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Stakeholders' Perception of the Impact of Curriculum Reform on the Quality of Primary Education in Zanzibar

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The need to undertake curriculum reform to improve education quality has become one of the crucial issues in the current world education reform agenda. This study examined the perceived impact of curriculum reform on the quality of primary education in Zanzibar. The aim was to generate an understanding of the assumptions for the reform, its impact on the teaching and learning process and pupils learning outcomes and finally to understand its relevance to individuals and communities. A hybrid phenomenology design was used to guide the study. The study sample was obtained using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, documentary reviews, focused group discussions and non-participatory observation. Collected data were thematically analysed. The findings indicate that the leadership influence (political stance) and recommendations from the 2019 Need Assessment Report were the two main assumed triggers of the reform. Changing the teaching and learning approaches, reducing the number of subjects, using new assessment procedures, delaying the delivery of curriculum materials to schools, and lack of teachers in some new subjects were among the impacts of the reform. Activities-based learning and, a competence-based approach which encourages active participation for the learners are among the missing relevance included in this new reform since their inclusion improved in the current teaching and learning process. The study recommends a thorough analysis of the reform needs before final decisions for curriculum change are made, and there should be adequate preparation for curriculum reform specifically considering the timely delivery of necessary curriculum materials and thorough teacher training as a prior requirement for new curriculum implementation.

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INTRODUCTION

The need to undertake curriculum reform has become one of the crucial issues in the current agenda for education reform worldwide (Campbell, 2020; Edger, 2016; Scoffham, 2018; Kasuga, 2019; Gough, 1999). Meanwhile, within the context of intensified globalisation, the political, social, and economic interests of different countries and regional blocks are identified as driving forces for such curriculum reforms across the world. Reforms are normally done under the assumptions (which are either implicit or explicit), strategies and values, which not only act as an overarching philosophy but also state the rationale of why the curriculum has to be reformed (Feng, 2006), since they are in fact, the most central determinants of the reform success (Tikkanen et al., 2019). Gunzelman (2008) cautioned on such assumptions and strategies that, they are very often practised in institutions without a thorough thought or analysis. The issue of curriculum reforms and their impacts on teachers and classroom practices has also drawn the attention of researchers in both developed and developing countries (Guthrie, 2002). Developed countries have been reported as leading global regions in the success of curriculum reforms (Kasuga, 2019; Scoffham, 2018; Fleisch et al., 2019; Chisholm, & Leyendecker, 2008).

The literature further indicates that there has been unprecedented interest in reforming curriculum as well as pedagogical practices in Sub-Saharan Africa since the 1990s. In this region, the central aims and purposes of education have been reshaped by four interconnected developments, namely globalization, the changed focus of international aid agencies towards development assistance, the adaptation of Sub-Saharan African countries to the new world order with its new political emphasis, and spilling over of new pedagogical ideas from USA and Europe into Sub-Saharan Africa (Chisholm, & Leyendecker, 2008). In this way, most Sub-Saharan African countries practice curriculum reforms over time to obey the loan conditions from financial institutions. For instance, the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) through the Structural Adjustment Program, since we (Africans specifically third world countries) entrusted that, curriculum reforms are part of poverty reduction strategies. It also entails measures intended to improve access and quality of education (Chisholm, & Leyendecker, 2008). In the study undertaken by Babaci-Wilhite (2014) focusing on the use of English in Science and Mathematics, the data indicated that it was only the money promised as international aid that led to that reform in primary education. That is why most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are reported to have low success and backwardness when compared to developed countries (Fleisch et al., 2019; Altinyelken, 2010; Edger, 2016). For example, the 2009 reform which led to the change of the language of instruction for standards 5 and 6 in science and mathematics, had a low success since the power and capacity for Zanzibar was low in infrastructure and monetary aspects to run the program very effective (Babaci-Wilhite, 2014). It should be always noted that the effectiveness of curriculum reform depends on the capacity or power of the reforming catalyst since some of the reform catalysts or assumptions are more powerful than others or have the potential to be more robust (CEDEFOP, 2012).

In Zanzibar, there have been increased efforts to undertake curriculum reforms since 1964 (after independence), aiming to improve the country's education quality (Mohammed, & Salim, 2011; RGoZ, 1991, 1995, 2006; RGoZ, 2003). There were various associated initiatives in every reform undertaken in Zanzibar including; the Poverty Reduction Plan, Zanzibar Education Master Plan, education policy revision and renewal, that have been introduced to ensure success in curriculum reform in Zanzibar (RGOZ, 2003; Mohammed, & Salim, 2011). However, the literature indicates that the reforms need to be studied (Nassor, & Mohammed, 1998; Mohammed, & Salim, 2011; RGoZ, 2022; RGOZ, 2003) to establish their justification based on theoretical and empirical evidence. The literature further indicates that several studies have been undertaken in Zanzibar to examine

the implementation of curriculum (Suleiman, 2016); and to establish factors contributing to successful curriculum implementation (Nassor et al., 2005; RGoZ, 2007; Salim, 2011; Nassor, & Mohammed (1998); and the changing of the language of instruction (Babaci-Wilhite, 2014). These studies did not present a thorough analysis of the assumptions and strategies underlying the curriculum reform practices. That is why there is little or no coverage from these studies regarding the assumptions and their effects on classroom practices as experienced by curriculum designers, implementers and other education stakeholders. Stick on looking at the shortcomings of the curriculum as the document itself is not a comprehensive determinant for the reform, as such, looking at the underlying foundation is a much more reasonable aspect. Therefore, the overall aim was for a study that will address such limitations on the 2021 curriculum reform on the quality of Primary Education in Zanzibar.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several theories or models have been used to study curriculum reform practices and their impacts, although the term theory has been used synonymously with the terms' beliefs, educational value orientations, ideologies and so forth (Yassar, & Aslan, 2021). In this study, power-coercive theory, rational-empirical approach and normative re-educative approach have been discussed.

Power-Coercive Approach

This is a framework in organizational change management that emphasizes the role of power and coercion in facilitating or hindering organizational change. This theory suggests that change within an organization can be driven by the use of power and coercion (Pfeffer, 1992). The key elements in power coercive theory are power and influence, coercion, resistance to change, and effectiveness of consequences. The theory can be applied in practice when leaders need to enforce compliance rapidly or when other methods of persuasion and negotiation have been exhausted.

In these situations, reform is achieved by the use of force, with those in positions of authority forcing subordinates to submit. The so-called Center

Periphery model, which depicts a top-down innovation movement, is an excellent illustration of a power-coercive strategy. It entails the passive dissemination of a centrally planned invention that the recipients believe necessary. According to Whitehead (2013) when an innovation is established, the demands of the beneficiaries are typically overlooked. The 2021 curriculum reform in Zanzibar seems to follow the Centre-Periphery model. The government of Zanzibar enforce compliance rapidly on an already- standard seven-prepared curriculum (in terms of syllabus) developed by the curriculum reform committee under the close supervision of the Zanzibar Institute of Education and Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, and given to teachers to implement (Taskforce Report, 2022). As such, it is evident that the return of standard seven along with the change of teaching and learning approach was the national priority. National curricula often reflect the political priorities, historical roots, and sociocultural environment in which schools operate (Segura, & Mbiti, 2022). It is believed that the content of the curriculum and mode of teaching and learning approach are in the interest of the government in monitoring the curriculum progress (Kennedy, 2019). This approach is criticized in reliance solely on coercion which can damage relationships and organizational culture over time and potentially impact their strategies on employees and the overall work environment.

Rational-Empirical Approach

The Rational-Empirical Theory of curriculum reform is a pragmatic approach that integrates rational planning with empirical evidence to guide educational change. The theory emphasizes the use of systematic analysis and data-driven decision-making in the development and implementation of curriculum reforms. It seeks to ensure that, educational practices are grounded in both theoretical reasoning and empirical research, aiming for improvements based on observable outcomes and effective strategies. The key elements of rational-empirical theory are systematic planning, empirical evidence, and continuous evaluation (Guskey, 2000).

In this approach of curriculum reform practice, the agents introduce the reform with the assumption that it will benefit the implementers (teachers) and since teachers are assumed to be rational people under the expectation of adopting the proposed change (Handal, & Herrington). It usually employs a top-down strategy, similar to those used by the 1960s curricular innovation pioneers in the USA and Europe. The Research, Development, and Diffusion (RDD) model is an illustration of one of these models. Marsh & Sharman (2009) argues that this model usually involves the formulation of an innovation by an "originator" (Marsh, & Sharman, 2009) who starts with the identification of the problem, goes through the process of finding solutions to the problem through research, development and finally diffusion of the solution to the audience. The same way is related to what has occurred in Zanzibar in 2021, where the Ministry of Education, following the recommendation from 2019 needs an assessment report in line with social hearings to justify the reform, without data from empirical research undertaken.

In Zanzibar, once they were given the government consent to return standard seven in 2021, based on the 2019 need assessment report and social hearings, the implementation started in 2022, where the standard seven syllabus was distributed with short training to standard seven teachers and finally the exams were enacted. The model is limited to assuming a passive diffusion of innovation to teachers, and this proved to be ineffective in initiating and sustaining change.

Normative Re-educative Approach

This is a theory of curriculum reform that emphasizes the establishment and adherence to standards and ideals in the curriculum development process. The theory is grounded in the belief that educational reforms should be grounded by a set of predefining norms or standards that reflect societal values, academic goals and desired outcomes for students. In this strategy, it is believed that people can be re-educated to change from the norm to the new ways. This strategy acknowledges that peoples' behaviour is influenced by their socio-cultural norms and that through direct interventions by change agents people can change their attitudes, values and

skills. The key elements of normative theory are; standards and values, guidance and direction, and focus on desired outcomes.

The first two approaches were looked at in more detail because they are similar to the approaches used in the Zanzibar curriculum reform process in 2021. So, the following discussions are based on those approaches. The disadvantage of the tendency of governments to centralize educational change, as evidenced by the studies cited by Kennedy (2019) is that centrally managed reforms impede the implementation of change and stifle the development and creativity of teachers. According to Pinto et al. (2015), the literature indicates that imposed innovations are often ineffective, and in most cases lead to failure if teachers do not accept or do not understand the innovations. Pinto et al. (2015) point out that innovation is more successful when teachers feel some sense of ownership of the innovation. Since the first two methods are comparable to those employed in Zanzibar curriculum change, they were examined in further detail. Thus, those techniques form the basis of the subsequent debates. The studies Kennedy (2019) referenced show that governments tend to centralize educational change, which has the drawback that centrally directed reforms hinder change implementation and discourage teachers' growth and innovation. The literature, according to Pinto et al. (2015), shows that mandated innovations are frequently ineffectual and, in most situations, result in failure if teachers reject or misunderstand the innovations. According to Pinto et al. (2015), innovation has a greater chance of succeeding when teachers experience a degree of ownership over it.

According to Eisner (1992), instructors will find it difficult to dedicate themselves to reforms as long as they consider themselves actors carrying out someone else's ideas. It follows that it will be difficult for instructors to take ownership of the invention and, consequently, difficult to make the required adjustments if they are not actively involved in its development. Due to the difficulties encountered when employing top-down models and the lessons learned from previous innovations, Supriani et al. (2022) think that including end users in the creation of innovations and curriculum

materials is crucial because it may increase their acceptance and, consequently, their effectiveness when implemented in the classroom.

It is acknowledged in the Periphery-Centre (Whitehead, 2013), Social-Interaction (Marsh, & Sharman, 2009), and Problem-Solving (Marsh, & Sharman, 2009) models that when developing and executing new curricula, innovations should begin with the requirements of the schools and teachers. Teachers are viewed as vital members of curriculum development teams in these frameworks. It is asserted that teacher involvement in curriculum reform leads to more ownership, relevance, dedication, and participation, which reduces finger-pointing when things don't go as planned. Rather, curriculum designers, educators, and school administrators often collaborate to identify answers (Kennedy, 2019). But even these models have their shortcomings. They appear to be under the impression that all educators will have similar needs and that educators will respond.

According to Mayer et al. (2012), it's critical to view these models as mutually supportive of one another rather than as alternatives to attempt and make implementation more meaningful as I strongly prefer the use of this idea to Zanzibar curriculum reform practice. Dalin et al. quoted by (Kennedy, 2019) conducted research in Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Colombia to determine the characteristics of successful schools involved in significant national reforms. They discovered that successful innovations are facilitated by both a result, they advise appropriately combining the approaches. Indeed, as in the same case in Zanzibar, there is a great and considerable need and interest to combine the approaches rather than using a single approach for national educational or curriculum reform.

The periphery (at the school level) "designs or adapts materials, and conducts staff development and teacher training, both of which are carried out as 'close' to the classroom as possible," according to Kennedy, who highlights the need for appropriate linkage in the roles of the "," such as a government/ministry, curriculum development Centre, etc., to "provide long term political support and the necessary pressure for systemic reform" (Kennedy, 2019, p. 79). Studying innovation tactics

and models has taught us that, although these approaches have produced some successes, they are not without issues. Guthrie (2016) cautions that to maximize the benefits, developing nations, Zanzibar included, must carefully consider the models before choosing which one to adopt for the coming or future reforms—carefully considering the model for curriculum reform before choosing impacts alignment with goals, stakeholders' involvement, implementation feasibility, and scalability and assessment capabilities. Selecting the appropriate model helps ensure the reform's success and sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach in conjunction with a hybrid phenomenology design as they are both concerned with human behaviour, experiences and actions. Samples were drawn using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used in sample selection because the study needed participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the study objectives. For example, being a member of the curriculum reform committee (technical team member) for ministry officials and teachers having long experience in teaching and have been given training for the new curriculum in respective levels or classes, hence the researcher used it since purposive sampling focusing on specific populations as needed in the study (Palinkas et al., 2015), its efficiency and feasibility in the hard-to-reach population (Etikan et al., 2016), in-depth understanding of the data due to be having special characteristics (Patton, 2015), expertise and knowledge if the participant has special knowledge (Tong et al., 2013) and relevance to the research objectives (Bernard, 2017). For example, the study objective concerning the assumptions for curriculum reform in Zanzibar, the committee members were chosen since they are the originators of the reform, and as such they know the philosophical underpinning of the reform. Apart from purposive, the study used snowball sampling since some of the researchers' respondents were hidden, hard to reach, or unknown to him. This technique is very rationale due to its ability to build trust and rapport specifically when you are sent to a respondent with a person who knows each other (Goodman, 1961), it

is cost-effective since it gives you direct directions to reach the respondents instead of using more cost to move around the offices to search for respondents manually (Biernacki, & Waldorf, 1981), and so forth. For example, the study under discussion needed information from the Ministry Principal Secretary who is in charge during the reform of 2021 in Zanzibar, during the data collection in 2023, the PS was already sent to another ministry with the same position, the current PS transfer the researcher to the former PS to get valid information from the PS in charge at the time of 2021 curriculum reform in Zanzibar primary education.

Semi-structured interviews were used with seven Ministry of Education officials and two technical team members. Interviews were chosen so that the stakeholders could provide their understanding and experience of the subject of the study. The researcher used every means to ensure a safe environment during the interview not to affect the flow of the required data through their perceptions. Instead, he stimulated the discussion and allowed the experiences of the interviewees to come to the fore. It is argued that researchers in qualitative stance study phenomena in their natural setting, trying to reveal it or to interpret the subject in terms of the meaning individuals may bring to them (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2000).

Through interaction, I also reviewed several documents, namely, the Needs Assessment Report (2019), Pre-Primary and Primary Education Curriculum Framework (2022), Zanzibar Schools Inspection Reports (2021/2022; 2022/2023), Zanzibar 2022 National Examination Report, and Zanzibar National Examination Evaluation Reports (2022, 2023).

Apart from that, I observed six teaching and learning classroom sessions to capture the actual picture of how the process is in the classroom situations. This led to the collection and confirmation of the real data, instead of those reported from interviewees, documents and focus group discussions. The researcher used the components developed in the first interview session between him and the curriculum reform committee members (technical team members) to prove what has been said and

documented if practised as desired for the targeted outcomes in the classroom situations or not.

The data were thematically analysed, where I re-read the transcripts and took preliminary notes during the transcription of recorded interviews and focus group discussions to familiarise the gathered information. In this part, I cross-checked the transcripts with audio recordings for accuracy. Then I generated the initial code by colour-coding the phrase with identified relevant features of the data. The preliminary review was done with my fellow PhD candidates to ensure that the codes accurately represent the data. I organised the codes into potential themes and grouped the related codes to identify patterns and consider how those codes can be combined to form broader overarching themes. I have thoroughly assessed whether the themes accurately capture the range and depth of the data. Then I refined the themes by checking if they worked with the coded extract and the entire dataset. In this part, I reviewed and revised the themes to ensure that they are distinct and encompass all relevant data. To ensure themes are robust and reflective of the participants' perspectives, I presented the themes to participants through their e-mails to gather their feedback. I clearly defined and named each theme based on the data it presents and developed details descriptions that outline the essence and scope of each theme. I wrote detailed theme descriptions and identified representation quotes for the data to ensure that each theme has a clear and informative name that reflects its content. This is to verify that the names and definitions of themes accurately represent the data and are consistent with the analysis. I have integrated thematic findings with relevant literature and theoretical framework and I used illustrative quotes and examples to support and clarify the themes. Finally, I have revised the report several times with my fellow PhD candidates to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the thematic analysis. All these have been done to detect the patterns of perceived impact of curriculum reform on the assumptions and its essence, its impacts on the teaching and learning process on pupils' learning outcomes and also the relevance of the curriculum with individual and community needs and interests.

FINDINGS

The analysis of data has revealed two major assumptions, which are; leadership influence on curriculum reform; and recommendations from the 2019 Needs Assessment Report (Zanzibar Institute of Education, 2019). These two major assumptions are accompanied by their essence, impact on the teaching and learning process and pupils learning outcomes together with the relevance of the curriculum. The details of each theme supported by respective quotations from respondents are presented as follows;

Leadership Influence on Curriculum Reform

In the evolving landscape of education, leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping and guiding curriculum reform. As educational institutions strive to meet the demands of an increasingly complex and dynamic world, effective leadership becomes essential in steering the direction and implementation of curricular changes. Curriculum reform is not merely a response to emerging educational needs but a proactive strategy to enhance teaching and learning experiences, ensuring that students acquire relevant skills and knowledge for the 21st century (Fullan, 2007). Effective leaders influence curriculum reform through their vision, strategic planning, and capacity to foster collaborative environments. According to Leithwood et al. (2004), leadership that is both visionary and participative significantly impacts the success of curriculum reforms by aligning educational goals with broader institutional objectives. This type of leadership encourages innovation and supports the adaptation of curricula to better meet the needs of diverse student populations. Moreover, leadership in curriculum reform requires a nuanced understanding of educational policies, stakeholder interests, and the practical challenges of implementation. As highlighted by Elmore (2004), leaders must navigate complex political and social landscapes, balancing the demands of various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and policymakers. The ability to manage these relationships and build consensus is crucial for the successful enactment of curriculum reforms.

The role of leadership in curriculum reform is also underscored by the need for continuous professional development and support for educators. According to Darling-Hammond (2009), effective leaders provide the necessary resources and training to teachers, enabling them to adapt to and implement new curricula effectively. This support is vital for ensuring that reforms are not only introduced but also sustained and integrated into daily teaching practices.

In summary, leadership is integral to the process of curriculum reform, influencing both the strategic direction and the practical implementation of changes. By fostering a collaborative vision, managing stakeholder relationships, and supporting educators, leaders can drive meaningful and lasting improvements in educational outcomes.

The 2021 curriculum reform, which facilitated the resumption of standard seven in primary education in Zanzibar was due to the wide changes made by the revolutionary government of Zanzibar associated with leadership/regime influence in the eighth phase of the presidency of Zanzibar. The process and criteria used by new leadership to justify the 2021 curriculum reform in Zanzibar primary education is multifaceted involving stages and consideration. Here is an overview of the typical process:

- Needs assessment which involved data collection and data analysis.
- Setting objectives specifically educational goals and strategic planning
- Stakeholder engagement through consultation and commitment
- Design and development involved curriculum design without pilot testing
- Implementation in line with various pieces of training and support without resource allocation.

The criteria used to justify the reform used by the new leadership in Zanzibar are:

- Evidence of need assessment. Including performance data, stakeholders' consultations, and parents' opinions. No research -Justification.
- Best practices to support changes.

- Alignment with standards

In fact, by looking at the processes which the new leadership has used in curriculum reform, you could find that there are several ignored steps in the reform management, these ignored steps include the use of data from educational research in the need assessment, inadequate and thorough strategic planning in setting objectives steps, pilot test in design and development step, resource allocation in implantation step, and ongoing assessment in evaluation and Revision step. This ignoring step in the process is not a good indicator of successful curriculum reform.

The justification for curriculum reform was done under good criteria, although there were very crucial criteria which have been ignored. For example, cost-benefit analysis which includes financial consideration and resource allocation, which are the soul of educational reforms in any region. This implies that ignoring cost-benefit analysis can lead to several significant implications, including inefficient resource allocation, missed opportunities for improvement, increased inequality, long-term consequences, and lack of accountability in the educational intervention (Ladd, 2012; Hanushek, 2015; Ellenbogen, 2005; Miller, 2014; Schiller, 2009). The influence of leadership as an assumption was viewed and described from different perspectives by the participants, some supporting the assumption of the reform and others against it. Those who argued for the assumption were focused on the process and justification of the criteria which the reform process underwent. They see that, the reform practice was a result of a spontaneous decision because it was against the recommendation provided during the needs assessment practice undertaken, but it seemed to be a top-down decision which is by protocol unquestionable. A few vivid and relevant examples from the interview data where this meaning is revealed are presented in the following quotes from the ministry official:

The leadership of the ministry changed and when this happened, the President of this phase, Hussein Mwinyi, came up with reforms in every sector, which directly dropped the system of standard six and returned to the system of

standard seven (Interviewed on the 12th December 2023).

One of the things that led us to shift from standard six back to standard seven is the President's declarations because anything he utters is an order you cannot question again (Committee member interview, 13th and 14th December 2023).

Such statements reveal the power of the government in dictating/centralized curriculum reform and when exactly such reforms should take place. However, some contrary views were given by another participant who argued that the change did not come as an order, it was rooted in the formal procedures which all reforms pass through. The ministry official claimed that;

...we directly left the system of standard six and returned to the system of standard seven, and it has not been done as if it was just an order, no, it went through the same process, except that this has changed and all processes are acceptable (Interviewed on 12th December 2023).

The argument that has been raised here is contrary to the approach used by the leadership in the reform process since in the first phase of Needs Assessment Practice, the approach used was the bottom-up approach, but in the second needs assessment, they used an approach where government officials went down in level procedures as they were sending the message from the top management. If the reform followed the formal procedures, it could follow those steps completely. For example, need assessment could include data collection and analysis based on multiple sources such as students' performance metrics, teachers' feedback, stakeholders' input and educational research, but the documentary review I have done did not indicate the sound educational research used in data collection. Also, the strategic planning was ignored, until the data collection of this study was done which was the 2nd and 3rd years of implementation, no curriculum materials were allocated in Zanzibar primary schools. I have witnessed the technical team members working in analyzing and editing the first draft of curriculum materials for verification, then

the materials back to the publisher for printing, with no time allocated for delivery of these materials, you can ask yourself the role of strategic plan due to the delays of curriculum materials while the teachers and students are in second and third years of implementation. This idea is interpreted from the quotation below, which lacks argumentative support to enrich the justification if the reform process follows the reform procedures as indicated by the scholarly analysis.

it went through the same process, except that this has changed and all methods are acceptable, Penh, we can start from the bottom to come up or up to come down, so the top-down approach came so they came down from the top and started to be brought down at different social levels and the consultative meetings were held again (Interviewed on 12th December 2023).

These findings revealed deep meditation on the way reform has been done, it was too first to decide and implemented immediately. This could be interpreted as an order which has been brought indirectly from top management, the same ministry officials in the bottom-up approach recommended the remaining with standard six, and after a while, they turned to support the return of standard seven in primary education.

That is why some respondents associated this decision with a political perspective, arguing that there was no reasonable need to return standard seven except for a political decision which led to the budget enlargement, and other costs which the government could avoid by ignoring the return of standard seven. Here the ministry official said:

Technically, I consider it to be political matters, as an expert, but that is not the position of the Ministry of Education, I am giving you my technical input... (Interviewed on 30th April 2024).

This idea was challenged by other ministry officials, who argued that the reform decision was not from a political perspective, it was an academic and technical decision, and the justification for the decision was the 2019 needs assessment report, and also a real context itself allowed to add one year

ahead instead of standard six. Existing double shifts and overloaded classrooms in Zanzibar primary schools are very technical reasons for the reform and addition of one year to standard seven to eradicate the said challenges. The Former Ministry Permanent Secretary said:

Maybe I should say one of the reasons that led us to go back to the seventh grade is that our children get very little to study because we have two or three streams... The second reason is that the classes have so many children that even the teaching itself is a problem (Interviewed on 23rd May 2024).

The officer continues to argue that, the cost of education is not the case of ignoring the return of standard seven, He argues that for any government service, you are not supposed to consider the cost, any social services did care about the cost, this is to say that if the primary education is given for six years without effectiveness, and the addition of one year could improve the effectiveness, what could be the best practice? The former ministry official said that:

I disagree with them, they say the argument of giving the government the cost burden, I know that when you add one year to the cost, but I made these decisions on this basis: 1) in any government service you should not consider the cost, 2) in social services the government does not care about the cost, important service is available. The basic point is this, if you provide basic education that is not quality at a low cost, and later you provide that education by adding one year and get the desired quality, where should it be followed? Educational investment does not delay costs, and the person with that view lacks economic understanding in preparing peoples' resources, so that a person can be productive, he must have a broad understanding of things (Interviewed on 23rd May, 2024).

A critical analysis of the argument presented above indicates that cost-benefit analysis for social welfare or services is an important issue to be considered but is not the base for ignoring investment and educational interventions such as curriculum reforms.

Apart from that, the official argued on the delaying time for public services as being public servant, he cautioned that under eighteen children are not allowed to work if we give six years of primary education where could they go after completing their education? He said that it is not a good argument to ignore the addition of one year for primary education.

Recommendations from the 2019 Needs Assessment Report

The needs assessment report serves as a critical tool in identifying and understanding the gaps between current conditions and desired outcomes within an organization or community. By systematically analysing these gaps, the report provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities present. Based on this thorough evaluation, the following recommendations are proposed. These recommendations aim to address the identified needs effectively leveraging strategic solutions to enhance performance, optimize resources, and achieve the desired goals. Implementing these recommendations will facilitate targeted improvements and foster meaningful progress in alignment with the overall objectives.

The second assumption which is said to lead to the return of standard seven in primary education in Zanzibar is associated with those recommendations provided in the 2021 Needs Assessment Report. The Needs Assessment Report comprises almost 33 recommendations which have been categorised into eight main categories:

- Recommendations related to the structure of the Curriculum/ Curriculum approach (6)
- Recommendation related to the content of the curriculum (3)
- Recommendations related to language (4)
- Recommendation related to learning outcomes (4)
- Recommendations related to the curriculum drafting process (3)
- Recommendation related to the Pre-Primary Curriculum (3)

- Recommendation related to Curriculum implementation (6)
- Other recommendations (2)

This assumption has been viewed differently by respondents, some supported and agreed that recommendations from the 2019 Needs Assessment Report are among the assumptions for the 2021 curriculum reform which returned the standard seven, the following quotation exemplifies their support:

....therefore, due to the complaints received from people who had not been researched, there was nothing like research was done and came to investigate, but it is just the opinion of the people who gave it, according to the information, it is the needs of the community (Interviewed on 13th and 14th December 2023).

On the same point, some argue against that by saying it is not only a needs assessment report, there is something else, which triggered the reform and return of standard seven. This is because a needs assessment analysis was done in 2019 and procedures were taken to the conclusion recommended by the government through the respective Ministry. The idea of returning to standard seven was not recommended in the report, how come in 2021 curriculum reform to return to standard seven could be associated with the needs assessment report, the following quotes symbolize this interpretation:

all those who were required to participate in the review were required to be present at the consultative meetings, now various opinions came out and one of the questions that was being asked was the transition from standard six to standard seven as in remaining in the standard six, so during that period the majority, especially the majority, agreed to remain with the standard six, accepted to remain with the standard six, they did not see that there was a great need to have a standard seven and they felt that having a standard six would only be good because when the students finish universities, they will have more time to be able to serve the nation before they reach their age of retirement (Interviewed on 12th December, 2023).

This quotation points out that, an argument to return to standard seven cannot be associated with the 2019 Need Assessment Report, maybe there is another way around the reform intention among the government officials, in which they were not publicly mentioned for certain purposes.

In a similar view another Ministry official during the interview, argued that:

when the president made that statement, it had meaning and we had to follow the order that the President gave even though we were also interviewing people and we saw that many people were giving their complaints, sometimes without depending on what it meant (Interviewed on 13th and 14th December 2023).

These findings revealed contradicting ideas on the same point, this is a far and vivid indicator which allows us to conclude the interpretation that this criterion did not have a reliable influence on the change of the curriculum by returning to the standard seven in Zanzibar's primary education.

Impact of Curriculum Reform on Teaching and Learning Process

Curriculum reform represents a pivotal shift in educational practice, aimed at improving the alignment between educational standards and the evolving needs of students. Such reform can significantly impact the teaching and learning process, influencing instructional strategies, resource allocation, and student engagement. Research indicates that effective curriculum reforms can enhance educational outcomes by fostering more relevant and vigorous content, promoting innovative teaching methods, and supporting diverse learning styles (Fullan, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Conversely, poorly implemented reforms may disrupt established practices and challenge educator's adaptability (Cohen, & Hill, 2011). Exploring the multifaceted effects of curriculum reform on teaching and learning and emphasizing the need for reforms serves as a critical tool in identifying and understanding the gaps between current conditions and desired outcomes within an organization or community.

The study further analysed the improvement which has been done in the teaching and learning of the 2021 curriculum reforms, the kinds of training and strategies used during the provision to teachers and other stakeholders, but the most important thing is to evaluate the impacts on the improvement made in the new curriculum. Empirical data obtained in the interviews show that changes in teaching and learning approach (from content to competence-based approach), reducing the number of subjects, use of activities-based training, lack and too far delaying of teaching and learning materials, lack of professional teachers in the new subjects initiated in the curriculum are among the impacts drawn from this study. Almost all the interviewees argued about the delay and lack of curriculum materials which are essential for their professional. They said:

in the field itself, you can see that there is now a shortage of curriculum materials, there are four curriculum materials, which are: syllabuses, the teacher's guide, the student's book and the learning standards (achievement standards), if the basis of the implementation of the curriculum is to get the four bases (Committee Member Interview, 12th December, 2023).

Another respondent with the same view has the following quote:

you know in our curriculum we have the challenge of access to equipment, the equipment itself. More teaching and learning books, they are not ready, that is the challenge, I told you that for the results to be good, there are many things, many factors must come together to be together, money is what led to the delay in the equipment, and that is the basis for financial resources to come in on time, to come in enough, not to document (Ministry Official interview, 12th December 2023).

The findings depicted in this argumentation indicate that, in addition to having good goals defined with great professionalism by government officials through the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training Zanzibar, the process of bringing back the standard seven as well as improving the curriculum and being in the shape it seems today, the implementation process was greatly accelerated

before the implementation environment is friendly and permissive. In that way, one of the respondents said:

but the President came and made official declarations that we should bring back the seventh grade, in addition to that, I told you yesterday that everything needs to be done to make educational changes, go professionally, and not panic, short brings another difference, but it wanted us to go professionally, although I can also say that what we went through is a step in professionalism because when you do something professionally, even getting peoples' opinions are included in a certain kind of expertise, but we should have gone with other additional steps (Committee Member Interview, 13th & 14th December 2023).

Accelerating the implementation of a revised curriculum in teaching and learning can have several significant impacts, both positive and challenging. Positive impacts in accelerating the curriculum implementation can be observed in the following implementation aspects:

Enhanced Relevance and Engagement: Enhanced relevance refers to aligning curriculum content with current trends, real-world applications, and students' interests, making learning more applicable to their future careers and everyday lives. When curriculums are updated to reflect contemporary issues and emerging fields, students often find the material more meaningful and engaging. This can increase student engagement and motivation. As such, engagement is improved when the curriculum is updated to reflect contemporary issues and interests, students are more likely to be motivated and involved in their learning.

Improved Learning Outcomes: This refers to the enhanced academic achievements and skills development that result from a well-designed and effectively implemented curriculum. A revised curriculum often incorporates updated pedagogical methods and content that better address the needs of students and align with current educational standards. For example, the introduction of inquiry-based learning has been linked to enhanced problem-

solving skills and academic performance (Beers, 2011).

Professional Development Opportunities: These are essential for educators as they navigate the complexities of implementing a revised curriculum. When curriculums are updated, they often introduce new teaching strategies, content areas, and technological tools that require teachers to adapt their instructional practices. Targeted professional development programs are crucial for improving teaching practices and consequently student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Well-structured training programs provide teachers with insights into new pedagogical approaches, subject matter content, and instructional techniques which result in teacher growth. By investing in comprehensive professional development, educational institutions can ensure that teachers are well-prepared to deliver revised curricula effectively, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes and a more dynamic learning environment.

Alignment with Standards: This is a crucial aspect of curriculum development and implementation, in ensuring that educational content and instructional practices meet established educational benchmarks and expectations. Standards provide a framework that guides the curriculum in delivering key knowledge and skills required for student success at various educational levels. When a revised curriculum aligns well with these standards, it ensures that students are acquiring the competencies necessary to meet academic and professional requirements which indeed form standard compliance. This alignment ensures that students meet the current expectations set by authorities and can facilitate smoother transitions to higher education or the workforce (National Research Council, 2000). For example, the new curriculum reform in pre-primary and primary education in Zanzibar aligns with the recommendations of the 2019 Needs Assessment Report. The alignment is seen in the following aspects:

- Integrating skills and content that meet the identified need, for instance: recommendation reveal that students lack critical thinking skills, and the new curriculum changes the teaching

and learning approach to meet that identified need.

- The revised curriculum reflects the expectations and needs of all relevant parties since the reform processes the information gathered through stakeholder engagement and consultation meetings and workshops.
- Reform has been grounded by need assessment data and best practices. For example, reducing the number of subjects and the integration of "creative arts and physical education" identified gaps in data from need assessment as evidence.

These aspects of the new curriculum are evidence that the new curriculum aligns with the recommendations from the 2019 need assessment report, and indeed they make this new curriculum relevant to the needs and interests of the individual learner and community.

On the other hand, the study observed the negative impacts of accelerating the curriculum implementation can be further observed in the implementation aspects as well, which can be noted as implementation challenges, these are:

Logistic Issues: This refers to practical challenges and complexities associated with the planning, implementation, and management of the processes and resources in an educational setting. These issues can encompass a range of problems, including the allocation of materials, scheduling, coordination among the stakeholders, and ensuring that all necessary resources are available and effectively utilized. In the curriculum reform context, logistic issues often involve the distribution of new teaching materials, the scheduling of professional development sessions, and the adjustment of classroom resources to support a revised curriculum (Elmore, 2004). This situation is observed in the 2021 curriculum reform in Zanzibar, where the implementation began in 2022, but there is a difficulty in providing adequate professional training, what is practised is superficial training as a decree in any reform based on a theoretical perspective. There are also delays in delivering updated textbooks and other curriculum-supportive documents which are core requisite for curriculum implementation. These hinder the effectiveness of

the curriculum implementation process and reduce the effectiveness of curriculum reform. In this case, Fullan (2007) argue that effective management of logistic issues is crucial for the successful integration of new curriculum, as those challenges can impact the smoother transition to new instructional practices and affect overall educational outcomes.

Teacher Resistance and Burnout: This refers to challenges that educators face when adapting to change in their teaching environment, such as the implementation of a new revised curriculum. Resistance is associated with a lack of familiarity or perceived adequacy of the previous curriculum, which undermines the effectiveness of the new curriculum and affects teacher morale (Cuban, 1998). Burnout is associated with physical and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged and excessive stress, often exacerbated by the adapting demands to a significant change in the educational setting (Maslach, & Leiter, 2016). They added that reduced enthusiasm for teaching, feelings of inadequacy, and a decrease in job performance are burnout symptoms. It is concluded that both resistance and burnout can undermine the effectiveness of curriculum implementation and negatively affect the students' outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Equity – Concern: In education equity-concern refers to challenges associated with ensuring fair and just access to resources, opportunities, and support for all students, regardless of their background or circumstances. When implementing a revised curriculum equity concerns can arise if the resources and support necessary for the successful implementation are not distributed evenly among schools and students. This can lead to disparities in education outcomes, particularly altering students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005).

Evaluation and Feedback: In the context of curriculum reform implementation evaluation and feedback involve systematically assessing the effectiveness of the new curriculum and gathering insights to inform curriculum improvement. This process helps identify whether the curriculum meets its intended goals and how it can be reformed. Thus, the rapid or accelerating curriculum implementation

will lack the data due to insufficient time for evaluation and feedback. This is to say that, without thorough evaluation, it is challenging to assess the effectiveness of the new curriculum or make necessary adjustments based on students' performance and feedback (Elmore, 2004). In other words, this implies that incorporating thorough evaluation and constructive feedback is essential for making data-driven decisions and ensuring that curriculum revisions lead to meaningful improvements in students learning and engagement. As such, while accelerating the implementation of a revised curriculum can bring significant benefits in terms of relevance, engagement, and improved learning outcomes, it also poses challenges related to logistic issues, resistance, equity concerns, and evaluation. Balancing these factors is crucial for a successful transition.

Impact of Curriculum Reform on the Relevance of the Curriculum

Curriculum reform significantly influences the relevance of the educational content, ensuring that it meets the evolving demands of society, technology, and the job market. As the education system strives to prepare students for a rapidly changing world, curriculum reforms are often implemented to align academic programs with contemporary knowledge and skills (Beineke, 2010). Such reforms seek to bridge the gap between traditional academic content and practical, real-world competencies required in today's diverse and dynamic landscape. For example, incorporating technology and digital literacy into a curriculum reflects the increasing importance of these skills in the modern workforce (Vogt, & Roblin, 2012). Additionally integrating interdisciplinary approaches and contemporary issues, such as sustainability and global citizenship, enhances the curriculum relevance by connecting academic learning with students' everyday lives and future challenges (Schleicher, 2018). By continually updating and refining educational context, curriculum reforms aim to ensure that learning experiences are not only current but also meaningful and applicable to students' future endeavours.

Relevance of the curriculum in Zanzibar primary education is one of the complained components during the situation analysis and also needs

assessment analysis in 2019. The component was given very intensive prominence during the needs assessment procedures since it was a long-time cry for the people of Zanzibar and their education, in almost all curriculum reforms undertaken (Needs Assessment Report, 2019). This study examined how this long-time cry could have got its solutions in this curriculum reform. Ministry officials during the interview have explained that the changes have added to bring relevance of the curriculum due to the needs and interests of Zanzibar. Changing the teaching and learning approach (playing-based approach for pre-primary and competence-based approach for lower and upper primary) accompanied with an assessment of learning, activities-based learning with the active participation of the pupils as a missing component which has been added to this new curriculum reform. The Committee Members' quotations which reveal the inclusion of these components are:

first of all, it is because of the approach itself that we used the competence-based, but right now our curricula take them more into action and prepare them for work, we have set up creative arts and games, where they can start being taught to make various things(Interviewed on 13th & 14th, December 2023).

The words of the curriculum committee member who was the one among the technical team in reviewing and reforming the curriculum can be interpreted that, the cook is only and most powerful witness of how the food was prepared. Having said that, it is true that the 2021 curriculum has relevant aspects which prompt one to argue that the curriculum is relevant to the current trends and real-world contexts. For example, the decision to have a competence-based approach, current issues, science and technology subjects, and inquiry-based learning are symptoms of relevant curricula that reflect individual needs and interests.

Also, the Ministry Official with the same view said that;

those that focus on the target of the curriculum itself, the curriculum itself says that it is a competency curriculum, it is a competency for the teacher in the way of teaching the way of

wanting to change the child's knowledge, skills and attitude, that is to gain knowledge, skills and orientation, and this is the main thing that has come up with a new curriculum (Interviewed on 12th December 2023).

These findings lead us to believe that there are patterns which indicate the existence of relevance in this new curriculum reform undertaking in 2021 in Zanzibar. The data from the documentary review, for example, in "Pre-Primary and Primary Education Curriculum Framework" indicate that pedagogical change from a subject base to a thematic approach in line with a playing-based approach for pre-primary education is to make pre-primary education more realistic as well as more engaged for the learners. Apart from that, reducing the number of subjects, integrating "creative arts and physical education" the existence of science and technology as a subject, integrating environmental education in pre-primary education and cross-cutting issues like citizenship are evidence that the curriculum is relevant and reflecting the needs and interests of the learners to suit in the contemporary world.

The researcher compared the Needs Assessment Report, (2019) and Pre-Primary and Primary Education Curriculum Framework (2022) and observed that many of the recommendations provided during the assessment have been worked out, and the framework shows that it is the type of curriculum which was the dream of the people of Zanzibar, what is remaining is the second phase of implementation, although there are minor recommendations which have been ignored. Needs Assessment Report comprised thirty-three (33) recommendations, among the thirty-three (33) twenty-five recommendations have been worked out and the remaining eight were ignored. The eight ignored recommendations as arranged in the report are number 10, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, and 27 as here observed:

10- A more balanced approach should be taken to the teaching of English bearing in mind the uses to which children will put the language.

19- The pre-service teacher education curriculum should be revised along with any revision of the pre-primary and primary curriculum framework.

21- It is recommended that issues related to curriculum implementation are considered at each stage of the curriculum review process.

22- When drafting the curriculum framework, care should be taken to consider what resources are needed to deliver the curriculum and the cost of these. Without this stage in planning for curriculum development, the curriculum can become merely aspirational and not realizable in practice. It is also recommended that whatever teachers are asked to produce should be realistic both in terms of the teacher's time and the use to which the resources can be put in the large, mixed-ability classes of Zanzibar.

23- When planning for implementation of the curriculum, it is vitally important to keep teachers in the loop and provide training especially if there is a change of approach. The training should include the theory and rationale behind the new curriculum in a way which enables teachers to see its benefits. It should also include practical skills and techniques for effective delivery.

24- It is recommended that communication strategies made up of a robust and persuasive communication plan should be developed along with the implementation plan. This should include a sound rationale for the approach to the curriculum which has been decided.

26- It is recommended that a monitoring plan is put in place to track implementation and enable the early identification of any challenges.

27- While scope for individualization can be built into the curriculum, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education looks at broader issues related to right age enrolment. This affects not only the effectiveness of the ability to implement the curriculum is just one example but also on system's effectiveness.

The potential reasons for the ignoring of these mentioned recommendations are associated with the rapid or accelerating implementation of the reformed curriculum, which is characterized by implantation challenges including logistic issues. These logistic challenges are due to inadequate time for proper and thorough preparation to adapt new materials or insufficient resources for transition.

Impacts of Curriculum Reform on Pupils' Learning Outcomes

Curriculum reform plays a crucial role in shaping pupils' learning outcomes by redefining educational objectives, content, and pedagogical approaches. These reforms aim to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and improve students' academic performance and skills development (Guskey, 2000). By introducing new standards, updating content, and incorporating innovative teaching methods, curriculum reform seeks to address gaps in traditional educational practices and better prepare students for future challenges (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Reforms that emphasise critical thinking, problem-solving, and real-world applications tend to foster higher levels of engagement and motivation among students (Brusilovsky, & Millan, 2007). Thus, the impact of curriculum reforms on learning outcomes is substantial, influencing both the quality of education and the preparedness of students for future academic and professional endeavors.

Evaluating the impact of curriculum reforms on pupils' learning outcomes is another critical area where this study comes from, specifically the impacts that could be observed in pupils' learning outcomes under the new curriculum.

The findings revealed that the impact on pupils' learning outcomes for 2021 curriculum reform is reviewed from multiple viewpoints, the negative and positive impacts according to the stakeholders' perceptions during the data collection. The following are positive impacts as observed during the data collection:

The Reform has Enhanced Relevance and Engagement

The newly updated curriculum has ensured that content is relevant to contemporary issues and students' interests, which has boosted student engagement and motivation. The introduction of Creative Arts and Physical Education as a subject in the new 2021 primary education curriculum has motivated students and increased their interests. The Ministry Official during the interview showed that creative arts and physical education are among the interesting subjects for primary students who have never seen before, this is because, during the session,

learners get multiple opportunities to show their creativity, and talents, which were not given chance in the former curriculum. Here the Ministry Official said:

Creative arts are one of the subjects most loved by students than any other subject, this is due to students seeing the reality of what they are doing in this subject. This is because children have many talents, and now it is an area that has allowed them to show their talents and abilities, it is also because currently Art is one of the fastest growing areas in the world, and children see its progress (Interviewed on 12th December, 2023).

This finding implies that creative arts and physical education content are relevant to contemporary issues and students' interests which motivate the students to a large extent. This is because creative arts have an impact on daily lives.

Another Ministry official during the interview said, that "Creative Arts and Physical Education" is the most performed subject during the national examination results, both in 2022 examinations where the results were announced in 2023 and 2023 examinations where the results were announced in 2024.

Creative arts and sports are the favourite subjects and the most successful, seventh grade students, than all other subjects (Interviewed on 12th December 2023).

Primary school teachers during the focus group discussion have shown the positive impact of this reform specifically they emphasize the introduction of Creative Arts and Physical Education, they said that topics like food preparation including preparing chapatti, and avocado juice have greatly motivated students. One of the teachers gave out a testimonial conversation between students who were asked each other, on the previous topic of "preparing avocado juice" One student asked his fellow student.

"... hey Juma, did you prepare avocado juice last day? Because I prepared it myself at home as the teacher told us, I also mix with "iliki" and ginger, it was so a delicious drink"

This testimonial conversation gives feedback to the teachers on the application of the knowledge the student acquired during the last day session. This feedback implies that the subject content is relevant and reflects the learners' interests. It is argued that increased student engagement is linked to improved academic performance and greater enthusiasm for learning (Hattie, 2009).

Improved Learning Strategies: Curriculum reform has created an effective pedagogy and incorporates advanced pedagogical strategies such as inquiry-based learning collaborative projects, and differentiated instructions. These strategies cater to diverse learning styles and promote deeper understanding, although it is to a moderate extent. This situation enhanced students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. For example, the change in teaching and learning approach from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred approach is a vivid example of improved learning strategies with diverse learning styles, including play-based learning for the pre-primary education curriculum.

Enhanced Skills Development: The curriculum reform in Zanzibar witnessed the integration of 21st-century skills, in which the modern curriculum frequently emphasizes digital literacy, communication and teamwork. By focusing on these skills, students are better prepared for future academic and professional challenges. The integration of "science and technology" as a subject in new curriculum, helps students to develop competencies that are crucial in today's job market.

Higher standards and Expectations: The elevated learning goals always involve raising educational standards and expectations. Higher standards set in this new curriculum will improve learning outcomes by challenging students to achieve more and by providing a clearer framework for assessment and achievement. These enhanced standards as set by the Zanzibar Institute of Education, under the Ministry of Education supervision, can drive higher levels of student performance and academic achievement.

Apart from the positive impacts which have been addressed by the study, the negative aspects have also been thoroughly observed. This is due to rapid redesign and implementation the following are

observed negative impacts due to stakeholders' perceptions.

Disruption of Learning Continuity: This situation has greatly created learning gaps in knowledge and skills. This was specifically because that curriculum is new with several changes, there was enough time to prepare the learner to cope with the change, and the implementation was done. The student was struggling to adjust to new content and pedagogical approaches that differed significantly from their previous experience. This is witnessed by the 2023 standard seven examination results where all registered and sited for exams students pass in "C" and "D" grades, with no grade "A" or "B" in their pass marks. This has been affected by poor preparation of the assessment process itself which did not have a national assessment framework caused by several factors including the urgency (rapid) of the implementation of the curriculum itself, the absence of achievement standards that would show the limitation and scope of the topics, the nature of the students themselves are from the content-based curriculum, within the implementation of the new curriculum for the year, how can you test a child with a competency-based curriculum. Combining two or more subjects during the National examination while they were studied as separate subjects was also a challenge, the subjects he studied in English for about six years, then changed the language while entering standard seven, he/she finds himself being tested in Kiswahili in the first-grade exams. All these had a negative effect as a result (learning outcomes) on the students, although there are subjects that are more successful, especially the "creative arts and physical education" that entered the curriculum. The respondents had many perceptions of these pupils' learning outcomes as can be seen in the quotations of their explanations:

... But the biggest challenge for the examination board was that you cannot test the new standard seven curriculum for a student who has just entered the standard seven Because when we test our exams, it doesn't just start from standard seven, it starts from the standard four, we take the standard five, we take the standard six and ends the standard seven now, there was a bit of challenge here because how do you test a new

curriculum where the student has previously studied the content- based until the standard seven has studied competence, how do you measure? Using which assessment? So, what we did in order not to create a big challenge, we tested it urgently, we tested it by looking at what the student had studied in the seventh grade, but we also tested it using the content that was used for the fourth, fifth and last grade, otherwise it would have been a bigger challenge (Ministry Official interview, 12th December 2023).

The president came and made official declarations that we should bring back the seventh grade, but in addition to that, I told you yesterday that everything needs to be done to make educational changes, go professionally, and not panic. Short brings another difference, but it wanted us to go professionally, although I can also say that what we went through is a step in professionalism because when you do something professionally, even getting peoples' opinions are included in a certain kind of expertise, but we should have gone with other additional steps (Committee Member Interview, 13th /14th December 2023).

The findings indicate that the learning and knowledge gaps created by rapid implementation have affected the learning outcomes of the students in Zanzibar primary education in the 2023 and 2024 national examinations results. The findings imply that it gives a clear picture of the way 2021 curriculum reform took place in the way there was not enough preparation and the environment was not very friendly to facilitate the implementation of the curriculum so quickly.

Inadequate Teacher Preparation: This created an implementation challenge, since the teachers were not adequately prepared or supported during the transition to a new curriculum, their ability to deliver the content using a competence-based approach had been effectively compromised. The inadequate training and resources were the nominated factor which can also lead to confusion and frustration among educators.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study revealed that 2021 primary education curriculum reform assumptions are from different perspectives, one of them is of those who did not see a great need to return on standard seven and they are the majority, what they recommended is structural curriculum reform along with the reduction or minimizing the number of subjects, changing of the teaching and learning approach and other salient recommendations as documented in a needs assessment report of 2019, although there are other perspectives of those who see needs to return the standard seven in the prior base of acting upon the recommendations undertaking in the needs assessment report 2019 and Merced by presidential declaration of the whole sectorial change including education, which was under the leadership influence. The results remind us that, the inspiration for any orientation of any curriculum reform is drawn mostly from three sources: psychological beliefs about learning, teaching and personality development, or societal forces either directly or indirect, which include parents' associations, publishers, political and religious groups and professional associations (Osaki, 1996). The sources reflected a number of theories on education including progressivism, which promotes critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It also advocates for a curriculum that is responsive to the needs and interests of students and encourages active participation (Dewey, 1938). The idea is supported by Piaget, & Skinner (1950) by encouraging curriculum reforms that emphasize student-centred learning and meaningful, context-rich activities. Freire (1970) supports curriculum reform that challenges traditional educational practices and aims to empower learners through critical thinking and reflection on social, political, and cultural issues. In that regard, the study results further clearly indicate that leadership influence which believed on the whole government sectorial changes declared by the eighth governance, in 2021 in Zanzibar is powered and influencing assumption led to the 2021 curriculum reform and return of standard seven, although their argument was given as an excuse to agree with the recommendations made in 2019 Needs Assessment Report. This explanation confirms the argument made by CEDEFOP (2012)

that always the effectiveness of curriculum reform decisions depends on the capacity or power of the reforming catalyst since some of the reform catalysts or assumptions are more powerful than others or have the potential to be more robust. This sort of decision reminds us of the Resnick (1968) argument as described in Osaki (1996) which was known as "revolution by education". After the rapid changes of 2009 which, for a strong and great effort, initiated primary education as only ended up in standard six, the decision the return to standard seven in 2021 acts as a retreating decision which could raise many questions about the nature and direction of the pre-primary and primary education curriculum in Zanzibar, along with the sustainability and safeguard procedures. This is because retreating has a lot of negative consequences in educational practices including educational continuity and stability (Elmore, 2004), effect on teacher morale and professional development (Fullan, 2007), impact on student learning outcomes (Hagreaves, & Fullan, 2012), public perception and trust in educational institutions (Tyack, & Cuban, 1995) and so forth.

Sometimes a reform contradicts or competes with existing policies or recommendations, and may create obstacles to effective implementation. Increasing teachers' workload or forcing teachers to invest in one policy or recommendation at the expense of the other are potential barriers to curriculum implementation (OECD, 2020). The changes and reforms in the 2021 primary education curriculum have entrusted the entire society that this is only a bridge toward the quality education which they dreamed of for a long time. This is because, any good curriculum ought to ultimately enable every individual to attain his dream of self-actualization (Osaki, 1996). Fear, doubt and concern come when, the curriculum reform directed to start working especially, with strong management which officially started in 2022 for standard seven only, and later the standard one in 2023, no materials for curriculum would enable the implementation of the curriculum, as quoted through the statements of the interviewees, claiming the absence of materials of any of the four important. When I went around the schools observing how this curriculum is being implemented in December 2023, I found teachers with only the standard seven and standard one trial syllabi without

any teaching materials, while the teachers' instructional materials are not limited to textbooks and syllabuses (Mupa, & Chinooneka, 2015), they also refer to teaching methods, materials, time available for instruction, the knowledge and skills of the teachers acquired through training and experience (Okongo et al., 2015).

Moreover, in January 2024, when the researcher was continuing to observe classroom practices, he found teachers who were supposed to teach standard II (second grade) with the new competence-based syllabuses were directed to return to the old content-based syllabus because the new competence-based syllabuses for the standard two were not yet ready and there was no any official instructions or information on when they will be available. In the focus group discussion researcher conducted with teachers in two phases, the participants of the discussion said that among the challenges they had, they were given training on how to teach the competence-based curriculum, but apart from the syllabus of the standard one and seven, there were no any other materials given, which leads to the following effects: differences in the scope of topics in teaching between schools, there is no teaching efficiency, losing children to one level being taught with a different type of curriculum than that of other classes, it has reached a point where the teachers are confused and do not know where they are going. And they suggested a lot such as: no training if the equipment is not ready for implementation, and no new system should be introduced if the preparation is not sufficient for the expected goals. Researches show that the paucity of material resources is a factor that contributes to ineffective teaching in primary schools (Mupa, & Chinooneka, 2015). It is often believed that teaching pupils without equipping teachers with appropriate instructional materials to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens is failing the learners (Okongo et al., 2015). Mupa, & Chinooneka noted that it is not the buildings themselves that are critical for effective teaching and learning but the quality of the processes that take place within the buildings. In this regard, it is reasonable to bear in mind that, if there is neglect on the issue of teaching and learning resources in primary schools, the full potential of lower primary school children may never be discovered and in the

end, the ripple effects are carried over to other levels of schooling (Njoroge, 2019). This is to say that if the new competence-based curriculum is being taught with neglect of the instructional materials it is the same as that we have postponed the problem for now that we will encounter before our professional journey. This is a fact, the resources and school materials that are to be used in teaching and learning have been observed as powerful strategies to bring about the efficient acquisition of expected knowledge and skills (Germain, & De Dieu, 2023). In this case, Fullan (2015 p.2) argues that curriculum implementation corresponds to the means to accomplish desired objectives, and for the new curriculum to bear fruit, it needs to be translated into classroom practices. In addition to this complexity, a major issue many countries encounter when trying to reform curriculums concerns the implementation of the reform. Echoing traditions and debates in these fields, curriculum reform has previously been seen from a "top-down" perspective, where the "success" of the implementation was measured by the "fidelity" and "adherence" to the reformed curriculum by implementers, such as teachers. Nevertheless, this approach does not fit the trend of autonomy-centered curriculum enactment, where the central role of teachers in the process, both as enactors and mediators of the policy, makes obsolete the concept of fidelity itself (OECD, 2020).

The idea of implementing a curriculum without curriculum materials was against the constructivist theory which is the base of the learner-centered approach where the new curriculum was developed. Piaget, the proponent of constructivism, emphasises that learners construct knowledge through stages of cognitive development and that materials are crucial aspects which help in building this cognitive structure (Piaget, 1950).

Lev Vygotsky focused on the social aspects of learning, introducing the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners benefit from the use of materials and tools provided by more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978). This is to say implementing curriculum without curriculum materials in Zanzibar has caused inconsistency in instructions between the schools, also increased workload for teachers, potential gaps

in content, unequal access, challenges in assessment and limited professional development observed in teaching and learning process or curriculum implementation challenges in Zanzibar pre-primary and primary schools. These challenges can be mitigated by teachers themselves by doing the following; providing support to each other, creating collaborative networks for teachers, utilizing technology and regular monitoring and feedback. This is in fact, implementing curriculum without materials requires careful planning and support to ensure that it meets educational goals and serves all students effectively.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to investigate the stakeholders' perceptions on the impact of curriculum reforms on the quality of primary education in Zanzibar, the study has given us remarkable results which tell us that, the 2021 curriculum reform is the source of return of standard seven in primary education in Zanzibar, although it was the results of the retreating decision influenced by a higher authority in the eighth governance phase, have made possible for the provision of primary education under competence-based curriculum format. These reforms focused on the Millennium Development Vision in terms of access to quality education given the needs of the 21st Century where a real revolution would be found in the education sector. This is to bring testimonial argument that what has been done in the curriculum reform and improvements in the primary education system has a positive and negative effect on the development of Zanzibar not only in academic perspectives but also in social, economic and political contexts, despite the existence of major and minor challenges in the context of the curriculum materials and resources, including textbooks, achievement standards, in which any education system of any third world country would not avoid encountering, is based on the economic power of the country in question. In that way the study recommends a thorough analysis of the assumptions before the final decision and make adequate preparation for curriculum reform, considering the necessary materials and requirements for new curriculum implementation. The need to encourage teachers to use improvisation so that they may be able to aid learners with materials which are readily

available in their locality. Furthermore, it is recommended that the authority make a high level and wide investment in educational reform through cost-benefit analysis, since important resources and materials for the countries' economic, political and social changes depend more on the level of investment in education for the quality improvement, for the next generation and global sustainable development.

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