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# A Qualitative Study on the Environment and Classroom Interactions in GOAL Case Study Schools



March 2013

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Cover Photo: John P. Mitchell Public School in Bong County, Liberia. Photo by Michael Richards.

# **A Qualitative Study on the Environment and Classroom Interactions in GOAL Case Study Schools**

**March 2013**

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Girls' Opportunity to Access Learning (GOAL) Project



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abbreviations and Acronyms</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Methodology.....	2
Findings.....	2
Recommendations.....	5
<b>I. Background and Project Context</b> .....	<b>7</b>
1.1 Girls' participation in the Liberia's Formal Education System.....	7
1.2 The Girls' Opportunities to Access Learning (GOAL) project.....	7
1.3 Ethnographic and In-Classroom Study on School-Community Dynamics.....	10
1.4 Qualitative focus on Six Study Communities.....	11
<b>2. Methodology</b> .....	<b>13</b>
2.1 Research Method.....	13
2.2 Selection of School.....	13
2.3 Instrument Design.....	14
2.3.1 Time Sequence & Observational Coding Forms.....	14
2.3.2 Methodological Tools.....	15
2.4 Team and Training.....	16
2.5 Instrument Testing.....	16
2.6 Data Collection.....	16
2.7 Data Entry and Quality Control.....	17
2.8 Data Compilation and Reporting.....	18
<b>3. School Environment</b> .....	<b>19</b>
3.1 Days/Hours in School.....	19
3.2 Daily Absences and Half days.....	20
3.3 Punctuality of School and Class Schedule.....	21
3.4 Health and Sanitation.....	22
3.5 Overcrowded Kindergarten and ABC Classrooms.....	22
3.6 Findings.....	23
<b>4. Classroom Environment</b> .....	<b>24</b>
4.1 Physical Condition.....	24
4.2 Classroom Composition and Setup.....	24
4.3 Spatial Seating.....	24

4.4	Chalkboards .....	26
4.5	Supplies.....	26
4.6	Findings.....	26
<b>5.</b>	<b>Teacher Issues.....</b>	<b>28</b>
5.1	Current Context of Teachers in Liberia.....	28
5.2	Observed Teachers.....	29
5.3	Underrepresentation of Female Teachers.....	29
5.4	Teachers' Literacy Level.....	30
5.5	Teacher Attendance.....	31
5.6	Roll Call/Head Count.....	32
5.7	Other Teacher Issues .....	33
5.8	Findings.....	33
<b>6.</b>	<b>Teacher Interactions.....</b>	<b>34</b>
6.1	Teacher Performance and Gender Sensitivity Awareness.....	34
6.2	Gender Equality and Inclusion .....	35
6.3	Teacher-Student Interactions Data .....	36
6.5	Findings.....	38
<b>7.</b>	<b>Student Issues .....</b>	<b>40</b>
7.1	Students' Literacy Level and Comprehension of Class Assignments .....	40
7.2	Overage Students.....	41
7.3	Language.....	42
7.5	Female Student Issues: Bush School, Early Marriage, and Early Pregnancy.....	43
7.6	General Reasons for Stopping out, Dropping out or Never attending school.....	44
7.7	Findings.....	49
<b>8.</b>	<b>Student Interactions in the Classroom .....</b>	<b>50</b>
8.1	Out of Classroom Interactions .....	50
8.2	Student Classroom Interaction Data .....	50
8.3	Paired Student-Period Unit Observations made by School, Grade and Subject.....	51
8.4	Student Engaged Activities and Context of Activities.....	55
8.5	Activity and Sex of Student .....	56
8.6	Activity and Sex of Teacher .....	56
8.7	Activity and Subject.....	57
8.8	Activity and Grade.....	61
8.9	Context of Activities.....	62

8.9.I Group Work .....	63
8.10 Findings .....	64
<b>9. Recommendations.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Sources Consulted .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Appendix A Research Team Composition .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Appendix B Fieldwork Schedule .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Appendix C Teacher Interactions Observation Form .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Appendix E Classroom Inventory .....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Appendix F Classroom Map .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Appendix G Class Activity Summary .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Appendix H Official Class schedule .....</b>	<b>79</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. GOAL Intervention Categories for the Six Case Study Schools .....	14
Table 2. Grade Levels Observed.....	17
Table 3. Number of Female Teachers at Primary Level by County.....	29
Table 4. Number of Trained Teachers at Primary Level by County and Gender .....	30
Table 5. Number of Student-Period Units Observed by School .....	52
Table 6. Observations Recorded by Grade Levels .....	52
Table 7. Observations on Student-Period Units by Sex of Teacher .....	53
Table 8. Observations on Student-Period Units by Grade Level and Sex of Teacher .....	53
Table 9. Observations on Student-Period Units of Subject Matter by Schools .....	54
Table 10. Subject Matter by Sex of Teacher .....	54
Table 11. Frequency of Activities Engaged in by Observed Students .....	55
Table 12. Activity by Six Salient Activity Categories for Grade .....	61
Table 13. Frequency Distribution of All Interactional Contexts .....	62
Table 14. Student Activities in Interactional Context .....	63

## LIST OF CHARTS

Chart 1. Gender Divergence by Age for Lofa, Bong, and Grand Bassa Counties .....	9
Chart 2. Teacher Interactions by Respondent Type .....	36
Chart 3. Respondent Type by Subject .....	37
Chart 4. Respondent Type by Category of Evaluation.....	38
Chart 5. Approximate Student Catchment Area for Saturday Town Public School.....	47
Chart 6. Approximate Student Catchment Area for John P Mitchell Public School.....	48
Chart 7. Activity <i>Writing</i> by Sex of Teacher .....	56
Chart 8. Activity <i>Choral Response</i> by Sex of Teacher .....	57
Chart 9. Activity Category <i>Listening</i> for Subject Matter .....	58
Chart 10. Activity Category for Subject <i>Writing</i> .....	58
Chart 11. Activity Category Read Silently for Subject Matter .....	59
Chart 12. Activity Category Choral Response for Subject Matter .....	60
Chart 13. Activity by Category Reading Aloud for Subject Matter .....	61



## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

AIR	American Institutes for Research
CEO	County Education Officer
DEO	District Education Officer
EEPCT	Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition
FAWE	Forum of African Women Educationalists
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GER	Gross Enrollment Rate
GIS	Geographic Information System
GOAL	Girls' Opportunities to Access Learning
GOL	Government of Liberia
IEQ	Improving Education in Quality
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LISGIS	Liberia Institute of Statistics & Geo-Information Services
L-MEP	Liberia- Monitoring and Evaluation Program
LTTP	Liberia Teacher Training Program
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MOE	Ministry of Education
NER	Net Enrollment Rate
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PI	Principal Investigator
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
SCRE	Scottish Council for Research in Education
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TMG	The Mitchell Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Program

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study contributes to ongoing research carried out by the USAID-Millennium Challenge Corporation Girls' Opportunities to Access Learning (MCC-GOAL) project. A principal practice established between the USAID-Liberia Monitoring and Evaluation Program (L-MEP) project and the MCC-GOAL project from early on has enabled a collegial and collaborative relationship between the two projects. One of L-MEP's mandates in its research role in the MCC Threshold projects is to strive for research complementarity without forsaking objectivity in its research role. For this reason, since the baseline study identified the six study school/communities and established their initial descriptive profiles, three research ventures have been conducted by MCC-GOAL and L-MEP in collaborative fashion.

There are a number of people who played important roles in making this study possible:

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This study design and implementation was carried out by Michael Richards and Casey McHugh. Additional members of the field research team were Jerry Zangar, Annie Tamba, and James Dwalu. The report was authored by Michael Richards and Casey McHugh.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2009, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Government of Liberia (GOL) developed a Threshold Country Plan. One of the areas targeted in the plan was girls' education. The Girls' Opportunities to Access Learning (GOAL) is a three-year (MCC) funded and USAID-administered threshold project. The aim of the GOAL project is to improve girls' retention, attendance, and enrollment in primary schools in targeted schools in Lofa, Bong, and Grand Bassa counties. GOAL is a partnership, comprising the American Institutes for Research (AIR), the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), and Search for Common Ground (SFCG).

In order to measure different treatment interventions in different types of schools, the GOAL project has a set of control schools in its research longitudinal correlational design, as well. The three intervention models in different schools are: (1) a scholarship program; (2) a community mobilization package through Parent Teacher Association (PTA) capacity building and grants; and (3) a combination of the scholarship and community mobilization programs. In the first model, GOAL offers in-kind scholarships and complementary services to build girls' leadership skills and to help them succeed in their academic studies. These complementary services include the provision of teachers' kits, the establishment of Girls' Clubs, and tutorial services.

The USAID-Liberia Monitoring and Evaluation Program (L-MEP) provides various services to USAID and its implementing partners in the areas of monitoring and evaluation. In 2012, the USAID/L-MEP project implementing partner began conducting complimentary research studies in the three areas the MCC Threshold projects supported—land policy and land rights, trade and commerce, and girls' education.

The study is a continuation of focused investigation on the GOAL project's six schools/communities that form part of the baseline research. L-MEP has collaborated with GOAL researchers on two previous qualitative research efforts in the six communities to obtain information regarding barriers to girls' education.

An initial phase of qualitative data collection was carried out in July 2012. This Phase One of the qualitative investigation built on prior information collected to uncover underlying educational decision-making and participation in schooling of students, parents, and teachers. The methodology included ethnographic annotation using a participant observation approach, key interviews, and small focus group discussions. Key informant interviews were conducted with students and parents of scholarship recipients who "stopped out" and even those who dropped out. Additionally, the study examined the circumstances and decision-making factors surrounding girls who never enrolled in a school.

In order to fill a gap in research information concerning in-school dynamics, a Phase Two research agenda, carried out in October 2012 concentrated on obtaining formal in-class data. The researchers also noted their observations made on social phenomena that occur at the start of school, at recess time, and at the close of the daily school session. Additionally, the Phase Two part of the study included obtaining information deriving from observations and interviews on the dynamics of girls' and boys' activities beyond school time.

The combined Phase One/ Phase Two obtained both qualitative and quantitative data on the six school/communities and is providing information to evaluate girls' attendance, retention, and completion of primary school in order to help explain whether the three interventions GOAL is supporting are working and could work in an expanded future program.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The six school/communities are distributed evenly (two each) across the three counties of Grand Bassa, Bong and Lofa. Three of the schools are scholarship and grant interventions of the GOAL project; two are grant-only interventions, and one is scholarship only. The GOAL project conducts a wider, quantitative data focused research agenda on its 40 interventions schools with a more even distribution across the type of intervention. The qualitative data inquiry on the six case study school/communities is performed in order to obtain an interpretive framework for the larger volume of data on the total 40 schools.

Formal instruments were designed and pretested before the conduct of the three-week fieldwork. These formal instruments consist of a teacher observation form, a student observation form, and a classroom inventory form. Additional methodological tools included classroom maps of seating arrangements of boys and girls, and the breadth of modal teacher-used space. The maps also helped derive the sample of girls and boys who were selected for observation, and to record their activities on the student interaction form. The researchers also recorded information on an "Official Class Schedule & Classroom Activity Form." A student interaction form captured the different activities in which randomly selected students were engaged; it also recorded who they were interacting with across three class periods.

## **FINDINGS**

**School Environment.** Regarding the school environment, the physical conditions of the case study schools ranged from very poor to newly renovated. There is clearly a reduced number of days and hours students spend in the classroom receiving lessons that affect the quality of education being administered in the study schools. The lack of study time is due to obligatory work days in the schools, the common practice of dismissing Fridays as a study day ("Super Fridays"), market days, unofficial half days, and general teacher and student absenteeism. These constitute the most pervasive problems reported over the course of the study. Although the key grades of 2 through 6 (focus of GOAL interventions) in the study schools may seem crowded, the research team was struck by the impact kindergarten and ABC classes had on the overall school environment. With the exception of one school, all of the pre-primary grades were conducted on the same campus as the primary school. These pre-primary classes were extremely overcrowded, with as many as 100 students in one classroom with just one teacher. With such a large number of small children, some as young as three years old, a chaotic air permeated the rest of the campus, causing major distraction to the listening and hearing abilities of students in the primary grade classrooms.

The most common seating arrangement in classrooms was benches with attached desks. The setup and spacing of student benches and chairs often affected teacher access to students. In well-spaced classrooms, teachers were more likely to be observed walking up and down aisles, checking student work; however, in overcrowded classrooms where desks or benches were

spaced close together, the teacher was unable to walk between students, thereby much less likely to provide individual attention or to check on work and assess their comprehension of class material. There was no definitive pattern regarding the seating of children by gender or age.

Issues involving health and hygiene varied greatly from school to school. In two schools there was a major problem of sanitation, specifically a large degree of animal (goat) feces on school grounds and even on the floors of classrooms. While both schools had fences, these did not keep goats off the premises. In regards to the school environment, nearly all of the girls in all of the schools stated that more girls latrines were necessary.

**The Classroom Environment.** There was some variability in the classroom environment of the observed six schools. Of the specific classrooms observed, six were reported as in good physical condition and 14 in moderately good condition. Most classrooms showed some signs of water leakage, and needed painting and thorough cleaning.

With the exception of three classrooms, the grades observed were all single-grade classes. Two classrooms, the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> at one school, were combined classes receiving the same lessons. In another, the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade were combined and each grade received separate lesson. Only one grade in the class received a subject lesson per period, requiring the other grade to take a free period. All of the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classrooms and most of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classrooms were led by a single teacher. One 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, and all of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades observed, were taught by multiple rotating teachers by subject area.

Sufficiently large sized chalkboards were present in all observed classrooms. However, the clarity of the chalkboards was often poor, with many in need of repainting. In a number of observation periods, the brightness of the outside produced a reflective glare, making it difficult or impossible for students to read what their teachers wrote. A positive discovery across all of the schools was that most students appeared to have the basic supplies necessary to attend class. Nearly all the students observed had a writing implement, such as a pen or pencil, and only a few students were seen asking to borrowing pens or pencils from classmates. Almost all of the students had at least one copybook.

**Teacher Issues.** Major teacher issues that emerged over the course of school and classroom observations included: low number of female teachers, low literacy levels, teacher absenteeism, lack of roll call and inaccurate reporting of head counts, corporal punishment of students, and teacher drunkenness. The research team was particularly struck by the fact that teachers had very deficient literacy skills. A considerable number of teachers appeared to struggle with the material they were presenting and were visibly awkward in carrying out the instruction. Words were frequently misspelled on the chalkboard, and their reading skills were halting – they read word by word in a slow, staccato rate. General teacher absenteeism was high. Researchers noted coverage for absences was provided by the principal, the registrar, or teachers who were not assigned to the class. Class lessons were hastily provided to substitute stand-in teachers. They also noted that teachers were in some instances pulled from classes not being observed to cover the observed class, leaving their classrooms without supervision.

The overall degree to which teachers were observed administering physical punishment with rattan canes varied by teacher (i.e., none, threat of use, light use, or harsh use). It was clear that rattan canes were present in almost every classroom. In addition to teachers wielding canes,

older students designated as discipline lieutenants patrolled school grounds during recess with cane in hand.

**Teacher Interactions.** With the caveat that the presence of the researchers had some on teachers' behavior and the gender framed classroom interactions, a general trend in the observations on teacher interaction in the classroom indicates that the majority of observed teachers (19 of 31) were noted for encouraging participation from girls and boys, either calling on both sexes to answer questions and solve problems or allowing students equal opportunity to volunteer. However, when teachers tried to engage or call on girls, female students were in general hesitant to answer and occasionally refused to participate.

With regard to teacher interactions with students, one of the most striking findings recorded in the time-sequenced teacher interaction form, was that a high number (38 percent) of the recorded teacher observations (551) were coded as "no interaction," indicating that there was no direct verbal exchange between teachers and students at the scheduled timeframe. This suggests that the "chalk and talk" method of teaching remains prevalent in the GOAL case study schools. Of the 334 interactions that did take place, teachers overall provided roughly equal attention to both female and male students.

The most common classification of teacher interaction with female students, male students, the class or group was acceptance (51 percent), followed by praise (21 percent), and remediation (19 percent). In general, criticism on the part of the teacher was low, making up only 10 percent of type of teachers' interaction. Both boys and girls individual interactions with the teachers were most likely to be receiving acceptance from the teacher, with boys receiving approximately eight percent more acceptance interactions than girls. Girls were more likely to receive praise for their responses than boys by seven percent.

**Student Issues.** There are a number of barriers constraining children in the case study schools to access educational opportunities and to receive a quality education. A number of students struggled with class materials and demonstrated low or non-existent reading ability; the observations bear out that this was a greater problem for girls. Other contributing factors to children not in, enrolling or dropping out of, primary school included: delayed age of enrollment; low or none existent command of English; shame of being overage; costs of school-related expenses; lack of parental support; family structure and household responsibility; financial concerns and incentives; dropped school feeding programs; illness or disability; and the distance from satellite villages to school. For girls particularly, factors influencing girls' attendance, retention, and drop out included their attendance in 'bush schools' and early marriage.

**Student Interaction in Classroom.** The observations on students interactions in the classroom corroborate the findings of the teacher observations, most notably, that students are passive actors in an eminently teacher-driven classroom environment. Students spend most of the time in the classroom listening to the teacher. This is not to say that the teacher is dynamically speaking in the classroom most of the time. What is really occurring is that there are prolonged periods of no utterances coming from the teacher, and essentially, students simply wait for the next cue, making for a lot of interaction down time. Following listening, writing follows as the next category of activity importance. Most of this writing is copying what the teacher places on the chalkboard, and the volume of letters and simple words (in 1<sup>st</sup> grade) or simple sentences and basic arithmetic constructions (2<sup>nd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grades) is very low.

Choral response is the third important category, with the entire class echoing the teacher's utterance.

The bulk of contexts in which the student activities take place is with teacher and the whole class. This is followed by activities engaged in by students doing the observed activity being alone, having a social interaction.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Monitoring and Oversight as a Means to Increase School Instructional Time.**

Interviewed Community members called for greater oversight and monitoring of the schools. They believed that with regular spot checks, teachers and administrators would come to believe they would be regularly observed and held accountable for their actions, and consequently help address some of the major schooling problems.

**Teachers and Equity.** The GOAL project has begun rolling out teacher gender sensitive pedagogy training for teachers in their schools. Gender equality means doing more than just calling on girls and boys equally; the teacher needs to enable an encouraging and positive learning environment where girls feel comfortable trying to answer, even if they are unsure whether or not they are correct.

**Overage Students.** The GOAL project should continue with its programming in raising awareness about age appropriate enrollment and the benefits of having girls start school at age rather than delaying enrollment.

**The Girls Club Program.** Within the GOAL project, this is a good venue to continue working on girls' schoolwork, confidence, and self-esteem. There also is a need to focus more heavily on tutoring and study sessions to bring up girls' level of reading and other skills up to grade level. With an increase in confidence, they should be able to participate more willingly and fully in classroom activities, specifically answering teachers' questions.

**Teenage Pregnancy.** Teenage pregnancy emerged as the most often discussed and highlighted challenge for girls and young women remaining in school and continuing their education. GOAL has already played a role in raising awareness and sensitivity on this issue. This includes encouraging girls to remain in schools far into the pregnancy as possible in order to reduce stop out "stop out time" (GOAL project staff members use this term to signify a temporary hiatus in attendance, due to seasonal farm work, pregnancy, etc.). This effort should be expanded to create awareness and sensitization around the teasing and bullying young pregnant women in the schools.

**Other Areas of Improvement.** Girls who were interviewed in Phase One of the study called for teachers being more supportive in their learning environment, tutoring or additional study class help and more women teachers. Many of the girls stated that having more female teachers would improve their learning environment. In regards to the school environment, nearly all of the girls stated that more girls' latrines were necessary, that fences be put up around the school, and that evening classes for young mothers and overage students be provide. Requests made during Phase Two included requests for raingear, additional lesson books for teachers (one for each subject or grade being taught), and additional flashlight batteries to enable studying in the evenings.

**Potential for Further Research.** Based on the current methodology and instruments, this study could be revised and updated for a larger-scale, comprehensive study on the school and classroom environments. This need not necessarily be restricted to girls' education. While many of the different issues discussed are relatively wide known and acknowledged, a large-scale study could provide more concrete data on general classroom dynamics across specific counties of interest, or all of Liberia. The methodologies used in this study could possibly be incorporated into pre-service teacher training institutes to do data collection providing a structured in classroom framework for new teachers to make objective observations on classrooms in order to internalize good pedagogical practice. The methodology could also engage university students of sociology, anthropology, and education. It could also help shape teachers' understanding and awareness of classroom dynamics and see how the students would be benefitted. Further, implementing this methodology in a wider context could enable an effective participatory research dimension in teacher training.

# **I. BACKGROUND AND PROJECT CONTEXT**

## **I.1 GIRLS' PARTICIPATION IN THE LIBERIA'S FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Since the end of civil conflict in Liberia, the Liberian government has made significant advancement in its social and economic development, in spite of the daunting challenges the country faces as the country transitions out of the 14 year conflict that ended in 2003. In 2006, the Ministry of Education introduced compulsory and free primary education, and, in 2011 the Education Reform Act extended free education in the public schools up to the ninth grade. Nevertheless, schooling beyond the first few years of elementary school is out of reach for many of Liberia's girls. While Liberia's increasing primary school enrollment shows future promise, net enrollment is low, and most girls of primary school going age (6 to 11) do not complete the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

The Ministry of Education cites that girls accounted for 46 percent of the overall enrollment population at the primary level.<sup>1</sup> However, the primary gross enrollment and completion rates for girls in all Liberian schools are 13 percent lower than that of boys. Net enrollment and completion rates for all primary school students contrast sharply to gross enrollment and completion rates<sup>2</sup>. For primary school girls, the net enrollment rate is 40 percent, and their net completion rate is 3.2 percent. Boys' net enrollment rate at the national level exceeds that of girls by 4 percent, and their net completion rate is higher than girls' net completion rate by only 0.3 percent. Basically speaking, the majority of girls and boys enrolled in primary school in Liberia are overage. When children are enrolled at the correct primary school appropriate age, the difference between the enrollment and completion rates of boys and girls narrows and the degree of overage student population in the primary level decreases.

## **I.2 THE GIRLS' OPPORTUNITIES TO ACCESS LEARNING PROJECT**

In 2009, in consultation with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Government of Liberia (GOL), developed a Threshold Country Plan. One of the areas targeted in the plan was girls' education. The Girls' Opportunities to Access Learning (GOAL) is a three-year (MCC) funded and USAID-administered threshold project. The aim of the GOAL project is to improve girls' retention, attendance and enrollment in primary schools in targeted schools in Lofa, Bong, and Grand Bassa counties.

These three counties were chosen for an intervention package to bolster girls' participation in primary school because the gross enrollment and completion rate vary considerably. Since a key feature of the GOAL project is to measure intervention outcomes based on different types

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education, Republic of Liberia (October 2010). *A Case for System Transformation: the 2008/09 National School Census Report*. Monrovia: author.

<sup>2</sup> Net Enrollment Rate (NER) is the number of children in the official school age group enrolled in school over the entire population of that age bracket. Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) consists of all the enrolled children of all ages over the number of the official school age group.

of interventions, this variability is important. For example, In Bong County, girls' gross enrollment and completion rates are higher than national rates. Grand Bassa's gross enrollment rate for girls is among the lowest. Similarly, Grand Bassa's gross completion rate of 43 percent as well as the net enrollment rate of 25 percent is low compared to the national average. Lofa's gross enrollment rate for girls is eight percent lower than the 99 percent national rate; in contrast, the gross completion rate for primary school girls in Lofa is 3 percent higher than the national rate.<sup>3</sup>

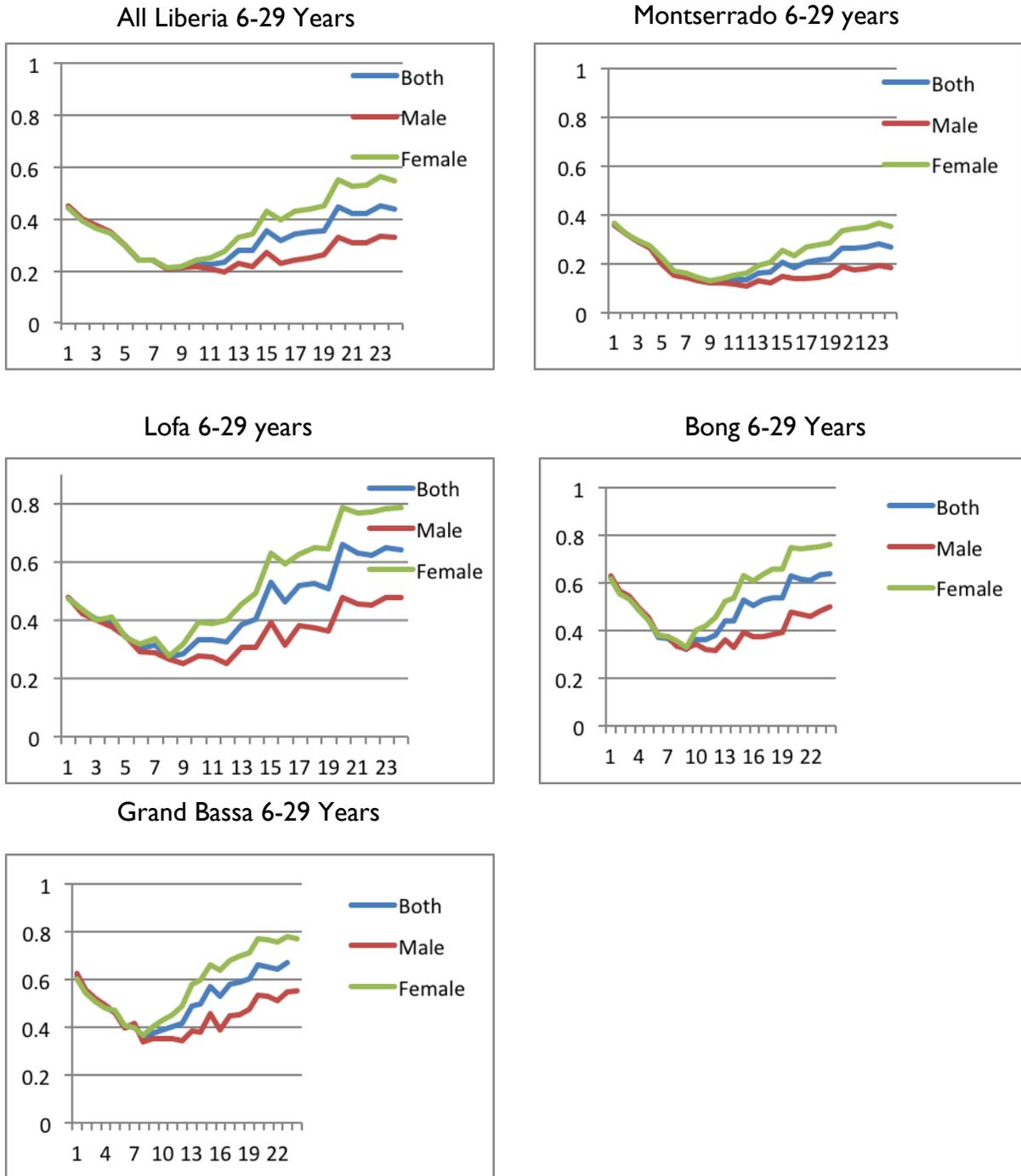
In Liberia's 2008 National Population and Housing Census there is a table of data that reports a category of "never attended school" by county. It is illustrative to look at the pattern of gender divergence in graphic form in the following series of charts. The data show a clear increase in the percentage of persons who never attended school at ages 9-11 for the general Liberian population. This is also where the pattern of gender divergence becomes noticeably marked. These data were collected at the national level in 2007 and reflect the effects of the war. Today, the pattern is different for the age-specific category of never attended school, as there is a great deal more participation in schooling than reflected in the earlier period of the aftermath reporting that reflects the war. Also, the age period for this phenomenon likely would be shifted to later age groupings if a national census were carried out today; the general pattern of gender divergence at an early age for never having attended school, however, is still a fact.

For reference purposes, the first chart depicts the situation at the national level, and the second, the case of Montserrado County. For Montserrado County, the gender divergence age occurs in the 11-13 year bracket. For Liberia as a whole, it occurs approximately in the 9-11 age bracket. Largely, it is Montserrado County, the largest and most urbanized that exerts the pull to a lower age bracket of gender divergence for the country as a whole. Following these are the charts for the three counties of interest of the GOAL project—Lofa, Bong, and Grand Bassa Counties.

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<sup>3</sup> GOAL Revised Performance Management Plan. American Institutes for Research (AIR), in partnership with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and Search for Common Ground (SFCG), submitted to USAID under Cooperative Agreement No. 669-A-00-11-00015, January 2012.

**Chart I. Gender Divergence by Age for Lofa, Bong, and Grand Bassa Counties**



As can be seen in the above series of charts, Lofa, Bong, and Grand Bassa, in noticeable contrast to Montserrado County, have more acutely divergent gender patterns as seen in the category of “never attended school,” which is occurring in the earlier 7-10 age bracket.

As a three-year MCC funded and USAID-administered threshold project, the aim of the GOAL project is to improve girls' retention, attendance and enrollment in primary schools in targeted schools in Lofa, Bong, and Grand Bassa counties. GOAL is a partnership, comprising the American Institutes for Research (AIR), the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), and Search for Common Ground (SFCG).

GOAL is designed as a quasi-experimental project to provide different treatment interventions in different types of schools. It has a set of control schools, as well. The three intervention models in different schools are: (1) a scholarship program; (2) a community mobilization package through Parent Teacher Association (PTA) capacity building and grants, and (3) a combination of the scholarship and community mobilization programs. In the first model, GOAL offers in-kind scholarships and complementary services to build girls' leadership skills and to help them succeed in their academic studies. These complementary services include the provision of teachers' kits, the establishment of Girls' Clubs, and tutorial services.

In the second model, GOAL builds the capacity of PTAs. The project begins by training PTAs in basic operations and preparation of school improvement plans. After their participation in these activities, GOAL awards grants in three stages to PTAs to carry out projects that meet needs identified in their school improvement plans. In order for the PTAs to receive an award, they must complete a proposal that meets certain criteria. The proposals are then reviewed by committees whose membership includes GOAL staff and representatives from the Ministry of Education. In the first phase, each GOAL-supported PTA whose proposal meets the criteria receives a grant to implement a school improvement project. The projects should have an emphasis on activities with the greatest potential to support primary school going girls. In the second and third phases, PTA grants are awarded on a competitive basis. The grants serve not only to meet priority needs identified in school improvement plans but also provide an opportunity for PTA members to work together to achieve mutually defined outcomes and strengthen their planning and management skills.

In all the targeted schools, GOAL carries out community sensitization and awareness-raising through town hall meetings and the medium of drama and radio messaging to help create environments that are supportive of girls' education. Some whole school health activities are engaged in as well.

It is intended that the results of research undertaken on these intervention models will provide an evidence base to determine which intervention(s) are associated with the greatest change in key outcomes of interest: enrollment, attendance, and retention. Findings from the research will assist the GOL in addressing policy areas for improvement and achieving the "threshold" of eligibility that concerns girls' completion of primary school for MCC compact assistance.

### **1.3 ETHNOGRAPHIC AND IN-CLASSROOM STUDY ON SCHOOL-COMMUNITY DYNAMICS**

The USAID-Liberia Monitoring and Evaluation Program (L-MEP) provides various services to USAID and its implementing partners in the areas of monitoring and evaluation. In 2011, MCC requested L-MEP's USAID implementing partner, The Mitchell Group, Inc., (TMG) to submit a proposal for conducting complimentary research studies in the three areas the MCC Threshold

projects supported—land policy and land rights, trade and commerce, and girls’ education. The agreement with TMG was signed on April 19, 2012.

Through the contract, L-MEP is responsible for ensuring that necessary data and information are compiled to permit a reliable and rigorous discussion of program results. L-MEP has data collection responsibilities for the three components of the Threshold Program, including baseline, midterm, and end-of-project data collection in order to permit a rigorous and reliable discussion on the extent to which activities have met their goals.

As is the case for all three MCC Threshold projects, AIR has a large responsibility for data collection, especially as the project was established with a strong research framework. To this end, L-MEP conducts spot checks and data quality assessments under the MCC contract. In addition, L-MEP’s role is to also assist in measuring the impact of assistance through the design and implementation of surveys, focus groups, and other appropriate and cost-effective data collection tools for intermediate points of measurement and for the end-of-project evaluation.

## **1.4 QUALITATIVE FOCUS ON SIX STUDY COMMUNITIES**

Since the inception of the GOAL project, it was felt that a solid base of qualitative information should complement the quantitative data sets. For this reason, six school/communities were chosen to function as case study schools. A basic document from the first study round carried out by an AIR researcher constitutes the qualitative baseline report prior to the GOAL interventions<sup>4</sup>. Another AIR researcher planned a follow-up visit to the six schools in early February 2012. At this point GOAL and L-MEP had decided to join efforts to carry out these studies. Therefore, the qualitative research inquiry, using largely focus groups discussion (FGD) methodology combined with some key informant interviews (KIIs), involved a joint GOAL/L-MEP team. The investigation centered on girl scholarship recipients, parents involved in the schools through the PTAs, teachers, and interviews with the school principals.

Since there is already a dearth of information on these school/communities, the efficacy of the evaluation L-MEP is carrying out under its obligation to support the MCC Threshold programs continues to focus on these six school/communities in order to put together a more complete picture of the school and community dynamics that affect girls’ participation in the formal education sector.

In July and August 2012, a doctoral candidate educational researcher volunteered her time and expertise to work with an L-MEP team conducting more in-depth FDGs and individual interviews. A principal added dimension of this study was that it purposefully tracked down girls in the communities who had never been to school. These girls and their parents were interviewed, along with the scholarship recipients and members of PTAs and teachers, adding more data to the earlier studies. This research constituted Phase One of the qualitative inquiry.

It was anticipated that this investigative phase would answer a number of outstanding questions relating to phenomena present in GOAL schools/communities. Furthermore, it was expected that lingering unanswered issues could be followed up in a Phase Two field activity at the

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<sup>4</sup> American Institutes for Research (2011). GOAL Baseline Study Report. Monrovia 2011.

beginning of the 2012-2013 school year. The main findings from the Phase One of the qualitative research are incorporated in the present report.

Examining the various reports and notes that document the six case study schools/communities in the GOAL project, it became eminently clear that there were some key research areas in need of additional pursuit. These included: (1) obtaining basic information on classroom dynamics by carrying out formal in-class data collection; (2) compiling observations on social phenomena that occur at the start of school, at recess time, and at the close of the daily school session; and (3) recording the dynamics of girls<sup>5</sup> and boys' activities beyond school hour time. For observations to be conducted during evening and early morning times, part of the field methodology involved spending additional time in the communities to carry out observations and interviews, sometimes in the evenings.

Immediately following the Background and Project Context section is the Methodology section. In this section there is detailed the aspects of fieldwork processes and techniques, and how these relate to answering the research questions. Section 3— School Environment—includes the general school schedule, issues of health and sanitation, and the pre-primary programs in the schools. Following this, Section 4—Classroom Environment--examines the physical conditions, composition, setup, spatial seating arrangements, and availability of supplies in the classroom. Section 5—General Teacher Issues—probes more deeply into matters facing gender imbalance, literacy levels, and attendance patterns.

Section 6—Teacher Interactions—begins the examination of in-class observations, beginning with the teacher interaction data. The discussion primarily focuses on performance of teachers, how they interact with students, and changes that have come about through gender sensitivity awareness training. The evidence for making statements on these aspects of teacher performance and interaction styles derive from the formal classroom observations the team carried out, coded onto forms, and statistically analyzed. Following this, Section 7—Student Issues—focuses directly on the students and what exactly they were doing at specified time intervals that were recorded on forms. Interpretations for the student in-class behavior are based on analyses of 1,426 observations of 63 girls and 63 boys in classrooms of the six study schools. On the forms were recorded the type of action the student was engaged in, as well as the interactional context of that action. These data are analyzed within different frameworks of sex of the teacher, sex of the student, the grade, and the subject matter being taught.

Finally, the report concludes with overall conclusions emerging from the study and recommendations for future directions to be charted in the area of girls' education in Liberia.

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<sup>5</sup> Liberian primary schools have high levels of overage students, with teenagers and young adults up to their late twenties all falling under the same terminology of "students." For the purpose of this study and simplicity of reading, the terms "girls" and "boys" will also be used to encompass both at age and overage students in primary school.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses an integrated field methodology that incorporated observations and interviews. There were two types of observation approaches used—a formal one involving time-sequence observations that had recording sheets and informal observations made in school classrooms, on school grounds, and in the six communities that form the core investigative focus of the GOAL Project and non-structured to gain additional insight on pertinent topics involving educational and girls' issues. The main research focus was the school environment. Classroom and schoolyard formal observations focused on the following: (1) gathering in-class data on basic classroom dynamics, and (2) making complementary observations on social phenomena that occurs at the start of school, at recess time, and at the close of the daily school session. In addition, informal community observations and key informant interviews were conducted to learn more about the experiences of students and school aged children who stop out, drop out, or never attend school.

The methodology incorporates and builds on findings from Phase One of the research study which used participatory methodology involving stakeholders related to the project. During Phase One, illustrative methods for obtaining deeper information underlying educational decision-making and participation in schooling included ethnographic annotation using the participant observation approach, key interviews, small focus group discussions, and time allocation tracking. Key informant interviews (KII) were conducted among students and parents of scholarship recipients, of those who stopped out, and even those who dropped out. Additionally, the study examined the circumstances and decision-making factors surrounding girls who never enrolled in a school.

### **2.2 SELECTION OF SCHOOL**

Since the inception of the GOAL project it was felt that a solid base of qualitative information should complement the quantitative data sets. For this reason, six school/communities were chosen from the onset to function as case study schools, two in each county the program is working in. The schools observed include the three types of intervention utilized by the GOAL project: (1) Scholarship only schools, (2) Scholarship and grants schools, and (3) grant only schools. There is a wide range in school population size. The following Table 1 profiles the six schools by location and GOAL project intervention type.

**Table I. GOAL Intervention Categories for the Six Case Study Schools**

SCHOOL NAME	TOWN	COUNTY	INTERVENTION
John P. Mitchell Elem. & Jr. High School	Gbondoi	Bong	Grant
William R. Tolbert Elem. & Jr. High School	Gbarlatua	Bong	Scholarship + grant
Kpanay Town School AM	Kpanay	Grand Bassa	Scholarship + grant
Saturday Town Public School	Saturday Town	Grand Bassa	Scholarship
Borkeza Public School	Borkeza	Lofa	Scholarship + grant
Gorlu Elem. & Jr. High School	Gorlu	Lofa	Grant

## 2.3 INSTRUMENT DESIGN

Several instruments were used in this study to help capture the relevant data from the case study schools. The instruments can be divided into two categories: (1) Time Sequenced & Observational Coding Forms, and (2) Methodological Tools.

### 2.3.1 Time Sequence & Observational Coding Forms

**Teacher Interactions Observation Form.** In order to capture the nature of teachers' comments to students in the classroom setting, the team developed a simplified version of the INTERactions for Sex Equity in Classroom Teaching (INTERSECT) developed by Sadker, Sadker, & Bauchner<sup>6</sup> and modified by Duffy, Warren & Walsh.<sup>7</sup> This form was specifically developed to help capture teachers' potential gender bias in their classroom interactions with students. For this study, this instrument used time-sequenced observations to code interactions between teachers and students within the classroom, focusing specifically on verbal exchanges. Observers coded teacher student interactions by: Initiation Method, Respondent, and Teacher Evaluation. One teacher initiated interaction was recorded approximately every 5 minutes. When no teacher-student interaction occurred near the 5-minute interval, the observer recorded "no interaction" on the observation form.

**Student Observation Form.** This observation form was used to capture the different activities randomly selected students' engaged in, as well as who they were interacting with, during three class periods (approximately 45 minutes each). The form was developed based on McPake & Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE)<sup>8</sup> "Pupil Observation Schedule" and

<sup>6</sup> Sadker, M., Bauchner, J., Sadker, D. & Hergert, L. (1981). Observers Manual for INTERSECT Interactions for sex equity in classroom teaching. Washington, DC: US Department of Education.

<sup>7</sup> Duffy, J., Warren, K., & Walsh, M. (2001). Classroom interactions: Gender of teacher, gender of student and classroom subject. *Sex Roles*, 45, 579-593.

<sup>8</sup> McPake, J., & Scottish Council for Research in Education. (1999). Teachers' and pupils' days in the primary classroom. Edinburgh: SCRE.

Chesterfield's<sup>9</sup> "Pupil Observation Form" from the Improving Education in Quality (IEQ) project in Ghana. This instrument also used time sequenced observations to code randomly selected students activities and interactions in the classroom. For each classroom observed six students (three girls and three boys) were randomly selected. The researcher observed each selected students individually for 1 minute per 10 minute cycle, observing the selected student for one full minute and then ticking the main activity the student was engaged in as well as who he or she interacted with. The random selection of the set of girls and the set of boys was based on their numeric and spatial distribution within the classroom (see section Classroom Map below).

**Classroom Inventory Form.** This form was adapted from the Liberia GOAL School Observation form. While the GOAL form assessed the conditions of the schools as whole, this form builds on that data by recording information on each specific classroom observed. It collected information regarding classroom condition (for example physical condition, ventilation, lighting and noise level) as well as students' materials (adequate chairs, pens or pencils, and notebooks).

### 2.3.2 Methodological Tools

**Classroom Map.** Before beginning classroom observation forms, each team completed a drawing of the classroom in map form, marking the location of each student by using a "O" symbol for female students and a "∇" symbol for male students. The form assisted observers in randomly selecting individuals for the student observation form (3 female students and 3 male students). The procedure involved counting the total number of female students and total number of male students present that day, then dividing each group by three to determine the selection interval for each sex category. Based on these numbers, the observer selected the first student for each sex, and then using the interval, proceeded to count students to the right of the bench if present, then move down the column to select the next student. The observer continued counting using the interval to select the final student.<sup>10</sup> The map could then be used as a reference throughout the period to locate each randomly selected student while conducting the student observation form. An example of the classroom map and random selection of students can be found in Appendix F.

**Official Class Schedule & Classroom Activity Form.** Observers also recorded the official class schedule from the school (usually principal's office or teachers' lounge) and completed a summarized classroom activity form. These forms were used as reference to see the degree to which schools ran their daily activities in line with the official schedule.

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<sup>9</sup> Chesterfield, Ray. (undated). Classroom Observation Tools. Institute for International Research/Improving Educational Quality Project. US Agency for International Development, Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade, Office for Education.

<sup>10</sup> Observers would alternate between starting with the first or second student in the top left corner in the classroom. The vertical and horizontal movement of counting was also shaped by classroom seating setup, for example what constituted a column was determined by whether students were seating in benches or individual desk chairs.

## 2.4 TEAM AND TRAINING

A team of five researchers were employed to carry out this study. Dr. Michael Richards, part of L-MEP's permanent staff and an anthropologist with previous experience in educational research and gender issues, acted as Principal Investigator (PI) for this field activity. He was supported by expat Consultant, Casey McHugh, who has extensive experience in international education projects, with a gender focus, and who possesses strong research skills in qualitative investigation and analysis. Jerry Zangar, LMEP's MCC Coordinator also acted as a field researcher, and two Liberian field researchers who worked in Phase One of the Efficacy Evaluation study, Annie Tamba and James Dwalu, formed part of the field research team. Harris Kpai provided logistical and transportation support.

The team underwent an initial two days' of training to review the study's objectives, methodology and timeline for data collection. The next three days were spent reviewing, testing and revising the data collection instruments and training team members on how to complete the forms.

## 2.5 INSTRUMENT TESTING

The research team, with the assistance of Liberian Teacher Training Program (LTTP) field coordinator Oscar Goyee, conducted the first pre-test of the study school observation instruments on September 26, 2012, in Sass Town Elementary and Junior High School in Klay, Bomi county. After completing the classroom observations, the team met to discuss challenges, gaps and other issues encountered when completing the forms in the classroom. Based on the initial pre-test and feedback from the team, the instruments were revised and the second pre-test was conducted at William D. Coleman, in Virginia, Greater Montserrado. The final revisions of the instruments was completed prior to the team departing for the field.

## 2.6 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was conducted over the first three weeks of October. The team spent a week in each of the three focus counties, observing two schools in each county. At least two days of school level observation were carried out at each school. Schedule permitting, a third day of a more informal school observation took place in three out of the six case study schools.

**School Observation.** On each observation day, the team arrived before the official start of school in order to observe the process and timeline of the school day (i.e., student and teachers' arrival, devotion, class disbursement, etc.). The team would remain on the school campus until after recess ended and 4<sup>th</sup> period began. While the team provided GOAL with the schedule of data collection, the case study schools were not necessarily aware of the exact date of the team's visit, enabling the researchers' to perform an unannounced spot check on the first day of school and classroom observations.

**Classroom Observation.** The study focused on formal classroom observations of Grades 2 – 6 in each school, specifically focusing on the first three periods of the school session. In one instance, both 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade as well as 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade were combined, enabling the team to also observe one 1<sup>st</sup> grade class.

**Table 2. Grade Levels Observed**

SCHOOL NAME	GRADE LEVEL			
	Day 1		Day 2	
John P. Mitchell Elem. & Jr. High School	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup> /4 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup> /6 <sup>th</sup>
William R. Tolbert Elem. & Jr. High School	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>
Kpanay Town School AM	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>
Saturday Town Public School	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup> /6 <sup>th</sup>
Borkeza Public School <sup>11</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>
Gorlu Elem & Jr. High School	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>

To complete the classroom observations the research team split into two groups, with each pair observing one classroom per day. One team member was responsible for focusing on the teacher’s interactions and completing the Teacher Interactions Form, the Classroom Inventory, and recording a running log describing class activities later summarized in the Class Activity Form. The other team member was responsible for focusing on the randomly selected students’ activities and completing the Student Observation form, the Classroom Map, and keeping notes on classroom activity.

**Community Observation.** Community observations followed a more informal opportunity-driven approach. Depending on the context (time and location of village), the team went into the communities surrounding the school and informally discussed with community members topics related to the school, youth activities in the community, as well as reasons for school aged children dropping or never attending school. When possible, the team returned to the community in the evenings to observe students and other school aged children’s evening interactions/activities, as well as talk to community members in a more relaxed context. Team members also held informal discussions with out-of-school children. In two schools the team was also able to meet with PTA members, gaining some additional perspective. As discussed previously, these observations built on the findings from Phase One of the research study.

## 2.7 DATA ENTRY AND QUALITY CONTROL

At the end of each day of classroom and/or community observations the team conducted an end-of-day recapitulation methodology of brainstorming the day’s highlights. In these sessions the team discussed the findings for the day as well as any issues or problems encountered with the methodology or observational forms. Detailed notes from these sessions were recorded

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<sup>11</sup> Borkeza has two sections for second grade, the team observed Grade 2A. It also took two third-grade sections. Section 3B’s teacher was absent on the day of observations so the third grade classes were combined into one room, which the team observed.

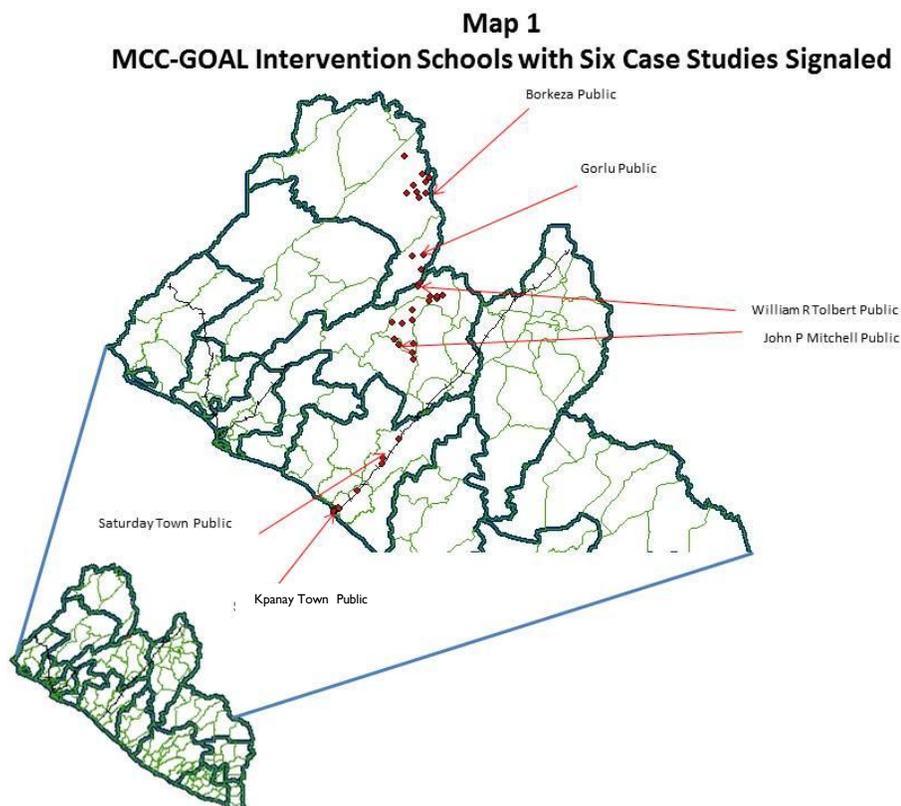
and summarized into a word document. These meetings were also digitally recorded, coded and analyzed for key trends, patterns or other findings.

The Consultant also reviewed each team members' observational instruments daily for any missing data, inconsistencies, errors or other discrepancies in order for the team to be able to discuss, come to a consensus, and make any needed corrections while the observations were still fresh. Data entry for the Classroom Inventory Form and Teacher Interactions were entered in the field by the Consultant as well, so that questions relating to the observations could be addressed as they arose.

The reviewed student observation forms were brought to Monrovia and were keyed into an Excel template based that mirrored the paper form. The completed file was concatenated; i.e., the four observation periods plus student ID information were stacked and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science™ (SPSS).

## 2.8 DATA COMPILATION AND REPORTING

Drawing on the daily observation and recapitulation meetings, a running word document on emerging issues and themes was kept throughout the data collection process. On the completion of the data collection, qualitative data from school and community level observations were compiled based on the general categories and themes that surfaced during the course of data collection. Summaries of each observed classroom were recorded on the teacher observation form, and later coded and analyzed in an excel-based database by the Consultant. Two of the researchers also compiled their field notes into school level summaries for each of the case study schools.



### 3. SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Retention and promotion rates are two of the key indicators used for measuring the success of the GOAL project. These indicators are associated with understanding quality of education, and therefore serve as necessary areas of focus to improving girls' education in Liberia.<sup>12</sup> In order to ensure girls are receiving consistent and quality education, the basic school practices and daily administration need to be assessed and monitored. By conducting school level observations, the research team was able to see first-hand if, and how strongly, different school level challenges commonly found in Liberia were directly impacting GOAL's case studies schools. In the case study schools, the team found a lack of accountability and oversight to ensure schools are open and running according to official Ministry of Education (MOE) standards and schedules. The following issues surrounding the school environment emerged:

- 1) Reduced number of days and hours students spent in the classroom receiving instruction,
- 2) Problems of student and teacher attendance,
- 3) Lack of punctual school and class schedules,
- 4) Health and/or sanitation issues on school grounds, and
- 5) Overcrowded and disruptive pre-primary classes.

#### 3.1 DAYS/HOURS IN SCHOOL

One of the major challenges for students receiving quality education in Liberia is the limited number of days and hours actually spent at school and within the classroom receiving instructions. Across the six schools the following weekly events or occurrences were cited to varying degrees as affecting the time or days that school is in session: Workdays; Super Fridays; and Market days.

**Workday.** Officially many schools designate one day or half a day during the school week as a "workday." Students spend this time cleaning up the school and doing basic grounds maintenance, (e.g., sweeping, cutting the grass) as opposed to being in the classroom receiving lessons. What this amounts to can be either one full day or one half day less of instruction each and every week.

**Super Friday.** Many schools still hold unofficial "Super Fridays" despite government condemnation of the practice.<sup>13</sup> Super Fridays occur when schools are unofficially closed or close early (half day) on Fridays. In addition, even when schools are open, either teachers or students, or both (and this can be of varying degrees or numbers), may decide not to go to school on Friday. In several schools, teachers and other administrators indicated that they now purposely hold quizzes or other assessments on Fridays to encourage students to come to school on that day or face academic consequences.

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<sup>12</sup> UNGEI. (2002) The Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations Girls Education Initiative: A Guidance Note to UN Country Teams.

<sup>13</sup> Wolokol, A. M. (2012, Nov). *Liberia: Education Warns Over 'Super Friday.'* The Inquirer. 19 November 2012. Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/201211201216.html>. While this article specifically discusses Super Friday in Monrovia, it provides an idea of how prevalent the issue is.

**Market Day.** In addition to Super Fridays, several students also declared that market days were considered “no good school days” in their community. Market days are specific days set aside by towns and other large communities in rural Liberia for general business transaction. Traders and consumers from other towns and communities converge in the town hosting the market to buy or sell. Many consumer goods, such as tobacco, oil, toiletries, liquor, imported medicines, clothing, and local farm produce and livestock are sold in the markets. How deeply market days influence school attendance will depend on which day of the week it falls on. For instance, if the community’s market day falls on a Saturday it may be less disruptive to the school than one that falls on a school day. The degree to which it disrupts school attendance may vary from a school being unofficially closed, an unofficial school-wide half day, or individual teachers and/or students taking the day off or a half day.

There are several different factors that contribute to pulling students and/or teachers to the market and generally keeping them out of school. Teachers and students may simply want to attend the market, need to buy certain things only available on market day, or need to sell items at the market. Teachers and students may also be drawn away from school the day prior to the market in order to prepare and/or transport food or other items they intend to sell the next day. In one community, late until the evening the team saw students and of various ages returning from the farms, carrying heavy loads of produce into town in preparation of the market day. Furthermore, the evening before a market day can also be quite festive with socializing and dancing taking place late into the night. Students, or teachers for that matter, who participate in late night activities may not go to school the next day, or if they do go, they may be inattentive or sleep during class.

**Market Day Eve in Gbondo.** The team arrived in the community at 6:50 pm the evening prior to market day, going from house to house to speak with community members and observing the activities. Many parents and students had not come home yet from their farms, and weren’t seen returning until after 8:00 pm. Farmers came with produce, with children helping to carry it from the farm on their heads. Many families met traders already waiting for them at their homes. Community members indicated that the families are expected to host traders for the night they want to transact business with the next day. Children are obliged to allow traders to use their sleeping places.

The school week is officially scheduled at five days, with curricula, lessons and tests based on the amount of instruction time that can be covered across this time. The loss of instruction time that students receive because of work days, Super Fridays, or Market days definitely affects students’ ability to receive the necessary amount of instruction time needed for skill development and comprehension levels to pass tests and be promoted into the next grade. Moreover, it contributes to the overall attrition rate as students become frustrated in not being able to maintain pace with even the minimal dosage of instruction that occurs in the schools.

### **3.2 DAILY ABSENCES AND HALF DAYS**

In addition to the unofficial, but regular, weekly disruptions that impact attendance school wide, problems with unofficial half days not affiliated with these events also emerged. The team members were told that in many cases students, as well as teachers, may not return to campus after the school lets out for recess. Reports on why this happens included students not

returning on their own accord or students not returning because they do not expect the teachers themselves to return.

In one observed classroom the teacher reprimanded the students for not returning after recess the previous day, and indicated he would take roll call at that point on that day to ensure that they return after recess. The students fired back with flat out negative responses, including a vehement, “No! We’re not coming back!” In another grade a teacher reprimanded the class for leaving early, stating that 20 out of the 41 enrolled students did not return to class after recess the previous day. Other observations included seeing school age students in uniform around town or within the community after recess when they should be back in school. Based on the teams’ observations, as well as what was reported by community members, it became evident that this is a common issue in most of the case study schools.

The difference in total hours of instruction can be significant, leaving school after recess reduces the time spent in class from five periods of lessons (3 hours and 45 minutes) to three periods (2 hours and 15 minutes), putting again into question whether students are receiving an adequate amount of instruction.

In addition, teachers noted that in rural communities that are far from major city centers (and banks), the collection of teachers’ monthly paychecks also disrupted the school week. One teacher discussed that between traveling to and from the city and the bank, she typically would be absent from school for one or two school days each pay period. Another issue related to distance that emerged during the pre-test but not directly discussed in the case study, schools was how far the teachers lived from the school campus. With teachers living a far distance and without access to consistent, reliable and inexpensive transport, their attendance and punctuality suffered.

### **3.3 PUNCTUALITY OF SCHOOL AND CLASS SCHEDULE**

Compounding this issue is teacher, administrator and student punctuality; in other words, how closely the school adheres to the official schedule. Across the different schools, teachers were observed arriving late to school openings, to individual classes, as well as returning to the school late from recess. For example in one school most of the teachers were observed to arrive at least 45 minutes late to school opening on the first unannounced day of observation. In another instance, a teacher was over an hour late returning to his class after recess. In his absence (even as he took his time walking back to the classroom) his students were rambunctious, running around yelling and screaming, distracting other classes that were in session. Other teachers had to leave their own classrooms to try to get his group of students to return to their classroom and quiet down.

At least five of the 31 teachers observed (this number excludes Kpanay town teachers, as the structure of class periods were altered due to test taking) were also observed starting at least one of their class periods at least 10 minutes late or ending 10 minutes early. In some instances periods both started late and ended early, reducing the lesson time from 45 minutes to less than 25 minutes. Teachers were also noted for using songs or other energizers to pass time while waiting for the class period to end and the bell to ring. In addition, when multiple teachers rotated across grades, there were few instances when teachers followed the bell (if there was one). Some teachers also ran 10-15 minutes into the next subject period.

Students also were observed arriving late to the start of the school day (devotional prayers typically start at 7:45 am). Within classrooms, students—particularly older girls—were seen trickling into the classroom throughout the first 15 minutes of a class period. An interesting point was made when one observer asked why a young female student was late for devotion. The girl responded, “We’re not late, the teachers are early,” indicating that the start of the school day on that day may not have been typical, but a response to outsider observers being present. In most schools (with the exception of Saturday Town), students were 15-30 minutes late returning to class after the bell rang to indicate recess was over. Again, further research is needed in order to determine whether student tardiness is due to their own late showing, or whether it is a response to teachers’ tardiness.

Reduced instruction time obviously bears consequences on students’ opportunity to gain additional information, material and command of the different subject areas. Furthermore, the general lack of seriousness in which teachers adhere to the schedule and classroom instruction in general creates a lackadaisical sense that undoubtedly gets passed on to students, and in the development of life skills learning; oftentimes it is these formed attitudes that emerge more importantly than exposure to actual imparted knowledge content

### **3.4 HEALTH AND SANITATION**

Issues involving health and hygiene varied greatly from school to school. In two schools there was a major problem of sanitation, specifically a large degree of animal feces on school grounds and even on the floors of classrooms. While both schools had fences, these did not appear to be keeping goats off the premises. In one of the schools, the building housing the pre-primary and some primary classrooms the stench was overwhelming while in the classrooms. This is a particularly concerning matter because the area of the school grounds, where the smallest and most vulnerable children are located, are the most unsanitary.

In regards to other health concerns, the availability of treatment and basic medication varied widely. While two of the schools had health clinics directly across from the school grounds, other schools were not so fortunate, and did not even have adequate supplies or a nearby clinic to help sick children. In the two schools visited this became apparent when the observers were brought into the communications loop, and learned that there were ill students on campus. The team members inquired with the principal about the first aid kit and his response was that the first aid kits had yet to be restocked this school year.

### **3.5 OVERCROWDED KINDERGARTEN AND ABC CLASSROOMS**

Despite not officially observing kindergarten or ABC classrooms, the research team was struck by the impact these classes had on the overall school environment. With the exception of Gorlu Public School, all of the pre-primary grades were conducted on the same campus as the primary school. The pre-primary classes were extremely overcrowded, with principals and teachers often reporting as many as 100 students in one class with only one teacher. With such a large number of small children, some as young as three years old, there was a chaotic air that permeated throughout the rest of the campus. The noise from these classrooms was often very loud, and a major distraction to the listening and hearing in the primary grade classrooms.

### 3.6 FINDINGS

Regarding the school environment, the physical conditions of the case study schools ranged from very poor to newly renovated. There is clearly a reduced number of days and hours students spend in the classroom receiving lessons that affect the quality of education being administered in the study schools. The lack of study time is due to obligatory work days in the schools, the common practice of dismissing Fridays as a study day (“Super Fridays”), market days, unofficial half days, and general teacher or student absenteeism constitute the most pervasive problems reported over the course of the study. Although the key grades of 2 through 6 (focus of GOAL interventions) in the study schools are terribly over crowded, the research team was struck by the impact kindergarten and ABC classes had on the overall school environment. With the exception of one school, all of the pre-primary grades were conducted on the same campus as the primary school. These pre-primary classes were extremely overcrowded, with as many as 100 students in one class with only one teacher. With such a large number of small children, some as young as three years old, a chaotic air permeated throughout the rest of the campus, causing major distraction to the listening and hearing abilities of students in the primary grade classrooms.

The most common seating classroom arrangement was students seated in benches with attached desks. The set up and spacing of students’ benches and chairs often affected the teacher’s access to students. In well-spaced classrooms, teachers were more likely to be observed walking up and down aisles, checking individual students’ work. In overcrowded classrooms with desks or benches grouped close together, the teacher was unable to walk between students, thereby much less likely to provide individual attention in checking each student’s work and assessing their comprehension of class material. No definitive pattern emerged in regards to the spatial seating of children by gender or age.

Issues involving health and hygiene varied greatly from school to school. In two schools, there was a major problem of sanitation, specifically a large degree of animal (goat) feces on school grounds and even on the floors of classrooms. While both schools had fences, these did not appear to be keeping goats off the premises. In regards to the school environment, nearly all of the girls in all of the schools stated that more girls’ latrines were necessary.

## **4. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT**

In the previous section, the general school environment was described. The present section goes more into depth on the classroom environments themselves. The following topics related to classroom environment are discussed: physical condition, composition and setup (i.e., combined grade levels, single teacher or rotating), students' spatial seating, chalkboard size and quality, and students' access and use of basic supplies. The classroom varied considerably across the case study schools and classrooms.

### **4.1 PHYSICAL CONDITION**

Of the 26 specific classrooms observed, six were reported as in good physical condition, 14 in moderately good condition, three in poor condition, and one in bad condition. Most classrooms showed some sign of leaks, need for repainting, and a solid effort to remove dust from the floors, but overall the physical conditions were reported as adequate. It was also noted that many classrooms did not have locks to keep doors closed during non-school hours.

### **4.2 CLASSROOM COMPOSITION AND SETUP**

With the exception of three classrooms, the classroom grades observed were all single grade classes. Two classrooms, the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> at John P. Mitchell, were combined classes receiving the same lesson. At Saturday Town, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade were combined in one classroom but each grade received separate lesson. Only one grade received a subject lesson per period, leaving the other grade with a free period.

All of the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classrooms and most of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classrooms observed were led by a single teacher. One 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, and all of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades observed were taught by multiple rotating teachers by subject area. This is an important point that is referred to in Section 8 Student Interactions, as it conditioned the way in which the classroom observation frames were structured and analyzed.

### **4.3 SPATIAL SEATING**

Within the classrooms students were seated in bench/desks, individual desk chairs, simple benches, and regular chairs. The most common seating arrangement found in classrooms, were benches with attached desks. In at least five classrooms students used individual desk chairs. The team was unable to determine the number of classrooms where chairs versus benches were for the four classrooms observed in Kpanay town because of the atypical setup of classrooms during test taking. For example, students from the same grade classroom were split across one or two classrooms, the hallway, and could be found outside on the lawn ground on an assortment of benches, desk chairs, and regular chairs to take their test. In addition, to prevent spying or cheating by neighboring students during the test, only two students were allowed to sit on an individual bench; in other schools they typically sat three or four on a bench.

At least 11 classrooms were noted as being overcrowded, meaning the classroom size or setup inadequately fit the number of students present. For example, even though the 4<sup>th</sup> grade class in

Saturday Town had less than 20 students, the classroom size was so small the students barely fit within the space. The first grade and pre-primary grades were especially overcrowded, in some cases so much that a number of students have to bring their own benches or chairs to school and others have to directly sit on the floor during their lessons.

The set up and spacing of students' benches and chairs often affected the teacher's access to students. In well-spaced classrooms, teachers were more likely to be observed walking up and down aisles, checking individual students' work. In overcrowded classrooms with desks or benches spaced close together, the teacher was unable to walk between students, thereby much less likely to provide individual attention in checking each student's work and assessing their comprehension of class material.

No definitive pattern emerged with regard to the spatial seating of children by gender or age. Nearly all of the classrooms observed mixed boys and girls seating throughout the classroom. An example of one of the observed classroom's gender dispersal can be found in Appendix F. Across individual classrooms, a more mixed pattern of where overage students were seated also emerged. In some classes noticeably overage students were found clustered in the back of the classroom and they tended to consult one another before answering teacher's questions. In other classes overage students were more dispersed among their at-age student counterparts. Overall though, no consistent pattern for overage students seating distribution emerged.

**Kpanay Town Seating Challenges.** During exams, students were observed using chairs with no table or desk tops, sitting on benches with nothing sturdy to write on, or older students required to use kindergarten or ABC sized chairs. The team also witnessed multiple fights among students over chairs, with older children taking the "good chairs" from younger children or physically pushing them out of their seats. The principal shared with the team that student dispersion after devotion is usually a troublesome time as students run and push their way into the classroom to claim the "good" seats.



## 4.4 CHALKBOARDS

Sufficiently large sized chalkboards were present in all observed classrooms. However, the clarity of the chalkboards was often poor, with many in need of repainting. In a number of observation periods, the brightness of the outside produced a reflective glare on the chalkboard, making it unreadable to many students in the classroom. Almost all of the teachers used the chalkboard during his or her class instruction to write notes or problems on the boards for students to copy or solve. However, many of the teachers wrote in undecipherable, small letters. Students, mostly male, were habitually seen going up to the board, pointing to a letter, and asking for clarification of what should students be copying down. Other students who could not see the board copied from neighboring student's notebook. With so much time of the lessons devoted to reading and copying notes off the chalkboard, the fact that many students are unable to clearly see and understand what is written on the board poses an additional challenge to students' comprehension of class material. Nine classrooms were reported having very adequate chalkboards; 11 reported that they were okay, and one was designated as having inadequate chalkboards.

## 4.5 SUPPLIES

A positive discovery across all of the schools was that most students appeared to have the most basic supplies necessary for class. Nearly all the students observed had a pen or pencil to write with, while only a few students were seen asking or borrowing pens or pencils from their classmates. Almost all of the students also had at least one copybook.<sup>14</sup> However, it was unclear if they had enough separate copybooks for each individual subject.

## 4.6 FINDINGS

There was some variability in the classroom environment of the observed six schools. Of the specific classrooms observed, six were reported as in good physical condition and 14 in moderately good condition. Most classrooms showed some sign of leaks and were in need for repainting and a robust sweeping effort to remove dust from the floors.

With the exception of three classrooms, the classroom grades observed were all single grade classes. Two classrooms, the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> at one school were combined classes receiving the same lesson. In another, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade were combined in one classroom, and each grade received separate lesson. Only one grade received a subject lesson per period, leaving the other grade with a free period. All of the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classrooms and most of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classrooms observed were led by a single teacher. One 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, and all of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades observed were taught by multiple rotating teachers by subject area.

Sufficiently large sized chalkboards were present in all observed classrooms. However, the clarity of the chalkboards was often poor, with many in need of repainting. In a number of

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<sup>14</sup> Many of students in schools in Bong and Lofa were seen using UNICEF provided notebooks but UNICEF notebooks were not seen to be as widely used in the Grand Bassa schools. When the team asked the few individual students who had UNICEF notebooks or backpacks at Kpanay Town School, the students indicated they had purchased the materials at the market.

observation periods, the brightness of the outside produced a reflective glare, making it difficult or impossible for students to read the content the teacher wrote on them. A positive discovery across all of the schools was that most students appeared to have the most basic supplies necessary for class. Nearly all the students observed had something to write with (i.e., a pen or pencil), with only a few students seen asking or borrowing pens or pencils from their classmates. Almost all of the students also had at least one copybook.

## 5. TEACHER ISSUES

This section details some of the major issues that emerged regarding the teachers observed in the case study schools. Before discussing the findings of the case study observations, this section provides a brief background contextualizing the current context of teachers in Liberia. This section also provides details on the teachers observed, the underrepresentation of female teachers in primary schools, low literacy levels, attendance, as well as other issues that were observed.

### 5.1 CURRENT CONTEXT OF TEACHERS IN LIBERIA

In Liberia, the training and overall quality of teachers remains an overall challenge. The education sector was deeply shaken by the 14 year civil war. Teachers who had been trained and were actively teaching in various regions of the country during the war were killed or forced to flee their home, communities, and even their country. During this period of protracted war, formal training of new teachers came to a halt, with the teacher training institutions turning into camps for the various warring factions and were intensely damaged physically or completely destroyed.<sup>15</sup>

During the crisis and post-crisis period, there were often no teachers available in schools and formalized training came to a standstill. However, during short periods of stability, as well as immediately after the war, “volunteer teachers” from within the communities stepped forth to help fill the gap in teaching staff left by the conflict. While some volunteer teachers received short-term “emergency” training on basic teaching skills, they often had limited formalized schooling and their literacy levels were extremely low. Faced with little alternative, communities accepted and instated these volunteers as teachers in order to allow the schools to begin functioning.<sup>16</sup>

The interruption of education and schooling during the crisis, the halt in pre- and in-service teacher training, as well as inclusion of volunteer teachers with little training and low literacy levels into the teaching profession, continues to greatly affect the overall capacity of teachers in Liberia. Furthermore, the lack of strong infrastructure and a practically non-existent monitoring system of teachers and other administrators makes it difficult for the MOE to enforce their own standards and protocols to ensure that that quality education is being provided in Liberian schools.<sup>17</sup> This is particularly apparent when looking at the overall number of days and the hours of instruction students receive in a typical school week.

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<sup>15</sup> USAID 2009. Mid-term Assessment of Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTTP).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Education, Government of Liberia. 2010. The Education Sector Plan of Liberia – A Commitment To Making A Difference.

## 5.2 OBSERVED TEACHERS

Over the course of the study, 36 teachers were observed across the six case study schools.<sup>18</sup> While many of the individuals observed were the assigned teachers, of that class period or grade, in some instances a principal or a vice principal was observed teaching a class in a teacher's absence. The range of teachers' mastery of subject, engagement with students, and didactic method varied considerably among and within the different study schools.

## 5.3 UNDERREPRESENTATION OF FEMALE TEACHERS

Throughout primary schools in Liberia there is an underrepresentation of female teachers. In the three GOAL focus counties the percentage of female teachers at primary level remains strikingly low. According to the 2010/2011 National School Census Report, approximately nine percent of primary teachers in Bong and Grand Bassa are female. In Lofa, the number is even smaller, with female teachers making up approximately four percent of all primary school teachers.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 3. Number of Female Teachers at Primary Level by County**

County	Primary		
	Number Female	%	Total
National	3,497	13.9%	25,137
Bong	162	8.6%	1,881
Grand Bassa	103	9.1%	1,138
Lofa	62	4.0%	1,544

Source: 2010/2011 National School Census Report

Of the 35 teachers observed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms, only three were female. Furthermore, all three female teachers taught in the lower primary grades (2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade).<sup>20</sup> Within the first phase of the research study several of the girls and young women interviewed indicated that having more female teachers would make their school better. The importance of girls seeing female teachers, having adult women present as role models to look up to, must not

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<sup>18</sup> While 36 teachers were observed at the school and classroom level, formal observations using the student observation form and teacher interaction form only took place with 30 teachers. Kpanay town was administering first period tests on the observations days and therefore not included.

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Education, Government of Liberia. 2011. Transforming Education for Children in Liberia: 2010/2011 National School Census Report. Page 27.

<sup>20</sup> One additional female teacher was observed teaching a 1<sup>st</sup> grade class in one of the schools. However, as the focus of the GOAL intervention is on 2<sup>nd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade, no comparable data was collected on the gender of other 1<sup>st</sup> grade teachers, therefore, she is not included in this count.

be overlooked when trying to determine different reasons why girls drop out of school, or in formulating ways to combat school desertion and non-attendance.<sup>21</sup>

## 5.4 TEACHER LITERACY LEVEL

The lack of qualified teachers in Liberia remains a major challenge in the education system. According to the MOE's 2010/2011 National School Census report, only 56 percent of primary level teachers are trained.<sup>22</sup> A teacher with a general Grade C or B certificate is considered trained (even if it is not for the particular education level they are teach at).<sup>23</sup> Within the GOAL project focus counties, the percentage of trained primary level teachers was recorded as 53 percent in Grand Bassa, 59 percent in Lofa, and 66 percent in Bong. However, while the overall total number of female teachers remains low, within the focus counties and nationally, female teachers at the primary level were more likely to be trained than their male counterparts. Sixty-two percent of all primary level female teachers nationally were considered trained as opposed to 56 percent of all the primary level male teachers nationally.

**Table 4. Number of Trained Teachers at Primary Level by County and Gender**

County	All Teacher			Trained Teachers			% Total Trained
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	
National	3,497	21,640	25,137	2,197	11,972	14,169	56%
Bong	162	1,719	1,881	121	1,123	1,244	66%
Grand Bassa	103	1,035	1,138	66	541	607	53%
Lofa	62	1,482	1,544	40	868	908	59%

Source: 2010/2011 National School Census Report

In addition, a 2009 USAID-LTTP report noted that two-thirds of the approximate 1,000 in-service teacher applicants for an eight-week training session failed a basic literacy, numeracy, and teaching suitability test required for admission.<sup>24</sup>

While in the present study there were several very engaging teachers who demonstrated a strong command over their subject area, the research team witnessed first-hand a number of teachers whose basic literacy skills were highly deficient. A considerable number of teachers appeared to struggle with the material they were presenting and were visibly awkward in carrying out the instruction. In several cases, teachers consulted their guidebooks and left the class in total suspension of activity and silence for five minutes or more. When they would

<sup>21</sup> Mannathoko, Changu. 2008. Promoting Education Quality through Gender-Friendly Schools. In *Girls Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Gender Equality, Empowerment and Economic Growth*. Eds. Mary Tembon and Lucia Fort. World Bank.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Education, Government of Liberia. 2011. *Transforming Education for Children in Liberia: 2010/2011 National School Census Report*. Page 27.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. The C certificate qualifies teachers to teach at the primary level; the B certificate (requiring one additional year of teacher training) qualifies teachers to teach at the middle school level, and the A certificate authorizes for teaching at the high school level this level requiring even more training.

<sup>24</sup> USAID (2009). *Mid-term Assessment of Liberian Teacher Training Program (LTTP)*.

return to the lesson, they produced one or two sentences they painstakingly wrote on the chalkboard for students to copy.

While observing different primary school level classrooms, other striking instances denoting low literacy included:

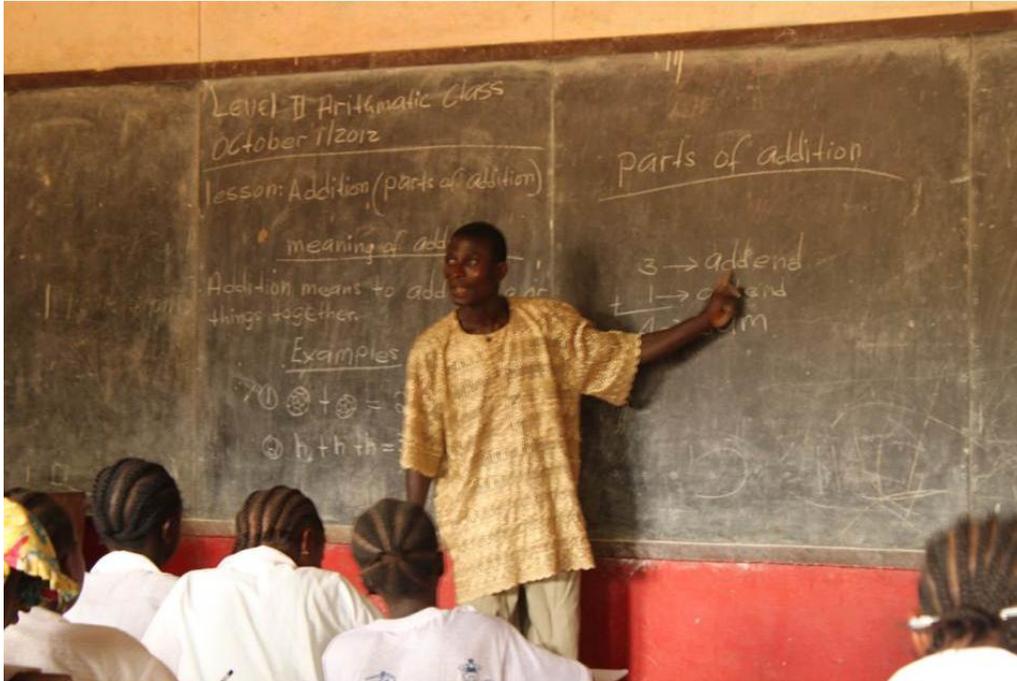
- 1) Teachers misspelling words on the blackboard;
- 2) Teachers copying notes from their lesson books to chalkboard letter by letter rather than word by word or clusters of words;
- 3) When reading aloud from his or her own notes written on the chalkboard to the students, the teacher misread words or sentences (reading one word incorrectly, including words that are not there, or even changing the entire structure of the sentence); and
- 4) When reading aloud, the teacher would read word by word in awkward, and very slow staccato fashion, rather than uttering linked string fragments of sentences, let alone a sentence.

In addition, when reading aloud, teachers' pronunciation of several sounds and letters were unclear, mispronounced, or simply were dropped. Students, in turn, were heard repeating the teachers' utterances, completely taking on the teachers' style of pronunciation. The degree or gravity of this problem is difficult to access, however, because more detailed cases of this sort need to be collected to ascertain the difference between acceptable accented pronunciations versus mispronunciations.

Teachers' low level of literacy undoubtedly has an effect on the quality of education children receive. The team observed students repeating and mimicking teachers' mistake. With unqualified teachers who can barely read, students will struggle in developing and learning good reading practices. Furthermore, in more than one classroom, an observer reported one or more of the students trying to correct the teacher's spelling or other mistakes only to be reprimanded by the teacher. A student may be discouraged from continuing to attend school when he or she does not respect or believe in the teacher's qualifications or command of the subject he or she is teaching.

## **5.5 TEACHER ATTENDANCE**

Another issue that became apparent is widespread teacher absenteeism. While all the classes observed included a teacher or other administrator leading the class, that person was not always the officially assigned teacher. In the assigned teacher's absence, the principal, registrar, vice president of administration, or other teachers not assigned to that class would cover for the missing individual and hastily provide a lesson in the observed classroom. In several cases this switch only became apparent to the observers after checking the official school schedule. Teachers were sometimes pulled from classes not being observed that day to cover the observed class, inevitably leaving his or her classroom and students without any instructor or supervision. Teacher attendance continues to be a major issue in preventing students from receiving the required number of hours of instruction as well as quality schooling. Furthermore, if there is no expectation that a teacher or another administrator will be in class to provide lessons, students themselves are likely to be discouraged from showing up or remaining in school, especially when traveling from significant distances from their homes.



While there is a wide range of reasons accounting for teacher absence, whether legitimate or unexcused, a systematic way to ensure all classes receive coverage and adult supervision is necessary. More also needs to be done to hold teachers accountable for days missed and determining excused versus unexcused absence. The need for better oversight and monitoring by the District Education Officers (DEO) and County Education Officers (CEO) remains essential to raising expectations of teacher attendance levels and accountability for unexcused absences.

## 5.6 ROLL CALL/HEAD COUNT

One of the main purposes of the GOAL project is to increase girls' attendance in grades 2-6 in the intervention schools. For this project, attendance data is a vital reporting indicator for measuring the success of the various interventions. However, based on the team's observations, there is concern over the availability and accuracy of student level attendance data at the GOAL case study schools. Across the six schools observed in the study, only Saturday Town school completed full roll call in all of their classrooms. Many classrooms did not give any indication of taking roll call. Of those who took roll, at least two classes did not complete the whole attendance list (i.e., began taking roll but stopped before completing the full list). Several classes who completed taking attendance were also missing between four to eight students on their listings.

In addition, many, but not all of the classrooms, completed a head count of the students present that day (male, female, and total), and they recorded the numbers on the chalkboard. However, when the team compared the teacher's headcount with their headcount based on the classroom map, nearly all of the teachers' reported head counts were to some degree incorrect. Again, if teachers are using the headcounts as a means of reporting the attendance

level, the accuracy in reporting remains is an issue to be figured into school efficiency calculations.

## **5.7 OTHER TEACHER ISSUES**

Two additional issues of questionable teacher behavior that emerged from the school observation included teachers' use of alcohol and corporal punishment. In four out of the six schools observed at least one teacher was visibly intoxicated during school hours. The team witnessed one teacher frequenting a shop during the recess period and consuming palm wine; he would return late and drunk to his class that day. Furthermore, another intoxicated teacher was observed repeatedly and harshly hitting his 1<sup>st</sup> grade students throughout the first three periods with a rattan cane.

The overall degree to which teachers were observed administering physical punishment using rattan canes varied from teacher to teacher (i.e., none, threat of use, light use, or harsh use). While the degree to which teachers altered or lessened their use of physical punishment for discipline while the team was there is debatable, it was still clear that use of rattan canes was common in many of the classrooms. For example, one teacher did not use corporal punishment at all throughout the three periods of observation, but was later seen switching students when not formally being observed. How corporal punishment affects students' attitude and willingness to attend school needs to be considered in assessing reasons for why students drop out or fail to regularly attend school.

## **5.8 FINDINGS**

Major issues that emerged over the course of school and classroom observations regarding teachers included: low number of female teachers, low literacy levels, teacher absenteeism, lack of roll call and inaccurate reporting of head counts, the use of corporal punishment, and cases of teacher drunkenness. The research team was particularly struck by the fact that teachers had very deficient literacy skills. A considerable number of teachers appeared to struggle with the material they were presenting and were visibly awkward in carrying out the instruction. Words were frequently misspelled when they wrote on the chalkboard, and when reading from a book, the teacher would read word by word in halted and at a very slow staccato rate. General teacher absenteeism is high, and the researchers noted that covering for an assigned teacher's absence consisted of the principal, the registrar, or other teachers not assigned to that class would cover for the missing individual and hastily provide a lesson in the observed classroom. Teachers were sometimes pulled from classes not being observed that day to cover the researcher observed class, inevitably leaving his or her classroom and students without any instructor or supervision.

The overall degree to which teachers were observed administering physical punishment using rattan canes varied from teacher to teacher, but it was clear that rattan canes were present in almost every classroom. In addition to teachers wielding canes, older students designated as discipline lieutenants also patrolled hallways and the school grounds.

## 6. TEACHER INTERACTIONS

One important feature affecting the delivery of quality education in Liberia is the low level of engagement and interaction with students, specifically girls. How does low engagement/interaction influence student performance? Does this discourage girls to stay in schools?

In an attempt to answer these questions, a principal focus of this research study was to investigate how teachers interacted with girl students in the classroom. The research methodology called for paying particularly close attention to whom the teacher called on in class: was it mainly to boys, mainly to girls, or was it a balanced mix? The research sought to compare the tone of voice (positive, negative, encouraging, discouraging) of teacher feedback to girls versus boys. This section discusses several concepts and findings surrounding teacher interactions in the case study schools. It includes a discussion highlighting the effect of the observers on teacher performance and implementation of gender sensitive pedagogy; gender equality and inclusion in the classroom, and the findings from the formal time-sequenced teacher interactions form.

### 6.1 TEACHER PERFORMANCE AND GENDER SENSITIVITY AWARENESS

Before discussing the study's findings related to teacher student interactions, the effect of the observers on teachers' behavior and the gender framed classroom interactions must be highlighted. In Baker and Lee's<sup>25</sup> article on unexpected pitfalls doing classroom research, they discuss two of the common "pitfalls" to classroom observation, including the "observer's paradox" and the "Hawthorne effect." The "observer's paradox" highlights how the presence of an observer may have an effect on the actions or behaviors of those observed, regardless of whether this is a positive or negative influence. On the other hand, the Hawthorne effect comments on the possibility of those being observed altering their normal behavior in a positive manner, perhaps in hopes of pleasing the observer or the belief that they are helping the observers in their research.

These conceptual frameworks become particularly relevant when analyzing teachers' gender sensitivity in their interactions with students. Despite that at least one day of classroom observations at each school amounted to being an unannounced spot check, teachers should have been aware that research team was working in part of with the GOAL project and reporting their observations back to the program. Whether the school receives student scholarships, PTA grants, or both, the teachers should have been exposed to the GOAL project's emphasis on girls' education. In addition, with the Liberian government's emphasis on girls' education, the schools and communities may have received considerable sensitization or awareness-raising emanating from the government or other agencies outside of the GOAL project. While clearly teachers' exposure and incorporation of gender sensitive teaching practices is a positive observation, whether the teachers altered their classroom behavior based

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<sup>25</sup> Baker, A.A., & Lee, J. J. (2011). Mind the Gap: Unexpected Pitfalls in Doing Classroom Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(5), 1437-1438.

on their assumptions of what the researchers were looking for in teacher-student interactions (i.e., girls' participation), must be taken into consideration when trying to interpret the findings and extrapolating to the similar school contexts.

## 6.2 GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

The majority of teachers observed (19 out of the 31<sup>26</sup>) were noted for encouraging participation from girls and boys, either calling on both sexes to answer questions and solve problems or allowing students equal opportunity to volunteer. The team observed several teachers actively trying to engage girls during their lessons.

Several teachers appeared keen in demonstrating their incorporation of priorities of increased attention and inclusion of girls in education, whether from GOAL, the government and other NGOs. In the observed classrooms, several teachers were heard utilizing certain buzzwords, (specifically "gender equality") when either calling on girls or encouraging them to volunteer or participate. When one teacher called on a girl he would say "I'm doing this because this time it is gender equality." Other interesting phrases teachers were heard saying included: "Now because we have a woman president, and we know a girl can do anything, let's have a girl answer," as well as "because of gender equality, we must have a girl answer."

Multiple teachers also employed several types of approaches to showcase inclusion of girls in their lessons. When asking students for responses or to complete problems, a number of teachers would alternate between calling on a boy or girl each turn, providing both sexes with an equal opportunity to participate and answer. Several teachers went to the extreme of calling mainly (or almost solely) on girls to answer questions or solve problems on the board, almost entirely ignoring the boys. Only a small number of teachers (approximately three or four) called mainly on boys.

As discussed previously, how indicative of a typical lesson the research team observed needs to be taken with caution. Despite the team's best efforts to quietly observe, taking a "fly on the wall" approach and allowing the class to proceed as normal is nearly impossible. In several cases, specifically when discussing gender equality or lecturing on the importance of education, the observed teacher focused almost exclusively on the researchers, making direct eye contact with the observer, indicating that the words being said may have been more for the observers benefit than the students.

In team debriefing sessions the concept of teachers' "stage managing" became a running theme with observers suspecting that the extra attention or time teachers spent focusing on girls in the classroom the day observed was different than a typical day. Reasons for this became apparent when several inconsistencies emerged. For example, one teacher spoke several times about gender equality while conducting his lesson, only called on girls to solve math problems for the first half of the period, but then proceeded at the end of the lesson to criticize the girls, saying they made lots of mistakes and don't read or pronounce well. While he may have incorporated some of the key buzzwords of the gender discourse, he may not have fully digested the message of encouraging girls' participation and continued to belittle their attempts.

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<sup>26</sup> Kpanay town teachers were not included in this count because of their school was in testing during observation.

Another teacher who favored girls to answer questions throughout the period offered the first girl who could spell “charcoal” two points on her next test. Boys were not allowed to answer and after asking each girl individually, not one of the girls was able to provide the correct answer. Despite this, the teacher announced that every girl in the class would receive the bonus two points. Again, whether such behavior or favoritism would have occurred without outside observers present is uncertain.

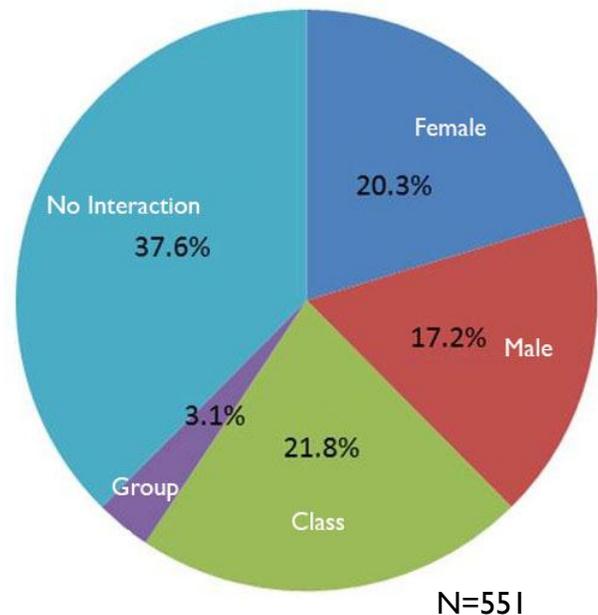
Even when teachers tried to engage or call on girls, overall, female students were often more hesitant to answer than boys in the classroom, sometimes even outright refusing to participate. There are several ways this can be interpreted: the girls could be shy or are less confident in their answers; girls are also more likely to give incorrect answers, or they are unable to provide any response at all, leading to future discouragement in trying to answer.

### 6.3 TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS DATA

In addition to the general observations and examples provided, the research team also utilized a time-sequenced teacher interaction form to capture the nature of teacher-student interactions. During the course of classroom observations, one researcher was responsible for coding teacher interactions (focusing on verbal exchanges) at 5-minute intervals throughout each class period. The concentration of the data analysis was on type of respondent (female student, male student, the class as a whole, or a group within the class) and the teacher’s evaluation of the students’ response (praise, acceptance, remediation, or criticism).

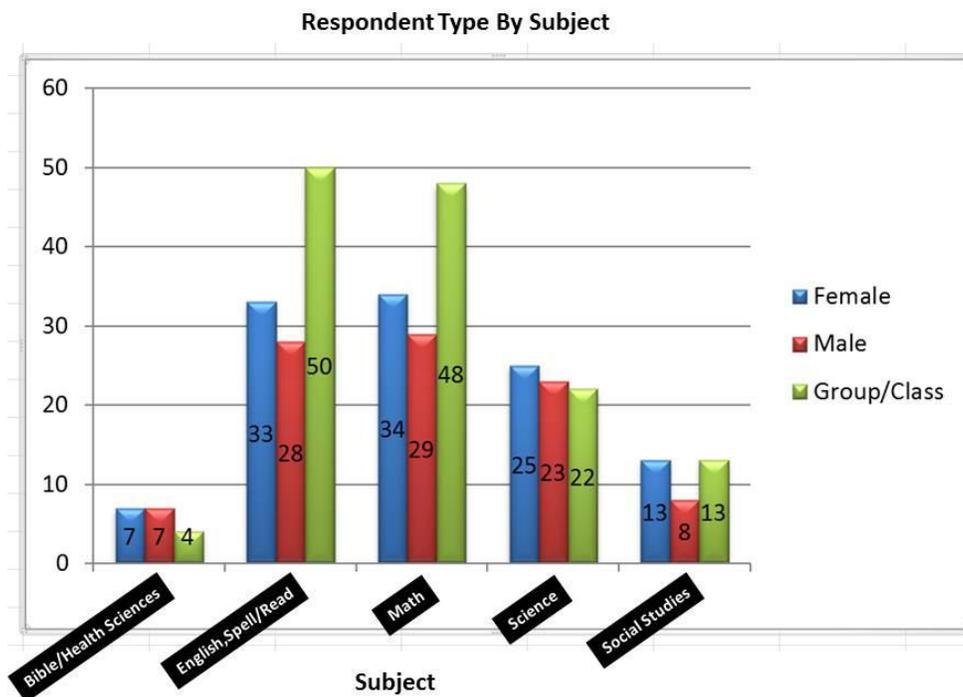
One of the most striking findings was that a high number of the recorded teacher observations were coded as “no interaction,” indicating that there was no direct verbal exchange between teachers and students at the scheduled time frame. In these cases, the teacher was lecturing, writing on the chalkboard, or was physically out of the classroom. It also includes time where students are copying notes off the board while the teacher either waits or is otherwise occupied in a solitary undertaking. Of the 551 valid teacher observations made, the sheer volume of “no interactions” recorded (37.6 percent), combined with general classroom observations, suggests that the “chalk and talk” method of teaching remains prevalent in the GOAL case study schools. The low level of direct engagement and exchanges individual students have with their teachers, as well as the lack of feedback provided by teachers, are factors that must be considered when trying to assess how students learn and comprehend class materials. Furthermore, the manner in which the low level of teacher interaction ultimately affects student motivation and their commitment to engage in the education process needs to be considered in developing more dynamic classroom strategies.

**Chart 2. Teacher Interactions by Respondent Type**



Furthermore, upon examining the interactions that did take place (N=344), the findings support the general observations reported previously, that overall teachers provided roughly equal attention to both female and male students. The most common respondent to those teacher interactions that did take place was the class (35.0 percent), followed by female students (32.6 percent), then male students (27.6 percent). Teacher interactions with a group were least likely, accounting for only 5.9 percent of teacher interactions. Female students had slightly more interactions (verbal exchanges) with the teacher than boys (112 interactions with female students versus 95 interactions with male students, not a significant difference). The following Chart 3 shows that the subject area of Social Studies had the most difference between female and male respondents to teacher-initiated interactions.

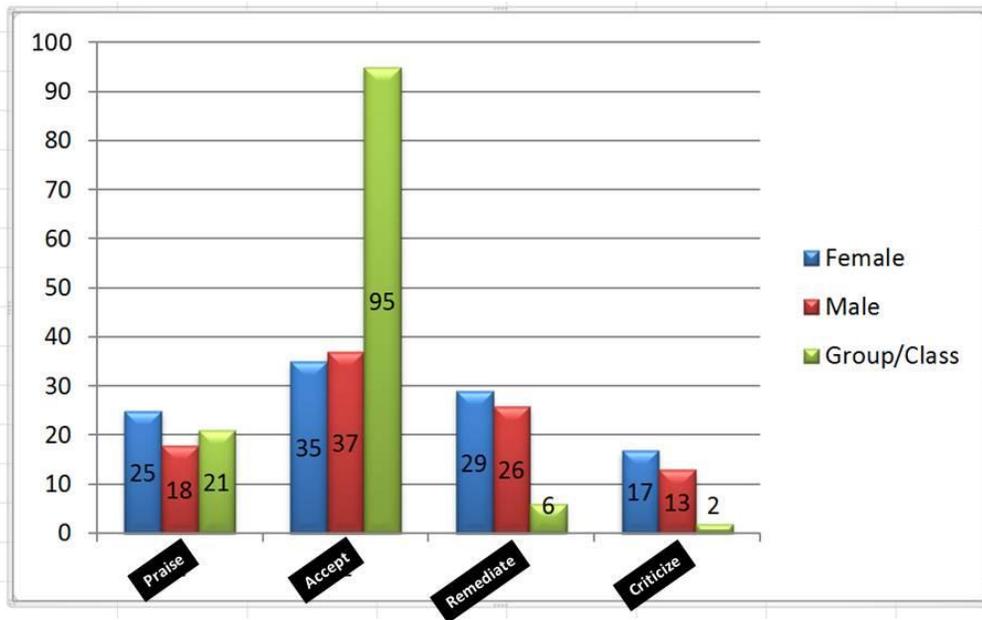
**Chart 3. Respondent Type by Subject**



The most common classification of teacher interaction with female students, male students, the class or group was acceptance (50.9 percent), followed by praise (20.7 percent) and remediation (18.6 percent). In general, criticism on the part of the teacher was low, making up only 9.8 percent of teachers' interaction. Both boys and girls individual interactions with the teachers were most likely to be receiving acceptance from the teacher, with boys receiving more acceptance (of the acceptance category 39.4 percent of boys' interactions were of this type, while girl's interactions with the teacher was 31.8 percent). Girls were more likely to receive praise for their responses than boys (26.4 percent girls' interactions received praise from the teacher as opposed 19.1 percent of boys' interactions). Again, while positive teacher interactions are an encouraging find, one must take into consideration the effect the observers had on teachers' behaviors.

**Chart 4. Respondent Type by Category of Evaluation**

Respondent Type By Category of Evaluation



In sum, teachers demonstrating a gender bias within the classroom (either explicitly or implicitly), tended to be more the exception than the norm across classes observed in the case study schools. In general, male and female students appeared to receive similar number of interactions (verbal exchanges) with teachers. As previously discussed, the effect of the observers on teacher behavior and performance in the classroom is a factor to acknowledge; however, the overall findings relating to teachers' inclusiveness along gender lines appeared positive.

One striking finding was that a high number of the recorded teacher observations were coded as "no interaction," indicating that there was no direct verbal exchange between teachers and students at the scheduled time frame. This was not due to teachers' leaving students to work alone or in groups, but rather prolonged 'down' time, in an interactional sense, characterized mostly by the teacher pacing around, saying nothing, with the students awaiting the next act.

## 6.5 FINDINGS

With the caveat that the presence of the researchers had some impact on teachers' behavior and the gender framed classroom interactions, a general trend in the observations on teacher interaction in the classroom indicates that the majority of teachers observed (19 out of the 31) were noted for encouraging participation from girls and boys, either calling on both sexes to answer questions and solve problems or allowing students equal opportunity to volunteer. However, when teachers tried to engage or call on girls, female students were often more hesitant to answer than boys in the classroom, sometimes refusing to participate.

With regard to teacher interactions with students, formally recorded in the time-sequenced teacher interaction form, one of the most striking findings was that a high number (38 percent) of the recorded teacher observations (551) were coded as “no interaction,” indicating that there was no direct verbal exchange between teachers and students at the scheduled time frame. This suggests that the “chalk and talk” method of teaching remains prevalent in the GOAL case study schools. Of the 334 interactions that did take place, teachers overall provided roughly equal attention to both female and male students.

The most common classification of teacher interaction with female students, male students, the class or group was acceptance (51 percent) followed by praise (21 percent) and remediation (19 percent). In general, criticism on the part of the teacher was low, making up only 10 percent of type of teachers’ interaction. Both boys and girls individual interactions with the teachers were most likely to be receiving acceptance from the teacher, with boys receiving approximately eight percent more acceptance interactions than girls. Girls were more likely to receive praise for their responses than boys by 7 percent.

## 7. STUDENT ISSUES

While several of the issues regarding students have been addressed in previous sections (for example, student attendance and teacher-student interactions), there are additional student related concerns that require more detailed attention. This section draws on findings from Phase One of the study (focus group discussions and key informant interviews with PTAS, principals, teachers, parents and girls who had dropped out, stopped out, or never been to school) and the Phase Two school and community level observations. The major issues that emerged over the course of the research include the following: student literacy levels and comprehension of class assignments; overage students; language issues and barriers; problems or issues specific to girls including ‘bush school,’ early marriage, and early pregnancy; as well as general factors influencing children’s access to education.

### 7.1 STUDENTS’ LITERACY LEVEL AND COMPREHENSION OF CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

While Liberia has made great strides in increasing the overall enrollment of students in primary school, the quality of education and learning remains a struggle. One area where this becomes clearly evident is students’ literacy levels. A Fast Track Initiative report<sup>27</sup> on girls’ education cited that in studies measuring the number of words second graders could read in Liberia, there were a large number of students with several years of schooling who could not read a single word. While the degree to which this occurred in the case studies schools was not directly tested, there were clear indications that students across the second through fifth grade levels could not read at all or were well below their grade level. Furthermore, within the classroom observations, it also became apparent in multiple instances that girls tended to struggle more with the material and content than boys. Following are some of the instances:

- In several Math classes, observers reported girls as more likely than boys to be unable to solve a problem, or that they give an incorrect response.
- In a 3rd grade English class, the few girls who did try to answer the teachers question could only provide incorrect answers.
- In a 4<sup>th</sup> grade Science class, two out of the three female students in the class were unable or unwilling to read aloud.
- In a 4<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies class, the teacher encouraged girls to participate, but they either gave wrong answers or refused to respond. Students who could not read were offered their choice of punishment: either five lashes, or detention. The girls opted for the lashes, the boys elected detention.
- In one Science class the teacher tried to involve girls but they were having difficulty in giving correct answers. The teacher asked girls to pronounce the word “charcoal” off the board, offered 2 points to any girl who could pronounce it; none of them could -- even though he tried to help by mouthing the word. Eventually, he awarded the girls two points anyway.

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<sup>27</sup> Fast Track Initiative. (2011). Fast Tracking Girls Education: A Progress Report by the Education for All- Fast Track Initiative.

- In a 4th grade Math class it was difficult to assess girls' level of comprehension because the teacher gave girls much simpler addition problems that were below grade level, which they solved correctly, as opposed to at-level problems given to the boys.
- In a 3rd grade Math class the teacher was not patient in allowing time for students, especially girls, to work out problems.

It should be noted, however, that there was often one strong female student who would actively engage with the teacher and provide correct answers. Several times when this occurred the teacher would indicate that the strong female student “saved or redeemed the girls” of the class. Furthermore, when interpreting the phenomenon of the large number of observations of girls' reluctance to participate in the class exercise, or refusing to answer when called on by the teacher, one should consider the effect of “stage managing” by teachers for outside observers. For example, if teachers altered their behavior to call on girls during the observation periods, when this is not usually their practice, girls' may be so unfamiliar with the unexpected attention that they are reluctant to participate.

## 7.2 OVERAGE STUDENTS

The 2010/2011 National School Census reported that more than 60 percent of primary level students are considered overage (more than 11 years old).<sup>28</sup> While this is a widespread and well-known phenomenon affecting the primary education sector, more needs to be done to address the specific needs and challenges of this group. One reason cited as contributing to this high level of overage students is disruption of the entire education process during the conflict. This, in turn, contributed to delayed enrollment. There is also a culturally-rooted practice of delaying enrollment based on belief that children should begin schooling at an older age.<sup>29</sup> In Phase One of the research, PTA members were asked about the appropriate age for children to enroll in school. Some respondents indicated that students should start primary school at age six, others stated that seven or eight years of age is more appropriate. One individual discussed that some parents delay enrollment as late as when the child is 10 years old. Reasons discussed for why parents delay enrollment included needing them to help on their farms, assist with the childcare of younger siblings, or out of genuine concern for their child's safety in getting to and from school (this is particularly important in those schools that drew students from satellite or catchment communities located a good distance from the school grounds). In addition, until 2010, students were required to pass a test in order to enroll in first grade, with students who could not pass being held over in the Kindergarten or ABC grades. This holdover and delay in enrolling at the appropriate age also contributes to the overage student population in Liberian primary schools.<sup>30</sup>

Recent surges in enrollment of both overage and at-age students very likely is attributable to the Government's Free and Compulsory Primary Education Policy, as well as other community

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<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Education, Government of Liberia (2011). Transforming Education for Children in Liberia: 2010/2011 National School Census Report.

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF (2011). Progress Evaluation of the UNICEF Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition Program (EEPCT): Liberian Case Study.

<sup>30</sup> UNICEF (2012). The Situation of Children and Women in Liberia 2012.

awareness and sensitization programs implemented by the government or NGOs.<sup>31</sup> In addition, GOAL schools that are providing the scholarship package may be more successful in drawing greater enrollment of girls by removing some of the financial or material barriers for girls or young women that normally hindered them from enrolling or staying in school. This intervention, thus has enabled overage girls who previously never had attended or who had dropped out a chance to enroll or re-enroll.

Several issues specific to overage students emerged throughout the course of school and classroom observations. Interviews with students and community members indicated that children or young adults who delayed enrollment and would be starting school late felt embarrassed to be in class with the younger children. Even when overage girls enrolled into primary school, a common sentiment expressed that the girls “were ashamed because they were too big for the class and didn’t want to be called ABC grandma,” steering them to drop out. Furthermore, teenage pregnancy is especially high in Liberia. At the recent World Population Day Press Conference, the UNFPA reported a teenage pregnancy rate of 38 percent in Liberia.<sup>32</sup> With such a large number of overage students enrolled in primary schools, pregnancy leads a major problem. This topic will be discussed in more detail when addressing factors that are associated with girls dropping out of school.

### 7.3 LANGUAGE

While standard English was the observed language of instruction in all of the GOAL case study schools, for many students English is not their native language. Before the official school opening and during recess the team more often heard students using local languages (Kpelle, Bassa, Lorma, Mandingo, and others) rather than English. Teachers as well were often heard using local languages outside of the classroom setting. Several teachers also used the local language a few times within their lessons, specifically when trying to provide additional explanation of a new English word. Additionally, a spot check verification exercise carried out jointly by the GOAL project and L-MEP in March 2012 came to a similar conclusion, that children come to school dominant in an indigenous language and that as they proceed through gradelevels, they continue to use it informally throughout the day in the playground area during recess and before and after school hours.

That classroom instruction is delivered in the students’ non-native language can pose an additional challenge to students’ understanding and comprehension of the lessons, which can build frustration levels to the point of discouraging enrollment, enhancing absenteeism, and promoting drop-out. Precisely, one of the reported factors associated with students (especially girls) never enrolling in school or dropping out is the low level (or non-existent) command and understanding of English. In the study, this situation was especially noted for girls who recently arrived in the communities from other parts of the country or Guinea.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Wilson, G. (2012, Nov). Teenage Pregnancy Stands at 38 percent... As Liberia Celebrates World Population Day Today. *The Inquirer*. Nov 19, 2012. Retrieved from [www.theinquirer.com.lr/content.l.php?news\\_id=739&main=news](http://www.theinquirer.com.lr/content.l.php?news_id=739&main=news).

## 7.5 FEMALE STUDENT ISSUES: BUSH SCHOOL, EARLY MARRIAGE, AND EARLY PREGNANCY

While many of the issues previously discussed affect both boys and girls stopping out, dropping out or never enrolling in primary school, several themes are specific to girls or young women. These include the following: “bush school,” early marriage, and pregnancy.

**Bush schools.** In Phase One of the research study, “bush school” (associated with women’s secret society, sometimes called “Sande”) was mentioned as a hindrance for girls staying in school in Grand Bassa and by only one parent in Bong. In Phase Two, no one from any of the case study communities independently brought up the issue of “bush school”. When the female Liberian researcher inquired about the topic and how it might affect girls’ attendance or enrollment with community or PTA members, community members were often hesitant and slow to respond. In one community in Grand Bassa, PTA and other community members waited for one of the more outspoken women to speak; when she did come forth with some information, she said that their community had already made a decision to reduce the length of time girls spend in “bush school,” and that they had shifted the time of year it is held to coincide with Christmas break in order to ensure it would not interfere with girls’ formal schooling. However, the Liberian woman researcher on the team (and very informed on the subject) remained skeptical that the “bush school” could be held in such a short timeframe and have no impact on girls missing school. While there is a similar secret society male “bush school” for boys (sometimes called “Poro”), the team did not inquire about the effect of bush school on boy’s schooling.

**Early Marriage.** Early marriage continues to be a widespread practice across Liberia, with the most recent Demographic and Health Survey in 2007 reporting that 48.7 percent of women aged 20 – 24 were married/in union before they were 18 years old.<sup>33</sup> While the topic of early marriage was mentioned several times as an influencing factor propitiating girls to drop out of school, it was noted to be less prevalent than in former times. Furthermore, many of the community and PTA members indicated that government and NGO sensitization and awareness-raising has helped reduce the practice. In addition, PTA and other community members went on to add that they believe it is no longer the parents who promote early marriage on their daughters, but that it is the daughters themselves who actively seek out a boyfriend or husband on their own accord.

**Early Pregnancy and Stigmatization.** Teenage pregnancy continues to be a major issue throughout Liberia. The most recent Demographic and Health Survey in 2007 reported a teenage pregnancy rate of at least 31 percent.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the field study the most often discussed and reported reason for girls dropping out of school was teenage pregnancy. There were multiple factors in addition to the pregnancy itself that influenced when the pregnant girls stopped out, how long they would stop out, or if they would drop out of school entirely.

Students and community members discussed the stigmatization and shaming that pregnant students often face from their peers. In at least two schools where there were mentions of this,

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<sup>33</sup> Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2007. In UNICEF, *The Situation of Children and Women in Liberia 2012: From Conflict to Peace*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

it was common for a pregnant girl's peers to tease her for "swallowing the GOAL backpack." The shame that pregnant students felt from their friends and peers related to teasing about becoming pregnant was one reason cited for girls stopping out early or dropping out entirely.

When speaking with one PTA group, its members discussed how that before the GOAL project, it was generally the case that a girl attending school who became pregnant would immediately drop out of school and then wait until the child was weaned (approximately 2 years) before returning to their studies. However, through GOAL's awareness and sensitization campaign, the PTA and other community members stated that they now try to encourage the girls to remain in class as long as possible throughout the pregnancy and that they should return shortly after having the child.

Lack of parental or other familial support to help with childcare and enable young mothers to attend school was another reason cited for girls dropping out or not returning to school after giving birth. However, in two schools, PTA/Community members discussed how the parents or other family members bring the child onto the school grounds at recess to enable the mother to breastfeed, enabling them to continue with their studies.

**Mothers in the classroom.** In one case study school, the team was surprised to find two third-grade student mothers brought their infants to school and remained with them throughout the morning class session. The observers noted that the mothers were distracted from the lessons, spending much of the time fussing over the child.

## 7.6 GENERAL REASONS FOR STOPPING OUT, DROPPING OUT OR NEVER ATTENDING SCHOOL.

The various factors associated with students stopping out, dropping out, or never attending school are often interrelated. While certain circumstances are unique to girls, other complications may have a greater impact on boys. In the segment that follows, specific issues are highlighted to help provide an overall context in what leads children to stop out, drop out, or never attend. However, these should not be taken as discrete or isolated contributing factors, as they often interrelate with a host of other factors that affect school participation for both girls and boys.

**School Related Expenses.** Although tuition and enrollment fees in public schools are free, there are a number of direct school expenses (reproduction of examination costs, purchase of chalk and other dwindling supplies as the year draws on) or indirect school related expenses (uniforms, school shoes, copybooks) that serve to inhibit a boy or girl enrolling as student and maintaining his or her participation in the case study schools. Parents are expected to contribute toward these costs. In addition, in non-scholarship schools, uniforms were discussed as a major barrier to school enrollment and attendance. Students reported being sent home and sometimes forced to drop out of school



because they did not possess the proper uniform (wrong color blouse, no approved school shoes, torn clothes) or that they lacked the financial means to purchase a new uniform.

Parents may not invest in spending money on school related expense for their daughters or sons, simply because they do not have the financial means to do so; in other words, poverty being the root cause. However, even parents who could produce the requisite financial resources for their child to participate in schooling may view schooling as not being a worthwhile investment. Children and young adults who desire to go to school often are responsible for finding their own means and ways to generate money to pay for school-related expenses. Other issues linked to how financial circumstances bear on schooling is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

**Parental Support.** Non-financial types of parental or other family member support was also mentioned as an associated factor in determining whether a child enrolls or continues in school. These kinds of support can be linked to structural aspects related to students' families, such as specific household demographic configurations and financial position, or they can be rooted in more generalized parental beliefs and varying degrees of commitment to education (specifically girls' education).

Parental support (or the lack thereof) was discussed above as manifesting itself in many different forms in Phase One and Phase Two discussions with PTA and other community members. It included willingness to cover school related expenses, such as uniforms or shoes, allowing the student to sidestep performing the household chores or other familial responsibilities to focus on their homework or other studies, monitoring the child's academic progress with teachers or other school administrators, or being involved in the school PTA. The girls and young women interviewed during the Phase One of the research who had not stopped out of school reported having a greater familial support structure than did those who had stopped out.

**Community Support.** How invested the communities immediately surrounding the schools were in the children and other youth education also needs to be taken into consideration when looking at children's enrollment, attendance, and retention. This includes how active or effective the community PTA is, as well as how community member or parents react to students and/or teachers being out of school on scheduled school days and hours. For example, is there support or indifference in trying to control students and make sure students stay in school on market day, Super Friday, or for general full day? While these issues may affect both girls' and boys' participation and attendance in school, a community's cultural practices and expectations may have a unique affect on girls' educational pathways.

**Family Structure and Household Responsibilities.** Another factor associated with children's enrollment and retention in primary school that emerged throughout the course of the study was the structure of a child's family. All the girls interviewed during Phase One who had dropped out or never been to school lived with single mothers, foster parents, or with a father and stepmother. In the case of children living with relatives, priority is generally given to sending the foster parent's biological children to school, leaving the foster child waiting to attend school at a later date or not at all. Case study interviews from Phase One also indicated that mothers were often more supportive in their daughters pursuit of education than fathers.

Both pre-pubescent girls and young women in the Liberian household context are generally charged with carrying out a significant role rearing younger siblings, nieces and nephews, or other younger extended relatives with whom they live. This generalization, however, does not necessarily apply uniformly to all girls—there invariably comes into play certain household demographic factors that may more pre-condition some girls to assume more prominent roles than others. For example, birth spacing and gender sequencing among siblings can act so that some girls are more intensely driven into these roles than others. A 14 year-old girl with no immediate older siblings and two or three very young siblings is more prone to perform significant childcare duty than a girl who has no younger siblings.

In terms of household chores, such as obtaining firewood, if a girl of adolescent age has brothers of similar age, she likely will be spared this important chore, with the brothers assuming the slack. Gender role-specific chores, such as clothes washing, however, are a different story, as it is unlikely boys will assume this activity. However, if the girl has two or three other female siblings of chore performing age, the activity can be shared, permitting more latitude in terms of opportunity for school participation.

***Financial Concerns and Incentives.*** Another dimension discussed by school staff and community members as being important influences affecting student enrollment and retention relates to financial concerns or incentives. Community members cited that those male and female students who serve as primary breadwinners for their families were more likely to drop out of school early. It was mentioned that even in households that rely on a child to supplement the household's income, the child may not receive the sufficient degree of parental support to permit the child to focus their time and energy on school. The lack of moral support or encouragement brings about a greater sense of discouragement, leading to that same route of enhanced likelihood to drop out. In a more structured economic sense, here was a surprising degree of reporting on children and school-aged youth who engaged in wage-labor contract work on farms, selling at the market, assisting family members with selling produce or performing farm work in general, as well as or other income generating activities.

Furthermore, the draw of a sense of personal independence that comes from earning one's own money, surfaced as a reason for why students drop out of primary school. For older boys this included working as motorbike (“pehn-pehn”) taxi drivers, laboring in gold extraction sites, or working as day laborers (for example, in Saturday Town working on the train track). Girls, on the other hand, were signaled in a parallel manner as “running after man business,” an allusion to the fact that they take up with these boys or men in order to gain financial security or access to gifts, cash, or other means of support, with, of course, all the implications of the transactional sex dimension involved in these relationships.<sup>35</sup>

***Discontinued school feeding programs.*** Two communities reported that after the World Food Program (WFP) School Feeding Program stopped, students dropped out of the school. Only one of the case study schools was observed implementing a School Feeding Program. At the time of this writing, the WFP has been reduced in Liberia, with a reduction in international donor funding. During the Ivorian crisis, some of the WFP food was diverted from schools to supply refugee camps.

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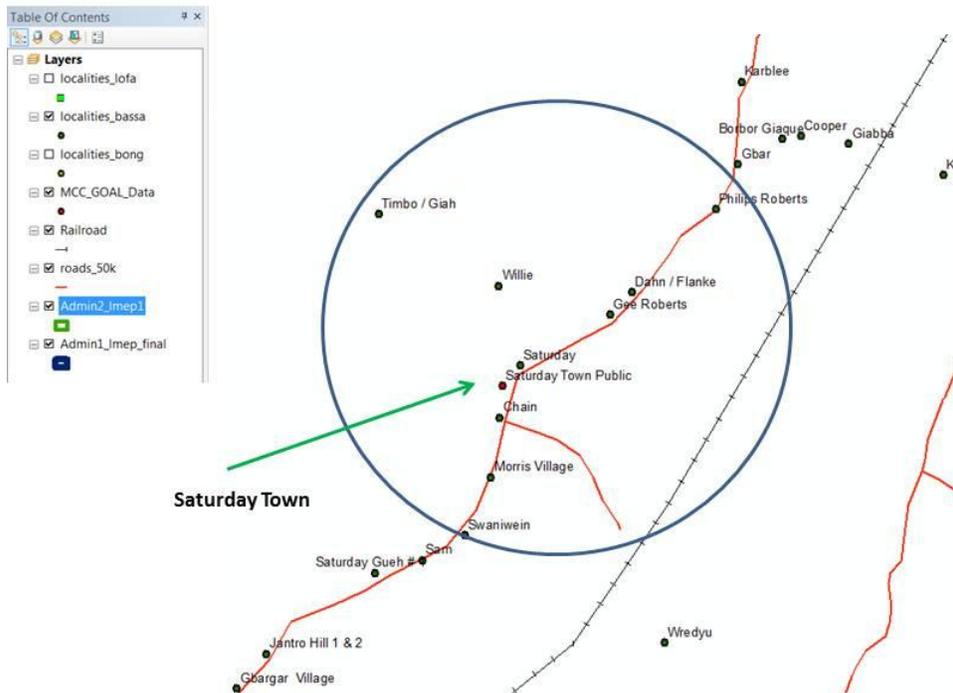
<sup>35</sup> For more details on girls' involvement in 'transactional sex' please consult UNICEF's report on “The Situation of Children and Women in Liberia 2012.”

**Illness or Disability.** Chronic illness and disability were also factors associated with children dropping out or never enrolling in primary school. At least two of the girls from Phase One who stopped out or dropped out attributed it to an illness. In addition to illness, disability, or a death of family members will compel a girl or young woman to withdraw from school to assist in stabilizing the family situation.

**Distance from satellite villages to the school.** There is a spatial/geographical reality that impinges highly on school participation behavior of both boys and girls, and that is distance from the school. Not only is the physical distance a factor that conditions participation, but the combination of distance, the time required to cover that distance, and the psycho-social perception of danger, particularly for girls, can exert a negative influence on participation in schooling.

### Chart 5. Approximate Student Catchment Area for Saturday Town Public School

Approximate Student Catchment Area for Saturday Town Public School, District 3, Grand Bassa County

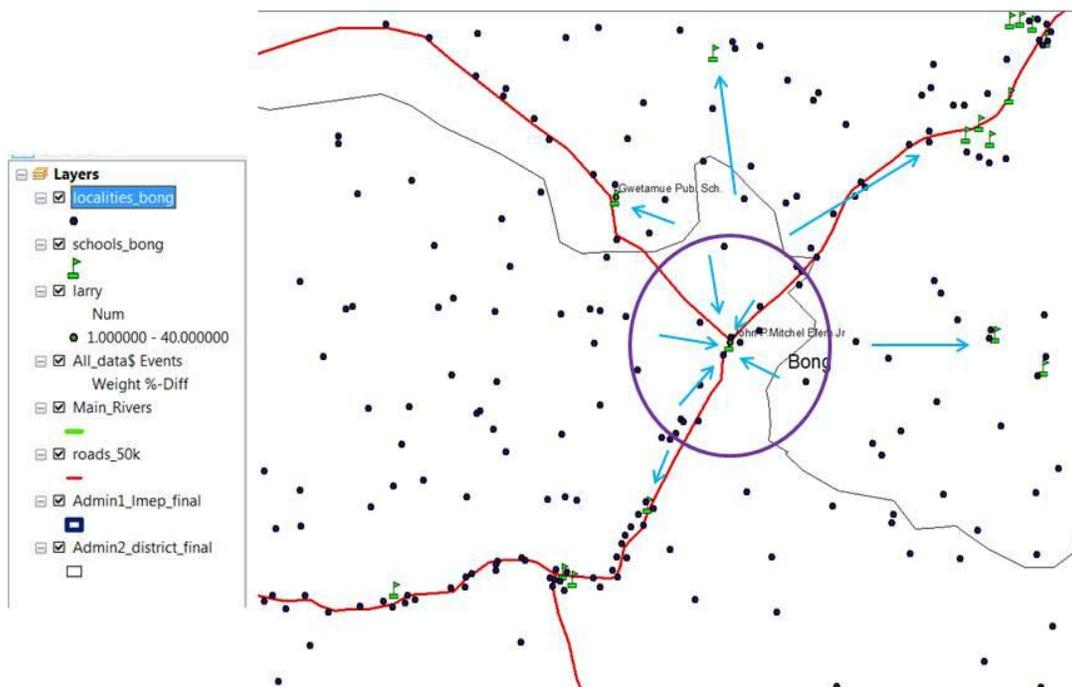


Across the six study school/communities there are different settlement configurations that condition how far a student needs to travel to arrive to school from home. Kpanay Town school in peri-urban Buchanan draws students from a reasonably dense settlement, so the distances from home to school are not that far. The Saturday Town school in rural Grand Bassa County, on the other hand, draws students from a number of communities from surrounding villages. In fact, the community of Saturday Town itself is nothing more than a village of a dozen households. The school draws students from other surrounding villages of roughly equal size within a radius of approximately two and a half kilometers. Schematically represented, the map below depicts this student catchment area for the Saturday Town school in District 3, Grand Bassa.

Schools draw in students within a certain catchment zone, but there is also a ‘draw-out’ phenomenon whereby other surrounding schools pull students. In the following Map \_\_\_ the John P. Mitchell School in Suakoko, Bong County is shown to draw students from a certain radius, but since there are other schools outside the radius, these too draw students from the communities surrounding them. The degree to which these competing ‘pull’ factors operate within a geographical is not only a function of distance, but of perceived instructional benefits as well. These geographic ‘push-pull’ dynamics thus internalize families’ ‘cost-benefit’ appraisals of the utility of a particular school.

**Chart 6. Approximate Student Catchment Area for John P Mitchell Public School**

Approximate Student Catchment Area for John P Mitchell Public School, Gbondoi, Suakako District, Bong County



The blue areas within the circle represent the direction of draw of students within an approximate catchment area into the John P. Mitchell school. Outside of the radius, however, students are drawn into surrounding schools (blue arrows in opposing direction).

As mentioned, there is more than simply a distance factor at work in the decision making processes leading to whether a child enrolls in this school or that school. Education quality figures in prominently also. But distance is important, and distance does not merely represent physical distance. There is a good deal of worry over traffic matters because there are high probabilities of children getting into motorbike or car accidents. And then there is fear of the so-called “heartmen,” ritualistic killers in search of body parts that they believe enhances one’s power. Greater distance to travel represents more time spent in the liminal zone between home and school. And there is a perceived factor of danger associated with children, especially girls, spending extensive amounts of time in these areas. Older girls are perceived susceptible

to the overtures of boys along the paths, but there is also the matter of unwanted sexual coercion, including rape, that presents itself as a perceived element of danger.

**Video Clubs.** One of the most cited problems when discussing student issues within the community are video clubs. Video clubs are places to watch movies, listen and dance to music, and interact with friends. PTA and other community members shared their consternation with the researchers about how children of all different age ranges were frequenting the video clubs late into the evening, even on school nights. Concern over video clubs centered on how they interfere with students' time, especially regarding homework and other aspects of studies, such as sleep deprivation. With young children staying at the clubs late into the evening (10, 11, or 12 midnight), it may be difficult for them to get a full night's rest and be ready and alert for their lessons in the morning. Students, however, defended the video clubs, stating they went to them to do homework or to study in the evening because it was usually one of the few or only places in the community with electricity. While the research team did observe some students with copybooks at the clubs, only a handful of students were actually observed doing homework in or around these locales.

## **7.7 FINDINGS**

There are a number of barriers constraining children in the case study schools to access educational opportunities and to receive a quality education. A number of students observed struggled with class materials and demonstrated low or non-existent reading abilities; the observations bear out that this was a greater problem for girls. Other contributing factors to children never enrolling or dropping out of primary school included: delayed age of enrollment; low or non-existent command of English; shame associated with being overage; costs of school related expenses; lack of parental support; family structure and household responsibility; other financial concerns and incentives; dropped school feeding programs; illness or disability; and the distance from satellite villages to school. For girls particularly, factors influencing girls' attendance, retention, and drop out included their attendance in 'bush schools' and early marriage.

## **8. STUDENT INTERACTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM**

The bulk of this section address student activities and interactions within the classroom setting across the case study schools, but with the exception of Kpanay Town.<sup>36</sup> However, before discussing this, some general observations on students in the schoolyard are made.

### **8.1 OUT OF CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS**

Students' perception of their schooling goes beyond just the classroom learning environment. It can also include the start of school, recess or other free periods, as well as what follows on the school ground at the end of the school day. This section provides additional context of the overall experience for students in the school environment. During recess, several patterns of behaviors and activity by gender were observed. Boys were mostly likely to be found on the school grounds playing football, wrestling, or practicing acrobatics. Girls on the other hand were often playing kickball, "lappa" (a clapping game played in pairs or small groups), or other games in smaller groups. Throughout the day, girls were also noted for selling small biscuits, candies or other treats to their fellow students. In one of the schools where young mothers brought their infants to school with them one of the mothers expressed sadness over not being able to play with her friends because she needed to care for her baby. In addition, some girls not currently enrolled in school expressed similar sentiments with whom the team spoke, stated that they wish to attend school and play kickball or other games with their friends.

No definitive interaction patterns based on gender were observed before or immediately after school. In two schools, students (both boys and girls) were observed fighting amongst themselves during the period before school and during recess. In one school only a handful of cases of fighting were observed (girls fighting with girls as well as girls and boys fighting with each other), but teachers or other administrators intervened quickly. In the other school, fighting was widespread with little interventions by teachers. Older students were beating on younger students, older girls beat on younger boys, and boys and girls fought with their same aged peers. Children or parents' perception of how comfortable or safe they feel at school is an important factor to consider when discussing quality of school as well as factors influencing student drop out.

### **8.2 STUDENT CLASSROOM INTERACTION DATA**

The findings presented in this section use different units of analysis because observations made on students at the moment of the one minute recording need to be situated in specific contexts. In addition to the obvious context of interaction, which is explained more in depth further down, there is the very important context of the subject matter that is taught. For the most part, one subject is bound to a period, but there were cases in which two or more subjects were covered during one period. Another important context is the teacher who drives the direction of the class. For this reason, an entire section is devoted to teacher interactions.

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<sup>36</sup> Time-sequenced classroom observations forms were not completed in Kpanay Town classrooms due to the irregular nature of test taking on the days of observation.

Because there are parallel intersecting contexts surrounding the student actions, the analysis section of this study factors in different units of analysis.

At the first level, there are the students themselves who were observed: they are 126, three girls and three boys in 20 observed classrooms. The second unit of analysis is called the “student-period unit.” In the analysis, it is necessary to generate some statistics that relates observed student activity in the classroom to the context of the teacher or to subject being taught. Since each student was observed over three periods (with generally three different subjects being taught, and where sometimes there was a change in the teacher) there are thus 378 student-period units of analysis ( $126 \times 3=378$ ).

Finally, in order to examine the individual activities and the contexts in which they occur, the generated statistics are based on the total number of individual observational frames. The sum total of observational frames takes into account that four observational recordings were made at 10 minute intervals for each period. Thus, the total number of observations could maximally be 1,512 (126 students  $\times$  3 classroom periods  $\times$  4 observational cycles for each period). In actuality, however, there were 1,426 observations made, as some periods started late or were ended early and part of the classroom observational methodology required the making of the classroom map and the subsequent selection of students, which took up an appreciable amount of time.

As mentioned in the Methodology section 2, it was not possible to carry out the observations in Kpanay Town school in Grand Bassa, so consequently there are only five schools in which student interaction observations were undertaken.

### **8.3 PAIRED STUDENT-PERIOD UNIT OBSERVATIONS MADE BY SCHOOL, GRADE AND SUBJECT**

In this section, the data presented is on the 126 students observed over the three periods (N=378). Beginning with Table 5 below, the distribution of the student-period units is represented across the five schools where student activities were recorded. It can be seen that the two Bong County schools of John P. Mitchell and William R. Tolbert had the most student-period unit observations. The number of observations carried out in these two schools in Bong County is disproportionate because one researcher (MR) observed in the same classrooms in the Bong schools as did JZ, albeit recording interactions among different sets of students. At the county level, 180 student-period units were observed in Bong County versus 126 in Lofa County and 72 in Grand Bassa County. Table 5 contains the breakdown of student-period observations by school.

**Table 5. Number of Student-Period Units Observed by School**

		SCHOOL			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	John P Mitchell	90	23.8	23.8	23.8
	William R Tolbert	90	23.8	23.8	47.6
	Saturday Town	72	19.0	19.0	66.7
	Borkeza	72	19.0	19.0	85.7
	Gorlu	54	14.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	378	100.0	100.0	

The breakdown of observations on the student-period units for each grade can be seen in Table 6 below. Note that 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade has the greatest number of observations (23.8 percent) and 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> grades combined have the fewest (4.8 percent each).

**Table 6. Observations Recorded by Grade Levels**

		GRADE			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	First	18	4.8	4.8	4.8
	Second	72	19.0	19.0	23.8
	Third	90	23.8	23.8	47.6
	Fourth	72	19.0	19.0	66.7
	Fifth	54	14.3	14.3	81.0
	Third & Fourth	18	4.8	4.8	85.7
	Fifth & Sixth	54	14.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	378	100.0	100.0	

Observations undertaken on the student-period units occurred largely during the morning before recess. Every attempt was made to conduct the observations in the three consecutive periods before the recess period, because it is frequently the case that when the recess hour arrives, this signals the end of the day, as the students bolt to their homes or to another point in the community, as described in the school environment Section 3. As previously mentioned in that section, the School Assembly/Devotion ceremony, wherein all students, teachers, and the principal congregate for the invocation, followed by directives issued to students, is supposed to begin by 7:45 am. Classroom instructional periods commence afterwards, somewhere between 8:00-8:15 am. With the exception of one school, Borkeza, where 36 student-period units were observed in the afternoon (12:45 to 3:00 pm), all observations were done in the first part of the morning before the recess period.

As has been discussed, teachers in the observed classrooms are predominately men. Of the 378 student-period units observed, male teachers accounted for 90.2 percent of these, as can be seen in the following Table 7 where the frequency of male and female teachers is represented by student-period units of observation.

**Table 7. Observations on Student-Period Units by Sex of Teacher**

		TEACHER			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	341	90.2	90.2	90.2
	Female	37	9.8	9.8	100.0
	Total	378	100.0	100.0	

In terms of the differentiation of male and female teachers by observations made on the student-period units by grade, Table 8 provides the summary overview.

**Table 8. Observations on Student-Period Units by Grade Level and Sex of Teacher**

GRADE \* TEACHER Crosstabulation

			TEACHER		Total
			Male	Female	
GRADE	First	Count		64	64
		% within GRADE		100.0%	100.0%
	Second	Count	189	72	261
		% within GRADE	72.4%	27.6%	100.0%
	Third	Count	332		332
		% within GRADE	100.0%		100.0%
	Fourth	Count	285		285
		% within GRADE	100.0%		100.0%
	Fifth	Count	206		206
		% within GRADE	100.0%		100.0%
	Third&Fourth	Count	72		72
		% within GRADE	100.0%		100.0%
	Fifth&Sixth	Count	206		206
		% within GRADE	100.0%		100.0%
Total		Count	1290	136	1426
		% within GRADE	90.5%	9.5%	100.0%

It can be seen that observations conducted in classrooms directed by women teachers were solely in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades. Male teachers predominated in the observations made in all grades, with the exception of 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The only female teachers who figured into the classroom observations were in the two schools in Bong County—John P. Mitchell and William R. Tolbert.

In Table 9 below, the distribution of the various subjects taught, matched against the student-period units observed, are shown by school. In general, Mathematics period was the most observed, followed by Science, English/Language Arts, and Social Studies and Reading. The subject areas of Health Sciences, Bible Studies, Spelling trailed with fewer observations.

**Table 9. Observations on Student-Period Units of Subject Matter by Schools**

**SUBJECT \* SCHOOL Crosstabulation**

			SCHOOL					Total
			John P Mitchell	William R Tolbert	Saturday Town	Borkeza	Gorlu	
SUBJECT Bible	Count	12					12	
	% within SUBJECT	100.0%					100.0%	
English, Language Arts	Count	6	24	6	18		54	
	% within SUBJECT	11.1%	44.4%	11.1%	33.3%		100.0%	
Math	Count	30	18	30	24	12	114	
	% within SUBJECT	26.3%	15.8%	26.3%	21.1%	10.5%	100.0%	
Health Science	Count			6		12	18	
	% within SUBJECT			33.3%		66.7%	100.0%	
Science	Count	24	12	18	12	6	72	
	% within SUBJECT	33.3%	16.7%	25.0%	16.7%	8.3%	100.0%	
Social Studies	Count	6	18	6		18	48	
	% within SUBJECT	12.5%	37.5%	12.5%		37.5%	100.0%	
Spelling	Count			6			6	
	% within SUBJECT			100.0%			100.0%	
Reading	Count	6	18		18	6	48	
	% within SUBJECT	12.5%	37.5%		37.5%	12.5%	100.0%	
Soc_Studies & Spelling	Count	6					6	
	% within SUBJECT	100.0%					100.0%	
Total	Count	90	90	72	72	54	378	
	% within SUBJECT	23.8%	23.8%	19.0%	19.0%	14.3%	100.0%	

During the student-period unit observations, the relatively few women teachers were noted to be teaching mostly Reading and Social Studies, and to a lesser extent, English-Language Arts, Math and Science, as can be seen in Table 10.

**Table 10. Subject Matter by Sex of Teacher**

**SUBJECT \* TEACHER Crosstabulation**

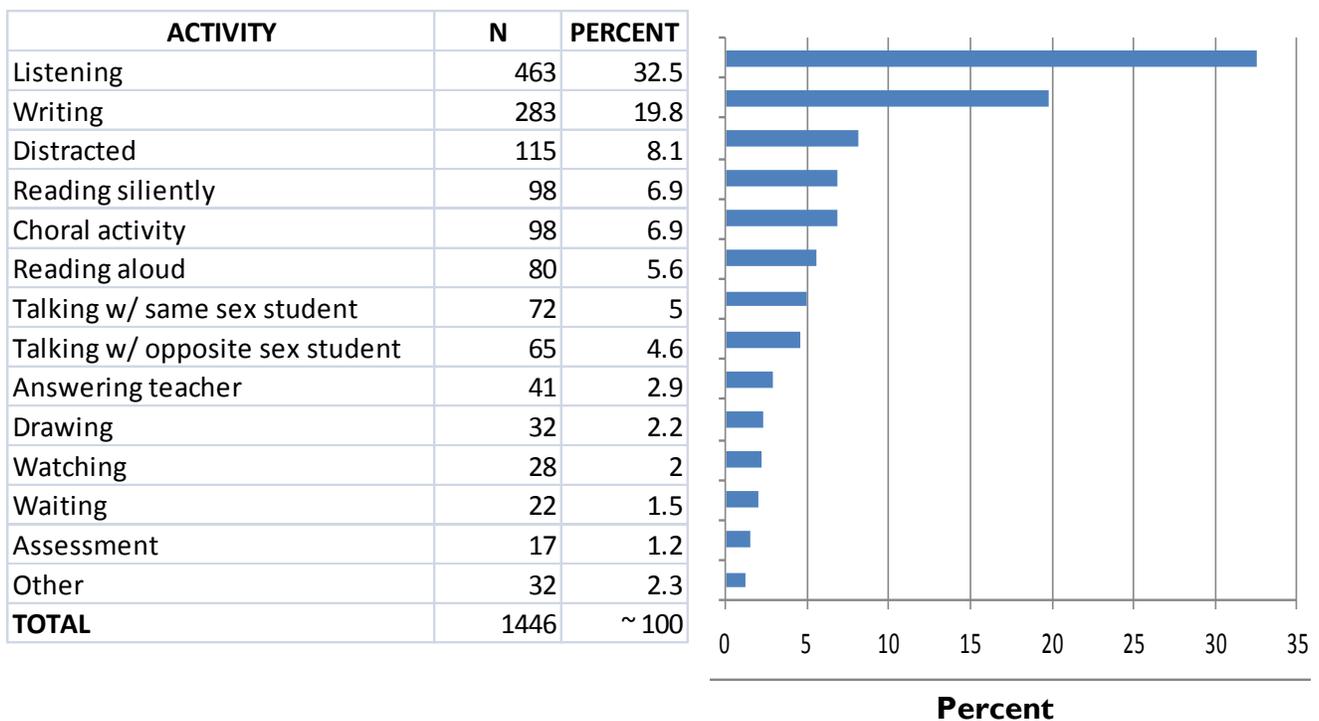
			TEACHER		Total
			Male	Female	
SUBJECT Bible	Count	12		12	
	% within TEACHER	3.5%		3.2%	
English, Language Arts	Count	53	1	54	
	% within TEACHER	15.5%	2.7%	14.3%	
Math	Count	108	6	114	
	% within TEACHER	31.7%	16.2%	30.2%	
Health Science	Count	18		18	
	% within TEACHER	5.3%		4.8%	
Science	Count	66	6	72	
	% within TEACHER	19.4%	16.2%	19.0%	
Social Studies	Count	36	12	48	
	% within TEACHER	10.6%	32.4%	12.7%	
Spelling	Count	6		6	
	% within TEACHER	1.8%		1.6%	
Reading	Count	36	12	48	
	% within TEACHER	10.6%	32.4%	12.7%	
Soc_Studies & Spelling	Count	6		6	
	% within TEACHER	1.8%		1.6%	
Total	Count	341	37	378	
	% within TEACHER	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

## 8.4 STUDENT ENGAGED ACTIVITIES AND CONTEXT OF ACTIVITIES

This section presents an analysis of the different types of activities students engage in, and what is the specific context of those interactions. Instead of reporting on the number of student-period units observed (378), as in the section above, the focus in this section is on the total number of interactions of the 378 students. As mentioned, in theory the maximum number of observations should be 1,512 (four cycles for the 378 students), but the actual number of observed interactions is 1,426, for reasons mentioned earlier.

It can be seen in Table II that the category *Listening* clearly stands out as the preeminent activity in which students are engaged. As will be seen in other discussion sections of this report, the students' listening behavior centers almost exclusively on listening to the teacher. These particular classrooms observed, which are not unusual for any Liberian school outside of Monrovia, are largely teacher-centric, with the teachers directing the vast part of classroom time either reading, uttering commands to order, citing facts, or opining on some aspect of life in Liberia—and students listen. In the analysis of who students listened to, 96 percent were the teacher.

**Table II. Frequency of Activities Engaged in by Observed Students**



NOTE: The category of “Other” included infrequently observed instances of “sleeping” (9), “questioning teacher” (7), “misbehaving” (5), “out of classroom” (3), “energising” (3), and “eating” (1).

The activity category that follows—*Writing*—is prominently represented in the frequency distribution. As is discussed below, writing consists largely of copying, and this occurs among students at all grade levels, but particularly in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, as noted further below. The analysis

of the context of *writing* revealed that 77 percent was performed with the teacher and the whole class, while 23 percent figured in as writing alone.

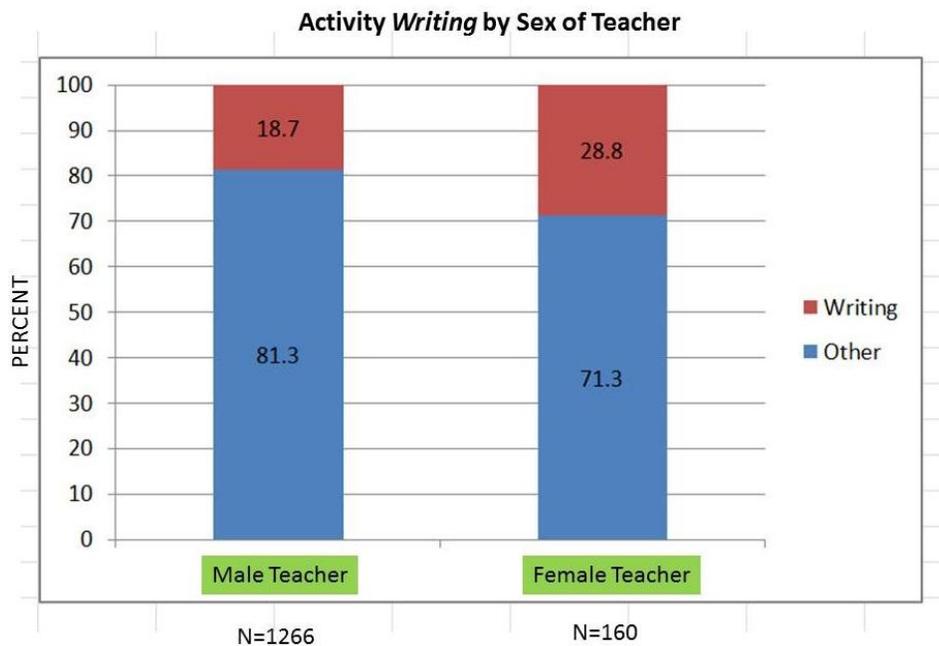
## 8.5 ACTIVITY AND SEX OF STUDENT

There was no real difference in the recorded activities by sex of the student for the 1,426 observations. The activities with any noted difference are *Reading Silently* (girls—58 cases; boys—40 cases), *talking with someone of same sex* (girls—44 cases; boys—28 cases), and *distracted* (girls—53 cases; boys—62 cases) but differences in any of these are not statistically significant. Interestingly, the five observations of misbehaving were noted for boys only.

## 8.6 ACTIVITY AND SEX OF TEACHER

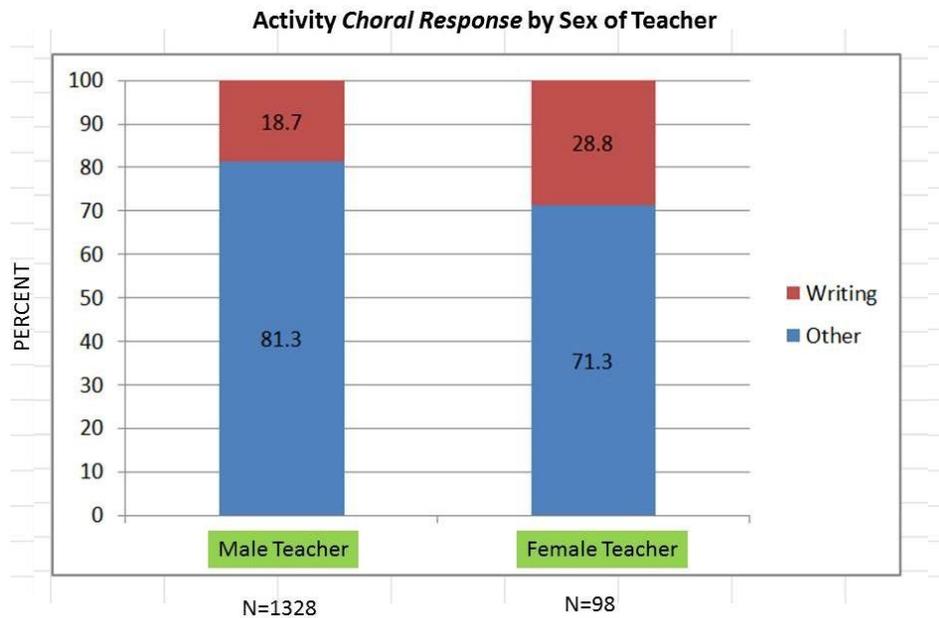
There are three categories where there are significant differences between the lines of sex of teacher—*Writing*, *Choral Response*, and *Answering Teacher*. In the following Chart 7 there were 283 observed instances of *Writing*; in these, students engaged in writing more under female teachers than male teachers by ten percentage points ( $P < .01$ ).

**Chart 7. Activity Writing by Sex of Teacher**



In the following Chart 8, it can be seen that students are more likely to be called out by a female teacher to provide a choral response than a male teacher (12.5 percent versus 6.2 percent, respectively, of the 98 observed instances [ $P < .01$ ]).

**Chart 8. Activity Choral Response by Sex of Teacher**



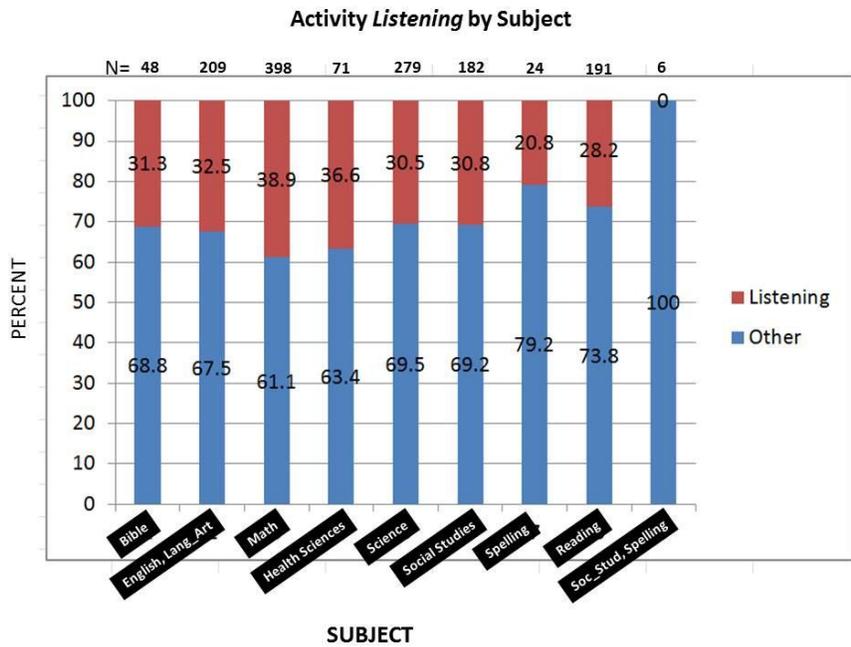
In regard to *Answering Teacher*, of the 41 cases, all were conducted in classrooms taught by male teachers, and the difference is significant ( $P < .01$ ).

## 8.7 ACTIVITY AND SUBJECT

There is some variation in the types of activities in which students are involved across subject taught. Taking the top six categories according to their numerical importance, as seen in Table 11, the following series of tables depicts these differences. There are no particular trends in the patterns of student behaviors by subject, but the chi square tests significantly attest to the fact that there are differences across the subject categories; the one exception, *distraction*, shows no difference at all across subject categories.

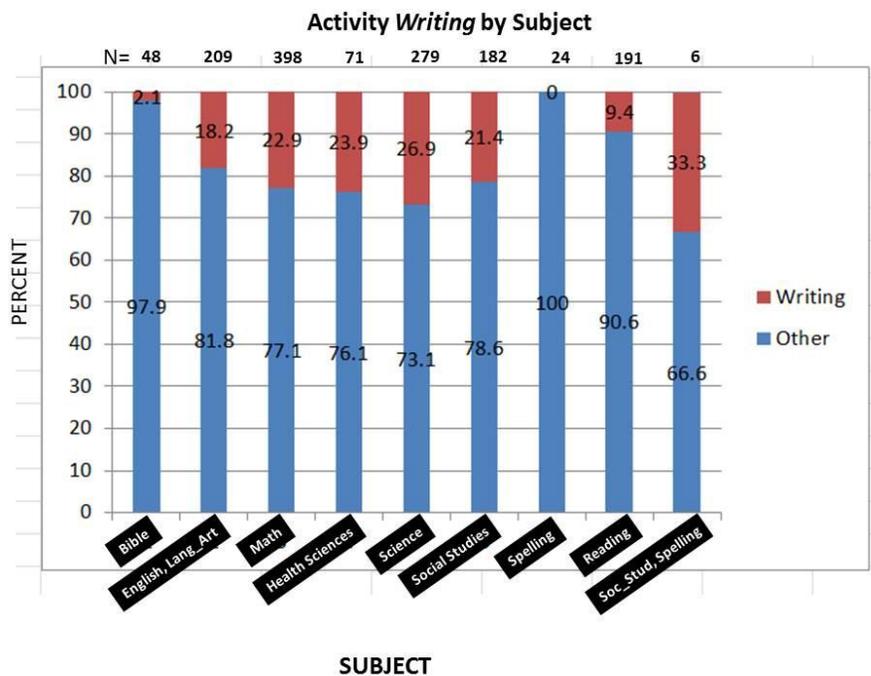
In the first instance, *Listening*, it can be seen in Chart 9 that Math (38.9 percent) and Health Sciences (36.6 percent) lead the frequency of observations.

**Chart 9. Activity Category *Listening* for Subject Matter**



In the case of *Writing*, three subjects together account for the bulk (73.3 percent) of the observations: Science (26.9 percent), Health Sciences (23.9 percent), and Math (22.9 percent), as can be seen in Chart 10 below.

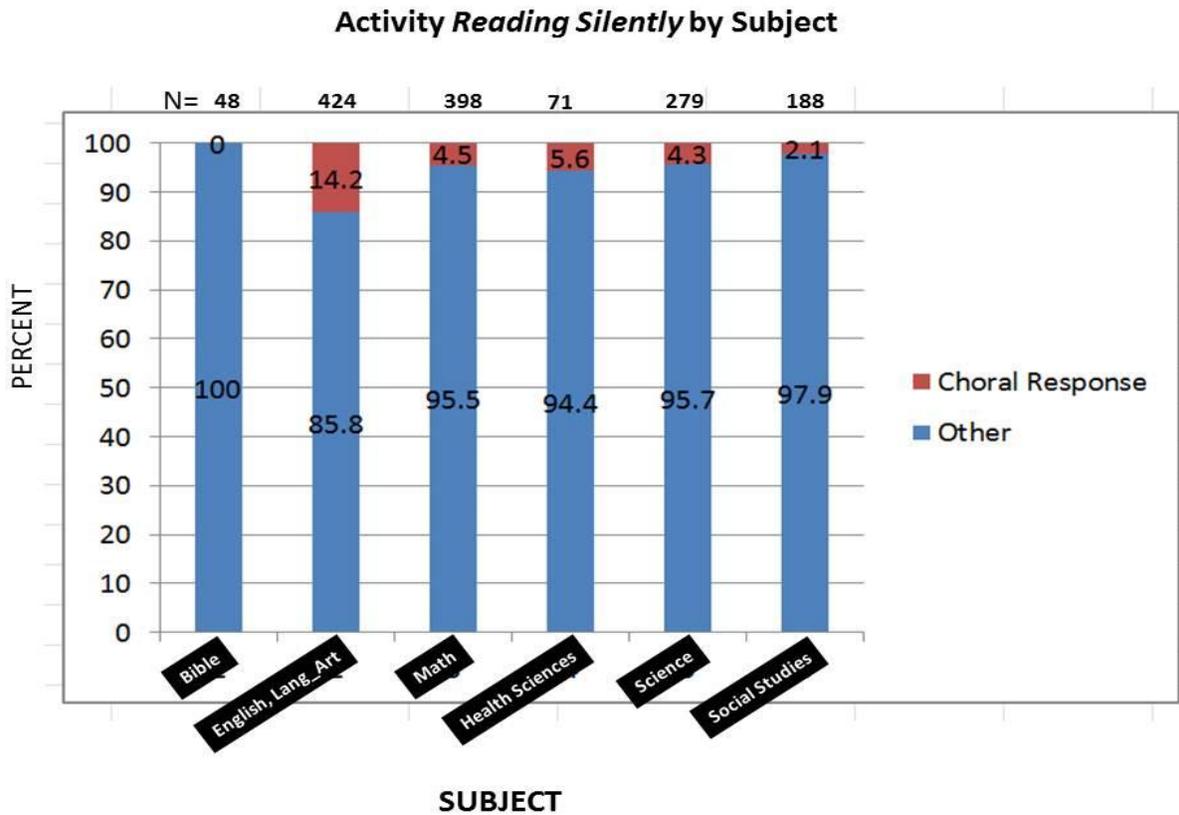
**Chart 10. Activity Category for Subject *Writing***



In the third prominent category of *distracted*, there is nothing can really be said of this, as, for example, Subject A promotes more distraction in students than do others.

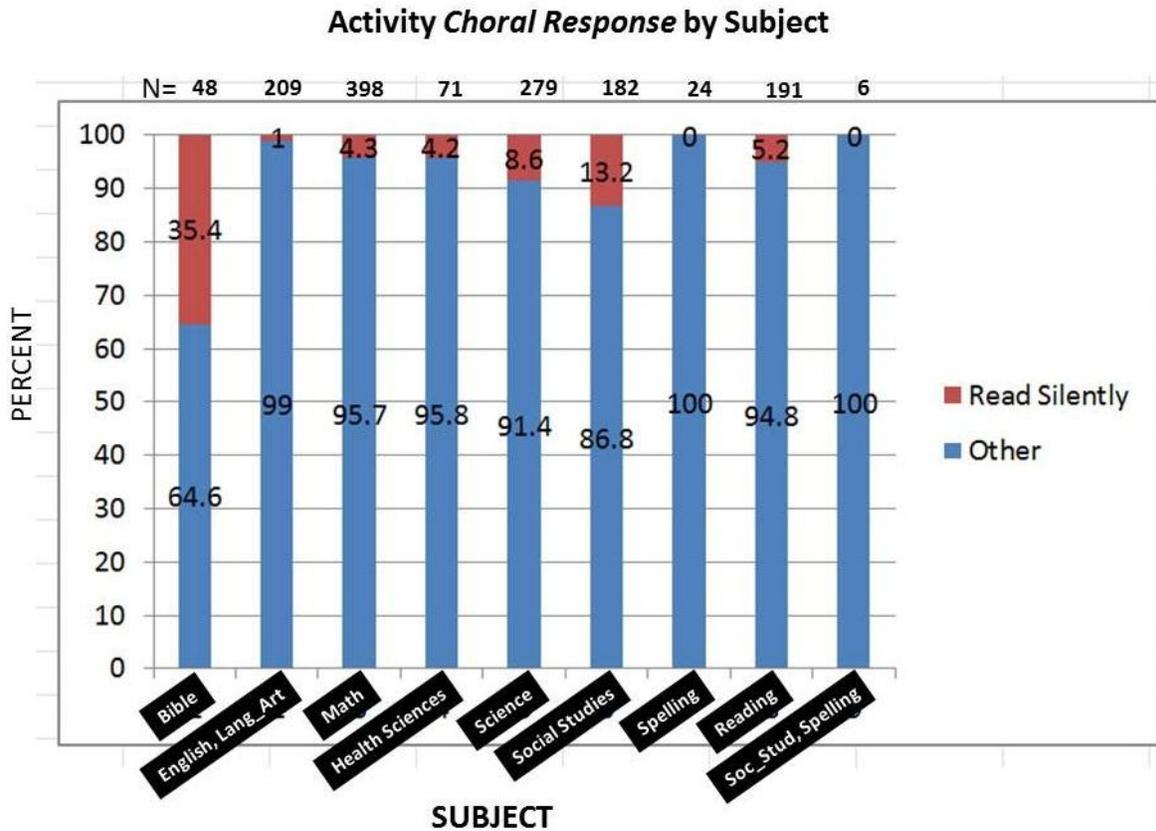
In the category of *Reading Silently*, Bible Studies and Social Studies figure most prominently, as can be seen in Chart II.

**Chart II. Activity Category Read Silently for Subject Matter**



For *Choral Response*, the principal subjects that stand out in Chart 12 are Reading (17.8 percent) and English/Language Arts (12.4 percent). When Spelling and Reading are combined with English/Language Arts<sup>37</sup>, the student activity of Choral Response is most tied to this combined subject area (P<.001).

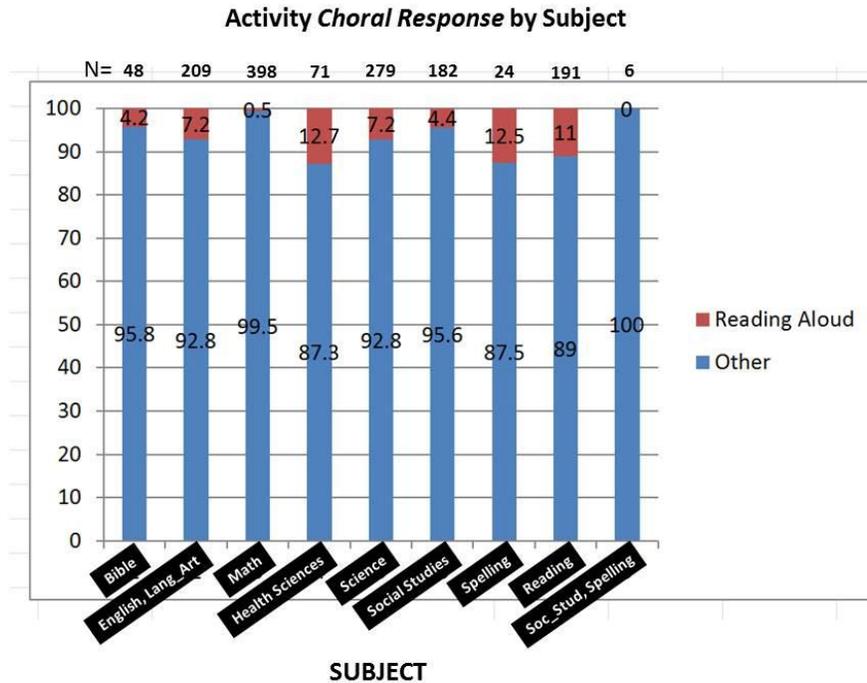
**Chart 12. Activity Category Choral Response for Subject Matter**



<sup>37</sup> It is legitimate to combine these categories because they lie within the same overall English/Language Arts framework, even though they are treated as distinct subject areas in Liberian schools.

Finally, for *Reading Aloud*, Health Sciences (12.7) percent, Spelling (12.5 percent), and Reading (11.0 percent) together account for 36 percent of the instances, with no other subject individually exceeding seven percent.

**Chart 13. Activity by Category Reading Aloud for Subject Matter**



## 8.8 ACTIVITY AND GRADE

Following the same selection of the six most salient activities in which students are engaged, beginning with the first—*Listening*—it can be seen in Table 12 below that students in the combined 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades (30 of 72 observations, or 42 percent) spent more time on this activity than did observed students in other grades. Second graders followed with 38 percent (99 of 261 observations), and these were followed by students in 5<sup>th</sup> Grade, those in the combined 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, and students in the combined 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (35 percent, 34 percent, and 33 percent, respectively).

**Table 12. Activity by Six Salient Activity Categories for Grade**

ACTIVITY	GRADE							
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Third/Fourth	Fifth/Sixth	
<b>Total Activities Recorded</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>206</b>	
Listening	6 9.4%	99 37.9%	111 33.4%	74 26.0%	72 35.0%	30 41.7%	71 34.5%	
Writing	35 54.7%	44 16.9%	41 12.3%	50 17.5%	56 7.2%	22 30.6%	35 7.0%	
Distracted	6 9.4%	32 12.3%	31 9.3%	16 5.6%	8 .9%	9 2.5%	13 6.3%	
Reading silently	8 12.5%	10 3.8%	12 3.6%	32 11.2%	8 3.9%	1 1.4%	27 3.1%	
Choral activity	2 3.1%	18 6.9%	47 14.2%	18 6.3%	11 5.3%	0 0%	2 1.0%	
Reading aloud	0 0%	14 5.4%	27 8.1%	26 9.1%	6 2.9%	1 1.4%	6 2.9%	
<b>Remaining Categories</b>	<b>7 10.9%</b>	<b>44 16.9%</b>	<b>63 19.0%</b>	<b>69 24.2%</b>	<b>45 21.8%</b>	<b>9 12.5%</b>	<b>52 25.2%</b>	

For the *Writing* category, students in 1<sup>st</sup> grade proportionally (55 percent) spent the most time doing this activity. Following these, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades combined and 4<sup>th</sup> grade spent 31 percent and 18 percent, respectively. Although observations in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade were fewest (64), the general qualitative observations attested that 1<sup>st</sup> graders spend much of their time in class toiling through the school day copying the alphabet, whole words, and numbers in their notebooks, which may help account for the highest preponderance of observations noted for *Writing*.

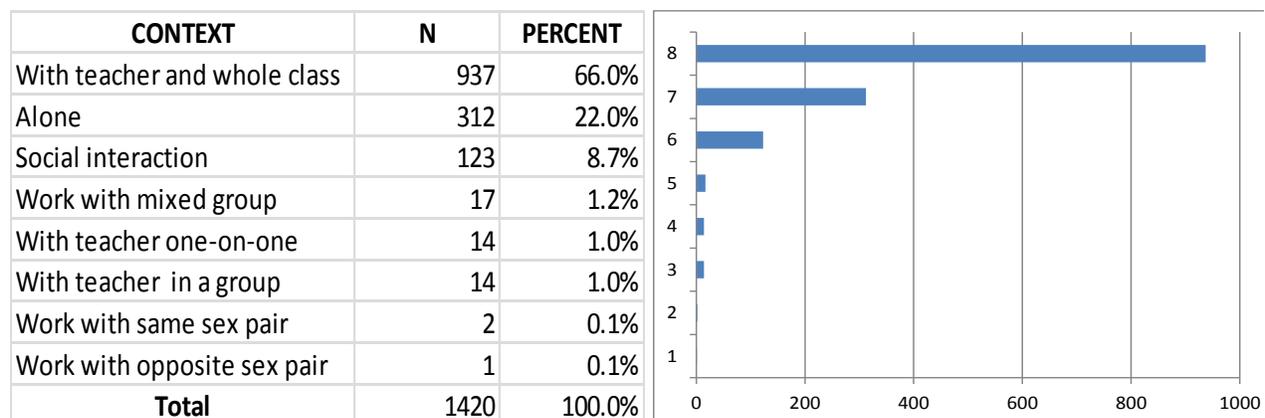
The third most frequent Category of activity, *distracted*, does not demonstrate any real difference across grades, although it is interesting to note that students in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade had the highest proportion of observations in this category (12 percent). In similar fashion, the category *Reading Silently* by grade level does not show any existent pattern worthy of making any statement on the matter, except that 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders led with the highest proportions (13 percent and 11 percent, respectively), with the other grades trailing with under four percent for each.

The third most frequent Category of activity, *distracted*, does not demonstrate any real difference across grades *Choral Response* was most salient among 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students (14 percent), and *Reading Aloud* was an activity that was practiced predominately in the 4<sup>th</sup> and by 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, then 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.

## 8.9 CONTEXT OF ACTIVITIES

As was seen, the activities are tabulated by the important categories of sex of teacher, sex of student, subject, and grade. It is appropriate, however, to view the activities in the context of interaction. As was explained in the Methodology Section 2 the recording sheet (see Appendix D), has a set of categories of inter-personal dynamics that are linked to the student activity recorded. Thus, an activity such as *Listening* is contextualized in the observation as to whom that student is listening to. In order to provide an initial overview of the distribution of these contexts associated with the activities recorded, Table 13 and the histogram below depict the frequency distribution for the contexts of all categories together.

**Table 13. Frequency Distribution of All Interactional Contexts**



Taking all of the contexts in which all student observed activities are lumped together, it can be seen in that the bulk of these (66 percent) takes place in the context of the *teacher and the whole class*. This is followed by activities engaged in by students being *alone* (22 percent), *having a social interaction* (9 percent), with the rest of the context categories trailing with low numbers of observations. It is more important, however, to discuss the categories of activity and context as a paired units. Table 14 following represents these intersecting concepts.

**Table 14. Student Activities in Interactional Context**

ACTIVITY	CONTEXT									TOTAL
	Alone	With teacher one-on-one	With teacher in group	With teacher whole class	Social interaction	Working in same sex pair	Working in opposite sex pair	Working in same sex group	Working in mixed group	
Listening	0	1 (0.2)	6 (1.3)	445 (96.1)	4 (0.9)	0	0	0	7 (1.6)	463
Writing	65 (23.0)	0	1 (0.3)	217 (76.7)	0	0	0	0	0	283
Distracted	103 (89.6)	2 (1.7)	0	6 (5.2)	4 (3.4)	0	0	0	0	115
Reading silently	73 (74.4)	3 (3.0)	0	21 (21.4)	0	0	0	0	1 (1.0)	98
Choral activity	0	0	1 (1.1)	94 (95.9)	3 (3.0)	0	0	0	0	98
Reading aloud	2 (2.5)	0	1 (1.3)	76 (95.0)	1 (1.3)	0	0	0	0	80
Talking w/ same sex student	0	0	3 (4.1)	2 (2.8)	60 (83.3)	0	0	0	7 (9.7)	72
Talking w/ opposite sex student	0	0	0	4 (6.1)	57 (87.7)	0	0	0	4 (6.1)	65
Answering teacher	0	5 (12.8)	0	34	0	0	0	0	0	39
Drawing	12	0	0	20	0	0	0	0	0	32
Watching	7	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	0	28
Waiting	14	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	1	22
Assessment	1	0	0	15	1	0	0	0	0	17

**Row percentages are in parentheses**

In Table 14 above, it can be seen that for the most prominent activity—*Listening*—students engaged principally with the teacher in relation to a total class function; an overwhelming proportion (96 percent) of the *listening* behavior of students observed revolved around listening to the teacher. This corroborates what is generally noted about classroom dynamics in Liberia, wherein instruction leans heavily toward being teacher directed. The following important category—*Writing*—similarly reflects the unidirectional nature of classroom activity emanating from the teacher, as do the categories of *Choral Activity*, *Reading Aloud*, and naturally enough, *Answering Teacher*.

The category, *distracted*, is the third most important one, but the observations that students exercise this behavior as a solitary practice, combined with the low incidences of *misbehavior*, *sleeping*, *eating*, bears out the case that the classrooms observed were generally orderly, with the teacher maintaining a high degree of authority. This may be a result of the fact that the observations were carried out primarily in grades 2 through 6, which are the primary grades the GOAL project addresses. Only four percent of the observations were conducted in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. It is in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and going down to the pre-primary levels where over-crowding of the classrooms predominates and teachers have to constantly make calls to realign generalized disorderly conduct.

With respect to the context of social interaction, there is essentially no difference between same-gender and cross-gender lines, as was noted in the coding categories of the activities.

### 8.9.1 Group Work

Overall, there was very little group work observed across the class periods. When students were divided into groups to complete an assignment, the task or assignment was usually not

appropriate for group work or encouraging of collaboration among students (i.e., having a group of 10 students complete a simple Math problem). Again, the effect of the observers on teacher's behavior may have come into play. Teachers may have received training on the importance of group work and student collaborations, but may not have fully digested the materials or understood how to get the students to collaborate in groups effectively.

## 8.10 FINDINGS

The observations on students' interactions in the classroom corroborate the findings of the teacher observations described in Section 7; most notably, that students were passive actors in an eminently teacher-driven classroom environment. Students spend most of the time in the classroom listening to the teacher. However, this is not to say that the teacher is dynamically speaking in the classroom most of the time. What largely occurs is that there are prolonged periods of no utterances coming from the teacher, and essentially, students simply await the next cue, making for a lot of 'down' time in the interactional sense. In the order of importance of time allocation on activity follows Writing. Most of this writing is copying what the teacher places on the chalkboard, and the volume of letters and simple words (in 1<sup>st</sup> grade) or simple sentences and basic arithmetic constructions (2<sup>nd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grades) is very low. Choral Response is the third important category, with the entire class echoing the teacher's utterance.

While there were relatively far fewer observations carried out in classrooms directed by women teachers, the study does note that there are three categories where there are significant differences between the lines of sex of teacher—*Writing*, *Choral Response*, and *Answering Teacher*.

In terms of subject area, the activity *Listening*, is most prominent in the subjects of Math and Health Sciences. In the case of *Writing*, three subjects together account for the bulk (73.3 percent) of the observations: Science, Health Sciences, and Math. In the category of *Reading Silently*, Bible Studies and Social Studies figure most prominently. For *Choral Response*, the principal subjects that stand out are Reading and English/Language Arts.

Students in the combined 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades spent more time on this activity than did observed students in other grades. Following this grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> graders followed, in turn followed by those in 5<sup>th</sup> Grade, those in the combined 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, and students in the combined 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. For the *Writing* category, students in 1<sup>st</sup> grade proportionally spent the most time performing this activity, followed by the combined 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades, then 4<sup>th</sup> graders alone. The third most frequent category of activity, *distracted*, does not demonstrate any real difference across grades. *Choral Response* was most salient among 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students (14 percent), and *Reading Aloud* was an activity that was practiced predominately in the 4<sup>th</sup> and by 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, then 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.

Taking all of the contexts in which all student observed activities are lumped together the bulk of these takes place in the context of the *teacher and the whole class*. This is followed by activities engaged in by students being *alone*, *having a social interaction*.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from this report, found at the end of every section, contextualize the setting in which the GOAL project operates. While some aspects and challenges found in the quality of primary schools in Liberia are beyond the parameters of the project's mandate, it is necessary to understand and acknowledge these in order to understand the challenges that form the backdrop to the project. The GOAL project's main objective is to get girls to attend and remain in primary school. However, the project has little control over the quality of education being provided to the students. Some pedagogical training on gender sensitivity is being administered, but that addresses only a small part of the widespread problem of teachers' low level of literacy and their qualifications in general.

**Monitoring and Oversight as a Means to Increase School Instructional Time.** A recommendation from community members that emerged during this study called for more oversight and monitoring of the case study schools. Community members believed that with regular spot checks teachers and administrators they would come to believe they would be regularly observed and held accountable for their actions; this assumed accountability would help address some of the major issues in the schools. Implementing greater oversight specifically would be relevant in addressing the insufficient total days and hours of instructions students receive during the school week. If regular spot checks were held (by GOAL or MOE) and schools felt accountable, the push to make sure students (and teachers) attend school regularly (regardless of market days or super Fridays), and for the whole school day (as opposed to leaving after recess), may become more of a reality. Oversight from the MOE from the CEO/DEOs would be an essential step towards improving the quality of primary schools in Liberia.

**Teachers.** The GOAL project has begun rolling out teacher gender sensitive pedagogy training for teachers in their schools. However, at the time of the research study the only formal classroom observation of teachers who should have received this training was in Saturday Town. Additional training to understand what gender equality in the classroom means need to be administered. Gender equality means doing more than just calling on girls and boys equally; the teacher needs to enable an encouraging and positive learning environment where girls feel comfortable trying to answer, even if they are unsure whether or not they are correct. This also means being patient and allowing girls and boys the time to work out answers when called on. Furthermore, a priority on girls should not translate to ignoring the boys. Follow-up classroom observations to see how teachers' interact with girls and boys in their classrooms may be beneficial to the program.

**Overage Students.** The large number of overage students in Liberia continues to be a major concern. The GOAL project should continue with its programming in raising awareness about age appropriate enrollment and the benefits of having girls start school at age rather than delaying enrollment.

**Girls Club.** One of the major findings the team observed in the field was girls struggling with class materials and a low level of class participation (they were reluctant or refused to answer teacher questions). The Girls Club program within the GOAL project is a good venue to continue working on girls' schoolwork, confidence and self-esteem. There also is a need to focus more heavily on tutoring and study sessions to bring up girls' level of reading and other

skills up to grade level. With greater confidence acquired, they hopefully can begin to participate more willingly and fully in classroom activities, specifically answering teachers' questions.

**Teenage Pregnancy.** Teenage pregnancy emerged as the most often discussed and highlighted challenge for girls and young women remaining in school and continuing their education. As discussed by several PTA and community members during the Phase Two part of this study, GOAL has already played a role in raising awareness and sensitivity to this issue. This includes encouraging girls to remain in school as far into the pregnancy as possible in order to reduce stop out time. This effort should be expanded to create awareness about the bullying and teasing that young women who are pregnant face from friends and peers.

Once a girl has delivered her baby and become a young mother, familial support in helping taking care of the child is essential if she intends on returning to her studies. However, not all of these young mothers have the support network to help them return to school while their children are infants. GOAL should continue encouraging parents and other family members of these girls to help support them with childcare while the young mothers attend school. Separate evening or afternoon school sessions specifically geared toward young mothers needs to be reexamined. During the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) this type of program was piloted. Follow up on how it was administered, examining program challenges, and carefully analyzing what strategies worked or not could be beneficial for the girls education program.

It is obvious that one of the first steps in addressing the issue of underage pregnancy should be, where ever possible, to provide stronger understanding of reproductive health and family planning. Regular discussions about the advantages of delaying pregnancy until after completion of school, coupled with real known cases could aid in this effort to diminish premature occurrence of pregnancy. If students are enrolled at age, meaning girls are enrolled into 1st grade at age six, and following a general promotion route, will help ensure that girls will complete their primary school education before becoming sexually active and vulnerable to teenage pregnancy.

**Phase One Girls' Recommendations.** During Phase One of the study, girls were asked what would make their school better. The following recommendations were given. In regard to teachers, the girls interviewed called for teachers being more supportive in their learning environment, the need for a tutor or additional study class help, as well as more female teachers. Many of the girls stated that having more female teachers would improve their learning environment. In regards to the school environment, nearly all of the girls stated that more girls' latrines were necessary. Fencing around the school was also suggested. They also requested evening classes for young mothers and overage students. Other requested materials suggested during Phase Two included: raingear, additional lesson books for teachers (one for each subject being taught), and batteries in order to be able to study in the evenings.

**Potential for Further Research.** Based on the current methodology and instruments, this study could be revised and updated for a larger-scale more comprehensive study on the school and classroom environments. This does not necessarily have to be restricted to girls' education, however. While many of the different issues discussed are relatively wide known and acknowledged, a large scale research study could provide more concrete data on general classroom dynamics across specific counties of interest, or all of Liberia. The methodologies used in this study could possibly be incorporated into pre-service teacher training institutes to

do data collection providing a structured in classroom framework for new teachers to make objective observations on classrooms in order to internalize good pedagogical practice. The methodology could also use with students from sociology/anthropology and education tracks at the university level. It could also help shape teachers' understanding and awareness of what the expectations of classroom dynamics are versus what the reality is. Furthermore, implementing the methodology in a wider context could enable an effective participatory research dimension in their training.

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# APPENDIX A RESEARCH TEAM COMPOSITION

## L-MEP

### MCC GOAL Study - L-MEP

October 2012

No.	Name	Position
1	Dr. Michael Richards	Principal Investigator
2	Casey McHugh	Consultant
3	Jerry Zangar	MCC Coordinator for L-MEP
4	Annie Tamba	Field Researcher
5	James Dwalu	Field Researcher
6	Harris Kpai	Logistician and driver

## APPENDIX B FIELDWORK SCHEDULE

### County/Town Observation Schedule

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
9/30/12	Teams travel to the field	Bong County	Data Collection
10/1/12	John P. Mitchell Classroom and Community Observations	Gbondoi, Bong	Data Collection
10/2/12	John P. Mitchell Classroom and Community Observations	Gbarlatua, Bong	Data Collection
10/3/12	William R. Tolbert Classroom and Community Observations	Gbarlatua, Bong	Data Collection
10/4/12	William R. Tolbert Classroom and Community Observations	Gbarlatua, Bong	Data Collection
10/5/12	William R. Tolbert School and Community Observations	Gbarlatua, Bong	Data Collection
10/6/12	Travel to Lofa	Lofa County	Data Collection
10/7/12	Day off	-	-
10/8/12	Borkeza Public School Classroom and Community Observation	Borkeza, Lofa	Data Collection
10/9/12	Borkeza Public School Classroom and Community Observation	Borkeza, Lofa	Data Collection
10/10/12	TRAVEL to Gorlu/Gorlu School and Community Observation	Gorlu, Lofa	Data Collection
10/11/12	Gorlu School Classroom and Community Observation	Gorlu, Lofa	Data Collection
10/12/12	Gorlu School Classroom and Community Observation	Gorlu, Lofa	Data Collection
10/13/12	Travel to Grand Bassa	Grand Bassa County	Data Collection
10/14/12	Day off	-	-
10/15/12	Saturday Town School Classroom and Community Observation	Saturday Town, Bassa	Data Collection
10/16/12	Saturday Town School Classroom and Community Observation	Saturday Town, Bassa	Data Collection
10/17/12	Kpanay School Classroom Observation	Kpanay, Bassa	Data Collection
10/18/12	Kpanay School Classroom Observation	Kpanay, Bassa	Data Collection
10/19/12	Kpanay School and Community Observation	Kpanay, Bassa	-
10/20/12	Return to Monrovia	-	-

# APPENDIX C TEACHER INTERACTIONS OBSERVATION FORM

<b>School:</b> _____	<b>Observer:</b> _____
<b>Grade:</b> _____	<b>Date:</b> _____
<b>Teacher:</b> _____ ( M / F )	<b>Start Time:</b> _____
<b>Subject:</b> _____	

**INSTRUCTIONS:** This instrument structures the coding of interactions between teachers and students within the classroom. This will involve coding teacher student interactions by: Initiation Method, Respondent, and Teacher Evaluation. One teacher initiated interaction should be recorded approximately every 5 minutes. To complete, record time of the teacher-student interaction, method of initiation, respondent, and the teacher's evaluation of the interaction. Please make sure to also include a short description of the recorded interaction. If no teacher initiated interaction occurs near the 5 minute interval, record the time and tick "No interaction."

Time of Interaction	Initiation Method	Respondent	Teacher Evaluation	Description of Interaction
Time: ( ) <i>No Interaction</i>	MOVE CALL OUT PRIVATE	Student (F) Student (M) Class Group	PRAISE ACCEPT REMEDiate CRITICIZE	
Time: ( ) <i>No Interaction</i>	MOVE CALL OUT PRIVATE	Student (F) Student (M) Class Group	PRAISE ACCEPT REMEDiate CRITICIZE	
Time: ( ) <i>No Interaction</i>	MOVE CALL OUT PRIVATE	Student (F) Student (M) Class Group	PRAISE ACCEPT REMEDiate CRITICIZE	
Time: ( ) <i>No Interaction</i>	MOVE CALL OUT PRIVATE	Student (F) Student (M) Class Group	PRAISE ACCEPT REMEDiate CRITICIZE	
Time: ( ) <i>No Interaction</i>	MOVE CALL OUT PRIVATE	Student (F) Student (M) Class Group	PRAISE ACCEPT REMEDiate CRITICIZE	
Time: ( ) <i>No Interaction</i>	MOVE CALL OUT PRIVATE	Student (F) Student (M) Class Group	PRAISE ACCEPT REMEDiate CRITICIZE	
Time: ( ) <i>No Interaction</i>	MOVE CALL OUT PRIVATE	Student (F) Student (M) Class Group	PRAISE ACCEPT REMEDiate CRITICIZE	
Time: ( ) <i>No Interaction</i>	MOVE CALL OUT PRIVATE	Student (F) Student (M) Class Group	PRAISE ACCEPT REMEDiate CRITICIZE	



## Appendix D Student Observation Form

<b>School:</b> _____	<b>Observer:</b> _____
<b>Grade:</b> _____	<b>Date:</b> _____
<b>Teacher:</b> _____ (M / F)	<b>Start Time:</b> _____
<b>Subject:</b> _____	
<p><b>INSTRUCTIONS:</b> You will be observing selected students individually for 1 minute each per 10 minute cycle. Begin by noting the time you start each cycle. Observe the first selected student for one full minute and then tick the MAIN activity the student was engaged in as well as who he or she interacted with. If the student in engaged equally in two activities you may select up to 2 activities for that cycle. Repeat the same observation process for each student until the first cycle is completed. Start the following cycle 10 minutes after the previous cycle began (i.e. if Cycle 1 began at 10:15, Cycle 2 should began at 10:25).</p>	
	<i>Cycle 1 Start Time:</i> _____ <i>Cycle 2 Start Time:</i> _____ <i>Cycle 3 Start Time:</i> _____ <i>Cycle 4 Start Time:</i> _____
<b>CHILD ACTIVITY</b>	<b>G1 B1 G2 B2 G3 B3 G1 B1 G2 B2 G3 B3 G1 B1 G2 B2 G3 B3 G1 B1 G2 B2 G3 B3</b>
Assessment (Taking test or quiz)	
Listening	
Drawing	
Writing	
Reading out loud	
Reading silently	
Giving choral answer	
Asking questions of teacher	
Answering teacher's question	
Talking with same-sex pupils	
Talking with opp sex pupils	
Eating	
Distracted (daydreaming, not paying attention, etc)	
Sleeping	
Misbehaving or disrupting the class	
Other1: _____	
Other2: _____	
<b>CHILD INTERACTION</b>	<b>G1 B1 G2 B2 G3 B3 G1 B1 G2 B2 G3 B3 G1 B1 G2 B2 G3 B3 G1 B1 G2 B2 G3 B3</b>
Alone	
With teacher and one-to-one	
With teacher in group	
with teacher whole class	
Social Interaction	
Working in same sex pair	
Working in opp sex pair	
Working in same sex group	
Working in mixed group	

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Please provide a short summary detailing each selected students' interactions, attitude or activities during the observed class period.

<b>GIRL 1:</b>	
<b>BOY 1:</b>	
<b>GIRL 2:</b>	
<b>BOY 2:</b>	
<b>GIRL 3:</b>	
<b>BOY 3:</b>	

MCC GOAL Study: Phase 2

## APPENDIX E CLASSROOM INVENTORY

<b>School:</b> _____					<b>Observer:</b> _____				
<b>Grade:</b> _____					<b>Date:</b> _____				
<b>Teacher:</b> _____ ( M / F )					<b>Start Time:</b> _____				
<b>Approx Size of Classroom:</b> _____ (L x W)									

Circle one number response for each line, which best meets the conditions you find in the school or classroom.		Not at all true	A little bit true	Moderately true	Yes, very true	Not applicable, cannot say	Comments
1	Classroom is in good physical condition (no leaks, peeling paint, broken windows, etc.)	1	2	3	4	99	
2	There is adequate ventilation in the classroom	1	2	3	4	99	
3	There is adequate lighting in the classroom	1	2	3	4	99	
4	The noise level is such that students and teachers can hear one another in class	1	2	3	4	99	
5	Classroom has adequate chalk	1	2	3	4	99	
6	Classroom has adequate chalkboards (size, clarity, material etc.)	1	2	3	4	99	
7	Classroom walls are "talking" - visual aides, posters, student work, art projects, etc	1	2	3	4	99	
8	Teacher has chair and table	1	2	3	4	99	
9	There are adequate seats (chairs, benches, etc) for all GIRL students in the classroom	1	2	3	4	99	
10	There are adequate seats (chairs, benches, etc) for all BOY students in the classroom	1	2	3	4	99	
11	Most GIRL students have something to write in or on (notebooks, paper, etc)	1	2	3	4	99	
12	Most BOY students have something to write in or on (notebooks, paper, etc)	1	2	3	4	99	
13	Most GIRL students have something to write with (pen, pencil, etc)	1	2	3	4	99	
14	Most BOY students have something to write with (pen, pencil, etc)	1	2	3	4	99	

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## APPENDIX F CLASSROOM MAP

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ ( M / F )

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_

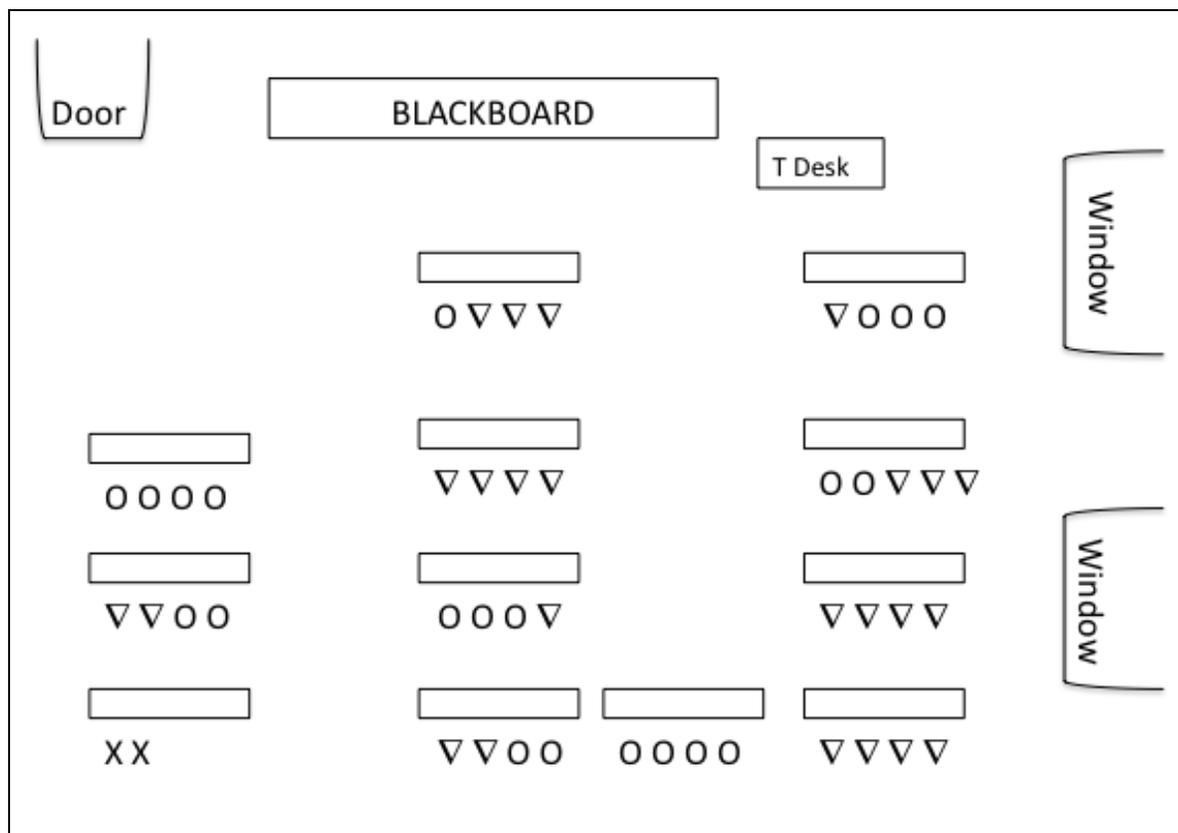
Students enrolled: \_\_\_\_\_

Students present: \_\_\_\_\_ Females

\_\_\_\_\_ Males

**Key:** O = Girls    X = Observer  
 ▽ = Boys

**INSTRUCTIONS:** On this page draw a map of the classroom. Locate the blackboard, windows, doors, posters, schedules, etc. and draw the position of each desk (including the teacher's.) When more than one grade is present in the classroom, please make sure to locate where each grade. Mark the location of each student by using a "O" symbol for female students and a "▽" symbol for male students. Mark and "X" to indicate the location of the observer.



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## APPENDIX G CLASS ACTIVITY SUMMARY

<b>School:</b> _____	<b>Observer:</b> _____
<b>Grade:</b> _____	<b>Date:</b> _____
<b>Teacher:</b> _____ ( M / F )	<b>Start Time:</b> _____
<b>Instructions:</b> Please indicate the type of activity or subject being covered by the students in the classroom you are observing	
TIME	CLASS ACTIVITY
7:30 AM	
7:45 AM	
8:00 AM	
8:15 AM	
8:30 AM	
8:45 AM	
9:00 AM	
9:15 AM	
9:30 AM	
9:45 AM	
10:00 AM	
10:15 AM	
10:30 AM	
10:45 AM	
11:00 AM	
11:15 AM	
11:30 AM	
11:45 AM	
12:00 PM	
12:15 PM	
12:30 PM	
12:45 PM	
<b>COMMENTS</b>	

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