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COUNTRY MAPPING REPORT

School Leadership in Liberia

Prepared by:
African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL)

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The African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) is a coalition of partners coordinated by ADEA, ESSA, FAWE and VVOB.

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GUINEA
SIERRA LEONE
Zorzor
GBARPOLU
Belle Yella
Kongo
GRAND CAPE MOUNT
Bopolu
Bo
Tubmanburg
Robertsport
BOMI
Bong Town
BONG
Gbarnga
Palala
Sanniquellie
Ganta
Sagleipie
NIMBA
COTE D'IVOIRE
Kakata
MONTSERRADO
Bensonville
Monrovia
MARGIBI
Tapeta
Toobli
GRAND BASSA
Guata
Zwedru
GRAND GEDEH
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SINOE
RIVER GEE
Fish Town
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Greenville
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International Boundary
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Other Cities
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List of acronyms

ACSL	African Centre for School Leadership
AERD	African Education Research Database
ASC	Annual School Census
BRAC	Building Resources Across Communities (international development organisation)
CapED	Capacity Development for Education (UNESCO programme)
CEO	County Education Officer
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DEEP	Diversified Educators Empowerment Project
DEO	District Education Officer
EBSCO	EBSCO (academic research database)
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EDC	Education Development Center
EDPG	Education Development Partners Group
EJSR	Education Joint Sector Review (see also JESR)
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ERIC	Education Resources Information Center (academic database)
ESP	Education Sector Plan
EXCEL	Excellence in Learning in Liberia (project)
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GEM	Global Education Monitoring (Report)
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HR	Human Resources
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO)
JESR	Joint Education Sector Review
KII	Key Informant Interview
LEAP	Liberia Education Advancement Programme
LEG	Local Education Group
LiT	Leaders in Teaching
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSQS	National School Quality Standards
NTAL	National Teachers Association of Liberia
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Professional Development
PEER	Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews
PSL	Partnership Schools for Liberia
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
REO	Regional Education Officer
RTI	Research Triangle Institute (RTI International)
RTTI	Rural Teacher Training Institute
SL	School Leadership
SMC	School Management Committee
SRGBV	School-Related Gender-Based Violence
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAEC	West African Examinations Council
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Executive Summary

School leaders are central to translating Liberia's education reforms into improved teaching, learning, equity, inclusion, and accountability at school level. They are responsible not only for managing school operations but also for supporting teaching and learning, supervising teachers, engaging communities, promoting safe and inclusive learning environments, and ensuring compliance with Ministry of Education policies. Yet many school leaders assume these responsibilities with limited formal preparation, mentoring, guidance, and operational support.

Against this backdrop, the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL), in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Education Development Center (EDC), and other partners under the Leaders in Teaching initiative, undertook a comprehensive mapping of the school leadership landscape in Liberia. The mapping examined four interconnected areas: policy and systems; school leadership practice and professional development; research and evidence; and communication, advocacy, and sector coordination. Gender equality and social inclusion were applied as cross-cutting lenses throughout the exercise.

The mapping combined a desk review of national legislation, policies, sector plans, programme documents, research and grey literature, using the GEM Report's school leadership PEER profile for Liberia as one of the entry points. The research mapping identified 43 studies for screening, of which 29 publications met the inclusion criteria for detailed analysis. Primary data collection involved 36 stakeholders from government, training institutions, development partners, civil society, professional and community organisations, and schools. The findings were subsequently validated through a two-day national workshop on 1–2 April 2026 involving approximately 31 stakeholders. The process generated a triangulated evidence base and a nationally validated set of priorities and actions for strengthening school leadership.

School leadership policy and systems

Liberia has an important and substantial policy foundation for school leadership. Key instruments include the Education Reform Act (2011), the National Education Sector Plan (2017), the National School Quality Standards (2019), the National Teachers' Professional Performance Standards (2020), the National Teacher Training Management Policy (2022), the Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators (2014), and successive Education Sector Plans. Together, these instruments establish governance arrangements, professional expectations, quality standards, accountability requirements, and commitments related to leadership development and inclusion.

The central challenge is therefore not the absence of policy, but its fragmentation and uneven implementation. Liberia does not yet have a standalone national school leadership policy or professional standards framework that brings together leadership roles, competencies, accountability, professional development, and career progression. Expectations are dispersed across broader education, teacher development, quality assurance, and regulatory instruments. Although authority is formally distributed across national, county, district, and school levels, decision-making remains highly centralised in practice, feedback loops are weak, and sub-national actors face significant resource and capacity constraints. Recruitment is also not consistently standardised, particularly across private, faith-based, and community schools, where institutional networks and local arrangements can shape access to leadership positions.

School leadership practice and professional development

Liberia has growing experience with school leadership development through initiatives including the Principals' School Leadership Training and Certification Programme, USAID Read Liberia, LEAP/Partnership Schools, the National School Quality Standards leadership training, and the EXCEL project. These initiatives demonstrate increasing recognition of school leadership as a critical component of education quality. However, provision remains fragmented, with substantial reliance on donor-funded programmes and limited mechanisms for monitoring leadership development nationally. School leadership indicators were not tracked in the 2024/25 Annual School Census, making it difficult to assess progress against national training targets.

There is no dedicated pre-service programme specifically preparing individuals for school leadership. Although policy requires specialised training before a teacher assumes a principalship, in practice there is no standardised national induction programme, and newly appointed principals often learn through informal arrangements and on-the-job experience. In-service CPD is provided by multiple government, university, NGO, and development-partner actors, but there is no unified framework linking preparation, induction, mentoring, continuous learning, certification, performance management, and career progression. Peer learning between schools is also limited, while the predominance of face-to-face training restricts reach to remote and hard-to-reach counties.

School leadership research and evidence

The evidence base is small but growing. The mapping identified 29 school leadership publications from 2010–2025, with increasing research activity in recent years. Research is concentrated particularly on leadership development and the relationship between leadership and teacher or student outcomes. By contrast, teaching and classroom practice and equity, inclusion, and justice remain among the least researched areas. Stakeholders also identified important gaps in understanding instructional leadership in practice, leadership pathways and progression, data use, accountability, equity and inclusion, and differences in leadership across public and private schools.

The research ecosystem itself remains fragmented. Research is often driven by individual researchers, institutional interests, or donor priorities, while formal mechanisms connecting research institutions to government planning and policy processes remain limited. Research is also not consistently translated into accessible products for policymakers and practitioners. Importantly, the national validation workshop produced Liberia's first consolidated, stakeholder-endorsed research agenda for school leadership, with priorities including leadership effectiveness and training, instructional leadership and teaching practice, leadership styles and school improvement, gender, equity and inclusion, and policy–practice implementation gaps.

Coordination, gender, and equity

Coordination on school leadership is fragmented, largely bilateral and informal, and not yet visible as a distinct agenda item within national platforms such as the Local Education Group, the Education Development Partners Group, or the Joint Education Sector Review.

Although policy commitments to gender responsiveness and social inclusion, such as the involvement of people living with disabilities, are strong, women and people with disabilities remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions. For example, women account for roughly 4% to 18% of principals across education levels and hold only about 6% of County Education Officer positions across education levels, with gender targets missed at every tier. Persistent barriers include restrictive social norms, limited promotion pathways, safety and mobility concerns, and the absence of basic facilities such as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).

Across the four areas, the findings converge on a consistent conclusion: Liberia's principal challenge is not a lack of policies, programmes, or stakeholder commitment, but a lack of coherence, coordination, implementation, and accountability. The country has established important foundations for professionalising school leadership, but these provisions and initiatives have not yet been consolidated into an integrated system. Fragmented expectations, weak implementation mechanisms, limited sub-national capacity, uncoordinated professional development, weak evidence-to-policy pathways, and persistent gender and inclusion gaps constrain the translation of policy commitments into consistent improvements in school leadership practice.



Key Recommendations

The report therefore calls for a shift from a policy-rich environment to an implementation-oriented school leadership system. Priority actions are to:

1. **Consolidate existing policy instruments** into a coherent national school leadership policy and standards framework that defines roles, competencies, accountability, and career pathways, supported by a dedicated budget line with clear responsibilities across national, county, district, and school levels.
2. **Build an integrated professional development pathway** linking recruitment, preparation, induction, mentoring, CPD, certification, performance management, and career progression, while embedding leadership development within existing supervision and school quality assurance systems.
3. **Restructure existing leadership training modules into a national school leadership training curriculum** for Rural Teacher Training Institutes and other teacher training institutions, covering both pre-service preparation and in-service development, so that aspiring and serving school leaders acquire the competencies required for school leadership beyond those needed for classroom teaching.
4. **Institutionalise the national school leadership research agenda** and establish formal evidence-to-policy channels so that research and existing education datasets inform planning, sector reviews, policy development, and school improvement.
5. **Make school leadership more visible within existing coordination structures**, particularly the Teacher Professional Development Technical Working Group and the Joint Education Sector Review, while using professional associations and digital and broadcast platforms to strengthen knowledge sharing and communities of practice.
6. **Translate gender and social inclusion commitments into measurable action**, including stronger monitoring of women's representation, deliberate attention to the participation of people with disabilities, and measures to address the working conditions, social norms, safety, mobility, and WASH barriers that affect access to and progression in school leadership.

An accompanying roadmap provides a time-bound implementation pathway for translating these priorities into action and strengthening national ownership of school leadership reform. The mapping therefore provides not only a diagnosis of the current landscape but also a stakeholder-validated basis for moving towards a more coherent, professionalised, inclusive, and implementation-capable school leadership system in Liberia.

1. Introduction

Liberia's education system has undergone significant reconstruction over the past two decades following years of civil war (1989–2003) and the 2014–2016 Ebola crisis, both of which severely weakened school infrastructure, teacher capacity, and governance systems. Since then, the government has continued to pursue reforms aimed at improving access, quality, equity, accountability, and system resilience. These priorities are reflected in the Education Sector Plan 2022/23–2026/27, which places renewed emphasis on strengthening education management, improving teaching and learning, and building more inclusive and effective schools (Ministry of Education, 2022). In 2019/2020, the country had more than 3,300 junior and secondary schools, of which more than 50% were privately owned (Laterite, 2024).

School leaders play a central role in translating national policies into school-level practice. They are responsible not only for managing school operations but also for supporting teaching and learning, monitoring performance, engaging communities, promoting safe and inclusive learning environments, and ensuring compliance with Ministry of Education policies (Bush, 2019). In Liberia, school leadership responsibilities are typically distributed across principals, vice principals for instruction and student affairs, and vice principals for administration. However, the principal remains the primary accountability holder at the school level, with overall responsibility for the school's functioning and performance. Despite these significant responsibilities, many school leaders assume their roles with limited formal preparation in instructional leadership, school management, or continuous professional development (Norman, 2013). They are expected to balance administrative responsibilities, teacher supervision, community engagement, student welfare, resource mobilisation, and accountability requirements, often with limited access to training, mentoring, guidance, and operational support (Ministry of Education, 2022; UNESCO, 2021). These constraints contribute to uneven leadership practice, inconsistent instructional quality, and weak accountability systems, particularly in public, community, and resource-constrained schools.

These are precisely the challenges that the Leaders in Teaching (LiT) initiative seeks to address through its Lead pillar. The initiative aims to strengthen instructional leadership by developing a School Leadership Competency Framework and enhancing the School Quality Assurance Framework; introducing a new certification programme for school leaders in partnership with higher education institutions and Rural Teacher Training Institutes; and training and accrediting approximately 3,200 school leaders and 124 district leaders in instructional leadership, monitoring, supervision, and accountability (EDC, 2025). Designing these interventions effectively, however, requires a clear, evidence-based understanding of how school leadership is currently structured, supported, and practised in Liberia. This need provides the rationale for the present mapping exercise.

Against this backdrop, the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL), in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Education Development Center (EDC), and other partners under the Leaders in Teaching initiative, undertook a comprehensive mapping of the school leadership landscape in Liberia. The mapping aimed to generate an evidence-based understanding of the current state of school leadership by examining four interconnected areas: the policy and institutional framework; school leadership practice and professional development; research and evidence on school leadership; and communication, advocacy, and sector coordination. Throughout the exercise, gender equality and social inclusion were applied as cross-cutting lenses to ensure that the analysis captured the diverse experiences, opportunities, and barriers affecting school leadership across the system.

This report presents the findings from the mapping exercise, drawing on desk review, primary data collection, and stakeholder validation. It identifies key strengths, gaps, opportunities, and priority actions for strengthening school leadership in Liberia. The report is intended to support national dialogue and decision-making on how school leadership can be more deliberately professionalised, coordinated, resourced, and positioned as a central part of Liberia's wider education reform agenda.

2. Methodology

ACSL designed a phased, participatory mapping approach that integrated desk review, primary data collection, and a national stakeholder validation of the findings (more on the ACSL approach to mapping here). This multi-pronged approach is intended to provide both breadth and depth, enabling systematic analysis while capturing lived realities, motivations, and institutional factors that shape school leadership research in the country. The mapping focused on four core areas: school leadership policy and systems; school leadership practices and professional development; research and evidence generation; and communication, advocacy, and sector coordination. Gender equality and social inclusion were considered as cross-cutting themes throughout the process.

2.1 A desk review

The desk review served as the primary entry point for understanding the policy, practice, research, and coordination landscape for school leadership in Liberia. It examined relevant legislation, policy frameworks, implementation guidelines, programme outputs, sector coordination and advocacy efforts, research publications, and grey literature related to school leadership and education management. The review drew on international and regional sources, including the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report's PEER country profile on school leadership, which provides country-level policy information linked to the 2024/5 GEM Report on leadership in education.

The review also consulted key national education documents, including the Education Sector Plan, Education Sector Analysis, Education Reform Act, national teacher policy documents, development partner reports, and other relevant policy and programme materials. These were complemented by searches of education and social science research databases, including the African Education Research Database (AERD), EBSCO, ERIC, Google Scholar, and local repositories. The AERD contains a curated collection of education research undertaken by scholars based in sub-Saharan Africa and is intended to consolidate evidence for education policy, practice, and future research priorities. A snowballing technique was used to identify additional policy documents, evaluations, research outputs, and grey literature cited in core sources. This helped broaden the scope of the review and reduce the risk of omitting relevant documents that may not have appeared in initial database searches.

To contextualise the review for Liberia, the research mapping initially identified 43 studies for screening and review. From this process, 29 publications met the inclusion criteria for school leadership research and were analysed in greater detail. The analysis was structured around thematic areas including leadership development; impact on teachers and students; leadership roles and structures; policy and system context; teaching and classroom practice; and equity, inclusion, and justice. Publications were assessed to understand the volume, focus, authorship patterns, methodological approaches, institutional affiliations, and attention to equity dimensions within the school leadership evidence base.

2.2 Primary data collection

To ensure that all relevant information on school leadership in Liberia is captured, primary data collection was conducted to complement the desk review, fill evidence gaps, and capture stakeholder experiences that are not always visible in published literature or policy documents.

The primary data collection engaged 36 participants, including 21 male and 15 female respondents. Participants included government actors such as the Ministry of Education, Civil Service Agency, County Education Officers, District Education Officers, and the National Commission on Higher Education; training institutions such as Rural Teacher Training Institutes, Bishop Kun Polytechnic, University of Liberia, African Methodist Episcopal University, African University Women Association, and Diversified Educators Empowerment Project (DEEP); development partners such as BRAC and EDC; civil society actors such as FAWE; coordination and community actors such as the National Association of Liberian School Principals and the National Association of Disabled Organisations; and school-level actors, including principals and vice principals.

The primary data collection used key informant interviews and focus group discussions to explore school leadership policies, practices, professional development opportunities, research needs, coordination mechanisms, and implementation challenges. These discussions helped test and enrich the desk review findings by incorporating practical insights from actors working at the national, county, district, institutional, and school levels. The data also helped identify gaps between policy intentions and implementation realities, particularly around leadership training, preparation, recruitment, induction, CPD, mentoring, accountability, gender equity, disability inclusion, and school-level support.

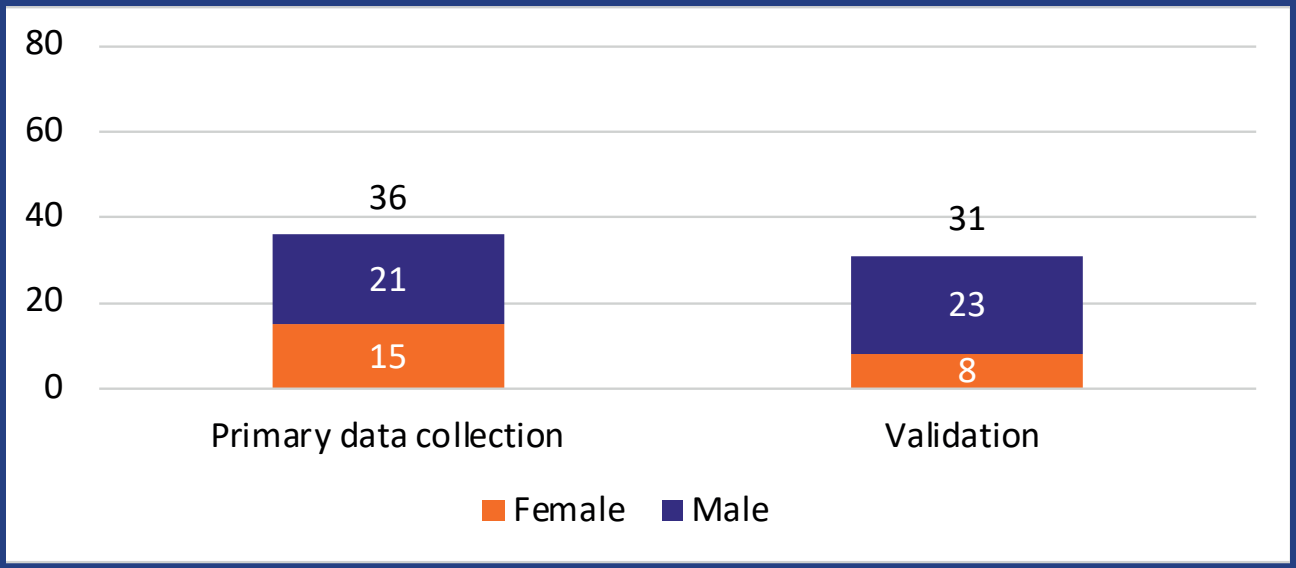
2.3 Validation of the mapping findings

The combined findings of the desk review and primary data collection were subsequently validated through a two-day workshop (1–2 April 2026) that brought together approximately 31 participants (23 male and 8 female). Participants included key education stakeholders from the Ministry of Education (MoE), professional development partners, government agencies, universities, development partners, civil society organisations, representatives from school governance bodies, representatives from the Liberia Disabled Association, private school associations, and school leaders.

The main objectives of the workshop were to validate the preliminary findings of the mapping exercise in Liberia; identify key gaps, challenges and opportunities in strengthening school leadership policies, systems and practices; define priority research areas, and develop a roadmap for action to guide future initiatives. The workshop also provided an opportunity to gather additional insights and generate concrete, actionable recommendations in response to the identified gaps.

The workshop was structured around two linked stages. Day 1 focused on interrogating and validating the preliminary findings on school leadership policies, professional development, research, advocacy, and sector coordination; through plenary discussions, group work, and Q&A sessions, participants confirmed findings that resonated with their experience, flagged areas requiring correction or further nuance, surfaced missing perspectives, and identified evidence gaps and research priorities. Day 2 moved from evidence to action—building consensus on research priorities, discussing coordination across actors, and translating the validated findings into a roadmap of practical actions with potential leads, resource considerations, expected results, and means of verification—ensuring that the exercise goes beyond diagnosis to contribute to a practical, nationally owned roadmap. Throughout, discussions applied an intentional gender equality and social inclusion lens, reflecting on women's participation in school leadership, the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and the need to move from policy commitments to practical implementation while reinforcing the positioning of school leadership within Liberia's wider education reform agenda.

Figure 1: Gender representation in the data collection and validation



Source: SL Mapping in Liberia (2026).



2.4 Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this mapping exercise. First, although the desk review drew on multiple databases, repositories, policy sources, and grey literature, not all relevant resources may have been captured, particularly unpublished or locally held documents. Second, the search terms and query strategies used may not have captured all possible language used to describe school leadership, education management, school administration, instructional leadership, or related concepts. Third, while the primary data collection and validation workshop engaged a diverse set of stakeholders, the findings reflect the views of selected participants and should not be interpreted as fully representative of all actors, counties, schools, or communities.

In addition, some responses may have been shaped by participants' personal experiences, institutional positions, or the sensitivity of the issues discussed. Limited time and resources also affected the number of stakeholders engaged and the depth of inquiry possible across different regions. As a result, local differences across counties, school types, and rural and urban contexts may not be fully captured. These limitations do not invalidate the findings, but they highlight the need to interpret them as a grounded but evolving evidence base that should continue to be refined through further consultation, research, and implementation learning.

3. Key Findings

This section presents the key findings from the mapping exercise. The findings are structured around four core areas: policy and system landscape for school leadership; practice and professional development initiatives for school leaders; research and evidence generation; and cross-cutting dimensions of advocacy, communication, sector coordination, gender, equity, and social inclusion.

3.1 School leadership policy and system landscape

This section outlines the governance structure, policy frameworks, and institutional arrangements that shape school leadership in Liberia. It examines how authority, accountability, and leadership roles are defined across levels of the education system and how school leaders are trained, recruited, regulated, and supported.

3.1.1 Structure of educational leadership

The leadership structure of the Liberia Ministry of Education flows from the national level to the school level, with each level assigned distinct roles in policy direction, coordination, supervision, implementation, and accountability. The Ministry of Education is responsible for policymaking and management of the education system, with management offices at central, county, and district levels. Each of the 16 county education systems is headed by a County Education Officer, supported by District Education Officers who supervise the implementation of education policies and programmes at district and school levels (World, 2023).

National level

The national level is where policy is defined. Financing initiatives are centralised, and norms and standards are set at the same level. Overall duties and responsibilities are led by the **Minister of Education**, who carries cabinet-level responsibility for the sector, signs the Joint Education Sector Review's Aide-Mémoire on behalf of the government, and sets up the strategic agenda for the Department. Below the Minister sit the **Deputy Ministers**, each holding a portfolio: the Deputy Minister for Administration, the Deputy Minister for Instruction, and the Deputy Minister for Planning, Research & Development (responsible for the Education Management Information System – EMIS). **Assistant Ministers** — for Planning, Basic & Secondary Education, Teacher Education, and Fiscal & Human Affairs — run the operational portfolios within each Deputy's domain. The **Line Directorates** are the technical arms of the Ministry: the Bureau of Teacher Education, the EMIS Division, the Division of Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation, the Bureau of Basic & Secondary Education, TVET, Higher Education, Student Personnel Services, and others responsible for day-to-day technical and programmatic operations. They draft policies and frameworks, manage national budget allocations to schools, hold relationships with development partners, commission the WAEC examinations, and maintain national datasets. For school leadership activities, the national level is important because it defines the policy expectations, standards, reporting requirements, financing arrangements, and accountability mechanisms within which school leaders operate. In practice, this means that the national level determines what school leaders are expected to implement, how schools are monitored, and how school-level performance is reported and assessed.

Regional level

The regional level sits between the central Ministry and the 16 county education systems, serving primarily as a layer for coordination and supervision. Liberia is grouped into three education regions: Region 1 covers Bomi, Margibi, Montserrado 1 & 2, Gbarpolu, and Grand Cape Mount; Region 2 covers Bong, Lofa, Nimba, Rivercess, and Grand Bassa; and Region 3 covers Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Maryland, Grand Kru, and Sinoe.

Regional Education Officers (REOs) consolidate county performance reports into regional submissions for the Joint Education Sector Reviews, support inter-county coordination on issues that cross county lines (such as teacher deployment, examination logistics, and partner programmes operating across multiple counties), and act as a relay point between the Ministry's central directorates and the County Education Officers. In practice, the mapping found that this layer is relatively thin when compared with the national or county tiers, assuming a coordinating function with limited independent decision-making authority over school leadership policy or implementation.

County level

The county level is where central policy meets local implementation. Each of Liberia's 15 counties—with Montserrado split into two systems, bringing the total to 16 county education systems—is led by a **County Education Officer (CEO)** who heads the County Education System. The CEO is responsible for county-level education operations. The Education Administrative Regulations describe the County Education Officer as the most senior education officer in the county, serving as Executive Officer and Secretary to the County School Board. The County Education Officer (CEO) oversees many District Education Officers (DEOs), who in turn oversee school-level leaders, mainly school principals, vice principals in charge of school affairs, vice principals in charge of instruction, and vice principals in charge of administration. The same regulations state that District Education Officers and school principals within a county are accountable to the County Education Officer for the performance of their duties (Liberia, 2011).

In practice, the County Education Officers translate the Education Sector Plan into a county operational plan, manage the county allotment from the central Ministry, supervise the schools within the county, chair the County School Board, host the Mini-Joint Education Sector Reviews (JESRs), and produce the county performance report that feeds upward into the JESR. The CEO is the chief accountability figure at this level for teacher deployment, school feeding rollout, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) installation, enrolment drives, and the verification of volunteer teachers for placement on government payroll.

Stakeholder consultations consistently highlighted capacity constraints at this level, and a deeper structural concern relating to the use of information across the system: *"We collect reports from schools, but we don't always get feedback or support from higher levels."* (KII, County Education Officer, Female, 2026). These observations point to weak feedback loops among the school, district, county, and national levels, limiting the system's ability to respond to school-level needs in a timely manner.

District level

The District Education Officers (DEOs) manage the school districts within the county and report directly to the CEOs. A typical county contains between five and fifteen school districts: Margibi, for instance, has six (Kakata 1 & 2, Gibi, Marshall, Mamba Kaba, and Farmington), while Grand Kru has eight (Barclayville, Buah, Sasstown, Trehn, Wedabo, Grandcess, Dorbor, and Jloh). DEOs carry out school monitoring visits, validate principals' EMIS submissions, support the establishment and revitalisation of School Management Committees and PTAs, deliver in-district training and refresher workshops for teachers and administrators, and serve as the first line of escalation when schools report problems.

The county and district tiers together form the operational backbone of the system. However, key informant interviews indicated that these levels are largely under-resourced and insufficiently supported to fulfil their responsibilities, resulting in capacity strain in school supervision, planning, and financial management. As one female District Education Officer explained: "You have to get a passion for this job. You use your own money to transport yourself from school to school." (KII, District Education Officer, Female, 2026)

This highlights an important implementation gap: while the governance structure assigns supervision and accountability responsibilities to district and county actors, their ability to perform these functions is constrained by limited logistical, financial, and operational support.

School level

The school-level tier is where education is ultimately delivered and where national policy commitments are translated into practices for teaching, learning, inclusion, safety, and accountability. As of the 2024/2025 Annual School Census, Liberia has 6,394 schools, ranging from large urban high schools enrolling thousands of students to small rural Early Childhood Education Centres serving fewer than fifty learners (Ministry of Education, Republic of Liberia, 2025).

School-level leadership is structured around three core roles:

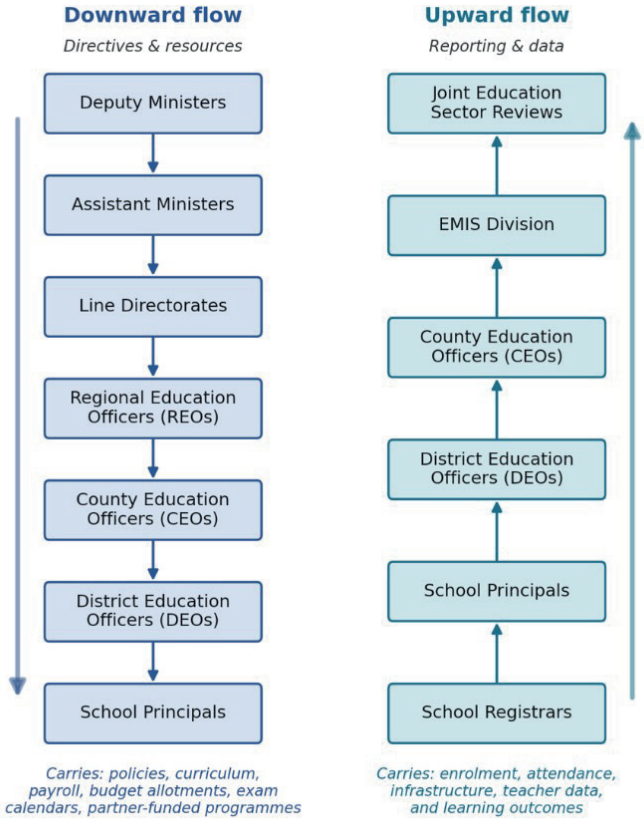
- The **Principal** serves as the head of the school and its chief administrator, responsible for instructional leadership, teacher supervision, student discipline, management of school accounts, Annual School Census data submission, examination registration, parent engagement, and overall school performance.
- **Vice Principals**, present in larger schools and sometimes appointed in pairs, typically split responsibilities between instruction (curriculum oversight, classroom observation, and teacher coaching) and school administration (operations, discipline, and scheduling).
- The **Registrar** is the school's records officer, responsible for student enrolment records, attendance data, transcripts, examination registration files, and the data submitted to the EMIS each year.

Surrounding and supporting school leadership are three community accountability structures:

- The **Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)**, which the 2024/2025 Annual School Census found to be the most consistently active community body, mobilising parents and managing community contributions to schools to benefit the development and implementation of school improvement plans;
- The **School Management Committee (SMC)**, which is intended to provide governance oversight and financial accountability but, according to the 2024/2025 ASC, meets less consistently than PTAs; and
- The **School Management Board (or Board of Directors)**, which carries higher-level fiduciary and strategic responsibility for the school but functions unevenly across the system.

Validation workshop participants underscored this unevenness: "PTAs are active in most schools, but School Management Committees are often inactive or hold irregular activities." (Validation Workshop, Participant, Male, 2026). In terms of reporting, information is expected to move in both directions across the hierarchy in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Downward and upward information flows across Liberia's education governance tiers



Source: Republic of Liberia (2011)

During the validation workshop, however, participants suggested that while these reporting structures are clearly defined, the use of information for feedback and decision-making is limited. Data collected at the school level does not always reach decision-makers and sometimes fails to translate into timely support or policy adjustments at higher levels, weakening the system's capacity for responsive planning and school leadership support.

In terms of autonomy, school principals' mandates and responsibilities for academic and administrative matters are carried out in accordance with rules and regulations issued by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the local school boards. They are guided by the Ministry in leading school reform, organising the academic curriculum, and raising student achievement, as stipulated by the 2011 Education Reform Act, which is the guiding national education development policy, stating the roles of different levels of education leaders, including at school level, as elaborated in the 2011 Liberia Education Administration Regulations. Regarding the administration of school funds, principals manage finances under Ministry guidance and are required to submit reports to the Ministry and the local school boards, in line with the 2014 Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators, which sets out the professional and fiduciary expectations for principals, vice principals, registrars, and other school administrators. Despite this formal decentralised structure, key informant interviews suggest that decision-making remains highly centralised in practice, leaving schools with limited autonomy to respond flexibly to local needs. One participant said: *"Principals are responsible for everything, but they don't always have the authority to make decisions."* (KII, Principal, Female, 2026).

3.1.2 Policies, frameworks and guidelines for school leaders

School leadership in Liberia is shaped by a broader set of education laws, policies, and sector plans that govern the Ministry of Education as a whole, as well as the management and quality assurance of the education system, rather than by a policy framework dedicated exclusively to school leadership. Key education policies and guidelines include:

- The Education Reform Act (2011);
- The Liberia Education Administration Regulations (2011);
- The National Education Policy (2021);
- The Education Sector Plan (2022/23–2026/27);
- The National School Quality Standards (2019);
- The National Teachers' Professional Performance Standards (2020);
- The National Teacher Training Management Policy (2022);
- The Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators (2014).

The Code of Conduct sets out the professional and ethical expectations that regulate the teaching profession in Liberia and is regarded by sector stakeholders as a foundation, as one respondent emphasised: *"The code of conduct for teachers is the Earth Holy Bible for Education."* (KII, Policymaker, Female, 2026)

The Education Reform Act (2011) establishes the overall governance architecture of the education system and underpins accountability expectations across schools, including the role of school leadership in service delivery and in system oversight (Government of Liberia, 2011). The National Education Policy (2021) further articulates system-wide directions relevant to school leadership, including decentralisation, school-level management responsibilities, and expectations that principals strengthen their capacities in areas such as human resource management, community engagement, and financial oversight (Ministry of Education, 2021). These directions align with international evidence on the growing organisational complexity of the principal's role (OECD, 2008; Bush, 2019).

More recent instruments further specify professional expectations within the system. The National Teachers' Professional Performance Standards (2020) and the National Teacher Training Management Policy (2022) reinforce expectations regarding teacher qualifications, supervision, and continuous professional development. Although these instruments are directed primarily at teachers, they indirectly shape the instructional leadership role of principals, who are responsible for supervising teachers against these standards and facilitating their professional development at the school level.

The review of national documents nonetheless indicates that Liberia does not yet have a standalone professional standards framework dedicated exclusively to school leaders. Expectations are instead articulated through two distinct types of instruments. The first comprises documents that set out expected practice, most notably the National School Quality Standards, which function as a de facto performance reference for school management (Ministry of Education, 2019), and the Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators, which defines ethical and professional conduct (Ministry of Education, 2014). The second comprises leadership development initiatives, such as the competency-oriented Principals' Leadership Programme introduced under the Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017–2021) (Global Partnership for Education, 2018). Because none of these instruments was designed to articulate, in a consolidated way, the roles, accountabilities, and career progression of school leaders, a dedicated professional standards framework for school leadership remains an emerging policy area in Liberia.



3.1.3 Professional development policies and plans

This section outlines the governance structure, policy frameworks, and institutional arrangements that shape school leadership in Liberia. It examines how authority, accountability, and leadership roles are defined across levels of the education system and how school leaders are trained, recruited, regulated, and supported.

Leadership development becomes more explicit in the Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017–2021), which introduced a structured Principals' Leadership Programme linked to school quality improvement plans and accountability reforms (Ministry of Education, 2017; Global Partnership for Education, 2018). The subsequent Education Sector Plan (2022/23–2026/27) continues this trajectory, signalling an intention to institutionalise continuous professional development (CPD) for principals and administrative staff and to scale up leadership capacity-building nationally (Ministry of Education, 2022; UNESCO Education Profiles, 2023).

Complementing these sector plans, the National School Quality Standards (NSQS) and their associated supervision tools provide a national reference for defining and monitoring school quality, implicitly shaping leadership practice through supervision and accountability mechanisms (Ministry of Education, 2019). The Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators further articulates the professional and ethical expectations placed on school administrators, reinforcing norms of integrity and accountability that are central to effective school leadership (Ministry of Education, n.d.; Day & Sammons, 2016).
International research indicates that CPD is most effective when it is closely linked to supervision, feedback, and school-improvement processes, rather than delivered as standalone training (Timperley, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Measured against this evidence, Liberia's current CPD landscape reflects an emerging but still fragmented approach to school leadership development. While system-wide CPD intentions are clearly stated in policy, they have not yet been translated into a consolidated national framework that specifically links preparation, induction, continuous learning, mentoring, and career progression for school leaders. Leadership development is instead embedded within broader teacher development, school quality assurance, and system improvement initiatives.

Despite this evolving policy landscape, the desk review and validation discussions point to several persistent gaps. First, school leadership is not yet anchored in a dedicated, standalone policy or professional standards framework; provisions are scattered across the Education Reform Act, the sector plans, teacher training policies, and codes of conduct, making it difficult to operationalise a coherent national vision for school leaders. Second, while policies articulate clear expectations regarding qualifications, leadership progression, gender-responsive promotion, and instructional supervision, the implementation mechanisms and accountability structures required to enforce them remain weak, a point repeatedly raised in both the key informant interviews and the validation workshop. Third, feedback loops between schools, districts, counties, and the national level remain fragile, limiting the use of school-level data for responsive policy adjustment. Together, these gaps frame the practice-level findings discussed in the next section.

3.1.4 Career pathways and accession to leadership

Formal policy expects entry into school leadership to follow a progression from teaching, supported by minimum academic qualifications and experience thresholds. The Education Reform Act (2011) and the accompanying Education Administrative Regulations require all persons employed as teachers or school administrators to hold a valid teaching certificate or degree and to meet qualification standards defined by level (Republic of Liberia, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2022a).

The pathway begins at the secondary level: a candidate must first be a senior secondary graduate before enrolling in the teaching or school-leadership track through a Teacher Training Institute. Promotion into school leadership is then tied to further qualification and experience requirements. A Secondary School Principal is expected to hold at least a bachelor's degree in education and to have completed a minimum of three years of teaching service before becoming eligible for appointment as Vice-Principal or Principal.

Responsibility for recruitment and appointment is differentiated by school type. In public schools, the Ministry of Education is responsible for appointments, transfers, tenure, and disciplinary action concerning teachers, principals, and other education officers, while principals remain accountable both to the Ministry and to the local school board. In practice, this means that recruitment is initiated by the local school board and final appointments are made by the Ministry. In private, faith-based, and community schools, recruitment and appointment are conducted by the proprietor or managing organisation; these institutions are nonetheless expected to comply with national education regulations.

Evidence from the mapping exercise indicates that recruitment into school leadership is not consistently standardised across the system. Validation-workshop participants reported substantial variation in appointment practices across public, private, faith-based, and community schools. In several settings — particularly in the private and faith-based sectors — leadership selection is shaped less by the formal qualification thresholds than by institutional networks, ownership arrangements, internal staffing decisions, and affordability considerations: *"In Liberia, who you know, or who knows you, is often the way to rise to school leadership positions, not always your qualifications for the job."* (Validation Workshop, Participant, Female, 2026)

This reveals a gap between the qualification-linked expectations articulated in national policy and the realities of how school leaders are identified and appointed on the ground. Participants further observed that the absence of an enforced career pathway from licensing to promotion weakens the incentive for professional progression. As one participant noted: "When someone enters the profession, they want to go up the ladder, but if the pathway is left open, people simply enter and relax; therefore, having a clear pathway from licensing to climbing the ladder will help." (Validation Workshop, Participant, Female, 2026)

Taken together, these findings suggest that, while Liberia's policy framework establishes a qualification-linked pathway into school leadership in principle, the route from teacher to school leader remains only partially structured and unevenly implemented in practice across the sector.

3.1.5 Gender, equity and social inclusion considerations

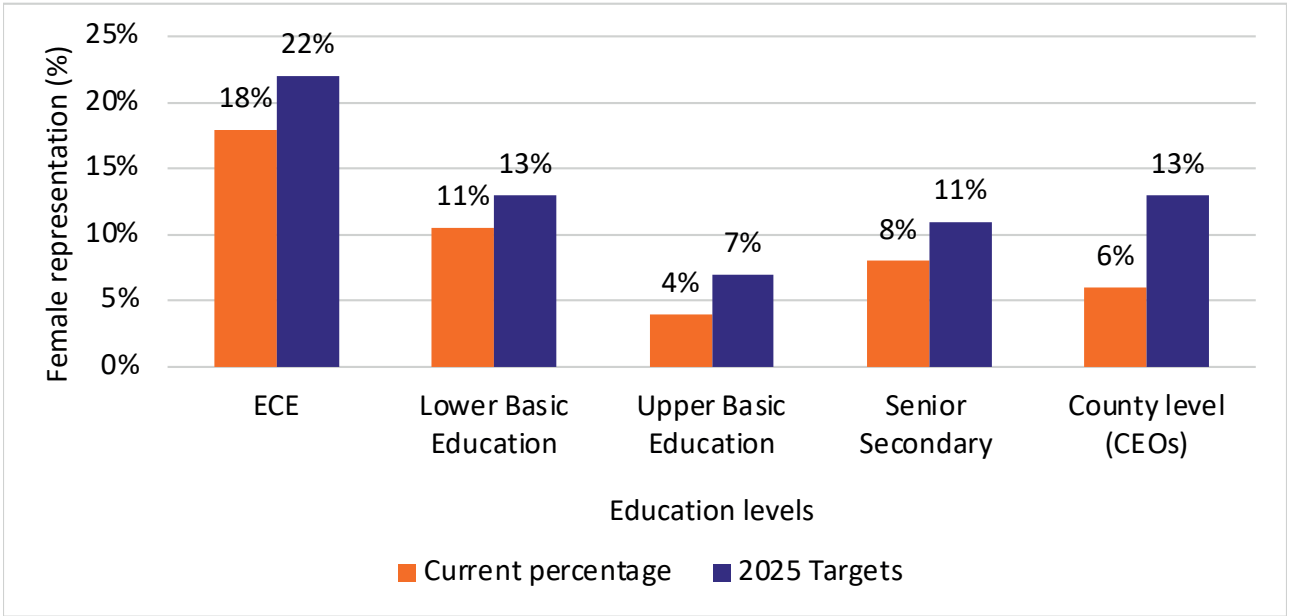
Liberia's education policies demonstrate a strong commitment to social inclusion and gender-responsive school leadership matters. The 2022 National Teacher Training Management Policy explicitly encourages female teachers and people living with disabilities to apply for school leadership positions, mandates their participation in decision-making at school and subnational levels, and promotes the recruitment and training of local women in rural areas, including those without formal qualifications. The policy also introduces practical measures to reduce barriers to women's participation, including childcare facilities, transport support, stipends and meals for caregivers, incentives for female trainers in Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs) and teacher-training institutions, scholarships for female teachers in rural areas, and targeted support to enable women to apply for and assume principalship roles (Ministry of Education, 2022a).

Similarly, the 2022/23–2026/27 Education Sector Plan recognises women's underrepresentation in school leadership and proposes incentive packages to recruit, retain, and promote female leaders, including within STEM and disability-inclusive education. Complementing these efforts, the 2021 National Policy on Girls' Education prioritises leadership development for girls and women, increased female participation in education policy and decision-making, and equal professional opportunities for female and male educators (GEM Report, 2024).

Taken together, these policy instruments provide a relatively comprehensive normative framework for advancing gender equality and social inclusion in school leadership. Rather than reflecting a lack of policy ambition, Liberia's policy landscape demonstrates growing recognition that strengthening the participation of women and people with disabilities in educational leadership is both an equity and a system-strengthening priority.

However, the evidence suggests that these policy commitments have yet to translate into meaningful improvements in representation. The Annual School Census (ASC) 2024/2025 indicates that women remain substantially underrepresented in school leadership across all education levels, as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Female representation among school leaders against 2025 targets, by education level and county tier



Source: ASC 2024/25 (Ministry of Education, 2025)

Figure 3 demonstrates that women remain consistently underrepresented across both school leadership and education administration. In every category, female representation falls short of national targets, suggesting that existing policy commitments have yet to translate into equitable leadership outcomes. Particularly notable is the sharp decline in women's representation beyond early childhood education, indicating persistent barriers to progression into more senior leadership positions. The persistence of these gaps suggests that policy commitments alone have been insufficient to alter the structural conditions shaping women's access to leadership positions.

The mapping exercise and validation workshop indicate that this implementation gap reflects a broader systems challenge rather than isolated gender-specific barriers. Participants consistently described gender inequality in school leadership as emerging from the interaction of institutional, organisational, and socio-cultural factors. Difficult working conditions, weak implementation and accountability mechanisms, inadequate support structures, and entrenched gender norms collectively reduce women's opportunities to enter and progress through leadership pathways.

These findings are consistent with wider evidence from the literature. Female school leaders continue to face restrictive gender norms, scepticism towards women's leadership, limited opportunities for promotion, and safety and mobility concerns (UNESCO, 2021). Furthermore, inadequate WASH infrastructure, particularly in rural schools, increases occupational hardship and disproportionately affects women's willingness to accept or remain in leadership positions. Counties experiencing the greatest WASH deficits and gender-related risks also tend to report the lowest representation of female school administrators (Impact Evaluation, 2025).

Validation workshop participants repeatedly emphasised that implementation, rather than policy design, constitutes the principal bottleneck: *"The problem is not policy, because most of what is being discussed is already covered in existing laws. The issue is lack of compliance."* (Validation Workshop, Participant, Male, 2026)

Participants further observed that broader conditions within the profession affect women's and men's willingness to enter and remain in school leadership:

> **"Most women are not interested in school leadership positions because school leadership is not an attractive position—there is no money in the profession. Even the men who remain are managing without passion, and in some areas, schools lack basic infrastructure, such as WASH facilities."**
>
> (Validation Workshop, Participant, Male, 2026)

These accounts suggest that gender-responsive policies alone are unlikely to achieve meaningful change unless accompanied by broader reforms that improve the attractiveness, professional status, and working conditions of school leadership. In other words, gender equality in leadership cannot be addressed in isolation from broader school leadership reform.

To conclude, these findings suggest that the key constraint is not the absence of policy, but rather the lack of coherence and effective operationalisation. While school leadership is reflected across multiple policies, plans, and regulatory frameworks, these provisions are not yet integrated into a single, coherent system that clearly links standards, professional development, recruitment, and accountability mechanisms. In addition, differences in decision-making authority and implementation capacity across national, county, district, and school levels further affect the consistency of policy implementation.

There is therefore a need to move from a policy-rich environment to a more integrated and implementation-oriented system. In particular, existing commitments related to continuous professional development (CPD), instructional leadership, and merit-based recruitment provide a strong foundation; however, these require alignment, institutionalisation, and linkage to supervision and accountability mechanisms to ensure effectiveness and sustainability at scale. The implications fall into four areas:

- For **principals**, fragmented expectations across the Reform Act, sector plans, the NSQS, and the Code of Conduct create ambiguity about what they are accountable for, against which standards, and through which support structures.
- **For sub-national actors**, weak feedback loops and limited operational resources at district and county levels constrain their ability to supervise, support, and develop school leaders.
- **For equity**, the gap between gender-responsive policy commitments and their enforcement means that structural barriers to women's leadership continue to operate, even as the policy framework formally addresses them.
- **For the system as a whole**, the absence of a consolidated school-leadership framework and a clear distribution of authority across levels limits the use of school-level evidence for responsive policy adjustment.

In response, priority actions should focus on:

1. Supporting the consolidation of existing policy instruments into a coherent national school leadership framework that clearly defines standards, competencies, career pathways, and accountability mechanisms.
2. Strengthening the implementation of leadership development by embedding CPD within existing supervision and school quality assurance systems so that preparation, induction, continuous learning, mentoring and career progression form a connected pathway rather than a set of standalone activities.
3. Reinforcing sector coordination and accountability structures to ensure that policy commitments, particularly those related to gender equity and leadership professionalisation, are effectively monitored and enforced. This approach will enable a shift from policy formulation to policy execution, with a stronger focus on system coherence and measurable improvements in school leadership practice.
4. Strengthening clarity and consistency in how responsibilities and decision-making authority are distributed across national, county, district, and school levels, in order to reduce overlap, improve accountability, and ensure that school leadership policies are implemented more consistently in practice across different parts of the education system.

Table 1: Key policy and legal instruments shaping school leadership in Liberia

Policy / legal instrument (year)	Relevance to school leadership
Education Reform Act (2011)	Establishes the overall governance architecture of the education system and defines the roles of education leaders across levels, including school leadership; underpins accountability expectations and merit-based recruitment principles.
Liberia Education Administration Regulations (2011)	Set out the duties and reporting lines of County and District Education Officers and school principals; identify the CEO as the most senior county education officer and define the accountability of DEOs and principals.
National Education Policy (2021)	Articulates system-wide directions relevant to school leadership, including decentralisation, school-level management responsibilities, and expectations for principals in human resource management, community engagement, and financial oversight.
National School Quality Standards (2019)	Function as a de facto performance reference for school management and quality assurance, shaping leadership practice through supervision and accountability tools.
National Teachers' Professional Performance Standards (2020)	Set expectations for teacher qualification, supervision, and continuous professional development; indirectly shape principals' instructional leadership role in supervising teachers against these standards.

National Teacher Training Management Policy (2022)	Requires specialised training before a teacher assumes a principalship; promotes the recruitment, training, and promotion of female teachers and school leaders; and supports gender-responsive measures.
Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators (2014)	Defines the professional, ethical, and fiduciary expectations for principals, vice principals, registrars, and other administrators; regarded by stakeholders as a foundational instrument.
Education Sector Plan 2022/23–2026/27	Prioritises CPD for principals and administrative staff, sets supervisory-training targets, and commits to SRGBV-prevention training and gender-responsive leadership measures.
Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017–2021)	Introduced the structured Principals' Leadership Programme, linking leadership development to school quality improvement plans and accountability reforms.
National Policy on Girls' Education (2021)	Prioritises leadership development for girls and women, increased female participation in education decision-making, and equal professional opportunities for female and male educators.

Source: SL Mapping in Liberia (2026).

3.2 School leadership practices and professional development

This section explores current initiatives in school leadership development, including in-service and induction programmes; outlines the structure and reach of school leadership programmes; highlights the key providers involved in delivering leadership development; and identifies remaining gaps and opportunities for improvement.

3.2.1 School leadership practices

School leaders carry out many responsibilities, which include overseeing school management and maintenance, developing and enforcing school discipline policies, coordinating instructional programmes, and ensuring compliance with Ministry of Education regulations. Principals are also expected to lead school improvement and reform initiatives to enhance student achievement, working collaboratively with teachers and the wider school community to develop and implement shared strategies for learner success. In addition, principals are required to engage parents not only in addressing disciplinary issues but also through formal governance structures such as Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs). They are further responsible for ensuring that school campuses are safe and secure by maintaining facilities and equipment in good working order, supervising school personnel, and enforcing school-wide discipline policies (Ministry of Education, 2022a).

Given the breadth and complexity of their responsibilities, effective capacity building for school principals is paramount. Recognising this need, investment in continuous professional development (CPD) for education leaders, including school principals and administrative staff at all levels, has been identified as a strategic priority in the current Education Sector Plan (Ministry of Education, 2022). The Plan sets out clear performance indicators, including a target to increase the proportion of trained school supervisors (principals and District Education Officers) from 38% in 2022 to 100% by 2027, with a 75% target in 2025, in order to strengthen supervisory and instructional leadership across the system.

Key informant discussions, however, highlighted that despite this policy emphasis, school leadership practice is shaped by broader systemic constraints. These include teacher shortages; low teacher motivation, with some teachers serving on a voluntary basis; insufficient salary compensation for school principals; limited coaching and mentoring of school principals by District Education Officers; weak induction programmes for newly recruited principals; and weak monitoring and accountability systems. As one principal reflected: *"I go above the responsibilities detailed in my job description… Sometimes you have to balance the needs of the school with the realities of teachers' availability and motivation."* (FGD, School Principal, Female, 2026). These constraints reflect the broader operating environment in which school leaders function, in which formal expectations often exceed available resources and support systems.

Recruitment practices also vary by school type. During the validation workshop, participants indicated that, although the 2011 Education Reform Act stipulates merit-based recruitment principles for teachers and school leaders, in practice recruitment is largely informal, experience-based, and non-standardised, with significant variation across institutions and contexts. As one principal observed: *"You need to have a network of people who know you, or to belong to a church, to be able to get a job."* (FGD, School Principal, Male, 2026)

Training priorities for school principals, as outlined in policy documents, are broadly aligned with national needs and emerging challenges. For example, the 2022/23–2026/27 Education Sector Plan (ESP) commits to training all principals and school-level leaders on the prevention of, and response to, school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), a priority given its documented impact on girls' retention, on female teachers' working conditions, and consequently on the pipeline of women into school leadership, alongside the provision of relevant instructional and guidance materials (Republic of Liberia, 2022). However, the interviews and validation workshop discussions indicated that, while county-level professional development activities are implemented, the topics covered are often concentrated on financial and administrative management rather than instructional leadership or pedagogical support. Participants further noted that CPD design does not consistently reflect the expressed needs of school leaders, leading to a mismatch between training content and school-level realities. As one participant reflected: *"Training should start from what principals actually need in their schools, not just what is available to deliver."* (Validation Workshop, Participant, Male, 2026)



3.2.2 Leadership preparation and professional development

a) Pre-service

In Liberia, there is no dedicated pre-service programme that prepares individuals specifically for school leadership roles. Pre-service teacher education is delivered through a network of Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs) and universities or teacher-training colleges, which offer certificates, diplomas, and degrees depending on the qualification awarded (Ministry of Education, 2022b). However, these institutions are primarily mandated to prepare teachers in general and not school leaders.

The 2011 Education Reform Act requires at least two years of teaching experience before a teacher can progress into a school principal role. This arrangement assumes that a good teacher will become a good instructional leader, an assumption that may hold for vice principals for instruction, as noted by one participant: *"I have taught across all levels, from early grades to high school, which helped me feel prepared for the role."* (FGD, School Principal, Female, 2026)

However, stakeholder consultations and validation discussions suggest that this progression does not fully prepare individuals for the broader responsibilities of school leadership, where administrative, managerial, and accountability demands extend beyond classroom instruction. As a result, school leadership preparation remains largely embedded within general teacher training structures, with no dedicated pre-service leadership track or formalised preparation pathway for principals. This creates a gap between teacher preparation systems and the competencies required for effective school leadership roles. There is, therefore, a clear need to leverage the strengths of RTTIs and other teacher-training institutions (both public and private) by introducing dedicated courses that prepare school principals for their roles.

b) Induction programme

Although Liberia does not currently have a formal, standardised induction programme for newly recruited school principals, the 2022 National Teacher Training Management Policy stipulates that "any teacher appointed to be the principal of a school shall receive specialised training prior to assuming that role" (Ministry of Education, 2022a). However, interviews revealed that no such standardised induction programme exists in practice and that induction is instead largely informal and inconsistent. As one FGD participant explained: "In my case, I was introduced to the PTA, traditional authorities, and local leadership, who later informed the students about the new principal. It was only after this process that I was formally introduced to the school." (FGD, School Principal, Male, 2026)

Another principal described a largely self-directed process of learning on the job: "My first days at school were more of a 'learning by doing' experience—being thrown into the role and learning on the job." (FGD, School Principal, Female, 2026) These accounts point to the absence of a structured induction programme to support new principals in navigating the realities of school life.

Validation workshop participants confirmed that no structured induction programme exists for new school principals:

> **Many new school principals struggle to navigate real school challenges. Although many leadership skills are learned through practice rather than formal training, structured mentorship and practice-based training could support new principals in their leadership posts in navigating the complexities of school leadership"**
>
> (Validation Workshop, Participant, Female, 2026).

Across both interviews and validation discussions, a consistent pattern emerges: induction for school leaders is largely informal, inconsistent, and dependent on local arrangements rather than a standardised national system. Existing training materials, such as the Liberia School Leadership Training Manual, which incorporates eight modules covering key policies and issues in Liberian education, could be leveraged as a starting point for developing a national, standardised induction programme for school leaders in Liberia, while the capacity of District Education Officers is strengthened to support new principals effectively.

c) In-service programme

In-service continuous professional development (CPD) for school leaders in Liberia is delivered by various partners, including government institutions through RTTIs; universities such as the University of Liberia; non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other private institutions such as Education Development Center (EDC), Diversified Educators Empowerment Project (DEEP), Bridge Liberia, Rising Academies; and teacher unions such as the National Association of Liberia School Principals.

3.2.3 School leadership initiatives in Liberia

In the past few years, Liberia has developed some school leadership training initiatives aimed at strengthening the quality of school management, instructional leadership, and inclusive education, largely through the Ministry of Education in partnership with development partners.



a) USAID Read Liberia (RTI International)

The programme was implemented over five years, from September 2017 to September 2022, reaching 640 public schools across six counties: Lofa, Bong, Grand Bassa, Nimba, Margibi, and Montserrado. It focused on significantly improving early-grade reading outcomes for children in Grades 1 and 2 and piloting emergent literacy programmes for kindergarten learners. The leadership component aimed to equip principals and vice principals to support and observe teachers delivering early-grade reading instruction, while strengthening the capacity of county and district education officers to monitor school performance, assess teaching quality, and use student data for decision-making. The programme adopted a school-based, in-service, cascade-style delivery model complemented by ongoing coaching and support. Implementation was led jointly by RTI technical staff and Ministry of Education master trainers and provided continuing professional development support rather than a certified qualification. In addition, the programme partnered with civil society organisations, including Another Option, to mobilise parents and promote a culture of literacy at home (RTI International, 2022).

b) Principals' School Leadership Training and Certification Programme (by GPE)

This programme was the principal certification-based school leadership initiative in Liberia's recent education reforms and the main formal in-service training pathway for public basic school principals. Delivered in two cohorts (2020 and 2022) under the 2018–2023 Getting to Best in Education programme, it was implemented through the Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs) and combined in-person training with master trainers and supervised practice hours (World Bank, 2023). Against an original target of around 1,500 principals (The New Dawn, 2018), the programme certified 876 principals across 11 counties (19% female participation) (Lusk-Stover et al., 2024; World Bank, 2023). Beyond principal training, it also supported annual monitoring activities in 572 schools and strengthened the capacity of District Education Officers through annual School Quality Assessment training (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, n.d.-b; The New Dawn, 2018).

The programme covered key leadership competencies, including school quality improvement, school management and leadership, school administration, teacher supervision and support, financial management, and community and parent-teacher engagement (Lusk-Stover et al., 2024), through an intensive eight-module structure requiring approximately 900 learning hours—300 in-person hours with master trainers and 600 supervised practice hours (FrontPage Africa, 2022). Initially implemented through partnerships between external service providers and the RTTIs before transitioning fully to RTTI management (World Bank, 2023), the initiative established an important foundation for structured school leadership development, although its scale and sustainability remained limited relative to national needs.

c) LEAP / Partnership Schools operators

Liberia's public-private school management model, launched in 2016 as the Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL) and subsequently rebranded around 2017–2018, following a change of government, as the Liberia Education Advancement Programme (LEAP), represents one of the country's largest approaches to school leadership support through non-state actors (NewGlobe, 2024). The model engages multiple operators, including Bridge (now NewGlobe), Rising Academies, BRAC, Street Child, More than Me, Youth Movement for Collective Action, and Stella Maris (Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, n.d.). By 2022, the four remaining operators collectively managed approximately 487 public primary schools across all 15 counties, supporting approximately 3,549 teachers and 4,300 staff (Bridge Liberia, n.d.). Over the life of the programme, LEAP grew from 94 schools in 2017 to roughly 475 by 2024, accounting for close to 20% of all public primary schools nationally (LGT Venture Philanthropy, n.d.).

Under the LEAP model, the Liberian government retains full ownership and control, staffing, and monitoring of every school, while operators support service delivery through professional development, innovation, and quality assurance (Bridge Liberia, n.d.). Operators are responsible for training and supporting their own school leaders through continuous professional development and coaching systems, with content typically covering school management, instructional leadership, lesson delivery, safeguarding, and data use. For example, Rising Academies combines school-leader training with weekly coaching visits (Rising Academies, n.d.), while Bridge Liberia, the largest LEAP operator, equips teachers and school leaders with specially designed tablets that generate real-time data on attendance, lesson completion, and learner progress, supported by tech-enabled, data-driven coaching delivered through specialised smartphone applications (NewGlobe, 2024; NewGlobe, n.d.).

While leadership development under LEAP is intensive, qualifications remain operator-specific rather than nationally accredited, and oversight is provided by the Ministry of Education through county education officers and spot-check evaluations (Bridge Liberia, n.d.). The programme has continued across successive governments and, in 2024, met the government's USD 50-per-pupil financial sustainability threshold, with operators averaging roughly USD 45 per pupil—down from USD 304 in 2017 (LGT Venture Philanthropy, n.d.). Funding has been supported through partnerships between the Government of Liberia and philanthropic organisations, including LGT Venture Philanthropy, the Mulago Foundation, the UBS Optimus Foundation, and the AKO Foundation (LGT Venture Philanthropy, n.d.).

d) National School Quality Standards (NSQS) Leadership Training

In 2024, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with UNICEF-Liberia, launched training on the National School Quality Standards (NSQS) in 200 model schools. Rolled out in phases, the programme targeted approximately 600 school leaders, including principals, vice principals for instruction, and PTA chairpersons. The training focused on quality standards, school improvement planning, monitoring, and accountability systems (Ministry of Education Liberia, 2024), and represented a shift towards using quality frameworks as a tool to strengthen leadership practice at the school level.

e) UNESCO CapED—Education data and EMIS training for County and District Education Officers

Delivered under UNESCO's Capacity Development for Education (CapED) Programme, this strand focused on strengthening Liberia's capacity to collect, process, and use education data rather than on pedagogical school leadership, and is best understood as systems-and-data training for Education Officers. The anchor activity was a workshop in December 2019, organised jointly by UNESCO and Liberia's Inter-Ministerial Task Force on TVET on data collection, processing, and analysis; its aim was to demonstrate to participants across the system, from school teachers to central Ministry staff, how to use an education management information system (EMIS) to support planning, monitoring, and management (UNESCO, 2020). The programme's design was explicitly cascade-based: in 2020, trained County Education Officers and the central EMIS team were to roll out training to all 124 District Education Officers at county level and establish local data-collection teams (UNESCO, 2020).

The training modality was workshop-based and cascade-delivered, with CEOs trained centrally and then serving as the delivery channel to the wider DEO cohort. Trainers were UNESCO/CapED technical personnel working with the Ministry's EMIS team.

f) Edify Liberia — Leadership and pedagogy training for low-fee Christian schools

Edify is a US-based, faith-based NGO (founded 2009) that has operated in Liberia since 2013, working with low-fee independent Christian schools (Edify, n.d.-a). Its model combines three resources: training to equip school leaders to develop Christ-centred and sustainable schools, loan capital to expand and improve facilities, and education technology to enhance learning outcomes, so that its leadership and continuous professional development work is tightly linked to a school-financing (microloan) model, a characteristic that distinguishes it from the other partners discussed in this section (Edify, n.d.-b). Importantly, the «school leader» in Edify's model is frequently the proprietor or owner of a private school rather than a public-sector principal.

The training content and delivery are largely channelled through partners. The University of San Diego serves as Edify's education-training partner in several countries, including Liberia, and developed module-style training in school leadership, early childhood education (ECE), and early grade literacy, contextualised for each setting; the leadership modules help proprietors improve conditions for learning and learn how to hire, support, and evaluate teachers, while the ECE and literacy modules build teachers' pedagogy, with all training meeting country and/or international standards (Edify, n.d.-b). A separate partner, Awana, provides Christ-centred and discipleship training to proprietors and teachers. On a large scale, the Liberia programme targets training 6,500 teachers and school leaders in ECE, pedagogy, and leadership, alongside increased enrolment in 3,250 low-fee, Christ-centred schools and sustainable school financing through microloans and partnerships (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, n.d.-a).

g) EXCEL Project Leadership Capacity Component

The Excellence in Learning in Liberia (EXCEL) project is a five-year national programme, implemented by the Ministry of Education with support from the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and aims to strengthen the capacity of approximately 12,000 teachers and principals from 2,337 public primary schools in 15 counties. It includes a functional review of school management and pedagogical leadership planned for 2026 and explicitly names school leadership as a foundation-level priority alongside literacy, numeracy, and inclusion. The project focuses on foundational learning, instructional leadership, teacher mentoring, education data management, and overall school management (World Bank, 2025).

h) LiT Liberia School Leadership Programme, 2025–2030

Building on Liberia's existing investments in school leadership development, LiT Liberia (2025–2030) aims to strengthen the leadership and management capacities of school leaders to improve teaching, learning, inclusion, and school performance. The programme is designed to complement ongoing Ministry of Education and partner-supported initiatives, while addressing identified gaps in school-level instructional leadership and support for teachers.

LiT Liberia will provide pre-service and in-service school leadership development, with a particular focus on increasing the participation of women in school leadership. Training will strengthen competencies in instructional leadership at the secondary level, teacher supervision and support, school management, monitoring, accountability, and school improvement. School leaders will also be equipped to support Work Readiness skills clubs (WRN) and to reinforce teachers' application of professional development in areas such as competency-based curriculum (CBC) and digital literacy. Safeguarding and inclusive leadership will be integrated throughout the programme, including strengthening compliance with the Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators and ensuring that school leaders understand and support appropriate safeguarding and reporting mechanisms.

Beyond formal training, LiT Liberia will explore communities of learning for school leaders to promote peer learning, coaching, collaboration, and continuous professional development. The programme will draw on and adapt existing Ministry of Education and partner-developed leadership resources, ensuring that its interventions build on rather than duplicate previous investments in Liberia.
During the programme period, LiT Liberia will work with the Ministry of Education and local partners to align school leadership activities with national priorities and strengthen the sustainability of leadership development beyond the life of the programme.

Collectively, these initiatives reflect Liberia's growing commitment to professionalising school leadership. However, challenges remain in achieving nationwide coverage, ensuring sustained training, and providing consistent follow-up support and mentoring, particularly in remote and resource-constrained areas. Despite this diversity of actors, insights from the interviews and validation workshop discussions highlight various challenges facing in-service CPD in Liberia, notwithstanding a strong policy landscape. These challenges include:

First, existing school leadership development efforts would benefit from more robust measurement and monitoring mechanisms.

The ESP 2022/23–2026/27 includes Indicator 20, which tracks the proportion of public-school principals and DEOs trained in school leadership with a baseline of 38% and a target of 75% for 2024/25. However, school leadership indicators were not tracked in the recently concluded Annual School Census (ASC). This makes it difficult to assess national progress against stated targets, as neither the MoE, the RTTIs, nor the LiT consortium aggregates this data into the national system. The validation workshop also confirmed that the indicators on school leadership were not tracked during the 2024/25 Annual School Census, calling for an intentional effort to ensure SL is tracked in future tools.

> **"In 2019, around 1,500 school leaders were trained and certified through the GPE programme by the Kakata RTTI; however, the majority of them have since retired, others can no longer be traced, and none can clearly demonstrate the difference they made in their schools as a result of the training."**
>
> (FGD, Principal, Female, 2026)

Second, there is no unified CPD framework for school leadership. No single framework currently governs school leadership development across the full professional cycle from the appointment of school principals through ongoing development to their retirement or exit. As a result, development partners entering this space often train school leaders independently, sometimes without coordination with the Department of Continuous Professional Development. The 2017–2021 ESP referenced a «leadership programme» concept with core competencies, but it was not translated into a fully operational framework linking CPD participation to structured career progression.

Third, in-service school leadership professional development is fragmented and donor-dependent. Interviews and group discussions highlighted that a significant proportion of current school leadership training is supported through donor-funded programmes and partnerships. This creates sustainability risks, as continuity of training is not guaranteed if external funding cycles end. Models such as Bridge Liberia depend heavily on continued external or partnership-based support, reinforcing the vulnerability of CPD provision to funding fluctuations. In contrast, although the LiT initiative is funded by the Mastercard Foundation, it has been intentionally designed for implementation in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education to strengthen government ownership and ensure its long-term sustainability.

Fourth, peer learning and collaboration between schools are limited. Schools in Liberia often operate in isolation, with limited structured mechanisms for exchanging practice or learning from one another. Validation workshop participants recommended revitalising the cluster system and peer-learning models to foster a culture of professional learning among schools.

Fifth, most in-service training is delivered through face-to-face modalities, limiting access, scalability, and reach, particularly for principals in remote or hard-to-reach counties. This affects the equitable distribution of professional development opportunities across the country.

Lastly, **professional development opportunities for school leaders remain limited**, ad hoc, and not consistently aligned with school realities, while **mentorship and experiential support** from district and county officers are similarly constrained.

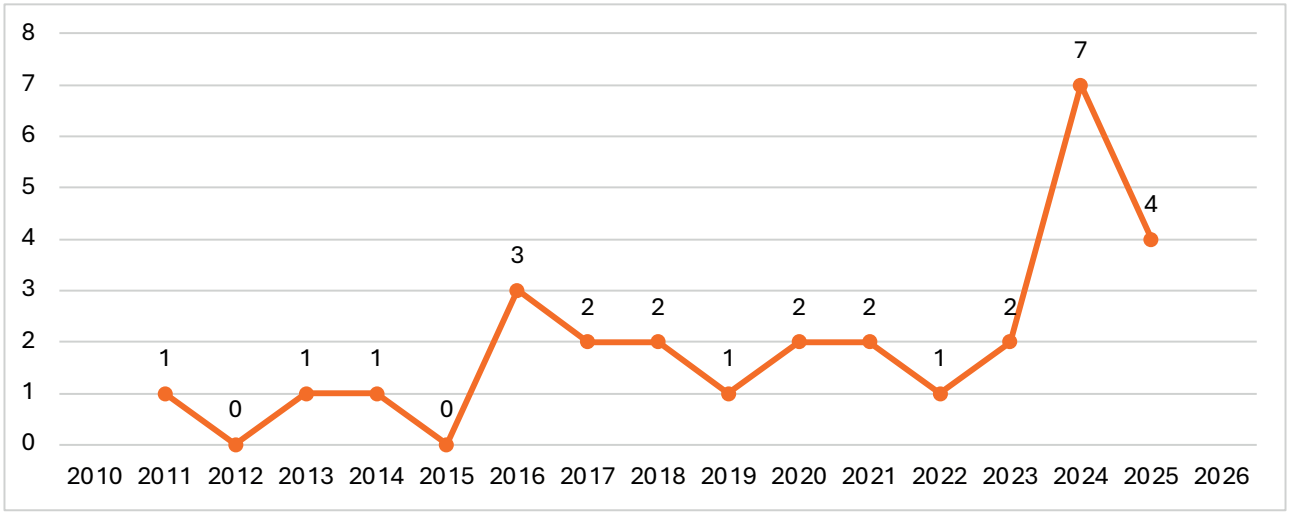
3.3 Research and researchers in school leadership

This section presents a synthesis of evidence on school leadership research in Liberia, drawing on a triangulated dataset comprising 29 publications identified through the mapping exercise (2010–2025), primary qualitative data from key informant interviews, and findings from the validation workshop with education stakeholders. The section is organised into thematic areas that reflect key research trends, researchers' contributions to the field of school leadership, and the relationship among research, practice, and decision-making in the education sector.

3.3.1 Knowledge base in the field of school leadership

The research landscape on school leadership in Liberia is characterised by limited but gradually expanding knowledge production, alongside significant structural constraints that shape both the volume and nature of research outputs. The desk review identified a total of 29 publications between 2010 and 2025 (with 2025 data covering January to November). These publications were sourced from the African Education Research Database (AERD), Scopus, Web of Science, local institutional repositories, and grey literature from universities and civil society organisations. The overall trend shows that research output was low and uneven for much of the period, but publication volumes increased in recent years, suggesting growing recognition of school leadership as an important area of educational inquiry.

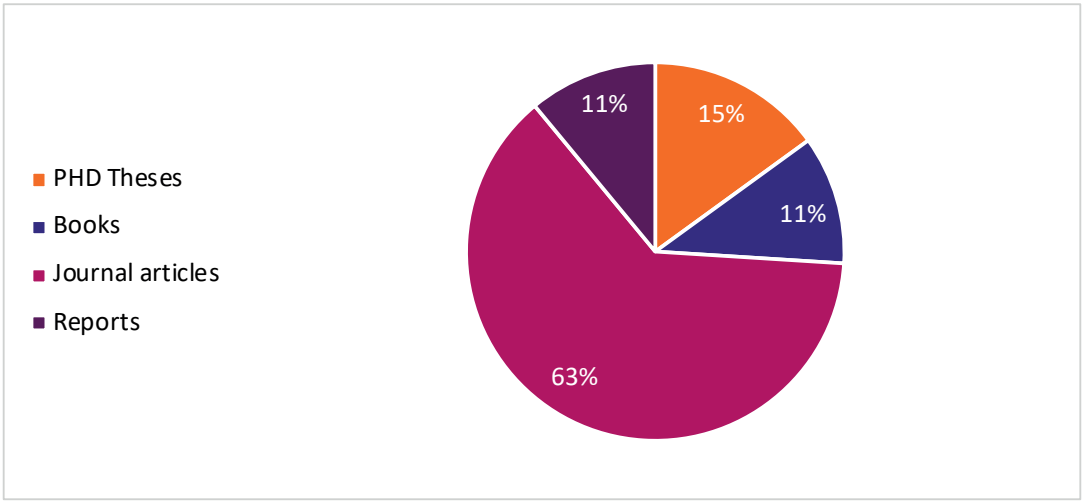
Figure 4: School leadership research publications per year



Source: SL Mapping in Liberia (2026)

A closer look at publication formats reveals that journal articles dominate the landscape, accounting for 63% of all mapped outputs. PhD theses account for a smaller share (15%), reflecting modest but important postgraduate contributions. Alternative formats, such as policy reports and book chapters, remain limited, each representing approximately 11% of the total output.

Figure 5: Distribution of sources cited by document type



Source: SL Mapping in Liberia (2026)

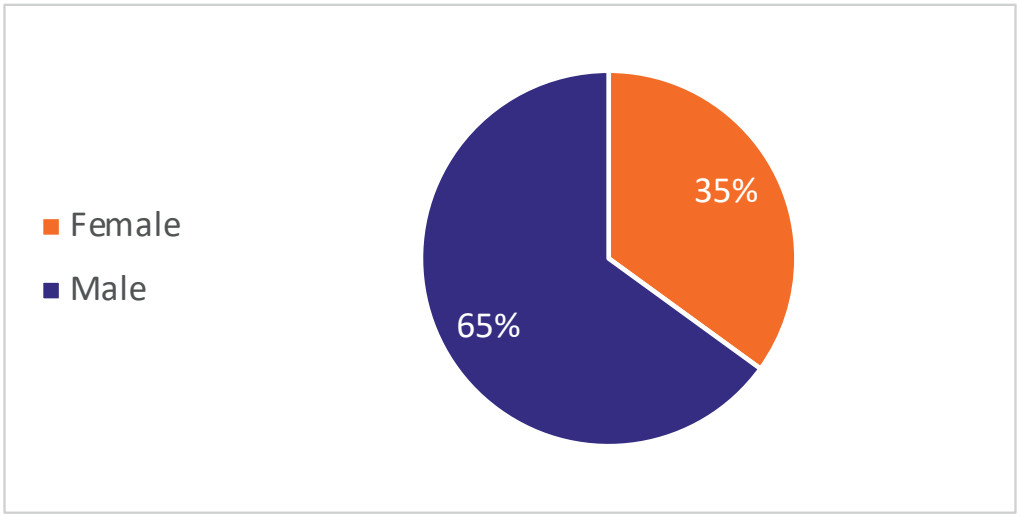
The composition of the evidence base indicates that academic journals remain the principal channel for disseminating school leadership research in Liberia, with comparatively limited production of practice-oriented outputs such as policy briefs and technical reports. This pattern suggests that while research is increasingly being generated, its translation into formats readily accessible to policymakers and practitioners remains constrained.

Overall, the evidence points to an emerging but still relatively small body of scholarship. The upward trend in publications is encouraging and reflects increasing academic interest in school leadership and its role in improving teaching and learning outcomes. The following sections examine the thematic areas that this body of research addresses and highlights the most significant gaps in current knowledge.

3.3.2 Actors within the SL research space

The study examined authorship data to understand the gender distribution of school leadership researchers in Liberia. The analysis reveals a clear gender imbalance, as illustrated in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Gender distribution of authors in school leadership publications



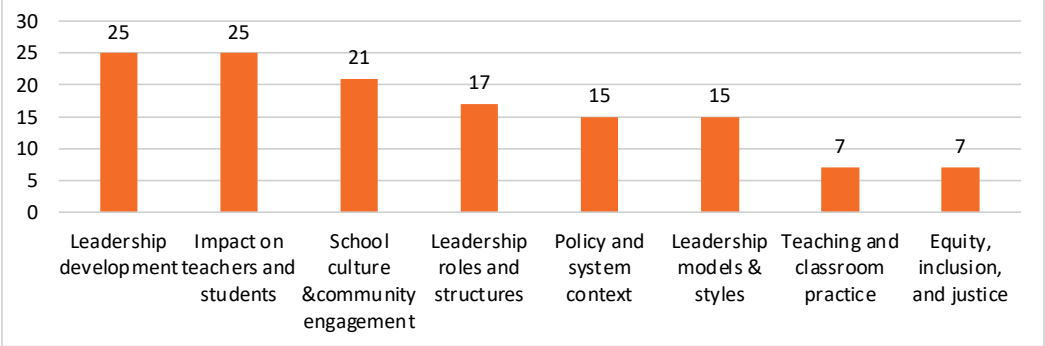
Source: SL Mapping in Liberia (2026)

The analysis indicates that authorship of school leadership publications in Liberia is predominantly male. While women contribute to the evidence base, they remain underrepresented, highlighting an opportunity to strengthen the participation and visibility of female researchers in school leadership research.

3.3.3 Thematic areas and knowledge gaps

To understand the focus of knowledge production in Liberia, each publication was analysed using a thematic coding framework aligned with the eight domains of school leadership research established by the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL, 2026). This framework tracked metadata including authorship, gender, institutional affiliation, methodology, and attention to equity dimensions such as gender, disability, and rurality.

Figure 7: School leadership research thematic focus



Note: *Base = Research outputs analysed: 29. The numbers on the chart refer to the frequency of pre-identified keywords related to each thematic area, indicating how extensively a theme has been explored.*
Source: SL Mapping in Liberia (2026)

The analysis reveals an uneven distribution of research attention. Because many publications were linked to more than one theme, the outputs highlight a multi-dimensional but heavily skewed focus, with clear concentrations in certain areas and limited exploration in others.

a) The research focus: concentrated vs developing themes

Two themes dominate the existing literature: (a) school leadership development and (b) the impact of school leadership on teachers and students. Together, these represent the most frequently explored areas in the mapped literature, reflecting a strong research emphasis on leadership as a primary driver of teacher performance, school supervision, and student academic outcomes.

Separately, feedback from the validation workshop pointed to a strong interest in generating more evidence on school leadership effectiveness, specifically on how school leadership training and development contribute to more effective leadership practices, improved teaching and learning environments, and ultimately better student learning outcomes. This feedback therefore highlights an evidence gap identified by stakeholders: the need for research to move beyond documenting leadership development and its broad effects towards understanding whether, how, and under what conditions leadership development contributes to improvements in leadership practice, teaching and learning environments, and student learning outcomes in Liberia.

A second cluster of studies focuses on school culture and community engagement, as well as leadership roles and structures. These themes show growing interest in how school leaders shape organisational environments and stakeholder relationships, although they remain noticeably less developed than the primary focus on individual leadership capacity.

b) The knowledge gaps: underexplored systemic and classroom realities

Several areas receive limited attention. Leadership models and styles and the broader policy and systems context are underrepresented, leaving important questions unanswered about how leadership is shaped by institutional structures and national education reforms.

Most notably, the areas that matter most to day-to-day education receive the least attention. Teaching and classroom practice, and equity, inclusion, and justice, are the least researched themes. This is significant because these areas are central to understanding how leadership influences instructional quality and inclusive education. This gap is also reflected in stakeholder priorities, which highlight equity and inclusion as critical areas requiring further research attention, particularly in relation to marginalised learners, gender disparities, and rural education contexts.

Stakeholders also highlighted that comparative understanding of leadership practices across public and private schools remains underexplored in the current knowledge base, despite being a key area of interest for system-level learning and policy design.

c) The disconnect between research and practice

While the literature frames school leadership as a robust driver of educational improvement, insights from key informants and the validation workshop reveal a stark disconnect between how leadership is conceptualised in research and how it is enacted on the ground. Stakeholder evidence points to three critical areas where research conceptualisation clashes with practical reality:

- Administrative vs instructional reality: Despite the academic focus on leadership development, true instructional leadership is rarely realised at the school level. On the ground, many school leaders continue to operate primarily in administrative roles rather than as instructional leaders focused on teaching and learning. As one participant noted: *“Many school leaders are operating more in an administrative capacity… but not necessarily focusing on teaching and learning itself.”* (KII, Monrovia, Montserrado County)

- Policy vs implementation: While the systems context is under-researched, stakeholders emphasised that the true bottleneck is not a lack of regulatory frameworks, but a lack of execution. What this suggests is that research has not sufficiently examined how leadership operates within and responds to these systemic constraints: *"The issue is less about absence of policy, and more about failure to implement and enforce existing policies."* (KII, , Montserrado County)
- Data collection vs data utilisation: The policy-to-practice gap is further compounded by how information is handled within schools. Schools routinely collect data, but this information is rarely analysed or used to guide decisions. This limits the potential for evidence-informed leadership and school improvement: *"School leaders also collect data… but they do not go further to analyse it or use it to guide decisions."* (KII, Monrovia, Montserrado County)

Stakeholders noted that this pattern extends beyond individual schools. For example, data collected through annual school censuses are not consistently analysed or translated into actionable insights for planning and policy formulation. They also emphasised that research on policy implementation and enforcement of existing education laws is limited, despite its importance for understanding why implementation gaps persist in school leadership practice.

Across the themes, a clear pattern emerges: the evidence base is skewed towards high-level outcomes and leadership capacity, with limited attention to how leadership translates into classroom practice, system implementation, and inclusive outcomes. These thematic gaps are further compounded by structural challenges in the research ecosystem itself, as research is often fragmented, driven by individual interests or donor priorities, and weakly connected to policy processes. As a result, key areas such as leadership pathways, instructional practice, and context-specific challenges, particularly in rural and resource-constrained settings, remain underexplored.

To bridge these gaps and align future knowledge production with the actual needs of the Liberian education system, stakeholder engagement identified five urgent priorities for the national research agenda:

- Instructional leadership: Practical application and support strategies within classrooms.
- Pathways and progression: Structured leadership development pathways and clear career progression frameworks.
- Data-driven decision-making: Building capacity for data use at both the school and system levels.
- Equity and inclusion: Targeted leadership strategies for gender equity and supporting marginalised student populations.
- Accountability systems: Mechanisms for system-level accountability and effective policy implementation.

Taken together, the findings show that the evidence base is concentrated in a relatively narrow set of themes and does not adequately reflect the operational realities facing school leaders. Understanding why these gaps persist requires closer examination of the institutional environment in which research is produced and used.

3.3.4 School leadership knowledge ecosystem in Liberia

While publication trends and thematic gaps outline the current state of Liberian school leadership research, the underlying knowledge ecosystem explains how these dynamics operate in practice. Education research in Liberia is driven largely by committed individuals who often draw on their own professional experiences as teachers, school leaders, and education practitioners. For many of them, research is not viewed as an isolated academic exercise but seen as a practical mechanism for documenting localised classroom knowledge and making systemic challenges visible. For instance, a researcher from Louisiana, Montserrado County, explained that he views his work as a direct way to ensure effective teaching practices are preserved and shared beyond the walls of an individual classroom.

Stakeholders' consultations showed that the absence of a clearly structured national research agenda has contributed to research priorities being shaped more by individual interests or by the priorities of externally funded projects rather than by coordinated system needs. *"Research topics are frequently determined by what scholars already know or by the availability of funding, rather than by the most pressing needs of the education system."* (KII, University Lecturer, Male, 2026). While this has enabled some important work to be undertaken, it can also result in uneven attention to issues of greatest national relevance.

Research production is also constrained by significant institutional and structural challenges. Academics, for example, have limited access to mentorship and face heavy teaching loads. These are primary hurdles that limit the time available for sustained research or professional development. Furthermore, because institutional research funding is scarce, academics are routinely forced to rely on personal resources to conduct their research. The practical impact of these financial and logistical barriers was highlighted by a researcher from Louisiana, Montserrado County, who noted that economic constraints often affect basic daily operations: *"Many academic researchers are still in transition and remain constrained by financial and logistical barriers. If some of them can't even go to their workplaces because of economic constraints, how then will they even think about prioritising research?"* (KII, Participant, Male, 2026)



3.3.5 Collaborations and dissemination

These resource constraints also affect how researchers interact with the wider academic community. Although some partnership frameworks with international institutions exist, collaboration within the country remains largely informal and dependent on individual networks. Furthermore, engagement with other African countries is limited, representing a missed opportunity for regional knowledge exchange and contextually grounded peer collaboration.

Local universities are shifting their institutional criteria to incentivise joint projects over solo authorship. This operational transition remains difficult as researchers still face fundamental economic constraints. *"Solo writing (individual authorship) used to be seen as prestigious, but universities currently are encouraging collaborations. But the financial problem still remains."* (KII, University Lecturer, Male, 2026)

These constraints affect not only the production of research but also its dissemination. The validation process also highlighted a gap between research production and its practical utility for education sector decision-making. While a growing body of research focuses on school leadership effectiveness and outcomes, less attention is paid to ensuring that research outputs are packaged to directly address the operational needs of policymakers, school leaders, and system managers. In addition, findings are often shared through teaching, presentations, or informal discussions rather than through structured dissemination platforms such as journals, policy briefs, or national research forums.

Limited use of research findings in national policies

The limited institutionalisation of research reduces its influence on policy. Even when policymakers have a genuine interest in using evidence, two distinct barriers prevent local research from informing national reform efforts:

- Absence of formal pathways: There are no structured, institutional channels connecting research organisations to government ministries. This gap is reinforced by the absence of structured mechanisms linking research outputs to national planning cycles, policy review processes, and education sector performance monitoring systems. Without these formal mechanisms, the process for integrating evidence into planning remains inconsistent and dependent on ad hoc relationships.
- Weak dissemination and alignment: Local school leadership research is rarely packaged or communicated in a format that meets the immediate operational needs of decision-makers. Because research outputs are seldom aligned with explicit government planning cycles, valuable insights are routinely excluded from sector reviews and policy design.

These gaps mirror broader system-level challenges identified in the school leadership policy and practice sections, specifically the weak feedback loops between data collection, professional development systems, and school leadership support mechanisms. Together, they suggest that the limitations in school leadership research are not only about volume or quality, but also about its weak integration into the wider education system's governance and improvement architecture.

3.3.6 National research agenda

Building on the evidence gaps and ecosystem challenges identified above, stakeholders at the national validation workshop developed Liberia's first consolidated, stakeholder-endorsed research agenda for school leadership.

Core research priorities (top areas based on consensus voting)

The following priority areas emerged as the most critical, based on stakeholder voting and plenary discussions:

Table 2: Co-created national research priorities

Research Thematic Area
Core Priority Areas: **These priorities reflect a strong emphasis on understanding what works in leadership, particularly in linking leadership actions to measurable improvements in teaching and learning outcomes.**
• Effectiveness of School Leadership and Leadership Training (including the causal chain between leadership training, teacher behaviour, and student learning outcomes; and the relationship between leadership qualifications and performance) • Instructional Leadership and Teaching Practice (including lesson planning, teacher supervision, and time-on-task) • Leadership Styles and Practices for School Improvement • Gender, Equity, and Inclusion in School Leadership (including representation of female leaders and gender-responsive pedagogies) • Policy–Practice Implementation Gaps (focusing on enforcement of existing education laws and accountability mechanisms)
Secondary Priorities: **These areas highlight the need for more context-specific and practice-oriented research, particularly in understanding variations across school types and system conditions.**
• School Culture and its Impact on Leadership, Teaching, and Learning Outcomes • Differences in School Leadership Practices across Public and Private Schools • Effectiveness of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Programmes • Application and Operationalisation of Education Laws in School Leadership • Teacher Attendance, Time-on-Task, and Instructional Leadership Practices

Across both core and secondary priorities, participants emphasised several cross-cutting issues that should guide future research:

- Strengthening research quality and methodological rigour, including the use of impact evaluation and mixed-method approaches
- Improving coordination and collaboration among researchers, institutions, and stakeholders
- Establishing national platforms for research dissemination, including local journals and research networks
- Enhancing the use of data and evidence in decision-making, particularly at school and system levels

Strategic significance



Overall, the findings from school leadership research in Liberia indicate that, while there is a growing and increasingly structured body of knowledge, opportunities remain to strengthen its integration, broaden its reach, and enhance its use in education sector decision-making processes. Research activity continues to be characterised by isolated initiatives that are heavily insulated from national policy needs.

The newly co-created research agenda addresses these systemic vulnerabilities by serving as an operational bridge between research production and institutional reform. Rather than acting as a passive diagnostic of existing knowledge gaps, the implementation of this research agenda marks a strategic transition point for the education sector. It offers a structured path to transform school leadership research from decentralised individual efforts into a coordinated, demand-driven evidence base.

By establishing a clear stakeholder consensus on the empirical evidence needed to guide the sector, this agenda provides a practical mechanism for aligning future data generation with explicit national priorities. If systematically implemented, this research agenda will foster stronger local collaboration, build institutional ownership, and provide the strategic foundation necessary to support effective school management, improve instructional quality, and drive sustainable education outcomes across Liberia.

3.4 Stakeholders, communication and sector coordination

Liberia decentralised its education system in 2011 through the Education Reform Act, establishing a formal communication structure linking the Ministry of Education to counties, districts, and schools through County Education Officers (CEOs) and District Education Officers (DEOs) (Republic of Liberia, 2011). The system is designed to support two-way communication, enabling national policies and guidance to flow from the central level to schools, while reports and feedback are communicated upward to inform decision-making at the national level. Table 3 below provides an overview of the key government and sector institutions involved in school leadership and their respective roles.

Table 3: List of government and sector institutions and their roles

Institution	Key role
Ministry of Education (MoE)	Sets national education policy, standards, curriculum, and financing; provides overall stewardship, quality assurance, and certification frameworks for school leadership; issues guidance and reporting requirements to counties, districts, and schools.
Civil Service Agency (CSA)	Manages recruitment, appointment, deployment, and conditions of service for civil servants, including principals and education officers; sets job classifications, qualifications, and pay scales.
Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP)	Allocates and disburses the national education budget and county allotments; approves and releases financing for staffing, training, and school operations.
County Education Offices / CEOs	Lead the county education system; translate national policy into county operational plans; supervise districts and schools; convene coordination meetings and channel information between the national level and schools.
District Education Offices / DEOs	Provide frontline supervision, mentoring, and support to principals; maintain routine contact with schools; relay data, reports, and feedback between schools and the county level.
County and District School Boards	Provide subnational governance, oversight, and community accountability; support communication and coordination between communities, schools, and the education administration.
West African Examinations Council (WAEC)	Administers national examinations and sets the examination calendars that school leaders implement and manage at school level.
Teacher-training institutions (RTTIs) and the National Commission on Higher Education	Deliver pre-service and in-service training and certification pathways for teachers and aspiring school leaders.
Local Education Group (LEG)	Multi-stakeholder platform for education-sector policy dialogue, planning, and coordination among the Government, development partners, and civil society; a forum in which school leadership priorities can be raised.
Education Development Partners Group (EDPG)	Coordination body of development partners supporting the education sector; aligns partner assistance and can channel technical and financial support relevant to school leadership development.
National Teachers Association of Liberia (NTAL)	Professional association representing teachers and school leaders; advocates for members' welfare and conditions of service and engages with the Ministry and other stakeholders on policy.
National Association of School Principals	Professional association of school principals; convenes an Annual Conference at which school leadership affairs, particularly at secondary level, are discussed, and represents principals' professional interests.

In practice, however, communication across the system remains weak and uneven. Although CEOs and DEOs are expected to meet regularly and maintain routine contact with schools, these processes are constrained by persistent funding, connectivity, and staffing challenges. Unfilled DEO positions and limited travel resources prevent many school principals from participating in coordination meetings, resulting in gaps in information flow between schools and the district level.
These constraints are further compounded by poor connectivity, which delays reporting processes and creates bottlenecks at the county level, and by the limited functionality of County and District School Boards. Unclear mandates, expired terms of office, and inadequate financial support have undermined the effectiveness of these bodies in facilitating communication, coordination, and accountability. As a result, key education policies, curricula, and operational guidelines often fail to reach schools outside Monrovia, thereby weakening local-level implementation despite the intended benefits of decentralisation (Republic of Liberia, 2022).

In addition to the Local Education Group (LEG) and Education Development Partners Group (EDPG) coordination meetings, the Ministry of Education conducts the national JESR at the end of the year with other line ministries for sector coordination, including addressing certain aspects of school leadership development. The Annual Conference of Liberia's National Association of School Principals is another venue for discussing school leadership affairs at the secondary school level.

Existing platforms where school leadership development topics are discussed include radio broadcasts, newspapers and WhatsApp groups, through which information regarding teachers' and principals' welfare and opportunities is disseminated. One school leader described this outreach: *"Through our Facebook platform and WhatsApp group, we do direct engagement with stakeholders, including Parents Teachers Association (PTA), National Teachers Association of Liberia (NTAL), and NGOs."* (FGD, School Principal, Female, 2026)



4. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

This section synthesises the findings presented throughout the report and examines their implications for strengthening school leadership in Liberia. It identifies the key patterns emerging across the four areas of analysis: policy, professional development, research, and stakeholder coordination, and presents targeted recommendations for each. The section concludes with an overall assessment of the progress made to date, the persistent challenges that remain, and the priority actions required to strengthen school leadership as part of Liberia's broader education reform agenda.

4.1 Discussion and recommendations

Policy and implementation

The mapping exercise revealed that school leadership in Liberia is influenced by various policies and regulations. However, these are not yet incorporated into a unified leadership framework. Responsibilities are spread across documents like the Education Reform Act, the National Education Policy, the National School Quality Standards, the Code of Conduct, and sector plans. This fragmented policy environment leads to overlapping roles among stakeholders at different levels, with limited resources to strengthen school leadership.

Additionally, the findings indicate that school leadership is often seen as a role for experienced teachers rather than as a specialised career path requiring specific training and ongoing development. This highlights the need for a more coordinated, intentional, and well-funded approach to developing and supporting school leaders.

The study also pointed out weaknesses in how policies are shared and implemented. Communication mainly occurs through workshops, training, and meetings like the National Association of School Principals of Liberia's annual conference. Although a cascade model is employed, where trained individuals are expected to relay information to lower levels, communication frequently falters. Consequently, policy implementation depends heavily on individual effort and local improvisation, resulting in inconsistent understanding and application, and significant variation in how policies are translated into practice across schools and counties.

Recommendations – Policy Actions

- **Develop a coherent and explicit national school leadership policy and standards framework.** Building on existing policy instruments—including the Education Reform Act (2011), the National Education Policy (2021), the National School Quality Standards (2019), the Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators (2014), and the National Teachers' Professional Performance Standards (2020)—develop a standalone national school leadership policy and standards framework that clearly defines the roles, competencies, responsibilities, and career pathways of school leaders. The competency framework should reflect the demands of contemporary school leadership, encompassing instructional leadership, financial and human resource management, community engagement, digital and data literacy, gender equality and social inclusion, safeguarding, environmental sustainability, education for sustainable development, partnership building, and resource mobilisation. The framework should also establish a comprehensive professional development architecture that spans pre-service preparation, recruitment, induction, continuous professional development, certification, performance management, and career progression, ensuring that leadership standards, professional learning, and career pathways are integrated into a coherent and sustainable system rather than implemented as separate initiatives.
- **Enforce policy provisions to advance gender equity and social inclusion.** Operationalise the gender-related commitments in the 2022 National Teacher Training Management Policy to promote the recruitment, training, and promotion of female teachers, school leaders and people living with disabilities at all levels of the system.

- **Integrate school leadership as a distinct line in the next Education Sector Plan and the national budget.** Finalise and adopt the national school leadership framework, formalise the career pathway (certification, licensing, and standards), and allocate a dedicated budget line to sustain implementation across counties.

School leadership practices and professional development

School leadership practices and professional development in Liberia are receiving critical attention, as they are anchored in diverse policy documents. Training has been conducted across the country; however, challenges remain, including the formal preparation and induction of new school principals; weak measurement and monitoring; absence of a unified CPD framework for school leadership; school leadership PD that is fragmented and heavily project-dependent; limited peer learning and collaboration opportunities among schools; heavy reliance on face-to-face delivery; and limited alignment of professional development modalities with school realities, while mentorship and experiential support from district and county officers are similarly constrained. Building on the school leadership framework proposed under the policy actions above, the recommendations below focus on operationalising leadership preparation and development in practice.



Recommendations – Professional Development Actions

- **Establish a national pre-service leadership pathway.** Leverage the existing infrastructure of Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs), private teacher training institutions, and universities to design and deliver a dedicated pre-service pathway that equips aspiring school leaders with the competencies required for the principalship, beyond those needed for classroom teaching.
- **Restructure existing training modules into a national school leadership training curriculum.** Review and restructure existing school leadership training modules into a national curriculum for Rural Teacher Training Institutes and other teacher training institutions, covering both pre-service preparation and in-service development, so that the pre-service pathway and in-service CPD draw on one coherent, competency-based curriculum.
- **Institutionalise a standardised national induction and onboarding programme.** Develop and operationalise a structured induction pathway for all newly appointed school leaders, drawing on existing resources such as the Liberia School Leadership Training Manual, to ensure consistent preparation across counties and reduce reliance on informal, «learn as you go» approaches.
- **Scale up practice-based, competency-driven in-service CPD.** Expand continuous professional development programmes that are targeted, grounded in day-to-day school realities, and aligned with a shared national competency framework, moving beyond fragmented, project-dependent training.
- **Link training to career progression and impact evaluation.** Connect individual training records to career advancement pathways, while systematically evaluating the effectiveness of leadership development activities to ensure that investments translate into improved school outcomes.
- **Establish national systems for tracking, mentoring, and performance monitoring.** Integrate school leadership indicators into the Annual School Census and other education management information systems to enable consistent tracking of training coverage, mentoring uptake, and leadership performance over time.
- **Revitalise cluster systems and peer learning models.** Rebuild and strengthen school clusters as platforms for peer exchange, joint problem-solving, and collaborative learning between principals, breaking the silos in which many schools currently operate.
- **Build structured mentoring and peer networks.** Establish formal mentoring arrangements that pair new and experienced principals, complemented by active coaching support from District Education Officers (DEOs) and county-level education authorities.
- **Strengthen the capacity of DEOs to mentor and coach**. Invest in the skills, tools, and time of DEOs so they can provide meaningful instructional and leadership support to principals, rather than limiting their role to administrative oversight.
- **Promote advocacy and visibility of female school leaders.** Actively showcase the contributions, experiences, and achievements of female principals and those with disabilities through national platforms, awards, and communication campaigns to inspire future generations and shift perceptions around women in school leadership.

Research and evidence

The findings from this study reveal an education sector caught between an increasing structural recognition of school leadership and a deeply constrained operational reality. While the creation of a national research agenda marks a significant step forward, the baseline data show that knowledge production and application in Liberia remain constrained by structural imbalances. Analysing these findings points to three core systemic tensions that need to be resolved to build a functional, evidence-driven school leadership framework.

a) The imbalance between theoretical capacity and classroom reality

The thematic mapping reveals a strong concentration of research on broad concepts such as leadership development and the theoretical impacts of school leadership. However, this emphasis contrasts sharply with the realities described by school-level practitioners. Stakeholders consistently report that school leaders spend much of their time fulfilling administrative responsibilities rather than providing instructional leadership. This disconnect highlights an important gap in the current evidence base. While existing research largely focuses on strengthening individual leadership capacity, it gives comparatively little attention to the practical conditions that shape teaching and learning within schools, including instructional quality, classroom practice, and localised equity challenges. As a result, the evidence provides limited guidance on how school leaders can translate leadership competencies into improved classroom outcomes. Unless future research moves beyond individual leadership development to address the systemic and infrastructural constraints that limit instructional leadership, investments in leadership frameworks and professional development are likely to continue facing implementation bottlenecks at the school level.

b) Institutional workloads and the subsistence economy of research

The qualitative findings indicate that the limited volume of school leadership research is closely linked to structural constraints within the research ecosystem. Stakeholders consistently identified chronic underfunding of school leadership research, competing professional responsibilities (including heavy university teaching workloads), and the absence of formal mentorship and research support networks as major barriers to knowledge production. Accounts of academics struggling to meet basic financial and logistical costs, such as commuting to their institutions, further illustrate the resource-constrained environment in which research is conducted. As a result, research production is largely sustained through personal financial contributions and short-term donor-funded projects rather than stable institutional investment. While donor funding has enabled research activity to continue, it has also influenced the research agenda, with priorities often reflecting international development interests rather than nationally identified education needs. The absence of sustained institutional support has further limited opportunities for collaboration within regional African research networks, contributing to the relative isolation of Liberian scholarship and reducing opportunities for contextually grounded peer learning and knowledge exchange.

c) The data paradox and the policy disconnect

A final and critical tension lies in the disconnect between data collection, research dissemination, and national policymaking. The findings reveal a clear data paradox: although routine school censuses generate substantial amounts of education data, these data are rarely analysed or strategically used to inform decision-making at the school level. This gap extends to the national level, where the absence of formal institutional mechanisms linking higher education institutions, research organisations, and government ministries limits the translation of research evidence into policy. Without structured pathways to connect knowledge production with government planning and decision-making processes, locally generated evidence remains underutilised. As a result, sector reviews, policy formulation, and education reforms risk being shaped by incomplete or externally driven evidence rather than the empirical realities and priorities emerging from the education system itself.

Recommendations – Research Actions

a) Policy integration and institutional governance

- **Encourage the alignment of future studies with the national research agenda:** The Ministry of Education (MoE), in collaboration with local higher education institutions and development partners, could consider formally adopting the co-created National Research Agenda as a reference framework. Establishing this framework will help systematically align upcoming donor-funded initiatives, project-based research, and postgraduate studies with identified national priorities.
- **Establish structured evidence-to-policy channels:** Stakeholders should consider creating formal communication pathways – such as a joint consultative working group between the MoE and academic institutions – to ensure that local research outputs routinely inform annual sector reviews, policy design, and national educational planning cycles.

b) Knowledge translation and practical application

- **Optimise and utilise existing national education datasets:** The Ministry of Education (MoE), in collaboration with local research institutions, can systematically analyse and leverage existing, robust datasets to guide educational planning. Rather than relying solely on commissioning new studies, immediate priority should be given to processing underutilised, government-commissioned assets, such as the Annual School Census data. Transforming these comprehensive datasets into descriptive and diagnostic reports will provide decision-makers with an immediate, evidence-based foundation for resource allocation, school-level interventions, and policy design.
- **Incentivise diversified and actionable dissemination formats:** Providing clear incentives and training for researchers to translate empirical findings into brief policy notes, operational toolkits, and practitioner summaries will significantly enhance the practical utility of their work for decision-makers.
- **Incorporate data utilisation into school leadership CPD:** To resolve the current data paradox, practical modules on data interpretation and evidence-based decision-making should be systematically integrated into continuous professional development (CPD) programmes for school leaders. This training should focus on equipping administrators to analyse and apply locally collected metrics for immediate school-level improvement.
- **Facilitate regional knowledge exchanges:** Education stakeholders should actively champion opportunities that connect Liberian researchers with school leadership networks and hubs across other African nations. Formalising these cross-border partnerships will facilitate regional knowledge sharing, resource pooling, and collaborative multi-country studies.

Communication and sector coordination

Coordination on school leadership in Liberia is currently fragmented and largely informal. Although Liberia has functional national coordination platforms — the Local Education Group (LEG) and the Education Development Partners Group (EDPG) — neither addresses school leadership as a distinct agenda item, resulting in the issue remaining insufficiently visible at the sector-coordination level. Bilateral and partner-by-partner coordination prevails, making activity in this space difficult to map, document, or evaluate. The annual conference of the National Association of School Principals of Liberia and its affiliated WhatsApp group have served as informal spaces for information-sharing on teacher and principal welfare, professional development opportunities, and emerging issues, but these are not integrated into the formal coordination architecture.

Recommendations – Coordination Actions

- Embed school leadership coordination within existing Ministry of Education structures, anchored in the TPD Technical Working Group.
- Use the Joint Education Sector Review (JESR) as a strategic moment to promote school leadership, share knowledge and information and sensitise stakeholders on key SL matters.
- **Use existing platforms** (radio broadcasts, dedicated WhatsApp groups) to strengthen knowledge sharing, advocacy, and promote communities of practice.

4.2 Conclusion

This mapping exercise set out to develop a comprehensive understanding of the school leadership landscape in Liberia by examining the policy environment, leadership practice and professional development, the research base, and the mechanisms for communication, advocacy, and sector coordination, with gender equality and social inclusion considered as cross-cutting dimensions. Taken together, the findings present a coherent and consistent picture across these four areas.

First, Liberia has established important foundations for strengthening school leadership. The Education Reform Act (2011), the Education Administrative Regulations, the National Education Policy (2021), the National School Quality Standards (2019), the National Teachers' Professional Performance Standards (2020), the National Teacher Training Management Policy (2022), the Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators (2014), and successive Education Sector Plans together provide a substantial policy foundation. In addition, initiatives such as the Principals' Leadership Programme, the rollout of the National School Quality Standards in model schools, EXCEL, and the LEAP partnership demonstrate growing institutional commitment to strengthening school leadership. Although still limited in scale, research on school leadership has increased in recent years, while the validation workshop culminated in the development of Liberia's first stakeholder-endorsed national research agenda for school leadership.

Second, despite these positive developments, the evidence indicates that the system remains fragmented and unevenly implemented. School leadership is not yet anchored within a dedicated national framework or competency standards, with expectations dispersed across broader teacher and education management policies. There is no formal pre-service preparation for aspiring school leaders, induction remains largely informal, and continuing professional development is heavily donor-funded, inconsistently monitored, and only weakly linked to career progression. Recruitment practices—particularly in private and faith-based schools—continue to rely more on institutional networks than transparent, competency-based processes. Women remain significantly underrepresented in school leadership across all education levels, with gender targets consistently falling short. Similarly, while research activity is growing, it remains largely driven by individual researchers rather than institutional priorities, and coordination on school leadership is predominantly bilateral and project-based, with limited visibility within national sector coordination platforms such as the Local Education Group (LEG), the Education Development Partners Group (EDPG), and the Joint Education Sector Review (JESR).

Third, a consistent message emerged across all data sources and was reinforced during the validation workshop: the principal challenge is not the absence of policies, but the lack of coherence, coordination, implementation, and accountability.

Addressing these challenges requires a shift from a policy-rich environment to an implementation-oriented school leadership system. This means consolidating existing policies into a coherent national school leadership framework with clearly defined roles and responsibilities across the national, county, district, and school levels. It also requires establishing an integrated leadership development pathway that connects recruitment, preparation, induction, mentoring, continuing professional development, certification, performance management, and career progression. At the same time, research should be institutionalised to generate evidence that informs policy and practice, while stakeholder coordination should become more structured, inclusive, and visible within national education sector mechanisms.

This mapping exercise provides the evidence, stakeholder consensus, and strategic direction needed to strengthen school leadership in Liberia. Building on these findings, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL), Education Development Center (EDC), development partners implementing the Leaders in Teaching initiative, and other education stakeholders, is well positioned to move from fragmented interventions towards a coherent national approach to school leadership system strengthening. Such an approach would establish school leadership as a recognised, professional, and accountable component of Liberia's education system, while helping to translate the country's strong policy commitments into tangible improvements in school leadership, teaching quality, and learner outcomes.

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6. Annex 1: Roadmap

Policy					
Recommendation	**1- 6 Months**	**6 -12 Months**	**12 - 24 Months**	**2 - 5 Years**	**Goal**
Develop a coherent and explicit school leadership policy and Standards Framework based on the existing policy documents	Convene a national coordination mechanism on School Leadership to audit existing policy instruments and extract provisions relating to school leadership	Draft a standalone National School Leadership Policy and Standards Framework, including roles, competencies, accountabilities, and career progression	Validate the draft framework through national and county-level consultations; finalise and adopt. Dissemate through MoE structures, RTTIs, and principal associations.	Roll out training on the framework to all CEOs, DEOs, and principals; embed in pre-service, induction, and CPD; review and update every five years.	*A single, credible, context-driven National School Leadership Policy and Standards Framework adopted and operationalised across the system*
Develop and implement a comprehensive Professional Development Framework for school leaders.	Convene a multi-sector education team to conduct a needs assessment and mapping of existing initiatives across pre-service preparation, recruitment, induction, in-service CPD, certification, and career progression.	Draft the comprehensive Professional Development Framework, covering the full leadership cycle: pre-service preparation; recruitment standards; induction; in-service CPD; certification; and career progression.	• Validate the framework through national and county-level consultations. • Pilot the framework in a few counties covering each stage of the leadership cycle, with structured monitoring. • Formally adopt the framework and integrate it into RTTIs and university curricula	• Roll out the framework nationally through phased county-by-county implementation. Embed it in RTTIs, universities, and MoE supervision structures. • Link it to the EMIS-based professional portfolio system so that pre-service, induction, CPD, certification, and career progression are connected in a single record. • Review and refresh the framework every three to five years based on implementation data and impact evaluation evidence.	*A comprehensive, context-grounded Professional Development Framework that connects pre-service preparation, recruitment, induction, CPD, certification, and career progression in a single, coherent pathway for school leaders — fully aligned with the National School Leadership Policy and resourced through the dedicated ESP budget line.*
Integrate school leadership as a distinct line in the next Education Sector Plan and the national budget	Conduct a costing exercise for the National School Leadership Policy and Standards Framework.	Submit a school-leadership budget line proposal for inclusion in the next Education Sector Plan and annual MoE budget.	Allocation approved and disbursed; ring-fenced for SL implementation	Annual review of expenditure and outcomes; recurrent budget line institutionalised.	*School leadership treated as a discrete, funded line in national education planning rather than as a residual activity.*

Institutionalise a standardised national induction and onboarding programme	Review and update the Liberia School Leadership Training Manual to reflect current competencies and realities.	• Design a structured national induction package (modules, duration, delivery modes, assessment). • Establish a tracking mechanism for induction completion	• Train CEOs and DEOs on the induction package for new school principals. • Deliver induction to all newly appointed principals within their first six months of appointment	• Institutionalise induction as a mandatory part of the appointment process. • Periodically review and refresh induction content based on principal and DEO feedback.	*Develop and operationalise a structured induction pathway for all newly appointed school leaders, drawing on existing resources such as the Liberia School Leadership Training Manual, to ensure consistent preparation across counties.*
Restructure existing training modules into a national school leadership training curriculum	Map existing school leadership training modules and materials used by RTTIs and other teacher training institutions.	• Draft a competency-based curriculum aligned with the national school leadership competency framework, with a pre-service strand and an in-service strand that serves as the CPD content with gender-responsive leadership built in. • Validate the draft with key stakeholders	• Develop facilitator guides and assessment tools and train RTTI tutors and facilitators. • Pilot the curriculum in selected RTTIs and teacher training institutions, and revise it based on the pilot's feedback. • Acquire formal approval from the Ministry of Education and the National Commission on Higher Education.	• Roll out the approved curriculum across RTTIs and other teacher training institutions, integrated into pre-service programmes and national in-service CPD • Review and update the curriculum periodically in line with the leadership standards and policy.	*Review and restructure the existing school leadership training modules into a national curriculum for Rural Teacher Training Institutes and other teacher training institutions, covering both pre-service preparation and in-service development, so that the pre-service pathway and in-service CPD draw on one coherent, competency-based curriculum.*
Scale up practice-based, competency-driven in-service CPD	Finalise and disseminate the national school leadership competency framework.	Develop modular, practice-based CPD content aligned with the framework	• Establish delivery mechanisms (school-cluster based, cascade, blended, digital). • Train master trainers and cluster facilitators. • Coordinate development partner CPD activities through the DCPD to reduce fragmentation	• Scale CPD nationwide with sustained financing and quality assurance. • Periodically refresh modules based on competency assessments and school outcomes.	*Expand continuous professional development programmes that are targeted, grounded in day-to-day school realities, and aligned with a shared national competency framework*

Link CPD training to career progression and impact evaluation	Design a professional portfolio/record system that captures each principal's CPD history, mentoring, and performance through EMIS	Draft a career progression pathway that explicitly ties promotion to CPD milestones and performance.	• Integrate professional records into civil service and MoE HR processes • Develop an evaluation framework to measure the effectiveness of leadership development activities (which could be part of the Annual School Census) • Commission periodic independent impact studies linking CPD to school outcomes	• Use evaluation evidence to reallocate resources to the most effective interventions • Publish annual reports on the return on investment of leadership development	*Connect individual training records to career advancement pathways, while systematically evaluating the effectiveness of leadership development activities to ensure that investments translate into improved school outcomes.*
Establish national systems for tracking, mentoring, and performance monitoring	Audit the Annual School Census (ASC) and EMIS to identify gaps in school leadership indicators.	• Define a core set of indicators (induction status, CPD participation, mentoring uptake, leadership performance ratings) • Update Annual School Census and EMIS instruments and data flows to capture the new indicators. • Train data collectors and DEOs on the revised instruments • Produce the first national report disaggregated by county, gender, rurality and disability status.	• Use leadership data to inform planning, resource allocation, and targeted support. • Make dashboards available to counties and districts for local planning.		*Integrate school leadership indicators into the Annual School Census and other education management information systems to enable consistent tracking of training coverage, mentoring uptake, and leadership performance over time.*

Strengthen decentralised instructional leadership support systems	Conduct training needs assessment for EOs	• Develop a CPD tracking system for EOs • Design a CPD course relevant to EOs' learning gaps	• Deliver structured coaching and mentoring training to all DEOs, with tools (observation, protocols, coaching guides, feedback templates) • Provide logistical support to DEOs (transport, per diems and time allocation) for regular school visits • Introduce supporting and classroom observation routines	• Embed DEO coaching time and resources in recurrent budgets. • Evaluate and refine DEO coaching model based on school-level outcomes	*Invest in the skills, tools, and time of DEOs so they can provide meaningful instructional and leadership support to principals, rather than limiting their role to administrative oversight.* *Empower CEOs and DEOs to lead mentoring, coaching and performance monitoring, complemented by cluster-based peer learning networks.*
Enforce policy provisions to advance gender equity	Conduct a gender audit of recruitment, training, and promotion practices for teachers and school leaders.	Translate the 2022 National Teacher Training Management Policy's gender commitments into concrete, time-bound actions.	• Introduce affirmative measures (targeted scholarships, quotas for training cohorts, leadership incubators for aspiring female leaders). • Publish annual gender-disaggregated data on recruitment, training, appointments, and promotions. • Strengthen safeguarding, anti-harassment, and family-friendly workplace policies.	• Review progress against gender targets and adjust measures accordingly. • Mainstream gender equity monitoring in all education sector performance reviews.	*Operationalise the gender-related commitments in the 2022 National Teacher Training Management Policy to promote the recruitment, training, and promotion of female teachers and school leaders at all levels of the system.*
Promote advocacy and visibility of female school leaders	Establish national recognition platforms (e.g. an annual Female School Leader Award).	Document and publish case studies and profiles of successful female principals.	Run national communication campaigns on radio, television, and social media showcasing female leaders. • Support the creation of networks and peer associations for f emale principals. • Engage female principals as role models in teacher training institutions.	• Institutionalise awards, campaigns, and networks under sustained government and partner funding. • Track longitudinal changes in perceptions and female representation in leadership.	*Actively showcase the contributions, experiences, and achievements of female principals through national platforms, awards, and communication campaigns to inspire future generations and shift perceptions around women in school leadership.*

Embed school leadership coordination within existing Ministry of Education structures, anchored in the TPD Technical Working Group	• Constitute the small steering committee endorsed by the validation workshop — chaired by the Assistant Minister for Teacher Education, with the Director of CPD and selected partners • Draft Terms of Reference for the school leadership coordination function within the TPD Technical Working Group. • Add school leadership as a standing item on the TPD TWG agenda. Conduct a mapping of existing MoE coordination platforms and their school leadership touchpoints to avoid duplication.	• Formally adopt the Terms of Reference and launch the school leadership coordination function as a recognised sub-component of the TPD TWG. • Designate a school leadership focal point within the Bureau of Teacher Education. • Establish formal interfaces with the Local Education Group (LEG), the Education Development Partners Group (EDPG), and the JESR process through dedicated SL representation.	• Hold regular (monthly or bi-monthly) meetings of the school leadership component of the TPD TWG, with structured agendas linked to policy, CPD, research, and coordination priorities. • Develop a five-year strategic plan for school leadership coordination, aligned with the next Education Sector Plan. • Produce quarterly progress reports for MoE leadership, partners, and the JESR. • Use the coordination function to align partner-funded SL programmes (LiT, EXCEL, NSQS roll-out, LEAP/Bridge) behind a single agenda.	• Institutionalise the school leadership coordination function as a permanent feature of the TPD TWG, with dedicated MoE staff time and recurrent budget support. • Implement and refresh the strategic plan in line with successive ESP cycles. • Track coordination effectiveness through clear indicators (meeting regularity, partner alignment, policy uptake) and report annually to the JESR.	*A recognised institutional home for school leadership coordination within the Ministry's existing TPD architecture, with defined leadership, regular meeting rhythm, partner alignment, and a mandate that does not require new parallel structures*
Use the Joint Education Sector Review (JESR) as a strategic moment to promote school leadership, share knowledge and information, and sensitise stakeholders on key SL matters	• Engage the MoE Planning Division on adding school leadership as a recognised thematic area within the JESR (and Mini-JESRs at county level). • Prepare at least two (qualitative and quantitative) school leadership indicators to be added to the list of national indicators to be reviewed during JESRs	• Collect baseline data for the SL indicators through the Annual School Census, EMIS, and partner reporting. • Coordinate with REOs, CEOs, and DEOs to feed county-level evidence into both the Mini-JESRs and the national JESR.	• Analyse data and prepare an analysis of SL development advancement • Hold the first JESR with school leadership as a recognised thematic area, with a dedicated session, indicator review, and tabled recommendations. Produce an annual School Leadership Performance • Analysis as a standing JESR input document. Embed school leadership reporting into the	• Use data to assess, adjust and adapt SL policies and practice, CPD, research actions, and coordination and communication activities. • Embed school leadership reporting as a permanent feature of the JESR and Mini-JESR cycle. Track year-on-year movement in SL indicators against baseline and targets. Use JESR findings to adjust national policy,	*structurally embedded in national accountability and sector review processes, with evidence-based annual adjustment of policy, CPD, and coordination — making school leadership visible, tracked, and prioritised at sector level.*

	• Define two SL indicators, set baseline and annual targets • Designate a school leadership focal representative for the JESR process.		Mini-JESRs to ensure county-level accountability • Use JESR findings to prioritise the following year's coordination, CPD, research, and policy actions.	CPD, research priorities, and partner-aligned investment • Publish an annual School Leadership Status Report timed to the JESR cycle and disseminated	
Use existing platforms (radio broadcasts, dedicated WhatsApp groups) to strengthen knowledge sharing, advocacy, and communities of practice	Map existing communication channels reaching school leaders Identify champion school leaders — including female principals, rural principals, and principals leading inclusive schools — to anchor radio segments and WhatsApp dialogue.	• Launch a regular school leadership radio segment on national and community radio in partnership with NALSP, with content aligned to the national school leadership policy. • Activate dedicated WhatsApp groups • Begin sustained visibility of female school leaders and rural leaders through both radio and WhatsApp to address representation gaps. • Pilot two to three communities of practice around defined themes	• Scale radio coverage to all 16 county education systems, including local-language broadcasts where appropriate. • Launch a periodic school leadership digest or newsletter aggregating insights from radio dialogue, WhatsApp threads, and community-of-practice outputs.	• Institutionalise multi-channel school leadership communication as a recurring MoE activity with dedicated capacity within the Bureau of Teacher Education and NALSP. • Measure reach, uptake, and impact through annual principal surveys. • Build feedback loops so that questions, frustrations, and innovations raised through radio and WhatsApp feed back into policy, CPD design, and JESR reporting	*Principals across all 16 county education systems — including rural and remote schools — receive timely, accessible, and consistent information through trusted, low-cost channels; an active community of practice underpins professional identity, continuous learning, and the visibility of women and underrepresented leaders in the profession.*

RECOMMENDATION (from mapping)	ACTIVITIES (Q1 = next 6 months)	LEAD	RESEARCH WHERE RESOURCES WOULD COME FROM	EXPECTED RESULTS	MEANS OF VERIFICA-TION
RQ1: Causal Chain: Does school leadership training produce a verifiable pathway linking principal training, teacher behaviour change, and improved student learning outcomes? (Method: Contribution Analysis + Difference-in-Differences)					
RESEARCH Define a national research agenda for school leadership aligned with the most pressing national needs, and strengthen the link between research, policy, and practice. **Mapping area:** Research Pillar	**Q1 (Apr–Sep 2026):** • **Activity 1:** Design and launch a causal-chain study examining whether school leadership training changes principal management practices and whether those changes lead to improvements in teacher instructional behaviour. • **Activity 2:** Identify a sample of schools that received NSQS leadership training in 2024 and an equal-size matched comparison group of untrained schools, using existing ASC 2025/26 data. • **Activity 3:** Develop a structured principal observation tool and teacher behaviour survey to collect baseline data in both treatment and comparison schools before any new EDC-LiT and EXCEL training begins.	**Lead:** Impact Evaluation (IE) - research design and data collection **Co-lead:** ACSL (coordination and dissemination) **Technical support:** MoE CPD, Planning Divisions, EMIS (school access and ASC data)	• **Primary:** Small Research Grant ACSL; EDC-LiT; • **Aligned:** UNICEF Liberia (evaluation of NSQS investment in 200 model schools) • **Long-term:** GPE KIX Africa 19 Hub (applied policy research in Liberia)	• A published baseline profile of principal management practices in a sample of NSQS-trained schools vs matched untrained schools, using structured observation data. • A causal chain map (Theory of Change) validated with school leaders, teachers, and MoE, showing the expected pathway from training to classroom behaviour to student outcomes. • A policy brief submitted to t he MoE and ACSL identifying where the causal chain is strongest and where it breaks down, informing the design of EDC-LiT and EXCEL training.	Data source: Structured principal observation tool scores (pre/post), collected independently by IE field team in treatment and comparison schools. Data source: Teacher behaviour survey scores, measuring frequency of lesson planning, use of TLMs, peer collaboration, linked to school ID. Data source: ASC 2025/26 data confirming the training status of each school in the sample. Output: Peer-reviewed research paper OR policy brief with findings submitted by Q4 2026.

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