



Examining Career Opportunities for Unemployed Graduate Teachers in Zambia: A Case of Lusaka Urban District

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to investigate career opportunities for unemployed graduate teachers in Lusaka District, Zambia. Graduate teacher unemployment has become a pressing socioeconomic and policy concern, resulting from both supply-side factors such as the overproduction of graduates and demand-side constraints including limited recruitment. Quantitative data were collected from 400 unemployed graduate teachers using structured surveys and analyzed in SPSS, while qualitative insights were gathered through in-depth interviews with 20 purposively selected participants. Logistic regression analysis revealed that

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limited government recruitment (OR = 0.43, $p = .001$), insufficient teaching experience (OR = 0.59, $p = .013$), and favoritism in hiring (OR = 0.67, $p = .045$) significantly reduced employment odds. Chi-square tests indicated significant differences in employment outcomes across training institutions ($p = .02$). Thematic analysis of qualitative data highlighted a persistent cycle where lack of experience hindered employment opportunities, yet such experience could only be obtained through unstable, short-term teaching roles. The study recommends that the government increase recruitment funding and establish structured internship and induction programs to bridge the gap between training and employment. Furthermore, universities should revise curricula to reflect classroom realities and introduce extended practicum placements in diverse educational settings. This research contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the specific structural and institutional barriers affecting graduate teachers in Zambia. The findings hold relevance for education policymakers, higher education institutions, and labor market stakeholders seeking to design targeted interventions that improve graduate employability and address teacher unemployment at both systemic and programmatic levels.

Keywords: Graduate unemployment; labor market; career opportunities; recruitment favouritism; graduate teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Zambia, like many developing nations, is confronted with the challenge of preparing its citizens for a rapidly evolving job market. In this regard, the School of Education stands as a critical institution responsible for nurturing the next generation of educators. The effectiveness of the education system is not only measured by the quality of instruction but also by the subsequent employment opportunities it provides for its graduates (OECD, 2023).

According to the Unemployed Teachers Association of Zambia (UTAZ, 2023) there are 70,800 unemployed teachers by the end of 2023 despite the positive impact of the significant recruitment of 30,496 teachers by the Government between 2021 and 2022. The Association highlighted that the ideal teacher-pupil ratio in public schools is 1:40 for primary and 1:30 for secondary education. However, they expressed concern over the current teacher-pupil ratio, which remains problematic due to a significant number of teachers remaining unemployed, largely due to budget constraints within the government.

The Teaching Council of Zambia (TCZ) confirmed that by 2023, over 190,000 teachers were registered across the country, with 110,000 employed in government schools, 30,000 working in private institutions, and approximately 70,000 remaining unemployed (Teaching Council of Zambia, 2023). The pursuit of higher education, particularly in the field of education, is often driven by a commitment to societal development through teaching and educational leadership (Mululu, 2023). However, the career

prospects for graduates of the School of Education in Zambia extend beyond traditional teaching roles, encompassing diverse opportunities in educational administration, curriculum development, educational research, corporate training, and policy advocacy (Mulenga & Muchanga, 2023). Understanding these career pathways is crucial for multiple stakeholders, including students, educators, policymakers, employers, and society at large, as it informs career decision-making, workforce planning, and educational policy development (Kalimaposo, 2019). Therefore, a comprehensive exploration and comparison of career opportunities for School of Education graduates in Zambia is essential to bridging the gap between educational qualifications and employment opportunities while ensuring the optimal utilization of skilled professionals in various sectors.

While many graduates from the School of Education aspire to become teachers, not all may ultimately pursue this path (OECD, 2023). By exploring and comparing career opportunities within and beyond the educational sector, this study aims to equip graduates with a deeper understanding of the diverse array of career options available to them. Such insights can empower graduates to make informed decisions about their career trajectories, allowing them to leverage their skills and competencies in ways that align with their personal aspirations and societal needs (Lent et al., 1994).

Zambia, like many countries, faces challenges related to workforce demand and supply. While there may be a surplus of qualified teachers in some regions or subjects, there may be

shortages in other critical areas such as educational leadership, curriculum development, educational technology, and policy analysis (Mashabe, 2024)). By exploring the range of career opportunities available to School of Education graduates, this study can shed light on areas of high demand and help identify potential mismatches between workforce supply and societal needs.

1.1 Literature Review

Globally, graduate teacher unemployment is influenced by structural labor market imbalances, education system expansion, and policy mismatches. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023), teacher training output has increased significantly worldwide over the past decade, but recruitment rates have not kept pace, particularly in countries with fiscal constraints. Research from OECD countries also highlights that many teacher graduates face underemployment or are forced into non-teaching jobs due to limited vacancies and competitive hiring processes (OECD, 2022). Furthermore, studies in developed contexts emphasize that employability is increasingly linked to transferable skills, such as technology integration, classroom innovation, and adaptability. These global patterns reveal that graduate teacher unemployment is not solely a developing-country issue but a widespread challenge that requires strategic workforce planning and alignment between education outputs and labor market demands (HEC, 2022).

Within Sub-Saharan Africa, teacher unemployment reflects both overproduction and recruitment limitations. Singh & Gupta (2022) report that in many African countries, including Zambia, up to one-third of teacher graduates remain unemployed due to constrained government recruitment budgets and inefficient deployment systems. A regional study by UNESCO (2023) also found that while there is an overall shortage of teachers in rural areas, urban centers experience oversaturation, leading to heightened unemployment rates among graduates. Moreover, systemic issues such as politicized recruitment, lack of induction programs, and insufficient teaching practice exacerbate the challenge. Scholars such as Samako & Masaiti (2025) argue that African teacher education programs must integrate entrepreneurship, innovation, and non-traditional career pathways to improve graduate employability beyond the public education sector. In Zambia, graduate teacher unemployment is

particularly visible in urban districts like Lusaka. Mukulu (2023) found that unemployed graduate teachers in Lusaka's Compound often resort to informal economic activities while awaiting recruitment. The study identified favoritism in hiring, insufficient classroom experience, and the absence of structured career entry programs as major barriers. Similarly, Ng'andu et al. (2023) revealed that Zambia's teacher training institutions remain overly theoretical, with limited exposure to diverse classroom environments. This mismatch between training and practice leaves graduates underprepared and less competitive in the job market. Public perceptions, as seen in Zambian online forums, also suggest that universities prioritize enrollment growth over curriculum relevance, producing graduates without market-ready skills. Addressing these local issues requires both policy reforms—such as increased recruitment funding and structured internships—and curriculum redesign to align with classroom realities and broader labor market needs (Chanda et al., 2024).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite significant investment in the education and training, many graduates from the School of Education in Zambia struggle to secure employment within the teaching profession (Mululu, 2023). Recent statistics from the Ministry of Education highlight the severity of this issue. In 2023, the government recruited only 7,221 teachers from a pool of 69,311 applicants, leaving over 80,000 qualified graduates unemployed (Efficacy News Africa, 2024). Similarly, in 2024, only 4,200 out of 70,778 applicants secured positions, indicating a growing gap between teacher supply and demand (Zambia Monitor, 2024). The scarcity of job opportunities and intense competition for available positions further exacerbate this issue (ZIPAR, 2020). Despite the government recruiting over 37,000 teachers in two years, there remains a significant deficit of approximately 100,000 teachers required to meet the optimal teacher-pupil ratio (Nalwimba, 2024). This paradox of simultaneous teacher shortages and high unemployment among graduates suggests a misalignment between the production of qualified teachers and the absorption capacity of the education sector. To address these challenges, this study explored and compared career opportunities available to unemployed graduate teachers in Lusaka District, identifying barriers to employment and proposing targeted interventions to enhance job prospects.

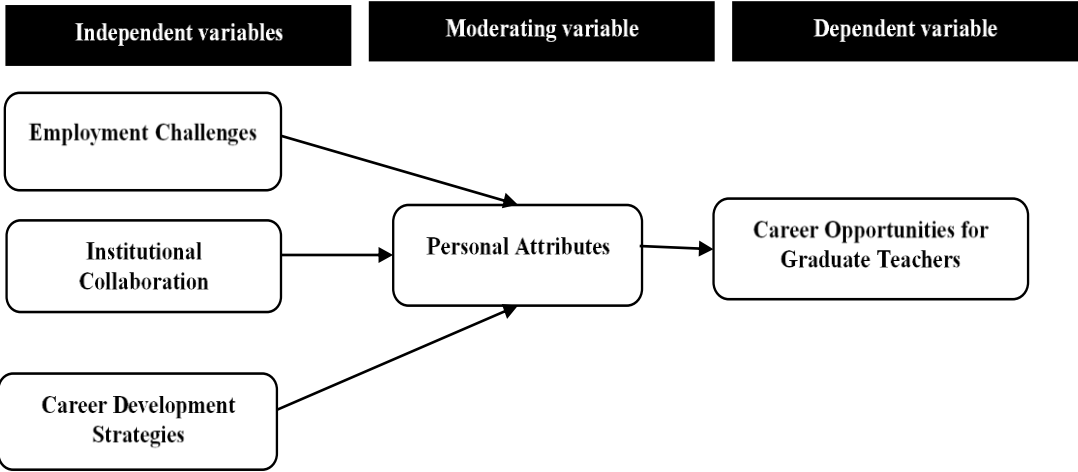


Fig. 1. Conceptual model

1.3 Research Objectives

- To identify the challenges faced by School of Education graduates in Lusaka District in securing employment within the teaching profession.
- To assess the current landscape of job opportunities for School of Education graduates in Lusaka District.
- To evaluate strategies aimed at improving the job prospects of graduates from educational institutions, both within the education sector and beyond.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

By mapping out these interactions, the conceptual framework guides the research in identifying not only the structural barriers to employment but also the critical role of institutional and personal efforts in improving the job prospects of graduate teachers in Zambia. This structure provides a sound basis for hypothesis development, data analysis, and policy recommendations.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study primarily benefited School of Education graduates by providing insights into various career opportunities, helping them make informed decisions, improve employability, and align their skills with market demands. Educational institutions, particularly the School of Education, gained valuable feedback on the effectiveness of their programs in preparing

graduates for careers, guiding curriculum improvements and strategic planning to better meet student and job market needs. Employers in the education sector benefited by understanding graduates' preferences, expectations, and skills, enabling them to refine hiring practices, professional development initiatives, and work environments to attract and retain skilled educators.

2. METHODOLOGY

Following data collection from a sample size of 400 respondents, the study proceeded with a systematic process of data entry, processing, and analysis using both qualitative and quantitative approaches aligned with the convergent parallel mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The study was conducted in selected zones of Lusaka District, specifically focusing on the urban areas of Matero and Lusaka Central, where unemployed graduate teachers are densely concentrated. Quantitative data gathered through structured questionnaires were input into statistical software and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means to provide a broad overview of trends and relationships. Simultaneously, qualitative data were collected from 20 purposively selected participants through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. These qualitative data were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis to uncover recurring themes and patterns related to graduate unemployment experiences, perceived challenges, and job market realities (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). This dual approach enabled a robust and integrated interpretation of the data, combining the objective analysis of employment metrics with the nuanced, narrative insights of stakeholders and unemployed graduates. As such, the mixed methods strategy offered a comprehensive understanding of the employment landscape for School of Education graduates in Lusaka, integrating statistical generalizability with in-depth contextual perspectives (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

2.1 Research Ethics

Ethical standards were upheld throughout the research process. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. These ethical safeguards were essential for maintaining the integrity of the research process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Challenges Faced by School of Education Graduates in Lusaka District in Securing Employment within the Teaching Profession

The study provides a multidimensional understanding of the structural and systemic barriers facing School of Education graduates in Lusaka District. The logistic regression model (Table 2) reveals that lack of government job openings significantly reduces the likelihood of employment among graduates ($B = -0.85$, $p =$

0.001, $OR = 0.43$). This aligns with ZANEC (2021), who argue that despite national education reforms, recruitment into public teaching service remains sporadic, underfunded, and politically constrained. The odds ratio below 1 indicates that graduates facing this challenge are over 50% less likely to be employed, reflecting severe public sector bottlenecks and a constrained fiscal environment.

The issue of insufficient teaching experience ($B = -0.52$, $p = 0.013$, $OR = 0.59$) further compounds the unemployment crisis. Graduates without prior teaching exposure face diminished employability, which echoes (Mashabe, 2024) and Mulenga & Mwanza (2019), who found that most entry-level teaching positions paradoxically demand experience, creating a “transition trap” between graduation and employment.

Moreover, recruitment favoritism and nepotism emerge as statistically significant ($B = -0.40$, $p = 0.045$), suggesting that non-meritocratic practices weaken the integrity of recruitment processes. Although less significant, the lack of career guidance and job search skills ($B = -0.32$, $p = 0.085$) still presents a near-threshold influence, indicating the importance of structured career support mechanisms. These findings are substantiated by Kapambwe et al., (2020), who emphasize that institutional career services in Zambian tertiary institutions are either underdeveloped or inaccessible to many students.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of response towards challenges by participants

Challenge	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Lack of government job openings	272	68
Insufficient teaching experience	216	54
Recruitment favoritism/nepotism	148	37
Lack of career guidance and job search skills	132	33
Limited private school hiring	120	30
Unclear or delayed recruitment processes	104	26
Poor communication from Ministry of Education	92	23
Other (e.g., low motivation, relocation issues)	64	16
	400	100

Table 2. Logistic regression – predicting employment status based on challenges faced

Challenge	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	p-value	Odds Ratio
Lack of government job openings	-0.85	0.22	0.001	0.43
Insufficient teaching experience	-0.52	0.18	0.013	0.59
Recruitment favoritism/nepotism	-0.40	0.20	0.045	0.67
Lack of career guidance and job search skills	-0.32	0.19	0.085	0.73

Descriptive statistics further highlight additional barriers such as limited private sector absorption (30%), unclear recruitment procedures (26%), and poor communication from the Ministry of Education (23%), corroborating findings from the World Bank (2021), ILO (2020). These challenges contribute not only to professional stagnation but also to mental health issues among graduates, including anxiety, hopelessness, and social withdrawal, a trend reported by Mukulu (2023). Collectively, these quantitative insights unveil an intersection of supply-side overproduction of education graduates and demand-side stagnation, compounded by weak institutional support systems and non-transparent labor mechanisms. The result is a systemic unemployment trap that undermines Zambia's national objectives for education sector development and youth empowerment.

3.2 The Current Landscape of Job Opportunities for School of Education Graduates in Lusaka District

The investigation into the current employment landscape shows a grim picture of underutilized

talent and limited diversification in job access. Despite 70% of graduates having applied for government teaching roles, logistic regression analysis (Table 3) finds no statistically significant relationship between job type and employment status, suggesting that mere application efforts are insufficient in a constrained market. Private school opportunities, although more accessible (52.5%), offer lower remuneration and demand more experience, reinforcing the earlier identified transition trap. While the coefficient for private school employment is relatively high ($B = 0.5532$, $p = 0.067$, $OR = 1.739$), its borderline p-value suggests a potential trend toward significance, indicating that with targeted preparation and reform, this segment may offer a viable alternative to public employment.

Other avenues such as tutoring (24.5%), volunteer teaching (19%), and NGO outreach (11%) remain underutilized, potentially due to informality, lack of structure, or low public awareness. These findings reflect Yangailo, (2024) assertion that education graduates often operate in mismatched ecosystems where qualifications do not translate directly into job offers. This disconnect between academic

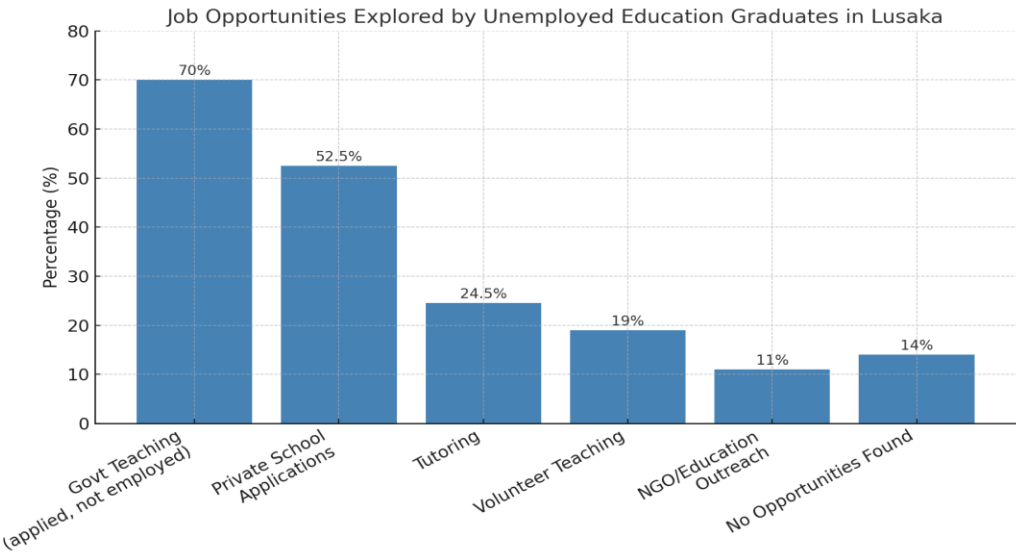


Fig. 2. Types of job opportunities accessed or explored

Table 3. Logistic regression coefficients – job opportunity types and employment status

Opportunity Type	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	p-value	Odds Ratio (e^B)
Government Teaching	0.2122	0.316	0.505	1.236
Private School	0.5532	0.304	0.067	1.739
Tutoring	0.4180	0.361	0.255	1.519
Volunteer Teaching	0.1566	0.408	0.699	1.170
NGO Outreach	0.2891	0.434	0.511	1.335

preparation and labor market demands exemplifies structural employability gaps. It affirms the criticism that Zambia's teacher education model remains overly theoretical, with insufficient integration of labor-responsive skills and competencies. As such, employment outcomes appear more influenced by social capital, informal networks, and individual adaptability than by the type of opportunity pursued (EPI, 2021).

3.3 Strategies aimed at improving the Job Prospects of Graduates from Educational Institutions, Both within the Education Sector and beyond

To address the employment crisis, the study evaluated strategies aimed at enhancing employability, yielding rich insights into their effectiveness and accessibility (Tables 4 & 5). Career counselling emerged as the most impactful strategy, with 58% of respondents rating it highly effective and statistically significant institutional differences in access ($\chi^2 = 10.83$, $p = 0.004$). This underscores the transformative potential of structured guidance,

as also argued by Jackson & Wilton (2017), who advocate for embedding career services in the core institutional curriculum.

Internship programs, rated highly effective by 52% of respondents and significant at $p = 0.010$, provide critical bridges between theoretical training and workplace readiness. Poláková et al. (2023) emphasize that internships cultivate industry familiarity, build confidence, and develop soft skills, thereby enhancing employability in a competitive labor market.

On the contrary, entrepreneurship training and networking events received mixed ratings. Only 45% viewed entrepreneurship training as effective, and it lacked statistical significance in predicting employment outcomes. This may reflect poor contextual adaptation or the absence of capital and mentorship ecosystems necessary for entrepreneurial success. Yang (2022) note that poorly designed networking events often fail to attract meaningful engagement, especially if alumni networks and employer relationships are underdeveloped.

Table 4. Graduate ratings of strategy effectiveness

Strategy	Rated Highly Effective (%)	Rated Ineffective (%)
Career Counselling	58%	12%
Internships	52%	18%
Curriculum Matching Job Market	40%	22%
Entrepreneurship Training	45%	20%
Networking Events	38%	30%
Soft Skills Workshops	49%	16%

Table 5. Chi-square test: institution type vs. strategy access

Tested whether graduates from different institution types (public university, private university, colleges) reported different access to support strategies.

Strategy Type	χ^2 Value	p-value
Career Guidance Services	10.83	0.004
Internship Opportunities	9.21	0.010
Entrepreneurship Training	2.43	0.119

Table 6. Summary of qualitative findings

Theme	Sub-theme	Key Insight	Representative Quote
Challenges	Superficial Career Guidance	Career services were generic and lacked personalized support.	"The career office told us to write a CV, but they never showed us examples..."
	Inadequate Internship Exposure	Internships were too short and lacked supervision.	"I only taught for six weeks, and most of the time I was observing."
	Curriculum Mismatch	The curriculum was outdated and lacked ICT, soft skills, or entrepreneurship training.	"They taught us theories from the 1980s, but no one explained how to use a digital board."

Theme	Sub-theme	Key Insight	Representative Quote
Job Landscape	Oversaturation in Public Sector Government-Centric Mindset	Too many graduates chasing too few government jobs. Most graduates did not consider private or NGO options.	"Government jobs are less than 10% of what's needed." "Everyone wants to join government because it's more secure..."
Strategies	Improve Career Guidance Revamp Internship Model	Add personalized mentorship and early career planning. Extend duration, diversify placements, and increase feedback.	"If they paired us with someone already teaching..." "We need proper teaching practice – maybe one full term or more."

Interestingly, curriculum relevance to labor market needs was rated effective by only 40% of graduates, with 22% deeming it ineffective. This suggests that current curricula are insufficiently aligned with evolving labor demands—a finding corroborated by Mukunda (2023). This disconnect continues to generate "skills mismatches," wherein graduates possess academic qualifications but lack actionable competencies sought by employers. Furthermore, descriptive statistics show a disparity in access to support mechanisms. While access to career guidance (70%) and internships (55%) is relatively high, participation in entrepreneurship training (37.5%) and alumni networking (25%) remains low. This points to institutional inequities that disproportionately disadvantage graduates from non-urban or resource-constrained institutions.

3.4 Theme 1: Challenges faced by School of Education graduates in Lusaka District in Securing Employment within the Teaching Profession

Graduates consistently reported that career guidance services were generic and lacked practical support. One participant remarked, "*The career office told us to write a CV, but they never showed us examples...*" This reflects what Watts & Fretwell (2004) describe as "institutionalized formality without functional utility," where career services exist in name but fail in meaningful engagement. Similarly, Okolie et al. (2020) found that many African tertiary institutions offer fragmented or under-resourced career services, contributing to graduate disorientation and unstructured job searches.

Another significant concern was the short duration and limited supervision during teaching practice. A participant stated, "*I only taught for six weeks, and most of the time I was observing.*" This aligns with Billett (2011), who emphasizes that effective work-integrated learning requires

active participation, structured feedback, and reflection—not passive observation. Moreover, Jackson & Wilton (2016) argue that internships are only beneficial when designed with intentional learning outcomes and clear institutional support, which was evidently lacking in the cases described by participants.

Graduates strongly criticized the current teacher education curriculum for being outdated and disconnected from the realities of modern classrooms. Many expressed frustration that their training overly emphasized theoretical knowledge at the expense of practical, contemporary teaching skills. One graduate noted, "*They taught us theories from the 1980s, but no one explained how to use a digital board,*" underscoring a broader concern about the lack of training in educational technology and other modern instructional tools. This statement reflects the findings by Chanda et al (2024) who noted that a deep-seated issue where course content has not evolved in line with technological advancements or the dynamic needs of today's education sector. As global education systems increasingly embrace digital transformation and learner-centered methodologies, graduates felt ill-equipped to meet employer expectations or to thrive in 21st-century learning environments.

Supporting this critique, McCowan (2015) and Hinchliffe & Jolly (2011) argue that teacher education programs in many developing countries continue to overlook essential 21st-century competencies. These include digital literacy, entrepreneurship, problem-solving, collaboration, adaptability, and communication skills—capabilities that are critical not only for effective teaching but also for broader employability in competitive job markets. The failure to embed such skills into the curriculum has contributed to a growing gap between what graduates can offer and what schools and employers actually require. This mismatch often results in underemployment, low confidence, and

difficulty transitioning into professional roles. It also raises questions about the relevance and responsiveness of education systems in preparing graduates who can drive innovation, adapt to changing technologies, and contribute meaningfully to national development goals.

3.5 Theme 2: The Current Landscape of Job Opportunities for School of Education Graduates in Lusaka District

Graduates emphasized a clear structural mismatch between the number of qualified teachers being produced by universities and colleges and the limited availability of government teaching positions. This discrepancy has created frustration and uncertainty among job seekers, many of whom feel that their qualifications do not guarantee employment. As one respondent put it, *“Government jobs are less than 10% of what’s needed,”* highlighting the limited absorption capacity of the public sector relative to the volume of graduates entering the labor market each year. This concern is supported by findings from (ZIPAR, 2021), which both indicate that Zambia’s teacher training institutions continue to produce graduates at rates that outpace the national education system’s employment potential.

The outcome of this imbalance is what Oketch (2016) terms graduate congestion, where highly trained individuals are funneled into a narrow and saturated job market with limited opportunities for meaningful employment. This phenomenon not only leads to underemployment and unemployment but also contributes to the demoralization of graduates who are forced to take on unrelated or informal jobs to survive. Furthermore, the bottleneck effect exacerbates regional inequalities, as few graduates are willing to take up poorly incentivized positions in rural or remote areas even when they are available. This growing misalignment between graduate output and job market demands signals the urgent need for systemic reforms in workforce planning, particularly in linking higher education outputs to realistic employment pathways within and beyond the public sector (Chanda et al., 2024).

Participants revealed a strong cultural bias toward government employment, often overlooking private or NGO opportunities. *“Everyone wants to join government because it’s more secure...”* reflects a preference grounded in perceived job security and social prestige.

Studies by Muteshi & Itegi (2021) and Morley et al. (2018) have found similar patterns across Africa, where state employment is viewed as stable and respectable, while private or NGO sectors are perceived as precarious or less rewarding. This mindset limits graduates’ willingness to explore alternative, potentially growing labor markets (Chanda et al., 2024).

3.6 Theme 3: Strategies aimed at Improving the Job Prospects of Graduates from Educational Institutions, Both within the Education Sector and Beyond

Graduates proposed that training institutions should incorporate personalized mentorship, early career planning, and practical exposure to real-world teaching environments as part of their teacher preparation programs. One graduate noted, *“If they paired us with someone already teaching...”*—highlighting the value of mentorship and on-the-job learning in preparing for the realities of the profession. This aligns with Bridgstock (2009), who emphasizes the critical role of career self-management competencies, such as mentoring, role modeling, and proactive career planning, in enhancing graduate employability. These competencies help students not only gain confidence but also develop clearer career trajectories. Supporting this perspective, Gutteridge (2021) found that structured mentoring programs significantly improved employment readiness, professional confidence, and career clarity among education graduates in East and Southern Africa. These findings suggest that integrating mentorship into teacher education can bridge the gap between academic training and practical application, thereby equipping graduates with the necessary skills, insights, and support networks to navigate the transition into the workforce more effectively.

Participants emphasized the need for longer, more engaging, and better supervised teaching internships, noting that current arrangements often fall short in preparing them for the real-world demands of the classroom. One participant stated, *“We need proper teaching practice – maybe one full term or more,”* underscoring the call for deeper and more sustained immersion in actual school environments. This perspective aligns with the findings of Patrick et al. (2008), who argue that effective internships must not only be of sufficient duration but should also expose student teachers to a range of teaching contexts and challenges. They emphasize the

importance of institutional feedback loops where supervisors, mentors, and student teachers engage in reflective dialogue to improve practice and build confidence (Chanda, 2024). Without adequate time and meaningful engagement during internships, many participants felt underprepared and disconnected from the realities of the teaching profession.

In support of these concerns, Lee & Blanchard (2019) advocate for a balance between observation and hands-on teaching during internships. They argue that when student teachers are confined to passive observation or limited teaching exposure, their ability to develop classroom management, lesson planning, and adaptive teaching skills is severely hindered. Participants in the study expressed frustration over internships that felt more procedural than practical, lacking clear mentorship or structured opportunities for self-directed growth. They called for programs that assign clear roles and responsibilities, provide opportunities for independent instruction, and offer consistent guidance from experienced educators. Chanda (2024) added that this would ensure that graduates not only understand theoretical pedagogy but can also apply it confidently and effectively in diverse classroom settings.

4. CONCLUSION

School of Education graduates in Lusaka face significant challenges in securing employment due to a combination of limited government vacancies, lack of practical experience, recruitment favoritism, and systemic inefficiencies, resulting in a mismatch between the number of qualified teachers and available positions. The job market is heavily skewed towards the public sector, which offers limited opportunities amid fiscal constraints, while private sector jobs remain scarce and often require experience. This structural imbalance undermines the value of educational qualifications and diminishes graduates' motivation and career confidence. Additionally, there is a notable disconnect between higher education institutions and prospective employers, with inadequate practical training and weak collaboration leading to graduates being ill-prepared for the demands of the teaching profession. Current strategies aimed at improving graduate employability, such as career counseling, internships, and entrepreneurship programs, are largely ineffective due to poor alignment with labor market needs and insufficient support. To enhance job prospects,

systemic reforms are needed to expand recruitment capacity, strengthen partnerships between academia and employers, improve practical training and career services, and adopt more innovative, inclusive approaches that address the evolving employment landscape and support diverse career pathways.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Establish Bilateral Agreements for Teacher Exportation

Government should sign Memorandums of Understanding with countries needing teachers to deploy surplus graduates abroad, boosting employment and foreign remittances.

ii. Strategic Expansion of Public Sector Teaching Positions

The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, Teaching Service Commission (TSC), Local Education Authorities (LEAs), and Parliamentary Committees on Education, is to lead the strategic expansion of public sector teaching positions by conducting staffing audits and ensuring stable recruitment budgets, particularly for rural areas.

iii. Institutionalize Transparent, Meritocratic Recruitment Mechanisms

The Teaching Service Commission (TSC), in partnership with the Public Service Management Division (PSMD), Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and the Information and Communication Technology Authority (ICTA) to implement a transparent, digital, merit-based teacher recruitment system that includes standardized testing and independent oversight.

CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose and the voluntary nature of their participation. Confidentiality was maintained, and participants were assured that their personal information would not be shared without their consent.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models have been used during the writing or editing of manuscripts. This explanation will include the

name, version, model, and source of the generative AI technology as well as all input prompts provided to the generative AI technology.

Details of the AI usage are given below:

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 - **Purpose of Use:** Assisted in editing references into proper APA 7th edition format, generating literature review paragraphs, and formatting citations.
2. **AI Tool Used:** Grammarly (<https://www.grammarly.com/>)
 - **Purpose of Use:** Assisted in checking grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and overall readability of the manuscript.
 - **Input Prompts Provided:** Entire manuscript text uploaded to Grammarly for editing and improvement of clarity, cohesion, and correctness.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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