



What's going on in our schools?

Citizens reflect on the state of education



1. Introduction

Primary education in Tanzania is seen to have successfully expanded access: according to the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (www.moe.go.tz) the proportion of 7-13 year old children going to primary school was 92% in 2012. At the same time many signals indicate that schooling is not the same as learning. These signals come from government sources, for example the much debated 2012 Form 4 examination failure rate of 61% (with only 6% getting Division I-III), but also from the Uwezo learning assessments which indicate that children fail to pick up essential reading and numeracy skills in primary school (www.uwezo.net).

These problems continue up the chain all the way up the education pipeline to university and ultimately translate into labour market shortages. The executive secretary of the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) was recently quoted as “Universities in the East African region are producing a theoretical, unskilled and unpractical labour force”. With red flags at all these levels it is not surprising that education has become a priority area for government action.

This brief reports the most recent citizen opinions and facts on schools and learning in Tanzania. The findings are based on the 17th round of Sauti za Wananchi, Africa's first nationally representative mobile phone survey (www.twaweza.org/sauti). Data were collected from a panel of respondents from across Mainland Tanzania. Calls were made between 22 April and 20 May 2014; and include responses from 1442 households.

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This brief’s key findings are:

- 91% of pupils sit on a bench or at a desk in class, but only 49% have something to eat in school
- 69% of pupils report they are “rarely” or “never” given homework
- Primary school pupils in 38% of households report their main teacher was not in class at all the day before the interview
- 35% of citizens estimate that fewer than 25% of pupils can read at Standard 2 level after completing Standard 2
- Despite low learning levels hardly any pupil drops out because of poor performance
- 15% of citizens are aware of the Big Results Now initiative

2. Eight facts about education

Fact 1: Basic data

In **86%** of Tanzanian households at least one of the children attends a primary school.

In **95%** of these households at least one child attends a government school.

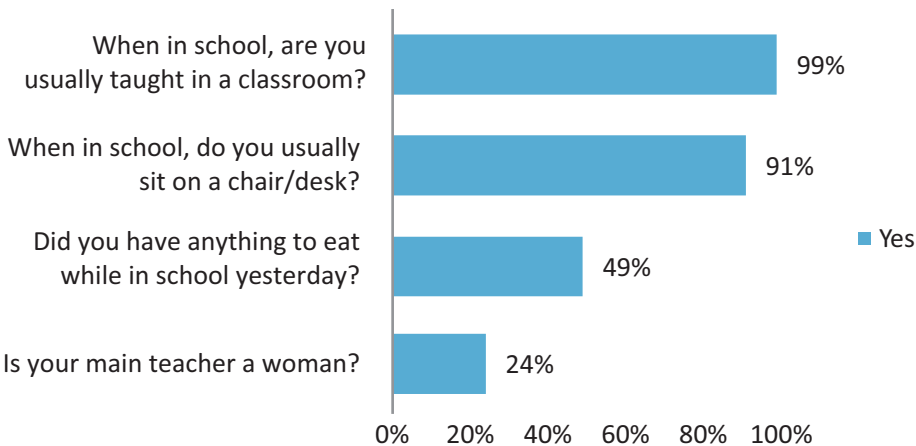
Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey – Round 17, April - May 2014.

Adding up over households, in 2012 about eight million Tanzanian children attended a government primary school (Ministry of Education, www.moe.go.tz).

Fact 2: Nearly all students sit in classrooms and on benches

Figure 1 shows data on school conditions obtained from interviews with primary school students. These students report that they are nearly always taught in a classroom while sitting on a bench or at a desk, by a male teacher in most cases (76%). However, they often (51%) do not have anything to eat while in school.

Figure 1: School conditions – student interviews

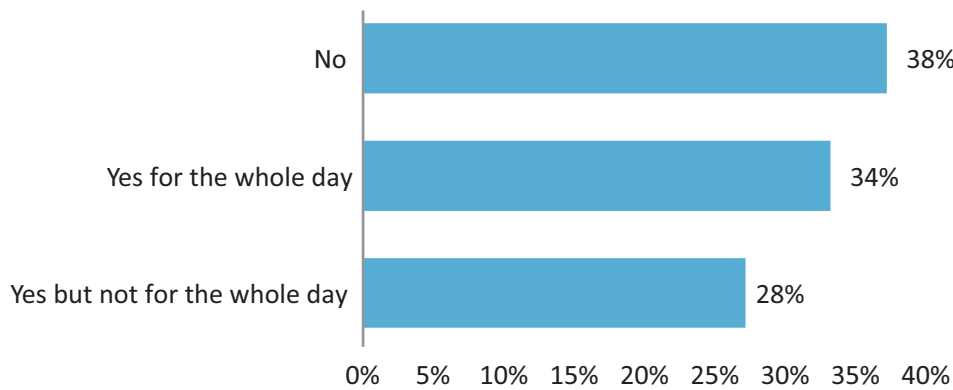


Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey – Round 17, April-May 2014.

Fact 3: Teachers often not in class

Primary school pupils who attended school on the day before the interview were asked about the attendance of their main teacher. Results (Figure 2) show the main teacher was in class all day in 34% of cases, while in 38% he/she was not in class at all. This means that only 3 out of 10 teachers are actually in class for the expected time.

Figure 2: Was your main teacher in class yesterday?

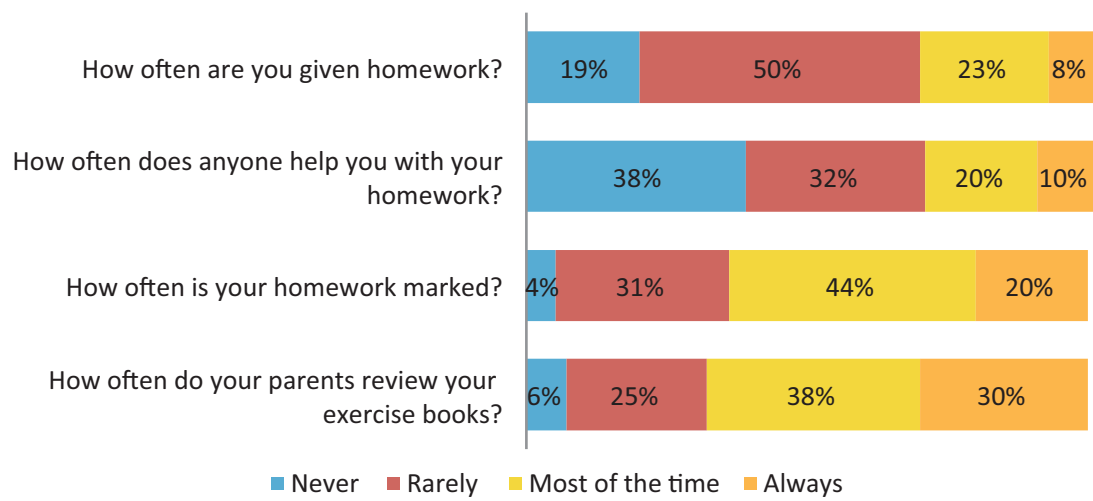


Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey – Round 17, April-May 2014.

Fact 4: Homework is rare in primary schools

Seven out of ten students state that they are given homework “rarely” or “never” (note that students were selected from all primary school grades). Those that do receive homework typically receive no help with it. However, in many cases homework is marked (64%) and/or reviewed by parents (68%) “most of the time” or “always”.

Figure 3: Homework

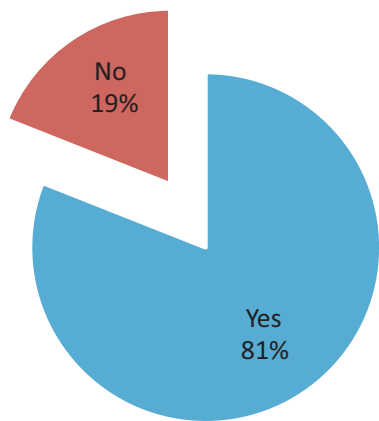


Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey – Round 17, April-May 2014.

Fact 5: Most families receive report cards

The parents of the primary school students indicate that these schools largely do provide families with report cards: nevertheless one in five families did not receive a report card in the last six months.

Figure 4: Has your family received a performance review report card in the last six months?

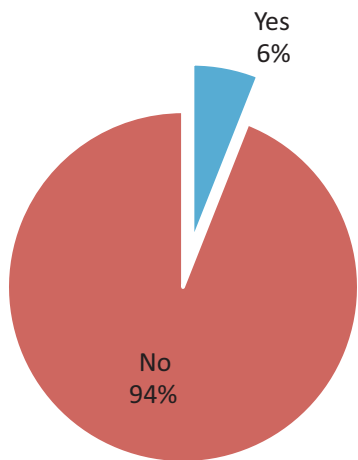


Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey – Round 17, April-May 2014.

Fact 6: Dismissal in primary school is remarkably rare

Some parents (6%) with children of school age report that one of them dropped out of primary school last year. The most frequently reasons for drop outs are “not interested”, “school too far from home” and “no money for fees, uniform, books”.

Figure 5: Does your household have a child aged between 6 and 16 years who has dropped out of primary school in the last year?



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey – Round 17, April-May 2014.

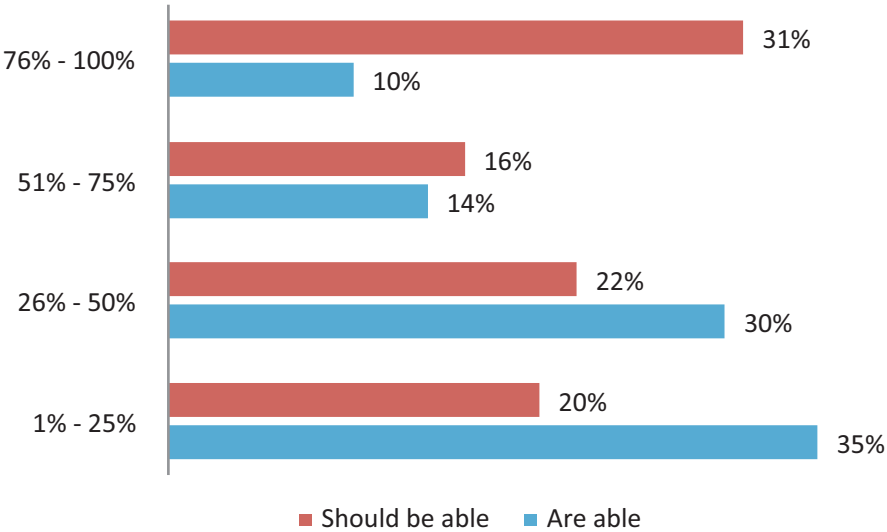
Very few households mention failing exams as a reason for dropping out (only 3.5% out of those where a child dropped out). This is notable since so many children perform below the official curriculum standards. According to Uwezo, only 57% of children in Standard 3 or above were able to read a simple Standard 2 level story in Kiswahili in 2012. In other words, many students reach upper primary without being able to read at Grade 2 level.

Fact 7: A majority have low (and correct) expectations about learning levels

What do citizens say about abilities of Standard 2 students? What percentage of students do they think are able to meet the Standard 2 requirements for reading and math? And what percentage do they think should be able to meet them?

Figure 6 shows that citizens are not optimistic about actual abilities: many (35%) believe that fewer than 25% of students have acquired reading and numeracy skills to the appropriate level by the end of Standard 2 (against 10% of citizens believing that more than 75% of students have these skills). Results of large-scale Uwezo learning assessments show that only 1 out of 5 children in Standard 3 can perform both basic multiplication and read a simple story in Kiswahili¹ – in other words, the majority are well-informed but many are too optimistic. Figure 6 also shows that only 31% say that more than 75% of pupils should be able to perform at their grade level, meaning that expectations of the education system are low.

**Figure 6: When thinking about all Tanzanian children who have recently completed Standard 2, what percentage do you think *are actually able* to read and understand a Standard 2 story and do a Standard 2 math problem?
What percentage should be able to do this?**



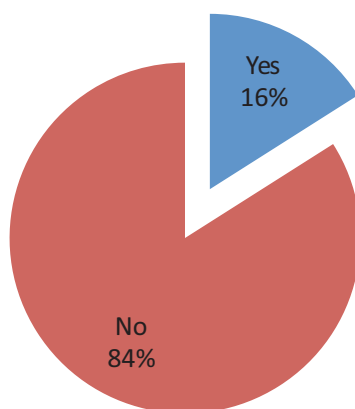
Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey – Round 17, April-May 2014.

¹ See <http://www.uwezo.net/publications/reports/> for details and reports.

Fact 8: 16% are aware of Big Results Now

In a bid to become a middle income economy by 2025, and drawing inspiration from the Malaysian experience, Tanzania adopted the Big Results Now program in 2013.² This initiative aims to achieve desired outcomes in a number of key sectors, including education, water and agriculture. According to information available on the website of the Prime Minister's Office – Regional Administration and Local Government, "... the public will be involved to learn about the development plans and share their views accordingly." According to *Sauti za Wananchi* data only a small minority (16%) of Tanzanians are aware of the initiative.

Figure 7: Are you aware that early last year the Government of Tanzania launched a new initiative, Big Results Now (BRN)?



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey – Round 17, April-May 2014.

Those who are aware of Big Results Now most frequently mention education as the sector where the program is being implemented. When asked whether they have noticed any positive changes, 6% of all citizens (36% of those aware of the initiative) say yes. Among these, some mention improvements like "teachers have been added" and "children are given quality education".

3. Conclusion

This brief highlights key facts and citizen opinions about learning at the primary level in Tanzania, the foundation of the education system. Many of these facts are worrying, and most are well-known. Families in Tanzania typically have one or more children in a primary school. In school these children usually sit in class but often no teacher is present; and homework is rarely given. Parents receive report cards about their child's progress.

² See <http://www.pmoralg.go.tz/quick-menu/brn/> for details.

Many parents correctly estimate that learning levels are low but *most do not demand that learning outcomes should be better*. Low demand for quality is a worrying find for national education authorities and citizens alike: if parents have such low expectations and demands, does anyone have an incentive to monitor learning outcomes at the local level – where it matters most? Follow-up research should ask how it is possible that parents have such low quality demands: do they not see the skills learned as valuable? Can other actors, such as school inspectors, control quality at the school level effectively?

There is a related problem in Tanzanian primary schools. Grade repetition is generally discouraged. Since 2009, non-performing students are promoted to the next level but required to follow remedial classes.³ This poses a fundamental incentive problem since teachers now are not able to play their essential quality assurance role by teaching children by ability.

It is easy to imagine how the neglect of basic individual differences within classrooms leads to a complete breakdown of incentives for quality. For students and their families, there is no visible penalty for not performing to standards since grade promotion with the peer group is guaranteed. For teachers, the system signals a disinterest in quality and child centered learning. This is of concern, since there is growing evidence from experimental studies in East Africa that differentiating between high and low-ability students within classes, also known as achievement streaming, can make a large difference in learning progress for both low and high ability students.⁴ This also impacts teacher motivation, evidenced by the high levels of absenteeism reported through *Sauti za Wananchi*.

The government of Tanzania has taken up the challenge to improve learning outcomes in its primary schools. Steps have been taken to improve availability of textbooks and to monitor the receipt of the capitation grant to finance learning aides. The BRN education initiative explicitly focuses on improving learning outcomes. However, how do we really know what works to improve learning?

All the measures contemplated and implemented in the education sector have in common that they compete for scarce resources: each shilling can only be spent once. It is thus imperative that the interventions financed credibly improve learning outcomes. Without this, there is no assurance that value for money is obtained. In other words, policy makers should use evidence to convince taxpayers, sector partners and politicians that tax money is spent on policies that work and that “buy” learning outcomes. Equally, policies that do not demonstrably work do not deserve scarce taxpayers money. This type of smart spending requires a constituency of education policy makers, scientists and politicians to think and act together strategically using evidence based policy making to improve learning.

³ UNESCO, Tanzania Education Sector Analysis, 2011.

⁴ See for example Dufló, E., Dupas, P., & Kremer, M. (2011). Peer effects, teacher incentives, and the impact of tracking: Evidence from a randomized evaluation in Kenya. *American Economic Review*, 101, 1739-1774.

