



ADDRESSING THE INPUT-OUTCOME GAPS IN EDUCATIONAL POLICIES:  
CASE STUDY OF LIBERIA

Dissertation Manuscript

Submitted to UNICAF University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctorate of Education (EdD)

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October 2023

Approval of the Thesis

ADDRESSING THE INPUT-OUTCOME GAP IN EDUCATIONAL POLICIES: CASE  
STUDY OF LIBERIA

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## Abstract

## ADDRESSING THE INPUT-OUTCOME GAP IN EDUCATIONAL POLICIES: CASE STUDY OF LIBERIA

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This research aimed to examine the discrepancies between inputs and outcomes in educational policies within Liberia. The primary motivation behind this investigation was the concern that despite Liberia's incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG- 4) into its educational policies and the allocation of resources and efforts towards achieving educational objectives, there appears to be limited recognition of the resulting educational outcomes. Previous inconclusive studies on education policy in Liberia have identified various gaps in the sector such as the exclusion of stakeholders, inadequate resource allocation, unreliable data, low political will and capacity, insufficient technical knowledge, deficiencies in monitoring and assessment, and centralized governance. Additionally, the Liberian Civil War (1989-2003), as well as the Ebola (2014-2016) and COVID-19 pandemics, have been implicated as contributing factors.

To explore, uncover, and elucidate the gaps in Liberia's education policy management cycle, this study employed content and thematic analysis, as well as descriptive procedures, within a mixed-method design utilizing a case study approach. The research process consisted of three distinct phases: document review, survey questionnaires, and interviews. The document review encompassed the examination of 25 policy documents while the survey questionnaires were completed by 122 respondents. Additionally, 10 key informant interviews were conducted. The study identified gaps in educational outcomes including disparities in access to quality and relevant education across all levels of the educational hierarchy. The research also revealed notable input gaps such as the exclusion of stakeholders, inadequate resource allocation, unreliable data, diminished political will, and insufficient capacity.

Based on the findings, the study recommended increased funding to improve the provision of learning resources and facilities. Furthermore, it suggested the depoliticization of educational policy environment in the country.

### Declaration

I hereby declare that the research work presented in this document, unless otherwise stated, is solely my own. All sources of information used have been duly acknowledged and referenced. No part of this work has been submitted for any other academic qualification.

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I confirm that I retain the intellectual property and copyright of the thesis submitted. I also allow Unicaf University to produce and disseminate the contributions of the thesis in all mediaforms known or to come as per the Creative Commons BY License (CC BY).

## Dedication

Dedicated to My Father, Mr. Morris G. Wehye

For his unwavering passion and unwavering support in my academic and professional pursuits. Your dedication to lifelong learning and your belief in the power of education have been a constant source of inspiration for me. It is through your guidance and encouragement that I have been able to achieve my goal of earning a terminal degree. This research work is a testament to your profound influence on my journey. Thank you for being my guiding light.

With love and gratitude,  
Benjamin Yele Wehye

## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to The Lord Jesus Christ for His wisdom, grace, and protection throughout this research journey. His divine guidance has been instrumental in every step of the way enabling me to overcome challenges and find inspiration in the pursuit of knowledge.

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Asimwe Specioza for her invaluable guidance, expertise, and continuous support. Her mentorship and insightful feedback have shaped this research work and enriched my understanding of the subject matter. Her dedication and belief in my abilities have been truly motivating.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to my children, Morrislyne Wehye, Benjamin D. Wehye, Jr. Beneatha F. Wehye, Kelvin Wehye and Peace N. Wehye, for their understanding and support. They have willingly sacrificed precious family time to allow me to focus on my research efforts. Their encouragement, love, and patience have been a constant source of strength reminding me of the importance of balancing my academic pursuits with family commitments.

Furthermore, I extend my thanks to research participants, colleagues and friends for their contributions whether big or small have played a significant role in the completion of this research.

To all those mentioned above, and countless others who have supported me in various ways, my deepest appreciation and gratitude go out to each of you. Your contributions have been invaluable, and I am truly blessed to have had you by my side on this research journey.

With profound appreciation,  
Benjamin Yele Wehye

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Significant progress has been made in the field of educational policymaking over the past four decades with a notable increase in global commitment compared to previous eras. This commitment is evident through the development of various global policy documents aimed at enhancing educational outcomes. Notable examples include the Education for All (EFA) Goals, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which have been ratified by numerous countries including Liberia. These policies are designed to address existing disparities in global education and ensure equal access to quality and relevant education for all individuals. Each set of goals represents a commitment by the international community to achieve specific targets within a given timeframe. This summary provides an overview of these goals and their key objectives.

The Education for All Goals were established in 2000 with the aim of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all individuals. These goals encompassed six main objectives including expanding early childhood care and education, ensuring free and compulsory primary education, promoting learning opportunities for youth and adults, achieving gender equality in education, enhancing the quality of education, and fostering education for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2000). The EFA Goals provided a framework for countries to guide their policies and actions toward achieving universal education and reducing educational disparities worldwide (UNESCO, 2015).

The Millennium Development Goals were a set of eight global targets established in 2000 which ended in 2015. Goal 2 focused specifically on achieving universal primary education aiming to ensure that all children have access to and complete primary schooling. The targets included achieving universal primary education, eliminating gender disparities in education, and improving adult literacy rates (UN, 2000). While progress was made in some

areas, challenges remained in achieving all the targets by the specified timeframe.

The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015, succeeded the MDGs and expanded the global development agenda. Goal 4 specifically addresses education, aiming to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The targets include universal access to quality early childhood development, primary and secondary education, ensuring equal access for all genders and marginalized groups, and improving relevant skills for employment and sustainable development (UN, 2015). The SDGs provide a comprehensive framework for countries to promote education as a fundamental driver of sustainable development.

The Education for All Goals, MDGs and SDGs represent global commitments to address educational inequalities and foster sustainable development. While the EFA Goals sought to ensure inclusive and quality education for all individuals, the MDGs focused on achieving universal primary education within a specific timeframe (UNESCO, 2015). The SDGs build upon these efforts by encompassing a broader range of education targets and emphasizing the role of education in sustainable development. These goals provide a roadmap for countries to advance educational opportunities, reduce disparities and create a more equitable, and sustainable future.

Despite the increased global attention and implementation of various policy interventions, the goal of providing universal access to quality, and relevant education remains unfulfilled. This is evident as millions of children worldwide continue to be out of school and many of those who do complete primary education lack basic numeracy and literacy skills (Uwezo, 2017; USAID, 2018; ASER, 2019). The situation is not limited to specific regions, as there are alarming results globally. In the East Asia and Pacific region, around 60 percent of learners are enrolled in dysfunctional education systems (World Bank Group, 2018). In India, it demonstrated that more than half of the children are unable to read and comprehend a simple

text by the age of 10, according to the 2018 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2019). Recent research on out-of-school children predicts that by 2030, one in every six children will still be out of primary and secondary schools, and only six out of ten children will finish secondary education (UNESCO, 2019).

Regionally, the governments of Anglophone West African nations such as Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Gambia have collaborated with local and international partners to develop numerous policies aligned with global targets to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4). However, the objective of attaining quality and accessible education remains significantly challenged (EU, 2020). Independent research conducted thus far indicates both remarkable achievements and challenges across various SDG-4 indicators, with some being common to all countries in the region while others are specific to individual countries. For instance, findings reveal that Ghana allocates a higher proportion of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to education (6.16%) but achieves lower outcomes compared to top-performing countries (Kwadwo & Konadu, 2019). On the other hand, in Nigeria, the national completion rates for primary and secondary levels stand at 55.1 percent and 39.4 percent, respectively, with over 10.2 million children still out of school (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022).

There are significant regional disparities in educational outcomes within Nigeria, with South Western children displaying better reading performance compared to their counterparts in North Eastern Nigeria (United Nations [UN], 2020). Similarly, in Sierra Leone, despite the country allocating a substantial portion of its GDP (7.1%) to education and implementing Free and Compulsory Education for children (UNESCO, 2016), the results have not been promising. Challenges such as high drop-out rates and the affordability of quality education pose major obstacles to achieving educational policy goals in Sierra Leone (Government of Sierra Leone, 2018). In Liberia, unlike other countries in the region, the

number of private schools exceeds that of public schools creating significant barriers to access due to high tuition fees (Ministry of Education, 2020). To make progress towards global, regional, and national policy targets, each country must identify the specific drawbacks they face and establish key educational milestones through evidence-based research.

In order to attain the global, regional, and national policy targets related to education, it is crucial for each country to identify the specific challenges and obstacles they face. This requires conducting evidence-based research to determine key educational milestones. Countries can develop targeted policy interventions that are tailored to their unique circumstances by obtaining empirical confirmation through research for valuable support and guidance.

Hence, the presence of this evidence indicates the existence of disparities in various areas and on various scales. To address these discrepancies effectively, it is crucial to conduct thorough comparative analysis and research aiming to identify viable solutions. While these gaps persist, the potential of education to enhance community well-being by reducing poverty, improving health outcomes, and fostering socioeconomic progress and development remains uncertain and global policies continue to lack effectiveness.

The investigation of disparities within educational systems can be approached through a systems theory framework which involves examining the value chain analysis encompassing inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes, and impact (European Commission, 2011). However, the majority of the studies analyzed primarily focused on two key aspects of policy management: Input and Outcome. From a systems perspective, inputs refer to the resources that contribute to the achievement of a program, project, or policy's objectives including funds, human resources, time, equipment, buildings, and others. Outputs on the other hand, represent measurable policy results that are intended to lead to outcomes such as the number of schools constructed, the number of teachers trained, and the number of students completing secondary

school.

The outcomes encompass the particular aspects of people's well-being and advancement that are anticipated to be influenced by the outputs such as increased literacy, improved livelihoods, reduced unemployment, social harmony, and overall societal well-being. In simpler terms, the outputs alone are insufficient until the specific well-being of individuals is attained. Another perspective offered by UNESCO (2013) presents a distinct framework for identifying gaps in the input-outcome relationship of educational policies across all countries. This approach emphasizes the examination of national visions and aspirations outlined in constitutions and legislation, as well as national educational policies, strategies, plans, and commitments to international education objectives.

The outcomes encompass the particular aspects of people's well-being and advancement that are anticipated to be influenced by the outputs such as increased literacy, improved livelihoods, reduced unemployment, social harmony, and overall societal well-being. In simple terms, the outputs alone are insufficient until the specific well-being of individuals is attained. Another perspective offered by UNESCO (2013) presents a distinct framework for identifying gaps in the input-outcome relationship of educational policies across all countries. This approach emphasizes the examination of national visions and aspirations outlined in constitutions and legislation, as well as national educational policies, strategies, plans, and commitments to international educational objectives.

This could involve the endorsement of global development frameworks such as the MDGs from 2000-2015 and the SDGs from 2015 - 2030 (Ministry of Education, 2019; World Bank, 2020). These conventions outline educational objectives that the international community is expected to achieve within specific timeframes. Once these goals are ratified and incorporated into national policies, they offer a potential framework for assessing both the inputs of educational policies and their corresponding outcomes.



In a related vein, Kaseorg (2017) proposes that the management system of educational policies can be examined by employing the production function theory, conflict theory, and functionalism theory. The production function theory views educational policy as a means of generating specific benefits within the community through the utilization of inputs, employing particular educational processes, and producing outputs that yield desired outcomes. The functionality theory identifies two types of benefits resulting from educational policy as manifest effects and latent effects. Manifest effects pertain to the direct impact created by the educational policy which can be observed over time. This includes factors such as enrollment numbers, attendance rates, completion rates at designated educational levels, grade scores, knowledge transmission to subsequent generations, innovation of new products, and the direct resolution of societal problems.

In contrast, latent benefits refer to those that are not immediately identifiable but can be observed through their outputs. For instance, while primary education may not yield immediate direct advantages for society, changes in literacy and numeracy levels can be observed. These changes enable policymakers to assess the outputs and outcomes generated by the inputs into the educational system and identify any gaps between the inputs and actual results. On the otherhand, the conflict theory examines how education policies serve as a means to perpetuate class systems.

The objective of this research, in accordance with the ideas put forth by Kaseorg (2017), the Ministry of Education (2019), and the World Bank (2020), is to examine the policy management cycle of Liberia in relation to the inputs and outcomes of selected policies across Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary, Higher, and Technical Education levels. To narrow down the key variables in this study, the researcher divided the policy cycle into input and outcome stages. The input stage includes analysis and formulation while the outcome stage comprises implementation and evaluation. The study assumes a connection between the inputs

of educational policies and their resulting outcomes. It is important to note that educational policies are considered as part of the institutional mechanisms studied within the cycle and are not treated as a variable in themselves. This distinction is crucial to clarify as different tiers of the educational system may have specific types of policies that require distinct analysis, formulation, implementation, and evaluation approaches.

The researcher sought to identify best practices in the policy management cycle specifically focusing on what constitutes effective analysis and formulation as well as the necessary indicators for implementation and evaluation. Armed with this information, the researcher selected a sample of 25 policies (5 from each educational tier) to examine the existing gaps in the input and outcome aspects of Liberia's educational policies. The goal was to propose strategies for addressing these gaps in the management process of educational policies. Upon reviewing the selected policies, the researcher took note of the commitments outlined in these policies, such as increasing girls' enrollment, teacher training, and school construction. To assess the progress made in fulfilling these commitments, the researcher consulted available evaluation reports generated by practitioners such as the Education Management Information System (EMIS), UNICEF, and USAID.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the gaps in input and outcome within Liberia's educational policy management process. The study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how policies are initiated and implemented throughout the policy management cycle with a specific focus on examining the perspectives of education stakeholders regarding past and current policies and practices in the field of education. The objective was to document the opinions of participants regarding the performance of key policy indicators across different subsector levels.

Numerous researchers in the field of education policy reform have highlighted various factors contributing to poor policy outcomes including the exclusion of stakeholders,

insufficient allocation of resources, unreliable data, limited political will, inadequate capacity and technical expertise, ineffective monitoring and assessment, and centralized governance (Sanderson, 2002; Berry & Adamson, 2011; European Union [EU], 2020). Building upon these points, other researchers such as Ascher (2017) have argued that undesirable policy outcomes stem from gaps arising due to a lack of direction and a clear understanding among stakeholders involved in the policy process. While these factors are acknowledged, the question remains why there has been a slow response from educational policies and actors in addressing these gaps.

It remains a perplexing question as to why educational policies in Liberia continue to fall short of achieving their desired outcomes. Is it possible that there are other undiscovered factors that contribute to the persistent presence of gaps between policy inputs and outcomes in the educational system? Could it be that the factors identified by current researchers are the result rather than the cause of poor policy outcomes? These initial inquiries form the foundation for this epistemological exploration.

By delving into relevant literature related to key research terms, the researcher began to uncover patterns and trends that were associated with specific theories and theoretical frameworks, shaping the perspective through which this research was conducted. Additionally, while reviewing policy documents, several themes emerged which were classified as the primary focal points of educational policies across different subsystem levels.

Numerous scholars specializing in education policy reform have identified several factors that contribute to poor policy outcomes including the exclusion of stakeholders, insufficient allocation of resources, unreliable data, lack of political will, limited capacity and technical expertise, inadequate monitoring and assessment, and centralized governance (Sanderson, 2002; Berry & Adamson, 2011; European Union [EU], 2020). In line with these arguments, other researchers such as Ascher (2017) have suggested that undesired policy outcomes stem from gaps resulting from a lack of direction and a clear understanding among

stakeholders involved in the policy process. Despite the awareness of these factors, the question remains as to why the response from educational policies and actors in addressing these gaps has been sluggish. It remains a puzzle as to why educational policies in Liberia continue to fall short of achieving their desired outcomes.

Are there yet undiscovered factors that contribute to the persistent presence of gaps between policy inputs and outcomes in the educational system? Is it possible that the factors identified by current researchers are the result rather than the cause of poor policy outcomes in education? These initial questions provide the foundation for this epistemological exploration. By examining literature related to key research terms, the researcher began to identify patterns and trends that were associated with specific theories and theoretical frameworks shaping the perspective through which this research was conducted. Additionally, while reviewing policy documents, several themes emerged that were classified as the primary focal points of educational policies across different subsystem levels.

The researcher noted that gaps in the educational policy management existed throughout the various levels of the educational system and value chain of education policymaking. It was also assumed that a cause – effect relationship could exist between the inputs and outcomes of the educational policy in any country which calls for future scientific exploration.

The researcher observed that there were deficiencies in the management of educational policies at different levels of the education system and in the process of formulating educational policies. It was also assumed that there could be a cause-and-effect relationship between the inputs and outcomes of educational policies in any country which suggests the need for future scientific investigation. Similar to other sectors, Liberia's education sector suffered greatly due to a prolonged armed conflict that lasted for more than fourteen years. However, the policies implemented after the war were primarily aimed at transitioning the country from

an emergency situation to a rehabilitation phase rather than establishing a sustainable long-term development agenda. In essence, policymakers focused on restoring the country's educational status to its pre-war condition at best.

This appears to have been a significant error as education had progressed in neighboring countries despite the ongoing 14-year civil war in Liberia. This suggests that policymakers in more stable countries were looking ahead and embracing forward-thinking approaches while policymakers in Liberia were fixated on returning to the pre-war era reflecting a backward mindset. Consequently, there was a lack of innovative ideas to propel the country's education sector to the level achieved by other countries in the region. Instead of striving to catch up with the progress made by neighboring countries over time, policymakers in Liberia focused on compensating for what was missed during the war period.

In Liberia, there is an ongoing process of gradually reforming the education system to cater to the needs of learners. As part of the government's educational reform agenda and in accordance with Chapter 2 Article 6 of the Liberian 1986 Constitution which mandates the Republic to take sole responsibility for the social, economic, and political well-being of all citizens by ensuring equal access to educational opportunities and facilities, the government has implemented several measures to rebuild the damaged education sector. These measures include the repeal of the Education Law of A.D. 2001 which was approved on January 8, 2002 and the establishment of a new Education Reform Act in 2011, found in Title 10 of the Liberian Code of Laws revised which was approved on August 8, 2011. The Education Reform Act serves as the primary legal framework for the education system. However, it primarily addresses routine or ordinary matters and does not fully encompass the comprehensive changes necessary for a complete educational transformation. The objectives are as follows:

1. Ensure that high-quality education is provided to all citizens of Liberia at every level of the education system.

2. Promote equal access to educational opportunities for all Liberians, regardless of anyform of discrimination.
3. Foster and maintain public trust in the educational system.
4. Implement a decentralized educational system to maximize its impact throughout theentire country.
5. Advocate for and uphold the principles of human rights in relation to access and opportunities for quality education for all Liberians.
6. Reduce the prevalence and level of illiteracy in the nation.
7. Promote gender equity and equality within the educational system and equal access to education.
8. Develop responsible citizens equipped with the necessary skills to contribute to thereconstruction and development of the country.
9. Ensure effective governance and management of the education sector in line with thenational educational philosophy and goals.

The initial reforms in 2001 failed to address the gaps and neglected to incorporate 21st-century methods for ensuring improved access to quality and relevant education. This issue warrants further investigation. Subsequently, when the second round of reforms began in 2011, it became evident that the government's promised comprehensive and inclusive approach was lacking. In 2013, the University of Liberia reported that 25,000 high school students who took the entrance and placement exam did not pass. According to the West African Examination Council (WAEC), those who failed in 2016 accounted for almost half (48.46%) of the total number of students who took the exam. A similar situation of widespread failure was observed in 2018 where out of a total of 10,837 students who took the University of Liberia's entrance examination, only 1,901 met the minimum passing criteria for undergraduate studies.

These observations highlight deficiencies in the educational system that result in

the production of graduates with inadequate cognitive abilities to meet the demands of higher education and intellectual pursuits. Additionally, a significant number of schools in the country are privately owned and operated by religious organizations such as the Catholic, Methodist, Episcopal, and a few other churches. These schools are recognized for providing high-quality education but they are inaccessible to the majority of the population, particularly the economically disadvantaged who make up approximately 50.6 percent of the population (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Possibly, this could explain the disparities in the duration of schooling between children from affluent backgrounds who typically spend an average of 10.4 years in school and children from poor backgrounds who only spend about 4.8 years. Furthermore, it could account for the relatively low literacy rates in the country which stood at 48.30 percent in comparison to the rest of Africa, where the literacy rate was approximately 70 percent as of 2017. It is worth noting that the education system in Liberia particularly in public schools faces significant challenges. These challenges have been attributed to insufficient supervision and a lack of adequate teaching materials (Ministry of Education, 2017; UNESCO, 2022). For instance, there is a high learner-to-textbook ratio with six learners sharing a language textbook in primary schools and seven learners sharing a textbook in secondary education. Additionally, eight learners share a mathematics textbook whereas the ideal ratio should be one learner per textbook.

It is also observed that a significant number of students fail to achieve their learning objectives. At the primary level, despite a gross enrollment rate of 94 percent, only about 43 percent of students transition to junior secondary education while approximately 48 percent do not complete primary education. This situation combined with the disparity in the amount of time spent in school by students from affluent backgrounds, contributes to socioeconomic inequality which has serious implications for educational outcomes in the medium and long

term. Additionally, there are several other challenges identified including inadequate budgetary support as the country allocates around 13.8 percent of the per capita GDP to education instead of the recommended 20 percent for countries striving to achieve SDG-4. In comparison, Liberia has the third lowest per capita expenditure at the primary level, at 8.3 percent, and at the secondary level, at 20.7 percent (UNESCO, 2022). Furthermore, there are weaknesses in the systems and structures that hinder the effective delivery of education services, insufficient human and logistical capacities, the large number of out-of-school children and young people and the insufficient involvement of parents and communities (Ministry of Education, 2016).

From the foregoing data, the country could lag behind realization of SDG-4 despite thereform efforts to catapult the sector to where it is planned to be by 2030 when the SDGs come to an end. Research conducted so far largely reveals both country-specific and generic drawbacks in policy management. For example, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2015) reported that the primary enrollment ratio did not improve in Liberia during the period 1995-2011 as compared to Cape Verde which maintained its net primary enrolment rate above 90 percent within the same period.

This paper presents a comprehensive and inclusive approach that encompasses all levels of the education system. It utilizes a global or thematic framework along with established theories and practices, to identify gaps and determine the most effective allocation of educational resources. The findings of this study will offer empirical evidence and serve as a platform for policymakers to derive valuable insights for establishing and maintaining an effective educational policy system in the country. By identifying existing gaps and providing recommendations for addressing them, policymakers and implementers will be able to accelerate progress towards achieving the targets set by SDG-4 before the year 2030. This will contribute to enhancing the overall policy management process and facilitate the improvement of education policies in the country.



## Statement of the Problem

The assessment of Liberia's educational policies reveals that they are developed with global targets in mind. This is evident from the alignment of national goals and aspirations outlined in the constitution, legislation, educational policies, strategies, and plans, with international education objectives, as recommended by UNESCO in 2013. Despite these commitments and efforts which have led to the country's adoption of international conventions such as the MDGs from 2000 to 2015 and the SDGs (Ministry of Education, 2019; World Bank, 2020), Liberia continues to fall far behind its global and regional counterparts.

In Liberia, a significant portion of schools are privately owned which poses a challenge for the poor population who make up approximately 50.6 percent of the country's population (Ministry of Education, 2017). Liberia's per capita expenditure on education at the primary level is among the lowest in the world with only 8.3 percent of the country's resources allocated to education (UNESCO, 2022). This limited financial investment severely hampers the education system's ability to provide adequate resources, infrastructure, qualified teachers, and learning materials. Insufficient funding negatively impacts the quality of education and limits opportunities for educational advancement for Liberian children.

Liberia faces the challenge of a significant number of out-of-school children and young people. This means that a considerable portion of the population is not receiving any formal education or access to learning opportunities. The reasons for this can be multifaceted including financial constraints, lack of infrastructure, and cultural factors. Additionally, the involvement of parents and communities in supporting and promoting education is insufficient. Without active engagement from parents, guardians, and communities, children may not receive the necessary support and encouragement to pursue education (UNESCO, 2022).

When examining the gaps and challenges in Liberia's education system, existing literature often points to two main factors. Firstly, policy management issues are identified as

a significant contributing factor. This includes ineffective policy implementation, inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and lack of coordination among relevant stakeholders. Secondly, external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and past conflicts and wars have also had a detrimental impact on the education system. These factors disrupt educational continuity, damage infrastructure, displace populations, and divert resources away from education.

Despite the acknowledgment of policy management issues and external challenges in Liberia's education system, there is a lack of comprehensive research and scholarly literature that articulates the specific input-output gaps in the country's education system. These gaps refer to the disparities between the resources invested in education (inputs) and the desired educational outcomes (outputs). The absence of detailed analysis and evidence-based research on these gaps limits the formulation of effective policies and strategies to address the root causes and improve educational outcomes in Liberia.

According to a recent report from the Liberia Educational Policy & Data Centre (2018), educational achievement in the country falls below expectations. The report highlights several concerning statistics: 25 percent of school-age girls and 20 percent of boys are out of school while 11 percent of youth in Liberia have no formal education. The enrollment rate is below the target of 100 percent and the primary education completion rate stands at approximately 59 percent. The repetition rate indicating the percentage of students repeating grades, is 6.7 percent, slightly higher than the global average of 6.1 percent.

However, despite the implementation of reforms and the apparent commitment of the government to support the education sector in achieving its development targets according to national and international benchmarks, there are still significant gaps in educational achievement. Liberia is ranked as the worst country in terms of access to primary education, as reported by UNICEF in 2016. Additionally, although there is a Teachers Code of Conduct in

place since 2014, outlining the eligibility criteria for teachers in the country, the government revealed in 2018 that over 6,000 classrooms lacked qualified teachers. Many researchers and stakeholders attribute these gaps to the historical marginalization of indigenous people, the prolonged civil unrest spanning fourteen years, the Ebola epidemic, and other factors, as discussed in studies by Menashy and Dryden (2015), USAID (2019), the Ministry of Education (2018), and UNICEF (n.d.).

The existing challenges in the education sector in Liberia have the potential to hinder the country's progress in achieving SDG-4 which focuses on creating human capital, improving wellbeing through higher literacy rates, and enhancing socio-economic outcomes. To address this, policymakers, implementers, and academia need to recognize and understand the current educational crisis, particularly the gaps between inputs and outcomes, and develop evidence-based strategies. Studies indicate significant gaps in the education system of Liberia as highlighted by Dopoe (2018), USAID (2018), the Ministry of Education (2019), and the WorldBank (2020). Over the past decade, reports of input-outcome gaps in education policies in developing countries have prompted aid agencies, multilateral and bilateral partners, and the Local Education Group (LEG) to emphasize the importance of evidence-based research to identify effective solutions.

Many researchers in the field of educational policy reform have noted that factors such as exclusion of stakeholders, inadequate allocation of resources, lack of reliable data, absence of political will, limited capacity and technical expertise, insufficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and centralized governance contribute to poor policy outcomes (Sanderson, 2002; Berry & Adamson, 2011; EU, 2020). Ascher (2017) also argues that gaps in policy outcomes arise from a lack of guidance and understanding of policymaking among stakeholders who may not possess the necessary knowledge. Regardless of the specific reasons, evidence consistently demonstrates that educational policies in Liberia and other West African

countries are not producing the desired outcomes.

This study takes into account the perspectives and experiences of stakeholders actively involved in the operation of the education system to examine the persistent leakages within it. The research also recognizes the impact of the external environment on the education system. As a result, the use of theoretical benchmarks in this study aims to uncover the reasons behind the formulation and implementation of policies that have not met the expectations of experts. The ultimate goal of this study is to provide evidence-based policy information that can address the identified gaps and contribute to improved outcomes in the education sector.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to delve into the educational policy cycle of Liberia specifically examining its input and outcome. The nature of the topic necessitated the use of a Mixed Methods Design in the form of a Case Study which allowed for an in-depth investigation of the policy circle within the education system. In order to ensure the credibility and reliability of the study, rigorous validation processes were employed for data sources, collection methods, and instruments.

The primary aim of this study was to provide valuable insights and information to policymakers and educators enabling them to develop a deeper understanding of Liberia's education system. By comprehensively examining the policy management cycle, the study aimed to identify specific areas within the cycle where additional resources and attention are required to accelerate educational achievement.

Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study aimed to gather a wide range of data including interviews, surveys, observations, and document analysis. By employing mixed methods, researchers were able to capture both the rich contextual details and the statistical trends related to the educational policy cycle in Liberia.

The findings of this study are intended to serve as a foundation for evidence-based

decision-making in education policy. By identifying gaps, challenges, and opportunities within the policy cycle, policymakers and educators can make informed decisions and allocate resources effectively. Ultimately, the study aimed to contribute to the improvement of education outcomes in Liberia by providing actionable recommendations based on a comprehensive understanding of the education system's strengths and weaknesses.

To be able to achieve the study purpose, a clear understanding was required of the gaps in the policy circle which include:

1. Policy Analysis: Gaps in policy analysis refer to shortcomings or inadequacies in the process of examining and assessing policy options and their potential impacts. Some common gaps in policy analysis include:

- Lack of comprehensive and rigorous data: Insufficient or incomplete data can hinder the accuracy and effectiveness of policy analysis. Without robust data, policymakers may struggle to understand the problem at hand, identify potential solutions, and predict the likely outcomes of different policy options.
- Limited stakeholder involvement: Failure to involve relevant stakeholders, such as experts, affected communities, or advocacy groups, in the policy analysis process can lead to incomplete or biased assessments. Engaging diverse perspectives and experiences is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the policy issue.
- Inadequate consideration of alternative options: Narrowly focusing on a single policy option or failing to explore a range of alternatives can limit the effectiveness of policy analysis. Considering multiple options allows for a more thorough evaluation of potential benefits, risks, and trade-offs.

2. Policy Formulation: Gaps in policy formulation arise when there are deficiencies in the process of designing and developing policies. Some common gaps in policy formulation include:

- Lack of evidence-based decision-making: Policies formulated without a solid foundation of evidence and research may be ineffective or fail to address the underlying issues adequately. Relying on anecdotal evidence or personal beliefs rather than rigorous analysis can result in policies that do not achieve their intended objectives.
  - Insufficient stakeholder engagement: Policy formulation processes that do not involve key stakeholders can lead to policies that do not reflect the needs and perspectives of those affected. Collaboration and consultation with relevant stakeholders including experts, community representatives, and advocacy groups, can help ensure that policies are well-informed and inclusive.
  - Inadequate consideration of implementation challenges: Policies formulated without a thorough assessment of potential implementation challenges may encounter significant obstacles during the execution phase. Failing to anticipate logistical, financial, or administrative constraints can hinder policy effectiveness.
3. Policy Implementation: Gaps in policy implementation refer to shortcomings in the process of putting policies into action. Some common gaps in policy implementation include:
- Lack of resources: Insufficient funding, personnel, infrastructure, or capacity can impede the effective implementation of policies. Without adequate resources, policymakers may struggle to execute their plans, resulting in delays, incomplete implementation, or compromised outcomes.
  - Weak coordination and collaboration: Ineffective coordination among different implementing agencies or stakeholders can lead to fragmented or inconsistent implementation efforts. Clear communication, collaboration, and coordination mechanisms are essential for ensuring smooth policy implementation.

- Limited monitoring and accountability: Inadequate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating policy implementation can hinder effective oversight and accountability.

Without robust monitoring systems in place, it becomes challenging to identify and address implementation gaps or adjust strategies as needed.

4. Policy Evaluation: Gaps in policy evaluation arise when there are deficiencies in assessing the effectiveness and impact of policies. Some common gaps in policy evaluation include:

- Lack of clear evaluation criteria and indicators: Without well-defined criteria and indicators, it becomes difficult to measure and assess policy outcomes accurately. Establishing clear evaluation frameworks and metrics from the outset is crucial for effective policy evaluation.

- Insufficient data collection and analysis: Inadequate data collection methods or limited analytical capabilities can compromise the rigor and reliability of policy evaluations. Comprehensive data collection including both qualitative and quantitative approaches, is essential for robust evaluation. Limited utilization of the evaluation findings.

In summary, the study sought to explore the educational policy cycle in Liberia through a mixed methods case study approach. Its main objective was to provide policymakers and educators with a deeper understanding of the country's education system and to identify specific areas within the policy management cycle that require additional resources and attention to enhance educational outcomes.

In addition to the above gaps, the following gaps associated with the implementation stage continue to be highlighted in the Ministry of Education and stakeholder reports as responsible for policy failure in Liberia:

- i. Highly Centralized Governance System: highly centralized system of governance in

Liberia has and continues to impede not only popular participation and local initiative but also the provision of public goods, and services. This has contributed to the need for greater accountability and transparency in the management of public affairs. However, based on the centralized governance system, the Ministry of Education of Liberia refused to devolve power to the established county local structures. This seems to be one of the major factors that continue to undermine the progress of policies thus leading to a gap in economic growth and development, equal access to quality education, social and economic opportunities, and human wellbeing between Monrovia and the rest of Liberia.

- ii. **Massive Corruption:** Corruption in education can take many forms: bribes paid by parents to teachers to ensure good grades and examination results; bribes paid by teachers to public officials to get preferred posting, and promotion; and embezzlement of funds allocated to purchase teaching materials or to build schools. Corruption in the education sector can also mean bypassing of criteria in the approval of school establishment and accreditation, cronyism and nepotism in procurement and teacher appointment, resulting in "ghost teachers". Corruption in the education sector of Liberia remains one of the major factors which continue to undermine the implementation of the education policy. As the policy seeks to ensure the provision of quality education to all citizens of Liberia, corruption is that cankerworm that is eating up the sector, and compromising the very spirit of the policy.
- iii. **Inadequate Educational and Learning Materials:** The lack of educational or learning materials is another problem that engulfs the sector. In this 21st century, it may interest you to note that schools are built without laboratory thus leading to poor or dismal performance of our already struggling students in the sciences. For example, barely three years after the passage of this policy; in 2014 over 2000 students in Liberia sat



the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) with no one making a pass mark. This is not a sign of progress.

- iv. **Lack of Proper Management of Existing Schools:** A large number of unqualified persons were recruited in the service especially in the school system largely on the basis of allegiance to the various warring factions that participated in the armed conflicts. As a result of this, the schools mainly in the rural part of the country are not properly managed, because those managing them lack Knowledge, Skills and Ability (KSA) to efficiently and effectively execute their duties.
- v. **Fourteen years of conflict has destroyed the Civil Service.** The modicum of a merit-based, civil service system prevailing in Liberia has been ruined. During the war, civil service standards, policies, and procedures were ignored. Liberians acquiesced to this situation as a trade-off between conflict and peace. But even before the conflicts, the service had begun to deteriorate on account of recruitment, placement, and promotion being based on ethnicity, partisanship, and social contacts. The conflicts only worsened the situation.
- vi. **Low Incentives for Teachers and Education Workers:** Despite the cardinal role teachers' play in every society, they remain the low paid public servants in Liberia. To become a teacher in Liberia means you choose to die poor. This unacceptable practice continues to make trained and qualified teachers to leave the sector in search of well-paid jobs at the detriment of the education of the future generation.
- vii. **Limited Public Schools:** The limitation of public schools in the country and the increasing rate of school going children, do not only undermine government policy on free and compulsory primary education but also lead to the overcrowding of classrooms. Insufficient schools, limits the access to education. This infringes on their right to quality education more especially, the girl child, and persons with disabilities.

Well-structured schools are the heart of any educational system. No meaningful curriculum planning is complete without implementation and evaluation; these can only be gotten from well-structured public schools. Therefore, if these public schools are limited, the human and material resources are directly or indirectly affected.

- viii. **Inadequate Human and Material Resources:** The 14-year long civil war destroyed educational system – infrastructure destroyed, basic supplies for service delivery stopped flowing and most skilled professionals fled to neighboring countries or to the United States; population was not able to produce industry personnel to ensure future sustainability of the human capital stock system (ESP, 2010). Where a government is unable to effectively carry out its own policies due to weak human resource capacity and inadequate material availability, the consequences may be very damaging, and costly to society. Insufficient numbers of well trained, qualified, and motivated teachers, understaffed and over-crowded public institutions, and poor quality programs being offered at some institutions of higher learning are all results or consequences of inadequate human and material resources.
- ix. **Weak Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) System:** Monitoring and evaluation is another important stage in the policy process that is not considered in Liberia's education sector. The lack of an effective and efficient M&E system in place due to inadequate logistics and human resources led to schools engaging in activities that contravene the principle of the policy.
- x. **Inadequate funding:** Education in Liberia is funded by the government, households, and donors. The global economic crisis has caused a steep decline in actual and projected national revenue. Government resources are further constrained by low levels of tax payments by individuals and businesses thus making it difficult for the government to implement some policies that would be beneficial to the educational

sector.

Although the above gaps are suggested by various reports (Menashy & Dryden 2015, Ministry of Education, 2018; USAID, 2019;) as being evident in the policy management circle, much of the focus is on primary, and junior secondary education. It, therefore, remains unclear whether they actually exist across all levels of education in the country.

## **Nature and Significance of the Study**

The nature the research study was adopted the Exploratory Sequential Design (Harvard College, 2023). It is a mixed-methods approach which combines qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. In this design, qualitative data is collected first and build up to the quantitative approach. Here's an expansion on each step of the process:

Qualitative Data Collection and Enumerative Content Analysis:

In this step, the researcher conducted qualitative data collection through document review. The documents reviewed included reports, academic papers and policy documents. A total of 25 policy documents, some specifically addressing issues related to specific sub-sectors, were respectively reviewed. As review was ongoing, the researcher was also looking out for other theoretical indicators, prescribed by literature on the policy management process including evidence of whether:

- Policies are based on scientific theories, program management experience and political will (Head, 2008).
- Policies following the traditional order were intentional and led to action and then to outcome (Hupe & Hill, 2016).
- Policies are unpredictable, non-linear, and adaptable (Braithwaite et al., 2018).

In this regard, the researcher reviewed issues related to the following:

- i. Major stakeholders influencing the initiation of the policy process including

academics/researchers, practitioners/technicians and politicians/political will.

- ii. The circumstances leading to policy formulation (like political manifestos, needs assessment reports, research findings, donor/international demands, new global trend analyses or citizens/stakeholders demand).
- iii. The budgetary commitments made by stakeholders to implement the policy adopted.

During the document review, enumerative content analysis to derive codes (Grbich, 2013). Enumerative content analysis involves systematically identifying and categorizing specific elements within the documents. This is also referred to as thematic analysis (Stirling, 2001). During review, the researcher identified sections or statements that relate to access, quality, and relevance of education and assigned codes to them. For example: - Access: Codes related to access was assigned to statements discussing enrollment rates, educational facilities, geographical barriers, or financial constraints. - Quality: Codes related to quality was assigned to statements discussing curriculum standards, teacher qualifications, learning outcomes, or assessment methods. - Relevance: Codes related to relevance was assigned to statements discussing the alignment of education with societal needs, vocational training, or the inclusion of cultural perspectives. Content analysis and corresponding theoretical assumptions aided the crafting of questionnaires and interview questions Quantitative Data Collection and Frequency/Descriptive Analysis.

After the qualitative data collection and analysis, the researcher proceeded with quantitative data collection using questionnaires. A total of 122 participants completed these surveys. The questionnaires contained structured questions with predefined response options. For the analysis of the questionnaire data, the researcher employed frequency analysis and descriptive analysis techniques. Frequency analysis involves calculating the number or percentage of participants who selected each response option for each question. It helps to identify patterns and trends in the data. Descriptive analysis, on the other hand, focuses on

summarizing and describing the main characteristics of the collected data, such as calculating means, standard deviations, or creating charts and graphs to present the findings.

#### Qualitative Data Collection and Thematic analysis:

In this step, the researcher conducted qualitative data collection using interviews with 10 key informants. The purpose of these interviews was to gather data specifically related to policy interventions for accelerating Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) related to education. The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed responses from the informants regarding policy interventions (McNamara, 1999). After conducting the interviews, the researcher analyzed the data using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data. It helps to uncover common ideas, perspectives, or experiences shared by the interviewees. By conducting vivo analysis, the researcher aimed to gain insights into policy interventions that can contribute to the achievement of SDG goals in education.

#### Integration of Results:

The final step of the research study was the integration of results. This involves combining the findings from the qualitative content analysis, quantitative analysis, and interview analysis. By integrating these results, the researcher aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, explore relationships between different variables, and draw meaningful conclusions. This synthesis of findings allowed the researcher to address the research objectives and contribute to the existing knowledge in the field of education and policy interventions for SDG goals.

The research study utilized convenience sampling for selecting participants for the questionnaires. Convenience sampling involves selecting individuals who are easily accessible and willing to participate at the time the information is needed (Singh, 2007). In this case, the questionnaires were administered to individuals involved in implementing educational policies,

such as members of civil society organizations, interest groups, heads of tertiary institutions and heads of K-12 schools. This sampling method was chosen to ensure that the researcher could gather data from available and willing participants, even if reaching remote stakeholders in the education sector was challenging. Despite not being a random sampling method, convenience sampling aimed to select accessible samples that can provide representative insights for a specific region.

For the interviews, the research study employed expert sampling. Expert sampling involves deliberately selecting individuals who possess knowledge and expertise in a particular area of research. In this case, the researcher selected participants who demonstrated expertise and capacity relevant to the research topic. Expert sampling allows for in-depth insights and perspectives from individuals who can provide valuable information based on their experience and knowledge in the field.

Overall, the research study employed convenience sampling for the questionnaires to select readily available participants involved in educational policy implementation while expert sampling was employed for the interviews to select individuals with specific expertise and knowledge in the research area.

The researcher noticed that many of these literatures discussing Liberia education lacked a theoretical foundation for diagnosing the gaps and did not provide information on the specific stages within the policy management cycle where these gaps were more apparent. Additionally, the literatures did not elaborate on how these gaps systematically affected outcomes at different levels within the education sub-sector. Recognizing the importance of theories in providing a clearer understanding of research problems, the researcher understood that utilizing theories would be beneficial in diagnosing the causes of input-outcome gaps in education (Cheng, Cheng, & Tang, 2010). By employing theoretical frameworks, researchers can gain insights into the underlying factors contributing to these gaps and identify appropriate

remedies based on best practices.

In response to this gap in the literature, the researcher chose to employ a systematic, theoretical, and comparative approach in exploring the educational policy management process in Liberia. This approach involved systematically examining the policy management cycle, applying relevant theoretical perspectives to analyze the causes of gaps and making comparisons to similar contexts or interventions that have proven successful in addressing such gaps.

By utilizing through systematic, theoretical, and comparative evidence-based approach, the researcher aimed to provide a more comprehensive and insightful analysis of the educational policy management process in Liberia. This approach would contribute to a better understanding of the causes of input-outcome gaps, facilitate the identification of effective remedies, and promote evidence-based decision-making and best practices in the education sector.

## **Research Questions**

The research aimed to identify potential gaps in the analysis, formulation, implementation, and evaluation of educational policies in Liberia. The research questions provided a framework for generating thematic codes based on the analysis of documents. The first research question focused on the contextual description of the existing situation. It was important to establish the presence of problems, as the absence of prior research on a specific topic does not justify the necessity of conducting research.

To address this, the study sought to demonstrate that certain problems exist despite the existence of numerous educational policies, statutes, and laws in Liberia. This was accomplished through an extensive review of documents and literature. Various articles, reports, and scholarly peer-reviewed papers were utilized to establish the fact that the resources

and efforts invested in education policy management in Liberia have not met experts' expectations. The intention was to provide evidence supporting the presence of these issues and emphasizing the need for further research.

In this regard, the following questions were answered:

**Q1.** What gaps are there in the analysis, formulation, implementation, and evaluation of educational policies in Liberia and which factors are responsible for their existence?

**Q2.** What factors have contributed to access, quality, and relevance gaps in the educational policies of Liberia and what are their effects on the pace of growth in the sector including the achievement of the SDG-4 goals?

**Q3.** Which policy interventions could be most effective to improve the policy management process so as to accelerate the achievement of the SDG-4 goals in Liberia?



## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

The desk review conducted a comparative educational analysis of inputs and outcomes in literature for different educational systems. It aimed to understand how actors at different levels of the system should interact during the policy process to produce accessible, quality, and relevant education for citizens. To gather relevant information, over 200 articles, reports, and policy documents were initially retrieved from sources like Proquest and Google Scholar. Only documents published after 2010 or specifically addressing the keywords and themes outlined in the research title were considered. The paper prioritized selecting research based on the conceptual framework of the dissertation and research based on gap analysis.

In addition to scholarly articles, efforts were made to review unpublished policy documents and reports related to Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Education. The goal was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current state of education systems and policies across various levels. In this procedure, policies were examined and emphasized to identify the intended inputs and outputs concerning access, quality, and relevance in Liberia's educational system. The literature review is structured thematically, aligning with the key themes outlined in the following sections and subsections. The review commenced with an overview of the industry, providing the purpose, historical perspective, and significance of the review. It also included the definition of keywords and themes, as well as the theoretical framework guiding the study.

Furthermore, the review encompassed an examination of the various levels of the educational system, specifically exploring the current state within each subsector. This analysis focused on both the potential opportunities and existing challenges associated with each level.

The review concluded by providing an overview of the concept of leadership that exists or should exist to promote improved learning outcomes. Additionally, it acknowledged the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which not only introduced new approaches to managing education worldwide but also hindered progress in various other areas of human interaction.

### **Industry Description and Purpose of the Review**

The Gaps in policy input and outcome have been a concern to many policy researchers for decades (Berry, & Adamson, 2011; Schumann, 2016; Ascher, 2017). The production functions, conflict theory, and functionalism are among several theories which have aided the conduct of gap analyses in different disciplines for improved productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness of systems. For example, Montgomery (2019) adopted this approach to help reduce the gaps in access to behavioral health services while Waage et al. (2013) embraced the approach to review areas in the existing literature which have not sufficiently linked agriculture to food security and nutrition. The use of these theories as lenses to study existing gaps revealed the best places to focus energy and resources in order to bridge the policy gaps that existed in the policy systems examined.

Whether adopted for uncovering fissures in policy interventions or for uncovering gaps in existing literature this approach to inquiry allowed the researchers to conduct a comparative study of past and present conditions of a system to discover prospects that could enhance the achievement of future goals or identify barriers hindering planned goals (Glasgow, 2012). Through the adoption of various gap analysis frameworks, the literature review conducts a keywords search on educational input, output, and outcome at various levels of the educational ladder (from Early Childhood Education to Higher Education) as it relates to access, relevance, and quality of educational interventions in different educational systems across space and time.

## Historical Perspective and Significance of Review

Presently, the education systems globally seem to be facing a crisis of failure to meet the expectations of the communities more especially, quality literacy and numeracy skills and development of appropriate human capital stock for the future while marinating the existing one from depreciation (Ascher, 2017). While countries have greatly expanded access to education, attending school is not the same as learning. Hundreds of millions of children around the world come into adulthood without the most basic skills - for example, not knowing how to correctly count change after a purchase, read doctor's instructions or understand bus schedules, not to mention building a successful career or educating their children. Whereas education is the foundation of human capital, the latest World Bank research shows that 56 percent of the world's children will be more than half as productive as they would be if they were fully educated and in perfect health (World Bank Group, 2018). Yet, when well organized, education – as well as the human capital it creates – benefits both people and society. Education increases the self-esteem of a citizen, expands employment, and income opportunities. Moreover, it helps the country to strengthen public institutions, ensures long- term economic growth, reduces poverty, stimulates innovation, leads to better healthcare outcomes, and social harmony.

While it is evident that the world has shown greater commitment to improving educational outcomes over the last four decades, many reports continue to show evidence of significant gaps in the inputs and outcomes of educational interventions especially, in the developing countries (Government of Sierra Leone, 2018; ASER, 2019; Kwadwo & Konadu, 2019; UNESCO, 2019; United Nations [UN], 2020). Meanwhile, UNESCO (2013) suggests a unique framework for uncovering gaps in the input-outcome analysis of educational policies across space and time. The key foci of the analyses is the national vision, aspirations prescribed in the constitution and legislation, national development policies, strategies, and plans; and commitments to international educational goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals

specifically, SDG-4.

Numerous scholars on education policy reform have pointed to the exclusion of stakeholders, limited allocation of resources, unreliable data, reduced political will, low capacity, and technical know-how, inadequate monitoring and assessment, and centralized governance as responsible for weak policy outcomes (Ascher 2017; Berry & Adamson, 2011; EU, 2020; Sanderson, 2002;). Accentuating this point, Koc and Fadlelmula (2016) also highlighted gaps related to stakeholders' satisfaction and involvement with policy reform in the education sector from the angle of the sectors inputs and outcomes.

Though several different methods and theories have been used by researchers in conducting systemic gap analysis (Balata, 2020; Shinde et al., 2015), there is no one-size-fits-all method. The authors of much of the literature related to gaps analysis in the educational system claimed that they were evaluating the "system". However, many fell short of Aristotle's approach to studying whole systems which envisage a holistic review of all the subsystems that constitute the education system in a given country. Aristotle pointed out that the epistemology of systems can be best understood from studying the whole and not that of the single parts. He defined a system as an entity whose comprehensive responsibility allows it to be identified by specific inputs, and outputs, dissimilar to external functions (Mele et al., 2010). This suggests that systems are composed of sub-systems with specific responsibilities necessary for the entire system to maintain its productivity – optimality. Although each subsystem is assumed to have its unique input and output indicators, the entire system is adjudged by such quality of outputs or outcomes it discharges to its external environment. Analogously, the subsystems constituting the Liberian education system include Early Childhood Education, primary education, secondary education, higher education and Technical and Vocational Education.

From the above perspectives, one of the main reasons that the learning crisis has not yet been overcome is that education systems in many developing countries lack concrete and

evidence based holistic information about the gaps in the value chain of education from input to output to outcome. This is occasioned by how the education sector is viewed by the stakeholders. Viewing it as a whole system or breaking it down in its constituent components. This makes it difficult to somehow correct the situation as the problem seems not to be well framed. The World Bank vision is that all children and youth should learn and acquire the skills they need to become productive, successful and active citizens, and workers. The focus, therefore, of the entire education sector as a system should be on providing inputs that will support the realization of the intended benefits. The system should focus on helping teachers at all levels become more effective in improving learning, improving educational technology, improving the quality of school and systems management, and at the same time empowering students of all ages, from preschoolers to adults - to succeed. All the subsystems of education should be mutually supportive to lead to the desired outcomes. This historical observation informed the researcher's theorization and conceptualization of the study phenomenon in order to comprehensively cover it during the investigation.

### **Defining Education as Whole System**

While there is still confusion about the definition and hierarchy of the education system of countries, there is much agreement that the education system refers to public education between preschool to secondary school (Michaelowa, 2007). This characterization of an education system is somewhat limited as it leaves out private, tertiary, vocational, and university education. Also, considering Aristotle's approach to system research and understanding, outputs of the system are those that enter and transform the economy. The United States Sub-Committee on Education and Labor (1970) stressed this when they espoused that the goal of every education system is to:

- Help every child become an economically productive adult capable of earning

enough for himself and his family.

- Help every child become a responsible and effective participant in the enhancement of societal values and norms.
- Help every child shape his own life in terms of decisions and experiences and choices such as good health and self-esteem.

The committee's description is indistinguishable to Haji and Cuypers (2011) ultimate goals of education as the personal wellbeing that allows children to live lives that are good in themselves. It may be claimed that for education to become of high quality, it is necessary to create systems that ensure the daily education of millions of students in thousands of schools contributes toward their life goals. Therefore, successful reform of the education system requires the development of sound policies, willingness of key stakeholders to act and high capacity for implementation. Naturally, all this may sound an extremely difficult task. It requires efficient use of funds which is a challenge in many countries due to incompetence. Moreover, higher spending on education does not always translate into improved quality and quantity of education and building the human capital stock and wellbeing. To solve these problems, it is necessary to understand what affects all levels of the system and to focus on debugging the failures in the system.

Further, at the central level, ministries of education need to involve the best experts in the design and implementation of programs based on national specifics and available data. Local and national governments need the ability and the tools to monitor learning and provide support. Meanwhile, at the school level, school leaders need to have the knowledge and willingness to manage and lead schools, from making spending plans to supervising and assisting teachers (Haji & Cuypers, 2011; UNESCO, 2019). Changes are not possible if there is no data. To take the right steps to improve things, governments need to know what is missing in their education systems – and what is being done right. The World Bank is working with the

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the UK Department for International Development to create a Global Education Dashboard (World Bank, 2020). This new initiative will provide governments with a system to monitor the performance of their education systems, from learning outcomes to action plans thus enabling them to make fast, data-driven decisions.

Overall, it has been established in the literature that all levels of the education system are interdependent so that a gap at one level affects the other. Michaelowa (2007) emphasized that the enrollment rate at each level of the system is contingent upon the completion of the lower level. Hence, rates at the higher level cannot exceed those at the lower level in typical systems. Relatedly, Nanney (2016) observed that there is an established link between early childhood and secondary school dropout. He averred that children who could not attend Early Childhood Education lacked the motivation needed to move on to higher levels of education. Dropouts at any level of the system are generally known to be associated with economic hurdles which undermine the economic, civic, and personal benefits of education (Staresina, 2011).

Therefore, if the enrollment rate and quality of higher levels are contingent on lower levels and the ultimate output of education is to provide society with citizens who are capable to meet the economic, civic, and personal needs, then the education system should comprise all activities ranging from preschool to higher and vocational institutions. The linkages between each subsystem should be well serviced so that the gaps in one subsystem do not spill over to the next leading to dysfunctionality of the entire system.

## Definition of Keywords and Themes

The key concepts that underpin the study are described in this subsection.

### Inputs

Mati (2018) defines inputs as the assets required for translating something into a desired output. He used the input-transformation-output model to derive key performance indicators needed for accrediting higher education into three categories; human, physical, and financial resource. Relatedly, to Ntawiha (2011), inputs are categorized into endogenous inputs and exogenous input. Endogenous input is similar to Mati's human and physical resources while exogenous inputs include family background and financial inputs. Although the two researchers were looking at different subsystems (higher education and secondary education), they both agree that inputs can be human, physical, or financial. However, according to Natwiha (2011), exogenous input, specifically, family background was not considered by Mati (2018) was not part of the operational considerations in conceptualization of the inputs reviewed by this study.

Arshad (2010) categorized educational input into four categories including family background, peer or community influence, school resources, and inborn abilities. Arshad and Natwiha agreed on the relevance of family background when determining input while also agreeing on physical and financial resources. From another angle, Schumann (2016) considers input indicators as the number of resources that are allocated to a policy. Schumann shifts the debate from physical resources to the amount of financial and human resources directed toward the development of a policy. From the foregoing, whether directed towards the formulation, analysis, implementation, and evaluation of education policies, the input can take the form of human, financial, material, and legal resources needed for the achievement of educational goals.

### Outputs

Outputs are means through which policy objectives are achieved and not end in themselves (Schumann, 2016). Outputs are measurable policy actions whose intended task is



to produce outcomes such as the number of schools built, number of roads rehabilitated and number of people employed, among others. Educational output is typically measured by students' academic performance. Arshad (2010) considers test scores as outputs. Educational output is also described by Ntawiha (2011) as the outcome of the teaching/learning process. Thus, both Ntawiha (2011) and Arshad (2010) agreed that output can be measured by students' performance in a given test, among others. They are the direct results of the educational policy processes. The focus of output analysis is the capability of those products of education exiting the system (Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development [OECD], 2018).

## **Outcome**

In education, outcome refers to the impact graduates of education system can make to society, such as employment, innovation, and development (Petrušić, 2019). In other words, unlike output which answers the 'what' about education policy, outcome answers the "why" aspect of education interventions. The outcomes may be manifested in the behaviors exhibited by those who have gone through the educational system on the one hand and the effects such a behavior has on the wider community that received the outputs of education and experiences its effects. This may include, among others, lower poverty levels; employment; level of creativity, innovation, and inventions; healthcare seeking behaviors; higher incomes; social harmony; and general wellbeing of the community (OECD, 2018).

## **Macro-level**

The macro-setting of educational policy requires the basic understanding of the constitutional framework, physical conditions, and culture of a society (Birkland, 2019). From the macro-level of the system flow, political commitments as well as policies, instructions, and incentives translate commitment into policy action (OECD, 2015). Decisions at this level usually involve a lot of political debates and interactions between the levels and branches of government. Education policies are usually amended or changed not because of the input in the

decision-making process at the macro level but because of conflict of interest and institutional "friction" associated with the separation of power (Weible & Peter, 2011).

The macro-level is responsible for leadership for the entire system. Leadership is about setting the vision and direction and is focused on setting strategic goals and objectives and ensures that visions are translated into reality by motivated followers (Zeeck, 1999 as cited in UNESCO, 2016). Actors at this level are involved in the shaping of the educational system through the crafting of education policy, curricular reform, appropriation of financial resources including teacher's salary/ learning materials and others (Kaseorg, 2017). Bell and Stevenson (2006), suggest that what happens in the macro policy environment shapes the day-to-day activities of schools, colleges, and individuals within the system.

### **Meso Level**

At the Meso level, the focus is on the management function related to directing and controlling. UNESCO (2016) described the roles of managers as those responsible for handling and carrying out programs and procedures which have already been outlined and envisioned. The plans could be earlier made by the same person or by someone else. Thus, the works of managers are confined within existing structures. In other words, managers are responsible to work with subordinates to ensure the programs and plans made, are translated into output and outcome which are beneficial to the organization. Activities at this level include the provision of continuous professional development, goal-setting, curricular, student assessment, and teacher evaluation (Kaseorg, 2017).

### **Micro Level**

Processes on the micro-level are primarily administrative. Administration serves the purpose of ensuring that the goals of leaders and the roles of managers are brought to reality or set into motion (Dembowski, 2007). Administrators at the micro-level are involved with school microclimate, teachers' participation in the decision-making processes, work experience,

relationship between colleagues, and recognition (Kaseorg, 2017).

In summary, Englund (2018) recapped that the processes at the macro-level are influenced by the structural context, the meso level by systemic and sociocultural context, and the micro- level by conceptions, and approaches to teaching. The OECD (2015) alludes that the macro level is associated with political commitment, and policy statements, the meso level by policy coordination mechanisms, and the micro-level by systems for monitoring, analysis, and reporting. According to Englund (2018), a study is still needed to discover the interrelationship between micro, meso, and micro level influence on policy outcome. While the OECD (2015) concludes that there are no assurances for influencing the policy process.

## **Education Policy**

Educational policy may be defined as the laid out procedures needed to control every activity aimed at enhancing, sustaining, and achieving national development through the education sector. This definition is unique to this research as it links the education sector to national development noting specifically that one is necessary for the achievement of the other (Olumuyiwa, Akinkuowo & Kareem, 2014).

## **Policy Process**

The policy process can be sequential or non-sequential. The policy process is sequential when the process of change and development of policy flows through different stages, actors, events, and contexts. The stages emphasized include agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, implementation, evaluation, and termination. This study summarized the stages of policy circle into analysis, formulation, implementation and evaluation. McDonald (2012) suggests that some education policies are exported across national borders. Haddad and Demsky (1995) suggest four modes through which both sequential and imported national and international educational policies are made. These modes can be understood as: systemic,

incremental, ad hoc, and importation.

- Systemic mode is more sequential as it begins with the generation of data, formulation and prioritization of options and refining options.
- Incremental mode seeks to adjust present difficulties rather than to anticipate future ones thereby promoting incremental improvements. This can be either sequential or imported.
- Ad hoc mode is adopted usually when outside environment places a demand on the system directly. It may not even be a problem but instead, the emergence of a new elite or a major political event which requires that the educational system makes some adjustments or changes.
- Importation mode is adopted when countries need to import a policy model from another country. However, a certain policy adopted elsewhere can be imported successfully only if it meets the needs of particular groups in the society or could be adapted to mirror the specific needs of the country.

## **Policy Gaps**

Policy gaps refers to the problems, barriers, or failures in the policy management cycle that affect its efficient and effective delivery of the policy goals or objectives (Haddad & Demsky, 1995). These gaps may appear during the development and/ or implementation phases of the policy.

## **Conclusion**

Research has shown that although there is much effort aimed at closing the input-outcome gaps of education policies, there is still a great need for further studies using the whole system's approach. Noting that the study adopted a case study mixed-methods design, the rest of this paper will focus on the input-outcome of education policies at different levels of the

entire system in Liberia (the case study) determined before data collection comparable to other scholarly research in related area from other jurisdictions. The essence is to gain greater insight into what is in Liberia vis-à-vis what is elsewhere and how other researchers and policymakers attempted to narrow the gap in education policy process.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The input-outcome gap in educational policies in this paper is explained by several theories including the production function, conflict theory, and functionalism theory. From a system's perspective, clearer insight of the input and output of the education can be gained from an assessment of the macro, meso, and micro levels (Kaseorg, 2017). While there is agreement that the common inputs in education include resources, teachers, family, and societal attributes, there is little guidance as to the role of the education policy in increasing output. Therefore, Schumann (2012) claims that input, output and outcome indicators are used to measure effort, efficiency, and effectiveness of policies at all levels of the system.

## **Production Function**

Production function in economics is believed to be first coined by Philip Wicksteed in 1894. The theory holds that there exists a relationship between the physical outputs of a production process and physical inputs. The assumption is that there is a cause – effect between what goes into the system as the raw material, its processing, and the results generated by the system. In this case, the amount of output depends on the total contributions of the inputs, given the restraints forced by the underlying technical process.

In education, the production function is viewed as a firm that runs based on profit maximization thus, it uses a variety of inputs to increase output at different levels of the system (Ntahiwa, 2016). While inputs are direct – human, finance, textbooks, classroom blocks, and learners, among others, it is challenging to measure outputs because they vary. Inefficiency in

input in education leads to less output. For example, there is a direct relationship between school expenditure and student performance, teaching and learning effectiveness and class grades, attendance and academic achievement, the teacher learner ratio and learning (Arshad, 2010). Therefore, the lesser the input, the higher probability exists for weak output/outcome. Although resources can be available to all, it is also challenging to get similar outputs because children learn differently and have different capabilities thus will perform differently. The education processes are thought to produce transitional goods, where students acquire more education for transition into higher education or for the job market. When applying the production function to education, it is assumed that administrative problems of technical efficiency have already been addressed and solved.

In this study, the production theory of education helped in articulating the relationship between the inputs and the outputs of the educational policy. It was assumed that in the study context, the education system is seen as a production machine and uses inputs to produce the desired outputs that lead to expected outcomes. Therefore, the quantity and quality of the inputs the education sector receives and its transformational processes can determine what outcomes the country will experience. Any gaps at the input level are assumed to be absorbed into the processes and will come out through outputs and outcomes. Charging the poor higher fees could lead to fewer years at school and hence affect the literacy and numeracy levels, among others. This theory therefore, helped to investigate the study variables at levels of education in the hierarchy of the country's educational system and to note the gaps the inputs and outcomes.

### **Functionalism**

According to functionality theory, education has two functions of manifest and latent (Yokozeki, 1996). Manifest is the direct impact of education; therefore education is a form of socialization that allows people to climb in social mobility. Functionalists see education as a way of passing knowledge and skills to the next generation for their benefit in terms of social

harmony, social control, and ethical conduct, among others. Émile Durkheim, the founder of functionalism theory sees education as a way for people to socialize in mainstream society. Durkheim sees moral education as helpful in forming a more cohesive structure that brings people together from diverse backgrounds. Society can only survive when there is a degree of homogeneity which is perpetuated by education such as shared values about society like maintaining stability.

Yokozeki (1996) further argues that schools teach students both social and general values necessary for homogeneity. The gap in education according to functionalists happens when there are emphases on some issues such as passing exams rather than societal values and social skills. Schools that fail to produce dignity for working-class pupils who passed their exams lead to some subcultures which reject the primary values of education and the general society. Creative and aggressive students are condemned and punished thus producing an unquestioning and unimaginative workforce that is easily manipulated and exploited by employers. School subjects are also fragmented where some children perform better in certain subjects while failing in others. They, therefore, get segregated from the others leading to an inferiority complex in life.

To help countries reform the teaching profession to avoid emphasis on passing exams rather than societal values and social skills, the World Bank is creating the Successful Teachers, Successful Students platform (Thomson, 2015). This global platform for teachers aims to address key issues such as ensuring that every teacher performs effectively, making the profession a respected and attractive through effective human resources policies and enabling teachers to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge before entering the workforce and follow-up support during such activities.

Rapid technological progress raises the stakes. Already today, technology plays a huge role in supporting teachers, students and the learning process in general (Thomson, 2015).

It can help teachers work more effectively in the classroom and offer different tasks to different students. In addition, technology can enable school administrators, parents, and students to interact seamlessly. Millions of learners are already actively taking advantage of technology but millions in developing countries are not.

Functionalists further argue that economic conditions affect the input where the rich can get additional attention leading to better performance even when they are poor in class (Thomson, 2015). Higher tuition fee in some professional institutions makes it inaccessible by people from poor backgrounds. This keeps some people from achievement in life which increases the gap between the available resources and what students gain and become after school. People from wealthy families have access to higher-level jobs than those from lower classes. Education should be liberating by developing talents.

Functionalists argue that the education system has another problem because teachers come from different backgrounds. Teaching should be left to an individual with a good background of the lesson they are teaching from the behaviorism perspective. Behaviourism does not empower learners. Real learning does not happen when the students follow the instructions but when the students are allowed to be free and involved in the learning process (Role of Education; Functionalist and Critical Perspective, n. d.). For these reasons, students emerge from the educational system without actually learning, being diploma competent rather than being provided with skills and competences for a particular occupation. This challenge emanates from the dominant teaching and learning theories espoused by the teacher training institutions and the policy on instruction. Where the behaviorism learning theory is predominant in curriculum design and instruction, teacher centered learning ecosystem is applied and learners are not provided an opportunity to participate in the learning process which affects the outcomes of education. This comes from the input side of the education value chain.

This theory shaped the researcher's focus on the functions of education and how



the inputs relate to the outcomes. The outcomes focused on are those related to learners acquiring and exhibiting the desired behaviors that promote the values of the country. It is assumed that the type of curriculum, trained teachers, and learning facilities have an influence on the desired outcomes whether directly or indirectly. This theory supplemented the production theory in peering through the country's educational system at all levels to ascertain the input-outcome gaps.

### **Conflict Theory**

The conflict theory contests the belief that schools reduce social inequality by providing equal opportunities (Harcourt, 2020). It contends that schools perpetuate social inequality arising from class, gender, ethnicity, and race. The education system pushes people of lower status into obedience thus keeping them economically disadvantaged while the rich and powerful continue to excel through economic and social opportunities. Input factors such as the cost of education, ease of accessibility to educational opportunities, the type of curriculum and instruction determine how the general society benefits from education. The design of the education policy and its implementation may be because of inequality which is seen as a social gap especially, where education is seen as a source of socioeconomic equality in society.

According to the conflict theory, the people in low economic status are not accorded similar opportunities like those from higher status despite their abilities and willingness to learn. Students from low social class also face the problem of limited help from their social environment. They face an additional problem where the traditional education system is designed to be easily understood and completed by those from higher socioeconomic classes. These conditions lead to social class reproduction where members of the upper class are more advantaged than those from lower-status families. In this case, the education system maintains a cycle where the upper class is rewarded while the lower class is condemned. When the upper-

class culture dominates the education system and leaves the lower and middle class struggling to adapt, educational outcomes become limited.

Schools in more affluent places have more funding and learning opportunities. These schools can attract and afford to pay higher salaries and purchase learning materials. Therefore, students who attend such schools have a substantial advantage in life because they have a higher chance of going to better colleges and access better-paying jobs. A student in less affluent areas and some immersed in chronic poverty lack these advantages with a higher risk of dropping out of school hence will be limited to less paying jobs. The conflict theory contends that school systems favor the affluent in financing and tests. The poor on the other hand suffer because they lack the knowledge to respond to tests that favor the rich because they lack the required knowledge. The conflict theory, therefore, perceives education systems as a power structure utilized by the rich members of society to create a low-cost workforce from those in low-income status.

The conflict theory provided the researcher with the lens to examine the input-outcome gaps that affect the ability of the members of society to access equal opportunities during and after school. The resources provided by the state, the dominance of private schools that are not affordable by the poor, the inability of the poor to break into the schools dominated by the rich due to the tuition fee structure, inadequate teaching and learning materials in public schools and poorly trained teachers can provide a clue to the researcher to understand the gaps in access, quality, and relevance of education. In addition, it helps to ascertain where the education places those who have attained a qualification from such an educational system.

The production function, conflict theory, and functionalism have all been applied to different fields of studies which have contributed to scholarly literatures. This paper provides a unique opportunity to combine these theories to explore the gaps in Liberia's education sector. While the production theory tries to establish the gap in the input-output and outcomes

of policies at all levels, functionalism focuses on gaps in the primary values of education and the general society and the conflict theory focuses on the socio- economic gaps arising therefrom. Therefore, these theories complemented one another in providing a holistic view of the input- outcome status of the education sector in Liberia. It also aided the researcher in making plausible recommendations on the best way to close the gaps in the educational system of the country.

## **Early Child Education as a Subsystem**

This section reviews early childhood as a subsystem of the educational sector.

### **Introduction**

Conventionally, early childhood education is the beginning of the tier in the educational system (Mligo, 2017). However, it appears less energy has been given to this foundational level by many countries as compared to the other layers, yet it is the foundation of effective learning. Using the whole system approach (Mele et al., 2010), this chapter assesses the early childhood subsystem with a focus on the legal, administrative, historical, and theoretical world views as well as current trends and challenges at local, national, regional, and international levels. A focus is also placed on how input within this tier contributes to the quality of outputs and outcomes produced by the entire educational system.

Another emphasis of this section is to evaluate how research within the realm of early childhood education has utilized the production function, the conflict theory and functionalism. The understanding of how these theories can be applied to early childhood research will set the basis for the appropriate selection of the research methodology. Research papers selected within this chapter are focused on identifying and addressing the gaps in the input and the outcome of interventions within early childhood education as well as trending inquiry within the last decade.

## Definition of Early Childhood Education

Numerous studies on Early Childhood Education define it as a subsystem of learning which is focused on children before enrollment in primary school (Härkönen, 2002; Malović 2017; Checqdin Childcare Software, 2019; UNESCO, 2019). This kind of learning may not necessarily be considered as school-based since different sociocultural definitions are associated with learning at this level. While Härkönen (2002) espoused that Early Childhood Education begins from birth to the commencement of primary school, others extended the bar from birth up to grade three and up to eight years (Malović, 2017; Checqdin Childcare Software, 2019; UNESCO, 2019).

In Liberia, early childhood education covers three to five years, followed by six years of primary education (Ministry of Education, 2017). This therefore infers that the term early childhood education may be used to refer to the period of study before children enroll for primary school in the Liberian context. It may also be averred that it is the time for early childhood development and may be interchangeably used in context to suggest that early childhood education is the education given during the early childhood development.

Aside from defining Early Childhood Education based only on age and class levels Goffin (2013) defines Early Childhood Education as a system of programs, services, and policies directed towards the developments of a child's personality. The programs and services for Early Childhood Education include the delivery of explicit curriculum and policies or services by qualified and competent stakeholders (Akbari & McCuaig, 2014). This definition provides the fundamental activities associated with Early Childhood Education responsible for translating policy inputs into policy outputs and outcomes.

From the above perspectives, Early Childhood Education may be considered as a system of education beginning at birth and focused on programs, services, and policies for the physical, ~~and~~ social, and mental development of children. It is the basis for educational

development of the children. In the search for outcomes of the subsystem, less attention should be given to age barriers but more focus should be placed on the kind of inputs associated with policies and programs used in educating children and what gains in terms of childhood development are associated with the resource consumption.

## **The Evolution of Early Childhood Education**

The history of Early Childhood Education spans over 400 years with Martin Luther (1483-1546) amongst the earliest proponents in the 1500s and David Weikart amongst the latest in the 2000s. From Luther's idea of children's biblical knowledge as a moral guide to John Locke's concept of "tabula rasa," the behaviorism conception of the child mind as a clean slate that has to be filled by the educational system and Friedrich Froebel's idea of play based learning, the fundamental significance of Early Childhood Education has always been that it sets the basis for primary education, individual motivation, societal transformation and academic elevation (Bonnay, 2017; Cheqdin Childcare Software, 2019). However, the curriculum and the method of delivery have been a point of diverse contentions among researchers.

Methodologically, Rousseau Jean-Jacques suggested that education should come naturally, and children must be allowed to use their abilities without restrictions from caregivers or adults (Bonnay, 2017; Cheqdin Childcare Software, 2019). Further, Pestalozzi Johann Heinrich suggested that the family is the child's first and most important educator. It is the child's first school where basics of life are learnt from. Similarly, Robert Owen also suggested that environmental and adult influence also has a bearing on children's learning –the nurture effect of associating with adults. In addition, Lev Vygotsky also claimed existence of a sociocultural position where collaboration, and the implementation of a mixed age grouping of children helps young children to learn harder skills from older ones (Bonnay, 2017). These methods are either combined or separated in today's world of Early Childhood Education.

With reference to curriculum, Bonnay (2017) suggested five structural curriculums

for Early Childhood including: 1) Theme-based learning with focus on direct instruction; 2) Montessori-based curriculum with a focus on individual children and their interests; 3) High Scope curriculum with a focus on a balance between the theme-based learning and the Montessori approach; 4) Emergent curriculum with emphasis on children exploration, problem solving skills, innovation, and research skills; and 5) Waldorf curriculum which emphasizes a guided storytelling, and play-based learning. These curricula forms have been singularly or collectively used from time to time in early childhood education in a number of countries with documented effect on the learning abilities of children. Notably, children taught through such systematic curricula have demonstrated development of cognitive abilities such as remembering some basic words, stories, places, and processes; affective skills or social abilities – relating with peers; and motor skills – using simple tools which are appropriate for that age.

### **African Perspective**

Pence and Nsamenang (2008) found evidence of variations between Western Early Childhood Education approaches and the African indigenous history of childcare. According to them, although there are some similarities between the western theorists and Africa's Early Childhood Education heritages, the African indigenous, as well as the Islamic foundations, have rarely been taken into account in western Early Childhood Education programming (Pence & Nsamenang, 2008). However, this assertion could be better justified had the history of African Childcare and heritage been appropriately researched about systematically and documented like their western counterparts. What is true is that African heritage of childcare from oral traditions and practices are as old as the African civilizations itself.

In Africa's indigenous Early Childhood Education heritages, newborns are treated as valuable possessions by the family and the community (Pence & Nsamenang, 2008). This theory agrees with Pestalozzi Johann Heinrich western suggestions that the family is the child's first and most important educator of moral life, participative skills, social values, and ways of

the world (Bonnay, 2017). Also, the Africa's Islamic Early Childhood heritage which allows groups of children to sit together and continually learn literacy, leadership and, morality (Pence & Nsamenang, 2008) agrees with Lev Vygotsky socio-cultural position where collaboration helps young children to learn harder skills from older ones (Bonnay, 2017).

Nevertheless, some Euro-centric Early Childhood Education practices have overshadowed the African perspectives and thereby appearing as universally acceptable pedagogies without alternatives in the African traditional childcare practices. For example, Rousseau Jean-Jacques method of natural education where children use their abilities without restrictions from caregivers is the opposite of African philosophical perspectives to childcare. Again, Montessori-based curriculum where the focus is towards the individual child and their interests are rarely African as the African view is collective, rather than individualistic (Pence & Nsamenang, 2008). This therefore validates how the choice of curriculum, methodologies and practices in Early Childhood Education must be based on sociocultural and not universal context to have an African appeal and application.

From the foregoing, though there are variances between western perspectives of early childhood education and the African approaches, internationalization of educational practices has standardized application of early childhood education practices based on western theorization. Even in Liberia, the design philosophy of early childhood education is not purely African but is greatly influenced by the western educational philosophies. This, among others, includes the effect of ratification and domestication of the SDGs including SDG-4 on education whose indicators at this level may only be demonstrated with adoption of western other than African philosophy of education. Therefore, the assessment of the input – outcome gaps at this level may focus on aspects related to what is missing at this level by international standards – SDG-4 indicators and what the child is expected to demonstrate at completion of this level as specified by international standards. This western influence is explored more in the next section.

## **Legal and Administrative Framework**

As suggested by UNESCO (2013), clear analyses of international, national and local commitments made by stakeholders expressed through visions, legislations, constitutions and policies are essential for understanding gaps in the inputs-outcomes of educational policies. Since the UN adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, the world's collective attention has been drawn to Early Childhood Education (Pence & Nsamenang, 2008). Within the last decade also, one of the international commitments which most countries have signed up to, is the Sustainable Development Goals. Under pillar four (4) of the Sustainable Development Goals, the issue of ensuring that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood education as part of early childhood development is highlighted (UNESCO, 2018). Another global resolution is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These commitments obligate countries to provide Early Childhood Education as part of the right of every child. To understand gaps in these policies, one must study the targets and indicators and compare the findings with trending developments (Boeren, 2019).

In Liberia, the commitments to the SDG-4 goals and other visions have led to the development of a range of policy tools to support an implementation strategy such as the Early Childhood Development Community Education and Awareness Program (ECDCEAP), the Early Childhood Development Skill Training Education Program (ECDSTEP) which is the Government new policy framework necessary for the attainment of its ECE goals (ECD Measure Team, 2019). These policy and legal frameworks define the types of inputs and outputs the education sector is supposed to have. Consequently, demonstrating their presence or absence provides the basis for analyzing the input – output gaps of education at early childhood learning level.

## **Current Trend in Early Childhood Education**

According to a UNICEF (2019) report, the current global trend for access to pre-



primary education stands at 26.86 percent for low income countries and 41.32 percent for lower middle income countries. Meanwhile, the projections for universal pre-primary enrollment by 2030 will be 32.30 percent and 48.76 percent for low and lower middle income countries respectively. This does not come as a surprise because while high income countries spend 8.70 percent and upper middle income countries are spending 7.75 percent of government's education expenditure on pre-primary education, low income countries are spending as low as 1.95 percent (UNICEF, 2019). This points to resource inadequacy and a high likelihood of not meeting the outputs and outcomes of education at this level in low income countries including Liberia. The report also shows that due to underfunding of this level of education, the young children who are at risk of poor development in Liberia stand at 54 percent, Ghana 23 percent, Nigeria 67 percent, Sierra Leone 76 percent and Gambia 56 percent. These statistics show the need for low income countries like Liberia to triple their efforts if the 2030 SDG-4 targets are to be achieved.

Between 2001 and 2018, the World Bank increased its investment in Early Childhood Education from less than a million dollars to over one billion dollars globally (Devercelli & Saavedra, 2019). These funds have been committed to policy dialogue, research, and projects in over fifty (50) countries. Some of such projects are the Liberia Getting to the Best in Education Project and the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls. In these projects, the World Bank committed itself to providing Early Childhood Education and skill training programs to empower young women with the skills needed to work or open their own ECE centers in Liberia (World Bank, n.d).

It is claimed that access to high-quality early childhood development (ECD) and preschool programs contributes not only to ensuring that all students enter the school system ready to learn but also to reducing socioeconomic gaps in cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional behavior of children. Gillborn et al. (2017) agree that early childhood education

incentive policies are more cost-effective than other educational policies. Unlike investments in human capital in later stages, international evidence indicates that investments in early childhood are not only efficient but also equitable and effective.

Based on numerous studies carried out in different regions of the world, researchers assert that —early childhood is the most cost-effective and prime time to ensure that children develop their full potential. The returns on investment in early childhood development appear to be substantial. Increasing preschool enrollment to 25 percent or 50 percent in each low- and middle-income country would result in a benefit/cost ratio ranging from 4 to 6 and 6 to 17 depending on the preschool enrollment rate and the rate of discount. It may be asserted that unless governments allocate more resources to quality early childhood development programs for the poorest people in the population, economic disparities will remain, or escalate.

Early stimulation is also a predictor of higher earnings for adults in their professional lives. A study carried out in Jamaica by a group of renowned researchers and published by the prestigious *Journal of Science* reveals that the early stimulation received by children in the treatment group increased their average earnings by 25 percent compared to those in the control group (Berry & Adamson, 2011). Additionally, it was found that the income of the treatment group with delayed growth equaled the income of the comparison group that had normal growth. The results show that early childhood socio-emotional stimulation, in unfavorable environments, can have a substantial effect on labor market outcomes and as a policy to reduce inequality.

### **Relating Early Childhood Education to other Levels**

Early childhood education is related to other levels of education as highlighted in the next subsections.

#### **Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary**

There is now a mounting body of literature on the influence of Early Childhood

Education and achievement in life (Atinc & Wright, 2013). Overall, it has been established in literature that all levels of the education system are interdependent, so that a gap at one level creates a gap at the next level hierarchically. Nanney (2016) observed that there is an established link between early childhood and secondary school dropout. He averred that children who could not attend Early Childhood Education program lacked the motivation needed to move on to higher levels of the education system. The above seems to echo Michaelowa (2007) who emphasized that the enrollment rate at each level of the system is contingent upon the completion of the lower level. Hence, it may be noted that the rates at the higher level cannot exceed those at the lower level. Therefore, if the enrollment rate and quality of higher levels are contingent on lower levels and the ultimate output of education is to provide society with citizens who are capable to meet the economic, civic, and personal needs, then a focus on early childhood education as a foundation of learning is essential to avoid dropout and thereby decrease economic hurdles and crimes (Nanney, 2016). Also, the problems faced by millions of children entering the education system without being able to read or write or do basic numeracy after years of primary school has been attributed to challenges associated with Early Childhood Education (UNICEF, 2020).

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Views of Early Childhood Education**

The application of the production function in the educational setting is as explained in the following subsections.

#### **Production function application**

Espinosa (2017) used the education production function to evaluate how inputs such as child personality, school environment, teachers, and family characteristics affect a child's educational outputs. The study made a theoretical contribution by arguing that cognitive and non-cognitive skills are equally important outcomes and the production process behind them

should be analyzed together. The research brings to the debate non- tangible inputs, such as relationship with parents and peers as a direct consequence of fostering both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. This assertion also agrees with Heinrich & Vygotsky western perspectives as well as the African Indigenous and Islamic theorist (Espinosa, 2017). The bottom line is that in Early Childhood Education assessment, the use of the production function confirms besides the tangible inputs, non-tangible inputs such as relationship with the family and peers can contribute to sound outcomes leading to a child's academic and personal development.

Hanushek (2007) on the other hand argues that the output of the educational process is not controlled by family socio-economic status or relationship, neither is it determined by peer or student characteristics but rather by physical inputs placed directly into the system by policy makers including the characteristics of schools, teachers, curricula, among others. Hanushek avers that since inputs applied in the past can affect current outcomes, the use of the production function to measure how a given input such as quality teachers, textbooks, and other materials contributes to outcome like students achievements has no clear and systematic relationship. He argues that a child's output in school "B" may not necessarily be as a result of deliberate effort or resources invested but rather by the effort of school "A" from which the child transferred.

However, this does not disqualify the application of this theory in analysis of input-outcome gaps at early childhood education level as it may provide an analytical framework to trace what has gone into the system and what the system has produced controlling for other factors. Therefore, the production function theory remains an important theory in exploring the input-outcome gaps in an educational setting.

### **Conflict theory application**

In application of the conflict theory to study early childhood education, Chernoff (2013) argued that although Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim addressed the

relationship of education and social conflict, conflict theory in education still remains an area of interest for researchers. The question of the role played by education in creating and sustaining social imbalances did not end with the diagnosis and prognosis by Weber but remains a point of concern to the existing researchers. Furthering the argument of the effect of education, Mishra (2013) proposed that the conflict theory in education occurs when the dominant class tries to sustain themselves in power by providing unequal opportunity for every child. This happens when public education is seen as belonging to the lower class in society while the quest for private education increases for the wealthy. The private schools that admit children from well to do families access high quality education that guarantees them better jobs, quick ascent to social and business status while the low class are trained in public schools to be submissive to the wealthy class. Conflict theorist also sees the tracking system as a form of segregation and discrimination which allows students in lower tracks to receive less qualified teachers putting them at a disadvantage for college education.

From the reflections of the authors, analysis of educational input-outcome gaps in education can still be traced from what the system is intended to contribute from the policy framers and implementers. The analytical framework helps in examining the resource inputs at this level and the likely or actual outcomes that this level of investment will produce. The allocation of resources may reveal whether the education system will likely to escalate the social inequalities or close the social gaps between the low class and middle and upper classes in society. A less funded public education system competing against a highly funded private educational sector will most likely perpetuate social inequality. However, whether in Liberia this was the case needed this type of theory to guide the researcher.

### **Macro-Meso and Micro level Review of Early Childhood Education**

Stier and Kaplan (2019) informed that macro level policies for early childhood education should be influenced by three extents; family support, cultural environment and

economic conditions. Biswas and Kabir (2018) also found that low- income family, single parents, women's unemployment, and lack of home teaching and learning technology as some macro-meso and micro level input factors which greatly affect physical, social, emotional, language, cognitive, and communication outcomes.

From another angle, Zualkernan (2015) argues that factors like economic background, gender of students and teachers, geographical area, facilities, and condition of the schools can collectively contribute to high or low educational outcomes. Kaseorg (2017) asserted that the Meso level of schools includes a control system and management of macro-level decisions in educational institutions. Meso level decisions can include issues surrounding accessibility, building the confidence of learners, and parents, providing strong vision, and ensuring that institutions provide the best learning opportunities (Boeren 2019).

At the Micro levels, parents and children are the most important actors in the evaluation of success and failure of policy interventions in ECE (Manninen, 2018). Therefore, there seem to be a clearer source for outcome evaluation (parents' perception and students' results) than there is for input evaluation since a number of factors-tangible and intangible-affects early childhood education. Nonetheless, it is plausible that the input- outcome assessment can be done at this level and valid policy recommendations made.

## **Conclusion**

Early Childhood Education is a system of education beginning at birth and focused on programs, services and policies for the physical, emotional, social, and mental development of children. Research has shown that quality early childhood education has a positive effect on educational motivation at higher levels of the educational system as well as success in life. Despite the benefits of this foundational level, not much investment has been given by many

countries. The issue of access to, quality of, and relevance in ECE is still a fundamental problem. Theorists studying early childhood education have different views on the kind of method and curriculum that is universally acceptable for better outcomes. This is due to socio-economic, sociocultural, as well as a variety of non-tangible and tangible inputs and outcomes associated with the subsystem. Hence, contextual investigations of Liberia's early childhood subsystem will expose gaps and further contribute to existing literatures on early childhood education in developing societies.

### **Primary Education as a Subsystem**

The section focuses on the primary education which is one of the critical subsystems of the education system.

#### **Introduction**

This subchapter evaluates the efficacy of existing primary education policies by conducting a desk review to identify specific themes and indicators envisioned by policy makers and compare these themes to relevant literatures and reports. Overarching policy framework documents which promised to deliver Universal Primary Education in Liberia include the Education Reform Act of 2011, the National Education Sector Plan (2010- 2020), the Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017-2021), and the Strategy for Education Transformation (2018-2028). These policies highlight steps made or being made by the government of Liberia to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE). A brief overview of the above policies will be followed by an analysis of how these policies addressed the issue of access, quality, and relevance in primary education.

#### **Legal and Administrative Framework**

The goal of primary education is usually to provide the basis for all children so as to

set them up for productive life and wellbeing. However, many jurisdictions consider this learning basis appropriate for children between age six to eleven (Ghana Education Service, 2012; UNICEF, 2021). The appropriate age for primary school children in Liberia falls between ages six to twelve years (ERA, 2011). The Liberian government has a constitutional mandate to provide equal access to educational opportunities and facilities for all children of primary school age (ERA, 2001). Besides the constitutional mandate, there are constructed laws that recognize education as a fundamental right for all children of primary school age.

### **Education Reform Act of 2011**

One very important instrument which specifically expands the mandate of the constitution to children in primary and basic education is the Education Reform Act of 2011. This act establishes free compulsory primary education for all children in public schools (ERA, 2011). The Education Reform Act of 2011 has its origin in the Education Reform Act of 2001 which also draws its source from the Education Reform Law of 1972. Through this law, the Government of Liberia promised to provide free quality and accessible primary education to all children of appropriate age so as to reduce the rate of illiteracy and produce citizens with the necessary skills for the development of the country.

### **The National Education Sector Plan (2010-2020)**

This policy, which expired a year ago focused on improving the quality of the teaching staff as well as increasing access, retention, and completion rate for primary level. It further promised to review and revise the primary school curriculum to enhance relevance and to ensure the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction in primary schools (Liberia, 2021). Though this policy expired, it had focused on improving teaching and learning in the



country at primary school level to ensure that the desired learning outcomes are realized and the long-term benefits to the society are achieved. The plan highlighted the expected resource inputs for the period and how they would be sourced and applied. This plan is a source of information on resource gaps comparing the planned actual resources allocated and the likely outcome gaps matching the actual and observable benefits against the planned benefits that the sector could have experienced during its implementation and thereafter.

### **The Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017-2021)**

Again, this policy basically focused on the issues of access, quality, and relevance in primary education. It promised the training of over 11,000 primary teachers in early grade literacy and numeracy, provision of school grants to all primary schools to replace school fees and provide quality alternative and accelerated education pathways for overage and out-of-school children. It further promised to implement a national assessment system for primary level for grades 3 and 6 (Ministry of Education, 2016). This plan provides indicators about the planned and allocated inputs and the demonstrable results that these resources produced during the period. It may be observed that having such blue prints helps the government and stakeholders to track the performance of the sector including documenting the inputs and outcomes of the plan.

### **Strategy for Education Transformation, 2018-2028**

Relying on previous reforms, this 10-year policy is the most recent effort which plans to address issues related to access, quality, and relevance in primary education. Specifically, the policy promised to fulfill the seven primary targets of SDG 4 in education by 2030 (ERA, 2011). The strategy specifies the interventions into the education sector to be made in the planned period and the resources required. The plan focuses on the education sector from

early childhood to adult education. It aims at improving access to education, quality of education, relevance, teacher development, and teaching facilities, among others. The funding, source of funding and their application are also suggested. From the analysis of the plan, one may ascertain whether there are gaps or are likely to exist at inputs level and could lead to gaps in outcomes in future.

A summary of the major inputs and promises directed towards achieving Universal Primary Education in Liberia is seen in Table 1 below (Ministry of Education, 2016; Summary Drawn from Liberia, 2011, 2021). From Table 1, one notes that there are attempts to enhance the outcomes of education in the country. What is not clear though is whether these provisions which are intended to enhance access, quality, and relevance as key aspects of education are being demonstrated and realized or not.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Major inputs and Promises towards Primary Education*

<b>Access</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Relevance</b>
Construct, Repair and upgrade Primary Schools	Qualified teachers, and administrators in Primary schools	Teach one local language, and provide instruction in local languages
Provide School Grants to all primary schools including Private Schools	Conduct National Assessment at grade 3 and 6	Provide Marketable Skill and Computer Literacy to Primary School
Ensure age appropriateness and provide alternative for overage and out-of school kids Free Primary Education	Train Primary Teachers Reduce illiteracy	Provide an education that is appropriate for the learners

## **Access to Primary Education**

In educational terms, access refers to deliberate efforts on the part of institutions and stakeholders to provide households with school and learning places available to the children within a reasonable distance (World Bank, 2004). Providing access is regardless of race, religion, gender, disability, past academic performance, family income, geographical location, or school facilities (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). UNICEF (2021) reported that access to education still remains a major gap in the achievement of Universal Primary Education and that

the Western and Central Africa accounts for the largest rate of at-risk children worldwide. Liberia, a West African country is reported to have the world's highest levels of out-of-school children with 15-20 percent of its children (6-14) out of school due to access related issues (UNICEF, nd). USAID (2020) placed the net enrollment rate and primary age students attending primary grades at only 44 percent. This means that a significant number of Liberian children lack access to learning basics, and are unlikely to become productive citizens if deliberate actions are not taken. Some measures intended to narrow this access related gap include:

### **Free Primary Education in Perspective**

A number of key international treaties guaranteed that education at primary level should be free and compulsory. A few of them include; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child and Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child (Tomaševski, 2001). These international instruments conceptualized free primary education as children having access to learning in a prescribed government supported school void of paying any kind of fees or charges or expenses which might prevent them from continuing or completing elementary education.

Evidence shows that children from poor families are more unlikely to attend primary school (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). Therefore, free primary education policies try to address barriers related to family income. The assumption from policy makers is that if primary education is made free, parents who cannot afford to send their children to school due to high fees will be willing to do so. This assumption is evidenced in Liberia because the free primary education policy is only focused on addressing the economic cost of primary education. However, studies show that addressing the economic cost of primary education, and ignoring the opportunity cost presents a serious challenge to the achievement of free primary education

especially in developing countries (Sulochana, 2015).

The economic costs of primary education are the direct and indirect cost associated with getting elementary education which can include school fees, expenditure on books and reading/writing materials, travelling to school, school uniform, and feeding, among others. On the other hand, the opportunity cost of primary education refers to the wages, benefits or prospects the parent/child would have otherwise earned by functioning at home. It is important to point out here that because the economic benefits of primary education are latent, many parents, communities, and children especially from marginalized and poor countries, prefer the opportunity cost rather than the economic cost, even when primary education is free.

One may argue that in order for free primary education policies to become more effective, there is need for increased awareness about the benefits of primary education. This may be supplemented by the enforcement of the compulsory primary education policies as well as providing incentives for parents whose children complete primary education. Ostensibly, this could help bridge the gap in policy expectations and policy outcomes.

### **Free Primary Education in Liberia**

Although free primary education has been enacted over three decades ago in Liberia, its purpose has never been realized. In fact, the government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Education launched a mobile money platform (New Dawn Newspaper, 2019) which required each child in primary school to pay the amount of \$L1000.00 (equivalent to US\$5.00) per academic year. This amount does not include textbooks, uniforms, identification cards, physical education uniforms, book bags, transportation, and feeding, among others. The Education Sector analysis (2017-2021) revealed that of the 741,180 children of primary school going age (6-12), 16 percent (121,598) are out-of-school. This could be associated with access or economic barriers. Hence, it is well established that the declaration of free primary education in Liberia was done with no adequate measures in place for implementation and that the country

was financially unprepared for the execution of such policy (Ying & Ketter, 2016). Besides the access barriers related to family income which the free primary education policy was meant to achieve, there are still gaps in access to primary education related to gender, age, and school distance which need to be addressed.

### **Age appropriateness**

The definition of primary education does not cover overage children who also need primary education to navigate their way into a successful life. For example, Darvas and Namit (2016) reported that 82 percent of students in primary school in Liberia are too old for their grade. In Nepal also, more than two-thirds of students in grades 1-12 are overage (Lee, 2015). Considering the fact that overage students are at greater risk of failure or dropout (Lee, 2015), the number of overage children has an effect on the primary completion rate. This could be one reason why the primary entry rate is reaching the universal benchmark in most countries but primary completion rates are far below expectations (Education Policy & Data Center, 2009, 2018).

Failure and dropout are not the only likely outcomes of overage children in primary school, research shows that overage children in over-crowded classrooms ( typical of free primary education in Liberia) present a pedagogical challenge for teachers and administrators (Tarumi, Loaiza & Engle, 2010) which inadvertently affects the quality of learning taking place in the classroom. In short, overage enrollment present challenges related to access, where overage children occupy the limited space for age appropriate children and quality where over age children exhibit behaviors that slow down learning.

### **Age Appropriateness in Liberian Schools**

Liberia has a higher percentage of youth in school (62%) than that of Rwanda,

Zambia, Ghana, and Cote D' Ivoire. However, 82 percent of school children drop out before completing grade 12 (Krua, 2015). UNICEF (2018) blamed the over age enrollment in Liberia's primary education to overage enrollment in Early Childhood Education (ECE). According to the report, about 50 percent of children attending Early Childhood Education are already above the required age of six years and so do not enter primary school until they are 8 to 10 years old. This suggests that the children are 2-4 years overage for their respective levels of education creating pedagogical and administrative challenges. When these overage children join primaryone, they are less likely to complete the level. This justifies Michaelowa (2007) observation that the enrollment rate and quality of output and outcome at each level of the system is contingent upon the lower level.

Relatedly, UNICEF (2018) described the situation of overage children in Liberia as a civil war legacy. During the fifteen years of conflict in Liberia (1989-2003), schools were damaged or destroyed, teachers left their posts, and children immigrated to neighboring countries. As a consequence, nearly 40 percent of primary school students are three years older than the appropriate age for their grade. Another reason for overage school kids in Liberia is the number of out-of-school children. Of the over 740,000 primary school-age children, 16 percent were physically out of school (UNICEF, 2018) due to economic, geographic, cultural, and political conditions.

This situation is not unique to Liberia. Lee (2015) also reported that in Nepal 48.5 percent of new entrants in grade 1 are overage by 2 years or more and 45 percent of children age 6 are not yet enrolled in primary school. The research blamed overage children in primary school in Nepal to the high proportion of late entry into primary school. Like Liberia, Nepal also experienced a decade long instability (Valente, 2013). What this means is that straight policy measures are required in order to address the problem of overage children in primary school. The Getting to Best Education Sector Plan suggests that the Government of Liberia provides

quality alternative and accelerated education program pathways for children in this category. Valente (2013) suggests four mutually inclusive options. First, increase access to primary schools by building schools in remote areas. Second, provide education in mother tongue other than the usual language. Third, provide some form of cash motivation to parents from poorer communities for sending their children to school on time instead of keeping them on farm to provide labour. Forth, increase access to Early Childhood Education opportunities to encourage children start school in time.

### **Compulsory Primary Education**

Most educational policies that make primary education free also make its attainment compulsory. The compulsory nature of primary education obliges parents, communities, government, local authorities, and other stakeholders to ensure that children of primary education age are in school. Compulsory education is the name given to the legally required period of time that children are expected to attend school (Diamond, 2020). It has been observed that the “free” aspect of primary and basic education is easier to implement than the “compulsory” aspect. This is because its implementation is crosscutting and raises a number of human rights issues (Tomaševski, 2000). Enforcement mechanisms can differ from one jurisdiction to another but it mostly reprimands parents through fines and imprisonment and in some instances, the child may also be punished for not attending school (Ministry of Education, 2021). Enforcement of free and compulsory education resources permitting enables children to realize educational attainments in time. However, it may be observed that the enforcement mechanisms are weak or the resources are not sufficient to support full implementation of compulsory education. This creates gaps at both input and outcome stages.

### **Compulsory Primary Education in Liberia**

There is no written report on how the government of Liberia through the Ministry

of Education has instituted measures to ensure that parents or children are punished for staying out of school. The Getting to Best Education Sector plan did not even mention this indicator as a challenge for the government. This means that no eye has yet been turned to the enforcement of this component of the policy. UNICEF (2013), reported that of the over 500,000 out of school children across Liberia, 21 percent of them are of primary school age and are engaged in domestic servitude, street selling, agricultural labor and sexual exploitation. Similar reports currently point to the same situation (UNICEF, 2018; World Bank, 2020; Liberia, 2021). This lacuna in the policy creates operational challenges in effective implementation of the policy. The beginning point in addressing policy issues is identifying and documenting those challenges and putting in place mechanisms to address them.

### **School Construction, Repair, and Updating**

Providing free and compulsory primary education is meaningless unless deliberate efforts are taken to bring learning facilities as close as possible to communities. Access to education refers to the availability of schools, in the right numbers and proximal locations in communities, the number of grades offered and the opportunities for students to progress from one level to the other (Geissinger, 1999 as cited in Sifuna, 2007). For children to smoothly sail through the tiers of education, school infrastructures must be able to accessibly accommodate the various levels (ECE through Secondary School) so as to reduce the distance, difficulties, and cost associated with traveling long distances. Studies show a link between long home-to-school distance and school dropout rate (Yemane, n.d.). In instances where students have to relocate from one school district to another to continue higher levels of education, it has also been discovered that they are twice as likely to drop out of school as their non-mobile counterparts (South, Haynie, & Bos, 2007).

### **School Construction, Repair, and Updating in Liberia**



It is worth noting that after 14 years of civil war, the existing schools in Liberia were either destroyed or dilapidated. More so, given the fact that schools could not be constructed during the civil war and the population of young people also increased overtime, available schools lack the capacity to enroll all children from the nearby communities thereby leading to an increase in the number of out-of-school-children. However, the government of Liberia began bold steps to address this problem as far back as 2011 after the enactment of the Education Reform Act of 2011. According to the school census, the Ministry of Education oversaw the expansion of primary schools by 15 percent (Liberia, 2016). However, the census reported that children enrolled in primary schools were sitting on the floor due to limited desks and chairs and many classrooms did not have chalkboards. Therefore, one may argue that the reforms did not have an effective impact on provision of adequate materials such as furniture, among others. This arguably has an impact on meeting the educational outcomes as it limits learning and encourages drop out.

### **Non-discriminatory Access to Education**

In the right to education for all children, there is guarantee under international protocols, national laws and constructed policies, that there is a special preference given to children living with disabilities, and girls' education. This right was internationally guaranteed when Liberia signed onto the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012, just a year after the passage of the Education Reform Act of 2011. The Education Reform Act (2011) of Liberia provides that all public schools keep a record of disabled primary school children who are seeking enrollment so as to refer such student to other schools with the capability to take care of the disadvantaged child. With international protocol signed and national legislations in place, it was not until 2020 that the Ministry of Education, for the first time launched the inclusive Education (IE) Policy, and began activities aimed at addressing the

difficulties faced by children with disability in attaining education. This policy addresses issues of special education, integrated education, and inclusive education (Ministry of Education, 2018). Amongst other things, the policy aims to ensure new curriculum considers children with disabilities, conduct Continual Professional Development for teachers teaching children with disabilities, and improve attendance of children living with disabilities, among others.

### **Relevance of Primary Education**

Generally, relevance in education has two outcomes, personal relevance, and life relevance (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). Both personal and life relevance makes connections between what children do in school and their lives during and after school. (Albrecht, & Karabenick, 2018). Personal relevance refers to those skills and knowledge acquired by children during primary years which enables them to aspire for greater achievements while life relevance refers to the skills and knowledge acquired during primary years which helps children to engage real-world issues, problems, and contexts. Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) had earlier indicated that primary education has two relevant purposes 1) to produce a literate and numerate population that can deal with problems encountered at home and at work, and 2) to serve as a foundation on which further education is built. Therefore, the education children obtain should be able not only to ensure that they advance in transitioning from primary to junior secondary but should be in position to solve some of the basic challenges of life. Designing the school program at primary level should ensure that the inputs, processes and outputs give the children the skills and competences they need to be successful in both aspects. Where such is not happening, one may point to the input – outcome challenges within the system.

### **Relevance of Primary Education in Liberia**

To achieve relevance in primary education in Liberia, policymakers underscored that besides academic proficiency, primary pupils must acquire national literacy and marketable skills through computer literacy and development (Liberia, 2011). This has led to the launch of a new competency based curriculum. Speaking at the launch of a new curriculum for primary, middle and secondary schools, the Director of Curriculum Development and Textbooks Research at the Ministry of Education Republic of Liberia is quoted as saying, “instead of going back to a content-based- curriculum that did not create skills, we decided to go to a competency-based [curriculum], that no matter whether students drop out of school, they will have the skills to move on in life (Ballah, 2018).” Although the old national curriculum was used by over 90 percent of primary schools (Ministry of Education, 2016), there is limited research on the distribution of the new curriculum in primary schools and how the use of the new curriculum is impacting marketable and computer skills necessary for the personal or societal survival of children. It is also worth noting that having a curriculum in place and realizing its benefits through teaching and learning processes is another.

### **Quality of Primary Education**

Quality in education can be construed from different dimensions. According to UNICEF(2000) quality in education should be evaluated from five perspectives including Learners, Environment, Content, Processes, and Outcomes. From the learner perspective, quality is achieved when children are healthy, well-nourished, willing to learn, and encouraged by their families and communities to continue learning. From the environmental perspective, quality is judged by healthy, safe, protective, and inclusive facilities; Content wise, quality refers to a curriculum embedded with basic skills in literacy, numeracy, skills for life, such as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, and peace. Process refers to the facilitation of knowledge

by trained teachers and outcomes are the exhibits of education seen in personal life and linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society. Parents tend to see quality as closely related to the opportunity for social promotion and employment (UNICEF, 2000). In other words, if primary education, as well as other levels of the educational hierarchy, is not leading to progress in learning and employment, parents tend to keep their children out of school so as to focus on the opportunity cost of primary education. Moreover, where the opportunity cost of educating a child at family level is deemed to be higher than the benefits to be derived from school, school dropout rates increase and the overall benefits of education are negated.

### **Quality of Primary Education in Liberia**

Although the Education Reform Act of 2011 addressed the issue of quality by ensuring that each school has a principal, vice principal, and teaching staff with minimum qualifications, a large proportion of the existing basic education teaching force seem not to have the knowledge or skills required to be effective in the classroom (Ministry of Education, 2016). Achieving content related quality still remains a challenge as 35 percent of grade 2 students and 17 percent of grade 3 students could not read a single word in English and oral reading fluency was under 20 correct words per minute lower than the MOE benchmark of 45 correct words (Ministry of Education, 2016). This points to some challenges within the system.

To ensure quality also, the Getting to Best Education Sector Plan suggests the establishment of a national assessment system for grades 3 and 6. Another issue associated with quality which the Education Reform Act of 2011 suggests is that each school should have a guidance counselor, physical education and health science teachers. The extent to which these quality indicators have been achieved will indicate if the Liberia primary education subsector is providing high quality education or poor quality education for children.

## **Conclusion**

In this literature review, gaps in the holistic achievement of Universal Primary Education across contexts were categorized into three groups, access, quality, and relevance. To bridge the access gap, in Liberia, it is important to increase primary schools by building schools in remote areas, provide some form of incentives to parents from poorer communities for sending their children to school on time and completing primary school, increase access to Early Childhood Education and enforce the compulsory education policy. To bridge the relevance gap, it is worth embedding and emphasizing the teaching of marketable and computer skills to children in primary school for the personal or societal survival. To improve quality, it is recommended that teachers undergo Continual Professional Development (CPD) for the use of the new competency based curriculum and that the curriculum and relevant teaching and learning materials are made readily available to teachers and students.

## **Secondary Education as a Subsystem**

The educational subsystem is comprised of the several components and its outlook is described in the following subsections.

## **Introduction**

In spite of the general unanimity that young people can only experience their full potential when secondary education equips them with the preliminary skills, intellect, and talents required for life, there is still much variance on how best countries can allocate scarce resources and focus energy on filling the current gap in the subsector. Secondary education delivers the early output for the labor market and serves as a conversion from teenage to adulthood as well as post-secondary non- tertiary and tertiary education (ISCED, 2011). These years of transition are very critical to the young peoples' future as they experience biological, emotional, physical, and intellectual conversion. The effectiveness of an educational system to

enable learners acquire the planned skills for this level enhances the productivity of the population.

Over the last decade, the government of Liberia established legal and administrative frameworks intended to provide senior secondary education that is accessible, relevant, and of quality. Some of the framework documents include the Education Reform Act of 2011, the National Education Sector Plan (2010-2020), the Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017-2021), the Strategy for Education Transformation (2018-2028), and the Improving Results in Secondary Education (IRISE 2019-2023) projects. These initiatives, among other things, promised to deliver output indicators like increased gross enrollment ratio at the senior secondary level, increased rate of transition to and completion of senior secondary education for girls, improved teacher competencies and pedagogical skills, improved knowledge and competencies relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and improved secondary education service delivery. This subchapter conducts a desk review of the status of these policies as well as a review of best practices both in related literature and other countries with the goal of identifying cross contextual exposition of educational gaps in the realization of policy goals.

## **Overview of Secondary Education**

Unlike primary education, secondary education is considered more advanced to be considered universal and too broad to be considered as expert or professional accomplishment. Hadley (1902) one of the earliest experts on secondary education exerts that while primary education guarantees general intelligence and technical education assures professional intelligence, secondary education should provide the balance of both general, and professional intelligence in excess. This conceptualization of secondary education seems to set the tone of what competencies secondary education should develop and by which it should be assessed.

In Liberia, secondary school level is divided into two cycles, lower secondary and

uppersecondary. Lower secondary which is known as upper basic education consists of grades 7- 9 which builds on lower basic grades 1-6 and culminates in the West African Examination Council (WAEC) Certificate of education. The passage of this exam is required for admission into the next senior secondary level (Liberia,2011). The upper secondary which is known as senior secondary education, consists of grades 10-12, and culminates in the West African Examination Council Senior Secondary Certificate Exam (WASSCE) (Liberia, 2011). This exam is a major prerequisite for transition into many post-secondary institutions.

Although the gross enrollment in the senior secondary level has continued to grow since the end of the country's civil war in 2003, transition into tertiary institutions has not always been substantial. In 2013, the University of Liberia reported that 25,000 senior secondary students who sat for the entrance and placement exam failed 100 percent. Parallel situation of mass failure was reported in 2018 when the total of 10,837 students who sat the entrance examination of the University of Liberia, only 17.54 percent met the passing threshold for undergraduate. In 2020, out of the 11,432 candidates who sat the same exam, 28.75 percent passed (Front Page Africa, 2020) indicating a slight improvement. Further improvement was noticed in 2021 with a leap in passing from 28.75 percent in 2020 to 49.3 percent in 2021 (New Dawn Newspaper, 2021). While the passage rate has been incremental, it is almost a decade and not more than 50 percent of the students from senior secondary school are able to transition from senior secondary schools to the State run University of Liberia entrance and placement exams.

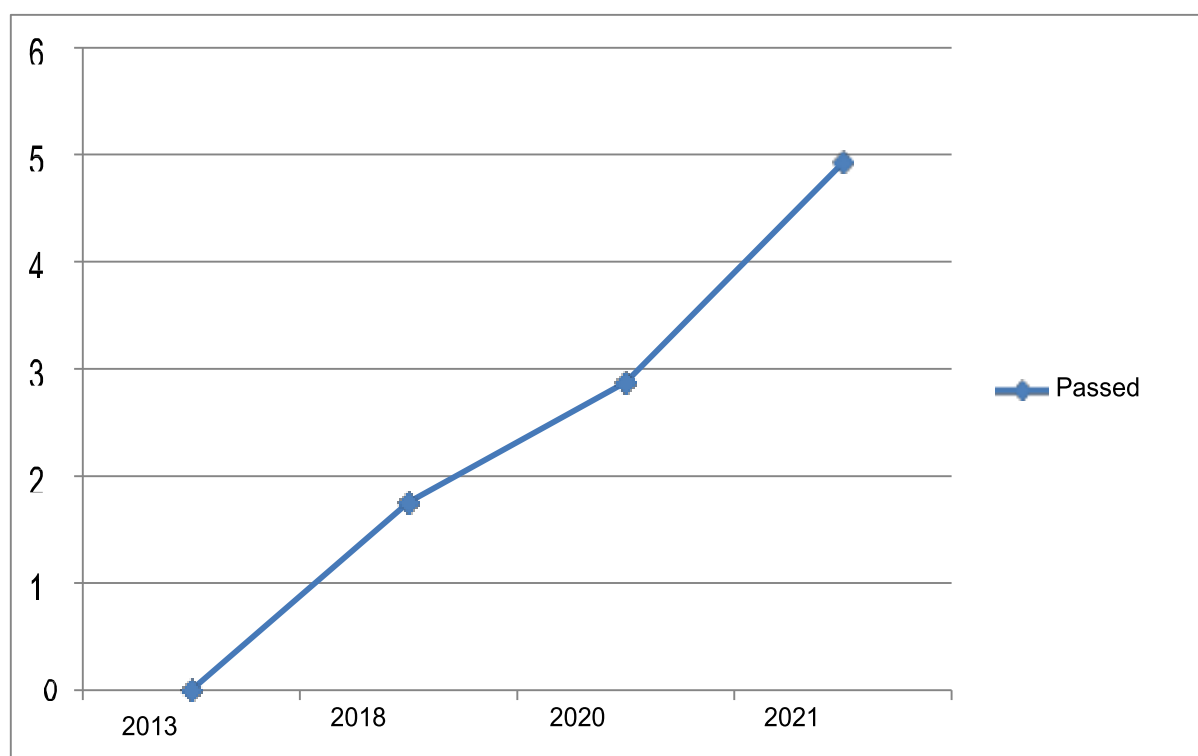
Moreover, numerous tertiary institutions in the country rely on the entrance and placement exams for admission decisions. There is no universal standard for admission using the West African Senior Secondary Exam (WASSE). Unlike Liberia, students in Ghana are obliged to score C6 or above in at least three core subjects to gain admission into universities. In 2018 for example, more than 62 percent of 315,621 test takers failed to score C6 or above in

at least three core subjects (Kamran, Liang, & Trines, 2019). This is a clear evidence of a gap in the provision of secondary education because success in tertiary education exams is closely interconnected to success in senior secondary education (Conley, 2003). In Liberia, there are limited reports about the involvement of higher education faculty in setting educational standards and assessments for K-12 education. In Figure 1, the transition rate of senior secondary students gaining admission to the University of Liberia is shown below:

Figure 1 below indicates that in 2013, no students passed the admission tests. This has improved between 2018 onwards where by, for every 10 students that sat for admission exams, between 2 and 5 people passed.

**Figure 1**

*Pass Rate of Senior Secondary Students gaining admission to University of Liberia*



## Legal and Administrative Framework

The appropriate age for senior secondary school children in Liberia falls between ages fifteen and eighteen (Liberia, 2011) although a huge number of overage scenarios exist.



The Liberian government has a constitutional mandate to provide equal access to educational opportunities and facilities for all children (Liberia, 2001). Besides the constitutional mandate, there are constructed laws that recognize education as a fundamental right for all children of school age. The government of Liberia through the Education Reform Act of 2011, the National Education Sector Plan (2010-2020), the Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017-2021), the Strategy for Education Transformation (2018-2028), and the Improving Results in Secondary Education (IRISE 2019-2023) projects promised to address issues directly related to access, quality and relevance within the secondary education tier. A summary of the major inputs and promises directed towards achieving secondary education in Liberia is seen below. In Figure 3, the suggested access, quality and relevance propositions of the sector are provided.

**Table 2**

*Summary of Major Inputs and Promises towards Secondary Education*

<b>Access</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Relevance</b>
Construct, Repair and upgrade secondary schools	Provide Teaching and Learning Materials	Guarantee Job readiness for 25% of High school graduates
Increase access and transition	Upgrade performance in WASSCE and other External Assessment	Establish specialized secondary schools for science, agriculture, technology and nutrition
Reduce Dropout and out of School Pupils Increase Girls retention	Improve teacher competencies and pedagogical skills	Provide access to learning digital skills

**Source:** (Liberia, 2011, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2016)

From Table 2, some of the planned action indicators to promote access, quality, and relevance at senior secondary level are provided.

### **Access to Secondary Education**

In educational terms, access refers to deliberate efforts on the part of institutions and stakeholders to provide a means by which households, regardless of race, religion, gender, disability, past academic performance, family income or geographical location can receive quality secondary education (World Bank, 2004; Great Schools Partnership, 2014) when demanded for. Access to secondary education can be constrained from both the supply and the

demand side. Supply-side solutions may include the construction of new schools in areas where there are no secondary schools or the elevation of existing junior secondary schools to senior secondary level. Demand-side solutions are achieved by young people or their parents' willingness to assume the economic cost of secondary education. It can also be achieved through the provision of free secondary education or scholarships for low-income and disadvantaged students including girls (Coady & Parker, 2004; Ghana, 2021). From all indications, access to secondary education is highly constrained from supply and demand side in Liberia.

### **Addressing Supply Side Constraints**

In this subsection, issues related to addressing supply side constraints in education are highlighted as debated in existing studies.

### **School Construction, Repair, and Updating**

Access to education refers to the availability of schools, the number and locations of schools, the number of grades offered, and the opportunities for students to progress from one level to the other (Geissinger 1999 as cited in Sifuna, 2007). For children to smoothly sail through the tiers of education, school infrastructure must be proximal to communities, and able to accommodate the various levels so as to reduce the distance, difficulties, and costs associated with traveling long distances. Studies show a link between long home-to- school distance and school dropout (Yemane, n.d.). In instances where students have to relocate from one school district to another to continue higher levels of education, it has been discovered that they are twice as likely to drop out of school as their non-mobile counterparts (South, Haynie, Bos, 2007).

The construction of new schools in rural communities has proved to reduce gaps

associated with access. In Ghana, for example, the transition rates from lower to higher secondary schools grew from 39 percent in 2014 to 72 percent in 2019 due to the construction of new schools in rural communities (Ghana, 2021). In Liberia, the World Bank (2019) reported that there are also important disparities in access with six out of the 15 political subdivisions having less than 5 percent of all senior secondary schools. The economic cost of senior secondary education is also high as only 22 percent of all senior secondary school is provided by the government. This means that a huge chunk of senior secondary education is provided by private, concession, and community actors which come with financial burdens associated with high fees. To crown it all up, about 25 of the 124 school districts have no senior secondary school (World Bank, 2019). This means that students completing basic secondary school will have to travel to other districts with available senior secondary schools increasing chances of learners dropping out of school.

Recently, the government of Liberia, realizing the huge access gap created by the huge numbers of learners in transition every year from lower secondary education to senior secondary education has embarked on steps to increase access to senior secondary education, reduce high school dropout, and decrease the number of out-of-school-secondary students through the Improving Results in Secondary Education (IRISE 2019-2023) project. The project aims at increasing access to secondary education to over 40,000 students, 60% of which will include females. The project aims at rehabilitating available senior secondary schools, expanding rural junior secondary schools to senior secondary schools in districts with no senior secondary schools and constructing secondary schools in urban areas with high student - teacher ratio (World Bank, 2019).

### **Dropout in Senior Secondary School**

The concept of dropout as direct and unambiguous as it may seem, has been applied differently in different educational systems. For example, drop-out within Ghana education

system refers to students who were admitted in school but failed to complete the level of the educational cycle admitted to (Yokozeki, 1996). This means that leaving school after the completion of a compulsory cycle without going onto the succeeding cycle does not constitute drop-out. The analysis in this context is done by calculating the percentage of students who could not complete an educational level as compared to the total number of children enrolled initially in the educational cycle. This definition of dropout sets a boundary of analysis, and statistical inferences.

However, the above definition was not considered in Krua (2015) analysis of dropout in Liberia. He reported that Liberia, with a higher percentage of youth in school (62%) has dropout rate of 82 percent before grade 12. Unlike other countries in the region, transitioning to grade 10 does not increase the likelihood of graduating from grade 12. Dropout during grades 10, 11, and 12 remains a critical and pressing issue especially for girls. Krua (2015) defined dropout from a whole system perspective. His definition agrees with Michaelowa (2007) when he detected that the completion rate and quality of output and outcome at each level of the system affects the succeeding levels. Hence, an increase in the dropout rate at one level of the system will reduce the enrollment rate at the next level.

### **Age appropriateness**

The problem of overage students in Liberian schools is prevalent. It is reported that 93 percent of all pupils in primary and secondary education are at least one year overage for their grade, and 84 percent are at least two years overage (Ministry of Education, 2018). Also, Darvas and Namit (2016) reported that 82 percent of students in primary school in Liberia are too old for their grade. Overage children in primary school lead to overage transition in senior secondary school since it's the same students leaving primary and basic education moving up to senior secondary school. In Nepal also, it is reported that more than two-thirds of students in

grades 1-12 are over aged (Lee, 2015). Considering the fact that overage students are at greater risk of failure or dropout (Lee, 2015), the number of overage children has an effect on quality outcomes because research shows that overage children in over-crowded classrooms present a pedagogical challenge for teachers, and administrators (Tarumi et al., 2010). In short, overage enrollment presents challenges related to access because overage children occupy the limited space for age appropriate children.

### **Non-discriminatory Access to Education**

There are provision both in international protocols, national laws, and constructed policies. These aim at ensuring that there is no segregation of children from accessing education on the basis of gender, race, tribe, age, and disability, among others. In most jurisdictions, there is a special preference given to children living with disabilities and girls' education. Current efforts basically focus on increasing opportunities for girls to transition to and complete senior secondary education. The IRISE project addresses this at individual, school, and community levels to enable young women to enter grade 10 and graduate from grade 12 (World Bank, 2019). It provides scholarships for girls in counties with the highest female dropout rates at the senior secondary education level. It is envisaged that with such efforts in place, the transition rates for the marginalized children should be high for such groups.

### **Relevance of Secondary Education**

Relevance in education has two outcomes, personal relevance and life relevance (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). Both personal and life relevance make connections between what children do in school and in their actual lives (Albrecht & Karabenick, 2018). Personal relevance refers to those skills and knowledge acquired by children which enables them to aspire for greater achievements while life relevance refers to the skills and knowledge acquired which helps children to engage real-world issues, problems,

and contexts. In designing educational programs, it is imperative that the needs of the individual learners and those of the community are put into consideration. This consideration would simultaneously solve the issue of relevance of education at both personal and life level considerations.

### **Relevance of Secondary Education in Liberia**

Since the new government of Liberia assumed power in 2018, its focus has been on developing its human capital and building the capacity of the country's youth to reach their potential in turn, creating a qualified and skilled labor force that can contribute to and participate meaningfully in the economic development. To achieve relevance in education in Liberia, policymakers underscored that besides academic proficiency, pupils must acquire national literacy and marketable skills through computer literacy and development (Liberia, 2011). However, practical training is still considered a waste of time in many schools. Students are not provided the right environment to develop their practical knowledge and skills. There is lack of proper laboratories, instruments, and staff. Students get only theoretical knowledge which results in the students coming out of school without the knowledge of technology and its practical use. As a result, they are not able to get suitable employment.

Although a new competence based curriculum was launched in 2018 (Ballah, 2018), there is limited research on the distribution of the new curriculum in schools and how the use of the new curriculum is impacting marketable and computer skills necessary for the personal or societal survival of children. Students in Liberia have limited if any opportunity to acquire even the most basic digital skills. In most cases, teachers do not provide any instruction in this. A lack of digital literacy and skills will put Liberia further behind in modernizing its economy and catching up with the rest of the world in the 4th generation of industrialization (World Bank, 2019). Liberian students receive more emphasis on academics and knowledge

centered education which does not give them the confidence suitable for personal and life relevant competences.

To address the issue of relevance, the current Minister of education promised to introduce a three-track senior secondary school learning system for students after they complete the basic junior high school. The paths include Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Vocational Training. The aim was to introduce students to other specialized fields as a means of having a path towards developing a meaningful career (Senah, 2018). However, with the lack of basic equipment and qualified vocational skill training teachers this has been a difficult attempt. Recently, the government of Liberia and partners began to recruit qualified vocational teachers to be sent abroad for additional trainings in order to fill this gap (Front Page, 2020).

### **Quality of Secondary Education**

Quality in education can be construed from different dimensions. According to UNICEF (2000) quality in education should be evaluated from five dimensions namely, learners, environments, content, processes, and outcomes. From the learner dimension, quality is achieved when children are healthy, well-nourished, willing to learn and encouraged by their families and communities. From the environmental dimension, quality is judged by healthy, safe, protective, and inclusive facilities provided by the school. Meanwhile, the content factors include a curriculum embedded with basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and skills for life, such as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, and peace. While process refers to the facilitation of knowledge by trained teachers and outcomes are the exhibits of education seen in personal life and linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society. A holistic secondary education would ensure that the learners gain knowledge and skills appropriate for this level in an environment that encourages learning.

Parents as key stakeholders of an educational system tend to see quality as closely related to the opportunity for socioeconomic progression including employment and earning

better incomes, among others (UNICEF, 2000). This quality is structurally loaded in the school system and it improves as learners' transition from one grade to the next. Learners who might have missed some aspects at lower levels may fail to exhibit better competences for the next level in the educational hierarchy.

### **Quality of Secondary Education in Liberia**

A lack of a defined merit system which guarantees that students who perform in secondary school are more likely to gain easy admission into tertiary education or get meaningful employment diverts students' interest in secondary education. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, learning environment lacks the basic facilities that will motivate students to keep in school. Although the Education Reform Act of 2011 addressed the issue of quality by ensuring that each school has teachers with minimum qualification, a large proportion of the existing secondary education teaching force do not have the knowledge or skills required to be effective in the classroom (Ministry of Education, 2016). Further, the expenditure on secondary education is still minimal and does not seem to guarantee adequacy in terms of resources that would ensure quality delivery of educational services to meet the stakeholder expectations.

World Bank (2019) attributes the quality challenge to insufficient and misaligned teaching and learning materials, few qualified teachers in rural areas and public schools, and inefficient teacher management. In addition, weak governance and management of the education system and limited, and fragmented public financing also affect the quality of education in the country at secondary level affecting both public and private schools.

Due to the experience associated with private institutions especially, the high cost of education, there has been a fight against the privatization of education in Liberia. The National Teachers' Association of Liberia together with twelve civil and human rights organizations has led the advocacy in this regard. In response to the expansion of the Liberian government's planned school partnership program, a movement led by Bridge International



Academies, the National Teachers' Association of Liberia (NTAL) and civil society organizations stepped up their campaign for the public education and its commitment to fight against the commercialization of education (Ministry of Education, 2019). The letter to the government clearly exposed the shortcomings of Liberia's education system and urged the government to commit to public education.

Efforts by the private sector have not yielded many benefits. Bridge International Academies (BIA), one of the key players in the School Partnership Program for Liberia, is the fastest growing chain of low-cost, for-profit schools in the world. And it is also the subject of much controversy. Studies commissioned by Education International (EI) have identified numerous problems in BIA-run schools in several African countries. There are serious concerns about BIA's substandard teaching methods and facilities, regulatory non-compliance and practices intended to maximize profit at the expense of educational outcomes (Piper & Korda, 2011).

Fighting commercialization of education is a top priority for educators around the world, noticing that the private sector cannot ensure equitable access to education for all as envisaged in SDG-4. The 8th World Congress of Education International passed a resolution reaffirming the commitment and determination of teachers to deepen and strengthen the global response to privatization (UN, 2020). Further, it is intended to renew efforts at the local, national and regional levels strengthening the EI's global advocacy work to challenge and oppose profit making in education. It is noted that commercialization of education undermines the right of all students to receive a free and quality education. Moreover, it creates and entrenches inequality and violates the working conditions and rights of teachers and other education workers.

## **Conclusion**

It has been established through literature that secondary education provides the

initial labor force for the economy. Nonetheless, gaps still exist in the effort to provide accessible, quality and relevant senior secondary education despite the growing number of children leaving primary and basic education. Resolving the relevance gap requires a jump from the knowledge based approach of delivering secondary education to a more practical application of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology in the classroom. To bridge the access gap, in Liberia, it is important to build schools in remote areas, provide some incentives to parents from poorer communities for sending their children to school, increase the completion and retention rates of girls from basic education and reduce the rate of systematic dropout, among others. To improve quality, it is recommended that teachers undergo Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to build their competences to manage the new competency based curriculum, adapt the pedagogical skills to deliver the curriculum including the development and use of relevant teaching and learning materials. Resources should be allocated to ensure that the needed materials are made readily available to teachers and students.

## **Higher Education as a Subsystem**

This section reviews the higher education as a subsystem of the education sector.

### **Introduction**

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are defined as those training organizations beyond the senior secondary level (Lablah, 2019). The purpose of higher education in Liberia is to source a workforce for both the public and private sectors to grow the nation's economy. Within the last ten years, higher education has witnessed a growing demand. It is noted that between 2008 and 2015, enrollment in higher education institutions increased by 50.8 percent (SABER Country Report, 2017). Considering the fact that over 75 percent of Liberians population is under the age of 35, investment in higher education will propel the nation towards economic growth and development. In this regard, government of Liberia over the last decade initiated several legal and administrative frameworks through the National Commission on

Higher Education (NCHE), the Higher Education Strategic Plan (HESP), the Revised National Policy on Higher Education (2015), the Education Reform Act (2011), and the Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017–2021). However, it seems the envisaged outcomes of higher education are yet to be fully realized as envisioned. The country is still one of the world's poorest countries with immense human capital gaps to spur socioeconomic development (Stebbins, 2019).

Numerous authors have attributed gaps in Higher Education (HE) to extensive damage, multi-source constraints and years of neglect, as well as quality, relevance and access gaps in the provision of higher education in Liberia (Boateng, 2020; Gbollie & David, 2014; National Commission on Higher Education, 2012). While these factors have had their own share of the blame, it appears that a leadership gap has persisted in the running of HEIs in Liberia. This subchapter conducts a desk review of the HEI policies and practices in Liberia and the best practices elsewhere through related literature with the goal of identifying gaps and solutions in the realization of HE policy goals.

## **Overview of Higher Education in Liberia**

Created in 1822, Liberia became the home for a group of Americans of African heritage who chose to relocate to Africa during the struggle for the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. It is obvious that the land which was later called Liberia, already had inhabitants prior to the arrival of the settlers. The Pepper Coast or Green Coast, as the land was formerly referred to, was believed to have a combination of African natives whose major occupation were farming, fishing, trading, and hunting. The arrival of a new group of people created a class struggle for both resources and power in the country. This development was to continue influencing the social dynamics of the country including access to power and its roots including quality education.

History made us to believe that these natives had settled in Liberia after they

fled the instabilities associated with the fall of great African empires including the Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. The land became known to the outside world through European voyagers who were interested in African products including the famous Melegueta pepper, then as valuable as gold. Although the settlers loosely called Congoes or Americo-Liberians met the natives or indigenous Liberians on the soil, it was easy to penetrate the natives as their tribal and religious differences did not allow them to form a common front against intruders. In fact, they were almost always fighting amongst themselves. Hence, the settlers with a master- slave mindset picked from their former country began to dominate the terrain by adopting the native youth, first as house helps and later as wards. The children of the natives were particularly denied HE unless recommended by an Americo-Liberian who would eventually change the name of his/her ward to a more — ‘civilized name’.

This trend continued for over 133 years when the many years of indigenous suppression took a major political shift in 1980 through a bloody coup d’état that brought the first native President, Samuel Kanyan Doe, to office. This change automatically led to a paradigm shift in higher education as issues related to access, quality, and relevance were redefined to include the indigenous people of the land. Admission requirements were changed to accommodate the native population which was the origin of accessible HE for all who could afford. However, because the University of Liberia was built for a limited number of students, the access shift created quality issues as classrooms became overcrowded, learner to lecturer ratio increased, and student political movements came to surface.

Until 1989, higher education in Liberia was limited to two public institutions – the University of Liberia and William V.S. Tubman University. The only private higher education institution established before that time was the Cuttington College (now Cuttington University) which was the first university in West Africa established in 1889 (National Commission on Higher Education, 2012). The University of Liberia, earlier known as College of Liberia was

established in 1862 as a training hub for the Baptist Church and as a means to provide higher educational opportunity for children of the settlers who could not travel back to America or other European Countries to obtain the same. The College of Liberia was elevated into a university status in 1951. Currently, there are 46 accredited institutions of higher learning in the Liberia (NCHE, 2020). It is envisaged that with such a high number of HEIs in the country, higher education is more accessible and of better quality and relevance.

Several factors related to Macro, Meso, and Micro level systemic issues have defined the culture inherent in Liberia's higher education. At the Macro level, the conflict theory has persisted where higher education perpetuates social inequality through class, gender, ethnicity, and racial admission. The system, over the years has pushed young people into obedience through mismatched curriculum unlinked to the economic direction of the country thus keeping them economically disadvantaged while the rich and powerful continue to excel through economic and social opportunities. From the macro level of the system, political will is also not forthcoming as required. At the Meso level, the focus of higher education should be on the management function related to directing and controlling. This too is challenged due to gaps in leadership. At the micro-level, issues related to cultural, political, demographic, and socioeconomic concerns have defined the roles leaders, administrators, and managers play in the sector.

More so, higher education in Liberia is vulnerable to shocks from the social and political environment, corruption and the country's uncertain economic future. It may be noted that the gaps in achievement of accessible, quality, and relevant HE in Liberia have been routinely associated with the following factors as enumerated in the next subsections. Politics Shift in HE policies has always been associated with political regime change, a case demonstrated in the late 1980s after the native takeover of Liberia (Ministry of Education, 2019). Therefore, it has been difficult to sustain the vision of HEIs for a longer period without

disruption. Additionally, the heads of all public HEIs in Liberia are Presidential appointees who usually see their job as a means of satisfying the political direction of the regime that placed them at the helm of authority in academia. A similar situation is evidenced in private HEIs which are largely private and faith-based. The Bishop or church clergy, as well as proprietors or shareholders are responsible for the appointment of heads who are almost always remote controlled thereby undermining the autonomy needed for HE to set strategic and sustainable structures, systems, policies, processes, and procedures that would enhance pursuance of vision related to delivering the much needed attributes of good education like quality, relevance, and access. Moreover, political instability affected the country's ability to create and sustain stable institutions and policy environment that would mature to deliver the benefits expected from higher education.

## **Culture**

The curriculum in HE is predominately knowledge focused and not society focused (Ministry of Education, 2017). The tradition of teacher-centered lectures, assessment practices and the role of students, technological adaptation and the culture of leadership have not experienced significant change for decades. For instance, the curriculum in higher education is focused on producing more of white collar oriented graduates who are job seekers than hands-on technicians who are job creators. Moreover, the needed skills to man the revenue generating sectors of the economy like geology, mining, forestry, fishery, engineering, among others were not developed through such an educational ecosystem. Moreover, private and faith based HEIs are mostly business oriented and remain a source of profit making for owners.

## **Economic Issues**

Shortfalls in higher education finance have been observed in many forms and can be traced to many regimes in the past but the current government exacerbated the problem when it

declared "free tuition" at all public HEIs (Woods, 2019). The decision has left HEIs to hugely rely on government subsidy which is not forthcoming and very inadequate to meet the needs of the HEIs. There suggests that the HEIs are unable to provide an education that meets the accessibility, relevance, and quality.

It is difficult to understand the direct funding that goes into HE because although the Ministry of Education includes HE in its annual budget, some HEIs receive direct subsidy transferred which is not captured under the MOE. For example, in the 2016 budget, the MOE allocated USD 150,000 to HEIs accounting for 83.3 percent while over 30 USD million was directly transferred to the HEIs (Boateng, 2020). The limitation of sustainable funding to HE has also led to gaps in the provision of relevant HE. For example, the current government vetoed a bill seeking to repeal the Act intended to establish the Tumutu Agriculture College due to budget constraints (Executive Mansion, 2020). The establishment of the college would have created the only HEI directly focused on producing the manpower needed to advance the agricultural sector and grow the Liberia economy.

### **Access to Higher Education**

Like all other subsystem, access refers to deliberate efforts on the part of institutions and stakeholders to provide a means by which citizens, regardless of race, religion, gender, disability, past academic performance, family income or geographical location can receive quality higher education (World Bank, 2004; Great Schools Partnership, 2014) when demanded for. The growing demand for higher education in Liberia has led to the unavailability of vacant seats at State Owned Universities. The access gap is partially filled by the availability of privately run HEIs which are expensive and escalate the unequal access to higher education in the country.

However, given the economic cost of attending private HEIs the publically run HEIs are still overwhelmed with demand side constraints related to access in higher Education.

This demand side constraint in higher education is projected to be resolved through the —Free Public University Policy declared by President George Weah (Shaban, 2018). However, in 2019, the University of Liberia reported to the Liberian Senate that it was experiencing funding challenge because the government was defaulting on its free tuition obligation despite the huge enrolment triggered by the policy enactment (Geeplay, 2020). This inability to fund the growing numbers at the HEIs has led to challenges with ensuring this level of education is more accessible. It is hoped that when funding improves, better benefits of HE will be realized.

### **Relevance of Higher Education**

The relevance of education including higher education level is twofold: personal relevance and life relevance (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). In higher education, relevance of education relates to personal development, sustainable employment and active citizenship (European Union, 2018). Meanwhile, life relevance is about the learners' ability to meet life challenges including solving social challenges. Both personal, and life relevance have connections between what is done in school and real life situations (Albrecht & Karabenick, 2018).

Since the current government of Liberia assumed power in 2018, its focus has been on developing its human capital and building the capacity of the country's youth to reach their potential in turn, creating a qualified and skilled labor force that can contribute to and participate meaningfully in the economy. To achieve relevance in education in Liberia, policymakers underscored that besides academic proficiency, young people must acquire national literacy and marketable skills through computer literacy and development (Liberia, 2011). It was observed that a lack of digital literacy and skills would put Liberia further behind in modernizing its economy and catching up with the rest of the world in the 4<sup>th</sup> generation of industrialization (World Bank, 2019). Like the European Commission, Liberia needs to promote —fit-for- purpose STEM and information and communications technology (ICT) higher



education program based on the STEAM – science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics –approach to educationl. This would ensure production of a labor force that has the skills needed by the digital market, fast-track other sectors through scientific research and innovation and cut down the country’s import bill through import substitution depending on the products and services produced by the local population.

### **Quality of Higher Education**

It has been established that quality in higher education serves as the catalyst for the attraction of Foreign Direct Investors (FDI) because they reduce the burden associated with the importation of skilled manpower needed for investment in every sector of a country’s economy (Sumaworo, 2015). According to UNICEF (2000), quality in education should be evaluated from five viewpoints; learners, environments, content, processes, and outcomes. Similarly, Gbollie and David (2014) suggest that quality should be viewed from five angles: providing greater value; with limited or no flaws; achieve its purpose of providing the manpower for the economy; value for money paid; and lead to permanent change in behavior of the recipient. From the above viewpoints, quality in education is an ambiguous term but fundamentally associated with the ability of individuals acquiring HE to contribute to the creation of adequate skilled labor as needed by any country. Quality in higher education can be enhanced through continual capacity development of HE faculty in 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogy, the reorientation of the curriculum from a more knowledge base to a more societal focus and the provision and enhancement of research and resource materials for HE stakeholders is essential. As outlined in several policies related to HE in Liberia, some of the actions highlighted in Table 3 below are intended to close the gaps relatedto access, relevance, and quality.

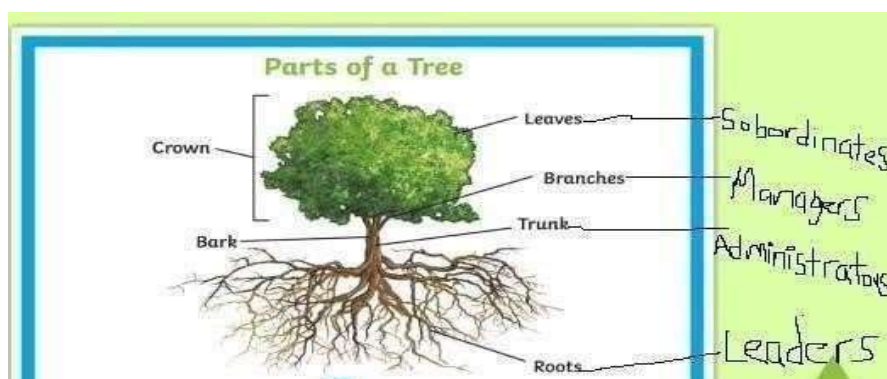
**Table 3***Summary of Major Inputs and Promises towards Higher Education*

<b>Access</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Relevance</b>
Develop a national student aidProgram	Pursue intensive programs for faculty and staff development	Identify national priorities and link them to academic courses.
Equitable access to higher education for the vulnerablePopulation	Transform and reorient the curriculum	integration of ICT into the higher education
Strengthen linkage between higher education and secondaryeducation	Develop and consolidate library and other resource materials in national network	Strengthen the community colleges to produce students for career readiness
Coordinate efforts to pursue renovation and reconstruction of its physical assets and services	Reduce illiteracy	Establish and link other national, regional, and international higher learning institutions.

*Summary Drawn from Higher Education Strategic Plan, 2012, Revised National Policy on Higher Education in Liberia, 2015, Ministry of Education, 2016).*

**Leadership Gap in Liberia's Higher Education**

It has been noted that heads of HEIs in Liberia are remotely controlled by politicians, shareholders, and proprietors thereby limiting the autonomy required (Ministry of Education, 2019). In many instances, the issue of setting a vision and exerting influence as well as budgetary allocation is external to HEIs. This reality validates the suggestion or observation that HEIs in Liberia are being governed by administrators and managers and not leaders. To understand the critical role leadership plays in the running of HEIs, let's illustrate using the plant shown in Figure 2 below:

**Figure 2*****Leadership Illustration***

*Source: Modified Home Learning Support Page (2018)*

## **Leadership in Higher Education**

From Figure 2 above, leaders are the foundational establishment of higher education. For any HEI to grow, it must have strong leadership which is grounded in knowledge, skills, and professional networks. Leadership is the major pillar upon which all components of HE lean. As a plant without deeply established roots, it can be easily uprooted or wither, so is any organization without entrenched leaders in the management of the affairs of the institutions. Without leadership, HEIs are visionless and lack a sense of sustained direction. Leadership is about creating goals and setting strategic direction for H.E. It ensures that followers who are motivated enough to translate the vision into reality (Zeeck, 1999 in UNESCO, 2016). In the context of higher education, the focus of leadership must be primarily directed towards setting a curriculum that is aligned with national priorities and ensuring that staff and students are influenced in such ways that enables them translate the vision into reality through the knowledge, skills, and behaviors acquired from the institutions of higher learning.

The leaders in higher education, to ensure success, must focus on producing effective outputs that are marketable in transforming the developmental objectives of their institutions and society. The SABER Country Report (2017) revealed that the visions for HEIs were set by the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) but issues regarding budget formulation are more or less outside the role of the heads of HEIs. Nonetheless, effective utilization of the limited resources received by the sector should be put to proper use to ensure that there are demonstrable results from higher education.

## **Management**

As observed from Figure 2, managers act as the branches of the tree. Therefore, managers are responsible for ensuring that resources, transmitted from the leadership move through the right channels to all areas of the institutions that need them. UNESCO (2016) described the roles of managers as those responsible for handling and carrying out programs,

and procedures which have already been outlined and envisioned by another person. Thus, the work of managers is confined within existing structures. In other words, managers are responsible to work with subordinates to ensure that they translate the programs and plans already. Relating this to higher education in Liberia, managers are only left with the duty to implement plans and policies made by politicians, shareholders, and proprietors, among others. It should be noted that the efficiency and effectiveness of the institutions rests with the managers who are responsible for the day to day running of these institutions. They plan, organize, coordinate and communicate with various stakeholders, control activities, and ensure learning and change. When they don't do this role properly, the institutions would not be position to deliver on their promises. This creates gaps in service delivery.

## **Administration**

Administration ensures orderly performance of institutional roles. They ensure that the governance mechanisms make the leaders' goals and managers' roles reflect existing reality or are set into motion (Dembowski, 2007). Administrators therefore become the bridge through which leaders' structure and translate their visions to managers while ensuring that managers are accountable to and are working towards the vision. In higher education, administration is responsible to translate vision, and strategies into operational plans and policies while dividing job responsibilities in departments for proper accountability. From Figure 2, we can note that administrators are like a trunk of the tree which serves both the roots – leaders and the branches – managers thereby validating the role of administrators as those responsible for ensuring that the goals of leaders and the roles of managers are harmonized in order to achieve the vision through the activities of the institutions (Dembowski, 2007).

Leadership has become a central quality for the management of organizations. Educational institutions, committed to the fulfillment of quality indicators, have found in leadership a determining factor for the fulfillment of their goals and the development of their mission purposes in an efficient

manner. Educational leadership is not only perceived as an exercise in institutional management but also has a consequence in learning. Similarly, it has become a key factor in improving educational quality.

It may be claimed that the progress of educational institutions depends largely on the management teams and the exercise of their leadership role in the organization, energizing, supporting, motivating and transforming the institutional processes and strategies into observable knowledge, behaviors, and skills among learners that are well prepared to meet both personal and life needs. This is evidenced by the McKinsey report (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) and the OECD reports (2008, 2016) that include educational leadership as the second relevant factor in learning achievement from teaching action. This is because managers who exercise leadership have the ability to influence the development and well-being of their team of teachers and therefore, student performance.

On the one hand, HE heads are considered in their roles as managers, administrators and counselors, that is, they are characterized by exercising different responsibilities and leadership associated with pressures in the performance of their duties. On the other hand, there is an explicit link between the quality and success of a school in relation to the leader (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; OECD, 2016). Leadership is entirely concerned with improving the organization; more specifically, it's about setting worthwhile agreements and directions for the organization in question and doing whatever it takes to push and support people to move in those directions. Hence the need to think about the teaching directors and the educational leadership they require to run the institutions. This may not be done in isolation from the institutional review and topical discussions on the subject. One of the key issues to look at is the pedagogical leadership which is currently highlighted as essential to generate good practices, and contribute to the improvement of learning results.

In institutional leadership, there seem to be two ways to influence student academic outcomes and thus exercise pedagogical leadership (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; OECD, 2016).

Firstly, taking those actions related to having a direct impact on teaching and learning (training that contributes to the development of conceptual, procedural, and attitudinal competencies of managers) and secondly, taking those activities that indirectly influence teaching practices (organizational conditions of the school). In this sense, empirical studies that theorize about how leadership practices are shaped and strengthened by this type of practice contribute to pedagogical knowledge by the management team with a focus on professional development. Thus, leadership begins to be seen as a practice in the community distributed, more democratic, and instrumental at structuring the school entire school. Moreover, it is not only the leadership but also the leadership style that influences the quality and success of the programs. It is claimed that transformative, educational or pedagogical leadership (Bernasconi & Rodríguez-Ponce, 2018; Leithwood & Strauss, 2009) in schools triggers success. The school managers and scholarly community should think about different perspectives of leadership in educational organizations such as dialogic leadership, socio-formative and distributive, and how they influence leadership so that the best attributes of the various leadership styles may be adapted to improve performance of schools.

### **Education Leadership Concept**

Several of the reviewed documents address the concept of leadership to locate their research theoretically. Hence, it is pertinent to recover such definitions to delimit key elements of leadership and based on this, observe what educational leadership would be. In the case of Bernasconi and Rodríguez-Ponce (2018), they maintain that the leader is the one who has influence on the members of a team or organization so that they carry out the necessary tasks to achieve the objectives. Consequently, leadership would be "the ability to influence or induce groups or individuals within a team or an organization to achieve a certain action or behavior in favor of achieving institutional objectives or goals" (p.31).

Castro, Miquilena and Peley (2006) agree that leadership implies influencing others

but they point out that it is a phenomenon resulting from social interaction, and is an inherent element present in all human groups. In this line, Piper and Korda (2011) argue that leadership is refers to the ability of a person to influence the members of an organization, inducing them to behave in a certain way" and within other members of the organization to commit their physical, mental and emotional energies within the framework of an organization to achieve organizational results. Leadership, therefore, must be oriented to achieve the ends that an institution sets itself as enshrined in its vision and mission statements.

According to Jean-Marie, Normore and Brooks (2009), three approaches can be identified in understanding leadership: 1- one that focuses on personal traits which is based on the assumption that leaders have innate characteristics, for which reason they seek to analyze the subject's attributes; 2- one that addresses leadership as the "set of actions and strategies undertaken by the leader to achieve success which leads to thinking of effective leadership practices; and 3- one that focuses its interest on the links and relationships between leaders and followers which implies incorporating the contextual characteristics of the institution in which leadership is generated and exercised.

The latter confirms that leadership must be understood as a process of social order, that is, of relationships between subjects that are structured not only based on the extraordinary qualities of their leader but also on their work and that these two elements match the characteristics and needs of the followers and with the characteristics of the context. In other words, leadership is seen as a process through which individuals influence others, inspire, motivate, and guide them to achieve objectives as a team (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009).

Now, in the educational framework, leadership is associated with the management of educational institutions to achieve their efficiency especially in that students achieve learning outcomes (Piper & Korda, 2011) and, in this way, achieve quality dynamics. This requires not only the ability to influence the work team but also to direct and have "a vision of what the

educational organization is and should be.

### **Differences between Educational, Pedagogical, and School Leadership**

In some articles, the concepts of school leadership and pedagogical leadership are often used as synonyms for educational leadership. However, there are others that point out differences, although these are not always explicit in the statement. For example, Hernández, et al. (2017 p.542) affirm that "the school leader should understand the pedagogical principles that underlie the classroom process". In other words, the idea remains latent that the school leader may not always know about pedagogy, so such is not automatically a pedagogical leader.

Another example is the OECD's Improving School Leadership Program which shows that the development of school leadership goes through four main axes: (re)-defining responsibilities; distributing school leadership; acquiring the necessary skills to exercise effective leadership; and making leadership an attractive profession, all bearing in mind that leadership for learning is the fundamental character of school leadership. As can be observed, none of the above makes explicit the pedagogical leadership as a constitutive dimension of school leadership (talking about learning is not necessarily talking about pedagogy since it refers to a noun that can be achieved without the intervention of the teacher and or without the need for a school). Therefore, a school leader may not by constitution be a pedagogical leader.

To this extent, best pedagogical leadership is one that implies an improvement in the quality and effectiveness of the school's operation. This type of leadership requires that institutions focus their activities on what allows them to establish their purposes in the team of teachers, and administrators, so that operational and organizational conditions are generated to exercise a culture of collaboration. Likewise, teacher professional development is promoted; therefore, pedagogical leadership is leadership for learning.

Educational leadership is assumed as a shared project in which the leaders, the collaborators, the context, the project, and the common commitments are involved. As



Leithwood and Strauss (2009) put it, the role of leadership is revitalizing a group or an organization to generate its own growth based on a shared mission or project. It is assumed as the —task of mobilizing, and influencing others to articulate and achieve the shared intentions and goals of the schoolll (p. 20). This leadership, then, is not attributable to a leader but to the actions and forms of collaborative work that it generates in a contextualized way and registered beyond the school, that is, in any social institution. In contrast to the school leadership, that would settle in this one. School leadership is associated with the dynamics of the school and the ways of influencing problem solving. It is a polysemantic concept linked to the different functions of the manager. That is, associated with the work carried out by the management team in collaboration with the teachers which is linked to the management of human resources, the management of the organizational climate, and coexistence, administration and leadership for learning.

Different investigations (Marzano et al., 2001; OECD, 2016), show that the school leadership exerts considerable effort in the operation, results, and development of the school. It is also about impacting the results through interventions focused on teachers and their capacities. It is evident, then, that leadership is not a sphere of action and competence exclusive to managers but rather must really be exercised by all members of the educational community, where one has an inspiration function over others at various levels of management in the school. Based on the review, it can be affirmed that educational leadership is a concept that refers to the influence that is exercised in a group to successfully achieve the educational process but given that education is not limited to a single social institution such as universities, media, and family, among others, the school leadership would indicate that such influence is done specifically in colleges and schools. For its part, pedagogical leadership would refer to the specificity of influencing the curriculum and teaching practice using the knowledge of pedagogy as a field of knowledge (Marzano et al., 2001; OECD, 2009).

School leadership encompasses school management which implies administration, and management of resources outside the classroom. However, it may contingently influence the practice that occurs there, because if there is no budget for the board this influences the development of teaching. Although the TALIS report (OECD, 2009; Piper & Korda, 2011) shows that there is no tension between an administrative and a pedagogical exercise, not every administrative leader is necessarily a pedagogical leader and vice versa. This observation, unless otherwise taken seriously, may affect the allocation of resources for both school leadership in general and pedagogical leadership in particular. Further, it is imperative that school leaders take cognizance of the importance of pedagogical leadership in achieving school goals.

The latter implies thinking that school leadership could refer to pedagogical leadership but it is not inherent to it, since a school leader could be a good manager but not necessarily a pedagogue and, in the same way, there would be good pedagogical leaders but who do not interfere in administrative decisions of the schools where they work. In other words, it is possible to think of a school with pedagogical leaders, and school leaders that complement each other, so as not to fall into a belief that places a large number of qualities in a single school actor (OECD, 2016; Piper & Korda, 2011;).

In nutshell, educational leadership refers to the direction carried out in said institutions to ensure that the set goals and objectives by the educational institutions are realized. This leadership can be exercised in different ways. A dichotomy of exercise of this leadership has been noted including pedagogical leadership – primarily focused on teaching or academic instruction to meet the curricular and learning results, comprising curricular planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation. There is also administrative leadership (management of the organization) which is focused on the management of the entire institutional activities meet the diverse goals of the school.

## **Leadership as a manager's role**

Leadership as an exercise may be placed under the educational or school director. That is, as if it was an activity to be carried out due to the nature of the position. Some educational policies have as a strategy to strengthen the leadership of school administrators and ensure that managers have the necessary skills and competences to provide both pedagogical and administrative leadership (Piper & Korda, 2011). There is a growing emphasis managerial leadership in schools as being one of the most effective routes for the school context, since the principal has, in the end, a decision-making power. In addition, the role of executive leadership is essential to achieve quality standards, effective results, and changes that improve the quality of learning. Hence, one of the most important characteristics of effective schools is quality direction arising from a clear and open leadership of the principal.

Along these lines, Piper and Korda (2011) argue that the director's leadership must be eminently pedagogical, so his fundamental concern is the promotion or empowerment of all the members and those involved in the educational entity or initiative, to achieve teaching effectiveness and improvement to ensure learners acquire the necessary quality of education. In educational leadership which is also a pyramidal structure, the manager fulfills a substantive function and leadership qualities are desirable to manage conflicts that arise between the numerous spheres of the institution. The leaders have the onus to welcome diversity of voices, and allow them to be heard from the higher hierarchy. As noted by OECD (2018), the vertical culture rooted in educational institutions makes subjects want decision-making managerial leadership, contrary to theories that speak of participation and horizontality, of shared leadership.

On the one hand, it may be inferred that whether leadership is a matter associated with a position (the school principal) or not, the truth is that it is a necessary exercise in contemporary education. It ensures existence of focused efforts and motivation to meet both

administrative and pedagogical goals of institutions are met. On the other hand, in the literature there are studies that indicate that leadership is necessary for institutions to adapt to social needs which implies having an ethical reference in sustainability, dominating skills, and attitudes that respond to new changes and commitment to inclusion (OECD, 2016). In this line, leadership is a quality of the organization that is systemic and distributed (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009). In higher institutions of learning, leadership is also a multiple, team, shared responsibility, in which teachers assume their role as professionals in their areas and exercise the direction of their fields of knowledge, for this, the faculty have to commit to:

- The development of a shared vision focused on students and their needs.
- A commitment and involvement in teaching and learning.
- An involvement of teachers for the professional learning of all staff.
- Developing a collaborative culture.
- An emphasis on action learning.
- Facilitate systems thinking.

The manager thus becomes an agent of change who inspires and capitalizes on the skills of the members of his community to achieve common goals, solve school problems, set goals, and develop a climate of collaboration.

### **Educational Direction and Types of Leadership**

Faced with the role that manager's play and the leadership that they must exercise, reflections have been developed, and theories from other fields have been brought to determine qualities that are necessary to consider in the position. For example, Varpilah et al. (2011) point out the importance of distributive leadership and demonstrate that: —it is characterized by the fact that the leader creates routines that help transform the culture of the center, contributing to the improvement of the job satisfaction of teachers and the academic performance of students. Therefore, it is associated with democratic forms and co- responsibility.

Another type of leadership that is addressed is transformational which focuses on motivating people to put their best effort into achieving their expectations. Changes are produced in groups, organizations, and society which in turn represent a benefit for the community. In transformational leadership, the leader is responsible for generating purpose and goals that are challenging, those that are sought to be achieved as an institution or as a team. In that order, it is about seeing leadership not as a matter of a person but of an organization, what Noguera (2009) calls organizational leadership. What is unique about this form of school leadership is that it seeks change for better results in the organization. The change may be administrative or pedagogical depending on where modifications are required for better performance.

Jean-Marie, Normore and Brooks (2009) propose leadership for social justice that deals with actions, first of all, on recognizing the inequality of those groups at risk of social exclusion. It seeks to influence the teaching and learning processes to effectively limit the gaps in service delivery that could escalate the social gaps. This leadership implies recognition of inequalities and keeping in mind the nature of schools in disadvantaged contexts. It is a leadership oriented to the practices of management teams to achieve an inclusive culture that eliminates the marginalization of race, class, gender, special learning conditions, that work for the common good and distributive justice. Leadership for social justice shares certain traits with the formative leadership proposed, since it speaks of "love for knowledge, commitment, respect, care, and responsibility while enabling those that would be excluded to participate without undue limitations. It is even related to emotional leadership in which the leader can influence the emotions of the team to promote self-knowledge, self-regulation, and social skills.

### **Rethinking the roles of Heads of HEIs Higher Education**

It is almost a decade since Liberia adopted the initial vision for HE. Although the vision is considered strategic and covers all areas related to addressing quality, equity, efficiency, and access, it has been reported that limited actions have been taken to place the vision into action (Saber County Report, 2017). In this regard, Higher Education must adopt policies which are responsive for achieving the following:

Accountability for school performance—under this approach, educational establishments usually have a greater degree of autonomy in their financial and administrative management but this occurs in exchange for being accountable to the State for their performance in national evaluations (Biesta, 2007; Saber County Report, 2017). Specifically, this policy involves a combination of strategies, phases, and devices that includes: i) goals of results prefixed from the State; ii) Standardized evaluation systems of the quality of learning results; iii) Publication of results and system of classification of the quality of schools; iv) Consequences for results usually, rewards and sanctions; and v) resources and/or technical advice for those establishments that obtain unsatisfactory performance. As mentioned, this is usually added to the requirement that the school be accountable for its results also to the families, within the framework of a market-oriented system. In this way, parents are expected to be regulators of the quality of the educational system based on transparent sharing of information, and thus be able to choose, sue and, eventually, drop out of a school (Biesta, 2007).

Professional responsibility—this approach aims to hold the school team accountable for delivering quality learning experiences and is contingent on the sustainable development of professional skills within the school. This responsibility is oriented towards educational communities — internal accountability — and to the local and/or national State, that is, public accountability. External evaluation and accountability systems may exist but these tend to be flexible, not tied to inter-school competition policies or individual bonuses or

sanctions and results are not published in the media (OECD, 2016; Varpilah et al. 2011).

The efforts of this type of policy are oriented towards obtaining high standards in teacher training and its entry barriers, together with a high social status of the profession and attractive working conditions. This is combined with a low level of structuring of the national curriculum, the existence of strong local governments that provide stable support and a grassroots confidence in institutional capacities. This model has been developed in countries with high levels of social equity and national agreements regarding the value of education and teaching work (Gillborn et al. 2017). It is important to note that the educational systems of each country combine components of the different approaches analyzed; however, generally one model predominates over the others.

Furthermore, the issue connecting higher education curriculum to national economic vision is key to transforming the sector (Sumaworo, 2015). Again, the decentralization, capacity building for HEI stakeholders, and research are issues that are very important to the transformation of the sector. Finally, there is need to continually revise the statute creating the National Commission on Higher Education to ensure accountability of HEIs, and to ensure that quality assurance protocols are upheld (Saber Country Report, 2017) by the institutional leadership.

## **Conclusion**

Higher Education in Liberia has experienced the conflict theory by perpetuating social inequality through class, gender, ethnicity, and racial admission. On the one hand, the system, over the years has pushed young people into obedience through mismatched curriculum unlinked to the economic direction of the country. On the other hand, micro-level issues related to cultural, political, demographic, and socioeconomic reasons have not only led to gaps in access, relevance, and quality but also defined the roles leaders, administrators, and managers

play in the sector. To close the access gap, the government of Liberia decentralized HE through the enactment and construction of several community colleges. From the quality perspective, HE must contribute to the creation of adequate skilled labor as needed by any country. This can be achieved through continual capacity development of HE faculty in 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogy, the reorientation of the curriculum to develop the desired skills and knowledge and enhancement of research, and resource materials for HE stakeholders. Finally, in bridging the leadership gap, the paper suggests that heads of HEIs be granted the autonomy required to set strategic vision and direction as well as influence followers to translate vision into reality. The paper suggests the de-politicization especially in the appointment of heads of HEIs, Continuous Professional Development (CPD), and increased budgetary support to HEIs as a possible remedy needed to quickly transform HEIs in Liberia.

## **Technical and Vocational Education as a Subsystem**

This section explores the technical and vocational education as a subsystem of education and brings out its intentions, contributions, and missed opportunities.

### **Introduction**

This subchapter conducts a desk review intended to highlight the mechanism and external support which exist for quality TVET in Liberia, the main challenges that TVET providers face in accessing accurate labor market intelligence and the impediments to widening TVET access and participation by all who desire TVET education. Besides bringing to the forefront issues directly related to access, relevance, and quality in TVET, the review will endeavor to reveal best practices, both in related literature, and other countries with the goal of identifying gaps in the realization of policy goals.



## Overview of Technical and Vocational Education and Training

TVET is generally used to refer to vocational and technical education and training, on-the-job-training, internship, apprenticeship as well as the acquisition of technology and science-related knowledge and skills directly related to the job market, and economic wellbeing of people (Tripney et al., 2012; Tripney & Hombrados, 2013). Different methodological approaches, policy interventions, research, and available data on TVET has made drawing strong generalizations implausible. Unlike other levels of the educational ladder, acquiring TVET is not usually restricted by age, academic proficiency, or disability. TVET programs can target any group of people before, during or after basic and compulsory school, school dropouts, continuous education for adults, capacity/skill training for unemployed persons, and on the job training for employed persons, amongst others.

TVET is central to the achievement of national international goals including the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goal 4. Given the growing number of young people, coupled with the increasing data on unemployment and underemployment, these global targets have been adopted by many countries to ensure lifelong learning opportunities for all through technical and vocational skills development, decent work and entrepreneurial development in promoting economic wellbeing, and reducing social inequality (UNESCO, 2016).

It is important to note that the response countries give to TVET education is somehow tied to the historical antecedent leading to the development of TVET policies and interventions. As King and Palmer (2007) put it, TVET has not always been tied to the production of a middleclass, poverty reduction or economic growth as theory would like to imply. During colonial and metropolitan regimes, TVET was either left for the less academic students, lower class citizens or the working class. This concept still dominates some sub-Saharan countries (Zinnah & Jackollie, 2020). Up to the decade of the 60s, most Liberians perceived TVET as an

education for school dropouts who lacked academic potential for formal education. On the contrary, other countries like the Soviet Union and some European Countries discovered the direct link between TVET, labor/employment, and production. In the latter scenario, TVET was considered the short-cut to getting out of poverty (World Bank, 2004) and the gateway for economic growth of a nation through intensive use of technology and innovation.

### **Overview of Liberia's TVET**

Historically, Liberia's TVET sector became formal with the establishment of the Booker Washington Institute (BWI) in 1929. Primarily, BWI was established to supply a United States owned company called Firestone Natural Rubber Plantation with middle level technicians specialized in areas of agriculture, business education, building trades, and electrical trades (Zinnah & Jackollie, 2020). A Ministry of Education and UNESCO report also affirmed that only Booker T. Washington (BWI) offered any kind of TVET education with established curriculum at this time (Liberia, 2020). This purpose of this institution was not to train technicians for Liberia's labor market and could not, therefore, claim to meet national demand for technicians.

As the country became to experience larger economic diversification as a result of investment in forestry, mining, manufacturing, and construction, it became evidently apparent that BWI lacked the needed capacity to cater to the manpower needs of the country. Although investors like the Liberian-American-Swedish Mining Company (LAMCO), Bong Mining Company (BMC), Liberian Mining Company (LMC), and National Iron Ore Company (NIOC) set up their own TVET programs; it was not enough to meet the human resource gap. Moreover, there were no mechanisms to manage such independent TVET institutions based on a central, countrywide policy. Hence, UNESCO suggested either the importation of foreign technician to help the country meet its human capital needs or massive TVET expansion and investment. As to which of the options were prioritized, it was not until the 1980s, when a control

system was suggested for TVET. This provided the much needed framework for a nationwide establishment of a TVET educational subsector in the country.

The establishment of the National Council for Vocational/Technical Education and Training (NCV/TET) and the Agriculture and Industrial Training Bureau (AITB) was proposed to oversee, and regulate all TVET activities. However, these institutions are currently non-existent and a new legislation is proposed to establish a Liberia TVET Commission (LiTCOM) that will have the powers and authority to spearhead the process of implementation and regulation for TVET, and for other related matters. It is therefore safe to say that the closure of many investment related companies due to the 14 years of civil war created a gap in the production of skilled manpower for the economy.

## **Country Context**

Liberia is considered one of the richest countries both in human and natural resources but has been largely deprived of development due to a lack of the relevant human capital, knowledge and strategies needed to transform its productive sector into wealth through technology and investments (Liberia, 2018). The government has ambitiously targeted 620,000 skilled manpower to meet the current industry demand before 2030, however, the lack of end-to-end data and information for pre-service and in-service TVET makes it difficult to avoid a dead end and to relate TVET output directly to various segments of the economy such as fisheries, forestry, mining, engineering, agriculture, and services (Liberia, 2020). The appraisal report of the Education Sector Plan (ESP) by the country's development partners also acknowledged the acute limitation in TVET data (Liberia, 2018). The lack of data to inform public decisions means that the government cannot have empirical and grounded policy making process informed by more reliable knowledge of what works and what does not (Sanderson, 2002). With such lacuna in national data, the focus has always been what would make an immediate impact (Konneh, 2014). This affirms that policy making in TVET has not been

sequential and scientific but rather ad hoc or imported.

The Ministry of Education is required to ensure that a curriculum for TVET is taught at the senior secondary level. Recently, the current Minister of Education promised to enforce this mandate by introducing a three-track senior secondary school learning system for students with TVET orientations to have a path towards developing a meaningful career (Senah, 2018). The TVET Bureau of the Ministry of Education is responsible to oversee secondary and non-degree granting TVET institutions not governed by the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (Zinnah & Jackollie, 2020). However, there has been a challenge related to the availability of a trained TVET workforce along with a lack of teaching and learning materials (Front Page Africa, 2020). Moreover, a limited number of tertiary institutions offer TVET education to students while the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) on the other hand operates vocational training centers at intermediate levels. The MYS trainings usually target dropouts and disadvantage youths to acquire on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs.

Liberia's TVET sector is predominantly controlled by private actors including NGOs, concessions, and religiously owned organizations. About 13.6 percent of TVET providers are government owned (Liberia, 2020). There is no accreditation hierarchy for TVET institutions or uniformed curricula making it difficult to compare qualifications across TVET providers.

Currently, Liberia is ranked 175 out of 189 countries and territories using HDI indicators rising 10.3 percent between 2000 and 2019 (UNDP, 2020). This, however, is not satisfactory as three-quarters of Liberia's population is classified as youth with only 16.5 percent in wage related employment and 83.5 percent in non-wage employment.

To end with, the constraints hampering the effective delivery of TVET in Liberia include low resource allocation, a lack of capacity development programs for staff, limited access and awareness, unstandardized curriculum, a lack of a unified TVET management body, a

lack of training equipment, low turnout with people with disabilities, a lack of National TVET Teacher Training Institution, and limited intelligence on industry participation, among others.

### **Access to TVET Education**

Like all other subsystems, access refers to deliberate efforts on the part of institutions and stakeholders to provide a means by which households, regardless of race, religion, gender, disability, past academic performance, family income or geographical location can receive quality TVET education (World Bank, 2004, Great Schools Partnership, 2014). Currently, the government of Liberia runs six TVET institutions and one project providing training in a number of areas. These include the Monrovia Vocational Training Center (MVTC), Business Domestic Occupational Training Center (BDOTC), Klay Agriculture and Vocational Training Center (KAVTC), Tumutu Agriculture Vocational Training (TAVTC), Youth Agriculture Training Center (YATC), Julijuah Vocational Training Center (JVTC), and Youth-On-The Job Training (YOJT). At community college level, there are about seven Counties in which TVET education is offered at Associate of Arts degree level.

The Government has recognized that TVET is a surest way of providing sustainable jobs to the increasing population of young people seeking jobs all over the country. This will require rebuilding the TVET institutions, equipping them and setting up institutional frameworks for the effective operations and management of these institutions. In 2018, the European Union (EU) committed €20 million grant to support TVET programs intended to rebuilt infrastructures and equip training centers with necessary training and learning equipment.

### **Relevance of TVET Education**

Making Liberia's TVET programs relevant requires mitigating the misalignments between the skills supply and the needs of the industry, reskilling to aid the current workforce

meet the changing labor strains of the industry, leaving the traditional formal educational tract and engender a paradigm shift towards the acquisition of skills that add value to the human capital. This may also include developing and adopting standardized curriculums for different disciplines and integrating the informal sector into the country's TVET platform. The courses offered in the formal TVET institutions are mainly in the traditional areas or fields, such as carpentry, masonry, plumbing, cookery, tailoring, soap making, ICT, and secretarial services.

However, the countries major areas of economic activities and employment are in the Agriculture (Rice, Cassava, Forestry and Fishing), Mining, Manufacturing, Construction, and Services. There is need, therefore, to align these trainings needs and the ability of the TVET curriculum in meeting such a need cannot be overstated. Also, the establishment of a TVET Management Information System (TVET- MIS) and a Labor Market Information System (LMIS), as is the case in Guyana, will go a long way in ensuring relevance, and employability by facilitating a better alignment of TVET programs with the requirements of the labor market (Guyana, n.d).

Due to the slow capacity of the Liberian economy in producing jobs, entrepreneurship education as a vehicle for self-employment is critical. Consequently, entrepreneurship education is not yet integrated into the curricula of TVET institutions. This remains a gap in enhancing entrepreneurial stock in the country. Perhaps learners with entrepreneurship potential shall be identified for intensive training and set on the path toward self-employment, self-sufficiency, and becoming employers when such program is integrated into TVET mechanism.

Additionally, factors which enhance and sustain one's employability including life coping skills like promptness, work habits, and attitudes, personal management skills, team work, communication skills, gender responsive skills, decision making, interpersonal skills, creative thinking skills, problem solving skills, or conflict management skills, and career

development need to be integrated into TVET provision. Like Ghana, the need to build basic skills through informal apprenticeships and on-the- job training is also critical to creating awareness and provision of a sense of career direction for young people (Adams et al., 2013).

### Quality in TVET Education

It has been established that quality in education serves as the catalyst for the attraction of Foreign Direct Investors (FDI) because it reduces the burden associated with the importation of skilled manpower needed for investment in every sector of a country's economy (Sumaworo,2015). The more a country can attract FDI, the better the rank of that country on the Human Development Index as the economy is able to generate wealth to improve human living standards. Quality in TVET education would come with several benefits to the economy. These would include the provision of qualified teachers, appropriate training equipment and adequate teaching and learning materials. This would further lead to production of work-ready and socially resilient graduates with entrepreneurial, life coping, and market-relevant skills that can be adapted to changing production technologies or for self-employment in a wide range of fields. This involves a combination of strategies including investments in teacher education and training and teaching and learning infrastructure, knowledge of the supply and demand of skills, and the dynamics of the labor market. As outlined in several policies related to TVET, Table 4 highlights how to close the gaps related to access, relevance, and quality in the sector.

**Table 4**

#### ***Summary of Major Inputs and Promises towards Technical and Vocational Education***

<b>Access</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Relevance</b>
Include TVET in secondary education Equitable access to TVET for the vulnerable population	Pursue intensive programs for faculty and staff development Transform and reorient the Curriculum	Identify national priorities and link them to TVET. Integration of ICT into the TVET
Establish TVET at tertiary level	Supply teaching and learning equipment	Introduce entrepreneurship and apprenticeship programs
Coordinate efforts to pursue renovation and reconstruction TVET schools	Set up regulatory boards for TVET	Establish and link other national, regional, and international higher learning institutions.

*(Summary Drawn from National Policy for TVET 2015-2020, the MYS Strategic and*

*Operational Plan (2018-2022), the Liberia TVET Draft Legislation (2019), PAPD 2018-2023).*

## **Conclusion**

Some underlying issues related to quality TVET education include persistent poverty limited access to quality and relevant education and training, lack of employment opportunities, and opportunities for capacity development. Government, teachers, parents, and the international community need to do everything in their power to realize the opportunities that education provides to all students in every village, every city, and every country. A review of the technical and vocational environment reveals potential gaps in data, staff and program management, mismatch between skills-supply and demand as well as inadequate funding as primary factors affecting the delivery of accessible, relevant, and quality TVET program. Hence, to revolutionize the sector, there is a need to take a critical look at the current operational context.

## **Post-pandemic Education**

Although Liberia had earlier experienced emergency situations associated with the 14 years of civil war, Ebola, and other insecurities, the pandemic generated by Covid-19 undoubtedly brought a devastating tragedy for all humanity including Liberia. Directly or indirectly, it has caused, and continues to cause, great damage to the economies of the countries, and suffering that will take a long time to alleviate (UNESCO, 2022). Few people doubt that, for education, the pandemic has meant not only a significant delay in the cognitive learning of many students but has also generated enormous stress for students, teachers, and families alike. Therefore, this research would be incomplete without the review of the effects of this global menace.

Educational policies cannot be justified in catastrophes but they can emerge renewed from the lessons learned. This arises where the existing mode of education fails to



address the challenges that come with such catastrophes. One of the most used mottos in education is that “you learn from mistakes”. Perhaps it is the right time for those responsible for education to recognize the exhaustion of the current model, learn from its mistakes, and become the promoters of much-needed change.

A review of the effects of Covid-19 on educational service delivery in many countries reveals that the consequences of the pandemic on education, included the reduction and in many cases, the elimination of face-to-face attendance, as a result of the population lockdowns implemented by most governments (UNESCO, 2022). This had the most harmful effect on education, of all the pandemic management measures that were instituted. As of mid-April 2020, nearly 90 percent of students around the world were denied access to face-to-face classes and had to rely on the unfamiliar digital classes that had their limitations. The limitation of personal contact, until now a fundamental pillar of learning, exposed enormous weaknesses in the educational systems of the time.

The rigidity of the systems and an inadequate preparation of all the actors in education and the result of decades of immobile educational policies and far from the reality of the times have caused immense damage to student learning. Among those affected, is the safety of learners and their well-being which may take a long time to restore (UNESCO, 2022). It could be said that beyond the damage caused to families, Covid-19 has not been the true origin of such great damage to the progress of student education but rather, the decades of bad educational policies and non-existent emergency mechanisms whose lack of realism has been exposed during the pandemic.

The limitation of face-to-face attendance in educational institutions has forced teachers to incorporate distance learning in their classes, having to quickly adapt to the use of educational platforms, improvised in most cases. The way of evaluating learning has also had to adapt drastically. In countries such as France, the United Kingdom, and Ireland, final exams

were suspended during periods of confinement (UN, 2020). In most North American educational institutions, grading was suspended for the entire year of 2020, returning to the simplified "pass" or "fail" method. This affected the evaluation teaching and learning during the period. In addition, where access to technology by both learners and teachers was limited, accessibility, quality, and relevance of education were severely damaged.

At the present time and as most educational institutions return to face-to-face teaching and learning especially in the most developed countries, they are considering important changes in their culture. In general, there is a tendency to be more flexible, more efficient, and more receptive to the proposals of their actors (ASER, 2019). Among the improvements introduced by educational centers in their process of adaptation to the current reality, the definitive integration of technologies into educational processes stands out not only through the provision of technological infrastructure but also through the incorporation of platforms, the training of teachers and managers and the transformation of a culture. Until now, the educational system was rigid and exclusive calling for a more receptive and inclusive one. It is expected that such changes will make education service delivery more responsive to sudden changes in the service environment.

Through educational policies, governments are obliged to prepare a generation to face the problems of the new world that appear after pandemics. Distance education, teleworking, and the reduction of in-person social contact are measures that had made inroads in the education sector since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Russell & Haney, 2000; UN, 2020). Finding and using the appropriate tools to ensure that education meets its objectives of equitable social development in each given context is an unavoidable task of the State, through the government.

### **Integration of Technologies in Educational Processes**

It is not in contention that the crisis generated by the pandemic has given a

considerable boost to the use of technology in education especially in a profession such as that of the teacher in too many cases resistant to change which has led and still does delay in its adoption. In any case, educational institutions have been forced to anticipate and accelerate their investments in technology and to train their teachers to incorporate them into teaching. Companies that invest in private education have doubled their investments integrating educational technologies in educational processes since 2020 (UNESCO, 2022). In many cases, the adoption of technologies has helped advance learning for students who in other circumstances, encountered serious barriers to learning. It is noted that it minimized the effects of weak learning where the mother tongue was not the vehicle for learning or where access to the campus school was hampered by limitations such as distance, the absence of transportation, the weather, or the inability of parents to transport their children to the school. It is noted that for these students, the use of technical resources has facilitated learning and understanding of the teachings.

Many children have done better when studying remotely, particularly, those who suffer from anxiety or victims of bullying. Moreover, some shy students who struggled to participate in face-to-face classes have found video calls and chats less intimidating and more inclusive (UN, 2020). At the higher level, distance education has helped to de-temporalize, relocate, and universalize education. Students can attend classes synchronously or asynchronously, attend classes in person, or watching the videos of the conferences at another time, and in another place. In addition, for the working class, integrating technology has facilitated the compatibility of study and work, or the care of dependents and promoting equity of access to inclusive education.

However, it is observed that there are enough reasons to be pessimistic about the speed and agility with which educational institutions can recover from the effects of the pandemic in spite of integration of technologies (UNESCO, 2022). The teachers are exhausted.

Relations between unions and authorities have deteriorated. Governments are tightening their belts regarding allocation of resources to facilitate deeper integration of technologies in educational services. Parents who have had to juggle full-time work and full-time supervision and nurturing of children are desperate to turn their children over to others for longer not less time. These may pose challenges to effective adoption of information technology in education.

Developing countries which suffer resource limitations may take time to cope with this new reality. But the rapid shift to distance learning has shown that educational institutions are capable of dramatic transformations, albeit the challenges (OECD, 2016). Technology drives reforms that once seemed scary now seem easy. Many students and parents who previously rejected distance learning now prefer it to the risks and costs of traveling and the dead time of face-to-face learning. But for this process to be a success, teachers must play a fundamental role. They must adapt their way of teaching to the new model and use technological tools that allow breaking the barriers of time and space which prevent many students from accessing higher education. In addition, governments should allocate resources to establish the required infrastructure to support this model of service delivery while parents spend resources to provide the necessary gadgets and guidance to the learners in order to optimize learning.

### **New Education Learning Models**

Information and communication technologies (ICT) have been used in recent years as essential pedagogical resources to improve the quality of educational processes and accessibility of educational facilities. It is a tool for educational inclusion. Considered as a means of support and pluralization of the content and knowledge base that is taught in educational institutions of all academic levels (OECD, 2016; World Bank, 2018). ICTs have substantially changed the teaching-learning experience during the last decades, since the dynamism that they pose not only contribute to the creation of practical knowledge but also

strengthens the traditional teaching model by promoting the development of transversal skills such as communication, collaborative work, and autonomous learning.

Despite how novel the above may seem, it is important to mention that the system used by contemporary virtual education models is not totally new or unknown. Its antecedents can be traced back to correspondence courses, radio schools, and teaching telephone very popular educational modalities since the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the ease they gave students to overcome spatiotemporal barriers (World Bank, 2018; UNESCO, 2022). By incorporating emerging technologies into the field of education, these distance learning models contributed to shaping what is now known as virtual or online education –classes. This model of education has developed visibility throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to ICTs and to the great demand of users and suppliers. It is coming to offer a wide range of organized and planned educational possibilities at affordable prices.

Online teaching, or traditional virtual education, is a fully planned educational experience, with a systematic model for the design, and development of curricular activities. It allows a planned interaction between educators and students in the midst of a digital environment created specifically for this purpose (ASER, 2019). By fully incorporating ICT tools and traditional pedagogical methodologies, this model favors autonomous learning while trying to strengthen collaborative work to support students, not only in educational matters but also psychosocial needs of learners. It should be noted that over the last decades, three generations of adopting autonomous learning models in education can be identified which allow one to observe a gradual advance in the methods that have consolidated the system that characterizes the online teaching model today (UWEZO, 2017).

The first generation was based on printed material resources sent by mail; in the second phase, electronic media such as the computer were incorporated while in the third generation, education began to rely on ICTs (UWEZO, 2017; Ministry of Education, 2019).

Evidence suggests that the last generation which makes use of ICT is the one that remains in force and applied in creation of virtual education. The multiplicity of possibilities that ICT offers to the pedagogical scenario encourages promotion of teaching learning in autonomous learning environment. However, the constant search to optimize quality and to remain current within the accelerated contemporary society keeps this model in a process of permanent transmutation.

Compared to virtual learning, the Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) model cannot always be thought of as a digital teaching-learning resource. It is conceived as —a temporary change from the delivery of instruction to an alternative mode of delivery due to crisis circumstances (OECD, 2016; UNESCO, 2022). The intention of the ERT educational model, beyond configuring an ecosystem that allows the interaction of educators and students, it consists of providing a temporary solution or instructional support that helps to overcome the barriers of traditional face-to-face learning. Although this implies a greater responsibility for the student who must only partially face his educational process, it also has a negative impact on the educational quality, since most of the time it is not possible to implement ICT due to the lack of a favorable environment.

Meanwhile, the technological and socioeconomic barriers that some students experienced since the establishment of online classes have cut short their chances of learning from home. Not having the minimum materials to carry out the activities proposed during virtual meetings increases the existing educational gaps among the student population and also encourages school dropout (ASER, 2019; Ministry of Education, 2019). This situation which especially affects students who live in vulnerable environments, leaves them behind educationally because they do not have the facilities and motivation or socio-emotional support in their immediate environment that allows them to support their academic training.

Further, connectivity such as internet is another determining factor which increases

access to a technological device to consult asynchronous educational tools or attend virtual classes. This ensures continuity in the learning process. However, where such facilities are lacking, virtual learning is impeded. On the other hand, the impact that the health emergency has had among educators, who do not have sufficient preparation to offer an effective virtual education has been considerable (USAID, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2019). Despite the fact that the use of ICT applied to teaching is a topic that has been given priority in recent years, the skills required by this type of instruction are different from those that educators have accumulated in their experience in the educational field. In this sense, the transition to a remote education model has met two challenges. Firstly, the increased workload of educators, due to the preparation required by academic and pedagogical planning to offer online classes. Secondly, the stress levels associated with all the inconveniences of providing quality education in a context of such marked socioeconomic inequality.

As the COVID-19 pandemic enters its third year, schools in 23 countries – home to an estimated 405 million school-age children – remain unopened for full operation. This suggests that many school-age children are at risk of dropping out, according to a new UNICEF report (USAID, 2018; UNICEF, 2021). Findings related to whether children are really learning or not present country-level data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures on children and provides an up-to-date analysis of the state of children's learning before the pandemic. The report highlights that 147 million boys and girls lost more than half of their face-to-face education in the last two years. In total, this represents a loss of two billion hours of face-to-face education. This is a scenario that either ERT or virtual learning would have mitigated.

### **Accountability Policy for School Performance**

The last stage of the policy circle is policy evaluation. This stage provides the basis for making judgment on the efficiency and effectiveness of educational policies

(UNESCO, 2022). This approach implies a set of linked measures that hope to mobilize actions among the actors to measure certain pre-established standards and expected results outlined at the INPUTstage (analysis and formulation). It underlies a set of components and assumptions for the achievement of effective implementation that generates the desired outcomes. These are examined below.

**Quality: measurable and comparable.** Evaluating the quality of each intervention is a key axis of the model in order to establish the accountability of schools and motivate continuous improvement. It is important to note that from this perspective, it is assumed that educational quality can be agreed upon and standardized and that the degree of achievement can be measured (UN, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). Likewise, it is possible and necessary to compare and prioritize these levels of quality achievement based on national standards.

**Equity: National Standards-** The school actors are understood as responsible for the evaluative results of the students, consequently, the responsibility is particularized at the institutional level (UN, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). This perspective seems only to consider in a marginal or secondary way the structural and contextual conditions of the schools, the socio-cultural origin of the students, the resources for hiring teachers, as well as the responsibility of both the local and the national governments. The quality of the offer is defined, then, independently of the specific context, although there may be more or less sophisticated mechanisms in each country to control variables such as the socio-economic level of the students and the —peer effect (Darling-Hammond, 2015). In this sense this approach assumes a notion of equity in which all schools are equally responsible for their results and must be held accountable for them.

**Differentiation, classification and competition as a motor for improvement-** The standardized evaluation establishes and publicly shows differences between schools. In Liberia, schools are categorized from A-F using a set of indicators (Ministry of Education, 2019; UN,



2020). Thus, the informed choice of parents and the competition between schools for better academic results are allowed. In other words, to stimulate educational improvement processes, the design of the policy requires the creation of differentiation mechanisms for classification and ordering of the schools according to their capabilities. In contrast, there are models that focus on defining minimum and mandatory requirements for all schools and therefore, differentiated degrees of achievement are not established but instead try to achieve equal conditions under a framework of universal policies. In Liberia, this is evidenced in the new Licensing and Accreditation policy.

**Rational management-** This model promotes the idea of achievement-oriented management, in which goals are set regarding the results in standardized tests and other established indicators. Systematic monitoring is carried out and decisions are made based on —evidence derived from the evaluative results (—data -driven decision-making). From this perspective, high confidence and legitimacy are given to the standardized evaluation instruments and their results which indicate to the institutions how they should guide management according to the least achieved aspects (Ministry of Education, 2019). Therefore, the evaluative results are decisive to determine the priorities of the pedagogical management. This implies that, for example, the 10 best performing schools in the West African Senior School Certificate Exam (WASSCE) should be given a merit based subsidy. This kind of subsidy may be directed towards increasing teachers' incentives thereby promoting competition and motivation.

**Flexibility of educational processes: adaptive learning-**New educational policies must contemplate the adaptation of learning to the needs and abilities of students. Imposing the same type of education to all students leaves many out of the system and of course, it has proven not to be the most adequate nor the most equitable way of education service delivery. Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) and ASER (2019) argue that educational institutions should move away from the —factory model that provides all students with the same lessons during the same period

of time, and move closer to the —medical model- in which it is assumed that students have various types of assistance needs, at different times and durations. This may include solving problems outside of school that prevent students from arriving at school in good physical and mental condition and motivated to learn.

The aforementioned measures ensure that the benefits of education can be visibly demonstrated and evaluated. The planning, implementation, and evaluation of the policy results should be synchronized to ensure that the stakeholders appreciate the contribution of a given educational policy. Having parameters as those underscored above helps in meeting the desired policy outcomes and impact and to demonstrate it to the stakeholders.

### **Increased Teacher Effectiveness**

The quality of the teaching staff and their effectiveness in achieving high performance from their students constitutes the key factor in the success of educational institutions (RTI International, 2018; OECD, 2013). However, improving the quality of teachers is not easy. The teacher's experience, the amount of training one has accumulated, or where they trained, the numbers of pedagogical studies carried out, among others, are not enough indicators of whether teachers are effective in the classroom or not (Hanushek, 2007). Improving the ability of teachers to deliver high-quality instruction begins with the hiring process. Selecting, motivating and retaining teachers who can provide high-quality instruction are actions that greatly return the resources in time, effort, and money devoted to it. Teachers are the most important factor for students to learn and acquire established skills and competencies. Therefore, it is essential that students have access to effective teachers.

Access to a high-quality teacher during a school year produces significant improvements in the learning of your students (; UNESCO, 2022; UWEZO, 2017). Effective teachers also have positive impacts on their students' opportunities to access higher education and even on their future salaries. Therefore, it is essential that the education system be capable of attracting,

developing, motivating, and retaining teachers. Becoming an excellent teacher is not something that happens by chance, it is not enough to have gone through teacher training, or university. A teacher must be motivated to teach, must receive the necessary technical and pedagogical support and must work in an appropriate environment to fully develop their potential. Both monetary and non-monetary incentives, such as recognition, and professional development opportunities, can have a significant impact on teacher effectiveness. These incentives serve as a stimulus to retain and attract talent to the teaching profession.

### **Relevant Competencies**

The pandemic has revealed a notorious dissociation between what educational systems produce and the skills that society needs. Even before the pandemic, the labor markets of different countries demanded a significant disconnect between the skills demanded by companies and institutions and those offered by educational systems (ASER, 2019; UWEZO, 2018). There has been an important change in the nature of human work, in the division of labour between machines and workers, and consequently, in the way in which one must think about education and training for work. There is a greater demand for work in non-routine, analytical, managerial, technical, and creative tasks. The most demanded skills are related to health, technology and communication but there are skills that add up a lot when it comes to getting a job, such as social relationships, creativity and imagination, work flexibility, and the ability to adapt to the environment.

Furthermore, not only cognitive skills but also socio-emotional ones influence the achievement of educational and employment outcomes. Young graduates from technical education exhibit higher levels of socio-emotional skills, either by selection or by training. Technical education seems to be associated with skills that the labor market currently demands, at least to a greater extent than scientific-humanist education (OECD, 2016).

On the other hand, the pandemic has left us with a new way of thinking and

working. The attitude towards work and the way of working have changed a lot. There are countries in which the pandemic has left many jobs vacant, either due to death or illness, or simply because many people have changed their attitude towards life and value leisure time more (OECD, 2016; UN, 2020). This has given rise to the concept of teleworking that requires special ICT competences. Teleworking has also expanded the fields of learning, as well as the diversity of skills and competencies that must be developed. Theorists and experts in the field of pedagogy agree that education cannot be limited to the traditional concept of knowledge acquisition (ASER, 2019; OECD, 2016). Education must be able to enhance the skills and abilities of children and young people to live in a changing society including teleworking.

The pandemic has also made this aspect clear to scholars and practitioners. The need for emotional support has increased significantly during and in the immediate post-pandemic period. The lack of adequate preparation to balance emotions is the main cause of a sustained increase in violence and suicides among young people. This increase in violence and suicides among young people is associated with unhappiness. A recent report from the Children's Society (2020) reveals that one in 15 young people is not happy in the UK. The number of children who are unhappy has almost doubled in just over a decade, according to the charity. Among the concerns of young people are: their future, school or their physical appearance. They rate their happiness more in relation to family, health or friends. The educational system as a socializing community is designed to enable children cope with such challenges. However, with the pandemic and virtual learning some of these social issues may not be adequately attended to leaving a vacuum that the youth find difficult to handle.

The image of world-famous young athletes, such as the gymnast Simone Biles, or the tennis player Naomi Osaka, retiring from sport to prioritize their mental health gives us an idea of the stress that young people are subjected to in today's world (Children's Society, 2020). To the pressure of social networks, the main cause of emotional stress for young people has

been added the difficulty of dealing with a global tragedy like the pandemic, without adequate emotional preparation. Through the development of students' self-knowledge and the acquisition of skills that allow for a healthy personal and interpersonal construction would help students deal with the problems of self-esteem, mood, and behavior that some children suffer from spending their days in a school environment that does not achieve a balance between teaching of academic skills and the personal development of children and young people (OECD, 2013; Varpilah et al., 2011).

When children are faced with an academic environment that forces them to sacrifice the development of talents, hobbies, interests, or family time, they generate a high level of frustration, stress and anxiety that can lead to conflicts for them and their families. However, when a child learns to develop his personality to be happy, he becomes able to solve the different demands of his school context. In addition, the learner manages to acquire what every child, adolescent, and adult needs to be happy. This includes feeling calm, secure with himself, valued and accepted in society (Adams, Silva & Razmara, 2013).

The educational project of the Summerhill School established by Alexander Neill 100 years ago in 1921 already put the happiness of children before traditional formal instruction (Adams, Silva & Razmara, 2013). He considered unhappiness as a barrier to learning. Along the same lines, the Montessori Method, developed by Maria Montessori in Italy in 1907, also prioritizes the psychological and environmental state of the child before formal instruction. To educate, it is necessary to rely on positive emotions so that the brain associates the learning process with happy emotions and thus shows itself predisposed to education.

On the contrary, according to (UWEZO, 2017), when teaching is carried out in a forced or scarcely and barely motivating way, when a negative attitude or rejection on the part of the students' predominates the learning environment, the brain ends up associating negative emotions with learning and, as a consequence, rejects it. For Biesta (2007), positive

attitudes favor effective work and allow for better results. Happiness leads to success as learning is exciting to the learners. The school must not turn work into torture creating negative emotions about the entire process. The process of embedding positivity in teaching and environment takes effort, perseverance, and application. Effort is needed to make learning easy and to ensure that what is intended to be achieved is worth achieving. This includes making the way of seeking knowledge pleasant and stimulating.

For a long time, insufficient schooling has been cited as a cause of low levels of training (Biesta, 2007). Frequently, the fallacy is based on the fact that by stretching the number of educational hours, the amount of education is also increased – quantity of education. This premise has been proven to be tragically false. It is claimed that if you want to find a child without an education in today's world, the sad reality is that you should look for him in a school. In many countries around the world, children go through 3, 4, 5, 6 years of school and are still basically illiterate, unable to read and write, certainly not reading with the complexity that is required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (UNESCO, 2020). The children are basically in school to create numbers and in many cases, they are practically incapable of performing simple arithmetic operations and incapable of applying analytical and reasoning skills appropriate for their age and or level of education (Russell & Haney, 2000).

Many children and young people especially from the public education system, find themselves in situations of poverty and trauma such that when they arrive at school, or at the educational center, they are unable to maintain the attention and concentration necessary to achieve effective learning (UNICEF, 2016; UNESCO, 2020). In these cases, additional support is needed from inside and outside the school. From the treatment of acute mental health problems and accommodations for students with special needs to guidance and counseling, these support services are designed to facilitate the conditions in which all children - particularly those living in poverty - come to life at school (Darling-Hammond, 2015).

However, it seems in number of contexts the educational services are not holistic enough to provide for such activities that develop a child holistically.

## **Conclusions**

It is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed major shortcomings in the Liberian educational system when implementing changes in its teaching-learning models. Although this is an unprecedented situation that confronts educational institutions of all academic levels to respond in a very short time, it is possible to observe that the adoption of ICT is an extremely necessary factor in the educational environment, not only to support the work of educators but also to contribute effectively to the autonomous learning processes of students.

It is up to educational policymakers to prepare teachers in the use and application of virtual platforms, with training and support mechanisms for teachers. Although there is great motivation for the use of ICT by teachers and students, both face challenges on a daily basis, associated with the limitations and problems that Cuba faces (Altman & Fogarty, 2010). Technological advances that have emerged over the years require advanced systematic training in technology for teachers as leaders in the educational teaching process. This requires an elaborate and interdisciplinary strategy to be able to transmit it to the students and achieve, between them, the necessary feedback in this process. In this way, computerization will be achieved in the universities and, therefore, in the country.

## **Summary of Review**

This review points to existence of substantial gaps in the input and outcome of educational interventions across space and time and are more pronounced in the developing world. These exist ahead of the expiration of the sustainable development goals (ASER, 2019; Government of Sierra Leone, 2018; World Bank Group, 2018; Kwadwo & Konadu, 2019;

UNESCO, 2019; United Nations, 2020). The gaps exist at every subsystem ranging from Early Childhood, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Tertiary Education, and Technical and Vocational Education. Since each subsystem has its unique input and output indicators which define the quality of output or outcome the system discharges to the external environment, the need to initiate research aimed at closing the input-outcome gap of education policies, using the whole system approach cannot be overemphasized.

This review adopted several gap analysis structures to appraise educational input, output, and outcome at various levels of the educational ladder. The review took into consideration key international, national, local, legal, and administrative frameworks intended to improve access, relevance, and quality of educational interventions in Liberia as well as different educational systems.

Research using the production function, conflict theory, and functionalism revealed that the production theory tries to establish the gap in the input-output and outcome of policies at all levels, functionalism focuses on gaps in the primary values of education and the general society and the conflict theory focuses on the socio-economic gaps created by an educational system at any level.

International research indicates that those students who are older than their classmates in the same grade are less likely to be literate and more likely to drop out of school before completing basic education. Moreover, the disparity between life expectancy at school between the rich and the poor is widening. On average, children from poor backgrounds spend about 4.2 years at school compared with the rich that spend over 10 years in school. This leads to disproportionate access to life opportunities and perpetuates socioeconomic inequalities.

Nearly 2 in 5 children, or 18 million, do not attend school in the ten nations with the highest rates of children without access to a primary education, according to a recent UNICEF report. Liberia has the largest percentage of primary school-aged children who are not



enrolled in school, at about two thirds. Meanwhile in South Sudan, the fighting has forced 1 in 3 schools in the country to close and 59 percent of the children cannot benefit from a primary education there. Among the top 10 nations with the lowest enrollment rates are Nigeria (34%), Niger (38%), Afghanistan (46%), and Sudan (45%). These nations collectively provide us a stark example of how prolonged conflicts and humanitarian events prevent children from attending school in spite of the efforts to make education relevant, of the right quality, and accessible for all (Moorosi, 2006; UNICEF, 2020).

Gaps exist in the holistic achievement of overall educational goals at all levels of education. These lead to limited access to quality and relevant education. Associated factors include schools being far from communities, discrimination related to race, religion, gender, disability, past academic performance, and family income, and failure to incorporate ICT and other relevant skills related to real-world issues, problems, and contexts are concerned. The quality of teachers and the availability of teaching and learning materials still present a quality challenge at primary level.

While related studies on input-outcome gaps from outside Liberia and within the country itself point to existence of input-outcome gaps at various levels, their nature and existent from the perspectives of the actors in the Liberian context is not empirically articulated. Most of the data comes from the official reports without the scholarly rigor to provide in-depth examination of their source, nature, and effect on meeting the country's educational goals.

In addition, there is no holistic academic or practitioner analysis that has been done to isolate and explain these gaps and to suggest plausible strategies for closing them to ensure desired educational benefits are realized. It is also observed from the literature review that there is no current study from a related theoretical standpoint (production, functionalism, and conflict theory) or thematic framework which has focused on the educational gaps albeit the new initiatives the government has undertaken to enhance the contribution of the educational sector.

Further, most of the literature sources are short of locating the gaps in the philosophical paradigms that could contribute to a logical design of policy frameworks capable of enriching the contribution of education from empirical evidence from the stakeholders.

Arising from the foregoing, this study proceeded to investigate the input-outcome gaps in Liberia's educational sector in order to suggest plausible, valid, and feasible recommendations for closing them. The study would provide theoretical, conceptual, and philosophical underpinnings that would lead to a logical and justifiable renaissance of the educational sector that would meet the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs of the Liberian society.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The research plan outlined in this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of how the study was conducted including the research approach, design, study population, sampling methods, materials and research tools, ethical measures, and the role of the researcher during data collection. Each of these components is crucial in ensuring the validity, reliability, and ethical integrity of the study. The chapter begins by describing the research approach employed in the investigation. This could be a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approach, depending on the nature of the research questions and objectives. The rationale for choosing a particular approach is provided, highlighting its suitability for addressing the research problem effectively.

Next, the research design is discussed. This includes specifying whether the study is experimental, observational, correlational, or descriptive in nature. The design determines the overall structure and framework of the study guiding the selection of appropriate data collection methods and statistical analyses. The study population is then identified and described. This refers to the group of individuals or entities that the researcher aims to investigate. The population may be defined by specific demographic characteristics, geographic location, or any other relevant criteria. The chapter should explain why this population was chosen and how it aligns with the research objectives.

Sampling methods are an essential aspect of any study particularly when the entire population cannot be included in the research. The chapter should detail the sampling technique employed (e.g., random sampling, stratified sampling, convenience sampling) and justify its selection based on practicality, representativeness, and generalizability. Furthermore, the chapter should provide a thorough description and justification of the materials and research tools used for data collection. This may include surveys, questionnaires, interview protocols,

observation checklists, or any other instruments utilized to gather data. The rationale behind the selection of these tools should be explained, considering their validity, reliability, and appropriateness for capturing the required information.

Ethical measures taken to ensure participants' safety and well-being should also be discussed. This involves obtaining informed consent from participants, protecting their privacy and confidentiality and addressing any potential risks or harm associated with the study. The chapter should outline the ethical guidelines followed and any approvals obtained from relevant institutional review boards or ethics committees. Finally, the role of the researcher during data collection is explained. This includes detailing the procedures followed, the researcher's involvement in data collection (for example, administering surveys, conducting interviews, making observations), and the steps taken to minimize bias and ensure data quality. The chapter should discuss the researcher's training and expertise, as well as any measures implemented to enhance the reliability and validity of the data collected.

Overall, this chapter serves as a roadmap for readers to understand how the study was conducted, providing a clear and transparent account of the research plan and its various components. By addressing the research approach, design, study population, sampling methods, materials and research tools, ethical measures, and role of the researcher, the chapter establishes the foundation for the subsequent analysis and interpretation of the study's findings. The investigation discussed in this context was prompted by a significant problem within the educational sector of Liberia, Africa's oldest Republic. Despite the implementation of various policies, interventions, and resources aimed at modernizing the educational system and aligning it with global standards, the sector continues to fall short of expectations set by experts in the field.

While existing literature has shed some light on the potential causes and existence of input-outcome gaps in Liberia's education system, there remains a need for further investigation. (GPE, 2018; Liberia, 2016; UNICEF, 2021; USAID, 2021). This additional research is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the specific nature and extent of these gaps. By conducting a comprehensive study on the input-outcome gaps in Liberia's education sector, the aim is to gather more knowledge and insights that can inform effective strategies and policies to bridge these gaps. The investigation seeks to ensure that the educational sector progresses in a manner that aligns with national policies and meets the targets set by experts in the field.

Through this research, the study seeks to go beyond the identification of general causes and allusions to the existence of input-outcome gaps. It aims to delve into the specific challenges faced by Liberia's education system and explore the factors contributing to these gaps. By doing so, the study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand and generate actionable recommendations to facilitate progress and improvement in the sector.

Overall, this investigation recognizes the persistent disparities between the current state of Liberia's education system and the desired outcomes. By conducting a comprehensive study and addressing the specific input-outcome gaps within the country, the research aims to contribute to the advancement of the educational sector in Liberia, ensuring that it aligns with policy goals and meets the expectations of experts in the field.

In this study, the primary objective was to explore the subjective meanings that participants ascribe to the problem being investigated. To achieve this aim, the study employed a case study mixed-methods exploratory design (Creswell & Plano, 2018; Cook & Kamalodeen, 2020). This design was chosen based on its suitability for capturing the richness and complexity of participants' perspectives and experiences related to the problem under investigation.

(Weaver, 2018).

The selection of the research design and methods was influenced by the researcher's pragmatic worldview. Pragmatism is a philosophical perspective that emphasizes the practical consequences and utility of knowledge. In this context, the researcher argues that the focus of the study should not be on discovering absolute truths or realities but rather on identifying what works in addressing the problem at hand. Epistemologically, the researcher subscribed to the belief that social inquiry should not rely solely on a single scientific method of inquiry to access truth about the real world. In the case of investigating the input-outcome gaps in the Liberian education system, using a single scientific method may not provide the necessary rigor to comprehensively describe and explain the reality from multiple perspectives.

By employing a mixed-methods approach within a case study design, the study aims to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. This approach allows for a more holistic understanding of the problem, integrating insights from diverse sources. The qualitative component enables an in-depth exploration of participants' meanings, experiences, and perceptions providing rich and contextualized data (Meyer, 2001). The quantitative component, on the other hand, allows for the collection of numerical data that can be analyzed statistically, providing a broader perspective and facilitating comparisons and generalizations.

The utilization of a mixed-methods exploratory design within a case study framework reflects the researcher's intention to capture the complexity and nuances of participants' understandings of the problem. By embracing a pragmatic worldview and adopting multiple research methods, the study aims to generate practical knowledge that can inform effective interventions and strategies to address the input-outcome gaps in Liberia's education system.

This study recognizes the importance of exploring participants' subjective meanings regarding the problem under investigation. By employing a case study mixed-

methods exploratory design and embracing a pragmatic worldview, the research aims to provide a comprehensive and practical understanding of the input-outcome gaps in the Liberian education system, thereby contributing to the development of effective solutions to improve the sector. The choice to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods in this study is justified by the unique strengths they bring to the research process and the complementary nature of their respective contributions.

## **Research Goal**

The purpose of this study was to gain valuable insight into the educational policy management process in Liberia. The study aimed to identify input-outcome gaps and document the performance of the education sector, with the ultimate goal of identifying the most effective places to allocate resources.

To achieve these objectives, the study employed a combination of research methods including document review, survey questionnaires, and interviews. The document review allowed for an examination of past and present policies, practices, and stakeholders' issues related to education in Liberia. By analyzing these documents, the study aimed to identify gaps and areas of improvement within the policy management cycle.

Survey questionnaires and interviews were utilized to gather data directly from key stakeholders including educational institutions, policymakers, administrators, teachers, and students. These methods provided an opportunity to collect first-hand insights, opinions, and experiences regarding educational policies and their implementation. By engaging with stakeholders through surveys and interviews, the study aimed to capture diverse perspectives and gain a comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape in Liberia.

Importantly, this study adopted a singular system-wide approach, targeting all levels of the educational hierarchy. By examining the entire system, from national policies to local practices, the study aimed to provide a holistic view of the educational policy management

process. This approach allowed for an examination of the interconnectedness and interdependencies within the system, identifying potential areas of improvement and resource allocation.

The study also utilized a global/thematic framework and drew upon accepted theories and practices in the field of education. By incorporating established frameworks and theories, the study aimed to ensure a rigorous and well-grounded analysis of educational policies. This approach provided a foundation for exploring and understanding the policies in question and allowed for comparisons with international best practices.

Overall, this study had four primary goals. First, it aimed to identify input-outcome gaps within the educational system in Liberia. Second, it sought to document the performance of the education sector, highlighting areas of success and areas in need of improvement. Third, it aimed to pinpoint the most effective places to allocate resources, ensuring that resources are deployed in a targeted and impactful manner. Finally, the study aimed to contribute to accelerating educational accomplishments in Liberia aligning with the broader goal of achieving educational targets before 2030.

By addressing these goals, the study aimed to provide valuable insights and recommendations to inform policy decisions, resource allocation, and educational improvement efforts in Liberia. Firstly, the study offers a comprehensive examination of the policy management cycle, highlighting areas that are in need of improvement. Secondly, it serves as a valuable resource for policymakers and educators by presenting a collection of lessons learned from Liberia's policy management process, drawing upon best practices identified through research. Thirdly, it identifies strategic focal points within the policy management cycle where resources and efforts can be concentrated to expedite progress and achieve better policy outcomes. Lastly, the study establishes the theoretical underpinnings of Liberia's education management process.



## Research Method

The study utilized a Case Study Mixed-Methods Exploratory design which combines the features of a Case Study Design with those of a Mixed Methods Design (Cook & Kamalodeen, 2020; Creswell & Plano, 2018;).. The Case Study Design involves an in-depth investigation of a research context of interest which in this case was the input-outcome gaps in the educational system of Liberia in its contextual setting. The Mixed Methods Design involves the application of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research, ensuring triangulation of data sources, data collection methods, and instruments.

While the research approach prioritized the use of the qualitative method, some quantitative data collection instruments were used at certain points in the study. The aim of incorporating these quantitative methods was to improve the accuracy of descriptions of the phenomenon, enhance the validity or confidence level of some phenomena, and reduce the potential biases associated with the exclusive use of qualitative methods (Greene et al., 1989). The use of a Case Study Mixed-Methods Exploratory design allowed the study to take advantage of the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative component of the study allowed for a deep exploration and understanding of participants' subjective experiences and perceptions of the input-outcome gaps in Liberia's educational system. This approach provided rich and contextualized data, enabling the study to capture the complexity and nuances of the research context. The quantitative component of the study provided numerical data that could be analyzed statistically, contributing to a broader perspective and facilitating comparisons and generalizations. This approach allowed the study to quantify and measure various aspects of the phenomenon, increasing the accuracy and validity of the study's findings. By employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study aimed to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the input-outcome gaps in Liberia's educational system.

Overall, the use of a Case Study Mixed-Methods Exploratory design reflects the study's objective of capturing the richness and complexity of the research context while also providing rigorous and well-grounded analysis. By adopting a pragmatic worldview and drawing upon established frameworks and theories, the study aimed to generate valuable insights and recommendations to inform policy decisions and educational improvement efforts in Liberia.

In the research study focusing on Liberia's education system, the primary research approach employed was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research emphasizes understanding and interpreting phenomena through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis. By adopting a qualitative approach, the researchers aimed to gain in-depth insights into the inputs and outcomes of the education sector in Liberia. However, to enhance the accuracy, validity, and confidence level of the study findings, as well as to mitigate potential biases associated with relying solely on qualitative methods, the researchers also incorporated certain quantitative data collection instruments into their research design. Quantitative data involves numerical measurement and statistical analysis, providing a different perspective and adding quantitative precision to the research findings.

The inclusion of quantitative methods in this study served several purposes. Firstly, it allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by expanding the scope of the research beyond qualitative descriptions. The quantitative data provided additional context and support to the qualitative findings, enabling a more robust interpretation of the research results.

The research design also employed a sequential triangulation approach. Sequential triangulation involves utilizing the results obtained from one research method to inform and enrich subsequent methods employed in the study (Lobe & Vehovar, 2008). In this case, the

researchers likely used qualitative methods as the initial step to gain an in-depth understanding of Liberia's education system. The subsequent integration of quantitative methods acted as a follow-up step, building upon the qualitative findings and expanding the research insights (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

To summarize, the research study on Liberia's education system prioritized a qualitative research approach to delve into the inputs and outcomes of the sector. However, to enhance the accuracy, validity, and comprehensiveness of the findings, the researchers incorporated quantitative data collection instruments and employed sequential triangulation. This combination of qualitative and quantitative methods allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon, strengthened the qualitative findings, and validated the research outcomes within the Liberia education context. The selection of the research design and methods in this study was guided by the researcher's pragmatic worldview. The pragmatic philosophical perspective emphasizes the practical implications and effectiveness of knowledge rather than focusing on absolute truth or reality. In adopting this perspective, the researcher acknowledged that the primary concern should be determining what works within the specific context of the study.

From an ontological standpoint, the researcher embraced the idea that the nature of the research phenomenon, in this case, the educational policy environment in Liberia, should be understood in terms of what policy framers considered effective in terms of inputs and outcomes at the time of policy enactment. This ontological perception allowed the researcher to explore and investigate the policies implemented in the education sector based on their perceived functionality and practicality rather than seeking an absolute truth or reality.

Epistemologically, the researcher recognized that social inquiry should not be limited to a single scientific method of inquiry in order to access truth about the real world, particularly regarding the input-outcome gaps in Liberia's education system. Relying solely on

one scientific method may not provide the necessary rigor to adequately describe and explain the complex reality from multiple perspectives. Therefore, by adopting a pragmatic perspective, the researcher acknowledged the importance of employing a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon.

In summary, the researcher's pragmatic worldview influenced the selection of the research design and methods. It shifted the focus from absolute truth to practicality and effectiveness, allowing the researcher to examine the educational policy environment in Liberia based on what was considered to work at the time. By embracing a mixed-methods approach, the researcher aimed to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the input-outcome gaps in Liberia's education system, considering multiple perspectives and enhancing the rigor of the research.

## **Research Instruments**

The research study was conducted in three distinct phases, each requiring the use of specific instruments for data collection and analysis. The goal of these phases was to gather comprehensive data from multiple sources and perspectives to enrich the understanding of the research phenomenon.

In the initial phase, the research employed an enumerative content analysis approach within the context of case study research. This approach involved systematically examining educational policies related to the research phenomenon that exhibited repetitive or discrete characteristics, along with their corresponding outcomes. Through this content analysis, the researcher aimed to identify patterns, themes, and key elements within the policies and outcomes. The findings from this exploratory phase were then used to construct a thematic network which visually represented the interconnections and relationships among the identified themes (Stirling, 2001).

To address the potential bias associated with relying solely on qualitative case study methods, the researcher incorporated findings from the document review into the subsequent phases of data collection. The insights gained from the content analysis and thematic network construction informed the development of qualitative interview questions and quantitative questionnaires. This integration of qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments allowed for a more comprehensive and multi-faceted examination of the research phenomenon. Since case studies typically require data from multiple sources within the unit of analysis (Schoch, 2020) which in this case was Liberia's education system, the researcher adopted three research tools in a sequential manner. These tools included a document review checklist, questionnaires, and an interview guide. The document review checklist enabled the systematic examination and analysis of relevant documents, such as educational policies, reports, and statistical data. The questionnaires provided a structured approach to gather quantitative data from a larger sample of participants, allowing for statistical analysis and generalization to some extent. Lastly, the interview guide facilitated qualitative interviews with selected individuals or groups, providing an opportunity to delve deeper into their experiences, perspectives, and insights related to the research phenomenon.

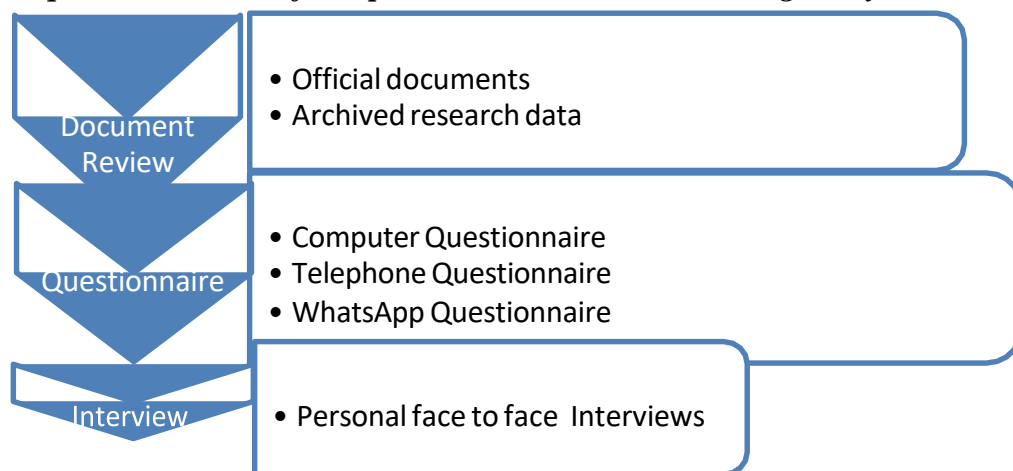
By employing these three research tools in a sequential manner, the researcher ensured a comprehensive data collection process, integrating different types of data and perspectives. This approach enhanced the richness and validity of the research findings by triangulating information from various sources and employing both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Therefore, the research study was conducted in three phases, each utilizing specific instruments for data collection and analysis. The initial phase involved an enumerative content analysis approach to explore educational policies and outcomes, followed by the construction of a thematic network. To address potential biases, findings from the content analysis informed

the development of qualitative interview questions and quantitative questionnaires. Additionally, three research tools were sequentially adopted including a document review checklist, questionnaires, and an interview guide, to ensure multiple data sources were considered from the case unit of analysis. The research process followed a specific sequence, outlined in Figure 3 which depicted the order in which the research instruments were utilized. This sequence ensured a systematic and logical progression of data collection and analysis. The subsequent sections provide a detailed description and application of each research instrument.

**Figure 3**

***Sequential selection of accepted Research Instruments designed by the Researcher***



The first step in the research process was the document review through a process called Exploratory Sequential Design (Harvard College, 2023). The initial stage aims to gain an in- depth understanding of the research topic, explore experiences, and generate themes or patterns. Quantitative data were collected through document review. These allowed researchers to gather rich and detailed information. The collected qualitative data were transcribed, organized, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Themes, patterns, or codes were identified to capture key ideas, concepts, or experiences from the data. This involved gathering relevant qualitative data from documents, such as educational policies, reports, and other related materials. The data contained within these documents were carefully analyzed to extract valuable information and insights. The document review served as an important foundation for

understanding the context, policies, and outcomes related to the research phenomenon. It provided a comprehensive overview of the existing knowledge and documentation available.

Following the document review, a questionnaire was designed to enable the researcher implement another mixed method data collection method called the quantitative inquiry as part of the Explanatory Sequential Design (Harvard College, 2023). The second stage involved collecting quantitative data to explore the prevalence, frequency, or distribution of themes identified in the qualitative phase. It aimed to provide a broader perspective and quantify the findings. Survey questionnaires were designed to collect structured data from 125 participants. They included both closed-ended questions based on Likert scales as the rating scales to gather standardized responses and open ended questions to give the respondents latitude to explore their perceptions about the research constructs. Quantitative data collected from the survey questionnaires were analyzed using statistical methods, such as descriptive statistics, correlations, or inferential analyses. These analyses helped identify relationships and trends or associations among variables of interest. The questionnaire was administered through various channels including computer-based surveys, telephone interviews, and the messaging platform on WhatsApp. These different modes of administration allowed for flexibility and convenience, accommodating participants' preferences and accessibility. The questionnaire included a range of closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture both quantitative data and qualitative insights.

Once the data from the questionnaires were collected and analyzed, an interview guide was designed. The final stage aims to further explore and validate the quantitative findings, gain additional insights, and provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Follow-up interviews are conducted with a subset of participants from the quantitative phase. These interviews are semi-structured and allow participants to elaborate on their responses, provide context, or share additional perspectives. The qualitative data from the

follow-up interviews are transcribed, organized, and analyzed using thematic analysis similar to the first stage. The analysis focuses on identifying new themes, confirming or challenging the quantitative findings and providing a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives.

The interview guide provided a framework for conducting face-to-face interviews with selected individuals or groups. These interviews allowed for more in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and insights related to the research phenomenon. The interview guide contained a set of predetermined questions and prompts while also allowing for flexibility to probe further and explore emerging themes or issues during the interview process.

The exploratory sequential design allows researchers to combine the strengths of qualitative and quantitative data, providing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research topic. It enables initial exploration, hypothesis generation, and validation through iterative data collection and analysis.

By following this sequence of research instruments, starting with the document review, followed by the questionnaire, and concluding with face-to-face interviews, the research process ensured a comprehensive and iterative approach to data collection and analysis. Each instrument built upon the insights gained from the previous one, allowing for a deeper exploration of the research phenomenon from multiple perspectives and sources of data.

### **Justification of Research Method**

The research study was associated with a human problem that required exploration. As such, the study was aligned with the principles of social investigation which typically necessitates the use of qualitative research methods (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research methods are particularly useful in exploring complex social phenomena, such as the input-output gaps in Liberia's education system.

However, the researcher recognized that the exclusive use of qualitative methods may lead to



potential biases and limitations in the research findings. To mitigate these issues, the researcher also incorporated a quantitative data collection instrument, the questionnaire, at some point in the study. The use of the questionnaire helped to improve the validity and confidence level of certain aspects of the research phenomenon, as well as reduce potential biases associated with relying solely on qualitative methods (Greene et al., 1989).

Furthermore, the paradigmatic view adopted by the researcher requires the use of multiple sources to construct social reality. In this case, the qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for both philosophical and methodological reasons (Singh, 2007). Philosophically, the qualitative method allowed the researcher to form part of the study and gain a deeper understanding of the language and meaning of the phenomenon. This approach facilitated a more holistic and nuanced exploration of the research phenomenon, considering the perspectives and experiences of the participants.

Methodologically, the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gather rich and in-depth data through various means, such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis. This enabled the researcher to capture the complexity and diversity of the research phenomenon while also providing an opportunity to explore emerging themes or issues.

In brief, the research study was associated with a human problem that required exploration, making it appropriate for a qualitative research approach. However, to enhance the validity and rigor of the research findings and to mitigate potential biases, the researcher also incorporated a quantitative data collection instrument, the questionnaire. The paradigmatic view adopted by the researcher required the use of multiple sources to construct social reality, further supporting the use of a mixed-methods approach. Philosophically and methodologically, the qualitative approach was appropriate, enabling the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon from multiple perspectives and sources of data.

## **Sampling Size**

The researcher refers to the recommendations of Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) as a guiding principle for establishing the sample size. According to Onwuegbuzie and Collins, when a study involves multiple subgroups, a minimum sample size of three or more participants per subgroup is considered sufficient to obtain reliable data for a scientific inquiry. The rationale behind this recommendation is that having at least three participants per subgroup allows for some level of variation within each subgroup which can contribute to the richness and diversity of the data collected. In the study being discussed, the researcher followed this guideline in determining the sample size for each phase of data collection. The passage mentions that the tables depicting the sampling size in each phase demonstrate that each subgroup had more than three samples. This means that the researcher ensured that there were at least three participants in each subgroup, providing a reasonable level of representation and variation within each subgroup.

Based on this information, the researcher gained confidence that the sample size of 25 policy documents reviewed, 125 respondents surveyed, and 10 respondents interviewed was adequate for the investigation at hand. Since each subgroup had more than three participants, the researcher believed that the sample size was sufficient to obtain reliable data and draw meaningful conclusions in accordance with the objectives of the study.

The researcher followed the recommendation of Onwuegbuzie and Collins to have a minimum sample size of three or more participants per subgroup in the study. By ensuring that each subgroup had more than three samples, the researcher believed that the sample size of policy documents reviewed, survey respondents, and interview participants was adequate for the investigation.

## **Sampling Method**

The sequential methodological provides and interplay of qualitative and quantitative instruments in the study. It explains that different sampling methods were used to accommodate

each data collection instrument and satisfy the requirements of the research. In the first phase of the study which involved collecting policy documents and reports related to each level of the educational hierarchy, purposive sampling was employed (Alkassim & Tran, 2016). Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling method that involves selecting participants based on specific criteria that align with the research objectives. In this case, the researcher used purposive sampling to choose relevant policy documents and reports that were deemed important for the study.

In the second phase which involved administering questionnaires to selected respondents, convenience sampling was utilized (Alkassim & Tran, 2016). Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method that involves selecting participants who are readily available and accessible to the researcher. This sampling method is often used when practicality and convenience are prioritized over representativeness. In this study, convenience sampling was employed to administer questionnaires covering all areas of the policy management cycle to selected respondents.

The third phase of the study involved conducting interviews with participants who possessed expertise and extensive knowledge about the topic under investigation. For this phase, expert sampling was utilized. Expert sampling (Singh, 2007) is a purposive sampling method that involves selecting participants who are considered experts in a particular field or possess specialized knowledge. By using expert sampling, the researcher aimed to gather in-depth and insightful information from individuals who were highly knowledgeable about the policy management process in the educational system.

The study employed a sequential methodological approach that involved the interplay of qualitative and quantitative instruments. Purposive sampling was used to select policy documents, convenience sampling was employed for administering questionnaires and expert sampling was utilized to conduct interviews. These sampling methods were chosen to

align with the specific requirements of each data collection instrument and to gather data from participants who could provide valuable insights into the research topic.

### **Sampling Method for Document Review**

The researcher employed a purposive sampling method to choose documents related to different levels of education including early childhood education, primary and elementary education, middle and secondary education, higher education, and vocational and technical education. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method where the researcher intentionally selects a specific subset of the population that is believed to possess information or characteristics relevant to the research questions or hypothesis. In this case, the researcher handpicked the documents that were deemed crucial for the study based on their relevance to the various levels of education.

The main reason for using the purposive sampling method in the document review process was the prioritization and weighting of policies. Policies are often given priority based on the resources invested and the timeline for implementation. By using purposive sampling, the researcher could specifically select policies that were considered significant within each level of education and that would provide valuable insights into the policy management process. It should be noted that purposive sampling allows for a focused and targeted approach to data collection, as the researcher intentionally selects documents that are likely to contain relevant and valuable information. This sampling method is particularly useful when the goal is to gain in-depth understanding or when specific policies or documents are of particular interest to the study. From each of the five subsections mentioned earlier (early childhood education, primary and elementary education, middle and secondary education, higher education, and vocational and technical education), the researcher selected five policies that met the inclusion criteria of being current and significant sources. These policies were considered to contain valuable information pertaining to the study phenomenon.

To further ensure the selection of relevant policies, the researcher conducted a membercheck. This involved seeking input from stakeholders working at the Ministry of Education, who were asked to review and vet the policies according to the ministry's priority. This additional step of validation helped to refine the selection and ensure alignment with the ministry's perspective and priorities. As a result of this process, a total of twenty-five policy documents were selected for review. Policies that did not meet the set criteria, such as being current and significant, were excluded from the final selection.

In summary, the researcher employed a purposive sampling method to select policy documents for review. The selection process involved categorizing policies, ranking them based on their timeline, and choosing policies that were current and significant. The researcher also sought input and validation from stakeholders at the Ministry of Education to ensure the policies aligned with the ministry's priorities. The outcome of this process was the selection of twenty-five policy documents that met the criteria for inclusion in the study.

### **Sampling Method for Questionnaire Respondents**

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method that involves selecting participants who are readily available and willing to participate in the study at the time the information is required. In this case, efforts were made to administer questionnaires to stakeholders involved in the education industry at different subsystem levels (Bhat, n. d). The participants were drawn from various categories of organizations including civil society organizations, government agencies, education workers, heads of tertiary institutions, and heads of schools (primary-secondary, vocational, and technical).

The inclusion criteria for selecting participants were that they were actively involved in educational activities within the specified categories of organizations and that they had direct involvement or knowledge about the educational policies and processes in the country. This ensured that the selected participants had relevant expertise and insights to

provide meaningful responses to the questionnaire.

Convenience sampling was chosen as the sampling method for selecting respondents due to its practicality and accessibility. It allowed the researcher to collect data efficiently by engaging participants who were readily available and willing to participate in the study. While convenience sampling may not provide a representative sample of the entire population, it can still generate valuable insights and perspectives from individuals involved in the education industry.

Therefore, convenience sampling was used to select respondents for the questionnaires in the study. The participants were chosen based on their availability and willingness to participate and they were drawn from various categories of organizations involved in the education sector. The inclusion criteria ensured that the participants had direct involvement or knowledge about educational policies and processes, making them suitable for providing relevant insights.

Expert sampling is a purposive sampling method that involves intentionally selecting individuals who possess expertise and demonstrated familiarity in a specific area of research interest. These individuals are considered experts due to their knowledge, experience, and contributions to the field. In the context of the study, the experts were individuals who were acknowledged as contributors to a given education policy. They were deemed knowledgeable and capable of providing valuable insights and information relevant to the research.

The selection of experts through expert sampling allowed the researcher to gather in-depth and specialized knowledge from individuals who had a deep understanding of the education policy being studied. By targeting these experts, the researcher aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the policy management process and the factors influencing its implementation. In addition to expert sampling, convenience sampling was also utilized in the selection of participants for the interviews. Convenience sampling involves selecting

individuals who are readily available and accessible to the researcher. This sampling method is often used when practicality and convenience are prioritized over representativeness.

By combining expert sampling and convenience sampling, the researcher could identify individuals who were both knowledgeable about the education policy and easily accessible for interviews. This approach ensured that the selected participants were experts in the field and could provide valuable insights while also considering the practicality of conducting the interviews.

Hence, the study employed a combination of expert sampling and convenience sampling to select participants for the interview phase. Expert sampling was used to identify individuals who were acknowledged contributors to the education policy being studied while convenience sampling was employed to ensure accessibility and practicality. This sampling approach allowed the researcher to gather specialized knowledge from experts while considering the feasibility of conducting the interviews.

As indicated in Table 5 below, the study sampled 125 participants that were a source of primary data. The characteristics of the sample population in terms of stakeholder category represented, the sample size per group, organizational level, and the data collection instruments used to collect data from the groups are highlighted. The primary aim of taking this sample was to ensure that key stakeholders were represented during the study to generate comprehensive sector wide views. The breakdown of the stakeholders is provided in Table 5.

**Table 5***Sample Population and Data Collection Instruments*

<b>Stakeholder Category</b>	<b>No. of Respondent s</b>	<b>Organization/level</b>	<b>Data Collection Instrument</b>	<b>Estimated Population</b>
Ministry of Education/ Policy makers	5	Senior management (Macro level)	Questionnaires followed by Interview	25
Ministry of Education/ Policy makers	5	Middle managers (Meso Level)	Questionnaires followed by Interview	150
Ministry of Education/ Policy makers	20	Civil Servants(Micro level)	Questionnaires followed by Interview	15,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>			
Civil Society/ Interest Groups	10	Members of National Principal Association	Questionnaires followed by Interview	1000
Civil Society/ Interest Groups	10	Members of National Teachers Association	Questionnaires followed by Interview	6000
Civil Society/ Interest Groups	10	Members of National Parents Teachers Association (NPTA)	Questionnaires followed by Interview	300
Civil Society/ Interest Groups	5	Members of Association of Universities and Colleges	Questionnaires followed by Interview	25
Civil Society/ Interest Groups	5	Legislative Office Staff	Questionnaires followed by Interviews	
Civil Society/ Interest Groups	10	Members of National Assoc. of Private School Owners	Questionnaires followed by Interview	500
	50			
Head of Schools	10	Early Childhood Education	Questionnaires followed by Interview	3000
Head of Schools	10	Basic and Primary Education	Questionnaires followed by Interview	
Head of Schools	10	Secondary Education	Questionnaires Followedby Interview	900
Head of Schools	10	Higher Education	Questionnaires followed by Interview	50
Head of Schools	10	TVET Education	Questionnaires followed by Interview	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>			
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>125</b>			

**Research Procedure**

Participant protection in research is a crucial aspect that universities worldwide prioritize and this includes Unicaf. As mentioned in Kaiser's research from 2009, universities recognize the significance of ensuring the well-being and rights of individuals involved in research studies. Unicaf being committed to upholding ethical standards required the researcher to seek and obtain approval from the Unicaf Research and Ethics Committee (UREC) before undertaking the research project.



The primary responsibility of UREC was to safeguard the participants' interests and ensure their protection throughout the study. One of the key requirements set by the committee was for the researcher to obtain written informed consent from all participants. This process ensured that individuals willingly agreed to participate in the research after being fully informed about the objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits involved. Informed consent is essential to ensure that participants have the freedom to provide information voluntarily and without any coercion.

Moreover, UREC emphasized the need to treat all data collected during the research as confidential. Participants must trust that their personal information and responses will remain anonymous and will not be disclosed to unauthorized individuals. By assuring participants of data confidentiality, the committee aimed to eliminate the possibility of deductive disclosure. Deductive disclosure refers to the potential identification of participants through the combination or deduction of various data points, thereby compromising their anonymity. The research project was conducted in three distinct phases to gather comprehensive and reliable data.

Phase 1 involved a thorough document review and analysis. This phase aimed to gather existing information, literature, and relevant documents related to the research topic. Document analysis provides a foundation for understanding the background, context, and previous findings in the field. Phase 2 focused on the collection and analysis of data through questionnaires. The researcher prepared a set of carefully designed questions to gather specific information from the participants. Questionnaires are a common method for acquiring quantitative data, allowing for statistical analysis and the identification of patterns or trends. Phase 3 encompassed conducting interviews with selected participants and analyzing the gathered information. Interviews offer an opportunity to delve deeper into the research topic, explore participants' perspectives, and obtain qualitative data. This phase aimed to provide a

more nuanced understanding of the subject matter and potentially uncover insights that may have been missed through document review and questionnaires.

By following these three phases, the research project aimed to gather a comprehensive range of data that would contribute to a thorough analysis and insightful conclusions. The adherence to ethical guidelines, particularly regarding participant protection and data confidentiality, ensured the research's integrity and the well-being of all involved individuals.

### **Phase 1-Document Review**

The researcher employed a document review as an additional method to gather and validate information, complementing the thematic codes derived from the literature review. This approach aimed to access factual data from various printed and electronic sources, as highlighted by Bowen's research in 2009. During the document review, the researcher made deliberate efforts to obtain documents directly related to the education policy process in Liberia. The goal was to gather information from multiple subsector levels within the education system. These sources included adopted policy documents, annual reports, Education Management and Information System (EMIS) data, journals, and newspapers.

To access these documents, the researcher reached out to specific departments within the Ministry of Education of Liberia. Each department was responsible for regulating and overseeing a particular subsystem under investigation. These departments included the Bureau of Early Childhood Education; Bureau of Primary, Basic, and Secondary Education; National Commission on Higher Education; and the Bureau of Technical and Vocational Education.

By accessing these specific sources, the researcher aimed to gather accurate and reliable information directly related to the education policies and practices in Liberia. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the education system and its various

subsectors.

The document review process involved carefully examining and analyzing the obtained materials. This analysis would have included identifying key themes, trends, and relevant datapoints that align with the research objectives. By triangulating findings from the literature review, thematic codes, and the document review, the researcher could strengthen the validity and credibility of the research.

Overall, the document review served as a valuable method to collect factual information, verify assumptions, and gain insights into the education policy landscape in Liberia. It ensured that the research was grounded in accurate and up-to-date data, enhancing the overall quality and reliability of the study. Document review, as described by Bowen in 2009, involves a thorough examination and interpretation of themes found within the gathered documents. The purpose of this review is to derive implications and gain knowledge from the information contained within the documents.

During the document review process, the researcher sought to draw upon multiple sources of evidence. This approach aimed to identify patterns, corroborate existing themes derived from the literature review and identify any divergences or discrepancies. By comparing and analyzing data from various sources, the researcher could strengthen the validity of the findings and enhance the overall understanding of the research topic. This aligns with the recommendations made by Bowen in 2009 regarding the importance of seeking diverse sources of evidence to support research conclusions.

The information gathered from the document review served multiple purposes in the research project. Firstly, it complemented the development of questionnaires, interviews, and areas of observation. By gaining insights from the documents, the researcher could craft targeted and relevant questions and observation points that align with the specific context and issues addressed in the study.

Furthermore, the document review provided the basis for conducting a change analysis in the crafting of education policies over time. By examining the historical evolution of education policies through the gathered documents, the researcher could identify trends, shifts, and modifications in policy approaches. This analysis enabled a comprehensive understanding of how education policies had evolved and changed over the years, providing valuable insights into the dynamics and challenges faced by the education system.

Overall, the document review process played a crucial role in the research project. It allowed the researcher to derive implications, gain knowledge, and identify patterns or discrepancies within the collected documents. The information gleaned from the review process informed the development of research instruments and facilitated a comprehensive analysis of policy changes over time.

Document review, like any research method, has its inherent limitations. Two specific limitations addressed in the research were the potential lack of detail or intentional manipulation of documents by policy makers to present a favorable political image and the bias associated with the researcher's selection of documents that align with their preconceived notions of the research purpose. These limitations were acknowledged and efforts were made to overcome them.

The first limitation which relates to insufficient detail or manipulation of documents for political reasons, was addressed through multiple research methods. The administration of questionnaires, interviews, and observations supplemented the document review process. These methods allowed the researcher to gather information directly from stakeholders involved in the education policy process. By engaging with policy makers, administrators, educators, and other relevant individuals, the researcher could obtain additional insights, clarify ambiguities, and gather nuanced perspectives that may not have been clearly documented in the reviewed materials. This approach ensured that the research captured a more comprehensive

understanding of the policies and their implementation.

The second limitation which pertains to potential bias in document selection, was mitigated by adopting an objective stance. The researcher consciously positioned themselves as an impartial observer, setting aside personal biases and preconceived notions. This approach aimed to ensure a balanced and unbiased selection of documents for the review process.

To further enhance objectivity, the researcher incorporated expert sampling of selected policy documents. Expert sampling involves seeking the input and guidance of individuals with expertise and knowledge in the field. These experts could provide valuable insights into the selection of relevant policy documents, ensuring that a wide range of perspectives and sources were considered. By incorporating expert sampling, the researcher sought to counteract any potential bias in document selection and enhance the objectivity of the study.

By addressing these limitations and implementing appropriate strategies, the research aimed to maintain validity, objectivity, and a comprehensive understanding of the education policy landscape. The combination of document review, questionnaires, interviews, observations, and expert sampling allowed for a robust and well-rounded analysis of education policies, minimizing potential biases and limitations.

When conducting a document review, it is essential for the researcher to consider the moral responsibility of obtaining consent from data sources. This responsibility implies that authorities or individuals who possess the required information should be willing to release it. While not every document may require explicit consent, such as those freely available online or in the public domain, the researcher made deliberate efforts to seek consent from data sources whenever applicable.

Gaining consent from data sources can sometimes present challenges. However, the researcher was able to navigate these challenges through several strategies. Firstly, the researcher's ability to establish rapport and build relationships with individuals in the sector

played a crucial role. By fostering trust and credibility, the researcher could approach data sources and request their consent for accessing specific documents.

Additionally, the use of a gatekeeper letter and an informed consent form helped facilitate the consent process. A gatekeeper letter is a formal request addressed to the appropriate authorities or individuals who possess the desired documents. It explains the purpose of the research, the intended use of the documents, and seeks permission for their access. The informed consent form, on the other hand, provides clear information about the research, its objectives, and the use of the collected data. It ensures that individuals providing access to the documents are fully informed and voluntarily agree to participate in the research. It is important to note that the researcher did not rely on the Freedom of Information Act 2010 (Liberia, 2010) during the data collection process. While this act obligates public officials to make requested information available to citizens, it was not employed in this particular research. Instead, the researcher focused on establishing direct communication, seeking consent, and building relationships to gain access to the necessary documents.

By adhering to ethical principles and obtaining consent from data sources, the researcher demonstrated respect for the autonomy and rights of those possessing the documents. This approach ensured that the document review process was conducted in an ethical and responsible manner, upholding the principles of informed consent and integrity in research.

### **Analysis of Document Review**

During the literature review conducted in chapter two of the research paper, several themes emerged as key foci of educational policies at different subsystem levels and stages of the policy management cycle. The researcher retrieved over 200 articles from Proquest and other peer-reviewed sources. Only articles published after 2010 or those specifically addressing issues related to the case unit of analysis and the theoretical framework of the dissertation were retained. This approach was deliberate to ensure that the research findings were contemporary,

directly supporting the ontological, epistemological, and methodological direction of the study. By focusing on recent articles, the research ensured that the analysis of education policies was up-to-date and reflected current practices and trends. The selection criteria also ensured that the research was grounded in relevant and applicable literature, directly addressing the research questions and objectives.

In addition to the articles, the researcher retrieved about 75 policy documents and reports related to Early Childhood Education, Primary and Basic Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education, and Vocational and Technical Education. These documents were obtained from relevant sources and provided valuable insights into the education policy landscape in Liberia.

The use of policy documents and reports complemented the literature review, providing a more nuanced understanding of the policy implementation process. Through an analysis of these documents, the research could identify trends, gaps, and challenges in policy implementation. This information was critical to the development of research questions, the identification of relevant stakeholders, and the selection of appropriate research methods.

Overall, the combination of literature review and policy document analysis provided a robust foundation for the research project. By focusing on recent and relevant literature and documents, the research ensured that the findings were current, applicable, and directly aligned with the research objectives.

In the study conducted on education policies in Liberia, a systematic approach was taken to analyze the impact and outcomes of these policies. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the researcher selected five policy documents that addressed each level of the educational subsystem. This selection resulted in a total of 25 policies that were thoroughly reviewed. The policies were chosen based on two main criteria. Firstly, policies that were still ongoing at the time of the study were selected to allow the researcher to investigate the trend of implementation

over time. This approach provided insights into the long-term effects of these policies and identified any challenges or successes encountered during their implementation. Secondly, the policies were chosen based on the significant amount of resources including human, financial, and technical resources, involved in their management cycle. These policies were deemed critical by the Ministry of Education, indicating their importance in shaping the education system in Liberia.

To conduct the review, the researcher employed purposive sampling. This sampling technique involves selecting documents based on predetermined characteristics. In this case, the researcher eliminated policies whose timeline of implementation, as indicated within the policy document, had expired over three years before the inquiry. By excluding these outdated policies, the study focused on policies that were still relevant and had a potential impact on the education system.

By using this process, the initial selection of 75 policies was reduced to a final set of 45 policies for thorough analysis. This reduction in the number of policies allowed the researcher to concentrate on a manageable sample size while ensuring that the selected policies were recent and influential in the educational context of Liberia.

Overall, this systematic approach to policy document selection and review provided a robust framework for evaluating the impact and outcomes of education policies in Liberia. It ensured that the policies analyzed were current, ongoing, and significant in terms of resource allocation and prioritization by the Ministry of Education.

In the second phase of the research on education policies in Liberia, the researcher employed the expert sampling method to refine the selection of the 45 policy documents for further analysis. This method involved seeking the input of three technical personnel working at the Ministry of Education who had expertise and knowledge in the field.

The criteria for choosing these technical personnel were based on their positions



within the Ministry and their professional relationships with the researcher. It was important to select individuals who were well-versed in the policies and had a deep understanding of the priorities and resource allocation within the education system.

The three selected technical personnel were then asked to rank the 45 policies in terms of their priorities and the amount of resources required for their successful implementation. This ranking exercise was crucial in identifying the policies that were considered most significant and impactful by the experts. To ensure a manageable selection, each technical personnel was requested to choose only five policies from each subsector category. This limitation helped to narrow down the focus and prioritize the policies that were deemed most important within each specific area of the education system.

During the process of reviewing the policy documents, certain recurring themes consistently emerged. These themes were considered as initial concepts and were grouped together based on their similarities and relevance. This categorization helped in organizing and analyzing the policies effectively. For instance, many of the policy documents emphasized the need to construct, repair, or build new schools, as well as provide non-discriminatory education. These concepts were easily grouped under the category of "Access to Education," as they all related to ensuring equal opportunities for students to access schooling.

Additionally, the policies highlighted the importance of teacher training, increasing the supply of teachers and upgrading curriculums. These concepts were categorized under the broader theme of "Quality of Education," as they pertained to improving the overall educational experience and enhancing the skills and knowledge of teachers.

Furthermore, the policies consistently addressed the issue of the technology gap and the need to enhance marketable skills in teaching and learning. These concepts were grouped together under the category of "Relevance of Education," as they focused on aligning education with the demands of the modern world and equipping students with skills that are applicable in

the job market.

Table 6, presents a summary of the population of documents reviewed at each level of the educational subsystems. This table provides an overview of the distribution of policy documents across various levels and subsectors, indicating the scope and coverage of the analysis.

**Table 6**

*List of Policies Reviewed*

<b>Subsystem</b>	<b>Policy Document Reviewed</b>	<b>Key themes Highlighted</b>	<b>Status</b>
Early Childhood Education	Sustainable Development Goal (4)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Early Childhood Development Community Education and Awareness Program(ECDCEAP) & Early Childhood Development Skill Training Education Program ECDSTEP),	Awareness, Relevance, Quality	Expired
Primary Education	Education Reform Act of 2011	Access, Quality, and Relevance	Ongoing
	National Education Sector Plan (2010- 2020)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired
	Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017- 2021)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired
	Sustainable Development Goal (4)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Strategy for Education Transformation (2018- 2028).	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
Secondary Education	Education Reform Act of 2011	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	National Education Sector Plan (2010-2020)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired
	Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017-2021)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired
	Sustainable Development Goal (4)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Strategy for Education Transformation (2018- 2028).	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
Higher Education	Education Reform Act of 2011	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	National Education Sector Plan (2010-2020)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired
	Improving Results in Secondary Education (IRISE2019-2023)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Sustainable Development Goal (4)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Higher Education Strategic Plan (HESP)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
TVET Education	Education Reform Act of 2011	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017–2021)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired
	Revised National Policy on Higher Education (2015)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Sustainable Development Goal (4)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Ministry of Youth and Sports Strategic and Operational Plan (2018 –2022)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Liberia Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Legislation	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	National Youth Policy and Action Plan	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	National Policy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET2015-2020)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired

By identifying and categorizing these recurring themes, the analysis of the policy documents could begin in a structured manner. The coding and categorization of themes allowed for a systematic examination of the policies, enabling the researcher to identify patterns, trends, and areas of focus within the education system. This approach ensured that the analysis went beyond individual policies and explored the broader goals and priorities of the

education sector in Liberia. It provided a framework for understanding the key areas of concern and assessing the effectiveness of the policies in addressing those issues. Overall, by grouping the themes that consistently emerged across the policy documents, the research was able to establish a foundation for further analysis and evaluation of the education policies in Liberia.

In the research on education policies in Liberia, the process of analyzing the collected data involved coding and producing memos, following the approach suggested by Bryant and Charmaz (2007). This analytical method served the purpose of identifying and organizing the data items that were collected during the document review. Coding refers to the process of assigning labels or tags to specific segments of data based on their content or meaning. By coding the data, the researcher was able to categorize and organize the information in a systematic and structured manner. This approach facilitated the identification of patterns, themes, and relationships within the data.

Additionally, producing memos played a crucial role in the analysis process. Memos are written notes or reflections that capture the researcher's thoughts, observations, and interpretations of the data. These memos helped in documenting the researcher's insights, reflections, and emerging ideas throughout the analysis process. They also served as a record of the researcher's evolving understanding of the data and the emerging themes. By employing coding and memo writing, the researcher was able to uncover new dimensions and perspectives within the data. This process allowed for the generation of new insights and worldviews that may not have been apparent at first glance. It facilitated a deeper understanding of the policies and their implications within the education system of Liberia.

The approach used during the document review in the research on education policies in Liberia facilitated the classification of the policy aims or inputs into three distinct categories: Access, Quality, and Relevance. This classification provided the researcher with a clear framework to construct research questions that aimed to uncover the intended objectives and

purposes of each policy at the subsystem level.

The document review instrument served as a valuable tool to gain insights into the analysis stage of the policy management cycle. It helped to understand and evaluate what occurred during this stage and how it influenced the subsequent stages of the policy management cycle. By examining the policy documents, the researcher could identify any gaps, challenges, or successes in the analysis phase and explore their implications for the overall policy implementation process.

It may be noted that the approach used in the document review phase provided a solid foundation for the research by categorizing policy aims, constructing research questions, evaluating policy effectiveness, and understanding the impact of the analysis stage on the rest of the policy management cycle. This systematic analysis and presentation of the findings allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the education policies in Liberia and their implications for the education system.

### **Ethical Assurance during Document Review Data collection**

In the first phase of the research on education policies in Liberia, ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure proper access to the required documents. To adhere to ethical guidelines and obtain the necessary permissions, a gatekeeper letter was sent to the Minister of Education. This letter was sent through an official email address, formally requesting the Minister's authorization for the researcher to access documents from various management levels within the education system.

The gatekeeper letter explained the purpose of the research and outlined the specific documents that were needed for the study. This included requesting access to authorities such as the Education Management and Information System (EMIS), the Bureau of Early Childhood Education, the Bureau of Basic and Primary & Secondary Education, the Bureau of TVET Education, and the National Commission on Higher Education.

The aim of accessing these documents was to gather recent annual reports from 2015 to 2020. These reports provided valuable insights into the activities and engagements of these respective bureaus and commissions within the policy circle. By examining these reports, the researcher could gain a comprehensive understanding of the policy landscape and the initiatives undertaken by these entities in relation to education policies.

Seeking permission from the Minister of Education and obtaining access to these documents through official channels ensured that the research was conducted in an ethical and responsible manner. It demonstrated respect for the authority and protocols within the education system and maintained transparency in accessing the necessary information. By complying with ethical considerations and obtaining permission to access the required documents, the research was able to gather valuable data and insights for the analysis of education policies in Liberia. This approach ensured that the research was conducted with integrity and in accordance with the established ethical standards of conducting research.

## **Phase II: Formulating Questionnaires**

This section covers the procedures and processes involved during the development and use of the questionnaire during the investigation.

### **Policy Analysis Questions**

Policy analysis involves going beyond understanding the stated objectives of policies, such as increasing access, quality, and relevance of education. It also requires examining the background and underlying problems that led to the development of these policies. This broader perspective is essential because policies are influenced by various factors and individuals and understanding these influences provides important context for their formulation and implementation.

In the case of Liberia, policies are initiated for several reasons. One reason is the

existence of a specific problem that is of national concern which can be attributed to social or administrative factors. These factors could include challenges related to equity in access to education, inadequate infrastructure, or issues of inclusivity within the education system. Policies are developed to address these problems and provide solutions.

Another factor that can drive policy development is the political vision or agenda of a particular regime. Politicians and policymakers may introduce education policies to align with their political objectives, such as improving educational outcomes to gain public support or fulfill campaign promises. Political factors can significantly influence the content and direction of education policies in Liberia.

Furthermore, policy development can be driven by public opinion stemming from previous policy failures. When policies fail to achieve their intended outcomes or face significant challenges, public opinion can create pressure for change and the development of new policies. This feedback from the public can be influenced by both social and administrative factors, as well as political considerations.

Additionally, economic factors play a role in policy initiation. The availability or scarcity of resources can shape the development and implementation of education policies. For example, limited financial resources may necessitate prioritization in resource allocation or innovative approaches to achieve policy goals. Economic considerations can influence the feasibility and sustainability of education policies in Liberia.

Understanding these various factors and their interplay provides a comprehensive understanding of the policy landscape in Liberia. It sheds light on the motivations, challenges, and opportunities that shape education policies. By considering the broader context and underlying factors, policy analysis can provide insights into the complexities and dynamics of policy formulation and implementation processes.

The researcher employed the thematic analysis approach, as outlined by Stirling in

2001, to develop a set of a priori categories. These categories were then used to construct questionnaires for gathering participants' perspectives on the reasons behind the initiation of certain policies. The three broad categories that emerged from the thematic analysis were Social/Administrative, Political, and Economic factors.

Understanding the underlying factors that led to the introduction of policies is crucial because different factors necessitate distinct management approaches. By categorizing the policies based on their motivating factors, the researcher aimed to gain insight into the unique challenges and requirements associated with each category.

During the course of the study, the researcher observed that policies initiated primarily due to political factors often struggled to be sustained over long periods. Historical analysis of national education policies revealed a pattern where significant policy changes were directly influenced by regime changes and revolutions. For instance, the current administration, led by President George Weah, decided to replace Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL) program with a new policy called the Liberia Education Advancement Program (LEAP) (Weah, 2018). This change exemplifies how political factors can lead to policy shifts, rendering previous initiatives obsolete.

The researcher's findings suggest that policies driven by political factors may be subject to instability and discontinuity due to the influence of changing regimes. Understanding this historical trend is essential for policymakers and stakeholders, as it highlights the need for long-term planning and sustainability measures when implementing education policies.

In conclusion, the researcher employed thematic analysis to develop categories representing the different factors influencing policy initiation. By doing so, they were able to gather participants' perspectives on why certain policies were introduced. The observation that policies initiated due to political factors often face challenges in long-term sustainability highlights the importance of considering historical context and implementing appropriate measures

to ensure policy continuity and effectiveness.

## **Policy formulation Questions**

Understanding the factors that influenced the development of an education policy is only one aspect of comprehending the policymaking process. In addition to these factors, it is crucial to consider the financial, political, and technical feasibility of a particular policy during its formulation.

According to Head (2008), an evidence-based approach to policy formulation requires the integration of three lenses: technical, political, and theoretical. These lenses represent different perspectives that need to be considered to ensure the success of a policy. The technical lens involves experts and practitioners who bring practical experience and knowledge to the policymaking process. These individuals possess on-the-ground insights into the education system, understand its complexities, and can provide guidance on the feasibility and implementation of proposed policies. Their input is vital in developing policies that can be effectively executed and achieve the desired outcomes.

The political lens acknowledges the importance of political will in policymaking. Politicians and decision-makers play a significant role in shaping and implementing education policies. They bring the necessary authority, power, and resources to support and drive policy initiatives. Political considerations, such as public opinion, electoral cycles, and competing interests, must be taken into account when formulating policies to ensure their acceptance and sustainability.

The theoretical lens emphasizes the role of scholars and researchers in policymaking. These individuals bring theoretical frameworks, scientific evidence, and research findings to inform policy decisions. Their expertise and analytical tools help assess existing policies, identify gaps or shortcomings, and develop new approaches based on rigorous analysis.



Theoretical insights provide a foundation for evidence-informed policymaking and help align policies with educational goals and best practices. The successful formulation of an education policy requires the collaboration and balance of these three lenses. By bringing together technical expertise, political will and theoretical evidence, policymakers can create comprehensive and effective policies that are grounded in practicality, supported by financial resources, and informed by research and analysis.

In conclusion, understanding the factors that influence education policies is necessary but not sufficient to grasp the policymaking process. Policymakers must also consider the financial, political and technical feasibility of proposed policies. By incorporating the technical, political and theoretical lenses, policymakers can ensure that policies are practical, politically viable and informed by evidence, ultimately contributing to the improvement of education systems. Once the thematic categories (political, technical, and theoretical) were established, the next step was to design and administer questionnaires to participants to assess the influence or involvement of each of these actors during the policymaking process.

The questionnaires were carefully constructed to capture the participants' perceptions and perspectives on the dominant influences shaping the formulation of a particular policy. The goal was to gather data that would enable the researchers to evaluate and rate the level of influence exerted by the political, technical, and theoretical factors.

Participants were asked to rate and provide their feedback on the extent to which each of these factors played a role in the policymaking process. This could be done using Likert scale questions, where participants were asked to rate the level of influence on a numerical scale (e.g., from 1 to 5 or from strongly disagree to strongly agree). After collecting the questionnaire responses, the data underwent analysis. The analysis involved organizing the responses into tables that reflected the predefined codes which in this case were political, technical, and

theoretical. Each response was categorized based on the dominant influence perceived by the participant.

For example, if a participant rated political factors as the most influential in shaping a policy, their response would be categorized under the political code. Similarly, if another participant emphasized the technical aspects, their response would be categorized under the technical code, and so on.

By organizing the data in this way, the researchers were able to identify patterns and trends in the perceived dominance of each factor across different policies. This enabled them to gain a comprehensive understanding of how participants felt about the influence of political, technical, and theoretical factors in policymaking.

The tables created during the analysis phase facilitated the comparison and interpretation of the data. Researchers could examine the frequency and distribution of responses within each category, identify any variations or discrepancies, and draw conclusions about the dominant influences in the formulation of different policies. Overall, the questionnaire-based approach provided a structured method for assessing and quantifying the perceived influence of political, technical, and theoretical factors in the policymaking process. By organizing the responses in tables based on predefined codes, the researchers were able to gain insights into participants' perspectives and generate data that supported their analysis and conclusions.

### **Policy Implementation Questions**

In addition to assessing the influences on policy formulation, the questionnaires were also designed to gather information about the implementation stage of the policies. Policy implementation is a critical stage in the policymaking process, particularly in developing nations where challenges often arise.

Payne (2008) defines policy implementation as the phase that occurs between the

establishment of a policy and the actual consequences it has on the individuals it affects. Implementation problems occur when the desired outcomes for the target beneficiaries are not achieved. The questionnaires in this category aimed to uncover any implementation gaps and identify the causes behind them. Participants were directly asked about the outcomes of a particular policy including the inputs promised by the policy and the actual outcomes achieved. By comparing the intended inputs and the realized outcomes, researchers could identify discrepancies and gaps in implementation.

To complement the questionnaire responses, the researchers also gathered data from the Education Management and Information System. This data source provided additional insights into the implementation of the policies under investigation. By combining the questionnaire responses with the data from the Education Management and Information System, the researchers were able to gather comprehensive information about the implementation gaps and reasons behind them.

The findings in this category shed light on the effectiveness of the policies in achieving their intended outcomes. It allowed the researchers to identify areas where the policy implementation fell short and understand the factors contributing to the implementation gaps. Such insights are valuable in addressing the challenges faced in policy implementation and making informed decisions for improvement.

By analyzing the questionnaire responses and incorporating data from the Education Management and Information System, the researchers were able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation stage of the policies under investigation. This approach provided a well-rounded view of the policy process, from formulation to implementation, and facilitated a deeper analysis of the challenges and opportunities at each stage.

In conclusion, the questionnaires directed towards policy implementation aimed to

uncover any implementation gaps and their causes. The researchers relied on participants' responses regarding the promised inputs and actual outcomes of the policies. Additionally, data from the Education Management and Information System provided further insights into policy implementation. By combining these sources of information, the researchers obtained a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in implementing the policies.

### **Policy Evaluation Questions**

The evaluation stage of the policy management cycle is a critical component in assessing the effectiveness and impact of educational policies. It involves measuring the outcomes of policies to determine their success, identify areas for improvement and ensure accountability.

To investigate the evaluation stage of educational policies, questionnaires were used as a research tool. Questionnaires are a common method for collecting data and gathering insights from a large number of participants efficiently. They typically consist of a series of structured questions designed to elicit specific information and opinions.

The purpose of using questionnaires in the evaluation stage of policy management is to gather data on policy outcomes and assess the perceptions and attitudes of individuals at various levels of the educational system. This includes policymakers, administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders involved in the policy implementation process. By administering questionnaires to participants at different levels of the educational system, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of how policy outcomes are perceived and interpreted. The questionnaire responses provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of policies, their impact on different stakeholders, and the extent to which they align with the intended goals and objectives.

The analysis of questionnaire data involves examining the responses and identifying patterns, trends, and correlations. Researchers can explore how participants at

different levels of the educational system perceive the outcomes of policies. They can identify variations in viewpoints, understand the factors influencing these perceptions, and assess the overall alignment between policy goals and actual outcomes.

Analyzing questionnaire data also helps in assessing the degree of accountability in policy implementation. By comparing the perspectives of various stakeholders, researchers can identify gaps, discrepancies, or areas of disagreement in how policy outcomes are perceived. This information can inform discussions on policy effectiveness, resource allocation, and decision-making processes.

Furthermore, the evaluation stage of educational policies can go beyond questionnaires to include other research methods such as interviews, focus groups, case studies, and data analysis of educational indicators. These approaches provide a more comprehensive understanding of policy outcomes and allow for triangulation of findings.

Overall, investigating the evaluation stage of educational policies through questionnaires provides valuable insights into policy effectiveness, stakeholder perceptions, and accountability. It supports evidence-based decision making, helps identify areas for improvement and contributes to the continuous improvement of educational policies and practices.

### **Pretesting the Questionnaires**

Before distributing the questionnaires to participants, a pretesting phase was conducted to ensure their effectiveness and clarity. This pretesting process involved expert review by two highly regarded Liberian PhD holders who possessed the necessary knowledge and expertise in the field. The purpose of this expert review was to obtain professional opinions on the questionnaire design and structure. By involving experts in the pretesting phase, the researchers sought to benefit from their expertise and ensure that the questionnaire was well-designed, relevant, and effective in capturing the desired information. The experts were able to

provide valuable feedback on the questionnaire's content, format, and clarity. This helped the researcher gain insights into the average time required to complete the questionnaire. It also provided an opportunity to identify any ambiguities or difficulties participants encountered while answering the questions.

The feedback obtained from the pretesting phase was used to refine and improve the questionnaire. Clarity issues were addressed and any necessary modifications were made to ensure that the questions were clear, concise, and easily understandable by the intended participants. The pretesting phase also helped in re-categorizing the questionnaire to avoid any potential bias in participant responses.

Questionnaires are often considered a cost-efficient method for collecting data in mixed methods research. They provide a flexible and scalable approach to gathering insights into social trends and patterns. By using questionnaires, researchers can reach a large number of participants efficiently and obtain a wide range of perspectives.

To ensure the best possible outcome from the use of questionnaires, the researcher took several measures. First, the questions were carefully crafted to be clear and unambiguous, avoiding any jargon or technical language that could confuse participants. Additionally, the selected participants were chosen based on their knowledge and expertise in the subject area, ensuring that they were capable of providing informed responses.

By conducting pretesting and incorporating expert feedback, the researcher ensured that the questionnaires were well-designed, relevant, and capable of capturing the necessary data. This rigorous approach to questionnaire development helps enhance the validity and reliability of the research findings and ensures that the collected data is of high quality.

The questionnaires were employed to assess the perspectives of the majority regarding the results of educational interventions in Liberia (McNamara, 1999). Individuals from various levels of the educational system associated with the research themes were chosen as

respondents. The questionnaires underwent pretesting to evaluate their quality, design, suitability, target audience, comprehensibility, and duration. Participants were requested to choose categories or rank items to indicate their attitudes or opinions on the themes and assumptions (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016). While closed-ended questions offer benefits such as easy analysis and coding, participants' responses are typically confined to the scale provided by the researcher. To address this limitation and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the questionnaire results, interviews were conducted later in the research process. These interviews helped overcome the constraint and provided a deeper insight into the obtained questionnaire results.

### **Administering Questionnaires**

The electronic questions were integrated into a data collection and analysis software called Kobo API. This software is commonly utilized by field workers, particularly those engaged in humanitarian work, to gather data in challenging environments. Kobo API offers a seamless digital platform for data collection. While Kobo has the capability to manipulate data and present it in analytical formats such as charts and graphs, the analysis for this study was not conducted using the Kobo data analysis software. Instead, the software was solely employed for data collection purposes. The decision not to use Kobo API for data analysis was primarily due to the fact that the results obtained through the software accounted for only 35 percent of the total respondents. The remaining 65 percent of the data was collected using hard copy questionnaires which were printed, distributed to participants, and subsequently retrieved by the researcher once they completed.

Due to the mixed methods approach of data collection, the data collected through KoboAPI was imported into Excel Power Query for analysis. This allowed the researcher to consolidate and integrate the data from the electronic questionnaires with the manually entered

results from the hard copy questionnaires.

Excel Power Query provided a flexible and powerful tool for data manipulation and analysis. The researcher used this functionality to generate statistical representations of the data. For questionnaires that included scaling questions, where respondents were asked to rate items on a scale from 1 to 5, the results were calculated based on the proportions of respondents who answered within each category. This helped provide insights into the distribution of opinions or attitudes within the sample population.

For most of the questionnaires, mean scores were computed for individual questions or groups of questions. This involved calculating the average response for each question or set of related questions. Mean scores provide a summary measure of the central tendency of the responses, allowing the researcher to understand the average opinion or perception of the participants on specific issues.

By utilizing Excel Power Query for data analysis, the researcher was able to process and analyze the combined dataset, incorporating both the electronic and hard copy questionnaire responses. This approach facilitated the computation of statistical representations and mean scores, enabling the researcher to derive meaningful insights from the collected data. It's worth noting that the University of Bristol (2021) has been referenced as a source regarding the computation of mean scores for individual or grouped questions. This suggests that the researcher may have followed established methodologies or guidelines from the university in analyzing the questionnaire data using mean scores.

### **Ethical Considerations during questionnaire Data collection**

During the stage of questionnaire administration, ensuring informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and protecting the participants' rights were crucial considerations. However, due to challenges related to obtaining online informed consent and the limitations in sending and retrieving electronic data in certain parts of Liberia, a combination of electronic



and hard copy questionnaires were used.

Participants were required to provide prior consent by signing consent forms before participating in the study. This ensured that they were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the research project (Panel on Institutional Review Boards, 2003). Informed consent is an ethical requirement that ensures participants have the necessary information to make an autonomous decision about their involvement in the study. To accommodate the limitations in technology infrastructure, both electronic and hard copy questionnaires were employed. Electronic questionnaires were suitable for participants who had access to digital devices and reliable internet connectivity. On the other hand, hard copy questionnaires were utilized for individuals in areas where electronic data transmission was challenging.

Throughout the process, participant protection was a priority. This involved taking measures to minimize any potential risks associated with participation in the study. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, meaning that their individual answers and identities would be kept confidential and not disclosed without their consent. Confidentiality is important to foster trust and encourage participants to provide honest and uninhibited responses.

Additionally, participant protection aimed to respect the autonomy of individuals by allowing them to make decisions about their involvement in the research project voluntarily. Respecting autonomy means that participants have the right to decide whether to participate, withdraw from the study at any time, or decline to answer specific questions.

The overall objective of participant protection is to strike a balance between minimizing risks, safeguarding participants' rights, and maximizing the potential benefits of their participation. This ensures that ethical principles and guidelines, such as those set forth by the Panel on Institutional Review Boards, are upheld throughout the research process.

## **Phase IV: Interviews**

The final data collection method utilized in the study was interviews which were conducted using an interview guide as the data collection tool. The interviews were intended to enhance the credibility and depth of the data obtained from the previous data collection instruments. The purpose of the interviews was to gain more in-depth insights from individuals in the hierarchy of educational policymaking in Liberia.

Interviews are a useful method for following up with individual respondents after questionnaires to further investigate their responses and seek clarifications where necessary. According to McNamara (1999, in Quad, 2016), interviews can provide a more comprehensive understanding of participants' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences.

To ensure that the interviews were conducted ethically, the University of Glasgow (2012) suggested that three actions be considered. Firstly, the procedures for the interviews must be outlined in writing and explained to the participants before the interview commences. This ensures that participants are fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits of the interview.

Secondly, the convenience and safety of the interviewee in terms of location must be guaranteed. It is important to ensure that the interview location is accessible and safe for the interviewee to minimize any potential risks or discomfort.

Lastly, interviewees should not be named unless permission is given to do so. This helps protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents which is especially important for sensitive topics or contexts.

Overall, interviews were employed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of individuals involved in educational policymaking in Liberia. Ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure participant protection, informed consent, and confidentiality.

After conducting the interviews with the participants, the data obtained was analyzed using thematic and coding methods. Thematic analysis involves identifying and analyzing patterns or themes within the data while coding refers to the process of assigning labels or codes to segments of data to categorize and organize it for analysis.

The interviews were conducted over a period of three weeks, allowing sufficient time to gather comprehensive data from the participants. The selection of participants was carried out using the expert sampling method which involves intentionally selecting individuals who possess expertise or in-depth knowledge relevant to the research topic. This approach ensures that the participants can provide valuable insights and perspectives based on their expertise.

Table 7 list the participants who took part in the interview sessions. This table serves as a record of the individuals involved in the study, providing transparency and accountability regarding the sample composition. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher had already categorized and coded the responses obtained from the first two phases of the research. This categorization and coding process involved organizing the data based on predefined categories and codes that directly related to the research objectives and questions. This initial coding framework served as a guide for analyzing the interview data and helped ensure consistency and coherence throughout the research process.

During the interviews, the researcher actively listened to the participants' responses, paying close attention to the concepts and words they used. This active listening approach allowed the researcher to identify and note down any new concepts or themes that emerged during the interviews. These newly identified concepts enriched the existing coding framework and provided additional insights into the research topic.

Furthermore, as participants shared their responses, the researcher made spontaneous verbal probes as follow-ups. These probes aimed to authenticate the information

being provided by the participants and to further clarify their perspectives. The use of verbal probes helped ensure the accuracy and validity of the data by confirming participants' understanding and awareness of the information they were sharing.

By employing thematic and coding methods, conducting interviews over a specific timeframe, using expert sampling, and employing verbal probes, the researcher aimed to analyze and interpret the interview data in a systematic and rigorous manner. These methods facilitated the identification of key themes, patterns, and insights derived from the participants' responses, ultimately contributing to the overall findings and conclusions of the research. The data collection process followed a sequential approach, as depicted in Figure 3 where stakeholders were contacted in a specific order, starting with Early Childhood Education sources and progressing to Higher and TVET Education. The data collection phase took place between December 2021 and March 2022.

**Table 7**

*Participants interviewed*

<b>Subsystem</b>	<b># of Participants</b>	<b>Category</b>
Early Childhood Education	1	Senior management (Macro level)
	1	Middle managers (Meso Level)
	1	Civil Servants (Micro level)
Primary Education	1	Senior management (Macro level)
	1	Middle managers (Meso Level)
	1	Civil Servants (Micro level)
Secondary Education	1	Senior management (Macro level)
	1	Middle managers (Meso Level)
	1	Civil Servants (Micro level)
Higher Education	1	Senior management (Macro level)
	1	Middle managers (Meso Level)
	1	Civil Servants (Micro level)
Technical and Vocational Education	1	Senior management (Macro level)
	1	Middle managers (Meso Level)
	1	Civil Servants (Micro level)
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	

**Description of Time**

It is worth noting that the research was conducted during the period coinciding with the beginning of the Academic Calendar year which commenced on November 1, 2021. This timing was chosen strategically as it offered advantages for data collection. Education

stakeholders were expected to have comprehensive academic information and data available before schools started. Additionally, during this period, many stakeholders in the education sector had published reports and opinions covering the previous year, making them a valuable source of information.

Moreover, the research coincided with Liberia's bicentennial anniversary, marking 200 years since the arrival of the first group of settlers from America who founded the country in 1822. This historical significance added context to the research and the overall understanding of the education landscape in Liberia.

Overall, the data collection process followed a sequential approach, targeting stakeholders in a specific order, and was conducted during a period that offered advantages in terms of stakeholders' readiness and availability of academic information. The timing also aligned with a significant historical milestone for Liberia, further enriching the context of the research.

### **Description of the Researcher**

Having been a classroom teacher since 2005, the researcher has gained experience in both the public and private sectors. Throughout the researcher's career, the researcher has held various roles, ranging from being a classroom teacher to serving as a school principal and even founding their own school. Additionally, the researcher has played a significant role in providing extensive teacher training across Liberia, covering a wide range of educational institutions.

This firsthand experience has provided the researcher with an insider's perspective on how education policies implemented over the past sixteen years have influenced learning outcomes in the country. The researcher has witnessed the impact of these policies on the ground and has observed how they have shaped the education system.

Currently, the researcher holds the position of President at the National Association

of Liberia School Principals. This association represents principals from private, mission, and public schools at the early childhood education (ECE), primary, basic and secondary levels across Liberia. The primary objective of the association is to enhance the quality of education in Liberia by advocating for and safeguarding the interests of principals, school administrators, and the teaching profession as a whole.

Due to the researcher's role as President, the researcher is also a member of several national educational boards, as stipulated by the association's bylaws. Being part of these boards allows them to contribute to educational policymaking and decision-making processes at the national level.

In brief, the researcher's extensive experience as a classroom teacher, school principal, and proprietor combined with their current position as President of the National Association of Liberia School Principals, has provided them with deep insights into the impact of education policies on learning outcomes. The researcher's involvement in national educational boards further enables them to contribute to shaping the educational landscape in Liberia.

The researcher also holds the position of President at LICOSESS College of Education which is one of the largest private institutions in Liberia offering teacher certification programs at the tertiary level. This role provides the researcher with convenient access to and understanding of the policies that govern higher education and the corresponding outcomes. These experiences and positions have granted the researcher an insider's perspective which in turn facilitates the process of gathering data.

However, the researcher acknowledges the potential for bias, interview probes, and analysis that may arise from their close proximity to stakeholders. To mitigate this, careful measures were taken to avoid such biases. The researcher approached the research phenomenon from the participants' worldview, appreciating their perspectives and ensuring that the data was transcribed and interpreted as presented without personal influence.

The researcher maintained a professional and impartial stance throughout the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes. The researcher consciously avoided allowing personal experiences to impact these stages. Instead, handled the collected data with the utmost objectivity and professionalism, maintaining an impersonal relationship with the information gathered.

### **Reliability of Research**

The concept of reliability in research refers to the consistency and stability of the research findings. It suggests that if the same research design is repeated by different researchers, the results should remain consistent (University of Connecticut, 2012). This means that if another researcher were to replicate the study using the same research design, similar findings would be expected. However, the reliability of the findings can be influenced by various factors including the participants involved and the timing of the research.

In the context of this study, it is important to consider the social constructivist perspective. According to this perspective, individuals construct responses to a given phenomenon based on their unique experiences and the social dynamics of the time. Therefore, even if the study were to be replicated with the same research design, using the same participants, there may be variations in the responses obtained. This is because societal dynamics can change over time, leading individuals to construct their responses differently.

It is worth noting that no systematic study targeting all levels of the educational hierarchy in Liberia, based on a theoretical foundation, and has been conducted previously. This lack of existing literature makes it challenging to determine the reliability of the research findings using previous studies as a reference.

To address this limitation, the researcher in this study took steps to enhance the reliability of the findings. This included carefully designing the research process, ensuring transparency in data collection and analysis, and maintaining consistent procedures throughout

the study. By adhering to rigorous research methodologies and documenting the research process in detail, the researcher aimed to enhance the reliability of the findings within the context of this specific study.

While the concept of reliability suggests consistency in research findings, the social constructivist perspective recognizes that responses to a given phenomenon can vary over time due to changing societal dynamics. Due to the lack of previous comprehensive studies in Liberia and the unique nature of the research context, the researcher focused on maintaining rigor and transparency in the research process to enhance the reliability of the findings within the scope of this study.

In summary, this chapter provided an overview of the research methodology including the research approach, rationale, and philosophical assumptions that guided the study. It also discussed the data collection methods, the instruments used, and the techniques employed for data analysis. Additionally, the chapter focused on the researcher's role, the research setting, the participants involved, and the procedures followed during data collection. The research procedure was guided by Ying's (2016) approach to case study investigation in qualitative studies. To begin with, the researcher conducted a comprehensive review of educational policy documents, reports, research findings, and archival documents. This desk review aimed to identify recurring or distinct phenomena related to the research topic, as well as their corresponding outcomes or expected results. Through this exploratory reading, a thematic network, following Stirling's (2001) framework, was constructed. This thematic network helped organize and categorize the global themes derived from the desk review, along with their corresponding assumptions.

Based on the identified themes and assumptions, questionnaires were formulated or selected for the study. These questionnaires would serve as the primary instrument for data collection, allowing the researcher to gather relevant information and insights from the



participants.

The chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the research methodology, outlining the key components and steps involved in conducting the study. By following a case study approach and employing a desk review of relevant literature, the researcher aimed to ensure a systematic and rigorous research process. The use of questionnaires as the primary data collection instrument further enhanced the study's ability to capture valuable insights from the participants. Overall, this chapter served as a foundation for the subsequent chapters, setting the stage for the research methodology and providing a clear understanding of the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques used in the study.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Introduction

This chapter presents the major thrusts and findings of this research. The overview of the study, analysis of the outcomes in relation to prior studies, discussion of shortcomings, implications and evaluation of findings followed the presentation of the data's reliability, validity and graphical/tabular representations and interpretations. The suggestions for application and future studies are offered before the conclusion of the study.

In Liberia's recent history, the educational infrastructure was found to be fragile and structurally weak, with some critical issues requiring attention. These issues include the need to improve access to quality and relevant education at all levels of education ladder, ranging from early childhood education, primary education, and secondary education, higher education as well as vocational and technical education.

Studying accountability policies for rewarding performance or determining consequences in Liberia is crucial to understanding how these regulatory mechanisms operate in the school system. In this study the researcher firstly examined the components (inputs, outcomes, policy management circle, and education system) and assumptions (study assumes a relationship between the Inputs of an educational systems and its results – outcomes) at the base of the model. This allowed the researcher to discuss its foundations and raise questions about certain notions that have become naturalized in the discourses of policy management in Liberia. Likewise, different approaches to educational responsibility were identified which showed that accountability is not an exclusive component for the countries that have incorporated the accountability for policy performance scheme but rather, there are different ideas, and ways of combining the concepts (Moorosi, 2006).

Secondly, a bibliographical review of the empirical evidence was carried out regarding the effects of the performance accountability model, both internationally, and nationally. The initial expectation is that the combination of accountability measures within the policy management circle at all subsystem levels will generate adequate incentives for educational teams to continuously improve educational processes. However, although some authors identify advances or positive aspects —such as greater monitoring of children's learning and greater alignment between the national curriculum and classroom work; there is an extensive specialized literature that shows significant tensions and even, harmful effects for the development of the internal capacities of the institutions, and the professionalization of teachers (Moorosi, 2006).

Thirdly, these findings allow us to rethink politics and its possible transformations. In this regard, progress must be made towards a model similar to that of the Nordic and Asian countries which have put the priority focus on the training, and working conditions of teachers which they have called the fourth pathway. Sahlberg (2011), for his part, refers to the Finnish case, sustaining the relevance that educational achievements are due precisely to the high professionalism and autonomy of teachers and schools, together with extensive public education and a strong ethics for education including equity, and social rights. Along the same lines, the case of Scotland stands out which although it has introduced standardized planning and evaluation policies, emphasizes the internal reflection of school teams, and their professional development.

Most of the reviewed documents mentioned the Liberian civil war (1989-2003) as responsible for the country's education sector's decline. However, this paper discovered that although the civil war exacerbated these issues by leaving everything from the school's infrastructure to its equipment, administrative structure and teaching staff in chaos, foundational elitist principles are also responsible for the sector not producing the right

products, nurturing inequity and failure to serve the needs of society – in terms of access, quality and relevance. These have contributed to missteps in the sector prior to, and after the crises.

Using sub-themes derived from document review, as well as a key focus on the theoretical framework (production function, conflict theory, and functionalism) described in this paper, the research generally realized that Liberia education sector has historically utilized elite mythical norm to gain and retain power, and control over the population. This was done by ensuring that certain cultural capital and convictions are forced and buried into policy management process so that those benefiting from the policy, or being educated by it, can maintain a certain way of life, thereby limiting them from reaching their full potential. This happened through having educational policies that did not even out inequalities occasioned by disparities in access, relevance and quality of education. Over time, these gaps have manifested in further limited access, poor quality, and relevance of educational outcomes in the country.

The investigation adopted the whole system approach in selecting policies and participants from each subsector level. This was necessary because research revealed that every level of the educational system is interlinked and that gaps at one level inadvertently have a causal effect on the next level. Hence, bridging the gaps through systemic intervention means understanding where gaps exist at one level and how much the gap affects or spills into the next level.

This study by adopting a pragmatist's view did not seek to provide the ultimate reality about the topic under investigation but rather, it aimed at exploring the meaning participants have about the problem under exploration. Thus, such understanding and interpretation can be best explored using the qualitative approach to research design since its descriptive nature allows researchers to attach meaning to participants' experiences and the effects of the problem (Meyer, 2001). This would be complemented by a quantitative approach to generate data to augment what has been observed from the policies. The phases of the study

necessitated the employment of three different devices for data collection and analysis. This study utilized the case study mixed-methods techniques to investigate educational policies from analysis, formulation, implementation and evaluation stages by capturing a variety of variables from document reviews, interviews, and questionnaires. Hence, it investigated gaps in the policy management cycle.

It was discovered that **access**, **quality**, and **relevance** were key themes in each subsector and were also significant foci of policies, and stakeholders. Theoretically, these gaps are related to the nature of inputs, processes and outputs – production theory, inequity driven by the type of education received by the population – conflict theory, and functionalism – the benefits seen from the education sector. Also, gaps in these three areas presented themselves as overarching gaps, in achieving SDG-4 goals. Hence, to meet its SDG-4 targets before 2030, Liberia is enjoined to bridge gaps related to these three outcomes. Therefore, the document review, research questionnaires and interviews were all focused on how policies are addressing or failing to address access, quality, and relevance gaps in the country's education sector.

### **Trustworthiness of Data**

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher focused on the results generated from the questionnaires and interviews by regularly pondering the dangers to the trustworthiness and the quality of the data when data collection tools are influenced by prejudice. Therefore, where necessary, before documents were acquired, gatekeeper letters were signed by key agents. Additionally, before the questionnaires were distributed to participants, pretesting, through expert review, was conducted using three acclaimed Liberian educators. This was done to get expert opinions on the design step of the questionnaire (ISTAT, 2017). The pretesting informed the researcher about the average time a person needed to complete the questionnaires, provided clarity on some of the questions, and helped re-categorize the questionnaire in a way that did

not elicit biased responses from participants. In summary, pre- testing was conducted to determine the merits, design, appropriateness, audience, understanding, clarity, and duration of completing the questionnaires.

Questionnaires are useful in mixed method research because they provide a cost-efficient tool for insights into social trends and patterns in a more flexible manner (McNamara, 1999). To get the best outcome from questionnaires, the researcher ensured that questions were clear enough, and that the selected participants had the knowledge to answer them. Closed questions were drawn using themes and information from literature and document reviews. The questionnaires were also used to determine what the majority think (McNamara, 1999) about the input-outcome of educational interventions in Liberia.

Participants were asked to select categories or rank items as an indicative measure of attitudes or opinions on themes and assumptions (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016). The use of a closed questionnaire provides advantages ranging from easy analysis, and coding, the participants' answer which are usually limited to the response options provided by the researcher. This presents a major shortcoming. The use of interviews later during the research helped to overcome this limitation. Since most of the questions were repeated in the interview on an open-ended basis, participants were able to provide clearer answers, and to explain the nuances in the data from closed end questions. Moreover, it presents additional information which may not have been reported on the scale or categories in the closed questions. More details of how the data collection process was undertaken were covered in the methodology chapter.

### **Results of Findings including graphical illustrations**

The research findings are divided into two categories: content analysis results and data from questionnaires and interviews. Content analysis involved comparing document review results with raw data from the Education Management Information System (EMIS). The

researcher selected 25 policy documents based on their relevance to Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Tertiary Education, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). The study prioritized the areas of access, quality, and relevance in education based on the Sustainable Development Goal 4 and existing literature reviews.

Hence, the researcher employed the concepts of concordance and co-concordance, as suggested by Grbich (2013), for the enumerative content analysis. This approach facilitated the comparison of themes, premises, and patterns found in the policy documents and the report provided by the Education Management Information System (EMIS) data. As a result, three main themes emerged as significant gaps in the sector that demand attention in order to achieve the goals of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) which include improving access, quality, and relevance of education. The subthemes associated with each of these categories, as identified in the reviewed policy documents, are as follows:

Access:

- Insufficient facilities for disabled individuals
  - Presence of overage students
  - Inadequate Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities
  - Overcrowded classrooms
  - Parents with limited education and motivation
  - Long distance between schools and communities
  - High school fees
  - Lack of feeding opportunities for students
  - Irregular attendance of teachers
- Quality:
- Inadequate teacher training
  - Outdated curriculums
  - Challenges in school leadership

- Limited opportunities for professional growth
- Lack or absence of classroom observation and supervision
- Inadequate classroom environment
- Insufficient teaching-learning materials
- Limited access to technology and teaching aids
- Lack of technical and digital tools and skills
- Curriculum that prioritizes knowledge over skills development
- Absence of practical tools to demonstrate competence
- Limited apprenticeship opportunities
- Limited capacity for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs
- Lack of electricity
- Limited access to internet facilities

To gain a deeper understanding of the data's importance and provide robust support for the findings, the researcher integrated pertinent categories that were collected during the entire research process. These categories were utilized to bolster the significance of the data and enrich the analysis. The themes derived from the document review, questionnaires, and interviews were synthesized and consolidated. By amalgamating these various sources of information, the researcher aimed to present a comprehensive overview of stakeholders' perspectives on the policy management cycle.

Insights obtained from stakeholders involved in Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education, and Technical and Vocational Education were meticulously examined and analyzed. The previously established categories served as a framework for organizing and interpreting the stakeholders' viewpoints and opinions. By incorporating these diverse perspectives, the research aimed to capture a holistic



understanding of the policy management cycle and its implications across different educational sectors. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the stakeholders' experiences, insights, and recommendations within the specific contexts of Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education, and Technical and Vocational Education.

## **Early Childhood Education Findings**

In terms of Early Childhood Education, the government has introduced several initiatives and mechanisms to tackle the challenges related to access, quality, and relevance. These initiatives include:

1. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-4): The government has aligned its efforts with SDG-4 which specifically focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all including early childhood education.
2. Early Childhood Development Community Education and Awareness Program (ECDCEAP): This program aims to raise awareness and promote community involvement in early childhood development. It emphasizes the importance of quality education and holistic development during the early years.
3. Early Childhood Development Skill Training Education Program (ECDSTEP): ECDSTEP focuses on enhancing the skills and capacities of early childhood educators. It provides training and support to educators to improve the quality of early childhood education.
4. Education Reform Act of 2011: This act serves as a framework for comprehensive education reform in the country. It addresses various aspects of the education system including early childhood education, with the goal of improving access, quality, and relevance.

5. National Education Sector Plan (2010-2020): The government has developed a comprehensive education sector plan that encompasses all levels of education including early childhood education. This plan outlines strategies and targets for improving access, quality, and relevance in early childhood education.
6. Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017-2021): This specific education sector plan focuses on achieving excellence in education. It includes provisions and initiatives aimed at improving early childhood education to ensure better access, quality, and relevance.

These initiatives and policies demonstrate the government's commitment to addressing the challenges and improving early childhood education in terms of access, quality, and relevance. According to the Liberia Education Statistics Report 2019-2020, findings from the Education Management Information System (EMIS) revealed that the Education Reform Act of 2011 mandated the government to establish Early Childhood Education (ECE) facilities in all districts. However, it was observed that many districts still do not have public ECE programs and the public access to Early Childhood Education stands at only 44 percent even after eleven (11) years since the policy was enacted.

The records indicate that most of the public ECE schools were constructed prior to the implementation of this policy. This suggests that the mandate outlined in the policy has not been effectively enforced. Furthermore, an evaluation of the national budget from 2011 to 2021 indicates minimal or no allocation of funds for establishing new ECE facilities in districts as stipulated by the policy. As a result, the absence of public ECE facilities in certain districts leaves parents with limited options. Private ECE schools are often too expensive for parents to afford and the distance to public facilities in neighboring districts is impractical for toddlers and their parents. Consequently, there is a high cost of tuition for private ECE schools, making it difficult for parents to access quality early childhood education for their children.

This finding supports the UNICEF report of 2019 that reveals low-income countries, such as Liberia, invest less in pre-primary education. In fact, Liberia's investment is even lower than some other low-income countries. As a result, it is unlikely that Liberia will be able to achieve the target of universal pre-primary enrollment by 2030 which is estimated at 32.30 percent for low-income countries. This falls far below the access threshold, highlighting the need for low-income countries like Liberia to increase their expenditure on pre-primary education by four times to meet the 2030 targets.

Furthermore, the Education Management Information System (EMIS) data shows that overage enrollment constitutes more than 60 percent of children in all Early Childhood Education (ECE) schools. This overage enrollment remains a significant barrier to access as older pupils occupy limited classroom spaces meant for age-appropriate children. Due to limited space, younger children who are of age-appropriate for early childhood education have to wait until older children vacate the limited spaces. They also have to wait for their legs to get stronger so that they can cover the distance to the nearby public school. As a result, the main reasons why a child is unable to access early childhood education are: (i) inability to afford school fees and related expenses, (ii) enrolling late or being older than the recommended age, and (iii) living far away from the school.

Regarding quality, the Education Reform Act of 2011 promised government assistance to teacher training colleges in order to produce teachers for early childhood education. However, this promise remains unfulfilled as there have been no public funds allocated for this purpose. Consequently, there is a shortage of qualified teachers and high student-to-teacher ratios, particularly in public schools. Other bilateral partners have recognized this gap and began some efforts to bridging them. In 2021, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) initiated a program called Transforming the Education System for Teachers and Students (TESTS) which specifically focuses on enhancing the

capabilities of eight (8) teacher training institutions. The objective is to equip these institutions with the necessary resources to train more than 3500 early childhood education (ECE) and primary teachers throughout the duration of the project (USAID, 2020). Despite this effort, there are still limitations in terms of access to the ECE curriculum and supplementary materials for teachers. Furthermore, there is insufficient emphasis on the relevance of ECE and inadequate measures being taken to improve or incorporate technological awareness at this level which is likely inappropriate and insufficient.

### **Primary Education Findings**

During the primary education review, various policy documents were examined, such as the Strategy for Education Transformation (2018-2028), the Education Reform Act of 2011, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-4), the National Education Sector Plan (2010-2020), and the Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017-2021). These policies outlined the efforts made or currently being made by the Liberian government to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE). According to data from the Education Management Information System (EMIS), the current access to primary education stands at 43.2%. To enhance access, the Education Reform Act of 2011 pledged to offer school grants to all primary schools including private schools, eliminate fees for education, and provide high-quality alternative and accelerated education pathways for older and out-of-school children.

Despite the implementation of the government's free primary education policy, the requirement of fee payments still poses a barrier to accessing primary schools. It is worth mentioning that Liberia has consistently failed to meet the criteria outlined in the Millennium Challenge Corporation Scorecard (MCC) for the past five years. As a result, Liberia missed the opportunity to secure a second compact worth at least 500 million dollars from the United States Government. This failure was primarily due to the government's repeated refusal to increase its

expenditure on primary education (Front Page Africa, 2022).

Regarding the issue of quality, these policies made commitments to address it by increasing the training of primary school teachers and conducting a national assessment in the 3rd and 6th grades to evaluate learning outcomes. The Getting to Best Education Sector Plan highlighted the need to review the curriculum established in 2011. This review aimed to include syllabuses that focus on literacy and numeracy learning outcomes for grades 1-6, with an emphasis on providing phonological awareness and introducing high-frequency vocabulary.

In the past couple of years, the Ministry of Education and its collaborators have notably intensified their endeavors to formulate a National Reading Strategy and enhance the frequency of reading instruction at the primary level. Additionally, the USAID-Read Liberia project has reached its conclusion. The main aim of this initiative was to enhance the reading abilities of Liberian students in first and second grades attending public kindergarten schools in six specific counties: Bong, Nimba, Lofa, Margibi, Grand Bassa, and Montserrado Counties (Front Page Africa, 2022).

Furthermore, it has been revealed that the government is fulfilling its commitment to conducting the National Assessment for students in the 3rd and 6th grades on an annual basis. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding how the results of these exams are being utilized to address the quality gap at the primary level. It is essential to establish effective strategies and interventions based on the assessment findings to improve the overall quality of education.

In terms of teacher training for the primary level, data from the Education Management Information System has indicated that there are still 6,599 untrained teachers in public primary schools. This is despite the promise made in the Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017-2021) to train over 11,000 primary teachers. The shortfall in teacher training raises concerns about the qualifications and competencies of these untrained teachers and highlights the need for further investment in teacher development programs to ensure that all teachers receive the

necessary training and support to deliver quality education to students.

The government made a commitment to equip primary school students with marketable skills and computer literacy to enhance the relevance of their education. However, the current reality is that only 0.9 percent of public schools have a computer lab. This lack of access to computer labs or digital devices makes it extremely challenging to introduce students to the technological skills that are crucial for career advancement in today's world. The limited availability of computer facilities hinders the effective integration of technology into the curriculum, potentially limiting the students' ability to develop the necessary digital literacy and skills required for success in the modern job market.

### **Senior Secondary Education Findings**

The results indicate that the challenges experienced in early childhood education (ECE) and primary school level spill over to the senior secondary level. As a result, the gaps in access to secondary education can be attributed to the following factors: (i) school fees and related expenses, (ii) late enrollment or being overage for the grade level, and (iii) distance to school.

Providing secondary education in Liberia continues to face difficulties due to the growing demand resulting from the number of students completing primary and basic education. Additionally, financial constraints hinder young people and their families from affording the economic costs associated with secondary education. Poor governance and management of the education system, along with fragmented public funding directed to the sector, also contribute to the challenges faced in delivering quality secondary education.

These difficulties, along with various others, have resulted in gaps in the supply and demand of secondary education in terms of access, relevance, and quality (Gropello, 2006). The policies that were extensively examined in this particular subsector include the Education Reform Act of 2011, the National Education Sector Plan (2010-2020), the Getting to Best

Education Sector Plan (2017-2021), the Strategy for Education Transformation (2018-2028), and the Improving Results in Secondary Education (IRISE 2019-2023).

In order to tackle the issue of limited access, the World Bank, in collaboration with the Liberian government, has taken measures to enhance enrollment in senior secondary education through the implementation of the Improving Results in Secondary Education (IRISE 2019- 2023) project. As part of this initiative, the project aims to construct or upgrade twenty-five schools in districts where there are no existing senior secondary schools. The objective is to increase the number of students entering secondary education to over 40,000. Presently, the government operates only 21.7 percent of the senior secondary schools in Liberia.

In Liberia, the evaluation of educational quality primarily relies on student performance. Based on the results obtained by Liberian students in the examinations administered by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), some educational stakeholders argue that students in Liberia receive a substandard education, as evidenced by the modest improvement in academic performance. For instance, in 2013, no candidate achieved a passing grade in the highest division category. Furthermore, out of the 27,651 candidates who took the exam in the May/June 2014 session, only 13,349 or 48.26 percent were successful (Liberian Daily Observer, 2014). The results from 2016 also indicated a decline in academic performance among students. It is evident that the educational offerings in Liberia are not meeting the required standards.

In terms of quality in secondary education, the government has made a commitment to improve students' performance in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and other similar exams. This commitment is being fulfilled through various interventions. These interventions include covering the costs of WASSCE for all students, providing free tutorial classes, and conducting free mock exams. Since 2020, these measures have had a positive impact on examination results. The percentage of candidates who failed in

all subjects has been decreasing, with a reduction of 23.84 percent in 2020, 5.08 percent in 2021, and 1.51 percent in 2022, respectively.

When it comes to relevance in senior secondary education in Liberia, policymakers have emphasized that students should not only focus on academic proficiency but also develop national literacy and marketable skills. This includes the acquisition of computer literacy and practical knowledge. However, the current state of inadequate practical training, laboratories, and limited access to computers poses a significant obstacle to achieving these goals.

It is worth noting that only a small percentage of public senior secondary schools in Liberia have computer labs. Specifically, just 11.6 percent of these schools possess the necessary facilities to provide students with hands-on computer training. Additionally, a mere 21.1 percent of public senior secondary schools have access to electricity. This lack of infrastructure and resources severely hampers the ability of students to gain practical knowledge and skills that are relevant in today's technological and digital age.

The absence of adequate practical training, laboratories, and computers in the majority of senior secondary schools in Liberia highlights the urgent need for investment and improvement in infrastructure. By providing the necessary facilities, such as well-equipped computer labs and reliable electricity supply, students can enhance their practical skills and be better prepared for the demands of the modern workforce.

## **Higher Education**

In the realm of higher education, significant policies that were examined include the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-4), the Higher Education Strategic Plan (HESP), the Education Reform Act of 2011, the Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017–2021), and the Revised National Policy on Higher Education (2015).

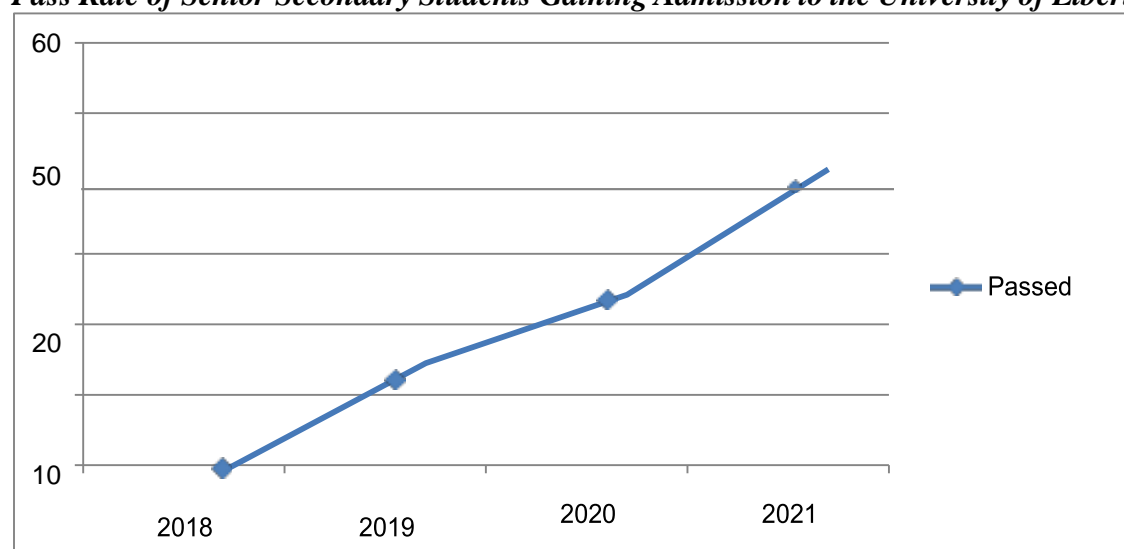
Regarding access, the government has made commitments to establish a national student aid program, enhance equitable access to higher education for vulnerable populations,



and strengthen the connection between higher education and secondary education. The reviewed policy documents indicate that higher education enrollment has seen an increase, primarily attributed to the government's implementation of a free education policy for public tertiary institutions. There is also improvement in access as the pass rate for admission to higher education at the University of Liberia have been incremental over the last 4 years, as shown in Figure 4 below:

**Figure 4**

***Pass Rate of Senior Secondary Students Gaining Admission to the University of Liberia***



**Source:** Field Data (2023)

As seen in Figure 4 above, access to higher education at the University of Liberia has shown improvement in recent years. The pass rate for admission has gradually increased over the past four years and there has been a noticeable growth in the number of students enrolling in the university within the last three years. The progress in transitioning from Senior Secondary to Higher Education can be attributed to various government initiatives. For instance, the government has sponsored the payment of the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) fees for all students. Additionally, free tutorial classes and mock exams have been provided to students. These interventions by the government have had a positive impact on exam results, particularly in core subjects like Mathematics and English

which are essential for admission into higher education.

When it comes to quality, the Higher Education system in Liberia has faced challenges in meeting the demand for skilled labor in the country's job market. There is a notable gap in the capacity of Higher Education faculty members to effectively employ 21st-century teaching methods and pedagogy. Moreover, there is a need for the curriculum to be reoriented to align with the evolving needs of industries and employers. Another area where improvement is required is in research and the availability of resource materials for stakeholders in Higher Education.

One of the key hindrances to addressing these quality issues is the lack of adequate funding allocated to the Higher Education sector. Insufficient financial resources have limited the implementation of necessary activities aimed at improving skills development among students. Without adequate funding, it is challenging to enhance teaching methodologies, update curriculum content, and provide the necessary resources for research and learning materials. Therefore, bridging the gap in quality within the Higher Education system requires concerted efforts to address several areas. These include investing in faculty development programs to enhance their pedagogical skills and teaching methods in line with the demands of the 21st century. Curriculum revision is also crucial to ensure it aligns with the needs of the labor market and equips students with relevant and up-to-date knowledge and skills.

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When it comes to relevance, the curriculum in Higher Education institutions in Liberia has been criticized for its inability to align with the country's economic direction. The current curriculum often fails to provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge that are in high demand in the job market. As a result, young people who graduate from these institutions may find themselves economically disadvantaged, as they are ill-prepared to meet the needs and requirements of industries and employers.

One of the issues with the curriculum is that it tends to promote obedience rather than nurturing critical thinking and innovation. This approach limits students' ability to think creatively and independently which are essential skills for success in today's rapidly changing world. The mismatch between the curriculum and the economic direction of the country further exacerbates this problem, as it hinders students' ability to contribute meaningfully to the workforce and the overall development of the nation.

Inequities also exist within the Higher Education system, where the rich and powerful often have better access to economic and social opportunities. This advantage enables

them to excel and secure higher-paying jobs while those from less privileged backgrounds struggle to compete on an equal footing. This perpetuates economic disparities and limits social mobility, as opportunities for advancement are not equally accessible to all.

Another significant challenge to relevance in Higher Education is the lack of digital literacy and skills among students. In today's digital age, proficiency in technology and digital tools is crucial for employability and success in many fields. However, the absence of digital literacy and skills training within the curriculum leaves students ill-equipped to navigate the digital landscape and participate fully in the modern workforce. This creates a significant gap between the skills students possess and the skills that employers require, further contributing to their economic disadvantage.

Overall, enhancing the relevance of Higher Education in Liberia requires a comprehensive approach that addresses curriculum gaps, promotes equal opportunities and fosters digital literacy and skills development. By doing so, the Higher Education system can better equip students to meet the demands of the economy, reduce economic disparities, and contribute to the overall development of the country.

### **Technical and Vocational Education findings**

The analysis of the documents uncovered that out of the 49 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions in the country, 18 are publicly owned. Interestingly, there are no TVET institutions at the tertiary level which means that TVET education is predominantly provided by private institutions. However, the resources allocated to these institutions are insufficient, as they receive less funding than what was originally planned according to documents from the Government of Liberia (2016), Ministry of Education (2017), and UNESCO (2022).

Furthermore, despite the private sector having almost twice as many TVET

institutions as the public sector, there is a lower attendance rate in private TVET institutions compared to public ones. This indicates that a significant number of learners are being excluded from TVET education opportunities, as they are unable to access or afford private institutions. The reason for this can be attributed to the exorbitant tuition fees imposed by these institutions. Additionally, there is a shortage of staff members in these institutions compared to what was initially planned which hampers the learning process and the development of skills. As a result, the quality and relevance of TVET education are adversely affected. The documents also highlight other concerns including a lack of sufficient facilities such as computers.

At the tertiary level, there is a noticeable absence of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions. Consequently, young individuals seeking TVET skills and education have limited options available to them. While there are a few public TVET institutions, they are outnumbered by private institutions. However, the cost of attending these private institutions is often prohibitively expensive for the majority of young people.

This financial barrier significantly restricts access to TVET skills, particularly for the large portion of the population in Liberia who live in poverty. With over 50 percent of the population falling into this category, it becomes evident that a significant proportion of potential learners cannot afford the fees associated with private TVET institutions. This creates a significant disparity in access to TVET education, as those who are economically disadvantaged are effectively excluded from pursuing these skills and opportunities.

Furthermore, the geographical location of TVET institutions compounds the access issue. Most TVET institutions are concentrated in urban areas, making them less accessible to learners from rural communities. This geographic imbalance further limits the opportunities for learners residing in rural areas to access TVET education. The lack of institutions in rural settings makes it challenging for individuals from these communities to pursue TVET skills without having to overcome significant logistical and financial barriers.

The document review phase of this paper has revealed significant gaps within the system under study. These gaps, as previously explained in Section 2.1.3, refer to issues, obstacles, or deficiencies within the policy management cycle. Broadly speaking, these gaps can be divided into two main categories: input gaps and outcome gaps.

Input gaps pertain to the initial stages of the policy management cycle, namely policy analysis and formulation. These gaps indicate shortcomings and deficiencies in the way policies are developed and shaped. Examples of input gaps could include a lack of comprehensive research or data analysis during the policy analysis phase, resulting in policies that are not well-informed or evidence-based. Insufficient stakeholder engagement or consultation during the formulation stage could also contribute to input gaps, as the perspectives and needs of key stakeholders may not be adequately considered.

On the other hand, outcome gaps are associated with the later stages of the policy management cycle, specifically policy implementation and policy evaluation. These gaps highlight problems and shortcomings in how policies are put into practice and assessed for their effectiveness. Policy implementation gaps may arise from inadequate resource allocation, poor coordination among implementing agencies, or a lack of clear guidelines and procedures for execution. Policy evaluation gaps, on the other hand, may be caused by a failure to establish robust evaluation frameworks, insufficient monitoring and feedback mechanisms, or a lack of capacity to assess policy outcomes effectively.

To gain further insights into these input and outcome gaps, the study utilized questionnaires and interviews to collect data. These methods helped identify specific instances and instances of input and outcome gaps, allowing for a more detailed analysis of the issues at hand. By examining the findings from the questionnaires and interviews, the paper provided a comprehensive assessment of the visible gaps within the system and offer recommendations for addressing them. Finally, ten (10) INPUT gaps and three (3) OUTCOME gaps were selected

and used to investigate the research phenomenon further as indicated in Table 8 below.

**Table 8**

*Specific Input and Outcome Gaps identified from Document Review*

<b>INPUT Gaps</b>	<b>OUTCOME Gaps</b>
Exclusion of Stakeholders, Limited Allocation of Resources, Lack of Reliable Data, Reduced Political Will, Low Capacity or Technical Know-How, Inadequate Monitoring and Assessment, Centralized Governance/Bureaucracy, Corruption, Inaccessibility	Access to Education Quality of Education Relevance of Education
of policies, Over politicization of policies,	

## **Findings from Questionnaires and Interviews**

In the research study, a descriptive analysis approach was employed to analyze the data collected through the questionnaires. Descriptive analysis involves summarizing and organizing the data to gain insights and understand patterns or trends within the dataset. Out of the 130 questionnaires distributed to the participants, a total of 122 questionnaires were duly filled and recovered from the field. This represents a response rate of 93.8 percent which is considered quite good for questionnaires. A high response rate indicates a high level of engagement and willingness of the participants to provide the requested information.

However, there were 8 questionnaires that were not included in the analysis. Among these 8 questionnaires, 4 had missing data which means that respondents did not provide complete information for certain questions. Missing data can occur due to various reasons, such as respondents skipping questions or failing to provide all the required information. The remaining 4 questionnaires were non-responses, indicating that those participants did not return the questionnaires at all. As a result, these 8 questionnaires were considered unwanted for analysis. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the results, it is common practice to exclude incomplete or missing data from the analysis. This helps to maintain the integrity of the findings and ensures that the conclusions drawn are based on complete and reliable information.

For the 122 valid questionnaires, the next step was to quantify the number of times

a particular response appeared for each question. This involved tallying the frequency of each response option and recording it in a systematic manner. The key variables demanded by individual questions were used to create a tabular form to present the results. Each question was assigned a row in the table and the columns represented the different response options or categories. This tabular presentation makes it easier to compare and interpret the responses for each question, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of the data.

By quantifying and organizing the responses in this manner, researchers can gain a clear understanding of the distribution and frequency of different response options. This allows for a thorough examination of the data, identification of patterns or trends, and the extraction of meaningful insights.

In this study, in addition to questionnaires, qualitative interviews were conducted to gather in-depth information and insights from the participants. The interviews involved a total of fifteen (10) participants who were deliberately selected to represent different levels of educational policymaking in Liberia, specifically the meso and macro levels. The selection of participants from different levels of policymaking ensures a comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape and allows for a broader exploration of perspectives and experiences related to the research topic. This approach provides a more holistic view of the issues under investigation and enhances the credibility and validity of the findings.

The interview questions were designed to align with the questions asked in the questionnaires, allowing for a comparison and integration of the quantitative and qualitative data. This approach helps to triangulate the findings and provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research topic.

During the interviews, detailed notes were taken to capture key themes emerging from the participants' responses. These notes serve as additional data sources that complement and provide further explanation of the insights captured by the questionnaires. The analysis of



these qualitative notes helps to uncover and explore underlying motivations, perspectives, and experiences that may not be fully captured by the quantitative data alone.

It is important to note that the analysis of the questionnaires and interviews was conducted concurrently, meaning that both types of data were analyzed simultaneously. This integrated approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the research findings, ensuring that the quantitative and qualitative data are considered together to provide a more robust understanding of the research topic.

The integration of the questionnaire and interview findings in this section helps to enrich the analysis and interpretation of the data. By combining both types of data, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the research topic, identify patterns and themes that emerge across different data sources, and provide a more comprehensive and nuanced explanation of the quantitative findings. Overall, the integration of the questionnaire and interview findings in this study enhances the depth and richness of the analysis, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic and its implications in the context of educational policymaking in Liberia. The first section of the questionnaires was designed to gather data from respondents regarding their involvement in the educational sector. It aimed to identify the specific level of the sector in which the respondents were engaged, such as at the meso or macro level of educational policymaking in Liberia.

Additionally, this section of the questionnaires focused on exploring weaknesses within the policy management cycle. The cycle encompasses four stages: analysis, formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The questions in this section sought to uncover major indicators of success or failure at each stage of the policy cycle. To identify these indicators, the questions were guided by best practices and the policy goals outlined in major policy documents that were reviewed as part of the study. The aim was to align the assessment of the policies with established standards and objectives.

It's worth noting that the policy cycle is divided into two sets of stages: the first two stages (analysis and formulation) are responsible for determining the content and components of the policy. As such, they were analyzed as the "inputs" of the policies. On the other hand, the last two stages (implementation and evaluation) were analyzed as the "outcomes" of the policies. These stages examine how the policies are put into action and evaluate their effectiveness.

By distinguishing between the input and outcome constructs, the researcher aimed to focus the analysis on specific areas of interest. The input construct allowed for an examination of what goes into the policy including the analysis and formulation stages. The outcome construct, on the other hand, facilitated an analysis of the results and impacts of the policies, encompassing the implementation and evaluation stages. These two constructs, input and outcome, served as the domains of interest in determining the measurements captured by the questionnaires. By measuring these constructs, the researchers aimed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the policies at different stages of the policy cycle, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of educational policymaking in Liberia.

The first section of the questionnaires focused on gathering data related to the respondents' involvement in the educational sector and exploring weaknesses within the policy management cycle. The questions were designed to identify indicators of success or failure at different stages of the policy cycle, guided by best practices and policy goals outlined in major policy documents. The distinction between input and outcome constructs allowed for a targeted analysis of the policies, examining what goes into them and the resulting outcomes. To answer the question regarding the level of the education sector at which the respondents were serving, the researchers first needed to ascertain the specific level of the education sector in which each respondent was involved. To do this, they referred to the documents reviewed which outlined the five levels of the education sector in Liberia.

These levels include Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) (Ministry of Education, 2021). By determining the level of the education sector in which each respondent served, the researchers ensured that the study involved relevant participants who were directly engaged in the specific areas of focus. This approach allowed for cross-sectional representation of views and perspectives from key players operating within different levels of the education sector. In order to capture this information, the researchers included a question in the questionnaires that asked respondents to indicate the level of the education subsector with which they were mostly involved. This question served as the guiding prompt for this aspect of the study.

**Table 9**

*Participants Level within the Education Sector*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Early Childhood Education	12	9.83
Primary Education	39	31.96
Secondary Education	32	26.22
Higher Education	29	23.77
Technical and Vocational Education and Training	10	8.19
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

The responses obtained from the participants were then compiled and represented in Table 9. This table likely presented a breakdown of the respondents based on the levels of the education sector they represented. The table would have indicated the number or percentage of respondents associated with each level, providing an overview of the distribution and representation of participants across the different segments of the education sector.

By examining the distribution of respondents across the various levels of the education sector, the researchers could ensure that the perspectives and insights gathered from the study were comprehensive and covered a diverse range of educational subsectors. This allowed for a more holistic understanding of the research topic and facilitated a deeper analysis

of the specific challenges, strengths, and dynamics within each level of the education sector.

The researcher identified the level of the education sector at which each respondent served by referring to the documents that outlined the five levels of the education sector in Liberia. This information was gathered through a question in the questionnaires which asked respondents to indicate their primary involvement in a specific level of the education subsector. The resulting data provided a cross-sectional representation of views and perspectives from key players across the different levels of the education sector. Based on the information provided, a descriptive analysis of the data from Table 9 can be conducted to understand the distribution of respondents across different levels of the education sector. The table reveals the following:

- Primary Education: The majority of respondents, 39 (31%), were at the primary level of education. This indicates that a significant proportion of the participants were primarily involved in primary education.
- Secondary Education: The second-largest group of respondents, comprising 32 individuals (26.22%), were involved in secondary education. This suggests a substantial representation of participants engaged in the secondary education sector.
- Higher Education: The study included 29 respondents (23.77%) who were primarily associated with higher education. This indicates that a notable number of participants were involved in the higher education subsector.
- Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET): Both ECE and TVET had a smaller representation among the respondents, each accounting for less than 10% of the total. This suggests that a relatively smaller number of participants were primarily engaged in ECE and TVET.

The distribution of respondents across the different levels of the education sector aligns with the current structure and level of activity within Liberia's education sector, as

indicated by the Ministry of Education (2021). The dominance of primary education, followed by secondary and higher education, reflects the concentration of learners and educational activities in these subsectors within the country's education system.

Therefore, the representation of the education sector in the study can be considered in line with the prevailing composition and importance of each subsector in Liberia's education landscape. This suggests that the study captured the perspectives and insights from key players in relation to the dominance and significance of these subsectors, providing a comprehensive understanding of the education sector in the country.

The descriptive analysis of Table 9 indicates that the majority of respondents were involved in primary education, followed by secondary and higher education. The smaller representation of participants in ECE and TVET aligns with the current structure and level of activity in Liberia's education sector. This distribution suggests that the study effectively captured the representation and perspectives of the education subsectors in relation to their prominence within the country's education system.

The findings suggest that Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) are not given priority in Liberia. This lack of prioritization has consequences for the development of young children in the country, as highlighted by UNICEF (2019) and Boeren (2019). The limited knowledge about ECE and TVET at the macro, meso, and micro levels of the education system poses a risk to the overall development of children.

At the macro level, this means that decision-making processes regarding improving access to ECE and TVET, building the confidence of learners and parents, and providing a strong vision for these educational pathways are hindered. The policymakers and administrators responsible for shaping the educational landscape may not have sufficient understanding or awareness of the importance of ECE and TVET, leading to inadequate policies and resource

allocation.

At the meso level which includes schools and institutions, the lack of knowledge about ECE and TVET could result in limited opportunities and resources for children. Schools may not have the necessary infrastructure, curriculum, or trained teachers to provide quality ECE and TVET programs. This can further perpetuate the cycle of limited access and poor development outcomes for children.

At the micro level, individual parents and caregivers may lack awareness and understanding of the importance of ECE and TVET. This can impact their decisions regarding their children's education, leading to a lack of enrollment in ECE programs or a preference for traditional academic pathways over TVET. Without informed choices and support from parents, children may miss out on the benefits and opportunities offered by ECE and TVET.

Ascher (2017) argues that the lack of direction and clear understanding among stakeholders involved in the policy process contributes to undesired policy outcomes. In the case of Liberia, this lack of understanding about ECE and TVET may result in policy gaps and ineffective implementation of measures to improve accessibility and quality of these educational pathways.

The limited knowledge in TVET also presents challenges for TVET providers. They may struggle to access accurate labor market intelligence which is essential for designing relevant and up-to-date training programs that meet the needs of the job market. Additionally, the unavailability of a trained TVET workforce further hampers efforts to expand TVET access. Without a skilled and qualified workforce, it becomes difficult to deliver high-quality TVET programs that can effectively equip students with the necessary skills for employment.

The limited knowledge about ECE and TVET in Liberia at different levels of the education system poses significant challenges. It impacts decision-making processes, resource allocation, accessibility, and the overall quality of education in these areas. Addressing these

knowledge gaps and raising awareness about the importance of ECE and TVET are crucial steps towards improving the educational opportunities and outcomes for young children in Liberia.

### **Gaps in the policy management cycle (analysis, formulation, implementation, evaluation) of educational policies in Liberia**

**Table 10**

#### *Presence of Input Gaps*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	108	88.53
No	14	11.47
Total	122	100%

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

The findings presented in Table 10 indicate that a significant majority of the respondents, 108 out of the total sample (88.52%), agreed that there are input gaps in Liberia's policy management cycle. These gaps are identified across various stages of the policy cycle including analysis, formulation, implementation, and evaluation.

The high agreement among the respondents regarding the existence of input gaps in the education sector's policy management cycle is a testament to their knowledge and understanding of the challenges and deficiencies within the system. It signifies that the participants have a comprehensive understanding of the policy gaps and can effectively articulate them during research studies like the one being conducted.

This level of knowledge and awareness among the respondents is valuable because it provides insightful information about the specific areas where these gaps are perceived to exist. By identifying and understanding these gaps from the perspectives of the actors involved, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the issues at hand and develop plausible recommendations based on empirical evidence.

The next question posed by the researcher aims to explore the participants' perception of where these gaps are considered to be. By asking for specific areas or stages within

the policy management cycle, the researcher seeks to obtain detailed insights into the participants' understanding of the gaps and the factors contributing to them. By analyzing the responses to this question, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the specific stages or areas where the policy gaps are perceived to be most prominent. This information can serve as a foundation for developing targeted recommendations and interventions to address the identified gaps effectively.

Overall, the agreement among respondents regarding the existence of input gaps in Liberia's policy management cycle, combined with their knowledge and ability to articulate these gaps, provides researchers with valuable insights. These insights can help to inform evidence-based recommendations and strategies aimed at closing the identified policy gaps and improving the overall effectiveness and impact of education policies in Liberia.

### **Part of the policy management cycle where gaps are most evident**

Table 11 reveals the levels where respondents consider policy gaps to be noticeably prevalent in order of perception.

**Table 11**

*Levels of Policy where Gaps are most evident*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Policy Analysis	44	36
Policy Formulation	38	31
Policy Implementation	26	22
Policy Evaluation	14	11
	122	100%

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

According to Table 11, the analysis stage of the policy cycle is perceived to have the most gaps, as indicated by the majority of respondents. Out of the total sample, 44 respondents (36%) identified the analysis stage as the area with the highest number of gaps. This is followed by policy formulation which was considered to have the most gaps by 38 respondents (31%). Policy implementation was deemed to have the second highest number of



gaps by 26 respondents (22%). On the other hand, policy evaluation was perceived to be the least affected by input gaps.

The findings suggest that the analysis stage of the policy cycle is particularly vulnerable to gaps and deficiencies. This stage involves conducting a comprehensive analysis of the policy problem, identifying its root causes, and assessing potential solutions. If there are gaps in this initial analysis, it can have far-reaching implications for the rest of the policy cycle. A wrong or incomplete definition of the policy problem can lead to misguided policy formulation and subsequent challenges in implementation and evaluation.

The spillover effect of gaps from one stage to another is a logical consequence of the interconnected nature of the policy cycle. Deficiencies in the analysis stage can propagate to other stages, impacting the overall effectiveness of the policy. For instance, if the policy problem is not accurately defined, it may result in inadequate policy formulation that fails to address the underlying issues. This, in turn, can hinder effective policy implementation and compromise the desired outcomes.

Inadequate allocation of resources or limited funding at one level can also have ripple effects on other stages of the policy cycle. Insufficient resources can impede policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation efforts, undermining the overall effectiveness of the policy. The interconnectedness of the policy cycle highlights the importance of addressing gaps and challenges at each stage to ensure a coherent and successful policy process.

The references to the Ministry of Education (2019), UNESCO (2022), ASER (2019), and the World Bank (2020) indicate that these findings are supported by existing research and reports. These sources likely provide additional evidence and insights into the impact of gaps in the policy cycle, further emphasizing the need for addressing these gaps to enhance the quality and effectiveness of education policies.

It is demonstrated that the analysis stage of the policy cycle is perceived to have the

most gaps according to the respondents. The identification of gaps in this stage, as well as in policy formulation and implementation, highlights the importance of addressing deficiencies early in the policy process. By focusing on improving the analysis stage and ensuring adequate resources and funding throughout the entire policy cycle, policymakers can enhance the chances of developing and implementing effective education policies in Liberia.

The findings in this stage indicate that the primary gaps in the educational policy cycle of the country originate from the policy formulation process itself and extend to other stages of the cycle. This confirms the observations made by Dopoe (2018) regarding spillovers in policy formulation as input gaps. During the interviews, the participants disclosed that policy analysis which marks the beginning of the policy formulation process, faces challenges due to information gaps present in the country. They mentioned that when conducting policy studies for new policy formulation, they often lack access to evaluation reports from previous projects. These reports are typically unavailable, likely due to the destruction of documents during the civil war that affected the country. As a result, there are information gaps concerning what has worked in the past, what hasn't, and the reasons behind successes or failures. This lack of information hampers the ability to learn from past experiences and ensure that future policies benefit from valuable lessons.

The research findings indicate that the main gaps in the educational policy cycle of the country originate from the policy formulation process and extend to other stages. The interviews revealed challenges in policy analysis due to information gaps, particularly regarding the unavailability of evaluation reports from previous projects. These gaps stem from the consequences of the civil war which destroyed important documents and created a lack of information about past successes, failures, and lessons learned.

## Stage of policy formulation where gaps are mostly observed

Table 12 indicates the stages where respondents consider policy gaps to be noticeably prevalent in order of perception.

**Table 12**

*Stages where Gaps are common*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Input	88	72.14
Outcome	34	27.86
Total	122	100

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

According to Table 12, the input stage of the policy cycle was identified as the most problematic by the majority of respondents. Specifically, 88 respondents (72.14%) suggested that the input stage is where policy gaps are commonly found. This finding aligns with the results presented in Table 6. On the other hand, fewer respondents, 34 (27.86%), believed that the outcome stage is where policy gaps are more common. When considering the findings from Tables 10, 11, and 12 together, it becomes evident that the respondents consistently perceive the input stage as the area with the most policy challenges and gaps in the country's education sector. This consistency in opinion strengthens the validity of the observations.

This alignment between the respondents' views and the arguments put forth by UNESCO(2013) further supports the notion that the input stage of policy formulation plays a critical role in creating policy gaps. According to UNESCO, a well-designed policy formulation framework should have a clear understanding of the input aspects of the country including its vision and national objectives. These aspects are typically addressed during the policy formulation process.

The input stage involves gathering and analyzing relevant information, defining the policy problem, setting objectives, and establishing a vision for the desired outcomes. It is at this stage that decisions are made regarding the inputs, resources, and strategies that will be

used to achieve the desired policy outcomes. Therefore, if there are gaps or deficiencies in the input stage, it can have significant implications for the effectiveness and success of the overall policy.

The findings from Table 12 indicate that the input stage of the policy cycle is considered more problematic by the majority of respondents. This finding is consistent with the respondents' opinions expressed in Tables 10 and 11. The alignment between the views of the respondents and the arguments presented by UNESCO reinforces the importance of addressing policy challenges and gaps at the input stage, as it sets the foundation for effective policy formulation and implementation in the education sector of the country.

During the interviews, participants highlighted that the highly centralized system of governance in Liberia poses challenges to the analysis and formulation of educational policies in the country. They expressed that major educational decisions leading to policy change are predominantly made using a top-down approach.

According to the participants, the Minister of Education, along with several Deputies, Assistant Ministers, Directors, and other heads of departments and units, form the Senior Management Team (SMT) and are primarily responsible for policy analysis and formulation. This top-down decision-making structure limits the involvement and input of various stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and local communities, in the policy development process. The centralized approach to governance in Liberia means that policy decisions are primarily driven by a select group of high-ranking officials, often without extensive input or consultation from those directly affected by the policies. This can lead to a lack of diverse perspectives and a limited understanding of the realities and challenges faced by stakeholders at the grassroots level.

From the interviews, it was noted that by expanding the involvement of various stakeholders including teachers, parents, and local communities, in the policy development

process, a more comprehensive understanding of the needs and aspirations of the education sector can be achieved. This inclusive approach can lead to policies that are better aligned with the realities on the ground and have a higher likelihood of success. One interviewee had this to say:

*“Most of the top level positions constituting the SMT are not held by educational technocrats and their inputs into educational policies are not well constructed constraining the policy formulation process. Much as educational policy is multidisciplinary in effect, involvement of the communities and educational technocrats and academia would be central to effective analysis, and formulation of educational policies. However, this is exclusive to a few people in the central government who make decisions and impose them on the sector at all levels”* Key informant A 2023.

Hence, the interviews revealed that the highly centralized system of governance in Liberia hampers the analysis and formulation of educational policies. The decision-making process is primarily top-down, with limited input from stakeholders at the grassroots level. To address this challenge, it is crucial to adopt a more inclusive and participatory approach that involves a wider range of stakeholders in the policy development process. This can lead to more effective and contextually relevant educational policies in Liberia. When the policy problem is not well defined, it means that there is a lack of clarity and precision regarding the specific issue that the policy aims to address. This lack of definition can stem from various factors, such as insufficient research, inadequate data, or ineffective problem identification processes.

At this stage, a policy gap emerges which refers to a discrepancy or disconnect between the policies being developed and the actual needs and realities on the ground. This policy gap, resulting from the inadequately defined problem, permeates all subsequent stages of the policy development process. It affects the formulation of strategies, the allocation of

resources, the implementation of the policy, and ultimately, the results and outcomes that are achieved.

The implications of this policy gap are particularly evident in areas related to education. For example, there may be cases where schools are established in locations where there is little or no demand for education. This could lead to underutilized resources and wasted investments. At the same time, areas that urgently require schools and have a significant number of school-age children may be overlooked and left with unmet educational needs.

This discrepancy between policy implementation and actual needs can have a detrimental impact on the intended beneficiaries of the policy, such as parents and communities. They may have certain expectations regarding the outcomes and benefits of the policy, such as improved access to quality education. However, due to the policy gap resulting from the inadequately defined problem, these expectations may not be met, and the desired outcomes may not be achieved.

When the policy problem is not well defined, it can lead to a policy gap that permeates all stages of the policy development process. This can result in policy suggestions and actions that do not effectively address the problem or achieve the desired outcomes. In the context of education, it can lead to the establishment of schools where there is little demand while neglecting areas with urgent educational needs. Ultimately, the policy beneficiaries may not receive the expected benefits and the desired educational outcomes may remain unmet.

### **Whether education laws, policies, and objectives exist that explicitly refer to the respondents' area of the system**

Table 13 provides respondents' views about existence of laws, policies and objectives about their areas of the educational system in the country.

**Table 13***Existence of the Laws, Policies, and Objectives*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	95	77.87
No	27	22.13
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

Table 13 reveals that majority of the respondents 95(77.87) agree that there are laws, policies, and objectives for their areas in the country's educational system compared to 27(22.13%) who are of the opinion that they are not there. This is supported by Government of Liberia (2016) the —Getting to Best Education Plan (2017-2021) which, among others, lists the following instruments related to the existence of the laws, policies, and objectives in the education sector: Constitution of the Republic of Liberia (1986), Education Reform Act (2011), Agenda for Transformation (2012), Liberia Rising: Vision 2030, Getting to Best (G2B) Roadmap 2016, Getting to Best Priorities 2015-2017, Education Sector Analysis (ESA) 2016, MoE Education Sector Plan 2010-2020, MoE Operational Plan 2014-16, Joint Education Sector Review (2015), Education Sector Analysis (2016), and the Education management information system (EMIS) data from 2014 and 2015.

The findings suggest that there is an institutional framework to guide and regulate the education sector in the country. This would be an important input into the educational system as noted by World Bank (2020). Existence of these instruments helps in the allocation of resources, monitoring and evaluation of performance and providing the sector's development direction. This would ultimately lead to better outcomes from the education sector in the country.

While the presence of laws, policies, and objectives in place may initially suggest that there is no policy gap, it is important to examine their functionality and effectiveness beyond their normative existence. Merely having these instruments does not guarantee that they

are functioning well or achieving their intended outcomes. To gain a deeper understanding of their impact, the researcher conducted interviews and reviewed relevant documents.

According to the participants' responses, it became evident that the main sources of gaps in the education sector were not a lack of laws, policies, and objectives per se but rather various other factors. These factors included the allocation of resources for funding the activities outlined in these documents, exclusion of key stakeholders during the formulation processes, unreliable data, limited political will, insufficient capacity in terms of staff and infrastructure, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

The allocation of resources emerged as a significant factor affecting the functionality and effectiveness of the existing laws, policies, and objectives. Even if sound policies are in place, without sufficient financial support and resource allocation, their implementation may be hindered or ineffective. Inadequate funding can result in a lack of necessary infrastructure, educational materials, and qualified teachers which in turn negatively impact the quality of education provided.

Exclusion of stakeholders during the formulation of policies and objectives was another identified gap. When key stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and local communities, are not adequately involved in the policy development process, their perspectives and needs may be overlooked. This can lead to policies that do not align with the realities and aspirations of those directly affected by them, resulting in reduced effectiveness and limited buy-in from stakeholders.

The participants also highlighted the importance of reliable data for evidence-based policy formulation and decision-making. Inaccurate or incomplete data can lead to misguided policy choices and ineffective resource allocation. Additionally, limited political will to prioritize education and allocate sufficient resources can hinder the successful implementation of policies and objectives. Furthermore, low capacity in terms of both human resources (such



as trained staff) and infrastructure was identified as a significant gap. Without an adequate number of qualified teachers, appropriate facilities, and supportive educational infrastructure, it becomes challenging to deliver quality education and achieve the desired outcomes.

Finally, the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms was mentioned as another factor undermining the functionality and effectiveness of existing laws, policies, and objectives. Without proper monitoring and evaluation, it becomes difficult to assess progress, identify areas of improvement, and hold responsible parties accountable for their implementation. This is supported by the claims of Government of Liberia (2016), Archer (2017), Ministry of Education (2019), and EU (2020) who aver that existence of the right frameworks may not mean a lack of gaps in the sectors supported by the existing instruments. The authors also confirm that factors mentioned during the document review can potentially paralyse policy implementation to realize the planned policy outcomes.

It may be averred that while the mere existence of laws, policies, and objectives might initially suggest the absence of a policy gap, it is crucial to assess their functionality and effectiveness. The findings from interviews and document reviews revealed that the actual gaps in the education sector as highlighted above that need to be addressed.

### **Whether respondents find laws, policies, and objectives accessible to them**

Table 14 provides the opinions about accessibility of the instruments investigated in Table 13 above.

**Table 14**

#### *Accessibility of Policies*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Policy not Accessible	80	65.57
Policy Likely Accessible	27	22.14
Policy Highly Accessible	15	12.29
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

Table 14 provides insights into the opinions of the respondents regarding the accessibility of the instruments that were investigated in Table 13. In Table 13, it was established that most of the respondents were aware of the existence of laws, policies, and objectives related to the education sector. However, Table 14 delves deeper into the level of accessibility perceived by the respondents.

According to the results presented in Table 14, the majority of the respondents, accounting for 80 individuals or 65.57% of the total, expressed the view that these instruments were not accessible. This suggests that despite being aware of their existence, the respondents faced challenges or barriers when attempting to access the specific laws, policies, and objectives related to education. The reasons for this lack of accessibility could vary and may include factors such as limited dissemination of information, bureaucratic hurdles, complex language or legal jargon, or a lack of awareness about the channels through which these documents can be accessed.

On the other hand, 27 respondents, representing 22.14% of the total, indicated that they perceived these instruments to be accessible. This subset of respondents may have had relatively easy access to the relevant documents, possibly due to factors such as their professional background, involvement in the education sector, or familiarity with the processes and systems in place for accessing such information.

Additionally, 15 respondents, accounting for 12.29% of the total, went a step further and reported that they found these instruments to be highly accessible. This indicates that a smaller portion of the respondents perceived the accessibility of the laws, policies, and objectives to be not only satisfactory but also exceptionally good. These individuals may have had a comprehensive understanding of the sources, channels, or platforms available for accessing the relevant documents, making them readily available and easily obtainable.

The varying perceptions of accessibility expressed by the respondents highlight the

importance of considering different perspectives when assessing the effectiveness and impact of these instruments. While some respondents encountered difficulties in accessing the laws, policies, and objectives, others found them accessible or highly accessible. These findings suggest that efforts should be made to address the barriers that hinder accessibility, ensuring that these crucial documents are easily reachable by all stakeholders in the education sector.

The perception that the instruments are not accessible may be influenced by factors other than the respondents' inability to access them, as these documents are openly available. A review of the government of Liberia's websites including the Ministry of Education's website, revealed that these documents can be freely accessed online. However, key informant interviews shed light on why the respondents considered the instruments inaccessible.

One significant reason highlighted during the interviews was the lack of wider participation during the formulation of these instruments. The exclusion of key stakeholders and communities during the development of laws, policies, and objectives can lead to a perception of inaccessibility. When people feel that their voices and perspectives were not adequately considered in the policy-making process, they may view the resulting instruments as detached from their needs and realities.

Another factor contributing to the perceived inaccessibility is the language barrier. The instruments were predominantly available in English which may not be a language that many individuals are comfortable with. This linguistic limitation can pose a significant challenge for people who are not proficient in English, hindering their ability to understand and engage with the content of these documents.

Furthermore, the lack of sufficient efforts to sensitize and raise awareness among the population about the availability and importance of these instruments was identified as a contributing factor. Inadequate dissemination of information about the existence, content, and relevance of laws, policies, and objectives can create a gap between the documents and the

people they are intended to benefit. Without proper awareness campaigns and targeted information sharing, the accessibility of these instruments can be limited.

The observations made by the participants align with the findings of Lemke and Harris-Wai (2015), who argue that the inaccessibility of policies can be attributed to various gaps in the policy cycle. These gaps include limited information sharing, consultation, involvement, coordination, and evaluation. In the case of the education sector in Liberia, the lack of wider participation, limited efforts to sensitize the public, and linguistic barriers contribute to the perception of inaccessibility.

During the follow-up interviews, 3 of the 10 interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the way information about new policies, and procedures is shared. For example, one interviewee informed the researcher that:

*“The K-12<sup>th</sup> Academic Calendar which the Ministry of Education annually releases, is not distributed to all schools as required. With such a gap in the flow of information about what should or should not be done, stakeholders at lower levels of the system are left to figure out what should be done on their own. The existence of policies in itself is not enough to promote efficiency in delivery of educational outcomes especially considering the limitations in knowledge and capacity in some subsectors like ECE, and TVET. Policies affecting each subsector must be made available to every educational entity across the country.”* Key Informant A, 2023.

Though the instruments are openly available, the perception of their inaccessibility is influenced by factors such as limited participation during their formulation, linguistic barriers, and inadequate awareness campaigns. It is essential to address these factors and promote wider stakeholder engagement, multilingual availability, and effective communication strategies to enhance the accessibility of laws, policies, and objectives in the education sector in Liberia.

### Whether participants are involved in the analysis and formulation of policies in their respective areas

Table 15 provides the findings regarding how respondents felt involved in policy analysis and formulation. It provides insights into whether the respondents feel that they have been involved in the policy formulation process. The table indicates that slightly more than half of the participants, specifically 65 individuals or 53.27% of the total, believe that they have never been involved in developing policies within their work area. This finding suggests that the policy formulation process is not as participative as it should be, particularly in cases where stakeholder involvement and participation are expected.

**Table 15**

#### *Involvement in Policy Formulation*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Never Involved	65	53.27
Sometimes Involved	35	28.70
Always involved	22	18.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

The fact that over half of the respondents feel excluded from the policy formulation process raises concerns about the inclusivity and democratic nature of policy development within their respective work areas. Effective policy formulation requires the active engagement and input of key stakeholders including those who will be directly affected by the policies. By excluding a significant portion of stakeholders, there is a risk that policies may not accurately reflect the diverse needs, perspectives, and experiences of the individuals and communities they are intended to serve.

Participatory policy formulation is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it promotes transparency and accountability by involving individuals and organizations that will be impacted by the policies. Their input ensures that policies are well-informed, practical, and aligned with the realities on the ground. Secondly, involving a wide range of stakeholders helps

to build ownership and support for the policies. When people feel that they have had a say in the development process, they are more likely to understand and support the resulting policies, leading to better implementation and outcomes.

The findings from Table 15 also suggest that there may be a gap in communication and engagement between policymakers and the individuals affected by their policies. It is important for policymakers to create opportunities for meaningful participation, such as consultations, workshops, or focus group discussions, to ensure that diverse voices and perspectives are heard and considered during the formulation process. This approach can help bridge the gap between policy development and implementation, leading to more effective and responsive policies.

As observed, Table 15 indicates that a significant proportion of the respondents feel excluded from the policy formulation process within their work areas. This highlights the need for more participatory approaches to policy development, where stakeholders are actively engaged and given the opportunity to contribute their insights and perspectives. By promoting inclusivity and involving a wide range of stakeholders, policymakers can ensure that policies are well-informed, practical, and reflective of the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve.

The primary conclusion drawn is that an over-centralized, top-down approach to policy making hampers the development of participatory processes. As a result, local perspectives and potential solutions are often disregarded. This lack of inclusivity in policy development further exacerbates the challenge of achieving local ownership of policies, as those affected by the decisions may resist implementation or refuse to take responsibility for the policies.

The opinions expressed in Table 13 which are supported by the findings mentioned, align with the conclusions reached by various sources such as the Government of Liberia

(2016), Archer (2017), the Ministry of Education (2019), and the European Union (EU) (2020). These sources shed light on the causes of policy gaps in the country, further corroborating the notion that the absence of stakeholder voices in policy development contributes to the challenges faced in establishing effective and locally accepted policies.

Table 16 presents the opinions of respondents regarding the factors that contribute to gaps in Liberia's education sector during the input stage of policy development. The factors identified by the respondents include stakeholder exclusion, limited resources, unreliable data, reduced political will, low capacity, inadequate monitoring, bureaucracy, and corruption.

### **Major factors contributing to gaps at the Input stage of policy making**

Table 16 provides a list of factors considered to contribute to the input stage gaps.

**Table 16**

*Factors contributing to Input Gaps in Policy Making*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Stakeholders Exclusion	46	37.70
Corruption	23	18.85
Reduced Political Will	15	12.30
Inadequate monitoring	12	9.80
Unreliable data	11	9.00
Limited Resources	9	7.40
Low capacity	3	2.50
Bureaucracy	3	2.45
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023

According to the findings presented in Table 16, the respondents consider stakeholder exclusion as the most significant factor, with 46 respondents (37.70%) expressing this opinion. Corruption is identified as the second most important factor, with 23 respondents (18.85%) highlighting its impact. Reduced political will is ranked third, with 15 respondents (9.80%) emphasizing its contribution to policy gaps. These three factors together account for 66.35 percent of the opinions expressed. Additionally, inadequate monitoring, unreliable data, limited resources, low capacity, and bureaucracy collectively account for 33.65 percent of the opinions. These factors are considered less dominant but are still recognized as contributing to

the gaps in the policy input stage.

The findings in Table 16 align with previous studies conducted by the Government of Liberia (2016), Archer (2017), the Ministry of Education (2019), and the European Union (EU)(2020) on the causes of policy gaps in the country. These studies likely investigated similar factors and identified stakeholder exclusion, corruption, and reduced political will as significant contributors to policy gaps. Thus, the findings presented in Table 16 support and reinforce the conclusions reached by these earlier studies.

The opinions expressed in Table 16 shed light on the factors contributing to policy gaps in Liberia's education sector during the input stage. Stakeholder exclusion, corruption, and reduced political will are considered the most influential factors while other elements such as inadequate monitoring, unreliable data, limited resources, low capacity, and bureaucracy are also recognized as contributing factors. The alignment of these findings with previous studies adds credibility to the identified causes of policy gaps.

The finding emphasizes the negative consequences of an overly centralized policy-making process that neglects local perspectives and stakeholder engagement. Inclusive policy development ensures local ownership and successful implementation of policies. As previously indicated in Tables 13 and 14, it has been observed that policies in Liberia exist but suffer from issues related to functionality, effectiveness, and accessibility. These issues are primarily attributed to factors such as stakeholder exclusion, corruption, and other challenges. In the context of Liberia's education sector, key informant interviews have revealed specific instances that shed light on the impact of these issues.

During these interviews, it was disclosed that instances of bribery occur within the education system. For instance, parents may pay bribes to teachers in order to secure good grades or favorable examination results for their children. Similarly, teachers may offer bribes to public officials in exchange for preferred job postings or promotions. Moreover, there are



cases of embezzlement of funds allocated for the purchase of teaching materials or the construction of schools. These corrupt practices undermine the intended effectiveness of education policies.

In addition to corruption, cronyism and nepotism are prevalent in procurement processes and teacher appointments. This results in the appointment of individuals based on personal connections rather than merit, leading to the presence of "ghost teachers" who are officially employed but do not actively teach in physical classrooms.

These revelations highlight the detrimental effects of corruption, bribery, cronyism, and nepotism on the implementation and effectiveness of education policies in Liberia. Such practices compromise the integrity of the system, divert resources from their intended purposes, and hinder the delivery of quality education to students.

It is important to address these issues in order to improve policy outcomes and ensure that education policies are implemented in a transparent, fair, and effective manner. By combating stakeholder exclusion, corruption, and other related challenges, Liberia can work towards a more functional and accessible education system that serves the needs of its students and society as a whole.

As stated by UNESCO (2016), the factors of stakeholder exclusion, corruption, and reduced political will contribute to policy gaps in the provision of quality education in Liberia. The Ministry of Education (2019) further emphasizes that corruption is a pervasive problem within the sector, undermining the objectives and integrity of education policies. Additionally, the lack of strong commitment and political will from policymakers at the macro level has significant implications for limited access, compromised quality, and relevance of education.

According to Houghton Mufflin Harcourt (2020), the presence of reduced political will results in disproportionate access to quality education, leading to social inequalities in the distribution of educational services. When political will is lacking, resources and opportunities

are often directed towards privileged groups, exacerbating existing disparities and marginalizing disadvantaged populations. This perspective aligns with the conflict theory which posits that education systems can perpetuate social stratification by providing advantages to the children of the wealthy, such as access to quality education, better job prospects, and higher incomes. Meanwhile, children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are often left with an education that perpetuates their subordination and limits their opportunities for upward mobility.

In this context, the education system in Liberia is seen as reinforcing social inequalities and exacerbating the divide between the rich and the poor. The presence of corruption, reduced political will, and stakeholder exclusion hinders the realization of equitable and inclusive education. To address these challenges, it is crucial to combat corruption, promote transparency and accountability, and prioritize the allocation of resources and policies that aim to provide equal access to quality education for all citizens, irrespective of their socioeconomic background.

Table 17 presents the perspectives of respondents regarding the factors that have the most influence on education policies in Liberia. According to the respondents, political factors were identified as the most influential, with 82 respondents (67.22%) expressing this view. Technical factors were ranked second, with 22 respondents (18.03%) emphasizing their impact, followed by theoretical factors which garnered the opinions of 18 respondents (14.75%).

Political factors encompass a range of influences that can have implications for education policies. They may include reduced political will to support policies, stakeholder exclusion, inadequate resource allocation, and deficiencies in monitoring and evaluation processes. These factors reflect the broader political environment in which policies are formulated and implemented.

Technical factors, on the other hand, primarily pertain to issues related to data

availability, human resource capacity, and technical knowledge required for the formulation and implementation of policies. These factors highlight the importance of having the necessary expertise and resources to design and effectively execute policies in the education sector. Theoretical factors refer to the conceptual and programmatic aspects of policy change. They can influence how policies are conceived and designed to support their intended goals. This includes considerations such as the quality of the theory of change underlying a project or policy initiative.

The observations made in Table 17 align with the findings and perspectives of Menashy and Dryden (2015), Ascher (2017), and UNESCO (2022). These studies highlight the influence of political, technical, and theoretical factors on policy formulation and subsequent implementation. The interplay of these factors can impact policy outcomes and contribute to the existence of gaps and challenges, as observed in the input stage of policy development.

### **Factors considered mostly influential to the education policy in Liberia**

Table 17 reveals the factors that mostly influence the education policy in Liberia in general. These were categorized into political, technical and theoretical. The perspectives of the respondents are as indicated below.

**Table 17**

*Factors that mostly influence Education Policy*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Political	82	67.22
Technical	22	18.03
Theoretical	18	14.75
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

The opinions expressed in Table 17 underscore the significance of political, technical, and theoretical factors in shaping education policies in Liberia. Political factors can affect political will, stakeholder inclusion, resource adequacy, and monitoring processes.

Technical factors can influence data availability, human resource capacity, and technical expertise. Theoretical factors can impact the conceptualization and programming of policy change. These factors collectively shape the formulation and implementation of policies which can result in input gaps and challenges. The alignment of these findings with previous studies adds further support to the understanding of the multifaceted nature of policy influences in the education sector.

During the key informant interviews, participants emphasized the significant role played by the political regime of the country in the formulation and implementation of education policies. They suggested that the political climate and the level of political will have a direct impact on the success and effectiveness of these policies.

Participants pointed out that despite the existence of various plans and frameworks aimed at developing vibrant Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) subsectors, the actual outcomes have fallen short of expectations. This discrepancy is attributed to limited political will. Limited political will refers to a lack of strong commitment and prioritization of education policies by the political leadership. When there is limited political will, the necessary resources, support, and attention that are essential for the successful implementation of policies may be lacking. As a result, the intended goals and objectives outlined in the plans and frameworks may not be fully realized.

The participants' observations highlight the crucial role of political will in driving the effective implementation of education policies. Without a genuine commitment from the political leadership, even well-designed strategies and frameworks may fail to achieve their intended outcomes. The effects of limited political will can be particularly detrimental in areas such as Early Childhood Education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training, where focused attention and investment are needed to ensure quality and relevance. When political will is lacking, necessary reforms, resource allocation, and capacity-building efforts

may not be adequately prioritized, resulting in underdeveloped subsectors and unfulfilled potential.

By elevating the status of education within the political discourse and securing sustained political will, Liberia can work towards achieving its goals of developing vibrant Early Childhood Education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training subsectors, ultimately providing quality education and opportunities for its citizens.

Table 18 presents the perspectives of respondents regarding the factors that contribute to policy failure in Liberia's education sector. According to the findings, lack of political will was identified as the most significant factor, with 69 respondents (56.60%) attributing policy failures to this cause. Lack of technical knowledge was perceived as a serious factor by 33 respondents (27%) while 20 respondents (16.40%) believed that lack of scholarly knowledge was to blame.

The results in Table 18 are consistent with those in Table 17 which emphasized the importance of political and technical factors in shaping education policies in Liberia. Specifically, lack of political will and technical knowledge were identified as significant barriers to successful policy implementation. Political factors were considered the most problematic, with limited political will being the most frequently cited cause of policy failures.

### **Factors considered mostly influential to the education policy in Liberia**

Table 18 reveals the factors that mostly influence the education policy in Liberia

**Table 18**

*Factors mostly blamed for Policy Failure*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lack of political will	69	56.60
Lack of Technical Knowledge	33	27.00
Lack of Scholarly knowledge	20	16.40
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

When tables 17 and 18 are considered concurrently, the lack of political will emerges as a major challenge in the education sector, contributing to gaps and failures in policy implementation. Without sufficient political commitment and prioritization, education policies may lack the necessary resources, support, and attention to succeed.

Moreover, the lack of technical knowledge is another significant barrier to effective policy implementation, as it can limit the capacity of policymakers and relevant stakeholders to design and execute policies that meet the needs of the education sector. Scholarly knowledge, while identified as a factor by a smaller group of respondents, is also important in ensuring that policies are informed by relevant research and data, and are grounded in evidence-based practices.

Overall, the findings presented in Tables 17 and 18 highlight the critical role of political will and technical knowledge in shaping education policies in Liberia. Addressing these challenges will require a concerted effort from policymakers, stakeholders and relevant actors to prioritize education, invest in building technical and scholarly knowledge, and foster a strong commitment to education policies.

The lack of technical knowledge is a significant factor contributing to the failure of educational policies. Policymaking in the field of education requires a deep understanding of the technical aspects involved. This includes knowledge of effective teaching methods, curriculum development, assessment techniques, and educational research. When policymakers lack this technical knowledge, they may make decisions that are not grounded in evidence-based practices, resulting in ineffective policies.

One of the reasons for the lack of technical knowledge in policymaking is the presence of under-qualified staff and educational leaders without adequate pedagogical leadership abilities. In order to develop and implement effective educational policies, it is crucial to have individuals with the necessary expertise and qualifications in leadership

positions. When educational leaders lack the required pedagogical knowledge and skills, they may struggle to make informed decisions that positively impact teaching and learning.

Additionally, a high proportion of unqualified staff in teaching positions contributes to the overall lack of technical knowledge in the education system. When teachers are not adequately trained and qualified, they may struggle to effectively deliver the curriculum and meet the diverse needs of students. This can result in poor educational outcomes and hinder the success of educational policies.

Several studies and reports, such as those by Ascher (2017), Menashy & Dryden (2015), and UNESCO (2022), have highlighted the influence of political, technical, and theoretical aspects on educational policies. These aspects interact and shape the educational landscape of a country. In the context of your example, the low political will in the country's education sector has led to various challenges. Corruption is prevalent in both public and private institutions, diverting resources that should be allocated to education. Insufficient financial resources lead to a lack of teaching and learning materials, further hindering educational quality. The presence of ghost teachers on the public payroll, who do not actually teach but still receive salaries, is another consequence of low political will and contributes to the ineffective implementation of educational policies.

During the key informant interviews, participants suggested that the political regime of the country plays a key role in formulating and implementing the policies. Basing on the various plans that have been made by the country, there would be vibrant ECE, and TVET subsectors. However, due to limited political will, these frameworks have not worked to the expectation. One of the participants had this to say:

*“When politicians don’t support a policy, gaps are already created right from inception or at any other stage the political support is withdrawn. Without citing examples for my own considerations, we have seen very good policies in whose*

*formulation government spent millions of dollars but have not been supported by the top executive. These policies have not met their objectives. Some have been reviewed to suit the interests of the politicians other than those of the citizens. These effects can further be seen in the way resources are allocated or the level of mobilization of the stakeholders that goes in. So, political factors can influence what inputs go into the policy and what outcomes the policy will realize. This has been prevalent as we have seen in the education sector here in Liberia in the past 8 years”* Key informant C, 2023.

A lack of technical knowledge in policymaking, along with the presence of under-qualified staff and educational leaders, can undermine the effectiveness of educational policies. Political, technical, and theoretical aspects interact and influence educational policies and when they are not adequately addressed, educational systems may suffer from corruption, limited resources, and a high proportion of under-qualified staff, ultimately hindering the quality of education provided.

### **The single most important factor blamed for policy failure in Liberia**

Table 19 presents the single most important factor blamed for policy failure.

To check further the respondents’ appreciation of the factors responsible for policy failure in the education sector, a question related to what is revealed in tables 17 and 18 was posed to them.

The findings are as indicated in Table 19.

**Table 19**

*Single most factor blamed for Policy Failure in Liberia*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Political	79	65
Administrative	32	26
Economic	11	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023.



The findings presented in Table 19 indicate that political aspects are the primary factor to blame for policy failure in Liberia, accounting for 65% of the cases. This is compared to administrative issues which contribute to 26% of the failures, and economic factors which account for 9% of the failures. These statistics suggest that political factors play a dominant role in hindering the success of educational policies in Liberia.

Tables 17, 18, and 19 collectively demonstrate that politics overshadow other factors and underlying principles in the development of educational policies across all subsectors of education in Liberia. This indicates that political considerations often take precedence over technical expertise, scientific theories, and a comprehensive understanding of the problems being addressed by the policies. Research has shown that policies are most effective when they are based on a combination of scientific theories, program management experience, and political will (Head, 2008). However, in the case of Liberia, the over-politicization of policies with limited technical and theoretical data and contributions has contributed to their failure. This suggests that policies in Liberia may have been developed and implemented without sufficient input from academics, researchers, practitioners, and technicians who possess the necessary expertise and knowledge.

The findings indicate that political aspects are the primary factor to blame for policy failure in Liberia. The over-politicization of policies, coupled with limited technical and theoretical data and contributions, has hindered their success. The lack of clarity regarding the involvement of academics, researchers, practitioners, and technicians suggests that their valuable input may have been overlooked in the policy development process. To improve the effectiveness of educational policies, it is important to strike a balance between political considerations and technical expertise while ensuring the active participation of relevant stakeholders in the policymaking process.

In Liberia, it is observed that many educational policies are formulated based on

political manifestos or donor demands rather than thorough needs assessments, research findings, new global trends, or stakeholders' demands. This approach to policymaking is in line with the arguments put forth by Ascher (2017) regarding the influence of politics on policy management. As highlighted in tables 17 and 18, the impact of politics on policy success in Liberia is significant.

Policies developed primarily for political purposes often lack the necessary foundation to succeed. They may overlook the complexities of the education system, disregard research and expert opinions, and fail to allocate sufficient resources for implementation. As a result, the policies are unable to bring about the desired improvements in education and may further exacerbate existing challenges.

In a nutshell, the prevalence of educational policies in Liberia driven by political manifestos or donor demands rather than needs assessments, research findings, and stakeholder demands has hampered their effectiveness. The example of the free education program highlights the challenges associated with policies that are primarily politically motivated. To improve the success of educational policies, it is essential to prioritize evidence-based decision-making, engage stakeholders, and allocate sufficient resources for implementation.

During the key informant interviews conducted, all 10 participants expressed dissatisfaction with the educational policies in Liberia and attributed it to the government. They specifically pointed out macro-level actors such as ministers, directors, and politicians as primarily responsible for the gaps observed in the INPUT stage of the policy cycle. These gaps were identified as limited stakeholders' involvement in policy analysis and formulation, inaccessibility of educational policies, corruption, and over-politicization.

One of the participants highlighted the political influence on educational policy in the country as follows:

*“In Liberia, the politics of the country dictates the type of an education system*

*to have and who to benefit from it. Until about 1989 for example, the education system was not all inclusive. Some sections of Liberians were left out in the beneficiaries of the education. Subsequent governments have focused on inclusivity. From this observation, politics is important in determining where to locate schools, which schools to receive heavy government grants, and the administration of education. It affects educational policy formulation, adoption, and implementation. The policy may fail when politicians don't support it"* Key informant D, 2023.

The participants highlighted the lack of meaningful involvement of stakeholders in the analysis and formulation of educational policies as a significant gap in the INPUT stage. This suggests that key actors and organizations representing various educational stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, students, and civil society groups, were not adequately consulted or engaged in the policy development process. The exclusion of these stakeholders can result in policies that do not address the real needs and concerns of the education community, leading to a lack of ownership and buy-in from those directly affected by the policies.

Another gap mentioned by the participants was the inaccessibility of educational policies. This refers to a lack of transparency and limited dissemination of policy documents, making it difficult for stakeholders to access and understand the policies that govern the education sector. When policies are not easily accessible, it hinders the ability of stakeholders to actively engage in discussions, provide feedback, and effectively contribute to policy development and implementation.

Corruption was identified as a significant issue influencing educational policies in Liberia. Participants pointed out that corrupt practices, such as bribery and embezzlement of funds allocated for education, undermine the effective implementation of policies. Corruption diverts resources that should be used to improve educational infrastructure, provide quality

teaching and learning materials, and support professional development opportunities for teachers. The presence of corruption erodes trust in the education system and hampers efforts to achieve positive outcomes.

Over-politicization of educational policies was also highlighted as a major concern. This refers to the excessive influence of political considerations and motivations in the development and implementation of policies, often at the expense of evidence-based decision-making. When policies are driven primarily by political agendas rather than the best interests of students and the education system as a whole, it can lead to ineffective and unsustainable policy interventions.

### **Frequency of evaluation of on implementing the policies at the respondents' work**

Table 20 highlights the frequency of evaluating respondents on implementing policies at their places of work.

**Table 20**

*Frequency of Evaluation on Policy Implementation*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Sometimes Evaluated	67	54.91
Rarely evaluated	44	36.08
Always Evaluated	11	9.01
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

In Table 20, the findings regarding the OUTCOME stage of the policy cycle indicate that a majority of the respondents, 67 (54.91%), reported being sometimes evaluated while 44 (36.08%) indicated that they were rarely evaluated. Only 11 (9.01%) respondents stated that they were always evaluated. These results highlight the presence of inconsistent educational policy evaluation practices in Liberia.

The inconsistency in policy evaluation practices aligns with the findings of the Ministry of Education (2017) and UNESCO (2022) which both noted poor supervision and

evaluation of educational activities in the country. Effective policy evaluation plays a crucial role in determining the impact and success of policies. When policies are not adequately evaluated, it becomes challenging to assess their achievements or failures accurately. Without comprehensive evaluations, it becomes difficult to understand whether the intended outcomes of policies are being achieved, and if not, what adjustments or improvements are needed.

During the key informant interviews, all the participants indicated that they were always evaluated during or after the implementation of educational policies in their respective subsectors. This suggests a discrepancy between the reported evaluations by the participants and the findings from the quantitative survey data. It is possible that the participants' perception of evaluation differed from the formal evaluation processes conducted at the national level. It may also highlight variations in evaluation practices across different subsectors of education.

The findings in Table 20 highlight the inconsistent nature of educational policy evaluation practices in Liberia. While the majority of respondents reported being sometimes evaluated, a significant proportion mentioned rare or no evaluation. The lack of consistent evaluation aligns with previous reports of poor supervision and evaluation of educational activities in the country. Establishing robust and consistent evaluation practices is crucial for assessing policy impact, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring the effective utilization of resources in the education sector.

The findings highlights several issues related to the evaluation, record-keeping, measurement of policy impact, and policy accountability:

1. Lack of clear evaluation records: The passage mentions that there are no clear evaluation records available. This means that there is a lack of documented information regarding the assessment of policies and their outcomes. Without proper evaluation records, it becomes challenging to determine the effectiveness and success of policies.

2. Incomplete management information system: The existing management information system is noted to be inadequate in capturing all the necessary data. This means that important information related to policy activities, outcomes, and impacts is not being effectively collected and stored. The incomplete nature of the system hampers decision-making, learning, and the ability to bring about necessary changes.
3. Difficulty in relating policy activities to outcomes: Due to the weak record-keeping and limited data availability, beneficiaries of policies may find it difficult to establish a clear connection between policy activities and their actual outcomes. This lack of transparency and understanding can hinder the ability to measure the impact of policies accurately.
4. Weak policy accountability: The passage mentions that policy accountability is also weak. This implies that there is a lack of responsibility and answerability for the implementation and outcomes of policies. Without proper accountability mechanisms in place, it becomes challenging to track the utilization of public resources, ensure their efficient allocation, and prevent wastage.
5. Failure to learn from previous policies: The weak record-keeping and evaluation practices hinder the ability to learn from the experiences of previous policies. As a result, valuable lessons and insights that could inform the development and implementation of new policies are not effectively utilized. This can lead to the repetition of mistakes, wasted resources, and missed opportunities for improvement.
6. Limitations in documenting policy development and implementation: The challenges mentioned in the passage pose limitations to documenting the process of policy development and implementation. Without comprehensive records and data, it becomes difficult to track the evolution of policies, understand the factors influencing their implementation, and identify areas for improvement.

7. Difficulty in assessing compliance and demonstrating policy impact: The lack of robust evaluation records and data availability makes it challenging to assess compliance with existing policies and demonstrate their impact.

The issues highlighted revolve around the weak evaluation records, incomplete data capture, difficulties in measuring policy impact, weak policy accountability, failure to learn from previous policies, limitations in documenting policy development and implementation, and challenges in assessing compliance and demonstrating policy impact. Addressing these challenges is essential for effective policy-making, learning, and accountability.

### **The factors considered to be mostly responsible for gaps observed at the implementation stage of the policy process**

Table 21 provides the factors mostly responsible for gaps at implementation stage.

**Table 21**

*Factors Responsible for Implementation Gaps*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Administrative factors	65	53.28
Political factors	34	27.87
Economic factors	23	18.85
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

In Table 21, Administrative factors are identified as the primary contributors to gaps in the implementation stage of policymaking. These factors are responsible for 65 out of 121 cases, accounting for 53.28% of the total. Political factors are the second most significant contributors, accounting for 34 cases (27.87%), followed by economic factors with 23 cases (18.85%).

The responsibility for policy implementation lies with the administration. Therefore, when the administrative system is weak or ineffective, it leads to a failure in carrying out policy activities as planned, ultimately resulting in the failure to achieve the desired policy

outcomes.

Reports from the Ministry of Education in 2019 specifically highlight administrative practices as the main cause of policy failures during implementation. The issues mentioned include corruption, payment to ghost staff (non-existent employees receiving salaries or benefits), weak supervision of policy activities, nepotism (favoritism based on personal relationships), misuse of funds, and a lack of administrative commitment to ensuring policy results.

Corruption within the administrative system can divert resources away from their intended purposes, undermining the effectiveness of policies. Payment to ghost staff indicates a lack of proper controls and oversight, leading to the misuse of public funds. Weak supervision of policy activities suggests a lack of monitoring and accountability which can result in non-compliance and deviations from the intended policy objectives.

Furthermore, nepotism can lead to the appointment or promotion of individuals based on personal connections rather than merit, compromising the quality and efficiency of policy implementation. The misuse of funds can occur through embezzlement, misallocation, or inappropriate spending, all of which undermine the intended outcomes of policies.

The lack of administrative commitment to ensuring policy results reflects a broader issue of organizational culture and priorities. When administrators are not fully dedicated to achieving policy goals and fail to enforce compliance, it becomes challenging to achieve the desired outcomes. Issues such as corruption, payment to ghost staff, weak supervision, nepotism, misuse of funds, and a lack of administrative commitment are identified as key contributors to policy failures during the implementation stage. Addressing these administrative challenges is crucial to improving policy implementation and achieving the intended policy outcomes.

During key informant interviews, several administrative gaps were identified as



responsible for poor policy results. Stakeholder exclusion, restricted allocation of resources, and incorrect data were mentioned as some of these gaps. On this issue of over centralization of power, one of the participants noted the following:

*“As a result of this concentration of authority at the ministry level, there has been less room for open discussion, and involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process. More likely, it has resulted in a lack of oversight leading to the excesses we observe in the education sector including high cases of corruption, location of educational facilities where there is no need, weak monitoring, and evaluation practices, patronage, and exploitative networks of middlemen to negotiatedeals in the sector. Patronage and corruption have also contributed to the politicization of service delivery by reinforcing a mindset of 'we' versus 'them'”*

Participant F, 2023.

Participants in the interviews also highlighted a lack of direction and clarity among the various parties involved in the decision-making process. When multiple stakeholders have different goals, priorities, and interpretations of policies, it can create confusion and hinder effective implementation. The absence of clear guidance and coordination mechanisms can lead to inconsistent actions, delays, and conflicting outcomes.

Over centralization of power in the hands of ministry officials was identified as a significant impediment to policy implementation. When decision-making authority is concentrated in a few individuals or entities, it limits the involvement of other stakeholders and hampers effective governance. Over-centralization can lead to bureaucratic bottlenecks, delays in decision-making, and a lack of responsiveness to local needs and contexts.

The observations made in the passage align with the findings and postulations of DiPrete and Buchmann (2013), who identified several activities within the implementation ecosystem that can hinder policy implementation. These activities are relevant to the context of

the Liberian educational policy and can lead to challenges in achieving efficient and effective policy implementation as well as the realization of policy results.

One of the activities that can hamper policy implementation is corruption. Corruption involves the misuse of power, influence, or resources for personal gain, and it undermines the effective implementation of policies. When corruption exists within the implementation ecosystem, it can lead to the misallocation of resources, favoritism, and overall inefficiency in policy execution.

The exclusion of stakeholders is another activity that can impede policy implementation. When key stakeholders are not adequately involved or their perspectives and interests are disregarded, it can result in a lack of ownership, resistance, and reduced commitment to policy goals. Inclusive participation and engagement of stakeholders are crucial for effective policy implementation as it ensures that policies address the needs and concerns of those affected by them.

A lack of administrative authority to manage policy actions at the grassroots level can also hinder implementation. When there is a gap in authority or capacity at the local level, it becomes challenging to translate policies into action on the ground. Local administrators may lack the necessary resources, decision-making power, or knowledge to effectively execute policies, leading to delays, inconsistencies, and suboptimal outcomes.

Weak monitoring and evaluation systems exacerbate the challenges of policy implementation. Monitoring and evaluation provide essential feedback loops to track progress, identify bottlenecks, and make timely adjustments. When monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are weak or absent, it becomes difficult to trace progress, measure the impact of policies, and provide timely data for decision-making. This lack of information and feedback impairs the ability to make informed choices and adjust strategies as needed.

Furthermore, the involvement of political elites in the operations of projects can

undermine effective policy implementation. When political elites intervene in project activities, it can lead to issues such as favoritism, politicization, and diversion of resources for political gains. This interference can disrupt the implementation process, distort priorities, and compromise the intended outcomes of policies.

These observations are consistent with the postulations of DiPrete and Buchmann (2013). The existence of corruption, exclusion of stakeholders, lack of administrative authority at the grassroots level, weak monitoring and evaluation systems, and involvement of political elites in the educational policy context of Liberia can pose significant challenges to efficient and effective policy implementation. Addressing these challenges requires measures to combat corruption, promote stakeholder engagement, strengthen local administrative capacity, establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and ensure the depoliticization of project operations.

### **The factors considered to be mostly responsible for gaps observed at the evaluation stage of the policy process**

Table 22 presents factors responsible for policy gaps at evaluation stage.

**Table 22**

#### *Factors Responsible for Policy Gaps at Evaluation*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Administrative factors	78	63.93
Political factors	34	27.87
Economic factors	10	8.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Data 2023

Findings presented in Table 22 indicate that administrative factors are primarily responsible for policy gaps at the evaluation stage, accounting for 78 cases or 63.93% of the total. Political factors are the second most influential, accounting for 34 cases or 27.87% while economic factors have the least impact. It should be noted that evaluation, like implementation, is an administrative responsibility and can be influenced either positively or negatively by

administrative actions.

During key informant interviews, it was revealed that there is a significant level of laxity at the evaluation stage of policy formulation. Effective monitoring during project implementation which is directly related to evaluation, was found to be lacking. Monitoring plays a crucial role in tracking progress, identifying challenges, and making informed decisions. Without effective monitoring, it becomes difficult to evaluate the impact and outcomes of policies accurately.

Furthermore, it was noted that although evaluation frameworks are often included in policy documents, sufficient resources are not allocated to carry out the evaluation exercises. Lack of adequate resources hampers the ability to conduct comprehensive evaluations, collect relevant data, and analyze the results. Insufficient resources also limit the capacity to involve key stakeholders who possess valuable on-ground information about the operations and impacts of policies.

Proper involvement of key stakeholders in the evaluation process is crucial for obtaining comprehensive and accurate information. These stakeholders have firsthand knowledge and experiences related to policy implementation and outcomes. Their involvement ensures that the evaluation process incorporates a wide range of perspectives, captures contextual nuances, and provides a more complete understanding of the policy's effectiveness.

Insufficient stakeholder involvement, along with inadequate resources and lax monitoring, contributes to incomplete evaluations and limited insights into policy impacts. This hinders the ability to make evidence-based decisions, learn from experiences, and improve future policy development and implementation.

The key informant interviews highlighted issues such as laxity, inadequate monitoring, insufficient allocation of resources, and limited stakeholder involvement as key challenges in conducting effective evaluations. Addressing these challenges requires

strengthening monitoring and evaluation practices, allocating adequate resources, and ensuring meaningful engagement of key stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. By doing so, policymakers can obtain more accurate and comprehensive information to inform decision-making, enhance policy impacts, and improve the overall effectiveness of policies.

This finding supports the claims of several organizations including the Ministry of Education (2017), World Bank (2020), and UNESCO (2022) which have observed weak policy monitoring and evaluation leading to project failure in Liberia. These organizations have identified similar challenges in a number of educational policies in Liberia over the last decades. The consequences of weak policy monitoring and evaluation are significant. Without effective evaluation, it becomes challenging to track progress, measure the impact of policies, and identify areas for improvement. This can lead to policies that do not effectively address the needs and concerns of the target population, resulting in suboptimal outcomes and limited impact.

Moreover, weak policy monitoring and evaluation can undermine accountability and transparency in the policy-making process. Evaluation provides essential feedback mechanisms to assess the performance of policies and ensure that they are meeting their intended objectives. When evaluation is weak or absent, it becomes difficult to hold policymakers and implementers accountable for policy outcomes. This can contribute to a lack of trust in the policy-making process and limit the effectiveness of policies.

The observations highlight the critical role of policy monitoring and evaluation in achieving policy objectives. Weaknesses in the evaluation process can lead to gaps in policy performance and contribute to project failure. Addressing these challenges requires strengthening monitoring and evaluation practices, allocating adequate resources, and ensuring meaningful engagement of key stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. By doing so, policymakers can obtain accurate and comprehensive information to inform decision-making, enhance policy impacts, and improve the overall effectiveness of policies.

**The internal factors considered to be mostly responsible for gaps at the output stage (implementation and evaluation) of the policy management cycle in the respondents' area of work**

Table 23 presents the internal factors considered to be mostly responsible for output gaps.

**Table 23**

*Internal Factors Responsible for Outcome Gaps*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Corruption	50	41.00
Inadequate monitoring and assessment	32	26.00
Lack of or reliable data,	10	8.00
Reduced political will	10	8.00
Low capacity or technical know-how	7	6.00
Exclusion of stakeholders	6	5.00
Limited allocation of resources	5	4.00
Centralized governance/Bureaucracy	2	2.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

The findings presented in tables 16 and 17 highlight the acknowledgment of participants regarding the existence of administrative problems that have led to significant gaps in the educational policies of the country. These gaps suggest that the desired outcomes of these policies are not being fully realized due to various administrative issues. Table 13 provides a more detailed breakdown of these administrative factors which have already been mentioned in existing literature. The data suggests that corruption emerges as the most significant challenge in the country's policy administration, with 41 percent of respondents identifying it as a major issue. This implies that corrupt practices, such as bribery or embezzlement, are prevalent within the education system, negatively impacting the implementation and effectiveness of educational policies.

Other important administrative challenges identified by the respondents include inadequate monitoring, lack of data, reduced political will, and low capacity. These factors collectively represent 48 percent of the opinions expressed by the participants. Inadequate monitoring implies a lack of effective mechanisms to track and evaluate policy implementation,

making it difficult to identify and address shortcomings. The lack of data suggests a scarcity of reliable and comprehensive information necessary for evidence-based decision-making in education policy. The reduced political will indicates a lack of commitment and prioritization of educational issues by the country's decision-makers which can impede the successful implementation of policies. Low capacity refers to insufficient skills, knowledge, and resources within the administrative bodies responsible for policy implementation which can hinder effective execution.

During key informant interviews, it was further observed that these administrative challenges affect the entire policy cycle, starting from the initial input stage through the implementation process to the eventual outcome stage. This means that corruption, inadequate monitoring, lack of data, reduced political will, and low capacity impact various aspects of policy development and execution, leading to unfavorable outcomes in education. One of the participants had this to say about the challenge:

*“Corruption in the education sector in Liberia has not only affected the efficiency and effectiveness of developing and implementing the country’s educational policies, it has also damaged the country's social, economic, and political future. It has made many stakeholders come to believe that personal effort and merit do not count and that success comes through manipulation, favoritism, and bribery. It has made the stakeholders think that policies are meant to create an avenue for accessing public resources and using them for private gain. It is a fact that resources that go into policy development and implementation are residual, after the kingmakers have picked their share. This situation will remain a source of policy gaps not only in the education sector but in all other sectors for a long time unless, specific efforts are made to curb it”* Participant H, 2023.

Corruption sticks out as a significant and pervasive challenge in the country's

policy administration, according to the opinions expressed by the participants. Other administrative issues, such as inadequate monitoring, lack of data, reduced political will, and low capacity, also play substantial roles in creating outcome gaps in educational policies are noted.

**The factors that have contributed to access, quality and relevance gaps in the education sector and what are their effects on the pace of growth including achievement of theSDG-4 goals**

Liberia, starting from 2016, has adopted and integrated the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into its national agenda. Among the SDGs, SDG 4 specifically focuses on the education sector. The primary objective of SDG4 is to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education while also promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals.

The keywords that encapsulate the main goal of SDG 4, as suggested by the Liberian Ministry of Education in 2017, are access, quality, and relevance. The integration of these goals into national policies and programs provides a framework for guiding decision-making, resource allocation, and monitoring of progress in education. It also enables Liberia to align its efforts with the global community in achieving the broader sustainable development agenda. The Liberian government has established various policies and strategic documents to guide the implementation of the SDG goals. These instruments include Liberia Rising: Vision 2030, Getting to Best (G2B) Roadmap, Getting to Best Priorities 2015-2017, Education Sector Analysis (ESA) 2016, MoE Education Sector Plan 2010-2020, and MoE Operational Plan 2014-16. These documents provide a framework for planning, resource allocation, and monitoring of progress in the education sector.

Respondents and key informants in the study identified several overarching factors that contribute to these policy gaps. These factors are categorized as political, technical, administrative, and economic. Political factors refer to issues related to policy prioritization, decision-making, and the commitment of key stakeholders. Technical factors encompass the



knowledge, skills, and expertise required for effective policy implementation. Administrative factors involve the management and coordination of educational programs and resources. Economic factors pertain to the availability and allocation of financial resources for the education sector.

Further analysis of these factors reveals specific challenges within each category. These include the exclusion of stakeholders from policy processes, limited allocation of resources foreducation, lack of reliable data for evidence-based decision-making, reduced political will to prioritize education, low capacity or technical knowledge among education professionals, inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and corruption within the education sector.

The cumulative effect of these challenges seems to have impeded the pace of growth in the educationsector and hindered the achievement of SDG 4 targets. Insufficient stakeholder engagement canlead to policies that do not fully address the needs and aspirations of the education community. Limited resource allocation affects the availability of necessary infrastructure, teaching materials, and teacher training programs. The lack of reliable data makes it difficult toaccurately assess the progress and impact of educational interventions. Reduced political will and low capacity undermine the effective implementation of policies and programs. Inadequate monitoring and evaluation hinder the identification of gaps and the necessary adjustments to improve educational outcomes. Corruption further exacerbates these challenges by diverting resources and compromising the integrity of the education system.

### **Rate the following factors creating access barriers in your subsector**

Table 24 rates the factors creating access barriers in the education sector in Liberia.

**Table 24***Factors creating Access Barriers to Education*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
High school fees	54	44.10
Distance of school to community	32	26.00
Overage students	20	16.40
Limited space in school	14	11.50
Issues of gender, health, nutrition, limiting access	2	2.00
Lack of facility to cater to students with special needs	0	0
Inadequate sanitation and WASH facilities	0	0
Uneducated and demotivated parents	0	0
Lack of feeding opportunities for students	0	0
The teachers not attending classes regularly	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Data 2023

In Table 24, participants confirmed earlier findings by highlighting that high school fees are the highest barrier to access, constituting 54(44.10%), followed by a distance of school from the community 32(26%) and overage enrollment at 20(16.40%), and limited space in school 14(11.50%). Overall, Table 24 presents a comprehensive overview of the barriers to accessing education in Liberia. The findings highlight the significant challenges faced by many families, particularly related to high school fees, distance to schools, overage enrollment, infrastructure deficiencies, gender disparities, teacher shortages, and lack of educational resources. Addressing these barriers is crucial to ensuring equitable and inclusive access to education for all children in Liberia.

The divergence between the findings of Table 24 and the official reports by the Ministry of Education, World Bank, and UNESCO can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, it is important to note that the official reports may have relied on broader statistical data and surveys that encompassed a larger sample size and a wider range of perspectives. These reports often aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of the education system as a whole, taking into account various factors and indicators. On the other hand, Table 24 may have focused specifically on the opinions and experiences of the participants who were directly interviewed or surveyed which could have resulted in a narrower scope of analysis.

Secondly, the respondents in Table 24 might have emphasized certain barriers based on their personal experiences or the specific context in which they reside. Their perspectives and opinions are shaped by their direct interactions with the education system and the challenges they have encountered. Therefore, their views may not fully align with the broader assessments provided by the official reports.

Moreover, the key informant interviews shed light on an additional factor that was not explicitly addressed in Table 24. The involvement of the private sector in the education system, particularly in early childhood education (ECE), technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and secondary schools, could have a significant impact on access to education. If these private institutions charge high tuition fees, it can limit the access of the majority of the population who are economically disadvantaged.

It is worth noting that differing perspectives and discrepancies between research findings are not uncommon especially in complex issues such as education. Each study or report may have its own methodology, focus, and limitations which can lead to variations in the conclusions drawn. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers to education in Liberia, it would be beneficial to consider multiple sources of information including both quantitative data from official reports and qualitative insights from direct interviews or surveys. This holistic approach can provide a more nuanced and accurate portrayal of the challenges faced by individuals and communities in accessing education.

The challenge of overage learners was identified as a double-sided issue. On one hand, overage learners take up spaces in classrooms that could have been occupied by children of the appropriate age, thereby limiting access for those who are the right age for their grade level. On the other hand, overage learners often struggle to complete their education which further delays the enrollment of children who would have wished to start school at the appropriate age. This creates a bottleneck in the education system and contributes to low access rates for children

of the right age.

Another issue raised by the participants was the inadequate physical space to accommodate all learners of school-going age. Insufficient infrastructure, such as classrooms and schools, results in a shortage of educational opportunities for children. This leads to some children, who are of the right age and willing to attend school, being unable to access educational services.

However, it should be acknowledged that the presence of these gaps and challenges, as identified by the participants, contributes to low access rates and outcomes gaps in terms of educational services in the country. These issues collectively hinder equal and inclusive access to quality education for all children in Liberia. Addressing these barriers and closing the gaps in access and outcomes is crucial for improving the overall educational landscape in the country.

### **Rate the following factors creating quality barriers in your subsector**

Table 25 focuses on the factors that create quality barriers in the education sector in the country.

**Table 25**

*Rating of Factors that create Quality Barriers*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Limited training of teachers	45	36.90
Absence of teaching-learning materials	34	27.90
The classroom is not conducive to support teaching and learning	22	18.00
Absence of national curriculum in schools	10	8.20
Limited opportunity for professional growth	5	4.10
School leadership challenge	3	2.50
Limited classroom observation and supervision	2	1.60
No feedback to teachers on teaching practices	1	0.80
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023

In Table 25, the topmost three barriers to quality according to participants included limited training for teachers 45(36.88%), absence of teaching and learning materials 34(27.86%) and non-conducive teaching, and learning environment 22 (18.03%), respectively.

Also, 7 of the 10 interviewees, while answering the question —which three important factors mostly affect the quality of the school in your area, confirmed the above quality challenges adding that the lack of textbooks as well as materials for adequately teaching the science related subjects, were a key quality challenge. The findings from the study further support the claims made by various organizations regarding the weak quality of education in Liberia. Reports from UNESCO (2016), Uwezo (2017), RTI International (2018), World Bank Group (2018), and ASER (2019) have consistently highlighted the low reading and numeracy skills among students in early childhood education (ECE) and primary school which often persist into secondary education. The participants' concerns about barriers to quality education, qualified teachers, old teaching strategies, and lack of educational resources, contribute to the resource gaps in the education sector. These resource gaps have a direct impact on the quality of education provided in the country.

### **Rate the following factors creating relevance barriers in your subsector**

Table 26 rates the factors deemed to create gaps in the relevance of education of Liberia.

**Table 26**

#### *Rating of Factors that create Gaps in the relevance of Education*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lack of Technology to support teaching and learning	35	28.70
Lack of technical skills to facilitate teaching	20	16.40
Unaligned curriculum	20	16.40
Limited apprenticeship opportunities for students and graduate	19	15.60
Lack of Practical tools to demonstrate competence.	10	8.20
Limited teaching aids	9	7.40
Limited access to internet facilities	5	4.10
Limited capacity for quality STEM programs	2	1.60
Limited materials for the acquisition of basic skills in literacy and Numeracy	2	1.60
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Data 2023.

In Table 26, the respondents identified four significant factors that contribute to the relevance gaps in a particular context. These factors are as follows:

1. Lack of technology: This factor, highlighted by 35 respondents (28.69% of the total), refers to either an absence or insufficient availability of technological resources and infrastructure. It implies that the educational institutions or organizations surveyed may not have access to up- to-date technology or may lack the necessary tools and equipment required to provide relevant training or education.
2. Lack of technical skills: Approximately 20 respondents (16.39% of the total) pointed out a lack of technical skills as a contributing factor to the relevance gaps. This suggests that students or graduates may not possess the specific technical competencies required by employers or industries. This gap may arise due to outdated curricula, inadequate practical training, or limited exposure to real-world scenarios.
3. Unaligned curriculum: Another factor mentioned by 20 respondents (16.39% of the total) is an unaligned curriculum. This suggests a disparity between the content taught in educational programs and the industry's current needs and trends. This implies that graduates might lack the necessary knowledge and expertise to be immediately productive in their chosen fields.
4. Limited apprenticeship opportunities: 19 respondents (15.60% of the total) indicated that there is limited availability of apprenticeship opportunities for students and graduates. This can result in a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, affecting graduates' employability and their ability to meet industry expectations.

These four major factors, as highlighted by the respondents, collectively contribute to the relevance gaps observed in the context under study. Addressing these factors would involve initiatives such as improving access to technology, enhancing technical skill

development programs, aligning curricula with industry needs, and expanding apprenticeship opportunities for students and graduates. By bridging these gaps, educational institutions and organizations can better prepare individuals for the demands of the job market and foster a more relevant and skilled workforce.

The interviews conducted in the context of Liberia revealed unexpected findings related to the three educational outcomes of access, quality, and relevance. These findings, often referred to as serendipitous, shed light on the complex interplay between educational policies and broader societal challenges. Here is an expansion on the various aspects highlighted:

1. **Poverty, unemployment, and inequality:** The interviews indicated that high poverty rate, coupled with significant levels of youth unemployment, contribute to the barriers of access, relevance, and quality in education. These can lead to substantial levels of inequality that further deepen these barriers, creating disparities in access to quality education and perpetuating the cycle of poverty.
2. **Alignment of educational policies with SDG-8:** Participants emphasized the importance of aligning educational policies with Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG-8). SDG-8 focuses on promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full employment, and decent work for all. Participants argued that inclusive, long-term economic growth and productive employment are crucial for achieving SDG-4 which specifically targets quality education.
3. **Linking economic growth and education:** Alluding to the arguments put forth by Parkes (2015), participants highlighted the interdependence of economic growth and education. They emphasized that promoting inclusive economic growth and decent work opportunities is vital for addressing the barriers in access, relevance, and quality of education. By linking economic growth and education, participants suggested a holistic and integrated approach to address the multifaceted challenges

faced by Liberia's education system.

Overall, the interviews conducted in Liberia revealed that addressing the barriers to access, quality, and relevance in education requires considering the broader socioeconomic context. Poverty, unemployment, and inequality were identified as key factors that impact educational policies and outcomes. Aligning educational policies with SDG-8 and promoting inclusive economic growth were underscored as essential strategies for achieving SDG-4 and creating a conducive environment for education in Liberia.

A participant in the TVET sector while answering the question about the major challenge, is quoted as saying:

*“A lack of human and organizational capability for dealing with current challenges including a scarcity of qualified people, a shortage of specialized training, a lack of training tools, and a lack of adequate budgetary support to TVET activities are making it difficult to solve the relevance gaps in the sector. There are several reasons why effective decentralization, and delegation of TVET activities has not been successful. One that stands out is a lack of ability in terms of facilities, manpower, technical knowledge and a curriculum that is not aligned to the vision, national objectives, and policy outcomes. Further, due to a lack of skills at decentralized levels, leaders at the central level do not devolve the power downwards. Personnel at micro levels do not get experience in operational decision-making and execution, and hence do not improve their capabilities. This can lead to a vicious cycle of fragility in the sector.”* Key informant H, 2023.

The participants' views agreed with Parkes (2015) claims that economic well-being plays a crucial role in overcoming the problem of access to education. They suggested that parents who have sufficient financial resources can address access barriers by enrolling their children in private schools. Private schools often require tuition fees but parents with economic



means can afford these fees, ensuring their children's access to education. Additionally, financially stable parents can provide means of transportation for their children especially if the school is located at a distance from their community. This helps overcome the geographical barriers to access. Furthermore, parents with economic resources can provide learning materials such as textbooks, stationery, and other resources that enhance the educational experience for their children. In some cases, they might even hire additional teachers to provide personalized education at home. All these measures underscore the importance of economic well-being in ensuring access to education.

Regarding the whole educational system, one respondent highlighted that Liberia's education system is heavily influenced by the United States of America. This observation is significant as it reveals the impact of western culture on Liberian society, particularly in the context of education. The respondent's remark suggests that Liberia's educational systems have adopted structures and practices that are similar to those found in the United States. This influence might stem from historical ties between the two countries or Liberia's historical connections to the American colonization movement. The adoption of a similar educational system indicates the transmission of cultural capital from the West to Liberia through the education sector.

Furthermore, the attendance of children from wealthy families in private schools reflects the strong influence of western culture on Liberian society. Sending one's child to a private school has traditionally been associated with the dominant Western civilization. This practice demonstrates the perception that private schools, often influenced by Western educational models, provide a higher quality of education and social status. It highlights the cultural impact and aspirations of Liberian families towards Western norms and values, particularly within the educational context.

The participants in the study acknowledged that copying an educational system

from a society that is not homogeneous with Liberia presents challenges (Coffie, 2014). These challenges are rooted in the fact that Liberia, as a country, has its unique social, economic, and cultural context that might not align with the system being borrowed. Conflict theorists argue that this copying creates unnecessary inequality because the majority of Liberian citizens are poor while a small class of privileged elites has a greater influence on the country's development. This disparity in wealth and power can lead to unequal access to quality education, further exacerbating existing social inequalities within the society.

Another aspect that the participants highlighted is the lingering effects of the Liberian civil war on the development of the country including its educational sector. The civil war resulted in the destruction of physical and social infrastructure which had a detrimental impact on the overall educational environment. Schools, educational facilities, and resources were damaged or destroyed, making it challenging to provide quality education to the population. Additionally, the prolonged conflict led to persistent poverty which further hampered access to education for many individuals and families. The consequences of the civil war, such as displacement, trauma, and disrupted education, also resulted in a significant number of overage learners who struggled to catch up with their education.

These factors highlight the complex challenges faced by Liberia's educational sector which extend beyond the mere adoption of an educational system from another country. The socio-economic disparities and the aftermath of the civil war have contributed to the existing barriers in the education system including limited access, poor infrastructure, and educational inequalities. Understanding and addressing these challenges require context-specific approaches that take into account the unique needs and circumstances of Liberia's population.

According to Michel et al. (2018), the war in Liberia had profound and detrimental effects on school children, parents, and instructors. The conflict disrupted the educational

system and caused immense harm to individuals involved in the education sector. The consequences of the war including violence, displacement, and destruction of infrastructure, had a lasting impact on the lives and well-being of those affected.

In the aftermath of the war, efforts have been made to improve access, quality, and relevance in Liberia's education sector. These efforts aim to rebuild the educational system, provide equitable access to education, enhance the quality of teaching and learning, and align education with the needs of the society and economy. However, despite these ongoing efforts, substantial governance issues persist.

Governance issues refer to challenges related to the management, administration, and accountability within the education sector. These issues can include corruption, mismanagement of resources, inadequate policies and regulations, and a lack of transparency and accountability. Such governance issues create a sense of mistrust and skepticism among the public regarding the government's ability and willingness to fulfill its commitments to the education sector including the goals outlined in SDG-4.

The skepticism regarding the government's commitment to education, particularly to achieving SDG-4, reflects broader concerns about the overall governance and public service delivery in Liberia. Rebuilding public trust and confidence in the government's ability to prioritize and effectively address the challenges in the education sector is crucial for sustainable progress.

The war in Liberia had severe consequences for school children, parents, and instructors. However, the ongoing efforts to improve access, quality, and relevance in the education sector are hindered by persistent governance issues, which undermine public faith in the government's ability to deliver on its commitments to the sector and the SDG-4 goals. Addressing these challenges and restoring public trust are essential for the successful implementation of policies and initiatives aimed at improving education outcomes in Liberia.

## CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

In this section of the paper, a summary report is provided to explain the significance of the research findings within the field of study. The report likely highlights the implications of the findings including any insights gained, potential areas for improvement, and the overall impact on the knowledge and understanding of the subject. It may also discuss how the research findings contribute to existing theories, concepts, or practices in the field of education.

The researcher structured the presentation of the research findings around the conceptual framework of the dissertation and the research questions. The conceptual assumptions underlying the study were based on the idea that gaps in inputs, such as resources, lead to gaps in outcomes. Consequently, the researcher hypothesized that gaps in policy analysis and formulation contribute to gaps in policy implementation and evaluation which ultimately manifest as gaps in access, quality, and relevance within educational policies.

To validate these assumptions and compare the research results with existing knowledge, the researcher referred back to the literature reviewed in the dissertation. By analyzing the findings derived from document reviews, questionnaires, and interviews, this section aimed to confirm whether the results were in line with the expected outcomes as indicated in the research plan. Additionally, the section aimed to assess how the findings contributed to achieving the research goals and addressing the research questions.

The evaluation process began with a comparative analysis of the research results and the theories and arguments presented in the literature review. This analysis sought to determine whether the research findings aligned with the three foundational theories that guided the study: the input-output theory which suggests a relationship between inputs and outcomes; the policy cycle theory which outlines the stages of policy development and implementation; and the theory of educational policy gaps which highlights the existence and implications of

gaps within educational policies.

By scrutinizing the congruence between the research findings and the three theoretical frameworks, the evaluation aimed to provide further insights into the research questions and validate the conceptual assumptions. This process helped establish the reliability and validity of the results, reinforcing their significance within the context of the study and contributing to the overall understanding of the subject matter.

### **Evaluation of Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this dissertation consists of three theories: the production function, functionalism, and conflict theory. The combination of these three theories provides a unique approach to identifying gaps within Liberia's education sector which has not been explored in previous research. The production function theory is employed to assess the gaps between inputs and outcomes of policies at various levels within the education sector. It seeks to understand how different inputs, such as resources, funding, and human capital, contribute to the desired outcomes in terms of educational achievements, student performance, and overall system effectiveness. By applying the production function theory, the researcher aims to identify gaps that exist between the inputs and outcomes within the education sector in Liberia.

Functionalism, another component of the theoretical framework, focuses on the gaps that arise in the primary values of education and the broader society. This theory examines the role of education in transmitting values, social cohesion, and promoting societal functions. By analyzing the functional aspects of education, the researcher aims to identify any gaps that may exist between the intended values of education and their actual manifestation within the Liberian society.

The third theory, conflict theory, focuses on socio-economic gaps within the education sector. This theory explores how power dynamics, social inequalities, and economic

disparities shape educational opportunities and outcomes. By applying the conflict theory, the researcher intends to identify gaps that arise due to social and economic factors, such as disparities in access to education, unequal distribution of resources, and inequities in educational outcomes.

By combining these three theories, the researcher aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of gaps within Liberia's education sector. While the production function theory addresses gaps in inputs and outcomes, functionalism examines gaps in primary values, and conflict theory focuses on socio-economic gaps. This multi-dimensional approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and disparities present in the education system and provides a foundation for developing targeted strategies to address these gaps. The integration of these theories in the study fills a gap in the existing research literature, as no previous research has explored these specific theoretical perspectives in relation to Liberia's education sector.

The production function theory posits that there is a direct relationship between the physical inputs and outputs of a production process. It is based on the idea that the quantity and quality of inputs used in a production process directly impact the quantity and quality of the resulting outputs. In the context of policy evaluation, production functionalists utilize the production function theory to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of policies.

To effectively apply the production function theory in measuring policy efficiency and effectiveness, certain preconditions need to be met. First, administrative and technical problems related to the production process must have been identified and resolved. These problems can include issues such as inefficiencies in resource allocation, inadequate infrastructure, or ineffective management practices. By addressing these problems, the production process can operate more smoothly, allowing for a more accurate assessment of policy outcomes.

Additionally, the production function theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the technical process underlying the production. This means that the specific methods, techniques, and technologies used in the production process must be considered when measuring policy efficiency and effectiveness. Different technical processes can yield varying levels of output even with the same inputs.

By considering these preconditions and principles of the production function theory, policymakers can assess the efficiency and effectiveness of policies by examining the relationship between inputs and outputs. This analysis helps identify any gaps or inefficiencies in the policy implementation process and provides insights into how to improve policy outcomes by optimizing the allocation of resources and addressing any administrative or technical issues.

The paper had limitations of using the production function to measure the efficacy of educational policies. The research results revealed unresolved administrative problems at both the input stage (policy analysis and formulation) and the outcome stage (policy implementation and evaluation) of the policy cycle, rendering the application of the production function insufficient.

At the input stage, the paper discovered that there were administrative issues that remained unresolved. These problems could include inefficiencies in the analysis and formulation of policies, such as inadequate data collection, inconsistent decision-making processes, or insufficient stakeholder involvement. These unresolved administrative problems hindered the accurate measurement of policy efficacy using the production function.

Similarly, at the outcome stage, the implementation and evaluation of policies were marred by administrative challenges. The participants in the study criticized the national government for prioritizing political manipulations over technical and administrative contributions. This interference undermined the effectiveness of policy implementation and

evaluation, further complicating the use of the production function as a measure of efficacy.

Moreover, the paper recognized that for the production function to adequately measure input and output levels, technical gaps needed to be addressed. The technical contribution to the production process had been overridden, potentially leading to suboptimal output levels. To accurately assess policy efficacy using the production function, deliberate efforts were required to bridge these technical gaps. These efforts might involve enhancing technical expertise, improving infrastructure, or implementing standardized processes to ensure consistent and reliable output levels.

In the third instance, the paper identifies input-related problems that participants in the study associated with the policy analysis and formulation stages, also known as the conception stages. These gaps were reported by the participants and shed light on various issues within the education sector.

One of the input-related problems highlighted by the participants was stakeholder exclusion. The process of policy analysis and formulation was characterized by limited involvement and consultation with relevant stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and community members. This exclusion prevented the incorporation of diverse perspectives and resulted in policies that may not fully address the needs and concerns of those directly affected by them. Another problem identified was the restricted allocation of resources. Insufficient financial resources allocated to the education sector hindered the implementation of effective policies. Limited funding impacted various aspects including infrastructure development, teacher training, and the availability of teaching and learning materials. These resource constraints created barriers to providing quality education and improving overall educational outcomes. All these limitations are highlighted in Gaspar et al. (2019).

The participants also pointed out incorrect data as an input-related problem. Inaccurate or unreliable data used during the policy analysis and formulation stages can lead to



misguided decision-making. Without accurate information, policymakers may design policies that do not align with the actual needs and realities of the education system, resulting in ineffective solutions.

Insufficient political will was another input-related problem highlighted by the participants. The lack of commitment and prioritization of education at the political level can hinder the successful implementation of policies. Political will is crucial for securing necessary resources, implementing reforms, and sustaining long-term improvements in the education sector.

The limited availability of teaching and learning materials was a further input-related problem mentioned by the participants. Inadequate access to textbooks, instructional resources, and technological tools can impede effective teaching and learning processes. Insufficient materials can hinder student engagement, limit teacher effectiveness, and undermine educational quality.

Other input-related problems mentioned by the participants included school leadership challenges, limited professional training opportunities, administrative incompetence, and insufficient monitoring. These issues reflect gaps in the capacity and effectiveness of educational institutions and systems. Weak school leadership, inadequate professional development for educators, administrative inefficiencies, and a lack of robust monitoring mechanisms can all contribute to suboptimal educational outcomes.

By identifying and highlighting these input-related problems associated with the policy analysis and formulation stages, the paper emphasizes the importance of addressing these gaps to improve the effectiveness of educational policies. Addressing stakeholder exclusion, increasing resource allocation, ensuring accurate data, fostering political will, providing adequate teaching and learning materials, strengthening school leadership, enhancing professional training, improving administrative competence, and implementing

effective monitoring mechanisms are all essential steps towards addressing these input-related challenges in the education sector.

The obtained results indicate that the gaps in the input and outcome of educational policies in Liberia cannot be adequately explained by solely relying on the production function. This is primarily due to the presence of unresolved administrative and technical issues within the education system. These issues represent significant weaknesses in the pipeline responsible for delivering educational resources from policymakers to key stakeholders such as teachers, students, and principals.

The existence of technical and administrative cracks in the pipeline causes leakages along the way, hindering the smooth flow of resources and limiting the production function's ability to explain gaps in the education sector. These cracks refer to the deficiencies, inefficiencies, and challenges that arise during the policy management process which impede the effective implementation and evaluation of policies.

However, despite the limitations of the production function, it still serves a valuable purpose in identifying the specific locations of these cracks within the policy management cycle. By applying the production function, the researcher was able to pinpoint where the gaps were more prevalent. The research findings revealed that, according to over 67% of the participants, the policy formulation and analysis stages exhibited more gaps compared to the policy implementation and evaluation stages. This information is presented in Tables 10, 11, and 12, providing quantitative evidence of the participants' perceptions.

The conflict theory offers an alternative perspective on educational systems, viewing them as power structures that serve the interests of the wealthy members of society. According to this theory, the purpose of education is not solely to provide equal opportunities for all individuals but rather to create a low-cost workforce for those in positions of power, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. From a conflict theory perspective,

educational policies are seen as having inherent gaps or shortcomings that perpetuate inequality throughout society. This theoretical lens allows researchers to examine how barriers in educational service delivery contribute to inequalities in access to education, the quality of education received, and the overall benefits derived from education for individuals and society. It highlights the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and power within the education system which can reinforce existing social hierarchies and maintain the status quo.

From a conflict theoretical perspective, the findings highlight two specific factors contributing to the access gap in education which are higher tuition fees in schools and the dominance of private over public schools. The existence of high tuition fees as a barrier to access undermines the achievement of SDG-4. The goal of SDG-4 is to remove barriers associated with access to primary education, ensuring that education is available to all children regardless of their socioeconomic background. However, when high tuition fees become a hindrance, it hampers the progress towards achieving this goal.

The conflict theory offers a valuable theoretical framework for analyzing the factors that influence educational policies and their ability to achieve their intended objectives within society. By adopting a Conflict theory perspective, it becomes evident that barriers to access, quality, and relevance persist across all levels of the education system.

By recognizing and understanding these barriers through the lens of conflict theory, policymakers and stakeholders can develop strategies and interventions to address them systematically. This may involve implementing policies that remove financial barriers to access, improving infrastructure and resources, enhancing teacher training and professional development, and revising curricula to align with the evolving needs of society.

Functionalism theory provides a framework for understanding the gaps in education policy. According to functionalists, education serves multiple functions in society including preparing students for future roles and responsibilities. These roles encompass

employment, leadership, income generation, and contributing to overall societal development. When policies fail to address these manifest and latent functions adequately, gaps in education policy emerge. The theory of functionalism is introduced to provide a perspective on how education policies should address the various functions that education serves in society. By addressing these gaps and incorporating functionalist principles, recommendations can be made to improve the quality and relevance of education in Liberia.

When applying the functionalist theory to the school-to-work transition, particular emphasis is placed on the relevance and quality of the curriculum. Participants in studies associated with this transition commonly identify issues related to curriculum as significant barriers. For example, technology was identified as the top barrier by 28.69% of the participants, indicating that the lack of access to or familiarity with technology hampers individuals' ability to transition successfully from school to the workforce. Additionally, the lack of technical skills (16.39%) and unaligned curriculum (16.39%) were also recognized as major barriers affecting the school-to-work transition.

The functionalist theory brings attention to the systemic inequalities present within the education system and their impact on individuals' opportunities and outcomes. By highlighting the role of power dynamics and unequal resource allocation, this theory encourages critical analysis of educational policies and practices to identify and address the barriers that perpetuate inequality.

Therefore, the functionalist theory emphasizes the gaps and shortcomings in educational policies that contribute to benefits of education. When applied to the school-to-work transition, the functionalist theory emphasizes the relevance and quality of the curriculum as barriers that hinder individuals' successful transition into the workforce. By recognizing and addressing these barriers, it becomes possible to create a more equitable and inclusive education system.

To address these issues, it is important to recognize and address the systemic inequalities within the educational system. This may involve implementing policies and interventions aimed at reducing disparities in access to quality education, ensuring that the curriculum is aligned with the needs of the job market, and providing support and resources to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. By doing so, it becomes possible to create a more equitable educational system that empowers individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds to succeed and contribute positively to society.

As previously mentioned, private institutions often charge high fees which creates barriers to access, quality, and relevance in education. These barriers disproportionately affect the poor, who are unable to afford such expensive education. This is particularly problematic in a country where a significant portion of the population lives below the poverty line, surviving on less than \$1 a day.

Furthermore, the findings suggests that political considerations often take precedence over economic concerns in the educational system. This implies that political manipulations and favoritism can influence the allocation of educational resources and opportunities. As a result, a social class divide is perpetuated, with members of the upper class enjoying greater advantages in terms of educational opportunities while individuals from lower-status families face disadvantages. This confirms the existence of a gap in the education system that reproduces and reinforces social class divisions.

To address these issues, it is necessary to implement policies and reforms that promote equitable access to education, regardless of socioeconomic background. This may involve initiatives such as increasing public investment in education, providing financial assistance and scholarships to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and ensuring that educational policies prioritize equal opportunities and outcomes for all individuals. By addressing the gaps and inequalities within the education system, it becomes possible to

break the cycle that perpetuates social class divisions and create a more just and inclusive educational environment.

Furthermore, the findings of the study not only shed light on the challenges within Liberia's educational system but also provided theoretical justification for the development of mechanisms that can effectively address these challenges. By grounding the study in empirical evidence, the research findings offer a solid basis for implementing changes and improvements in the education sector.

Moreover, the theoretical frameworks used in the study, in conjunction with the comprehensive literature review, establish a connection between the current study and the existing body of knowledge in the field of educational policies. Through this linkage, the study reinforces, supports, expands upon, justifies, modifies, and even generates new insights regarding the prevailing views and beliefs about educational policies in Liberia.

The implications of this are significant for various stakeholders including policymakers, implementers, and academia. The study provides evidence-based ideas and recommendations that these stakeholders can draw upon to develop and manage policies in a more sustainable and effective manner. Policymakers can leverage the findings to identify key areas of improvement and prioritize interventions that address the identified gaps in the educational system.

Implementers, such as educational administrators and practitioners, can utilize the study's insights to inform the design and implementation of specific programs and initiatives. They can adopt best practices and evidence-based strategies to enhance curriculum alignment, bridge the gap between education and the workforce, and promote social equity within the system.

Academia benefits from the study by gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges within Liberia's educational policies. It provides a foundation for

further research and scholarship, allowing researchers to build upon the findings and explore new avenues of inquiry. The study contributes to the expansion of knowledge in the field and encourages a more evidence-based and informed approach to educational policy and practice. Overall, the study's findings, supported by theoretical frameworks and existing literature, have practical implications for policy makers, implementers, and academia. It offers a valuable resource that can guide decision-making, policy development, and the pursuit of sustainable and equitable educational practices in Liberia.

### **Evaluation on answering Question One**

#### **Q1. What gaps exist in Liberia's analysis, formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of educational policies and which factors are responsible for their existence?**

Firstly, UNESCO (2013) has emphasized the importance of analyzing the national vision, aspirations, and legal frameworks outlined in the constitution and legislation, as well as national development policies, strategies, plans, and commitments to international education goals, in order to bridge the input-outcome gap in educational policies. The documents reviewed in this study corroborated and supported this notion, highlighting the existence of significant input-outcome gaps in terms of access to quality and relevant education.

Specifically, the study identified two subthemes related to the input-outcome gaps: policy analysis and formulation gaps at the input level, and policy implementation and evaluation gaps at the outcome level. These gaps represent deficiencies and challenges within the educational policy framework that contribute to the disparity between the intended inputs and desired outcomes. Several factors were found to be responsible for these gaps:

1. Inadequate policy analysis and formulation: The study revealed that there are shortcomings in the analysis and formulation of educational policies at the input level. This includes a lack of comprehensive assessment of the educational needs and priorities of the country, insufficient consideration of contextual factors, and

inadequate alignment with international standards and goals. These gaps in policy analysis and formulation hinder the development of effective and targeted policies that can address the specific challenges within the educational system.

2. **Weak policy implementation and evaluation:** At the outcome level, the study identified gaps in policy implementation and evaluation. This includes challenges in translating policies into action, limited monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and inadequate accountability frameworks. Insufficient resources, capacity constraints, and bureaucratic hurdles were also identified as contributing factors. These gaps in policy implementation and evaluation impede the effective delivery of educational services and limit the achievement of desired outcomes.
3. **Socioeconomic disparities:** The study also highlighted socioeconomic factors as significant contributors to the input-outcome gaps. It revealed that access to quality and relevant education is unequal, with marginalized and disadvantaged groups facing greater barriers. Economic inequalities, geographic disparities, and social exclusion were identified as key factors that limit equitable access to education and perpetuate the input-outcome gaps.
4. **Insufficient stakeholder engagement:** The study found that limited stakeholder engagement and participation in the policy development and implementation processes contribute to the input-outcome gaps. Lack of involvement from teachers, parents, students, and civil society organizations hinders the identification of diverse perspectives and the incorporation of multiple voices into policy decisions. This lack of inclusivity can lead to policies that do not adequately address the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders.

Addressing these factors and closing the identified gaps requires comprehensive reforms and interventions within the educational policy landscape. This may involve



strengthening policy analysis and formulation processes, enhancing policy implementation and evaluation mechanisms, addressing socioeconomic disparities, and promoting inclusive stakeholder engagement. By understanding and addressing these contributing factors, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards bridging the input-outcome gaps and achieving a more equitable and effective educational system in Liberia.

The structural challenges within the educational system in Liberia exist at both the central and decentralized levels. Reports indicate that a significant proportion of teachers in the country are untrained, with notable variations observed across different counties. For instance, approximately 70 percent of primary school teachers in Sinoe County have not received any form of training. Overall, there are nearly 13,000 teachers in Liberia who lack teaching qualifications.

Furthermore, the majority of the teachers who have received training have only undergone initial training, without subsequent refresher courses or continuous professional development opportunities. This lack of ongoing training and development hampers the ability of teachers to stay updated with the latest pedagogical approaches, curriculum changes, and educational innovations. It also limits their capacity to effectively address the diverse needs of students and provide quality education.

Another significant challenge within the educational system in Liberia is the limited budget support which affects the management and supervision of schools. Due to resource constraints, educational authorities often struggle to actively monitor and supervise the operation of schools across the country. This lack of effective oversight can lead to inconsistencies in educational practices, inadequate quality control, and disparities in the delivery of education.

To overcome these challenges, it is crucial for the government, in collaboration with international partners and stakeholders, to prioritize educational reforms and allocate

sufficient resources to the sector. By investing in teacher training, continuous professional development, and strengthening management and oversight structures, Liberia can work towards building a more qualified and effective teaching workforce and ensuring quality education for all its citizens.

Tables 12 and 13 in the study reveal that theoretical knowledge and scholarly work were rated the lowest among the factors influencing policy making in Liberia. This indicates that scientific theories and evidence-based research have limited influence on policy decisions. Consequently, there are doubts about the extent to which policies in Liberia are truly evidence-based. This lack of influence of scientific theories on policymaking may contribute to the misalignment of the curriculum and other educational challenges.

Participants in the study highlighted that many policies in Liberia were primarily politically motivated rather than being informed by technical or theoretical considerations. This suggests that political interests and considerations take precedence over evidence-based approaches in the policymaking process. The influence of political factors may result in policies that are not grounded in educational research, leading to suboptimal outcomes and limited effectiveness.

This situation underscores the need for greater integration of scientific theories and evidence-based research into the policymaking process in Liberia. Policymakers should prioritize the inclusion of experts and scholars who can provide technical and theoretical insights when formulating education policies. By incorporating diverse perspectives and evidence-based knowledge, policymakers can develop more informed and effective strategies to address the challenges within the educational system. Additionally, efforts should be made to enhance the capacity of policymakers and stakeholders to understand, interpret, and utilize scientific theories and research findings in the policymaking process. This can involve providing training on evidence-informed decision-making, promoting collaboration between

researchers and policymakers, and fostering a culture of data-driven policy development.

Ultimately, by promoting a more balanced approach that integrates scientific theories, program management experience, and political will, Liberia can strengthen its education policymaking process and develop policies that are more effective, equitable, and aligned with the needs of its students and society as a whole. This finding further supports the notion that policies in Liberia are not based on program management experience or proven theories. According to Hupe and Hill (2016), successful policies typically follow a traditional order where intentions lead to action which then leads to desired outcomes. However, in the case of Liberia, the study reveals a misalignment between policy intentions and actual outcomes.

For example, the Education Reform Act of 2011 aimed to establish Early Childhood Facilities in all districts of Liberia. However, the Education Management Information Service (EMIS) data indicates that public access to Early Childhood Education remains low at 44 percent, far from achieving universal access, even after eleven years since the policy was enacted. This discrepancy suggests a failure to effectively implement the policy and achieve the intended outcome.

Similarly, the Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017-2021) aimed to train over 11,000 primary teachers in early grade literacy and numeracy. However, the data reveals that over 62.28 percent of public school teachers are reported to be untrained. This demonstrates a significant gap between the intended policy action and the actual implementation, resulting in unmet targets and a lack of progress in improving teacher quality. These examples highlight the ineffectiveness of educational policies in Liberia. Despite the intentions and goals set forth in the policies, there is a significant disconnect between policy implementation and desired outcomes. This suggests that policies are not achieving their intended objectives and are falling short of bringing about positive changes in the education

system.

To address this issue, it is crucial to identify the underlying reasons for the policy implementation gaps and failures. This may involve a comprehensive review of the policy development and implementation processes including the identification of barriers, challenges, and systemic issues that hinder effective policy execution. Additionally, there is a need to strengthen program management capabilities, ensure adequate resources and support for policy implementation, and foster a culture of accountability and monitoring to track progress and address implementation gaps.

By addressing these issues and promoting a more coherent and evidence-based approach to policy development and implementation, Liberia can increase the chances of successful policy outcomes and make significant strides in improving its education system. The study's results emphasize the significant role of political influence in shaping educational interventions. It suggests that political factors play a crucial role in determining the direction and effectiveness of education policies. However, due to the nature of politics as a complex and unpredictable game, it is difficult to establish a direct formula for policy-making in the context of Liberia. This perspective aligns with the viewpoint put forward by Braithwaite et al. (2018), highlighting the unpredictable, non-linear, and adaptive nature of policies in Liberia.

The findings of the study provide substantial support for this claim. They reveal that educational interventions in Liberia are heavily influenced by political dynamics, making it challenging to implement consistent and long-term strategies. The ever-changing political landscape and power dynamics contribute to the unpredictability of education policies which can hinder the development and improvement of the education system.

In a nutshell, the study's results confirm the existence of various other circumstances that contribute to the gaps in the education system in Liberia. The country's 14-year civil war, characterized by violence and instability, had a severe impact on the education sector. The war

not only disrupted the schooling of children but also had devastating effects on parents and instructors. The destruction and displacement caused by the conflict significantly hampered the accessibility and quality of education. Moreover, the study highlights other factors such as bad governance, security concerns, and corruption as contributors to the challenges faced by the education system in Liberia. These factors create a complex web of obstacles that hinder the effective implementation of educational interventions. By acknowledging these additional circumstances, the study underscores the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced in the education sector.

### **Evaluation on answering Question Two**

**Q2. What factors have contributed to access, quality, and relevance gaps in the educational policies of Liberia, and what are their effects on the pace of growth in the sector including achievement of SDG- 4 goals?**

In analyzing the results presented above, it is important to recognize that there are multiple theoretical perspectives that offer different interpretations. These perspectives provide varying angles of analysis when considering the implications of performance accountability policies in the education system. One theoretical perspective acknowledges that performance accountability policies can have "undesired effects," as noted by Sherman (1982). This perspective acknowledges that such policies may have unintended consequences or drawbacks. However, proponents of this viewpoint argue that these issues can be corrected or mitigated, and ultimately the benefits of the policy outweigh the negative aspects. They advocate for the implementation of safeguards to ensure that accountability is appropriately integrated into the education system.

To address the potential negative effects of performance accountability policies, proponents of this perspective suggest several measures. One such measure is being cautious about the number of incentives provided. By carefully considering the incentive structure,

policymakers can avoid unintended consequences and ensure that the policy remains effective. Additionally, proponents advocate for the use of multiple evaluation instruments that encompass both quantitative and qualitative evaluations across different subjects and school levels. This approach reduces the possibility of gaming the system or distorting the evaluation process for personal gain.

By incorporating a variety of evaluation instruments, policymakers can obtain a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of educational performance. This approach helps to ensure that the evaluation process is robust, reliable, and less susceptible to manipulation. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative evaluations provides a more holistic understanding of student achievement, instructional quality, and overall educational outcomes.

In contrast to the previous perspective, there are intellectuals and scholars associated with the theory of school improvement, such as Riep and Machacek (2020), who present an alternative viewpoint. They argue against the notion that the negative effects of performance accountability policies are solely a result of specific components or implementation issues. Instead, they contend that these effects are inherent in the overall design of the accountability model itself.

According to this perspective, proponents of school improvement theory agree on the importance of external evaluations that provide feedback on educational practices. They acknowledge the value of accountability measures in assessing the effectiveness of schools and promoting educational quality. However, they express concerns about the potential imbalance in the design of such policies.

The critics argue that performance accountability policies may inadvertently prioritize prescription and sanctions over the development of internal skills within professional teams. They contend that excessive focus on external evaluations and the pressure to meet predefined benchmarks can lead to a narrowing of the curriculum and a shift towards a more

standardized approach to education. This, in turn, may undermine the autonomy and creativity of teachers and limit their ability to tailor instruction to the unique needs of their students.

From the perspective of school improvement theory, critics argue for a more comprehensive approach that values both external evaluations and the cultivation of internal capacities within schools. They advocate for a balanced model that recognizes the importance of accountability while also supporting the professional growth and expertise of educators. This involves providing opportunities for ongoing professional development, collaborative learning, and shared decision-making within schools.

By emphasizing a holistic approach to school improvement, proponents of this perspective aim to strike a balance between external accountability and the cultivation of internal skills and capacities. They argue that a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to accountability can lead to improved educational outcomes without sacrificing the professional autonomy and creativity of teachers.

Therefore, intellectuals associated with the theory of school improvement argue against the idea that the negative effects of performance accountability policies are solely due to specific implementation issues. They contend that these effects are inherent in the overall design of the accountability model. They advocate for a more balanced approach that values both external evaluations and the development of internal capacities within schools. This perspective emphasizes the importance of supporting teachers' professional growth and fostering a collaborative and empowering school environment.

From a socio-critical perspective, the authors highlight that the analyzed policies have placed schools within a competitive framework. This competitive environment has transformed the subjectivity of the actors involved in education including teachers, administrators, and students, as well as the overall goals of education itself. According to this viewpoint, the pursuit of established goals and the desire to demonstrate a "successful"

performance have effectively "colonized" school management and the daily actions of teachers. In this socio-critical perspective, it is argued that the emphasis on achieving predefined goals and demonstrating success has overshadowed other important aspects of education. The pressure to meet these goals has influenced the decision-making processes, instructional practices, and resource allocation within schools. This competitive atmosphere has led to a shift in focus from meeting local needs and fostering deep learning to prioritizing actions that contribute to institutional prestige within a quasi-market setting.

The authors acknowledge that within this context, there is often resistance and criticism from school actors themselves including teachers, students, and even parents. However, despite such resistance, the pervasive influence of the competitive framework and the pressure to achieve visible goals persist. This tension between meeting local needs and striving for visible achievements creates a complex dynamic for schools.

On one hand, schools must strive to address the unique needs and promote deep learning among their students. This requires a focus on holistic development, critical thinking, and individual growth. On the other hand, schools are compelled to pursue the visible goals that contribute to institutional prestige within the competitive market-like environment. These visible goals often prioritize standardized test scores, rankings, and other quantifiable metrics that are easily comparable and measurable.

Consequently, schools find themselves navigating this tension between meeting local needs for deep learning and striving for visible achievements that align with the competitive framework. This socio-critical perspective recognizes the challenges and conflicts that arise from this tension and emphasizes the need to critically examine the underlying assumptions and consequences of such policies.

It may be inferred that the socio-critical perspective highlights how policies that place schools within a competitive matrix can have profound effects on the subjectivity of



education actors and the goals of education itself. The pursuit of visible goals and institutional prestige can overshadow local needs and deep learning. This perspective emphasizes the importance of critically evaluating and questioning the impact of competitive policies on education and advocates for a more nuanced approach that balances local needs with the pressures of the competitive environment.

The gaps in access to education were identified as one of the primary challenges in the education sector. The study found that factors such as poverty, geographic location, and gender inequality contribute to limited access to education, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized groups such as girls and children in rural areas. These gaps in access to education affect the ability of students to benefit from educational opportunities and contribute to the overall development of the country.

Moreover, the study identified gaps in the quality of education which have adverse effects on learning outcomes and the overall effectiveness of the educational system. The quality of education in Liberia is impacted by various factors including inadequate teacher training and low teacher motivation, limited access to educational resources, and inadequate infrastructure.

Furthermore, the study found that there were significant gaps in the relevance of education in Liberia. The educational policies in the country do not adequately respond to the needs and aspirations of the learners, nor do they align with national development goals. This lack of relevance results in a mismatch between the skills and knowledge acquired through education and the demands of the labor market.

Importantly, the study identified that these gaps in access, quality, and relevance of education stem from cracks in the policy management cycle. The study found that these gaps can be attributed to shortcomings in the policy analysis, policy formulation, policy implementation, and policy evaluation stages. The study highlights that addressing these gaps

requires a comprehensive approach that focuses on improving the entire policy management cycle to ensure that policies are designed and implemented in a way that effectively addresses the challenges facing the education sector.

The study's findings highlight the significant gaps that exist in Liberia's educational policies at both the input and outcome levels. These gaps affect the access, quality, and relevance of education in the country. The study emphasizes that addressing these gaps will require a comprehensive approach that focuses on improving the policy management cycle to ensure that policies are designed and implemented to effectively address the challenges facing the education sector.

The research results also confirmed Mishra's (2013) diagnosis that the conflict theory in education occurs when the dominant class tries to sustain themselves in power by providing unequal opportunities for every child. This happens when public education is seen as belonging to the lower class while the quest for private and international education increases for the wealthy. In Liberia, apart from higher education where public institutions constitute about 77.7 percent, other subsystems range between 36.7 percent for TVET and 28.7 percent for secondary education. This limits realization of targets 4.1 to 4.6 of SDG-4. As earlier noted, there is a high dropout rate in the country, denying the youth opportunities to acquire skills, among others. The absence of teaching-learning materials, such as books and reading/writing materials were major problems with quality which the free primary education policy has not yet addressed. This confirms that addressing the economic cost of primary education by providing —free primary education is not enough because the opportunity cost of education presents a serious challenge to achieving free primary education (Sulochana, 2015). The opportunity cost of primary education refers to the wages, benefits or prospects the parent/child would otherwise earn by functioning at home. Thus, if socio-economic issues raised in this paper are addressed, many parents, communities, and children especially from marginalized,

and developing countries, would access quality, and relevant education.

Lack of access to technology to support teaching, and learning is the major barrier to relevance. Also, the issue of connecting higher education curricula to the national economic vision is key to transforming the sector (Sumaworo, 2015). This was confirmed when unaligned curricula were reported as one major cause of gaps in the relevance of education. These undeniably affect implementation and realization of the SDG-4 goals.

The introduction of a policy of free and compulsory education is undoubtedly a laudable initiative. Free education also helps some poor parents to send their children to school. But some hidden costs have long hindered children's access to education. According to the Global Education Cluster assessment of the effects of the Ebola crisis on the education system in Liberia in 351 schools in nine of the country's fifteen counties, approximately 60 percent of children surveyed cited school fees as the most common reason not to go to school. This was echoed in the field findings that high school fees limited the number of school going children. This affected implementation of the Liberian free education system through the compulsory education policy. It appears this policy which is the foundation of SDG-4 targets 4.1 and 4.2 remains at the promise. There is a huge disparity between the number of enrollments, and that of those who complete primary and secondary education, and the out-of-school children. This diminishes the chances for implementing SDG-4 and the growth of the educational sector in the country.

### **Summary of the Section**

The goal of this evaluation was twofold: on the one hand, it was to establish whether the findings answered the main research questions. On the other hand, it was to discover whether the research findings, and results agreed or disagreed with assumptions, concepts, theories, and arguments presented earlier in the paper. In the first place, the research findings were able to establish the gaps in the analysis, formulation, implementation, and

evaluation of educational policies in Liberia and the factors that caused them. These were established as demonstrated in Chapter 4, and Sections 5.2-5.4 of Chapter 5. This was done by comparing the research results with the theories for theoretical evaluation and the findings while for questions one and two, it was done by both comparing the findings and the questions as well as the literature reviewed in this dissertation. The section began by comparing the results to the theoretical foundation of the paper. To begin with, the theories contributed to conceptualizing the study to filter out the themes, subthemes, and the factors that cause policy gaps. This was further supported by the document analysis. Secondly, the theories helped in the explanation of the study concepts and their behavior, that is, input and outcome policy gaps.

The major research questions and sub-questions were also used to understand the views of education stakeholders about educational policy gaps in Liberia. The gaps and what causes them were established, and explained. Establishment and explanation of the gaps, and their causes were the primary concerns of questions one, and two. In addition, question two was also able to demonstrate the effects of educational policy gaps on meeting the SDG-4 goals, and the growth of the educational sector in Liberia. The findings from this study would be plausible in providing a basis for recommending policy actions that will lead to better policy management in future.

## **Implications**

The section in question focuses on presenting the implications, significance, and limitations of the study. It serves as an opportunity for the researcher to contextualize the study's outcomes and discuss their broader implications. Here's a more detailed expansion of each aspect:

1. **Implications:** The researcher describes the implications of the study's findings by explaining their significance and relevance within the specific context. This involves highlighting how the results address the study problem or research

questions, how they align (or diverge) with the conceptual framework established earlier in the paper and how they contribute to the existing body of literature presented in Chapter Two.

2. Significance: The findings identify and highlight the policy gaps and suggests means through which these gaps could be closed. Specifically, it provides new insights or perspectives, challenges existing theories or assumptions, and offers practical solutions for policymakers or practitioners.
3. Limitations: These arise from factors such as sample size, data collection methods, timeconstraints, or the scope of the study which have been addressed variously throughout the thesis. This demonstrates transparency and acknowledges the potential impact of these constraints on the study's outcomes. It also provides opportunities for future researchers to build upon the study and address its limitations.

Overall, this section of the research paper allows the researcher to summarize and discuss the implications of the study's findings within the specific context. By highlighting the significance, aligning the results with the conceptual framework, and connecting them to the existing literature, the researcher underscores the importance of the research outcomes. Additionally, by acknowledging the study's limitations, the researcher ensures transparency and provides insights for future research directions.

Before embarking on this study, the researcher noticed that despite the allocation of significant resources and sustained efforts towards education policy management in Liberia, the desired outcomes were not being achieved. Consequently, an input-outcome gap in relation to the attainment of SDG-4 goals was observed. The researcher made the assumption that policies in place were politically influenced, lacked systematicity, and lacked strategic approaches in addressing the identified gaps within the policy management cycle. These assumptions were based on the presence of technical and theoretical deficiencies in the policies.

To some extent, the researcher's assumptions were confirmed during the study. The findings indicated that political influence, exclusion of stakeholders, limited political will, and corruption were prevalent factors within the policy management cycle that contributed to further gaps and inefficiencies. These findings highlighted the existence of leakages in the implementation of policies which hindered the achievement of desired educational outcomes.

However, the researcher did not anticipate that socio-economic issues, as emphasized in SDG-8 goals, would have significant contributions towards the achievement of SDG-4. This unexpected finding suggests that socio-economic factors play a crucial role in educational outcomes. As a result, the researcher recommends further research that explores the linkages between socio-economic indicators, theories, and educational outcomes in Liberia. This research would provide a deeper understanding of how socio-economic factors intersect with educational policies and outcomes, enabling more comprehensive strategies to be developed.

The findings of the study have significant implications in both the social and pedagogical fields, particularly in relation to the provision of educational opportunities for students facing financial challenges. The identification of policy gaps and their impact on access to education is particularly relevant in the context of free and compulsory education initiatives. Students who are unable to afford tuition fees can benefit greatly from such policies. Therefore, addressing the identified gaps becomes crucial for ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Furthermore, the study's findings have implications for national objectives related to universal education, skills development, gender equality, universal youth literacy, and the establishment of effective learning environments. These objectives are directly affected by the presence of policy gaps. By understanding the nature and causes of these gaps, policymakers can make informed decisions to improve policy management and enhance the effectiveness of

initiatives aimed at achieving these objectives. This, in turn, can lead to more inclusive, quality education systems.

Articulating the identified gaps in terms of their characteristics, their location within the policy management cycle, and their root causes is essential for improving policy management. By clearly identifying and understanding these gaps, policymakers, implementers, and academia can collaborate to develop targeted strategies and interventions. This knowledge allows for informed decision-making, enabling the implementation of effective policies and practices that address the identified gaps and promote positive educational outcomes.

Therefore, the study's findings have implications in the social field by highlighting the impact of policy gaps on students who face challenges in paying tuition fees. They also have implications in the pedagogical field, as they affect the attainment of national objectives related to universal education, skills development, gender equality, youth literacy, and the quality of learning environments. Understanding and addressing these gaps is crucial for improving policy management and ensuring that educational opportunities are accessible to all students. The insights gained from this research are valuable to policymakers, implementers, and academia, as they provide a foundation for more effective policy development and implementation.

### **Synopsis and significance of the study**

The researcher in this study reported from the outset that various forms of literature exist that discuss the actors and circumstances necessary for bridging the input-outcome gaps prevalent in policy-making processes in developing countries. The literature reviewed by the researcher agreed that the gaps in Liberia's policy management cycle are caused by several shortcomings. These include stakeholder exclusion, limited resource allocation, lack of reliable data, lack of political will, weak capacity and technical know-how, inadequate monitoring and supervision, and centralized governance.

The literature cited by the researcher provides a range of perspectives on the factors contributing to the input-outcome gaps in policy-making processes. Berry and Adamson (2011) highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement in policy development and implementation. EU (2020) emphasizes the need for effective resource allocation to ensure the successful implementation of policies. Sanderson (2002) discusses the importance of reliable data in informing policy development and the need for strong monitoring and supervision mechanisms.

Overall, the literature cited by the researcher provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to input-outcome gaps in policy-making processes. These gaps are caused by a range of shortcomings including stakeholder exclusion, limited resource allocation, lack of reliable data, lack of political will, weak capacity and technical know-how, inadequate monitoring and supervision, and centralized governance. By acknowledging these factors, policymakers and researchers alike can develop more effective strategies to address these shortcomings and improve policy outcomes.

The researcher identified a significant issue in the existing literature concerning gaps in Liberia's educational sector. They noticed that many of the studies lacked clarity and precision in their diagnosis of these gaps. Specifically, these studies failed to mention the theoretical framework they used to investigate educational policies, neglected to identify the specific stages in the policy management cycle where these gaps were most prominent, and did not thoroughly explore the systematic impact of these gaps on both internal and external aspects of society.

Additionally, the researcher observed that the causes of these policy gaps were not adequately addressed in the existing literature. Without solid evidence and understanding of the root causes, it becomes difficult to develop effective solutions. The researcher recognized that a faulty diagnosis is equivalent to faulty results, and addressing a problem without a clear



understanding of its causes can often lead to ineffective treatments.

To rectify these shortcomings, the researcher took a systematic and rigorous approach. They employed theoretical frameworks and utilized comparative evidence to examine the policy management cycle of Liberia's educational sector. By adopting a systematic approach, the researcher aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the gaps in the sector, considering various stages of the policy management cycle.

Moreover, the researcher emphasized the importance of utilizing a theoretical foundation to guide their examination. By employing established theoretical frameworks, the researcher could bring clarity and structure to their analysis of educational policies in Liberia. This approach would enable a deeper understanding of the underlying factors contributing to the identified gaps.

Furthermore, the researcher recognized the significance of considering the internal and external outcomes of these policy gaps on society. Understanding the broader implications of these gaps would allow for a more holistic evaluation of their effects. By systematically examining the impacts within and beyond the educational sector, the researcher aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the magnitude and significance of the identified gaps.

The researcher identified several deficiencies in the existing literature regarding gaps in Liberia's educational sector. To address these limitations, they employed a systematic, theoretical, and comparative approach to examine the policy management cycle. By adopting these rigorous methodologies, the researcher aimed to provide a more comprehensive diagnosis of the gaps, identify their causes with evidence, and shed light on their internal and external societal impacts.

## Methodological Implication

The use of an exploratory sequential design in research entails collecting and analyzing mixed-method data in a specific sequence. This approach involves an initial qualitative phase followed by a quantitative phase, with the aim of exploring a phenomenon in depth and then validating or generalizing the findings. The methodological impact of employing an exploratory sequential design are as follows:

1. **Comprehensive understanding:** By starting with a qualitative phase, the researcher can gain a comprehensive and an in-depth understanding of the research topic. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups discussions, or observations, allow for rich data collection, exploration of participants' perspectives, and identification of key themes or patterns. The study enabled the researcher to extensively investigate the phenomenon and discover the salient issues that needed to be explored and explained to the reader as highlighted both in the findings and conclusions and recommendations from the study.
2. **Theory development:** The qualitative phase of the research helps in theory development or hypothesis generation. Through the exploration of qualitative data, the researcher was able to generate new ideas, examine the existing theories about the research phenomenon, and reexamine the hypotheses that were further tested in the subsequent quantitative phase.
3. **Sampling and instrument development:** The qualitative phase provides insights into the target population, allowing for informed sampling decisions in the quantitative phase. Additionally, the qualitative findings can guide the development or adaptation of measurement instruments to ensure their relevance and validity. The study proved that adopting a mixed methods design aids the researcher handle sampling and instrument development from the informed point of view based on

what is already existing in the study context.

4. **Triangulation:** The use of mixed methods allows for triangulation which is the integration of findings from different data sources or methods. The study demonstrated the soundness of the concept of triangulation of approaches, methods and data sources as a means to enhance the validity and reliability of the research by cross-verifying the results obtained from qualitative and quantitative analyses. In addition, it provided the necessary depth of explanation to meet the research objectives.
5. **Sequential process:** The exploratory sequential design follows a specific sequence of data collection and analysis. The qualitative phase is conducted first, followed by the quantitative phase. This sequential process allows for an iterative approach, where the findings from the qualitative phase inform the design and focus of the quantitative phase, ensuring that the research questions are addressed effectively.
6. **Complementary insights:** By combining both qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. During the study, it was evident that the qualitative data provided rich contextual information and in-depth insights into participants' experiences while quantitative data allowed for statistical analysis, generalization, and identification of patterns or trends in a larger sample.
7. **Enhanced validity and reliability:** The use of mixed methods and the sequential design can enhance the validity and reliability of the research findings. The qualitative phase helped in constructing a robust theoretical framework while the quantitative phase allowed for statistical analysis and generalizability of the findings to a larger population. This was key to generating findings for policy information.

In summation, the methodological implications of using an exploratory sequential design in research involve gaining comprehensive insights, theory development, informed sampling and instrument development, triangulation, a sequential process, complementary insights, and enhanced validity and reliability. This approach allowed the researcher to explore the research topic in depth to generate new ideas, opinions, examine and critique existing theories or hypotheses, and to obtain a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

### **Theoretical Implication**

Combining the production function, functionalism theory, and conflict theories in educational research can have several theoretical implications. Here are a few possible implications:

1. **Holistic Understanding:** By integrating theoretical perspectives, the researchers gained a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of educational processes in the country. The combination provided multiple perspectives of the research phenomenon from theoretical angle. The production function approach emphasizes the inputs and outputs of education, such as resources, teaching quality, and student achievement. Functionalism theory focuses on the role of education in maintaining societal equilibrium and social integration. Meanwhile, conflict theories highlight power dynamics, social inequalities, and the reproduction of social structures within educational institutions. By combining these perspectives, the researcher explored how these factors interacted and influenced educational outcomes in Liberia which generated insightful ideas and opinions about the context of the Liberian educational sector and how best it could be improved going forward.
2. **Multilevel Analysis:** The combination of these theories encourages researchers to

analyze educational phenomena at multiple levels. The production function approach often focuses on individual-level factors, such as student characteristics and teacher quality. Functionalism theory considers the macro-level functions of education in society, such as socialization and skills development. Conflict theories examine power dynamics and social class differences at both macro and micro levels. Integrating these theories encouraged the researcher to analyze educational issues from individual, institutional, and societal perspectives, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in the country's educational sector in relation to meeting its stated objectives.

3. **Power and Inequality:** Conflict theories emphasize power struggles and social inequalities within educational systems. By incorporating conflict theories into educational research, the researcher was able to analyze how power differentials and social conflicts affect educational processes and outcomes in the country. This included examining issues such as educational access, resource allocation, tracking, and the reproduction of social inequalities. Combining the production function and conflict theories enabled the researcher to shed light on how educational policies and practices could be perpetuating or challenging the existing power structures and inequalities in the country's socioeconomic structure.
4. **Functionality and Efficiency:** Functionalism theory emphasizes the functions of education in society, such as social integration, cultural transmission, and economic development. By integrating the production function approach, the researcher can examine how educational inputs and processes contribute to achieving these functions efficiently. This can involve investigating the relationship between resource allocation, teaching practices, and educational outcomes. Understanding the interplay between educational functions and efficiency was

instrumental in informing the recommendations for policy and practice decisions aimed at improving educational systems in the country.

5. **Complex Interactions:** The combination of these theories acknowledges the complex interactions between various factors in educational settings. It recognizes that educational processes are influenced by a range of factors including resources, social structures, power dynamics, and individual agency. By integrating these theories, the researcher explored the interconnections and feedback loops between these factors, providing a more nuanced understanding of the educational phenomenon under investigation and suggest means through which such complexity in the sector could be managed.

It is important to note that the combination of these theories requires careful consideration and integration to ensure coherence and validity in research design and analysis. Therefore, the researchers critically interrogated the strengths and limitations of each theory and applied them appropriately within the context of the research questions and objectives. This way, it was possible to generate findings that have an impact on the educational questions related to the input-output gaps should be addressed by policy scholars, makers and implementers.

### **Practical Implication**

The following practical discovery is worth noting:

- (i) Over 67 percent of participants agreed that the policy formulation and analysis stages have more gaps than the policy implementation and evaluation stages. This discovery means that although analysis and formulation stages are usually abstract, they are responsible for most of the perceived gaps observed within the sector. Politics and inaccessibility of policies were noted as key hindrances. Therefore, reducing the politics during the policymaking process including technical and

theoretical contributions is key. There is also need to make policies accessible to all stakeholders in the education sector.

- (ii) Higher tuition fees, long school distance to school, and unequal distribution of educational interventions are the major causes of unequal output – access, quality, and relevance of educational benefits between rural and urban schools. The findings imply that to improve the performance of the educational sector in the country, these factors should be addressed.
- (iii) The Liberian education system appears to have been used as a power structure to create a low-cost workforce for those in low-income status through unaligned curriculum design, lack of skills for school-work transition, increase in private education for the wealthy, social class reproduction, and limited economic analysis of educational interventions before implementation. This implies that educational policy makers should repurpose the educational policies of the country to close the gaps.
- (iv) The major cracks in input-outcome processes of the policy management cycle are caused by (10) factors expressed in the form of exclusion of stakeholders, limited allocation of resources, lack of reliable data, reduced political will, low capacity or technical know-how, inadequate monitoring, and assessment, centralized governance/bureaucracy, corruption, inaccessibility of policies, and over politicization. These are the factors that policy framers should focus on to enhance the contribution of the educational sector in the country.
- (v) Intentions of policies are not yielding their desired outcomes because of the unbalanced employment of scientific theories, program management experience, and low political will in the policy management cycle. The implication of this observation is that the country's educational policies should be tailored toward

meeting the needs of the society.

- (vi) The country's 14-year civil war, bad governance, security concerns, and corruption still contribute to the input-outcome gaps in the policy management cycle of the Liberian education sector. This indicates that these aspects have not been fully addressed in order to alleviate their effects on the wider society especially, the education sector in the country.
- (vii) The lack of stakeholders' full participation in the conception, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of education policy is affecting the achievement of SDG- 4 goals. Education in the country is becoming less accessible, of low quality, and not very relevant to the needs of the people. It is not meeting its functional expectations of contributing towards meeting the needs of the communities. Besides, it is promoting inequality between the rich and the poor. This revelation calls upon those in charge of the educational policy to promote community participations in the process.
- (viii) Socioeconomic issues espoused in SDG-8 are important catalysts for achieving SDG- 4. They seem to ensure that parents are empowered economically to meet school fees requirements and may afford education at a cost since free and compulsory education appears not to be meeting its designed objectives.
- (ix) Public education is seen as belonging to the lower class in Liberia while the quest for private education increases for the wealthy. As already noted in (vii) above. This points out to the need to close the gap between the services offered by the two types of school ownership, that is, the public and private sectors to ensure that freedom of choice regarding which school to attend.
- (x) Addressing the economic cost of education by providing —free education at primary, and higher education is not enough because the opportunity cost of



education also presents itself as a serious challenge to the achievement of educational goals. Therefore, the policy on free education should provide means to close the gap created by the alternative cost of the time spent on education.

- (xi) Enrollment rate, quality of output, and outcome at each system level are contingent upon the lower level. This is because outputs from the lower level eventually become inputs in the upper level. Therefore, failures at ECE, and primary education spillover into the secondary, higher education, and TVET subsectors. This eventually affects that type of educational outputs, and outcomes the society receives. This implies that the educational policies need to address learner transition from one level to another to ensure that the system pushes up candidates that are more prepared to handle the higher levels of education.

The above discoveries provide insights into the reasons educational policies are failing to meet their intended objectives. This serves the research purposes by exposing the problems, barriers, and failures of the current educational policies in order to devise recommendations that may close the gaps in the current policy management process.

## **Limitations**

The limitation of the lack of previous research on the topic in the country poses several challenges for the researcher. Firstly, the absence of local literature makes it difficult to build upon existing knowledge and theories specific to the context of the study. This can hinder the researcher's ability to situate their research within the local educational landscape and understand the unique factors at play.

Furthermore, the identification of a theoretical foundation becomes challenging when there is a dearth of local literature. The researcher may struggle to find established theories or frameworks that directly address the research topic or provide a suitable lens for

analysis. In such cases, the researcher may need to broaden their search beyond the local context and explore literature from other countries or regions to find relevant theoretical perspectives.

The process of exploring literature from other contexts and official reports to derive educational theories for the gap analysis can be time-consuming. It requires a thorough review and synthesis of existing theories, concepts, and empirical studies to adapt them to the specific research context. This additional effort adds to the time and resources required for the research project.

In this particular case, the researcher decided to combine three theories as the basis for exploring gaps in the policy management cycle of Liberia. While this approach offers the potential for a new research typology, ontology, and epistemology, the limited time and resources prevented an in-depth analysis of each theory. The researcher may have faced constraints in terms of conducting extensive literature reviews, collecting and analyzing data, or engaging in comprehensive theoretical discussions.

Given these limitations, the researcher suggests that future studies should conduct individual research using each of the three theories separately. This recommendation acknowledges the need for more focused and in-depth investigations into the specific theories and their applicability within the Liberian context. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of each theory's implications and potential contributions to educational research and policy in Liberia.

The limitation identified after the analysis of the research results pertains to the insufficient level of detail and nuanced responses provided by policymakers at the macro level during document reviews and interviews. This limitation suggests that policymakers may have been hesitant to provide comprehensive or candid information, potentially due to political considerations or a desire to present a favorable image.

To overcome this barrier, the researcher employed a strategy of triangulation by

comparing responses and data gathered from various sources. By validating the information obtained from policymakers with data from national, international, private, and public sources, the researcher sought to enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings. Triangulation can help mitigate the limitations associated with potential bias or incomplete information from single source, providing a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the research topic.

Despite these limitations, the study was able to achieve its goal of answering the research questions. This suggests that despite the challenges faced, the researcher was able to gather sufficient data and information to provide meaningful insights into the gap between educational policy inputs and outcomes.

The methodological implications of this limitation highlight the importance of employing diverse data collection methods and sources to enhance the validity and reliability of research findings. By combining different approaches such as document reviews, interviews, and data triangulation, researchers can overcome the limitations associated with incomplete or biased information from a single source.

The theoretical implications of this limitation underscore the need for researchers to critically analyze and interpret the data obtained. Policymakers' reluctance to provide detailed responses may indicate underlying political dynamics or power struggles within the education system. This highlights the relevance of conflict theories and power analysis in understanding the complexities of educational policy processes.

From a practical perspective, the study's results hold the potential to contribute to bridging the gap between educational policy inputs and outcomes. By deepening the understanding of the factors influencing policy implementation and its impact on educational outcomes, the study's findings can inform future policy development and implementation strategies. The insights gained from the research can guide policymakers in making informed

decisions and designing interventions that address the identified gaps.

## Conclusions

The main conclusions of this research on the treatment of the gap between inputs and outcomes of Liberia's educational policies are as follows:

1. The research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of Liberia's educational policy management cycle, with a specific focus on the input and outcome gaps. The study sought to examine the factors contributing to these gaps and their implications for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) targets.
2. The SDG-4 goals are centered on ensuring accessible, quality, relevant, and lifelong learning opportunities for all children by 2030. The study recognized the significance of these goals and aimed to shed light on the major leakages within Liberia's education system that hinder progress toward achieving them.
3. Through a comprehensive analysis of the input and outcome gaps, the research identified key factors that contribute to the slow achievement of SDG-4 goals in Liberia. These factors may include inadequate resource allocation, ineffective policy implementation, socio-economic disparities, lack of teacher training and support, and limited access to quality educational facilities.
4. The study's findings have implications for policy and practice in Liberia's educational sector. The research highlights the need for targeted interventions and reforms to address the identified leakages and improve the effectiveness of educational policies. This may involve enhancing resource allocation, strengthening policy implementation mechanisms, addressing socio-economic disparities, investing in teacher professional development, and improving infrastructure and access to quality education.
5. The conclusions drawn from this research are directly linked to the study's purpose,

research questions, and results. The study set out to investigate the input and outcome gaps in Liberia's educational policies and provide insights into the factors contributing to these gaps.

The research findings suggest that Liberia has historically employed norms associated with servitude to gain and maintain power and control over the population. These norms have influenced the policy management process in a way that perpetuates certain cultural capital and convictions, limiting individuals from reaching their full potential. This observation aligns with the notion that education policies in Liberia have been shaped to reinforce existing power structures and maintain a certain way of life.

One manifestation of these norms is the inequitable access to quality and relevant education in Liberia. The research indicates that certain segments of the population have been systematically disadvantaged, leading to disparities in educational opportunities. This inequality in access further perpetuates social and economic disparities within the society.

The 2022 World Bank report on Liberia supports these findings by highlighting the low Human Capital Index (HCI) of Liberia which stands at only 32 percent. The HCI is an indicator that measures the knowledge, skills, and health that individuals accumulate over their lifetimes. A low HCI score indicates that the population's human capital potential is not being fully realized which can be attributed to factors such as limited access to quality education.

The research findings imply that these norms have influenced the way policies have addressed issues related to education in Liberia. The policies may have prioritized maintaining the status quo and perpetuating the existing power structures rather than focusing on ensuring equitable access to quality and relevant education at all levels. This has resulted in a system that reinforces social inequalities and restricts individuals from reaching their full potential. The implications of these findings are significant as they highlight the need for transformative changes in educational policies and practices in Liberia. Addressing these norms and power

dynamics is crucial for creating an inclusive and equitable education system that enables all individuals to access quality education and reach their full potential. This requires reforms that challenge existing power structures, promote social justice, and ensure that education policies prioritize the needs and aspirations of all learners.

In summary, the research findings suggest that Liberia's historical utilization of norms associated with servitude and the perpetuation of certain cultural capital have had a detrimental impact on educational policies, resulting in inequitable access to quality and relevant education. Recognizing and addressing these norms is essential for achieving a more inclusive and equitable education system in Liberia.

The research findings identified ten key subthemes that consistently emerged as responsible for input gaps in the policy management cycle. These subthemes shed light on various factors that contribute to the exclusion of stakeholders, insufficient allocation of resources, lack of reliable data, and inaccessible policies. They also highlighted challenges such as reduced political will, over politicization of policies, low capacity or technical know-how, centralized governance or bureaucracy, inadequate monitoring, assessment, and evaluation, as well as corruption.

The exclusion of stakeholders was identified as a significant factor in the policy management cycle. When key stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and community members, are left out of the decision-making process, their perspectives and expertise are not considered, leading to policies that may not effectively address the needs and concerns of those directly affected.

Limited allocation of resources was another crucial subtheme. Insufficient funding for education at all levels, from early childhood to tertiary and technical and vocational education, hinders the implementation of effective policies. Lack of financial resources can result in inadequate infrastructure, limited access to quality materials and resources, and

inadequate support for teachers and students.

The research also highlighted the lack of reliable data as a significant challenge. Without accurate and up-to-date data on education systems and outcomes, policymakers face difficulties in making informed decisions. Data gaps can lead to policies that are not based on evidence and may not effectively target areas of improvement.

Inaccessible policies were identified as a barrier to effective policy implementation. When policies are not communicated clearly or are difficult to understand, stakeholders may struggle to comply with them or may not be aware of their existence. This can lead to inconsistent or ineffective implementation, undermining the intended goals of the policies.

The study also found that reduced political will and over politicization of policies negatively impact the policy management cycle. When education policies become subject to political agendas or are not prioritized by policymakers, implementation efforts may be compromised, and the desired outcomes may not be achieved.

Low capacity or technical know-how was identified as a key challenge in effectively managing education policies. Insufficient training and professional development opportunities for education professionals can limit their ability to implement policies effectively.

Centralized governance or bureaucracy was identified as a factor contributing to input gaps. When decision-making processes are overly centralized, it can impede effective policy implementation. Decisions may take longer to be made, and local contexts and needs may be overlooked, leading to policies that are not responsive to the diverse realities of different regions or communities.

Inadequate monitoring, assessment, and evaluation were highlighted as crucial parts of the policy management cycle that often face challenges. Without robust mechanisms to monitor and evaluate policy implementation and outcomes, it becomes difficult to identify

areas of improvement and make necessary adjustments.

Corruption was identified as a significant factor undermining the policy management cycle. When resources meant for education are misappropriated or misused due to corrupt practices, it hampers the effective implementation of policies and compromises the quality and accessibility of education.

The research findings enabled the study to answer specific research questions in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, particularly Question 1, Question 2, and Question 3. These answers, presented in the recommendations section, provided insights and suggestions for addressing the identified input gaps in the policy management cycle. By recognizing these factors and understanding their impact, policymakers can work towards developing more inclusive, evidence-based, and effective education policies that address the access, quality, and relevance gaps across different educational tiers.

### **Provide an overview of the policy management cycle, and present areas that have gaps, and would require improvements**

In Liberia, there are deficiencies in the education sector that need to be addressed in order to improve the overall quality and accessibility of education. One crucial aspect is the balance between educational supply and demand. It is important to ensure that the supply of education, such as schools, teachers, and resources, matches the demand from students and the broader community.

The imbalance between educational supply and demand is evident across all levels of education in Liberia. Firstly, there is an access gap, meaning that a significant number of young people have limited access to early childhood education (ECE), primary, secondary, tertiary, and technical and vocational education (TVET). This lack of access prevents many students from pursuing education and limits their opportunities for personal and professional growth.



Secondly, there is a quality gap in education. Insufficient teaching and learning materials, coupled with a shortage of qualified teachers, hinder effective implementation of the curriculum. This results in subpar educational experiences for students, impacting their ability to learn and acquire the necessary skills and knowledge.

Lastly, there is a relevance gap in the education system. The research findings indicate that the government of Liberia has given the least attention to the relevance of education. In today's rapidly changing world, it is crucial for education to equip students with 21st-century skills that are necessary for career growth and livelihood. However, the current curriculum and educational practices may not adequately address these skills, leading to a mismatch between the education provided and the skills demanded by the job market.

Addressing these three factors—access, quality, and relevance—is essential for improving the education sector in Liberia. Efforts should be made to increase access to education, particularly at the early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary, and TVET levels. This can involve building more schools, expanding educational infrastructure, and implementing policies that promote inclusive education.

Improving the quality of education requires investing in teaching and learning materials, as well as providing professional development opportunities for teachers. By ensuring that teachers are well-equipped and qualified, they can effectively implement the curriculum and enhance the learning experience for students.

Lastly, placing greater emphasis on the relevance of education is crucial. This involves aligning the curriculum with the skills and knowledge needed for the modern workforce. Incorporating 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship, can better prepare students for future career opportunities.

Overall, by addressing the deficiencies in educational supply and demand, and giving due attention to access, quality, and relevance, Liberia can work towards creating a more equitable

and effective education system that meets the needs of its students and contributes to national development.

In order to bridge the relevance gap in education, schools need to shift their focus from a knowledge-based approach to a more practical and real-world-oriented model of learning. This means that education should not be limited to abstract concepts but should also equip students with the skills, knowledge, and behavior necessary for success in the real world.

One way to address the relevance gap is by incorporating 21st-century technology into the classroom. Technology plays a significant role in today's society, and integrating it into the learning process can help students develop essential digital literacy skills and adapt to the evolving technological landscape. By utilizing technology, such as computers, tablets, and educational software, students can engage in interactive and immersive learning experiences that simulate real-world scenarios. This approach can enhance their problem-solving, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills which are highly valued in the modern workforce.

Furthermore, technical and vocational education should be introduced at all levels of education to provide students with practical skills that can lead to employment and livelihood opportunities. Recognizing that parents often prioritize education as a means of social advancement and economic stability for their children, offering technical and vocational education can be particularly attractive. Parents may perceive young adults with skills and jobs as better educated and more prepared for success in life compared to those who are unemployed or lack practical skills.

By expanding the availability of technical and vocational education, students can gain specialized skills in areas such as trades, technology, healthcare, and other industries. This can empower them to enter the job market with valuable qualifications and increase their chances of securing gainful employment. Technical and vocational education can also foster

entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities, allowing individuals to create their own livelihoods and contribute to economic growth.

To address quality discrepancies in education, it is important to ensure that the curriculum and associated teaching and learning resources are freely available to teachers and students. Access to comprehensive and up-to-date curriculum materials enables teachers to effectively deliver lessons and facilitate student learning. Providing open access to these resources promotes consistency and equity in education, as all schools and educators can benefit from the same high-quality materials.

Continual Professional Development (CPD) for teachers is crucial in implementing new competency-based curricula. Teachers need training and support to understand and effectively implement the new approaches and methodologies embedded in the curriculum. CPD programs should be designed to enhance teachers' subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, and assessment strategies, enabling them to deliver quality education aligned with the curriculum objectives.

The involvement of higher education stakeholders in K-12 education is essential for a smooth transition and to ensure students' success. Collaboration between secondary schools and higher education institutions can facilitate alignment between secondary and tertiary education, ensuring that students are prepared for the demands of higher education. By sharing expertise, resources, and best practices, higher education stakeholders can contribute to curriculum development, teacher training, and the establishment of pathways for students' academic and career progression.

In terms of financing, relying solely on government subsidies for public schools and students may limit the resources available for quality education. Education stakeholders should explore alternative funding models and strategies to supplement government support. This can involve partnerships with private sector organizations, philanthropic foundations, and

community-based initiatives. Diversifying funding sources can provide additional resources for improving infrastructure, investing in teaching and learning materials, and supporting student scholarships and other educational programs.

Effective administration and leadership are vital components of quality education. School leaders play a crucial role in creating a conducive learning environment, managing resources efficiently, and promoting a culture of continuous improvement. Building the capacity of school leaders through training programs in areas such as project management, grant application writing, business management, and entrepreneurial studies can enhance their ability to effectively lead and manage educational institutions.

By addressing these various aspects of quality education, such as curriculum availability, teacher training, collaboration between educational levels, alternative funding models, and effective administration, stakeholders can work towards improving the overall quality of education. These efforts contribute to creating an environment where students can thrive, acquire relevant skills, and achieve academic success, ultimately leading to positive educational outcomes and societal development.

**Assist policymakers, and educators by compiling an archive of lessons learned from Liberia's policy management process based on best practices from research**

In society, there are often complex problems that require collaborative efforts to find effective solutions. One way to address these challenges is through group conversations involving various stakeholders. These conversations provide a platform for different perspectives and ideas to be shared, enabling the community to collectively determine how to solve problems that impact them.

However, it has been observed that certain stakeholders are often excluded from the policy management cycle. This exclusion can limit the effectiveness of decision-making processes and hinder the development of inclusive solutions. Recognizing this, it is important

to involve stakeholders at all levels including community members, educators, parents, and students, in discussions related to educational policies.

By involving stakeholders and facilitating the exchange of ideas, it becomes possible to harness the collective wisdom and experiences of the community. This approach benefits both the school and the wider community. Educational services are a crucial part of the central government's responsibilities including assessing their impact on residents and ensuring that the educational system serves the needs of the community effectively.

To address the challenges faced by the educational system, collaborations between the community and the government can be forged. Partnerships between these two entities can contribute to improving educational outcomes and supporting government efforts to provide the necessary resources. Such partnerships may involve community organizations, businesses, nonprofit groups, and individuals who are invested in the well-being of the education system. Recognizing the importance of education, it is crucial to prioritize it as a key component of the county's recovery. Just as education has played a significant role in past recoveries, it continues to be a vital factor in addressing societal challenges and ensuring long-term growth and development. The reference to Muralidharan and Sheth (2016) suggests that education has been recognized as a critical element in driving progress and should be given due attention in current and future recovery efforts.

Therefore, group conversations involving stakeholders can be valuable in solving community problems. In the context of education, involving stakeholders and exchanging ideas benefits both the school and the wider community. Collaborations between the community and the government can help address difficulties in the educational system and improve educational outcomes. Education plays a pivotal role in societal recovery and should be prioritized accordingly.

The researcher acknowledged the presence of numerous works of literature that

discuss the actors and circumstances necessary to bridge the input-outcome gaps in policy-making processes in developing countries. These works highlight the challenges faced by such countries including Liberia, in effectively managing policies and achieving desired outcomes. The first issue identified in the literature is the exclusion of stakeholders from the policy management cycle. Stakeholders including community members, civil society organizations, and marginalized groups, should have a voice in decision-making processes. When stakeholders are excluded, their perspectives and expertise are not considered which can result in policies that do not adequately address the needs and aspirations of the population.

**Identify the finest locations in the policy management circle where resources and energy may be used to accelerate progress and deliver better policy outcomes**

Another factor contributing to the input-outcome gaps is the limited allocation of resources. Developing countries often face constraints in terms of financial and human resources which can impede the implementation of policies and programs. Insufficient funding and a lack of personnel can hinder the effective execution of policies, leading to a gap between intended outcomes and actual results.

The availability of reliable data is another crucial aspect highlighted in the literature. Without accurate and up-to-date data, policymakers may struggle to make informed decisions. Data gaps and deficiencies in data collection and analysis can hinder the formulation of evidence-based policies, resulting in ineffective outcomes.

Furthermore, reduced political will can undermine the success of policy implementation. When policymakers lack the commitment and determination to address societal challenges, policy initiatives may not receive the necessary support and resources, leading to limited progress in achieving desired outcomes.

Low capacity or technical know-how among policymakers and government officials is another challenge mentioned in the literature. Adequate understanding of policy

formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes is crucial for effective governance. When there is a lack of skills and expertise, the implementation of policies may be flawed, leading to gaps between intended inputs and desired outcomes.

Inadequate monitoring, assessment, and evaluation mechanisms are also identified as factors contributing to the input-outcome gaps. Without proper monitoring and evaluation, policy makers may not have a clear understanding of the effectiveness of policies and whether they are achieving the desired outcomes. This can hinder the ability to make necessary adjustments and improvements.

Centralized governance and bureaucracy can also create challenges in policy management. When decision-making processes are highly centralized, there may be limited opportunities for participation and input from various stakeholders. Excessive bureaucracy can slow down decision-making processes and impede the efficient implementation of policies. Corruption is another factor mentioned in the literature that can undermine the effectiveness of policies. When corruption is prevalent, resources may be mismanaged or diverted, leading to inefficiencies and the failure to achieve desired outcomes.

Additionally, the inaccessibility of policies can hinder effective implementation. If policies are not communicated clearly or are not easily accessible to relevant stakeholders, there may be a lack of understanding and compliance, leading to gaps between policy inputs and desired outcomes.

Over-politicization of policy processes can also be a challenge. When policies become highly politicized, decision-making may be driven by short-term political considerations rather than long-term societal needs. This can result in policies that do not effectively address the underlying issues and contribute to the input-outcome gaps.

In summary, the literature identifies various factors contributing to the input-outcome gaps in policy management in developing countries like Liberia. These include the

exclusion of stakeholders, limited resources, lack of reliable data, reduced political will, low capacity or technical know-how, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, centralized governance, corruption, inaccessibility of policies, and over-politicization.

### **Present the theoretical foundation of Liberia's education policy management thoughts**

The researcher noted a lack of clarity and specificity in the literature regarding the diagnosis of gaps in Liberia's educational sector. Many of the works reviewed did not clearly indicate the theoretical foundation used to analyze educational policies, the specific stages in the policy management cycle where gaps are most apparent, or how these gaps contribute to the overall outcomes of the sector.

While it is generally recognized that gaps exist in the areas of access, quality, and relevance of education, the literature lacked a comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors that have contributed to these gaps over time. The researcher realized that addressing these gaps requires a deeper analysis of the theoretical and socio-economic issues that have influenced the educational sector in Liberia.

Upon comparing the research results presented in the dissertation with the existing literature, it was discovered that no previous studies on Liberia's education sector had combined the production function, functionalism, and conflict theories in evaluating educational policies. This finding highlights a significant gap in the literature and suggests that a more holistic and multidimensional approach is needed to understand and address the challenges in the educational sector.

The production function theory focuses on inputs, outputs, and the relationship between them in the production process. Applying this theory to educational policies would involve analyzing the resources, such as teachers, infrastructure, and curriculum, and their impact on educational outcomes.



Functionalism theory examines the role of education in society, emphasizing its contribution to social stability and cohesion. By incorporating this theory, researchers can explore how educational policies align with societal needs and promote social integration and development.

Conflict theory, on the other hand, highlights social inequalities and power dynamics. By incorporating this theory, researchers can analyze how educational policies may perpetuate or challenge existing social, economic, and political inequalities in Liberia.

By integrating these three theoretical perspectives, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities and dynamics of educational policies in Liberia. This approach can shed light on the specific stages in the policy management cycle where gaps are most pronounced and how these gaps interact to influence the overall outcomes of the educational sector.

The researcher identified a lack of clarity in the existing literature regarding the diagnosis of gaps in Liberia's educational sector. To address this gap, it is necessary to combine the production function, functionalism, and conflict theories to evaluate educational policies. This multidimensional approach will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and dynamics in the sector and facilitate the development of more effective and inclusive policies.

## **Secondary Results**

Findings from sub-questions contradict Hanushek's (2007) assertion that there is no relationship between the output of the educational process and socio-economic issues such as high fees. The relationship between education outcome and socio-economic indicators can be observed when certain gaps at a lower educational subsector spill into a higher level subsector. For example, weak literacy and numeracy skills at ECE and Primary education affect the quality of products that come into secondary education. If this is caused by limited

expenditure on books and reading/writing materials, travelling to school, school uniform, and feeding, among others, it becomes a serious challenge to mold them into the products that the community would need (Sulochana, 2015).

The research results also confirmed Mishra's (2013) diagnosis that the conflict theory in Liberia is evident since public education is seen as belonging to the lower class while the quest for private education increases for the wealthy. Private education has an overall advantage in the provision of accessible, quality and relevant education.

Reading through much of the literatures, it became evident that Liberia still lags behind in achieving SDG-4 goals despite attempts to focus on achieving the targets. This research largely reveals country-specific drawbacks in policy management across all levels of the educational ladder. This project provided a singular system-wide approach targeting all levels of the educational hierarchy using a global/thematic framework, and accepted theories, and practices to expose the best areas to deploy educational resources to accelerate achievement. As a whole, this dissertation focused on education's purpose, and function. The results are meant to provide a clear understanding of education's purpose to help policymakers make well-informed choices about finding lasting solutions.

While researchers still continue to blame the many years of marginalizing the indigenes, the fourteen years of civil unrest, the Ebola epidemic, corruption, lack of funding as responsible for Liberia's education decline, this research realized a missing link. These factors are in themselves external to the sector, and are all momentary happenings. In other words, although they had an effect on the sector, they were not caused by decisions made within the sector neither had they been perpetual. In fact, it is almost two decades since the silence of the guns in Liberia but the education sector still lags behind. It still suffers low funding, unaligned curriculum, low staffing, a lack of teaching and learning materials, and lack of meaningful engagement with the stakeholders. This has limited access, quality, and relevance of education.

Through a comparative analysis in literature, it became clearer that some countries which have suffered similar situations, are ahead of Liberia's educational rankings. This therefore brings us to the conclusion that there is the need to eliminate the servitude norms which have knowingly, and unknowingly been perpetuated by macro level actors, and evolved through the policy management process leading to input and outcome gaps in Liberia's educational sector. Ultimately, how Liberian policymakers define the value of education will decide how they utilize it if they want citizens to pursue it at a higher level, and reach their greatest potential.

### **Recommendations for Application**

This section besides being a formal part of any research process, in this study's design, it attempted to answer question three of the study. **Q3.** —Which policy interventions could be most effective to improve the policy management process so as to accelerate the achievement of the SDG-4 goals in Liberia? To answer this question, the researcher found it pertinent to first analyze, interpret, and discuss the findings from the interview data, evaluate them, and then suggest plausible interventions that would effectively improve policy management in Liberia's education sector.

Liberia's post-conflict education sector still faces several obstacles. Yet, efficient and effective educational policy management remains a fundamental aspect of socioeconomic development of the country. In addition, it is imperative that the educational policy produces citizens that have the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that can promote harmony. Bearing this in mind, policy recommendations contained herein are informed by the findings of the study but also by the context within which they are meant to be implemented. Here below, the researcher provides some of the key contextual aspects that informed the policy recommendations in addition to the empirical evidence of this study:

- i. Recognition of education's ability to mitigate conflict, and fragility, and the repercussions of not educating people is a vital first step in taking action. Even while these difficulties are becoming more well known, they still need to be better highlighted especially outside the educated elites, and wealthy communities, where learning is typically considered an expense rather than an investment in societal well-being (Malta et al., 2019).
- ii. The core reasons and legacies of conflict in Liberia are still in play, and continue to be played out today. Land conflicts, weak, and the exclusionary rule of law, institutional, and societal inequalities are a few examples of the many problems external to the education sector but with greater impact on the educational outcomes including widespread poverty, and unemployment.
- iii. According to reports, and field interviews, although the last two decades have witnessed considerable obvious evidence of stability, such as better physical security, economic activity, and enhanced openness, and accountability, many of the ongoing dangers to stability are linked to long-standing socio-economic issues, and legacies of past instability, and war, raising the likelihood of escalating tension in the future. Such difficulties must be addressed promptly if peace is to be maintained (Michel et al., 2018). However, many of the government's official inclusionary rhetoric, policies, and practice are still far from systematic.
- iv. Limited accessibility, and subpar quality, lack of economic opportunities for many young people, and a lack of integration into relevant skill opportunities (Newbrander et al., 2011), and a weak human capital basis are only some of the issues that education policies must begin to address.
- v. Instead of a total change in the education model, reconstruction efforts following the war have centered on restoring education as rapidly as possible, returning it to its pre-conflict state (although with improved access). As a result, fundamental

problems concerning rebuilding the entire system for global competitiveness, and relevance have not been adequately addressed. A long-term commitment and effort are required to reform, and improve education systems that were in place before the beginning of the war (Saran et al., 2020).

- vi. Many people in Liberia believe that the state's foundational practices, and institutions are to blame for the country's current state. Liberia's educational system has historically been restrictive, contributing to conflict. Schools in Liberia have always been geared toward the country's wealthy elite while the rest of the population has had to make up for poorer quality education with limited accessibility.
- vii. Recognizing that educational inequity contributed significantly to the outbreak of the crises, the government took an early decision to encourage equitable access to education for all citizens. This effort addressed issues connected to curriculum, textbooks, and teacher training to enhance the overall quality of education. Such quick impact modes of reform are no longer sustainable due to global competitiveness in the relevance of education. The need therefore to digitize education by ensuring that every child has access to educational gadgets which limit the use of textbooks, is essential.
- viii. Growing, and improving service delivery has been difficult because of government institutions' limited ability, and resources (Asongu, 2017). Consequently, access to high-quality education continues to be restricted, and mostly based on factors such as geography, wealth, and political affiliation. With security, economic, and social growth at stake, quick and effective action is needed to rectify current faults and openly track discrepancies in access and quality to ensure the nation's long-term viability.

- ix. Sustained investment, policy attention, monitoring, and follow-up should be prioritized for this goal since government goodwill is an essential but insufficient condition of success. This may be achieved through efficiently and effectively implemented educational policies.

However, these gaps in Liberia's education policy management cycle, can be addressed by suitable initiatives which are evidence based, such as the recommendations given in this report. Following these guidelines would be a good starting point for policymakers, and members of the general public to consider when implementing new policies. Data based on participants' opinions, document searches, and the researcher's interpretation of the findings led to these suggestions.

The recommendations summarized below are based on the identified problems, barriers, and or failures in the educational policy management cycle putting into consideration the contextual aspects that perhaps have an influence on the success of the educational policies. The suggested policy interventions are highlighted in tables 27 and 28 below. The policy interventions in Table 27 below are intended to address the policy gaps at the input level.

**Table 27***Summary of the suggested Policy Interventions for Input Gaps*

<b>INPUT Gaps</b>	<b>Policy Intervention</b>
Exclusion of Stakeholders	(i) Include stakeholder representatives in the policy formulation process. (ii) Communicate regularly with them. (iii) Establish communities of practice on policy cycle management to articulate stakeholder issues.
Limited Allocation of Resources	(i) Allocate at least 4 to 6 percent of Liberia's GDP or at least 15 to 20 percent of the country's total public expenditure to education, with a focus on basic education. (ii) Allocate the resources proportionally to the needs of each subsector of education.
Lack of Reliable Data	(i) Strengthen the country's bureau of statistics to collect more reliable data. (ii) Provide adequate funding to educational research. (iii) Provide adequate funding for the sector's monitoring and evaluation. (iv) Build the human resource capacity of the ministry's department responsible for monitoring and evaluation.
Reduced Political Will	(i) Strengthen familiarity and trust between civil society and state actors. (ii) Seek critical collaborations with various actors in the policy management cycle. (iii) Lobby, and make use of the legal/policy reforms, and frameworks with the politicians. (iv) Demonstrate the clear benefits of educational policies to the political class. (v) Build political self-interest among politicians in educational policies.
Low Capacity or Technical Know-How	(i) Invest in teacher training, and educational policy planning, and management to develop both administrative and pedagogical leadership. (ii) Engage competent technocrats in the educational policy management cycle.
Inadequate Monitoring, and Assessment	(i) Invest in developing the country's educational monitoring, and evaluation system. (ii) Develop a national monitoring and evaluation framework for tracking educational policy performance.
Centralized Governance/Bureaucracy	(i) Adhere to the frameworks for devolution of authority to lower level governments. (ii) Lower level governments should build the capacity to manage the educational policy cycle.
Corruption	(i) Enforce the transparency, and accountability legal framework at all levels of government to close the gaps leading to corruption. (ii) Sensitize the stakeholders about their right against corrupt practices. (iii) Severely hold accountable those found corrupt in accordance with the national legal framework.
Inaccessibility of policies	(i) Engage with relevant stakeholders at every level of policy management. (ii) Create avenues such as radio/TV programs where public officials explain educational policies to the communities. (iii) Translate the policies into local languages to make them easy to read and understand.
Over politicization of policies	(i) Build the capacity and power of the teacher unions in the country to counter balance other political centers. (ii) Strengthen stakeholder groups to engage with politicians and lobby for support. (iii) Develop coalitions with both state, and non-state actors to participate in the agenda setting of educational policies.

The suggested policy interventions for addressing the outcome gaps are provided in Table 28 below.

**Table 28***Summary of the suggested Policy Interventions for Output Gaps*

<b>OUTCOME Gaps</b>	<b>Policy Interventions</b>
Access to Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Increase the number of public schools in the country. This includes establishing seed schools where they are lacking.</li> <li>(ii) Reduce the cost of education by public funding of all learning costs other than tuition.</li> <li>(iii) Subsidize private schools through paying for teachers, and providing appropriate teaching, and learning materials like computers, textbooks, laboratory equipment, and skills training tools for courses like carpentry, electronics, motor vehicles maintenance, construction, plumbing.</li> <li>(iv) Sensitize parents about sending and sustaining children at schools.</li> <li>(v) Emphasize inclusive education.</li> <li>(vi) Adopt appropriate teaching and learning tools, and models including use of ITC for traditional, and blended learning.</li> <li>(vii) Increase resources for teachers to keep them motivated and at school.</li> </ul>
Quality of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Make funding schools a priority, and increase the funding to the level recommended for implementation of the SDG-4 goals.</li> <li>(ii) Build more classroom blocks to reduce overcrowding in schools.</li> <li>(iii) Train teachers in teaching approaches that enhance learning including making continuous teacher professional development a priority for all and part of performance assessment, and promotion.</li> <li>(iv) Involve the community in classroom running, and curriculum building.</li> <li>(v) Provide appropriate teaching and learning materials for both public, and private schools.</li> <li>(vi) Enhance school inspection standards to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning meets the minimum standards.</li> </ul>
Relevance of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Put into account local traditions and institutions other than importing educational policies from America wholesale.</li> <li>(ii) Include positive cultural practices of the society.</li> <li>(iii) Include the belief systems of the community.</li> <li>(iv) Incorporate the skill sets needed by the community.</li> <li>(v) Include the community in school activities.</li> <li>(vi) Provide the necessary teaching, and learning materials.</li> <li>(vii) Build robust school to community linkages more especially at TVET level to capture and incorporate the needs of the community, and internship programs.</li> <li>(viii) Train teachers and educators on more appropriate instructional strategies to make learning more effective, and development of the right skills, knowledge, and behaviors needed by the society.</li> <li>(ix) Adopt appropriate instructional strategies for curriculum and delivery that promote critical thinking, creativity, and innovation.</li> </ul>

To implement the above mentioned suggestions, the following stakeholders need to take the lead in spearheading the application of the specific suggestions that are considered to fall under their jurisdiction. This will ease the identification and operationalization of the suggested interventions.



## **Recommendation for leadership in primary, secondary and higher education**

As Primary, Secondary (Ndwandwe et al., 2018), and Higher Education Institutions in Liberia continue to be built, it is imperative that the livelihood requirements of the country's youth, who have historically been denied relevant skill training associated with TVET schooling, be addressed. While primary, and secondary education has gotten most of the focus, and resources, this study found that in a situation where primary education has received the most attention, and resources compared to post-primary education, its resources are still inadequate and they have not addressed the demands of young people's livelihoods appropriately. By giving basic education, and skills training, we can avoid any destabilizing influence from disengaged young people, regarded as one of the most potential spoilers of peace, from arising.

Steps need to be done to understand better the purpose, and function of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) for overage, and dropped out children, particularly its link to primary education, and the TVET system on the one hand, and the other youth programs, and livelihood training is important. These should include training in the appropriate skills, knowledge, and behaviors that the society needs including computer skills – digital skills, and technical competences.

There should be greater effort to collaborate across sectors, and ministries, and with the private sector, and non-governmental groups. Programs aimed at helping young people find work, and learn a trade or technical skills should be thoughtfully crafted considering the needs, and goals of the individuals they serve, and the actual environment in which they live.

Liberia has made a variety of steps to encourage local engagement. PTAs, SMCs, and County, and District Education Officers have been given the power to make decisions on behalf of their schools as stakeholder communities. Therefore, communities, and education authorities near schools have a lot of potential, and should be sensitized to participate more in

the school activities. Taking advantage of and re-energizing these can help reduce some pressure on the government while also encouraging a greater sense of local ownership. Developing supporting tools and procedures which involve communities, women, and youth is essential to maximizing local resources. It is possible that a small amount of money invested in supporting community initiatives could have an enormous impact on the local economy, and help to build a legacy of active civil society organizations at both local, and national levels, zealous in protecting their members' rights, and prerogatives as well as ensuring that the schools run more efficiently and effectively (Menashy & Dryden, 2015).

Encourage continuous teacher development programs, training of teachers in pedagogical practices that improve teaching, and learning, development of the desired skills, knowledge, and behaviors in the communities. Ensure that teachers adopt appropriate pedagogical competencies to deliver the curriculum.

### **The following is a list of Recommendations for Policymakers**

Provide the Ministry of Education with enough budgetary allocations to procure more school supplies, and build more classrooms in public schools to accommodate students moving from rural, and other metropolitan areas to urban areas. This will address issues of quality, and access. In addition, plant seed schools in rural areas to absorb the demand for education at local communities.

Work with the Ministry of Education, and the PTA to further increase the role, and responsibilities of community members in community partnership. This will help address governance, and accountability issues. Moreover, involving communities in classroom running and curriculum development will ensure that skills, knowledge, and behaviors relevant to the community are developed. Moreover, it will improve community participation, knowledge of the policies, and local level support, among others.

To help reduce reliance on government subsidy, and support, increase budgetary support to help build the capacity of school leaders in areas such as project writing, and management, grant application writing and management, business management, and entrepreneurial studies so as to help them source additional funding for education support.

Solicit feedback from staff, parents, and the PTA during the policy-making process and provide opportunities for teachers and administrators to get regular or more professional development training to enhance their performance. Build mechanisms to enforce anti-corruption mechanisms in the country to ensure proper use of educational resources. In addition, ensure adequate political will to support implementation of educational policies in the country.

### **The following is a list of recommendations for community stakeholders**

Encourage, and form partnerships with central government, and other commercial, and public organizations to give training, and develop the skills necessary to build human potential in the schools.

Lobby politicians to provide more resources to provide educational facilities that help promote teaching and learning at schools. In addition, visit schools regularly, and ensure that the school leaders and teachers do what they are supposed to do.

Hold regular meetings to discuss issues impacting the school, and work with school, and education officials to find solutions. This would include sensitizing parents about their role in policy management, support to the schools, and skills, knowledge, and behavior development.

Strengthen familiarity, and trust between civil society, state, and non-state actors. Demonstrate to other stakeholders of the clear benefits of educational policies at the grassroots level to ensure effective participation of the community.

In a nutshell, being knowledgeable of these practical recommendations, and with readiness to undertake appropriate policy adjustments in the sector, educational leadership, policymakers, and stakeholders representing the political, theoretical, and technical extremes of the policy management cycle can better predict, and manage inputs, and outcomes including any shortcomings in the process that may threaten realization of the SDG-4 goals ahead of 2030.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Liberia's education system is an example of how education inequalities can hurt the economic system if used repeatedly. An important finding from this study shows how those who have been marginalized can rise to become oppressors themselves and how education was used to achieve this goal. Essentially, education in Liberia was used as a tool to oppress the majority of the people (Michel et al., 2018).

There must be a thorough investigation of how a war-torn country might be rebuilt to stop the vicious cycle that happens when the methods of the dominant culture become the ways of the oppressed. Because of the connection between the above-mentioned ideological frameworks and education, more research is needed to look into studies that would allow the dismantling of the educational system previous to develop new skills, knowledge, behaviors, and cultural values that promote peace and harmony.

The entire education sector of Liberia has to be reconstructed at this time (Alfaro & Jones, 2018). To do this, people should be aware that new educational systems may again be highly influenced by cultural capital. Therefore, a new paradigm for indigenous research may be developed by establishing counter-practices as they relate to indigenous cultures and movements historically, culturally, and socially. This is necessary because research has proven that historical, and philosophical foundations have their way of establishing superiority, such as colonial education, and the idea of space, and time. Indigenous intellectuals in their own

cultures also reported that informal information-gathering techniques were institutionalized, and there is an ongoing danger to indigenous communities about their control of knowledge and cultural traditions (Goren & Yemini, 2017).

Additionally, indigenous researchers who research indigenous communities emphasize that decolonization, healing, mobilization, and changes are all included in the framework for an indigenous research agenda. Survival, recovery, progress, and self-determination are some community statuses that may be accomplished in this way. It is reported that western superiority has been emphasized in Language and education (Mensah et al., 2021). Because indigenous research may contribute to a broader body of knowledge on societal value, a better system (economic, educational, social and political) may be formed in the country if all Liberians, wealthy or poor, can truly comprehend the challenges that experienced concerning obtaining little or no education. Liberia's political, social, and economic isolation of the majority of the population directly resulted from a lack of education in the country, as illustrated throughout this dissertation (Muralidharan & Sheth, 2016).

Scholars and educators in Liberia, and Africa should collaborate to find models for successful intercultural coexistence (Gaspar et al., 2019). In particular, educational models should incorporate the histories of all cultures. These models should show how people from different cultures can live together peacefully while respecting each group's cultural norms. In the long run, indigenous researchers' knowledge production will lead to cultural renewal, eventually ending the dominance of the Americo-Liberian culture in political, cultural, and economic matters.

As a historically oppressed group, it is important to understand how they could accomplish these advanced degrees in education, and still maintain sovereignty. For Liberia, how education was valued, installed, and passed down from generation to generation can be studied, and passed down to future generations. This way, all students whether in Liberia or

elsewhere will endeavor to achieve higher levels of academic success (Liu & Garcia, 2017) to break the economic disparity, and inequality created by the old education system.

Additionally, as noted by Newbrander et al. (2011), Liberia's education system is very similar to the one that existed, and continues to exist in the United States at the time. Interviewees confirmed that the educational system in Liberia particularly private schools was comparable to that in the United States before 1980 based on descriptions of their curriculum. To many, Liberia's scenario was one-of-a-kind, marked by distinct aspects of schooling. However, much of what's happening now does not resemble the American educational system. Therefore, there is a need to establish a Liberian, and American education research program to comprehend the link between American and Liberian education and to discover where deviations are significant, and why they occurred to make plausible recommendations for improvement. The recent changes that have occurred in the evaluation of learning are positive measures to face the processes of educational exclusion. It is necessary, however, that the evaluation can also assess qualitative aspects that improve the appreciation of the contributions of the student body (Noguera, 2009).

The strengthening of retention factors is a fundamental action that should not be neglected. There are three factors identified in this study that should be favored: a) student motivation, understood as the student's ability to remain in the institution despite family difficulties, (b) family support, specifically family dynamics with an improvement of the socioeconomic aid that is already provided, and c) actions, at the institutional level, for the selection of teachers, the attention of seventh graders, the adjustment of hours, recreational activities, and the revision and improvement of the curriculum (Vanderlinde, & van Braak, 2010). This would provide helpful information that can reshape knowledge about the suspects and their effects on society.

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## APPENDICES

### a. Appendix: A

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRES

##### General Instructions

Hello, thank you for choosing to participate in this research survey intended to discover potential gaps in the analysis, formulation, implementation, and evaluation of educational policies in Liberia. These are questions for a research project I am conducting for a Doctorate of Education at UNICAF University based in Zambia. This survey has only 35 questions and should take you less than 20 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in how you feel judging from your experience in the sector.

By participating in this survey, you are indicating that you understand that your responses are anonymous and will not be identified with you in any way and that you are at least 18 years old. You may skip any question that you find intrusive or offensive but it will help me if you respond to as many questions as you feel comfortable with.

Thank you. I really appreciate your help!

Please circle the letter bearing your best opinion on question 1-19 below

1. Which level of the education ladder are you mostly involved or very knowledgeable?
  - a. Early Childhood Education
  - b. Primary Education
  - c. Secondary Education
  - d. Higher Education
  - e. Technical and Vocational Education and Training
2. Do education laws, education policies and objectives exist which explicitly refers to your area of the system?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
3. How accessible are these policies to you
  - a. Highly accessible
  - b. Likely accessible
  - c. Not accessible
  - d. Choose not to comment
4. How often are you evaluated on the implementation of the policies in your area of work?
  - a. Always evaluated
  - b. Sometimes evaluated
  - c. Never evaluated
  - d. Choose not to comment
5. Do you feel your involvement in the formulation of policies in your area of work?
  - a. Always involved
  - b. Sometimes involved
  - c. Never involved
  - d. Choose not to comment

6. Are there gaps in the policy management Circle (analysis, formulation, implementation, evaluation) of Educational Policies in Liberia?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know
7. Which part of the policy management circle do you think gaps are mostly evident
  - a. Policy Analysis
  - b. Policy Formulation
  - c. Policy Implementation
  - d. Policy Evaluation
8. The policy circle basically has two stages, input (analysis, formulation) and outcome (implementation and evaluation) which stage is gaps mostly observed in your area
  - a. Input
  - b. Outcome
  - c. Choose not to comment
9. Which of the following factors do you think mostly influence the analysis and formulation of education policy in Liberia
  - a. Political orientation
  - b. Technical ability
  - c. Theoretical orientation
  - d. Choose not to comment
10. Which of the following factor do you mostly blamed for policy failure in your area
  - a. Lack of Technical knowledge in policy process
  - b. Lack of Scholarly knowledge in policy process
  - c. Lack of political will in policy process
  - d. Choose not to comment
11. Which single most important factor will you blame for policy failure in Liberia
  - a. Administrative factors
  - b. Political factors
  - c. Economic factors
  - d. No opinion
12. Which of the following factor is mostly responsible for gaps observed at the **analysis** stage of policy process
  - a. Administrative factors
  - b. Political factors
  - c. Economic factors
  - d. No opinion
13. Which of the following factor is mostly responsible for gaps observed at the **formulation** stage of policy process
  - a. Administrative factors
  - b. Political factors
  - c. Economic factors
  - d. No opinion
14. Which of the following factor is mostly responsible for gaps observed at the **implementation** stage of policy process
  - 5.8 Administrative factors
  - 5.9 Political factors
  - 5.10 Economic factors
  - 5.11 No opinion
15. Which of the following factor is mostly responsible for gaps observed at the



**evaluation** stage of policy process

- a. Administrative factors
  - b. Political factors
  - c. Economic factors
  - d. No opinion
16. How many people live in the city, town, or area where you work?
- a. More than 500,000 people
  - b. 100,001 to 500,000 people
  - c. 50,001 to 100,000 people
  - d. 15,001 to 50,000 people
  - e. 3,001 to 15,000 people
  - f. 3,000 people or fewer
17. Is your school a public or a private school? (Public school is a school managed directly or indirectly by a public education authority, government agency, or governing board appointed by government or elected by public franchise and private school is a school managed directly or indirectly by a non-government organization; e.g. a church, trade union, business, or other private institution.)
- a. Public
  - b. Private
18. Some schools organize instruction differently for students with different abilities. What is your school's policy about this for students? Students are grouped by ability
- a. For all subjects
  - b. For some subjects
  - c. Not for any subjects
19. What is the average size of classes in your school? (Please select one response.)
- a. 15 or fewer
  - b. 16-20 students
  - c. 21-25 students
  - d. 26-30 students
  - e. 31-35 students
  - f. 36-40 students
  - g. 41-45 students
  - h. 46-50 students
  - i. More than 50 students
20. Which of the following categories of policy actors do you think is mostly responsible for the gaps experienced in your area of work? Underline one option on each row

Macro Level (ex. Ministers, directors, politicians)	Mostly responsible	Likely responsible	Sometimes responsible	Not Responsible
Meso Level ( ex. CEOs, DEOs, Board of trustees, proprietors)	Mostly responsible	Likely responsible	Sometimes responsible	Not Responsible
Micro Levels (Teachers, principals, parents)	Mostly responsible	Likely responsible	Sometimes responsible	Not Responsible

21. Which internal factor is most responsible for gaps at input stage of the policy

managementcircle in your area of work?

Policy Analysis Stage						
	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low	No Comment
Exclusion of stakeholders	5	4	3	2	1	0
limited allocation of resources	5	4	3	2	1	0
Lack of or reliable data,	5	4	3	2	1	0
reduced political will	5	4	3	2	1	0
low capacity or and technical know-how	5	4	3	2	1	0
inadequate monitoring and assessment	5	4	3	2	1	0
centralized governance/Bureaucracy	5	4	3	2	1	0
Corruption	5	4	3	2	1	0

Policy formulation Stage						
	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low	No Comment
Exclusion of stakeholders	5	4	3	2	1	0
limited allocation of resources	5	4	3	2	1	0
Lack of or unreliable data,	5	4	3	2	1	0
reduced political will	5	4	3	2	1	0
low capacity or and technical know-how	5	4	3	2	1	0
inadequate monitoring and assessment	5	4	3	2	1	0
centralized governance/Bureaucracy	5	4	3	2	1	0
Corruption	5	4	3	2	1	0

#### Policy Implementation Stage

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low	No Comment
Exclusion of stakeholders	5	4	3	2	1	0
limited allocation of resources	5	4	3	2	1	0
Lack of or unreliable data,	5	4	3	2	1	0
reduced political will	5	4	3	2	1	0
low capacity or and technical know-how	5	4	3	2	1	0
inadequate monitoring and assessment	5	4	3	2	1	0
centralized governance/Bureaucracy	5	4	3	2	1	0
Corruption	5	4	3	2	1	0

#### Policy Evaluation Stage

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low	No Comment
Exclusion of stakeholders	5	4	3	2	1	0
limited allocation of resources	5	4	3	2	1	0
Lack of or unreliable data,	5	4	3	2	1	0
reduced political will	5	4	3	2	1	0
low capacity or and technical know-how	5	4	3	2	1	0
inadequate monitoring and assessment	5	4	3	2	1	0
centralized governance/Bureaucracy	5	4	3	2	1	0
Corruption	5	4	3	2	1	0

22. Rate the following factors as they relate to access, quality and relevance indicators in your area of work

**Barriers to Access in your school**

	<b>Very High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Very Low</b>	<b>No Comment</b>
Lack of facility to cater to students with special needs	5	4	3	2	1	0

Overage students	5	4	3	2	1	0
Inadequate sanitation and WASH facilities	5	4	3	2	1	0
Limited space in school	5	4	3	2	1	0
Uneducated and demotivated parents	5	4	3	2	1	0
Distance of school to community	5	4	3	2	1	0
High school fees	5	4	3	2	1	0
Lack of feeding opportunity for students	5	4	3	2	1	0
Teacher not attending classes regularly	5	4	3	2	1	0
Issues of gender, health, nutrition, limiting access	5	4	3	2	1	0

**Barriers to quality in your school**

	<b>Very High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Very Low</b>	<b>No Comment</b>
School leadership challenge	5	4	3	2	1	0
Limited opportunity for professional growth	5	4	3	2	1	0
No feedback to teachers on teaching practices	5	4	3	2	1	0
Limited or no classroom observation and supervision	5	4	3	2	1	0
Teachers have little or no training and lacks content knowledge and pedagogical skills	5	4	3	2	1	0
Classroom not conducive to support teaching and learning	5	4	3	2	1	0
Absence of teaching learning materials	5	4	3	2	1	0
Absence of the national curriculum in schools	5	4	3	2	1	0

**Barriers to relevance in your school**

	<b>Very High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Very Low</b>	<b>No Comment</b>
Lack of Technology to support teaching and learning	5	4	3	2	1	0
Limited teaching aids	5	4	3	2	1	0
Lack of technical skills to facilitate teaching	5	4	3	2	1	0
Curriculum is more knowledge focus than competence oriented	5	4	3	2	1	0
Lack of Practical tools to demonstrate competence.	5	4	3	2	1	0
	5	4	3	2	1	0
Limited apprenticeship opportunity for students and graduates	5	4	3	2	1	0
Limited capacity for quality Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs	5	4	3	2	1	0
Limited access to internet facilities	5	4	3	2	1	0
Limited materials for the acquisition of basic skills (literacy, numeracy and skills for life) is limited	5	4	3	2	1	0

**23. Rate the following factors as they relate to output and outcome gaps in your area**

	<b>Very High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Very Low</b>	<b>No Comment</b>
Teachers' job satisfaction	5	4	3	2	1	0
Teacher's opportunities for professional development	5	4	3	2	1	0
Teachers' understanding of the school's curricular goals	5	4	3	2	1	0
Teachers' degree of success in implementing the school's curriculum	5	4	3	2	1	0
Teachers' expectations for student achievement	5	4	3	2	1	0
Parental support for student achievement	5	4	3	2	1	0
Parental involvement in school activities	5	4	3	2	1	0
Students' regard for school property	5	4	3	2	1	0
Students' desire to do well in school	5	4	3	2	1	0
Issues of gender, health, nutrition,	5	4	3	2	1	0

24. Is your school's capacity to provide instruction affected by a shortage or inadequacy of any of the following?

	<b>Very High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Very Low</b>	<b>No Comment</b>
Qualified teachers	5	4	3	2	1	0
Library materials	5	4	3	2	1	0
Laboratory equipment and materials	5	4	3	2	1	0
Computers for instruction and learning	5	4	3	2	1	0
Special equipment for students with disabilities	5	4	3	2	1	0
Instructional space (e.g., classrooms)	5	4	3	2	1	0
Heating/cooling and lighting systems	5	4	3	2	1	0
Budget for supplies (e.g., paper, pencils)	5	4	3	2	1	0
Instructional materials (e.g., textbook)	5	4	3	2	1	0

25. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your school's capacity to enhance learning and teaching using digital devices? (Please select one response in each row.)

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>No Comment</b>
Teachers are provided with incentives to integrate digital devices in their teaching	5	4	3	2	1
An effective online learning support platform is available	5	4	3	2	1
Effective professional resources for teachers to learn how to use digital devices are available	5	4	3	2	1
Teachers have sufficient time to prepare lessons integrating digital devices	5	4	3	2	1
Teachers have the necessary technical and pedagogical skills to integrate digital devices in instruction	5	4	3	2	1
The availability of adequate software is sufficient	5	4	3	2	1
The number of digital devices for instruction is sufficient	5	4	3	2	1
The school's Internet bandwidth or speed is insufficient	5	4	3	2	1
The number of digital devices connected to the Internet is sufficient	5	4	3	3	1

26. Approximately what percentage of students in your school has the following background? Fill in each blank with one of the following options

- More than 50%
  - 26 to 50%
  - 11 to 25%
  - 0 to 10%
- b. Come from economically very disadvantaged homes \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Come from economically affluent homes \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Comes from somewhat affluent homes \_\_\_\_\_

27. How difficult is it to fill teaching vacancies for this school year for the following subjects?

Fill in each blank with the letter that match your response

- a. Very difficult
- b. Somewhat difficult
- c. Easy to fill vacancies
- d. Were no vacancies in this subject
- Mathematics \_\_\_\_\_
  - Early Childhood Education \_\_\_\_\_
  - Physics \_\_\_\_\_
  - Computer science /information technology \_\_\_\_\_
  - Chemistry \_\_\_\_\_
  - Arts Subjects \_\_\_\_\_
  - Reading \_\_\_\_\_
  - Phonics \_\_\_\_\_

28. In your school, are any of the following used to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers?

Fill in one circle for each row with.

- a. Very often
- b. Sometimes
- c. Not often
- d. Never
- Observations by the principal or senior staff \_\_\_\_\_
  - Observations by inspectors or other persons external to the school \_\_\_\_\_
  - Student achievements in standard exams \_\_\_\_\_

29. Teacher peer review \_\_\_\_\_

30. How often does each of the following problem behaviors occur among students in your school? If the behavior occurs, how severe a problem does it present?

- a. Serious problem
- b. Minor problem
- c. Not a problem
- Arriving late at school \_\_\_\_\_
  - Absenteeism (i.e., unjustified absences) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Skipping class <hours/periods> \_\_\_\_\_
  - Classroom disturbance \_\_\_\_\_
  - Cheating \_\_\_\_\_
  - Vandalism \_\_\_\_\_
  - Theft \_\_\_\_\_
  - Intimidation or verbal abuse of other students \_\_\_\_\_

- Physical injury to other students \_\_\_\_\_
- Intimidation or verbal abuse of teachers or staff \_\_\_\_\_

31. About what percentage of your total funding for a typical school year comes from the following sources? (Please enter a number for each response. Enter —0 (zero) if there are none.) Government (includes departments, local, regional, state and national)

- a. Student fees or school charges paid by parents \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Benefactors, donations, bequests, sponsorships \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Fundraising/Investments \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Personal funding \_\_\_\_\_ Total

100% Consistency check/soft reminder if the sum is not 100.

32. We are interested in the options parents have when choosing a school for their children. Which of the following statements best describes the schooling available to students in your location? (Please select one response.)

- a. There are two or more other schools in this area that compete for our students.
- b. There is one other school in this area that competes for our students.
- c. There are no other schools in this area that compete for our students.

33. How often the following factors are considered when students are admitted to your school? (Please select one letter and place it in each row.)

- a. Never
- b. Sometimes
- c. Always
- Student's record of academic performance (including placement tests) \_\_\_\_\_
- Recommendation of feeder schools \_\_\_\_\_
- Parents' endorsement of the instructional or religious philosophy of the school \_\_\_\_\_
- Whether the student requires or is interested in a special program \_\_\_\_\_
- Preference given to family members of current or former students \_\_\_\_\_
- Residence in a particular area \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

34. Which of the following methods was used to cover vacancies in the last year in your schools? Please circle one option

- a. A fully qualified teacher was hired on a permanent or temporary basis = Yes No
- b. A person with less than full qualification was hired = Yes = No
- c. A planned course offer was cancelled Yes No
- d. The sizes of some of the classes were expanded Yes No
- e. Sections (courses) were added to other teachers' normal teaching hours Yes No

35. Which ways does your school support or encourage the professional development of teachers? (By professional development we mean any activity that develops an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher.). Please circle one option

- a. The school has a separate budget for the professional development of teachers Yes No

- b. The school provides time for teachers for professional development (e.g., by building in professional days within the regular school year, by organizing rotated schedules for PD and organizing replacement for teachers attending courses). Yes No
- c. The school organizes staff development activities (e.g., peer observation of classes, mentoring of young teachers, staff conferences on particular educational subjects, participation in developmental work, action research) Yes No
- d. The school collects and circulates information on professional development courses in the school district Yes No
- e. Other

36. As part of this program, how often does your school use the following methods of career counseling? By career counseling we mean any systematic effort by the school to assist students in making decisions on further education and/or transition to the labor market. If the services below are provided for your students, fill out this table even if career counseling is the responsibility of an out-of-school organization. Circle one option in each row.

1=Never or rarely 2=Sometimes 3=Often or always

- a. Specific classes are set aside in the curriculum for this purpose 1 2 3
- b. Subject matter teachers include a module in their teaching schedule focused on career counseling related to the subject 1 2 3
- c. A specific guidance plan is provided for all students along the whole duration of the program 1 2 3
- d. Information about possible careers is provided to all students through occasional classes or lectures 1 2 3
- e. Personal guidance is provided by a tutor and/or school counselor 1 2 3
- f. Informal guidance is given to students 1 2 3
- g. The school invites employers and/or practitioners to talk to students within or outside instruction time 1 2 3
- h. The school organizes visits for students to employment organizations and/or counseling services 1 2 3
- i. The school organizes visits to institutes of further education 1 2 3



## **b. Appendix B**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE**

#### General Instructions

Hello, thank you for choosing to participate in this research interview intended to discover potential gaps in the analysis, formulation, implementation, and evaluation of educational policies in Liberia. These are questions for a research project I am conducting for a Doctorate of Education at UNICAF University based in Zambia. This interview has only 18 questions and should take less than 20 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in how you feel judging from your experience in the sector.

Thank you. I really appreciate your help!

1. Which level of the education ladder are you mostly involved or very knowledgeable?
2. How accessible are education policies and objectives which explicitly refer to your area of the system?
3. When was the last time you were evaluated for the policies in your area of work? Whodid the evaluation?
4. Have you or any member of your team ever consulted during the crafted of a particularpolicy? If yes which one. If no, how do you feel implementing a policy you are unaware about?
5. Which part of the policy management circle do you think gaps are mostly evident
6. The policy circle basically has two stages, input (analysis, formulation) and outcome (implementation and evaluation) which stage are gaps mostly observed in your area. Can you give example?
7. Which category of policy actors do you hold mostly responsible for gaps in the sector
8. According to Head (2008) the policy process should involve the combination of political will, Technicalability and scholarly knowledge. Which of the three is most evident and which is mostly ignored. Why do you feel so?
9. Which three internal factors are most responsible for gaps at stages of policy management in your area of work?
10. Which three most important factor mostly affect access to school in your area
11. Which three most important factor mostly affect quality of school in your area
12. Which three most important factors mostly affect relevance of education in your

area?

13. The majority of students in your school come from which background?
14. What is your thought on Continual Professional Development and how regular has it been in your area? What would you recommend? How difficult is it to fill teaching vacancies for this school year for the following subjects? Very difficult
15. Is your school's capacity to provide instruction affected by a shortage or inadequacy of any of the following?
16. Is your school a public or a private school?
17. What do you consider your greatest challenge? How could you suggest remedy for this challenge both internally and externally
18. Which of the methods was used to cover vacancies in the last year in your school?
19. How often your school does conduct career counseling for schools? Are your graduates satisfy with their career?

**c. Appendix C****Participants Location**

#### d. Appendix D: Map of Liberia

