



Time to Teach

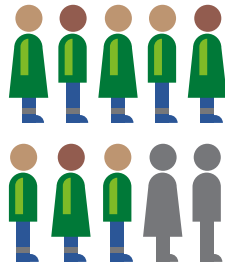
Teacher attendance and time on task
in West and Central Africa

REPORT SUMMARY

October 2021

Context and study rationale

High levels of learning poverty



82%

of children in West and Central Africa are 'learning poor' – that is, they cannot read and understand a simple text by the age of 10 years.¹

For learning to take place, teachers need to be in class and to spend quality time on task!

Widespread loss in teaching time

On any given day in sub-Saharan Africa:²

14–45%

of primary school teachers are **absent from school**.

22–56%

of primary school teachers are **absent from class**.

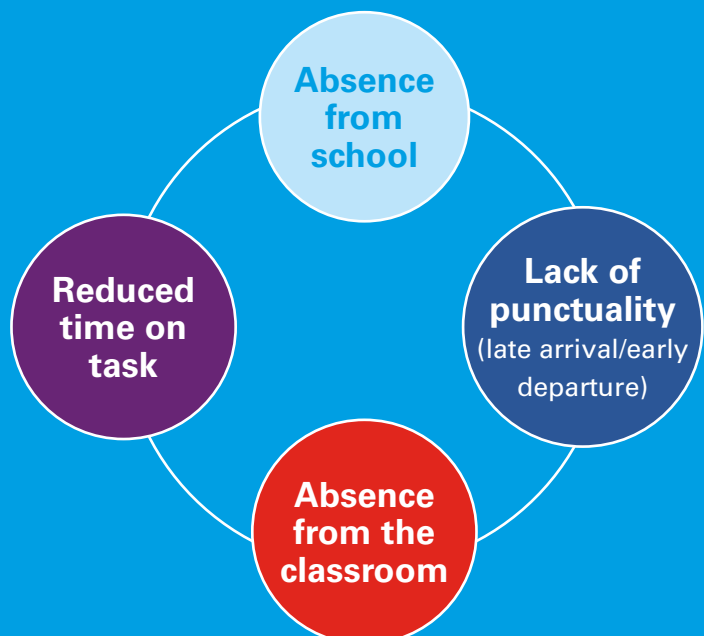
4–27%

of scheduled teaching **time is lost** to non-teaching activities.

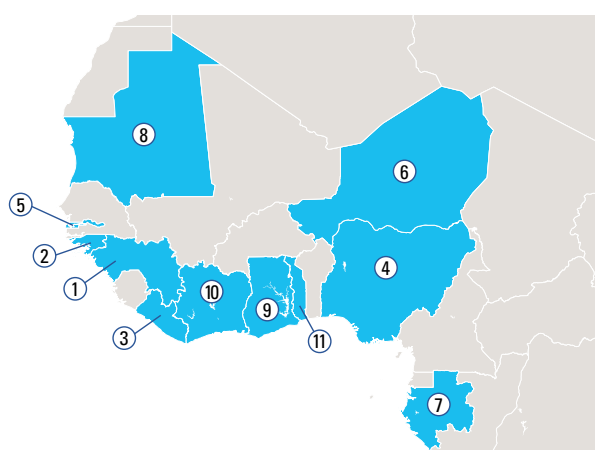
The loss of teaching hours due to **teacher absenteeism corresponds to a waste of approximately 46 cents for every dollar invested in education, an annual wastage of 1–3% of GDP.**³

The Time to Teach study

The **Time to Teach** study uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to provide critical insights into the factors that underpin **different forms** of primary school teacher absenteeism in West and Central Africa.⁴



Participating countries



1. Guinea
2. Guinea Bissau
3. Liberia
4. Nigeria
5. The Gambia
6. Niger
7. Gabon
8. Mauritania
9. Ghana
10. Cote d'Ivoire
11. Togo

Map by FreeVectorMaps.com

This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers

How frequently are teachers absent?

Most frequent forms of absenteeism

17.1% Lack of punctuality

15.3% Reduced time on task (while in the classroom)

Less frequent forms of absenteeism

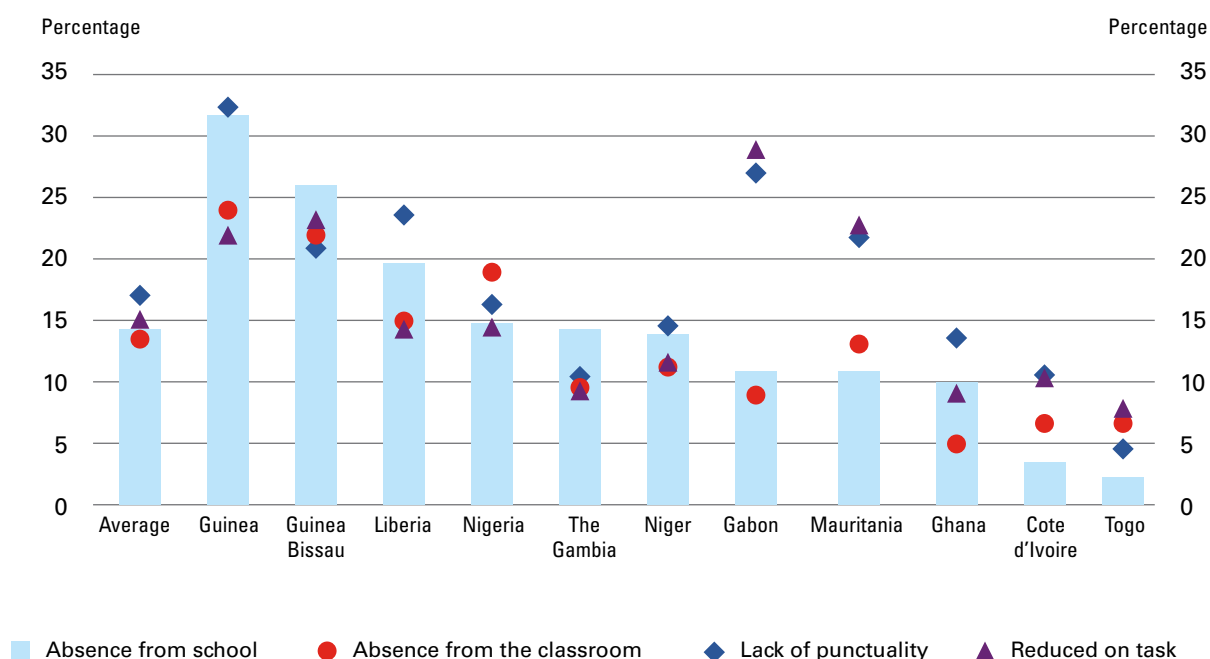
14.7% Absence from school

14.4% Absence from the classroom (while in school)

Teacher absenteeism is higher in **public** than private schools.

There are no differences between **rural** and **urban** areas, and between **male** and **female** teachers' self-reported absenteeism rates.⁵


Proportion of teachers who report being absent at least once a week




Why are teachers absent?

Monitoring

- Teachers appreciate the commitment of educational advisors and inspectors.
- The monitoring capacity and leadership skills of head teachers are key factors in reducing teacher absenteeism.
- Results show a positive association between greater community and parental involvement and **lower school and classroom absenteeism.**





76%
Teachers report that school inspectors regularly visit their schools.


Teachers who perceive their supervisor as actively encouraging their attendance are less likely to:


- Be absent from school (13% vs 21%).
- Be late (16% vs 21%).
- Be absent from the classroom (13% vs 19%).
- Reduce time on task (13% vs 23%).

Teachers who believe parents encourage pupils' attendance are less likely to arrive at school late or leave early (14% vs 21%).

Training


The qualifications and experience of teachers and their initial and continuous professional development are sensitive and decisive aspects of their capacity, motivation and attendance.



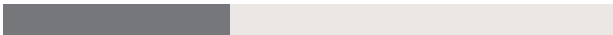


48%
Teachers have access to sufficient training opportunities.

Highest rates: Ghana, Guinea and Togo. **54%**





Lowest rates: Guinea Bissau. **37%**




Salaries

- Salary is not always a good predictor of attendance.
- The timing and ease with which teachers receive their pay have more impact on absenteeism than the amount they receive.





25%
Teachers are satisfied with their pay.




55%
Teachers receive their salary on time.

Teachers who have difficulty receiving their pay are less likely to be on time (14% vs 21%).


Workload

- Excessive workload is among the most cited reasons for **classroom absence and reduced instruction time.**
- Teachers in **rural areas** and in **lower grades** experience higher pupil-teacher ratios and heavier workloads due to ineffective teacher recruitment and inequitable teacher allocation.




Teachers who cite excessive workload (such as administrative and class preparation tasks) **as a reason for classroom absence:**

9 out of 10 in Togo.



5 out of 10 in Liberia.



Teachers who report having too many administrative tasks (such as office work, meetings) are more likely to be absent from the classroom (17% vs 12%).

School resources

Lack of teaching and learning materials is linked to classroom absence and to reduced time on task, especially in rural and public schools.




Strikes

- Strikes hinder teacher **school attendance** and **punctuality**.
- Teachers point to delays in payment and working conditions as common reasons leading to strikes.



Teachers who cite strikes as a reason for school absence:




3 out of 10 teachers in Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria.



Less than **1 out of 10** teachers in The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mauritania and Niger.

Non-system factors

- The absence of local services (such as healthcare facilities, banks, internet connectivity) and security are linked to **school absence** and **lack of punctuality**.
- Health and weather are the most frequent reasons teachers give to explain **all forms of absence**, especially in **rural** settings with poor school and community infrastructure.
- Familial and social obligations are major motivations for **low school attendance** and **lack of punctuality**.




8 out of 10 teachers cite health problems as a reason for different forms of absence.



4 out of 10 teachers cite weather as a reason for different forms of absence.

Teachers facing health issues are more likely to arrive late or leave early (19% vs 15%).

Teachers citing increased family obligations are also more likely to lack punctuality (20% vs 15%).

Voices from the field

"Our teacher is always present. Sometimes he is absent because he is called by the director or from the inspection or because there is a meeting. If one arrives and the teacher is in the principal's office or with the inspector, they leave us homework. But that is boring."

Student, rural public school, **Côte d'Ivoire**



"Since the school went into self-management, in addition to providing teacher salaries, the community has established links with school staff and is increasingly involved in school-related matters."

Parent, public school, **Guinea-Bissau**



"Our classrooms are not good, when it is hot, many colleagues prefer to stay in the veranda. Our classrooms are not well lit and when it rains, the children cannot see the blackboard. I live close by, so I come, but there are other colleagues who can't find a cab and the kids can't get there either. Yes, I have a class of 28 students, assuming only 10 come because of the rain, I wouldn't be able to teach, I would just put exercises on the board."

Teacher, urban public school, **Gabon**



"Parents will ask their children and if a teacher has been absent, they follow up with us. So, the teachers are aware that the community is interested in the affairs of the school, and this helps in monitoring their attendance."

Headteacher, urban public school, **Ghana**



"The difficulties we face here are related to transport means and road connectivity. This is a serious problem across the country. There is no maintenance for the vehicles, and we must buy our own gas. The vehicle you see here, it has been parked for a month because it's not working."

County education officer, **Liberia**



"When our salaries were delayed, the teachers decided to go on a sit-in strike. This left pupils alone in the classroom while teachers sat outside in protest."

Teacher, urban public school, **The Gambia**



"When the inspector comes here, they want to know how I teach, then if I have a couple of hours, they sit in my yard and give me advice; they tell me what I do wrong and how I can do better. Usually they come in every three months and they give us a lot in terms of pedagogy and classroom management."

Teacher, urban school, **Guinea**



"There is no public or private health center in the village. There are no banking or microfinance institutions either. So, in case of illness, or to collect salaries, teachers are forced to travel to the prefectural hospital or to the bank in the nearest town."

Parent, rural school, **Togo**



"Training takes up a lot of school time. Instead of being organized during the summer break or the end of the two terms, training is organized during the school year. This encroaches on school time in any case."

School inspector, **Niger**



"Sometimes I miss my lesson because there is a request from the ministry to select pupils for a function, maybe a debate, a quiz, or a cultural event. These requests are usually impromptu, and we must make special arrangements for them. I usually end up missing my class."

Teacher, urban public school, **Nigeria**



"Absenteeism is more frequent in rural than in urban areas due to lack of transportation means that prevents frequent school visits."

Regional education officer, **Mauritania**



Promising practices

Monitoring

- **Nigeria** has introduced training for parents and community representatives to monitor teachers' professional development and training.
- **Togo** has established clear requirements for school principalship. Candidates are not only required to have the academic qualifications to be good teachers but also the skills to be good managers, leaders and positive role models.
- **Ghana** provides head teachers and circuit supervisors with management training.

Salaries

- **Gabon, Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria** have introduced special allowances and incentive packages to make postings in rural and hardship areas more attractive.
- **The Gambia** supports the provision of teachers' salaries at the school level to address delays in payment.
- **Liberia** has introduced mobile salary payments for teachers.

Strikes

- **Guinea-Bissau** has changed public schools' status to self-managed (autogestão) to allow schools to raise money to top-up teachers salaries and prevent strikes.

Training

- **Guinea** has introduced a one-year practical component in pre-service teacher training. The country has also devised peer learning workshops at the school level in which teachers share experiences and find solutions to common pedagogical problems.
- **Togo** has developed a remedial training program for volunteer and auxiliary teachers recruited without any formal training.
- **Côte d'Ivoire** has been implementing virtual learning programmes for teachers even before COVID-19.

Workload and school resources

- **Ghana** deploys individuals participating in the National Youth Employment Program as teaching assistants to support schools and to reduce class size and teacher workload.
- **The Gambia and Togo** use school-level data (EMIS)⁶ to improve allocation of school resources and to increase accountability in the payment of school improvement grants.

Non-system factors

- **Niger** delivers radio education in areas where insecurity persists and together with UNICEF is strengthening the capacity of school management structures to cope with risks and emergencies in schools.
- **In Ghana**, a small-scale bicycle distribution program for teachers seeks to boost teacher attendance by improving their mobility and reducing their travel time to school.

References

- 1 World Bank, Learning Poverty: Historical Data and Sub-Components, 2019. Retrieved from <https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/dataset/learning-poverty>. The reported average is computed based on the latest available learning poverty values of the following countries in West and Central Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo. Data for the remaining 12 countries where UNICEF works in the region is not available. This categorization follows the internal organization of UNICEF. For more information on the work of UNICEF in the region please visit <https://www.unicef.org/wca/>
- 2 World Bank, Service Delivery Indicators (SDI) Data Set. Retrieved from <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/service-delivery-indicators>, 2016. Data was gathered in the following countries: Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal, Togo, Madagascar, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda.
- 3 Calculations based on Filmer (2015) and World Development Indicators, 2015. Filmer, D., Education quality in Sub-Saharan Africa [Presentation slides], 2015. Retrieved from http://www.riseprogram.org/sites/www.rise.ox.ac.uk/files/25_Filmer_SDI-RISE.pdf
- 4 The Time to Teach study has been implemented also in eight East and Southern African countries and Morocco. For more information on the Time to Teach study and participating countries, please visit <https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/time-to-teach/>
- 5 A total of 2,585 individuals participated in the Time to Teach study in West and Central Africa, including representatives from national Ministries of Education, teachers' unions, district and regional education offices, teachers, head teachers, students, and community representatives. A paper-based survey was administered to 1,673 teachers working in 234 selected schools. Data collection took place during the 2018–2019 school year.
- 6 Education management information system (EMIS).

for every child, answers

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