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### THE NEXUS BETWEEN CAREER GUIDANCE SERVICES AND SOFT SKILLS ACQUISITION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN TANZANIA

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#### ABSTRACT

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The study explored the role of career guidance services on soft skills enhancement among university students in Tanzania. The study examined different types of career services offered, effectiveness of career guidance services on soft skill acquisition, and the challenges facing the effective provision of career guidance services. Guided by Social Cognitive Career Theory, the study adopted interpretivism research philosophy using a qualitative research approach. The study used focus group discussions and interviews methods to collect data which were analyzed thematically. Results indicated that, advanced communication, leadership and teamwork, adaptability, creative thinking, problem-solving, emotional intelligence and computer skills were frequently highlighted as essential skills. Also, the study found that career guidance and counselling services assisted students in identifying their career interests and capabilities, changed their entrepreneurial mindset, improved their communication process, and enhanced their problem-solving skills. Limited funds, few qualified professionals, lack of students' interest and non-institutionalizing of career teaching curricula were the main challenges limiting the effective access of soft skills. Conclusively, career guidance was found to be the best method that aids students in developing soft skills and enhancing their confidence. The study recommends for policy interventions in institutionalizing career guidance in university curricular for effective employability skill trainings across the country.

**Keywords:** Career guidance, Soft skills, Career services, Qualitative, Students, JEL Classification: M 12

#### INTRODUCTION

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The demand for graduates with technical proficiency and non-technical skills—now known as soft skills has grown in recent years as a result of globalization and technological advancements (Andriany, 2017). The ILO (2023) report indicates that employers in today's labor market value both because technical skills deal with "how" a work is done, while non-technical skills decide "what" problem is solved and "who" is involved leading to greater career advancement, adaptability, and overall business success. Indeed, the rapid advancement of technology highlights the importance of adaptability, creativity, and flexibility thus employees that can readily adjust to change, continuously grow, and

share newly acquired skills within their organization. They are likely to thrive in the contemporary, fast-paced business environment. Similarly, the World Economic Forum (2020) indicates that about 50% of job today requires interpersonal and cognitive abilities, such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving among others. Additionally, Ho et al. (2022) note that when employing recent business graduates, employers are placing a greater emphasis on soft skills that position them to succeed professionally and have a significant impact on any organization.

Additionally, survey conducted by the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower in 2021 revealed that

approximately 70% of Indonesian businesses view soft skills as the primary criterion for hiring new staff members and evaluating employee performance (Setiadi, 2019). According to OECD (2023), soft skills refer to a combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive abilities, as well as interpersonal and practical skills, which enables individuals to adapt and respond positively to professional and everyday challenges. In this study, soft skills refer to non-technical, interpersonal, and personal attributes that compliment a student's technical or hard skills. According to research, university students need crucial skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, and time management for both academic and career success (Hurrel, 2016; Mgaiwa, 2021; Federica, 2018). In South Africa, the study by Taylor (2016) found that continuous learning was associated with possession of right skills which is crucial for achieving successful career outcomes. On the other hand, the study undertaken in Nigeria by Igwe et al. (2022) informed as opposed to the cognitive skills the lack of soft skills was the main reason as to why millions of university graduates are unemployed or underemployed. In addition, Wachira et al. (2024) found that interpersonal and cognitive skills to plays an essential role in work environments characterized by automation, remote work and rapid technological innovation

In Tanzania, a report by Setonga and Omary (2025) indicate that graduate unemployment is still a major problem despite a relatively low overall unemployment rate—which dropped from 9% in 2021 to 8.8% in 2023, with forecasts showing a further decline to 8.1% by 2030 due to persistent challenges such as job-skills mismatch (Mgaiwa, 2021), limited job availability (OECD, 2023), and skills mismatches. The same study indicated that many university graduates lack critical skills including communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability, which often causes difficulties for them when they secure opportunities in the workforce. They also demonstrated limited understanding and

mastery of basic computer skills and software applications. The overwhelming research studies have indicated substantial challenges related to limited soft skills among graduates (Fajayat et al. 2020; Geda, 2021; Martin & Kuboja 2022, Kumar et al.2022) among others. Notably, Kiboli et al. (2024) indicated that some firms have criticized the Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) for failing to effectively prepare students for the modern workforce. Nevertheless, Munishi (2022) indicates that in Tanzania, 60% of employers complain about soft skills mismatch with the available job requirements among graduates forcing them to provide extra training which leads to additional costs to the organization. Therefore, in an attempt to commend the approach, Geda (2021) postulates that the holistic approach on career guidance is critical to impart graduates with soft skills so as to adapt to changes and enhancing competence for better results. Thus, the assertion by Geda is in line with the major assumptions of this study.

As indicated by TCU (2019), Tanzania Education Policy (2014), Tanzania Development Vision, (2025), both envisioned that by 2025, the country's projection is to produces the qualified number of educated workforce sufficiently equipped with the requisite knowledge to meet the global competitive labour challenges. In this way the need and the importance of career guidance among students has been emphasized by the government of Tanzania through the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (Amani, 2020). For instance, one of the required courses in their training curricula is career coaching, which helps teachers become more knowledgeable and conscious of concerns pertaining to their line of the teaching career. With this awareness, they are not only prepared to offer career guidance services to students but also for them to be well acquainted with knowledge of issues relating to different occupations (Bashungwa & Michael, 2020).

Furthermore, the ongoing efforts under the Higher Education for Economic Transformation project

mandates all HLI's new curricula and the existing ones be revised to incorporate practical aspects deemed necessary for graduates to cope with labour market demand (MoEST, 2021). In a same vein, all secondary school administrators must appoint career masters and mistresses to counsel and mentor students on career-related issues. On the other hand, Libanwa et al. (2021) assert that, since soft skills are transferable and teachable career counseling programs at universities can help students in navigating the job market, enhance their competitiveness, and streamline the employment process. Therefore, to ensure graduates' best opportunities in the job market, HLI's are required to provide information and guidance/counseling services related to their studies and potential work placement. As far as the human-centric abilities have become the primary source of value in the labour market (Kibona and Woldeglorgis, 2023) the high quality on students educational experiences are mostly emphasized. Therefore, in order to ensure that graduates have the best opportunities in the job market, HLI's are required to provide information and guidance/counseling services related to their studies and potential work placement. Kinyondo and Shija, (2023) argues that, in Tanzania, the efforts to increase employability have concentrated on improving technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to promote competency-based education and training required to graduated employability

To do this, the government created the Department of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (DTVET) within the Education Ministry in 1994 to supervise two organizations that monitor TVET quality, namely: the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA) for vocational education and training (Kiboli et al., 2024). Both institutions had a crucial role in driving industrialization and economic growth by equipping youth with practical skills for the labor market, thereby reducing unemployment (ILO, 2021). Besides various initiatives have been employed in Tanzania to address the graduates' soft skill such as

implementation of skills development fund scheme by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, (MoEST, 2020; NACTEVET, 2023), curriculum reforms (Mbunda et al. 2020), practical training (Mfugale 2024), and collaboration between the government, private sector, and international partners (TEA, 2022). These initiatives have ensured that the training provided in HLI's is relevant to current industry needs and that there they are relevant for a smooth transition from training to the labour market.

Despite these efforts, a significant mismatch between graduate skills and employer needs persists. A recent report by Munishi (2022) submits that 60% of employers in Tanzania complain about soft skills mismatch with the available job requirements among graduates. Additionally, among East African countries, Tanzania is among the worst-performing nations when it comes to producing graduates with modern market skills as 61% of Tanzanian graduates lack relevant knowledge, skills, and attitude (KSAs), compared to 55% in Burundi, 52% in Rwanda, and 51% in Kenya (Kinyondo & Byaro, 2022). As reflected by Amani, (2022) the mismatch between the demands of the job market and education, brought about by out-of-date curricula, poor training facilities, and insufficient focus on soft skills are among the reasons cited to contribute to Tanzania's low employability scores. Thus, the primary consequences of graduates with inadequate employability skills include limited career development (Libanwa et al. 2021), poor work performance (Nnko, 2024), and significant unemployment or underemployment (ILO, 2021). Therefore, this implies that career preparation is crucial for students to navigate the world of work and achieve their desired professional paths by providing them with necessary skills, knowledge, and expertise; and thus, emphasizing it to be provided at every stage of life, throughout. In light of this, the current study aimed to determine how career guidance services influence soft skills development among the university students in Tanzania.

Specifically, the study intended to determine the availability of career related guidance forums, to establish the effectiveness of career guidance services on the development of soft skills as well as analyzing the obstacles to the efficient delivery of career counseling services among the university students in HLIs in Tanzania

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Review**

The study adopted Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) which emphasizes the complex interplay between environmental influences and individual agency. The theory assumes that despite individuals' having autonomy in decision making, they still face external factors like environmental obstacles, which can either reinforce or diminish their agency, and in some cases, override it. Due to its strength to predict the outcomes of different behavioural relationships, the theory was found to be relevant to this study. With the study's intention to explore career guidance's role in enhancing soft skills acquisition, SCCT was crucial for establishing career interest development and decision-making. This is also confirmed by Ivanova and Dubinenkova (2012), who used SCCT theory to conduct a study on the development of soft skills through career counseling among Bulgarian students, and found that those SCCT-based interventions clearly enhance a number of soft skills, such as social understanding, problem-solving, and communication. Thus, the SCCT theory was found to be useful in this study since its fundamental concepts, such as self-efficacy and observational learning, directly support the development and use of these behavioral and interpersonal abilities.

### **Study Design**

This study used a qualitative research approach and followed the interpretivism research philosophy. According to Fajayat et al. (2020), qualitative research is the study of the nature of phenomena, including the characteristics they possess, different expressions, the context in which they happen, or the perspectives from which they can be examined.

The study was carried out at the Universities of Dodoma and Dar es Salaam. The University of Dar es Salaam was strategically chosen since it is the oldest and most prestigious university in the country, while UDOM was selected due to its high number of student enrollment and availability of well-established career guidance centers (Bashagi & Michael, 2025). Likewise, the choice of HLIs based on the fact that at this level, students need to connect their chosen field of study with career options, which support their employability (TEA, 2022). Therefore, study participants were engaged collectively and individually to share their different perspectives regarding career guidance provision in their respective institutions.

### **Sampling, Data collection and Analysis Techniques**

This study adopted the purposive and convenience sampling methods utilizing personal interviews and focus group discussions to collect data. Furthermore, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with the university management to get their insights on policy issues on career guidance services. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were done with selected study participants who were purposely identified to obtain their perspectives (Campbell et al., 2020). The study used the saturation principle, which describes the moment at which no new themes, patterns, or information can be found in the data. The consideration criteria comprised of final year students who were considered to have covered almost all university curricula and hence thought to have accumulated enough experience and understanding to add to the relevant insights to the study objectives. Therefore, as recommended by Creswell, (2012), the study conducted 14 focus group discussions, out of each 7 FGDs were conducted in each university each with 7-10 participants; to share their perspectives as to whether or not they received career guidance while attending the university. In this way, getting the lived experiences and different views from varying locations could provide a range of perspectives and insightful analysis of the study's conclusions and suggestions. The interviews were

then audio recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed utilizing the voices of the study participants with their consent in order to find important patterns and insights. To enhance confidentiality, the actual names of the participating students from each university were serially numbered.

### **Data Analysis**

The interview transcripts in this study were analyzed using theme analysis in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2016) six-phase model: familiarity with the data, preliminary coding, theme development, theme evaluation, theme definition and naming, and final reporting. In coding process, a combination of inductive and deductive coding was applied, allowing both data-driven patterns and theory-informed categories to emerge. The types of career guidance services, the efficacy of career guidance, and the perceived gaps in career assistance were among the major subjects that were anticipated. Both themes were aligned with the research objective to assess how career guidance services shaped soft skill acquisition among university students. To ensure consistency and minimize bias, coding was conducted manually and supported by qualitative analysis software (NVivo 12). Inter-coder reliability was maintained through independent coding by the researcher and peer review of selected transcripts.

On the other hand, team checking was employed by sharing summaries of key findings with selected participants for verification, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis (Cresswell, 2012). This qualitative approach enabled a deeper understanding of students' life experiences and helped contextualize how career guidance services influenced soft skill acquisition beyond what quantitative metrics could reveal. Finally, the manuscript was produced by writing final analysis extracts with relevant narrations and examples relating to the research questions and the literature reviewed.

### **Results and Discussion**

The primary results of the study are shown in this section. The study initially shows students'

perceptions of various career services provided in each institution in order to comprehend the availability of career guidance services. This information provides foundation grasp for students' awareness of career development services potentials on future job preparedness. Secondly, students' opinions of the guidance services' effectiveness is presented with the aim of understanding their opinions on how these services support them in preparation for the labour market. Furthermore, limitations facing students in accessing career counseling services in their intuitions are also explored.

#### **Availability of Career Guidance Services in HLIs**

Career guidance is key for success in learning activities, effective career transitions and in increasing labour market participation (Edin et al. 2022). In this study, most students indicated that they are aware of different career guidance services available in their institutions. This perception was strongly supported by the majority of respondents regardless of their efficiency in enhancing their soft skill development. For instance, in University Dodoma (UDOM) students indicated that they frequently received professional development sessions which focus on resume writing, interview preparation, and networking. Similarly, in University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) participants indicated that, in their university there is a dedicated office which provides a comprehensive information on various industries, job market trends, and the educational or training requirements for various careers.

Several strategies used to impart students with soft skills were mentioned, ranging from alumnae gatherings, dedicated workshops and seminars, internships and practical, role playing and simulations, guest lecturers and class presentations among others. In this study participant insights indicated that these forums developed a strong foundation for them to acquire different skills ranging from leadership skills, advanced communication, problem solving, adaptability, entrepreneurship skills, emotional intelligence, and

digital literacy that is key for the current market employability. As reported in this study, alumnae gatherings serve as powerful testimonials to students which highlighting their achievements offering invaluable, personalized advice on navigating specific industries, setting career goals, and overcoming professional challenges in the future.

**A1 participant elaborated during interviews:**

“The most memorable career development session I have ever attended is the alumnae session focusing on entrepreneurship as well as job application and interview process training conducted last month. Honestly, it was my first experience to learn that well-crafted resume, industry certification or documented skills can set me apart from other job applicants.”

**(UDOM, 28th August, 2025)**

As indicated by the participant, alumnae gathering sessions have been observed to influence soft skills acquisition in different ways. As alumnae working in relevant fields can share their current industry trends, potential skills, and realities of different jobs, these sessions prepared students more effectively for the workforce than theoretical emphasis alone can achieve. In this way participants acknowledged that this session imparted them with advanced communication skills, adaptability skills, entrepreneurship and job search skills which are crucial for graduate employability.

With reference to dedicated workshops and seminars, participants indicated that the events allowed for in-depth exploration and mastery of individual competencies that are crucial for professional success. As also indicated, since they are often designed to target specific skills, such as negotiation tactics, conflict resolution, time management, or effective presentation delivery the structured environment of a workshop allows students to develop their soft skills and learn from their mistakes without facing real-world repercussions.

This perspective was shared by A2 who had the following information:

“I had a dream of changing this career for so long since most of my friends who have graduated from this program are unemployed; However, through the career fair event conducted under the students’ organization, I was completely relieved from career frustration through critical thinking skills and digital literacy skills learnt there”

**(UDSM, 26th August, 2025).**

With reference to this participant, it is acknowledged that unlike traditional classroom lectures, workshops and seminars encourage active participation through activities such as public speaking exercises, role-playing, team-based projects, and mock interviews among others. This allows students to refine communication and interpersonal approaches which reinforce learning and build confidence.

On the other hand, internships and practical trainings were identified as the best approaches used to provide an immersive professional environment to participants where soft skills are practiced in a professional context. In this way students gain firsthand experience with workplace dynamics, learning on the use of different digitalized software, practicing effective communication and feedback, time management, professional etiquette, and organizational culture for smooth transition from academia to professional employment.

**As indicated by A3;**

“I very well remember; during internship my supervisor insisted me to demonstrate high level of digital literacy, punctuality, high emotional stability, discipline, and a strong work ethic, which are crucial soft skills for career success, something which helped me to shape my future job aspirations”

**(UDOM, 28th August, 2025)**

In this study, internships has been acknowledged as a beneficial means for university students to get first work experience and knowledge, thereby improving their employability in a competitive labor market. Since interns are expected to communicate with supervisors, colleagues, and clients through various

channels, they learn the importance of clear communication, asking for clarification when needed, and providing professional updates. Since internship exposes students with various use of digital tools and information, it ultimately encourages problem-solving, creativity and critical thinking.

Nonetheless, role playing and simulations were mentioned by the participants as a best forum that allow them to take on different roles in simulated scenarios (e.g., job interviews, negotiation, client interactions) to practise and receive feedback in a safe environment. In this way, participants encounter complex, realistic scenarios that require them to analyze problems, make decisions under pressure, and adjust their approaches. This fosters team engagement, active listening and negotiation skills.

A4 participant shared this perspective during the field interviews

“When students get engaged in realistic scenarios that require them to analyze problems, make decisions under pressure, and adjust their approaches; they can strengthen their teamwork and problem-solving skills, thus motivating them to maintain high standards in every task they do”.

**(UDSM, 26th August, 2025)**

As noted from the participant, experiencing simulated challenges and making mistakes in a supportive, controlled environment helps students build confidence and emotional resilience. These remarks indicate that enhancing students’ employability skills through simulations empower students with excellent communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, and adaptability skills, among others.

Furthermore, participants informed that their university normally invites different experts from outside a university, such as business people or visiting academics, who are asked to educate, share their practical experiences, or offer insights on a particular subject for a brief period of time. These give students in-depth information from their

academic or professional fields by sharing their experience or by participating in lead discussions or mentorship. As students articulate their ideas, ask questions, and engage in meaningful conversations their confidence and public speaking skills are enhanced by being exposed to a variety of communication styles and analytical skills.

A5 participant started:

“The invited guest speakers’ expertise and real-world examples provided valuable insights that significantly enriched our understanding of the subject matter, fostering essential critical thinking and problem-solving abilities”

**(UDOM, 28th August, 2025).**

Further information from the participants revealed that guest speaking opportunities expose students to a variety of job choices and industry expectations fostering professional awareness, networking skills, and the drive and confidence needed for a smooth transfer from the university to the labour market. To corroborate the information from student participants, the interviews were conducted with the university management of the respective schools and colleges under each university. The results confirmed that tailored career guidance services are offered in each school and college with different contents in different timeframe. It was further exposed that, with cooperation from different stakeholders as a part of the university almanac, each university has dedicated two full days for students’ career fair where different potential employers, alumni and famous people are invited to inspire and orient students about their future career as well as connecting them with different industries. Both opportunities enrich students with essential soft skills employers actually prefer, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.

**Effectiveness of Career Guidance Services on Soft Skills Development**

Regarding the efficacy of career guidance services on soft skills development, the study found that the services were very effective in enhancing students understanding of their own talents, values, and

aptitudes which are the cornerstones of building important marketability skills (Manai, 2020). Participants indicated that career guidance services offered an organized method to assist in identifying their interests and capabilities, changed their entrepreneurial mindset, communicate professionally, connecting them to appropriate career routes, and practicing critical qualities like leadership, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Concerning effectiveness in identifying interest and capabilities, participants acknowledged that through career guidance services they were able to realize their career interests lowering the likelihood that they would follow an unfulfilling professional path and therefore helping them to focus on opportunities that are a good fit. This alignment helps prevent the future job burnout and discontent that frequently result from professions that do not connect with their values or passions.

As affirmed by A6:

"Obviously, when our passion is incorporated into career development, we are likely more driven to reinforce our interest and soft skill development".

**(UDSM, 26th August, 2025)**

With the above narration, determining a student's interests and passion is essential for promotion of soft skills as it encourages customized learning strategy in which students participate in difficult yet personally relevant activities. Focusing on the enhanced ability to provide and receive feedback, the study found that the ability to effectively offer, accept, and act upon feedback is vital for continual professional development, performance improvement, and career advancement in the workplace. Participants reported that having strong communication skills improved their capacity to offer perceptive criticism and assess information from instructors and colleagues, fostering a cooperative and friendly learning environment.

**A7 respondents affirm that:**

"For us, we have noted a marked increase in our ability to confidently provide and receive feedback

when navigating complex team discussions, directly translating to more effective problem-solving skills" (UDOM, 28th August, 2025)

Therefore, interview results confirmed that the improved feedback allows individuals to take greater responsibility for their own growth, allowing them to self-correct and choose appropriate challenges, which are crucial abilities for professional independence. On the other hand, enhanced team working and development was also noted as among the contributions of career guidance services. This was ensured through effective communication, interpersonal skills and enhanced self-awareness which allows students to recognize their potential contributions to a team and also identify areas where they might need support from colleagues.

**As A8 emphasizes:**

"Working in a team benefited me from active listening and adaptability as well as learning to comprehend the perspectives of my colleagues".

(UDSM, 26th August, 2025)

Proactive goal setting was also noted to improve as the result of career guidance services among participants. This is due to the fact that through self-evaluations and reflection exercises, students are able to discover their innate leadership styles, values, and capabilities which serve as a basis for proactive goal-setting, which is crucial for a dynamic job market.

**A9 respondent marked:**

"Through improved career planning we can develop more realistic and knowledgeable career plans because we have a better grasp of our objectives, values, and interests"

This indicates that through the process of sticking to objectives and following a plan, students learn to take responsibility for their actions and results, which is a crucial life skill. As students unavoidably face challenges when pursuing a goal their will to achieve pushes them to look for new approaches and original ideas, improving their critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

**(UDOM, 28th August, 2024).**

Career guidance services were also found to enhance a better capacity to adapt to new situations and change among participants. As indicated, the capacity to adjust to new circumstances and change is essential because it helps students deal with the rapid improvements in technology, changing job roles and working environment. Therefore, in order to stay current and competitive in their areas, students are able and motivated to participate in lifelong learning to pick up new skills.

A10 respondent remarked:

“I personally believe that the knowledge gained in the advanced computer skills offered during career fair event will help me to make well-informed decisions, which greatly improves my productivity and creativity at work”.

**(UDSM, 26th August, 2025)**

With the response, participants believe that they were able to improve their digital knowledge and abilities because, in today's digital-first labor market, being proficient in technology is essential for securing jobs, boosting productivity, and guaranteeing professional advancement. Participants also indicated that through career guidance services they were able to improve their entrepreneurial mindset as creativity and adaptability skills encouraged them to see problems as opportunities and developing a vision for the future. They also indicated that by fostering entrepreneurial skills, they will be more alert with future job uncertainties and reduce overdependence on white collar jobs. A11 Participant remarks:

“If you ask me, I can say it openly that entrepreneurship skills are inspiring and motivating as they equip students with skills to create opportunities and reduce reliance on traditional employment”.

**(UDSM, 28th 2025)**

With this response, it is clear that career counseling services promoted students' self-starting attitude and ability to take ownership of their work. Thus enhanced self-employment helps students tackle

high youth unemployment, offering a route to financial independence and personal fulfillment. To corroborate the information, university management acknowledged the crucial role of career guidance services to students' soft skills enhancement. Generally, it was noted that across all universities, high priority is given on diverse programs that promote efficiency in communication, adaptability, digital technology flexibility and innovativeness, among others. On the other hand, participants indicated that by offering specialized, stand-alone classes or seminars that concentrate on important soft skills, students were able to improve their team working skills, minimize conflicts, and proper time management.

**Factors Limiting the Efficient Delivery of Career Guidance Services in HLIs in Tanzania**

The study also aimed to determine the obstacles that hinder HLIs' ability to effectively provide career counseling services. By understanding the challenges, the universities could make this crucial service more effective and accessible by addressing and overcoming its challenges, hence allowing graduates to explore their passions and natural abilities which help in finding a fulfilling career path. Responses from all universities revealed that both universities experience shortage of fund and qualified staff to facilitate the provisions of comprehensive career sessions. On the other hand, less student commitment to the program was found to influence the effective results of career guidance services. In this regard, A12 had the following explanations:

“This is a public university; therefore, we rely much on government budget with fixed activities, hence, without enough funding; these critical support services would be overworked, underdeveloped, and unable to satisfy the unique needs of the student”.

(UDOM, 28th August, 2025)

One of the main issues affecting the provision of career advising to students was determined to be the shortage of qualified counselors. University guidance services require professional and experienced

people to assist students in adjusting to new environments, making informed academic and career decisions, and supporting their general well-being. Therefore, lack of qualified professionals hinders the effective provision of specialized services aimed at identifying and nurturing the necessary competence required for career exploration and academic planning. The comments from participant 13 affirm that:

“You know, as far as our academic environment is concerned, university-level career services vary, hence a wide range of abilities are considered important for the particular services requiring diverse competencies which are rare to obtain in the institution”.

#### **(UDSM, 26th August, 2025)**

Generally, a lack of interest in seeking career guidance services was also a major problem noted in the study area. As noted earlier, students who show interest in career guidance can actively investigate career possibilities, develop necessary skills, and build a clear plan for their future, resulting in improved academic achievement and job satisfaction. Participant A14 had the following to say: “Since career counseling is seen as extracurricular, we do not currently incorporate it into all university programs. They are activities designed by university career services to supplement academic learning by connecting students with employers for internships, jobs, and career development”

#### **(UDOM 28th August, 2025).**

The study found that despite the university initiatives, most students seem to either be uninterested with career guidance services offered in universities or they frequently rely on the internet, which can present a confusing and sometimes inaccurate overview of their careers. On the other hand, due to a lack of perceived value, a long over-saturation of attendees, little relevance to their particular field of study, and a preference for online job searches, university students frequently avoid career fairs. Furthermore, lack of institutionalization of career guidance services was a big problem noted

in all universities under this study. As indicated earlier, career institutionalization guarantees that students and employees receive consistent, professional guidance by embedding it in university curricular and thereby, providing a scientific foundation for decision making.

#### **Discussion**

This section presents summarized results followed by discussion. This study found that several programs exist under the university's career guidance programs that provide students with the skills they need to succeed in the labour market. Career counselors and different industry experts create fair goals and build strategies to achieve them by combining personal strengths with job prospects. In particular, the study has indicated that career guidance services offered in HLIs range from career planning (Keswanti & Yulia, 2021), skill development and training (Geda, 2021), job search and placement support (Brandley et al. 2021), among others. These programs help students explore career possibilities, define career objectives, develop essential skills, and finding employments that match their abilities and interests. According to this study, career guidance services fostered a variety of soft skills, including digital literacy, problem-solving, leadership, communication, flexibility, and entrepreneurship. As indicated by Amani, (2020) since universities generate numerous graduates annually who cannot be accommodated by the formal labour market, soft skills are vital to overcome high unemployment challenges.

Nevertheless, the finalist students regard career fair events as an excellent opportunity for them to think about their career after graduation, exploring various areas, and as opportunities to speak with potential employers. The findings of this study align with earlier research undertaken in various settings. For example: Shabanu and Mpofu (2025) investigated the types of career guidance services provided by South African universities. The study found that career counseling services promoted students', emotional intelligence, effective

leadership, digital literacy and effective communication skills. The study concluded that both skills bridge the gap between education and employment by providing resources which boost employability and lead to higher earnings. Past studies (Maiwa, 2021; Oman et al. 2022) also indicate that through workshops and individual counseling session's students can develop soft skills such as time management, communication, leadership, and critical thinking skills hence being able to match personal skills with employment opportunities

Regarding the effectiveness of career guidance services and soft skill enhancement, the study revealed that career guidance was found to be very effective in enhancing students' self-awareness and confidence on their career path, promoting entrepreneurial mindset, equip them with practical job search skills, and offer vital insights into the changing labor. For instance, participants proclaimed that their communication effectiveness was improved as a result of career guidance services where they were able to produce quality reports and other documents. On the other hand, participants acknowledged that their self-employment mindset was instilled through entrepreneurship trainings conducted in the study area. For example, most of the participants confirmed that their goal had shifted from being merely employees to becoming job creators, allowing them to leverage their skills for greater autonomy and a direct impact. This highlights a shift from a qualifications-first approach to one that emphasizes skills and opportunities, indicating a transition from reliance on existing structures to proactive creation.

As affirmed by Hojnik, et al. (2023), this mindset shift is critical for developing a future-ready workforce done by encouraging creativity through varied perspectives, and assisting employers in building a more engaged and productive employee base. On the other hand, Ho, et al. (2022) affirms that many graduates struggle to obtain jobs due to a mismatch between their talents and the labor market

requirements, as the curriculum does not emphasize soft skills from primary to higher learning levels. Another study conducted in Tanzania by Martin and Kuboja (2022) acknowledges that career guidance helps students explore possibilities, define objectives, develop essential skills, and finding employment that matches their abilities and interests.

On the other hand, similar research (Keshf & Khanum 2021; Heleta & Bargus, 2021; Kinyondo & Shija, 2023) revealed that different career services are important to students because they give critical guidance, networking, and skill development that improves job chances, reduces anxiety, and assists students in aligning their future with their particular talents and interest. With reference to SET theory, since students allocate their time, effort, and financial resources to participate in career guidance services in exchange with anticipation of being rewarded information on job market they are likely to be committed to the expected outcomes (Ajay et al, 2023; Geda, 2021). In terms of the issues preventing the efficient provision of career guidance, this study reveals that career guidance services in the study area are still in the early stages of development due to a lack of intentional and well-planned efforts to allow individual students to plan their needs. It was further revealed that this crucial service was not professionally provided due to lack of enough qualified staff. For instance, the study noted that very few career guidance services existed in both universities and they were largely not formal because of trainees' indecision, the lack of professional career counselors and the varied nature of students' study programs. Similar studies conducted in Tanzania found that a lack of career guidance services led to a varied career information, which in turn affects students' profession decision when they enroll in higher education (Bashagi, & Michael, 2020; Lubanwa et al. 2021). In South Africa, Shabangu and Mpofu (2025) reported that the traditional career guidance programs were

insufficient and did not help students in making informed decisions about their careers.

The study further found that, a variety of factors that limited the effectiveness of career guidance ranged from the complexity of executing career counseling programs in academic settings, the lack of continuous follow-ups, the short execution period, and staffing constraints. As a result, many graduated recent graduate failed to make timely and the well informed career decisions. Additionally, in Malaysia, the study by market (Brandley et al. 2023) indicated that insufficient career awareness limits graduates' limited self-awareness and understanding of the job market leading to uninformed career decisions, heightening anxiety and uncertainty during their transition from education to employment.

Furthermore, the study found that management recognized the importance of career guidance services in promoting students' soft skills, such as leadership, report writing, communication and entrepreneurship skills. For instance, respondents indicated that report writing skills enabled students to support arguments and opinions with facts and evidence, particularly in academic contexts such as essays, reports or debates. On the other hand, the management appreciated the role of career guidance services in enhancing smooth career transitions and addressing challenges, encouraging self-employment, and facilitating more smooth entry into the job market; while connecting academic knowledge with workplace expectations. For example, it was reported that self-employment provides students with the flexibility to balance work and studies, while also helping them earn income to support their education amid rising living costs and tuition fees. The findings align with Busaka et al, (2022) who indicated that career service programs encourage graduates to shift from merely seeking jobs to creating them by identifying business opportunities within their field or community. In consonance with this study, Ho et al. (2022) assert that universities are increasingly emphasizing the development of soft skills—such as leadership,

teamwork, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving—and acknowledging their importance to employers.

On the other hand, management pinpointed that regardless of its crucial role, university career guidance faces challenges due to insufficient resources, and staffing which lead to a poor student-to-counselor ratio, hindering personalized support for students. Additionally, they acknowledged that many students delay engagement with career guidance services until their final year, potentially missing out on valuable guidance and being unaware of available resources and opportunities. As noted from the management participants, despite the promising role of career guidance, it is still not effectively provided; limiting students realization of the current job market demands, resulting in a misalignment between their skills and employer needs. The findings support the SET which operates on the norm of reciprocity, where students expect their universities to reciprocate their investment of time and skills with support and career development. A lack of career guidance for soft skills enhancement is perceived as a breach of this obligation, leading to students' dissatisfaction or tarnishing the university image (Bashagi & Michael, 2020).

### **Study Implications**

This paper presents important links and theoretical issues in academic research. On one hand, the study aligns well with the theory of SET which posits that any relationships involve a reciprocal assessment of fairness and balance between contributions and rewards. Practically, the findings have significant implications for workplace HLI policies and interventions. The findings supports the need for intensive career guidance services as the most effective way of imparting students with such skills so that they have career maturity to make the correct career choice decisions. In regard to HLIs, the findings highlight the need for curricular updates that explicitly integrates soft skills in all programs. This can be done incorporating real teamwork,

project-based learning methodologies, debates and oral presentations, simulations of work situations and internships in companies where students can exercise their creativity, negotiation, critical thinking and other soft skills in authentic contexts. Nevertheless, in policy organs, the implications suggest an active role for the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and TCU to intervene and promote soft skills development programs that complement the workforce's technical training demanded in the labour market. Therefore, the findings of this study contribute to the scientific discourse and provide a roadmap for employers, policymakers and career counselors dedicated to fostering a more comprehensive and resilient human resource amid ongoing global changes.

### Conclusion

The study concludes that HLI in Tanzania prioritizes soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, computer literacy, entrepreneurship, emotional intelligence and adaptability, hence emphasizes them for improvement of students' professional abilities. As a result, efforts have been made to align the curriculum with labor market demands and enhance industry connections, ensuring graduates are fully equipped to meet evolving job requirements. On the other hand, the study concludes that career development is crucial in promoting soft skills which are essential for diversifying career options and reducing the reliance on the public sector employment. Furthermore, the study concludes that the most basic challenges to the efficient provision of career counseling in HLI include a shortage of trained career counselors, poor self-awareness among students, and a lack of a defined policy for implementing career guidance

### Recommendations

The following are the main suggestions based on the study's findings:

- 1) To ensure a closer alignment with industry needs, HLI should shift from a content-based

curriculum to a more market-oriented approach by ensuring that each program reflects the actual labor market demands in terms of skills and competencies. This could be possibly done by establishing a special course under each program to incorporate target real-world professional needs competencies, such as emotional intelligence, time management, project management, and communication skills.

- 2) To enhance graduate career readiness, the HLI should partner with business incubators and start-up accelerators to encourage students to be more engaged in entrepreneurial ventures where they can gain more practical insight and experience of labour market issues. In addition, encouraging students to engage with the private sector through internships and collaborations with businesses will broaden their career prospects and enhance their employability.
- 3) To improve professional abilities and increase students' confidence, HLI should organize time to time professional career fairs for students to interact with professionals from other fields and provide insight into the abilities, certifications, and experiences needed for specific careers. Attending such events can improve students' professional abilities, increase confidence, and provide practical assistance for successfully navigating the job market.
- 4) To enhance students' full participation on the career guidance program, engagement of students' organization in all processes is crucial since they are the key partners in supporting career development initiatives. By involving and considering their inputs, the universities are likely to get full support from different stakeholders and develop the tailor-made programs suitable for student needs.

## Study Limitations

This study suffered a number of limitations. First, the sample size was limited, which restricts how broadly the results can be applied and could not accurately reflect the real situation. Second, the scope of the research was too broad, which may have hindered the ability to gather in-depth information and maintain a focused research approach. Future research should aim to expand the sample size and refine the focus of the study to improve its quality and effectiveness. By addressing these limitations, future research can offer a more thorough comprehension of the connection between HLI students' development of soft skills and career counseling services. However, despite these limitations, the findings of this study provide important information about career guidance services and how it promoted soft skills acquisition among students in Tanzanian HLIs.

## Conflict of Interest

The author affirms that the work presented in this paper was not influenced by any known competing financial interests or personal relationships.

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