

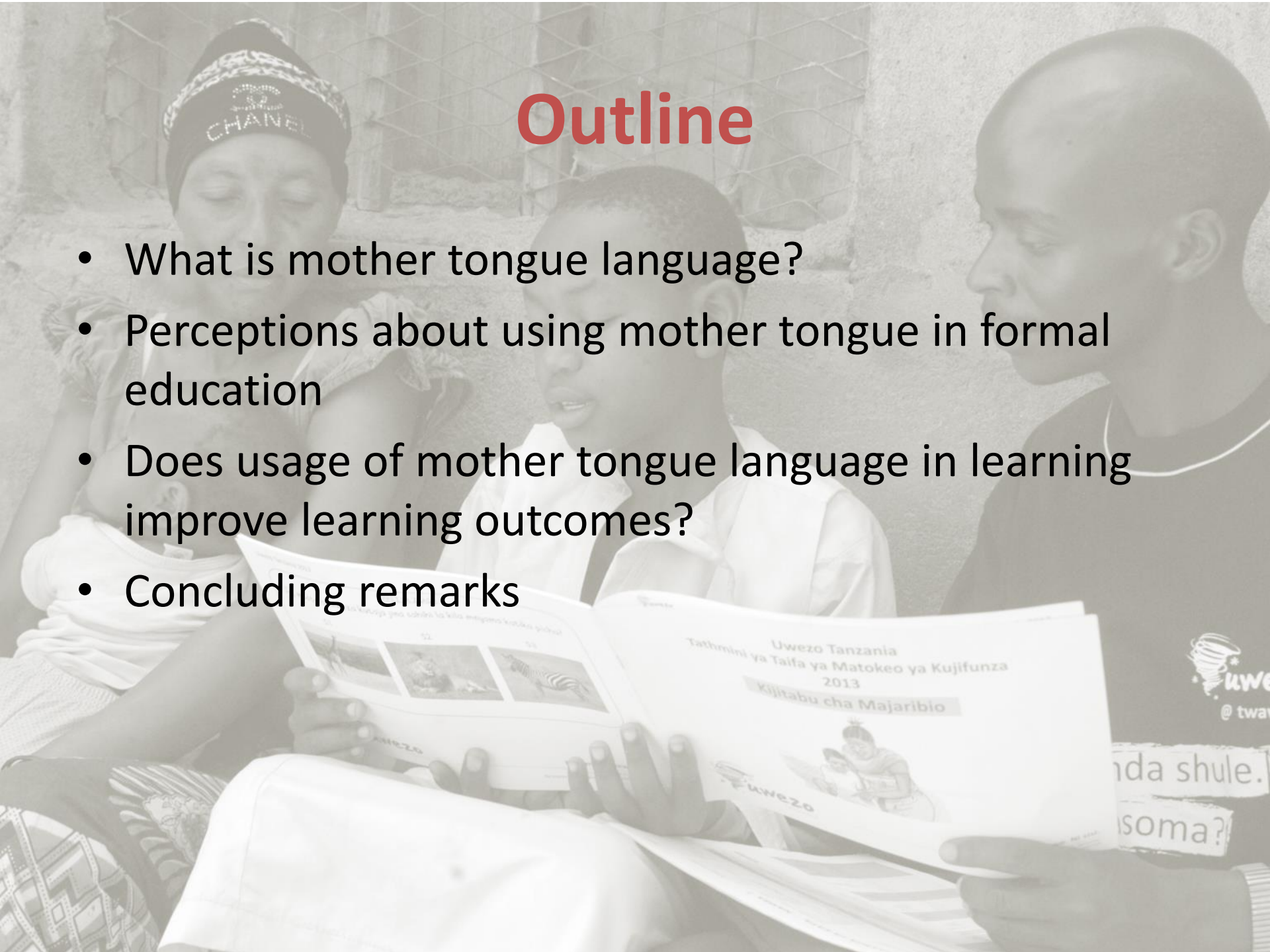
Does learning in mother tongue-based language improve learning outcomes? - Evidence from Uwezo and other assessments



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Outline

- What is mother tongue language?
- Perceptions about using mother tongue in formal education
- Does usage of mother tongue language in learning improve learning outcomes?
- Concluding remarks



What is a mother tongue language?

Tackie-Ofusu et al. (2015). Mother tongue usage in Ghanaian Pre-Schools: Perceptions of parents and teachers. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6 (34).

- **Not necessarily the language of the mother!!**
- Also called: native language or first language
- The language of one's origin, of intimate family experience and of our early social relations (Matsuura, 2008).
- It is the language a person has learned from birth or speaks the best, and is often the basis for sociolinguistic identity.

Why is mother tongue important in learning?

- It is extremely difficult to introduce basic literacy skills in an unfamiliar language
- Children who cannot understand the language used in the classroom are unable to demonstrate what they know and cannot participate actively in the learning process



What is mother tongue based education?

(RTI International, Improving Learning Outcomes through Mother Tongue-Based Education ,

- **Instruction in a child's first language (L1), usually with a planned gradual transition to a second language (L2) or foreign language at a specified time in primary school.**
 - Instruction in a language that is most familiar to children
 - It may be provided as part of a bilingual or multilingual education program
 - Students have the opportunity to learn core concepts primarily in a familiar language, and, later, they learn similar and other concepts in a new language
 - MTB education is especially beneficial in early childhood programs, preschool, and the early grades, when children are learning to read and gaining new concepts.

Language Policy in Education

- Kiswahili is the medium of instruction for pre and primary education
- English is taught as a subject in post-secondary education levels
 - In the new education and training policy (2014) both English and Kiswahili are recognised as media of instruction with stronger emphasis in Kiswahili



Problems with English

- English is introduced too late
- English is rarely used beyond the walls of lecture halls/class rooms
- Very few people have exposure to English: less than 50% of Tanzanians have access to secondary education
- Thus, though English is thought of as a second language in Tanzania, it is in essence a foreign language

Possible solutions currently in academic debate

Solution 1:

- Make Kiswahili a language of instruction throughout the education system, and teach English as a subject, for both academic and cultural reasons:
 - Promoting our culture
 - Learning is more effective in a familiar language than in a foreign language

Objections

- Knowledge repository is in English
- Kiswahili is devoid of appropriate scientific and technological terminologies essential in academic learning





Objections...

- English is the Kiswahili of the world
 - It is a language of globalisation which is unavoidable!
- Too costly to translate and write new teaching and learning materials into Kiswahili
 - Can we afford it?



Solution II

Teach English well and early beginning at primary school (at least age 7), effectively making it the second language

Objections to solution II

- Unpatriotic-
 - this will be at the expense of effective Kiswahili learning
- Not possible to promote effective mastery of English in an environment where the language is virtually not used

Perceptions of Wananchi

- The majority (89%) of Tanzanians believe students face challenges when making the Kiswahili-English switch from primary to secondary school. Specifically they said:
 - “It takes time for them to adjust.”
 - “It affects their ability to learn.”

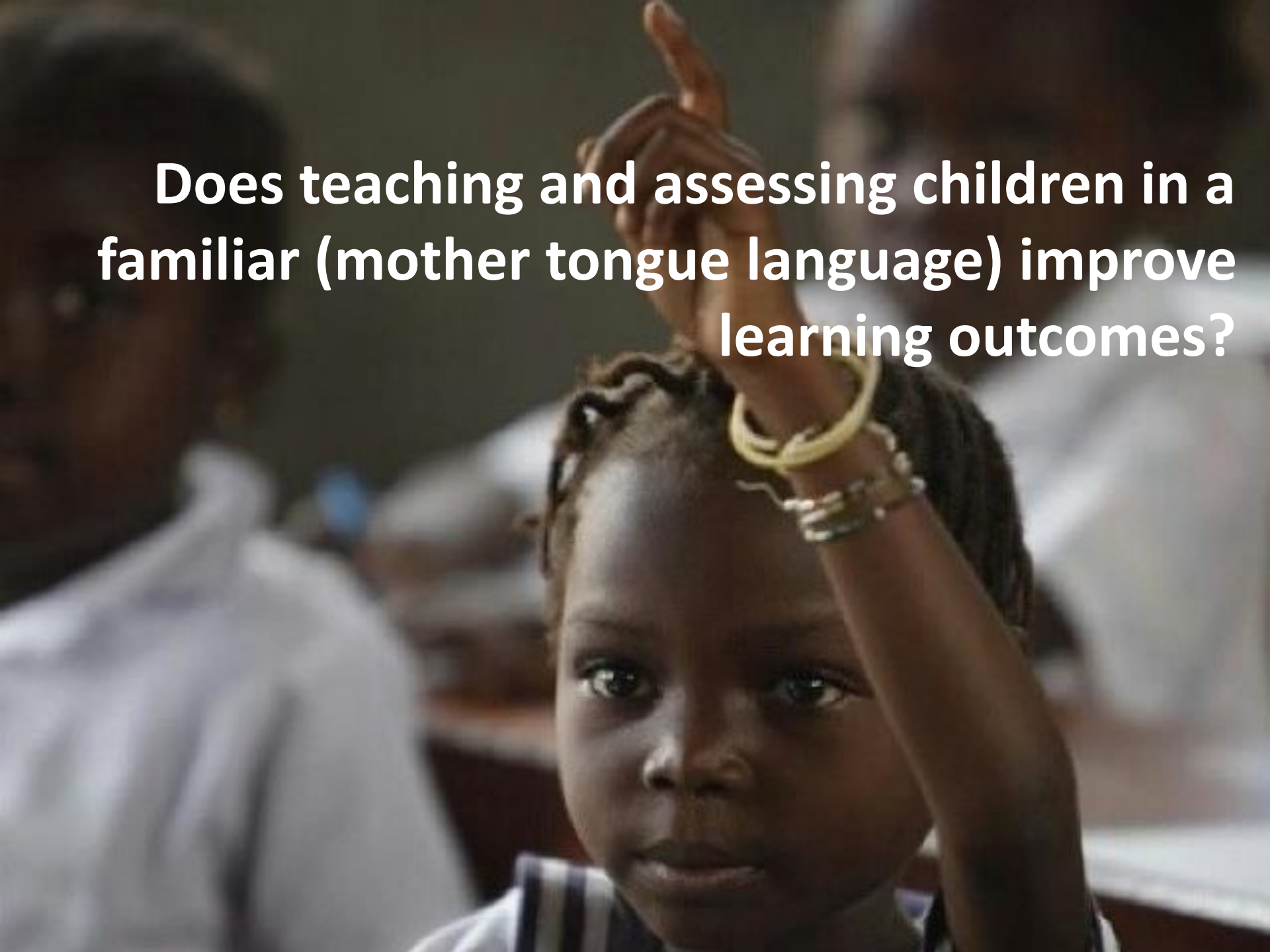
Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi, 2015

The people's solution

The majority (63%) of parents think that

“English should be the language of instruction for both primary and secondary school”.



A close-up photograph of a young girl with dark skin and braided hair, wearing a school uniform. She is raising her right hand, pointing her index finger upwards. She has a yellow beaded bracelet and a metal bangle on her wrist. The background is blurred, showing other students in a classroom setting.

Does teaching and assessing children in a familiar (mother tongue language) improve learning outcomes?

Uwezo

- Large scale citizen-led initiative in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda which started in 2009/10
- Focus on assessing and improving basic literacy and numeracy skills among children aged 6-16
- Annual household based learning assessments among children aged 6-16
 - covers every district, 30 villages per district
 - subjects: Kiswahili / local language, English and mathematics
 - all tests at Standard 2 level, as per national curriculum

Uwezo

- Children assessed at the household, by citizen volunteers
- More than 100,000 children assessed each year in each country



Summary of Uwezo Assessment Results

Percentage of Standard 3 pupils in Tanzania who passed the Standard 2 exercise

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Kiswahili	32.7%	28.3%	26.3%	45%	54%
English	7.7%	11.5%	12.1%	19%	19%
Arithmetic	30.3%	30.4%	44.4%	31%	35%

Does usage of a mother tongue language improve performance?

Based on Uwezo assessments

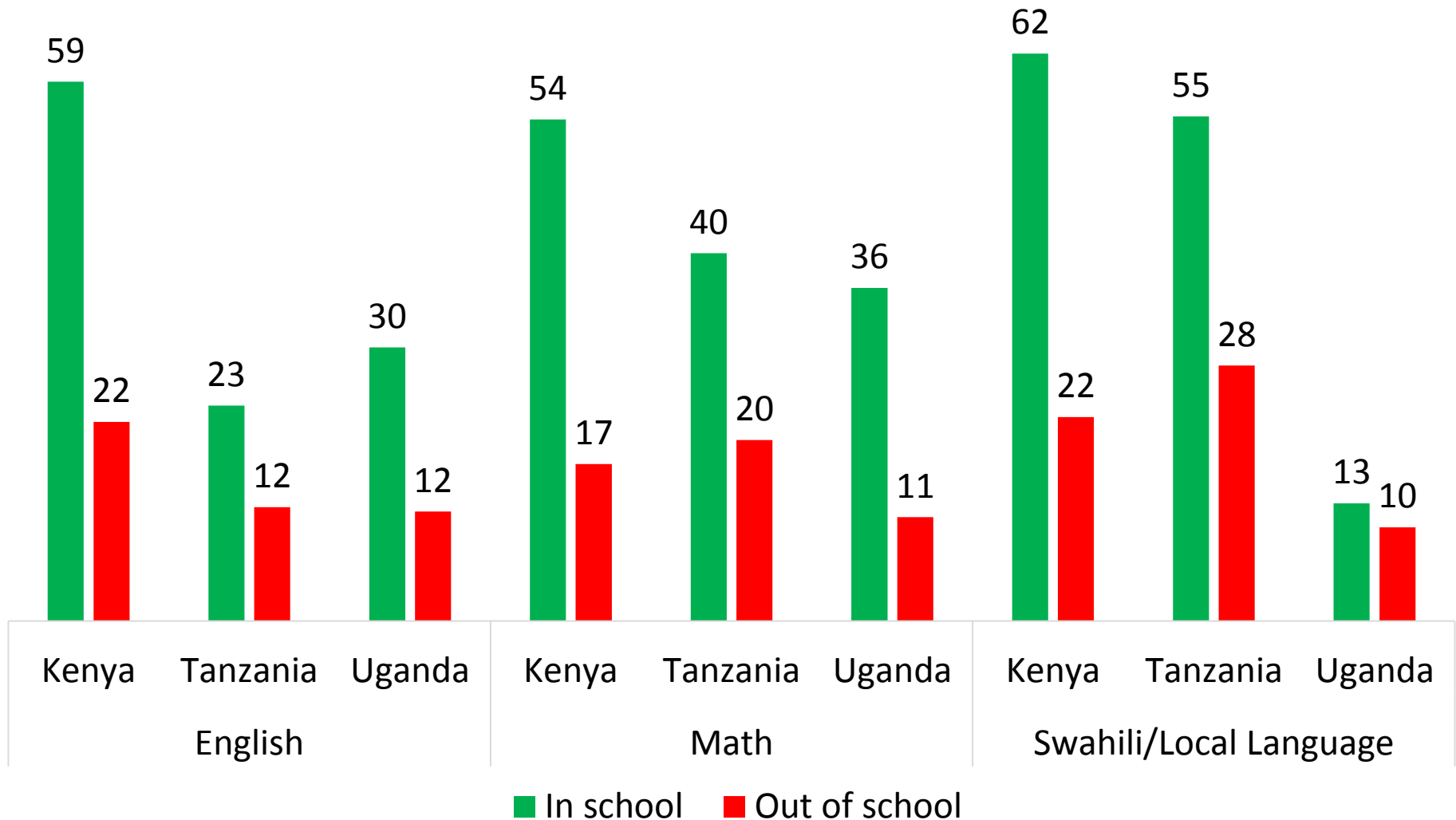
In Tanzania: children are more competent in
Kiswahili than English.

In Uganda: children are more competent in
English than in local languages

**Pupils' literacy competencies in local languages and English,
by grade, Uganda, 2014**

Grade	Story – Local Language	Story - English
P3	9.5	19
P4	13.9	29
P5	18.0	49
P6	24.6	70
P7	31.3	84
Total	16.9	42

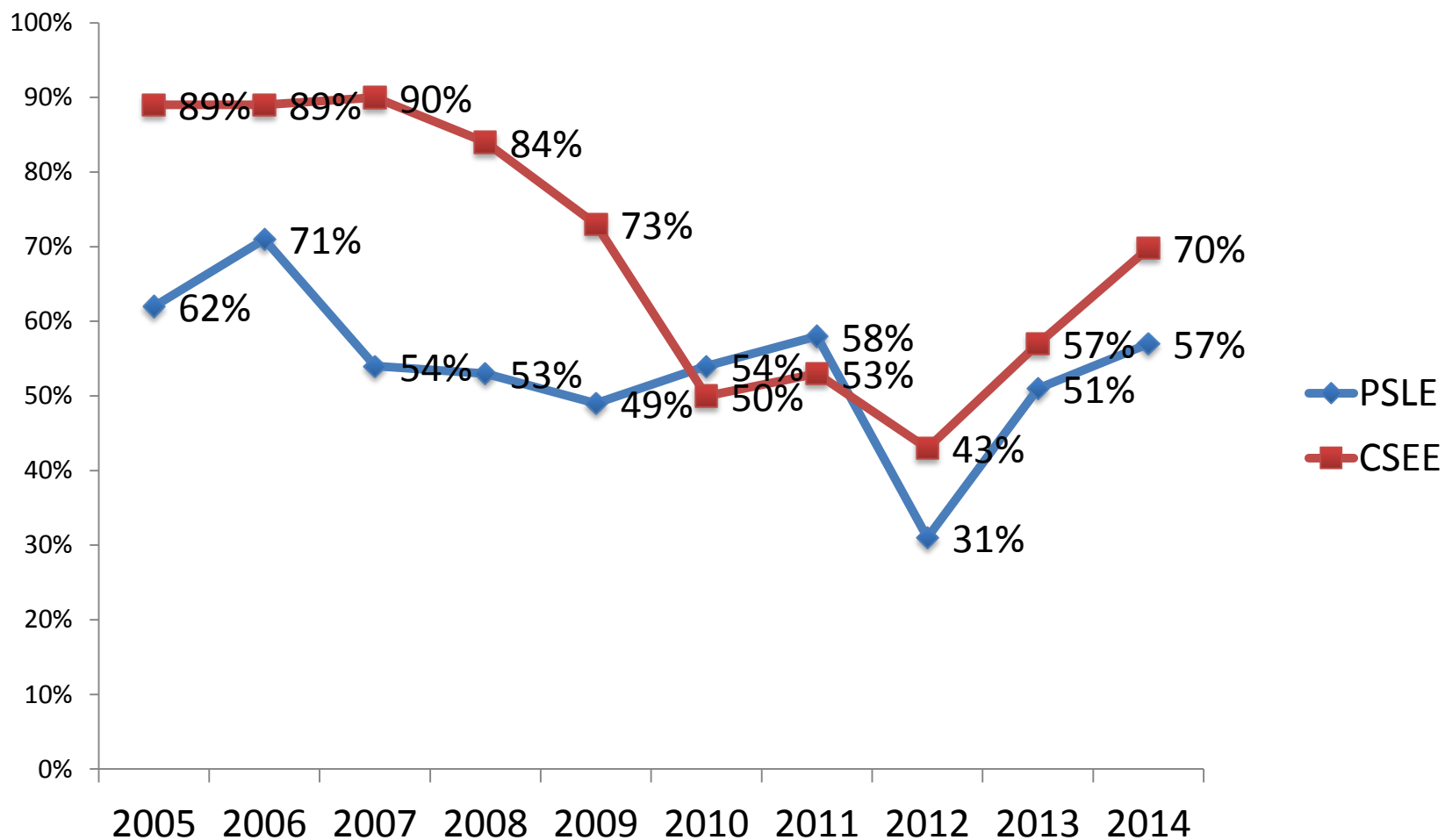
Percentage Competence level in Numeracy and Literacy among children in and out of school age 6-16, 2014



Evidence from other assessments

- PSLE and CSEE
 - Primary education is conducted and assessed in Kiswahili
 - Secondary education is conducted and assessed in English
- The variation in performance in these two exams is not telling and cannot be attributed to language

Percentage of children who passed PSLE and CSEE 2005-2014



Reflections

- Language is an important vehicle for learning
- Mother tongue based instruction is critical especially at early grades but not evidently so at later grades and further education
- Presently, English cannot be (wholly) attributed to the apparent poor learning outcomes in our education system
- Tanzania is uniquely place to promoting and embracing a bilingual education system
 - Kiswahili is a natural choice
 - English is a 'loved' language and seen as a gateway to future employment

Let us discuss



**Thank
You!!!**