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Time to Teach

Teacher attendance and time on task in primary schools

Kenya

Despina Karamperidou

November 2020

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Foreword

Teachers have a vital role of imparting knowledge to pupils. But they are more than just conduits of information. Teachers 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. And yet, many education systems in Eastern and Southern Africa are failing to adequately prepare, support, motivate and manage their teachers, as illustrated by the high teacher absenteeism rates, which range from 15 per cent to 45 per cent.

Notably, Kenya has invested heavily in education and teacher development. Since 2013, and in comparison with the other countries in Eastern Africa, the Government of Kenya (GoK) has been spending the largest proportion of its gross domestic product on education. Despite that progress, teacher absenteeism continues to be a serious challenge that hinders the provision of quality education in Kenyan primary schools. Although there are many valid reasons for a teacher to be away from school and the classroom, some absences are clearly illegitimate, such as when teachers moonlight (work elsewhere) when they should be teaching. This contributes to the fact that many children attending school in Kenya still lack foundational literacy, numeracy and the socio-emotional skills necessary to reach their full potential.

Addressing teacher absenteeism and providing quality education are critical if Kenya is to meet its goal of ending poverty and boosting shared prosperity by 2030.

Teacher absenteeism and reduced time on task waste valuable financial resources and have negative consequences on the entire school system. The low attendance of teachers can also cause much broader economic losses as any hindrance to human capital development has a deteriorating impact on sustainable development across sectors. Therefore, enhancing teachers' presence in school and in their classrooms and ensuring that class time is spent teaching can contribute significantly to the productivity and inclusive prosperity of any country.

This Time to Teach (TTT) study collates and strengthens the evidence base on primary school teacher absenteeism in Kenya. The study uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide critical insights on the factors that underpin multiple forms of teacher absenteeism and diminished time on task. It also examines how factors vary across school types and teacher characteristics.

It is hoped that findings from this study will inform policies that will ensure a motivated teaching force, increase the opportunities for children to learn at school and, ultimately, improve their life and work opportunities.

The Research Team

UNICEF Innocenti

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Acronyms and abbreviations

BoM	Board of Management
CEB	County Education Board
CSO	Curriculum Support Officer
FPE	Free Primary Education
QASO	Quality Assurance and Standards Officer
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
GoK	Government of Kenya
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
KEMI	Kenya Education Management Institute
KES	Kenyan shilling
KISE	Kenya Institute of Special Education
KICD	Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development
KCPE	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
KNUT	Kenyan National Union of Teachers
MoE	Ministry of Education
NEB	National Education Board
NESP	National Education Sector Plan
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
TPAD	Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development
TLM	Teaching and learning materials
TSC	Teacher Service Commission
TTT	Time to Teach

Executive summary

Overview

Teacher absenteeism constitutes a significant barrier to achieving quality education in many low- and middle-income countries globally, where teachers' school absence rates range from 3 per cent to 27 per cent.[1] In Kenya, where primary education has made remarkable improvements in recent years, teacher absenteeism remains a foremost challenge for the education system. In 2102, the World Bank estimated the average rate of teacher absenteeism from schools across the country at 15 per cent and the average rate of teacher absenteeism from the classroom at 42 per cent.[2] The World Bank also found that, on average, the amount of time primary school teachers spend on teaching is approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes, which is only half of the scheduled time, and that 18 per cent of a typical lesson is lost to non-teaching activities. More recently (2016), a study conducted in 4,529 Kenyan primary schools found that, on average, one in ten teachers was absent from school and that half of all schools had a teacher absenteeism rate in excess of 10 per cent.[3] While the stark numbers are available, the evidence base on what factors, policies and practices affect teacher attendance in Kenya remains scant.

Time to Teach (TTT) targets this knowledge gap. Its primary objective is to identify factors affecting the various forms of primary school teacher attendance and to use this evidence to inform the design and implementation of teacher-related policies. Specifically, the study looks at four distinct forms of teacher attendance: (i) being in school; (ii) being punctual (not arriving late or leaving early); (iii) being in the classroom (while in school); and (iv) spending sufficient time on task (while in the classroom).

TTT is a mixed-methods study employing both qualitative and quantitative research tools. The study draws on national and system-wide qualitative data collections, school observations and a quantitative survey with 312 teachers working in 20 purposively selected primary schools (among a total of 582 study participants).

Main findings

How frequently are teachers absent?

More than 9 per cent of the surveyed teachers **reported being absent from school** at least once a week, with more experienced teachers reporting a higher frequency of school absenteeism. And 10 per cent of the surveyed teachers reported **arriving to school late or leaving school early** once a week or more, while 9 per cent of teachers reported **missing class while at school** also once a week or more. Reduced time spent on task while in the classroom was reported by 14 per cent of the surveyed teachers as occurring at least once a week.

Why are teachers absent?

Teacher absenteeism in Kenya is influenced by a multitude of interplaying factors at different levels of the education system (national, subnational, community, school and individual teacher levels). The main determinants reported are:

- **The ability of head teachers** to effectively monitor, manage and provide teaching mentorship to teachers is crucial for discouraging all dimensions of absenteeism. These functions, however, are dwarfed by inadequate head teacher training in organizational and personnel management, the absence of meritocratic selection processes and an excessive workload.
- **Increased frequency of school inspections** is linked with low rates of school absenteeism and lateness to duty. Nevertheless, inspections are hindered by a number of factors, including the understaffing of county and subcounty education offices, the absence of sufficient means of transportation and inadequate travel and accommodation allowances required for school visits.
- **The teacher performance appraisal and development** (TPAD) system has significantly reduced school absenteeism across Kenya since its introduction in 2016. But it also may have increased the propensity of teachers to engage in alternative forms of absenteeism, such as being absent from the classroom or reducing their time on task.
- **Insufficient pre-service and in-service training of teachers** limit their opportunities to learn new pedagogical skills and to acquire content knowledge, which restricts classroom attendance and time on task.
- **Limited parental and community involvement** encourage higher rates of school and classroom absenteeism. In schools that have poor relations with parents, teachers also tend to spend less time on task.
- **Inadequate school infrastructure and teaching equipment** do not adversely affect teachers' school attendance and punctuality. However, infrastructural limitations can encourage subtler manifestations of absenteeism, such as teachers' absence from class and reduced time on task. Public schools in marginalized and remote areas are the most heavily affected as they experience the biggest investment needs.
- **Inadequate community infrastructure**, specifically the unavailability of developed road networks, reliable transportation services and high-quality health care, is directly associated with low rates of school attendance and low teacher punctuality. Distance between a teacher's home residence and work is also closely linked with reporting to school without fail and on time, irrespective of mode of transport used.
- **Female teachers** are more likely than their male counterparts to be absent from school or unpunctual in their teaching commitments due to family obligations. Yet there is no significant difference between male and female teachers in terms of classroom absenteeism and time on task.
- **Ill health** is the most frequently (self-reported) reason for all types of absenteeism. Significant variations in the frequency of health-induced teacher absences did not emerge in terms of teacher gender and school type (public or private, rural or urban). However, teachers serving in remote areas are more likely to be absent for multiple days when ill and more prone to lateness caused by illness due to the unavailability of a health care facility in close proximity to their school or home.
- **Intercommunal conflict and terrorist violence** continue to be major contributors to teachers' school absenteeism and desertion, despite serious efforts by the Government to keep schools in conflict-prone regions open. A series of challenges directly related to frequent bursts of violence in conflict-affected areas also hinder teachers' capacity to spend sufficient time on task. These include psychological distress, overcrowded schools and classrooms (the result of schools closing in the aftermath of attacks) and students suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

- **Weather,** in particular, excessive rainfall and heat, contributes to high rates of school absenteeism and late arrival to duty, in combination with poor community infrastructure (roads and transportation services). Weather also affects teachers' class attendance, time on task and teaching quality, especially in conjunction with poor school infrastructure.

How can teach attendance be improved?

- **Ensure that all head teachers have access to training courses** on various aspects of leadership and teacher monitoring and oversight. Making this training a requisite for recruitment or promotion to head teacher (along with other objective and clearly defined criteria) is also important for ensuring that teacher management is enhanced in every educational institution, leading to better teacher motivation and attendance.
- **Increase the frequency of school inspections, especially in rural and remote areas.** This could be achieved by developing (in partnership with field education offices) a system for determining which offices may require additional staff and more funds for transportation, taking into account the number of schools and teachers served, miles travelled, availability of public transportation and other contextual specificities, including climatic conditions and political instability.
- **Simplify the TPAD data entry requirements** to reduce teacher workload and therefore classroom absences and insufficient content delivery. Educating stakeholders at the school level on the effective use of the TPAD system and exploring alternative means of receiving TPAD data from remote and hardship-area schools with limited internet access will also counter the TPAD's adverse effects on attendance.
- **Reform and strengthen the pre-service teacher training curriculum** to ensure that it contains a strong practical component and extensive practice in competency-based learning. Re-examining the effectiveness of the cascade in-service training delivery model may also be needed**.**
- **Boost parental and community involvement, especially low-income and rural public schools, as a way of improving teacher accountability and attendance.** As a first step, this involves head teachers and teachers increasing their effort to communicate with parents. Formal initiatives can include parent–teacher events and increased parent representation on the school management board. Raising awareness and building up the capacity of community actors in their monitoring role are also necessary for increasing their ability and motivation to monitor teacher behaviour.
- **Prioritize the disbursement of funds** for infrastructural rehabilitation and new construction of primary schools in the arid and semi-arid regions, urban slums and hard-to-reach vulnerable areas. Work in strategic partnership with development partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), line ministries, communities, parents and other stakeholders on the provision of infrastructure in all public primary schools.
- **Strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration** and work in strategic partnership with line ministries, development partners, NGOs, communities, parents and other stakeholders to address factors beyond the education system that affect teacher attendance and time on task, in particular in relation to health and infrastructure.

Section 1: Introduction

1.1. Context and rationale

Teacher absenteeism wastes valuable financial resources, short-changes young students and is one of the most cumbersome obstacles on the path towards universal learning in developing countries.[4] Studies from across the developing world have found that national averages of teacher absenteeism range from 3 per cent to 27 per cent.[5] These national averages conceal even higher rates of absenteeism within countries and large variations in educational opportunities and outcomes, with educators tending to be more frequently absent in poorer and more remote communities and schools.[6]

Teacher absenteeism is particularly prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa. The Service Delivery Indicators study that the World Bank published in 2017 found that, on any given day, between 15 per cent and 45 per cent of all primary school teachers in seven sub-Saharan African countries[i] were absent from school and between 23 per cent and 57 per cent were absent from class.[7] The same study estimated that, on average, the loss of teaching hours due to teacher absenteeism corresponds to a waste of approximately 46 cents on every dollar invested in education, which is equivalent to an annual wastage of between 1 per cent and 3 per cent of gross domestic product.[8] Afrobarometer data, drawn from 36 African countries,[9] also indicate that teacher absenteeism contributes to unequal education outcomes, confirming a strong association between high levels of teacher absenteeism and the presence of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

In Kenya, empirical evidence suggests that teacher absenteeism has been a problem for years due to rapid expansions in primary school enrolment that put substantial pressure on the education system's ability to recruit, train and retain teachers. A 2010 study found that teachers in rural schools were absent 20 per cent of the required time.[10] Based on a series of unannounced visits to 306 primary schools across the country, the World Bank's Service Delivery Indicators report for Kenya estimated the average rate of teacher absenteeism from primary school at 15 per cent and the average rate of teacher absenteeism from the classroom at 42 per cent.[11] The 2017 Service Delivery Indicators report also noted that, on average, the amount of time primary school teachers spent on teaching was approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes, which was only half of the scheduled time. And the percentage of lessons lost to non-teaching activities was estimated at approximately 18 per cent of a typical lesson. More recently (2016), a study conducted in 4,529 schools showed that, on average, one in ten Kenyan teachers were absent from the school on any given day and that half of all schools had a teacher absenteeism rate in excess of 10 per cent[12] .

Such alarming statistics on teacher absenteeism from primary school as well as mounting evidence regarding absenteeism from the classroom and from teaching while at school point to systemic governance, accountability and management issues.[13] The multifaceted nature of the problem and its magnitude suggest a pressing need to identify and address the underlying causes. Failure to do so will not only perpetuate a waste of the considerable resources the GoK spends on education but will also condemn generations of students to suboptimal education, stunt their academic growth and diminish their opportunities in life.

i Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, United Republic of Tanzania, Togo and Uganda.

1.2. Objectives

Policymakers and education stakeholders are becoming increasingly aware of the negative consequences of teacher absenteeism. Nevertheless, the evidence base on how policies and practices at various levels of the education system influence different dimensions of teacher attendance (school, classroom and so on) remains limited. This lack of evidence contributes to difficulties in designing effective teacher management policies to increase educators' motivations and opportunities to teach and successfully implement school governance reforms.[14]

The principal objective of the Time to Teach (TTT) study is to generate and collate empirical evidence on the various types and determinants of primary school teacher absenteeism in Kenya and to provide practical recommendations for improving teacher attendance rates.

More specifically, the study aims to:

- Understand the various forms of primary school teacher absenteeism (e.g. absence from school, classroom, etc.) and assess their prevalence in different regions, types of schools (public or private) and settings (rural or urban).
- Explore the issue of teacher absenteeism from a systemic perspective and identify factors at different levels of the education system (national, subnational, community, school and teacher) that affect teacher attendance and time on task.
- Provide actionable policy recommendations on increasing teachers' attendance as a means of improving learners' academic performance.

1.3. Methods

TTT is a mixed-methods study that employs both qualitative and quantitative research tools. In total, 20 primary schools were purposively selected based on the following four criteria: location (region or county), governance (public or private), community setting (rural or urban) and performance (high or low). At each school, in-depth interviews were carried out with the head teacher, three teachers and a member of the school management board. A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with students and a teacher survey was administered to all teachers who were present on the day of the (pre-announced) school visit. National and subnational education officers in charge of teacher monitoring and teacher union representatives were also interviewed. In total, 582 individuals participated in the study.

1.4. Report organization

This report is structured as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of Kenya's primary education system and teacher management policies. Section 3 presents the design of the study, explores the definition of teacher absenteeism and discusses sampling, instrument development, data collection and data analysis. The results are presented in Section 4. Section 5 outlines emerging policy recommendations.

Section 2: The Kenyan context

2.1. Country overview

2.1.1. Geography and demographics

Kenya is in the eastern part of the African continent, sharing borders with Ethiopia and South Sudan to the north, Uganda to the west, the United Republic of Tanzania to the south and Somalia to the north-east. The Indian Ocean lies to the south-east. Since the mid-twentieth century, Kenya has experienced rapid population growth as a result of its high birth rate and declining mortality rate.[15] According to latest available estimates, Kenya has a population of 49.7 million people.[16] Because of sustained high fertility and early marriage and childbearing, the population is fairly young, with persons aged 15 years or younger constituting about 40 per cent of the total population.[17] Kenyan society is also quite diverse, comprising 42 ethnic communities that include some of Africa's major sociolinguistic groups. As many as 80 per cent of Kenyans are Christian, and 10 per cent are Muslim, while the remainder follows traditional African religions or other faiths.[18] English and Kiswahili (Swahili) are the official languages.

2.1.2. Politics and administrative structure

Kenya is a former British colony. Since independence in 1963, the country has experienced relative stability, with a strong centralized government and a dominant executive.[19] Multiparty elections were introduced in 1992, allowing the alternation of political parties in power. In 2007–2008, peace was threatened by widespread post-election violence that left more than 1,100 people dead and forced more than 500,000 people to flee their home.[20] The need for national cohesion and accountable, inclusive governance led to a 2010 constitutional referendum and a new Constitution thesame year. This resulted in the replacement of Kenya's province-based administrative structure by a system of counties in 2013, which transformed the country into a devolved governance system designed to ensure the equitable distribution of national and local resources and to promote citizen participation in decision-making.[ii] Kenya is currently divided into 47 counties, each managed by a governor, with considerable legislative and executive powers.

2.1.3. Economy

Short life expectancy and low per capita incomes are major characteristics of Kenya's socioeconomic status.[21] Unemployment and underemployment are high, estimated to affect 40 per cent of the population.[22] While Kenya has a growing entrepreneurial middle class and rising tourism and service industries, agriculture remains the backbone of its economy, contributing one third of gross domestic product. Approximately 75 per cent of Kenya's workforce is engaged, at least partly, in agricultural activities.[23] However, disparities in the distribution of arable land and the amount of rainfall in the country have significant effect on economic output, resulting in sizeable regional inequalities.[24] Kenya's semi-arid and arid lands are the least developed. They are often affected by drought and famine, and their inhabitants are mainly nomads dependent on livestock production. Wide disparities also exist between urban and rural areas, with 85 per cent of all poor people living in rural areas, while the majority of the urban poor live in slums and peri-urban settlements.[25]

Despite these challenges, Kenya remains the economic, financial and transport hub of East Africa, experiencing steady growth over the past decade, with a real gross domestic product annual increase averaging more than 5 per cent in the past five years.[26] Kenya's human capital is of a comparatively high

ii Prior to the enactment of the 2010 Constitution, the country was organized into a system of eight provinces: Coast, Central, Eastern, Nairobi, Rift Valley, Nyanza, Western and North Eastern.

quality, undergirding a resilient private sector, which, through its advantageous access to trading routes, carries the potential to realize Kenya's vision of becoming a middle-income country by 2030.[27]

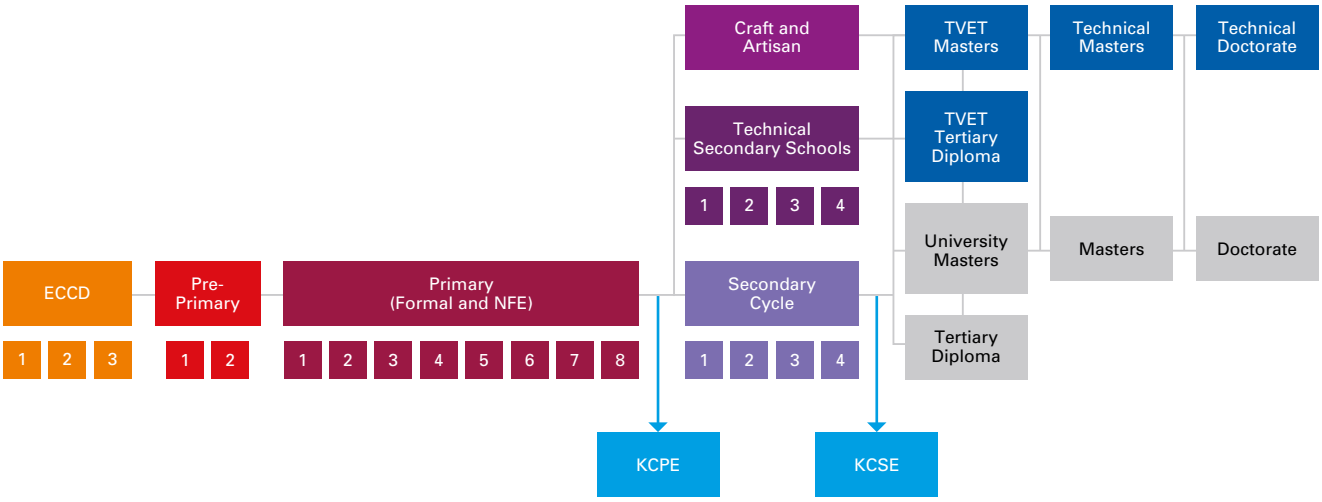
2.2. Kenya's primary education system

2.2.1. Structure

The current education and vocational training system in Kenya is structured as an 8-4-4 system consisting of: (i) eight years of primary education for children aged 6–13, leading to the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE); (ii) four years of secondary education for students aged 14–17, leading to the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education; and (iii) university education, which targets learners aged 18 and older, lasts a minimum of four years and leads to a bachelor's degree, with an option for post-graduate training programmes (master's and doctorate degrees).[28]

The scope of the 8-4-4 system incorporates early childhood care development, education and technical skills. It covers early childhood care for children up to age 3 years and pre-primary services for children aged 4–5 years. Technical and vocational education and training programmes (TVET) target youth who do not enrol in the regular education system. TVET is provided by youth polytechnics, technical training institutes and institutes of technology, leading to certificates and diplomas in various disciplines. These institutions also provide business education-related courses.[29] Figure 1 illustrates the system's structure.

Figure 1. Kenyan education and vocational training system



Note: ECCD=early childhood care and development; NFE=non-formal education; TVET=Technical and Vocational Education and Training; KCPE=Kenya Certificate of Primary Education; KCSE=Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education.

Source: Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Basic Education Sector Analysis Report*, Nairobi, 2012.

The 8-4-4 structure was introduced in 1985. It has since been criticized for not adequately preparing primary school leavers for entering TVET programmes and for ignoring sectors that promote fast economic growth, such as construction, agriculture and fishing.[30] Other issues associated with the 8-4-4 system include an overloaded, broad-based curriculum; high costs for parents; limited provision of teaching and learning materials (TLM); and a lack of attention to learners with disabilities.[31]

The MOE is now rolling out a new education system. It features a 2-6-3-3 curriculum, which is entirely competence-based. According to the new system, primary education will be split into two categories - pre-primary and primary –lasting two and six years respectively. Students will then progress to Junior Secondary School where they will stay for three years prior to joining the Senior Secondary level. At the senior level, students will spend another three years focusing on areas of specialization, depending on their interests and competencies. After the senior secondary stage, they will have the opportunity to either enrol in vocational training centres or pursue university education.[32] The new system began instituting pre-primary 1 and 2 and primary Grades 1, 2 and 3 across the country in January 2019. Full implementation is expected to begin in 2020.

2.2.2. Governance

Prior to the 2010 Constitution, Kenya's education system was highly centralized, with the MOE the principal centre of authority. With the new Constitution, ministry functions have been partially assigned to counties. County government is now responsible for providing pre-primary education, village polytechnics, homecraft centres and childcare facilities.[33] The MOE continues to be responsible for primary and secondary education. Its jurisdiction covers policy formulation; development of sector strategies; inspection and supervision of education institutions, teacher education and management; school administration and programmes; school equipment; curriculum development; examinations and certification; and audits of resource utility.[34] In 2013, a National Education Board (NEB) was established to advise the MOE cabinet secretary on matters related to education stakeholder coordination and the removal of barriers to quality education. The NEB is also responsible for publishing an annual report on the state of education in the country.[35]

Other national organizations central to the education system include the Kenya National Examination Council, which independently administers the examinations (for the primary and secondary education certificates), the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD),[iii] which develops basic education curriculum and teacher training materials, and the Teacher Service Commission (TSC), which serves as the primary employer of all teachers, except those in private schools and universities.[36] The TSC is responsible for registering trained teachers, recruiting and employing registered teachers, promoting and transferring teachers, exercising disciplinary control over teachers, terminating teachers' employment, reviewing the standards of education and training of persons entering the teaching service and advising the Government on matters relating to the teaching profession.[37]

Subnationally, several actors oversee implementation of the education policies. At the county level, there is (i) a County Education Board (CEB), headed by a CDE and comprising 12 members appointed by the MOE cabinet secretary, and (ii) an Education Standards Quality Assurance Council, which consists of Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QASOs) appointed by the CEB.[38] Education functions devolved to these bodies include the monitoring and evaluation of programmes, standards assurance, quality maintenance, supervision and oversight of curriculum implementation, and the capacity building of teachers.

Clearly designed management structures also exist at the subcounty, district and zone levels to coordinate inspection, education and training activities. The quality assurance and standards officers at these levels are tasked with visiting schools to inspect facility infrastructure and school management, the number of textbooks and the attendance of students and teachers. They also advise teachers on their teaching methods.[39]

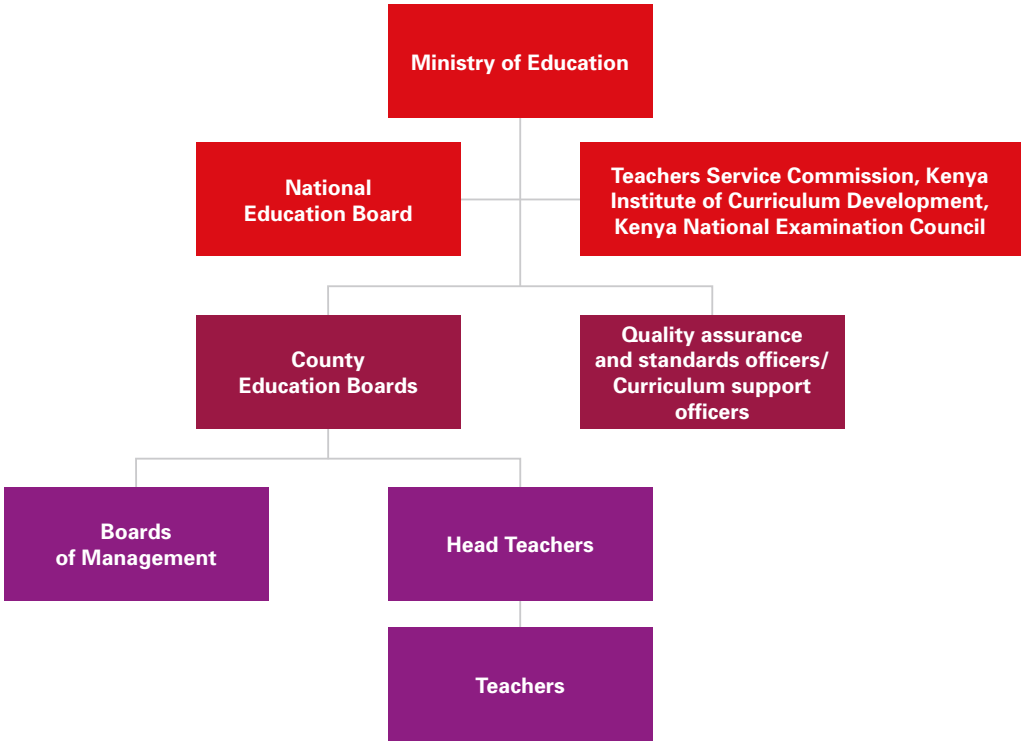
iii Formerly the Kenya Institute for Education.

For purposes of providing quality teaching and learning, the TSC can establish a curriculum support centre staffed with Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs) at the zone level or any other level within the subcounty. The CSOs are tasked with identifying the training needs of teachers, organizing courses of curriculum delivery, assisting teachers to develop teaching aids and updating teachers on curriculum changes, pedagogy and content coverage.

At the school level, a board of management (BoM) – appointed by the CEB – is responsible for managing the public primary schools. Their membership includes parents of pupils as well as representatives of the teaching staff, the student council and special interest groups in the community. In public schools, the chairperson is elected by the members, while the head teacher serves as secretary.[40] The board of management carries out day-to-day operations on all school-related matters, including assessing and ensuring the suitability of the school's physical facilities, advising the CEB on staffing needs, providing counselling to learners, encouraging and ensuring the safety of teachers and managing school resources.[41] Head teachers are responsible for providing overall leadership and overseeing the effective management of the school, for overseeing teachers' compliance with professional practice, for ensuring the prudent management of resources and staff, for supervising curriculum implementation and for providing directions for effective teaching.[42]

Figure 2 lays out the governance structure for primary education in Kenya, highlighting the key actors at the different levels of the education system.

Figure 2. Primary education governance



Source: Author's illustration based on Teachers Service Commission, *Code of Regulations for Teachers*, Nairobi, 2015.

2.2.3. Major achievements and challenges

Since independence, the Government has invested heavily to improve access to free and quality primary education. In 2003, the Government launched its Free Primary Education (FPE) programme that abolished school fees and levies. A year later, it developed a sector wide approach to planning (SWAP) for education. The two frameworks paved the way for the adoption of Sessional Paper No.1, that became the basis of the current education system, and the Education Sector Support Program (KESSP), a five-year, donor-supported investment plan (2005-2010) that was aimed at achieving the FPE programme's objectives. [43]

To enhance an all-inclusive and equitable basic education, the MOE developed a series of subsector policies that deal with areas previously neglected. These include the Education Sector Policy on HIV and AIDS (2004), the Gender Policy in Education (2008), the Policy Framework for Nomadic Education (2010) and the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities (2018).[44]

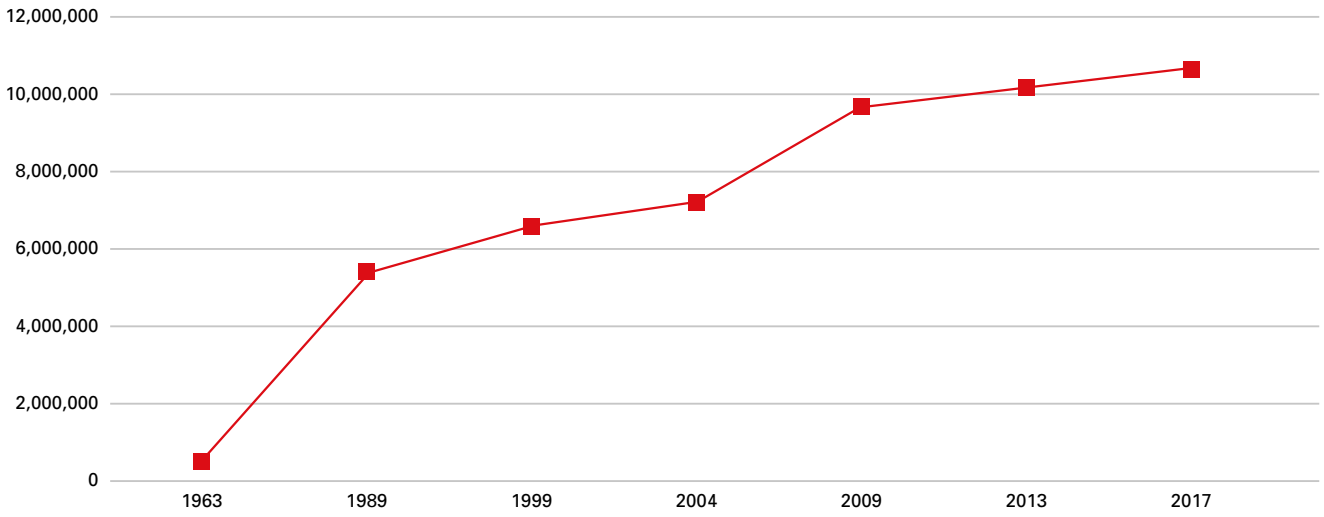
The National Education Sector Plan (NESP) 2013–2018, a new policy framework at that time, was adopted to guide the development of education and training sectors. The plan highlighted policy goals and major challenges and suggested strategies and financing options for goal realization. It prioritized access, equity and quality across all levels of basic education and training. It also promoted the elimination of gender and regional disparities.[45]

Access, completion and equity

As a result of these policy initiatives, tremendous improvement has been recorded in primary education access, completion and equity (*see Figures 3, 4*).

In 2000, prior to the introduction of free primary education, the national Gross Enrolement Rate (GER) in primary education was 87 per cent. In 2007, the GER reached just beyond 112 per cent, before declining to 104 per cent in 2017.[46] This suggests that access to primary education has increased steadily over time, but with more overaged children participating. Moreover, the rising national net enrolment rate (NER), from 70.1 per cent in 1999 to 91.2 per cent in 2017, indicate that the proportion of children from the appropriate age group (6–13 years) enrolled in primary school has also been improving consistently.[47]

Figure 3. Number of children enrolled in formal primary school

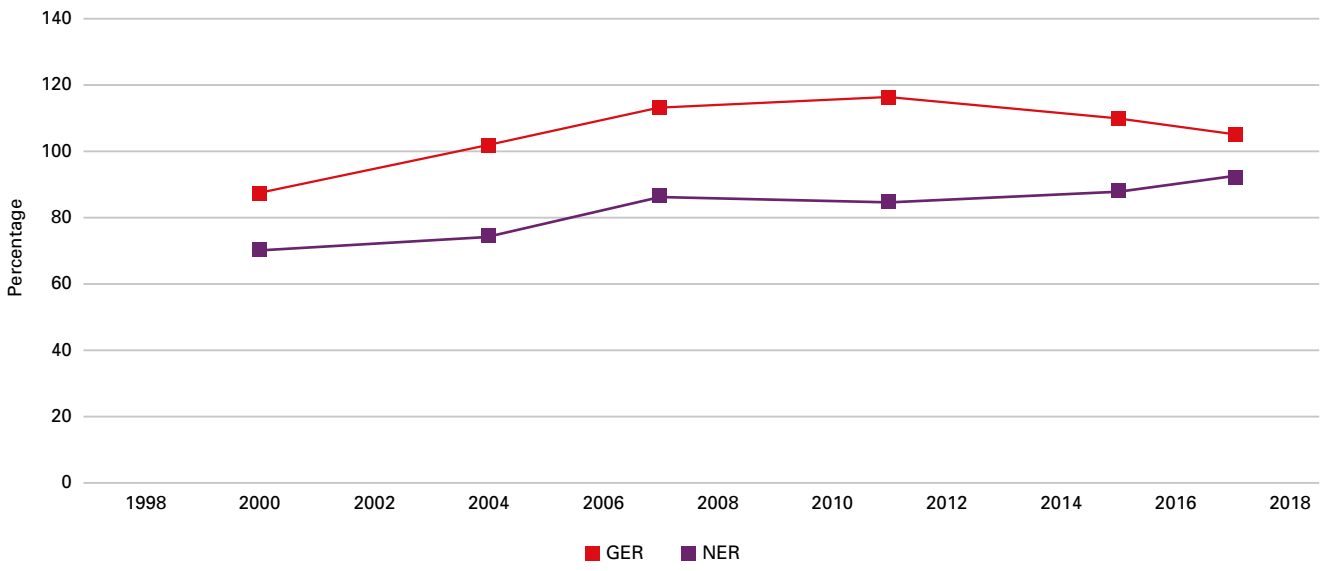


Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, *National Education Sector Plan, Volume One: Basic Education Program Rationale and Approach 2013/2014–2017/2018*, Nairobi, Government of Kenya, 2014.

Repetition and drop-out rates have recorded similar improvements. The national repetition rate decreased from 13.2 per cent in 1999 to 3.4 per cent in 2015, and the drop-out rate went from 27.2 per cent in 2003 to 7 per cent in 2014.[48] Gains were also recorded in the primary-to-secondary transition rate, which increased from 45 per cent in 1999 to 83.1 per cent in 2017, and in the rate of survival to last grade of primary education, which increased from 72.8 per cent in 2003 to 93 per cent in 2014.[49]

Kenya is also making good progress on improving gender disparities, particularly with primary education enrolment and completion. Traditionally, enrolment rates for boys had been higher than for girls; today, they are close to parity, with 5.3 million boys and 5.1 million girls enrolled in primary school in 2017.[50]

Figure 4. GER and NER, 2000–2017

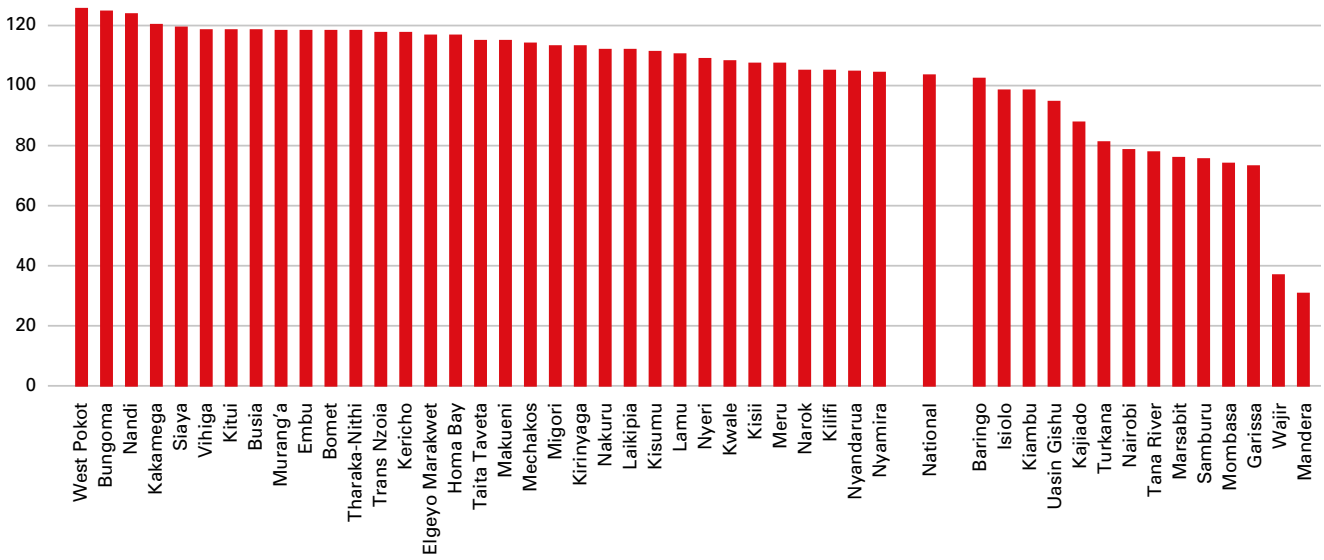


Source: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, *Economic Survey 2018,* Nairobi, Government of Kenya, 2018; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, *A Policy Framework for Education, Training, and Research,* Seasonal Paper No. 1, Nairobi, Government of Kenya, 2004; and <https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/dataset/education-statistics>, accessed 3 June 2019.

Despite these gains, there are still significant barriers to education access and equity. Enrolment is currently high on average, but there are still groups among whom low enrolment is persistent, such as working children, children living on the streets and children with disabilities.[51] Irregular attendance among enrolled students continues to be a problem across the country.[52]

Sizeable subnational disparities exist both in the overall enrolment rates as well as in levels of participation for boys and girls.[53] According to 2015 data, a total of 33 counties recorded a GER above the national average, while 14 counties recorded a rate below the national average (*see Figure 5*). The lack of equity in the distribution of education resources (including teachers), especially in the semi-arid and arid lands and in the urban informal settlements, is a key factor underpinning these variations. Ancillary costs of primary education, such as school uniforms, have also been found to contribute to the persistently low enrolment rates. The same is true with gender disparities, especially in nomadic and pastoral communities, where supporting boys' education is often preferred when resources are scarce. Cultural norms and religious practices, such as early marriage for girls and female genital mutilation, have been highlighted as contributing factors.[54]

Figure 5. Gross enrolment rate, by county, 2015



Source: Ministry of Education, *Basic Education Statistical Booklet,* Nairobi, Government of Kenya, 2015.

Quality

With the introduction of FPE Kenya has made substantial progress in promoting access to education. However, the surge in enrolment rates, combined with the lack of stakeholder readiness to effectively manage the immediate demands of the programme, has undermined the quality of education provided in primary schools.

To address this challenge, the Government injected financial resources into areas of strategic priority for quality education, such as school teaching materials and infrastructure, school nutrition and health, teacher management, teacher pre-service and in-service training and capacity building, and quality assurance.[55] The Government has also provided additional support for low-cost boarding schools in the semi-arid and arid lands, enhanced the capacity of school managers and quality assurance officers, developed a competency-based curriculum and reformed the teacher labour market.[56]

Despite the substantial allocation of resources and the notable achievements attained,[57] important challenges to quality education remain. These include large and heterogeneous classes, especially in counties with high enrolment rates; high pupil–teacher ratios in densely populated areas; shortages in TLM; insufficient teacher training; poor teacher utilization; and internal inefficiencies in the management of education resources.[58]

As a result, student learning continues to be inadequate. A nationwide study carried out in 2016 revealed disappointing levels of learning among primary school children.[59] The study reached more than 130,653 children (aged 3–16) in more than 4,000 Kenyan schools in 157 districts to conduct learning assessment tests in three subjects: English, Kiswahili and maths. It found that, on average, only three out of ten children in Class 3 could do Class 2 work. Specifically, only 47 per cent of third graders were able to do Class 2 maths, and only 40 per cent and 46 per cent of third graders could read Class 2 English and Kiswahili text, respectively. Alarmingly, 8 per cent of Class 8 pupils were unable to do Class 2 work. This implies that almost one out of ten Class 8 pupils graduate primary school without having acquired the basic competencies expected of an 8-year-old child.

2.3. Teachers in Kenya

Despite the rising primary enrolment rates, the number of public primary school teachers in Kenya remained relatively stable between 2002 and 2011 and increased only recently, reaching 217,152 in 2017.[60] Nevertheless, teacher shortages and high pupil–teacher ratios still persist. To overcome these challenges, school management boards have been allowed to hire teachers. According to 2015 data, 32,036 of all public primary school teachers in the country have been hired by a school BoM. An additional 90,455 teachers work in private schools.

Table 1 highlights the number of primary school teachers in Kenya in 2015 by type of school, employment status and gender. Of the total number of teachers, 49.7 per cent were male and 50.3 per cent were female; 73.2 per cent worked in public schools, while 26.7 per cent were in private schools; and 87 per cent were TSC-employed, while 13 per cent were hired by the school management board.

Table 1. Total number of primary school teachers, 2015

School type	Employment status and sex				Total		
	TSC male	TSC female	Board of Management male	Board of Management female	TSC total	Board of Management total	Total teachers
Public	106,835	107,926	17,569	14,467	214,761	32,036	246,797
Private	N/A	N/A	43,227	47,228	0	90,455	90,455

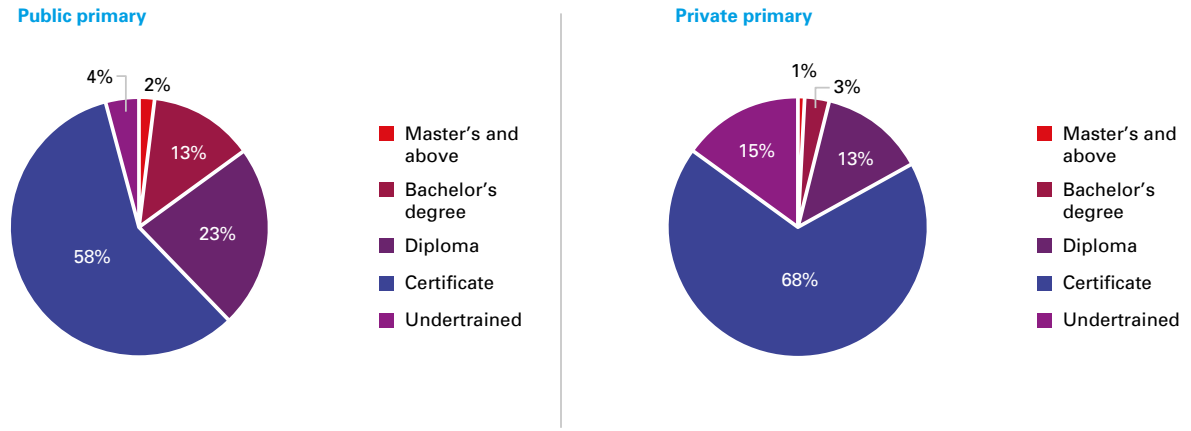
Note: Employment status refers to which entity hired the teachers.

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, *Basic Education Statistical Booklet*, Nairobi, Government of Kenya, 2015.

2.3.1. Teacher policies

The minimum qualification required to enter the teaching profession in Kenya is a primary education certificate (P1), which is acquired after undergoing a two-year training at a teacher training college. Currently, most teachers in both public and private schools have P1 qualification. Only 23 per cent of public-school teachers have diploma qualification (S1) that is acquired after completing three years at a teacher training college. According to MOE data, only a small proportion of teachers are untrained, although some variations exist between public and private school teachers (at 15 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively). Few primary school teachers have a bachelor's degree or higher (*see Figure 6*).

Figure 6. Primary teacher qualifications



Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, *Basic Education Statistical Booklet*, Nairobi, Government of Kenya, 2015.

Remuneration

Teachers in private schools are paid by their school via student school fees, while the salaries of public-school teachers depend on their qualification. In 2017, all TSC teachers received an enhanced package of basic salary, medical benefits and allowances, following the CBA between the TSC and the teachers' unions (the Kenyan National Union of Teachers (KNUT) and the Kenya Union of Post Primary Education Teachers).[61] The implementation of the new grade and salary system started in 2018 and will be completed in 2021. With the introduction of the new system, teachers of all job groups will receive a salary boost, but school heads, their deputies and senior teachers will be the biggest gainers.[62] Several allowances for teachers are also included in the CBA, such as a hardship allowance (an incentive for teachers in disadvantaged areas); a housing and commuter allowance; and a responsibility allowance (an incentive targeting specifically head teachers). TSC teachers are also entitled to 30 days of annual leave with full pay, to be taken during school holidays, as well as sick and maternity leave with full pay for a maximum period of three months.[63]

In-service training

While the majority of primary school teachers in Kenya are trained, teaching quality remains a challenge, particularly in terms of teachers' classroom practice, pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge. To address this issue, the TSC recently strengthened its in-service education and training programme, introducing professional development training for teachers on a large scale. These trainings are typically offered in a cascade manner, whereby county trainers are trained at the national level and then train as many teachers as possible in various training centres around the country, usually during school holidays and over a short period of time.

The Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI) also offers specialized trainings for school managers, while the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) trains teachers in special schools or special units attached to mainstream schools. Specialized agencies, like the Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa, offer dedicated training courses to subject teachers.

Donors contribute towards improving the content and pedagogical knowledge of Kenya's primary school teachers through Tusome, which means 'let's read' in Kiswahili and is a nationwide programme funded by the United States Agency for International Development and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development and implemented by the MOE.[64] Tusome has already reached more than 98,000 lower primary school teachers and head teachers, focusing on early grade literacy and aiming to improve learning outcomes of 7.4 million Grade 1–3 pupils in all public primary schools and in 5,027 low-cost private

schools across the country. The programme's objective is to expose teachers to better instructional practices and pedagogical skills in lesson planning, curriculum coverage and reading comprehension.[65] Tusome also trains head teachers and CSOs in providing instructional leadership and senior county officers in addressing gaps in policies and regulations that affect early-grade reading.[66]

Teachers in Kenya receive information and communication technology (ICT) training as part of the Digital Literacy Programme, a national initiative led by the MOE that was introduced in 2016 to equip primary schools with digital devices (laptops and tablets) and to develop twenty-first century skills among primary school students.[67] The programme targets three teachers per primary school and trains them on the integration of digital technologies in learning and education management. Trained teachers, or ICT champions as they are called, are then tasked with meta-training their colleagues. So far, according to TSC officers, more than 113,000 primary school teachers have benefited from the cascade structure of this programme.

Finally, prior to the implementation of the first phase of the new competency-based curriculum in January 2019, some 186,000 lower primary school teachers (Grades 1–3) received training on the new syllabus.[68] These trainings were coordinated by the TSC and provided by national master trainers drawn from the TSC; the KICD; the Kenya National Examination Council; the Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa; the KISE; and the KEMI. The master trainers also provided training to the CSOs and the competency-based curriculum champions who now train teachers at the zone level (with support from the master trainers), focusing on learning activities, teaching methodology, assessments, resources and time required to cover various topics. Additional trainings are planned to reach all teachers before the full implementation of the new curriculum in 2020.

Teacher registration, recruitment, transfer and promotion

Teacher registration, recruitment, transfer and promotion are all functions of the TSC. According to the TSC standards, all qualified teachers should be registered, and only registered teachers are allowed to teach in public and private schools.[69] Due to inadequate funding, however, the TSC has yet to register all qualified teachers or to sensitize unregistered teachers on their legal requirements. Partial registration continues to be an issue, even after the introduction of online teacher registration (on the TSC website), largely because a substantial number of Kenyan teachers remain digitally challenged.[70]

Since implementation of the 2010 Constitution and the establishment of the county system, teacher recruitment and transfers have been decentralized to counties as field agencies of the TSC. Currently, it is the CEB, under the leadership of the county director of education, that oversees teacher placement in public primary schools.[71] The final appointment of teachers is done based on specific guidelines and a selection scorecard that is revised annually prior to recruitment.[72] As previously noted, public primary school boards of management can also employ (and pay) teachers directly, much like private primary schools.

Despite efforts to bridge gaps in primary school teacher deployment, a deficit in excess of 37,000 teachers remains.[73] To close this gap, the TSC introduced a teacher transfer programme in 2018, which resulted in more than 3,000 teachers moving from their home county. The vast majority of these transfers involved head teachers having served in the same school for nine years or more.[74] The new policy demands teachers work at least five years in the county where they are posted before they can seek a transfer to a preferred region. The transfer programme has received much criticism from the KNUT on the grounds that teacher delocalization is adding to the shortages by forcing educators to leave the profession and seek alternative employment.[75]

Promotions are also the responsibility of the TSC. Until recently, they were awarded on the basis of attaining higher qualification. Due to budgetary limitations, there were only limited posts available for those eligible for promotion. In 2015, more than 13,565 teachers had served in the same position for more than 15 years without a promotion,[76] a situation that has led to low morale, poor teaching quality and lack of discipline among some teachers.

The new grade and salary scheme of service that was put in place in 2018, is expected to address some of these challenges and to improve teachers' career prospects.[77] The new system foresees the scrapping of the entry-level grade (P1), which implies that more than 106,000 teachers who previously fell under this grade will automatically be promoted to new levels. Promotions will depend not on interviews but on more objective criteria, such as the satisfactory completion of the teachers' professional development trainings, the (TPAD) scoring during and out of class and relevant experience (completion of a minimum number of years in each grade). However, promotions will continue to be dependent on funded vacancies.

Teacher evaluation, monitoring and disciplining

Poor teacher supervision in Kenyan schools has contributed to teacher absenteeism and desertion, adversely affecting teachers' ability to understand and deliver the curriculum.[78] To address these challenges, the TSC has, over the years, formalized procedures for the evaluation of teachers' performance and attendance. This effort culminated in 2016 with the introduction of the TPAD system, which allows the TSC to monitor teacher attendance, syllabus coverage, classroom performance as well as knowledge, creativity and discipline. Head teachers, CSOs and students can all contribute to the teachers' evaluations and monitoring through the TPAD tools, which also allow teachers to rate their own performance. All relevant information is uploaded on the TSC website.[79] While expectations of the system's effectiveness are high, to date, there has been limited research on its awareness among teachers, the frequency of its use and the actual results in addressing poor teaching quality and low attendance rates.[80]

To further enhance integrity and professionalism in the teaching service, the TSC developed a Teacher Code of Conduct and Ethics (2015),[81] enforced through established discipline panels.[82] The TSC has employed a proactive approach in creating awareness of the provisions among teachers, but anyone found guilty of certain provisions (faking academic certificates or convicted of a criminal offence) is dismissed from service and removed from the register.

Regarding teacher attendance, the Code of Conduct and Ethics recognizes the following offences as subject to disciplinary action:

(i) **chronic absenteeism**, defined as "being absent from duty or from a place of work without leave or other lawful cause";

(ii) **lateness to duty**;

(iii) **negligence of duty**, understood as instances in which a teacher "wilfully neglects" to perform any work that is their duty to perform or if they "carelessly or improperly" perform any work that is their duty to perform "carefully and properly"; and

(iv) **desertion**, understood as being "absent from duty continuously" for a period of 14 days or more without written authority.[83]

Any individual with information that a teacher has engaged in any of the above-listed types of professional misconduct can report the allegation (verbally or in writing) to the school management board, the head teacher or the county director of education. Once an allegation has been received, an investigative panel is formed consisting of TSC officials and other bodies tasked by the TSC to investigate. Upon completion of the investigation, the panel issues a written report regarding the teacher's disciplinary status. Depending on the content of the report, the BoM or the county director can: (i) issue an administrative warning in writing; (ii) recommend leave (such as when misconduct is a result of a medical condition); (iii) suspend the teacher; or (iv) dismiss the teacher.

Section 3: Research design and methodology

3.1. Teacher absenteeism: A multidimensional concept

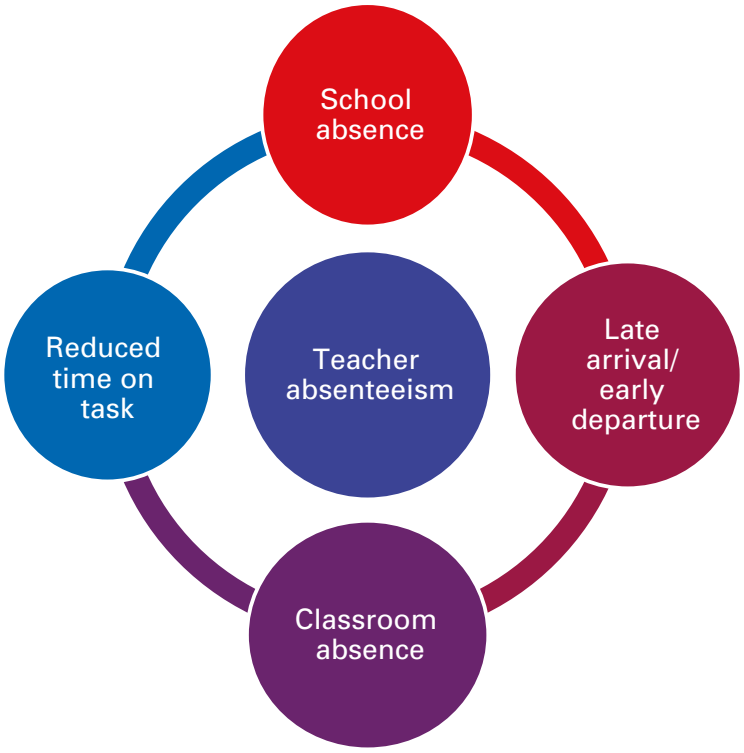
Policymakers and researchers have traditionally recognized one form of teacher absenteeism: absence of teachers from school. Accordingly, in the past two decades, numerous programmes have been implemented globally to increase teacher school attendance as a means of improving student learning.[84]

Several interventions aimed at improving teacher school attendance have been found to be successful, especially when they couple monitoring systems with rewards.[85] Yet, few studies have established an association between increased teacher school attendance and student achievements.[86] This is due to the fact that teacher attendance in school does not necessarily mean that teachers are actually in the classroom teaching or, when they are teaching, that they spend the required time on task.[87] Consequently, the relationship between teacher school attendance, motivation to teach and time on task needs to be further unpacked, to better understand learning mechanisms and outcomes.

Although the TTT study does not focus explicitly on learning outcomes, in defining teacher absenteeism, the research team relied on the assumption that for learning to occur, a number of minimal conditions relating to the role of teachers in the learning process need to be fulfilled. Teachers must be in school, in the classroom and actively teaching. This led to the development of a multidimensional concept for teacher absenteeism, illustrated in Figure 7. The concept is in line with contemporary understandings of absenteeism that look beyond school absence[88] and recognize four distinct forms of teacher absence: (i) absence from school; (ii) absence of punctuality (late arrival and/or early departure from school); (iii) absence from the classroom (while in school); and (iv) reduced time on task (while in the classroom).

A multidimensional definition of teacher absenteeism has not been widely used in education sector analysis, for which the teacher–pupil ratio and share of qualified teachers have conventionally been used to represent educational inputs and human resources available for children, under the implicit assumption that employed teachers will be in school spending time for educational activities with students. A multidimensional definition of absenteeism can therefore help us classify and further understand 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 effect on quality learning time for students. It is therefore imperative that the drivers of each type of absenteeism are identified and that corresponding policies are designed to address the adverse effects of teacher absenteeism on learning.

Figure 7. The multidimensional concept of teacher absenteeism



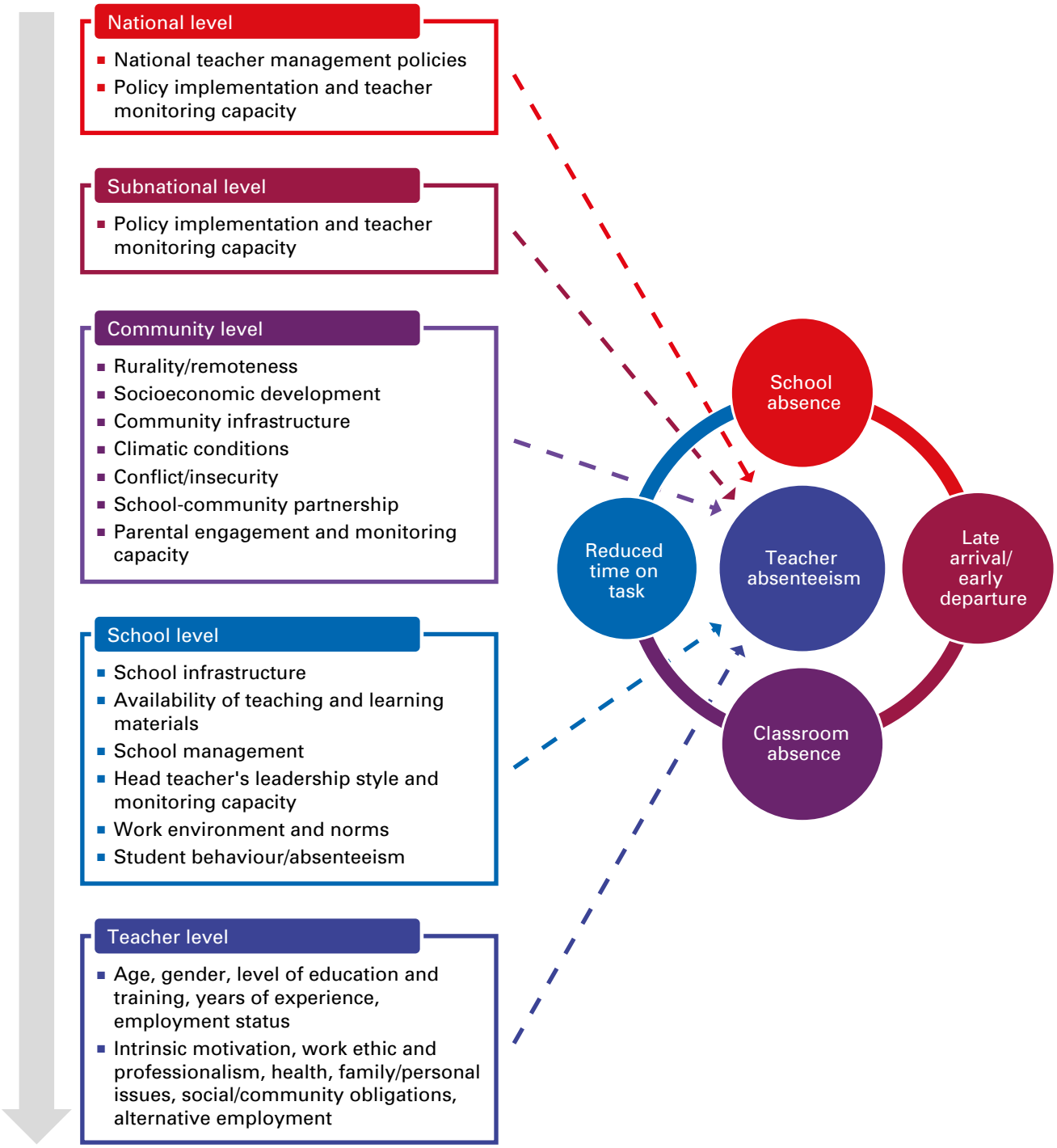
3.2. Understanding teacher absenteeism from a system's perspective

The determinants of teacher absenteeism are likely to be located at various levels of the education system. A systemic analytical framework is therefore needed 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 in particular, Guerrero et al. (2012, 2013)[89] suggested three sets of factors affecting teacher attendance: (i) teacher-level variables, (ii) school-level variables and (iii) 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 include organizational factors within the school, such as work norms and the head teacher's leadership style, but also teachers' administrative workload. Finally, community-level variables include remoteness, community level of prosperity and school-community partnerships.

The TTT study adopted Guerrero et al.'s (2012, 2013) explanatory model with an important modification that consists of two additional groups of variables (*see Figure 8*). These variables operate on two additional levels of the education system: the national and the subnational. These variables are included to measure the impact of national teacher management policies and subnational policy implementation on the dimensions of teacher absenteeism.

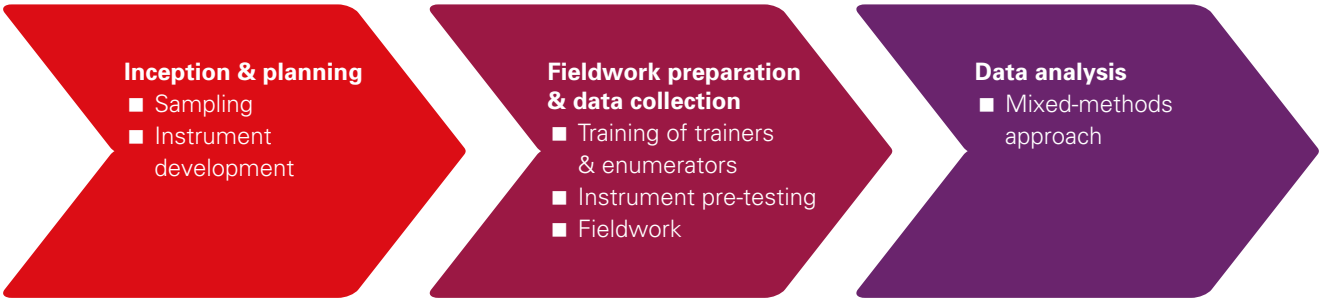
Figure 8: The TTT explanatory model



3.3. Study implementation

The TTT study was implemented in consultation with the MOE and the TSC and involved three stages (*see Figure 9*).

Figure 9: Stages of implementation



3.3.1. Sampling and instrument development

Following a series of consultation meetings with national partners in February 2018, the research team developed a sampling strategy and designed the instruments for primary data collection.

School and respondent selection involved a combination of purposive and quota sampling techniques. School selection was based on four criteria: location, community setting, governance and student performance. In the end, 20 schools were selected across four regions (former provinces) and eight counties. The school sample includes rural and urban schools; government (public) and non-government (private) schools;[iv] high-, average- and low-performing schools;[v] and a special needs or integrated school (*see Table 2*).

iv The number of urban, rural, public and private schools included in the Kenyan sample reflect the actual proportion of these schools in Kenya, according to the most recent available data (Ministry of Education, *Education Statistical Booklet*, Nairobi, Government of Kenya, 2015).

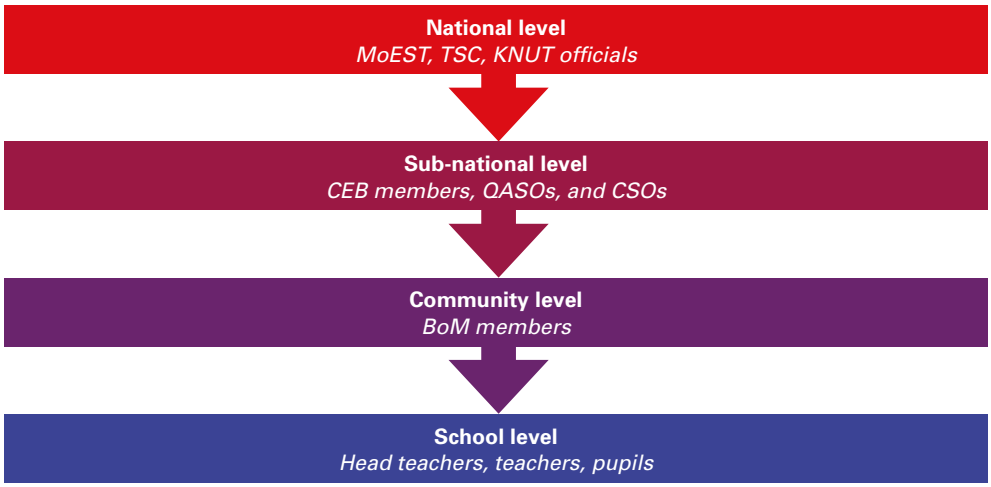
v The classification was based on exam scores. Data were provided by the MOE.

Table 2. School sample

Region	County	Number of schools	Public urban	Public rural	Private urban	Private rural
Rift Valley	Nakuru	3		2		1
	Baringo	2		2		
Nairobi Metropolitan	Nairobi	2	2 (includes an integrated school)			
	Kiambu	3		2	1	
North Eastern	Garissa	3		2		1
	Wajir	2		2		
Western	Kakamega	3		2		1
	Bungoma	2		2		
Total		20	2	14	1	3

Note: To identify study participants, the research team employed a number of criteria.

Figure 10. Study participants, by level of analysis



At the national level, the study targeted the MOE, the TSC and the KNUT officials, whose portfolio was relevant to primary education and teacher management and monitoring. Respondents at the county and subcounty levels included members of CEBs, primarily TSC officers (QASOs and CSO), who were familiar with school governance and teacher evaluation processes. Community respondents had an intimate knowledge of the selected schools and school staff and in most cases served on the schools' BoM. In each school, the study targeted the head teacher (or in their absence, the deputy head teacher), three teachers and seven students (*See Figure 10*).

Teachers were selected on the basis of their individual characteristics, specifically age, gender, employment status (TSC or BoM-hired teachers) and years of experience. The goal of diversifying the teacher sample 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 Grade 6 and Grade 7 students (aged 11–13) participated in the study. The sample was gender balanced. To rule out selection bias and convenience sampling, student respondents were identified via lottery.

To collect the data, the research team designed a range of qualitative and quantitative tools, including in-depth interviews, FGDs and a pen-and-paper survey. Different tools were used for each respondent group, reflecting the participants' expert knowledge and unique perspective. (*see Table 3*)The pen-and-paper survey was administered to all teachers serving in the selected schools to supplement and triangulate teacher interview data.[vi] An observation tool was also designed to record the enumerators' observations on teacher absences, teacher–student interaction and teacher working relations during school visits.

All tools were shared with the MOE and the TSC for feedback and were revised accordingly. The tools were then translated from English to Kiswahili and back-translated into English to ensure accuracy and consistency. The Innocenti team sought and received research ethics approval for the TTT instruments and fieldwork protocols by the Health Media Lab and the Institutional Review Board of the Office for Human Research Protections in the United States Department of Health and Human Services Research.[90]

Table 3. Number of study respondents

Respondent type and data collection method	Number of respondents
Head teachers (interviews)	20
Teachers (interviews)	60
Teachers (pen-and-paper survey)	312
Pupils (group discussions)	140
Community representatives (interviews)	20
National teacher union officials (interviews)	2
TSC directors – national (interviews)	2
TSC county directors (interviews)	8
County staffing officers (interviews)	4
MOE national officials (interviews)	2
MOE county directors of education (interviews)	4
MOE district education officers (interviews)	4
MOE quality assurance officers (interviews)	4
Total number of respondents	582

vi The teacher survey was self-administered.

3.3.2. Fieldwork preparation and data collection

A training of trainers took place at UNICEF ESARO offices on 22 and 23 August 2018. The training was facilitated by the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti and involved the local data collection team, specifically, the team leader, project manager, group discussion and interview moderators and their assistants. National trainers were introduced to the objectives of the TTT study, the procedure for respondent selection and the study protocols. Daily requisite field preparations and checklists and probable risks were discussed. A series of debrief sessions of field enumerators took place on 28 and 29 August 2018. These sessions were meant to familiarize the data collection team with the TTT tools, replicating the process employed for the training of trainers.

The local research team pre-tested the data collection tools on 31 August and 3–4 September 2018 in Nairobi and Kiambu counties. The goals of the pre-testing were to assess the duration and flow of instrument administration and the respondents' cognitive understanding of questions and key concepts. Two schools were purposively selected for the pre-testing, based on their performance and location. A high-performing rural school was selected in Kiambu County while an average-performing urban school was selected in Nairobi. A detailed report on the findings of the pilot, including suggested changes to the data collection tools, was shared with the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti prior to initiating the main fieldwork. A debrief meeting followed whereby the research team familiarized themselves with the final data collection tools as approved by UNICEF. During the debrief meeting, data collection teams were issued with all necessary study materials.

The data collection team was deployed to the eight counties on 10 September 2018. The team comprised four moderators and four assistant moderators (a moderator and an assistant moderator per region). The technical team was also deployed to the field on different dates. Each team was allocated two days per school to undertake interviews with teachers and community leaders, FGDs with pupils as well as to conduct an observation of each school. Additional days were allowed for interviewing county, subcounty and national MOE and TSC officials. Fieldwork was completed on 13 October 2018.

3.3.3. Data analysis

Qualitative data

The multifaceted data generation strategy employed during the fieldwork facilitated the collection of a large amount of qualitative evidence, ensuring saturation and triangulation. All interviews and group discussions were transcribed word for word, resulting in approximately 3,000 pages of transcribed material. To systematically analyse and interpret this data, the research team employed thematic content analysis. While content analysis is a broad methodology that can be applied in various ways, the approach adopted in the TTT study promotes interpretive analyses of latent content with the use of a codebook. The codebook was informed by existing literature and the inductive reading of transcripts.[91] Coding was done manually. Coders organized the data into distinct themes and employed frequency measurement and various interpretive methods.

Quantitative data

The 312 pen-to-paper teacher surveys from the 20 schools were cleaned and compiled. Information that could identify participants was removed and the Stata software package was used for descriptive analysis. The main aim of the survey data analysis was to enrich the interviews and group discussion data and to provide further insights across the 20 selected schools while highlighting variations between regions and school types.

3.4. Study limitations

Like all studies relying on self-reported data and conducted under time and budget constraints, TTT is not free of methodological limitations. The following explains the three most significant challenges likely to have emerged during data collection, along with mitigation strategies employed to ensure accurate data interpretation.

Response bias, including social desirability bias, may have been a significant challenge, as in some contexts participants may have perceived the study as potentially threatening their employment status. These limitations were taken into consideration when interpreting data. Surveyors were trained to communicate the objectives and clarify any misconceptions regarding implications of voluntary participation, also highlighting the principles of anonymity and confidentiality

Selection bias may have also been an issue. The selection of interviewed and surveyed teachers was limited to the teachers who were in school on the day of the visit. This means that some frequently absent teachers may not have been interviewed or surveyed. To pre-empt this problem, school visits were announced and teachers were informed about them in advance. However, this does not exclude the possibility of built-in bias among those who participated in the study.

Representativeness of survey data is a challenge due to the small size of the TTT survey (N=312). TTT findings, therefore, can provide a snapshot of the selected schools rather than a representative view of the situation across all schools in Kenya. For this reason, the majority of findings reported hereafter depend on the systematic analysis of qualitative data.

Section 4: Findings

4.1. Overview of survey findings

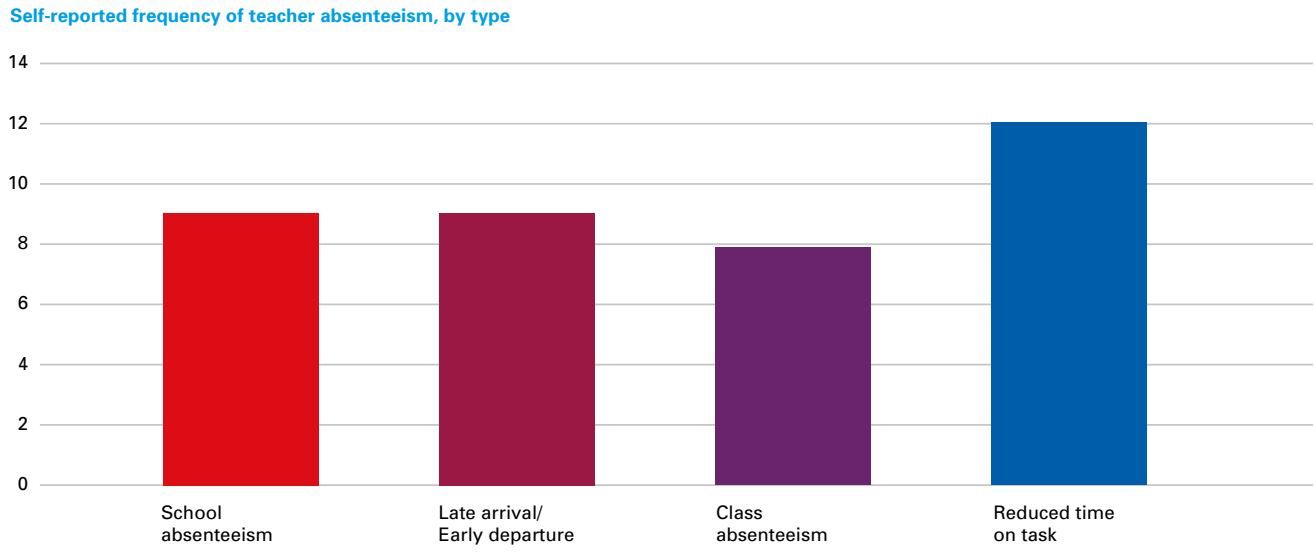
In the TTT survey, teachers were queried on the frequency with which they had engaged in different types of absenteeism since the start of the 2018 school year[vii] and were asked to select one among the following five responses: never; a few times (fewer than three); less than once a week; once a week; more than once a week. Teachers were also asked to elaborate on the reasons for each form of absenteeism by selecting up to three responses as to what keeps them from school or causes them to be absent and so on.

The teacher survey data provide a useful snapshot into the types, frequencies and reasons for teacher absenteeism in Kenya. The figures presented hereafter are referred to throughout the remainder of the report. However, this data only capture part of the picture. The interviews with head teachers, teachers, students, community representatives and government officials complement this data with a contextual understanding of the determinants of teacher absenteeism in Kenya.

Conforming with the explanatory framework presented in Section 3, in subsequent sections, the analysis and findings are presented at five levels of the education system, starting with the national level (Section 4.2) and descending to the subnational level (Section 4.3) and the community (Section 4.4), school (Section 4.5) and teacher level (Section 4.6).

4.1.1. Frequency of teacher absenteeism

Figure 11. Percentage of teachers who reported being absent frequently (i.e. at least once a week), by form of absence



vii Survey data was collected in September–October 2018, seven months after the start of the school year.

4.1.2. Primary reasons for absenteeism, by form of absenteeism

Figure 12. Primary reasons for school absenteeism, by sex and school type

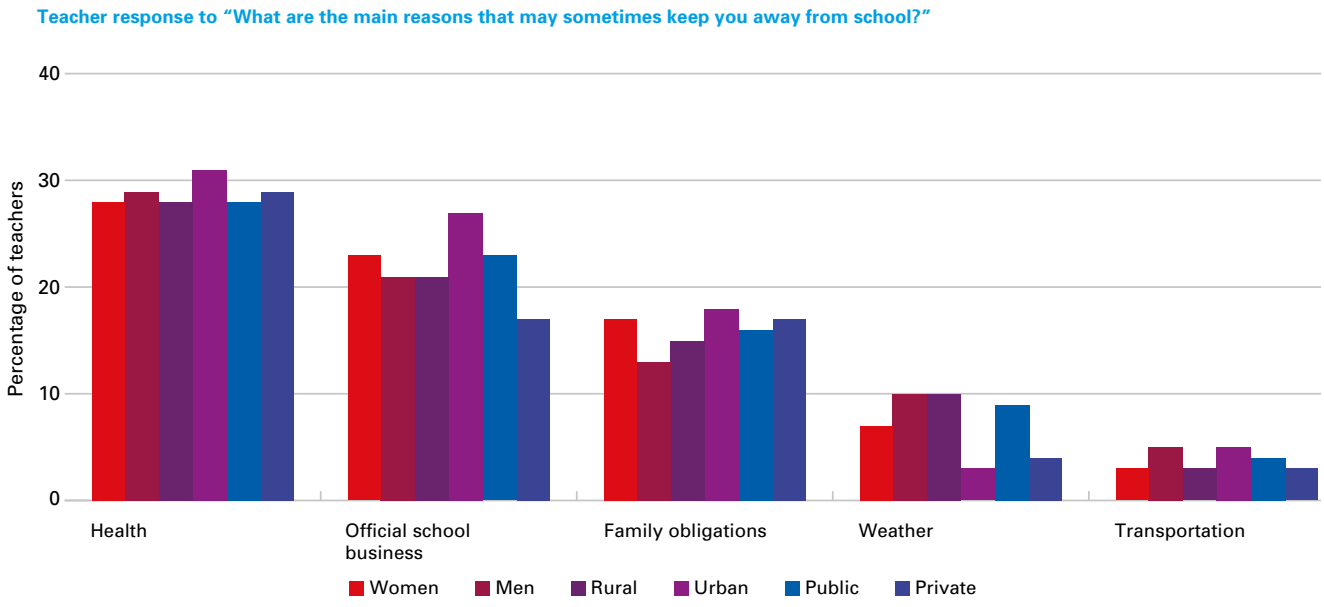


Figure 13. Primary reasons for arriving late or leaving early, by sex and school type

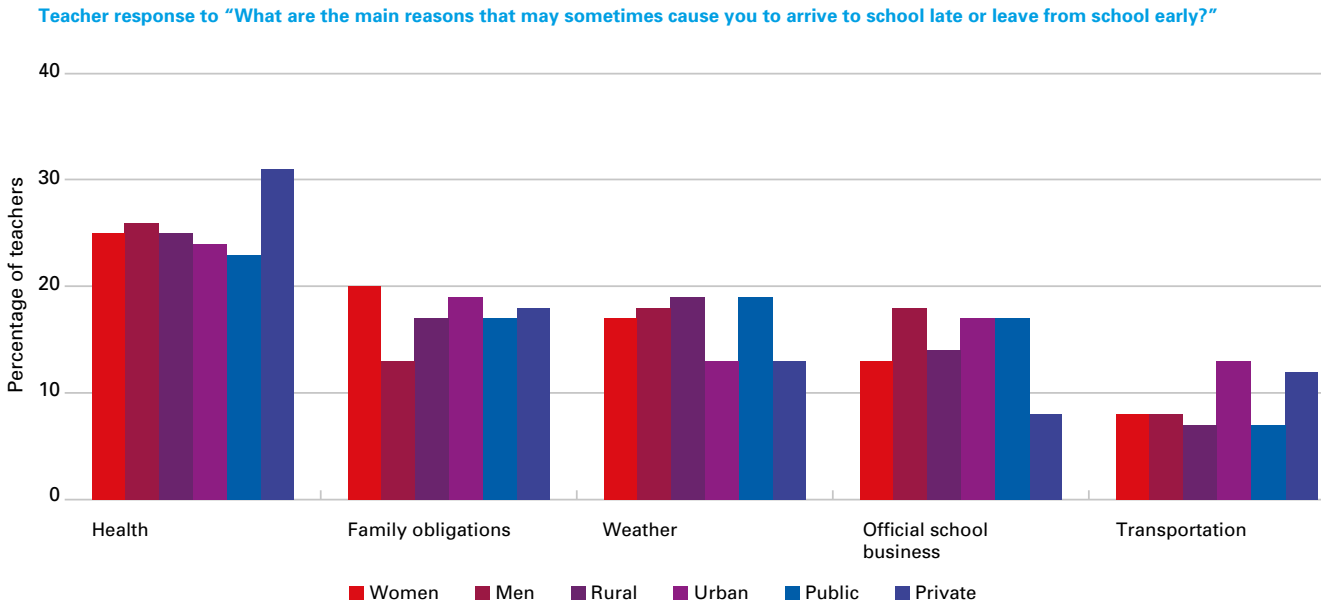


Figure 14. Primary reasons for classroom absenteeism, by sex and school type

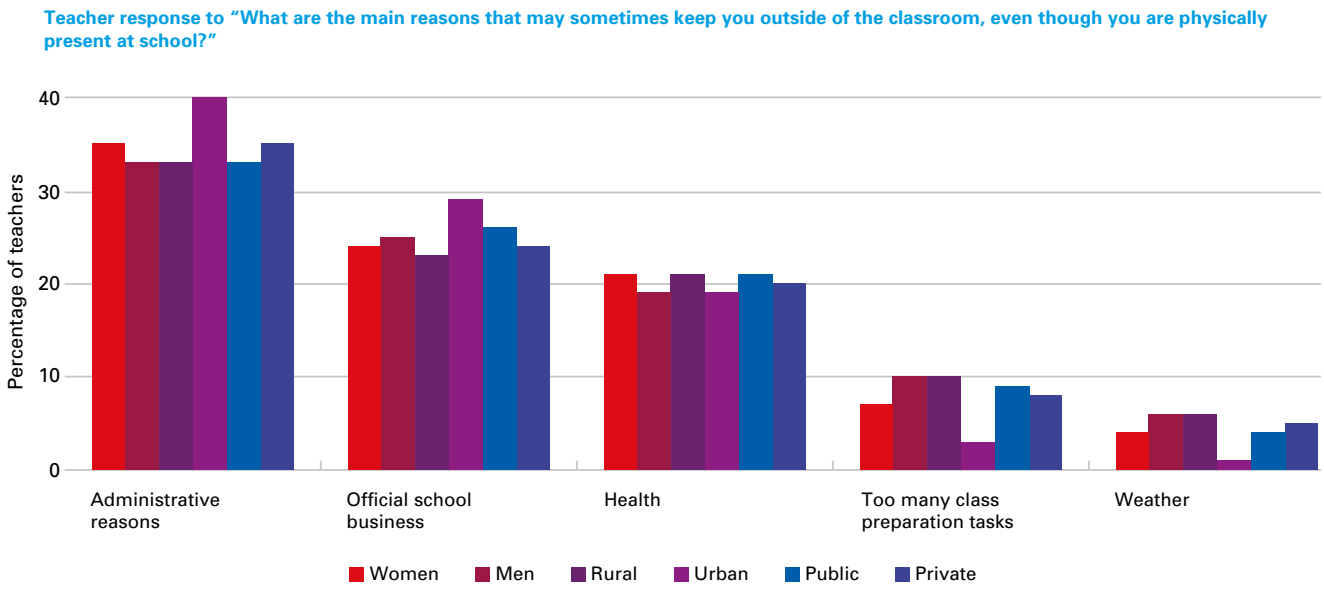
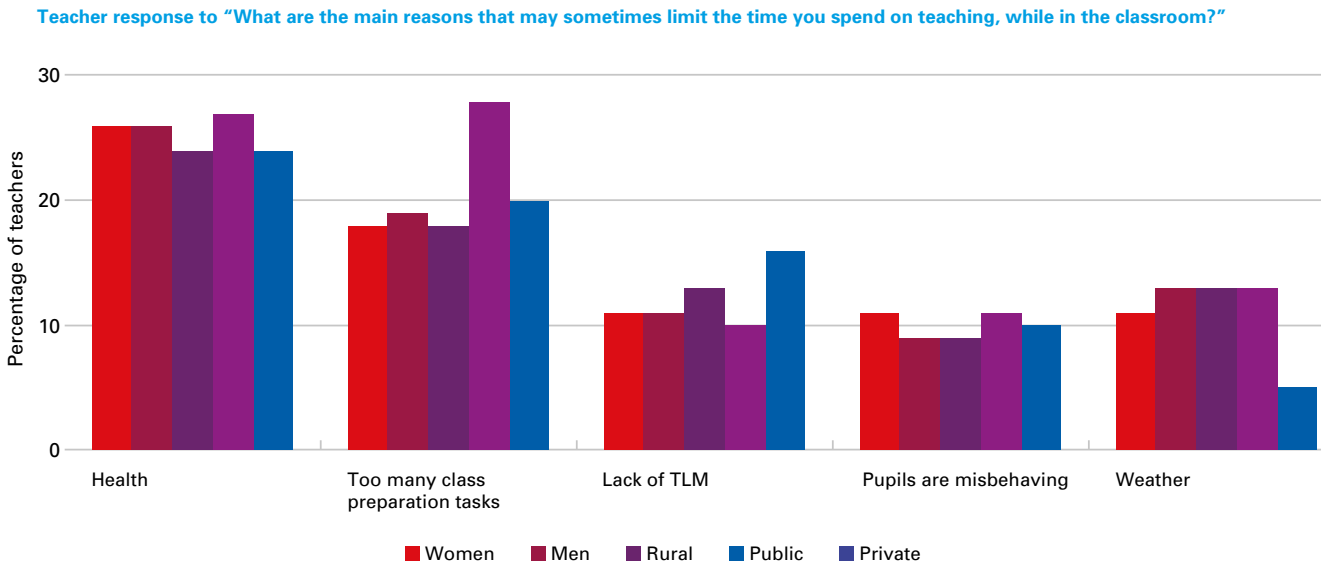


Figure 15. Primary reasons for reduced time on task, by sex and school type



4.2. National factors associated with teacher attendance and time on task

Summary

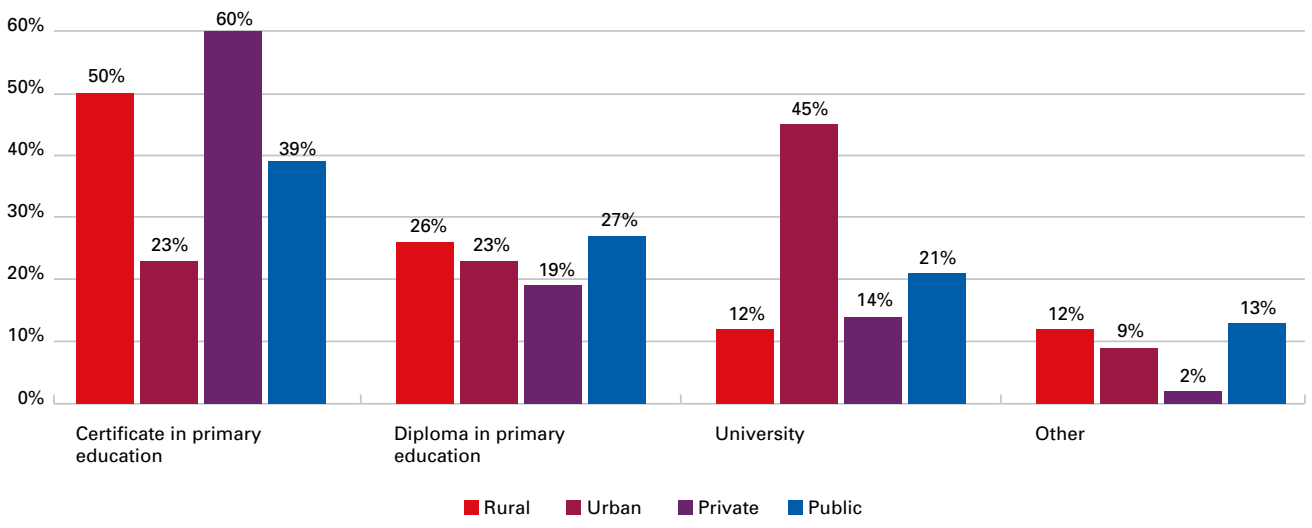
This section investigates the effects of national policies on teacher attendance. Three topics are discussed: (i) teacher training; (ii) salaries, allowances and career progression; and (iii) absence registration and reporting. The main findings:

1. School absenteeism due to in-service training has reduced significantly in recent years because most professional development courses take place during school holidays and weekends. However, teacher training continues to be insufficient. This limits teachers' content knowledge and reduces the time they spend on task. Inadequate training of head teachers also limits their capacity to provide instructional leadership and guidance to educators, encouraging various forms of absenteeism.
2. The recent reform of the teacher grading and salary structure has improved the motivation of school administrators and senior teachers. However, incremental salary increases, insufficient allowances and the absence of a clear progression path for low-grade teachers still constitute thorny issues that contribute to school absenteeism and lateness to duty.
3. While school absenteeism has dropped significantly since the introduction of the TPAD system in 2016, empirical evidence suggests that TPAD may have increased subtler forms of absenteeism, such as absence from the classroom and reduced time on task.

4.2.1.Training

While the majority of teachers in Kenya have received some form of training, significant variations between schools exist. Among the surveyed teachers, those with a higher level of training were more likely to work in urban and public schools rather than in rural and private schools (*see Figure 16*). This finding suggests that teacher recruitment is more competitive in urban areas. It also reflects the tendency of for-profit schools to hire teachers with a basic level of training, presumably to minimize personnel costs.

Figure 16. Teacher training, by type of school



"Teaching can be intimidating for poorly trained teachers who deliberately avoid going to class or devote less time on teaching while in the classroom."

– Head teacher, rural public school, Wajir County

"In Kenya, head teachers and curriculum advisers are expected to provide instructional leadership and supervise curriculum implementation, yet they receive only ad hoc and haphazard preparation for this role."

– Head teacher, rural public school, Wajir County

"While the Kenya Education Management Institute has intensified its work over the years, some head teachers and district-level personnel have not received any management training…Even those who have attended the courses feel they lack the administrative and leadership skills required to undertake their tasks effectively."

– TSC official

The majority of the surveyed teachers were confident that they have the knowledge and skills needed to teach well (at 89 per cent). However, only 43 per cent reported having access to sufficient training opportunities.

Head teachers and TSC officers perceived **pre-service training** as insufficient and highlighted several limitations: in-service courses are not frequent enough, they do not reach all teachers, and courses are not always well prepared. Other challenges include the weak coordination between pre-service and in-service trainings and the partial harmonization of training programmes. Respondents were especially concerned with teachers' capacity to implement the newly introduced competency-based curriculum and deemed relevant trainings and support materials as insufficient.

The **cascade model of delivery** that is frequently utilized for in-service teacher trainings in Kenya was also criticized. MOE officials attributed the preference for this model – through which a group of teachers are trained on a particular skill or knowledge and then, in turn, train their colleagues – to its cost effectiveness and its ability to reach many teachers within a short period of time. They also stressed the shortcomings of its trickle-down effect – the dilution and misinterpretation of content as it is transferred from one group to another, which undermines programme effectiveness.

Only a few of the respondents linked the delivery of in-service courses to frequent school absences. This is largely due to a recent TSC guideline that called for all trainings to take place during holidays and on weekends. However, **lack of sufficient** and **relevant training** was identified as a key contributor to **reduced classroom attendance** and **time on task.** Some teachers and head teachers, for instance, recognized that teachers may sit in the staffroom instead of going to class when they lack content knowledge, classroom management skills and preparedness.

Insufficient in-service training is affecting not only teachers but also **head teachers** and **education officers**.

National officials attributed this widely shared view to human and financial resource shortages faced by the KEMI, which is tasked with the responsibility of in-service training of education managers.

Given these gaps in education sector training, it is not surprising that several of the interviewed teachers reported lacking curriculum support in the classroom.

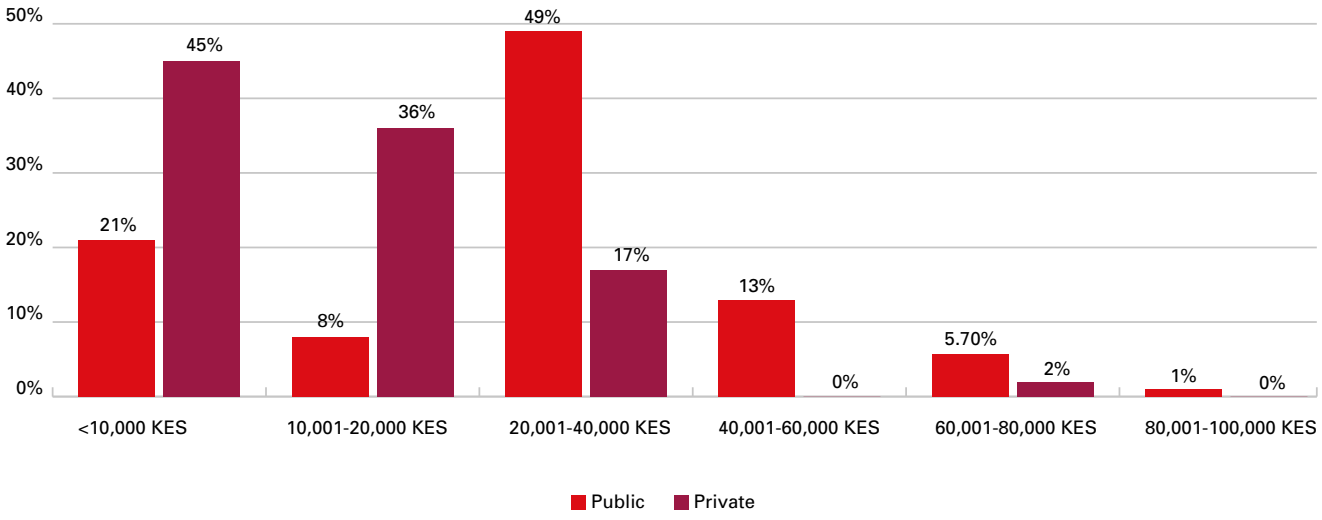
4.2.2. Salaries and allowances

Salaries for TSC teachers, are managed nationally. Meanwhile, the payment mechanism and the amount of salaries for BoM-hired and private school teachers are based on the school's financial capabilities.

Teacher salaries vary significantly between schools (*see Figure 17*). The average salary of public-school teachers, at approximately 40,000 Kenyan shillings (KES) a month, is almost three times that of the average salary of private-school teachers, irrespective of the latter's qualifications. The monthly salaries of public-school teachers also vary considerably, from less than 10,000 KES to more than 100,000 KES, based on professional qualifications and years of service. Additionally, public-school teachers are significantly more likely to receive allowances (housing, transportation and hardship) than private-school teachers, which further increases the wage gap between the two groups.

Irrespective of their employment status and salary, most of the surveyed educators (at 77 per cent) stated that they are not happy with their pay. An even greater proportion (at 95 per cent) considers their salary insufficient to cover monthly household expenses. Still, TSC teachers are much more likely than private-school teachers to receive their salary on time (at 86 per cent compared with 64 per cent) and with relative ease (at 87 per cent compared with 52 per cent), either by going to the bank or by using a mobile telephone application.

Figure 17. Teacher salaries, by type of school (public and private)



The recent CBA between the TSC and the teachers' unions was frequently discussed in the interviews. While the effect of the agreement is hard to estimate (full implementation is expected in 2021), the respondents' perceptions on the new teacher grading and salary system varied considerably. While MOE and TSC officers considered the agreement beneficial for all teachers, low-grade educators argued that school administrators (head teachers and their deputies) are benefiting the most from the reform.

In particular, the interviewed TSC and MOE officials stressed that following the CBA, Kenyan teachers are among the highest paid in Eastern Africa and therefore 'comparatively wealthy'. They also argued that increasing the salary of school administrators is a strategic priority and a means of ensuring curriculum implementation. Low-grade teachers acknowledged improvements in their salary but criticized the incremental nature. They also complained about the absence of promotion and upgrading opportunities, which deflates their morale, and highlighted the limitations of their housing and commuter allowances, which they consider minimal and insufficient to meet their daily needs.

Despite recent salary increases, teacher compensation still contributes to school absenteeism and negatively affects teacher punctuality.

"Teachers miss school for a reason: to try and make life better. The money is little, and they have families to look after. So, teachers sometimes have motorbikes, taxis or other businesses and try to earn extra money."

– Teacher, private school, Garissa County

"Our [board of management] teacher is not in school today. He has gone to look for casual work, as there is no money to pay him. Right now, there is nothing to offer him so he went somewhere for casual work and we [the rest of the teachers] took his subjects. What else could we have done?"

– Head teacher, public school, Kakamega County

"Go to the town right now, and you'll find a number of teachers who are there engaging in commercial activities at the expense of teaching. We keep chasing them from these shops, reminding them they are supposed to be in school."

– Quality assurance officer, Baringo County

Low pay and insufficient allowances were frequently cited during the interviews with teachers and head teachers as factors contributing to various forms of absenteeism. Moonlighting, or the engaging of teachers in income-generating activities in addition to teaching, was seen as leading to both **absences from school** as well as **lateness to duty**. While moonlighting was generally perceived as unprofessional behaviour, it was frequently justified when practised by the BoM-hired teachers, who experienced delays in receiving their salary.

Moonlighting was more frequently reported by low-grade teachers and teachers with a large number of dependants. Nevertheless, no association was found between school type and probability of having a second job. Both private- and public-school teachers were equally likely to engage in alternative income-generating activities, irrespective of whether they resided in an urban or rural community.

4.2.3. Absence registration and reporting

Accurate monitoring and efficient reporting of teacher absences are essential for improving school and classroom attendance and for increasing instruction time. This section examines the implementation of the TPAD system that was introduced in 2016 to systematically monitor teachers' attendance, syllabus coverage, classroom performance and discipline.

Head teachers in most selected schools reported **a decrease in teachers' school absences** and cited TPAD as the main underlying cause. TSC officers also confirmed this trend, based on TPAD data that were collected during the 2018 school year.

While the perception of the TPAD system's effectiveness in reducing school absenteeism is overwhelmingly positive and awareness of it is very high across Kenya, actual implementation is less clear, and it is **uncertain how frequently and consistently teacher attendance is recorded.** For example, some teachers reported using the tool every week while others admitted using it as rarely as once every term or even more sparingly. A few teachers also reported never having used it at all.

Furthermore, **implementation seems to vary across schools**. In some schools, teachers upload information to the online TPAD system individually, while in other schools it the head teacher or designated teachers who collect and register the information. Different implementation modalities can be attributed to teachers' varying digital literacy skills. However, respondents emphasized that teachers are insufficiently informed about the objectives of the TPAD system and that they have received only superficial training on how to use it.

TPAD is largely perceived as successful in reducing school absenteeism.

"TPAD is now monitoring teachers. By the end of the term, teachers report the lessons they have been teaching, the number of days they have been absent – it reflects everything. So, every teacher is now avoiding being absent."

– Head teacher, public school, Nairobi

"In the last three years, we introduced TPAD, [and] school attendance has improved drastically."

– MOE official, Nairobi

"Because of TPAD, teacher accountability and attendance have increased. We now have two kinds of attendance registers: the teachers sign in to indicate that they are present in school. The students also sign a form to confirm classroom attendance."

– TSC official, Nairobi

Accuracy of recorded information is also disputed. Students (class prefects) are tasked with reporting teacher classroom attendance and syllabus coverage. However, several interviewees maintained that teachers often convince pupils to misreport attendance data.

Teachers also expressed their frustration over how burdensome and costly the system's implementation is. In fact, interview data seem to suggest that, at least in some settings, the use of the TPAD system may contribute to certain types of absenteeism, like **absence from school, class and teaching**.

Administrators and teachers in schools in the semi-arid and arid lands in particular, where access to internet services is often limited, explained that they have to travel long distances to upload TPAD data, at the expense of their teaching and management duties.

Costs associated with this travel also burden educators, who "have to use their own money" to cover them.

Finally, few teachers reported that TPAD helps them improve their practice. Even fewer viewed it as an instrument designed to empower them and facilitate their professional development. On the contrary, the majority of **educators perceived TPAD as a policing mechanism** that "inflicts fear and stress", as one public-school head teacher in Nairobi explained.

Interviewed TSC and MOE officials defended the effectiveness of the tool, which they characterized as a 'game changer', yet acknowledged its limitations and stressed the need to address policy implementation gaps. "We need to automate TPAD so that it is no longer cumbersome. We need to convince teachers that TPAD is not a witch-hunt and that its only intention is to ensure that work is smooth in school." argued a TSC official working in the teacher service and discipline division. Focusing more on the monitoring rather than motivating nature of the initiative, a TSC officer in Baringo County stated.

TPAD was designed to monitor and discourage absence from class and teaching. And yet, in some settings, implementation may have encouraged these types of absences.

"Teachers have to travel to get online services and can spend up to three days to submit the data required. And these can be the only teachers in their schools. [So], schools are left without a teacher."

– Education officer, Wajir County

"TPAD was simply brought in, and it seems that the teachers have not yet taken it up fully. From my own point of view, it has not really met its potential because of the way it was introduced – without much consultation and training."

– Head teacher, rural public school, Rift Valley county

"TPAD forms take a lot of time to fill in and, as a result, teachers are not doing their classroom preparations. Sometimes they don't even go to class but spend that time to complete TPAD requirements."

– Head teacher, public school, Baringo County

National and subnational education officers also highlighted the **need to expedite the dispensation of disciplinary cases** and **improve the enforcement of sanctioning mechanisms**. Among the factors associated with these challenges are the lack of technical capacity of field agents to investigate cases of absenteeism and desertion; failure by accused teachers and critical witnesses to appear for disciplinary hearings; delays in the submission of evidence; and limited awareness among head teachers of relevant provisions of the Code of Regulations for Teachers and the Code of Conduct and Ethics.

"To be honest, TPAD is very tiring.... Teachers are doing a lot of paperwork. By the time they go to teach, they are already tired and cannot deliver as expected. Or they go to class and give the students work so they can finish filling the TPAD forms."

– Head teacher, urban school, Nairobi

"We have to travel to upload the TPAD forms. We are more clerks than teachers…[and] because most of the head teachers in this area are also class teachers, schools are frequently deprived of at least one teacher."

– Head teacher, rural public school, Wajir County

4.3. Subnational factors associated with teacher attendance and time on task

Summary

Since 2012, when Kenya embarked on educational decentralization, all education policies are implemented along the following descending line: national, county, subcounty, district and zone. Decentralized TSC and MOE officers, especially front-line staff like the QASOs and the curriculum support officers, provide a wide range of education activities with the potential to influence teacher attendance and time on task both directly and indirectly. These include monitoring teacher absences; delivering trainings and instruction consultation to teachers; monitoring and evaluation of school programmes; supervision of school cleanliness, school materials and infrastructure; and oversight of curriculum implementation and delivery.

This section assesses whether measures designed to support teachers and monitor their attendance and time on task are not enforced regularly or consistently. The main findings are:

1. The frequency of inspection and consultation visits varies considerably from school to school, ranging from several times per month to once a term or none at all. Schools visited by QASOs and CSOs more frequently have a higher rate of teacher school attendance and fewer instances of lateness to duty. Teachers in these schools also report feeling more confident teaching the new curriculum.
2. Although the TSC has developed specific guidelines for monitoring and reporting teacher absences, the response of school inspectors to cases of absenteeism is not uniform across counties and schools. This potentially indicates insufficient capacity by field officers to identify and follow up on disciplinary cases.
3. Several challenges hinder the effectiveness of field officers in discouraging school and classroom absenteeism. These include the understaffing of county and subcounty education offices; the absence of sufficient means of transportation; inadequate travel and accommodation allowances required for school visits; and lack of adequate technical training for the QASOs and the CSOs.

4.3.1. Engagement with schools

The interview data suggest that school visits for inspection and monitoring purposes constitute a key function of the subnational education officers in Kenya. However, the reported **frequency of these visits varies considerably between schools**, ranging from several times a month to once a term or even less. Public schools are more likely to be inspected than private schools. Additionally, schools located in close proximity to the county and subcounty education offices are more likely to be visited than remote schools.

Although the survey data did not uncover a clear correlation between frequency of school visits and teacher attendance rates, the interviews with school staff suggest that such a relationship does exist. Knowing that the quality assurance and standards officers and the curriculum support officers can visit at any moment seems to discourage all types of absenteeism, especially **absence from school** and **lateness to duty**.

> "Because this is an urban centre, any absenteeism or lateness is noted very quickly by the respective officers, like the CEO and the subcounty TSC director. You see, all these officers are just around the corner."
>
> – Head teacher, urban public school, Wajir County

"When you visit [these schools] once, teachers know that they will not be visited again until next term. So, they relax."

– Subcounty Director of Education, North Eastern region

Interviewed field officers also confirmed this link, arguing that absence from school and lack of punctuality is rampant only in hard-to-reach schools and communities.

The **content of inspection visits** also **varies from school to school**. Regarding the monitoring of teachers' school absences, most head teachers pointed out that the QASOs' typically request to survey the attendance book and inquire about absent teachers having received permission for their absence. However, whether a QASO actually follows up with unjustifiably absent teachers and how that is done remains unclear. Some head teachers described a standardized process that is systematically followed, consisting of filing a report, sending out warning letters, inviting teachers to a disciplinary hearing and, when necessary, interdicting teachers. Other head teachers maintained that this process is rarely put in motion and that chronically absent teachers are typically transferred rather than interdicted.

Similarly, teachers held different perceptions about the capacity of school inspectors to curb absenteeism. Around 87 per cent of those who took the survey agreed or strongly agreed that inspectors heavily discourage absences, and 50 per cent said that inspectors frequently sanctioned absenteeism. But few of the teachers could elaborate on the specific mechanism that inspectors employ to do so, mentioning simply that they 'offer advice' and that they 'remind teachers of their obligations and the Code of Regulations'.

The response of field officers to chronic teacher absences varies from school to school.

"When they visit the school, they ask me, 'How many teachers are absent?' and 'Did you give them permission?' If I say, 'I don't know', then they take the telephone number of the teacher and call them. They report, [and] the teacher goes to the [subcounty] office and explains [himself/herself]."

– Head teacher, public rural school, Nakuru County

"I don't take any action against any teacher who absents [himself/herself] from school or maybe doesn't do anything. Because I have no authority over the teachers. I only have the authority to advise, to correct – you get the point?"

– County education officer, Garissa County

When asked how they handle cases of chronic teacher absences, field officers also responded differently: Some described the process of monitoring and reporting in detail, while others argued that they lack the authority to report or sanction teachers and complained of political interference in disciplinary matters. Variations and delays in the handling of disciplinary cases were attributed to the lack of technical capacity of field agents, who are not always aware of the process of indictment, and to difficulties in contacting accused teachers, who may be hard to reach, especially in cases of desertion.

Lack of uniformity is also observed in teacher performance assessment and curriculum implementation monitoring across schools and counties. While in certain schools the QASO interacted directly with teachers and engaged in classroom observations to evaluate their classroom management and pedagogical skills, in others the performance assessment was based solely on lesson plans and was done indirectly via matching teachers' lesson plans with students' notebooks or, more recently, by checking progress against targets that teachers had set within their TPAD scheme.

In both cases, teachers considered the assessment rigorous and felt compelled to improve **their classroom attendance** and **curriculum coverage**. Yet, few educators reported being motivated and inspired by the school inspectors (at 37 per cent), and some even reported feeling "harassed" by them. What is more, teachers were less likely to report close interaction with the quality assurance officers than head teachers, who appear to have the most direct contact with inspectors during school visits.

Perceptions of the support provided by the CSOs varied across schools, with several teachers reporting positive interactions with them and others criticizing the absence of strong support, which they associated with their **inability to rise up to teaching standards**, especially with the new competency-based curriculum.

4.3.2. Practical challenges

Respondents unanimously agreed with the spirit of decentralization and recognized its potential to relieve regional and ethnic pressures, to improve efficiency and to ameliorate the quality of schooling. Yet, they also stressed the many challenges and complexities related to decentralizing teacher management functions, from agents at the TSC and MOE headquarters to the jurisdiction of the county and subcounty staff.

Resources

Subnational education officers felt restricted in their capacity to perform their duties due to the **lack of resources**, particularly **lack of personnel, means of transportation and travel and accommodation funds** for carrying out school visits.

Interviewed field staff typically spent three days a week in the field, but in most cases, they were unable to reach all schools within their jurisdiction or pay multiple visits to schools. Understaffing seemed to affect all stations, with the number of staff ranging from zero to six. It was particularly prominent in conflict-prone areas in the north due to the prevailing insecurity in that region and in certain areas of the semi-arid and arid lands, where the few schools are scattered over a vast space. In many of these areas, retaining personnel is hard, and although officers have been posted on paper, they are not always operating in practice. Officers serving in these areas reported feeling overstretched and pressured. Personnel shortages hinder ability to perform monitoring and capacity building functions efficiently.

In almost all of the subcounties, QASOs and CSOs highlighted the **absence of sufficient means of transport** (cars and motorcycles) and the **lack of travel and accommodation allowances** as two additional factors negatively affecting the frequency and thoroughness of school visits. Field officers further stated that the problem is exacerbated during the rainy season or when visiting remote schools, where an overnight stay is usually expected. National- and school-level respondents confirmed that transportation budgets are not always provided in a timely manner, forcing field officers to use their own money to pay for fuel or to repair broken-down vehicles.

"They normally come to see the head teacher. They don't even set foot inside classrooms. They just come to the office, meet with the head teacher or the deputy head teacher and then leave."

– Public school teacher, Kakamega County

A KNUT representative succinctly summarized the limitations that subnational education officers currently face:

"The philosophy of decentralizing services is good by any standard, but the necessary infrastructure for personnel to operate at that level has not been provided, like decent offices, support staff, and also the necessary capacity-building programmes so that they are able to execute certain mandates."

"How much can we do when we need to cover so many schools? At some point, we are forced not to do as required. Effective monitoring requires spending an entire day at each school so that you can observe what's happening and give necessary advice. But when you pop in, spend 20 minutes and leave, how much will you have really seen?"

– CSO in Marigat Subcounty (Baringo County)

Decentralized education offices are understaffed, especially in the semi-arid and arid lands and conflict-prone areas.

"In the whole of Wajir County, we have only two quality assurance officers. So, when go out to monitor, we all go, including the [curriculum support officer] and me."

– Director, Wajir Subcounty Education Office

"Of late, the Government has recruited more officers, but we still have subcounties, like Maeti, where there's only the subcounty director. There are no officers on the ground."

– Director, Bungoma County Education Office

Absence of system coherence, and tensions between levels of authority

Respondents highlighted communication gaps, insufficient fiscal transfers, and other tensions between national and sub-national levels of authority that inhibit teacher monitoring and result in delayed actions against teacher absenteeism. For example, subcounty officers criticized the lack of support from county directors on whom they are entirely dependent for grants. Yet, at the same time, they recognized that county education offices have their own problems and cannot help when their own funding is erratic.

"There is no proper understanding of roles in a given structure. Roles and mandates exist on paper, but people do things differently. You can find somebody at the county doing the work of somebody at the subcounty. There is no alignment yet, and still, new policies are introduced all the time, without being disseminated to the officers below.... How are they supposed to respond?"

– County education officer, Bungoma South

The roles and mandates of actors at different levels of authority are often unclear, and education officers have varying degrees of awareness of their duties and obligations with regard to monitoring and sanctioning teacher absences when conducting school visits. As a result, practice frequently deviates from official expectations.

Delays in handling disciplinary cases are also attributed to lack of awareness of the process of indictment. Teachers who are frequently absent are described as not fearing consequences since they are aware of the long and bureaucratic sanctioning process. Consequently, it is critical to establish an accountability framework of actors involved in teacher monitoring and sanctioning, and to ensure that the delegation of monitoring and sanctioning tasks is coherent with financing, information and incentives provided to decentralized actors.

4.4. Community factors associated with teacher attendance and time on task

Summary

This section examines the effects of community-level factors on various types of teacher absence. Three topics are discussed: (i) community infrastructure and climate; (ii) communal violence and insecurity; and (iii) the degree of community engagement with schools and school staff, including the capacity of parents and the school BoM to monitor and sanction teacher absenteeism. The main findings are:

1. Community infrastructure, specifically, the unavailability of developed road networks, reliable transportation services and health care, is associated with low rates of school attendance and low teacher punctuality. Distance between a teacher's home residence and work is closely linked with reporting to school without fail and on time, irrespective of the mode of transport used.

2. Harsh climate (excessive rainfall) contributes to high rates of school absenteeism and late arrival to duty, in combination with poor community infrastructure (roads and transportation services). Climatic conditions (excessive rainfall or heat) also affect teachers' class attendance, time on task and teaching quality, in combination with poor school infrastructure.

3. Despite serious efforts by the Government to keep schools in Kenya's fragile regions open, intercommunal and terrorist violence continue to be major contributors to teacher school absenteeism and desertion. A series of practical challenges directly related to frequent bursts of violence in these areas hinder capacity to provide sufficient and high-quality education. These include teachers' psychological distress, overcrowded schools and classrooms (the result of schools closing in the aftermath of attacks) and students suffering from PTSD.

4. A positive feedback loop exists between lower teacher school and classroom absenteeism and greater parental involvement. In schools that retain better relations with parents, teachers tend to spend more time on task and to deliver higher-quality teaching. However, these are typically schools where parents are wealthier and more educated.

4.4.1. Community infrastructure and climate

Poor community infrastructure and harsh climatic conditions emerged as important determinants of various types of teacher absenteeism across Kenya (*see Figures 12–15*).

Teachers serving in **rural and remote schools and communities**, where communications, transportation and health services are thinly spread and road networks are undeveloped, more often cited the absence of critical community infrastructure as a factor affecting their **attendance** and **punctuality at school** than did teachers working in or close to a town or city.

Location of teachers' home residence and distance from work was also closely linked with their capacity to report to school without fail and on time, irrespective of their mode of transport. Teachers without a car of their own who live far from school often struggle with

Poor community infrastructure combined with harsh climatic conditions significantly affect teacher punctuality and school attendance.

"Most of the teachers here are non-locals, they come from very far. During rainy season, they face very big challenges as roads becoming inaccessible. You often find them stranded far from school, sometimes for weeks."

– Head teacher, rural public school, Wajir County

Harsh climatic conditions also affect teachers' classroom attendance, time on task, and teaching quality.

"When it's raining very hard, teachers tend not to go to class. What's the point? It's so noisy they can't even hear themselves."

– Teacher, rural private school, Bungoma County

"With heavy rain, maybe they [the students] are writing their composition. You are there, but you're not teaching, they are only writing."

– Teacher, rural, public school, Bungoma County

"If it's extremely hot you can try different things, like taking cover under a tree. But then, is this really conducive to learning?"

– Teacher, rural public school, Wajir County

"It's so bad you cannot stand in a class and teach. You are sweating, the students are sweating, and some of them are sleeping."

– Teacher, Wajir County

the absence of sufficient and reliable means of public transportation, especially during rainy season, when floods and landslides in some counties delay or entirely prohibit movement. Some of the surveyed teachers reported requiring as many as 90 minutes to reach the school under normal circumstances, a figure that almost doubles during rainy season. Apart from checking in late, these teachers may also have to leave school early, depending on the bus or other public means of transport schedules of operation. Interestignly, the punctuality of teachers who used private vehicles to get to work and resided in areas with paved roads was equally affected by rainy season, primarily due to congestion and long traffic jams.

Harsh climatic conditions can influence teacher attendance in ways unrelated to late arrival or school absence (*see Figures 12, 13*). In Garissa and Wajir counties, for example, interviewed teachers admitted **skipping class** when the temperature rises above 40 degrees Celsius.

In parts of Kenya with heavy rainfall, where schools have iron-sheet roofs, classrooom absenteeism was justified on the basis that the noise is so loud that it is impossible for teachers to continue teaching. Even when teaching sessions take place as scheduled, the **amount of time teachers actively spend teaching** is often reduced. Some teachers reported that when it rains, instead of teaching they may write notes for students or assign class work. Teachers in drought-affected regions also explained that they frequently conduct lessons under a tree, even though they recognize the limitations of this approach in terms of using teaching aids and ensuring student focus.

4.4.2. Intercommunal violence and insecurity

Since independence, Kenya has experienced nationwide upheaval only once (in 2007–2008). Nevertheless, parts of the country, primarily the semi-arid and arid lands in the north and north-east, have a long history of ethnic conflict, violence and marginalization. Recently, new conflict drivers related to terrorism and resource extraction have exacerbated these local tensions and raised challenges for service provision, including education.

Lack of security is a major determinant of teacher school absenteeism in counties affected by communal violence and terrorism.

Three counties included in the TTT sample are directly affected by conflict and insecurity: Baringo County in the north-west (Rift Valley) and Wajir and Garissa counties in the north-east. In Baringo County, conflict and volatile politics involve violent competition over tribally defined constituencies, boundaries, jobs and land. Cattle rustling is frequent, and it is exacerbated by prolonged droughts and livestock loss. In Wajir and Garissa counties, nomadic competition over scarce resources coexists with the threat of terrorism and ethnic strife. Sharing a long and porous border with Somalia to the east, both counties have experienced the consequences of the Somali civil war, including massacres, kidnappings and refugee inflows. Localized political conflict, instigated by the fall-out of the war in Somalia, are frequent.

Attacks attributed to terrorist and insurgency groups, like the al-Shabaab and its Eastern African affiliate, al-Hijra, are also increasing. In November 2014, for instance, an attack in the village of Arabia, near Mandera town in the county to the north of Wajir, left 28 people dead, including 17 teachers and other civil servants. In April 2015, an unprecedented attack by al-Shabaab militants made headlines around the world with the murder of 148 people in the student residences of Garissa University. The wave of attacks against education targets continued in recent years. In February 2018, a few months prior to the TTT fieldwork, an al-Shabaab orchestrated attack against a primary school in Wajir County resulted in the death of two teachers and the mass exodus of educators from the area.[92]

While the Government has made considerable efforts to keep schools in fragile regions open, insecurity often motivates teachers to leave their posts en masse and to request transfers to safer places. Some schools visited as part of the TTT study had had many of their teachers and students flee from political or ethnic violence. At the time of fieldwork, several schools remained closed. However, even when schools were reopened and restaffed, personnel were weary and stressed. Interviewed teachers and head teachers in such schools confirmed that **lack of security** is a major driver of teachers' **school absenteeism and desertion**.

County education officers confirmed that the situation remains critical despite improvements in teacher distribution and the tightening of security.

Threat of violence affects educators' capacity **to teach the required hours** because their distress interferes with their sense of duty, reducing their intrinsic motivation to teach. The students' fragile mental state and a series of practical challenges related to the frequent bursts of violence further restrict the teachers' commitment to provide sufficient education. In Baringo County, for example, schools affected by cattle rustling often shut down, and students move to neighbouring schools that are deemed safe. In those recipient schools, teachers struggle with the overcrowded classrooms and their limited capacity to help children learn.

In Wajir and Garissa counties, where schools host a large population of Somali refugees, linguistic and cultural barriers between teachers and students inhibit both teaching and learning. In these areas, interviewed teachers reported that children coming from Somalia (typically after having experienced extreme levels of violence) often exhibit behaviours that undermine in-class learning, such as disrespecting teachers, resorting to violence to solve problems or finding it hard to concentrate. While teachers recognize the reason for such behaviours and express sympathy for their students, they also admit being unable to help them concentrate on learning because they **lack the necessary counselling and classroom management skills**.

"This year [2018], we had problems due to insecurity in this county, and around 900 non-local teachers fled the area. They went to TSC headquarters. Through the [KNUT], they demanded mass transfers, which they eventually received. During that time, the head teacher and I were left completely alone here."

– Deputy head teacher, rural public school, Wajir County

Insecurity affects teachers' time-on-task and teaching quality.

"Since the insecurity started, teachers, especially the down country teachers, are in school physically but their input is very little or none."

– Teacher, urban private school, Garissa County

"When there is high insecurity, there is a problem. Even when they are in class, teachers are not settled and cannot teach."

– Head teacher, rural public school, Garissa County

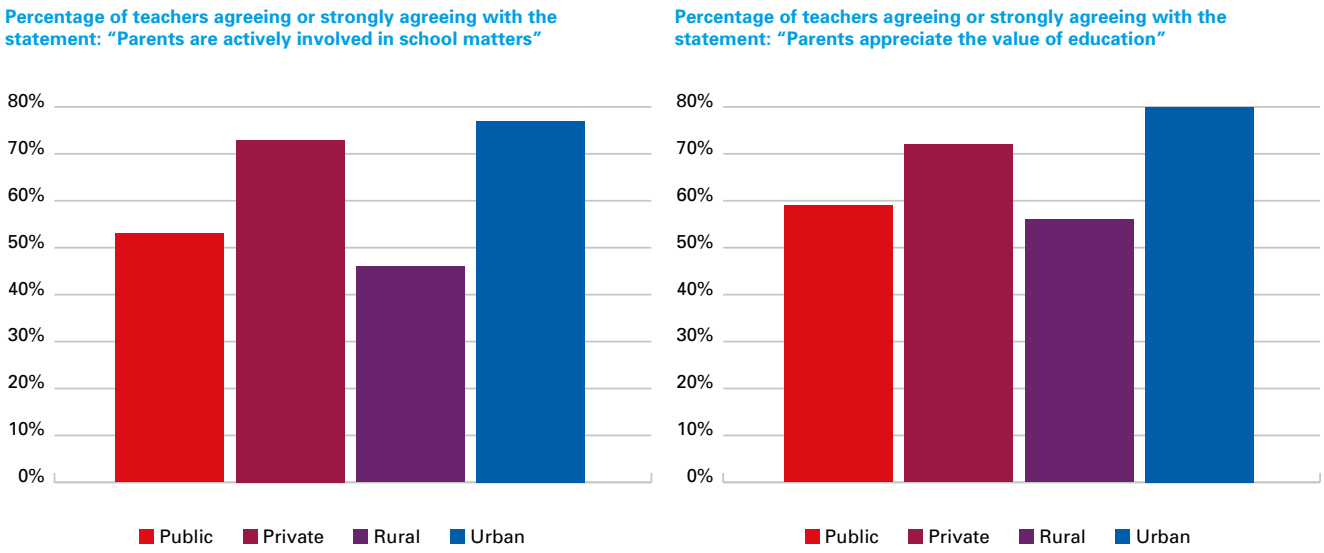
"When the rustlers attack, the pupils come from that school to this one. This is why you see so much congestion. You can find classes with 90 pupils, from nursery to Class 8, because of cattle rustling. How can you teach such a class?"

– Teacher, public rural school, Baringo County

4.4.3. Community engagement and monitoring capacity

Interviews with teachers and community representatives in selected schools suggest a **positive feedback loop between lower school and classroom absenteeism and greater community and parental involvement**. Schools that retain better relations with parents are also those where teachers typically spend **more time on task**. These are usually private schools or public schools attended by children from (relatively) higher-income families whose members are **educated and hold a high appreciation for education** (*see Figure 18*).

Figure 18. Teacher perception of parental engagement in school matters and interest in education, by school type



In schools in which parental engagement is high, teacher punctuality and teaching quality are higher than average.

The community keeps us on our toes. If you don't go to class or do not teach as expected, students will go home and say, 'Today we didn't have a proper class', and you'll have parents coming here or calling. So, you do not even dare underperform."

– Teacher, rural public school, Bungoma County

In schools in which parental engagement is high, the **BoM meets several times during the term** to discuss school matters. They also pool resources to ensure that BoM-hired teachers are paid on time; that housing, meals and transportation are provided to non-local teachers; and that school infrastructure is constantly improved. In many of these schools, teacher motivation is recognized as of paramount importance for teacher attendance and performance, and parents go to great lengths to provide extrinsic and intrinsic incentives to teachers: They organize prize days; offer performance-based awards; consult and morally support teachers; and financially assist teachers facing personal difficulties, such as ill health or family turmoil.

Teachers serving in schools where community involvement is high confirmed that parents had respect for education (*see Figure 18*), valued their contributions and responded to calls for books, school uniforms and school meals. Teacher–parent communication, described by both sides as "daily" and "continuous", was often done via social media platforms, such as Facebook and WhatsApp. In most cases, this allowed the timely exchange of information and the swift resolution of urgent issues.

Active BoM members were cognizant of their role in monitoring teacher attendance and performance and exercised it effectively. According to teachers serving in high community engagement schools, parents come and inquire daily about their children's performance. BoM chairpersons reported that whenever parents feel aggrieved, they call and inquire about a teacher's attendance and competence, often demanding further investigation and closer monitoring. In some of these schools, interviewees were able to recall instances of parents filing a complaint to the subcounty or even holding demonstrations until chronically absent and underperforming teachers were removed and replaced. In other cases, close parental and school management board monitoring prompted head teachers to better adhere to their own consultation and mentoring obligations.

These findings from the field offer a valuable glimpse into how parents and communities attempt to improve teacher motivation and attendance and thus increase children's opportunities to learn. What emerges quite clearly from the data, however, is that a **high degree of community engagement is more likely in schools with (relatively) higher-income-earning and better-educated parents**. These are usually private schools or public schools situated in urban centres or in close proximity.

In remote and marginalized communities, teachers were much more likely to argue that parents are disengaged from school activities and that the BoM's functioning was sporadic and inefficient. Many teachers described feeling unmotivated and disrespected and blamed parents and the broader community for being unsupportive and even hostile. They also complained that parents have an improper understanding of and respect for what goes on at school. In these communities, parents may also lack the resources needed to equip children with school uniforms, books and other learning materials when they are unavailable.

The interview responses indicate that these parents lack agency and a sufficient understanding of their role in monitoring the performance and attendance of teachers and students. Education officials, for instance, maintained that parents rarely contact the school to inquire about their children's grades or to report teacher absences.

Increased monitoring of teachers by the school BoM and individual parents reduces school, classroom and teaching absenteeism.

"There was a time [when] parents were complaining about a teacher who was always present [at school] but would always be on the phone while in class. The head teacher was able to address this by consulting with the teacher. It didn't go further than that, as the teacher's behaviour changed and the situation improved."

– Board of management chairperson, rural public school, Kiambu County

"Teachers are always present because of the interaction with the community, especially parents. In this school, if a teacher does not come, you will receive multiple SMSs asking, 'How come the teacher is not there?'"

– Board of management chairperson, urban public school, Nairobi

Such opinions were more frequently voiced in regions with nomadic and/or minority populations, where the consequences of resource scarcity and low levels of education among parents are further exacerbated by cultural divides between parents and non-local teachers. Teachers in Muslim- and nomadic-majority areas, for example, often complained that parents prefer to pay the *duksi* or madrasa fees over secular school fees, to prioritize pastoralist home education over formal schooling and to use schools solely as feeding centres. They also blamed parents for the spotty attendance and prolonged absences of students during grazing season or during Ramadan, which affects their own attendance in school and class as well as their time on task.

Part of the problem, however, seems to lie with formal school agents and their luck of awareness of local culture and customes. Interviewed parents and BoM members in nomadic-majority schools, for example, complained that non-local teachers do not always engage well with the pastoralist system and frequently look down upon their lifestyle, considering it primordial and outdated. In Muslim-majority areas, interviewed

Community engagement is lower in remote and marginalized communities, where parents are less educated and less well-off. This encourages teacher school absenteeism.

"The quality of committee members in urban areas is much higher, and they know how to monitor and manage teachers. Teachers who are frequently absent will be asked, 'When are you coming to school?' But in the rural areas, parents don't care whether the teacher is absent [and they don't care whether the teacher is late because they don't understand the impact of absenteeism."

– MOE official, Nairobi

BoM members and head teachers explained that formal schools are largely seen as an externally imposed institution that is culturally irrelevant and ineffective. When asked why they chose to send only some of their children to school while providing others with home schooling or religious education, parents in Muslim majority areas referred to the high rates of failure and the incapacity of formal schooling to equip their children with sufficient knowledge and skills.

In these schools, the vicious cycle between limited parent–teacher interaction, low teacher motivation and attendance and school ineffectiveness seems to be in full motion. Cultural divides between parents and students, combined with the immense difficulties faced by schools in these areas (such as teacher shortages and lack of infrastructure), feed parents' suspicion about the usefulness and relevance of formal education, which encourages apathy and disengagement from school activities. Those reactions, in turn, demotivate teachers, functioning as a disincentive for increased effort and attendance. The overall effect weighs down on students' performance and re-enforces parents' mistrust.

"In these places, the community does not see monitoring as their responsibility. They think it is the responsibility of the Government. And since the Government cannot always be there, their hands are tied."

– TSC official, Nairobi

4.5. School factors associated with teacher attendance and time on task

Summary

This section looks at contextual factors at school, to examine the direct and indirect effects on various forms of teacher attendance. Three topics are analysed in detail: (i) **the role of the head teacher**, (ii) **the working environment of teachers**, especially the quality of school infrastructure, and (iii) the availability of **TLM and teacher workload**. The main findings are:

1. The ability of head teachers to effectively monitor, manage and provide teaching mentorship to teachers is crucial for discouraging all forms of absenteeism. These functions, however, are dwarfed by inadequate head teacher training in organizational and personnel management, the absence of meritocratic selection processes, nativeness (teachers working in their native community) and excessive workload, among other factors.
2. Inadequate school infrastructure and teaching equipment do not adversely affect teachers' school attendance and punctuality. However, infrastructural limitations encourage subtler manifestations of absenteeism, such as teachers' absence from class. They also tend to limit teachers' time on task while in the classroom. Public schools in marginalized and rural and remote areas are the most badly hurt because they face the biggest investment needs.
3. Heavy non-teaching workload, encompassing both classroom- and non-classroom-related activities, can result in missed classes and reduced teaching time, especially in public schools located in rural and remote areas, where teacher shortages and student–teacher ratios are higher than the national average.

4.5.1. The role of the head teacher

In the discussions with participants, few factors were as overwhelmingly highlighted for their importance for teacher attendance as the monitoring capacities and leadership skills of head teachers. Together, these factors seem to explain much of the variation between low and high absenteeism in schools across all regions of Kenya, **regardless of school type** (public or private) and **community setting** (urban or rural). The monitoring capacity of head teachers, however, is **much more relevant in verifying teacher presence at school and punctuality** and less so in reporting subtle manifestations of absenteeism, like absence from class and teaching and poor lesson delivery.

> "If the head teacher is weak and not proactive, the school will go down with that person. The school is as good as the head teacher. There is a saying: Ask me about a good school, and I will show you a good master."
>
> – MOE official

In most of the selected schools, **mechanisms for monitoring school absence** and **punctuality** were in place and sufficiently utilized by head teachers and their deputies. These included staff registers filled in by school management and attendance registry (a clocking-in and clocking-out book) signed by individual teachers upon their arrival and when they leave the school's premises. Interviewed head teachers reported using these tools daily, a statement confirmed by the majority of surveyed teachers, 62 per cent of whom maintained that their supervisors record absences consistently. In most schools, teachers were also able to elaborate on the process of requesting leave, on the mechanisms in place for ensuring that students are not left unattended and on how compensation classes are organized. However, only in **low-absenteeism schools** were head teachers likely to mention the role of students in registering **teacher presence** and **punctuality** by class period – a practice introduced recently within the TPAD framework.[viii] These head

viii This is possibly indicative of better TPAD implementation.

Frequent classroom observation and teaching mentoring provided by head teachers increase teachers' class attendance and time on task.

"The head teacher is always after us. You cannot even waste one minute in the staffroom. He will come and check the timetable. Then he tells you, 'Why are you sitting down?' So, for you to avoid that embarrassment or an argument with him, you hurry to your class. So, I can say it is excellent."

– Teacher, rural public school, Garissa County

"The leadership quality of the head teacher is good. She is always there for us. The head teacher observes my classes and offers advice about twice a month. It's very useful. She motivates us by giving us advice on how to do the work and how to handle the pupils."

– Teacher, urban public school, Nairobi

"The moment you join an institution, you abide by its culture. It is our working culture, arriving and leaving at the right time."

– Teacher, rural public school, Bungoma County

In describing the consultative management style of his supervisor, a teacher in a rural school in Nakuru explained:

"He [the head teacher] is not hard on the teachers, he is understanding. When a teacher approaches him with a problem, he counsels. He is a father, he is a leader, he is everything. He gives teachers peace of mind and provides what they need to deliver."

teachers also tried to increase school attendance and punctuality of teachers by improving their living conditions and by offering incentives that limit their movement in and out of school during class intermissions and breaks. The provision of housing to non-local teachers (within school premises) and the establishment of meal programmes and tea breaks for teaching staff are some examples of these initiatives.

In well-managed schools, head teachers were often credited for improving teacher attendance and performance through a series of soft measures that encourage and motivate educators, like organizing prize and award days; arranging staff get-togethers and parties; favouring inclusive decision-making processes; cultivating an environment of mutual support and respect; encouraging high professional standards; and establishing a culture of intolerance towards unjustified absenteeism. To achieve this, head teachers often try to lead by example and to serve as role models for teachers. Interviewed teachers confirmed that when their supervisors arrive at school earlier than they do, they feel more obligated and encouraged to be on time and to teach well.

Good head teachers were viewed as compassionate and understanding. They were seen as engaging in extensive consultation and counselling with educators who faced work-related or personal issues that affected their performance and attendance.

In most cases, the consultative approach to dealing with frequent teacher absences seems to have borne fruit. In the few cases where it did not, school managers were able to follow established guidelines and to frequently hold absent teachers accountable by issuing warning letters and, in some extreme situations, by reporting them for desertion of duty.

Indeed, teachers in schools in which rules and regulations pertaining to absenteeism are upheld were more likely to report that they knew of someone who had been transferred or otherwise sanctioned. Moreover, they seemed apprehensive about missing school due to possible wage reductions and other forms of punishment.

On the contrary, teachers in **high-absenteeism** schools often criticized their supervisors for being absent from school, not conducting meetings with teaching staff and communicating rarely with parents. They also perceived their leadership and mentoring skills as weak due to their inability to uphold discipline, school rules and act as positive role models for teachers. Some educators noted that poor school management makes them feel unappreciated and unmotivated as well as indifferent towards their obligations.

Respondents cited several factors as contributing to the inability of head teachers to keep teachers motivated and accountable. Subnational and national education officers, for example, considered the absence of training and the lack of transparency in the selection process of head teachers as areas in need of renewed attention.

Others highlighted the adverse effects of nativeness, arguing that discipline is harder when teachers and head teachers come from the same community, which entails social interactions beyond their professional capacity.

Finally, in areas with significant teacher shortages, where head teachers also serve as class teachers, insufficient monitoring of absenteeism was attributed to excessive head teacher workload.

> "After three warnings, I write them a letter. After three more warnings, they usually get transferred.... Other rule-breakers then develop some fear, and they start working more."
>
> – Head teacher, rural public school, Garissa County

4.5.2. School infrastructure and availability of teaching and learning materials

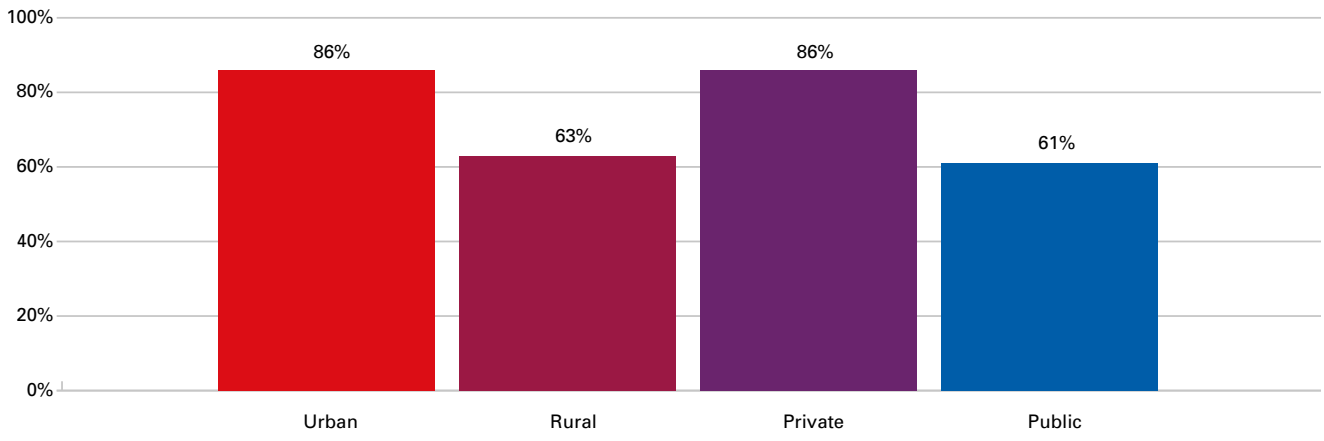
Since the introduction of free primary education, the Government has invested heavily in improving school infrastructure and the availability of critical TLM and equipment to meet the increasing numbers of admitted students. Over the past 15 years, tremendous progress has been observed on all fronts, but important challenges remain: In many schools across the country, there is an overwhelming need for additional classrooms and crucial infrastructure, such as labs, libraries and dormitories as well as books, teacher guides and teaching aids.

School and classroom observations revealed that **public schools in marginalized, rural and remote areas face the biggest investment needs**. Students in these areas experience double disadvantages: They come from low-income families and attend poorly equipped schools, thus encountering difficult hurdles in terms of social mobility. **Urban and private schools are, on average, better equipped** and **offer a better working environment to teachers** (*see Figure 19*).

> "Some [head teachers] have used undue influence or money to get leadership positions, even though they lack leadership skills. Many lack proper in-service training to understand their mandate."
>
> – MOE official, Nairobi
>
> "[These head teachers] have a common saying: 'I don't want teachers to die in my hands'. Familiarity with a specific area and its people skews their judgement, leading them to implement policy in a poor manner."
>
> – TSC director, Bungoma County

> "Some school head teachers are also class teachers. In the morning, when the first bell rings, where do they go? To class – they go and perform their number one duty as teachers. When are they going to assess attendance and quality of learning in other classes? There's no time."
>
> – County education officer, Garissa County.

Figure 19. Percentage of teachers reporting that the working environment in their school is good, by school type



Interviews with teaching staff and group discussions with students suggest that inadequate school infrastructure and teaching equipment do not adversely affect teachers' school attendance and punctuality. These **limitations** do, however, **encourage** teachers' **absence from class**. They also tend to **limit their time on task** (*see Figures 14, 15*).

"When you have no content to teach, you get to a point where you run out of words. What are you doing for the children then? You just tell them to read a story."

– Teacher, rural public school, Baringo County

"When specific instructions and aids are provided, you need little time to prepare for class. Otherwise, you have to improvise and look for materials yourself. This takes a lot of time, which we don't have. It can make you miss class or go to class late."

– TSC director and curriculum support officer, Bungoma County

Students' access to books was reported as sufficient in only a slim minority of schools. Most respondents noted that **textbook availability is limited** and that students must share books. This is done in varying ratios, ranging from one book per two students to one book per eight students. Within schools, this ratio also varies by class and tends to be lower in classes that parents and teachers perceive as critical, such as Class 1 and Class 8. Teachers also highlighted the **absence of sufficient teaching guides** (especially for the new competency-based curriculum), **teaching aids** and **special equipment and rooms**, such as computer and science labs. While some educators mentioned receiving an allowance for purchasing instructional materials, they were also quick to point out that it is insufficient to cover the glaring equipment shortages their schools often experience.

Insufficient TLM affect teachers' **classroom attendance** and their **time on task**. Absence of teaching guides and teaching aids, for example, may reduce confidence in delivering certain lessons and may, at the same time, increase the propensity to skip class because teachers lack important content knowledge.

The insufficient provision of preparatory materials and guidelines may increase the time teachers need to prepare for class, which can also lead to missed classes and reduced teaching time.

School infrastructure also **influences teachers' (and students') classroom attendance and time on task**. The absence of adequate safe water facilities, for example, interferes with the time spent on teaching and learning, especially in the semi-arid and arid lands, where water is scarce and water distribution networks are underdeveloped. Many schools in these areas rely on boreholes and tanks, which are often inoperative. Classes are frequently interrupted or end early when students and teachers run out of water. In some cases, students and teachers must walk long distances to fetch water before returning to school again.

"The sun is so hot, even 3 litres of water cannot take you through the whole day. After lunch time, it's very stressful because lessons begin after the bell rings and we enter the classroom and start learning. By that time, you've finished your water and you're really thirsty, so you have to go fetch some more and come back."

– Class 7 student, rural public school, Baringo County

4.5.3. Teacher workload

Heavy workload is another impotant contributor to absenteeism. Many of the interviewed teachers explained that on any given school day, apart from completing their teaching duties, they are also expected to undertake a number of classroom- and non-classroom-related activities.[ix] This sometimes results in them **missing class** and **reducing their time on task**.

The survey data confirm this finding. Administrative tasks and official school business were reported by teachers as contributing to **classroom absenteeism** (*see Figure 14*). Having too many classroom preparation tasks also appears to contribute to **absences from class** and **reduced time on task** in schools across the country (*see Figures 14, 15*). However, important variations exist between different regions and types of schools. Teachers in rural and public schools were much more likely to report missing classes or reducing the length of their lessons as a result of these factors, compared with teachers serving in urban and private schools (*see Figures 14, 15*). What is more, having to complete too many **classroom preparation tasks** seems to be a much bigger issue for teachers in regions with marginalized and remote areas, like the North Eastern and Rift Valley regions, compared with the broader Nairobi region (*see Figures 20, 21*).

Heavy workload, comprising classroom- and non-classroom-related activities, can result in missed classes and reduced teaching time.

"You're meant to spend no more than an hour preparing for each lesson, but if you're going to do a half-decent job, you need two. If you have 25 hours of lessons a week, that's already 45–50 hours. And then you've got marking, reporting and other things on top."

– Teacher, rural public school, Bungoma County

"When there is a staff briefing or I'm in charge of certain activity and there is something that is required in the office urgently, I miss class because I have to prepare for that activity."

– Teacher, urban public school, Nairobi

"When our class teacher is too busy preparing or marking, she gives us work or tells us to finish any work we have. Mostly, she splits us into groups and we do group discussions."

– Class 7 student, urban rural school, Kiambu County

ix Classroom-related activities include class preparation, lesson planning and marking exams and workbooks. Non-classroom-related activities incude management board and staff meetings; requests from school teachers for administrative aid; planned and unplanned visits from various actors, including parents, CSOs and donors; overseeing extracurricular activities (music, drama, sports); and TPAD reporting.

Figure 20. Key determinants of classroom absenteeism, by region

Percentage of teachers citing various factors as keys determinants of class absenteeism

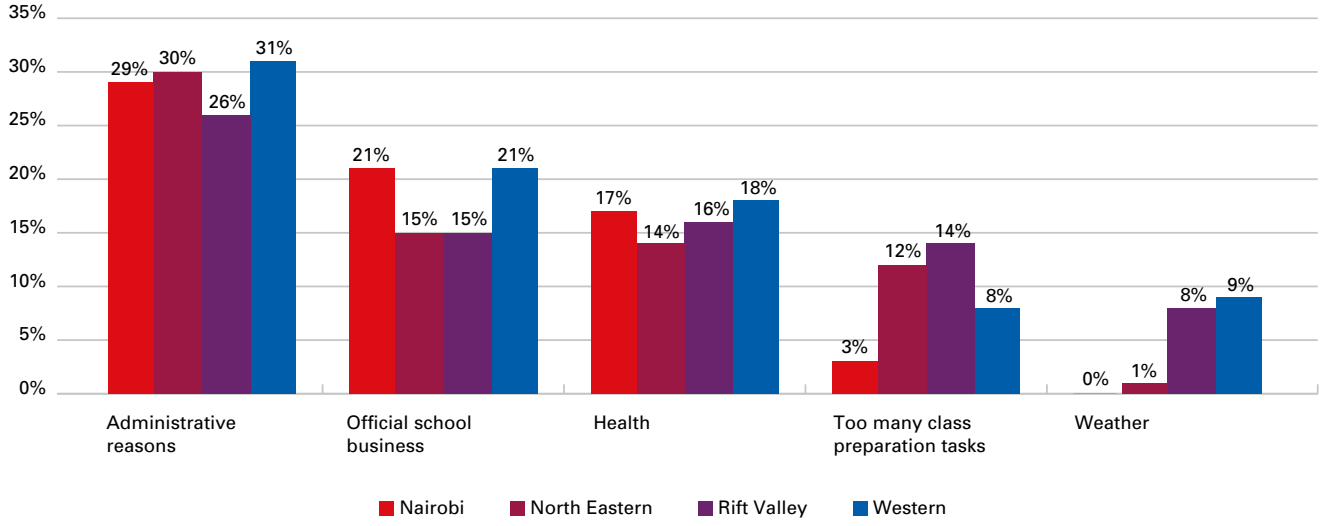
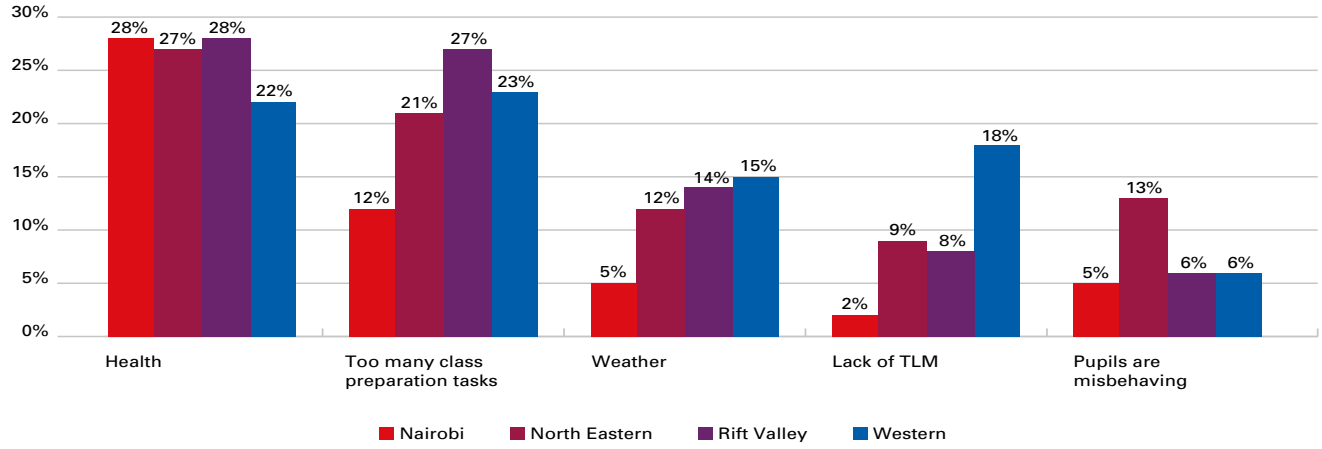


Figure 21. Key determinants of reduced time on task, by region

Percentage of teachers reporting various factors as key determinants of reduced time on task



These findings suggest that teacher workload and its impact on absenteeism should be analysed against the background of student–teacher ratios and variations between schools and regions. While the 2015 Basic Education Act and the latest NESP propose a maximum class size of 50 students,[93] the reality is that in many schools across the country – mostly public schools in remote areas – classes are much larger than 50 due to the lack of teachers. With the current (nationwide) shortage in primary schools standing at 37,643 teachers, some teachers must work an average of 60 hours a week during term time and sometimes through their holidays to keep up. These employees, despite their love of teaching, cannot maintain a healthy work–life balance and subsequently engage in various forms of absenteeism. This reality is well known to stakeholders across the education system.

> "They are in school, but they do not attend class. Yeah, there is huge work I'm telling you. For example, there are competitions like music, drama, sports, so teachers who are involved in these activities will miss class or school. And teacher shortage is affecting these teachers so much. A teacher is in school and cannot tend to Class 8 because he's in Class 4. He is in school and cannot tend to Class 3 because he is in Class 5. There's not much they can do."
>
> – County education officer, Garissa County

4.6. Teacher characteristics associated with teacher attendance and time on task

Summary

This section analyses the impact of individual teacher factors on teacher attendance. Individual factors are defined here as demographic and social variables. Demographic characteristics are drawn from the TTT teacher survey, and the results presented here are organized in three categories: **gender**, **years of experience** and **health**. The main findings are:

1. Female teachers were more likely than their male counterparts to be absent from school or unpunctual in their teaching obligations due to family obligations. However, there was no significant difference between male and female teachers in terms of classroom absenteeism and reduced time on task.
2. While age failed to predict the frequency of any form of absenteeism, years of experience seem to matter for teacher school absenteeism: More experienced educators were more likely to report a higher frequency of school absence (once a week or more) than less experienced ones. However, experienced teachers were more confident in their teaching skills and instructional effectiveness and reported less instances of students struggling to follow their class, compared with the less-experienced teachers.
3. While health was one of the most frequently cited reasons for all forms of absenteeism, significant variations in the frequency of health-induced teacher absences by teachers' gender and school type (public or private, rural or urban) were not observed. However, teachers working in remote areas were more likely to be absent for multiple days when ill and more prone to lateness caused by illness due to the unavailability of a health care facility in close proximity to their school or home.

4.6.1. Gender

The interviews with all participants indicated a widely held perception that **female teachers** tend to be more **frequently absent from school** and **less punctual in their teaching obligations** than their male colleagues due to increased familial obligations.

> "Obviously we will not condemn our female teachers, but they are more prone to absenteeism than male teachers because of the time they need to care for a sick child or breastfeed a child at home."
>
> – County education officer, Nairobi

The survey data, however, do not entirely corroborate this claim. On one hand, 24 per cent of the female teachers included in the TTT sample cited familial obligations as a reason for arriving late or leaving school early, compared with 16 per cent of the male teachers. Female teachers also reported being absent from school due to urgent family matters, at a rate of 22 per cent, compared with 16 per cent of male teachers (*see Figure 22*). However, female teachers were also more likely to report a lower frequency of school absenteeism[x] (at 53 per cent) than male colleagues (at 73 per cent) and a higher frequency of punctual arrival to and departure from school. As many as 69 per cent of the female teachers reported three or fewer instances of lateness to duty since the start of the school year, compared with 59 per cent of their male

x Defined as three or less instances of school absence since the start of the school year.

colleagues (*see Figure 23*). These findings seem to suggest that while female teachers are somewhat more likely to be absent from school or late to duty due to increased family obligations than their male counterparts, they frequently are not necessarily absent or late overall.

Interestingly, gender failed to predict the frequency of other forms of absenteeism, like missing scheduled classes while at school and spending limited time on teaching while in the classroom.

Figure 22. Percentage of teachers reporting family obligations as a reason for school absence and lateness to duty, by gender

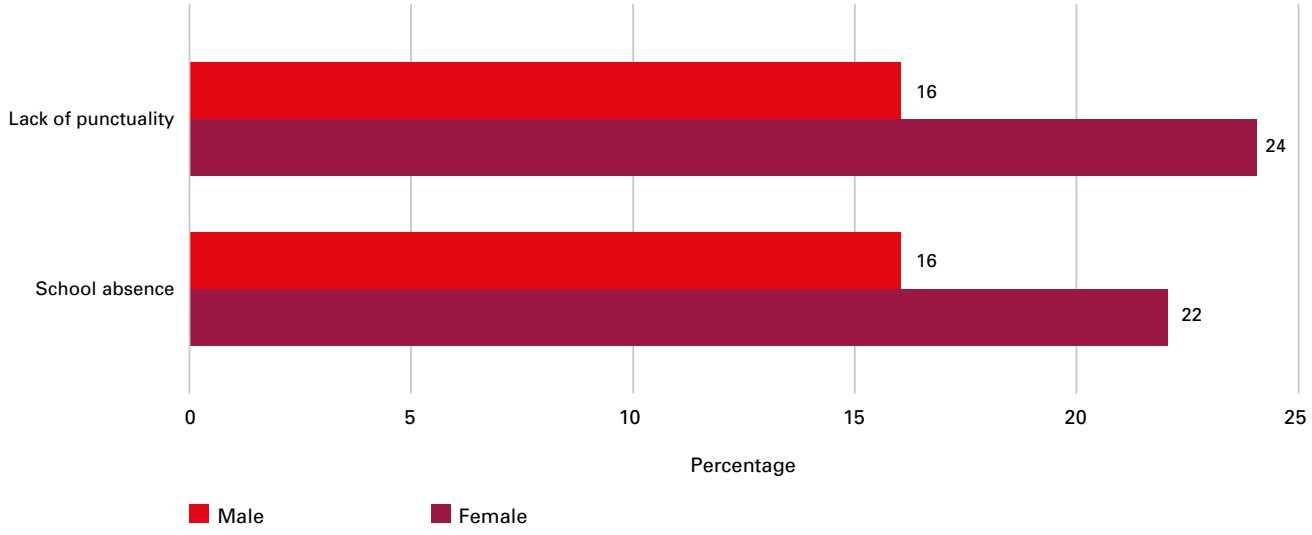
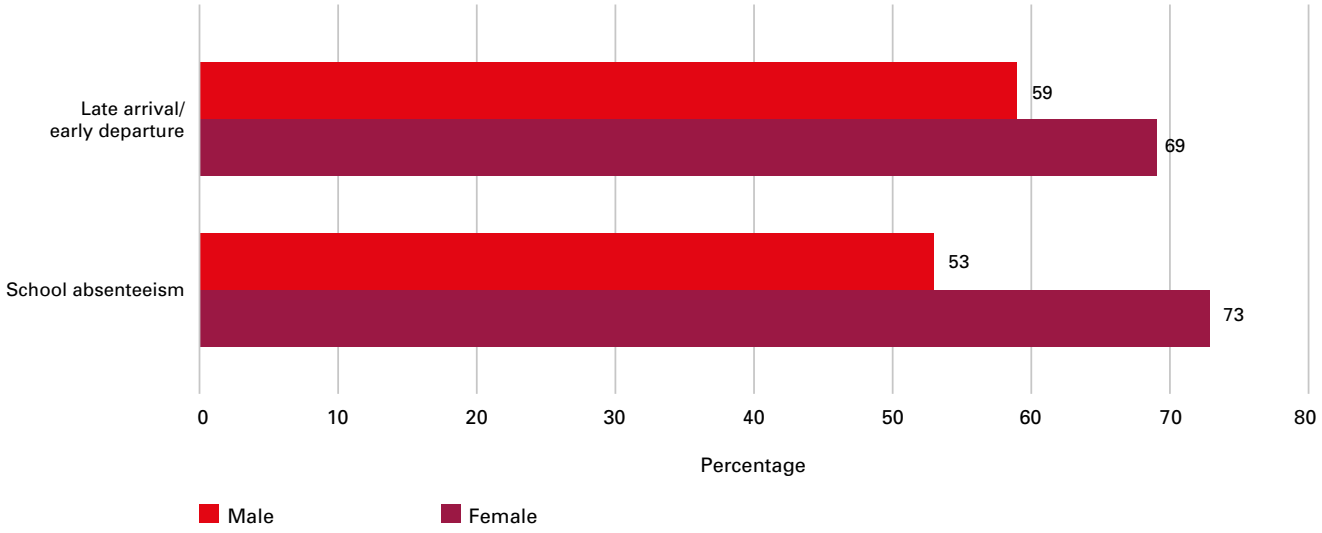


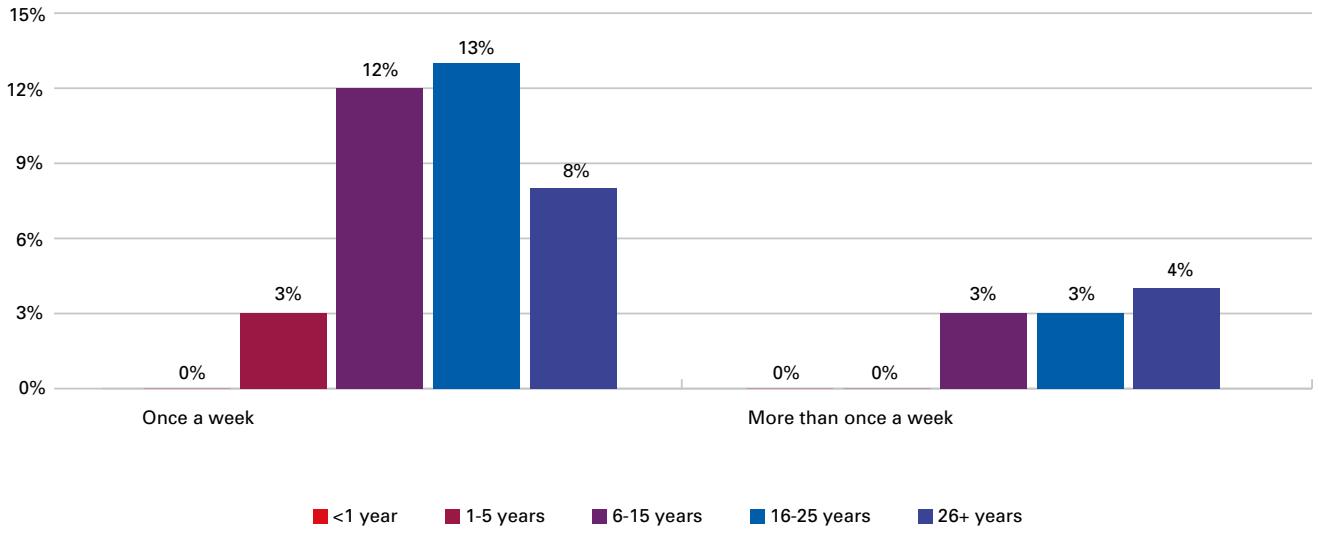
Figure 23. Percentage of teachers reporting three or fewer instances of school absence and late arrival or early departure from school since the start of the school year, by gender



4.6.2. Years of experience

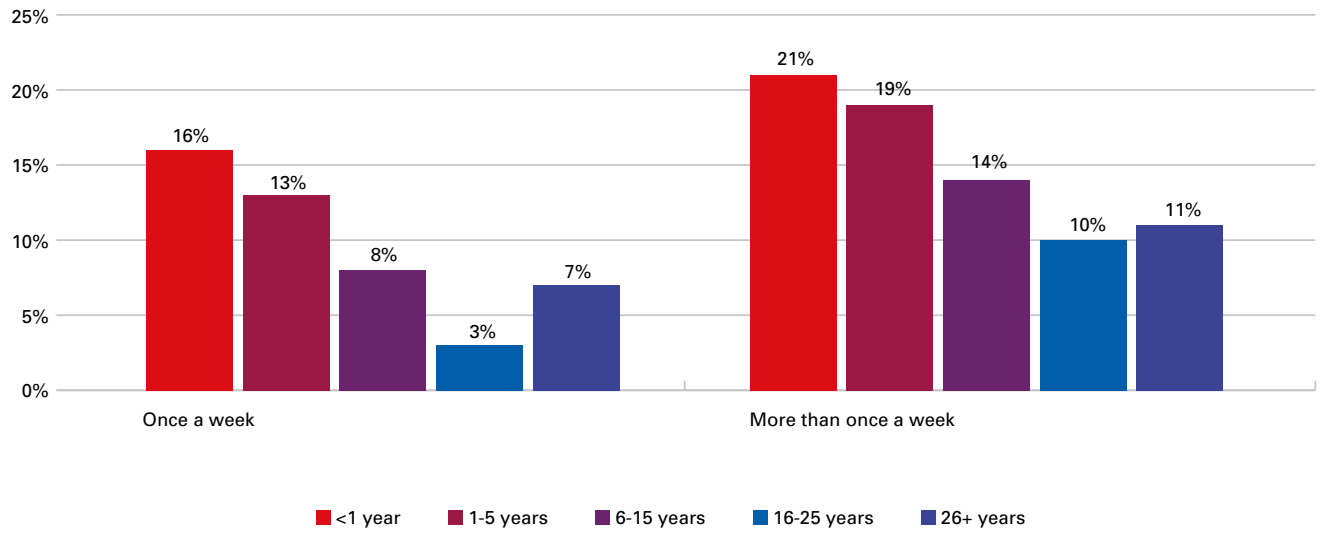
All participants perceived senior teachers as less amenable to ideas about workplace professionalism and therefore more prone to chronic school absenteeism. The survey data do not confirm this claim, but they do point towards a positive **relationship between years of experience and school absences**. As shown in Figure 24, experienced teachers in the TTT sample were more likely to report a high frequency of school absence (once a week or more) than the less-experienced teachers. Teachers with 16–25 years of experience, for example, were four times more likely to report being absent from school once a week, compared with teachers with only one to five years of experience. Of course, it is possible that other factors confound the effect of teacher experience on absenteeism. For example, if outside opportunities for experienced teachers (such as private tutoring) increase faster than their pay within the government pay structure or if experienced teachers take up more official school duties than less-experienced teachers, the results presented here could be misleading.

Figure 24. Percentage of teachers reporting a high frequency of school absenteeism since the start of the school year, by years of experience



Years of experience also seem to matter for teaching quality and effectiveness: A larger percentage of less-experienced teachers reported that their students struggle to follow their class on a frequent basis (once a week or more) than more-experienced teachers. For example, newly hired teachers with less than one year of service were five times more likely to state that key messages do not get through to their students at least once a week than teachers with 16–25 years of experience (*see Figure 25*).

Figure 25. Percentage of teachers reporting a high frequency of ineffective teaching, by years of experience

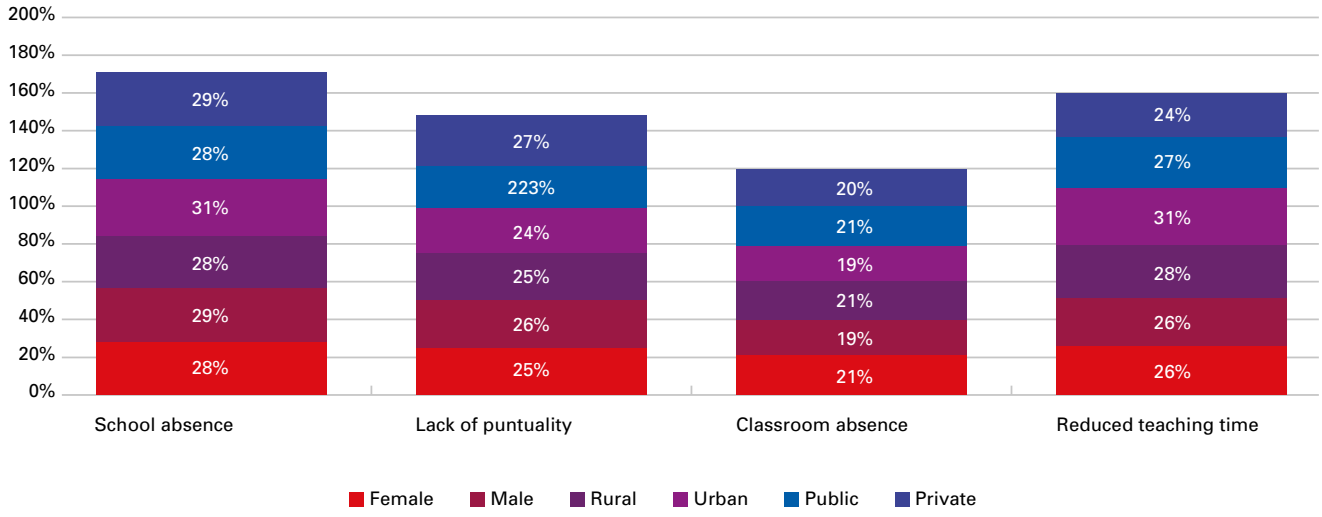


4.6.3. Health

Surveyed teachers cited ill health as the most important reason for **absence from school**, for **arriving to school late** or for **spending less time teaching** than originally planned (*see Figures 12, 13, 15*). Poor teacher health was also the third most frequently reported reason for **low class attendance** (*see Figure 14*).

The survey data did not reveal significant variations in the frequency of health-induced teacher absences by teacher gender and type of school (public or private and urban or rural) (*see Figure 26*). However, the interviews with respondents across the country suggest that teachers serving in remote areas are more likely to be absent for multiple days when taken ill and more prone to lateness caused by illness due to the unavailability of a health care facility in close proximity to their school or home.

Figure 26. Percentage of surveyed teachers reporting health as a factor affecting attendance and time on task, by sex and school type



"Teachers fall sick or their children fall sick very often. This is a problem when you compare with town schools because when teachers get sick here, even if it's just the flu, they don't use the local health centre but instead go to town. 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, Kakamega County

It is not only attendence of teachers that deteriorates but also their performance:

"The qualitative effects of HIV and AIDS are clear. Teachers are concerned about their health and become nervous and depressed. They are frequently absent. Their attitudes to work deteriorates. And they are unable to perform their duties well."

– TSC officer, Bungoma County

Teachers often described health-related absences as valid, natural, justifiable and legitimate, which may explain their willingness to report these absences in the first place and to talk about them at length. Among the conditions affecting teachers' school attendance, especially in areas with limited access to safe water, were diarrhoea, cholera and typhoid fever. For Kenya overall, however, it was malaria, HIV and AIDS that respondents associated with frequent chronic teacher school absences. While teachers and head teachers were hesitant to discuss the impact of HIV or AIDS on teacher attendance and student learning, interviewed education officers in all counties were of the view that, where teachers are infected, learning does not take place effectively because teachers become increasingly unavailable to their students.

Local education officers reported that teachers dying from AIDS-related causes are not swiftly replaced, resulting in teacher shortages.

Other determinants of school absenteeism reported in all counties include alcohol and drug addiction (primarily cannabis and *miraa*[xi]). Low classroom attendance and reduced lesson duration were most often attributed to effects on health, such as dizziness, heat exhaustion and heat stroke, mainly induced by exposure to extreme heat. These seem to occur more frequently in the semi-arid and arid lands, primarily affecting non-local teachers and increasing in magnitude when combined with poor school infrastructure.

xi Miraa, also known as Khat, is a stimulant drug.

Section 5: Policy recommendations

The TTT study sheds light on factors affecting primary school teachers' attendance in Kenya. Insights from the fieldwork, such as suggestions on how to curb absenteeism offered by teachers and other respondents, were combined with the existing teacher management policies and educational strategic plans and targets (*see Section 2*) to arrive at policy recommendations for sustainably improving teacher attendance.

The recommendations are presented by policy area. Recommendations are primarily directed to the MOE and the TSC; but they are pertinent to education actors at all levels, including the county and subcounty education offices and the school boards of management.

5.1. Teacher monitoring

- Ensure that all head teachers in public and private schools have access to training courses and tools on school leadership and teacher management. This includes teacher monitoring and oversight, curriculum implementation and supervision, instructional leadership and resource mobilization. Making the KEMI diploma training course[xii] (along with other objectives and clearly defined criteria) a prerequisite for recruitment or promotion to head teachership would enhance teacher management in every educational institution. This could lead to better teacher productivity, retention, motivation and attendance.
- Clarify school inspection criteria and increase the frequency of school inspections, especially in rural and remote areas. This could be achieved by developing (in partnership with sub-national education offices) a system for determining which offices may require additional staff and more funds for transportation to complete more frequent inspections. Such a system would take into account the number of schools/teachers served, miles travelled, availability of public transportation and other contextual specificities, including climatic conditions and political instability.
- Improve system coherence and ensure that all actors engaged in teacher monitoring are aware of their roles and core responsibilities and understand how these are shared between levels of authority. This could be achieved by developing manuals with detailed information and examples on each actor's role in monitoring, reporting and sanctioning teacher absences. To be effective, such manuals should be accessible and their content easy to learn, and they should include reference checklists. Establishing an accountability framework of actors involved in teacher monitoring and sanctioning – and ensuring that the delegation of these tasks is coherent with financing, information and incentives provided to decentralized actors – is also critical.
- Continue educating teachers and head teachers on the effective use of the TPAD system and simplify TPAD data entry requirements to reduce teacher workload. Combine the use of the TPAD system with other reforms aimed not at monitoring but at better motivating teachers and improving teachers' working conditions (*see also Section 5.4.*).
- Boost parental and community involvement, especially at low-income and rural public schools, as a way of improving teacher accountability and attendance. As a first step, this involves strengthening the representation of parents and cummnity groups on school management boards. Raising awareness and building the capacity of community actors is also necessary to increase their ability and motivation to monitor teacher behaviour. However, for community engagement programmes to increase teacher performance and attendance, experience in community organization and teacher buy-in are important prerequisites. Especially in areas where there is a growing gulf between the

xii The course focuses on financial, human resources, curriculum implementation and supervision, and project planning and implementation management.

culture and language learned in school and that of the community, ensure that education provision resonates with the needs and aspirations of children and parents. This may include:

- Building links between the school and the local culture that promote mutual respect.
- Developing learning materials in a language that pupils and parents can understand.
- Exploring ways of formally incorporating duksi and madrassa teachers in secular education and integrating secular education in the duksi and madrassa systems of instruction.

5.2. Teacher training

5.2.1. Pre-service training

- Develop a qualification framework for personnel entering the teaching profession, and make criteria for entering teacher training colleges more selective.
- Reform and strengthen the pre-service teacher training model and curriculum to ensure that it is in tandem with children's needs and that adequate time is devoted to pedagogical learning, including:
  - practical pedagogical exercises for student-centred learning;
  - teaching practice in schools;
  - practice in competency-based learning; and
  - cross-cutting themes pedagogy, such as cultural sensitivity.
- Ensure that pre-service training models include classroom management techniques and counselling skills acquisition.

5.2.2. In-service training

- Continue scheduling training sessions for weekends and school holidays to minimize school absenteeism and to ensure curriculum completion and implementation. Ensuring that enough substitute teachers are available to cover teachers in training (during school days) is another way to ensure curriculum implementation, which also is more sensitive to teachers' work–life balance.
- Ensure follow up, continuity and coherence of in-service trainings. This entails working with donors to guarantee complementarity between externally funded courses and alignment with the MOE and TSC priorities.
- Re-examine the effectiveness of the cascade training delivery model. Consider training programmes that are flexible, collaborative and school-based in nature, and take into consideration teachers' contexts. Such models allow teachers to shape the content of their training according to the core needs of their context.
- Provide special trainings to (non-local) teachers posted in nomadic, conflict-prone and refugee-majority areas that match the needs of their students and the broader community they serve, such as PTSD counselling, cultural awareness and linguistic support.

5.2.3. Teacher remuneration

- Ensure the availability of funds required to continue and complete the implementation of the CBA in a timely manner.
- Enhance the impact of the CBA by ensuring the successful implementation of critical complementary reforms, like the TPAD process and the expansion of in-service support for teachers. This recommendation is in line with global evidence indicating that reforms that couple increased monetary rewards with monitoring and motivation are most effective in addressing teacher attendance challenges in a sustainable manner.[94]
- Consider providing additional transportation and housing stipends, conditional upon school attendance and punctuality, to low-grade and non-local teachers who live far from their school and who cannot find other suitable accommodation closer to the school. Non-monetary incentives can be offered to teachers in remote areas facing housing limitations, such as a 'subsistence and welcome' pack to include bedding and other basic household items. A costlier, longer-term solution to these challenges would involve devising a strategy for building teacher housing in areas facing serious investment needs, targeting particularly schools in the semi-arid and arid lands, poor rural districts, impoverished areas, urban slums and the hard-to-reach areas.

5.2.4. Teacher working and living conditions

- Strengthen the enforcement of teacher allocation rules to address the unequal distribution of teachers and reduce teacher workload. This involves strengthening institutional capacities and establishing tools to automate the allocation of teachers. Developing incentive strategies to make postings in rural and hardship areas more attractive is also critical. Hiring untrained teachers locally but offering opportunities for remote qualification acquisition is another option for improving teacher retention in these areas.
- Prioritize the disbursement of funds for infrastructural rehabilitation and the construction of new primary schools in the semi-arid and arid lands, urban slums and the hard-to-reach and hardship areas. Prioritize capitation grants for TLM in schools with a higher rate of wear and tear of textbooks and teaching aids or where increased loss or theft of instructional materials has been observed and parental support is not available.
- Strenghten collaboration with the ministry of public works, the ministry of transport and infrastructure, and local authorities, as poor infrastructure in the community limits teachers' ability to carry out their duties. Special attention needs to be given to providing reliable transportation and functioning roads to improve teacher school attendance and discourage lateness.
- Work in partnership with the ministry of health to address inadequate health care and prevention programmes that affect teacher time on task. While malaria and HIV/AIDS are common causes of poor health among teachers in this study, their occurrence varies across regions and schools and therefore they require a needs-based approach.
- Especially in conflict-prone areas, strengthen cooperation with police and security forces, civil society organizations and local communities to increase the number of guards stationed at schools. Work with line ministries and development partners to improve school security infrastructure, but ensure that efforts to strengthen school security do not 'militarize' or give schools an intimidating appearance because this could further reduce teacher attendance. Expanding the provision of counselling services to teachers is equally critical for encouraging attendance.

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