

Implications of Theory-Driven Evaluation in Assessing Stakeholders' Perceptions of Zanzibar's 2021 Curriculum Reforms

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Abstract: *The study looks at the implications of using theory-driven evaluation to examine stakeholders' perceptions on the impacts of Zanzibar's 2021 curriculum reforms. The evaluation uses an explicit theory of change as a guiding framework to study how educators, administrators, and other key stakeholders understand and experience the reforms. This technique allows for a thorough examination of the causal pathways that connect curriculum inputs, activities, and outcomes, yielding insights into both intended and unintentional consequences. By incorporating qualitative data, the evaluation provides a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms by which reforms influence educational practices and outcomes. The study discovered 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 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 useful tools for assessing educational programs and improving them continuously.*

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

INTRODUCTION

The 2021 curriculum reforms in Zanzibar are a watershed moment in the region's educational scene, attempting to match pedagogical practices with global standards while also addressing local socio-cultural demands. However, assessing the effectiveness of such reforms necessitates moving beyond traditional "black box" evaluations that only consider results (Intrac, 2017; "Theory-driven evaluation," 2025). This study uses a theory-driven assessment technique to comprehensively evaluate stakeholders' opinions of the reforms, focusing on the causal mechanisms and contextual elements that influence their implementation and impact ("Theory-driven evaluation," 2025; Wahlstrom & Sunberg, 2015). Curriculum revisions frequently confront difficulties in integrating transnational policy effects with national traditions, as seen by similar assessments of Sweden's Lgr 11 curriculum (Wahlstrom & Sunberg, 2015). Theory-driven assessment offers a formal framework for unraveling these dynamics by defining a theory of change that connects reform actions to desired outcomes while accounting for unforeseen consequences (Theory-driven evaluation, 2025; Intrac, 2017). This method, which focuses on stakeholders such as educators, administrators, and legislators, reflects how reforms are interpreted, implemented, and experienced in real-world contexts (Wahlstrom & Sunberg, 2015; Lin & Wu, 2016). The study is set in Zanzibar's unique sociopolitical setting, where education acts as both a technical tool and a vehicle for cultural reproduction (Wahlstrom & Sunberg, 2015). Traditional evaluation approaches risk neglecting these intricacies, but theory-driven procedures allow for a more nuanced understanding of how global educational discourses are recontextualized locally (Lilliedahl et al., 2016). Although this strategy promotes mixed-methodologies data integration, including qualitative and quantitative methods, this study is exclusively conducted using a qualitative approach to analyze insights into stakeholders' experiences with reform outcomes (Wahlstrom & Sunberg, 2015; Intrac, 2017). This review contributes to broader discussions on evidence-based educational reform by closing the gap between legislative intent and practical implementation. It emphasizes the importance of theory-driven frameworks in promoting adaptive policymaking and long-term changes in curriculum design, especially in postcolonial contexts such as Zanzibar (Wahlstrom & Sunberg, 2015).

The Purpose study

The goal of this study was to investigate the implications of using theory-driven evaluation to assess stakeholders' perceptions of Zanzibar's 2021 curriculum reforms on key dimensions of primary education quality in Zanzibar, such as the teaching and learning process, students' learning outcomes, and education's relevance to local needs. The investigation of this study has been primarily based on the following question: How does theory-driven evaluation affect stakeholders' opinions of Zanzibar's 2021 curricular reforms?

Theoretical Framework

The methodology is based on the Theory Driven Evaluation (TDE) approach, which focuses on testing and improving a theory of change related to curricular reform. TDE directs the study by informing the development of research topics, data-gathering tactics, and data analysis procedures, with the goal of determining how, why, and under what conditions the reform affects education quality.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research approach to investigate stakeholders' perspectives on the 2021 curriculum change and its impact on primary education quality 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 fits well with the theory-driven evaluation framework, which stresses understanding the underlying mechanisms of change. Several qualitative data sources were used to capture a broad and nuanced understanding: These include semi-structured interviews with key educational stakeholders (policymakers, teachers, and parents). Focus group discussions are used to gather collective opinions and promote interaction among participants. Document reviews, including policy and curricular materials, are used to contextualize findings. Classroom observations are conducted to acquire direct evidence of curriculum implementation in practice. Purposive sampling was used to pick people and settings that were the most knowledgeable and relevant to education reform and quality. The data was examined using inductive thematic analysis, which allowed themes to emerge from the data while being understood within the TDE framework. This technique makes it easier to link data patterns to theoretical conceptions of reform impact, allowing for a more thorough evaluation of the curriculum reform's mechanisms and outcomes. The use of numerous qualitative methodologies ensures methodological triangulation, which increases the validity and depth of the results. Purposive sampling is consistent with the evaluation's focus on key informants who are likely to provide valuable information. Inductive theme analysis allows for a grounded but theoretically informed interpretation of evidence. 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 curriculum reform impact in Zanzibar. This technique explicitly integrates the research design, data sources, sampling, and analysis with the theory-driven evaluation approach, assuring coherence and rigor in assessing the perceived impact of curriculum reform.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As previously stated, the interviews and focus group discussions were thematically examined to identify patterns in how the implications of using theory-driven assessment aid to assess stakeholders' perspectives of 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 analyze how stakeholders' perceptions align or conflict with the intended theory of change behind Zanzibar curriculum reforms. The following is a full examination and explanation of the findings. The analysis will investigate how theory-driven assessment can assist in assessing how stakeholders view Zanzibar's 2021 curriculum adjustments.

Theory-driven evaluation helps to unpack factors that shape the stakeholders 'Perceptions.

The findings from Zanzibar's 2021 curriculum reform demonstrate a multidimensional approach that includes needs assessment, broad stakeholder discussions, and strategic planning, yet there is a notable lack of pilot testing. This reform process was also influenced by the dynamics of new political leadership,

which complicated implementation and stakeholder involvement. Understanding how these elements influenced stakeholders' perceptions, particularly of the reform's relevance, implementation issues, and resource support, is crucial for assessing its effectiveness and guiding future policy decisions. Disclosing the assumptions, procedures, and contextual elements that influence how stakeholders interpret and value program results. For example, Jacobson and Azzam (2018) argue that theory-driven evaluation is a valuable tool for deconstructing the complex dynamics impacting stakeholder perspectives, which is critical in politically sensitive and multifaceted reforms such as Zanzibar's curriculum revision. The Theory-Based Stakeholder Evaluation (TSE) methodology developed by Hansen and Vedung (2010) expands on 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 emphasizes the significance of genuine stakeholder participation in theory-driven evaluations. Their findings underline the importance of participative techniques in eliciting and comprehending 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, such as in Zanzibar. Overall, these empirical investigations give strong support for the use of theory-driven evaluation in complicated reform situations. They underline that such assessments do more than just analyze outcomes; they also illuminate the assumptions, methods, and contextual influences that form stakeholder perceptions. This complete understanding is critical for policymakers and implementers who want to improve reform relevance, overcome implementation obstacles, and optimize resource allocation. Finally, the Zanzibar curriculum reform case demonstrates how theory-driven evaluation may be a valuable tool for identifying the multiple elements that influence stakeholder 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, as well as actively incorporating stakeholders.

Theory-driven evaluation revealed the gaps in awareness, training, and resources that affect curriculum enactment.

This study's findings also show that stakeholders' perceptions assessed using TDE reveal gaps in awareness, training, and resources that affect curriculum enactment, which is consistent with findings in related contexts such as mainland Tanzania, where teachers face challenges due to a lack of skills and support. The study's findings, which highlight gaps in stakeholders' understanding, training, and resources influencing 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 useful in identifying major gaps that impede effective curriculum implementation. The study emphasizes 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 is its ability to deconstruct these underlying elements by explicitly identifying the causal mechanisms and contextual contexts that influence stakeholder perceptions. For example, Coryn et al. (2011) argue that TDE might disclose 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 gives 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 operation can reveal important limitations such as a lack of training and limited resources. This paradigm emphasizes the necessity of utilizing stakeholder input to accurately assess implementation issues and customize interventions accordingly. Recent participatory realist evaluations (Malengreaux et al., 2024) highlight the need of actively integrating 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 enactment, leading to poor uptake and sustainability. In this way, the findings of this study are consistent with a growing body of empirical research emphasizing the necessity of addressing capacity building and resource provision as the foundation of successful curriculum implementation. Theory-driven evaluation not only helps to identify these gaps, but it also drives initiatives for improving 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 other similar settings.

Theory-driven evaluation helps to analyze how the stakeholders' perceptions align or conflict with the intended theory of change behind the Zanzibar curriculum reforms.

The findings also show that by using TDE, researchers may systematically analyze how stakeholders' perceptions coincide or conflict with the desired theory of change driving the Zanzibar curriculum reforms, identifying areas for targeted improvement and more successful engagement techniques. The discovery that using Theory-Driven Evaluation (TDE) allows researchers to systematically assess how stakeholders' perceptions coincide or conflict with the intended theory of change underlying the Zanzibar curriculum revisions is a major insight with good empirical support. The ability of TDE to compare stakeholder perspectives to the program's theoretical framework is critical for finding 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 the program's underlying assumptions and causal pathways, allowing evaluators to determine whether stakeholders' experiences and perceptions correspond to 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 unraveling the alignment between theory and practice. This alignment is critical to ensuring that reforms are executed as intended and identifying where modifications may be required. Hansen and Vedung's (2010) Theory-Based Stakeholder Evaluation (TSE) paradigm emphasizes 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 the 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 in 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, whether in expectations, understanding, or resource availability. This diagnostic tool facilitates targeted adjustments, such as fine-tuning communication tactics, improving professional development, or altering resource allocation to better support curriculum implementation. Thus, the 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. This method increases the likelihood of obtaining targeted educational outcomes in Zanzibar and other reform environments.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that using Theory-Driven Evaluation (TDE) is a comprehensive and systematic way to analyze 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 insights 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 need immediate attention. Third, TDE allows for a systematic study of how stakeholders' views coincide or conflict with the desired theory of change behind the reforms, revealing misalignments that can be used to 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, improving understanding and leading to more effective reform implementation. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made to improve the implementation and evaluation of Zanzibar's curriculum reforms: To begin, 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 curriculums. Send and enhance resource allocation; this will enable adequate provision of teaching materials, infrastructure, and support systems to facilitate seamless implementation and decrease resource-related impediments identified by stakeholders. Furthermore, using theory-driven evaluation on a regular basis will lead to the institutionalization of TDE as a major component of ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities to continuously gather stakeholder perceptions, detect developing difficulties, and assess alignment with the reform's theory of change. Furthermore, engaging stakeholders is important for developing inclusive and participative engagement strategies that incorporate multiple stakeholder groups in evaluation processes, so increasing ownership, addressing misconceptions, and aligning perceptions with reform objectives. Aside from that, improve reform goal communication to all stakeholders by clearly articulating the theory of change and expected consequences of curriculum reforms, so minimizing misunderstandings and building consensus around implementation tactics. Implementing these guidelines allows policymakers

and educational leaders to use the capabilities of theory-driven evaluation to improve curriculum reform processes, thereby improving educational results in Zanzibar.

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