

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH EMPLOYEE VOICE
INFLUENCES OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH PRACTICES: A
CASE OF DWANGWA SUGAR ESTATE**

**MASTER OF ARTS (HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS) THESIS**

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UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

MARCH, 2022



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By

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Submitted to the Department of Political and Administrative Studies, Faculty of
Social Science, University of Malawi in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis entitled “**Analysing the extent to which employee voice influences Occupational Safety and Health Practices: A Case Study of Dwangwa Sugar Estate**” is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people’s work has been used, due acknowledgements have been made.

Full legal name

Signature

Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the student's own work and effort,
and has been submitted with his approval.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Mustafa Kennedy Hussein (Associate Professor)

Supervisor

DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to my family comprising my wife, my daughters and my sons, for showing interest in my studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am indebted to my supervisor, Associate Professor Mustafa Kennedy Hussein, for his unwavering guidance in the writing of this thesis. I am also grateful to employees of Dwangwa Sugar Estate for their participation in this study, and Messers Tobias Nkhonya and Alex Mbukwa for being collaborators of this research.

ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to analyse the extent to which employee voice (EV) influences occupational safety and health practices (OSH) at Dwangwa Sugar estate. The objectives of this study were three fold; to assess the legal and policy framework relating to EV and OSH practices, to analyse the effect of EV on OSH practices, and to examine the challenges associated with EV in uplifting OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate. The study adopted a hybrid research design. Purposive sampling and simple random sampling produced study samples of 14 employees and 322 employees respectively from a study population of 1,986 employees. The study also reviewed various selected reports and policies of the Dwangwa Sugar estate. The researcher collected the data from the 14 employees through direct interviews whereas the data were collected from the 322 employees through a survey in which a self-administered structured questionnaire was issued to the participants. The data collected from the 14 employees, and through archival review of the reports and policies were analysed through literal and interpretive reading. The researcher analysed the data collected from the 322 employees through use of the Microsoft Excel. The study found that Dwangwa Sugar estate has the legal and policy framework relating to EV and OSH practices, that EV minimally affects OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate, and that EV faces a myriad of challenges in uplifting OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate. The study concluded that EV influences OSH practices to a lesser extent at Dwangwa Sugar estate. Against this conclusion, the study recommended that the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi should attract the 40 percent of employees who are not its members into its camp so that it enjoys an overwhelming employee voice. The study also recommended that the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi should review the qualification requirements of candidates aspiring for election into its executive to deal with leadership challenges at the top. The third recommendation although related to the second one was that the executive team of the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi should frequently undergo relevant trainings to improve strategic impetus. Finally, it was the recommendation of this study that the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi should lobby management for an amendment of the Recognition Agreement (1995) to secure recognition rights on matters of occupational safety and health.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Collective Agreement
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Union
EV	Employee Voice
LRA, 1996	Labour Relations Act, 1996
MCTU	Malawi Congress of Trade Unions
NUM	National Union of Mine Workers
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
OSHOWA	Occupational Safety, Health and Welfare Act
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SPAWUM	Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TUM	Teachers Union of Malawi

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study discusses the extent of influence of employee voice (EV) on occupational safety and health practices (OSH) in organisations, the case of Dwangwa Sugar Estate. Employee voice is a vehicle through which employees articulate their views in organisations and this voice takes many different forms but all these many forms of voice lead to a situation in which employees are given, gain or develop a degree of influence over what happens in organisations (Wilkinson, 2004; Torrington, et al., 2014).

The West and South Africa celebrate employee voice for improvements in Occupational Safety and Health and indeed many studies indicate that employee voice driven workplaces are safer and healthier than those without employee voice (Abrams, 2001; O'Neill, 2002; Zwi, et al., 1988). While employee voice is leads to safer and heathier workplaces elsewhere in the world, there is little written about Malawi probably because no similar studies have been undertaken. This study therefore was undertaken to find out if employee voice leads to safer and healthier workplaces in Malawi with a particular focus on Dwangwa Sugar Estate.

Owned by Illovo Sugar (Malawi) plc, Dwangwa Sugar Estate is located in Nkhotakota district in the central region of Malawi and is 13,300 hectares. Illovo Sugar (Malawi) plc also owns Nchalo Sugar Estate situated in Chikhwawa in the Southern part of

Malawi and is 20,925 hectares. Both estates employed about of 5,657 permanent employees and 3,706 non-permanent employees in 2016(Corporate Citizenship, 2017).

1.1 Background to the Study

As indicated in the first paragraph of this chapter, employee voice is a means through which employees gain or develop a degree of influence in organizations (Torrington et al, 2014). Scholars have defined employee voice in many different ways but for the purpose of this research, employee voice refers to a collective representation of employees who can use union or non-union processes to communicate the views of the workforce to management (Wilkinson, 2004).

Employee voice occurs in an employment relationship that is characterised by a top-down authority structure (Kaufman, 2013). Although the concept and practice of employee voice has attracted attention in the last thirty years, the idea is as old the industrial revolution and the accompanying industrialisation process (Morrison, 2011; Drakopoulos & Katselidis, 2012). In fact, the first writers to use the term voice were economists; then, the employee voice concept denoted the employee's act of speaking up and expressing his or her mind against employers (Kaufman, 2013). The term employee voice gradually became synonymous with trade union membership and collective bargaining (Rees et al., 2013). Eventually, the employee voice term swiftly became a standard part of the discourse about unions (Kaufman, 2013).

Employees of Dwangwa Sugar estate express their views about their organisation via the Sugar Plantations and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (SPAWUM), and this Union covers Dwangwa Sugar Estate, Dwangwa Cane Growers Limited, Nchalo Sugar Estate and Kasinthula Cane Growers Limited (SPAWUM Constitution, 1995).

Dwangwa Sugar Estate, the focus of this study, had a staff complement of 1,986 employees out of which 1,183 employees were members of the Union at the time of this research (Staff Compliment, December 2020). The study therefore discusses the extent of influence of employee voice on Occupational Safety and Health at Dwangwa Sugar estate where employee voice is exercised through a collective representation in the form of the trade union called the Sugar Plantations and Allied Workers Union of Malawi.

1.2 Problem statement

Malawi lost its employee voice freedoms during the one party state period and regained it in 1993 after attaining political pluralism (Dzimbiri, 2005). Sequel to the change in politics, the country registered an increased expression of employee voice through protests over improved wages, conditions of employment and at times removal of senior managers particularly in the public sector. For instance, 90 strikes were reported between 1992 and 1999 (Dzimbiri; 2005), 32 strikes from May to December in 2012, 27 strikes in 2014, 26 strikes in 2015 and 25 strikes from January to June 2016 according to the data maintained by the Malawi Congress of Trade Union (MCTU).

Poor wages triggered this wave of the visible expressions of employee voice save for one protest which was precipitated by poor working conditions related to dilapidated buildings and infestation of bed bugs. The question that arises from this situation is whether OSH matters are a concern among workers in Malawi.

Malawi has enacted a litany of legislation in employment law in response to the dictates of the 1994 Malawi Constitution, which entrenches the freedom of association and other

labour rights. The tentacles of this employment law regime extend to the private sector, and so the workforce in this sector enjoys the labour freedoms and rights. It is not surprising, therefore, that the private sector suffered 14 strikes in 2012, 8 strikes in 2014 and 4 strikes in 2015. Sadly, OSH issues were not the concern of these protests according to a 2020 register of the Malawi Congress of Trade Unions.

Dwangwa Sugar estate is one of the two estates under Illovo Sugar Malawi. The Estate is 13,300 hectares and has a trade union (Corporate Citizenship Report, 2014). The Corporate Citizenship Report (2014) indicates that 91 percent of its non-management employees were members of a trade union in 2013, and this is down slightly from 92 percent in 2012. However, only 60 percent of the workforce were members of the union in 2020 (Staff Compliment, December 2020).

The Corporate Citizenship, 2017 states that Dwangwa Sugar estate employees are able to raise grievances through the union and through the in-house country dispute resolution mechanisms, 78 percent of employees are covered by Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA) and management maintains conducive working relationships with the trade union as guided by the Labour Relations Act, 1996 (LRA). The Corporate Citizenship, 2017 also indicates that issues discussed through the trade union include industrial relations, wages, conditions of service, disciplinary procedures, welfare and business performance. It is hence noted from the preceding sentence that issues of occupational safety and health do not find their way into the discussions between the union and management and this therefore raises the following pertinent questions: Does the workforce have a say on safety and health issues at Dwangwa Sugar estate? Does the workforce view safety and health issues as a necessary agenda item to be included

in the Collective Bargaining Agreements? Does the declining union membership affects its influence on the safety and health agenda?

The Occupational Safety, Health and Welfare Act, 1997 (OSHWA) of Malawi makes provisions for the regulation of the conditions of employment in workplaces and specifically places primary duty on every employer to ensure the safety, health and welfare at work of all his employees. On the other hand, the Act gives employees a secondary duty to take reasonable care for their own safety and health and that of other persons who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work. Does EV influence OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate within the context of this Act?

The Human Capital Report (2015) indicates that Dwangwa Sugar estate follows best practice international standards as regards to its OSH practices, and has earned a four-star accreditation under the National Occupational Safety Association's (NOSA-South Africa) Integrated Five-star System covering safety, health and environmental management. Did EV have a hand in attaining the four-star accreditation? If yes, to what extent was this achievement attributable to employee voice?

Dwangwa and Nchalo Sugar estates under Illovo Malawi spent ZAR 1 million on safety related training in 2012/13, which included activities such as a group risk management conference, safety and health environment, quality representatives training, fire team member training and first aid. Despite the investment in training and the NOSA accreditation, Illovo Malawi experienced a fatality in November 2012 (Human Capital Report, 2015). This situation raises the following questions: Were the trainings effective? Does EV have a say on who should be on Safety, Health, Environment and Quality representative committees and related trainings? Did EV influence the training

efforts? Did EV have a say on the post fatality investigations to determine what led to the accident? Did EV have a say on corrective measures after the fatality to avoid a repeat of a similar incident?

Illovo safety statistics for Malawi operations for the period to 31 March 2016 indicate the disabling injury frequency rates of 0.08 against a target of 0.25 in 2016, 0.09 against a target of 0.35 in 2015 and 0.11 against a target of 0.35 in 2014 (Human Capital Report, 2015). The record improvement in the disabling injury frequency rates cannot go without raising questions. Did EV contribute to this improvement in safety and if yes to what extent did the voice influence this improvement?”

Employee voice occurs through a consultative process between employer and employee, and this process remains an essential factor central to most workplace safety and health improvements since industrial revolution (Abrams, 2001; Walters, 2003). Indeed studies add to the voice by various scholars that employee voice leads to improvements in workplace safety and health. A 1993 study done for the Canadian Ministries of Labour concluded that employee-employer discussions about health and safety have a significant impact in reducing injury rates. Later studies for the Ontario Workplace Health and Safety Agency in Canada found that 78-79 per cent of unionized workplaces reported high compliance with health and safety legislation while only 54 - 61 percent of non-unionized workplaces reported such compliance (O'Neill, 2002). O'Neill (2002) further hints that a study in the form of a review of safety and health in the United Kingdom's workplaces by a United States academic concluded that employee voice dramatically improves safety in even the most hazardous workplaces.

The review further found that a non-union office worker was 13 times more likely to suffer an injury than was a closed-shop union worker on an industrial assembly line.

Scholars remain persuasive that EV is central to improvements in OSH practices but is this the case at Dwangwa Sugar estate? Dwangwa Sugar estate has a trade union as a means of EV but to what extent does it influence OSH practices?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to analyse the extent of influence of employee voice on occupational safety and health practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate.

1.3.1 Specific objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- assess the legal and policy framework relating to employee voice (EV) and occupational safety and health (OSH) practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate.
- analyse the effects of employee voice (EV) on occupational safety and health (OSH) practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate.
- examine the challenges associated with employee voice (EV) in uplifting occupational safety and health (OSH) practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate.

1.4 Justification of the Study

Employee voice remains an essential factor in occupational safety and health improvements (Abrams, 2001). Scholars maintain that employee voice driven workplaces are safer and healthier than those without employee voice and that employee voice leads to improvements in safety and health standards (O'Neill, 2002). While employee voice is celebrated for safer and healthier workplaces internationally, nothing has been stated about Malawi probably because no similar studies have been undertaken. Therefore, this study will therefore fill this void.

1.5 Organization of the Thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one outlines the introduction to the study, the problem statement, the objectives of the study and its justification. The second chapter tackles literature review with focus on the employee voice concept, employee voice in relation to OSH legal and policy framework, employee voice mechanism, effects of employee voice on occupational safety and health, challenges to employee voice, employee voice theory and the conceptual framework within which employee voice concept operates.

Chapter three is about the methodology, which the study followed and includes research design, population, sample and sampling techniques, data collection, data analysis, ethical consideration and limitations of the study. Finally, presentation and discussion of the findings is under chapter four while chapter five discusses the conclusion and recommendations.

1.6 Chapter Summary

In this thesis, employee voice refers to a collective representation of employees who can use union or non-union processes to communicate the views of the workforce to management (Wilkinson, 2004). Therefore, employees use employee voice as a vehicle through which they gain, are given or develop influence over what happens in organisations (Wilkinson, 2004; Torrington et al., 2014). Dwangwa Sugar estate was the case study of this research and its employees use the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union to communicate its views to management. Employees' views in this case relate to securing complete organization of the workers, regulating just and proper rates of wages and other conditions of work, regulating relations and settling disputes between the members and employers, educating the members about their rights and promoting legislation in the interest of the members (SPAWUM Constitution, 1995).

Abrams and Walters (2001; Walters, 2003) celebrate employee voice for its positive influence on occupational health and safety around the globe. This positive gain seems not to be conspicuous in the context of Dwangwa Sugar estate although the estate has a visible voice through the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (SPAWUM Constitution, 1995) and the policy and legal framework vis-à-vis OSH. This is the source of the research problem.

The main research objective of this study was to analyse the extent of influence of employee voice on occupational safety and health practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate. Three specific objectives were carefully selected to drive this study, and they were to assess the legal and policy framework relating to employee voice (EV) and occupational safety and health (OSH) practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate, to analyse the effects of employee voice (EV) on occupational safety and health (OSH) practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate and to examine the challenges associated with employee voice (EV) in uplifting occupational safety and health (OSH) practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section reviewed a wide range of literature on EV and OSH practices with focus on definitions and core concepts of EV, OSH legal and policy framework germane to EV, EV mechanisms, EV effects on OSH practices, and challenges to EV. The section concludes by drawing the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, which guided this study.

2.2 Definitions

Employee voice is a versatile concept and can, therefore, be interpreted and used in a great variety of ways. This therefore points to the fact that there are multiple meanings of employee voice across disciplines (Wilkinson et al., 2014). Wilkinson et al. (2014) define EV in three ways. EV is the articulation of individual dissatisfaction aimed at addressing a specific problem with management. It can take the form of collective organization where it provides a countervailing source of power to management. EV is also defined as a contribution to management decision-making with the aim of improving work organization and efficiency through employees' inputs. Finally, Wilkinson et al. (2014) refer to EV as an instrument of mutual gain through productive collaboration between capital and labour in order to increase the long-term viability of an organization and economic wellbeing of employees.

Boxal and Purcell (2011) state that the term voice refers to all kinds of opportunities where an individual employee will have a chance to express himself and exert some influence on workplace decisions while Morrison (2011) defines voice as an act of championing and speaking up on certain fundamental issues affecting employee productive work behaviour. Morrison (2011) also defines EV as discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions about work-related issues with intent to improve organizational functioning while Armstrong (2009) defined voice as a say that employees have at work comprising involvement, participation, problem solving and communication.

A study on the changing patterns of employee voice in firms in the United Kingdom and Ireland by Marchington et al. (2004) assigns five other meanings to the voice concept. Firstly, this study views EV as an opportunity for employees and managers to exchange views about issues be it on an individual basis or through a collective consultation process. This study also views EV as an opportunity for employees to provide feedback on specific topics hence not so much as a dialogue but more as a way to improve organizational performance. The third meaning assigned by the study to EV is that EV is a collective representation that offers an opportunity for employee representatives to communicate the views of the workforce to management. The fourth meaning the study assigns to EV is that it is a say employees have about issues. This say provides workers with the opportunity to express their views and expect that their views will be taken by management, and will influence how decisions are made. The final meaning this study by Marchington et al., (2004) assigns to EV is that it is engagement where engagement means a feeling on the part of employees that they are able to express their views to managers in an open environment and that management

will provide support to allow it to happen. It can safely be surmised from the definitions that EV is all about discretionary say that employees must have to express dissatisfaction or to contribute to the functioning of the organisation.

The Labour Relations Act (1996) of Malawi champions freedom of association and collective bargaining. The Act elevates the degree of EV from a level of individual expression of dissatisfaction by employees to collective representation. McCabe and Lewin (1992), summarized voice as consisting of the expression of grievances in a work context by employees to management and the participation of employees in the decision-making processes at either individual level or collective consultation level. In this context, EV serves as a safety valve for expression of dissatisfaction and as a means of influencing the decision-making process in organizations. Hirschman (1970) refers to voice as any attempts directed at changing any objectionable state of affairs through individual or collective petition to the management, appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, and through various types of actions and protests, including those that are directed at mobilizing public opinion.

Employee voice is undoubtedly a contentious and multifaceted concept because of the so many meanings assigned to it. However, the bottom line of all these meanings is the say employees ought to have about the context of work in organisations. In this article, EV equals collective representation that offers an opportunity for representatives to communicate the views of the workforce to management in a bid to influence decisions (Marchington et al., 2004).

2.3 Employee Voice: OSH Legal and Policy Framework

Srivastava & Mohapatra (2013) note that as the EV concept was settling down in organizations, researchers have been attempting to identify factors that encourage employees to express their voice to their managers. Researchers were probably motivated to go into this area by the fact that EV has been recognized as an important source of organizational adaptation to challenges of change and the desire to create an organizational climate in which employees are encouraged to speak the truth becomes imperative (Collins, 2001). On the other hand, a work place without EV can exact a high psychological price on individuals leading to the generation of feelings of humiliation, pernicious anger and resentment, which can contaminate every interaction, shut down creativity, and undermine productivity (Perlow & Williams, 2003).

Dundon and Golan (2007) state that trade unions have been seen as the major institutional form that acted as powerful channel for employees to voice their grievances and dissatisfaction relating to conditions of employment and treatment at workplace. The expression of EV via the unions therefore enabled employees to air their concerns without being penalised. Although unions are effective platforms of EV for employees, the situation has not remained the same with the passage of time in that during the past two decades or so, it has been increasingly realised that EV through unions has its own limitations, and needs to be broad based to include direct voice mechanisms within a variety of non-union settings (Dundon & Golan, 2007). The proposed direct institutional formal voice mechanisms outside the union setting are suggestion schemes, grievances redressal systems, quality circles and open-door policies, among others. Sadly, many of these mechanisms are often not able to achieve the desired objectives if management does not have the will to take appropriate action

(Srivastava & Mohapatra, 2013). This may be the reason so many countries have enacted legislation to influence and safeguard EV in relation to various aspects of employment, conditions of work, and safety and health. Member countries of the European Commission have legislation that backs EV to influence OSH practices with the sole aim of encouraging improvements in the safety and health of workers at work (Geurts & Gründemann, 1999). Britain is a member of the European Commission, where EV in OSH practices is largely influenced by the Health and Safety at Work Act (HSWA, 1974), the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations (SRSC, 1977) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (MHSW, 1992). The laws and regulations bind employers to undertake consultation on matters of OSH with their employees and the consultations are not limited to giving employees' information or employees listening to them but also taking account of what employees say before employers take OSH decisions. However, the choice, form and strength of OSH voice differ according to whether employers recognize a union or not. Notwithstanding this, the SRSC (1977) regulations, recognize trade unions as being entitled to appoint OSH representatives from among the workforce and once appointed, these representatives are required to represent all employees, union members or not, at each workplace within any given organization (Robinson & Smallman, 2019).

South Africa is a role model in the area of industrial relations in Southern Africa because of its advanced industrial relations system (Fashoyin, 1998). Owing to her advanced industrial relations system, South Africa has a litany of legislation on OHS through her Republican Constitution, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Labour Relations Act, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, the Compensation for Occupational Diseases and Injuries Act, the Unemployment Insurance Act, the

Employment Equity Act and the Skills Development Act. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the Labour Relations Act and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act all guarantee freedoms of association, collective bargaining rights and rights of employers to form employers' organizations and to participate in the activities thereof (Rothmann & Pienaar, 2014).

The Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act imposes a general duty on employers to provide a reasonably safe and healthy working environment, information, training and supervision as is necessary to ensure health and safety and to report to an inspector any incident in which an employee dies or is injured or when dangerous situations arise. Employees, on the other hand, are obliged to obey OHS rules and to report unsafe or unhealthy situations or incidents to employers or OHS representatives (Rothmann & Pienaar, 2014). The OHS Act further compels employers with more than 20 employees to appoint one or more full-time employees as health and safety representative after consultation and further instructs employers to provide training and facilities to these representatives. Employers with more than 1 safety representative must also establish health and safety committees, with which they must consult on health and safety issues (Grogan, 2005). South Africa and the European Union alike have a clear case of employee voice in OSH matters through their legislative framework.

Malawi has a horde of statutes that safeguard EV and these are the Malawi Constitution (1994), the Employment Act (2000) and the Labour Relations Act (1996). These legal blueprints provide for fair labour practices, freedom of association, trade unionism and collective bargaining. Malawi has legislative framework which safeguards the health, safety and welfare of employees at work in the name of the Occupational Safety, Health

and Welfare Act, 1996 (OSHWA). The Act places a duty on every employer to ensure the safety, health and welfare at work of all the employees, and empowers the relevant Minister to make regulations for the appointment by trade unions of safety representatives from amongst the employees in order to represent the employees in consultations with the employer. The Act further instructs every employer to consult with any safety representatives with a view to the making and maintenance of arrangements, which will enable the employer and his employees to ensure the safety and health at work of the employees, and in checking the effectiveness of such measures. It is intriguing to realise that other than safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of employees at work, the Occupational Safety, Health and Welfare Act, 1996 also encourages EV in OSH practices through encouraging the appointment of safety representatives from amongst the employees by trade unions.

Other than through the provisions of the OSHWA, 1996, employees can influence OSH practices through collective bargaining mechanisms as provided for in the Labour Relations Act (1996). Specifically put, Section 32 of the LRA (1996) instructs what should constitute a collective bargaining agreement, and further provides leeway that collective agreements can provide for such matters as may be agreed between the parties. Therefore, OSH matters may surely find their way into these agreements. Malawi has a clearly favourable legal environment that allows EV to flourish and influence OSH practices. Dwangwa Sugar estate has policies on safety, health, environment and food quality, which set standards on OSH matters. On the EV side, the estate has the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi, a visible beacon for the expression of EV. The legal and policy frameworks set the tone for EV in OSH practices worldwide.

2.4 Employee Voice Mechanisms

Organizations deploy various mechanisms to EV and these mechanisms can be formal or informal, direct or indirect, one-off or sustained over time, central to an organization's core business or relatively peripheral (Torrington et al., 2014). These mechanisms have been categorised into three, and the first category relates to human resource practices, which focus on performance and the necessity to make better and more efficient decisions, and promote higher commitment. This is a direct voice mechanism and is expressed by employees in the form of suggestions, ideas, information sharing, team briefing, quality circles, newssheets, attitude surveys, suggestion schemes, consultation, cooperatives and codetermination (Bovin & Moachin, 2019; Torrington et al., 2014).

The second of the mechanisms to the EV concept relates to industrial relations practices. This perspective considers EV as a vehicle for providing workers with some degree of control over management decision-making and workers exercise countervailing power to managerial decisions (Bonvin & Moachon, 2019). This is as an indirect voice mechanism where employers consider employees' views through the filter of a representative institution that may be a trade union or another kind of body such as a works council, a working party or a consultative committee. McCabe and Lewin (1992) adds that such indirect voice strategies can be either mandated or voluntary. An example to the assertion by McCabe et al., 1992 are the European Union (EU) directives on European workers' councils that are mandatory and collective bargaining, which is voluntary.

The final of the mechanisms to employee voice relates to task autonomy through work groups or self-managing teams' practices. In this perspective, the content and modalities of the task may be redesigned at group level, as teams are provided with skill discretion to solve problems via the mobilization of the group knowledge and means discretion to choose the best way to organize work within the team. The essence of this EV mechanism is that those who work with autonomy are better able to contribute to their self-fulfilment and to the improvement of performance and profitability (Bonvin & Moachon, 2019). Indeed, most organizations constitute committees, for instance, disciplinary hearing committees, training and development committees and quality improvement committees among others, to look into issues that demand expertise from properly constituted teams

The three voice mechanisms outlined in the foregoing discourse are also broadly categorised as direct and indirect forms of voice. Direct as the term implies refers to situations in which management dialogues with, consults with or co-determine decisions with employees as individuals (Torrington et al., 2014). Indirect approach to employee voice refers to a situation in which employers take account of employee views through a filter of a representative institution (Armstrong, 2006; Torrington et al., 2014).

In Malawi, the direct and indirect voice mechanisms become very necessary where the employer intends to terminate employment of the employee at employer's own initiative. Employers have a legal duty to consult employees before termination occurs and the duty to consult can be achieved through the two broad categories of the voice mechanisms. The voice of the employee in this context is preserved by the International

Labour Organization Convention Number 158, which deals with termination of employment at the initiative of the employer that Malawi ratified before the 1994 Constitution (Dzinyemba vs Reserve Bank of Malawi, 2001).

Indirect EV mechanism through trade unions has dropped significantly over the past 30 years in countries with the most developed economies due to the effects of global competition, a growing trend in outsourcing, legal constraints, and employer sponsored forms of employee participation (Wright, 2011). Regardless of this situation, trade unions remain a common means of indirect voice mechanism of collective representation in organizations, and their role is principally collective bargaining and representing the interests of individual employees and groups of employees (Beardwell, 2004).

2.5 Effects of Employee Voice on Occupational Safety and Health

The terms EV and OSH have co-existed since the advent of the industrial revolution (Herbert Abrams, 2001). Scholars have raised so many arguments on the influence of EV on OSH practices. Maso (2015) asserts that involving employees in discussions on work environment and working conditions improves employees' awareness of the hazards associated with their workplace and their cooperation in promoting safety and safe work practices. The logic to this assertion is that employees are experts in their jobs and involving their expertise and knowledge in finding solutions relating to OSH issues could lead to more appropriate OSH measures. The other assertion is that involving employees in discussions in OSH matters leads to improvements in OSH standards in the sense that such discussions lead to improved awareness, cooperation and harnessing of employees' expertise in finding solutions to OSH problems.

Eaton and Nocerino (2000; 2009) submit that the appointment of employee voice representative on OSH teams miraculously contributes to improved safety practices because it empowers those closest to the problem and are better placed to solve the problems. Eaton and Nocerino (2000; 2009) further submit that EV representation on OSH committees can be effective in achieving improved safety practices because collective EV wields countervailing power against management and so can influence budgets for improved safety practices. On the other hand, direct representation can easily be swayed by the powerful employer hence it is an ineffective means of influencing management decisions on OSH matters, among others. Further evidence of the effect of EV on OSH practices is available in studies carried out in Canada, the United States of America and Australia. A 1993 study done for the Canadian Ministries of Labour concluded that employee-employer supported health and safety committees have a significant impact in reducing injury rates. Subsequent studies for the Ontario Workplace Health and Safety Agency found that 78-79 percent of EV dominated workplaces reported high compliance with health and safety legislation while only 54-61 per cent of the workplaces without the voice reported such compliance (O'Neill, 2002).

A review of health and safety in the United Kingdom's workplaces revealed that EV dramatically improves safety in even the most hazardous workplaces, and went on to state that an office worker without a voice was 13 times more likely to suffer an injury than was a worker with a voice on an industrial assembly line (O'Neill, 2002).

The positive effect of EV on OSH is also visible in South Africa where EV via trade unions increasingly places OSH on the industrial relations agenda. EV fights for the right to refuse unsafe work and the right to information about the hazards of the work

processes and materials among others (Zwi et al., 1988). For instance, the Transport and General Workers Union, an affiliate of Congress of Southern Africa Trade Union, has a signed agreement on health and safety with the asbestos cement manufacturers. The agreement compels the employer to negotiate directly all OSH matters with the union's Shop Stewards Committee, thus ensuring that these issues are not removed from direct negotiations between EV leadership and management. This agreement further instructs management to provide union representatives and union-nominated experts and doctors access to information concerning OHS and the industry-held medical records, where the membership of the union requests so (Zwi, et al., 1988).

Scholars remain adamant that EV is central to OSH improvements and the global perspective is that EV is a miraculous vehicle for uplifting OSH standards.

2.6 Challenges to Employee Voice

Where employees fail to speak up concerns or ideas, the ensuing silence can have dire consequences when, for example, accounting irregularities are suppressed (Gordon, 2004), or researchers fail to speak up about product safety (O'Connell, 2004). Scholars have laid down diverse perspectives to explain employees' failure to speak up in organizations. Argyris and Schon (1996) suggest that some managers suppress employee voice because they believe that day to day EV about problems or opportunities is distracting and that soliciting it is not a worthwhile use of their valuable time. However, scholars in favour of employee voice rebut that managers who ignore the voice of employees are bound to perish because success depends on learning and responding before problems expand or opportunities are lost.

Employees fail to speak up concerns because the potential personal costs of voice outweigh the likely benefits and so the voice behaviour is frequently withheld (Milliken et al., 2003; Van Dyne et al., 2003). Therefore, employees who fear speaking up to those above them or believe that it is futile to do so are likely to remain silent and acquiescent. This situation therefore leaves prosocial and improvement oriented voice as the source of genuine, constructive input about problems and possibilities for change (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998).

Managers have power over pay, promotions and job assignments, and this makes them particularly salient in an economy where most people rely on formal organizations to meet their material and psychological needs (Leavitt, 2005; Perrow, 1991). The dependency of subordinates on higher ups for resources to address the specific issues raised and for continued employment makes managers a key influence on subordinates' voice perceptions and behaviour (Detert & Treviño, 2010).

Employers' preference is currently drifting from union-based EV mechanisms to non-union based mechanisms owing to the belief among employers that union only voice does not add value to their businesses or organizational objectives. But studies insist that unions continue to be the most effective mechanisms for representing worker interests, and that non-union mechanisms produce limited benefits for management in terms of productivity (Butler, 2009; Heery, 2010).

Employee voice through trade unions has changed significantly over the past thirty years due to global competition, a growing trend in outsourcing, legal constraints, and employer sponsored forms of employee participation. This has precipitated a significant

fall in union membership and the coverage of collective bargaining (Wright, 2011). This view is collaborated by Tapia and Kochan (2015) who argue that there is a shift of preference from union-based voice mechanisms to non-unions ones due to the decline in trade unions in western economies. The decline signals a drastic fall in employee voice because a collective voice is more powerful than a direct voice mechanism. Other forms of voice have consequently emerged to fill the gap left by declining indirect voice mechanism and these alternative forms are mostly employer sponsored.

2.7 Pluralism or Conflict theory-The Guiding Theory of this Study

Pluralism or Conflict theory guided this research. Pluralism asserts that work and the employment relationship are rooted in an inherent conflict of interest between employers and employees interacting in imperfect labour markets (Budd, et al., 2004; Hameed, 2018). Budd, et al., (2004) add that the resultant employment relationship is a bargaining problem between the stakeholders with competing interests and the employment outcomes depend on the different elements of the environment that determine each stakeholder's bargaining power.

Pluralists emphasize that conflict is inevitable in work organisations owing to competing interests, and further states that conflict is functional in that it is a precursor to evolution and positive change when well managed. In the case of Dwangwa Sugar estate, the conflict is between management of the estate and the members of the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi because of their seemingly conflicting interests. However, this conflict is a vehicle for the delivery of the common good in that the conflicting parties are partners to positive change. Pluralists also argue that unions are the legitimate representatives of employees (Oludele, 2014). Similarly, the

Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi is bonafide representative of employees' interests in the context of Dwangwa Sugar estate. Oludele (2014) concludes that collective bargaining is the safest escape valve to the conflict between unions and management. Pluralism therefore entrenches collective EV in work organisations and is the chosen theory this study.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

Abbot (2006) observed that people have all manner of opinions about the events they witness in their day to day lives. Such opinions are shaped by their family, school circumstances, the jobs they hold, the organizations they work for, the churches and clubs they patronize, and the circle of friends and communities they belong to. He further observes that since work is such a central part in people's lives, its nature and governance are a one social phenomenon that often invokes intense and passionate debate. Abbot (2006) considers that such debates are frequently framed in terms of the assumptions and values people use as reference points when conceptualizing its nature and governance hence the term frames of reference.

The frames of reference concept on EV was first coined by Alan Fox (1966, 1974) and defines it as a means of categorizing the different opinions held by people towards issues (Abbott, 2006). There are three frames of reference that capture the main currents of opinion about EV in organizations, and they are Unitarism, Pluralism and Marxism (Abbott, 2006).

Unitarism

Oludele (2014) states that Unitarism as a frame of reference perceives an organization as an integrated and harmonious whole where management and all other employees share a common purpose emphasizing cooperation. In this case, management enjoys the loyalty of all employees, conflict is considered disruptive and its presence a result of agitators, interpersonal friction and communication breakdown. EV is deemed as unnecessary since the loyalty between employees and organizations are considered mutually exclusive (Oludele, 2014). This frame of reference reduces EV to weak and ineffective instrument of voice.

Pluralism

Oludele's (2014) view about Pluralism is that organisations consists of two powerful and divergent subgroups each with its own legitimate loyalties, set of objectives and leaders. The two divergent subgroups under this perspective are management and unions. This perspective in the lenses of Oludele (2014) perceives conflict as functional, and a source of evolution and positive change. The roles of management and unions are summarised as persuasion and coordination, and legitimate representation of employees respectively. Collective bargaining is a platform for resolving their often varying sets of objectives between the two divergent groups (Oludele, 2014).

Marxism

Chid and Okpala (2011) perceives a Marxist frame of reference as a more or less general theory of society and of social change with implications for the analysis of industrial relations within capitalist societies. Capitalist societies are characterized by perpetual class struggle caused by inequalities in the distribution of wealth and the skewed ownership of the means of production. Wealth and property ownership are highly concentrated in the hands of a small number of the owners of the means of production while the vast mass of the workers live in poverty. Abbott (2006) adds that societies organized along these lines developed political systems and class-based values that legitimized the dominant position of the capitalist class and coerced the working class into a false consciousness that accepted the status quo.

Abbott (2006) therefore concludes that the deepening impoverishment of workers eventually moves them to recognize their common class interests and spurs them to organize against their exploitation. This perspective views social conflict as a natural outcome of capitalism, the result of on-going struggle between two competing social classes, and social conflict is a reflection of this struggle played out in the workplace. Chidi and Okpala (2011) complement Abbott's (2006) views on social conflict by restating that conflict is a disorder precursor to change, and resolving this conflict will lead to a change in the imbalance and inequalities in society in terms of power and wealth. Marxism therefore sanctifies organized employee voice as a way of altering the imbalance and inequalities in societies.

Pluralism is the theory that guided this study. Pluralism advocates the existence of collective EV in workplaces and campaigns for collective EV as the only viable means

of influencing management decisions in organizations (Oludele, 2014). Unitarism is a weak and ineffective instrument of voice against the powerful hand of the employer while Marxism seeks to alter the balance of power in a society by overthrowing existing establishments and through regime change. Marxism is a too powerful and ambitious form of collective voice and therefore not a suitable mode of EV in organisations.

2.9 Chapter Summary

The employee voice concept is an intriguing one in that it continues to earn more and more meanings from scholars, has legal and policy safeguards, manifests in many forms, is confronted with challenges and is motivated by theories.

Milliken et al., 2003 and Van Dyne et al., 2003 indicate that employee voice suffers many challenges in organizations but survives these challenges because countries have made regulations and enacted laws to safeguard it (Geurts et al., 1999; Rothmann et al., 2014). The concept of employee voice dates back to the industrial revolution era and has since been associated with three currents of opinion such as Marxism, Pluralism and Unitarism (Abbott, 2006). Pluralism is the theory that guided this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research methodology, which this research study deployed to deliver expected outcomes to the research questions in an apt manner. Greener (2008) describes methodology as more about one's attitude to and one's understanding of research and the strategy one chooses. Kothari (2004) describes methodology as encompassing a number of issues such as why a research study has been undertaken, how the research problem has been defined, in what way and why the hypothesis has been formulated, what data have been collected and what particular method has been adopted, and why a particular technique of analysing data has been used among other questions. Research methodology is, therefore, all about a thorough understanding of the research guiding parameters.

This research study had three specific objectives namely, assessing the legal and policy framework relating to EV and OSH practices, analysing the effects of EV on OSH practices and examining the challenges associated with EV in uplifting OSH standards at Dwangwa Sugar estate.

This study applied a hybrid approach to research comprising qualitative and quantitative approaches to address the research questions. Precisely, the study used

qualitative approach to address the first specific objective and engaged both qualitative and quantitative methods to address the second and third specific objectives.

3.2 Research Design

Kothari (2004) defines research design as the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, this study adopted the qualitative and the quantitative approaches. Qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour, and the research in such a situation is a function of researcher's insights and impressions (Kothari, 2004). This approach to research generates results in the form, which cannot be subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis. On the contrary, the quantitative approach to research involves the generation of data in a quantitative form subjected to a rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion (Kothari, 2004).

3.3 Population

Population refers to the entire set of cases or items from which a sample is drawn (Taherdoost, 2016). In this study, employees of Dwangwa Sugar estate constituted the population, and the estate had a workforce 1,986 at the time of the study (Staff Compliment Report, Dec. 2020).

3.4 Sample and Sampling Technique

This research deployed qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative approach adopted a purposive sampling technique to get a research sample while the quantitative approach used simple random sampling to produce a study sample. Greener

(2008) defines a sample as the section of the population chosen for study and Taherdoost (2016) defines a sampling technique as a systematic plan for obtaining a study sample from a given population.

Purposive sampling refers to selecting groups of units of study based on relevance to the research questions, theoretical position, analytical framework and practice, and more importantly to the argument one is developing (Mason, 2002). Maxwell (1996) adds that purposive or judgmental sampling is a strategy in which particular settings persons or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other choices. This is where the researcher includes cases or participants in the sample because he or she believes they warrant inclusion. Therefore, the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for study and these cases are those from which a researcher can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, hence the term purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). Purposive or judgemental sampling technique gives discretion to the researcher about what items, participants or events to be included for information gathering. Although purposive sampling is cheap, convenient, not time consuming and ideal for exploratory research design, it does not allow generalization and is largely subjective (Taherdoost, 2016).

Fourteen employees were purposively identified as information rich cases, and selected for in-depth direct interviews by the researcher. These employees were drawn from the list of employees who were executive members of the trade union at Dwangwa Sugar estate, employees from human resource, environment, safety and health, quality and finance departments.

This study also engaged the quantitative approach to the research design and applied the simple random sampling technique. As intimated, the quantitative approach involves the generation of data that are subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion (Kothari, 2004). Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) state that a simple random sample means that every case of the population has an equal probability of inclusion in the sample. However, this technique of sampling suffers setbacks in that a complete list of all units in the whole population is needed, the cost of obtaining the sample can be high if the units are geographically widely scattered and that the standard errors of estimators can be high (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). Dwangwa Sugar estate had workforce of 1,986 employees at the time of this study out of which 322 employees were identified for the study through use of the simple random sampling technique (Staff Compliment Report, Dec 2020). The sample drawn had a confidence level of 95%.

3.5 Data Collection

This study used archival reviews, direct interviews with key informants and a survey as data collection tools. Cassim (2015) defines data as results which when analysed generate information that can give meaning or interpretations of the truth that help to shed light on a particular subject.

One of the data collection tools used in this research was archival review of documents. The documents reviewed included the Constitution of the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union, the Recognition Agreement between the Dwangwa Sugar estate management and the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi, the Staff Compliment Report for the month of December 2020, Policies on safety, health,

environment and quality, and payroll information. The nature of the data collected in this case was secondary. Cassim (2015) refers to secondary data as data that is already gathered by other researchers, which the current researcher is using. Examples of secondary data include findings that are published in academic journals, textbooks, reports and many others and the disadvantage of relying on secondary data is that it may have errors hence the researcher must be careful when using it (Cassim, 2015).

Secondly, data were collected by means of direct interviews of three officers in the human resource department, four executive members of the union operating at Dwangwa Sugar estate, five employees in the safety, health and environment department and two employees in the finance department. These direct interviews resulted into collection of primary data and Cassim (2015) describes primary data as data gathered directly by the researcher. One of the benefits of collecting primary data is that it gives opportunity to the researcher to check the results for errors.

The researcher also collected data of primary nature through a survey in which case a structured questionnaire was administered on 322 employees who were drawn from 1,986 employees through a simple random sampling. Kothari (2004) defines a questionnaire as a set of questions typed in a definite order on a form or set of forms and a structured questionnaire is one in which the questions are definite, concrete and pre-determined and presented with exactly the same wording and in the same order to all respondents. Care is taken to this sort of standardization to ensure that all respondents reply to the same set of questions. Structured questionnaires may also have fixed alternative questions in which responses of the informants are limited to the stated alternatives. In a highly structured questionnaire, all questions and answers are specific,

and comments in the respondent's own words are held to the minimum. Kothari (2004) hints that structured questionnaires are simple to administer and relatively inexpensive to analyse and the provision of alternative replies, at times, helps to understand the meaning of the question clearly

3.6 Data Analysis

This research collected the data by means of direct interviews of key informants, archival reviews and a survey. It is this data, which was subjected to analysis. Data analysis is the computation of certain indices or measures along with the searching for patterns of relationship that exist among the data groups (Kothari, 2004). Secondary data collected by means of archival review and primary data collected through direct interviews of key informants were analysed through literal and interpretive reading. Literal reading looks at the data in their literal form while interpretive reading involves the researcher constructing a version of what the investigator thinks the data mean, represent and what can be inferred from the same (Kothari, 2004). Data collected by means of a survey were processed using the Microsoft Excel.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Since the essence of research is to obtain valid and reliable findings that may advance scientific knowledge, it is often necessary to impinge upon the rights of individuals (Marczyk et al., 1964). Marczyk et al., (1964) argue that almost all studies with human participants involve some degree of risk, which may range from minor discomfort or embarrassment. This risk stems from somewhat intrusive questions to much more severe effects on participants' physical or emotional well-being, and they present researchers with an ethical dilemma regarding the degree to which participants ought

to be placed at risk in the name of scientific progress. As a way of mitigating against the risks that come with participating in this research, all the participants were given utmost confidentiality in line with the ethical requirements of the University of Malawi in conducting research. Kothari (2004) defines research as a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific topic.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

The attitude and availability of respondents due to COVID 19 restrictions affected the study. Dwangwa Sugar estate however appointed an officer who helped in reaching to all the respondents. The term respondent refers to all those cases that agreed to participate in the research (Taherdoost, 2016).

3.9 Chapter Summary

This study adopted a hybrid research design consisting of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The workforce of 1,986 constituted the study population (Staff Compliment, Dec. 2020) and the samples were obtained from this population through purposive sampling and simple random sampling. The Data collection methods from the samples included direct interviews with key informants, archive reviews and through a survey and the data collected were either primary or secondary in nature. The data collected were analysed through literal and interpretive reading and through use of the Microsoft Excel.

Ethical considerations were taken into account before data were collected from the population because research often impinges upon the rights of individuals (Marczyk, DeMatteo & Festinger, 1964). Marczyk et al, (1964) argue that almost all studies with

human participants involve some degree of risk, which may range from minor discomfort or embarrassment. All participants to the research were given protection through confidentiality in line with the ethical requirements of the University of Malawi in conducting research.

The attitude and availability of respondents due to COVID 19 restrictions affected the study. However, an officer was appointed by Dwangwa estate management to help in reaching to all the respondents.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This research study had three specific objectives to address as follows: - to assess the legal and policy framework relating to EV and OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate, to analyse how EV affects OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate and to examine the challenges associated with EV in uplifting OSH standards at Dwangwa Sugar estate. Chapter three of this research highlights that the study applied both qualitative and quantitative research approaches and further indicated that the study engaged direct interviews of key informants and archival reviews as data collection tools in dealing with specific objective number one. Chapter three of this study also state that the study adopted direct interviews, archival reviews and a survey as data collection tools to deal with the last two specific objectives. Direct interviews of key informants and archival reviews fall under the qualitative approach while a survey is principally quantitative. Both primary and secondary data were collected during the research study. This chapter presents and discusses the findings of this study in order of the specific objectives from the first to the third.

4.1.1 Objective One: Assessing the Legal and Policy Framework relating to Employee Voice and Occupational Safety and Health Practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate

Dwangwa Sugar estate employees subscribe to a trade union named the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (SPAWUM). The Union covers Dwangwa Sugar estate, Nchalo Sugar estate, Dwangwa Cane Growers Limited and Kasinthula Cane Growers Limited (SPAWUM Constitution, 1995). Founded in 1995 (Certificate of Registration, 1995), SPAWUM aims at securing complete organization of the workers, regulating just and proper rates of wages and other conditions of work, regulating relations and settling disputes between the members and employers, educating the members about their rights and promoting legislation in the interest of the members (SPAWUM Constitution, 1995). SPAWUM has 1,183 members from a workforce of 1,986 at Dwangwa Sugar estate. SPAWUM membership is approximately 60 percent of the workforce (Staff Compliment Report, December 2020).

SPAWUM has an active Recognition Agreement (RA) also referred to as a Collective Bargaining Agreement with management of Dwangwa Sugar estate and the Recognition Agreement was first signed in 1995 (Recognition Agreement, 1995). A Recognition Agreement is a written agreement between an employer, or an employers' organization authorized by the employer, and a trade union concerning terms and conditions of employment and any other matter of mutual interest (Labour Relations Act, 1996). Based on this Agreement, the parties recognize their mutual interest as maintaining high standards of workmanship, securing high standards of productivity and working conditions in the undertaking, and the right of the Company to manage, direct and control its affairs (Recognition Agreement, 1995).

Dwangwa Sugar estate has Policies on safety, health, environment and quality policies crumbled into one booklet referred to as SHEQ. Dwangwa Sugar estate has a separate Policy on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), which details what protective equipment ought to be issued, at what intervals and replacement procedures. These policies are subject to the dictates of the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act, 1997. Dwangwa Sugar estate, therefore, has the relevant legal and policy framework relating to employee voice (EV) and occupational safety and health (OSH). This situation is similar to what is obtainable in developed economies where the role of EV in OSH practices are influenced and protected by laws and policies. In Britain for instance, laws and regulations bind employers to undertake consultation on matters of OSH with their employees and the consultations are not limited to giving employees' information or employees listening to them but also taking account of what employees say before employers take OSH decisions. Precisely, the SRSC (1977) regulations, recognize trade unions as being entitled to appoint OSH representatives from among the workforce and once appointed, these representatives are required to represent all employees, union members or not, at each workplace within any given organization (Robinson & Smallman, 2019). The Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act of the Republic of South Africa imposes a general duty on employers to provide a reasonably safe and healthy working environment, among others (Rothmann & Pienaar, 2014). The OHS Act further compels employers with more than 20 employees to appoint one or more full-time employees as health and safety representative after consultation and further instructs employers to provide training and facilities to these representatives (Grogan, 2005).

4.1.2 Objective Two: Analysing how Employee Voice affects Occupational Safety and Health Practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate

To competently respond to objective number two, the researcher did literal and interpretive reading to analyse the data collected qualitatively and made use of the Microsoft Excel package to analyse the quantitative data. Structured questionnaires with fifteen parameters for assessment of the workforce's views on how EV affects OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate were issued to 322 employees to collect the quantitative data. On the other hand, qualitative data were collected via direct interviews with key informants and through reading of various reports of Dwangwa Sugar estate. The first five of the fifteen parameters asked whether Dwangwa Sugar estate management declares the OSH Budget to SPAWUM, whether the SPAWUM conducts awareness meetings with its membership on Workplace Policy, whether the SPAWUM has clear Work plans and Budget that influence OHS practices, whether the SPAWUM monitors usage and availability of PPE and finally whether the SPAWUM resolves concerns on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), amongst employees.

The middle five of the fifteen parameters were whether SPAWUM has a positive impact on OSH, whether there are problems in the implementation of OSH Standards and Policies, whether there are challenges in the implementation of the Recognition Agreement on OSH practices, whether SPAWUM is informed of OSH incidents and accidents at Dwangwa Sugar estate; and whether SPAWUM is involved in any investigations into OSH incidents and accidents.

The last five parameters focused on whether SPAWUM is involved in the implementation of OSH improvements after incidents and accidents, whether

SPAWUM has a signed Recognition Agreement with management, whether the Dwangwa Sugar estate management adheres to OSH Standards and Policies, whether SPAWUM sensitizes its membership on its constitution and finally whether the workforce is aware that SPAWUM has a constitution.

Of the 322 questionnaires issued, only 256 were returned representing a response rate of 80%. The figure 1 below shows the results on the first five parameters.

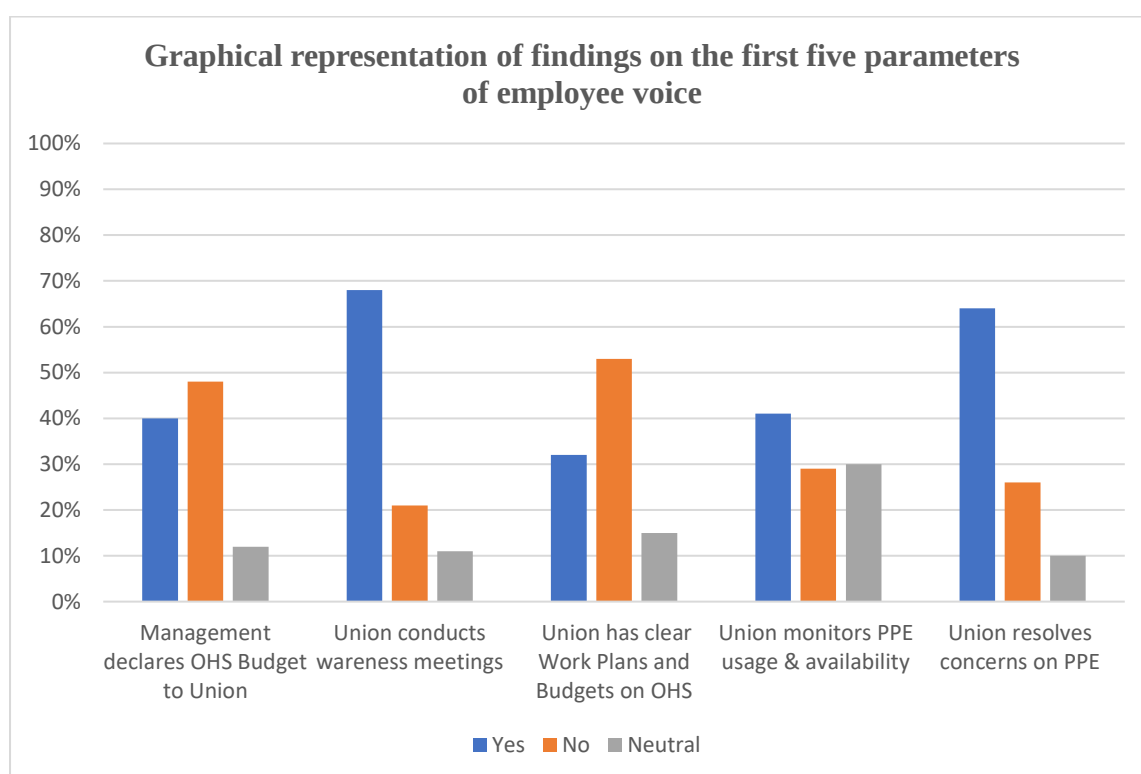


Figure 1: Graphical representation of findings on the first five parameters of employee voice

The results in figure 1 above show that 48 % of the population was of the view that management does not declare its OSH budgets to the Union while 40 % shared the view that management discloses the OSH budgets. The 12 percent was mute. Secondly, the results indicate that 68 percent of the population stated the SPAWUM conducts awareness meetings with its membership on workplace policy while 21 percent stated

that SPAWUM does not conduct awareness meetings and 11 percent remained neutral. On whether SPAWUM has clear annual Work Plans and Budgets to influence OSH, the results indicate that 53 percent of the population said SPAWUM did not have clear annual Work Plans and Budgets to influence OSH practices at the estate while 32 percent agreed SPAWUM did not have annual Work Plans and Budgets to influence OSH practices. The remainder 15 percent was neutral.

The results further show that 41 percent of the population felt SPAWUM monitors the usage and availability of PPE amongst all employees at Dwangwa Sugar estate while 29 percent was of the contrary view and 30 percent was mute. Finally, the results in the figure 1 above show that 64 percent of the population felt SPAWUM resolves concerns relating to PPE amongst the employees while 26 % disagreed and the 10 % was indifferent.

The figure 2 below is a graphical representation of the results on the five middle parameters.

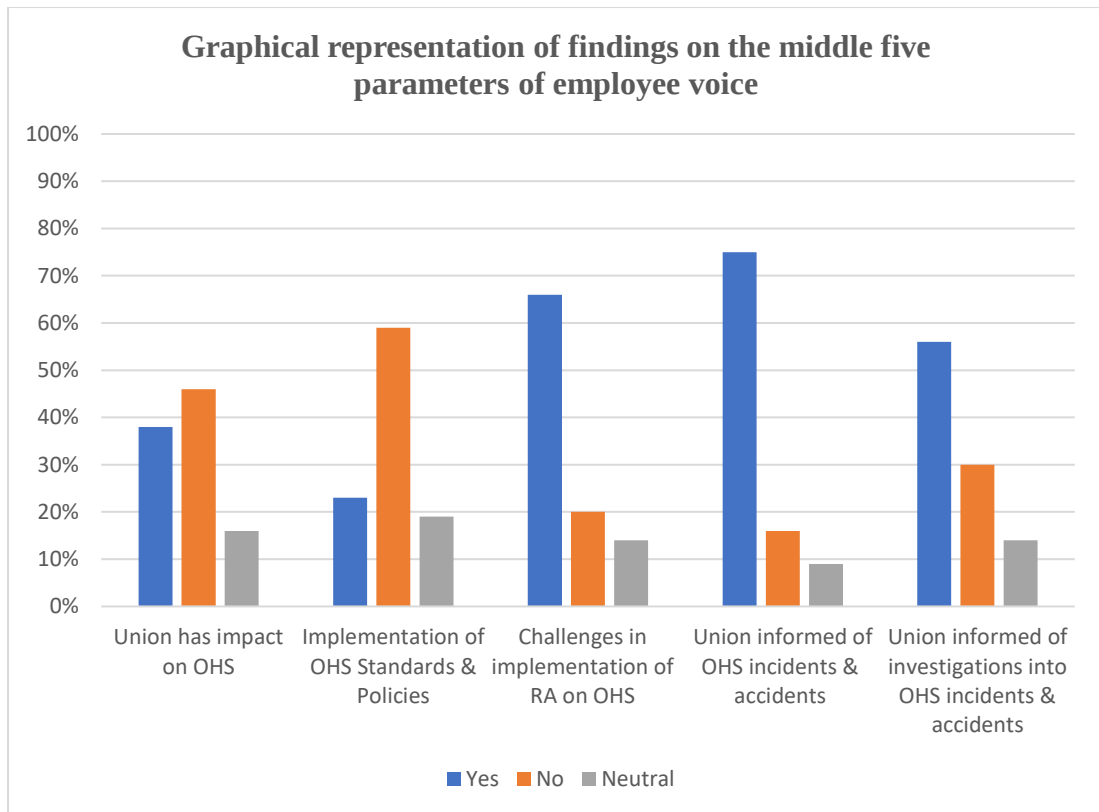


Figure 2: Graphical representation of findings on the middle five parameters of employee voice

The results in figure 2 above show that 46 percent of the population indicated SPAWUM does not influence OSH practices while the 38 percent felt SPAWUM impacts on OSH standards and the 16 percent was indifferent. The results further show that 59 percent of the population felt there are problems at Dwangwa Sugar estate regarding the implementation of the OSH standards and policies while the 23 percent were of the view that there are no problems regarding the implementation of the OSH standards and policies, and the 19 percent was neutral. On whether there are challenges in the implementation of the Recognition Agreement on OSH matters, the results show that 66 percent of the population indicated there are challenges in the implementation of the Recognition Agreement on OSH matters while 20 percent felt there are no challenges and the rest are indifferent.

The results also indicate that 75 percent of the population says SPAWUM is informed of any OSH incidents and accidents while 16 percent held a contrary view and the rest were mute. Finally, 56 percent of the population indicated SPAWUM is involved in any investigations into OSH incidents and accidents on the estate while 30 percent denied the assertion and the rest remain indifferent.

The figure 3 below is a graphical representation of the results on the last five parameters consisting of whether SPAWUM is involved in the implementation of OSH improvements after incidents or accidents, whether SPAWUM has a signed Recognition Agreement with management, whether management adheres to OSH standards and policies, whether SPAWUM sensitizes its members on its constitution and whether the members are aware if SPAWUM has a constitution.

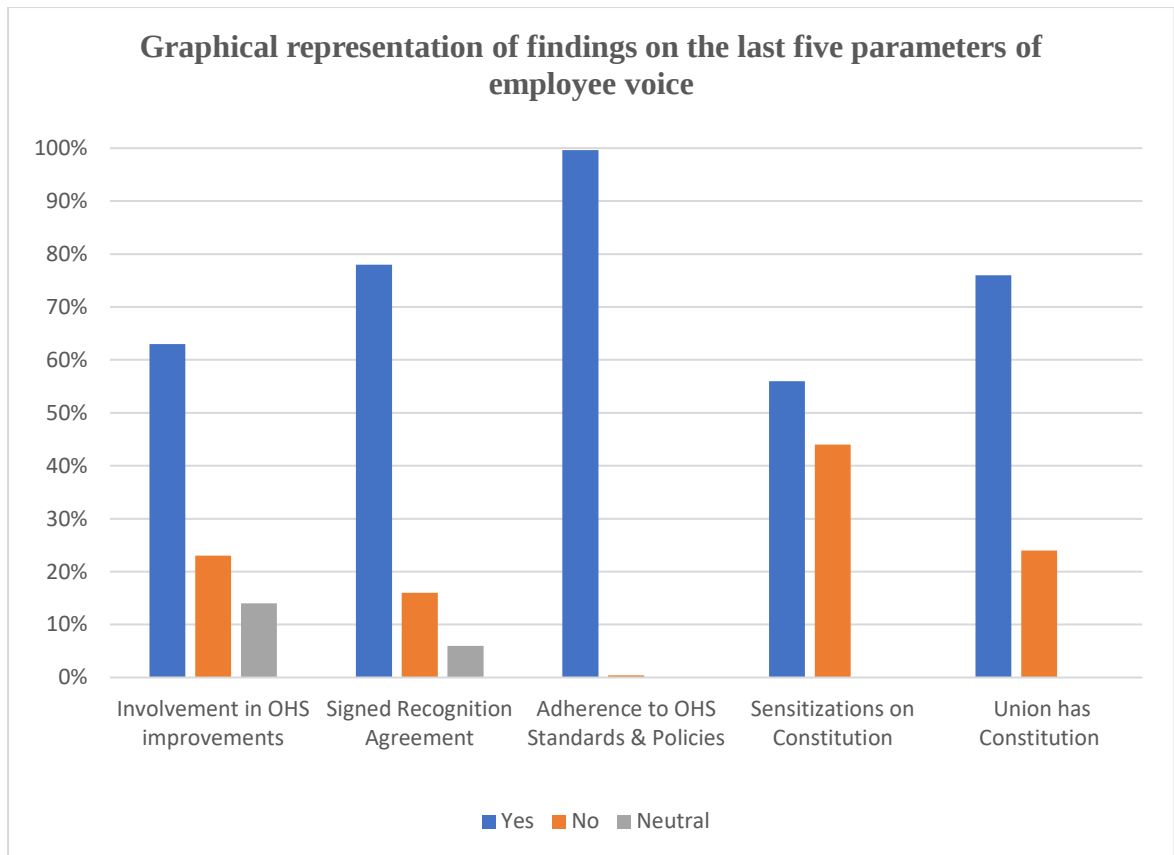


Figure 3: Graphical representation of findings on the last five parameters of employee voice

Figure 3 above shows that 63 percent of the population indicated SPAWUM is involved in the implementation of OSH improvements after the incident or accident while 23 percent was of a contrary view and the remainder was mute. The results also show 78 percent of the population state that SPAWUM has a signed Recognition Agreement with management while 16 percent was of the opposite view and 6 percent was indifferent. The results further indicate that 99.6 percent of the workforce felt management adheres to OSH standards and policies while 0.4 percent of indicated management does not adhere to OSH standards and policies.

On whether SPAWUM sensitizes its members on its constitution, the results are that 56 percent of the workforce agreed that SPAWUM sensitizes its members on its constitution while 44 percent disagreed SPAWUM does not sensitize its members on

the same. Finally, 76 percent of the workforce indicated it was aware that SPAWUM has a constitution while 24 percent stated it is not aware that SPAWUM does have a constitution.

The above findings have opened up interesting threads of discourse on the effects of employee voice on occupational safety and health. Statistics indicate that 48 percent of the workforce at Dwangwa Sugar estate felt management does not declare the OSH budget to the Union while 40 percent indicated management declared the OSH budget to the Union and the remaining 12 percent remained neutral. Direct interviews with SPAWUM Executives and ordinary membership of SPAWUM indicated SPAWUM does not have any idea about the OSH budget. Budgets are carriers of powerful decisions and tools of persuasion and influence. Private companies operate under very strict budgetary guidelines and their ultimate goal is profit maximization. Any expense that erodes the profit maximization goal is not easily entertained, and the situation can get worse if that expense is not in the budget. Ordinarily, it is very difficult to request for an expenditure for an activity whose budget you are not aware, even when such an activity is in the budget. Management can easily override such a request because the requesting entity does not have the information about its budgetary implication. Absence of the budget and lack of knowledge about the budget on OSH puts serious questions on the Union's ability to implement its action plans in general and specifically on occupational health and safety.

Secondly, statistics indicate that 53 percent of the population indicated SPAWUM does not have clear Work Plans and Budgets over its annual activities, 32 percent were of the contrary view, and 15 percent were neutral. Direct interviews with the SPAWUM executives and ordinary members of the SPAWUM indicated SPAWUM does not have

laid down Annual Work Plans and their associated budgets. A request for a record of the SPAWUM's Annual Work Plans and associated budgets did not yield anything. Work Plans and Budgets help to keep track of planned activities, progress against the activities and resources used. The absence of the work plans and budgets results in loss of control over the affairs of SPAWUM and a shift of focus from strategic goals and objectives of SPAWUM to routine and less important activities of the same. Thus, there is general loss of strategic direction without the plans and related budgets. Absence of plans and related budgets leads to poor performance generally, and poor performance on the part of the SPAWUM can breed a strenuous relationship between the SPAWUM executive and its members. In South Africa, EV fights for the right to refuse unsafe work and the right to information about the hazards of the work processes and materials among others and can compel management to provide it and its nominated experts and doctors access to information concerning OHS and the industry-held medical records (Zwi, et al., 1988). One therefore wonders if SPAWUM can attain this level of engagement with management Dwangwa Sugar estate considering that SPAWUM cannot influence OSH budgets and is not invited to participate in investigations into OSH incidents and accidents.

The study revealed that the Union conducts awareness meetings, monitors the usage and availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) amongst all employees and resolves concerns relating to PPE amongst the employees. The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi is doing commendable work in these areas although the good work is on routine and operational matters while strategic matters fall by the wayside. Issues of OSH Budget and Work Plans are central to strategic OSH matters but fall by the wayside. Statistics of this study, which indicate that 46 percent of the

population stated the SPAWUM, does not have an impact on OSH, 38 percent was in the positive and 16 percent was indifferent, probably collaborates the analysis that SPAWUM only influences routine and operational issues of OSH and fails on strategic OSH issues.

Direct interviews with the SPAWUM executives, its ordinary membership working in the safety department and ordinary members of the SPAWUM working in the human resource department highlighted that SPAWUM is not involved in OSH investigations. Previous reports of accidents investigations were not accessible to the researcher because they were classified confidential. Information on any OSH incidents and accidents, and the accompanying investigations are a rich source of information. The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi needs this information to update the membership on issues they may be interested to know. However, being part of the investigations would be a great win for SPAWUM in that it would access raw information about the causes of the incidents and accidents that would help the Union in holding those responsible to account for their actions in order to avoid recurrences. In South Africa, where employee voice has formidable influence on OSH, unions are involved in investigations and sometimes hire specialists to do the investigations for them (Zwi, et al., 1988).

Further direct interviews with SPAWUM executives, selected ordinary members of the same and members of staff in the human resource department at Dwangwa Sugar estate indicated that employees who are members of SPAWUM are appointed into safety and health committees in various departments and sections. This practice augurs well with what is happening in the West where involvement of employees in discussions on work

environment and working conditions is notable for improving employees' awareness of the hazards associated with their workplace and harnessing their cooperation in promoting safety and safe work practices (Maso, 2015). The argument by Maso (2015) is centred on the fact that employees are experts in their jobs and involving their expertise and knowledge in finding solutions relating to safety and health issues could lead to more appropriate health and safety measures.

4.1.3 Objective Three: Examining the Challenges associated with Employee Voice in uplifting Occupational Safety and Health Practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate

The third objective of this study was to examine the challenges associated with EV in uplifting OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate. Archival reviews established that Dwangwa Sugar estate has a signed Recognition Agreement with SPAWUM, and that the Recognition Agreement recognizes the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi as the exclusive collective representative of employees (Recognition Agreement, 1995). The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi and the Dwangwa Sugar estate management have two areas of mutual recognition centred on working conditions and maintaining high standards of workmanship and productivity (Recognition Agreement, 1995). Statistics from the study are in support of the archival review in that they indicate that 78 percent of the population agreed that SPAWUM has a signed agreement with management, 16 percent declined and 6 percent remained indifferent.

The silence in the clauses of the Recognition Agreement on matters of OSH, wages and terminations presents a serious challenge to SPAWUM to tilt the balance of power in

its favour in OSH discourse at the estate. The explicit outcome of the silent clause in the Recognition Agreement between SPAWUM and the Dwangwa Sugar estate management on safety and health agenda is that SPAWUM does not enjoy recognition in such matters. This cripples the Union's activism on occupational safety and health issues. Zwi, et al. (1988) hint that OSH enjoys a central role in industrial relations in South Africa in that collective bargaining agreements recognise the rights of unions to refuse unsafe work, right to information about the hazards of the work processes and materials, the right appropriate workers compensation, and the right to utilise specialist resources to help study, document or challenge in court health and safety issues.

Rule 3(a) of the Sugar Plantation Allied Workers Union's Constitution (1995) candidly opens membership of the Union to all workers employed in the sugar industry. At the same time, Annexure A of the Recognition Agreement (1995) excludes a certain level of employees from membership of the Union. The decision to exclude a certain level of employees from participating in the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi might have be based on Section 25 (3) of the Labour Relations Act (1996) which bars senior management from joining an in house trade union. The argument is that 105 employees are prevented from participating in the Union yet only 11 of them are senior managers (Staff Compliment Report, December 2020). The exclusion decision violates the freedom of association of the 94 employees assuming all of them were interested to join SPAWUM. In fact, those excluded represent a significant proportion of employees who have the abilities to conceive, process, and analyse information while the bulk of SPAWUM members are employees in blue-collar jobs and have less than average abilities to conceive, process and analyse situations. The outcome of this is that SPAWUM does not countervailing power against management.

Section 25 (3) of the Labour Relations Act (1996) allows senior managers of an enterprise to be members of the union other than the one to which the bulk of the employees of the same enterprise belong for purposes of collective bargaining. The Recognition Agreement between the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi and Dwangwa Sugar estate management prevents certain positions from internal union activities. In the case of the Dwangwa Sugar estate, 105 employees are restricted from the internal union activities, and this is without suggesting alternative means of union representation to them. This instils and settles in them the reasoning that being a member of the union on their part is a violation of the Recognition Agreement and the Dwangwa Sugar estate Conditions of Service.

4.2 Chapter Summary

The study was directed by three specific research objectives. These were to assess the legal and policy framework relating to EV and OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate, to analyse the effects of EV on OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate and to examine the challenges associated with EV in uplifting OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate. The research found that Dwangwa Sugar estate has the legal and policy framework relating to EV and OSH practices, EV has challenges in uplifting OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate, and that EV minimally affects OSH practices at Dwangwa Sugar estate.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion of the findings of the study whose main research question was to analyse the extent of influence of employee voice on occupational safety and health practices at Dwangwa Sugar Estate. This conclusion flows in the order of the three specific objectives of the research and tails off with presenting the conclusion to the main research question, recommendations and future research areas arising.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

The first finding of the study was that Dwangwa Sugar estate has policies on food safety, environment, health and safety, and personal protective equipment, which provide standards of compliance on OSH matters. The second finding was that SPAWUM has a lukewarm effect on occupational safety and health at Dwangwa Sugar estate and this finding arises from the fact that SPAWUM lacks strategic stature in its operations. The last finding of this study was that SPAWUM faces many challenges to uplift OSH standards at Dwangwa Sugar estate.

5.3 Conclusion

Owing to the discussion of the findings on all the three specific objectives, EV influences OSH to a lesser extent at Dwangwa Sugar estate. This largely because EV is good at day-to-day matters while it is weak on strategic fronts.

5.4 Recommendations

This research study made four recommendations. The first recommendation was that SPAWUM should endeavour to attract a big proportion of the 40 percent non-membership into its camp so that it enjoys the overwhelming voice of most employees at Dwangwa Sugar estate. The popular voice will strengthen employee voice on matters of their interest. The second recommendation was that SPAWUM should review the qualification requirements of candidates for election into its executive to deal with leadership challenges at its helm. The third recommendation though linked to the second was that the executive team should undergo relevant trainings to deal with strategy bankruptcy. The last recommendation comes against the defective Recognition Agreement, which does not grant recognition rights to SPAWUM on OSH matters at the estate. The recommendation is that the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi should lobby management for an amendment of the Recognition Agreement (1995) to guarantee recognition rights on matters of OSH.

5.5 Future Research Areas

The areas of future research emanating from this study are double fold. These are analysing the degree to which collective employee voice secures employment for the members and analysing the extent to which the benefits of employee voice(EV) affect the non-members owing to the observation that only 60% of the employees are members of the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire



Chancellor College

Department of Political and Administrative Studies Survey Questionnaire

My name is Chesterfield Harry Phiri, a postgraduate student at the University of Malawi. I am studying towards the Master of Arts in Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations Degree. The requirement of this degree program is that a student produces a Thesis in the area of specialisation. Accordingly, my area of interest for this Thesis is analysing the Extent to which Employee Voice influences Occupational Safety and Health: A case study of Dwangwa Sugar estate. I therefore request you to support my studies by participating in this survey.

This survey takes approximately 10 to 15 minutes and participation is purely voluntary. Participants to this survey are free to withdraw their involvement in the survey if they feel compromised or uncomfortable. All respondents to this survey have my assurance that I will give their responses utmost confidentiality. Feel free to contact me by email at cphiri@ra.org if you have any questions at any time about the survey.

I thank you for your interest in participating in this survey and start the survey below.

Answer the following questions by ticking the appropriate response amongst the given responses.

1. Which of the following age brackets below best describes your age?

- i. 18-25
- ii. 26 - 35

- iii. 36 - 45
- iv. 46 - 60
- v. Above 60

2. Which of the following gender options below best describes your gender?

- i. Male
- ii. Female

3. Which of the following education levels below best describes your education attainment?

- i. Primary School
- ii. Secondary School
- iii. Diploma
- iv. Degree
- v. Other

4. Which of the following period below indicate your length of employment at Dwangwa Sugar estate

- i. Less than 1 year
- ii. 1-5 years
- iii. 6-10 years
- iv. More than 10 years

5. Dwangwa Sugar Estate is a member of the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (SPAWUM). Are you a member of this Union?

- i. Yes
- ii. No

6. If the answer is yes to 5, which of the three options below best describes your membership?

- i. Ordinary member
- ii. Committee member
- iii. Executive member

iv. Ordinary member but former executive member

7. Are you aware that the Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (SPAWUM) has a Constitution?

i. Yes

ii. No

8. The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (SPAWUM) sensitizes its members on its Constitution. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below:

i. Strongly Disagree

ii. Disagree

iii. Neutral

iv. Agree

v. Strongly Agree

9. Employees of Dwangwa Sugar Estate feel Management adheres to Occupational Health and Safety Standards and Policies on the estate. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below: -

i. Strongly Disagree

ii. Disagree

iii. Neutral

iv. Agree

v. Strongly Agree

10. Dwangwa Sugar Estate management declares its annual Occupational Health and Safety budgets to the Union (SPAWUM). Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below: -

- i. Strongly Disagree
- ii. Disagree
- iii. Neutral
- iv. Agree
- v. Strongly Agree

11. The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (SPAWUM) conducts employee awareness meetings with its members on workplace policy. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below: -

- i. Strongly Disagree
- ii. Disagree
- iii. Neutral
- iv. Agree
- v. Strongly Agree

12. The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (SPAWUM) has clear Annual Work plans and Budgets that positively influences Occupational Health and Safety at Dwangwa Sugar estate. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below: -

- i. Strongly Disagree
- ii. Disagree
- iii. Neutral
- iv. Agree
- v. Strongly Agree

13. The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (SPAWUM) monitors availability and usage of Personal Protective Equipment among all the employees at Dwangwa Sugar estate. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below: -

- i. Strongly Disagree
- ii. Disagree
- iii. Neutral
- iv. Agree
- v. Strongly Agree

14. The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (SPAWUM) resolves concerns relating to Occupational Health and Safety such as Personal Protective Equipment amongst all the employees. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below: -

- i. Strongly Disagree
- ii. Disagree
- iii. Neutral
- iv. Agree
- v. Strongly Agree

15. The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (SPAWUM) has greatly impacted Occupational Health and Safety to the benefit of employees at Dwangwa Sugar estate. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below: -

- i. Strongly Disagree
- ii. Disagree
- iii. Neutral
- iv. Agree
- v. Strongly Agree

16. There are some problems in the implementation of Occupational Health and Safety Standards and Policies on the estate. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below: -

- i. Strongly Disagree
- ii. Disagree
- iii. Neutral
- iv. Agree

- v. Strongly Agree

17. The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (SPAWUM) has a signed **Recognition Agreement/ Collective Bargaining Agreement** with Management. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below: -

- i. Yes
- ii. No

18. There are some challenges in the implementation of the **Recognition Agreement/ Collective Agreement on issues of Occupational Health and Safety**. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below: -

- i. Strongly Disagree
- ii. Disagree
- iii. Neutral
- iv. Agree
- v. Strongly Agree

19. The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union (SPAWUM) is notified of any health and safety incident/ accident on the Estate. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below: -

- i. Strongly Disagree
- ii. Disagree
- iii. Neutral
- iv. Agree
- v. Strongly Agree

20. The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union (SPAWUM) is notified of any investigations into health and safety incident/ accident on the Estate. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below: -

- i. Strongly Disagree
- ii. Disagree
- iii. Neutral
- iv. Agree
- v. Strongly Agree

21. The Sugar Plantation and Allied Workers Union (SPAWUM) is involved in the implementation of Occupational Health and Safety improvements after an incident/accident on the Estate. Indicate your views by choosing any one of the responses below:

- i. Strongly Disagree
- ii. Disagree
- iii. Neutral
- iv. Agree
- i. Strongly agree