

EFFECT OF TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES ON EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION IN THE HEALTH SECTOR IN MBALE CITY, UGANDA

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Abstract

The study examined the effect of trade union activities on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City, Uganda. The specific objectives were; i) to analyze the effect of lobbying for attractive pay on job satisfaction of workers in the health sector in Mbale City; ii) to determine the effect of advocating for conducive work conditions on job satisfaction of workers in the health sector in Mbale City; and iii) to establish the effect of advocating for acceptable non-financial compensation schemes on job satisfaction of workers in the health sector in Mbale City. A cross-sectional design was used alongside quantitative and qualitative approaches whereby questionnaires and interviews were employed to collect data from 93 respondents out of the 112 targeted, giving a response rate of 83%. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select union leaders, doctors, clinical officers, nurses and midwives. The results were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, correlation and regression analysis. The findings revealed that; a) lobbying for attractive pay had a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = .254$, $t = 2.177$, $p = .032$); b) advocating for acceptable non-financial compensation schemes had a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = .451$, $t = 4.632$, $p < .001$); and c) advocating for conducive work conditions had a positive but insignificant effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = .124$, $t = 1.061$, $p = .292$). The study concludes that attractive pay and acceptable non-financial compensation schemes have a greater influence on employee job satisfaction than conducive work conditions. The study recommends that health-sector management and trade unions strengthen mechanisms for negotiating attractive pay and non-financial benefits while improving working conditions to enhance employee job satisfaction and service delivery.

Key words: *Trade unions, employee job satisfaction, attractive pay, work conditions, non-financial compensation, health sector.*

1.1.Introduction

Trade unions are organizations of workers formed to promote and protect employees' interests through collective action, particularly in relation to wages, working conditions and other employment benefits (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Through collective bargaining and representation, trade unions seek to improve employees' terms and conditions of service, including attractive pay, conducive working conditions and non-financial compensation (Flower, 2018; Cappelli, 2016). These activities are important in shaping employees' experiences at influencing job satisfaction. Job satisfaction refers to the feelings, attitudes and preferences that employees have towards their work and working environment (Armstrong, 2010).

Globally, trade unions play an important role in regulating employment relations and protecting workers' interests. In countries such as the United States and those in the European Union, labour laws provide for employees' rights to organize, bargain collectively and advocate for improved pay and working conditions (Sempijja & Wamono, 2024). These activities contribute to employee retention, skills development, workplace security and improved relations between employees and management. The relationship between trade union activities and job satisfaction has also been explained through the exit-voice perspective, where unionized employees are more likely to express dissatisfaction and seek improvements in workplace conditions rather than leave their employment (Bryson, 2014).

In Uganda, the right of workers to organize and join trade unions is provided under Article 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995) and in the Labour Unions Act, 2006. Trade unions therefore have a legitimate role in representing employees and advocating for improved terms and conditions of employment. In the health sector, issues relating to remuneration, working conditions, recognition, job security and other non-financial benefits are particularly important because health workers operate in demanding work environments. Although trade unions are expected to safeguard workers' interests, concerns regarding employee satisfaction and working conditions remain relevant to the effectiveness and productivity of health workers.

Mbale City has a growing health sector comprising of public and private hospitals, health centres, clinics and other healthcare facilities that provide a wide range of services to individuals and communities. The sector depends heavily on medical professionals and other health workers whose motivation and satisfaction are important for effective service delivery. However, despite the existence of trade unions and their role in advocating for workers' interests, it remains unclear to what extent trade union activities influence employee job satisfaction among health workers in Mbale City. This study therefore examined the effect of trade union activities, particularly lobbying for attractive pay, advocating for conducive work conditions and advocating for acceptable non-financial compensation schemes, on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City, Uganda.

1.2.Statement of the Problem

Historically, Trade unions are central in advancing employees' rights and welfare through collective bargaining, employee representation, grievance handling, advocacy, negotiation and protection of favourable terms and conditions of employment. When it comes to the health sector, it is assumed that the activities of trade unions must contribute to better remuneration, improved

working conditions, employee recognition and effective resolution of workplace grievances which may enhance employees' job satisfaction.

Uganda's legal regime recognizes the importance of trade unions as organizations mandated to represent and protect the rights and interests of employees at workplaces; collective bargaining provides avenues for negotiating employment conditions. Through health-sector arrangements, the Ugandan government has recognized agreements with trade unions providing a basis for negotiation and collective bargaining that influence workers' welfare and working conditions.

However, job satisfaction among health workers in Uganda is still a going concern especially when it comes to employee remunerations and working conditions. Available research about Uganda's health workforce found dissatisfaction with compensation and working conditions, low salary, poor or lack of compensation benefits, heavy workload, inadequate medical equipment as critical areas affecting health-workers morale. Uganda's Health Workforce Strategy (2020–2030) provides for career progression which underscores job satisfaction as an important factor of workforce sustainability. However, research on frontline health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that there was low satisfaction with salaries and risk allowances (Walusimbi, et al., 2025).

These concerns are a reason why health professionals, labour unions and associations such as Uganda Medical Association call for industrial actions and labour disputes within Uganda's health sector. This shows that, despite trade unions presence and their operations, serious concerns concerning health workers' employment conditions continue to arise.

Extant studies have examined factors affecting job satisfaction among health workers in Uganda such as working conditions, acceptable nonfinancial compensation scheme and attractive pay. However, empirical evidence that examines the extent to which trade union activities influence employee job satisfaction among health workers in Mbale City is still limited. For instance, according to the research conducted by Luyirika & Timothy (2021) revealed that working conditions and job descriptions were significantly associated with job satisfaction among medical personnel though the study was limited to factors affecting satisfaction rather than the specific contribution of trade union activities. Similarly, Twinamasiko, et al., (2024) carried out a study on how trade union activities influence labour relations and working conditions though this study falls short in establishing the effect on the job satisfaction of health workers in Mbale City.

As a result, contextually and empirically, a gap exists as regards to whether and how trade union activities such as lobbying for attractive pay and advocacy can influence the job satisfaction of health workers in Mbale City. With absence of such evidence, there remains difficulties to determine which trade union activities may influence job satisfaction in the health sector. It is

against this background that the study seeks to examine the effect of trade union activities on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City, Uganda.

1.3.Objectives of the study

- i.) To establish the effect of lobbying for attractive pay on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City.
- ii.) To establish the effect of advocating for conducive work conditions on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City.
- iii.) To establish the effect of advocating for acceptable non-financial compensation schemes on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City.

1.4.Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is a statistically significant effect of lobbying for attractive pay on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City.

H₀₂: There is a statistically significant effect of advocating for conducive work conditions on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City.

H₀₃: There is a statistically significant effect of advocating for acceptable non-financial compensation schemes on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City.

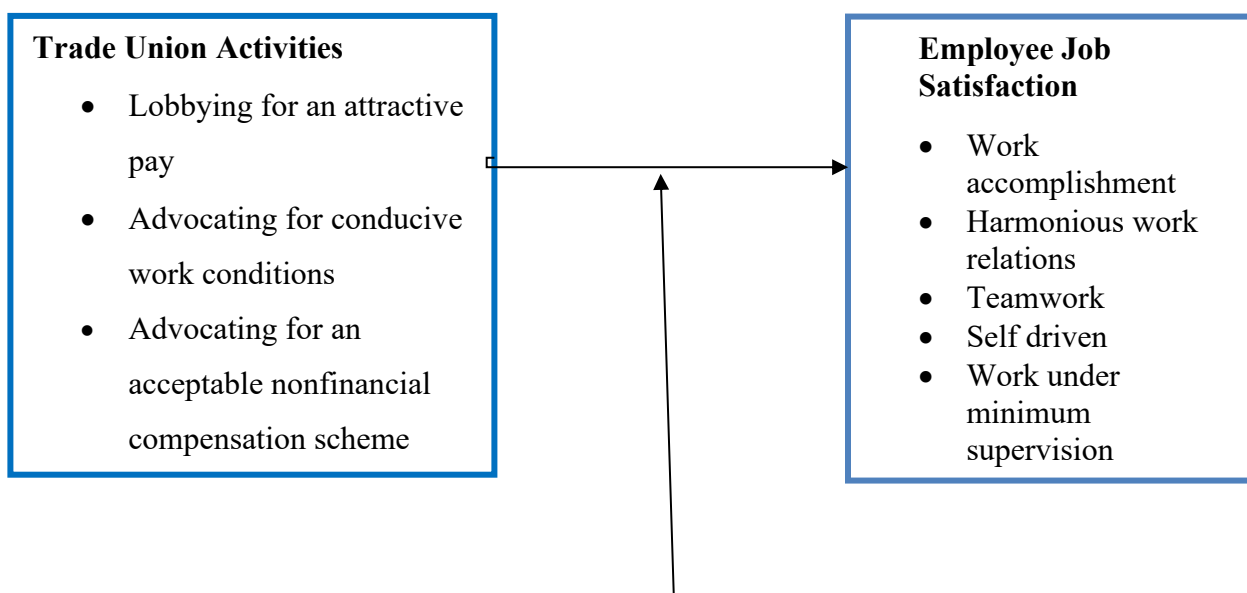
1.5.Conceptual Model

Under this model, the independent variable is Trade Union Activities, comprising lobbying for attractive pay, advocating for conducive work conditions and advocating for acceptable non-financial compensation schemes, while the dependent variable is Employee Job Satisfaction, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable



Moderating Variable

- Health Policy/decisions
- Trade union policy/decisions

2.0. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was guided by Herzberg's (1976) Two-Factor Theory and Vroom's (1968) Expectancy Theory. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory explains job satisfaction through motivators and hygiene factors. Hygiene factors include pay, working conditions, supervision and job security, which prevent dissatisfaction, while motivators such as recognition, achievement, responsibility and advancement enhance satisfaction. The theory is relevant to this study because trade unions advocate for both financial and non-financial conditions that may influence the satisfaction of health workers. Vroom's Expectancy Theory, on the other hand, argues that employees' motivation is influenced by their expectations that effort will result in performance and desirable rewards. The theory therefore suggests that health workers are likely to experience greater job satisfaction when trade union activities contribute to the achievement of their expected rewards and employment conditions.

2.2 Lobbying for Attractive Pay and Job Satisfaction

Trade unions play an important role in collective bargaining and negotiation for better wages, salaries and other financial benefits (Grogan, 2013). Through collective action, unions can strengthen employees' bargaining position and influence decisions concerning remuneration and employment conditions. Attractive remuneration has been associated with improved employee attitudes, motivation and performance while collective bargaining can significantly influence the level of remuneration received by workers (Akhaukwa et al., 2013).

Empirical studies also indicate a positive association between pay and job satisfaction. Parasail (2013) found that employees' satisfaction was influenced by salary, benefits and bonuses, while Glumpton (2010) reported that financial benefits associated with salary positively influenced job satisfaction and motivation among public-sector employees. Jepkorir (2014) further established a positive relationship between employee wages, working conditions and terms of employment. However, much of the existing literature focuses on general employee populations or sectors outside health care, with limited attention to the extent to which trade union lobbying for attractive pay influences job satisfaction among health workers in Uganda. This study therefore examined the effect of lobbying for attractive pay on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City.

2.3 Advocating for Conducive Work Conditions and Job Satisfaction

Working conditions comprise various physical, social and organizational factors that influence employees' experiences and satisfaction at work (Sempijja & Wamono, (2024). These include work autonomy, job security, and organizational culture, working hours, safety and availability of appropriate equipment (Suharno & Despinur, 2017; Jui-Min & Da-Sen, 2018). Bakotić and Babić (2013) found that employees working under normal conditions reported higher levels of job satisfaction than those exposed to difficult working conditions.

Trade unions provide employees with a collective voice through which workplace concerns, including health and safety, working hours and other employment conditions, can be raised with management (Lane et al., 2010). Poor working conditions have also been associated with the desire for union representation (Bryson & Freeman, 2013). However, previous studies have largely focused on sectors such as banking, telecommunications, universities and informal employment, leaving limited empirical evidence on the role of trade unions in improving working conditions and job satisfaction among health workers. This study therefore examined the effect of advocating for conducive work conditions on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City.

2.4 Advocating for Acceptable Non-Financial Compensation Schemes and Job Satisfaction

Non-financial compensation includes benefits and employment conditions that do not involve direct monetary payments, such as recognition, promotion opportunities, job security, accommodation, a supportive working environment and meaningful work. Such benefits can enhance employee commitment, loyalty and job satisfaction. Bakotić and Babić (2013) further identifies interesting work, responsibility, recognition, competent supervision and a comfortable working environment as important forms of non-financial compensation that can satisfy employees.

Trade unions can advocate for non-financial benefits such as housing, social security, insurance and job security as part of their responsibility to protect employee welfare (Jenn et al., 2016; Alexander et al., 2020). These benefits may strengthen employees' attachment to the organization and improve their satisfaction with work. However, existing studies provide limited evidence on the extent to which trade union capacity to advocate for non-financial compensation influences job satisfaction, particularly among health workers. This study therefore examined the effect of advocating for acceptable non-financial compensation schemes on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City.

2.5 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to employees' feelings and attitudes towards their work and workplace (Flood et al., 2012). It is influenced by factors such as pay, working conditions, recognition, promotion and job security. High job satisfaction enhances employee motivation, commitment and productivity, while dissatisfaction may contribute to absenteeism and turnover (Blegen, 2013). In the health sector, job satisfaction is particularly important because it can influence the quality-of-service delivery. Studies have linked job satisfaction to compensation, social support and unionism (Sutherland et al., 2013; Eric et al., 2013; Alken et al., 2014). However, limited attention has been given to the effect of specific trade union activities on job satisfaction among health workers in Uganda, hence the need for this study.

4.0.Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The target population comprised 120 health workers and 10 trade union leaders from Mbale Regional Referral Hospital, Namatala Health Centre IV and Bufumbo Health Centre IV in Mbale City. A sample of 112 respondents was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) approach. Purposive sampling was used to select union leaders, doctors and clinical officers, while simple random sampling was used to select nurses and midwives.

Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews and documentary review. Questionnaires were administered to health workers, while interviews were conducted with trade union leaders. The data were processed and analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize the data, while Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis were used to examine the effect of trade union activities on employee job satisfaction. The study achieved 93 usable responses from the 112 sampled respondents, representing a response rate of 83%.

4.0. Analysis

Employee job satisfaction constituted the dependent variable, while trade union activities comprising lobbying for attractive pay, advocating for conducive work conditions and advocating for acceptable non-financial compensation schemes constituted the independent variables. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the responses, while Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis were used to examine the relationships and effects between the variables. The results are presented in Tables 1–6

Table 1 Responses on Lobbying for Attractive Pay

No	Item	Responses		
	Responses on Relational Capital	SA & A % SD%	NS%	D & SD%
1.	I have been mobilized to be a member of the medical union	88.2	3.5	8.3
2.	My pay benefits are enhanced through representative negotiation	88.2	5.9	5.9
3.	I use my trade union to push for better pay	83.5	7.1	9.4
4.	I use my trade union as a channel to demand for better pay terms and conditions	85.9	8.2	5.9
5.	All my pay in terms of salary is determined by the medical union	57.6	11.8	30.6

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents agreed that trade unions play an important role in lobbying for attractive pay. Most respondents indicated that they had been mobilized to join the

medical union (88.2%) and that their pay benefits were enhanced through representative negotiation (88.2%). Similarly, 83.5% reported using their trade unions to push for better pay, while 85.9% used the unions to demand better pay terms and conditions. However, only 57.6% agreed that their salaries were determined by the medical union, while 30.6% disagreed. This implies that trade unions provide an important platform for health workers to collectively negotiate and advocate for improved pay and employment terms. The findings are consistent with Grogan (2013) and Zhavoronkov (2015), who emphasize the role of trade unions in collective bargaining and protecting workers' interests. Overall, the findings suggest that lobbying for attractive pay is an important trade union activity that can contribute to employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City.

Table 2 Responses on Advocating for Conducive Work Conditions

No	Item	Responses		
		SA & A %	NS%	D & SD%
	Responses on Relational Capital			
1.	I also use functional tools while performing my work duties	88.2	5.9	5.9
2.	I am driven to feel at work due to available work autonomy atmosphere	89.4	3.5	7.1
3.	Interpersonal communication motivates me to do my work as expected	92.9	5.9	1.2
4.	I am taken up to work by the learning and creative environment	84.7	9.4	5.9
5.	I am subjected to safety measures in the course of my work	91.8	2.4	5.9

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents agreed that conducive work conditions are supported through trade union activities. Most respondents reported that they use functional work tools (88.2%), experience work autonomy (89.4%), and are motivated by interpersonal communication (92.9%). Similarly, 84.7% agreed that the work environment is learning and creative, while 91.8% reported being subjected to safety measures at work. These findings suggest that trade union advocacy contributes to improving workplace safety, autonomy, communication and the general work environment. The findings are consistent with Bakotić and Babić (2013), and Lane et al. (2010), who emphasize the importance of conducive working conditions, safety and autonomy in enhancing job satisfaction. Overall, the findings suggest that advocating for conducive work conditions is an important trade union activity that can contribute to employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City.

Table 3 Responses on Advocating for an Acceptable Non-Financial Compensation Scheme

No	Item	Responses		
	Reponses on Structural Capital	SA & A %	NS %	D & SD%
1.	I am entitled to compensation at my workplace	89.4	4.7	5.9
2.	I am entitled to accommodation in terms of housing as a medical worker	58.8	12.9	28.3
3.	I follow certain grievance procedures to make claims for compensation	88.2	7.1	4.7
4.	I am subjected to compensation in terms of health insurance	35.3	14.1	50.6
5.	I have assurance of compensation with regard to my welfare	87.1	2.4	10.6

Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents agreed that health workers benefit from trade union advocacy for acceptable non-financial compensation schemes in the health sector at Mbale City. The highest proportion of respondents, 76 (89.4%), agreed that they are entitled to compensation at their workplace, followed by 75 (88.2%) who agreed that they follow grievance procedures to make claims for compensation and 74 (87.1%) who agreed that they have assurance of compensation with regard to their welfare. However, only 50 (58.8%) agreed that they are entitled to accommodation in terms of housing, while 30 (35.3%) agreed that they are subjected to compensation in terms of health insurance. This implies that trade unions play an important role in advocating for the welfare and compensation of health workers, although gaps still exist, particularly in the provision of housing and health insurance. This finding is in agreement with Benson (2012), who observed that trade unions provide workers with a collective voice to secure fair compensation and welfare benefits. The findings therefore suggest that strengthening trade union advocacy for non-financial compensation schemes could enhance employee welfare and job satisfaction among health workers in Mbale City.

Table 4 Correlation Matrix

	Lobbying for attractive pay	Advocating for Conducive Work Conditions	Advocating for Acceptable Non- Financial Compensation	Job Satisfaction
Lobbying for attractive pay				.614**
Advocating for Conducive Work Conditions				.421**
Advocating for Acceptable Non- Financial Compensation				.674**
Job Satisfaction	.614**	.421**	.674**	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Testing the Relationship between Lobbying for Attractive Pay and Job Satisfaction

After the descriptive analysis above, a correlation matrix was generated to establish the relationship between lobbying for attractive pay and job satisfaction among health workers in Mbale City. As indicated in Table 4.X, there was a positive and significant relationship between lobbying for attractive pay and job satisfaction ($r = .614$, $n = 85$, $p < .001$). This implies that effective lobbying by trade unions for attractive pay is associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among health workers. Therefore, the findings support the view that trade union efforts to improve salaries, allowances and other pay-related benefits can contribute to employee job satisfaction.

Testing the Relationship between Advocating for Conducive Work Conditions and Job Satisfaction

A correlation analysis was also employed to determine the relationship between advocating for conducive work conditions and job satisfaction among health workers in Mbale City. Results indicate a positive and significant relationship between advocating for conducive work conditions and job satisfaction ($r = .421$, $n = 85$, $p < .001$). This represents a moderate relationship, implying that improvements in working conditions, including safety, work autonomy, functional tools and

a supportive work environment, are associated with increased job satisfaction among health workers. Thus, trade union advocacy for conducive working conditions is relevant to enhancing employee job satisfaction.

Testing the Relationship between Advocating for Acceptable Non-Financial Compensation and Job Satisfaction

In order to establish the relationship between advocating for an acceptable non-financial compensation scheme and job satisfaction, a correlation matrix was generated. As indicated in Table 4.X, the results reveal a positive and significant relationship between advocating for acceptable non-financial compensation and job satisfaction ($r = .674$, $n = 85$, $p < .001$). This indicates a strong relationship, suggesting that greater advocacy for non-financial benefits such as accommodation, health insurance, welfare benefits and other employee benefits is associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among health workers. Therefore, trade union advocacy for acceptable non-financial compensation plays an important role in enhancing job satisfaction.

5.0. Discussions

In this section, the study findings are compared with existing literature to establish areas of agreement or difference. The results are discussed according to the major study variables.

Lobbying for Attractive Pay on Job Satisfaction in the Health Sector in Mbale City

The study found a positive and significant effect of lobbying for attractive pay on job satisfaction among health workers. This implies that adequate remuneration is important in enhancing employees' satisfaction and effectiveness at work. Zhavoronkov (2015) observes that trade unions play an important role in protecting and improving members' rights to better pay. Similarly, Jepkorir (2014) found a positive relationship between employee wages, working conditions and organizational productivity in Kenya. Pandya S, et al., (2022) further established that trade unions can positively influence productivity when they successfully negotiate better remuneration packages. The findings are therefore consistent with previous studies and the Uganda Health Sector Report (2018), as well as the 1995 Constitution of Uganda, which recognizes workers' rights to fair remuneration.

Advocating for Conducive Work Conditions on Job Satisfaction in the Health Sector in Mbale City

The findings indicate that advocating for conducive working conditions contributes to job satisfaction among health workers. Previous studies by Al-Hussami et al. (2011), and Yap et al. (2010) similarly emphasize the importance of favourable working conditions in promoting employee satisfaction and service delivery. Bakotić (2013), Guy Newsham et al. (2009), Ogonda et al. (2015), and Bryson and Freeman (2013) further demonstrate that employees value safe, comfortable and non-unpleasant working environments. The findings of the current study are therefore consistent with existing literature, suggesting that trade unions should strengthen

advocacy for working conditions that promote employee satisfaction and effective service delivery.

Advocating for an Acceptable Nonfinancial Compensation Scheme on Job Satisfaction in the Health Sector in Mbale City

The study established a positive and significant effect of acceptable nonfinancial compensation on job satisfaction. This finding is consistent with Nuchrawee (2019), who emphasize the importance of effective compensation strategies in promoting employee commitment, loyalty and positive attitudes towards their organizations. Although the current study did not identify specific nonfinancial compensation schemes preferred by health workers, the findings demonstrate that acceptable benefits can enhance job satisfaction. The appropriate compensation schemes may, however, vary across organizations and countries depending on employees' needs and institutional circumstances.

6.0. Conclusions

The study concludes that trade union activities have varying effects on employee job satisfaction in the health sector in Mbale City. Lobbying for attractive pay and advocating for acceptable nonfinancial compensation schemes had positive and significant effects on job satisfaction, while advocating for conducive work conditions had no significant effect. The findings therefore suggest that trade unions should strategically strengthen activities that have demonstrated a significant contribution to employee job satisfaction, particularly effective pay negotiations and nonfinancial compensation initiatives. However, since the variables examined did not fully explain variations in job satisfaction, further research is necessary to identify other factors influencing job satisfaction among health workers in Mbale City.

7.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings, trade unions, employers and government should strengthen collaboration to improve employee job satisfaction in the health sector. Trade unions should enhance engagement with employers and the Ministry of Health to advocate for attractive and equitable remuneration, while government and health sector authorities should continue supporting safe working environments, adequate work equipment and mechanisms for protecting health workers' rights. Greater emphasis should also be placed on acceptable nonfinancial compensation schemes, including employee recognition, professional development, welfare initiatives and other appropriate incentives, given their significant positive effect on job satisfaction. Trade unions should be strengthened through appropriate training and enabling frameworks to effectively represent workers' interests, while health sector management should maintain constructive relationships with trade unions and establish effective negotiation mechanisms to prevent workers' concerns from escalating into industrial disputes. Finally, further research should examine other factors that may influence job satisfaction among health workers, since the variables examined in this study did not fully explain variations in job satisfaction.

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