



Time to Teach

Teacher attendance and time on task
in primary schools

Guinea-Bissau

Dita Nugroho

October 2021

UNICEF OFFICE OF RESEARCH – INNOCENTI

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Correspondence should be addressed to:

UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti

Via degli Alfani, 58

50121 Florence, Italy

Tel: (+39) 055 20 330

Fax: (+39) 055 2033 220

florence@unicef.org

www.unicef-irc.org

twitter: @UNICEFInnocenti

[facebook.com/UnicefInnocenti](https://www.facebook.com/UnicefInnocenti)

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Acknowledgements

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Acronyms

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| CCT | Conditional cash transfer |
| COVID-19 | COVID-19 pandemic |
| CSO | Civil society organization |
| ESP | Education Sector Plan |
| ESS | Education Sector Strategy |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GPE | Global Partnership for Education |
| MENES | Ministry of National Education and Higher Education |
| MICS | Multiple indicator cluster survey |
| SABER | Systems Approach for Better Education Results |
| TTT | Time to Teach |
| WASH | Water sanitation and hygiene |

Executive summary

Study overview

While the world was already in a learning crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to worsen this situation. Teacher absenteeism is one of the most troubling obstacles on the path to universal access to learning opportunities. There is mounting evidence that teacher absenteeism is a particular challenge in low- and middle-income countries around the globe, with rates varying from 3 to 27 per cent (Guerrero et al. 2013). This significantly impedes children's chances to learn in Guinea-Bissau. In 2018–2019, more than 42 per cent of children had missed class either due to school closures or teacher absence (INE, 2020). With systematic teacher absenteeism estimates otherwise unavailable in Guinea-Bissau, this study seeks to fill an important knowledge gap.

The Time to Teach study seeks to support the Ministry of National Education and Higher Education (MENES) in its efforts to strengthen teacher's role in the school to increase their time on task. Its primary objective is to identify factors affecting the various dimensions of primary school teacher attendance and to use this evidence to inform the design and implementation of teacher policies. Specifically, the study looks at four distinct dimensions of teacher attendance: (1) being in school; (2) being punctual (i.e., not arriving late/leaving early); (3) being in the classroom (while in school); and (4) spending sufficient time on task (while in the classroom).

Time to Teach in Guinea-Bissau is a mixed-methods project, employing both qualitative and quantitative research tools. In total, 20 Bissau-Guinean primary schools were purposely selected, covering nine regions of the country. At each school, in-depth interviews took place with the head teacher, three teachers, as well as a community leader, while a focus group discussion was conducted with pupils. Additionally, 180 teachers completed pen-and-paper surveys and field data collectors undertook structured school observations. A total of 339 individuals took part in the study. Data were collected in 2019, prior to the current COVID-19 crisis. The findings of this report, however, have implications on how to go beyond recovery and continue accelerating progress to reduce learning poverty.

What is the extent of teacher absence?

Our findings, based on surveyed teachers' self-reports,ⁱ show that:

- Just over one in four teachers reported that they were absent from school regularly, or at least once a week. This was the most frequently reported form of regular absence.
- Absence from school was closely followed by reduced time on task (experienced regularly by 23 per cent of teachers), absence from class (experienced by 22 per cent of teachers regularly) and late arrival or early departure from school (21 per cent of teachers).

ⁱ With a purposive approach in selecting schools, the findings are a snapshot of the selected schools rather than a representative view of the situation across all schools in Guinea-Bissau. A description of the study methodology can be found in Section 1.4.

- Teachers in rural areas were less likely to report being absent from class regularly. Compared to the 29 per cent of urban teachers who reported that they were absent from class at least weekly, only 11.5 per cent of teachers in rural areas experienced this regularly.
- Absence levels also varied by school type. Teachers in schools that were under self-management were less likely to report regularly being absent from class and experiencing reduced time on task compared to their colleagues in public schools, and to a lesser extent, in other types of private schools.

Why are teachers absent?

The Time to Teach study identified several factors associated with teacher absenteeism in Guinea-Bissau:

- Teacher strikes were among the top reasons for absences from school, late arrival/early departure and absences from class by teachers in the public sector. More than half of public school teachers surveyed, for example, said that strikes were one of the top three reasons they have been absent from school. Many of the strikes revolved around backpay of salaries, which more recently had been attributed to the lack of clarity around career ladder provisions set out in *Teacher Law*.
- Teachers in self-managed schools recorded the lowest levels of all forms of absences. Interviewees attributed this not just to the use of parent fees on teacher salary and/or financial incentives, but also the impact this financial contribution had on strengthening the community's role in monitoring teacher performance.
- School leadership practices play a role in incentivizing teacher attendance. In the teacher survey, those who reported that their head teachers were always in attendance at school also reported lower rates of absence from school and late arrival/departure. Those who reported that the head teacher always records teacher absences also reported higher rates of time on task. A couple of school policies and practices were raised during interviews as influencing attendance rates. One is the administrative workload teachers face. Another is the expectation on teaching when student attendance is low.
- Teachers who were satisfied with their job were, unsurprisingly, less likely to be absent. This was particularly true in urban areas, with teachers in urban areas who were satisfied with their jobs being half as likely than those who were unsatisfied to arrive late/depart early, be absent from class and experience reduced time on task on a regular basis. Self-efficacy also matters, with teachers who believed that they had the skills and knowledge to teach well also being less likely to be absent from class.

What are the potential recommendations for policy making?

The resilience of Guinea-Bissau's education system in the face of changing and persistent political and resourcing challenges has been noted before. This resilience is being tested again as the education system responds to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study supports the notion of the system's resilience, particularly in its use of self-management to reduce teacher absenteeism. It identifies five priority areas to address the factors behind teacher absenteeism in Guinea-Bissau:

- **Employment conditions in the public sector** play a role in the attendance of teachers in public schools or those employed by the public sector. As this study highlights, delayed salary payment is a frequent source of disagreement behind teacher strikes, which has had a substantial impact on teacher attendance in the country.

- The MENES should continue working with the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the respective ministries' subnational institutions to improve financial systems and processes, and increase their public transparency.
 - The government should work with development partners on interim measures such as loan schemes to ensure on-time teacher salary payments. This should be accompanied by fiduciary measures and broader reforms to clarify teacher policies, as well as by accountability mechanisms around attendance.
 - Lack of clarity around employment conditions may also lead to tensions that may result in strikes, as was the example with the teacher career ladder provision in the Education Law. This also highlights the importance of consulting with broader education stakeholders, including teacher representative bodies, in the formulation and implementation of policies.
- **Community engagement** has a strong tradition in the Bissau-Guinean education system, but there is currently no systematic definition, role, or support for existing forms of school management committees. This study highlights the characteristics and practices found in self-managed schools that support teacher attendance and time on task, namely, community involvement and oversight that comes with financial contributions.
- The MENES should systematize the role of school management communities and formalize their role in monitoring teacher attendance and performance;
 - The MENES should consider direct support to schools and communities that strengthens this involvement and oversight, independent of the community's ability to raise fees. This could be embedded in national policy and supported by, in an example from the literature, joint agreements between school and community stakeholders on school performance goals to support head teachers' and teachers' buy-in in the community monitoring process;
 - UNICEF Guinea-Bissau and the MENES should consider incorporating encouragement or incentives to monitor teacher attendance as part of their new GPE-funded conditional cash transfer programme.
- Adequate **teacher training** plays a role in attendance through improving teachers' self-efficacy. Teachers in this study who believed they had the knowledge and skills to teach well were also found to be less likely to report regular absences from class.
- The total capacity of teacher training institutions to prepare and support the teachers needed to meet demand in primary education enrolments should continue to be monitored, as well as their distribution. In this study, for example, there remained teachers who were seeking transfers in order to seek training opportunities.
 - With much attention being paid to greater connectivity and remote learning opportunities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this provides an opportunity to develop remote learning also to enhance teacher training.

- This study found evidence supporting the role of effective **school leadership** in supporting teacher attendance and time on task.
 - While training of head teachers already forms part of the 2017–2025 Education Sector Plan, mechanisms for ensuring head teachers can, or could develop, the necessary skills to lead their schools effectively should be established. The requirements of the role should be clarified in policy and include expectations around head teachers' role in modelling attendance as well as monitoring, recording and discouraging teacher absence.
- Finally, **learning continuity** measures developed in response to COVID-19 school closures are particularly valuable in Guinea-Bissau, helping to further build the resilience of the education system. Extended school closures globally have drawn greater attention to what children lose when they do not have the opportunity to attend school. Even before the current pandemic, closures often lasting months at a time, frequently occurred in Guinea-Bissau.
 - The MENES should make recorded radio and television lessons available to regional offices for deployment during future school closures, including localized ones. These may also be distributed via USB or other physical means to community leaders, particularly in areas most prone to experiencing teachers' strikes;
 - The MENES should engage and train teachers in incorporating these resources during in-school teaching where possible, to support a smooth transition between home and school learning;
 - The MENES and development partners should consider trialling mobile phone support to home learning. This may initially be tested in the context of reopened schools to support students in closing the learning gap from previous extended school closures in 2019–2020. If found to be impactful, this can also be deployed during future closures.

1. Introduction

1.1. Context and study rationale

Despite the global progress in increasing access to schooling, the world is still facing a learning crisis. More than one in two children in low- and middle-income countries are in 'learning poverty', unable to read and understand a simple text by the end of primary school age (Azevedo et al, 2019). The COVID-19 crisis is expected to further amplify the learning crisis. In sub-Saharan Africa, the learning poverty rate was estimated to be 87 per cent, even before the crisis, and may subsequently reach as high as 91 per cent (Azevedo, 2020).

Teacher absenteeism is one of the most troubling obstacles on the path toward universal access to learning opportunities at school. Over the past decades, studies have found that teacher absenteeism is particularly prevalent in certain parts of Africa. A World Bank study estimates that between 15 and 45 per cent of all primary school teachers in seven sub-Saharan African countries are absent from school and between 23 and 57 per cent are absent from class on any given day (Bold et al, 2017). These rates often conceal even higher rates within countries. The same study estimates that, on average, the loss of teaching hours due to absenteeism corresponds to a waste of approximately 46 cents for every dollar invested in education, equivalent to an annual wastage of between 1 to 3 per cent of GDP (Filmer, 2015).

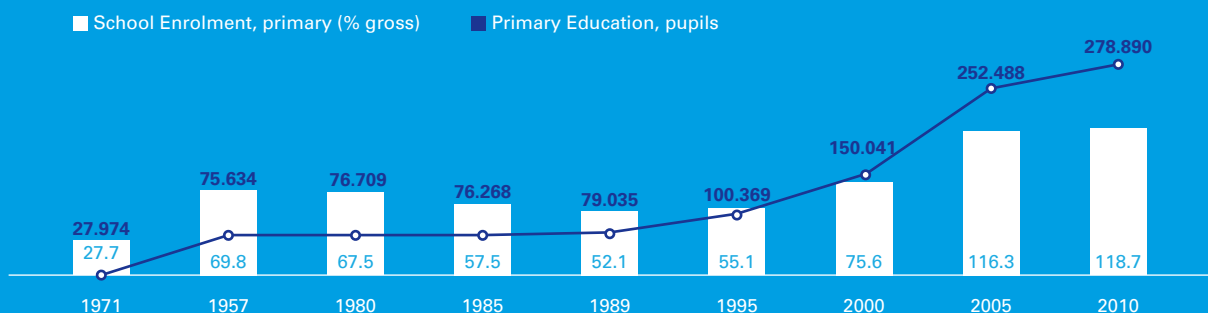
While Guinea-Bissau has not administered or taken part in regional or international efforts to systematically monitor and assess the rates of teacher absenteeism, the issue is noted in the 2017–2025 Education Sector Plan, which includes an aim to strengthen controls on teacher absenteeism (for a brief overview of the country's primary education system see *Box 1*). The Time to Teach study seeks to fill this important knowledge gap and support the Ministry of National Education and Higher Education (MENES) in its efforts to strengthen the teacher's role in school to increase their time on task.

Box 1.

Overview of primary education, teachers and teaching policies in Guinea-Bissau

At independence in 1973, Guinea-Bissau was reported to have a school population of less than 50,000, from a total population of 800,000, and a 5 per cent literacy rate (Carr-Hill and Rosengard, 2015). The structure of the education system remained largely unchanged until the early 1990s (da Silva and Oliveria, 2017). Since then, the country has made great strides in increasing primary school enrolment, with more than triple the number of children enrolled in primary school in 2010 compared to 1975 (see *Figure 1*). This translates to a considerable increase in gross enrolment rates.

Figure 1: Primary school enrolment in Guinea-Bissau, 1971–2010



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Note that data for 1970 and 1990 were not available and are substituted by nearest available years.

Despite this significant progress in enrolment, there are persistent challenges with children's progression, with only 60 per cent of children completing the full six years of compulsory primary schooling (Jourde, 2016). In 2014, more than 85,000 children aged 6–11 years (the age of the first two cycles of primary school) were estimated to be out-of-school (World Bank, 2018a). This low completion rate is partly attributed to provision, with half of primary school children studying in schools that do not offer the full six years (Ibid.).

In addition to public schools funded and run by the state, a few types of schools exist in Guinea-Bissau, including private schools, madrassas, community, and self-managed schools. The distinctions between these types of schools at times lack clarity (Ribero, 2005; World Bank, 2018a), but to varying degrees these are schools funded at least in part by community contributions, religious organizations and/or national and international organizations. The 2013/2014 Statistical Yearbook indicated that two-thirds of students enrolled in the three cycles of basic education were enrolled in public school. However, comprehensive review of education research on Guinea-Bissau in 2017 was unable to identify statistical information on the breakdown across other types of schools, noting that there are regional variations in how these schools are defined (da Silva and Oliveira, 2017).

The 2017–2025 Education Sector Plan (ESP) was endorsed by development partners in 2017 and prepared with funding and technical support of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). Priorities in the plan included access to basic education, teaching and learning quality, and teacher training. The ESP's first tri-annual action plan, however, was criticised for being more of a 'fundraising' tool rather than a planning and budgeting document (World Bank, 2018b). Its implementation has also faced delays due to high staff turnover caused by political instability and frequent teacher strikes (Ibid.).

Long and recurring periods of political instability have interrupted numerous attempted reforms to the teacher training system, in turn contributing to the insufficient supply of trained teachers to meet national

demand (UNESCO, 2013a). Primary school teachers are considered qualified to teach after completing the equivalent of vocational post-secondary training (World Bank, 2012). The 2010 Education Law specified that this teacher training was to be carried out in specialized schools and institutions and new regional institutions have recently been established.

The role of MENES in overseeing the primary teaching workforce is limited, with recruitment and the employment status of civil service teachers being the responsibility of the Ministry of Civil Service, and salaries being the responsibility of Ministry of Finance (MEN, 2017). MENES plays a role in managing the assignment of teachers geographically, but this has been noted to be unsatisfactory and done with little understanding of the relationship between the teacher supply and actual needs (Ibid., p.99; MENCJD, 2013). The system is centralized and has led to difficulties in ensuring sufficient teachers, particularly in rural areas (Saldanha, 2019). There is a lack of clear policy that authorizes the regions to hire contract teachers and manage deployment in schools (World Bank, 2017).

In-service training has continued to be a focus of the Bissau-Guinean Government under the current ESP. A national assessment of primary school teachers was conducted in 2010 to inform elements of the in-service training system. It found that a significant number of primary skills in mathematics and Portuguese (UNESCO, 2015) were not achieved. Donor support in the area continues through contributions from the Portuguese Cooperation Agency (Instituto Camões, 2020), the GPE-co-funded Quality Education for All Programme (World Bank, 2019), and UNICEF. International CSO's average teacher salary in Guinea-Bissau was found to be significantly lower than those in comparable African countries (UNESCO, 2013b). The *Education Law 2010* included a teacher career ladder which called for regular teacher performance evaluation linked to pay increases and career advancements. However, the budget impact and evaluation mechanisms has not been clearly understood (World Bank, 2018a).

1.2. Existing literature on teacher absenteeism in Guinea-Bissau

While Guinea-Bissau has not administered or taken part in regional or international efforts to systematically track the rates of teacher absenteeism, the importance of the issue features in national policy. As part of its human resource management strategies, the 2017–2025 Education Sector Plan includes goals to strengthen control on teacher absenteeism. This is focused on paying salaries at places of employment, through bank transfers, mobile banking and other means, in order to reduce absenteeism due to receiving payment from outside sites (MEN, 2017).

The recently published report from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) presented parents' reports on the degree of this problem in the country (INE, 2020). MICS Round 6 in Guinea-Bissau visited a representative sample of 7,379 households between November 2018 and March 2019. Parents of children aged 7–14 years and enrolled in school were asked whether their child's school had been closed, including due to teacher strike, and whether they had been unable to attend class due to their teacher being absent.

In the 12 months prior to the visit (approximately covering the period of 2018), 42.5 per cent of children were unable to attend class due to school closure or teacher absence. Of these children, 62.9 per cent missed school

due to teacher strike and 46.8 per cent due to teacher absence (83.1 per cent missed school for one of these two reasons). Taken together, this meant that in the previous year, teacher absence or strike had caused around a third of the country's children to miss school.

A higher proportion of children in rural areas had missed school due to teacher strikes or absence compared to urban areas, with the incidence highest in Bolama/Bijagós and Gabu and lowest in Sector Autonomous Bissau. Nationally, children in public schools were much more likely to experience loss of school days due to teacher strikes compared to children in private schools. However, there was little difference between public and private schools with regard to loss of school days due to teacher absences not related to strikes.

Widespread teacher strikes occurred frequently and lasted months. In the 2016–2017 school year, for example, almost half of teaching days were lost due to strike (UNICEF, 2019). The 2018–2019 school year ended up with only five out of nine months of attendance due to the combination of strikes and the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant that public school students lost most of the 2010–2020 school year (Daramé, 2021). After schools reopened in the 2020–2021 school year, teacher strikes also resumed (Ibid.; So, 2020).

1.3. Study objectives

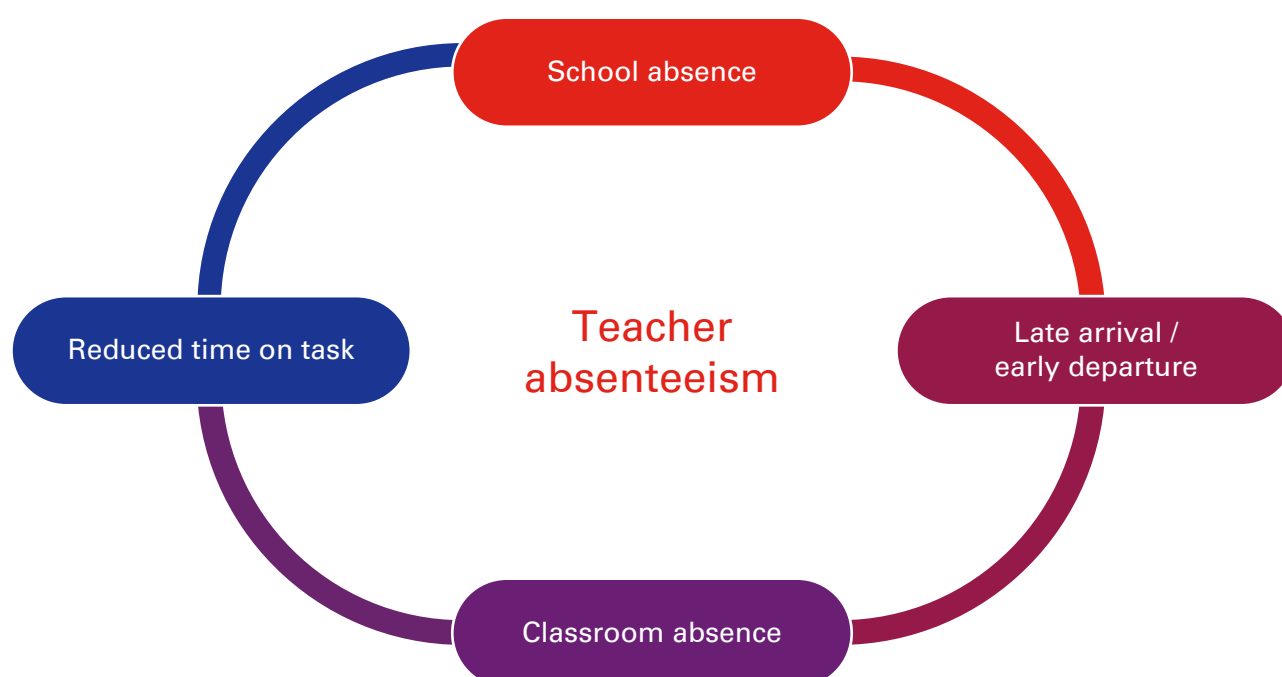
The principal objective of the Time to Teach study is to generate and collate empirical evidence on the various types and determinants of primary school teacher absenteeism in Guinea-Bissau and to provide potential recommendations for improving teacher attendance rates.

More specifically, the study aims to:

- Understand the various forms of primary school teacher absenteeism (e.g., absence from school, classroom, teaching, etc.) and assess their prevalence in different regions, types of schools (e.g., public/private) and settings (e.g., rural/urban);
- Explore the issue of teacher absenteeism from a systemic perspective and identify factors at different levels of the education system (national, subnational, community, school, and teacher) that affect teacher attendance and time on task;
- Detect gaps in teacher policy and policy implementation linked to identified determinants of absenteeism and barriers to higher teacher attendance rates;
- Identify promising practices and provide actionable policy recommendations on increasing teachers' time on task;
- Increase awareness among national education policy makers, international organizations, and donors supporting education, on the importance of well-designed teacher policies and the integration of the issue of teacher attendance into national education strategies, programmes, and policy discussions.

1.4. Definitions, data and methods

Figure 2: Teacher absenteeism as a multi-dimensional concept

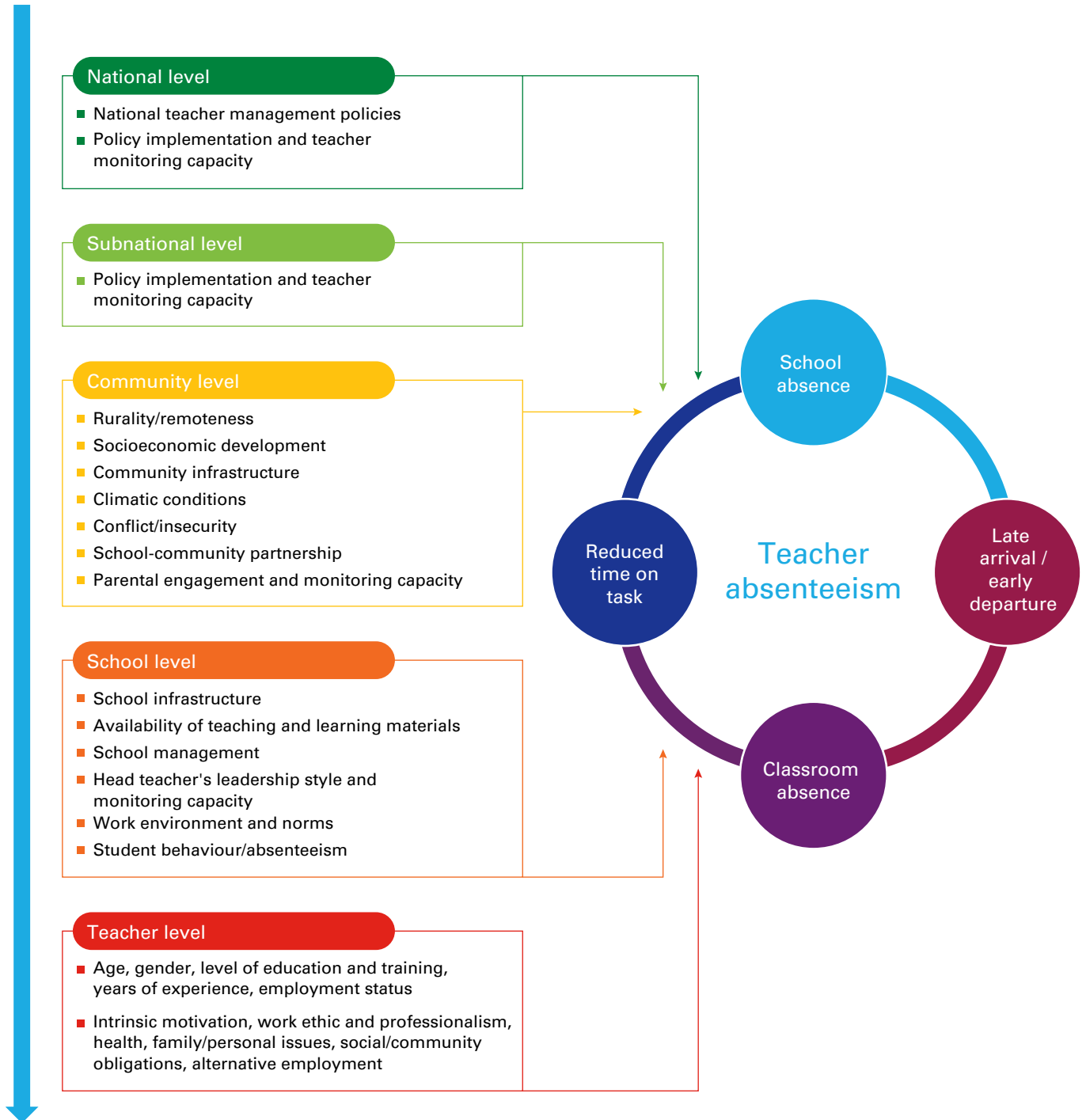


For learning to occur, a number of minimum conditions, relating to the role of teachers in the learning process, need to be fulfilled. Specifically, teachers need to: (1) be in school; (2) be punctual (i.e., not arriving late/leaving early); (3) be in the classroom (while in school); and (4) spend sufficient time on task (while in the classroom).

Based on this assumption, the Time to Teach study moves beyond the conventional definition of teacher attendance, which focuses mainly on presence at the school, and instead introduces a multi-dimensional concept of teacher absenteeism that recognizes four distinct forms of teacher absence, as shown in *Figure 2*.

The study adopts the explanatory model of Guerrero et al. (2013), which examines the impact of community, school and teacher factors on teacher attendance, with an important modification that consists of adding two further groups of variables. 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 3: The Time to Teach explanatory model



In total, 20 primary schools were purposively selected based on three criteria: location (region), governance (public, private, community or self-managed, *see Box 1*) and rurality (rural, urban or peri-urban), (*see Table 1*). At each school, in-depth interviews were carried out with the head teacher, three teachers, and a member of the school committee.ⁱⁱ A focus group discussion was also conducted with students in all schools. Finally, a teacher survey was administered to all teachers who were at school on the day of the visit (180).ⁱⁱⁱ Overall, 339 individuals participated in the study.

The field team piloted the data collection tools in March 2019, following training at a public school in the Oio district, not included in the main sample of the study. 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. Afterwards, details on the findings of the pilot and suggested changes to the data collection tools were shared with UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti before the start of the main fieldwork. Based on the experience of the pilot, the field team determined that two data collectors would visit each sampled school in order to complete data collection within the allocated time.

The main data collection took place in May and June 2019. Delays in obtaining permissions from the relevant education authorities, followed by extended teacher strikes, caused the data collection period to be delayed to the end of June 2019. In public schools, which participated in the strikes, data collection could only take place in the two days of the week that schools were running.

Table 1: Visited schools and number of study participants, by data collection method

| Region | Schools | | Teacher Surveys Head teachers | INTERVIEWS | | | FGDs |
|--------|---------|---|----------------------------------|------------|----------|----------|------|
| | | | | Community | Teachers | Students | |
| BAFATÁ | 3 | Rural, self-managed Urban, self-managed Peri-urban, community | 20 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 13 |
| BIOMBO | 3 | Peri-urban, public Rural, self-managed Peri-urban, private | 28 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 21 |
| BOLAMA | 1 | Rural, self-managed | 14 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 7 |

ii In total, 112 interviews were conducted. Age, gender, years of experience and education were the selection criteria for interviewed teachers.

iii In each school, seven students from grades 6 and 7 were invited to participate in the focus group discussions. The sample was gender balanced. To rule out selection bias and convenience sampling, student respondents were identified via a lottery.

| Region | Schools | | Teacher Surveys Head teachers | INTERVIEWS | | | FGDs |
|--------------|---------|--|----------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| | | | | Community | Teachers | Students | |
| CACHEU | 3 | Rural, public Urban, public Peri-urban, self-managed | 23 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 14 |
| GABU | 3 | Rural, community Peri-urban, public Urban, public | 39 | 2 | 3 | 9 | 21 |
| OIO | 2 | Rural, self-managed Rural, public | 17 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 15 |
| QUINARA | 2 | Peri-urban, self-managed Rural, public | 13 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 11 |
| TOMBALI | 1 | Peri-urban, private | 10 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 7 |
| SAB | 2 | Urban, self-managed Urban, private | 16 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 12 |
| Total | | 20 | 180 | 18 | 20 | 56 | 121 |

Note: the different types of schools are briefly described in Box 1.

Data collection, storage, and management were in line with international best practice and the UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation and Data Collection and Analysis (see Box 2).

Box 2. Note on research ethics

UNICEF Innocenti applied for ethical clearance for the qualitative data collection study to the Health Media Lab (HML) and to the Institutional Review Board of the Office for Human Research Protections at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, both located in Washington, D.C. Ethical clearance was granted in July 2018, prior to the fieldwork.

All data collectors were extensively trained in research ethics and abided by the UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation and Data Collection and Analysis.

A structured observation tool was used to record enumerators' observations on teacher absences, teacher-student interactions, and teacher working relations during visits to selected schools. Observational data were used for validation and triangulation purposes. Methodological limitations to this study are outlined in the Annex.

Thematic content analysis was employed to code and analyze transcribed interviews and focus group discussions. The Stata software package was used for the descriptive and correlational analysis of survey data.

2. Findings

This section presents the findings of the TTT study in Guinea-Bissau, starting with a snapshot of the reported frequency of the four dimensions of teacher absences overall, and by the key differences between location, school type and gender. It is then followed by more in-depth discussion of the factors found to be associated with these absence levels, combining the survey information and qualitative data collected from interviews and focus group discussions.

2.1. How frequently are teachers absent? A snapshot of the survey data on teacher absenteeism

The most common form of absence reported by surveyed Bissau-Guinean teachers was absence from school, with 26 per cent of teachers experiencing this once a week or more (see *Figure 4*). This was closely followed by reduced time on task (experienced regularly by 23 per cent of teachers) and absence from class (experienced by 22 per cent of teachers regularly) and late arrival or early departure from school (21 per cent of teachers).

There were significant differences in reported instances of frequent absences between teachers in different locations and school types. Teachers in rural areas were less likely to report experiencing all types of absences regularly (see *Figure 5*). Compared to the 29 per cent of urban teachers who reported that they were absent from class at least weekly, only 11.5 per cent of teachers in rural areas experienced this regularly.

In the TTT survey, absence levels also varied by school type (see *Figure 6*). Teachers in self-managed schools were less likely to report regular absence from class and reduced time on task compared to their colleagues in public schools and, to a lesser extent, in other private schools. Surveyed teachers were asked to nominate the three main reasons that led to them being absent. The most common reason for being absent from school and arriving late/departing early was health, nominated as a main factor by a majority of teachers across locations, school types, and gender.

A significant variation in reasons could be seen between different school types. Most public school teachers reported strikes as a main reason for being absent for school, while less than one-fifth of teachers in private or self-managed schools did so (see *Figure 8*). Additionally, while close to one-third of teachers in self-managed schools and one in four public school teachers nominated lack of pay, fewer than 5 per cent of teachers in private community schools did so. Teachers in private schools were also less likely to nominate strikes as a reason for late arrival/early departure and more likely to nominate health as a reason compared to their counterparts in public and self-managed schools (see *Figure 9*).

With regard to absence from the classroom, the reasons most frequently raised by surveyed teachers were administrative causes, closely followed by official school business, health, and lack of pupils (see *Figure 10*). Strikes were the fifth most frequently raised reason, nominated by more than one-third of public teachers but by fewer than one in five teachers in self-managed schools and by 10 per cent of private school teachers. Finally, the reason most frequently cited by surveyed teachers for reduced time on task while in the classroom was a lack of teaching and learning materials, followed by health reasons (see *Figure 11*). Other reasons raised by teachers were: not enough pupils being present, being distracted due to personal matters, and weather or climate.

Figure 4: Proportion of teachers who were absent once a week or more, by types of absence

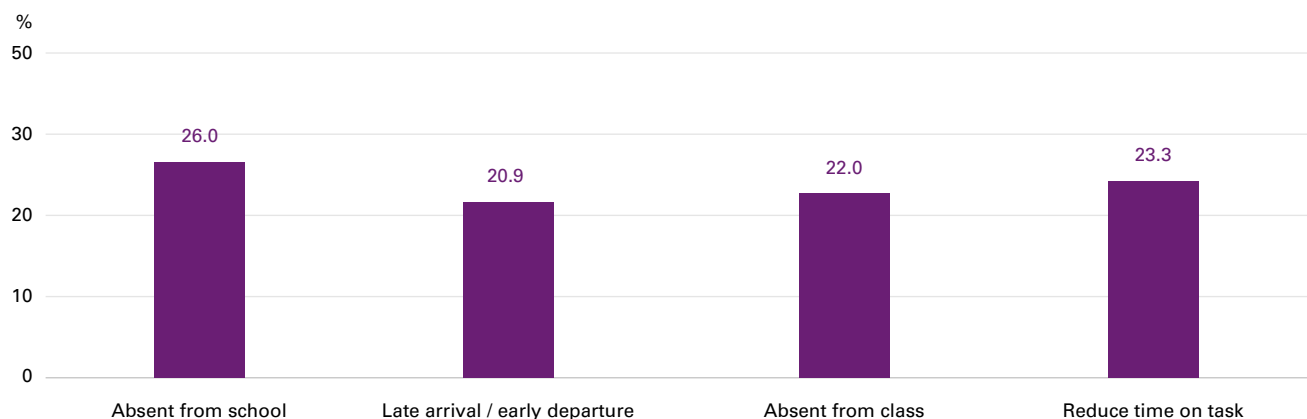


Figure 5: Proportion of teachers who were absent once a week or more, by location

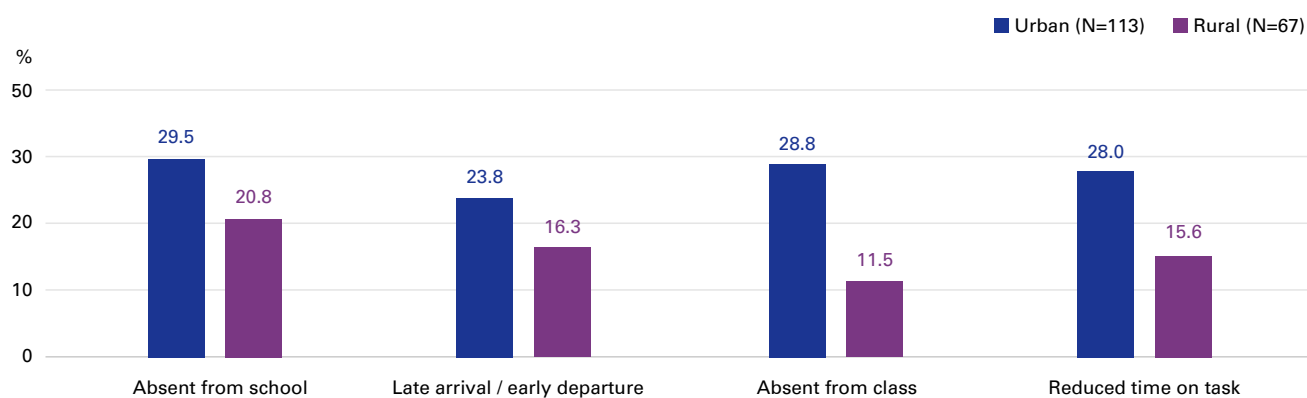


Figure 6: Proportion of teachers who were absent once a week or more, by school type

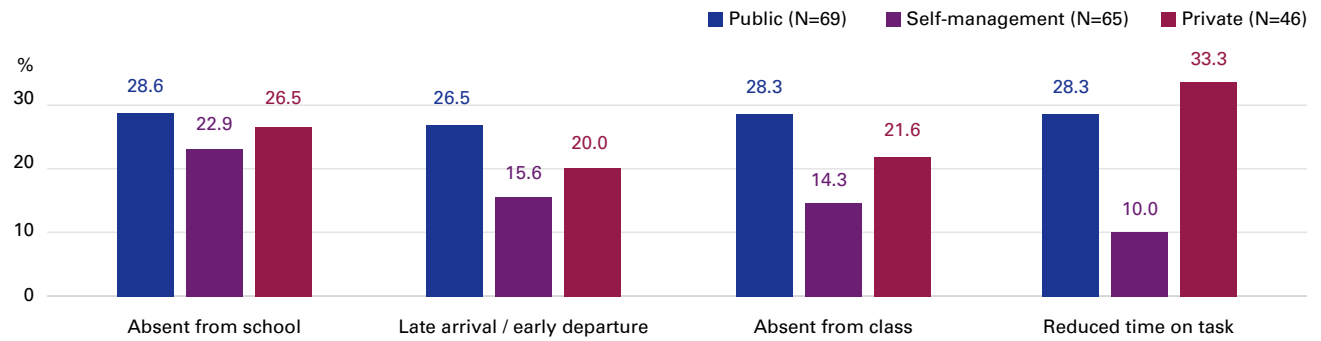


Figure 7: Proportion of teachers who were absent once a week or more, by gender

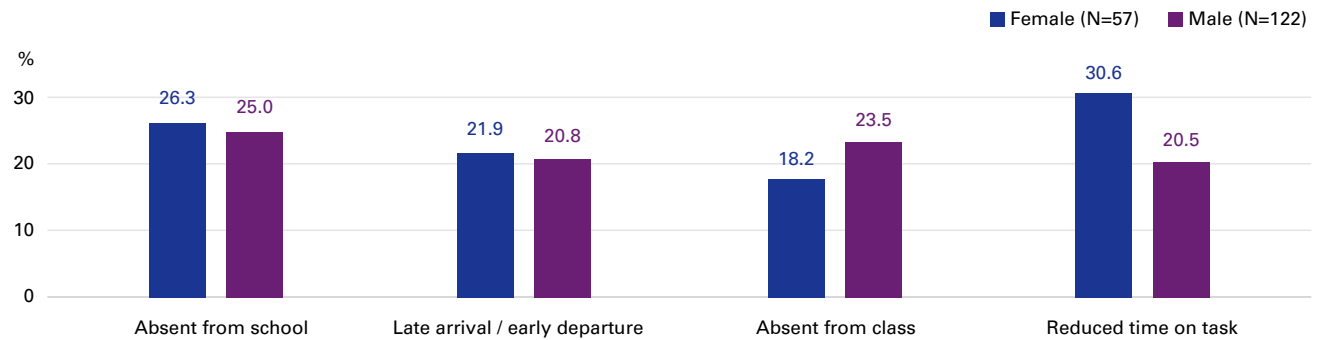


Figure 8: Top five reasons behind absence from school, by location, school type and gender

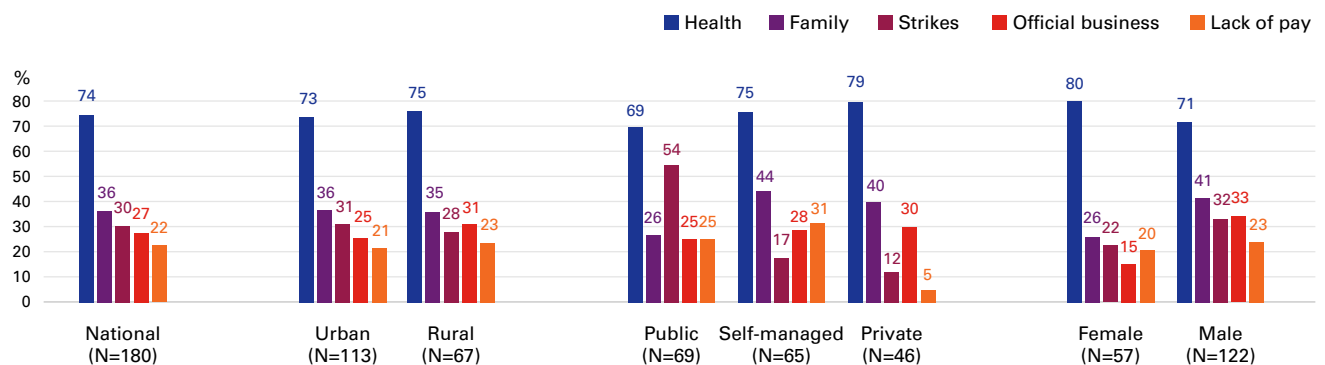


Figure 9: Top five reasons behind late arrival/early departure, by location, school type and gender

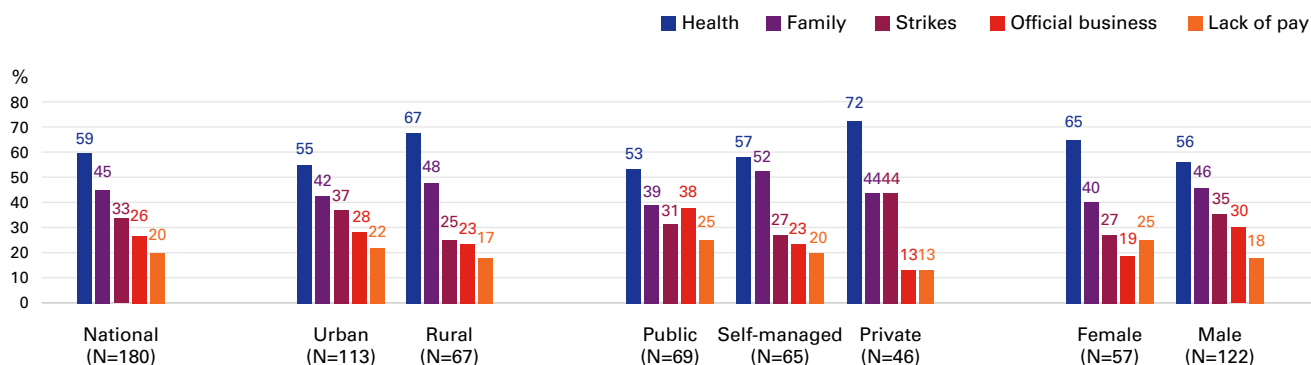


Figure 10: Top five reasons behind absence from class, by location, school type and gender

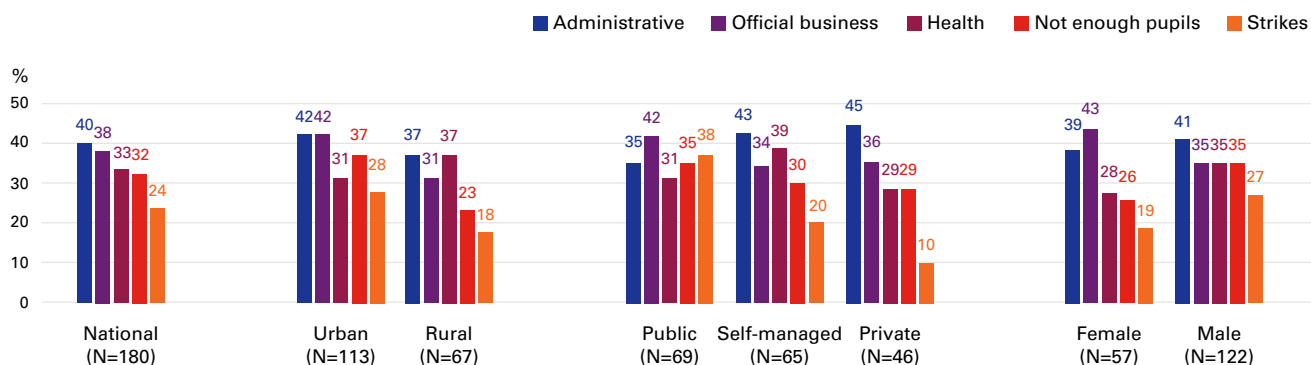
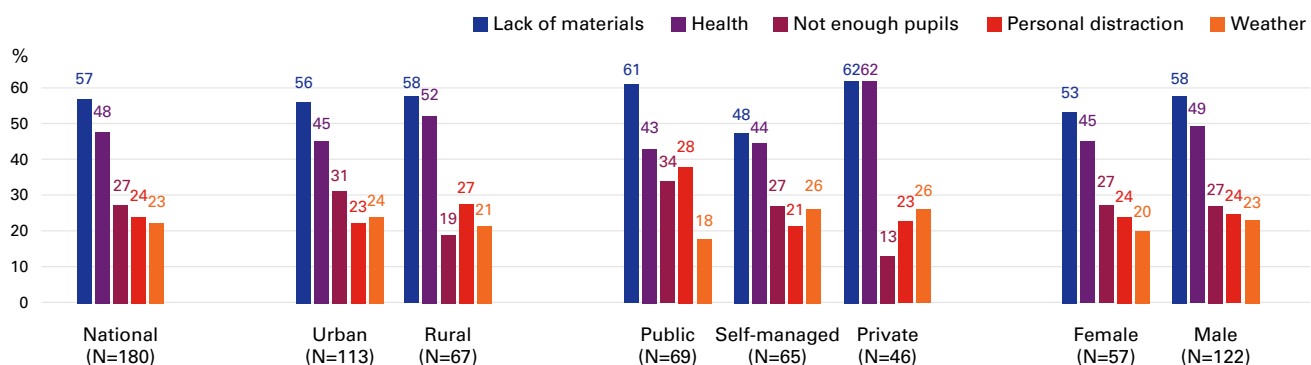


Figure 11: Top five reasons behind reduced time on task, by location, school type and gender



2.2. What factors are associated with teacher attendance?

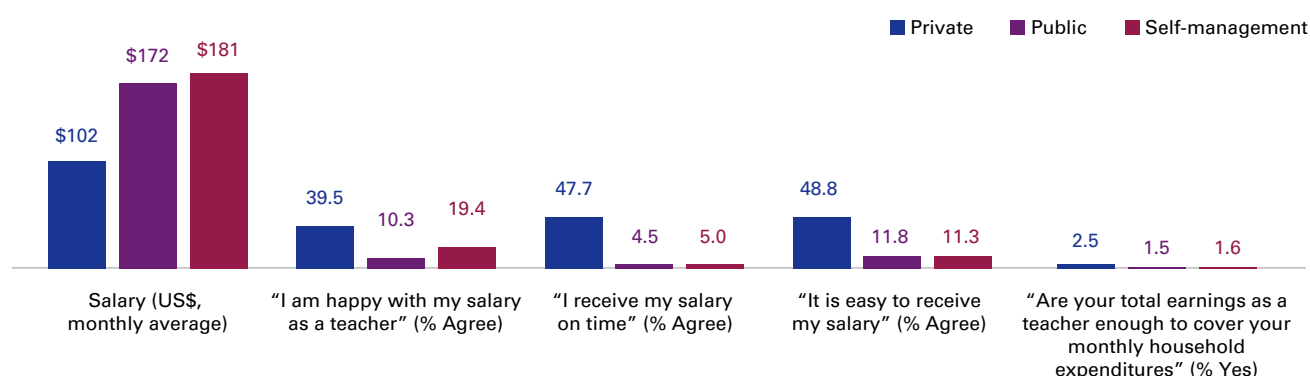
2.2.1. National factors associated with teacher attendance

Teacher remuneration and incentives

The average teacher salary in Guinea-Bissau was significantly lower than that in comparable African countries (UNESCO, 2013), and lower than the Fast Track Initiative target (MNECYS, 2010). Within the country, however, there are further variations in salary level. Secondary education teachers receive a higher level of pay than their basic education counterparts, which could be linked to the higher qualification required to teach at that level (Ibid.). The Time to Teach study also found differences in average salary levels between teachers at different school types, as illustrated in *Figure 12*.

Surveyed teachers in private community schools reported receiving significantly lower levels of monthly salary compared to their counterparts in public and self-managed schools. However, teachers in private community schools were more likely to be satisfied with their salary as a teacher (40 per cent were) compared to teachers in self-managed (19 per cent) and public (10 per cent) schools. This is despite very few teachers (fewer than 2 per cent), across all school types, saying that their total earnings as a teacher were enough to cover their household expenditure. The distinguishing factor likely contributing to private school teachers' satisfaction with their salaries appeared to be that they were more likely to receive their salary on time (48 per cent agreed with this, compared to 5 per cent or fewer in self-managed and public schools) and found it easy to receive their salary (49 per cent compared to 11–12 per cent).

Figure 12: Teachers' average monthly salaries (US\$) and satisfaction with salary, by school type



Several interviewees linked delays in salary payments to attendance, especially those in public schools. For example, the head teacher at a rural public school in Biombo remarked, “How will I motivate my teachers if they have nothing to eat at home?”. Very few teachers (7 of the 180 respondents, or fewer than 4 per cent) reported receiving any form of additional monetary or non-monetary incentives in addition to their base salary. These teachers were in a mixture of different school types and locations, and with no clear pattern to their reported absences.

Teachers’ unions and organized strikes

As illustrated above, strikes were among the top reasons for absence by teachers in the public sector. More than half of public school teachers surveyed nominated strikes as one of the top three reasons they had been absent from school (see *Figure 8*). This issue is interlinked with that of delayed salary payments discussed above, as teacher unions have been striking since as early as 1991 over failures to pay salaries in a timely manner (Rudebeck, 2002).

In the current study, the difference in surveyed teachers’ reporting of strikes as a reason for absence varied consistently with the findings on salary, with teachers in public school most affected and those in private schools least affected. Furthermore, in interviews with school committee members, many acknowledged that delays in salary payments were the driver of these strikes. As one rural community leader remarked about the government’s role in primary education: “The government does not pay teacher salaries, which leads them to strikes that have left us demoralized”.

In addition to strikes directly impacting teacher absence – in that striking teachers are not attending school over the period – strikes were also reported to reduce teacher attendance more indirectly. As reported in the methodology section of this report, teacher strikes were ongoing during the data collection period for this study. With the unions agreeing to teach on Mondays and Fridays, data collection in public schools could be conducted on those days. However, several teachers and head teachers reported in interviews that during periods of strikes, some teachers were absent even on those two days. Several interviewees attributed this to lower student attendance during strikes, with teachers reluctant to come into school to teach only small groups of children. For example, one public teacher in rural Gabu observed that:

“It does not mean that colleagues do not come to teach; it is only in this period of strike that some do not come on the days set by the union, Monday and Friday. Some claim lack of students without attending school, but it would be better if the teacher went to school and if he found a sufficient number of students, he could work with them. And if they are not enough to return home, but to stay at home imagining that there are not enough students in school is not fair.”

– Teacher, urban public school, Gabu

Some students who participated in focus group discussions also spoke about the tendency for higher student absenteeism during strikes. In one session at a rural public school in Oio, for example, when asked if others at the school come every day, a student remarked: “Not since the strikes started. There were 45 of us, but no[w] we are only here 10. Only those who live near the school come”. Another student added: “Those who live far away have difficulty coming”, with the first student completing that: “Because of the strikes, the majority gave up”.

2.2.2. Subnational factors

Subnational monitoring and accountability systems

Although two-thirds of surveyed teachers reported that school inspectors visited their schools regularly, less than a third of teachers reported that they “motivated and inspired school staff”, “discouraged teacher absenteeism” or “frequently sanctioned teacher absenteeism”. Only a few teachers who reported that inspectors discouraged teacher absenteeism also reported that they regularly arrived late/departed early from work, though this trend was not statistically significant. There were no other discernible differences in the self-reported absences of teachers based on their reporting of school inspections.

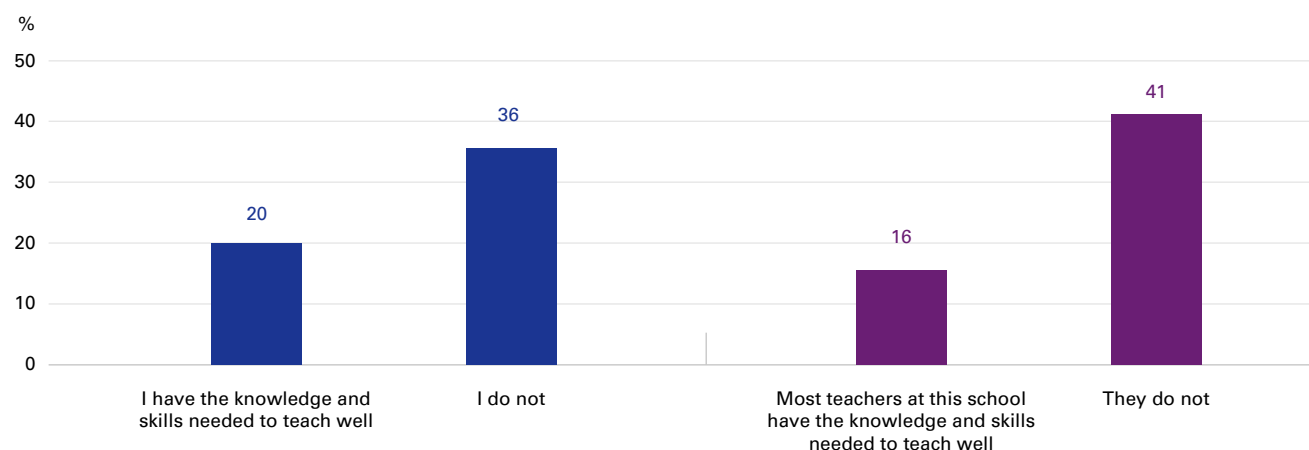
During interviews, head teachers were more positive than teachers in discussing the role of inspectors from the district. A common report from teachers was that inspectors did not have, or lacked, the power to action issues discussed during visits, including training, payment of salary, or transfers. On the latter, some teachers reported that inspectors had raised transfers to another district as a sanction for frequent absences, but none reported first-hand experience of knowledge of this occurring. Other teachers reported that while they were aware inspectors conducted visits, they did not directly interact with teachers or observe classes.

Teacher training and professional learning

Surveyed teachers who reported that they, and most teachers at their school, had the knowledge and skills to teach well, were also less likely to report regular absences from class (see Figure 13). This highlights the importance of training, which is supported by regional Unidades de Apoio Pedagógico. These training opportunities contribute to teachers’ preparedness to teach and in turn, influences their behaviour in attending classes. Other studies have identified that continued professional development training programmes raised the morale of participating teachers in Guinea-Bissau (da Silva and Oliveira, 2020).

Unfortunately, it was not possible to analyse the relationship between teachers’ qualifications or level of training with attendance, due to limitations around data collected on the former. This in turn could be attributed to the historical and current lack of standardization in the system for teacher training and limited capacity (World Bank, 2018a).

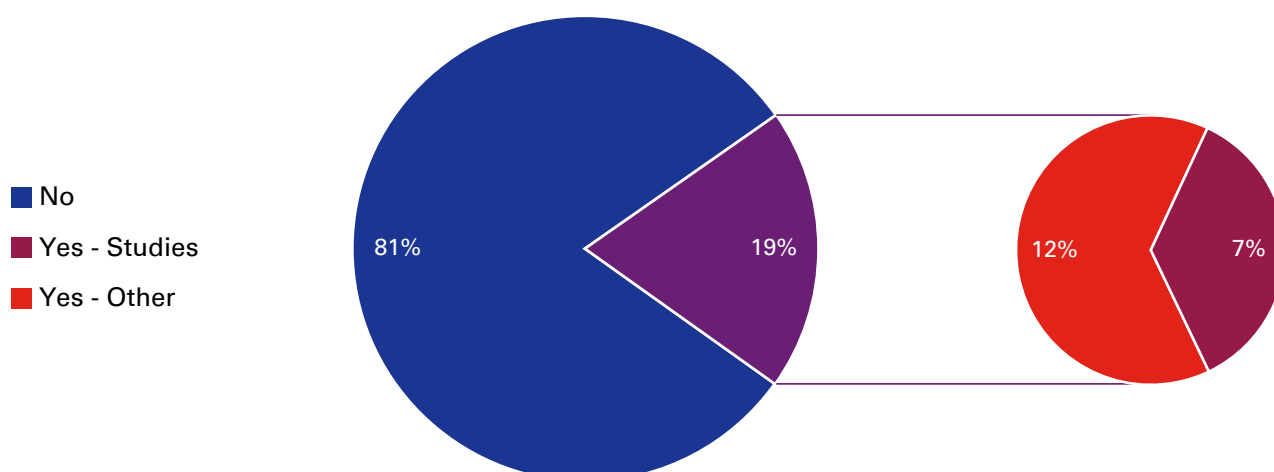
Figure 13: Proportion of teachers who self-reported absence from class once a week or more, by perception of skill



There were no significant differences by gender or school type in the way teachers responded to the statement on their knowledge and skill level. Teachers in urban areas, however, were more likely to believe that they had the knowledge and skills needed to teach well. Among surveyed teachers, 17 per cent reported that they were studying or undergoing training at the time of the survey. These teachers were significantly more likely to be working in private/community schools and to be younger than 30 years old (the average age among all surveyed teachers was 40 years old).

Although there were minimal differences in the rates of study among surveyed teachers in rural and urban areas, other data points suggested that location may also influence study opportunity. Among 33 teachers who said they had requested a transfer (19 per cent of surveyed teachers), 12 teachers (or a third of those who requested transfers) did so to pursue further studies or training (see *Figure 14*).

Figure 14: Proportion of surveyed teachers who had requested a transfer, and those who did so to pursue training or study



During interviews, several head teachers and community representatives explicitly linked teachers' skills and performance to their training qualification. They also linked teachers' motivation, including as reflected in attendance, to training opportunities. As one community representative from an urban public school in Gabu stated: "Attendance by teachers has increased in recent years due to the training and retraining seminars they now receive". A handful of teachers noted that attendance at study programmes, including further studies at university level, could necessitate absence or early departure from school. This was not observed in the survey data, however, with surveyed teachers who were studying being less likely to report regular absences and late arrivals/early departures (although the pattern was not statistically significant).

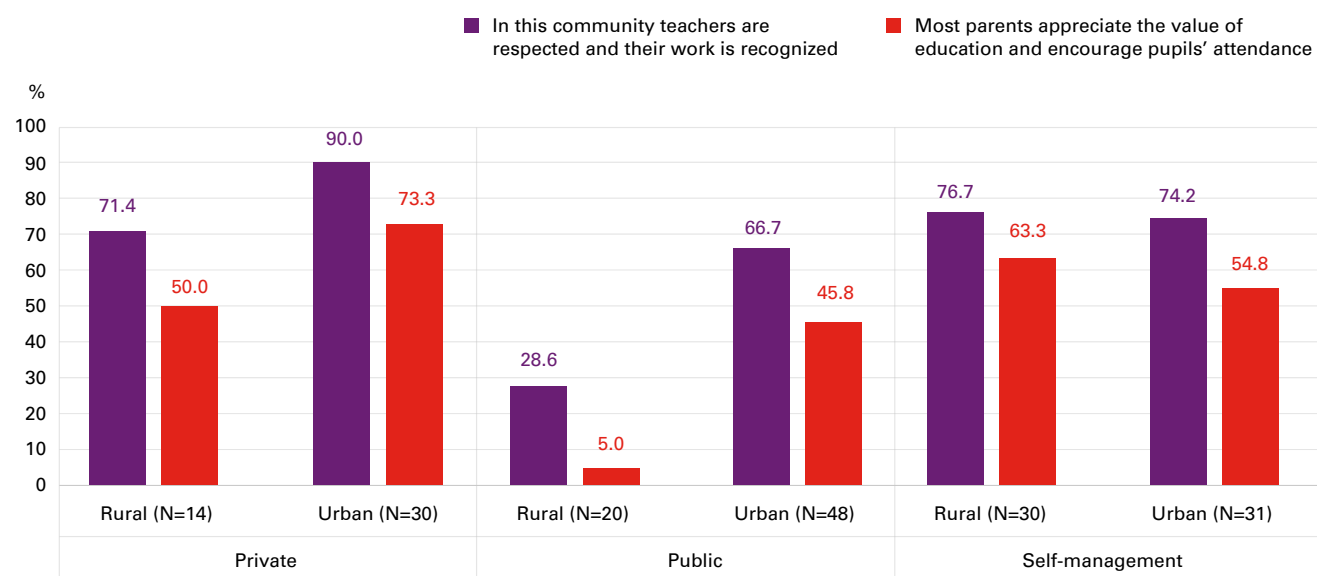
2.2.3. Community factors

Community engagement, monitoring and accountability

Overall, 70 per cent of surveyed teachers believed that within their communities, teachers were respected and their work recognized. Just over half agreed that most parents appreciated the value of education and encouraged pupils' attendance. Teachers who felt respected by their community were less likely to report that they were regularly absent from school, and those who believed parents appreciated the value of education were less likely to report arriving late or departing early from school regularly. These patterns, however, were driven by the considerable differences in these reported degrees of community values according to school location and type (see Figure 15).

Most notably, fewer than 30 per cent of public school teachers in rural areas felt respected by their community and only 5 per cent believed that parents appreciated the value of education. Compared to teachers in private and self-managed schools, public school teachers were both less likely to feel respected by their community and less likely to believe that parents appreciated the value of education. Those in rural areas were generally less likely to feel respected by the community than those in urban areas, except for teachers in self-managed schools where there were minimal differences by location.

Figure 15: Community perceptions of education, by school location and type



A 2018 study of out-of-school children in Guinea-Bissau reported on the growth of the private school sector as a response to the poor reputation of public schools in the country (Marshall et al., 2018). The report observed that changing public schools' status to self-managed (*autogestão*) allowed schools to raise money through fees and other types of contributions from parents that could be used to top-up teachers' salaries and therefore prevent strikes.

As raised by several interviewees in the current study, the community's financial involvement in self-managed schools was also reflected in greater engagement and, in turn, more accountability among teachers and the school to their community. A community representative in Cacheu described it in the following way: "Since the school went into self-management, in addition to receiving the salary, the community has established links with teachers and is increasingly involved in school-related matters". Also in Cacheu, a public school teacher reflected that the school he worked at before was: "...different from here because there, the school is of self-management, [...] the teachers will work without any excuse; there is control, there is direct participation of the parents". When asked about timely arrivals at and departures from school, a teacher in Tombali remarked that: "There are no punctuality issues at this school. We have a strong level of demand from the school principal. Teachers know that being in self-management is more controlled and also has a commitment to the community".

However, although the option of becoming self-managed can be a community-driven way to maintain school operations in the context of national challenges, it can also perpetuate the socio-economic gap between communities that can afford fees for school and those that cannot. Making the change to self-management requires parents in the school's local community to be able and willing to make the required financial contribution. The head teacher at a rural public school in an agricultural community in Quinara illustrated this dynamic by describing his unsuccessful attempt to change the school's status:

"At that meeting, where I presented the idea of increasing the rooms, I also presented the idea of self-management as the way to encourage teachers. Imagine if we had self-management in this school; we would not be on strike; but some parents agreed and the others did not agree. But we concluded, this self-management will be applied, but then, the parents themselves decided to pay only in the [cashew] campaign period, from the month of May. We have a symbolic price just to make it work because I know, in any case, that the schools in Guinea-Bissau must later have self-management because without it, it is difficult to stop strikes. Yes, the teachers feel motivated because sincerely, Guinea-Bissau is a land where guests are welcomed. This one of the motivations, but if there was self-management it would give more motivation."

Parental and community engagement do not, however, rely only on financial capacity. Some interviewees reported in-kind contributions from the community in the form of labour, such as cleaning the school at the start of the school year. Involvement in school meetings and the monitoring of school activities, including teacher attendance, are other forms of non-financial community contributions reported by a few interviewees. This included another rural public school in Quinara, with an active parent-teacher association, where the head teacher and community representative reported seeing improved attendance by teachers in recent years due to regular meetings to communicate issues between the community, the school board, and teachers. This and other examples raised during interviews highlighted the importance of strong leadership, both in schools as well as from the community.

The community's financial involvement in self-managed schools was also reflected in greater engagement and in turn, more accountability to the community by teachers and the school. The option of becoming a self-managed school can perpetuate the socio-economic gap. Parental and community engagement do not, however, rely only on financial capacity.

Not all parents feel equally empowered to hold teachers accountable for absences. In the MICS 6 study, 22 per cent of parents reported that they or another adult member of the household contacted a school official or governing body representative when their child missed school due to teacher absence or strike (INE, 2020). There was notable difference based on education level and socio-economic status. More than 30 per cent of parents from the richest quintile did this, compared to less than 17 per cent of parents from the poorest quintile. Similarly, more than one third of parents from households where the mother had a secondary education did this, compared to less than one in five where mothers had not completed basic education.

Community facilities, distances and activities

Distance between school and teachers' homes did not appear to be a significant barrier to teacher attendance, with only around 10 per cent of teachers nominating this as one of the main reasons they were absent from school or arrived late/departed early. In interviews, many teachers and head teachers also noted that most teachers lived in the same village as the school. On average, surveyed teachers take around half an hour to get to travel between home and school. This figure does not vary greatly between seasons (29 minutes in the dry season and 33 minutes in the rainy season). Around 33 per cent of teachers, however, raised transportation as one of the reasons they arrived late or departed early from school. Most teachers, 65 per cent, walk to school and very few teachers (3 per cent) changed their mode of transport by the season.

Several interviewees raised access to financial services as a contributor to absences, especially with teachers needing to travel to distant banks in order to receive their salary. This is one of the reasons frequently cited in the literature around teacher absenteeism, and the 2017–2025 Guinea-Bissau Education Sector Plan also includes a strategy to reduce teacher absenteeism by improving salary payments closer to employment sites (MEN, 2017). This did not (or was no longer) a common reason for missing school, however, around 6 per cent of surveyed teachers said one of the main reasons they had been absent from school or arrived late/departed early was to retrieve their pay.

Finally, a minority of surveyed teachers reported that social or community responsibilities were one of the main reasons they were absent. Fewer than 5 per cent of surveyed teachers said this was one of the reasons they had been absent from school, and 7.5 per cent said that it had caused them to arrive late or depart early from school. The most common activities raised during interviews were involvement in the circumcision (*fanado*) ceremony, funeral rituals, or harvesting during the cashew season.

Interviewees spoke of the cashew campaign or harvesting season indirectly influencing teacher attendance in one of two ways. First, several teachers and community members noted that some parents took their children out of school to assist with harvesting, and lower children attendance levels may influence teacher attendance. However, several interviewees (mostly head teachers), also noted the income earned from cashew harvesting allowed parents to contribute to school fees – at least during those seasons – which in turn, could be used to supplement teacher incomes during periods of strike, establish incentives for attendance, and increase parents' engagement. These topics are discussed further in subsequent sub-sections.

2.2.4. School factors

School type and employment in more than one school

As illustrated at the start of this chapter, absence levels reported by surveyed teachers varied greatly depending on the type of school where they are employed, with teachers in schools under self-management reporting the lowest absence levels (see *Figure 6*). This chapter further discussed how this difference could be attributed to the ability of self-managed schools to raise money for teacher salaries, therefore avoiding strikes, and the stronger oversight played by the community.

More than one in four surveyed teachers (27 per cent) reported that they were also teaching at another school. More than half interviewed in a private or self-managed school worked at another private or self-managed school. Most of the rest were working at both a public school and a private or self-managed school. A teacher at a private school in Tombali asked the interviewer to: “Imagine only a teacher who teaches in the one, two and three schools until this means that he is in danger of delaying or even to the point of not going to school, so this behaviour will not help in the learning of the students”. Remarking on teachers who combine public and private school teaching work, one head teacher at a rural school in Quinara observed that these teachers tend to prioritize their responsibilities at the private schools, which are more likely to deduct salary in the case of absences.

Despite this, there was little difference in the reported rate of regular absence among teachers who taught in more than one school and those who taught at only one school. The Quinara head teacher’s report above, of teachers prioritising work in private schools over public schools, would fit with the overall trend of higher absences among public schools. However, survey data from teachers who work in more than one school did not support this view.

Among teachers surveyed in public schools, 16 said they were also teaching at another school. Overwhelmingly the other school where they were teaching was a private or self-managed school. However, only one teacher in this group said they regularly arrived late or departed early from school, that being the public school where they were interviewed. This was a smaller proportion compared to surveyed public school teachers who only taught at one school, over a third of whom said they regularly arrived late or departed early.

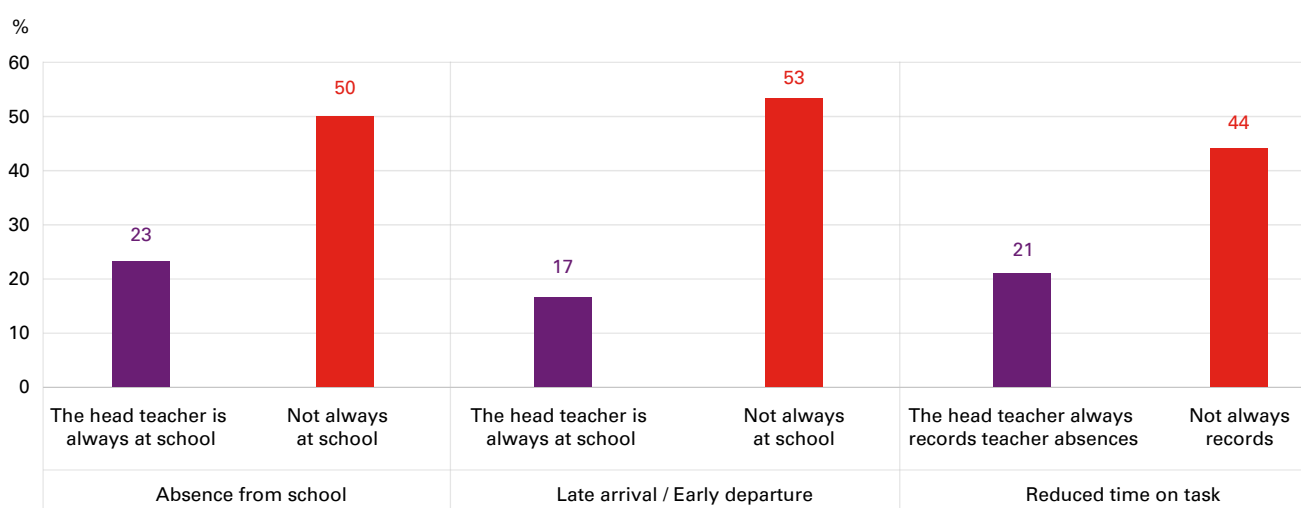
Meanwhile, among teachers in schools under self-management, 19 teachers who worked in more than one school were more likely to be absent than those who only worked in one self-managed school. These teachers overwhelmingly worked at another private or self-managed school. Close to one-third of teachers within this group, five of them, said they were regularly absent from school, a higher proportion than of their counterparts who only worked at the one school. In the group of self-managed teachers who did not work at any other school, 18 per cent were regularly absent from school.

These patterns were derived from smaller groups of surveyed teachers, and little information could be gleaned from interviews to explain them. It is a topic that could be worth further exploration to examine if, were it not for the issues with salary delays, teachers would prefer to be employed in the public system. One teacher in Cacheu who started out working at a private school and moved to a public school felt this way: “I am more pleased to work here because in the other school, it was just to gain experience, see? Because here is a school of state, I prefer to give my contribution to my country, it is because of that. The other school was private, even for the welfare of the country, this is for the state. We must help to make our state a real state”.

School leadership, culture and policies

This study's findings suggest that school leadership practices play a role in incentivising teacher attendance. Specifically, surveyed teachers who agreed that "the head teacher is always at school" were less likely to be regularly absent and less likely to regularly arrive late or depart early than those who disagreed with that statement (see Figure 16). Additionally, teachers who agreed that "the head teacher always records teacher absences" were less likely to report regularly experiencing reduced time on task than those who disagreed with this statement.

Figure 16: Teacher absences, by head teachers' attendance and recording of absences



Interviews with school-level stakeholders for this study uncovered examples of strong leadership influencing teacher attendance across sectors and locations. Teachers at these schools reported low rates of regular absences and spoke of different ways that head teachers can model, monitor and incentivize teacher attendance. At a rural private school in Gabu, a teacher described the head teacher as someone who: "does not tolerate the faults. And he scores the absences every day, and he advises on the foul." There is a system of accountability in place, with the head teacher describing that: "I do discourage absence; I have a public list of teachers' absences...they get ashamed to be in that list", and a community representative noting that: "Last year some teachers had no desire to teach... in which case their position is available to other teachers who want to work".

There were also examples of such practices in public schools. At a public school in an urban area in Bafata, teachers spoke of a head teacher who: "is always in school, even in moments of strike. If he gets here, he will find him inside the school". Beyond modelling the behaviour by consistently being in attendance, teachers at the school also reported that the head teacher regularly observed classes and provided feedback, supported teachers in applying for training and involved teachers in making decisions about the school. A teacher reported that: "At the end of the month, he takes the absences to the police station to be counted. The teachers who are absent, this is the way to discourage absences of the teachers". This practice appeared to achieve the intended impact, although the head teacher said: "These faults are taken to the police station but are never discounted".

At a public school in rural Quinara and another one in urban Bolama, head teachers and teachers spoke of a system where the school raised money for teacher incentives, which were deducted for marked absences. Teachers interviewed at this school also noted the importance of verbal warnings from the head teacher before this happened, serving as a reminder of stronger sanctions for repeated absences. Finally, consistent with other findings in this section, staff at schools under self-management also raised the role of monitoring by head teachers in combination with financial incentives. As described by a teacher in Tombali:

“I think we are better than other schools in the region because we have a self-management system. Teachers are paid to comply with the program. In addition, there is strong control on the part of the school principal. Teachers are afraid to miss because they are registered.”

– Teacher, self-managed urban school, Tombali

The leadership of the head teacher sets the direction of a school. Beyond this, there were a handful of school policies and practices raised during interviews as influencing attendance rates. One is the administrative workload of teachers. As illustrated in *Figure 10*, administrative work and official school business were the most frequently nominated reasons for being absent from class. In interviews, teachers raised examples of being called into the office during class hours to attend meetings, meet with visitors, or attend to other school business. There is a policy against this at one urban public school in Bafata, however, with the head teacher noting: “We never admit someone to come and sit without entering the classes, so we do not have this question of missing classes programmed while we are physically in school. Here the secretariat is autonomous; the teacher does not do administrative work, the teacher only has to teach”.

School leadership practices play a role in incentivising teacher attendance. The leadership of the head teacher sets the direction of a school. Beyond this, there were a handful of school policies and practices raised during interviews as influencing attendance rates. One is the administrative workload of teachers. Another is the expectation on teaching when student attendance is low.

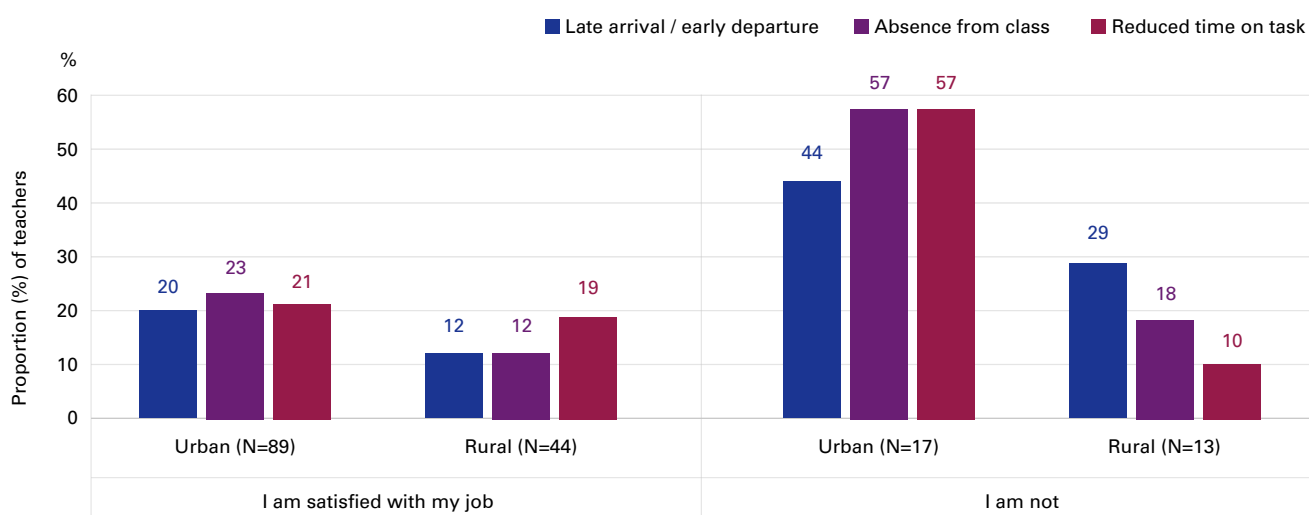
Another aspect raised by interviewees is the expectation of teaching when student attendance is low. Teachers and head teachers across four schools in the sample specifically raised this. If only a small number of students are present at school, there is a policy that teachers are not expected to teach and should go home instead. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this is a particularly pertinent issue among public schools impacted by teacher strikes. A teacher from a public school in Gabu noted that: “If students hear about a strike, even if the teacher wants to work, he won’t find the students for it. On these Mondays and Fridays, imagine, I leave my house a little far away from here, but when I get here, I sometimes find three or four students. Can I work with them? On Fridays, students really don’t show up because it’s hard to work with five students out of a total of 42 students. When that’s the case, we sign the time book and come home”. In other schools, head teachers expressed a preference for teachers being absent from school rather than being at school and not teaching. As one head teacher at a public school in Cacheu stated about frequency of absence from class: “Not here, because I always recommend staying home instead of coming here and standing in the courtyard for a walk or improvising classes”.

2.2.5. Teacher factors

Personal motivation and professional satisfaction

Professional satisfaction is high among surveyed teachers, with more than four in five agreeing with the statement “I am satisfied with my job”. There was a relationship between job satisfaction and late arrival/ departures, absence from class, and reduced time on task in the classroom. Although the majority of surveyed teachers were satisfied with their jobs, those who were not were also more likely to report being regularly unpunctual, absent from class, and experiencing reduced time on task. This relationship is particularly apparent among teachers in urban areas (*see Figure 17*).

Figure 17: Proportion of teachers who reported regular absences, by school location and job satisfaction



Teachers' job satisfaction in the survey correlated with whether they received their salary on time, yet those who reported that they did receive on-time salary payment were less likely to be satisfied (and subsequently, they were more likely to arrive late/ depart early, be absent from class, and experience reduced time on task). The exact reasoning for this is not clear from the current study, and is worth further examination in other studies. A couple of likely influencing factors arose from the current study. One, as noted in the sub-section on remunerations in this chapter, is that private school teachers, while more likely to report receiving their salary on time, but also received a lower amount of salary. This may be because private schools in Guinea-Bissau (beyond self-managed schools) are not a monolith, and the diversity of the group could not be captured in the small sample size of this survey.

There was a relationship between job satisfaction and late arrival/departures, absence from class and reduced time on task in the classroom. The complex dynamic between satisfaction, motivation, and salary likely also play a role.

The complex dynamic between satisfaction, motivation and salary likely also plays a role. Several interviewees noted that teachers were motivated not only by money, but that salary plays a role in their ability to fulfil their job. Further is the trade-off between salary levels and timely payments across different school sectors in Guinea-Bissau, as discussed in the remuneration sub-chapter. This likely plays a role as well. A teacher at an urban public school in Biombo described the dynamic as follows: “When I choose a profession, it is because it is the one I want and love, so I have to take it seriously, perhaps because of motivation ... And motivation depends on a good wage, if there is a minimum wage, although teachers [choose] to work in private schools despite the state paying more ... in the private school wages go out on time, while in the state schools sometimes wages are paid on time and sometimes not.

Health and family responsibilities

As illustrated in *Figure 8* and *Figure 9*, health and family responsibilities were among the most frequently named reasons for being absent and arriving late/departing early from school. Interviewees linked these reasons to occasional absences and lack of punctuality rather than to regular occurrences. More specific reasons ranged from teachers’ own health challenges (although no specific types of illnesses were raised), and included the associated challenge of having long travel times to seek medical support for more complex needs, the health of family members, and compassionate leave due to death in the family or of members of the community.

Health and family responsibilities were among the most frequently named reasons for being absent and arriving late/departing early from school.

Although no specific illnesses were identified during interviews, diarrhoeal diseases remained the second highest cause of death and disability in Guinea-Bissau in 2019 (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2020). In the current study, teachers, students and community members raised the absence or shortage of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities as one of the major challenges faced by their school. The response to COVID-19 includes provisions that can have an impact on this challenge in the long run, including through the maintenance and provision of WASH facilities (UNICEF, 2020).

Analysis of the teacher survey was also unable to establish significant patterns of such absences by teachers’ age, marital or parental status. One trend that did emerge was that male teachers and those with large numbers of people in their household were somewhat more likely to have nominated family responsibilities as a reason for being absent from school or arriving late/departing early. The average reported household size in the survey was 10 people, slightly larger than the 8.03 reported for the national average size of household in the 2009 census (National Institute of Statistics, 2009).

A male teacher at an urban public school in Bafata, when asked about the last time he arrived late or departed early from school, illustrated the challenge in the following way:

“The fact that I do have a large number of children, not just my kids, but my nieces and nephews that I have in my house, which [means] at times my salary does not cover the whole of the month. I need to ensure the situation in the home before coming to school, and sometimes there are times when, for example, the woman at the house calls, and she says now there’s nothing to eat so, I have to leave the school to ensure the sustainability of the house. That usually happens at least once a month.”

– Teacher, urban public school, Bafata

Finally, some interviewees raised the confluence of family, identity, and place of origin in relation to attendance. Several teachers brought up examples of having to travel to care for or visit family in other regions. One teacher at a rural public school in Quinara raised a desire to be transferred to a school closer to where their sick mother resides. In these examples, distance to family meant that attending to family matters resulted in prolonged absences from school. Meanwhile, a couple of head teachers at public schools – one in Quinara and the other in Cacheu – noted that although many teachers at their school came from outside the region, they had become embedded in the community, including building a family with community members, which they linked to greater motivation of these teachers in performing their work.

3. Implications on policy

The Time to Teach study in Guinea-Bissau seeks to identify major themes and factors at each level of the education system affecting specific types of teachers' time on task. The goal, however, is not to identify which type of teachers' time on task deserves more attention than others, nor to point out which level of authority in the education system ought to take on more responsibility to address this challenge.

The policy recommendations are based upon findings presented in this report and are directly related to policy and implementation gaps identified in the previous section. The recommendations are also informed by global evidence on best practices in reducing teacher absences. This evidence suggests that countries that have had the most success in combating school absenteeism have combined direct interventions (i.e., interventions aimed directly at reducing teacher absence) with indirect interventions (i.e., interventions where the reduction of absenteeism was a secondary objective or a mechanism for achieving broader goals, like improved learning outcomes) (Guerrero et al, 2013).

The Guinea-Bissau school system is noted by authors and researchers for its tremendous resilience, despite the challenging political and resourcing context it has faced. This is signalled by, among others, the passing of key legislation during brief periods of political stability and continued growth in enrolment rates (da Silva and Oliveira, 2017). Bissau-Guinean communities are extremely active in mobilizing service delivery when the government is absent (UNICEF Guinea-Bissau, 2016). This resilience is being tested again as schools close in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and as the system recovers to build back better after the crisis.

The question that should be asked in the Guinea-Bissau context is: How to best support teachers and a primary education sector operating under ongoing instability? Based on this understanding, and drawing from the analysis in previous sections, promising ways forward are suggested below under five aspects.

3.1. Cross-sectoral collaborations to address employment conditions in the public sector

Delayed salary payment is a frequent source of teacher strikes in the country, highlighting the importance of broader cross-sectoral work to improve financial arrangements and systems, as well as increasing transparency around these processes. They should build on the public expenditure review by the World Bank (2018) which, among other things, recommended for the education sector:

- Documenting the mandates and responsibilities of central and decentralized education entities;
- Documenting the amount and distribution of school fees;
- Making financial information and service delivery performance available to the public; and
- Enhancing capacity in budgeting, human resources and payroll.

Persistent teacher strikes directly reduce the teaching and learning time available to students, especially in public schools. Having long been a presence in the Bissau-Guinean system, pervasive strikes have also acted as a barrier to meaningful reforms of the teacher training system and decades of donor activities. Identifying and addressing the root causes of these strikes should remain a priority, including as exemplified in the World Bank's Quality Education for All project. It identified confusion around the career ladder provision in the Education Law as creating tension that led to strikes, and then worked with the government to clarify these (World Bank, 2018a).

Two other areas of teachers' employment conditions emerged in this study as worthy of clarification, in support of teacher attendance. First, are the administrative responsibilities that fall on teachers, which currently vary by school and in some schools, were attributed to regular absences from class. Another is the expectation on teachers to attend classes and deliver teaching to all students who seek it at school, even when student attendance is low or lower than usual due to periods of teacher strike or harvest season.

- The MENES should continue working with the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the respective ministries' subnational institutions to improve financial systems, processes, and increase their public transparency;
- The government should work with development partners on interim measures, such as loan schemes, to ensure on-time teacher salary payments. For example, Cameroon used GPE grants to pay teacher salaries to address shortages from the 1990s (Global Partnership for Education, 2013). The government accompanied this with reforms to establish clear policies on hiring, salary scales, benefits, and career development of teachers, as well as better fiduciary policies and mechanisms. This should be aligned with accountability mechanisms on attendance. In the Sindh province of Pakistan, for example, the World Bank with GPE funds supported the digitization of school staff data so that salaries for absentee teachers could be frozen (World Bank, 2018c);
- Working with the Ministry of Civil Service is also needed, to ensure clarity around employment conditions. A component of this would be to include consulting with broader education stakeholders, including teacher representative bodies, in the formulation and implementation of teacher and teaching policies.

3.2. Community engagement

The strong role that the Bissau-Guinean community has played in ensuring the continued delivery of education to the country's children in the face of political and economic instability is an asset identified by the above works. This strength again emerged in the current study for its role in supporting teacher attendance and time on task. A clear example of this was the way public schools changed status to self-management to raise community funds to supplement teacher payment and prevent strikes. In addition to ameliorating the negative impact of delayed payments however, interviewees in this study also highlighted the resulting increase in community engagement, which was also linked to lower absences.

This particular finding's implication on policy, therefore, is focused on the characteristics and practices of self-managed schools that lead to increased teacher attendance and time on task. It does not suggest that some school types are inherently better than others. Instead, the aspects of strong community engagement should be harnessed and encouraged across public schools and other forms of private schools as well.

An area of further work raised in this study is that of the requirement of fees to achieve impact on teacher attendance. This could mean the trend is widening the gap with the most disadvantaged schools and communities,

where parents are less able to contribute. The government and its partners should therefore examine ways in which it can support the high degree of community engagement seen among self-managed schools without the requirement of financial contribution from parents (which goes against the principle of free basic education).

One approach would be the use of conditional cash transfer (CCT) to parents directly. In Peru, for example, a CCT program was found to reduce impact on teacher absenteeism (Streuli, 2012). In other contexts, such as in India, lower teacher absenteeism was the prerequisite for seeing the impact of CCT on student enrolment (Das and Sarkhel, 2020). UNICEF Guinea-Bissau has started implementation of a cash transfer programme, funded by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), to support vulnerable families and incentivize parents to keep their children in school (UNICEF, 2020). The programme could consider at least encouraging parent involvement in the monitoring of teacher attendance. Additionally, where children are attending local public schools that experience frequent teacher strikes, parents can also be encouraged to mobilize and connect with their school to consider becoming self-managed.

The 2017–2025 Education Sector Strategy already included an intention for the government to progressively take charge of the operating expenses and provision of teachers to community schools and madrasa to relieve families of financial pressure and increase equity of access (MEN, 2017). This is a worthwhile goal but should be approached carefully. This study has raised that teachers in public schools are more prone to absences, particularly due to prolonged and continuing strikes. Reliance on community funding should be reduced, with consideration for how this may impact the degree of community oversight and engagement in school operations, including monitoring of teacher performance.

As the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) review noted, community participation was a key feature of the education system in Guinea-Bissau, but while various forms of school management committees are present, the country lacks a systematic definition, role, or support for these bodies (World Bank, 2017). The role of school management committees should, therefore, be clarified and formalized, including formalizing their involvement in monitoring teacher attendance and performance.

The literature on interventions to improve teacher attendance provides several examples of approaches that have worked in other contexts, from providing better information to parents to increasing parents' and communities' decision-making capacities in school management (Guerrero et al, 2013). Institutionalizing the monitoring role of parents and the community, building their monitoring capacity, giving them additional resources, and strengthening their representation on school councils have all been found to improve teacher performance and attendance when two enabling conditions are found. The first is community experience in self-organization and management, which the proliferation of self-managed schools shows is present in Guinea-Bissau. The second is teacher buy-in and recognition of parents and community members as legitimate monitoring actors.

In a more recent experience, formulating joint commitment between schools and community members to improve education increased student achievement. The greatest impact was seen when combined with the use of independent methods – in that instance, time-stamped cameras – to verify attendance, which also increased teachers' time on task and parents' investment in their children's education (Gaduh et al, 2020).

As previous studies have established, teacher buy-in for these forms of community involvement is very important (Snisiveit et al, 2015). This is in line with broader studies around engaging communities in monitoring the delivery of services; involving providers in the design of the monitoring process is critical for ensuring buy-in for the results (World Bank, 2004). Similarly, any joint agreements and community monitoring activities should make clear that it does not take responsibility away from head teachers and instead, makes their role and accountability to the community clear.

School closures due to COVID-19 are increasing the demand for parents' engagement and involvement in their children's learning. As schools reopen, harnessing this increased engagement and making it a formal feature of the Bissau-Guinean education system would strengthen the system in the long run:

- The role of school management communities should be systematized and their role in monitoring teacher attendance and performance formalized. This could be embedded in national policy and supported by, in an example from the literature, joint agreements between school and community stakeholders on school performance goals to support teacher buy-in for the process;
- The MENES should consider direct support to schools and communities that strengthen this involvement and oversight independent of the community's ability to raise fees;
- UNICEF Guinea-Bissau and the MENES should consider incorporating encouragement or incentives to monitor teacher attendance as part of their new GPE-funded conditional cash transfer program.

3.3. Teacher training

Adequate training for teachers plays a role in attendance by improving teachers' self-efficacy. Teachers in this study who believed that they had the knowledge and skills to teach well were found to also be less likely to report regular absences from class. With the establishment of new teacher training institutions, teacher training options have increased in recent years in Guinea-Bissau. It would be prudent, however, to continue monitoring the resulting total capacity of training institutions in the country and whether they are now sufficient to prepare the quality supply of teachers needed in the future. In this study, for example, teachers were seeking transfers in order to get training opportunities.

The 2017–2025 Education Sector Plan includes measures to clarify the roles and responsibilities of teacher training stakeholders, reducing class sizes at teacher training institutions, maximizing their physical capacity through double shifts and recruiting new trainers with higher wages. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) programme also includes a component to improve the quality of instruction by establishing standards and harmonizing the system for teacher training. This could then be used to continue tracking the relationship between teacher training, teacher attendance, and time on task. While much has been written on distance learning for children and young people, there is also a lot to be said about opportunities for teacher training that have been expanded as large groups of people transition to online work, including undertaking placements in online learning programmes:

- The total capacity of teacher training institutions to prepare and support the teachers needed to meet demand in primary education enrolments should continue to be monitored, as well as their regional distribution. In this study, for example, teachers were seeking transfers in order to seek training opportunities;
- The recommendation above also relies on improved systems to accurately project the demand for primary school teachers at the regional and school levels, including formalizing the role of Regional Directors in this process, as has been called for in previous works (World Bank, 2017);
- With much attention on supporting greater connectivity and remote learning opportunities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an opportunity to identify the role remote learning could play in teacher training.

3.4. Support for effective school leadership

Finally, this study found evidence supporting previous studies on the role school leadership has in supporting teacher attendance and time on task. Teachers who reported that their head teacher was always present at school, and those who reported that their head teacher always recorded teacher absences, were also less likely to be absent. Training of school principals already forms part of the 2017–2025 Education Sector Plan in the context of strengthening the pedagogical and administrative supervision of schools. As had been raised in the SABER-Teacher Initiative for Guinea-Bissau, there is still no specific mechanism to ensure head teachers are expected to or can develop the necessary skills (World Bank, 2012). Outlining these requirements should be prioritized, and in doing so, the role of head teachers in modelling attendance and monitoring, recording, and discouraging teacher absences is included:

- Mechanisms to ensure that head teachers are expected to, or can develop, the necessary skills to lead their schools effectively should be established. The requirements of the role should be clarified in policy and include expectations of modelling attendance as well as monitoring, recording, and discouraging teacher absences.

3.5. Continuity of learning during school closures

Global school closures due to COVID-19 raised attention on what is lost when children are unable to go to school for extended periods of time. The World Bank estimates that approximately US\$10 trillion in earnings could be lost by the current cohort of learners due to lower levels of learning and their potential for dropping out of school (Azevedo et al, 2020). In another estimate, children could lose more than a year's worth of learning from a three-month school closure due to being behind, and falling further behind, when schools reopen (Kaffenberger, 2020).

Schools in Guinea-Bissau closed in mid-March 2020. They remained closed until July 2020, the end of the 2019–2020 school year, to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 (UNESCO, 2020), with localized closures taking place in 2020–2021 to contain outbreaks (Fernando, 2021). Due to teacher strikes, however, months-long extended school closures have been long-standing occurrences in Guinea-Bissau, even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The global response to the current crisis has led to an increase in the creation of learning resources to support learning continuity outside of school. Through funding from the Global Partnership for Education, UNICEF Guinea-Bissau has led the translation and development of a full package of television and radio lessons for pre-school, school-aged, and out-of-school children (Global Partnership for Education, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). These resources can be broadcast to support learning continuity during future periods of school closures, due to strikes or for other reasons. With 60 per cent of families owning a radio, compared to 22 per cent having a television (INE, 2020), interactive radio instruction (IRI) has solid potential in Guinea-Bissau. A significant evidence base supports the potential impact of IRI on children's learning and development (Ho and Thukral, 2009).

Mobile telephones may also be considered a means to support learning continuity at home. During COVID-19 school closures, this was the most frequently reported method of communication between teachers and families (UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank, 2020). In a randomized controlled trial in Botswana, sending SMS text messages to support parents with mathematics lessons and problems was found to increase parental engagement and children's numeracy skills, especially when accompanied with follow-up telephone calls (Angrist et al, 2020). This type of programme has significant potential in Guinea-Bissau, with 94 per cent of households reporting that they have access to a mobile telephone (INE, 2020):

- The MENES should make recorded radio and television lessons available to regional offices for deployment during future school closures, including localized closures. These may also be distributed via USB or other physical means to community leaders, particularly in areas most prone to experience teacher strikes;
- The MENES should engage and train teachers in incorporating these resources, during in-school teaching where possible, to support smooth transition between home and school learning;
- The MENES and development partners should consider trialling mobile phone support to home learning. This may initially be tested in the context of reopened schools, to support students in closing the learning gap from previous extended school closures in 2019–2020. If found to be effective, this can also be deployed during future closures.

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ANNEX: Study limitations

Like all studies relying on self-reported data and conducted under time and budget constraints, TTT Guinea-Bissau is not free of methodological limitations. The three most significant challenges likely to have emerged during data collection are:

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 the 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 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=180) and purposive approach in selecting schools. The TTT findings, therefore, can provide a snapshot of the selected schools rather than a representative view of the situation across all schools in Guinea-Bissau. For this reason, the majority of findings reported in subsequent chapters depend on the systematic analysis of qualitative and quantitative data.

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UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti

Via degli Alfani, 58 – 50121

Florence, Italy

Tel: (+39) 055 20 330

Fax: (+39) 055 2033 220

florence@unicef.org

www.unicef-irc.org

twitter: @UNICEFInnocenti

facebook.com/UnicefInnocenti

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