



## Time to Teach

Teacher attendance and time on task  
in primary schools

Rwanda

Brianna Guidorzi and Despina Karamperidou

November 2020

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## Foreword

Teachers play a fundamental role in imparting knowledge to pupils. But they are not only passing on information. Teachers also equip children with the academic and socio-emotional skills and the tools to analyse, problem solve and effectively use information – skills that are necessary to lead healthy and productive lives. They help them to use information effectively, which is necessary for children to lead healthy and productive lives.

However, many education systems in East and Southern Africa fail to prepare, support, motivate, and manage their teachers.

Rwanda has made significant progress since the universalisation of primary education school in 2003. It currently boasts one of the highest primary student enrolment rates in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet teacher absenteeism continues to be one of the most serious challenges and hinders provision of quality education in Rwandan primary schools. Teachers absenteeism is the main reason why many pupils and students in Rwanda lack foundational literacy, numeracy, and the socio-emotional skills and therefore cannot reach their full potential. While there may be many valid reasons for a teacher to be absent from school and classroom, not all reasons are legitimate. Some teachers, for example, do not come to work because they pursue other occupations elsewhere.

Quality education is a pillar of Rwanda's Vision 2020 goal of becoming a middle-income country. Any hindrance to the development of adequate, reliable, and competent human capital has a deteriorating impact on development. Absenteeism of teachers can have negative effects on the entire school system in terms of reputation as well as loss of investments. It also lowers student attendance and achievement and as a result causes broader economic loss.

We hope that the findings of this study will help to tailor the future interventions of the Ministry of Education and the Rwandan Education Board. The goal would be to ensure a competent and motivated teaching force but also to increase the opportunities for children to learn and, as a result, improve their opportunities in life.

The Research Team  
UNICEF Innocenti

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

BLF	Building Learning Foundations	SBMP	School-Based Mentor Programme
CBC	Competence-based curriculum	SBT	Sector-Based Trainer
CPD	Continuous professional development	SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
DCC	District Continuous Professional Development Committees	SGAC	School General Assembly Committee
DDE	District Director of Education	SEI	Sector Education Inspector
DEO	District Education Officer	SSL	School Subject Leader
DFID	UK Department for International Development	TDM	Teacher development and management
DoS	Dean of Studies	TTC	Teacher Training College
EQS	Education Quality and Standards	TTT	Time to Teach
ESSP	Education Sector Strategic Plan	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
FGD	Focus group discussion	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
HT	Head teacher	VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
IDI	In-depth interview	9YBE	Nine Years Basic Education
LARS	Learning and Achievement in Rwanda Schools	12YBE	12 Years Basic Education
MDG	Millennium Development Goal		
MIFOTRA	Ministry of Public Service and Labour		
MINEDUC	Ministry of Education		
MINALOC	Ministry of Local Government		
MININFRA	Ministry of Infrastructure		
MINECOFIN	Ministry of Finance		
MoH	Ministry of Health		
NER	Net enrolment rate		
RAMA	La Rwanda d'Assurance Maladie		
REB	Rwandan Education Board		
RENCP	Rwandan Education NDO Coordination Platform		
SBM	School-based mentor		

# Executive summary

## Overview

Teacher absenteeism constitutes a significant barrier to achieving quality universal education. There is mounting evidence that teacher absenteeism is a challenge in low- and middle-income countries around the globe. The rates of teacher absence in these countries varies between 3 to 27 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Within these average national prevalence rates, it is suspected that absenteeism may be higher in poorer, rural areas. Due to a dearth of research on teacher absenteeism, the consequences of this phenomenon are not fully evident. However, it is clear that countries are losing valuable resources they channelled into their education systems.

This study moves beyond the conventional conception of teacher absenteeism—that of absence from school—to include other forms of absenteeism. The reasoning behind such a broad framing is that increasing evidence shows that school attendance does not necessarily equate to other forms of presence, including punctuality, being in the classroom, teaching for the proper duration, or teaching effectively.

While this study does not focus on student performance per se, it departs from the assumption that teachers must be present in all possible ways for learning to transpire. In order to investigate such a large phenomenon, this study takes a systematic approach to teacher absenteeism. It looks at variables at the national-, sub-national-, community-, school-, and teacher-levels that may increase or decrease the prevalence of teacher absenteeism. The study's goal is not to stigmatize the teachers. On the contrary, it looks primarily at the work that teachers do and the challenges they face which may prevent them from being fully present at school.

In Rwanda, Time to Teach (TTT) is a mixed-methods project, employing both qualitative and quantitative research tools. The study included stakeholders from all levels: national and sub-national education actors as well as members of the School General Assemblies (SGAs), head teachers, teachers, and students. 20 primary schools were purposively selected, which are distributed over ten different districts in all four provinces of Rwanda.<sup>i</sup> In each school, the research team conducted interviews with the head teacher, with three teachers, and with a community leader. Furthermore, in each school, a focus group discussion with pupils took place.

## Main findings

### How frequently are teachers absent?

- The majority of teachers reported being absent in different ways only a few times since the start of the 2018 school year.<sup>ii</sup> However, nine per cent of teachers reported not attending school at least once a week. The rate of absence from school was similar when disaggregated by gender, school type and location.
- A higher proportion of teachers, 17 per cent of those surveys, reported that they frequently arriving late or departing early from school (defined as once a week or more).

i The school sample includes rural and urban schools; government (public and government-subsidized) and non-government (private) schools; and special needs/refugee-integrated schools.

ii In Rwanda, the school year runs from January to November. Data for the TTT study was collected in August-September 2018, eight months after the start of the school year.

- Eight per cent of teachers reported being absent from class at least weekly. This rate is lower in urban schools (4 per cent) compared to rural schools (10 per cent), and lower among teachers in private schools (5 per cent) compared to those in public schools (8 per cent).
- Twelve per cent of teachers surveyed reported that they frequently spent reduced time on task. The rate is higher for female teachers (14 per cent) than male teachers (10 per cent).

### Why are teachers absent?

Teacher absenteeism in Rwanda is influenced by a multitude of interdependent factors at different levels of the education system (national, sub-national, community, school and individual teacher-level). The key factors found to be correlated with teacher absence at each of these levels, discussed further in Section 4 of this report, were:

- At the national level, several factors such as remuneration, incentives and in-service training - including those supporting the implementation of the national curriculum were identified as factors impacting teacher motivation, attendance and time use in the classroom;
- The sub-national level section of this report discusses policy implementation challenges that are inherent in decentralisation, including the difficulties regarding engagement, monitoring, and sanctioning of teachers more broadly as well as in relation to teacher absenteeism;
- At the community level, climatic conditions, notably during the rainy season, remoteness and transportation challenges are key factors to absenteeism. Difficulty in receiving pay, and the community's capacity to monitor teachers also play a role that exacerbates the phenomenon.
- School level, findings illustrate that head teachers' monitoring capacity is essential in preventing absenteeism at school. Moreover, high teacher workload and the lack of availability of teaching and learning materials (TLM) have a negative impact on attendance.
- Finally, at the teacher level, data shows that personal and social responsibilities, as well as health, play direct roles in the absence or presence of teachers. Low teacher welfare can push teachers into alternative income-generating activities. Additionally, in a bilingual education system, teachers lose time when translating materials (from English to Kinyarwanda) in the classroom.

### What are the potential recommendations for policy making?

- Continuous professional development (CPD) must be strengthened at multiple levels to support teachers and support them with education reforms and efficient time use in the classroom. This should include continuing specific subject targeting of in-service training (as in the case of the Building Learning Foundations (BLF) and Soma Umenye programmes) as well as identifying remaining gaps in targeting. Also, the formal integration of in-service training into District Development Plans (DDPs) so that this is connected to performance contracts for district and sector officials, who report to MINALOC. At the same time, strengthening the role of school-based mentors (SBM) and school-subject leaders (SSL) to make CPD more collaborative rather than relying on cascading alone. And finally, considering moving in-service training to holiday periods to avoid absenteeism due to training.
- The monitoring of teachers should be streamlined across districts through DDPs. Nation-wide monitoring in regard to absenteeism from school, to punctuality or to leaving early must be strengthened. Simultaneously, a focus should be placed on quality education indicators. Districts serving remote or hard-to-reach schools need to be supported with means of transportation or a transportation budget. At community and school level, school general assemblies should be strengthened to carry out their mandates.

- Teacher welfare issues should be addressed, for example with incentives that foster teacher attendance. This could include transportation assistance or stipends, additional teacher housing or long-term, subsidised housing loans.
- When building schools and updating existing infrastructure, MINEDUC needs to provide communities with solid building materials. These materials should not only take into consideration universal design but also should withstand the rainy season. Another issue is the provision of textbooks and teaching materials. It should be seamlessly aligned with national curriculum modifications. Finally, improvement of healthcare, access to banking and community infrastructure such as roads will require inter-ministry collaboration.

## Section 1: Introduction

### 1.1. Context and study rationale

One of the most troubling obstacles on the path towards universal learning in developing countries is teacher absenteeism.<sup>2</sup> Studies from across the developing world have shown national averages of teacher absenteeism that range from 3 to 27 per cent.<sup>3</sup> These percentages, however, often conceal even higher rates of absenteeism within countries, as well as variations in educational opportunities and outcomes, since teachers tend to be more frequently absent in poorer and more remote communities and schools.<sup>4</sup>

Teacher absenteeism is prevalent in certain parts of Africa. A 2015 study by the World Bank in seven sub-Saharan African countries<sup>iii</sup> found that between 15 and 45 per cent of all primary school teachers are absent from school. Between 23 and 57 per cent are absent from class on any given day.<sup>5</sup> Such high rates of school and classroom absenteeism result in a serious waste of public funds. The same study estimates that, on average, the loss of teaching hours due to absenteeism corresponds to a loss of approximately 46 cents in every dollar invested in education. This is equivalent to an annual loss of 1 to 3 per cent of the GDP of the participating countries.<sup>6</sup> Afrobarometer data, drawn from 36 African countries,<sup>7</sup> also indicate that teacher absenteeism contributes to unequal education outcomes. They confirm a strong association between high levels of teacher absenteeism and the presence of marginalised and vulnerable groups.

In Rwanda there are no national rates on teacher absenteeism. But small-scale studies suggest that teacher absenteeism has been a challenge for years. A 2003 study found that 20 per cent of head teachers cited teacher absence from school as a problem.<sup>8</sup> In 2008, a similar study analysed teacher absenteeism by school governance. It found that 40 per cent of teachers from public schools and 39 per cent from government-subsidized schools agreed that absenteeism was a problem. Whereas only 13 per cent of teachers from private schools<sup>9</sup> felt the same, suggesting that absenteeism may be more prevalent at public schools. The most recent study on teacher absenteeism in Rwanda was conducted by MINEDUC and UNICEF Rwanda in 2017. Students in Primary 1 through Primary 6 were asked whether their teachers are often absent. The results varied widely throughout primary levels: while 18 per cent of Primary 6 students said their teachers were often absent, an alarming 87 per cent of Primary 1 students reported their teachers as often being away from the classroom.<sup>10</sup>

The Time to Teach (TTT) study is an Africa-wide research initiative that aims to address knowledge, policy and policy implementation gaps that relate to the causes and remedies of teacher absenteeism in the continent. Established in 2017, the project is a collaboration between the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, UNICEF Regional and Country Offices, national governments and research partners, DFID (UK Department for International Development), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Mastercard Foundation. In total, the project investigates the determinants of teacher absenteeism and explores ways of limiting the prevalence of the phenomenon in 20 African countries.<sup>iv</sup> In Rwanda, project implementation began in July 2018 and employed a case study methodology with a mixed-method approach.

iii Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda

iv Rwanda, Kenya, Comoros, Somalia (Puntland), Tanzania, South Sudan, Uganda, Mozambique, Ghana, Gambia, Liberia, Nigeria, Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Gabon, Guinea, Togo, Guinea-Bissau, Morocco

## 1.2. Objectives

The principal objective of the Time to Teach Rwanda study is to collate and strengthen the evidence base on the various types and determinants of primary school teacher absenteeism. It should provide practical recommendations for improving teacher attendance rates. The study seeks to provide critical insights into the factors that influence teacher attendance at different levels of the education system. Furthermore, it aims to assist the policy and programmatic work of MINEDUC, REB, and UNICEF Rwanda.

More specifically, the objectives of the project are to:

- Understand the various forms of primary school teacher absenteeism (e.g. absence from school, classroom, teaching, etc.) and assess its prevalence in different provinces, types of schools (e.g. public/private) and settings (e.g. rural/urban);
- Explore the issue from a systems perspective and identify factors at different levels of the education system (national, sub-national, community, school, and teacher) that affect teacher attendance. as well as teachers' capacity and motivation to teach up to standard;
- Detect gaps in teacher policy and policy implementation that are linked to identified determinants of absenteeism and barriers to higher teacher attendance rates;
- Provide actionable policy recommendations on increasing teachers' time-on-task as a means of improving learners' academic performance;
- Increase awareness among national education policy makers, international organizations, and donors supporting education on the importance of well-designed teacher policies and the integration of teacher absenteeism into national education strategies, programmes, and policy discussions.

The Time to Teach research initiative addresses different questions identifying the various manifestations of teacher absenteeism. It unpacks interactions between the factors that promote types of absenteeism at different levels of the education system. Findings are interpreted in relation to specific teacher policy as well as policy implementation gaps and inhibiting practices. The initiative provides practical recommendations to reduce teacher absenteeism and improve the effectiveness of the entire education system.

Key research questions addressed in this report include:

- How does teacher absenteeism manifest in Rwanda's primary schools? What are the various types of teacher absences that result in reduced teacher-student interaction and potentially poor student learning outcomes?
- What are the factors in the Rwandan education system that cause primary school teachers to be absent in various ways? How are these factors interlinked? How can they be addressed in the short, medium, and long-term?
- Which systemic factors lead to policy and implementation gaps in managing teacher absenteeism? How can these gaps be addressed?

As an Africa-wide research initiative, the Time to Teach study also aims to:

- Identify common challenges among participating countries and uncover patterns in the determinants of teacher absenteeism across African countries;
- Develop a regional inventory of teacher management policies; and
- Facilitate cross-country learning by identifying good practices in improving teacher monitoring and evaluation, increasing teacher motivation, and reducing chronic teacher absences.

Rwanda and other participating countries are expected to benefit from the second phase of the Time to Teach project, which involves a cross-country comparison. Results from the comparative analysis of ESA countries will be presented in a synthesis report. The report will show the determinants of teacher absenteeism across the region and link them to the evidence base around addressing barriers to teacher attendance. It will include information on successful teacher policies and effective policy implementation. The Time to Teach ESA synthesis report will also include an assessment of the external validity of the evidence base and outline preconditions to public policy transfers.<sup>v</sup>

### 1.3. Data and methods

TTT is a mixed-methods project, that employs qualitative and quantitative research tools. The study takes a systems approach toward explaining teacher absenteeism and examines the relevance of factors at various levels of the education system, including the national-, sub-national-, community-, school-, and individual teacher-levels. The study also evaluates if factors outside of the education system have an important role to play in determining teacher attendance, and what that role might be.

In total, 20 primary schools were selected, based on the following criteria:

- location (region/county)
- governance (public or private)
- community setting (rural or urban)
- performance (high or low)

At each school, in-depth interviews (IDIs) were carried out with the head teacher, three teachers and a member of the school management board.

Furthermore students engaged in a focus group discussion (FGD) and teachers present on the pre-announced day of the visit participated in a survey. National and sub-national education officers, in charge of teacher monitoring, and teacher union representatives were also interviewed. In total, 548 individuals participated in the study.

<sup>v</sup> The synthesis report will be published in 2020

## 1.4. Chapter organization

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides a short overview of Rwanda’s primary education system and teacher policies. It also critically reviews existing studies on the drivers of teacher absenteeism in the country and highlights their limitations.
- Section 3 presents the methodology of the study and discusses issues of sampling, instruments development, data collection, and data analysis.
- Section 4 shows detailed findings.
- Section 5 links empirical findings on the determinants of teacher absenteeism to specific teacher policy and policy implementation gaps.
- Section 6 concludes with a series of actionable policy recommendations.



## Section 2: Country context

### 2.1. Country overview

Rwanda is a sub-Saharan, East African country. It is land-locked and relatively small compared to its neighbouring countries. Burundi borders to the south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west, Tanzania to the east, and Uganda to the north. Rwanda is the most densely populated country on mainland Africa with a population of approximately 12 million people.<sup>11</sup> Around 1.3 million people live in the capital Kigali and approximately 70 per cent of the population live in rural areas.<sup>12</sup>

After more than 50 years of German and Belgian colonial rule, Rwanda gained independence in 1962. Colonial rule stoked ethnic tensions, a problem which continued long after independence. On April 6, 1994, a genocide started, which lasted for 100 days and resulted in the massacre of approximately 800,000 people, primarily Tutsis.<sup>13</sup> After the genocide, Paul Kagame, leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, took control of the government. He formed a coalition government of national unity headed by President Pasteur Bizimungu. Rwanda has been politically stable since. Paul Kagame became president in 2003 and, following an amendment to the constitution in 2015 regarding presidential term limits, was recently elected for a third-term as president.<sup>14</sup> In 1996, English became one of the official languages, mainly for political and economic reasons. However, Kinyarwanda remains the language spoken by the entire population.<sup>15</sup> Rwanda now has four official languages: Kinyarwanda, Swahili, English, and French. In 2007, the country became an official member of the East African Community.<sup>16</sup>

Rwanda is often referred to as 'the land of a thousand hills' due to its mountainous terrain. The country is divided by mountain ranges running across its land from north to south. To sustain the population, almost every available piece of land is under cultivation. Agriculture and services represent the two largest economic activities.<sup>17</sup>

Rwanda is a low-income country. Thirty-nine per cent of the population live below the poverty line and 16 per cent of the population live in extreme poverty.<sup>18</sup> Overall, life expectancy, education, and GNI per capita have improved since 1995. But Rwanda's Human Development Index (HDI) score of 0.524, places the country in the low human development category.<sup>19</sup> Rwanda met the majority of its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, including impressive progress in universal primary education,<sup>20</sup> and the country aimed to become a middle-income country by 2020. Rwanda is divided into five provinces –Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western, and Kigali — which comprise 30 districts and 416 sectors.

### 2.2. Overview of Rwanda's national primary education system

Enrolment in primary education improved following Rwanda's independence, increasing from 46 per cent to 76 per cent between 1973 and 1990. The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, however, destroyed the education system — there was a sharp decline of the teacher workforce. Damage to school infrastructure was considerable.<sup>21</sup> Since then, primary education has made significant strides, and primary enrolment rates are now some of the highest in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the education system has been marked by a number of recent and noteworthy changes: universal primary education was introduced in 2003,<sup>23</sup> and in 2008 English became the language of instruction beginning in upper primary school.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, universal access to lower-secondary school (Nine Years Basic Education) began in 2009 and was extended to upper-secondary (Twelve Years Basic Education) in 2012.<sup>25</sup>

The structure of the education system of Rwanda is shown in Table 1. Pre-primary school has not yet been universalized, and only a minority of children in the country attend pre-primary school. The first stage of primary school (the first three years, P1–P3) is conducted in Kinyarwanda. It focuses on learning how to

read, write, and calculate. During the second stage of primary school (P4 –P6), the language of instruction switches to English. Kinyarwanda and French are offered as language subjects. The primary level represents the largest part of Rwanda’s education system: there are twice as many primary school teachers as there are secondary school teachers and nearly twice as many primary schools as secondary schools.<sup>26</sup> The majority of primary schools are government-subsidized, while 25 per cent of schools are fully public and 14 per cent of schools are private.<sup>27</sup> Primary school ends with national examinations to determine students’ readiness for secondary school. Lower secondary education also ends with an examination after which students can enrol in either upper secondary or in a Technical Secondary School (TSS). They can also attend a Teacher Training College (TTC) to become a primary school teacher. Upon completion of upper-secondary, students can progress to tertiary education. Another possibility, which MINEDUC is promoting and investing in, is Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

Table 1: Structure of the basic education sector in Rwanda and key statistics

Level	Age	NER	# Enrolled	# Institutions	# Staff
Pre-primary	4-6	20.80%	226,706	3,210	7,178
Primary (P1-P6)	7-12	98.30%	2,503,705	2,909	44,544
Lower-secondary (S1-S3)	13-15	30.10%	422,093	1,728	30,040
Upper-secondary (S4-S6)	16-18		236,192		

Source: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, Statistical Yearbook 2018 data <sup>28</sup>

Regarding the governance of the basic education system (*see Figure 1*), the MINEDUC is responsible for creating education policy at the national level and ensuring education quality and standards. The ministry works closely with the Rwanda Education Board (REB), a semi-autonomous agency established in 2010. REB functions under the supervision of MINEDUC and is responsible for coordination and implementation of education policy on topics such as:

- Curricula materials production and distribution
- Teacher education management and professionalisation
- Examinations and accreditation

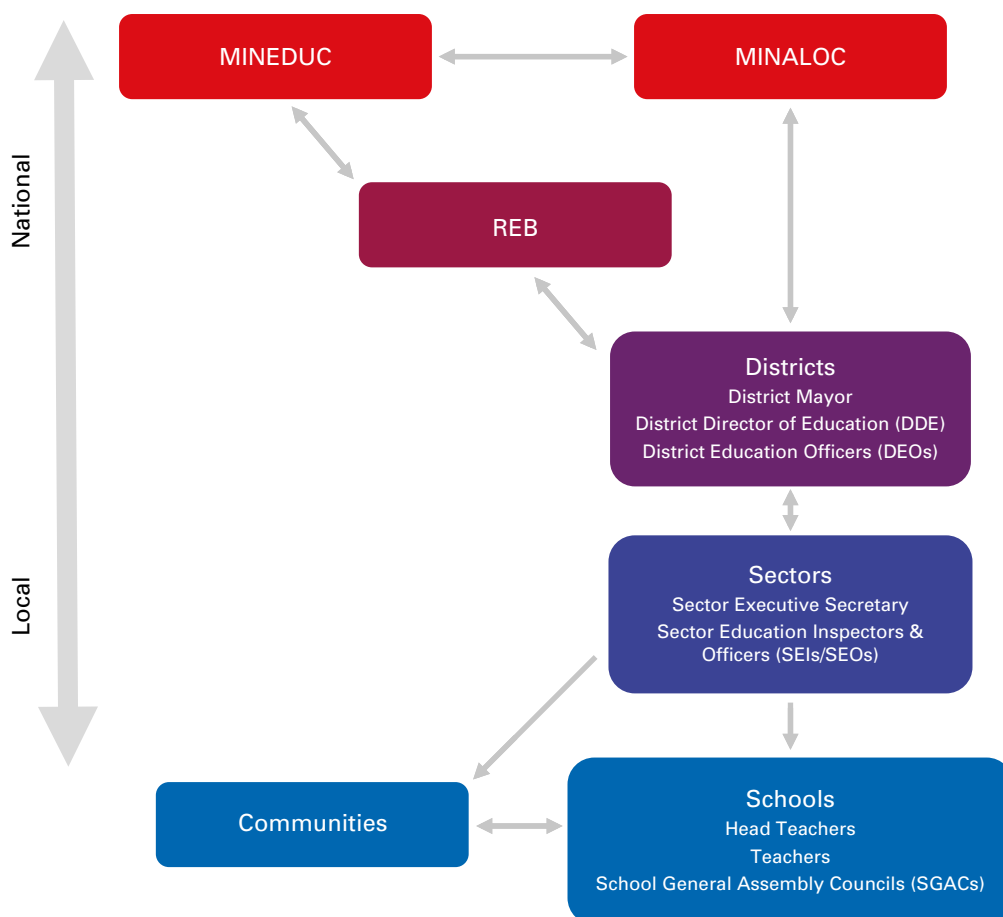
ICT in education and open and distance e-Learning.<sup>29</sup> Within MINEDUC, the most important actors are the Minister of Education, the Minister of State in Charge of Primary and Secondary Education, and the Permanent Secretary. Several other ministries also play an important role in primary education provision and development: The Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN) oversees financial planning and the execution of the budget. The Ministry of Public Service and Labour (MIFOTRA) sets the salary as well as the conditions of service for all civil servants, including teachers. The Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) oversees the decentralized entities of education, including all district administrations across the country.<sup>30</sup>

Districts and sectors play an essential role in policy implementation and share the responsibility of teacher recruitment jointly with MINEDUC. Each district administration has a District Director of Education (DDE) who manages several District Education Officers (DEOs). One of the DEOs is in charge of primary education,

others may be responsible for pre-primary or, secondary education, for TVET or infrastructure. In collaboration with DDEs and DEOs, district administrations have the task to establish a five-year District Education Development Plan and a Three-Year District Education Strategic Plan. They need to be aligned with national priorities as laid out in MINEDUC's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP). These plans are part of the broader five-year District Development Plan (DDP).

At local level, Sector Education Inspector (SEIs) report to the Sector Executive Secretary<sup>31</sup> and work with school leaders and community members. They work with head teacher, community leaders, and the School General Assembly Council (SGAC) on matters such as running a school and delivery of services. Finally, at the school-level, head teachers<sup>vi</sup> are responsible for managing and appraising teachers. They are also in charge of financial management and distribution of capitation grants at the school level. This task requires communication with the sector and district level.<sup>32</sup>

Figure 1: Governance of the basic education system in Rwanda



Source: Author's illustration based on analysis of Rwandan education policies and legislative documents

vi Head teachers are referred to in Rwandan law as 'Headmasters'.

## 2.3. Overview of primary education statistics, trends, and national strategies

The education sector has grown significantly since the implementation of universal primary education. According to the MINEDUC's 2018 data, Rwanda's net primary enrolment rate (NER) is 98.30 per cent. 2,503,705 students are enrolled. With girls representing 98.50 per cent and boys representing 98 per cent, enrolment is approximately gender equal.

The NER has increased nearly two percentage points (p.p.) compared to 2012, when the NER was 96.50 per cent.<sup>33</sup>

Although the number of primary school students increased by 71 per cent from 2000 to 2015, the number of teachers in the same period increased only by 46 per cent<sup>34</sup>. This suggests that Rwanda is suffering from a primary teacher shortage. Data on student-teacher ratios show that there were 54 primary students per teacher in the year 2000<sup>35</sup>. In 2018 the ratio stood at 56 students per teacher.<sup>36</sup> The student-classroom ratio is at 77 students to one classroom, and it has been slightly decreasing since 2012.<sup>37</sup> It is worth noting that in practice, these ratios may be even higher than reported due to teacher absenteeism.<sup>38</sup>

Dropout rates have decreased from 14.3 per cent in 2013 to 6.7 per cent in 2018. This represents progress toward inclusivity. However, in certain provinces the rates may differ. In the Northern and Western Provinces and in rural areas in general, drop-out rates are higher than the national average.<sup>39</sup>

Regarding student achievement, results from the 2016 Learning Achievement in Rwanda Schools (LARS)<sup>vii</sup>, which measures literacy and numeracy, show that there is scope for improvement. Students in primary level 2 had an average score of 33 per cent in numeracy and 45 per cent in literacy.<sup>40</sup> Dropout rates and low performance create another challenge: Completion rates in Rwanda are lower than enrolment rates. The completion rate was 65.20 per cent in 2016, with 71.10 per cent of girls and 59.30 per cent of boys completing primary school. This rate has decreased since 2012, when it stood at 72.70 per cent.

Seen primarily through enrolment rates, there have been impressive improvements in access to primary school education in Rwanda. However, quality remains a challenge and top priority for the government. The number of primary school students with disabilities enrolled unfortunately decreased from 2014 to 2018, although MINEDUC has recently begun training initiatives around inclusive primary education.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, Rwanda hopes to increase its capacity in early child development and enrol more children in pre-primary school. It is aiming at an enrolment rate of 38 per cent by 2022/23. The current net enrolment rate stands at 20.80 per cent.

Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2013/14-2017/18 contained three overarching goals: expanding access to education at all levels, improving the quality of education and training, and strengthening the relevance of education and training to meet labour market demands.<sup>42</sup>

vii International student achievement measures are not available for Rwanda

The latest ESSP 2017/18-2022/23 is even more ambitious, containing nine strategic priorities for the education sector. The following six priorities are linked to primary education and relevant for this study:

1. Improving quality of learning outcomes;
2. Strengthening professional development as well as management of teachers;
3. Increasing access to education, ensuring that *all* children are enrolled in primary education;
4. Strengthening school infrastructure, which is necessary as the education system continues to grow;
5. Creating equitable opportunities for all children, specifically for girls and children with disabilities;
6. Improving governance and accountability within the education system itself.

Many of these strategies directly affect the teachers, who have challenging occupations. The ESSP 2017/18-2022/23 acknowledges the steep difficulties that teachers face. It points out that teachers spend an average of 6.5 hours per day teaching but they are paid much less than other civil servants.

The following section lays out existing teacher management policies.

## 2.4. Primary school teacher management policies

To become a primary school teacher in Rwanda, candidates must complete nine years of basic education and attend primary teacher training college (PTTC). PTTC consists of a three-year teacher training programme, the end of which a Primary Teaching Certificate is awarded.<sup>43</sup> Teachers hired before this requirement was in place, who therefore do not have this certificate are required to complete a pedagogical programme organised by MINEDUC. With this they can acquire a certificate in education by 2019.<sup>44</sup> In the future the requirement to become a teacher could increase to 12 years of basic education followed by teacher training, but this has not yet been implemented.<sup>45</sup> Teachers are hired by District Administrations for positions at public primary schools. These positions are filled by open competition.<sup>46</sup> In government -subsidised schools, teachers are selected jointly by the founder of the school and the government. The founder and the government also decide on details regarding salary, management, and possible dismissal of a teacher. Teachers at private primary schools are recruited and hired directly by the private schools.<sup>47</sup> Districts can transfer teachers in public and government-subsidized school from one district to another in which case transfer expenses are covered. A teacher can also request to be transferred. She or he can make such request to the district they are currently serving in.<sup>48</sup>

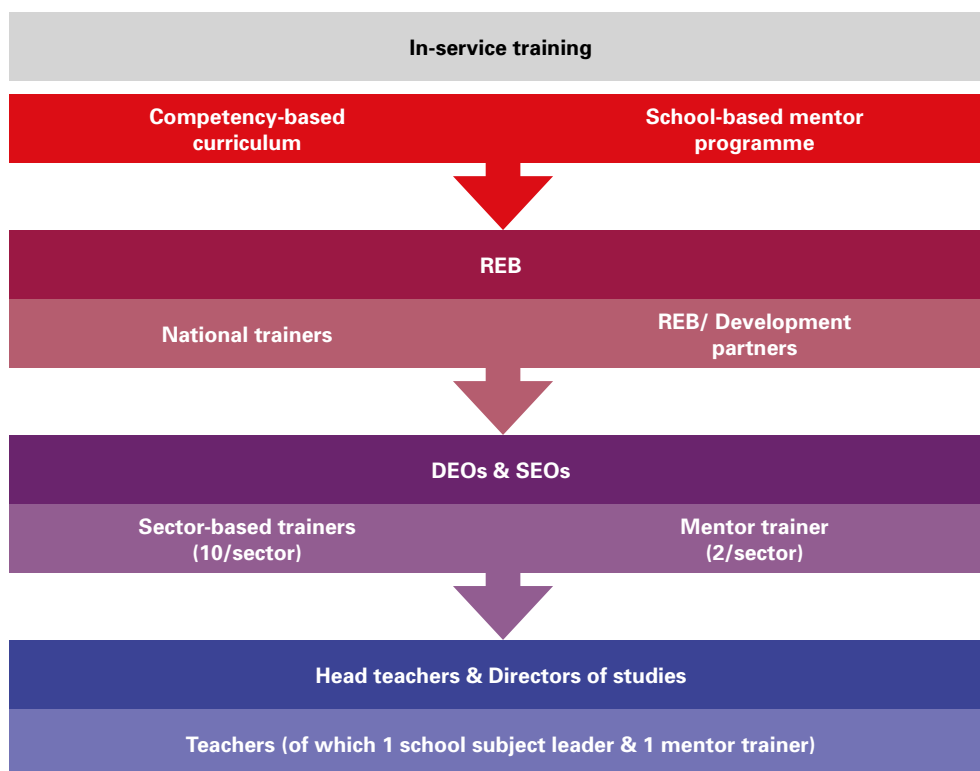
Teachers in Rwanda have been affected by several recent national policy changes. With the start of Nine Years Basic Education (9YBE) policy, teachers undertook double shifting. They take on a morning and afternoon shift with different students.<sup>49</sup> This policy was intended to increase the capacity of enrolment without having to scale up the number of teachers. Another change was the switch to English as the primary language of instruction for primary school students of the fourth year.<sup>50</sup> The most significant policy change is the move from a knowledge-based curriculum to a competence-based curriculum (CBC). Beginning of 2016, primary teachers were expected to implement CBC in P1 and P4; in 2017, CBC extended to P2 and P5; finally, in 2018 CBC extended to P3 and P6, marking complete transformation to CBC.<sup>51</sup>

The change in language of instruction and the shift to CBC required and still requires additional training. In-service training in Rwanda, or CPD, applies to all public and government -subsidised schools. The REB is responsible for coordinating activities and teacher training programmes.<sup>52</sup> One of the main aspects of CPD at the school level is the School Based Mentoring Programme (SBMP). It was launched in 2012 to improve English language skills and teaching methodology. Mentors for the SBMP were recruited from all over the

East African Community (EAC). Due to recruitment challenges, though, REB was not able to place mentors in all primary schools.<sup>53</sup> In 2016, the SBMP was redesigned to cover both, English language training and CBC training (see Figure 2).

School Based Mentors (SBMs) are now selected directly from schools, and they receive training which cascades from the REB to Mentor Trainers at the district level. The Mentors are supervised by the head teachers and half of their timetable is meant to be allocated to mentoring. At the same time, all teachers on CBC received a training by the end of 2017.<sup>54</sup> The REB trains National Trainers (NTs), who subsequently train 10 Sector-Based Trainers (SBTs) per sector. Teachers in the sector are assigned to a group based on the subject and level they teach, and they receive a series of training sessions. The REB recommends that teachers have at least three periods (or the equivalent of 120 minutes) of training per week. Head teachers must ensure that these trainings take place. In the area of in-service training, the education system has received support from international development partners. In June 2017, DFID began the Building Learning Foundations (BLF) programme, which has a three-pronged focus on teacher development, leadership for learning, and system strengthening.<sup>55</sup> Teacher development in BLF has focused on English and mathematics for P1-P3 teachers and students. Alongside REB, BLF is implemented by a consortium consisting of Education Development Trust, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), and British Council. USAID is also addressing in-service training gaps through the Soma Umenye (Read and Learn) programme. It focuses on improving early literacy in Kinyarwanda, which began in 2016 and is being implemented through 2021.<sup>56</sup>

Figure 2: Types of in-service training and their implementors



Source: Author's illustration based on REB & MINEDUC, 2017, Guideline for Sector: School-based CPD for CBC<sup>57</sup>

Decentralization had an influence on the management of schools and the monitoring of teachers. Head teachers are responsible for school management, which includes financially managing the capitation grant<sup>viii</sup>.

At the beginning of the school year, head teachers of public and government-subsidized schools inform their DEOs on the number of students enrolled. This information is passed on to the Ministry of Finance (MINECOFIN), which sends money to the schools on a quarterly basis. Head teachers are also responsible for ensuring that the school timetable is followed and, in case of teacher absence, for finding a replacement.<sup>58</sup> Head teachers of public schools are monitored by SEIs and DEOs (Honeyman, 2017). At government-subsidized schools, head teachers are managed similarly, although the owner of the school evaluates the head teacher before the SEI.<sup>59</sup> Schools are expected to have a School General Assembly Council (SGAC). The Assembly reports to the sector and district level, monitors and follows up on teacher behaviour and approves potential parent contributions to the school.<sup>60</sup> Within MINEDUC, the Department of Basic Education Quality and Standards (BEQAD) conducts inspections of schools, validating the quality of education including pedagogy as well as school construction.<sup>61</sup>

While teachers are monitored indirectly by the above actors, they are first and foremost evaluated by head teachers. These evaluations determine bonuses or horizontal promotion in public and government-subsidized schools.<sup>62</sup> Teachers of these schools are public servants and their pay is determined nationally (see Table 2).<sup>63</sup>

Teachers at private schools are paid by the school via student school fees. Public and government-subsidized school teachers have performance contracts. As of 2016, those who had been teaching for three years were eligible for a financial promotion, also referred to as horizontal promotion. For performance of 70-79 per cent teachers are awarded a three per cent bonus on top of their salary; for performance of 80 per cent and higher, they receive a bonus of five per cent. Teachers with a performance less than 70 per cent do not obtain an annual bonus, and those with a performance score less than 60 per cent are removed from their position. All primary and secondary teachers were given a 10 per cent salary increase beginning in March 2019.<sup>64</sup>

Regarding non-financial benefits, teachers are entitled to 30 days annual leave, to be taken during school holidays. Other forms of leave include incidental leave, maternity leave, sick leave or authorized absence.<sup>65</sup> Teachers receive medical benefits and are required to make a monthly contribution to *La Rwanda d'Assurance Maladie* (RAMA) at a rate determined by the government.<sup>66</sup> Teachers have an account at the Mwalimu Saving and Credit Cooperative (Sacco) — established in 2006 and licensed by the National Bank of Rwanda. This bank is specifically for teachers with the goal to facilitate savings and loans. There are 30 branches total, one in each district.<sup>67</sup> Finally, through REB's Girinka Mwarimu Project ('One Cow per Teacher'), some high-performing teachers have received a cow. Those selected at the sector level for their educational, social, or economic successes subsequently compete at the district level, which selects 15 teachers to award.<sup>68</sup> In addition to cows, teachers can receive laptops, motorbikes and tuition fees for their children. MINEDUC aimed to reach 5 per cent of teachers with this incentive programme by 2017/18.<sup>69</sup>

Each public and government-subsidized schools is supposed to have a disciplinary committee consisting of the head teacher, two elected teachers, and two parents (one woman and one man). Teachers can legally appeal decisions made by the disciplinary committee.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, head teachers, SEIs, DEOs, as well as national inspectors can report problems with teachers. Reports are made to the District Mayor, who has the power to suspend or terminate a contract of a teacher.<sup>71</sup> Absence for a non-specific period constitutes legal grounds for termination of contract.<sup>72</sup>

viii The capitation grant replaced school fees in Rwanda at both public and government-subsidized schools. 4,250 Rwf are given per student, per year, although this amount is split into quarterly payments. 50 per cent of the capitation grant should be spent on the functioning of the schools, 35 per cent for infrastructure/sanitation and 15 per cent for teacher training.

Table 2: Teachers' and head teachers' job levels/grades and corresponding gross salaries (Rwandan franc)<sup>ix</sup>

Qualification	Level/Grade	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIV	XV	XI
A0 Teacher	6	206,816	237,838	261,622	287,784	316,563	348,219	383,041	421,345	463,480	509,828	560,811	678,581	746,439	821,083
A1 Teacher	8	157,880	181,562	199,718	219,690	241,659	265,825	292,407	321,648	353,813	389,194	428,114	518,018	569,819	626,801
A2 Teacher	10	56,511	64,988	71,486	78,635	86,499	95,148	104,663	115,130	126,643	139,307	153,237	185,417	203,959	224,355
A3 Teacher	10	56,511	64,988	71,486	78,635	86,499	95,148	104,663	115,130	126,643	139,307	153,237	185,417	203,959	224,355
A0 Head-master	4	327,622	376,765	414,442	455,886	501,475	551,622	606,784	667,463	734,209	807,630	888,393	1,074,955	1,182,451	1,300,696
A1 Head-master	6	243,721	280,279	308,307	339,138	373,052	410,357	451,392	496,532	546,185	600,803	660,884	799,669	879,636	967,600
A2 Head-master	9	109,667	126,117	138,729	152,602	167,862	184,648	203,113	223,424	245,766	270,343	297,377	359,827	395,809	435,390

Source: Government of Rwanda Official Gazette no. 48 of 28.11.2016 <sup>73</sup>

ix These salaries were in effect when this study was conducted. This table does not capture the 10 per cent salary increase for primary and secondary teachers, effective March 2019.



## 2.5. Existing literature on teacher absenteeism in Rwanda

In March 2018, *The New Times* in Rwanda reported that 32 teachers in Nyagatare District in the Eastern Province were accused of professional misconduct. Absenteeism was one of the accusations. Yet, little is known about the prevalence or determinants of teacher absenteeism in Rwanda. This section provides a review of the literature on teacher absenteeism in Rwanda to date and highlights remaining gaps in the literature.

### Magnitude and drivers of teacher absenteeism

According to a 2003 survey in Rwanda, 20 per cent of head teachers reported that absenteeism was a problem and 56 per cent of head teachers reported that it sometimes was a problem.<sup>74</sup> A similar study in 2008 looked at perceptions of absenteeism rates by type of school. It found that 87 per cent of teachers from private schools stated that absenteeism was not a problem at their school. Sixty per cent of teachers in government schools and 61 per cent in government-subsidized schools stated that absenteeism was not a problem.<sup>75</sup> A similar trend was noted in regards to arriving on time: 100 per cent of teachers in private schools said that teachers at their school arrived at work on time compared to 92 per cent and 90 per cent of teachers in government and government-subsidized schools (see *Table 3*).

Table 3: Teacher response to survey questions by primary school governance type

Survey question	Government schools	Government-subsidized schools	Private schools
Teacher absenteeism is not a problem at my school	60%	61%	87%
Teachers at my school come to work on time	92%	90%	100%

Source: Bennell and Ntagaramba, 2008<sup>76</sup>

Table 4: Teacher absenteeism rates at primary schools in October 2008 by reason and school governance type

Reason for absence	Government schools	Government-subsidized schools	Private schools	Total
Sick	2.3%	2.3%	6.1%	10.7%
Training	0.3%	1%	0.2%	1.5%
Official duties	1.9%	1%	0.5%	3.4%
Funeral attendance	0.7%	0.4%	0.3%	1.4%
Child sick	0.8%	0.6%	0.6%	2%
Leave	1.7%	1.4%	4.4%	7.5%
Other	1.1%	0.1%	0.2%	1.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8.8%</b>	<b>6.8%</b>	<b>12.3%</b>	

Source: Bennell and Ntagaramba, 2008<sup>77</sup>

The same study found that in the month of October 2008, 8.8 per cent of teachers were absent from government schools, 6.8 per cent from government-subsidized schools and 12.3 per cent from private schools for various reasons (see Table 4). Sickness accounted for the highest rate of absenteeism in all types of schools, followed by leave, official duties and child sickness. Other researchers had similar results and found that the most common determinants of absence from school were illness, family reasons and funeral attendance.<sup>78</sup> None of these studies have been replicated or repeated, making it impossible to understand trends of absenteeism over the last two decades.

The literature mentions many factors, which could affect absenteeism. These studies provide insight into the drivers of teacher absenteeism in Rwanda, although most findings do not focus on teacher absenteeism specifically. Rather, absenteeism is a topic which emerges peripherally, and the absenteeism is typically understood as being absent from school only. Regarding health, some scholars have focused on how HIV/AIDS could have a detrimental impact on the education sector across sub-Saharan Africa, although there is no robust data on HIV/AIDS prevalence among teachers in Rwanda.<sup>79</sup> It has been documented that the need to look for part-time work to supplement teacher income can lead to absence and has also a negative effect on the time spent planning lessons or marking student work.<sup>80</sup> Considering that women often have greater domestic and agricultural duties than men, a perception among certain teachers persists that gender may play a role in absenteeism.<sup>81</sup> The literature, however, is lacking in nation-wide statistics on absenteeism disaggregated by sex. No studies have so far explored whether there are gendered reasons for being absent.

Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) has conducted focus group discussions with teachers in Rwanda. The discussions revealed that a teacher with personal problems may be absent more often, and when present, may be distracted and therefore unable to fully concentrate on the objectives of the lessons.<sup>82</sup> One primary school teacher in the study stated that: "A happy teacher is punctual", suggesting that personal difficulties could also affect whether or not a teacher arrives on time.

Table 5: Perception on teacher absence, as reported by pupil and grade

Grade	Agree or strongly agree that teachers are often absent	Neutral or disagree that teachers are often absent
Primary 1	49.1%	50.9%
Primary 2	42.7%	57.3%
Primary 3	37.0%	63.0%
Primary 4	31.6%	68.4%
Primary 5	25.0%	75.0%
Primary 6	18.6%	81.5%

Source: MINEDUC and UNICEF Rwanda, 2017<sup>83</sup>

There are other factors that could affect teacher absenteeism. There are government plans to build one teachers' housing block per sector. The goal is to increase punctuality to work. This suggests a link between absenteeism and transportation cost, time or remoteness.<sup>84</sup> Transparency International Rwanda conducted a survey with parents in the PTA and teachers across 70 schools about the capitation grant funding from the government to all public and government-subsidized schools in Rwanda. Seventy-two per cent of parents and 63 per cent of teachers perceived that the capitation grant had contributed to reducing teacher absenteeism in the school. Meanwhile, 71 per cent of parents and 59 per cent of teachers observed that the grant had contributed to reducing teachers being late to school.<sup>85</sup> Parent involvement is also thought to increase teachers presence in schools.<sup>86</sup> A recent study from UNICEF Rwanda and MINEDUC found that absenteeism rates as reported by students, may be higher in lower levels of primary school (see *Table 5*). The study does not state whether students' understanding of unjustified absence may vary with students' age.

Finally, teachers have spoken of challenges while teaching. They have acknowledged that a lack of textbooks impedes their work. One primary school teacher in the Transparency International study stated: "[What I find difficult] is teaching many students whom I can't help enough during the lesson by repeating new works or by correcting their written exercises".<sup>87</sup> This suggests that high student teacher ratios could prevent teachers from teaching up to standard.

### Status of existing literature and gaps regarding teacher absenteeism in Rwanda

Much of the literature cited in this review focuses not on teacher absenteeism but on other topics such as intrinsic teacher motivation, for example.<sup>88</sup> Absenteeism emerges from the literature as a potential negative consequence of various factors, but these determinants of teacher absenteeism — and the way in which determinants interact — remain largely unexplored and underdiscussed.

It is important to note that there is no publicly available national data regarding the number of teachers who have been sanctioned or fired for absenteeism; regardless, such numbers would not necessarily capture the magnitude of absenteeism, as there exists a reluctance to report absenteeism.<sup>89</sup> The World Bank's Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs) on absenteeism do not currently include Rwanda. Overall, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding absenteeism in Rwanda, which this report intends to alleviate by focusing on the topic.

## Section 3: Research approach and methodology

### 3.1. Teacher absenteeism: a multidimensional concept

Policy makers and researchers have traditionally recognized one form of teacher absenteeism: absence of the teacher from school. Accordingly, in the past two decades, numerous programmes have been implemented globally to increase teacher school attendance to improve student learning.<sup>90</sup>

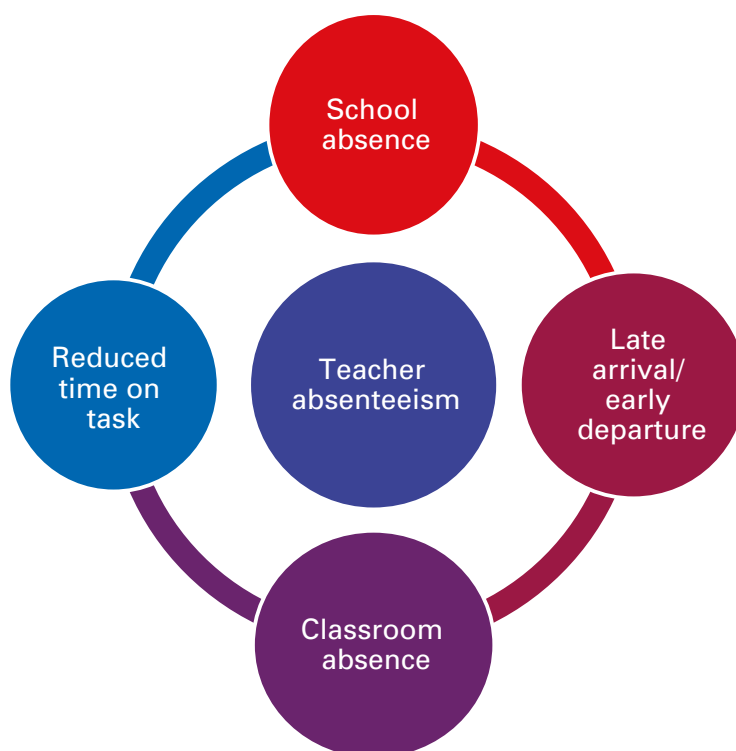
Several interventions aimed at increasing teacher school attendance, have been found to be successful — especially when they couple monitoring systems with rewards.<sup>91</sup> However, few studies have so far established an association between increased teacher school attendance and student achievements.<sup>92</sup> This is due to the fact that teacher attendance in school does not necessarily mean the teachers are actually in the classroom teaching. Nor does it necessarily mean they spend the required time on task.<sup>93</sup> Consequently, the relationship between teacher school attendance, motivation to teach, and time on task needs to be further analysed in order to better understand learning mechanisms and outcomes.

While the Time to Teach study does not focus explicitly on learning outcomes, in defining teacher absenteeism, the research team relied on the assumption that in order for learning to occur, a number of minimal conditions relating to the role of teachers in the learning process, need to be fulfilled. Specifically, teachers must be in school, in the classroom and actively teaching. This led to the development of a multi-dimensional concept for teacher absenteeism, illustrated in Figure 8. The concept is in line with contemporary understandings of absenteeism that look beyond school absence<sup>94</sup> and recognizes four distinct forms of teacher absence:

- 1) absence from school;
- 2) absence of punctuality including late arrival and/or early departure from school;
- 3) absence from the classroom while in school; and
- 4) reduced time-on-task (while in the classroom).

A multi-dimensional definition of teacher absenteeism has not been widely used in education sector analysis. Conventionally teacher-pupil ratio and share of qualified teachers have been used to represent educational inputs and human resources available for children. The implicit assumption was that employed teachers will be in school spending time for educational activities with students. A multi-dimensional definition of absenteeism can therefore help us classify and further examine the various obstacles to effective learning and establish causal links between these obstacles and specific types of teacher absence. Factors that hinder teachers from achieving any form of attendance can have direct effects on quality learning time for students. It is therefore imperative that the drivers of each type of absenteeism are identified and corresponding policies are designed to address the adverse effects of teacher absenteeism on learning.

Figure 3: The multi-dimensional concept of teacher absenteeism



### 3.2. Understanding teacher absenteeism from a system's perspective

The determinants of teacher absenteeism can be identified at various levels of the education system. It needs a systemic analytical framework to understand first, how factors within the education system combine to force teachers to be absent in various ways, and second, which policies can holistically address chronic teacher absences.

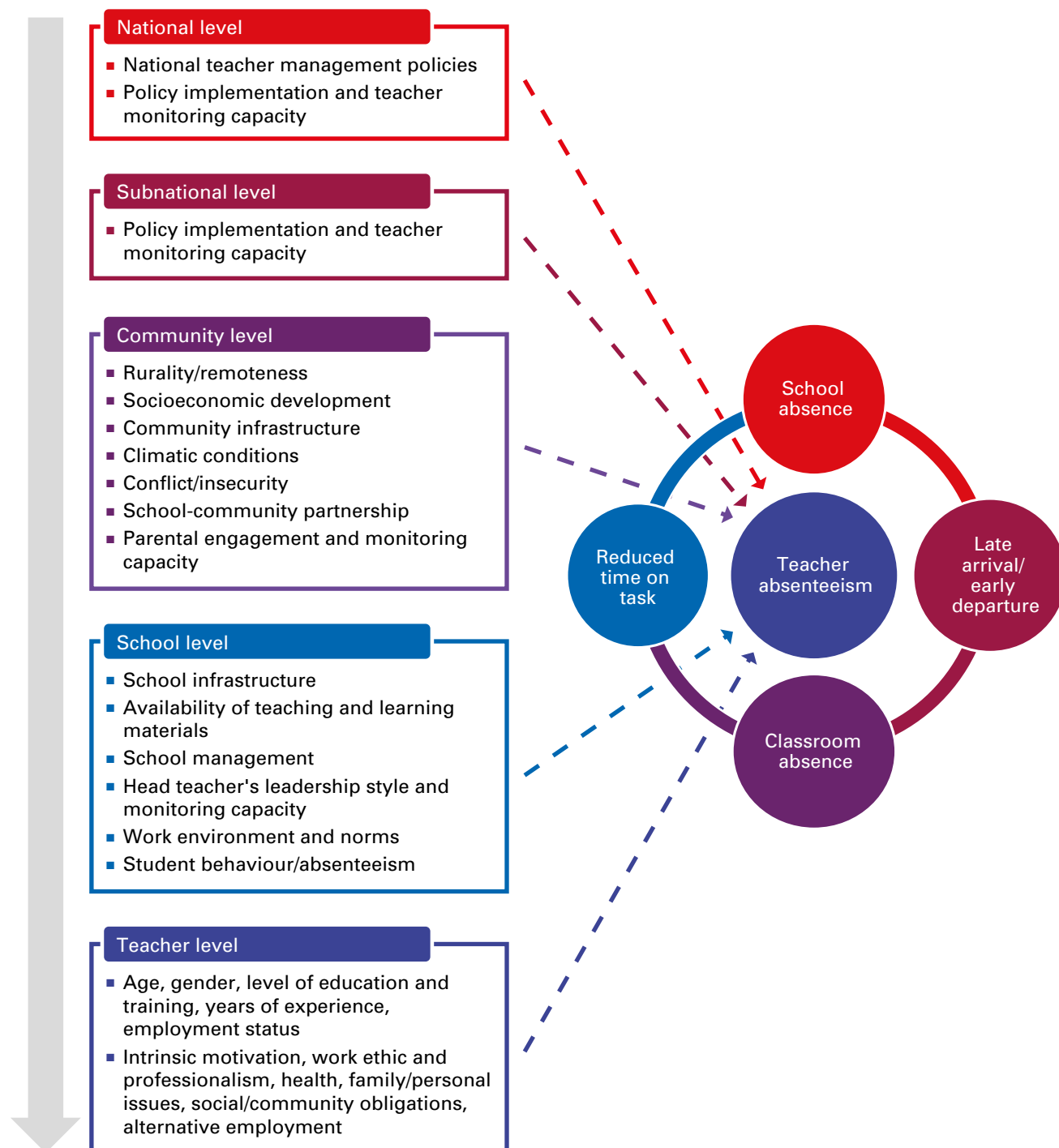
Based on a review of existing conceptual models of general employee absenteeism and the literature on teacher absenteeism, Guerrero et al. (2012–2013),<sup>95</sup> suggested three sets of factors affecting teacher attendance:

- 1) teacher-level variables,
- 2) school-level variables, and
- 3) community-level variables.

Their model considers two groups of teacher-level variables: teachers' demographic factors, such as age, gender and level of education, and teachers' school-related factors such as job satisfaction, opportunities for professional development, and work environment. School-level variables encompass organizational factors within the school such as work norms or the head teacher's leadership style. But they also include teachers' administrative workload. Community-level variables consist of remoteness, level of prosperity, and school-community partnerships.

The Time to Teach project adopts Guerrero et al.'s (2012–2013) explanatory model with an important modification that consists of adding two further groups of variables (see Figure 4). These variables operate on two additional levels of the education system, the 'national' and the 'sub-national'. These variables are included to measure the impact of national teacher management policies and sub-national policy implementation on the dimensions of teacher absenteeism.

Figure 4: The TTT explanatory model



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.*

### 3.3. Study implementation

In Rwanda, the Time to Teach study was implemented in consultation with MINEDUC and REB. It involved three complementary but separate processes (see *Figure 5*).

Figure 5: Stages of implementation



#### Sampling and instrument development

In November 2017, following a series of consultation meetings with national partners including MINEDUC and REB representatives, the research team developed a sampling strategy and designed the instruments for primary data collection.

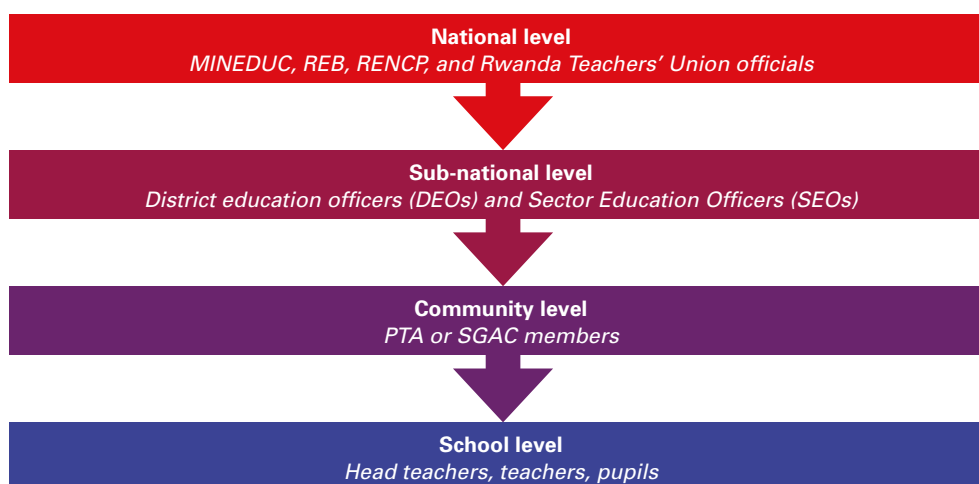
School and respondent selection involved purposive sampling techniques. The REB assisted with school selection, which was based on three criteria: location, community setting (rural/urban) and governance. In the end, 20 schools were selected across five provinces and 10 districts in Rwanda. The school selection is a mix of rural and urban schools; a mix of government (public and government-subsidized) and non-government (private) schools; and special needs/refugee-integrated schools. The list of schools can be seen in Table 6. The selected schools were assured complete confidentiality and their names are not mentioned in this report.

Table 6: TTT Schools visited in Rwanda

Province	Sector	Number of schools	Public urban	Public rural	Private urban	Private rural
Northern	Gakenke	2		1 (school inclusive of students with disabilities)	1	
	Rulindo	2	1	1		
Southern	Huye	2	1		1	
	Nyamagabe	2		2 (includes a refugee-integrated school)		
Eastern	Kirehe	2		2 (includes a refugee-integrated school)		
	Nyagatare	2	1		1	
Western	Ngororero	2		2		
	Nyabihu	2	1		1	
Kigali	Kicukiro	2	1		1	
	Nyarugenge	2	1	1 (school inclusive of students with disabilities)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>

In selecting respondents, the research team employed a number of criteria, such as the respondents' unique position within the education system, expert knowledge, and personal characteristics (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Study participants by level of analysis





At the national level, the study targeted representatives from MINEDUC, REB, Rwandan Education NGO Coordination Platform (RENCP), and the Rwanda Teachers' Union, whose portfolio was relevant to primary education and teacher management and monitoring. Respondents at the sub-national level included district and sector representatives, who were familiar with school governance and teacher evaluation processes. Community respondents had an intimate knowledge of the selected schools and school staff. In most cases they served on the schools' Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or School General Assembly Council (SGAC). In each selected school, the study targeted the head teacher (or in her/his absence the deputy head teacher/director of studies), three of the serving teachers, and seven students. Teachers were selected based on their individual characteristics; specifically, age, gender, and years of experience. The goal of diversifying the teacher selection was to capture a wide range of unique teacher experiences related to absenteeism, shaped not only by the teachers' contextual circumstances, but also by their individual traits. Student selection was based on age and gender. In each school, seven students from the last three years of primary school (P4–P6, typically aged 10–12<sup>x</sup>) participated in the study, in a balanced gender mix. To rule out selection bias and convenience sampling, student respondents were identified via lottery.

The UNICEF Innocenti team designed a range of qualitative and quantitative tools to collect data. They consisted of in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and a pen-and-paper survey. Dedicated tools were used for each respondent group to reflect the participants' expert knowledge and unique perspective. Some were modified for each type of school. The pen-and-paper survey was administered to all teachers serving in the selected primary schools to supplement and triangulate teacher interview data.<sup>xi</sup> Furthermore, an observation tool was designed to record enumerators' observations on teacher absenteeism, teacher-student interaction, and teacher working relations during visits to selected schools.

Data collection tools were shared with MINEDUC, REB and UNICEF Rwanda for feedback and review and were refined accordingly. The tools were then translated from English to Kinyarwanda and back translated into English to ensure accuracy and consistency. Before starting the fieldwork, the Innocenti team sought and received research ethics approval for the final version of the TTT instruments and data collection/management protocols from the Health Media Lab (HML) Research and Ethics Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Rwanda Education Board (REB). After approving the tools and protocols, the REB wrote a letter of introduction to the selected districts, officially introducing the study and seeking for collaboration and support.

All the TTT data collection tools that were administered in Rwanda can be found on the TTT website. Table 7 summarises the number of study participants in Rwanda and specifies the data collection tool administered to each respondent group.

x Students from P5 and P6 were prioritized.

xi The teacher survey was self-administered. The profile of surveyed teachers can be found in the Appendix.

Table 7: Number of study participants in Rwanda

Respondent type and data collection method	Number of respondents
Head teachers (IDIs)	20 <sup>xii</sup>
Teachers (IDIs)	60
Teachers (Pen-and-Paper survey)	302
Pupils (FGDs)	140
Community representatives (IDIs)	12
District Education Officers (IDIs)	5
Sector Education Officers (IDIs)	4
MINEDUC National Officials (IDIs)	1
REB National Officials (IDIs)	2
Rwanda Teachers' Union (IDIs)	1
RENCP Official (IDIs)	1
<b>Total number of respondents</b>	<b>548</b>

### Fieldwork preparation and data collection

A training of trainers took place at UNICEF ESARO offices (Nairobi, Kenya), on June 26 and 27, 2018. UNICEF Innocenti facilitated the training which involved a representative of MINEDUC/REB, a representative of UNICEF Rwanda, and the leader of the local data collection team. The training introduced partners to the Time to Teach study and its objectives, explained the sampling frame, the selection of the respondents, and study protocols as well as daily requisite field preparations/checklist and probable risks. Starting from August 15, 2018, a four-days training of field enumerators took place at UNICEF Rwanda offices. These sessions were meant to familiarize the data collection team with questionnaires, replicating the process employed for the training of trainers.

On August 22 the field team proceeded to pre-test the data collection tools in Kigali at two schools in the Kicukiro and Gasabo districts, which were not included in the study. The pre-testing assessed the duration and flow of instrument administration, and the respondents' cognitive understanding of questions and key concepts. The field team shared the details on the findings of the pre-testing and on suggested changes to the data collection tools with UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti before start of the main fieldwork. A debrief meeting followed where the research team familiarised themselves with the final data collection tools as approved by UNICEF. During this meeting, the data collection teams were issued with all the necessary study materials.

The data collection began on August 23, 2018 with two data collection teams, each composed of a team leader and four to six team members. Each team was allocated one day per school to hold interviews with teachers, community leaders, district and sector officers, to undertake focus group discussions with pupils, and to conduct an observation in each school. Fieldwork at schools lasted ten days in total and was completed on September 5, 2018. Additional days were allowed for interviewing national-level officials.

xii Two Directors of Study (Dos) and one Deputy Head Teacher filled in for three Head Teachers who were not available.

## Data analysis

### *Qualitative data*

The multi-faceted data generation strategy employed in Rwanda facilitated the collection of a large amount of rich, qualitative evidence, which ensured saturation and triangulation. The 126 interviews and FGDs that were conducted with seven different education system actors, were typically one hour in duration, and were transcribed word-for-word. The research team employed Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) to analyse and interpret this data. While content analysis is a broad methodology that can be applied in various ways, the approach adopted to draft this report is closer to the interpretive analysis of latent content with the use of a codebook that comes from the deductive reading of existing literature and the inductive reading of the transcripts.<sup>96</sup> Coding was done manually, and assisted the organization of data into themes, and thereafter the analysis of the data with the use of frequency measurement and interpretive methods.

### *Quantitative data*

The 302 pen-to-paper teacher surveys from the 20 schools were cleaned and compiled. Information that could identify participants was removed. Tests were run to correlate teachers' responses with qualitative findings, to compare responses, and to identify diversions or similarities. The main goal of the quantitative data analysis was to enrich the IDI and FGD data and to provide further insights, while highlighting variations between regions and school types.

## 3.4. Limitations and challenges

TTT Rwanda is not free of methodological limitations, like all studies relying on self-reported data and conducted under time and budget constraints. The three most significant challenges that emerged during data collection are presented below along with mitigation strategies employed to ensure accurate data interpretation and minimise impact on findings and conclusions.

### **3.4.1. Response bias**

Surveyors were trained to communicate the objectives of the study in a non-threatening manner and clarify any misconceptions regarding implications of voluntary participation. Surveyors also highlighted the principles of anonymity and confidentiality underpinning data collection and usage, stressing the right of participants to revoke consent and demand their testimonies disregarded and destroyed. Response bias may have been a significant challenge as absenteeism is a taboo subject. In some contexts, participants may have perceived the study as inquisitive or potentially threatening to their employment status. Under these conditions, three types of response bias seem likely:

- 1) selective memory, i.e. remembering or not remembering experiences or events;
- 2) telescoping, i.e. recalling events that occurred at one time as if they occurred at another time; and
- 3) downplaying, i.e. representing outcomes or events as less significant than is suggested from other data.

These potential limitations have been taken into consideration when interpreting data. Systematic data triangulation was also undertaken across multiple sources to ensure the relevance and reliability of findings.

### 3.4.2. Selection bias

Selection bias may have also been an issue. The selection of interviewed teachers was based on a set of pre-determined criteria and was performed randomly among teachers sharing the same characteristics. Nevertheless, it was limited to the teachers who were in school on the day of the visit. Additionally, the teacher survey was only administered to present teachers. This means that some of the frequently absent teachers may not have been interviewed or surveyed. To pre-empt this problem, none of the school visits happened unannounced and teachers were informed well in advance. However, this does not exclude the possibility of built-in bias among those who eventually participated in the study.

### 3.4.3. Representativeness of survey data

The research team recognizes that due to the small size of the TTT survey (N=302) it is difficult to draw statistically significant conclusions, make general claims and ensure the internal and external validity of quantitative findings. The TTT survey data can only provide a snapshot of the issues surrounding teacher absenteeism in selected schools rather than a comprehensive view of the situation across all schools in Rwanda. For this reason, most of the findings reported in subsequent chapters depend on the systematic analysis of qualitative data for which saturation has been achieved.

## Section 4: Findings and analysis

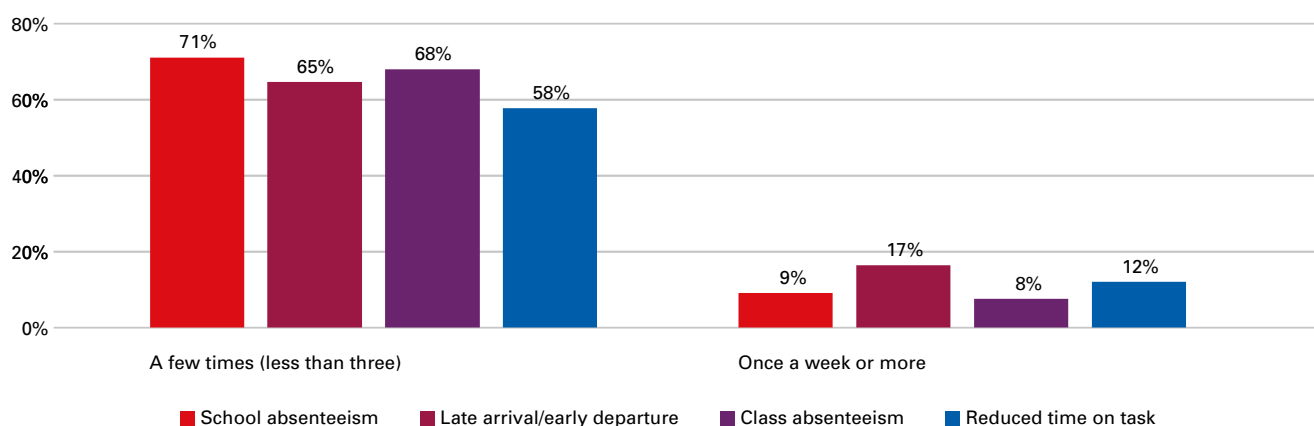
### 4.1. A snapshot of teacher absenteeism determinants in Rwanda

This study is concerned with four forms of teacher absenteeism, as presented in the analytical framework in Section 3 (Research Approach and Methodology). In the Time to Teach survey, teachers were enquired about the frequency with which they have engaged in each form of absenteeism since the start of the school year.<sup>xiii</sup>

The majority of respondents reported having been absent from school and class, and not teaching while in the classroom, less than three times. Self-reported frequencies were very similar when disaggregated. Teachers serving in rural and public schools were slightly more likely to miss a scheduled class than those in urban and private schools.

The evidence is much more scattered for teacher punctuality. Seventeen per cent of teachers reported arriving to school late or leaving from school early frequently, i.e. once a week or more. Meanwhile 12 per cent of the surveyed teachers reported reduced time on task at least once a week. The rate is higher for female teachers (14 per cent) than male teachers (10 per cent).

Figure 7: Self-reported frequency of various forms of teacher absenteeism (since the start of the school year)



Teachers were also questioned about reasons for each form of teacher absenteeism and asked to select up to three responses as to what keeps them from school, causes them to be late, and so on. This data provides a snapshot into reasons for teacher absenteeism, and figures presented herein will be referred to throughout Section 4. The figures created from this data, only capture part of the picture. Interviews with head teachers, teacher, students, and government officials complemented this data with a contextual understanding of the determinants of teacher absenteeism in Rwanda.

<sup>xiii</sup> In Rwanda, the school year runs from January to November. Data for the TTT study was collected in August-September 2018, eight months after the start of the school year.

Beginning in Section 4.2, analysis and findings are subsequently presented by individual levels of the education system. It starts at the national level (4.2), descending to the sub-national level (4.3), and subsequently to the community (4.4), school (4.5), and teacher level (4.6). Findings are presented in this order to align with the explanatory framework presented in Section 3, which considers how determinants of teacher absenteeism originate or manifest at various levels of the education system. Breaking down findings into levels enables a detailed analysis, which paves the way to holistic systemic analysis (see Section 5) as well as actionable policy recommendations (see Section 6).

Figure 8: Primary reasons which cause absence from school, according to surveyed teachers

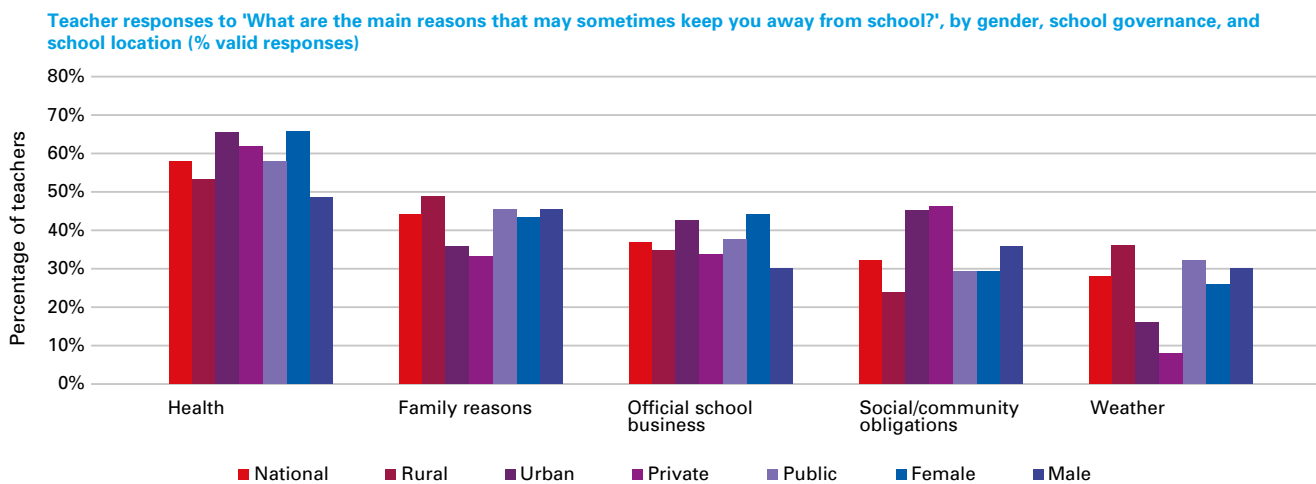


Figure 9: Primary reasons which cause late arrival/early departure, according to surveyed teachers

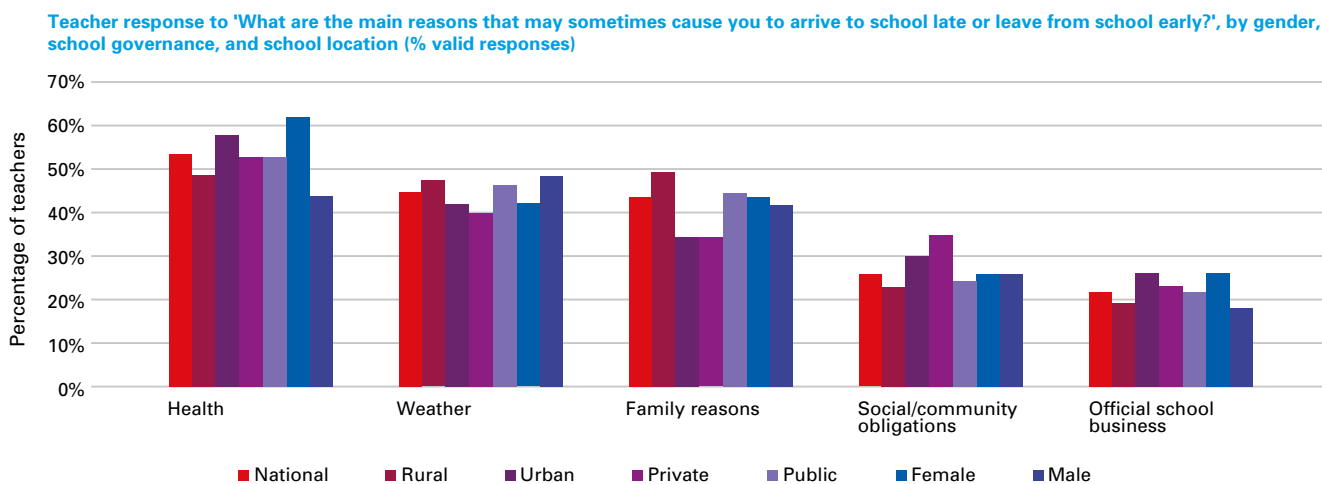


Figure 10: Primary reasons which kept teachers outside of the classroom, according to surveyed teachers

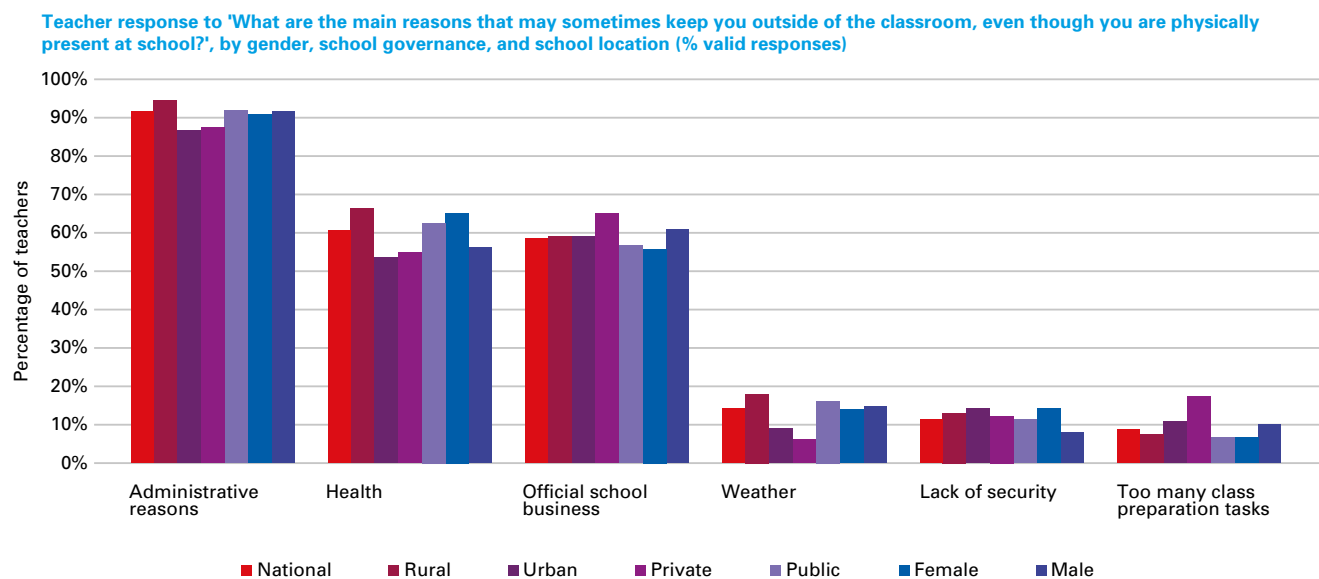
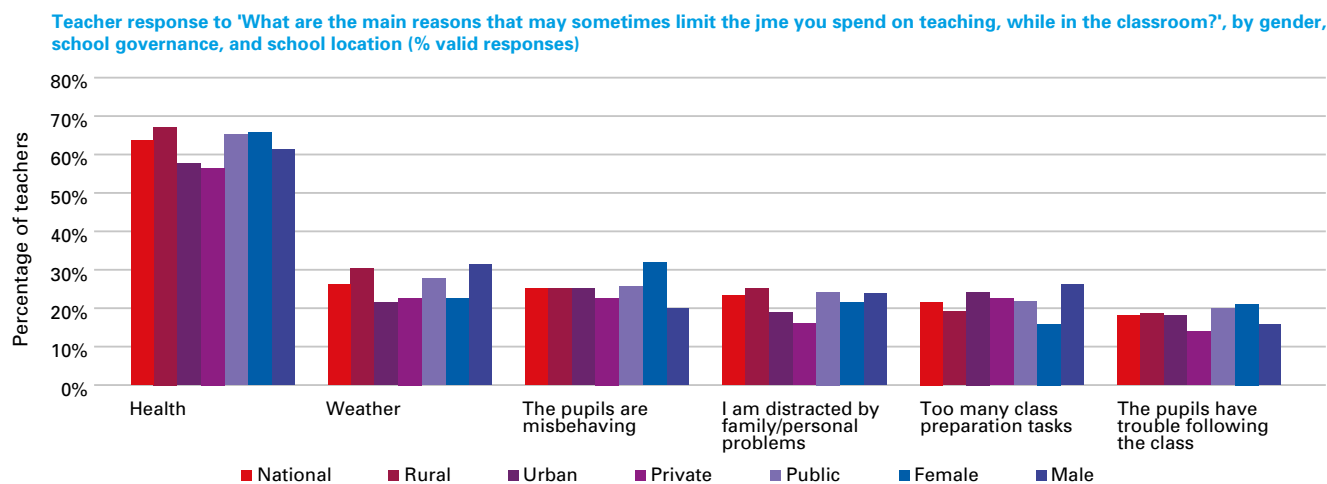


Figure 11: Primary reasons which limit the time spent teaching while in the classroom, according to teachers



## 4.2. National-level determinants of teacher absenteeism

In the interviews, National-level officials usually described Rwanda's education system as holistic, contextualising teacher absenteeism within the country's educational policy landscape. While most stakeholders spoke positively about education policies, many were able to critique recent policy implementation. For example, they expressed that new curriculum policies and the difficulties with their implementation have created a challenging environment for teachers across the country. They also acknowledged that low salaries remain a challenge for teachers and could affect teacher absenteeism negatively.<sup>xiv</sup> Other stakeholders, including community representatives, head teachers, and teachers, welcomed certain policies, particularly the recent introduction of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Many of the same respondents spoke less positively about the implementation of new curriculum and various in-service trainings. They viewed them as insufficient and contributing to teacher absenteeism. While all lamented the low salaries of teachers, opinions were mixed regarding various incentive schemes to increase teacher welfare. Among the many topics arising in the interviews, the following issues were specifically linked to different types of teacher absenteeism and will be discussed in detail in this section:

- Recent curriculum implementation coupled with insufficient in-service training jeopardizes teachers' ability to learn new pedagogical content knowledge and effectively use teaching time.
- remuneration and incentives for teachers are essential in raising teacher motivation, although certain forms of incentives which encourage activities outside of teaching, may result in increased risk of teacher absenteeism.
- there exists tension between national and sub-national monitoring of schools. This may impede the effective monitoring of various types of absenteeism.
- Existing national strategic priorities on quality education could play a key role in reducing teacher absenteeism in the future.

CBC helped teachers discover that all pupils have a right to knowledge, that they can discover by themselves. Before the CBC programme, a teacher delivered a lesson and afterwards gave a test or questions; the pupil who gave correct response was considered the one who understood the lesson. But now all pupils have to participate in groups to properly discover, then when the teacher gives a lesson the pupils, they are able to understand something. That is one good action taken by the Ministry of Education.

– Head teacher, rural public school, Eastern Province

### 4.2.1. Curriculum change and in-service training

Most respondents described CBC as a national policy, which has significantly changed their day-to-day lives at school. In the majority, head teachers and teachers spoke positively about CBC, often stating that rather than being centred on teaching and evaluation exclusively, it encourages students to think innovatively. They emphasised that the focus has shifted from teachers to students and that student participation is more highly valued now. Nevertheless, stakeholders also shared several challenges surrounding the curriculum's implementation. First, teachers said that they are not yet fully acquainted with the new curriculum. As a result, it was difficult to execute the curriculum as designed. Some teachers from various provinces said that the 40-minute class period duration were not enough for CBC and that as a result, they taught in a hurry and that students did therefore not comprehend the material well. Some other teachers chose not to rush through curriculum due to time constraints but rather make it up later. A teacher from a rural public school in the Western Province, said that teachers and students came to school on Saturdays to finish curriculum that was not completed on the weekdays. The teacher noted that not all students were able to attend, suggesting that not all students completed the lessons.

<sup>xiv</sup> Primary teacher salaries have since been increased by 10 per cent across the board, effective March 2019.



Teachers did not usually elaborate on why they are not able to finish CBC. However, stakeholders across various levels of the education system discussed other challenges which provide additional context to the situation. Most of them expressed that CBC required many textbooks, and that for many years, the government has not provided all of them at the beginning of the school year or term. In one case, a SEI from the Western Province noted that CBC textbooks arrived at the end of the school year in which they were intended to be used. The lack of textbook provision resulted in a number of other challenges: teachers said they started CBC late in the school year and/or that they did not finish it. They noted that this negatively affects students' exam results, or that they even integrated old aspects of the curriculum into the new curriculum. For teachers who had received textbooks on time, they lamented the quality of the materials. They stated that chapters were missing. These testimonies were corroborated by sub-national officials.

The lack of CBC teaching materials appears to affect both public and private schools across all provinces of Rwanda. A teacher at an urban private school in the Northern Province, explained that the government did not provide them with textbooks as they did with public and government-subsidized schools. They subsequently struggled to purchase the textbooks because they were not available on the market. Overall, data suggests that at both, public and private schools, teachers feel they are left on their own to implement CBC in spite the lack of materials. A SEI from the Southern Province, stated that "teachers are always able to find their own solution to the problem". He suggested that districts were limited in how they could help with this challenge and that teachers were expected to ensure quality teaching without the necessary tools.

In addition to the topic of curriculum, many respondents talked about in-service training as a key component to curriculum implementation. Teachers described their CBC training in different ways. While some felt that they had received enough training, most teachers did not. Some teachers explained the 'training of trainers' system, whereby only some teachers received direct training and then cascaded the training to teachers at their schools. In general, teachers spoke negatively about this training mechanism. They perceived the amount and duration of the training as insufficient. National and sub-national-level respondents conceded that teachers had not received enough training on CBC. One DEO from the Western Province said that the 'training of trainers' system did not give the expected results. In summary: while head teachers and teachers positively received the shift to CBC with regard to content, they viewed the implementation, including training, negatively. Teachers discussed various **consequences** of not having proper CBC learning materials and in-service training. This **included reduced teaching time and inability to complete the curriculum as stipulated.**

Not having textbooks in time means we teach without proper guidance, and when the textbooks come, we find that we missed important topics in the book. So, we end up going back to cover those topics. This brings a change that is not good for teachers or pupils. We do not cover the curriculum in the stated period. Also, the issue of harmonizing the old system and the new system of CBC somehow does not overlap well. As a teacher I will include topics that are in the old system but were skipped by CBC curriculum.

– Teacher, rural public school, Northern Province

All stakeholders, from teachers up to national-level actors, noted that they appreciated the student-focused approach of CBC. Implementation challenges regarding the curriculum and training, however, have negatively affected the impact of curriculum changes:

[...] the curriculum was launched before the books became available. As a result, it took a long time for teachers to adapt to that curriculum. In my opinion the introduction of the competence-based curriculum and training of teachers on that curriculum were less successfully implemented. Teachers didn't receive enough training; therefore, they are still challenged due to that failed implementation."

– Chairperson, Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform

Initially, we mobilized teachers and had them take three-week crash courses of English language, but this proved inefficient and insufficient. So currently we have adopted a strategy of employing mentors. English language proficient mentors are placed in schools, and after normal school hours, they teach English language to other teachers. This is still a work-in-progress, so we don't have any measure of its success.

– MINEDUC Official

We get training opportunities. We recently got Soma Umenye training, and English and math trainings...the Soma Umenye system, which helps students to learn to read, is a success because it works from all sides: students, parents, and teachers, in a way that when children go back home, their parents will continue to help them in reading so that they keep on getting better in reading.

– Teacher, urban public school, Northern Province

Discussion of in-service training was not limited to CBC. In majority, the teachers discussed English language training as well. As with CBC, many teachers accepted the switch to English as the official language of instruction and saw potential benefits to it. However, most teachers were not satisfied with the level of English language training they had received (discussed more in Section 4.5). The teachers felt the intensive training was too short, and that ongoing training was not suited to the teachers' busy schedules. Qualitative data illustrates that there is difficulty reconciling busy teaching timetables<sup>xv</sup> with all ongoing professional developments. Teachers described that due to language training, they were sometimes absent from school or they were in school but not in class, as they had to attend a training at school.<sup>xvi</sup> Certain schools mitigated these forms of absenteeism by organising trainings on the weekend or after school. But teachers said that they were not compensated for these additional working hours.

CBC and English language trainings were the main trainings discussed by many of the respondents. Some teachers, however, mentioned a number of other trainings, including trainings on ICT and refugee integration. This was provided on behalf of education partners such as UNHCR and Handicap International. Several stakeholders positively mentioned in-service training supported by international partners. This included the BLF programme focusing on English and mathematics of the Soma Umenye programme, focusing on early literacy. Overall, teachers believed continuous training is essential to keep up with the evolving policy landscape, especially with regard to curriculum and language.

#### 4.2.2. Teacher remuneration and incentives

Throughout interviews, **stakeholders consistently drew links between low teacher salaries and poor motivation of teachers.** Indeed, the teacher survey shows notable salary disparities between women and men, rural and urban schools, as well as public and private schools (see Figure 12). National-level officials often spoke

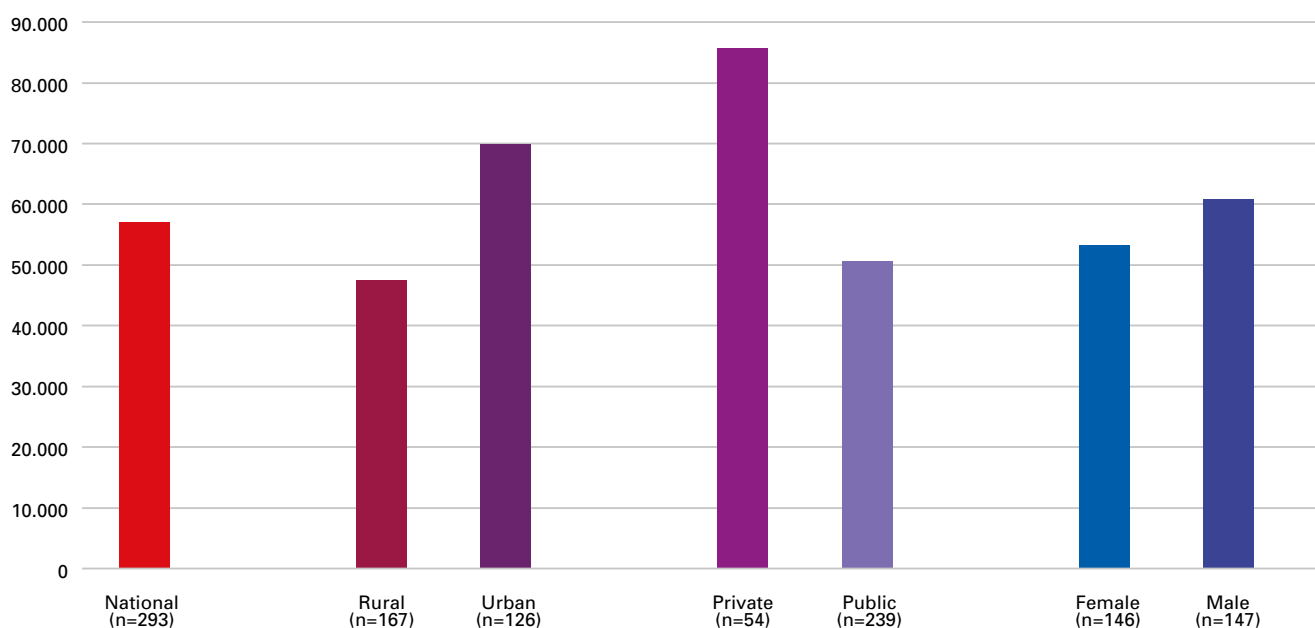
of salaries within the context of budget constraints. Head teacher and teachers described the impact that salaries have on teachers' welfare. As Section 4.5 elaborates, many teachers are not able to meet their basic needs. This leads them to come to school late or affects their ability to teach. Figure 12 suggests that public school teachers may be most vulnerable, with rural teachers and women teachers being the most vulnerable. The salaries of women and rural teachers were lower compared to that of men and urban-school teachers, even when taking into account education level (secondary, vocational, or university) and number of years of experience.<sup>xvii</sup> The teacher-level section also shows that some teachers must engage in income-generating activities in addition to teaching. This can lead to absence from school as well as lateness or leaving early. Salaries appeared less problematic in private schools where teachers' salaries are paid by student tuition and are typically higher than salaries of public-school teachers and at public or government-subsidized schools. Here teachers receive bonuses or one-off financial contributions from parents or from the PTA (discussed more in Section 4.3 regarding the community-level determinants of teacher absenteeism).

xv According to MINEDUC, public-school teachers teach for approximately 6.5 hours per day.

xvi The section 'Teacher-level determinants of teacher absenteeism' discusses linguistic challenges in more depth.

xvii This held true for surveyed teachers with 6-15 years of experience and teachers with 16+ years of experience. For teachers with <1-5 years of experience, female teachers had higher salaries.

Figure 12: Average annual teacher salaries of surveyed teachers, by gender, school governance, and location



The Ministry of Education has embarked on a number of policies as to improve the welfare of public-school teachers. They include microfinancing schemes for teachers, bonuses from performance contracts and horizontal promotion, and awarding the best performing teachers with prizes. While many teachers did not have a strong understanding of national-level government policies in general, they were able to speak knowledgeably about various incentive schemes.

Almost all teachers in the study refer to *Mwalimu Sacco*, the Teachers' Cooperative Savings and Credit through which most teachers receive their salaries. They can also receive low-interest loans there. National and sub-national officials stated that teachers are able to receive loans at an 11 per cent interest rate, lower than commercial rates of 18–20 per cent in Rwanda). Some teachers spoke positively about *Mwalimu Sacco*, stating that it has lifted teachers out of poverty, allowed them to purchase houses, and increased their motivation. Other respondents, however, stated that it has not been helpful in raising the welfare of teachers. A teacher at a rural public school in Southern Province called it "a drop in the ocean". Stakeholders at various levels—including teachers and national-level respondents governance, and location criticised these loans, which are intended for conducting small-scale business. They stated that they have detracted from teachers' primary duties or led teachers to abandon their teaching career altogether, which led to either short- or long-term absenteeism.

I would not say it like this if I was talking to a Minister or any other high ranking official but since you are researchers, I can tell you that teachers are bitter or they are not happy with their job because of the small salary....Since parents here cannot give incentives due to low capacity, teachers in this area do their job because they are pushed or because they depend on the small salary.

– Head Teacher, rural public school, Kigali City

Mwalimu Sacco has not helped us as teachers. Instead, it allowed us to borrow easily, but end of the month we end up with 8,000- 12,000 Rwf which can hardly do much for a teacher. Also, I do not believe that teachers should be involved in income generating activities. Instead, they should deal with being teachers and not be sidestepped by other activities outside the teaching profession. The solution to move teachers forward is to have increased salary.

– Teacher, rural public school, Western Province

I think the Mwalimu SACCO has been successfully implemented in that it has lifted some teachers out of poverty. However, it has also helped to remove them from the teaching profession, in that after getting loans and starting successful businesses, they have tended to resign and tend to their businesses full time.

– RENCP Member

Teachers also had mixed opinions regarding bonuses associated with performance contracts and horizontal promotion. These two incentives are intended to directly increase the salaries of well-performing teachers. National and sub-national officials viewed these policies as successful and most head teachers and teachers welcomed these recently implemented policy changes. Teachers receive a 3 or 5 per cent bonus on top of their salaries depending on whether their performance is evaluated at 70 per cent or 80 per cent. After three years of performance at 70 or 80 per cent, teachers can see their salary increase permanently by a certain percentage, which is known as 'horizontal promotion.' Some head teachers and teachers, however, stated that such policies have failed to materialise. Interestingly, head teachers did not discuss how teachers are evaluated for promotion. The quote (see box) from a teacher at a rural public school in the Southern Province suggests that criteria for evaluation may not be clear to teachers:

“Horizontal promotion has created conflict among teachers ... After the evaluation of teachers, those who got 70 per cent wonder why the other one got 80 per cent when they feel she/he was not any better. Also, it becomes clear that when the head teacher is not happy with the teacher, then they evaluate them at 60 per cent repeatedly and this becomes a reason to fire them.”

– Teacher, rural public school, Southern Province.

Stakeholders mentioned that each year, certain teachers were selected as “Best Teacher” at the sector and district levels. As a reward the teachers receive a laptop or a cow. A DEO from the Eastern Province gave further context, stating that such incentives are part of a broader ‘One Cow per Teacher’ programme, initiated by the REB. A national-level official stated that the government was also considering paying the secondary school fees of teachers’ children to improve the teachers’ financial status. In sum, while some stakeholders pointed out issues with various incentive schemes, most teachers appeared to appreciate these policies, associating them with increased motivation.

“We conduct inspection campaigns in which we crisscross the country. In September we inspected 900 schools, in May and January 650 schools...when the campaign started everyone was scared, because each district was allocated five high-ranked government officials...We are seeing positive results from the exercise. For example, there is a school in Kirehe district that we visited in May and decided to dismiss the head teacher. The district didn’t respect the decision to dismiss the head teacher, so he returned to his job. But when we revisited in September, we noticed many improvements and we realised how the inspection campaign can motivate a school to improve from the worst to the best in four months, and now the head teacher is going to get a reward.”

– MINEDUC Official

### 4.2.3. National monitoring and strategic policies

Head teachers and teachers stated that they rarely saw national-level inspectors at their schools. This is to be expected, given that most monitoring and evaluation of head teachers and teachers is conducted by the district and the sector, who subsequently send reports to REB (Section 4.2 goes into more detail on this topic). Since 2018, MINEDUC also conducts quarterly awareness and inspection campaigns. An Official from REB mentioned the *ubukangurambaga* campaign, describing it as one, which was centred on encouraging teachers and listening to their concerns, and which may have been effective in reducing teachers' absence from school. A MINEDUC Official described a more recent 'inspection campaign'. It illustrates the tensions between the authority of national and sub-national actors:

A gap between national-level education officers and teachers was highlighted in interviews with the school's staff. It was common for head teachers and teachers in rural areas to suggest that governmental officials do not understand their unique challenges. Many teachers admitted that they do not know about national educational policies. Yet, teachers often echoed the need for various actions, which are currently strategic priorities of the Ministry of Education: Teachers at nearly half of the schools discussed the challenge of automatic promotion. They explained that students could proceed to the next grade level even when they had not mastered the subject and received poor marks. This made it very difficult for teachers to teach properly in subsequent levels. Additionally, teachers as well as some sub-national and national-level officials pointed out the need for pre-primary school for children aged 4–6. As a consequence, children would be better prepared for primary school, which would improve the quality of education in primary school. An Official of MINEDUC voiced a similar concern:

"In 2017 pupils who had a chance to study in nurseries were 20 per cent, and in 2016 it was 17 per cent. This is a big challenge because primary school preparedness for pupils who enter P1 is inadequate. Many of the pupils are entering school for the first time, and when they are given a lot of information in a strange environment, they get intimidated or fed up and may decide not to come back. We believe pre-school preparedness is a serious challenge."

– MINEDUC Official

Interview data suggests that there is a need for increased training on inclusive education, at inclusive and non-inclusive schools alike:

We have children at this school with special needs, children with disabilities for example deaf and blind children. Teachers are not able to help them, and here in this district we have no schools specialised to help children with such disabilities, for example that a deaf child can be in class but lack somebody to help him/her to translate using sign language.

– Community representative from a refugee-inclusive rural public school in the Eastern Province

## Summary

In sum, there have been several recent policy changes in Rwanda. They entail moving from a knowledge-based curriculum to a competence-based curriculum and shifting the language of instruction from French to English. With these policies, various implementation challenges have been associated such as the provision of in-service training. While some teachers felt that training has been enough, many others perceived that they do not have adequate training to implement the new changes and teach properly. The topic of remuneration arose repeatedly. Stakeholders explained that low salaries affected motivation negatively and subsequently encouraged multiple types of teacher absenteeism. Survey data suggests that the salaries of women and rural teachers are lower compared to that of men and urban teachers, no matter the education level (secondary, vocational, and university) or the number of years of experience. MINEDUC and REB have implemented numerous schemes that aim at increasing the welfare of teachers. While teachers' opinions vary, most welcome these policies. Shortly after this study was conducted, MINEDUC increased all primary teacher salaries by 10 per cent. The district and the sector conduct monitoring and evaluation on behalf of the Ministry of Education. They have an intimate understanding of schools and teachers in general, despite certain tensions which may arise between the authority of the national and sub-national level. Even if teachers were not able to speak in detail about national-level policies, they were acutely aware of the need to focus on inclusive education as well as improve the quality of education by investing in pre-primary schools.

### 4.3. Sub-national level determinants of teacher absenteeism

Rwanda began decentralisation in 2000, and all national policies are currently implemented along the following descending line: national, province, district, sector, cell, village. There are 30 districts and 416 sectors in the country. District Administrations play key roles in education provision. Each District Office is responsible for developing a five-year District Development Plan (DDP) containing educational goals. Like any other civil servants in Rwanda, DEOs and SEIs have performance contracts detailing how they will be evaluated. Sub-national level officials, namely DEOs and SEIs, were therefore included in this study to better understand the role they play in preventing teacher absenteeism. According to interviews, they monitor a range of school-level functions, for example school infrastructure and hygiene as well as teacher absence from school and quality of education. Consequently, sub-national officials' tasks do not centre on monitoring teacher absenteeism per se; they include a wide range of education provision activities, such as the monitoring of school cleanliness and school construction projects. The main findings on teacher absenteeism as regards the sub-national level, discussed in detail in this section, are as follows:

- Monitoring of schools includes verifying teacher absence from school and working to increase the quality of education via provisioning of training and school materials. Engagement with schools and communities is much broader, albeit related to a number of topics potentially affecting teacher absenteeism, including student drop out, teacher motivation, and parent engagement;
- Various implementation challenges could hamper the success of districts in preventing teacher absenteeism. Among these are the efficacy of sanctioning mechanisms, the lack of transportation budgets for SEIs, and the insufficient reporting between the sub-national and national levels.

#### 4.3.1. Sub-national monitoring of schools and engagement with schools and communities

According to qualitative data, sub-national officials monitor teachers' absence from school in verifying attendance and monitoring quality of education. They do so through several activities. They provide teaching materials and in-service training, they give information on curriculum, and evaluate performance. Regarding absence from school, many head teachers and teachers explained that when sub-national officers visited their schools, they typically looked at the attendance book. In some districts, DEOs discussed daily attendance reports, which are sent to them via the SEI and head teacher. They highlighted the success they have seen from these. Daily attendance reports are a district rather than national-level initiative. This practice was not mainstreamed across districts, though if successful it could serve as good practice.

On the topic of quality education and teaching, teachers said that sub-national-level officials gave them teaching materials when necessary, and that they monitored the "teaching system." Some teachers described how the sub-national level helped with curriculum implementation. They said that SEIs and DEOs organised CBC trainings, gave information on curriculum, or verified that curriculum is used. It was not clear whether SEIs or DEOs observed teachers *in* the classroom to evaluate their classroom management or pedagogical skills. Only a few teachers said that sub-national officials verified the curriculum is 'being used properly.' Evidence points to the fact that curriculum utilisation is monitored indirectly, via matching teachers' lesson plans with students' notebooks: "We figure out that a teacher has been in the class but not teaching

[...] teachers used to be absent from school, coming late and leaving work early, but this has stopped. Before, there wasn't a daily attendance report, but with the increase of pupil dropout rate, district authorities have put in place for the first time a pupil's attendance report, and after they added teacher's attendance report cards as well. The results have been good, now teachers are always at school unless they have health issues or are in other school assignments.

– District Education Officer,  
Northern Province

when we visit classes and ask the teacher for preparation documents. We verify whether the lesson plan is matching with the time of the date of lesson or not. If not, we ask students why such day they didn't study a certain lesson and they reply that the teacher was absent. In that case the head teacher is condemned too, due to not controlling teachers." (DEO, Eastern Province). Head teachers appear to have the most direct contact with SEIs and DEOs during school visits. The monitoring of teachers appears to occur indirectly, via the head teacher. This provides further evidence that classroom observation is rare: "We don't see DEOs often. They only came here once. They came here to ask for schemes of work, lesson plan and they didn't talk to teachers. They only talked to the school administration." (Teacher, urban private school, Kigali City).

There is decentralisation policy which provided a sector education inspector for solving education problems at the sector level. This increases the awareness of parents in education of their children and raises the number of children going to primary school.

– Community representative, urban public school, Western Province

We carry out inspection but since we are closer to teachers, we help to sort out their problems. We solve problems where we can but lobby higher level if the problems have to be handled at higher levels. We also follow and return children who drop out of school.

– SEI, Western Province

Overall, enforcing school attendance and performance seems lax. When head teachers and teachers were asked how the sub-national level discourages multiple forms of teacher absenteeism, most teachers explained that sub-national officers, especially SEIs, provide them with 'advice' and 'encouragement'. But they were unable to further elaborate on the specific mechanisms, school inspectors and curriculum advisors employ to decrease absenteeism.

Head teachers and teachers made it clear that districts and their inspectors have many tasks beyond monitoring for teacher absenteeism. Some head teachers and teachers felt that the sub-national emphasis was disproportionately focused more on easily measured indicators such as construction rather than on quality education. They explained that DEOs and SEIs visited them to check several issues including infrastructure, cleanliness, and hygiene of the school. Teachers said that DEOs and SEIs also checked construction progress, feeding programmes as well as specific issues related to the school- or the community. At a rural public school with a high refugee student population in the Eastern Province, a teacher described how the DEO came to the school to aid in integrating refugee students with Rwandan students. Many SEIs and DEOs discussed their role in sensitizing the community to the importance of education and to sending children to schools. They often followed up on student absenteeism or students who had dropped out via campaigns. In sum, on the one hand, certain forms of engagement — such as verifying school construction — were often perceived by head teachers and teachers as disconnected from the needs of teachers or from quality education. On the other hand, it was acknowledged that these officers play an essential role in bridging the gap between schools and communities and national actors such as REB and MINEDUC.

### 4.3.2. Policy implementation challenges

The first challenge centres around monitoring and sanctioning of teacher absenteeism specifically. A teacher from a rural public school in the Northern Province explained that: "If there is a teacher who doesn't have good performance, the district does a close follow up with her/him," although there were no further details provided about what a 'close follow-up' would entail. When it comes to unjustified absences from school, head teachers and teachers noted that the SEI may be called to come to the school to investigate or that the teacher in question may be asked to give an explanation or letter to the sector or district offices. Most teachers, however, could not detail what sanction would result from unjustified absenteeism, and most teachers did not know anyone who had been sanctioned, suggesting that it is rare.



There were only a few instances where sub-national officers described having followed protocol to sanction teachers. For example, a DEO from the Eastern Province detailed an occasion where a teacher was caught using his/her phone rather than teaching and she/he was given a 'last warning' letter. It was more common, however, for head teachers to express frustration regarding ineffective sanctioning mechanisms. This could stem from the fact that while head teachers are first and foremost responsible for teachers, they cannot directly sanction them for absenteeism. Instead, they must report teachers to the sector or district level. The latter has the power to sanction. Some head teachers felt that the sub-national level was not handling this effectively. This is particularly detrimental to teachers in areas where parent and community engagement or capacity to monitor is also low.

At the same time, national-level education officials perceived that head teachers might be *protecting* teachers from sanctioning. When speaking about the difficulties that SEIs and DEOs face, one national-level respondent said, "Monitoring can be done by the people who have access to these schools regularly, and who can manage to beat some Head Teachers at their game of protecting some teachers from being sanctioned." This suggests that there is a tension between different levels of authority regarding the effective disciplining and sanctioning of teachers.

Another challenge to effective engagement and monitoring, is the lack of transportation budget for SEIs. In nearly all provinces, sub-national-level and national-level, respondents mentioned that SEIs were prevented from visiting schools as many times as planned because they were not given a transportation allowance by the district. Sub-national officials further stated that the problem is exacerbated during the rainy seasons or for visiting remote schools.

Finally, there appears to be tension surrounding sub-national reporting to the national level. National-level officials attested that they receive monthly reports from the DEO via the SEI and spoke positively about the results of decentralisation:

**"If there is an area where much effort is being put in the most recent years, it is in monitoring and sanctioning of absenteeism in schools. We have tried to enforce this by restructuring the Sector Education Office to ensure that they put education first by carrying out regular inspection of schools in their areas and reporting monthly to the District Education Office, which in turn reports to REB and MINEDUC for further action" (REB Official).**

I just make a report and send it to the district level, because the we [head teachers] don't have enough authority over the teacher. That's why you see this disobedience; each teacher wants to leave early, they come late, they are most of the time absent; only the district can make a decision... when we send the reports, the district authorities do nothing... when other teachers notice that those who were reported for bad conduct are still working without any rebuke, they also do the same. Imagine, there are teachers who come and sign and leave right after.

– Head teacher, urban public school, Western Province

Those who follow up on teacher absenteeism must be empowered to do it, for example by receiving means of transport, like motorcycles, or transport allowances in order to do school inspection. Not having enough budget for school inspection is a big issue. For example, a district with ten sectors may get an annual budget of four million francs for inspection activities. It means that every sector will get four hundred thousand francs—that will not be enough to visit all schools annually as planned. Sometimes the budget doesn't even get to district accounts on time and inspections may not be done as planned.

– DEO, Western Province

Some national-level respondents interviewed, though, felt differently. They stated that they are receiving reports directly from SEIs, rather than DEOs, and others said that the structure is being reorganised to receive reports directly from SEIs: "Now we are centralising the Sector Education Officers so that they can report directly to the MINEDUC. The district was not monitoring them..." (MINEDUC Official).

## Summary

According to all stakeholders, sub-national officials both DEOs and SEIs play an important part in engaging with schools and with monitoring. This is important regarding teacher absence from school and the quality of teaching. However, sub-national engagement is not without challenges. Sub-national officials have many engagement and monitoring tasks, which are not directly related to teacher absenteeism. This includes engaging with the community on issues like student absenteeism and drop out as well as monitoring school construction and hygiene. This raises the question of how much focus DEOs and SEIs can place on teacher absenteeism. Head teachers and teachers have varied levels of satisfaction on the support provided by the sub-national level. Some head teachers and teachers expressed having positive relationships with DEOs and SEIs. It appears, however, that quality of teaching is difficult to monitor, and some head teachers were dissatisfied with the sanctioning mechanisms. Evidence suggests that these challenges are exacerbated by the fact that SEIs do not receive a transportation budget. This prevents them from carrying out the number of visits they should. Finally, national level respondents suggested that reporting between sub-national decentralised entities and MINEDUC needs to be improved.

## 4.4. Community-level determinants of teacher absenteeism

The schools within this study correspond to communities of different socioeconomic statuses across all five provinces in Rwanda. Many communities included in the study experience poverty. This is not the case for communities sending their children to private school, who are typically more affluent. At all schools, stakeholders generally described parent engagement as low. This especially the case at public schools. Respondents at public schools, said that less than half of parents would attend beginning- and end-of-term meetings. In private schools just most parents were said to attend. Many head teachers and teachers felt that education was not valued within the community, citing poverty, lack of awareness, and high unemployment rates among the educated as explanatory factors. Similarly, head teachers and teachers explained that it was not uncommon for parents to keep children at home to help with domestic work and economic activities. Nevertheless, by pooling together funds, the parents at some public schools were able to provide teachers with a financial bonus or a one-off contribution such as chairs or a printer. More often, however, parents provided support in cleaning the school or tending to the garden during *umuganda*, or community working days.

These topics, as well as others such as teacher housing, respect for teachers, and community infrastructure, were discussed in interviews. This helped to understand how community-level factors affect different types of teacher absenteeism. According to the qualitative data, the main community-level factors affecting teacher absenteeism are the following:

- The rainy season, which affects the teacher's punctuality, their absence from school, and leads to reduced teaching time.
- Remoteness from school and transportation, which primarily causes teachers to be late at school although it can also cause absence.
- Hindered access to financial services, which mainly causes absence from school and lateness-
- The capacity of communities to monitor teachers. Monitoring can act as deterrent of absence from school, lateness/early departure, and other forms of absenteeism. But it is highly dependent on the level of community engagement with the school.

### 4.4.1. The rainy season

In interviews, rain was one of the most frequently cited reasons for multiple types of teacher absenteeism at the community level. Survey data (see *Figure 8*) illustrates that absence from school due to weather is a specific challenge for teachers at rural and public schools. Across interview and survey data, emphasis was on the negative effect that rain has on teacher punctuality. A head teacher from a rural public school in the Eastern Province stated that: "The frequency with which teachers arrive late varies; it is more frequent during the rain period in December or April". This illustrates that there may be a seasonal spike in lateness. Compared to other possible determinants of teacher absenteeism, rain was an undisputed topic due to its unavoidability.

Most teachers did not go into detail on their lateness during the rainy seasons. Based on the responses of some teachers it appears that lateness is proportionate to weather conditions. Some teachers mentioned that they may be 15 minutes late due to rain. Others said it could cause up to a few hours' lateness. This is a wide range, which would have varied effects on scheduled classes. It is noteworthy that many participants believed that even if rain causes lateness, it should not be used as a justification for complete absence from school. They drew an important distinction between these two forms of teacher absenteeism. One teacher said that "teachers come late but they are not absent, because it is very rare that it can rain the whole day" (rural public school, Eastern Province). Some teachers pointed to circumstances such as extreme rains through the night and poor community infrastructure where the rainy season could result in absence from school:

“Most of the time when it is raining, roads are destroyed and that can cause teacher’s absence at school.”

– Teacher, rural school, Eastern Province).

“The roads are in a poor state and are almost impassable during the rainy season.”

– Community representative, urban private school, Northern Province.

Rain can lead to excessive noise on roofs or even to power outages. Nonetheless, some teachers find ways of engaging students:

Even when it is dark because of rain teachers will substitute from teaching certain classes and do storytelling, teach pupils songs to complete the scheduled time instead of leaving early, since we have no electricity and no solar energy at these class buildings.

– Teacher, rural public school, Western Province

Survey data corroborates the effect that weather can have on teacher absenteeism. It appears as the second most commonly mentioned reason for lateness (*see Figure 9*), and the fourth most commonly mentioned reason for absence from school (*see Figure 8*), particularly affecting rural and public schools.

Finally, **rain can lead to reduced teaching time** at public and private schools alike. Most schools in Rwanda have iron sheeted roofs. When there is heavy rain, the noise on the roof is so loud that it is impossible for teachers to continue with their class or lesson normally. There may even be electricity outages. Instead of teaching, some teachers may write notes for students or they may assign class work. Regardless of the activity done during heavy rains, most teachers stayed in the classroom for classroom management purposes. “Maybe you sit there, you start marking books while monitoring pupils, because if you are not in class, pupils start fighting,” (urban private school, Eastern Province). In summary, rain affects punctuality first and foremost, followed by absence from school and time spent teaching. Rural and urban schools as well as public and private schools, are all affected by this issue, although the condition of both school and community infrastructure has a role to play in how negatively rain affects teacher absenteeism.

We have a teacher here who lives far from school, and most of the time he lacks transportation money. So, I wouldn’t condemn him if he is sometimes late to school. Covering a long distance on foot coming to school and then going back home is not very easy.

– Teacher, urban public school, Western Province

#### 4.4.2. Distance from school and transportation

According to interview data, distance from school and transportation challenges can have a negative impact on teachers’ punctuality. In general, many teachers from both rural and urban schools lived far from where they work and walked to work. But even teachers who expressed living closer to their schools mentioned that transportation can be over-crowded or have unreliable schedules. A teacher from a rural public school in the Southern Province provided an example capturing both these difficulties:

“Lateness may happen because most teachers live in Nyamagabe, which is 15 kilometres away. They may arrive at school late because they could not get a taxi or bus in time, or it comes full and there is no space for an extra passenger.”

Some teachers, primarily public-school teachers, said that they could not afford transportation due to their low salaries. Their only option was walking to school. According to the interviews, this can

cause lateness or leaving early, or even complete absence from school in cases where the teacher is not able to walk to and from school that day. Especially teachers in the Western and Eastern provinces discussed the unaffordability of public transport. More analysis will have to be done to determine whether transportation costs more for teachers in rural or urban areas and whether there are unique province differences in public transportation. In contrast to teachers who live far from school and/or who have to take public transportation, those who live close to schools expressed that lateness due to distance is not a problem and expressed contentment regarding their situation.

It is important to contextualize transportation and distance from school within the issue of lack of teacher housing near schools. When asked how teachers' working and living conditions could be improved, many respondents in rural and urban areas mentioned additional teacher housing near schools to decrease teachers' distance from school. Some teachers stated that teacher accommodation existed at their school, but they often noted that there was not enough housing for all teachers or that housing could only accommodate single teachers rather than families. Finally, while respondents did not directly link the rainy season with distance from school or transportation issues, these challenges certainly exacerbate each other.

#### 4.4.3. Access to financial services

According to qualitative data, poor access to financial services, primarily to collect salary, was a common factor for absence from school. Many teachers admitted that they had been absent from school multiple times during the school year for this reason. Some teachers explained that during payment times, there were teachers absent from school (see Figure 8). Some teachers elaborated on why they missed an entire day of school. They explained that getting to the bank could take hours by car or foot, and that at the bank there were long queues, or that the bank's network was not functioning properly. This could result in not receiving the salary. A DEO from the Northern Province was of the opinion that teachers from rural schools might be more affected by this challenge than teachers from urban schools, as "...all the services are far from the school unlike the case of town schools...". Survey data confirmed this (see Figure 8). Yet, interview data did not; rather, it showed that urban and private school teachers are equally affected by long distances and commutes to banks and by poor services.

While most teachers said that poor access to banks causes absence from school, just as many respondents said that it is common for them to arrive late or leave early due to trips to the bank. It appears to be the case for teachers who have shorter commutes or better services at their banks. The difference in distance to the bank may be explained by the fact that most teachers receive their salary through *Mwalimu Sacco*. There is only one of these banks in each district. Teachers who are located closer to the bank, stated that it was acceptable to be late or to miss some classes but not to be absent altogether: "It takes a few minutes, about 30 minutes [to go to the bank]; hence, a teacher can miss some lessons but can't be absent." — Teacher, urban private school, Eastern Province.

This school is close to where I live. I am among those who are lucky; nowadays those who are completing schools are being sent to teach far from their homes, but me I got the chance to work close to where I live.

– Teacher, urban public school, Northern Province

Difficulties receiving salaries affects public and private school alike. At one urban private school, both the head teacher and a teacher mentioned how teachers are absent due to long queues at the bank:

[...] the bank where we receive our pay is very far from school; it's about one hour and half while walking on foot, and even when you reach there you find long queues and internet disconnections, sometimes you go back without receiving your pay.

– Teacher

They take a day off because with banks in this area, there are maybe two cashiers for 500 customers. So, it takes long to be served, and they need their salaries.

– Head teacher

Some teachers mentioned that they did not miss any school to go to the bank because it was open on Saturday. Head teachers and teachers, however, said that many teachers could not wait until the weekend to receive their salaries because they were struggling to meet their basic needs. Overall, from the school level up to the district level, it appeared that going to the bank to receive salaries was generally condoned. One head teacher from a rural public school in the Eastern Province explained that their school did not deny teachers' requests to go to the bank to collect their salary when they were in financial need. They rather asked teachers to go in groups at different times to avoid that all of them were absent at the same time. This could be interpreted as a strategy to minimize the effect of teachers' absence from school. But it also suggests that teacher absenteeism is high when salaries are paid. Acceptance of absenteeism for going to the bank extends to sub-national level actors from the Eastern and Northern Provinces: "I don't consider that [going to the bank to withdraw salaries] to be absenteeism; one day in a month and sometimes a few hours in a day is not being absent," — DEO, Eastern Province.

#### 4.4.4. Community monitoring of teachers

Head teachers and teacher said that community, and in particular, parent engagement is low. But it is worth noting that at most schools in the study, stakeholders described how the community played a role in monitoring teachers. Teachers and head teachers from all types of schools explained that it was not uncommon for parents or members of the community to inform the head teacher if they saw a teacher who was outside the school on a weekday. Thereby they were monitoring for absence from school and lateness or early departure. Some community representatives included this in this study. Usually members of the PTA/SGAC, stated that they visited the school often, about once a week or three times a month. They mentioned that they interacted closely with the head teacher or PTA if a teacher was found to persistently be absent without justification: "Once a teacher is absent, we write asking her/him to explain the reasons for being absent; we even call her/him. If it is necessary the discipline council meeting is held to examine the case, also the PTA committee may ask the head teacher to provide some explanations," — Community representative, rural public school, Western Province.

National and sub-national actors interviewed viewed PTAs and School General Assemblies as playing an important role in monitoring teachers:

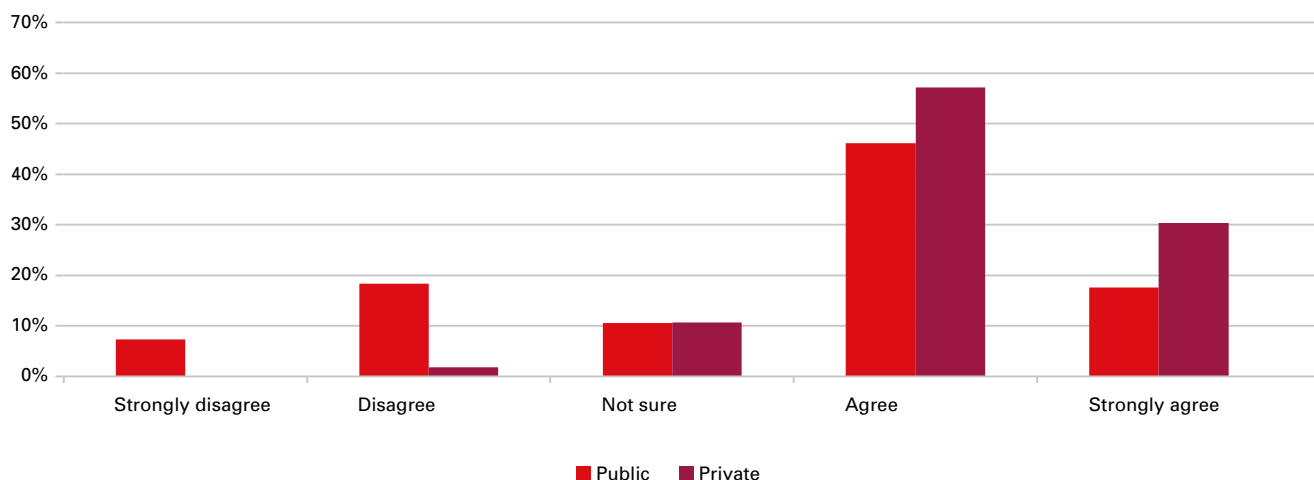
In some schools where the community actors are educated and have the time, they react to teacher absenteeism, among other issues. In this respect, the government is now helping to carry out reforms in schools' PTAs, so that they are composed of enlightened people who have knowledge about education.

– REB Official

Qualitative data shows that community monitoring focused primarily on absence from school and arriving late or leaving early. But some data points to the fact that at certain schools, parents are able to monitor teaching. A head teacher from an urban public school in the Northern Province stated, "Parents see that a teacher is not teaching when checking pupils' homework, or on their children's school report." This suggests that parents can indirectly monitor teaching time or even pedagogical abilities, although a high level of parent involvement and literacy is necessary. Data shows that parents at private schools are much more likely to monitor teachers indirectly, through student performance, because they are paying tuition fees: "If the performance of the school goes down, parents react immediately and take their children to another school that is performing better. Our school is private, and parents are eager to see results and positive results for that matter," — Teacher, urban private school. Teachers at private schools, compared to those at public schools, were more likely to completely or somewhat agree that parents are actively engaged in school matters (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Parent engagement in school affairs, by school governance type

Teacher response to the question 'Parents are actively engaged in school affairs', by school governance type



## Summary

There are many factors at the community level which cause teacher absenteeism. In interviews, the rainy season was the most frequently mentioned factor, causing lateness, reduced teaching time, and in severe conditions, even absence from school. Remoteness and transportation difficulties also impeded teachers from being on time. Most teachers walk to school and many cited the unaffordability or unreliability of public transportation. When asked how teachers' lives could be improved, many stressed the need for increased teacher accommodation near schools, which decreases their commute. Finally, teachers are absent, late, or leave early in order to collect their salaries from the bank. This is a determinant of absenteeism, which is exacerbated by low teacher welfare, distance from the bank, or overcrowded services at the bank. Stakeholders regarded this determinant, as well as rain, as circumstantial and largely out of the control of teachers.

## 4.5. School-level determinants of teacher absenteeism

Several school-related factors varied across the study, including quality of infrastructure, ICT resources, and student attendance. Almost all schools in the study were connected to the electrical grid and had piped water. However, a few rural public schools did not have electricity in all classrooms and a few urban public schools did not have access to piped water. The number of computers or laptops differed widely: while some schools had no computers or only had computers for the head teacher or staff, other schools, including some rural schools, had over 100 laptops. They are part of the One Laptop per Child programme. As regards student attendance, public schools struggled more with student absenteeism. This is due to students having to travel long distances to come to school, due to illness, to poverty and to hunger. Other reasons are the lack of school supplies or having to aide parents in domestic or economic activities. Especially girls are expected to help with domestic chores at home. The same reasons, particularly poverty and hunger, often account for students' difficulty performing in the classroom. It is also the reason why students drop out, which happens predominantly at public schools. Two inclusive schools and two refugee schools, all of which are rural public schools, were included in this study. There was no evidence that these schools have higher levels of teacher absenteeism than at other schools. Although data shows that they face similar challenges like other rural schools. Some schools in the study, including inclusive and refugee schools, are supported by NGOs.

In addition to the above topics, a number of factors were discussed. The following issues are the most frequently connected to the five forms of teacher absenteeism.

- Head teachers' monitoring capacity is most evident in verifying presence at school and punctuality, compared to teacher classroom presence and time on task.
- High teacher workload results in teachers being absent from the classroom and reduced teaching time. This is due to both, class-room-related and non-classroom-related tasks.
- Poor availability of teaching and learning materials results in decreased pedagogical and content knowledge. It also reduces the quality of teaching and has a negative impact on student performance.

### 4.5.1. Head teacher capacity to monitor

At the school-level, head teachers play an essential role in monitoring school absences and punctuality. The majority of teachers said that they were required to sign an attendance register when they arrived at school as well as when they left. But teachers at some rural and urban schools mentioned that morning assemblies enabled the head teacher to easily see who has arrived at school and whether they have arrived on time. Teachers explained that they informed the head teacher in advance when they were going to be absent or late. Based on interview data, however there is not a consistent way in which teacher go about this. A head teacher from a rural public school in Kigali City noted the positive effects of their school's accountability mechanisms in combatting absenteeism:

"When I arrived here in 2015, there was a lot of absenteeism and sometimes teachers would be absent without bothering to inform the administration. We agreed that [for] a teacher to be absent from school she/he has to write a letter requesting for permission to be absent and when a teacher has a health problem, she /he will go to the health unit and bring a medical note. Those two strategies have reduced the issue of absenteeism very much."



Head teachers rarely said that they verify if **teachers are in the classroom or in the classroom teaching**. Some stated that they monitor such forms of absenteeism indirectly, by checking lesson plans against student notebooks. This way they checked that what was prepared was taught. They also mentioned that students might tell them if a teacher was not teaching while in the classroom. They also said that they did inspections, ensuring teachers were teaching and teaching up to standard. One head teacher noted, that monitoring these forms of absenteeism required visiting the teacher in class. Teachers on the other hand, cited various frequencies regarding head teacher classroom visits. This validated the fact that monitoring classroom attendance, time spent teaching, and quality is likely less common than monitoring other forms of teacher absenteeism via attendance sheets.

Qualitative data shows that higher actors expect head teachers to monitor teachers closely. Some DEOs, were pointed out that if **classroom absenteeism** occurs, it is the fault of head teachers: "Sometimes during our inspections we can catch some teachers by surprise; instead of being in classrooms they are outside talking. The main reason is poor leadership; it is the head teacher tasked to make sure that every teacher is in the classroom doing his or her duties correctly," – DEO, Western Province. There are however understandable limitations to head teachers' monitoring capacities. A DEO from the Eastern Province explained that head teachers had many responsibilities, which could result in them being absent on official business up to once a week. This suggests that their monitoring capacity at school is reduced. Head teachers explained that other than requesting teachers to write an explanatory letter regarding why they were absent or late without permission, they can do nothing except report the teacher to the district (to a SEI, DEO, or District Mayor), This is especially the case if they do not have adequate support from a PTA/SGAC or a functioning school disciplinary committee. Few teachers noted that there might be sanctions for being absent or late without permission. Most teachers, however, did not know of a teacher who had been sanctioned, nor could they state what kind of sanctions exist.

The strategy we have is that each Monday morning we have a meeting called 'Morning Staff', where we evaluate the past week and see how to plan the new week. If there is a teacher who was absent during the week under evaluation, and we show that the teacher didn't complete their duties, we ask that he corrects himself in the coming week. We then follow up, checking that she/he corrects what she/he did wrong the previous week...If we didn't meet, the teacher might carry on performing poorly, because there no other venue by which we can talk to her/him.

– Head teacher, refugee-inclusive rural public school, Eastern Province

#### **Fingerprint clock-in to monitor for school absence and punctuality:**

An urban public school in Kigali City has recently implemented a biometric fingerprint system, and the head teacher explained that absences and punctuality are evaluated at the end of each week. Before the school used a physical attendance booklet, as is still the case for most of the schools in Rwanda. One teacher noted the change the fingerprint sign in has brought: "Before we used to sign in attendance book and, as you know, someone can come late, sign and put incorrect information. But now it is no longer possible." Although this was the only school in the study using such technology, sub-national actors across Rwanda spoke positively of it: "...as you know, there is the technology of using fingerprints, and I wish every school would have that system. It would facilitate follow-up on teacher absenteeism [...] the information we get with the manual report cannot be 100 per cent reliable[...]"

– DEO, Northern Province

### 4.5.2. Teacher workload

Qualitative data shows that teachers in Rwanda have a heavy workload. MINEDUC's recent estimation that public-school teachers in Rwanda teach for 6.5 hours per day on average supports this data. As there is little to no free time in teachers' daily schedules, classroom-related and non-classroom-related factors can result in classroom absenteeism. Regarding non-classroom related activities, teachers at all schools explained that they missed class while at school due to school meetings, to requests from school leaders for administrative aid, or due to unplanned visits from various actors, namely parents. Furthermore, many teachers discussed how in-service training could result in being absent from the classroom: because there was not adequate space in the timetable for training, it ended up replacing class periods. Figure 10 shows that these non-classroom-related factors — administrative tasks and official school business — account for top reasons, a teacher may be absent from the classroom. This is valid for teachers across the entire study. Interview data and survey data show that classroom-related tasks, such as lesson planning and marking, also resulted in absence from the classroom or reduced teaching time. Teachers stayed in the staff room to get work done (see Figures 10 and Figure 11). Many teachers admitted that they were not supposed to be doing this and did not view it as excusable. But at the same time they expressed not seeing an alternative, as they need enough time to prepare lessons. Some said that it was important for them to stay in the classroom and give students exercises while they completed their tasks.

Not only does double-shifting increase teachers' workload, but it directly decreases teaching time, negatively affecting the quality of education:

"Adopting the double shift reduced the numbers of contact hours pupils get face to face with their teachers, because whereas the minimum recommended is 900 hours per year, due to the double shift strategy the maximum we could have was 780 hours per year. That affected the quality of education, because primary pupils were not getting the minimum yearly hours required with their teachers. This year we began eliminating the strategy, starting with P6... Gradually we would like to phase it out before 2023, and doing so requires the expansion of the infrastructure."

– Permanent Secretary,  
MINEDUC

Teachers' high workloads should be seen in context with high student-teacher ratios, and the practice of double shifting in public schools whereby different cohorts of students attend school in the mornings and afternoons. All levels of stakeholders in the study were aware of these challenges. A DEO from the Eastern Province summarized succinctly:

"...when a teacher has 70 pupils to teach in the morning shift and another 70 pupils in the evening, it may discourage a teacher. The teacher will teach those of the morning shift well and neglect those of the afternoon; he just gives them homework because she/he is tired. It might be a lot easier when a teacher has 30 pupils in the morning shift and other 30 pupils in evening shift."

Double shifting applies only to public schools. According to a DEO from Kigali City, private school teachers do not struggle with the same workload and have adequate time to plan lessons and mark papers. Yet, students from two private schools included in the study attested that their teachers have marked work or prepared class instead of teaching, implying a reduction of teaching time.

Most schools in the study did not have the capacity or strategies to mitigate absences. This is due to either non-classroom-related tasks as well as classroom-related tasks. A head teacher from a rural public school in Kigali City shared the following positive practice regarding parent meetings. Hereby the administration supports the teachers: "We advise teachers to meet parents during break time to avoid wasting time for the class... when a parent comes, the administration first talks to them and helps where necessary and

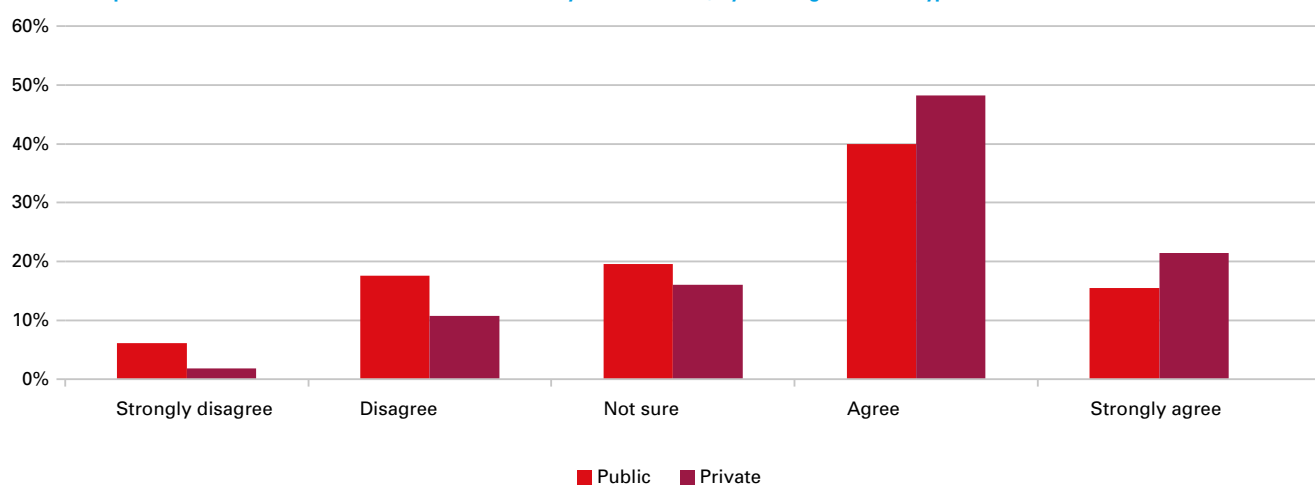
when she/he goes to the teacher, the latter informs her/him to wait until break time." An urban public in the Northern Province mentioned that they usually scheduled their teacher meetings at lunchtime. However, given teachers' intense workload, occupying their break time does not seem sustainable.

### 4.5.3. Availability of teaching and learning materials

According to qualitative data, public and private schools in rural and urban areas struggle with not having enough teaching and learning materials (TLM). Teacher surveys indicate that this is particularly a challenge for public schools (see *Figure 14*). As already discussed in Section 4.1, the government has not provided CBC textbooks in time for the roll-out of new curriculum. This leads to inadequate teaching. These difficulties result in reduced teaching time as teachers struggle to pull together a planned lesson. It also leads to a decreased quality of teaching. In general, teachers in rural and urban areas cited high student to textbook ratios, a factor impeding quality teaching and learning.<sup>xviii</sup> These findings were confirmed by students in focus group discussions who said that they shared books in large groups and that overall there were only a few books. Deficits extended to teaching materials including printers, computers or laptops for ICT courses, as well as visual aids. When teachers were asked what affects students' understanding and ability to learn, one teacher said, "lack of teaching materials; for example if I teach P1 pupils how to count from 0 to 10, I must have teaching material that shows them what I am saying," — rural public school, Southern Province). A teacher from a rural public school in Kigali City said that in the absence of readymade school materials they made their own. A teacher from a rural public school in the Eastern Province described the negative effect that the lack of TLM has on quality education: "It is very easy for student to understand a lesson when you're using some teaching materials. So, if you don't have any, the lesson is not well understood."

Figure 14: Having the teaching and learning materials necessary to teach, by school governance type

Teacher response to 'Teachers at this school have the TLM they need to teach', by school governance type



Textbooks are provided by MINEDUC and REB. At the beginning of each term the capitation grant sent to public and government-subsidized schools. This is supposed to cover a range of costs, from construction to learning materials for teachers and students. According to a community representative for an urban public school in the Eastern Province, the capitation grant can arrive late. The school then struggles to purchase supplies, such as chalk and notebooks. At some schools, including those with a high population of refugee students and inclusive to students with disabilities, NGOs and donors played a key role in provision of materials. Even there, teachers and students expressed certain challenges including inconsistent or inadequate provision of financial support for school materials (rural public school, Southern Province). They also mentioned that there could be tension between refugee children and Rwandan children because the former are provided with uniforms (rural public schools, Eastern Province). A representative of an inclusive school in Kigali City spoke positively about the relationship with an INGO, which not only provides materials but also engages in teaching sign language and in-service teacher training.

xviii According to 2018 data from the Statistical Yearbook, this ratio is five pupils to one math book and four pupils to one English book.

[...]there is the issue of poverty in this sector; sometimes pupils are obliged to do income-generating activities instead of being at school. That income helps pupils buy school uniforms, shoes, and school materials, because their parents are not able to provide them. Some pupils indicate that they missed school because they had gone to get money to buy exercise books or a uniform...

– Teacher, rural public school, Southern Province

Despite the fact that primary education is tuition-free at public schools, students are expected to provide some of their own learning materials. This still serves as a barrier to entry for children living in poverty. One student at an urban public school in the Eastern Province said that a teacher told them not to return to school unless they had the necessary school materials. Lack of those or lack of a uniform was only one of the many reasons that stakeholders gave for student absenteeism — other contributing factors mentioned at public and private schools alike included corporal punishment, poverty, student hunger, tiredness, lack of parent engagement, and the need to engage in income-generating activities. Some of these factors — as well as others such as unexpected pregnancy — resulted in dropout from school. According to qualitative data, dropout was more common in rural schools.

The relationship between teacher absenteeism and student absenteeism warrants more investigation: Student absenteeism and student dropout came up many times in interviews, particularly with head teachers and teachers. UNICEF and MINEDUC (2018) recently reported schools with high rates of teacher absenteeism, had high levels of student absence and student dropout. Data from this study suggests that the relationship may operate in the opposite way as well: student absenteeism may result in teacher absenteeism. More investigation is necessary to understand the relationship between teacher and student absenteeism.

When there are not enough pupils in class, we don't teach new subjects; instead, we do revisions.

– Teacher, urban public, Northern Province

If there are not enough students, you teach those who are present, but you don't start new topic.

– Teacher, rural public school, Eastern Province

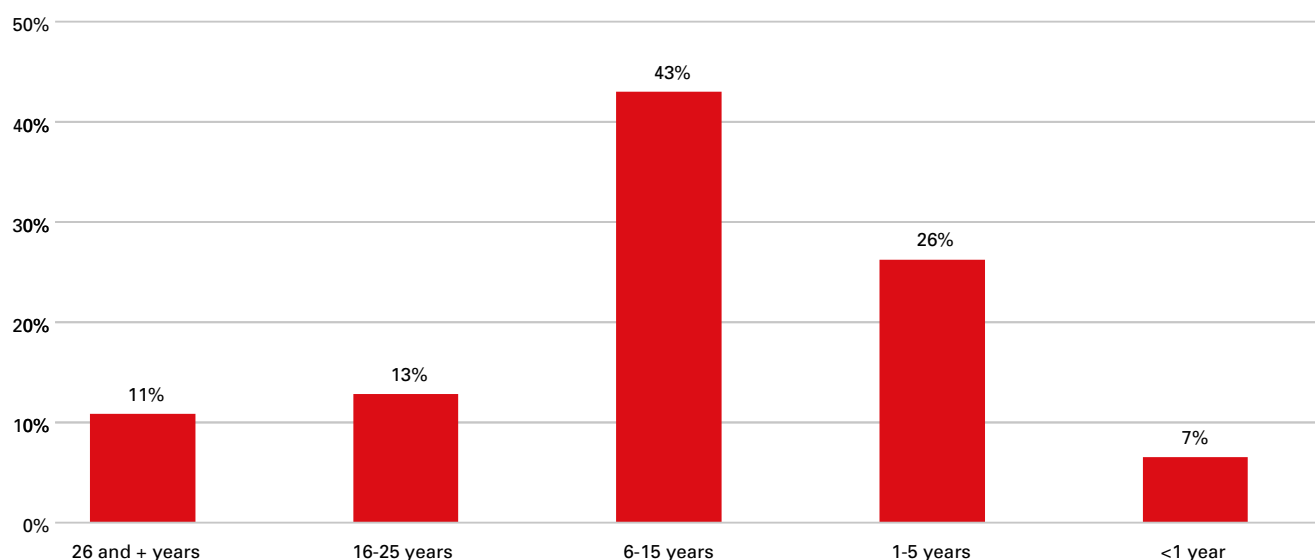
## Summary

There are many school-level factors that affect teacher absenteeism. Head teachers are first and foremost responsible for teachers, and they are diligent in ensuring that teachers come to school and arrive on time. Head teachers are less likely to monitor for forms of teacher absenteeism that require more classroom monitoring. Additionally, head teachers' authority is limited- Without adequate support from the PTA/SGAC or from a disciplinary committee, they have no option but to refer the teacher to the district, which may or may not take action. Another key determinant of teacher absenteeism is the heavy workload. Due to double shifting, teachers admitted that, even though they do not want to miss class or reduce their teaching time, they have no choice, mainly due to the heavy burden of classroom-related and non-classroom related tasks. The lack of teaching and learning materials, especially textbooks, decreases teachers' pedagogical knowledge and confidence. This has a negative impact on student performance. Survey data shows that schools struggle because of the lack of learning materials. Interview data shows that students living in poverty may not have the means to acquire materials such as notebooks and writing utensils. This is serving as a barrier to universal education.

## 4.6. Teacher-level determinants of teacher absenteeism

Teachers across all schools in the study expressed a dedication to working with children and teaching. The majority of teachers who took the survey had over six years of experience (see *Figure 15*). Teachers felt particularly motivated and proud when students understood lessons well and went on to succeed in higher levels and complete basic education. Some teachers, particularly those in rural areas, worked in the communities in which they grew up. They felt a sense of commitment and accountability to their students, schools, and communities. Teachers and other stakeholders interviewed also talked about the challenges that teachers faced — primarily welfare issues such as low salaries and lack of housing — and described how this affects teacher motivation. Qualitative data pointed to how individual characteristics, such as gender, can impact on teachers' working lives. Stakeholders explained that female teachers were often expected to take on the bulk of domestic tasks in the morning and evening, including caring for their children.

Figure 15: Years of teaching experience of survey participants



Several teacher-level topics were discussed with interviewees. They included motivation, employment status, gender, and age, among others. According to qualitative data, the main findings are as follows:

- Personal and social obligations and health cause absence from school as well as lateness. These absences are typically perceived as unavoidable;
- Linguistic challenges, with English as the language of instruction, pose serious barriers to quality teaching and learning. This is evidenced by teachers' lack of comfortability in the language and by students' lack of comprehension;
- Overall, teacher welfare is low, and some teachers engage in alternative income-generating activities to make ends meet. This can lead to absence from school and lateness or early departure.

#### 4.6.1. Personal and social obligations and teacher health

At the teacher level, personal and social responsibilities as well as health were the most frequently cited causes for absence from school according to the interview data. 'Personal and social obligations' can be understood as a large category, capturing familial obligations, which includes caring for family members, and community obligations. The most common reasons teachers gave for their absence were personal illness or an illness of a child or family member- Furthermore, they also cited attendance at familial events such as weddings and funerals. Absences due to these reasons were condoned by head teachers and teachers alike. Respondents usually referred to these absences as "justifiable," "relevant," "normal," "understandable," and "circumstantial." In fact, many teachers stated that these are the *only* reasons why they would be absent. Survey data confirms that health is one of the most common reasons given for multiple forms of teacher absenteeism (see *Figure 8, Figure 9, Figure 10, Figure 11*). Social and community obligations account for absence from school, lack of punctuality or for leaving school early (see *Figure 8 and Figure 9*). Teachers explained that they informed the head teacher when they would be absent for these reasons. Some teachers and head teachers even noted a maximum number of days where they can be absent. But these thresholds varied widely across the country, suggesting that a standardised norm of time off is not well enforced. Furthermore, data reveals that there is an inconsistency in teachers informing head teachers of their absences. In two schools, the head teacher could not account for absent teachers.

**Interviewer:** How many teachers are absent today?

**Head teacher:** Today, two peoples are absent, one asked for permission.

**Interviewer:** What are the reasons that they gave?

**Head teacher:** One, his baby is sick and the other is the one who is sick most of the time.

– Rural public school, Eastern Province

"Teachers fall sick or their children fall sick very often. You might find it a [rural] problem when you compare with town schools, because when a teacher is sick, even if it just flu, she/he does not use the health centre at Kanyinya or Shyorongi, which are near, but instead goes to town. In contrast, head teachers from town schools tell me their teachers visit the health unit close by and quickly return to work"

– Head teacher, rural public school, Kigali City

According to a head teacher from a rural school in Kigali City, when it comes to health issues, rural schools are more affected by absenteeism. Teachers must travel farther to access adequate healthcare. As for those from rural schools, they did not relate their absences to remoteness from healthcare services. Even though in the same interview, when asked about community infrastructure, many of them noted that they were not located near healthcare facilities.

Personal and social responsibilities as well as health issues are the reasons for other forms of absenteeism as well. Qualitative data show that teachers are likely to arrive late to school or leave early from school for these reasons. The reasons for being late were the same as the aforementioned, not feeling well or taking a child or relative to a medical clinic or hospital. Although some distinct reasons emerged. One teacher from a rural public school in the Southern Province, noted that the personal stresses of being a teacher has caused her/him to wake up late and subsequently arrive late. The same teacher, as well as other public-school teachers, mentioned food scarcity and the need to 'look for food' for themselves or their children before

school. Female teachers from public schools mentioned that domestic chores such as preparing food and taking care of children, could delay them. They cannot afford to employ domestic workers to mitigate this issue themselves. It is noteworthy that only teachers from public schools mentioned food scarcity. This suggests that some salaries may not be enough to cover basic needs. As stated in section 4.1, women, rural schoolteachers, and public-school teachers are disadvantaged in this way.

Health can also affect classroom absenteeism or reduced time on task in the classroom. However, health issues have more an influence on arriving late or leaving early as well as on teaching time. Survey data (see *Figure 9*) illustrates that women are more concerned than men. Teachers who felt momentarily sick or who had to deal with a personal issue explained that they might stay in the staff room rather than being in the classroom teaching or that they might be in the classroom but not teaching pupils. This results in lost teaching hours. Only teachers from public schools mentioned feeling hungry and not well during school. Public school teachers relative to private school teachers who typically have higher salaries are more likely to experience socioeconomic hardships, such as hunger: "...when a teacher is hungry and feels like she/he is about to faint, that teacher may choose to not teach and sits instead," — Teacher, urban public school, Kigali City.

Teachers' participation in local government causes absence from school: Head teachers and teachers from most schools said in interviews that teachers are sometimes absent from school because they participate in local government or elections and local organizations. Absence for this reason was not looked upon in a negative way.

"[...] many times, a teacher is a member of different local leadership committees. For example, a teacher heading a SACCO committee or is a member of a cell committee, or on women's committee; because of so many tasks a teacher may be absent for two days in week".

– Head teacher, urban public school, Western Province

#### 4.6.2. Linguistic challenges

When universal primary education was introduced in 2003, Kinyarwanda was the language of instruction in lower primary (Primary 1 through Primary 3). Schools could use either French or English for instruction in upper primary (Primary 4 through Primary 6). In 2008, this changed. English became the official language of instruction beginning in upper primary. While these policies were enacted at the national level, their complexity becomes apparent at the teacher level, especially when it comes to teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical capacity. In interviews, a large majority of the participants expressed having difficulty with French and with English. This difficulty was experienced at private and public schools alike, in rural and urban areas.

Many teachers explained that they completed their teacher training when French was still one of the primary languages of instruction. They were taught in French. Many emphasized that because of the policy shift they had received training in English. And although it had been intensive, a one-off training was not adequate. As mentioned in previous sections (see sections 4.1 and 4.4), REB has placed mentors at schools to help with the English language and with CBC. National-level actors often highlighted this in interviews. However, there is often no space in teachers' timetable for continuous professional development. To increase their English proficiency teachers often are required to put in additional, unpaid hours after school. Many made it clear that English remains a language in which they are not comfortable or confident teaching. CBC and the English language are interlinked. Therefore teachers' difficulties using English affects the quality of teaching as well as learning to use the new curriculum.

Some teachers focused on linguistic difficulties that students may face in a trilingual system: drawing a distinction between the

"The challenge, I would say, is that even though the teachers are academically qualified, they need to improve their knowledge of the English language...English is the language of instruction, but most teachers don't have sufficient training in English, and by the time the pupils enter P4, P5 and P6, teachers must be sufficiently proficient in the usage of English language. This is still our biggest challenge, even after trying various remedies."

– MINEDUC Official

language of instruction and the dominant spoken language (Kinyarwanda), these teachers expressed concern that many students may not be able to receive help with homework or for national examination preparation from family members. They may not have a good level of English, which can affect the student's performance. The teacher survey confirmed that they feel students may struggle to follow class because the language of instruction is different than the one spoken at home. Other respondents highlighted that the linguistic challenges emerge strongly for teachers and students from P4 onward, when the language of instruction shifts from Kinyarwanda to English. At this stage, students could also have problems with Kinyarwanda and French, which are introduced, respectively, as language subjects. Teachers often mentioned that at this level that some students start falling behind. This indicates that teachers do not have the linguistic and pedagogical skills necessary to smooth the transition from Kinyarwanda to English. According to interview data, an urban government-subsidized school in Kigali City uses English as the language of instruction from P1. According to other sources, many private schools do the same. Teachers at rural public schools in the Southern and Eastern Provinces, which have a high percentages of refugee students from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi, noted that students could struggle because of the shift from the languages they use in their home countries and in Rwanda.

Pupils speak Kinyarwanda in their families, while here at school they study in English; and once they get home, they will not be able to find someone to help them with English.

– Teacher, urban public school, Northern Province

Regarding linguistic difficulties, focus group discussions with students<sup>xix</sup> were especially insightful. Some students from public and private schools openly admitted that they did not understand or know English very well. Others said that they asked their teachers to explain lessons in Kinyarwanda or translate from English to Kinyarwanda. They noted however, that this was not possible either because their teacher forbade it or because she/he was not from Rwanda and didn't speak Kinyarwanda. Translating curriculum from Kinyarwanda to English suggests that teaching time is lost and that the quality of instruction is jeopardized. Students also expressed having difficulty with French as a subject. This was mentioned less frequently than difficulties with English, maybe because French is only a subject starting from level P4 and higher.

#### 4.6.3. Alternative employment

Data from interviews show that primarily teachers in rural locations subsidize their teaching salaries with additional economic activities. Engaging in income-generating activities causes absence from school and lateness. Stakeholders said that teachers have additional jobs because their teaching salary is not high enough to meet their basic needs. National and sub-national level officials had contradictory opinions

“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, rural public school, Northern Province

regarding whether teachers from urban or rural schools are more likely to seek employment outside of school: While one SEI representing Kigali City explained that teachers in rural areas were more likely to be absent because they have farms, a SEI representing the Northern Province said that he assumed the opposite. He suspected that teachers in urban areas were more likely to engage in alternative employment because they had more opportunities. Data from the interviews with head teachers and teachers support the claim that teachers in rural areas are more likely to have alternative employment. While some teachers at urban schools in the Western Province mentioned farming as a reason for their absence from school, public-school teachers from all provinces acknowledged that this activity could be a cause for their absence from school.

xix As outlined in the methodology, only students in P4 through P6 were included in focus group discussions, in order to ensure that students were able to consent to participating and so that they would understand the questionnaire. Considering that only students in higher levels were interviewed, it is not likely that this study captured difficulties that students experienced in learning to read and write in Kinyarwanda during the first three years of primary school.



Although other types of income-generating activities were mentioned, farming seems to be the primary alternative employment. Some respondents said that absence from school was typically higher during cultivation and harvesting. A few teachers stated that they engage in economic activities outside of teaching in the survey. It is possible, however, that they did not feel comfortable admitting this on a pen and paper survey.

Overall, interviews indicate that teachers engage in alternative employment out of economic necessity and that it primarily leads to absence from school. And yet, a quote from a teacher from a rural public school in the Western Province illustrates how such activities may affect the quality of education in ways that are more difficult to measure: “Salary issues are a big problem. What we get is too little for us. We look forward for the weekend so that we can go cultivate the land, but if we had good salaries, we would instead work towards improving the standard of education for our pupils.”

Phone use at public and private schools causes absence from the classroom and reduced time-on-task:

You may also find some teachers who get distracted by their mobile phones. Instead of teaching; they give pupils some work to do and then spend the rest of the time on internet.

– Teacher, rural public, Eastern Province

Interviews show that phone use during class hours is a challenge at the majority of the schools involved in this study. Some stakeholders said that teachers step out of the classroom to use their phones. Or they take a call and leave students unattended, causing classroom absenteeism. More interviewees, however, talked about how phone use causes teaching absenteeism, with teachers using their phones in the classroom for at least part of teaching time. Teachers, head teachers, and students alike spoke about this issue. The data is not conclusive regarding why teachers are using their phones. In one case, at an urban public school in the Western Province, students said their teacher was watching football on her/his phone. This example shows that phone use could be linked to poor work ethic and lack of professionalism. Interviewees did not provide reasons for the phone use. Understanding the causes is essential to tackle phone use in class as well as teacher absence.

## Summary

Data shows that despite heavy workloads and low motivation, teachers in Rwanda are committed to their occupations and want to see their students succeed. Based on interview data and survey data, personal health or health of a family member is a common reason for being absent or late. Together with health, personal and social reasons also account for absence from school and lack of punctuality. These absences were largely regarded as circumstantial- Interview data suggests that when it comes to family-related health or social responsibilities, women may be more likely absent. This has to do with to gender norms regarding care activities. Interviewees also pointed out the role that linguistic challenges play in teacher absenteeism, especially when it comes to pedagogical confidence and skills needed to teach CBC in English. Many teachers who were trained before English was the primary language of instruction, feel that their training has not been enough for them to properly adapt. Low teacher welfare is seen as one of the main reasons why teachers — particularly in rural areas — engage in alternative income-generating activities, mainly farming. This can lead to absence from school, lateness, leaving early or, more broadly speaking, decreased personal investment in teaching.

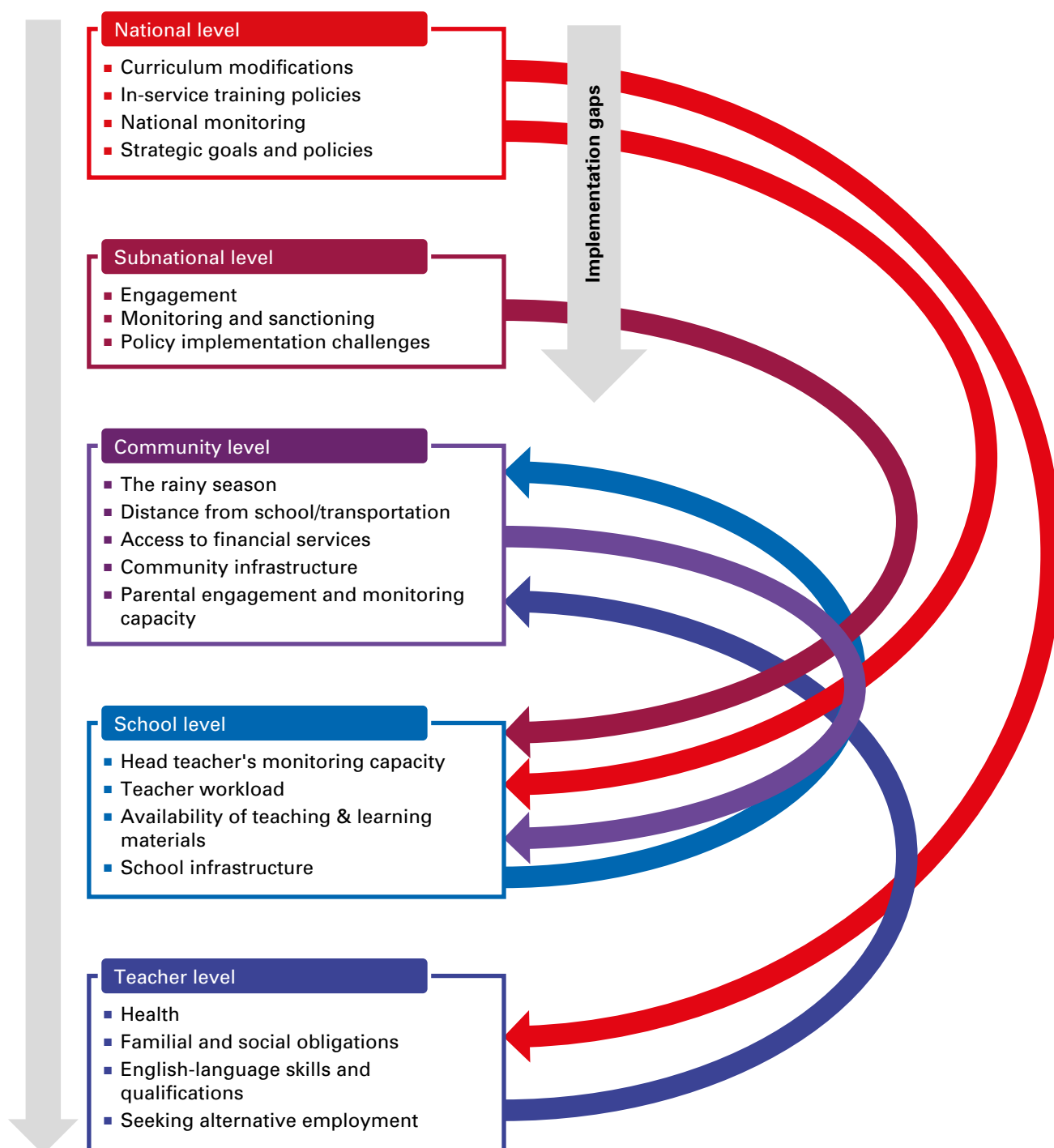
## Section 5: Bringing it all together: Understanding the determinants of teacher absenteeism from a system's perspective

The previous sections presented determinants of teacher absenteeism by level of education system. This is necessary to simplify complex webs of interactions between factors at the national, sub-national, community, school, and teacher levels. Many of the key findings corroborate existing literature on teacher absenteeism in Rwanda, as presented in Section 2. The primary reasons found for teachers' absence from school echo those found in Bennell and Ntagaramba (2008), including personal reasons such as illness or familial and social obligations. Findings from other country studies — for example, Bold et al. (2017)<sup>97</sup> arguing that teachers must have a higher level of skills in the language of instructions than what is taught to students — offer key insights to the Rwandan context. This study, however, builds on the literature and fills a gap by focusing centrally on teacher absenteeism. As a result, findings herein add vital evidence to previously underexplored topics such as teacher housing, availability of textbooks, implications of changes in pedagogical methods, the need to look for part time work, and personal difficulties directly affecting teacher absenteeism. This study was able to examine teacher absenteeism holistically and from a systemic perspective, analyse a broad number of possible determinants of teacher absenteeism within each education system level and considering the pathways between these determinants. This section summarises key findings by grouping together interrelated determinants of teacher absenteeism across different levels of the education system. Additionally, existing policies related to these themes are discussed in order to identify gaps in policy and implementation.

### 5.1. Revisiting the Time to Teach explanatory framework

The determinants and contextual factors, which were found to most directly affect teacher absenteeism in Rwanda are presented in Figure 16. Findings demonstrate that determinants of teacher absenteeism have a trickle-down effect from higher to lower levels of the education system. In other words, national-level policies influence heavily the work of the sub-national actors. These policies and policy implementation directly affect communities, schools, and teachers. This is evidenced clearly in the policy changes that Rwanda has seen in its education system in the past decade. The official language of instruction has shifted from French to English and an entirely new curriculum has been introduced. Both have been received positively but require extensive in-service training for teachers for them to be able to teach up to newly defined standards. At the same time, determinants of teacher absenteeism interact not only in a top-to-bottom manner but within and across levels of the education system. As an example, low salaries and poor teacher welfare result in multiple forms of teacher absenteeism and give rise to other forms of absenteeism. These other forms include teachers traveling to the bank to collect their salary or teachers working in extracurricular jobs. Contextual factors can create unique environments, reducing or exacerbating teacher absenteeism. Data show, that poor school and community infrastructure can amplify absence, lateness, and decreased teaching time during the rainy season. Figure 16 illustrates a few of these complex pathways, revising the explanatory model to show that it is essential to conceive of determinants of teacher absenteeism as interactive rather than static.

Figure 16: Revisiting the explanatory model for the Rwandan context to reflect the interactive nature of teacher absenteeism



## 5.2. Main findings on teacher absenteeism across levels of the education system

Given that determinants of teacher absenteeism interact in complex ways and give rise to various manifestations of teacher absenteeism, it is helpful to look at broader themes that seize determinants across levels of the education system. Doing so captures the pathways of teacher absenteeism and paves the way to design more holistic and effective teacher management policies. These themes, discussed below, centre around continuous professional development, monitoring, teacher welfare, and infrastructure and resources.

### 5.2.1. Teacher training

***In the face of language and curriculum policy changes, continuous professional development plays a vital role in ensuring that teachers have the pedagogical and language skills necessary to teach up to standard—but in-service training has also caused teacher absenteeism***

Rwanda has implemented a number of policies requiring extensive in-service training. They include shifting the language of instruction from French to English for P4 and higher and rolling-out CBC. While continuous professional development originates with national-level policy, implementation and subsequent results manifest across levels of the education system, notably at the sub-national, school, and teacher levels. Most of the in-service training for teachers in Rwanda has consisted of ‘Training of Trainers,’ or training, which cascades down from the national to the teacher level, with the sub-national level holding the primary role in implementation. This is summarized in Figure 2 in the Country Context Section of this report. It describes in detail the two primary pathways for CBC and English language training.

Qualitative data from this study shows that most teachers felt the ‘Training of Trainers’ model was not effective, and the amount of in-service training they underwent, was not sufficient. Teachers welcomed CBC, expressing that it shifted the focus from rote teaching to student interaction and innovation. But they also stated they were not familiar enough with the curriculum. Some admitted blending old curriculum into the new curriculum. This lack of pedagogical and content knowledge is partially linked to a lack of textbook provision from REB. Teachers said that they did not receive books, received them late, or received copies with missing chapters. But even when textbooks arrived on time, teachers expressed that the 40-minute class period was too short to execute the curriculum properly, again pointing to unfamiliarity with the curriculum.

Teachers similarly felt that they had not received enough training in English. Many admitted that they were not comfortable with the language of instruction. These findings are supported by data from focus group discussion with students. Many students said that they did not understand English well and that they often requested their teachers to translate from English to Kinyarwanda during class time. This resulted in reduced teaching time. While further in-service training is necessary, a current cause for concern is that teachers miss school or class in order to attend trainings. Evidence shows that some schools hold training after school or on the weekend, which mitigates absenteeism. It is unclear whether this is the best solution because it intensifies teachers’ workload without additional financial compensation. Some teachers also mentioned the role of mentors, although this was not consistent across the selected schools. Teachers did not always connect mentoring to specific types of training. These frustrations could be due to challenges with former policy implementation. Upon initial implementation of the SBMP, REB was not able to place an English language mentor at each school. Many mentors recruited from other East African countries did not want to be placed in rural areas. REB cites that between 2012-2015, approximately 12,000 teachers increased their English language levels. However, this represents only a fraction of all teachers, indicating that more training is necessary (REB, School-Based Mentor Programme Framework). More importantly, the DFID-supported BLF programme and the USAID-supported Soma Umenye, which began in 2017 and 2016, have contributed to filling certain in-service training gaps. This is particularly the case for P1 to P3 teachers in the subjects of English, mathematics, and early literacy in Kinyarwanda.

Upon introduction of CBC, the SBMP was revamped to take on a joint approach to English and CBC. Confusion at schools regarding whether the REB or head teachers were responsible for the supervision of mentors, created new challenges as did the lack of official policy governing the SBMP. According to recent policy, continuous professional development is sector- and school-based. A close analysis of the roles of actors in sector- and school-based CPD (shown in Table 8) suggests that there is an unnecessary overlapping of responsibilities, particularly between the head teachers and directors of studies and the sector-based trainers. Furthermore, REB has not stated how often districts should provide them with feedback, nor have they stipulated that training be integrated into district development plans (DDPs). These plans dictate all district activities. One of the largest implementation challenges recognised by REB is the fact there is simply no space in teachers' timetables for the recommended 120 minutes or three teaching periods of training per week that head teachers are supposed to ensure.

Table 8: Responsibilities of stakeholders in sector-based CBC

	Teacher	HT/DoS	SBM	SSL	SBT	SEI	DEO	DCC
Preparation		X			X	X		
Implementation	X	X	X	X	X			
Review	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Follow-Up	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Monitoring and evaluation		X			X	X	X	X

Source: REB and MINEDUC, 2017, Guideline for Sector: School-based CPC for CBC<sup>98</sup>

### 5.2.2. Teacher monitoring

**Monitoring of teachers focuses primarily on ensuring teachers are present at school and arrive on time. Monitoring varies by several factors, including district, head teacher authority, community engagement, and school governance**

Monitoring of teachers occurs at multiple levels of the education system, but head teachers are first and foremost responsible, playing a vital role in ensuring that teachers are present at school and arrive on time. This was better in schools where teachers cited strict monitoring on the part of the head teacher. Data regarding absence from the classroom and decreased teaching time was not clear. Compared to head teachers in larger schools, those in schools with smaller numbers of teachers expressed that it was easier to monitor them. When head teachers had problems with teacher absenteeism, they first tried to handle them on their own. Those who had to take these cases to the district, however, mentioned inaction on the part of the District Mayor, which is the actor who can sanction or dismiss teachers).

SEIs and DEOs can also report disciplinary concerns to the District Mayor, but qualitative data indicates that sub-national actors are busy monitoring many other activities, including school construction and school hygiene. The extent to which districts focus on teacher attendance varies across the country. Some districts collect daily attendance reports while others do not. Furthermore, DEOs and SEIs interact primarily with head teachers, and it is unclear how often or in what way teachers' pedagogical or classroom management skills are evaluated. Perhaps most importantly, stakeholders widely acknowledged that SEIs are limited. They lack transportation budget, which prevents them from visiting schools as often as planned. This most likely affects visits to rural schools and schools in communities with poor infrastructure. MINEDUC monitors only a small percentage of schools annually, and most school stakeholders did not see these actors often.

Communities also play a role in monitoring teachers through PTAs/SGACs or school disciplinary committees. Such monitoring varies widely, based on the level of community and parent engagement: in schools with low parent engagement, communities are less likely to monitor whether teachers are at school, are arriving late or leaving early, or whether children are learning what is taught in the classroom. Private schools had the highest levels of parent monitoring of teachers. Head teachers, teachers, and community representatives explained that this was because parents pay tuition for their children. Compared to public schools, the head teacher and school owner in a private school have more power to dismiss teachers- The process for dismissing teachers is more bureaucratic in public schools. Across most communities and schools, however, teachers cited parent engagement as low. They explained that many parents did not attend meetings at the beginning and end of the school year.

The various mechanisms at the national, sub-national, community, and school-levels for monitoring teachers point to several policy challenges. First, there are tensions between the monitoring of head teachers and the conducted by SEIs, DEOs or the national level. On one hand national and sub-national stakeholders emphasize the responsibility a head teacher has in monitoring teachers' attendance and performance. On the other hand, head teachers do not have the mandate to sanction teachers. Furthermore, it is not clear whether districts are adhering to a standard procedure when they receive reports of teacher absenteeism. According to Rwandan law, School General Assemblies are composed of elected parents and students and monitor the management of the school. They, or school disciplinary committees, could play an intermediary role in dealing with teacher absenteeism at the school and community level. Teachers, however, cited parent engagement as very low, and neither PTAs/School General Assemblies nor school disciplinary committees were frequently mentioned in interviews. There is a need for initiatives building up these formal bodies to support and take pressure off head teachers. and engage parents in education. Another concern is the lack of official and consistent monitoring of teacher absenteeism at the district level. Interviews showed that only some districts collect daily attendance reports from schools via SEIs and head teachers. DEOs are either not able to cite the prevalence of absence from school in their districts or they give a low number such as 3 per cent, which seems unrealistic, given existing research and estimations in East African countries.

### 5.2.3. Teacher welfare

#### ***Low teacher welfare and motivation not only cause teacher absenteeism but also give rise to other forms of teacher absenteeism, particularly at public schools***

Repeatedly, inadequate teacher salaries emerged in interviews with stakeholders. National-level officials acknowledged that teacher salaries are low compared to those of other civil servants. Some teachers from public schools explained that they suffer from food scarcity, which could lead to absence from school or lateness if they were searching for food for their families. Evidence shows that namely rural public-school teachers who are in precarious financial situations and experience hunger and personal stress, may also be absent from the classroom, reduce teaching time or not teach up to standard. Many teachers admitted that they are engaged in income-generating activities in addition to teaching, also resulting in absence from school and lateness or leaving early. Teachers in urban and rural areas had side jobs, although the prevalence was higher in rural areas. Farming was the most frequently mentioned activity. Teachers at private schools were less affected by low welfare. Data show that they receive higher salaries than public-school teachers. Similarly, teachers at public and government-subsidized schools where parents give bonuses to teachers, were motivated by these contributions and talked less about financial difficulties. Many national-level actors thought that these donations have a vital role to play in improving the education system and motivating teachers. Yet, the topic is controversial because forced contributions jeopardize the concept of universal education and create an incentive for teachers to move to more affluent areas. Data from this study are inconclusive on whether parent contributions have a direct positive effect on teacher absenteeism, even though such contributions correlated with higher levels of parent engagement. As for nationally sponsored incentives, MINEDUC has implemented a range of policies that teachers were generally positive about. They mentioned in particular annual bonuses, horizontal promotion, and Mwalimu Sacco loan rates. At the same time, some teachers stated that Mwalimu Sacco loans, which encourage teachers to start small

businesses, risked being detrimental to the teaching system. They said that teachers were distracted with other economic activities or became successful in their small business and would leave the teaching system altogether.

MINEDUC policies on annual bonuses and horizontal promotion have resulted in direct increases in teachers' salaries after a minimum of three years teaching. There is a gap, however, regarding salary incentives for newly qualified teacher. They do not qualify for these incentives, even if their performance is rated at 70 per cent, which is the minimum required for an annual bonus or even at 80 per cent or above. The government has provided affordable loans to teachers through Mwalimu Sacco. There appears to be no official investigation into whether teachers who started a business with such loans became more absent from school. It is not known if the quality of their teaching decreased, or if they left their jobs. Other government-sponsored incentives, for example REB's 'One Cow per Teacher', raises similar concerns. Teachers who receive a cow are vetted to ensure that they can take care of it and it is only when the cow gives birth to a calf that they officially own the cow. The calf was be given to another teacher. According to REB only 5 per cent of total teachers benefited from this incentive programme in 2018. There was no follow-up on how teachers balance their teaching workload with taking care of livestock.

#### 5.2.4. School and community infrastructure

##### ***Poor school and community infrastructure and lack of resources directly and indirectly cause absence from school, lateness, absence from the classroom and reduced teaching time***

Qualitative findings show high prevalence of absence from school, lateness, and reduced teaching time during the rainy season, primarily because of poor school and community infrastructure. When it rains heavily, it can be impossible for teachers to continue teaching during scheduled class time. The rain creates an overbearing noise on the iron-sheeted roofs. Most schools in this study are built with this kind of roof. Some schools mentioned losing electricity during heavy rains. This also affects teaching time. While all schools in the study struggled with absenteeism during the rainy season, rural public schools are the most affected with poor infrastructure and the lack of consistent electricity and running water.

Another challenge for teachers to arrive on time or being present is the remoteness and the difficulties with transportation. This illustrates that there are factors outside the education system, which affect teacher absenteeism. Many teachers at urban and rural schools walk long distances to school, because they sometimes cannot afford alternative forms of transportation. Even teachers who can access and afford transportation, often experience delays due to overcrowding or unreliable transport schedules. Teachers who live close to their schools do not struggle with lateness and absence as much. When teachers were asked how MINEDUC could improve the education system, many teachers brought up the need for additional teacher housing. Remoteness as a determinant of teacher absenteeism also interacts with teachers' experiences going to the bank and results in absence from school as well as lateness: Most teachers bank with Mwalimu Sacco- There is only one branch per district., Many teachers travel large distances to collect their salaries. In other words, low teacher welfare gives rise to absences. They need to go to the bank as they cannot wait until the weekend to receive their monthly salary. The combination of remoteness and poor community infrastructure has also created challenges for SEIs, who are not able to visit schools as often as they should due to a lack of transportation budget and who expressed that this negatively affects their engagement with and monitoring of schools.

Finally, there are challenges related to lack of resources at the school level. They include poor textbook provision and a lack of essential school materials for children such as notebooks and pencils. This has an impact on the quality of teaching and the teaching time, as teachers struggle to pull together a planned lesson. Head teachers, teachers, and students said that students were expected to provide their own material. If they are unable, they are told not to come to school, resulting in increased student absenteeism and even dropout. Some teachers emphasized the need for additional pre-primary schools. This would increase primary school readiness and decrease dropout rates. According to qualitative data, these challenges particularly affect public schools in poor communities.

This study's data point to several policy and implementation gaps in school and community infrastructure and resources. Since implementation of universal primary education, building up school infrastructure has remained one of MINEDUC's top strategic priorities. The latest ESSP acknowledges the need for 'modern infrastructure' and the need to map out schools lacking electricity and water. There is, however, no mention of ensuring that infrastructure is conducive to learning during all seasons of the year, including the rainy season. For the expansion of pre-primary schools, the policy focus is not on building schools but on identifying existing community facilities, which could serve as pre-primary schools. There is also a policy gap when it comes to addressing the consequences of remoteness and transportation — MINEDUC's latest ESSP mentions housing as an important element in increasing teacher welfare. But rather than being considered part of infrastructure goals, it is included next to incentives such as giving laptops and cows to best performing teachers, when it should be targeted at teachers with the most urgent needs. The latest TDM policy, however, goes into more depth, stating it will build a few hundred houses for teachers in rural or remote areas, although there is no mention of whether housing will accommodate teachers with families. 3,900 teachers will receive bicycles to decrease their commute to school. Improving school and community infrastructure and enhancing accessibility of healthcare centres and banks will require more than action from MINEDUC alone. It requires ministry-wide solutions.

## Summary

This section considered the interconnected nature of determinants of teacher absenteeism across all levels of the education system. While national level policies have a clear top-down effect on other levels of the education system, factors at the sub-national, community, school, and teacher level interact in unique ways. This gives rise to multiple forms of teacher absenteeism. Four broad themes capturing the cross-level nature of teacher absenteeism were discussed. These were continuous professional development provision, monitoring of teachers, teacher welfare, and infrastructure and resources. The gap in policy and policy implementation was also addressed, paving the way to policy recommendations in the next and final section.



## Section 6: Policy recommendations

Existing policies and strategic documents in Rwanda aim at increasing teacher motivation and improving activities directly and indirectly related to teacher absenteeism. They include sub-national monitoring, in-service training, and school and community infrastructure. An explicit acknowledgement of teacher absenteeism and direct linkage between policies and teacher absenteeism type remain absent from existing strategic priorities within the ESSP.

The policy recommendations below are based upon findings presented in this report and are related to policy and implementation gaps identified in the previous section. The recommendations are informed by global evidence on best practices in reducing teacher absences. This evidence suggests that countries with the most success in combating school absenteeism have combined direct interventions (i.e. interventions aimed directly at reducing teacher absences) with indirect interventions (i.e. interventions where the reduction of absenteeism was a secondary objective or a mechanism for achieving broader goals, like improved learning outcomes).<sup>99</sup> Some studies have shown that direct interventions, especially those that couple monitoring systems and accountability with financial rewards, have a positive and statistically significant effect on teacher school attendance.<sup>100</sup> Other studies have found that indirect interventions, such as involving the community in students' education, providing incentives schemes for students,<sup>101</sup> and improving school infrastructure,<sup>102</sup> can also result in reduced rates of teacher school absenteeism and can increase the time teachers spend on teaching.

However, there is no single, widely accepted recipe that can be readily handed down to education policy makers. More research is needed to identify what works in reducing the many forms of teacher absenteeism in different contexts. Consequently, the recommendations below are not prioritized in terms of importance. They should be ingredients that policy makers can add to the policy mix, depending on time and budget constraints and perceived implementation risks.

### 6.1. Continuous professional development implementation must be strengthened at multiple levels in order to guarantee quality education in the face of recent language instruction and curriculum policy changes

#### a. In-service training should continue to be based on specific subject and grade-level targeting

Most teachers in this study felt they had not received enough in-service training in English and CBC to teach up to standard. MINEDUC has recognized the need to implement an effective system for in-service training. It has also recognized that one-off or short-term trainings on CBC will not result in successful curriculum implementation. Rwanda's latest ESSP 2017/18-2022/23 strategically notes that English language training and CBC are interconnected. While it is necessary to improve the English language level of all teachers in the education system, there is a particular need to focus on all P4-P6 teachers who are the first teachers to instruct students entirely in English). The focus needs to be at P1 - P3 English language subject teachers as well who are the first to introduce English to students at school and who need to lay the foundation of literacy. English language training should thus be directly targeted to these teachers in the future. This targeting should apply to other trainings such as ICT, which is currently prioritized for all teachers, despite the fact that not all schools have computers or electricity.

DFID-supported BLF and USAID-supported Soma Umenye are examples of programmes conducting subject- and grade-level specific in-service trainings for teachers. In the case of BLF the programmes

are targeted at P1 – P3 teachers in the area of English and mathematics. In the case of Soma Umenye they target the same group in early literacy in Kinyarwanda. Upon the completion of these programmes in 2021, it will be essential for MINEDUC and REB to analyse the impact. They should look at on how to maintain the success of the programmes and take stock of any remaining gaps in subject training or grade-level targeting.

**b. Sector and school-based in-service training should become part of District Development Plans (DDPs) in order to ensure consistent delivery across all districts**

REB has produced a detailed programme for sector- and school-based in-service training (see REB, 2017, 'Guideline for Sector/School-Based CBC for CPD'). Training cascades down from the national level to sectors with schools ultimately taking the primary responsibility for implementation. As part of such programme, REB has requested districts to form District Continuous Professional Development Committees (DCCs). Districts are not required to comply with this request unless it appears in their District Development Plans (DDPs), which are the basis for performance contracts of all district employees. MINEDUC has acknowledged in the ESSP 2017/17-2022/23 that because DEOs and SEIs are employees of MINALOC, districts do not necessarily integrate national education policies and strategies into their DDPs. They have also acknowledged that DDPs, compared to education quality, tend to place disproportionate attention on education infrastructure. As a solution, MINEDUC should follow through with existing plans to strengthen communication between the national and district administrations by disseminating the national ESSP in Kinyarwanda to districts and making it a requirement for districts to align DDPs with national strategies. This would, in effect, better harmonize national and sub-national actions. Furthermore, the recent transition of Sector Education Officers (SEOs) to SEIs, who will now report directly to MINEDUC, may help in some of the challenges experienced in decentralisation. Considering that it is more difficult to develop indicators related to education quality, it would be essential that MINEDUC and REB provide technical assistance where possible.

**c. Strengthen the role of school-based mentors (SBM) and school-subject leaders (SSL) in order to eliminate duplication of work for head teachers and emphasize the collaborative rather than cascading nature of training**

According to existing TDM policy, SBMs have half the teaching load of other primary school teachers, to have time to mentor in CBC pedagogy and English language. Each school is also meant to have SSLs, serving as teachers' first point of reference for any CBC subject-related queries. There are, however, overlaps in the responsibilities with those of the head teacher: all are listed as responsible for sharing challenges and good practice with sector-based trainers (SBTs) who are above them. Since this study shows that head teachers have high workloads and are often away from schools for meetings, it would be beneficial to strengthen the role of the SBM as well as SSLs. In this way duplication of work between them and the head teacher can be avoided. Strengthening these roles would also improve the functioning of cascaded training. It would reinforce the collaborative element of CPD in schools. SMBs and SSLs could also facilitate in establishing communities of practice within schools, drawing on learning experiences from VVOB. Possible limitations in giving more SBMs and SSLs engagement and oversight in in-service training include the risk of decreased head teacher engagement or the risk of overworking SBMs and SSLs, who also have teaching duties. These risks are unlikely to manifest, however, as SBMs and SSLs' roles and responsibilities would merely be strengthened rather than shifted, and the head teacher would remain in a position of oversight.

#### **d. It is necessary to find time for teachers to complete sufficient in-service training**

According to MINEDUC, primary school teachers spend 6.5 hours per day teaching. In large part this is because of double-shifting. Teachers have one cohort of students in the morning and another in the afternoon. All stakeholders in this study attested to teachers' high workload. They confirmed that this can result in teachers being away from the classroom or not teaching during certain periods because of fatigue or due or because they are marking exams or preparing lessons. Data also suggests that some teachers are absent from school or the classroom due to in-service training. National-level policy is currently not clear on how much in-service training teachers should receive: while REB envisions in its training manuals that teachers will spend 120 minutes (or 3 teaching periods) per week on in-service training, according to MINEDUC's latest ESSP the minimum mandatory number of days teachers will spend on in-service training per year has not been specified yet. Regardless, there must be more space in teachers' timetables. This will hopefully be possible once the phasing out double shifting is completed. Before then, conducting in-service training during summer holidays and compensating teachers for this time could be considered. The latter may be more viable financially, as phasing out double shifting would require the recruitment of additional teachers and the construction of additional schools. Finding time in teachers' schedules to dedicate to in-service training is particularly important for public schools. Most private schools do not do double shifting and therefore their teaching workload is less.

### **6.2. Monitoring of teachers should be streamlined across districts. While nation-wide monitoring regarding absence from school and punctuality and leaving early must be strengthened, more of a focus should be placed on quality education indicators**

#### **a. Engagement and monitoring for quality of education must become part of DDPs, which will require increased support and guidance from MINEDUC**

Data show that districts' level of engagement and monitoring varies across the country and that there is a strong emphasis on school infrastructure rather than on quality education. This is a problem, which MINEDUC highlights in its latest ESSP 2017/18-2022/23. Nonetheless, an updated Inspection Framework providing clear inspection guidelines on roles and responsibilities is missing as well as schools norms and standards. There should also be inspection tools, including lesson observation tools as well as a system for feedback and reporting.

Part of the monitoring and engagement challenge stems from the fact that not all District Administrations have a district strategic plan. As already suggested by MINEDUC in the latest ESSP, there must be effective and well-timed coordination between the creation and communication of national education priorities and the creation of DDPs. To ensure that there is not an implementation gap regarding education priorities between the national and sub-national level, MINEDUC intends to send a copy of the ESSP in Kinyarwanda to each District Administration. MINEDUC has stated that DDEs, DEOs, and SEIs needed to be empowered to monitor learning. Yet, districts may understandably be hesitant, as MINEDUC needs to provide more support and guidance on how DEOs and SEIs should monitor quality education. Ideally this would be in the form of standardised indicators, such as the regular use of LARS.

**b. School General Assemblies could play a beneficial role in integrating parents, students, and teachers in monitoring at the community and school level**

DEOs and SEIs could be charged with building up the role of School General Assembly Councils, (SGACs) formerly known as Parent-Teacher Associations. They are composed of elected parents, students and teachers. According to Rwandan law they should exist for the purpose of monitoring the management of the school. Strengthening SGACs would be beneficial given that data from this study shows that parent engagement is low, especially in rural public schools and schools with high student absenteeism and dropout. Furthermore, DEOs, SEIs, and HTs could sensitize these assemblies to the issue of teacher absenteeism as part of an effort to improve communication channels between school assemblies and sector and district officers. This recommendation is not intended to transform parents into whistle blowers on a day-to-day basis. That could result in tension between teachers and parent., It is rather intended to make parents a partner of the school. This way they can help the head teacher in addressing frequently absent teachers at the school and community level. In turn, this increased parent engagement may ultimately relieve monitoring pressure from head teachers as well as sub-national officials. Other initiatives from the East African region could be considered in the Rwandan context such as *student* reporting of teacher absenteeism, as is seen in Kenya. A possible downside of such mechanisms is the creation of tension between students and teachers.

**c. SEIs who travel to remote schools need transportation budgets**

Many SEIs, particularly those in rural areas, are not able to visit schools as planned because of a lack of budget for transportation. It is essential that SEIs can visit schools for engagement and monitoring purposes. While it may be too expensive to allocate all SEIs a transportation budget, MINALOC should in partnership with the districts, develop a system for determining which SEIs may require a budget. They have to take into account the number of miles travelled, availability of public transportation, the community infrastructure of schools visited, and the season. For districts who serve exclusively rural schools, MINEDUC may need to provide additional financial assistance.

**d. Results from initiatives such as the electronic fingerprint clock-in system should be gathered, and if the project proved successful, this initiative could be scaled up**

There are no nation-wide data on prevalence of teacher absence from school or lateness and leaving early. Some districts in this study engaged in collecting daily attendance reports via head teachers and SEIs. It remained unclear if these reports were collected consistently or whether they fed into larger monitoring on the prevalence of absence from school or lateness and leaving early. Most DEOs interviewed were not able to cite the prevalence of teacher absence from school. One school in this study, however, had recently begun using an electronic fingerprint clock-in system for their teachers. While this may not be feasible in all schools, as not all schools have consistent supply of electricity, there should be an evaluation of the initiative focusing on teacher absence and teachers arriving late or leaving early. If this initiative proved successful in reducing rates of teacher absenteeism, applying the same system to other schools could eliminate the need to manually check attendance sheets for absence and lateness. This would free up time for head teachers and sub-national actors to reallocate monitoring focus elsewhere.

### 6.3. Teacher welfare issues must be addressed in order to decrease multiple forms of teacher absenteeism:

#### a. **Prioritise incentives for teachers who do not risk detracting from teaching duties (MINEDUC & REB)**

This study shows that public-school teacher welfare is low and that teachers welcome financial incentives supported by MINEDUC and REB.<sup>xx</sup> At the same time, data suggests that certain incentives, such as Mwalimu Sacco small business loans, may in some cases distract from teaching duties. The 'One cow per teacher' incentive for the best performing teachers poses a similar question. There has not been a national evaluation of the effect of either Mwalimu Sacco small business loans or 'one cow per teacher' on teacher absenteeism. As regards decreasing teacher absenteeism, it would be more advisable for MINEDUC and REB to prioritise incentives that increase teacher welfare without the possibility of encouraging additional side work. As an example, emphasis could be shifted from rewarding the best performing teachers with cows to targeting teachers who struggle with remoteness and transportation. This would more directly reduce teacher absence and lateness. In a recent TDM policy, MINEDUC laid out plans to distribute 1,800 cows estimated at 900,000,000 RWF (920,000 USD) and to give bicycles estimated at 390,000,000 RWF (400,000 USD) to 3,900 teachers in rural areas. Providing bicycles to teachers is thus a less expensive initiative. MINEDUC also has plans to build additional teacher housing. While this is important, it remains a long-term solution, and is one of the most expensive initiatives to increase teacher welfare. It also impacts the smallest number of teachers. In the short-term, MINEDUC could consider whether it is more financially feasible to provide teachers who live a certain distance from the school and cannot find suitable accommodation closer to the school with conditional, bi-annual remoteness stipends. The provision of long-term, subsidised housing loans could also be an effective measure to improve the livelihoods of teachers. The feasibility of establishing a housing loan scheme for teachers, possibly based on revolving fund with subsidised interest rates, should be carefully examined.

### 6.4. Poor school and community infrastructure and lack of teaching materials must be addressed in order to reduce teacher absence from the classroom and prevent teachers from reducing their teaching time

#### a. **When building schools and updating existing infrastructure, it is essential that MINEDUC provide communities with building materials, which will withstand the rainy season. It should not interfere with teaching and that there should be monitoring of school construction**

Across all schools in this study, teachers had to stop teaching during heavy rains because of the deafening noise on the iron-sheeted roofs. Now that MINEDUC has made significant progress with universalizing primary education, priorities are shifting away from infrastructure to quality education. However, infrastructure and quality are directly linked. MINEDUC has existing policy plans to strengthen modern school infrastructure and promote universal design across the country. In doing so it should consider alternatives to iron-sheet roofs to avoid seasonal spikes in teacher absenteeism. Other climatic challenges, which did not come out in this study but may affect learning environments should not be neglected.

xx Shortly after data for this study was collected, MEN announced a 10 per cent increase in all primary and secondary teacher salaries.

**b. Textbook provision must be tightly aligned with national curriculum modifications**

MINEDUC's existing plans to provide TTCs with CBC textbooks will increase newly qualified teachers' professional readiness. MINEDUC also plans to increase digitalized content in order to decrease the need for textbooks. This should remain a long-term goal because not all schools may have the necessary number of computers or adequate supply of electricity. As the rollout of CBC comes to an end, MINEDUC must ensure that teachers have the textbooks necessary to fully integrate the new curriculum.

**c. Inter-ministry collaboration is necessary to combat all determinants of teacher absenteeism, particularly regarding access to community infrastructure**

MINEDUC alone can make some progress regarding the community infrastructure available to teachers. It can encourage Mwalimu Sacco to expand its number of branches per district, particularly in remote districts. This would prevent teachers from making long journeys to collect their salaries and from being absent from school. If increasing the number of bank branches is not financially viable, alternatives such as mobile banking and spending could be considered. Efforts must go beyond the mandate of MINEDUC and extend to inter-ministry collaboration. Indeed, the latest ESSP identifies limited coordination on cross-cutting issues between government agencies as a risk to achieving educational goals as currently outlined. Inter-ministry collaboration between MINEDUC, the Ministry of Infrastructure (MININFRA) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) will be vital in improving factors outside of the education system that affect teachers' daily lives.

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