



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Decoding barriers and failures in Liberia's educational policy implementation

Wehye Benjamin Yele and Asimwe Specioza \*

*School of Education Unicaf University, Zambia.*

World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 23(01), 495–508

Publication history: Received on 23 May 2024; revised on 03 July 2024; accepted on 06 July 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.23.1.2009>

### Abstract

While educational policy research in Africa in general and Liberia in particular has seemingly concentrated on policy challenges and remedies, this paper explores policy barriers and failures. From a policy analysis perspective, it attempts to explain what has deterred Liberia's education policies from the effective realisation of equitable access to quality and relevant education, and lifelong learning as policy objectives that underpin the country's educational system. To analyse the educational policy barriers and failures, 25 policy documents were reviewed, 125 respondents surveyed using a questionnaire, and 10 key informants interviewed. Findings showed that the country faces social, economic, political, institutional, environmental, and learning and innovation barriers. It also demonstrated that the policy failures include inequitable access to education, low academic achievement, early leaving, low staff capacity, inappropriate skills development, weak parental participation, fewer lifelong learning opportunities, and over centralised governance. The researchers recommend that the Liberian government increases investment in education and leverages on technology to promote greater equitable access to quality and relevant education and lifelong learning.

**Keywords:** Educational Policy; Policy Barriers; Policy Failures; Equitable Access; Lifelong Learning

### 1. Introduction

Education for all is a major thrust to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The contribution of education to societal development is possible where there is an efficient and effective educational system that provides the much desired human capital to drive the development agenda both in the short and long-term. The success of the educational system itself depends on the robustness of the policies that guide decisions. To this extent, educational policies underpin the development of society in general. Educational policies are central to decision-making processes related to how the educational system of a given society will contribute to both the short-term and long-term development objectives (Falalu, 2020). Educational policies guide the allocation of scarce resources to achieve national or international objectives. The essence of these policies is promotion of efficiency and effectiveness in the sector in terms of ensuring cost optimisation, promoting compliance, providing a safe learning environment, ensuring an active learning culture, promoting equity and diversity inclusion, promoting quality education, and contribution to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Bashar and Sifawa (2022) note that a policy is a broad authoritative prescription to guide institutional processes. It should have three key ingredients including the policy agents, policy actions, and policy purposes – objectives. It is imperative that a policy including the educational policies must reflect future goals, aspirations, and the guidelines for reaching the desired objectives. Papanikos (2010) defines education policy as any organised intervention aimed at improving the practice of education in society at all levels. It is exercised by all the potential stakeholders of the education sector. It is observed that the key stakeholder is the government at all levels from the central to the local governments. The stakeholders are expected to promote the efficiency and effectiveness of educational policies. Each stakeholder group such as teachers, parents, school administrators, students, community groups, employers, and government officials has a duty to ensure that educational policies meet the planned objectives.

\* Corresponding author: Asimwe Specioza

In Liberia, like other developing countries, the country devised a number of educational policies to promote the sector and ensure that the expected goals are achieved. Since 2015, the primary focus of the educational policies in the country is meeting SDG-4 targets in particular and contributing to realisation of the SDGs by 2030 in general. These policies include; the Education Reform Act 2011 and supplementary policies such as the 2018 Inclusive Education Policy, the 2019 National School Health Policy for quality school-based health services, and the 2019 National Career Guidance and Psychological Counselling Policy for Liberian Schools (Wehye & Asimwe, 2024). In spite of a presence of the aforementioned educational policies, it appears they have not lived to their expected performance. As noted by UNICEF (2018), USAID (2020), World Bank (2022), Government of Liberia, Ministry of Education (2022), and Wehye and Asimwe (2024), there are visible performance shortcomings in the sector. For example, stakeholder participation remains low, the quality of education is characterized by low proficiency scores in literacy (45.2%), and numeracy (38.3%) that are below the required average. Moreover, the burden of overage children remains higher and around 19 percent of the school going children do not attend school when education is free. The disparities in access to education remain disappointingly high between urban and rural dwellers and girls and boys. There are fewer girls 42 percent than boys 46 percent who complete junior secondary school education. The quantity and quality of teachers does not meet the desired standards to realise the planned target of education for all as many schools especially, in rural schools lack adequate qualified teachers to meet the staffing needs for quality and relevant education. The education sector performance statistics in Liberia regarding enrolment and learning outcomes remain among the poorest in the world. As the United Nations member countries promote SDG-4 through their country level educational policies, the inability of Liberia to ensure equitable access to quality and relevant education, and to promote lifelong learning signals a presence of policy barriers and failures that should raise serious concerns to the educational sector stakeholders to identify, document, and address them.

While research in Africa in general and Liberia in particular focuses on educational policy challenges, this study features policy barriers and failures in relation to equitable access to quality and relevant education, and promotion of lifelong learning in Liberia. This study documents the multifaceted contextual nature of such barriers and failures in the country's educational policy pipeline. It reports on a section of PhD thesis (Wehye, 2023) that focused on "addressing the input-outcome gaps in educational policies: case study of Liberia". The paper examined the barriers and failures in Liberia's educational policy as the overarching research objective. The main contribution of this paper extending the existing literature of educational policy in the developing countries context by highlighting and clarifying the educational policy barriers and failures. This literature is expected to provide empirical evidence that explains why equitable access to quality and relevant education, which is the pivotal to domesticating the SGD-4 gains remains elusive in Liberia. In addition, the paper suggests policy points that could lead to dramatic improvements in the educational sector moving forward.

---

## 2. Literature Review

In the public sector realm, policies are designed to realise specific ends in their designated areas. They carry government intentions to implement its programmes. Policies may relate to a defined government sector to streamline its operations in that field like agricultural policy, foreign policy, health policy, immigration policy, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) policy, and others. According to Rosha (2022), an educational policy is one that is directly focused on educational services. The policy prescribes the authoritative directions or priorities taken or to be taken by a government to guide educational sector development and service delivery. It is a framework of guidelines, activities, resource requirements and utilization, and the expected results (Falalu, 2020). Musisi (2015) asserts that educational policies are the fulcrum of all other public policies in a country as they provide the foundation for human capital development. Therefore, educational policies are embedded in all other policies and drive their success directly or indirectly. Falalu (2020), and Bashar and Shifawa (2022) indicate that quality educational policies are goal oriented, authoritative, problem focused, target a particular area of concern, prescribe the decisional process, and are aligned to other policies either at national or international level.

To meet their purpose, educational policies should take a particular form that addresses a specific educational need. Musisi (2015), Falalu (2020), and Bashar and Shifawa (2022) provide a taxonomy of 8 forms of educational policies including (i) curricular policies which specify what schools should teach to satisfy both manifest and latent goals of education. (ii) Pedagogical policies that specify the methods and materials educators should use in the classroom environment. (iii) Resource policies which specify the necessary scholastic resources. (iv) Distributional policies that relate to how to share educational resources and opportunities. (v) Redistributive policies which are concerned with sharing educational resources and opportunities more equitably – balancing policies. (vi) Regulatory policies which focus on providing regulations, laws and instruments to deliver the desired educational outputs, outcomes, and impact. (vii) Constituent polices that focus on organisation and reorganisation of educational institutions. (viii) Institutional policies which relate to a specific institution such as a school highlighting the guidelines that the organisation is

supposed to follow. All these policies are supposed to be aligned to the national development objectives. Having in place policies that do not communicate to each other or hear from one another causes dysfunctionality in the sector, wastes national resources, and hinders sustainable national human capital development and the overall progress of a country.

The role of education in society cannot be overemphasised. It is a fundamental human right and a foundation of maintainable socioeconomic development in society. It is a process that equips individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills and behaviours for holistic wellbeing. Though its importance is well acknowledged at global level through the SDGs, the quality of educational policies and their influence on both the educational sector itself, and the general community remains debatable. Equitable access to quality and relevant education, and lifelong learning appears to remain a challenge to governments and other stakeholders in many parts of the world (World Bank, 2022). Wehye and Asiimwe (2024) viewing the role of education from the functionalist lens contend that education has two main functions in society; the manifest function and the latent function. The manifest function relates to the intentional aims of education. This includes promoting socialisation, social control, promoting social and political integration, being agents of change, transmitting culture across generations and cultural innovation, career selection, and cognitive development including rational thinking, among others. The latent functions are the unintended roles of education in society such as learning social skills. As noted by Asiimwe and Magunda (2023), the outputs and outcomes of education are expected to promote socioeconomic transformation in society. However, education may fail to realise both its functional and manifest roles in society. Moreover, as claimed by many conflict theorists (Ascher, 2017), education may promote inequity in society instead of alleviating it. In the current circumstances, this happens when equitable access to quality and relevant education for all, and lifelong learning as the overall policy goals are deterred by impediments in the value chain.

Globally, the existence of policy barriers and the consequential policy failures in the education sector is a widespread experience and concern, which has not yet received adequate attention in the policy discourses (Wehye, 2023). There seems to be a persistent observation that the same type of policy barriers and failures are repeated across time and space. This happens in spite of the availability of numerous opportunities for policy learning and change. As noted by Howlett, Ramesh, and Wu (2015), Sittison (2020), Kurowski, Černý, and Trapl (2022), and Wehye (2023), much of the existing literature on policy studies in education has focused on conceptualising the topic of policy barriers and failures with less attention on systematically examining these aspects across the educational spectrum. Several studies have stressed technical concerns, like resource inadequacies or weak design, or personal level aspects such as weak leadership as policy barriers with policy failure directed at specifics other than broader goals of education as a system such as equitable access to quality and relevant education, and lifelong learning (Wehye, 2023). It may be noted that in most cases, such factors are always eccentric and could mask the dynamic social, political, economic, technological, cultural, or even procedural aspects that could be regular barriers in the policy formulation process itself or the entire policy management value chain, and become a cause of persistent failures of educational policies. In this study, we define policy barriers as all those factors that may inhibit a policy from achieving its intended objectives while policy failure refers to the inability of a policy to achieve its stated objectives. The objectives of education in this paper are limited to the SDG-4 related indicators of equitable access to quality and relevant education, and lifelong learning (UNICEF, 2018).

Numerous studies emphasise that educational policy barriers come from both external and internal sources and include aspects such as social, economic, political, environmental, feedback, and learning and innovation, among others (Longworth, 2003; Sittison, 2020; Amaan & Diyammi, 2022; Braun, 2022). Economic barriers relate to poverty levels, lack of adequate resources, and economic inequalities where individuals and families cannot afford the cost of education. Social barriers cover the cultural norms, attitudes – dispositional aspects, behaviours, and poor family culture of learning that undermine the value of education or deter access to educational opportunities including, inter alia, cases of child marriage and labour. McKenzie (2021) highlights curriculum, infrastructure, cultural effects, limited awareness of policy goals, and low participation of parents as hindrances to effectiveness of educational policies. Meanwhile, Mwambe (2020), Rowherder (2020), and Paschal, Nyoni and Mkulu (2021) identify institutional barriers such as excessive class size, curriculum relevance, medium of instruction, heavy workload, challenges with standardised examinations, and lack of teacher motivation as key barriers to educational policy. Relatedly, Mackenzie, Bower, and Owaineh (2020) demonstrate that barriers to effective, equitable, and quality education include political, financial, and physical constraints. The political constraints relate to the level of political goodwill or support provided by the government; and financial constraints focus on the level of funding to support infrastructural development, human resources, provision of scholastic materials development, and meeting other needs of the sector. Stites, Athieno, and Dyer (2022) demonstrate that the cost of education in terms of lack of funds, opportunity cost – loss of labour, and social cost – delayed marriages and bride wealth, and unfulfilled responsibilities at home were serious barriers to educational policy implementation especially, in relation to meeting commitments related to the girl child education. In addition, cultural factors – source of bride wealth from girls and physical barriers – distance, rainy seasons, and topology were noted to limit the success of educational policies especially, the equitable access to education. Sittison (2020) argues

that educational policy may be hindered by poverty, high fertility rate in the society, and increasing population. The gist of the argument is that low fertility and poverty rates correlate with better socioeconomic development, a presence of adequate resources and a lower strain on educational policy resources thus leading to higher quality education and vice versa. This claim seems to hinge on materialistic deprivation theory (Herbert, 1996) that sees educational policy failures at school level and collectively at higher levels as caused by poverty. Poverty reduces learning opportunities for children from poor backgrounds who are prone to illnesses, present learning and speaking problems, and benefit less from the education system (Giavrimis & Papanis, 2008). In addition, poverty complicates the society's ability to raise adequate resources to fund educational policy needs (Sittison, 2020). This is common in societies with high population growth rates compared to those with low population growth rates.

Literature indicates that in many cases, it is not very clear to ascertain whether a policy has rightly failed or not, and to pinpoint where, and what exactly has failed (Mueller, 2019). Prescribing policy failure requires taking note of the different policy dimensions to isolate those that have met their targets from those that have missed. Moreover, what is a policy failure to one group might be considered a success to another since different policy stakeholders may have different policy preferences and perspectives. Therefore, policy outputs, outcomes, and impact may have both winners and losers. McConnell (2015) claims that a policy fails when it does not significantly achieve its planned goals. This seems to suggest that to analyse policy failure, it is imperative that the policy intents are clearly known, the performance targets are specified, and what constitutes policy failure can unequivocally be isolated and articulated. Presently, at global level, the main policy guideline for the country level educational policies is the SDG-4 that enjoins member states to ensure that they promote an educational policy environment that enhances equitable access to quality and relevant education for all, and life-long learning (Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024). Country level analyses of educational policy environments would not, therefore, be complete without a pronouncement on whether they advance those objectives and to what extent they have progressed on the performance chart.

Educational policy failures appear to be an all pervasive global concern with some few context specific variations. Both structural and institutional weaknesses and risks which have been articulated under the policy barriers in the education systems expose educational policies to certain failures. These failures come with costs to both individuals and communities. Muller (2019) notes that at individual level, the consequences of educational failures are linked to issues such as unemployment, social exclusion and inequity, poverty, and weak physical and poor mental health. Others include lower life expectancy, lower participation in democratic institutions and initiatives, and overall poor quality of life. Meanwhile, at community and national level, the outcomes of failed educational policies correlate with low economic growth and development with high economic and social costs to both the state and the citizens. As demonstrated by Mokhosi (2023), the failed quintile educational policy on funding schools in South Africa has widened the access gap to quality and relevant education between the rural communities and the urban ones while at the same time exacerbating the income inequality between the rich and the poor families. This arises due to the inequitable access to quality and relevant educational opportunities that determine access to employment opportunities and life choices. This situation perpetuates class systems, deepens economic polarisation, and social tensions.

Educational policy may be deemed successful when learner enrolment is growing and both supportive infrastructure and human resource capacity are in place. The collective presence of these aspects makes the education more accessible, equitable, of right quality, and able to meet the present and future needs of the individuals and their respective communities (UNESCO, 2018). However, numerous studies point out a number of aspects that manifest existence of educational policy failure that could be a point of reference for educational policy analysts, framers, and implementers. Savvides et al. (2021) assert that early leaving (EL) – terminating education or training without having formally completed the programme of study is the most preeminent policy failure in education. This seems to be accentuated by Mokhosi (2023) who demonstrates that dropping out of school before completing a compulsory programme such as primary education in a free for all educational system manifests significant policy failure. In addition, Nikolaou, Papa, and Gogou (2018), Adams (2020), and Savvides et al. (2021) point out that educational policy failure is characterized by inability to provide fair and inclusive educational services that lead to successful learning, engagement, and hinder participation in the community activities as well as transition to stable and sustainable adulthood. Mokhosi (2023) further notes that an educational policy that does not tackle social exclusion is filled with failure as the global framework under the SDG-4 aims at promoting equitable access to quality and relevant education for all and lifelong learning. Failure to build teachers capacity affects the policy objective not only in terms of promoting quality education but also its accessibility, and relevance as some schools lack qualified staff (Savvides et al., 2021). European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2019), and Mokhosi (2023) explicate how low teacher capacity lowers both accessibility to education and school attendance. Other policy failures include: weak engagement with families which affects parental participation in school activities yet, it is an imperative in promoting academic achievement of learners (Asiimwe & Magunda, 2017; Asiimwe & Nabitake, 2023); weak community based support services (Adams, 2020); narrow curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy (Savvides et al., 2021); weak support to learner health and wellbeing (Nikolaou

et al., 2018; Sumarowo, 2023); transition failures from one level to another; and inability to include adult learners (Asiimwe & Magunda, 2023; Wehye, 2023) which excludes them from the mainstream society.

### 3. Materials and Methods

The study adopted a mixed-methods exploratory design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018; Cook & Kamalodeen, 2020). It involved the application of both qualitative and quantitative strands of inquiry ensuring triangulation of data sources, data collection methods, and instruments. The selection of this study design and the methods was influenced by the researcher's pragmatic worldview. The study applied a singular system-wide approach, targeting all levels of the educational hierarchy in Liberia. This included examining the entire system, from national policies to local practices in order to provide a holistic view of the educational policy management process. In addition, the study utilized a global thematic framework anchored on SDG-4, and drew upon accepted theories and practices in the field of education to ensure rigorous and well-grounded analysis of educational policies in the country. The data were collected from a sample of 25 policy documents as highlighted in Table 1 below. In addition, it included 125 survey respondents, and 10 key informants. Convenient and purposive sampling strategies were used to select the desired data sources that were information rich with commendable life experiences in the education policy environment. Document review, survey questionnaires, and key informant interviews were utilized to collect the data. A sequential data collection approach was applied including content analysis, administration of survey questionnaires, and key informant interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data while quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The data were analysed sequentially and integrated into a flowing paper. The researchers ensured that all ethical concerns regarding this study were addressed.

**Table 1** List of Policies Reviewed

Subsystem	Policy Document Reviewed	Key themes Highlighted	Status
Early Childhood Education	Sustainable Development Goal (4)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Early Childhood Development Community Education and Awareness Program (ECDCEAP) & Early Childhood Development Skill Training Education Program (ECDSTEP),	Awareness, Relevance, Quality	Expired
	Education Reform Act of 2011	Access, Quality, and Relevance	Ongoing
	National Education Sector Plan (2010- 2020)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired
	Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017-2021)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired
Primary Education	Sustainable Development Goal (4)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Strategy for Education Transformation (2018-2028).	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Education Reform Act of 2011	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	National Education Sector Plan (2010-2020)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired
	Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017-2021)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired
Secondary Education	Sustainable Development Goal (4)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Strategy for Education Transformation (2018-2028).	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Education Reform Act of 2011	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	National Education Sector Plan (2010-2020)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired
	Improving Results in Secondary Education (IRISE2019-2023)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
Higher Education	Sustainable Development Goal (4)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing

	Higher Education Strategic Plan (HESP)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Education Reform Act of 2011	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Getting to Best Education Sector Plan (2017–2021)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired
	Revised National Policy on Higher Education (2015)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
TVET Education	Sustainable Development Goal (4)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Ministry of Youth and Sports Strategic and Operational Plan (2018–2022)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	Liberia Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Legislation	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	National Youth Policy and Action Plan	Access, Quality and Relevance	Ongoing
	National Policy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET 2015–2020)	Access, Quality and Relevance	Expired

#### 4. Results

The Liberian government's current efforts to ensure more equitable access to quality and relevant education can be traced back to 2011 in the educational sector reforms that took shape with the enactment of the Educational Reform Act (ERA) in 2011. The institutional framework as highlighted in Table 1 aimed at improving the quality of education in general, and increase access to education for all, and reform governance structure of the country's education system. The policy framework culminated into interventions, among others, the Liberia Education Advancement Programme (LEAP) implemented in 2016. This programme was designated to improve school management and accountability, enhance teachers' and administrators' abilities to deliver quality learning outcomes, and to optimise delivery models for the country's public schools. The programme also focused on improving physical infrastructure of schools. The overall aim of the educational policy ecosystem was to provide the country with an education delivery system that meets international standards and speaks to the SDGs, specifically, SDG-4. It is acclaimed that the wider interventions in the educational sector of Liberia registered a number of successes, inter alia, improved school enrolment at all levels, public investment in some infrastructural development, and provision of basic scholastic materials to learners. However, these successes notwithstanding, empirical evidence suggests that as of 2023, the country was not where it planned to be in terms of equitable access to quality and relevant education for all as well as lifelong learning (Wehye & Asimwe, 2024) suggesting a presence of both barriers and failures in the educational policy.

##### 4.1. Policy Barriers

The literature inquiry on Liberia's educational system notes a number of policy barriers as thematically demonstrated in Table 2. These include social, economic, political, environmental/physical, feedback, learning and innovation, and institutional barriers.

**Table 2** Policy Barriers in Liberia's Educational System

<b>Policy Goal: Equitable Access to Quality and Relevant Education For All, and Life-long Learning</b>	
General Policy Barriers	Specific Factors
Social	Stigmatisation associated with disability Discriminatory social and gender norms against girls Low levels of social health and reproductive rights for girls– teenage pregnancies and child marriage High levels of sexual and gender based violence Insufficient facilities for the learners with disabilities Parents with limited education and motivation to send children to school Ethnicity and indigenous status

	Displacement of people Dispositional/attitudinal beliefs about lifelong learning
Economic	General poverty in the country limiting parents ability to provide scholastic support High fees charges in private schools Limited funds to meet the planned educational costs Low human resources/teachers in schools
Political	Corruption Poor implementation of educational policies Limited political will and low commitment of resources to education Weak leadership and governance of the education sector Centralisation of higher education
Institutional	Excessive class size Lack of curriculum relevance – emphasis on knowledge and not skills development Shortage of teachers Under qualified teachers Poor teacher performance Heavy workload Challenges with standardised exams Low level of teacher motivation Inadequate infrastructure in terms of building and ICT Limited classroom observation Insufficient teaching and learning materials Presence of overage students Limited opportunities for professional growth Limited access to technology Low technical and digital skills Absence of practical tools to demonstrate competence development Inadequate apprenticeship opportunities Limited capacity for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) Low level of internet connectivity and access
Environmental/Physical	Long distance between school and home Seasonal effects - heavy rains Topology – mountains, valleys, and water bodies
Learning and Innovation	Limited evidence based policy formulation and implementation process Low levels of adoption of new technologies to leverage technologies adaption Poor harnessing of the creative resources of the population

The findings in Table 2 demonstrate that the general policy barriers identified from the existing literature highlighted the social, economic, political, institutional environmental, and learning and innovation. The most salient factors driving the barriers are also noted. These are later corroborated with the quantitative results in Table 3 below.

Quantitative findings from the survey questionnaire revealed the following as key barriers to equitable access to quality and relevant education and lifelong learning as indicated in Table 3.

**Table 3** Educational Policy Barriers

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Access Barriers		
High school fees	54	44.10
Distance of school to community	32	26.00
Overage students	20	16.40
Limited space in school	14	11.50
Issues of gender, health, nutrition, limiting access	2	2.00
Total	122	100%
Quality Barriers		
Limited training of teachers	45	36.90
Absence of teaching-learning materials	34	27.90
Poor classroom environment to support teaching and learning	22	18.00
Absence of national curriculum in schools	10	8.20
Limited opportunity for professional growth	5	4.10
School leadership challenge	3	2.50
Limited classroom observation and supervision	2	1.60
No feedback to teachers on teaching practices	1	0.80
Total	122	100%
Relevance Barriers		
Lack of Technology to support teaching and learning	35	28.70
Lack of technical skills to facilitate teaching	20	16.40
Unaligned curriculum	20	16.40
Limited apprenticeship opportunities for students and graduate	19	15.60
Lack of Practical tools to demonstrate competence.	10	8.20
Limited teaching aids	9	7.40
Limited access to internet facilities	5	4.10
Limited capacity for quality STEM programs	2	1.60
Limited materials for Literacy and Numeracy Skills	2	1.60
Total	122	100%
Lifelong Learning Barriers		
Limited sensitization about sensitization about lifelong learning	30	24.60
Lack of adequate facilities for adult learning	25	20.50
Weak social culture of learning	20	16.39
Limited funding	13	10.65
High costs for learning	12	9.83
Lack of relevant curriculum	12	9.83



Limited skills in training adults	10	8.20
Total	122	100%

Source: Field Data 2023

In Table 3, participants confirmed most of the findings in Table 2 that the educational policy landscape is characterized by barriers that limit the educational policies from meeting their planned goals. Regarding equitable access to education, results in Table 3 demonstrate that the salient barriers were; high school fees, distance of school from the community, overage enrollment, and limited space in school. Meanwhile, noticeable barriers to quality education included limited training of teachers, absence of teaching-learning materials, poor classroom environment to support teaching and learning, and absence of national curriculum in schools. The study further notes that the key barriers to relevant education were; lack of technology to support teaching and learning, lack of technical skills to facilitate teaching, unaligned curriculum, limited apprenticeship opportunities for students and graduate, lack of Practical tools to demonstrate competence, and limited teaching aids. Results in Table 3 also illustrate that barriers to lifelong learning existed and included aspects such as; limited sensitization about sensitization about lifelong learning, lack of adequate facilities for adult learning, weak social culture of learning, limited funding, high costs for learning, lack of relevant curriculum, and limited skills in training adults. The results in Table 3 relate to the general policy barriers under the taxonomy of social, economic, political, institutional, environmental, and learning and innovation provided in Table 2.

During key informant interviews, a complex interplay between educational policies and broader societal challenges were noted that result into barriers to educational policies. These include poverty, unemployment, and inequity, weak alignment of educational policies and SDG 8, and a weak linkage between economic growth and education. The study revealed that pervasive poverty afflicts more than 50 percent of the population in Liberia. This high poverty rate, coupled with significant levels of youth unemployment, contributes to the barriers to equitable access, relevance, and quality in education. It was noted that poverty limits individuals' ability to afford education-related expenses and access to educational opportunities. Moreover, the rampant unemployment erodes the trust in the educational system of the country further limiting its contribution to community development. In addition, high levels of inequality appear to create disparities in access to quality and relevant education and lifelong learning, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Regarding alignment of educational policies with SDG-8, participants asserted that inclusive, long-term economic growth, and productive employment are crucial for achieving SDG-4. Therefore, misalignment of SDG-4 policies and SDG-8 intervention limits the potency of educational policies from meeting their objectives. In relation to the aforesaid aspects, one of the participants noted thus:

*“Our educational policies are affected by a lack of human and organizational capability including a scarcity of qualified teachers, a shortage of specialized training, a lack of training tools, and a lack of adequate budgetary support to educational activities. This makes it difficult to successfully implement the sector policies. For example, TVET level policy is failing because of a lack of ability in terms of facilities, manpower, technical knowledge and a curriculum that is not aligned to the vision, national objectives, and policy outcomes. The observed policy hitches are leading to a vicious cycle of fragility in the education sector”* Key informant A, 2023.

The participants further claimed that the 14 year Liberian war that ended in 2003 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) had severe consequences for school children, parents, and instructors. The spillover of the effects of the war still affect the ongoing efforts to enhance equitable access, quality, and relevance in the education sector, and promotion of lifelong learning. The war eroded the country's governance culture, public trust in public policies, and the resource base to invest effectively in crucial sectors like education. Moreover, it worsened the poverty levels in the country. This is considered to ultimately deter the successful implementation of policies and initiatives aimed at improving education outcomes in Liberia.

#### 4.2. Educational Policy Failures

In the preceding paragraphs, the authors note that the primary policy objectives of Liberia's education system are ensuring equitable access to quality and relevant education, and lifelong learning. These underpin the country's ability to meet its SDG-4 targets by 2030. Similarly, the efforts in place as documented in the reviewed policies listed in Table 1 emphasise the same objectives. However, the study observes as highlighted in the section under policy barriers that there are several policy hindrances, whose effect could be a weak performing education sector reminiscent of policy failures. The findings in Table 4 demonstrate the noticeable policy failures that Liberia faces.

**Table 4** A Taxonomy of Educational Policy Failures in Liberia

Policy Failure	Failure Specifics
Inequitable Access to Education	High variations between urban and rural, rich and poor communities and between boys and girls. Girls reading ability lower than that of boys of the same age and grade. Performance of rural students being lower than that of urban counterparts. Lower gross enrolment in tertiary education for female compared to male.
Low Academic Achievement	89 percent of learners not able to do tasks fit either for their age or level of education. Low literacy and numeracy skills. High numbers of learners are not able to correctly answer test questions. Low test scores.
Early Leaving	High numbers of learners not able to complete their registered academic programmes. Dropping enrolment from 94 percent in primary education to 43 percent in lower secondary. Student transition rate is 79 percent. Low primary completion rate that is less than 50 percent.
Low Staff Capacity	Inability to build the staff capabilities both quantitatively – adequate teacher numbers and qualitatively – adequate skills.
Inappropriate Skills Development	TVETs and higher institutions of learning not producing graduates with the skills needed in the job market such as ICT skills and other STEM related skills
Weak Parental Participation	Low participation of parents in the education of the children.
Fewer lifelong Learning Opportunities	Facilities and prospects for lifelong learning remain haphazard. Large number of overage students without age appropriate learning opportunities.
Over centralised Governance	Governance of some sections of the education system remain highly centralised such as TVET and higher education limiting local participation.
Weak Curriculum Relevance	Curriculum not effectively aligned to the needs of the current Liberian society producing graduates without much real world application. Emphasis on passing exams rather than societal value – relevant skills and behaviours. Weak content relevance.
Poor Infrastructure	Weak infrastructure and facilities including fewer classrooms, laboratories, libraries, access to internet, power and water supply, and teacher accommodation. Limited schools with 25 out of 124 districts having no secondary schools.
High Failure in Transitional Exams	Low pass rate between 20-50% for university entry exams.
Social and Income Inequity	High income and social inequality between male and female, urban and rural.

Table 4 demonstrates that inequitable access to education, low academic achievement, early leaving, low teacher capacity, inappropriate skills development, weak parental participation, fewer lifelong learning opportunities, over centralised governance, and weak curriculum relevance were the outstanding policy failures. Others included poor infrastructure, high transitional failures, and social and income inequity. While meeting the SDG-4 goal is fundamental to Liberia’s socioeconomic progress and prosperity, the inability to ensure equitable access to quality and relevant education, and lifelong learning due to policy failures will keep the country lagging behind others in development. During key informant interviews, one of the participants had this to say;

*“As Liberians, we are getting disappointed that our educational policies are not working as planned. The teachers are inadequate to facilitate quality teaching and learning, dropout rates are among the highest in the world, the skills and behaviours developed are neither relevant to the local labour needs nor to those of our neighbouring countries, let alone the global labour market. Girls still face challenges to access education while the people living with disabilities remain highly excluded. Children in the rural communities and those from poor families go to schools without requisite facilities yet, sit the same exams as those from the rich families and urban areas that access better education. This promotes inequity. We promised ourselves a better curriculum that remains a dream. The quantity and quality of our educational*

*infrastructure is very weak and cannot support the growing enrolment thus excluding many citizens. I would say our educational policies have failed to meet 50 percent of their promised benefits”* Key informant B, 2023.

The key informants highlighted the nexus between the challenges the educational sector is facing and its failure to meet its planned objectives. They claimed that it would be practically impossible to expect the current level of funding to the education sector to deliver the kind of services planned and expected. The participants strongly stated that the main problem stems from policy funding and the rest are its consequences. The political will exhibited during policy formulation wanes when it comes to allocation of funds to implement the educational policies which leads to a knock-on effect on the ability of the policies to be effective. One of the participants said *“I think our educational policies represent a form of ‘political symbolism’. Otherwise, why don’t they get the resources planned?”* Key informant C, 2023.

---

## 5. Discussions

The study revealed that generally, policy barriers to Liberia’s educational policies as demonstrated in tables 3 and 4 can be grouped into social, economic, political, institutional, environmental, and learning and innovation. The social factors such as parents’ and learners’ attitudes, norms, values, and the family’s reading culture, among others, negatively affect the success of educational policies (McKenzie, 2021; Paschal et al., 2021; Stite et al., 2021). These aspects slow down the progress of educational activities in a community starting at family level upwards. The economic factors such as poverty, a lack of adequate resources, and economic inequalities diminish the ability of educational policies to operate effectively (Amaan & Diyammi, 2022; Braun, 2022). Both the government and the communities face resource constraints to fund the educational needs. In such circumstances, the state is not able to allocate sufficient funds to finance infrastructure, recruit and train teachers, supply scholastic materials, and provide other facilities including ICT connectivity. In addition, poor parents cannot afford tuition in fee paying schools on the one hand and or, to meet the basic requirements such as buying textbooks, exercise books, school uniforms, meals for the children, and other essential requirements on the other hand. This situation has a knock on effect on institutional capacity of the educational sector to effectively implement its policies (Herbert, 1996; McKenzie, et al., 2020; Mwambe, 2020; Rowherder, 2020; Sittison, 2020; Stite et al., 2022). The high cost of education especially, the tertiary level fees limit many qualifying candidates from completing their educational programmes. Adverse economic factors deter educational policies from ensuring equitable access to quality and relevant education, and promoting lifelong learning.

Political goodwill is central to successful implementation of policies. Most importantly, it determines resource allocation to the sector. In respectable democracies, failure to allocate adequate resources to education would cause changes in government. However, in developing countries, there is weak political goodwill and educational policies are mostly affected by inadequate funding that limits the functionality of all the facets of education leading to weak infrastructure, limited staffing, insufficient facilities, and other institutional weaknesses (Mwambe, 2020; Rowherder, 2020; Sittison, 2020; McKenzie, 2021; Braun, 2021; Amaan & Diyammi, 2022; Kurowski et al, 2022). Internal weaknesses within the educational sector which are commonly regarded as institutional factors have negatively affected the effectiveness of educational policies across space and time (Paschal et al., 2021). Curriculum relevance, heavy workload, examination system, low teacher motivation, low teacher capacity both in numbers and quality, excessive class size, inadequate infrastructure, and a weak leadership, among others, lessen the efficacy of educational policies. The physical environment within which the educational policies are implemented may have a limiting influence on their success (Longworth, 2003; McKenzie et al., 2020). Children having to walk long distances from home to school, seasonal factors, especially, rains and floods, and the areas topology potentially keep some children out of school. This mostly affects learners who have to cross wetlands, water bodies, and those that live in mountainous and hard to reach areas. In Liberia, educational policies face challenges related to low levels of learning and innovation. This includes limited evidence based policy formulation, weak adoption of new technologies especially, those related to use of ICT in the teaching and learning, and poor harnessing of the creative resources of the population. Policy feedback is critical to enhancing learning and innovation in the policy management cycle (Sittison, 2020; Amaan & Diyammi, 2022; Braun, 2022). Where such is ignored or not effectively applied, new policies may fail to meaningfully address obtaining challenges that they were designed to tackle.

A policy is deemed to have failed when it does not significantly attain its planned intentions (McConnel, 2015). Negative deviations between the intended and actual outputs, outcomes, and impacts of a policy demonstrate policy failure. The study in Table 4 notes that the educational policy failures in Liberia include; inequitable access to education, low academic achievement, early leaving, low staff capacity, inappropriate skills development, weak parental participation, fewer lifelong learning opportunities, and over centralised governance. Other failures revealed were; weak curriculum relevance, poor infrastructure, high failure in transitional exams, and social and income inequity. The essence of educational policies in Liberia since 2011 when the Education Reform Act of 2011 was enacted was to promote equitable access to quality and relevant education and lifelong learning (Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024). This was consistent

with the SDG-4 on education (Wehye, 2023). However, a presence of circumstances where the education system does not effectually provide fair and inclusive education, one where citizens lack opportunities to continue learning along various stages of life demonstrates policy failure (Adams, 2020; Mokhosi, 2023). The aforementioned policy failures have long term ramifications on the country's ability to meet its development goals. Education being the foundation of development, it determines the quantity and quality of the human capital to drive the country's social, economic, political, and technological success.

---

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Liberia's educational system has a number of incapacitating policy bottlenecks that continue to hinder its potential growth and development, and its ability to deliver the intended services. These are categorised into social, economic, political, institutional, environmental, and learning and innovation. These deterring factors have curtailed the ability of the educational sector to meet its intended objectives through a plethora of policies that have been enacted since 2011 to promote equitable access to quality and relevant education and lifelong learning in the country. Liberia continues to grapple with challenges of early leaving, low transition rates between primary and secondary and between secondary and tertiary institutions. It also continues to produce graduates with knowledge, skill, and behaviours not appropriate for the needs of the communities. Moreover, the unequal access to quality and relevant education between the rich and the poor, the male and female, and the urban and the rural communities continues to bother education policy stakeholders. This situation has the potential to stamp an undesirable class system in the country and to exacerbate the social exclusion, and reignite social tensions based on the polarised access to resources and opportunities triggered by failing educational policies.

Moving forward, government should invest more in the education sector to finance the unfunded priorities especially, building more classrooms, recruiting more teachers, training more teachers, extending power and internet facilities to rural schools, building laboratories and libraries, and school feeding in the free education schools. In addition, government must proactively promote inclusive learning. This should include developing a curriculum that speaks to the development needs of Liberia in terms of producing graduates with the right knowledge, skills, and behaviour; application of appropriate pedagogical approaches to reduce failures; and adapting the school environment that supports the diverse abilities of learners. Education sector stakeholders should increase sensitisation of the population to adopt social norms, attitudes, and values that promote education and lifelong learning. Institutions should strictly enforce internship programmes so that learners have an opportunity to practice their knowledge and skills in a real life situation. As technology continues to drive change and development, the government of Liberia should leverage on technology to enhance equitable access to quality and relevant education and to support lifelong learning. Therefore, extending internet and ICT facilities to all schools, building technology hubs in all urban centres including Monrovia, Gbarnga, Kakata, Bensonville, Harper, Voinjama, Buchanan, Zwedru, New Yekepa, Greenville, Ganta, Robertsport, Sanniquellie, Fish Town, Tubmanburg, Bopolu, Barclayville, and Cestos City is an imperative. These hubs should have online learning platforms that are accessible to learners in their respective jurisdictions providing each area with unique tools that meet their learning needs.

---

## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

---

## References

- [1] Adams, R. (2020, September 18). England's state schools suffering biggest fall in funding since 1980s, The Guardian Newspaper.
- [2] Amaan, M. B., & Diyammi, M. P. (2022). The contribution of government to the sustainability of inclusive education: A case of Urban District (Zanzibar), International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT), 10(11), 551-575.
- [3] Ascher, W. (2017). Understanding the policy making process. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [4] Asiimwe, S., & Magunda, H. (2017). Parents as enablers of academic achievement in secondary schools in Uganda: A Learners' View Point, The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies, 5(2), 215-225.

- [5] Asimwe, S., & Magunda, H. (2023). Revisiting behaviourism, cognitivist, constructivism and teaching adult learners, *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation*, 4(4), 1099-1106.
- [6] Asimwe, S., & Nabitake, R. (2022). The relationship between parents' involvement and student academic performance in Uganda, Lyantonde District, *IJARIE-ISSN (O)- 2395-4396*, 8(6), 1531-1540.
- [7] Bashar, S. I., & Sifawa, A. M. (2022). Educational policy: A review of its nature, forms, processes, rationale and misconceptions, *Rima International Journal of Education (RIJE)*, 1(2), 66 – 74
- [8] Braun, A. M. (2022). Barriers to inclusive education in Tanzania's policy environment: national policy actors' perspectives. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 52(1), 110-128.
- [9] Cook, L. D., & Kamalodeen, V. J. (2020). Combining Mixed Methods and Case Study Research (MMpCSR) to Give Mixed Methods Case Study Designs Caribbean, *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), 47–76
- [10] Creswell, J., & Plano-Clark. V. (2018). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research (3rdEd.)*. Thousand Oaks: Sage
- [11] Falalu, M. (2020). Educational policy in the 21st century era: A relook, *Malaysian Journal of Educational Policy*, 3 (2): 55-61.
- [12] Government of Liberia, Ministry of Education. (2022). *Education sector plan 2022/23–2026/27*. Liberia, Monrovia.
- [13] Herbert, M. (1996). *Psychological problems of children*. (J.N. Paraskevopoulos, Ed.). Athens: Ellinika Grammata.
- [14] Howlett, M., Ramesh, M., & Wu, X. (2015). Understanding the persistence of policy failures: The role of politics, governance and uncertainty, In *Special Issue Introduction: Policy Failure, Public Policy and Administration*, 2015, 30(3–4), 209–220
- [15] Kurowski, M., Černý, M., & Trapl, F. (2022). A review study of research articles on the barriers to inclusive education in primary schools, *Journal on Efficiency and Responsibility in Education and Science*, 15(2), 116-130.
- [16] Longworth, N. (2003). *Lifelong Learning in Action: Transforming Education in the 21st Century*. Routledge: London, UK.
- [17] MacKenzie, A.; Bower, C.; & Owaineh, M. (2020). Barriers to effective, equitable and quality education, *Int. J. Child. Rights*, 28, 805–832
- [18] McConnell, A. (2015). What is policy failure? A primer to help navigate the maze, *Publ. Policy Adm.* 30 (3–4), 221–242
- [19] McKenzie, J. (2021). Intellectual disability in inclusive education in South Africa: Curriculum challenges, *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 18(1), 53-57.
- [20] Mokhosi, B. (2023). *Investigating the impact of a non-government philanthropic primary school in bridging the education gap in rural, low-income, underserved, and marginalized communities in South Africa*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Unicaf University, Zambia.
- [21] Mueller, B. (2019). *Why public policies fail: Policymaking under complexity*. *Economia the journal of the National Association of Graduate Centers in Economics (ANPEC) in Brazil*, 2019.
- [22] Musisi, B. (2015). Theory and practice of educational policy and planning. *Islamic University Multidisciplinary Journal*, 3 (2): 103-109.
- [23] Mwambe, Z. (2020). *Teachers' perceptions on the implementation of inclusive education in public primary schools in Tanzania: A Case of Njombe Town Council, Unpublished*. Master's Thesis, The Open University of Tanzania.
- [24] Nikolaou, S. M., M. Papa, and L. Gogou. 2018. Early school leaving in Greece and Europe and educational inequality: Actions and policies against educational and social exclusion. *European Journal of Social Sciences Education and Research*, 5 (1): 212–220.
- [25] Papanikos, G. T. (2010). *Educational Policy: An introduction* in Papanikos, G. T. (Ed), *Educational Policy*, Athens Institute for Education and Research.
- [26] Paschal, M. J., Nyoni, T. T., & Mkulu, D. G. (2021). The role of cooperative learning in attaining inclusive education in the classroom, creativity and innovation in secondary schools in Mwanza Region-Tanzania, *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Sciences*, 5(2), 364-373.

- [27] Rohwerder, B. (2020). Disability inclusive development-Tanzania situational analysis, Institute of Development Studies (IDS)
- [28] Rosha, P. (2022). School effectiveness: Yesterday and today, South African Journal of Educational Research, 2 (2): 277–285
- [29] Savvides, N., Milhano, S., Mangas, C., Freire, C., & Lopes, S. (2021). 'Failures' in a failing education system: comparing structural and institutional risk factors to early leaving in England and Portugal. Journal of Education and Work, 34(7–8), 789–809.
- [30] Sittisom, W. (2020). Barriers in way towards quality education: poverty, fertility rate and increasing population, Journal of Security and Sustainability, 9, 215-227.
- [31] Stites, E., Athieno, B. and Dyer, C. 2022. Educating girls in Karamoja, Uganda: Barriers, benefits, and terms of inclusion in the perspectives of girls, their communities, and their teachers. Karamoja Resilience Support Unit (KRSU), Feinstein International Center, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, Kampala, Uganda
- [32] Sumarowo, M. (2023). Challenges of the higher education in Liberia and possible solutions, J. Asian Afr. soc. sci. humanit, 9(1), 22-33
- [33] UNICEF. (2018). The Situation for Children in Liberia. More than 2 million children under the age of 18 live in Liberia. Their journey to adulthood is not an easy one, UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/liberia/situation-children-liberia>
- [34] USAID. (2020). Request for proposals (RFP) No.: 72066920R00010 Transforming the Education System for Teachers and Students in Liberia (TESTS).
- [35] Wehye, B. Y., & Asiimwe, S. (2024). Examining the access, quality, and relevance gaps in Liberia's educational policy environment, International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR), 6(3), 1-13.
- [36] Wehye, Y. B. (2023). Addressing the input-outcome gaps in educational policies: Case study of Liberia. Unpublished Doctor of Education Thesis, Unicaf University, Zambia.
- [37] World Bank. (2022). Investing in human capital inclusive and sustainable growth. [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)