



# The key to life? Citizens' views on education



## 1. Introduction

In Tanzania, 25 out of every 100 shillings spent by government goes to education. At the same time, almost one out of every three children leave primary school unable to read and count.

In 2015, a new and ambitious Education and Training Policy was officially launched. Basic education has been extended from seven to ten years and it includes four years of compulsory secondary education. Government has promised to remove tuition fees for secondary schools with effect from 2016. The quality of secondary school education remains poor – as reflected in an increase in the failure rates in the Certificate of Secondary Education (of Form 4) examinations over the past few years. The new policy is a part response to the public outcry sparked by the high rate of student failure of Form 4 exams. Measures to improve the quality of secondary school education include boosting teacher motivation and improving school infrastructure.

Will the new policy lead to improved learning outcomes? To what extent does it resonate with the expectations and aspirations of ordinary citizens for their children?

In this brief, we report citizens' views on education, with a focus on the quality of secondary school education. The questionnaire was designed in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MOEVT). Data were collected between 5 and 22 November 2014 from a nationally-representative, high-frequency mobile phone survey, *Sauti za Wananchi*. The data, collected from 1,381 respondents, are representative for Mainland Tanzania. For information on previous rounds (including data, questionnaires, and briefs), visit [www.twaweza.org/sauti](http://www.twaweza.org/sauti).

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Some key findings are:

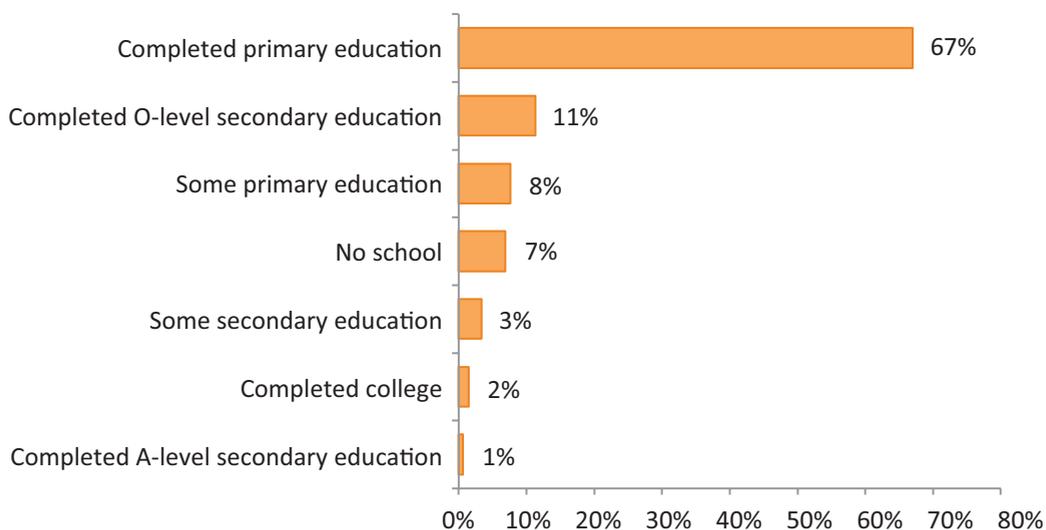
- One in two citizens believes that being able to read and write is the most important skill for secondary school graduates.
- Six out of ten citizens believe that the primary school system adequately prepares students for the transition to secondary school.
- Close to two out of three citizens believe that children should be taught in English throughout primary and secondary school.

## 2. Six facts about citizens' perceptions of the education sector in Tanzania

### Fact 1: There is a generation gap in access to schooling

Most citizens (67%) have gone through the primary school system (Figure 1). An additional 11% completed their O-levels in secondary school (Figure 1).

#### What is the highest degree or level of schooling you have completed?



**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey - Baseline (2012)

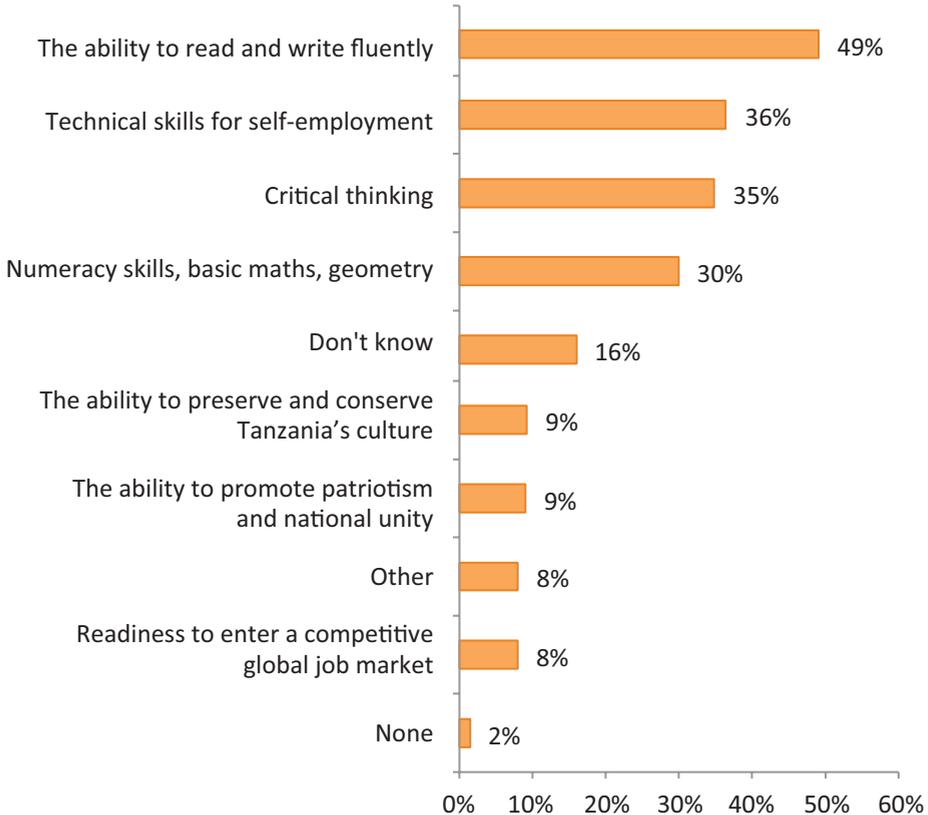
When asked about their children, similar numbers have a child in primary school (65%) as have completed primary school themselves. But, 26% have a son or daughter in secondary school; and 8% have a son or daughter in university or post-secondary education (data not shown in figure).

So while 11% reported having completed their O-levels, 26% reported having a son or daughter in secondary school – this may indicate increasing access to secondary school among the younger generation of Tanzanians. The new 2015 policy makes a year of pre-primary education compulsory, at zero cost to parents. There is little doubt that Tanzania's continuing focus on access to education, at different levels, is having a positive effect on enrolment. More children than ever are going to school.

## Fact 2: Expectations of secondary school graduates are modest

We asked citizens what a Form 4 graduate should be expected to know, and the most popular answer (mentioned by 49%) was literacy (Figure 2). This is a very low outcome for investing ten years in school. The second most popular answer was that Form 4 graduates should be equipped with the technical skills needed for self-employment (Figure 2). These aspirations are reflected in the new 2015 policy, which ensures that literacy, numeracy as well as analytical and innovation skills are developed in school (sections 3.2.4 to 3.2.6 of the policy).

**Figure 2: What is the first most important skill that a Form 4 graduate should have?**

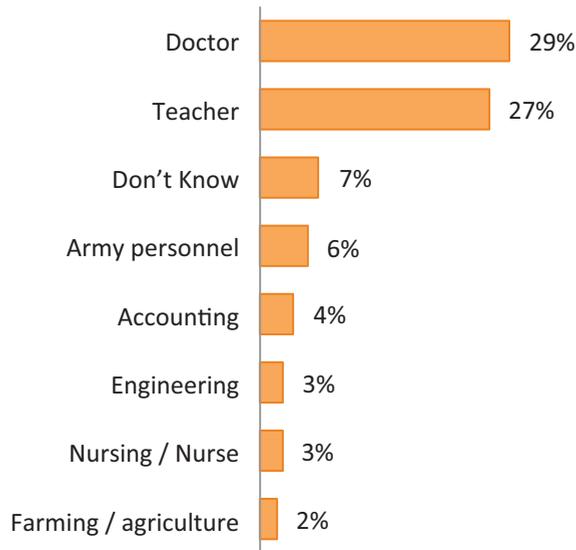


**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey - Round 27 (November 2014)

## Fact 3: Parents hope their children become doctors or teachers

We asked parents what they hoped for their children, career-wise. The most popular answers were “doctor” or “teacher” (Figure 3) – 29% and 27%, respectively. This is, in some ways, at odds with the fairly low expectations that parents have of what their children will learn in secondary school.

**Figure 3: What careers do parents want their children to pursue?**



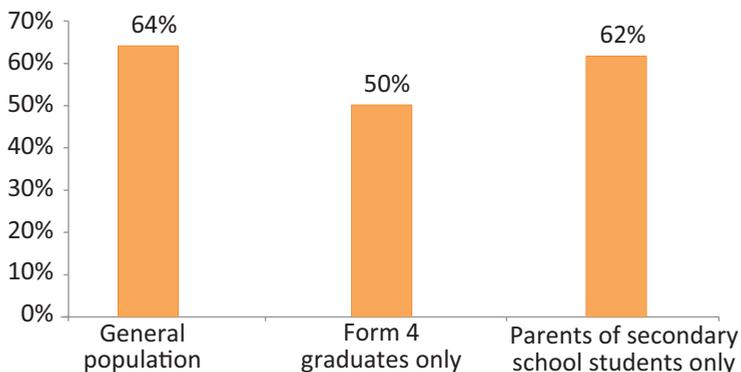
**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey- Round 27 (November 2014).

*Data in this chart from parents of secondary school students only.  
Full dataset available at [www.twaweza.org](http://www.twaweza.org).*

### **Fact 4: Six out of ten Tanzanians believe that primary school adequately prepares students for secondary school**

There is widespread faith in the school system; specifically, that primary schools are preparing students adequately for secondary school. Six out of ten citizens (64%) believe this to be so (Figure 4). Parents with children in secondary schools share this faith. Interestingly, Form 4 graduates who have gone through public primary and secondary schools, are less convinced. Just half of them believe that primary school adequately prepared them for secondary (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Do you think the skills that pupils are acquiring in primary school are giving them a good foundation for secondary school?**

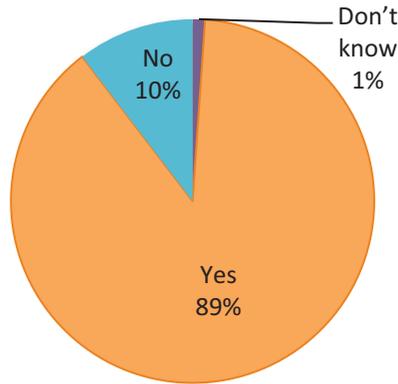


**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey - Round 27 (November 2014)

## Fact 5: A majority of parents believe students should be taught in English throughout school

While a modest majority of citizens believe that primary schools adequately prepare students for the next educational step, almost all secondary school parents agree that the language switch causes difficulties. Specifically, 89% of parents of secondary school students agree that switching the language of instruction from Kiswahili (in primary schools) to English (in secondary schools) leads to challenges (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Do you believe students face challenges when switching language of instruction from primary to secondary school?**



**Source of data:** *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey- Round 27 (November 2014).

*Data in this chart from parents of secondary school students only.  
Full dataset available at [www.twaweza.org](http://www.twaweza.org).*

We asked about what specific challenges the language switch might cause. The most popular answers were:

- “It takes time for them to adjust.” (52%)
- “It affects their ability to learn.” (31%)

The most popular proposed solution was: **“English should be the language of instruction for both primary and secondary school.” (63%)**. The new policy, however, adopts Kiswahili as the language of instruction across primary and secondary schooling.

## 3. Conclusion

An educated citizenry is one of the foundations of a nation’s development. Education has been shown to be positively related to better health outcomes, higher wages, and lower fertility. Investing in a strong educational system should therefore be a priority for any government.

Unfortunately, Tanzania has lagged behind in the effectiveness of its educational sector. A recent Uwezo report, using data from 2013, showed that only 56% of Tanzanian children

between 10-16 could pass a basic literacy exam <sup>1</sup>. There is an urgent need to improve these learning outcomes; the difficult question is: how?

In February 2015, President Jakaya Kikwete launched a new Education and Training Policy. It included, among other proposals, a switch from English to Kiswahili as the language of instruction for secondary school. This does address the common complaint that the switch from Kiswahili based teaching in primary school to English-based teaching in secondary school is a challenge for students – something we find in our data as well (Fact 5).

However, English skills are in huge demand even in Tanzania’s labour market. Pulling the focus away from teaching and learning in English (especially in light of Tanzanian children’s already low performance on English literacy tests) risks further disadvantaging the emerging Tanzanian workforce. On this issue, parents have also spoken – 63% prefer the language of instruction to be English for both primary and secondary schools (Fact 5).

The policy itself is unclear. It proposes moving all official instruction, at both primary and secondary school levels, to Kiswahili. It also states that the curriculum will ensure that English and “other foreign languages” are taught to a level of internationally-competitive proficiency (sections 3.2.17 to 3.2.20 of the policy). The ultimate question – how much English and how much Kiswahili will students end up learning? – is left ambiguous.

Perhaps the most worrying fact revealed by this *Sauti za Wananchi*, is on parents’ expectations. Half of parents believe that a secondary school graduate should be able to read and write fluently. This suggests that parents’ expectations are that their children will complete school with skills that they are meant to acquire in early primary school. A July 2014 *Sauti za Wananchi* brief had similar findings: only 31% of parents thought that students who complete Standard 2 ought to have mastered Standard 2 skills. And just 10% of parents believed that they actually have mastered those skills.<sup>2</sup> Such low expectations of the for the education system create a vicious cycle whereby outcomes are low and parents accept this as the norm, leaving policy actors, teachers and school administrations with no incentive to act.

It is still early days for the new Education and Training Policy. But, encouragingly, it creates unprecedented space for input and engagement by citizens in the details of its implementation. Such an opportunity must be enthusiastically seized by parents, students, education specialists and civil society actors. Taking ownership in this way will surely boost public expectations of what primary and secondary school graduates should be able to do. This will breathe life into the new policy, energizing it to transform Tanzania’s education into one that ensures that children are learning and building skills for a 21st century world.

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<sup>1</sup> Uwezo, 2015. “2013 East Africa Report – Summary”. <http://www.uwezo.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/2013-Uwezo-East-Africa-Report-Summary.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Sauti za Wananchi*, What’s going on in our schools, Brief No. 13, July 2014.



