Time to Teach

Understanding teacher attendance and time on task
in primary schools

Liberia

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October 2021

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Abbreviations

CEO	Country education officer
DEO	District education officer
MOE	Ministry of Education
PTA	Parents–Teachers Association
RTTI	Rural Teacher Training Institutes
TLM	Teaching and learning materials
TTT	Time to Teach

Executive summary

Teacher absenteeism is one of the main challenges to achieving universal learning in many developing countries, wherein absence rates among primary school teachers range from 3 to 27 per cent.[1] In Liberia, recurring school absenteeism and post abandonment are considered critical obstacles to quality education. Although national political actors recognize absenteeism as a major impediment to quality education, studies on the factors influencing teacher attendance in the country, including national policies and practices at the community and school levels, remain scarce.

Teachers are transitioning through a particularly uncertain time in terms of their professional lives and work. To reduce the spread of COVID-19, most countries around the world, including Liberia, temporarily closed schools. However, learning has not stopped but is now fully taking place remotely. The rapid move to remote delivery modes to keep students engaged in learning has intensified workloads for teachers as they work to not only assure learning continuity but also acquire the necessary remote teaching skills. There is a lack of knowledge of the direct and indirect ways through which the virus, and the measures adopted to contain it, impact primary school teachers. Thus, the report attempts to provide valuable insights into how the COVID-19 crisis may exacerbate existing education system challenges that affect teacher attendance and time on task. The Time to Teach (TTT) study seeks to fill these knowledge gaps. The main objective of the study is to **collect and strengthen the evidence base on the factors affecting the various dimensions of primary school teacher attendance** and to use this evidence to inform the design and implementation of teacher policies. More specifically, the study examines four distinct dimensions of teacher attendance: (1) being in school; (2) being punctual (i.e., not arriving late/leaving early); (3) being in the classroom (while in school); and (4) spending sufficient time on task (while in the classroom).

TTT is a mixed methods project, employing both qualitative and quantitative research tools. The study draws from national, system wide, qualitative data collection and school observations, and a quantitative survey, with 139 teachers working in 20 purposely selected primary schools. A total of 396 individuals participated in the study.

Key findings

How frequently are teachers absent?

Self-reported data from the TTT surveys show that the most common forms of absenteeism among surveyed teachers in Liberia are lack of punctuality, followed by school absenteeism. The least common are classroom absence and reduction of instruction time.

Twenty per cent of surveyed teachers reported having been absent from school on a recurring basis (i.e., at least once a week) during the 2018–2019 school year;[2] 24 per cent having arrived late or left early; 15 per cent having been absent from the classroom and 15 per cent having reduced teaching time (than originally planned).

- Public and faith-based school teachers report school absenteeism and lack of punctuality more frequently. The survey data indicated no significant variation in classroom absenteeism by school type (public/private/faith based) and locality (urban/rural). However, reduction of instruction time is more common in urban settings and faith-based schools.

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1   Guerrero, G., Leon, J., Zapata, M., Sugimaru, C., and Cueto, S., What Works to Improve Teacher Attendance in Developing Countries?: A systematic review, 2012.

2   The survey took place between April and May 2019 and the school year began in September 2018 and ended in June 2019.

What are the main factors associated with teacher absenteeism?

- **National-level factors** influencing teacher attendance include teacher training and remuneration. Lack of content knowledge and pedagogical skills necessary for effective teaching were mentioned in interviews as issues affecting teacher attendance, engagement and time on task. Teachers also acknowledged that attending in-service training programmes was a key determinant of school absence and lateness. Delays in receiving salaries, which can be late for several weeks due to the weaknesses in the centralized payroll payment system, also impacted school attendance and punctuality. Most teachers in private schools reported receiving their salary consistently at the end of the month and withdrawing it either by going to the bank or by using their phone. Public school teachers, however, mostly reported receiving their pay irregularly and facing major difficulties in withdrawing it.

- **Subnational factors** include the key role of subnational officials – both district education officers (DEOs) and country education officers (CEOs) – in monitoring, particularly regarding school absenteeism and lateness. Some identified challenges include lack of training, lack of resources – particularly means of transportation – and travel and accommodation budgets for conducting school visits. Furthermore, most teachers maintained that sanctions are rarely implemented because education inspectors cannot deduct salaries of absentee teachers due to payment centralization. Survey responses corroborate this finding, indicating that private school monitoring and sanction capacity is more effective than in public schools.

- At the **community level,** harsh climatic conditions were frequently cited as a reason for school absence and lateness, especially for those who rely on transportation to get to school. Weather is also highly associated with classroom absenteeism and reduced teaching time, especially in conjunction with poor school infrastructure. Limited access to health and financial services was also mentioned in interviews as a common determinant of absence from school and lateness. In addition, lack of parental and community engagement in teacher monitoring is linked with reduced teacher attendance and, in particular, with higher school and classroom absenteeism. Only one out of two teachers consider parents to be actively engaged in school matters, with lower percentages reported in rural settings and private schools.

- **School-level factors** include how the school environment plays a key role in teacher motivation, attendance, and time on task. Issues such as the monitoring of head teachers, teachers' workload, and the material conditions for teaching to take place (e.g., school infrastructure and teaching and learning materials – TLMs) are fundamental to curb teacher absenteeism and reduction of instruction time. Head teachers' monitoring capacity is found to be much more relevant in verifying teacher presence at school and punctuality and less so in reporting subtle manifestations of absenteeism, like absence from class and reduced teaching time. Interviews and survey data suggest that head teachers in private schools have greater sanction capacity than their peers in public schools. Interviews with different stakeholders suggest that inadequate school infrastructure and the unavailability of TLMs negatively impact teachers' school attendance and encourage subtler manifestations of absenteeism, such as teacher absence from class and reduced teaching time. Heavy workload can also result in classroom absenteeism and reduced teaching time.

- At the **teacher level,** health and family responsibilities are common reasons for school absence and lack of punctuality. Health is the most frequent reason given by teachers for explaining absence from school and lateness, and the second most frequent reason given for low class attendance and for spending less time on task than originally planned. Interview data showed a widespread perception that female teachers tend to be more prone to different types of absenteeism than their male counterparts because of health problems and family responsibilities. However, survey data did not reveal significant variations in the frequency of health and family-induced teacher absences by gender for any form of teacher absence.

What are the potential recommendations for policymaking?

This study found several factors that contribute to different forms of teacher absenteeism across the primary education system. The Liberian government has made remarkable progress in improving the quality and efficiency of primary education. However, as the findings of this study highlight, there are still pervasive challenges that continue to limit teacher attendance and time on task, which may be further exacerbated by the combined effect of school closures and the pandemic's economic impact. There is concern that teacher attendance will be further hindered by COVID-19 due to teachers' increased workload, issues with timely payments, lack of TLMs and health concerns, among others.

Building on the study's findings, five areas of action have been identified to further reduce teacher absenteeism:

1. **Remove obstacles to receiving pay and ensure the timely delivery of teacher salaries.** This could be achieved by increasing pay points, especially in remote areas where teachers must often travel for days to collect their salary. Following the example of other countries in the region, the Ministry of Education (MOE) could hire a third party to pay teacher salaries. Another potential solution is establishing a roster system at the school level, to ensure that not all teachers go to collect pay at the same time.

2. **Boost parental and community involvement as a way of improving teacher accountability and attendance.** Institutionalizing the monitoring role of parents and community groups and strengthening their representation on school councils and management boards can be a first step. Strengthening relationships between teachers and parents/community is especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

3. **Ensure teacher training has a strong practical component, and that training takes place only during holidays and weekends.** This should increase the likelihood that teachers are well equipped to perform effectively in the classroom and that they achieve effective curriculum coverage. Ensuring the organization of compensation classes to avoid leaving pupils alone when teachers are in training during school days is a way to safeguard both curriculum implementation and the teachers' work–life balance.

4. **Increase the representation of women teachers.** Use alternative deployment strategies to ensure well-qualified women teachers are attracted to rural schools. To enhance security for women teachers, ensure that 'safe school' and anti-harassment policies and teacher codes of conduct address sexual harassment of women teachers and that there are specific reporting and follow-up procedures in place. Developing more flexible teacher training programmes, which do not require long periods of absence from home and/or programmes which allow women to take young children with them, could be considered. Providing scholarships and incentives for women to attend pre-service teacher training or other incentives may also help.

5. **Strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration to address factors beyond the education system that affect teacher attendance and teaching time, in particular those related to health and infrastructure**. To limit health-related absenteeism in rural areas, the MOE could collaborate with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to provide school-level healthcare services to teachers and pupils. As part of the COVID-19 Education Response Plan, the MOE is already working to strengthen the link between the health and education sectors. This could be extended to other ministries impacting teachers' professional lives, such as collaborating with the Ministry of Transport to address the cost and availability of transport for teachers.

Section 1
Introduction

1.1   Context and study rationale

Teacher absenteeism is one of the main challenges to achieving universal learning in many developing countries, with teacher school absence rates ranging from 3 to 27 per cent (Guererro et al., 2013). These national averages conceal even higher absenteeism rates within countries and large variations in educational opportunities and outcomes, as teachers tend to be absent more often in the poorest and most remote communities and schools (Bennell and Akyeampong, 2007; Chaudhury et al., 2006; Alcazár et al., 2006).

Teacher absenteeism is particularly prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa. The World Bank's Service Delivery Indicators study found that in seven sub-Saharan African countries, between 15 to 45 per cent of all primary school teachers are absent from school, and between 23 and 57 per cent are absent from class, on any given day (Bold et al., 2017). The same study estimated that on average, the loss of teaching hours due to teacher absenteeism corresponds to a waste of approximately 46 cents for every dollar invested in education, which is equivalent to an annual wastage of 1 to 3 per cent of GDP (Filmer, 2015). Similarly, Afrobarometer data[3] drawn from 36 African countries, indicate that teacher absenteeism contributes to unequal education outcomes, confirming a strong association between high levels of teacher absenteeism and the presence of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

In Liberia, statistics suggest that teacher absenteeism has been a consistent challenge. A World Bank study in 2010 found variations in classroom teaching ranging from 12 to 32 hours per week in seven Anglophone countries (Filmer, 2015), including Liberia. High levels of school absenteeism and post abandonment are critical challenges identified in the 2016 Liberian Education Sector Analysis (MOE, 2016). A UNICEF study (2014) on out-of-school children and dropout rates in Liberia identified key supply side barriers such as teacher absenteeism, violence at school and school quality as factors that influence the incidence of primary school drop-out.

In addition, Liberia has experienced a long history of political, social and economic fragility and insecurity, whose legacies have inevitably shaped

> **Liberia, a post-conflict country**
>
> In 1979, a coup d'état led by Samuel Doe, precipitated a period of nearly 30 years of civil war. During these years, violence claimed the lives of an estimated 270,000 Liberians, and led to the forced displacement and migration of millions of citizens (Nmoma, 1997). In 2003, the country commenced a transition to a state of peace and stability and the Liberian government began the work of post-conflict reconstruction and development. By 2013, after a decade of post-conflict reconstruction, the Government of Liberia outlined an Agenda for Transformation that set the country on a path toward inclusive growth and development (Republic of Liberia, 2013).

the education sector today. Throughout its contemporary history, the education system has been characterized by fragility and structural weakness. This has included the need for 'motivated and well-paid teachers,' 'efficient governance,' (Lanier, 1961) as well as a stronger articulation between training provided at school and the needs of the economy (USAID, 1988). The civil war, which began in 1989 and ended with the signing of the 2003 Accra Peace Accord, greatly compounded these problems. In the aftermath of the conflict, infrastructure, equipment, the management system, and the teaching workforce were all in disarray, leading to the near destruction and disruption of the education system (Williams et al., 2011). Thirty per cent of public schools and 24 per cent of community-led schools were destroyed and many teachers fled, creating a legacy of shortage of qualified and trained teachers (Williams et al., 2011). All three Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs)[4] were destroyed (Williams et al., 2011), leaving many untrained and volunteer teachers. As a result of the war, an entire generation of children has missed the opportunity to attend school, and many children were abducted into fighting forces.

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3   https://afrobarometer.org/data

4   RTTIs are the primary institutions responsible for the preparation of primary school teachers.

Several studies have explored teacher absenteeism in Liberia (*see Box 1*). However, the relationship between teacher attendance and factors such as community infrastructure, subnational supervision, and gender has not yet been clarified. Furthermore, existing studies employ a conventional definition of teacher attendance that focuses primarily on school attendance or lateness, disregarding more subtle manifestations of the phenomenon, such as absence from class and reduced time on task.

Box 1. Existing literature and gaps regarding teacher absenteeism in Liberia

The distance of schools from basic services likely contributes to chronic problems relating to teacher absenteeism. Teachers serving in rural schools often have to travel long distances to access basic health care, collect salaries, purchase food and other household goods (MOE, 2016). According to the Liberia Training Project (LTTP II, 2016), 'travel to collect paycheck' and 'money problems' accounted for 30 per cent of teacher school absenteeism. For this reason, in July 2016, the government instituted reforms in the banking sector to allow teachers greater flexibility when collecting their pay (Dusza, 2016). The use of mobile money has been identified as an intervention that could improve teacher support, raise teacher morale, and reduce teacher absence (MOE, 2016). Participation in education-related training or administrative activities at the district or county levels has also been recognized as a main reason for teacher absenteeism (MOE, 2016). Some teachers miss school to work second jobs or work on their farms (GPE, 2018).

1.2   Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Liberian education system

In order to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government announced a series of containment measures and declared a national health emergency. All schools, colleges and universities were closed on 16 March 2020 when Liberia's first confirmed case was announced, disrupting the learning of 1.4 million children in pre-tertiary schools. Based on its previous experience with the Ebola outbreak in 2014, the government quickly developed a Coordinated Education Response Plan to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the education system. The MOE introduced a radio schooling initiative and delivered paper-based lessons to students at home to assure learning continuity for all learners, especially vulnerable children and those living in remote locations. Because parental and community involvement is important to support teachers and ensure the sustainability and success of these interventions, the MOE also developed parental support guides for teachers and learners' parents. To empower teachers to provide adequate remote learning support, the MOE also planned to provide training to teachers through online platforms and to design and implement strategies to improve school supervision and monitoring (GPE, 2020). The shift to remote learning, however, raised concerns about in-service teachers' preparedness to support remote learning and the inexperience of parents or guardians to assist pupils' learning needs, especially in rural settings (GPE, 2020; TEP and NESG, 2020).

The TTT report seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of teacher attendance in primary schools in Liberia. While the report does not specifically address the impact of COVID-19 on teacher attendance (as data collection was completed before the pandemic), the aim is to provide valuable insights on how the pandemic may exacerbate existing education system challenges that may affect teacher attendance, motivation and time on task. This study is, therefore, informative for policy making both in the current COVID-19 time and beyond.

1.3   Research objectives

The principal objective of the TTT study is to generate and collate empirical evidence on the various forms and determinants of primary school teacher absenteeism in Liberia and provide practical recommendations to improve teacher attendance rates. More specifically, the study aims to:

- Understand various forms of primary school teacher absenteeism (i.e., absence from school, lateness, absence from classroom, reduction of instruction time) and assess their prevalence in different regions, types of schools (i.e., public/private/faith-based) and settings (i.e., rural/urban).

- Explore the issue of teacher absenteeism from a systemic perspective and identify factors at different levels of the education system (national, subnational, community, school, and teacher) that affect teacher attendance.

- Examine gaps in teacher policy and policy implementation linked to identified determinants of absenteeism and barriers to higher teacher attendance rates.

- Identify promising practices and provide actionable policy recommendations to increase teachers' attendance and time on task

1.4   Data and methods

The TTT study is a mixed methods project, employing both qualitative and quantitative research tools. The study takes a systems approach toward explaining teacher absenteeism and therefore examines the relevance of factors at all levels of the education system, including the national, subnational, community, school, and teacher levels (*see Annex 1 for a detailed exploratory framework*). The study also evaluates whether factors outside of the education system may have an important role to play in determining teacher attendance, and if so, what that role is.

In total, 20 schools were purposively selected based on the following criteria: location (regions and counties), type of school (public, private or faith-based) and community setting (rural or urban). At each school, in-depth interviews were conducted with the head teacher, three teachers, and a member of the parent-teacher association. A focus group discussion was also conducted with students in all schools and a teacher survey was administered to all teachers present on the day of the visit.[5] Twenty structured observations were also used to record enumerators' observations on teacher absenteeism, teacher-student interactions, and teacher working relations during school visits. In addition, national and subnational education officers (in charge of teacher monitoring) and teacher union representatives were also interviewed.[6] In total, 396 individuals participated in the study (*see Table 1*).[7] Thematic content analysis was employed to code and analyse data from interviews and focus group discussions while the Stat software package was used for analysis of survey data.

Data collection, storage and management were in line with international best practice and the UNICEF procedure on ethical standards in research, evaluation and data collection and analysis (*see Annex 3*).

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5   In each school, seven students (aged 10–13 years) participated in the focus group discussions. The sample was gender balanced. To rule out selection bias and convenience sampling, student respondents were identified via a lottery.

6   Most interviewees and focus group discussion participants provided (written or verbal) consent for audio recording. The responses of participants who did not consent to audio recording were transcribed in summary during the interviews/focus group discussions. Privacy and confidentiality were ensured for all respondents.

7   Like all studies relying on self-reported data, TTT is not free of methodological limitations. See Annex 2 for a detailed explanation of this study's methodological limitations.

Table 1: Number of study participants by level of analysis and data collection method

Level	Type of respondent	Method	No. of respondents
National	Officials at Ministry of Education and National Teachers Association of Liberia	Semi-structured interview	4[8]
Subnational	County education officers (CEOs) and District education officers (DEOs)	Semi-structured interview	32
Community	Parents–Teachers Association (PTA) chairperson	Semi-structured interview	20
School	Head teachers	Semi-structured interview	20
School	Teachers	Semi-structured interview	60
School	Students	Focus group discussion	119
School	Teachers	Paper-based teacher survey	139

1.5   Report organization

The report is structured as follows: Section 2 presents findings on the frequency of teacher absenteeism based on the survey data collected from teachers in the selected schools. This section also combines survey data and qualitative data from the interviews and focus group discussions to examine how different factors, both within and outside the education system, affect teacher attendance. Section 3 discusses the implications of these findings for policies and programmes aimed at improving teacher attendance and time on task and provides potential recommendations. The section also takes stock of actions taken to address the COVID-19 pandemic and inform relevant MOE strategies.

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8   Only four people were available for the interview (instead of six).

Section 2
Key findings

2.1 Frequency of teacher absenteeism

In the TTT survey, teachers were asked to report how often, since the beginning of the school year they: 1) were absent from school, 2) arrived late or departed early from school, 3) were absent from class and 4) spent less time teaching in the classroom than planned (*see Figure 1*).

■ Lack of punctuality was the most common form of absence, with 24 per cent of teachers reporting that they arrived late or leave early once a week or more since the start of the school year. This was reported more often by faith-based (36 per cent) and public (28 per cent) school teachers than those in private schools (0 per cent).

■ School absence was the second most common form of absenteeism, with 20 per cent of surveyed teachers affirming they experienced it frequently. This form of absence was also more frequent among public (26 per cent) and faith-based (22 per cent) school teachers than those in private (0 per cent) settings.

■ Once at school, 15 per cent of teachers reported they were regularly absent from the classroom and were regularly spending less time teaching than scheduled. While there were no significant differences in terms of locality (urban/rural) and type of school (public/private/faith-based) for classroom absence, teachers in urban (21 per cent in urban; 8 per cent in rural) settings and in faith-based schools (47 per cent in faith-based; 12 per cent in public; 4 per cent in private) were more likely to reduce instruction time.

Figure 1: Frequency of teacher absenteeism
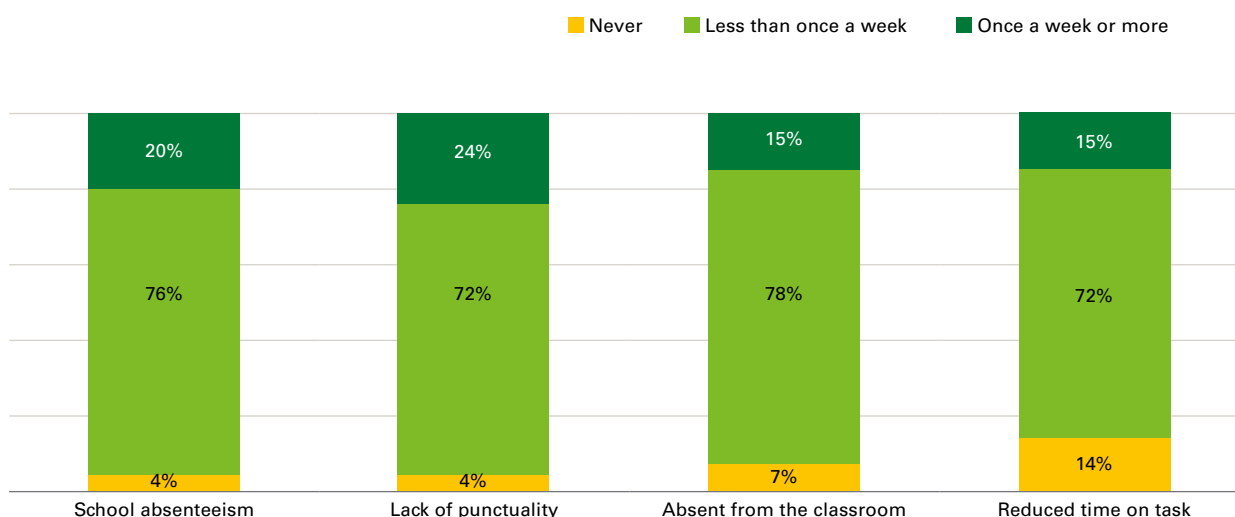
2.2 Primary reasons for teacher absenteeism

Health and weather were the reasons most often reported by surveyed teachers to justify their **absence from school** and **lack of punctuality** (*see Figures 2 and 3*). Health was the largest motivating factor for **school absence** (73 per cent) and for **arriving late and leaving early** (62 per cent). On the other hand, weather was mentioned by 41 per cent as a reason for **school absenteeism**, reaching 49 per cent among rural school teachers (compared with 34 per cent of teachers in urban areas) and 45 per cent among those in public schools (compared with 36 per cent in private and 29 per cent in faith-based schools).[9] Weather was also the second leading cause for **lateness** (41 per cent).

Teachers in all regions cited family reasons[10] as a major contributor to **low school attendance** (24 per cent) and **lack of punctuality** (29 per cent). Family reasons for both forms of absence were more common among faith-based (both 41 per cent) and private (36 per cent for school absence; 31 per cent for lateness) school teachers than among public (17 per cent for school absence; 26 per cent for lateness) school teachers.[11] Transportation was another concern for many teachers, with 21 per cent of teachers citing it as a main factor for being **absent from school** and 35 per cent as a main factor for **being late or leave the school earlier**. Transportation issues were more likely mentioned by public school teachers and men.[12]

Figure 2: Top five reasons for school absenteeism
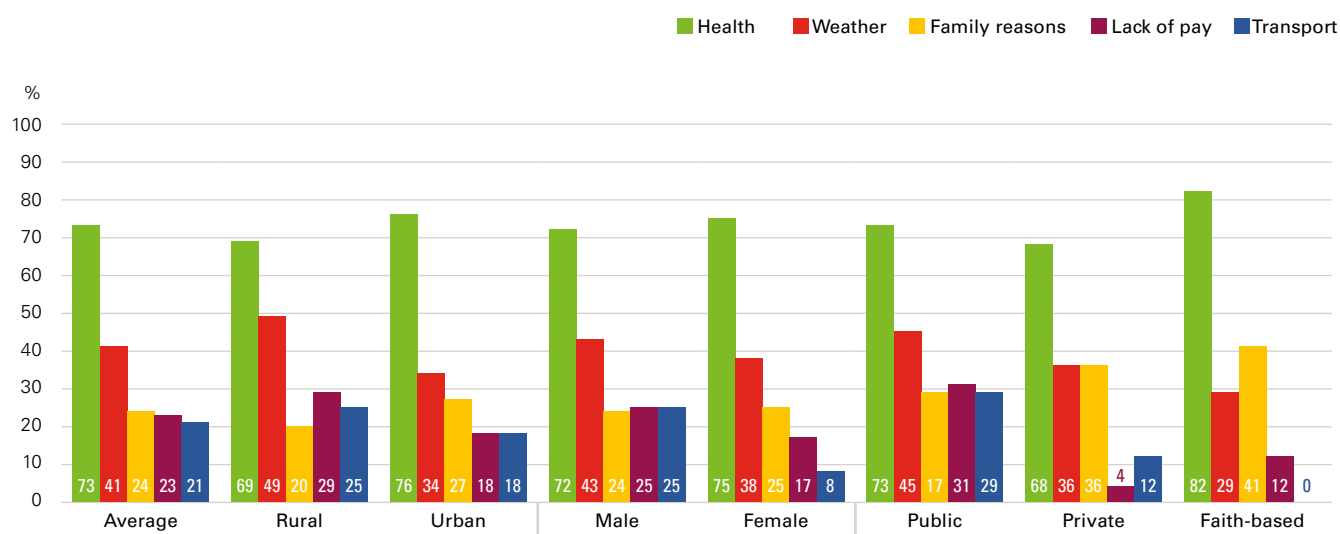
9 Differences are not statistically significant.

10 Family reasons is a broad category that includes caring for family members (e.g. when a child or other family member falls ill) and attending familial events such as weddings and funerals.

11 Differences are only significant for school absenteeism.

12 Gender differences are statistically significant only in the case of school absence.

Figure 3: Top five reasons for lateness

■ Health ■ Weather ■ Transport ■ Family reasons ■ Distance to school

	Average	Rural	Urban	Male	Female	Public	Private	Faith-based
Health	62	67	57	58	74	63	62	53
Weather	41	37	45	42	39	38	38	59
Transport	35	35	36	38	26	44	15	24
Family reasons	29	32	27	30	26	26	31	41
Distance to school	15	11	18	15	13	21	0	6
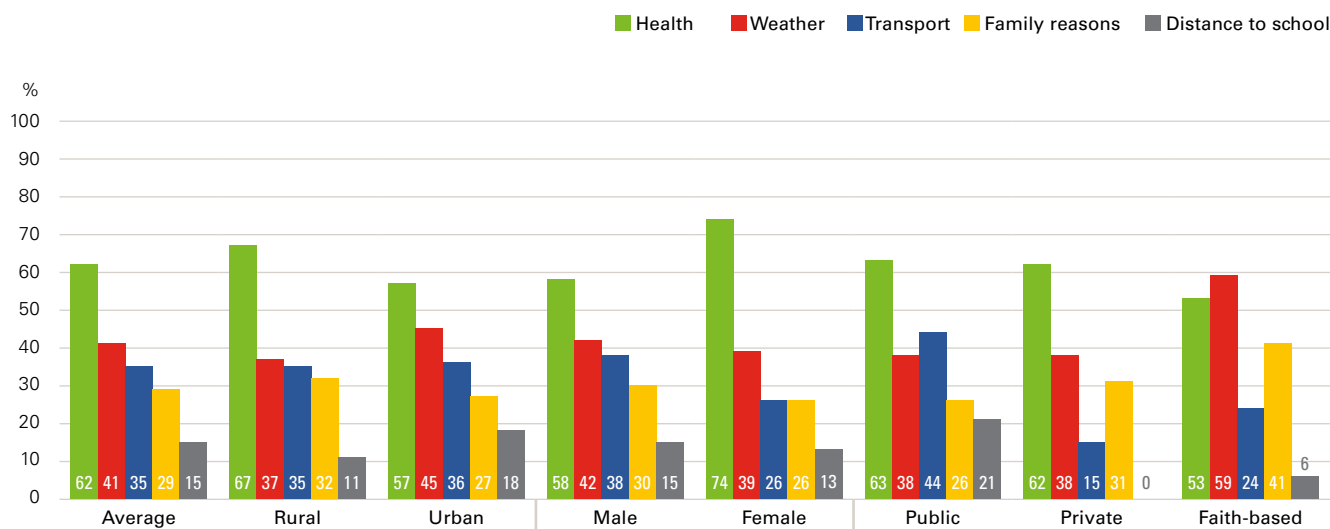
Once in school, the most common motivations for **classroom absence** were administrative reasons[13] (42 per cent), health issues (33 per cent) and official school business[14] (19 per cent) (*see Figure 4*). While in the classroom, surveyed teachers reported experiencing **reduced time on task** mainly due to student misconduct (34 per cent) and health issues (33 per cent) (*see Figure 5*).

Lack of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) was also among the main reasons for **classroom absenc**e (13 per cent) and **reduced time on task** (28 per cent). Lack of TLMs was more prevalent among rural (17 per cent in rural; 8 per cent in urban) school teachers for **classroom absenteeism**. However, very few faith-based and private school teachers claimed lack of TLMs as a main reason for **classroom absence** (0 per cent in faith-based; 4 per cent in private; 19 per cent in public) and for **reduced time on task** (7 per cent in faith-based; 5 per cent in private; 40 per cent in public schools).

Figure 4: Top five reasons for classroom absence

■ Administrative reasons ■ Health ■ Official school business ■ Lack of teaching materials ■ Weather

	Average	Rural	Urban	Male	Female	Public	Private	Faith-based
Administrative reasons	42	36	48	42	39	39	50	40
Health	33	31	36	33	35	35	23	40
Official school business	19	15	23	20	13	20	23	7
Lack of teaching materials	13	19	8	15	9	19	4	0
Weather	13	17	8	15	4	16	0	13
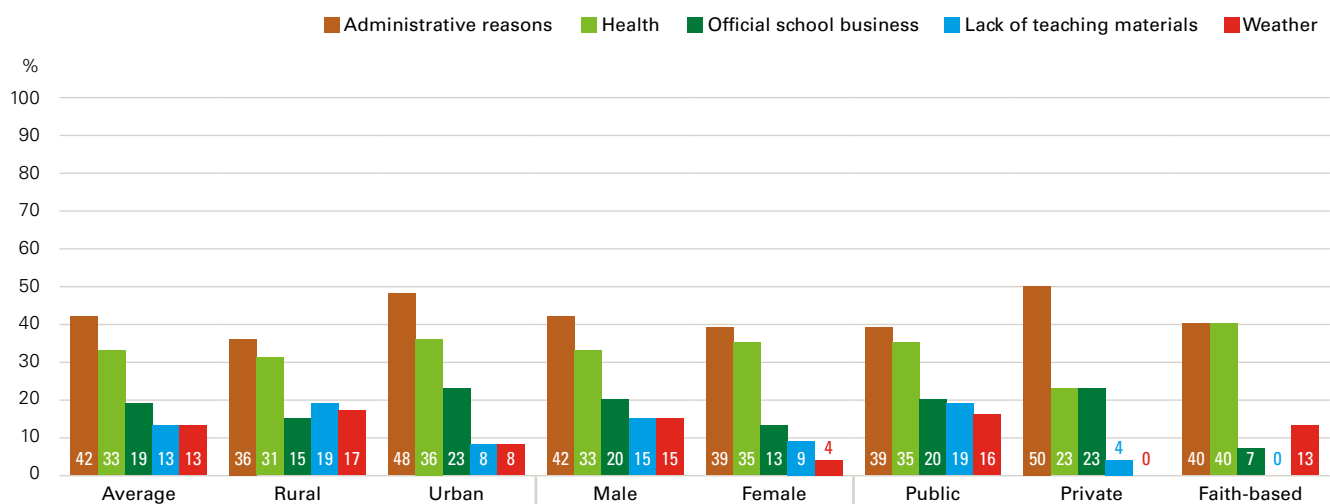
13   Administrative reasons include office work and teachers' meetings.

14   Official school business includes trainings, workshops or seminars.

Figure 5: Top five reasons for reduced teaching time

■ Pupils misbehave   ■ Health   ■ Lack of teaching materials   ■ Too many preparation tasks   ■ Distraction by family/personal problems

	Average	Rural	Urban	Male	Female	Public	Private	Faith-based
Pupils misbehave	34	30	38	36	28	37	23	36
Health	33	32	34	32	33	31	41	29
Lack of teaching materials	28	30	26	31	17	40	5	7
Too many preparation tasks	10	10	9	8	17	7	23	0
Distraction by family/personal problems	10	8	11	10	11	10	5	14

2.3 Factors associated with teacher absenteeism: A systems approach

2.3.1 National-level factors

2.3.1.1 Teacher training

Stakeholder interviews and governments' reports (MOE and UNESCO, 2014) recognize the role of qualifications and training on teacher performance, engagement and time on task. The Education Reform Act 2011 stated that the minimum requirement for teaching at the primary level (grades 1–6) is a Grade C certificate, which requires one year of post-secondary training. After two years of training, grade AA teaching certificates can be obtained, allowing both primary or junior high school teaching (*see Table 2 in Annex 4 for a detailed explanation of teaching certificates*).

Figure 6: Level of training of surveyed teachers

- 2% A Degree
- 15% AA Degree
- 4% B Certificate
- 68% C Certificate
- 12% Other

■ A Degree
■ AA Degree
■ B Certificate
■ C Certificate
■ Other
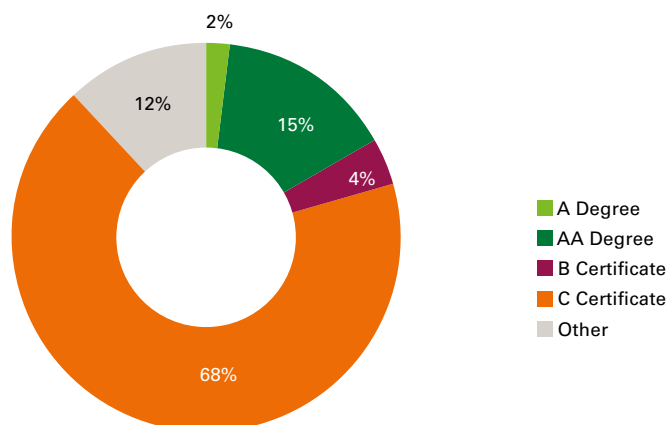
The TTT survey data shows that more than half (68 per cent) of primary school teachers are qualified through pre-service or in-service C Certificate programmes[15] (*see Figure 6*). Irrespective of their level of training, most surveyed teachers (93 per cent) expressed confidence in having the knowledge and skills required to teach well (*see Figure 7*). However, interviewed head teachers and inspectors often argued that teachers lack the content knowledge and pedagogical skills required for effective teaching. Part of the problem lies with the duration of the C certificate. Prior to the civil war (1999–2003), 'C' Certificate programmes were 18 months in duration, which is equivalent to two academic calendar years of study. After the civil war, the government attempted to qualify many teachers in a short period of time through an abbreviated, nine-month 'C', certificate program. However, many respondents showed concerns over the quality of teacher education delivered in such a short time frame. Many head teachers argued that limited training affects teachers' **time on task**, primarily due to poor classroom preparation or inadequate lesson preparation skills. Survey responses reveal that recurrent school absenteeism, lack of punctuality, classroom absence and reduction of instruction time was more frequent among teachers who feel less confident with their knowledge and skills.[16] In focus group discussions, students reported that teachers sometimes use their instructional time to engage pupils in activities not directly related to the instructional content (telling stories), or are engaged in non-task related activities (e.g., talking with other teachers or using the telephone).

The shortage of teachers in Liberia is one of the main reasons for the huge government demand to hire teachers with only a few months of training. An interviewed CEO from Bomi claimed that education officials beg people to get training so there will be sufficient teachers matching the number of students. These findings are consistent with recent reports showing the need for more trained teachers. A MOE report (2014b: 8) summarizes these concerns, arguing that the short duration of the 'C' certificate

> "The problems we have within the districts is that we don't have more teachers within the district, some schools have one teacher for a whole elementary school or two teachers for a whole elementary school. That's the problem we face."
>
> – District education officer.

program is "inadequate for in-depth content area coverage and knowledge". Recognizing the weak literacy and numeracy skills of some candidates, other studies argue for a greater emphasis on basic skills development and subject content knowledge for primary school teachers (Goyee et al., 2014; Goyee et al., 2015). Another evaluation notes that the "mix of pedagogy and subject matter content" offered by the programme needs to be revisited (USAID, 2017). Snyder et al., (2011, p19) argue that lowering standards for entry into the profession as a response to address the shortage of teachers results in unqualified teachers and lower respect for public education and educators. The COVID-19 pandemic might further increase these challenges and raises concerns about teachers' preparedness to provide remote learning support. The MOE included in its COVID-19 education response, the provision of remote training for teachers through existing platforms to support the continuity of learning (GPE, 2020). However, it is unclear if these measures will be carried out once schools reopen.

In interviews, teachers indicated that attending **in-service training programmes** was a key determinant of **school absence and lateness** Often these workshops or seminars are organized during the academic year over multiple days, requiring travel to different regions or to the capital. Teachers underscored the importance of in-service training to increase their content knowledge and pedagogical skills, which in turn influences their confidence. Survey data corroborates this finding and shows that teachers that were training/studying at the time of the survey were also more likely to arrive late or leave early, and to be absent from the classroom (*see Table 3 in Annex 6*). Most teachers viewed absences due to training opportunities as 'acceptable' on the basis that they are part of school-related activities. However, among survey respondents, only 53 per cent of teachers reported having access to sufficient training opportunities, with teachers in private schools arguing they had less access compared with their peers in public schools[17] (43 per cent private compared with 57 per cent in public and 50 per cent in faith-based) (*see Figure 7*).

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15 C certificate programmes are delivered in three RTTIs located in the cities of Kakata, Webbo and Zorzor. The 'C' certificate program takes two forms: (i) a residential pre-service training program requiring nine months of on-site study at an RTTI; or (ii) a nine-month in-service training program for teachers already working in schools that follows the same curriculum. The existing in-service training model is comprised of a six-week site-based training (during the school holiday) followed by eight months of field-based training where teachers meet once a month for classes and mentoring (MOE, 2014b). For more information on the national-level structures and training qualifications, see Annex 5.

16 Teachers that were frequently absent (in all four forms of absenteeism) were also less likely to affirm they have the adequate skills and knowledge to teach well than those that were not.

17 Differences are statistically significant.

Figure 7: Teachers' perceptions of teaching competence and training opportunities

Legend: Rural · Urban · Public · Private · Faith-based · Average

	I have adequate skills and knowledge	Most teachers have the knowledge and skills	I have access to training
Rural	95	78	55
Urban	90	77	52
Public	92	79	57
Private	100	82	43
Faith-based	83	65	50
Average	93	78	53
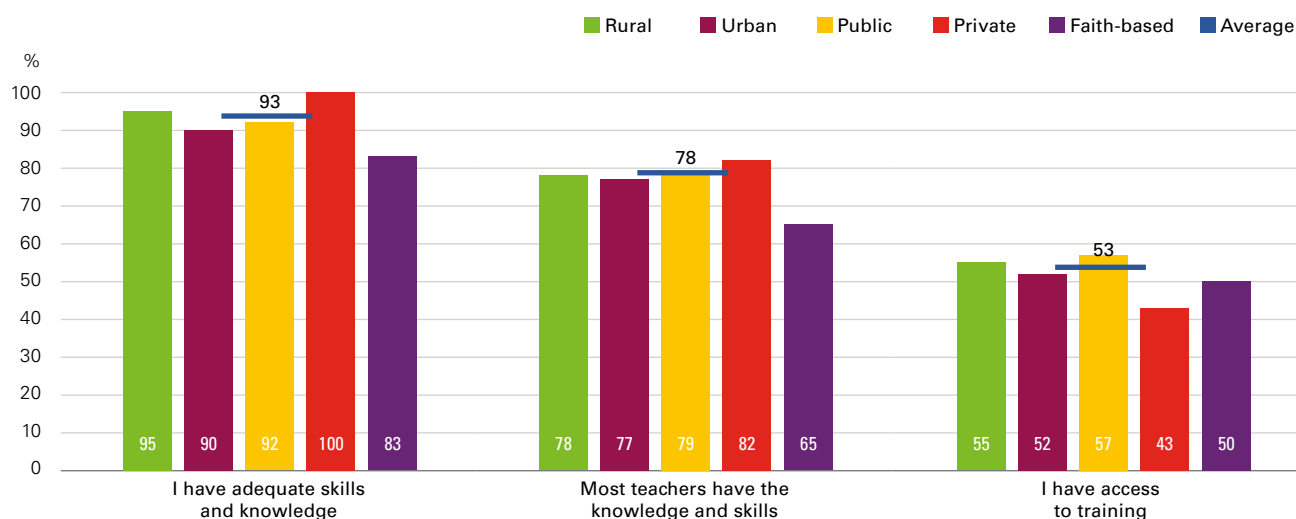
Box 3: A biometric system pilot to reduce teacher absenteeism in Montserrado County

The Liberia teacher training program phase two (LTTP II) was a five-year program (2010–2015) aimed at reducing teacher school absenteeism in Liberia (USAID, 2016a). A biometric system pilot program was implemented in schools and county education offices in Montserrado County. Solar panels and 26 biometric readers with protective cages were installed in schools to collect teacher and staff arrival and departure time-stamped data, downloadable by Ministry officials. Teachers received an ID card that included a chip with a picture, unique identification number and the digital fingerprints of the holder. Teachers used the biometric device to swipe in (using their fingerprint) and swipe out to mark the hours they worked each day. The MOE could download teacher attendance data for any school with a biometric reader, and transfer that information to the Civil Service Agency (CSA) and the Ministry of Finance institutional financial management information system for preparation of the monthly payroll. Ideally, the payroll for each teacher would be adjusted based upon attendance (allowing for excused sick days or other reasons).

Implementing technology-based interventions is increasingly seen as a way to ensure teacher attendance and punctuality. However, an evaluation study published by USAID (2016a) revealed many challenges that hindered the project's success. First, there weren't enough resources to conduct routine biometric reader and solar panel maintenance and data retrieval. While capacity building training was organized for MOE staff to fix both biometric readers and solar panels, the lack of financial resources for them to travel to each school was a key issue. Additionally, initial small challenges, such as finding schools with a constant power supply or the ability to generate solar power, became obstacles to implementation. Simple measures to guard against theft or damage, including the construction of protective cages for biometric readers, were also needed in addition to solving more structural problems like leaky school roofs or rolling power outages. The biometric pilot program exposed the limitations of broad implementation of high-tech solutions in the country. Existing empirical evidence suggests that technology-based solutions to reduce teacher absenteeism may not work and could even be counterproductive (Banerjee et al., 2008; Dhaliwal and Hanna, 2014; Callen et al., 2013), as high-tech solutions could challenge but not 'leapfrog' the infrastructure problems.

2.3.1.2 National-level monitoring and absence reporting measures

Accurate monitoring and sanctioning are essential for improving teacher **school attendance** and for increasing **time on task**. In 2014, the MOE adopted the code of conduct for teachers and school administrators to direct and guide teachers against unprofessional behaviour in and out of the classroom and to be able to exercise maximum professionalism (MOE 2014a). Absence from school without leave is listed amongst the main administrative offences along with the administrative enquiry procedures. If teachers are absent from school without an authorization, they will receive a penalty for each day absent up to 14 days. Absence for 14 consecutive days results in automatic dismissal.

There are also clear policies regarding time on task. The Education Law[18] requires a full-time teacher to teach a minimum of 65 to 70 per cent of normal school hours. According to the law, for a full-time teacher, the teaching time should not exceed 90 per cent of normal school hours to allow time for the preparation of lessons, record keeping, counselling and other administrative tasks. All full-time teachers must spend the entire school day on the school premises unless otherwise exempted by the school principal.

According to national authorities interviewed, in most schools there are mechanisms in place to monitor **school attendance** and teachers are generally aware they will face sanctions if they are absent from school without authorization. However, many teachers revealed that even if there are attendance books in most schools in order to check teachers' **presence at school** and **punctuality**, in many cases there is no follow up with teachers who are absent without authorization.

2.3.1.3 Teacher salaries and allowances

An effective and efficient teacher salary system is one of the most important elements of a high quality education in any country (INEE, 2009). 'Lack of pay' was cited as one of the main reasons to justify school absenteeism, especially in public schools (*see Figure 2*). Teacher interviews suggested the problem stems from delays in receiving salaries, which can be late for several weeks due to weaknesses in the centralized payroll payment system. National authorities argue that payment speed has improved, since teachers on the regular payroll can now receive their payment directly into their bank account. However, as many teachers are in different payroll categories (*see Box 4*), they rely on district education officers (DEO) for their payment. While national authorities claim this problem is being addressed, teachers in both rural and urban areas stated that their payments continue to be late, but with less delay than in the past.

Low salary and insufficient benefits for teachers were frequently cited during interviews as factors affecting teachers' commitment and contributing to various forms of absenteeism, including **absence from school** and **lateness**. The survey data suggest that public school teachers are in general more vulnerable to issues of late payments. While almost all teachers (96 per cent) in private schools stated they receive their salary on time, only 11 per cent of their public school counterparts agreed with that statement (*see Figure 8*). These variations can be attributed to the timing and mechanism of teachers' pay in private schools being regulated within the school, unlike public schools. As a result, most teachers in private schools reported receiving their salary consistently at the end of the month and withdrawing it either by going to the bank or by using their phone. Most public school teachers, however, reported receiving their pay irregularly and facing major inconvenience in withdrawing it. Furthermore, the vast majority of surveyed teachers (96 per cent) considered their salary insufficient to cover monthly household expenses,19 and very few affirmed receiving either cash (10 per cent) (mainly for housing or transportation) or non-cash (15 per cent) benefits (including school medication). Related to this, almost three out of four surveyed teachers (27 per cent) were engaged in alternative income-generating activities in addition to teaching, especially men (30 per cent compared with 9 per cent of women). This, according to teachers, often leads to school absences as well as lateness or early departure from school.

> "You see, this is a rural area, and teachers have farming land. As this season is for cultivation, teachers might be absent because they have taken workers to the farms."
>
> – Head teacher in rural public school, Northern Province.

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18 Education Laws Title 10 and Liberia Code of Law Revised.

19 On average, 76 per cent of surveyed teachers state they are the only earner in the household.

Throughout interviews, study participants consistently drew links between irregular teacher salaries and poor teacher motivation. Head teachers in public schools often complained about teachers not willing to **be present at school** or **be on time** because of delays in salary payments. Teacher surveys corroborate these results. Teachers that were frequently absent from school (24 per cent) were also less likely to affirm they received their salary on time than those that were not (45 per cent). Furthermore, almost all teachers in public schools identified the salary payment as a key factor that shapes their attitudes towards work.

"Sometimes the act of not being on payroll really discourages me. I am the breadwinner of my family. At the end of the month my family expects me to bring something to them and I see myself not even providing too while my friends are out trying to find things for them and their family; I am just here working and not getting anything as a father. So, sometimes the discouragement can just keep me at home, but I always take time to encourage myself."

– Teacher, Rural public school, Maryland county.

Only a minority of surveyed teachers (20 per cent) stated they are happy with their pay (*see Figure 8*). Teachers working in urban areas (15 per cent) seemed less happy with their salary than teachers working in rural areas (26 per cent),[20] probably because of the high cost of living in urban settings. Teachers in private schools (48 per cent) were happier with their salary compared with their peers in public schools (13 per cent). This finding is consistent with interview data, which showed that low salaries appear to be less of a problem in private schools, where teachers' salaries are paid by parents and are typically higher than in the public sector.

Figure 8: Teachers' perceptions of remuneration and delivery of pay
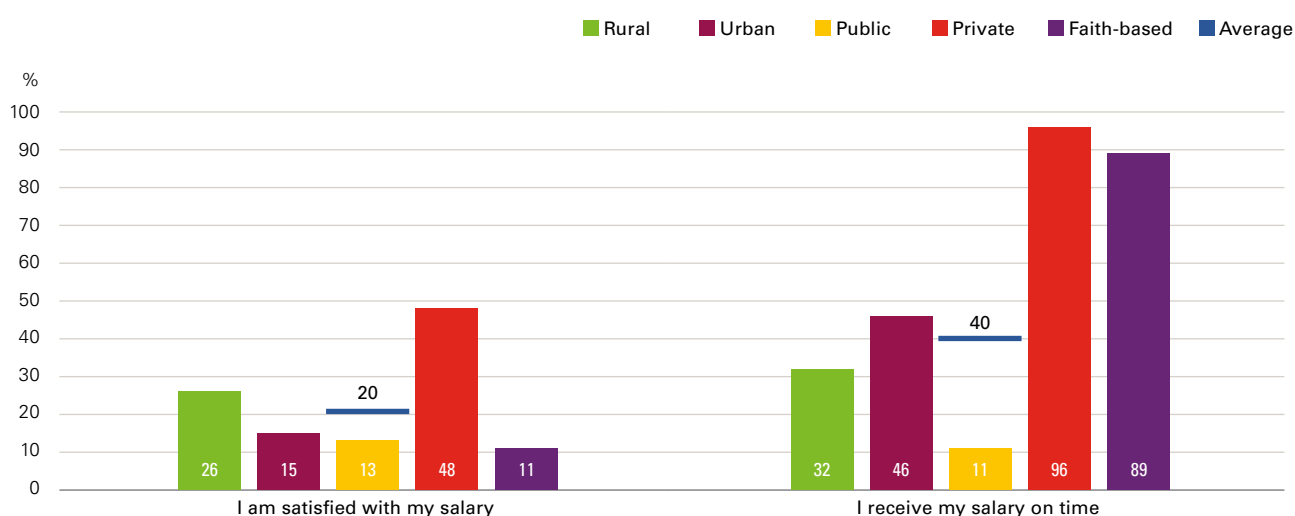
There is concern that the COVID-19 school closures and its economic impact will exacerbate existing salary-related issues in both public and private settings and thus affect teachers' motivation. To alleviate the financial hurdles of private school teachers who did not receive their pay when schools were closed (Kasseh, 2020), the government launched a stimulus package. However, only 5,000 teachers have reported receiving it (MoE, 2021).[21]

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20 Although differences are not statistically significant at the 10 per cent level.

21 As an emergency measure during the civil war, when thousands of teachers were killed or had to flee their posts, the government created a 'supplementary' payroll next to the existing regular payroll to compensate community members who stepped in to ensure that classes continued (Princeton University, 2018).

Box 4. Challenges with the payment of teachers' salaries in Liberia

The Civil Service Agency (CSA) manages the payment of teachers. At the beginning of the budget cycle, DEOs and CEOs forward lists of teachers to the MOE. These lists include key information such as name, qualification and age, and are used to calculate teachers' salaries. The MOE currently supports two payrolls: regular and supplementary.[22] According to the ministry's education sector analysis, carried out in November 2016, there were 13,403 teachers on the regular payroll and 6,024 on the supplementary payroll (in addition to 7,299 unpaid volunteer teachers) (MOE, 2016). In theory, these two payrolls were separate. In practice, the distinctions between them quickly blurred and the existence of two parallel – yet interlinked – payrolls aggravated problems of poor control, as the ministry lost track of which teachers were on which payroll. The existence of different payrolls led to teachers being overpaid or underpaid. After a payroll cleaning exercise was conducted since 2015, the ministry, working with the CSA, had removed 83 per cent of 2,046 ghost teachers. According to the available statistics, the removal of ghost teachers generated US$2.3 million of annual savings that opened spaces for the recruitment of new teachers. The project also revealed that more than 1,000 teachers older than the mandatory retirement age of 65 were still on the payroll at an estimated annual cost of US$2 million (Princeton University, 2018).

Liberia's challenges are not unique. Many countries have similarly struggled with payroll reliability and credibility. In a 2010 article on its public financial management blog, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) identified fragmentation between different databases, poor coordination among ministries and weak internal controls as key factors that created space for ghost workers (Bessette, 2010). Nigeria undertook a payroll cleanup in 2011 that identified 43,000 ghost workers (Holmes, 2011), and in 2016 the Tanzanian government announced it had expunged more than 10,000 ghost workers (Ng'wanakilala, 2016).

2.3.2 Subnational-level factors

Overall, teachers and head teachers have a positive perception of subnational actors' engagement in the maintenance of quality teaching. Teachers often expressed their appreciation for monitoring efforts and believe the direct engagement of DEOs and CEOs can have an immediate positive impact on the different types of teacher absenteeism and time on task. At the same time, different stakeholders point to significant challenges that hinder subnational monitoring efforts.

2.3.2.1 Monitoring and subnational actors' engagement

While nationally promoted measures, such as those mentioned in the previous section (2.3.1.2.), are essential to curb teacher absenteeism, subnational actors play a crucial role in their implementation on the ground (*see Box 5 for more details on the key responsibilities of subnational actors*).

Box 5. Key responsibilities of subnational monitoring actors in Liberia

MOE offices at the county level are led by a CEO and DEOs, who play an important role in monitoring teacher absenteeism. The Education Reform Act (2011) and the Code of Conduct (2014) outline responsibilities of CEOs and DEOs, including teacher hiring, firing, transfer and disciplinary procedures and providing administrative support to head teachers and teachers and responding to school concerns (e.g., learning materials, contractors). The CEO serves as a Ministry representative responsible for the "operations of the school system in the county, including the responsibility for the personnel in the system" (Education Act 2011:34). The DEO is responsible for enforcement of the CoC and monitoring and reporting of offences, malfeasance, and criminal conduct, inclusive of allegations of sexual violence, professional misconduct, and theft.

A key role of DEOs and CEOs is to conduct school visits for inspection and monitoring purposes. Sixty percent of surveyed teachers agree or strongly agree with the statement "inspectors visit this school regularly" (*see Figure 9*). However, interview data suggest that the frequency of these visits varies considerably between regions and schools, ranging from several times a month to once a year. Both interviews and survey responses suggest that school inspectors were more likely to visit schools in urban areas and those located near education offices than those in remote locations. Private school teachers were also more likely to receive visits from school inspectors than their peers in public and faith-based schools (*see Figure 9*).

Interviews with head teachers and inspectors indicate an association between frequency of school visits and teacher attendance. Knowing that DEOs and CEOs can visit the school at any moment is likely to discourage absenteeism, especially **absence from school** and **lateness**. Inspectors often argue that schools visited more frequently by DEOs and CEOs tend to have a lower rate of teacher school absenteeism and fewer instances of lateness. Some interviewed education officers also described supervising a school a day, i.e., going to school early in the morning and staying until the end of the day, as an effective way of monitoring. Teacher surveys corroborate these findings. Teachers that were frequently absent from the school (48 per cent compared with 61 per cent of those that were not), arrived late/left early (39 per cent compared with 63 per cent of those that were not) and were absent from the classroom (35 per cent compared with 61 per cent of those that were not), were also less likely to affirm that school inspectors make regular visits.

The content of visits varies from school to school. Generally, head teachers explained that during visits the attendance book is checked to verify teachers' presence at school and punctuality. However, in many cases there is no follow up with teachers who are absent without authorization. In some schools, there is a standard process comprised of filing a report, sending out warning letters and, when necessary, sanctioning the teacher through a dismissal or a salary deduction. Indeed, 70 per cent of surveyed teachers agreed or strongly agreed that inspectors heavily discourage absenteeism and 61 per cent thought that inspectors frequently sanction teachers who are chronically absent. However, during interviews, most teachers maintained that the sanctioning process is rarely implemented and that most of the time head teachers try to talk with the chronically absent teachers to motivate them instead of reporting. In survey responses, only 58 per cent of teachers affirmed that school inspectors motivate teaching staff (*see Figure 9*). In addition, during interviews very few teachers could elaborate on the mechanisms in place to discourage absenteeism. 'Offering advice' and 'motivating teachers' were often cited as methods used by inspectors to discourage absenteeism.

Both interviews and survey responses (*see Figure 9*) suggest that monitoring and sanction capacity[22] is more effective in private schools than in public schools. Interviewed education inspectors explained this is mainly related to their limited power in implementing sanctions. Education inspectors cannot use salary reduction as a sanction in public schools because of the centralization of payment, which results in no consequence for absentee teachers and hence does not have a deterrence effect.

> "Private school teachers are more present because the director of the institution determines the salary they make. If they reduce their attendance to the school, obviously their salary will be directly affected. The public school is different. A teacher is paid monthly by the central government. The central government doesn't know if a teacher has been absent one or two or three days. The salary deduction that in theory is there, in reality is not effective and is not happening. So, it doesn't serve as deterrence to teachers working in public schools."
>
> – Subnational-level interviewee, Bomi.

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22 Three out of four (75 per cent) surveyed teachers in private schools affirm that school inspectors frequently sanction absenteeism, compared to 55 per cent in public schools (*see Figure 9*).

Figure 9: Teachers' perception of subnational monitoring actors
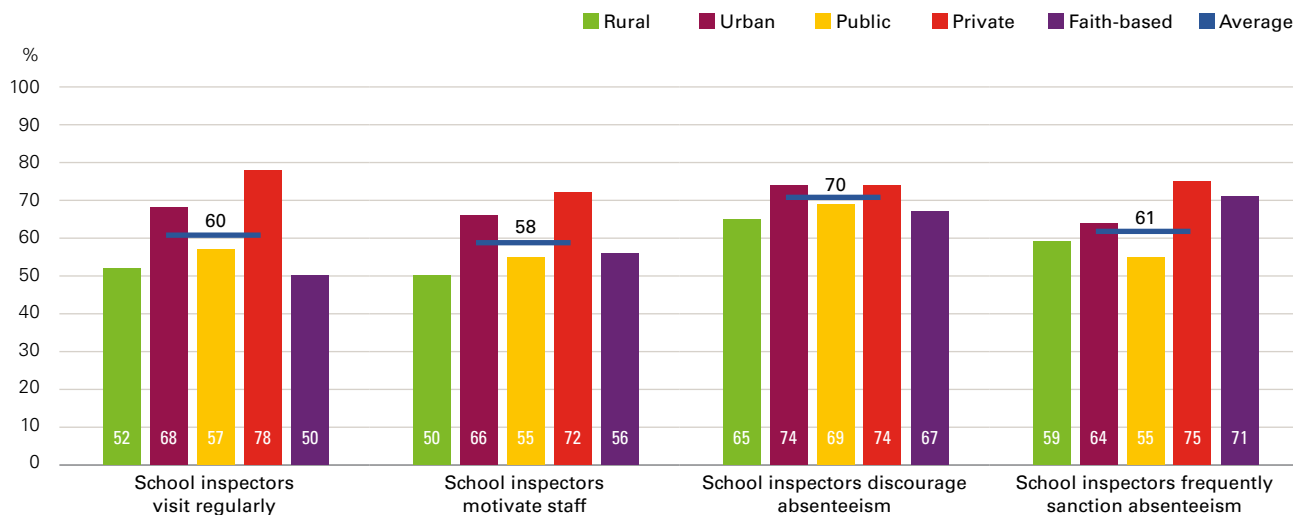
During the COVID-19 school closures, monitoring shifted focus to measure the effectiveness of remote learning with the support of parents and communities. As schools reopen, the ministry plans to strengthen its monitoring efforts to ensure that schools adhere to the new COVID-19 protocols (GPE, 2020).

2.3.2.2 Subnational engagement challenges

According to most stakeholders, subnational officials – both DEOs and CEOs – play an important role to engage with schools and monitor teacher **school absenteeism** and **lateness**. Subnational engagement, however, is not without its challenges. Some challenges that have been identified include lack of training, lack of resources, particularly means of transportation, and travel and accommodation budgets for conducting school visits.

According to interview data, the majority of **CEOs and DEOs have not received professional training** related to their job descriptions. The MOE has not yet developed training programmes or clear MOE guidelines or tools to support these staff in the execution of their job responsibilities. As a result, many lack critical accountability functions, such as holding administrative hearings on teacher offences, and do not conduct school inspections with the regularity envisioned in policy.

Interviews conducted with CEOs and DEOs also indicate they are not carrying out effective monitoring and supervision to validate **teacher attendance at school and in the classroom,** teacher **punctuality** and **time on task**. This is due to lack of resources and inadequate support received for maintenance of assigned transportation. Many CEOs and DEOs pointed out that oil and gasoline provided by the Ministry are largely insufficient to carry out effective monitoring.

> "The difficulties we have here are the transport means and road connectivity. In the county, this is a serious problem. We have to buy our own gas to monitor, there is no maintenance for the vehicle. In fact, the vehicle you see here, it has been parked here for a month because it's not working."
>
> – CEO in Gbarpolu County.

The TTT findings confirm recent evaluation studies (GAC, 2017; USAID, 2013; Ginsburg, 2014) that highlight the challenges CEO and DEOs face in the execution of their responsibilities. For example, lack of petrol, difficulty in maintaining vehicles, and communication challenges (e.g., airtime, or no access to a network) combined with logistical challenges (e.g., remote schools and roads which are impassable during rainy season). According to the auditor general's 2017 performance audit report, inadequate supervision and monitoring at the county level creates a gap for teachers to not fully implement the required curriculum, thus reducing their **time on task**: "In the absence of monitoring of instructional staff, teachers are not thoroughly teaching and completing the

required curriculum prescribed by MOE for the academic year." (GAC, 2017: 30). In 2013, a USAID evaluation also noted: "Unless some logistical problems, such as the lack of transportation, are solved, it is unlikely that CEOs or DEOs could conduct quality monitoring over the remaining life of LTTP II" (USAID, 2013: 26; Ginsburg, 2014: 26). DEOs typically do not have the resources to carry out this task on a regular, scheduled basis. Limited to travel by motorcycle, which often lacks fuel, and unable to reach the far corners of their counties, a DEO's ability to fulfil the mandate is severely compromised (Ginsburg, 2014: 28).

2.3.3 Community-level factors

Teacher attendance and time on task also depend on a number of external and contextual factors including local infrastructure and the social recognition of teachers by pupils' families and communities.

2.3.3.1 Community infrastructure

Poor community infrastructure emerged as an important factor leading to various types of teacher absenteeism and reduction of instruction time, especially in rural settings. **Transportation issues, health and financial services, and teacher housing are seen as constraints to teacher attendance and time on task.** The MOE has also recognized these issues as challenges that affect teachers' working conditions, especially in rural areas. Consequently, the MOE has stated it is working towards developing new incentives to reduce the burden of teachers posted to rural and remote areas (MOE, 2016).

> "Most of the schools in our rural parts are not accessible. The challenge has to do with the road conditions. Sometimes we are unable to reach certain places because of the bad roads. Once I had to go to a school close to the border area, to leave from here to go there, it took me almost a whole day because of the bad road conditions. Normally, it should take two or three hours, but the roads are really bad."
>
> – DEO Grand Cape Town.

Finding **reliable and affordable transportation** is described in interviews as a regular dilemma for teachers across rural and urban schools. Survey data show that transportation was a main concern for many teachers, as 21 per cent of teachers cited it as a main factor for being **absent from school** and 35 per cent as a main factor for **being late or leaving school earlier** (*see Figures 2 and 3*). This seems to be a particular concern among public school teachers, who (as mentioned in section 2.3.1) have lower salaries than their private school peers.

Teachers have to pay for transportation (either the collective taxi or a motorbike taxi) to get to school. To minimize transportation expenses, some educators stated they walk several kilometres every day; this results in tardiness and fatigue, which affects their **classroom attendance** and **time on task**. In a few cases, going to school less often minimizes transportation expenses. Ten per cent of surveyed teachers mentioned 'distance to school' as a main cause of **school absenteeism** and 15 per cent as a main cause of **lateness** (*see Figure 3*).

Lack of available teacher housing near the school further exacerbates these issues. Building additional

> "All of our schools here teachers live very close to the schools. They live in a camp and it's just minutes' walk, so we don't experience lateness. Unlike other areas, people have to commute by foot to school and the school is not close to the place. For instance, if it rains the whole night and in the morning there's a little creek between you and the school and it gets flooded, you may not even go because you won't be able to cross there."
>
> – Teacher in Grand Bassa.

teacher housing near schools has often been suggested in interviews with teachers. Many female teachers identified housing facilities – particularly for those assigned to rural areas – as a key concern. This is compounded by the need to find housing that is at the same time safe and not far from the school in which they teach. Travelling long distances alone is often unsafe and culturally unacceptable for women, and travel by public transport is both difficult and costly. Moreover, in rural areas many schools are often only until fourth grade and so teachers with older children may not find schools for them. All of these factors create a vicious circle that favour urban over rural postings and which discourage women from choosing teaching as a profession.

Limited access to health and financial services was also mentioned in interviews as a common determinant of **school absenteeism**. The absence of health services in proximity to the school and the unavailability of medicine affected teachers' capacity to **be present at school** and to **arrive at school on time**. Many teachers and head teachers also confirmed they had been absent from school multiple times during the school year to retrieve their salaries. Some miss an entire day, because getting to the bank can take hours by car or foot. When they arrive at the bank there are often long queues or the money is not available, which can result in not

> "For the teacher to receive their money, when they go to the bank, sometimes it takes the whole day and they won't come to school. It can't even be one teacher because they all can be eager to get their money from the bank. Sometimes about three to four teachers will leave at once to get their money from the bank. So, this time, the attendance can be low".
>
> – PTA representative in urban school.

receiving the salary despite the trip. Some teachers stated that sometimes they had to wait over a week in the city to receive their salary, resulting in a week of **school absenteeism**. Survey responses suggest that lack of access to financial services is especially an issue in rural settings, as teachers in rural schools were more likely to be absent from the school (31 per cent compared with 12 per cent in urban) and arrive late/leave early (19 per cent compared with 4 per cent in urban) in order to retrieve their salaries (*see Figures 2 and 3*).[23]

2.3.3.2 Community engagement

Box 6. Is mobile banking a reliable solution?

Thus far, the mobile money sector in Liberia has been dominated by person-to-person (P2P) mobile money transactions where an individual mobile money subscriber sends money to another mobile money subscriber. According to Save the Children (2016), the use of mobile money for P2P seemed like a natural entry for this technology into Liberian society, given the prevalence of a 'remittance culture' that developed in the 1980s and 1990s during Liberia's two civil wars. It is in this context, in a society that was already accustomed to electronically sending money via Western Union, that the first mobile money services were launched in 2012.[39] In July 2016, mSTAR partnered with the Government of Liberia to roll out the first mobile salary payments to 67 teachers in Nimba County (USAID, 2016b). The average time taken to cash out the mobile money payment was 25 minutes. Ninety-seven per cent of teachers reported they were satisfied with the process of collecting their salary via mobile money and many expressed that the process was easy and an improvement with regards to the direct deposit payment system (USAID, 2016b). However, according to the TTT data, interviewed teachers had contradictory opinions on the usefulness of the mobile money services. Some teachers underscored the importance of receiving their salaries through the mobile banking system because it decreases the time they need to be out of school to collect their payments. Nonetheless, according to teachers serving in rural areas, the mobile money services are often not working properly because of the network connection and agents not having cash money available.

Teacher and community representative interviews suggest a positive relationship between lower **school absenteeism** and greater community and parental involvement. Schools where parents are actively engaged are also those where teachers are typically more **present at school** and spend **more time teaching**. In schools where parents were actively engaged, PTAs often visited and met frequently to discuss school matters, including school infrastructure, pupils' wellbeing and teachers' attendance. Existing literature also shows that participation of parents and communities in school affairs can improve teacher motivation and attendance (s*ee Box 7*).

Self-reported teacher data shows that only 53 per cent of teachers considered parents to be actively engaged in school matters, with lower percentages in rural settings (45 per cent compared with 60 per cent in urban schools) and private schools (39 per cent compared with 58 per cent in public and 44 per cent in faith-based

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23 Lonestar, in partnership with Ecobank, launched its mobile money services in 2012 and Cellcom, in partnership with United Bank of Africa, launched its own mobile money services in March 2016. Both mobile money services use LRD, rather than USD, in sending and cashing out mobile money funds.

> **Box 7. Community and parental participation in school affairs can enhance teacher attendance**
>
> Existing literature suggests that community and parental participation in school management reduces teacher absenteeism (Lareau, 1987; Terrail, 1992; Saint-Laurent et al., 1994; Pujol and Gontier, 1998; Bouchard et al., 2000; Dabrusky, 2007; Bridgeland et al., 2008). Neilson (2007) shows how the involvement of communities in school construction and infrastructures can have a positive influence on teacher school attendance in Honduras and Peru. Parental involvement can also positively affect teachers, as research shows that people who have close contact with schools – such as parents who help in classrooms – often have much more positive attitudes towards teachers than people with little direct contact (OECD, 2011). This suggests that building stronger links and relationships between schools and parents can help to enhance teacher motivation and commitment and, indirectly, teacher attendance.

schools) (*see Figure 10*). In most remote communities in rural areas however, interviewed teachers argued that parents are often disengaged from school matters and that PTA functioning was sporadic. Several teachers expressed their concern over the lack of priority they feel parents and communities give to their pupils' academic and social well-being. As a result, many teachers felt unmotivated and disrespected and blamed parents and the broader community for being unsupportive. They also pointed to the lack of formal education among community members and therefore complained over an improper understanding and respect for education. Teachers' survey responses suggest that 64 per cent affirm that most parents appreciate the value of education and encourage pupils' attendance and 68 per cent feel that teachers are respected in the community (*see Figure 10*). Despite this, teachers feel the lack of social recognition from the community contributes to absenteeism. Teachers that were frequently late (46 per cent compared with 70 per cent of those that were not) and absent from the classroom (44 per cent compared with 70 per cent of those that were not) were also less likely to affirm that teachers are respected in the community.[24] These results align with existing literature that suggests that in schools where the links between teachers and parents/community are stronger, teachers are more motivated and committed, positively affecting their attendance (*see Box 7*).

Figure 10: Teachers' perceptions of parent involvement in school affairs
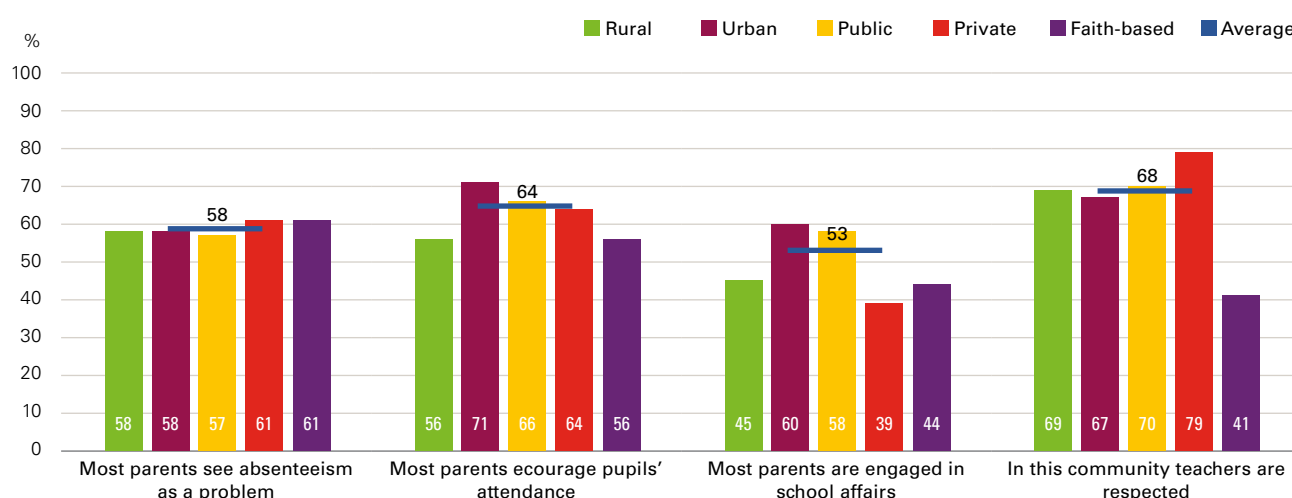
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The government is aware of the importance of parental and community engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, it included in its COVID-19 education response plan several measures (i.e., parental support tips and guides; learning continuity facilitators) to strengthen the relationship with teachers and sensitize parents to support their child's learning (GPE, 2020). It is not clear, however, how these will be conducted and whether they will continue once schools reopen.

2.3.4 School-level factors

School environment plays a key role in teachers' motivation, attendance and time on task. Issues such as the monitoring of head teachers, teachers' workload, and the material conditions for teaching to take place (school infrastructure and TLMs) are fundamental to curb teacher absenteeism and reduction of instruction time.

2.3.4.1 Role of the head teacher

> **Box 8. Key responsibilities of head teachers in Liberia**
>
> The Liberia Education Administration Regulations (MOE, 2011) provide details on the key responsibilities and expectations of head teachers in Liberia. "As the key ranking administrator, principals are responsible for the management, maintenance, school policy regarding discipline, coordination of instructional program and other overall school matters." In addition to these responsibilities, head teachers play a key role in the interaction with students: "school principals are also required to lead school reform that would raise student achievement", and parents: "Principals also interact with parents who serve on school advisory boards such as the parent-teacher associations (PTAs) [and] are responsible for making sure that their schools' campuses are safe and secure and in good working order" (MOE, 2011, pp. 80–81).

A head teacher's key responsibilities include monitoring capacities and leadership skills (*see Box 9*), which seem to play a crucial role in teacher absenteeism, regardless of community setting (urban/rural). According to surveyed teachers, the monitoring capacity of head teachers is much more relevant in verifying teacher **presence at school** and **punctuality** and less so in reporting subtle manifestations of absenteeism, like **absence from class** and **reduced teaching time**. Teachers reported that in most schools, there were different mechanisms for monitoring school absenteeism and punctuality. Generally, attendance books are signed by individual teachers upon arrival and when leaving the school's premises. In the interviews, head teachers reported using these tools daily. Eighty-one per cent of surveyed teachers affirmed that the head teacher is always at school and 80 per cent thought their supervisors recorded absences consistently and without fail (*see Figure 11*). In many schools, students elaborated on the mechanisms in place for ensuring that they are not left unattended and how compensation classes are organized. According to interviews with head teachers and teachers, only a small minority of head teachers conducted classroom observations to monitor teachers' presence and teaching time. This monitoring was usually indirect, via checking pupils' notebooks to assess that lessons have been taught. In some cases, head teachers check teachers' lesson plans, notebooks, student performance records, and test scripts as a means of monitoring the quality of time teachers spend in class.

In low absenteeism schools, head teachers play a key role in motivating teachers through the organization of meetings where teachers are reminded of their important role in the communities' and children's life. In addition, teachers reported the active role of head teachers in solving problems between teachers to improve working relations, and in giving suggestions on their methods and knowledge. Survey data confirm this finding, as the majority (84 per cent) of surveyed teachers affirmed, "the head teacher manages the school and the teachers well". However, teachers in urban settings (90 per cent)

> "He [the head teacher] often comes to me in the class and say - my man, remember the children we teach in this community, in this county. You're the only person that can make this student to be what we want them to be. Nobody will come from elsewhere to come teach our children besides we that in [name of the school]."
>
> –Teacher in a rural school.

were more likely to agree with that statement than their peers in rural areas (77 per cent). **Survey responses suggest that head teachers' presence and management skills are key to help limit the frequency of absenteeism.** Teachers that were frequently absent from school, late, absent from the classroom and reduced time on task were less likely to affirm the head teacher is always at school and manages the school well.[25]

Survey data also show that school governance plays a role in the monitoring of teacher absence. In private schools, 89 per cent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the head teacher discourages teachers absences, compared to only 67 per cent of public school teachers. A very large majority (92 per cent) of private school teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the head teacher always records teacher absences, compared to 76 per cent among public school teachers (*see Figure 11*). In most private schools, respondents mentioned the role of head teachers in sanctioning, ranging from pay reduction to replacement. At public schools, in contrast, pay reduction and sanctioning must be approved by subnational officers, decreasing the head teachers' direct monitoring capacity.

"Teachers are more frequently absent in public schools than private schools. In private schools, a principal can tell a teacher – today you are fired – and he meant it, because the principal has power from the board and can do that. [...] here [in public schools] we monitor but we don't act because we are not the one that pay, teachers receive the pay from central office and if we sanction, it takes several months before it's acted upon."

– DEO Grand Cape Mount.

During the interviews, some teachers elaborated on the role of head teachers in improving teachers' training. According to many teachers, they often receive information on workshops and seminars available to improve their knowledge and skills. This is confirmed by survey data: 79 per cent of surveyed teachers believed the head teacher encourages teacher training.

Figure 11: Teachers' opinions on the role of the head teacher
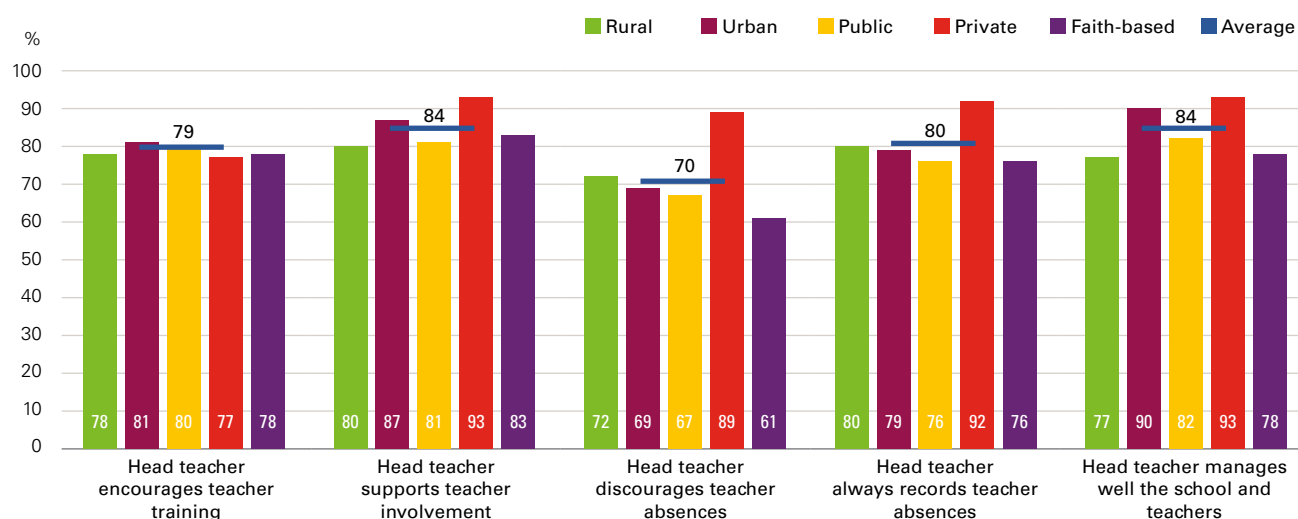
25 Teachers that were frequently absent from the school (71 per cent compared with 89 per cent of those who were not), late (78 per cent compared to 86 per cent of those who were nor), absent from the classroom (71 per cent compared with 87 per cent of those who were not) and reduced time on task (65 per cent compared to 88 per cent of those who were not) were less likely to affirm that the head teacher is always at school. Likewise, teachers that were frequently absent from the school (68 per cent compared with 86 per cent of those who were not), unpunctual (78 per cent compared to 86 per cent of those who were not), absent from the classroom (65 per cent compared with 86 per cent of those who were not) and reduced time on task (71 per cent compared with 84 per cent of those who were not) were less likely to affirm that the head teacher manages the school well.

Overall, TTT study participants had positive perceptions towards head teachers, with 81 per cent of surveyed teachers happy with their supervisor's feedback and describing most head teachers as trained and experienced mentors. Interestingly, different studies on the role of head teachers in Liberia showed that most head teachers did not receive extensive training regarding their job responsibilities. Several studies suggested that the majority of Liberian head teachers did not have degrees, diplomas or certification related to their work (Tuowal et al., 2014; Normal, 2012; MOE, 2014c; MOE, 2015). In terms of experience and promotion, it appeared that most school head teachers 'rose through the ranks' from teacher to head teacher at a certain moment in their career. In a small qualitative study of 12 head teachers in the capital Monrovia, Norman (2012) argued that most head teachers did not undergo any prescribed leadership education or training nor hold any principalship license. In recent years, the government made significant progress in ensuring head teachers' training, which could explain why TTT participants had a positive perception of head teachers' leadership skills. For instance, the principal leadership program targeted pre-primary, basic and secondary school head teachers and focused on the code of conduct for teachers, teacher's appraisal, discipline and performance management, in addition to MOE monitoring policies (MOE, 2016).

In the TTT study, teachers and head teachers argued that ascendency to principal was largely based on their experience as a teacher, political patronage, or social connections or a combination of these three factors. In addition to their teaching experience, some head teachers previously served in capacities such as vice principal for instruction or vice principal for administration. These results are confirmed in the literature (Norman, 2012) and show that the description of the promotion process appears to align with current policy that identifies work experience and some training (often in teaching, rather than school management) with promotion to school principal (MOE, 2016).

As schools reopen after COVID-19 closures, strong head teachers' leadership will be crucial (World Bank, 2020) in helping teachers carry out their new responsibilities established in the education recovery plan (e.g., psychosocial support, assessing learning gaps, respect of health measures, etc.) (GPE, 2020).

2.3.4.2 School infrastructure and availability of teaching and learning materials

Since 2015, the government has invested heavily in improving school infrastructure and the availability of TLMs in Liberian schools. In 2015–2016, there was a major procurement of textbooks for primary schools, including one million supplementary readers (for grades 1 to 4), 340,000 levelled readers, one million textbooks for mathematics, science, social studies and language for grades 5 to 9, and 200,000 teachers' guides to support learning in these subjects (World Bank, 2016). The COVID-19 education response plan aims at further accelerating this process by distributing textbooks and teacher guides for grades 1-9 on core subjects and accelerated education programmes (GPE, 2020). Other improvements have also been made in school infrastructure: since 2008, the overall stock of government primary schools increased by 15 per cent and the number of solid and semi-solid classrooms have been steadily increasing (World Bank, 2016). While tremendous progress is observed on all fronts, important challenges still remain. In 2015, nearly 30 per cent of primary school classrooms were in 'make-shift' and 'partitioned' structures (World Bank, 2016). The presence of damaged infrastructure contributes to an unsafe and unwelcome environment for students and teachers. In addition, school observations show that in many schools there is still an overwhelming need for teaching and learning items such as books, teacher guides and teaching aids.

Interviews with teachers and focus group discussions with students suggest that **inadequate school infrastructure and the unavailability of teaching equipment negatively impact teachers' school attendance and encourage subtler manifestations of absenteeism, such as teachers' absence from class and reduced teaching time.** Most students reported that textbook availability is limited and that,

> "There is nothing to attract the teachers to stay on campus. There's no library to sit, there's no teaching aids, no science labs, nothing".
>
> – CEO in Grand Bassa.

in most cases, students must share books. Apart from the lack of textbooks – which teachers considered crucial for teaching – respondents also indicated the absence of teacher guides, teaching and learning aids and special rooms (e.g., computer and science labs) affect their motivation. This is also evident in survey data where only 36 per cent of teachers affirmed their school had the necessary teaching materials, regardless of community setting (rural/urban). However, public school teachers were less likely to agree with that statement (29 per cent) compared to their peers in private (50 per cent) and faith-based schools (50 percent) (*see Figure*

12). "Lack of teaching materials" was also cited by 13 per cent of respondents as a main motivation for classroom absenteeism, and by 28 per cent as a main reason to reduce time on task, a challenge especially pervasive among public school teachers (*see Figures 4 and 5*). While some teachers mentioned teaching without teaching aids, some said they had to buy items themselves in order to deliver class. Crowded classes[26] were also a frequent complaint, especially in first years of schooling (grades 1, 2 and 3) with some teachers reporting having as many as 80 students in a class. Consistently, survey responses show that the top reason for the reduction of instruction time was student misbehaviour, mentioned by 34 per cent of teachers (*see Figure 5*), which is more likely to happen in crowded classes.

Figure 12: Teachers' opinions on teaching and learning materials
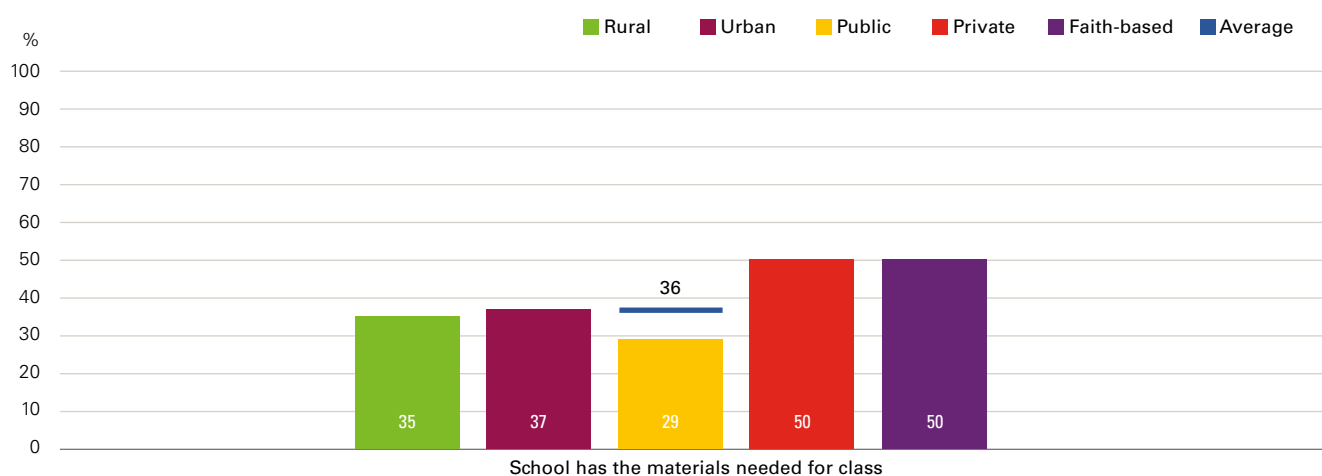
Teachers also indicated that **poor classroom infrastructure combined with harsh climatic conditions,** such as intense heat and heavy rainfall, **can influence their attendance in class and teaching time**. When there are heavy rains, students indicated that noise on the roof is so loud it is impossible for teachers to deliver lessons. Similarly, when the heat is too intense, teachers and students cannot stay in the classroom because of the high temperature. Survey data corroborates the effect that weather can have on teacher attendance; with it appearing as the fifth most commonly mentioned reason for classroom absenteeism (13 per cent). This is a challenge especially for public school teachers (16 per cent compared to 0 per cent in private and 13 per cent in faith-based schools) (*see Figure 4*).

2.3.4.3 Workload

Another major cause of teacher absenteeism is heavy workload, most often resulting in **classroom absenteeism** and **reduced teaching time**. Interviewed teachers explained that on any given school day, apart from teaching, they are also expected to undertake several activities that impact negatively their attendance and time on task. First, planned and unplanned visits from different stakeholders (such as donors, community members and parents) often prevent teachers from being in the classroom, especially in small schools. Administrative reasons were often mentioned as a main cause for **classroom absenteeism** (42 per cent of surveyed respondents). Interestingly, these absences were generally considered justified, as they were viewed as related to school activities. Marking exams and workbooks as well as preparing class was also often mentioned as a cause for **reduced teaching time**: 10 per cent of surveyed teachers reported that "too many preparation tasks" resulted in a reduction of their teaching time, especially for those in private schools (*see Figure 4*). However, many teachers felt guilty when they failed to deliver as planned, but also argued they had no alternative due to limited time to dedicate to class preparation and lesson planning. When schools reopen after the COVID-19 closures, teachers' workload is likely to increase, as they will assume new responsibilities alongside teaching as established in the government's recovery plan (e.g., psychosocial support, assessment of learning losses, implementation of health measures in classrooms, etc.) (GPE, 2020).

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26   The required class size given by the Ministry of Education is 45 pupils per class.

2.3.5 Teacher-level factors

Most teachers feel they have an important responsibility towards their pupils and often seek strategies to include those learners who may be struggling. Overall, teachers consider their presence at school and in class, as well as their punctuality and duration of time on task as important responsibilities. At times however, their efforts are constrained due to circumstances they ascribe as being beyond their control. Notably, health, family and community responsibilities and the need for alternative income-generating activities are common factors that hinder teacher's attendance and duration of time on task.

2.3.5.1 Health

Health is often described as a frequent reason for **school absence** and **lateness** across the different schools, mentioned by 73 per cent and 62 per cent of respondents as the top motivation respectively (*see Figures 2 and 3*). Teacher interviews suggest that those serving in remote areas are more likely to be absent for multiple days and more prone to lateness caused by health problems, due to the unavailability of adequate, nearby health care facilities. Teachers normally inform the head teacher when they will be absent or late and some head teachers even noted a maximum number of days that they can be absent, but these thresholds varied widely across the schools, suggesting a standardized norm is not enforced.

Health problems are also linked to **classroom absenteeism** and reduction of **time on task**, mentioned by 33 per cent of surveyed teachers as the second most prevalent reason for both forms (*see Figures 4 and 5*). In some cases, when teachers are sick, they still may choose to come to school but not enter the classroom because they don't feel well enough to deliver lessons. Others might be present in the classroom but decide to rest or give homework to students in order to rest in the classroom.

Qualitative data show a widespread perception that female teachers tend to be more prone to different types of absenteeism than their male counterparts because of health problems. Survey data, however, did not reveal significant variations in the frequency of health-induced teacher absences by gender for any form of absence (*see Figures 2 to 5*). According to many female teachers, although there exists a discourse among educational authorities in support of increased participation of women teachers, the practice is not equally supportive. Several female teachers argued they were reprimanded for taking care of their children who had become ill and needed medical attention.

Beyond their own health conditions, interviewed teachers stated that their attendance is influenced by the hunger and health of their students, which significantly reduce the time they spend on teaching or force them to leave early.

2.3.5.2 Family and community problems

According to teachers and head teachers, **personal and social responsibilities were frequently cited as causes for absence from school and lateness.** Personal and social responsibilities include both familial obligations (including caring for family members) and community obligations (including weddings and funerals). In a minor form, **teachers reported to be absent from class or to reduce time on task because of personal and family distractions.** For instance, only 10 per cent of surveyed teachers mentioned "distraction from personal and family

> "Since the WFP has terminated their contract and there have been no school feeding supplies for the past year and half. The MOE is saying that children should leave campus at 3:00 o'clock but because of the feeding you cannot keep children in hunger that is the reason we go home earlier.
>
> – Head teacher, Rural public school, Grand.

problems" as a main reason for a reduction of teaching time (*see Figure 5*). Interview data indicate a widely held perception that female teachers tend to be more frequently absent from school and less punctual than their male colleagues, due to increased familial responsibilities. Survey data, however, did not reveal significant variations in the frequency of absences and lateness by gender for school and classroom absence, and lack of punctuality. However, female teachers (29 percent) were more likely to reduce instruction time than their male counterparts (11 per cent). As schools reopen, there is concern that COVID-19 will further increase teachers' household responsibilities, particularly for females who usually bear a significantly higher portion of family duty and responsibilities (United Nations, 2020).

Section 3
Recommendations

The TTT study is a multi-dimensional approach to teacher attendance that highlights various factors influencing teacher attendance at various levels of the education system. This approach recognizes that challenges at specific levels often intersect, resulting in new constraints, or exacerbating existing ones. Thus, system wide analysis and understanding are needed to enable provision of relevant policy recommendations and overcome existing challenges that hinder teacher attendance and time on task.

This section builds on the study's findings to provide recommendations to potentially increase teacher attendance in its four forms that might help Liberian education authorities achieve their educational aims both during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Remove obstacles to receiving pay and ensure the timely delivery of teacher salaries.

This could be achieved by increasing pay points, especially in remote areas where teachers often have to travel for days to collect their salary. Other countries in the region have implemented programmes to address this challenge. In Sierra Leone, for instance, the MOE hired an international private accounting firm to pay teacher salary subsidies directly to the head teachers of primary schools. This worked so that cash transfers were being made by a third party in order to avoid weakness of the banking system and the use of intermediaries to retrieve salaries (Holmes and Jackson, 2007). Establishing a roster system at the school level to ensure that not all teachers will go to collect pay at the same time, will also ensure that retrieving salaries does not interfere with teaching time.

2. Ensure teacher training has a strong practical component, and that training takes place only during holidays and weekends.

This should increase the likelihood that teachers are well equipped to perform effectively in the classroom and that they achieve effective curriculum coverage. For example, in 2017, the Teacher Service Commission in Kenya issued a circular ordering all teacher professional development training to take place during holidays and weekends (Karamperidou et al., 2020). Interviews with Kenyan stakeholders confirmed its current implementation and that it has encouraged school attendance, despite initial opposition from teacher unions (ibid). Ensuring compensation classes are organized and the allocation of substitute teachers to avoid leaving pupils alone when teachers are in training is a way to safeguard both curriculum implementation and teachers' work-life balance.

3. Increase the representation of women teachers, especially in rural areas. If women are recruited and assigned to positions in rural areas, they might face multiple obstacles when working away from their home, their family and/or their partner.

Travelling long distances alone may be culturally unacceptable and unsafe, risking harassment by men en route or in the villages where they teach (Warwick and Reiners, 1995; Banu et al., 2001; Kirk, 2006). It is important to use alternative deployment strategies to ensure qualified women teachers are attracted to rural schools. For example, providing rural incentive allowances, employing two women teachers to work and live together, and encouraging communities to set up welcoming support structures for women teachers are recognized as promising practices in other countries (Bista and Cosstick, 2005; Banu et al., 2001). Creating support structures is especially relevant in the post-COVID-19 environment, as their obligations have increased and will continue to add to their workload.

4. Strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration to address factors beyond the education system that affect teacher attendance and time on task, in particular, health and infrastructure.

To address challenges related to inadequate housing and healthcare in rural areas, it is recommended to develop an identification system for teachers who may need further support. This will help prioritize the delivery of the new incentive packages the ministry plans to provide to teachers working in difficult contexts and regions.

To limit health-related absenteeism in rural areas, the MOE should collaborate with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to provide school-level healthcare services to teachers and pupils. While this may attract additional costs, it will address a significant cause of school absence, and through its provision, contribute significantly towards enhanced school attendance and punctuality. As part of the COVID-19 education response plan, the MOE is already working to strengthen the link between the health and education sectors and this could be extended to other ministries that impact teachers' professional lives. Thus, the MOE could consider collaborating with the Ministry of Transport in addressing the cost and availability of transport for teachers.

5. Boost parental and community involvement as a way of improving teacher accountability and attendance. Raising awareness and delivering information on the important role that community and parents can play in teacher monitoring is often seen as a strategy to curb teacher absenteeism.

However, interventions that focus simply on providing information to parents and other community stakeholders were found to be unsuccessful in increasing parental and community involvement and improving teacher attendance in India and other contexts (Banerjee et.al., 2010). In particular, existing empirical evidence highlights the need to couple information sharing initiatives with effective accountability mechanisms that are accessible to parents (Munyas Ghadially, 2013). Research on such initiatives illustrates the need to design contextually appropriate strategies. Institutionalizing the monitoring role of parents and community groups and strengthening their representation on school councils and management boards can be a first step.

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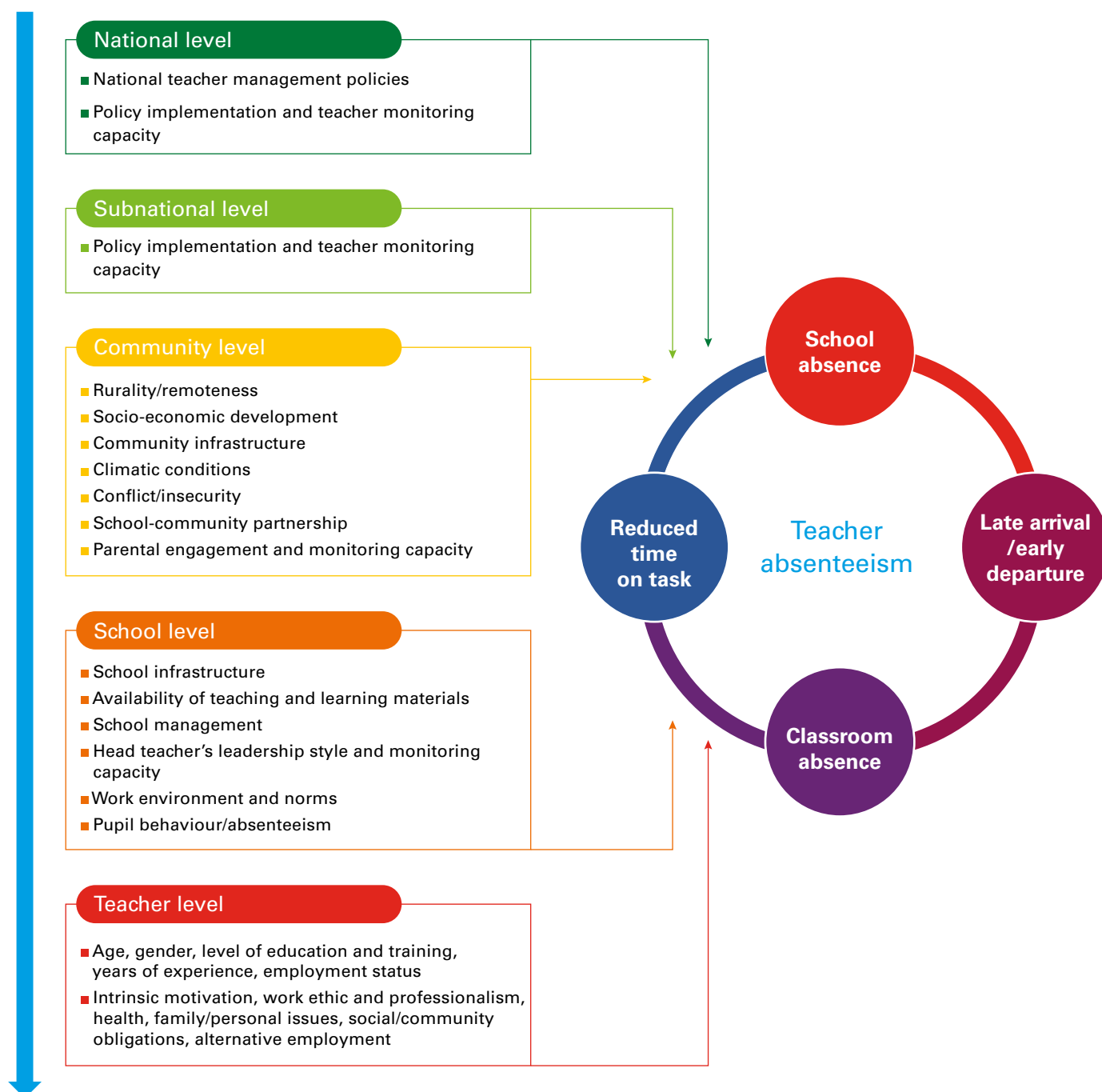World Bank, 'Learning to Realize Education's Promise', *World Development Report 2018*, The World Bank, Washington D. C., 2018 <www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>

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Annexes

Annex 1. Definition and exploratory framework

The Time to Teach project adopts Guerrero et al.'s (2012, 2013) explanatory model with an important modification that adds two further groups of variables (*see Figure 13*). These variables operate on two additional levels of the education system: the 'national' and the 'subnational'. These variables are included to measure the impact of national teacher management policies and subnational policy implementation on the dimensions of teacher absenteeism.

Figure 13: The TTT explanatory model

National level
- National teacher management policies
- Policy implementation and teacher monitoring capacity

Subnational level
- Policy implementation and teacher monitoring capacity

Community level
- Rurality/remoteness
- Socio-economic development
- Community infrastructure
- Climatic conditions
- Conflict/insecurity
- School-community partnership
- Parental engagement and monitoring capacity

School level
- School infrastructure
- Availability of teaching and learning materials
- School management
- Head teacher's leadership style and monitoring capacity
- Work environment and norms
- Pupil behaviour/absenteeism

Teacher level
- Age, gender, level of education and training, years of experience, employment status
- Intrinsic motivation, work ethic and professionalism, health, family/personal issues, social/community obligations, alternative employment

Teacher absenteeism
- School absence
- Late arrival /early departure
- Classroom absence
- Reduced time on task

Source: Adaptation of the work of Guerrero et al. (2012): Guerrero, G., Leon, J., Zapata, M., Sugimaru, C., & Cueto, S. (2012). What works to improve teacher attendance in developing countries?: A systematic review

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Annex 2. Study limitations

Like all studies relying on self-reported data, TTT is not free of methodological limitations.

Response bias may have been a challenge, as absenteeism is generally a taboo subject and it is unclear how truthfully teachers responded to questions around the nature and frequency of their absences, even though the principles of anonymity and confidentiality were highlighted during data collection. Enumerators were trained to communicate the objectives of the study clearly and to clarify any misconceptions regarding possible consequences and implications of voluntary participation. Moreover, other typical problems of self-reported data may have arisen, such as selective memory, social desirability bias, telescoping and differentiated weighting of events with respect to their true significance.

Selection bias may also have been an issue, as the teacher survey was administered only to teachers who were present at school on the day of the school visit. This means that some of the frequently absent teachers may not have been surveyed. To pre-empt this problem, all school visits were announced and teachers were informed about them well in advance.

Finally, the research team recognizes issues of **representativeness of the survey data** due to the purposive approach in selecting schools[27] and the size of the TTT survey sample (139 teachers), which although important, is small and may affect the accuracy of any population estimates and limit the disaggregation of the analysis. Thus, the TTT findings can only provide a snapshot of the selected schools rather than a representative view of the situation across all schools in the country.

For these reasons, the above-mentioned limitations were taken into consideration when interpreting the data. All reported findings have been thoroughly triangulated through qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with key education stakeholders.

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27   The main unit of analysis is a total of 20 schools, selected on the basis of regional diversity, type of governance (public, private, faith-based) and location (urban/rural). All teachers that were present in the school at the time of the survey were selected for a paper-based survey and three teachers were interviewed.

Annex 3. Research ethics

The UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti applied for ethical clearance for the TTT study to the Health Media Lab and to the Institutional Review Board of the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, both located in Washington, D.C. Ethical clearance was granted in July 2018. The study was also cleared by the Ethics Review Board of Makerere University, Uganda, and Rwanda Education Board.

In Liberia, study implementation was preceded by extensive consultation with national governments and key education stakeholders on research tool design, sampling and instrument administration. All contracted partners were extensively trained in research ethics and abided by the UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation and Data Collection and Analysis.

Annex 4. Training qualification requirements

Table 2: Description of training qualification

Qualification	Description
C Certificate	A grade C certificate is the minimum requirement for teaching in primary school (grade 1–6) and requires one year of post-secondary training.
B Certificate	A grade B certificate is the minimum requirement for teaching junior high school and requires two years of post-secondary training and the acquisition of expertise in a specific subject.
AA Certificate	A grade AA certificate allows one to teach in either primary or junior high school and requires two years of training.
Degree	A bachelor's degree and AA certificate is the minimum requirement for teaching at the senior high level (grades 10–12).

Source: Liberia Education Sector Analysis, 2016

Annex 5. National-level structures

At the national level, the Ministry of Education (MOE) coordinates with the following stakeholders:

■ The Presidential Cabinet

■ Ministries, agencies and Special Commissions, including the Civil Service Authority, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Gender, and the National Governance Commission

■ Educational institutions, including RTTIs, colleges and universities, and the National Higher Education Council

■ Educational organizations, including the National Teachers Association of Liberia (NTAL), the National PTA of Liberia, the West Africa Examinations Council, religious organizations and the Association of Private School Operators

■ Local non-governmental and civil society organizations

■ Private sector organizations and institutions, and

■ Multi-lateral and bi-lateral development partners, inclusive of the Education Sector Development Committee.

In 2015, the MOE started a process of restructuring to align organizational structure of the ministry and its staffing with its mandate as laid out in the Education Reform Act (2011). Currently, the MOE has three departments, overseen by Deputy Ministers in Administration, Instruction, and Planning (*see Figure 15*). In 2015, the President constituted the National Education Advisory Board (NEAB) in order to represent different institutions engaged in education, to serve as an advisory body to the MOE.

Figure 14: Ministry of Education organogram, 2016
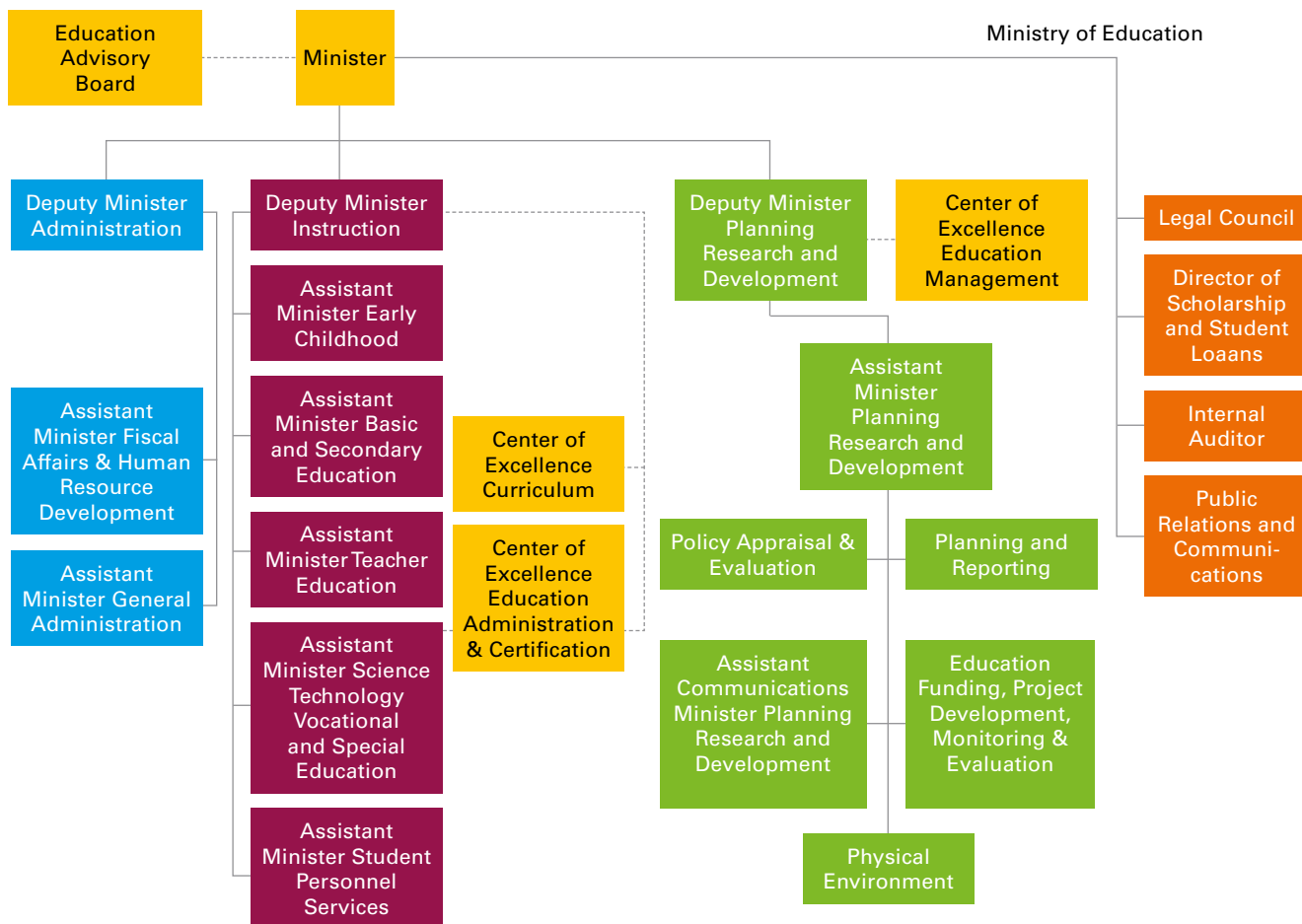
Centers to become semi-autonomous and will have limited permanent staff, recruiting temporary expertise as needed

Source: EMIS 2014.

Annex 6. Absenteeism and selected teacher characteristics

Table 3: Absenteeism and selected teacher characteristics

	Absence from school	Lack of punctuality	Absence from the classroom	Reduced time on task	Any form absenteeism
Location					
Urban (%)	17	23	16	21	35
Rural (%)	22	24	14	8	34
Diff	**-5**	**-1**	**2**	**13**	**1**
p-value	**0,48**	**0,86**	**0,74**	**0,04**	**0,87**
Type of school					
Public (%)	26	28	18	12	39
Private (%)	0	0	4	4	7
Diff private-public (%)	**-26**	**-28**	**-14**	**-8**	**-32**
p-value	**0,00**	**0,00**	**0,11**	**0,29**	**0,00**
Faith-based (%)	22	36	14	47	56
Diff faith-based-public (%)	**-3**	**7**	**-4**	**35**	**17**
p-value	**0,74**	**0,54**	**0,71**	**0,00**	**0,16**
Gender					
Female (%)	23	23	17	29	33
Male (%)	19	24	15	11	35
Diff (%)	**3**	**-1**	**2**	**17**	**-2**
p-value	**0,71**	**0,92**	**0,82**	**0,04**	**0,87**
Studying/training					
Training (%)	28	44	24	18	54
No training (%)	16	16	10	14	27
Diff (%)	**12**	**28**	**14**	**4**	**27**
p-value	**0,14**	**0,00**	**0,06**	**0,62**	**0,00**
Salary					
Above median (%)	13	18	17	4	25
Below median (%)	25	29	16	27	45
Diff (%)	**-12**	**-10**	**1**	**-23**	**-20**
p-value	**0,13**	**0,22**	**0,93**	**0,00**	**0,03**
Time to school dry season					
Above median (%)	24	24	15	14	37
Below median (%)	14	22	16	17	33
Diff (%)	**10**	**2**	**0**	**-3**	**4**
p-value	**0,17**	**0,80**	**0,97**	**0,65**	**0,68**
Time to school rainy season					
Above median (%)	28	24	16	11	38
Below median (%)	13	21	15	16	31
Diff (%)	**14**	**4**	**1**	**-5**	**7**
p-value	**0,06**	**0,66**	**0,86**	**0,49**	**0,45**

Note: Percentages indicate the proportion of teachers who report recurrent absences (i.e., once a week or more) based on each characteristic. The reported p-values are from OLS regression models estimated separately for each variable using robust standard errors.

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