

Assessing the Government's Commitment to Free Quality School Education in Sierra Leone: Achievements, Challenges, and Future Directions.

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ABSTRACT:

The 1960 UNESCO Resolution and the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All call aimed to ensure equality in education and non-discrimination in access to learning opportunities for under-served groups. These documents have influenced national laws and policies worldwide, including the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, which mandates the Government to guarantee equal educational opportunities for all citizens. The Government of Sierra Leone prioritizes education as a critical driver for national development through its Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy. This paper examines the Government's efforts to implement FQSE across the country. It affords a historical synopsis of education in Sierra Leone, explores educational system changes, and evaluates education policies over the years. The paper assesses the accessibility and enrollment of school-going children and analyzes the education sector's problems and challenges. The research methods include questionnaires, interviews, observations, discussions, and secondary data from the internet and books. The data will be analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively, with recommendations to improve and strengthen education policies.

Keywords: Free quality school education; Education equality; Educational policies; National Development; Policy implementation.

1. Introduction

Global importance has rested on increasing children's access to education. The Education for All goals that came up in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 reproduced a solid assurance by countries to meet elementary education requirements for their kids. This obligation to enlighten "Learning for All" was endorsed in the Dakar Agenda for Achievement in 2000, where Goal 6 stressed refining the worth of education.^[1] Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 similarly focused on ensuring all progenies and adolescents go through elementary school. Even though there has been substantial development in the quantity of children appearing in schools, apprehensions about the excellence of education persist. The 2012 Education for All Global Monitoring Report projected that at least 250 million primary school-age kids worldwide cannot read, write, or count sound correctly to meet the least education standards, even after attending school for a minimum of four years.^[2] It has shifted the focus from merely providing admittance to education to ensuring access and learning.^[3] The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), propounded by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 to replace the MDGs, include an instruction goal stressing all-encompassing and

¹ This policy brief is based on the following paper:

Out-of-School Children in Ethiopia: Impacts of Climate Change and Political Instability
Semela, T & Cochrane, L. (under review).

reasonable quality education and permanent learning for all. Furthermore, the World Bank's 2020 approach proposes to endorse country-level education structure improvements to achieve "learning for all." [4]

The focus is on education excellence and knowledge outcomes, which has improved curiosity and requests for national, regional, and international learning 1. General valuations deliver treasured education quality and performance information in a specific classification. In contrast, international assessments permit comparisons across education structures, enabling nations to segment applications, organizational constructions, and guidelines that have demonstrated effectiveness and success. According to the World Bank (2011)[4], "Some countries achieve much higher levels of educational performance, in terms of system operation as well as outcomes than expected based on their incomes. Detailed and internationally comparable information about education systems helps identify these strong performers in specific areas while also flagging weaknesses in other areas."

The Government's commitment has been crucial in recovering and rapidly improving the Sierra Leonean education system. The Education Act of 2004 necessitates all kids to go through foundation education: six years of primary school and three years of junior secondary school (JSS). This nationwide importance aligns with the international standards on educational MDGs, which aim to guarantee that all school-going children go through their primary education by 2015 and can also eliminate gender disparities in education. Education is the cornerstone of any society's development, enlightenment, and transformation.[5] It empowers individuals and communities, providing the foundation for prosperity and advancement. Once a key player in British colonial West Africa's education

system, Sierra Leone got a high-quality British instructive framework. Nevertheless, owing to neglect, maladministration, and corruption, Sierra Leone's education quality has declined. The administration of Sierra Leone aims to promote education at all levels, train competent teachers, and improve education to strengthen democracy, develop civic life, and pave the way for economic success.

2. Related Literature

2.1 Educational Policies and System Change in Sierra Leone

In 1961, Sierra Leone gained its independence from the British Government. The British people introduced the bookish type of education for the running of their administration. So, they left a 7-5-2-4 system, which comprised seven years of primary education, five years of junior secondary school, two years of senior secondary school, and four years of tertiary education. However, in 1993, to meet global standards and address the country's educational needs, the system was restructured into the 6-3-3-4 system.[6] This new structure comprised six years of prime school, three years of junior secondary school, three years of senior secondary school, and four years of tertiary education. The change in the system from the previous one aimed to provide students with a more balanced and comprehensive educational experience. Additionally, the Government introduced various forms of financial support, such as subsidies for school heads and grants for college or university students, to ensure that education is accessible to all, especially low-income families. [7, 8]

The Government of Sierra Leone has implemented several initiatives that support education and combat poverty. By subsidizing education costs and providing grants, the Government aims to make education

accessible to all citizens, thereby reducing illiteracy and promoting self-reliance through job opportunities. One significant initiative is the school feeding program, which provides meals to needy students. This program helps students maintain their energy levels and encourages attendance, particularly among children from poor households. By addressing basic needs, the Government helps students concentrate better on their studies, improving educational outcomes. Despite the government's strong commitment to reducing poverty in schools, some challenges remain. Continuous approval of new schools, not initially included in the program's planning, has led to resource strains. Consequently, the school feeding program could not fully meet its objectives in terms of student health and attendance in all schools.

To develop the worth of education, the Government has focused on training school authorities and instructors through specialized development by setting high standards for learning and teaching. Several legislative acts and policies were recommended to support this goal. For instance, the New Education Policy for Sierra Leone (1995) aimed to provide all citizens access to relevant and functional quality education. This policy laid the groundwork for subsequent legislation strengthening the education system. The Tertiary Education Commission Act (2001) was initiated to oversee and improve tertiary education, including budgeting, fundraising, and daily operations.

The Government also recognized the importance of technical and vocational education in fostering practical skills and employment opportunities. The Polytechnics Act (2001) and the National Council for Technical, Vocational, and Other Academic Awards Act (2001) were introduced to control and enhance the excellence of technical and vocational instruction. These acts established independent bodies to confirm and legalize awards and approve institutions, ensuring that the curriculum and examinations met the required

standards. This focus on vocational education aimed to provide students with practical skills that would make them more competitive in the job market.

More reforms were introduced to the advanced tutoring sector and local governance. Education Act of 2004 provided a comprehensive framework for all levels of schooling, emphasizing the reputation of quality education. Also, the Local Government Act of 2004 aimed to decentralize educational responsibilities, empowering local councils to manage and implement education policies effectively. Additionally, the Universities Act of 2005 facilitated the establishment of multiple universities, promoting higher education accessibility and diversity. New institutions such as the University of Makeni (UNIMAK) and Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology (EBKUST) were established, along with the University of Management and Technology (UNIMTECH). The 2007 Education Policy further rebranded and strengthened the 1995 policy, incorporating new principles to fortify the educational landscape in Sierra Leone. ^[7]

2.2 Education for All

All over the globe, education obtains separate attention and priority because every nation needs knowledgeable and well-informed personalities who are responsible for managing various institutions and services. The global community knows the critical issues connected to primary school enrollment, admission of girls to learning institutions, elementary education and daycare, and the educational and progressive gaps that should be addressed collectively. In response, governments established "Education for All" objectives during the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) in Jomtien, Thailand. This conference, attended by 155 countries, 125 non-governmental organizations, and 33 intergovernmental organizations, expanded the

vision for education and renewed the commitment to several key areas^[8]: Universalizing access and sponsoring equality; Devotion to learning; Increasing the means and opportunity of primary education; Fixing the environment for learning; Consolidation partnerships.

Governments are devoted to attaining numerous goals, including extended early youthful care and developmental activities, enhanced learning accomplishment, worldwide primary education, established training for youth and adults, promotion of adult illiteracy, and improved knowledge and services for sustainable development. ^[9]

The Sierra Leone Government is committed to the "Education for All" program as a Commonwealth member. The country contributed to the follow-up conference framed by the World Education Forum (WEF)^[10] in Dakar, Senegal 2000. While representatives celebrated considerable progress in some areas of the previous policies, they also recognized several deficits. They affirmed their obligation to the Education for All application by setting six specific goals, with three aimed to be achieved by 2015. One of the key goals was to confirm that all kids, especially girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those from traditional sections, have admission to schooling for free and obligatory primary education of good quality. ^[11]

Different workshops, conferences, and seminars globally continue to deliberate and discuss refining education quality. In Africa, further consultative meetings in February 2015 resounded the objective of confirming unbiased and comprehensive quality education and enduring learning for all.^[12,13] A Commonwealth report in 2015 analyzed the educational standards in Sierra Leone, emphasizing the country's population at 6,090,000, with a school-going aged population of 16% and a birth rate

of 4.8. Despite these demographics, the Human Development Guide was low at 0.37. The report also noted that the preprimary school life expectation was 0.07, and the net enrollment rate was average but growing by 0.4 per year. However, the school life expectancy was below average by 0.5 standard deviations and decreased by 0.03 per year.

Sierra Leone has also committed to addressing inequalities, including those related to disabilities, by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol. The gender parity index indicated that primary education had a ratio of 1.00, junior secondary school (JSS) had a ratio of 1.01, and senior secondary school (SSS) had a ratio of 1.01. The dropout rates showed that urban primary dropout rates were 1.3, while rural rates were 1.6. Additionally, the report found that many parents paid for private tutoring for primary-aged children, often due to the pressure to complete the syllabus on time. ^[11]

Regarding the quality of education, funding indicators showed that 11.69% of the GDP was spent on education, with 8.29% of the national budget directed towards it. The youth literacy rate stood at 90%, and the adult literacy rate at 80%. Specifically, the funding percentages of GDP for different educational levels were 0.79% for preprimary, 1.79% for primary, and 1.60% for JSS. The teacher-student ratios were 22 for preprimary, 26 for primary, 18 for JSS, and 15 for SSS. The proportion of trained teachers was 57% for preprimary, 48% for primary, 73% for JSS, and 75% for SSS. It is significant to note that these means were premeditated internationally and gathered by Human Development Index levels (Very High, High, Medium, Low) using historical data^[12] projected for 2015.



2.3 Quality Education for Quality Life in Sierra Leone

Education in Sierra Leone goes beyond acquiring academic skills; it also helps students become resilient, feel connected to their communities, and aspire for a better future. Education allows children to experience and understand society in all its facets, which can significantly influence their attitudes and comportment. The Government addresses educational problems by attending to schoolchildren's emotional and social needs, helping the learners progress an intellect of control over their future and the flexibility required for achievement. ^[13]

To expand and nurture the country's human resources, the Government has focused on promoting innovative and sustainable sources of financial growth and enlightening living standards through education. This effort starts with providing excellent primary education for all people. The Government's obligation to education is mirrored in its Education Segment Guidelines, which have positively impacted the enrollment rates in preprimary, primary, and secondary education.

Despite significant improvements, the Government still needs help achieving quality primary education. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology has implemented various policies to address these challenges, including the Education Policy of 1964, the structure modification from the 7-5-2-4 system to the 6-3-3-4 system in 1993, the New Education Policy in 1995, and several others. These policies aim to improve the quality of instruction and promote future growth in Sierra Leone.

The Education Act 2004 also targets branding primary schooling as free and obligatory. Still, challenges such as affordability, overcrowded schools, lack of space for learners to exhibit their talents, and

availability of teaching and learning materials continue to surface. Several regions need secondary schools, school structures, essential water, and health facilities. The Government is determined to upsurge elementary education access for beginners aged 3 to 5 from 11% in 2020 and improve primary school entry and completion rates from 75.4% in 2016 to 85% in 2020.^[14] Efforts also included increasing school infrastructure and facilities across all districts to provide a conducive learning environment.

Another essential pillar is Improving the quality and relevance of the education system to attain high values of integrity and performance. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology intended to ensure that at least 50% of primary school children had sufficient learning materials and access to core subject textbooks. The distribution was equitably done based on the statistics of school children lists submitted to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology by the school heads. It is certain that schools in the urban areas were more populated than rural schools. Furthermore, the Government focused on eliminating examination malpractice by 20% in 2020 through a national strategy and action plan. Regarding the 2006 Country Status Report and the 2004 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, the Education Sector Plan outlines how the Government will continue developing education post-war, aiming for all children to receive a quality education by 2015. ^[15]

2.4 Free Quality Education in Sierra Leone

The status of education in Sierra Leone has experienced significant challenges, contributing to widespread failure in Government projects, poor educational standards, civil war due to perpetual illiteracy, corruption of civil society, lawlessness of youths countrywide, under-development as a nation

at various levels, and backwardness below the poverty line. In response, President Retired Brigadier-General Julius Maada Bio- the current president of Sierra Leone- promised to prioritize education to build human capital, provide skills training, improve health, and protect vulnerable citizens during his campaign. Believing that developing the human resources of Sierra Leone was the best way to address the country's problems, President Bio introduced the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative ^[16] under the New Direction policy in August 2018. Demonstrating his commitment, he allocated 21% of the national budget to implement this initiative.

The Free Quality School Education (FQSE) program aims to operate entirely within the education scheme at the preprimary, primary, junior, and secondary school stages. It seeks to relieve parents and guardians of the financial burden of paying school fees by making education accessible. The Government also provides all pupils with essential teaching aids, equipment, and other learning materials, such as textbooks and exercise books, and provisions of teaching materials to all teachers. Additionally, the Government pays school fees and subsidizes school heads of Government and Government-Assisted Schools to ensure the provision of furniture in schools, expansion of school infrastructure, and amenities like water and sanitation facilities. ^[16]

Since introducing FQSE, under President Bio's leadership, the Government of Sierra Leone has distributed over 12 million exercise books and more than 94 containers of core textbooks nationwide. This distribution is supported by teaching and learning materials to enhance the quality of education. The Government has also extended schools to other deprived and underserved areas and claims to introduce an all-inclusive school feeding program. These efforts have significantly increased enrollment rates at all levels of schooling.

Rising enrollment rates have necessitated the recruitment of more trained teachers to meet the growing demand. The Government has focused on distributing these teachers nationwide to ensure that every school can effectively educate pupils and students. The Free Quality Education initiative is a top priority for the Government of Sierra Leone and is a vital tool for the country's development and transformation through education.

The Free Quality School Education program ^[17] represents a significant step towards improving education in Sierra Leone. By addressing financial barriers, providing essential resources, and expanding educational infrastructure, the Government aims to create a more equitable and effective education system. This initiative reflects a commitment to empowering the nation's youth and fostering long-term national development through education.

2.5 New Curriculum in Sierra Leone - National Curriculum Framework

The current Government in Sierra Leone has introduced a new curriculum guideline called the National Curriculum Framework. This framework aims to encourage and guide persons in authority to design, implement, and supervise the new primary education curriculum for Sierra Leone. It is set for nine years of quality primary education, as authorized by the 2004 Education Act. ^[18] The framework seeks to promote national goals such as facilitating equality and radical inclusion, achieving learners' aspirations, improving employability and good living through skills training, and supporting general harmony and good governance by celebrating the country's rich cultural diversity. It aims to help children reach their full potential by promoting applications that improve their health and well-being.

The Government of Sierra Leone significantly developed by increasing admission to schooling and attaining gender uniformity. Primary enrollment rose from 1,194,503 in 2010 to 1,770,368 in 2020, while junior secondary enrollment increased from 244,489 to 451,685 in the same period. Gender parity for primary schooling enhanced from 0.95 to 1.00. Despite these gains, challenges remain, as 37.2% of primary-school-age children and 22.2% of junior secondary school-age children still need to be in school. Central to this issue of education in Sierra Leone is the pervasive poverty among parents, who often lack the financial means to support their children's educational needs. Although education is free, parents still bear the costs of transportation, lunch, and other necessary expenses. Consequently, government policies have not been entirely effective in removing all obstacles to universal education access. The government's decision to eliminate the two-shift system aimed to enhance learning opportunities and allow teachers to complete their syllabi. However, this policy encountered significant challenges due to inadequate preparation. The existing school infrastructure could not accommodate all students in a single shift, resulting in overcrowded classrooms.

Additionally, schools did not receive timely support for necessary furniture from the government, exacerbating the situation. The two-shift system previously allowed some teachers to work effectively, but its removal has led to teacher shortages as the new system could not accommodate all teachers. Furthermore, teachers continue to urge the government to increase their salaries to cope with the rising cost of living, highlighting the ongoing struggle for adequate compensation. Many of these children come from disadvantaged backgrounds, live in remote rural areas, have disabilities, or face other barriers, such as being orphans or young mothers. The Ministry of Basic &

Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) aims to address these issues by ensuring inclusive economic development and equitable participation in education. ^[19]

To further address these challenges, the MBSSE has established limitations for the new primary education curriculum that reflect advances in education and modern knowledge. The new curriculum emphasizes equity and radical inclusion, supporting kids from deprived rural areas, urban shantytowns, orphans, street children, teenage girls, prenatal girls, and children with incapacities. It aims to rebuild self-assurance in the excellence of schools and the truthfulness of the education system. The curriculum focuses on evolving skills in problem-solving, critical and creative thoughtfulness, communication, teamwork, and coordination. It also aims to promote societal unity, celebrate diversity, and prevent sexual abuse and gender-based violence.

The new curriculum framework incorporates subjects familiar to teachers in Sierra Leone. Structured on the nation's past curriculum innovation, the framework avoids introducing new subjects that could be challenging to implement. Instead, it aligns with the international consensus on essential learning for today's students, based on the work of the Acquaintance Metrics Task Force by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics and the Centre for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution. ^[20] This task force recognized seven learning areas significant for success in school and life: Physical Well-being, social and emotional, Culture and the Arts, Literacy and communication, Learning Approaches and Cognition, Numeracy and mathematics, and Science and technology. These domains are integrated into the subject areas and pedagogical methods recommended by the Ministry of Basic Education.

The innovative primary teaching syllabus in Sierra Leone consists of Core Subjects and Optional Subjects (Electives) imbued with cross-cutting skills such as computational thinking, creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and teamwork. All subjects at the primary level are presented as core subjects, with six subjects in lower primary and eight in upper primary, to allow more time for literacy and numeracy development. Junior Secondary School (JSS) builds on primary education and prepares students for further general studies, specialist studies, or the workforce. MBSSE has set a timetable of 30 periods per week for primary schools and 35 periods per week for JSS, with JSS students studying six core subjects and one elective.

In terms of language instruction, MBSSE has instructed that the national language usually used in the school locality should be the language of teaching in classes 1-3. From class 4 forward, English became the medium of instruction in all subjects, except for other languages offered as subjects. Arabic is offered in schools where the local community thinks it is essential. At the JSS level, schools may provide prevalent indigenous languages in the area, but there is also value in teaching national languages to help preserve cultural heritage. This approach aims to ensure that children develop a strong foundation in their native languages while acquiring proficiency in English and other relevant languages.

2.6 Statement of the Problem

Before the war ended, Sierra Leone's educational system suffered from poor access and completion, underfunding, weak civil capacity, and poor quality of academic outcomes, especially in public schools. There was a lack of solid coordination mechanisms at both local and national levels. The war led to a significant decline in the number and quality of

teachers due to displacement and fluid mobility, leaving many schools in remote rural areas with few or no qualified teachers.

Alhaji Bakar Kamara (2020), in his paper "Government Commitment to Quality Education - An Overview of Free Quality School Education in Sierra Leone," emphasizes the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy as a critical priority for national transformation through education. Kamara highlights the Government's recognition of education's influence and power in national development and its prioritization as a flagship program. However, while the article provides a historical overview of education in Sierra Leone and changes in the system, it needs to fully explore the Government's interventions in education over the years. ^[21]

The World Bank's 2007 report, "Education in Sierra Leone - Present Challenges, Future Opportunities," noted a remarkable recovery in the educational system, reflected in increased enrollment at all levels. The report highlighted the Government's commitment to promoting education and equity in resource distribution, suggesting a promising future for the sustainability of the education system. However, this report also needed a detailed analysis of post-war government interventions. ^[22]

Despite these efforts and achievements, significant challenges remain in Sierra Leone's education system. These include persistent access, quality, teacher availability, and resource distribution issues. The ongoing difficulties necessitate a thorough assessment of the functionality and impact of the Government's Free Quality Education initiative.

This paper focuses on the strengths and current challenges of education in Sierra Leone. It is crucial to evaluate the effectiveness of the Free Quality

Education initiative and understand how well it addresses the ongoing issues within the educational system. By assessing these factors, we can gain insights into the successes and areas needing improvement in Sierra Leone's quest for educational transformation and national development.

2.6.1 Research Objectives

- To determine the improvement or strength of Free Quality Education in Sierra Leone.
- To find out the present challenges of the Free Quality Education in Sierra Leone.
- To recommend the measures for improving the Free Quality Education in Sierra Leone.

3. Research Methodology

The research methodology involved engaging critical stakeholders in focus group discussions, including representatives from the Ministry of Education, university authorities, and community members. These discussions provided in-depth insights into the topic under review, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of education's current state and various initiatives' impact. By incorporating the perspectives of those directly involved in the education sector, the research aimed to capture a holistic view of the challenges and successes experienced within the system.

In addition to the focus group discussions, the research sought supplementary information from existing literature published by relevant institutions, particularly the Ministry of Education and universities. This approach ensured the study was grounded in documented evidence and aligned with ongoing educational policies and frameworks. The scope of the research was limited to the Western Area,

providing a focused geographical context for analyzing the implementation and effectiveness of academic programs and initiatives in Sierra Leone.

3.1 Research Design

The research design primarily employed an analytical approach, gathering data through primary methods to comprehensively understand the topic under review. Both stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to ensure a diverse and representative sample. Stratified sampling involved selecting a specific group of internal interviewees, including authorities from the Ministry of Education, universities, and community leaders. This method allowed for targeted insights from key stakeholders who play strategic roles in the education sector, ensuring that the research captured a wide range of perspectives and experiences.

Questionnaires were administered to officials and lecturers from the Ministry of Education, universities, and other relevant organizations to collect quantitative data. These questionnaires were designed to elicit detailed responses on various aspects of the educational system, including policy implementation, resource allocation, and the overall effectiveness of the Free Quality Education initiative. Simple random sampling for the distribution of questionnaires ensured that the data collected was unbiased and representative of the broader population within these institutions. This approach helped to gather objective, quantifiable data that could be analyzed to identify trends and patterns.

The combination of stratified and simple random sampling techniques provided a robust framework for the research design, allowing for a thorough and balanced analysis. By engaging with both high-level authorities and ground-level officials, the research

was able to integrate strategic insights with practical, on-the-ground experiences. This methodological approach ensured that the research findings were comprehensive, reflecting the complexities and nuances of the education system in the Western Area. The analytical nature of the research design, supported by primary data collection, enabled a detailed examination of the current state of education and identified critical areas for improvement.

3.2 Population and Sample

The research population comprised a diverse group of individuals from various sectors within the education system, including administrative and academic staff from the Ministry of Education and universities. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, members from these groups were strategically selected. Additionally, other department members were randomly chosen for interviews. Random sampling among the staff was crucial for capturing a wide range of perspectives and identifying trends and correlations in their views. This approach ensured that the data reflected the opinions and experiences of officials, lecturers, and community authorities from different departments and levels, including senior and head-of-department positions.

The stratified population was divided into two main groups. The first group included internal interviewees from different Ministry of Education and university departments. These participants provided insights into the strategic and operational aspects of the education system. The second group comprised community members participating in personal interviews and focus group discussions. This division allowed the research to gather comprehensive data from both institutional and community perspectives, ensuring a holistic understanding of the educational landscape in Sierra Leone. Engaging with community

members was particularly important for capturing the on-the-ground realities and challenges students and parents face.

The research employed primary and secondary sources to gather the necessary data. Primary data were collected through questionnaires administered to officials and lecturers, interviews, and focus group discussions with community members. These methods provided firsthand insights into the experiences and opinions of the participants. Secondary data were sourced from existing literature, official reports, and publications from the Ministry of Education and universities. This combination of data sources ensured a robust and well-rounded analysis, allowing the research to draw well-supported conclusions about the effectiveness of educational initiatives and the current state of education in the Western Area.

3.3 Research Instrumentation

The research employed a variety of data collection instruments to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the educational landscape in Sierra Leone. These instruments included personal interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions, and literature reviews.

Personal Interviews: Personal interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including officials from the Ministry of Education, university authorities, and community leaders. These interviews provided in-depth insights and allowed for detailed discussions about specific challenges and successes within the education system. The face-to-face nature of these interviews facilitated a deeper understanding of the participants' personal experiences and perspectives.

Questionnaires: Questionnaires were administered to a broader group of participants, including teachers, lecturers, and administrative staff. These questionnaires were designed to gather quantitative data on various aspects of the education system, such as enrollment rates, availability of resources, and satisfaction levels with the Free Quality Education initiative. Using questionnaires allowed for data collection from a large sample size, ensuring that the findings were representative and statistically significant.

Focus Group Discussions: Focus group discussions was held with different groups within the community, including parents, students, and local leaders. These discussions allowed participants to share their experiences and views collaboratively, highlighting common issues and generating collective insights. The interactive nature of focus group discussions helped uncover the community's dynamics and shared concerns regarding the education system.

Literature Reviews: Secondary data were collected through literature reviews of existing publications, reports, and official documents from the Ministry of Education and universities. This review provided a context for the primary data, allowing the research to be grounded in existing knowledge and to build upon previous findings. Literature reviews helped to identify trends, gaps, and best practices in the education sector, contributing to a more comprehensive analysis.

By utilizing these diverse data collection instruments, the research gathered rich and varied data, ensuring a robust and well-rounded understanding of the educational challenges and opportunities in Sierra Leone.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

The data analysis section evaluates the impact and effectiveness of the Free Quality Education (FQE) initiative in Sierra Leone by examining government expenditure, teacher recruitment, school facilities, and materials provided. The analysis, based on surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, reveals significant improvements in government initial support, such as increased funding, more teachers, and higher salaries. However, challenges remain, including the delayed and insufficient payment of subsidies and a lack of essential school facilities like playing fields, laboratories, and technology labs. The provision of basic materials like desks and chairs also needs improvement. These findings highlight the progress and ongoing efforts required to ensure quality education for all students in Sierra Leone.

4.1 Strength/Impact of Free Quality Education

Table 4.1: Strength/Impact of Free Quality Education

Strength/impact of FQE	YES	NO	%YES	%NO
Expenditure in education	20	0	100	0
Total responses	20		100	
Increased more teachers	20	0	100	0
Total responses	20		100	
Paid more subsidies	20	0	100	0
Total responses	20		100	



Strength/impact of FQE	YES	NO	%YES	%NO
The government increases the payment of a fee	20	0	100	0
Total responses	20		100	
School feeding programme	6	14	30	70
Total responses	20		100	
Increased teacher's salaries	20	0	100	0
Total responses	20		100	
School materials in school	20	0	100	0
Total responses	20		100	
Approved more school	20	0	100	0
Total responses	20		100	
Increase students enrollment	20	0	100	0
Total responses	20		100	
More facilities for physically challenged students	18	20	90	10
Total responses	20		100	
Improved school structure	19	1	95	5
Total responses	20		100	

In Table 4.1, the Free Quality Education (FQE) initiative in Sierra Leone has demonstrated significant strengths and positive impacts across various aspects of the education system. The Government has shown a strong commitment by increasing expenditure on education, hiring more teachers, paying more subsidies, and covering school fees for students in government and

government-assisted schools. These efforts have ensured that education is more accessible and affordable for all students. Additionally, the provision of teaching and learning materials, along with increased teachers' salaries, has dramatically enhanced the quality of education.

The initiative has also led to the approval of more schools, resulting in higher student enrollment rates. This indicates that the financial and accessibility barriers to education are being effectively addressed. The Government's focus on improving school infrastructure and providing adequate facilities for physically challenged students ensures inclusivity and equal opportunities for all learners. These measures contribute to a more equitable and supportive learning environment, which is crucial for students' development.

However, some areas need further improvement, particularly the school feeding program, which only 30% of respondents reported. Expanding and effectively implementing this program can help address hunger and nutritional needs, improving student attendance and concentration. Overall, the FQE initiative has significantly enhanced Sierra Leone's education quality. Still, continuous efforts are needed to ensure all students fully benefit from these educational reforms.

Table 4.2: Independent Officers Operating in School

Officers	YES	NO	%YES	%NO
Bursar	14	6	70	30
Total	20		100	
Vice Principal	16	4	80	20
Total	20		100	

Officers	YES	NO	%YES	%NO
Examination Office	8	12	40	60
Total	20		100	
School feeding programme	18	2	90	10
Total	20		100	
Increased teacher's salaries	4	16	20	80
Total	20		100	

Table 4.2 shows the presence of independent school officers who play a crucial role in the efficient management and operation of educational institutions. According to the data in Table 4.2, bursars are present in 70% of the schools, with 14 out of 20 schools having this officer. Bursars are essential for managing school finances and ensuring funds are appropriately allocated and spent. The absence of bursars in 30% of the schools indicates a gap in financial management, which could affect the efficient use of resources.

Vice principals are present in 80% of the schools, with 16 out of 20 schools reporting their presence. Vice principals assist principals in administrative duties and play a key role in maintaining discipline and overseeing students' academic progress. The absence of vice principals in 20% of the schools suggests that those schools may need help managing their administrative workload and maintaining educational standards.

The presence of an examination office is less common, with only 40% of the schools having one. This indicates that 60% of the schools need a dedicated office to handle examination-related activities, which could impact the organization and administration of exams. The data also shows that

staff rooms are available in 90% of the schools, providing a space for teachers to collaborate and prepare for classes. However, only 20% of the schools have dedicated games and sports officers, highlighting a significant gap in promoting physical education and extracurricular activities. The lack of such officers in 80% of the schools may limit students' opportunities for physical development and teamwork skills.

Table 4.3 Available School Facilities for Students

Facilities	YES	NO	%YES	%NO
Toilets	18	2	90	10
Total	20		100	
Playing Field	3	17	15	85
Total	20		100	
School Garden	2	18	10	90
Total	20		100	
School Laboratory	2	18	10	90
Total	20		100	
Library	8	12	40	60
Total	20		100	
School Store	14	6	70	30
Total	20		100	
Technology Lab	2	18	10	90
Total	20		100	



The data in Table 4.3 provides insight into the availability of various school facilities for students in Sierra Leone. Toilets are widely available, and 90% of schools have this essential facility. This high percentage reflects the Government's efforts to provide basic sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools, which are crucial for the health and well-being of students. However, the absence of toilets in 10% of the schools indicates that there is still room for improvement to ensure that all students have access to these basic amenities.

In contrast, the availability of other essential facilities is significantly lower. Only 15% of the schools have a playing field, and just 10% have a school garden, laboratory, and technology lab. The lack of these facilities highlights a significant gap in providing a holistic educational experience that includes physical activities, practical science education, and technological skills development. The absence of playing fields limits sports and physical education opportunities, which are essential for students' physical health and teamwork skills. Similarly, the lack of laboratories and technology labs restricts students' hands-on learning experiences and ability to engage with modern technology.

The data also shows that only 40% of schools have a library, which is essential for fostering a reading culture and providing students access to a wide range of learning resources. The absence of libraries in 60% of the schools is a significant concern as it limits students' ability to engage in self-directed learning and research. On a positive note, 70% of the schools have a school store, which can help store educational materials and supplies. Overall, the data indicates that while some basic facilities are in place, there is a significant need to improve the availability of critical educational facilities to enhance the learning environment for students in Sierra Leone.

Table 4.4: Material Supplied by the Government

Materials	YES	NO	%YES	%NO
Textbooks	20	0	100	0
Total	20		100	
Exercise Books	20	0	100	0
Total	20		100	
Desk	0	20	0	100
Total	20		100	
Registers	8	12	40	60
Total	20		100	
Chairs	4	16	20	80
Total	20		100	
Blackboard	2	18	10	90
Total	20		100	
Chalks	10	10	50	50
Total	20		100	

The data in Table 4.4 shows the distribution of various educational materials supplied by the Government to schools in Sierra Leone. Textbooks and exercise books have been universally provided, with 100% of schools receiving these essential learning materials. This is a significant strength of the Government's initiative, ensuring that all students have access to crucial educational resources necessary for their studies.

However, other critical materials are less widely distributed. Desks are absent in most schools, with

0% reporting receipt of this essential furniture. This indicates a significant gap in providing basic infrastructure, which can affect students' comfort and ability to focus during lessons. Similarly, only 20% of schools have received chairs, and just 10% have been supplied with blackboards, highlighting significant deficiencies in classroom furnishings and teaching aids. These items can help effective teaching and learning, as students and teachers need more tools for a conducive learning environment.

Registers, used for maintaining student attendance records, are present in only 40% of schools, suggesting a need for improved administrative support. Chalk, another primary teaching material, has been supplied to 50% of the schools, indicating that half may need help with basic classroom instruction due to a lack of this essential item. Overall, while the Government has made commendable efforts to supply textbooks and exercise books, there is a clear need for increased provision of furniture, teaching aids, and administrative materials to fully support the educational needs of students and teachers in Sierra Leone.

Table 4.5: Government Support to Schools

Subsidies	YES	NO	%YES	%NO
Paid	20	0	100	0
Total responses	20		100	
On-time payment	0	20	0	100
Total responses	20		100	
Enough subsidies	0	20	0	100
Total responses	20		100	

The data in Table 4.5 provides insight into the Government's financial support to schools in Sierra Leone through subsidies. While the Government has successfully paid subsidies to all schools, as indicated by 100% of the respondents confirming receipt of payments, there are significant issues related to the timing and sufficiency of these payments.

Despite the universal payment of subsidies, none of the schools reported receiving these payments on time. This 100% delay in payment can create financial instability for schools, hindering their ability to effectively plan and manage their resources. Timely financial support is crucial for the smooth operation of schools, affecting everything from paying staff to purchasing necessary supplies.

Furthermore, all respondents indicated that the subsidies provided were insufficient to meet their needs. This 100% insufficiency highlights a critical gap in the Government's funding. Insufficient subsidies mean that schools may need help covering basic expenses, potentially impacting the quality of education they can offer. Due to this financial shortfall, schools may need help maintaining infrastructure, purchasing educational materials, and supporting various school programs.

Therefore, while the Government's effort to provide subsidies to schools is commendable, delayed and insufficient payments significantly undermine the effectiveness of this support. Addressing these issues by ensuring timely and adequate financial assistance is essential for improving the overall educational environment and outcomes in Sierra Leone.



4.2 Strength/Impact of Free Quality Education

4.2.1 Objective 1: Evaluate the Government's Expenditure on Education

The Free Quality Education (FQE) initiative has seen a significant increase in government expenditure on education, which all the heads of the twenty schools under study unanimously confirmed. Each head (100%) agreed that the Government has substantially raised its financial commitment to education. This increased funding has enabled schools to improve their infrastructure, supply essential educational materials, and support various academic programs. The unanimous agreement among school heads underscores the Government's dedication to enhancing the educational landscape in Sierra Leone through substantial financial investment.

4.2.2 Objective 2: Assess the Increase in Teacher Recruitment and Salaries

Another critical impact of the FQE initiative is the increase in teacher recruitment and salaries. All twenty school heads (100%) confirmed that the Government has significantly increased the number of teachers in schools, addressing the teacher shortage issue. Additionally, the Government has raised teachers' salaries, with all respondents acknowledging this improvement. These measures have not only helped to reduce student-to-teacher ratios but have also boosted teacher morale and retention. The enhanced teacher workforce is crucial for improving education quality and ensuring that learners receive adequate attention and support in their learning journey.

4.2.3 Objective 3: Examine the Provision of School Facilities and Support Programs

The Government's efforts have also extended to providing school facilities and support programs. All

school heads reported that the Government has consistently paid more school subsidies and covered examination fees for WASSCE, BECE, and NPSE candidates, making education more accessible. While there is unanimous agreement (100%) on the increased supply of school materials and approval of more schools, only 30% of school heads acknowledged an increase in school feeding programs, indicating a need for further improvement. Although the policy itself was well-conceived, the implementation of the food distribution was flawed. Some consignments failed to reach certain schools, particularly in rural areas. Besides, the program could not be sustained as initially promised due to corruption and a lack of funds.

Additionally, the Government has provided more facilities for disabled students and improved school infrastructure, with all heads agreeing on these points. However, only 30% of heads believed that there are adequate teachers in all schools, suggesting a need for continued focus on teacher distribution, especially in rural areas.

These efforts reflect the Government's commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive educational environment, though some areas still require attention to achieve comprehensive improvements. Teachers responded that, the Government approved too many schools without fulfilling its promises to upgrade the conditions of living of teachers. As the salary of teachers is too small to meet the cost of living, Government promised to give scholarships to their children in colleges or universities, which was not fulfilled. Students complained that, there is no effective teaching in schools. Instead, students experience too much harassment from teachers and school authorities for money. Some students complained that, they are too over crowded in some classes that they could not have the opportunity to effectively learn in their classes. The parents are

tired with too much pressure money demand from teachers and school authorities. As a result, they prefer the old system of paying school fees directly to school authorities so that they can prepare the school immediately the school academic year starts. Also, parents blame Government that they did not fulfill their promises of providing school bags, books, uniforms, school feeding to reduce the daily lunch and transportation. Indeed, they agree that the policy is good, the implementation is poor and not effective.

4.3 The Problem/Challenges of Education in Sierra Leone

One of the significant challenges facing the education system in Sierra Leone is the need for more teachers in schools. All twenty school heads (100%) agreed that there are not enough teachers to meet the demands of their schools. This shortage is more pronounced in rural areas, where schools often need help to attract and retain qualified teachers. The lack of adequate teaching staff impacts the quality of education, which leads to larger class sizes and overburdened teachers, which can hinder effective teaching and individualized student support. The equitable distribution of teachers remains a critical concern that ensures all students receive a quality education.

Another significant problem is the need for more trained and qualified teachers. All school heads (100%) confirmed that not all teachers possess the necessary training and qualifications. This issue is particularly severe in rural schools, where trained and qualified teachers need to be improved. The absence of adequately trained educators compromises the standard of education, as unqualified teachers may need to gain the skills or knowledge required to

deliver effective instruction. This gap in teacher qualifications underscores the need for enhanced teacher training programs and professional development opportunities to ensure that all educators are well-prepared to meet the educational needs of their students.

Teacher compensation and support also pose significant challenges. While the Government has increased teachers' salaries, all twenty school heads (100%) agreed that these salaries are still insufficient to meet the cost of living in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, no special allowances exist for teachers deployed to rural areas, making it difficult to attract qualified teachers to these underserved regions. Additionally, the lack of scholarships for teachers' children to study in universities adds to the financial burden on teachers. These issues contribute to low teacher morale and retention rates, particularly in rural areas with more pronounced challenges. Addressing these problems requires comprehensive policies that include better compensation, allowances for rural teachers, and support for teachers' families to improve their living and working conditions.

4.4 Schools Leadership/Administration

4.4.1 Trained and Qualified Teachers

The presence of trained and qualified teachers is critical for effective school leadership and administration. According to the data, 13 out of 20 school heads (65%) are trained and qualified, while 7 (35%) lack the necessary qualifications. This discrepancy indicates that a significant portion of school leadership must have the formal training to manage educational institutions effectively. The lack of qualified leadership can affect the overall

quality of education, as these leaders may need to be fully equipped to address the complex challenges that schools face. Ensuring that all school heads receive proper training and qualifications is essential for improving educational outcomes.

4.4.2 Promotion Pathways

The pathway to leadership positions in schools is also a matter of concern. Fourteen school heads (70%) attained their positions by following the prescribed educational policies and promotion pathways, while six heads (30%) achieved their roles without adhering to these procedures. This bypassing of standard protocols can undermine the integrity and effectiveness of school leadership. Leaders who have yet to progress through the proper channels may need more experience and understanding of the educational system's intricacies, potentially leading to administrative inefficiencies and poor decision-making. Enforcing strict adherence to promotion policies is crucial to make sure that only qualified and experienced individuals lead schools.

4.4.3 Appointment Letters from the Ministry of Education

The legitimacy of school leadership is further questioned by the fact that only 3 out of 20 school heads (15%) could produce their appointment letters from the Ministry of Education. This low percentage suggests a need for Government to give formal appointment letter to school heads for credibility and recognition. Strengthening the issuing and verifying appointment letters is necessary to establish clear lines of authority and accountability in school administration.

5.0 Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The research highlights several critical issues within the educational leadership and administration in Sierra Leone. Many teachers report that their salaries are too low to meet the cost of living, exacerbating the challenges they face in their professional and personal lives. The need for more teaching and learning materials, inadequate school infrastructure, and poor monitoring and inspection of schools further complicate the educational landscape. Additionally, the late payment of subsidies, lack of libraries and computer labs, and frequent power outages hinder the learning environment. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies, including better salary structures, timely subsidy payments, improved infrastructure, and enhanced training and support for school leaders. Moreover, providing special allowances for rural teachers, offering scholarships for teachers' children, and enforcing promotion policies can help attract and retain qualified educators, ultimately improving Sierra Leone's education quality.

5.1 Conclusion

Education is essential for improving the lives of citizens, and its quality needs significant attention and support from the Government. The Government of Sierra Leone has committed to promoting quality education by prioritizing it in the national budget. This commitment includes increasing teachers' salaries, approving more teachers for schools, and paying school fees for WASSCE, BECE, and NPSE candidates. The Government has also supplied schools with essential materials such as textbooks and exercise books, increasing enrollment. Additionally, more schools have been approved, and

facilities for disabled students have been improved, along with more opportunities for science students and girls' education.

Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain that could undermine the quality of education in Sierra Leone. Timely and sufficient financial support is crucial, but schools must receive subsidies on time, and the amounts provided need to be increased to cover essential expenses. Schools need help with the high cost of living, making it difficult to maintain infrastructure, pay staff, and provide necessary materials. Teacher salaries remain low, affecting their ability to secure basic needs for themselves and their families. The need for more teaching and learning materials continues to impact the efficiency of education.

Overcrowded classrooms are another pressing issue, highlighting the need for more classroom construction to accommodate the increasing number of students. Rural schools, in particular, need more trained and qualified teachers. The Government needs to implement effective mechanisms to motivate teachers to prefer teaching in village schools instead of urban areas. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education's monitoring and inspection of schools need to be improved, with reports of inspectors prioritizing personal gains over thorough inspections. The emphasis on research and technology needs to be improved, with insufficient school computers and library books.

Moreover, the country faces broader socio-economic challenges such as hunger, hardship, and the high cost of living, which impede students' ability to maintain quality education. Continuous support and sponsorship are necessary for learners, but economic barriers hinder these. Additionally, constant electricity and affordable internet access still need to be improved, further affecting education.

Addressing these issues is essential for improving the quality of education in Sierra Leone and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

5.2 Recommendations for Government, NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, and Community Leaders

The Government to construct and rehabilitate roads. The Government must construct and rehabilitate roads leading to various schools nationwide to ease accessibility, improve the educational infrastructure, and ensure adequate seating accommodations for pupils nationwide.

Improve Conditions of Service for Teachers:

The Government should enhance the conditions of service for teachers in Sierra Leone to match the current geometric increase in the general price level of goods and services.

Harmonize Salaries of Civil Servants: The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) should harmonize the salaries of all civil servants based on their qualifications to maintain trained and qualified teachers in the classroom and ensure a stable future for the next generation.

Provide School Facilities: The Government should equip schools with improved laboratories, standard libraries, and other essential facilities to enable pupils to conduct their research effectively.

Ensure Adequate Electricity Supply:

The Government should provide adequate and constant electricity to all schools. Electricity is crucial for operating most modern educational tools and appliances, such as computers, printers, and projectors.

Provide Internet Facilities: All schools should provide constant Internet facilities to allow pupils to conduct research and complete assignments efficiently.

Increase Allowances for Rural Teachers:

The Government should increase allowances for teachers in rural areas to attract and retain qualified educators in these regions.

Recruit More Teachers: To address the growing pupil population, the Government of Sierra Leone should recruit more teachers to ensure a manageable student-to-teacher ratio.

Implement Effective School Feeding Programs:

The Government should ensure an effective and adequate school feeding program in all primary schools nationwide to promote better learning outcomes.

Improve Infrastructure and Recruit Qualified Teachers:

The Government should recruit more trained and qualified teachers and improve the infrastructural facilities in schools to provide a conducive learning environment.

Increase Electricity Supply: The Government should ensure a reliable electricity supply to all schools to support educational activities and modern technologies.

Provide Computers and Internet Facilities:

The Government should equip schools with computers and ensure Internet facilities are available to support digital learning.

Timely Payment of Subsidies: The Government should ensure that subsidies are paid before the start of the new academic school year and that these subsidies are increased to meet the rising cost of living.

Equip Laboratories and Libraries: The Government should provide all schools with well-equipped laboratories and standard libraries to enhance the quality of education and support student research and learning activities.

Change of WAEC examination timetable

The Government to change the West Africa Examination Council Examination from May -June to August-September so that learning of JSS and SSS levels will not be altered in schools that are centers for the examination.

By implementing these recommendations, the Government, NGOs, civil society organizations, and community leaders can significantly improve Sierra Leone's education quality and ensure that all students have the resources and environment needed to succeed.

6. Limitation and Further Research Direction

6.1 Limitations

One significant limitation of this research is the geographic constraint, as the study is confined to the Western Area of Sierra Leone. This restriction may not accurately reflect the educational landscape across the country, where conditions vary widely between urban and rural regions. The focus on the Western Area means that the findings might not account for schools' unique challenges in remote or less developed areas, such as limited access to resources, infrastructure deficits, and a lack of qualified teachers. Consequently, the results need to be more generalizable to the broader context of Sierra Leone's educational system.

Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data from questionnaires, interviews, and focus

group discussions. While these methods provide valuable insights, they are exposed to biases such as social desirability bias, where respondents may provide answers they believe are expected rather than their genuine opinions or experiences. Additionally, the accuracy of the data may be compromised by respondents' recall ability and willingness to share candidly, especially if discussing sensitive issues like financial management, school performance, or governmental support. These factors can affect the reliability and validity of the findings, potentially leading to an incomplete or skewed understanding of the educational challenges and successes.

Furthermore, the study's methodological approach includes both stratified and simple random sampling techniques, which, while robust, still face inherent limitations. Stratified sampling ensures that key stakeholders are represented, but it might miss the nuances experienced by less prominent groups within the educational system. On the other hand, simple random sampling might not capture the full spectrum of perspectives due to the random selection. Combining these methods provides a balanced view but does not remove the risk of sampling bias. Additionally, excluding secondary sources and existing literature reviews as a significant part of the data collection process could limit the study's depth, as it might overlook relevant historical and policy contexts crucial for a comprehensive analysis.

6.2 Future Research Direction

Future research on the Free Quality Education (FQE) initiative in Sierra Leone should expand beyond the Western Area to include a more comprehensive geographic scope that encompasses rural and remote regions. This broader study would help identify

regional disparities and tailor educational policies to address the unique challenges schools face in different parts of the country. Understanding these variances can lead to more targeted interventions and equitable resource allocation, ensuring that all students benefit equally from the FQE initiative regardless of location.

Another important direction for future research is to incorporate longitudinal studies that track the long-term impacts of the FQE initiative on educational outcomes. Such studies would provide valuable insights into how sustained government investment in education influences student performance, retention rates, and overall school quality over time. Longitudinal data also helps assess the effectiveness of specific interventions and policies, allowing for adjustments and improvements based on empirical evidence. This approach could highlight the initiative's successes and areas needing continuous support or modification.

Finally, future research should explore the role of technology and innovation in enhancing educational quality and access. Investigating how digital tools and online learning platforms can supplement traditional teaching methods, especially in under-resourced schools, would be highly beneficial. Researchers could focus on integrating technology into the curriculum, training teachers to use digital tools, and evaluating the effectiveness of e-learning in improving educational outcomes. By leveraging modern technological advancements to bridge these gaps, this focus on technology could solve some identified challenges, such as the lack of trained teachers in rural areas and insufficient educational materials.

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