Global Scientific JOURNALS

GSJ: Volume 9, Issue 10, October 2021, Online: ISSN 2320-9186

www.globalscientificjournal.com

Factors Influencing Unfair Termination of Employment in the Private Sector in Tanzania

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Abstract: The background of the law on termination of employment in Tanzania is founded on the ILO Convention number 158 of 1982 on termination of employment which was adopted by the ILO member states in 1982. Much as Tanzania has not ratified the Convention to date, but still, an obligation lies upon it as a member of ILO to inform the ILO committee of experts on how it fares with the implementation of the convention. It is on this basis that the large part of the Tanzania Law on termination of employment originates from the Convention and recommendations No. 166 (Mayalu, 2017).

The Labour Laws have spoken about the aspect of termination of employment, outlined the fairgrounds and procedures for termination of employment by employers. Despite the Labour Laws outlining what amounts to fair termination and how to fairly terminate employments, there is a practical challenge with the implementation of these laws by employers in Tanzania. The report issued by the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration shows that out of the 184 disputes that were referred to the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration and High Court Labour Division from the years 2008-2011, unfair termination dispute had the highest number of cases hence the leading disputes. This study intends to find out the causes of unfair termination of employment in the private sector in Tanzania with a case study of the Iringa region.

In particular, the study focused on the procedure for employment termination in the private sector, and the relevance of employment and labour relations laws regarding termination of employment. A qualitative approach using content analysis is used in the paper to analyse the collected information to advance the argument on causes of unfair termination of employment in the private sector. To ensure 360-degree data collection; data were collected from all the stakeholders and partners in the employment cycle – the employers, the employees, Trade unions and the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration. Also, several previous ruled cases were reviewed.

The findings show that the unfair termination of employment by employers is mainly due to the failure of employers to adhere to the laid down procedures for termination of employment. In most cases, the employers have valid reason/grounds for termination, but they error in following the procedures for termination as laid out in the labour laws. This is mainly because the procedures are too bureaucratic and cumbersome to follow. Also, the study found that some employers do not have HR practitioners / legal advisors to advise them on the matters of labour relations; while some employers are too rigid, they don't want to follow the process, they just believe in a fair dismissal. While the study recommends that employers should follow the law regulating the termination of employment, the study also recommends the need to call for a review and amendment of the law regulating employment and labour relations particularly on the aspect of termination of employment. The proposed review should involve and take opinions from the employers, employees, CMA, employees' trade union and Association of employers.

Keywords: Employment termination; Unfair termination.

Abbreviations:

- ILO- International Labour Organisation
- CMA- Commission for Mediation and Arbitration
- ELRA -Employment and Labour Relations

Act

1. Introduction

1.1. *Unfair termination in a General Perspective*

The employer's right to discipline their employees is presented on the failure of the workers to fulfil their duties and responsibilities under the contract of employment which involves giving honest and faithful service by using relevant skills, care and all reasonable orders and not otherwise [13]. Employers are not always right; sometimes they can act unreasonably just because of over ambitions toward their worker's performance, and behaviours. It is during this time they can act and take awkward decisions of dismissing employees without considering the formal procedures and the provision of laws on the fair termination grounds. In discussing employees right based on fairgrounds of termination of employment the Industrial Relations Commission of South Australia under Fair Work Act, (2009) section 108(1) provides that during the hearing of the case the commission must determine whether, on the balance of probabilities, the dismissal is harsh, unjust, or unreasonable, and they must have regard to the termination of employment convention, rules and procedures for termination.

The Queensland Industrial Relations Act (1999) revealed the grounds for unfair dismissal if there is an application of invalid reason. The invalid reason is when an employee is alleged for a temporary absence from work because of illness, or injury or his spouse has given birth to a child. The General Protection Provision of the fair work Act (2009) also mentioned unjustifiable reasons for termination like being a member of any trade union, physical and mental disability, marital status, sex, age preferences, and gender. If termination of employment was done under those circumstances, then the employees have the legal right to apply for reinstatement [11]. The act provides that the application for reinstatement must be made within 21 days after the dismissal to be dealt with.

1.2. *Termination and Unfair Termination of employment*

The process of dismissing someone from work is categorized in the group of disciplinary action of the office [13]. Disciplinary actions are formal actions taken by the management against an employee who fails to comply with rules established within the organization. Employers have the legal authority in the utterance of commands and the operations of restrictions or sanctions to ensure enforcement and compliance with those rules [13]. Normally employers expect their employees to comply with general society and managerial work rules and be away from unacceptable behaviours like fighting, stealing, drunkenness, sexual and racial discrimination, insubordination, and poor performance [13]. However, offices witness a lot of unfair grounds in applying these disciplinary rules in which employers acquire legal possession over employees.

Most employees are still in the battle of fighting for their rights towards management. Their hopes remain in the Trade unions hands. They believe that it is from trade unions where they can get greater bargain power, free from being unfairly dismissed, win participation in discussing matters affecting their interests and maintain peace of mind by acquiring freedom of self-expression and a better relationship with management. But on the contrary all the efforts and hopes to end up in vain. Employees' rights are still infringed, they have acquired very low power of collective bargaining, their employment is being unfairly terminated and they are left with their grievances and complaints [13].

Employers are prohibited from discriminating in any way against employees who reported unfair employers labour practices hence employees should feel free to use their right of being reinstated when they are treated unfairly [2]. The General Protection Provision of the fair work Act (2009) listed some of

the fairgrounds that justify termination of employment as when the employee refuses to obey the employer's lawful instructions, repeatedly inefficiency, incompetence at the workplace, or where the employer has given clear warning that the employee's work is unsatisfactory and yet no improvement has been made regardless of given ample time to rectify the situation, and misconducts like drunkenness, drugs, assault, serious breaches of work safety standards, dishonesty, or criminal acts. The act concluded that not all misconduct will justify termination of employment, but it depends on many factors like how serious the misconduct was.

1.3. *Termination of employment in Tanzania*

Generally, the laws of Tanzania allow termination of employment. Termination of employment can be initiated by either of the parties to the contract of employment; that is the employee or the employer-provided that she/he observes all duly stated reasons that justify termination and prescribed procedures [1].

The emerge of the law on termination of employment in Tanzania is founded on the ILO Convention number 158 of 1982 on termination of employment which was adopted by the ILO member states in 1982. Much as Tanzania has not ratified the Convention to date, but still, an obligation lies upon it as a member of ILO to inform the ILO committee of experts on how it fares with the implementation of the convention. It is on this basis that the large part of the Tanzania Law on termination of employment originates from the Convention and recommendations No. 166 [10].

On 4th June 2004, Benjamin Mkapa, the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania signed and introduced the Employment and Labour Relations Act. The Act aimed at making provisions for core labour rights; establishing basic employment standards, providing a framework for collective bargaining, providing for prevention and settlement of disputes, and other related matters. In its sub-part (E) the Act provides a clear meaning of unfair termination of employment; by interpreting the application and describing unfair termination grounds. It also shows the importance of the proof, remedies and notice of termination.

Despite the Labour Laws outlining what amounts to fair termination and how to fairly terminate employments, there is a practical challenge with the implementation of these laws by employers in Tanzania. The report issued by the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration shows that out of the 184 disputes that were referred to the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration and High Court Labour Division from the years 2008-2011, unfair termination dispute had the highest number of cases hence the leading disputes. [5]. This motivated the researcher to assess what factors influence unfair termination by employers in the private sector.

2. Literature review

A survey report done by [4] in Tanzania on the causes of employee termination in the mining sector revealed a practical case of unfair dismissal where the court upheld the unfair dismissal claim of 700 mineworkers in July 2010. These employees were ex-miners of Bulyanhulu underground gold mining in Shinyanga, Tanzania. The miners were dismissed for taking part in a strike in 2007 following a breakdown of pay talks. The mine suspended output for several weeks before firing all the 1,300 striking workers, accusing them of illegally walking out. Some were later rehired, while the rest were represented in the court case. The Tanzania Mines, Energy, Construction and Allied Workers' Union has accused the employer, Barrick gold mine, Tanzania Ltd, of poor labour practices.

A study was done by [6] on prevalent cases of unfair termination in the private sector in Tanzania where the company has 2,100 workers who work day and night in a shift to make it operate 24 hours. Sun flag manufactures clothes, such as T-shirts and dresses, and produces lengths of material for stores and individual labels in developed countries. The study found that in February 2008, about 350 workers who were protesting the low wages granted by their employer contrary to those proposed by the government were dismissed unfairly. Later, around a hundred workers were rehired at another company production

site. Four-fifth (80.1%) of patients reported that employees are unfairly terminated due to lack of job contracts and hence fail any redress means. Employees who had contracts showed there is a fair process for dismissal as most of them are subjected to internal processes before being dismissed.

Similarly, [7] conducted a study on servitude and forced labour in the 21st century: The Human Rights of Workers in Indiana USA. The study found that private companies' employees' job security is under threat since they are dismissed in disregard of the laws of South Africa. The study found that majority of private companies had court proceedings against them as a result of unfair job termination.

A study by [12] employee, conditions of work and employment: A legal perspective. The study findings revealed that the conditions under which employees work and perform their labour services are, in most cases, very degrading and appalling. The study further found that employees suffer from poor working conditions and that their isolation makes difficult some kind of organization which would allow them to improve their condition, therefore, justifying the need for labour law for every category of workers.

A study by [9] on giving the help the silent treatment: How Alabama's new immigration law punishes domestic workers, ignores certain employers, and short-changes us all in Alabama. Through a qualitative approach, the study found that the invisibility aspect of the work makes the employers thrive in their exploitations and abuses. The study as well found that employees are mistreated in most private companies and are dismissed at will by their employers. However, it is pertinent to point out that employees in private companies are recognised under the law, hence, are entitled to enjoy the protective mechanisms enshrined in the law.

A study by [3] on international law and regulation by the European Union whereby a study found that workers are often paid for results rather than time. Their vulnerability is linked in many instances to the absence of an employment relationship or the existence of a flimsy one and that most of these workers are unskilled or work in sectors with limited trade union organisation and limited coverage by collective bargaining, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.

A study by [8] on dismissals for the cause: The difference that just eight paragraphs can make. The study findings revealed that employers could terminate any workers at will based on any flimsy reasons or excuses without considering the effects and implications such termination will have on the worker. It was confirmed that the culture of unfair dismissal is the norm rather than the exception and hence proving employees' vulnerability in Vietnam.

In Tanzania, there is limited research done on the topic however, some scholars have written papers about termination of employment in the Tanzanian context as outlined below;

Mwalongo, (2012) in his paper titled "Unfair Dismissal / Unfair Termination of Employment". The paper focused on the forms/ grounds of termination of employment by both parties (employee and the employer); the substantive and procedural aspect of termination of employment by the employer, jurisdiction to adjudicate unfair termination of employment and the time limits for filing complaints at the CMA and High Courts. The paper clearly outlined that if the procedure used is not fair and/or the reason is not fair; then such termination is said to be unfair termination of employment.

Ardean Law Chambers, (2018) in their paper on "Termination of Employment Contract Under the Laws of Tanzania". In the same way, as earlier, the paper talks about the procedures to terminate employment contracts and has to a large extent focused on the grounds for termination of employment by the employer as well as the procedures to be followed in each of the grounds. The paper also talks about notice and payments on termination of employment.

ABC Attorneys, (2019) also wrote a paper titled "Process of firing an employee in Tanzania". The paper focused on the firing process (the grounds for termination; the procedure and payments on termination) referring to the Employment and Labour Relations Act and the Employment and Labour Relations (Code of Good Practice) Rules.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted in Iringa Region; used private companies and organisations based in Iringa Region to represent the private sectors in Tanzania. Selection of the Iringa Region was mainly due to the increasing number of NGO's in Iringa lately and also a number of private companies working in the forestry sector hence increased number of employment opportunities.

A qualitative method was applied to get accurate data for the problem conclusion. The study adopted purposive sampling technique, so interviews were conducted with the mediators/arbitrators of the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration (CMA), employers, terminated employees as well as trade union representatives all of which are the stakeholders in the employment circle; hence a sample size of 20 individuals was drawn. This is because the employers are in most cases the ones initiating and implements termination of employment; Trade Unions represent employees with unfair termination cases at the CMA's and Labour Court; CMA are the ones hearing and adjudicating unfair termination disputes and the employees who are the are the victims of unfair termination by employers.

In this study, an in-depth interview was conducted with all sampled respondents in their categories. A review of previous judgements of unfair termination cases was also conducted. The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

The researcher had some of the interview guiding questions and the interviewees were supposed to state their views by answering interview questions. Questions were asked to employers, CMA, trade union and terminated employees. The findings are presented as follows.

4.1. *The most common reason for Unfair Termination*

Question regarding what the most common reason for termination of employment asked was and below are the responses.

4 out of 5 employers indicated that the most common reason for termination of employment has been misconduct followed by poor performance.

In the NGO's – the cut off of funding and programme phase-out was also mentioned as common reasons for termination as well as poor performance.

On the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration – *The mediators and arbitrators mentioned that unfair termination cases that are referred to the commission are those related to misconduct, incapacity and operational requirement. However, they mentioned that out of all these misconducts are the leading cases"*

Terminated employees - *The terminated employees that were interviewed mentioned that they were terminated due to alleged theft, poor performance, retrenchment and nonrenewal of fixed-term contracts.*

The above responses indicate that while there are many reasons for which the employer can terminate the employment of the employee such as ill-health, incompatibility, retrenchment/ operational requirements and expiration of the fixed-term contract; misconducts and poor performance are the most common reason for employees' termination from employment by private sector employers. The interviews also spotted the issue of cut-off of funding from donors and programme phase out as reasons for termination of employment particularly in the NGO's and donor-funded programs.

The findings also show that private-sector employers- in particular, NGOs use fixed-term contracts to termination their employees. When they do no longer want to keep the employees they wait for the expiry of their contracts and just do not renew them.

Terminated employees were asked whether they were given the opportunity to be heard / express / defend themselves before being terminated.

3 out of 5 terminated employees interviewed indicated that employers did not follow the due process before termination.

Employee 1: *"I was called by the HR Manager and Line Manager who told me that the company has noticed the fraudulent act I had committed contrary to the organization's policies and as such I should explain myself. After I had explained myself, a few days later I was handled in the termination letter."*

Employee 3: *"I was given the letter that my contract of employment is coming to an end in 1 week and that it won't be renewed so I should hand over all organisation properties in my possession to my Line Manager"*

Another question posed to the employee who was terminated due to poor performance was whether he was given the opportunity to improve his performance before his employment was terminated and the answer was

Employee 2: "*No. I was just been given the letter that my performance evaluation has shown that most of the targets were not met hence my performance has not been up to the required standard hence termination".*

The arbitrators and mediators were asked what were the main reasons for those cases that were ruled in favour of the employee?

All the arbitrators confirmed that in most cases – it is due to technicalities / procedural irregularity although they are a few which are due to failure of having a substantive reason/cause.

Arbitrator 3: *"Most cases are due to failure to follow the required procedure however, there are few which are due to failure of having a substantive reason/cause."*

CMA Arbitrator 5: "*Procedural irregularity - most employers fail to adhere to a fair procedure before terminating employers although they may have a valid reason for termination."*

CMA Arbitrator 2: "*Most of the cases ruled against the employer are due to technicalities / procedural irregularity. In most cases, employers have a fair and valid reason for termination but they error in procedures. Once an employer error in one bit of the procedure then the termination is procedurally unfair"*

The findings show that the reason for unfair termination by employers is their failure to follow the laid down procedures for termination of employment. In most cases, the employers have the valid reason/grounds for termination, but they error in following the procedures for termination as laid out in the labour laws hence tendering the termination unfair.

4.2. *Relevance of employment and labour relation laws regarding termination of employment*

The question was - How is the balance between the employers right to terminate the employment of an employee and the obligations posed by the laws regulating the termination of employment?

All the employers mentioned that there is no bright balance between the employer's right to terminate the employee and the obligation imposed by the labour laws.

"There is no *right balance. The employer's right to terminate is infringed. The employer can hire at his discretion but cannot terminate at his discretion. Too many technicalities*". **(Employer 1).**

"*Whilst the law protects the employee, but the laws are too bureaucratic and time-consuming. You keep staying with the employee who has conducted the misconduct for long until the termination process is over*". (**Employer 2)**

"*The employee can decide to terminate the employment at any time leaving the employer miserable and the law is silent about it, but the employer cannot easily terminate the employee even if the employee had indeed committed an offence. It is like the law assumes that the employee is always right. The process to terminate an employee is too bureaucratic to fire"* (**Employer 5)**

"The position regarding the burden of proof be on the employer is not right as it assumes that the employer was wrong in terminating the employee. Its high time burden of proof is on both the employee and the employer" **(Employer 3).**

The arbitrator and trade union on the other side said there is the right balance - employers have the right to hire and fire subject to following the laid down procedures when terminating employees.

"*There is the right balance because when there is the right there is also an obligation. So, the law has provided the employers with the right to terminate only that it has laid down the procedures which the employers should follow"*

The majority of employers feels that there is no right balance between the employers' right to terminate the employee and the obligations posed by the laws regulating the termination of employment. They feel their right to terminate when they need is limited. The laws are too bureaucratic. However, on the other hand, arbitrators and trade unions felt that there is the right balance, and the employers just need to follow the laid down procedures when terminating employees.

Another question asked during interviews was about the respondents' perceptions about the penalties imposed to employers for unfair termination.

All the employers felt like the penalties imposed are in favour of the employees and inconsistent with the offence committed by the employer. Sometimes the employee indeed committed the offence and it's only that the employer errored in a small procedure, but the penalty is taken as if the employee did not commit the offence.

"The remedies should be in line with the extent of the omission by the employer" (Employer 5).

On the other hand, the trade union felt that the penalty imposed for unfair termination should be tight and also severance pay be improved. The current calculation (seven days salary for years worked up to 10 years) is enough especially for the low-income employees.

The employers feel that the penalty imposed to employers for unfair termination is to some extent inconsistent with the offence/omission by the employer particularly when they had a valid reason for termination and only errored in [the procedure. The employers call for the review of penalties so that they are in line with the extent to which they errored in terminating the employees.

The other question asked to employers and employees was whether they would prefer to pay/ receive monetary compensation of not less than 12 months' salary other than to / be reinstated or re-engaged? If yes- why?

Both the employers and employees interviewed were pro monetary compensation other than reinstatement/re-engagement as due to two major reasons – loss of confidence in both employer and employee; irreparably work relationships hence unable to continue working together; they need to instill discipline at workplaces.

"*Would prefer to pay compensation other than reinstatement/re-engagement because already I would have lost confidence and trust with the employee"*. (**Employer).**

"I w*ould prefer monetary compensation as opposed to reinstatement and re-engagement because in most cases after the case the working relationship is irreparably broken /damaged and not worth continuing with the same employer"*. **(Employee**).

'Most cases they are not reinstated/ reengaged (only 4 employees) have so far been reinstated. We usually do not advise because of the already damaged relationship - we usually advocate for compensation." **(Trade Union).**

*"In most cases, we order monetary compensation other than reinstatement/reengagement. This is because at that point the relationship is already damaged and not worth re-engaging the employee" (***CMA Arbitrator)**

The findings show that all the respondents were pro monetary compensation other than reinstatement and reengagement. Reinstating/ re-engaging the employee who has won a case against the employer is

difficult, not healthy and not practical. Because the employment relationship is based on trust, honesty and confidence between the two parties of which will no longer be available after the unfair termination dispute.

The findings show that there are some aspects of the law that are no longer relevant and practical and as such, there is a need for law reform.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

For any termination of employment to be fair, it must be both substantively and procedurally right. This means that there should be a fair reason/ ground for termination and the termination must be in accordance with a fair procedure. The laws and regulations regarding employment and labour relations issues in Tanzania have provided the procedures to be followed by employers when they want to terminate their employees. The law has categorized different grounds for which employers can terminate the employees and outlined the procedure for each ground. However, even with that, there are still a number of unfair termination cases by employers, and this is because in most cases the employer's error in procedures hence renders the termination unfair.

The study has found out that employers' errors in procedures for termination due to not having human resources practitioners / legal advisors who are knowledgeable with the employment and labour relations laws and regulations; Some do get away with complying with the procedures as the procedures are too bureaucratic and cumbersome to follow and while some employers are just rigid, do not want to follow the process – they just believe in a fair dismissal.

From the above findings, the study recommends the following:

- Need to call for a review and amendments of the laws regulating the termination of employment. The amendments should collect suggestions from employers, employees, trade unions and CMA. Some of the areas needing a review include:
  - The procedures to be followed during termination of employment
  - The penalty to be imposed to employers for unfair termination when the employer is substantively right and procedurally wrong
  - Appealing against the decision of the disciplinary committee through internal channels
  - The mediator may decide the case ex-parte and issue an award if the employer doesn't show up during mediation. This compromises the role of the mediator to that of the arbitrator.
- The laws should also strike a right balance between the rights and obligations of the employee and employer with regard to termination of employment. While the employee can terminate the employment anyhow even without having any reason and the employer cannot easy terminate the employee- there has to be a valid reason and a procedure for that.
- Employers should involve HR professionals and legal advisors when contemplating and implementing termination of employment. It was revealed during the interviews that in some organizations, HR's are just administrative clerks and do not take part in such delicate decisions or processes. The top management should also be seeking advice from the HR's when implementing termination of employment.
- Trade Unions and employers' Association (ATE) should conduct training to their members (employees and employers) on various aspects of the employment and labour laws

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