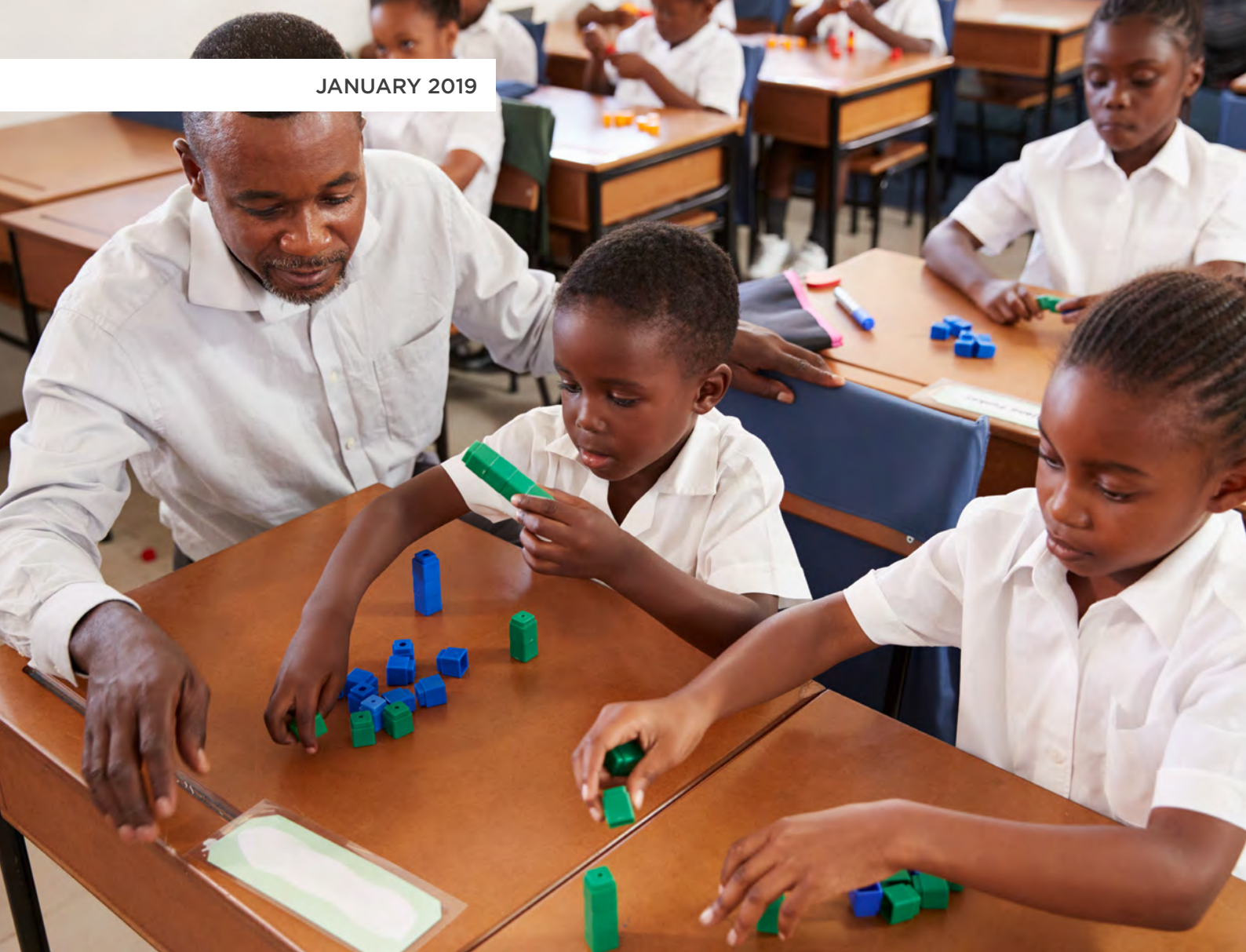


JANUARY 2019



Policy Paper
Understanding teacher attendance
in Kenya: a case study of Embu County

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Executive summary

Teachers attending school is generally accepted as a prerequisite to effective teaching. Yet, as in other developing countries, teacher absenteeism rates in Kenya are high, and there is limited evidence on how existing reforms address issues of attendance. This paper looks at Embu County in Kenya as a case study and, using a mixed methods design, seeks to explore three avenues of research:

1. Current levels of teacher attendance in Embu County.
2. Factors associated with teacher attendance.
3. Awareness and perceived efficacy of recent reforms to improve attendance.

Research question one: What are the current levels of teacher attendance in Embu County?

Our findings show that:

- *School* absenteeism rates based on an unannounced spot check in 20 randomly selected schools were largely consistent with Kenya wide estimates and stood at ten per cent (Uwezo 2016; Uwezo 2012; Martin and Pimhidzai, 2013, henceforth referred to as the SDI Report), however, stakeholders in this study (teachers, headteachers, parents and community members), appeared to downplay the absenteeism challenge.
- Teacher absenteeism rates from *class* were substantially higher than *school absenteeism* rates in our sample schools. At 27 per cent (37 per cent school and class absenteeism combined) these rates are still consistent with Kenya wide estimates of 42 per cent¹ school and class absenteeism combined (SDI Report, 2013). Surprisingly, stakeholders did not view *class absenteeism* as a challenge at all.
- All stakeholders appeared to agree on certain norms around what was considered acceptable and unacceptable absence. For example sickness and personal emergencies falling in the former category, and substance abuse-related absence and chronic unauthorised leave falling in the latter.



“*Class absenteeism is significantly higher than school absenteeism*”

¹ The SDI Report marks teachers as absent from the class if they are not on the school premises or if they are present on school premises, but not found in the classroom. Our study only counts teachers as absent from the classroom if on the school premises, but not in the classroom.

Research question two: What factors are associated with absenteeism in Embu County?

We looked at three levels which can effect teacher attendance, using the Guerrero & EPPI-Centre (2012) model of teacher attendance. This model looks at teacher, school and system, and contextual characteristics which increase the likelihood of absenteeism. Findings in this section were informed by self-reported teacher surveys, which found that on average eight per cent of teachers reported being absent from *school*, and 13 per cent reported being absent from the *classroom* three or more times in the past month.

Our findings show that:

Teacher Characteristics

- Female teachers were more likely to report being absent from *school* (14 per cent, compared to the sample average of eight per cent), and men were more likely to report being absent from *class* (18 per cent compared with the sample average of 13 per cent). Stakeholders attribute family commitments and domestic issues to female teacher absenteeism, but very few identify reasons why men might be more likely to be absent from class.
- Teachers with higher reported salaries were more likely to report being absent from *school*. Despite this, dissatisfaction with salary is often discussed, and stakeholders regularly point to issues around low salary, insufficient opportunities for promotion and overwork as challenges facing teachers.

School and system characteristics

- Perceptions of headteacher leadership, local state supervision and likelihood of being sanctioned are all important factors which can affect levels of absenteeism at the *school and class* levels.
- Headteachers are considered to be the critical people on the ground monitoring teacher attendance and teaching quality, particularly at the class level.
- Perceptions of close state supervision and belief that absenteeism will be sanctioned appear to improve teacher's *school* attendance, but the effectiveness of state supervision may be limited in some contexts due to a lack of resources.

Contextual Characteristics

- Teachers who live closer to school are more likely to report being absent from *school*. Some respondents suggest that teachers who live close to the school are more likely to be absent to attend to local responsibilities – such as family care, other business, and farming.

The causes of teacher absenteeism at the school and class level are varied and are likely to be highly context specific.

- As is seen in existing literature, it is difficult to identify clear and conclusive trends when looking at the causes of teacher absenteeism. Findings are at times contradictory and counter-intuitive, which speaks to the highly context specific nature of absenteeism.



“ Causes of absenteeism are varied and highly context specific

Research question three: What is the awareness and perceived efficacy of recent absenteeism reforms?

The Teacher Performance Appraisal Development (TPAD) tool enables the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) to monitor teacher attendance, syllabus coverage, classroom performance, knowledge, innovation, creativity and discipline. Students note teacher arrival and departure times, in addition to curriculum coverage, and teachers rate their own performance (Global Partnership for Education (GPE), 2018).

Our findings show that:

- Awareness and use of the TPAD tool is high, but it is not clear if teacher attendance is recorded accurately or consistently.
- Feedback on the availability and quality of training on the TPAD is mixed. Teachers report challenges with using the system, and very few teachers report that TPAD helps with improving their teaching practice.
- The perceptions around the effectiveness of TPAD are mostly positive, and over 93 per cent of teachers think that attendance has improved. However, teachers see TPAD as one of many methods to 'police' their performance, rather than as a tool to empower and build their professional development.

“ Awareness and use of TPAD is high, but further training may be required to increase its overall effectiveness

Policy implications

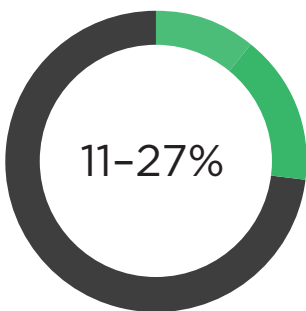
We propose four key policy recommendations based on our findings:

1. **Focus on interventions that address not only school but also class absenteeism.** We found that *class* attendance was a larger challenge than *school* attendance. Yet, many global reforms around teacher absenteeism focus on reducing *school absenteeism*. Ensuring that both types of absenteeism are addressed may be critical to improving teacher attendance. Further research may be necessary to identify sustainable solutions that tackle *class absenteeism*.
2. **Consider ways of shifting the focus of TPAD's practical usage in Kenya from simply monitoring teachers to better motivating them.** Systems that couple monitoring with rewards and motivation are most effective in addressing teacher attendance challenges in a sustainable manner (Guerrero & EPPI-Centre, 2012). The TPAD system aims to fulfil this criteria by not only monitoring teacher attendance, but also motivating teachers with tools to self-assess and improve their teaching practice. Moving TPAD's practical focus from policing performance to supporting personal development may be a useful way to sustain early success in addressing attendance challenges.
3. **Consider ways to educate stakeholders in schools on effectively using TPAD.** While our research shows that teachers are clearly aware of, and using the TPAD system, they perceive challenges related to the quality of training provided, and the nature of TPAD usage. Because the success and sustainability of such reforms depends critically on the stakeholders using them, it may be important to consider ways to further educate key stakeholders on the TPAD system. This could be in the form of refresher training to help teachers to use the system more effectively, providing mentors or coaches, or through contests and prizes encouraging effective usage.
4. **Educate communities about the issue of teacher absenteeism, and seek creative ways to engage them in solutions.** Community members can play an important role in understanding and tackling absenteeism, although the exact role they play will depend on the context. Our research demonstrated that stakeholders outside of the school had limited knowledge about the extent of the teacher attendance challenge, particularly at the *class* level. While stakeholders raise critical challenges related to teaching and learning they did not consider teacher attendance an issue. This may imply that they do not exercise their rights to hold schools to account for teacher absenteeism, particularly at the class level.

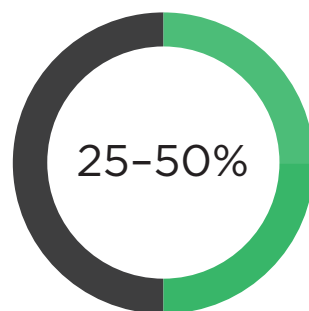
These recommendations cannot fully address all the barriers to effective teaching and learning. Nonetheless, placed alongside the wider literature on the topic, our findings do go some way to understanding how to build on existing efforts to monitor and discourage teacher absenteeism, by beginning to place more of a focus on building motivation and improving job satisfaction for teachers.

In recent decades, access to education in developing countries has seen massive improvements. However, the quality of learning remains a significant challenge, with over 50 per cent of the world's children not on track to reach the minimum level of proficiency in reading and mathematics (UNESCO, 2017). These trends are mirrored in Kenya, where only 60.4 per cent of children aged 6-16 years could do everyday maths, and only 30 per cent of class 3 students could complete standard primary class 2 work (UWEZO 2016).

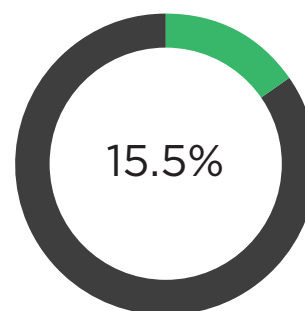
Global and national estimates of teacher absenteeism:



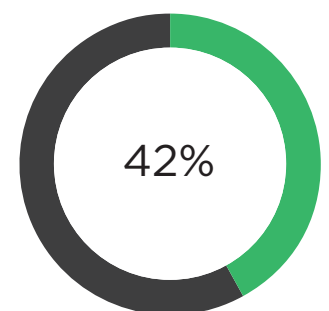
Between 11 to 27 per cent of teachers were absent from *schools* in an early study in Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru and Uganda (Chaudhury *et al*, 2006).



Approximately 25 to 50 per cent of all teachers in primary schools were found to be absent from *classrooms* in seven African countries, including - Kenya, Nigeria, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo and Uganda (Bold *et al*, 2017).



In Kenya, 15.5 per cent of teachers were found to be absent from *school* (Service Delivery Indicator (SDI Report, 2013)



42 per cent of teachers were found to be absent from the *classroom* during an unannounced visit (SDI Report, 2013)



Teacher attendance is a notable issue in Kenya

Teacher attendance in school is generally accepted as a prerequisite to effective teaching. Yet, like in other developing countries, teacher absenteeism rates in Kenya are high. Whilst there is some disagreement in the literature about the actual figures, the most recent findings suggest an average rate of 11-16 per cent of teachers are absent from primary schools in Kenya (UWEZO 2016; UWEZO, 2012, the SDI Report, 2013).

These statistics are concerning for a number of reasons. Firstly, high levels of teacher absenteeism lead to a substantial loss of learning time, reducing the opportunities for children to learn effectively (World Bank, 2018). Secondly, not only is teaching quality reduced, but absenteeism may also have a knock on impact on school access and dropout rates, as parents are less motivated to make sacrifices to send their children to school (World Bank, 2010). Finally, teacher absenteeism holds a significant financial cost for the economy of a country (World Bank, 2010; Toshiba Max Limited, 2012).

Existing literature indicates that the most commonly identified reasons for teacher absenteeism are family events, official duties, illness, distance to school and lifestyle factors

such as alcohol and drug abuse. Some studies also examine individual characteristics that influence absenteeism, including gender, age, level of education, marital status, seniority, union participation and teachers working in their home districts. However, contradictory results appear (Obiero *et al.*, 2017, Chaudhry *et al.*, 2006, the SDI Report, 2013, Atege and Okibo, 2015 Musyoki, 2015). For example, Chaudhry *et al.* (2006) indicate that if a teacher was born in the district where they are employed, instances of absence reduce. In contrast, the SDI Report suggests sending teachers to live and work away from their district of birth is a strategy for improving school attendance. Gender and marital status are also raised as points of conflict in terms of their influence on teacher absenteeism. Generally speaking, the literature finds a mixed picture in terms of what correlates with teacher absenteeism, findings seem context-specific, and possibly affected by the choice of research methodology (e.g. spot-check/teacher self-report/headteacher views), as well as the timing and season of the data collection. This suggests new research is needed which unpicks these mediating factors, as well as new methodologies and approaches to understand how these factors interact in different contexts.

In recent years, policy makers in Kenya have implemented reforms to improve teacher attendance

To address teacher attendance, policy makers in Kenya have implemented two initiatives in the recent years. First, the TSC regulations were updated to require teachers to register absences in 2015 (TSC, 2017), and to allow disciplinary action to be taken for chronic absence. And second, the online TPAD system was established by the TSC as a major initiative to tackle teacher absenteeism. The TPAD tool enables the TSC to monitor teacher attendance, syllabus coverage, classroom performance, knowledge, innovation, creativity and discipline. Students note teacher arrival and departure times, in addition to curriculum

coverage, and teachers rate their own performance (GPE, 2018).

There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of these two reforms, and anecdotal evidence is contradictory. Some education practitioners suggest that the reforms have been effective and attendance has improved; however, there is evidence of implementation challenges (see Machio, 2017), and sceptics assert that there is a mismatch between the causes of absenteeism and the solutions proposed.

“ Like in another developing countries, teacher absenteeism rates in Kenya are high, with 11-16 per cent of teachers found to be absent from primary schools

We undertook an illustrative case study of teacher attendance in Embu County

This paper looks at Embu County in Kenya as a case study, and seeks to explore three avenues of research:

1. current levels of teacher attendance in Embu County
2. factors associated with low attendance
3. awareness and perceived efficacy of recent reforms to improve attendance, focusing in particular on TPAD

We selected Embu County purposively as an illustrative case because the values of county-level educational variables are similar to national averages. We conducted fieldwork in two out of the five sub-counties in Embu County, namely Mbeere South and Mbeere North, as these have the largest proportion of students in government schools, and tend to perform less well on socio-economic measures.

We employed a mixed methods approach to interrogate teacher attendance

A mixed methods approach was used, involving concurrent qualitative and quantitative data collection with teachers, headteachers, parents, and community members.

Our tools were primarily developed from pre-existing materials (such as SABER, UNICEF Innocenti and SDI Report 2013), most of which have already been tested in the field. This allowed us to complement and reinforce wider research in this area. For the third research question, however, several new questions were developed. All tools were piloted extensively in the field prior to implementation². The fieldwork was conducted by Gmaurich Insights, with support and supervision by NFER.

Challenges and Limitations

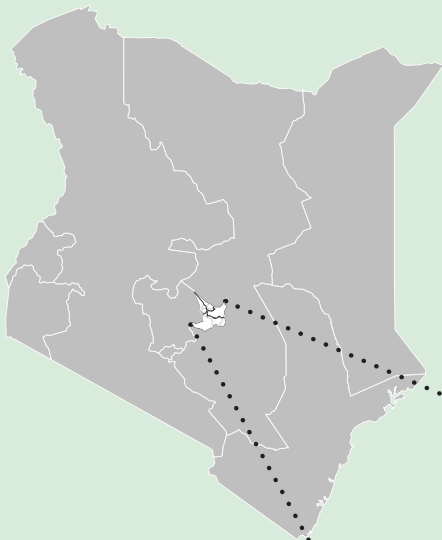
- **External validity:** This study is intended to provide a snapshot view of the issues surrounding teacher attendance in a specific geography. The small sample size used means that it is not possible to draw statistical significance from the findings. Findings from this study may have implications for similar counties, but not all results are directly transferable across contexts
- **Selection bias:** There may be some level of built in selection bias in the focus group discussions and teacher surveys in terms of those who actually responded. If a teacher was absent from school at the time of the surveys, another teacher would be randomly selected in their place, however, this could mean that those teachers who were more likely to be absent were not interviewed.
- **Response bias:** All teacher surveys rely on teachers providing honest and accurate responses. However, there may have been reluctance to provide negative responses for fear of negative outcomes. There is therefore a risk that responses are disproportionately positive, or otherwise biased due to conflicts of interest.

In our study, we understand response bias may have been a challenge. This is particularly likely of the teachers (and to some extent headteachers) surveyed. Several teachers mentioned rumours of widespread transfers, and TSC had issued policies requiring transfers of long-serving staff. It is possible this led to some bias in the responses to questions around satisfaction with the headteacher or school due to concern that it may affect their transfers. Similarly, it was unclear to what extent headteachers can provide honest feedback on absenteeism when it was emphasized that they were the ones who could check absenteeism by being present.

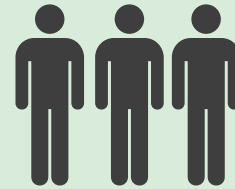
These limitations are recognised in our reporting of findings, and we have triangulated data across multiple sources to ensure the relevance and validity of findings. Self-reporting was completed anonymously in order to increase the likelihood of honest reporting.

² Research tools are available upon request

Embu County Snapshot



Location:
Eastern Kenya



Population:
577,390
inhabitants³



Economy:
Agriculture is the main
economic activity...

...employing 70.1 per
cent of the population



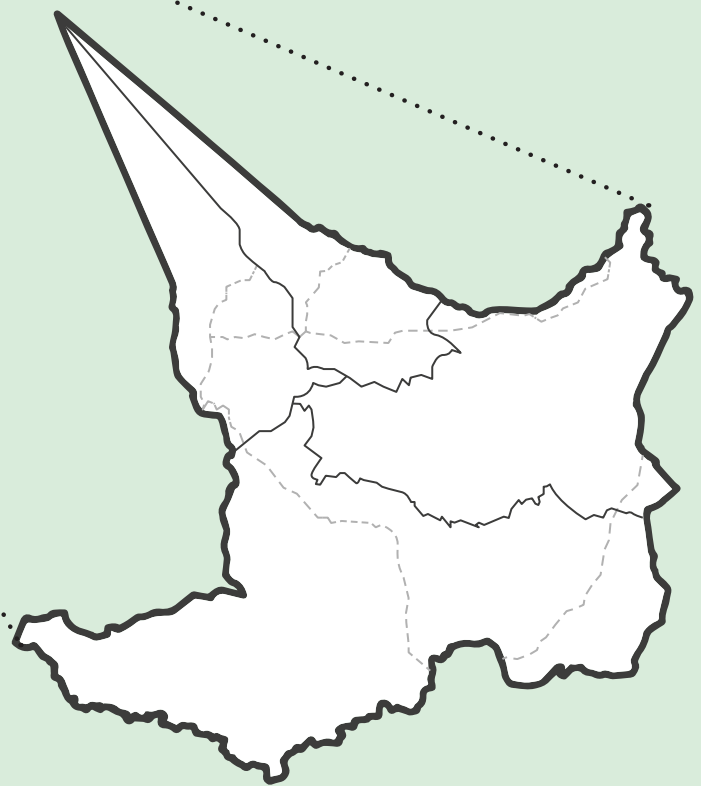
Teachers:
Approximately

4,022



We randomly selected 20 primary government schools in Embu County, and conducted:

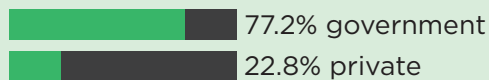
- two unannounced spot checks per school
- structured surveys with three randomly selected primary school teachers in each school⁵
- semi-structured interviews with all school headteachers
- one focus group discussion with community members and parents in each sub-county, comprising six participants
- one focus group discussion with teachers in each sub-county, comprising four participants in Mbeere South, and six participants in Mbeere North⁶



Education system:

128,688

students in 482
primary schools



³ Estimation of the County Government for 2017 based on the figure from the 2009 Census (516,212 inhabitants)

⁴ Based on the average teacher:pupil ratio for primary schools in Embu (1:32). The teacher-pupil ratio in primary schools ranges from 1:29 to 1:35 across sub-counties

⁵ Note that surveys were conducted with randomly selected school teachers who were on the School Register. If the teacher selected was not in school, another teacher would be randomly selected in their place.

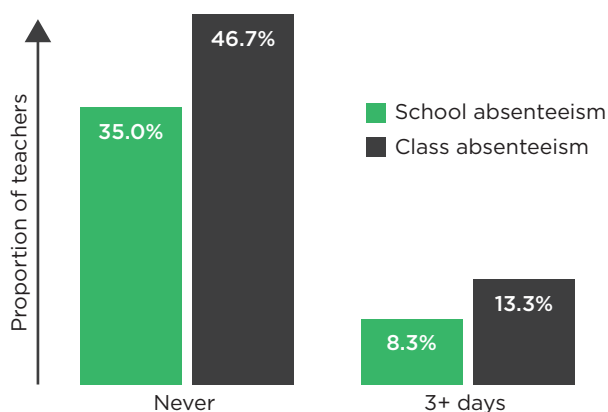
⁶ Participant numbers were low in Mbeere South due to the small number of teachers in schools.

C. Research question one: What are the levels of teacher attendance in Embu County?

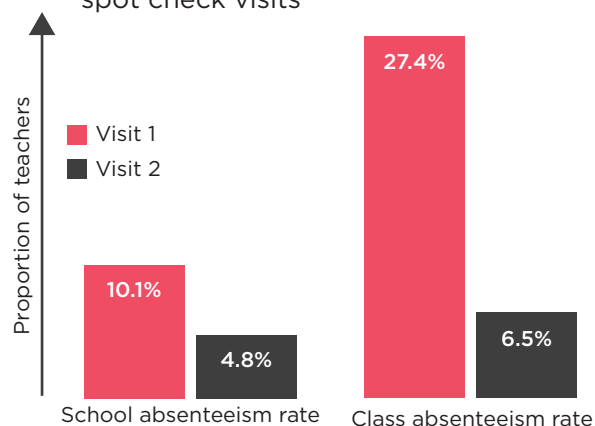
In order to answer this question, we looked at the level of absenteeism self-reported by teachers, and triangulated this with the results from two unannounced spot checks per school. Spot checks were conducted in the middle of the second term of school, in the months of June and July 2018. It should be noted that Kenya was experiencing heavy rains during this period, which may have had an impact on findings in some schools.

We consider absenteeism at two levels: *School absenteeism* and *class absenteeism*. *School absenteeism* is calculated as the number of teachers not in school divided by the number of teachers expected in school. *Class absenteeism* is calculated as the number of teachers not in class divided by the number expected in school. Throughout our analysis, we consider instances of self-reported absence of three days or more during the previous month, not including official holidays, as a notable level of absence. In addition, we also use figures from the first spot check only. This is because absenteeism rates dropped considerably between our two spot checks, indicating that teachers might have anticipated the second visit.

Self-reported teacher absenteeism in the past month



Absenteeism rate from spot check visits



School absenteeism

School absenteeism rates were largely consistent with Kenya-wide estimates, but stakeholders appeared to downplay the absenteeism challenge

Eight per cent of teachers reported being absent from school three or more days, and ten per cent of teachers were absent during spot checks. Both figures are slightly lower than reported averages at the national level, which stand at between 11 per cent and 16 per cent UWEZO 2016; UWEZO, 2012, the SDI Report, 2013).

When parents, teachers and headteachers were asked about the occurrence of teacher absenteeism in Embu County schools in focus group discussions, respondents tended to downplay the issue as “rare” or “not rampant”. Teachers in particular were reluctant to admit teacher absenteeism was an issue in their schools, which may be in part due to

concern over negative consequences of admitting issues with absenteeism:

Absenteeism is not an issue. (Teacher in focus group discussion, Mbeere South).

No, we are very committed to our work. (Teacher in focus group discussion, Mbeere North).

Headteachers and parents were more open to discussing teacher absenteeism than teachers, but the levels reported were mixed. Responses from headteachers were especially varied, and in some instances seemed contradictory. For example, one headteacher reported that absenteeism was not

an issue, but estimated that approximately 20 per cent of teachers are absent in a month. Parent and community groups highlighted that teacher absenteeism occurs, but either felt the situation has improved, or that it is was not a widespread issue:

[Absenteeism] used to be there sometime back. But it is not anymore. (Parent in focus group, Mbeere North).

[Lateness and absenteeism] used to be there but it is no longer. (Parent in focus group, Mbeere South).

Class absenteeism

Class absenteeism rates were higher than school absenteeism rates, but consistent with Kenya wide estimates. Surprisingly, stakeholders did not view class absenteeism as a challenge at all

Thirteen per cent of teachers reported missing class while being in school in the past month. However, spot check results found that up to 27 per cent of teachers were absent from the classroom, with a combined rate of 37 per cent absenteeism at both school and class level. While the spot check data reveals much higher levels of class absenteeism than self-reported data, this is consistent with the combined school and class level absenteeism rate of 42 per cent reported in the SDI Report.⁷

Surprisingly, when teachers, parents and headteachers were asked to discuss levels of class absenteeism, very few were aware of this being an issue in Embu County schools. If acknowledged at all, most suggested this happens once or twice a month for official or unavoidable reasons, such as in the event of an emergency, or as a result of official visitors:

Not unless when we have the officers who employ the teachers or visitors. (Teacher in focus group, Mbeere North).

Perceptions of absenteeism

All stakeholders appeared to agree on certain norms around what was considered acceptable and unacceptable absence

When headteachers were asked how much they agree with the following statement: 'Teachers perceive absenteeism as unprofessional behaviour', all but two out of 20 respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Two teachers responded 'not sure', and when asked to provide further information, both stressed that certain kinds of absence were acceptable and unavoidable – and in those situations absenteeism would not be seen as unprofessional. These views were mirrored in the focus group discussions:

Depends on level of absenteeism; if chronic then its unprofessional I agree, but if domestic and attending to personal issues I disagree [that it is unprofessional]. (Headteacher interview, Mbeere South).

It was also considered acceptable to be absent if the correct protocols were followed, such as providing a minimum of two days' notice, organising another teacher to provide classroom cover, and seeking the appropriate sign off approval from the relevant level.

He could call and tell the teacher I won't be available. And the teacher just agrees. But this one [current head] tells them to say it in advance, ahead of time. (Parent in focus group, Mbeere North).

If a teacher comes late or fails to come without permission is marked absent. And others ask for permissions for lame reasons. That is denied and indicated absent. That's how it stays. (Parent in focus group, Mbeere South).

Conversely, certain excuses were more likely to be considered 'unacceptable' or 'unprofessional', including: absence resulting from alcohol or drug abuse; 'chronic' or unauthorised absence; dealing with another business (i.e. running a family farm); insufficient notice provided, or protocols not followed (although this might be accepted in an emergency situation, such as a hospital visit or a sick child); and in some cases, environmental factors such as heavy rains affecting roads were not acceptable excuses.

⁷ The SDI Report marks teachers from absent from the class if they are not on the school premises or if they are present on school premises, but not found in the classroom. This study only counts teachers as absent from the classroom if on the school premises, but not in the classroom.

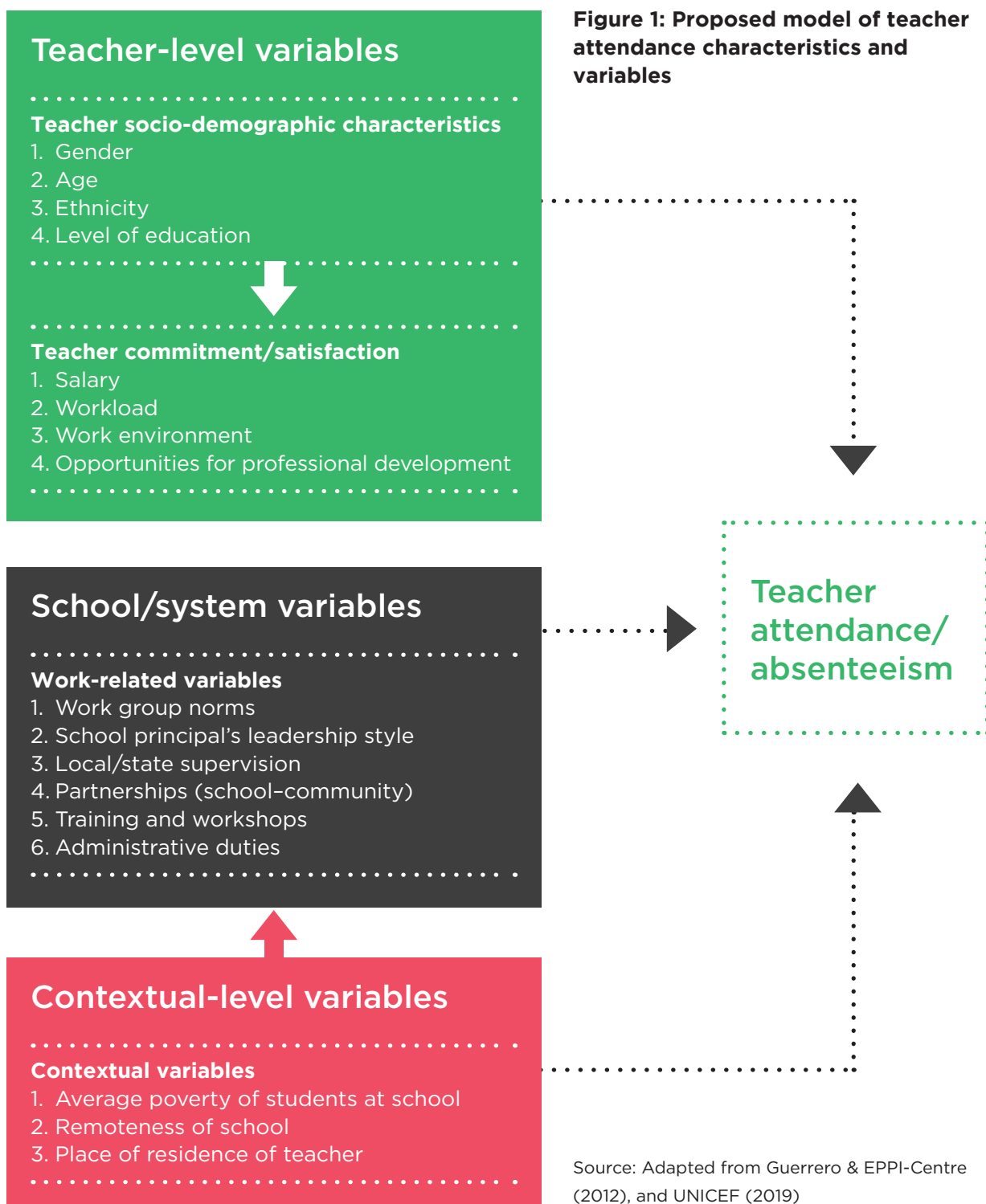
Perceived as
acceptable reasons

Perceived as
unacceptable reasons



D. Research question two: What factors are associated with low attendance in Embu County?

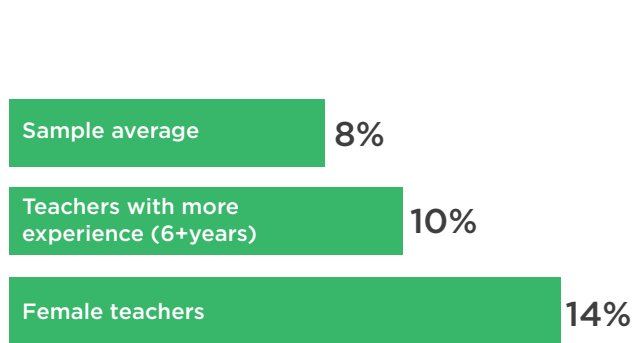
In analysing the factors associated with teacher attendance in Embu County, we used the model developed by Guerrero & EPPI-Centre (2012) and adapted by UNICEF (2019). This model proposes three levels of influence with the potential to affect teacher attendance: (i) teacher-level (including socio-demographic characteristics, and commitment / satisfaction characteristics), (ii) school-level, and (iii) context-level variables. We present results separately for each level, and throughout this section highlight that our findings are mixed and context-specific, in line with the literature.



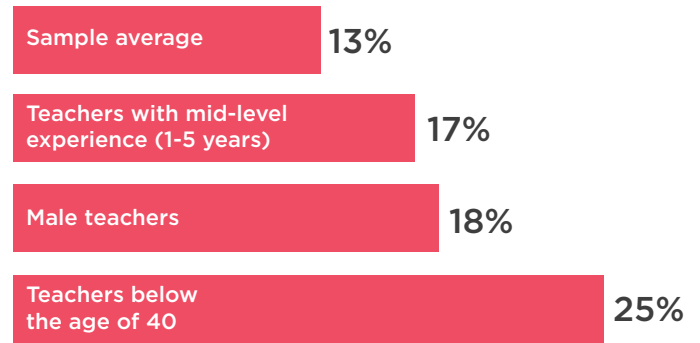
Teacher characteristics: socio-demographic

Female teachers were more likely to be absent from *school*, but male teachers were more likely to be absent from *class*. In addition, more experienced teachers reported higher absenteeism

Sub-groups with higher self-reported **school absenteeism**, relative to the sample average



Sub-groups with higher self-reported **class absenteeism**, relative to the sample average



Self-reported 3 or more days absent from school in the past month

A higher proportion of female teachers reported being absent from *school* for three or more days in the past month compared with the sample average (14 per cent compared with eight per cent). Gender was also a clear theme during discussions with teachers, parents and headteachers, with many respondents suggesting women are more likely to be absent as a result of domestic duties, family responsibilities, visits to the clinic during pregnancy and maternity leave.

Male teachers were more likely to report being absent from the *classroom*, with 18 per cent of male teachers absent from the classroom three or more times in the last month, compared with the sample average of 13 per cent. To some extent this contradicts many of the qualitative findings, as respondents rarely suggested that men were

more likely to be absent from school or from class. The exception to this came when discussing alcohol abuse, which was usually assumed to affect male absences more than female. The SDI report similarly found that men were more likely to be absent from the *classroom*, particularly older, male teachers with higher education, training and seniority.

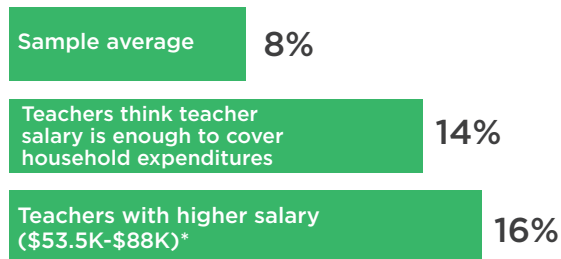
Across all the factors we considered, only years of experience was found to have a statistically significant correlation with higher levels of *school absenteeism*, with teachers with more years of experience (over six years) reporting higher levels of absence from school. The SDI Report similarly found a significant correlation between seniority and *school absenteeism*.

“ Only years of experience was found to have a statistically significant correlation with higher levels of *school absenteeism* ”

Teacher characteristics: commitment and satisfaction

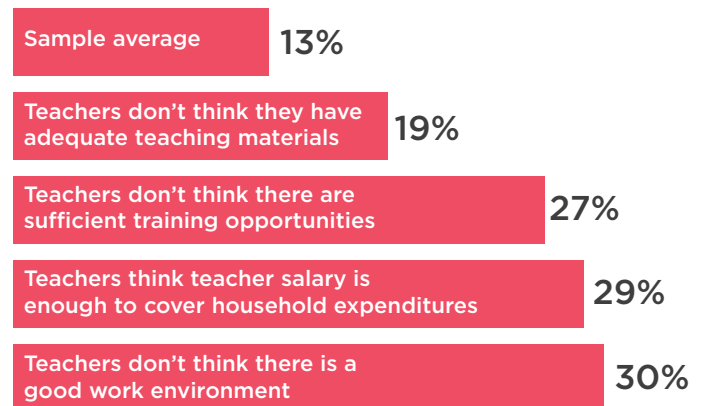
Teachers with higher salaries were more likely to report being absent from school

Sub-groups with higher self-reported **school absenteeism**, relative to the sample average



*currency is Kenyan Shillings

Sub-groups with higher self-reported **class absenteeism**, relative to the sample average



Self-reported 3 or more days absent from school in the past month

Only 20 per cent of teachers reported being satisfied with their current salary, and 28 per cent stated that remuneration was a key change that could reduce teacher absenteeism. However, teachers with higher salaries, and who reported being satisfied with their salary, were actually more likely to report higher levels of absence from *school* in the last month.

It might logically be assumed that salary increases will increase motivation and therefore improve teacher attendance. However, existing literature suggests that salary alone may not be sufficient to improve overall levels of motivation in the long term (Branch *et al*, 2013; World Bank, 2018). Very few stakeholders attributed absenteeism to

dissatisfaction with salary, either at the *school* or *classroom* level. Rather, several respondents described low salaries in addition to poor benefits and limited opportunities for promotion as key challenges that affect teacher morale. Consistent with wider literature, this data seems to suggest that although salary is a concern for teachers, addressing this concern alone is not enough to improve teacher attendance.

If you are not motivated and you stay for five, ten years no promotion, no nothing... That is why you see some teachers absent because they are stressed after working but no promotions...there is no motivation. (Teacher in focus group, Mbeere North).

Teachers with poor perceptions of the school environment reported higher levels of *class absenteeism*, but this was not the case for *school absenteeism*

Poor perceptions of the school environment did not appear to impact reported levels of *school* absenteeism, however those who do report that the work environment was poor were more likely to say they had been absent from *class* compared with the sample average (30 per cent against sample average of 13 per cent). Dissatisfaction with teaching materials and training opportunities also increased the likelihood of teachers reporting being absent from *class* (19 per cent and 27 per cent respectively). These concerns were further reflected in many of the stakeholder discussions:

The teacher has to go around with one book showing the pupils. Had there been enough books on each desk that could've made the learning process easy. (Parent in focus group, Mbeere South).

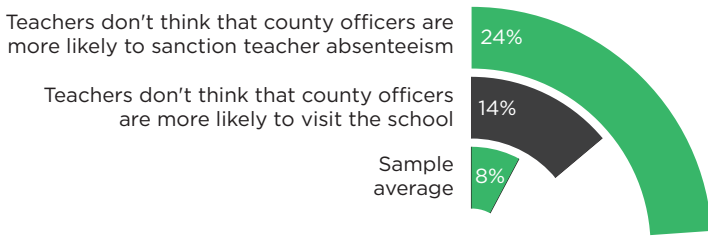
While perceptions around workload did not affect reported levels of absenteeism, it was often mentioned during qualitative data collection, and warrants consideration in the context of teacher commitment and satisfaction. Comments were made by all stakeholder types around workload, with references made to understaffing, long hours, and minimal recognition.

...they strain from Monday to Friday. Teachers don't leave class if you want to see a teacher you have to make it break time...See like that teacher we were with here, he does everything solely. (Parent in focus group, Mbeere South).

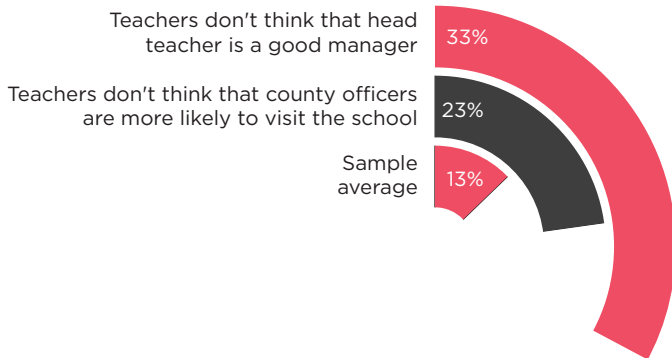
School and system characteristics

Headteachers play an important role in improving teacher attendance, particularly at the *class* level

Sub-groups with higher self-reported **school absenteeism**, relative to the sample average



Sub-groups with higher self-reported **class absenteeism**, relative to the sample average



Teacher data did not reveal any clear trends between headteacher leadership and *school* level absenteeism, but there was a correlation between perceptions of headteacher management and reported *class* level absenteeism. Over 33 per cent of teachers who *do not* think the headteacher is a good manager report being absent from *class* three or more times in the past month.

Several stakeholders referred to the importance of school leadership in tackling teacher absenteeism, as well as building teacher morale. The parent groups in particular referred to 'strict' leaders who will not tolerate absenteeism. Headteachers were often seen as the critical people on the ground monitoring teacher absenteeism and ensuring teacher quality, particularly as they are present in school and able to monitor absenteeism levels on a daily basis – unlike parents or local officials:

...we have a new headmistress and we have started seeing the difference. This school was dragging so behind. But now we have started seeing teachers get to school quite early to teach in the morning. (Parent in focus group, Mbeere North).

Other forms of supervision, including local county officers and community members are also important in tackling absenteeism

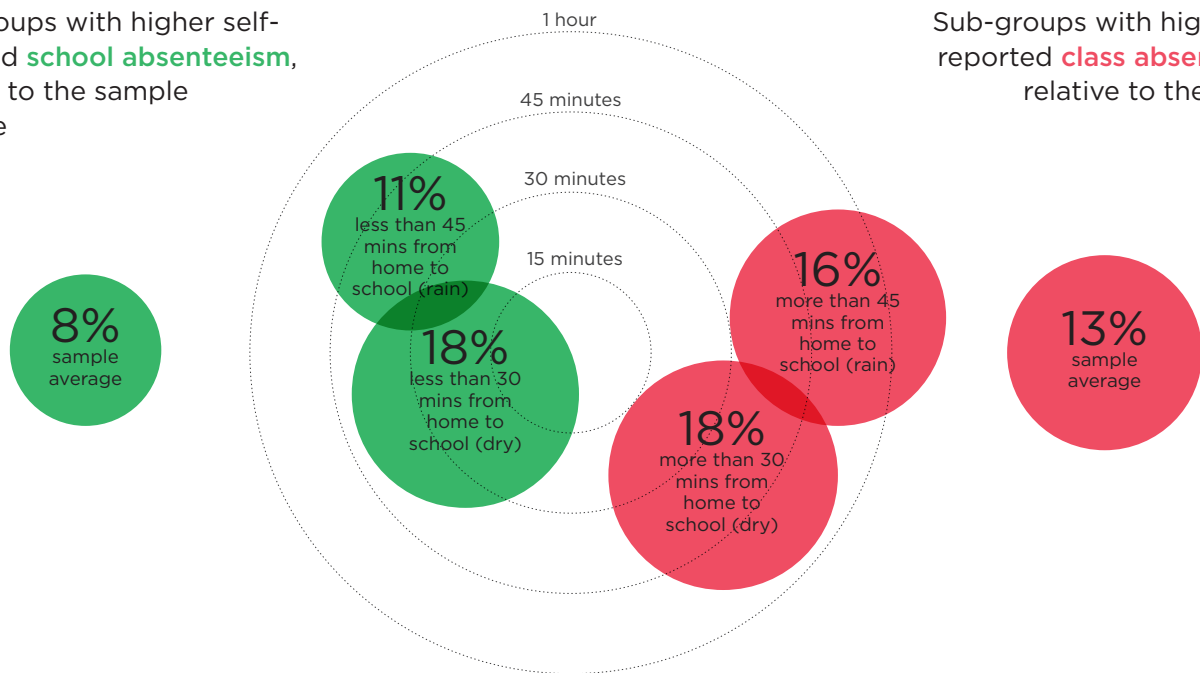
Findings from the teacher surveys suggest that perceptions of close local state supervision, and belief that absenteeism is sanctioned, both lead to reductions in absenteeism at the *school* level. Teachers who did *not* think county officers are more likely to visit were more likely to report being absent from *school* (14 per cent), and similarly those who did *not* think that county officers are likely to sanction teachers due to absenteeism had

higher levels of reported *school level absenteeism* (24 per cent). Qualitative responses indicate the availability of local/state support is mixed. While some received regular support and supervision from local officials, others found this to be very limited. Those who report minimal state supervision suggest this is primarily due to a lack of resources to support the number of schools in the area.

Context characteristics

Teachers who live closer to school are more likely to be absent from *school*, but teachers who live further away are more likely to be absent from *class*

Sub-groups with higher self-reported **school absenteeism**, relative to the sample average



Sub-groups with higher self-reported **class absenteeism**, relative to the sample average

Teachers that live closer to the school reported higher *school* absenteeism than the sample average, while teachers that live further away from the school reported higher *class* absenteeism rates. This may initially seem counter-intuitive, since it could be assumed that distance and travel time would cause teachers to be absent from school. However this finding resonates with findings from the SDI Report, which found a significant correlation between teachers born in the same district as the school and absence from *school*. This might be explained by comments from one of the parent focus group discussions, who strongly advocated for teachers being provided with housing and serving away from their hometowns. They argued that those who live close to school are more likely to leave school to attend to personal issues or business:

You see if a teacher is teaching in the neighbourhood he will be thinking about home. Maybe I didn't leave the cattle with

feeds. Even at times they might rush home to take good care of personal issues. (Parent in focus group, Mbeere North).

In the teacher survey, we found that 32 per cent of teachers report that they do other activities apart from teaching. When asked what key things need to change in order to reduce levels of teacher absenteeism, one teacher responded: 'Transfers to be done outside of the home [county] since teachers run businesses'

There are comments in both parent and teacher groups that absenteeism as a result of weather conditions or impassable roads are considered unacceptable excuses for absence – this partly seems to be down to the 'strictness' of the headteacher, but also whether climate is a genuine issue in a particular area. Many headteacher responses do suggest climate, weather conditions, or impassable roads affect teachers' (and students') ability to reach school, but this is not reflected in the teacher data.

In summary, the causes of teacher absenteeism at the *school* and *class* level are varied and are likely to be highly context specific

As seen in existing literature, it is difficult to identify any clear trends which explain the causes of teacher absenteeism, and at times the results are contradictory or counter-intuitive.

While our sample size does not allow us to draw concrete conclusions on the causes of

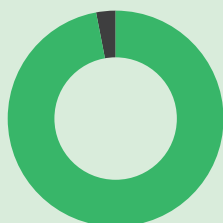
absenteeism, this does allow us to understand some of the existing challenges and barriers facing teachers and communities, and the need for tailored approaches to monitor absenteeism, address structural and contextual challenges and identify ways to improve teacher's job satisfaction.

E. Research question three: What is the awareness and perceived efficacy of recent reforms to improve attendance in Embu County?

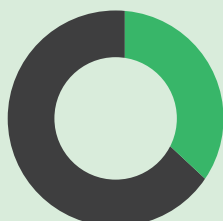
In this section, we look at one of the key reforms implemented in Kenya to address teacher performance and attendance - the TPAD system. Findings in this section are particularly interesting due to the potential relevance for other regions implementing TPAD.



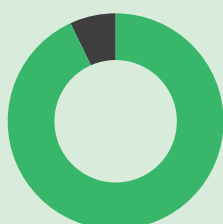
100% of teachers
are aware of TPAD



97% of teachers
report using TPAD



37% of teachers
claimed they had not
received training in
how to use TPAD



93% of teachers feel
teacher absenteeism
has reduced in the
last year

Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development (TPAD) system

The TPAD tool enables the TSC to monitor teacher attendance, syllabus coverage, classroom performance, knowledge, innovation, creativity and discipline. Students note teacher arrival and departure times, in addition to curriculum coverage, and teachers rate their own performance. Lessons are observed by education supervisors, and these are discussed with school principals. All information is uploaded via the TPAD tool on the TSC website (GPE, 2018).

A 2014 pilot of the TPAD system was implemented in six counties to 'raise awareness and compliance with the TSC Code of Regulations and Ethics, enhance the capacity of the TSC headquarters and county offices to support school-based teacher performance, and trial and evaluate a new teacher appraisal system in the six pilot counties' (British Council, 2018). Successful results from the pilot influenced the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to invest \$5 million through the World Bank to take the TPAD tool to all 47 counties in Kenya.

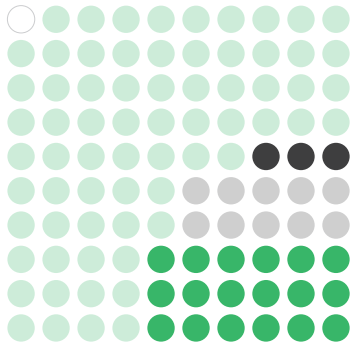
“ The TPAD tool enables the Teacher Service Commission to monitor teacher attendance, syllabus coverage, classroom performance, knowledge, innovation, creativity and discipline

Awareness and use of TPAD, is strikingly high

One hundred per cent of the teachers surveyed reported that they were aware of TPAD and have used it. Respondents were typically able to describe the TPAD system without prompting. Most teachers and headteachers mentioned TPAD independently as a key reform throughout discussions and interviews, without the interviewer raising it directly.

In addition to knowing about TPAD, 100 per cent of teachers reported that they had used the system, with 97 per cent stating they use TPAD to rate their own teaching, and 93 per cent saying they used it to monitor their own attendance.

The reliability of absenteeism rates recorded through TPAD is less clear



How often do you use the TPAD system?

- every year
- every week
- every month
- every term

Although the reported usage of TPAD was very high, the frequency of usage was more mixed, with most teachers saying they only use the system once per *term* (68 per cent), and a small number reporting they only use it once per *year* (three per cent). It is unclear whether this level of usage is sufficient to ensure accurate reporting. Responses from headteachers provided mixed feedback, with some saying TPAD is supposed to be completed weekly, others saying termly and one saying it is supposed to be completed once a year.

Some teachers and headteachers questioned the integrity of the information recorded on TPAD, with reports of information being 'faked' or manipulated easily. In one case there was a suggestion that 'other schools don't use it', although there is no conclusive evidence of this from this study. Some of the headteachers suggested TPAD should be used with other monitoring methods to increase the accuracy – such as classroom observations, class registers, and headteacher vigilance – to reduce the potential inaccuracy of information recorded through TPAD.

Teachers noted limited training and guidance on how to use TPAD effectively

Correct use of the TPAD system was also unclear. When piloting our research tools, we found many teachers did not understand the term '*online TPAD system*'. It transpired that many teachers would fill out a hard copy form, which was later uploaded by another member of staff onto the online system. This is referred to in some of the interviews, and suggests that not all teachers had the technical skills or physical access to computers and internet connection, to enable them to use the system as intended.

Approximately 37 per cent of teachers claimed they had not received training in how to use TPAD. One of the teacher focus groups highlighted a lack of technical ability as a barrier to them effectively using TPAD, suggesting that more training is needed:

Moderator: So you think the training was not enough?

Respondent: Yes, even they themselves did not get it.

(Teacher in focus group, Mbeere South)

Training also came up in discussions with headteachers. A number suggested that additional seminars or guidance on how to use and apply TPAD may increase its impact. Feedback from teachers suggested there is a defensive response to the introduction of TPAD. They claimed it is an administrative burden, a way of policing them, and a top down approach that has been forced upon them, rather than a useful tool to support them in improving their own professional development by recognising strengths and weaknesses in their performance.

.....

Perceptions of effectiveness suggests TPAD may help to reduce *school absenteeism*, but may not necessarily address intrinsic motivation

.....

The perceptions around effectiveness of TPAD was quite positive. 93 per cent of teachers thought that levels of absenteeism had reduced in the last year, and 85 per cent stated they are more likely to report absences than they were last year. Overall, there appear to be indications that *school level absenteeism* is improving in Embu County schools, but it is less clear if it has been successful in addressing *class absenteeism*.

While some teachers and headteachers recognise how TPAD has enabled teachers to work together to ensure they are covering the school syllabus, and incentivise them to ensure they are present in school, it does not yet appear that teachers themselves fully buy into the system. Teacher groups were defensive when talking about absenteeism. Both teachers and headteachers would commonly remind the interviewer that ‘teachers are humans too’, and are often away from school for legitimate reasons. Headteachers referred to teachers being ‘intimidated’ rather than counselled or guided by officials tackling absenteeism. Some teachers report being made to feel like criminals or labourers, that the challenges they face are ignored, and that they are not empowered to take control of their own professional development and workload. The overall tone seems to suggest teachers often feel overworked, demoralised and under-appreciated:

I understand we had one teacher within Embu who hanged himself but we do not know the reason. We heard from the police force and maybe that teacher had some problems. It might happen to somebody else and it is good if they monitor instead of accusing me as the criminal absentee teacher. (Teacher in focus group, Mbeere North).

TPAD addresses some extrinsic motivations. For example, teachers are motivated to be present in school to avoid sanctions, and motivated to use TPAD to increase their chances of promotion. However, there is less evidence to suggest it helps to address intrinsic motivations, such as a feeling pride in their work, which is required to keep teachers in the classroom and effectively teaching the students.

Finally, while TPAD may have helped to motivate teachers to be present in schools, it cannot (and does not necessarily claim to) overcome other barriers which prevent teachers from getting to school. For example, it was apparent that women were perceived to be more likely to be absent due to domestic and family responsibilities, which suggests a specific barrier facing women which cannot be addressed by TPAD. Teachers may be in school, but structural challenges can keep them from teaching effectively – such as scarce teaching materials and a lack of classrooms.

.....

“ There are indications that *school level absenteeism* is reducing in Embu County schools, but progress in reducing *class absenteeism* is less clear



F. Policy implications

Our research yields several interesting findings. Because many of our findings are context-specific, they are most likely to be useful for informing policymakers in Embu County and in other similar counties on how to effectively manage the teaching workforce. That said, several of our varied results can also contribute to the wider debates in Kenya on addressing the attendance challenge effectively. The four key policy implications are summarised below.



Focus on interventions that address not only *school* but also *class absenteeism*

In line with other studies from Kenya, we found that *class* attendance was a larger challenge than *school* attendance. Yet, many reforms around teacher absenteeism around the world appear to focus on reducing the latter as opposed to the former. One reason for this may be that *school* attendance is easier to both measure and address than *class* attendance. A second reason may be that awareness of this difference in types of absenteeism is limited among key stakeholders. Ensuring that any reforms attempting to address attendance include interventions that can address both types of absenteeism may be critical to improving teacher attendance.



Consider ways of shifting the focus of TPAD's practical usage in Kenya from simply monitoring teachers to better motivating them

The literature indicates that systems that couple monitoring with rewards and motivation are most effective in addressing teacher attendance challenges in a sustainable manner (Guerrero & EPPI-Centre, 2012). The TPAD on paper fulfils this criteria and aims to not only monitor teacher attendance and performance, but also to help motivate teachers by providing them with tools to self-assess and improve their teaching practice. However, our research found that although stakeholders perceive that attendance has improved since TPAD's implementation, in practice schools are focusing on the monitoring aims of the system more than the motivational aims. Moving TPAD's practical usage away from simply policing performance to supporting personal development may be a useful way to sustain early achievement and further address attendance challenges.



These recommendations cannot fully address all the barriers to effective teaching and learning. In particular, it was not within the scope of this research to examine the prevalence or impact of teachers who are in class but not teaching, or those teachers lacking pedagogical knowledge to teach effectively. Both instances can hamper learning even if *school* and *class attendance* are at acceptable levels. Nonetheless, our findings do go some way to understanding how to build on existing efforts to monitor and discourage teacher absenteeism, by beginning to place more of a focus on building motivation and improving job satisfaction for teachers.



Consider ways to educate stakeholders in schools on effectively using TPAD

While our research shows that teachers are clearly aware of, and using the TPAD system, some teachers perceived challenges related to (a) the quality of training provided and (b) the nature of TPAD usage. In addition, we also noted several perceived challenges around buy-in from teachers to the utility of the system. While this study did not involve a systematic evaluation of the TPAD system, these perceptions may warrant further investigation, since the success and sustainability of such reforms depends critically on stakeholders such as teachers and headteachers, using them. It may be important to consider ways to further educate this group on the TPAD. This could be in the form of refresher training to help teachers to use the system more effectively, or in the form of written communication, or through contests and prizes encouraging effective usage. To be effective, any initiative undertaken should focus on working with teachers to help them move beyond completing TPAD as a tick box exercise, to truly engaging with the system for their own personal improvement.



Educate communities about the issue of teacher absenteeism, and seek creative ways to engage them in solutions

Community members can play an important role in understanding and tackling absenteeism, although the exact role they might play will depend on the context. Our research demonstrated that stakeholders outside of the school had limited knowledge about the extent of the teacher attendance challenge, particularly at the *class* level. Stakeholders did raise other critical challenges related to teaching and learning such as lack of classrooms and teaching resources, student poverty, or student absence from school when supporting family farming, all of which could be hindering effective learning. However, the fact that stakeholders did not consider teacher attendance an issue probably implies that they do not exercise their rights to hold schools to account for teacher absenteeism.

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