

# Problems Confronting the Teaching Profession in Tanzania and Implications towards Educational Excellence in the Digital Age

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<i>Keywords</i>	<b>Abstract</b>
teaching profession, educational excellence, Digital Age	This study examined the problems encountered by the teaching profession in Tanzania and their impact on achieving educational excellence in the digital age. It was a qualitative phenomenological study involving 33 participants, including key educational administrators, heads of schools, and teachers. Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) formed the main data collection methods, whereas, data collected were subjected to thematic analysis. The findings revealed several problems, including technology integration in teaching due to a lack of ICT resources, teachers' lack of digital competence, nonchalant attitudes towards technology and a reluctance to change, deplorable working and living conditions, limited opportunities for professional development and professional misconduct. These problems affect the quality of teaching and the country's education system. The study recommends the improvement of training programmes by equipping teachers with technological competencies needed in the contemporary digital age.

## Introduction

Teaching is undoubtedly the most popular and unique of the professions ever practised in the ancient and contemporary world (Anangisye, 2009). Its unique character is confirmed by the view that it is the source of all other professions (Ishumi, 2013). Also, it stems from its scholastic services, which are instrumental in individual and national development (Morgan, 2016; Atjonen, 2015). For a nation to succeed in the digitalised and knowledge economy, it must have a high-quality workforce (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022). The quality of the workforce is determined by the quality of a nation's teaching profession (Mgaiwa, 2018). A vibrant teaching profession is the hub for preparing an effective and efficient workforce capable of transforming a nation in all dimensions of development (Komba et al., 2008).

Recognising the significant role of the teaching profession, countries with high quality education systems, such as Finland, Canada, South Korea and Singapore, have made stringent investments in the teaching profession (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016b; 2016a). They have established autonomous regulatory authorities, a rigorous system of selecting cream-of-the-crop entrants, and mandatory continuing professional development for teachers. Accordingly, effective enforcement of a teacher's professional code of conduct, professional autonomy and technology integration in teaching have received due attention (Sahlberg, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

As in high-performing education systems, the government of Tanzania recognises its teaching profession as a potential channel to prepare a competent and competitive workforce in an increasingly digitalised economy. As a result, several reforms have been taken by the government to enhance the standards of the teaching profession. These include converting secondary schools and teacher training colleges into universities to increase graduate teachers



(Sigalla, 2013; MoEST, 2019; 2022). In addition, the entry qualifications for the initial teacher education programme were raised from Division IV to Division III in the final secondary education examinations, and a Teachers Service Commission (TSC) was established as an autonomous overseer of the teaching profession (TSC, 2015; MoEVT, 2014). Further, the government has been enthusiastic about integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the profession. To realise this, in 2007, the ICT Policy for basic education was launched to guide ICT integration and equip teachers with adequate digital competence (MoEVT, 2007). Accordingly, the government has ensured a range of technologies and related services, such as the availability of the internet in schools, teacher training colleges, and universities (Mfaume & Bilinga, 2022). Until 2017, approximately 20% of secondary schools and all government-owned teacher training colleges were connected to the internet service (MoEST, 2017). In November 2022, the government launched the distribution of 293,400 tablets to teachers, school quality assurance officers, and teacher-training college tutors to improve the quality of the profession (*Daily News*, 2022).

Despite the government's enthusiasm to empower the teaching profession and attain educational excellence, attaining these goals has been challenging. The teaching profession's status and education quality in the country has frequently been reported as diminishing (Mulkeen, 2010; Sigalla, 2013; Sumra, 2006). This is demonstrated by the large number of students graduating without the skills and competencies necessary to work in the digital and knowledge economy (Sigalla, 2013; Mulkeen, 2010; Mmasa & Anney, 2016; Kasuga, 2019). This situation signifies 'missing links' or 'gaps' in the teaching profession in Tanzania that need immediate attention. Therefore, the researcher examined key problems confronting the profession with the conviction that gaining an empirical understanding of the problems would inform the ongoing debate on the quality of the profession and education in Tanzania, and eventually lead to appropriate remedies. For this purpose, the researcher attempted to answer the following key questions:

1. What fundamental problems are confronting the teaching profession in Tanzania?
2. How do the issues identified in the teaching profession hinder the attainment of educational excellence in Tanzania?

### **Literature Review**

Scholars worldwide have highlighted the challenges and problems facing the teaching profession and their associated impacts. Some research has been reviewed to gain insight into this area. Poor pre-service training programmes in teaching have been a concern in countries such as India, Zambia, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Lesotho, Malawi, and Mozambique (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008; Kasonde & Chipindi, 2022). For instance, Mulkeen & Chen (2008) showed that Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, and Uganda suffer from teachers being poorly prepared for the teaching task. Sinyolo (2007) showed that about 67% of anglophone Sub-Saharan African countries such as Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Uganda, and Zambia, lacked qualified teachers, leading to a decline in the quality of teaching and education. Accordingly, Fourie & Fourie (2017) attributed the failure of school teachers and teacher educators to serve as professional role models in South Africa to inept graduates who could not fulfil their professional roles.

Teachers' working and living conditions are another critical problem confronting teachers and the teaching profession in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Keuren et al. (2015), Evans et al. (2018) and Bennell & Akyeampong (2007), teachers in many developing countries are overwhelmed by heavy workloads, unattractive and delayed salaries, and horrible working and living conditions. These conditions ruined the teaching and learning process, teachers'

motivation, commitment, and the status of the teaching profession. A research report in the Philippines indicated heavy workloads and student indiscipline as prevalent professional problems (Duplon et al., 2022).

Bennell & Akyeampong (2007) revealed that rare and poor continuous professional development support for teachers in the surveyed African countries deprived them of interest in teaching, motivation to teach, in the quality of their teaching, and in education altogether. Teacher malpractice has been a serious problem in Africa, Asia, and South America. Teachers indulge in lateness, absenteeism, laziness, sexual and drug abuse, examination fraud, and embezzlement (OECD, 2020; Mfaume & Bilinga, 2017; Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). These behaviours affected the quality of teaching/learning and the profession's status (OECD, 2020; Mfaume & Bilinga, 2017).

### **Methods**

A qualitative research approach was adopted to gain a thorough understanding of the subject from the viewpoints of the participants (Creswell, 2014). In line with this approach, the study was informed by a phenomenological design. The design was appropriate as it enabled the researcher to gain insights into the problems confronting the teaching profession and their effects directly from the diverse perspectives and lived experiences of the participants (Patton, 2015; Lodico et al., 2010; Alhazmi, 2022).

### **Population and Sample**

The study included four purposively selected government secondary schools, two in Moshi district in Kilimanjaro region and two in Nachingwea district in Lindi region in Tanzania, with a total of 33 participants. The participants included the Director of Teacher Training, the Director of Education Administration, the Director of School Quality Assurance, the General Secretary of the Teacher Service Commission, and the General Secretary of Tanzania's Teachers Union. Additionally, there were four heads of schools (one from each sample school) and 24 teachers (six from each sample school). The sample size was determined based on data saturation (Patton, 2015). To maintain confidentiality, the names of schools and participants were anonymised for ethical reasons.

The purposive sampling technique, which allows researchers to use their own judgement in the selection process (Magwa & Magwa, 2015), was employed to select schools and study participants. Four secondary schools were chosen based on their performance in national examinations, with two top-performing schools in Moshi district and two low-performing schools in Nachingwea district involved in the study. Accordingly, all educational directors, general secretaries, and heads of schools were selected based on the positions they held in the education sector and their respective schools. Likewise, teachers with over five years of work experience were also included.

### **Instruments**

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The former was used to elicit data from all educational directors, general secretaries, and heads of schools, while the latter was used for secondary school teachers. Semi-structured interviews and FGDs allowed the participants to express their opinions in full, enabling the researcher to delve deeply into insiders' perspectives through probing questions (Turner, 2010). Both interviews and FGDs were conducted in relaxed and private environments, which assured privacy and freedom among participants. The researcher held four FGDs, one involving six participants in each

sample school. Each interview and FGD session lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and was audio recorded with the participants' consent.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected were subjected to the six stages of thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The first stage involved becoming familiar with the data by transcribing the audio recordings into written form and repeatedly reviewing each transcript. In the second stage, the data were organised into sections containing recurring ideas and were combined to create initial codes. The third stage involved refining the initial codes through iterative modifications to capture the meaning of each extract and its associated codes. Interpretive coding was conducted in the fourth stage, focusing on interpreting the meaning within each code. Codes with similar ideas were grouped together with research questions and the existing literature. The fifth stage involved identifying major themes by grouping codes with similar meanings. Finally, the researcher formulated generalised statements and conclusions based on the relationships among the emerging themes and reported the findings. Some data sets were presented as participants' original statements or voices.

Ethical guidelines were adhered to during data collection, analysis, and reporting, as recommended by Patton (2015), Lodico et al. (2010), and Creswell (2014). Clearance letters were obtained from the relevant authorities, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained by treating the information as anonymous.

### **Findings**

This section presents the findings in two subsequent subsections according to the research questions as follows.

#### **Major Problems Confronting the Teaching Profession in Tanzania**

After analysing the data, a number of significant problems confronting the teaching profession in Tanzania were identified.

##### ***Problems Related to Technology Integration***

All participants noted that, while the government is making efforts to promote standards in the teaching profession by integrating ICT as outlined in the ICT policy, achieving this goal faces a significant challenge. They pointed out that numerous schools lack crucial ICT equipment and necessary services such as computers, projectors, internet connectivity, and technical support. This issue was identified as a barrier to accessing online platforms, thereby compromising professional standards. The head of school 'A' affirmed:

Technology integration is a serious problem in teaching. Can you imagine in the 21st century many of our schools lack computers or internet connectivity to support teaching and learning process?

The findings imply that achieving standards in the teaching profession and quality education necessitates significant investments in ICT infrastructures within the Tanzanian education system.

##### ***Teachers' Lack of Digital Competence and Skills***

Teachers' insufficient digital competence and skills were identified as a significant problem by all participants. They admitted that many teachers lack competencies, especially in utilising digital technologies for educational purposes, which is essential in the digital age. The lack of digital competencies has compelled many teachers to rely on traditional teaching methods, hence

compromising the provision of high-quality education. The Director of School Quality Assurance clarified:

Digital literacy is crucial for teachers to fulfil their pedagogical roles in the 21st-century. Unfortunately, many teachers lack this vital competence, leading them to rely on traditional teaching methods hence compromising quality of education.

Based on the findings it is apparent that teachers should be equipped with the 21st-century digital skills to enhance teaching standards and promote educational excellence.

### ***Teachers' Nonchalant Attitudes towards Technology***

The participants argued that though the 21st century requires teachers who are digitally competent to enhance teaching effectiveness, most teachers were hesitant to incorporate technology into their professional practices. As a result, they lag behind in terms of innovation and, hence, struggle to meet the needs of 21st-century learners. The Director of Education Administration clarified:

Teachers' resistance to change is a major obstacle in the teaching profession. Despite the government efforts to integrate technology in teaching, many teachers prefer traditional methods of teaching.

Based on the findings, the low standard of the teaching profession in Tanzania could be partly attributed to teachers' resistance to change.

### ***Deplorable Working and Living Conditions***

Study participants, mainly school heads and teachers, expressed concerns about poor working and living conditions. They highlighted issues such as lack of accommodation, heavy workloads, and inadequate technology to support teaching and learning as significant problems confronting teachers. A teacher at school 'D' elaborated:

Poor living and working conditions associated with heavy workloads and a lack of technology to facilitate pedagogical practices are common problems in this profession.

The sentiment expressed by participants imply that unfavourable working conditions adversely affect the quality of education in the country.

### ***Limited Opportunities for Teachers' Professional Development***

The participants highlighted the lack of effective mentoring support and in-service training for teachers as a major challenge. They alleged that many teachers have not received in-service training as required by education policies, due to funding constraints and underutilisation of digital technologies. They insisted that using virtual platforms for in-service teacher training could be an effective solution if technology is used efficiently. The TTU officer admitted:

Teachers in our education institutions often lack formal mentorship programmes and teachers do not receive school-based training due to limited funds and inadequate technology integration.

Based on the findings, insufficient funding, ineffective use of technologies and teachers' limited commitment limit their development of the skills needed in the contemporary world.

### ***Teacher Professional Misconduct***

Study participants highlighted teachers' unethical use of technology for various misconducts, including examination malpractices, inappropriate relationships with students, excessive chatting, neglecting duties, absenteeism, and alcohol abuse. The problems arose from the TSC's

failure to ensure easy access to codes of conduct for teachers, keep them informed about ethical obligations, and a reluctance to address problems using new technology. A teacher at school 'C' commented:

I am uncomfortable with the TSC system of enforcing the code of conduct. They must be innovative and be willing to confront problems with new technology. By using technology they can guarantee that teachers have easy access to the code and are reminded of their ethical duties.

Based on the findings, the poor quality of teaching in Tanzania may be attributed to the TSC's resistance to change and reluctance to adopt new technology.

### **Repercussions of Problems in the Teaching Profession in Tanzania**

The findings showed that problems confronting the teaching profession affect the attainment of education excellence in different ways as discussed below.

#### ***Limited Technology Integration Impairs the Teaching and Learning Process***

The participants stated that inadequate technology integration in education affects both teachers and students, hindering the development of crucial skills needed in the contemporary world. The situation forces teachers to rely on traditional teaching approaches, resulting in delays in syllabus coverage and limiting access to online collaborative teaching and learning materials. A teacher at school 'A' lamented:

Poor ICT integration in schools denies us to access teaching and learning materials and opportunities for online professional development programmes.

Based on the findings, technology is essential for simplifying the teaching and learning process. It is important for the government and education stakeholders to prioritise its integration.

#### ***Deterioration of the Status of the Teaching Profession***

Participants highlighted teachers' unethical use of technology, such as examination malpractices, excessive chatting, inappropriate relationships with students, and other misconduct damaging to the status of teachers and the profession. As a result, even the most ambitious candidates who aspired to become teachers would not do so, particularly because of the low public respect teachers receive. The head of school 'B' remarked:

The low status accorded to teachers and the teaching profession results from teachers' malpractices, low salaries and remuneration, poor living and working conditions, and low entry qualifications.

The results suggest that unless the problems facing the teaching profession are tackled, reinforcing the status of teaching and attracting top candidates are doomed to failure.

#### ***The Decline in Students' Academic Achievements***

All participants mentioned the insufficient use of technology in the teaching and learning process, combined with teachers' unprofessional behaviour, as factors in the low academic achievement of students. They also said that teachers who are underpaid and underqualified and who work and live in terrible conditions are less engaged in teaching students. Accordingly, students receive low-quality education and perform poorly in exams, which can impact their future lives.

Based on the findings, it is evident that massive student failures are attributable to problems inherent in the teaching profession. This suggests that a concerted effort to address the problems is paramount.

### ***Repercussions on Students' Discipline and Conduct***

All participants indicated that professional problems, including poor teacher professionalisation processes, teachers' professional misconduct, and attenuated teaching/learning environments contributed to student indiscipline. For example, the FGDs indicated that some teachers—although certainly not all—worried more about their private preoccupations than enforcing student discipline and following up on school rules and procedures with students. Regarding this, the TSC officer commented:

The persistence of student absenteeism in schools was partly attributed to inadequate teacher education and training, particularly to teachers' inability to effectively manage students in the classroom and schools, to teacher absenteeism, and/or to low teacher morale and dedication.

These findings signify that problems inherent in the teaching profession contribute significantly to the deterioration of student discipline.

## **Discussion**

The findings are discussed based on the two research questions of this study.

The findings revealed that poor ICT integration was among the critical problems faced by the teaching profession in Tanzania. The findings support the study by Manyengo (2021) that technology integration in education in Tanzania was inadequate due to a lack of access to digital facilities, digital competencies and skills among teachers. Arguably, although the government has taken initiatives to integrate ICT into the profession, maximising the benefits of digital technologies in education requires more effort, especially in ICT infrastructure, facilities and training.

The study also revealed nonchalant teachers' attitudes and reluctance to change among the significant problems in the profession. Concurrent with the findings, Snoeyink and Ertmer (2001) came across teachers who aspired to remain comfortable with traditional teaching rather than using technology in their practices. Negative attitudes and reluctance often signify a lack of awareness of the potential use of technology, skills and competence among teachers (Mfaume, 2019). Thus, training teachers in the pedagogical use of technology is crucial for changing their attitudes and realising the benefits of technology for quality education.

Furthermore, the findings suggested teachers' deplorable working and living conditions are critical problems experienced by almost all teachers in the teaching profession in Tanzania. The findings bolster what has transpired in various studies (Sumra, 2004; Sinyolo, 2007; Sigalla, 2013; Kasuga, 2019). Quality education has been linked to quality teacher living and working conditions. Improving these two aspects is imperative to attract quality applicants and retain competent teachers. Providing teachers with housing allowances, reducing their workload and providing other important services such as water, electricity, and communication networks may improve their morale and professional performance.

Also, the findings showed the problem of teacher misconduct in the teaching profession. The findings support the work of Mfaume & Bilinga (2017), Moses (2017) and Kasuga (2019). The prevalence of teacher misconduct reflects ineffectiveness in enforcing teachers' professional code of conduct. Teachers have complained about lacking access to the code of conduct and training on ethics and professionalism. Arguably, to address the problem and promote teachers'

discipline, responsible authorities, including the TSC, should be willing to confront problems with new tools and approaches. For example, they could ensure teachers' access to the code and train teachers on what the code addresses through virtual platforms.

Correspondingly, the results registered the deterioration of teachers' professional knowledge, competencies, commitments, respect, and status as consequences of problems in the teaching profession in Tanzania. The findings agree with Moses (2017) and Isanzu (2014), who, for example, paired the low status of teachers and the teaching profession in Tanzania with professional problems. Furthermore, the current research results exposed the disruption of the teaching and learning process, student learning, performance, and specialisation choices as other issues confronting the teaching profession in the country. Earlier, Sumra (2004), Sinyolo (2007), Mulkeen & Chen (2008), Moses (2017), and Kasuga (2019) pointed out how various professional problems, including poor teaching and learning environments, led to the poor academic performance of students in Tanzania. These findings denote that problems inherent in the teaching profession have greatly affected the quality of teaching and education. So, if not well addressed, they will continue to impair government initiatives toward realising educational excellence.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, the study has revealed several problems confronting the teaching profession in Tanzania, including issues related to technology integration, lack of teachers' digital competence, teachers' nonchalant attitudes and reluctance to change, deplorable working and living conditions, and teachers' professional misconduct. These problems have multiple repercussions on the quality of the teaching profession and the country's education system. Therefore, there is a need for educational planners, policymakers and administrators, in collaboration with other key educational stakeholders, to develop, formalise and implement policies relevant to address problems in the profession. The study recommends the improvement of training programmes by ensuring that teachers are equipped with competencies needed in the contemporary world, particularly with regard to effectively using technology in teaching.

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