



The Role of Theory-Driven Evaluation in Analyzing Stakeholders' Perceptions of the 2021 Curriculum Reforms in Zanzibar

**Suleiman, Suleiman, George Kahangwa, Aurelia Kimaro,
Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies,
University of Dar es Salaam, P. O. BOX 35091, Dar es-Salaam, Tanzania.*

**Corresponding Email: jumakimea777@yahoo.com*

Abstract

This study examines the implications of theory-driven evaluation for stakeholders' perceptions of the impacts of Zanzibar's 2021 curriculum reforms. The assessment uses an explicit theory of change as a guiding framework to study how educators, administrators, and other key stakeholders understand and experience reforms. This technique enables a thorough examination of the causal pathways linking curriculum inputs, activities, and outcomes, yielding insights into both intended and unintended consequences. The study seeks to answer the following questions: How does theory-driven evaluation help in realizing the factors that shape stakeholders' perceptions? What gaps in awareness, training, and resources affecting curriculum enactment were revealed by theory-driven evaluation? How does theory-driven evaluation help analyze whether stakeholders' perceptions align or conflict with the intended theory of change behind the Zanzibar curriculum reforms? By incorporating qualitative data, the evaluation provides a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms by which reforms influence educational practices and their outcomes. The study found that TDE can help researchers unpack how factors shape stakeholders' perceptions, reveal gaps in awareness, training, and resources that affect curriculum enactment, and analyze how stakeholders' perceptions align with or conflict with the intended theory of change behind the Zanzibar curriculum reforms. The findings emphasize the importance of theory-driven evaluation in capturing complex program dynamics and informing policy decisions to improve curriculum implementation and educational quality in Zanzibar. This study adds to the expanding body of evidence that theory-driven techniques are valuable tools for assessing and continuously improving academic programs.

Keywords: Stakeholders' perceptions, implications, curriculum reforms, educational outcomes, theory of change.

Introduction

Since the introduction of free compulsory education in 1964, Zanzibar's education sector has experienced substantial expansion (Juma, 2022). The current structure comprises two years of pre-primary, six years of primary, four years of basic secondary, two years of advanced secondary, and higher education, including one public university (RGoZ, 2022). Enrollment has increased markedly, with over 467,000 students attending government schools according to recent data (RGoZ, 2022). This growth has been supported by the abolition of school fees in 2015 and 2018. However, challenges persist, including large class sizes and disparities in educational quality (Suleiman et al., 2024). Free education since 1964, reinforced by fee abolitions in 2015 and 2018, has driven enrollment in government schools to over 467,000 students, reflecting successful policy expansions and infrastructure growth, such as the standardized 2-6-4-2 structure and higher education. They highlight the need for targeted investments in teacher training, materials, and infrastructure to balance access with relevance and employability, as noted in sector analyses (Nugroho, 2024).

The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training administers a system supported by government priorities, development partners, non-governmental organizations, and private schools, which account for approximately 15% of total enrollment (RGoZ, 2022). RGoZ (2022) insists that access to education has improved through the establishment of additional schools, increased textbook availability, and the implementation of equity programs. Nevertheless, constant challenges include teacher shortages, despite an increase from 6,457 to 10,997 teachers, and concerns regarding student learning outcomes. Emphasis is placed on teacher training and non-formal education, with Zanzibar coordinating its practices with international standards while tackling local priorities, including improving employability (Suleiman et al., 2024).

The 2021 curriculum reforms in Zanzibar mark a watershed moment in the region's education sector, aiming to align pedagogical practices with global standards while addressing local socio-cultural needs. However, assessing their effectiveness demands moving past traditional "black box" evaluations that emphasize outcomes alone (Intrac, 2017; "Theory-driven evaluation," 2025). This study uses a theory-driven evaluation approach to thoroughly examine stakeholders' perceptions, unpacking the causal mechanisms and circumstantial factors shaping implementation and impact ("Theory-driven evaluation," 2025; Wahlstrom & Sunberg, 2015). Curriculum reforms commonly grapple with integrating transnational policies and national traditions, as seen in Sweden's Lgr 11 reforms (Wahlstrom & Sunberg, 2015). By articulating a theory of change that links reform inputs to outcomes—while including towards unintended effects—this method delivers a structured lens for these dynamics (Theory-driven evaluation, 2025; INTRAC, 2017). Focusing on stakeholders such as educators, administrators, and



decision-makers, it captures how reforms are interpreted and enacted in real-world settings (Wahlstrom & Sunberg, 2015; Lin & Wu, 2016).

Zanzibar's unique sociopolitical context positions education as both a technical instrument and a tool for cultural reproduction (Wahlstrom & Sunberg, 2015). Traditional evaluations overlook these nuances, whereas theory-driven methods reveal how global discourses are recontextualized locally (Lilliedahl et al., 2016). Although mixed-methods integration is ideal, this qualitative study prioritizes stakeholders' lived experiences with reform outcomes (Wahlstrom & Sunberg, 2015; Intrac, 2017). To ground this analysis, theory-driven evaluation stands out for probing *why* programs succeed or fail, rather than fixating on endpoints. It constructs and tests an explicit theory of change, mapping inputs to outcomes via intermediary mechanisms and drawing on participant data and data (Chen, 2014; De Silve et al., 2014; Chen, 2020; Flicker, 2024). In education, this illuminates overlooked elements, including teacher competencies and resources (Nadeem et al., 2013; Desimone & Hill, 2017), providing policymakers with actionable insights that go beyond superficial metrics and align with evidence-based principles (Popper, 2012; Aberbach & Christensen, 2014). In analyzing Zanzibar's reforms, it examines basic assumptions to avoid failures stemming from unexamined root causes.

These reforms reversed a 2016 policy that scrapped Standard Seven and shortened primary schooling to six years, prompted by a 2019 Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) assessment that revealed declining performance, overcrowding, and incompatibility with development goals (Suleiman et al., 2024). Under President Hussein Mwinyi, the shift reinstated Standard Seven, blending familiar structures with modern, learner-centered methods and asserting autonomy from mainland Tanzania. Building on the Zanzibar Education Sector Plan (2017/18-2021/22), it reduced core subjects from 14 to 9 (emphasizing Swahili, English, math, science, social studies, and vocational skills) while stressing life skills aligned with SDG 4 (Yasar & Aslan, 2021). Continuous assessments supplanted high-stakes exams, supporting collaborative, project-based learning adapted to tourism needs, with ICT in environmental education and teacher guides for in-service training. However challenges persisted: only 40% of teachers had accessed training by mid-2022, hardware shortages limited innovation, and a rushed rollout strained adaptations of competency-based models inspired by Kenya and Finland, contextualized for Zanzibar's Islamic setting.

Stakeholder views highlight tensions: educators and principals appreciate practical skills and active learning but decry delayed syllabi, inadequate preparation, and support gaps—issues which reflect Tanzania-wide concerns (Maro, 2013). Parents value achievement yet worry over unclear requirements and inequities (Reeves, 2003). Theory-driven evaluation pinpoints root causes, such as skipped implementation steps and political overrides (Blundo et al., 2020; Suddaby et al., 2017), with leadership and training shaping perceptions (Kanyamuna, 2019). Integrating this system means studying the full chain (from policy to outcomes) using evidence such as interviews and observations, debunking unrealistic assumptions (e.g., seamless teacher upskilling), and proposing fixes such as sustained development (DeMonte & Coggshall, 2018; Bailey, 2020). It links perceptions to results, such as material delays undermining skills, and stresses stakeholder input toward refining reforms. Via systematic refutation of unsupported hypotheses, Zanzibar feedback challenges the perfect execution of policy (this approach promotes adaptive, evidence-led policymaking over politics, especially in postcolonial contexts). Comparative Tanzanian studies affirm that reforms succeed when they heed established theories, pointing to the role of theory-driven evaluation in joining legislative intent and practice for enduring curriculum evolution.

The 2021 primary curriculum reform was initiated under the leadership of the eighth presidential administration and informed by the 2019 Needs Assessment Report. The reform sought to boost educational quality in line with global trends. Key measures included reinstating standard seven (reversing the previous 7+3 to 2+6+4 structure), reducing the number of subjects, and adopting a competence-based, activity-oriented approach to learning (RGoZ, 2022).

According to the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, a political directive led to fast, top-down policy implementation using the Centre-Periphery model, concentrating on policy compliance rather than broad stakeholder input (Suleiman et al., 2024)

A curriculum committee at the Zanzibar Institute of Education, together with the Ministry, developed the syllabus, which was then standardized and rapidly distributed to schools (Suleiman et al., 2024). Suleiman et al. (2024) added that the policy notes that curriculum overload remains an issue within the system. Key changes included new teaching approaches, assessment methods, and fewer subjects, but rollout faced delays in materials, teacher shortages for new subjects, and an inadequate needs assessment was conducted prior to setting objectives, although stakeholders identified deficiencies in the preparatory process.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to investigate stakeholders' perspectives on the 2021 curriculum change and its impact on the quality of primary education in Zanzibar. The qualitative approach is appropriate for obtaining deep, context-rich insights into the subjective experiences and perspectives of multiple education stakeholders, and it aligns well with the



theory-driven evaluation framework, which emphasises understanding the program's underlying mechanisms of change (Ngandu, 2024; Dong, 2025). Several qualitative data sources were used to capture a broad and nuanced understanding, including semi-structured interviews with key educational stakeholders (policymakers, teachers, and parents) (Clerke et al., 2013; Davis et al., 2021). Three Focus group discussions session with six participant each were used to gather collective opinions and promote interaction among the participants as recommended by O.Nyumba et al. (2018). Document reviews (including 2006 Zanzibar Education Policy, school inspection reports 2020/20021, 2021/2022 and other curricular materials) were used to contextualise the findings. Six Classroom observations sessions were conducted to obtain direct evidence of curriculum implementation (Van den Akker, 2010). Purposive sampling was used to select 34 participants and settings most knowledgeable and relevant to education reform and quality (Omona, 2013; Ahmad & Wikkins, 2025). The consent forms was provided to seek the participants' permission to participate in the study freely, as well as the procedures for research clearance and permit were followed in respective institutions, for example the University of Dar es salaam, and the office the second vice President of the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar. The data were examined using inductive thematic analysis, which allowed themes to emerge from the data while being understood within the TDE framework (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Proudfoot, 2023). This technique makes it easier to link data patterns to theoretical conceptions of reform impact, allowing for a more thorough evaluation of the mechanisms and outcomes of curriculum reforms (Chatterji, 2002; Schildkamp & Kuiper, 2010). The use of multiple qualitative methodologies ensured methodological triangulation, thereby increasing the validity and depth of the results (trustworthiness) under the study. Purposive sampling aligns with the evaluation's focus on key informants who are likely to provide valuable insights to the study (Homann, 2003; Chatterji, 2002). Inductive theme analysis allows for a grounded, but theoretically informed, interpretation of the evidence (Cooper et al., 2012; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The theory-driven evaluation framework underpins the entire process, guaranteeing that all steps, from question design to data interpretation, are used to test and refine the theory of the curriculum reform impact in Zanzibar. This technique explicitly integrates research design, data sources, sampling, and analysis with a theory-driven evaluation approach, assuring coherence and rigour in assessing the perceived impact of curriculum reform. This is to say Theory-based assessment (also called theory-driven or theory-of-change evaluation) guides research by providing an organised framework for testing underlying assumptions about how and why a program or intervention (such as Zanzibar's 2021 curriculum reforms) produces outcomes (Weiss, 1997; Funnell & Rogers, 2011). It starts with articulating a program's causal routes: inputs (e.g., new syllabi, training) lead to outputs (e.g., teacher adoption) via mechanisms (e.g., competence-based methods improving skills), resulting in impacts (e.g., better learning). This informs the research design by identifying verifiable hypotheses and moving beyond "black box" outcome checks to probe why reforms succeed or fail (EvalCommunity, 2023). Researcher use it to select methods (like stakeholder interviews or observations in your Zanzibar study) that target key links in the chain, such as contextual barriers (e.g., material delays) or unintended effects (e.g., teacher resistance). It prioritises evidence on mechanisms, rival explanations, and local adaptations, guaranteeing rigorous validation or refutation of the reform's logic (Chen et al., 2020). By revealing causal insights, it informs discussions of root causes (e.g., political top-down rollout gaps) and practical fixes (e.g., better training), making the findings useful for policymakers rather than merely descriptive (INTRAC, 2017).

Results and Discussion

As previously stated, the interviews and focus group discussions were thematically examined to identify patterns in the implications of using theory-driven assessment for stakeholders' perspectives on Zanzibar's 2021 curriculum reforms. The findings revealed three specific influences on Zanzibar's 2021 curriculum reform assessment: a) TDE helps to unpack factors that shape stakeholders' perceptions; b) TDE reveals gaps in awareness, training, and resources that affect curriculum enactment; and c) TDE helps to analyse how stakeholders' perceptions align or conflict with the intended theory of change behind Zanzibar curriculum reforms. The following is a complete examination and explanation of these findings. The analysis investigates how theory-driven assessment can inform stakeholders' views of Zanzibar's 2021 curriculum adjustments.

Theory-Driven Evaluation Helps Unpack the Factors that Shape Stakeholders' Perceptions.

The findings from Zanzibar's 2021 curriculum reform demonstrate a multidimensional approach that includes needs assessment, broad stakeholder discussions, and strategic planning; however, there is a notable lack of pilot testing in this regard. The dynamics of new political leadership, which complicated implementation and stakeholder participation, also influenced this reform process. In the focus group discussion, participant D argued that:

I believe that using TDE to analyze and process stakeholder perspectives demonstrates to us how different types of elements impact stakeholders' opinions, particularly when analyzing a curriculum change program.

The quotation implies that TDE highlights how factors such as program assumptions, teacher experience, policy pressures, and resource gaps shape views, enabling targeted adjustments to improve implementation. This is very important.



In the same point, participant B added that,

The 2006 education policy introduced modifications to key curriculum elements to enhance the quality of education in Zanzibar. Implementation of these changes ought to follow established curriculum change procedures and be informed by a thorough understanding of the change system, while lessening the impact of activist perspectives or political interests. Stressing the delivery of a curriculum that is thoroughly prepared for implementation is important.

The quotation insist that, adherence to structured procedures ensures that reforms address genuine quality gaps in Zanzibar's curriculum, such as outdated content or ineffective delivery methods, rather than responding to political pressures. This method prevents rushed implementation by emphasizing readiness assessments, stakeholder alignment, and evidence-based planning instead of advocacy-driven decisions. Clarifying the policy's intent supports sustainable change and enhances capacity for effective implementation in resource-constrained settings such as Zanzibar. Understanding how these elements influence stakeholders' perceptions, particularly regarding the reform's relevance, implementation issues, and resource support, is crucial for assessing its effectiveness, guiding future policy decisions, and disclosing the assumptions, procedures, and contextual factors that shape how stakeholders interpret and value program outcomes. For example, Jacobson and Azzam (2018) argue that theory-driven evaluation is a valuable tool for deconstructing the complex dynamics that shape stakeholder perspectives, which is critical for politically sensitive, multifaceted reforms such as Zanzibar's curriculum revision. The Theory-Based Stakeholder Evaluation (TSE) methodology developed by Hansen and Vedung (2010) expands this understanding by explicitly incorporating stakeholder perspectives into the evaluation framework. Their empirical research shows that mapping stakeholders' ideas and assumptions about program functioning uncovers the underlying determinants that influence their views of success or failure. This method is especially essential for Zanzibar's reform, as various stakeholder groups are likely to have different assumptions regarding the curriculum's goal, practicality, and resource adequacy. This method is especially essential for Zanzibar's reform, as various stakeholder groups are likely to have different assumptions regarding the curriculum's goal, practicality, and resource adequacy. Furthermore, Malengreaux et al.'s (2024) scoping review emphasises the significance of genuine stakeholder participation in theory-driven evaluations. Their findings underscore the importance of participatory techniques for eliciting and understanding stakeholders' assumptions about how programs achieve results. This interactive element immediately contributes to understanding the subtle elements influencing stakeholder perceptions and interpretations, which is critical in reforms that lack pilot testing and are undertaken under changing political leadership, as in Zanzibar. Overall, these empirical investigations strongly support the use of theory-driven evaluations in complicated reform situations. They underline that such assessments do more than analyse outcomes; they also illuminate the assumptions, methods, and contextual influences that shape stakeholder perceptions. This complete understanding is critical for policymakers and implementers who want to improve the relevance of reforms, overcome implementation obstacles, and optimise resource allocation. Finally, the Zanzibar curriculum reform case demonstrates how theory-driven evaluation can be a valuable tool for identifying the multiple elements that influence stakeholders' views. Theory-driven assessment improves the capacity to understand, evaluate, and ultimately improve educational reforms in complex and dynamic environments by explicitly identifying causal pathways and contextual variables, and actively incorporating stakeholders.

Theory-Driven Evaluation Revealed Gaps in Awareness, Training, and Resources that Affect Curriculum Enactment.

This study's findings also show that stakeholders' perceptions, as assessed using TDE, reveal gaps in awareness, training, and resources that affect curriculum enactment, consistent with findings in related contexts, such as mainland Tanzania, where teachers face challenges due to a lack of skills and support. One of the participant during the interview said:

I think you have noticed shortcomings in our understanding of the concept of curriculum change across various elements, including assumptions for curriculum reforms, as well as in the current implementation, where you have observed many shortcomings during classroom observations due to narrow scope of in-service training.

The speaker is showing a limited grasp of curriculum change theory leads to flawed assumptions, such as overlooking contextual readiness and stakeholder buy-in in Zanzibar's reforms. Classroom observations reveal gaps stemming from rushed policy implementation, including inadequate teacher training, resource shortages, and misaligned delivery. Addressing these requires theory-driven approaches to test assumptions and refine implementation for true quality gains. The findings from classroom observation revealed incapability of teacher in the use of new assessment procedures (assessment for learning) during the classroom practice. This indicate the insufficient training time during the induction.

The study's findings, which highlight gaps in stakeholders' understanding, training, and resources that influence curriculum enactment, are consistent with empirical evidence from similar educational contexts, such as the Tanzanian mainland. Assessing stakeholder perceptions using Theory-Driven Evaluation (TDE) has proven helpful in identifying significant gaps that impede effective curriculum implementation. The study emphasises that low stakeholder awareness, poor professional training, and insufficient resource allocation all work together to undermine curriculum implementation. These limitations are



not unique to Zanzibar; they are consistent with findings from empirical research conducted on the Tanzanian mainland, where instructors expressed difficulty adopting new curricula due to a lack of pedagogical skills and systemic support (Mosha & Mgaya, 2017; Mkumbo, 2012). The strength of theory-driven evaluation lies in its ability to deconstruct these underlying elements by explicitly identifying the causal mechanisms and contextual factors that influence stakeholder perceptions. For example, Coryn et al. (2011) argue that TDE might reveal how shortages in capacity and resources affect program outcomes, which, in this case, translates into curriculum-delivery issues. By engaging stakeholders and collecting their beliefs and experiences, TDE provides a comprehensive understanding of why curriculum improvements may fail despite well-intentioned policy design. Furthermore, Hansen and Vedung's (2010) Theory-Based Stakeholder Evaluation (TSE) model supports this approach by illustrating how mapping stakeholder beliefs about program operations can reveal important limitations, such as a lack of training and limited resources. This paradigm emphasises the necessity of utilising stakeholder input to assess implementation issues and customise interventions accurately. Recent participatory realist evaluations (Malengreaux et al., 2024) highlight the need to actively integrate stakeholders in identifying and addressing gaps in awareness and support systems. Their findings imply that without such involvement, reforms may be seen as unimportant or impracticable by those responsible for enacting them, leading to poor uptake and sustainability. Thus, the findings of this study are consistent with a growing body of empirical research emphasising the necessity of addressing capacity building and resource provision as the foundation of successful curriculum implementation. Theory-driven evaluation not only helps identify these gaps but also drives initiatives to improve stakeholder engagement, training programs and resource allocation. This thorough understanding is critical for policymakers and educational leaders who want to translate curriculum reforms into effective classroom practices, thereby boosting educational outcomes in Zanzibar and similar settings.

Theory-Driven Evaluation Helps Analyse How Stakeholders' Perceptions Align or Conflict With the Intended Theory of Change Behind the Zanzibar Curriculum Reforms.

The findings also show that using TDE enables researchers to systematically analyse how stakeholders' perceptions align with or conflict with the desired theory of change driving the Zanzibar curriculum reforms, identifying areas for targeted improvement and more effective engagement techniques. The discovery that Theory-Driven Evaluation (TDE) enables researchers to systematically assess how stakeholders' perceptions align with or conflict with the intended theory of change underlying the Zanzibar curriculum revisions is a significant insight, with strong empirical support. The ability of TDE to compare stakeholder perspectives with the program's theoretical framework is critical for identifying gaps, misunderstandings, and areas that require targeted improvement. Empirical studies consistently show that one of the key strengths of theory-driven approaches is their ability to explicitly state a program's underlying assumptions and causal pathways, thereby allowing evaluators to determine whether stakeholders' experiences and perceptions align with these intended mechanisms. Coryn et al. (2011), for example, underline that TDE promotes a deeper understanding of how and why programs function (or do not work) by unravelling the alignment between theory and practice. This alignment is critical to ensuring that reforms are executed as intended and identifying where modifications are required. Hansen and Vedung's (2010) Theory-Based Stakeholder Evaluation (TSE) paradigm emphasises this issue by explicitly including stakeholder opinions into the evaluation framework. Malengreaux et al. (2024) conducted a scoping review of participatory realists and found that mapping stakeholder assumptions against a program's theory of change reveals critical divergences that may hinder successful implementation. This process enables evaluators and policymakers to pinpoint specific areas where communication, training, or resource allocation needs strengthening to better align stakeholder understanding with reform objectives. This information is invaluable for developing more effective engagement tactics that address stakeholder issues and create ownership of the reform process. In the context of Zanzibar curricular reforms, using TDE to examine stakeholder perceptions against the desired theory of change enables the systematic discovery of misalignments in expectations, understanding, or resource availability. This diagnostic tool facilitates targeted adjustments, such as fine-tuning communication tactics, enhancing professional development, and reallocating resources to better support curriculum implementation. Thus, empirical research confirms that TDE's systematic comparison of stakeholder perceptions with the planned theory of change is an effective evaluation tool. It not only highlights areas of alignment and conflict but also offers concrete ideas for strengthening reform implementation and stakeholder engagement going forward. This method increases the likelihood of obtaining the targeted educational outcomes in Zanzibar and other reform environments.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows that Theory-Driven Evaluation (TDE) is a comprehensive and systematic approach for analysing stakeholders' perceptions of Zanzibar's 2021 curriculum reforms. Thematic analysis of the interviews and focus group discussions identified three significant contributions of TDE in this setting: First, TDE successfully unpacks the various aspects that influence stakeholders' perceptions, providing greater insight into their perspectives on the reform's relevance, obstacles, and resource support. Second, it identifies important gaps in awareness, training, and resources that impede effective curriculum implementation, highlighting areas that require immediate attention. Third, TDE enables a systematic study of how



stakeholders' views align with or conflict with the desired theory of change underpinning the reforms, revealing misalignments that can inspire targeted improvements. Collectively, these findings confirm that TDE is a potent evaluative tool that not only collects stakeholder viewpoints but also directly connects them to program theory, thereby improving understanding and enabling more effective reform implementation in the future. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made to improve the implementation and evaluation of Zanzibar's curriculum reforms: First, raise stakeholder awareness and training to address identified gaps by developing comprehensive awareness campaigns and targeted professional development programs to provide educators and other stakeholders with the knowledge and skills they need to implement effective curricula. Sending and enhancing resources will enable the adequate provision of teaching materials, infrastructure, and support systems to facilitate seamless implementation and reduce resource-related impediments identified by stakeholders. Furthermore, regularly using theory-driven evaluation will institutionalise TDE as a significant component of ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities, enabling the continuous collection of stakeholder perceptions, the detection of emerging challenges, and the assessment of alignment with the reform's theory of change. Furthermore, engaging stakeholders is important for developing inclusive, participatory strategies that incorporate multiple stakeholder groups into evaluation processes, thereby increasing ownership, addressing misconceptions, and aligning perceptions with reform objectives. In addition, reform goal communication should be improved for all stakeholders by clearly articulating the theory of change and expected consequences of curriculum reforms, thereby minimising misunderstandings and building consensus around implementation tactics. Implementing these guidelines enables policymakers and educational leaders to leverage the capabilities of theory-driven evaluation to improve curriculum reform processes, thereby enhancing educational outcomes in Zanzibar's primary schools.

The study subtly reveals its strengths and limitations while pointing to encouraging paths for future inquiry. Among the strengths, theory-driven evaluation (TDE) stands out for its comprehensive ability to unpack stakeholders' perceptions of Zanzibar's 2021 curriculum reforms, exploring aspects such as relevance, obstacles, and resource support, and directly linking these views to the underlying theory of change for truly usable insights. It is also proficient in systematically pinpointing critical implementation gaps (such as deficiencies in awareness, training, and resources) thereby affirming TDE's capability to bridge qualitative data with program theory. Furthermore, by detecting misalignments between stakeholder perceptions and reform objectives, TDE acts as a practical tool for fostering ongoing, targeted enhancements in educational reforms.

On the limitations side, the study's heavy reliance on thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups inherently curtails generalizability, as it prioritises subjective perceptions over harder, objective data such as student performance or long-term impacts. Its narrow focus on primary school stakeholders in the specific context of Zanzibar's 2021 reforms risks overlooking broader influences, such as national policy dynamics and knock-on effects on secondary education. Additionally, the resource-constrained scope is implied by the recommendations themselves, which call for extensive campaigns, training, and monitoring—indicating the research could not fully explore or test prolonged interventions.

For further research, multiple compelling directions emerge: quantitative efforts to validate TDE's qualitative findings via long-term monitoring of student achievement or controlled trials pitting reformed against non-reformed schools; comparative examinations applying TDE across other Tanzanian regions or analogous competence-based reforms, like those in Kenya, to tease out contextual subtleties; and long-term investigations monitoring post-2021 outcomes over 3–5 years, blending mixed methods to evaluate how closing gaps in training and resources ultimately influences employability and equity.

Acknowledgements

I am sincerely grateful to my supervisors, Professor George Leonard Kahangwa and Dr. Aurelia Raphael Kimaro, for their unwavering dedication and support. Their insightful feedback, mentorship, and guidance have significantly shaped my academic development. I also wish to thank the panelists and academic staff of the School of Education at the University of Dar es Salaam for their consistent willingness to provide support and advice, which ensured that this research remained focused and maintained a high standard of quality.

References

- Ahmad, M., & Wilkins, S. (2025). Purposive sampling in qualitative research: A framework for the entire journey. *Quality & Quantity*, 59(2), 1461-1479.
- Chatterji, M. (2002). Models and methods for examining standards-based reforms and accountability initiatives: Have the tools of inquiry answered pressing questions on improving schools?. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(3), 345-386.
- Clarke, J., Fletcher, B., Lancashire, E., Pallan, M., & Adab, P. (2013). The views of stakeholders on the role of the primary school in preventing childhood obesity: a qualitative systematic review. *Obesity Reviews*, 14(12), 975-988.
- Chen, H., Astbury, B., & Roatré, P. F. (2020). A refined method for theory-based evaluation of the health impacts of intersectoral policies. *Implementation Science*, 15(1), Article 12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-020-0976-4>
- Cooper, R., Chenail, R. J., & Fleming, S. (2012). A grounded theory of inductive qualitative research education: results of a meta-data analysis. *Qualitative Report*, 17, 8.
- Coryn, C. L. S., Westine, C.D., & Schroter, D.C. (2011). A Systematic Review of Theory-Driven Evaluation Practice from 1990 to 2009.



- American Journal of Evaluation*, 32(2), 199-226. Doi: 10.1177/1098214010389321.
- Davis, D., Miller, D., Mrema, D., Matsoai, M., Mapetla, N., Raikes, A., & Burton, A. (2021). Understanding perceptions of quality among early childhood education stakeholders in Tanzania and Lesotho: A multiple qualitative case study. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 4(1), 100153.
- EvalCommunity. (2023). *Theory-based evaluation approach*. <https://www.evalcommunity.com/career-center/theory-based-evaluation-approach/>
- Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 5(1), 80-92.
- Funnell, S. C., & Rogers, P. J. (2011). *Purposeful program theory: Effective use of theories of change and logic models*. Jossey-Bass.
- INTRAC (2017). *Theory-Based Evaluation*. Intrac for Civil Society.
- Hansen, M. B., & Vedung, E. (2010). Theory-Based Stakeholder Evaluation: *American Journal of Evaluation* 31(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214010366174>.
- Jacobson, M., & Azzam (2018). The Effects of Stakeholder Involvement on Perceptions of an Evaluation credibility. *Eval Program Plan*, 68, 64-73, doi:10.1016/j.evalprogrplan.2018.02.006Epub2018Feb.10PMID: 29486426.
- Juma, S. (2022). Analytical Review of School Reforms toward the Education 2030 Agenda in Zanzibar. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*.
- Lilliedahl, J., Sundberg, D., & Wahlstrom, N. (2016). Theory-Based Evaluation in Response to the Issues of Education Reforms in the Early 2000s. *Pedagogisk Borskning*, 1(21), 1401-6788.
- Lin, S., & Wu, M. (2016). Applying a Program Theory-Driven Approach to Design and Evaluate a Teacher Professional Development Programs. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(24), 2222-1935
- Malengreaux, S., Martens, M., Castellano, P. V., Olujuwon, I., Van Belle, S., Renmans, D., & Belrhiti Z. (2024). Stakeholder involvement in realist evaluation: A scoping review and Best-fit framework synthesis. *Evaluation*, 31(1), 22-48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13563890241279562>
- Maro, W. (2013). *Design and evaluation of a professional development programme to support activity-based biology teaching and learning in Tanzanian secondary schools* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Southampton).
- Mosha, E., & Mgya, E. (2017). Problems Confronting the Teaching Professional in Tanzania and their Impact on Educational Quality. *Journal of Learning for Development*, 4(2).
- Ngandu, N. S. (2024). *A systems approach towards a framework for utilising evaluative knowledge in the national policy system* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria).
- Nugroho, R. (2024). Comparative analysis of educational development strategies in emerging economies. *Advances: Jurnal Ekonomi & Bisnis*, 2(3), 174-185.
- Omona, J. (2013). Sampling in qualitative research: Improving the quality of research outcomes in higher education. *Makerere Journal of Higher Education*, 4(2), 169-185.
- O. Nyumba, T., Wilson, K., Derrick, C. J., & Mukherjee, N. (2018). The use of focus group discussion methodology: Insights from two decades of application in conservation. *Methods in Ecology and evolution*, 9(1), 20-32.
- Proudfoot, K. (2023). Inductive/deductive hybrid thematic analysis in mixed methods research. *Journal of mixed methods research*, 17(3), 308-326.
- Schildkamp, K., & Kuiper, W. (2010). Data-informed curriculum reform: Which data, what purposes, and promoting and hindering factors. *Teaching and teacher education*, 26(3), 482-496.
- Theory-Driven Evaluation (2025, 5 May 2025). In Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory-driven_evaluation.
- Van den Akker, J. (2010). Building bridges: How research may improve curriculum policies and classroom practices. In *Beyond Lisbon 2010: Perspectives from research and development for educational policy in Europe* (pp. 175-195). CIDREE.
- Wahlstrom, N., & Sunberg, D. (2015). *Theory-Based Evaluation of the Curriculum Lgr 11. Working Paper 2015:11*. Institute of Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy.
- Weiss, C. H. (1997). How can theory-based evaluation make greater headway? *Evaluation Review*, 21(4), 501-524. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193841X9702100405>