From Community of Learning to Classroom: Implementation at Distance in Tanzania's MEWAKA Teacher Professional Development Programme

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Abstract

MEWAKA (Mafunzo Endelevu kwa Walimu Kazini) is Tanzania's school- and cluster-based programme of teacher continuous professional development, built around peer-facilitated Communities of Learning (CoLs). This article investigated why the collaborative, reflective model intended in national policy has been only partly realised in schools. It reports a critical document analysis, following the READ approach, of the national framework and nine public records of the embedded design-based implementation research (DBIR) on MEWAKA, published between 2022 and March 2026 and covering Cycle 1 (four Lindi schools, 2022), Cycle 2 (eight Lindi schools, 2023) and Phase 2 (twelve schools in four regions, 2024). Each claim was coded by evidential level: intention, implementation record, participant perception or measured outcome. The records show real progress. Observed lecturing in CoLs fell from 67% to 43% of sessions once structured modules were introduced, and women facilitated a quarter of observed sessions in Cycle 2, up from none. Yet classroom practice showed no clear pattern of change, sessions were short and rarely attended by all staff, teachers paid for data themselves, and women remained under-represented as facilitators. The article reconstructs a Community of Learning theory of change in which three conditions (facilitation, collegial and reflective presence) mediate between system inputs and classroom use. It argues that MEWAKA's implementation distance lies chiefly in the step from professional learning to classroom application, and that this step needs its own support, monitoring and evaluation.

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1. Introduction

Teacher continuous professional development (TCPD) matters in Tanzania because the quality of teaching depends on what teachers keep learning after initial training. The National Framework for Teachers Continuous Professional Development (NF-TCPD) sets out a coordinated national strategy to strengthen subject mastery, classroom practice, technology use and equity, and recognises school-based, cluster, distance and individual modes of learning (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2020). It also names financing and sustainability as implementation risks.

MEWAKA is the school- and cluster-based expression of this policy. Its core mechanism is the Community of Learning (CoL), a weekly session of about an hour in which teachers, led by a trained peer facilitator, discuss classroom problems, work through structured modules, plan and try new strategies, and reflect on the results (Chachage et al., 2024; Koomar et al., 2024). The design draws on a long tradition of research on teacher communities, which holds that sustained collegial work is a more durable route to instructional change than occasional workshops (Vescio et al., 2008; Wenger, 1998). It also moves responsibility closer to schools, peer facilitators, headteachers, Ward Education Officers (WEOs) and School Quality Assurance Officers (SQAOs).

From 2022, MEWAKA has been studied through embedded design-based implementation research (DBIR) led by EdTech Hub with the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), Aga Khan University and the Aga Khan Foundation. The research produced two DBIR cycles in Lindi Region, a second phase on equity, agency and adaptation in four regions, and a peer-reviewed account of how DBIR itself was adapted to a national, technology-supported reform (Adam et al., 2026). This body of evidence is now large enough to ask a question that no single report answers: across the cycles, where does the distance between the intended CoL model and enacted practice persist, and why?

This article uses the term *implementation distance* for the observable gap between a programme's intended mechanism and what happens in practice. The idea draws on implementation research, which distinguishes the outcomes of implementation, such as fidelity, adoption and sustainability, from the outcomes of the intervention itself (Proctor et al., 2011), and which shows that both fidelity and local adaptation shape results (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). The concern here is not whether every school follows one rigid format, but whether the core learning process survives adaptation.

The article makes three contributions. First, it brings together evidence across all published rounds of MEWAKA research, which allows change over time to be seen. Second, it interprets that evidence at system, school, teacher, technology and equity levels, rather than placing responsibility on teachers alone. Third, it offers a testable Community of Learning theory of change that locates the main remaining gap and marks clearly which links have evidence and which do not. Where Adam et al. (2026) theorise the research–government partnership that produced the evidence, this article focuses on the professional learning process inside the CoL and its link to the classroom.

2. Review questions

The analysis was guided by three questions:

1. What does the documentary record show about the intended logic of MEWAKA and about how CoLs were enacted across Cycle 1, Cycle 2 and Phase 2?
2. Where does implementation distance persist across rounds, and which system, school, technology and equity conditions are associated with it?

3. How can a Community of Learning theory of change explain the relationship between these conditions, CoL processes and possible classroom change?

3. Methods

3.1 Design

The study is a critical document analysis. It follows the four steps of the READ approach to policy document analysis: ready the materials, extract data, analyse data and distil findings (Dalglish et al., 2020). It is not a systematic review: it does not aim to locate every study of teacher development in Tanzania, but to analyse closely the complete public record of one programme and its embedded research.

3.2 Author positionality

The author is a Principal Curriculum Developer at TIE, which develops MEWAKA materials and is a partner in the research analysed here. The author was not a member of the DBIR research team and did not collect any of the data reported in the documents. This position gives familiarity with the programme's aims and materials, but it also creates a risk of interpreting the evidence favourably. Three safeguards were used: every claim was coded by evidential level before interpretation; negative and null findings were extracted as systematically as positive ones; and conclusions were checked against the original wording of each document.

3.3 Identification of documents

Documents were identified through the EdTech Hub Evidence Library, the Aga Khan University eCommons repository, the TIE and Ministry websites, Google Scholar and ERIC, using the English terms "MEWAKA", "teacher continuous professional development Tanzania", "TCPD Tanzania" and "Community of Learning Tanzania", and the Kiswahili phrase "Mafunzo Endelevu kwa Walimu Kazini". Reference lists of retrieved documents were checked. The cut-off for inclusion was 31 March 2026, and searches were completed on 2 October 2026.

3.4 Eligibility and document set

Documents were eligible if they (a) stated national TCPD policy, or (b) reported primary data on MEWAKA implementation, or (c) reported research findings or recommendations derived from such data. Blogs and webpages were included only where they reported findings not available elsewhere, and are marked as such. Documents were excluded if only a title or abstract could be obtained. Table 1 lists the ten documents analysed.

Table 1. *Documents analysed*

Document	Type	Data and setting	Role in analysis
MoEST (2020), National Framework for TCPD	Policy	Not applicable	Statement of policy intention
Koomar et al. (2023), Cycle 1 recommendations	Policy brief	Cycle 1, four Lindi schools, 2022	Cycle 1 recommendations
Koomar et al. (2024), Cycle 1 findings	Technical report	Four rural Lindi schools, Sept–Dec 2022; 15 classroom and 15 CoL observations; survey (25 of 33); interviews and focus groups at all levels	Principal source for Cycle 1

Document	Type	Data and setting	Role in analysis
Chachage et al. (2024), Cycle 2 recommendations	Policy brief	Eight rural Lindi schools, Aug–Nov 2023; fortnightly CoL and classroom observations; survey; interviews and focus groups	Principal source for Cycle 2 and change since Cycle 1
Swai et al. (2024), Phase 2 Round 1 recommendations	Policy brief	Twelve schools, four regions, March 2024	Phase 2 focus on equity, agency and adaptation
Chachage et al. (2025), Phase 2 Round 2 recommendations	Policy brief	Same twelve sites in Dodoma, Iringa, Lindi and Mwanza, Sept–Nov 2024; 12 CoL and 11 classroom observations; focus groups and interviews, including teachers with disabilities	Principal source for Phase 2 implementation, gender and disability findings
Mrosso and Hennessy (2025), gender equity in MEWAKA	Research blog	Phase 2, twelve rural schools in Dodoma, Iringa, Lindi and Mwanza	Phase 2 gender findings
EdTech Hub (2026), project record	Project webpage	Whole programme, 2021–2026	Timeline, ethics approval, reported policy uptake
Adam et al. (2026)	Peer-reviewed article	Realist-informed case study of DBIR in MEWAKA	How the research–government partnership operated
Hennessy et al. (2022)	Systematic review	170 studies, 40 low- and middle-income countries	Comparative context on technology-supported teacher development

The Phase 2 Round 2 policy brief (Chachage et al., 2025) reports CoL and classroom observations made in the same twelve sites between September and November 2024. It is the principal source for Phase 2 figures, and the research blog (Mrosso & Hennessy, 2025) is used to corroborate its gender findings.

3.5 Extraction, coding and appraisal

Data were extracted on policy intention, setting, design, participants, implementation processes, enablers and barriers, technology, equity, observed practice and stated limitations. Each extracted statement was then coded at one of four evidential levels (Table 2). This prevented a reported perception from being read as a measured effect.

Table 2. *Evidential levels used in coding*

Level	Meaning	Example from the record
1. Intention	What policy or programme design intends	CoLs are meant to be held weekly for about an hour (Chachage et al., 2024)
2. Implementation record	What was observed or documented to happen	Lecturing was observed in 43% of Cycle 2 CoLs (Chachage et al., 2024)
3. Participant perception	What participants reported	77% of surveyed teachers found CoLs with TIE modules more relevant (Chachage et al., 2024)
4. Measured outcome	Change in practice or learning measured against a comparison	No clear pattern of change in observed classroom practice between cycles (Chachage et al., 2024)

Each document was appraised for authority, methodological transparency, sample and setting, directness to MEWAKA and traceability of claims. The technical report (Koomar et al., 2024) gives the fullest account of methods. The policy briefs (Koomar et al., 2023; Chachage et al., 2024; Swai et al., 2024; Chachage et al., 2025) summarise findings and give fewer

methodological details, so their figures are used as reported and not re-analysed. The blog (Mrosso & Hennessy, 2025) and webpage (EdTech Hub, 2026) are treated as the weakest sources and are used only where they add information and are corroborated in substance by another document. Every figure and quotation reported below was checked against the page of its source.

3.6 Interpretive literature

Literature beyond the MEWAKA record was used for interpretation, not as evidence about MEWAKA. It was chosen purposively to address the four mechanisms that recur in the record: collaborative teacher learning (Avalos, 2011; Vescio et al., 2008; Wenger, 1998), effective features of professional development (Desimone, 2009; Kraft et al., 2018; Popova et al., 2022), accountability (O'Day, 2002) and implementation and adaptation (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Penuel et al., 2011; Proctor et al., 2011). Tanzanian and regional studies were added for context (Akyeampong et al., 2013; Hardman et al., 2015; Komba & Nkumbi, 2008; UNESCO, 2020). The three-presence lens was adapted from the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison et al., 2000; Stenbom, 2018) and from an earlier review in which the author was a co-author (Keulen et al., 2023).

3.7 Ethics

This article analyses publicly available documents and involved no human participants, so no ethics approval was required. The research it draws on received ethical approval from the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) during its inception phase in 2021–2022 (EdTech Hub, 2026).

4. Findings

4.1 Policy intention and programme logic

The NF-TCPD treats professional development as a system responsibility. It links teacher learning to institutional arrangements, monitoring and evaluation, funding and sustainability, and it names equity and access for vulnerable groups among its aims (MoEST, 2020). MEWAKA turns this into a school-level routine: a regular CoL, guided by a peer facilitator and, from 2023, by structured TIE modules hosted on a learning management system (LMS), in which teachers move from a classroom problem to a planned response and back again (Koomar et al., 2024; Chachage et al., 2024). The intended pathway is a cycle of inquiry, not attendance at a meeting.

The research describes this pathway as nested in a wider system. Policy, workforce, financing and regulation sit at the macro level; school culture, leadership, facilitation and technology support at the meso level; teacher and learner activity at the micro level (Koomar et al., 2024). This framing matters for interpretation. A lecture-like CoL, a short session or a teacher who never opens the LMS may reflect conditions at any of these levels, not only the skill of a facilitator.

4.2 Early strengths and change across rounds

Cycle 1 recorded promising early signals in four schools. Weekly CoLs were observed in all four, with average observed attendance of 88% (range 69–100%); 23 of 25 survey respondents said they were motivated "a lot", and 24 of 25 rated the activities highly relevant (Koomar et al., 2024). Teachers described greater confidence, collaboration and willingness to admit what they did not know (Koomar et al., 2024, p. 39). These are implementation records and perceptions from a small, intensively supported setting.

Cycle 2 allows change to be seen for the first time (Table 3). Its key change was the introduction of structured TIE CoL modules, which schools chose according to need; six of eight schools chose the Inclusive Education module (Chachage et al., 2024). Observed lecturing in CoLs fell from 67% of sessions in Cycle 1 to 43% in Cycle 2, and more sessions showed interactive activity, teacher engagement and peer feedback. Local government officers attributed the shift directly to facilitators following the module activities. Seventy-seven per cent of surveyed teachers found CoLs with modules more relevant than those without (Chachage et al., 2024).

Table 3. *Selected indicators across MEWAKA research rounds*

Indicator	Cycle 1 (2022, four schools)	Cycle 2 (2023, eight schools)	Phase 2 (2024, twelve schools)
CoLs with observed lecturing	67%	43%	Not quantified; sessions ranged from interactive to lecture-style
CoLs facilitated by women	None of those observed	25% of those observed	About one-third of peer facilitators were women (5 of 14 observed in Round 2), although two-thirds of teachers were
Attendance	Average 88% observed	All teachers present in 6 of 40 CoLs	Average 82% (Round 2); all teachers present in 4 of 12 CoLs; women's attendance limited by caregiving duties
Session length	Not reported	Average 47 minutes (range 31–64)	Average 44 minutes (range 8–85)
Teachers using own data	Reported as a barrier	87.5% of surveyed teachers	Women less likely to buy data (reported)
Classroom practice	Limited interactive learning observed	No clear pattern of change between cycles	Pupils asking their own questions rated low in 7 of 11 lessons

Sources: Koomar et al. (2024); Chachage et al. (2024, 2025); Mrosso and Hennessy (2025). Phase 2 figures are from Round 2 (September–November 2024) and are based on twelve CoL and eleven classroom observations.

4.3 Facilitation and the learning process

In Cycle 1, the clearest gap concerned the nature of facilitation. In two-thirds of observed CoLs, facilitators scored low or medium on engagement and facilitation, and sessions were often content-led: six of the observed sessions were on subject content, four on general pedagogy, two on special needs and two on technology (Koomar et al., 2024, p. 30). Peer feedback, rehearsal, role play and collective evaluation of strategies were rare. Facilitators asked for continuing coaching, model videos and follow-up learning (Koomar et al., 2024).

Cycle 2 shows that structure helps. The TIE modules gave facilitators activities to follow, and lecturing fell. Teachers said the modules brought knowledge "beyond the expertise available among peers", which partly answers the Cycle 1 concern that schools lacked access to subject expertise (Chachage et al., 2024). Yet the same comparison shows what did not change. Fewer Cycle 2 sessions included small-group work, explicit links between the CoL topic and teachers' own classrooms, brainstorming or teachers sharing what happened when they tried a new strategy (Chachage et al., 2024). Facilitators also reported that the module activities could not be completed in the time available. Phase 2 Round 2 shows the same pattern a year later. Facilitators generally built trust and kept discussion on instruction, but over half of the twelve observed CoLs (58%) were rated low for encouraging teachers to reflect on the strategies shared (Chachage et al., 2025).

This is an important pattern. The improvement occurred in facilitation (how the session was run) but not in the reflective link to practice (what teachers brought back from their classrooms). In the terms of the theory of change set out in Section 5, facilitation presence strengthened while cognitive and reflective presence did not. The pattern is consistent with international evidence that professional development changes practice when it combines active learning with opportunities to enact and review new practice, and when coaching is sustained (Desimone, 2009; Kraft et al., 2018).

Facilitation roles also varied. Some schools rotated facilitation among staff; others relied on two or three teachers (Koomar et al., 2024). Rotation can widen ownership but, without a clear minimum role and feedback, it can make responsibility diffuse.

4.4 Time, incentives, financing and accountability

High attendance in Cycle 1 did not mean participation was protected. Teachers reported that CoLs clashed with other duties or were held after school as unpaid work, and that preparing to facilitate competed with lesson preparation (Koomar et al., 2024). One teacher described weekly sessions as risking being seen as a "punishment" where implementation was uneven (Koomar et al., 2024, p. 41). Cycle 2 quantifies the problem: all teachers attended only 6 of 40 observed CoLs (15%), and sessions averaged 47 minutes, possibly shaped by the 40-minute lesson period (Chachage et al., 2024). Teachers preferred sessions within working hours. Schools that piloted fortnightly CoLs had higher observed quality but shorter sessions, while most teachers preferred a weekly rhythm (Chachage et al., 2024). In Phase 2, average attendance fell from 88% in Round 1 to 82% in Round 2, all teachers were present in only four of twelve observed CoLs, and sessions lasted between 8 and 85 minutes, with an average of 44 (Chachage et al., 2025).

Incentives were tested directly in Cycle 2. TIE issued Certificates of Completion to 66 teachers who attended at least 70% of sessions and completed module tasks, and four schools piloted a Certificate of Outstanding Achievement. All stakeholder groups agreed that certificates raised motivation, but three of the four pilot schools were uneasy about peers nominating each other and preferred independent selection (Chachage et al., 2024). The project record states that certificates have since been extended and that links to career progression are being explored (EdTech Hub, 2026). These are encouraging, but they remain reported actions rather than evaluated effects.

Financing was a constant theme. Cycle 1 recorded a lack of operating funds and transport for monitoring, with some officers using personal allowances (Koomar et al., 2024). Cycle 2 found that the absence of designated MEWAKA funds affected materials, connectivity, refreshments and attendance at cluster sessions; one school paid for refreshments from its school garden income (Chachage et al., 2024). Monitoring in Cycle 1 tended to focus on schedules and reporting rather than the quality of learning (Koomar et al., 2024). This reflects the distinction drawn by O'Day (2002) between bureaucratic accountability, which counts compliance, and professional accountability, which attends to the quality of practice. Attendance registers cannot show whether teachers examined classroom evidence or tried anything new.

4.5 Subject expertise and classroom application

The weakest link across all rounds is from the CoL to the classroom. In Cycle 1, stakeholders perceived gains in teaching, but classroom observations still showed little interactive learning; pupils rarely asked questions, and formative questioning and feedback were inconsistent (Koomar et al., 2024). In Cycle 2, classroom observation showed no clear pattern of change. Some foundational practices, such as giving reasoning tasks and pointers for improvement, were seen more often, while others, such as inviting pupils to share their experiences, were

seen less; pupil questioning stayed low in both cycles (Chachage et al., 2024). The research team notes that module content was not directly tied to the classroom observation protocol, so a direct effect was not expected (Chachage et al., 2024). In Phase 2 Round 2, observed lessons were generally clear and respectful, but pupils asking their own questions was rated low in seven of eleven lessons, and group work was seen in only two (Chachage et al., 2025).

This gap is not new in Tanzania. A school-based teacher development pilot evaluated in 2012 reported improved perceptions and a far lower cost per teacher than college-based training, but also the need for long-term, school-linked support to change classroom practice at scale (Hardman et al., 2015). Earlier studies described Tanzanian professional development as poorly coordinated and dependent on individual goodwill (Komba & Nkumbi, 2008), and regional evidence links teaching quality to the depth of both initial and continuing preparation (Akyeampong et al., 2013). Internationally, Popova et al. (2022) found that features associated with larger gains, such as follow-up visits and links to career incentives, were less common in programmes delivered at scale. MEWAKA's record suggests a similar risk: the parts that are easiest to scale, namely meetings and modules, are improving, while the parts that are hardest to scale, namely classroom follow-up and feedback, remain thin.

4.6 Technology and low-resource fit

Teachers valued technology for resources, communication and administration, and in Cycle 2 they reported using government-issued tablets regularly, often outside CoL sessions (Koomar et al., 2024; Chachage et al., 2024). But electricity, network coverage and data costs hampered LMS access in 75% of Cycle 2 schools, and 87.5% of surveyed teachers said they or colleagues used their own data credit for TCPD (Chachage et al., 2024). Low digital literacy remained a constraint; in one observed session only three of nine teachers reached the LMS site (Chachage et al., 2024). Promised support from district IT technicians had not reached any study school by November 2023.

The research tested practical workarounds. Schools received the modules as PDF files, and two schools used a tablet server or a Raspberry Pi to run the full LMS offline (Chachage et al., 2024). PDFs allowed teachers to complete activities but not to view module videos. The project record later reports that the government negotiated zero-rating of CoL materials on the LMS with one mobile network operator, Vodacom, to reduce data costs (EdTech Hub, 2026). Because networks vary by location, Cycle 2 recommended pursuing zero-rating across operators (Chachage et al., 2024). Even so, LMS use stayed low. No observed Phase 2 Round 2 CoL used the LMS directly, and in May 2025 just under 10,000 of about 300,000 teachers in Tanzania (3.3%) had logged in during the previous six months (Chachage et al., 2025).

Technology also has a gender dimension. Phase 2 reported that national LMS usage data showed about three times as many men as women accessing the materials, and that women teachers, with heavier caregiving duties, had less time and money for devices and data (Mrosso & Hennessy, 2025). The lesson is that technology must be designed around low-resource conditions and around who actually has access, not treated as a neutral channel. This is consistent with the systematic review by Hennessy et al. (2022), which found that access, support and context shape the value of technology for teacher development in low- and middle-income countries.

4.7 Gender, disability and participation

Gender equity improved but remains incomplete. In Cycle 1, only five of 25 survey respondents were women, and no women facilitated observed CoLs (Koomar et al., 2024). In Cycle 2, women facilitated 25% of observed sessions, although about half of teachers are women; participation by women and men was rated low or inequitable in nearly a quarter of sessions

(Chachage et al., 2024). Phase 2, in twelve rural schools across four regions, found that women made up about two-thirds of teachers in the sample but only about one-third of peer facilitators; participation was roughly proportionate in two-thirds of observed CoLs, and men on average made slightly more substantive contributions (Mrosso & Hennessy, 2025). The Round 2 brief gives the figures: five of the fourteen observed facilitators (36%) were women, and men averaged 1.13 substantive contributions each against 0.85 for women (Chachage et al., 2025). Teachers attributed women's lower participation to caregiving duties, to being assigned tasks such as receiving visitors and supervising refreshments, and to men being chosen for technology workshops (Mrosso & Hennessy, 2025). These are reported explanations from one phase and should be tested further, but they move the evidence beyond the uncertainty recorded in Cycle 1.

Disability inclusion was raised from Cycle 1, where teachers who were blind, had low vision or were hearing impaired faced inaccessible materials and technology (Koomar et al., 2024). The popularity of the Inclusive Education module in Cycle 2 shows demand for this content (Chachage et al., 2024). The project record reports that government awareness of teachers with disabilities has since risen and is informing new materials (EdTech Hub, 2026). Phase 2 Round 2 examined disability directly. Teachers known to have disabilities made up 4.4% of observed CoL participants, most materials lacked accommodations for visual and hearing impairments, and teachers with chronic illness had no way to catch up on missed sessions (Chachage et al., 2025). Regional evidence shows how rare inclusion training has been: across ten francophone countries in sub-Saharan Africa, fewer than one in ten primary teachers reported any training on inclusive teaching (UNESCO, 2020).

5. A reconstructed Community of Learning theory of change

The model in Figure 1 is the author's reconstruction from the national framework, the CoL design described in the research, the DBIR logic of iterative redesign (Penuel et al., 2011) and an adapted three-presence lens. The research reports do not publish a formal theory of change, and this model has not been validated.

The three presences are adapted from the Community of Inquiry framework, which distinguishes teaching, social and cognitive presence in online learning communities (Garrison et al., 2000; Stenbom, 2018). Adapted for teacher CoLs, *facilitation presence* concerns preparation, questioning, modelling and feedback; *collegial presence* concerns trust, equal voice and the inclusion of women and teachers with disabilities; and *reflective presence* concerns examining learner thinking, planning a change and reviewing what happened. The adaptation is an analytical device and has not been tested as a measure.

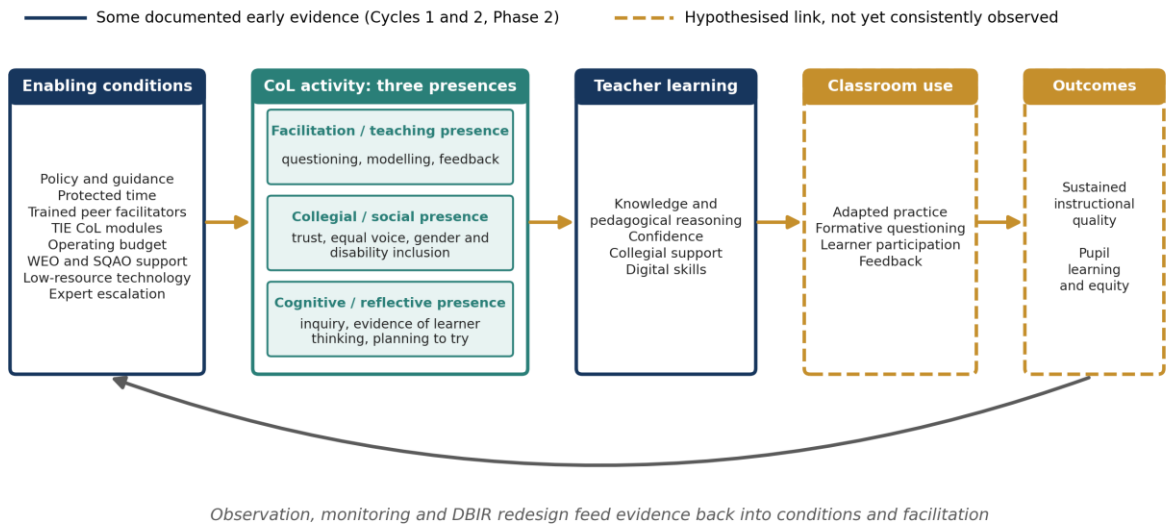


Figure 1. *Reconstructed Community of Learning theory of change for MEWAKA. Solid outlines mark stages with some documented evidence across research rounds; dashed outlines mark hypothesised links not yet consistently observed. The lower arrow shows the redesign loop.*

Table 4. *Stages, indicators and evidential status of the theory of change*

Stage	Proposed mechanism	Indicators	Evidential status
Enabling conditions	Policy, time, people, materials and money make regular learning possible	Guidance; protected time; trained facilitators; TIE modules; budget; WEO and SQAO support; offline access; expert escalation	Policy intention (MoEST, 2020); modules and zero-rating introduced (Chachage et al., 2024; EdTech Hub, 2026); time and funding remain weak (Chachage et al., 2024)
Facilitation presence	Skilled facilitation turns a meeting into guided learning	Less lecturing; questioning; modelling; feedback	Improved between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 (Chachage et al., 2024)
Collegial presence	Trust and inclusion let teachers disclose problems and learn together	Respectful interaction; equal voice; women as facilitators; accessible materials	Respectful sessions reported (Koomar et al., 2024); gender gap narrowing but not closed (Chachage et al., 2024; Mrosso & Hennessy, 2025)
Reflective presence	Inquiry links discussion to teachers' own classrooms	Links to own classroom; sharing results of trying strategies; peer critique	Weak and not improved in Cycle 2 (Chachage et al., 2024); still weak in Phase 2 (Chachage et al., 2025)
Teacher learning	Teachers gain knowledge, confidence and skills	Reported confidence; digital skills; module completion	Reported gains (Koomar et al., 2024; Chachage et al., 2024); not independently measured
Classroom use	Learning is enacted in lessons	Formative questioning; pupil questions; feedback	No clear change between cycles (Chachage et al., 2024); pupil questioning low in Phase 2 (Chachage et al., 2025)
Outcomes	Sustained practice contributes to pupil learning and equity	Teaching quality; pupil attainment	Not yet tested
Redesign loop	Evidence feeds the next cycle	Joint prioritisation of recommendations; reimplementation	Documented across cycles (Chachage et al., 2024; Adam et al., 2026)

The model makes one central claim: the three presences are each necessary, and none is sufficient. The record shows them moving at different speeds. Facilitation presence improved once structured modules were provided. Collegial presence was generally positive but uneven for women. Reflective presence, the condition that connects the CoL to the classroom, did not improve, and this is where the theory predicts that classroom change will stall. The model therefore points to a specific redesign target rather than to MEWAKA as a whole.

6. Discussion

The evidence supports a balanced reading of MEWAKA. The programme has a coherent policy basis and has improved in measurable ways. Within two DBIR cycles, sessions became more interactive, women began to facilitate, certificates were piloted and adopted, and the government acted on connectivity costs (Chachage et al., 2024; EdTech Hub, 2026). These are not small achievements in a national reform with very limited operating funds.

The same evidence shows where the distance remains. It has moved. In Cycle 1 the most visible gap lay inside the CoL, in lecture-led facilitation. By Cycle 2 the most visible gap lay between the CoL and the classroom. Phase 2 Round 2 data from four regions show the same profile a year later (Chachage et al., 2025). This shift supports the view, common across reviews of teacher learning, that a collaborative structure can exist and even function well while still not producing changes in practice, because teacher learning depends on an interacting set of personal, social and organisational conditions (Avalos, 2011; Vescio et al., 2008). Structured modules seem to have solved part of the facilitation problem. They have not yet created routines in which teachers bring evidence from their classrooms back to colleagues.

This distance is not a sign of weak teacher commitment. Teachers attended, valued the modules and spent their own money on data (Chachage et al., 2024). What constrained them were time, money, connectivity, unequal domestic and school duties, and the absence of classroom-level follow-up. The NF-TCPD already recognises that teacher development needs governance and resources (MoEST, 2020). The practical issue is whether those resources reach the step from learning to application.

The findings also clarify the relationship between decentralisation and support. A school-based model brings learning closer to teaching, but it does not remove the need for expertise, coaching, transport, data and quality assurance. Implementation research suggests that programmes work best when they protect their core components while adapting the rest to context (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). For MEWAKA, the core components identified by this analysis are the three presences, and especially the reflective link to classrooms. Topics, timing, delivery format and technology can reasonably vary.

This article differs from, and complements, the account of Adam et al. (2026). Their realist-informed case study explains how DBIR was adapted to a large, digitally enabled reform. Among other things, they argue that embedding government officials as co-researchers was central to evidence uptake, that technology components should be tested before rollout, and that researchers should map what lies within and beyond their sphere of influence. The present analysis looks at a different level: what happened inside the CoL and whether it reached the classroom. The two analyses fit together. The redesign loop in Figure 1 depends on the partnership that Adam et al. (2026) describe; the stalled reflective link identified here is a natural target for the next turn of that loop.

The three-presence reconstruction offers a way to examine quality that goes beyond attendance. It suggests that a CoL can score well on one presence and poorly on another, as the Cycle 2 data show. It is informed by the Community of Inquiry framework and by a review in which

the author was involved (Keulen et al., 2023), but those sources concern different populations, so the lens should be tested rather than assumed to transfer.

7. Implications for policy and practice

Several recommendations from the research have already been acted on, according to the project record, including certificates, zero-rating with one operator and new attention to teachers with disabilities (EdTech Hub, 2026). The priorities below are those that follow most directly from the remaining gap and are grouped by responsible actor.

TIE. Revise CoL modules so that each session ends with a specific classroom task and the next session begins by reviewing what teachers tried. Adjust module length to fit a realistic session. Provide offline versions that include video, for example through local servers, since PDFs omit key content (Chachage et al., 2024).

MoEST and PO-RALG. Build CoL time into the school timetable within working hours. Pursue zero-rating across all major network operators. Provide a small, designated operating budget for MEWAKA at school and ward level. Continue work to link participation to career progression, with independent rather than peer selection for achievement awards (Chachage et al., 2024).

Local government, WEOs and SQAOs. Add a few learning-focused indicators to routine monitoring: whether teachers discuss evidence from their own classrooms, whether a strategy is tried and reviewed, who speaks, and whether women facilitate in proportion to their numbers. Use classroom visits to support application, not only to check that lessons occur.

Schools. Rotate social and administrative duties so that women can attend and facilitate. Name a teacher as an ICT champion to support colleagues, a step the research describes as cost-free (Chachage et al., 2024).

Researchers. The next stage of evidence should test the link from CoL to classroom directly, using classroom observation aligned to module content, pupil assessments and cost data, with gender and disability analysis planned from the outset.

8. Limitations

The analysis has five main limitations. First, it relies on published documents. Most are policy briefs that summarise rather than fully report methods, and Phase 2 rests on two policy briefs and a research blog, with twelve CoL and eleven classroom observations in Round 2. Second, the empirical record comes from a small number of purposively selected rural schools that received research support; it cannot show national prevalence. Third, much of the evidence on benefits is reported by participants and is not an independent measure of changes in teaching or learning, and no causal estimate of MEWAKA's effect is yet available. Fourth, the three-presence lens is adapted from research on distributed learning and has not been validated for Tanzanian CoLs. Fifth, the author works at an institution involved in MEWAKA; the safeguards described in Section 3.2 reduce but cannot remove the risk of favourable interpretation.

9. Conclusion

MEWAKA is a coherent and improving response to the need for continuous, collaborative teacher development in Tanzania. Across its first research rounds, the programme moved from largely lecture-led sessions to more interactive ones, began to include women as facilitators and acted on certificates and data costs. The remaining implementation distance lies mainly between the CoL and the classroom. Teachers learn together more effectively than before, but

routines for trying, reviewing and refining practice in their own lessons are still weak, and classroom observations show no clear change. The reconstructed theory of change makes this gap visible and testable. Future redesign should treat reflective presence and classroom follow-up as core components, resource them accordingly, and evaluate whether they lead to lasting change in teaching and pupil learning.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate. Not applicable. This study analysed publicly available documents and involved no human participants.

Data availability. All documents analysed are publicly available and are listed in Table 1 and the reference list. The coded extraction matrix is available from the author on request.

Competing interests. The author is employed as a Principal Curriculum Developer at the Tanzania Institute of Education, which develops MEWAKA materials and is a partner in the research analysed. The author was not a member of that research team. The author is a co-author of Keulen et al. (2023), cited in this article.

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Use of artificial intelligence. AI-assisted tools were used to support literature searching and language editing. The author selected, read and verified all sources and is responsible for the content.

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