Examining the 'Ideal' and 'Actual' Characteristics of University Academics: Perceptions and Experiences of Prospective Teachers in Tanzania

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Abstract

Examining the "ideal" versus "actual" characteristics of university lecturers is a crucial focus in higher education research. This study explored prospective teachers' perceptions of the "ideal" characteristics of university lecturers while uncovering their experiences with the "actual" characteristics observed in practice. The study employed a qualitative approach using a single case study design with a sample size of 26 participants. Regarding "ideal" characteristics, findings indicated that university lecturers should be friendly, maintain good relationships with prospective teachers, be role models and advisors, be creative and reflective, and be competent in pedagogical content knowledge. Mixed results were found on the "actual" university lecturers' characteristics, revealing that while some lecturers exhibited negative traits such as being less competent, unkind, and authoritarian, others demonstrated positive qualities, including competence, approachability, and friendliness as advisors to prospective teachers. The study concludes that university lecturers must strive to cultivate positive traits within themselves to ensure the smooth teaching and learning of prospective teachers.

Introduction

Researching the characteristics of ideal lecturers has recently become a topic of discussion in various studies (Joseph, 2018; Martín, 2019; Morrison & Evans, 2018; Murray, 2021; Nushi et al., 2022; Pekkarinen et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2021). Good characteristics of university lecturers contribute to the smooth learning of students. Several studies have identified the characteristics of good university lecturers. For instance, competence in pedagogical content knowledge (Murray, 2021; Nushi et al., 2022; Pekkarinen et al., 2020), good communication skills (Martín, 2019; Murray, 2021; Nushi et al., 2022; Osinski & Hernández, 2013), respect to students, closeness to students, kind, caring and friendly (Martín, 2019; Nushi et al., 2022; Osinski & Herná-

ndez, 2013), creative and reflective (Freire, 2010; Hooks, 2010; Morrison & Evans, 2018), knowing students (Osinski & Hernández, 2013), and being role model (Joseph, 2018).

Issues related to what makes good university academics have been viewed as a vital area of study in higher education due to the implications it has on students' adjustment to campus life (Arjanggi & Kusumaningsih, 2016; Lee, 2016), students' motivation (Joseph, 2018; Martín, 2019; Morrison & Evans, 2018; Osinski & Hernández, 2013), lecturer-students relationship (Elegbe, 2018; Mallik, 2023), students development of critical thinking (Kavenuke et al., 2020; Nushi et al., 2022), and lecturer-students advising role (Pekkarinen et al., 2020). Given these responsibilities that academics must undertake for the holistic development of prospective teachers, they must possess some good qualities.

Although a plethora of studies have focused on examining the characteristics of university lecturers, many of them are rather limited in terms of the methodology used. Many of the studies (e.g. Arjanggi & Kusumaningsih, 2016; Lee, 2016; Martín, 2019; Nushi et al., 2022; Osinski & Hernández, 2013; Pekkarinen et al., 2020; Samian & Noor, 2012) have used questionnaires which measure attitudes, and opinions. Only a few reviewed studies (Morrison & Evans, 2018; Singh et al., 2021) have used the interview method, which gathers in-depth data about the topic under study. The assessment of the methodological approaches in previous studies is a common approach researchers used to identify research gaps in other studies (Siegfried et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2021). The approach is commendable because studies have indicated that each research methodological approach tends to produce different dimensions of knowledge (Kang & Evans, 2020; Kinyota & Kavenuke, 2022). In that regard, using interviews and focus group discussion in this study was necessary because the methods generated in-depth data about the topic, producing a different kind of knowledge that the questionnaire method may not deliver. Thus, to augment the literature in this area of study, this study used interviews and focus group discussions to examine the perceptions and experiences of prospective teachers on the 'ideal' and 'actual' characteristics of lecturers in one of the colleges of teacher education in Tanzania.

Universities worldwide have thrived to ensure that students learn in a conducive environment. Among others, such efforts have been allocating students to academic advisors to support their advisees in various issues of concern (Fussy, 2018; Kavenuke, 2015). Despite those efforts, evidence (Elegbe, 2018; Mallik, 2023) has indicated that many lecturers have limited skills necessary to interact with students. Such lack of qualities and skills among lecturers necessitated me to ask questions such as 'What characteristics an 'ideal' university lecturer should have?' and 'What characteristics does an 'actual' university lecturer have?". Similarly, a question

that clicked in my mind is, 'Are universities aware of the characteristics of the academics before they assign them to teach students?' Evidence has indicated that most academics are moody, unfriendly, harsh, and unapproachable in their interactions with students (Elegbe, 2018; Eloff et al., 2021; Kavenuke, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2018) to the extent of making some students lose interest in attending the courses which these lecturers are teaching since, they experience sorrow, grief, and insecurity (Elegbe, 2018; Mallik, 2023).

Moreover, throughout the reviewed literature, it has been noted that studies on the characteristics of good academics have been mainly conducted outside Africa (Liu et al., 2024; Martín, 2019; Morrison & Evans, 2018; Nushi et al., 2022; Pekkarinen et al., 2020). Thus, the topic has attracted less attention in the context of teaching in other parts of the world, including Africa (Liu et al., 2024; Martín, 2019; Morrison & Evans, 2018; Nushi et al., 2022; Pekkarinen et al., 2020). Since the notion of what makes good lecturers depends on numerous factors, such as the evaluator's beliefs and culture (Morrison & Evans, 2018), it became necessary that a study in the context of Tanzania be conducted. Characteristics of university academics in Tanzania need to be studied independently because of the different cultural values that shape them as opposed to cultural values that have shaped university academics in other countries. In that regard, Tanzania's university academics are likely to portray different characteristics from academics in countries of other cultures. Thus, this study sought to unearth the university academics' 'ideal' and 'actual' characteristics in Tanzania, which might impact prospective teachers as they interact with them in their day-to-day undertakings. Hence, the following research questions guided the study: (i) what are the prospective teachers' perceived 'ideal' characteristics of university academics? (ii) what are prospective teachers' experiences of the 'actual' characteristics of university academics?

Characterising ideal university academics

The quality of interaction between academics and prospective teachers depends on the lecturers' level of genuine interest in student matters (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2018) and the level of trust, care, love, and humility demonstrated between academics and prospective students (Elegbe, 2018; Freire, 2010). Xie and Derakhshan (2021) added that academics' immediacy, humour, praise, and relational closeness are all positive interpersonal characteristics necessary for the interaction. It is the role of academics and prospective teachers to develop such a level of trust and intimacy. However, academics' characteristics influence the prospective teachers to proceed or stop interacting with the academics. In support of this, studies (Hagenauer et al., 2022; Mallik, 2023) have indicated that academics with good characteristics interact easily with prospective teachers, unlike academics with bad traits such as harshness and unfriendliness. Moreover,

ideal academics must instruct with passion and joy while using prospective teachers' actual experiences. Martín (2019) argues that quality academics should set clear learning outcomes, manage class time and resources wisely and effectively, and precisely evaluate students' learning outcomes. Moreover, ideal academics must be reflective enough by taking prospective teachers outside the lecture rooms. Principally, prospective teachers' learning abilities are enhanced when relevant teaching strategies are rightfully implemented by reflecting on the lesson. Academics with creative and reflective minds see the problem, critically analyse the situation, look for a solution among many alternatives and take action—the idea of 'praxis' (reflection and action) (Freire, 2010).

The academics' role goes beyond assisting prospective teachers in learning. Other roles include that of being counsellors and advisors. For academics to perform well in counselling and advising, they must also be empathetic, friendly, humorous, and patient. Eloff et al. (2021) have argued that academics must understand their role in improving prospective teachers' psychological well-being. In this regard, academics must have relevant knowledge and skills to manage the emotional atmosphere of the classroom, establish a good rapport with prospective teachers, and recognise and appreciate them (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021).

Other scholars have characterised 'ideal' academics depending on the behaviours expected to be portrayed by good academics. Such behaviours include being friendly and tolerant leaders, understanding, and giving students more responsibility and freedom to explore nature (Bai et al., 2022; Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Misbah et al., 2015). In other words, the 'ideal' academics should be less uncertain, reprimanding, dissatisfied, and less strict (Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Maulana et al., 2013; Wei et al., 2015).

Lastly, academics should nurture prospective teachers' character by applying 'respectful didactics', particularly teaching respect and acceptance among learners (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). To maintain a good interaction between academics and prospective teachers, academics must be respectful. They need to learn to respect ideas coming from prospective teachers. This way, they also teach prospective teachers to respect others' ideas. The classroom has to be regarded as a space for liberation where students express their thoughts freely (Hooks, 2010). Students' freedom to express their thoughts only works if the academics respect students' opinions.

Methodology

Research approach and design
The study employed a qualitative approach. to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences, allowing for a detailed exploration of the

'ideal' and 'actual' characteristics of university academics. This approach was suitable as it enabled the collection of rich, descriptive data through participants' narratives, capturing their nuanced perspectives in a way that quantitative methods may not fully achieve. Notably, the study used a single case study design to examine participants' perceptions and experiences on the topic under study. A single case study is a typical research design used when researchers want to answer questions such as 'what' and 'how' requiring participants' perceptions and experiences (Yin, 2018). Given (2008) emphasises that understanding individuals' perceptions and experiences requires providing them with a platform to express their views, often through narratives and storytelling. This approach enabled the researcher to capture rich insights into how prospective teachers perceive university academics and the extent to which their expectations align with reality.

Area of the study

The study was conducted at a university college of education in Tanzania, chosen for its direct relevance to the research topic. Established to prepare future teachers, the institution provides a fitting context for examining prospective teachers' perceptions and experiences of the 'ideal' versus 'actual' characteristics of university academics.

Participants and sampling

The researcher met all final-year prospective teachers from all programmes while attending one course, bringing them all to one lecture hall. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to them. The total population of the prospective teachers in the programme was 1,105 for Bachelor of Arts with Education (BAED), 127 for Bachelor of Education in Arts (BED Arts), 118 for Bachelor of Education in Science (BED Sc), and 283 for Bachelor of Science with Education (BSc. Ed.) The researcher set a criterion of having 40 prospective teachers from different programmes participate in the study, assuming the number could reach the data saturation point. Prospective teachers willing to participate in the study raised their hands, and the researcher took their contacts for future organisation of the data collection procedures. The selection of prospective teachers willing to participate in the study also considered gender. Finally, the study involved 26 final-year prospective teachers. Of these 26 participants, 21 were engaged in Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to discuss issues related to the topic under scrutiny. The FGD was organised into four groups consisting of five to six members in each group. The FGD was 40 to 45 minutes long. In the FGD, participants were asked questions to answer both research questions. Detailed information on each participant in FGD is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants Involved in FGD

Pseudo name	Sex	FGD groups	Year of Study	Programme of study	Time length (in minutes)
Student P, Student Q, Student R	F		3		
Student K, Student L, Student M	M	Group 1	3	BED Arts	40
Student N, Student O	F		3		
Student S, Student T, Student U	M	Group 2	3	BED Science	40
Student A, Student B, Student C	F		3		
Student D, Student E	M	Group 3	3	BA.Ed	45
Student F, Student G, Student H	F	Group 4	3	BSc.Ed.	40
Student I, Student J	M		3		

Note: Pseudonyms were used to protect participants

For triangulation and in-depth discussion purposes, 5 participants were interviewed one-on-one. Similarly, each participant was asked questions to answer both research questions. Table 2 provides detailed information on participants involved in face-to-face interviews.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Participants Involved in the Interview

Pseudo name	Sex	Year of Study	Programme of study	Time length (in minutes)
Student V	M	3	BSc. Ed.	25
Student W	M	3	BA.Ed	30
Student X	F	3	BA.Ed	30
Student Y	F	3	BED Sc	25
Student Z	M	3	BED Arts	30

Note: Pseudonyms were used to protect participants

When I noted that participants in both the interview and FGD were producing recurring responses, I stopped recruiting more participants for the study. In other words, the saturation point determined the sample size of 26 participants. I reached

that decision when I collected data until I reached a point of diminishing return (Marshall et al., 2013), where no new ideas were generated by participants other than repeating what was already reported. The study involved only third-year, who, in the context of the study area, are final-year prospective teachers. Final-year prospective teachers were selected purposefully, given that they had stayed in the college for a long time compared to first – and second-year prospective teachers. Therefore, they were considered to have relevant information regarding perceptions and experiences of university academics' 'ideal' and 'actual' characteristics.

Data analysis

Data obtained through interviews and FGD were voice-recorded, transcribed, and coded. The generated data were subjected to thematic analysis by following the six steps. The steps include (i) becoming familiar with data, (ii) generating initial codes (such as competent, reflective, friendly, and advisor, to mention a few), (iii) combining codes into themes (such as competent in pedagogical content knowledge, unkind and authoritative, to mention a few), (iv) reviewing themes, (v) determining the significance of the themes, and (vi) reporting the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). From the codes generated, I developed themes relevant to the topic under study (Saldana, 2009). Thus, I reduced and categorised the data into themes such as competent in pedagogical content knowledge, advisor and role model (for ideal), and unkind and authoritative, competent versus less competent (for actual), to mention a few. Scholars (e.g. Moosa, 2013) have argued that it is challenging to present the views of all participants in a study. Therefore, a few of the individual voices identified in the interview and FGD sessions that seemed more relevant to the themes generated were used to support the study's findings.

Ethical considerations

Participants were requested verbally to partake in the study. However, before FGDs and the interviews had started, participants were given the informed consent form to read and sign, showing their willingness and readiness to participate in the study. The researcher ensured that participants would not be identified (pseudonyms) (see Tables 1 & 2) and represented the participants' voices. Scholars (Hett & Hett, 2013; Moosa, 2013; Shamim & Qureshi, 2013) have argued that in research, it is vital to ask participants to willingly partake in the study by signing an informed consent form and protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

Findings

Findings are presented per the research questions delineated earlier. The findings are presented as follows:

Prospective teachers' perceived 'ideal' characteristics of university academics

Regarding university academics' 'ideal' characteristics, findings indicated that 'ideal' academics must demonstrate several characteristics. These include:

Being friendly and fostering positive relationships with prospective teachers

Many participants indicated that ideal university academics should be friendly to prospective teachers. They reported that ideal academics should motivate and be close to prospective teachers by making regular follow-ups on their progress. Participants emphasised that ideal university academics should treat prospective teachers in a friendly manner, have a close and positive relationship with prospective teachers, be reachable and approachable, be ready to help prospective teachers and be charming and humorous. To highlight the matter, one student in FGD had this to say:

> In my view, university lecturers should be friendly and reachable to us when needed. Even though many of us [prospective teachers] stay off-campus, lecturers should maintain close interaction with us in classrooms or offices. Whenever we approach them for help, they should recognise that we are their clients, and thus, they need to attend to us friendly even if they do not know us in person (Student K, FGD, May 2023).

Similarly, during one-on-one interviews with participants, one participant emphasised that:

> I believe that lecturers should maintain good relationships with prospective teachers. This kind of relationship helps us [prospective teachers] in academic matters and settles social issues that have tended to frustrate many of us. Lecturers' friendliness and close relationship with us give us confidence when approaching our lecturers (Interview with Student X, April 2023).

Indeed, being friendly and maintaining a good relationship with prospective teachers not only improves classroom interaction and confidence among prospective teachers but also builds trust and improves prospective teachers' learning.

Should be competent in pedagogical content knowledge

Most participants perceived that ideal university academics should be competent in pedagogical content knowledge. In particular, they emphasised that academics should know their students. Participants reported that when students hear academics calling them by names, they feel happy and attentive. Moreover, findings indicated that ideal academics should understand students' needs, underst-

and and deliver the content to students adequately, possess adequate voices, be lifelong learners, and consider learners' diverse needs when teaching. During an interview, a participant underscored that:

> Ideal lecturers must be competent in pedagogy, content, and knowledge. To be informed in all these areas, they should be lifelong learners who keep updating their knowledge. Also, ideal lecturers must consider learners' diverse needs when teaching. Many students have diverse needs, such as deaf, blind, students with low vision, slow learners, and fast learners, to mention a few. These differences can be easily noted if lecturers are competent (Interview with Student W, April 2023).

The quotation highlights the importance of university academics being competent in pedagogy, content, and knowledge. In fact, academics' competence in pedagogical content knowledge enables them to tailor the teaching methods based on the students' needs. It also ensures that learning is engaging. Learning engagement is necessitated by academics mastering the content and being aware of how to teach it effectively.

Should be role model and advisor

The participants perceived ideal university academics as role models and possessed the qualities of advisors. In particular, they emphasised that ideal university lecturers should play the role of advising prospective teachers on various issues related to academics. Participants believed ideal academics should also advise prospective teachers on life after campus and how to cope with it, especially when unemployment is a significant issue of concern to any graduate. They reported that academics are also expected to be role models where prospective teachers can emulate their behaviours. In FGD, one participant underlined that:

> Lecturers should act as role models and advisors. They need to advise us on different areas because they know many issues better than we do. In other words, lecturers should advise us on the coping strategies for life after graduation. I also think lecturers should be role models in terms of behaviour so that we can emulate their good practices (Student B in FGD, May 2023).

Participants emphasised the importance of academics' role modelling to prospective teachers because academics are likely to shape, motivate and inspire prospective teachers through role modelling.

Should be creative and reflective in teaching

Findings indicated that ideal university academics should be creative and reflective. For a lecturer to teach creatively, they must be reflective, too. Findings showed that academics' creativity in the classroom motivates learning and makes the lesson engaging. Also, it was reported that academics' reflectiveness in teaching helps students to self-reflect on the knowledge gained in the classroom in relation to real-life experiences. In particular, the findings showed that academics must teach prospective teachers to understand issues from different perspectives. Moreover, findings indicated that ideal academics should link prospective teachers with what is happening in society in their process of teaching. In other words, academics must make teaching reflective enough to enable prospective teachers to relate whatever they are taught to real-life situations. To highlight this, one participant in FGD had this to emphasise:

> An ideal lecturer should teach creatively and enable us [prospective teachers] to be reflective enough to relate the content taught to societal experiences. This kind of knowledge gained helps us fit into society after graduation. So, being competent in the content alone is not enough. Lecturers must also creatively help us connect what is taught with what is happening in society (Student J in FGD, May 2023).

The quotation above indicates how academics' creativity is linked with reflectiveness and how the two interrelated concepts are essential in describing ideal university academics. In actual fact, academics' reflection enhances creativity, and their creative experiences and practices foster deeper reflection.

Fulfilling a parenting role

Academics are viewed as parental figures while students are in university colleges. The findings revealed that ideal academics should exhibit parent-like qualities, such as kindness, care, respect for student-teachers, and a close, nurturing relationship similar to that of a parent and child. Participants stressed that ideal academics should treat prospective teachers as their own children, showing humility and a sense of care. They also noted that ideal academics should care about students' success, feeling saddened when students struggle academically or face challenges that may jeopardise their future. This level of concern reassures prospective teachers that someone is monitoring their progress and well-being. To illustrate, one participant in the focus group discussion remarked:

> Lecturers should act as parents to prospective teachers. Most prospective teachers come from different geographical locations. When they face various challenges, they sometimes need lecturers'

support to settle. On such occasions, academics should take the parental role in helping us [prospective teachers] (Student S in FGD, May 2023).

From the preceding quotation, we note the importance that prospective teachers attach to university academics. Prospective teachers give university academics a similar role to parents who must help them settle when they encounter difficulties at the university campus.

Prospective teachers' experiences of the 'actual' characteristics of university academics

The findings on the actual attributes of academics produced mixed findings. Findings indicated that academics demonstrated both good and bad characteristics. Such actual characteristics of academics are presented as follows:

Advisors and friends

Findings indicated that many university academics portray good characteristics by looking friendly to prospective teachers and playing the role of advisors. Participants reported that some academics are charming and approachable and treat prospective teachers humbly. Moreover, findings indicated that some academics advise prospective teachers on academic matters and knowledge about life after campus. In other words, academics advised prospective teachers to think outside the box. To highlight that, one prospective teacher added that:

> Most of the lecturers are friendly and approachable. They treat us [prospective teachers] so friendly and advise us when facing challenges during learning. Many lecturers are charming; they teach us carefully and are willing to repeat the content so that we all understand. Lecturers advise us to become responsible for our actions and think about life after campus (Student P in FGD, May 2023).

The preceding quotation indicates the importance of having friendly academics on prospective teachers' learning. The findings suggest that friendly academics also act as advisors.

Competent versus less competent

Findings indicated that many university academics know the content and teaching methods well. Participants reported that many academics have mastered the course well and have used effective class organisation techniques. It was reported that many academics motivate and make the classes active by placing dialogue at the

centre of learning, particularly during lectures and seminar sessions. Participants reported that these competent academics tend to teach by modifying the traditional lecture method by encouraging prospective teachers to contribute their ideas during teaching. One participant succinctly underscored that:

> One lecturer taught us so competently that he could make the lesson engaging and motivating. That teaching style helped us [prospective teachers] realise how to apply the content taught in real-life situations. The lecturer linked the content with our day-to-day social life. The lecturer is knowledgeable enough when teaching and is motivating to the extent that we enjoy his lectures. I wish all lecturers could teach the way the lecturer taught us (Student F in FGD, May 2023).

On the contrary, some academics were less competent and had weak teaching techniques. Participants reported that some academics are less competent and do not have enough content to deliver. When it comes to teaching technique, participants were of the view that some academics' teaching styles are questionable. Participants emphasised that some academics tended to read everything from the slides without any explanations after reading. Concerning this, during an interview, one participant highlighted that:

> Some lecturers' teaching techniques are weak. For instance, in one of the courses I have attended, there is a topic that deals with calculations, but our lecturer always uses slides to teach calculations. We rarely understand this lecturer. We must do calculations to understand that rather than relying on slides (Interview with Student V, April 2023).

Similarly, participants reported encountering a lecturer who was always hesitant and unsure of the content to be taught. Participants reported that this lecturer has demonstrated doubtfulness on several occasions. The participants reported that the lecturer sometimes told them to read independently because the same topic was studied in advanced secondary school. To emphasise the same matter, one participant during FGD underlined that:

> … some lecturers have been teaching us but are less competent in pedagogy. When we were in the second year, final-year students told us that when we reach the final year, we will be taught by one less competent lecturer. Now that we are in the final year, we have witnessed and experienced it ourselves. The lecturer does not deliver the content well (Student E in FGD, May 2023).

Participants' voices indicate their experiences with competent and less competent university academics. From the quotations, we learn that prospective teachers

need engaging and motivating university academics to translate the content taught into their daily lives.

Unkind and authoritative

Findings indicated that prospective teachers perceived their academics as unkind and authoritative. In particular, it was reported that the unkindness and authoritativeness are related to a weak relationship between academics and prospective teachers. Participants reported that the relationship is weak because prospective teachers fear approaching some academics when having problems. A participant in an interview had this to highlight:

> During teaching, if we [prospective teachers] fail to answer questions, the lecturer usually tells us, you will be my soup in the future [meaning, when students fail the examination, they will have to either sit for a supplementary exam or carry over the course]. Sometimes, we may come for the lecture a bit lately for justifiable reasons, but some lecturers have been telling us to leave the classroom instead of asking gently why we went in the classroom lately. Such practices make us lose concentration in that course (Interview with Student Y, April 2023).

Moreover, participants reported that some academics embarrass prospective teachers in front of others, discourage prospective teachers, treat prospective teachers unkindly, and are very authoritative. To highlight this, one prospective teacher underscored that:

> One of our lecturers gave us a headache. The lecturer is very unkind and authoritative during teaching and seminar presentations. When we do presentations, if the idea is incorrect, the lecturer usually shouts, in a high tone, 'Hey, sit down! What are you presenting here?' …. I think lecturers should recognise that we [university students] are adults and should learn to treat us with respect rather than reprimanding us in front of the class, as some lecturers do (Student D in FGD, May 2023).

Participants' voices indicate prospective teachers are dissatisfied with unkind and authoritative lecturers. The quotations remind university academics of the need to communicate with prospective teachers more gently rather than intimidating them when they fail to answer questions during lecture or seminar hours. Academics need to learn to relate with prospective teachers in a kind and humorous way to allow learning to occur.

Less considerate to prospective teachers' diverse needs

Findings showed that some academics lack relevant pedagogical skills to handle prospective teachers with diverse needs. In particular, participants reported that some academics hardly consider the diverse needs of prospective teachers in the classroom when teaching. Participants reported that the College has a lot of prospective teachers with special needs such as deaf, blind, albinism, physical impairment, and students with low vision who need to be identified earlier before teaching starts so that they are given relevant support. However, it was reported that some academics do not recognise the presence of prospective teachers with special needs in the classrooms. One participant highlighted that:

> I have noted that lecturers, knowingly or unknowingly, do not consider the diverse needs of students in the classroom. For example, in a certain course, one prospective teacher is deaf, but the lecturer always teaches while facing the chalkboard. This practice makes it difficult for the prospective teacher to follow the lesson (Student O in FGD, May 2023).

In connection to the quotation above, participants emphasised that it is essential to teach while facing students so that deaf learners can read the academics' lips as teaching is taking its course.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results that ideal academics should be friendly relate to other studies, presenting an ideal university academic as friendly and helpful. For instance, studies (Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Maulana et al., 2013; Wei et al., 2015) observed that university academics should be more tolerant, patient, helpful and friendly, meaning they should be less admonishing, and less authoritative. Academics' competence in pedagogical content knowledge has also been emphasised in previous studies. For instance, numerous studies have recorded that pedagogical content knowledge is a quality that ideal university academics must possess because it helps them facilitate students' learning more effectively (Murray, 2021; Nushi et al., 2022; Pekkarinen et al., 2020). The fact that academics were also reported to be less competent is an alert that university academics must accept to become lifelong learners and familiarise themselves with the course contents taught in universities in recent days.

The findings that ideal university academics should possess the advisor and role model qualities have been presented in earlier findings (Joseph, 2018; Pekkarinen et al., 2020). Joseph (2018) found that academics see their role as setting high ethical standards and modelling positive behaviours for students to emulate. On the issue of advising, Pekkarinen et al. (2020) presented an ideal academic as a facili-

tator and advisor of learning, describing a good university lecturer as an enabler of prospective students' learning. Regarding university academics' creative and reflective characteristics, scholars (e.g. Hooks, 2010; Morrison & Evans, 2018) have also argued that academics must be willing to teach students by engaging them beyond the surface level for creative and reflective learning to occur. In other words, students must be allowed to develop different ideas and connect the content taught to their real lives. Concerning academics playing the parental role, many other studies (Martín, 2019; Nushi et al., 2022; Osinski & Hernández, 2013) have documented that ideal university academics should behave more or less like parents. Thus, they must be respectful, close to students, kind, and caring.

As stated earlier, university lecturers were perceived to possess good and bad characteristics. Concerning good university lecturer characteristics, the findings indicated that most lecturers are competent, reflective, friendly, and play the role of advising students. Such findings replicate the earlier studies that ideal university lecturers are expected to be competent (Nushi et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2021), friendly (Martín, 2019; Nushi et al., 2022), reflective (Freire, 2010; Hooks, 2010), students' advisors (Pekkarinen et al., 2020).

In addition, the findings that actual university lecturers are unkind and authoritative have been documented in previous studies. For instance, studies (e.g. Elegbe, 2018; Eloff et al., 2021; Kavenuke, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2018) have noted that most lecturers have tended to be harsh and unapproachable to students (Elegbe, 2018; Eloff et al., 2021; Kavenuke, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2018). My experiences as a researcher and university lecturer have shown that prospective teachers have difficulties interacting with lecturers who seem to be unkind and authoritative.

The tendency of academics to be less considerate towards prospective teachers with diverse needs is a cause for concern, particularly in recent times when inclusive education in higher education is being emphasised. It is recognised that inclusive education is one of the most sensitive ongoing issues in higher education, yet scholars (e.g. Mag et al., 2017; Mondal, 2021) have noted that handling students with special needs is still a challenge among university academics. Thus, academics must identify people with special needs as early as possible and support them during lecture hours. Academics must also learn relevant pedagogical skills to handle student-teachers with special needs effectively.

Findings indicated that academics portrayed good and bad characteristics. Regarding participants' perception of the 'ideal' university academics, the study concludes that prospective teachers perceived their academics as being friendly, role models and advisors, creative and reflective, and competent in pedagogical content know-

ledge. Concerning the 'actual' characteristics of university academics, the study concludes that prospective teachers experienced their academics demonstrating characteristics such as advising and friendship, unkind and authoritative, competent versus less competent, and less considerate to prospective teachers' diverse needs. From the study findings, I recommend that academics' practices should reflect the characteristics of an ideal university lecturer. Therefore, academics must interact with prospective teachers respectfully, humbly, kindly, and with friendliness while teaching prospective teachers.

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