

Teacher Agency and Contribution to Quality Education in Post-conflict Contexts: The Case of Liberia

Master's thesis

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Abstract

This qualitative case study investigates how teachers in post-conflict Liberia understand and exercise their agency in the pursuit of quality education while being ‘caught in the middle’ of social, political and economic struggles.

Twenty-nine in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions seem to reveal that the views expressed by teachers on their understanding of agency differ from what is often expected of teachers in many education systems: to be implementers of curriculum and educational reforms. This research employed the Critical, Cultural Political Economy of Education (CCPEE) theoretical framework by Robertson and Dale (2014). CCPEE is used as an approach to probe the different cultural, political and economic factors that might affect teachers’ agency and their contribution to quality education in post-conflict Liberia. This case study demonstrates that many teacher policy directives are largely applicable to peaceful contexts, and are thus interpreted and experienced differently in post-conflict ones. Teachers in Liberia see themselves as second parents, humanitarians, ‘town criers’ and role models. Despite holding expectations for teachers to implement national mandates, other educational stakeholders in Liberia expressed similar views on teacher agency. They see Liberian teachers as guardians, parents, counsellors, unifiers, agents of peace, ‘Hercules’ and psychologists to help students suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder after the 2003 civil war and 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak.

Furthermore, the generally expressed view on teachers’ role in meeting global education targets in Liberia is that quality education cannot be achieved without addressing the many challenges facing Liberian teachers. These findings are instructive because, despite the perceptions of teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia, teachers are to an extent incapacitated in exercising their agency, as they seem to struggle to manage a precarious balance between aspirational intentions and a demotivating situation.

The implications of this study on teacher policies must be contextualized for post-conflict regions because they present certain social, political and economic conditions that influence and constrain the experience and understanding of teacher agency. My findings demonstrate that the recent public-private partnership, Partnership Schools for Liberia, may endanger teachers’ autonomy and has no clear pathways to improve the current challenges facing teachers. In addition, this research contributes to the knowledge base that can inform teacher policies in post-conflict settings.

Key words: Teacher agency, quality education, post-conflict context, Liberia, teacher policy, education development

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List of Acronyms

AFL: Armed Forces of Liberia
BIA: Bridge International Academies
CCPEE: Critical, Cultural Political Economy of Education
CEOs: County Education Officers
CPE: Cultural Political Economy
DEOs: District Education Officers
ECE: Early Childhood Education
GEM: Global Education Monitoring
GMERs: Global Managerial Education Reforms
GMR: Global Monitoring Report
GoL: Government of Liberia
GPE: Global Partnership for Education
KRTTI: Kakata Rural Teachers' Training Institute
LDF: Lofa Defence Force
LPC: Liberian Peace Council
LTTP: Liberian Teacher Training Programme
LURD: Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MODEL: Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MoE: Ministry of Education
NGOs: Non-governmental organizations
NPFL: National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPFL-CRC: NPFL Central Revolutionary Council
PPP: Public-private partnership
PQTR: Pupil-Qualified Teacher Ratio
PSL: Partnership Schools for Liberia
PTA: Parent-Teacher Association

RCT: Randomized Controlled Trial

RTTIs: Rural Teacher Training Institutes

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal

SMC: School Management Committee

SSA: Sub-Saharan Africa

TVET: Technical and Vocational Education and Training

UN: United Nations

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

US: United States

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

WRTII: Webbo Rural Teachers' Training Institute

ZRTTI: Zorzor Rural Teachers' Training Institute

1. Introduction

In post-conflict Liberia, it is regretful to say that a teacher is a dynamic weapon in the society but the least regarded socially and this is quite unfortunate¹

1.1 Background to the Study

The 2016 United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report revealed that it would take about 50 years for countries in the developing world to attain universal basic education. Developing countries in the global south are still far behind in meeting global education goals, especially countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). According to the report “... for every single country in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, even expanding their education systems at the fastest rates ever observed in the regions would be too slow to meet the first target in the global goal of education, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning” (UNESCO, 2016a, p. 12). In other words, it is less likely that countries in SSA region will achieve the SDG 4 by 2030.

Therefore, this calls for a need to interrogate why education in countries in the developing world, especially SSA is not yielding expected dividends. Education is seen as a levelling ground for all and a pathway to sustainable development. Moreover, it has been argued that education is a human right with great benefits, and education has the potential of contributing immensely to the economic development of any country (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007; Lee, 2013; UNESCO, 2016a).

Against this backdrop, recent studies on education reforms seem to reveal that teachers and the teaching profession is key to the success of education reforms, quality education, as well as the performance of any education system as a whole (Altinyelken, 2010a, 2013; Assie-Lumumba,

¹ Focus group- Teacher C (R28)

2012; Balarin & Benavides, 2010; Bantwini, 2010; Lopes Cardozo, 2015; Priestley et al., 2015; Verger & Altinyelken, 2013).

The role of teachers in any education system cannot be over emphasised. Furthermore, in recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the study of education in post-conflict societies (Davies, 2005; Novelli, 2016; Novelli & Lopes Cardozo, 2008; Novelli et al., 2015; Smith, 2005; Verger & Moschetti, 2016). Evidence from research on education in post-conflict contexts appear to reveal that teachers and their agency in such contexts cannot be ruled out because teachers are mostly saddled with the responsibility of ensuring peace and quality education (Altinyelken, 2013; Balarin & Benavides, 2010; Lopes Cardozo, 2015). However, the realities of teachers in post-conflict contexts prevent them from meeting their expected functions within the education system. Such realities include insufficient teacher education, low teacher motivation, lack of educational facilities, poor working conditions, lack of professional advancement opportunities, low salaries, obsolete pedagogical practice, absence of classroom support and poor social status (Altinyelken, 2013; Bantwini, 2010). It is also worthy of note that the role of teachers in education systems globally has been influenced by the dynamic growth of Global Managerial Education Reforms (GMERs) movement, “GMERs convert teachers into objects of intervention and assets to be managed rather than to subjects of educational change” (Verger & Altinyelken, 2013, p. 2).

Teachers in post-conflict contexts are not exempted from this changing role of teachers’ work, autonomy, and profession. In fact, it is more critical for them, as they are expected to go beyond the normal teaching and pursuit of quality education. In most cases, they are expected to be agents of peace and decolonization, liberation, and to provide psychosocial support for students traumatized as a result of war or conflict (Lopes Cardozo, 2015; Lopes Cardozo & Hoeks, 2014; Novelli & Sayed, 2016).

In SSA, it has been argued that education policies and reforms fail to accomplish expected objectives as a result of teachers’ challenges and that policymakers most often do not take into consideration the challenges of teachers when education policies are formulated and implemented (Altinyelken, 2010a; Bantwini, 2010). Consequently, the possibility of realizing quality education in SSA will be paramount to how well teachers and their challenges are managed especially in post-conflict societies.

Electronic means has been used to review research and reports on the subject. It appears that much has not been published or available online on the topic, especially, in exploring the differences between the ways teachers in peaceful societies and those in post-conflict societies experience teachers' challenges within the SSA region². In addition, there seems to be inadequate literature examining how peculiar social, economic and political conditions in post-conflict contexts may shape the way teachers understand and exercise their agency within the education system. This research attempts to fill up this gap.

1.2 Problem Statement

This research study investigates teachers' agency in post-conflict contexts. Liberia, a post-conflict country in West African sub-region, is taken as a case study. Liberia has experienced 14 years of civil wars (1989 – 1996) and the Ebola Virus Disease Crisis (2014-2015), which practically shut down the country (Mungai, 2016). Therefore, Liberia's education was gravely affected by the conflicts, and recent statistics show that Liberia is doing poorly in all education indicators (UNESCO, 2016a). In fact, the education system is facing such a challenge as in 2013, all 25, 000 students that wrote the national examinations for admission into University of Liberia, failed, prompting the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to describe the education system as 'messy' (Pailey, 2013).

One of the common factors that have been ascribed to the dire state of Liberia's education system is the failure to meet up with the demand for qualified and trained teachers (Government of Liberia, 2014; Open Society Foundations, 2015). However, policymakers, when drafting teachers' policies, give less attention to the challenges faced by teachers in Liberia (Open Society Foundations, 2015). Teachers in Liberia experience challenges such as poor social status, an absence of social welfare and community regard for the profession, corruption within the education system, poor institutional support and dwindling autonomy, low salaries, a lack of incentives, and high inflation rate due to a volatile national economy (Open Society Foundations, 2015). Despite the obvious challenges that confront teachers in Liberia, they are expected within the education system to

² Searches included the Comparative and International Education Society (CIER) journal, EBSCOHOST, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Google Scholar, Social Science Research Network, Liberia Ministry of Education website, UNESCO documents, UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report website, UIS website and World Bank Databases. Google and Bing were used to search for documents and other materials on the internet using related key words; Liberia, education policy, education in SSA, quality education, teachers' unions in Liberia, teacher agency, Liberia Ministry of Education, teachers' policies in Africa, teachers, and education in post-conflict contexts.

ensure peace, offer psychosocial support to traumatized students and act as guardians (Open Society Foundations, 2015).

This research project, therefore, examines how teachers in post-conflict Liberia understand and exercise their professional agency in pursuit of quality education while being ‘caught in the middle’ of social, political and economic struggles.

1.3 Aim and Relevance of the Study

This study is relevant as it tries to fill in the gaps in research on this topic. The understanding of teachers in post-conflict contexts cannot be conclusive without empirical knowledge of how teachers conceptualize their agency in such contexts, and how they exercise their agency for quality education. This research study is also relevant as it relates to recent calls by Clarke and O'Donoghue (2013), Justino (2014) and Novelli and Sayed (2016) for more research on the role of key actors of education, especially teachers, in post-conflict societies that will inform policymakers, non-governmental organizations and other education stakeholders to make necessary educational reforms in post-conflict contexts.

The findings of this study can inform researchers, policymakers and education stakeholders on this topic.

1.4 Research Questions

As described above, a lot has been done on education in post-conflict contexts; however, little attention has been given to teacher agency in post-conflict societies in SSA. In fact, it is established that teachers are critical stakeholders to achieve school success and quality education in conflict, post-conflict and peaceful contexts (Lopes Cardozo & Hoeks, 2014; Novelli & Sayed, 2016). This is why this research project aims to investigate teacher agency in a post-conflict context in SSA, how teachers understand their agency, and how they can exercise their agency for quality education.

This study is guided by one main research question and one sub-question, which are as follows:

- 1A. How do teachers understand their professional agency, being ‘caught in the middle’ of social, political and economic struggles in post-conflict settings with special reference to Liberia?
- B. How do teachers’ exercise their agency for quality education?

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

In the chapters that follow, a review of literature on teacher agency and teachers in post-conflict societies is done to enable an identification of what has been done, the limitations, and what needs to be done on this topic. This is followed by an exploration of the capability approach to education. This approach has been adopted by this research study to explain quality education and how teachers in post-conflict Liberia can contribute to quality education. The Critical, Cultural Political Economy of Education (CCPEE) theoretical framework, has been adopted to investigate the political, economic and social/cultural factors that may influence teachers' conceptualization of their agency in post-conflict Liberia.

The method chapter provides information about the steps and techniques employed for this explorative and interpretive qualitative investigation. The chapter on research context gives an overview of the Liberian context, recent educational development, teachers and teacher policy in Liberia. In the two chapters on results, the main research question and sub-question will be followed to represent, contrast and interpret views on teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia, and how teachers can contribute to quality education in Liberia. Finally, the conclusion and discussion chapter reflects on major research findings with previous research studies, provides recommendations for addressing issues with teachers and quality education in post-conflict Liberia, and key issues for further research.

2. Review of Literature

This chapter provides a review of research on teachers, teacher agency and teachers in post-conflict settings. It is intended that this will enable a broad understanding of the various perspectives and views on the subject. As it has been stated in the previous chapter, this study focuses on how teachers in post-conflict contexts understand their professional agency, and how they exercise their agency in the pursuit of goals for quality education. Therefore, a review and analysis of perspectives and approaches to teacher agency will provide a strong background to investigate and find answers to the identified research questions. Furthermore, the review on teachers in post-conflict settings will vividly paint the picture of existing dimensions of teacher agency, especially in post-conflict societies. This is important as it affords a good starting point to delve into the main issues this research project will attempt to examine.

This chapter concludes with the unpacking of quality education, and the exploration of the capability approach to quality education. The capability approach has been employed by this research project to understand and examine how teachers can contribute to quality education in post-conflict Liberia. As it will be seen in the analysis below, defining quality education has been quite problematic (Tikly, 2010) and there are several approaches to explaining what quality education is all about. Quality education carries different meanings according to contexts and it is unlikely for the definition of quality education to be universal (Barrett, Chawla-Duggan, Lowe, Nickel & Ukpo, 2006). It will also be seen that the capability approach has been argued to have its own shortcomings. However, for the purpose of the research context, this approach to quality education will be adopted for this research study.

2.1 Understanding Teacher Agency

2.1.1 Teachers

For the purpose of this review and study, it is imperative to define who a teacher is. According to UNESCO/ILO (2008) teachers are identified and selected persons that teach and are tasked with coordinating learning in schools and specified institutions (both private and public). They have the responsibility of educating children and youths in pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and

upper secondary education. However, with changing global educational targets, the term ‘teachers’ will be used more broadly, recognizing that within the context of SDG 4 - Education 2030, “teachers are the key to achieving all of the Education 2030 agenda” (UNESCO, 2016b, p. 21). In other words, teachers will be selected trained persons responsible for teaching in both formal and non-formal learning institutions.

Furthermore, SDG 4c highlights that by 2030 there will be a substantial increase in “the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States” (UNESCO, 2016a). This underlines the crucial role of teachers in the current global education agenda. In addition, the indicators for this goal include the percentage of teachers in pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education.

Moreover, teachers are agents capable of playing a vital role in promoting quality teaching and learning outcomes in any educational system. However, teachers in developing countries have been plagued with socio-political and economic challenges, which in turn affect their motivation and capacity to deliver (Lopes Cardozo, 2015). The GMERs largely have influenced the nature of teachers’ work and autonomy. The GMERs movement, which “emphasizes a mix of market and managerialist policy solutions as the most effective way to solve old and new educational problems,” has reduced teachers’ autonomy to contribute to educational processes (Verger & Altinyelken, 2013, p. 1).

Consequently, GMERs advocate for heavy investment in educational systems and thus see teachers as ‘tools’ to realize reforms goals and aims, and not as agents that need to be given due consideration and recognition in reform processes. Therefore, teachers are not seen beyond their classrooms responsibilities. Equally, the teaching profession is even perceived by GMERs as a contributory factor to educational problems (Verger & Altinyelken, 2013). Hence, “GMERs converts teachers into objects of intervention and assets to be managed rather than to subjects of educational change” (Verger & Altinyelken, 2013, p. 2).

This is why Giroux (2003) argues that there should be a rethinking on the agency of teachers. According to Giroux, teachers in their roles should be seen as ‘transformative intellectuals’ and not just ‘puppets’ controlled and after the dictates of the system. Giroux posits that teachers should be part of entire education processes as they are capable of causing change within and outside the

classroom environments. Lopes Cardozo, backing this argument in her research on teachers in Bolivia writes, “often policy makers display little confidence in teachers’ intellectual and moral abilities and tend to ignore their role in preparing active and critical citizens” (2015, p. 7).

It is quite ironic that despite the significant role of teachers in any educational system, policymakers still perceive teachers as instrument to implement national education mandates. This basically calls for policymakers to encourage more teachers’ participation in education processes (Altinyelken, 2010a).

In SSA, Altinyelken, in her article submits that “the failure of policy makers to adequately consider the classroom realities, as well as other subjective and objective realities within which teachers work, is not uncommon...” (2010b, p. 160). In other words, there is a need for policymakers to rethink the crucial role of teachers and their agency within the education system in SSA. This is paramount to the success of education reforms in SSA.

2.1.2 Teacher agency

The term agency can simply be explained as the ability of identified actors to “critically shape their responses to problematic situations” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 11). In other words, agency reflects how identified actors negotiate with the system, be it political, social and economic. Agency has also been described as separate actors acting from others with the power to cause necessary or demand changes (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015; Archer, 2000).

Teacher agency often refers to the roles, functions, and capacities of teachers in educational processes (Priestley et al., 2015). Teachers are agents capable of playing a key role in promoting quality teaching and learning outcomes in any educational system. Therefore, teacher agency is a significant component of educational processes. In addition, teachers’ involvement in conflict-affected areas cannot be overlooked, because teacher agency dimensions are significantly dynamic (Lopes Cardozo, 2015).

However, there is no consensus on the definition of teacher agency (Pantić, 2015). There are several perspectives on teacher agency, and different approaches have been developed by scholars to understand teacher agency (Pantić, 2015; Campbell, 2012). Nevertheless, the closest to a generally agreed view on teacher agency is that teachers in the exercise of their agency are supposed to use their technical expertise to achieve quality teaching and learning outcomes (Priestley, Edwards, A. Priestley & Miller, 2012). On the other hand, Campbell (2012) argues that

agency enables teachers to use their professional capacities as agents of change, exercise influence on education policy or the society at large.

Campbell (2012) went further by saying that the above perspective of teacher agency does not validate the perception that interprets teacher agency, as teachers adhering to the curriculum, implementing education policy (Priestley et al., 2012), and guaranteeing quality teaching and learning outputs. She concluded by stressing that teacher agency explanation should be “context-specific, inevitably rooted in values and assumptions of a political, social, and philosophical nature” (Campbell, 2012, p. 183). In other words, it will be quite problematic to attempt to separate the understanding or conceptualization of teacher agency from the political, social and economic environments, which teachers work.

In support of Campbell (2012) arguments, Datnow (2012, p. 194) in her research on teacher agency from a social network approach, believes that “the agency of teachers is part of a complex dynamic, interwoven with the structural and cultural features of the school, district, and the larger policy environment”. Indeed, teacher agency cannot be separated from context and environmental influences. This makes any attempt to generalize teacher agency difficult.

The above arguments establish the need to understand the dynamics of teacher agency in post-conflict societies, to achieve quality education and teacher career development in such contexts. It suffices to say here that teacher policy directives are largely applicable to peaceful contexts and maybe thus interpreted and experienced differently in post-conflict societies. Biesta, Priestley and Robinson (2017) concede largely, that surrounding cultures and structures determines teachers’ professional outputs and their agency. They also posit that the level of teachers’ inputs in the educational processes, in terms of participation, determines how they exercise their agency.

Tao and Gao (2017) in their study on curriculum reform at a Chinese university, argue that the ways teachers enact their agency is individualistic in nature, which is predicated on individual past experiences and ‘identity commitment’. They explain “identity commitment as the combination of a teacher’s professional interests and aspirations” (Tao & Gao, 2017, p. 347). The essence of Tao and Gao (2017) argument is that individual teachers’ experiences, aspirations and interests influence the way they understand and enact their agency at the individual level. This perspective brings to bear the place of identity formation in the achievement of teacher agency. In a similar vein, Buchanan (2015, p. 705) agrees that “agency and identity are intertwined”.

Moreover, Pantić (2015) calls for more clarity on the purpose and meaning of teacher agency with empirical evidence. Pantić responded to his call by proposing a model that can be used by researchers to examine teacher agency in various settings. The model enunciates the “study of teacher agency as a process whereby teachers act strategically to transform the risks of exclusion and under achievement into inclusion and improved outcomes for all students in contexts of cultural and social diversity” (Pantić, 2015, p. 759). Basically, Pantić (2015) is saying that the study of teacher agency must use the following tools; purpose, competence, autonomy and reflexivity to analyse teachers in the political and cultural environments they find themselves, and how they influence learning outcomes of their students.

The understandings generated from this review on teachers and teacher agency uncovers that the need to study teachers and their agency from settings in which they work cannot be overemphasised. In addition, the understanding of teacher agency within any context has implications for policy, teachers, and the teaching profession. This makes the next section on review of teachers in post-conflict societies useful for this research study.

2.2 Teachers in Post-Conflict Societies

Education in post-conflict contexts has been seen as a means of brokering peace, reconstruction, reconciliation and a path to development (Hawrylenko, 2010). Furthermore, it has been recognized that teachers play a significant role in post-conflict educational systems (Lopes Cardozo, 2015; Novelli & Sayed, 2016). It is a fact that teachers are regularly victims of war/conflicts; they are either killed or displaced, causing a huge demand for qualified and experienced teachers after conflicts (Barrios-Tao, Siciliani-Barraza & Bonilla-Barrios, 2017).

As it has been established in earlier sections, teachers in post-conflict societies are majorly saddled with the tasks of ensuring peace, implementing curriculum and promoting nationalism (Barrios-Tao et al., 2017; Hawrylenko, 2010; Lopes Cardozo, 2015). However, as it will be seen in the analysis below on research on education and teachers in post-conflict contexts, less attention is given to the role of teachers in the pursuit of quality education in post-conflict societies.

In his study, *Education in Post-conflict Societies*, Hawrylenko (2010) argues that a paramount challenge of education systems in post-conflict settings is the absence of trained and experienced teachers. According to Hawrylenko (2010) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the new progressive

curriculum that was introduced after the conflicts were unsuccessful in implementation, as teachers were not all trained to use the curriculum. Only a few were adequately trained to teach the curriculum, this resulted in many teachers being overwhelmed with the workload. In addition, there were no policy commitments and support for teachers from the government.

In the case of Rwanda, the Belgian colonial government favoured one ethnic group (*Tutsi*), in terms of educational and employment opportunities over other ethnic groups (*Hutu* and *Twa*) in the country. The *Hutu* ethnic group happens to be the largest group, while the *Tutsi*, second largest group and *Twa* makes up the smallest group. However, upon Rwanda's independence in 1962, the *Hutu* who were in charge of the independence government, provided a curriculum that were "used by teachers as they saw fit, inflamed hatred, violence, and revenge by perpetuating ethnic stereotypes imposed by the colonial administration" (Hawrylenko, 2010, p. 30). This situation was part of the factors that led to the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. Therefore, Hawrylenko (2010) argues that in Rwanda, teachers were a contributing factor to the conflict, in a similar vein, through a post-conflict curriculum, teachers can promote peace, unity, nationalism and tolerance in post-conflict contexts.

For Cambodia, during the conflict, teachers were heavily targeted and there were few trained and experienced teachers remaining after the conflict. The few-trained teachers available were tasked with huge responsibilities of helping traumatized students and rebuilding the societal value system. Teachers in post-conflict Cambodia, were charged beyond teaching in the classrooms, they were expected to be agents of peace and social change (Hawrylenko, 2010).

It is right to say at this point that, an overarching challenge in post-conflict societies is the unavailability of qualified and trained teachers. It should also be noted that trained teachers in a post-conflict setting, may not in most cases be limited to the ability of teachers to implement curriculum effectively but the ability to respond as psychologists to help students and parents suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Barrios-Tao et al. (2017, p. 8) in their review of education programs in post-conflict areas such as Liberia, Sierra Leona and South Africa pointed out that the conflict in Liberia, did not only lead to many education facilities and school properties destroyed. The conflict led to the "total absence of teachers". In other words, the consequences of the many years of Liberia's civil war were dire for its educational system development. Furthermore, the aftermath of the conflicts in Liberia

posed a greater challenge to its education system, as many students missed education, many of them were involved as child soldiers during the wartime. This caused the Liberian government to take drastic actions in teacher training. Teachers were therefore trained for shorter periods to meet up with the demand for quality teaching and learning outputs (Barrios-Tao et al., 2017).

In addition, Barrios-Tao et al. (2017) argue that in post-conflict environments, teachers are expected not to educate only students but the society. According to them, teachers influence the school environment and atmosphere. Therefore, they stress the need for teachers' salaries to be paid regularly and motivation to be improved, given their critical role in post-conflict education processes. A case in point, the peace education that was introduced in Sierra Leone after the conflict required teachers to not only 'preach' the curriculum, but also act what they 'preach', as part of the learning process. In other words, teachers were expected to be both agents and models of peaceful behaviours to students and the larger society (Barrios-Tao et al., 2017).

The countries reviewed above by Barrios-Tao et al. (2017) in particular their education programmes after conflicts, provided insights to teachers in post-conflict societies. However, their review failed to examine how conflict and post-conflict conditions affect the way teachers conceptualize and enact their agency, and how it is different from what policymakers in the case countries expect from them.

Butcher, Bastian, Beck, d'Arbon & Taouk (2015) identified that a crucial difficulty of education in post-conflict settings is that countries are limited by resources and capacities to adequately revamp their education systems and train teachers to meet the demands of out of school children and youths after conflicts. According to them, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are observed to intervene in training teachers to meet with growing demands for teachers. On the other hand, it has been argued that the above form of NGOs interventionism in teachers training in post-conflict societies - often leads to producing poorly trained teachers and low-quality teaching outcomes in such societies (Barrios-Tao et al., 2017).

Clarke and O'Donoghue (2013) argue that in post-conflict contexts, to keep teachers motivated, high school principals have a role to play. According to them, school principals must attempt to see to the social and professional support of their teachers. In other words, school leadership often represented by school principals have critical responsibility of shaping teachers and the teaching profession in post-conflict settings.

On the other hand, Norman (2012) in his research argues that school leadership or governance in post-conflict Liberia are incapable and challenged to manage teachers and school governance. He highlights that some of the challenges facing school principals in post-conflict Liberia, include poor policy commitment on the part of the government, lack of institutional support, inadequate professional leadership development and lack of qualified teachers (Norman, 2012, p. 128). It can be argued that this might be the case with school principals in many post-conflict societies.

Weldon (2010) makes a case for the respect and consideration of teacher identity in post-conflict teacher development. Taking a case of South Africa, Weldon (2010) highlights that teachers identities, emotions, and beliefs should be an utmost consideration in curriculum formulation and implementation. In addition, teachers tend to pass across elements of their identities in classrooms. “The legacy of the conflict, especially with regard to teacher identities shaped during conflict, is seldom taken in account” (Weldon, 2010, p. 353). This reiterates my reflection on the literature review so far, on the need to investigate how political and socio-economic conditions in post-conflict contexts influence teachers’ conceptualization of their agency and enactment. This seems to be lacking in research. Furthermore, this also relates to the objective of this research project, which is examining how teachers in post-conflict Liberia understand and exercise their agency in the pursuit of quality education, and in the midst of social, political and economic struggles.

While there is a great deal of research about teachers as agents of peace, reconciliation, and reconstruction in post-conflict societies, there is more to be uncovered on the role of teachers in the pursuit of quality education in post-conflict contexts. This leads to the next section of the study, where this research study attempts to unpack quality education or educational quality as well as examining the capability approach to education, which will be employed by this study to understand quality education in post-conflict Liberia.

2.3 ‘Unpacking’ Quality Education

In recent decades, unpacking quality education has been quite challenging, several researchers have put forward what educational quality or quality education should entail (Barrett et al., 2006; Tikly, 2010; UNESCO, 2005). According to Barrett et al. (2006, p. 12), in a review of literature on educational quality, argue that there are five components of education quality that often represented researchers perspectives when examining quality education. These five components include effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance and sustainability. Furthermore, these five

components have been developed into a framework to improve our understanding of quality education (Barrett et al., 2006).

The above components is argued as an attempt to elaborate Chitty (2002) indicators of quality education; “human fulfilment, preparation for the world of work and contributing to social progress and social change” (Barrett et al., 2006, p. 15). According to Chitty (2002), the purpose of education or quality education should drive at bringing about personal satisfaction and, in turn, lead to sustainable social development.

The United Nations (UN) agency, UNESCO, entrusted in coordinating and monitoring education globally in 2005, through its Global Monitoring Report (GMR), undertook a holistic approach in the understanding of quality education, which can be seen in Figure 1 below (UNESCO, 2005).

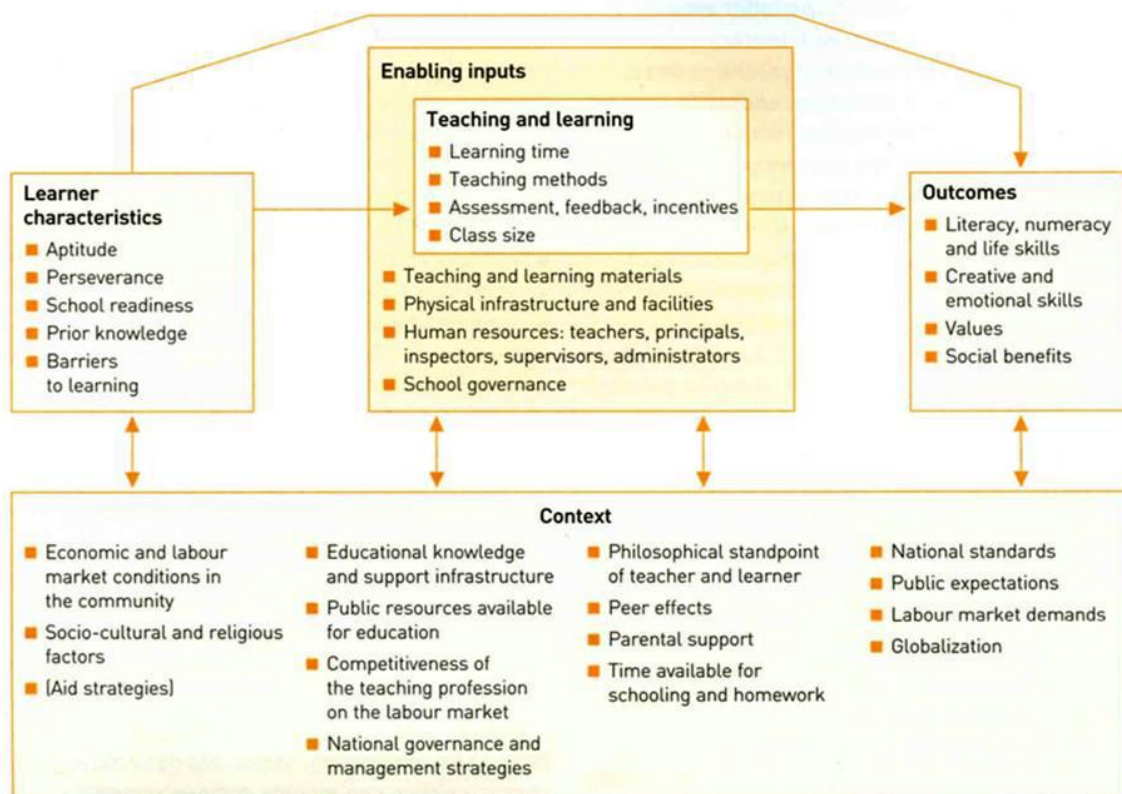


Figure 1: UNESCO holistic approach to quality education (Source: UNESCO, 2005)

What can be observed from this holistic view of quality education from the UNESCO’s GMR of 2015 in Figure 1 above is that four variables can be identified. These variables include learner characteristics, context, outcomes and enabling inputs (UNESCO, 2005). In other words, quality

education must be learner-centred, with context playing a strategic role and supported with adequate teaching and learning resources, and, ultimately, achieving the goals of high literacy, creative skills, social values and benefits (UNESCO, 2005). Similarly, Tikly (2010) argues that the place of context is important when framing quality education. Additionally, having a universal framing of quality education can be difficult and may contradict the principles of social justice.

Furthermore, Tikly (2010, p.16) posits that:

Issues relating to education quality are inseparable from a consideration of the wider context including the historical legacy of colonialism, the nature of the quality gap and of educational inequality and disadvantage, the role of education in relation to national and local development priorities, the impact of global and regional agendas and the role of the state and of the private sector in providing access to a good quality education.

In other words, education quality should be context specific and considerate of environmental factors that may influence the attainment of quality education. I agree with Tikly (2010) position, this research project as identified the place of context (post-conflict), when examining teacher agency in Liberia.

To illustrate the above position further, Tikly (2010) proposes a framework for analysing educational quality in Africa. See Figure 2 below.

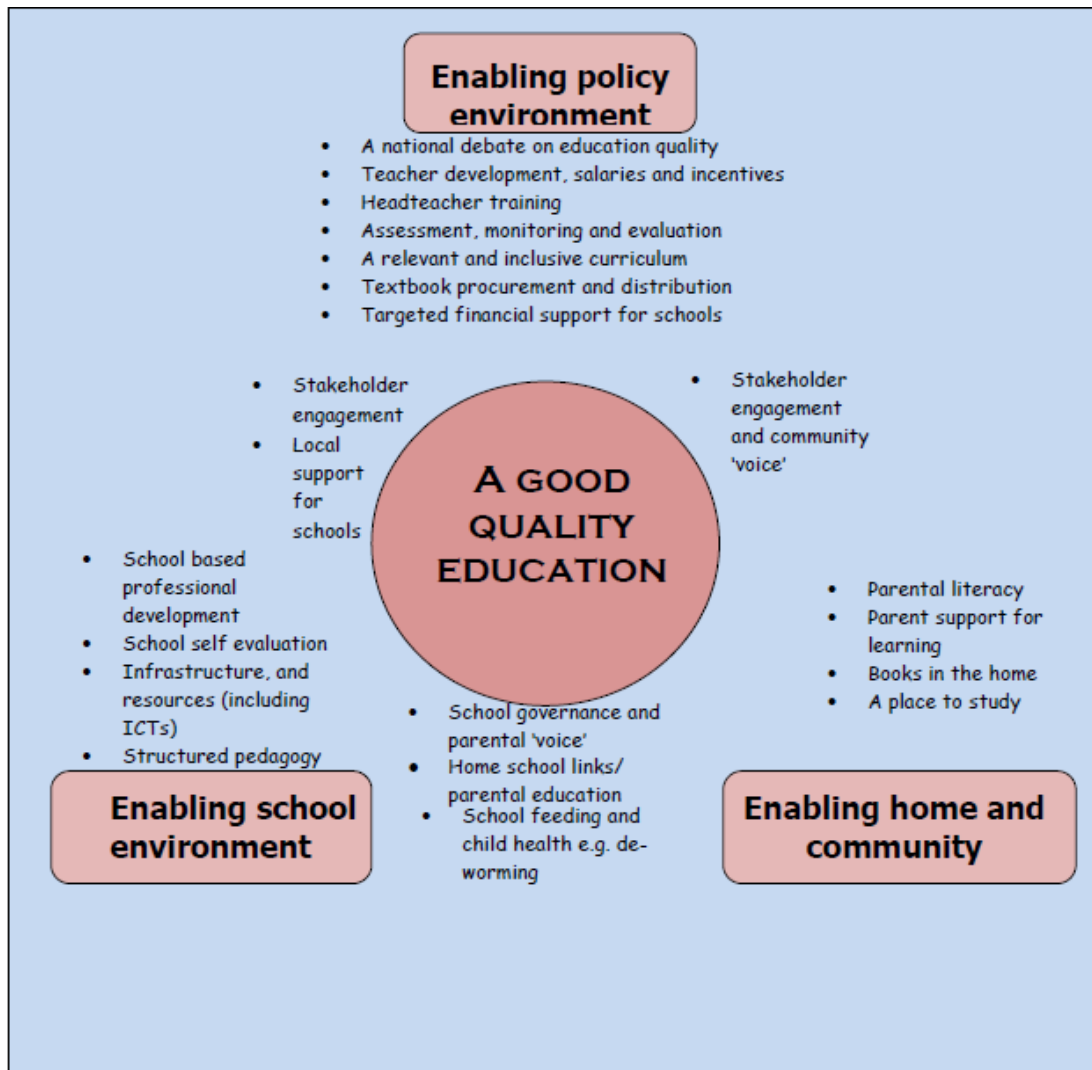


Figure 2: Framework for analysis of educational quality in Africa (Source: Tikly, 2010, p. 19)

In the Figure 2 above, Tikly (2010) identified factors that influence quality education in Africa, these factors include, enabling policy environment, enabling school environment and, enabling home and community. The identification of factors that may influence quality education in any context is quite imperative, as the role of environment to achieving quality education cannot be overstated.

2.4 Capability Approach and Quality Education

2.4.1 Capability approach

The capability approach developed from Amartya Sen's work, *Development as Freedom* (Sen, 2001). The capability approach emphasises social and economic empowerments as valuable tools to human development (McCowan, 2011). According to Sen (2001), for equal development in a society, every member of that society must have social and economic capabilities and supports,

which will enable equal development and opportunities for all. The capability approach advocates for equal opportunities for all and it is entrenched in the principles of social justice. The capability approach is framed alongside these ideas (McCowan, 2011).

2.4.2 Capability approach to quality education

The capability approach to quality education presents education as an empowerment factor that can improve capabilities and skills, which can cause significant human development (Wood & Deprez, 2012). According to Unterhalter (2009), the capability approach to quality education and development posits that education has three major roles, which include; it is instrumental, empowering and redistributive. In other words, education must empower for active participation in decision-making (instrumental), education must create necessary platforms for marginalised and excluded groups to organize politically (empowering), thereby improving capabilities to advocate for redistribution (redistributive). According to Nussbaum (2003), the value of education to contribute meaningfully to human development and the society has been admitted by the capability approach. This is illustrated in Figure 3 below:

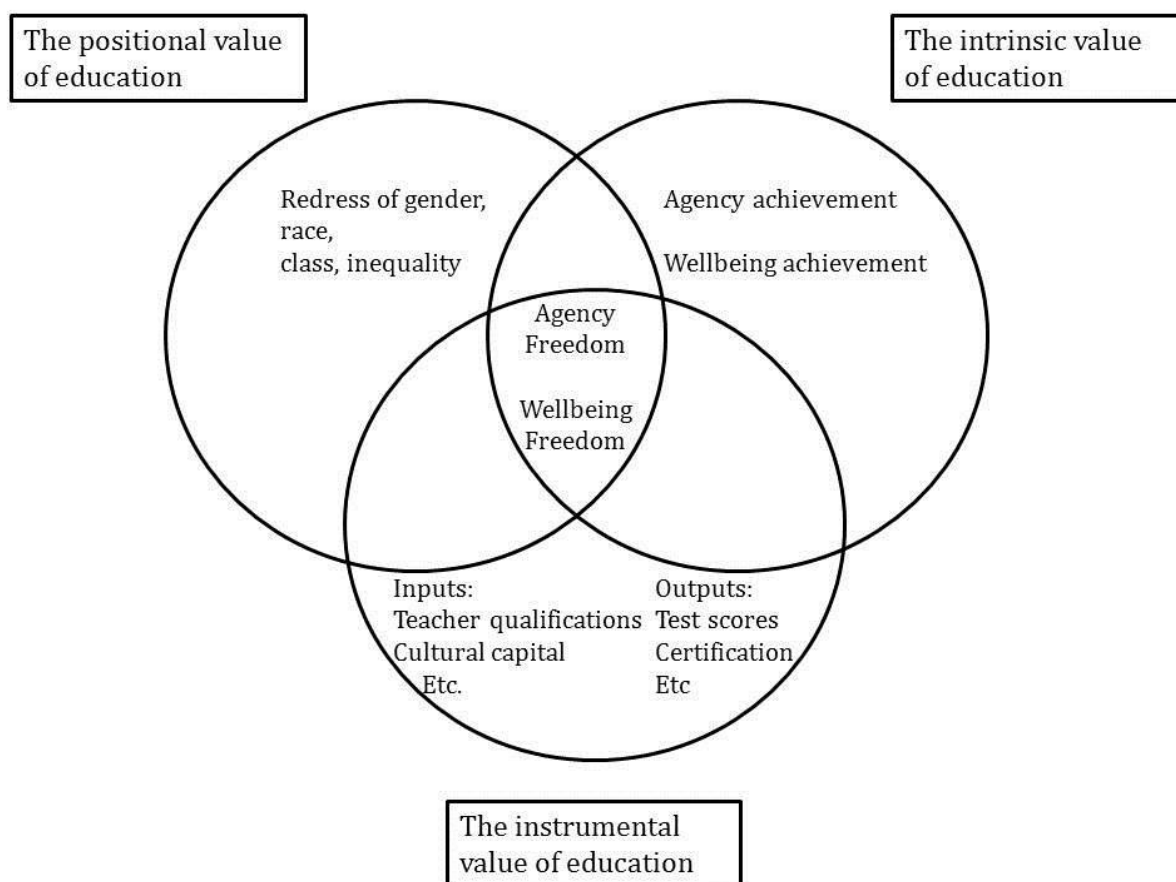


Figure 3: Capability approach: Values of quality education (Source: Vermeulen, 2013, p. 29, adapted from Brighouse and Unterhalter, 2010, p. 208)

In the above Figure 3, *the instrumental value* emphasises the place of schooling to lead a productive life. *The intrinsic value* of education identifies the dividends of education in general. While *the positional value of education* refers to the social status and educational access of a successful person in comparison to others. “Finally, central in the model of Brighthouse and Unterhalter is the capability approach’s concern with *well-being freedom* and *agency freedom*. These freedoms relate to the social conditions that secure instrumental, intrinsic and positional values through education.” (Vermeulen, 2013, p.29)

Flowing from the above, the capability approach to education is needed in a post-conflict Liberia, where the many years of civil war have resulted to high level of youth unemployment and a volatile national economy (Open Society Foundations, 2015). Although, the UNESCO quality education framework is holistic, it is quite general not ‘context-specific’. It does not focus on developing countries or post-conflict societies. This is understandable as the framework is intended to be international. However, from the review of literature, it was vivid that quality education framework needs to sufficiently reflect the local peculiarities of a context (Tikly, 2010). The capability approach to quality education actually takes into account contextual constraints to achieving quality education in post-conflict societies (Vermeulen, 2013).

Therefore, it can be argued that the values of education espoused by the capability approach are necessary for the desirable sustainable development in Liberia. A major critique of the capability approach is that it is ‘liberal-individualist’ in nature (Dean, 2009, p. 10). In other words, capability approach has the tendency of promoting high level of individualism within the society, placing individuals before the larger society. In addition, it has been argued that capability approach places much emphasis on human agency while given less attention to social context (Dean, 2009).

On the other hand, Vermeulen (2013, p. 30), argues that capability approach “takes account of the contextual constraints to a quality education system from a personal, social, and environmental level. This provides a more holistic perspective on school quality and on the success of quality improvement interventions”. Basically, adopting the capability approach to explain quality education, does not neglect peculiarities of contexts which education systems are located. Therefore, this research study employs capability approach to quality education, in examining how teachers can exercise their agency as agents of quality education in post-conflict Liberia.

To be more explicit the capability approach to quality education helps in addressing the research sub-question; how do teachers' exercise their agency for quality education? While the CCPEE theoretical framework adopted helps to answer the main research questions; how do teachers understand their professional agency, being 'caught in the middle' of social, political and economic struggles in post-conflict settings with special reference to Liberia?

The capability approach to quality education and CCPEE theoretical framework relates quite well. The CCPEE looks at the political, economic and the social factors that can influence teachers understanding and enactment of their agency in post-conflict Liberia. While the capability approach takes into consideration these contextual factors that CCPEE tries to identify when trying to understand quality education, and how teachers can contribute to quality education in post-conflict Liberia.

The following chapter provides more information about the theoretical underpinnings as well as the conceptual framework of this research study.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter explains the theoretical framework underpinning this study, and the conceptual scheme. The purpose of this chapter is to understand the framework that guides data collection for this research project, and how the data will be analysed and interpreted. The chapter proceeds with the CCPEE theoretical framework, followed by the conceptual scheme.

3.1 Critical, Cultural Political Economy of Education (CCPEE)

The Cultural Political Economy (CPE) is a theoretical approach that is grounded in critical realism. Sayer (2000) and Jessop (2004) developed the CPE framework. This approach enables us to investigate political, cultural and social systems more holistically. Robertson and Dale (2014) further developed this approach into CCPEE for educational research and analysis. This was a paradigm shift for researchers to acknowledge the role of politics, culture and economy factors in education analysis.

Therefore, this shift in educational investigation justified Robertson and Dale's push for educational research to go beyond 'methodological nationalism' (Robertson & Dale, 2008). Furthermore, CCPEE posits that education should be seen in the light of the larger society. Educational research will not be adequate when it does not reference political, cultural and economic factors. The CCPEE approach criticizes traditional approaches to educational research as stranded in 'educationism' (Dale, 2000; Lopes Cardozo, 2009; Robertson & Dale, 2014). CCPEE therefore proposes that education must be seen as an 'ensemble' and cannot exist outside political, economic and social conundrums (Robertson & Dale, 2014).

In understanding the case of education 'ensemble', Robertson and Dale (2014, p. 8) suggest four moments as an analytical lens to understand the 'ensemble'. The moments include first, 'moment of the politics of education', this examines the politicking that exists in political systems, the power play of 'who gets what, when and how', and how it affects education. Second, 'moment of educational politics', this looks at "issues around the relationship between policy and practice,

such as how and by whom are these things decided?” (Brandt, 2014, p. 13). Third, ‘moment of educational practices’, this investigates environments that learning take place and what is being taught in terms of curriculum. Lastly, ‘moment of outcomes’, which is concerned with the seen and unseen forces that exist in the relationship process between education, politics, and the politics of education (Dale, 2005; Robertson & Dale, 2014; Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2016).

It is worthy of note that CCPEE encourages researchers to interrogate political, cultural and economic factors within the educational system and not outside of it. For this research study, CCPEE is used as an approach to probe the different social, political and economic factors that might affect teachers’ agency and their contribution to quality education in post-conflict Liberia. Just as Robertson and Dale (2014) suggest to educational researchers to go beyond “educationism”. This research study adopts the CCPEE as a theoretical lens to go beyond seeing teachers as only implementers of curriculum and educational reforms (Altinyelken, 2013; Bantwini, 2010). In addition, this framework is used to address the main research question of how teachers in post-conflict Liberia understand their professional agency in the midst of political, economic and social struggles.

3.2 Conceptual Scheme

The conceptual scheme, Figure 4 below was adapted from Biesta, Priestley and Robinson (2015) model for analysing teachers’ achievement of their agency. Given that this research project investigates, how teachers conceptualize and exercise their agency in the pursuit of quality education in post-conflict Liberia, the conceptual framework is therefore, informed by the fact that teachers understanding of their agency is significantly influenced by “cultural, material and resources within the environments they are located” (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 627). In addition, this relates to the CCPEE theoretical framework by Robertson and Dale (2014), employed by this research study to probe the different social, political and economic factors that might affect the understanding of teacher agency and their contribution to quality education in Liberia.

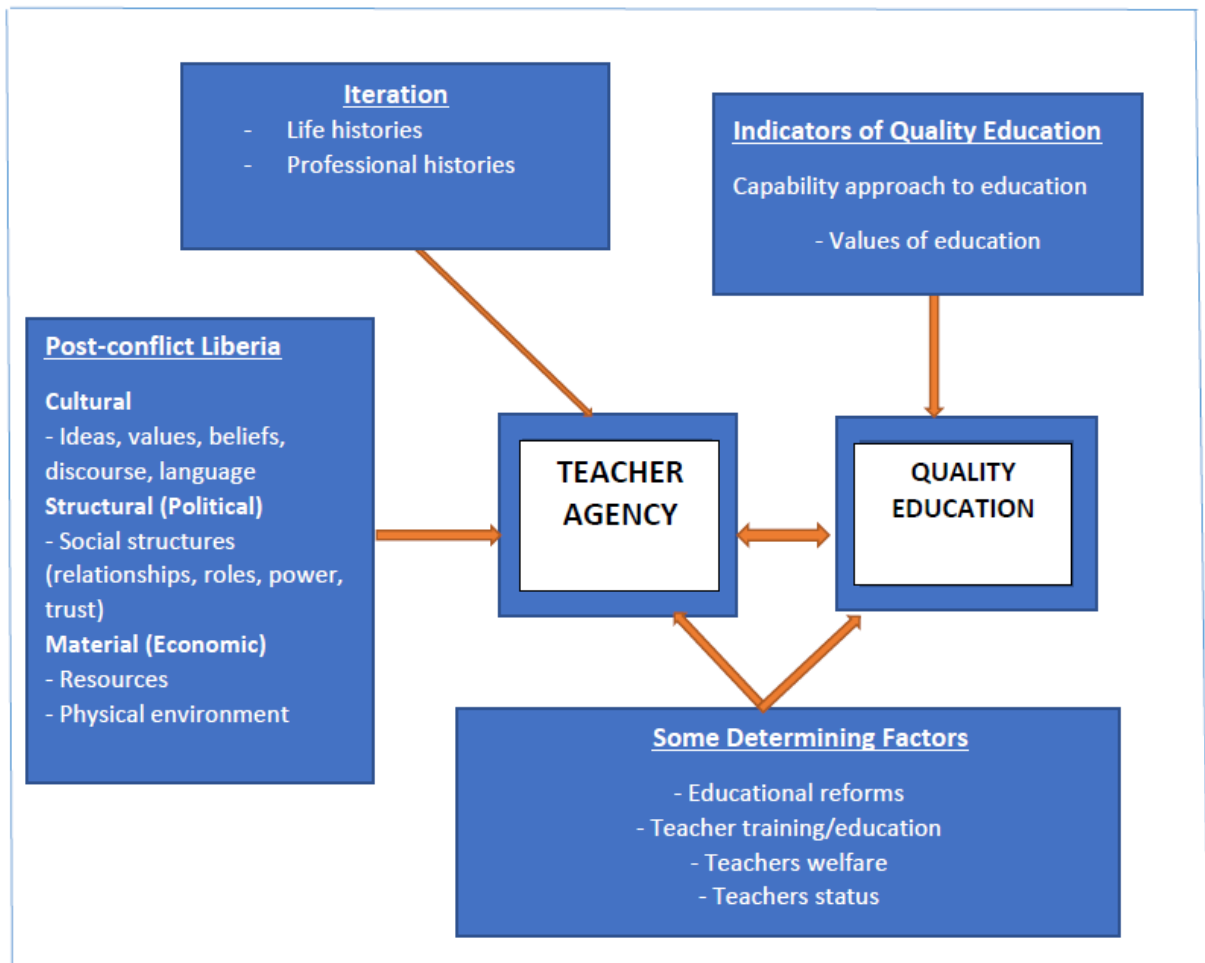


Figure 4: Conceptual scheme (Adapted from Biesta et al., 2015, p. 627)

3.2.1 Conceptual scheme explanation

The conceptual scheme is drawn from Biesta et al. (2015) work on the process in which teachers conceptualize and achieve their agency. The scheme reads from left to right. First, from the analysis in earlier sections, it was identified that there is a need to consider context specificities when analysing teacher agency (Campbell, 2012; Tikly, 2010). In addition, it is argued that environments in which teachers work influences their conceptualization and achievement of agency (Biesta et al., 2015).

Based on the main research question: how do teachers understand their professional agency, being ‘caught in the middle’ of social, political and economic struggles in post-conflict settings with special reference to Liberia? And the research sub-question: how do teachers’ exercise their agency for quality education? The main concepts of this research study are teacher agency, quality education and post-conflict context. These concepts are important when examining teachers and education in Liberia.

Further, the theoretical framework helps to highlight the role of certain factors that may exist within a context when carrying out educational research (Robertson & Dale, 2014). Hence, the relationships between the main concepts, and how they guide the process of answering the research questions are painted in Figure 4 above.

This research project agrees with Biesta et al. (2015) argument on the importance of the environment in which teacher work in their agency formation. This research study identifies post-conflict context as a significant part of investigating how teachers understand and exercise their agency in Liberia, which can be observed in the boxes to the left and at down part of the scheme.

Furthermore, the CCPEE by Robertson and Dale (2014) employed by this study provides a platform to examine cultural, political and economic conditions in Liberia that might determine teachers' conceptualization of their agency. The box (Post-conflict Liberia) to the left highlights some conditions that exist in Liberia, such as, ideas, values, beliefs, social structures, resources distribution and physical environment that possibly shape teachers understanding of their agency. The arrow from the Post-conflict Liberia box to the Teacher Agency box shows how certain factors that exist within Liberia influence the understanding of teacher agency.

The arrow from the Iteration box at the top left to the Teacher Agency box shows how teachers' life history and professional biographies contribute to their agency formation. At the top right the arrow from the Indicators of Quality Education box to Quality Education box highlights a way of understanding quality education in post-conflict Liberia from the capability approach.

Central in the framework, are the concepts, teacher agency, and quality education, which are part of the main concepts of this research study. The arrow between Teacher Agency and Quality Education boxes, show the dialectical interplay between the two concepts. There are features that contribute to teacher agency formation and understanding, as well as indicators of quality education that guide the examination of quality education post-conflict Liberia. Explicitly, the understanding of teacher agency determines quality education to an extent, and the success of quality education informs the nature of teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia.

In the box at the down part (Some Determining Factors), the arrows observed explain the contribution of some factors to teacher agency and quality education in post-conflict Liberia. It is worthy of note that these factors may influence the understanding of teacher agency and achievement of quality education in post-conflict Liberia.

The next chapter provides information on the research methodology and highlights the process in which data was collected and will be analysed for this research project.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Ontological and Epistemological Position: Critical Realism

This research study is based on the ontology and epistemology of critical realism. This has been argued to be a philosophy of knowledge positioned between positivism and interpretivism (Zachariadis, Scott & Barrett, 2013, p. 2). Furthermore, this study explores Sayer's (1992; 2000), works on critical realism. He is notably a key figure in the critical realism school of thought. Other scholars in this school includes Hunt (2000), Jessop (2005) and Layder (1990).

The philosophical assumptions of this study are highlighted in Sayer (1992) book, *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*, where he identified eight key assumptions of critical realism. They are as follows:

1. "The world exists independently of our knowledge of it.
2. Our knowledge of the world is fallible and theory-laden. Concepts of truth and falsity fail to provide a coherent view of the relationship between knowledge and its object. Nevertheless, knowledge is not immune to empirical check and its effectiveness in informing and explaining successful material practice is not a mere accident.
3. Knowledge develops neither wholly continuously, as the steady accumulation of facts within a stable conceptual framework, nor discontinuously, through simultaneous and universal changes in concepts.
4. There is necessity in the world; objects—whether natural or social—necessarily have particular powers or ways of acting and particular susceptibilities.
5. The world is differentiated and stratified, consisting not only of events, but objects, including structures, which have powers and liabilities capable of generating events. These structures may be present even where, as in the social world and much of the natural world, they do not generate regular patterns of events.
6. Social phenomena such as actions, texts and institutions are concept dependent. We not only have to explain their production and material effects but to understand, read or interpret what they mean. Although they have to be interpreted by starting from the researcher's own frames of

meaning, by and large, they exist regardless of researchers' interpretation of them. A qualified version of 1, therefore, applies to the social world. In view of 4–6, the methods of social science and natural science have both differences and similarities.

7. Science or the production of any kind of knowledge is a social practice. For better or worse (not just worse) the conditions and social relations of the production of knowledge influence its content. Knowledge is also largely—though not exclusively—linguistic, and the nature of language and the way we communicate are not incidental to what is known and communicated. Awareness of these relationships is vital in evaluating knowledge.

8. Social science must be critical of its object. In order to be able to explain and understand social phenomena we have to evaluate them critically” (Sayer, 1992, p.5).

Basically, the above eight key assumptions of critical realism suggests that knowledge cannot be monopolized. The critical realist perspective to knowledge emphasises that our social realities and institutions influence our knowledge of the world. An observer or researcher must embrace the differences between the tools used in studying the society and the ‘real’ world. The ‘real’ world and realities are constructed socially (Easton, 2010).

Therefore, the way one approaches and sees the world determines what one sees. According to Jessop (2005), ‘retroduction’ is offered by critical realism as an alternative to induction and deduction when trying to convey a hypothesis. Further, “retroduction involves asking what the real world must be like for a specific explanandum to be actualized” (p. 43).

In particular, the tenets six, seven and eight of the above assumptions of critical realism are subscribed to by this research study. Social institutions should not be excluded in our understanding of the society. In addition, social scientists need to be critical when interrogating societal issues. A critical stance of this research study is that it examines social, political and economic factors that may influence, and enable better understanding and explanation of teacher agency and quality education in post-conflict Liberia.

Furthermore, the interrogation of post-conflict context of Liberia and how it influences teachers conceptualization and enactment of their agency as against what may be generally observe of teacher agency in any education system is true to critical realism.

4.2 Research Design

According to Mouton (2001), a research design is a blueprint intended to guide a researcher in carrying out a research study. Therefore, this research work will adopt a qualitative case study approach. A qualitative case study approach will enable a critical interrogation of issues in this research project. Furthermore, a qualitative dimension of understanding and analysing participants' social views, attitudes, experiences, knowledge and opinions about the phenomenon under study will be more relevant in providing answers to the identified research questions than a quantitative approach (Bryman, 2012).

The research design of this study follows the qualitative case study model, which is a single case study of post-conflict Liberia. A literature review on teachers and teacher policy in Liberia was first conducted in preparation for the fieldwork, the deskwork helped in providing some insights on the possible directions the fieldwork should go. In addition, gaps in understanding of teachers in Liberia were also identified through the deskwork.

Twenty- nine semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions were held with local teachers and other educational stakeholders to explore how teachers in post-conflict Liberia conceptualize and exercise their agency in the pursuit of quality education while being caught in the middle of social, political and economic struggles. Furthermore, as a foreign researcher, observations as part of the process of data collection guided my personal reflections and values toward my case study (Burawoy, 1998).

4.3 Description of the Study Area

For this research project, post-conflict Liberia is taken as a case study to investigate and gain insights on how teachers conceptualise and enact their agency for quality education. Liberia has experienced 14 years of civil wars and it became imperative to examine how the years of wars, and the current state of the country would have shaped the teaching profession in Liberia. The post-conflict Liberia contextualization is very important because wars/conflicts always have their aftermath effects in any society, therefore, this makes post-conflict Liberia critical as it manifests certain conditions, politically, socially and economically, that teacher agency may have evolved. As a case study, it is intended that the implications of this research project on teacher policy can be contextualised for post-conflict settings because they present certain situations that influence and constrain the experience and understanding of teacher agency.

This research study was primarily conducted in the capital city, Monrovia and its environs. Furthermore, many of the research participants were either working or living in rural places outside Monrovia. Some of the teachers interviewed were teaching in schools within the capital, but they live in rural places because they cannot afford the high expenses that come with living in the capital city.

Many of the research participants have to travel about 45 kilometres to get to their place of work. One of the teachers interviewed even commented that he has to wake up at 4 am every working day and walk about 1 hour 30 minutes from where he resides to the nearest bus station, to get a bus going to the capital, where his school is located³. Moreover, this was almost the case with all the teachers interviewed; many of them cannot afford to live in Monrovia because of low salaries. Consequently, a school principal interviewed observed a high level of teachers' lateness in his school.

4.4 Sampling and Sampling Procedure

Non-random sampling technique was employed for selecting research participants. My internship with UNESCO Monrovia Antenna Office provided me the platform to network with potential research participants that may have the necessary experiences to contribute significantly to the research study. As Best and Kahn (2006) explained that researchers are supposed to choose participants who tend to have required and relevant personal, profession experiences, and knowledge that can contribute significantly to answering the research questions. Hence, the criteria for the selection of participants include their years (two years minimum) of professional experience in teaching and education in Liberia, and must be indigenous Liberians or foreign experts.

In fact, the years of experience of the participants in teaching and education in Liberia ranges from two to fifty years. The research participants were mainly teachers actively engaged in their various schools. Further, the teachers possess minimum C-Certificate required by the Liberian education law for anyone to teach in the classroom (Government of Liberia, 2014). The main research participants were teachers teaching in either private or public schools, in both urban and rural parts of Liberia. Other research participants include teacher trainers, school principals, teachers' association executives, policymakers and other educational stakeholders. Two focus groups discussions were held with teachers and policymakers (see Table 1).

³ - Focus group – Teacher C (R30)

Table 1 Overview and numbers of interviews, focus group discussions and participants

	Interviews	Focus group discussions	Total (N=36)
School principals	2 participants		2 participants
Teachers	10 participants	4 participants	14 participants
Teacher trainers	6 participants		6 participants
Policymakers	6 participants	3 participants	9 participants
Teachers association executives	2 participants		2 participants
Others	3 participants		3 participants

4.5 Methods of Data Collection

This research study adopted a case method, for a critical and empirical analysis of the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, a case study is done “to make a case understandable” (Stake, 1995, p. 85). For this type of research study, data collection mostly takes place in the field, and the data are usually qualitative and all-inclusive in nature. According to Stake (1995), there is the instrumental case study and the intrinsic case study. The intrinsic case study is carried out to achieve a focused understanding of a case. In other words, there is a budding interest in that particular case. For an instrumental case study, the purpose is to understand other things not necessarily the case under study, the goal of instrumental case studies is often to trigger other research (Stake, 1995).

For the purpose of this research project, the descriptive aspect of the research study is intrinsic, because the case is specific. While the part of the research study that provides explanations, findings, and results, with the goal of achieving generalisation will be instrumental. It should also be noted that “case studies can be comparative, consisting of multiple cases, or non-comparative, existing of just one case” (Wauben, 2011, p. 45). This research work will be a single case study (Yin, 2003).

In any research study, “data collection is always driven by theory” (Swanborg, 2008, p. 108). Hence, the identified CCPEE theoretical framework guided the process of data collection to achieve critical answers to the research questions. For this research project, data collection was

mainly through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and observations. The research participants included teachers, teacher trainers, school principals, teachers' association executives, policymakers and other educational stakeholders. A total number of 29 interviews and 2 focus group discussions were conducted in Liberia.

4.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were in English language, and an interview guide was prepared ahead to ensure that the conversations ultimately address the aims of the research study. The interview guide had questions informed by the theoretical framework and research questions. The interviews were held in several places; within and outside schools, offices and public spaces. The interviews were recorded after the participants gave consent. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Before the interviews commenced, the research participants were informed about the purpose and goals of the study. In the course of the interviews, a smartphone was used as a recorder and participants were asked to give their consents before the recording started. Every participant of this research study gave their consent for the conversations to be recorded. However, the researcher observed that during some interviews, participants were a bit hesitant to give some information, probably because of the conversations being recorded. The researcher, however, assured the participants that every data collected will be anonymized, and the conversations will be confidential.

The interviews explored participants' backgrounds, experiences, understanding of teacher professional agency in post-conflict Liberia, and the challenges that teachers face within the educational system. On the second research question, that investigates how teachers in post-conflict Liberia enact their agency for quality education; the concept of quality education from the perspective of capability approach was first explained to participants before they gave their responses. The in-depth semi-structured interviews were the major source of data collection during the fieldwork.

4.5.2 Focus group discussions

Two focus group discussions were organised, one focus group was with teachers and the other focus group was with policymakers. Discussions were in English language, and the sessions were recorded after participants gave consents. A discussion guide informed by the CCPEE theoretical framework and research questions, was prepared in advance, focusing on political, social and economic conditions that may affect teachers and their agency in post-conflict Liberia, teachers' role for quality education, and national development in Liberia.

In the course of the focus group discussions, a smartphone was used as a recorder and participants were asked to give their consents before the recording started. Every participant gave their consent for the discussions to be recorded. The discussions lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. The researcher observed that in the course of the discussions, participants shared similar views on the issues raised and discussed.

Just as with the case of interviews, on the second research question, that investigates how teachers in post-conflict Liberia enact their agency for quality education; the concept of quality education from the perspective of capability approach was duly explained to participants before they gave their responses.

4.5.3 Observations

With the complexities of the post-conflict Liberia context, observations helped the researcher in gaining clarity and understanding of information derived from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. According to Bailey, Hennink and Hutter (2011, p. 170), observation is defined as follow:

Observation is a research method that enables researches to systematically observe and record people's behaviour, actions and interactions. The method also allows researchers to obtain a detailed description of social settings or events in order to situate people's behaviour within their own socio-cultural context.

Furthermore, observations provide a researcher platforms to examine the culture, lifestyle, and behaviours of the people within the society (Holloway, 1997). It has been argued that observation has its own limitations, such as, research participants being constrained to release vital information when they feel they are being observed (Creswell, 2003). Thus, this research study adopted a non-participant observation approach. This is a situation when a researcher observes activities without directly participating in the activities (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

As a researcher, doing a field study for the first time, observations were helpful in understanding and gaining clarity of information derived from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. For example, in the interviews, educational stakeholders see teachers in post-conflict Liberia as ‘psychologists’ and their responsibilities as an ‘herculean task’, at first this was quite difficult for the researcher to understand. However, from being part of the society and following up on newspapers articles, online news stories and events related to teachers and education in

Liberia, the researcher came to a better comprehension of the data collected in the interviews and focus group discussions.

The researcher observed people's day-to-day activities in a non-participatory approach, walking the streets, observing social events, and having a first-hand of the effects of the many years of civil wars and the Ebola outbreak in the Liberian society. I argue that it is imperative to have a total experience of a research context, in my case Monrovia and its environs, as this will richly complement the information derived from interviews and focus group. Observation helped the researcher in making sense of the data collected from the field.

4.6 Data Analysis

All interviews and focus group discussions conducted and recorded were transcribed into texts. After the transcription, the texts were later coded⁴ and grouped⁵ for easy analysis. The codes were created and developed from the research questions and theoretical review. This was done to enable a “theoretical understanding of the social phenomenon under study in terms of the research question” (Boeije, 2010, p. 76). Furthermore, an ample amount of time was given to transcribing interviews and focus group discussions, the transcriptions were done verbatim, that is, every recorded word was transcribed exactly into text, to ensure the accuracy. This was done to ensure that every useful information was collected and in detail, as this study employs only qualitative methods.

Furthermore, for the coding of data collected during the fieldwork, Atlas ti. qualitative data analysis software was used for organising and coding the transcripts of the interviews and focus group discussions. The codes helped in identifying general themes while the code groups were instrumental to the process of theory development.

⁴ Codes: *Challenges of post-conflict settings, Challenges that faces teachers, Consequences of teachers challenges, Curriculum, Educational challenges Liberia's education system, Education reforms and development, Teachers contribution to quality education, Addressing teachers' challenges, Teacher education, Teachers views of their role/agency, Other educational stakeholders views of role/agency of teachers, Real life examples of teachers challenges, Insightful perspectives from other educational stakeholders, Insightful perspectives from teachers, Re-occurring perspectives on teachers and education, School System, Teachers before the conflicts, Teachers after the conflicts, Teachers contribution to national development, Teachers' participation in policymaking, Teachers' working conditions and Teaching profession in Liberia*

⁵ Code groups: *Challenges facing teachers in post-conflict Liberia, Liberia's education system and development, Insightful perspectives on education in Liberia, Solutions to challenges facing teachers and education in Liberia, Teachers and their agency, Teachers and teaching profession before and after conflicts, Views on teachers and their agency*

According to Swanborg, “data analysis is always primarily the reduction of a multitude of research results” (2008, p. 111). Therefore, the data analysis for this research study will primarily be concerned with answering the following research questions:

- 1A. How do teachers understand their professional agency, being ‘caught in the middle’ of social, political and economic struggles in post-conflict settings with special reference to Liberia?
- B. How do teachers’ exercise their agency for quality education?

Thematic analysis, which is employed to identify, analyse and report themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was adopted by this research study. In relation to critical realism that encourages researchers to be critical when investigating social issues, thematic analysis allows for an insightful and critical exploration of the texts and underlying themes, with respect to finding answers to the research questions. With thematic analysis, the researcher was able “to make sense of the data, and tell the reader what it does or might mean” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 94).

Furthermore, in the reporting of collected information, direct quotations and statements were used when applicable. In addition, relevant literature was used to back the researcher’s reporting and analysis of respondents’ perspectives.

4.7 Quality Criteria

The aim of this research study to examine critically the understanding of teacher agency in post-conflict contexts gave the researcher the privilege to share in people’s personal and professional experiences. As a young researcher raised in Nigeria, I share similar social and economic backgrounds with many of the research participants and this gave me the ability to interact well with the experiences of the participants. Despite that, I was a foreign young researcher studying in Europe; the research participants welcomed me as a ‘brother’ from Nigeria, a neighbouring country. In other words, I was not too ‘foreign’ to them.

Thus, I had insightful and relevant conversations. I make bold to say that the results of this study are correct because all the participants are locals, and many of them have been involved within the education system at different stages of Liberia’s national development (Pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict eras). In addition, my research findings and its implications for teacher policy should be contextualised for post-conflict settings. To an extent, the findings of this research project can be generalized for Liberia, as interviews had to be stopped after the 29th interview, due to the observation that participants were raising and emphasising on same issues, and no new

information was being recorded. I believe that this was a point of data saturation during the fieldwork process of data collection (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Moreover, this research project employed triangulation to strengthen the quality criteria of the data collected, using the methods of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observations (Sunner & Tribe, 2008). Triangulation allowed for the methods used in data collection, and finding answers to the research questions to be compared and contrasted. A clear understanding of the research context and perspectives of research participants in regards to the research question was achieved with triangulation.

4.8 Ethical Consideration

Taking Guillemin and Gillam (2004) perspective on reflexivity as part of a research process, this research study gives importance to ethical consideration by respecting the place of reflexivity on the part of the researcher in the field. Furthermore, the post-conflict nature of Liberia informed the reflexivity of this research project, as a researcher coming from 'outside' Liberia, I am obliged to protect and not endanger the country's fragile peace. I demonstrated this by considering what is real and sensitive in this context. I avoided controversial education topics like the recent public-private Partnership Schools for Liberia, that are politically sensitive during conversations, only topics relating to the research objectives were raised for discussions. However, some research participants willingly brought up and commented on the Partnership Schools phenomenon.

In addition, the fragile nature of Liberia, tense political atmosphere and volatile economy were deeply reflected upon, before and during field research. In the course of the fieldwork, participants were first informed about the nature and purpose of the research project, they were asked to give their consent or not before the beginning of the interviews or focus group discussions. In addition, individuals were informed that they were free to join the research study or not, and even drop out of the study when they feel uncomfortable to continue with the study. Furthermore, permissions were requested from participants before conversations were audio recorded using a smartphone. The privacy of all participants was assured and information collected will be anonymised, and treated confidentially. In other words, no information or quotes will be directly traceable to any of the respondents.

Many of the research participants requested for the findings of the study to be circulated in order to inform policymakers, non-governmental organizations and other educational stakeholders in implementing relevant policies that will address teacher challenges and, in turn, propel progress towards goals for quality education in post-conflict Liberia.

Some of the research participants also requested for copies of the thesis, when it is fully completed. I responded to the requests by assuring the participants that I will work towards disseminating the findings of the study, through conferences and research dissemination seminars to inform teacher policy in Liberia and other post-conflict environments. I also promised to work towards making available hard or soft copies of the finished thesis to participants that requested it through my local supervisor, Mr Stevenson Seidi.

4.9 Fieldwork Diary

A personal diary was kept during the two months of fieldwork in Liberia. The diary has notes, reflections, and observations of the Liberian context. These observations gave me a good understanding of the peculiarities of my context, what makes it unique, as well the fragile nature of Liberia. The diary was significant and helpful during data analysis, as it brings back to memory, events, and experiences on the field.

4.10 Limitations of Study

It is important to recognize the limitations of any empirical study. For this research project, many of the limitations a researcher often experience in the process of data collection and analysis were avoided easily. For example, English language is the official language and medium of communication in Liberia, and English happens to be my first language. Therefore, communications with research participants went smoothly. Furthermore, Liberia and Nigeria are both in West African sub-region; they share similar culture and practices. This enabled me to integrate easily into the Liberian society, as well as a quick understanding of the research context, based on my background as a Nigerian. In fact, I was able to understand Liberia's lingua franca (Liberian English) some days after I arrived the country.

However, a major limitation of this research project is the inability to reach teachers in most rural parts of Liberia, due to the poor road network and limited resources. The majority of research participants including teachers were located in urban areas like Monrovia and Paynesville, and few other participants were situated in easy to reach rural areas. Therefore, generalizations of this

research study would be done with caution as not all parts of Liberia was covered. Nevertheless, the research findings of how teachers conceptualise their agency and contribute to quality education might be relevant for post-conflict settings.

5. Research Context

This chapter provides general information about the Liberian context, highlighting the current social, political and economic challenges that exist within the Liberian state because of the many years of violence and conflict. This is important because based on the CCPEE theoretical framework adopted for this research study, it is necessary to identify certain factors that may influence teachers' conceptualization of their agency and their contribution to quality education in post-conflict Liberia. Having this background of understanding the political, social and economic factors in post-conflict Liberia will be vital when delving into the issues of this research project.

The chapter further explores education in Liberia as well as its major achievements and challenges. This is followed by an examination of the recent education public-private partnership, Partnership Schools for Liberia and its implications on teachers and quality education in post-conflict Liberia. Thereafter, a special attention is given to the analysis of teacher policy in Liberia. The chapter concludes with a highlight of key issues on teachers and teacher policy in post-conflict Liberia.

5.1 Historical Analysis of Liberia

The very foundation of the Liberian nation was plagued with subjugation, discrimination, and oppression (Funaki & Glencorse, 2014; Outram, 1999). It was former and freed African-American slaves that came to settle in Liberia in 1822, that were at the wheel of the subjugation and discrimination against indigenous people that occupied the area we now know as Liberia (Funaki & Glencorse, 2014). Consequently, Liberia that became a republic in 1847 had its political system founded on high consolidation of state power through centralization, and marginalization of indigenous ethnic groups (Funaki & Glencorse, 2014).

According to Funaki and Glencorse (2014), from the early foundation of Liberia, political power was harnessed by the Americo-Liberians, former African-American slaves and used as a distinguishing tool between the 'elite' usually Americo-Liberians and the rest of the citizens, which at first were the native Liberians. Subsequently, "elite would often leverage political power for private benefit. They would also use the state apparatus to capture resources, labour and

revenue for personal gain and to keep the opposition in check” (Funaki & Glencorse, 2014, p. 839).

This is why Outram (1999, p. 168) argues “that Liberia before 1980 was riven by a complex of differences and inequalities between the Americos and the indigenes; subsequent to 1980 ethnic differences among the indigenes became highly salient”. This explains the civil wars that accompanied the later formation of the Liberian state.

Several internal conflicts were experienced in the development process of Liberia. These internal conflicts were reactions to the oppressions of native Liberians by the ‘elite’ Liberians. This eventually led to the first Coup d’état that brought in the first indigenous Liberian head of government, Master Sergeant Samuel Doe, from the *Krahn* ethnic group in 1980 (Dennis, 2006).

However, few years after the Coup d’état, a civil war broke out in 1989 and lasted till 1996, the violent conflict followed the activities of a rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor. The rebel group was concerned with overthrowing Doe’s government, which they successfully achieved in 1989. The dismantling of Doe’s government in 1989 led to the emergence of several factions, and they engaged themselves in fierce warfare to control the government (Dennis, 2006).

The first Liberian civil war ended in 1995 with the signing of a peace treaty in line with the Abuja Peace Accord. Consequently, the major warring factions which include NPFL, NPFL Central Revolutionary Council (NPFL-CRC), Lofa Defence Force (LDF), ULIMO-K, ULIMO-J, Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and Liberian Peace Council (LPC), agreed together to set up the Liberian Council of State (Dennis, 2006). Furthermore, this action did not entirely put a halt to the conflicts, as violence, battles, and bloodshed were still recorded in the country in 1996.

However, fresh elections were conducted in 1997 and Charles Taylor was elected President of Liberia. Not too long after Taylor was sworn in as president, the second civil war broke out (1997-2003), the insurrection was against Taylor’s government, led by the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebel group. Another rebel group, Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) in 2003, later joined the insurrection. This eventually led to the resignation of President Taylor and his exile in Nigeria (Dennis, 2006).

With a breadth of relatively peaceful atmosphere, new elections were conducted in Liberia in 2005, and it brought to power, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a former Minister of Finance, as the first elected female President of Liberia (Dennis, 2006). The coming in of President Sirleaf as Liberia's head of government marked the beginning of the era of post-conflict Liberia, because several warring factions signed a peace accord after Charles Taylor was ousted from the country and peaceful democratic elections were successfully conducted (Dennis, 2006). It is worthy of note that the civil wars in Liberia, were mostly propelled by the effects of ethnocentrism (Dennis, 2006). Thus, Liberia's relative peace is still threatened by 'internal conflict drivers', and as a 'fragile' state, Liberia's peace "still remains vulnerable to a number of conflict drivers", such as high rate of unemployment, poverty, political marginalization and unstable national economy (Funaki & Glencorse, 2014, p. 839).

5.2 Challenges in Post-conflict Liberia

Following the end of the civil conflicts in 2003, an epidemic crisis struck Liberia from 2014 to 2015, the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak, which practically shut down the country. Moreover, post-conflict Liberia has struggled to keep up growth and stability after the 14 years of wars and Ebola outbreak, "challenges remain, with a huge infrastructure deficit and considerable governance, institutional, and capacity constraints, and continuing risks of instability" (African Development Bank Group [ADBG], 2013, p. 1).

However, Liberia has made significant improvements politically, after the Accra Peace Accord in 2003 that ended the 14 years of civil crises. The Peace Accord ushered in fresh democratic elections in 2005 and 2011 that made elected President Sirleaf, serving two tenures of six years presidential term (ADBG, 2013). Nevertheless, the violence that erupted during the 2011 presidential election shows the fragility and challenges embedded in Liberia's political system. It has been identified that corruption and a high level of political exclusion within the political system are the major sources of political instability in Liberia (ADBG, 2013; Funaki & Glencorse, 2014).

In recent times, the Government of Liberia (GoL), in trying to address some of the political challenges that have engulfed the country, approved a decentralization policy in 2012. In addition, a Truth and Reconciliation Roadmap was formally launched in 2012, to fast track the reconciliation process, and tackle corruption within the political system (ADBG, 2013). However, Funaki and Glencorse (2014, p. 849), note that in post-conflict Liberia, "current anti-corruption efforts have not been seen as successful by many Liberians, and that the problem of corruption remains

significant”. In other words, corruption remains a bane for sustainable development in post-conflict Liberia.

In 2012, the GoL launched the Agenda for Transformation (AFT) for 2012 – 2017. AFT was a development strategy that provided steps in improving Liberia’s economic system. It also aimed at promoting inclusive growth and development (Republic of Liberia, 2013). According to ADBG (2013, p. 2), Liberia has made some progress economically, “ growth in 2012 of 8.9% was driven by the first full year of iron ore exports since the end of the war, timber and rubber exports, construction, and services sector growth. The country has attracted over US\$16 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) commitments since 2006”. Basically, post-conflict Liberia has made some progress in developing its economy but this has not been quite significant in improving the standard of living of many Liberians.

In addition, this supposed economic growth has not address the lack of job opportunities existing in the country; this may be due to high level of corruption within the system and failed anti-corruption efforts by the government (ADBG, 2013; Funaki & Glencorse, 2014). According to the World Bank (2017), the Ebola outbreak and drop in commodity prices at the international level caused Liberia’s economy to be “stagnated over the past three years, representing an average annual growth rate of 0% over the period 2014–2016”. In other words, no economic progress was recorded in Liberia between 2014 and 2016.

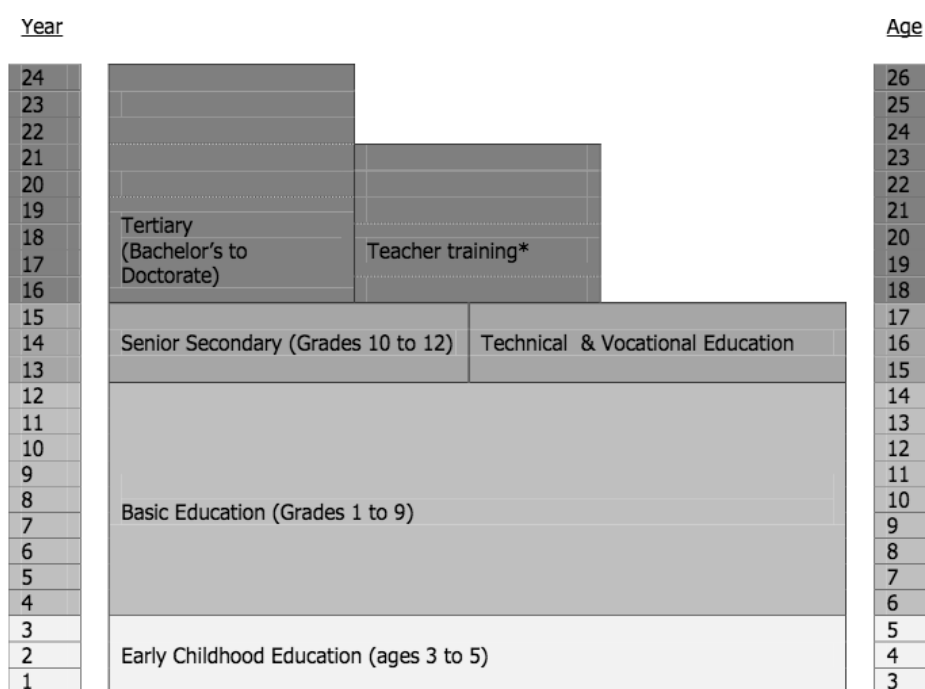
Socially, despite several development strategies that were launched by the GoL after the conflict. Liberia has failed to achieve sustainable development; many Liberians still live in poverty, limited access to employment opportunities, lack of social infrastructures, poor national economy and absence of quality education (United Nations, 2013). In the 2016 Human Development Index, Liberia ranks 177th of 187 countries listed in the development index (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2016).

In summary, the political and the socio-economic challenges that are predominant in post-conflict Liberia include “limited physical infrastructure, especially power and roads, outside Monrovia, weak human and institutional capacity, risk of regional and internal instability, limited private sector development and formal employment outside of extractive sectors and aid-reliant service industries, significant exposure to international shocks and vulnerability to climate change” (ADBG, 2013, p. 9 – 10).

5.3 Education in Liberia

Since the end of the civil wars, the GoL, has strived to resuscitate the country’s education system from the debris of long years of violent conflict. In particular, the reviving of formal education system that almost went extinct because of many years of war, have been the focus of the GoL. In addition, the GoL has introduced several education policies in an attempt to revive both formal and non-formal education system, to provide accessible, equitable and quality education for all Liberians (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017).

According to UNESCO-IBE (2010), the main aim of Liberia’s education system is to ensure that Liberian children have access to the type of education that will enable them lead a meaningful life, and contribute positively to the society. Article 6 of the Liberian Constitution that came into force on 6 January 1986 backs this educational aim. The article states, “the Republic shall, because of the vital role assigned to the individual citizen under this Constitution for the social, economic and political wellbeing of Liberia, provide equal access to educational opportunities and facilities for all citizens to the extent of available resources. Emphasis shall be placed on the mass education of the Liberian people and the elimination of illiteracy”. Furthermore, this is in a way supports why this research study adopts the capability approach to understand quality education, and how teachers can contribute to quality education in post-conflict Liberia.



* As per the Education Reform Act 2011, the Grade C teaching certificate is for teaching primary school (grades 1-6) only and requires 1 year of training (two semesters). The Grade AA teaching certificate (equivalent to an associate's degree) is for teaching both primary and junior high secondary only (grades 6-9) and requires 2 years of training. The Grade B teaching certificate (equivalent to a bachelor's degree) is for teaching secondary school (grades 6-12) only and requires 2 years of training. The teaching certificate to teach in Colleges of Education requires 2 years of training in teaching and a Master's degree.

Figure 5: Structure of Liberia’s education system (Source: MoE, 2017, p. 9)

From the Figure 5 above, Liberia’s formal education system is composed of three years of Early Childhood Education (ECE), nine years of Basic Education, three years of Senior Secondary Education, which is either academic or technical and vocation training. At the tertiary level, there is “Higher Education and Post-Secondary Training, which includes certificate, diploma, degree and post-graduate programs offered by teacher training institutes, colleges and universities” (MoE, 2017, p. 8).

According to the MoE (2017), schools in Liberia are categorized as government (public and community schools) and non-government (private and faith-based schools) ownership. Moreover, the private education sector, consisting of faith-based and private schools dominates the education system as a result of the civil wars.

Presently, Liberia has several school systems, which include Catholic School System, controls schools owned by the Catholic Church, Seven Day Adventist Church School System administers schools owned by the Seven Day Adventist Church, and the Salvation Army School System runs schools owned by Salvation Army. The Monrovia Consolidated School System established by an act of parliament in 1964 operates government schools in Monrovia, all other government schools in Liberia are managed by the MoE (MoE, 2017). Table 2 below shows the distribution of schools by ownership in Liberia.

Table 2: Numbers of schools by ownership in Liberia

	ECE	Primary	Jun. High	Sen. High	Physical Total
Public	2,425	2,494	549	144	2,611
Private	1,555	1,558	778	307	1,656
Faith-based	793	822	423	177	851
Community	307	304	82	12	320
Total	5,080	5,178	1,832	640	5,438

Source: MoE (2017, p. 10)

From the above Table 2, it can be seen that a high numbers of senior secondary students in Liberia are educated in non-government schools. Even as the government schools still remain the largest provider of both ECE and primary education in Liberia.

5.3.1 Educational governance in Liberia

On education governance in Liberia, the MoE headed by the Minister and assisted by three deputies, is the organization responsible for both administrative and financial control of the country's entire education system. However, the MoE lacks required capacities and resources to manage the education system (MoE, 2017). Furthermore, there are other bodies that support the MoE in the administration of education in Liberia, they include:

- “Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs)
- Colleges and universities with education or technical and vocational education and training (TVET) courses
- National Teachers’ Association of Liberia
- National Commission on Higher Education
- Non-government school providers, including faith-based and private education systems such as the Association of Private School Operators
- Development partners and bilateral and multilateral donors
- Local and international non-government organizations and civil society organizations
- Private sector businesses including large agricultural and mining concessions” (MoE, 2017, p. 11).

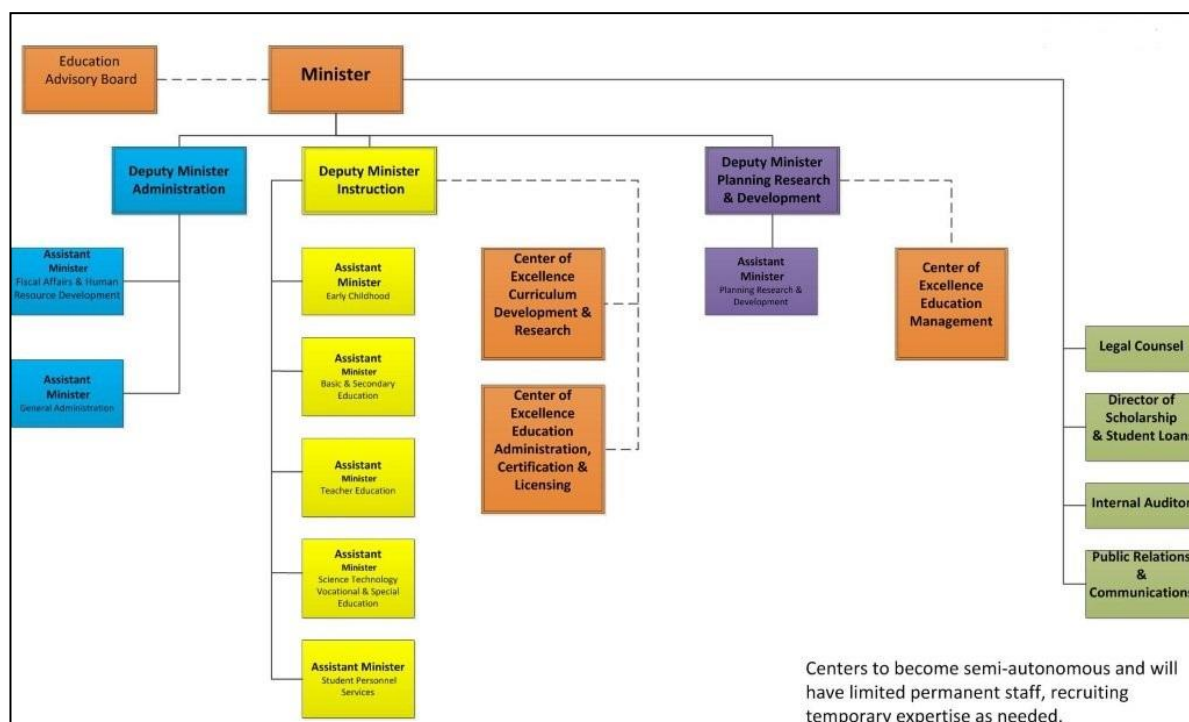


Figure 6: Liberia's Ministry of Education organogram (Source: MoE, 2017, p. 11)

The above organogram shows the institutional set up of the MoE in Liberia, which was restructured by the Education Reform Act of 2011. The Education Reform of 2011 emphasised the need for the right to education to be pursued in Liberia, as well as the restructuring of the MoE. In addition, this education legislation “reformed the student grade structure and laid out a pathway to decentralization through the establishment of county and district education boards. In 2015, the MoE reduced headquarter staffing from 926 to 425 persons” (MoE, 2017, p. 10).

The 2001 Education Law encourages education decentralization and highlights the relevance of teachers in Liberia. The Law clearly stated that authorities/responsibilities should be delegated to the ‘grassroots’ (counties and districts). Further, the county and district officers are to be representative of the MoE at the county and district levels respectively (Education Law of 2001, cited in Government of Liberia, 2009; UNESCO-IIEP/INEE, 2011). The implication of this education decentralization on school governance is that schools are to be managed by school principals, and they are expected to set up a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), and School Management Committee (SMC). The PTA and SMC are tasked with the responsibility of providing an “oversight to the school principal, oversee school performance, monitor financial expenditure, ensure availability of relevant school statistics, and provide annual feedback on school performance” (Government of Liberia, 2009, p. 151, cited in Norman, 2012).

However, according to UNESCO-IIEP/INEE (2011, p. 45):

Despite the existence of such decentralization policies, implementation has lagged behind. To date few education functions have been decentralized to county and district levels. Most decision-making continues to be concentrated at the central ministry, with capacity at the top levels being limited by the workload and the inadequate number of personnel. Conversely, at the more local levels, County Education Officers (CEOs) and District Education Officers (DEOs) have little or no decision-making authority or discretionary budget, as well as limited technical capacity.

Basically, the above quotation affirms the arguments that educational strategies employed in post-conflict Liberia has not yielded expected results, the education system is plagued with institutional inadequacies, and decentralization is still far from being achieved within the system (Barrios-Tao et al., 2017; Funaki & Glencorse, 2014; Norman, 2012).

According to Norman (2012), school leadership or governance in Liberia can become more effective with the commitment of the MoE to address the challenges facing school principals, and develop ‘transformative principals’, that would ensure “the ingredients of change—ideas,

innovations, influence, and consideration for the individual in the process” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 391). In other words, the development of school principals will improve schools outcomes in Liberia.

5.3.2 Major achievements and challenges of Liberia’s education system

Table 3 below summarises the major achievements of Liberia’s education system in the last few years, as well as the challenges that are rooted in the system.

Table 3: Achievements and challenges of Liberia’s education system

Achievements	Challenges
Steady increase in primary level enrolment	Growing demand with limited resources
Secondary level enrolment has increased	High number of out-of-school children and low completion rates
Implementation of the teacher payroll verification exercise	Overage enrolment
Organizational restructuring at the MoE central office, reducing the number of central office staff	High level of teacher absenteeism
Regular strengthening of the annual school census exercise	Lack of qualified teachers
Implementation of a new ‘B’ certificate in-service training program to address the shortage of trained junior high school subject specialist teachers	Poor institutional support for teachers
Provision of annual grants to basic education schools	Institutional capacity deficiency

Distribution of over 1.4 million textbooks to schools for Grade 1-9 students	Lack of school quality standards
Begun a trial of the largest public-private partnership education program in Africa: Partnership Schools for Liberia	Gender Inequality

Adapted from MoE (2017, pp. 13-33)

5.4 Inputs, Outputs and Outcomes in Education

5.4.1 Resources

In Liberia, education is largely financed by donor contributions, while government funding of education is around 13% in the last couple of years. This is below the expected funding of 20% stated in the Education Sector Plan 2010–2020, and the minimum benchmark of Global Partnership for Education (GPE) (MoE, 2016). According to the MoE (2016, p. 41), “the share of donor financing of the education sector is fairly high, over 50%”. See Table 5 below, for Liberia’s education expenditure from 2010 to 2016.

Table 4: Education expenditure, 2010/11-2015/16

	2010/11	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Education Budget	53,005,030	76,928,436	70,942,476	64,156,410	83,822,000
Total GoL Budget	408,380,000	672,050,000	582,931,413	605,900,000	622,740,000
% of Education in GoL Budget	12.98%	11.45%	12.17%	10.59%	13.46%

% of Education in GoL Budget	13.00%	11.60%	12.50%	10.30%	13.50%
GDP (USD billion)	1.54	1.746	1.962	2.01	2.02
Education as % of GDP	3.44%	4.41%	3.62%	3.19%	4.15%

Source: MoE (2016, p. 41)

In the above Table 4, it can be observed that in the past six years, the GoL has failed to meet up with the minimum global required percentage of government funding for education in the total national budget, which is 20%. According to MoE (2017), the implementation of education policies or programmes in Liberia have been constrained with limited funding. In addition, the MoE and public schools are under-funded, and lacked required resources. This makes it difficult to achieve accessible, equitable and quality education for all in Liberia (MoE, 2017).

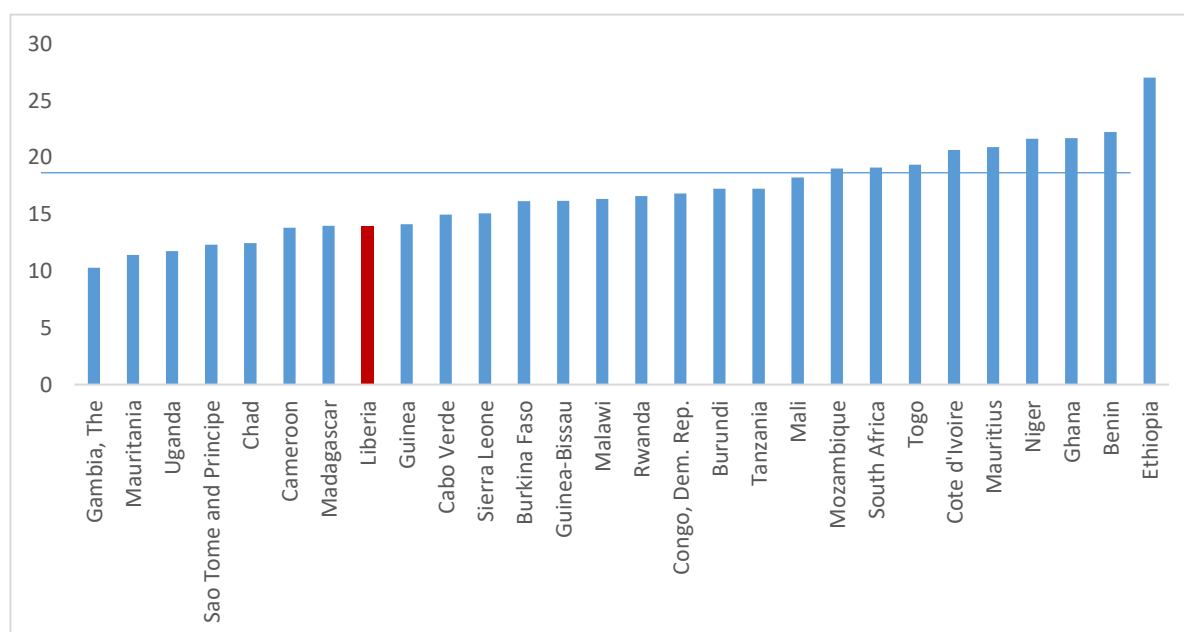


Figure 7: Share of education expenditure in overall expenditure in selected countries (Source: Ministry of Finance & Development Planning and World Bank Edstats, Cited in MoE, 2016, p. 42)

From Figure 7 above, Liberia ranks low in the category of countries that have its government resources to national education below the GPE minimum benchmark of 20%. According to MoE (2017, p. 12), Liberia's "education sector is operating in a fragile budget context where external

shocks or crisis can easily have negative influence on the available resources to education”. In other words, government funding to national education in post-conflict Liberia is problematic and dependent on external factors, such as donor contributions and global economic stability.

5.4.2 Enrolment

After the civil wars, there were significant increases in gross enrolment ratio at different education levels in Liberia, especially, between 2008 and 2010. However, between 2014 and 2015, there was a drastic drop in the gross enrolment ratio at the various educational levels, particularly at the primary level (see Table 5 below).

Table 5: Gross enrolment ratio by education (%)

	2008	2009	2011	2014	2015
Primary	93.3	99.6	102.4	57.7	86.7
Lower Secondary	42.7	46.4	49.4	31.5	52.7
Upper Secondary	-	-	40.3		39.4

Source: MoE (2017, p. 14)

Furthermore, the challenge of overage students and their significant increase in enrolment has shaped Liberia’s education system. The enrolment of overage students tremendously increased after the civil crises, this is possibly a result of the use of child soldiers during the wars. Many of the child soldiers missed primary education schooling, and they needed to be re-enrolled back to schools after the war at which they were mostly above the expected age group for primary education (MoE, 2017).

Other reasons given for overage students phenomenon include, lack of resources for parents to pay entrance examinations at both public and private schools, high level of poor students performance, leading to grade repetitions, and parents not being able to pay their wards school fees in private schools due to poverty, resulting in high dropout rate (MoE, 2017).

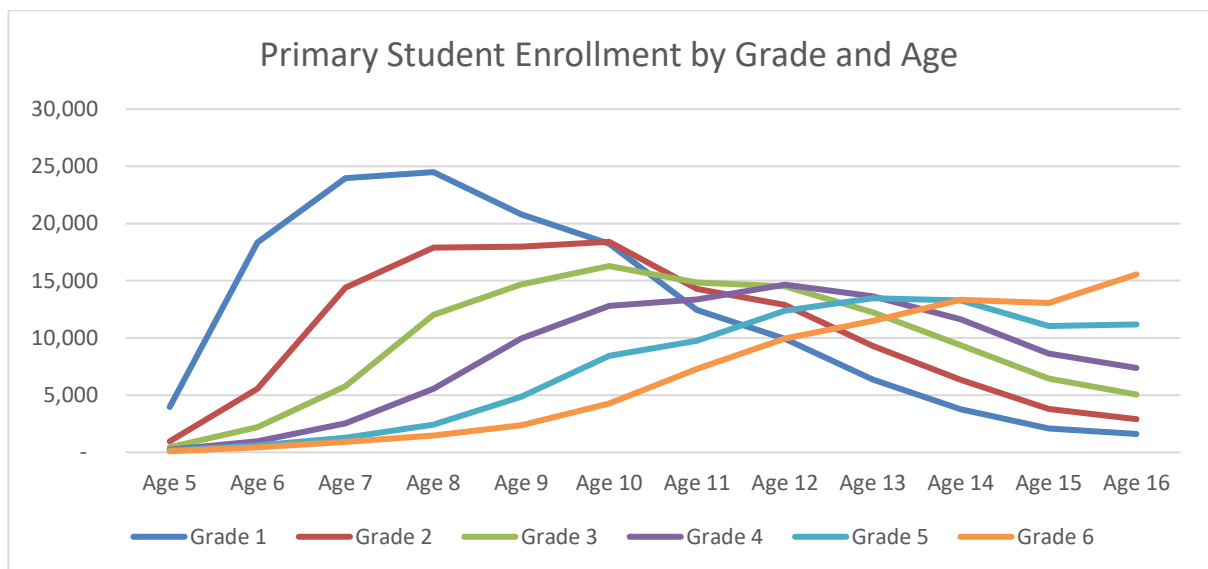


Figure 8: Distribution of primary school students by age in all primary schools (Source: MoE, 2017, p. 18)

The Figure 8 above shows primary student enrolment by grade and age levels. The momentous enrolment of overage student at the Grade 1 level can vividly be observed. According to the MoE (2017), the challenge of overage students and out-of-school children in post-conflict Liberia has greatly affected access to equitable and quality education in the country.

5.5 Current Education Reform in Liberia

5.5.1 The public-private Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL)

In 2013, President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, described Liberia’s educational system as ‘messy’, when about 25,000 of Liberian students failed the entrance examination for the University of Liberia (Pailey, 2013). This massive failure forced President Sirleaf to announce that Liberia’s education system is in a coma and in need of serious resuscitation (Global Education Monitoring Report [GEMR], 2016). However, the dire situation of the educational system can be attributed to the protracted civil wars, and the recent Ebola Virus Disease outbreak (Mungai, 2016).

The current situation of Liberia’s ‘messy’ educational system prompted the GoL through the MoE, led by the newly appointed Education Minister, George K. Werner, to establish the public-private Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL), as a form of education reform, to improve teaching and learning at the pre-primary and primary education levels in Liberia (Global Initiative, 2016).

This educational reform, PSL, outsources the country’s pre-primary and primary education to private education service providers for the next five years and, starting with Bridge International Academies (BIA) piloting the project with 50 schools by September 2016 (Claude, 2016; GEMR, 2016; Global Initiative, 2016; Novelli, 2016).

However, due to spontaneous reactions from both local and international education stakeholders, on this ‘first in Africa’, education public-private partnership (PPP) in Liberia, other private education service providers were included in the pilot phase (Rosenberg, 2016). These other service providers chosen to be part of the PSL pilot phase, along with BIA include BRAC Liberia, Liberia Youth Network, More Than Me, Omega Schools, Rising Academies, Stella Maris and Street Child (Krua, 2016). See Table 6 below for the distribution of schools and operators of the PSL.

Table 6: Operators and number of partnership schools for Liberia assigned

Operator	Number of Schools
BRAC Liberia	20
Liberian Youth Network	4
More Than Me	6
Omega Schools	19
Rising Academies	5
Stella Maris	4
Street Child	12
Bridge International Academies	23

Source: Krua, J. (2016)

Beyond expectations, this education policy move by the Liberian government has generated huge attention at several levels, locally and internationally. Campaigns, advocacies, reports, open letters and press releases have been made requesting the government to withdraw from the path they may be treading (Global Initiative, 2016). Some critical arguments against the PPP include that this policy infringes on Liberia’s constitution and international commitments to education. The PPP will undermine the public system in fulfilling its responsibilities of providing quality, accessible, equitable and free education to all members of the society, that BIA’s approach to teaching and learning may not be what is needed in a country that is recovering from years of social and political unrest (Global Initiative, 2016).

According to Verger, Fontdevila and Zancajo (2017, p. 23), it will be quite difficult for a country to revert to public education system after a certain level of educational privatization. They identified this level as “once the percentage of private schools has exceeded a certain threshold and the private sector in education has brought together a range of powerful political and economic interests”. Ultimately, the powerful political and economic forces that would have been developed in the process of educational privatization will not allow an easy relinquishing of education provisions to a public system. Liberia may be treading this path with the PSL.

According to Caerus Capital (2017), operators of the PSL will seek to address the challenges of curriculum delivery, teacher training, and learning outputs in their assigned schools. Further, a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) between the PSL and controlled schools has been developed to evaluate the results of the first year of the PSL, and if the results are good, the GoL “plans to expand the programme to all 2,750 government schools in the country by year 5 [2021]” (Caerus Capital, 2017, p. 214).

On the other hand, the RCT methodology has been heavily criticized as well, and some of the criticisms against using the methodology include unfair differences in terms of funding between control schools and PSL. PSL has smaller classes compared to the control schools, PSL has strong government backing, there is political pressure for the PSL to succeed, and PSL focuses on teaching to the test (Cameron, 2017; Romero et al., 2017; Senah, 2017). According to Caerus Capital, with the success of PSL, the GoL intends to scale the programme over the next year five years, “the total budget of the program is estimated at - \$158 million over five years” (2017, p. 214).

The Liberian government has posited that the education PPP move is an inspiration from the New Orleans, Louisiana, post-Hurricane Katrina experience in the United States (US) (Novelli, 2016). This source of inspiration for the GoL’s action is problematic, research has shown that the post-crisis New Orleans education policy led to schools being established along the lines of race, class and educational advantage (Novelli, 2016). Consequently, this educational reform in New Orleans increased social stratification and segregation in that part of the US (Novelli, 2016).

5.5.2 Implications of PSL on teachers and quality education

Reflecting on the CCPEE theoretical framework adopted for this research study, it is imperative for this study to examine in what ways this radical educational reform can affect teacher agency and quality education in post-conflict Liberia.

To begin with, Verger et al. (2017, p. 2), in their study, identify that there are six major paths among others in which countries privatize their education systems. These paths include:

privatization as a deeply ideological and structural state reform; scaling up privatization through school choice reforms; privatization in social democratic welfare states; historical public-private partnerships in education systems with a tradition of religious schooling; privatization through the emergence and expansion of low-fee private schools in low-income countries, and privatization through catastrophe.

The PSL can be associated with the path of education ‘privatization through catastrophe’. Furthermore, education privatization implies a possible limitation of teacher autonomy, and even non-recognition of unionism (Verger et al., 2017). Moreover, the PSL does not clearly indicate ways in which the challenges facing teachers in post-conflict Liberia will be addressed (Global Initiative, 2016).

On the issue of how the PSL may affect teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia, one of the research respondents remarked:

Presently, there is a crisis between the teachers and the Ministry of Education (MoE). The crisis came about when the MoE came with this education partnership, they want to privatize our education sector especially our primary sector, that is the base and we are saying no, because they are coming in with private providers and paying more money to them instead of improving our public sector. Because of this, they (MoE) have refused to work with the teachers.

- Executive A, Teacher Association (R11)

On how the PSL may affect quality education, recent report shows that the PSL has contributed to increasing dropout rates in schools. Students enrolled in the PSL are kept for longer hours in schools without a feeding programme. As a result of hunger, due to the longer school sessions, students are dropping out of schools, and even the ones still in school find it difficult to comprehend the lessons as a result of exhaustion. Furthermore, the PSL teaches to test which might not necessarily be the quality that is needful for students in post-conflict Liberia (Mukpo, 2017).

In support of the above report, a research respondent observed that:

....they (PSL) keep the children in school from 7.30 am to 4 pm without food.

- Executive A, Teacher Association (R11)

5.6 Teacher Policies in Liberia

5.6.1 Teachers in Liberia

In the early years of the Liberian state, the challenges that teachers faced were minimal but over the years, low teacher salaries, poor working conditions and inadequate teacher training programmes have been an obstacle to teachers effectively transmitting knowledge to their students. Therefore, education is in an all-time low in post-conflict Liberia (Beleli et al., 2007).

With the end of the civil wars, the GoL through the MoE has taken several initiatives to improve teachers and the teaching profession in Liberia. The MoE has collaborated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development partners to train teachers and implement programmes for teacher development (Beleli et al., 2007). However, these teachers' reconstruction efforts have not been successful due to frequent non-payment of teacher salaries and low capacity on the part of the MoE to implement education policies. As of present, there still exist a high number of unqualified and not well-trained teachers in Liberia's education system (Open Society Foundations, 2015).

According to the MoE (2017, p. 104), the teaching workforce in Liberia has increased in recent years, "from 44,297 in 2010/11 to approximately 55,000 teachers across ECE, primary and secondary in 2015". Many of these teachers are unqualified, volunteers and 'ghost teachers' (MoE, 2017; Open Society Foundations, 2015).

Table 7: Teacher workforce by sector and type of schools

Sector	ECE	Primary	Junior High	Senior High	TVET & AE	Total
Public	5,308	12,215	3,880	1,608	676	23,687
Private	5,668	10,808	5,537	2,890	356	25,259
Faith-based	2,479	5,676	3,072	1,916	69	13,212
Community	836	1,739	494	135	67	3,271
Total	14,311	30,438	12,893	6,549	1,168	65,359

Sources: MoE (2017, P. 104)

The Table 7 above shows that there are more teachers in private schools than government schools. Less than 50% of teachers in Liberia are employed in public schools, while majority of teachers in junior and senior high are employed by private or faith-based schools.

5.6.2 Teacher recruitment and retention

In post-conflict Liberia, the teaching profession is plagued by many challenges, some of which include lack of development of skills of the teaching force, absence of professional advancement opportunities, lack of institutional support, inadequate teachers' training programmes, chaotic teachers' recruitment and retention processes, poor teachers' salaries and payment procedures (UNESCO-IIEP/INEE, 2011).

According to the MoE (2017), the challenge of 'ghost teachers', within the teaching workforce has affected teachers payroll and validation processes in post-conflict Liberia. Because, during the years of the civil wars, many teachers were either killed or fled, and this led to the high intake of volunteered teachers, to keep the education system working. Many of these volunteered teachers were unqualified and without required teaching certifications. Hence, getting them registered and validated in the government's payroll has been quite challenging. "Nearly 26 percent (6,910) of teachers at government and community schools (ECE to senior high) are volunteer or 'household' teachers who are not formally remunerated for their work" (MoE, 2017, p. 105).

Furthermore, many of the killed or fled teachers still reflect on government payrolls, according to the Liberia's MoE, "an estimated 15% of the teachers on the government payroll are 'ghost' teachers who do not attend to their classes" (MoE, 2017, p. 105). In other words, many teachers are not carrying out their professional obligations but are receiving salaries from the government. According to Friedman (2011), there are about estimated 8,000 ghost workers in the Liberian civil service. This is a general problem within the Liberian civil service.

Another challenge that affects teachers' retention in post-conflict Liberia is the poor teachers' salaries. The teaching profession in Liberia is becoming less attractive as a result of low and irregular salaries. In fact, even qualified teachers are taking up other careers instead of teaching, for the prospect of a better life (MoE 2016, 2017). One of the research participants, on the societal perception of the teaching profession in Liberia, commented:

The mind of many Liberians is that if you want to sign up for poverty. You go to the classrooms and become a teacher.

- Teacher Trainer B, University of Liberia (R21)

In rural Liberia, it is more difficult for teachers to receive their monthly salaries because banking systems are not available in rural Liberia, and teachers in such areas have to travel long distances

to pick up their pay cheques. They end up being absent from schools, and making extra expenses from the limited teachers' salaries (MoE, 2017).

Table 8: Number and share of qualified teachers by level, all schools, 2015

Sector	ECE	Primary	Junior High	Senior High	Total
Qualified	7,048	18,975	4,295	2,219	32,537
Unqualified	7,263	11,247	8,688	4,230	31,628
Total	14,311	30,438	12,983	6,549	64,281
% qualified	49.2%	62.3%	33.1%	33.9%	50.6%

Source: MoE (2017, p. 106)

From Table 8 above, despite that Liberia has experienced an increasing number in the teaching workforce, “the large number of unqualified teachers has meant that the Pupil-Qualified Teacher Ratio (PQTR) in public primary schools is 40:1” (MoE, 2017, p. 106). This implies that having a large number of unqualified teachers in the system might be disadvantageous to achieving quality education.

5.6.3 Teacher education (initial and continuing)

No doubt, the high level of unqualified and untrained teachers is a hindrance to achieving quality teaching and learning outcomes in post-conflict Liberia (MoE, 2017). In 2006, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded the Liberian Teacher Training Programme (LTTP) project. The project was to cover the period, 2006-2010. The programme was intended to contribute to Liberia’s teacher education and capacity development, for better teaching and learning outcomes (Open Society Foundations, 2015).

The rationale for the LTTP was derived from the dire situation, that as at 1988, about 73 percent of teachers in Liberia’s primary schools were underqualified, with most of them only having secondary school level education or dropped out of secondary schools.

According to Open Society Foundations (2015), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has helped to organize a C-Certificate programme to improve teacher quality in Liberian primary schools. The programme was implemented between 2000 and 2004 by “NGOs for (approximately 600) teachers who are in the classroom but have never received teacher training” (USAID-Liberia,

2006. p. 3). On the other hand, the infrastructural limitations of the Rural Teachers Training Institutes (RTTIs) in Kakata, Webbo and Zorzor, the lack of empowerment and capacity building of the MoE, and the low budget crisis within the GoL, limited the success of the LTTP programmes. Furthermore, the RTTIs destroyed during the wars had to be renovated for effective implementation of the LTTP programmes (Open Society Foundations, 2015).

According to UNESCO-IBE (2010, p. 12), “in-service teacher training has continued to receive priority attention, even though the Government is faced with serious financial constraints”. In other words, finance is a major challenge to successful implementation of programmes to improve the teaching profession in post-conflict Liberia. In addition, NGOs and development partners in collaboration with the MoE have been at the helm of continuous professional development programmes for teachers in Liberia (MoE, 2017).

There are three RTTIs in Liberia; they include Kakata Rural Teachers’ Training Institute (KRTTI) located in Margibi County, Zorzor Rural Teachers’ Training Institute (ZRTTI) in Lofa County, and Webbo Rural Teachers’ Training Institute (WRTII) in River Gee County. Liberia also has other teachers’ training institute (public and private), Teachers College, University of Liberia, Cuttington University, United Methodist University, African Methodist Episcopal University and Stellar Maris Poly-technique (Government of Liberia, 2014).

Table 9: Teacher training programmes in Liberia⁶

Program	Duration	Minimum level of education required for entry	For which grade level	Provider or Institution type
C- certificate	9 months	High School diploma/WAEC Certificate	Primary level	TTI’s
B- certificate (to be developed soon)	18 months	High School diploma/WAEC Certificate	Senior secondary	TTI’s
A - certificate	18 months	High School diploma/WAEC Certificate	Senior secondary	Universities or Teacher colleges
Bachelor degree in Education	4 years	High School diploma/WAEC Certificate	All grade levels depending on area of concentration	Universities or Teacher colleges
Master degree in Education	3 years	Bachelor degree	All grade levels depending on area of concentration	University of Liberia and Cuttington University as yet

Source: Government of Liberia (2014)

⁶ Liberia practices the 9-3-4 education structure that was established by decree of the National Legislature (Parliament) under the New Education Act of 2011. The structure consists of the following stages:

a) 2 years of early childhood education, followed by b) 9 years of Basic education (lower basic: Grades 1-6; upper basic/lower secondary: Grades 7-9) c) 3 years of senior secondary education or 3 years of technical or vocational education in lieu thereof; Grades 10 – 12. d) 4 years of University or other Tertiary under graduate education (Government of Liberia, 2014, p. 16)

5.6.4 Teacher employment and working conditions

The RTTIs awards the Grade ‘C’ Certificate needed to be employed as a teacher in the elementary schools. For the junior high school’s level, a Grade ‘B’ Certificate is needed. Furthermore, to be a teacher at the senior school level, a Bachelor of Science degree in education or other fields is required (UNESCO-IBE, 2010).

To be employed as a teacher in colleges of education, one has to have acquired a Master’s degree. Additionally, it is stipulated that lecturers in colleges of education need to have a teaching qualification aside their degree (UNESCO-IBE, 2010). See Table 10 below for an overview of teachers’ qualifications in Liberia.

Teachers working conditions have not been quite encouraging in post-conflict Liberia. All the research respondents, especially teachers, identified that poor working conditions is a major challenge for teachers in post-conflict Liberia. Both in the public and private schools, teachers are not properly equipped with the necessary facilities to teach, there is no institutional support for teachers, most teachers do not have access to housing and health facilities. The situation is more worrisome for teachers in rural Liberia, apart from absence of good working conditions, teachers in rural Liberia do not get any incentive for being deployed to rural areas (MoE, 2017).

Table 10: Teachers’ qualifications

Qualification	Description
‘C’ Certificate	A grade ‘C’ teaching certificate is the minimum requirement for teaching in primary school (grades 1-6) and requires one year of post-secondary training.
‘B’ Certificate	A grade ‘B’ teaching certificate is the minimum requirement for teaching Junior High school and requires two years of post-secondary training and the acquisition of expertise in a specific subject.
AA Certificate	A grade AA teaching certificate allows one to teach in either primary or junior high school and requires two years of training.
Degree	A Bachelor’s Degree and an A-Certificate is the minimum requirement for teaching at the Senior High level (Grades 10-12).

Source: MoE (2016, p. 134)

5.6.5 Teacher reward and remuneration

In Liberia, according to UNESCO-IBE (2010, p. 12), “teachers who possess a degree/diploma in education receive a higher salary compared to teachers with an ordinary degree or diploma”. However, this is not the case, it has been argued that teachers with higher degree tend to leave the teaching profession in search of other jobs because of low salaries (Open Society Foundations, 2015).

Furthermore, “the Ministry of Education has yet to develop a teacher pay scale/schedule with graduated steps and standard criteria that defines how a teacher advances from one level to another” (Government of Liberia, 2014, p. 36). In other words, there is a need to develop a structural scale for paying teachers in Liberia. According to Government of Liberia (2014), a newly hired teacher may need to wait between 6 months to 5 years to receive first month salary. This is because the processes of recruitment, deployment, and payment are manually done. Moreover, these processes often are disorganized and uncoordinated (Open Society Foundations, 2015).

Table 11: Sources of teachers’ salaries or benefits

NO.	Description	Total number of teachers	GOL	Private	Community	Volunteers and NGO’s	Unknown
1.	Early Childhood	6276	3152	1817	282	972	55
2.	Primary	15688	9361	4066	574	1585	102
3.	Secondary	7179	3454	3116	185	382	60
Total		29143	15967 (54.87%)	8999 (30.87%)	1041 (3.57%)	2939 (10.14%)	217 (0.74%)

Source: Ministry of Education School Census Report 2013

Table 11 above shows the different sources of teachers’ salaries or benefits in Liberia. From the table, the GoL pays 54.89% of teachers, while the Private sector pays 30.87% of teachers in Liberia. This is because there are more public school teachers than any other category of teachers in Liberia.

5.7 Highlight of key Issues on Teachers and Teacher Policy in Post-conflict Liberia

From the above analysis of teachers and teacher policy in Liberia, the following key issues have been identified:

- Liberia’s education system is undermined by absence of qualified and trained teachers
- Liberia lacks a holistic and relevant strategy for teacher development

- Lack of institutional support for teachers, discourages teachers from going to rural schools
- Liberia's procedures for teacher recruitment, training and retention are inadequate
- Lack of facilities and resources at teacher training institutes
- Procedures for teacher deployment are inadequate
- Inadequate policies for career opportunities
- Lack of professional development programmes
- Low social status, morale and professionalism of teacher
- Poor working conditions of teachers' in a post-conflict Liberia
- Poor teachers; salaries and remuneration makes it difficult for education reforms to succeed

The above issues need to be given due consideration by the MoE and other educational stakeholders when drafting teacher policies for profession development, and quality teaching in post-conflict Liberia. Building on this chapter, the next chapter presents the findings of this research study according to the main research question.

6. Understanding Teacher Agency in Post-conflict Liberia

Teachers in post-conflict Liberia see their responsibilities beyond teaching.⁷

This chapter presents findings of this research study, with a focus on presenting data that address the main research question: How do teachers understand their professional agency, being ‘caught in the middle’ of social, political and economic struggles in post-conflict settings with special reference to Liberia?

This chapter is divided into two main sections; the first section explores teachers’ perceptions of their agency, while the second section highlights other educational stakeholders’ views of teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia. It is also worthy of note that the themes in this chapter were generated from the raw research data collected during fieldwork. In addition, the research study’s theoretical and conceptual frameworks also guided the process of theme generation. The data presented are from the in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and general observations of the research context. The semi-structured interviews were the major source of data, while the focus group and observations complemented, and brought clarity to the data collected.

6.1 Teachers’ Perspectives of their Agency

In preceding chapters, this research study emphasised on the important role of context or environment in which teachers work, when trying to understand teacher agency. For this research study, Liberia as a post-conflict country is taken into context. The post-conflict nature of Liberia is very significant and critical because it manifests certain conditions that influence teachers’ perception of their roles.

Reiterating that this research study’s analysis and philosophical assumptions are based on the ontological and epistemological position of critical realism, and with this position, it argues that certain social realities and structures influence teachers and our understanding of their agency.

⁷ - Teacher A (R2)

Hence, the CCPEE theoretical framework allows this research project to be critical of Liberia's post-conflict conditions, which can be political, economic, and social, that may to a significant extent influence the conceptualization or understanding of teacher agency in Liberia.

Furthermore, an interesting part of the data is that the interview and focus group guides used during the fieldwork prompted teachers to reflect on their professional agency in post-conflict Liberia. However, they came up with various dimensions of agency that do not directly relate to their professional agency. These dimensions of agency are presented below and they are drawn from the perspectives of teachers through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and researcher's observations.

6.1.1 Teachers as parents/second parents

The concept of teachers as parents/second parents in post-conflict Liberia occurred in all the interviews and focus group discussion with teachers. A good number (12 out of 14) of teachers that were part of the research participants presented that the social conditions in Liberia and their willingness to see their students learn have compelled them to function as parents and second parents to their students. They feel obliged to respond to their students in need of love and emotional care a natural parent is expected to give his/her wards. Many of the respondents (teachers) pointed out that many of their students lost their parents, guardians, during the years of civil conflict and the recent Ebola crisis. They identified that many students in Liberian schools are emotionally unstable as a result of loss of parents, and teachers most often need to go beyond their primary duty of teaching students in the classrooms to actually be concerned about their total welfare.

Further, the teachers interviewed pointed out that due to the high level of poverty and illiteracy among the adult population in Liberia, many students are 'abused' by their parents and guardians; some are even left on the street to fend for themselves. It now becomes the responsibility of teachers to ensure that such students are in right emotional state of mind, and to an extent, their welfare taken care of before teaching and learning can take place.

A teacher explicitly explained this type of agency:

I see myself as a parent or second parent to my students. During the war, most of our children had their parents slaughtered and killed. So, now as a teacher to those type of students, you need to go further than teaching. The students are somehow disturbed, we have to call them and talk to them. Even while in school their minds are not always in the lesson. The things that happened in Liberia did not happen in a place like Nigeria. Therefore, learning here in Liberia is different from that of Nigeria.

- Teacher A (R3)

Another teacher went further by highlighting how the years of crises in Liberia had over time influence teachers understanding and enactment of their agency as parents/second parents:

Many of our students are easily distracted as a result of the wars and recent Ebola outbreak, you have to guide them, they are emotionally unstable and sometimes you need to pray with them to calm them down. You have to guide them as a parent and not only as a teacher. The role of a teacher in post conflict Liberia cannot be compared to other countries where teachers are just there to pass knowledge, here you are there as a parent because of the social and economic peculiarities of Liberia.

- Teacher B (R23)

From the researcher's observations on the field, in Liberia and specifically, Monrovia the capital city, where the research was primarily conducted, it is common to find many Liberian youth and children on the streets fending for themselves, 'hustling' for survival or just wandering around for daily meals. This makes the above teacher agency real and important to reflect upon.

6.1.2 Teachers as humanitarians

It was interesting to find out that a teacher as a humanitarian was an agency, brought up during interviews and focus group. Teachers' seeing themselves as humanitarians is very pro-social in nature. Teachers as humanitarians imply that they see themselves not only serving their students but the society and humanity. When the researcher pressed further on why this type of agency, many of the teachers interviewed identified that the current situation of the country and its history has over time influenced their agency. Further, the teachers expressed that they do not only see themselves as implementers of curriculum and teaching in the classrooms.

When a teacher was asked to reflect on his professional agency in post-conflict Liberia, this was his response:

Firstly, for me I will take myself as a humanitarian, helping children and developing their potential in Economics.

- Teacher A (R3)

Another teacher reflecting on his professional agency in post-conflict Liberia during the focus group discussion with teachers explained:

For me to be here as a teacher, is to serve God and humanity. In Liberia now, especially in public schools we find some students that are over aged, radical as being former child soldiers and emotionally abused. All these make teachers work in school challenging, also

makes it difficult to keep the students in schools. To be a teacher in post-conflict Liberia, you have to be a humanitarian.

- Focus group- Teacher C (R30)

6.1.3 Teachers as ‘town criers’

According to the online Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, a town crier is defined as a “person whose job was to walk through a town shouting news, official announcements, etc.” It was instructive to find out that when teachers were asked to reflect on their agency in post-conflict Liberia, the concept of ‘town criers’ surfaced. However, town criers in this situation are not only shouting news or official announcement, but it goes further towards an advocacy role. In other words, teachers in post-conflict Liberia exercise their agency as town criers by calling for better education reforms and social development in Liberia. They exercise this agency through demonstrations, protests and lobbying as organized groups (unionism) for favourable education policy and change.

A teacher interviewed puts it this way:

We teachers in Liberia are like town criers, we continue to cry for peace, safe and conducive learning environment, potable water, good health policies and education system for our students.

- Teacher B (R23)

Furthermore, the researcher’s observations on the field seem to confirm the above teacher agency. For example, the researcher witnessed agitations and demonstrations by teachers against the recent public-private Partnership Schools for Liberia. Also, with the poor state of the country’s education system and a high level of political, social and economic instability in post-conflict Liberia. The above teacher agency becomes imperative for quality education to be achieved in Liberia.

6.1.4 Teachers as role models

In almost every educational system, it is often expected that part of teacher agency should be teachers acting as role models to their students. Therefore, it was not quite surprising for teachers in post-conflict Liberia to identify themselves as role models too. However, it was interesting to discover that all the research participants including teachers and other educational stakeholders stressed the importance for teachers to be role models in Liberia. The respondents explained that with the post-conflict nature of Liberia, teachers as quality role models cannot be overemphasized. In Liberia, teachers are role models to both students and the larger society.

According to a teacher interviewed:

In post-conflict Liberia, a teacher serves as a role model. It is a fact that you (teacher) provide knowledge and you are the one people should look up to as a mentor. Despite Liberia being a post-conflict or underdeveloped country, a teacher goes down to every person and student, whether you are in a privileged or underprivileged position. Once you serve as that individual that provides knowledge to everyone irrespective of social class. It means that you are a role model.

- Teacher A (R2)

Furthermore, a teacher trainer acknowledged this dimension of teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia by advising:

Well, all teachers in post-conflict Liberia must consider themselves as role models, as people who are looked up to produce the types of Liberians that we should have.

- Teacher Trainer A, University of Liberia (R20)

In summary, a teacher as a role model in post-conflict Liberia implies being a knowledgeable teacher, and able to produce responsible Liberians that will be agents of positive social change.

6.2 Other Educational Stakeholders Perspectives of Teacher Agency

Despite holding expectations for teachers in post-conflict Liberia to execute national mandates, such as implementing the national curriculum and contributing to quality education. It was very interesting to find out that when educational stakeholders (non-teachers) were prompted to reflect on the professional agency of teachers in post-conflict Liberia, all of them like the teachers came up with different dimensions of teacher agency, which does not relate to their professional agency. It is also significant to note that despite the known challenges facing teachers in Liberia, educational stakeholders including policymakers, still perceive teachers as key in ensuring that the dividends of education are maximised in Liberia. These dimensions of teacher agency are explored below.

6.2.1 Teachers as guardians and counsellors

Many of the respondents (educational stakeholders) that participated in this research study emphasised that the agency of teachers in post-conflict Liberia is beyond teaching in the classrooms. Gone are the days where teachers are only expected to pass on knowledge to their students. In present day Liberia, they are needed to do more. Some of the educational stakeholders expressed that teachers are guardians and counsellors, and this type of agency is needed in Liberia, due to its fragility and instability - politically, socially and economically.

Respondents opined that in post-conflict Liberia, students, parents and the society at large, look up to teachers for guidance and direction in life generally.

A school principal interviewed pointed out:

A teacher in post-conflict Liberia must be a guardian to be able to deliver, which is foremost. You may have all the expertise but in a country like Liberia, you are more than a teacher, you are not only writing notes on the board, demonstrating notes, giving the class evaluation... We do have situations where students are not readily set, for learning for the day... That is why I said you as a teacher must be a guardian.

- School Principal A (R1)

In a focus group discussion with policymakers from the Ministry of Education (MoE), one of the respondents explained:

In recent years, teachers work has doubled, in addition to contributing to quality education, teachers are meant to serve as guardians and counsellors, it has become a compulsory added responsibility after the wars, traditionally, teachers function as guidance counsellors in school, but things are quite difficult for teachers presently... as they are struggling in this role in post-conflict Liberia.

- Focus group, Policymaker MoE (R6)

While highlighting some basic responsibilities of teachers, a teacher trainer and Director of one of the RTTIs interviewed identified that in post-conflict Liberia, teachers functioning as guardians and counsellors is important and needful. In his words:

The general basic responsibility of a teacher is to carry out instructional delivery to students but the teacher must be prepared, you must be the one who plan his lessons well and the objectives of the teaching should be met and the assessments either formal or non-formal. A teacher must know how to evaluate students based on what they are taught. A teacher in a community is both a guardian and counsellor. In some Liberian communities, during meetings, you find teachers as secretaries because they are thought and expected to be well knowledgeable. In post-conflict Liberia, it is critical for teachers to be guardians and counsellors.

- Teacher Trainer/Director RTTI C (R14)

From the perspectives of the respondents, a teacher as a guardian in post-conflict Liberia, guides the students in making right decisions in their academic, career and personal lives.

6.2.2 Teachers as unifiers and agents of peace

In previous sections, through review of literature, it was established that in conflict and post-conflict countries, teachers are expected by policymakers to promote national unity and peacebuilding processes. In post-conflict Liberia, teachers are also expected to be unifiers and promote peace within and outside the classrooms.

A policymaker from the MoE interviewed opined that teachers not effectively functioning as unifiers and agents of peace contributed to the long years of conflict. In his words:

Well, in the case of post-conflict Liberia, the role of a teacher is actually to mould the minds of students, teaching them nationalism, patriotism, loyalty and respect for the rule of law. They are also expected to contribute in shaping the minds of our people. Those were the things that were missing in the early stages of Liberia's national development. And this led to the conflicts to begin with, so the role of the teacher is to teach civil responsibility, civil rights, promote peace and unity.

- Policymaker MoE (R10)

Furthermore, a teacher trainer interviewed emphasised the importance of teachers in post-conflict Liberia to be unifiers and agents of peace. She identified that at the teacher training institutes, steps are being taken to ensure that teachers are well-trained to perform this agency. In her words:

A teacher is an agent of peace, stability and a unifier; we have to build that in the minds of the teachers we are training because the division (conflict) was very great, especially between the Americo-Liberians and Indigenous Liberians. As a teacher in Liberia you are rendering services to mankind, you don't get that much pay, so whatever little you get... maybe you will be rewarded by God or somehow.

-Teacher Trainer B, University of Liberia (R21)

6.2.3 Teachers as 'Hercules'

It was very instructive to discover that the role of teachers in post-conflict Liberia was compared to a Herculean task. This view was admitted by most of the educational stakeholders interviewed. The responsibilities of teachers in Liberia require the strength of Hercules, a metaphor of Greek mythology, meaning someone who needs great strength to perform difficult tasks. Respondents expressed that the duties of teachers in the midst of political, social and economic struggles, are quite challenging. And teachers in post-conflict Liberia require strength to perform expected responsibilities. A school principal posited:

The role of a teacher in a post conflict Liberia is critical, and a herculean task. It is a fact that every sector and Liberians were critically affected by the wars and recent Ebola crisis. A teacher is expected to manage the defiance posture of students that may have directly or indirectly participated in the wars. Serve as counsellors to students that may be suffering from traumatic issues, a teacher is to serve as parents to some students that need welfare support before they can really learn. We should not forget that this teacher is most likely suffering from social and economic challenges too. In fact, the role is complex!

- School Principal C (R27)

Further, in a summary of how Herculean in nature is teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia, an education expert interviewed highlights:

In post-conflict Liberia, a teacher plays the role of a role model, medical person, psychologist, guidance officer, parent and many other roles.

- UNESCO Project Officer B (R36)

Teachers in post-conflict Liberia performs the role of Hercules as they emerge to exercise their agency despite the challenges within and outside the profession. Furthermore, it was quite a discovery that only a few of the educational stakeholders interviewed mentioned how teachers are to go about getting this great strength to perform their herculean tasks, as many of the stakeholders spent a great deal of time talking about the difficult tasks, teachers are expected to perform in post-conflict Liberia. This will be explored further in the conclusion and discussion chapter.

6.2.4 Teachers as psychologists

Another common concept of teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia, among educational stakeholders interviewed, is seeing teachers as psychologists. Ideally, for a person to be referred to as psychologist and practice accordingly, such person would have gone through required education and training. It was at first quite unclear to the researcher when a significant number of respondents expressed the agency of teachers as psychologists. Respondents posit that teachers in post-conflict Liberia function as psychologists through helping students suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder after the 2003 civil war and 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak. It is interesting to note that research participants made distinctions between teachers as psychologists, counsellors and role models.

An education expert emphasizing on the above agency of teachers explained:

The role of a teacher in post-conflict Liberia is not limited to the provision of teaching and learning activities, because the country itself is deluge with traumatized students and people. A teacher's responsibility of just providing knowledge and skills in the classroom is no longer enough, he/she has to de-traumatize the students and people. It is often expected of teachers to have the psychological ability though many of them might not be trained for this. But, the teacher has to ensure that students have the power to go to from where they are... to moving on from the wars.

- UNESCO Project Officer B (R36)

Further, a teacher trainer interviewed identifies that a lot of Liberians are traumatised from the years of wars and Ebola crisis. Therefore, a teacher is responsible for ensuring that the effects of the past experiences of the country do not serve as a hindrance to quality education and national development. In his words:

It is a fact that a lot of Liberians are still traumatized from the Liberian war, we should not continue like that and this why I think that the teachers are responsible to making sure the

society is improved by providing the type of education that our young people need and even psychosocial support to their students.

- Teacher Trainer A (R20)

In addition, a school principal interviewed explained that from his personal observations of students in his school, some students possess a defiant attitude and character. Therefore, a teacher is not expected to only give out instructions to students, but a teacher should provide help to students suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. It is with this that quality learning can take place for students in such categories, the principal argued. In his words:

With the existence of some students suffering from traumatic issues, the role of a teacher in post-conflict Liberia cannot be limited to giving instructions to students... but you are both a counsellor and a teacher, providing psychosocial support to help these students to actually be concerned about their education... You have to inspire them to learn.

- School Principal C (R27)

6.3 Concluding Remarks on First Findings Chapter

The findings presented in this chapter with respect to the main research question: How do teachers understand their professional agency, being ‘caught in the middle’ of social, political and economic struggles in post-conflict settings with special reference to Liberia? trigger a lot of reflections about the dimensions of teacher agency in a post-conflict setting like Liberia, some of these reflections will be explored further in the discussion chapter.

It should be noted that research participants discussed briefly the traditional conceptions of teacher agency: teaching, implementing curriculum and education reforms. However, they were quick to identify that over the years the traditional conceptions of teacher agency have become minimal in Liberia as a result of the many years of crises. It is worthy of note that several of the above dimensions are pro-social and not directly related to teacher professional agency. This brings to bear the usefulness of the research study’s theoretical lens, CCPEE in guiding the research process. CCPEE was used as an approach to be critical of different political, social and economic factors that might influence the understanding or conceptualization of teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia. These factors were interrogated in the research context chapter, and from the empirical findings, it is clear that political, social and economic factors within post-conflict Liberia truly influence the understanding and enactment of teacher agency in Liberia.

Furthermore, from the findings, it is quite instructive to note that both teachers and other educational stakeholders expressed similar views on teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia. Both groups, for example, see teachers as parents, guardians and counsellors, and professionals whose job is critical in the service to Liberia and humanity.

Finally, the above findings are useful because, despite the perceptions of teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia, teachers are to an extent incapacitated in exercising their agency, as they seem to struggle to manage a precarious balance between aspirational intentions and a demotivating situation.

7. Teacher Agency in Relation to Quality Education

Teachers in post-conflict Liberia are very vital and needs support⁸

In this second chapter of research findings presentation, the section highlights findings with the aim of answering the research study's sub-question: How do teachers' exercise their agency for quality education?

This chapter explores how teachers can contribute to quality education in post-conflict Liberia, teachers' challenges from the views of teachers and other educational stakeholders in Liberia. Further, this section presents recommendations from research participants on addressing teachers' challenges for quality education in post-conflict Liberia. Research participants include teachers, teacher trainers, school principals, teachers' association executives, policymakers and education experts. The section concludes with a remark on the findings of this second research findings chapter.

7.1 Teachers and Quality Education in Post-conflict Liberia

Through the interview and focus group guides, teachers (research participants) were asked to reflect on how they can contribute to quality education through their agency in post-conflict Liberia. Other educational stakeholders (research participants) were also asked to reflect on post-conflict Liberian teachers' contribution to quality education in Liberia.

It is worthy of note that before the research participants gave their responses to ways in which teachers can contribute to quality education in post-conflict Liberia, the researcher explained what quality education means for this research study from the capability approach. The capability approach to education implies that education provided empowers, improve capabilities and skills, which can cause significant human development (See Chapter 2.4). With quality education from the capability approach well explained to respondents, the researcher went ahead to collect their reflections.

⁸ Teacher Trainer/Director RTTI B (R13)

It was interesting to discover that several of the research participants were not very optimistic about the possible contributions of teachers to quality education in post-conflict Liberia. From their responses, it could be deduced that expecting teachers to exercise their agency for or contribute to quality education in post-conflict Liberia, is an attempt ‘to put the cart before the horse’. When the researcher probed further about this common perception on teachers and quality education in Liberia among respondents. Many of them pointed out that quality education cannot be achieved without addressing the many challenges facing Liberian teachers.

A school principal interviewed argued:

There is a need to improve teacher education if you want to achieve the quality education you talked about...

- School Principal A (R1)

Furthermore, a teacher interviewed also reacted:

Teachers must be catered to, if you want 100 percent quality from the teachers, they have to be catered for in the first place...

- Teacher A (R3)

Interestingly, an education expert interviewed, in reflecting on teachers’ contribution to quality education in post-conflict Liberia, took a significant approach by emphasizing that teachers’ basic need must be prioritized before quality education. The expert cited Abraham Maslow’s ladder of needs in his argument. In his own words:

I do not want to put the cart before the horse, for the teachers to contribute to quality education, you go to Abraham Maslow’s ladder of needs, the basic and physical needs must be met, they need security and self-actualization. Until this is done... You cannot give what you do not have, when you are inadequate and limited how can you promote other people to be limitless. It is difficult, the salaries teachers are paid cannot meet their physical needs, they have families to take care of, they don’t have living quarters, no medicals, they live at distances to go to school, there is no transportation to convey them to their various schools...

- UNESCO Project Officer B (R36)

Flowing from the above, it was a common perception among respondents that teachers’ challenges need to be addressed before quality education can be realized in post-conflict Liberia. The next section presents the challenges facing teachers in post-conflict Liberia from the perspectives of research participants.

7.2 Challenges Facing Teachers

Some teachers and other educational stakeholders interviewed and part of the focus group discussions identified different challenges affecting teachers in post-conflict Liberia. Furthermore, nearly all respondents established that it is paramount to address these challenges before quality education can be achieved in Liberia. The common challenges identified by research participants are presented below. In addition, when necessary, direct quotations of views of respondents are used to aid the vivid description of these challenges. It is worthy of note that many of the challenges facing teachers in post-conflict Liberia are not peculiar to the country, as these challenges are real in other countries in SSA and developing countries in general. However, the research participants pointed out that these challenges are experienced differently in Liberia, because of the many years of political, social and economic instabilities. The respondents also established that teachers' challenges are critical to quality education in post-conflict Liberia.

7.2.1 Low salaries and lack of incentives

All the research participants identified low salaries and lack of incentives for teachers as the main challenges facing teachers in post-conflict Liberia. According to respondents, due to a volatile national economy, the salaries teachers are being paid are not enough to meet their necessities. This situation has compelled some teachers to engage in unethical activities such as taking bribes from students and parents, and engaging students in forced labour for survival. Furthermore, research participants also identified that teacher salaries are not always paid on time, some of the respondents even claimed that teachers would work for many months before they start receiving salaries. In the words of a teacher interviewed:

Teachers do not get appropriate rewards for their services and this leads to bribery and other unethical behaviours... Teachers are forced to generate alternatives to generate more funds that will aid them to provide some of their necessities.

- Teacher A (R2)

Further, an executive of the teacher association in Liberia also pointed out:

Teachers in Liberia are being paid very low salaries; you have some of the teachers that will work for many years before they can even start receiving the low salaries we talk about...

- Executive A, Teacher Association (R11)

This research study finds that lack of incentives for teachers posted to schools in rural Liberia have discouraged qualified teachers from going to work in rural parts of Liberia. This has led to few qualified/trained teachers taking up teaching positions in schools in rural Liberia. In addition, respondents identified that the working conditions of teachers in rural areas of Liberia are worse

than the conditions of teachers in urban areas. An executive of the teacher association interviewed explained:

The teachers are trying to do their best but we have in the rural parts of Liberia, a teacher will work 5-6 months and will not get a dime. Teachers in rural Liberia that have to travel long distances from their place of assignment to pick up their pay die in the process and this is no longer something that is strange in Liberia. With all these constraints, what you expect to get from the teachers you may not get.

- Executive A, Teacher Association (R11)

Some respondents pointed out that many teachers are transferred to rural Liberia without necessary support and incentives. Research participants also revealed some consequences of teachers' low salaries and lack of incentives, a teacher trainer interviewed pointed out:

I have told the Minister of Education that they have to realistically look at the salary structure what they have on paper that teacher should get, teachers are not getting it in most of the schools, so teachers need to work many jobs for them to survive, and that is making a teacher not to be too effective.

- Teacher Trainer B, University of Liberia (R21)

Furthermore, many teachers in post-conflict Liberia need to take up other jobs to meet their basic needs. Moreover, this type of distraction hinders their needed contribution to quality education in Liberia.

Another executive of teacher association interviewed added to the above argument:

Teachers are unwilling to take positions in rural Liberia because of lack of housing, health facilities, insurance, communications are very poor there, and some of the areas are even lacking high schools where some of these teachers having their children attending schools in urban centres will not be willing to take their children to the rural places.

- Executive B, Teacher Association (R22)

A teacher interviewed, when pressed by the researcher to elaborate on how low salaries and lack of incentives affect him and his professional obligations, he responded in a second person point of view:

You as a family man, you have many responsibilities and maybe your expenditure and what you are spending/expenses are more than what you receive. As a result, you go to people to get credits and this put you into debts. Because you have two children and they have to go to school and you receive between 100 to 200 United States dollars as monthly salary, you pay rent, you have to cater for the feeding of your children. So looking at this amount how will the children go to school, you cannot be teaching in a school and your children will be at home, it is unfair. They will not see you as a responsible father to have. You are a teacher teaching in a school and because of low salaries, your children are affected because after the payment of bills there is nothing left for the children to go to school... This is what low salaries and lack of incentives mean to me as a teacher.

- Teacher B (R19)

7.2.2 Poor social status

Research participants identified that the civil wars and instability, contributed to the critical decline of teachers' social status in Liberia. There is a community disregard for the teaching professional and the general social perspective of teachers in post-conflict Liberia is not very encouraging. According to many respondents, becoming a teacher in post-conflict Liberia is popular seen as one signing up for a life of penury. A teacher interviewed puts it this way:

Many people in Liberia see the teaching profession as not a valuable career and for you to take on the teaching profession, means you are ready to live with that perception of an underprivileged life.

- Teacher A (R2)

A teacher trainer interviewed was very direct on the challenge of social status of teachers in post-conflict Liberia:

The mind of many Liberians is that if you want to sign up for poverty. You go to the classrooms and become a teacher.

- Teacher Trainer B, University of Liberia (R21)

Furthermore, some respondents also identified that the teaching profession has become a 'surviving basket for graduates' in Liberia. In other words, many tertiary education graduates only take up the teaching profession for survival, when they are unable to get white-collar jobs, and will be quick to leave the profession when they get better job offers.

The teaching profession in Liberia has become a surviving basket for graduates.

- Policymaker MoE B (R9)

It was very strong among research participants that the decline in the social perception of teachers in post-conflict Liberia reduces teacher motivation that affects teaching and learning outputs. They argued that many teachers are unmotivated and no longer see the profession as a noble calling. Respondents recognized that teachers' social perception was better before the conflict. According to a policymaker interviewed:

Before the wars, the teaching profession was ascribed to by people in the society with so much commitment, respect and love. A good number of those we saw in the teaching profession were not in the profession with the mind that they do not have any other thing to do. The percentage of people who had walked to the teaching profession had the mind that I go in here because I love this particular profession, to teach and impact knowledge into others.

- Policymaker, Catholic School System (R5)

7.2.3 Existence of unqualified teachers and poor teacher training/education

Another major challenge facing teachers' contribution to quality education in post-conflict Liberia is the significant existence of unqualified teachers in the education system and poor teacher training/education. 'Unqualified' here means teachers without required training and certification. Many of the research participants argued that this a pertinent challenge and this need to be effectively addressed if educational quality is to be achieved in post-conflict Liberia.

According to respondents, there is a high number of unqualified teachers in the classrooms, and the few qualified/trained teachers are taking up other professions due to low salaries and lack of incentives. Furthermore, during the conflict, many qualified teachers were killed or fled the country and this created a huge demand for teachers in post-conflict Liberia. In a desperate need to fill up the classrooms again with teachers, the saying 'when the capable are unavailable, those that are available become capable', holds true about teachers in post-conflict Liberia.

Due to many qualified teachers that fled or were killed during the war, the government was forced to recruit unqualified teachers to teach and without qualified teachers, we cannot produce quality students, the purpose of the recent validation testing of teachers is to detect the weakness in the teaching profession and proffer necessary solutions.

- Focus group, Policymaker MoE B (R7)

In post-conflict Liberia school system, the challenges are overwhelming. It all started from the war itself, because there were individuals in classes and they were called teachers because they were available and not necessary qualified because during the war, many teachers fled, killed, went to other countries and they were not willing to come back...So those available were absorbed into the schools regardless of their training or qualifications.

- Teacher Trainer/Director RTTI C (R14)

A teacher trainer interviewed, explained that many teachers in post-conflict Liberia, lack sufficient skills and training to deliver good teaching and learning outcomes. In addition, teachers after the wars, lacked necessary knowledge and training to enact their important agency as psychologists, to help students suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

In the words of another teacher trainer and director of one of the RTTIs:

Many teachers in Liberia may have the content knowledge but lack the pedagogical knowledge, how to teach is lacking, this is where the teachers training/college become necessary, classroom management, test evaluation are important skills every teacher must have and this is gotten through training. This country came from war, a teacher must have a good knowledge of psychology and psycho-social issues because students bring behaviour from outside to the classroom and some of the behaviours are product of the years of wars.

- Teacher Trainer/Director RTTI B (R13)

According to the Liberian education law, C-Certificate is the minimum requirement to teach in Liberia at the primary level (See Chapter 5.6.4). However, respondents pointed out that majority of teachers in Liberia possess the C-Certificate and many are teaching at the high school level without the required B-Certificate. A teacher trainer at the University of Liberia interviewed highlighted:

We told the Ministry of Education that the greatest challenge that teachers are facing is capacity building. There is a need for continuous professional development for teachers who are in the classroom and have taught for 5-10 years and they have basic skills and need to build their experience or to improve their capacity. The C-Certificate holders that have graduated from the RTTIs, they need to be trained at the B-Level so that they can fill up the gap at the Junior High Level, right now we do not have many B-Certificate holders to teach from 7th to 9th grade. Right now, we have more bachelor degree holders that have no teacher training, teaching in high schools in Liberia.

- Teacher Trainer B, University of Liberia (R21)

7.2.4 Other teachers' challenges

The research participants touched on other challenges and their hindrances to teachers' contribution to quality education in post-conflict Liberia. The challenges not covered above but mentioned by many of the respondents are highlighted below.

- Respondents identified that lack of policies for teachers professional development is a challenge in post-conflict Liberia. According to the respondents, many teachers have been stagnant for years in terms of professional advancement.
- Research participants expressed that lack of educational facilities for teachers and students in Liberian schools, especially in government-owned schools is a challenge to teachers contribution to quality education
- Another challenge identified by respondents is poor institutional support for teachers. In other words, teachers in Liberia are not well supervised and monitored by the government. Further, respondents identified that teachers' participation and voice in education policy making processes are very minimal, and the MoE has not duly recognized teacher autonomy in post-conflict Liberia.
- According to research participants, corruption within the education system affects the smooth implementation of education policies and reforms, which in the long run fuels existing challenges within the education system.

- Due to the many years of conflict and the recent Ebola crisis, Liberia had zero economy growth rate in the last three years. The unstable national economy has resulted in high inflation rates, and teachers are gravely affected because of very low salaries.

7.3 Addressing Teachers Challenges for Quality Education

It was quite interesting to find out that research participants did not stop at identifying teachers' challenges and difficulties of achieving quality education in post-conflict Liberia. Respondents went further to recommend policies and strategies when implemented will address teachers' challenges, and in turn, propel progress towards goals for quality education. The recommendations from research participants are presented below.

- Research participants recommended that teacher training/education needs to be reviewed to meet the current demands of Liberia's education system. Furthermore, in-service teacher training should be well structured and regular.
- Respondents expressed that a significant way of addressing many of the teachers' challenges is to have teachers' salaries improved and incentives provided for teachers especially those in rural Liberia.
- According to research participants, providing school infrastructures and better working conditions for teachers will ameliorate some of the difficulties of teachers contributing to quality education in post-conflict Liberia.
- Respondents recommended that government through the MoE should set up effective supervision and monitoring of teachers. This will enable the government to be aware of the needs of teachers and respond accordingly.

However, a teacher interviewed expressed concerns about teachers' challenges being addressed in post-conflict Liberia. According to him:

I find it concerning that there are no steps taken by the government to address these challenges because the challenges are continuous.

- Teacher B (R19)

7.4 Concluding Remarks on Second Findings Chapter

The above findings represented an attempt to provide an answer to this research study's sub-question: How do teachers' exercise their agency for quality education?

It is worthy of note that this study adopted the capability approach to understand and examine quality education in post-conflict Liberia. From the findings, it is quite clear that for post-conflict

Liberia, it will be difficult for quality education to be achieved without addressing the many challenges that threaten the teaching profession. Both teachers and other educational stakeholders were very strong on the perception that talking about quality education without implementing relevant teacher policies in post-conflict Liberia is ‘putting the cart before the horse’. In other words, research participants stressed the need for teachers’ challenges to be adequately understood, and necessary policies should be implemented to address the challenges, this will in turn, make quality education a reality in Liberia.

Furthermore, the above teachers’ challenges presented are not peculiar to Liberia, but because of the unique Liberia’s political, social and economic history, these challenges are experienced differently. Respondents also recommended ways to address teachers’ challenges, which will make educational quality possible in post-conflict Liberia. These recommendations and others will be explored further in the next chapter.

Finally, from the above empirical findings, a message to take home is that the pursuit of quality education in post-conflict Liberia needs the active involvement and consideration of all educational stakeholders, and no stakeholder should be seen as less crucial in meeting the goals of quality education.

8. Conclusion and Discussion

This empirical qualitative research study explored how teachers in post-conflict settings understand their agency and contribute to quality education. Liberia was taken as a case study. The research study also analysed the views of different actors in Liberia, including fourteen teachers, nine policymakers, six teacher trainers, two teachers association executives, two school principals and three other educational stakeholders. This chapter of this research study concludes with a summary of the major findings in line with the research question and sub-question. The discussions in this chapter are linked to literature and studies related to the subject, the purpose of this is to weigh the present study findings and see how it compares, confirms or contradicts with earlier research studies.

The section closes with recommendations for addressing issues with teachers and quality education in post-conflict Liberia, and key issues for further research.

8.1 Summary of Major Research Findings

8.1.1 Understanding teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia

Presenting the findings of this research study in relation to the first research question: How do teachers understand their professional agency, being ‘caught in the middle’ of social, political and economic struggles in post-conflict settings with special reference to Liberia? confirms the debates about the problem of arriving at a consensus on how teacher agency should be defined. In addition, there are arguments that several factors influence the process of teacher agency conceptualization (Biesta et al., 2015; Campbell, 2012; Pantić, 2015; Priestley et al., 2012). Research has also shown that certain factors or conditions in which teachers work determine their understanding of agency. These factors could be political, social and economic (Pantić, 2015; Campbell, 2012).

The above debates are valid for this research study, as the research findings revealed that certain social, political and economic conditions within post-conflict Liberia influence teachers’ understanding or conceptualization of their agency. Furthermore, the dimensions of teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia, according to the research findings do not directly relate to the traditional professional agency of teachers: using their technical expertise and through engaging pedagogy

contribute to quality teaching and learning outcomes (Priestley et al., 2012). These dimensions of teachers agency in post-conflict Liberia according to the research findings include teachers as parents/second parents, humanitarians, town criers, role models, guardians and counsellors, unifiers and agents of peace, Hercules and psychologists.

It is instructive to point out that this research study was based on the ontological and epistemological position of critical realism (See Chapter 4.1). This philosophical assumption was adopted to examine how social realities influence teacher agency and to be critical of that, and this thesis argues that in post-conflict Liberia, teacher agency is a direct result of post-conflict conditions.

The objective of this research study was to examine how teachers in post-conflict Liberia understand their agency in the midst of political, social and economic struggles, and to explore how teachers enact their agency for quality education. Hence, the research project employed the Critical, Cultural Political Economy of Education (CCPEE) theoretical framework by Robertson and Dale (2014) to identify and probe certain factors; political, social and economic that may influence teachers' understanding of their agency and contribution to quality education in post-conflict Liberia. The CCPEE framework (See Chapter 3.1) was very useful for this research study as it solidifies the argument that educational research needs to go beyond 'methodological nationalism', and that education must be seen as an 'ensemble' that cannot exist outside political, social and economic conundrums (Lopes Cardozo, 2009; Robertson & Dale, 2008, 2014).

From the foregoing, it is important to point out that the history of Liberia's national development has been plagued with political instabilities, which led to almost two decades of civil wars (Dennis, 2006). Furthermore, corruption is endemic within the national system and several anti-corruption efforts by the Liberian government failed to yield expected results. Consequently, corruption remains a bane to sustainable development in post-conflict Liberia (ADB, 2013; Funaki & Glencorse, 2014).

Economically, post-conflict Liberia is plagued with high inflation rates due to a volatile national economy caused by many years of conflict and recent Ebola crisis. In addition, in the last three years (2014-2016), Liberia has experienced 0% annual growth rate (World Bank, 2017). In other words, Liberia's economy has been static and not progressing.

Socially, Liberia is a multi-ethnic society, with more than ten official ethnic groups, and from the earlier stages of the development of the Liberian state, the complex of differences and inequalities between the various ethnic groups have been a major source of conflicts (Outram, 1999). These

differences and inequalities sustained the prolonged civil wars (Dennis, 2006). Further, in post-conflict Liberia, the social context can be seen in many Liberians living in poverty, high level of unemployment, lack of social infrastructures and absence of quality education (United Nations, 2013). In addition, Liberia ranks 177th of 187 countries listed in the development index of the 2016 Human Development Report (UNDP, 2016).

Flowing from the above, many of the research participants emphasised on how the post-conflict conditions of Liberia have influenced the understanding of teachers' agency in the country. Moreover, teachers and other educational stakeholders interviewed acknowledged the traditional agency of teachers, that is, implementing education reforms, curriculum and contributing to quality teaching and learning outcomes (Priestley et al., 2012, 2015). However, respondents were quick to acknowledge that the post-conflict nature has influenced greatly the understanding and enactment of teacher agency in Liberia. Thus, the research findings have confirmed the positions of Campbell (2012), Datnow (2012) and Lopes Cardozo (2015) that teacher agency is significantly dynamic, and that it is context specific or driven.

According to the research findings, teachers in post-conflict Liberia see themselves as second parents/parents, guardians and counsellors. Respondents pointed out that many students in Liberian schools are emotionally unstable, and that many of them lost their parents and guardians in the past conflicts and Ebola crisis. Therefore, teachers most often need to go beyond their primary duty of teaching in the classrooms to be actually concerned about these students' total welfare. Furthermore, research participants identified that in present day Liberia, students, parents and society look up to teachers for guidance and direction in life generally. Truly, teachers play a significant role in post-conflict societies and education systems (Novelli & Sayed, 2016).

Teachers in post-conflict Liberia are also seen as humanitarians, role models and Hercules. Respondents argued that teachers in Liberia do not only serve their students but humanity. In a focus group discussion with teachers, a teacher even acknowledged a spiritual dimension to the teaching profession. In other words, the teaching of moral values close to the Christian faith to students, makes teachers see their work as a service to God. It is expected that the teaching of moral values will make students more tolerant of other ethnic groups, and strive to lead peaceable lives.

According to Hawrylenko (2010), in the case of Cambodia and Rwanda, after the conflicts, teachers were expected to help in restoring the moral values of students and the societal value system. Teachers as role models in post-conflict Liberia, simply imply that being a model is to be a knowledgeable teacher that can produce citizens capable of salvaging Liberia from all the odds.

Furthermore, the challenges embedded in post-conflict Liberia were identified by research participants as a hindrance to teachers enacting their agency. However, teachers striving to enact their agency in the midst of the challenges make themselves be referred to as Hercules. These research findings reflect the critical role and daunting tasks of teachers in post-conflict societies (Barrios-Tao et al., 2017; Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2013).

Finally on the understanding of teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia, according to the research findings, teachers in Liberia are seen as town criers, unifiers and agents of peace, and psychologists. Teachers as town criers imply that they are organised groups that lobby for good education policies and through demonstrations, protests and unionism they influence educational processes. This is in line with Campbell's (2012) argument that agency enables teachers to use their professional capacities as agents of change, and to exercise influence on education policies and the society.

According to Hawrylenko (2010), Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks (2014), and Novelli and Sayed (2016), in post-conflict societies, teachers are majorly saddled with the tasks of promoting peace, unity and nationalism. This is not far-fetched in post-conflict Liberia, as teachers perform the above tasks as unifiers and agents of peace. It was also interesting to find out that teachers in post-conflict Liberia exercise their agency as psychologists to help students suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder after the 2003 civil war and 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak. In their studies, Hawrylenko (2010), Lopes Cardozo (2015), Novelli and Sayed (2016) posited that teachers in post-conflict contexts are often expected to provide psychosocial support for students and parents traumatized from wars and conflicts.

To conclude, despite the significant dimensions of teacher agency in post-conflict Liberia, teachers are incapacitated in exercising their agency, as they seem to struggle to manage a precarious balance between aspirational intentions and a demotivating situation.

8.1.2 Teachers' contribution to quality education in post-conflict Liberia

Research has shown that teachers are essential actors to achieving quality education in any education system, including post-conflict ones (Altinyelken, 2010a, 2013; Lopes Cardozo, 2015; Novelli & Sayed, 2016; Priestley et al., 2015; Verger & Altinyelken, 2013).

With the research study sub-question: How do teachers' exercise their agency for quality education? as a guide, this thesis employed the capability approach to explore and understand quality education in post-conflict Liberia. When research participants were asked to reflect on how teachers can contribute to quality education in post-conflict Liberia, respondents were of the major

opinion that talking about quality education in Liberia without addressing the many challenges affecting teachers is like ‘putting the cart before the horse’. Several of the research participants identified that teachers’ challenges need to be first addressed before they can contribute or exercise their agency for quality education in post-conflict Liberia. According to the research findings, teachers’ challenges in post-conflict Liberia include low salaries and lack of incentives, poor social status, unqualified teachers and poor teacher training/education, lack of policies for teachers’ professional development, poor institutional support, absence of education facilities and high inflation rates due to a capricious national economy. These challenges are also predominant in many countries in SSA (Altinyelken, 2010a; Bantwini, 2010; Brandt, 2014).

Altinyelken (2010b) in her study found out that Ugandan teachers face some of the challenges above and this made the new thematic curriculum that was introduced for quality education in Uganda unsuccessful. In addition, Barrios-Tao et al. (2017) and Norman (2012) in their studies recognised similar challenges as an obstacle to maximising the benefits of quality education in Liberia.

Bantwini (2010) in his research about teachers and the new curriculum reform in South Africa, identified that poor teacher working conditions and lack of quality teacher training on using the new curriculum led to the failure of the education reform that was expected to increase educational quality in South African schools.

Furthermore, research participants recommended ways in which teachers’ challenges can be addressed for quality education to be realized in post-conflict Liberia. These recommendations include review of teacher training/education to meet the demands of post-conflict Liberian education system, regular in-service teacher training, review of teacher training curriculum, provision of school infrastructures, better working conditions for teachers, opportunities for teachers professional development, and effective supervision and monitoring of teachers by the government.

It is worthy of note that Altinyelken (2010b), Bantwini (2010), Barrios-Tao et al. (2017), Brandt (2014), Norman (2012) and Novelli and Sayed (2016) in their research also made similar recommendations in addressing teachers challenges in SSA and post-conflict contexts in general.

Based on the findings of this research study, this thesis argues that teachers’ challenges need to be first addressed before quality education can be achieved in post-conflict Liberia. This argument is affirmed by Wauben (2011), in her study on Zambian teachers unions in education policy making, concluding that “quality education starts with motivated teachers” (p. 73).

To close, this thesis explicitly argues that if teachers in post-conflict Liberia are enabled to enact the agency that they identify with, this can be favourable to quality education in the country. From the findings, teachers were strong on the opinion that exercising the various dimensions of agency above will positively impact teaching and learning outcomes in post-conflict Liberia. This argument is in line with Lopes Cardozo (2015) and Novelli and Sayed (2016) conclusion that teachers are critical actors to the success or failure of education systems in post-conflict settings.

8.2 Recommendations

It is imperative for policymakers, non-governmental organizations and other educational stakeholders to adequately understand how teachers in post-conflict contexts conceptualize their agency and implement relevant policies that will address teacher challenges and, in turn, propel progress towards goals for quality education. Therefore, the empirical findings of this research study inform the following recommendations:

- Teachers in post-conflict Liberia identify themselves as psychologists but their capacity to act as a psychologist is very limited. There is no sufficient training for teachers to effectively engage in psychosocial interventions in Liberia. Therefore, at the policy level, necessary structural support and training should be put in place for teachers to perform their agency as psychologists. Furthermore, teachers should also be given psychosocial support as well, because many of them were victims and traumatized from the many years of conflicts. Therefore, international organizations in the field of education should collaborate with the national government to provide psychosocial training for teachers in Liberia. This is essential for quality education to be realized in the country.
- Teachers see themselves as humanitarians, meaning that they endeavour to meet the immediate needs of their students and other members of the society. At the policy level, teachers need to be well supported with the needed materials and resources to respond to the immediate needs of their students and community.
- Teachers in post-conflict Liberia see themselves as counsellors, and role models. However, from the Liberian social context, teachers' recognition and social status are very low, but the teachers are still able to manifest themselves or emerge despite the challenges. Therefore, government and education stakeholders should empower them by promoting the teaching profession as a noble one with good working conditions, provide institutional support and supervision, and provide teachers with regular conferences, seminars and workshops that will make them better counsellors.

- Teacher training curriculum should be developed with teachers' inputs. Teachers are in a good position to identify the areas lacking in teachers training/education in post-conflict Liberia.
- With better salaries, remunerations and incentives, teachers' motivation will be improved and this in turn, will increase the possibilities of achieving quality education in post-conflict Liberia.

8.3 Key Issues for Further Research

The findings of this research study revealed that teachers conceptualization of their agency differ from what is often expected of teachers in many education systems: to be implementers of curriculum and education reforms. A comprehensive understanding of the dimensions of teacher agency identified by this research study would require that future studies investigate further, how teachers daily live these dimensions of agency within and outside the classroom environments.

Secondly, future research study can examine what institutional support at the national and international levels are available for teachers in post-conflict Liberia to exercise the agency that they identify with, and consequently how this impacts the quality of education in the country.

Thirdly, this research study revealed that teachers in post-conflict Liberia identify themselves as psychologists. Further studies can investigate how and to what extent both national and international responses to teacher training have included psychosocial skills for teachers in post-conflict settings, particularly in Liberia.

Fourthly, future research study can seek to examine the content of current teacher education in post-conflict Liberia, with the aim to analyse how and to what extent the training reflects the needs of teachers in the process of enacting their perceived agency.

Finally, as teachers in post-conflict Liberia exercise their agency as humanitarians, role models, second parents, counsellors, agents of peace and unifiers, further research studies can explore how and to what extent education institutions and reforms in post-conflict Liberia are enabling teachers to enact the above dimensions of agency.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Map of Liberia



Source: Government of Liberia (2004)

Appendix B: Overview of Respondents

Interview/focus group number	Category	Respondent number	Years of (Teaching/Education)	Date of interview
1	School Principal A	1	20	05/12/2016
2	Teacher A	2	5	05/12/2016
3	Teacher A	3	12	05/12/2016
4	Teacher Trainer/Director RTTI A	4	15	06/12/2016
5	Policymaker – Catholic School System	5	5	06/12/2016
6	Policymaker MoE A Policymaker MoE B Policymaker MoE C	6 7 8	15 18 15	06/12/2016
7	Policymaker MoE B	9	18	06/12/2016
8	Policymaker MoE A	10	15	06/12/2016
9	Executive A, Teacher Association	11	18	07/12/2016
10	Policymaker – MCSS	12	17	07/12/2016
11	Teacher Trainer/Director RTTI B	13	40	08/12/2016

12	Teacher Trainer/Director RTTI C	14	38	08/12/2016
13	Teacher Trainer RTTI C	15	30	08/12/2016
14	Policymaker MoE D	16	8	12/12/2016
15	Policymaker MoE B	17	15	12/12/2016
16	Registrar School B	18	2	13/12/2016
17	Teacher B	19	8	13/12/2016
18	Teacher Trainer A, Williams V.S. Tubman Teachers College, University of Liberia	20	33	13/12/2016
19	Teacher Trainer B, Williams V.S. Tubman Teachers College, University of Liberia	21	50	13/12/2016
20	Executive, B Teacher Association	22	28	14/12/2016
21	Teacher B	23	3	14/12/2016

22	Teacher B	24	4	14/12/2016
23	Teacher B	25	3	14/12/2016
24	UNESCO Project Officer A	26	4	16/12/2016
25	School Principal C	27	35	16/12/2016
26	Teacher C	28	20	16/12/2016
	Teacher C	29	13	
	Teacher C	30	15	
	Teacher C	31	45	
27	Teacher C	32	20	16/12/2016
28	Teacher C	33	13	16/12/2016
29	Teacher C	34	15	16/12/2016
30	Teacher C	35	45	16/12/2016
31	UNESCO Project Officer B	36	35	20/12/2016

Appendix C: Interview and Focus Group Guide

Brief Introduction of Researcher

Introduction of Research Study Aims and Objectives

Brief Introduction of Respondents

Interview Questions for Teachers

1. What do you think of your role as a teacher and the teaching profession in post-conflict Liberia?
2. What can you say about teachers' role in the education system?
3. What are the challenges that influence your work as a teacher?
4. How has the current political, social and economic situation of post-conflict Liberia influenced your role as a teacher?
5. In what ways can you as a teacher contribute to quality education?
6. How do you exercise your agency for quality education?
7. What made you chose the teaching profession?
8. Any questions for me?

Interview Questions for Education Stakeholders (Government, NGOs, Development Partners, Associations, National Education Commissions, Experts etc.)

1. What do you think of the role of a teacher and the teaching profession in post-conflict Liberia?
2. What can you say about teachers' role in the education system?
3. How has the current political, social and economic situation of post-conflict Liberia influenced the role of a teacher?
4. What challenges influence teachers' work? And what steps are taken by policymakers to address these challenges?
5. How can teachers contribute to quality education?
6. In what ways do teachers contribute to quality education?
7. Any questions for me?

Focus Group Questions for Teachers

1. What do you think of the role of a teacher and the teaching profession in post-conflict Liberia?
2. How has the current political, social and economic situation of post-conflict Liberia influenced the role of a teacher?
3. What are the challenges of teachers and how can these challenges be addressed?
4. In what ways do teachers contribute to quality education?
5. Any questions for me?

Focus Group Questions for Policymakers

1. What do you think of the role of a teacher and the teaching profession in post-conflict Liberia?
2. How has the current political, social and economic situation of post-conflict Liberia influenced the role of a teacher?
3. What are the challenges of teachers and what steps are taken by policymakers to address these challenges?
4. In what ways do teachers contribute to quality education?
5. Any questions for me?

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Background and Purpose

This research project is part of the requirements of completing the Erasmus Mundus Joint Degree Master in Education Policies for Global Development (GLOBED), offered by Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain, University of Oslo, Norway, University of Malta, Malta and University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

For the selection of participants, a non-random sampling method will be adopted for this research work. The participants have been selected based on the observation that they have the required and relevant professional experience and knowledge that can contribute significantly in answering the project research questions below:

- How do teachers understand their professional agency, being ‘caught in the middle’ of social, political and economic struggles in post-conflict settings with special reference to Liberia?
- How do teachers’ exercise their agency for quality education?

What does participation in the project imply?

The data collection for the research project that requires active participation will be in interviews and focus group discussions. The type of data to be collected are based on questions relating to the identified research questions. In addition, data will be collected through notes and audio recordings.

What will happen to the information about you?

All personal data will be treated confidentially. Only the student and project supervisor will have access to personal data. Furthermore, to ensure the confidentiality of personal data /recordings in storage, the list of names of participants will be stored separately from other data.

In addition, participants will be recognized anonymously in the acknowledgement section of the project publication.

The project is scheduled for completion by 31 August 2017. Hence, all personal data and any recordings will be made anonymous by project completion.

Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in the project, and you can at any time choose to withdraw your consent without stating any reason. If you decide to withdraw, all your personal data will be made anonymous.

If you would like to participate or if you have any questions concerning the project, please contact, Student name: Seun Adebayo, Email: seun.b.adebayo@gmail.com, Tel.: +33758252695

and Supervisor name: Dr. Teklu Abate, Email: teklu.bekele@iped.uio.no, Tel.: +47936444054

The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

Consent for participation in the study

I have received information about the project and am willing to participate

(Signed by participant, date)

I agree to participate in the interview

I agree that information about me may be obtained from other sources like register