

HOW DO VIEWS ABOUT TEACHERS INFLUENCE EARLY EDUCATION IN LIBERIA?



INTRODUCTION

Internationally, the social status of the teaching profession is shown to impact recruitment and retention of effective teachers¹ and is a critical factor for ensuring that investment in a strong teacher preparation system translates to effective classroom teaching in the long-term. In Liberia, the Ministry of Education's current strategy recognizes that improving teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge, as well as their teaching practice, is a key factor for improving learning outcomes. Additionally, addressing overage enrollment is a critical priority for the Ministry of Education.²

Only local solutions can bring meaningful and sustainable transformation of Liberia's education system. To improve

the quality of the teaching, we must understand how current norms, relationships, and incentives shape Liberians' views of teaching as a profession. Overage enrollment cannot be addressed without clarity about the incentives and disincentives that impact parents' decisions about school attendance. That's why we want to know: **How do Liberians view the teaching profession? What influences decisions about when to send children to school?**

To answer these questions, IREX partnered with The YMCA of Liberia to conduct a study of perceptions of the teaching profession and early childhood education.

KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, the perceived social status of the teaching profession is low.
- Friends and teachers have a lot of influence on whether or not a young person decides to become a teacher.
- Quality of teaching is a major factor influencing when children start school.
- When judging who is a good teacher, teaching quality and evidence of student learning matter more than certifications or years of experience.

1. The World Bank, Successful Teachers, Successful Students <<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/235831548858735497/Successful-Teachers-Successful-Students-Recruiting-and-Supporting-Society-s-Most-Crucial-Profession.pdf>>
 2. See Getting to Best Education Sector Plan 2018 – 2021, Chapter 8 Overage and Out-of-School and Chapter 9 Teacher Education and Management Program <https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/getting_to_best_education_sector_plan_2017-2021_liberia.pdf>

ABOUT IREX AND YMCA

IREX is a global development and education organization dedicated to building a more just, prosperous, and inclusive world by empowering youth, cultivating leaders, strengthening institutions, and extending access to quality education and information. Through the five-year Civil Society and Media Leadership Program, IREX and its partners The Carter Center and Social Impact, worked to sustain peace in Liberia through greater inclusion, giving a voice to, informing and engaging Liberian citizens. We knew then that Liberian voices were essential to creating locally led solutions to development challenges. Today, IREX and YMCA have partnered to collect and share Liberian perspectives on the teaching profession and early childhood education to inform solutions aimed at enhancing teachers' capabilities in the classroom.

Whether strengthening pre-service teacher education programs³, leveraging in-service teacher training to develop student

digital literacy⁴, or supporting university administrators who lead reforms⁵, IREX invests heavily in locally tailored training, curriculum, and instructional methods that are research-proven to improve student learning outcomes. We believe that public perceptions of the teaching profession and early childhood education are a sound starting point for Liberians to develop local solutions for a more self-reliant and inclusive education system that delivers high quality instruction to all children.

On this research, IREX worked in partnership with The YMCA of Liberia, an ecumenical movement comprising individuals and institutions that are committed to fostering development among themselves and their communities. Working hand-in-hand with the people it serves, YMCA works for the growth and development of youth and communities across Liberia, empowering them for social transformation.⁶

METHODOLOGY

Leveraging an online survey platform, IREX in partnership with YMCA Liberia, conducted targeted data collection in six counties in Liberia to identify common attitudes about the teaching profession and what shapes those attitudes. YMCA Liberia recruited and trained enumerators in Bong, Grand Bassa, Lofa, Margibi, Montserrado, and Nimba and were able to collect data from over 1,200 individuals from eleven locations across these counties.

This study utilized a stratified random sampling strategy. YMCA Liberia gathered demographic data, including gender, county, level of education, work status, and age. The sample composed of equal proportions of men and women, as well as equal proportions of individuals over the age of 25 and under the age of 25.

Due to connectivity challenges, enumerators experienced difficulty saving some responses, resulting in some missing

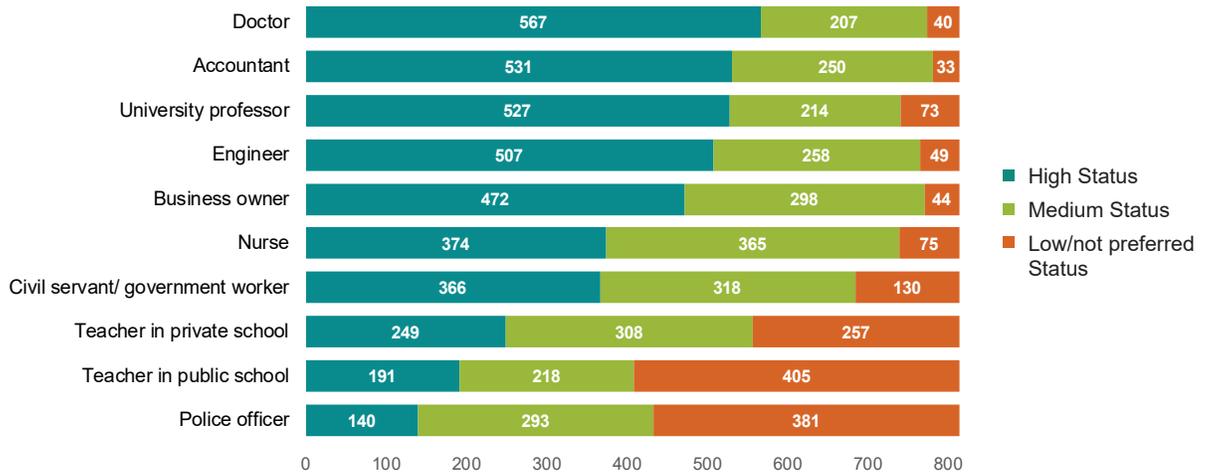
data. Initial analysis addressed issues of missing data, but it proved to be a limitation to drawing representative views across the Liberian population. Thus, this report was calculated using available responses. Response rates varied per survey question, though responses often totaled over 800.



3. IREX approaches strengthening pre-service teacher education at a systems level, working to address incentive structures in accreditation systems, measuring and improving performance, and reforming curriculum to align with established teacher performance standards <<https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/ptea-fact-sheet.pdf>>
4. As a result of IREX teacher training, secondary students were more likely detect hate speech and differentiate between fact and opinion <<https://www.irex.org/resource/evaluation-students-ability-detect-disinformation-after-learning-media-literacy-techniques>>
5. IREX works with administrators on institutional reform at universities in nine countries of Sub-Saharan Africa <<https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/UASP2019%201-page%20Africa.pdf>>
6. YMCA Liberia helped to implement the Core Education Skills for Liberian Youth (CESLY) and the subsequent Advancing Youth Project (AYP), producing work readiness and life skills training manuals and programs as well as the developing the Alternative Basic Education (ABE) Curriculum www.ymca.org.lr

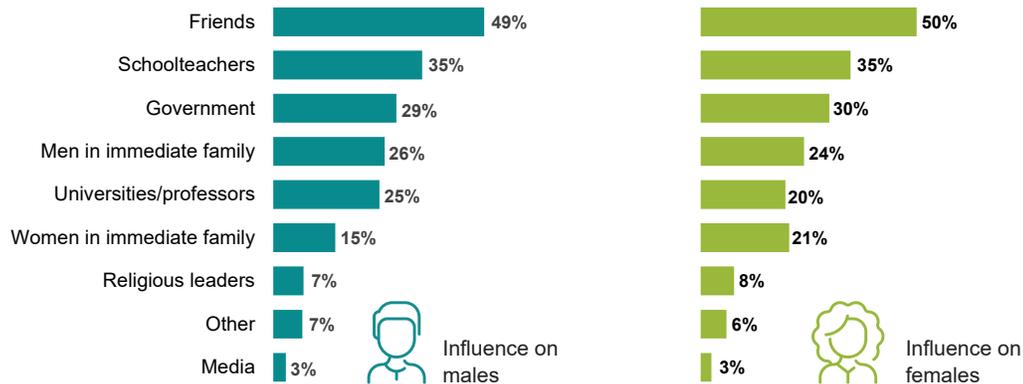
KEY FINDINGS: HOW DO LIBERIANS VIEW THE TEACHING PROFESSION?

Overall, the perceived social status of the teaching profession is low.



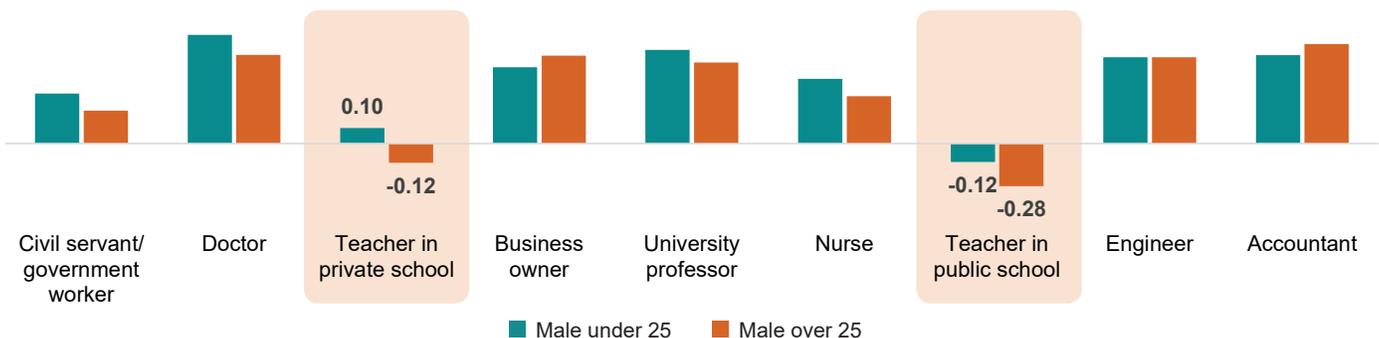
Most public and private sector occupations are perceived to have a higher status than teaching. Based on this study, a larger margin of Liberians perceive teaching in a private school to have a higher status than teaching at a public school.

Friends and teachers have a lot of influence on whether or not a young person decides to become a teacher.



Friends, teachers, and government have the greatest influence on both men and women in their decisions about pursuing a career as a teacher. Government, university professors, and immediate family members also play a role.

Perceptions are largely similar across genders and age groups, with some limited variation.

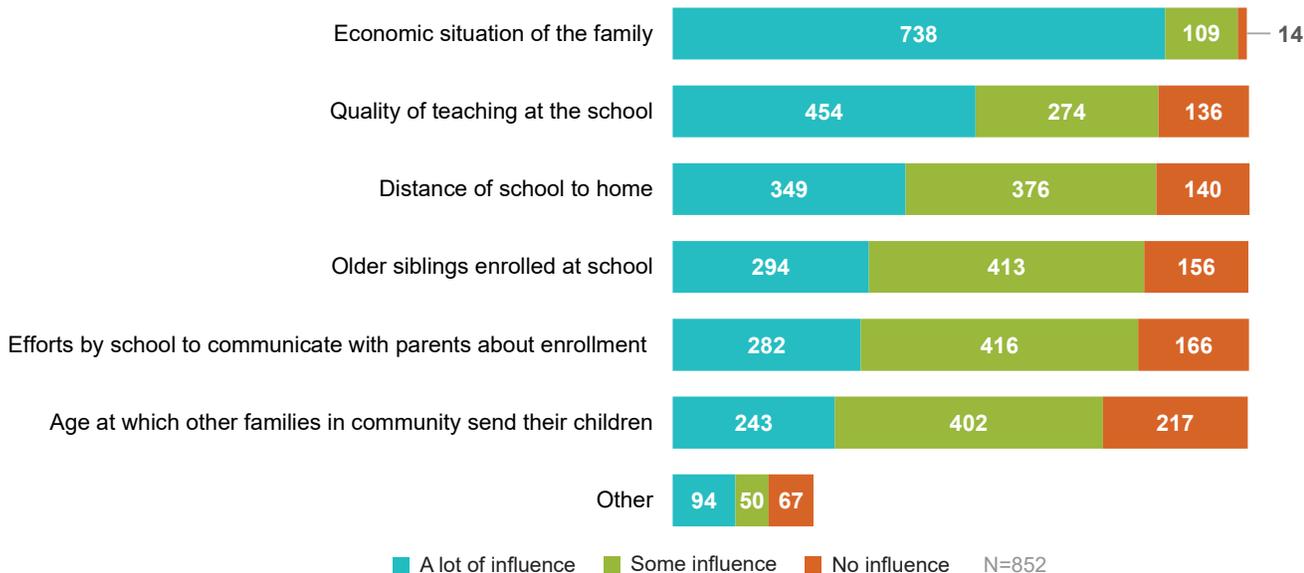


Young men generally have a more favorable impression of the teaching profession than older men. However, there was no statistical significance found in comparing differences in the likelihood of men, women, young people, or older adults in encouraging an immediate family member to become a teacher.

All highlighted findings are statistically significant at $p=0.05$.

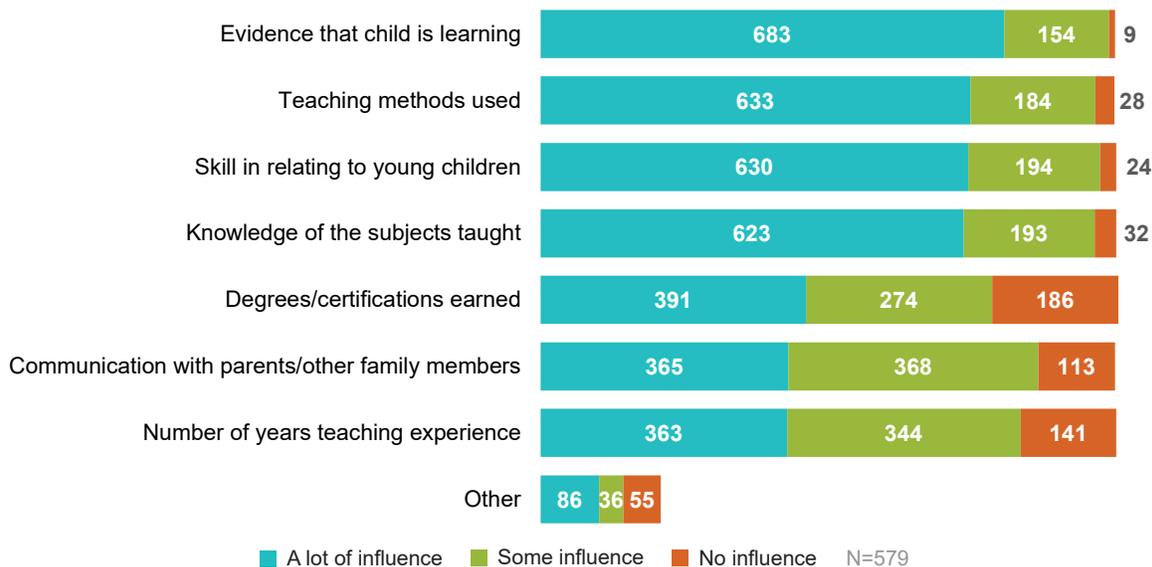
KEY FINDINGS: WHAT INFLUENCES DECISIONS ABOUT WHEN TO SEND CHILDREN TO SCHOOL?

Quality of teaching is a major factor influencing when children start school.



While the economic situation of the family is considered to have the most influence on whether or not parents send children aged 3-5 to school, quality of teaching at the school also has a lot of influence.

When judging who is a good teacher, teaching quality and evidence of student learning matter more than certifications or years of experience.

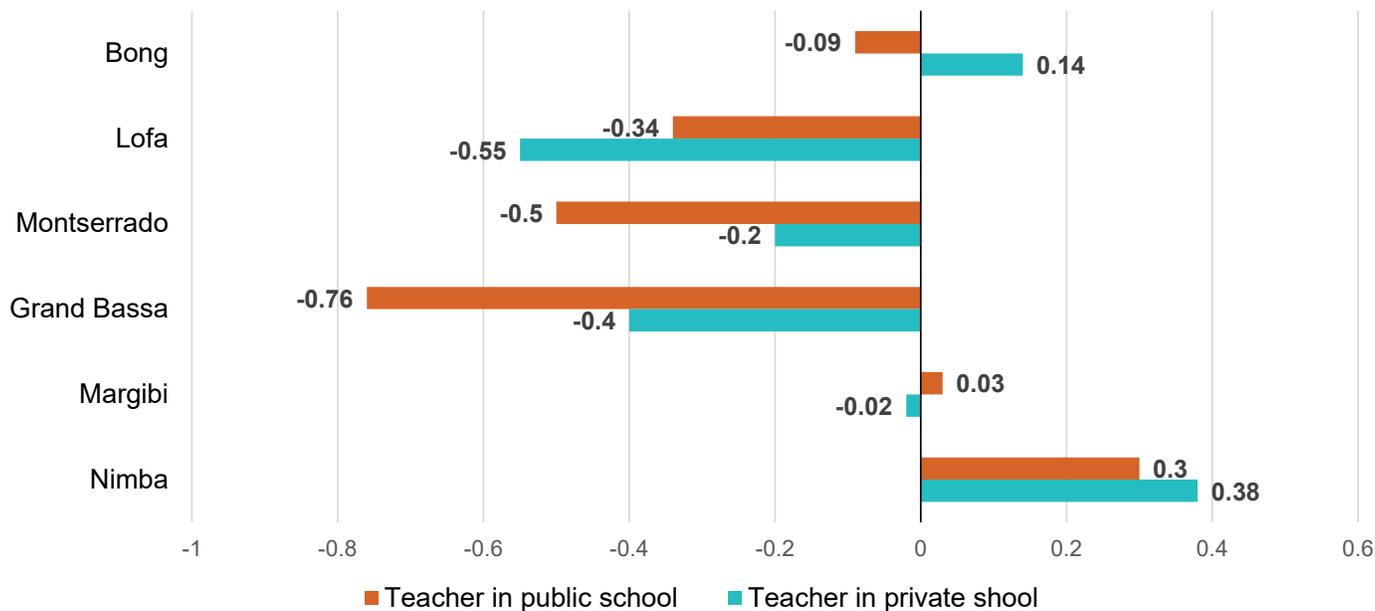


Evidence of student learning has the most influence on a parent's perception of a teacher. Perceptions of teacher knowledge, skills, and practices are more influential than certifications or experience.

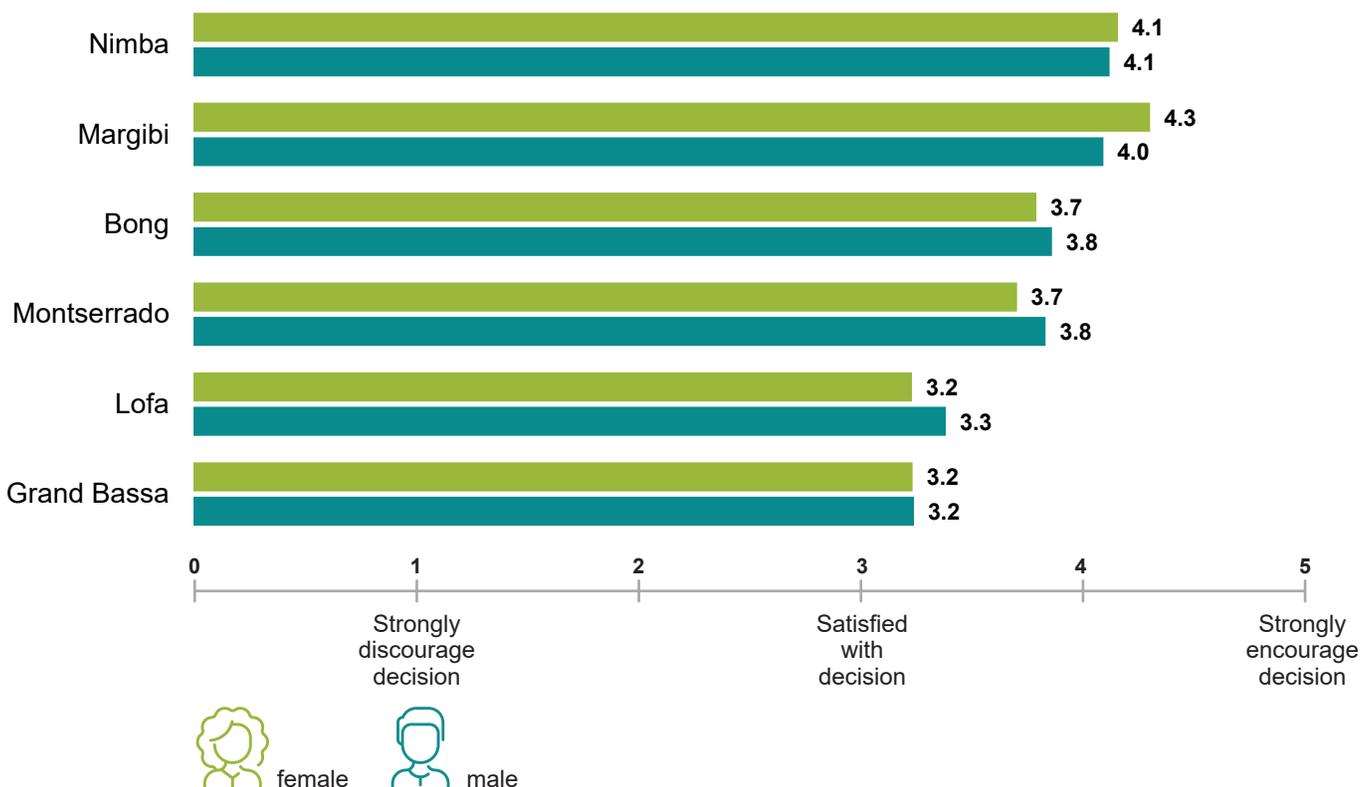


GEOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN FINDINGS

Liberians in Nimba, Margibi, and Bong counties have more favorable views about the social status of the teaching profession than those in Grand Bassa, Lofa, and Montserrado.



Only in Nimba and Margibi would family members encourage other family members' in their decision to become a teacher.



AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

IREX and YMCA have collaborated to collect and share insights on Liberian perceptions of the teaching profession in six counties. However, more research would advance the development of local solutions and lead to greater transformation of the education sector in Liberia. Avenues for further research include:

- Qualitative research, for example a problem-driven political economy analysis to **build understanding of the incentives and disincentives for young men and women to pursue careers in teaching.**
- Key informant interviews and focus group discussions with young women to **identify key inflection points in whether or not to pursue a career in teaching.** While this research did not uncover major gender differences in perceptions of the teaching profession and in whom is encouraged to become a teacher, women are significantly underrepresented in Liberia's teaching force.
- Nationwide research to determine **if and how perceptions of the teaching profession differ in other counties,** and whether or not there is a correlation between the level of poverty in a county and the desirability of the teaching profession.
- Research to understand in greater depth **how parents and caregivers judge the quality of teaching and whether or not young children are learning at school.** This initial research indicates that parents don't place a high value on communications from teachers and schools, yet an absence of this communication may make it difficult to discern what children are learning.
- Focus group discussions with **parents of children with disabilities to determine how they view and make decisions about early childhood education.**

