



Time to Teach

Teacher attendance and time on task
in primary schools

South Sudan

Silvana Târlea, Christine Han, Dita Nugroho
and Despina Karamperidou

May 2021

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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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Acronyms and abbreviations

BoG	Board of Governors
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus group discussion
GDP	Gross domestic product
IDI	In-depth interview
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MoGEI	Ministry of General Education and Instruction
NEF	National Education Forum
NESP	National Education Sector Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SMC	School Management Committee
SmoE	State Ministry of Education
TTT	Time to Teach
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

Executive summary

Study overview

The Government of South Sudan, through the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) and its development partners, has made efforts over the past decade to rebuild South Sudan's primary education system. Challenges to the delivery of education have persisted, both within the education system and external to it.

The Time to Teach study focuses specifically on the issue of teacher attendance. It distinguishes between four types of interruptions to teacher attendance: absence from school; lack of punctuality; absence from class; and loss of teaching time in class. The study aims to identify the specific determinants at each level of the education system of South Sudan. In doing so, it highlights the role of various education stakeholders, from the central and decentralized levels, to the community level and as school level actors in monitoring and addressing the challenges to teacher attendance. This study seeks to contribute a better understanding of the various challenges faced by teachers and especially, the system deficits that affect teachers' attendance and motivation, with a view to providing evidence-based policy recommendations to relevant education stakeholders in the country.

The study was based on 145 qualitative interviews/focus group discussions with government officials, head teachers, teachers and community representatives, as well as a survey of 200 teachers from visits to 20 schools across the 10 states in South Sudan. Both public and private schools were selected, in urban and rural areas.

Main findings

How common are teacher absences?

Surveyed teachers were asked about the frequency with which they experienced each type of interruption to teaching. The results found:

- More than half of surveyed teachers (53 per cent) reported experiencing at least one form of absence once a week or more;
- Thirty per cent of teachers surveyed reported being absent from school at least weekly. This rate is comparable to the proportion of teachers found not to be in school when surveyed by the Education Cluster Assessment;
- One in four teachers reported that they arrived late or left early from school once a week or more. A similar proportion of teachers reported regularly being absent from class, even though they were at school;
- Less time spent teaching than planned was reported as a regular occurrence by more than 30 per cent of teachers;
- Compared to public school teachers, teachers in private schools were more likely to report all types of absences;
- Female teachers were more likely to report being regularly absent from school and losing teaching time in the classroom than male teachers.

Why are teachers absent?

Teacher surveys and interviews with stakeholders found that:

- Lack of pay was the most frequently reported reason for being absent from school among public school teachers. Stakeholders reported that public school teachers often experienced very delayed payments of their low salaries. Most teachers in private schools reported that they received timely salary payments;
- Late payment of salary did more than lower the motivation of teachers; it also weakened the accountability system to support attendance. Head teachers and local government officials were sympathetic to a range of reasons for absence related to the resulting financial hardship borne by teachers – from health challenges to seeking alternative sources of income in order to support their families;
- Distance to school, weather, and community infrastructure – including poor quality roads and lack of public transportation options – interact to become key barriers to teachers' punctuality. During the rainy season, it takes more than half of teachers at least 90 minutes to travel to school;
- Strong school leadership and management was linked to smaller rates of frequent absences;
- Teachers were often called away from class to undertake administrative work at school or to attend training and meetings at county offices. This was the most common reason reported by teachers for missing class when they were already at school;
- Inadequate school infrastructure and lack of teaching materials such as chalk, textbooks and visual aids were frequently attributed to loss of planned teaching time;
- Health featured in the top three reasons teachers reported for all forms of absence, particularly among female teachers.

What are the potential implications for policy making?

Based on the above findings and a review of the literature of the South Sudanese primary education context, several policy implications are recommended:

- Continuing to build on the work that the Government of South Sudan and its partners is undertaking to pay public service salaries on time and to increase the allocation of public funding for education by improving transparency around the budget and identifying existing bottlenecks;
- Strengthening systems around teacher accountability, including improving teacher monitoring and attendance-based payment, clarifying guidelines for school inspection and supervision, and supporting better school-level monitoring of attendance.
- Offering training on effective school management practices, classroom management and gender sensitivity, and working with training providers to schedule training during school holidays and weekends, or at the very least, with enough notice to allow schools to plan around scheduled absence;
- Mapping school infrastructure needs, including learning-friendly classrooms, teacher housing, and sanitation facilities. This should inform the basis for mobilizing resources for their provision, including from budget allocation, development partners and community involvement;
- Collaborating across sectors to establish schools as safe hubs for teachers and children, with nutrition, health, and gender-sensitive supports.

Section 1: Introduction

1.1. Study rationale

Teacher absenteeism wastes valuable financial resources, short-changes young students, and is one of the most cumbersome obstacles on the path toward universal learning in developing countries.¹ Studies from across the developing world have found national averages of teacher absenteeism that range from 3 to 27 per cent.² These national averages conceal even higher rates of absenteeism within countries, and large variations in educational opportunities and outcomes, since educators tend to be more frequently absent in poorer and more remote communities and schools.³

Teacher absenteeism is particularly prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa. The Service Delivery Indicators (SDI) study by the World Bank found that 15 to 45 per cent of all primary school teachers in seven sub-Saharan African countriesⁱ were absent from school, and between 23 and 57 per cent were absent from class, on any given day.⁴ The same study estimated that on average, the loss of teaching hours due to teacher absenteeism corresponded to a waste of approximately 46 cents of every dollar invested in education, equivalent to an annual wastage between 1 and 3 per cent of GDP.⁵ Afrobarometer data, drawn from 36 African countries,⁶ also indicated that teacher absenteeism contributed to unequal education outcomes, confirming a strong association between high levels of teacher absenteeism and the presence of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

Statistics from South Sudan suggest that teacher absence has also been a challenge, due to pressures from the years of conflict and economic crisis on the education system. In 2018, a survey of 400 primary schools in the country found 30 per cent of teachers not in school on the day of visit;⁷ this figure had only changed slightly from the previous two years. The main reason put forward by teachers for absences was delay or non-payment of salaries.

Policy makers and education stakeholders in South Sudan and other African countries are becoming increasingly aware of the negative consequences of teacher absences and have recently taken legislative action against it. However, the evidence base on how policies and practices at various levels of the education system influence different types of time-on-task remains limited. This lack of evidence contributes to difficulties in designing effective teacher management policies to increase teacher motivations and opportunities to teach and to difficulties in successfully implementing school governance reforms.⁸

The Time to Teach study is an Africa-wide research initiative that aims to address knowledge, policy, and policy implementation gaps relating to teachers' time-on-task in the continent. Initiated in 2017, the project is a collaboration between the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, UNICEF Regional and Country Offices, national governments and research partners, DFID (UK Department for International Development), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Mastercard Foundation. In total, the project investigates the determinants of teachers' time-on-task and explores ways of mitigating the phenomenon in 20 African countries.ⁱⁱ

i Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda.

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

1.2. Objectives and research questions

The principal objective of the Time to Teach study in South Sudan is to collate and strengthen the evidence base on the various types and determinants of primary school teachers' time-on-task and provide practical recommendations for improving teacher attendance rates. The study seeks to provide critical insights into the factors at different levels of the education system that influence teacher attendance and assist the policy and programmatic work of the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MOGEI) and UNICEF South Sudan.

More specifically, the objectives of the project are to:

- Understand the various forms of primary school teachers' time-on-task namely, attendance in school and classroom, punctuality, teaching time in classroom, and quality of teaching, and assess their prevalence in different regions across the country, the type of schools (public/private/faith-based) and their setting (rural/urban/semi-rural);
- Approach the issue of teachers' time-on-task from a systems perspective and identify factors at different levels of the education system (national, subnational, community, school, and teacher level) that affect teachers' time-on-task as well as teachers' capacity and motivation to teach to standard;
- Identify gaps in teacher policy and policy implementation linked to the determinants of teachers' attendance and the barriers to improved teacher attendance;
- Provide evidence-based and action-oriented policy recommendations for increasing attendance and time spent teaching as a means of improving children's academic performance; and
- Increase awareness among national education stakeholders, and development partners supporting the education sector, on the importance of well-designed and implemented teacher policies and the incorporation of teachers' time-on-task into national education strategies, programmes, and policy discussions.

The Time to Teach research initiative addresses questions centred on identifying the different manifestations of teachers' time-on-task and identifying the interactions between factors at different levels of the education system that contribute to each type of time-on-task. Findings are interpreted in relation to specific teacher policy and policy implementation gaps, and practical recommendations are provided to increase teachers' time-on-task and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the entire education system.

Key research questions addressed in this report include:

- How does teachers' time-on-task manifest itself in primary schools across South Sudan? What are the various forms of teachers' time-on-task affecting teacher-pupil interaction and pupils' learning outcomes?
- What are the factors in South Sudan's education system causing primary school teachers to reduce time-on-task in various ways, how are these factors inter-linked, and how can they be addressed in a systematic and holistic way?
- Which systemic factors lead to policy and implementation gaps in managing teachers' time-on-task? How can these challenges be addressed?

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

- Identify common challenges among participating countries and unveil patterns in the determinants of teachers' time-on-task across African countries;
- Develop a regional inventory of teacher management policies; and
- Facilitate cross-country learning by identifying good practices in improving teacher monitoring and evaluation, increasing teacher motivation, and teachers' time-on-task.

South Sudan and other participating countries are expected to benefit from the second phase of the Time to Teach project that involves a cross-country comparison. Results from the comparative analysis of East and Southern African (ESA) countries will be presented in a synthesis report attesting to determinants of teachers' time-on-task across the region and link determinants to the evidence base around addressing barriers to teacher attendance. Evidence will include information on successful teacher policies and effective policy implementation. The Time to Teach ESA synthesis report will also include an assessment of the external validity of the evidence base and outline preconditions to public policy transfers.

1.3. Chapter organization

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides a short overview of South Sudan's primary education system and teacher policies;
- Section 3 presents the methodology of the study and discusses issues of sampling, instruments development, data collection and analysis.
- Section 4 presents key results by level of the education system.
- Section 5 links empirical findings on the determinants of teachers' time-on-task to specific teacher policy and policy implementation gaps.
- Section 6 concludes with a series of actionable policy recommendations.

Section 2: Country context

South Sudan became the world's youngest sovereign nation when it gained independence in 2011 following decades of conflict. Two years later, conflict resumed with civil war and ethnic violence that, in a country of 12 million people, has displaced an estimated 1.5 million people internally and another 2.3 million externally to neighboring Sudan.⁹ The most recent peace agreement, signed in February 2020, and the formation of a coalition government between warring parties brings cautious hope.¹⁰

Following independence, the country administratively comprised of 10 states: Upper Nile, Jonglei, Unity, Warrap, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Western Bahr el Ghazal, Lakes, Western Equatoria, Central Equatoria, and Eastern Equatoria. In 2015 the government announced the establishment of 28 states, largely along ethnic lines, and another three in 2017. However, the country returned to the 10 states structure in February 2020. This report references the 10-state administrative division. States are divided into 180 counties which are in turn divided into 540 payams and 2,500 bomas. At independence, English was chosen as the official language and the language of instruction. Prior to independence, Arabic was also an official language and was previously the language of instruction. In addition, the constitution recognizes the more than 60 indigenous languages spoken in the country to be national languages.

Prolonged conflict disrupted oil production, the country's dominant source of revenue. Combined with rampant inflation, which reached a rate of 800 per cent in 2016, the country has undergone a pronounced economic crisis. Per capita GDP decreased significantly, from US\$1,111 in 2014¹¹ to US\$200 in 2017.¹² The oil sector has since rebounded, improving the country's economic outlook if the peace treaty holds, although poverty levels are expected to remain high, with a projected 89 per cent of South Sudanese living below the international poverty line in 2019,¹³ and at least half of the population estimated to suffer from severe acute food insecurity.¹⁴

In the 2018/19 financial year, the Government of South Sudan allocated 9.4 per cent of its budget to the education sector. This was an increase from the around 4 to 6 per cent allocated to the sector across the preceding five years;¹⁵ however, the government has historically faced difficulty fully financing its budget. The bulk of education sector funding is used on wages, salaries and transfers. By the end of the 2018/19 financial year, civil service salaries were in arrears of four months and transfers to states in arrears of five months.¹⁶ More broadly, the government's education expenditure as a proportion of GDP is still below international targets and is the lowest in East Africa.¹⁷

This is the backdrop for a large and growing number of South Sudanese children. South Sudan is also a young country demographically, with over 40 per cent of its population under the age of 15 years.¹⁸ The country's school-aged population is projected to increase from 5.8 million in 2015 to 7.7 million in 2030.¹⁹ Years of conflict however, have damaged or destroyed 30 per cent of schools and left at least 70 per cent of school-aged children out of school.²⁰

2.1. Primary education in South Sudan

The right to education is enshrined in the Republic of South Sudan's General Education Act, 2012, which establishes the regulatory framework and structures for the country's education system, and states that "[p]rimary education shall be free and accessible to all citizens in South Sudan without discrimination on the basis of sex, race, and ethnicity, health status including HIV/AIDs, gender or disability".²¹

The country's education system recognises different formal learning pathways (see *Figure 1*).²² Primary education starts at the age of six and continues for eight years: four years of Lower Level and four years of Upper Level.²³ Pupils are required to sit and pass the Certificate of Primary Education Exam to transition to secondary education.

Figure 1: Republic of South Sudan Education System



Source: Republic of South Sudan, National Education Statistics 2016.³¹

According to the constitution, education in South Sudan is to be administered by the central government and the State Ministries of Education (SMoEs), which are responsible for providing and managing education services at the state level. The Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI), at the central level, is responsible for the formulation of education policies and national education strategies for primary and secondary level education.

The country's General Education Strategic Plan was first developed in 2012 and sets a five-year framework for the reform of the education sector (GESP I, 2012-2017). This was followed by the second GESP (GESP II, 2017-2021). Both documents acknowledged the challenges the education sector faced, operating on a backdrop of conflict and a fragile economy. Subsequent external assessments agreed that although the GESPs themselves met international standards, the civil war and financing shortages undermined their implementation.²⁴

The current GESP II acknowledges that South Sudan has not had a coherent government-led framework to guide education policies for decades and that education interventions have intended to address humanitarian crises rather than focus on long-term development.²⁵ These donor-driven programmes have created a fragmented system and high level of aid dependency.²⁶ In response to this, the MoGEI established the Development Partners Coordination Unit and the National Education Forum (NEF) with a number of thematic working groups.

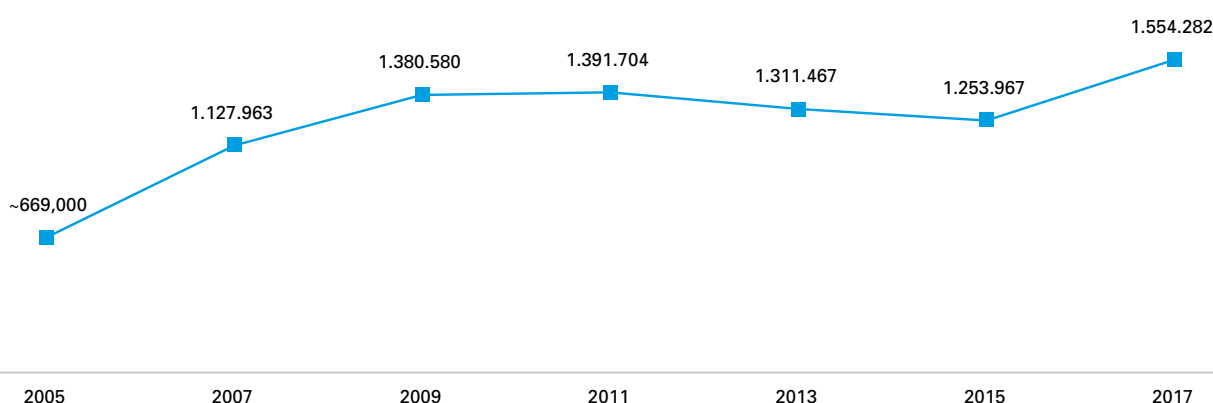
The central government transfers public resources on education to individual states; the states then disburse the funds to their respective counties. The counties perform the final allocation of the education funds to their respective local governments.²⁷ Education authorities include the smallest to the largest units of organization: *boma* education officials, payam education officials, county education officials, state education officials, and national education officials.

At the state level, State Ministries of Education (SMoEs) coordinate implementation of priority programmes in their states using resources allocated to them from the central government. County Education Offices monitor schools to ensure a common level of learning outcomes throughout the county. However, a report on the operations and capacities of county- and payam-level education offices found the roles and responsibilities of county and payam officials were not clearly communicated and currently, the government is facing challenges with retaining trained staff in county offices.²⁸

The delivery and management of education services in South Sudan relies heavily on decentralized levels. However, the implementing education policies and programmes has proven difficult because offices at low administrative levels operate with limited infrastructure, staff, or resources.²⁹

At the community and school levels, the school governing body is expected to be an authority on matters related to finance, academic discipline, co-curricular activities, and the general welfare of the school. Head teachers, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), and school management committees (SMCs)/boards of governors (BoGs) work together to monitor and manage schools. SMCs and BoGs play a role in raising awareness among parents and the community and ensuring the school records teacher attendance every day. The head teacher is expected to ensure that staff and learners observe rules and regulations of the school.

Figure 2: Primary school enrolment in South Sudan, 2005 – 2017



Sources: UNESCO Out of School Children study (2018, for 2013, 2015 and 2017), Government of South Sudan EMIS (2009, for 2007-2009, and 2012 for 2011), World Bank Education in the South Sudan (2011, for 2005).

Accurate and up-to-date statistics are difficult to obtain in a prolonged conflict context. In 2017 an estimated 1.55 million children were enrolled in 3,892 primary schools nationwide.³⁰ At independence, the number of children enrolled in primary schools was double what it was in 2005. While data comparability year-on-year can be problematic, overall trends showed that enrolments dropped in the following years of conflict, before reaching a peak in 2017 (see *Figure 2*).

2.2. Challenges facing the primary education sector

According to a 2016 report from the Education Management Information System (EMIS), just under 70 per cent of the country's primary schools were government-owned,³¹ and the rest were either run by the community, were private, religious or run by NGOs.³² A large proportion of schools relied on external financing from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and multilateral and bilateral development agencies. The support ranged from provision of school feeding to school materials.³³ The presence of so many different providers has led to a fragmented education system, referred to as "islands of education".³⁴

Prolonged fighting in the country has had devastating consequences on the education system, with varying impacts by region. For instance, in 2017 over 40 per cent of schools were closed and a third of remaining schools had been affected by attacks.³⁵ Only around a third of schools in Eastern Equatoria, Western Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile were open. Furthermore, 30 days of schooling on average were lost due to late starts and interruptions secondary to security reasons, rainfall, and lack of teacher payments. This figure varied by states and was highest in Upper Nile (58 days lost) and Warrap (41 days).

School infrastructure was destroyed or damaged by the conflict. An assessment in 2018 found that 35 per cent of classrooms were permanent structures, 30 per cent were semi-permanent and the rest were open air, tent, or roof classrooms.³⁶ ³⁷ In November 2014, 9.4 million primary school textbooks were set on fire during the war.³⁸

Several programmes to deliver and support education in emergencies were set up by the government and donor partners in response to the conflict's impact on education. They included delivering education in temporary shelters to 250,000 displaced children in 2015, although 70 per cent of the teachers were untrained.³⁹ More than 1,000 Alternative Education System (AES) schools deliver education to adults or older children who have missed primary education as a result of several years of conflict.⁴⁰

Overcrowded classrooms are common in primary schools, with considerable disparity across states, especially in the context of increasing enrolment of over-aged students and the return of IDPs. Schools are under-equipped to meet growing demands.⁴¹ Boys are more likely to drop out from school in areas affected by violence, and very few girls who begin primary education continue to the secondary level.⁴²

South Sudan has national guidelines for school inspection and supervision to be performed by county and payam officials. However, according to 2018 data, only 18 per cent of payam supervisors visited schools four to seven times a year as their requirement, while 54 per cent visited two to three times a year, and three per cent never visited at all. The deficiency in school inspections should be understood in a context in which inspection offices lack transportation, staff, and training.⁴³

2.3. Primary school teachers in South Sudan

Based on the 2018 EMIS report collected from seven states, there are approximately 26,000 primary teachers in the country.⁴⁴ The majority (58 per cent) did not hold a teaching qualification and only 61 per cent held a secondary certificate or above. With more than 60 national languages spoken in the country, the relatively recent requirement to speak English as the language of instruction further contributes to teacher

shortage.⁴⁵ In 2016, fewer than 20 per cent of the South Sudanese teaching workforce was female, a rate lower than the proportion of female pupils, and it has remained fairly stagnant from previous years.⁴⁶

Public primary school teachers in South Sudan are recruited into three categories. Category 1 includes secondary school graduates who have undergone continuous professional development; Category 2 is for secondary education graduates with some professional qualification in teaching; and Category 3 is made up of volunteer teachers selected from those applicants who can read and comprehend a text in the language commonly used by the population. These teachers are deployed to emergency situations when Category 1 or 2 teachers are not available.⁴⁷ However, volunteer teachers are not on the payroll of the government, they are hired for the entire academic year, and their salaries are paid using school capitation grants, SMOEs, and county development funds. Available data shows that, of approximately 50,000 education staff in 10 states, only 30,000 are on the payroll. Even the salary received by trained teachers may not be sufficient. In 2017, public school teachers' salaries had not been revised for a decade, nor their value in real terms considering significant inflation.⁴⁸

A Southern Sudan teachers' Professional Code of Conduct was published in 2008, followed by the South Sudan Code of Conduct for Emergency Situations in 2012.⁴⁹ These two codes are complementary and explicitly lay out the responsibilities of teachers during peace as well as during emergency situations such as those produced by war. They aim to improve teachers' time-on-task of all types. According to this legislation, a teacher must be present and on time for class; teacher absences should be authorised and communicated to learners in advance; and teachers must be prepared to teach and not while under the influence of alcohol or drugs in class.⁵⁰

The MoGEI, however, lacks a dedicated teacher administrative structure to coordinate teacher recruitment and support teachers' professional development.⁵¹ Teacher transfers are allowed between and within counties but are difficult to enforce due to lack of financial resources to cover incentives, transportation, and accommodation for teachers. Lack of funding has also shifted a large section of teacher recruitment away from the MoGEI towards schools.

Financing for teacher recruitment has been scarce in recent years. Consequently, schools cannot recruit permanent teachers on a yearly basis and instead, fill gaps using volunteers and part-time staff, funded by capitation grants or direct contributions from parents. Some states, such as Central Equatoria, have used local state revenues to support teacher wages,⁵² however delayed payment or non-payment of teacher salaries remains a major issue.⁵³ Salaries to both officials and teachers are not regularly paid and have lost value due to hyperinflation.⁵⁴ The delay or non-payment of salaries has led to decreased numbers of teachers.⁵⁵ Funding from external sources has also experienced delay, caused by cumbersome bureaucratic processes.⁵⁶

To address this challenge, the European Union-funded IMPACT programme provides an additional incentive payment of US\$40 to complement primary teachers' low income. The EUR32 million initiative spans 10 states of the country and specifically seeks to help improve primary school teachers' attendance and the quality of education service delivery in the context of ongoing ethnic tension.⁵⁷ The programme officially began in 2017 and was planned to last 36 months. A biometric Human Resource Information System (HRIS) has also been set up to register, process and monitor teachers and their pay.⁵⁸

The 2018/19 budget included central government transfers for incentives to secondary, pre-primary, vocational, and teacher training teachers. It assumed that IMPACT would continue to provide incentives for primary school teachers.⁵⁹ The GESP II (2017–2022) prioritizes payment of teacher incentive as a means of improving the quality of education and includes pre-service and in-service teacher training as areas of priority.

Section 3: Research design and methodology

3.1. Teacher absenteeism: A multidimensional concept

Policy makers and researchers have traditionally recognized one form of teacher absenteeism: absence of the teacher from school. Accordingly, in the past two decades, numerous programmes have been implemented globally to increase teacher school attendance as a means of improving student learning.⁶⁰

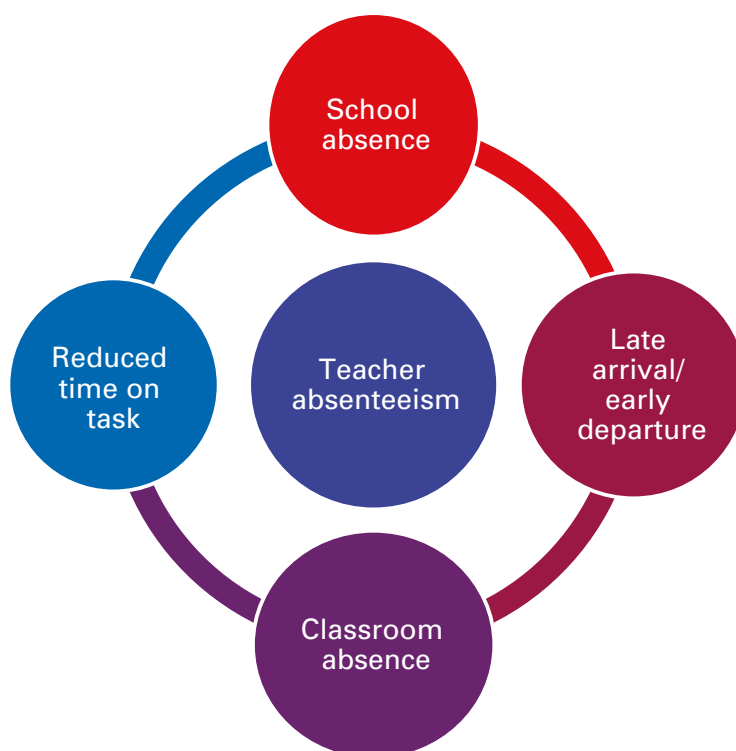
Several interventions have been found to be successful (especially when they couple monitoring systems with rewards).⁶¹ However, few studies have so far established an association between increased teacher school attendance and student achievement.⁶² This is because teacher attendance in school does not necessarily mean teachers are actually in the classroom teaching for the duration they planned to.⁶³ Consequently, the relationship between teacher school attendance, motivation to teach, and time on task needs to be further unpacked in order to better understand learning mechanisms and outcomes.

While the Time to Teach study does not focus explicitly on learning outcomes, in defining teacher absenteeism the research team relied on the assumption that in order for learning to occur, a number of minimal conditions relating to the role of teachers in the learning process, need to be fulfilled. Specifically, teachers must be in school, in the classroom, and actively teaching. This led to the development of a multi-dimensional concept for teacher absenteeism (*see Figure 8*). The concept is in line with the contemporary understanding of absenteeism that looks beyond school absence⁶⁴ and recognizes four distinct forms of teacher absence:

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

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

Figure 3: The multi-dimensional concept of teacher absenteeism



3.2. Understanding teacher absenteeism from a system's perspective

The determinants of teacher absenteeism are likely to be located at various levels of the education system. A systemic analytical framework is therefore needed to first understand how factors within the education system combine to force teachers to be absent in various way and second, which policies can holistically address chronic teacher absence.

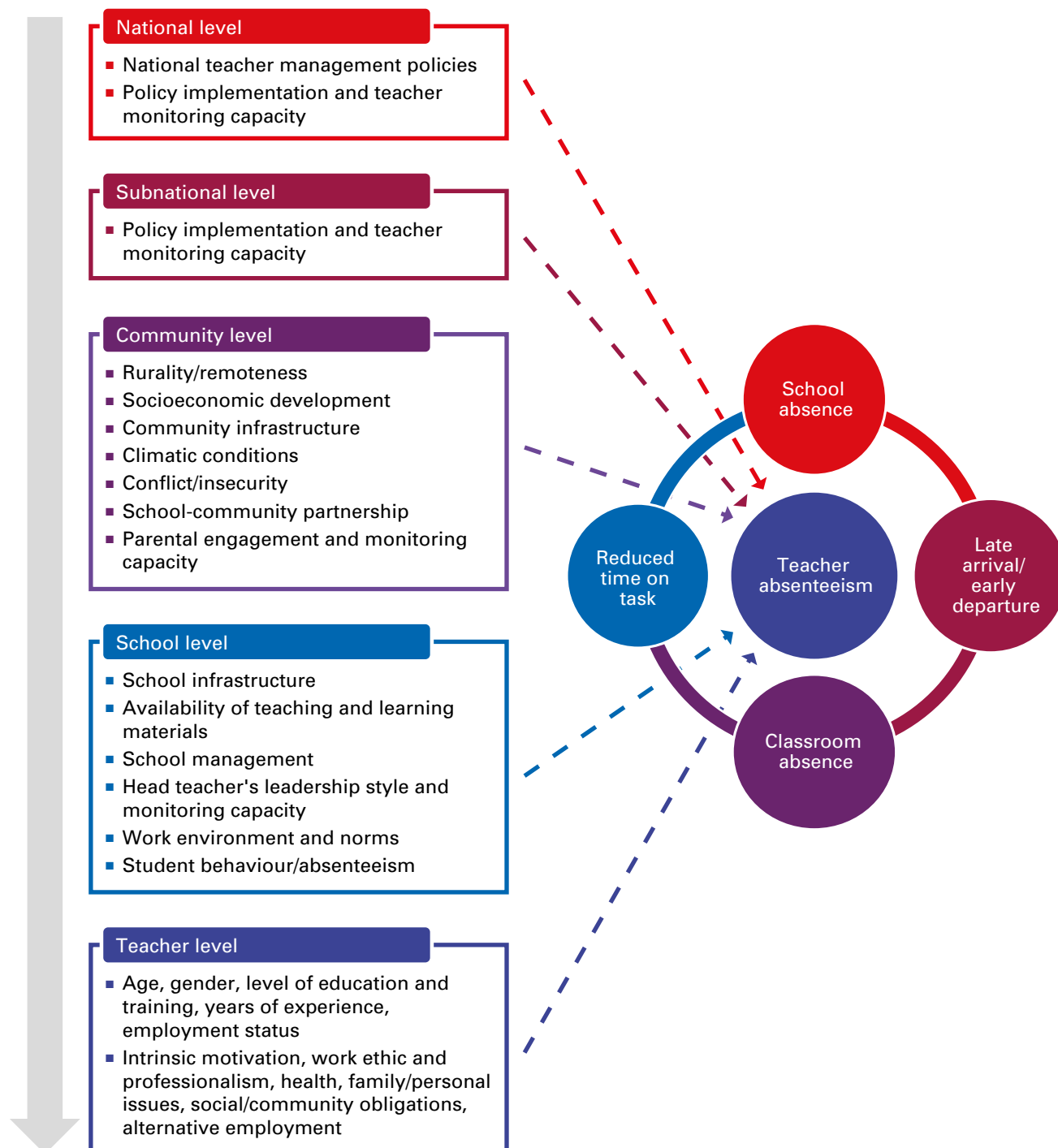
Based on a review of existing conceptual models of general employee absenteeism and the literature on teacher absenteeism in particular, Guerrero et al. (2012, 2013)⁶⁵ suggested three sets of factors affecting teacher attendance:

- (i) teacher-level factors;
- (ii) school-level factors; and
- (iii) community-level factors.

Their model considered two groups of teacher-level variables: teachers' demographic factors, such as age, gender, and level of education; and teachers' school-related factors such as job satisfaction, opportunities for professional development, and work environment. School-level variables included organizational factors within the school, such as work norms, the head teacher's leadership style, and teachers' administrative workload. Finally, community-level variables included remoteness, level of prosperity, and school-community partnerships.

The Time to Teach project adopts Guerrero et al.'s (2012, 2013) explanatory model with an important modification – adding two further groups of variables (see Figure 4). 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 4: The TTT explanatory model



Source: Adaptation of the work of Guerrero et al. (2012); What works to improve teacher attendance in developing countries? A systematic review.⁶⁰

3.3. Study implementation

The Time to Teach study in South Sudan was implemented in consultation with the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) and involved three stages.

Figure 5: Stages of implementation



3.3.1. Sampling and instrument development

Following a series of consultation meetings with national partners in Juba, the research team developed a sampling strategy and designed the instruments for primary data collection. School and respondent selection involved a combination of purposive, quota, and random sampling techniques.

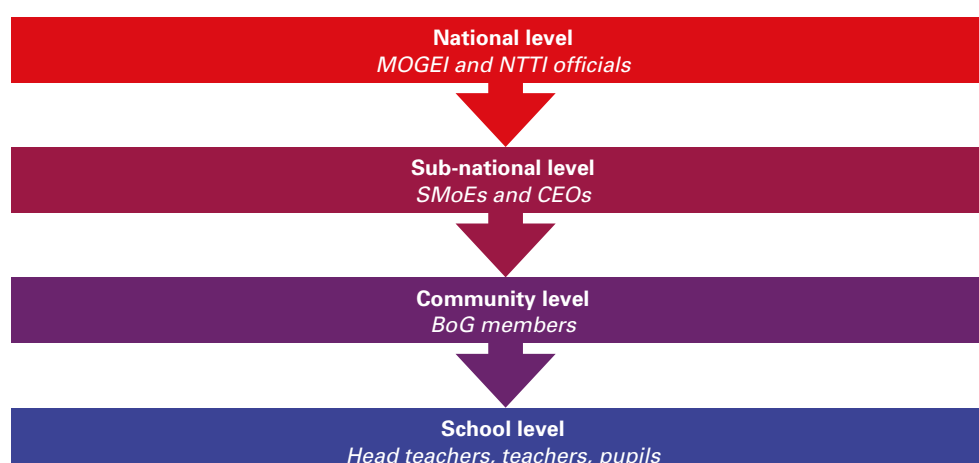
School selection was based on three criteria: location, rurality, and governance. Twenty schools were selected across the 10 states of South Sudan. The school sample includes a combination of rural and urban schools; and a mix of public and private (including faith-based) schools. The selected schools were assured complete confidentiality, so their names are not mentioned in this report.

Table 1: Time to Teach school sample in South Sudan

State	Number of Schools	Description
Upper Nile	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rural public ■ Urban private faith-based
Jonglei	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rural public ■ Urban public
Unity	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rural public ■ Urban public
Warrap	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rural public ■ Urban public
Northern Bahr el Ghazal	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Urban public
Western Bahr el Ghazal	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rural private faith-based ■ Urban public
Lakes	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Urban public ■ Rural private faith-based
Western Equatoria	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Urban public ■ Rural private faith-based
Central Equatoria	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rural private faith-based ■ Urban public ■ Urban private
Eastern Equatoria	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rural private faith-based ■ Urban public
Total number of schools = 20		

At the national level, the study targeted MOGEI officials whose portfolio was relevant to primary education. Subnational respondents included both director-level and senior technical staff. Community respondents had an intimate knowledge of the selected schools and school staff, and in most cases served on the schools' BoGs. In each sampled school, the study targeted the head teacher (or in his/her absence, the deputy head teacher), three of the serving teachers, and pupils. Teachers were selected based on their individual characteristics specifically: age, gender, employment status, and years of experience. The goal of diversifying the teacher sample was to capture a wide range of unique teacher experiences related to absence, shaped not only by teachers' contextual circumstances, but also by their individual traits. Pupil selection was based on age and gender to the extent possible.

Figure 6: Study participants by level of analysis



To facilitate data collection, the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti team designed a range of qualitative and quantitative tools in consultation with the South Sudan country team, including five in-depth interview (IDI) guides, one focus group discussions (FGD) guide, and a pen-and-paper survey. The team visited two pilot schools in Central Equatoria to test the validity and reliability of these instruments.

These tools were used for each respondent group to reflect the participants' expert knowledge and unique perspective, and some were also adapted to each type of school. The pen-and-paper survey was administered to all teachers serving in the sampled primary schools who were present on the day of the visit, including those who participated in IDIs, to supplement and triangulate with teacher interview data.ⁱⁱⁱ Finally, an observation tool was designed to record enumerators' field observations on school and classroom infrastructure, teacher–student interaction, and teacher working relations during their visit to the sampled schools. The enumerators spoke Azande, Bari, Arabic, Shiluk, Nuer, Dinka, English, Toposa during data collection to accommodate various respondents.

Data collection tools were shared with MOGEI for feedback and review and were refined accordingly. Tools were then translated from English to Arabic and back translated into English to ensure accuracy and consistency. The Innocenti team sought and received research ethics approval to use the Time to Teach instruments and fieldwork protocols from the Health Media Lab (HML) and the Institutional Review Board of the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Research.⁶⁶

All the data collection tools for the study administered in South Sudan can be found on the Time to Teach website.^{iv} Table 2 summarizes the number of study participants in South Sudan and specifies the data collection tool administered to each respondent group.

Table 2: Number of study participants in South Sudan

Respondent type (data collection method)	Number of respondents
Head teachers (IDIs)	20
Teachers (IDIs)	60
Teachers (pen-and-paper survey)	200 (including those who took part in the interview)
Pupils (FGDs)	133
Community representatives (IDIs)	20
County education officers (IDIs)	9
State level respondents (IDIs)	10
National level respondents (IDIs)	6
Total number of respondents	398

iii The teacher survey was self-administered.

iv Time to Teach: <https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/time-to-teach/>

3.3.2. Fieldwork preparation and data collection

A training of trainers took place at the UNICEF ESARO offices in Nairobi, Kenya, on 26 and 27 June 2018. The training was provided by UNICEF Innocenti and involved two team leads for South Sudan. It provided a comprehensive overview of the Time to Teach study, as well as its objectives, conceptual framework, methodology, sampling criteria, fieldwork protocols and potential risks. Following the training of trainers, the team leader provided training to enumerators and on 20 July 2018, proceeded to pre-test the data collection tools to assess the duration and flow of instrument administration and the respondents' cognitive understanding of questions and key concepts.

The data collection team was deployed to the eight sampled study counties on 10 September 2018. The team comprised of four moderators as well four assistant moderators (i.e., a moderator and an assistant moderator per region). Also deployed to the field on diverse dates was the technical project team. Each team was allocated two days per school to undertake interviews with teachers, community leaders, FGDs with pupils, and to conduct an observation in each school.

The first phase of the data collection started on 11 August and ended on 25 August 2018. The second phase of data collection started on 2 October and stopped on 26 October 2018. During this time, airline operations from Juba were suspended and the data collection stalled. The data collection was resumed between the 10 and 12 November 2018. Accessibility was poor, particularly in Upper Nile state because of conflict in the area.

3.3.3. Data analysis

Qualitative data

The multi-faceted data generation strategy employed in the South Sudan study facilitated the collection of a large amount of rich qualitative evidence to achieve saturation and triangulation. The 145 IDIs and FGDs conducted with seven categories of education system actors were transcribed word-for-word. To systematically analyse and interpret this data, the research team undertook thematic content analysis using a deductively derived codebook followed by inductive categorising of themes.⁶⁷ Coding was done manually. Analysts organised the data into distinct themes and employed frequency analyses and interpretative methods.

Quantitative data

The 200 pen-to-paper teacher surveys from the 20 schools were cleaned and compiled. Information that could identify participants was removed. Tests were run to correlate teachers' responses with qualitative findings to compare responses and to identify diversions or similarities. The main aim of the quantitative data analysis was to enrich the IDI and FGD data and to provide further insights across the 20 selected schools, while highlighting variations between regions and school types.

3.4. Limitations and challenges

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

3.4.1. Response bias

Enumerators were trained to communicate the objectives of the study in a calm manner and to clarify any misconceptions regarding implications of voluntary participation. Enumerators also highlighted the principles of anonymity and confidentiality underpinning data collection and usage, stressing that participants had the right to revoke consent and demand their testimonies be disregarded and destroyed. Response bias may have been a challenge, as absenteeism is a taboo subject and, in some contexts, participants may have perceived the study as inquisitive or potentially threatening to their employment status. It is therefore unclear how truthfully teachers responded to questions around the nature and frequency of their absences and the role of the head teacher in providing leadership and instructional support, due to concerns that their responses may affect performance evaluations. Under these conditions, three types of response bias seem likely: (1) selective memory, i.e., remembering or not remembering experiences or events; (2) telescoping, i.e., recalling events that occurred at one time as if they occurred at another time; and (3) downplaying, i.e., representing outcomes or events as less significant than is suggested from other data. These potential limitations have been taken into consideration when interpreting data. Systematic data triangulation was also undertaken to ensure the reliability of reported findings.

3.4.2. Selection bias

Selection bias may have also been an issue. Not all schools included through the initial sampling were interviewed. Five schools had to be replaced in Unity, Upper Nile and Warrap where conflict was ongoing at the time of the data collection. Some schools were destroyed or were unreachable, given the conflict situation.

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

3.4.3. Representativeness of survey data

Finally, the research team recognizes that due to the small size of the TTT study (N=200) it is difficult to draw statistically significant conclusions, make generalizable claims, and ensure the internal and external validity of quantitative findings. The TTT survey data can only provide a snapshot of issues surrounding teacher absenteeism in selected schools rather than a comprehensive view of the situation across all schools in Kenya. For this reason, most findings reported in subsequent chapters depend on the systematic analysis of qualitative data for which saturation has been achieved.

Section 4: Findings and analysis

4.1. A snapshot of teacher absenteeism determinants in South Sudan

As the sample of teachers for this study were drawn from purposively selected schools, they are not representative of the entire primary teaching force in South Sudan and therefore, the findings in this section cannot be generalized beyond the sample itself. These findings, however, demonstrate trends that arose from the 198 valid survey responses from teachers across the 20 schools.

The survey found that more than half of teachers (53 per cent) experienced a form of absence once a week or more. This is higher for female teachers than for male teachers (75 per cent and 43 per cent respectively) and for teachers surveyed in public schools compared to those in private schools (60 per cent and 38 per cent respectively).

The most common form of regular absence, reported by teachers as occurring at least weekly, was loss of planned teaching time in the classroom (31 per cent) and not being present in school (30 per cent). One in four teachers also reported regularly arriving late or leaving early for school and missing class although they were present at school.

Figure 16 presents a breakdown of these findings. It shows a pronounced gender difference in regular absence, with significantly more female teachers reporting regular absence from school as well as loss of teaching time in the classroom.

Compared to public school teachers, private school teachers reported more regular absences from school and from the classroom and a loss of teaching time in the classroom. Interviews suggest that this is likely due to more reliable salary payments as well as stronger accountability. These will be discussed further in this chapter.

Surveyed teachers were also asked to identify the top reasons for the different forms of teaching time loss they had experienced. The five most frequently reported reasons for each form of teaching time loss are presented in Figures 7–11 below.

The most common reasons teachers reported kept them away from school were lack of pay (49 per cent of teachers reported this as a top reason), family responsibilities (45 per cent), health (44 per cent), lack of security (35 per cent) and weather (28 per cent).

Asked about the reasons for arriving late or leaving early from school, teachers most frequently nominated health and family reasons (both reported by 39 per cent of teachers), followed by weather (36 per cent), distance to school (33 per cent) and lack of security (27 per cent).

The most frequently reported reason for being absent from class when at school was for administrative responsibilities (64 per cent) followed by official school business (45 per cent), health (45 per cent), weather (30 per cent) and lack of security (23 per cent).

In class, the most common reason for less teaching duration than teachers had planned was lack of teaching materials/aids required to teach the class (56 per cent), health (43 per cent), pupils misbehaving (41 per cent), being distracted by family/personal problems (32 per cent), and weather (31 per cent).

Figure 7: Teachers experiencing different types of absences once a week or more

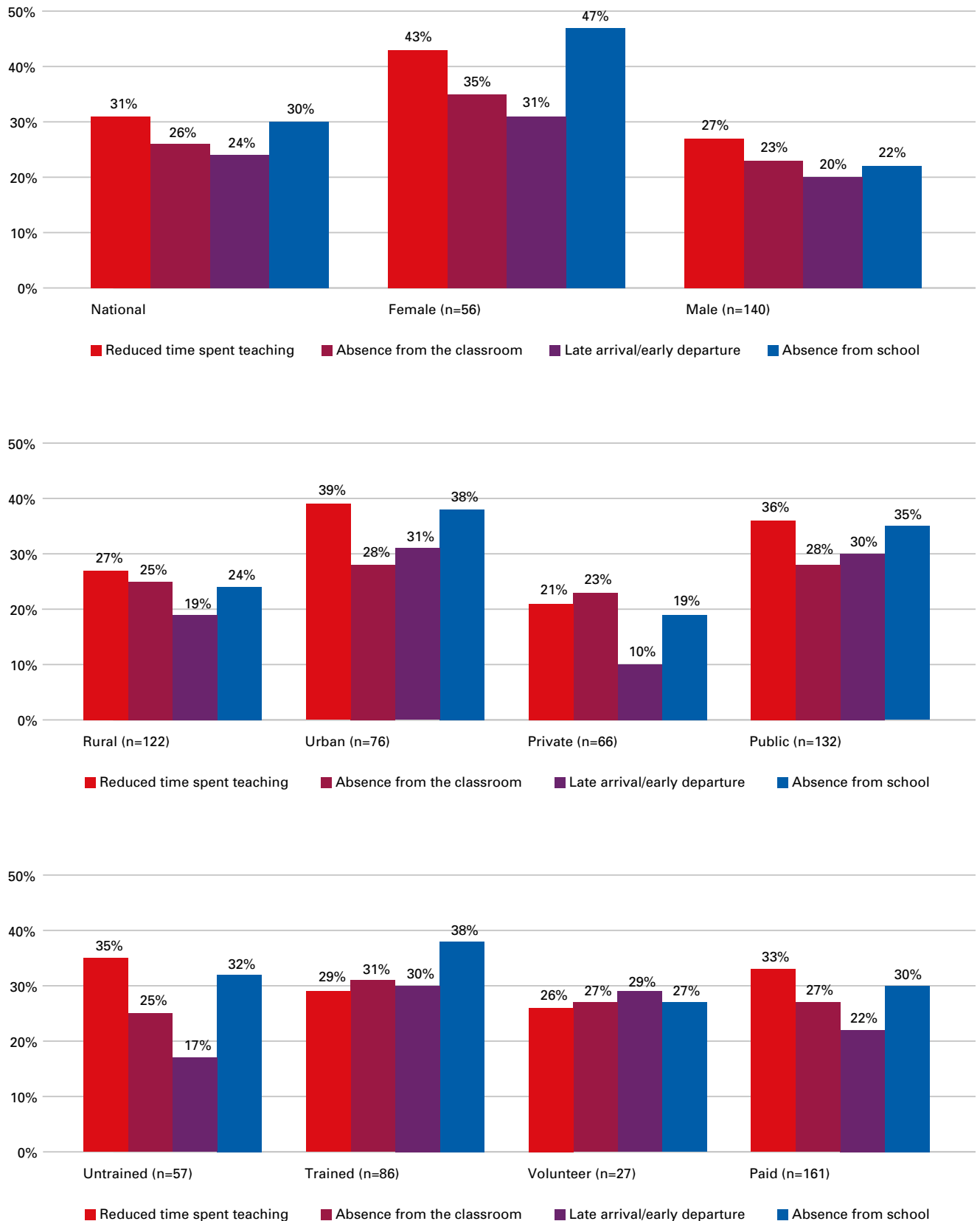


Figure 8: Top three reasons for being absent from school (percentage of teacher respondents)

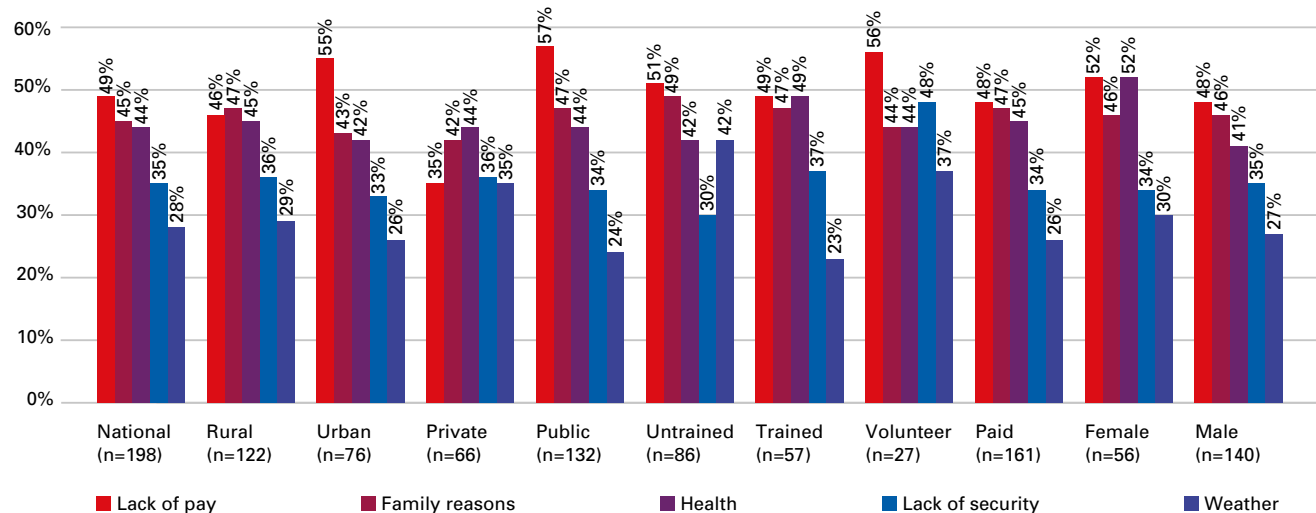


Figure 9: Top three reasons for arriving late / leaving early from school (percentage of teacher respondents)

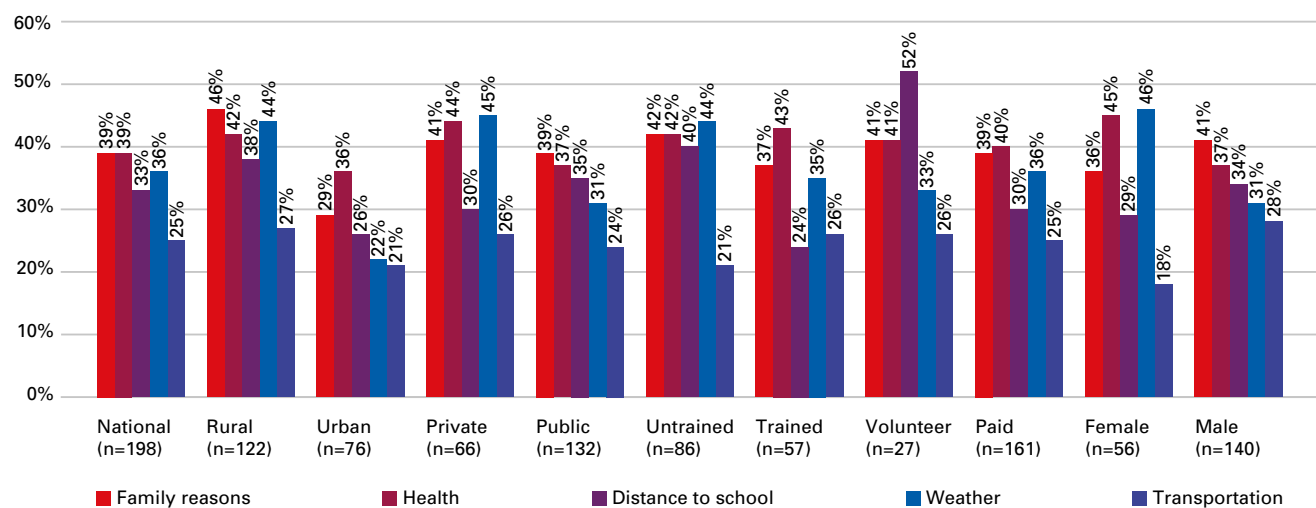


Figure 10: Top three reasons for being absent from class (percentage of teacher respondents)

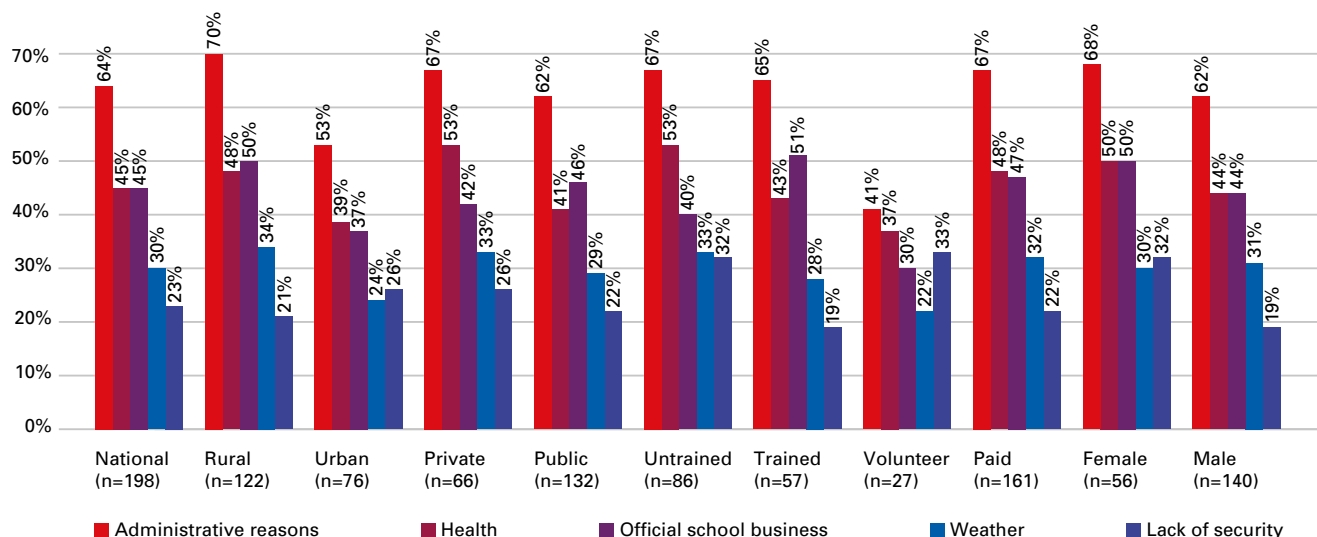
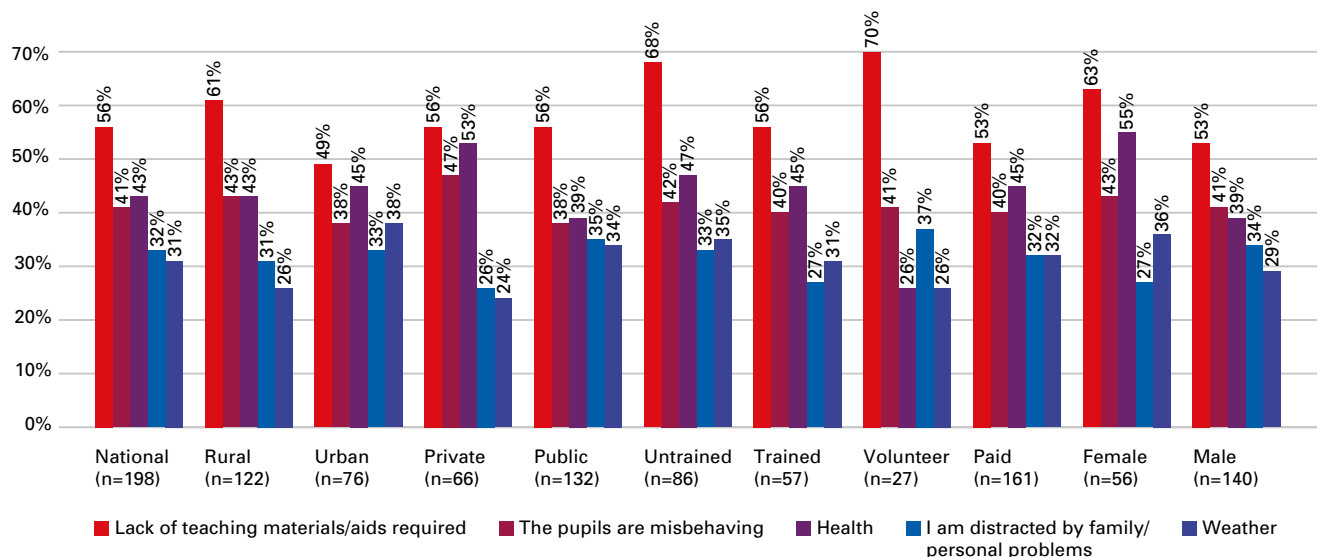


Figure 11: Top three reasons for lost teaching time (percentage of teacher respondents)



4.2. National-level factors associated with absenteeism

The impact of prolonged conflict and hyperinflation has permeated all levels of the education system and through these different pathways, contributed to teacher time loss. Teachers saw the value of their already limited salary drop, despite increases in the government salary scale. Many have had to seek other income sources to secure their livelihood, including 32 per cent of teachers surveyed in this study. Hunger and sickness have affected teachers, students, and their families and school buildings, housing, and roads have been destroyed.

As the Government of South Sudan continues to rebuild the country's education system, securing a livelihood is front of mind among those interviewed for this study. Teacher remuneration challenges, particularly insufficient and delayed payment of salary, was the most frequently raised topic in relation to the teaching context and teacher absence. The impact of these challenges was felt on other aspects of teaching work and reported by all groups of interviewees.

National-level initiatives that had broad awareness among interviewees were largely donor-funded, and mainly the EU-IMPACT incentives. Several interviewees credited the national government for their role in cooperating with donors on these types of programmes including, for example, school feeding and distribution of textbooks. Teachers otherwise reported being largely unaware of national measures implemented at the national level to improve their attendance and motivation.

Interviewees made a distinction between policies on paper and their implementation. Central government representatives raised policy implementation as a challenge. Teachers too were acutely aware of this implementation gap issue. Some teachers contrasted the implementation of donor-supported programmes which they could see occur, against what they did not see happen from the central government such as timely salary payments, new schools being built, housing support, training opportunities, or visits.

National-level factors influencing teacher absence in South Sudan based on survey and interview findings are presented around four themes: teacher employment; remuneration; external support; and national policy.

4.2.1. Teacher recruitment and employment

In the context of the economic crisis and displacement driven by internal conflict, respondents complained about not being able to retain teachers. "Professional teachers", as respondents referred to those who held teaching qualifications, were driven away by low pay and left to find other employment. The poor employment conditions also made recruitment of new teachers more difficult. Furthermore, the requirement of English as the language of instruction created a further challenge, with many more comfortable with Arabic or a local language.

In response, schools filled vacancies with largely untrained volunteer teachers. Among teachers surveyed for this study, 14 per cent were volunteers and almost all of them had not received teacher training. These volunteers were not on the government's payroll, and were largely supported by community contributions, although this was inconsistently reported by schools. Schools' reduced ability to collect fees from parents during the economic crisis also reduced their ability to employ volunteers.

Head teachers and local officials spoke of the challenges in employing volunteer teachers. They come to school sporadically, leaving whenever they have an opportunity to seek additional or alternative sources of income. Pupils and even some volunteer teachers themselves corroborated this information.

"Many teachers of us are volunteer. They don't have salary and as you know, now many of us are the one who do go and search for something for his/ her family so that is the only thing that make teachers to be absent."

– Teacher, rural public school, Unity

“If a teacher fails to come, it maybe because of the little pay. I personally cannot quarrel with them because most of them are volunteers with low pay. So, we only beg them because of our situation.”

– Community representative, semi-rural private faith-based school, Central Equatoria

“...Our teachers here are suffering my boy; they are not paid their salaries on time, especially our brothers from the government school, so I think they are not motivated. Also, our brothers in the private schools are getting very small salary although it comes on time but still, I feel that is not enough to motivate them to take their job seriously.”

– Community Representative, Urban Private School, Comboni

Accountability was also challenged by the reality of minimal pay and poor employment conditions faced by volunteer teachers. School community representatives reported that even if they could monitor volunteer teachers' attendance, they were not able to hold volunteer teachers accountable for their behaviour.

4.2.2. Teacher remuneration and incentives

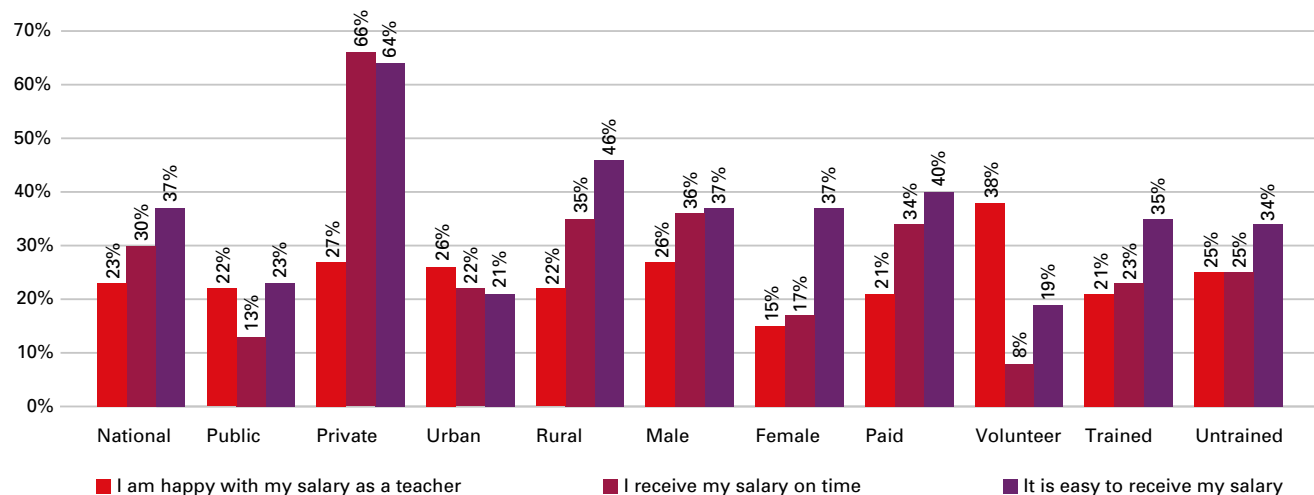
Time and again, issues around level and timeliness of teacher salary were raised by study participants as the reasons behind teaching time loss. As shown in Figure 8 almost half of the teachers surveyed nominated lack of pay as one of the top reasons that they missed school. Further, one in four teachers also identified lack of pay as a top reason they arrived late or left early from school. Although some interviewees noted that teachers' salaries had increased over the years, their value had also decreased due to the country's historic levels of inflation. Teacher survey results showed 77 per cent were not happy with their salary. Those interviewed detailed how their salary was not sufficient to cover theirs and their families' basic needs. Several interviewees also noted the limited opportunities for promotion and progression along the salary grades.

Another issue related to salaries is delayed payment, especially for public school teachers. It was common to find teachers (who participated in the survey) who had not been paid for three or four months. In some cases, teachers had not been paid for even longer and up to one year. Survey results found only 30 per cent of teachers indicated they were receiving their salaries on time.

Private school teachers, however, reported receiving more timely payments than public school teachers (66 per cent and 13 per cent respectively). Private school teachers also reported finding it easier to receive their salary (64 per cent agreed with this statement, compared to 23 per cent among public school teachers). These were the aspects of teaching salary that were significantly different by school sector. Notably, while the average monthly salary reported by private school teachers was more than three times the average monthly salary reported by public school teachers, the proportion of teachers in private and public schools happy with the amount of pay they received was comparable.

An implication of low teacher salaries is that many end up seeking alternative income sources. Government and community respondents observed that public school teachers did this in all areas. In urban areas they mostly engage in agricultural activities while in urban areas they may tutor, teach in private schools, or work for NGOs. This topic will be further discussed in a later section.

Figure 12: Teachers who agreed with the following statements about their salary



Low and delayed salary payments were also reported to affect attendance by influencing teachers' motivations and morale. Being unhappy with their working conditions reduced teachers' ability to focus on their work, distracted by the need to supplement their salary and lacking in energy from insufficient food intake. Even when they come to school, the time they spend teaching is reduced from this lack of energy and focus. The wider community largely sympathised with the situation facing teachers, acknowledging that these issues justified frequent absences.

The Government's financing challenges affect not only public teachers' salaries, but also those of head teachers. National and subnational education officers are also largely aware of this issue and voiced their concern that lack of pay was one of the biggest challenges facing teachers in South Sudan, demotivating them and directly affect their attendance.

Crucially, although key strategies to improve teachers' attendance include increasing monitoring and accountability, respondents noted that the issue of low and delayed remuneration also weakens these systems. In some private schools, monitoring mechanism appears to work more effectively because teachers who are not present for class do not get paid as a penalty. However, this mechanism cannot be enforced when teachers do not get paid at all.

"Because there is no way we can complain, since the teachers can spend that much without getting money. We could see it is their right because they are not eating in the school. At the end of the month they are not getting money, they just go like that and they could explain the reason why I did not come to school because I have to do other things so that I save myself. So, when you see, it is his rights, what will we do? That is why we are keeping quiet."

– Community representative, urban public school, Warrap

"Even if I write the letter that you are doing well, they will say do I eat this letter? They need money first. They need good pay. These are the motivation factors that teachers at the moment need, not the letter. We only encourage them, as I said before, that we have to help the community. We should first keep the thinking of money aside; this is what I tell them. They listen and they come and now you can see them."

– Head teacher, Rural public school, Western Equatoria

4.2.3. External support

The primary education sector of South Sudan receives considerable support from development partners, including UN agencies, and government and non-government organizations. Interviewees from all levels of the primary education system were aware of these supports, mentioning a number of donors or their programmes by name.

The most frequently mentioned development cooperation initiative in support of primary school teacher attendance was the EU-supported IMPACT initiative, part of an EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. This initiative's core activity is to provide financial incentives for teachers and thus encourage teacher attendance. Many respondents noted that IMPACT was the only initiative they knew of, from any funding source, that supported teacher attendance.

According to many respondents, the introduction of financial incentives through IMPACT had improved teacher attendance by directly increasing their motivation. As some respondents noted, the size of the incentive was significant compared to the small amount teachers would receive as their salary and in some instances, doubling their pay.

In addition to the value of the incentives themselves, respondents attributed the impact of the initiative on strengthening the monitoring of teacher's attendance. The programme independently verified attendances and teachers knew that they would only receive the incentive payment if they attended school or classes. Others also saw a strengthening of accountability mechanisms through the role of school inspectors, who strengthened their attendance monitoring practices and expected teachers to attend school because they knew that lack of salary payment was no longer an insurmountable challenge.

While most interviewees who discussed the IMPACT programme saw that it had led to an increase in teacher attendance, several raised shortcomings. Some noted that the size of the incentive was itself insufficient to make a difference in teachers' livelihood in the context of rising prices. Further, several respondents observed delays in the payment of IMPACT incentives, effectively undoing the positive effect it had previously achieved. Finally, a couple of teachers not receiving the IMPACT incentive stated that they did not know why their school had been deemed ineligible.

In addition to IMPACT, interviewees also spoke of the role development partners had played in the primary education sector. Teachers, government officials and community representatives credited the DFID-funded Girls Education South Sudan for providing school grants, UNICEF for providing teaching and learning materials, the World Food Programme for school feeding and organizations, including World Vision, ADRA, Medair, and Intersos, for providing teacher training.

With regard to school feeding, some respondents raised the potential benefits of including teachers as beneficiaries because some are attending school hungry. Others noted the benefit of the programme on teachers, including by being involved in the preparation of food and through increased student engagement in class.

Development partners have played a substantial role in supporting the primary education sector in South Sudan. As a County Education Office representative from Upper Nile noted: "If the NGOs would not have support, then I think the school may not be operational". The role of development partners includes supporting the development of education policy. Central MoGEI representatives described the heavy involvement of UNESCO, for example, in all stages of policy development, from providing an initial guide and research consultants, to writing and reviewing policy documents.

One issue raised by respondents in relation to the strong presence of donor partners in the country was how they attract teachers away from schools. Many noted working for NGOs provides better and more reliable pay than teaching, and it is frequently cited by respondents as where people go when they leave the teaching profession, particularly in urban areas. Some who remained in teaching also worked for NGOs as an additional source of income, which impacted their attendance at school.

4.2.4. National policy priorities to support teaching

Many interviewees explicitly noted that they did not know of any national policies supporting teachers, as opposed to those funded by NGOs. Capitation grants and training on the new national curriculum were the only specific government initiatives recounted by school-based interviewees. Some respondents, however, credited the government for its role in bringing in and cooperating with development partners to introduce much needed supports to the education sector.

Representatives from MoGEI interviewed for the study outlined the role of the national government as setting the policies in the form of the five-year strategic plans, annual work planning and budgeting, and specific national policies. Key activities raised by interviewees include national teacher registration, support for teacher training colleges and a comprehensive teacher policy. Ministry representatives at the central and state levels noted the challenge of not receiving funding to actually implement these policies.

A number of educational leaders – head teachers and government representatives – stressed the importance of ensuring that funding for teachers in the budget was sufficient. They also stressed the need for a willingness to deliver on policies, and having national representation for teachers' interest, such as a union. These respondents agreed on the importance of making teachers a national priority, ensuring there is political will from the national government to value the role of teachers in building the country's future workforce.

“So, I am saying let the policies makers or decision makers of this country recognise teachers as vital to the progress of this country and they should be placed on top of the priorities of this country. That is by treating them sufficiently, they should be cared for properly, ranging from accommodation, from their conditions of work, from their capacities. They need to be built up to become competent enough to run the quality education on the entire country. If that has not happened, I don't think that South Sudan will be a success because the future of this country lies on teachers being on the pre-school level or primaries and secondary. The progress of this country lies on the teachers so teachers should be given [priority] by the government.”

– State Ministry of Education,
Central Equatoria

4.3. Subnational level determinants of teacher absenteeism

The decentralised governance of primary education in South Sudan involves several structures at the subnational level. These include the State Ministries of Education (I), county education officers, and payam-level officers and supervisors who have direct relationships with schools. As described by a MoGEI representative: “These decentralised education structures, the state, county and the payam, are there to negotiate on issues of education, to assist in the implementation of education and more importantly now, to support monitoring of the implementation process”.

A number of variables that influence how well policies are implemented in practice exist at these local levels. These include, as raised by interviewees: infrastructure; security; cultural acceptance for punitive measures; capacity for monitoring. This section presents interview and survey findings on the role of subnational structures practices in supporting teacher attendance and time on task.

4.3.1. Subnational practices and initiatives

School and community participants in the study described the main form of support they receive from subnational education offices as materials, with chalk and textbooks the most common items they reported receiving from the I through county or payam officers. Some interviewees, both from schools and the subnational offices themselves, reflected that the provision of resources had lessened and in recent times, inspectors or supervisors were only able to provide verbal encouragements and appreciation.

“The work of Ministry of Education here at the state level and the one of the payam I think they are doing the same things. They are providing books, chalks and other things unless what they don’t have in the offices.”

– Teacher, urban public school, Warrap

Part of the role of county and payam offices is to mobilise communities around education, mainly in engaging communities around the importance of schooling to increase enrolment in schools. There were a few reported instances, however, of community mobilisation to focus on encouraging teacher attendance. In a couple of schools, county and payam officers also reportedly volunteered their time to teach in classrooms.

Teachers and head teachers received training at the county level offices. The training programmes themselves were provided by the national MoGEI, State Ministry of Education or NGOs (at times teachers who had participated were unsure of who the provider was). Teachers generally reported valuing the training they received, which included topics such as teaching methods, English language, and life skills. However, training scheduled on school days can have a negative impact on teachers’ attendance at school.

In this study’s survey, teachers reported that official school business was one of the main reasons they missed classes, even though they were already at school (*see Figure 3*). Interviews with teachers and head teachers suggested that training and meetings at the state or county education offices were often behind this, with some teachers reporting that the request to attend could come at short notice, leaving them with little time to organize a replacement teacher or activities for their class. Teachers have reported being away from school for days and up to two weeks at a time to attend training programme,

4.3.2. School inspection visits

The General Education Act (2012) calls for MoGEI to “inspect all schools every term” and “collate all inspection reports from all states and produce a national report on the quality and standards of education in the Republic of South Sudan on annual basis.” The responsibility for these inspections, as described by study interviewees, had been devolved to county and payam offices.

The actual frequency of visits by county and payam education officers, as reported by school and community interviews, varies greatly. Some schools reported seeing an inspector once a week and some once a month, while others said they had not been visited at all in that academic year.

Interviewees, particularly from national, county, and payam education offices, suggested that resourcing constraints were a barrier to meeting school inspection requirements. There were insufficient financial supports for inspectors to regularly visit all schools they were responsible for. The most frequently reported barrier was transportation, but this was followed by other allowances such as for overnight stays and food, considering the long distances they had to travel. Another barrier frequently reported by Ministry officials was a shortage of inspectors themselves to carry out visits.

“In fact, most of the inspectors in rural areas are not observing or doing their work, because there is no motivation, like allowances. And those in the urban areas, I have four inspectors, but because they are not committed, some fled back to POCs and there was only one left, and even the one who is left is not showing these days.”

– County education official, Unity

4.3.3. Roles and accountability relationships

The collection of interviews with government officials, and community and school representatives intimated that beyond the challenges of conducting school visits, there was not a great deal of clarity around what should be achieved during and following inspections. There were different interpretations from different stakeholders on the role of inspectors and subnational offices, especially in maintaining accountability around teacher attendance and time on task.

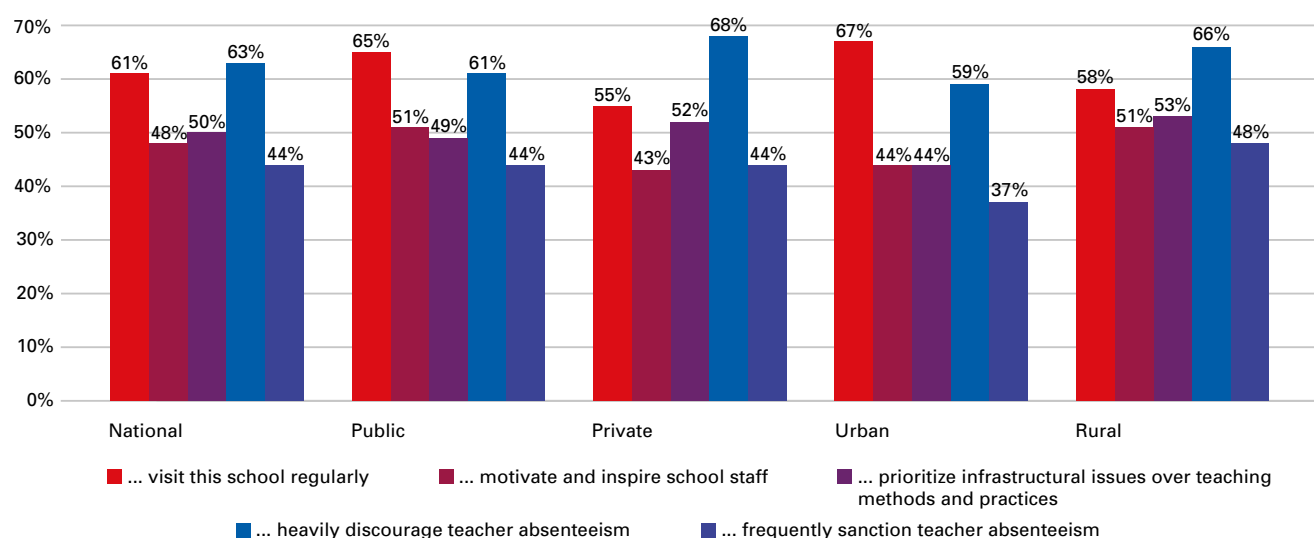
In describing visits by school inspectors, many teachers and head teachers affirmed that when these visits did occur, the inspector checked teacher attendance, which may consist of checking the attendance book. Some reported that inspectors would speak with teachers about the importance of regular attendance, others said that inspectors would speak to head teachers about other teachers' attendance.

A few community representatives and head teachers also noted instances where parents or community members were able to raise concerns over teacher absences to county education offices. Teachers were aware that in turn, inspectors reported to the Ministry through payam, county, then state offices.

When there were issues with chronic or significant absences, there were varying reports on what inspectors and county education offices should and could do. The widespread issues with delayed salary payments to government teachers meant that officials were not able to use financial levers. Instead, some interviewees spoke of inspectors providing verbal encouragements to attend school, some reported verbal warnings, followed by written warnings. A couple of teachers spoke of inspectors withholding salaries and replacing head teachers. Many noted that inspectors did not sanction chronic absentees. And while some head teachers said they relied on county inspectors to be able to apply sanctions to the most problematic teachers, a MoGEL interviewer noted that supporting head teachers in sanctioning absenteeism was not the role of supervisors and inspectors.

This variation was, to some extent, reflected in the survey. Just over 60 per cent of teachers surveyed reported that inspectors visited the school regularly (*see Figure 6*). However, fewer than half of teachers surveyed reported that inspectors motivated and inspired school staff. Similarly, while two-thirds of teachers said that school inspectors heavily discouraged teacher absenteeism, only 44 per cent reported that inspectors frequently sanctioned absenteeism. There was little variation to this pattern by school location or governance type. Surveyed teachers who reported that school inspectors motivated and inspired school staff and visited their school regularly, were also less likely to report regular absences from school.

Figure 13: Teachers who agreed with the following statements about school inspectors



4.4. Community-level factors associated with absenteeism

Teachers and schools are part of communities, and previous studies have identified several factors relating to the characteristics of those communities that influence teacher attendance. This section discusses the community-level factors of teacher attendance in South Sudan as highlighted by participants in this study. It is set around four themes: remoteness, climate conditions and infrastructure; conflict and insecurity; and community engagement.

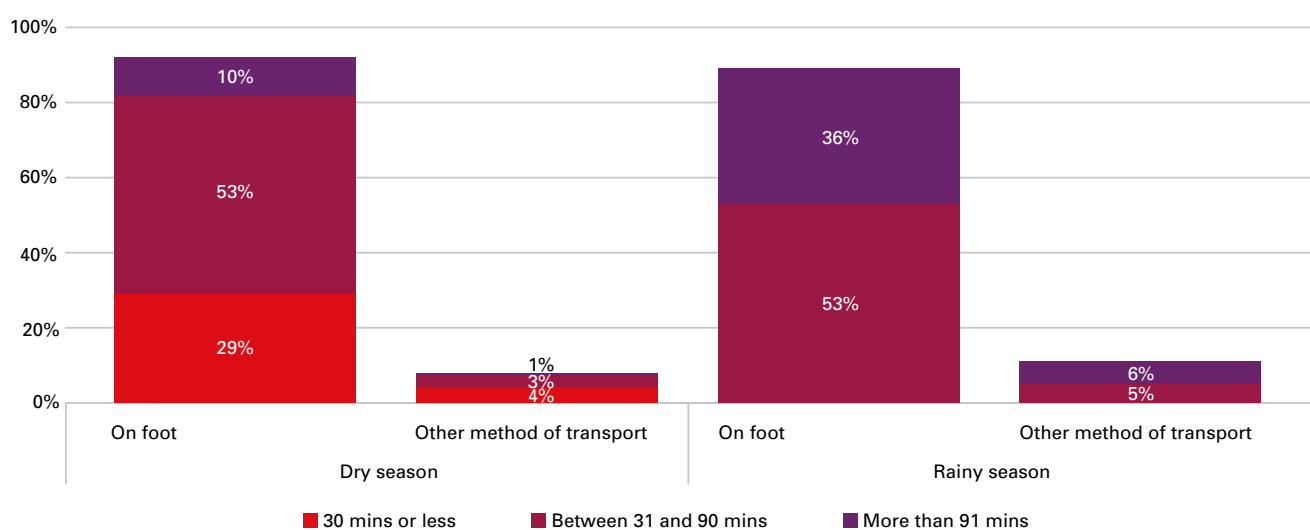
4.4.1. Remoteness, climate, and community infrastructure

The weather, the distance from school, and insufficient community infrastructure were individually credited as barriers to teacher attendance. As illustrated in Figures 8–11, teachers nominated the weather as one of the top reasons for all forms of absences, while distance to school was separately named as a key reason for arriving late or leaving early from school. Furthermore, one in four surveyed teachers nominated transportation as a key reason for not attending school and for arriving late or leaving early.

Interviews with stakeholders, however, found that it was the interaction of factors that tended to create the most cited insurmountable challenges. For example, heavy rains during the wet season caused rivers to flood into roads, which prevented teachers (who had long distances to travel to school by foot) from coming to school.

When distance to school was raised as a contributor to absences, respondents were referring to walking distance. Public transportation options are non-existent in most parts of South Sudan. More than 80 per cent of teachers surveyed travel to school by foot. Only one in five reported regularly using a different mode of transport, and almost all of those were private transportation (cars, motorcycles, or bicycles). As Figure 14 illustrates, the rainy season significantly increases travel time for teachers, especially those without any other method of transportation. While only 11 per cent of teachers took more than 1.5 hours to travel to school during the dry season, 42 per cent of teachers took this long to get to school in the rainy season.

Figure 14: Teachers' mode of transport and travel time to school, by season



Many interviewees noted that support for transportation to school would benefit teacher attendance and assist in overcoming the challenge of getting to school. They reported that teachers could not afford to rent *boda boda* (motorcycle taxi), nor purchase petrol for their own motorcycle or fix their bicycles.

With the quality of roads and lack of public transport in mind, some interviewees proposed the provision of teacher housing as a solution. Only a few schools visited had teacher housing available, and teachers in these schools noted that distance and transportation did not present an issue in their attendance. One school had teacher housing, but it was abandoned after being destroyed during the 2016 conflict.

On the issue of weather, heavy rain was also cited as a factor in reducing the time teachers spent teaching. In some schools, this was due to the loud noise from rain falling on iron sheet roofs. Other schools did not have classrooms with a permanent roof or walls, making teaching time susceptible to the impact of not only rain but also wind and very cold or hot days.

4.4.2. Conflict, insecurity, and displacement

At the time of data collection, the extent to which conflict had pervaded the education system varied among states. The security situation in some states had improved while others were still experiencing conflict. Between a quarter and a third of teachers surveyed across the 10 states reported a lack of security among their main reasons for being absent from school, arriving late or leaving early, and being absent from class (see Figures 7–11).

The longer-term impact of conflict was still felt, even in areas not experiencing active conflict. Some teachers and students were travelling to and from school from Protection of Civilian (POC) sites while some were themselves, or had family, still living in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. The difficulties travelling to and from these sites could contribute to absences from school. Respondents also noted that the long-term trauma from the conflict was particularly felt by children, and negatively impacted their ability to learn.

4.4.3. Engagement and monitoring capacity

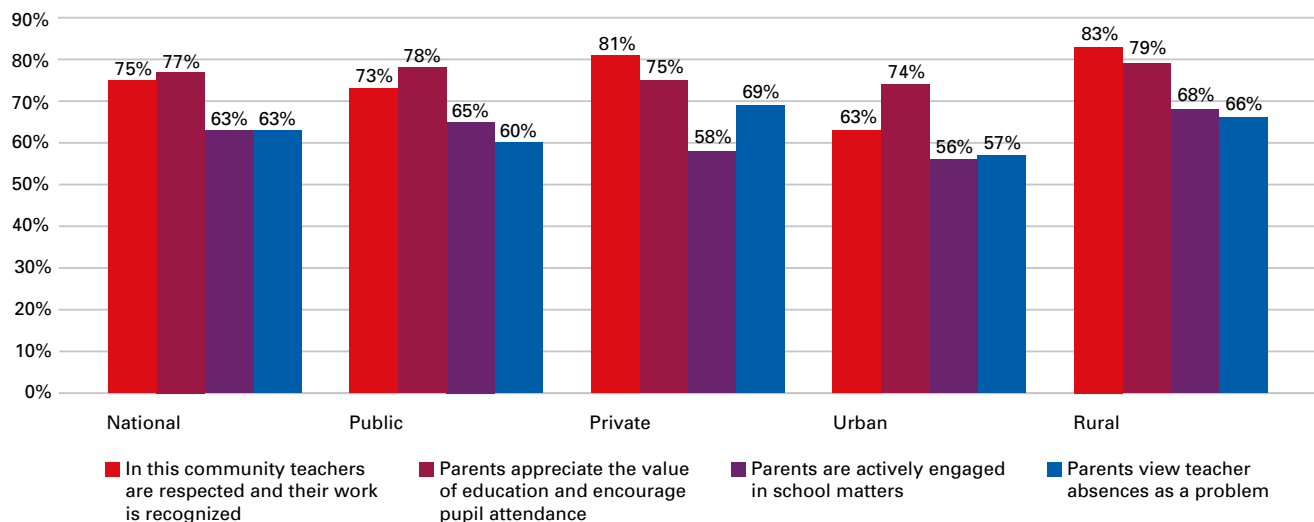
School interviews provided a range of examples on the different ways parents and communities have contributed to and mobilized resources for their local teachers and schools. These include providing food items and meals to teachers, providing land for teacher housing, cash gifts, and supplying labour and materials to improve school infrastructure. However, in multiple instances, head teachers and community representatives remarked that while these types of supports had occurred, they had stopped as the community was themselves going through economic hardship.

In general, according to various respondents, parents in South Sudan consider education as valuable and they show respect for teachers. However, their reported capacity for, and demonstrated engagement in, school affairs was mixed. This is supported by survey results where 77 per cent of teachers agreed that parents appreciated the value of education and encouraged pupil attendance, but only 63 per cent reported that parents were actively engaged in school matters (see Figure 15). Teachers who more strongly agreed with statements about community views on education and parent engagement were also less likely to report experiencing regular absences (see Table 3).

“The local community ... values education as something so vital to them, because as the whole world is progressing towards technology, they realise that they are behind. So, they only need to be given some directives and some values to add to their values.”

– Head teacher, urban private school, Central Equatoria

Figure 15: Teachers who agreed with the following statements about community engagement



According to the GESP, school management committees, and Boards of Governors have the role of raising awareness among parents about the importance of school. In turn, the community is expected to be involved in monitoring teachers and schools.

Interviews with community, school, and local government representatives presented several instances of community monitoring at work in relation to teacher attendance. Parents had either observed teacher absences during a visit to the school, or were informed by their children, and raised the issue with either the head teacher or payam office through the parent-teacher association (PTA). In a couple of cases, the teachers in question were sanctioned. One private school deducted its teacher’s salary, and a county office reshuffled and moved a teacher away. In other instances, head teachers explained the challenges their teachers were facing, such as sickness and low salary in the examples provided, and parents who had raised concerns were sympathetic.

In many other cases, however, interviewees reported little or no engagement from parents and community on the issue of teacher attendance. According to some, low education levels in the community made people reluctant to engage with more educated teachers and school staff. Others noted that parents and community members were facing economic hardship themselves and were unable to contribute materials, time, or attention to schools.

4.5. School-level factors associated with absenteeism

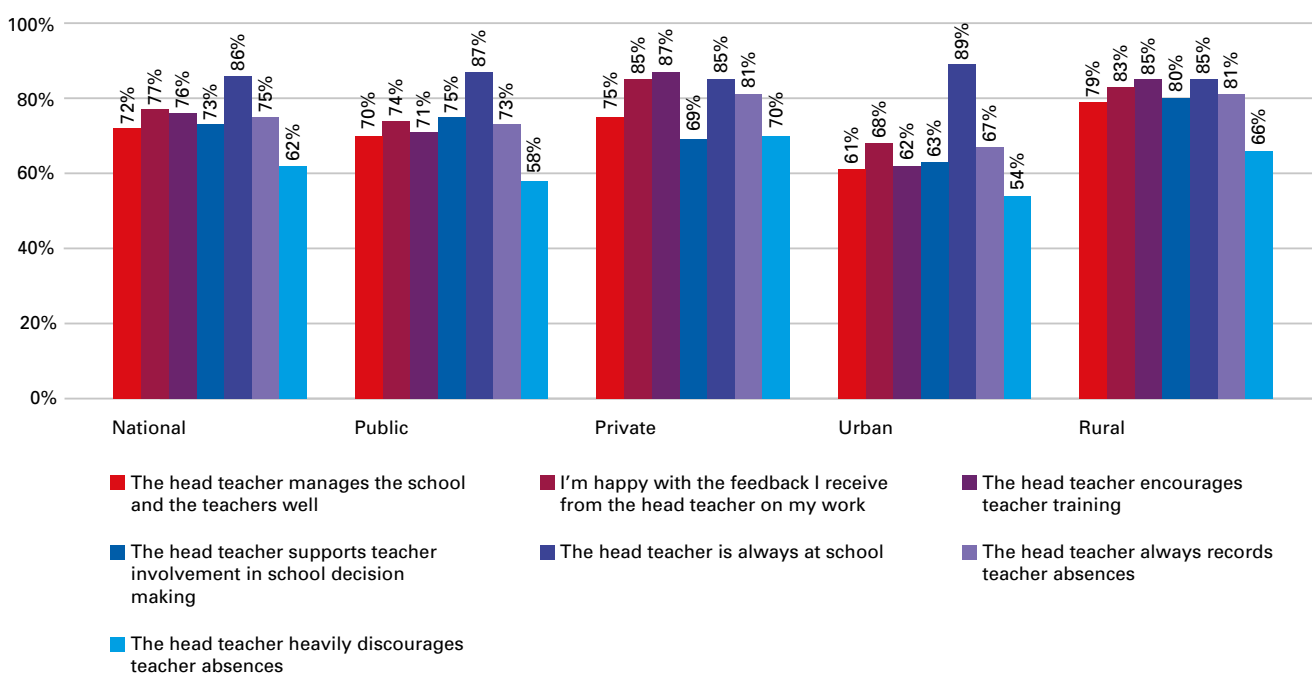
The 20 schools in the sample were purposively sampled to illustrate the diversity of teaching context in the country: between public and private schools (including faith-based), and in rural, semi-rural and urban areas. At the school level, three themes were identified around factors that impact teacher attendance: broader school leadership and management; pupil context and classroom management; and infrastructure and teaching materials.

4.5.1. School leadership and management

Strong school leadership and management can influence teacher practices, including attendance, even in resource-constrained environments. This was found to be so in this study as among the sample of surveyed teachers, those who were felt “the head teacher manages the school and teachers well” and those who were “happy with the feedback [they] receive from the head teacher on [their] work”, were also less likely to experience regular absences (*see Table 3*).

While 86 per cent of teachers reported that their head teacher was always at school, slightly lower proportions reported good leadership practices by these head teachers (*see Figure 16*). For example, only 77 per cent of teachers were happy with the feedback they received from head teachers while 73 per cent felt that head teachers involved teachers in school decision making. This gap was particularly pronounced among teachers in urban areas, despite interviewees being more likely to believe rural schools face greater challenges in school leadership. Compared to private school teachers, those in public schools were also less likely to believe that their head teacher managed their school and teachers well.

Figure 16: Teachers who agree with the following statements about their head teacher



Almost all schools reported some form of teacher attendance monitoring. Three of four teachers surveyed reported that their head teacher always recorded teacher absences. From interviews with school staff, this monitoring most commonly took the form of a daily attendance book where teachers signed in on their arrival to and departure from school. In several schools, additional monitoring steps were taken. There were reported independent verification steps by either the principal, a teacher appointed as school monitor, or a guard at the school gate. In a couple of schools, teachers' lesson attendances were also taken, and in one school this was also verified by students logging teacher attendance in their lesson books for the head teacher to check.

Two-thirds of surveyed teachers agreed that their head teacher "heavily discourages teacher absences". This rate was lower among public school teachers (58 per cent) and teachers in urban areas (54 per cent). In interviews, the most common follow-up to non-attendance was a call from with the head teacher or a conversation in their office the next time the teacher was at school.

With more frequent absences, the teacher likely received a verbal and/or written warning from the head teacher. There were also several reported instances of stronger reprimands for chronic absences, including pay cuts, suspensions, and dismissals. These were largely reported at private schools. In addition to more dependable salary payments therefore, the lower rates of regular absences appeared to have also been driven by this stronger accountability structure. Compared to their public-school counterparts, head teachers at private schools were reported to have greater authority over these forms of staffing decisions at their school. The following two quotes from head teachers illustrate this disparity:

"... Suspending the teacher or sanctioning the teacher or dismissing the teacher, there are so many procedures that can take place... There is [a] rule if a teacher did mistake, maybe I can report it to the Ministry of Education, to the secondary level, to the director of secondary and basic education. There should be a discussion but the teacher cannot be dismissed in the school just [sic]. But for me in [this] primary school, there is no dismissal; it will not happen."

– Head teacher, urban public school, Unity

"Yes, if a teacher is realized to have a lot of problems, like absenting him/self frequently, definitely action is taken on that particular teacher by serving him/her with either [a] warning letter, suspension letter or even dismissal letter by the managing director or the head teacher. This is usually done with a copy [of] the letter sent to the county education office."

– Head teacher, rural private school, Eastern Equatoria

Aside from monitoring and following up on absences, other school leadership and management practices were also reported to influence teacher attendance. How schools manage the impact of teachers' administrative duties on their classroom teaching responsibilities is one example. As demonstrated in Figure 10, this was the most common driver for classroom absences, particularly for paid (non-volunteer) teachers, with two of three teachers nominating administrative responsibilities as a main reason they missed classes even though they were present at school.

Examples of these administrative responsibilities include meetings with a visiting school inspector and supporting the head teacher in planning work to meet government or donor reporting responsibilities. Importantly, there were diverging attitudes towards this type of absence. Some teachers and head teachers did not think delivering administrative duties because they are important to the running of a school should be considered absence. Others did not think administrative duties should take teachers out of class and suggested that better planning and timetabling would prevent this.

Strong school management has the potential of alleviating the impact of teacher absence on student learning. A few teacher interviewees noted that non-teaching academic duties, such as preparing lesson plans and marking assignments, should not interrupt classroom teaching time because they had these activities scheduled for when they were not teaching. Forward planning and timetabling adjustments around teachers' administrative duties and training commitments could allow schools to secure a substitute teacher or allow the class teacher to prepare an appropriate task requiring only minor supervision.

In focus group discussions, some students noted that this was what usually took place when their teacher was absent. For the most part however, students reported that someone else would oversee the class. Many noted that this was often done by volunteers who would not give them work to do but were there mainly to ensure pupils were not misbehaving.

Government respondents noted that many head teachers in South Sudan had not completed primary or secondary education or had not received relevant training. In response, the government had developed initiatives to enhance the capacity of head teachers', including instigating a school leadership and management policy that seeks to train head teachers, deputy head teachers, and senior teachers on school management. It was not clear from the field visits how effective these initiatives have been.

4.5.2. Pupil behaviour and classroom management

The behaviour of pupils was among the main reasons teachers nominated as contributing to losing teaching time in the classroom (*see Figure 11*). Furthermore, teachers who agreed that their pupils were motivated to study, and those saw that their pupils had high educational aspirations, were less likely to be regularly absent from school (*see Table 3*).

Just over 40 per cent of teachers surveyed said their teaching time was sometimes reduced due to pupil misbehaviour. Instead of delivering their planned teaching activities, they spend class time disciplining students. There was little variation in this figure by either school type or teacher characteristics. Some interviews however, linked this challenge to a lack of training, noting that better training of teachers would make them more prepared for, and skilled in, managing classroom behaviour.

Teachers were asked whether pupil absences contributed to their own non-attendance. In the survey, only 16 teachers said their classroom teaching time was reduced by not having enough pupils in class. This was supported by interview findings. A few interviewees did say that when teachers did not expect many pupils to turn up to class, they would lose motivation to attend. However, most teachers and head teachers insisted that no matter how few pupils were in class, those pupils deserved to be taught. Regardless, chronic pupil absences may still impact on the efficiency of lessons, as some teachers noted that when only a few pupils attended, they would revise or repeat materials rather than cover new topics.

Another issue raised as a factor in compromising teaching time was overcrowding. Some teachers reported significantly more pupils in their classes than previously. This impacted their teaching time through the additional non-teaching academic workload, such as grading or marking assignments. For some teachers, the number of pupil assignments they had to mark was so great that this work spilled over to class time; they had to spend time completing this in class instead of delivering their lessons. Overcrowding also caused discomfort among pupils and impact on their ability to follow or focus on lessons.

4.5.3. School infrastructure and teaching materials

The condition of school infrastructure can influence teacher attendance in several ways. More than two-thirds of classrooms are either non-permanent or semi-permanent structures, and teachers reported on disruption caused by learning under trees or in tents. Without a proper roof, walls or windows, pupils are susceptible to disturbance from rain, wind, and extreme temperatures. An insufficient number of working classrooms has also led to overcrowding in available classrooms, affecting students' learning.

“Education used to take place anywhere, even under the trees. Teachers were not missing. What is missing and may be making teacher not to come to school is not because of the poor infrastructure of the school.”

– County Education Office,
Eastern Equatoria

Additionally, over half of teachers surveyed reported that a lack of teaching materials or learning aids was a main reason for losing teaching time in the classroom (see *Figure 11*). This rate was comparable across different school types and locations. Teachers in rural schools however, were also more likely to agree with the statement that “teachers at this school have the teaching materials they need to teach” compared to those in urban schools.

Finally, although some interviewees reported that poor infrastructure and lack of teaching materials would prevent teachers from being able to teach, others were adamant that this should not be a barrier. Some interviewees pointed out that trained teachers would be better prepared to develop their own learning materials or to prepare activities that can be undertaken without needing materials not available at school. Just under 70 per cent of untrained surveyed teachers reported a lack of materials as a reason for losing teaching time (see *Figure 11*).

4.6. Teacher-level factors associated with absenteeism

Teachers’ behaviours should be examined within the context of their personal characteristics and context. Survey and interviewed data identified several factors at the individual and household levels that influenced teachers’ attendance. They are presented in this section around three main themes: health; family responsibilities, including alternative employment; and professional competency and conduct.

Female teachers in the South Sudan survey reported a higher rate of regular absences than male teachers. Close to half of female teachers said they were absent from school once a week or more, compared to just over one in five male teachers (see *Figure 6*). Similarly, 43 per cent of female teachers regularly spent less time teaching in the classroom than planned, compared to 27 per cent of male teachers (see *Figure 6*). This section will also explore how these individual and household level themes interact with gender.

4.6.1. Health and food security

Teachers considered their health a key factor in all forms of absence. Approximately 40 to 45 per cent of teachers noted that health was one of the key reasons they had been absent from school, had been late or left early, had been absent from class, or had missed teaching time in class (see *Figures 7–11*). Interviews illustrated that depending on how sick teachers were, and when they started feeling sick, health issues could, for example, prevent them from attending school altogether, encourage them to leave early or arrive late due to resting or seeking medical assistance, or leave teachers unable to go to class or unable to teach, even when they were in class.

The most common medical condition named by teachers was malaria, particularly peaking in the rainy season. Others mentioned typhoid and diarrhoea as specific health reasons for missing attendance. A couple of interviewees raised menstruation and related pains as a reason that female teachers missed school and class. When surveyed, female teachers were more likely than male teachers to report regularly losing classroom teaching time for health reasons (see *Figure 11*).

With food insecurity prevalent across the country, interviewees also reported that weakness and sickness from hunger prevented teachers from being present in school, being late, and to being unable to focus when teaching. Salary uncertainties exacerbated these challenges. In some cases, not being able to afford treatment delayed teachers’ recovery, causing even more prolonged absences. Where there was no health

facility in the school, or even first aid kits as in many reported instances in the sample, teachers were unable to seek help if they fell sick at school.

While in some instances teachers who were unwell could seek advance permission for their absence, in other cases this was not possible. Interviews indicated that in cases of teachers' poor health, the head teacher would usually show understanding and grant permission. However, a handful of head teachers and interviewees raised that teachers could, on occasion, use health as an excuse to cover up other reasons for missing school, such as other income-generating activities.

4.6.2. Family responsibilities and other income-generating activities

Beyond teachers' own health issues, caring for family with health issues and other family responsibilities also constituted a common reason for teachers to be away from their duties. This applied to teachers across different settings in South Sudan. Family reasons closely aligned with health reasons were emerging drivers behind teachers' absence from school, including late arrival or early departure from school. Additionally, 32 per cent of teachers reported experiencing reduced teaching time in the classroom because they were distracted by family or personal problems.

Family reasons, including death and illness, were reasons teachers mentioned for missing school. In interviews, many teachers reported bearing responsibility for taking care of sick family members, including young dependent children, which prevented them from either coming to school or coming to school on time. This was reported as more frequently affecting female teachers, who were more likely to bear the weight of caring for children and other dependants, as well as for other household responsibilities.

Teachers reported that the demand of providing for their families while their teaching salary was low and often delayed meant they needed to seek other means of income. Among those with valid survey responses, 24 per cent indicated they were engaged in activities other than teaching. Another 10 per cent of teachers were also employed at other schools. Male teachers were more likely than female teachers to undertake additional income-generating activities.

Only a handful of activities were specified, except in agricultural areas where farming was commonly reported. In at least two states, officials reported there were scheduled school holidays during harvest season which allowed teachers to tend to their farm without missing teaching time. Other alternative income sources included selling in the market or working with NGOs.

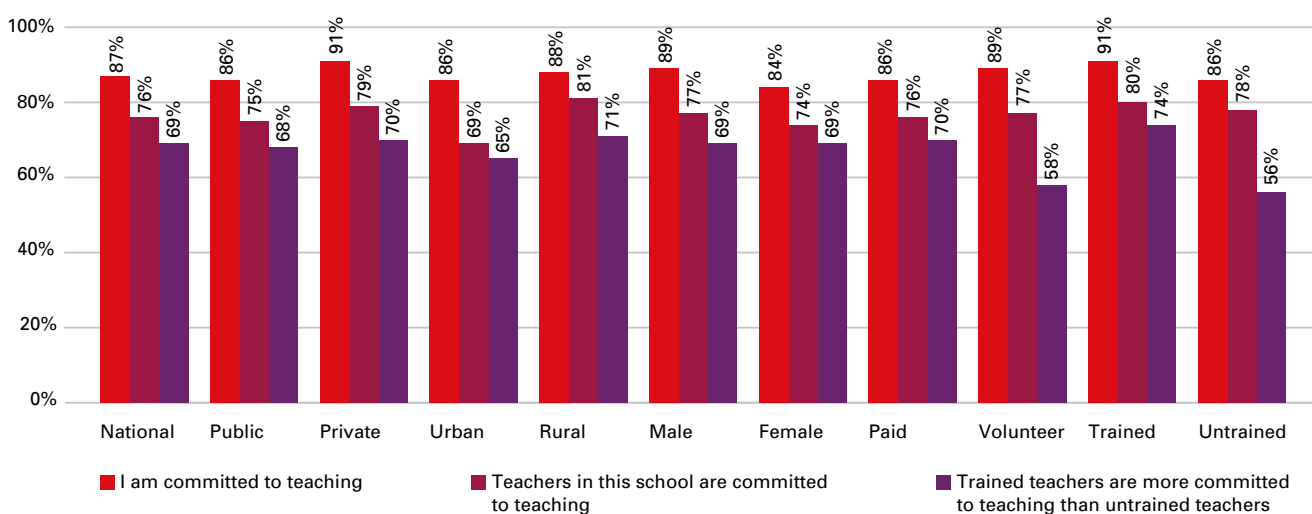
Survey data did not identify significant differences in undertaking additional income-generating activities by school type or location. However, a couple of private schools reported having a policy in place of not allowing their teachers to hold second jobs that could impact on their teaching responsibilities. In contrast, some public school teachers reported that their school leaders were sympathetic to their need to undertake other employment to make up for the lack of salary from their teaching role.

For many teachers, engaging in extra economic activities was the only option to secure enough food for their families. Some teachers reported engaging in more than one or two extra income-generating activities in order to survive. As previously mentioned, many head teachers and education officials were sympathetic to this need to overcome the financial challenges facing teachers.

4.6.3. Professional competencies and conduct

Multiple respondents, mainly head teachers and government officials, raised teachers' professionalism and work ethic as the potential mitigating factor in overcoming barriers to attendance. The majority of teachers surveyed – 87 per cent – stated that they were committed to teaching, with three of four teachers agreeing that colleagues in their school were also. Those who stated their commitment more strongly, particularly those who more strongly agreed that their colleagues were committed to teaching, were less likely to report regularly losing teaching time in class (see Table 3).

Figure 17: Teachers who agreed with the following statements about their commitment to teaching



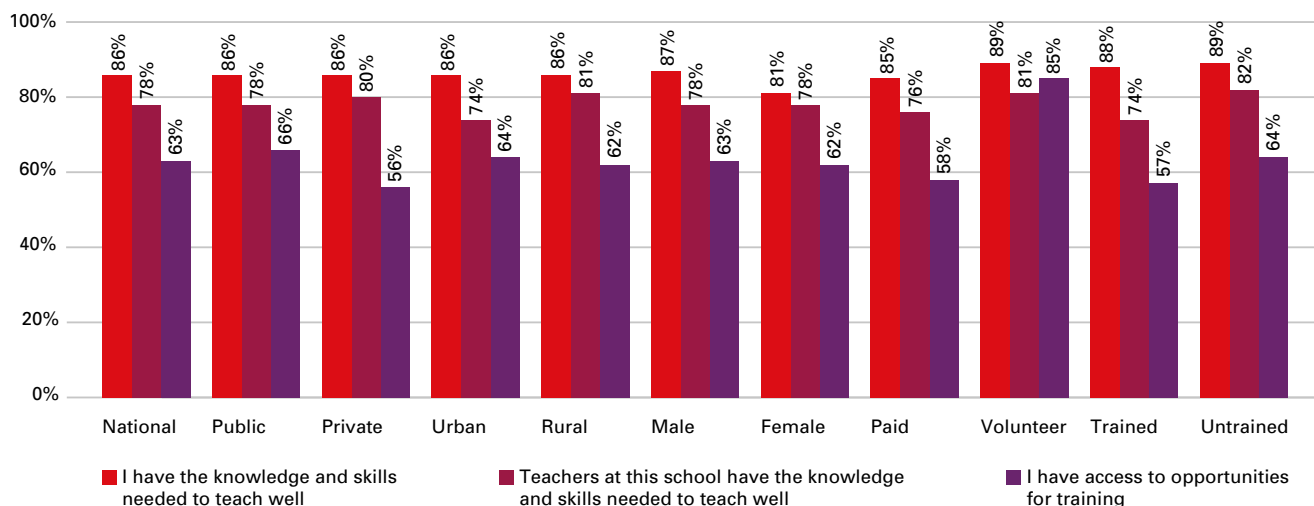
Despite teachers reporting high levels of commitment to teaching, interviewees also spoke of instances of unprofessional behaviour at schools. These included idling; spending time on cell phones instead of teaching; and arriving in class unprepared. These behaviours were linked to teachers missing class while at school as well as to reduced teaching time while in the class.

Several interviewees, including students, head teachers and other teachers, reported that some teachers showed up under the influence of alcohol: usually male teachers. This, along with findings on financial difficulties facing teachers, are consistent with past studies suggesting that being male and lacking a regular income were associated with higher alcohol use disorder in South Sudan.⁶⁸

Some respondents linked the prevalence of unprofessional behaviours to the fact that a significant proportion of the teaching workforce in South Sudan is made up of untrained volunteers. They postulated that these teachers considered teaching to be a transitional job that they did not take seriously. Close to 70 per cent of surveyed teachers believed that trained teachers were more committed to teaching than untrained teachers (see Figure 17). This view was, perhaps unsurprisingly, higher among paid and trained teachers.

Of the teachers surveyed, a majority had completed secondary education while a small percentage had finished either primary or tertiary education. Furthermore, only a minority of teachers had received specific teacher training. Differences between male and female teachers were stark: the proportion of surveyed female teachers who had received no training at all was double the proportion of male teachers.

Figure 18: Teachers who agreed with the following statements regarding knowledge, skills and training



Most teachers surveyed believed they had the knowledge and skills needed to teach well, and that teachers at their school did so too (see Figure 18). Those who agreed with that statement more strongly were also less likely to regularly spend a shorter time teaching in their classrooms than planned. Compared to these high rates, only two thirds of teachers surveyed said they had access to opportunities for training. Volunteer teachers were considerably more likely to report that they had training opportunities than those who were paid. This highlighted the focus of the government and partners on training volunteer teachers. On the other hand, this may also illustrate the risk of limited continuous professional development training opportunities for paid teachers.

Section 5: Policy implications

The Time to Teach study in South Sudan sought to identify major themes and factors at each level of the education system affecting specific types of teachers' time on task. Insights from fieldwork, such as suggestions from teachers and other respondents on how to curb absenteeism, are combined in this section with existing literature and national strategies and plans to develop policy recommendations to improve teacher attendance.

Recommendations are presented by policy area. While the background and rationale for each suggested intervention is briefly summarized in upcoming sections, these have been analysed and discussed in detail in earlier chapters. In the first instance, the recommendations here are directed to the MoGEI. However, they are pertinent to education actors at all levels, including State Ministries of Education, County Education Offices, Payam Education Offices, and schools.

5.1. Teacher salaries and incentives

The country's economic situation was the backdrop for the single most commonly raised challenge to teacher attendance in South Sudan: delayed or non-payment of public service salaries, including those of public-school teachers. This was found to contribute to low motivation of teachers as well as weakening the monitoring and accountability mechanisms that could otherwise be deployed to increase teacher attendance.

There were promising signals in the 2018/19 budget which increased the allocation of funding to education to 9 per cent and had a strong focus on paying salaries in arrears. Development partners are continuing to work with the Government of South Sudan on the payroll process as well as increasing transparency in public financing.

Several recommended activities could continue to build on these steps to support teacher absence, including:

- Continuing to improve **budget transparency and accountability** by disseminating accessible, plain language summaries of the education budget to stakeholders, including local governments, schools, communities, and civil society partners;
- Identifying **bottlenecks and leaks in salary payments**, for example through a Public Expenditure Tracking Survey. This could include identifying common challenges and lessons from donor-funded programmes that have provided incentives to teachers, such as IMPACT, which had also faced challenges with delayed payments;
- Assessing current processes in public teacher **promotions and salary progression**, to identify existing bottlenecks and supports that teachers need to build on and progress throughout their careers;
- Offering **transport allowances** to support travel to and from schools, including for school inspectors and subnational education officers. The allowance should be sensitive to school size, distances to school, availability of public transportation options, community infrastructure, and have higher loading during the wet season to account for the additional difficulty reaching schools at these times;
- Introducing **sick leave and parental leave provisions**, which will support the attraction and retention of female teachers in particular, allowing teachers to seek early care for health concerns and avoiding their condition worsening, as well as setting the expectation on how much permissible leave is reasonable and allow schools to plan according.

5.2. Absence monitoring and reporting

This study found that low levels of salary were not the only barrier to teacher attendance. Private schools, which reported higher attendance rates than public schools, provide higher levels and more consistent pay but were also more likely to have stronger policies to monitor, report, and take action on absences. Additionally, programmes such as IMPACT also led to increased attendance, not just by providing incentives, but by linking them to improved attendance monitoring.

Lessons from these contexts should be considered for implementation by the public school system including:

- Making a proportion of **teacher salary linked to attendance**. In addition to strengthening short-route accountability around attendance, this may also be a path to increase efficiency in public education funding, which may be used to fund the additional allowances suggested above;
- Continuing the national rollout of **teacher registration and biometric verification**, following those used by the IMPACT and GESS programmes, as the basis for monitoring teacher attendance and linking them to public school teacher salary payment;
- Disseminating accessible and plain language versions of the **guidelines for school inspection and supervision** to county, payam, school, and community stakeholders. The guidelines should include not just expectations around frequency of visits but also clear expectations on what should occur during inspection visits, including expectations around monitoring, tracking and action on absences;
- Developing **good practice guidelines for school-level monitoring of attendance**, which could include case studies of practices already taking place in the country to verify and track teacher attendance. It should also include consideration for multidimensional conception of attendance, including attendance in classroom and time use in lessons.

5.3. Training

In recognition of the significant proportion of untrained teachers in the South Sudan primary teaching workforce, the GESP 2017–2022 already places teacher pre-service and in-service training as priority activities in partnership with development partners. This study supports the need for more training, not just for teachers but also for head teachers, school inspectors, and PTA members. The suggested priority activities in the training area include:

- Enhancing **coordination** among development partners in financing teacher training and/or providing technical support to teachers so as to create synergy among various training schemes instead of duplicating efforts;
- Training for head teachers and school leadership on **effective school management practices**. These should include the monitoring and observation of teacher work, the provision of feedback to teachers, involving teachers in school planning and decision making, and school timetabling to accommodate sufficient teacher planning time and coverage for any scheduled absences;
- Working with training providers, including subnational education agencies and development partners to, as much possible, **schedule training during school holidays or weekends** or at the very least, provide notice to schools early enough to allow teachers and schools to plan their activities around scheduled absences;
- In-service training for all teachers on **classroom management**, including managing overcrowded classes and classes with changing pupil attendance numbers, and on delivery of lessons in resource-constrained contexts;

- Making **gender-sensitive training** widely available for all stakeholders, including training on gender discrimination, menstrual hygiene management, and gender-based violence, to support female pupils as well as female teacher attendance and participation in schooling;
- Training for school leaders on how to best utilise **volunteer teachers**, including the provision of classroom cover for teachers not in attendance and supporting teachers with overcrowded classes. Also, training for volunteer teachers themselves on how to monitor pupil behaviour and to understand and implement lesson plans.

5.4. Infrastructure and material support

School infrastructure development in South Sudan has faced multiple interruptions from security challenges, which have also destroyed some infrastructure already in place. As a result, permanent structures are a minority of primary classrooms in the country. This study found conditions to be disruptive, particularly to classroom attendance and to time spent teaching in the classroom. Many development partners are already engaged in providing infrastructure and material support to schools, and this should be supported to continue and be scaled up.

Investment in schools' physical infrastructure is crucial for the long-term development of the primary education sector, including preparing for continued growth in student numbers. This can be supported with the following recommended activities:

- Advocating for **increased capital allocation in the national budget** to support restoration and renovation of existing school buildings, including those destroyed by conflict, as well as the construction of new permanent classrooms and buildings to meet expected growth in student numbers;
- **Engaging development partners** in the provision of infrastructure support and materials for schools, including sustainable construction materials that account for the context, including insulation to work against the disruptive impact of weather;
- Identifying and mapping the need for **teacher housing** based on the distance between schools and teacher residences, and road conditions and transportation options;
- Working with the South Sudan Road Authority and state and county governments to map conditions of **roads to schools**, and direct investments to schools that need, and would benefit from, them the most;
- Leveraging **community involvement** in the construction and restoration of school facilities, including the use of local materials where and when possible. As has taken place in the country, in-kind contributions from the community, including labour, could be valuable in strengthening school infrastructure as well as strengthening community involvement and sense of ownership;
- Ensuring new and reconstructed schools meet school **sanitation standards**, including those to support menstrual hygiene management. These standards should also be included in the sanitation checklist for school inspectors, and be included in their reports to assist the national government in mapping need;
- In collaboration with development partners, implementing **school feeding programmes** at a larger scale across the country to retain both pupils and teachers;
- Include **menstrual hygiene management** in the sanitation checklist for school inspectors and the construction of new schools.

5.5. Cross-sector coordination and collaboration

Many of the challenges identified in this report cannot be mitigated by the MOGEI alone. Issues such as teachers' health problems, and school and community infrastructural deficit, as well as the larger financial crisis and insecurity, all necessitate cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration. It is therefore crucial for the MoGEI to work closely with other ministries and development partners to address challenges related to teachers in a coordinated and holistic manner.

More specifically, it would be useful for the MoGEI to engage in:

- Promoting **nutrition and health programmes** at the community and school level with the support from Ministry of Health and development partners, focusing on preventative and early support of pupils' and teachers' health;
- Cooperating with health and infrastructure actors in establishing **health facilities** at schools to focus on preventative and early support of children and teachers' health, including the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Housing, Physical Planning, and Environment and development partners who are supporting the health sector;
- Working with the Ministry of Housing, Physical Planning, and Environment and development partners to identify **school infrastructure needs** across the country and developing a strategy accordingly in order to bridge the gap;
- Collaborating with the Ministry for Gender, Child, and Social Welfare to roll out **comprehensive gender supports in schools**, including gender-sensitive training for schools and government stakeholders as well as infrastructure standards that account for the sanitation and safety needs for female pupils and teachers.

Appendix

Table 3: Correlations between teachers' views about their work and their regular absence (once a week or more)

Statement (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)	Absence from school		Late arrival/ early departure		Absence from class		Reduced teaching time	
I am satisfied with my job	-0.045		0.010		-0.162	*	-0.305	*
My colleagues in this school are satisfied with their jobs	-0.009		0.063		-0.078		-0.172	*
I am committed to teaching	-0.075		0.000		-0.078		-0.234	*
Teachers in this school are committed to teaching	-0.097		-0.105		-0.031		-0.316	*
Trained teachers are more committed to teaching than untrained teachers	-0.060		-0.067		0.049		-0.246	*
I am happy with my salary as a teacher	-0.106		-0.162	*	-0.045		-0.210	*
I receive my salary on time	-0.185	*	-0.136		0.020		-0.115	
It is easy to receive my salary	-0.108		-0.070		0.026		-0.239	*
I have the knowledge and skills needed to teach well	-0.107		-0.038		-0.004		-0.179	*
Teachers at this school have the knowledge and skills needed to teach well	-0.006		-0.098		-0.073		-0.178	*
Teachers at this school have the teaching materials they need to teach	-0.103		-0.065		-0.036		-0.227	*
Teachers in this school work well with one another	-0.093		-0.020		-0.076		-0.163	*
Teachers in this school are rarely absent	-0.039		0.026		0.161	*	-0.148	
Teachers in this school often come late and/or leave early	0.273	*	0.194	*	0.245	*	0.148	
When in school, teachers rarely miss class	-0.116		-0.015		0.191	*	-0.013	
The head teacher is always at school	-0.198	*	-0.028		-0.170	*	-0.048	
I'm happy with the feedback I receive from the head teacher on my work	-0.336	*	-0.191	*	-0.374	*	-0.247	*
The head teacher encourages teacher training	-0.235	*	-0.054		-0.098		-0.102	
The head teacher supports teacher involvement in school decision making	-0.224	*	-0.099		-0.040		-0.237	*

Statement (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)	Absence from school		Late arrival/ early departure		Absence from class		Reduced teaching time	
The head teacher always records teacher absences	-0.251	*	0.034		-0.088		-0.149	
The head teacher manages the school and the teachers well	-0.307	*	-0.207	*	-0.205	*	-0.309	*
School inspectors visit this school regularly	-0.186	*	-0.060		-0.125		-0.159	*
School inspectors motivate and inspire school staff	-0.228	*	-0.065		-0.133		-0.060	
School inspectors prioritize infrastructural issues over teaching methods and practices	-0.096		-0.031		0.024		-0.157	*
In this community teachers are respected, and their work is recognized	-0.284	*	-0.182	*	-0.131		-0.114	
Parents appreciate the value of education and encourage pupil attendance	-0.272	*	-0.128		-0.095		-0.198	*
Parents are actively engaged in school matters	-0.232	*	-0.123		-0.082		-0.226	*
Parents view teacher absences as a problem	-0.138		-0.022		0.023		-0.202	*
Pupils are well-motivated to study	-0.222	*	0.023		-0.084		-0.107	
Pupils have high educational aspirations	-0.198	*	-0.108		-0.115		-0.127	

* Denotes statistical significance of $p < 0.05$; only statements that were significantly correlated with at least one form of regular absence are shown

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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](https://twitter.com/UNICEFInnocenti)

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