



Kenyans see gains on education, though some still harbour doubts about new curriculum

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 680 | Laura Barasa

Summary

Kenya introduced a competency-based curriculum (CBC) in 2017. The new curriculum, known as the 2-6-3-3 system, replaced the teacher-centred, exam-oriented 8-4-4 education system, which focused on teachers delivering lessons with limited student-teacher interaction. In contrast, the CBC is learner-centred and skills-oriented, which is expected to foster creativity and innovation; teachers are guides, and student-teacher interaction is paramount. The new curriculum focuses on students' aptitudes, abilities, and interests, which had been virtually ignored by the old education system (Akala, 2021).

But Kenyans have raised a number of concerns regarding the shift to the new curriculum, citing challenges such as a lack of teaching materials, the high cost of learning materials that parents have to bear, and the time required in terms of parental support in carrying out learning activities (Amunga, Were, & Ashioya, 2020; Amutabi, 2019; Nyaboke, Kereri, & Nyabwari, 2021).

Some have complained that implementation of the CBC was haphazard, with delays in the disbursement of funding, and have expressed doubts as to whether the new system will improve education outcomes (Akala, 2021; Muchira, Morris, Wawire, & Oh, 2023).

How do ordinary Kenyans see their new curriculum, and their education system more broadly?

The most recent Afrobarometer survey in Kenya shows that views on the CBC remain divided, though a slim majority think it will make education in Kenya better.

Overall, solid majorities give their government good marks on handling the country's educational needs and say the school system has improved over the past five years. Most citizens who had contact with public schools during the preceding year say they were treated with respect and found it easy to get the services they needed.

Even so, education still ranks as one of the most important problems that citizens want their government to address, and few Kenyans are confident that they could obtain information on school budgets and expenditures.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Kenya, based at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, interviewed 2,400 adult Kenyans in November-December 2021. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95%

confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Kenya in 2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016, and 2019.

Key findings

- Education ranks sixth among important problems that Kenyans want the government to address.
- Among Kenyans who had contact with a public school during the preceding year:
 - Almost three-fourths (73%) say it was “easy” or “very easy” to obtain the services they needed, a modest improvement compared to 2019 (68%).
 - About one in six (16%) say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a teacher or school official to obtain the services they needed.
 - Eight in 10 (80%) say teachers and school officials treat them with respect.
- Six in 10 citizens (60%) think it is likely that they could get someone to take action if they reported teacher misbehaviour such as absenteeism or mistreatment of students.
- But only 28% are confident that they could obtain information about school budgets and how the funds have been used.
- About two-thirds (65%) of Kenyans say the government is addressing educational needs “fairly well” or “very well.” But that’s 10 percentage points lower than in 2019.
- Seven in 10 citizens (69%) say education services have improved “somewhat” or “a lot” over the past five years.
- More than half (52%) of respondents believe that the competency-based curriculum will improve education in Kenya, but 39% say it will help just “a little bit” or “not at all.”

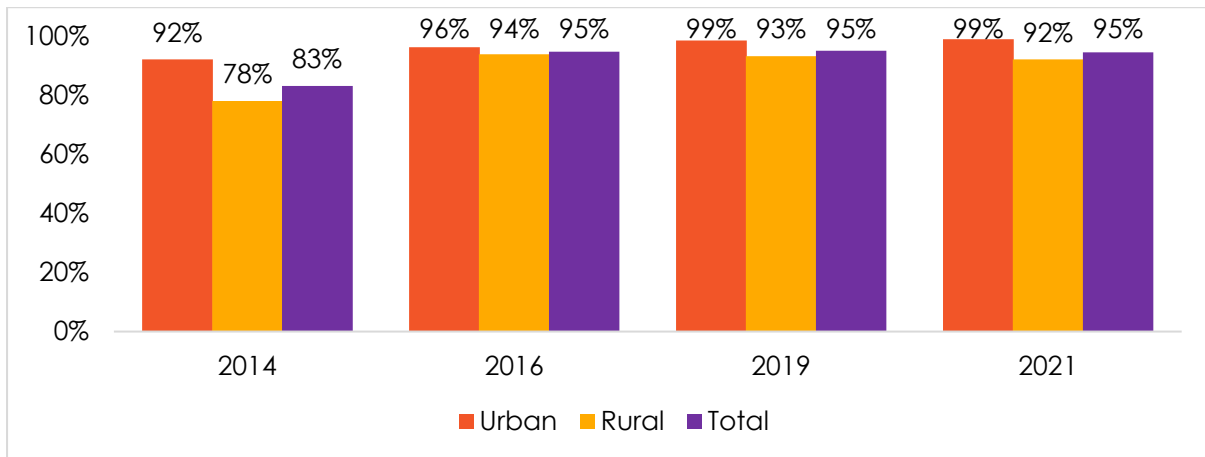
Proximity to schools

As part of their data-collection process, Afrobarometer field teams make on-the-ground observations in each census enumeration area (EA) they visit about facilities and services that are available in the area, such as a school, a police station, and an electricity grid. Since the EAs visited are selected to represent the population of the country as a whole, these data provide reliable indicators of infrastructure and service availability.

Survey results indicate that almost all Kenyans (95%) live within easy walking distance of a school. This is a significant improvement compared to 2014, when Afrobarometer interviewers found schools within easy reach of just 83% of respondents (Figure 1).

The improvement is particularly notable in rural areas (from 78% in 2014 to 92%), though they still trail urban areas (99%) in access to school facilities.

Figure 1: Proximity to schools | by urban-rural location | Kenya | 2014-2021

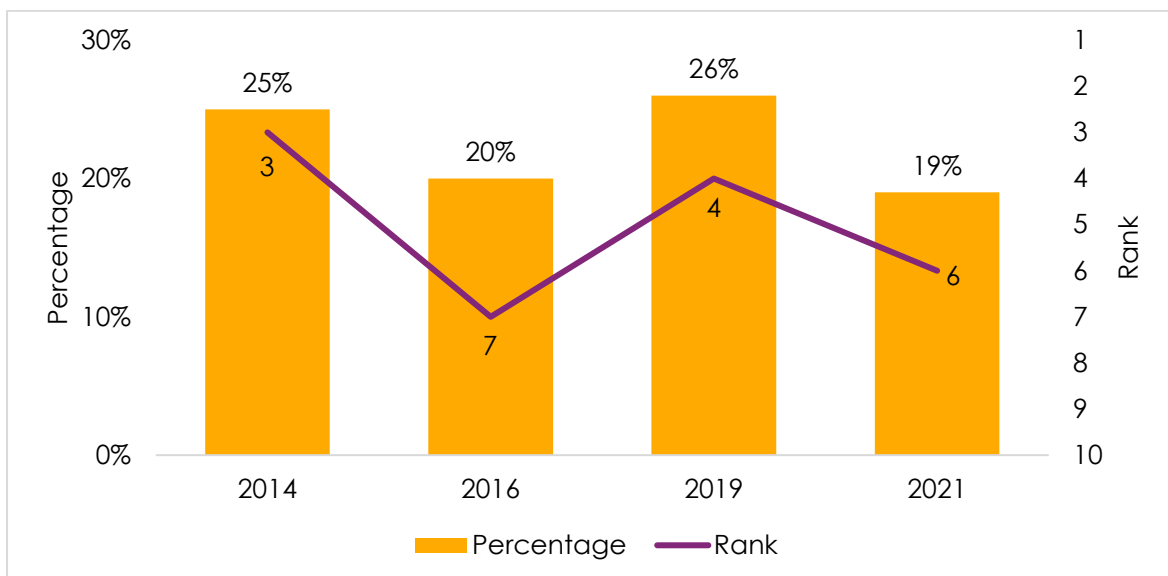


Interviewers were asked to record whether there was a school (private, public, or both) in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area or within easy walking distance. (% "yes")

Education as a key problem facing the country

When asked what they consider the most important problems facing the country that the government needs to address, Kenyans have consistently ranked education among the top 10 in recent years, though its specific rank has varied from third (in 2014) to seventh (in 2016) (Figure 2). In 2021, 19% of respondents cite education among their top three priorities, placing it sixth after management of the economy (40%), corruption (35%), unemployment (32%), health (24%), and crime and security (22%).

Figure 2: Education as a key problem facing the country | Kenya | 2014-2021



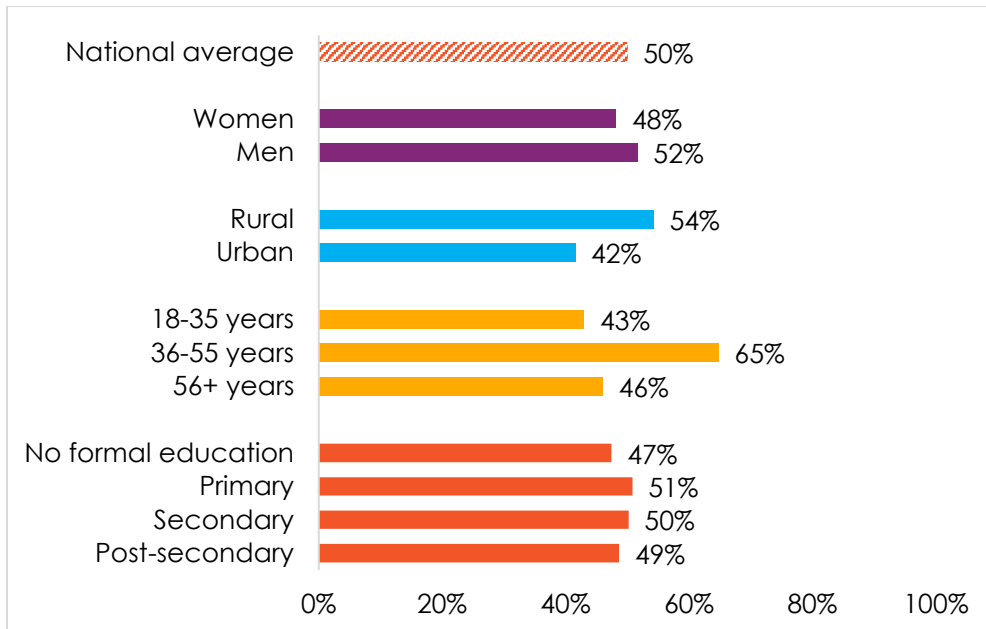
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three responses. Chart shows % of respondents who identified education as one of their three priorities.)

Interaction with public schools

Half (50%) of Kenyan adults say they had contact with a public school during the year preceding the survey (Figure 3). More men than women report having interacted with a

school (52% vs. 48%), and such contact was more common in rural areas than in cities (54% vs. 42%). The middle age group (65% among 36- to 55-year-olds) was considerably more likely to interact with schools than younger (43%) or older (46%) respondents.

Figure 3: Contact with public schools | by demographic group | Kenya | 2021

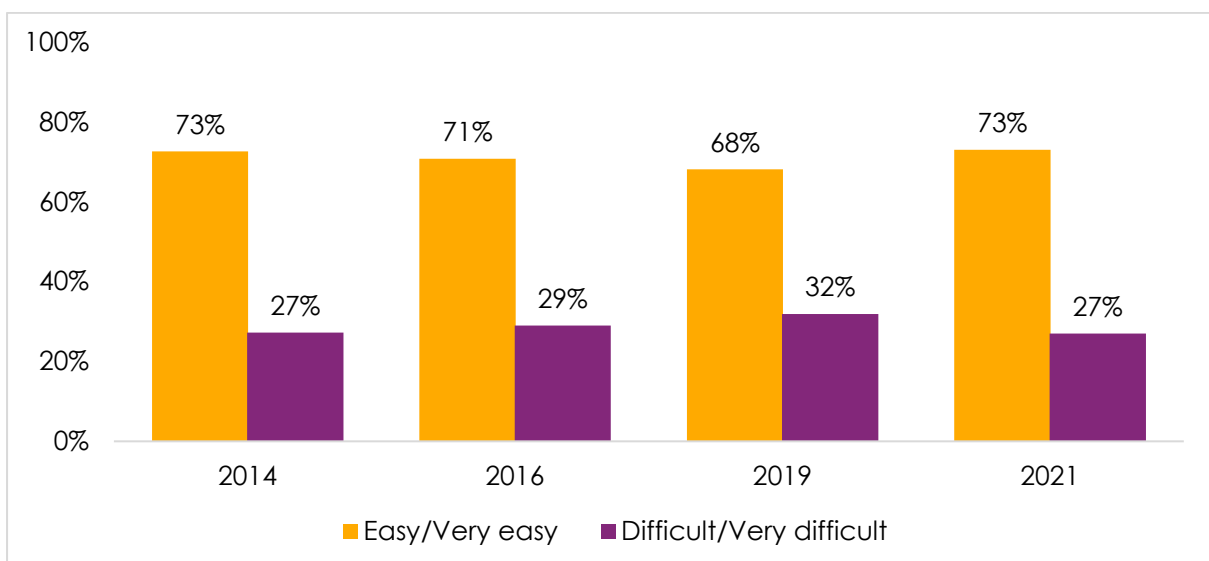


Respondents were asked: In the past 12 months, have you had contact with a public school? (% "yes")

Ease of obtaining services from schools

Among citizens who had contact with a public school during the previous year, almost three-fourths (73%) say it was "easy" or "very easy" to obtain the services they needed from teachers or school officials, a modest improvement compared to 2019 (68%) (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Ease of obtaining services from schools | Kenya | 2014-2021

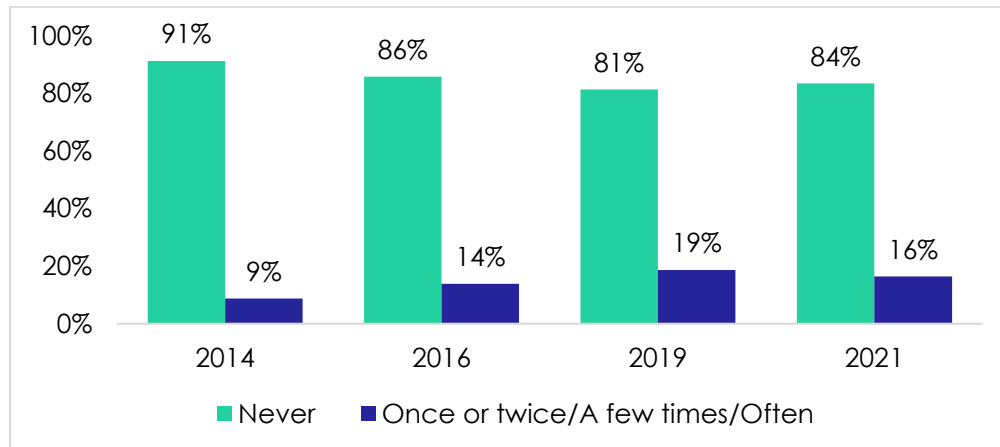


Respondents who said they had contact with a public school during the previous year were asked: How easy or difficult was it to obtain the services you needed from teachers or school officials? (Respondents who did not have contact with a school are excluded.)

Paying a bribe to get services from schools

About one in six Kenyans (16%) who had contact with a public school during the preceding year say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a teacher or school official “once or twice,” “a few times,” or “often” to obtain the services they needed from schools (Figure 5). This proportion has almost doubled compared to 2014 (9%).

Figure 5: Paid a bribe to get services from schools | Kenya | 2014-2021

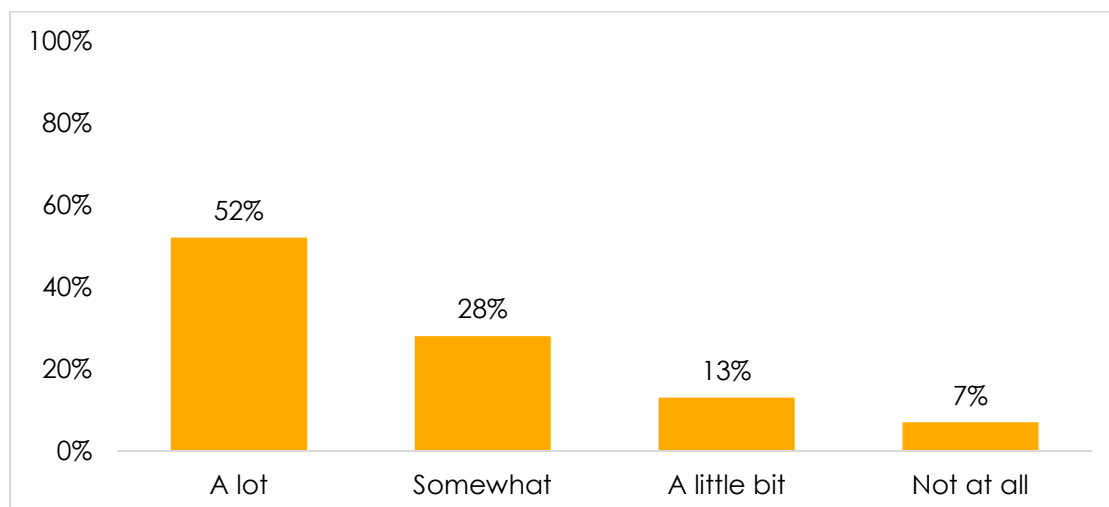


Respondents who had contact with a school during the previous year were asked: How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a teacher or school official in order to get the services you needed from the schools? (Respondents who did not have contact with a school are excluded.)

Treated with respect by teachers and school officials

Most citizens (80%) who had contact with a school during the previous year say that teachers and school officials treated them with respect during their interactions, including 52% who report being accorded “a lot” of respect (Figure 6). Only 7% say they received no respect “at all.”

Figure 6: Treated with respect by teachers and school officials? | Kenya | 2021



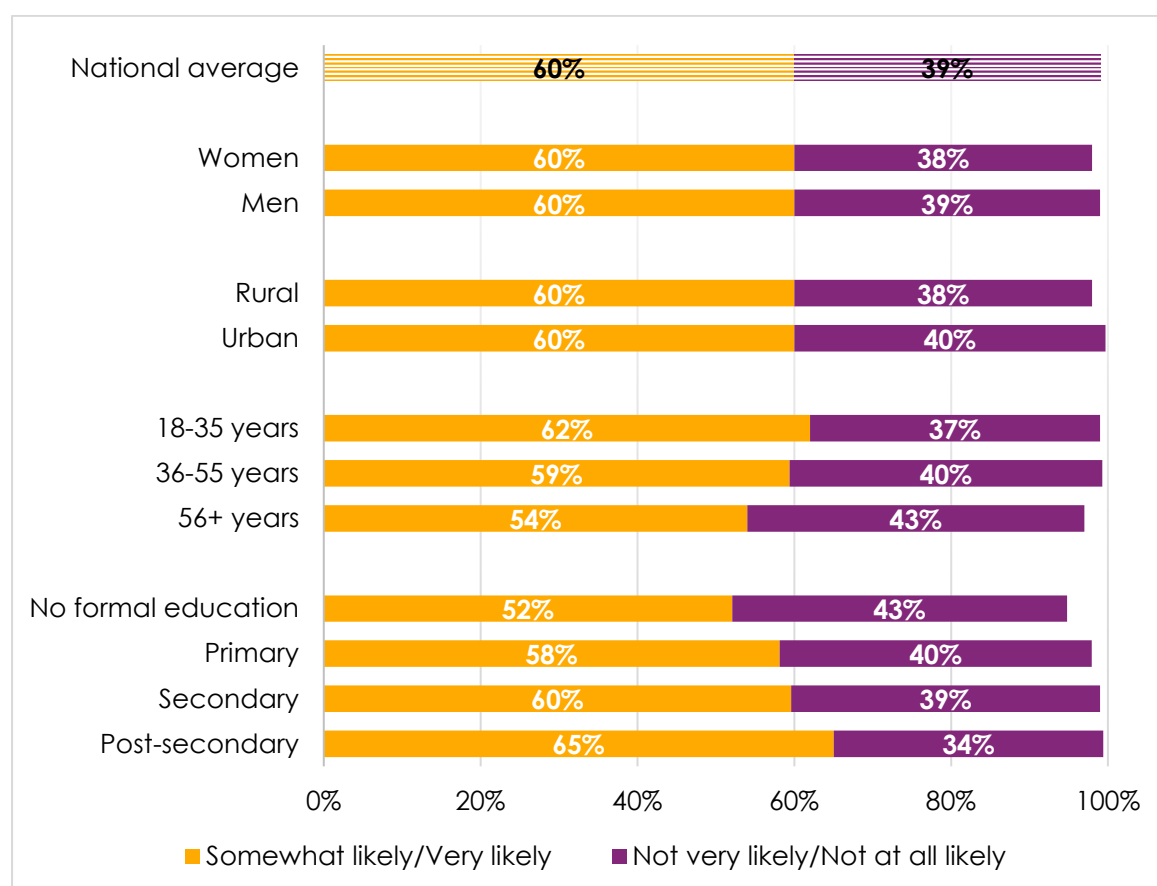
Respondents who had contact with a school during the previous year were asked: In general, when dealing with teachers and school officials, how much do you feel that they treat you with respect? (Respondents who did not have contact with a school are excluded.)

Likelihood of holding teachers accountable

In addition to feeling respected, a majority of adults think that someone will listen if they report teacher misbehaviour such as absenteeism or mistreatment of students. Six in 10 respondents (60%) say it is “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that they could get someone to take action on such a complaint (Figure 7).

This confidence is somewhat weaker among respondents with no formal education (52%) and older citizens (54%) but is equally strong among men and women as well as urban and rural residents.

Figure 7: Likelihood of holding teachers accountable | by demographic group
 | Kenya | 2021

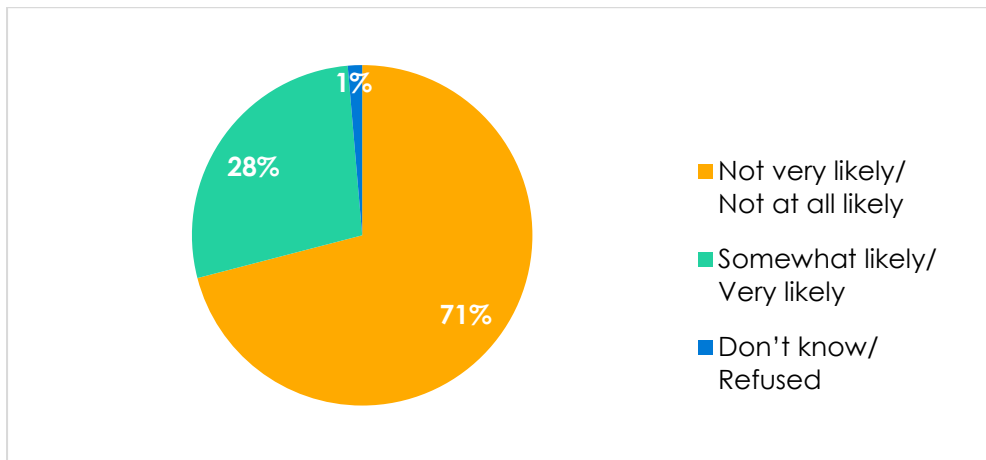


Respondents were asked: How likely is it that you could get someone to take action if you went to the local school to report teacher misbehaviour such as absenteeism or mistreatment of students?

Access to school budget information

Contrary to getting action on complaints about teacher behaviour, few citizens are confident that they could obtain information about school budgets and how the funds have been used. Only 28% of respondents think they could probably access such information, while 71% consider it “not very likely” or “not at all likely” (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Access to school budget information | Kenya | 2021



Respondents were asked: How likely is it that you could get the following information from government or other public institutions, or haven't you heard enough to say: If you contacted the local school to find out what the school's budget is and how the funds have been used?

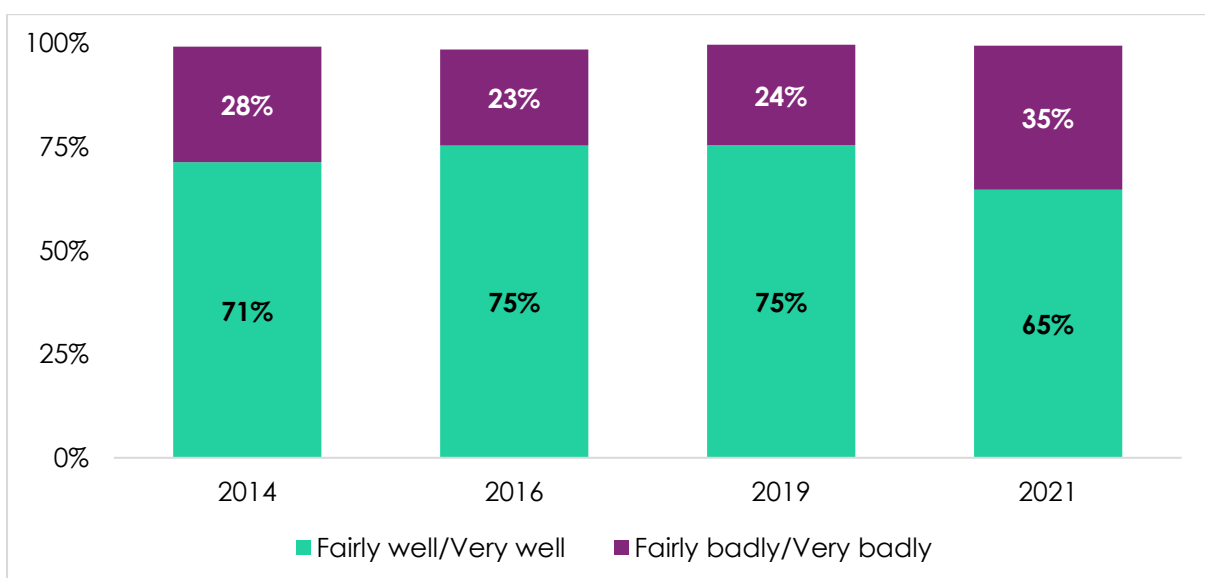
Quality of educational services

Government performance

Overall, about two-thirds (65%) of Kenyans say the government is handling educational needs "fairly well" or "very well," though this represents a 10-percentage-point drop compared to 2019 (Figure 9).

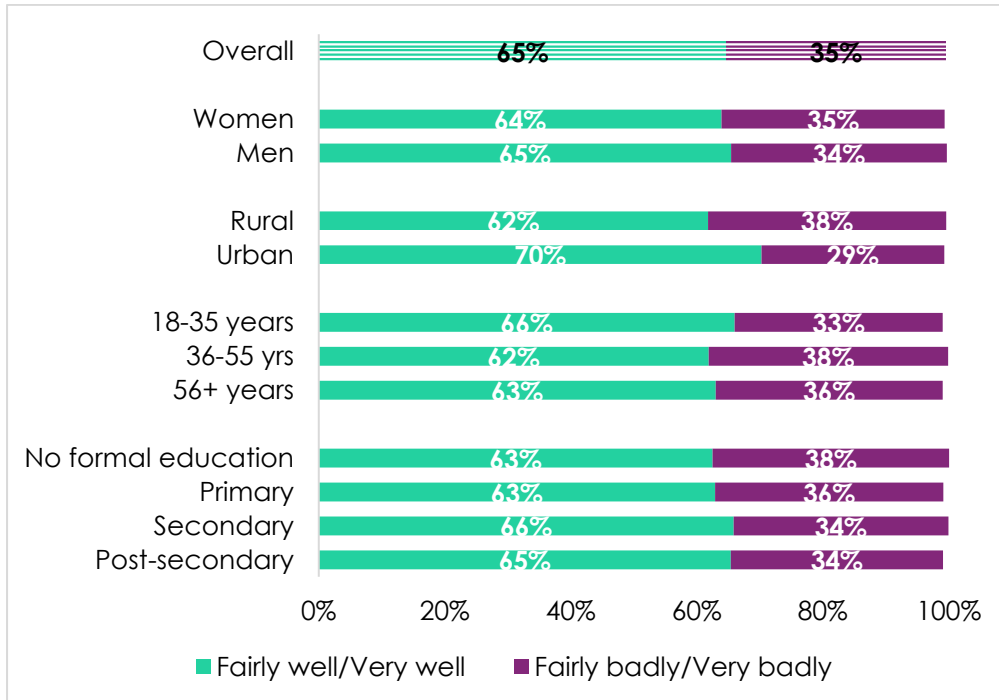
While assessments of the government's performance on education differ little across most key demographic groups, ratings are higher in cities (70%) than in rural areas (62%) (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Government performance in handling educational needs | Kenya | 2014-2021



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling addressing educational needs, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Figure 10: Government performance in handling educational needs | by demographic group | Kenya | 2021

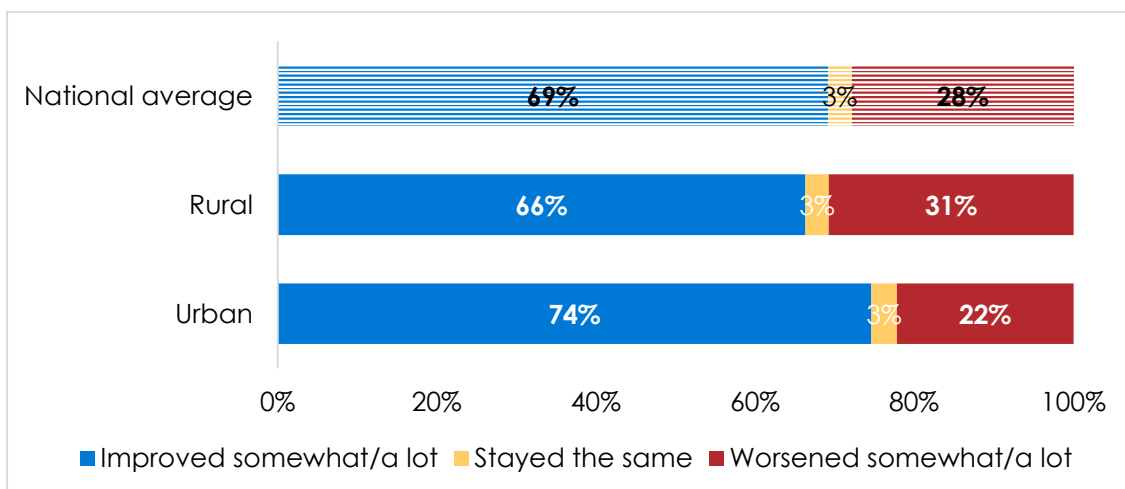


Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling educational needs, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Improvement over time

In line with widespread approval of the government's performance, seven in 10 Kenyans (69%) say that education services have improved "somewhat" or "a lot" over the past five years. Again, urban residents are more likely than their rural counterparts to see gains in educational services (74% vs. 66%) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Have education services improved or worsened over the past five years? | Kenya | 2021



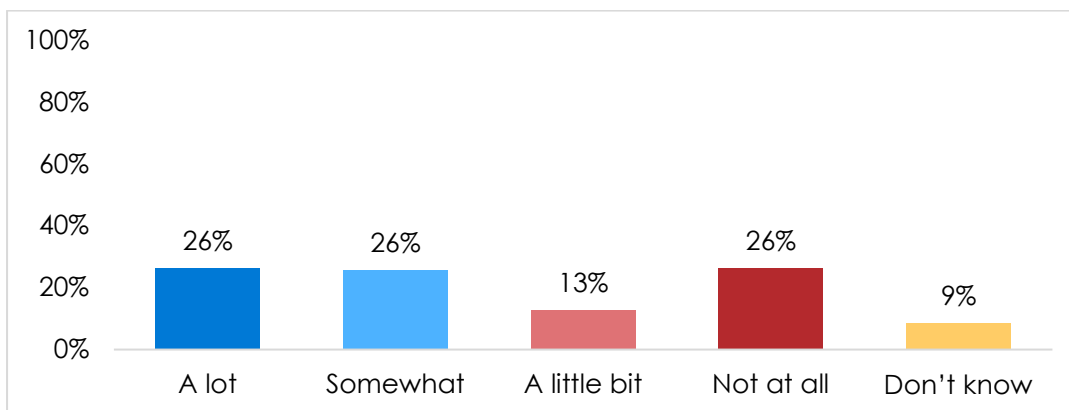
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, have education services improved or worsened in the last five years?

Potential for CBC to improve education

While the country's competency-based curriculum (CBC) introduced in 2017 is intended to improve educational outcomes, many Kenyans have their doubts. A slim majority (52%) think the CBC system will strengthen education in the country "somewhat" or "a lot," but a substantial share expect that it will help just "a little bit" (13%) or "not at all" (26%) (Figure 12).

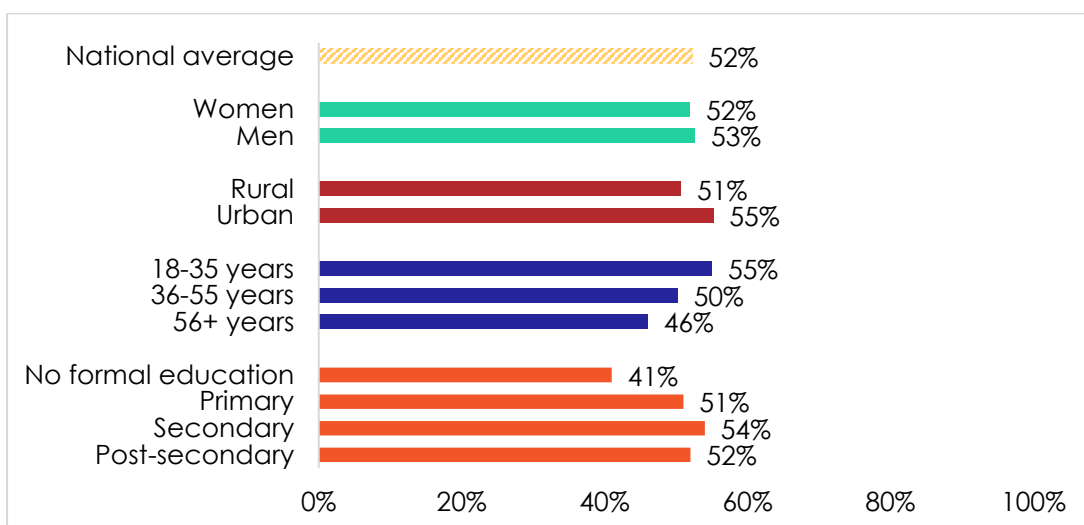
Urban residents (55%) and young citizens (55%) are more likely to expect improvement due to CBC than rural residents (51%) and older respondents (46%-50%). Respondents with no formal education (41%) are significantly less optimistic than their more educated counterparts (51%-54%) (Figure 13).

Figure 12: Will competency-based curriculum improve education? | Kenya | 2021



Respondents were asked: Recently Kenya changed its education curriculum to a new competency-based curriculum or CBC system, where learners spend two years of pre-primary education followed by six years of primary, six years of secondary, and at least three years of tertiary education. To what extent do you think the new system will improve the country's education?

Figure 13: Competency-based curriculum will improve education | by demographic group | Kenya | 2021



Respondents were asked: Recently Kenya changed its education curriculum to a new competency-based curriculum or CBC system, where learners spend two years of pre-primary education followed by six years of primary, six years of secondary, and at least three years of tertiary education. To what extent do you think the new system will improve the country's education? (% who say "improve somewhat" or "improve a lot")

Conclusion

The most recent Afrobarometer survey suggests that while education is not the most urgent issue on citizens' agenda, it is a sector that requires attention. A majority of Kenyans say the government is doing a good job on education, but that majority has shrunk significantly in recent years. In part, this may reflect continuing doubts about the competency-based curriculum, which has yet to gain full public acceptance.

Kenyans' perceptions that school officials are helpful and respectful and that citizens can get a response if they report teacher misconduct are strengths that the school system can build on. But survey findings also point to areas of concern, including corruption and a perceived lack of transparency when it comes to public access to financial information about their schools.

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Laura Barasa is a national researcher for Afrobarometer in Kenya and a lecturer in the Department of Economics and Development Studies at the University of Nairobi. Email: lauranelima@uonbi.ac.ke.

Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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