

*Facebook Feature*

“In-depth Analysis of the Educational System and Higher Education in Liberia”: Part One

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Greetings!

Hello, friends and supporters, I am pleased to share with you some of my thoughts about education in Liberia, with the hopes of collaborating with you in order to improve our educational system and secure the future of Liberian youth. Hence within the course of this week, I will be submitting excerpts from my recent writing entitled: **“In-depth Analysis of the Educational System and Higher Education in Liberia.”**

Please note that my manuscript is not intended to antagonize the government or anyone in Liberia and here in the diaspora about their work performance. Instead, I have written this article to shed light on the history and culture of education in Liberia and how we can work together as stakeholders to improve it. That said I want to begin by addressing or thanking all teachers, progressive student organizations, parents, guardians, and the general public for supporting public education in Liberia.

Below is Part One of my paper to begin the debate on education. Please feel free to share your comments and views with me because this manuscript is a working document.

## ***Introduction***

Firstly, I want to thank all my colleagues in the education field in Liberia and here in the diaspora for their patriotic efforts to keep the flames of education ablaze in Liberia. I also thank the officers and members of the Teachers Federation of Liberia, all progressive student groups, as well as parents and guardians who make huge sacrifices so that their children may gain knowledge in the classroom. Indeed, your efforts are very encouraging and worthy of praise despite the fact you are working with very scarce resources or pennies (so to speak) in order to educate Liberian youth and to keep Liberian schools open. For an example, teachers throughout Liberia lack basic instructional materials and incentives to teach (such as not being paid on time and regularly, as well as the lack of benefits—health and pension plans, etc.). Yet, you go the extra mile without food or you sometimes eat dry rice and farina just so that the youth of Liberia will not be left behind in the dungeon of ignorance and poverty. Against this background, I thank you very much and I wish you success in your future endeavors as we work together to secure a brighter future for the youth and their families in Liberia.

Secondly, I want to stress that the primary purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the educational system in Liberia so that Liberian educators and policymakers, parents, guardians and international stakeholders may have an opportunity to review how our educational system has developed over a century and a half. It is similarly intended to help educators and policymakers make informed decisions in the near future regarding school reforms and the development of a culturally relevant national curriculum that will address the teaching and learning needs of Liberian teachers and learners.

Therefore, this manuscript is not intended to antagonize the government of Liberia or any group of educators in or outside of Liberia. Instead, it is meant to provide a general picture of what worked and what did not work with respect to our school structures since the founding of the First Republic to the present. Further, the analysis provided herein are based on my own opinion and experience as an educator and cultural expert for more than thirty-three years—in Liberia and here in the United States. In view of the foregoing, I welcome your views and comments so that we may collaborate to improve the educational system in Liberia. In this light, I now begin my deliberation below by suggesting some necessary steps we should take when considering educational reforms and curriculum development or revision.

## ***Some General Steps Liberians Should Take When Considering Educational Reforms and Curriculum Development/Revision***

Generally, the analysis of an educational system and higher education in Liberia may require conducting a feasibility study and eventually designing a culturally rich national curriculum that speaks to the diverse training, teaching and learning needs of Liberian teachers and learners. Furthermore, such a study may be designed to actively engage and encourage Liberian teachers, educational leaders, policymakers, parents, guardians, and various stakeholders to provide the requisite supports needed to run an effective national educational system. For this reason, it may also require the construction and/or the inspection and renovation of educational infrastructures and facilities that are currently in use, as well as the production of locally produced textbooks, to facilitate and reflect the culture and national educational vision of the Liberian nation and people.

In addition, the analytic process may involve conducting educational research (qualitative and quantitative) in order to improve teaching and learning and the educational supports system. Moreover, an analysis of the educational system may entail making sure well-staffed libraries and laboratories are available to provide a favorable teaching and learning environment; that teachers and school administrators are paid in a timely manner and that they have job security and comprehensive benefits packages (including life insurance, retirement/pension plans, and so forth). Also, the analysis process may require finding out the total number of students and total number of teachers and infrastructures from Pre-K through college in order to determine an estimated cost of running a post war school system. Finally, an analysis may involve a comprehensive study of short term and long term educational reforms and the national vision for education in Liberia. Of course, this may be based on how Liberians view the overall process of schooling.

## *How Liberians Perceive Schooling*

School systems are designed and operated mainly based on how educators and policymakers and the general public view the notion of schooling. For this reason, those in power define the notion of schooling based on what they want the general populace to know and not know in order to preserve their own best interests. Thus, while the functional or operational definitions of education may include but not limited to **training, teaching, learning, tutelage, and culture**, just to name a few, yet there are conflicting views about education and schooling in Liberia based on the views supported by Liberian policymakers and educators. From a general perspective, education may be viewed as the process through which knowledge and wisdom were/are passed from one generation to the next in order to preserve our history and culture and to sustain ourselves in a dynamic socio-economic and political global system. Hence, in the case of Liberia, there have been two unique ways Liberians specifically view schooling or education based on the varied traditional histories and cultures of the Liberian people. These two systems of education include: **one, the traditional educational system**; and two, **the western educational system**. As a consequence, there are two unique ways in which Liberians decide who is *educated* or *literate* and/or who is *illiterate* or *not educated*. For this reason, our notion and/or definition of education has had a great impact on how we have viewed and planned our national curriculum and educational system over more than a century and a half. Thus, it is safe to argue that the concept of being ‘educated’ may differ from one person to another based on the belief systems of Liberians and their various ethnic and historical backgrounds. In addition, the same argument may apply when discussing the issue of ‘**literacy**’ versus ‘**illiteracy**’ in Liberia. Here, the general notion of **literacy in Liberia implies being able to speak, read and write in English or a Western language that is recognized by the status quo as the official mode of communication in Liberia.**

For this reason, ‘**illiteracy**’ is generally a term that is used to refer to Liberians of traditional backgrounds and other settler ethnicities who only speak native Liberian languages and Liberian patois (like the everyday Liberian English Congor or Americo-Liberians and Liberians of Creole descent speak). Some of these non-native citizens were mainly of the lower class structure like their native brothers and sisters and they were also denied access to equality of education for nearly a century. However, Creoles and Congors and Americo-Liberians of the lower class strata only speak Liberian patois, a substandard form of the English language.

Thus, when it comes to who is considered ‘educated’ and/or ‘not educated’, it is basically determined on the fact of being able to speak, read and write the English language; or, being schooled in a western educational system that has its own script. As a result, most Liberian educators and policymakers did not or do not recognize or prioritize traditional education in the past and present as the foundation of education in Liberia principally due to language or communication barriers between the Settlers and the natives. Another point in question was owing to the fact that traditional knowledge was not written but was transmitted through the age old process of oral tradition.

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