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Awareness of employment rights among teachers in selected senior high schools in the Central Region of Ghana

Abstract

This study examined teachers' awareness of employment rights as contained in the Labour Act, 2003 of Ghana in selected senior high schools (SHS) in the country. It was a descriptive study located within the interpretive-qualitative framework. Data was gathered in two phases. In the first phase, a semi-structured questionnaire was administered to fifty (50) teachers in five selected senior high schools. The second phase involved a semi-structured interview with ten teachers from the same schools. The study revealed that many teachers had insufficient knowledge of their employment rights. It was also revealed that majority of the teachers not read the Labour Act, 2003. However, the teachers indicated they had heard about parts of the document being discussed on various media platforms.

Introduction

The dream of most adult individuals is to have a descent employment so as to earn a living as it has often been said that the two most important things to human beings are love and work (Beato, 2004). Certainly, each of these two has the capacity infinitely to enrich, or to impoverish, human existence. Modern employment legislations all over the world invest the employee with important rights resulting in a greater degree of job security and improved legal protection in his or her employment (Befort, 2002; Short, 2007). In the words of Carby-Hall (1985), employment rights or entitlements are all personal in nature. This means they are to be enjoyed at the individual level.

Wellman (1996) opined that appropriate organizational values include dignity, respect, honesty, equal and fair treatment, integrity, ethics, and listening. These require great attention from employers across the various sectors of the economy. People in management have as a matter of necessity, to operationalize these values as identified by Wellman and others appropriate and relevant at the workplace so as to give value and dignity to their employees.

The United Nation Charter for Human Rights (1948), International Labour Organization (1919), African Charter for Human and Peoples' Rights (1979), Republican Constitution of Ghana (1992), and the Labour Act of Ghana (2003) all vest rights on the Ghanaian employee (Obeng-Foso, 2007). In fact, they provide for, protect and promote employment rights. A fundamental question however is, are employees aware of their employment rights? A significant question worth asking is "are teachers aware of their employment rights as codified in modern day documents as the Labour Act, 2003?" Interestingly, teachers in senior high schools (SHS) in Ghana are expected to have a minimum qualification of a first degree from a recognised university. This work sought to find out Ghanaian teachers' awareness of their employment rights as provided for in appropriate legal documents especially the Labour Act (2003).

The significance of the study is not farfetched. The study sought to inform the public about how teachers in private senior high schools in the Central Region of Ghana are aware of their employment rights. This is necessary because if one is unawareness of one's rights, one cannot defend their abuses.

Literature review

The Labour Act, 2003 is the legal labour document of the Republic of Ghana which among other provisions defines the working relationship that has to exist between employers and employees in the country in line with the 1992 Constitution and other international labour related documents. The provisions in these documents aim at protecting employees in Ghana so as to enhance productivity (Mensah, 2001; & Baah-Boateng, 2008).

Debrah & Mmieh (2009) described employment rights as the basic conditions granted to an employee which stem from statutory and or employment contract sources. It is important however to note that one's employment contract rights cannot take away one's rights by law when the former fall short of the latter. However, when one's contract of employment gives greater rights than by law, they apply (An-Na'im & Deng, 1990; Moberg, 1997; Nayar, 1980).

Legislations on employment rights have been passed throughout the globe since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Passing legislations and posting documents on employment rights, however, do not guarantee for protection and promotion of employees' rights. Indeed, studies from various parts of the world indicate ignorance and infringement of employment rights notwithstanding the various documents that exist from the national to international levels with the aim of protecting and promoting employment rights (Palmer, 2000, Boafo-Arthur, 2007).

Surely, the realization of employment rights depends, largely first, on the awareness of employment rights by employers and employees and secondly on the intervention of mandated state institutions for the promotion and protection of employment such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and Labour Commission as well as interested civil society organizations (Boafo-Arthur, 2007).

In all these, what is unclear from the literature studied by the researcher is the absence of how teachers especially those in private senior high schools are aware of their employment rights. This precisely the gap this study sought to fill; provide information on how teachers in private senior high schools in the Central Region of Ghana are aware of their employment rights.

Methodology

The study was carried out in selected private senior high schools in the Central Region of Ghana. A descriptive survey design was used for the study. The target population for the study was the teachers in private senior high schools in the Central Region of Ghana. The accessible population however was the teachers in the selected private senior high schools in the region. Data on the awareness of employment rights among teachers in the senior high schools was gathered from teachers at a point in time and analysis made. In all, fifty (50) randomly sampled male and female teachers were selected from the five (5) conveniently selected senior high schools in the country. Two instruments, a questionnaire and interview were used to gather data.

Results

To find out the extent of awareness of employment rights among teachers in the selected Senior High Schools in the Central Region, the researcher used questionnaire and interview to gather data. Respondents were required to indicate on a questionnaire whether they had "Insufficient" (INS), "Sufficient" (SU), or "Not at All" (NA) awareness of employment rights. The responses are as expressed in Table 1.

Table 1: Teachers’ awareness of employment rights

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not At All (NA)	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
Insufficient (INS)	42	84.0	84.0	94.0
Sufficient (SU)	3	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: *Field Data (2014)*

It can be seen from Table 1 above that five (5) of the fifty (50) respondents (representing 10%) were not aware of employment rights, forty two (42) respondents (84%) were insufficiently aware of employment rights and three (3) respondents (6%) indicated they had sufficient awareness of employment rights.

Even though, ninety percent (90%) of the respondents indicated they had some level of awareness of employment rights, majority of the respondents (84%) had insufficient awareness as indicated. A very high proposition (94%) of the respondents had inadequate knowledge of employment rights. This proposition comprised 84% and 10% of the respondents who respectively possessed insufficient awareness and no awareness of employment rights. This confirms Shorts’ (2007) assertion that many Ghanaians including employers, highly educated, and job seekers had little knowledge about employment rights. The 10% of the fifty (50) respondents who indicated they had “sufficient” knowledge of employment rights was rather a small portion of the total sample. Since majority of the respondents did not have adequate knowledge of employment rights, they could not have challenged their abuses.

Some respondents attributed the lack of employees’ awareness of employment rights to inadequate public education on employment rights. They held the view that governmental agencies such as the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), Information Service Department (ISD) and the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) who have the primary responsibilities of educating and informing the public were inadequately financed and resourced by government which has virtually grounded these institutions. It emerged that the large scale lack of awareness of employment rights among employees led to abuses; either also out of ignorance or deliberately by their employers.

Respondents were further asked on their awareness of the existence of the Labour Act, 2003, the legal national document that provides workers with rights and regulates labour relations in the country. It was realized that most of the employees had insufficient knowledge about the existence of the document. The responses related to this issue are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Awareness of the existence of the Labour Act, 2003

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not At All (NA)	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
Insufficient (INS)	42	84.0	84.0	92.0
Sufficient (SU)	4	8.0	8.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: *Field Data (2014)*

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The responses from Table 2 indicate that forty six (92%) of the employees were aware of the existence of the labour document. Whiles forty two of the respondents (84%) of them had “insufficient” awareness of the existence of the document, 4 respondents (8%) had “sufficient” awareness. An additional eight percent (4 respondents) were not aware of the document at all.

Respondents who were not aware of the existence of the Labour Act, 2003 explained that it was due to the scarcity of the printed document in circulation. Some, however, acknowledged seeing copies of the document but just that they did not bother to give it attention. This is a reflection of the general lack of concern for knowledge among the Ghanaian public.

In an attempt to find out how many of the sampled teachers had read the labour document, it was discovered that fifty eight percent (58%) of the respondents had not read the Labour Act, 2003. Twenty other respondents (40%) indicated they had done insufficient reading of the document. One respondent (2%) had done sufficient reading of the document. This amply showed that majority of the teachers had not adequately read the labour document. This was particularly curious because of the fact that all the respondents were graduate teachers from various universities with a few of them holding Master Degrees.

It was however, realized that forty four (88% of the 50 respondents) had heard about portions of the document through various media. Fifty eight percent (58%) of them had just heard a little about the document whiles ten (10) (20% of the respondents) had “sufficient” hearing about the document. Out of the 50 respondents, 6 (12%) of them had not heard about the Labour Act, 2003 of Ghana. This was supported by the following response from one of the teachers in an interview to the question “Have you heard about the Labour Act, 2003 of Ghana?”

Yes, I have heard about it from my colleagues at work. I have also heard it being discussed over the radio and even on television but I have not read the document itself. I have only read about the document from the dailies.
(Interview data; 2014)

There was a widely held view among the respondents that they had not heard much about the labour document because, its content had not been sufficiently publicized by the bodies/ organizations mandated to do so.

Conclusion

In Ghana, the Republican Constitution of 1992 and the Labour Act, 2003 show great commitment to the protection of the employment rights of employees. Generally, however, people have little awareness of employment rights. The study revealed that the majority of the research subjects did not have sufficient awareness of employment rights. Ninety two percent (92%) of the sample indicated they did not have sufficient awareness of the Labour Act, 2003 which provides them with their rights at their workplace. Majority of the teachers had only heard a little about the document from the broadcast media and friends at their workplaces.

Recommendations

The institutions of government responsible for the education of Ghanaians on their rights such as the Labour Commission, CHRAJ, NCCE, and National Information Service should design beneficial and interesting publicity activities to educate the Ghanaian public on employment rights through a wide range of means. For example, drama and discussions on employment rights could be done on television programmes. There may also be the need for local language versions of such programmes.

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