



STATE OF EDUCATION IN SIERRA LEONE 2023

Funded by the European Union

Research Conducted by: National Partnership for Social Accountability (NPSA)
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STATE OF EDUCATION, 2023

FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure as Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to, present the State of Education (SOE), 2023. Prepared by a network of local civil society organisations, the National Partnership for Social Accountability (NPSA), with funds from the EU Delegation, this report provides citizens' feedback on the state of education at the community and national levels and identifies key factors influencing education outcomes in primary, junior, and senior secondary schools throughout Sierra Leone.

This State of Education 2023 builds on previous service delivery indices and tracks changes and improvements made over time. A random sampling of 2,400 households and 400 schools across the country provides robust data reflecting citizens' constructive feedback on a range of education services including: financial management in schools, school infrastructure, WASH, satisfaction with teaching services, availability of school supplies, and citizens' views on the recently introduced Radical Inclusion Policy. As a government, we believe that amplifying citizens' voices on these issues and supporting the capacity of government to respond effectively to their priorities will promote greater accountability and responsiveness in education services.

The Government of HE President Bio is fully aware that when parents send their children to school, they place great trust in teachers and administrators. They hope their children are safe, can access the resources they need to learn, and through education can start acquiring the skills they need in life. It is for this reason that the EU supports GoSL in placing Human Capital Development at the core of the country's development aspirations. Since His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio launched the flagship Free School Quality Education Programme in 2018, Sierra Leone has recorded unprecedented progress, including the enrolment of over 2.5 million children, especially girls, in schools nationwide; the recruitment of additional new teachers; the resuscitation of school feeding for thousands of children; the approval of over 3,000 new schools; and the provision of teaching and learning materials. While noting the progress made, this report demonstrates that in some places, parents are concerned that some local schools do not measure up.

I welcome the recommendations of this SOE 2023 report and encourage other partners to actively support the MBSSE to better respond to parental feedback. It is my hope that the findings and recommendations will serve as a valuable resource for the formulation of strategies and programmes aimed at enhancing education outcomes for Sierra Leone.



Hon. Conrad Sacky

Minister of Basic & Senior Sec Education

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Executive Summary

This 2023 State of Education report is jointly produced by the National Partnership for Social Accountability (NPSA), a network of 45 local civil society organisations, as an embodiment of citizens' feedback on the investments the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL), households, and development partners are making to improve basic and senior secondary school education in Sierra Leone. In the last five years, GoSL and partners embarked on a transformative journey to enhance education quality and accessibility through the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative. To implement the FQSE, GoSL allocated (starting Financial Year, 2020) an unprecedented 22% national budget to education and introduced a Radical Inclusion Policy to accelerate the reach of education to excluded groups and communities. This 2023 report provides an evaluation of the strides Sierra Leone is making in key areas, as well as identifies challenges and opportunities for improvement. It is useful to emphasise that some of the areas covered such as WASH and school infrastructure are largely donor funded activities implemented by NGOs. This assessment therefore presents a holistic picture of the work of MBSSE and its partner NGOs.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was employed by the NPSA, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The research included document reviews, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, and surveys conducted among households and school staff. Random sampling identified 2,400 households and 400 schools across the country, providing robust data.

Key Findings

School governance:

School Management Committees (SMCs) and Boards of Governors (BoGs) are crucial for effective

school governance. Nationally, 75% of parents are aware of an SMC or BoG in their communities.

Subsidy transfers:

Financial support, especially subsidies, is crucial for educational institutions, particularly under fee-free systems. Ninety-three percent of interviewed Head Teachers and SMC members reported delays in subsidy transfers.

Financial management:

A cash book management system is present in 78% of schools surveyed, with varying adoption rates across districts.

There is a unanimous demand for training in school improvement planning and cash management, emphasizing its critical importance.

Parental Satisfaction with SMCs/BoGs:

Parental satisfaction with SMCs/BoGs is at 81%, but disparities exist, suggesting opportunities for improvement in Moyamba, Pujehun, and Bonthe districts.

Monitoring visits to schools:

Routine monitoring visits from District Education Office (DEO) supervisors/inspectors are reported by 99% of schools, but challenges in regular monitoring persist.

Infrastructure concerns:

Almost half of the parents (46%) indicated infrastructural problems as the most pressing issue in their children's school, with very similar ratios (45% and 44%) of school staff noting infrastructural issues among the major problems in education. Contributions toward maintenance of school facilities are requested from more than half of parents. These findings emphasize the critical need for infrastructure improvement and maintenance. Availability of teaching materials including textbooks and understaffing of schools were also among the key concerns according to parents and key staff of schools.

Access to teachers:

Persistent teacher gaps are jeopardising education. On average Sierra Leone schools have one trained teacher per 59 students, slightly below the sub-Saharan Africa average of 58 to 1 teacher (UNESCO update April 2023). Only 62% of the overall teaching staff are qualified teachers, which poses challenges to quality education. About 55% of schools have applied for new teachers in the past year, indicating a substantial need for qualified, approved teaching staff in the education system.

Teacher Attendance and Satisfaction with Teaching Services:

Seven in every 10 parents (71%) confirmed that teachers were always in school during the last term with 20% indicating teachers were sometimes absent. An overwhelming 91% of parents were satisfied with the teaching provided, while 75% believe that teachers provide extra care and support to pupils. However at least 20% of parents complained about requests for unauthorised gifts by teachers.

Textbook Availability in Schools:

Textbook availability varies significantly by district, with the national average at 67%. Pupil to textbook ratio remains under the ideal 1:1 as challenges in infrastructure and resources to deliver textbooks persist.

Radical Inclusion Policy:

Positive shifts in inclusion policies are reported by schools, including additional support for children with disabilities (66%), increased training for women teachers (67%), and consequences for misconduct against marginalized students (72%).

Access to Water and Sanitation infrastructure in schools: Access to a water source in schools stands at 57%, emphasizing the urgent need for investment. Pupil to toilet ratios is a concerning 1:75 nationally, while pupil to good toilet ratio is 1:132, more than five times the recommended ratio for girl students by WHO, indicating an unhealthy and dangerous learning environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, some key recommendations have been proposed.

School Governance:

- Increase awareness of school-level governance structures, such as SMCs/BoGs, on their roles and responsibilities to enhance transparency and accountability in management of school resources.
- Introduce a performance-related incentive scheme and invest in capacity building for the sustained functionality of governance structures.

Teacher Availability:

- Address the high pupil to teacher ratios, particularly in hard-to-reach areas, by accelerating the approval and equitable deployment of qualified teachers.
- Recruitment, training, and deployment of volunteer teachers in remote communities is strongly recommended. Sierra Leone can expand its youth volunteer corps to include

remote teachers, especially for teaching English, Science, and Maths.

Teacher Qualification and Retention:

- Adapt policies to ensure teacher deployment in rural communities as well as punitive action for teachers who abandon rural areas after being enrolled on government voucher.
- Allocate funds and improve training efforts for teacher qualification, approval, and adequate salaries.

Teacher Transfer and Replacement:

- Establishing guidelines to limit discretion in the transfer and placement of teachers especially in remote areas will also help teacher retention. We noted discretion in the replacement of retired teachers, leading to some schools losing pin codes when their designated teachers retire. Moreover, some school managers reported that some DDs transfer teachers without any consultation. Guidelines on teacher transfer and replacement is recommended to establish clear conditions and procedures on which transfers and replacements are made.

School Materials:

- Undertake robust tracking of the supply and utilisation of school materials.

Radical Inclusion:

- Implement a well-designed mechanism to communities, establishing minimum monitor and track the provisions of the standards for schools, and increasing access Radical Inclusion policy, addressing to performance-based funding to targeted challenges in textbook availability, qualified schools. teachers, and wash facilities.

WASH in Schools:

- Establish and improve WASH infrastructure addressing equity in education services and supplies, prioritizing schools without across communities. Allocate resources such support and those in hard-to-reach areas, as subsidies and teaching and learning especially schools with separate WASH materials more equitably to bridge the facilities for girls.
- Ensure sufficient coordination of NGO activities for effective implementation and improvement of WASH infrastructure.

Expanding Equitable Access to Education:

- Address disparities in education quality between urban and rural areas by accelerating school approval for remote communities, establishing minimum standards for schools, and increasing

access to performance-based funding to targeted schools.

Resource allocation:

- Increased investment is required to promote participation and capacity for good school governance and/or teacher management and addressing equity in education services across communities. Allocate resources such as subsidies and teaching and learning materials more equitably to bridge the urban-rural quality gap and address disparities in accessing these resources.

Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right, enshrined in our national constitution as a cornerstone of state policy and a key driver of human development. Sierra Leone faces complex challenges that significantly impact its education system. Over the past five years, there has been a concerted effort to transform the education landscape through the development of sector policies, strategy documents, guidelines, and initiatives aimed at enhancing both access to and the quality of education. Notably, the government's Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative has tackled the critical issue of access by eliminating financial barriers to basic and senior secondary school education.

Despite these commendable efforts, the education system grapples with persistent challenges, including inadequate infrastructure to accommodate the influx of previously unschooled children, a shortage of qualified teachers, and a curriculum that may not align seamlessly with the demands of the labour market.

The Education Services Report (ESR) in Sierra Leone, inspired by the Right to Education Index, represents a vital initiative dedicated to achieving equitable access to quality education. The inaugural State of Education Service Report (SESR) plays a pivotal role in the ongoing transformation of Sierra Leone's education landscape. By offering a comprehensive overview, it serves as a valuable tool for policymakers, researchers, and international organizations, enabling them to identify areas for improvement. The ESR's significance lies in its ability to uncover disparities between urban and rural education, monitor progress, assess policy impact, and guide the allocation of resources for educational development, ultimately shaping transformative policies in Sierra Leone's education sector.

Key indicators examined in the report include teacher management, pupil attendance, the

effectiveness of School Management Committees (SMCs), Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) in schools, instances of corruption, corporal punishment, learning outcomes, the supply of teaching and learning materials, and the promotion of radical inclusion¹.

Methodology

This report is produced by the National Partnership for Social Accountability (NPSA). The research design utilized a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods to facilitate a thorough exploration of the state of education services in Sierra Leone.

The methodology involved a comprehensive review and analysis of relevant literature and documents. This approach enabled the examination of context-specific trends and policy actions related to education service delivery in Sierra Leone. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including government officials, educators, community leaders, and representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Two sets of surveys were employed to collect data from citizens and key staff of schools (Headmaster/principal, Deputy Headmaster/vice principal, Senior Teacher, SMC Chairman, SMC Secretary). Random sampling was used to identify 2,400 households and 400 schools across the country, which provides data with an average margin of error of +/- 3% at a confidence interval of 95%.

Data was collected using Kobo Collect software, and data presentation and analysis was done in Excel

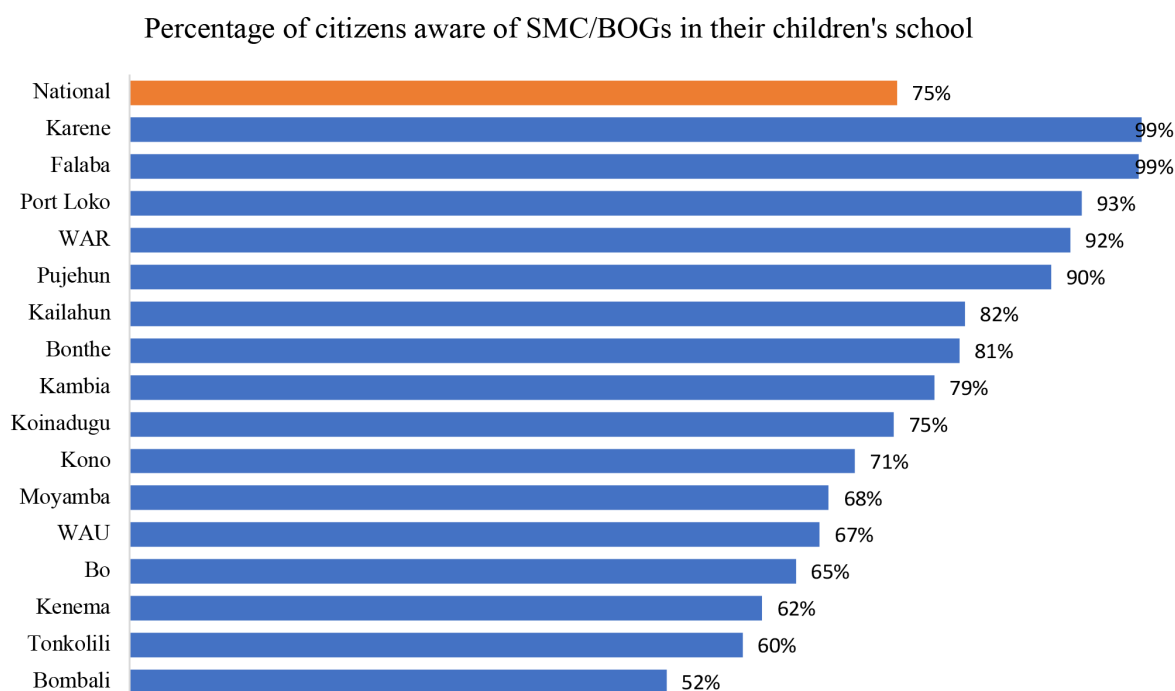


Findings

Awareness of SMC/BoGs²

Nationwide, 75% of schools are reported to have SMCs and BoGs, based on parental perceptions at the district level. The highest prevalence is observed in Karene and Falaba districts, standing at 99%, while Bombali, Tonkolili, and Kenema districts exhibit lower rates of 52%, 55%, and 56%, respectively. This underscores the need for increased community awareness regarding the operation of SMCs/BoGs.

Figure 1: Awareness of SMCs/BoGs

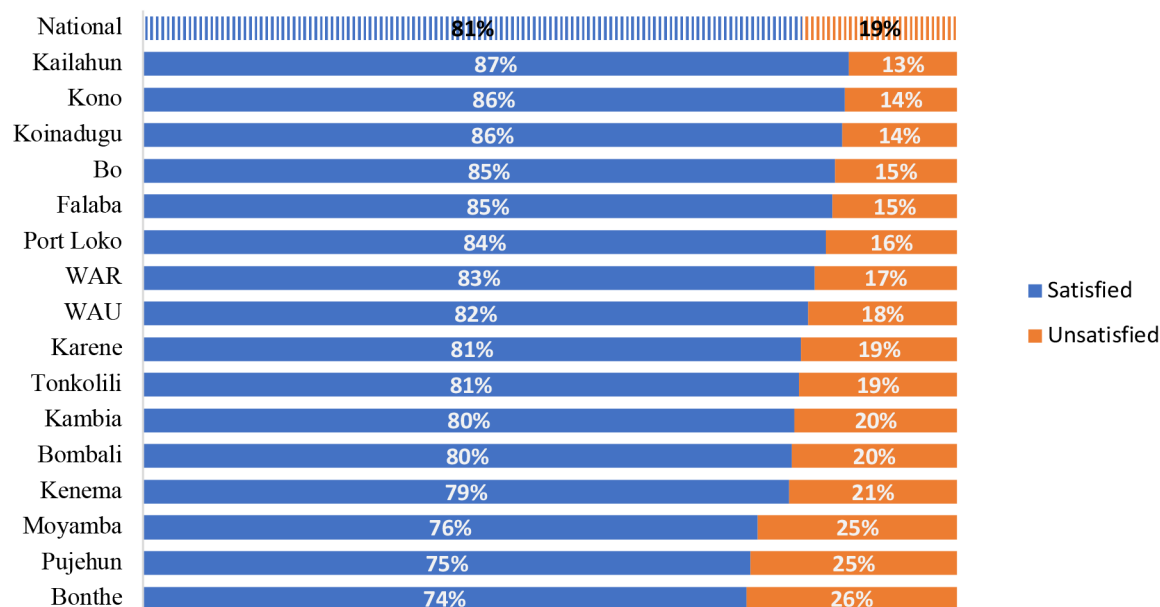


Q1: Do you know if there is an SMC/Board of Governors for school?

Satisfaction with SMCs/BoGs

At the national level there is notable parental satisfaction, with 81% of respondents expressing contentment with their engagement with School Management Committees (SMCs) and Boards of Governors (BoGs) regarding school issues. Lower levels of satisfaction particularly in Moyamba, Pujehun, and Bonthe districts at 76%, 75%, and 74%, respectively, suggest opportunities for improvement in achieving full participation in school governance discussions.

Figure 2: Satisfaction with SMCs/BoGs



*The National Policy on Radical Inclusion seeks to ensure that schools are accessible to all children. The policy was designed to support students that are often marginalized or excluded from education such as children with disabilities, children from low-income families, children in rural and underserved areas, and girls who are currently pregnant and or are parent learners.

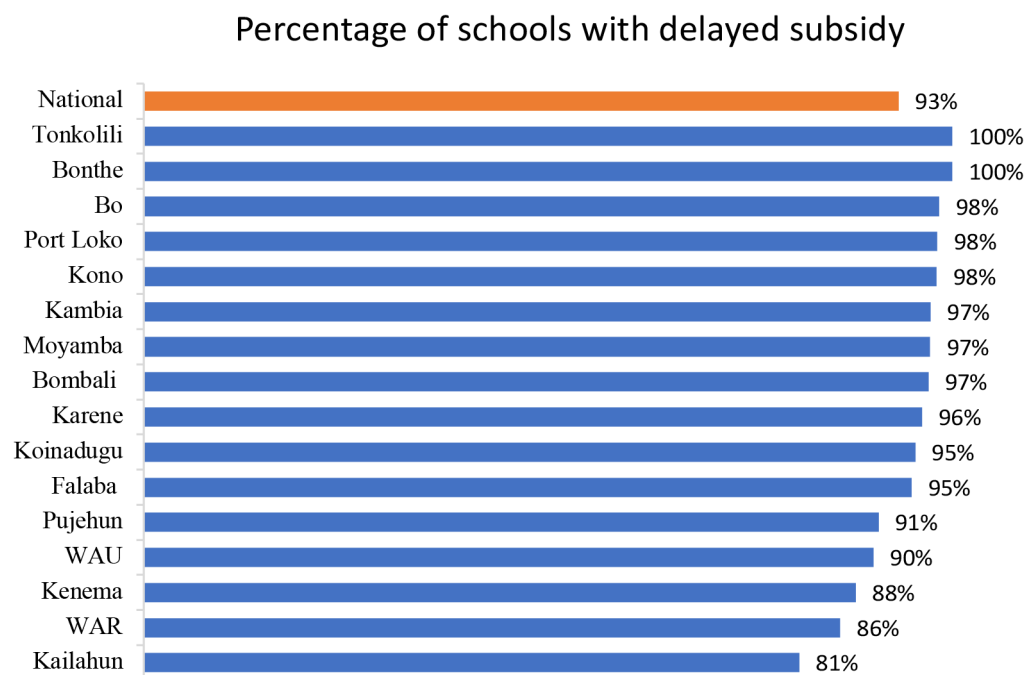
*The government has instituted a policy to bolster the management and oversight of schools through constituted School Management Committees (SMCs) and Boards of Governors (BoGs). These committees are intended to function effectively, supporting school governance, decision-making, and community involvement.

Q2: How satisfied are you with the support the SMC/Board of Governors is giving to the school?

Subsidy transfers

Financial support, particularly through subsidies, is vital for the effective operation of educational institutions, especially under the fee-free system in Sierra Leone. However, national data reveals a significant issue, with 93% of interviewed Head Teachers reporting delays in the timely arrival of subsidies. District-specific figures highlight notably low on-time transfer percentages in Bonthe, Tonkolili, and Bo districts. There is a government policy to support the management and oversight of schools with constituted SMCs/BoGs to function and effectively support school governance, decision-making, and community involvement.

Figure 3: Subsidy transfers to schools



Q3: Were subsidy transfers made on time?

Cash book management system

In 78% of schools assessed, a cash book management system was reported to be in place. Higher adoption rates were observed in Falaba, Western Rural, and Kono at 95%, 90%, and 88%, respectively, while Koinadugu and Port Loko, showed the lowest rates with 64% and 47%.

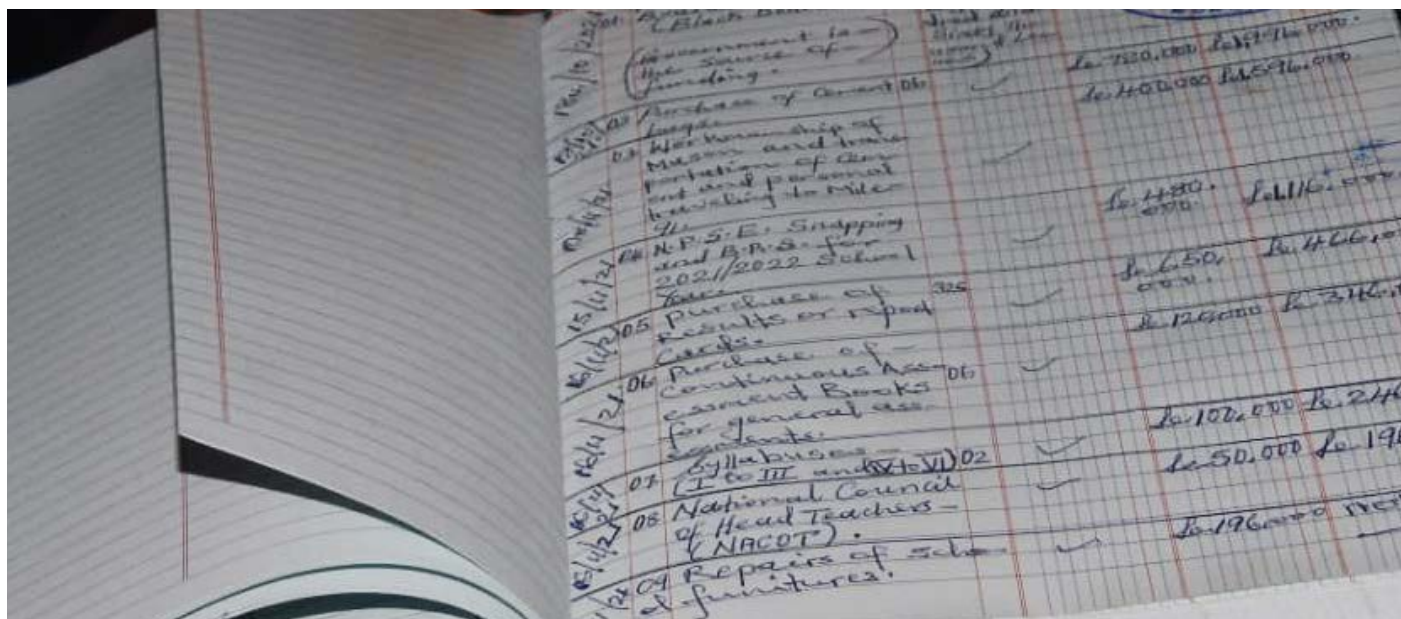
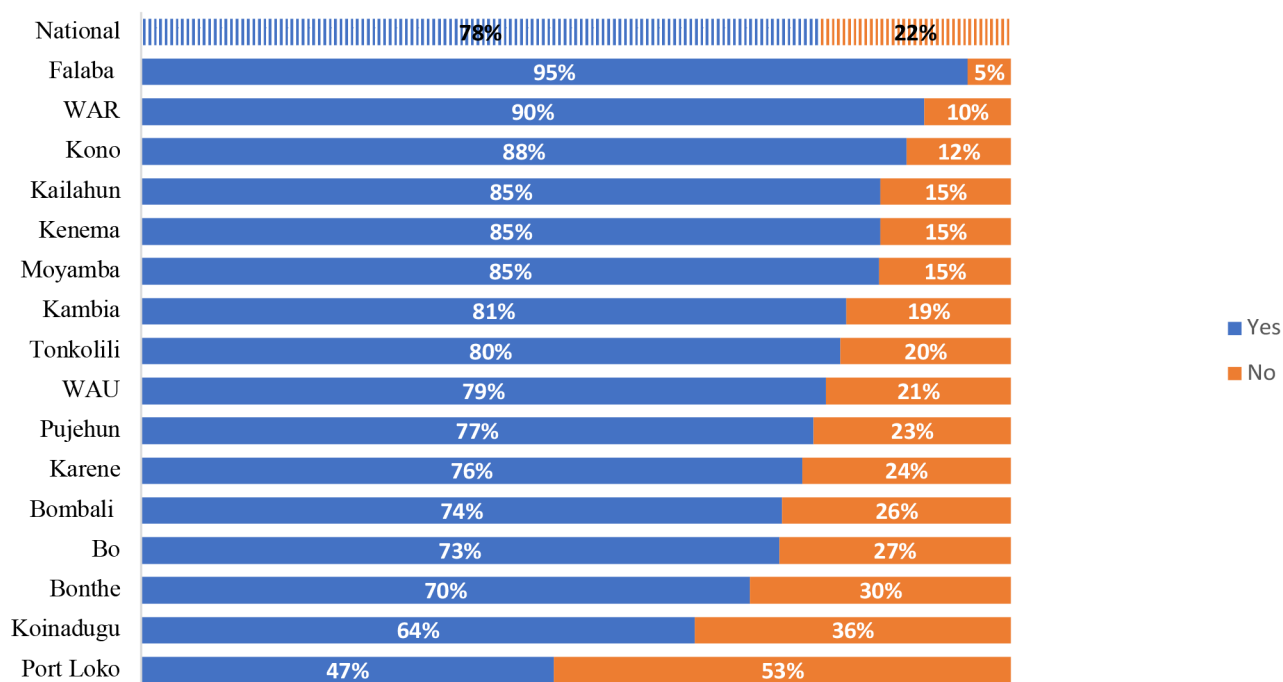


Figure 4: Cash book management



Q4: Does the school have a cash book management system?

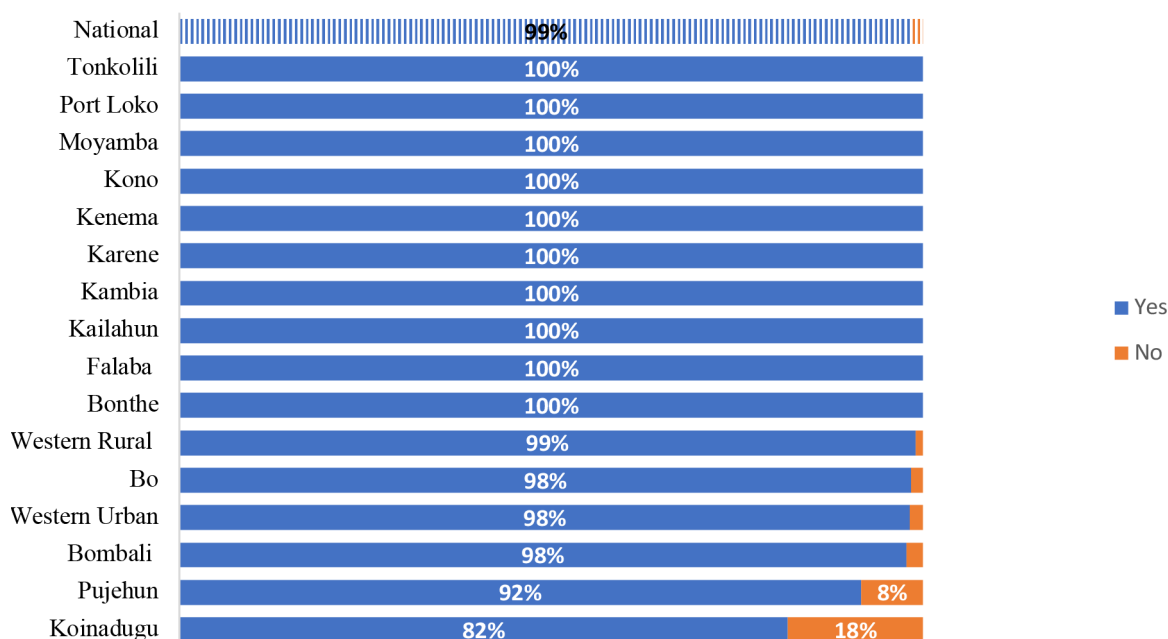
SMCs/BOGs training on development of school improvement plan

The urgent requirement for training in the development of school plans and cash management systems is apparent, with a substantial majority of surveyed School Management Committees (SMCs) expressing a clear desire for capacity building in these areas. Notably, districts such as Kono, Karene, Kambia, and Falaba reported unanimous agreement (100%) on the necessity for training in these crucial aspects, emphasizing widespread recognition across all districts. Even in the districts with the lowest affirmative responses, the recognition of the need for training still stands at 91%.

Monitoring of schools

Nationally, 99% of schools reported receiving routine monitoring visits from the District Education Office (DEO) supervisors/inspectors and Local Council (LC) representatives, demonstrating a strong commitment to maintaining educational standards and compliance with policies. However, this data can be influenced by positive response bias, as interviews with key staff of the DEOs suggest serious challenges in regular monitoring due to limited resources (fuel, vehicle) and poor road infrastructure. Many schools participating in the baseline assessment have not experienced any visits before, and school supervisor could not visit all of their assigned schools.

Figure 5: school monitoring

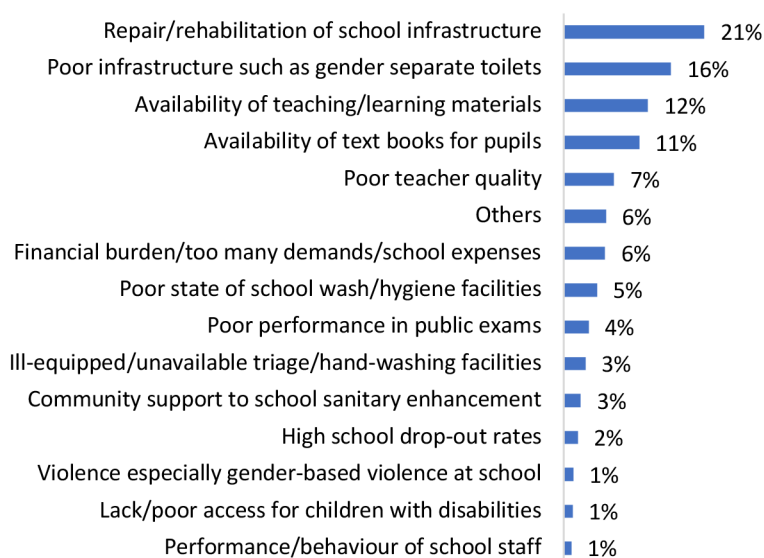


Q5: Are the DEO supervisors/inspectors with LCs representatives paying routine monitoring visits to your school?

Major issues affecting education

One in five parents identified the repair/rehabilitation of school infrastructure as the most pressing issue (21%), while 16% pointed to poor infrastructure such as gender separate toilets. Twelve percent of the parents were most concerned about the availability of teaching and learning materials, while 11% were concerned about the availability of textbooks (adding up to 23%). Almost half of surveyed parents (46%) indicated an infrastructural problem as the most pressing issue in their children’s school. These concerns underscore the critical need for infrastructure improvement and equitable access of teaching and learning materials.

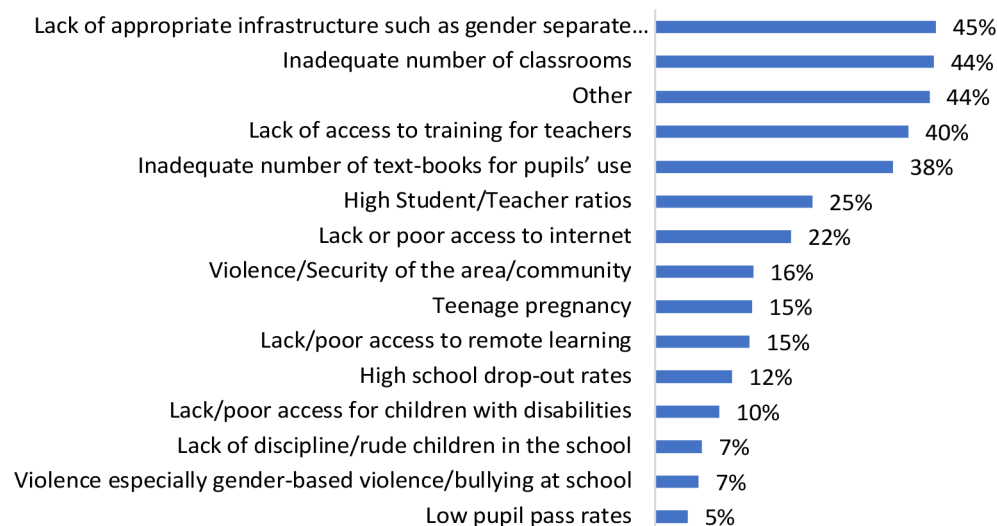
Figure 6: Most concerning issue in school according to parents



Q6: What is the top major concern/issue you have with this school?

According to the SMCs/Head Teachers, the most significant issues are the lack of appropriate physical infrastructure such as separate toilets for girls and boys (45%), and the inadequate number of classrooms (44%), which highlights the urgent need for improved school infrastructure. Additionally, other pressing concerns are the lack of access to teacher training (40%), inadequate textbook supplies (38%), high student-teacher ratios (25%), and the lack of, or poor access to the internet (22%), which all contribute to challenges in delivering quality education. Just over four in ten (44%) of school staff added another major concern to the options provided. The most frequent concern among them was the understaffing of the school including lack of PIN code for teachers.

Figure 7: Main Concerns of Education according to school staff

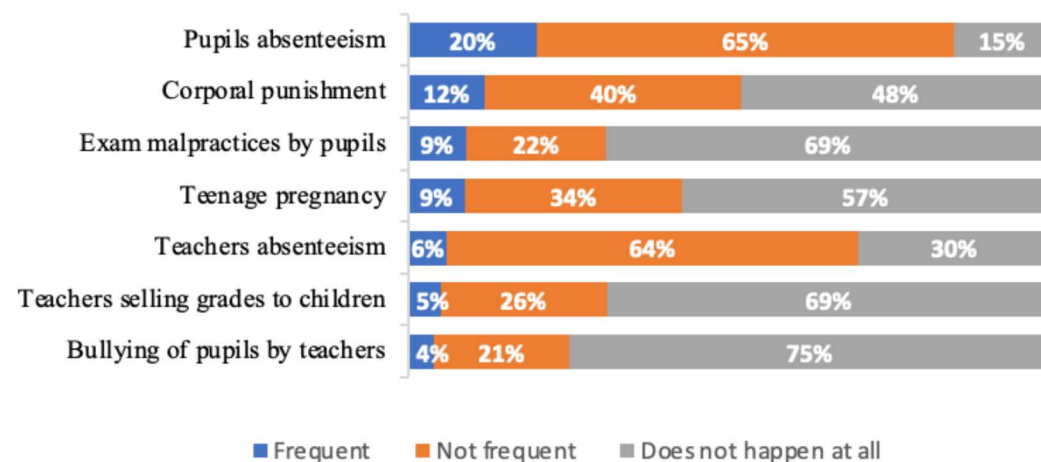


Q7: What are the main concerns on education in this community?

Prevalence of issues affecting education

Twenty percent of parents thinks pupil absenteeism is a frequent problem,. In contrast, only 4% reported frequent bullying by teachers while 5% mentioned teachers selling grades to students, indicating less common but recurring problems. Issues such as exam malpractice by pupils and teachers' absenteeism are moderately prevalent, with 9% and 6% of respondents reporting frequent occurrences, respectively. On the other hand, teenage pregnancy and corporal punishment are of greater concern, with 9% and 12% of respondents indicating these issues happen frequently. Seventy percent of respondents reported occurrence of teacher absenteeism with varied frequency. These variations underscore the diverse challenges within Sierra Leone's education system.

Figure 8: Prevalence of issues affecting education in schools

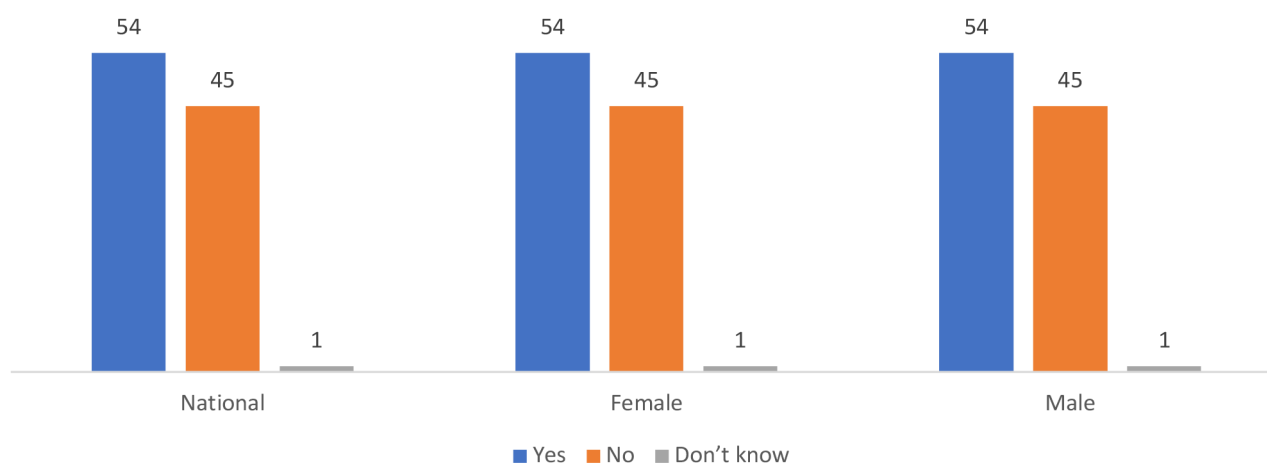


Q8: As far as you know, how prevalent is the following in your child's school?

Contributions to maintenance of school facility

Regardless of their gender, more than half of all parents have been asked to contribute in some way to the upkeep or maintenance of the school facility.

Figure 9: Contributions towards maintenance of schools



Q9: Have you ever been asked to contribute in any way to the upkeep/maintenance of the facility?

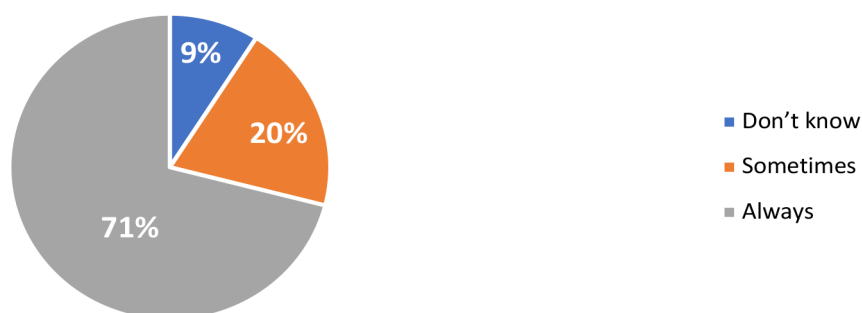
Average pupil to teacher ratio

The pupil to teacher ratio (PTR) averaged at 36:1 according to the Annual School Census in 2022, demonstrating a slight improvement compared to the ratio of 39:1 in 2021. However, the pupil to qualified teacher ratio (PQTR) at 59:1 remains similar to last year (58:1) (ASC, 2023). Both ratios are very high compared to OECD countries where student to teacher ratio averages at 15:1 in primary and 13:1 in secondary education – counting only qualified teachers (OECD/UIS/Eurostat, 2021)³. These ratios imply that qualification and recruitment of teaching staff could not meet the pace of the increasing enrolment rate which was a result of the radical inclusion policy. The data also shows a pattern of recruitment of unqualified teachers compared to qualified ones. Notably, Sierra Leone has a total of 56,982 qualified teachers, constituting 62% of the overall teaching staff across all school levels, which poses a significant barrier to equitable access of quality education.

Frequency of teacher(s) attendance in schools

The survey also solicited information from parents about teacher absenteeism from schools. The responses showed that a child's teacher(s) was/were present in school always during the last term, with the responses accounting for 71% - teacher attendance. Only 20% of parents indicated that teachers were sometimes absent while 9% were unsure about the teacher's attendance at all. This account from parents corroborates the responses from head teachers and SMCs/BoGs.

Figure 10: Teacher attendance



Q 10: As far as you know, in the last term did your child's teachers absent from school?

Punctuality of teachers in schools

According to the parents surveyed, 62% believe that their child's teachers always reported to school on time during the last term. Meanwhile, 24% indicated that teachers sometimes arrived on time, while 15% were uncertain about the punctuality of teachers.

Figure 11: Teacher punctuality

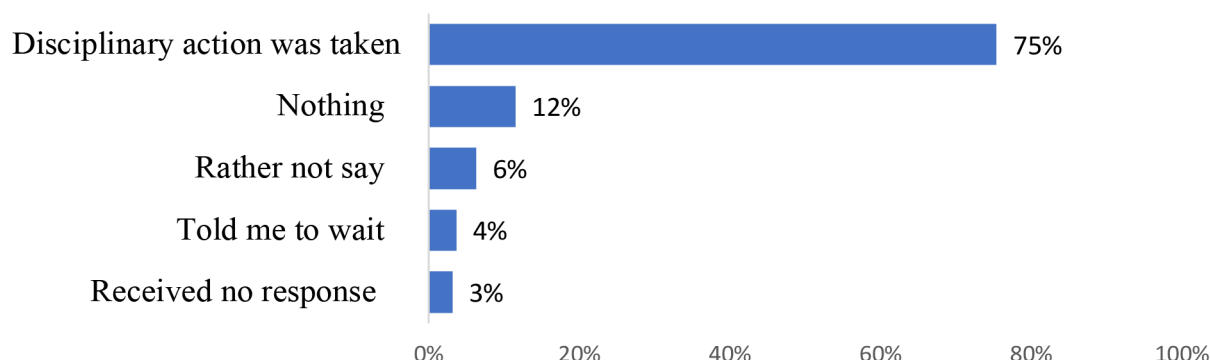


Q11: As far as you know, in the last term did your child's teachers report to school on time?

Action on teacher absenteeism

Seventy-five percent of Head Teachers and SMC members said that disciplinary action was taken after reporting cases of teacher absenteeism. Twelve percent of respondents noted that no action was taken, with four percent being told to wait and three percent received no response to their request. A relatively high six percent refused to answer this question.

Figure 12: Actions taken on teacher absenteeism

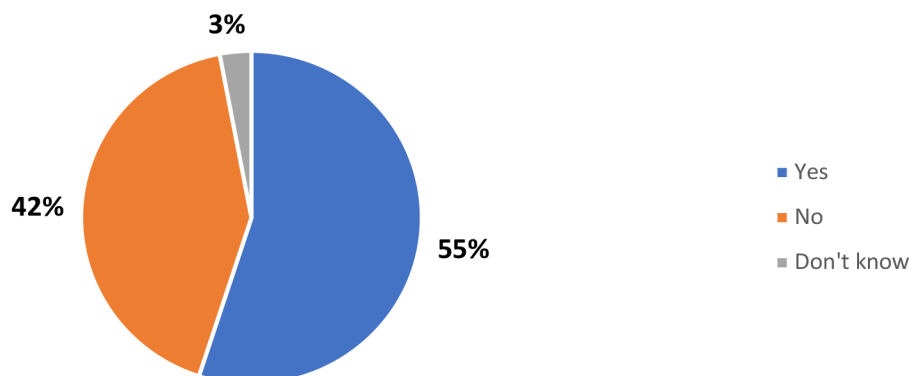


Q12: If you reported the issue of teacher absenteeism, what did they do?

Application for allocation of new teachers

Data from Figure 13 demonstrate that 55% of respondents have applied for new teachers, indicating that more than half of the schools are in dire need of qualified, approved teaching staff.

Figure 13: Percentage of schools that have applied for teachers



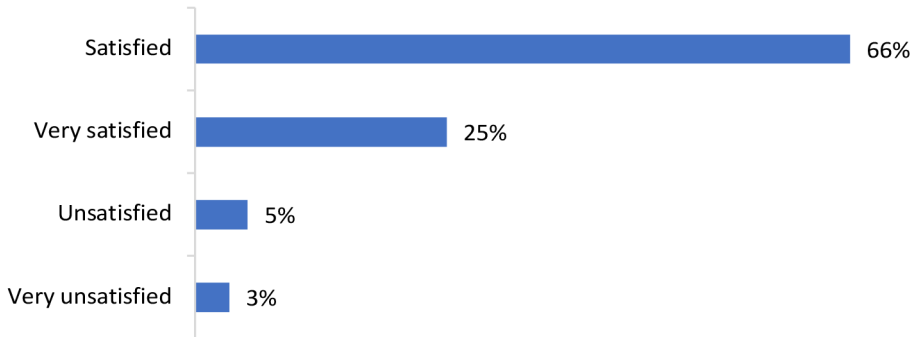
<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/e27ba260-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/e27ba260-en#:~:text=On%20average%20across%20OECD%20countries,23%20in%20lower%20secondary%20education>

Q13: Have you applied for allocation of new teachers?

Satisfaction with teaching

A majority of parents (66%) are satisfied with the teaching provided at the school, while 25% are very satisfied. Only a small percentage (8%) express dissatisfaction, with 5% unsatisfied and 3% being very unsatisfied.

Figure 14: Teaching satisfaction

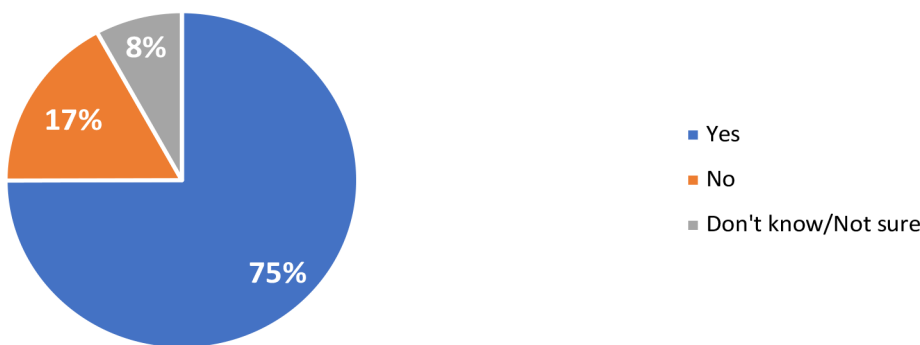


Q14: How satisfied are you with the teaching provided at the school?

Extra care and support provided to pupils

A significant majority of parents (75%) believe that their child’s teacher provides extra care and support to pupils, indicating a positive perception of teachers work ethic and dedication to duty. Only 17% of parents responded negatively to this question, while 8% were unsure. High pupil to teacher ratios, however, indicates limited resources to provide the necessary care and attention to students in the classroom.

Figure 15: Extra care by teachers

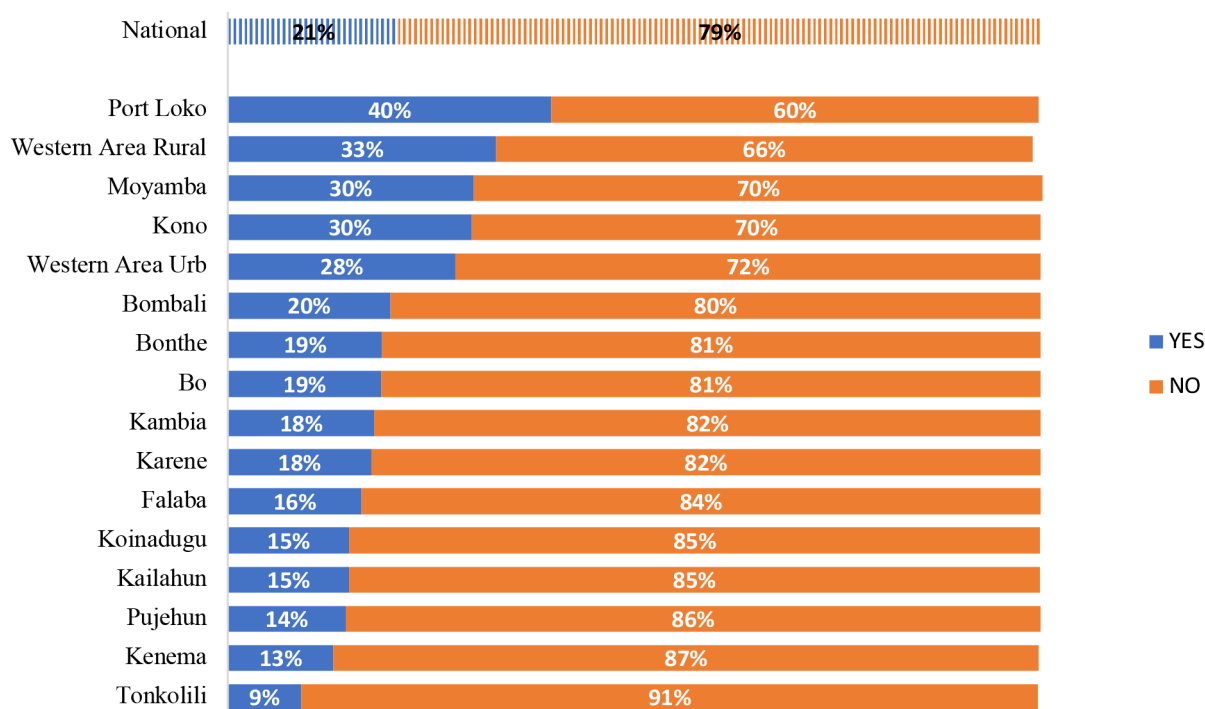


Q15: As far as you know does your child’s teacher provide extra care and support to his/her students?

Requests for unauthorised gifts from pupils

More than one in every five parents report that teachers frequently request gifts and unauthorized charges from students. According to parents, Port Loko has the highest incidence rate at 40%, followed by Western Rural at 33%.. Meanwhile, Tonkolili stands at 9% and Kenema at 13%, representing the lowest rates.

Figure 16: Request for unauthorised gifts by teachers by district

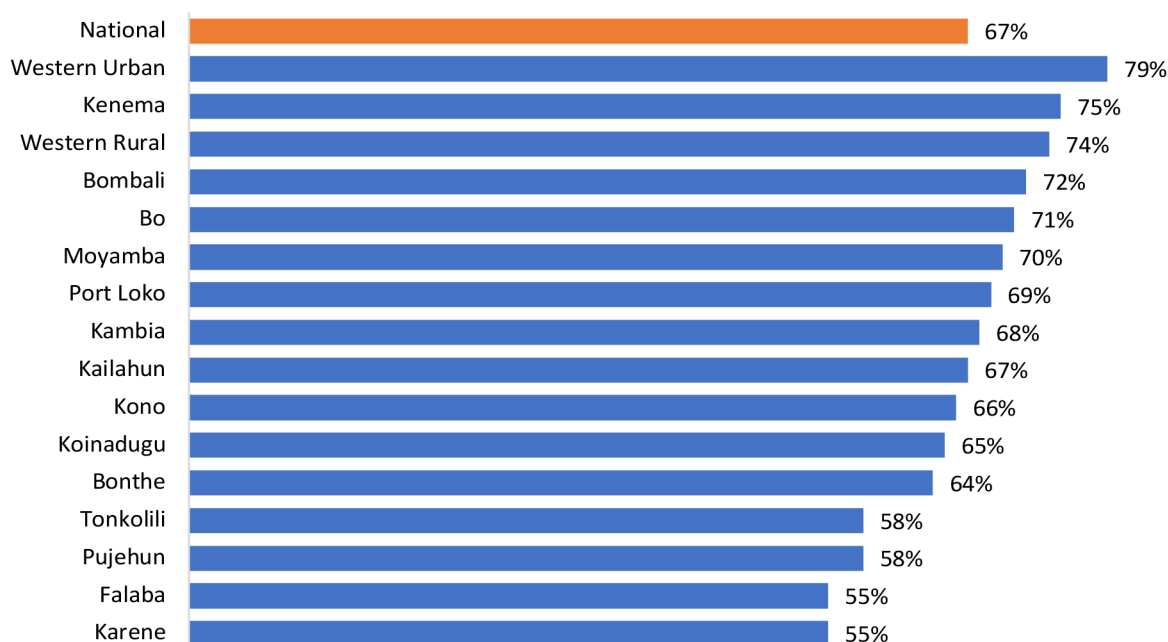


Q16: As far as you know does your child’s teacher frequently make request for gifts or other unauthorised charges to his/her students?

Textbook availability in schools

Textbook availability varies significantly by district. Currently, Western Urban district has the highest availability at 79%, while Karene and Falaba districts have the lowest availability with only 55%. On a national average, the availability of textbooks stands at 67%. Districts with greater infrastructural challenges show a lower availability rate validating the finding of qualitative assessments that DEOs have significant challenges reaching schools when it comes to textbook delivery or monitoring visits.

Figure 17: Textbook availability



Q17: In the last school year, did your child receive textbooks from his or her school?

Pupil to textbook ratios

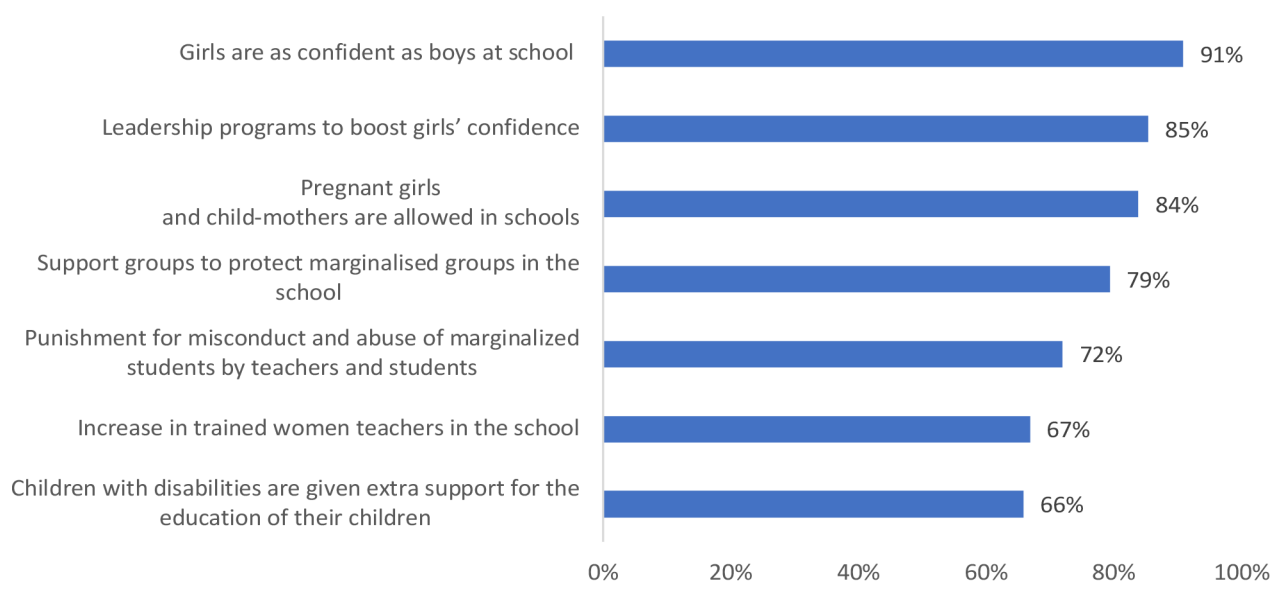
Government-assisted schools not only offer financial support through fee subsidies and tuition but also contribute to education by providing teaching and learning materials, particularly textbooks in core subjects. The ideal goal is a Pupil to Textbook Ratio (PTxR) of 1:1, aiming for one textbook per student, but the actual ratios differ by academic level and subject. For Junior Secondary School (JSS), the PTxR is 1:1 for English but 1:2 for Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Unfortunately, at the senior secondary level, the ratio drops to an unsatisfactory 1:3. The current Textbook Ratio (TxR) in government-assisted primary schools averages 1:2 for all core subjects. This means that, on average, one core textbook is shared between two pupils in English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies at the primary level. (ASC, 2023)



Implementation and results of radical inclusion policies

Two thirds of Head Teachers and SMC/BoG members reported that children with disabilities receive additional support in their schools (66%), and that women teachers' training has seen a rise (67%). Seventy-two percent said there are now repercussions for the misconduct and abuse of marginalized students. These shifts are deemed critical for enhancing completion rates, particularly in rural areas. An even higher rate of schools have managed to implement "inclusion champions" and support groups to safeguard marginalized groups (79%). These efforts provide equal educational opportunities for pregnant girls and child-mothers (84%), and leadership programs that aim to promote girls' confidence and empowerment (85%). As a result, nine out of ten Head Teacher/SMC members (91%) perceive that girls exhibit the same confidence levels as boys in school.

Figure 18: Implementation and results of Radical Inclusion policy

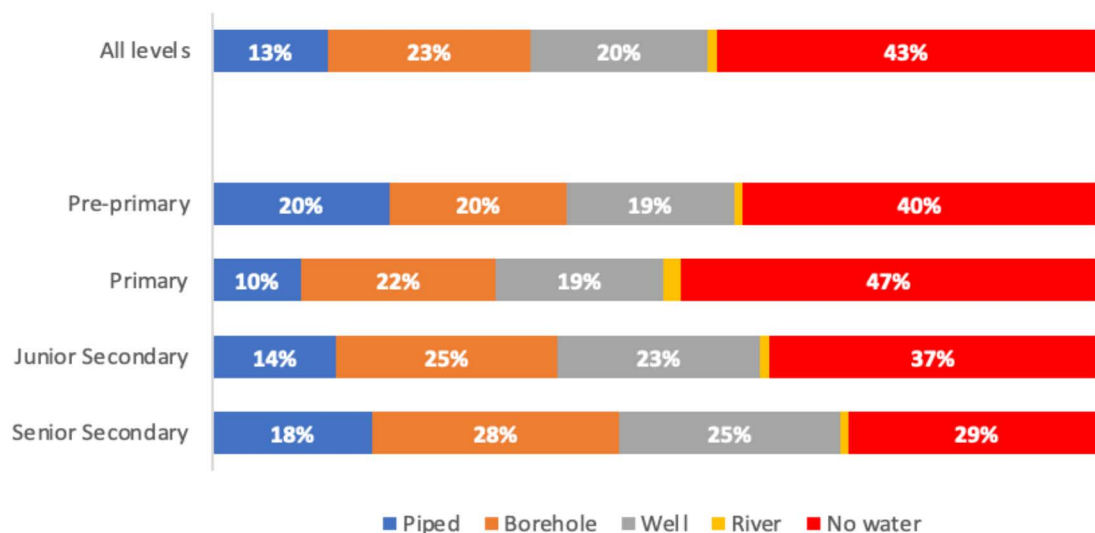


Q18. For each of the statements above, tell us if you think it is true, or false.

Access to water in schools

The annual school census by MBSSE shows that 43% of schools do not have access to water. This is worrisome because on average a school's accessibility to water has dropped by 16% (from 73% in 2021 to 57% in 2022). The sources of water reported were pipe borne (13%), borehole (23%), hand dug wells (20% of school), and river (1%). Pupils attending primary (47%) and pre-primary (40%) schools have the most limited access to water.

Figure 19: Access to water source



Source: ASC 2023

Access to sanitation

The WHO recommends a pupil-to-toilet ratio of 1:30 for boys and 1:25 for girls. ASC data reveals a much worse pupil to toilet ratio nationally of 1:75. Even more concerning is the pupil to good toilet ratio. A total of 132 students on average had to share a good toilet in schools in 20224. These findings underscore the urgent necessity to improve school sanitation facilities in order to create an environment conducive to healthier and more effective learning.

Table 1. Toilet to Pupil Ratio

School Level	Pupil to Good Toilet	Pupil to Toilet
Pre- Primary	58	36
Primary	145	77
Junior Secondary	123	76
Senior Secondary	158	100
Average	132	75

These key findings reflect diverse challenges and opportunities in Sierra Leone's education system, ranging from staffing needs and infrastructure concerns to perceptions of inclusion policies and issues related to sanitation and water access. Addressing these issues is crucial to increasing access to and improving equity and the quality of the education system.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Analysis of the data gathered from the state of education services yields the following recommendations for operational, strategic, and policy actions. If implemented, these measures will contribute to a better future for education services in the country.

School governance

Awareness of school level governance varied significantly in districts, which underscores the need to increase awareness about the work of SMCs/BoGs to achieve enhanced transparency and accountability towards communities and PTAs.

A performance-related incentive scheme should be introduced and investments in capacity building should be increased to ensure the establishment and sustained functionality of school governance structures.

Teacher management

Increasing pupil to teacher ratios, especially in hard-to-reach areas are an issue of concern, contributing to a deterioration in the quality of education by overwhelming teachers and limiting individual attention in the classroom. These ratios must be improved through a purposive strategy to increase the number of teachers and accelerate the approval of qualified teachers and deploying them equitably in rural and urban areas.

To harmonize the approaches related to teacher conduct, the TSC should develop and enforce a 'compliance adherence system' informed by the teacher code of ethics, which should be signed by all recruited teachers in government-assisted schools. A breach of the code of ethics will result in well-defined and implemented disciplinary measures.

School materials

To address the limited availability of school supplies, MBSSE should devise a strategy, develop guidelines, and introduce innovative means to enhance the timely delivery of materials to address discrepancies in the unequal access to educational materials in schools.

Radical inclusion

To maintain and improve education service delivery, MBSSE should put in place a robust mechanism for the implementation, monitoring, and tracking of the provisions of the Radical Inclusion policy. Increased enrolment rates impose an additional burden on an under-resourced education system, adding to its already serious challenges. These challenges in terms of textbook and school supply availability, access to qualified teachers and improved wash facilities need to be addressed at the central level with efforts to ensure the maintenance and improvement of the quality of education in the country. Further tracking of resources provided to ensure pregnant or nursing mothers have equitable access to education is also key.

WASH in schools

Establishing and enhancing Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) infrastructure in schools is crucial to addressing significant needs in basic facilities like toilets and water sources. This infrastructure is a prerequisite for school approval and support, necessitating urgent funding and coordinated NGO activities for implementation and improvement. Priority should be given to unsupported or unapproved schools, especially in hard-to-reach areas, and there is a need for increased volumes and equitable distribution of soap and sanitary pad supplies to effectively address territorial disparities.

Expanding equitable access to education

The MBSSE must address the persistent disparities in education quality, with urban areas enjoying better infrastructure, teaching resources, and learning materials than their rural counterparts. This quality gap hampers equitable educational opportunities for all children across the country. The MBSSE should develop minimum standards that promote equity to address these disparities.

To achieve a more equitable access to education, schools need to be better assisted in the school approval process. The process must be accelerated with a setting of target numbers of school approvals each year, to make them eligible for financial subsidy and performance-based funding. Performance based funding needs to be consistent and transparent with timely transfers and monitored performance. MBSSE needs to

ensure the timely transfer of the full amount of school subsidies (which includes granting direct access to schools to their accounts without the District Education Office's approval).

Lack of qualified and government paid teachers are pressing issues nationwide, but disproportionately affect those rural communities already struggling with poor infrastructure. Policies need to be adapted to ensure teachers do not abuse the government's policy to prioritize the approval of teachers in rural communities. This report documented cases of teachers leaving rural communities after receiving their PIN code, but MBSSE needs to devise strategies and incentives that will encourage them to stay in the rural communities to teach. Ultimately the solution is allocating more funding and improving training efforts to qualify and approve teachers, as well as providing them PIN codes and adequate salaries.

To achieve greater access to textbooks in hard-to-reach areas, MBSSE and DEO must ensure sufficient resources to deliver textbooks from the DEO to the schools. To overcome poor road infrastructure challenges, vehicles and fuel must be subsidized.

Government policies

Government policies and initiatives have had a positive impact on the education sector, particularly the introduction of free education, but ensuring that this continues with the implementation challenges and matching the scale of investment in an economically challenging environment continues to affect education outcomes. The government's current prioritization and investment in education must be maintained to sustain support and ongoing transformation processes in the sector.

