

POLICY BRIEF

Teacher Deployment in Sierra Leone

Lessons learnt and going forward

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Authors Iman Beoku Betts

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Reviewers

Chris McBurnie (EdTech Hub)

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ASC	Annual School Census
EU	European Union
GIS	Geographic Information System
JSS	Junior Secondary School
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PTR	Pupil-to-teacher ratio
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and maths
TMIS	Teacher management information system
TSC	Teaching Service Commission
TTI	Teacher Training Institution
WASSCE	West African Secondary School Certificate Examination

1. Introduction

In February 2022, EdTech Hub conducted qualitative research on GIS-supported (Geographic Information System) teacher allocation in Sierra Leone. The study aimed to understand better the reasons behind the inequitable distribution of government-paid teachers in Sierra Leone and how the government could mitigate this issue ([↑McBurnie et al., 2022](#)). The study highlights teachers' differing priorities for choosing which schools to work at. For example, we explored teachers' motivations for remaining at a particular school or what influenced them to move to a different one. In order to make teacher deployment successful, the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) requested more information on how to retain teachers, particularly those in remote areas.

This report provides an overview of the teacher deployment process in Sierra Leone prior to and including 2022. Through interviews with key stakeholders in the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and the TSC, we look at lessons learnt from this deployment process and the next steps for how teacher deployment can be implemented.

The TSC is a semi-autonomous body within the MBSSE, which exclusively focuses on teachers. According to the Teacher Service Commission Act and since its establishment in 2011, the TSC has the mandate to “manage the affairs of teachers to improve their professional status and economic wellbeing and for other related matters” ([↑Government of Sierra Leone, 2011](#), p. 1). The mandate includes matters such as teacher recruitment and deployment in government and government-assisted schools at all levels. Many teachers in Sierra Leone join schools as unpaid volunteer teachers and work without being on the government payroll. Here, we refer to the recruitment of teachers by the government as putting teachers on the government payroll.

Each year, the MBSSE collects data on the teaching workforce in Sierra Leone as part of the Annual School Census (ASC). According to the 2021 ASC, 42% of teachers across the country currently receive a government salary, an increase from 36% in 2019 ([↑MBSSE, 2019](#); [↑MBSSE, 2021](#)). At the same time, over one-third of teachers are unqualified, and 29% of all teachers in Sierra Leone are female ([↑MBSSE, 2021](#)). Through teacher deployment, the TSC has prioritised increasing the number of qualified teachers on the government payroll and the number of female teachers.

As well as information on teachers across the country, the ASC also reports on pupil-to-qualified-teacher ratios. The government target for the pupil-to-qualified-teacher ratio is 40:1. However, currently, the ratio of pupils-to-qualified-teachers is 60:1 ([↑MBSSE, 2021](#)). This ratio differs significantly between urban and rural areas. For example, the pupil-to-qualified-teacher ratio for urban schools is 44:1, while in rural areas, it is 76:1 ([↑Mackintosh et al., 2020](#)). Although the government has aimed to even out the discrepancy in ratios between urban and rural areas, up to a fifth of teachers did not take up their assignments in remote locations ([↑Mackintosh et al., 2020](#)). As a result, the TSC continue to prioritise recruitment in rural areas.

The context of teacher recruitment, retention, and deployment in Sierra Leone is complex. Readers may benefit from details to understand this context. We give these in a note below.

A note on the teacher workforce in Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, the teacher workforce is made up of those on the government payroll, those paid by private households, institutions, and schools, and lastly, volunteer teachers. Teachers on the government payroll make up 42% of the workforce and receive a monthly salary from the government. The remaining 58% of teachers are either paid privately or are volunteer teachers and therefore do not receive an official salary. To be able to go on the government payroll, a teacher must be qualified; that is, they must at least have a Teacher's Certificate. However, in previous years, this rule has not been enforced as strongly as now, particularly after the civil war when the demand for teachers was high. As a result, there are a number of unqualified teachers on the government payroll, who would not qualify for the payroll now. Thirty-two per cent of teachers in Sierra Leone are volunteer teachers; they may receive a small monetary subsidy from their school leaders. It is also common for teachers, including volunteer teachers, to have other jobs to provide them with extra income, such as conducting extra lessons for students. In some cases, teachers are motivated to work as volunteers, as they believe they will eventually be put on the government payroll.

A teacher is considered qualified once they have at least the minimum academic qualifications required to teach at the relevant school level ([↑MBSSE, 2021](#)). According to the Teaching Service Commission (TSC), the minimum academic qualification required is the Teachers' Certificate (TC)

or its equivalent. The minimum requirement for the pre-primary and primary levels is a TC, whereas the minimum for a junior secondary school teacher is the Higher Teachers' Certificate (HTC) Secondary, and for senior secondary, it is a bachelor's in education. Any of the following qualifications are acceptable for registration with the TSC as a qualified teacher:

- Teachers' Certificate (TC)
- Higher Teachers' Certificate (HTC) — this can be for primary or secondary
- Bachelor of Science in Education (BSc. Ed.)
- Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.)
- Master of Education (M. Ed.)
- PhD in Education
- A degree in another field + a post-graduate diploma in education

The recruitment and deployment of teachers in Sierra Leone typically involves identifying schools where non-payroll teachers (those not on the government payroll) will be put on the payroll — teachers who are already working in government and government-assisted schools are chosen to go on the government payroll and take up an assignment in the identified schools. This may or may not be the school they are already teaching in. Teachers identified to go on the government payroll must have the minimum academic qualifications needed to teach at their allocated level. Once a teacher is identified to go onto the government payroll, they are given a pin code. Although this pin code is assigned to the individual teacher rather than the school, the pin code is given to the teacher with the contingency that they must teach in the assigned school for at least three years. After three years, the teacher is allowed to apply to transfer to a different school.

The government is aiming to have at least one teacher on the government payroll in all government and government-assisted schools.

GIS-supported teacher allocation

The TSC is exploring new options – including an innovative teacher preference matching model – to harness geospatial data to strengthen workforce allocation. EdTech Hub and research partners Fab Inc. and the Education Commission are undertaking a Hub-led research (HLR) study to support the TSC to build evidence on the most feasible approach to GIS-supported teacher allocation in Sierra Leone. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study assesses the impact of this approach on teacher attendance and retention.

The research seeks to understand whether improving teacher allocation using GIS data can increase job uptake, decrease teacher absenteeism, and improve teacher retention. In February 2022, the study partners explored teachers' school choice preferences and what matters most for teacher deployment in Sierra Leone through qualitative research (see [↑McBurnie et al., 2022](#)). Between October and December 2022, the project also looked at teacher movements and retention rates through a quantitative study (see [↑Espinoza-Revollo et al., 2023](#)). Based on these two studies, the research partners want to look at the 'hot spots' and 'cold spots' for teacher retention to investigate what motivates teachers to stay at or leave a school. This will be done through intensive qualitative fieldwork and analysis in at least two districts in Sierra Leone in March 2023.

2. How have teachers been deployed in previous years?

Sierra Leone's schools have many volunteer teachers; 32% of the teaching workforce are volunteers ([↑MBSSE, 2021](#)). Teachers can sometimes work as volunteers for several years without being paid. However, they may receive a small monetary subsidy from their school leaders. In this context, the government aims to put more volunteer teachers on the payroll through a recruitment exercise rather than hiring external teachers. The TSC selects several volunteer teachers to go on the government payroll through this recruitment process each year. Following the recruitment, these teachers are deployed to schools across Sierra Leone, with the teacher deployment exercise building on the process from the previous year. Hence, some teachers will be asked to take up positions in different schools, and some will be given a paid position in their current schools. In 2019, the teacher deployment exercise aimed to distribute 5,000 new teachers to recently approved schools in the Western Area and Northern region ([↑Teaching Service Commission, 2021](#)).

In 2020 and 2021, it was decided that teachers would be hired across all regions in the country based on a set of objectives agreed upon by the TSC and MBSSE. Below is an excerpt from the TSC teacher deployment protocol from 2021, showing the objectives used for the deployment exercise. These objectives were adapted from the deployment protocol used in 2019.

Figure 1. *Objectives used for the teacher deployment exercise in 2021. Source: ([↑Teaching Service Commission, 2021](#), p. 2)*

1. Cover all levels of education (pre-primary, primary, junior secondary and senior secondary)
2. Deploy staff to underserved areas by starting with schools that have the lowest pupil-teacher ratio (PTR)
3. Get closer to the target PTR of 40:1
4. Prioritize schools which have been approved by the MBSSE for more than three years, and have no government-approved teachers
5. Provide at least one government teacher to an approved junior secondary school (JSS) in each chiefdom
6. Fulfil presidential pronouncements regarding teacher appointments

7. Prioritize full-time qualified teachers that have volunteered in approved schools
8. Increase the number of specialized teachers including Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) and foreign language (Arabic and French) teachers
9. Increase the number of female teachers.

In 2022, the TSC recruited 1,200 teachers onto the government payroll using the same objectives from the deployment process outlined in Figure 1 above. This year, for Objective 4, schools did not need to be approved for more than three years; however, they did need to be a school approved by the MBSSE (an 'approved school').¹ As schools that have been approved for more than three years are expected to have at least one qualified teacher, this objective was removed to make it possible for more schools without qualified teachers to have the opportunity for a qualified teacher on the payroll to be deployed to their school. At the same time, several teachers on the payroll were replaced because they had abandoned their posts (left their assigned school), retired, or passed away.

For the last three years, the teacher deployment protocol has followed a four-phase methodology based on the objectives given above. The protocol was created in collaboration with the TSC and is summarised in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Methodology used by the TSC for the teacher deployment exercise in 2021. Source: ([Teaching Service Commission, 2021](#), p. 3)

Phase 1: The TSC choose the number of teachers that will be allocated per education level. This is defined according to the distribution of students across the different levels in government and government-assisted schools. The TSC want to cover all levels of education, ensuring that teachers are allocated according to the number of students at each level. For example, the primary level has the largest student population; therefore, they will receive the highest percentage of teachers being put on the payroll.

¹ All schools in Sierra Leone need to be approved by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, however, there are schools operating in Sierra Leone without approval. Schools can be approved by the Chief Education Officer (CEO) or the Minister. More details on the approval process for schools can be found in the [Guidelines on Approval to Establish and Operate a School and/or Obtain Assistance from Government](#) (retrieved Tuesday 28th February 2023).

Phase 2: Using data from the ASC, the TSC defines the number of teachers allocated to each district based on the pupil-to-teacher ratio (PTR) of each district, with the aim of equalising the PTR between the districts as much as possible. Using the PTR determines the need for teachers in each district and ensures the number of teachers are allocated proportionally to the demand.

Phase 3: The TSC works with district offices to allocate teachers to government and government-assisted schools with the highest PTRs first, based on the objectives above, until the district quota is met. The aim here is to equalise the PTR within the districts as well as between the districts.

Phase 4: District offices work with each school to prioritise putting full-time, qualified teachers, especially STEM specialists, language teachers, and female teachers on the government payroll.

3. What went well with teacher deployment?

The teacher deployment protocol includes a clause that ensures teachers stay at their allocated school for at least three years after being put on the government payroll.

Recently, the TSC has introduced a clause whereby teachers must commit to staying at their allocated school for three years as a condition of being put on the government payroll. Once these three years have been completed, they can apply for a transfer to another government or government-assisted school. If a teacher who goes on the payroll leaves their allocated school before the three years are up, they will be reported as having abandoned their post. If a teacher is suspected of abandoning their post, the TSC must suspend their salary until further notice. If a government teacher is reported as a no-show at their allocated school for six months, they are removed from the payroll and replaced by another teacher. According to the [TSC](#),² there were 239 cases of abandonment in 2020.

Following the inclusion of this clause in the teacher recruitment and deployment strategy, the European Union (EU) supported the TSC in a sensitisation exercise in four districts across the country. The teacher deployment department at the TSC considered the exercise successful. They have noticed a reduction in the number of teachers abandoning their posts in the past year. The success of the sensitisation exercise has resulted in the TSC wishing to continue it in the future to ensure education stakeholders, particularly teachers and school leaders, understand the new strategy and how it works.

Teachers from rural areas being put on the government payroll and deployed to rural schools are better placed to teach in rural schools than teachers moving from urban to rural areas.

The TSC has noted that a successful part of teacher deployment has been recruiting teachers already living in rural areas and working in schools in hard-to-reach areas. This is likely because the teachers are already used to living and working in rural or hard-to-reach communities and areas. This strategy also means teachers can stay in the towns where they live, or

² See <https://tsc.gov.sl/public-notice-teacher-suspension-with-list/> Retrieved 22 March 2023

where their families live, in order to take up a position in a rural area and go on the government payroll. For those teachers who are the primary source of income for families, moving to a new town, particularly a rural town, may be difficult as they often have to leave their families. To manage this, they may have to spend large sums of money on transportation to go back home at the weekend.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as [Street Child](#)³ work in rural areas to provide training for unqualified community teachers. Street Child has trained 600 community teachers in hard-to-reach areas through their [Access To Quality Education](#)⁴ project. The programme offers teachers in-service teacher training to prepare them for completing the necessary training at a teacher training institute (TTI), enabling them to become approved teachers. [Plan International](#)⁵ offers a [distance teacher training programme](#)⁶ for women in remote areas in Sierra Leone. The programme supports and prepares women working in rural areas who aspire to teach but do not have the qualifications to enrol in a TTI. As these teachers are already from remote communities, it has been easier to deploy them to schools in hard-to reach-areas, as they are more likely to stay in these schools.

³ Retrieved 16 January 2023 <https://www.streetchildsl.org/what-we-do>

⁴ Retrieved 16 January 2023 <https://www.streetchildsl.org/projects>

⁵ Retrieved 16 January 2023 <https://plan-international.org/sierra-leone/>

⁶ Retrieved 16 January 2023 <https://edtechhub.org/2021/03/26/sierra-leone-series-plan-international-and-the-importance-of-community-support-for-distance-teacher-professional-development-programmes/>

4. What did not go well with teacher deployment?

Teachers fail to remain at allocated schools after going on the government payroll

Once a teacher goes on the government payroll, they are deployed at a school chosen by the TSC based on the need for more qualified teachers on the payroll. The school selected could be one where the teacher in question is already working as a volunteer. However, the teacher may often need to move to a different school. There are several reasons why teachers may not remain at their allocated school once they have been put on the government payroll. Some examples include:

- The school may be in a completely different district to the one they are already working in;
- They may be the sole income provider in their household and cannot afford to move their household to the new location;
- The new school is in a rural area with a lack of facilities such as electricity and water.

Many teachers would prefer to stay in the school they are already teaching at. [↑McBurnie et al. \(2022\)](#) found a number of reasons for teachers preferring to stay at their original school, including relationships they have with the school leader and community. In recent years, the TSC has noticed several teachers leaving their allocated posts after going on the payroll. Moving teachers from an urban area to a rural area that is unfamiliar to the teachers has been a problem for the TSC and teacher deployment over the years.

Sierra Leone has a shortage of qualified teachers

To go on the government payroll, teachers must be qualified to teach. According to the 2021 ASC, over one-third of teachers are unqualified ([↑MBSSE, 2021](#)). Some schools hire unqualified teachers as volunteers to increase their teaching capacity. This may include senior secondary school-leavers, who have just completed the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) exams. As a result, some schools — mainly rural — may not have qualified teachers on their staff. The government cannot put any of these teachers on the payroll, as qualification is required. In this case, the deployment exercise can become

more difficult because qualified teachers who do not live or already work in rural areas will need to be posted there to fill the vacancy.

5. How can teacher deployment be improved?

This section gives recommendations for improving the teacher deployment exercise in Sierra Leone going forward. These recommendations are based on suggestions from the key stakeholder interviews.

Target teachers in rural areas to fill rural vacancies by increasing their access to teacher training

The TSC has had the most difficulty deploying teachers from urban areas to rural areas. Deploying teachers to rural areas if they are already living or working in the same hard-to-reach areas has been successful; however, the lack of trained teachers in rural areas remains an issue. There are cases where teachers are willing to continue to work in their rural communities but do not meet the requirements for going on the government payroll.

The TSC should specifically target teachers in rural areas for rural vacancies by providing them with teacher training and the means to get qualified. NGOs such as Street Child and Plan International are already training teachers in rural areas. If the TSC were to partner with NGOs providing training to unqualified teachers, they could support these teachers to enrol on teacher training courses to get the necessary qualifications to become qualified teachers. Using Plan International's established programme, the TSC could provide distance training for teachers in remote areas. Providing teacher training in rural areas could incentivise and encourage unqualified teachers in urban locations to move from urban to rural areas to work. If the government can offer paid study leave for working in rural schools, this might encourage teachers to move to these areas. Teachers who are qualified and willing to move to or remain in a rural area could be prioritised for being put on the government payroll.

Work with TTIs to prioritise schools in rural areas for teacher training placements

During teacher training, trainee teachers have to spend some time working in schools. In their first year of training, the school is chosen by the student, and in the second year, it is chosen by the TTI. The TSC could work with the TTIs to create a list of appropriate schools to be chosen for teacher training, including several schools in rural areas that have been identified as needing qualified teachers. Through this collaboration, different schools can be marketed to students while they are still training with the offer of a

secure job and a place on the government payroll once they have completed their training.

If students are sent to remote schools for at least one term, they will have the chance to adapt to the school and form relationships within the community. This may make them feel more comfortable about returning to such a school once they have finished their training. Providing a list of schools before the beginning of the academic year would ensure that this process aligns well with both the TSC deployment and the TTIs. As well as working with TTIs to identify schools for teacher training placements, the TSC could work with the TTIs to track students who have come from different villages, as it will be easier to deploy them to schools in their own communities even if they have undertaken their training in urban areas.

Improve data systems, data use, and data uptake

The TSC want to use data collection to understand better what teachers want. What makes teachers willing to move to different schools? What would make teachers move to and remain at a rural school?

Data collected in the Annual School Census enables the TSC to see where there is a need for teachers, based on different variables such as pupil-to-teacher ratios. However, the data does not take into consideration teacher preferences. The TSC need to understand where teachers are willing to move to deploy and retain teachers. As the ASC may not cover all the TSC's needs, a teacher workforce survey may help the TSC identify teachers who can be targeted for particular vacancies. For example, the TSC would like to know how long teachers have been volunteering to allow them to consider this when deciding who will go on the government payroll each year. Asking more questions about volunteer teachers will enable the TSC to work with schools to ensure the distribution of teachers is as equitable as possible. Where possible, incorporating these questions into the ASC could prove to be invaluable.

All data collection will need to be incorporated and integrated into the teacher management information system (TMIS) currently being built. This will allow the TSC to see what data is available and needs to be collected to help them deploy teachers successfully. For example, the TSC want to know which schools are oversubscribed with teachers and which schools do not have enough teachers. They want to have a clear database including verified teachers' qualifications. More data collection and use could provide more information about the teaching workforce in Sierra Leone and where improvements are needed.

6. Next steps

The Government of Sierra Leone is prioritising teacher deployment and, as a first step, is working towards all schools having at least one teacher on the government payroll. This can only be achieved if the needs of the schools and the teacher workforce are identified. The TSC need data that will allow them to make better decisions on teacher deployment.

Following the success of the EU-supported sensitisation exercise of the teacher deployment protocol, the TSC would like to continue with stakeholder engagement associated with the exercise to ensure everyone understands how the deployment will work in the future. Increased stakeholder engagement can help the TSC identify and agree principles that will improve teacher deployment. For instance, the TSC may want to choose a particular district and test different strategies (e.g., prioritising teachers in rural areas to be put on the government payroll and taking up vacancies in rural areas) before scaling up the strategies nationally.

EdTech Hub will continue to work with the TSC, and other partners to improve teacher deployment in Sierra Leone through technical assistance and research. Through this collaboration, the partners can find the best deployment method for teachers in Sierra Leone.

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This bibliography is available digitally in our evidence library at <https://docs.edtechhub.org/lib/M3D6NGR4>

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