

# education

schooling  
or fooling ?



## Introduction

Wherever you are in the morning you see children emerging from every corner, more or less smartly dressed, all in uniform. It makes one's heart swell to see all our children heading off to be educated, to learn and grow. Their faces are bright and eager as they walk or skip, carrying their bags full of school materials.

Well, that is how it should be and maybe that is how it is in some places but, unfortunately, in the schools investigated in this survey, the opposite was almost entirely the case. The children are certainly heading to school, but the question is, what do they get once they reach the school? This brief looks particularly at the educational environment and the quality of education our children receive. The brief looks at both primary and secondary schools, but will concentrate on secondary schools because:

- a) Secondary schools have been less researched than primary schools
- b) Young people, who were the focus of the survey, are in secondary schools

The survey carried out by TAMASHA paid particular attention to education, visiting 16 primary schools and 16 secondary schools that were randomly selected. In each of these schools, pupils were also randomly chosen to fill in a questionnaire and take part in a reading test of Kiswahili and English passages.



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If you want to know how well services are working, ask those who use them. Since the rights and needs of young people are often not prioritized in relation to these services, TAMASHA in partnership with Twaweza, trained young people to carry out a survey on a selection of socio-economic services from a youth perspective in 2010. The data and information in this brief is the result of a survey carried out in 32 villages from 8 districts of Tanzania Mainland. The districts covered in the exercise were Arusha Urban, Iringa Urban, Kisarawe, Longido, Magu, Makete, Musoma Rural and Temeke.

**Finding One: Tanzanians want education but one building does not make a school.**

The majority of children and young people in Tanzania:

- See education as the key to fulfilment of their dreams of a better life.
- Believe that schools are the place where they can get such an education.

This explains the great demand for education in Tanzania, a demand which the government and other stakeholders are responding to. The education budget continues to increase as more and more schools are built. This has allowed greater physical access to secondary school as more primary school leavers can continue their education, and the distances they have to travel to school have been greatly reduced, a fact which was recognised by the survey.

However, there are certain requirements that qualify an institution or a building to be called ‘a school’. According to the Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP), the following standards should have been reached before or by 2009:

- Attainment of Student-Teacher Ratio of 30:1
- Adequate qualified teachers in all subjects in all schools and colleges.
- Text book by subject provided at a student-book ratio of 1:1
- All day schools provide lunch.

These targets are very far from being reached, leading one to ask the question:

*‘When is a school not a school?’*

**Finding Two: Students are not being taught**

Two indicators were used to measure whether students are being taught in schools: the student-teacher ratio, which determines the amount of time and attention teachers can give to their students, and the number of classes taught on the day of the survey. On both counts, the situation was far from ideal.

**Student-teacher pupil ratio, and number of classes taught**

	Secondary School	Ratio	Classes taught
<b>Arusha</b>	Elerai	50	1
	Kimaseki	48	1
<b>Iringa</b>	Kwakilosa	59	1.5
	Mlandege	n/a	1.5
<b>Kisarawe</b>	Masaki	41	3
	Msimbu	23	2
<b>Longido</b>	Namanga	34	4.5
	Longido	n/a	n/a
<b>Magu</b>	Sogesca	49	2
	Bukwande	54	3.5
<b>Makete</b>	Mwakauta	110	n/a
	Iwawa	n/a	5
<b>Musoma</b>	Kiagata	106	1
	Kukirango	98	2
<b>Temeke</b>	Kibada	296	3
	Mikwambe	173	2.5



### a) Student-teacher ratio

From the table it can be seen that:

- On average, the student -teacher ratio was 1:88.
- Only one school had reached the SEDP target of one teacher for every 30 students, and four other schools had a ratio of less than 50.
- In eight out of 13 secondary schools the student-teacher ratio was higher than 50. It was higher than 100 in four of the 13 schools. In Musoma and Temeke the ratios are so high it is difficult to see how learning can take place.
- By contrast, in primary schools the teacher-student ratio was 1:54 and in no school did the ratio reach 100.
- In half the districts surveyed, Arusha, Makete, Musoma and Temeke, the student-teacher ratio is worse in secondary schools than in primary schools. Yet in secondary schools there should be more teachers, including specialist subject teachers.

### b) Number of classes taught

In schools with high student-teacher ratios, students will be taught fewer classes. This is particularly the case in secondary schools where it is not easy for teachers to teach subjects outside their areas of specialisation. On the day of the survey:

- On average, students were taught 2.5 classes.
- The number of classes taught were on average, less than two in eight of 14 schools and less than three in 10 of 14 schools.
- By contrast, in primary schools, pupils were taught 3.5 classes. Only in six of 15 schools were pupils taught less than three classes.



### c) Shortage of teachers for science and maths

The shortage of teachers has had a particular impact on science and maths. There were shortages of these teachers everywhere, together with a shortage of laboratories in at least half of the secondary schools. This meant that these subjects were universally unpopular with students.



### d) Part time teachers

Schools are doing their best to cope with the shortage of teachers by employing high school leavers on a part time basis. In some cases schools are employing five or more. These untrained teachers were not included in the ratios given above as their attendance is not always reliable and the schools often have difficulty in paying them, as they depend on parents making contributions. In addition, even if these school leavers are committed and enthusiastic, they cannot be said to be the 'adequate qualified teachers' specified by SEDP.

Not surprisingly, 59% of respondents recommended increasing the number of teachers as the key to improving learning in schools.

### e) Examining students or schools?

Examinations are the tool used to assess the educational attainments of individual students.

In situations where schools have very few teachers, particularly in Science, Basic Mathematics and English, one cannot escape the conclusion that exams are no longer evaluating individual attainment but schools as a whole. The results of the National Examinations for Form Four in 2010 demonstrate this point.

**Finding Three: School materials and equipment are in very short supply**

Although the pictures depict primary schools, the same situation applies in many secondary schools.

The first picture shows the lack of classroom materials and equipment. There are no desks and no books. There are no posters or pictures or other teaching aids on the wall. Even in some secondary schools, like Mlandege in Iringa, students are also sitting on the floor.



However, not all classrooms were so badly off, as shown by the second picture. There are desks for the pupils, and some teaching aids on the wall. At the same time, it is worth noting that the desks in the classroom have been donated by Plan International, an international NGO and, once again, there are no books in sight.



If students had books to read at least it could compensate to some extent for the shortage of teachers. Unfortunately, books seemed to be a rare commodity in nearly all schools despite the SEDP goal of one textbook in every subject for every student. Even the school libraries had no books in sight. Library has become just another word for reading room, where pupils can sit and study their exercise books.



Interior of school library, Sungwi Primary School

In their recommendations for improving the quality of education, books were the second most important item after teachers (recommended by 20% of respondents) followed by school equipment including desks.

Many classrooms leave a lot to be desired. Other infrastructures were almost universally lacking, in particularly, laboratories and libraries. The lack of laboratories contributed significantly to the unpopularity of science subjects.

**Finding Four: The school environment is not conducive for learning**

The infrastructure of schools plays a major part in promoting or restricting learning.

**Other buildings**

The same applies to other infrastructures in the school, as shown by Kiagata Secondary School below. The nature of facilities affects the motivation and ability to learn of the pupils.



## Kiagata Secondary School



Dormitory outside



Dormitory inside

Dormitories are an important way of enabling students who live far from the schools to attend. Many parents also want their children to attend a boarding school because it gives them better opportunities to study even after school hours. Given the nature of the dormitories, one wonders to what extent this is true.

### **Finding Five: Students' growth and education are affected by poor nutrition**

Food was a major issue everywhere. Only in two secondary schools did the majority of students say that food was provided though it was mentioned by a few students in four other schools.



Kitchen: Kiagata Secondary School



Kitchen: Kimandolu Secondary School

Therefore food is not provided in the majority of secondary schools. If one bears in mind that children are too far away to go home for a meal and many parents cannot afford to give them money to buy food, many adolescents eat very little or nothing at all in the middle of the day. In some schools, even if food is provided, its nutritional value is questionable.

This has a serious effect on learning. Lack of food affects:

- School attendance. Researches elsewhere have shown that provision of school meals is an incentive for students to attend.
- The ability of students to concentrate and learn in class.

Not surprisingly, the introduction of school meals in secondary schools was recommended by the majority of respondents (52%).

### **Finding Six: Short term political considerations are having harmful educational effects**

School committees, teachers and parents were particularly bitter about what they see as political interference in schools.

All those involved with schools know that politicians may allow any building containing a large number of children or young people, without teachers, books or desks, to be called a school, but provision of education in such circumstances is sorely compromised.

**Finding Seven: It is no longer possible to use English as a medium of instruction in secondary schools**

Instead of being a medium of instruction in secondary schools, English has become both a medium of discrimination and a medium of destruction.

- **Medium of discrimination:** Twenty-five years ago, the coordinator of the English Language Support Programme for secondary schools commented that continuing to use English as a medium of instruction was one way of preventing universal secondary education. He said that as the majority of students did not have sufficient competence to pursue their studies in English it was imperative to make Kiswahili the language of instruction<sup>1</sup>. At that time there were far fewer schools therefore the selection process for secondary schools was more rigorous. Since then, the government has rapidly expanded secondary education to meet demand without any improvement in the language competencies of the students. They may be in secondary school but they still do not have sufficient English to pursue their studies in that language.
- **Medium of destruction:** Continuing to use English as a medium of instruction in secondary schools perpetuates not only inequity but also ignorance. You cannot learn in a language that you do not understand.

In the reading tests carried out in English and Kiswahili in primary and secondary schools, it was very clear that a large percentage of secondary school students do not have anything like the language skills required to study all subjects in English. Despite the fact that they were only asked to read and answer questions on a passage from a Standard two level text, large numbers were unable to carry out the test successfully.

*'No one can cope with the large number of students, because all decisions on the number of students, together with registration are made without any consideration for the adequacy of the infrastructure.'*  
~Temeke

*'Students should be registered in accordance with the capacity of the infrastructure, not political reasons.'*  
~Arusha



<sup>1</sup> Personal recollection

## English reading test: secondary schools

	Read English				Answer questions in English					
	Competent	Average	Read letters	Can not	Total	Competent	Average	Could try	Can not	Total
<b>Arusha</b>										
Elerai	8	2			10	13	4		3	20
Kimaseki	7	4	8		19	6	8	4	2	20
<b>Iringa</b>										
Kisiwani	6	8	6		20	1	9		9	20
Isakalilo	4	8	8		20	6	2		12	20
<b>Kisarawe</b>										
Masaki	2	14	2	2	20	2	14	1	3	20
Misumbwi	6	7	3	4	20	5	9	5	1	20
<b>Longido</b>										
Namanga	22	16		3	41	16	16		8	40
Longido										
<b>Magu</b>										
Bukwande	10	5	2	1	18	5	11	4		20
Sogesca	5	11			16	2	12		2	16
<b>Makete</b>										
Iwawa						4	8	8		20
Mwakauta	4	10	6		20	5	11	4		20
<b>Musoma</b>										
Kukirango		20			20		20			20
Kiagata	15	4	2		21		12	3	5	20
<b>Temeke</b>										
Mikwambe	3	5	4	8	20	2	6	4	8	20
Kibada	7	6	3	4	20	5	3	3	4	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>311</b>

Although students are supposed to study all their subjects in English, and the examinations at both Form II and Form IV levels will demand a well developed command of English:

- Only 34% were capable of reading a simple English passage from a Standard Two text and an even smaller percentage (23%) were able to answer questions the same simple text. This of course does not guarantee that they can cope with the more sophisticated English of secondary school textbooks.
- Twenty-three percent were incapable of reading the text or could only identify the letters. Twenty-one percent could not answer the questions at all.



- More than 50% of the students were able to answer the questions without difficulty in only two schools, one in Arusha, and one in Longido (on the border with Kenya). In Iringa 50% and in Temeke 34% of the students could not answer the questions at all.
- In Arusha and Iringa, students in secondary school actually did worse, on average, than their counterparts in primary school, thereby leading to the hypothesis that insisting on English as a medium of instruction, in a situation where there are few teachers and books actually leads to a decline in ability. Students don't just stand still in poor educational environments, they go backwards.



In order to be able to use English as a medium of instruction, students would have to complete their Primary Education with a sufficient command of the language. However:

- Only about one quarter of the primary school pupils could read the English text without difficulty and less than one quarter could answer the questions without difficulty.
- Thirty-eight percent could only identify the letters or less.

- Sixty-one percent could barely try to answer the questions or not answer them at all.
- More than half the pupils in Kisarawe, Temeke and Longido were unable to read the passages.
- Even fewer were able to answer the questions without difficulty, while 65% of pupils in Kisarawe, 39% in Magu, and 55% in Temeke could not answer at all. If you include those who could barely answer some of the questions the results are even worse: 100% of pupils in Kisarawe, 88% in Longido, 80% in Temeke, and 65% in Magu have no proficiency in English.
- Outside the Arusha schools (which had a very good student-teacher ratio), only 29 of 264 pupils (11%) could answer questions in English on a Standard Two passage without difficulty and 69% of all pupils had no English proficiency at all.

Such a situation shows that even the next generation of students will not be able to benefit from English as a medium of instruction. One wonders when policy makers will stop blindly asserting that:



- The best way to learn English is to use it as a medium of instruction.
- Students have sufficient English to learn in that language.
- The primary school system is capable of producing pupils with sufficient English, especially when there is already a large shortage of teachers of English.

The results of the National Examinations in 2010 have shown the effects of sticking to these policies, and the reading tests conducted during the survey showed the same. To insist on continuing in the same manner only ensures that the vast majority of our young people do not get educated and cannot move to further education because they will fail their examinations.

#### **Finding eight: Students are able to use Kiswahili as a medium of instruction**

Although there were still a few secondary school students who could not even answer questions on the Standard Two Kiswahili passage, the vast majority were competent,

- Seventy-five percent were fully capable of reading the Kiswahili passages and answering the questions on the passages.
- Seven percent were only able to recognise the letters or were incapable of reading the passage, while 4.5% were not able to answer the questions at all.

However, one should remember again that this is a Standard Two passage of Kiswahili so one would expect all students to read the passage fluently and be capable of answering all the questions without difficulty. One wonders how those who could not answer the questions at all were able to enter secondary school.



At primary school:

- Only 57% of the pupils were able to read the Kiswahili text without difficulty while 53% were able to answer the questions on the passage without difficulty. This means that nearly 50% of the pupils were not able to read and respond easily to questions on a simple Kiswahili text from Standard Two.
- Fifteen percent could not read the text at all or could only recognise letters and 28% could hardly answer the questions. 13% could not answer the questions at all.

## **Conclusion**

The time has come to question our assumptions about schools and education.

### **a) If standards are not met, it is not a school**

It has been taken for granted for too long that schooling is automatically good and anyone who opposes schooling, or does not send their children to school, does not understand the value of education. It is difficult to overemphasise the destructive effects on young people of the current situation. At a particularly formative stage in their lives thousands of students are forced to sit in bare classrooms, without books or any form of intellectual stimulation, without a teacher for most of the day, and not being able to understand a teacher when s/he does appear in class. The students know that they are just passing time there for four years before being certified as failures by an examination system that purports to measure individual attainment when the means of attainment are not there.

The time has come to put aside political considerations and set and maintain standards of education that ensure that our young people benefit from attending school. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training sets criteria which private schools have to meet before they can be registered and if they then fail to meet them at a later stage a school can be deregistered. One wonders why no action is taken to ensure similar standards in government schools. Unless these schools are upgraded or closed down, students and parents are being cheated.

In this respect, politicians and government officials need to look at schools and the provision of education in the same way that private sector actors look at their products. In order to be successful, they concentrate on increasing demand by improving and marketing the product. Otherwise they will not sell it. If education was regarded in the same way, maybe politicians and government officials would understand why a school with a student-teacher ratio of 100 or more, with few desks and fewer books, is not an attractive or even acceptable proposition for any parent or student. Then, maybe, serious efforts will be made to improve the quality of the schools to the point where learning is taking place.

### **b) If students do not have sufficient English, they cannot study in English**

Using English as a medium of instruction when the majority of students do not have sufficient proficiency in the language means that students do not improve their English and they do not learn anything. This is especially the case when many of the teachers are high school leavers who have insufficient English themselves. Other countries ensure that students learn in the language which makes it possible for them to understand and then teach English effectively as a subject in its own right. Imposing English as a medium of instruction is impeding learning.

### **c) If students do not have Mathematics and Science teachers, they cannot learn these subjects**

No one questions the importance of these two subjects but the current situation makes one wonder whether these subjects are even examinable in many cases.

#### **What can be done?**

There are no easy solutions to the current situation.

#### **Change the medium of instruction**

If the medium of instruction is changed to Kiswahili, there would be an immediate improvement in the level of learning in our schools. As many books are produced in Kiswahili pupils would be able to access and assimilate knowledge that is important to them without having to pass through a language that they do not understand.

#### **Give large incentives to teachers to teach in schools where there are very few teachers**

In other countries, hardship allowances, or incentives are given to teachers to teach in those schools which are not attractive to the majority of teachers. This can be done through significant increases in salary, or linking further educational opportunities to teaching in designated schools.

#### **Use technology appropriately**

The government is currently talking of using technology to overcome the shortage of teachers. This may indeed positively contribute to the education system, but only as long as the infrastructure for that technology is also put in place. However, we hope that the materials that will be used have been or will be developed with Tanzanians in mind and using Tanzanians to develop them. If Kiswahili becomes the medium of instruction, that will obviously be the case. Experiences from other countries show that merely importing materials produced for others, with language understandable to others does not increase learning.

#### **Involve young people**

While an educational system cannot depend on untrained teachers, the success of peer educators in the field of SRH and HIV and AIDS shows that, with good training, young people can play a valuable role as educators. Increasing the use of peer education was also recommended by a large number of respondents. In the current situation, students in school or young people out of school could be trained as teacher auxiliaries who would work with the teachers to conduct group discussions, increase participation and reinforce learning outcomes in appropriate subjects. Youth centres and groups should also be used to do the same out of school.