



School Opening and Attendance (SOA) Scoping Study Final Report

DELVe Formative Evaluation Workstream

May 2024

Executive Summary

Nigeria faces a learning crisis. Over 10 million primary age children are out of school and of those who are enrolled, as many as 40% do not attend regularly. Teacher shortages, inadequate funding and resourcing, lack of capacity in school monitoring and supervision, as well as leadership challenges compound the profound problem of equitable access to quality basic education. These issues are particularly acute in the five states of northern Nigeria where FCDO Nigeria's flagship education programme – Partnership for Learning for All in Nigerian Education (PLANE) – operates. Recognising the urgency of addressing these challenges, there is a growing national focus on initiatives to increase access to education and improve its quality. The Federal Ministry of Education's Roadmap for 2024-2027 highlights the need for comprehensive and prioritised strategies aimed at ensuring unhindered access to quality basic and senior secondary education, addressing teacher supply gaps, and enhancing the professional development of educators and school supervisors (2024, p. 26-27).

FCDO commissioned this School Opening and Attendance (SOA) scoping study to (i) gather and review existing studies from Nigeria and selected countries and regions regarding SOA; (ii) gather and review secondary quantitative and primary qualitative data from development partners, government and non-government agencies, and (iii) deliver analysis of evidence around SOA, and make recommendations for programming, monitoring, and further research. The following themes provide the framework through which school opening, teacher attendance, and student attendance are examined as separate components in this report: 1) Concepts and definitions; 2) Prevalence and practices in Nigeria; 3) Patterns in PLANE states; 4) Overarching issues and concerns; and 5) Promising responses. Evidence was gathered for this report through a mixed methods approach comprising:

- ▶ Document review of academic and grey literature pertaining to SOA;
- ▶ Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and informal discussions with government agencies at federal and state levels, non-government agencies, donors and PLANE partners;
- ▶ Secondary quantitative data collection and analysis from government, PLANE partners and external development partners.

The study is limited in scope by resource constraints and data quality and availability. The study finds that school opening, teacher, and student attendance are dynamic; they change over time and across different countries, states, and communities; they are highly localised. However, there are several key features and gaps that inform the following seven key findings and associated recommendations for programming, policy and further research.

1. Formal guidance at state levels on SOA

Key finding

- ▶ **There is very little guidance at federal level and none at state level (in PLANE states) that formalises standards for school opening, teacher or student attendance.** Official school calendars are inconsistent across years and states, and subject to change as a result of public holidays, celebrations, social, political and environmental incidents, and there are no established responses to these. It remains unclear whether policymakers at state or federal level consider the calculation of school days and contact time across an academic year when establishing and approving yearly calendars. This holds significant implications, as policymakers may inadvertently design and approve calendars that fail to meet minimum standards. Many calendars do not consistently fulfil the minimum standard of 180 days per year, mandated at the federal level by the 2016 National Education Quality Assurance Handbook. Additionally, there is a lack of systemic definition of, and metrics for, student or teacher attendance in primary schools. These gaps undermine efforts to enable equitable access to quality basic education. Standardising, monitoring and measuring practice would be an important improvement to the existing idiosyncratic system.

Recommendations

- ▶ With support from development partners, state government agencies should review and raise awareness, among education officials at state, local and school levels, of how the development and structure of official academic calendars fundamentally determine school opening and contact time.
- ▶ State government agencies should institute formal guidance on SOA, with support from development partners. Specifically, (i) detailed minimum standards for SOA (ii) recording and managing unplanned school closures and teacher absences; (iii) managing planned long-term teacher absence; (iv) strategies and government

support to address different forms and frequencies of student absence. This formalisation could be done in conjunction with new and revised Education Sector Plans (ESPs) or as addenda to relevant existing guidance and managed through collaborative processes.

- ▶ Once policies or guidance on SOA are revised or developed, state government agencies, with support from development partners, should track the implementation, effects and impact of reforms. The current 4-day week policy in Kaduna state, which has now been in place for two years, should be assessed as soon as possible through methods of monitoring or research. This assessment should examine localised operationalisation and effects on all elements of SOA including teaching days, contact hours, and learning outcomes.

2. Actual school opening and contact time

Key finding

Actual school days and contact time by state and Local Government Authority (LGA) per term is unknown. There is no data, and respondents were unable to provide estimates. This means no systematic information on unplanned closures, late starts or early finishes (per term or day), schools daily/weekly/termly functioning, and reasons for these. Data from KILs indicated broad social, environmental, political and economic reasons why schools may close – such as conflict, weather, farming, teacher supply – but we cannot map these possible explanations to actual patterns of opening. We also do not know whether, how and how often, schools attempt to mitigate closures with additional time. These data gaps mean that it is not possible to estimate systematically or with confidence the effect of school closures or opening days on students learning.

Recommendations

- ▶ Mixed method primary research is crucial to understanding patterns of actual school opening and closures and reasons for these. This should be co-designed and conducted at school and local level to make optimum use of existing data and knowledge. Building in access to existing streams of data – such as that gathered by School Support Officers (SSOs) – would be critical for a ‘joined up’ approach to data use and data production. Results should be discussed with schools, communities and local and state government agencies to interpret and respond to the findings.
- ▶ Development partners should support Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) and School Based Management Committees (SBMCs) to ensure that School Action Plans (SAPs) contain the school timetable, including opening and closing times and number and subject distribution of contact hours.
- ▶ Development partners should support schools and head teachers (within their areas of operation) to recognise localised patterns of teacher and student attendance and incorporate and explicitly outline strategies to tackle the challenges. Strategies could encompass infrastructure improvement, teacher training, community engagement, and provision of resources.

3. Teacher deployment and SOA

Key finding

Teacher deployment is imbalanced and highly idiosyncratic. Teachers are not sufficiently deployed close to their accommodation or home and therefore have to travel long distances to school. This is a direct contribution to teachers' late arrival and early departure, and of additional cost burden to teachers. In smaller schools with very few teachers, this also indirectly affects the timeliness of school opening and the punctuality of students. Evidence indicates that adequate deployment and retention of qualified teachers in rural areas is especially problematic; in addition, women are insufficiently targeted for tailored support to work and engage fully with teaching.

Recommendations

- ▶ Conduct mixed method research with and about teachers that actively seeks knowledge, participation and voice of female and male teachers in different locations and school types for more granular and comprehensive data on teachers' behaviour, including attendance, motivations and challenges. This could be contextualised by policy research that identifies and analyses teacher deployment and related policies and formal guidance.
- ▶ State government agencies should review and update teacher deployment, support and retention policies and packages, with support from development partners, and in line with state education sector plans. Examples such as the Rural Teacher Incentive Scheme in Kwara state and the recent Jigawa Teacher Recruitment,

Deployment and Management Policy (2019-20), both of which included strategies for more responsive and equitable teacher deployment, should be evaluated for effectiveness and relevance to state and local contexts. Results should be considered in terms of opportunities for replication, adaptation and learning from successful teacher deployment and support initiatives, especially for female teachers and for poorly resourced locations.

4. School leadership and SOA

Key finding

Weak school leadership - particularly by the head teacher – has profound effects on SOA, yet there is relatively little attention given to head teachers in the data reviewed for this study (compared to evidence on teachers and students). Head teachers are systemically relatively weak, having little control over financial resources, teacher management, or staffing. Their workloads are usually incredibly stretched, with administrative, management and teaching tasks. Head teachers may additionally lack qualifications, experience and professional capacity development to enable them to fully understand and fulfil their roles. Fewer women occupy leadership positions than men.

Recommendations

- ▶ State government agencies, supported by development partners, should develop, review and target policies and guidance that specifically supports the empowerment, accountability and capacity development of existing head teachers with clear roles and responsibilities, training programmes, remote learning opportunities, peer networking, and career progression opportunities.
- ▶ State and local education government agencies, with support from development partners, should review procedures for appointing and supervising head teachers and promoting qualified teachers to leadership positions, including strengthening training and selection, and engaging with female teachers to support targeted professional development.

5. Monitoring and supervision of SOA

Key finding

In PLANE states, the frequency, location and duration of formal school monitoring visits – including by School Support Officers (SSOs) is unclear and poorly documented. This raises concerns about the quantity, quality and use of school monitoring data. There is monitoring happening, but it is unclear whether this is evenly distributed and of good quality and utility. This study's review of Education Management Information System (EMIS) data on long-term teacher absence (or leave) raises concerns that the data inaccurately represents the reality of teacher attendance. There are discrepancies between different secondary quantitative data sources, and data is not well disaggregated.

Recommendations

- ▶ The new 2024 Education Roadmap strategy for basic education includes the mandate to “*Make Federal Education Quality Assurance (QA) Service Supervisors and QA Officers in the States more effective*”. Development partners should engage with federal and state governments to realise this strategy.
- ▶ Federal and state governments should determine a common and precise metric for both student and teacher attendance tracking, with minimum standards for data and reporting. This common metric should recognise and learn from other systems that have been trialled (for example by the World Bank BESDA and AGILE programmes, and UNICEF) to refine a scalable and effective attendance monitoring system.
- ▶ At state and local level, School Support Officers (SSOs) and QA Officers need clear terms of reference with detailed objectives for each monitoring visit and detailed school visit schedules. This is partially provided through the SSO Handbook, but this document was not known to all SSO respondents, many of whom felt it was too long and bureaucratic, indicating that this document needs review, adaptation and wider dissemination. SSOs and QA Officers need regular refresher training to maintain their skills and knowledge to fulfil their duties.
- ▶ Development partners should consider conducting qualitative research to examine the perceptions and experiences of tying different types of incentives to accurate attendance data collection, tracking and use, in order to establish what incentives could work to encourage rigorous and effective monitoring and to counter disincentives.

6. Community participation in SOA

Key finding

There are two strands of evidence on community participation in SOA. (1) recognises the significance of community engagement with monitoring school, teacher and student behaviours (opening and attendance), and (2) advocates for some degree of localised autonomy to adapt standard annual and termly school calendars to local needs and rituals, such as market days, harvests, prayers, etc. Involving communities is well-evidenced to increase local ownership of schools and encourage parents and caregivers to send children to school because they see that the school understands their needs and lives. While standards for SOA are essential for accountability and monitoring, evidence indicates that flexibility for adaptation at local levels is crucial to ensure equitable access to education. Weekly schedules and timetables need to work for the community and its learners. Adaptations that are locally relevant would mitigate the effects of unplanned closures or absenteeism (e.g. on market days) by preparing for these in advance and planning mitigation strategies that are agreed at community level (e.g. extra hours on a Saturday morning). The recommendations that follow link closely to the recommendations on formal guidance on SOA, empowered and accountable school leadership, and monitoring and supervision.

Recommendations

- ▶ State government agencies, supported by development partners, should encourage greater community participation in developing school calendars, school schedules, and tracking student and teacher attendance, such as through SBMCs and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). This approach has the potential to improve local ownership of schooling processes and decision-making, address individual behaviours, and help mitigate student and teacher absenteeism as well as planned or unplanned school closures.
- ▶ Localised control and autonomy for head teachers – in consultation with their communities – to adjust school calendars and schedules to local needs, while ensuring minimum standards are met, to be instituted in state policy and documented at the LGEA and school level.

7. SOA among remote communities and marginalised individuals

Key finding

Regular and timely school opening, teacher and student attendance is more challenging in the most remote, rural schools and among marginalised communities for a wide range of reasons. However, SOA data in Nigeria (as elsewhere) is not consistently disaggregated by sufficiently nuanced demographic characteristic to fully understand trends and patterns in SOA at sub-national levels, the result of which is to inadequately target interventions.

Recommendations

- ▶ Development partners should prioritise SOA data collection in their most remote rural schools to better understand patterns and practices of SOA in these locations. This would provide an evidence base to help better develop appropriate responses. Actual trends in SOA among marginalised communities and children must be highlighted.
- ▶ Existing data gathered by EMIS, Annual School Census (ASC) and PLANE – as well as by tools such as EduTrac and the National Assessment on Learning Achievement in Basic Education (NALABE) - should be reviewed to consider whether they could be further disaggregated by location, gender, age, grade or qualification, disability, and distance from home to school to accurately capture key determinants of attendance. This will help to track students' and teachers' participation in school and better understand specific causes of absenteeism.



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Acronyms and abbreviations

ABEP	Accelerated Basic Education Programme
AGILE	Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment
ASC	Annual School Census
AY	Academic Year
BESDA	Better Education Service Delivery for All
CSACEFA	Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All
CStL	Community Support to Learning
DELVe	Human Development Evaluation, Learning and Verification Service
(N)DHS	(Nigeria) Demographic and Health Surveys
DPRS	Department for Planning, Research and Statistics
EDOREN	Education Data, Research and Evaluation, Nigeria
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ES	Education Secretary
ESA	Education Sector Analysis
ESP	Education Sector Plans
ESSPIN	Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria
FCDO(-N)	UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (in Nigeria)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GAR	Gross Attendance Rate
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
HGSFP	Home Grown School Feeding Program
IP	Implementing Partner
IQTE	Islamic, Quranic and Tsangaya Education
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LEARN	Let's Assess, Engage and Report Nigeria
LGA	Local Government Authority
LGEA	Local Government Education Authority
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
(S)MoE	(State) Ministry of Education

NALABE	National Assessment on Learning Achievement in Basic Education
NAR	Net Attendance Rate
ND	No Date
NEDS	Nigeria Education Data Survey
NEQAH	National Education Quality Assurance Handbook for Basic and Secondary Education
NPC	National Population Commission
NPE	National Policy on Education
OOSC	Out-of-School Children
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLANE	Partnership for Learning for All in Nigerian Education
PTA	Parent-Teacher Associations
QA	Quality Assurance
SANE	State Agency for Nomadic Education
SAP	School Action Plan
SBMC	School Based Management Committees
SDI	Service Delivery Indicator (World Bank)
SDP	School Development Plan
SEIMU	State Education Inspectorate and Monitoring Unit
SOA	School Opening and Attendance
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SSE	School Self-Evaluation
SSO	School Support Officer
SUBEB	State Universal Basic Education Board
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey (OECD)
UBEC	Universal Basic Education Commission
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
W1, 2, 3	Windows 1, 2, 3 (PLANE Implementing Partners)
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Disclaimer

This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies. Under the terms of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) Global Evaluation Framework through which this programme is procured, Ecorys as the Supplier hereby grants to FCDO a perpetual, world-wide, non-exclusive, irrevocable, royalty-free licence to use all the Material. FCDO will be the final owner of the findings of the report.

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Programme Summary

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Consortium	Ecorys Ltd (lead supplier); Itad Ltd; Preston Associates for International Development Ltd
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1. Introduction

The Human Development Evaluation Learning and Verification Service (DELVE) has been commissioned by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and is responsible for providing monitoring, evaluation and learning services to the Partnership for Learning for All in Nigerian Education (PLANE) programme. PLANE is FCDO Nigeria's flagship education programme in Nigeria and is structured in three windows:

- i. Window 1 centres on improving education systems (Getting the Foundations Right),
- ii. Window 2 supports Education in Emergencies, and
- iii. Window 3 concerns Community Support to Learning (CStL).

The DELVE consortium is led by Ecorys which holds ultimate responsibility for the contract and provides monitoring and evaluation expertise. The DELVE consortium also comprises two other consortium members: Itad, which provides evaluation and learning expertise; and Preston Associates, providing Nigeria-based data collection services. This document reports on a Scoping Study of School Opening, Teacher and Student Attendance (SOA) in the five PLANE programme states of the Northwest (Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa) and Northeast (Borno and Yobe) regions. The study was requested under DELVE Work Package 3: Formative Evaluation.

1.1. Basic Education context

In Nigeria, the Education Act of 2004 mandates that: “*Every parent shall ensure that his child receives full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude by regular attendance at school*” (Education Act, 2004, Part 1, section 4:4. (1)). Despite this legal requirement, challenges persist in ensuring universal access to quality education for all children. The country grapples with a significant population of Out-of-School Children (OOSC), estimated to exceed 10 million at the primary level alone, 66% of whom live in the North East and North West regions (UNICEF, 2022). Even among enrolled students, many fail to attend regularly or make sufficient academic progress for a wide range of reasons, leading to premature drop out and persistently low learning outcomes. Teacher attendance is also erratic and generally inadequate to maximise quality schooling and student learning outcomes. Factors contributing to this phenomenon include inadequate infrastructure and teacher shortages nationwide (UBEC, 2018, p.469).

Recognising the urgency of addressing these challenges, there is a growing national focus on initiatives to increase access to, and quality of, education. The Federal Ministry of Education's Roadmap for 2024-2027 highlights the need for comprehensive and prioritised strategies aimed at ensuring unhindered access to quality basic and senior secondary education, addressing teacher supply gaps, and enhancing the professional development of educators and school supervisors (2024, p.26-27). Given the scale of the issue and the complexity of the underlying factors, collaborative efforts across government levels and sectors are essential to prioritise access to quality education and ensure foundational learning outcomes for all children in Nigeria.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

There are three main objectives of this study:

1. Gather and review existing studies from Nigeria and selected countries regarding school opening, teacher and student attendance;
2. Gather and review relevant secondary quantitative data from PLANE Implementing Partners, the Nigeria Education Management Information System (EMIS), and household surveys, and primary qualitative data from state and federal government stakeholders;
3. Deliver analysis of current evidence on SOA, and make recommendations for PLANE programmatic responses, monitoring needs, and a further in-depth primary research study.

The findings of this study will provide FCDO-N, PLANE Implementing Partners (IPs) and government stakeholders, with an evidence base for better identifying, understanding and responding effectively to recent and current trends, practices, strengths and weaknesses associated with SOA in Nigeria. The study will highlight



evidence gaps, including as they relate to existing quantitative data, and substantial promising practices. It is envisaged that the evidence will inform programmatic implementation and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) activities by the IPs, and could also be used for wider communication, awareness-raising and influencing.

1.3. Report structure

This report is structured as follows. Section 1 introduces the Scoping Study, providing a brief outline of the basic education context in Nigeria and presenting the study purpose. Section 2 describes the methodology, tools, scope and limitations. Sections 3-5 present the key findings: Section 3 discusses school opening; Section 4 examines teacher attendance, and Section 5 investigates student attendance. Section 6 considers the interactions and interdependencies of SOA, including their mutual barriers. Finally, Section 7 summarises the key findings and makes recommendations for programming, policy, and further research.

2. Methodology

2.1. Approach

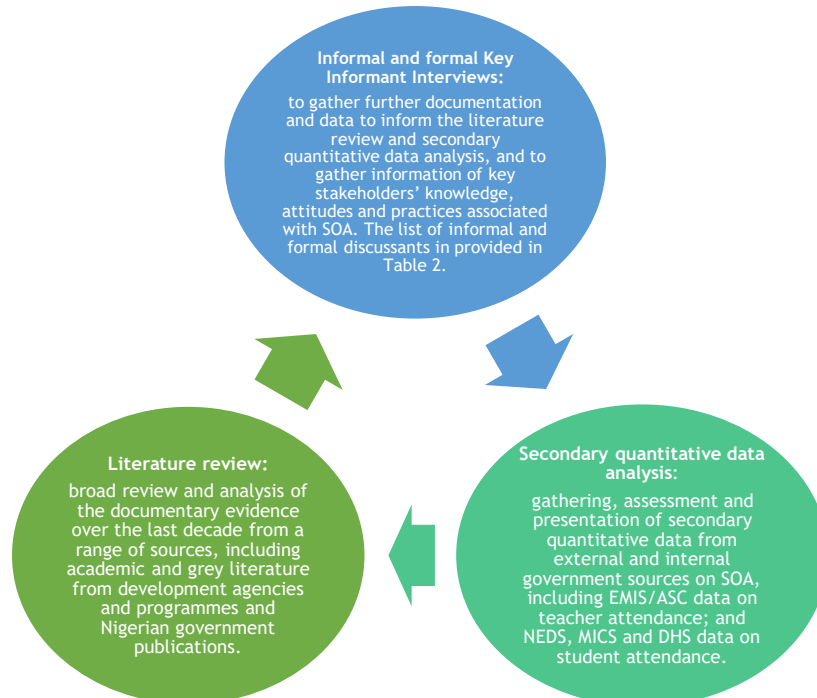
This is a scoping study of two main parts: (1) a non-systematic literature review including informal discussion with key stakeholders to gather documentation and gain initial perceptions and insights to the study, and (2) primary qualitative data collection through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with government and non-government stakeholders in each of the five PLANE states of operations and collection of secondary quantitative data from these respondents where feasible. The study covers the following topic areas associated with School Opening; Teacher Attendance; and Student Attendance. The scope of the study pertains to all five states of PLANE, federal education governance, and complementary evidence from comparable countries. It also seeks to include all school types: Public; Islamic, Quranic and Tsangaya Education (IQTE); Nomadic and/or non-formal; and Private/non-state.

For the purpose of this study, School Opening and Attendance is broadly understood to include all aspects of the timing and duration that schools are in session during the academic year, the frequency of student and teacher attendance (and/or absenteeism) during the expected period for which schools are in session. The literature review will enable the team to refine the definition of SOA and key terms, including to contribute to refining the objectives and research questions for any further mixed method study.

2.2. Methods and Research Questions

The study comprises three main methods, depicted in Figure 1. All methods are applied to answer research questions under each topic, utilising a mixed approach to understanding and providing evidence on SOA.

Figure 1: Study methodology



The study covers three topic areas: (1) School opening; (2) Teacher attendance, and (3) Student attendance. Each topic comprises six common research areas (Concepts, Practices, Barriers, Issues, Responses, and Gaps) and complementary research questions for which different research methods are applied (Table 1). Barriers to school opening, teacher attendance and student attendance are presented together given findings

of their multiple overlaps. The report concludes with recommendations for policy, programming, and further research.

Table 1: Research Questions and Methods

Category	School Opening	Teacher Attendance	Student Attendance
Concepts and Definitions	How are school opening, teacher and student attendance defined and understood in existing studies and documentation?		
Practices and patterns	<p>What are the policy-mandated state school openings per week / term / academic year in PLANE States?</p> <p>What does the evidence suggest are the actual opening of state schools over the last academic year?</p> <p>To what extent do actual and required opening times match?</p>	<p>What is the overall teacher attendance rate in PLANE States over the last academic year?</p> <p>What are potential patterns in this attendance data (disaggregated by gender, location; time)?</p>	<p>What is the student attendance rate in PLANE States over the last academic year?</p> <p>What are potential patterns in this attendance data? (disaggregated by gender; location; children living with disabilities; time; other)</p>
Barriers	What are the main barriers to school opening, student and teacher attendance? How are different groups of teachers and students affected by these barriers?		
Issues	What are the current main issues related to school opening, teacher attendance and student attendance?		
Responses	What are the main practice and policy responses to school opening, teacher attendance and student attendance issues, and what evidence exists of their effectiveness?		
Gaps and Recommendations	<p>What are the gaps in evidence on school opening, teacher attendance and student attendance, especially in regard to the Nigerian country context?</p> <p>What are the gaps in understanding school opening, teacher attendance and student attendance based on existing data?</p> <p>What recommendations have been made to address school opening, teacher attendance and student attendance, including any for further research?</p>		

2.3. Participants

Study participants included stakeholders across government and non-government agencies, as well as PLANE IPs (Table 2). In each PLANE state, key informant interviews (KIIs) were held with at least three state education government officials, including at least one each from the State Ministry of Education and SUBEB. Additionally, focus group discussions (FGDs) with School Support Officers (SSOs) in each state were conducted.

Table 2: Participant list

State	Data collection technique	Participant titles	Total number of participants
Kano	KII	Department for Planning, Research and Statistics (DPRS)	1
	KII	State Primary Islamiyya Schools Management Board	1
	KII	PLANE IP W1	1
	FGD	SUBEB Quality Assurance (QA), School Services, and M&E staff	6
	FGD	SSOs and QA Officers (covering 4 LGAs)	8
Kaduna	KII	State Bureau of Statistics	1
	KII	PLANE IP W1	2
	FGD	SUBEB DPRS Director, Zonal QA Officer, EMIS Officer, M&E Deputy Director	4

State	Data collection technique	Participant titles	Total number of participants
	FGD	SSOs (covering 4 LGAs)	5
Jigawa	KII	DPRS Director and Head of M&E	2
	KII	DPRS QA Director	1
	KII	Director General, State Education Inspectorate and Monitoring Unit (SEIMU)	1
	FGD	SSOs and QA Officers (covering 5 LGAs)	9
Borno	KII	SUBEB Director Quality Assurance	1
	KII	PLANE W2 IP	1
	FGD	SSOs and QA Officers (covering 5 LGAs)	8
Yobe	KII	SUBEB QA Director	1
	FGD	SSOs (covering 5 LGAs)	10
Education Stakeholders	Informal discussion	UBEC QA Department	1
		Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All (CSACEFA)	1
		Gates Foundation	1
		British Council	1
		PLANE Window 1	3
		PLANE Window 2	1
		PLANE Window 3	1
Paul Bennell – Independent Expert	1		

2.4. Data analysis and reporting

This report presents analysis and findings for the three component areas of the study – (i) school opening; (ii) teacher attendance, and (iii) student attendance. It draws on qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis symbiotically, presenting evidence from the literature review, informal and KIIs, FGDs and secondary quantitative data under each of the three areas. This provides a comprehensive, mixed-method approach to better understanding the dynamics of SOA. Data analysis was used thematic analysis approaches to qualitative data, and STATA and excel for the analysis of secondary quantitative data. Literature references were compiled and contained in Excel in a full annotated bibliography and stored on bibliographic software.

2.5. Scope and Limitations

This scoping study is explorative by design. It intended to capture understanding of, and practices associated with, school opening and teacher and student attendance both broadly and specifically in Nigeria and the states where PLANE operates. The main study limitations are therefore:

- ▶ **Non-systematic literature review.** Instead focusing on the most relevant literature according to pre-defined criteria, including geographic focus and time-bound (<10 years) and the study research questions.
- ▶ **Limitations of time and resources.** The requirement to deliver the scoping study before end of March 2024 within a budget limited the scope and scale of enquiry and the pursuit of further interesting study questions.
- ▶ **Data quality and availability.** Very limited availability of secondary quantitative data from both government and non-government sources, and (as discussed in the main report), inadequate data quality (reliability, robustness, completeness) pertaining to the queries of this study.

3. School Opening

Key Findings

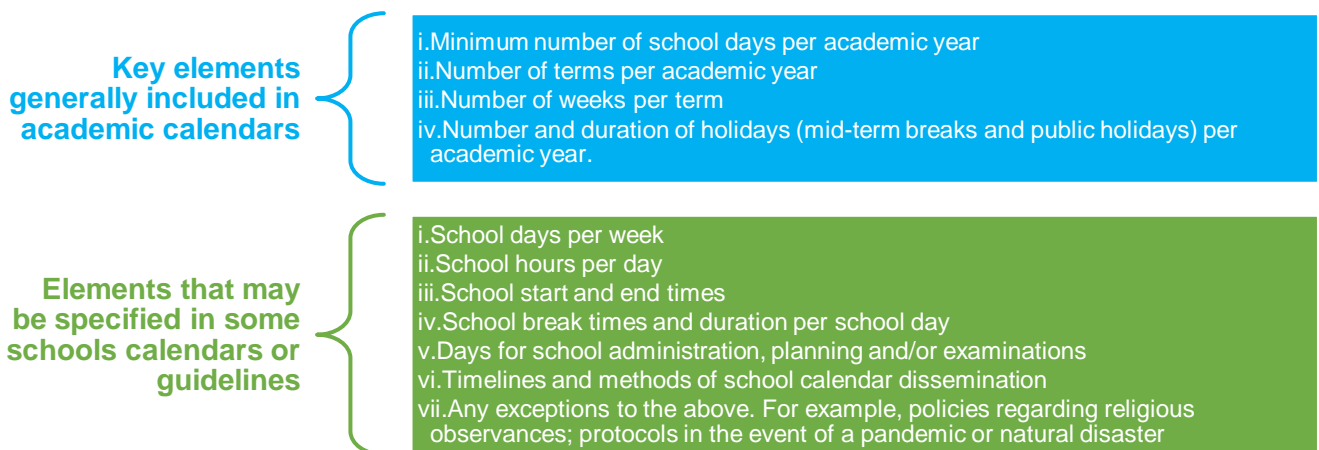
- ▶ Annual school calendars provide the official framework for school opening by year and term. In Nigeria, these are led by the State Ministry of Education. Most primary school calendars are divided into three terms of 12-15 weeks each.
- ▶ Discretionary addenda and unplanned closures, regulated by the State Ministry of Education (SMoE), reduce the number of days schools are open, often to below the minimum standard (2016) of 180 days per year. Changes affect attitudes and perceptions of schooling, educational consistency, and student-teacher contact time.
- ▶ The predominantly top-down authorisation for school opening and closures at state level in Nigeria limits localised and flexible decision-making, which would empower and enable head teachers and communities to determine flexes to daily and weekly schedules that could better meet the needs of their population and context, without compromising children's schooling.

3.1. Concepts and Definitions

Schools being open is a fundamental prerequisite to attendance, participation, and learning. School opening refers to when, how often and for how long schools are open and closed during an academic year and is presented officially in annual school calendars. Planned and unplanned variations to calendars exist by context, level and type of education, and specific school schedules.

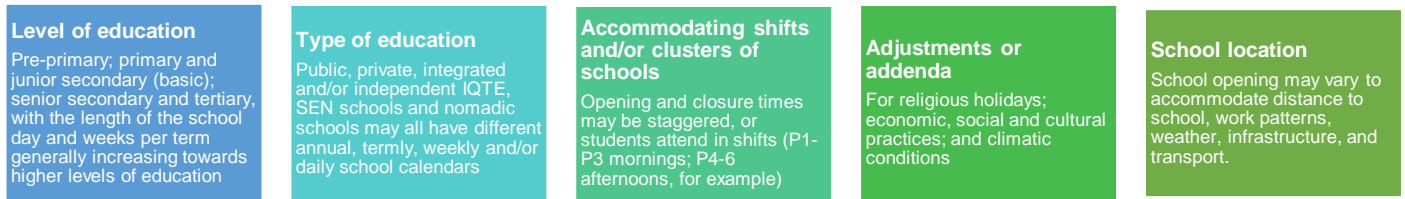
This study reviews both the official start and close dates of public primary schools in Nigeria (and comparator countries) and the additional, ad hoc and/or unofficial closures that happen through the school year for a variety of reasons. Guidance across Sub-Saharan Africa on primary school opening is often presented in annual school calendars. Elements specified in calendars are presented in Figure 2 below. The key components (in **blue**) of school calendars are typically set at the national or federal level through legislation, established guidelines or policies. Further specifications (in **green**) are usually delegated to sub-national, state or local level. Section 3.2. elaborates on these procedures in Nigeria.

Figure 2: Elements included in academic calendars



Different calendars operate in different countries. In anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa, primary schools tend to follow an opening schedule of three terms per year comprising 12-14 weeks per term, or 36-42 weeks per academic year. The longest school break tends to be at the end of the school year in July - August. This structure tends to be rooted in histories of colonialism and/or alignment with neighbouring countries (UNESCO, 2021, p.328). Nevertheless, there are differences between and within countries in length and distribution of school days, weeks and breaks through the year, and the opening and close times during the school day (ibid). Within countries, calendars may vary for a multitude of reasons, detailed in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Variation of school calendars



3.2. Prevalence and practices in Nigeria

Learners at primary and junior secondary schools in Nigeria should receive 180 days of schooling per year. How this is divided into terms, weeks, days, daily school schedules, and holidays varies by state. In the last three academic years, Kano is the only PLANE state to have consistently met this minimum standard. Public holidays, 4-day weeks, and sudden closures are major contributing factors. Pupil-teacher contact time may be, but is not systematically, formalised. To deliver the curriculum, most single-shift primary schools open from 8am to 1.30pm.

The National Education Quality Assurance Handbook (NEQAH) for Basic and Secondary Education in Nigeria states that “Every learner should receive a minimum of 180 days schooling per year.” (2016, 3.3.1. vii., p.11). Moreover, the recently published Education Roadmap Nigeria 2024-2027 specifies that “governments at all levels provide unhindered access to quality Basic [...] education for all learners of school age” (2024, p. 26). There is no further formal policy guidance at federal or state levels on school calendars. All state government interviewees in PLANE states confirmed no formal state policy documents setting expectations, standards or guidance for public or other primary school calendars, open and closed sessions, or public notice periods for opening and closures. Despite this, there is broad verbal consensus among federal and state respondents that the school, for example:

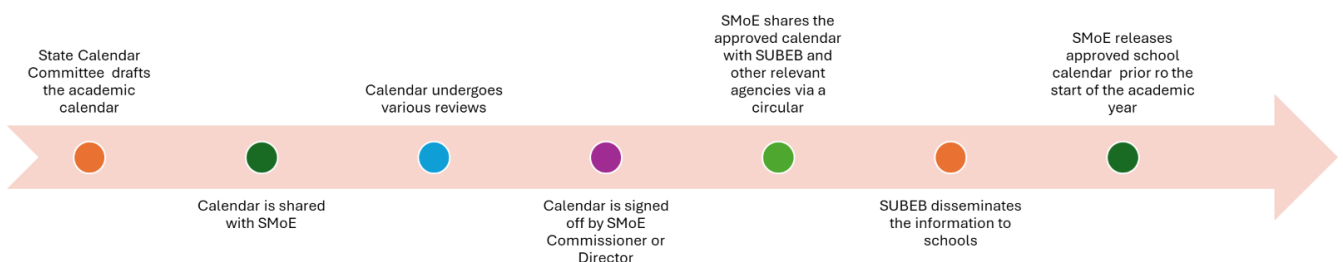
“There are three terms in a session; a session takes 13-15 weeks; within a session all activities should be carried out and examination carried out” (Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) KII).

“There are no policies for school opening and closing, but it is guided by Education law which stipulates that 12-15 weeks out of 52 weeks in a year are scheduled for holidays making 39 to 40 weeks for teaching and learning” (Kano State Government KII).

“There are three terms in the academic session, but one state might be in session, and one might be out of session. The domestication and adaptation differ at state level” (Borno State Government KII).

Figure 4 depicts the process for drafting and approving school calendars in Nigeria. School calendars are led by the SMoE in collaboration with other state education agencies. State Calendar Committees meet to draft the calendar before it is shared with the SMoE for review and approval. Calendars are signed off by the SMoE Commissioner. The Ministry shares the calendar with the SUBEB - and other relevant agencies including the IQSB and the State Agency for Nomadic Education (SANE) – via a circular, which shares it with all LGEAs, which disseminate the information to schools. Public announcements are made via social media and radio. In some states (e.g. Jigawa), head teachers are also reminded by the Local Government Area (LGA) Education Secretary (ES) of the official term start date a few days prior to term commencing. The calendar guides schools in planning lessons, examinations, monitoring visits, resources, and other activities (KIIs and FGDs).

Figure 4: School Calendar Drafting and Approval Process in Nigeria



3.2.1. School calendars in PLANE states

Given the minimal formal policy structure around school opening, it is unsurprising that there are variations in planned primary school opening between states and over time. Table 3 summarises planned Term 1 start dates as announced in the previous Academic Year (AY) calendar, dates of circulars for full academic year calendars, notice periods, and total number of academic and holiday weeks for primary school (public and private) calendars published and accessed by this study for the last three AYs¹. The analysis provided in this section relies on the calendars and public holidays documented in Annexes I and II. Annex I includes PLANE states AY calendars for AY 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24 and start dates for 2024-25, while Annex II documents Public Holidays in PLANE focal states, indicating whether they coincide with an academic week.

When analysing the AY calendars, some key considerations should be made:

- ▶ **Addenda:** All circulars contain caveats for discretionary amendments by the SMOE to the published calendar for, for example, additional holidays. Known addendums to published calendars are shown in Table 3 below. Addenda, like calendars, are shared via internal agency circular and public announcements. These indicate some reasons for variations between actual and planned calendars, including:
 - ▷ In AY 2022-23, the Presidential Election (February 2023) directly resulted in some school closures either because schools were used as polling centres and/or to enable people to vote. The addendum in Borno was raised 5 weeks prior to election week.
 - ▷ Observance of Ramadan varies between states: some SMOEs close schools for 1-2 days (e.g. Kaduna), while others close for 4-5 days (e.g. Jigawa, Kano). The current addendum in Borno was for one additional day holiday for Eid-al-Fitr (May 2024).

Efforts have been made to incorporate any known amendments to ensure the accuracy of academic weeks and school days estimates. Data presented here represents information gathered by DELVe, but there may be additional addenda and calendars, as well as unplanned and/or unannounced school closures, that may not have been accounted for.

- ▶ **Unplanned school closures:** Unplanned closures are logically not included in academic calendar circulars published at the state level. These closures are relatively common in PLANE states, caused by natural disasters, extreme weather events, conflicts, and disease outbreaks, etc., and their duration varies depending on the cause and nature of the closure. Therefore, the number of school opening days presented in Table 3 is solely based on planned school opening days according to calendars and addenda that have been published and gathered by DELVe, and does not include any additional school closures. Section 3.3 elaborates on findings around unplanned school closures and their management.
- ▶ **Notice period:** Each calendar includes the date of resumption for Term 1 of the next academic year. However, there is often a disparity between the date indicated in calendars published in the previous academic year and the actual start date. Therefore, while the start date of an academic year is announced approximately a year in advance, changes frequently occur with short notice. In some cases, Term 1 starts later than expected, and the calendar is released days after the previously indicated start date. These factors suggest that changes to full academic calendars, as well as those resulting from specific addenda, may be communicated to the public at the last minute.
- ▶ **School type:** Most circulars on the published calendars apply explicitly to public and private schools. Some calendars specifically mention voluntary schools (Kaduna and Kano circulars), and others distinguish between the resumption dates for boarding and day schools (Kano and Yobe circulars), with boarding schools usually resuming a day earlier. Additionally, some calendars differentiate between urban and rural schools (Borno circulars). There is, however, limited information on the extent to which these calendars are adhered to, and any differences or trends across school types. SSOs are responsible for the schools managed by SUBEB, indicating that it is within their mandate to visit: “*primary schools, Islamiyya and integrated schools, and even upper basic schools*” (Kano FGD), while IQTE, nomadic, and other non-state schools have a separate mandate. Some indication of compliance with the academic calendars by school

¹ AY calendar for Yobe in 2022-23 is not included in this section due to insufficient data availability. The Actual Number of School Days has been calculated by subtracting the number of public holidays coinciding with school days to the total number of school days calculated based on academic weeks. This is based on 5 days weeks for all states, apart from Kaduna which has introduced a 4-day week policy starting in Jan 22. It is also assumed that there was a typographical error in the initial start date provided for Kaduna's Term 3 in AY 2022-23, and that the correct term start date is 30th April. This is because the date indicated in the calendar (30th May) does not correspond with the end of the break and the total number of weeks as expected.

type is provided through KIIs and FGDs, however this information is self-reported and accuracy has not been verified:

- ▷ **Public schools:** Public schools are mandated to comply with state academic calendars; however, there is limited evidence regarding the extent to which these calendars are adhered to. State-level KII and FGD respondents have indicated broad knowledge of and adherence to the published academic calendars; however, practices at school level are unknown.
- ▷ **Private schools:** PLANE operates primarily in public schools and this preliminary study was not able to gather data on private schools' compliance with published academic calendars.
- ▷ **Integrated Islamiyya schools:** The KII with the Kano State Primary Islamiyya Schools Management Board indicated that integrated Islamiyya schools also “*strictly comply*” with the circulars shared by the government.
- ▷ **Non-integrated Islamiyya schools:** Evidence from one KII indicates that compliance does not extend to non-integrated Islamiyya schools:

“Where we have issues is with the non-integrated Islamiyya schools, they operate on their own without compliance with any regulations. There is no compliance to most of our circulars because they see themselves as not incline to government, they see themselves as independent, they are not private, they are voluntary and independent of government. They are not united with the integrated Islamiyya even in terms of curricula, they operate different curricula as they deem fit” (Kano State Primary Islamiyya Schools Management Board KII).

► Variations:

- ▷ **Total number of weeks, duration of terms, and breaks.** The number of weeks accounted for in published school calendars varies between 46 and 52. These result from differences in academic timelines or delays to the start of the academic year. Other variations are evident in the duration of each term (10-14 weeks) and the duration of each mid-term break (1-4 weeks).
- ▷ **Public holidays.** All calendars note that National and/or State Public Holidays will be observed accordingly. Schools should comply with federal public holidays, in addition to state public holidays in place for religious commemorations. Some calendars specify dates for these holidays (Jigawa indicated a Sallah break during Term 3 for academic years 2021-22 and 2022-23), while others do not provide specific dates in published calendars, instead indicating amendments throughout the year. Public Holidays partially coincide with school breaks, aligning with Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter. However, some holidays fall on standalone days in the middle of a term, further reducing the number of school days per year. To make up for changes to the published calendar, states may delay and/or shorten the longer holiday between AYs (July-August) and/or add days to the following term.
- ▷ **Structure of the school week.** The total number of school days is typically calculated based on a 5-day Monday-Friday week², except in Kaduna state, where calculations were based on a 5-day week until December 2021 and have been based on a 4-day week thereafter. This is because the Kaduna state government revised the working week to “*boost productivity, improve work-life balance, and enable workers to have more tie with their families, rest and engage in agricultural activities*” (Daily Trust, January 2022). Evidence of the potential outcomes of this revision are discussed further in Section 3.4.

² In Muslim areas, actual school opening tends to be shorted on Fridays for prayers. However, this is not structured systematically into planned academic calendars.

Table 3: Primary School Calendars in PLANE States

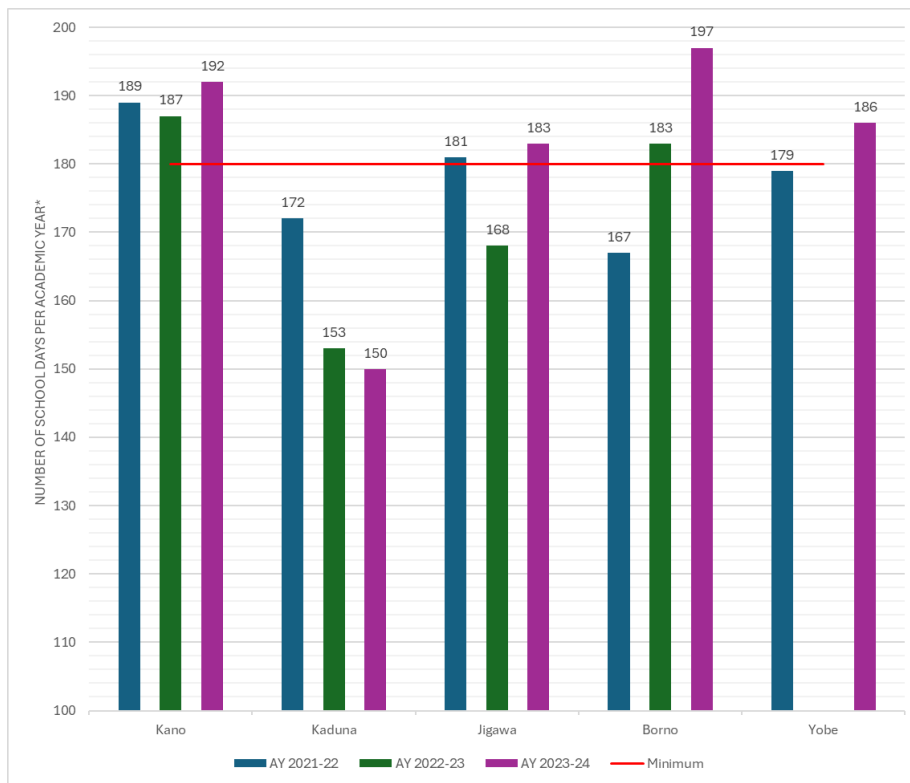
State	Starting date of AY indicated in the previous AY's calendar	Release of approved calendar for the full academic year (or addendum)	Confirmation of start date and notice period	# Academic weeks	# Public holidays	Actual # school days
AY 2021-22						
Kano	ND	27-Aug	ND	39	6	189
Kaduna	ND	09-Sep	ND	42	10	172
Jigawa	ND	03-Nov	ND	37	4	181
Borno (for Urban schools)	ND	24-Sep	ND	36	8	172
Borno (addendum for Aid-el-Fitr)	N/A	21-Mar	Additional week of holiday after T2 announced 1.5 months in advance	35	8	167
Yobe	ND	ND	ND	38	11	179
Average				38	8	178
AY 2022-23						
Kano	11-Sep	11-Nov	Yes	39	8	187
Kaduna	04-Sep	ND	Yes	40	7	153
Jigawa	25-Sep	29-Sep	T1 started a week later than announced. The full AY calendar was released 4 days after the previously indicated start date.	35	7	168
Borno	12-Sep	29-Jul	Yes	39	7	188
Borno (addendum for General Election)	N/A	13-Jan	Addendum published 3 weeks ahead of break	38	7	183
Yobe	ND	12-Sep	ND	N/A	N/A	N/A
Average (excl. Yobe)				38	7.3	173
AY 2023-24						
Kano	03-Sep	24-Aug	T1 started a week later than announced. The full AY calendar was released a week in advance of the previously stated start date.	40	8	192
Kaduna	10-Sep	ND	Yes	39	6	150
Kaduna (addendum for delayed start of the academic year)	N/A	12-Sep	T1 started 2 weeks later than announced. The full AY calendar was released 2 days after the previously announced start date.	39	6	150
Jigawa	17-Sep	15-Sep	Yes	38	7	183
Borno	11-Sep	28-Aug	Yes	41	8	197
Yobe	ND	ND	ND	39	9	186
Average				39.4	7.6	181.6
AY 2024-25						
Kano	08-Sep					
Kaduna	15-Sep					
Jigawa	08-Sep					
Borno	02-Sep					
Yobe	15-Sep					

Key: ■ Meeting the nationally mandated minimum number of school days (≥ 180)
■ Not meeting the nationally mandated minimum number of school days (< 180)

3.2.2. Actual number of primary school days per year in PLANE states

The number of public holidays that align with school days has been calculated based on data on published Public Holidays (Annex II)³. Based on these data, the actual number of public primary school days as per the published PLANE states' primary school calendars have been calculated and is presented in Figure 5. These calendars pertain to all public and private primary schools in the states.

Figure 5: Primary school Calendars in PLANE states in northern Nigeria⁴



Several academic calendars in different states and at different times fail to meet the minimum standard of 180 days of schooling per year, equivalent to 36 weeks in a 5-day week or 45 weeks in a 4-day week. There is significant disparity in the total number of school open days, from 197 (Borno 2023-24) to 150 days (Kaduna 2023-24) – a difference of 47 school days in the current AY. Over the last three academic years, with the exception of Kano, at least one academic calendar in each state falls short of meeting the minimum school opening requirement outlined in the NEQAH 2016. Overall, only 57% of calendars meet this standard, with key trends arising from the data for each state:

- ▶ Over the three years in question, Kano has met the standard in all three years,
- ▶ Borno and Yobe school open days have been steadily increasing and are now above the minimum standard,
- ▶ Jigawa had a blip in 2022-23, the reasons for which are not clear.
- ▶ Kaduna has not met the standard in any of the past three AYs – and the number of school open days has been decreasing year-on-year. Since 2021-2022, the number of academic weeks per year has decreased from 42 (AY 2021-22) to 40 (AY 2022-23) to 39 (2023-24). This means that not only has the number of school days decreased due to a declining number of academic weeks per year, but it has also decreased due to an additional day (Friday) of closure per week. This explains the lower average number of school

³ No official source of information on Federal and State public holidays has been identified through this study. The data are taken from: <https://www.officeholidays.com/countries/nigeria>. Reliability is unverified.

⁴ Based on 5 days weeks for all states, apart from Kaduna which has introduced a 4-day week policy starting in Jan 22.

days in Kaduna across the past 3 academic years (158) compared to other states (Kano: 189, Jigawa: 177, Borno: 182, Yobe: 183).

3.2.3. Contact time in PLANE states

The organisation of school calendars is directly linked to intended instruction time for pupils, often legislated by national or local authorities (UNESCO, 2021, p.327). Daily teacher-pupil contact time is not stated in states' published calendars. SUBEBs may publish timetables to guide schools that indicate expected hours teaching of each curriculum subject per week, month, term and / or year ('session'). For example:

- ▶ **Kaduna ESP** (2006-2015) states that students in basic education should have a “*minimum of 850 hours of contact time per year*” (p.37), equivalent to 22 contact hours per week (based on 39 weeks/year) or 4.5 hours per day (based on 5 days/week). However, note that this standard is prior to the revised 4-day week policy and DELVe could not access any revised contact time standard.
- ▶ **Kano timetable data** from the Academic Services Department at SUBEB show that all primary pupils (grades 1-6) should have 35 hours each of English and Maths per term, or 210 hours of core subjects per year. Pupils in Primary 1-3 should have 238 hours of all subject teaching per term (714 hours per year / 28.5 weeks per year) while pupils in P4-6 should have 280 hours per term (840 hours per year / 33.6 weeks/year).

Revision and examination periods are additional to these hours, which are achievable in complementarity to the published calendars shown in Table 3. All schools are required to develop and manage their own subject timetables for each grade, bearing in mind any existing state guidance:

“In every school, there is a general calendar that shows the number of periods to be covered within the week and the term at large. For instance, Mathematics and English period last for 30 minutes in junior classes and for 40 minutes for senior classes and math and English usually have more periods than other subjects. Each class then have a timetable which state the time to start and stop each subject” (Kaduna SSO FGD).

To manage the number of hours of contact time per subject required in states guidance, public primary schools in PLANE states normally open Monday-Friday, 8am to 1.30pm (5.5 hours) (consensus from KIIs). Respondents spoke of state guidance or “tradition” for these opening times:

“It has become a tradition learners start from 8am and end at around 1pm” (Borno State Government KII).

However, there were slight variations, for example:

“The school opens by 7.30am. At this time, the teacher has 15 minutes to sign in, observe, take student roll calls and do other things they have to do. From 7:45am to 8am, the students use this period to get set. By 8am, the period starts” (Jigawa State Government KII).

If schools operate in multiple shifts (e.g. for lower and upper primary) these hours will differ:

“Schools opening time is 8am but the closing hours varies depending on if the school have shift or not. Schools with shifts has reduced contact hours so that the school can close at a particular time. And because of the insecurities in Kaduna, schools cannot be opened till late evening. So, the contact hours will reduce, we try to make sure they close within safer hours. Usually, nursery schools close by 11am while the primary 1-3 close by 12:30 while in case of second shifts, the other classes start by 1pm and close by 5pm.” (Kaduna State Government KII).

The School Action Plan should contain the school timetable including opening and closing times and number and subject distribution of contact hours (Kaduna State Government KII). A calculation of the number of primary school hours (public and private) per state during the past three AYs is presented in Annex III. This has been calculated based on the available states Academic Calendars and Addenda, and on Federal and State Public Holidays.

3.3. Managing unplanned school closures

School closures that are not planned in published school calendars are relatively frequent in all PLANE states. Sudden closures happen mainly due to natural disasters, poor weather conditions, conflict and

disease outbreaks. There are no state policies or guidance on managing unplanned school closures, and whether schools make up for lost learning time is undocumented but appears uncommon.

The duration of school closures varies depending on the nature of the emergency. Extended school closures were reported during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as following natural disasters and extreme weather events:

“When there was a flood in 2022 when 11 bridges were destroyed and several schools collapsed [...], schools were closed for 4 weeks. In other situations, due to terrain and heavy rainfall, we may ask a particular LGA to close schools that are affected” (Jigawa State Government KII).

Long and short-term conflict-related school closures have been reported in several PLANE states. For example, closures followed the 2014 Boko Haram attack at the Federal Government College in Yobe; the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping in Borno in 2014; the Dapchi school abduction in Yobe in 2018; and the 2021 abduction of staff and students from the Chikun Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna. Schools in Yobe and Kaduna states have also experienced closures for short periods following specific attacks (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, GPEA, 2018). In Kaduna, the State Government has recently announced the relocation of 359 schools from conflict-prone and terrorist-infested zones to safer areas, following a drop in pupil enrolment due to insecurity concerns (Channels Television, 2024).

In Borno state, the deteriorating security situation resulted in the closure of all schools in the state from December 2013 to June 2015. By September 2017, UNICEF estimated that conflict had destroyed or damaged around 1,400 schools in Borno, with 57% of schools in the Northeast remaining closed due to insecurity or damage (UNifeed, 2017). In December 2019, 824 out of 1,359 government schools (about 61%) were reported closed due to insecurity and ongoing conflict (UNICEF, 2019). Even after schools were officially allowed to reopen, many could not do so due to ongoing insecurity, damage, destruction of infrastructure, or use of school buildings as shelters for internally displaced persons or military purposes. According to the Joint Educational Needs Assessment in November 2017, large areas of Borno state, as well as parts of Adamawa and Yobe states, remained inaccessible to humanitarian organizations, with no functional schools reported in these regions (in GCPEA, 2018).

All SUBEB respondents confirmed that there are no state policies or formal written guidance on managing unplanned school closures: *“Unplanned closures are treated as they occur” (Jigawa State Government KII).* The exception is Kano, where one KII respondent stated that unplanned closures are referenced under risk and mitigation guidelines (Kano State Government KII). In general, however, there is no proactive planning for structured responses; rather, unplanned closures are managed as emergencies occur. This means that often, when attacks happen, schools are closed immediately for extended periods without a clear plan for reopening (Bakar and Rabi, 2018).

Most government agency respondents indicated that there are two possible processes followed in cases of unplanned school closures:

- ▶ **Top-down:** unplanned closures are decided by the state MoE in collaboration with other education agencies, or by the State Chief Executive (Governor) and communicated to education agencies who release a circular to the media and schools. The closure is then included as part of the academic calendar as an addendum. This process was followed during COVID-19.
- ▶ **Bottom-up:** in general, respondents from all states agreed that schools and LGAs cannot close their schools without prior permission from SUBEB:

“Local governments cannot close schools without prior permission from SUBEB, Education Secretary writes a memo to SUBEB making a case for the need to close a school” (Kaduna SSO FGD).

“The Education Secretary has the right to close the school if some harmful things are happening in the area. The LGEA management call SUBEB and the ES is given directive to close the school” (Jigawa SSO FGD).

“As the emergencies unfold, schools get closed automatically when conflict, insurgency happens. The Education Secretary makes closure formal after the children or communities have responded to the emergencies. The ES alert the Government through SUBEB decisions and pronouncements are made on closure. Closures are recorded in files” (Borno State Government KII).

“During sudden crisis, because of the urgency of the matter, pupils are allowed to vacate the school immediately. The schools report to the ES and the ES will report the situation to SUBEB and they discuss with management and report to the ministry and make a decision which will be announced

over the radio. We have also trained the teachers on how to respond in times of crisis. A police report is also important, so the police have an input.” (Kaduna State Government KII)

Local decisions should be in line with state guidance (if any), but decisions depend on the nature of the emergency. Head teachers, SBMCs, and LGA ES can close a school but quickly inform SUBEB (via WhatsApp or phone in emergencies) who formalise and document the closure. This bottom-up process was described by study respondents in response to flooding in Jigawa state, and conflict and school attacks in Kaduna and Borno states:

“When there is an attack on a school or community by insurgents, if the headmaster is able to escape the insurgency, he will send a message or write to the ES about the incidence as soon as possible” (Kaduna SSO FGD)

A range of measures and strategies can be taken to mitigate and make up for lost learning time. For example, schools could be relocated or merged with those in safe locations, such as in the case of Kaduna (Channels Television, 2024), and students may be transferred to other neighbouring schools:

“We cannot transfer the learner to other school, but we can transfer the teachers to other schools” (Jigawa SSO FGD).

“If there is a neighbouring school, students are advised to go there. But in cases whereby their parents leave that area, they can enrol in new schools close to their new location” (Kaduna SSO FGD).

Virtual and remote teaching methods might be employed:

“When the situation persisted, we met and decided that the closure cannot continue so we put in place some emergency preparations to open schools and lessons continued. What we did was to collaborate with UNICEF who has emergency preparedness in their program, so they came in and ensured children were learning. We used some schools that were not flooded to gather children and delivered lessons through the radio and the teachers controlled the children to make sure they listen and are part of the radio lessons” (Jigawa State Government KII).

State governments might also provide guidelines to schools to recover lost schooling during the unplanned closures:

“We give them a guideline to increase daily closing by 10-20 minutes, depending on the nature of the environment. So, the time extension depends on the number of hours/days/weeks that was lost” (Jigawa State Government KII).

However, according to respondents, when such closure happens, it is difficult to regain lost school and contact time, although this depends on the duration of closure and commitment of school staff and the community (Ibid).

3.4. Overarching issues and concerns

There is a lack of regulation and regularity of official and actual school opening in Nigeria including in PLANE states. There is inadequate understanding of school opening requirements and the effects of closures, and little preparation time for families, children, and teachers to access schooling on time and for sufficient durations. A lack of planning – especially localised participatory planning - exacerbates inequitable access as children with the highest burden of competing demands, living in remote rural communities, struggle most to blend standard public schooling with the rhythms and requirements of daily life.

3.4.1. School calendars, school opening and ‘schooling days’

Respondents often did not have and/or could not refer to a document to evidence their interpretation of school opening. This finding aligns with the results of the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) Composite Survey 1 (Dunne et al., 2013), which revealed that, in 600 schools across 5 out of the 6 ESSPIN-supported states, less than 50% of students and teachers were able to agree on school opening times (Dunne et al., 2013, p. 30). The school opening data focuses on official school calendars, outlining when schools are scheduled to be open, but provides limited insight into what occurs in practice. Aside from KIIs and FGDs, there is little information on whether calendars are adhered to. Unexpected events or unplanned school closures are unaccounted for. Consequently, the actual number of school days may often be lower than indicated by planned

calendars. This gap highlights the need for more comprehensive data collection and monitoring mechanisms to accurately assess adherence to scheduled opening and closure, as well as the implications on teacher and student attendance and learning.

Additionally, there is ambiguity in the definition of 'days schooling' as delineated in the NEQAH (2016, p.11). There are no metrics to assess compliance with this minimum standard outlined in that document. Therefore, it is unclear whether this refers solely to the number of actual opening days or if 'schooling' also infers time in class. If the latter, there are various influencing factors that are not accounted for, including the duration of a school day, daily school schedule (learning time versus other activities such as breaks and administrative tasks), teacher attendance, student attendance, and a combination of these. This interplay of variables is summarised in Section 7.

It also remains unclear whether policymakers at state or federal level consider the calculation of school days and hours across an academic year when establishing and approving yearly calendars. While all calendars specify the number of academic and holiday weeks per year, they lack detailed information on the total number of school days and hours. This oversight holds significant implications, as policymakers may inadvertently design and approve calendars that fail to meet minimum standards of school operation.

Kaduna 4 days working week

In late 2021, the Kaduna State Government announced the transition to a four-day working week and adjustment of working hours for all Public Servants:

"I am directed to inform Public Servants that Kaduna State Government has with effect from 1st December, 2021 commenced the implementation of the transition to four-day working week in the State. Working hours for Public Servants have been adjusted to commence from 8am to 5pm, Mondays to Thursdays.

It is however worth noting that all Public Servants, other than those in Schools and Health Facilities, are directed to work from home on Fridays. The interim arrangement will subsist until when the government is ready to move to the next stage of the transition which will culminate in the four-day working week across all MDAs in the State.

The State Government expects the required legal and regulatory framework to be in place by January, 2022" (Kaduna State Government circular).

In January 2022, the Kaduna State Commissioner for Education, Halima Lawa, ordered all public schools to adhere to a 4-day working week. According to the Commissioner's statement, the government planned to modify the 2021/2022 academic calendar to ensure comprehensive coverage of the curriculum for the academic session.

Despite this commitment, it remains unclear whether any efforts have been made to ensure the fulfilment of the minimum required number of school days and to 'make up' teaching and learning time by shortening holidays or extending term dates. Concerns have been raised in the media (Daily Post, January 2022; Daily Trust, January 2022; The Guardian, January 2022) on a number of issues:

- ▶ The impact of reduced contact time on learning outcomes;
- ▶ Level of compliance with the new policy;
- ▶ Exacerbation of the disadvantage between public and private schools;
- ▶ Timing of the policy, implemented as Kaduna emerged from the pandemic-induced closures; and
- ▶ Adverse impact on teachers who are still expected to cover the same syllabus in less contact time, resulting in additional workload and stress through a policy purportedly aimed at improving work-life balance.

Conversely, a KII respondent from Kaduna State highlighted that traditionally, Fridays were considered half-days. However, with the transition to a four-day workweek, the hours allocated for Fridays have been redistributed across the rest of the week to ensure coverage of the curriculum. The same KII respondent pointed out that Friday is not a work-free day; rather, it is designated as a work-from-home day to encourage the habit of remote work among employees and online learning among students. On Fridays, teachers engage with students remotely, either virtually or via radio, by assigning homework and providing learning materials to keep them engaged and productive at home:

“The then governor also mentioned that people can work from home and pupils can learn from home, that they do not need physical contact to learn because we used the remote approach during Covid, and it was a success” (Kaduna State Government KII).

However, this study has found no additional evidence, and no accompanying policy or guidance at the state level to ensure the minimum number of school days are met. Moreover, there has been no formal direction regarding adjustments to school opening times to compensate for the time lost due to an additional day of school closure per week. Overall, there is insufficient evidence to assess the effect of this policy on contact time and ultimately learning outcomes.

3.4.2. Standardisation versus localisation

The relative importance of standardisation and regulation of school opening for consistency and alignment compared to localisation and adaptation for flexibility and responsiveness to local needs and demands is significant. Both standardisation and localisation have effects on equity, inclusive access to, and the quality of, basic education. On the one hand, standardisation of school opening enables comparability (inter- and intra-nationally) and equality of access to school. Everyone knows when to expect and plan around the academic year, including expectations for pupils’ regular and timely attendance. Different levels of the education system can coordinate with each other and across other sectors. Calendars can be made to align with national fiscal calendars and/or public service processes and programmes (including, for example, teacher training). This is the case for the Lagos 2023/2024 Approved Harmonized Academic Calendar, which integrates staff professional development as well as open days into the schedule (Lagos MoE, 2023).

On the other hand, there may be a mismatch between a standard, national academic calendar and the rhythms of family and community life. Mid-term holidays may not be aligned with the seasons, agricultural needs, or local festivals. School calendars’ lack of resonance with local cultures and practices has contributed to lower teacher and pupil attendance rates and higher levels of fatigue among both, in different contexts (UNESCO, 2021, p. 328). An analysis of school opening commissioned by UNESCO for the 2021 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report (2021) made four main recommendations for adaptable school calendars (term dates, opening hours, and closures) to improve pupil attendance:

- i. Align school holidays more closely with planting and harvesting season, especially in schools with poor, rural populations, to enable children to help with family farming commitments and/ or to earn extra income without missing school.
- ii. Flexing the weekly timetable to accommodate the main market day to support teachers and students to be in both the market and school.
- iii. Flexible hours on Fridays to fit around Muslim prayers.
- iv. Adapting calendars to localised climatic conditions.

3.4.3. Quantity or quality of school opening

A 2017 study in Ebonyi state asked whether longer instruction time in school improves students’ performance in response to state proposals to lengthen the school day. There was no consensus among respondents (teachers and parents) and the study concluded that how hours are distributed, and the quality of instruction are more important – *“optimal use of the time and careful consideration of need is more important to education policy”* - than simply lengthening the school day (Ezeonu et al., 2017, p.52). Additionally, extending the school day increases costs, requiring longer work contracts / more teachers / more infrastructure, as well as indirectly affecting parents work contracts (UNESCO, 2021).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic and persistently low levels of foundational skills among children have contributed to debates on ‘making up lost learning’ and ‘boosting performance’ via quantity and quality channels. Across a subset of Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) countries, more instruction time was associated with a greater likelihood of disadvantaged students succeeding academically (Agasisti et al., 2021, in UNESCO 2021, p. 328). Proposals to make up lost learning time have been mooted in different countries (South Africa, Ghana, Angola, the UK) including removing or reducing play/break times during the school day, and/or shortening mid-term holidays. Yet break times have been shown to *“improve students’ level of physical activity, memory and concentration, as well as their socioemotional development and academic*

performance” (Haapala et al., 2017; Zavacky and Michael, 2017, in UNESCO 2021, p329). The effects of longer school days and/or shorter breaks on student and teacher attendance and performance is not well evidenced.

School start and end times can influence student and teacher attendance and learning outcomes. For instance, research indicates that delaying school start times can lead to improved alertness and concentration levels among students, while also potentially accommodating household responsibilities by providing time to complete additional tasks before the school day begins (Kelley et al., 2015; UNESCO, 2021, p. 329). The issue revolves around the assumption that school opening directly equates to pupil learning, particularly in acquiring foundational skills. However, there is uncertainty in the literature and among respondents regarding what aspects of school opening and being in school matter the most. Specifically, a debate over whether it is more important to measure and assess teachers' and students' engagement in tasks, especially in subjects like Mathematics and language (Hausa/English), or to capture socio-emotional development, peer interactions, and other forms of learning that occur within the school environment. Multi-country surveys' definitions and measurements of 'what matters' – specifically measuring teacher-student contact time – are examined further in Section 4.3.1.

3.4.4. Formal schooling and other learning opportunities

Another key issue is the consideration of formal schooling alongside other learning opportunities when managing the school calendar and timetabling. A significant aspect of this issue in Nigeria revolves around accommodating children who engage in Qur'anic, non-formal, and nomadic learning within the public school system (Humphreys & Crawford, 2014). In Nigeria, many children exclusively attend Qur'anic schools, while others juggle between religious and government institutions. The issue arises when children attending Qur'anic schools in the morning often arrive late for primary school, and some opt out of school on Fridays to attend mosque for prayers (consensus from KIIs and FGDs).

3.4.5. Evidence gaps

Finally, there are a number of evidence gaps around school opening, both in Nigeria and across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Some of the gaps identified are presented in Table 4 below. These gaps are aligned to recommendations made in Section 7.

Table 4: Evidence gaps

Evidence Gap	Details
Paucity of school opening research	There is very little specific research on school opening in many countries, including Nigeria. Key studies on education in Nigeria (e.g. WB, 2013; WB 2018; EDOREN, 2014; Akseer & Jativa, 2021) do not cover academic calendars or school opening, including in any analysis of attendance and learning outcomes, despite these being a fundamental facet of education. Insufficient evidence means very little understanding of whether and to what extent official calendars are adhered to by schools; the interactions between official calendars and/or actual opening and learning outcomes, including whether and why different official or actual practices affect teacher and/or student attendance and/or performance. There is also no research on school-level schedules, including number and duration of class periods per week/term/year, against official calendars at state and federal levels.
No data on differences across school type, school size and school location on actual opening practices	For example, whether and how practices differ from government guidance across public, private, IQTE, nomadic and other non-state schools; or whether and how the size or location of a school affects practice. PLANE W1 staff suggested that in small remote primary schools where teacher deployment and retention are challenging, there may be only 1 or 2 teachers. If one or both are absent, the school is effectively closed. PLANE operates in such schools. Actual school opening may therefore be

Evidence Gap	Details
	correlated to teacher deployment and school population, but there is no published data on this.
Inadequate evidence on effects of flexible or adapted calendars on equity and access to formal schooling	The quality of research on modified school calendars in poor in general. Specific evidence on the effects of flexible or adapted calendars on access and equity at basic levels is insufficient, including no studies for northern Nigeria that this study located. There is a lack of understanding as to whether, how, and why different opening practices and/or guidance that meets local needs affect learner and teacher attendance and learning outcomes.
Some emerging research on climate change and school schedules	There is some but insufficient evidence on the short-term effects and longer-term impact of climate change (and different manifestations of climate change in different contexts) on the appropriacy and relevance of academic calendars and the types and effects of school scheduling practices. Research in Zambia and Malawi find that existing calendars are not fit for purpose to the changing climate as children are required to be in school when it is either too cold or too hot, exacerbated by the poor learning conditions of their schools (Save the Children, 2022).
Monitoring school opening practice	There are no consistent data or monitoring mechanisms to assess the actual delivery of official school days as per state-mandated calendars and addenda. Of the various monitoring that occurs in PLANE states (linked to attendance, see sections 4 and 5), there is little evidence as to the effectiveness of different types of monitoring such as electronic and paper-based records, or visits by different levels of government officials. School monitoring varies substantially between and within countries, including Nigeria (discussed further in Sections 4 and 5).

3.5. Promising responses

Policy frameworks, decentralised flexibility, and more and better school monitoring are three promising practices gleaned from other contexts to improve shared understanding of and standards for school opening. In South Africa, a national policy for school calendars has provided the framework for regulation, accountability and monitoring. In East Africa, adjustments to daily and weekly school timetables have accommodated agricultural seasons without compromising children’s schooling. Strengthening school monitoring, in India and Nigeria, using multiple methods and different personnel, may also prove effective in raising accountability for school opening.

3.5.1. Policy frameworks

Comparable anglophone SSA countries have attempted structure and consistency in school opening through regulation and policy guidance. In Kenya, the ‘Re-alignment of the Education Sector to the 2010 Constitution’ (2012) was mandated to review and align the education, training and research sector in accordance with the Constitution. This document recommended that the school year be divided into three terms of three months each to align the school calendar to the government financial year; process national examinations in August; and align basic and higher-level term dates to university calendars to support transitions. In South Africa, the government made a specific intervention in 2014 to describe and frame school opening requirements to improve consistency and accountability of schools for delivering education for all (Box 1). South Africa consults widely on any proposed changes to this school calendar policy and informal (media) responses to these national policy interventions are largely positive (BusinessTech, May 2023) and indicate the positive potential of broad consensus detailed in national frameworks of core elements of school opening (academic terms – number and timing). However, there is a lack of evidence on the degree to which such frameworks are implemented in practice, and limited understanding of their impact on school opening.

Box 1: South Africa National Policy for Public School Calendars

The National Policy for determining school calendars for public schools in South Africa (Department of Basic Education, South Africa, 2014) comprises the principles of school opening, specifications, criteria for scheduling, other factors, and steps to be taken in developing calendars. The policy gives minimum and maximum standards for all elements of academic calendars defined with guidance for observing religious, cultural and sporting holidays. It further mandates that developing a school calendar for a particular year must start three years in advance and provides specific steps that should be followed. A 2023 policy amendment recommended that approved academic calendars are publicised in the Government Gazette, Departmental website and social media. It also made provision for unplanned school closures such that,

“In case of a pandemic or natural disaster the Basic Education Subcommittee on School Calendar for Public Schools must urgently meet in responding to the natural disaster.” (Department of Basic Education, South Africa, 2023, p.4)

3.5.2. Decentralised flexibility

States’ autonomy for education is built into the concurrent system for education delivery in Nigeria. There are also federal mandates that support some decentralised flexibility in providing education for all:

“Governments shall develop appropriate strategies and programs to provide basic education for children of peculiar circumstances (such as children of pastoral nomads, hunters, migrant, fisher folk, orphans) who are unable to benefit from basic education within the conventional education system” (National Policy on Education, 2013, clause 26.3).

This clause implies adapted or non-conventional access for specific groups of marginalised children, including by implication different opening times and academic schedules to meet their routines, needs and rights. Arguably, the 4-day week measure in Kaduna state meets the needs and rights of Muslim children for Friday prayers, and for those who rely on farming activities to conciliate schooling with subsistence activities. Another example of decentralised flexibility is in Jigawa, where school management and SBMC agreed to close the school for part of the local market day and complete the remaining hours on Saturdays. This arrangement allows children to participate in market days without compromising the number of schooling hours.

“Attendance is also affected by ceremonies and big market like in Fosara, the market is on Tuesday. So the school in the area closes by noon, so that most learners can go to the market and do whatever they want. And then, on Saturday, they go back and complete the remaining hours. The SBMC discussed this with the school management and the decision was taken to complete the hours on Saturday” (Jigawa State Government Official KII).

Within this context, seasonality presents an opportunity not only to address basic issues regarding education access directly but also to encourage collaboration between education policy and other sectors such as food security, economics, and health. Examples from Sub-Saharan countries demonstrate the effectiveness of adapting school schedules to local contexts and demands. For instance, schools have adjusted their timetables to accommodate agricultural seasons, particularly in schools serving poor, rural populations, allowing children to participate in farming activities without compromising their education. In the Mwea Irrigation Settlement in Kenya, school schedules were adjusted to allow children to assist with rice cultivation. Similarly, in Teso, Uganda, school terms were modified to accommodate the demands during the cotton-picking season. In

Ethiopia, schools have the autonomy to determine their calendars as long as they remain open for 205-210 days per year (Colclough et al, 2003; Hadley, 2010, p.47).

Another suggested policy response is to institute a flexible weekly timetable to accommodate market days to mitigate pupil absenteeism as well as benefit teachers who may need to supplement their income during periods of delayed salary payments (Humphreys et al., 2015). These policy responses and recommendations have the potential to better align school opening with wider socio-economic and cultural factors. The consensus in the literature and among stakeholders is that adaptation of school calendars to local contexts can have positive equity implications. However, evidence on its effectiveness remains limited, both within Nigeria and across Sub-Saharan Africa.

3.5.3. School monitoring

In PLANE states, SUBEB officials, LGA ES's, and SSOs are involved in monitoring and supervising schools, including compliance to published calendar dates:

“We monitor school opening and that is why we get to the school early before the school opens during our daily monitoring and take note of the time the teachers and learners get to school” (Kano SSO FGD).

“[SSOs] mobilize the schools and communities on the time opening and closing” (Jigawa SSO FGD).

Evidence suggest that mixed method approaches to school monitoring, which also comprise teacher and student attendance monitoring, may be most successful at generating positive accountability for schooling among head teachers, teachers, SBMCs and children (Ciliersa et al., 2014). This includes the use of “multiple monitors” - supervisors, head teachers, SBMCs and community members - and multiple modes of monitoring - electronic and paper (ibid.). A specific example of effective attendance monitoring in India, which can be expanded to include school opening, is given in Section 4.4.

4. Teacher Attendance

Key Findings

- ▶ Teacher attendance means teachers being in school, in the classroom, and punctual. Different framings and metrics of attendance are utilised to emphasise different elements of the widespread challenges of regular and timely attendance, including long and short-term absence, its reasons and effects.
- ▶ A significant minority of teachers in Nigeria struggle with regular and timely school attendance. Secondary data from spot checks and self-reports suggest that 10-50% of teachers are not in school or class on any day. These behaviours are not captured in EMIS, which present very low prevalence (<8%) of teacher long-term absence. Coverage and reliability of attendance data are highly inadequate.
- ▶ No PLANE states have formal guidance on teacher attendance or absenteeism, including minimum expectations, justifiable or unjustifiable leave, and responses or sanctions.
- ▶ Public and integrated IQTE schools are required to have a teacher attendance register, or ‘time book’, which is expected to be completed twice daily and is monitored by head teachers and personnel at local and state government levels. However, data are unreliable: time books may be completed in advance or retrospectively, be poorly maintained, and data usage is weak.
- ▶ Mixed methods for monitoring teacher attendance; recruiting, incentivising and supporting teachers; and school management reforms are three areas that can be effective in improving teacher attendance.

Concerns about teacher attendance in school has grown with increasing attention to student learning outcomes. However, teacher attendance is problematised, measured, evidenced, and responded to differently by a range of datasets, studies and stakeholders (government and non-government) to education. This section describes key definitions and problematisations of teacher attendance; evidence of its prevalence and patterns in Nigeria and comparable countries in Sub-Saharan Africa; teacher attendance in PLANE states; overarching issues and concerns; and a handful of promising practices.

4.1. Conceptualising teacher attendance

Teacher attendance means teachers being in school, in the classroom, and punctual. Different framings and metrics of teacher attendance are utilised to emphasise different elements of the widespread challenges of regular and timely attendance, including long and short-term absence, its reasons and effects. Teacher attendance is widely agreed across academic and programmatic literature to be a multi-faceted concept. Recent studies identify four key elements of attendance, shown in Figure 6 (Guerrero et al., 2013; Bold et al., 2017; Akseer & Jativa, 2021; Karpinnen et al., 2021).

Figure 6: Key elements of teacher attendance



These ‘layers’ of attendance move beyond thinking about teachers ‘being there’ to include what teachers are ‘doing there’, acknowledging that being on school premises is essential but not sufficient: “*teacher attendance in school does not necessarily mean that teachers are motivated and provide education in classrooms*” (Bold et al., 2017; Akseer & Jativa, 2021). However, there is some disagreement as to whether defining (and measuring) teacher attendance should include contact time / time on task (point 3), whether teachers are ‘providing education’, given that these are questions of quality.

In addition to these key elements of teacher attendance is a binary approach to framing teacher behaviour: as either (1) absence / absenteeism, or (2) attendance. The main features of these different framings in the literature are described in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Teacher absence and teacher attendance

Teacher absence framing	Teacher attendance approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focuses on negative non-attendance. Data gathering on absence rates from school, classrooms, teaching and correlations with learning time loss and low student attainment (Akseer & Jativa, 2021; Karpinnen, 2021; Bold et al., 2017). ▪ Absence is presented as a 'threat' to learning, as 'disturbing', 'costly', 'inefficient' (Bold et al., 2017; Kudjo, 2018). ▪ Despite some teacher absence being legitimate (e.g. ill health, funeral) and most teacher absence being authorised (Bashir et al., 2018), many studies do not distinguish authorised and non-authorised absence. ▪ Teachers have been criticised for being "supportive of absenteeism under certain conditions" (Sabarwal and Abu-Jawdeh, 2018, p.5), or practising 'voluntary absenteeism' – absence under their control (Birioukov, 2015). However, data on authorised versus unauthorised absence is not presented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Entails considering opportunities and constraints on teachers' actions – why they do what they do – examining attendance in terms of the teacher and attempts to explain his/her attitudes and behaviour (Tao, 2014; Tao, 2016; Unterhalter, 2018). ▪ Acknowledges teachers as agents with needs and rights to dignified work, support and training, reliable salary, healthcare, and more. ▪ Consider voluntary absences in terms of the motivations for non-attendance and 'involuntary absences' where the conditions of a teacher's life keep them away from school (Birioukov, 2015; Obiero et al., 2017).

In practice, notions of teacher attendance draw on lots of different ideas about attendance and absence:

"A teacher may be in school and be late, that is about punctuality. Absenteeism is when the teacher did not come to school at all. Attendance is more than just being in school, but it is about teaching and learning. So, a teacher that is in school must interact with the pupils in the classroom, not telling stories but teaching and while the students are learning. If this does not happen, it is as good as not coming to school" (PLANE IP KII).

"Teachers in school and not in class are not considered to have attended" (Borno State Government KII).

There are many reasons to explain teacher attendance or absence, whether authorised, unauthorised, voluntary or involuntary. Some of these are captured in quantitative datasets, some are known to respondents reflecting on practices in PLANE states, but many are inadequately understood and evidenced by any data. The following sections consider evidence of the prevalence and patterns of teacher attendance, including in PLANE states, reflecting on different facets and meanings of attendance and/ or absence.

4.2 Prevalence and patterns in Nigeria

No PLANE states have formal policy guidance on teacher attendance or absenteeism, including for expectations, justifiable or unjustifiable leave, and responses or sanctions. However, all primary schools are expected to have a 'time book', on which teachers should mark their presence twice daily. These are monitored by head teachers, local and state government QA officers. However, the reliability and use of this data is weak.

The National Education Quality Assurance Handbook (NEQAH) for Basic and Secondary Education in Nigeria states that *"Every learner should be able to participate fully in class activities with the support of the teacher"* (2016, 3.3.1, vi, p.11). The Handbook emphasises the importance of teacher qualifications, training and attitudes to students' school experience and outcomes.

At federal level, the Public Service Rules (2008) contains justifiable reasons for leave including for maternity, training – for which a teacher needs prior approval – and sickness – which requires a note. These reasons mirror those represented in the categories of EMIS data on absence (Table 6 in Section 4.3.2 below). Every public and integrated IQTE primary school is required to have a teacher attendance register (or 'time book'). Teachers are required to fill in the time book upon arrival at school, if they leave school during the day, and on departure at school close. Time books are monitored by the head teacher, LGEA and SUBEB Quality Assurance departments and/or the Academic Services department through regular visits to schools:

"The time book is kept in the head teachers' office. There is regular inspection by the quality assurance department and SSOs with spot checks to verify teacher attendance" (Borno State Government KII)

“The time book is a fairly accurate data source for teacher attendance but does not actually reflect whether a teacher actively or efficiently carry out his responsibilities” (Kano State Government KII).

At the school level, the head teacher is responsible for the time book and checking teacher attendance throughout the school day. The head teacher should also observe teachers’ activities, check their lesson plan, ensure all staff attendance, and supervise the form master for each class and ensure they record student attendance (Kaduna and Jigawa State Government KIIs). During quality assurance monitoring visits, officials check and gather data and observe schools and classes for a full day. In Jigawa, data are uploaded:

“Into a dashboard that PLANE helped us to develop. With the dashboard, I can check the number of SSOs in any of our LGAs and know their movements” (Jigawa State Government KII).

According to the Public Service Rules, teachers must be in attendance at school when scheduled except for justifiable and authorised absences. Due process must be followed in cases of non-justifiable absence: a query is raised and salary withheld until resolved. There is a disciplinary committee that handles cases, and teachers should not be immediately suspended or sacked. However, there is no formal guidance on at what stage of absence (number of days/weeks) a salary should be withheld, for how long, or whether/ how it is recovered. No respondents understood the circumstances under which salary would be withheld, although they knew of it happening. Respondents noted:

“If we go for monitoring and a teacher is absent, we will ask the headteacher about the person to know if he is a habitual absentee, if it is his habit, we will give verbal warning to the person and if repeated, we give written warning, then a query. If the person continues to be absent, we will write a report on him and submit to SUBEB copying the LGEA” (Kaduna State Government KII).

“If a school consistently has absent teachers, they should be able to call the headteacher to find out what is happening” (Jigawa State Government KII).

In practice, the forms of and extent to which absence is allowed is likely to be highly variable. According to data analysed for Kano state as part of UNICEF’s Time to Teach series (section 4.3.1), 78% of teachers in Kano felt that inspectors generally sanctioned absence (Akseer & Jatava, 2021).

4.3 Teacher attendance in PLANE states

According to secondary quantitative data, a significant proportion of teachers in Nigeria struggle with regular and timely school attendance. Data from spot checks and self-reports suggest that 10-50% of teachers are not in school or class on any day. These daily/weekly behaviours are not captured in EMIS, which present very low prevalence (<8%) of teacher long-term absence. Coverage and reliability of teacher attendance data are highly inadequate overall.

This study reviews three quantitative sources that provide evidence on teacher attendance in Nigeria:

1. Data from survey-based studies: World Bank Service Delivery Indicator (WB SDI) surveys and UNICEF’s Time to Teach (TTT) study
2. Teacher Attendance data from PLANE Window 1 (W1)
3. Data from the national Annual School Census (ASC) incorporated into the Education Management Information System (EMIS).

A comparative analysis of the different data sources available for monitoring both teacher and student attendance is included in Annex IV.

4.3.1. Survey-based studies: World Bank and UNICEF

Large survey-based research studies conducted by the World Bank and UNICEF indicate that teachers in Nigeria struggle with regular attendance.

World Bank’s Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs)

The World Bank’s Service Delivery Indicators (SDI) provide key statistics on health and education services, focusing on provider ability, effort, and inputs, thus offering an overview of the average citizen’s experience with

these services. SDI surveys collect data from schools and health facilities, with 26 surveys completed in 12 SSA countries since 2010. These indicators are gathered using standardised questionnaires and data collection methods, ensuring results that are representative at both national and sub-national levels. The surveys allow for analysis by sub-regions (e.g., counties, provinces, districts), rural and urban areas, public and private providers, and other relevant characteristics (e.g., facility type). The definitions of indicators and data collection protocols are standardised for international comparability. In Nigeria, the SDI survey was conducted in 2013, focusing on primary schools in four states: Anambra, Bauchi, Ekiti, and Niger⁵. The sample was designed to ensure state-level representativeness, allowing for analysis by provider type (private/public) and location (rural/urban).

As illustrated in Figure 7, teacher absenteeism from class is higher than absenteeism from school across all surveyed countries, indicating that teachers are often present at school but absent from the classroom. Among these countries, Nigeria reported one of the lowest school absenteeism rates at 14% and the lowest class absenteeism rate at 19%, as shown in Figure 8 (Bashir et al., 2018). While the average teacher absenteeism from school at 14% was lower than for other countries in West and Central Africa, time on task absence was the highest of all WACA countries, with Nigerian teachers teaching for just 46% of allocated time (Bold et al., 2017, p.50). Thus, these reports suggest that in Nigeria, “the main leakages take place inside the school” (World Bank, 2013, p.9).

Teacher absenteeism rates in SSA also varied by school location and type of teacher contract. In Nigeria, the data shows that absenteeism rates were similar in both urban and rural schools. However, teachers on government contracts were more likely to be absent than those on private contracts, possibly due to stricter monitoring and stronger incentives in private schools (Bashir et al., 2018, pp. 264-267). This is consistent with findings from KIIs and FGDs, which indicate that teacher attendance is higher in private, Islamiyya, and Tsangaya schools compared to public schools. Respondents reported that in private schools, salary payments are often based on deliverables, supervision is stricter and conducted daily, and in Islamiyya and Tsangaya schools, higher levels of discipline result in fewer absences among both students and teachers.

Figure 7: School Absenteeism rates among primary school teachers in selected SSA countries

Country ^a	Year	Work venue		School location		Teacher's contract ^b	
		School	Class	Urban	Rural	Public	Private
Kenya	2013	0.15	0.43	0.13	0.16	0.17	0.13
Tanzania	2014	0.15	0.47	0.15	0.15	0.15	—
Togo	2013	0.21	0.36	0.12	0.25	0.24	0.15
Uganda	2013	0.24	0.53	0.16	0.28	0.27	0.14
Ethiopia	2014	0.05	0.22	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.00
Madagascar	2016	0.35	0.42	0.31	0.36	0.40	0.15
Mozambique	2014	0.43	0.55	0.31	0.46	0.4	—
Nigeria	2014	0.14	0.19	0.13	0.14	0.17	0.05
Senegal	2010	0.18	0.29	0.19	0.18	0.21	—

Source: Analysis of World Bank Service Delivery Indicators (SDI) surveys.

Note: — = not available. The data come from the second of two visits to the sample schools which, unlike the first visit, was unannounced.

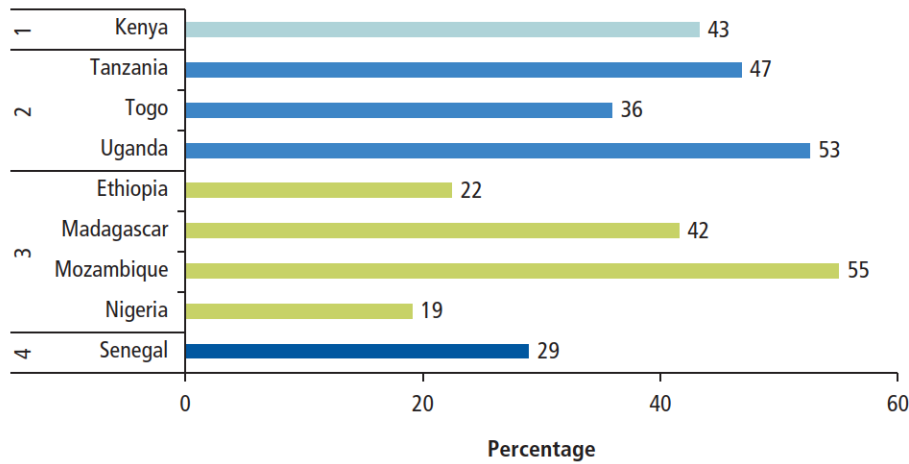
a. Countries are listed in order of the country groups to which they are assigned throughout this study: Kenya (Group 1); Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda (Group 2); Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Nigeria (Group 3); and Senegal (Group 4). For definitions of country Groups 1–4, see chapter 1 or figure 4.2.

b. Teachers on public contracts exclude those in public schools who are hired on school- or community-based contracts. Teachers on private contracts include only those working in nongovernment schools.

Source: Bashir et al., 2018 (with data from SDI country datasets)

⁵ Data was collected through personal interviews and provider assessments from a total of 760 randomly selected public and private schools (190 per state). In this survey, 2,435 teachers were assessed for knowledge, and 5,754 teachers were evaluated for effort.

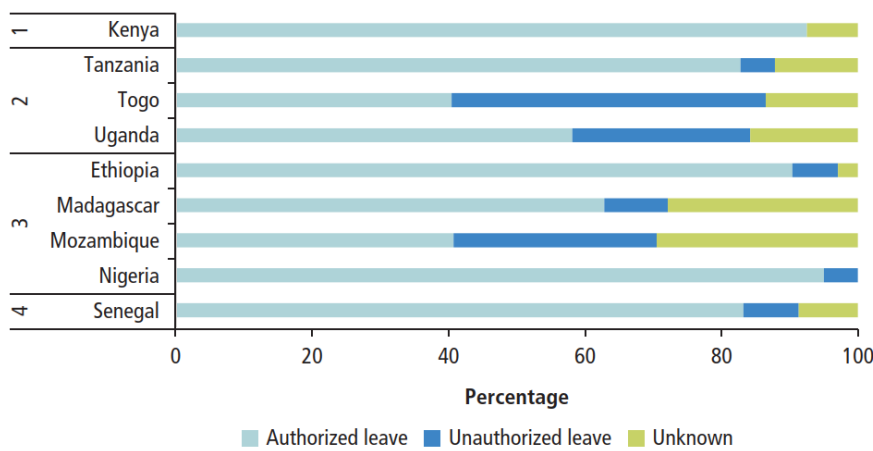
Figure 8: Percentage of “orphaned” classrooms



Source: Bashir et al., 2018 (with data from SDI country datasets)

The SDI surveys also gathered information on the reasons for teacher absenteeism on the day that enumerators visited the sampled school. As shown in Figure 9, in most of the countries teachers were found to be on “authorised leave” with Nigeria presenting the highest percentage of authorised leave among the selected countries. Authorised leave is leave due to legitimate reasons such as training or field trip, sickness, maternity leave, salary retrieval or other approved absences.

Figure 9: Percentage of teachers by reason for absence from schools



Source: Bashir et al., 2018 (with data from SDI country datasets)

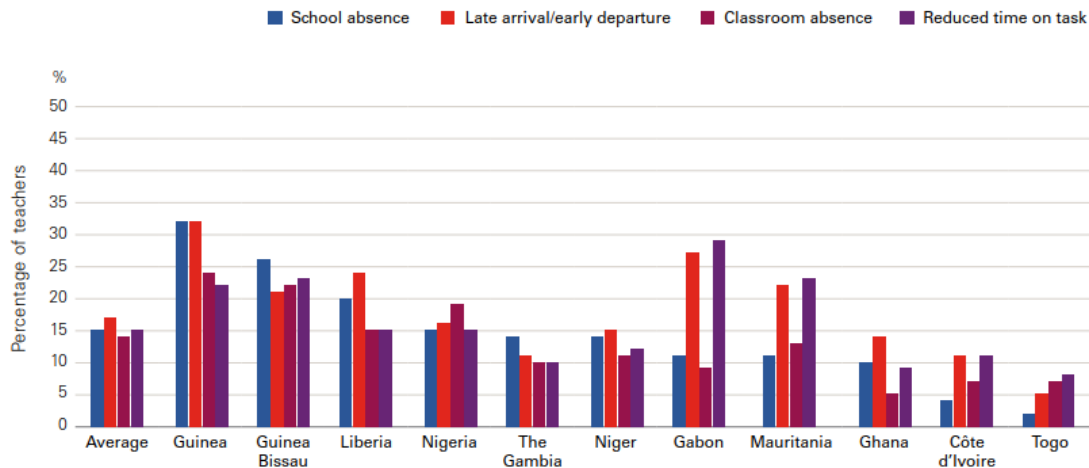
UNICEF’s Time to Teach study

Between 2019 and 2021, UNICEF conducted the Time to Teach (TTT) study in West and Central Africa. The aim of the study was to provide a comprehensive understanding of teacher attendance in the country’s primary schools, insights into how attendance challenges vary across different types of schools (public/Quranic/private) and settings (urban/rural), and inform teacher policy design and implementation, particularly in light of how the Covid-19 pandemic may have exacerbated existing challenges. The study examined four dimensions of teacher attendance: (i) being in school; (ii) being punctual (i.e., not arriving late or leaving early); (iii) being in the classroom while in school; and (iv) spending sufficient time on task while in the classroom. It also identified factors associated with teacher absenteeism at five different levels of the education system: national, state, LGA/community, school, and teacher levels. The TTT study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilising both

qualitative and quantitative research tools. It drew from national, system-wide qualitative data collections, school observations, and a quantitative survey based on primary school teacher self-reports of absence.

Figure 10 presents the percentage of teachers who self-reported being absent for various reasons on a regular basis across West and Central Africa. On average, 14.7% of surveyed teachers report being absent from school at least once a week. Additionally, 17% of teachers report late arrival or early departure, 14.5% report missing lessons while present in school, and 15.3% report reduced time on task in the classroom. Teacher absenteeism is also reported higher in public schools compared to private schools (16% vs. 13%). This discrepancy is particularly noticeable in terms of punctuality; 18% of teachers in public schools report arriving late or leaving early on a recurring basis, compared to 12% in private schools (Játiva et al., 2022).

Figure 10: Percentage of teachers who reported being absent at least once a week



Source: Játiva et al., 2022, p. 19

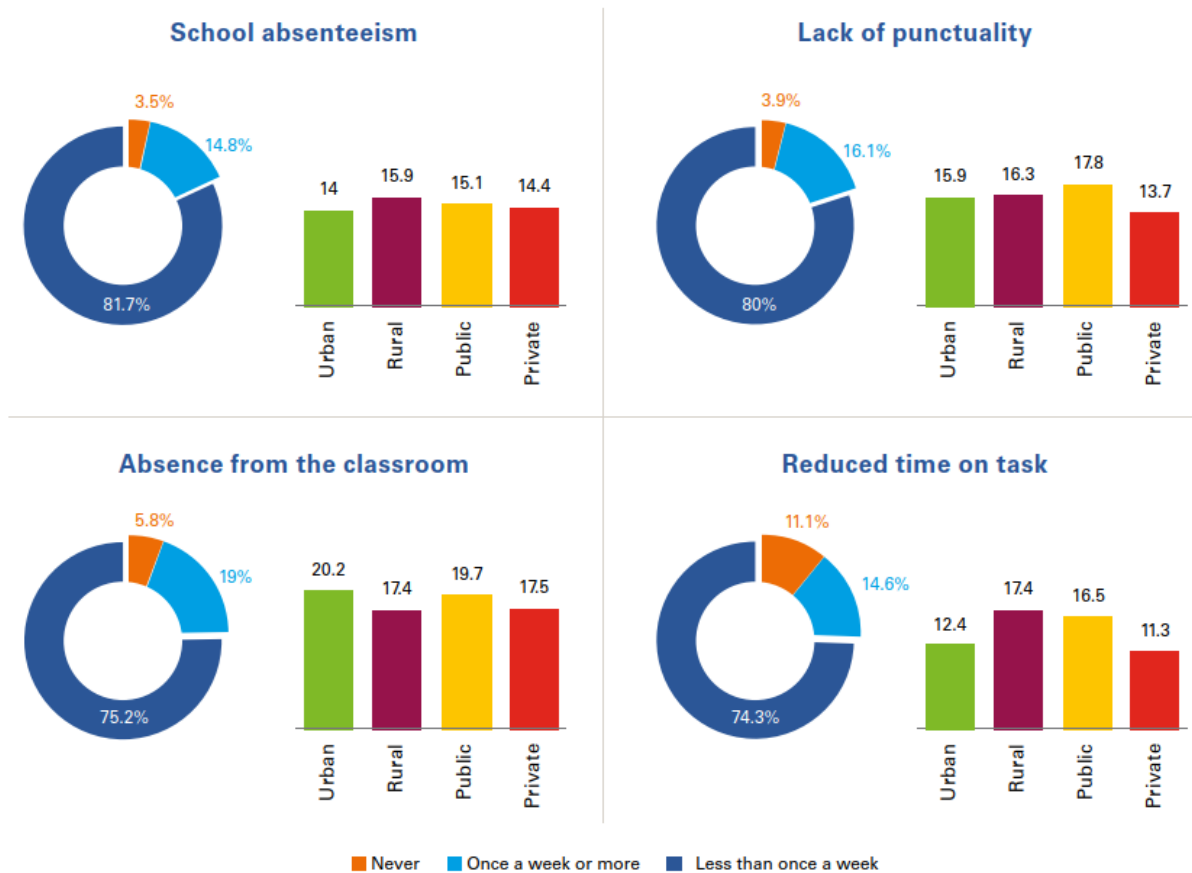
In Nigeria, the quantitative survey was conducted across six states: Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Enugu, Kano, and Oyo⁶ (Akseer and Jativa, 2021). Figure 11 below presents the self-reported frequency of teacher absenteeism in primary schools in Nigeria. According to the survey findings, 29% of primary school teachers have been recurrently absent (i.e., at least once a week) in one or more of the four dimensions of teacher attendance:

- ▶ Absence from school is reported by 14.8 percent of teachers in the surveyed primary schools.
- ▶ Late arrival or early departure is the second most frequent form of absenteeism, with 16.1 percent of teachers indicating they have arrived late or left early on a recurring basis (i.e., at least once a week) since the start of the school year.
- ▶ Classroom absence is the most frequent form of absenteeism, reported by 19 percent of teachers.
- ▶ Limited time on task is the least frequent form, reported by 14.6 percent of teachers.

Surveyed teachers were also asked about the main reasons behind each form of absenteeism. The primary reasons reported by teachers for each type of absenteeism are very similar. Ill health is the most frequently cited reason for absence from school, late arrival/early departure, and reduced time on task, and it is the second most frequent reason for classroom absence. Administrative reasons (e.g., office work, teacher meetings) are the most often cited motivation for classroom absence. Weather, family reasons, and transportation issues are also frequently mentioned (Ibid).

⁶ States were selected to ensure representation from each of the six geopolitical zones of the country. A total of 525 teachers were surveyed across 36 primary schools. The schools were purposively selected based on the following criteria: location (geopolitical zone/ state); community setting (urban and rural); and type of school (public and private).

Figure 11: Self-reported frequency of teacher absenteeism in primary schools in Nigeria⁷



Source: Akseer & Jativa, 2021, p. 19

At state levels in Nigeria, and at sub-national levels in other WACA countries, evidence from the World Bank and UNICEF studies suggest that teacher absence tends to be higher:

- ▶ In rural, poorer and more marginalised schools, due to the poorer working conditions for teachers, the paucity and unreliability of local infrastructure and services, and insecurity (Bold et al., 2017; World Bank, 2018);
- ▶ Among younger and less experienced teachers, men and women, who may lack commitment to and training for their roles (World Bank, 2013; Akseer & Jativa, 2021);
- ▶ Among female teachers, due to the gendered burden of care and household tasks, pregnancy and maternity leave and security concerns (Akseer & Jativa, 2021).

However, both surveys' distinct modes of data collection are problematic: spot checks (WB SDI surveys) are problematic for presenting one cross-section of attendance, while teacher self-reports (UNICEF TTT) are prone to various biases and inaccuracies. The barriers and issues associated with these trends (infrastructure, insecurity, care) are described more fully in Section 6 of this report.

Findings shared by the British Council with this research team, from their Accelerated Learning programme, is well contextualised for this SOA study. This programme defined teacher attendance as, the “*teacher is present in the class at 8am*”. Based on this definition, research found that, in seven targeted LGAs in Kano state, “*54% of classes started late due to teacher/pupil punctuality*”.

⁷ Percentages indicate the proportion of teachers who report never being absent, being absent less than once a week, and at least once a week or more since the beginning of the school year. The pie charts represent the responses of all surveyed teachers. On the right, the bar graphs represent the percentage of teachers who claim to be absent at least once a week or more by sub-groups: rural-urban and public-private.

4.3.2. Annual School Census

Each state of Nigeria operates an Education Management Information System (EMIS) based on data collection mandated and standardised through a national Annual School Census (ASC). The ASC is a mandatory exercise for all states to provide accurate and accessible data for planning, decision making and policy implementation. The ASC collects data on student enrolments, staffing, facilities, and institutional developments at pre-primary, primary and post-primary levels.

Head teachers are trained as enumerators and are assigned an average of two schools per day for data collection (and can assist a limited number of schools). Questionnaires are completed by the head teacher. Data is validated in two stages: (i) manual validation at the LGA level by Education Officers and LGA EMIS Officers; (ii) at the state level by the MoE and SUBEB EMIS Officers.

Individual teacher data is collected and input including: i) Staff File No; ii) Gender; iii) Type of staff; iv) Source of salary; v) Year of birth; vi) Year of first appointment; vii) Year of present appointment; viii) Year of posting to this school; ix) Grade level / Step; x) Present; xi) Academic Qualification; xii) Teaching Qualification; xiii) Area of specialisation; xiv) Main subject taught; xv) if teacher attended training workshop / seminar in last 12 months.

Teacher 'absence' is measured and categorised into five variables:

1. Present or temporarily absent
2. Absent for more than 1 month – Maternity leave
3. Absent for more than 1 month – Training
4. Absent for more than 1 month – Sick leave
5. Absent for more than 1 month – Unauthorised

Data focuses on long-term continuous absence of more than one month. All teachers who are not defined by the four predefined categories of long-term absence are marked as 'present or temporarily absent'. Daily attendance figures are not published in any ASC reports. Absence is only disaggregated by urban/ rural. No other measures of short-term absence or attendance data are collected or published.

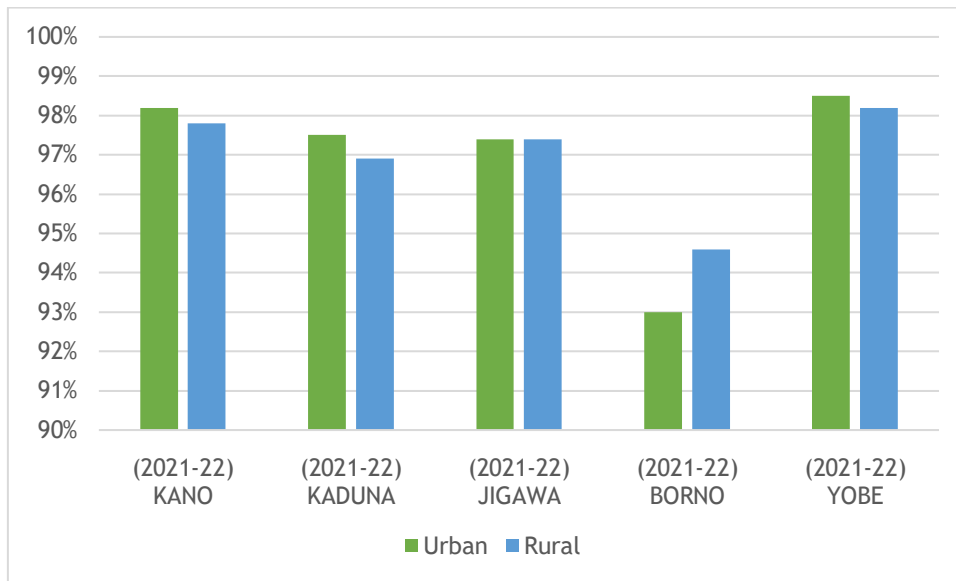
The latest available ASC data for each state suggest that the majority of teachers (>90% in each state) were present or temporarily absent at the last census. Teachers in urban areas are slightly more likely to be present or temporarily absent than their rural counterparts in Kano and Kaduna but have the same or higher likelihood of being present in Jigawa and Borno (Table 6; Figure 12).

Table 6: Present, temporarily absent and long-term absent teachers by reason, public primary

TYPE OF ABSENCE	KANO (2021-22)		KADUNA (2021-22)		JIGAWA (2021-22)		BORNO (2021-22)		YOBE (2021-22)	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
% Present or Temporarily Absent	98.2%	97.8%	97.5%	96.9%	97.4%	97.4%	93.0%	94.6%	98.5%	98.2%
% Maternity Leave	0.6%	0.9%	1.3%	1.2%	0.6%	0.6%	1.3%	2.3%	0.1%	0.4%
% Training	0.8%	0.8%	0.2%	0.4%	1.3%	1.3%	3.0%	1.8%	0.1%	0.3%
% Sick Leave	0.2%	0.4%	0.2%	0.2%	0.5%	0.5%	1.2%	0.9%	0.7%	0.9%
% Unauthorised	0.1%	0.2%	0.8%	1.4%	0.2%	0.2%	1.5%	0.4%	0.6%	0.2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Nigeria ASC 2021-2022 and 2022-2023

Figure 12: Present or temporarily absent teachers, urban and rural public primary



Source: Nigeria ASC 2021-2022 and 2022-2023

These data thus indicate a very low proportion of teachers on any category of long-term absence. These absences are, in any case, most likely to be authorised. Teachers on long-term leave are supposed to be replaced to mitigate the effects of their absence. However, when replacement teachers are not deployed or take a long time to arrive, teacher absence can have negative consequences on students, through no fault of the absent teacher.

Lastly, concerns with the accuracy, completeness and timeliness of EMIS data and ASC reports are common among PLANE IPs and external stakeholders, but are not shared by government officials:

“Data from the annual school census was bogus and I will say that they may not be reliable” (PLANE IP KII).

“In some cases, the data look suspicious” (Non-government education stakeholder KII).

“In my opinion, I will say the data are accurate” (Jigawa State Government KII).

“The data is relatively accurate, it is complete” (Borno State Government KII).

4.3.3. PLANE data

PLANE IPs stated that gathering data and monitoring attendance are challenging, particularly using existing administrative mechanisms such as EMIS. UNICEF’s EduTrac monitoring system is being deployed to gather attendance data in Yobe state. Window 1 is conducting monitoring activities on teacher attendance in the classroom and time spent teaching:

“We have a lesson calendar which covers days in the term. It is marked by the headteacher whenever a teacher goes to the class to teach. This will help us to monitor if teaching is taking place in the school” (PLANE W1 KII).

W1 enumerators have collected data at the start and end of each school year on a sample of pupils and teachers in Primary 2, 4, and 6 in Jigawa, Kano and Kaduna states. Baseline data is collected, including total enrollment, student and teacher attendance, and pupils and teachers are asked about their daily attendance in the last week⁸. W1 report that data is collected using three approaches (Table 7).

⁸ Attendance rates are calculated as:

% Student Attendance = No. students attending over the duration / total enrolment * 100

% Teacher Attendance = No. teachers attending over the duration / number of classes surveyed

Table 7: PLANE W1 Attendance Data Collection

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Approach 1: Direct observation of pupil attendance and teacher attendance in class, compared with pupil enrollment and the teacher roster.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most accurate way to capture attendance on a particular day • Data tend to show lower attendance than self-reports • Not dependent on reporting from teachers and Head Teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less representative since it captures one random day, and attendance fluctuates by day of the week • May conflate drop-out and attendance rates
Approach 2: Pupil and teacher self-reports. A sample of pupils and teachers report the number of days they attended school the previous week.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides data over the span of one week, rather than one day • Allows us to tie attendance data to learning outcomes • Measures attendance rather than drop-outs for pupils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results may skew high, which limits room for improvement in Key Performance Indicators
Approach 3: Review of attendance records (HT records on teachers, teacher records on pupils).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can capture data on all students over week(s) or month(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower accuracy • Teacher absenteeism will directly impact record-keeping on pupil attendance • Not all schools have records

Source: PLANE Window 1

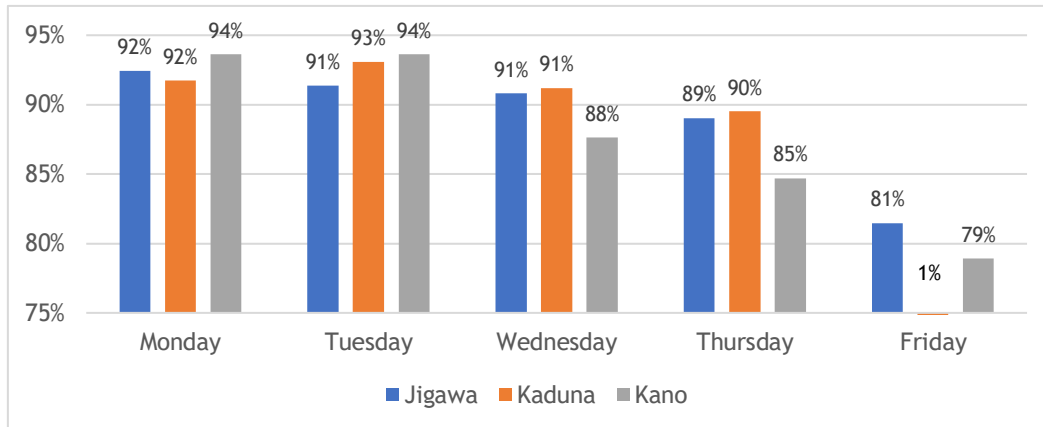
The data provided show that W1 also captures data on:

- i. Number of days school was scheduled to be open
- ii. Number of days school was actually open
- iii. Hours per day school is intended to be open
- iv. Time lost to schools starting late or ending early
- v. Hours per day dedicated to reading lesson
- vi. Time lost due to lesson starting late or ending early
- vii. Time lost due to teacher being 'off-task'

W1 is undertaking activities that are likely to have significant positive effects on student and teacher attendance in schools, including financial support to families whose children are enrolled in primary school, with a focus on marginalised groups, activities to help boost literacy, participation and encourage home based learning, and regular monitoring visits throughout the year, which may influence actual attendance and record-keeping. Attendance data from PLANE-supported schools may therefore vary from schools not engaged with PLANE. Moreover, the dataset provided by W1 was incomplete, with fields such as school codes and type of disability missing. This limits analysis and encourages caution in interpreting these data.

Nevertheless, analysis of W1 teacher attendance data for the school year 2023-24 indicates some interesting patterns. Data show variation in attendance by days of the week, with attendance gradually declining during the week (Figure 13). Attendance is lowest on Friday, known as 'Jumah', the day of gathering, important in northern states. Consistent with this and the 4-day week policy, Kaduna has almost no teacher attendance on Fridays.

Figure 13: Teacher attendance by day and state



Source: PLANE Window 1 (2023-2024)

4.4 Overarching issues and concerns

Teacher policies not directly concerned with attendance have significant effects on attendance; attention to these policies – recruitment, deployment, retention, remuneration – can contribute to positive change in attendance rates. However, currently inadequate coordination at state government levels seems to restrict policy reform for teachers. This is linked to the fact that there is insufficient evidence on teacher absence and its relationship with other facets of teacher employment and behaviour. Very little evidence could be gathered for this study on non-state, IQTE or nomadic teachers.

4.4.1 Politics, power, and teachers

Several well-known issues related to the politics and policies of teachers in Nigeria contribute to attendance:

- ▶ **Teacher recruitment** to address profound teacher shortages, especially in rural areas, for female teachers, and for qualified teachers: “Qualified teachers are in short supply at all levels of basic education” (National Personnel Audit Report, 2012, p. 460). Teacher shortages may lower existing teachers’ working conditions, contributing to lower morale, performance, and attendance (Humphreys et al., 2015; Subair and Talabi, 2015).
- ▶ **Teacher deployment and retention**, especially to rural locations, including the deployment of qualified and female teachers to these locations. Effective, equitable, coherent and transparent deployment and retention policies and packages, including financial incentives, opportunities for professional support, and postings near teachers’ family homes, may promote attendance by recognising and responding to teachers’ needs and preferences (Tao, 2014; McBurnie et al., 2021);
- ▶ **Teacher remuneration, support and professional development**, including the timely disbursement of salaries, higher remuneration, provision of teaching materials and professional support. These factors may encourage attendance by recognising teacher professionalism and status, providing capacity development for promotion, and addressing short-term absences in cases where teachers have to travel to collect salaries. KIIs and FGDs highlighted a general discontent with teachers’ working conditions and salaries, as well as the lack of government support, commitment, and recognition of their role:

“We were promised by the previous government that he will create a special fund for teachers’ salary, he did for navy and paramilitary but did not pay attention to teachers. What can teachers do with 30,000 minimum wages, when you have a teacher with 12 family members, what can he do with 30,000 [Naira]?” (Jigawa SSO FGD).

The latest Education Roadmap (2024) strategies to address basic education challenges include those for teachers, specifically:

- ▶ Address current teacher supply gaps in basic education schools;

- ▶ Recruit, train and re-train teachers;
- ▶ Enhance the quality of teachers, head teachers and school supervisors in basic education schools (p.26).

Different government agencies at different levels are responsible for teachers and coordination between agencies is often problematic. SUBEB recruits and appoints teachers while LGEAs are responsible for their deployment and retention. These coordination challenges 'contribute to highest level of randomness in teacher allocation in the [WACA] region' with teacher allocation [that is] 'inequitable to need across and within schools' (UNESCO, 2021a). One major problem with teacher shortages and deployment, which is not addressed in the latest Roadmap, is the inequitable distribution of male and female teachers and absolute shortages in remote rural schools (Tao, 2014). This requires tailored strategies to address teacher supply gaps that recognise the challenges of working conditions in rural areas and how to support all teachers to be deployed with adequate support provisions.

Research suggests that having female teachers in primary schools positively impacts girls' enrolment, retention, and academic performance (Humphreys et al., 2015; UNESCO, 2023). Female teachers serve as mentors and provide a supportive environment, encouraging girls to excel academically and feel safe in school (Ugoani, 2016). In-service training may support all teachers' professional development, pedagogical practices, and retention in the long-term. Yet, in the short-term requires teachers to be absent from class:

"Teachers with higher access to training self-reported more absence from the classroom and lower time on task, which could be a result of in-service programmes taking place during school hours" (Akseer & Jativa, 2021, p.27)

One major barrier to teachers' regular and timely attendance is distance to school (McBurnie et al., 2021; Section 6):

"On the part of the teachers, the challenge is mainly that they stay far away from their schools. For instance, a teacher staying in Kano but teaching in Bunkure how can he get there and not be late? Even if he is mobile, he cannot be punctual. The situation is even worse in hard-to-reach areas. If there are two teachers in a school, one may go on Monday and Tuesday and the other goes on Thursday and Friday" (PLANE IP KII).

Neither head teachers, SBMCs nor Education Secretaries at local government have the mandate to hire and fire teachers – this is done by SMoE/SUBEB. This affects their power and authority over the behaviour and performance of the teachers in their school:

"Head teachers are supposed to enforce attendance – they should be first to arrive and ensure on time arrival of teachers and pupils. But Heads tend not to be empowered to do this. They lack power to enforce punctuality – they can only report to the LGA. If they had more power to suspend this would help. Clusters of schools are supported by SSOs – the HT reports issues to the SSO who tries to deal with it. If he can't they report to the ES at LGA level" (Non-government education stakeholder KII).

"There are schools with poor leadership where there is no cooperation between teachers and the headteacher. This makes teachers not bother with the daily roll calls and there is no teaching and learning. Some head teachers cover up for their teachers in terms of attendance" (Kano SSO FGD).

Head teachers' lack of authority and autonomy to manage the teachers in their schools appears to be a significant constraint to teacher attitudes, behaviour and performance, including attendance.

4.4.2 Data

Approaches to measuring teacher attendance and/ or absenteeism are heterogenous. There are different methods of gathering, analysing and presenting these data (mostly quantitative), diverse contexts, and diverse and often complicated education systems, all of which make it difficult to compare data and findings from different sources and complicate a common understanding of teacher attendance/absence (UNESCO, 2021b). There is more attention to counting absence than to seeking to understand why teachers do what they do.

In Nigeria there are inconsistencies between absence rates recorded in large-scale surveys and those reported by stakeholders. There are also uncertainties and inconsistencies in the availability, capabilities, and number of monitoring resources across states, and the frequency and timing of monitoring. Different personnel are involved in school monitoring: SUBEB, LGEAs, SSOs, and head teachers. LGA Education Secretaries' monitoring visits are important but lack coherence: there are not enough resources, training, or authority of local inspectors. There is no clear description of work for SSOs and QA Officers.

Monitoring visits tend to focus on whole-day absence from school and punctuality on arrival in the morning, focussing on the time book, and not on other facets of attendance and reasons for absence. As a result of these issues, and the aggregation of teacher absence data to state level by ASC, there is no quantitative data indicating whether and what variations in teacher attendance exist between:

- ▶ different school types (public, private, nomadic, IQTE, voluntary, other) - some literature suggests that teacher absenteeism is lower in private compared to public primary schools (World Bank, 2022);
- ▶ different school grades (P1-P6);
- ▶ at different times of the school day (anecdotal that attendance drops off towards end of school day);
- ▶ across teacher and student attendance; and
- ▶ pre- and post- Covid-19.

There are lots of monitoring visits gathering data on schools, including teacher and student attendance – presence in school and punctuality specifically – but little confidence in what happens to this data, how it is processed, its reliability and accuracy:

“The quality of data depends, sometimes attendance is tempered with by the headteachers depending on relationships. In some cases, the headteacher connives with the teachers and make the data suspicious” (Borno State Government KII).

In addition, there is little evidence about what state governments do with these data beyond reporting long-term absence data from EMIS in state ASC reports (Table 6).

4.4.3 The work of teachers

The working patterns of teachers are unusual compared to other professions: teachers work intensively for 10-12 weeks during term time, punctuated by one to two weeks of mid-term breaks, inter-term holidays in December and April, and then 4-6 weeks leave during July and August (the long holiday). This is a highly specific pattern of work and workload.

The OECD’s Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) – a large-scale international survey of schools in participating OECD countries - ranks education systems on how much work teachers report doing in a given week (OECD 2018; 2019). The data can show hours worked during teachers’ ‘most recent calendar week’ or average numbers of hours worked per week during each term (Thompson et al., 2023). This indicates teachers’ overall workload and helps to contextualise patterns in teachers’ other behaviours, including attendance and absenteeism. It can show how much ‘extra’ work teachers are doing beyond their scheduled teaching hours, for administration, cover, extra-curricular activities, and more, and exposes a picture of teachers’ overall experience of being a teacher. The TALIS aims to provide robust international indicators and policy-relevant analysis on teachers and teaching to help countries review and develop policies that promote conditions for effective teaching and learning (Ainley and Carstens, 2018). However, the TALIS survey, like other large-scale surveys described here (e.g. UNICEF’s Time to Teach), relies on teacher self-reports and scheduled / official school opening and teaching time only. The TALIS does not consider the *quality* of teachers’ activities, their specific context and conditions, or whether, what kind, and how they work in school but not in the classroom or outside of school opening.

Nigeria has not participated in TALIS surveys as it is not a member of the OECD, but the TALIS usefully demonstrates the significance of a more holistic understanding of teachers’ work beyond presence or absence in school. The survey offers insights into factors endogenous to education (i.e. within schools and systems) that contribute to teacher attitudes and behaviours, such as high burdens of administrative work or extra-curricular responsibilities. This kind of information is not well-evidenced in regular data collection in Nigeria through EMIS or national and household surveys and is a missing piece for systematically better understanding Nigerian teachers.

4.5 Promising practices

Robust and regular monitoring; recruiting, incentivising and supporting teachers; and delivering school management reforms are three effective modes of improving teacher attendance.

Biometric monitoring systems have been trialled in diverse contexts, including northern Nigeria, to ease the administration of attendance registers and improve actual attendance. These may be expensive and can be usefully complemented by locally led monitoring initiatives.

Teachers need more and better-quality targeted support to improve their performance and commitment, which recognises the range of constraints and aspirations of men and women teachers. Strengthening school leadership - particularly of head teachers - provides teachers with support and helps to maintain appropriate and rigorous school routines, expectations and accountability.

4.5.1 Monitoring attendance

Evidence of promising practices in attendance monitoring and data collection engage mixed and complementary forms in terms of personnel and methods. In Kenya, the Teachers Service Commission issued guidelines in 2015 that required teachers to obtain written permission for any absence of one day or more from school and mandating that teachers can only attend conferences or training on weekends. Head teachers must also obtain written permission for their absences from TSC subcounty directors (Karpinnen et al., 2021). Evidence indicates that formalising guidance on absence has reduced unjustified or voluntary absenteeism.

Automated monitoring via cameras, punch cards and biometric systems have been tested in South Asia. In India, evidence shows that the biometric systems raised average teacher attendance in one trial rural primary school by over 60% in six months (Box 2). However, results in other locations also highlight that such systems are expensive and may be subject to sabotage (Banerjee et al., 2007).

There may be benefits of a combination of formal guidance, 'multiple monitors', the use of technology, and stricter protocols for monitoring. In Nigeria, respondents identified that:

"Schools that benefitted from BESDA [Better Education Service Delivery for All] intervention use biometrics for monitoring teacher attendance" (Yobe State Government KII)

"The use of the electronic monitor machine thumbprint should be adopted in all schools and programmed to cover the class resumption and closing time because some teachers show up in the morning and leave before noon; teachers arrive schools and stay till closing time when they know they are closely monitored. The electronic device also records if a teacher conducts their class lessons" (Kano State Government KII).

The Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) have also introduced and trained school staff on biometric attendance monitoring for teachers in secondary schools in Katsina state. Teachers with 80% weekly attendance receive 'incentives' while those with lower rates are engaged to identify support mechanisms. Locally led, mixed method monitoring including technology but also relying on existing paper-based systems – led by head teachers, SBMCs and/or parents – has also proved effective (Akseer & Jatava, 2021). However, this includes making changes in the lines of authority so that teachers are subject to, and acknowledge the authority of, monitoring by head teachers, communities and/ or SBMCs, who have some control over hiring and disciplining (Karpinnen et al., 2021). At present, SBMCs in Nigeria do not have a formal role in teacher attendance monitoring, purportedly to avoid friction between SBMCs and teachers. Overall, evidence collated does suggest that automated monitoring systems, within a framework of regular and responsive monitoring, can support improvements to teacher attendance and overall attitudes and behaviours. Nevertheless, more information is needed from programmes such as BESDA, AGILE and other countries to fully understand the sustainability and supporting structures of such approaches.

Box 2: Biometric scanners to monitor teacher attendance in a rural primary school, India

E-Hazar is a Biometric Attendance System that was trialled in a rural primary school in India to capture teachers' daily attendance. Biometric scans work via fingerprint scanning and send GPS coordinates to confirm the location of the staff member. The scanners have android operating systems installed and can be used to access the mobile app even if the head teacher does not have an adequate phone. Teachers submit their biometric attendance at login time (arrival) and logout time (departure) (i.e. twice daily). Teachers can also apply for leave using the system. This has helped to accelerate leave requests and enable management to coordinate replacement teachers. Teacher attendance can be monitored in real time through a dashboard and an alert sent to head teachers for staff who have not submitted data. The system increased teacher attendance by 60% in six months between 2017-2018 (adapted from Shoobridge, 2020, based on 'Report for EMIS in Andhra Pradesh' (Cambridge Education)).

4.5.2 Recruiting, incentivising and supporting teachers

Filling recruitment gaps and addressing the shortage of qualified teachers in the system would generate significant positive effects on existing individual teachers' morale and workloads, and opportunities and capacity to allow for justified absences for training, professional development, parental leave, and personal matters. Teacher recruitment, with appropriate incentives and packages of support, would create the space for teachers (and head teachers) to function more efficiently and effectively. Given that this is a long-term systemic goal, evidence indicates more immediate and effective interventions that can support teachers' attendance and engagement with school:

- ▶ **Prioritise teachers' physical and emotional well-being** by extending any existing guidance and counselling services to all school staff; providing sufficient break times during the school day and/ or mid-term breaks, including for rest, planning, and teacher peer support to share challenges and develop joint strategies; support schools and local health centres to establish networks of priority health care for serving teachers to access healthcare services; develop strategies to plan longer-term absences for maternity leave and childcare with female teachers; and improve security measures around schools (Humphreys et al., 2015; McBurnie et al., 2021).
- ▶ **Focus on creating an inspiring teaching and learning environment** and providing 'short and sweet' in-service capacity building activities for teachers during term time and within the LGA (Karpinnen et al., 2021). This may support teachers' sense of accountability and responsibility for their students learning, ownership of their schools, and sense of professionalism.
- ▶ **Offer small financial incentives** tied to their attendance or their students' attendance and performance. These are generally evidenced to be more effective when localised due to bureaucratic or political constraints of systemic incentive systems (Bold et al., 2017; PLANE IP KII). Incentives can also be tied to promotion.
- ▶ **Review teachers' conditions of service**, including pension and gratuity, professional recognition and promotion (Ugoani, 2016):

"To support teachers' attendance, there is need to improve their salaries and make sure it is paid promptly, giving promotion to those who deserve it" (Kaduna State Government KII).
- ▶ **Provide additional benefits and support.** The need for improved teacher working conditions and welfare has been mentioned as a key priority in various KIIs and FGDs with education stakeholders:

"The recurring issues of transportation and rising costs are primary reasons for attendance default which suggests that incentives will ameliorate these concerns are necessary" (Kano State Government KII).

Potential solutions mentioned by KII and FGD respondents included:

- ▷ The provision of teacher accommodation closer to schools, especially for teachers posted in remote rural areas outside of their home base;
- ▷ Provision of transport, transport allowance, mobility incentives or subsidies, such as the provision of loans or cars and motorcycles, especially for teachers in rural and remote areas;
- ▷ Provision of a hardship allowance for teachers deployed in remote areas

"Teachers in hard-to-reach areas and science teachers should have extra hardship allowances" (Yobe State Government KII).

4.5.3 School leadership and management reforms

School leadership has been identified as one of the most important factors influencing learner outcomes (Bush and Glover, 2016). Effective leadership and management should be able to identify teachers who are not fulfilling their teaching obligations without justification and work to support them. Effective school leaders also build more resilient schools (ibid.): schools that can plan, adapt, and respond to systemic or sudden changes, which, as the previous section highlighted, is often needed in northern Nigeria. The role, capabilities, attitudes and behaviours of the headteacher in particular are associated with rates and reasons for teacher absence. UNICEF data for the West Africa region indicates that *"teachers who believe the head teacher is not always present at school are 2.11 times more likely to be absent and 2.43 times more likely to reduce time on task"*

(Játiva et al., 2022, p.22). This indicates that effective leadership from a headteacher can have a significant effect on teachers and students' attendance and performance. For example, in Nigeria:

“Poor leadership in school also contributes to poor student attendance. Most of our headteachers are not qualified for the position and so do not know their responsibilities nor take it seriously. To help boost the attendance of teachers, there is what we call Mandatory Professional Development Meeting where the headteacher can talk to the teachers or even invite experts from outside the school to talk to teachers about the importance of attendance” (Kano SSOs FGD).

Strong leadership from female headteachers appears to be particularly significant. Female headteachers tend to be more supportive of teachers' attendance and are more effective in conveying the significance of their absence on students' learning (Akseer & Jativa, 2021); *“female-led schools are more likely to hold meetings with parents, offer remediation classes to pupils in their last year of primary school, keep a teacher attendance register, and report fewer occurrences of teacher absenteeism”* (UNESCO, 2023, p.8). This may result from more participative or collaborative styles of leadership among women and/or professional motivation (ibid.). However, where female teachers comprise a lower proportion of the teaching workforce at primary level (such as in Kano state where women comprise 30% public primary teachers), there will continue to be a lack of female headteachers. However, in Borno, Kaduna and Jigawa, where women comprise 50-60% of the public primary school teachers, there would seem to be opportunities to promote, train and support more women school leaders. Evidence in the literature indicates the significance of developing strong school leadership in the role and functions of the headteacher, through policy, continuous professional development opportunities, tracking the benefits of continuing professional development, and training and supporting more qualified and aspiring female teachers to take on leadership roles in schools.

4.5.4 Community involvement

Evidence is mixed on whether and how to engage parents and communities in teacher management, but there are some promising findings from existing studies. Community and parental enthusiasm and support for schooling, including through encouraging children's attendance and learning, can have positive effects on teachers' behaviour, including regular and timely attendance and teaching quality by giving teachers a sense of their valued role and professional status in the community. Parents and communities can monitor teachers in a supportive, rather than punitive, framework by engaging with the needs and challenges and resourcing or engaging in advocacy with and for teachers and schools. For instance, the MoE in Ghana emphasised active parental and community involvement in school activities as a key indicator of the quality of schooling. Communities' involvement in monitoring and supervising teachers has the potential of improving teacher attendance. In Ghana, parents and communities are involved in school activities in the form of representative groups, which are mandatory in all basic schools. This seems to have positive effects on teachers' morale.

UNICEF research suggests that SBMCs can be effective in increasing teacher punctuality in Nigeria through regular monitoring visits. However, the report also notes that the potential for backlash if teachers and headteachers feel that their authority is undermined (Akseer & Jativa, 2021, p.42). This emphasises the importance of social relations and formalised – at local or state levels – frameworks for monitoring with clear lines of responsibility.

5. Student Attendance

Key Findings

- ▶ Student attendance is well-researched, including in Nigeria, but is conceptualised heterogeneously, from enrolment, to sustained access to school, presence in class, and access to and participation in learning. Student attendance operates on a temporal continuum, from never attending to occasional, sporadic, seasonal and regular attendance. Those who have never or sporadically attended are usually targeted in drop-out data and interventions.
- ▶ Nigeria EMIS include enrolment and completion data but no other metrics of attendance. National household surveys offer data on student attendance at school, but the data are not well disaggregated and are representative only at the level of the state.
- ▶ Data collected from attendance monitoring should inform decision-making by planners and management, including the allocation and distribution of instructional materials and infrastructure, and out-of-school children campaigns. However, there are major concerns about the quality of student attendance data from schools.

Student attendance plays a pivotal role in shaping educational outcomes and societal development: "everyday counts: when children miss school, it's not just about missing lessons, it's also about losing valuable moments spent with their friends and teachers" (UK Children's Commissioner Rachel de Souza, 2024). The 2021 Federal MoE's Education Sector Analysis (ESA) report states that "although universalization remains elusive, more and more children are accessing school, and for those who do, there is generally high retention in each sub-cycle" (Federal MoE, 2021, p.91). However, significant access and retention disparities exist across regions, states, and localities. Student attendance is generally well-researched, reflecting a sustained focus on understanding its impact on educational quality, learning outcomes—particularly foundational skills—and broader societal development, wellbeing, equity, and stability. Yet there are specific evidence gaps; pursuing challenges related to student attendance remains crucial for advancing educational outcomes for all.

5.1. Concepts and Definitions

The concept of student attendance is multifaceted and has been defined in various ways in the education and development literature. One conceptualisation delineates attendance into distinct stages of access (Humphreys et al., 2015):

Figure 14: Elements of student attendance



Lewin's (2007) seven zones of exclusion describes how and why children may not transition between different levels of education, and distinguishes three categories of children: (i) those who have never attended school and are unlikely to do so, (ii) those who start at a certain level but drop out before completing the cycle, and (iii) those enrolled in primary school who are considered 'at risk' of dropping out due to irregular attendance, poor academic performance, and exclusion from meaningful learning experiences. Student attendance may thus be characterised by a continuum:

Figure 15: Student attendance continuum



Students who exit the education system prematurely, foregoing completion of the full curriculum, are categorised as dropouts. Dropout represents a critical juncture in the continuum, marking disengagement from formal education.

Learners who never attend school, while others attend intermittently, with attendance thresholds sometimes quantitatively defined (e.g., missing more than six days per term). Some children may be enrolled and never attend, children may attend for some time (either with or without formal enrolment).

Students may attend sporadically, with irregular patterns of presence.

Patterns of attendance tied to specific seasons or cycles, influenced by factors such as agricultural demands or cultural festivities.

Consistent and punctual attendance throughout the academic term, reflecting a committed engagement with the educational process.

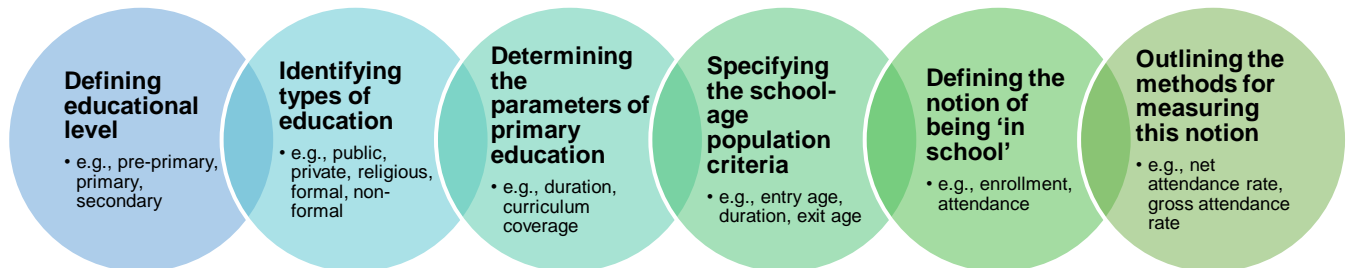
All these forms of attendance may also vary temporally: per year, term, week, on specific days, or during particular times of the day (Humphreys and Crawford, 2014).

“The number of children enrolled in school are high, but when the school starts, the same number of children will not be seen. They would have dropped out and not come to school and if they come, they come for a brief period and leave, maybe before breaktime. Even when you go to school in the morning, you will see a large population of students but after the break, the population will drop” (Kaduna State Government KII).

“The problem is not enrolment, because they [parents] register the children in school, but they will not be in school during school hours” (Kaduna State Government KII).

One of the difficulties with tracking student attendance is that there is no consensus on its definition or how best to measure it (UIS, 2010). This problem arises from variations in primary education between countries, differences in cycle durations (years), different entry ages, and discrepancies in data collection methods (Omoeva et al., 2013). Different data types have distinct definitions and methodologies, each susceptible to errors and biases. Considerations include:

Figure 16: Considerations on defining and measuring student attendance

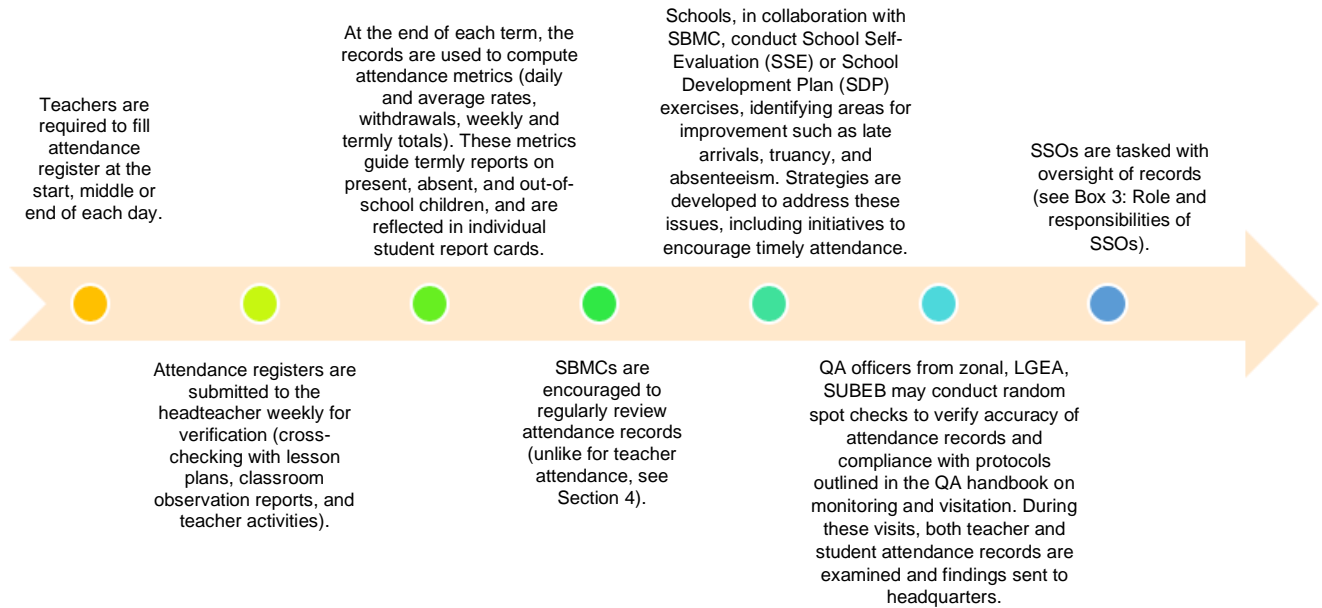


Most literature on student attendance focuses on sporadic/intermittent attendance and out-of-school children. According to UIS and UNICEF (2005), children are considered out of school if they had no exposure to school during the last or current school year. All other children are categorised as attending if they attended at any point during the period, no matter how often or whether they later dropped out.

5.2. Prevalence and patterns of student attendance

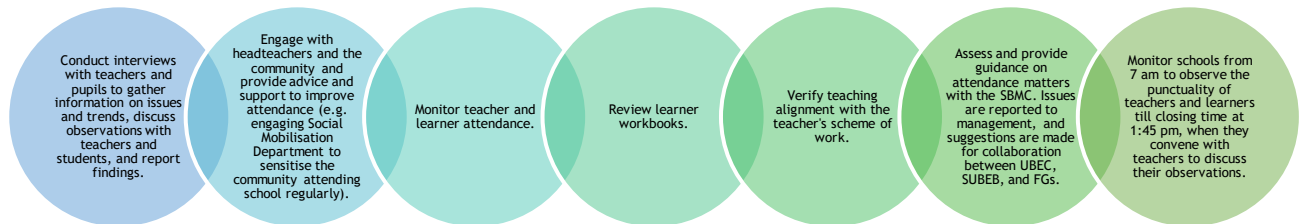
There are no formal enforced policies on student attendance (presence in school) at basic education level in PLANE states. Attendance is collected using class registers, and monitored at various levels: by teachers, headteachers, SBMCs, QA officers from zonal offices, LGEA SSOs, and SUBEB (Figure 17) (KIIs and FGDs; NEQAH, 2016).

Figure 17: Student attendance monitoring



SSOs visit schools regularly, providing two days' notice before their arrival. SSOs assist headteachers to enhance attendance through seven core responsibilities (Kano SSO FGD):

Figure 18: SSOs responsibilities



In Jigawa, SSOs also participate in 'experience sharing' sessions every Thursday. During these meetings, all SSOs, School Cluster Officers, and some staff from QA gather to discuss the progress made and challenges encountered in schools. The aim is to address any challenges that arise during the meeting and devise follow-up actions. It is the responsibility of the SSO of the respective cluster to implement the follow-up actions and address any issues identified during the meeting (Jigawa SSO FGD). Persistent challenges may prompt SSOs to involve the Social Mobilisation Unit to sensitise the community through various channels. SSOs should collaborate with SBMCs to engage with the community before leaving the school, to assess their contribution to School Self-Evaluation (SSE) or the School Development Plan (SDP) (Kano SSO FGD; NEQAH, 2016).

Data collected on student attendance is used to inform decision on the allocation and distribution of instructional materials and infrastructure at primary level. Attendance data is also instrumental in identifying communities with high numbers of out-of-school children and dropouts and targeting responses such as mobilisation campaigns (KII). However, respondents highlighted the unreliability of school-level attendance data:

"We asked SUBEB for data on the number of schools and children in the seven LGAs where we will be working and used the information for planning the quantity of materials we will need. But we had half the materials left after giving it to all the children in the LGAs" (Kano non-government stakeholder KII).

There are gaps and uncertainties among respondents about who takes the class register when teachers are late or absent, whether late-arriving and/ or early departing pupils are registered, and how missing or incomplete attendance records are addressed by head teachers and school supervisors (Humphreys et al., 2015). Interviewees remarked on cases where teachers allow pupils to mark their own attendance or where teachers retrospectively mark registers:

“Frankly speaking, there are many cases of teachers not updating the student attendance records in a timely manner” (Kaduna State Government KII).

Hard-to-reach communities are likely to receive less supervision and monitoring from LGAs, SSOs, and SUBEB than those in accessible rural and urban locations. As attendance data are used as a basis for funding and resource allocation, there are also concerns about the incentive to ‘massage’ pupil numbers to attract more resources (Humphreys et al., 2015).

5.3. Student attendance in PLANE States

Data on student attendance in Nigeria is primarily derived from household surveys. EMIS and ASC reports do not include student attendance data (beyond enrolment). This study therefore reviews three quantitative data sources which provide evidence on students’ presence in school in PLANE states⁹:

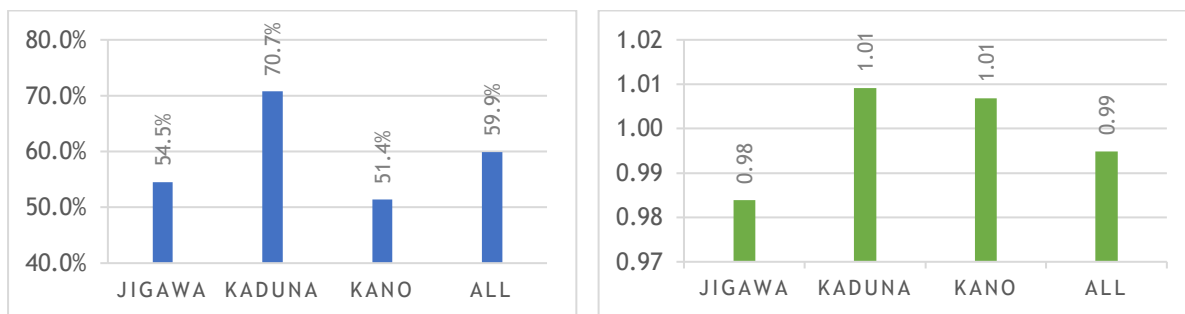
4. Student Attendance from PLANE Window 1 (W1)
5. 2015 Nigeria Education Data Survey (NEDS) and Nigeria Demographic and Health Surveys (NDHS)
6. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS).

5.3.1. PLANE Attendance Data: Window 1

PLANE Window 1 collects regular school-level data from monitoring visits conducted by SSOs and local PLANE staff. This includes teacher self-reported absence in the previous week and student attendance copied from the attendance book and physical observations of attendance (Table 7). Schools are supposed to be visited by SSOs or PLANE staff once per month. Data provided and analysed here are based on the sample of schools visited between February 2023 and January 2024.

Analysis of the student attendance dataset (based, we believe, on physical headcounts of pupils) indicates an average attendance rate in W1 primary schools of 60%, ranging from 51% in Kano to 71% in Kaduna (Figure 19). Data show near gender parity in attendance (GPI 0.99) with Jigawa having slightly more boys than girls proportional to attending (GPI 0.98).

Figure 19: A) % Student Attendance and B) Gender Parity Index (GPI) in Student Attendance

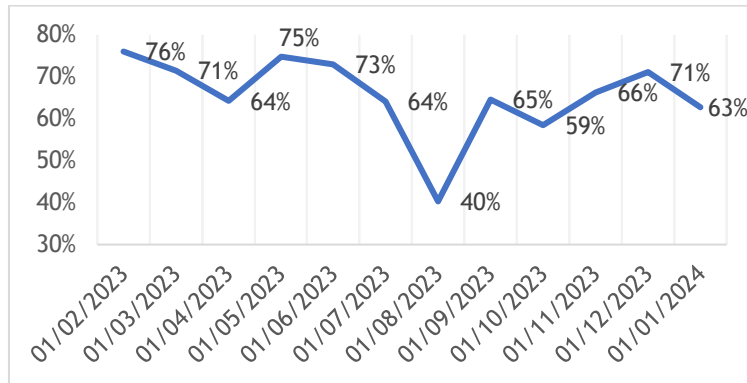


Source: PLANE 2023-2024

As shown in Figure 20, student attendance rates varied throughout the year. The academic year commenced with an attendance rate of 76%; a drop occurred during the mid-year break in July/August (40%) with a gradual rise to 71%. While attendance rates broadly correspond with school breaks, typically end December-January, end March-April, and August, there are variations observed during academic weeks and months when schools are open.

⁹ Secondary quantitative data from the following sources were requested but not provided: EduTrac data / information (UNICEF); Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP) data/information (UNICEF); BESDA, AGILE, Let’s Assess, Engage and Report Nigeria (LEARN) data (World Bank Nigeria).

Figure 20: Student Attendance by Date Collected



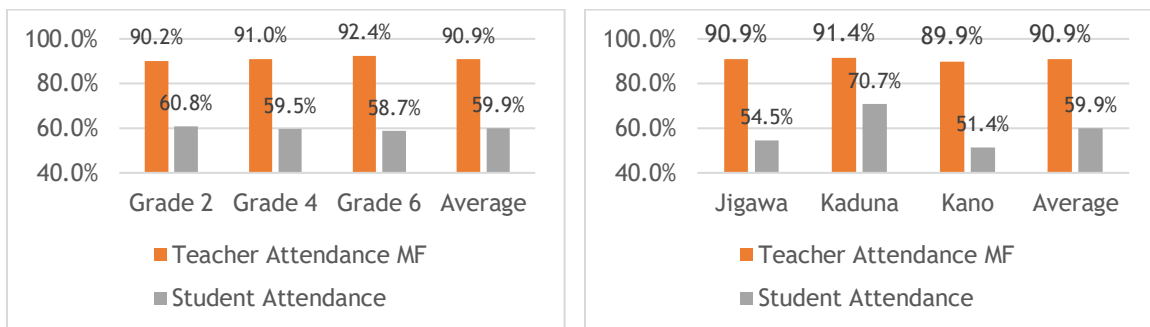
Source: PLANE 2023-2024

This trend aligns with literature and primary data gathered for this study, indicating that non-holiday seasonality influences student attendance. Factors contributing to this include agricultural seasons – the timing of planting and harvesting – weather conditions, and the movement of nomadic communities. Moreover, variations in attendance rates have also been reported depending on school levels:

“Lower basic schools close early but upper basic schools close late which prevent some students to attend schools or make them leave early” (Kano State Government KII).

According to PLANE data at state level or aggregated for all states by grade, there does not seem to be a correlation between student and teacher attendance (Figure 21 below)¹⁰.

Figure 21: Student Attendance and Teacher Attendance (Monday to Thursday) by A) Grade and B) State



Source: PLANE 2023-2024

This contrasts with findings from the literature and qualitative data, which indicate a strong correlation and interplay between teacher and student attendance, such that teacher absenteeism is indicated as a major contributing factor to student absenteeism, especially in rural areas that typically have smaller schools with a higher shortage of teachers (high pupil teacher ratios) and poorer working conditions. KII respondents noted that small, remote schools may only have one or two teachers on the roll (Jigawa State Government KII). If these teachers are absent for any reason, the school may not open at all:

“We were in a community in Wudil and we saw children playing during school hours in the community but there were no students in the school when we got there. When we asked the community leader and the SBMC members, they said the headteacher is not always in the school, the children only go to the school to play and fight with no one to oversee them. So, the parents decided to keep their children with them at home. So, teachers and headteachers’ attitudes also affect student attendance” (Kano State Government KII).

¹⁰ If the school code were made available further analysis could determine whether student attendance was higher in some schools and whether this is related to teacher factors.

A possible explanation for the lack of correlation between student and teacher absence in PLANE data is that the consistent 90% teacher rate is linked to long-term absence (as delineated by EMIS), rather than reflecting real short-term absence / non-attendance. In addition, data are aggregated at a high level and there may be more evidence of a relationship through more granular (e.g. classroom level) analysis. Further insight into this dataset, including meaning of absence, would help to interpret these data alongside other evidence.

5.3.2. Nigeria Education Data Survey (NEDS) and Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS)

The Nigeria Education Data Surveys (NEDS)¹¹ collect data on educational attainment and schooling status of household members, which allows for the calculation of net and gross attendance ratios (NAR and GARs).¹² NEDS is based on the structure of previous education profiles that traditionally use Demographic and Household Survey (DHS) data to characterise children's participation in primary and secondary schooling and adults' schooling attainment and literacy. Previously, these standardised profiles were used for cross-country comparisons. However, in the context of Nigeria, past DHS data, combined with the 2015 NEDS, allowed for a longitudinal perspective of the same indicators. The 2015 NEDS profile also provides more information than previous profiles on the mechanisms used to sample, collect, and analyse the household data and was used as a reference for the national and state reports.

NEDS (and DHS) data is disaggregated by sex, urban–rural residence, age, and region; the percentage of students who are under-age, the official age range (on-time), or over-age for each respective grade; age-specific schooling status of youth (attending, dropped out, or never attended); and adult primary and secondary school completion rates and educational attainment. The 2015 NEDS also included reasons for: school-aged children never having attended school or having dropped out of school; household expenditures for schooling; parents'/guardians' perceptions of the benefits of schooling and of school quality; distances and travel times to schools; and frequency of and reasons for student absenteeism.

The last NDHS published was conducted in 2018 (National Population Commission, 2019) with comparison to data from three nationally representative household surveys conducted in 2003, 2008 and 2015. The 2003 and 2008 datasets are derived from the DHS survey, and the 2015 dataset is derived from 2015 NEDS. The eligible households for NEDS were the same as those households in the 2013 NDHS sample for which interviews were completed and in which there was at least one child aged 2–14 years during the time of the survey. Approximately 41,000 households were interviewed in the 2013 and 2018 NDHS. The NEDS' follow-up was conducted on a subset of approximately 28,000 of these households and interviewed all children in the selected eligible households. The final sample size was approximately 2,000 completed interviews with eligible children per state.

The DHS and NEDS measures of children's school attendance differ from traditional sources of international statistics, such as those produced by Ministries of Education. Statistics on children's participation in schooling are usually derived from data on children's school enrolment, which are collected from school records and used to produce net and gross enrolment ratios. NEDS, on the other hand, measures children's participation in schooling using data provided by parents/guardians on school participation (referred to as attendance) from a representative sample of households. These surveys refer to net and gross attendance rates (as opposed to net and gross enrolment rates) because calculations are based on questions that ask whether children currently attend school, but not the extent to which they are attending regularly. Although the NAR and GAR may be seen as proxies for the more commonly used net and gross enrolment ratios, discrepancies between attendance and enrolment ratios can be expected¹³.

¹¹ NEDS is implemented by the National Population Commission (NPC) in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education, the Universal Basic Education Commission, and the National Bureau of Statistics (NPC, 2016).

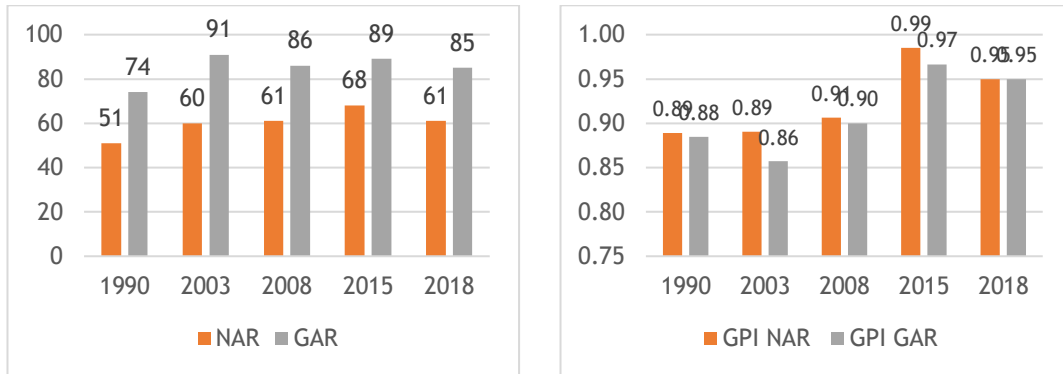
¹² Net and gross attendance ratios are calculated as: Net attendance ratios (NARs): percentage of the primary-school age population that is attending primary school. Gross attendance ratios (GARs): total number of primary school students, expressed as a percentage of the official primary-school-age population.

¹³ The questionnaire category "Ever Attended School" asks: What is the highest level of school (NAME) has attended?; and What is the highest class/year (NAME) completed at that level?. The category "Under Current/Recent School Attendance" asks: During [this/that] school year, what level and class/year [is/was] (NAME) attending?

The latter is the question used for correlating attendance with other individual-level data including basic demographic information, characteristics of the household's dwelling unit, and characteristics of parents/guardians.

The following key findings use data from the Nigeria DHS conducted in 2003 and 2008. Instead of the 2013 NDHS, data from household interviews of the 2015 NEDS were used. For overall net and gross attendance only, data from the 1990 DHS have been included¹⁴. According to these datasets, there has been a moderate increase in primary school attendance from 1990 to 2015. In 2015, 68% of primary aged children (6-11 years) attended primary school compared with 61% in 2008, 60% in 2002, and 51% in 1990. Despite this increase, attendance rates remain low. Boys are only slightly more likely than girls overall to attend primary school (68% versus 67%), as demonstrated in Figure 22 below (NEDS and DHS, 2018).

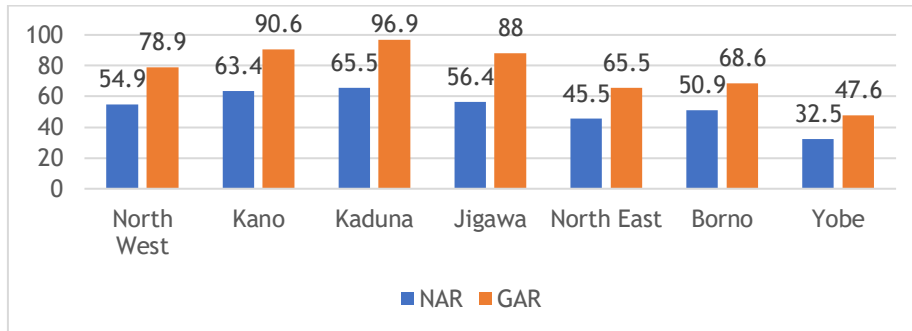
Figure 22: A) NAR and GAR 1990 to 2015 and B) GPI NAR and GPI GAR



Source: NEDS and DHS, 2018

As shown in Figure 23, regional disparities persist, with Northeast and Northwest primary attendance rates remaining about half those of southern regions. Rural primary NARs have remained constant (56% in 2003, 55% in 2008, and 59% in 2015). In contrast, urban primary NARs have seen an increase from 70% in 2003 to 81% in 2015. There is large variation in NAR between PLANE states in 2018 ranging from 65% in Kaduna to 32% in Yobe.

Figure 23: Comparison NAR and GAR for target states in Nigeria

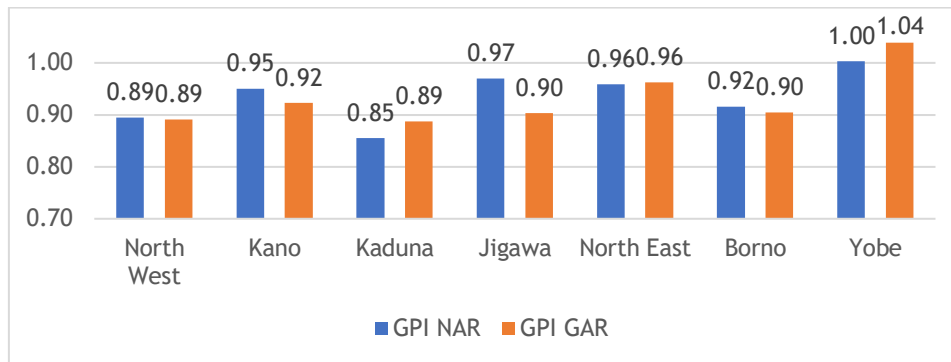


Source: DHS 2018

Gender parity also varied with Kaduna having more boys attending proportional to the population than girls (GPI NAR 0.85) and Yobe having equal parity (GPI NAR 1.00), as shown in Figure 24:

¹⁴ The 1990 DHS information comes from the 2003 profile report. It was dissimilar enough in question and survey design to preclude most comparisons except the overall attendance rates.

Figure 24: Comparison GPI NAR and GPI GAR for target states in Nigeria



Source: DHS 2018

These data resonate with the findings of the DELVE Baseline Evaluation (2023), which underscore generally low and sporadic / seasonal student attendance as well as a shifting landscape of student attendance and participation, including increased absenteeism among boys in specific localities (ibid., p. 41; p. 65) and lower attendance rates in rural and non-formal schools (ibid., p. 53). While gender remains a determinant of student attendance, particularly regarding the exclusion of girls from education, there is a growing recognition of the need for nuanced strategies that recognise compound and intersecting disadvantage, marginalisation and vulnerability that engages location, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, religion, and other factors. Incorporating local socio-economic dynamics alongside gender-related factors is thus essential for developing accurate and comprehensive strategies. Disparities in attendance between urban and rural areas further highlight the multifaceted nature of the issue. Rural communities often contend with markedly lower attendance:

“Students’ attendance differs in the urban areas to rural areas. Low attendance rate is [prevalent] in the rural areas as you may find a school with over 500 enrolled learners having less than 200-300 attendance” (Kano SSO FGD).

“I have a school in my cluster with teachers going to work for more than one week but there are no learners and I have done everything possible for these learners to come but there is no result. We have engaged the SBMC, changed the members, talked to community leaders, and many other things but it is still the same” (Jigawa SSO FGD).

In urban settings, the gender dynamics of attendance may differ because of work, family commitments and recreational activities, with a higher proportion of girls attending school compared to boys:

“Students struggling to attend school depends on the community, when the community is large, you can see that that the boys’ number will be larger than the girls and some communities you can see that girls are higher in attendance” (Jigawa SSO FGD).

“In addition, in the urban areas, the population of the girls attending schools is larger than the boys. The boys are easily distracted by things like football and other things that prevent them from going to school while in the rural areas, girls tend to farm especially during harvest and after harvest to process the farm produce. Some girls also go to look for work to earn money” (Jigawa SSO FGD).

5.3.3. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)

MICS is a multi-purpose household survey to collect data on a wide range of indicators related to the situation of children and women. The first in the series of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS1) in Nigeria was conducted in 1995. Since then, MICS has been institutionalised within the National Integrated Survey of Households (NISH) in the National Bureau of Statistics, as a process of collecting regular, reliable and timely social statistics. MICS was conducted in 1995, 1999, 2007, 2011, 2016/17 and 2021. MICS surveys measure key indicators that allow countries to generate data for use in policies, programmes, and national development plans, and to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other internationally agreed upon commitments. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) is designed to collect statistically robust and internationally comparable estimates of key indicators that are used to assess the situation of children and women in the areas of health, education and child protection.

The last round of MICS Nigeria (2021) was conducted with the sampling approach designed to provide estimates for a large number of indicators on the situation of children and women at national, rural/urban levels, for 36 states and Federal Capital Territory as well as the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. Five questionnaires were used in the survey, as presented in Figure 25:

- i. A household questionnaire to collect basic demographic information on all de jure household members (usual residents), the household, and the dwelling;
- ii. A questionnaire for individual women administered in each household to all women age 15-49 years;
- iii. A questionnaire for individual men administered in half of the selected household to all men age 15-49 years;
- iv. An under-5 questionnaire, administered to mothers (or caretakers) of all children under 5 living in the household; and
- v. A questionnaire for children age 5-17 years administered to the mother (or caretaker) of one randomly selected child age 5-17 years living in the household.

Figure 25: MICS questionnaire modules

Household Questionnaire	Questionnaire for Individual Women / Men	Questionnaire for Children Age 5-17 Years
List of Household Members Education Household Characteristics Social Transfers Household Energy Use Food Insecurity Water and Sanitation Handwashing Salt Iodisation	Woman's Background ^[M] Mass Media and ICT ^[M] Financial Inclusion ^[M] Fertility ^[M] /Birth History Desire for Last Birth Maternal and Newborn Health Post-natal Health Checks Contraception Unmet Need Female Genital Mutilation Attitudes Toward Domestic Violence ^[M] Victimization ^[M] Marriage/Union ^[M] Sexual Behaviour ^[M] Life Satisfaction ^[M]	Child's Background Child Labour Child Discipline Child Functioning Parental Involvement Foundational Learning Skills
		Questionnaire for Children Under 5
		Under-Five's Background Birth Registration Early Childhood Development Child Discipline Child Functioning Breastfeeding and Dietary Intake Immunisation Care of Illness

Source: MICS 2021

Relevant questions for education asked on MICS household survey include¹⁵:

- a. ED4: Has (name) ever attended formal school or any Early Childhood Education programme?
- b. ED4A: Has (name) ever attended non-formal education, such as Qur'anic/Madrassa/Islamic school, trade apprenticeship, basic education/literacy course, or similar organised learning?
- c. ED5: What is the highest level and grade or year of formal school (name) has ever attended?
- d. ED6: Did (name) ever complete that (grade/ year)?
- e. ED8: Check ED4: Ever attended formal school or ECE?
- f. ED9: At any time during the current (2020-2021) school year did (name) attend formal school or any Early Childhood Education programme?

¹⁵ Each question is identified by an acronym (e.g., ED for education) and a subsequent number to identify sub-questions. Relevant questions for education included in the report start from ED4, as the first three questions are related to personal data (name, a age, etc.).

- g. ED10: During the current (2020-2021) school year, which level and grade or year of formal school is (name) attending?
- h. ED11: Is (he/she) attending a public school?¹⁶**
- i. ED12: In the current (2020-2021) school year, has (name) received any school tuition support?
- j. ED13: Who provided the tuition support?
- k. ED14: For the current (2020-2021) school year, has (name) received any material support or cash to buy shoes, exercise books, notebooks, school uniforms or other school supplies?
- l. ED15: At any time during the previous (2019-2020) school year did (name) attend formal school or any Early Childhood Education programme?
- m. ED16: During that previous (2019-2020) school year a year ago, which level and grade or year did (name) attend?

Relevant data from the 2021 MICS report is presented in Table 8. The North West region generally shows higher attendance rates, particularly in Kano and Kaduna states. Jigawa state, however, exhibits a notable gender disparity, with lower attendance rates for male students compared to females. In the North East region, Borno and Yobe states display lower attendance rates overall, indicating significant challenges, possibly exacerbated by conflict. Overall, Table 8 below underscores regional variations in primary school attendance, suggesting both positive trends and ongoing obstacles that need to be addressed to ensure widespread access to education.

Table 8: Participation and Attendance Statistics

Region and State	Primary school Adjusted Net Attendance Rate (ANAR)		
	Female	Male	Total
North West	55.7	57.6	56.6
Kano	63.2	63.8	63.5
Kaduna	76.5	77.5	77
Jigawa	56.2	50.9	53.5
North East	47.6	47.6	47.6
Borno	45.4	45.7	45.5
Yobe	41.1	41.7	41.4

Source Nigeria MICS, 2021

To achieve comparability between varying national educational systems and classifications across the world, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) maintains the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) statistical framework. Its defined levels and coding are used in computation of MICS Indicators.

¹⁶ The indicators calculated are the same as for NEDS and NDHS being NAR and GAR.

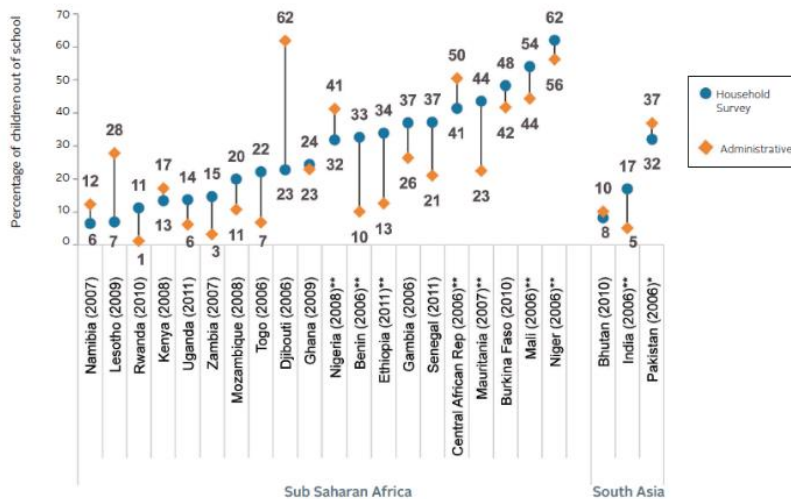
5.3.4. International data comparison

In 2005, Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNICEF undertook an extensive examination of data sources, definitions, and calculation methodologies to devise a framework for determining the number of out-of-school children at the national level. This framework leveraged a blend of administrative and survey data sources alongside the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) definitions. The methodology draws upon various data sources, including traditional education statistics procured directly from Member States by the UNESCO UIS, complemented by population census data gathered by the United Nations Population Division, termed administrative data. Additionally, household survey data collected through the MICS by national partners and UNICEF, as well as the DHS, were incorporated (UIS and UNICEF, 2005). Children are categorised as out of school if they had no exposure to formal education during the school year and are considered to be participating in school if they attended at any point throughout the reference period, regardless of their level of absenteeism or subsequent dropout. Initially, the number of out-of-school children is computed for each country, drawing from both administrative and survey data sources. Subsequently, the data and metadata are evaluated to integrate the two data streams into a unified estimate. However, there are substantial disparities between the published figures by UIS and UNICEF (Figure 26). For Nigeria, household data from DHS estimates a total of 32% of out-of-school children in 2008, while administrative data from the UIS Data Centre estimate a total of 41% for the same year.

Box 3: ISCED Document Review to Set Standards in Classification of OOSC in Nigeria

The Federal MoE has identified the lack of reliable data and weaknesses in the M&E system as key challenges hindering the achievement of access to quality education for children in Nigeria. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies based on evidence-based decision-making. Recognising the importance of reliable data for decision-making and policy formulation, the Federal MoE, in collaboration with PLANE, has organised a workshop to review ISCED standards and benchmarks for OOSC in Nigeria. The aim is to incorporate Nigerian-specific standards and benchmarks into the implementation plan, thereby ensuring tailored strategies to effectively address the issue of OOSC in the country.

Figure 26: Comparison of rates of out of school children of primary school age according to the same year household survey and UIS data¹⁷



Source: Omoeva et al., 2013, p.29¹⁸

In an effort to reconcile the discrepancy between sources, the two agencies collaborated to develop a unified estimate, leveraging data from both sources but only when available concurrently. They further investigated the extent to which differences in estimates from these varied sources could be attributed to potential data quality

¹⁷ Where countries are marked with **, UIS has indicated that values are UIS estimates. Where countries are marked with *, UIS has indicated that values are national estimates.

¹⁸ Administrative estimates taken from UIS Data Centre; household survey estimates are from DHS except for Central African Republic, Djibouti, Gambia, Mozambique, and Bhutan, which are from MICS.

issues, rather than fundamental conceptual distinctions (UIS, 2010). However, some concerns remain regarding the reliability and comparability of data (Omoeva et al., 2013):

- ▶ There is a considerable amount of missing information regarding out-of-school children, resulting in the use of imputed estimates when country-level values are absent.
- ▶ Decisions regarding which data source to use are often complicated by trade-offs between timeliness and detail. Administrative figures, collected annually, usually offer more current information compared to household surveys, which are conducted every few years. However, household surveys provide deeper insights into inequalities in school participation among subpopulations.
- ▶ Both administrative and survey sources can be affected by population measures, particularly sudden changes in population figures. This complication is amplified in situations where population or school participation trends are disrupted by emergencies such as natural disasters, famines, HIV/AIDS pandemics, or violent conflicts.
- ▶ There exists variation across countries in the starting age and duration of primary education cycles, leading to differences in the age groups to which measures of school exclusion are applied. For instance, household surveys may indicate a 32% out-of-school rate for primary-aged children in both Nigeria (2008) and Pakistan (2007). However, Nigeria's primary education cycle lasts six years, whereas Pakistan's lasts five years, resulting in Nigeria being held accountable for an additional age bracket, complicating cross-national comparisons (Omoeva et al., 2013).

5.4. Promising practices

5.4.1. Incentive schemes and reward systems

One approach to responding to student attendance challenges is to provide free school meals. Government school feeding programs are recognised as a significant influencer of attendance:

“There was a school with more than 337 pupils in the school, but the attendance fell to about 280. We checked the cause of the fall in attendance and one reason was that there is no more feeding in the school” (Kano SSO FGD).

“On school opening days, we normally get between 60 to 65 percent attendance which is low, but during school feeding, you will get up to 90% attendance on opening days” (Kano State Government KII).

The Nigerian Government instituted the Home Grown School Feeding Program (HGSFP) in 2016 and there are currently plans to double the provision of school meals to 20 million in 2025. There is strong political will and the belief that school meals increase attendance and concentration among students and teachers. Its impact can be particularly significant on children who rely on the provision of food at school due to food insecurity at home (KIIs and FGDs). However, while school feeding programs initially boost enrolment, they may not ensure sustained attendance. Some students attend school primarily to access meals and leave, a phenomenon which has been referred to as the ‘school feeding attendance booster’ (Jigawa State Government KII). The cessation of school feeding can lead to an increase in absenteeism. Moreover, an excessive reliance on such programmes has been reported to have adverse effects, including the diversion of resources intended for educational materials and a reduction in instructional time. For instance, the distribution of food during school hours may consume learning time (Kano State Government KII).

Individual pupils are motivated through prize-giving ceremonies and recreational activities to encourage attendance. Punctual students or their parents may also receive financial support, serving as a motivation for the prioritisation of attendance (Kano State Government KII). Some schools have developed their own reward systems, offering study materials to students who attend regularly and punctually, with the aim of motivating others to do the same. To further incentivise pupils and create a positive school environment, extra-curricular activities can be introduced to make learning more enjoyable. Additionally, amenities such as football and table tennis courts can be provided within the school premises to attract students and make the school experience more engaging and enjoyable for them. Teachers keeping students' belongings (bags, etc.) so that they have to ask to leave, is an anecdotal practice employed to encourage attendance (KIIs).

5.4.2. Role Models

Harnessing the influence of role models, which encompass community leaders, educators, and peers, presents a promising strategy to bolster student attendance rates. By establishing initiatives such as clubs and mentorship programmes, grounded in socio-relational approaches, schools can effectively cultivate an environment that prioritizes regular attendance. An example is observed in Kano, where the "Girls Champion Programme" initiative monitors the attendance and academic progression of female students across primary and Junior Secondary School levels. This programme not only serves as a means of tracking attendance but also provides a platform for successful participants to engage in dialogue regarding the challenges faced by their peers who may have dropped out prematurely. By involving students directly in these discussions, the initiative fosters a sense of collective responsibility and solidarity, motivating participants to uphold their commitment to their education (Kano State Government KII). These initiatives tend to have the best results when they are designed with and by participants. The conduct and demeanour of teachers significantly influence student attendance. This observation underscores the pivotal role that teachers play in shaping student behaviour:

"In my opinion, student attendance and punctuality is informed by the habit of the teachers. If teachers go to school early, their students will also go early because they will want to get to school before him. Children like to impress their teachers" (Jigawa State Government KII).

5.4.3. Addressing Teacher Misconduct and creating Child-Friendly Schools

Instances of teacher misconduct, such as neglecting to accurately mark their own or their pupils' attendance or allowing students to mark their own attendance, undermine the integrity of the educational system. To address such issues, proactive measures are sometimes taken. KII respondents were emphatic about these measures, including holding individual teachers accountable by summoning them to address their lapses in attendance monitoring. In cases where teachers demonstrate exemplary commitment to their responsibilities by maintaining accurate attendance records, recognition and rewards can serve as effective incentives. By publicly acknowledging and rewarding outstanding teachers, others are encouraged to improve. Additionally, a respondent said that refresher training sessions can equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil their duties effectively. These training sessions address gaps in understanding and reinforce the importance of accurate attendance monitoring. Verbal warnings may also be issued as a means of communicating expectations and encouraging corrective action. Through a combination of accountability measures, incentives, and professional development opportunities, educators can be guided towards upholding standards of professionalism and responsibility (KIIs and FGDs). These actions and incentives may go hand-in-hand with creating more child-friendly schools by motivating teachers to recognise their responsibilities towards their schools and students, notice students' strengths, needs and challenges, and treat them fairly and with respect.

5.4.4. Community involvement and awareness raising

Community involvement and awareness raising play a crucial role in addressing attendance challenges. SBMCs are key stakeholders responsible for monitoring various aspects of school operations, including pupil enrolment, attendance, and dropout (ESSPIN, 2013; Kwashabawa, 2017). SBMCs may engage in home and community visits to locate absent children and advocate for their education or intervene directly by escorting children to school or providing financial and material support to them (Little and Lewis, 2012). In Kano, stakeholders highlighted the positive impact of SBMC mobilisation efforts on attendance rates:

"We call the headteacher and the district head of the community and involved SBMC members to mobilize the community and the attendance picked up again" (Kano SSO FGD).

Participants emphasised the potential of well-managed SBMCs in reducing absenteeism and promoting punctuality. They can serve as a voice for the community, ensuring that children receive quality education and that issues affecting their learning environment are addressed promptly (Kano State Government KII). Through effective community involvement and collaboration with SBMCs, efforts to enhance attendance and improve educational outcomes can be significantly strengthened.

5.4.5. Electronic attendance monitoring

Physical monitoring of attendance is hindered by a lack of personnel and expenses associated with transportation and logistics. To tackle this issue, electronic student attendance monitoring methods have been introduced in PLANE focal states through various interventions (see also Section 4.5.1 for use of electronic methods for measuring teacher attendance). A State Government respondent from Kano has indicated that BESDA smart attendance devices are being tested in 20 model schools, while tablets have been deployed in 2,000 schools, for real-time data collection and analysis. This electronic monitoring system utilises class registers and electronically generated data for monitoring student attendance. Tablets provided to schools are synchronised to create a central dashboard, allowing QA officers and other units to capture and direct data to the dashboard in real-time. In Jigawa, UNICEF introduced the Learner Information Tracking System, which involves scanning hard copy attendance registers using mobile phone scanners. The data is then sent directly to a server for analysis. Similarly, UNICEF works with EduTrack to monitor the attendance of teachers, pupils, and SBMC activities. Data collected daily and weekly is shared with education stakeholders to inform decisions regarding attendance and SBMC grant utilisation.

However, limitations in electronic attendance methods have been identified. For instance, in BESDA, a significant percentage of schools are not covered across all intervention states, and access to data from tablets is limited as it goes directly to UBEC. To address this, there are plans to seek support from PLANE to develop a dashboard and app for statewide use. Concerns also arise regarding the sustainability of electronic monitoring methods, with issues such as theft and damage being prominent. Considering the widespread use of smartphones, there is interest to leverage them for attendance monitoring. However, the quality of learner attendance data still relies on teachers maintaining accurate registers. According to stakeholders, while implementing an electronic data collection system will have a positive impact, it will also require training for the personnel responsible for handling and managing the process. Therefore, there is a pressing need to expand the scope of electronic methods for generating attendance information.

6. SOA Interactions

Key findings:

- ▶ The interaction between school opening, teacher attendance, and student attendance at the primary school level is significant.
- ▶ Teacher and student absenteeism often reinforce each other, and both teacher and student absence are causes and consequences of school access and quality, highlighting the importance of addressing barriers associated with school opening and attendance.
- ▶ These barriers include endogenous factors inherent to the education system ("supply-side" barriers) and external exogenous conditions beyond direct control ("demand-side" and contextual barriers), operating at various levels from individual to governmental structures. Recognising and addressing these challenges is thus crucial for improving overall educational outcomes.

The interplay and interactions between school opening (official and actual), teacher attendance, and student attendance at primary school level are significant. The evidence presented in this scoping study show the layers of interdependency across:

- ▶ Whether, when and for how long schools are open and closed; and
- ▶ Whether, when and for how long teachers and students are present in their school, their classroom, and participating in school activities.

There thus seems to be a correlation between teacher and student absenteeism, meaning they could feed into each other. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in remote rural schools, where it's difficult to find replacements for absent teachers, and where students face significant competing demands that deter them from attending school. In some cases, teacher absences can even lead to the closure of schools during term time. Research indicates that when teachers are absent from school or the classroom, or when they lack punctuality, it has a detrimental impact on students' learning, overall school experience, and academic outcomes. Vice versa, persistent student absenteeism can significantly undermine teachers' own motivation and performance. When students are absent, they are also often unable to fully engage in learning activities, which in turn affects their academic progress and participation.

Moreover, teacher and student absence are both a cause and a consequence of school access and quality. A school being open is fundamental to attendance but there is a strong correlation, evidenced in quantitative and qualitative data, between teacher and student attendance. Issues of school quality and accessibility further encompasses inadequate infrastructure and resources, insufficient teacher staffing, ineffective leadership and supervision, limited community engagement, lack of extracurricular activities, and deficiencies in inclusion and equity initiatives. Recognising these multifaceted challenges is essential for addressing the barriers associated with school opening, teacher attendance, and student attendance, as they are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. In an attempt to shed some light on these interrelated issues, this section examines and summarises: 1) the mutual barriers to basic education that affect school opening, teacher attendance, and student attendance; 2) barriers common to teacher attendance and student attendance; and 3) the unique challenges within each area.

6.1. Barriers common to school opening, teacher and student attendance

Figure 27 illustrates both the common and distinct barriers affecting school opening, teacher attendance, and student attendance. It demonstrates that many barriers intersect across all three or two of these components, while only a few are unique to one aspect.

These barriers encompass:

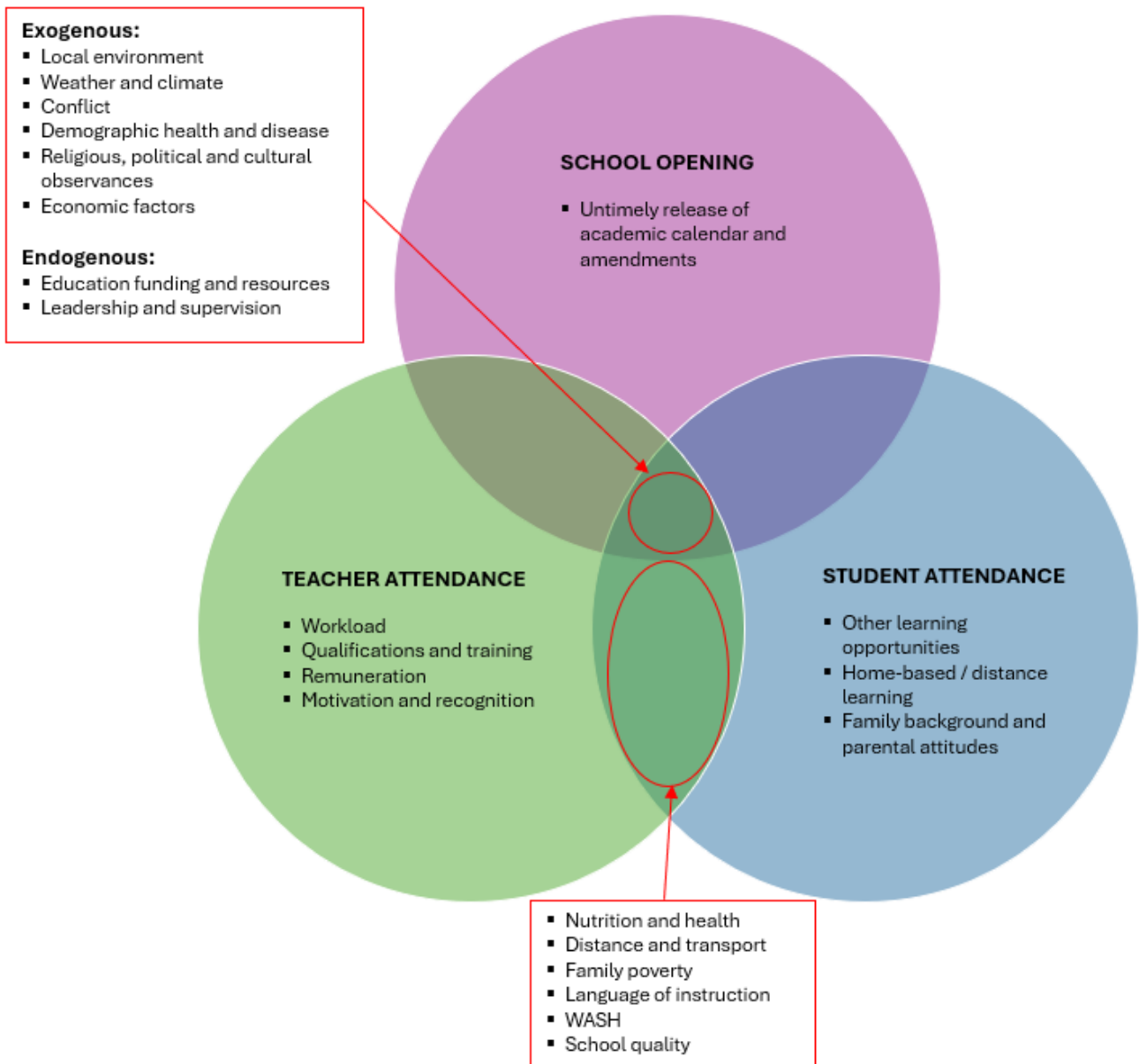
- ▶ **Endogenous** factors that are inherent to the education system, such as its structures and practices ('supply-side' barriers), as well as
- ▶ **Exogenous** factors originating from external socio-political, economic, environmental, or other conditions beyond the direct control of education ('demand-side' and contextual barriers).

Barriers also operate at various levels, ranging from:

- ▶ **Individual level** (involving teachers, students, and schools)
- ▶ **Community or local area level**
- ▶ **Government** systems and structures

Furthermore, it's important to recognise that barriers are dynamic, meaning they affect different schools and individuals differently over time and in different locations, highlighting the evolving nature of obstacles within the education sector.

Figure 27: SOA Barriers



Local environment

The local environment, including factors such as topography, remoteness, rurality, infrastructure, transport networks, provision of public services, and connectivity, all contribute to the challenges associated with achieving regular and timely school opening, student and teacher attendance.

“[SOA] issues are also low salary rates of teachers, low rate of women education in rural areas, far distance between the school and the community. Some students have to trek more than 1km before getting to school. Like during rainy or harmattan seasons, some rural areas are closed because the weather is very cold and so the learners do not attend school even if teachers are present so the parents need to be sensitised to tackle the issue” (Kano SSO FGD).

The geographical features of an area, such as its topography, can pose challenges for accessing schools, particularly in remote or rural regions where terrain may be rugged or difficult to traverse. Additionally, the level of remoteness and rurality can impact the availability and accessibility of educational facilities, as well as the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers. Furthermore, the adequacy of infrastructure and transport networks plays a critical role in ensuring that schools are accessible to students and staff. Insufficient infrastructure, including poorly maintained roads or lack of reliable transportation options, can hinder students' ability to attend school regularly and on time. The provision of public services, such as healthcare and social support, also influences students' attendance rates. In areas with limited access to essential services, students may face additional barriers to attending school regularly, particularly if they must prioritize other needs or responsibilities. Connectivity, both in terms of internet access and communication networks, is increasingly essential for education in the digital age. However, inadequate connectivity in rural or remote areas can impede access to online learning resources, communication with teachers and peers, and timely dissemination of important information regarding school schedules or closures.

Weather and climate

Adverse weather and long-term climate change are increasingly affecting SOA. Flooding and rain were most frequently mentioned in KIIs as directly causing unplanned school closures:

“During rainy or harmattan seasons, some rural areas are closed because the weather is very cold and so the learners do not attend school” (Kano SSO FGD).

In Jigawa, floods closed schools or forced the relocation of affected teachers and students to neighbouring schools in both of the last two academic years:

“Last year there was flood[ing] and two schools were closed because of this” (Jigawa SSO FGD).

Even if teachers are present, students may not attend:

“About two weeks ago [...], at around 10am, teachers were in school but there was no teaching because the pupils did not come to school because of the cold” (Kano State Government KII).

Weather and climate also determine farming and harvest seasons, which increase teacher and student absenteeism (UNESCO 2021; Humphreys, 2015). Children may be engaged before, during and after harvesting. Seasonality affects nomadic communities, as children move with their parents, interrupting their schooling (Kano KII). However, there is a lack of robust and PLANE state-specific evidence of the effects of weather, climate and seasonality on SOA. Longer-term effects of climate change in Nigeria on SOA are a known unknown (Akseer, & Jativa, 2021, p.39).

Conflict

Security remains a major challenge in Nigeria. Attacks in and around schools fundamentally undermine the notion of schools as safe places where teachers can teach, and children can learn. In northern Nigeria, attacks on schools, including mass abductions of students, have forced the closure of these and neighbouring schools on multiple occasions over the last fifteen years. This is particularly relevant for rural schools, which are often neglected, leaving children vulnerable to ongoing threats, while urban schools are typically better protected during such attacks by government security forces (Oladunjoye and Omemu, 2013). Moreover, Boko Haram's targeted attacks on schools and the abduction of schoolgirls have had a disproportionately negative effect to female students' access to education.

All PLANE states are liable to conflict or insurgency with various root causes that directly result in school closures, teacher and student non-attendance:

“Another thing that is affecting teacher and students' attendance is insecurity around the schools. There are no students in some schools just because of insecurity” (Kaduna State Government KII).

These attacks have long-term effects on school opening, student and teacher attendance. While the immediate effect of school closures curtails learning, there are extended ramifications on the psycho-emotional wellbeing of children, caregivers and communities, as well as on perceptions of school safety and general attitudes

towards education. Primary schools experience significantly reduced attendance as parents prevent their children from attending school during or following attacks or rumours of attacks (Oladunjoye and Omemu, 2013). The persistent threat of attacks makes it increasingly challenging for teachers and other stakeholders to persuade parents to allow their children to remain in school (Abdullahi, 2014).

For example, ten years after the Chibok schoolgirls' kidnapping in Borno, 82 girls remain in captivity, with many being forced to marry their abductors. Since then, Amnesty International has documented at least 17 cases of mass abductions involving at least 1,700 children (Amnesty International, 2024). By December 2019, UNICEF indicated that nearly 75%, or over 1.4 million children, were out of school in Borno State. As a result, many school-age children fleeing Boko Haram-controlled areas have been unable to access education for years (UNICEF, 2019), with many of the female students reporting that they had been forced to suspend their education by their parents after their school was attacked or decided to permanently drop out of school (GCPEA, 2018). The Borno State Government rebuilt the Government Girls Secondary School Chibok, which was completely burnt down by Boko Haram in 2014, and set up day secondary schools and a technical school in Chibok. However, academic activities in the schools remain minimal because parents are still sceptical of sending their children to school for fear of being abducted by Boko Haram (Amnesty International, 2024). A victim of the 2014 Boko Haram attack at the Federal Government College in Buni Yadi said:

"[After the attack], I went home. I was too afraid and decided not to go back. I told my parents I would never go back to school. They were also too afraid.... Before [the attack], I was so passionate to study and achieve my dream [of being a lawyer]. But now, this experience completely demoralized me.... I told my father that I will never go back because of Boko Haram threats and what I saw that night. I cannot go back to face the same thing again" (GCPEA, 2018).

Similarly, in Yobe, following the mass abduction of 111 schoolgirls from the Government Girls Technical College in Dapchi on February 19, the school officially reopened on April 30 (TheirWorld, 2018). However, teachers and students were reported not going to school because of perceived insecurity around schools:

"We have a total student population of 989, and out of that number only 314 have resumed after we reopened. Of the 314 that returned, 299 are writing their final examinations and will be leaving school in July. So, technically, we can say only 15 students have resumed, who will be continuing their education here" (Dapchi Government Girls Technical College Teacher, in TheirWorld, 2018).

In May 2024, Governor Uba Sani, through his Chief of Staff Sani Kila, announced plans to consolidate over 350 schools in vulnerable communities with those in safer areas. This decision was prompted by frequent attacks by bandits and terrorists, leading to numerous abductions and kidnappings in the state, as part of measures to safeguard schools and children:

"Kaduna state's educational system is facing a crisis of declining enrolment, with over 200,000 fewer primary school pupils recorded in the 2022/2023 academic session compared to the previous year (from 2,111,969 in 2021/2022 to 1,734,704 in 2022/2023). In several local government areas particularly Chikun, Birnin Gwari, Kajuru, Giwa, and Igabi, insecurity has forced school consolidation, further pushing up the number of out-of-school children. Incidents like the kidnapping of 135 students from the Lea Primary and Junior Secondary School, Kuriga, Chikun local government, tragically illustrate the devastating impact of insecurity on education access and safety" (Sani Kila's speech, reported by Channel Television, 2024).

Demographic health and disease

The most recent substantive period of school closures, teacher and student non-attendance at school in northern Nigeria were during the 2020-21 COVID-19 pandemic:

"We had about three changes to the school calendar due to COVID-19. The changes were done by the government [Ministry of Education]" (PLANE IP KII).

This study found anecdotal evidence that some schools in northern Nigeria have not re-opened since Covid-19, and that some students may not have resumed, but there is no robust evidence. Other incidental health issues can contribute to school closures, for example:

"There was one school that was attacked by this disease diphtheria, it is an airborne disease, so the teacher rushed to the LGA to report the spread of the disease in the school. The LGEA management called SUBEB and the ES was given directive to close the school" (Jigawa SSO FGD).

Teacher ill-health contributes to school closures particularly in remote settings where the total number of teachers registered to a school is very low. PLANE operates in many such schools: when one teacher is unwell,

there may be insufficient resources to provide cover for their class and one absence can even result in a full school closure.

Religious, political and cultural observances

PLANE operates in states of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity with a range of religious and cultural observances. Islamic holidays, including Eid-Al-Fitr, Ramadan, and Eid-al-Kabir, are observed by all states to varying degrees. Such holidays entail school closures additional to those planned in academic calendars, which tend to coincide more with Christian holidays (Christmas and Easter), a contributory long-term effect of British colonial rule. PLANE states have issued calendar amendments (full or partial day closures) for Ramadan from 1-5 days, or, as recently, shortening the school day to close at 12 noon due to fasting (Borno, March 2024).

“When there is an unplanned activity like the Ramadan that will lead to the closure of schools, the state government will have a deliberation with [stakeholders] to take a decision on it” (Jigawa State Government KII).

Depending on families and teachers’ religious observances, they also may choose to take additional holidays to meet their practices. Other religious practices such as attending early morning Qur’anic school and going to the Mosque on Friday mornings, also influence school opening, student and teacher attendance. Due to the reduced student attendance on Fridays, the state of Kaduna has implemented a four-day week policy, with children attending school from Monday to Thursday. This also relates to political events. For example, during the last election cycle, basic schools closed for periods of up to 4 weeks for election/political activities.

The economy

The 2009 Federal Government Roadmap for Education highlights that the *“frequency and duration of strikes lead to disruptions in the academic calendar”* (2009, p.109). These strikes can be called by teachers’ unions or other public sector unions. In Nigeria, over 30% of teachers cite strikes as a reason for school absences, with teachers’ strikes often being associated with delays in salary disbursements (UNICEF, 2022, p.33). While teacher absences due to strikes may result in school closures or interruptions to learning in the short term, they have the potential to yield positive long-term outcomes for teachers, students, and the education system. However, reports on the effects of strikes on school openings vary. Many respondents do not view strikes as a significant contributor to school closures. According to a UNICEF study, strikes are less common in states that receive more funding from the UBEC, such as Kano (Akseer & Jativa, 2021). At the time of the study, there was a teachers’ strike in the Federal Capital Territory that affected school openings.

Education funding and resources

Public primary schools heavily rely on consistent and timely funding and resources to operate effectively. These resources are obtained through states’ counterpart funding with Universal Basic Education funds, as well as allocations for teaching and learning materials. The distribution of these funds and resources depends partly on the accuracy and punctuality of school data. SOA depends on these funds and resources to provide and maintain basic infrastructure and essential materials for teaching and learning. Insufficient or delayed disbursements can compel schools to resort to levying fees on parents or restricting access, which significantly undermines SOA.

Moreover, lack of adequate resources also has a negative impact on SOA. For example, inadequate infrastructure poses a significant challenge to student attendance, as illustrated in Kaduna, where a newly constructed school became unusable due to community members dismantling and selling the rail intended for access into the school building (Kaduna State Government KII). Teachers represent a critical resource in the education system. However, systemic shortages of qualified teachers, particularly in rural areas, have a profound impact on schools’ operational capacity and students’ attendance.

Leadership and supervision

Inadequate school leadership through the head teacher and SBMC Chairperson can contribute to irregular and/or substandard school opening at local levels. Evidence from the literature indicates that head teachers are especially important to the smooth operations of the school. Ineffective supervision exacerbates these challenges, with funding shortages and capacity needs hindering effective school management. Reports from Kano indicate that many headteachers lack the qualifications for their positions and consequently fail to fulfil their responsibilities seriously. This results in a lack of daily roll calls and teaching and learning activities in schools (Kano SSO FGD). Additionally, corporal punishment by teachers further exacerbates the issue, as it may deter students from attending school (Humphreys, 2015). Moreover, Humphreys (2015) claims that educational authorities and school staff often fail to recognise their inadvertent contribution to denying access to education. Many are unaware or unwilling to acknowledge how school organisation and practices interact

with external factors, thereby hindering educational access. It has also been indicated that efforts should be made to streamline information management processes to ensure uniformity and accuracy across all data sources. Currently, retrieving specific data on local governments entails consulting multiple sources, which can result in potential inaccuracies. Instead, leveraging the nationally approved annual school census as a central data repository would consolidate information and mitigate discrepancies. Adopting a unified data source would enhance data accuracy and ensure consistent information dissemination across all platforms (KIIs and FGDs).

6.2. Barriers common to teacher and student attendance

Nutrition and health

Individual teacher and student ill health is one of the most, if not the most, significant reasons for teacher and student absence from school. Among girls and female teachers, a lack of resources to manage menstruation contributes to short-term absence, as well as longer-term absence in cases of pregnancy and childbirth. Women and girls may not resume schooling/teaching for at least one academic year after birth, or women teachers who do return juggle childcare with teaching in school and their classrooms. Adequate nutrition is fundamental to attendance and participation in school life, but malnutrition has reportedly increased since the pandemic: *“fatigue and hunger among both teachers and students significantly reduces instruction time”* (UNESCO, 2021a, p.328). Parents cite hunger as a reason for their children’s non-attendance. Additionally, some children engage in hawking activities in the morning to obtain food for themselves and their families before attending school (Kano State Government KII). Lack of nearby water contributes to children arriving late to school (Borno State Government KII).

The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy and the National School Health Policy (2006) advocate for school feeding programmes to promote student and teacher attendance and participation. There is compelling evidence suggesting that such programmes contribute to increased gross enrolment and attendance rates, as both teachers and students are incentivised to remain in school for meals. However, it’s important to note that the reported impact data may be inflated due to children who attend school solely for the purpose of receiving meals and then leave afterward. Additionally, while school feeding programmes have their benefits, they have also been reported to detract from instructional time due to organisational requirements, processes associated with the time allocated for meal distribution. Furthermore, some non-enrolled children may attend school solely for the provision of food, which further distorts the data (KIIs and FGDs). Thus, while school feeding programmes have the potential to improve attendance and participation, their implementation requires careful consideration of these complexities and potential drawbacks.

Distance and transport

It is crucial for learners to have access to schools within close proximity to their homes, as distance often serves as a significant barrier to regular attendance. Many students are required to undertake long journeys to reach school:

“Some students have to trek more than 1km before getting to school and this is the same for teachers. There are some teachers that have to cover more than 3km. I know a headteacher that have to trek more than 5km to school” (SSO FGD, Kano).

A Kano State Government official indicated that, according to education policies, children should attend the nearest school to their home. This is reflected in the scheduling of primary schools in the morning and Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) in the afternoon. However, some students opt to attend schools perceived to offer better quality education, even if they are located further away (Kano State Government KII).

Family poverty

Economic factors present significant obstacles to student and teacher attendance in Nigeria:

“That is the major challenge on the part of both the parents and teachers, poverty” (Kaduna State Government KII).

According to data from the Nigeria Living Standards Survey 2018-19, 14% of children in Kaduna and 10% in Kano are engaged in child labour, marking these states with the highest percentages among PLANE states. Child labour is associated with both never attending school and irregular attendance patterns. Household chores and income-generating activities interfere with teacher and student attendance. The demands of chores often prevent students from attending schools or leads children to arrive to school late and leave early. Student attendance is particularly low on market days, or the day before, to assist parents in preparation. ‘Family

reasons' are one of the most significant reasons for children's absence from school. Household wealth and parental education, particularly that of the mother, have a substantial impact. Rural disadvantages in Nigeria are largely attributed to disparities in household wealth (Kazeem et al., 2010).

Poverty is also affecting teachers, who are often paid a low salary and incur high transportation costs:

"The issue of teacher salary is also a factor here. Some teachers finish their salary in 8 days because of high cost of things including transport. Last week, I saw a teacher how was trekking from his house to school covering a distance of almost 8km to and from. So, this teacher has to reduce the number of times he goes to school from 5 to 2 days a week. The teachers' attendance in turn affects learners' attendance" (Kano SSO FGD).

Language of instruction

The National Policy on Education (NPE) requires bilingual teaching and learning from Primary 1 to Primary 3, with a transition to using English as the medium of instruction thereafter. However, when teachers and/or students encounter difficulties in understanding or teaching in either the dominant local language or English, it can have adverse effects on attendance, motivation, and learning.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Inadequate WASH facilities adversely affect student well-being and attendance (Bennell, 2004). For instance, in Kaduna, the poor state of WASH was highlighted as a key issue, with reports that individuals defecate on school premises outside school opening hours. Some students opt to return home to relieve themselves, thereby missing classes or not returning for the rest of the day – this is especially problematic for girls who are menstruating (Kaduna State Government KII).

School quality

School policies and rules, disciplinary processes, rewards, encouragement, and positive feedback, as well as the absence of satisfaction or enjoyment, poor relationships (both peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher), and overcrowded classrooms, are aspects of school quality that have been extensively documented to exert the most significant influence on teacher and student attendance. Guidelines typically advocate for specific student-teacher ratios, yet many classrooms exceed these limits, with some accommodating up to 110 students (Kano SSO FGD).

6.3. Barriers unique to school opening, teacher and student attendance

School opening

- ▷ *Untimely release of the academic calendar and subsequent amendments:* This issue can create uncertainty and confusion among students, parents, and school staff regarding the start dates of the academic year, holiday periods, and other important events. When the academic calendar is released late or subject to frequent changes, it can disrupt the planning process for schools, leading to challenges in scheduling classes, exams, and extracurricular activities (see Section 3).

Teacher attendance

- ▷ *Workload:* Workload serves as a fundamental barrier to teacher attendance, exerting a considerable influence on their ability to consistently attend school. Teachers often face an overwhelming workload, which encompasses not only teaching duties but also administrative tasks, lesson planning, grading, and extracurricular responsibilities. This heavy workload can lead to exhaustion, stress, and burnout among teachers, ultimately resulting in frequent absences from school. Moreover, the strain of managing such a demanding workload can contribute to various health issues, further exacerbating teacher absenteeism.
- ▷ *Salary collection:* Furthermore, another significant factor impacting teacher attendance is the logistical challenge of salary collection. In many cases, teachers are required to travel to urban centres on a monthly basis to receive their salary payments. This requirement necessitates taking time off from their teaching responsibilities to undertake the journey, often resulting in teachers being absent from school on those days. Additionally, factors such as transportation delays or long distances to urban centres can further compound the issue, making it even more challenging for teachers to maintain consistent attendance (see Section 4).

Student attendance

- ▷ **Other Learning Opportunities:** The availability of alternative learning opportunities outside of traditional schooling, such as IQTE, nomadic and/or non-formal schools; and private/non-state schools can impact student attendance in state schools.
- ▷ **Home-based / Distance Learning:** The rise of home-based or distance learning options, particularly in response to factors like the COVID-19 pandemic, can affect student attendance patterns. Students may be more likely to miss school if they have access to remote learning opportunities that provide flexibility in scheduling and location.
- ▷ **Family Background:** Socioeconomic factors and family circumstances play a significant role in student attendance. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may face additional barriers to regular attendance, such as lack of access to transportation, health issues, or responsibilities at home. Conversely, students from supportive and stable family environments may have higher attendance rates.
- ▷ **Parental Attitudes:** Parental attitudes and involvement in their child's education greatly influence student attendance. Parents who prioritise education, provide encouragement, and actively support their child's schooling are more likely to have children who attend school regularly. Vice versa, negative parental attitudes or lack of engagement can contribute to absenteeism, as some parents fail to recognise the importance of schooling. Student attendance is also influenced by gendered household roles, whereby boys education is prioritised while barring girls from attending school, as they rely on them for household support.
- ▷ **Cost of school materials:** The cost of school materials and other costs associated with school, such as uniforms, books, writing materials, and money for lunch, has also been reported as a challenge to student attendance. In particular, it has been highlighted that lower basic schools and upper basic schools may necessitate distinct uniform types. Moreover, even if the uniform types remain consistent, children often outgrow them, necessitating replacements. Similarly, concerning books, *“you can manage a book for a whole session but in upper basic, this is not possible”* (Kano State Government KII), thus incurring regular expenses for children and their families:

“Even though school is free, the free is relative, the child will still be asked to bring money for something in school and when the parents cannot afford it, the child will be asked to drop out or sit at home” (Kaduna State Government KII).

7. Key Findings and Recommendations

School opening, teacher, and student attendance are dynamic; they change over time and across different countries, states and communities; they are highly localised. This complicates efforts to accurately predict either feature: SOA is a measure and a function of educational context and conditions and the individuals who populate schools and education systems. Evidence from this mixed methods Scoping Study on SOA has generated the following key findings and linked recommendations. The recommendations are directed towards programming/implementation, policy, and/or further research. They cover institutional and systemic, local and community, and individual level findings, but are not intended in any priority order.

7.1. Formal guidance at state levels on SOA

Key finding

There is very little guidance at federal level and none at state level (in PLANE states) that formalises standards for school opening, teacher or student attendance. Official school calendars are inconsistent across years and states, and subject to change as a result of public holidays, celebrations, social, political and environmental incidents, and there are no established responses to these. It remains unclear whether policymakers at state or federal level consider the calculation of school days and contact time across an academic year when establishing and approving yearly calendars. This holds significant implications, as policymakers may inadvertently design and approve calendars that fail to meet minimum standards. Many calendars do not consistently meet the minimum requirement of 180 days. Additionally, there is a lack of systemic definition of, and metrics for, student or teacher attendance in primary schools. These gaps undermine efforts to enable equitable access to quality basic education. Standardising, monitoring and measuring practice would be an important improvement to the existing idiosyncratic system.

Recommendations

- ▶ With support from development partners, state government agencies should review and raise awareness, among education officials at state, local and school levels, of how the development and structure of official academic calendars fundamentally determine school opening and contact time.
- ▶ State government agencies should institute formal guidance on SOA, with support from development partners. Specifically, (i) detailed minimum standards for SOA (ii) recording and managing unplanned school closures and teacher absences; (iii) managing planned long-term teacher absence; (iv) strategies and government support to address different forms and frequencies of student absence. This formalisation could be done in conjunction with new/revised Education Sector Plans (ESPs) and or as addenda to relevant existing guidance and managed through collaborative processes.
- ▶ Once policies or guidance on SOA are revised/developed, state government agencies, with support from development partners, should track the implementation, effects and impact of reforms. The current 4-day week policy in Kaduna state, which has now been in place for two years, should be assessed as soon as possible through methods of monitoring or research. This assessment should examine localised operationalisation and effects on all elements of SOA including teaching days, contact hours, and learning outcomes.

7.2. Actual school opening and contact time

Key finding

Actual school days and contact time by state and Local Government Authority (LGA) per term is unknown. There is no data, and respondents were unable to provide estimates. This means no systematic information on unplanned closures, late starts or early finishes (per term or day), schools daily/weekly/termly functioning, and reasons for these. Data from KIIs indicated broad social, environmental, political and economic reasons why schools may close – such as conflict, weather, farming, teacher supply – but we cannot map these possible explanations to actual patterns of opening. We also do not know whether, how and how often, schools attempt to mitigate closures with additional time. These data gaps mean that it is not

possible to estimate systematically or with confidence the effect of closures / opening days on students learning.

Recommendations

- ▶ Mixed method primary research is crucial to understanding patterns of actual school opening and closures and reasons for these. This should be co-designed and conducted at school and local level to make optimum use of existing data and knowledge. Building in access to existing streams of data – such as that gathered by SSOs – would be critical for a ‘joined up’ approach to data use and data production. Results should be discussed with schools, communities and local and state government agencies to interpret and respond to the findings.
- ▶ Development partners should support Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) and School Based Management Committees (SBMCs) to ensure that School Action Plans (SAPs) contain the school timetable, including opening and closing times and number and subject distribution of contact hours.
- ▶ Development partners should support schools and head teachers (within their areas of operation) to recognise localised patterns of teacher and student attendance and incorporate and explicitly outline strategies to tackle the challenges. Strategies could encompass infrastructure improvement, teacher training, community engagement, and provision of resources.

7.3. Teacher deployment and SOA

Key finding

Teacher deployment is imbalanced and highly idiosyncratic. Teachers are not sufficiently deployed close to their accommodation or home, therefore travel long distances to school. This is a direct contribution to teachers' late arrival and early departure, and of additional cost burden to teachers. In smaller schools with very few teachers, this also indirectly affects the timeliness of school opening and the punctuality of students. Evidence indicates that adequate deployment and retention of qualified teachers in rural areas is especially problematic; in addition, women are insufficiently targeted for tailored support to work and engage fully with teaching.

Recommendations

- ▶ Conduct mixed method research with and about teachers that actively seeks knowledge, participation and voice of male and female teachers in different locations and school types for more fine-grained and comprehensive data on teachers' behaviour, including attendance, motivations and challenges. This could be contextualised by policy research that identifies and analyses teacher deployment and related policies/formal guidance.
- ▶ State government agencies should review and update teacher deployment, support and retention policies and packages, with support from development partners, and in line with state education sector plans. Examples such as the Rural Teacher Incentive Scheme in Kwara state and the recent Jigawa Teacher Recruitment, Deployment and Management Policy (2019-20), both of which included strategies for more responsive and equitable teacher deployment, should be evaluated for effectiveness and relevance to state and local contexts. Results should be considered in terms of opportunities for replication, adaptation and learning from successful teacher deployment and support initiatives, especially for female teachers and for poorly resourced locations.

7.4. School leadership and SOA

Key finding

Weak school leadership - particularly by the head teacher - has profound effects on SOA, yet there is relatively little attention given to head teachers in the data reviewed for this study (compared to evidence on teachers and students). Head teachers are systemically relatively weak, having little control over financial resources, teacher management, or staffing. Their workloads are usually incredibly stretched, with administrative, management, and teaching tasks. Head teachers may additionally lack qualifications,

experience and professional capacity development to enable them to fully understand and fulfil their roles. Fewer women occupy leadership positions than men.

Recommendations

- ▶ State government agencies, supported by development partners, should develop, review and target policies and guidance that specifically supports the empowerment with accountability and capacity development of existing head teachers with clear roles and responsibilities, training programmes, remote learning opportunities, peer networking, and career progression opportunities.
- ▶ State and local education government agencies, with support from development partners, should review procedures for appointing and supervising head teachers and promoting qualified teachers to leadership positions, including strengthening training and selection and engaging with female teachers to support targeted professional development.

7.5. Monitoring and supervision of SOA

Key finding

In PLANE states, the frequency, location and duration of formal school monitoring visits – including by SSOs is unclear and poorly documented. This raises concerns about the quantity, quality and use of school monitoring data. There is monitoring happening, but it is unclear whether this is evenly distributed and of good quality and utility. This study's review of Education Management Information System (EMIS) data on long-term teacher absence (or leave) raises concerns that these data inaccurately represent the reality of teacher attendance. There are discrepancies between different secondary quantitative data sources, and data are not well disaggregated.

Recommendations

- ▶ The new 2024 Education Roadmap strategy for basic education includes the mandate to “*Make Federal Education Quality Assurance (QA) Service Supervisors and QA Officers in the States more effective*”. Development partners should engage with federal and state government to realise this strategy.
- ▶ Federal and state governments should determine a common and precise metric for both student and teacher attendance tracking, with minimum standards for data and reporting. This common metric should recognise and learn from other systems that have been trialled (for example by the World Bank BESDA and AGILE programmes, and UNICEF) to refine a scalable and effective attendance monitoring system.
- ▶ At state and local level, School Support Officers (SSOs) and QA Officers need clear terms of reference with detailed objectives for each monitoring visit and detailed school visit schedules. This is partially provided through the SSO Handbook, but this document was not known to all SSO respondents, many of whom felt it was too long and bureaucratic, indicating that this document needs review, adaptation and wider dissemination. SSOs and QA Officers need regular refresher training to maintain their skills and knowledge to fulfil their duties.
- ▶ Development partners should consider conducting qualitative research to examine the perceptions and experiences of tying different types of incentives to accurate attendance data collection, tracking and use, in order to establish what incentives could work to encourage rigorous and effective monitoring and to counter disincentives.

7.6. Community participation in SOA

Key finding

There are two strands to the evidence on community participation in SOA: (1) that recognises the significance of community engagement with monitoring school, teacher and student behaviours (opening and attendance), and (2) that advocates for some degree of localised autonomy to adapt standard annual and termly school calendars to local needs and rituals, such as market days, harvests, prayers, etc. Involving communities is well-evidenced to increase local ownership of schools and encourage parents and caregivers to send children to school because they see that the school understands their needs and lives. While standards for SOA are essential for accountability and monitoring, evidence indicates that flexibility for adaptation at local levels is crucial to ensure equitable access to education. Weekly schedules and timetables need to work for the community and its people. Adaptations that are locally relevant would mitigate the effects of unplanned closures or absenteeism (e.g. on market days) by preparing for these in advance and planning mitigation strategies that are agreed at community level (e.g. extra hours on a Saturday morning). The recommendations that follow link closely to recommendations on formal guidance on SOA, for empowered and accountable school leadership, and for monitoring and supervision.

Recommendations

- ▶ State government agencies, supported by development partners, should encourage greater community participation in developing school calendars, school schedules, and tracking student and teacher attendance, such as through SBMCs and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). This approach has the potential to improve local ownership of schooling processes and decision-making, address individual behaviours, and help mitigate student and teacher absenteeism as well as planned or unplanned school closures.
- ▶ Localised control and autonomy for head teachers – in consultation with their communities – to adjust school calendars/schedules to local needs, while ensuring minimum standards are met, to be instituted in states' policy and documented at the LG/EA/school level.

7.7. SOA among remote communities and marginalised individuals

Key finding

Regular and timely school opening, teacher and student attendance is more challenging in the most remote, rural schools and among marginalised communities for a wide range of reasons. However, SOA data in Nigeria (as elsewhere) are not consistently disaggregated by sufficiently nuanced demographic characteristic to fully understand trends and patterns in SOA at sub-national levels, the result of which is to inadequately target interventions.

Recommendation:

- ▶ Development partners should prioritise SOA data collection in their most remote rural schools to better understand patterns and practices of SOA in these locations. This would provide an evidence base on which to develop appropriate responses. Actual trends in SOA among marginalised communities and children must be highlighted.
- ▶ Existing data gathered by EMIS, Annual School Census (ASC) and PLANE – as well as by tools such as EduTrac and the National Assessment on Learning Achievement in Basic Education (NALABE) - should be reviewed to consider whether they could be further disaggregated by location, gender, age, grade/qualification, disability, and distance from home to school to accurately capture key determinants of attendance. This will help to track students and teachers' participation in school and better understand specific causes of absenteeism.

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Annex I: PLANE calendars AYs 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24

State	Starting date of AY 2021-22 indicated in AY 2020-21 academic calendar	Release of approved calendar for the full academic year (or addendum*)	Confirmation of start date and notice period	Term 1 (T1)		Holiday		Term 2 (T2)		Holiday		Term 3 (T3)		Holiday		# Academic weeks	Equivalent # school days**	# Public holidays	Actual # school days	# Holiday weeks	Tot weeks
				Start	End	Start	End	Start	End	Start	End	Start*	End	Start	End						
AY 2021-22																					
Kano	ND	27-Aug	ND	12-Sep	11-Dec	12-Dec	08-Jan	09-Jan	09-Apr	10-Apr	07-May	08-May	06-Aug	07-Aug	10-Sep	39	195	6	189	13	39
Kaduna	ND	09-Sep	ND	12-Sep	17-Dec	18-Dec	08-Jan	09-Jan	08-Apr	09-Apr	30-Apr	01-May	05-Aug	06-Aug	03-Sep	42	182	10	172	10	42
Jigawa	ND	03-Nov	ND	14-Nov	05-Feb	05-Feb	19-Feb	20-Feb	30-Apr	30-Apr	14-May	Part 1: 15-May - 09-Jul Sallah break: 9-Jul - 16-Jul Part 2: 17-Jul - 27-Aug	27-Aug	27-Aug	24-Sep	37	185	4	181	9	37
Arno (for Urban schools)	ND	24-Sep	ND	17-Oct	17-Dec	18-Dec	09-Jan	10-Jan	08-Apr	09-Apr	30-Apr	02-May	05-Aug	05-Aug	09-Sep	36	180	8	172	11	36
Borno (addendum for Aid-el-Fitr)	N/A	21-Mar	Additional week of holiday after T2 announced 1.5 months in advance	17-Oct	17-Dec	18-Dec	09-Jan	10-Jan	08-Apr	09-Apr	08-May	09-May	05-Aug	05-Aug	09-Sep	35	175	8	167	12	35
Yobe	ND	ND	ND	12-Sep	17-Dec	18-Dec	08-Jan	09-Jan	08-Apr	09-Apr	30-Apr	01-May	05-Aug	06-Aug	16-Sep	38	190	11	179	12	38
Average																38	185	8	178	11.2	38.2
AY 2022-23																					
Kano	11-Sep	11-Nov	Yes	11-Sep	10-Dec	11-Dec	07-Jan	08-Jan	08-Apr	09-Apr	29-Apr	30-Apr	29-Jul	30-Jul	02-Sep	39	195	8	187	13	39
Kaduna	04-Sep	ND	Yes	04-Sep	16-Dec	17-Dec	07-Jan	08-Jan	06-Apr	08-Apr	30-Apr	30-Apr	04-Aug	05-Aug	09-Sep	40	160	7	153	11	40
Jigawa	25-Sep	29-Sep	T1 started a week later than announced. The full AY calendar was released 4 days after the previously indicated start date.	02-Oct	24-Dec	24-Dec	14-Jan	15-Jan	25-Mar	25-Mar	29-Apr	Part 1: 30-Apr - 24-Jun Sallah break: 24-Jun - 8-Jul Part 2: 09-Jul - 12-Aug	12-Aug	12-Aug	16-Sep	35	175	7	168	15	35
Borno	12-Sep	29-Jul	Yes	12-Sep	09-Dec	12-Dec	08-Jan	09-Jan	08-Apr	10-Apr	01-May	02-May	04-Aug	07-Aug	10-Sep	39	195	7	188	12	39
Borno (addendum for General Election)	N/A	13-Jan	Addendum published 3 weeks ahead of break	12-Sep	09-Dec	12-Dec	08-Jan	8 days of break (23-Feb - 1-Mar & 9-Mar - 15-Mar)	08-Apr	10-Apr	01-May	02-May	04-Aug	07-Aug	10-Sep	38	190	7	183	13	38
Yobe	ND	12-Sep	ND	18-Sep	16-Dec	17-Dec	07-Jan	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Average (excl. Yobe)																38	180	7.3	173	13	38
AY 2023-24																					
Kano	03-Sep	24-Aug	T1 started a week later than announced. The full AY calendar was released a week in advance of the previously stated start date.	10-Sep	16-Dec	17-Dec	06-Jan	07-Jan	30-Mar	31-Mar	20-Apr	21-Apr	27-Jul	28-Jul	07-Sep	40	200	8	192	12	40
Kaduna	10-Sep	ND	Yes	10-Sep	15-Dec	15-Dec	07-Jan	07-Jan	28-Mar	28-Mar	21-Apr	21-Apr	26-Jul	26-Jul	08-Sep	39	156	6	150	12	39
Kaduna (addendum for delayed start of the academic year)	N/A	12-Sep	T1 started 2 weeks later than announced. The full AY calendar was released 2 days after the previously announced start date.	24-Sep	22-Dec	22-Dec	07-Jan	07-Jan	28-Mar	28-Mar	21-Apr	21-Apr	02-Aug	02-Aug	15-Sep	39	156	6	150	11	39
Jigawa	17-Sep	15-Sep	Yes	17-Sep	16-Dec	16-Dec	06-Jan	07-Jan	16-Mar	16-Mar	13-Apr	14-Apr	27-Jul	27-Jul	07-Sep	38	190	7	183	14	38
Borno	11-Sep	28-Aug	Yes	10-Sep	15-Dec	15-Dec	07-Jan	08-Jan	05-Apr	05-Apr	28-Apr	29-Apr	02-Aug	02-Aug	01-Sep	41	205	8	197	12	41
Yobe	ND	ND	ND	17-Sep	15-Dec	16-Dec	07-Jan	07-Jan	05-Apr	06-Apr	28-Apr	28-Apr	02-Aug	03-Aug	15-Sep	39	195	9	186	12	39
Average																39.4	189.2	7.6	181.6	12.2	39.4
AY 2024-25																					
Kano	08-Sep																				
Kaduna	15-Sep																				
Jigawa	08-Sep																				
Borno	02-Sep																				
Yobe	15-Sep																				

Key:
 Meeting the nationally mandated minimum number of school days (≥180)
 Not meeting the nationally mandated minimum number of school days (180)

* It is assumed that there was a typographical error in the initial start date provided for Kaduna's Term 3 in the academic year 2022-23, and that the correct term start date is 30th April. This is because the date indicated in the calendar (30th May) does not correspond with the end of the break and the total number of weeks as expected.

** Based on 5 days weeks for all states, apart from Kaduna which has introduced a 4 day week policy starting in Jan 22

Annex II: Public holidays in PLANE focal states (AYs 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24)

Day	Date	Holiday Name	Holiday Type	Borno	Jigawa	Kano	Kaduna	Yobe
AY 2021-22								
Friday	01-Oct	Independence Day	National	X	X	X	X	X
Tuesday	19-Oct	Eidul-Mawlid	National	X	X	X	X	X
Wednesday	22-Dec	Sambisa Memorial Day	State (Borno)	X				
Saturday	25-Dec	Christmas Day	National	X	X	X	X	X
Sunday	26-Dec	Boxing Day	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	27-Dec	Christmas Day (in lieu)	National	X	X	X	X	X
Tuesday	28-Dec	Boxing Day (in lieu)	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	03-Jan	New Year's Day (in lieu)	National	X	X	X	X	X
Friday*	15-Apr	Good Friday	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	18-Apr	Easter Monday	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	02-May	Worker's Day (in lieu)	National	X	X	X	X	X
Tuesday	03-May	Eid-el-fitr'si Sallah	National	X	X	X	X	X
Friday*	27-May	Children's Day	School Holiday	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	13-Jun	Democracy Day (in lieu)	National	X	X	X	X	X
Wednesday	29-Jun	Collection of voting cards	State (Yobe)					X
Thursday	30-Jun	Collection of voting cards	State (Yobe)					X
Friday*	01-Jul	Collection of voting cards	State (Yobe)					X
Monday	11-Jul	Id el Kabir Holiday	National	X	X	X	X	X
Tuesday	12-Jul	Id el Kabir Holiday	National	X	X	X	X	X
Thursday	21-Jul	Collection of voting cards	State (Borno)	X				
Friday*	22-Jul	Collection of voting cards	State (Borno)	X				
Wednesday	27-Jul	Collection of voting cards	State (Kaduna)				X	
Thursday	28-Jul	Collection of voting cards	State (Kaduna)				X	
Friday*	29-Jul	Collection of voting cards	State (Kaduna)				X	
Monday	01-Aug	Islamic new year	State (Borno, Yobe)	X				X
TOT				8	4	6	10	11
AY 2022-23								
Monday	03-Oct	Independence Day (in lieu)	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	10-Oct	Eidul-Mawlid	National	X	X	X	X	X
Thursday	22-Dec	Sambisa Memorial Day	State (Borno)	X				
Monday	26-Dec	Boxing Day Holiday	National	X	X	X	X	X
Tuesday	27-Dec	Christmas Day (in lieu)	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	02-Jan	New Year's Day (in lieu)	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	09-Jan	Public Holiday	State (Yobe)					X
Tuesday	10-Jan	Public Holiday	State (Yobe)					X
Friday*	07-Apr	Good Friday	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	10-Apr	Easter Monday	National	X	X	X	X	X
Friday*	21-Apr	Eid-el-tri Sallah	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	24-Apr	Eid-el-tri Sallah	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	01-May	Worker's Day	National	X	X	X	X	X
Wednesday	27-May	Children's Holiday	School holiday	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	29-May	Presidential Inauguration Day	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	12-Jun	Democracy Day	National	X	X	X	X	X
Wednesday	28-Jun	Id el Kabir	National	X	X	X	X	X
Thursday	29-Jun	Id el Kabir Holiday	National	X	X	X	X	X
Wednesday	19-Jul	Islamic New Year	State (Borno, Jigawa, Kano, Yobe)	X	X	X		X
Monday	28-Aug	Anniversary of state's creation	State (Jigawa)		X			
TOT				7	7	8	7	N/A

Day	Date	Holiday Name	Holiday Type	Borno	Jigawa	Kano	Kaduna	Yobe
AY 2023-24								
Wednesday	27-Sep	Eidul-Mawlid	National	X	X	X	X	X
Thursday	28-Sep	Eidul-Mawlid	State (Jigawa)		X			
Monday	02-Oct	Independence Day (in lieu)	National	X	X	X	X	X
Wednesday	04-Oct	Takutaha	State (Kano)			X		
Friday*	22-Dec	Sambisa Memorial Day	Borno	X				
Monday	25-Dec	Christmas Day	National	X	X	X	X	X
Tuesday	26-Dec	Boxing Day	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	01-Jan	New Year's Day	National	X	X	X	X	X
Wednesday	07-Feb	Public Holiday	State (Yobe)					X
Friday*	29-Mar	Good Friday	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	01-Apr	Easter Monday	National	X	X	X	X	X
Wednesday	10-Apr	Sallah	National	X	X	X	X	X
Wednesday	01-May	Worker's Day	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	27-May	Childrens Day	School Holiday	X	X	X	X	X
Wednesday	12-Jun	Democracy Day	National	X	X	X	X	X
Monday	17-Jun	Id el Kabir	National	X	X	X	X	X
TOT				8	7	8	6	9

Key:

- x Public holiday
- x Public holiday coinciding with school day
- x Not known whether the public holiday coincides with school day (lack of data availability on school opening days)



Annex III: Number of School Hours per State (AYs 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24)

The graph below depicts the number of school hours per state during the past three AYs based on the school days calculated in Annex I and assuming a 5.5h day:



Annex IV: Comparative analysis of data sources

The table below presents a comparative analysis of the different data sources available for monitoring student and teacher attendance:

Data Source	Description	Geographic coverage	Years	Issues and Challenges	Strengths and Opportunities
Plane Project	Representative survey of enrolment and attendance data on students and attendance data on teachers at the approximate start and end of the school year on a representative sample of pupils and teachers in Primary 2, 4, 6.	i) Jigawa (Malam Madori and Babura LGA); ii) Kano (Minjibir, Makoda and Ajingi LGA); iii) Kaduna (Soba and Kauru LGA)	2023-2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Bias in that the selection of PLANE schools and regions being predominantly rural and disadvantaged and communities receive Interventions and funding having a positive impact on student and teacher attendance. ii. Teachers and students know are being monitored throughout the year which may have a positive influence on attendance. iii. Does not record critical and chronic absenteeism which are relevant to dropout. Students consistently absent are more likely to drop out. iv. Does not have information on individual students. v. Does not take into account religious days or public holidays (eg: Friday the teacher being absent for religious reasons) vi. A significant amount of relevant information is missing from the spreadsheet analysed including school code (EMIS Code), teacher gender etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Presents a methodology for monitoring students familiar to selected schools in some target areas. ii. Verified attendance data. iii. Capacity to correlate against more attributes such as school type, teacher qualification etc.. if data is presented.
2015 Nigeria Education Data Survey (NEDS) and Nigeria Demographic and Health Surveys (NDHS)	Representative health and demographic household survey conducted in over 40,000 households nationally to enable analysis to state level.	National in all 37 states	2003 (NDHS) 2008 (NDHS) 2015 (NEDS) 2018 (NDHS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The dataset may be able to correlate other data against attendance but the granular data is not openly published. The extent to which correlations would be statistically significant will depend on the sample sizes represented under variables. ii. In publications, attendance is analysed by Rural Urban, Geo-Political Zone and State only iii. Attendance data only measures whether a child attended school during the year, not the extent to which they attended. It is also not possible to identify whether children enrolled in school did not attend at all. iv. The NDHS does not focus on education as a main objective or reported category. v. The DHS is an expensive method of data collection requiring trained enumerators to visit households. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Highly detailed dataset enabling correlation (nationally) of attendance against a range of background attributes. ii. A standardized and well tested format which has been applied in many countries. iii. Methodology can be extended to apply to proper attendance monitoring.

Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)	MICS surveys measure key indicators that allow countries to generate data for use in policies, programmes, and national development plans, and to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other internationally agreed upon commitments. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) is designed to collect statistically robust and internationally comparable estimates of key indicators that are used to assess the situation of children and women in the areas of health, education and child protection.	National in all 37 states	1995, 1999, 2007, 2011, 2016/17, 2021	<p>MICS is similar to NDHS / NEDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The dataset may be able to correlate other data against attendance but the granular data is not openly published. The extent to which correlations would be statistically significant will depend on the sample sizes represented under variables. ii. In publications, attendance is analysed by Rural Urban, Geo-Political Zone and State only iii. Attendance data only measures whether a child attended school during the year, not the extent to which they attended. It is also not possible to identify whether children enrolled in school did not attend at all. iv. The MICS is an expensive method of data collection requiring trained enumerators to visit households. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Highly detailed dataset enabling correlation (nationally) of attendance against a range of background attributes. ii. A standardized and well tested format which has been applied in many countries. iii. Methodology can be extended to apply to proper attendance monitoring.
Annual School Census (ASC)	Each state in Nigeria operates a Education Management Information System (EMIS) based on data collection mandated and standardised through national ASC data collection forms for each level of education. The ASC collects data on enrolments, staffing, facilities, and institutional developments. Many states produce an ASC Report which presents analysed data on the status of pre-primary, primary, post-primary schools.	National in all 37 states	All since 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Student absence / attendance is not published. ii. Only teachers absent for more than one month absent are noted. Temporarily absent teachers may not be recorded properly. iii. Data is collected per school which includes detailed information on each school iv. Poor record keeping at schools' level has significantly affects the data quality. v. Most data is self reported by headteachers which may result in falsification of data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. A standardized format applied throughout Nigeria ii. Can provide required data on enrolments, staffing, facilities, and institutional developments to correlate against attendance data. ii. Already has tools developed for state use which could be expanded for attendance monitoring.