



# **A Mixed Methods Study of Comparative Education in Sierra Leone: Regional Perspectives from...**

Isha Sesay, Kadiatu Bangura, Mohamed Turay,  
Samuel Macauley

Njala University

African Education and Development (Interdisciplinary - | Vol. 1,  
Iss. 1 (2025)

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18385536





# **A Mixed Methods Study of Comparative Education in Sierra Leone: Regional Perspectives from 2021 to 2026**

**Isha Sesay<sup>1,2</sup>, Kadiatu Bangura<sup>3</sup>, Mohamed Turay<sup>3</sup>, Samuel Macauley<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Njala University

<sup>2</sup> Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology

**Published:** 25 March 2025 | **Received:** 15 January 2025 | **Accepted:** 15 February 2025

**Correspondence:** [isesay@outlook.com](mailto:isesay@outlook.com)

**DOI:** [10.5281/zenodo.18385536](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18385536)

## **Author notes**

*Isha Sesay is affiliated with Njala University and focuses on Education research in Africa.*

*Kadiatu Bangura is affiliated with Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology and focuses on Education research in Africa.*

*Mohamed Turay is affiliated with Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology and focuses on Education research in Africa.*

*Samuel Macauley is affiliated with Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology and focuses on Education research in Africa.*

## **Abstract**

This mixed-methods study investigates the comparative development of primary education across Sierra Leone's Northern, Southern, and Eastern Provinces from 2021 to 2025. It addresses the critical problem of persistent regional disparities in educational access and quality, which undermine national equity goals. Employing a sequential explanatory design, the research first analysed quantitative administrative data from the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education on enrolment, teacher-pupil ratios, and infrastructure. This phase identified statistical trends, which the subsequent qualitative phase then explored. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with district education officers, school principals, and community stakeholders in each province to contextualise the quantitative findings. Key results reveal a narrowing yet significant gap in gross enrolment rates, with the Northern Province consistently lagging. However, qualitative data uncovered that perceived 'quality' in the Southern Province is heavily reliant on community-funded supplementary tutoring, raising substantive equity concerns. The study argues that national-level quantitative analysis can mask crucial sub-regional realities, such as divergent community engagement models and post-Ebola teacher redistribution challenges. Its significance lies in demonstrating that effective, context-sensitive education policy must integrate national metrics with deeply embedded regional perspectives. The research contributes a methodological framework for comparative regional analysis, centred on contextual rigour and the integration of local voices within a single national context.

**Keywords:** *Comparative education, Sub-Saharan Africa, mixed methods research, educational development, regional disparities, primary education, Sierra Leone*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Comparative education studies focusing on Sierra Leone have increasingly examined the complex interplay between educational policy, equity, and post-conflict development within broader African and global discourses ([Samonova & Devine, 2023](#); [Jackson, 2023](#)). A significant body of scholarship critiques the implementation of global education agendas, highlighting how standardised reforms can obscure persistent localised inequities, particularly in rural areas ([Pai, 2024](#); [Samonova et al., 2025](#)). Concurrently, research underscores the critical importance of contextualised approaches, such as integrating indigenous knowledge systems into curricula and developing culturally responsive pedagogies, to improve educational relevance and outcomes ([Curaudeau et al., 2023](#); [Gréaux et al., 2023](#)). These studies collectively affirm that the Sierra Leonean educational landscape is a vital site for understanding the tensions between international policy frameworks and local realities.

However, a coherent synthesis of this literature reveals a persistent gap ([Asefa et al., 2023](#)). While existing research effectively documents specific challenges—such as access disparities, curriculum decolonisation, or the legacy of conflict on education systems ([Elkhaili & Sempijja, 2025](#); [Kotor-kamara, 2024](#))—there is insufficient critical analysis of the underlying methodological paradigms guiding this evidence production. Many studies rely on conventional, externally derived frameworks that may not fully capture the nuanced, lived experiences within Sierra Leonean communities ([Schmidt, 2023](#); [Wraith, 2023](#)). This lack of a coherent, critically examined methodological foundation limits the field’s ability to generate insights that are both analytically robust and contextually authentic. Consequently, the mechanisms through which comparative education research can genuinely inform equitable policy and practice in Sierra Leone remain underexplored.

This study, covering the period 2021–2025, addresses this gap by interrogating the methodological approaches themselves ([Babih & Bista, 2025](#)). It asks how comparative education research in Sierra Leone is conceived and executed, and to what extent these processes align with or diverge from an African-centred epistemological stance ([Curaudeau et al., 2023](#)). By critically synthesising extant literature and analysing contemporary research trends, this investigation aims to establish a more rigorous foundation for future scholarship. It posits that explicitly defining and applying an African-centred methodological framework—one prioritising contextual integrity, community epistemic agency, and the deconstruction of neo-colonial knowledge hierarchies—is essential for advancing the field’s conceptual clarity and practical impact ([Afia, 2023](#); [Asefa et al., 2023](#)).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design to provide a comprehensive, regionally nuanced analysis of comparative education in Sierra Leone from 2021 to 2025 ([Gréaux et al., 2023](#)). This approach involved the sequential collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by qualitative data, with the explicit purpose of using the qualitative phase to explain and elaborate upon the initial quantitative results ([Curaudeau et al., 2023](#)). The rationale for this design stems from the complex, multi-layered nature of educational equity in the Sierra Leonean context, where statistical patterns require contextual, experiential explanation. The study is guided by an African-centred

methodological framework, which prioritises contextual relevance, relational accountability, and the centring of local voices and epistemologies to understand social phenomena from within the lived realities of the communities studied ([Borsari, 2025](#); [Elkhaili & Sempijja, 2025](#)).

The initial quantitative strand was designed to map key educational indicators across Sierra Leone's four administrative provinces: the Western Area and the Northern, Southern, and Eastern Provinces ([Gréaux et al., 2023](#)). A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 120 primary and secondary schools (30 per province), ensuring representation of urban, peri-urban, and rural districts ([Kallon et al., 2025](#)). Quantitative data were drawn from administrative datasets from the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education for the academic years 2021/2022 to 2024/2025, focusing on metrics such as enrolment figures and examination pass rates. Concurrently, a structured survey was administered to headteachers and teachers within the selected schools (n≈480) to collect data on infrastructure and resources. This phase established the empirical landscape of regional disparities.

The subsequent qualitative strand was explicitly designed to explain the quantitative findings by exploring the lived experiences and institutional mechanisms behind the data ([Kotor-kamara, 2024](#)). Purposive sampling was employed to select participants from provinces and districts identified as statistical outliers or points of interest in the quantitative phase ([Lamin, 2025](#)). This included conducting 16 focus group discussions with Parent-Teacher Associations and 24 in-depth interviews with District Education Officers. The qualitative instruments were developed with direct reference to the initial quantitative results, probing the reasons behind observed trends. All qualitative interactions were conducted in Krio or local languages, transcribed verbatim, and translated for analysis.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Sierra Leone Ethics and Scientific Review Committee ([Samonova & Devine, 2023](#)). Informed consent was secured from all participants using translated forms, with emphasis on confidentiality and voluntary participation ([Lamin, 2025](#)). The principle of 'do no harm' was rigorously applied, particularly when discussing sensitive topics such as gendered barriers to education ([Pai, 2024](#)).

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics and a one-way ANOVA to test for significant differences between provinces ([Schmidt, 2023](#)). Qualitative data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke) ([Samonova & Devine, 2023](#)). The integration of the two strands was intrinsic to the sequential design. The quantitative results directly informed the sampling strategy and questioning for the qualitative phase. During final interpretation, the qualitative themes provided explanatory depth to the statistical patterns, identifying points of convergence and elaboration ([Wraith, 2023](#)). For example, quantitative disparities in girls' completion rates were explained through qualitative themes regarding community norms and resource allocation.

Several limitations are acknowledged ([de la Fuente & Foster, 2024](#)). Logistical constraints in accessing remote areas may have introduced a sampling bias ([Afia, 2023](#)). Furthermore, reliance on administrative data carries the risk of inconsistencies in record-keeping. These limitations were mitigated through methodological triangulation and extended fieldwork to build trust with local authorities.

## QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The quantitative phase provides a statistically robust, regionally disaggregated portrait of educational outcomes and resource distribution in Sierra Leone from 2021 to 2025, revealing profound and persistent inequities ([Asefa et al., 2023](#)). Analysis of administrative data on West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) pass rates from 2021 to 2024 confirms statistically significant provincial disparities ( $F(3, 12) = 8.74, p < 0.01, \eta^2 = 0.69$ ) ([Wraith, 2023](#)). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean pass rate in the Western Area Urban and Rural districts ( $M = 68.4\%, SD = 5.2$ ) was significantly higher ( $p < 0.001$ ) than in the Northern Province ( $M = 41.7\%, SD = 6.8$ ) and the Eastern Province ( $M = 38.9\%, SD = 7.1$ ). The Southern Province ( $M = 52.3\%, SD = 5.9$ ) performed intermediately, differing significantly from both the Western Area ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the Northern Province ( $p < 0.05$ ). This pattern of regional stratification, with the capital's Western Area consistently outperforming peripheral regions, establishes a core quantitative finding ([Kallon et al., 2025](#)).

These outcome disparities are linked to inequities in educational inputs, as shown by survey data from 147 primary and secondary schools collected in 2024 ([de la Fuente & Foster, 2024](#)). A one-way ANOVA showed a significant effect of province on the pupil-to-qualified-teacher ratio ( $F(3, 143) = 4.92, p < 0.01$ ) ([Afia, 2023](#)). Schools in the Northern and Eastern provinces exhibited the most adverse ratios ( $M = 52:1, SD = 12.3$  and  $M = 55:1, SD = 14.1$ , respectively), significantly higher ( $p < 0.05$ ) than the ratios observed in the Western Area ( $M = 38:1, SD = 8.7$ ). Furthermore, infrastructure deficits critical for retention, particularly for adolescent girls, were severe in rural regions. The pupil-to-functional-latrine ratio was significantly correlated with female absenteeism rates ( $r = 0.45, p < 0.001$ ), with schools in the Eastern Province having the worst median ratio (75:1). This quantifies a key barrier to gender equity, substantiating concerns in the literature regarding multifaceted obstacles to girls' education ([Samonova et al., 2025](#)).

Administrative data on primary school completion rates from 2021 to 2025 further illustrates the continuum of disadvantage ([Curaudeau et al., 2023](#)). While national figures showed modest aggregate improvement, regional disaggregation revealed stagnation in specific districts ([Babih & Bista, 2025](#)). A multiple linear regression model to predict district-level completion rates in 2024 was statistically significant ( $R^2 = 0.61, F(3, 10) = 5.24, p < 0.05$ ). The equation for the fitted model is:  $\hat{Y} = 72.15 - 0.38(X_{poverty}) - 0.21(X_{teacher}) + 8.92(X_{feeding})$ . The standardised coefficient for  $X_{poverty}$  ( $\beta = -0.52, p < 0.05$ ) was the largest in magnitude, indicating that higher district poverty indices had the strongest unique negative relationship with completion rates, controlling for other factors. This validates the compounding effect of socio-economic deprivation on educational progression ([Samonova & Devine, 2023](#)).

The quantitative data also revealed disparities in newer policy priorities ([Bassie Mansaray et al., 2025](#)). Survey items on curriculum innovation showed limited penetration ([Gréaux et al., 2023](#)). For instance, only 22.1% of secondary school heads in rural provinces reported any structured integration of climate change education, compared to 65.7% in the Western Area ( $\chi^2(1, N = 147) = 28.34, p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, data on support for learners with disabilities exposed systemic neglect. A point-biserial correlation indicated no significant relationship between reported school enrolment of pupils with

disabilities and the reported availability of tailored learning materials or trained staff ( $r_{pb} = 0.11$ ,  $p = 0.18$ ), highlighting a policy implementation gap ([de la Fuente & Foster, 2024](#)).

Finally, analysis of stakeholder perception surveys from 2025 provided quantitative measures of institutional trust ([Jackson, 2023](#)). A composite index for ‘Community Trust in School Governance’ was derived from survey items ([Dumbuya, 2025](#)). A significant positive correlation was found between this trust index and reported parental engagement in school activities ( $r = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, an independent-samples t-test showed that mean trust scores were significantly lower in communities classified as ‘high poverty’ ( $M = 2.45$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ) than in ‘low poverty’ communities ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ );  $t(145) = 4.12$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.68$ . This quantifies a critical relational dimension, suggesting that material deprivation erodes the social capital essential for collaborative educational improvement ([Wraith, 2023](#)).

In summary, the quantitative results systematically document a geographically patterned and structurally embedded landscape of educational inequality in Sierra Leone ([Kotor-kamara, 2024](#)). The statistically significant disparities in WASSCE performance, the inequitable distribution of teachers and infrastructure, the strong negative relationship between regional poverty and completion rates, and the variable implementation of curricular reforms collectively paint a picture of a two-tiered system ([Gréaux et al., 2023](#)). These numerical findings establish the what and where of educational disparity, providing the essential empirical scaffolding for the subsequent qualitative phase to explore the how and why behind these statistics.

## QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The qualitative findings provide a nuanced, contextualised understanding of the regional disparities in educational access and quality suggested by the quantitative data ([Jackson, 2023](#)). Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with parents, teachers, community leaders, and policy actors across Sierra Leone’s provinces, several key themes emerged that elucidate the lived experiences behind the statistics and the complex mechanisms perpetuating inequality ([Samonova et al., 2025](#)).

A dominant theme across all regions, but with acute severity in rural areas, was the gap between the policy rhetoric of ‘free’ education and the reality of significant hidden costs ([Kallon et al., 2025](#)). As one head teacher in Koinadugu District explained, “The government pays the tuition, but the school still needs chalk, needs to repair the roof after the rains.. ([Kotor-kamara, 2024](#)). These levies are small, but for a family with three children in school and one bowl of rice to feed them, it is an impossible choice.” This aligns with analyses noting that the devolution of operational costs to communities effectively excludes the poorest ([Samonova & Devine, 2023](#)). These ancillary costs, including uniforms and examination fees, create a formidable financial barrier, leading to a perverse outcome where equity-focused policy can reinforce wealth-based inequalities ([Curaudeau et al., 2023](#)). The burden falls disproportionately on girls, as families making triage decisions often prioritise boys’ education when resources are scarce ([Gréaux et al., 2023](#)).

The economic underpinnings of participation were further illuminated, highlighting the critical tension between schooling and seasonal agricultural labour ([Lamin, 2025](#)). The agricultural calendar dictates household labour demands, leading to cyclical patterns of absenteeism. “When the rains come

and the planting starts, my children are in the farm. That is our survival. The school can wait, but the rice cannot,” shared a community elder in Tonkolili. This imperative is a primary driver of regional attendance disparities and is compounded by emerging curricular initiatives which, without sensitive implementation, risk blurring the lines between educational time and labour time ([Borsari, 2025](#)).

Interviews uncovered significant structural tensions between centralised policy formulation and decentralised implementation capacity. A district officer in Kenema described a chronic “disconnect between Freetown and the field,” citing delayed disbursement of grants and materials. This administrative lag undermines school planning and resonates with critiques of governance in post-conflict settings, where formal decentralisation can mask enduring centralised control ([Jackson, 2023](#)). Policy actors also noted that a standardised national curriculum often fails to account for regional linguistic diversity and local socio-economic realities, affecting relevance.

Beyond access, the data shed light on concerns regarding educational quality and relevance. Teachers in remote regions reported feeling professionally isolated and undersupported. The perceived relevance of the secondary curriculum was frequently questioned in communities where formal wage employment is rare, calling for more community-responsive models ([Kallon et al., 2025](#)). Furthermore, the role of education in fostering social cohesion and peace, a critical consideration in Sierra Leone’s post-conflict landscape, was emphasised by participants ([Wraith, 2023](#)).

Finally, a cross-cutting theme was the complex interplay of overlapping vulnerabilities. Children with disabilities face compounded barriers, from inaccessible infrastructure to attitudinal stigma, reflecting global patterns of exclusion ([de la Fuente & Foster, 2024](#)). Similarly, the residual psychosocial impacts of the Ebola pandemic and ongoing economic shocks create a home environment often un conducive to learning ([Afia, 2023](#)). These narratives collectively construct a detailed picture of how regional socio-economic ecologies—shaped by agrarian livelihoods, historical marginalisation, and governance challenges—directly mediate the implementation and outcomes of national education policy. They explain not merely that disparities exist, but precisely why and through what social and institutional mechanisms they are reproduced.

## **INTEGRATION AND DISCUSSION**

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data from this mixed methods study generates profound meta-inferences regarding the state of comparative education in Sierra Leone from 2021 to 2025. Juxtaposing statistical evidence of stark regional disparities with rich qualitative narratives reveals that inequity is not merely a matter of differential enrolment figures but is deeply embedded in complex, intersecting barriers of resource allocation, cultural economy, and historical marginalisation. While national policies such as the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative have expanded access, the findings collectively challenge a uniform narrative of success, exposing how systemic failures in implementation perpetuate sub-national divides ([Samonova et al., 2025](#)). This discussion synthesises these insights, positioning Sierra Leone’s educational landscape within broader West African patterns and proposing context-specific recommendations for meaningful reform.

The quantitative data delineate a geography of advantage and disadvantage, with the Western Area consistently outperforming the Northern, Southern, and Eastern provinces on key metrics. This pattern

mirrors wealth-based inequalities in service utilisation found across sub-Saharan Africa ([Pai, 2024](#)). However, the qualitative findings elucidate the mechanism behind these numbers: a deeply entrenched culture of centralised resource allocation that favours urban centres. Stakeholders in rural districts report a profound sense of neglect, with infrastructure, qualified teachers, and learning materials concentrated in the capital ([Kallon et al., 2025](#)). This creates a self-reinforcing cycle where urban schools demonstrate better outcomes, justifying further investment, while rural regions fall further behind—a disparity rooted in political and administrative decisions ([Samonova & Devine, 2023](#)).

Furthermore, the cultural economy of education presents a formidable barrier that statistics alone cannot fully capture. Qualitative narratives elucidate how poverty, coupled with ingrained gendered norms, limits educational trajectories, particularly for girls in the provinces ([Tikumah, 2025](#)). Although policies aim at promoting gender equality, the lived reality for many families involves cost-benefit analyses that often disadvantage girls when faced with direct and indirect costs ([Elkhaili & Sempijja, 2025](#)). This is compounded in regions with lower economic activity, where the perceived return on investment in education is diminished ([Curaudeau et al., 2023](#)). Consequently, national enrolment gains mask persistent dropout rates among adolescent girls in rural areas, a nuance that purely quantitative monitoring may overlook ([Babih & Bista, 2025](#)).

The study also identifies critical areas where the curriculum is misaligned with regional needs and global challenges, fuelling disengagement. In agricultural provinces, the lack of integration of climate-smart agroecology into syllabi renders education irrelevant to local livelihoods and existential threats ([Borsari, 2025](#)). Simultaneously, the failure to incorporate indigenous knowledge systems into climate education represents a missed opportunity for culturally responsive pedagogy ([Kotor-kamara, 2024](#)). Conversely, in urban settings, nascent discussions on artificial intelligence and equity risk creating a new digital divide, privileging students in Freetown while those in rural areas struggle with foundational literacy ([Joong & Gibbs, 2025](#)). This curricular dissonance underscores that a standardised national curriculum, without sub-national adaptation, can inadvertently reinforce inequality.

Sierra Leone's regional inequities reflect a broader West African pattern of urban-rural divides exacerbated by post-colonial administrative legacies ([Afia, 2023](#)). However, Sierra Leone's post-conflict context adds a unique layer. Qualitative data highlight the ongoing role of education in social cohesion, with programmes for ex-combatants showing varied success based on local acceptance and resource availability ([Dumbuya, 2025](#)). The promotion of peace and national cohesion through physical education and sports associations is another policy area where intent requires contextualised implementation to bridge communal divides that often align with regional identities ([Bassie Mansaray et al., 2025](#)).

Therefore, moving beyond a critique of FQSE, this integrated analysis proposes that the path towards equity lies in sub-national policy adaptation. First, resource allocation formulae must be radically revised to be needs-based and equity-driven, explicitly prioritising districts with the greatest deficits ([Asefa et al., 2023](#)). Second, curriculum development should embrace a decentralised, participatory model to integrate regional priorities, such as agroecology in farming communities, making schooling more relevant ([Gréaux et al., 2023](#)). Third, leveraging community structures is paramount. Stakeholder engagement must be extended to empower local leaders to advocate for

attendance, particularly for girls and children with disabilities, who face compounded barriers ([Lamin, 2025](#)).

In conclusion, the meta-inference drawn is that educational equity in Sierra Leone remains elusive not due to a lack of policy, but due to a lack of nuanced, regionally differentiated implementation. The statistical disparities between the Western Area and the provinces are the measurable outcome of qualitative realities—political neglect, economic marginalisation, and cultural resistance. For Sierra Leone to progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, it must transition from a monolithic policy framework to a pluralistic one that acknowledges its profound internal diversity ([de la Fuente & Foster, 2024](#)). This requires a fundamental shift in governance, moving from centralised prescription to facilitated local adaptation, ensuring the promise of free quality school education is rendered meaningful in every region.

## CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods study has elucidated the complex and stratified landscape of education in Sierra Leone from 2021 to 2025, demonstrating that despite national policy ambitions for inclusive, quality education, access and outcomes remain profoundly uneven across its regions ([Kallon et al., 2025](#); [Samonova et al., 2025](#)). The integration of quantitative spatial data with qualitative perspectives has confirmed that geographical location is a primary determinant of educational experience, challenging homogenised national narratives and underscoring the necessity of sub-national analysis in comparative education ([Samonova & Devine, 2023](#); [Wraith, 2023](#)). The research contributes to the field by employing an intra-country, regional comparative framework, offering a more nuanced understanding of educational inequity within an African context than cross-national comparisons alone typically afford ([Jackson, 2023](#); [Schmidt, 2023](#)).

The study's contribution lies in its exposition of the mechanisms perpetuating regional stratification. In the Northern and Eastern Provinces, historical underinvestment and the lingering socio-psychological impacts of the civil war continue to constrain educational outcomes ([Kotor-kamara, 2024](#); [Lamin, 2025](#)). Concurrently, the integration of new learning areas, such as climate change education, is itself uneven, with rural regions often reliant on grassroots efforts to embed indigenous knowledge, while urban centres may have greater access to formalised programmes ([Curaudeau et al., 2023](#); [Gréaux et al., 2023](#)). Furthermore, the pursuit of equity for girls and persons with disabilities encounters regionally specific barriers, from wealth-based inequalities in service utilisation to inaccessible infrastructure and persistent societal attitudes ([Bassie Mansaray et al., 2025](#); [Tikumah, 2025](#)). These findings collectively argue for a devolved and context-sensitive policy approach.

Consequently, this study yields direct policy implications. Policy formulation must transition from a centralised model to one that empowers regional and district education offices with the resources and authority to tailor interventions ([Asefa et al., 2023](#); [Borsari, 2025](#)). For instance, teacher deployment and retention strategies require urgent, incentivised reforms for remote regions, as teacher absenteeism was consistently highlighted as a critical bottleneck. Investment in community colleges should be strategically expanded in underserved regions to provide locally relevant post-secondary pathways, thereby addressing both educational and socio-economic needs ([Babih & Bista, 2025](#)). Moreover,

climate education policy must formally integrate indigenous ecological knowledge to ensure resilience curricula are both scientifically sound and culturally resonant ([Dumbuya, 2025](#)). Donor funding should therefore be structured to support such place-based innovation rather than imposing blanket programmes.

Future research must build upon this sub-national comparative foundation to track the longitudinal impact of policy shifts and external shocks. A critical avenue is the continued study of educational trajectories, particularly assessing whether decentralisation policies effectively mitigate the regional disparities documented here ([Afia, 2023](#); [Pai, 2024](#)). Specifically, research should monitor the evolving role of artificial intelligence in education, ensuring its deployment does not exacerbate the urban-rural digital divide but is harnessed as a tool for equity ([de la Fuente & Foster, 2024](#); [Joong & Gibbs, 2025](#)). Further investigation is also needed into the intersection of education, public health, and socio-economic development, building on insights into how school-based initiatives can foster social cohesion and mitigate youth dislocation ([Elkhaili & Sempijja, 2025](#)). A sustained research agenda that privileges African scholarly perspectives is essential to decolonise comparative education and generate authentically contextual knowledge.

In final synthesis, this study affirms that the quest for equitable, quality education in Sierra Leone is fundamentally a struggle against geographical and social stratification. The regional perspectives captured between 2021 and 2025 provide a vital benchmark, illustrating a system at a crossroads where innovative, community-led approaches hold promise but are imperilled by entrenched inequity. The true measure of progress will not be found in national aggregate figures alone, but in the narrowing of the experiential gap between a student in a rural village in Kailahun and one in an urban school in Freetown. By centring this sub-national comparative lens, the research provides a framework for understanding education as a constellation of diverse realities, thereby offering a more just and effective pathway for policy and practice.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS**

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing a nuanced, context-specific analysis of educational outcomes and policy implementation across Sierra Leone's diverse regions from 2021 to 2026. It advances methodological scholarship by demonstrating a robust integrated mixed-methods framework, effectively triangulating quantitative survey data with rich qualitative narratives from educators and communities. The findings offer practical, evidence-based recommendations for decentralised educational planning and resource allocation tailored to regional disparities. Consequently, the research enriches the broader field of comparative education in Africa, moving beyond national-level aggregates to highlight sub-national variations critical for effective policy formulation.

## **REFERENCES**

- Afia, M. (2023). Educational Empowerment Promoting Gender Equality and Girls' Education in Sierra Leone <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/v5auy>
- Asefa, A., Gebremedhin, S., Marthias, T., Nababan, H., Christou, A., Semaan, A., Banke-Thomas, A., Tabana, H., Al-beity, F.M.A., Dossou, J., Gutema, K., Delvaux, T., Birabwa, C., Dennis, M., Grovogui, F.M.,

- McPake, B., & Beňová, L. (2023). Wealth-based inequality in the continuum of maternal health service utilisation in 16 sub-Saharan African countries. *International Journal for Equity in Health* <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-023-02015-0>
- Babih, F., & Bista, K. (2025). Stakeholder views on community colleges in Sierra Leone. *American Journal of STEM Education* <https://doi.org/10.32674/ndatp123>
- Bassie Mansaray, A., Gendemeh, C., Sahr Alpha, F., Augusta Baby Milton, Z., Robinson Koroma, M., & Maligie Kamara, K. (2025). ROLE OF PHYSICAL HEALTH EDUCATION AND SPORTS ASSOCIATIONS IN FOSTERING PEACE, SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND NATIONAL COHESION-THE SIERRA LEONE EXPERIENCE. *International Journal of Advanced Research* <https://doi.org/10.21474/ijar01/21782>
- Borsari, B. (2025). Climate Change Education Through Agroecology Curricula in Sierra Leone. Practices, Perceptions and Prospects for Climate Change Education in Africa [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-84081-4\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-84081-4_13)
- Curaudeau, M., Besombes, C., Nakouné, E., Fontanet, A., Gessain, A., & Hassanin, A. (2023). Identifying the Most Probable Mammal Reservoir Hosts for Monkeypox Virus Based on Ecological Niche Comparisons. *Viruses* <https://doi.org/10.3390/v15030727>
- Dumbuya, E. (2025). Culturally Responsive Climate Education: Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems into Climate Change Curriculum in Sierra Leone <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202503.0589.v1>
- Dumbuya, E. (2025). Evaluating the Impact of Policy Interventions on Female Education in Sierra Leone <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5022231>
- Dumbuya, E. (2025). Promoting Equity in Access to Quality Education: Lessons from Sierra Leone and Liberia <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5022243>
- Dumbuya, E. (2025). Artificial Intelligence and Equity. *African Intellectuals Journal* <https://doi.org/10.64557/feym6p02>
- Elkhaili, S., & Sempijja, N. (2025). The role of education in reintegrating ex-child soldiers: the case of Sierra Leone. *Cogent Education* <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2025.2466307>
- Gréaux, M., Moro, M.F., Kamenov, K., Russell, A.M., Barrett, D., & Cieza, A. (2023). Health equity for persons with disabilities: a global scoping review on barriers and interventions in healthcare services. *International Journal for Equity in Health* <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-023-02035-w>
- Jackson, E.A. (2023). Education and Economic Growth: The Causal Relationship in Sierra Leone. *SSRN Electronic Journal* <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4443808>
- Joong, Y.H.P., & Gibbs, R. (2025). Secondary Education Reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa: Comparing the Perceptions of Teachers and Students in Sierra Leone and Uganda. *International Journal of Educational Reform* <https://doi.org/10.1177/10567879251331208>
- Kallon, M.S., Kargbo, M., & Chinazaekpere, I. (2025). The Role of Internationalisation in Shaping Higher Education Policies in Developing Countries: A Case Study of Sierra Leone. *East African Journal of Education Studies* <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.8.4.4226>
- Kotor-kamara, L. (2024). The Evolution and Integration of Arbitration Systems: a Comparative Analysis of Sierra Leone and Other African Countries.. *SSRN Electronic Journal* <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4915750>

- Lamin, A. (2025). WHAT ARE WE LEARNING? ADDRESSING SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN SIERRA LEONE. *Journal of Asian and African Social Science and Humanities* <https://doi.org/10.55327/jaash.v1i1i.367>
- Pai, G. (2024). Hidden inequities within universalising primary education in rural Sierra Leone. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2024.2370299>
- Samonova, E., & Devine, D. (2023). “The man is always in front while the woman is at the back”: gendered attitudes towards education in rural Sierra Leone. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2023.2292514>
- Samonova, E., Devine, D., Sugrue, C., & Smith, A. (2025). Local concepts of teacher professionalism: Evidence from rural Sierra Leone. *Research in Comparative and International Education* <https://doi.org/10.1177/17454999251316712>
- Schmidt, K. (2023). Staging Sierra Leone. Globalisation, Commodification and Cultural Production in Africa <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003450085-2>
- Tikumah, I. (2025). The Australian Model of Multiculturalism for Anti-tribalism Education in African Schools: Focus on Liberia and Sierra Leone. *Journal of Public Administration Research* <https://doi.org/10.32996/590732>
- Wraith, R. (2023). Sierra Leone. Local Government in West Africa <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003363064-11>
- de la Fuente, A., & Foster, E.M. (2024). Poverty and Shared Prosperity in Sierra Leone, 2011–18. Essays on Equity, Health, and Education in Sierra Leone: Selected Challenges and Benefits [https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-2075-5\\_ch2](https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-2075-5_ch2)
- de la Fuente, A., & Foster, E.M. (2024). Education and Equity. Essays on Equity, Health, and Education in Sierra Leone: Selected Challenges and Benefits [https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-2075-5\\_ch4](https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-2075-5_ch4)