

The Mismatch Between Higher Education Outcomes and Labour Market Needs Among Young Graduates in Tanzania: A Systematic Review of Secondary Data

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Abstract

This study examines the growing mismatch between higher education outcomes and labour market requirements among young graduates in Tanzania, a challenge that continues to contribute to graduate unemployment and underemployment despite the rapid expansion of higher learning institutions. The purpose of the study was to explore the key factors contributing to this mismatch and identify strategies for improving graduate employability. The study employed a qualitative systematic review guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. Data were gathered from multiple academic data bases and search engines such as Google scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC and AJOL. A total of 150 publications published between 2010 and 2025 were identified, of which 20 met the inclusion criteria and were analysed qualitatively. The findings indicate that the mismatch is largely driven by outdated curricula, limited practical and industrial training, weak collaboration between universities and industries, and inadequate soft skills among graduates. Employers consistently highlighted deficiencies in communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. The study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and the availability of published literature within the selected period. Nevertheless, the review provides valuable insights into graduate employability challenges in Tanzania. The study recommends strengthening curriculum reforms, improving internship and practical training opportunities, promoting entrepreneurship education, and fostering stronger partnerships between higher learning institutions and industry to better align graduates' skills with labour market demands.

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Introduction

Education continues to play a vital role in shaping economic growth, improving living standards, and developing human capital worldwide. In many developing countries, higher education is increasingly viewed as a key pathway for empowering young people with the knowledge and skills needed to participate effectively in the labour market and contribute to national development. According to UNESCO (2022), education not only supports individual advancement but also strengthens social transformation, innovation, and sustainable development.



In Tanzania, the government has made significant efforts to expand access to higher education over the past two decades. The growth of universities and colleges, together with increased student enrolment, reflects national efforts to build a skilled and knowledgeable workforce capable of supporting socio-economic development. The Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU, 2023) reports that the number of students enrolled in higher learning institutions has continued to rise steadily due to policy reforms, liberalisation of the education sector, and growing public demand for university education.

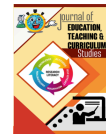
Despite this progress, the transition from university education to employment remains a major challenge for many graduates in Tanzania. Every year, thousands of graduates enter the labour market with expectations of securing meaningful employment and improving their livelihoods. However, employment opportunities within the formal sector remain limited, leaving many graduates unemployed or underemployed. Some graduates eventually accept jobs unrelated to their qualifications, while others engage in informal economic activities with low productivity and limited career growth. Similar concerns have been reported globally, particularly in developing economies where labour market growth has not kept pace with the rapid expansion of higher education systems (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022).

The growing concern surrounding graduate unemployment has directed attention towards the mismatch between education and labour market requirements. Skills mismatch occurs when graduates possess qualifications and competencies that do not align with employers' expectations or the realities of the labour market. This mismatch may appear in different forms, including overqualification, underqualification, or employment outside one's field of study. According to the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2023), skills mismatch has become a major barrier to youth employment across Africa because many education systems continue to produce graduates who lack market-relevant competencies and practical experience.

In Tanzania, employers increasingly express concern regarding the preparedness of graduates entering the labour market. Although graduates may possess academic qualifications, many employers argue that they lack the practical skills, adaptability, and workplace competencies needed to perform effectively in professional environments. Mwita et al. (2024) found that graduate employability in Tanzania is strongly influenced by both technical and soft skills, including communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking abilities. Employers today seek graduates who can apply knowledge in practical situations, collaborate, and adapt to rapidly changing work environments.

One of the major factors contributing to this mismatch is the continued emphasis on theoretical teaching within many higher learning institutions. In several universities, learning remains largely classroom-centred, with limited opportunities for students to gain practical exposure through industrial training, internships, or hands-on learning experiences. Consequently, many graduates leave university with strong theoretical knowledge but insufficient practical competencies required in the workplace. Mgaiwa (2021) argues that higher education institutions in Tanzania still face challenges in integrating employability-oriented practices into teaching and learning processes. This situation limits graduates' ability to transition smoothly from education to employment.

Similarly, weak collaboration between universities and industry stakeholders has continued to widen the gap between education and labour market needs. Universities often design curricula with limited involvement from employers and professional sectors, making it difficult for academic programmes to reflect emerging industry trends and workplace expectations. Mgaiwa and Poncian (2022) note that



inadequate partnerships between higher education institutions and industries have negatively affected graduate preparedness and employability in Tanzania.

The challenge is further compounded by the growing demand for soft skills in modern workplaces. In today's labour market, employers value graduates who can communicate effectively, solve problems creatively, work in teams, demonstrate leadership, and adapt to organisational changes. However, evidence suggests that many graduates in Tanzania continue to experience difficulties in these areas. Mayega (2024) found that employers frequently report dissatisfaction with graduates' communication skills, confidence, professionalism, and ability to work independently. This indicates that academic qualifications alone are no longer sufficient for securing employment in a competitive labour market.

Technological advancement and digital transformation have also changed the nature of work globally. According to the World Bank (2022), labour markets are evolving rapidly due to automation, digitalisation, and global economic transformation, increasing demand for workers with adaptable and transferable skills. However, many educational institutions in developing countries still struggle to integrate digital literacy and innovation-based learning into their curricula, creating further gaps between educational outcomes and labour market expectations.

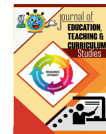
Recognising these challenges, the Tanzanian government and educational regulators have introduced several reforms to improve the quality and relevance of higher education. Institutions such as the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) and the National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NACTVET) continue to strengthen quality assurance systems, curriculum reviews, and accreditation standards.. TCU (2023) further emphasises the importance of competency-based education and stronger collaboration between universities and industry to enhance graduate employability.

Entrepreneurship education has also become an important strategy for addressing graduate unemployment in Tanzania and across Africa. Universities are increasingly encouraged to equip students with entrepreneurial knowledge and innovation skills that can enable self-employment and job creation. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023), entrepreneurship education can empower young graduates to become job creators rather than job seekers, particularly in economies where formal employment opportunities remain limited.

Recent studies also emphasise the importance of strengthening university–industry partnerships as a way of reducing skills mismatch and improving graduate employability. Heriel (2024) argues that improving education–employment linkages is essential for reducing graduate unemployment and ensuring that graduates are better prepared for professional environments.

Although previous studies have explored graduate employability and labour market challenges in Tanzania, much of the existing literature focuses on isolated aspects of the problem or specific institutions. There remains limited systematic synthesis of recent evidence concerning the broader mismatch between education and labour market needs among young graduates in Tanzania.

Therefore, the main objective of the study is to examine the mismatch between education and job market needs among young graduates in Tanzania. Specifically, the study intends to examine the types and extent of skills mismatch between graduate outcomes and labor market needs, analyse the factors contributing to skills mismatch on graduates' employability, explore employers' perceptions of graduates' skills and competencies, and to propose strategies for improving the alignment between education systems and job market needs.



The findings of this study provide useful insights for policymakers, educational institutions, employers, and other stakeholders involved in higher education and workforce development. Strengthening curriculum relevance, promoting practical learning, improving soft skills training, and enhancing collaboration between universities and industries are likely to play an important role in improving graduate employability and supporting sustainable socio-economic development in Tanzania

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory

This theory was developed by Gary Becker and emphasises the importance of education and training in improving individuals' productivity, employability, and economic value. According to Becker (1993), education is considered an investment that equips individuals with knowledge, skills, competencies, and abilities that enhance their performance in the labour market. The theory suggests that people who acquire higher levels of education are more likely to secure better employment opportunities, earn higher incomes, and contribute positively to national economic development.

In Tanzania, despite the rapid expansion of higher education, many graduates continue to experience unemployment and underemployment. Recent studies indicate that many graduates lack the practical experience, digital competencies, communication skills, and problem-solving abilities that employers require (Mwita et al., 2024; Mayega, 2024). Human Capital Theory is therefore relevant to this study because it helps explain the connection between education, skill development, and employability.

Skills Mismatch Theory

This theory explains the imbalance between the skills workers possess and those employers require in the labour market. The theory argues that unemployment and underemployment often occur when educational institutions fail to equip graduates with competencies that correspond to labour market expectations. According to McGuinness et al. (2018), skills mismatch may arise when workers have qualifications that exceed or fall short of job requirements, or when they are employed in fields unrelated to their area of study. This Theory is highly relevant to the Tanzanian context, where many graduates face difficulties transitioning from higher education to employment. Although universities continue to produce large numbers of graduates annually, employers frequently report that graduates lack practical competencies and workplace readiness.

Methodology

Research Design and Review Approach

This study employed a systematic review design guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, which provides a structured and transparent approach for identifying, screening, and selecting relevant literature (Page et al., 2021). The use of the PRISMA framework enhanced the rigour, transparency, and replicability of the review process by ensuring that only relevant and high-quality studies were included.

Search Strategy

The search strategy was performed across multiple academic databases and search engines, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and AJOL. A combination of keywords and Boolean operators (AND, OR) was used to ensure a systematic and exhaustive search. The primary search terminologies included "education and labour market mismatch," "skills mismatch," "graduate employability," "higher education outcomes," "labour market demands," "youth employment Tanzania," and "skills gap in higher education."



Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria required that studies: (a) were published between 2010 and 2025, (b) focused on education-labour market mismatch, skills gaps, or graduate employability, (c) were conducted in Tanzania or similar developing country contexts, (d) employed qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches, (e) were published in peer-reviewed journals or credible academic sources, and (f) were written in English.

Exclusion criteria eliminated studies that: (a) were published before 2010, (b) did not address the relationship between education and labour market outcomes, (c) focused on unrelated educational levels without labour market linkage, (d) were opinion-based without empirical or theoretical grounding, or (e) were duplicates or incomplete.

Study Selection Process

The process followed the four stages outlined in the PRISMA framework: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). A total of 150 records were initially identified through database searches, with zero additional sources. After removing duplicates, the remaining records were screened by title and abstract to assess relevance. Full-text articles were assessed for eligibility using the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies that did not meet the criteria were excluded for reasons such as lack of relevance to the research topic, insufficient methodological detail, or inadequate empirical evidence. Ultimately, 20 studies were included in the final analysis. A PRISMA flow diagram (see Figure 1) presents a visual summary of the study selection process, including the number of studies identified, screened, excluded, and included

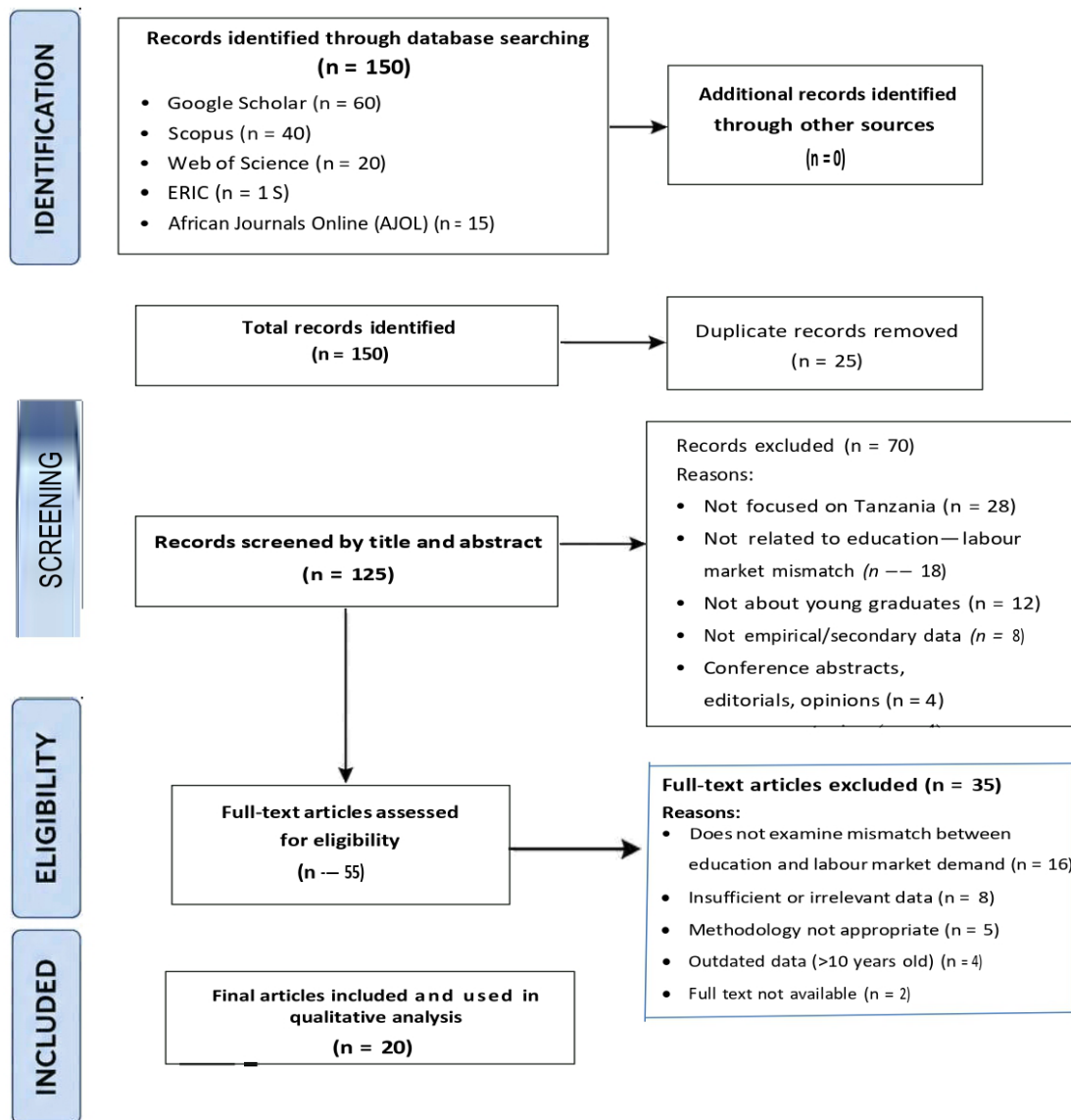
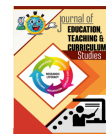
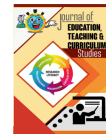


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram illustrating the study selection process for the systematic review

Source: Page et al., (2021)



Data Extraction and Management

The selected studies were extracted using a structured data extraction form. The extracted information included the author(s), year of publication, study context, research objectives, methodology, and key findings related to education-labour market mismatch and graduate employability. The use of a structured extraction process ensured consistency and facilitated comparison across studies.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

The study employed a systematic review of secondary data, guided by the **PRISMA** framework, to analyse data collected from selected studies. The analysis focused on identifying patterns, themes, and relationships related to the study. After the PRISMA screening and selection process, all eligible studies were downloaded and organised. The selected studies were read several times carefully to ensure a thorough understanding. Relevant information was then extracted and organised into a structured data extraction form, including details such as the author, year of publication, study objectives, methods, and key findings.

Thematic Analysis

The study applied thematic analysis to synthesise qualitative findings across the selected literature. Steps involved: Open coding: Key concepts and recurring ideas (e.g., “skills gap,” “lack of practical training”) were identified. Categorisation: Similar codes were grouped into categories. Theme development: Broader themes were developed from categories. Major themes identified included: Skills mismatch (technical vs soft skills), Curriculum relevance, Employer expectations, Structural and economic constraints. This method enabled the study to identify common patterns across different studies.

Content Analysis

In addition to thematic analysis, content analysis was used to: Examine the frequency and emphasis of key issues across studies. Compare how different authors discuss skills mismatch and employability. This helped to strengthen the interpretation and consistency of findings.

Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis was conducted to: Identify similarities (consistencies) across studies, highlight differences (inconsistencies) in findings for example, comparing employer perceptions vs. graduate self-assessments, comparing findings from Tanzania with those from other African countries

Synthesis of Findings

The results were integrated using a narrative synthesis approach, which involved: combining findings from different studies, interpreting relationships between themes, and drawing overall conclusions about the education-labour market mismatch

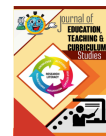
Reliability and Validity

To enhance the review's trustworthiness, several measures were implemented. These included a systematic, transparent search strategy, clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and consistent data extraction procedures. Additionally, multiple data sources were consulted to minimise bias and improve the credibility of the findings.

Results

Overview of Included Studies

Following the PRISMA-guided screening and selection process, a total of 20 studies published between 2010 and 2025 were included in this review. The selected studies employed a range of methodological



approaches, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods designs, as well as policy and institutional analyses. Quantitative studies largely examined employment outcomes, unemployment trends, and skills gaps using survey data, while qualitative studies explored the lived experiences and perceptions of graduates, employers, and policymakers. Mixed-methods studies combined these approaches to offer more nuanced and comprehensive insights. This diversity in research design strengthens the credibility of the overall findings by capturing both measurable trends and contextual realities.

In terms of geographical scope, most studies were conducted in Tanzania, with several extending to Sub-Saharan Africa and other developing regions. These broader perspectives allow for comparison and highlight that the challenge of education–labour market mismatch is not unique to Tanzania but part of a wider structural issue affecting many developing economies. Across the reviewed literature, several common areas of focus emerged, including graduate employability, skills gaps, curriculum relevance, employer expectations, practical training opportunities, and institutional or policy frameworks. Despite differences in context and methodology, the studies consistently pointed to a disconnect between what is taught in higher education institutions and what is required in the labour market. A detailed summary of the included studies, including their characteristics and thematic classification, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Data Extraction of Reviewed Studies on Education–Labour Market Mismatch

No.	Author(s) & Year	Study Focus	Methodology	Key Findings	Theme
1	Mgaiwa (2021)	Graduate employability in Tanzania	Qualitative	Universities fail to equip job-relevant skills	Skills mismatch
2	Msigwa & Kipesha (2013)	Youth unemployment determinants	Quantitative	Education level not aligned with job opportunities	Labour market mismatch
3	Komba & Mwandanji (2015)	Competence-based curriculum	Qualitative	Poor implementation limits skill acquisition	Curriculum relevance
4	Semali & Mehta (2012)	Science education challenges	Mixed-methods	Weak practical skills among graduates	Skills gap
5	Ngowi (2012)	Graduate employability	Qualitative	Graduates lack soft and technical skills	Employability skills
6	Ndyali (2016)	Jobless graduates	Qualitative	Expansion of education not matched with jobs	Education expansion vs demand
7	Mgonja (2017)	Higher education role	Qualitative	Weak industry linkages	University–industry linkage
8	Kinyondo & Pelizzo (2018)	Education quality & unemployment	Quantitative	Poor education quality drives unemployment	Education quality
9	Mushi (2015)	Curriculum reforms	Qualitative	Reforms not aligned with labour needs	Curriculum mismatch



10	Komba & Mwandaji (2017)	Employability skills	Mixed-methods	Employers demand soft skills lacking in graduates	Soft skills gap
11	Mgaiwa & Poncian (2016)	Public-private partnerships	Qualitative	Privatisation affects quality and relevance	Education quality
12	Masele & Magova (2011)	Skills gap in HE	Qualitative	Weak collaboration with employers	Skills mismatch
13	Kessy & Tilley (2014)	Education & labour outcomes	Quantitative	Education does not guarantee employment	Labour mismatch
14	Luhanga et al. (2013)	HE reforms	Qualitative	Reforms increased access but not employability	Structural mismatch
15	Macha et al. (2018)	Workforce development	Mixed-methods	Weak transition from school-to-work	School-to-work transition
16	Oketch (2014)	Vocational skills & employment	Comparative	TVET underdeveloped in Tanzania	TVET gap
17	Teal (2011)	Education & economic development	Quantitative	Skills shortage persists despite expansion	Skills shortage
18	Kinyondo (2020)	Graduate employability	Quantitative	Graduates lack job-ready competencies	Employability gap
19	Nsubuga & Amooti (2019)	Skills mismatch (East Africa)	Comparative	Regional mismatch in graduate skills	Skills mismatch
20	Mgonja & Yonah (2020)	Skills vs labour demand	Mixed-methods	Employers dissatisfied with graduate skills	Employer dissatisfaction

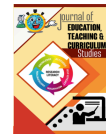
Source: Academic Databases, 2025

As shown in Table 1, the reviewed studies were categorised into several key themes, including skills gaps, curriculum mismatch, employer expectations, practical training deficiencies, institutional challenges, and policy issues.

Skills Mismatch: Nature and Extent

The study found that skills mismatch among young graduates in Tanzania is widespread and exists in several forms. Evidence from the reviewed studies indicates the presence of vertical and horizontal mismatches, as well as skills gaps, within the labour market. Vertical mismatch occurs when graduates possess qualifications that are either higher or lower than those required for available jobs. Horizontal mismatch occurs when graduates are employed in occupations unrelated to their fields of study, while skills gaps arise when graduates lack specific competencies demanded by employers (McGuinness et al., 2018).

The findings further reveal that many graduates in Tanzania continue to experience unemployment or underemployment because the skills acquired during university education do not adequately correspond with labour market expectations. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2022), youth unemployment in many developing countries is increasingly associated with the inability of education systems to provide market-relevant skills. Several studies reviewed in this research



indicate that a considerable number of Tanzanian graduates eventually engage in informal sector activities or low-skilled jobs that do not reflect their educational qualifications (Heriel, 2024; Mwita et al., 2024). This situation suggests a structural imbalance between educational outputs and the labour market's actual needs.

Factors Contributing to Skills Mismatch

Outdated and Theoretical Curricula

Several studies indicate that university curricula in Tanzania often focus heavily on academic content with limited attention to practical application and workplace-oriented competencies. As a result, graduates may possess theoretical understanding but lack the practical skills required in professional environments (Mgaiwa, 2021). Recent studies further suggest that many curricula are not regularly updated to reflect technological changes, labour market trends, and emerging industry demands (Mgaiwa & Poncian, 2022). This limits universities' ability to produce graduates who can effectively respond to contemporary workplace challenges.

Limited Practical Training and Work Exposure

The findings also reveal that many graduates complete their studies without adequate practical experience. Internship programmes, industrial attachments, and workplace learning opportunities remain limited at several institutions, reducing students' exposure to real-world work environments before graduation. According to Heriel (2024), weak practical training systems contribute significantly to graduates' lack of workplace readiness in Tanzania. Similarly, the World Bank (2022) highlights that practical learning experiences are essential for helping students develop technical competencies, confidence, and adaptability.

Weak University-Industry Linkages

The reviewed literature indicates that employers are rarely involved in curriculum design, programme review, or skills development initiatives within higher education institutions. Consequently, academic programmes may fail to reflect the actual needs and expectations of the labour market (Mgaiwa & Poncian, 2022).

Rapid Expansion of Higher Education

According to the African Development Bank (2023), many African countries, including Tanzania, continue to experience a growing gap between the number of graduates produced and the availability of formal employment opportunities. As a result, many graduates compete for a limited number of positions, increasing the likelihood of unemployment and underemployment among educated youth.

Employers' Perceptions of Graduates' Competencies

Several reviewed studies reveal that employers often express dissatisfaction with graduates' workplace readiness and professional competencies. Key concerns raised by employers include poor communication skills, limited critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, inadequate teamwork and collaboration skills, low adaptability, and insufficient work experience (Mayega, 2024; Mwita et al., 2024). Employers also reported that many graduates require additional training and supervision before they can perform effectively within organisations. Mayega (2024) found that employers place significant importance on soft skills such as communication, professionalism, creativity, leadership, and interpersonal relationships when recruiting graduates. However, many graduates continue to demonstrate weaknesses in these areas despite possessing academic qualifications.



Similarly, the International Labour Organisation (2022) emphasises that deficiencies in soft skills remain a major barrier to youth employment in developing countries. These findings suggest that employability in the contemporary labour market is no longer determined solely by academic achievement but also by the ability to apply knowledge, adapt to workplace environments, and collaborate effectively with others.

Strategies for Improving Alignment Between Education and Labour Market Needs

Curriculum Reform

The findings emphasise the need for regular curriculum review and reform in higher education institutions. Aligning curricula with labour market demands and adopting competency-based education approaches can improve graduate preparedness and employability (Mgaiwa, 2021). Universities need to ensure that academic programmes integrate practical learning, digital competencies, innovation, and problem-solving skills relevant to contemporary workplaces.

Strengthening University–Industry Collaboration

The reviewed literature strongly suggests stronger collaboration between universities and employers. Involving industry stakeholders in curriculum design, training, and programme evaluation can help ensure that academic programmes remain relevant to labour market needs (Mgaiwa & Poncian, 2022). Strong partnerships can also improve internship opportunities, mentorship programmes, and graduate transition into employment.

Enhancing Practical Training Opportunities

Expanding internships, apprenticeships, industrial attachments, and work-integrated learning opportunities was identified as another important strategy for improving graduate employability. Practical exposure allows students to gain workplace experience, develop confidence, and strengthen professional competencies before graduation (Heriel, 2024).

Integrating Soft Skills Development

The findings also highlight the importance of embedding soft skills training into university programmes. Skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, creativity, and leadership should be integrated into teaching and learning processes to better prepare graduates for modern workplaces (Mayega, 2024).

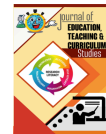
Promoting Entrepreneurship Education

Encouraging innovation, self-employment, and entrepreneurial thinking can help graduates create their own economic opportunities instead of relying solely on formal employment (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023).

Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the study findings in relation to existing literature and key theoretical perspectives, particularly Human Capital Theory and Skills Mismatch Theory.

The findings of this study show that skills mismatch in Tanzania is both widespread and complex. It appears in different forms, including vertical mismatch (where individuals are over- or under-qualified), horizontal mismatch (where the field of study does not match the job), and general skills gaps. These results are in line with global evidence suggesting that skills mismatch is a major structural challenge affecting both developed and developing economies (McGuinness et al., 2018). Viewed through the lens of Skills Mismatch Theory, these findings reflect a clear imbalance between the skills produced by the education system and those required in the labour market. The theory explains that



such imbalances can lead to underemployment, reduced productivity, and economic inefficiencies (Allen & van der Velden, 2001). These findings are consistent with broader African and global evidence showing that skills mismatch reduces labour productivity, weakens economic competitiveness, and limits the effective utilisation of human capital (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2023). The mismatch also affects graduates psychologically and economically, as many young people struggle to realise the expected benefits of higher education.

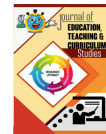
The findings are also consistent with reports from the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2022) and the World Bank (2022), which show that many young graduates in developing countries struggle to find appropriate employment because education systems are insufficiently aligned with labour market needs. In Tanzania, this is evident in the way many graduates end up working in informal sectors or in jobs unrelated to their qualifications. Similarly, studies across Sub-Saharan Africa suggest that the rapid expansion of higher education, without a corresponding increase in employment opportunities, has intensified competition in the labour market (African Development Bank, 2023). However, the findings also support the argument by Brixiová and Kangoye (2020) that skills mismatch alone does not fully explain graduate unemployment. Broader structural issues, such as slow industrial growth and limited job creation, also play a significant role.

The study identifies several key factors contributing to skills mismatch in Tanzania, including outdated curricula, limited practical training, weak links between universities and industry, and the rapid expansion of higher education. These findings strongly align with earlier research (Ishengoma, 2016; Ndyali, 2016), which highlights the continued emphasis on theoretical learning at the expense of practical skills. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), education is expected to equip individuals with skills that enhance their productivity and employability. However, the findings suggest that the type of skills being developed may not fully meet labour market needs. This indicates a gap in the effectiveness of human capital development, where educational investments do not translate into expected employment outcomes.

Also many graduates complete their studies without meaningful internship or industrial experience. This observation is consistent with the World Bank (2022) and UNESCO (2022), both of which emphasise the importance of practical learning in preparing students for the world of work. Without such experience, graduates often lack the ability to apply their knowledge in real-life situations.

The study also shows that weak collaboration between universities and employers contributes significantly to the mismatch. Employers are rarely involved in curriculum design or programme review processes, resulting in academic programmes that do not fully reflect labour market realities. This finding supports Mgaiwa and Poncian (2022), who argue that limited university–industry engagement reduces the relevance of higher education outcomes. However, the findings also suggest that curriculum reform alone may not be enough. As McGuinness et al. (2018) point out, even well-designed curricula can quickly become outdated due to rapid technological changes and evolving job requirements. This highlights the need for continuous adaptation and lifelong learning systems (ILO, 2022; World Bank, 2022).

The findings reveal that employers generally view graduates as academically capable but lacking in practical and soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability. These results are consistent with studies by Mayega (2024) and Mwita et al. (2024), which emphasise the growing importance of soft skills in the labour market. From a Human Capital Theory perspective, this suggests that education systems are producing incomplete forms of human capital. While technical



knowledge is developed, insufficient attention is paid to the interpersonal and behavioural skills essential in the workplace. As Becker (1993) argues, the true value of education lies in how effectively skills can be applied in real-world contexts.

The findings also align with Kinyondo and Pelizzo (2018), who found that many employers in Tanzania consider graduates “not job-ready” and often require additional training. This concern is also evident globally, with the ILO (2022) identifying soft-skills gaps as a major barrier to youth employment. In addition, the expectation that graduates should already have work experience presents a significant challenge. As noted by the World Bank (2022), this creates a paradox in which graduates are required to have experience they can only gain through employment. This highlights a shared responsibility between education institutions and employers in preparing graduates for the labour market and addressing employability gaps.

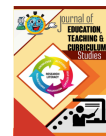
The study identifies several practical strategies for improving the alignment between education and labour market needs in Tanzania. These include curriculum reform, stronger collaboration between universities and industry, increased practical training opportunities, integration of soft skills, and promotion of entrepreneurship education. Curriculum reform, particularly through competency-based approaches, is widely recognised as an important step towards improving graduate employability (Ndyali, 2016; UNESCO, 2022). From a Human Capital Theory perspective, such reforms enhance the relevance and quality of skills acquired through education.

Strengthening university–industry collaboration is equally important. As noted by Mgaiwa and Poncian (2022) and the World Bank (2022), partnerships between educational institutions and employers can improve curriculum relevance, provide internship opportunities, and better prepare graduates for the workplace. This directly addresses the gaps highlighted in Skills Mismatch Theory. Expanding opportunities for practical training, such as internships and apprenticeships, is also critical. These experiences allow students to gain hands-on skills and better understand workplace expectations (Heriel, 2024).

The integration of soft skills into academic programmes is another key strategy. Skills such as communication, teamwork, and critical thinking are increasingly important in today’s labour market (ILO, 2022), and their inclusion can significantly enhance graduate employability. Finally, promoting entrepreneurship education offers an alternative pathway to addressing youth unemployment. As highlighted by the UNDP (2023), entrepreneurship can enable graduates to create their own employment opportunities. However, as Brixiová and Kangoye (2020) note, its success depends on supportive systems such as access to finance and markets.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, it relies largely on secondary data and existing literature, which may not fully capture current labour market dynamics. Second, the study does not provide detailed sector-specific or regional analyses within Tanzania, potentially overlooking important variations. Third, the fast-changing nature of labour markets, driven by technological advancements and globalisation, means that some findings may become outdated over time.

Fourth, the limited use of primary data from graduates and employers may restrict deeper insights into lived experiences and perceptions. Future research could address these limitations by using longitudinal designs, incorporating primary data, and focusing on specific sectors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.



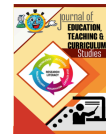
Conclusion

This systematic review of secondary data reveals a continuing gap between higher education outcomes and the demands of the labour market among young graduates in Tanzania. The evidence indicates that many graduates complete their studies without fully developing the practical competencies and skills that employers expect in today's working environment. This mismatch is mainly driven by curricular limitations, insufficient practical, hands-on training, rapidly changing labour market needs, and weak linkages between higher education institutions and industry.

Overall, the study concludes that reducing this gap requires broad and well-coordinated reforms within the higher education sector. These include updating and aligning curricula with labour market needs, strengthening collaboration between universities and industry, expanding practical learning opportunities, and improving career guidance and support services for students. Enhancing these areas is crucial for boosting graduate employability and ensuring that higher education makes a more meaningful contribution to Tanzania's socio-economic development.

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