

The Experience of Educators During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Surveys from During and After School Closures



The COVID-19 pandemic forced educators and students worldwide to rapidly shift to distance learning. As a result, governments, school systems, and educators worked to provide continuity in learning and services accessed through schools—such as school feeding programs—while trying to reconcile persistent equity gaps in access to technology and material and social resources. To date, global educational research has largely focused on how existing disparities and the social and economic downturn resulting from COVID-19 have undermined children’s learning. Much less data exist on how teachers fared during distance learning and the return to in-person schooling.

This brief leverages an **ongoing longitudinal study on children, parents, and teachers** in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Researchers conducted two rounds of phone surveys with 514 primary-school teachers from public and private schools to measure the pandemic’s repercussions on both children’s education and teacher well-being. Data were collected during school closures (October 2020) and when schools reopened (mid-January 2021) after ten months of distance learning.

Key Findings

- » Most school teachers (87 percent) attempted to reach caregivers during school closures to discuss academic and distance learning matters. However, such efforts dropped (65 percent) upon school re-openings. Most teachers (75 percent) were only able to reach **half or fewer of their students** while schools were closed, with private school teachers reaching more parents than public school teachers.
- » Nearly **one in five teachers** (18 percent) left the teaching profession when schools reopened. Those who left teaching were younger and more likely to work in a private school.
- » Upon reopening schools, teachers were concerned about a wide array of issues. The most highly reported was the **health and safety** of their students and themselves.
- » As students returned to school, nearly half of teachers reported that more than 50 percent of their students are behind in learning. **Twenty-one percent indicate that the learning loss is “very large.”** More public school teachers reported very large learning loss than private school teachers at 26 percent versus 16 percent, respectively.
- » To address pandemic-related learning loss once schools re-opened, teachers most frequently reported **assigning extra homework** (59 percent) and **holding remedial or after school classes** (39 percent) to mitigate this loss. Private school teachers reported organizing more after school classes for students (44 percent versus 33 percent of public school teachers). This finding is consistent with the pattern observed during distance learning, whereby private school teachers were also more likely to engage students in individualized learning activities during those months.

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PARTNERS

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council

TIMELINE

2020-2021

SECTOR

Education

SAMPLE

514 teachers

STUDY DESIGN

Observational

IPA STAFF

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Background

According to the United Nations, **94 percent** of students globally have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic through school closures, with detrimental effects being particularly large among the most vulnerable groups and in low- and middle-income countries.¹ Additionally, more than **63 million teachers** have been affected by this crisis.² As governments around the world grapple with addressing learning loss as children return to school, examining the concerns and perspectives of teachers on the ground is essential.

The Research

The sample of teachers in this study were the primary school teachers in February 2020 of a longitudinal sample of children. Two rounds of phone surveys (October 2020 and February 2021) were conducted to obtain insights from these teachers on distance learning, the return to in-person schooling, and teacher well-being. Data from both survey administrations are presented in this report. In October 2020, teachers were an average of 32.7 years old and 56 percent taught in private schools across six of the most disadvantaged districts in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. On average, private school teachers had 5.5 years of classroom experience and 14 percent had at least a bachelor's degree. In contrast, public school teachers had an average 14.7 years of teaching experience and 82 percent had at least a bachelor's level of education.

Findings

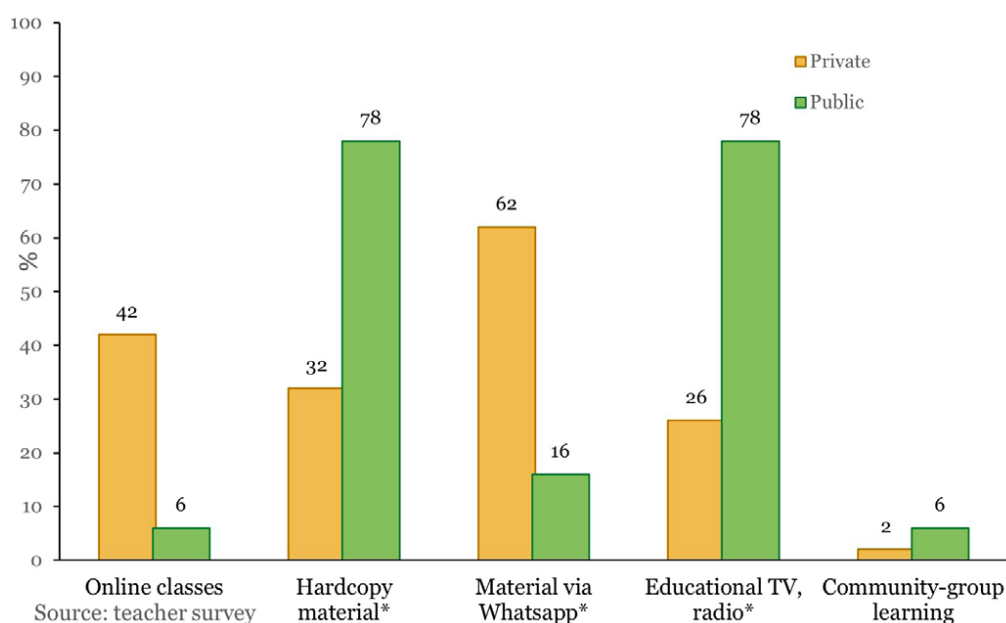
School Closures

During school closures, 87 percent of teachers attempted to contact their students and their students' families, with most caregivers reached via phone call. Most teachers (75 percent) were only able to reach half or fewer of their students while schools were closed, with private school teachers reaching more parents than public school teachers. Most teachers discussed distance learning-related matters, with 88 percent of teachers making contact to discuss how to help children with academic work and 70 percent to converse about keeping children engaged in distance learning.

Private school teachers were more likely to engage in individualized distance learning with students through online classes or instant messages, as shown in **Figure 1**. By contrast, public schools were more likely to give assignments to their students through hard-copy materials and encourage participation in government educational television and radio programming.

Figure 1. Private schools offered more individualized learning opportunities during school closures

Note. Only teachers who indicated that their schools provided distance learning were asked this question (N=276). 54% of respondents are private school teachers. All differences, except the one on community-group learning, are significant at $p < 0.01$ level.





Findings

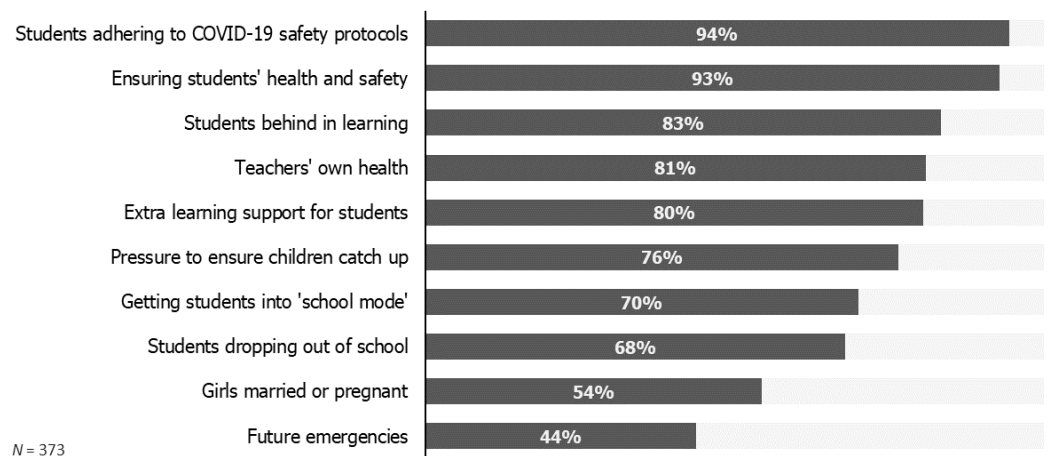
School Reopenings

As schools reopened (as of February 2021), nearly one in five teachers (18 percent) had left the teaching profession, highlighting an important potential loss of talent and human resources from the educational system. Of those who stayed, 88 percent continued teaching at the same school prior to COVID-19. Private school teachers were significantly more likely to leave teaching than public school teachers (94 percent versus 74 percent, respectively). Moreover, teachers who did not return to the teaching profession were younger on average (27 versus 34 years old).

Teachers in both private and public schools were concerned about the well-being of their students and their own health in the return to school; nearly all teachers indicated that they were concerned about their students adhering to the COVID-19 safety protocols and that they remained in good health (Figure 2). No statistically significant differences were found by school type. More than half of teachers remain scared (51 percent) or fearful (64 percent) of COVID-19 even though 96 percent of teachers reported their health from good to excellent.

Figure 2. Teachers major concerns as schools reopened

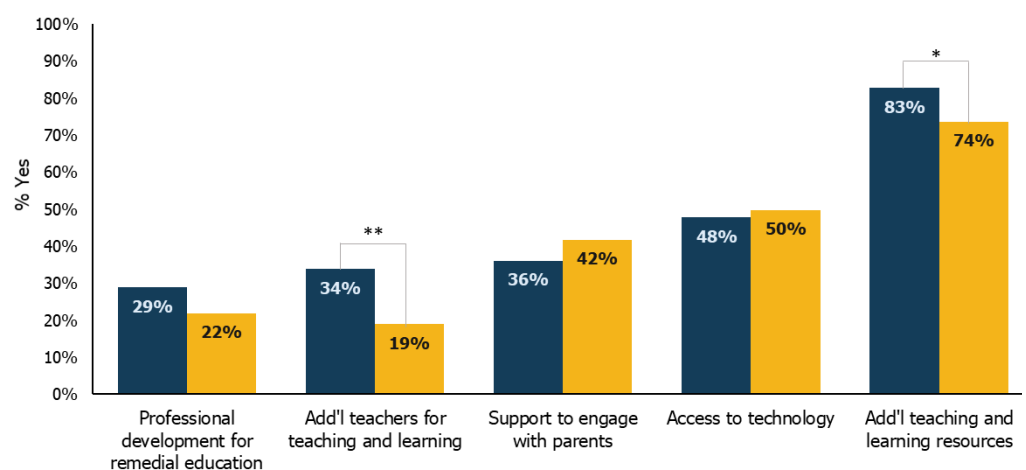
Note. N=373



As shown in Figure 3, as schools reopened, most teachers in both private and public schools identified needing additional teaching and learning resources, followed by access to technology, to address learning loss that accumulated during school closures. Public school teachers were significantly more likely to say that they needed additional teachers and teaching resources to aid in children's learning.

Figure 3. Supports public and private school teachers need to address learning loss

Note. N = 373.
** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.



Findings

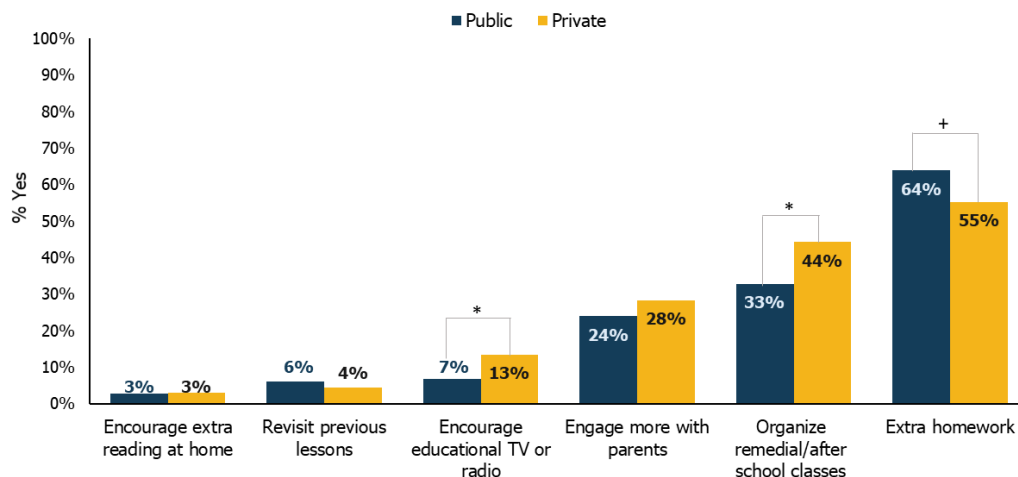
Addressing Learning Loss

Forty-seven percent of teachers reported that more than half of their students are behind in learning and 21 percent indicated that the learning loss is “very large.” More public school teachers reported very large learning loss than private school teachers at 16 percent versus 26 percent, respectively.

Most teachers, across public and private schools, have employed at least one strategy to address the learning loss acquired during school closures. The most frequently reported methods include 59 percent assigning extra homework and 39 percent holding remedial or after school classes. Notably, as shown in **Figure 4** with data from the February 2021 survey, private school teachers were significantly more likely to engage students in after school classes and encourage students to watch educational TV or listen to the radio programming. However, efforts to contact students and their families by phone declined (65 percent) after schools reopened.

Figure 4. Methods to address learning loss by public and private school teachers as schools reopened

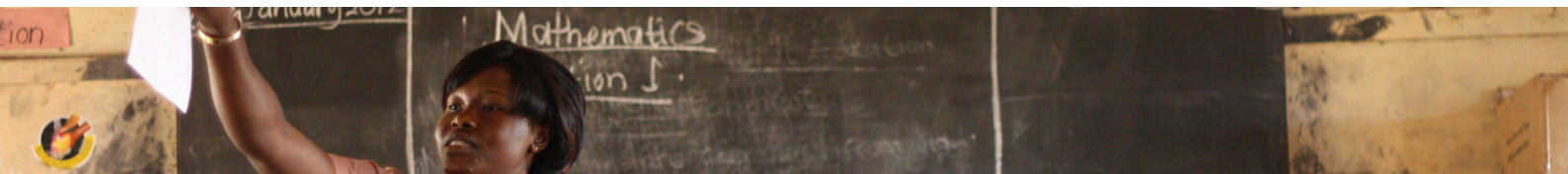
Note. N = 373.
* $p < .05$, + $p < .10$.



Conclusion

School closures disrupted daily life and children’s education, decreasing learning and widening inequalities. Many teachers remain worried about the health and safety of their students as schools have reopened. Now that students have returned to school, meeting students at their level of learning by using targeted instruction in the classroom may represent an effective strategy to tackling learning losses. Schools can also improve their learning outcomes by initiating feeding programs, which are a cost-effective method to reduce student nutrition deficits. In addition, educators should support and encourage parental involvement at home to mitigate any additional learning loss from future disruptions or school closures.

Further assessments with children, caregivers, and teachers are currently ongoing and will examine the short- and medium-term effects of the crisis on educational outcomes and inequalities.



REFERENCES

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