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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teacher Attitudes toward Grading Practices and Anti Discrimination in Public Secondary Schools in Temeke Municipality Tanzania^aJuma Orenda, ^aAtegwu Patrick Ogar, ^aBago Adam^aDepartment of Education Foundations School of Education Saint Augustine University of Tanzania**Corresponding Author**Juma Orenda, Email: jumaorenda846@gmail.com**Author's Contributions**

All authors contributed equally to this research.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how teachers' attitudes toward grading practices support non-discriminatory assessment in selected public secondary schools in Temeke Municipality, Tanzania. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used. Questionnaire data were obtained from 126 students and 55 teachers drawn from a target population of 24,734, and qualitative data were collected through interviews with heads of schools, Ward Education Officers, and the District Education Officer. The Teacher Attitude and Grading Questionnaire and the Anti-Discrimination Questionnaire were reviewed by specialists in measurement and evaluation and educational foundations. Internal consistency was established with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .91. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and interview data were analysed thematically. Students generally perceived grading as fair across gender, ethnicity, and social background. They also reported that teachers used transparent criteria, avoided favouritism, and provided comparable feedback and academic support. Teachers likewise reported strong commitments to fair grading: 92.7% indicated that they graded students fairly regardless of background, 87.3% reported using clear assessment criteria, and 90.9% agreed that fair grading helps reduce discrimination. Nevertheless, both data sources identified constraints on equitable practice, particularly large classes, limited time, unequal opportunities for improvement, and the risk of implicit bias. The findings suggest that favourable attitudes toward fairness, transparency, and impartiality can support equitable assessment when schools also provide clear procedures, professional learning, and adequate academic support.

Keywords: teacher attitudes, grading practices, anti-discrimination, equitable assessment, secondary education**INTRODUCTION**

Education can promote social inclusion when all learners receive comparable opportunities to demonstrate achievement and improve their performance. Teachers influence this process through instruction, assessment, feedback, and grading. Their professional competence and instructional practices shape students' educational experiences (Ategwu, 2018; Ategwu et al., 2022). Grading is especially consequential because grades communicate

judgements about achievement and may affect progression, access to further education, and future opportunities. Teachers may consider several forms of evidence when assigning grades (McMillan, 2001), and their decisions may also be influenced by factors beyond demonstrated academic performance (Randall & Engelhard, 2010). Teachers' attitudes toward grading can therefore strengthen or weaken equitable assessment.

Grades should represent students' knowledge, skills, and performance against stated criteria. Assessment becomes potentially discriminatory when gender, ethnicity, social background, classroom behaviour, or personal impressions influence grades without a defensible connection to the intended learning outcomes. Experimental and observational studies show that students with similar performance may receive different teacher-assigned grades. Hanna and Linden (2012), for example, identified caste-related differences in grading in India, while Botelho et al. (2015) reported racial disparities in teacher-assigned grades in Brazil after accounting for measured performance and behaviour. Such evidence positions grading as one possible mechanism through which educational disadvantage can be reproduced.

Concerns about bias in grading extend across gender, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic categories. Protivinsky and Munich (2018) found that teacher-assigned grades could differ by gender relative to objectively measured performance. Quinn (2020) further showed that structured grading scales can reduce racial bias in teachers' evaluation of student work. Together, these studies indicate that explicit criteria and consistent procedures can constrain the influence of subjective judgement.

Grading is not a purely mechanical conversion of test scores into marks. Teachers interpret responses, evaluate assignments, combine continuous assessment results, and exercise judgement when determining final grades. Those judgements may reflect expectations about students' abilities. Van Ewijk (2011) found that expectations concerning minority students could contribute indirectly to differences in educational outcomes, and Lavy (2008) identified gender-related bias in teacher evaluations. Attitudes that favour fairness, transparency, consistency, and evidence-based judgement are therefore important, although favourable attitudes alone do not guarantee equitable practice.

Equitable grading also requires a clear distinction between academic achievement and factors such as effort, participation, conduct, or personal familiarity unless those factors are explicitly part of the assessment criteria. Falch and Naper (2013) associated grading decisions with student and classroom characteristics, while Cornwell et al. (2013) reported gender differences between teacher-assigned grades and externally assessed performance. Common standards, explicit criteria, and transparent procedures

can reduce inconsistent use of non-achievement factors.

These concerns are salient in African education systems, where school-based assessment may determine progression and access to later opportunities. Discriminatory outcomes need not arise from deliberate intent; they may also reflect implicit expectations, stereotypes, or uneven application of professional judgement. Strengthening teachers' awareness of bias is therefore necessary, but schools must also establish procedures that make fair practice feasible and observable.

In Tanzania, secondary-school teachers use classroom assessments to monitor progress and determine achievement. Evidence nevertheless suggests a gap between recommended assessment approaches and classroom practice. Salema (2018) reported difficulties in implementing learner-centred assessment in secondary schools, and Kihyo et al. (2024) emphasised the value of item-response analysis for improving assessment practice in Zanzibar. These studies show that teachers' assessment knowledge and beliefs affect how achievement is evaluated, but they provide limited evidence about grading as an anti-discrimination practice in mainland public secondary schools.

Public secondary schools in Temeke Municipality serve students from diverse social, economic, cultural, and academic backgrounds. A recent scoping review concluded that student characteristics can influence school grades, although the magnitude and conditions of discrimination vary across settings (Tiedemann & Billes, 2023). Because structured criteria may reduce bias (Quinn, 2020), teachers' attitudes toward objective and transparent grading warrant examination alongside the institutional conditions that enable those attitudes to shape practice.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Scholarship on equitable assessment questions grading systems that allow non-achievement factors to influence academic outcomes. Rodriguez and Relaford-Doyle (2021) argue for anti-racist assessment, equity-oriented grading, and sustained professional learning. Gillborn et al. (2018), through a critical analysis of education data and race, likewise show why apparently neutral measures require scrutiny for patterned disadvantage. This literature treats equitable grading as both a technical matter of assessment design and an

institutional commitment to preventing differential treatment.

Evidence from Indonesia similarly indicates that teachers may value fairness while feeling constrained by established grading systems (Sari, 2023). This distinction is important: support for equitable assessment does not necessarily translate into consistent classroom practice. Professional learning, clear policy, and usable assessment tools may be needed to convert favourable attitudes into routine behaviour.

Studies reported from Botswana, Zambia, and Uganda identify a comparable pattern. Teachers generally support fair grading but describe conventional practices and resource constraints as potential sources of inequality (Chanda, 2024; Molefe, 2022; Namusoke, 2022). Although these studies broaden the regional evidence base, their findings are context-specific and rely heavily on self-reported perceptions. They therefore support, but do not replace, investigation of students' experiences and school-level explanations in Temeke Municipality.

Within Tanzania, Mwalongo (2023) found that teachers supported fairness in grading while recognising that conventional systems could disadvantage marginalised students. The study was limited to Dar es Salaam and Dodoma and used a quantitative survey. The present study extends this line of inquiry by combining student and teacher questionnaires with interviews of school and education leaders in Temeke Municipality.

The study was guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior. The theory proposes that behaviour is shaped by attitudes, perceived social expectations, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 2020; Bosnjak et al., 2020; Conner, 2020). Applied to grading, teachers may intend to assess students fairly because they value equity and perceive fairness as a professional norm. Their ability to act on that intention may nevertheless depend on class size, time, assessment competence, moderation procedures, and access to support. The framework therefore permits analysis of both favourable attitudes and the conditions that may limit their implementation.

The reviewed literature establishes that grading can reproduce disadvantage and that explicit criteria may reduce bias. Less is known about whether teachers' reported attitudes align with students' experiences in Tanzanian public secondary schools or how education leaders explain gaps between intention and practice. This study addressed that gap by examining teachers'

attitudes toward grading practices and their perceived contribution to anti-discrimination in selected public secondary schools in Temeke Municipality.

METHODOLOGY

The study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The target population comprised 24,734 individuals in Temeke Municipality. Quantitative data were collected from 126 students and 55 teachers selected through stratified and simple random sampling, while heads of schools, Ward Education Officers, and the District Education Officer were purposively selected for follow-up interviews. The Teacher Attitude and Grading Questionnaire and the Anti-Discrimination Questionnaire were used to collect survey data, and a semi-structured interview guide supported the qualitative phase. Specialists in measurement and evaluation and educational foundations at Saint Augustine University of Tanzania reviewed the instruments for content validity. A pilot study was conducted, and the questionnaire achieved a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .91. Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS Version 26 using frequencies and percentages; interview data were coded and analysed thematically. Participants provided informed consent, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were protected throughout the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis examined how teachers' attitudes toward grading practices were perceived to promote anti-discrimination. Student questionnaire results are presented first, followed by teacher responses and interview evidence from school and education leaders.

Table 1. *Student Responses on Teachers' Grading Practices and Anti Discrimination in Selected Public Secondary Schools*

Statements	SD F (%)	D F (%)	N F (%)	A F (%)	SA F (%)
i. My teachers did not grade students fairly regardless of gender, ethnicity, or social background	55 (43.7)	48 (38.1)	12 (9.5)	7 (5.6)	4 (3.1)
ii. Teachers use clear and transparent criteria when assessing students' work.	2 (1.6)	5 (4.0)	10 (7.9)	58 (46.0)	51 (40.5)
iii. Teachers did not provide equal	49 (38.9)	53 (42.1)	13 (10.3)	7 (5.6)	4 (3.1)

Statements	SD F (%)	D F (%)	N F (%)	A F (%)	SA F (%)
opportunities for all students to improve their grades					
iv. Teachers avoid favoritism when marking tests and assignments.	3 (2.4)	6 (4.8)	11 (8.7)	57 (45.2)	49 (38.9)
v. Students from all backgrounds receive equal feedback and support from teachers about their academic performance.	2 (1.6)	5 (4.0)	9 (7.1)	61 (48.4)	49 (38.9)

Note. n = 126. SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree. Field data, 2026.

Table 1 shows broadly favourable student perceptions. For the two negatively worded items, 81.8% and 81.0% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that most students perceived grading and opportunities for improvement as fair. Agreement with the three positively worded items ranged from 84.1% to 87.3%. The minority responses and neutral categories nevertheless indicate that equitable practice was not experienced uniformly.

Fairness across Student Backgrounds

A total of 103 students (81.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that teachers graded students unfairly because of gender, ethnicity, or social background. Twelve students (9.5%) were neutral, and 11 (8.7%) agreed or strongly agreed with the negative statement. Most respondents therefore perceived grading as fair, but the minority reporting unfair treatment remains educationally important because perceived bias can weaken confidence in assessment. A head of school described fairness as a continuing institutional responsibility:

Grading is an area where we have to be extremely careful because students and even parents notice patterns very quickly. If a teacher is consistently seen to give higher marks to students from a particular tribe, or to boys over girls, or to students whose parents are wealthier, it destroys the credibility of that teacher and, frankly, of the school as a whole. We remind our teachers regularly that grading must be based strictly on the quality of the work

submitted, nothing else. (HoS A, June 2026).

The survey and interview evidence suggests that school leaders actively reinforce expectations of fair grading, but neither source can establish that bias has been eliminated. The finding is consistent with Mwalongo (2023) and Rodriguez and Relaford-Doyle (2021), who emphasise that equitable intentions require institutional support. In terms of the Theory of Planned Behavior, supervisory expectations may operate as subjective norms that strengthen teachers' intentions to grade fairly (Conner, 2020).

Transparent Assessment Criteria

For the second item, 109 students (86.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that teachers used clear and transparent criteria when assessing their work. Ten students (7.9%) were neutral, and seven (5.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Transparent criteria can reduce discretionary variation by clarifying how performance will be judged. One Ward Education Officer explained:

When a teacher explains clearly, before the assessment, exactly what will be rewarded and what will not, there is very little room left for a student to feel that they were marked down because of who they are rather than the quality of their work. We have encouraged our teachers to share marking schemes and rubrics with students in advance wherever possible, because this transparency protects both the student and the teacher from accusations of unfair treatment. (WEO 1, June 2026).

This account identifies rubrics and marking schemes as procedural safeguards rather than evidence that bias is impossible. The result supports prior arguments for structured, equity-oriented assessment (Gillborn et al., 2018; Sari, 2023). Within the theoretical framework, competence in designing and applying criteria may increase teachers' perceived behavioural control and make equitable intentions easier to enact (Ajzen, 2020).

Equal Opportunities for Academic Improvement

For the third, negatively worded item, 102 students (81.0%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that teachers failed to provide equal opportunities to improve grades. Thirteen students (10.3%) were neutral, and 11 (8.7%)

agreed or strongly agreed. Although the majority response was favourable, the distribution suggests that access to retakes, remedial support, or additional guidance may be less consistent than fairness in initial marking. The District Education Officer noted:

Fair grading is only one part of the picture; equally important is whether a student who performs poorly is given a genuine chance to improve, regardless of their background. We have observed that in some schools, students from wealthier or more socially connected families are more likely to be given extra attention or additional opportunities to redo work, while students from poorer or more marginalised backgrounds are sometimes simply left with the low mark they received. This is something we are actively working to correct through supervision. (DEO, June 2026).

The interview evidence qualifies the favourable survey result by identifying a possible difference between equal marking and equal access to recovery opportunities. Related studies report that resource and institutional constraints can impede inclusive assessment even when teachers endorse fairness (Chanda, 2024; Namusoke, 2022). From a Theory of Planned Behavior perspective, limited time and support may reduce perceived behavioural control and weaken the translation of equitable intentions into consistent practice (Bosnjak et al., 2020).

Avoidance of Favouritism

A total of 106 students (84.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that teachers avoided favouritism when marking tests and assignments. Eleven students (8.7%) were neutral, and nine (7.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Most students thus trusted the impartiality of marking, although the minority responses again indicate variation in experience. A head of school described procedural measures used to limit personal influence:

Favouritism in marking is one of the quickest ways a teacher can lose the respect of their students, and most of our teachers understand this very well. We encourage practices such as marking without immediately looking at whose paper it is, or having a second teacher countercheck marks in cases of borderline

scores, precisely to remove any chance of personal bias creeping into the grading process. (HoS B, June 2026).

The interview suggests that anonymised marking and moderation may help translate impartial intentions into verifiable procedures. This interpretation accords with Molefe (2022) and Kato (2023), who argue that teachers benefit from structures that support consistent practice. Such procedures may strengthen perceived behavioural control by giving teachers practical means to manage potential bias (Conner, 2020).

Equal Feedback and Academic Support

For the fifth item, 110 students (87.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that students from different backgrounds received equal feedback and academic support. Nine students (7.1%) were neutral, and seven (5.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. The majority response was positive, but feedback quality may still vary across students. One Ward Education Officer observed:

Some teachers, without necessarily meaning to, give more detailed feedback to the students they already know are strong performers or come from families they interact with more often, while other students simply receive a mark with little explanation. We have worked to remind teachers that every student, especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have additional support at home, deserves the same quality of feedback so they know exactly how to improve. (WEO 2, June 2026).

This account shows that equitable assessment extends beyond the assigned mark to the guidance students receive afterward. Unequal feedback may restrict students' opportunity to improve even when initial scores are assigned fairly. The finding is consistent with equity-oriented approaches that treat feedback as part of assessment practice (Gillborn et al., 2018; Sari, 2023). Professional expectations concerning equal feedback may function as subjective norms that encourage more consistent support (Knauder & Koschmieder, 2019).

Teachers' Reported Attitudes toward Equitable Grading

Teachers also assessed their own grading practices. Their responses are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2.

Teacher Responses on Grading Practices and Anti Discrimination in Selected Public Secondary Schools

Statements	SD F (%)	D F (%)	N F (%)	A F (%)	SA F (%)
i. I ensure that my grading practices are fair to all students regardless of their background.	0 (0.0)	1 (1.8)	3 (5.5)	27 (49.1)	24 (43.6)
ii. I use clear and transparent criteria when assessing students' assignments and examinations.	1 (1.8)	2 (3.6)	4 (7.3)	28 (50.9)	20 (36.4)
iii. I avoid favoritism when grading students' academic work.	0 (0.0)	2 (3.6)	5 (9.1)	26 (47.3)	22 (40.0)
iv. I provide equal opportunities for all students to improve their academic performance.	1 (1.8)	2 (3.6)	6 (10.9)	27 (49.1)	19 (34.6)
v. I believe that fair grading practices help reduce discrimination among students.	0 (0.0)	1 (1.8)	4 (7.3)	29 (52.7)	21 (38.2)

Note. n = 55. SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree. Field data, 2026.

Table 2 indicates consistently favourable self-reports across the five items. Combined agreement ranged from 83.7% to 92.7%. Because these responses concern teachers' own professional conduct, they should be interpreted alongside the student and

interview evidence and with recognition of possible social-desirability bias.

Fair Grading Regardless of Background

Fifty-one teachers (92.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that they graded students fairly regardless of background. Three (5.5%) were neutral, and one (1.8%) disagreed. The result indicates a strong stated commitment to fairness. A head of school linked that commitment to staff induction:

Every teacher who has gone through our staff orientation knows that grading is one area where we simply cannot compromise. I always tell new teachers that a mark must reflect the work in front of them and nothing else, not the student's family name, not their tribe, not whether their parents are on the school committee. Over time, this has become second nature to most of our staff. (HoS C, June 2026).

The convergence between teacher self-reports, student responses, and the interview suggests that fair grading is widely recognised as a professional norm. The evidence concerns reported attitudes and perceptions, however, and should not be treated as direct observation of every grading decision. The pattern is consistent with Mwalongo (2023) and with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which links favourable attitudes to behavioural intention (Conner, 2020).

Use of Clear and Transparent Criteria

Forty-eight teachers (87.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that they used clear criteria when assessing assignments and examinations. Four (7.3%) were neutral, and three (5.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. The responses indicate broad support for criteria-based assessment. One Ward Education Officer described the value of determining criteria before marking:

I always prepare my marking scheme before I set the assignment, not after, because if you wait until you are marking to decide what counts as a good answer, that is exactly when personal bias can creep in without you even realising it. Having the criteria fixed in advance protects the student and protects me as the teacher. (WEO 3, June 2026).

Predetermined criteria may reduce the opportunity for impressions formed during marking to alter standards. This interpretation is consistent with equity-oriented assessment approaches that emphasise explicit criteria (Gillborn et al., 2018). In theoretical terms, the skill to prepare and apply criteria may strengthen perceived behavioural control and support consistent practice (Ajzen, 2020).

Avoidance of Favouritism in Grading

Forty-eight teachers (87.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that they avoided favouritism when grading academic work. Five (9.1%) were neutral, and two (3.6%) disagreed. These responses reinforce the favourable student perceptions, while still leaving a small group for whom practice or interpretation may differ. The District Education Officer explained:

We have built a culture across our schools where teachers understand that favouritism, even small and seemingly harmless favouritism, can seriously damage a student's trust in the entire education system. Most teachers I have interacted with take real pride in being seen as fair markers, and this reputation matters a great deal to them professionally. (DEO, June 2026).

The interview links impartial grading with teachers' professional identity and school expectations. This pattern is consistent with Kato (2023) and with the Theory of Planned Behavior: favourable attitudes may be reinforced by subjective norms that define impartiality as expected professional conduct (Bosnjak et al., 2020). Recognition should therefore be paired with moderation and review so that impartiality is supported by both professional culture and observable procedure.

Equal Opportunities to Improve Performance

Forty-six teachers (83.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that they provided equal opportunities for students to improve. Six (10.9%) were neutral, and three (5.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. This item had the lowest combined agreement and the highest combined neutrality and disagreement in the teacher survey, mirroring the relative weakness of this area in student responses. A head of school attributed the difficulty partly to workload:

Fair grading is something most of us can manage lesson by lesson, but consistently providing every single student with the same level of additional support to improve, especially when we have large classes and limited time, is genuinely more difficult. I try to make time for students who are struggling regardless of their background, but I will be honest that it is not always possible to give everyone the same amount of individual attention. (HoS D, June 2026).

The response distinguishes commitment to equal opportunity from the capacity to provide comparable individual support in large classes. Chanda (2024) similarly identifies structural constraints on equitable practice. The finding illustrates perceived behavioural control: time, class size, and staffing can limit whether favourable attitudes result in equal opportunities for improvement (Bosnjak et al., 2020).

Belief that Fair Grading Reduces Discrimination

Fifty teachers (90.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that fair grading helps reduce discrimination. Four (7.3%) were neutral, and one (1.8%) disagreed. Teachers therefore reported a strong conceptual connection between assessment fairness and anti-discrimination. One head of school stated:

I have come to believe very strongly that grading is one of the most powerful tools we have for either reinforcing or breaking down discrimination in a school. If students see, year after year, that the marks they receive genuinely reflect their effort and ability rather than who they are, it builds a kind of quiet trust in the fairness of the whole system that extends far beyond the classroom. This is something I try to instil in every teacher who joins our staff. (HoS E, June 2026).

The result indicates that most teachers view fair grading as part of the school's broader equity responsibilities. This interpretation aligns with Rodriguez and Relaford-Doyle (2021) and Molefe (2022), who connect equity-oriented grading with reduced disadvantage. Under the Theory of Planned Behavior, belief in the beneficial consequences of fair grading can strengthen favourable attitudes and intentions (Ajzen, 2020; Conner, 2020)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Teachers and students generally reported that grading in the selected schools was fair, transparent, and impartial. The strongest teacher responses concerned fairness regardless of background and the belief that fair grading helps reduce discrimination. Student responses also indicated broad confidence in transparent criteria, impartial marking, and equal feedback. These findings suggest that positive attitudes and professional norms support equitable assessment. They do not, however, demonstrate that discriminatory grading is absent. Minority responses, interview evidence, and the comparatively weaker results for opportunities to improve point to continuing risks associated with implicit bias, large classes, limited time, and uneven academic support. Equitable grading therefore depends on both teacher commitment and institutional conditions that make consistent practice possible.

Recommendations

Education authorities and school leaders should provide continuing professional learning on implicit bias, criteria-based grading, feedback, and inclusive assessment. Departments should prepare and share marking criteria before assessment, use moderation or second-marking procedures where feasible, and review grading patterns for unexplained disparities. Schools should establish consistent rules for retakes, remedial support, and feedback so that opportunities to improve do not depend on students' social connections or background. Finally, efforts to strengthen equitable grading should address workload and class-size constraints, because favourable attitudes alone cannot ensure equal support when teachers lack sufficient time and resources.

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