

# Teacher and pupil absenteeism and parental and community involvement in education: What Kenyans think!



## Key findings

- Only 3 out of 10 Kenyans with children in primary school are interested in following up on whether teachers are present or absent in school.
- 3 in 10 Kenyans think teachers and head teachers are frequently absent from school/do not come to school as expected of them.
- About 7 out of 10 Kenyans say teachers frequently give exercise to pupils and regularly mark the work.
- Only 3 out of 10 feel teachers are paid enough to sustain their livelihoods.
- Lack of school levies and poverty are the main causes of pupil absenteeism in Kenya.
- Only 3 out of 10 Kenyans have attended a public meeting in the past one year.
- Only 25% of Kenyans have attended a forum where education was discussed in the last one year.

## About Twaweza

Twaweza means “we can make it happen” in Swahili. Twaweza works on enabling children to learn, citizens to exercise agency and governments to be more open and responsive in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. We have programs, staff and offices across all three countries, and a world respected practice of learning, monitoring and evaluation. Our flagship programs include *Uwezo*, Africa’s largest annual citizen assessment to assess children’s learning levels across hundreds of thousands of households, and *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa’s first nationally representative mobile phone survey. We undertake effective public and policy engagement, through powerful media partnerships and global leadership of initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership.

## Methodology

In December 2016, Twaweza East Africa commissioned Ipsos Kenya to gather feedback on a number of our areas of work, through a nationally representative “omnibus” survey<sup>1</sup>. The survey consists of face to face interviews with randomly selected respondents, aged 18 or over, using a semi-structured questionnaire administered through smart phones. A sample size of 2,057 interviews was achieved with a margin of error +/-2% at 95% confidence interval. This sample was distributed evenly based on the estimated population size, and is also representative of the rural/urban clustering.

In this brief, we summarize the findings that relate to the twin issues of teacher and pupil absenteeism (both significantly related to learning time and learning outcomes), as well as to parental and community involvement in education. These results are particularly relevant to Twaweza’s “Public Agency” initiative, which aims to catalyze involvement by parents as well as teachers and school administrators to improve teacher and pupil presence in classrooms.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.surveyanalytics.com/omnibus-survey-definition.html>



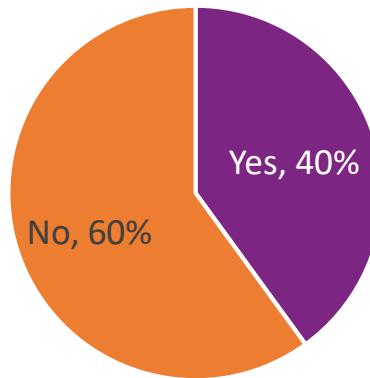
## Main findings

### Views on attendance and learning in public schools

**Fact 1: At least 4 in every 10 households in Kenya have a child in a public primary school.**

To set the stage for questions around schooling and views on teachers, the study first established many of the households visited had at least one child in a public primary school. As shown in *Figure 1* below, 40% of the households have at least one child attending a public primary school. A question on the gender of the eldest enrolled child revealed that 53% of these children are male and 47% are female.

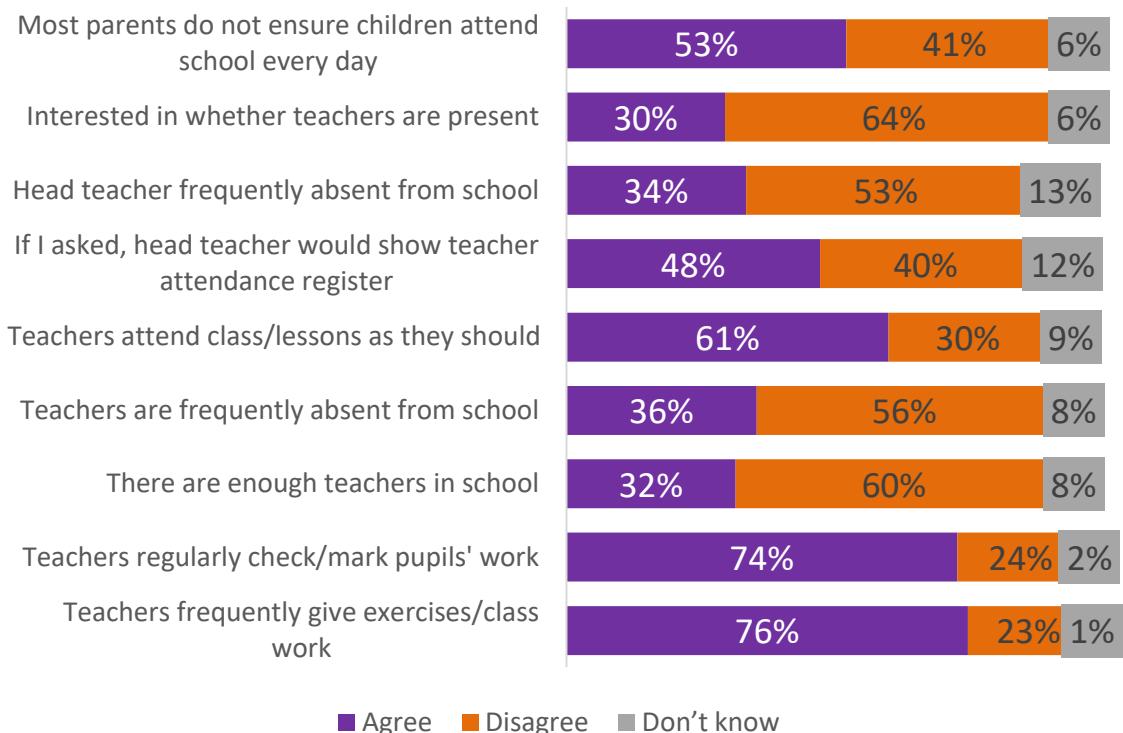
**Figure 1: Proportion of households with children in public primary schools  
(n=2057)**



**Fact 2: Only 3 out of 10 people (with children in public primary school) say they are interested in following up teacher attendance.**

Several statements were read out to all respondents who had a child in their household attending public primary school (*Figure 2*). Generally, most people (76%) report that teachers frequently give and 74% say the teachers regularly check and mark the exercises. Majority also feel teachers and head teachers are always present in school and attend class as they should. However, only 30% of parents are interested in following up teacher attendance in their schools and 53% of parents say most parents do not ensure their children attend school as required. Only a third of Kenyans also think there are enough teachers for all the grades and all children.

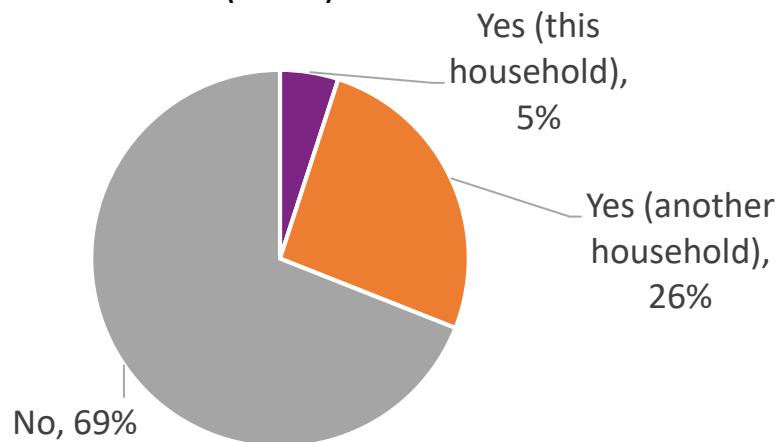
**Figure 2: Views on attendance and learning in public primary schools  
(n=828)**



**Fact 3: Only 3 out of 10 Kenyans know of a child who is regularly absent from school; the most common reason for this absence was lack of money for fees, and overall poverty.**

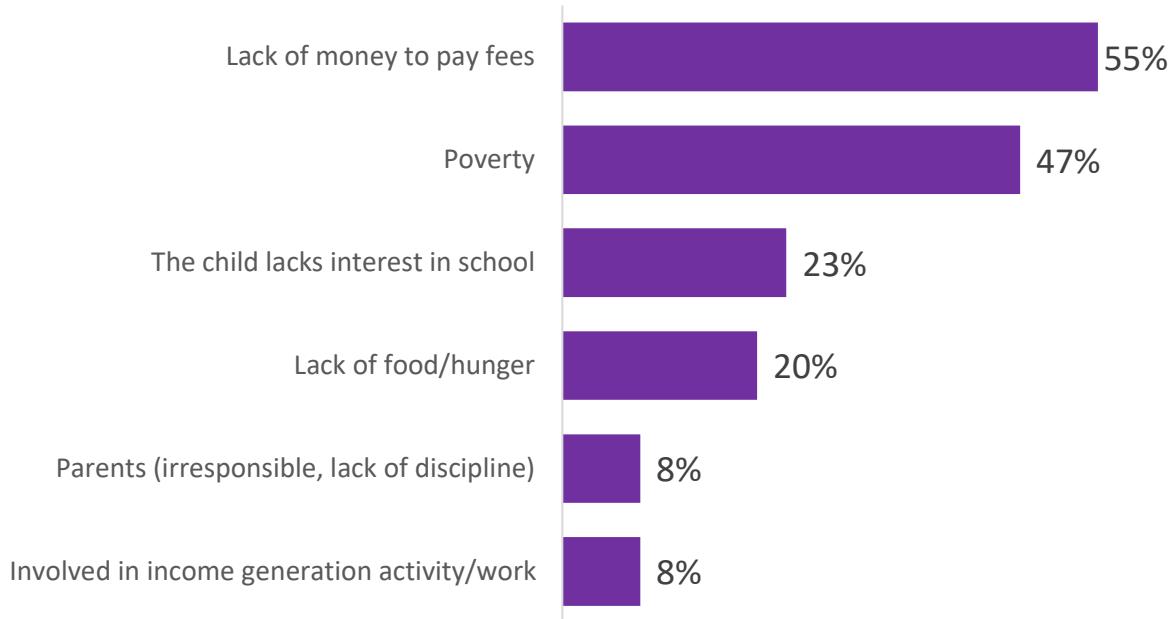
All respondents were asked if they knew of a child (either in their household or another) who does not attend school as regularly as they should. 26% said they knew of such a child in another household while 5% said they had such children in their very own households. *Figure 3* illustrates.

**Figure 3: Know of any child who does not attend school regularly  
(n=2057)**



The respondents who knew of a child who doesn't attend school regularly gave the following main reasons for the children missing school: lack of money to pay fees or levies 55%, poverty 47%, children's lack of interest in schooling 23%, lack of food or hunger 20% (Figure 4).

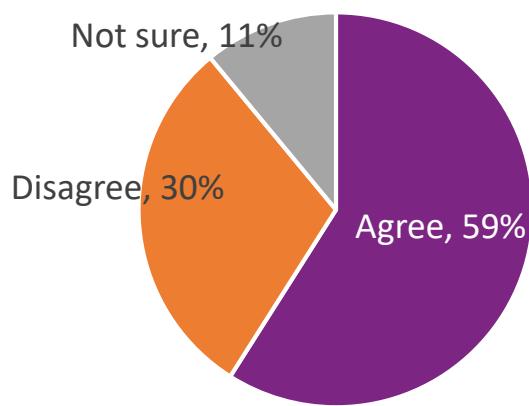
**Figure 4: Why children do not attend/misses school regularly (n=638)**



**Fact 4: Almost 6 out of 10 Kenyans with a public primary going child in the household has been contacted by their child's teacher to discuss the performance.**

To get a sense of the interaction between the teachers and parents, we asked all the 828 respondents who said they have a public primary school going child in the household, if their child's or children's teacher has gotten in touch with you to discuss the performance of your child or children within the last one year. Majority (59%) said they had been contacted, 305 had not while the rest could not recall or had no opinion (Figure 5).

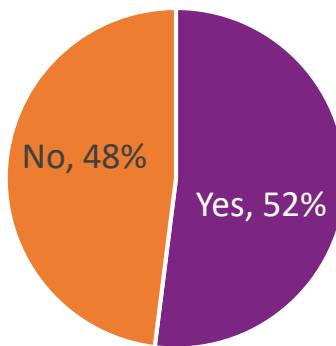
**Figure 5: Those who have been contacted by their child's teacher to discuss performance (n=828)**



**Fact 5: About half of Kenyans (with children in public schools) say they have visited their child's school at own initiative in the past year.**

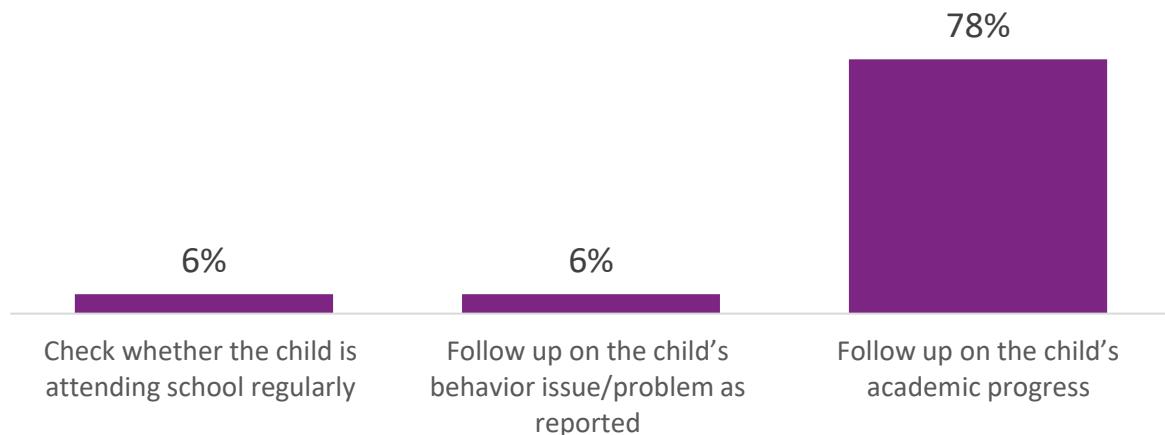
Conversely, we wanted to check how much parents connect with their children's teachers. Among respondents with public primary school going children, 52% reported that either they or somebody in their household had visited their children's school at own initiative (without being asked by teacher, or being invited for a parents meeting) in the last one year (*Figure 6*). More people from urban (58%) areas had made a visit to their children's school as compared to 50% from the rural areas.

**Figure 6: School in past year without invitation (n=828)**



78% of the parents (n=433) who said they or someone in their household had visited the school without being invited said they did so to follow-up on their children's academic progress (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Reason for visit (n=433)**





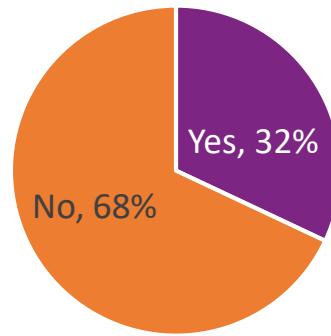
### Levels of participation in education forums

This study also assessed levels of participation in public meetings, specifically in those where education issues are discussed. To set the stage for this, we first asked how many people attend public meetings in general.

#### **Fact 6: 3 out of 10 Kenyans have attended a public meeting/forum in the last one year.**

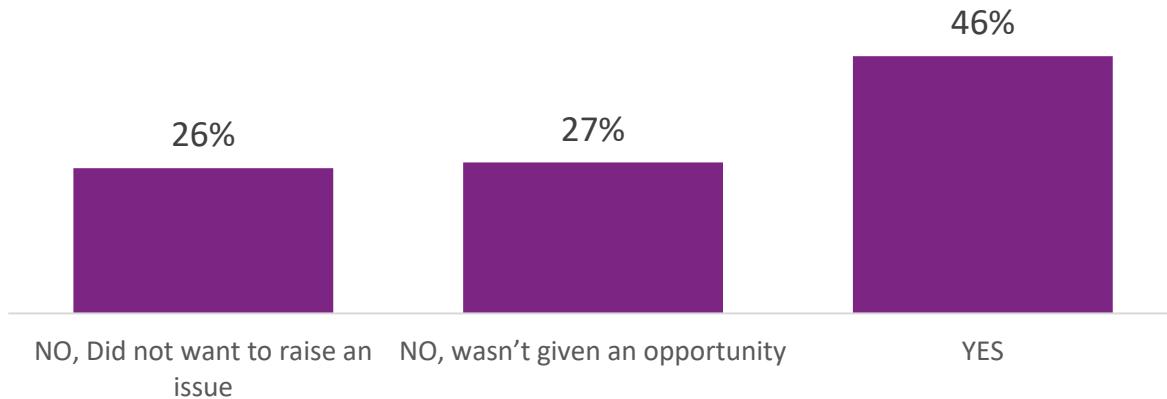
All the survey respondents were asked whether they had attended any local public meeting, chief or assistant chief's baraza or county government meeting within the last one year. As illustrated in figure 8 below, 32% said they had done so. However, there were differences across gender with more males 38% having done so as compared to 26% females. More Kenyans (38%) in rural areas had attended a meeting compared to 22% from urban areas. In terms of regions, Nairobi and North Eastern had the lowest levels of participation at 18% and 22% respectively. Nyanza and Western had the highest incidences of participation at 42% and 41% respectively. Eastern had 38%, Central 28%, Coast 29% and Rift Valley 31%.

**Figure 8: Have you attended a public meeting (n=2057)**



In addition, those who had attended (n=658) were asked if they got an opportunity to ask a question, raise an issue or express their point of view in the most recent meeting. About 46% of the respondents said yes while 27% said they were not given an opportunity and 26% did not want to raise an issue. Figure 9 illustrates

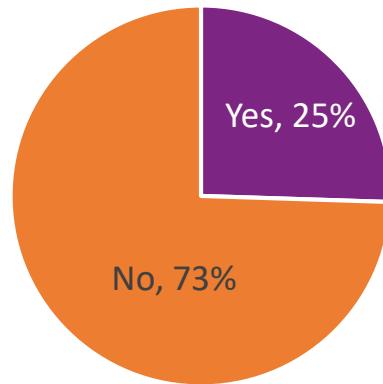
**Figure 9: Did you get an opportunity to raise an issue in most recent meeting  
(n=658)**



**Fact 7: One in five Kenyans report having attended any forum where education was discussed/featured in the previous year.**

The survey also captured separately whether Kenyans had participated in a community meeting where education was discussed in the previous year. Only 25% said they had attended such a forum in the previous year as shown in Figure 10. More rural respondents (29%) had participated in such a forum as compared to 19% of urban respondents. More men (29%) had also participated in such a forum as compared to 22% among the female respondents. While these levels are still relatively low, it could signal that education does feature in most of the meetings at local level.

**Figure 10: Attended forum where education was discussed in last one year  
(n=2057)**



## Conclusions

The findings of this study validates some of the commonly held views around the issues of teacher and pupil attendance but also on parental and community participation: i.e., most parents do not ensure their children go to school as required on all school days, that many Kenyans with primary school going children are not concerned with whether teachers are present or absent in school, and that school levies and poverty are the main causes of pupil absenteeism in Kenya. It however also raises a critical discussions on the contrasts that emerge between the findings where respondents report that parents say don't really engage with their children's schools, and then the separate question which asks if they themselves (or someone in their households) have been to school "without invitation" in the past year – where many respond in the affirmative, and majority of these visits are to follow up on academic progress of the children. So, seems that parents think other parents are not that engaged, but individually they report being engaged.

On the topic of teacher absenteeism, evidence has suggested that this is a significant problem affecting education in Kenya. For example, the latest Uwezo report (2015)

<http://www.twaweza.org/uploads/files/UwezoKenya2015ALAResport-FINAL-EN-web.pdf> revealed that on average 12 out of 100 teachers were absent during the day of visit in 2015 (representing an increase from 9% in 2014). In our study, we find that parents on the other hand think teachers and head teachers are mostly present as should be. This could be borne of the fact that people are not aware of the issue, or perhaps they just don't consider it a major one. Further, most parents think their children get regular exercises by teachers which are also marked, and they are therefore not interested in following up more. Interestingly, pupil absenteeism is flagged as a problem, and respondents believe parents as contributing to this, by not ensuring their children go to school. But even then the reasons given for this are overwhelmingly economic (school fees, or overall poverty), therefore not really something that a teacher or parent can (easily) change.

Given the evidence on teacher absenteeism, there may be an opportunity to invest in interventions that attempt to create the recognition among the Kenyan public (specifically parents) on the link between poor attendance and low quality of learning. And alongside to motivate parents to follow up on the attendance of both teachers and pupils.

These findings further provide evidence that Kenyan participation in local governance is relatively low, as about a third of respondents attend a public meeting in the last one year. Ask separately about whether they have attended any meetings where education featured, slightly less than a third respond in the affirmative. This could be a signal that education is featuring in most of those local meetings/forums. There is also some level (though low) of engagement in community meetings that discuss education issues (presumably this is about the benefit of larger community and education, not just one's child), and nearly half of those who attend speak up about an issue of interest. Evidence elsewhere has suggested that improving learning requires among other things parental and community involvement, so there seems to be opportunities to engage and galvanize parents; perhaps the biggest barrier at this point is the perception that "all is well" with education.