



Sierra Leone Right to Education Index (RTEI) Country Brief 2021

Country Scored 60%

Introduction

The Right to Education Index (RTEI) is a global accountability initiative that aims to ensure that all people, no matter where they live, enjoy their right to a quality education, and it is built out of the international right to education frame work to monitor national progress towards its fulfillment. This round of RTEI for 2021 targets 15 countries including the Brazil, Democratic /republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Palestine, Philippine, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, the United Kingdom, The United State of America and Zimbabwe.

RTEI partners with civil society organizations, research institutions, and governments to collect data on a wide range of indicators. . The data is used to form the Right to Education Index, which can be used by the public, civil society, researchers, and governments to identify areas in need of improvement, explore issues more deeply, and place efforts where they are most needed.

In Sierra Leone, the RTEI was conducted by Education for all Sierra Leone Coalition (EFASL Coalition) using the RTEI questionnaire to look at country performance in five thematic areas; **Governance¹, Availability², Accessibility³, Acceptability⁴ and Adaptability⁵**. This short review outlines key findings revealed by the Sierra Leone's RTEI data collection process in 2021. It identifies areas in which rights-holders and duty-bearers can look to improve efforts and fulfil their responsibilities in meeting internationally agreed education targets, such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and the Education 2030 Agenda. Sierra Leone's questionnaire can be accessed, [here](#).

¹ Governance speaks to the legal structure of education in a State. This includes State ratification of international declarations or treaties, education financing, and education standards and regulations.

² Availability speaks to the specific quantity of educational institutions available and the condition of such institutions.

³ Accessibility speaks to whether available institutions are accessible to all students regardless of their socio-economic, familial, or demographic status.

⁴ Acceptability speaks to the quality of available education. This moves beyond learning outcomes to also capture the cultural relevance and security of the educational environment as well as the aims and content of education.

⁵ Adaptability speaks to the ability of education to be flexible in meeting the needs of a diverse range of students.

Overview of the RTEI Results, Index Score:

Sierra Leone scores below average on the Right to Education Index with an overall score of 60% compared to the overall average of 69%. Sierra Leone is the tenth highest scoring country in the index, falling just behind Zimbabwe and doing relatively better in comparison to Tanzania, Uganda, DRC, Ethiopia and Haiti.

Theme and subtheme scores for Sierra Leone:

Governance: Sierra Leone was rated as 82%, with detailed sub-theme scores as follows: International Frameworks 74%; National Laws 68%; Plan of Action 100%; Monitoring and Reporting 100%; Financing of Education 78%; and Data Availability 70%.

Availability: Sierra Leone was rated 72%, with detailed scores - Classroom 83%; Sanitation 70%; Teachers 71%; and Learning Materials 64%.

Accessibility: Sierra Leone is rated 61%, with detailed scores - Free Education 58%; and Participation 63%.

Acceptability: Sierra Leone is rated 57%, with detailed scores - Aims of Education 71%; Learning Environment 25%; and Learning Outcomes 76%.

Adaptability: Sierra Leone scored 47% overall, with detailed scores - Children with Disabilities 67%; Children of Minorities and Indigenous peoples 0%; Girls' Education 71%; Child Labor 55%; Children Deprived of Liberty 44%; and Armed Conflict 67%.

By indicator type Sierra Leone scored: structural 66%, process 69%, and outcome 61%.

The table below provides the overall picture of the scoring by the fifteen (15) participating countries. In comparison Sierra Leone is led by nine countries with a rating of 60% while the most highly rated country (UK) is on 82% and the least rated country (Haiti) rated at 50%. The overall country scores of the participating countries is in the figure below.

Sierra Leone has scored relatively high in the three of the five areas scoring 82% in Governance; 72% in Availability and 61% in Accessibility, whilst it needs to improve on Acceptability where it scores 57% and adaptability 47% due to challenges in data availability on children of minorities, poor learning environment, and children deprived of liberty. Sierra Leone scored highly in the area of Governance ranking 2nd out of the 15 countries surveyed whilst doing poorly on adaptability with a score of 47%, ranking 14th out of the 15 countries surveyed.

Impact of Covid-19 on the Right to Education

The first case of Covid-19 on March 31, 2020 coincided with the end of second term in schools. To mitigate the spread, schools, universities, and other institutions of learning were all closed until early July 2020 when they were opened for pupils taking public exams. Schools, universities and other learning institutions remained closed until September 15, 2020. Thus, an estimated 2.6 million children from pre-primary to senior secondary were out of school due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and partners put in place measures geared towards continuous learning when schools were closed. TV and radio learning were launched for third-term schooling but faced challenges especially for pupils in remote rural areas where media coverage is either inaccessible or poor and poverty is high. The result is unequal access to these services.

Prior to Covid-19 outbreak, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS – 2017), indicated that 54.7% of households have a radio (44% rural compared to 67% for urban households). The percentage of households with television accounts for 18% (38.7% urban compared to 1.5% rural). Thus, the alternative radio and TV learning system perpetuates inequalities in access between urban and rural school pupils and between poor and rich. These are compounded by the lack of electricity in homes, household economic deprivations and poor supportive learning environments. Hence, the delivery of learning through the alternative methods of radio and TV raises issues around accessibility, participation and quality.

Universities also explored using e-learning platforms to deliver teachings but it did not make the positive impact for reasons similar to those for radio teaching. According to the MICS, the percentage of households that have a computer is 5.7%. Thus e-learning for university students was effectively inaccessible for many students. The percentage of households that have access to the internet by any device is also low at 13.8%. In the circumstances, the closure of schools poses additional risks to vulnerable groups including young girls who were then forced to congregate rate unsupervised in order to access lessons. It should be noted that young girls staying at home were vulnerable to several vices including sexual violence and rape, and teenage pregnancy. During the Ebola outbreak more than 14,000 young girls became pregnant, including 11,000 who were in school before the outbreak. More generally, the continuous closure of schools imposed several risks on children and made them susceptible to physical and emotional abuse.

Thematic Areas of Concern

For purposes of this policy brief, the EFASL has identified three of the thematic areas that require concerted attention from Government and education stakeholders.

Issue one: Adaptability- 47%

The adaptability theme seeks to interrogate issues around whether there are reasonable accommodation measures available for children with disabilities in schools, the percentage of trained teachers to handle disabilities or work in inclusive schools, and the percentage of children with disabilities enrolled in “special needs schools” within the country. Sierra Leone performs poorly on adaptability with a total average score of 47%.

Adaptability	47%
Children with Disabilities	67%
Children of Minorities & Indigenous Peoples	0%
Girls	71%
Child Labour	55%
Migrants, Refugees, IDPS, and Children Deprived of Liberty	44%
Armed Conflict	67%

Sierra Leone needs to boost its score in other subthemes under adaptability, specifically on minorities, disabilities and child labor where they scored 0%, 57% and 55% respectively with the most significant improvements needing to be made for children of minorities and children deprived of liberty. However, this survey also revealed that Sierra Leone performed well in responding to girls’ education, scoring 71% especially in managing the issue of expulsion of pregnant girls from school and developing an enabling policy environment that supports pregnant girls to stay in schools and provides age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education as part of the national curriculum.

The questionnaire also revealed the lack of data on trained and qualified teachers to handle children with disabilities. Furthermore, there were no data on the percentage of children with disabilities enrolled in special needs schools, nor on the percentage of students taught in their mother tongue. On discriminatory practice around girls’ rights to education, there is now a national radical inclusion policy in place that forbids the expulsion of pregnant girls from schools in Sierra Leone. However, there is no legislation in place banning the expulsion of pregnant girls from education.

Issue two: Acceptability- 57%

Acceptability speaks to the quality of available education. This moves beyond learning outcomes but to also capture the cultural relevance and security of the educational environment as well as the aims and content of education.⁶

Sierra Leone achieved a relatively a total low score of 57% in relation to aims of education learning environment and learning outcomes. There was distinct lack of inclusion of children in decision-making processes around the school curriculum and other policy that guides schools' operations. Even though the CRA referred to the right of the child to participate, there is no regulation that mandates the role of children in decision making. Under the subtheme of acceptability Sierra Leone did well on the aims of education, in terms of national laws, policies, curriculum, teacher training and textbooks, scoring 71%.

Acceptability	57%
Aims of Education	71%
Learning Environment	25%
Learning Outcomes	76%

Source: RTEI data 2021

The subtheme on learning environment interrogated whether the national government has adopted specific measures to protect children from violence and abuse in school – including national laws prohibiting corporal punishment, and whether in practice children in schools are free from violence and abuse. Sierra Leone has its worst score (25%) on learning environment. According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2017), 86.5% of children between the ages of 1-14 have experienced some form of violent discipline in the household. An insufficient number of female teachers contributed to the high prevalence of SRGBV, according to the SLOOCS study from 2021⁷. A total of 28% of instructors nationwide are female. Distance between schools and communities exacerbates this gap in rural locations. On a countrywide scale, 141 schools reported the presence of SRGBV in their schools, with junior secondary schools having the highest prevalence and Kambia District reporting the highest in Sierra Leone highest⁸.

In practice, by definition for the purpose of this index (rape, sexual assault, robbery and aggravated assault) manifest in schools through teenage pregnancy. Furthermore, research⁹ shows that there is often an unfriendly learning environment for learners. Corporal punishment is still common in schools. Sierra Leone endorsed the Safe to Learn call to action in 2019: this includes a commitment to prohibit corporal punishment in schools and promote positive discipline in practice. Article 2.2.3 of the Code of Conduct states that **“teachers and other education personnel shall establish and maintain zero tolerance for all forms of physical and humiliating forms of punishment”** and that “positive methods of corrective discipline” must be employed, but corporal punishment is still high¹⁰. As such, there is no regulation that prohibits corporal punishment in schools.

Issue three: Accessibility- 61%

Accessibility speaks to whether available institutions are accessible to all students regardless of their socio-economic, familial, or demographic status. The research looked at whether national laws provide for free and

⁶ UNESCO (2014). The Right to Education: Law and policy review guidelines. Paris: UNESCO.

⁷ SLOOCS (2021). Sierra Leone Out- of-School Children Study

⁸ ASC (2020) Annual School Census Report

⁹ Annual school census report 2020

¹⁰ [Sierra Leone | Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children \(endcorporalpunishment.org\)](https://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/)

compulsory pre-primary education, primary and secondary education, and also whether primary education is free in practice.

Sierra Leone achieved a relatively average score of 61% ranking 8th matching with USA who also scored 61% but ahead of 7 other countries including Tanzania, Indonesia, etc.

Accessibility	61%
Free Education	58%
Participation	63%

Source: RTEI data 2021

In review of documents during the research, Sierra Leone did relatively well under provision of Free Education scoring 58% as the national laws provided for basic education as compulsory, and primary education free. The Free Quality Schools education FQSE and 2021 National Policy on Radical Inclusion both recognize and seek to address cost barriers to access, although primary education is reportedly still not free in practice for many learners and families. Families and guardians are still paying some other costs related to education, with high household spending on education – including about 20% of household spending on secondary education¹¹.

In terms of participation, Sierra Leone scored 63% and the research looks at the gross and net enrollment rate and the completion rate. The overall gross enrollment rate for pre-primary schools is 20.6%, primary schools 136.9%, and secondary schools 59.1%¹². The overall completion rate for primary schools stood at 82% in 2019, and for secondary schools, the rate is 48.16% and 47.08% for boys and girls respectively¹³. Completion rate for boys and girls is 83.8%, showing a huge gap between completion from primary to secondary and this requires deliberate response from the government to close the huge gap.

Recommendations

To address the shortcomings in education for Sierra Leone based on the RTEI;

1. The government and education sector partnered to popularize, enforce, and implement the code of conduct for teachers and to develop a safe school policy.
2. Government to train teachers and educators on Comprehensive Sexuality Education which has been added to the curriculum to be taught in the basic education school.
3. Conduct capacity building trainings for teachers and educators for the teaching of comprehensive sexuality education which has been included in basic education schools curriculum.
4. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education should endeavor to revise the 2010 education policy and the Education Act 2004 to be in tune with the national constitution; as well as provisions of international laws such as the International Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other related covenants to which Sierra Leone is signatory to guarantee the right to education for all.

¹¹ page 79 of Education Sector Analysis Report 2020. Note figure given above is the mean values for Junior and senior secondary schools (15.3% & 24.1%)

¹² [ASC-2020-Report.pdf \(dsti.gov.sl\)](#)

¹³ ESA (2020) Education Sector Analysis Report

5. The Ministry of Basic and Senior and Secondary Education should invest more on inclusion issues in education, thereby training teachers to meet the needs of children with disabilities, and capturing disaggregated data on disability, quintile level and by location (rural or urban location) for purposes of an inclusion in education.
6. Urgent attention is required towards the training and recruitment of qualified teachers at senior secondary school level, particularly female teachers to serve as role models in supporting girls' education and helping to reduce the disparities between girls and boys at the senior secondary education level.
7. The Government should legislate a law that forbids discrimination against and expulsion of pregnant girls from school in Sierra Leone.
8. The Government should ensure that schools are friendly to children with disabilities, including through the provision of ramps, availing learning materials such as Braille and hearing aids, training of teachers, the generation of relevant data, and the creation of a positive attitude among school communities (teachers, schools administrators and students). Deeper engagement of CSOs and the international community should also be pursued.
9. This calls for the government to implement long-term and innovative education financing structures, with domestic finance serving as the foundation of future financing of the education sector. The establishment of the Sierra Leone National Education Fund to raise funding for major projects in education, tax reforms, matching donor funding, using earnings from natural resource extractions as a good alternative of mobilizing revenue particularly for the social sector.