extent of union involvement is typically shaped by the collective bargaining agreement, the legal framework, and the prevailing political climate (Hirsch-Weber, 2019). TUs in school governance effectively advocate for policies that promote educational inclusiveness and equity. Unions significantly enhance education quality by addressing key factors like learner-teacher ratios, professional development opportunities, and equitable remuneration (Han & Keefe, 2022). TUs have been crucial in ensuring educators have the necessary skills to meet the changing demands of the curriculum and a diverse student population (Logue, 2018).

Despite this notable achievement, TUs face various challenges in their advocacy efforts (Medadi & Mahdavi, 2025). The lack of collaboration from the SMT, resistance from educational authorities, and limitations due to inadequate financial resources primarily hinder TUs' ability to effect meaningful change (Bascia & Osmond, 2013). Additionally, unions have occasionally been criticized for prioritizing their

members' interests over wider educational objectives, leading to conflicts with policymakers and school administrators (Bascia, 2015). The debates on the role of TUs in enhancing or hindering school improvement are a significant and contentious issue in contemporary educational discourse (Mafisa, 2017; Msila, 2022).

The future trajectory of TUs in school governance will be shaped by educational reforms, shifts in labour relations, and the growing role of digital technologies in education (Maharaj & Bascia, 2021). The education system is constantly evolving, necessitating that unions adapt to new challenges while maintaining their core advocacy functions. The increasing emphasis on collaboration among stakeholders and the accountability of educational institutions presents various opportunities and challenges for TUs in their efforts to sustain relevance within governance structures. This study critically assesses the advocacy efforts of trade unions in school governance by analysing their successes, failures, and future trajectories. This article examines the impact of TUs on school leadership and management, aiming to provide insights into how these unions can improve effective, fair, equitable, and sustainable governance in educational institutions.

Literature Review

1. The Role Function Of TUs In Relation To School Governance And Professional Management

TUs provide inclusive, democratic, and responsive governance and professional management frameworks in educational institutions to meet the different needs of stakeholders (Symeonidis & Stromquist, 2020). Therefore, democratic governance theory should be applied to TUs' functional roles, which states that governance must be participatory and allow all educational stakeholders to participate in decision-making (Stevenson & Gilliland, 2015). Educational laws and legislation encourage educators to participate in SGBs to provide input on curriculum implementation, working conditions, and professional progress (Malunga, 2023).

Thus, TUs are important stakeholders who keep the SMT and SGB accountable for financial allocation and policy implementation (Brunner et al., 2020). Additionally, they must protect educators from unfair treatment and promote ethical leadership in educational institutions to ensure equitable labour practices. Thus, democracy requires a balance of power (Zhen, 2024). SMTs, SGBs, and TUs sometimes clash over policy enforcement, disciplinary procedures, and financial management (Mbokazi et al., 2022). TUs then mediate conflicts, assuring democratic resolutions rather than authoritarian or independent ones. TUs should promote democratic governance in educational institutions, but excessive politicization, resistance to accountability measures, and union interests over student outcomes are often overlooked (Msila, 2022). TUs may inhibit educational institution improvement procedures and managerial autonomy, leading in governance inefficiencies (Dermenci & Balyer, 2021).

2. Conceptualising TUs in School Governance And Professional Management: Global Perspective

TUs influence educational governance through policy lobbying, decision-making, and collective bargaining (Dobbins & Christ, 2019). Their involvement in educational governance ensures that education policies, school governance frameworks, and labour laws meet educators' needs while contributing to educational reforms (Tohidian & Nodooshan, 2021). TUs protect educators' rights by ensuring fair employment, workload, salary, and job security rules (Medadi & Mahdavi, 2025). Their involvement promotes educator interests and improves instruction. TUs influence branch, regional, and national educational policies (Govender, 2015). They actively contact policymakers, participate in legislative procedures, and do research to improve education. They also assure successful and beneficial teaching and assessment policies for educators and learners.

This is achieved by educators actively participating in professional development and capacity-building activities and government funding to improve education (Newman & Latifi, 2021). TUs actively advocate for better working conditions, employment contracts, dispute resolution, and educational quality in collective bargaining and decision-making (Mafisa, 2017). They also promote inclusive governance by ensuring educators are represented in SGB and other key policy frameworks. TUs promote democratic governance in school education by encouraging openness, inclusivity, and democratic decision-making (Khumalo, 2019).

It's also important to acknowledge and validate underrepresented instructors, especially those in underprivileged areas and underfunded schools. TUs benefit education but are criticised (Ghosn & Akkary, 2020). Politicization, accountability resistance, and disruptive strikes in schools typically prompt this critique (Wright, 2020). These activities encourage educator rights and student benefits, yet they may hurt teaching and learning.

Obstacles to Effective TU Advocacy

TUs face many challenges in their efforts to promote equitable labour practices by influencing educational policies, protecting educators' rights, and improving school governance (Medadi & Mahdavi, 2025). TUs have political, institutional, economic, and organisational obstacles that prevent them from changing education (Cowen & Strunk, 2014). Many TUs have political party affiliations, which can lead to conflicts of interest (Wachira & Odhiambo, 2021). Government policies also impede unions' ability to lobby for necessary reforms.

Current educational policies promote political goals over educational gains, weakening teacher and student advocacy (Gonzalez & Carney, 2014). Government and educational institutions often delay or refuse to engage with unions on policy issues. Educational ministries often create bureaucratic barriers that prevent unions from participating in decision-making (Lin, 2014).

Anti-union measures may prevent unions from striking or bargaining (Cross, 2017). Due to resource distribution discrepancies, a small TU may struggle to influence and be heard (Gavin, 2021). Union leadership conflicts often hinder advocacy. This hinders strategic planning, advocacy goal setting, and member mobilization (Line & Lasmane, 2014). Lack of active membership engagement reduces advocacy participation, reducing the union's impact. The public views TUs as self-serving, prioritising educator rights over student outcomes (Waldron, 2023). Union strikes, pickets, stay-aways, and salary conflicts in the media mostly damage public trust in TUs.

Making Sense of the Relative Significance of the TUs in School Governance and Professional Management

TUs excel in labour rights and advocacy in school governance and reform, but governance participation, political meddling, and bad public impression remain issues (Stevenson, 2014). As the main voice for teachers, TUs ensure good working conditions and professional growth (Makoa & Segalo, 2023). SGBs, policy boards, and educational councils may include unions to help union leaders advocate for teachers' rights. Education unions encourage participation in decision-making, ensuring transparency and accountability (Addo-Nkrumah, 2019). Negotiating salaries, workload, and educational justice are TU responsibilities. Despite these positive achievements, TUs face problems, including exclusion from governance systems that limit their policy influence (Govender, 2015).

Unions' political party affiliations may cause conflicts of interest and dilute their advocacy (Clemens & Strain, 2020). TUs are increasingly seen as emphasizing themselves over instructional quality. TUs must campaign for teacher participation in SGBs to guarantee educators have a say in finances and curriculum (Mafisa, 2017). To reduce partisanship and factionalism, the union needs transparent elections. Policymakers must be engaged to improve learning conditions. To build a coalition for educational progress, TUs should work with civil societies, parent groups, and student organizations (Winton & Johnson, 2016). Instead than focusing on wage disputes, media campaigns could promote unions' role in improving education (Hartney, 2022).

Teachers should build community relationships and ensure that unions address educational issues outside labour issues (Dobbins & Christ, 2019; Masbaka & Ahmad, 2021). For TU involvement in school governance and professional management, policymakers may alter the law (Govender, 2015). Unions can increase their power and sustain educational governance advances by using research-based, inclusive, and unambiguous advocacy (Medadi & Mahdavi, 2024). TUs can fight for more education spending to resist private and corporate influence in school governance, especially in light of global and economic issues (Stevenson, 2014).

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically a descriptive phenomenological approach, to investigate the advocacy role of TUs in school governance, emphasizing prospects, obstacles, and achievements. The objective was to document the firsthand experiences of school principals and teachers in SGB, SMT, and unions concerning their advocacy roles in school governance (Kruger et al., 2022). This methodological approach facilitated the identification of common themes and patterns within the narratives of participants engaged in union advocacy (Pierce et al., 2022). Participants were purposefully selected based on their firsthand experiences in SGB and their involvement in stages where advocacy efforts related to school governance policies and decision-making occurred (Bush & Glover, 2021). The sample consisted of sixteen participants: 4 principals, 4 union teachers, 4 teachers in the SGB, and 4 teachers in the SMT. The participants provided insights into the influence, challenges, and impact of TUs on governance policies.

2. Sampling

Sixteen participants were intentionally chosen from a total of four schools, comprising two public primary schools and two public secondary schools. Each school identified four representatives: the principal, one teacher from TU, one teacher from SGB, and one teacher from SMT, culminating in a total sample of 16 participants. The principals of schools employed a coding system (PSCH-1) to designate the principal of school 1 and so forth, while teachers associated with the union utilized a code (Union-1) to identify the teacher in union at school 1 and so on. The educators in SGB were assigned the designation (SGB-1) for those involved in school governance within school 1, and so on, while those in SMT employed the designation (SMT-1) for educators engaged in professional management in school 1, and so forth.

3. Data Collection

Data were collected via individual interviews, facilitating an in-depth examination of participants' experiences (Monday, 2020). This was done to solicit the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants on issue pertaining to TUs in school governance and professional management.

4. Data Analysis

Data was analysed inductively to extract the fundamental essence of lived experiences and realities, while assessing whether TU influence in schools is effectively transforming or hindering school reform. Themes and sub-themes were identified to illustrate the central dimension of teacher advocacy.

5. Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the study objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time to ensure adherence to ethical standards. Written permission to record interviews was requested and obtained. Pseudonyms were employed to safeguard the identity of the participants.

6. Validity and Reliability

The standards of trustworthiness, including dependability, credibility, transferability, and conformability, were adhered to ensure thoroughness throughout the research process.

The Findings

According to Potokri (2022), data interpretation is primarily separate from data analysis. Therefore, this section presents the study's findings which were grouped into four themes derived from participants' perceptions and experiences. A subsequent section will focus on data analyses, utilizing the scholarly contributions demonstrated in this study to support the insights of participants.

Table 1. Themes

Themes
1. The influential role of TU in school governance and professional management.
2. Shortcoming of TU involvement in school leadership.
3. Positive outlooks for TU in enhancing school reformation.
4. Gelling TU advocacy with school leadership for sustained school leadership.

1. The Influential Role of TU in School Governance and Professional Management

TUs hold a significant position in the decision-making process by ensuring that educators are well-informed about new policies and their implementation, extending beyond just professional conduct. The SMT member from school A emphasized that TUs play a crucial role in influencing teachers' conduct, as they organize workshops designed to guide and support educators in their professional practices. She noted that TUs play an important role in ensuring that:

“educators are thoroughly prepared in terms of policy and act implementation guidance related to the code of conduct in the workplace [SMT-1]”.

This observation underscores the significance of trade unions, as they play a crucial role in ensuring that policies are respected, and that professional conduct is maintained at the highest standards. The principal from school A expressed similar sentiments, emphasizing the multifaceted role of the union. They noted its involvement in:

“collective bargaining, grievance handling, professional support; professional development and growth-training and workshops, mentorship programmes, career advancement; school leadership and management partnership and collaboration policy development and review, school governance [PSCH-1]”

TUs serve as mediators and advocates in numerous instances, thereby ensuring that the perspectives of educators are effectively represented in decision-making processes. This representation facilitates a smoother process of professional management for the stakeholders involved. The statement from a prominent union in school 1 emphasized the significance of the TU's role, highlighting its advocacy for educators by

“negotiating employment terms and conditions, protecting teachers' rights, and influencing school leadership through collective bargaining, as well as representing their interests in decision-making [Union-1]”. A representative from school 2, who is part of the SGB, expressed agreement with this statement, noting that *“the TU serves as the first-hand or primary line of report.”* Their responsibilities include advocating for the interests of teachers, engaging in negotiations on their behalf, and representing them in significant decision-making meetings [SGB-2]”

Furthermore, it was noted that TUs play an essential role in fostering professional collaboration with other relevant unions and stakeholders, aiming to cultivate effective teamwork. The union representative from school 2 articulated that unions serve the purpose of:

“encouraging teamwork amongst educators” and “guiding or reminding teachers about how to abide by the laws and regulations at the workplace. [Union-2]”

Consequently, these concepts highlight the significance of TUs within educational institutions. The principal of school 2 further emphasized that *“TUs, school governance, and professional management are essential components of the school, necessitating collaboration among stakeholders in decision-making to enhance the school's effectiveness. [PSCH-2]”* Consequently, these insights underscore the significance of fostering a harmonious relationship with all stakeholders from these two entities, enabling schools to enhance their potential for success.

2. Shortcoming of TU involvement in school leadership

Despite the advantages, the participation of TUs in school governance presents several shortcomings and challenges that often require immediate attention. There appears to be a persistent concern regarding the widespread belief that unions excessively safeguard teachers, which may contribute to a reduction or reluctance in upholding professional accountability. A member of the school management team at school 1 remarked *that*:

“the overprotection and support provided to educators by the TU have led our educators to become spoiled, hesitant to self-motivate for additional tasks assigned, which impacts the daily operations of school activities [SMT-1]”. In a similar vein, the principal of School 1 expressed concern regarding the tendency of unions to neglect unprofessional behaviour among educators, highlighting that *“teacher apathy, indolence, and despondency are not rigorously addressed by TUs. The concept of job security is often misunderstood, as it can lead to a situation where educators overlook their primary responsibilities. Essential functions may be neglected under the guise of maintaining job security. [PSCH1-1]”*

These represent several challenges that are encountered and require attention to ensure that schools are positioned to operate effectively. Challenges are also inherently connected to the dynamics of leadership and the nuances of communication. A SMT representative from school 2 indicated that *“there is a communication breakdown between the employer and employee. [SMT-2]”* The SGB member from school 2 corroborated this assertion, stating,

“The ongoing disputes and disagreements within the union, aimed at advocating for and safeguarding members despite their inappropriate conduct, generate conflicts within the governance structures of the school [SGB-2].”

Consequently, these concepts prompted us to consider whether the mandates outlined in the policy laws of TUs are fully comprehended and whether there exists a shared understanding of how representatives within TUs should advocate for the rights and interests of the members they are committed to serving. Furthermore, it was concerning to hear a member of the school management team at School 2 express worries regarding the role of TUs in defending unprofessional behaviour. This individual remarked that

“They (TUs) act as a buffer between educators and leadership and management practice.” The issue arises when unprofessional behaviour is defended. Certain educators exhibit a lack of discipline, confident in the knowledge that the union will provide them with protection. [SMT-2].”

It is essential for forums to convene regularly to examine the underlying reasons for the formation of unions. The current conduct and presentation of TUs within schools appear to be fostering inappropriate behaviour and unprofessionalism, despite their intended role of denouncing such conduct.

3. Positive Outlooks For TU In Enhancing School Reformation

In the absence of an examination of challenges and shortcomings, teachers' unions possess the capacity to effectuate significant educational reforms within schools. When effectively engaged, they can enhance the conditions for teaching and learning. The school governor of school 4 articulated that unions:

“enhance teacher development initiatives, thereby improving learner outcomes. Educators are afforded an opportunity to express their perspectives and cultivate a sense of agency regarding the decisions made by policymaker. [SGB-4]”

Such sentiments indicate that there are still individuals who hold the belief in the valuable contributions that TUs can make to schools. Their presence not only serves to safeguard the rights of educators but is also anticipated to play a role in the overall enhancement of the educational environment. The SMT member of

School 3 stated that trade unions play a crucial role in guaranteeing equitable working conditions, remuneration, and benefits. Their role involves:

“advocating for teachers to guarantee that leadership and management choices reflect the best interests of educators, while also shaping decision-making through active engagement in consultations and participation in school governance frameworks, [SMT-3]”

The affirmative remarks from stakeholders demonstrate that schools continue to have confidence in the role of teachers' unions, recognizing their capacity to effectively advance school initiatives and foster a positive impact. It was also evident that TUs play a fundamental role in professional development and in ensuring that teachers maintain competence in their daily responsibilities. The principal of School 3 supported this assertion by stating that trade unions

“ensure that teachers are updated with the current teaching methods and maintain high standards [PSCH-3].”

This viewpoint was further reinforced by a union member from School 3, who concurred and noted that TUs *“ensure smooth and effective relationships between the employer and employees [Union-3]”* TU role is to facilitate a mutual understanding and consensus between the two parties involved. Consequently, these sentiments underline the significant challenge faced by TUs in striving to establish equitable conditions for schools, enabling them to effectively engage in commendable and noteworthy school improvement initiatives.

4. Gelling TU Advocacy with School Leadership for Sustained School Improvement

For trade unions to maintain a lasting influence on school administration, it is essential to collaborate with SGBs and the SMTs as highlighted in this study. A member of the SMT from School 2 articulated that

“it is essential for school leaders, policymakers, and TUs to collaboratively establish clear, shared objectives, promote open lines of communication, and enact policies that enhance teacher autonomy and facilitate professional development. [SMT-2]”

The significance of collective decision-making was emphasized as a crucial factor in promoting equitable operations within schools. The principal of school 1 proposed the implementation of:

“an annual bosberaad, the establishment of common chat groups, a symposium for TU leaders and managers, mentorship programs aimed at bridging the information gap between experienced and novice or struggling teachers, as well as the expansion of incentives for teachers seeking to advance their careers. PSCH-1]”

Teachers unions are essential for fostering significant connections among schools, ultimately contributing to the overall enhancement of educational institutions. TUs should be integrated into the strategic planning of the schools. This suggests the necessity for ongoing workshops organized for TUs to convene and exchange ideas on how schools can foster a favourable working environment that promotes collaboration among all stakeholders. In this context, the principal of School 3 articulated that

“during school holidays, school managers could collaborate with TUs to engage in strategic planning aimed at enhancing teaching and learning within the school. [PSCH-3]”

The collaboration among school managers, unions, and various stakeholders is indispensable for fostering a positive working environment and enhancing relationships among teachers. Furthermore, a representative from Union 3 expressed that

“unions should be afforded a larger platform and greater resources to facilitate and conduct additional professional workshops aimed at fostering collaboration among various groups of educators from different schools [Union-3].”

In sum, while TUs play a significant role in the governance of schools and the management of professionals, their participation presents both opportunities and challenges. Therefore, it is essential for key stakeholders, including trade unions, school leadership, and policymakers, to collaborate effectively to ensure that initiatives aimed at fostering positive change within schools result in sustainable improvements.

Discussion

1. The Influential Role Of TU In School Governance And Professional Management

Across the globe, TUs have gained significant recognition for their important role in shaping and advocating for educational policies as well as the rights of educators. This acknowledgment highlights the importance of their contributions to the educational landscape (Bruns et al., 2019). The influence of TU is evident in its reach, which goes beyond mere policy compliance. They actively engage in various areas, including the formulation of curricula, the establishment of professional standards, and the allocation of resources (Mafisa, 2017). TUs play a crucial role in advocating for educators, ensuring that their voices are heard in governance and professional management frameworks. They strive to balance the interests of teachers, learners, and policymakers, as highlighted by Msila in 2021. They play a significant role in professional management by facilitating teacher development through the organization of essential workshops and by advocating for equitable working conditions (Charney et al., 2021). Furthermore, teachers' unions play a crucial role in holding school management teams (SMTs) and school governing bodies (SGBs) accountable. This accountability is essential for the existence of democratic governance within schools, (Symeonidis & Stromquist, 2020).

2. Shortcomings Of TU Involvement In School Leadership

It has been observed that, in addition to the significant contributions that TUs are making in fulfilling their responsibilities, they are still encountering criticism regarding their chosen methods in the realms of school governance and professional management. Conflicts frequently emerge among TUs, SGBs, and SMTs due to varying perspectives and opinions (Dhlamini, 2023). Critics have argued that TUs often hinder school initiatives, thereby contributing significantly to bureaucratic inefficiencies (Msila, 2021). Furthermore, the complexities surrounding political affiliations and the resistance to accountability significantly complicate the role of TUs in school governance, as highlighted by Wachira and Odhiambo (2021). Furthermore, when unions become excessively involved in the governance of schools, it can result in adverse consequences. This involvement frequently manifests in disruptions, including strikes, stay-aways, picketing, and work stoppages. Such actions can significantly hinder the teaching and learning process, leading to negative outcomes for both educators and students (Wright, 2020). Consequently, the ongoing perception that TU prioritizes teacher rights over learner outcomes continues to be a matter of concern (Waldron, 2023).

3. Positive Outlooks For TU In Enhancing School Reformation

While there is evidence suggesting that TUs primarily advocate for the rights of educators, they also play a crucial role in fostering meaningful transparency within the decision-making process (Khumalo, 2019). By actively participating in collective bargaining and engaging in policy advocacy, trade unions play a crucial role in enhancing working conditions and promoting professional development opportunities for educators (Mafisa, 2017). The initiatives undertaken by TUs in ensuring fair distribution of resources, along with their commitment to enhancing teacher empowerment, play a critical role in the broader context of school reform (Han & Keefe, 2022). Furthermore, the emerging trends in education, including the integration of technology and innovative curricula in schools, present a significant opportunity for (TUs) to take an active role in

influencing the development of a modernized education system within contemporary society, particularly in more developed regions (Maharaj & Bascia, 2021).

4. Gelling TU Advocacy With School Leadership For Sustained School Leadership

The partnership among TUs, SMTs, and SGBs is regarded as crucial for fostering sustainable and enhanced leadership within schools. Therefore, the incorporation of TU advocacy within the frameworks of school leadership is likely to foster a collective vision aimed at advancing educational progress (Addo-Nkrumah, 2019). The theory of democratic governance posits that when decision-making processes are inclusive and involve a wide range of stakeholders, the outcomes for policy implementation and conflict resolution tend to improve significantly (Stevenson & Gilliland, 2015). By participating in constructive dialogue and steering clear of politicization, TUs can collaborate effectively with school leaders to enhance institutional effectiveness (Dermenci & Balyer, 2021). This collaboration will help ensure the development of governance systems within schools that prioritize both the welfare of teachers and the success of learners, as highlighted by Brunner et al. (2020).

Conclusion

This study emphasized the intricate and frequently overlooked role of TUs in school governance and the management of professional practices. TUs advocate for educators, significantly influencing policy and mobilizing resources to improve school environments. Nonetheless, their involvement in school governance may complicate leadership dynamics and decision-making processes. This study emphasizes the dual role of TU involvement in enhancing school improvement initiatives. The extent of collaboration between the SMT and SGB significantly influences progress, either facilitating or hindering it. TU's initiatives stand out in fostering equitable policies, advancing professional training and development, and supporting better working conditions. These contributions enhance the overall quality of education for learners.

Thus, it can be contended that TUs are central in enhancing and maintaining school governance and professional management within administration and policy matters, among others. Nonetheless, significant limitations impede effective governance in schools. Conflicts arise among SMTs and SGBs, alongside bureaucratic deadlocks and resistance to certain reforms. These challenges pose considerable barriers that need to be tackled to improve school governance. These challenges are especially pronounced in schools that have long experienced disadvantages, characterized by a notable deficiency in resource allocation. The complexities of power struggles complicate governance in these institutions. This study recommends adopting collaborative governance to achieve sustained improvements in education. This method aims to foster collaboration among trade unions, school management teams, and governing bodies, ultimately improving the educational environment.

It is vital to promote constructive dialogues in schools that align the advocacy efforts of TUs with the broader objectives of school development. This approach highlights the collective responsibilities of all stakeholders, ensuring that TUs support rather than disrupt existing school leadership structures. In conclusion, improving collaborations between TUs, policymakers, and school leaders can greatly enhance governance efficiency. This method enhances shared responsibility and significantly aids in creating a more responsive, leadership-oriented educational system. Further research should explore mechanisms to effectively align the advocacy efforts of TUs with the priorities of school leadership. This study is crucial for maintaining governance structures that support democratic values and effectively promote sustained advancements in schools.

Structured platforms in schools are crucial for engaging TUs, SMTs, and SGBs in collaborative decision-making to improve overall school success. Encouraging TUs to actively participate in policy evaluation processes is crucial. This engagement will align the advocacy efforts of the TUs with the broader objectives of school improvement. Ongoing training in leadership and governance for TU members is essential. This will allow them to improve their contributions to school governance efficiently. Schools must establish formal communication channels between TU and school leadership. This method seeks to resolve potential conflicts among these entities and improve the dissemination of essential information. Establishing

clear boundaries between TU advocacy and school management is recommended. This separation is central to avoid any unintended interference from either party involved. This highlights the need for a consistent framework to ensure that TU activities remain free from external political influences and concentrate on school improvement priorities.

Moreover, performance assessment tools can be implemented to align teaching units with the outcomes of learner-centred education. Independent mediation structures can be established to resolve conflicts between TU and schools. It is essential for TUs to actively engage in teacher development and participate in upskilling and mentorship initiatives to improve teaching quality. Their participation can enhance educational practices and outcomes significantly. Establishing networks to advocate for policies that ensure equal access to resources in public schools is crucial. These initiatives are vital for providing all learners with the opportunities they deserve. TUs must actively promote ethical leadership practices in schools. This approach allows for a meaningful contribution to the reform and transformation of educational institutions.

TUs facilitates partnerships with other schools, enabling the exchange of insights that contribute to mastery in school governance. Establishing agreement charters is important for aligning union advocacy with school performance goals. It is essential to implement capacity-building programs that promote collaborative learning between TUs and school leadership on effective governance structures. It is essential for schools to create an environment that promotes constructive dialogue between trade unions and school leaders, rather than permitting adversarial interactions. Policy makers must create policies that effectively integrate TU into school governance. This approach must emphasize a supportive function for TUs, ensuring their involvement improves the educational setting instead of leading to disruption.

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