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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN LIBERIA

Key Insights from the School Leadership Country Mapping | FACT SHEET

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

This brief presents key insights and findings from the country mapping of school leadership in Liberia conducted by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL), in collaboration with Education Development Center (EDC) and other partners of the Leaders in Teaching (LiT) initiative in Liberia.

The mapping examined Liberia's school leadership ecosystem across four areas — policy and systems, practice and professional development, research and evidence, and communication, advocacy and sector coordination — with gender equality and social inclusion applied as cross-cutting lenses. Drawing on a desk review of legislation, policies and programme documents, analysis of **29 research publications (2010–2025)** screened from 43 studies, primary data collection with **36 stakeholders** through key informant interviews and focus group discussions, and a two-day national validation workshop (1–2 April 2026) with **31 participants**, the study provides both a system-level overview and a grounded picture of the school leadership realities across Liberia's education sector.

Note for Readers: This fact sheet presents the headline findings. For detailed findings, data tables, stakeholder profiles, and the complete implementation roadmap, please consult the full Liberia School Leadership Mapping Report

LIBERIA EDUCATION CONTEXT

This mapping was conducted as Liberia continues to rebuild an education system weakened by the civil war (1989–2003) and the 2014–2016 Ebola crisis. The **Education Sector Plan 2022/2023 – 2026/2027** places renewed emphasis on education management, teaching and learning, and more inclusive and effective schools. The system is administered through 15 counties organised into **16 county education systems** (with Montserrado split into two), and the 2024/25 Annual School Census recorded **6,394 schools** — with more than half of junior and secondary schools privately owned. Liberia has a substantial body of education law and policy, but no standalone school leadership policy or professional standards framework. It is in this context that the mapping was undertaken as a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Education and the ACSL and EDC under the Leaders in Teaching (LiT) initiative, which in Liberia aims to train and accredit approximately 3,200 school leaders and 124 district leaders. LiT initiative is implemented in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation.

KEY SYSTEM SIGNALS FROM THE MAPPING



A substantial policy base — but no dedicated framework

Liberia has a broad policy foundation, from the Education Reform Act (2011) to the National Teacher Training Management Policy (2022). But expectations for school leaders are dispersed across instruments, and there is no standalone school leadership policy or professional standards framework.

Decentralised on paper, centralised in practice

Authority is formally distributed across national, county, district and school levels, yet decision-making remains highly centralised. County and district offices are under-resourced, and data collected in schools rarely returns as timely feedback or support. Equally, school leadership indicators were not tracked in the 2024/25 Annual School Census.

No structured pathway from teacher to school leader

There is no dedicated pre-service preparation and no standardised induction for new principals. In-service continuous professional development (CPD) is fragmented and largely donor dependent.

Women are under-represented at every tier

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Policy Landscape

- School leadership in Liberia is shaped by multiple instruments — the Education Reform Act and Education Administration Regulations (2011), 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 the Education Sector Plan 2022/2023 - 2026/2027 — but no standalone school leadership policy exists.
- The Education Sector Plan targets an increase in trained school supervisors (principals and District Education Officers) from 38% in 2022 to 100% by 2027 — but progress cannot be measured because school leadership indicators were not tracked in the 2024/25 Annual School Census.
- Policy ties entry into school leadership to teaching qualifications and experience, but recruitment is not standardised. In private, faith-based and community schools, appointments are often shaped by networks and ownership arrangements rather than qualifications.
- The National School Quality Standards serve as a de facto performance reference for school management. Principals, however, carry broad responsibility without matching authority, and county and district officers lack the resources to supervise and support them consistently.
- Gender and inclusion commitments are strong: the 2022 National Teacher Training Management Policy encourages women and persons living with disabilities to apply for leadership posts and provides for childcare, transport and scholarship support. These commitments have not yet been translated into representation.
- Feedback from stakeholders was consistent: the constraint is not the absence of policy, but fragmentation in policy implementation, weak enforcement and limited accountability.

School Leadership Professional Development

- Providers include Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs), the University of Liberia, EDC, DEEP, Bridge Liberia and Rising Academies. Key initiatives include the Principals' School Leadership Training and Certification Programme, which certified 876 principals across 11 counties (19% female) in two cohorts (2020 and 2022) through the RTTIs; USAID Read Liberia (2017–2022, 640 public schools); NSQS leadership training with UNICEF in 200 model schools (2024); operator-led coaching under the Liberia Education Advancement Programme (LEAP); and the EXCEL project with the World Bank and GPE.
- There is no dedicated pre-service programme for school leadership. RTTIs and universities are mandated to prepare teachers, not school leaders.
- · The 2022 National Teacher Training Management Policy requires specialised training before a teacher assumes the position of a principal, but no standardised induction programme exists in practice. New principals largely learn on the job.
- No unified CPD framework links preparation, induction, mentoring, certification and career progression. Provision is fragmented and donor-dependent, and partners often train school leaders without coordinating with the Department of Continuous Professional Development.
- County-level CPD tends to focus on financial and administrative management rather than instructional leadership. Training is predominantly face-to-face, limiting reach in remote counties, and peer learning between schools is limited.
- LiT Liberia (2025–2030) will provide pre-service and in-service school leadership development with a focus on increasing women's participation, building on existing Ministry and partner resources rather than duplicating them.

"The problem is not policy, because most of what is being discussed is already covered in existing laws. The issue is lack of compliance."

— Participant, Liberia Mapping Validation Workshop, April 2026

RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE LANDSCAPE

29
research publications analysed (2010–2025), from 43 screened

63%
journal articles — PhD theses 15%; books and reports 11% each

35%
of authors are female — women remain under-represented in research

7
publications in 2023 — the peak year in a small but growing evidence base

Dominant Research Themes

- Leadership development and the impact of school leadership on teachers and students are the most explored themes in the literature.
- A second cluster examines school culture and community engagement, and leadership roles and structures.

- Research is driven largely by individual researchers and donor priorities rather than a national agenda. Academics face heavy teaching loads, scarce funding, and limited mentorship.
- Collaboration within Liberia is informal and network-based, and engagement with researchers in other African countries is limited.
- Output was low and uneven for most of the period but has risen in recent years, peaking at seven publications in 2023.

Evidence Gaps and National Research Agenda

- Teaching and classroom practice, equity, inclusion and justice, are the least researched themes.
- Leadership models and styles and the policy and systems context are under-represented; differences in leadership across public and private schools are largely unexamined.
- A data paradox: schools and the Annual School Census generate data that is rarely analysed or used to guide decisions.
- No formal channels connect research institutions to Ministry planning, sector reviews or policy processes, and findings are rarely packaged for decision-makers.
- Five core priorities validated by stakeholders: (1) Effectiveness of school leadership and leadership training; (2) Instructional leadership and teaching practice; (3) Leadership styles and practices for school improvement; (4) Gender, equity and inclusion; (5) Policy–practice implementation gaps.
- The validation workshop produced Liberia's first consolidated, stakeholder-endorsed research agenda for school leadership.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ADVOCACY, COMMUNICATION AND SECTOR COORDINATION

- Key actors include the Ministry of Education, the Civil Service Agency, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, County and District Education Offices and School Boards, the RTTIs, the National Commission on Higher Education, the National Teachers Association of Liberia (NTAL), and the National Association of School Principals.
- National platforms exist — the Local Education Group (LEG), the Education Development Partners Group (EDPG) and the Joint Education Sector Review (JESR) — but none treats school leadership as a priority agenda item. Coordination remains bilateral, partner-by-partner, and informal.
- Communication through the system is weak: unfilled District Education Officer posts, limited travel resources, poor connectivity and inactive school boards mean policies and guidelines often fail to reach schools outside Monrovia.
- Informal channels — the Annual Conference of the National Association of School Principals, radio, newspapers, Facebook and WhatsApp groups — carry information to school leaders but sit outside the formal coordination architecture.
- Validation workshop participants endorsed anchoring school leadership coordination in the Teacher Professional Development (TPD) Technical Working Group, through a small steering committee chaired by the Assistant Minister for Teacher Education.
- Liberia's findings connect to and reinforce the continental picture documented in ACSL's School Leadership in Africa: A Continental Mapping Report (2026), which similarly identifies fragmented coordination, weak policy operationalisation, and an under-utilised evidence base as the defining system challenges across the continent.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

Adopt a national school leadership policy and standards framework

Consolidate existing instruments into one coherent framework that defines roles, competencies, accountability and career pathways — backed by a dedicated budget line in the next Education Sector Plan and clear responsibilities across national, county, district and school levels.

Recommendation 2

Build an integrated professional development pathway

Link recruitment, preparation, induction, mentoring, CPD, certification, performance management and career progression, and embed leadership development in existing supervision and school quality assurance systems. Start with a national induction package for newly appointed principals, as required by the 2022 National Teacher Training Management Policy.

Recommendation 3

Create a national school leadership training curriculum

Restructure existing training modules into one competency-based curriculum for RTTIs and other teacher training institutions, covering both pre-service preparation for aspiring school leaders and in-service development.

Recommendation 4

Institutionalise the national research agenda

Adopt the co-created agenda as the reference for donor-funded, project and postgraduate research, and establish formal evidence-to-policy channels so that research informs planning and sector reviews. Add school leadership indicators to the Annual School Census and put existing census data to use, so that progress against national training targets can be measured.

Recommendation 5

Make school leadership visible in sector coordination

Anchor coordination in the TPD Technical Working Group, make school leadership a recognised theme in the Joint Education Sector Review, and use professional associations, radio and WhatsApp to build communities of practice.

Recommendation 6

Turn gender and inclusion commitments into measurable action

Monitor women's representation and the participation of persons with disabilities, and address the working conditions, social norms, safety, mobility and WASH barriers that limit entry into and progression in school leadership.

IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP — KEY MILESTONES

This roadmap was co-developed with stakeholders during the national validation workshop (held in April 2026) to strengthen national ownership of school leadership reform.

1–6 Months

Convene a national coordination mechanism to audit existing policy instruments; constitute a school leadership steering committee within the TPD Technical Working Group; cost the framework; review the Liberia School Leadership Training Manual; audit the Annual School Census for leadership indicators; conduct a gender audit.

6–12 Months

Draft the standalone National School Leadership Policy and Standards Framework and a Professional Development Framework; propose a school leadership budget line for the next Education Sector Plan; design a national induction package and competency-based curriculum; update census instruments; turn gender commitments into time-bound actions; launch radio and WhatsApp channels.

12–24 Months

Validate and adopt the policy and standards framework through national and county consultations; pilot the professional development framework and curriculum in selected counties and RTTIs; train CEOs and DEOs on induction and coaching; introduce affirmative measures for aspiring women leaders, hold the first JESR with school leadership as a recognised theme.

2–5 Years

Roll out the framework and curriculum nationally; make induction mandatory on appointment; institutionalise a recurrent budget line; link CPD records to career progression; embed school leadership reporting in the JESR; track women's representation across all 16 county education systems.

Liberia has built important foundations for school leadership: a substantial policy framework, growing professional development initiatives, an expanding research base, and its first stakeholder-endorsed research agenda — but not yet an integrated system. What this mapping makes clear is that the challenge is not a lack of policy — it is a lack of coherence, coordination, implementation, and accountability. The roadmap co-created with Liberian stakeholders provides a concrete pathway from a policy-rich environment to an implementation-oriented school leadership system. What is required now is the institutional will, sustained investment, and cross-sector alignment to deliver it.

ABOUT ACSL

The African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) is a pan-African coalition of partners committed to strengthening school leadership systems that improve teaching, learning outcomes, and the well-being of learners across the continent. The Centre works with governments, researchers, and professional development providers to connect, support, and scale school leadership policy, practice, and evidence — from the country level to the continental level. ACSL is coordinated by four pan-African organisations: **ADEA (Association for the Development of Education in Africa)** leads policy development and advocacy; **ESSA** (Education Sub-Saharan Africa) leads research and evidence; **FAWE (Forum for African Women Educationalists)** leads gender equality and social inclusion; and **VVOB – education for development** leads professional development.

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