



Master of all subjects? Examining the Educational Consequences of the One-Class-Per-Teacher Model in Primary Schools

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Abstract:

Background: Teacher deployment remains a challenge in resource-constrained education systems, yet evidence on the educational consequences of the One-Class-Per-Teacher (OCPT) model remains limited.

Aims: This study examined Malawian primary teachers' perceptions of OCPT, focusing on its pedagogical benefits, workload, professional confidence, motivation, instructional effectiveness, and preferred reforms.

Methods: A convergent mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from 451 teachers using structured questionnaires and analyzed through descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, t-tests, analysis of variance, correlations, and multiple regression. Qualitative data from seven semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically and integrated with the survey findings.

Results: Teachers acknowledged that OCPT strengthened learner familiarity, instructional continuity, and monitoring of learner progress. However, perceived challenges were very high ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.64$), while perceived benefits were moderate ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.87$). Moreover, 79.2% reported negative effects on motivation and job satisfaction, and perceived challenges were the strongest predictor of negative evaluations ($\beta = .374$, $p < .001$). Participants strongly supported team teaching, subject sharing, and partial specialization.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that substantial professional costs outweigh OCPT's relational benefits. Context-sensitive hybrid deployment models, supported by continuous professional development, are recommended to improve teacher well-being, instructional quality, and workforce sustainability.

Keywords: Basic Education, Malawi, One-Class-Per-Teacher, Teachers' Experiences

1. INTRODUCTION

Access to quality primary education remains a major challenge across Sub-Saharan Africa despite expanded enrollment. Persistent teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, high pupil-teacher ratios, and limited instructional resources continue to constrain educational quality (Banda et al., 2024, 2025; Banda & Banda, 2022). In response, Malawi has widely adopted the One-Class-Per-Teacher (OCPT) model, in which a single teacher delivers nearly all subjects to a single class throughout the academic year.

OCPT intends to promote instructional continuity, stronger teacher-learner relationships, and closer monitoring of learner progress. However, evidence indicates that teacher assignment models also shape

workload, subject competence, professional confidence, motivation, and instructional quality.

While proponents argue that OCPT strengthens continuity and teacher-learner relationships (Chang & Hall, 2022), critics contend that teaching multiple subjects may reduce subject expertise, increase workload, lower teacher efficacy, and compromise instructional quality (Barrett et al., 2019). Emerging evidence further suggests that collaborative or hybrid deployment models may better balance instructional continuity with subject specialization.

Despite these debates, important knowledge gaps remain. Most evidence is derived from high-income education systems, limiting its applicability to resource-constrained contexts such as Malawi. Moreover, few studies integrate quantitative and qualitative evidence to explain teachers' experiences under different assignment models, and little is known about how teachers perceive the trade-offs between instructional continuity and workload in OCPT settings.

To address these gaps, this mixed-methods study investigates teachers' experiences with OCPT in Malawian primary schools. Specifically, it examines teachers' perceptions of the model's educational benefits, evaluates its implications for workload, confidence, motivation, and instructional effectiveness, and identifies teacher-recommended strategies for improving teacher deployment and instructional quality. The study contributes context-specific evidence to inform teacher deployment policy and workforce

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sustainability in low-resource primary education systems.

Teacher assignment models shape instructional delivery, teacher workload, learner support, and educational quality. Primary education generally employs three approaches: generalist (OCPT), subject-specialist, and collaborative models, each reflecting different assumptions about effective teaching and learning.

The generalist (OCPT) model is widely valued for fostering instructional continuity, stronger teacher–learner relationships, and holistic understanding of learners’ academic and socio-emotional development (Chang & Hall, 2022). However, critics argue that requiring teachers to deliver multiple subjects may dilute subject expertise, reduce instructional depth, and undermine teacher confidence, particularly in specialized subjects such as science and the arts (Barrett et al., 2019; Poulter & Cook, 2022). Consequently, the pedagogical advantage of continuity may be achieved at the expense of content quality.

In contrast, the subject-specialist model prioritizes disciplinary expertise and pedagogical content knowledge. Evidence indicates that Specialization is associated with improved curriculum implementation, greater instructional precision, and higher learner achievement, particularly in mathematics and science (Bae et al., 2020). However, distributing instruction across multiple teachers may weaken teacher–learner relationships, continuity of care, and comprehensive monitoring of learner progress, potentially limiting the socio-emotional benefits emphasized in primary education (Chang & Hall, 2022).

Recognizing these trade-offs, collaborative and team-teaching models have emerged as hybrid alternatives that combine instructional continuity with specialist expertise. Studies suggest that collaborative deployment can strengthen subject delivery while reducing individual teacher workload. Their effectiveness, however, depends on supportive institutional conditions, including professional development, mentoring, and coherent teacher deployment policies (Barrett et al., 2019).

Overall, the literature offers no consensus on an optimal assignment model. Rather, it identifies a persistent tension between instructional continuity, emphasized by generalist approaches, and subject expertise, emphasized by specialization. Importantly, this evidence is drawn predominantly from high-income education systems. Little is known about how these trade-offs manifest in resource-constrained settings characterized by teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and limited instructional resources. This gap is particularly evident in Malawi, where OCPT remains the dominant deployment model despite limited empirical evidence regarding its implications for teacher effectiveness, well-being, and instructional quality. Consequently, understanding whether the benefits of

continuity outweigh the professional costs of generalist teaching remains a critical policy and research priority in low-resource primary education systems.

Teacher assignment models shape not only instructional delivery but also teachers’ workload, well-being, and long-term professional sustainability. Although OCPT is often justified on grounds of instructional continuity and streamlined classroom management, its effectiveness increasingly depends on whether these benefits outweigh the cumulative demands placed on teachers.

Supporters argue that assigning one teacher to one class strengthens instructional coherence, learner monitoring, and classroom ownership. Conversely, critics contend that responsibility for multiple subjects, assessment, record-keeping, and learners’ socio-emotional needs substantially increases cognitive and administrative workload, elevating risks of stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout (Drevinskaite et al., 2025). From the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) perspective, such outcomes arise when instructional demands exceed available resources, whereas collegial support, professional development, administrative support, and adequate teaching materials can mitigate these effects.

Empirical evidence consistently associates excessive workload with emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, declining job satisfaction, stress, and burnout (Ozoemena et al., 2021; Xhelilaj et al., 2021). Although resilience, self-efficacy, professional experience, and adaptive coping strategies may buffer occupational stress (Donker et al., 2020; J. Wang et al., 2026; Y. Zhang et al., 2019), scholars caution that individual resilience cannot compensate for structurally excessive workloads. Instead, burnout becomes increasingly likely where high demands coincide with inadequate institutional support (Bartosiewicz et al., 2022).

These debates remain insufficiently examined in low-resource education systems. Most evidence originates from better-resourced contexts, leaving limited understanding of how OCPT influences teacher well-being, instructional effectiveness, and workforce sustainability in settings characterized by teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and scarce instructional resources. This gap is particularly pronounced in Malawi, where OCPT remains the dominant deployment model despite limited empirical evidence on its implications for teachers’ professional well-being and the quality of primary education.

A central debate surrounding OCPT concerns whether one teacher can sustain high-quality instruction across multiple subjects. While generalist teaching promotes curricular integration, continuity, and holistic learner development (Chang & Hall, 2022), critics question whether broad instructional responsibilities compromise pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), subject expertise, teacher self-efficacy, and instructional quality. PCK underpins effective teaching by integrating

disciplinary knowledge with knowledge of curriculum, assessment, student learning, and instructional strategies, enabling teachers to anticipate and respond appropriately to learners' conceptual difficulties (Grigaliūnienė et al., 2025; Vargas et al., 2024; Waugh et al., 2025; Zolfaghari et al., 2024).

Although generalist teachers may strengthen cross-disciplinary learning and adapt instruction through sustained knowledge of learners, expanding responsibility across many subjects can dilute expertise and professional confidence. Evidence across subject areas identifies significant variation and gaps in teachers' PCK, underscoring the importance of integrating disciplinary knowledge with appropriate pedagogical preparation (Kang et al., 2018; Padilla et al., 2025; Wittwer et al., 2025). Consequently, proponents of specialization argue that concentrating on fewer subjects enhances PCK, instructional precision, assessment, and curriculum implementation.

These differences are closely linked to teacher self-efficacy, which predicts instructional innovation, persistence, and professional effectiveness. Although pedagogical competence extends beyond subject expertise, effective instruction depends on teachers' ability to enact their PCK responsively in classroom practice, while uneven competence across curriculum areas may constrain instructional depth (Kang et al., 2018; Mazibe, 2026; M. Zhang & Guo, 2024). Evidence indicates that targeted content-focused professional development, subject-specific mentoring, collaborative learning, and frameworks such as TPACK can strengthen teachers' professional competence, confidence, and instructional practice across subject areas (Jiang & Ishak, 2025; McCarthy & Jones, 2026; Yildiz et al., 2025).

Despite these advances, important gaps remain. Existing evidence is dominated by specialist or higher-income contexts, with limited understanding of how teaching multiple subjects influences teachers' competence, self-efficacy, and instructional effectiveness in resource-constrained OCPT systems. This gap is particularly evident in Malawi, where empirical evidence is insufficient to determine whether the benefits of instructional continuity outweigh potential reductions in subject expertise and teaching quality.

Teacher motivation and job satisfaction are fundamental to instructional quality, professional commitment, and workforce sustainability. Increasingly, research recognizes that teacher assignment models influence these outcomes by shaping the balance between professional demands and available resources.

The Job Demands–Resources framework posits that excessive workload, role complexity, and time pressure undermine well-being, whereas collegial support, professional autonomy, recognition, and development opportunities enhance engagement and job satisfaction. Applied to OCPT, the framework highlights a central tension. Proponents argue that sustained relationships with a single class foster intrinsic motivation, professional identity, and satisfaction through continuity

of learner support (Chang & Hall, 2022). Conversely, critics contend that these motivational benefits are often offset by excessive workload, which is consistently associated with emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, weakened professional commitment, and burnout (Ozoemena et al., 2021; Xhelilaj et al., 2021).

Beyond workload, professional identity and organizational commitment mediate teachers' responses to assignment systems. Teachers who perceive themselves as competent and supported are more resilient and committed to the profession (Zhai et al., 2025), whereas unreasonable workloads and inadequate institutional support diminish professional commitment and increase intentions to leave. Consequently, scholars increasingly advocate collaborative teaching, partial subject specialization, and team-teaching as mechanisms for reducing workload while sustaining instructional quality and teacher engagement (Demerouti & Bakker, 2023).

Despite substantial international evidence, little is known about how OCPT shapes teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and professional commitment in low-resource education systems. This gap is particularly evident in Malawi, where teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and limited resources may intensify the motivational consequences of OCPT. Empirical evidence is therefore needed to determine whether the relational benefits of instructional continuity outweigh the occupational demands imposed by the model.

Persistent concerns over workload, instructional quality, teacher confidence, and motivation have shifted attention from the generalist–specialist dichotomy toward context-responsive teacher deployment models. Rather than identifying a universally superior approach, current scholarship emphasizes balancing instructional continuity, subject expertise, teacher well-being, and educational quality.

Subject specialization is associated with stronger content knowledge, improved lesson preparation, and enhanced learner achievement, particularly in mathematics and science (Wittwer et al., 2025). However, critics argue that Specialization may weaken teacher–learner continuity and is often impractical in resource-constrained systems characterized by teacher shortages (Banda, 2025; Banda et al., 2024; Banda & Banda, 2022; Chang & Hall, 2022). Consequently, collaborative teaching and partial specialization have emerged as hybrid alternatives that preserve continuity while strengthening subject expertise and distributing workload. Evidence suggests that such collaborative arrangements can enhance instructional quality, professional collaboration, mentoring, and workload sharing while strengthening the professional networks and shared responsibility that support teachers' development and commitment (Hornýák et al., 2026; Raustøl et al., 2024).

Increasingly, deployment reform is viewed as part of broader system strengthening rather than a structural reallocation of teachers alone. Effective implementation

depends on professional development, mentoring, instructional resources, and supportive leadership (Barrett et al., 2019; Szymańska-Tworek, 2022).

Subject-specific and peer mentoring may further strengthen professional practice by enabling teachers to share disciplinary expertise, engage in observational learning and feedback, and develop their pedagogical capabilities (Hamdan et al., 2024; McCarthy & Jones, 2026). Related evidence on collaborative and hybrid instructional coaching indicates that structured guidance, feedback, goal setting, and reflection can strengthen instructional practice and continuous professional learning (Çakıroğlu & Dada, 2026; Fantone et al., 2023). Instructional coaches and middle-tier leaders can also facilitate pedagogical change by strengthening professional support, trust, shared learning, and distributed leadership within and across schools (Caneva et al., 2023; Tournier et al., 2025). Supportive leadership is equally important for implementing instructional reform, as leadership development, mentoring, and professional learning can strengthen school leaders' capacity to support teachers and facilitate organizational change (Butler & Yendol-Hoppey, 2024; Irby et al., 2023).

Consistent with the JD-R framework, hybrid deployment models may reduce excessive job demands while expanding professional support, shared responsibility, and teacher engagement (Chen & Garcia, 2025; Demerouti & Bakker, 2023). Mentoring and coaching can also serve as important professional resources, supporting teachers' transition into teaching roles and strengthening their professional adjustment and development (Dutton et al., 2024). More broadly, evidence from blended teaching suggests that technology-supported instructional arrangements can contribute to teaching and learning quality when accompanied by appropriate teacher preparation, supervision, and supportive learning environments (Xinfa et al., 2025).

Despite growing international support for collaborative approaches, evidence from low-resource settings remains limited. In Malawi and much of Sub-Saharan Africa, teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and resource constraints continue to hinder the implementation of deployment reform. Moreover, teachers' perspectives on the feasibility and effectiveness of alternative deployment models remain underexplored. Addressing this gap is essential for developing evidence-based teacher deployment policies that improve instructional quality, strengthen teacher well-being, and sustain the primary education workforce.

The study is grounded primarily in the JD-R framework, which explains employee well-being, engagement, and work-related outcomes in terms of the balance between occupational demands and the resources available to manage them (Chen & Garcia, 2025; Demerouti & Bakker, 2023). Applied to the One-Class-Per-Teacher

(OCPT) model, this framework provides a useful basis for understanding why a single deployment arrangement may simultaneously generate professional resources and substantial demands. On the resource side, sustained responsibility for the same class may promote instructional continuity, stronger teacher–learner relationships, greater familiarity with individual learning needs, and more coordinated classroom management. Such relational and instructional resources can potentially support professional engagement, motivation, and satisfaction. However, OCPT also concentrates lesson preparation, assessment and marking, classroom management, administrative responsibilities, and multi-subject instruction within a single teacher. When these demands exceed the professional and institutional resources available to teachers, they may contribute to fatigue, stress, declining motivation, reduced job satisfaction, and burnout (Chen & Garcia, 2025).

The pedagogical dimension of this demand–resource relationship is further illuminated by Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). Effective teaching requires more than disciplinary knowledge; teachers must integrate subject knowledge with an understanding of curriculum, assessment, learners' conceptual difficulties, and appropriate instructional strategies (Grigaliūnienė et al., 2025; Padilla et al., 2025; Vargas et al., 2024; Waugh et al., 2025; Zolfaghari et al., 2024). Under OCPT, sustaining such competence across multiple curriculum areas may increase preparation and cognitive demands and contribute to uneven professional confidence, particularly where subject-specific expertise and support are limited. PCK therefore complements the JD-R framework by explaining how the breadth of instructional responsibility can itself constitute a professional demand and why access to subject-specific support represents an important resource.

Within this framework, professional development, mentoring, instructional coaching, collaborative practice, and supportive leadership constitute resources that may strengthen teachers' capacity to manage these demands. Mentoring can promote professional learning, reflection, confidence, and shared expertise (McCarthy & Jones, 2026; Szymańska-Tworek, 2022), while collaborative and instructional coaching can provide structured feedback, goal setting, reflection, and support for pedagogical improvement (Çakıroğlu & Dada, 2026; Fantone et al., 2023; Tournier et al., 2025). Collaborative professional networks can additionally strengthen relational capital and shared responsibility (Hornýák et al., 2026), while supportive leadership and resourceful school environments may facilitate professional learning, autonomy, job crafting, motivation, and psychological well-being (Hu et al., 2026; C. Wang et al., 2025). Collectively, these resources may strengthen teachers' professional capacity while reducing the extent to which OCPT

demands translate into adverse occupational and instructional experiences.

Accordingly, the conceptual framework moves beyond a binary assumption that either generalist or specialist deployment is inherently superior. Instead, the sustainability of teacher deployment is conceptualized as depending on the balance between instructional continuity and relational resources, on the one hand, and workload, multi-subject pedagogical demands, and available professional support, on the other. Team teaching, subject sharing, and partial specialization therefore represent potentially resource-enhancing hybrid arrangements because they may distribute instructional responsibility while preserving some of the continuity associated with OCPT (Hornýák et al., 2026; Raustøl et al., 2024; Rotar, 2024). The framework consequently links teachers' perceived benefits and challenges of OCPT with workload, professional confidence, instructional effectiveness, motivation, and job satisfaction, while positioning professional support and alternative deployment arrangements as mechanisms to improve the demand–resource balance. In this way, the integrated JD–R–PCK perspective provides the theoretical basis for examining not simply whether OCPT is beneficial or problematic, but under what balance of demands, resources, expertise, and support it can remain professionally and pedagogically sustainable.

Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources framework and the literature on teacher deployment, this study proposes that the One-Class-Per-Teacher (OCPT) model produces both pedagogical benefits and professional costs. Specifically, it is hypothesized that OCPT is positively associated with instructional continuity, teacher–learner familiarity, and the monitoring of learner progress (H1), but also with increased workload and reduced occupational well-being (H2). It is further hypothesized that the multi-subject demands of OCPT are associated with lower professional confidence and weaker perceived instructional effectiveness (H3), as well as reduced teacher motivation and job satisfaction (H4). In addition, teachers are expected to show stronger support for hybrid deployment arrangements, including team teaching, subject sharing, and partial specialization, than for the existing OCPT model (H5). Finally, perceived benefits, perceived challenges, reform preferences, workload category, and the number of subjects taught are hypothesized to significantly predict teachers' overall evaluations of the OCPT system, with perceived challenges expected to exert the strongest influence (H6).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This pragmatic research adopted a convergent mixed-methods research design. Under this design, quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same phase of the study, analyzed separately, and subsequently integrated during interpretation to provide

a comprehensive understanding of teachers' experiences with the OCPT system.

The quantitative component assessed primary school teachers' perceptions regarding the benefits, challenges, professional consequences, and improvement strategies associated with OCPT. The qualitative component explored how teachers experienced the system in their everyday professional practice, thereby providing explanatory depth to the quantitative findings.

The convergent design was considered appropriate because the study addressed a multifaceted educational issue involving both measurable perceptions and complex professional experiences that could not be adequately captured through a single methodological approach.

2.2 Study Population and Sample Size

For the quantitative phase, teachers were selected using simple random sampling to ensure that every eligible teacher had an equal probability of participation, thereby minimizing selection bias and enhancing sample representativeness. Purposive sampling was used to select information-rich participants who could provide detailed insights into the realities of implementing the OCPT system. Selection criteria included years of teaching experience, grade level taught, and willingness to participate in an in-depth interview.

Following the required research and administrative approvals, eligible primary schools within the study area were identified and contacted through the relevant education authorities and school leadership. Headteachers facilitated access to eligible teachers, after which the researchers approached potential participants directly and explained the purpose and procedures of the study. Teachers were eligible to participate if they were employed in the selected primary schools and had direct experience with the OCPT arrangement. Before questionnaire administration, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality of their responses, and their right to decline or withdraw without penalty. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

The qualitative sample comprised seven teachers. Qualitative sampling adequacy was determined through the principle of information power rather than statistical representativeness. Data collection ceased when sufficient depth and variation had been achieved to address the research objectives, and no substantially new insights emerged from subsequent interviews.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed from the literature on teacher assignment models, teacher workload, teacher self-efficacy, instructional effectiveness, and teacher motivation.

The questionnaire included demographic information, perceived benefits and challenges of OCPT, effects on professional confidence, motivation, and job satisfaction, and suggested reforms and improvement

strategies. Most items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The semi-structured interview guide explored teachers' experiences implementing OCPT, perceived educational benefits, workload and classroom management challenges, professional confidence and motivation, instructional effectiveness, and preferred alternatives and policy recommendations. The semi-structured format ensured consistency across interviews while allowing deeper probing of emerging issues.

2.4 Instrument Validity and Reliability

The structured questionnaire was developed specifically for this study through a review of theoretical and empirical literature on teacher assignment models, teacher workload and occupational well-being, teacher self-efficacy and professional confidence, instructional effectiveness, teacher motivation and job satisfaction, and alternative teacher-deployment arrangements (Ozoemena et al., 2021). Construct selection was further guided by the study objectives and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework. From this perspective, OCPT may simultaneously provide instructional resources, including continuity of instruction and sustained teacher–learner relationships, while generating job demands associated with multi-subject teaching, lesson preparation, assessment, classroom management, and administrative responsibilities. Accordingly, the questionnaire captured perceived benefits of OCPT, perceived challenges associated with its implementation, and preferences for reform-oriented deployment strategies. Additional questions examined workload, professional confidence, motivation, job satisfaction, and teaching responsibilities.

Content validity was addressed through expert review by three specialists in educational research, teacher education, and educational management. The reviewers examined the questionnaire with particular attention to its relevance, clarity, comprehensiveness, and alignment with the study objectives and the conceptual domains under investigation. This process was intended to establish whether the questionnaire adequately represented the substantive dimensions of teachers' experiences with OCPT.

Prior to the main data collection, the questionnaire was pilot-tested among 10 teachers from schools not included in the main study. The pilot exercise was used to assess item clarity and comprehensibility, the practical length of the questionnaire, and the feasibility of the administration procedures. Because detailed item-level psychometric statistics from the pilot exercise were not available for the present analysis, the pilot study is treated as a procedural and content-refinement stage rather than as an independent psychometric validation of the instrument.

Construct validity and internal consistency were subsequently examined using data obtained from the main survey sample. The suitability of the item correlation matrix for exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was assessed using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. EFA was then employed to examine the questionnaire's underlying dimensional structure and determine the extent to which the observed items corresponded to the theoretically anticipated domains. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for the identified subscales and the overall instrument.

Given that the questionnaire was developed for an exploratory, context-specific investigation rather than as an established, standardized psychometric scale, the resulting validity and reliability evidence was interpreted cautiously. The factor structure and internal-consistency coefficients are therefore regarded as preliminary evidence of the instrument's measurement properties in the present study population rather than definitive evidence of scale validation. Particular caution was applied to subscales exhibiting comparatively low internal consistency, and findings derived from these constructs were interpreted in conjunction with item-level responses and qualitative interview evidence.

2.5 Data Collection Procedures

All protocols were conducted in line with the Helsinki Code, and the study was cleared by the National Commission for Science and Technology prior to data collection. Data collection was conducted from June 10 to October 28, 2024. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained. Questionnaires were administered personally to participating teachers. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately, where possible, or retrieved on agreed dates.

A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed to eligible primary school teachers, of which 451 were completed and usable, yielding a response rate of 90.2%. The high response rate was facilitated by the personal administration of the questionnaires and the use of agreed collection arrangements, whereby completed questionnaires were collected immediately where possible or retrieved on agreed dates. These procedures enabled timely follow-up while allowing participants sufficient time to complete the questionnaire.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face at locations convenient to participants. Interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. All interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve the integrity of participants' accounts.

2.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 27. First, descriptive statistics, including

frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize teachers' perceptions of the OCPT system. Second, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to examine the underlying dimensions of teachers' perceptions and to assess construct validity. Third, inferential analyses including independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and correlation analysis were performed where appropriate to examine differences in perceptions across demographic groups and teaching characteristics. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .05$.

Interview transcripts were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase procedure. Analysis began with repeated reading of the verbatim transcripts to achieve familiarization with the data, followed by systematic generation of initial codes. Coding combined deductive and inductive approaches: the research objectives and the JD-R framework informed conceptually relevant deductive codes, while inductive coding yielded unanticipated insights directly from participants' narratives. Related codes were then compared and clustered according to conceptual similarity and recurring patterns of meaning. More specific patterns were organized into provisional sub-themes, which were subsequently grouped within broader candidate themes representing the principal dimensions of teachers' experiences with OCPT. The candidate themes and sub-themes were iteratively reviewed against both the coded extracts and the complete transcripts to assess coherence, distinctiveness, and consistency with participants' accounts. Overlapping categories were merged where appropriate, weakly supported patterns were reconsidered, and the final themes and sub-themes were refined, defined, and named before preparation of the analytical account.

Integration of the quantitative and qualitative strands occurred during interpretation through triangulation and complementarity, allowing areas of convergence, elaboration, and divergence to be identified.

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with participants and verbatim transcription of interviews. Transferability was enhanced through detailed description of the study context and participant characteristics. Dependability was strengthened through maintenance of an audit trail documenting methodological and analytical decisions throughout the research process. Confirmability was supported through reflexive memo writing and preservation of the original interview records, helping to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

3.1.1 Respondent Characteristics

A total of 451 primary school teachers participated in the study. Of these, 334 (74.1%) were male, and 117 (25.9%) were female. Regarding professional position, the majority were classroom teachers (59.2%), followed by deputy headteachers (19.7%), section heads (19.1%), and headteachers (2.0%). Most respondents held teaching certificates (89.4%), while 10.6% held diplomas, mostly in fields other than education.

In terms of teaching experience, 41.7% had less than five years of teaching experience, 41.0% had between six and ten years, 15.3% had between eleven and fifteen years, and 2.0% had more than sixteen years of service. The largest proportion of respondents taught Standard 1 (22.6%), followed by Standard 6 (17.3%), Standard 7 (14.2%), Standards 3 and 5 (13.3% each), Standard 2 (12.4%), Standard 4 (5.8%), and Standard 8 (1.1%). Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

Variable	Category	(n)	(%)
Gender	Male	334	74.1
	Female	117	25.9
Professional Position	Classroom Teacher	267	59.2
	Deputy Headteacher	89	19.7
	Section Head	86	19.1
	Headteacher	9	2.0
Professional Qualification	Certificate	403	89.4
	Diploma and Above	48	10.6
Teaching Experience	<5 years	188	41.7
	6–10 years	185	41.0
	11–15 years	69	15.3
	≥16 years	9	2.0

Slightly over half (54.3%) taught across the full primary cycle (Standards 1–8), while 31.7% taught Standards 1–5 and 14.0% taught Standards 1–6. Furthermore, 57.6% taught 4–5 subjects, while 25.2% taught six or more. Workload perceptions were overwhelmingly negative, with 40.6% describing their workload as heavy and 33.0% as very heavy. Only 26.4% considered their workload manageable.

3.1.2 Reliability and Construct Validity Assessment

Before the substantive findings were examined, the questionnaire's measurement properties were assessed using exploratory factor analysis and internal consistency. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .737, exceeding the commonly applied minimum criterion of .60 and indicating that the pattern of correlations among the questionnaire items was sufficiently adequate for exploratory factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity was also statistically significant, $\chi^2(78) = 761.85$, $p < .001$, indicating that the correlation matrix differed significantly from an identity matrix and was therefore suitable for factor extraction.

The exploratory factor analysis produced a three-factor solution that broadly corresponded to the conceptual domains of perceived benefits, perceived challenges, and reform solutions. Collectively, the three factors explained 47.9% of the total variance. The perceived-benefits factor had an eigenvalue of 2.41 and explained 18.5% of the variance, the perceived-challenges factor had an eigenvalue of 2.08 and explained 16.0%, and the reform-solutions factor had an eigenvalue of 1.74 and explained a further 13.4%. Factor loadings ranged from .449 to .605 across the three dimensions. These results provide preliminary evidence that the questionnaire items reflect a multidimensional structure

broadly consistent with the study's conceptual organization. Nevertheless, the moderate factor loadings and proportion of explained variance indicate that the resulting structure should be interpreted as exploratory rather than as definitive confirmation of the constructs.

Internal-consistency analysis showed variation across the three subscales. Cronbach's alpha was .69 for perceived benefits, .54 for perceived challenges, and .62 for reform solutions, while the overall 13-item instrument yielded an alpha coefficient of .71. Thus, the perceived-benefits subscale approached the conventional .70 benchmark. In contrast, the perceived-challenges and reform-solutions subscales demonstrated comparatively lower internal consistency. These coefficients suggest that the items within some domains may capture heterogeneous but conceptually related aspects of teachers' experiences with OCPT rather than highly homogeneous manifestations of a single latent construct.

The reliability results consequently require appropriate caution in interpreting composite scores, particularly for the perceived-challenges and reform-solutions subscales. The present study therefore does not treat these subscales as fully validated standardized psychometric measures. Rather, they are used as exploratory indicators of teachers' perceptions within the specific context investigated. To reduce reliance on any single form of measurement evidence, the composite scores were interpreted alongside item-level descriptive results and qualitative interview findings. This approach is consistent with the study's mixed-methods orientation, in which quantitative patterns and teachers' qualitative accounts are used in complementary ways to develop a more comprehensive interpretation of experiences with the OCPT model.

Table 2. Reliability and Construct Validity Assessment

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's α	KMO	Bartlett's χ^2	p -value	Interpretation
Perceived Benefits	5	.69	.737	761.85	< .001	Borderline internal consistency
Perceived Challenges	4	.54	.737	761.85	< .001	Low internal consistency; interpret cautiously
Reform Solutions	4	.62	.737	761.85	< .001	Modest internal consistency
Overall Instrument	13	.71	.737	761.85	< .001	Adequate overall internal consistency

Note. The KMO statistic and Bartlett's test of sphericity assess the suitability of the overall item correlation matrix for exploratory factor analysis. They should therefore be interpreted at the instrument level rather than as separate tests of the reliability of individual subscales. Cronbach's alpha coefficients are reported as

indicators of internal consistency. Given the comparatively low coefficients for some subscales, particularly perceived challenges, the corresponding composite scores are interpreted cautiously and are not presented as fully validated standardized measures

Table 3. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

Factor	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)	Loading Range
Benefits	2.41	18.5	.521–.584
Challenges	2.08	16.0	.453–.530
Solutions	1.74	13.4	.449–.605
Total	—	47.9	—

Note. The three-factor solution is interpreted as preliminary evidence of the questionnaire's dimensional structure. Given the exploratory nature of the instrument and the moderate factor loadings, the

results should not be interpreted as definitive confirmation of construct validity.

3.1.3 Descriptive Statistics of Major Study Constructs

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Major Study Constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Interpretation
Perceived Benefits	2.88	0.87	1.00	5.00	Moderate
Perceived Challenges	4.27	0.64	1.00	5.00	Very High
Reform Solutions	3.23	0.70	1.00	5.00	Moderate–High
Overall Perception of OCPT	4.01	0.81	1.00	5.00	Predominantly Negative

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for the major study constructs. Perceived challenges recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.64$), indicating strong agreement that the OCPT practice creates substantial professional difficulties. In contrast, perceived benefits recorded only a moderate mean score ($M = 2.88$, $SD =$

0.87), suggesting limited endorsement of the system's advantages. Support for reform strategies was moderately high ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.70$), indicating considerable teacher support for alternative deployment arrangements.

Table 5. Selected Item-Level Results

Item	Mean	SD	Agreement (%)
OCPT helps me know learners better	3.64	1.03	66.7
OCPT improves teaching convenience	2.31	1.12	20.4
OCPT improves job satisfaction	2.28	1.07	20.2
OCPT increases workload burden	4.61	0.72	95.6
OCPT affects lesson preparation negatively	4.58	0.76	95.6
More than one teacher should handle a class	4.42	0.81	89.8
Teachers should teach fewer subjects	4.33	0.84	84.0

3.1.4 Perceived Benefits of the OCPT Practice

Teachers reported only moderate support for the educational benefits of the OCPT practice. The overall benefits scale recorded a mean score of 2.88 ($SD = 0.87$), indicating relatively weak endorsement of the system's advantages. Among the perceived benefits, the strongest agreement was observed for the statement that the system enables teachers to know learners better across subjects ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.03$), with 66.7% of respondents agreeing. In contrast, only 20.4% agreed that the system improves teaching convenience, while 20.2% believed it enhances professional satisfaction.

The qualitative findings confirmed this interpretation. Teachers often mentioned that ongoing interaction helped them determine pupils' strengths, weaknesses, and learning needs in the various subjects. Most participants, however, highlighted that these benefits were not compensated for the high workload and teaching pressures. Some participants reported that a lack of familiarity with learners did not negatively affect teaching, but that familiarity did affect monitoring.

3.1.5 Workload Burden and Occupational Well-being

Overall, the highest mean score was for the challenge scale ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.64$), indicating strong agreement

that the OCPT system poses significant professional challenges.

Across most workload questions, over 84% of students agreed, and for two challenge indicators, more than 95% agreed. The results show almost universal agreement among responses that the system is imposing excessive instructional and administrative demands.

The results of the analysis of variance showed significant differences in challenge perceptions across the different workload categories, $F(2, 448) = 3.29$, $p = .038$. The most difficult workload scores were assigned by teachers who reported very heavy workloads ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.62$), followed by heavy ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.60$) and manageable ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.72$).

The qualitative findings reinforced these patterns, revealing that OCPT teachers experienced considerable physical, cognitive, and emotional strain. Many teachers described the burden of preparing lessons across multiple subjects, developing instructional materials, and completing extensive marking within limited time. One teacher explained:

“Teaching many subjects in one class means I have to prepare different lessons every day. Sometimes I spend the whole evening preparing because each subject requires different materials and approaches.”

Another participant highlighted the cumulative effect of these responsibilities on personal well-being:

“By the time I leave school, I am already exhausted. You teach, mark books, prepare tomorrow’s lessons, and still have administrative work waiting. It becomes difficult to maintain the same energy every day.”

Teachers also emphasized that large class sizes intensified workload pressures by increasing classroom management difficulties and limiting individualized learner support. As one respondent noted:

“When you have a large class, and you are teaching all subjects, it is not easy to know every learner’s challenges. Marking alone can take several days, especially when you want to provide meaningful feedback.”

Overall, the qualitative evidence suggests that while OCPT provides instructional continuity, it simultaneously creates significant workload pressures that may undermine teacher well-being, motivation, and sustained instructional effectiveness.

3.1.6 Professional Confidence and Instructional Effectiveness

The findings indicate that while OCPT teachers demonstrated strong commitment to their responsibilities, the model presents challenges to teachers’ self-confidence and perceived instructional effectiveness. Teachers reported varying levels of confidence across subjects, largely influenced by their

academic backgrounds, personal interests, and familiarity with specific content areas. Subjects perceived as difficult or outside teachers’ areas of strength were associated with lower confidence and less effective delivery.

Qualitative accounts revealed that teaching multiple subjects often limited preparation time and affected the depth of instruction. One teacher explained:

“There are subjects where I feel very confident because I understand the content well. However, for some topics, especially those I did not specialize in, I have to spend much more time preparing before I can teach.”

Another participant noted that OCPT could result in differences in instructional quality across subjects:

“When you are responsible for all subjects, you cannot give equal attention to everything. Some subjects receive more focus because you are more comfortable with them, while others may not be covered as deeply as they should.”

Teachers also linked reduced confidence to limited opportunities for professional development and subject-specific support. As one respondent stated:

“The challenge is not that teachers do not want to teach well; it is that teaching every subject requires knowledge and skills in all areas. Without continuous support, some subjects become difficult to teach effectively.”

Overall, the findings suggest that OCPT promotes continuity in learner–teacher relationships but may lead to uneven curriculum implementation due to differences in teachers’ subject competence and confidence. The requirement to deliver multiple subjects without adequate preparation time, specialist support, or targeted professional development may constrain instructional effectiveness.

3.1.7 Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction

The findings demonstrate predominantly negative perceptions of the OCPT model’s influence on teacher motivation and job satisfaction. Most respondents (357; 79.2%) indicated that the system affected them negatively, compared with 60 (13.3%) who perceived positive effects and 34 (7.5%) who reported no noticeable impact. These results suggest that the demands associated with multi-subject teaching may undermine teachers’ professional enthusiasm and overall job satisfaction.

Qualitative findings provided deeper explanations for these perceptions. Teachers frequently described OCPT as exhausting, stressful, and discouraging, with many linking reduced motivation to the cumulative demands of lesson preparation, teaching, assessment, and classroom management. One participant explained:

“At first, you are motivated because you want to help learners, but with time the workload becomes too much.

Preparing many subjects every day takes away the excitement you had for teaching.”

Another teacher highlighted the effect of continuous pressure on professional satisfaction:

“The challenge is not teaching itself; it is the amount of work that comes with teaching all subjects. You finish one task, and immediately another one is waiting. Sometimes you feel tired before the day even begins.”

Some participants also associated OCPT with declining morale among teachers, particularly where workload was not matched by adequate support. As one respondent noted:

“Many teachers are becoming discouraged because they feel they are carrying too many responsibilities without enough assistance. It affects how we feel about our work.”

Overall, the findings suggest that although OCPT enables continuity of instruction, its high workload demands may negatively influence teacher motivation, morale, and job satisfaction. Without adequate workload management, professional support, and recognition, the model risks weakening teacher commitment and long-term retention within the profession.

3.1.8 Predictors of Overall Perceptions of the OCPT System

To identify factors influencing teachers’ overall perceptions of the OCPT practice, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The analysis examined whether perceived benefits, perceived challenges, reform preferences, workload category, and number of subjects taught significantly predicted teachers’ overall evaluation of the OCPT system (Table 6).

Table 6. Multiple Regression Predicting Overall Perception of the OCPT System
Dependent Variable: Overall Perception of OCPT

Predictor	β	SE	t	p-value
Perceived Benefits	-0.316	0.041	-6.91	< .001
Perceived Challenges	0.374	0.037	8.42	< .001
Reform Solutions	-0.088	0.044	-2.03	.043
Workload Category	0.054	0.039	1.26	.209
Number of Subjects Taught	0.032	0.036	0.88	.382

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(8, 442) = 14.74$, $p < .001$, explaining 21.1% of the variance in teachers’ overall perceptions of the OCPT system ($R^2 = .211$). As shown in Table 6, perceived challenges emerged as the strongest predictor of negative evaluations of the system ($\beta = .374$, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that teachers’ experiences of workload burden, fatigue, and instructional strain substantially shaped their overall assessment of the OCPT practice.

Conversely, perceived benefits significantly predicted more favorable evaluations ($\beta = -.316$, $p < .001$), indicating that teachers who recognized advantages such as learner familiarity and instructional continuity were less likely to view the system negatively. Support for reform solutions also exhibited a small but statistically significant effect ($\beta = -.088$, $p = .043$), suggesting that teachers who strongly supported alternative deployment arrangements tended to hold more critical views of the current system.

Neither workload category ($\beta = .054$, $p = .209$) nor number of subjects taught ($\beta = .032$, $p = .382$) emerged as significant predictors after controlling for perceived benefits, challenges, and reform preferences. This suggests that teachers’ overall evaluations were influenced less by objective workload indicators and more by their experiences and interpretations of the system’s consequences in their professional practice.

Collectively, these findings indicate that the perceived costs and benefits of the OCPT system are more important determinants of teacher attitudes than demographic or workload characteristics alone.

3.1.9 Teacher-Recommended Reform Strategies

The solutions scale produced a moderate overall mean score of 3.23 ($SD = 0.70$), indicating considerable support for reforming current teacher assignment practices. Agreement was particularly high for recommendations to assign multiple teachers to a single class and to reduce the number of subjects handled by individual teachers. Agreement levels reached 84.0% and 89.8%, respectively, demonstrating strong consensus regarding the need for alternative deployment arrangements.

The qualitative findings strongly reinforced these patterns, although participants did not express entirely uniform preferences regarding the form that reform should take: “Specialization would be good, but with the shortage of teachers in our schools it may be difficult to have a different teacher for every subject. It would be more practical for one teacher to handle three or four subjects and share the others with another teacher.” Most participants advocated team teaching, subject sharing, or partial specialization. A notable divergence concerned the extent of Specialization: while some

teachers favored full subject specialization, others considered this impractical given Malawi's teacher shortages and instead preferred a hybrid model in which teachers receive broad training but teach a smaller, more manageable number of subjects. Despite this difference, a recurring recommendation was that no teacher should teach more than three to five subjects and that each class should be assigned at least two teachers.

A recurring recommendation was that no teacher should teach more than three to five subjects and that each class should be assigned at least two teachers.

The quantitative and qualitative findings converged in showing teachers' preference for alternative deployment arrangements, particularly team teaching, subject sharing, and partial specialization. Teachers expressed support for arrangements that would distribute

instructional responsibilities while retaining continuity in teacher–learner relationships. The qualitative findings further indicated that participants did not uniformly advocate complete subject specialization; rather, they generally favored arrangements combining continuity with shared teaching responsibilities and a more manageable allocation of subjects.

3.1.10 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Survey results showed high challenge scores, low benefit scores, and overwhelmingly negative evaluations of the system. Interview findings explained these patterns by revealing how excessive workload, preparation demands, marking burdens, reduced confidence in some subjects, and declining motivation shape teachers' daily experiences. See Table 7.

Table 7. Mixed-Methods Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative Finding	Supporting Qualitative Theme	Representative Evidence	Integrated Interpretation
Benefits Mean = 2.88	Learner familiarity and continuity	Teachers reported knowing learners' strengths and weaknesses across subjects.	OCPT promotes relational continuity but only modest professional benefits
Challenges Mean = 4.27	Fatigue, workload, marking burden	Teachers described exhaustion, excessive lesson preparation, and administrative burden.	Workload constitutes the dominant consequence of OCPT.
79.2% reported negative effects	Demotivation and reduced satisfaction	Teachers repeatedly described the system as tiring and discouraging	Professional well-being is negatively affected
High agreement for workload items (>95%)	Burnout and instructional strain	Participants reported difficulty teaching all subjects effectively	Excessive workload compromises instructional effectiveness
89.8% support multiple teachers per class	Team teaching preference	Participants advocated for two or three teachers per class	Teachers strongly favor collaborative deployment models
84.0% support fewer subjects	Partial Specialization	Teachers preferred teaching three to five subjects	Reform preferences centre on workload reduction and subject expertise

Integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings revealed three clear patterns. First, there was strong convergence: interview accounts corroborated the survey evidence on workload burden, reduced motivation, uneven professional confidence, instructional strain, and support for alternative deployment arrangements. Second, the qualitative findings complemented the quantitative findings by explaining how these patterns were experienced in practice, particularly through intensive lesson preparation, marking demands, limited subject-specific confidence, and insufficient professional support. Third, some divergence emerged in teachers' preferred reform approach: while some participants favored full subject specialization, others considered a hybrid arrangement

more feasible given Malawi's teacher shortages. Overall, the qualitative evidence both confirmed and extended the quantitative findings, producing a more nuanced interpretation of teachers' experiences with OCPT.

To provide a more systematic account of the qualitative findings, Table 7 synthesizes the main themes and sub-themes derived from the semi-structured interviews and presents representative verbatim quotations illustrating teachers' experiences of OCPT. The themes capture interconnected concerns relating to workload and occupational well-being, professional confidence and instructional effectiveness, and motivation and job satisfaction. Where participants expressed differing or qualified views, particularly regarding alternative

teacher-deployment arrangements, these perspectives are reported in the accompanying narrative to preserve

variation in teachers' experiences rather than presenting the findings as uniform.

Table 8. Main Qualitative Themes, Sub-themes, and Representative Participant Quotations

Main theme	Sub-theme	Representative participant quotation (verbatim)
Workload Burden and Occupational Well-being	Multi-subject lesson preparation and preparation demands	"Teaching many subjects in one class means I have to prepare different lessons every day. Sometimes I spend the whole evening preparing because each subject requires different materials and approaches."
Workload Burden and Occupational Well-being	Cumulative workload and physical exhaustion	"By the time I leave school, I am already exhausted. You teach, mark books, prepare tomorrow's lessons, and still have administrative work waiting. It becomes difficult to maintain the same energy every day."
Workload Burden and Occupational Well-being	Large classes, marking burden, and constrained individual learner support	"When you have a large class, and you are teaching all subjects, it is not easy to know every learner's challenges. Marking alone can take several days, especially when you want to provide meaningful feedback."
Professional Confidence and Instructional Effectiveness	Uneven subject confidence and specialization	"There are subjects where I feel very confident because I understand the content well. However, for some topics, especially those I did not specialize in, I have to spend much more time preparing before I can teach."
Professional Confidence and Instructional Effectiveness	Unequal instructional attention and depth across subjects	"When you are responsible for all subjects, you cannot give equal attention to everything. Some subjects receive more focus because you are more comfortable with them, while others may not be covered as deeply as they should."
Professional Confidence and Instructional Effectiveness	Need for continuous professional and subject-specific support	"The challenge is not that teachers do not want to teach well; it is that teaching every subject requires knowledge and skills in all areas. Without continuous support, some subjects become difficult to teach effectively." "Specialization would be good, but with the shortage of teachers in our schools, it may be difficult to have a different teacher for every subject. It would be more practical for one teacher to handle three or four subjects and share the others with another teacher."
Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction	Erosion of motivation through sustained workload	"At first, you are motivated because you want to help learners, but with time the workload becomes too much. Preparing many subjects every day takes away the excitement you had for teaching."
Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction	Continuous task pressure and reduced professional satisfaction	"The challenge is not teaching itself; it is the amount of work that comes with teaching all subjects. You finish one task, and immediately another one is waiting. Sometimes you feel tired before the day even begins."
Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction	Inadequate support and declining teacher morale	"Many teachers are becoming discouraged because they feel they are carrying too many responsibilities without enough assistance. It affects how we feel about our work."

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 OCPT Perceived Benefits

The findings present a qualified rather than uniformly negative assessment of OCPT. Teachers recognized its relational and pedagogical value, particularly the continuity created by sustained responsibility for the same learners and the resulting familiarity with their strengths, difficulties, and learning needs. This supports

earlier arguments that generalist primary teaching can strengthen teacher–learner relationships, instructional continuity, and holistic monitoring of learners (Chang & Hall, 2022). However, the moderate overall evaluation of these benefits indicates that relational continuity alone does not translate into an equally positive professional or instructional experience. In this respect, the findings are consistent with critiques suggesting that the advantages of generalist teaching may be

constrained when teachers simultaneously carry broad curricular and professional responsibilities (Barrett et al., 2019; Poulter & Cook, 2022).

This tension is particularly important in the Malawian context. Whereas much of the existing literature has considered generalist teaching in comparatively better-resourced systems, OCPT operates here alongside teacher shortages, large classes, and limited instructional resources. The findings therefore suggest that the effectiveness of generalist deployment is contingent on the resources available to sustain it. From the JD-R framework, instructional continuity and sustained teacher–learner relationships are potential job resources. However, their benefits may be insufficient when the demands associated with multi-subject teaching substantially exceed teachers’ available professional and institutional resources (Demerouti & Bakker, 2023). OCPT should therefore not be understood as inherently beneficial or detrimental; rather, its consequences appear to depend on the balance between the relational resources it creates and the occupational demands it imposes.

3.2.2 Professional Consequences of the OCPT Practice

The dominant finding is that the professional demands associated with OCPT substantially outweigh its perceived relational benefits. Quantitative and qualitative evidence converged around excessive lesson preparation, assessment and marking, classroom administration, fatigue, reduced motivation, and concerns about teaching effectively across multiple subjects. This pattern accords with international evidence linking excessive teacher workload with emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, declining job satisfaction, and burnout (Ozoemena et al., 2021; Xhelilaj et al., 2021). The Malawian evidence, however, adds an important dimension: workload under OCPT appears to be not only quantitative but also cognitively and pedagogically complex. Teachers are required to move repeatedly across disciplinary domains while simultaneously managing assessment, learner support, and administrative responsibilities.

This complexity helps explain the reported variation in professional confidence and perceived instructional effectiveness. Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) requires teachers to integrate disciplinary understanding with knowledge of curriculum, assessment, learner difficulties, and appropriate instructional strategies (Grigaliūnienė et al., 2025; Vargas et al., 2024; Waugh et al., 2025; Zolfaghari et al., 2024). Requiring individual teachers to sustain such competence across a broad curriculum may therefore stretch the depth with which PCK can be enacted in every subject. The present findings are consistent with research showing variation in teachers’ PCK across subject areas and with evidence that Specialization can strengthen instructional precision and subject-specific practice (Kang et al., 2018; Padilla et al., 2025). At the same time, the findings do not imply

that generalist teachers are intrinsically ineffective. Rather, they suggest that broad teaching assignments become problematic when teachers lack sufficient content-focused professional development, mentoring, collaborative support, and instructional resources. Evidence that such professional supports can strengthen teachers’ competence and enacted PCK reinforces this interpretation (Jiang & Ishak, 2025; McCarthy & Jones, 2026; Yildiz et al., 2025).

The effects on motivation and job satisfaction reveal the same imbalance. Although sustained relationships with learners may provide professional meaning and fulfilment (Chang & Hall, 2022), these resources did not appear sufficient to offset the cumulative demands experienced by teachers. This finding aligns with research linking excessive workload and inadequate institutional support to emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, weakened professional commitment, and disengagement (Ozoemena et al., 2021). It also sharpens the JD-R interpretation of OCPT: the problem is not simply the presence of demanding work, but a persistent imbalance between demands and compensating resources. This interpretation is reinforced by the regression results, which show that perceived challenges were more influential on teachers’ overall evaluations than workload category or the number of subjects taught. Thus, teachers’ responses appear to reflect how multiple demands accumulate and are experienced within their working environment rather than workload volume alone.

Importantly, teachers’ strong preference for team teaching, subject sharing, and partial specialization points toward rebalancing this demand–resource relationship rather than simply abandoning instructional continuity. This preference is consistent with evidence that collaborative arrangements can distribute workload, strengthen subject expertise, facilitate professional learning, and build shared responsibility (Hornýák et al., 2026; Raustøl et al., 2024; Rotar, 2024). It also qualifies arguments favoring complete specialization: while Specialization may strengthen content knowledge and instructional precision (Wittwer et al., 2025), complete fragmentation of classroom responsibility may weaken continuity and may be impractical where teacher shortages persist (Banda et al., 2024; Banda & Banda, 2023). The findings therefore support a context-responsive middle position in which continuity is retained while instructional responsibility is shared across a manageable range of subjects.

Such reform, however, cannot be reduced to reallocating subjects among teachers. Collaborative deployment is more likely to be sustainable when accompanied by professional development, subject-specific and peer mentoring, instructional coaching, and supportive leadership (Çakıroğlu & Dada, 2026; Caneva et al., 2023; Hamdan et al., 2024; McCarthy & Jones, 2026; Szymańska-Tworek, 2022; Tournier et al., 2025). From a JD-R perspective, these mechanisms constitute

professional resources that can offset instructional demands through shared expertise, feedback, collegial support, and distributed responsibility (Dutton et al., 2024). The broader implication is that teacher-deployment reform in resource-constrained systems should be understood as a strategy for reorganizing both job demands and professional resources, rather than merely changing the number of teachers assigned to a class.

3.2.2 Implications

The findings have important implications for teacher deployment policy and school management in resource-constrained primary education systems. The strong workload burden, uneven confidence across subjects, and substantial support for team teaching and partial specialization suggest that teacher deployment should consider not only staffing numbers but also the distribution of instructional demands and professional resources. In Malawi, a gradual shift toward context-sensitive hybrid arrangements may therefore be more feasible than either maintaining OCPT unchanged or adopting complete subject specialization. Schools could allocate teachers across selected subject clusters based on competence, while retaining sufficient continuity for learner monitoring and pastoral support. Such arrangements should be accompanied by targeted professional development, subject-specific mentoring, collaborative planning, and supportive instructional leadership. From a JD-R perspective, these measures may simultaneously reduce excessive demands and strengthen professional resources, thereby supporting teacher well-being and instructional effectiveness.

3.2.4 Research Contribution

This study contributes to the teacher-deployment literature in three respects. First, it provides context-specific evidence from Malawi, extending the literature, which is dominated by better-resourced education systems, to a setting characterized by teacher shortages, large classes, and constrained instructional resources. Second, it applies the JD-R framework to teacher deployment, showing how OCPT can simultaneously provide relational resources, particularly instructional continuity and learner familiarity, while generating substantial demands through multi-subject teaching, preparation, assessment, and administrative responsibilities. Third, the mixed-methods findings move the generalist–specialist debate beyond a binary choice by demonstrating teachers’ preference for hybrid arrangements that combine continuity with shared workload and manageable subject specialization. The study therefore contributes an empirically grounded perspective on teacher deployment as both a pedagogical and workforce-sustainability issue.

3.2.5 Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study primarily examined teachers’ perceptions and self-reported experiences; consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as direct evidence of the effects of OCPT on

learner achievement or objectively measured instructional quality. Second, the cross-sectional design captures teachers’ experiences at one point in time and does not establish causal relationships between deployment arrangements and professional outcomes. Third, although the questionnaire demonstrated adequate overall internal consistency, some subscales showed comparatively low reliability; findings based on these constructs should therefore be interpreted cautiously and in conjunction with the item-level and qualitative evidence. Fourth, the qualitative component involved seven participants and was intended to provide explanatory depth rather than statistical representation. Finally, the study was conducted within the Malawian primary education context, and differences in staffing, resources, curriculum organization, and teacher preparation may limit direct generalization to other education systems.

3.2.6 Suggestions

Future research should examine OCPT and alternative teacher-deployment models using longitudinal and comparative designs that can assess how different arrangements influence teachers and learners over time. Studies incorporating objective indicators of learner achievement, classroom observation, instructional quality, teacher absenteeism, and retention would complement the perception-based evidence reported here. Comparative evaluations of OCPT, team teaching, subject sharing, and partial specialization would be particularly valuable for determining whether hybrid arrangements produce measurable improvements in workload, teacher well-being, subject-specific instructional quality, and learner outcomes. Further research should also develop and validate context-sensitive measures of teachers’ experiences with deployment models and investigate how school characteristics, class size, teacher experience, subject competence, and resource availability condition the effectiveness of alternative deployment arrangements.

4. CONCLUSION

The study analyzed primary school teachers’ perceptions of OCPT practice and its impact on workload, professional confidence, motivation, instructional efficiency, and teacher deployment reform. The results indicate that the pedagogical gains of the OCPT model outweigh its professional costs, because it yields a small but significant pedagogical advantage by making teachers more familiar with their learners and facilitating continuity of learning, while also incurring a high professional cost. The teachers strongly felt that the system has led to excessive workload, fatigue, loss of confidence in some subjects, loss of motivation and concerns about instructional quality.

In the context of the JD-R model, the results indicate that the OCPT model is a high-demand deployment, with instructional tasks often exceeding professional resources. This tension negatively affects teachers’ well-being and perceived effectiveness in teaching.

Importantly, the study shows that teachers are not just rejecting the OCPT model; they are promoting alternative deployment schemes that maintain continuity, reduce workload and enhance subject expertise.

The high level of support for team teaching, subject sharing, and partial specialization suggests that the future of teacher deployment within resource-poor primary education systems may be hybrid systems that combine relational continuity with manageable levels of Specialization. This study provides empirical evidence from Malawi to international discussions on teacher deployment, teaching quality and the sustainability of the teaching workforce. It emphasizes the need for policy adjustments to simultaneously improve teachers' well-being, teaching effectiveness and teaching outcomes.

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6. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

LO, conceptualized the study, conducted data analysis, edited the manuscript, and wrote the final draft.

DK, managed the project, supervised the study, and contributed to visualization

MK, collected the data, wrote the first draft, and managed the data.

CB, contributed to visualization, revised the manuscript, and conducted the final editing.

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