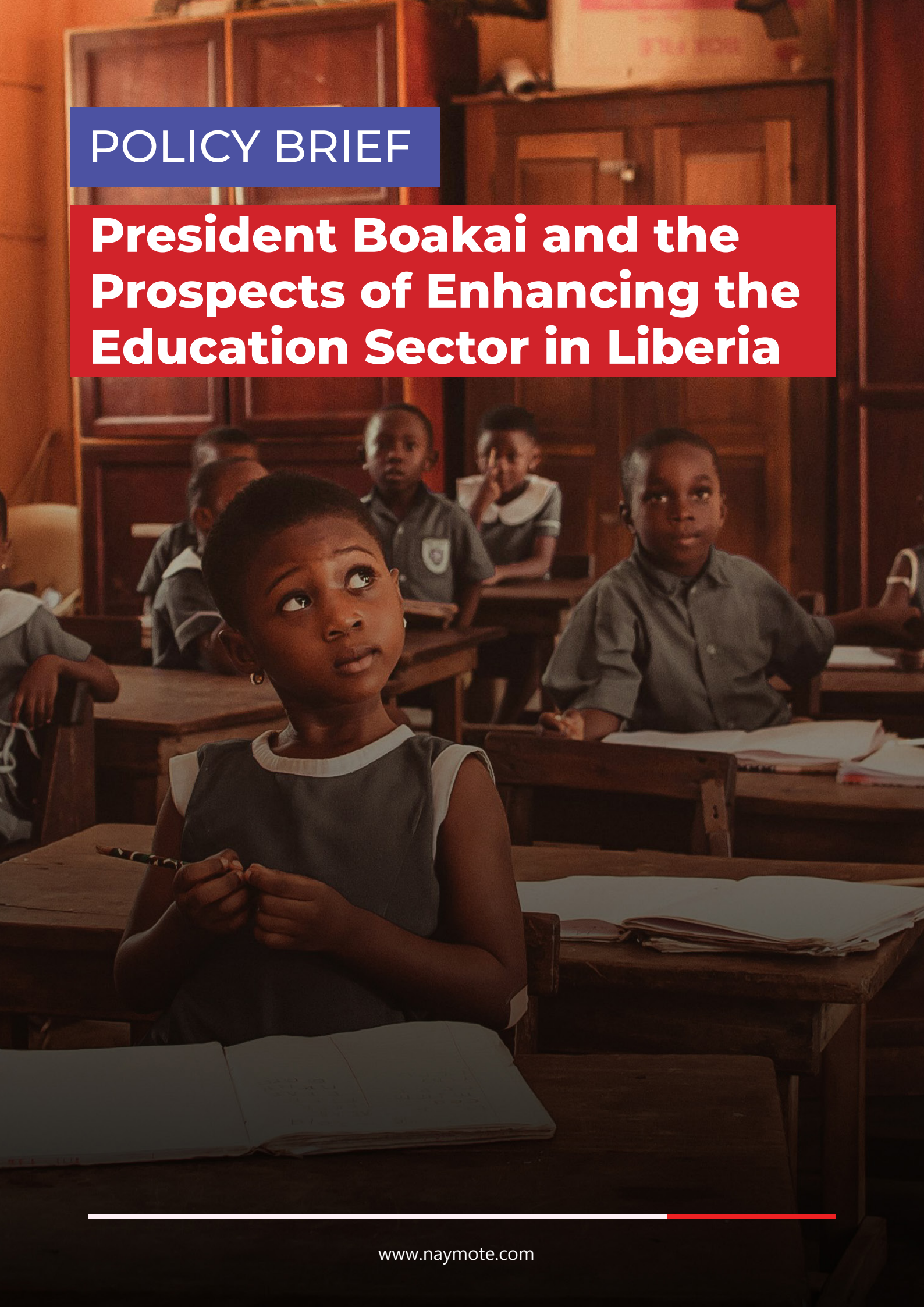


A young girl in a classroom, looking up thoughtfully. She is wearing a grey sleeveless dress with white trim. She is sitting at a wooden desk with an open book in front of her. Other children are visible in the background, also sitting at desks. The classroom has wooden walls and cabinets.

POLICY BRIEF

President Boakai and the Prospects of Enhancing the Education Sector in Liberia

Table of content

1. Introduction	3
2. Liberia's Education Sector: Legal and Policy Frameworks	4
3. The State of the Education Sector in Liberia	5
a. Persistent underfunding:	5
b. Infrastructure and Resources:	6
c. Teacher Quality and Learning Outcomes	6
d. Access and Equity	6
e. Governance and Management	7
4. Education Sector and Priorities of President Joseph Boakai	8
5. Recommendations	9
a. Increase Funding for Education	9
c. Enhance Infrastructure Development	9
d. Improve Teacher Quality	10
e. Expand Access to Education	10
f. Strengthen Community Involvement	10
g. Implement Robust Monitoring and Evaluation	10
6. References	11

1. Introduction



This policy brief examines the current state of Liberia's education sector, assesses how President Joseph Nyumah Boakai's priorities are aligned with the Country's Education Sector Plan (ESP) (2022-2027), and puts forward recommendations to address prevailing gaps and challenges. On January 22, 2024, Liberia marked another significant milestone with the inauguration of President Joseph N. Boakai, Sr as the 26th President of Liberia. This event was not just a political transition but a beacon of renewed hope for the nation's economic growth and development. Among the various sectors identified for transformation, education stands out as a primary focus of the administration, reflecting his party's (Unity Party) commitment to establishing a robust educational framework capable of addressing longstanding challenges of the sectors of Agriculture, Roads, Rule of Law, Education, Sanitation and Tourism (ARREST, 2023).

President Boakai's administration has laid an ambitious agenda to reform and enhance the educational landscape. Key campaign reforms include making early childhood education (ECE) free and compulsory in primary public schools, reducing overaged enrollment through community engagement, and enhancing teacher training to achieve a 90% certification rate for ECE teachers. The administration plans to invest in infrastructure to expand classroom capacity, as well as in special needs education and school feeding programs to improve inclusivity and student well-being. Moreover, they aim to achieve a 20% increase in primary school enrollment and a 40% reduction in out-of-school children, with specific programs designed to boost girls' education and improve science teaching quality. Additionally, legislative efforts will focus on submitting a Bill to establish the Liberia TVET Commission (LITCOM), alongside investments in vocational training, apprenticeship programs, and governance reforms aimed at ensuring holistic educational improvement nationwide (ARREST, 2023; 100-Day Deliverables, 2023).

While these campaign promises collectively reflect an ambitious approach to addressing the multifaceted challenges within Liberia's education sector, it is crucial to assess the capacity of the government's interventions since the assumption of Office in January 2024 to address lingering challenges in the country's education sector. It is also crucial to assess how President Boakai's priorities align with the strategic objectives of the country's ESP (2022-2027).

2. Liberia's Education Sector: Legal and Policy Frameworks

Liberia's education system follows a 3-9-3-4 model and is paralleled by alternative education programs that offer accelerated learning and adult education for overaged students (UNESCO, 2022). Over the years, successive governments have introduced various policies and laws to overhaul the educational system, aiming to deliver high-quality education that is more accessible and effective.

A significant milestone in this reform process was the enactment of the Education Reform Act in 2011. This legislation established free compulsory basic education up to Grade 9, marking a notable improvement from the 2001 Education Law (Right to Education Project, 2012). One of the critical changes introduced by the Act was the decentralization of education governance, transferring decision-making authority from the central government to county and district levels to enhance local accountability and responsiveness to educational needs (Salia, 2022).

The Act also emphasized several critical areas to uplift the quality of education in Liberia. It underscored the importance of teacher training, recognizing that well-prepared teachers are crucial for effective teaching and learning. Additionally, it highlighted the need for substantial investment in education infrastructure to ensure that schools have the necessary facilities to support a conducive learning environment. Furthermore, the Act mandated the restructuring of the Ministry of Education to improve its efficiency and effectiveness in managing the sector (World Bank, 2023; USAID, 2020). While the implementation of the legal framework has yielded mixed outcomes, it undoubtedly represents a comprehensive approach to addressing the systemic issues within Liberia's education sector.

Since the enactment of the 2011 Education Reform Act, the government has continued to formulate policies to achieve its primary objectives. The Education Sector Plan (ESP) – Getting to Best (2017–2021) has been replaced with the ESP (2022/23–2026/27), which has three overarching goals: increasing equitable access, improving the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, and strengthening the efficiency of the education system (ESP, 2022). Achieving these goals requires a multifaceted approach. For equitable access, it is crucial to reduce the over-age student population through policy enforcement and expand accelerated learning programs. Constructing and upgrading schools, especially in underserved areas, and providing financial support to the poorest students and those with disabilities will help lower out-of-school rates and address gender and regional disparities.

Improving teaching quality involves ensuring a well-trained and motivated workforce by offering incentives, implementing professional development programs, and developing a teacher licensing system. Aligning teaching materials with the reformed curriculum, expanding TVET, and increasing STEM and digital education training will enhance learning relevance and prepare students for future workforce demands. Lastly, strengthening management capacity involves establishing effective monitoring and evaluation systems, providing continuous professional development for school leaders, and building robust public-private partnerships to fully implement education policies and strategies (ESP, 2022). The implementation of ESP is further supported by several sub-sector-specific policies, including the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) policy and the Inclusive Education policy.

3. The State of the Education Sector in Liberia

The Liberian education system grapples with numerous challenges, including insufficient budget allocation and expenditure, infrastructure deficits, a high proportion of underqualified teachers, low learning outcomes, uneven access to education, and poor governance and management.

The Liberia Education Statistics Report of 2020-21 reported that the total number of schools in Liberia is 6311. Of the total schools, 244(3.87%) schools are community schools, 1405 representing (22.26%) are faith-based schools, while private schools account for 2084 (33.02%) and the remaining 2578(40.85) are government or public schools.

a. Persistent underfunding:

Inadequate funding has been a significant impediment to the growth and development of the education sector in Liberia. Over the past few years, budget allocations to education have consistently fallen short of the UNESCO recommendation that developing nations allocate 26% of their national budgets to education. This is also well below the suggested contribution of 4-6% of the GDP. This shortfall is evident in the budgetary data from 2022 to 2024.

Table 1: Budget Allocation to the Education Sector (2022-2024)

Year	Budget	% of Total Budget	% of education spending	% of GDP
2024	111,329,481	15.1		
2023	90,805,806	11.8	11.73	2.42
2022	92,067,671	11.3	7.39	2.60

Sources: National Budget (2022, 2023, and 2024); World Bank Databank (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?locations=LR>)

In 2024, Liberia allocated \$111,329,481 to education, accounting for only 15.1% of the total national budget. While this is an increase from previous years, it remains significantly below the UNESCO recommendation of 26%. The situation was even more critical in prior years. In 2023, the education budget was \$90,805,806, representing just 11.8% of the total budget. Furthermore, education expenditure constituted only 11.73% of the total spending and a mere 2.42% of the GDP. This trend continued in 2022, with \$92,067,671 allocated to education, comprising only 11.3% of the national budget. The percentage of education spending was a low 7.39%, with its contribution to GDP slightly higher at 2.60%.

A significant concern is that most of the budget is allocated to recurrent spending, with a higher percentage spent on salaries. According to UNESCO's Education Sector Analysis (2022), 63.5% of the recurrent budget was spent on salaries in the 2020/21 period. Furthermore, the largest proportion of non-salary expenditures went to grants and transfers, with almost 100% benefiting university education. Among ECOWAS Member States, Liberia spends the third lowest per learner, at around 11% of per capita GDP at the primary level, but is among the highest at the secondary level, at 37% (UNESCO, 2022). These figures highlight the persistent underfunding and misallocation within Liberia's education sector.



b. Infrastructure and Resources:

Liberia's education sector grapples with severe infrastructure deficits, particularly in rural areas. A substantial portion of schools lack essential facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, and libraries. According to the USAID Education Sector Fact Sheet (2021), 45% of schools are without adequate infrastructure, significantly affecting the learning environment. UNESCO's Education Sector Analysis report (2022) highlights the shortage of the country's learning facilities. According to the report, at the early childhood education (ECE) and primary levels, average class sizes are relatively manageable, with 23 and 31 learners per classroom, respectively. However, class sizes increase dramatically at the junior and senior secondary levels, with averages of 51 and 54 learners per classroom. Additionally, a substantial number of classrooms at these higher levels are not constructed from solid materials, indicating poor quality. The report also points out severe shortages in sanitation facilities, exemplified by more than 120 boys sharing a single toilet in Gbarpolu county.

c. Teacher Quality and Learning Outcomes

The quality and training of teachers in Liberia present another critical challenge. Many educators are underqualified and lack proper training. The UNESCO Education Sector Analysis (2022) reveals that only 35% of primary school teachers meet the necessary qualifications. Continuous professional development opportunities are minimal, which exacerbates the problem of teacher competency. The Education Policy and Data Centre (EPDC) National Education Profile (2018) highlights that the shortage of qualified teachers is particularly acute in rural areas, where educational needs are greatest. This disparity leads to significant variations in educational quality between urban and rural schools.

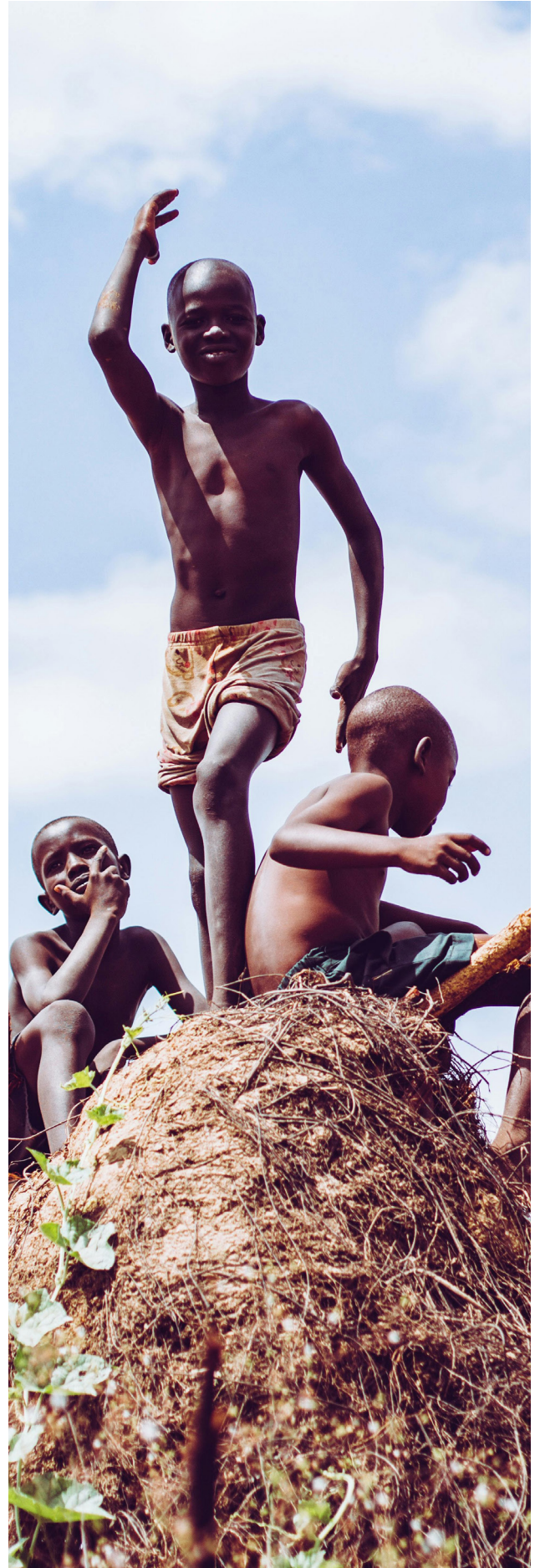
d. Access and Equity

Access to education in Liberia remains uneven, particularly for girls and children in rural regions. Cultural norms and economic barriers significantly lower enrollment rates for boys and girls in these areas. According to the EPDC NEP (2018), girls face additional obstacles such as early marriage and domestic responsibilities, which hinder their ability to attend school. The UNICEF COAR (2022) report indicates that only 60% of school-age children are enrolled in primary education, with even

lower rates for secondary education. This lack of access exacerbates educational inequities and limits the potential for social and economic development in these communities. Despite government efforts toward implementing the country's Inclusive Education Policy (2028), these disparities persist, highlighting the need for more effective strategies to ensure equitable access to education for all children in Liberia.

e. Governance and Management

In Liberia, weak governance and management structures severely impede the allocation of resources to schools, exacerbating the challenges within the education sector. According to Yele and Specioza (2024), ineffective policy implementation and a lack of robust accountability mechanisms are significant barriers to educational progress. The absence of transparency in administrative processes further complicates the situation, as does the limited involvement of local communities in academic governance. These governance deficiencies lead to inefficient resource allocation, preventing schools from receiving the necessary funding and support. Consequently, this hinders the development and enforcement of effective educational policies, perpetuating a cycle of underperformance and inequity within Liberia's education system.



4. Education Sector and Priorities of President Joseph Boakai



In the first six months of his administration, President Boakai has taken steps towards fulfilling his campaign promises and implementing the Education Sector Plan (ESP) for 2022/23 – 2026/27. Recognizing the crucial role of funding in the success of education policies, his administration has allocated 15% of the 2024 fiscal year budget to education. Although this allocation falls short of UNESCO's recommended 20% for developing countries, it marks a historic commitment that, if sustained and effectively managed, could lead to substantial improvements in the sector.

However, a closer examination of the budget reveals that 95% is earmarked for recurrent expenditures (National Budget, 2024). This allocation is made perhaps to ensure the stability and quality of daily operations, such as paying teacher salaries, maintaining facilities, and procuring educational materials. While these are essential for the immediate functioning of the education system, the overwhelming focus on recurrent costs raises concerns in a country facing significant infrastructure deficits. There is a need for a balanced approach that also includes capital investments for constructing new schools and upgrading existing facilities.

In alignment with Liberia's ESP, President Boakai's administration has also shown a commitment to enhancing TVET in the country. In June 2024, the House of Representatives passed an Act to establish the Liberia TVET Commission (LiTCOM). This commission has the mandate to regulate, coordinate, and harmonize TVET programs at all levels, including pre-tertiary, formal, and non-formal activities in both public and private sectors (Johnson, 2024). Additionally, in March 2024, a significant milestone was reached with the inauguration of a TVET training facility at Cape Palmas High School in Maryland County. This initiative, part of the Youth Rising project funded by the European Union (EU) and Sweden, and implemented by the United Nations Industrial Organization (UNIDO) in collaboration with the Liberian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, began in September 2018 (The Analyst News, 2024).

Although these developments are positive, holistic efforts are necessary to fully achieve the ESP

goals. This includes addressing systemic challenges, ensuring sustainable funding, and maintaining the quality and relevance of vocational training programs. Despite the importance of TVET programs in equipping individuals with livelihood skills, the challenge of employment post-graduation persists. Continued focus on creating job opportunities and aligning TVET curricula with market needs will be essential for the long-term success and impact of these programs. Another key milestone by the administration is the launch of the digital transformation project in May 2024, aimed at empowering 10,000 young people with digital skills within the first half of the year (Koinyeneh, 2024).

While these efforts are commendable, significant challenges remain. The success of these interventions in achieving the goals of the ESP depends on addressing crucial financial and systemic issues to build a more equitable and effective educational system.

5. Recommendations



a. Increase Funding for Education

To achieve significant improvements in Liberia's education sector, it is crucial to allocate at least 20% of the national budget to education, in line with UNESCO's recommendation, by the end of 2025. The budget must give priority to critical transformative areas in the sector. Given the challenges of generating domestic funds due to the country's low economy and high poverty rate, the government should strengthen existing partnerships with global educational organizations to secure financial support for large-scale educational projects.

b. Strengthening of accountability mechanisms

The ESP (2022/23-2026/27) commendably devolves authority for the management of basic education to the county and district levels, allowing local governance structures to exercise control over schools. Institutionalizing accountability measures at these levels is crucial for the effective management of resources and increasing investment in the sector. Therefore, the government should prioritize the implementation of these accountability measures to ensure the responsible use of budgeted

resources and to promote investment in education.

c. Enhance Infrastructure Development

Investing in the construction and renovation of school buildings is vital, particularly in rural areas where educational infrastructure is often lacking. Ensuring that schools have access to basic facilities such as electricity, clean water, and adequate sanitation facilities will create a conducive teaching and learning environment.

d. Improve Teacher Quality

Implementing comprehensive teacher training programs is essential for both pre-service and in-service teachers. These programs should focus on modern teaching methodologies, subject knowledge, and classroom management skills. Providing incentives such as housing and transportation allowances will attract and retain qualified teachers in rural areas, where they are most needed. By improving teacher quality, the overall educational outcomes will be significantly enhanced.

e. Expand Access to Education

To ensure that all children have the opportunity to receive an education, it is necessary to establish more schools in rural areas. Programs specifically designed to support girls' education and inclusive education for children with disabilities will help address existing disparities. These initiatives will promote equality and ensure that every child has access to quality education, regardless of their background or location.

f. Strengthen Community Involvement

Increasing awareness of educational reforms and involving communities in school management and governance can foster a sense of ownership and accountability, leading to a more effective and sustainable educational system. To achieve this, the government could collaborate with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) at all levels.

g. Implement Robust Monitoring and Evaluation

Creating a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework is crucial for tracking the progress and impact of educational initiatives. Regular data collection and analysis will enable evidence-based adjustments to strategies, ensuring their effectiveness and accountability. This approach will identify areas needing improvement and ensure efficient resource utilization to achieve desired educational outcomes. Partnering with CSOs will significantly aid in implementing this recommendation.

References

- Ministry of Education, Liberia. (2023). National Education Act.
- World Bank. (2023). Liberia Education Sector Reform Project.
- USAID. (2021). Education Sector Fact Sheet.
- UNESCO. (2022). Education Sector Analysis: Republic of Liberia.
- Yele and Specioza (2024). Examining the Access, Quality, and Relevance Gaps in Liberia's Educational Policy Environment, IJFMR.
- EPDC. (2018). National Education Profile: Liberia.
- UNICEF. (2022). Liberia Education Sector Plan.
- EducateHer Liberia. (2021). JESR Final Report.
- UNESCO (2022). Education Sector Analysis.
- Johnson O. (2024). Liberia: House Passes Landmark Act to Establish Liberia Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Commission. FrontpageAfrcaOnline.Com
- Koinyeneh, G. (2024). President Boakai Launches Liberia Digital Transformation Project, Targeting 10,000 Youths. FrontpageAfrcaOnline.Com
- National Budget (2024). Ministry of Finance and Development Planning.
- National Budget (2023). Ministry of Finance and Development Planning.
- National Budget (2022). Ministry of Finance and Development Planning.
- Right to Education Project (2012). Country Factsheet, Liberia.
- Salia M. (2022). Assessing the Impact of the 2011 Education Reform Act in Liberia
- World Bank (2023). Implementation Completion and Results Report, Liberia.
- Education Reform Act (2011)
- Education Sector Plan (2022). Ministry of Education.



NAYMOTE is a leading Liberian grassroots organisation promoting democracy, peacebuilding, human rights, and civic engagement.

www.naymote.com