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Teachers' Lived Experiences in Implementing Career Guidance Programmes in Secondary Schools in Temeke Municipality, Tanzania

Sia Meena[1], Ategwu Patrick Ogar[2], Adam Bago[3]

[1] Education Officer, Ubungo Municipality, Tanzania
[2,3] School of Education, St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Email Corrresponding : siahmeena412@gmail.com

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Abstract
Career guidance supports secondary school students in linking their interests, subject choices and educational opportunities to possible occupations. This study explored teachers' lived experiences of implementing career guidance programmes in four secondary schools in Temeke Municipality, Tanzania. Guided by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the study adopted a qualitative, phenomenological design involving 20 teachers and 16 students. Teachers participated in semi-structured interviews, while students contributed through focus group discussions. Data were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach, with NVivo supporting data organization. The findings revealed two perceptions: teachers considered career guidance essential to informed educational and occupational decisions, yet frequently felt insufficiently prepared to deliver it. Implementation was hindered by heavy workloads and limited time, inadequate materials and facilities, limited professional training, and large classes. Teachers responded through self-directed learning, peer collaboration, integration of career information into lessons, and external professional and alumni networks. The findings suggest that personal commitment and adaptive practices help sustain provision but cannot replace institutional resources and coordination. Strengthening practical teacher preparation, scheduled guidance time, appropriate materials, and sustained partnerships is therefore necessary for more consistent and equitable provision.

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INTRODUCTION

Career guidance is an educational process through which learners access information and support to understand their abilities and interests, explore educational and occupational options, and make informed decisions about future pathways. In secondary schools, these decisions are particularly consequential because choices about subjects, further study and training can shape the opportunities available after school. Career guidance thus complements classroom instruction by helping students interpret the practical relevance of what they learn and the requirements of different post-secondary routes.

The importance of educational relevance and skills development is reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 4 and in Tanzania's Education and Training Policy of 2014 (2023 edition), which places emphasis on improving the quality and relevance of education (United Nations, 2015; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2023). Yet policy aspirations do not, by themselves, establish accessible guidance services in schools. Their translation into practice depends on teachers' knowledge, the time available for guidance activities, the suitability of learning materials, school leadership, and opportunities to connect students with reliable information about courses and occupations.

Teachers are often the first adults within the school environment to whom students turn for information about subjects, college programmes and occupations. In settings where families have limited exposure to formal employment sectors or changing admission requirements, this responsibility may be especially important. Nevertheless, teachers must balance career guidance with teaching, assessment, administrative duties and other obligations. Tanzanian evidence indicates that lack of specialized training, time, materials and cooperation can restrict the provision of career guidance (Alloph & Msonge, 2023). Consequently, the existence of a programme or the positive attitude of an individual teacher should not be equated with its regular, individualized implementation.

Temeke Municipality in Dar es Salaam provides a relevant context for examining this problem. The concern addressed in the present study is the gap between expectations that schools offer meaningful career guidance and the conditions under which teachers attempt to provide it. When professional preparation, guidance materials, dedicated time and institutional support are inadequate, activities may become intermittent or depend heavily on individual initiative. Understanding this gap requires attention not only to whether teachers provide career information, but also to how they experience the responsibility, interpret constraints and adapt their practice.

Accordingly, the study explored teachers' lived experiences of implementing career guidance programmes in selected secondary schools in Temeke Municipality. It addressed three objectives: to examine teachers' perceptions of career guidance; to identify the challenges they encounter during implementation; and to explore the strategies they use to respond to those challenges. By bringing these dimensions together, the study offers a context-sensitive account of the relationship between professional beliefs, school conditions and everyday guidance practices.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The literature identifies teachers as important intermediaries between students and information about further education and work. Career guidance is not confined to providing a list of occupations; it also involves helping students understand pathways, entry requirements and the implications of their current academic choices. Duffy et al. (2016), in developing the Psychology of Working Theory, draw attention to the contextual conditions that shape career opportunity and decision-making. Although this framework concerns career development more broadly rather than teachers' delivery of guidance, it provides a useful reminder that students' choices cannot be understood separately from access to information and opportunity.

Studies also indicate that teachers' willingness to support career planning does not necessarily imply adequate preparation for the task. Hoff et al. (2026), examining vocational preparation for learners with learning disabilities in Germany, reported gaps between teachers' recognition of vocational preparation and their confidence and practical knowledge. Although conducted with a different student population and institutional setting, this study highlights a relevant distinction between valuing guidance and possessing the competencies needed to implement it. Dolezal et al. (2025), studying pre-service teachers' digital competence rather than career counselling itself, similarly underscore the significance of applied professional preparation; its relevance to the present study is therefore indirect, particularly regarding teachers' access to and use of updated digital information.

A more directly comparable Tanzanian study by Alloph and Msonge (2023) found that shortages of professional training, time and guidance materials, together with weak teacher–student cooperation, constrained career guidance provision in Magu District. Chheang and Huot (2025), reviewing teacher engagement in Cambodian high schools, likewise described the influence of competing roles and institutional support on career guidance practices. These findings suggest that implementation problems are not simply matters of teacher attitude. However, the studies are situated in different education systems or use designs that do not place teachers' lived experiences of simultaneous constraints and responses at the centre of the analysis.

Professional learning and collaboration may help teachers adapt when formal support is limited. Avalos (2011) portrays teacher development as a process involving professional learning within particular work contexts. This perspective is pertinent to teachers who independently seek career information or exchange resources with colleagues. Such strategies can widen access to information, but the literature also raises a practical question: how much can individual improvisation accomplish when timetable space, training opportunities and materials remain insufficient? The present study investigates those responses as practices shaped by, rather than detached from, institutional conditions.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory is the study's guiding theoretical framework (Bandura, 1986). The theory proposes reciprocal relationships among personal factors, behaviour and environmental conditions. In this study, personal factors include teachers' beliefs about career guidance, perceived competence and confidence; behavioural factors include the ways they organize guidance, teach career-related content and seek information; and environmental factors include workload, class size, resources, professional learning opportunities and administrative support. The concept of self-efficacy is useful in interpreting why teachers who consider career guidance important may nevertheless feel uncertain about their capacity to provide accurate, individualized support.

The theory also avoids portraying teachers either as fully autonomous implementers or as passive recipients of constraints. Limited resources can restrict practice, while teacher initiative and collaboration can modify what is possible within those limits. What remains insufficiently understood in the studies reviewed is how teachers in a specific urban Tanzanian municipal setting experience these reciprocal pressures and connect their perceptions of career guidance to practical coping strategies. The present phenomenological study addresses this contextual and experiential gap, using student perspectives to complement teachers' accounts.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a qualitative approach and a phenomenological research design to examine the meanings teachers attached to their experiences of implementing career guidance programmes. The study was undertaken in four selected secondary schools in Temeke Municipality, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Purposive sampling identified participants with relevant experience of career guidance. The sample comprised 36 participants: 20 teachers, who were the principal informants because of their implementation responsibilities, and 16 students,

who provided complementary accounts as recipients of guidance. Data collection was reported to continue until no substantially new themes were emerging.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to explore their perceptions, implementation difficulties and coping strategies. Focus group discussions with students provided accounts of their experience of career guidance activities. An open-ended interview guide, audio recordings made with participants' consent and field notes supported the process. Information about guidance materials and school internet access was also considered as contextual school-level evidence. Combining teachers' and students' accounts enabled comparison of perspectives, while the interviews remained the primary source for understanding teachers' lived experiences.

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. After verbatim transcription, the researcher familiarized themselves with the material, generated initial codes, grouped codes into candidate themes, reviewed and refined the themes, defined and named them, and interpreted them in relation to the study objectives. NVivo was used to organize and retrieve coded material; it did not determine the themes or replace interpretive judgement. The resulting themes were organized under perceptions, implementation challenges and coping strategies, allowing each objective to be addressed while retaining connections across them.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability procedures. Member checking and comparison of interview and focus group evidence supported credibility, detailed contextual description to assist transferability, an audit trail of analytic decisions for dependability, and reflexive documentation for confirmability. As a qualitative inquiry in four schools, the study was intended to provide rich contextual understanding rather than statistical estimates for all secondary schools in Tanzania. The tabled quotations below are illustrative extracts from the original participant accounts, not estimates of the prevalence of themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented directly by the three study objectives. Each table identifies the principal themes, gives illustrative participant evidence and summarizes what that evidence means for implementation. The interpretation following each table compares the study with prior research and considers the implications of Social Cognitive Theory. The quotations illustrate the themes and are not intended to indicate their frequency.

Table 1

Teachers' perceptions of career guidance programmes (Objective One)

Theme	Illustrative participant evidence	Interpretation
Recognition of the value of career guidance	"We are the ones who open their eyes to possibilities they never knew existed." (Teacher 5, Interview, 2026) "When we receive guidance, we understand better how to prepare for our future." (FGD 1, Student Participants, 2026)	Teachers and students understood guidance as a source of information for subject choice, further education and occupational planning.
Perceived inadequacy of preparation	"When I was in college, we did not have any course on career guidance." (Teacher 8, Interview, 2026)	Teachers' sense of responsibility was accompanied by uncertainty about specialized knowledge

		and their readiness to give practical advice.

Table 1 shows a distinction between the perceived importance of career guidance and teachers' confidence in delivering it. Both participant groups linked guidance to decisions about subjects, courses and occupations. The agreement suggests that the service was seen as educationally meaningful rather than peripheral. Yet teachers' accounts reveal that professional preparation did not consistently equip them with the practical knowledge required to translate this perceived value into guidance. In addition, 18 of the 20 participating teachers had not received formal career-guidance training, reinforcing the concern about professional preparation.

This pattern is comparable with Hoff et al. (2026), who found that acknowledging vocational preparation as a responsibility did not ensure high confidence in performing related tasks. It is also consistent with the training difficulties described by Alloph and Msonge (2023) in Tanzania, although the present study adds direct accounts of how teachers interpreted the gap between obligation and readiness. Through Social Cognitive Theory, the positive valuation of guidance can be understood as a personal belief supporting engagement, while lack of training may weaken perceived self-efficacy. The evidence suggests a potential constraint on implementation; it does not establish a quantified causal relationship between training and programme outcomes.

Table 2
Challenges experienced in implementing career guidance (Objective Two)

Theme	Illustrative participant evidence	Interpretation
Heavy workloads and limited time	"By the time I finish all these duties, I have no energy or time left to think about career guidance." (Teacher 7, Interview, 2026)	Teaching, marking and administrative work competed with guidance; activities were therefore vulnerable to irregular scheduling.
Inadequate materials, facilities and connectivity	"But we do not have a counseling office in our school." (Teacher 4, Interview, 2026) "[W]e do not have reliable internet access in the school." (Teacher 15, Interview, 2026)	Shortages of print information, suitable private space and digital access restricted both the quality and reach of advice.
Limited training and professional development	"I have been teaching for eight years, and I have never attended a training specifically on career guidance." (Teacher 4, Interview, 2026)	Absence of targeted initial and continuing preparation increased reliance on informal learning and reduced access to structured support.
Large classes and limited individual follow-up	"In my school, we have classes with forty to fifty students." (Teacher 1, Interview, 2026)	Large groups made personalized conversations and follow-up difficult; broad career talks often replaced individual guidance.

Table 2 shows that the challenges were interconnected rather than separate inconveniences. Time pressures limited opportunities for scheduled guidance, while large classes reduced the feasibility of individual assessment and follow-up. Material shortages affected the currency of advice, and the absence of private space potentially discouraged students from raising sensitive questions. The school-level evidence considered in the study indicated inadequate career-guidance books, manuals or brochures in all four schools and lack of internet access in three. These observations add context to participants' concerns, although the documentary assessment procedure was not described in detail.

The findings corroborate Alloph and Msonge's (2023) Tanzanian study, which documented shortages of time, training and materials, and resemble the teacher-role pressures discussed by Chheang and Huot (2025) in Cambodia. The present evidence extends these studies by showing how constraints compound: limited time and large classes encourage generalized advice, while inadequate materials and training restrict the content of that advice. In Social Cognitive Theory, these are environmental influences that can restrict the enactment of teachers' positive beliefs about guidance. However, because the evidence is qualitative, it should be interpreted as a patterned account of experiences rather than a ranking of barriers by statistical magnitude.

Table 3
Strategies used by teachers to address implementation challenges (Objective Three)

Theme	Illustrative participant evidence	Interpretation
Self-directed learning and resourcefulness	"Because I do not get formal training, I have to learn on my own." (Teacher 10, Interview, 2026)	Teachers sought information independently through reading, online sources and professional contacts to fill gaps in preparation.
Collaboration and peer support	"I share these with students and other teachers." (Teacher 9, Interview, 2026)	Informal sharing of materials and experiences converted individually acquired resources into a collective support mechanism.
Integration into regular teaching	"When a teacher gives examples of careers related to the subject we are learning, we understand better why the subject is important." (FGD 2, Student Participants, 2026)	Linking subject content to occupations enabled guidance to occur even when no separate timetable period was available.
External resources and partnerships	"I have built a network of people I can contact for career information." (Teacher 1, Interview, 2026) "I have connected with alumni who are now working or studying in different fields." (Teacher 19, Interview, 2026)	Contacts with professionals, alumni and training institutions broadened access to practical information and opportunities.

As Table 3 indicates, teachers did not simply abandon guidance when formal support was limited. They searched for information independently, circulated materials among colleagues, used subject teaching to introduce careers and drew on former students,

professionals and educational institutions. Student evidence supports the usefulness of curricular integration: linking a subject to possible occupations helped make learning purposes more concrete. At the same time, the accounts indicate that informal strategies depended on individual initiative, personal networks and uneven access to information. Such approaches were adaptive responses rather than evidence of a fully institutionalized programme.

Avalos (2011) supports an interpretation of teacher learning as an ongoing professional process, while Alloph and Msonge (2023) illustrate the importance of cooperation for career guidance in a Tanzanian setting. The present study adds nuance by showing peer collaboration and external networks as practical solutions to the very shortages identified in prior work. Social Cognitive Theory helps explain these responses as behavioural agency: teachers used their beliefs and available relationships to act within restrictive environments. Nevertheless, the findings also reveal the limits of agency. Self-study cannot guarantee accurate, current knowledge; informal partnerships may not reach every school; and guidance integrated into lessons cannot always provide confidential or individualized support.

Integrated Discussion

Across the three objectives, the central finding is a persistent mismatch between teachers' commitment to career guidance and the organizational capacity available for its delivery. Positive perceptions encouraged teachers to engage with students, yet insufficient preparation, crowded timetables, scarce resources and large classes constrained the depth and continuity of that engagement. Teachers' strategies partially bridged the mismatch but could not eliminate it. The evidence therefore cautions against treating teacher motivation as a sufficient explanation for successful implementation. Programme quality also depends on structures that enable knowledgeable, timely and inclusive practice.

The pattern is consistent with the reciprocal relationships proposed by Bandura (1986): teachers' beliefs and perceived competence are personal factors, their acts of sharing, teaching and networking are behavioural factors, and working conditions and school support are environmental factors. These influences interacted in the accounts. For example, limited training prompted self-directed learning, while an absence of dedicated time prompted integration of career information into subject lessons. These interpretations are theoretically coherent, but the interviews cannot establish the strength or direction of causal effects. The theory is used here as an interpretive lens, not as a model statistically tested with the data.

The contribution to the literature is primarily contextual and experiential. Alloph and Msonge (2023) documented several career-guidance barriers in Magu District, and related international work identified gaps in preparedness and institutional support (Chheang & Huot, 2025; Hoff et al., 2026). This study brings teachers' perceptions, constraints and responses together in the setting of Temeke Municipality and considers student accounts alongside teacher interviews. Its scope is limited to four selected schools, so the findings should inform analytically transferable lessons for comparable settings rather than claims about the prevalence of these experiences across Tanzania. Future studies could investigate school-level programme coordination and examine whether improved training, protected guidance time and partnerships are associated with better student access and decision-making.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that teachers in the selected secondary schools of Temeke Municipality regarded career guidance as valuable for students' educational and occupational planning, but faced a clear gap between this commitment and their preparedness to deliver consistent support. Heavy workloads, limited time, inadequate guidance resources, insufficient professional training and large classes combined to restrict regular and individualized provision. Teachers responded through personal learning, peer collaboration, subject-based guidance and external professional contacts; however, these adaptive practices could not fully

compensate for institutional constraints. Interpreted through Social Cognitive Theory, the findings show that teachers' beliefs and initiative matter, but their implementation practices remain closely shaped by the environments in which they work.

Teacher education institutions and responsible education authorities should strengthen practical career-guidance competencies in pre-service programmes and provide continuing in-service workshops, mentoring and opportunities to update information on educational pathways and occupations. School leaders should allocate clear responsibilities and protected timetable space for career guidance, coordinate guidance activities across subjects and reduce avoidable clashes with other duties. Schools and local education offices should prioritize accessible, current printed and digital materials, reliable connectivity where feasible, and suitable private spaces for individual consultations. These measures address not only teachers' knowledge and confidence but also the environmental barriers that prevent guidance from being delivered systematically.

School administrators should formalize collaborative practices by organizing regular career activities and establishing sustained links with universities, vocational training providers, employers, professional bodies and alumni rather than depending solely on individual teachers' contacts. Education authorities should provide operational guidance and proportionate monitoring focused on access, timeliness and continuity of services. Future research should include a wider range of Tanzanian secondary schools and examine students' experiences of guidance outcomes, potentially through mixed-methods or longitudinal designs. Taken together, these recommendations aim to turn teachers' existing commitment and resourcefulness into more equitable, coordinated and sustainable career guidance provision.

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