

ORIGINAL PAPER

Professional standards and competencies for teachers and school leaders: A case study for Sierra Leone

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Abstract: This paper investigates the state of professional standards and competencies for teachers and school leaders in Sierra Leone. It was conducted against the backdrop of guidance from international best practice, including instruments developed by UNESCO, Education International, and the African Union Commission. The paper is structured into three sections devoted respectively to: (1) the national framework of professional standards and competencies and its implementation; (2) teacher education, both pre-service and in-service; and (3) the working conditions of teachers and school leaders. The analysis relies on mixed quantitative and qualitative data collection.

Keywords: Teachers, School leaders, Professional standards, Competencies, Sierra Leone.

Introduction

As many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Sierra Leone is facing a deep learning crisis. Sub-Saharan Africa is faced with a deep learning crisis with some estimates suggesting that nine in ten children aged 10 may be learning poor, that is not able to read and understand a simple, age-appropriate text (World Bank et al., 2022; see also Bashir et al., 2018 on Africa). While some children are learning poor because they are out of school, in many African countries, most children who are enrolled in school are also not able to read and understand a simple text by age 10. Data on learning poverty are not available for Sierra Leone because the country has not participated in the international student assessments used for measurement, but it is likely to be an issue. Four out of five children do not acquire the early reading and numeracy skills necessary for subsequent learning according to data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS6). This is confirmed by the Secondary Grade Learning Assessment report which suggests that after 8 to 11 years of schooling, most students only demonstrate the English and mathematics skills expected from children in primary school. As a result, the pass rate for the Basic Education Certificate in Education in 2019 was less than half and only 6 percent of students taking the West African Senior School Certificate Examination meet the requirements for admission into university.

Improving learning is key for increasing human capital and the country's future development prospects. A country's assets base is what enables its population to be productive. This assets base includes natural capital, produced capital, and human capital, itself defined as the present value of the future earnings of the labor force. In Sierra Leone, estimates from the World Bank (2021) suggest that half (49 percent) of the country's wealth consists of human capital (see also Lange et al., 2018). This shows the importance of investing in people for the future development of the country. And yet the share of human capital wealth in total national wealth is much lower in Sierra Leone than in most other African countries. To increase human capital wealth, and thereby create the conditions for gains in standards of living, improving educational opportunities and learning in school must be a priority. This requires a focus on professional standards and competencies for teachers and school leaders since while many factors may contribute to high levels of learning poverty, a key factor is a lack of strong teachers and school leaders².

Better teachers and school leaders are needed to improve learning, but Sierra Leone faces important challenges to professionalize its teaching force. School enrolment, which stood at 2.7 million students in 2021, is rapidly rising in part due to population growth, leading to a shortage of (qualified) teachers. More than a third of

¹ UNESCO IICBA. The paper is based on a study funded by the Shanghai Trust-in-Fund project whose aim is to promote the professionalization of teaching in Africa and the Asia-Pacific, with Sierra Leone being one of the target countries. The analysis is that of the authors only and need not reflect the views of UNESCO, its Executive Directors, of the countries they represent, nor do they necessarily represent the views of the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa.

² Another issue is that of teacher shortages in part because the teaching profession may not be sufficiently attractive (on shortages, see International Teacher Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2021, 2021).

current teachers are considered ‘untrained and unqualified’ based on their education. Pupil-teacher ratios are not very high in comparison to other West African countries, but the pupil-qualified teacher ratios are high, especially in public schools (government or government-aided). There is also a persistent gender gap in the teaching force. While research suggests that female teachers and school leaders are associated with better learning outcomes, only a 29 percent of teachers in basic education are women (women account for most teachers only at the pre-primary level).

Sierra Leone has adopted international best practices in setting up its Teacher Service Commission a dozen years ago, but much remains to be done. The aim of this paper is to assess the state of professional standards and competencies for teachers and school leaders in the country, relying in part on frameworks from the African Union as benchmarks. Specifically, the paper considers (1) the national framework for teaching standards and competencies; (2) pre-service and in-service teacher education; and (3) working conditions for teachers. The analysis is based on a more detailed report (Nwokeocha et al., 2023).

The first area of focus is the national framework of professional standards and competencies for teachers and school leaders. Questions include: Which laws and key policies support the standards and competencies?; What are the institutional frameworks for the regulation of the standards and competencies?; What are the content and structure of the standards and competencies?; What is the level of implementation of the standards and competencies?; How are the standards and competencies aligned to the UNESCO and Education International (2019) and African Union Commission (2019a, 2019b) frameworks of professional standards?; and How is the regulation of the teaching profession aligned with the African Union Commission (2019c) *Continental Guidelines on the Teaching Profession*?

The second area of focus is teacher education. Questions include: What are the critical pre-service teacher issues?; What is the type/profile of the teaching qualifications required?; What are entry requirements, duration, and curricular framework for teacher qualifications?; What is the system of accreditation of teacher education programs and other quality assurance best practices?; Is there a national framework for continuous professional development (CPD) and what is the quantity, quality, and regularity of in-service training being provided?; Does CPD counts for teacher advancement?; Are teachers being mentored, especially after the initial induction?; Is there a mandatory course for School Leadership and Management?; What are some of the teacher quality issues encountered in the school system; and How is teacher education aligned with the provisions of the African Union Commission (2019b) *Continental Teacher Qualification Framework* and other frameworks based on best practices?

The third area of focus is the working conditions of the teachers and school leaders. Questions include: What are some of the key issues as expressed by teachers and school leaders that affect their working conditions?; and how are policies and practices aligned with the *Recommendations on the Training, Working and Living Conditions of Teachers* (African Union Commission, 2017) and *Teacher Support and Motivation Framework” and other guides?* (UNESCO IICBA, 2017).

The paper relies on a blend of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The analysis is based on online surveys for teachers and school leaders, key informant interviews, and other data. Key informants interviews were conducted with heads/high-level representatives of key organizations³. In addition, online surveys of teachers and school leaders were designed for teachers and school leaders with over 40 questions on professional standards, teacher education (pre-service and in-service) and working conditions. Links to the online questionnaires were sent randomly by the TSC to 1,000 teachers and 1,000 school leaders, ensuring that individuals in all school districts would receive links in accordance with the proportion of their teachers and school leaders. A total of 453 teachers and 406 school leaders responded, suggesting high response rates. Finally, brainstorming sessions were held with the Management Team of TSC, the agency established by law to employ and regulate teachers. This enabled the research team to regularly review data collected and understand them in the context of the work of the TSC. At the end of the fieldwork, a validation meeting was held at the TSC presided by the TSC Chairman and the Chief Education Officer of the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education.

³ Interviews were conducted with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education; the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education; the Teaching Service Commission; the Tertiary Education Commission; the National Council for Technical Vocational and other Academic Awards; the Sierra Leone Teachers Union; the Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools; the National Conference of Head Teachers; the Department of Education, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone; UNICEF; and consultants of the Teaching Service Commission (TSC).

Professional standards and competencies

General considerations

The first objective of this paper is to assess the framework for teaching standards and competencies in Sierra Leone. The Education Act of 2004 was the first elaborate and unambiguous statement of what has today metamorphosed into the professional standards and competencies for teachers and school leaders. The provisions in Part VIII (35) (1-5) included the appointment, functions, and tenure of headteachers or principals. The Act set standards for school leadership. The Act in Part VIII (36)(1-2) further prescribed the certification and licensing of teachers as follows: No person shall be employed as a permanent full-time teacher in any school unless he holds a professional certificate or a license issued by the Ministry; and every certificate and license issued by the Ministry under this section shall be in such form as may be prescribed by the Minister by rules made under this Act, and shall be signed by the Minister or by an officer of the Ministry authorized by the Minister in that behalf. Section 38 of the Act criminalized any attempt to obtain teacher registration by fraud and provided that the Ministry of Education shall maintain a Register of Teachers. The Act in sections 38-40 dealt with procedures for registration, exemption, and annual appraisal of teachers. The rest of the sections (41-43) treated issues such as appointment, transfer, and dismissal of teachers; and the establishment of the Teaching Service Trade Group Negotiating Council. Part VIII of the Act concluded by stating that the performance of the functions indicated will subsist till the Teaching Service Commission was established.

Therefore, besides laying the foundation for standards in Sierra Leone, the Act also foretold the establishment of the Teaching Service Commission. The need for professional standards for teachers and school leaders was therefore introduced in 2004, though not in the current format of the professional standards and competencies. Teaching regulatory authorities take a variety of forms and names, but there are basically two models: those that are both employers and regulators and those that are regulators only. In Sierra Leone, TSC is both an employer and regulator. This makes it easier to effectively enforce regulatory functions, but it may also make it more difficult to be ambitious in setting regulatory targets since TSC serves as both the judge and the jury. In terms of ownership, some teaching regulatory authorities are parastatals funded primarily by the government while others are independent of the government and funded primarily by the teachers although the government may give some financial grants or assistance. As to the autonomy of their professional decisions, some teaching regulatory authorities have the Minister of education as the overriding authority even in professional matters whereas others enjoy full autonomy guaranteed by law.

The TSC has been designated by law to be the professional regulatory agency, combining the functions of an employer with those of a regulator. TSC operates as a parastatal of the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education. In terms of professional decisions, TSC has limited autonomy as its governing board is largely made up of the Heads of the government parastatals. In a nutshell, TSC is a hybrid, which is not atypical. In operationalizing their statutory mandates, regulatory authorities often seek to strike a balance between these dichotomies to arrive at what works for their respective contexts. Of note, TSC is a member of the Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities (AFTRA), the continental intergovernmental umbrella of Ministries of Education and national agencies regulating teaching in Africa. It is also a member of the International Forum of Teaching Regulatory Authorities (IFTRA), the global body of teaching regulatory authorities. Benefits of such memberships include exchange of best practices and the promotion of the international recognition of Sierra Leone teachers.

TSC was established by the Teaching Service Commission Act of 2011. According to section 9 of the Act, its function is “to consider all matters pertaining to teacher management and the improvement of the professional status and wellbeing of teachers.” TSC’s origins go back to recommendations of the National Education Policy and the Education Act of 2004. The Commission was inaugurated in 2016 with its Chairman and Commissioners duly appointed. Staff recruitment, the setting up of offices, and other activities started in 2017. At present, TSC is well established with a fully constituted Board of Commissioners, a Chairman/Chief Executive Officer of the Commission, a management team, and staff.

Sierra Leone developed its *Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders* in 2017, aligning it with the (draft) UNESCO and African Union frameworks later published in 2019. The country benefitted from active participation in the debates, research, and policy developments leading to the international frameworks before they got published. TSC appointed an expert from the Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities (AFTRA), who was leading the development of the African *Continental Teaching Framework of Standards and Competencies*, to also lead the development of its standards and competencies. This enabled the country to adapt the continental framework to its local context. TSC Standards have three domains: Professional knowledge, practice, and engagement. The standards also include a career path similar to the path in the African Union framework. The four-stages of the Sierra Leone career path are New Teacher, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, and Distinguished.

TSC standards also align with the African Union *Standards for School Leadership*. The following seven domains of school leadership standards are common to both the Continental and TSC standards: Developing self and others; Leading professional knowledge, practice and conduct; Managing resources of the school; Promoting school improvement, innovation and change; Generating resources internally and ensuring accountability; Supporting learners' enrolment and participation; Engaging and working with the community. Like teachers, school leaders (head teachers and principals) have a four-stage career path with the seven domains of the leadership standards having specific competencies for the four stages.

Before the introduction of standards, competencies, and career path, teachers and school leaders were categorized only according to a salary grading system. The system comprises of 11 levels based on qualification and years of service. The new framework of standards introduced a fundamental change in the way teachers and school leaders are rated and rewarded. For instance, besides qualification and years of experience the career stage introduced a minimum number of credits that must be earned from professional development. In addition, TSC introduced teacher licensing tests and other forms of professional evaluation to determine the professional quality and attainments of individuals to place them in the appropriate professional stage in the career path.

TSC has mainstreamed the provisions of the professional standards and competencies and the career path into key policy documents, including the *Comprehensive and Harmonized National Teacher Policies* (TSC, 2020b), *Teacher Licensing Examination Guidelines and Syllabus* (2021d), and the *Collective Agreement* signed by TSC and the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (Sierra Leone, 2022). The *Comprehensive and Harmonized National Teacher Policies* has clarified the concepts of teacher professionalism, registration, certification, and licensing. It stipulates the criteria for registration, categorization of the teachers in accordance with the career path and fees payable for each category for registration and licensing. It also states that the license is renewable every three years. The *Teacher Licensing Examination Guidelines and Syllabus* define the competency examination that teachers must take before they can be registered and licensed to practice. There are five modules for the examination: English Language Grid for all Categories of Teachers; Mathematics Grid for all Categories of Teachers; ICT Grid for the various Categories of Teachers; Teacher Education Curriculum Grid for all Categories of Teachers; and Professional Standards Grid for the various Categories of Teacher.

Since the development of professional standards in 2017, TSC has conducted orientation programs for teachers and school leaders across the country. The aim was to let teachers and school leaders know about the new regime of standards and competencies. The move towards the implementation of the new standards and competencies was confirmed by the inclusion of the career path in the *Collective Agreement* between TSC and the Sierra Leone Teacher Union (SLTU). The document states that the actual grading system for employment, promotion, and salary payment of teachers shall be the teacher career path (no other African country has implemented the career path to that level).

While the creation of TSC is a major step forward, budgetary provisions and staffing are inadequate. Lack of funds makes it a necessity to rely heavily on donor agencies, whose support may be limited and ad-hoc. TSC requires increased funding from government and continued support from critical stakeholders including donor agencies and development partners. TSC also has a shortage of staff at Headquarters, and even more so in its 16 District Offices (each office has only two staff – a District Director and an Assistant). Therefore, performing all regulatory mandates is largely an impossible task. Funding should be provided to increase operational staff at both Headquarters and district offices. Ideally district offices should be able to have four staff. Finally, the professional regulatory operations of TSC are still far from being fully digitized which is required to ensure that no teacher, and no part of the country is left behind. For instance, teacher licensing examination needs to be Computer Based Testing (CBT) but neither the infrastructure nor funds to do this are available. Teacher registration and licensing also needs to be digitalized. Regulating a large body of professionals and having to perform a multiplicity of operations cannot succeed manually. TSC and funding agencies should work towards building adequate ICT infrastructure and build the capacity of staff and teachers to take the full benefit of digital operations.

Findings from the online surveys

The online surveys implemented for this paper suggest a high level of awareness and knowledge of professional standards and competencies among teachers and school leaders. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, most teachers and school leaders have heard about the standards, have read them, believe that the standards have been spelled out, and think that they can improve teacher performance. Figure 3 provides the views of teachers and school leaders on what they consider to be the most important source of standards in the country. An overwhelming majority of both teachers (329) and leaders (341) agree that the most important source is a nationally approved Professional Teaching Standards and Competencies, suggesting substantial progress towards implementation of the standards.

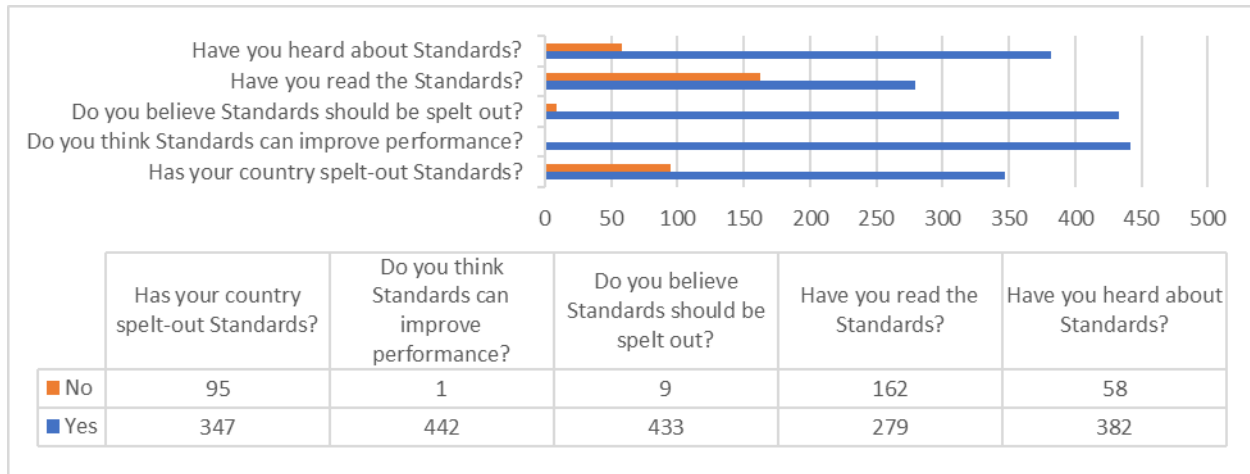


Fig. 1 Teachers' awareness about teaching standards

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

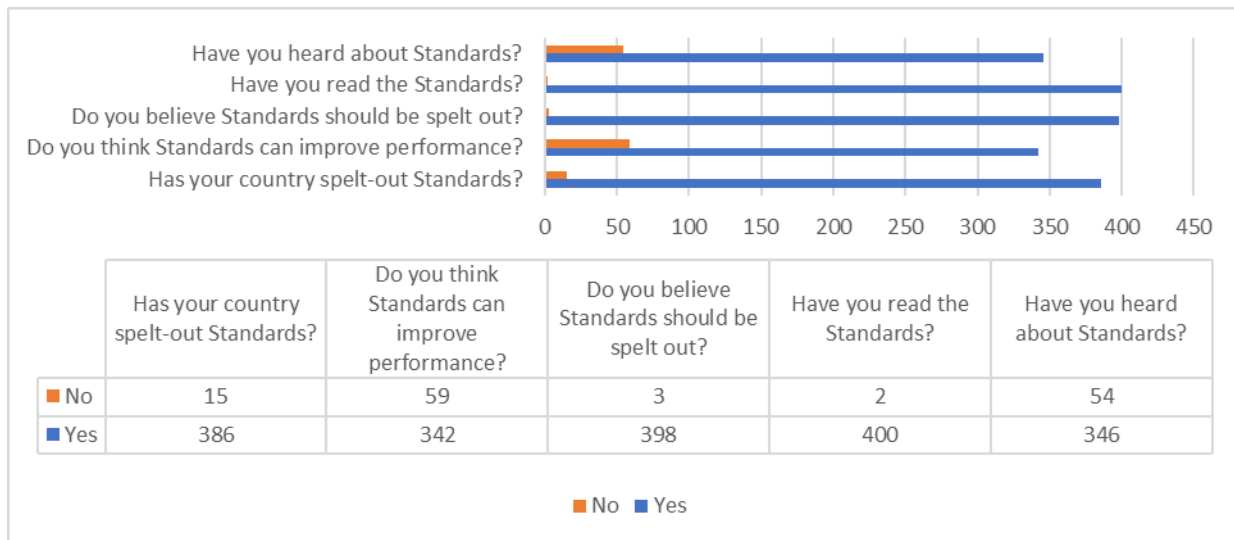


Fig. 2 School leaders' awareness about school leadership standards

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

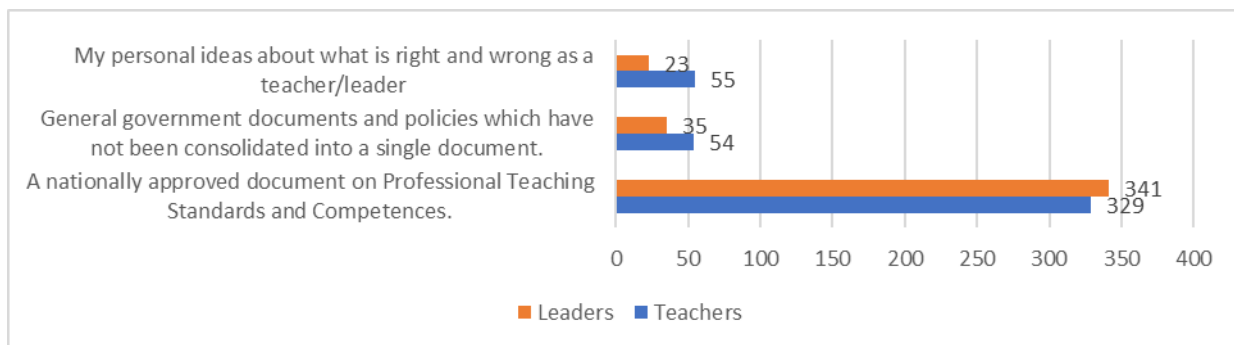


Fig. 3 Perceptions on the most important source of teaching and leadership standards

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

There is broad agreement that teaching or leading a school is a profession, but few teachers and school leaders have taken any professional test or examination before being appointed. Table 1 provides responses to questions on registration and licensing, competency tests, and induction. Most teachers and school leaders are registered as such. About two thirds of teachers and school leaders benefited from an induction before starting their job as a teacher or school leader. However, for the other two questions – whether individuals hold a teaching or leadership license like other professionals, and whether they took any professional test or examination before being appointed as teacher or school leader, substantial progress must still be achieved as only a small minority of respondents responded in the affirmative.

Table 1 Perceptions regarding professional registration and licensing

| Questions | Teachers | | | Leaders | | |
|--|----------|-----|-------|---------|-----|-------|
| | Yes | No | Total | Yes | No | Total |
| Currently, are you professionally registered as a teacher or leader by any authority in your country? | 303 | 138 | 441 | 225 | 174 | 399 |
| Currently, do you hold a teaching or leadership license like other professionals you know? | 39 | 400 | 439 | 27 | 372 | 399 |
| Did you take any professional test or examination before being appointed a teacher or leader? | 198 | 244 | 442 | 162 | 238 | 400 |
| Before starting your job as a teacher or leader, did you receive a professional induction (an orientation exercise)? | 290 | 152 | 442 | 278 | 123 | 401 |
| Overall, do you think teaching or school leadership is a profession? | 432 | 7 | 439 | 398 | 3 | 401 |

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

Teacher education

The second objective of this paper is to assess teacher education in Sierra Leone. Teacher education, both pre-service and in-service, is the foundation of teacher quality. TSC “*recognizes teacher development as a continuum starting with initial teacher education through processes of induction and mentoring to ongoing professional development [PD]*” (TSC, 2020). The *National Policy on Teacher Development and Performance* asserts that teacher PD shall consist of three key processes, namely: (1) An initial teacher education and training process in tertiary education institutions, leading to the acquisition of formal qualifications that are recognized by the TSC as a basis for recruitment of prospective candidates into the teaching force; (2) Induction training processes provided during a probation period. First induction shall be immediately after graduation from a teacher education institution, and a second induction shall be within the initial 6-month period of employment; and (3) Processes of continuous and career-long professional development provided through formal and informal opportunities (TSC, 2020).

Pre-service training

Teacher education matters for teaching standards and competencies – they are like two sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other, and their relationship is direct and mutual. Accordingly, this section reports the situation of teacher education in the country, considering first pre-service education, then continuous PD, and finally the Education Sector Plan 2022-2026. Perspectives from teachers and school leaders on those issues as they emerge from the online surveys are also discussed. Yet at the onset, it is important to note that many teachers can be considered as untrained and qualified (UUs). This may affect a third of teachers based on data from the National School Census (MoBSSE, 2021). TSC has identified 4,500 teachers on Government payroll that may need to be let go, but it also recognizes the difficulty of employing additional qualified teachers (TSC, 2021). The number of additional teachers approved for employment fall short of the needed number. Both deficiencies in pre-service teacher education and acute shortages of qualified teachers are major challenges in the country.

Pre-service education is the first course of preparation for teachers. Factors affecting the quality of pre-service education are complex (e.g., Chalmers, 2008; Sanyal 2013; Nwokeocha, 2018). For example, Chalmers (2008) lists five dimensions – assessment, engagement and learning community, diversity of teachers and students, and institutional climate, and systems that may affect the quality of the training received. He also pays attention to the quality of relationships at various levels such as an institution, its faculty, departments and programs, and teachers or individuals. Training in higher education involves inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes. Similarly, Sanyal (2013) notes similarly that the quality of training may be affected by a learner’s characteristics as well as by various inputs, contexts, and outcomes.

Quality assurance is indispensable in pre-service teacher training. A useful framework for quality assurance was designed by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council & Commonwealth of Learning (2007a, 2017b, 2017c). This framework provides five key dimensions, 25 aspects of quality, and 75 indicators to benchmark a teacher training program. The key dimensions are curriculum design and planning, curriculum transaction and evaluation, research development and extension, infrastructure and learning resources, and student support and progression. In a similar vein, African Union and European Commission (2018a) developed the *African Quality Rating Mechanism* (AQRM) and *African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*

(ASG-QA). Also relevant is the Harmonization of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) Initiative (African Union and European Commission, 2018b). The idea is to assess higher education programs against the standards and criteria of the AQRM and ASG-QA. The criteria of the AQRM are “Governance and Management; Infrastructure; Finances; Teaching and Learning; Research, Publication and Innovation; and Societal Engagement.” As to the ASG-QA, it provides criteria for internal and external quality assurance.

Teachers with only a Teacher’s Certificate outnumber all other teachers combined. The various levels of qualifications recognized in the country range from the Teachers’ Certificate to a master’s or PhD. Entry requirements into pre-service education programs remain relatively low. For instance, entry into the Teachers Certificate Program is provided for those who have “Attempted WASSCE”; have two credits in WASSCE; or passed the entrance examination. Most teachers only have a Teacher’s Certificate, which falls short of the minimum quality required to teach in primary education. In addition, there are other numerous challenges facing the teacher training institutions in terms of shortage of teaching staff, infrastructure, and teaching and learning resources.

Curricula for pre-service training need to be reviewed at all levels. As for the Teachers’ Certificate, curricula have not been reviewed for over ten years and are not aligned to the Basic Education Curricular Framework (MoBSSE, 2020). There is no national curriculum framework or benchmark for the Teachers’ Certificate, Higher Teachers’ Certificate (Primary) and Higher Teachers’ Certificate (Secondary). For university-based degree programs, there is also no national curriculum framework. Each university develops its programs and gets approval from the Tertiary Education Commission, which makes it difficult to programs across universities. Also critical is the fact that none of the education programs have received periodic external quality assurance visits in line with international best practices and the prescriptions of the African Continental Teacher Qualification Framework (African Union Commission, 2019b). Neither the NCTVA nor the TEC have sent accreditation panels to their respective institutions to accredit them in line with international best practices. None of the TC, HTC, and degree education programs is accredited.

A larger number of institutions are providing pre-service training since the University Act of 2021. The Freetown Teachers College was upgraded to a polytechnic in 2021. The Universities Act of 2021 established more public universities, such as the Milton Margai Technical University, the Eastern Technical University, and Kono University of Science and Technology. It also affirmed existing ones such as the University of Sierra Leone, Njala University, and Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science. Therefore, the number of institutions offering pre-service teacher education is on the increase, making it imperative for regulators to develop national curricular frameworks and send panel of experts to verify the quality of training, to either grant or deny accreditation to programs. The regulators have not published manuals for the accreditation of programs. However, from internal manuscripts of the Tertiary Education Commission, the following forms is used for evaluating and monitoring the programs of the universities: (1) Academic content; (2) Staffing; (3) Physical facilities; (4) Student admission; and (5) Examinations. Similarly, the Act of 2001 gave the NCTVA mandates for the following in respect of the sub-degree programs: (1) Curriculum Development; (2) Accreditation and Validation; (3) Assessment of students; (4) Issuance of Qualifications; and (5) Establishment of the National Occupational Standards (NCTVA, 2004).

The Government is aware of the challenges in pre-service teacher education. The challenges were discussed in the latest Education Sector Analysis (Sierra Leone, 2020). The report made references to what it termed the weak regulatory framework for higher education and TVET institutions in Sierra Leone. It noted that the higher education sector previously outperformed its peers in West Africa, yet due to the prolonged years of the war and other crises (including health pandemics), the country currently has “*a weakened learning environment, and inadequate learning materials, as well as accessibility and affordability issues.*” The report added that the subsector also lacks the capacity to “*fully absorb the potential increase in students as a result of the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) program.*” Another issue mentioned was the shortage of qualified TVET teachers.

The Education Sector Analysis articulated measures to raise the quality of pre-service teacher education, including: (1) Review of the Universities Act 2005, which has been completed and passed into law in 2021; (2) Inclusion of lecturers’ salaries in the government payroll; (3) Extensive construction and refurbishment of campuses and administrative buildings; (4) Scholarships for students and lecturers at undergraduate and postgraduate levels; (5) Upskilling of current lecturers with the assistance of retired professors from abroad; (6) Updated grant-in-aid policy providing women with automatic scholarships when applying to STEAM courses as well as, for the first time, to GTIs in order to increase enrolment of women in TVET courses; (7) Modification of higher education institutions’ curricula to meet labor market demands and ground students in the local realities so that the skills acquired are directly relevant for addressing local challenges and opportunities; and (8) Rolling out of the student loan scheme to increase access to education and raise the level of participation among students from all levels of learning.

Findings from the online surveys

Most teachers and school leaders believe that their training was adequate, but this may reflect self-confidence rather than high quality in the training received. Figure 4 shows that 83 teachers and 48 school leaders spent just one year in their teacher training institution. However, these may be graduate teachers with Post Graduate Diploma in Education. Another 57 teachers and 45 school leaders spent two years, but the majority (201 teachers and 129 school leaders) spent three years. This information corroborates data suggesting that most teachers, being holders of Teachers' Certificate and Higher Teachers' Certificate, spent three years in the teacher training institutions. Regarding the adequacy of the training received, as shown in Figure 5, most teachers and school leaders opined that their training was adequate. This self-rating, however, may indicate self-confidence rather than the reality of some of the deficiencies discussed earlier about which respondents may have little or no knowledge.

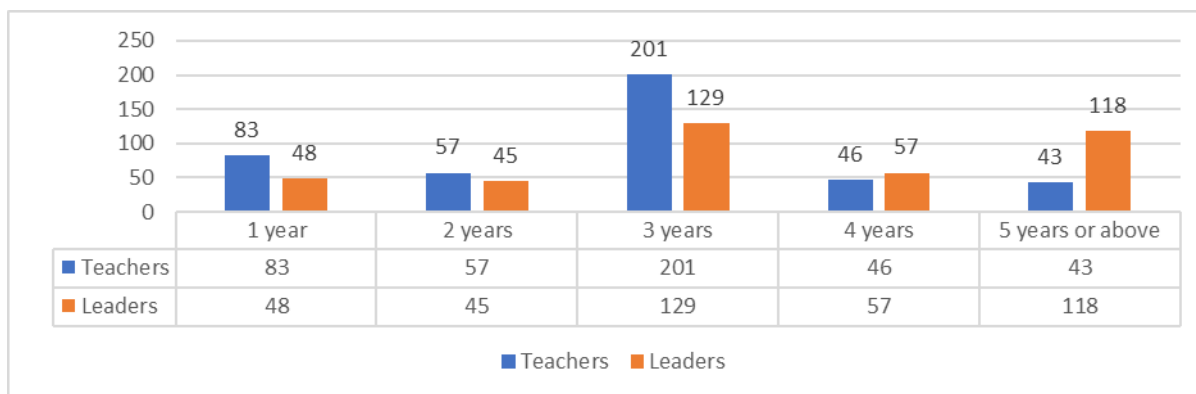


Fig. 4 Duration of pre-service education

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

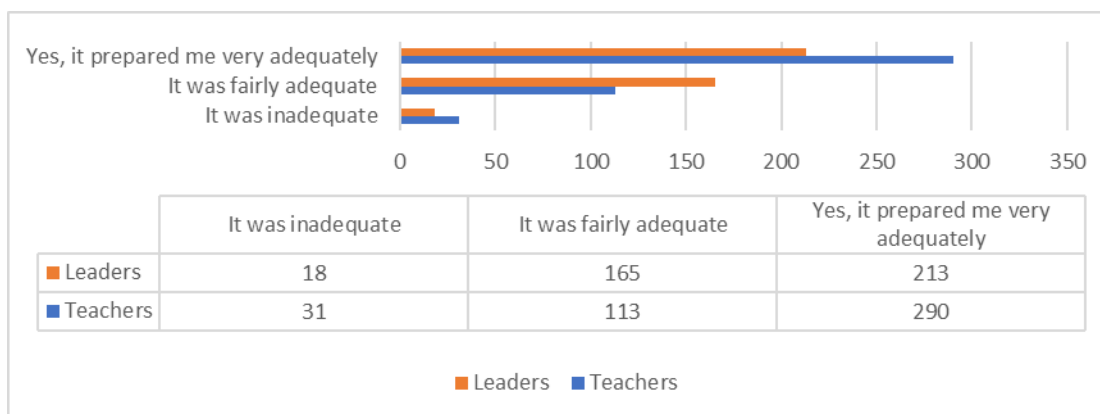


Fig. 5 Perception of the adequacy of pre-service education

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

At the same time, many teachers and school leaders declare having faced challenges since becoming a teacher or school leader. Table 2 presents perceptions of these challenges. Only 113 (27 percent) of teachers indicated that they did not have any of the challenges listed for them. Some 108 teachers (26 percent) opined that the pre-service teacher education did not expose them enough to the practical skills they needed to plan and deliver lessons and other educational programs. For school leaders, while 82 (21 percent) stated they had none of the challenges listed, most also encountered challenges, with a substantial minority stating they had all the three challenges listed in the questionnaire. Half opined that pre-service teacher training did not expose them enough to professional knowledge (theories, principles, leadership styles, technology, financial management, change and innovation, etc.) needed for school leadership. Overall, the responses suggest a need for improving pre-service education.

Table 2 Key challenges faced teachers and leaders since becoming teachers or leaders

| Options | Teachers | | School Leaders | |
|--|----------|---|----------------|--------|
| | Yes | Option | Yes | Option |
| The pre-service teacher training did not expose me enough to the content of the subject that I teach. | 51 | The pre-service teacher training did not expose me enough to the professional knowledge (theories, principles, leadership styles, technology, financial management, change and innovation, etc.) for school leadership. | 194 | |
| The pre-service teacher training did not expose me enough to the practical skills that I need to plan and deliver my lessons and other educational programs. | 108 | The pre-service teacher training did not expose me enough to the professional skills (planning and implementation of school programs, etc.) for school leadership. | 50 | |
| The pre-service teacher training did not expose me enough to the ethics and expected conduct which I need to know about as a teacher. | 65 | The pre-service teacher training did not expose me enough to the ethics and conduct which I need to know about as a head teacher or principal. | 18 | |
| I have all the three challenges listed above. | 77 | I have all the three challenges above. | 54 | |
| I do not have any of the three challenges listed above. | 113 | I do not have any of the three challenges listed above. | 82 | |
| Total | 414 | Total | 398 | |

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

In Service continuous professional development (CPD)

CPD is the second major component of teacher education. CPD consists of various forms of training, education, and development spanning the career of a teacher or school leader. Sometimes these are broken down into further studies to earn higher or professional certificates, diplomas, and degrees; induction and mentoring; capacity building workshops, seminars, and conferences; and self-development that comes through individualized efforts and search for knowledge. No matter how excellent the quality of pre-service education is, CPD is indispensable for the teacher and school leader to keep abreast of required teaching standards and competencies. Accordingly, this section reviews the landscape of CPD in Sierra Leone and the efforts and challenges faced by TSC to coordinate CPD.

While TSC is charged with overseeing CPD, the task remains challenging. TSC is explicitly the authority on matters of teacher professional development in Sierra Leone following a 2019 decision by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to transfer this responsibility and related assets to the Agency. TSC should not only have a CPD framework that binds all service providers together, but it should also serve as the hub or clearing house for funds, programs, administration, and use of CPD for the benefit of teachers and school leaders. Yet previous studies such as the 2018 Situation Analysis of the teaching profession have found that challenges persist. Expert opinions from key informants for this paper suggest that this is still the case. CPD can add significantly to the knowledge, orientation, and skills of teachers, which in turn contributed to better learning outcomes. But it remains mostly ad-hoc if not chaotic, reaching few teachers and school districts on a limited number of topics. There is no comprehensive, systematized approach that ensures that over time, all teachers would receive a specific set of CPD. Teachers and school leaders lack equal access to quality CPD, with most trainings funded by development partners, taking place as pilots in school districts chosen by them, and focusing on matters of their interest. It is also doubtful that CPD as implemented deals with fundamental requirements of the professional standards and competencies in any comprehensive manner. As will be discussed below, responses to the online questionnaires by teachers and school leaders attest that many are left out.

CPD should be mostly school based. The focus on school based CPD was already noted in the 2018 situation analysis of the teaching profession. This requires coming up with a new CPD framework that could bring the concepts of Communities of Practice (CoPs) and learning clusters or circles to the front-burner. This might not totally replace CPD that takes place outside the school such as regional or national events. But CPD credits should be earned when teachers learn and improve their daily practices through action research, induction, mentoring, peer learning, and active participation in CoPs and learning clusters. This would drastically cut down the expenditure on CPD while adding more value.

CPD still needs to be brought effectively under the regulation and coordination of the TSC. This requires a national CPD framework with CPD portfolios and a credit-based system, with assurance that teachers do not lose their CPD credits and that all credits are recorded and accumulated. These credits then will count during the evaluation and promotion of teachers and school leaders. Currently, TSC has a *National Policy on Teacher*

Development & Performance (TSC, 2020) that needs to be further developed to deal with these issues. TSC has been working on a comprehensive CPD framework since 2020 and has concluded plans for a High Level CPD Policy Consultation. These efforts, if completed will create a new National CPD Framework which can transform the CPD landscape in the country. The aim is to create a National Strategic Plan for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Guidelines for INSET of Teachers and School Leaders for the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) in Sierra Leone (Sessay, 2020).

CPD that teachers could invest in by themselves is negatively affected by a lack of rewards and the poor economic situation of not just many teachers, but workers more generally. Teachers may not be motivated to invest in their own CPD because the system has not convincingly demonstrated the benefits of such investments. Promotions have been without recourse to credits earned from CPD. But once the link between CPD and the career path is demonstrated, teachers may exploit self-development options available to them. CPD for teachers should elevate the value of self-development by ensuring that teachers clearly see the value of their efforts within the context of their career advancement.

Information from the Sierra Leone Teachers Union suggests that the Union has invested in the professional development of its members. This includes a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Canadian Federation of Teachers to partner in training teachers. The Union has worked with the Canadian Teachers' Federation and other non-governmental organizations to provide training, but only a portion of teachers can benefit from this source. Also, as indicated by the Union, it has not been able to extend its trainings to school leaders. This group therefore has not received much training for the school leadership job, which they were not especially prepared for before their appointment as school leaders.

The Government side of CPD is led by TSC with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education with funding from development partners such as the World Bank, UNICEF, the European Union, and others. Various trainings have been implemented, including on school leadership, literacy and numeracy skills, and other competencies. Yet the data from TSC suggest that a total of 24,227 school leaders and teachers were trained between 2018 and 2021. This means that most teachers and school leaders did not benefit from such training, especially as some teachers may have benefitted from more than one training. TSC is considering a new training program for school leaders. The African Continental Framework of Standards and Competencies advocates for a mandatory leadership training program. This should be a requirement for all teachers aspiring to be appointed as school leaders. TSC has taken steps to develop and implement such the program. The working document for the program outlines five core competencies for effective school leadership: (i) Demonstrating a commitment to improving learning outcomes and promoting inclusion; (ii) Promoting a culture of continuous self-sustaining school improvement; (iii) Modelling and guiding leadership for learning and for the inclusion of all students; (iv) Using evidence to plan, implement, and review improvements to inclusion and learning; and (v) Working collaboratively with all stakeholders to drive school and system improvement. Implementation would involve formal training, in-school support, and professional learning communities.

Findings from the online surveys

Teachers and school leaders responded to questions on the adequacy of CPD in the online surveys. Perhaps surprisingly, as shown in Figure 6, many teachers and school leaders described it as adequate (as for pre-service training, this does not however imply that CPD is indeed adequate). Table 3 shows the number of times teachers and school leaders attended a training, workshop, or conference in the last three years and who sponsored the event. Many teachers attended at least one training per sponsor, which is encouraging although not high number, with the union and the teachers themselves being the training sponsors more than the government. Overall, while many teachers and leaders may feel that CPD is adequate, by international best practice it is likely not.

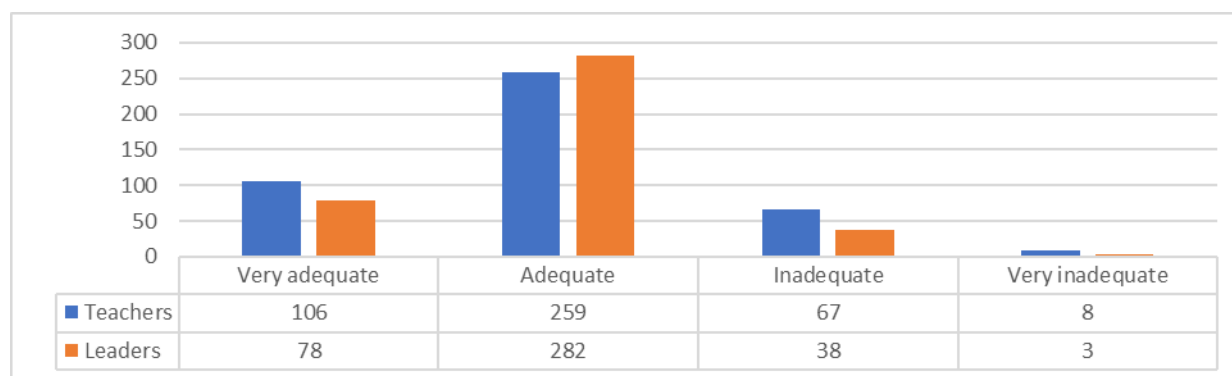


Fig. 6 Adequacy of CPD received since becoming a teacher or leader

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

Table 3 Training/Workshop/Conference attended in last 3 years by type of sponsor

| Number of events | Teachers | | | Leaders | | |
|------------------|------------|-------|------|------------|-------|------|
| | Government | Union | Self | Government | Union | Self |
| Once | 133 | 230 | 207 | 104 | 149 | 208 |
| 2 times | 102 | 65 | 65 | 39 | 136 | 58 |
| 3 times | 80 | 31 | 45 | 56 | 33 | 52 |
| 4 times | 34 | 15 | 19 | 63 | 22 | 24 |
| 5 times + | 79 | 28 | 25 | 136 | 42 | 46 |
| Total | 428 | 369 | 361 | 398 | 382 | 388 |

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

While CPD should count towards promotion, the perception of teachers and school leaders is that the assessment of their work by their supervisor matters even more. On the criteria for appointment and promotion (Table 4), a majority of both teachers (282 or 65%) and leaders (308 or 77%) opined that the amount of CPD was a criterion for promotion besides their years of experience. However, as shown in Figure 7, most teachers and slightly more than half of leaders stated that supervisor's comments on their evaluation form counts more for promotion than the amount of CPD earned.

Table 4 Perceived criteria for appointment/promotion of teachers/leaders besides year of service

| Teachers | | Leaders | |
|--|-----|--|-----|
| Options | Yes | Option | Yes |
| Credits/amount of PD done | 282 | Credits/amount of PD done | 308 |
| Civil service rules | 60 | Civil service rules | 56 |
| Connection with those in authority | 29 | Result of examination for head teachers/principals | 26 |
| Result of promotion examination | 48 | Preference to indigenes of Province/District | 9 |
| Preference to indigenes of Province/District | 15 | --- | -- |
| Total | 434 | Total | 399 |

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

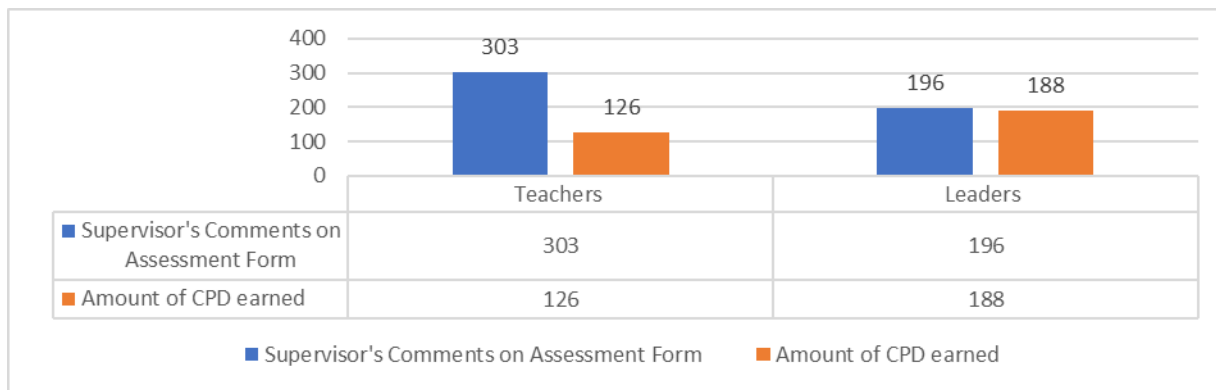


Fig. 7 What Counts most in performance evaluation as carried out?

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

The ability to access and use the internet is important for some forms of CPD, with most teachers and school leaders rating that ability as good or excellent, yet most do not own a computer. As shown in Figure 8, most teachers and leaders rate their capacity to access and use the internet as good or excellent, with only a small minority rating that capacity as poor or very poor. Table 5 also shows that while most teachers and leaders have heard about professional development portfolios and own a smart phone, a majority do not own a laptop, nor do they have access to an official computer, laptop, or tablet. In practice, most teachers may not take full advantage of digital resources for teaching and learning even though they have significant knowledge and skills in the use of computers and the internet.

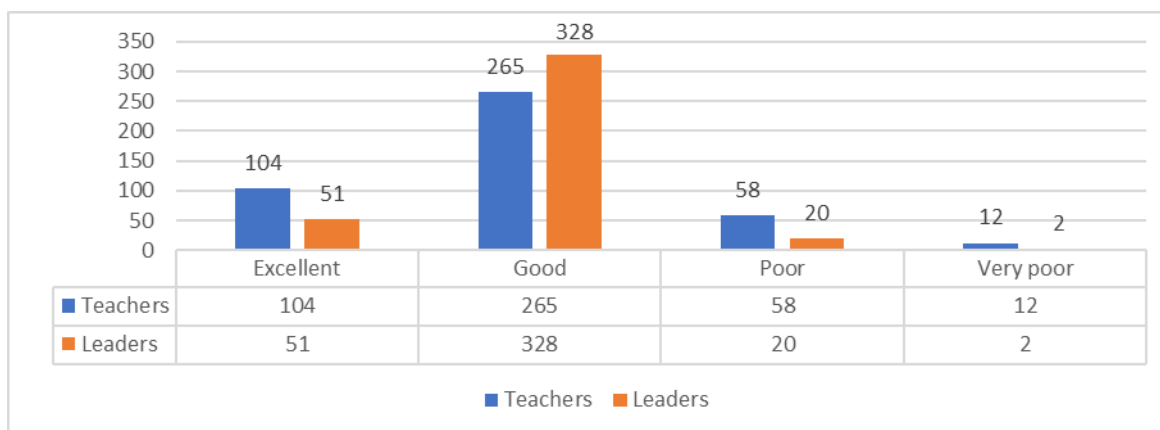


Fig. 8 ability/knowledge/skill in the use of internet and online resources

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

Table 5 Knowledge of CPD portfolio, ownership of computer/laptop/handset, and internet access

| | Teachers | | | School leaders | | |
|--|----------|-----|-------|----------------|-----|-------|
| | Yes | No | Total | Yes | No | Total |
| Have you ever heard the term "professional development portfolio"? | 308 | 122 | 430 | 363 | 31 | 394 |
| Do you have access to an official computer, laptop or tablet? | 87 | 349 | 436 | 102 | 295 | 297 |
| Do you have access to official internet connection/data? | 88 | 352 | 440 | 85 | 313 | 398 |
| Do you own a personal computer, laptop or tablet? | 120 | 318 | 438 | 150 | 251 | 401 |
| Do you own a smart phone? | 348 | 89 | 437 | 356 | 44 | 400 |

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

Lack of good internet connectivity in some areas may also affect the ability of teachers and school leaders to use digital resources. Information from the online surveys is provided in Table 6 on connectivity (note that the data are provided by respondents who managed to go online to answer the survey, hence the situation for some teachers and school leaders may be worse). Access to mobile phone networks is typically good, but access to reliable internet connections is weaker, and many schools do not have electricity. This may be part of the explanation why teachers and school leaders find personal computers/laptops/tablets more useful than official ones that may need to be used only in schools.

In terms of priorities for CPD, training in the use of educational technologies and teaching and learning online, and training for lesson plans and notes, lesson delivery, and learning assessment come first. Table 7 presents the views of teachers and leaders regarding CPD opportunities they need most. For teachers, training for lesson plans and notes, lesson delivery, and learning assessment comes first. For teachers, training in the use of educational technologies and teaching and learning online is mentioned more often. But both types of training would be appreciated by many teachers and school leaders. Capacity building to deepen knowledge in a teaching subject/area of specialization and capacity building in the instructional language (English) and in basic numeracy are mentioned less often.

Table 6 Online connectivity for teachers and school leaders

| Questions & Responses | Teachers | Leaders |
|---|----------|---------|
| Quality of mobile phone network in your location | | |
| Good | 322 | 268 |
| Poor | 110 | 127 |
| Non-existent | 6 | 5 |
| Total | 438 | 400 |
| Quality of internet connection in your location | | |
| Good | 293 | 250 |
| Poor | 127 | 149 |
| Non-Existent | 12 | 3 |
| Total | 432 | 402 |
| Most beneficial to access online teaching content/preparing lessons | | |
| Official computer/laptop/tablet | 87 | 107 |
| Personal computer/laptop/tablet. | 286 | 277 |
| Total | 373 | 384 |
| Electricity supply (public power supply or generator) in the school | | |
| Yes | N/A | 112 |
| No | N/A | 289 |
| Total | N/A | 401 |

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

Table 7 Which professional development program do you need the most at the moment?

| Options | Teachers | | Leaders | |
|--|----------|--|---------|--------|
| | Yes | Option | Yes | Option |
| Capacity building in the use of educational technologies, & online teaching and learning. | 175 | Capacity building in the use of educational technologies, & teaching and learning online | 239 | |
| Capacity building in teaching methodology – lesson plan and notes, lesson delivery, & learning assessment. | 223 | Capacity building in teaching methodology – lesson plan and notes, lesson delivery, & learning assessment. | 139 | |
| Capacity building to deepen knowledge in my teaching subject/area of specialisation. | 25 | Capacity building to deepen knowledge in my teaching subject/area of specialisation. | 15 | |
| Capacity building in the instructional language (English) & basic numeracy. | 14 | Capacity building in the instructional language (English) & basic numeracy. | 7 | |
| Total | 437 | Total | 400 | |

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

Teachers and school leaders believe that the availability of supplies of teaching materials and human resources is too low. Teachers and school leaders also have clear priorities for the CPD they need. Perceptions regarding the availability of supplies and human resources are shown in Figure 9 where a clear majority of teachers and especially school leaders describe supplies and human resources as insufficient. An additional question asked to school leaders is about support they may need – it suggests that training on leading professional knowledge, practice and conduct in the school is a priority. Figure 10 presents areas of CPD needed by leaders, based on the domains of the School Leadership Standards in the African Continental Framework of Standards and Competencies for the Teaching Profession. In descending order, the priorities are: (i) Leading professional knowledge, practice and conduct in the school; (ii) Generation of financial resources for the school; (iii) Promotion of school improvement, innovation and change; (iv) Theories, principles and practices of management; (v) Supporting learners' enrolment

and participation in school; and finally (vii) Engaging and working with the community. The demand seems on improving teaching in schools through professional knowledge and better practices.

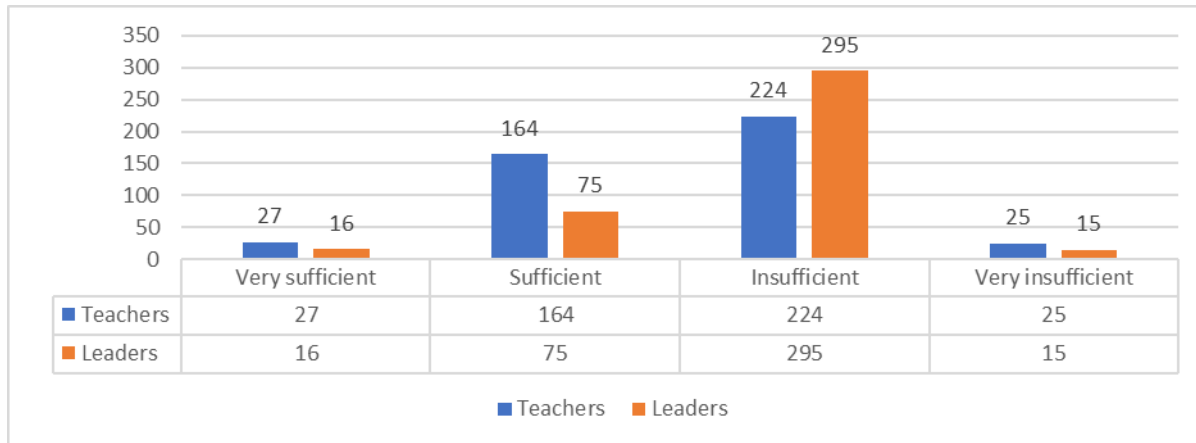


Fig. 9 Ratings for the supply of teaching and human resources in the school

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

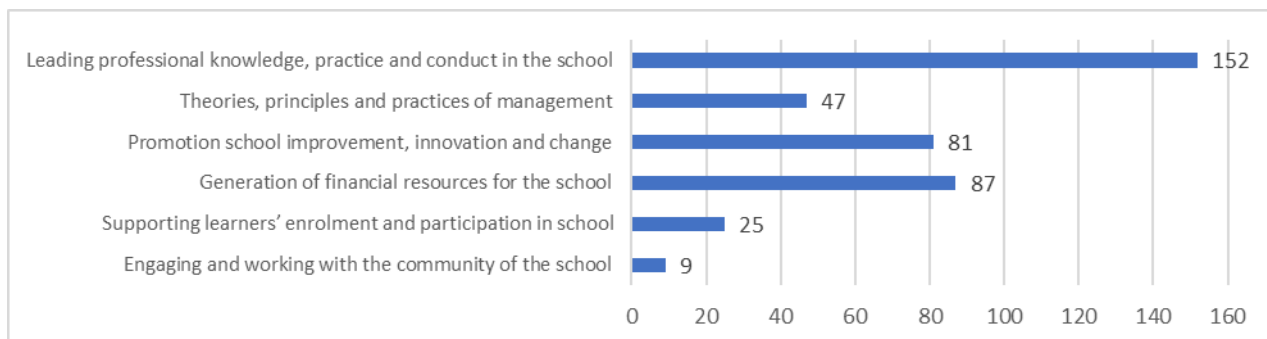


Fig. 10 Areas of CPD needed by school leaders

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

Issues related to pre-service and in-service training are discussed in the Education Sector Plan. The theme of the plan jointly produced by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (2022) is "Transforming Learning for All." The plan identifies learning deficits at the foundational level and recognizes the need for improvements in the quality of graduates from tertiary education who teach at that level. It also notes that the "Free Quality School Education" (FQSE) introduced in 2018 was a watershed event that led to an unprecedented increase in enrolment. That increase in demand must be matched, the plan argues, with a tangible improvement in the quality of teaching and learning to prevent public disillusionment about the benefits of education. The Plan focuses on nine priority objectives as follows: (i) Strengthen the instructional core; (ii) Recruit, retain, and support excellent educators; (iii) Reduce gender and other disparities in educational access, experience, and outcomes for the most marginalized; (iv) Provide safe, healthy, and conducive learning environments for all; (v) Strengthen governance, management, and accountability for performance; (vi) Enhance emergency prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery; (vii) Eliminate corruption in education; (viii) Strengthen partnerships in support of learning and work readiness; and finally (ix) Increase the use of data and technology to support learning and education service delivery.

The Plan sketches out initiatives to recruit and retain more teachers. The plan sets targets for the Pupil-Qualified Teacher Ratio (PQTR) and the number of teachers that may need to be recruited, with incentives to be provided to achieve these targets. Allowances will be paid to teachers in rural areas, stipends will be paid to literacy facilitators in Non-Formal Education Centers, the criteria for promoting TVET personnel will be reviewed, and outreach will target students in Senior Secondary Schools and Universities to encourage more candidates to take up teaching as a profession. From 2022 to 2026, the Plan calls for recruiting 1,667 pre-primary, 10,688 primary, and 7,143 secondary school teachers, yielding a target of 17,498 new teachers or half the number of teachers currently on the government payroll.

Measures are included in the Plan to strengthen the quality of pre- and in-service teacher education. For pre-service training, the measures include (i) Providing supervised teaching practice opportunities for teacher trainees; (ii) Providing scholarships to teacher trainees in STEAM, SNE, and languages with a focus on gender

balance; (iii) Designing training programs for teachers who are teaching but unqualified and untrained but already on the payroll; (iv) Training/upgrading unqualified teachers and certifying them based on TSC guidelines; (v) Upgrading classrooms, laboratories, libraries, resource centers, and technical workshops facilities in Teacher Training Institutions; and (vi) Developing a teacher performance assessment strategy and toolkit. Measures will also be taken to improve the quality of CPD, including by (i) Developing a career pathway for pre-primary teachers based on education, experience, and assessment; (ii) Providing regular in-service CPD for teachers and educators in gender-responsive pedagogy and subject content for curriculum delivery, including training on inclusive education; (iii) Training teachers and other educators on emerging issues such as climate change, comprehensive sexuality education, and HIV; (iv) Developing a comprehensive plan for staff capacity building; and (vi) Training staff based on the capacity development plan, including capacity development on gender issues.

Finally, it is also noteworthy that the Plan aims to increase the use of data and technology to support improvements in learning and education management. One aim is to provide a tablet to all government and government-assisted primary and secondary schools, with additional tablets provided for data collection and reporting to the Education Information Management System (EMIS). Other measures include (i) Developing interactive radio program focused on school readiness; (ii) Connecting primary and secondary schools to a power source (solar power, where necessary); (iii) Providing e-management/e-learning systems to TVET Institutions; (iv) Strengthening the capacity of TVET management and regulatory bodies for effective supervision and monitoring of digital learning and automated management systems; (v) Providing Bluetooth radio for tutorial at the CLCs; (vi) Equipping TVET institutions with computers; (vii) Procuring and install fast and reliable internet access in all TTIs and connecting them to a stable internet.

Working conditions

Teacher motivation is key to teacher performance. The literature suggests – not surprisingly, that teacher motivation matters for teacher effort, which in turn can lead to gains in learning for students. As noted in UNESCO IICBA (2017), there are multiple layers and approaches to understanding of what drives teacher motivation, but it clearly has an impact on teachers' behaviors and their teaching practice. As teachers have varying degrees of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, quick generalizations are risky, but a variety of factors affect motivation. This includes teacher salaries, but also their broader working conditions, and whether they believe that they have a realistic and rewarding career path ahead of them.

As working conditions matter for teacher motivation and the learning environment of students, a key responsibility of TSC is to ensure good working conditions for teachers and school leaders. In particular, working conditions can have impact on whether the standards and competencies of teachers and school leaders can be achieved. As TSC has taken over the employment of teachers, it has a mandate in this area. Yet as schools are owned by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, the role of TSC is also limited, coveting mostly salaries and other personnel issues while the supply of physical facilities and amenities, as well as that of teaching and learning resources, remain the responsibility of the Ministry. In addition, the TSC Act did not expressly empower TSC to manage appointments, transfers, disciplinary measures, and other matters concerning head teachers and principals. Therefore, the Ministry still plays these roles, even if it has mandated TSC to perform some of these functions on its behalf.

Collective agreement

The influence of TSC on working conditions for teachers will depend in part on the collective agreement it reached with the Sierra Leone Teachers Union. The Agreement (Sierra Leone, 2022) spells out the terms and conditions of teachers' employment in a comprehensive manner and has been gazetted by the government of Sierra Leone. This section discusses key features of this Agreement as well as briefly the question of teacher awards and teachers and school leaders' perceptions about their working conditions. The Collective Agreement between TSC and the Teacher Union has a duration of three years and marks the implementation of the Professional Standards and Competencies for Teachers and School Leaders. The Agreement uses the teacher career path for the salary structure – possibly making Sierra Leone the first country in Africa that structured the salary of its teaching force in accordance with the career path introduced by the African Union Commission (2019a) Framework of Standards and Competencies. Wages and salaries for teachers are based on the four stages of the career path (New, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, and Distinguished Teacher). It goes further to list qualifications that shall be classified in line with the career path. The basic structure of the career path is presented in Table 8.

Table 8 Criteria for appointment along the teacher career path

| New Teacher | Proficient Teacher | Highly Accomplished Teacher | Distinguished Teacher |
|---|--|--|--|
| 0-5 years of teaching experience; All the teaching qualifications listed above. | 5 years as New Teacher; 50 credits of PD; From Higher Teachers Certificate upwards; Senior Teacher, Head of Department, Deputy Head Teacher, and Head Teacher. | 5 years as Proficient Teacher; 50 credits of PD; First degree upwards; Senior Teacher, Head of Department, Deputy Head Teacher, Head Teacher, Vice Principal, and Principal. | 5 years as Accomplished Teacher; 50 credits of PD; First degree upwards; Deputy Head Teacher, Head Teacher, Vice Principal, and Principal. |

Source: Sierra Leone (2022).

The Agreement covers a wide range of topics, including those of professional autonomy and advancement in the career path. A wide range of topics are covered in the agreement, but it is noteworthy that the Agreement affirms that teachers “*have individual professional autonomy in determining the appropriate method of instruction, and in the planning, presentation, and evaluation of course materials in their general work assignment consistent with the course of studies that may be prescribed*” (Sierra Leone, 2022). The Agreement commits to continuing commensurate promotion of staff in accordance with the Professional Standards for Teachers and other Teacher Development and Performance policies. It states that additional qualifications will be recognized for the purpose of promotion, as well as performance in line with the Professional Standards and accrued professional development credits obtained through approved trainings, courses, and classroom observation.

The Agreement makes extensive provisions for performance assessments and the evaluation of teachers and school leaders, indicating clearly that these will be aligned with the Professional Standards, Career Path and requirements for years of experience and professional development credits. It asserts that performance assessment will promote best practices and best possible services to students while also fostering positive professional relations among educators. It further prescribes that evaluation shall be “*formative and summative to the fullest extent possible.*” An interesting provision is that a teacher who feels that her/his performance is “above standard” but has not been promoted shall have a right to write a formal complaint to the TSC. S/he will then be evaluated by an independent team comprising two officers from the School Quality Assurance and Resource Management Directorate and TSC, including a representative of the teacher union and one Senior Teacher from another school to be nominated by the Union. The Agreement further provides that all evaluation reports on a teacher shall be in writing; that the evaluator shall have a preliminary meeting with the teacher to be evaluated at least three months before the exercise; that the evaluation shall exclude factors over which the teacher has no control; and that feedback of the evaluation shall be given to the teacher within 24 hours after the exercise. The teacher shall have the right to complaint formally if s/he feels unfairly evaluated. It concludes that where the evaluation report shows that a teacher performed below standards, the service may be terminated.

Previous TSC policies on teacher evaluations and provisions of the Agreement have been consolidated into one document. That document, titled the *Comprehensive and Harmonized National Teacher Policies*, has been approved by the Government (Cabinet) of Sierra Leone. It contains the following policies: 1) Teacher Registration and Licensing Policy; (2) Teacher Management Policy; (3) Policy on Teacher Employee Relations; and lastly (4) Teacher Development and Performance Policy, which is the most relevant for teacher performance assessments. The TSC “Teacher Performance Appraisal Form” reveals the major steps and characteristics of the evaluation. On a scale of 1 to 5, the form rates five areas of core competencies (organization and management; innovation and strategic thinking; Leadership and decision making; Supporting and cooperating; and Maximizing and maintaining productivity). However, while the TPD Policy and Collective Agreement stated that evaluations shall rely on the Professional Standards, especially the competencies specified for each career path, the Performance Appraisal Form is not designed along the Standards, career path, and competencies. Therefore, there is still a need to align the performance appraisal system with these standards (by having a scale that assesses teachers across all the Professional Standards and specified competencies based on his or her career stage).

The Agreement lays out procedures to follow in resolving disputes and grievances between the teachers and employer or the school authority. Disputes may relate to: (i) the terms and conditions of employment including remuneration; (ii) the engagement of teachers; (iii) the times at which, or the conditions under which any work is, or is not performed; (iv) the demotion, suspension or imposition of any other penalty or discipline of an employee; (v) the termination of any agreement by which work is to be performed; (vi) grievances or complaints of employees with respect to their employment; and (vii) the machinery for negotiating these matters and settle grievances or work-related dispute. The grievance procedure prescribed in the Agreement includes as a first step the School Representative of the Teachers Union handling the matter with the School Disciplinary Committee. If this fails, the matter is transmitted to the School Management Committee (for primary schools) or the Board of Governors (for

secondary schools) to handle with the School Representative of the Union. Higher levels that may take over the case if it fails at the school level are the TSC District Officer, then the TSC Headquarters. If that fails, the matter goes to the Ministry of Labor, and beyond the Commissioner of Labor refers the matter to the Industrial Court.

The Agreement also covers a range of other topics, including disciplinary action and the role of the Teaching Service Trade Group Negotiating Council. On disciplinary action, the aim to be taken as a corrective rather than punitive action. However, criminal cases will be handled in line with national laws and regulations of the state. The Agreement also includes an appendix on the Teaching Service Trade Group Negotiating Council. The Council comprises representative of the Government cutting across the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Ministry of Finance, Office of the President, Local Government Finance Department, and the Teaching Service Commission on the one hand, and the Teachers' Union on the other. The Council meets at least twice a year with the aim to ensure industrial relations harmony between teachers and employers. Overall, before the Collective Agreement, the Teacher-Employer Relations of the Teaching Service Commission has recorded progress in conscientizing the teaching force regarding best practices in worker-employer relations. This effort was backed up with the development of the *Policy Guidelines on Teacher-Employer Relations* and *Revised Teachers Code of Conduct* (Teaching Service Commission, 2021) which define the rights and obligations of the employer and teachers. It also developed a *Teacher Complaints and Arbitration Management* software. The implication of the new developments is that the combination of the Collective Agreement and these existing mechanisms should make future resolution of disputes and conflicts within the teaching force easier.

Teacher awards

Many Governments and regional entities have introduced Best Teacher Awards to recognize outstanding teachers. These awards can raise the appreciation of teachers in society while demonstrating that hard work pays. In 2019, the African Union Commission instituted the Continental Best Teacher Award. Three teachers won the award in 2019, six in 2020, and nine in 2021. The winners received cash gifts and were celebrated. For some of the winners, their countries promoted them and added to their gifts. In 2022, the Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities also formally showcased them to the international audience during its annual Continental Conference. The impact of such recognition is hard to measure, but it may boost confidence in the value of the teaching profession and inspire teachers.

Sierra Leone launched a Presidential National Best Teachers Award organized by TSC with the Ministry of Basic Education. The award carries the authority of the President, and therefore is a high-level celebration. The first edition was held in 2021 while the second in 2022 was part of the World Teachers Day celebration, though held on a different date. The award was introduced as part of the 2018 Manifesto of the President, Brigadier (Rtd) Julius Maada Bio, as a Presidential candidate of the Sierra Leone People's Party. It recognizes teachers at both the district and national levels.

An important feature of the Award is that it is founded, among other criteria, on the teachers' performance in the areas of Knowledge, Practice and Engagement as defined by the Sierra Leone Professional Standards and Competencies for Teachers and School Leaders. This again demonstrates how TSC has mainstreamed the Professional Standards and Competencies into many teacher issues in the country, as done also in the 2022 Collective Agreement by using the teacher career structure as the actual salary structure and adopting the provisions of the career path policy as the basis for promoting teachers.

Findings from the online surveys

Teachers and school leaders were asked questions in the online surveys on a range of factors that may affect working conditions as well as their overall job satisfaction and perception of their status. Figure 11 provides data on whether the staff rooms and offices used by teachers and school leaders have basic amenities, while Figure 12 looks at the overall appreciation of the work environment. Most teachers and school leaders assess these facilities as good, but not great, and while staff rooms have some basic amenities, this is not always the case. Another question (Figure 13) pertains to working relationships in schools, with positive perceptions as most teachers and school leaders describe them as excellent or good.

This does not imply however that teachers and school leaders have high levels of job satisfaction. In many countries, teachers, and to a lower extent school leaders, tend not to be highly satisfied with their job. This is also the case in Sierra Leone. As shown in Figure 14, on a scale from 1 to 5, teachers rate their social status similarly (average value of 3.37 for teachers and 3.34 for school leaders). Similarly, the ratings for job satisfaction by teachers (average value of 3.05) are similar to those for school leaders (average value of 3.3, slightly higher which is not surprising given better pay and more autonomy and authority).

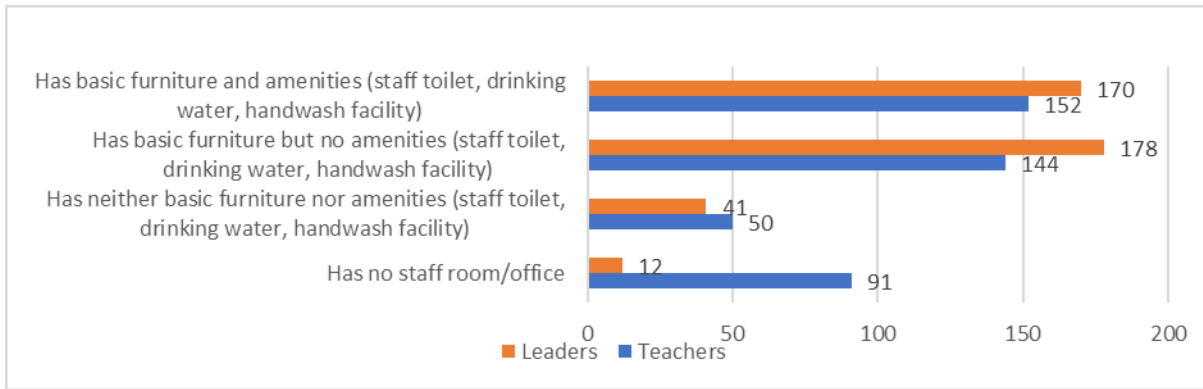


Fig. 11 Ratings for the staff room or school leader office

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

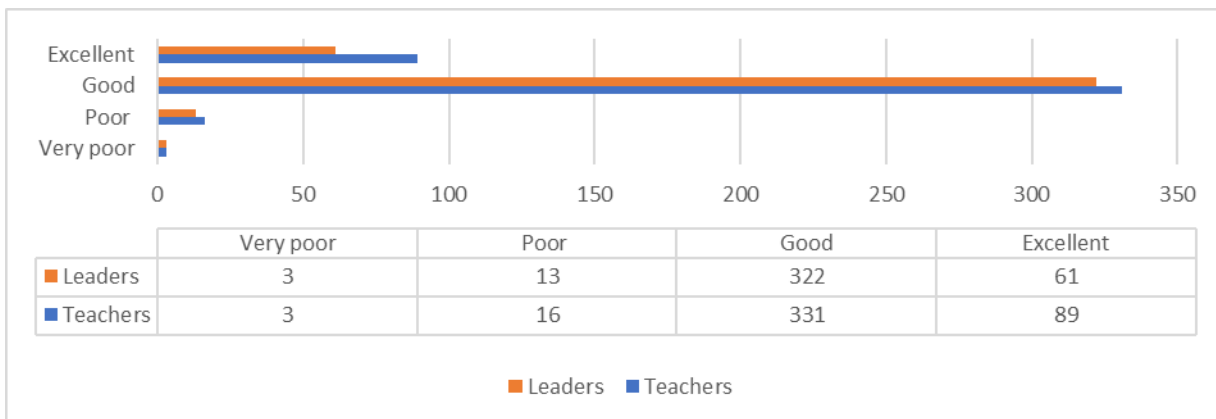


Fig. 12 Ratings for the physical working environment

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

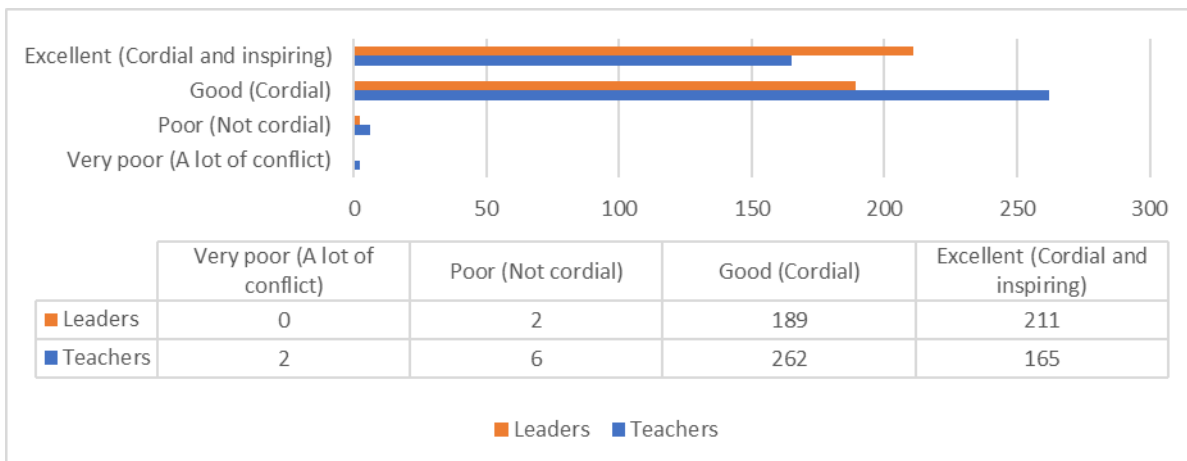


Fig. 13 Rating for working relationships

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

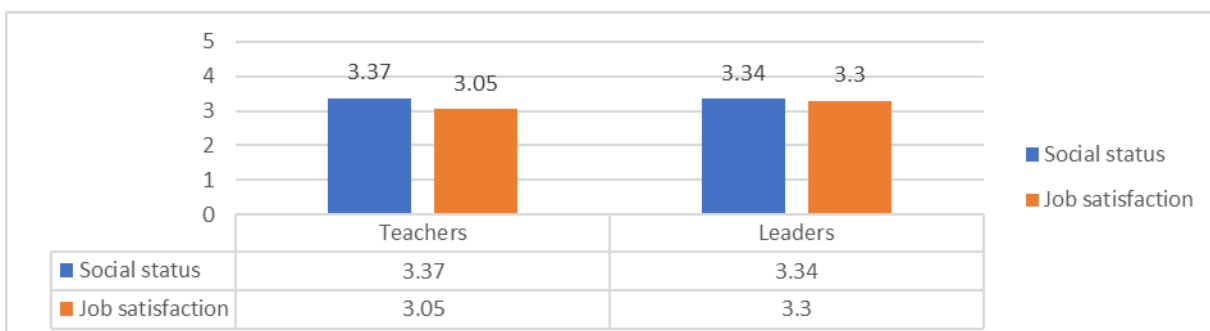


Fig.14 Ratings for social status and job satisfaction

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

The relatively low levels of job satisfaction may be due in part to the level of salaries, but possibly also to issues with the timing of payment of those salaries. Table 9 suggests that while most teachers and especially school leaders receive their salaries in time, this is not always the case. Similarly, most teachers and school leaders indicate that they are paid their salary in full, there are exceptions. On whether there are teacher awards or recognition programs at the school level, less than half of teachers answer in the affirmative (the question was not asked to school leaders). By contrast most teachers and school leaders are aware of national awards recognizing teachers. Still, about one in five teachers and school leaders seem unaware of the existence of the Presidential National Best Teacher Awards created in 2021.

Table 9 Payment of salary and other issues

| Questions | Teachers | | | Leaders | | |
|--|----------|-----|-------|---------|-----|-------|
| | Yes | No | Total | Yes | No | Total |
| Are you paid your salary monthly when due? | 328 | 107 | 435 | 364 | 37 | 401 |
| Are you always paid your salary in full or sometimes is it in part? | 334 | 85 | 419 | 351 | 46 | 397 |
| Is there a teacher award or other programs to recognise teacher performance organised at your school's level? | 197 | 238 | 435 | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Is there a teacher award or other programs to recognise teacher performance at the national level? Is there an award or other ceremonies to recognise high-performing head teachers? | 353 | 87 | 440 | 327 | 74 | 401 |

Source: Authors' estimation from online surveys.

Conclusion

In the last five years, Sierra Leone has made substantial progress towards establishing a national framework for professional standards and competencies. The country has a National Professional Standards and Competencies for Teachers and School Leaders (TSC, 2017) which has been mainstreamed the standards into policy documents including the Comprehensive and Harmonized National Teacher Policies, the Teacher Licensing Examination Guidelines and Syllabus and the Collective Agreement Between the Employers of Teachers of Sierra Leone and The Sierra Leone Teachers Union. The country may be the first in Africa to have signed an agreement with its teacher union to change the salary structure and grade level of teachers to match the four career stages prescribed by the African Union Commission's (2019a, 2019b) Continental Framework of Standards and Competencies, and Continental Teacher Qualification Framework. The Professional Standards and Competencies for Teachers and School Leaders align with continental frameworks. These positive findings can be summarized as follows: (1) Regulation of teaching in the country has a strong legal foundation; (2) TSC is solidly established to regulate teaching in the country; (3) TSC has significant international recognition as a teaching regulatory authority; (4) TSC has developed a national framework of professional standards and competencies since 2017 and advanced in its implementation; and (5) TSC's national framework of professional standards and competencies are perfectly aligned with the continental and global frameworks.

The implementation of the professional standards and competencies is no longer a matter of "if" but "how", with some challenges ahead. Implementation is underway, but TSC faces challenges, some of which can be summarized as follows: (1) TSC lacks funding to pursue its professional mandates; (2) TSC has a shortage of professional operations staff at headquarters as well as in districts; and (3) TSC still falls short of the required level of digitization of regulatory operations. On the other hand, a positive finding from the surveys of teachers and school leaders is that there is a high-level of awareness, knowledge and endorsement of professional standards and competencies among teachers and school leaders.

On teacher education, pre-service training faces multiple challenges that undermine its quality. Teacher education is fundamental to improve teaching and learning, especially in a context where a large share of teachers do not have the minimum qualifications for teaching. The following issues have been identified and require responses: (i) The regulatory and quality assurance frameworks for pre-service teacher education is weak; (ii) the TC is the dominant qualification in the school system, with at least 40 percent of the teachers considered as "untrained and unqualified"; (iii) even if teachers and school leaders opine that they had adequate pre-service education, retraining is likely needed.

Similar issues affect teachers' continuous professional development (CPD). There is lack of national framework for the regulation of CPD and an inability of TSC currently to exert its regulatory power over CPD programs. Government programs (and budgets) are insufficient to address CPD concerns, with only a minority of

teachers and school leaders being trained each year. Another issue is the multiplicity of agents training teachers, often with their own preferences in terms of what trainings emphasize, without effective coordination. CPD programs should have a positive impact on the professional capacities of teachers and school leaders yet may not count much towards the promotion and advancement along the career path. CPD is being provided by the government, the teacher union and individuals themselves, but coordination may again be lacking. A positive development is a National School Leadership Program being currently developed by TSC, although it could be better aligned with the African continental standards, domains, and competencies of school leadership. As to digital competencies, most teachers and school leaders feel that they have good or excellent knowledge and skills for using computers, the internet, and online resources but there are few official provisions for access to a computer, laptop, tablet, or the internet. In terms of priority needs for CPD, teachers and leaders emphasize capacity building in teaching methodologies and the use of educational technologies, respectively, with school leaders also emphasizing training for leading professional knowledge, practice and conduct in their school. Many of these topics and issues have been discussed in the Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan 2022-2026.

Finally, on working conditions the Collective Agreement signed by TSC and the Teacher Union is a step forward to strengthen professional standards and competencies. The National Framework of Standards and Competencies and the sixteen-page Collective Agreement are two important documents that define the working life of teachers and school leaders in Sierra Leone. The Agreement is a good practice in teacher-employer relationships. Other policy documents continue to matter, including the *Human Relations Manual* and *National Teaching Policy*. But the Professional Standards and Competencies and Collective Agreement are now the most definitive statements of what a teacher or school leader should know and do, how to behave and what to expect in terms of reward, sanctions, retirement, and general benefits. The fact that these various documents are aligned to a clear career path for teachers and school leaders is a major step forward. Another positive development is the explicit role of the Teaching Service Trade Group Negotiating Council in promoting harmony in labor relations between employers and the union.

At the same time, a range of issues remain for teachers and school leaders. Teacher performance evaluations still appear to follow the traditional pattern of superiors filling up annual performance reports and recommending for promotion, not necessarily taking into account CPD credits for example. The Presidential Teacher Awards have been instituted in 2021 to recognize some of the Best Teachers at the district and national levels, but some teachers and school leaders still do not know about these awards. In terms of their working environment, while most teachers and school leaders assess it as good, in many schools staffrooms and offices still do not have basic amenities. Working relations are generally good among colleagues and should be sustained. But while in the main, salaries are paid as and when due and completely, some teachers indicate that their salaries are paid only in part or late. Overall, teachers and school leaders rate their social status and job satisfaction as average only, rather than good.

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