

Bridging the Gap between Employers' Expectations and Classroom Realities: Perspectives from Education Stakeholders on Graduate Teachers in Tanzania

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Abstract

Amid growing concerns about the classroom readiness of graduate teachers in Tanzania, this study examined the qualities education stakeholders expect from graduate teachers and the extent to which these expectations are demonstrated in secondary school practice. The study adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design involving 16 participants comprising six Heads of Schools, seven School Quality Assurers, and three District Education Officers from Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Kilimanjaro, and Morogoro. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis and analysed using a hybrid thematic approach combining deductive and inductive coding, supported by NVivo 11. The findings show that stakeholders primarily expect graduate teachers to possess strong subject content knowledge, sound pedagogical skills, professional ethics, creativity, and vision for effective learning. Graduate teachers were generally perceived to meet expectations in subject content knowledge, while substantial gaps were identified in the practical application of pedagogical knowledge and skills. Perceptions of professional ethics were mixed, indicating variability in professional conduct. Creativity and vision emerged as additional professional expectations rather than demonstrated competence deficits. The study concludes that graduate teacher preparedness is multidimensional and requires stronger integration of subject knowledge, practical pedagogy, professional ethics, creativity, and reflective professional development. Closer feedback between teacher-education institutions and school-level stakeholders is recommended to strengthen alignment between graduate preparation and classroom expectations.

Keywords: *Graduate teacher preparation, employer expectations, classroom readiness, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), professional ethics, Tanzania*

Introduction

The preparation of graduate teachers within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) plays a pivotal role in shaping the quality, relevance, and effectiveness

of education systems globally (Taylor, 2023). Well-prepared teachers are essential not only for improving student learning outcomes but also for fostering innovation, critical thinking, and social development.

Contemporary teacher education frameworks emphasise the development of multidimensional competencies, particularly Subject Content Knowledge (SCK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and professional ethics, which collectively influence instructional effectiveness and learner engagement (König et al., 2023). Central to this discourse is Shulman's (1986) concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), which underscores the integration of content mastery and pedagogical expertise as fundamental for effective teaching. Subsequent studies have reinforced the importance of PCK in enabling teachers to transform subject knowledge into meaningful learning experiences tailored to diverse classroom contexts (Van Driel & Berry, 2022).

Despite the global recognition of these competencies, aligning teacher preparation programmes with such multidimensional expectations remains a persistent challenge, particularly in developing contexts. Empirical evidence indicates that while many graduate teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge, their ability to apply pedagogical strategies effectively and uphold professional standards often falls short (Caingcoy & Gallego, 2021).

In the East African region, similar concerns have been documented. For instance, Msamba et al. (2023) report that although in-service training has improved competency-based teaching practices in Tanzania, significant gaps remain in practical classroom implementation. Likewise, Mwakyobwe and Shawa (2023) observe that competency-based approaches are applied inconsistently in teacher training colleges, thereby limiting the development of essential pedagogical skills among pre-service teachers.

Variations in teacher preparation across HEIs further compound these challenges. Studies from neighbouring countries reveal inconsistencies in curriculum implementation, instructional quality, and resource allocation, which ultimately affect teacher preparedness and classroom performance (Atuhurra & Kaffenberger, 2022). Such variation suggests that possession of a university teaching qualification does not necessarily imply uniform professional readiness, as the quality and extent of opportunities for developing practical teaching competencies may differ across institutions and training contexts (Atuhurra & Kaffenberger, 2022; Mwakyobwe & Shawa, 2023).

In Tanzania, similar concerns have been raised regarding the uneven integration of technological and pedagogical competencies, leaving many graduate teachers inadequately prepared for contemporary classroom demands (Kafyulilo & Fisser, 2019; Nyangas, 2024). Moreover, limited emphasis on professional ethics, creativity, and reflective practice in teacher education programmes has been identified as a critical gap, undermining the development of well-rounded educators capable of adapting to evolving educational environments (Mweemba & Awuor, 2022).

From an employer's perspective, concerns regarding the preparedness of graduate teachers have become increasingly prominent. Education stakeholders consistently report that while graduates often possess adequate subject knowledge, they frequently lack the pedagogical skills necessary to engage learners effectively and the professional attributes required to uphold ethical standards in practice (Ozturk, 2026).

Nyangas (2024) highlights that although teachers show willingness to adopt Information and Communication Technology (ICT), their limited practical competence constrains effective integration. Similarly, Siayi et al. (2023) note the continued dominance of teacher-centred approaches, which hinder active learning and student participation. These observations suggest a misalignment between the competencies developed during university training and the expectations of employers within school environments.

While existing studies have extensively examined individual components of teacher competence, particularly SCK, PK, and PCK, there remains limited empirical evidence that integrates these dimensions with broader professional attributes such as ethics, creativity, and vision, particularly from the perspective of employers in Tanzania. Examining these competencies together is important because effective classroom practice requires more than isolated mastery of subject content or pedagogy; it also depends on teachers' professional judgement, adaptability, ethical conduct, and capacity to respond constructively to changing learning environments (König et al., 2023; Lawrent, 2022; Shulman, 1986; Van Driel & Berry, 2022).

Furthermore, much of the current literature relies on teacher self-assessments or institutional evaluations, with insufficient attention given to stakeholder-based assessments of graduate performance in real classroom settings. This creates a critical gap in understanding how teacher preparation translates into practice and whether it meets the dynamic demands of contemporary education systems.

This study addresses this gap by examining the alignment between employers' expectations and the actual competencies demonstrated by graduate teachers in Tanzanian secondary schools. Unlike previous studies, it adopts a stakeholder-centred approach, drawing insights from key education actors responsible for supervising and evaluating teachers' performance. By integrating pedagogical, ethical, and professional dimensions, including creativity and vision, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of teacher preparedness and its implications for educational quality. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- i) What qualities do employers expect from graduate teachers in Tanzanian secondary schools?
- ii) To what extent do graduate teachers meet these expectations in terms of subject content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and professional ethics?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on teacher education reform in Tanzania by offering evidence-based insights that can inform curriculum development, policy formulation, and professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality and relevance of graduate teacher preparation.

Literature Review

This section synthesises existing literature on teacher competencies, with particular emphasis on SCK, PK, PCK, and broader professional dimensions, including ethics, creativity, and vision. Rather than treating these domains in isolation, the review critically examines how they interact within teacher preparation and where gaps persist, particularly in the Tanzanian context.

A substantial body of literature consistently identifies SCK, PK, and PCK as the foundational pillars of effective teaching. Studies across different contexts indicate that strong subject mastery remains a central outcome of teacher education programmes, forming the basis upon which pedagogical practices are developed (Komba & Mwakabenga, 2019; Mwakyobwe & Shawa, 2023).

At the same time, pedagogical knowledge is widely recognised as the mechanism through which content is transformed into meaningful learning experiences, enabling teachers to manage classrooms, design instruction, and assess learning effectively (Sonmark et al., 2017; Barak, 2023). Building on this, PCK has emerged as a critical integrative construct that captures the dynamic interaction between content and pedagogy and enables teachers to adapt instruction to diverse learners and contexts (Sarkar et al., 2024; Van Driel & Berry, 2022).

Despite this theoretical consensus, empirical evidence reveals important tensions in how these competencies are developed and applied in practice. While teacher education programmes often succeed in cultivating strong SCK, multiple studies indicate that integrating SCK and PK into functional PCK remains inconsistent, particularly in developing contexts.

Kipanda and Maro (2024) found that even experienced teachers struggled to implement learner-centred approaches, suggesting limitations in the practical application of pedagogical knowledge. Similarly, Kipanda and Maro (2024) reported discrepancies between teachers' perceived and actual pedagogical practices, while Edward and Shukia (2022) observed gaps in pedagogical knowledge among pre-primary teachers despite moderate content understanding. These findings collectively suggest that the challenge is not merely the acquisition of knowledge, but its effective integration and application within classroom environments.

In the Tanzanian context, these challenges are further compounded by structural and institutional constraints. Studies highlight persistent difficulties in bridging the gap between pedagogical theory and classroom practice, often due to limited training resources, insufficient practicum experiences, and inadequate ongoing professional support (Mgaya, 2024; Nyangas, 2024; Aydın & Turhan, 2023).

Kafyulilo and Fisser (2019) and Mateka et al. (2024) emphasise that deficiencies in curriculum design and implementation hinder the development of integrated competencies, while Mafugu (2022) points to weaknesses in mentorship and teaching practice as critical barriers to experiential learning. Additionally, resource limitations, particularly regarding teaching materials and ICT integration, constrain opportunities for innovative pedagogy (Kasulwa, 2023; Musa & Mbeya, 2022). Collectively, these studies indicate that while the conceptual foundations of teacher preparation are well established, their translation into practice remains uneven and contextually constrained.

Beyond the core domains of SCK, PK, and PCK, there is growing recognition of the importance of professional ethics, creativity, and vision as integral components of teacher effectiveness. However, the literature suggests that these dimensions are often underemphasised or insufficiently integrated into teacher education programmes. Ethical competence, encompassing professional conduct, fairness, responsibility, and respect, is widely acknowledged as essential for fostering trust and maintaining effective learning environments (Rweyemamu & Kamugisha, 2022; Lawrent, 2022).

Nevertheless, evidence indicates that ethics education in Tanzania remains limited, with existing initiatives often lacking depth and sustained impact on professional behaviour (Lawrent, 2022; Fussy, 2018). This gap raises concerns about graduate teachers' preparedness to navigate the moral and professional demands of the teaching profession.

Similarly, creativity and innovation are increasingly recognised as critical competencies in contemporary education, particularly amid digital transformation and diverse learner needs. Research suggests that creative pedagogical practices enhance student engagement, adaptability, and problem-solving skills (König et al., 2023). However, studies also highlight significant constraints in the adoption of innovative teaching approaches, often linked to limited resources, inadequate training, and insufficient exposure to technology-enhanced learning environments (Kasulwa, 2023; Nyangas, 2024). This indicates a disconnect between the evolving expectations of modern education systems and the competencies developed through existing teacher preparation programmes.

The notion of teacher vision, understood as the ability to inspire, lead, and foster long-term educational goals, has received comparatively less empirical attention but remains a critical dimension of professional practice. Mweemba and Awuor (2022) emphasise the role of reflective practice and professional identity in shaping teachers' capacity to influence learning beyond immediate instructional outcomes. Such capacities are particularly important where teachers are expected not only to deliver prescribed content but also to motivate learners, respond to contextual challenges, and contribute to continuous school improvement. However, limited emphasis on leadership development and reflective competencies within teacher education programmes may constrain the development of such vision-oriented teaching practices, especially in resource-constrained educational settings (Mweemba & Awuor, 2022).

The literature reveals three key insights. First, there is broad agreement on the importance of SCK, PK, and PCK as foundational competencies, yet their integration into effective classroom practice remains inconsistent. Second, while pedagogical and structural challenges have been widely documented, there is a limited synthesis of how these challenges interact with broader professional dimensions such as ethics, creativity, and vision. Third, existing studies in Tanzania largely focus on isolated competencies or rely on teacher self-reports, with insufficient attention given to employer or stakeholder perspectives on teacher performance in real classroom contexts.

This gap underscores the need for a more holistic and empirically grounded understanding of teacher preparedness that integrates core instructional competencies with professional and innovative dimensions. By examining teacher competence through the lens of employer expectations, this study contributes to the literature by offering a multidimensional, practice-oriented perspective on the alignment between teacher preparation and classroom realities in Tanzania.

Theoretical Framework

This study is primarily grounded in the concept of PCK as advanced by Shulman (1986), which emphasises the integration of SCK and PK in effective teaching. PCK provides a foundational lens for understanding how teachers transform disciplinary knowledge into meaningful learning experiences that are accessible to diverse learners. Within this framework, effective teaching is not merely the possession of subject expertise but the ability to apply appropriate pedagogical strategies to facilitate student understanding.

However, while PCK offers a robust explanation of instructional competence, it does not fully capture broader professional dimensions such as ethical conduct, creativity, and vision, which are increasingly recognised as essential components of teacher effectiveness (König et al., 2023; Lawrent, 2022; Mweemba & Awuor, 2022). To address this limitation, the study is further informed by complementary perspectives on teacher professionalism and ethical competence. These perspectives emphasise the role of values, reflective practice, accountability, and professional identity in shaping teachers' behaviour and decision-making within educational contexts

In addition, contemporary views of teacher competence extend beyond knowledge and skills to include creativity and vision as critical elements of effective and transformative teaching (König et al., 2023; Mweemba & Awuor, 2022). Creativity enables teachers to adapt instructional strategies to diverse and resource-constrained environments, while vision reflects the ability to inspire, guide, and foster long-term learning outcomes (Nyangas, 2024; Mweemba & Awuor, 2022). These dimensions align with broader conceptions of teacher competence as a multidimensional practice integrating cognitive, behavioural, and ethical components (Caingcoy & Gallego, 2021; König et al., 2023).

By integrating PCK with teacher professionalism and ethical competence frameworks, this study adopts a holistic theoretical perspective that captures both instructional and professional dimensions of teaching. This integrated

framework provides a basis for analysing the alignment between employer expectations and the competencies demonstrated by graduate teachers, particularly in subject knowledge, pedagogical practice, ethical conduct, creativity, and vision in the Tanzanian context.

Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a multidimensional conceptual framework to examine the extent to which graduate teachers meet employer expectations in Tanzanian secondary schools. The framework conceptualises teacher competence as an integration of instructional knowledge, professional attributes, and transformative capacities that collectively influence classroom performance. The framework is author-developed, drawing primarily on Shulman's (1986) PCK perspective and complementary literature on professional ethics, creativity, and teacher vision.

At the foundation of the framework are SCK and PK, which interact to form PCK. These components reflect the teacher's ability to understand the subject matter and to deliver it effectively using appropriate instructional strategies. SCK ensures mastery of disciplinary content, while PK enables the design and implementation of teaching methods that facilitate student learning. Their integration into PCK reflects the practical application of knowledge in real classroom contexts and is considered a core determinant of instructional effectiveness.

Beyond these instructional competencies, the framework incorporates professional ethics as a critical dimension of teacher performance. Ethical competence encompasses professional conduct, responsibility, integrity, and adherence to institutional and societal expectations. It shapes teacher behaviour, influences classroom relationships, and contributes to trust and accountability within the education system.

In addition, the framework recognises creativity as an essential competency in contemporary teaching. Creativity refers to the teacher's ability to employ innovative teaching approaches, adapt to diverse classroom conditions, and utilise available resources effectively, particularly in environments with limited infrastructure. It reflects the capacity for flexibility and responsiveness in instructional practice.

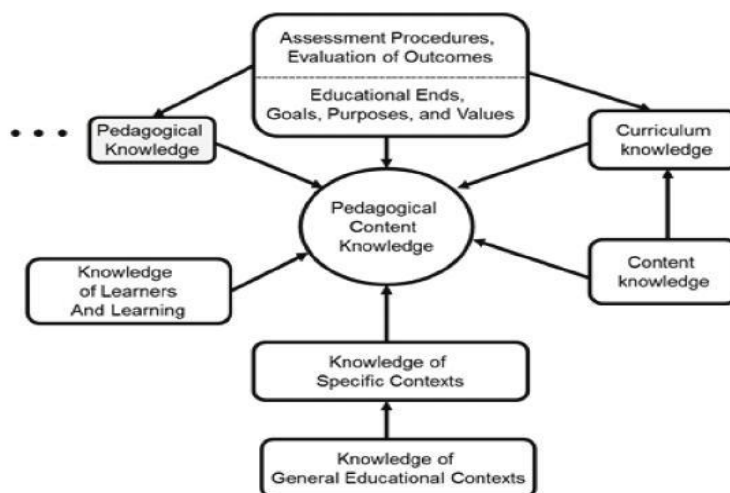
Furthermore, vision is conceptualised as a higher-order professional attribute that captures the teacher's ability to inspire, guide, and motivate learners towards long-term educational goals. Vision reflects elements of leadership, reflective practice, and commitment to continuous improvement, enabling

teachers to go beyond routine instruction and contribute to meaningful learning experiences.

These dimensions, SCK, PK/PCK, professional ethics, creativity, and vision, are conceptualised as independent but interrelated constructs that collectively influence the dependent outcome of this study, namely the extent to which graduate teachers meet employer expectations. This outcome is assessed through stakeholder perceptions, particularly from School Heads, School Quality Assurers, and District Education Officers, who evaluate teacher performance in real classroom settings.

Accordingly, the conceptual framework posits that effective teacher performance is determined not by subject knowledge alone but by the integrated application of pedagogical competence, ethical conduct, creative practice, and a visionary orientation. As shown in Figure 1, the degree of alignment between these competencies and employer expectations ultimately determines the classroom readiness and professional effectiveness of graduate teachers.

Figure 1:
Conceptual Framework for Graduate Teacher Competence and Employer Expectation Alignment in Tanzania



Methodology

This section outlines the research design, sampling procedures, data collection instruments, and data analysis techniques used to explore stakeholders' perspectives on graduate teachers in Tanzanian secondary schools, particularly regarding employers' expectations of pedagogical skills and professional ethics.

Research Approach

The study employed a qualitative research approach to explore stakeholders' perceptions and experiences regarding the competencies of graduate teachers and the extent to which these competencies align with employer expectations. The qualitative approach was appropriate because it enabled an in-depth understanding of participants' views within their professional and institutional contexts.

Research Design

The study adopted a multiple-case study design. Each case was defined as a stakeholder category comprising School Heads, School Quality Assurers, and District Education Officers within specific regional contexts. This design enabled comparison of perspectives across stakeholder groups and locations while preserving the contextual characteristics of each case. It also facilitated an in-depth examination of employer expectations and stakeholders' assessments of graduate teachers' competencies in real educational settings.

Population and Sampling Techniques

The study was conducted in four regions: Dar es Salaam (Kinondoni), Dodoma, Kilimanjaro, and Morogoro. These regions were selected for their high concentration of universities and secondary schools that employ graduate teachers. They also provided contextual variation (urban and peri-urban settings, public and faith-based schools), enhancing the diversity and transferability of findings.

The study sample comprised 16 participants, including six School Heads (HoSs), seven School Quality Assurers (SQAs), and three District Education Officers (DEOs). Participants were selected purposively based on their direct supervisory, evaluative, or administrative experience with graduate teachers. Snowball sampling was subsequently used, where necessary, to identify additional information-rich participants with relevant knowledge and experience. To minimise potential bias associated with referral-based sampling, participants were drawn from different regions, institutional settings, and professional roles.

To minimise bias associated with snowball sampling, participants were selected across diverse institutions, regions, and roles, and findings were triangulated across multiple data sources. The final sample included stakeholders from both public and faith-based institutions.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and documentary analysis. Interviews were conducted with HoSs, and DEOs, using guides developed from the study objectives and theoretical framework, lasting 45–60 minutes. FGDs were conducted with SQAs (4–6 participants per group) and lasted 60–90 minutes, using structured discussion guides aligned with key constructs.

The instruments were piloted ($n = 2$) to ensure clarity and alignment with SCK, PK, PCK, and ethical standards, and were refined accordingly. Documentary analysis included curriculum guidelines, teacher training syllabi (2018–2023), performance reports, and national education policies, supporting data triangulation.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was achieved through triangulation across interviews, FGDs, and documents, as well as member checking with selected participants ($n = 6$). Dependability was ensured through maintaining an audit trail of research procedures. Confirmability was strengthened through peer debriefing and reflexivity to minimise researcher bias. Transferability was supported by providing detailed contextual descriptions of the study.

Data Analysis

All interviews and FGDs were transcribed verbatim. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, while NVivo 11 was used to support data organisation, coding, and retrieval. A hybrid thematic analysis approach combining deductive and inductive coding was applied. Deductive coding was guided by SCK, PK, PCK, and professional ethics, while inductive coding allowed additional themes, including creativity and vision, to emerge from the data.

The analysis followed the thematic analysis procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2020), including familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, development of candidate themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and interpretation of the findings. A second coder reviewed selected transcripts to enhance analytical consistency, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Codes such as “lecture dominance” and “limited teaching methods” were grouped under “pedagogical constraints,” which contributed to the broader theme “gap in pedagogical application.” This iterative process supported a systematic and transparent interpretation of the data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was ensured through informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participants received information sheets and signed consent forms. Pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity, and data were securely stored in password-protected files. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. All procedures complied with institutional ethical standards.

Results

This section presents the findings derived from qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with District Education Officers (DEOs), Heads of Schools (HoSs), and School Quality Assurers (SQAs). The findings are organised around the two research questions. To enhance transparency, counts (n) indicate the number of participants who mentioned each theme during coding, while percentages are reported for descriptive purposes only and are not intended for statistical generalisation.

RQ 1: What qualities do education stakeholders expect from graduate teachers in Tanzanian secondary schools? The question was guided by key dimensions of teacher competence, including subject knowledge and expertise, pedagogical skills, professional ethics, creativity, and vision for effective learning. These dimensions reflect a holistic understanding of teacher competence that integrates knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions required for effective teaching. The findings derived from these indicators are summarised in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1:
Employers' Expectations of Graduate Teachers' Qualities (n = 16)

Response	DEOs n = 3	SQAs n = 7	HoSs n = 6	Total N = 16 (%)
1 High level of knowledge and expertise	3	6	6	15 (93.8%)
2 Sound pedagogical skills	3	5	6	14 (87.5%)
3 Professionalism by maintaining teaching ethics	2	5	5	12 (75.0%)
4 Creativity	1	5	4	10 (62.5%)
5 Vision that will enhance effective learning	2	3	2	7 (43.8%)

High Level of Knowledge and Expertise (SCK)

Table 1.1 shows that the majority of respondents (n = 15) indicated that graduate teachers are expected to possess strong Subject Content Knowledge.

Stakeholders consistently associated higher academic qualifications with deeper subject mastery and professional competence. One District Education

Officer noted:

The higher the level of education, the higher the expectations. Graduate teachers are expected to demonstrate deeper subject mastery and broader professional competence compared to diploma teachers” (Interview-DEO-R1).

Similarly, a Head of School stated:

Degree holders are expected to have greater expertise due to their extended training, particularly in their specialised subjects (Interview-HoS-R2).

These responses imply a shared expectation that university training should translate into advanced subject expertise and improved instructional quality.

Sound Pedagogical Skills (PK/PCK)

A majority of respondents (n = 14) emphasised the importance of pedagogical competence, particularly the ability to apply diverse, learner-centred teaching strategies. One SQA participant explained:

We expected graduate teachers to move beyond rote teaching and use diverse methods such as role play and interactive strategies to support active learning” (FGD-SQA-R3).

Another Head of School added:

Most graduate teachers rely heavily on group discussions. We expected them to use a wider range of teaching methods learned at university (Interview-HoS-R4).

These findings suggest that employers expect not only theoretical pedagogical knowledge but also its effective classroom application.

Professional Ethics

Respondents (n = 12) identified professional ethics as an important expectation. Stakeholders emphasised professional conduct, moral integrity, responsibility, and the role of graduate teachers as positive examples to learners. One Head of School stated:

Graduate teachers are expected to demonstrate professionalism in behaviour, communication, and ethical conduct, as they serve as role models to students (Interview-HoS-R5).

These findings highlight that ethical competence is viewed as an essential component of teacher professionalism.

Creativity in Teaching

Creativity was mentioned by respondents (n = 10), who expected teachers to adopt innovative teaching approaches and utilise available resources effectively. One SQA participant noted:

Graduate teachers should be creative in designing teaching materials and adapting to different classroom situations using available resources (FGD-SQA-R6).

This reflects expectations for flexible, adaptive, and engaging teaching practices.

Vision for Enhancing Learning

A smaller group of respondents (n = 7) emphasised the need for teachers to possess a clear vision for motivating students and enhancing learning outcomes. One DEO stated:

We need teachers who can inspire students and provide direction for learning, not just deliver content (Interview-DEO-R7).

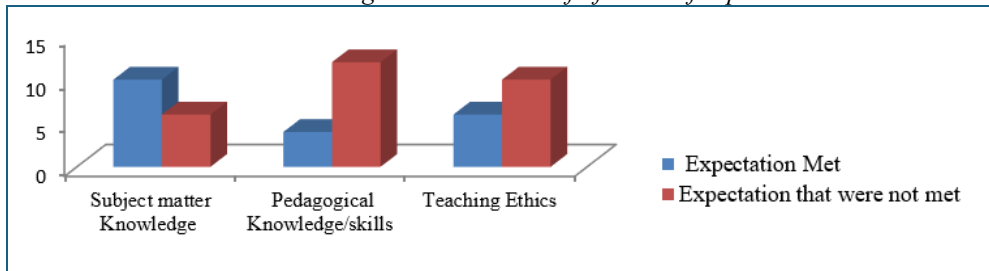
This suggests that visionary teaching is recognised but less consistently articulated among employers.

RQ 2: To what extent do graduate teachers meet these expectations in terms of subject content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and professional ethics? It examined the extent to which graduate teachers meet employer expectations in key areas of teacher competence: Subject Content Knowledge, pedagogical skills, and professional ethics.

Figure 1.1 presents employers' perceptions regarding the extent to which graduate teachers meet expectations in three key domains: SCK, Pedagogical Knowledge and Skills (PK), and professional ethics. Counts reflect coded responses across participants (n = 16) and are used descriptively to indicate the prevalence of views rather than statistical generalisation.

Figure 1.1:

Education stakeholders' viewson graduate teachers' fulfilment of expectations



Regarding Subject Content Knowledge, the majority of respondents ($n = 10$) indicated that expectations were met. Participants consistently acknowledged that graduate teachers demonstrate a strong grasp of subject matter, which supports effective instructional delivery. One School Quality Assurer noted that “*most graduate teachers demonstrate strong understanding of subject content, which supports effective teaching*” (FGD-SQA-R8). This suggests that university training remains effective in equipping graduates with foundational disciplinary knowledge. However, a small number of respondents highlighted inconsistencies, indicating that not all graduates demonstrate the same level of mastery.

In contrast, findings on pedagogical knowledge and skills reveal a substantial gap between expectations and practice. Only four respondents ($n = 4$) reported that expectations in this domain were met, while the majority ($n = 12$) indicated that they were not. Participants frequently observed that, although graduate teachers possess strong subject knowledge, they struggle to apply effective teaching methodologies. As one Head of School explained,

Graduate teachers are strong in content but weak in teaching methods. They rely mostly on lectures and group discussions” (Interview-HoS-R9). Similarly, a District Education Officer noted that “they struggle to engage students and apply appropriate teaching strategies in different classroom situations (Interview-DEO-R10).

These responses point to a clear disconnect between theoretical pedagogical preparation and its practical application in classroom settings.

Regarding teaching ethics and professionalism, the findings indicate mixed perceptions among employers. An equal number of respondents ($n = 8$) reported that expectations were met and unmet. This suggests variability in how graduate teachers demonstrate professional conduct in practice. One respondent observed that:

Some graduate teachers demonstrate good professionalism, but others show weaknesses in communication, commitment, and conduct (Interview-HoS-R11).

This variation indicates that while ethical competence is present among some graduates, it is not consistently developed across all individuals. Institutional references have been anonymised to protect confidentiality and ensure ethical reporting.

Discussion

This section interprets the findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical perspectives, focusing on the alignment between stakeholder expectations and graduate teachers' demonstrated competencies. The findings indicate comparatively strong subject content knowledge, gaps in pedagogical application, variation in professional ethics, and growing recognition of creativity and vision, suggesting that graduate teacher preparedness is multidimensional and cannot be judged by academic qualifications alone.

Alignment Between Expectations and Teacher Preparation

The findings confirm that stakeholders place considerable emphasis on SCK, PK, and PCK, consistent with prior studies (Taylor, 2023; König et al., 2023). Fifteen of the 16 participants identified a high level of knowledge and expertise as an expected quality, while 14 emphasised sound pedagogical knowledge and skills. This indicates that stakeholders expect graduate teachers not merely to know their subject areas but also to transform disciplinary knowledge into effective classroom instruction.

However, the findings also demonstrate that strong SCK does not automatically translate into effective teaching unless it is integrated with pedagogical practice. This supports the foundational arguments of Shulman (1986) and subsequent work by Van Driel and Berry (2022). Although 10 participants perceived graduate teachers as meeting expectations in SCK, only four considered pedagogical expectations to have been met. This difference suggests that disciplinary knowledge is more consistently demonstrated than the ability to convert that knowledge into pedagogically appropriate learning experiences.

Rather than indicating a general weakness in teacher preparation, the pattern points to uneven development across competence domains. Graduate teachers appear to demonstrate comparatively stronger mastery of subject matter than the practical pedagogical repertoire required to address learner differences and classroom demands. From a PCK perspective, the central challenge

concerns how teachers integrate what they know with how they represent, adapt, and communicate that knowledge to learners. The findings therefore suggest that subject preparation may be relatively strong while the practical enactment of pedagogical knowledge remains less consistently developed.

Pedagogical Gap and Practical Training

A key finding is the persistent gap between expected and demonstrated pedagogical competence. While stakeholders emphasised learner-centred approaches, graduate teachers were perceived as relying on a relatively narrow range of teaching strategies. This pattern aligns with earlier studies (Mgaya, 2024; Nyangas, 2024; Siayi et al., 2023). The magnitude of this perceived gap is notable. Twelve of the 16 participants indicated that pedagogical expectations were not met, compared with only four who considered them met. Participants particularly referred to reliance on lectures and group discussions, difficulties engaging learners, and challenges in selecting appropriate approaches for different classroom situations.

This finding should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence that graduate teachers lack pedagogical knowledge altogether. Rather, it suggests difficulty in translating pedagogical knowledge into context-sensitive classroom practice. Teachers may understand instructional principles theoretically but encounter challenges when adapting them to learner diversity, classroom size, available resources, and other realities of school practice.

Previous research has associated such theory–practice gaps with limited practicum exposure (Mwakyobwe & Shawa, 2023). The present study similarly identifies difficulties in translating theoretical pedagogical knowledge into classroom practice, although it did not directly examine practicum exposure as a causal factor. These findings support calls for more practice-oriented teacher preparation (Barak, 2023; Sonmark et al., 2017). More sustained opportunities for supervised teaching practice, classroom observation, mentoring, lesson experimentation, and structured reflection may therefore help strengthen the relationship between pedagogical knowledge and classroom performance. Such experiences can provide opportunities for prospective teachers to practise adapting instructional approaches before assuming full professional responsibilities.

Professional Ethics and Teacher Identity

The findings on professional ethics reveal substantial variation. Eight participants considered professional expectations to have been met, while eight indicated that they had not. This differs from the clearer patterns observed for subject knowledge and pedagogical competence and suggests

that ethical and professional behaviour is not demonstrated consistently among graduate teachers. This finding is consistent with studies by Rweyemamu and Kamugisha (2022) and Lawrent (2022), which document ethical challenges within Tanzanian schools. The reported weaknesses in communication, commitment, and conduct further suggest that professional ethics extends beyond formal knowledge of codes and regulations.

Ethical competence involves the consistent application of professional values in everyday relationships, responsibilities, and decision-making. In this sense, professional identity is likely to be shaped not only during university preparation but also through mentoring, institutional culture, professional socialisation, and continued reflective practice. Mweemba and Awuor (2022) highlight the importance of reflection in professional development, while Fussy (2018) links ethical conduct with trust and professionalism.

Teacher preparation may therefore need to move beyond presenting ethics primarily as theoretical knowledge or regulatory requirements. Greater use of professional dilemmas, case-based discussion, supervised practice, mentoring, and reflective evaluation could provide opportunities for prospective teachers to apply professional values within realistic educational situations.

Creativity and Vision as Emerging Competencies

The findings also identify creativity and vision as important dimensions of stakeholder expectations. Creativity was identified by 10 participants, whereas vision was mentioned by seven. This pattern suggests that both qualities are recognised as relevant to contemporary teaching, although they are less consistently emphasised than subject knowledge, pedagogical competence, and professional ethics.

This finding aligns with Nyangas (2024), who emphasises the growing importance of innovative instructional practices. Participants associated creativity with developing teaching materials, adapting instructional strategies, and making effective use of available resources.

In resource-constrained settings, creativity may therefore represent more than an optional professional attribute. It may function as a practical competence through which teachers respond to shortages of instructional resources, diverse learner needs, and changing classroom conditions while maintaining meaningful learning experiences. Vision was associated with the ability to inspire learners, provide educational direction, and move beyond routine content delivery. This is consistent with Mweemba and Awuor (2022) and

Mateka et al. (2024), who link broader professional capacities with reflective and developmental dimensions of teaching.

The comparatively lower frequency with which vision was identified may indicate that it is less explicitly articulated or less immediately observable than competencies such as subject mastery and instructional technique. Nevertheless, its emergence from stakeholder accounts suggests that some education stakeholders expect graduate teachers to contribute not only to immediate classroom instruction but also to learners' longer-term motivation and educational development.

Importantly, the findings provide stronger evidence that creativity and vision are stakeholder expectations than that graduate teachers consistently fail to demonstrate them. The second research question assessed actual performance primarily in SCK, pedagogical skills, and professional ethics. Creativity and vision should therefore be interpreted as emerging professional expectations rather than conclusively demonstrated competence deficits.

Overall Interpretation of the Findings

Overall, the strongest perceived alignment was evident in subject content knowledge, while the most pronounced perceived mismatch concerned the practical application of pedagogy. Professional ethics showed substantial variation, whereas creativity and vision broadened the range of competencies stakeholders associated with effective contemporary teaching.

This pattern suggests that classroom readiness cannot be assessed on the basis of academic qualifications or disciplinary expertise alone. Graduate teacher preparedness appears to depend on how effectively subject knowledge is combined with pedagogical application, professional conduct, adaptability, creativity, and a capacity to provide educational direction.

The findings therefore support a more integrated conception of teacher preparation in which SCK, PK/PCK, professional ethics, creativity, and vision are developed as complementary dimensions. Closer and more systematic feedback between teacher-education institutions and school-level stakeholders may help ensure that preparation programmes remain responsive to the competencies required and observed in actual classroom environments.

Conclusion

This study examined the qualities education stakeholders expect from graduate teachers and the extent to which graduate teachers demonstrate these qualities in Tanzanian secondary schools. Regarding the first research

question, the findings show that stakeholders expect graduate teachers to demonstrate strong subject content knowledge, sound pedagogical competence, professional ethics, creativity, and a clear vision for enhancing learning. Subject knowledge and pedagogical competence emerged as the most widely emphasised expectations, while professional ethics, creativity, and vision were also regarded as important dimensions of effective teaching.

Regarding the second research question, the findings reveal uneven alignment between these expectations and graduate teachers' demonstrated competencies. Graduate teachers were generally perceived to meet expectations in subject content knowledge, whereas a substantial gap was evident in the practical application of pedagogical knowledge and skills. Perceptions of professional ethics were evenly divided, indicating variability in the consistency with which professional conduct is demonstrated.

The study therefore concludes that graduate teacher preparedness cannot be understood in terms of subject knowledge alone. Effective classroom readiness requires the integration of disciplinary knowledge with pedagogical competence, professional ethics, creativity, and professional vision. Strengthening practice-oriented teacher preparation, reflective professional development, and sustained feedback between teacher-education institutions and school-level stakeholders may help improve alignment between graduate preparation and the competencies required in contemporary classroom settings.

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