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# Liberian Educational Stakeholders' Perceptions of Overcrowding in an Urban Public Elementary School in Monrovia

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# Walden University

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Franklin T. Dalieh

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2017

Abstract

Liberian Educational Stakeholders' Perceptions of Overcrowding in an Urban Public

Elementary School in Monrovia

by

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MSc, Fordham University, 1997

BA, Cuttington University College, 1984

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

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## Abstract

In post-conflict Liberia, more students are returning to schools and moving to urban areas resulting in overcrowding and class sizes that surpassed recommended and legally-sanctioned limits. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore educational stakeholders' perceptions of the factors (e.g., organizational leadership, social, and environmental) contributing to overcrowding and the challenges and opportunities of overcrowding. The conceptual framework was based on Bolman and Deal's theory of reframing organization and Bertalanffy's theory of general systems. The research questions centered on educational stakeholders' perceptions of the effects overcrowding has on elementary school students' achievement and the opportunities available for reducing overcrowding. Twelve participants, all stakeholders connected to a single school, were purposefully selected for the study. Data collected included individual interviews, a focus group discussion, and documents. A constant comparative analysis of the coded data was undertaken to identify themes and patterns. Participants stated that the national government's statutory and constitutional responsibilities obligate it to provide services including equitable education to its citizens. They also expressed willingness as community stakeholders to form partnerships with other private and public organizations to ensure that the issue of overcrowding is addressed. The findings may contribute to positive social change by providing evidence of stakeholders support for government initiated school construction and by informing leaders of the possible role that engaged stakeholders, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, can undertake in enforcing class size policy.

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## Dedication

To my family, I dedicate this study. To my three sons – Mark; Franklin, Jr.; and Horatio Nyema -- who understood the tedious task of my study, I want to say that the end of the road has been reached. I thank you all for understanding the task of achieving what you too are capable of achieving. I am and will always be grateful for your understanding of the challenges I had and the ease of mind you contributed to my achievement. I want you to know that your achievement in life depends on you, your time, your effort, and your spirit to always climb to the highest point, no matter your age.

I dedicate this study, also, to my illiterate mother, Mary Suboedae Lincoln, who is not alive to witness this achievement. Her desire for me to achieve my education was her goal because she knew the significance of education. To my uncle, also deceased, Bishop Emeritus Boniface Nyema Dalieh, who sponsored my education up to my undergraduate college achievement, I am most appreciative for all that he did for me. Both wanted to witness my success and accomplishment. I will celebrate with them in spirit. I cannot thank them enough. Wherever they are, rest in peace and be assured that I will utilize my achievement for the betterment of society.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Teachers are in the classroom with students most of the time and are critical to students' behavior and learning in school (Konstantopoulos & Sun, 2014; Kremer, Brannen, & Glennerster, 2013). Teaching large classes, however can impede educators' ability to fulfill expected societal outcomes for education (Bascia & Faubert, 2012; Wong & Wong, 1998). Overcrowded class sizes have been found to result in disruptions, classroom management problems, lack of textbooks and desks, poor educational infrastructures, and insufficient budgetary allotment as threats to academic achievement (Kewaza & Welch, 2013; Yelkper, Namale, Esia-Donkoh, & Ofori-Dwamena, 2012; see, also, Liberia's Ministry of Education's Annual Report, 2015).

Overcrowding is an issue manifested in public and elementary schools. According to Fan (2012) and Barrett and Toma (2013), class size is a significant factor in effective teaching and student achievement at the elementary level. In their investigation of the challenges faced by educators in teaching reading skills in large primary classes in Kampala Central Municipality, Uganda, Kewaza and Welch (2013) found that large student class size made teaching burdensome for teachers. Also, in public school systems, Foley and Masingila (2014) and Mamman, Chadi, and Jirgi (2015) found that overcrowded class sizes were an impediment to quality instruction and student achievement which resulted in declining instructional quality.

In Liberia's Ministry of Education's Annual Report (2015), inadequate national budgetary allotment for education was identified as a challenge to enhancing quality education, along with parental and community involvement in children's education.

Factors for overcrowding were found to be the same in these different global settings. Educational settings ranging from primary schools, junior and senior secondary schools in Botswana, Kenya, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Northern California, Moswela and Mphale (2015), Foley and Masingila (2014), and Kohansal (2015) concluded that the problem of overcrowding continues for two reasons: (a) the decisions by school administrators and teachers to accommodate many students at once and disregard official caps on class size, and (b) the lack of alternative choices for students, especially those residing in urban areas.

Overcrowded class sizes, inadequate budgetary allotment to support quality education, insufficient or unavailable learning materials, and inadequate maintenance of infrastructure all are factors challenging the delivery of quality education in urban public schools in Liberia. Liberia's Education Reform Act (2011) defined the education system as having a 9-3-4 structure, with 9 years of basic education, 3 years of senior secondary education, and 4 years of university or tertiary education. The National Educational Policies document published by the Liberian Ministry of Education (2011) stated, class size varies at each school level in public, private, and faith-based schools; at the elementary level, the teacher-student ratio is 1:44; at the junior secondary level, it is 1:40; and, at the senior secondary level, it is 1:30. As Dolo (2015), Jarkloh (2015), and Wreh-Wilson (2015) noted, many preprimary to secondary schools operate two academic sessions, morning and afternoon, to control overcrowding in Liberian elementary schools. Policy such as this, adjustments to physical space, and reductions in class size are some of the interventions that school administrators have used to improve teaching and

learning (Bascia & Faubert, 2012). Bascia and Faubert (2012) and Allais (2014) emphasized how class size reduction affects core educational activities. Bascia and Faubert elaborated that class size reduction provides opportunities to establish positive teacher-student relationship and student behavior. Allais (2014) explained that it is significant for the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, and it is difficult to achieve such contact in large classes

### **Background of the Study**

Liberia is a small West African nation that experienced the conflict (1990-2005) Post-conflict stakeholders in the country struggling to rebuild infrastructure, including education. According to Fitts (1994), educational opportunities for early settlers in Liberia in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were facilitated by the construction of many schools and the introduction of compulsory education in the capital city of Monrovia, with a population of 970,824 (LISGIS Census, 2008) which is the most populated urban area in Liberia. The system of compulsory education was a result of the widespread illiteracy among emigrants and indigenous people. Liberia now has a compulsory education system throughout the nation for preprimary through Grade 9 students, according to the Ministry of Education Academic Calendar (2015-2016).

At the elementary education level, there is a teacher-student ratio of 1:44 as noted the Liberian National Ministry of Education's National Education Policies (2011), the most recently available data. Elementary grades comprise Grades 1-6 with children ranging in age from 6 years to 12 years, according the Liberia's Education Reform Law

(2011). Class sizes at the elementary level have been higher than those at the higher grade levels of 7-12 (Liberia Education Administrative Regulations, 2011).

In this study, I sought to explore factors influencing overcrowding at the elementary level in urban public schools in Liberia. According to Mamman, Chadi, and Jirgi (2015), large class size reduces personal interaction between students and teachers. Yelkperri, Namale, Esia-Donkoh, and Ofosu-Dwamena (2012), in their investigation of teachers' and students' understanding of the effects of large class sizes in Ghana, also concluded that large class sizes do not enable lecturers to attend to weaker students. Yelkperri et al. also noted that having large class sizes does not promote quality teaching and learning. These findings are applicable to Liberia, according to my review of the literature. According to Jarkloh (2015), large class sizes and crowded classrooms are major challenges facing urban schools in Liberia due to the migration from rural areas of a large number of students seeking to achieve quality instruction which is lacking in rural areas. Overcrowded class sizes impede quality learning thereby creating a gap in the academic achievement of students.

In Liberia, the national government subsidized private and faith-based schools as a way of financially strengthening schools (Liberia's National Education Policies, 2011). The government has met some of these schools' expenses such as securing instructional materials and ensuring maintenance of school buildings in order to achieve government goals for the provision of education to Liberian citizens (Ministry of Education Annual Report, 2015). According to Liberia's Ministry of Education's Annual Budgetary Report (2015), the Ministry of Education expended \$153,913.28 of its annual budget of



\$23,570,118.80 on subsidies and scholarships, both local and foreign, which applied to students in both public and private schools. Liberia has a public school system and a private-mission school system in which instruction is provided at pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, primary (Grades 1-6), junior high (Grades 7-9), and senior high (Grades 10-12) levels (Kirk, 2009). The minimum full time teaching load is 5 hours daily with each instructional period running for 45 minutes (Liberia's Ministry of Education's Academic Calendar, 2015-2016).

According to Bosworth (2014), Dolo (2015), and Jarkloh (2015), administrators can take steps to control class sizes and help reduce its impacts, including on teachers' professional performance. Moore's (2007) comment that a "reduction [of class sizes] is relatively straightforward for schools to implement, given adequate resources" (p. 23) is applicable in the case of the Liberian national government. Liberia's National Education Policies (2011) emphasized that it is the responsibility of school administrators to ensure the implementation of class size policy. In discussing the issue of class size reduction, Chingos (2013) observed that reducing class size was a strategy welcomed by teachers, policymakers, and decision makers in order to help bring about improvement in the quality of public education.

### **Problem Statement**

Liberia is a country that is struggling with many challenges after the civil war (1990-2005) and has yet to recover in the post conflict period. Challenges include slow socioeconomic development, destruction of infrastructure, political dynamism, professional inexperience, insecurity, hunger, joblessness, and professional experience

(Ministry of Education Annual Report, 2015; The Heritage Foundation, 2017). A major challenge facing urban public schools has been the migration to urban areas of a large number of students seeking to achieve quality education. Furthermore, students who cannot afford tuition to enroll in private and faith-based schools are enrolled in public schools with overcrowded classes in urban areas (Jackson, 2015; Siaplay & Werker, 2013; Thomas-Gueh, 2015).

Because many perceive academic learning to be an important part of life, Liberian school administrators and teachers have chosen to accommodate many students at once thereby disregarding the official cap on class size (District Education Officer in Montserrado County, Liberia: personal communication; June 1, 2016). Students' desire to learn, which has been encouraged by their families, has left them with no alternative but to enroll in school irrespective of their class size (Ehrenberg & Brewer, 2015).

Large class sizes in many public and private-run schools, especially those in urban areas, has affected student achievement (Henkel, Martinez-Garcia, & Slate, 2016). The student-teacher ratio in 2015 stands at 1:50, 1:75, 1:100, or more depending on the location of the school (Harmon, 2015). Yelkperli et al. (2012) emphasized that large class sizes do not provide adequate space for lecturers to adequately engage or interact with their students. According to Harmon (2015) and Jarkloh (2015), in a context where large class sizes have not been addressed, students have continued to enroll in an academic environment that is not suitable for student learning and achievement. The problem of setting class size and addressing issues arising from large class sizes has become a national concern that needs to be studied. Research on these issues may provide national

policymakers with guidance so that they can devise measures to effectively control class size especially in urban schools, according to the Education for All 2015 National Review Report of Liberia (2015).

Based on my review of the literature, I concluded that further research was needed to explore the perceptions of current and retired administrators, teachers, education officers, educational policymakers, parent-teacher association members, community leaders, and community youth group members regarding the social and environmental factors impacting overcrowding in Liberia's urban public elementary classroom. School administrators appear to have the authority to control class sizes (Jasinki, 2017). However, Liberian schools and society have been involved with politics and issues related to political authority and inadequate budgetary support (Liberia's Ministry of Education's Annual Report; 2015). The involvement of community members in addressing overcrowding may result in improved education in Liberia.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore factors influencing overcrowding in an urban public elementary school in Liberia from the perspectives of educational stakeholders, including current and retired school administrators, teachers, education officers, education policymakers, parent-teacher association members, community leaders, and community youth group members. Chingos (2013) and Mamman, Chadi, and Jirgi (2015) emphasized that large class size reduced personal interaction between teacher and students and that reducing class size was a strategy employed by school administrators to improve educational standards. I explored the

phenomenon of overcrowding in Liberian classrooms to enhance an understanding of the factors that influence overcrowding and improve the quality of education in Liberia.

### **Research Questions**

I sought to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

RQ1 Subquestion 1: What are stakeholders' perceptions of the organizational leadership factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

RQ1 Subquestion 2: What are stakeholders' perceptions of the social factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

RQ1 Subquestion 3: What are stakeholders' perceptions of the post-war environmental factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ2:** What systemic, structural, human resource, political, and symbolic opportunities stakeholders perceive are available to address overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework relied on Bolman and Deal's (2008) theory of reframing organizations, particularly their four frameworks for leadership including the structural, the human resource, the political, and the symbolic, and Bertalanffy's (1968) general systems theory, which resulted from the formulation and derivation of principles

connecting the subsystems to the whole system considering various factors, where an organization was considered either an open or a closed system depending on the organization's activities, the relevance of feedback from the organization to the community and vice versa, and the importance of maintaining stability in the organization.

Bolman and Deal's (2008) reframing organizations theory emphasized, leaders, in the structural framework, were expected to design and implement a process appropriately addressing the problem and the circumstances of the institution. Discussing the human resource framework, Bolman and Deal explained the manager was one who listened and communicated well with people and those people, as part of the organization, were viewed as significant to any organization and should be supported and empowered through participation. Bolman and Deal further emphasized the political framework described a leader as one who understood the political reality of the institution and can ably deal with interest groups. The symbolic framework, according to Bolman and Deal, provides vision and inspiration to people in need of something to believe in. These people, in the case of employees, gave loyalty to the organization. Gichohi (2015) and Janmaat, McCowan, and Rao (2016) emphasized the involvement of education stakeholders working together, bringing new ideas where these stakeholders can learn from each other. The results of their interactions could possibly enhance quality performance in their tasks, roles, and responsibilities professionally. According to Bolman and Deal (2008), new ideas were developed from interactions with the leader or

manager where facts and focus on task became appropriate to problem resolution. The new ideas include:

- increasing of morale of employees with abundant resources,
- reasonable compromises in articulating differences among groups and identifying similarities and differences,
- the building of common vision in a diversity working environment.

Bertalanffy (1968) explained a system was either integrated, an open system, or non-integrated, a closed system. Bertalanffy viewed society and organizations, such as a school district, as working in partnership and therefore cannot be isolated from each other, and it was important to provide information to each other, society and organization. For organizations to maintain stability and equilibrium, feedback was necessary for the society and organization according to Bertalanffy. Bertalanffy's general systems theory related to the study and the research question in that the whole system or institution comprised subsystems that should collaborate to achieve the goal of the whole. Further, the whole institution interacted with inner and outer forces that either impeded as challenges or contributed as opportunities to the growth of the institution.

Bolman and Deal (2008) and Bertalanffy (1968) agreed an organization is a structured system, either open or closed, working for the improvement and development of people and the growth and stability of the organization. Bolman and Deal's theory elaborated on the reframing of organization where human interactions contribute to the growth and development of the institution among the four frameworks that every organization needs to function. Bertalanffy's general systems theory emphasized the

whole system consisted of subsystems that should function in harmony with one another as forces act on the whole system. These theories were described in chapter 2. Therefore, both theories complemented each other in exploring and understanding the challenges and opportunities of reducing class size to enhance quality education in urban public elementary schools in Liberia.

### **Nature of the Study**

The phenomena of interest of this study were the factors influencing urban public elementary schools' overcrowding in Liberia. The qualitative case study paradigm was appropriate as it was used to explore perceptions of current and retired school administrators, current and retired teachers, education officers, education policymakers, community leaders, parent-teacher association members, and a community youth group adult representative of overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia. To complete this case study, I conducted seven semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews, hosted a focus group session of five participants, and collected and analyzed government and educational documents. For data collection, I interviewed seven participants and engaged one group of five participants in the focus group.

I performed constant comparative analysis of the data to identify themes and patterns, until no new themes emerged. Also, I applied an interpretative account of the data collected.

### **Definitions**

*Class size:* The number of students in a given course or classroom (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2015).

*Educational stakeholder:* Anyone who is involved in the welfare and success of a school and its students, including administrators, teachers, parents, community members, city councilors and state representatives (Saxena, 2014).

*Environmental* The aggregate of conditions, internal and external including political, economic, structural, and social factors that influence the life of an individual, community, or institution (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

*Quality instruction:* A concept that provides understanding for instruction in the collection and use of different resources by schools to achieve teaching and learning goals (Jita & Mokhele, 2008).

### **Assumptions**

I conducted this study considering one assumption. I assumed educational stakeholders including current and retired school administrators, teachers, education officers, education policymakers, the head of the school's parent-teacher association, members of the school's parent-teacher association, community leaders, and a community youth group adult representative would demonstrate concern and speak honestly to perceived weaknesses in and reality of the education sector in Liberia. I welcome the participants' willingness to honestly speak and objectively criticize the system was welcomed, but they feared retribution from those in authority for their participation in the study. I did all I could to protect the identity of the participants applying codes instead of using the actual names and ensured confidentiality in data collection and in presenting the findings.



### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this study was limited to one selected urban public elementary school in one school district in the densely populated urban City of Monrovia, capital of Liberia. The City of Monrovia has been divided into districts and each district has a district education officer responsible for all public schools, elementary to senior secondary schools, within the defined district appointed by the Minister of Education to oversee and possibly address educational challenges within the district.

Delimitations of this research included the interviewing of educational stakeholders, including current and retired school administrators, current and retired teachers, education officers, and education policymakers. There were other possible stakeholders including politicians who were not approached to participate in this study. There were numerous teachers willing to participate in the study because of their experiences and roles and their understanding of how overcrowding impacted their job and student learning. However, I purposely selected one urban public elementary school, including current and retired school administrators, teachers, education officers, parent-teacher association members, and education policymakers as direct stakeholders, willing to participate in the study.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study resulted from the unwillingness of some school administrators and teachers to provide genuine information and objective criticism of the school or system. The fear of school administrators and current teachers losing their jobs due to the scarcity of jobs if they objectively express or criticize class size I considered a

threat to the validity and reliability of this research. My limited interviewing experience was also a limitation. Because most interviewees would not allow me to tape record interviews may have resulted in less than confirmable transcriptions, but I spent sufficient time organizing and describing the field notes into codes, then themes to verify and authenticate participants' responses. Another important limitation was the size of the study. Understanding only one school or district or a few grade levels limited transferability of my findings to other places in Liberia or in post-conflict nations. I used only one site for this study which increased validity of the findings but decreased generalization of the findings to other sites. However, the results of this research will still promote positive social change by providing additional research for informing Monrovia educational stakeholders of the factors influencing overcrowding which, in turn, may enhance the quality of elementary schools across the district of Monrovia.

### **Significance**

This study was significant because it explored factors influencing overcrowding in an urban public elementary school in Monrovia. The study was important for current and retired school administrators, teachers, district education officers, and education policymakers because findings from the study provided the necessary information about factors influencing overcrowding and recommendations that enhanced quality education in Liberia. While the impact of class size was broadly researched, there was no evidence to provide understanding of factors influencing overcrowding in Monrovia elementary schools to be able to be better informed in making decisions about class size and the perceived impacts.

Schools, as learning communities, allowed for the interactions and collaborations of current and retired school administrators, teachers, district education officer, and education policymakers. Li (2017) and Ojukwu (2017) argued schools are learning environments for teachers that should allow for reflections of experiences and roles in the process of personal learning and social growth that contribute to positive changes in society. According to Leech and Fulton (2008), schools are purposeful communities that enable the development of cultural empowerment, collegiality, and transformation through structural formation. Because societal needs were constantly evolving, education systems have the responsibility to address these needs. Bolin and Falk (1987) emphasized it is significant for the citizenry to enhance its ability to read, write, and reason to save the nation from demagogues which can be effected with added teachers' involvement. The results of this research will promote positive social change by providing additional research for informing Monrovia educational stakeholders of the factors influencing overcrowding which, in turn, may enhance the quality of elementary schools across the district of Monrovia.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I began with the background of the study where I explored challenges of the education sector in Liberia, especially overcrowded classrooms in urban public elementary schools. The problem of overcrowded classrooms was due in part to students' migration from rural to urban areas seeking quality education. The purpose of the study was to explore the challenges that may contribute to overcrowded classrooms in urban public elementary schools in Liberia. The research questions focused on the

perceptions of current and retired school administrators, teachers, the district education officer, and education policymakers on factors influencing overcrowding and opportunities to reduce class size. The conceptual framework was based on Bolman and Deal's (2008) theory of reframing organization and Bertalanffy's (1968) general systems theory. I introduced the case study design to explore and provide understanding of the experiences of school administrators, teachers, parent-teacher association members, and education policymakers on overcrowding. I ended with a review of the assumptions, limitations, and significance of the study. In Chapter 2, detailed discussions of the literature review are provided.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and gain a better understanding of the factors influencing overcrowding in an urban public elementary school in Liberia. A major problem facing Liberian urban public schools has been the migration of a large number of children from rural to urban ones in an effort to achieve a quality education, which has led to overcrowding in schools (Thomas-Queh, 2015). I focused on the factors influencing overcrowding from the perspectives of educational stakeholders, including current and retired school administrators, teachers, education officers, parent-teacher association members, community leaders, community youth group adult representatives, and education policymakers.

Liberia has been struggling with many challenges of recovery after the civil war (1990-2005). These include slow socioeconomic development, destruction of infrastructure, insecurity, hunger, joblessness, and the loss of experienced workers. The Liberian education system has faced protracted problems in the areas of access, quality, and equal opportunity, classrooms that are overcrowded at all levels (Dolo, 2015). A major challenge facing urban public elementary schools has been the migration from rural areas of large numbers of students seeking to find quality instruction which has been lacking in rural areas (Thomas-Queh, 2015). Foley and Masingila (2014), Kewaza and Welch (2013), and Allais (2014) explained that large classes at the elementary level are an obstacle to attaining quality education.

## Literature Search Strategy

I explored current, relevant literature on class size using databases and search engines I accessed from Walden University Library and other academic libraries. I searched Academic Search Complete, ERIC, Education Research Complete, and ProQuest Global Breaking Newswires as well as Google Scholar. To obtain current and in-depth information, I used the following search terms: *class size, large class size, small class size, overcrowded class size, school, school administrators, school administration, school leadership, school leaders, academic structure, African education, academic institution, education in sub-Saharan Africa, Liberian elementary education, education in Liberia, politics of education, education policy, and Liberia's Education Ministry*. Journal articles, most of which were no more than 5 years old, were used in obtaining information on class size.

Bolman and Deal (2008) emphasized that an organization is a structural framework that deals with human persons interacting in a political framework. The symbolic features are used to prepare for expected or unexpected challenges and be prepared to provide solutions to those challenges as they arise, and be capable of turning those challenges into opportunities for the organization deal with. Bolman and Deal emphasized four frameworks. In the first framework which is managerial, a manager tries to design and implement a process that will address the problem and attend to circumstances from where the problem arises (Bolman & Deal, 2008). As leaders, managers must anticipate problems and be prepared to provide solutions to those problems in the organization. This process of designing and implementing becomes

achievable when goals, information, and communication are clear. This is the case in an open system, according to Bertalanffy (1968), in formulating general systems theory. Bertalanffy emphasized further that general systems theory was not restricted to a particular discipline because it is humanistic. Doing things together means cooperating and sharing with others those things that are relevant to the institution.

Considering the human resource as the second framework, Bolman and Deal (2008) emphasized that a human resource manager should see people as important and responsive to employees' needs and goals in order to gain their commitment to the organization and that doing so results in employees trusting their employer. Trust from employees strengthens the manager's authority and enables the employees in an organization to experience care and support from the leaders (Fulmer, 2017).

Empowerment through employees' participation in activities and decisions strengthens the bond between employer and employee for the growth and success of the organization. Bolman and Deal, in explaining the political framework, stressed that leaders should understand the dynamics of political reality of organizations and should be prepared to deal with it. Such political reality is being able to deal with interest groups by understanding the differences of the different groups and how best to interact and deal with the groups considering the limited available resources of the organization.

The four leadership frameworks, propounded by Bolman and Deal (2008), are relevant to an organization and its leadership because they set the stage for quality performance by managers and participation by employees. People are relevant to organizations. Schools are institutions that interact with people and the environment, both

internal and external, to achieve goals. Consequently, schools, as organizations, should provide the relevant and conducive working atmosphere where its employees feel a sense of belonging. Participation brings empowerment to both employer and employees, and empowerment brings growth and development as a leader understands and interacts with employees (Bolman & Deal, 2008). School is an open community that employs and interacts with the environment through the process of input-transformation-output-feedback (Bertalanffy, 1968; Waber, Magnolfi, & Lindsay, 2014).

Bertalanffy's general systems theory evolved from his description of modern science as a complex specialization of every field based on enormous collections of data. Discussing the shortcomings of modern science, Bertalanffy explained that the activity and information of the various branches of science were entrapped in their own specialization. Bertalanffy emphasized that such an approach and behavior posed problems because science units such as physics, biology, and psychology appeared to function independently. This independent subunit function in isolation poses problems for the whole unit-science. Indeed, social science also views society as the totality of individuals functioning within the environment. Bertalanffy emphasized further that researchers in the various fields attempted to study only aspects related to individual field. However, theories evolved that looked at the whole system based on how individuals think and act (Shaked & Schechter, 2017). With this evolution of the 'whole' and 'wholeness,' came the direction towards generalized theories applicable to general systems (Bertalanffy, 1968).



In reality, elements of systems exist irrespective of organization structure and function. The concept of a general system involved the connection of subsystems to the whole system (Bertalanffy, 1968). The subsystems, each of which includes departments, programs, projects, teams, and informal collections of employees (Kokemuller, 2016), have a specific role and responsibility and work in coordination to achieve the goal of the whole system (Perdicoulis, 2016).

Bertalanffy (1968), therefore, described systems as being either integrated or nonintegrated or open and closed. Bertalanffy explained that open systems are those that integrate and interact with their environments. Closed systems are those that isolate themselves from their environments in which they are a part (Bertalanffy, 1968). Comparing and contrasting open and closed systems, Bertalanffy explained an example of equilibrium, which he referred to as the principle of *equifinality*, and stated:

In a closed system, the final state is determined by the initial conditions.

If the initial conditions or the process is altered the final state will also be changed. In open systems, this is not the case. In open systems, the final state may be reached from different initial conditions in different ways.

(pp. 39-40)

Bertalanffy (1968) viewed society and organizations as working in partnership. In closed systems there is a disconnectedness to the environment on how information is kept and utilized. This was contrary to open system which was connected to the environment through interactions and interdependence which enhanced social science as general system theory. Bertalanffy discussed social science as a system science to which it has to

adapt to the concept of general systems theory. Though all factors of natural science do not necessarily involve social science, both sciences can approach their distinct goal through systemic principles. However, depending on the system, open or closed, methodology varied considering the conditions and ways to achieve the end.

Bertalanffy (1968) emphasized, in an open system people interact with each other and the environment through sharing, learning, and developing new ideas. This is relevant to the improvement of schools, teachers, and school administrators as well as the subsections of school systems. For systems to effectively and efficiently function, it is necessary to establish a structure where ideas, strategies and plans can be satisfactorily processed with feedback for growth and development.

Oshry (1996) stated for organizations to maintain stability, it is significant that those organizations, including school systems, follow and maintain a systemic structure that enhances security. This approach provides security to the organization once the system is functioning to the expectations of those that are on the inside and those that are on the outside. A system must be designed to meet the needs and values of the organization. Bertalanffy (1968) emphasized human values develop from the intrinsic motivation of individuals that are then demonstrated and achieved through human capability. The demonstration of the human capability to achieve intended goals contributes to stability from feedback. Bertalanffy (1968), Hoy and Miskel (1996), and Senge (1990) explained an organization, including a school, is a place of social, human, and environmental interactions, that must be structured to maintain stability, wisely use available resources, and where people capability to create ideas and expand knowledge

take place. Schools are formal organizations for teaching and learning through social interactions, and informal characteristics from the environment interact with the formal that influence and impact people need, values, attitudes, and behavior.

Bertalanffy (1968) discussed information referred to feedback and homeostasis in an open system as vital for organizations stability and referred to receptor as input providing stimulus, control apparatus as transforming machinery of the receptor, and effector as output into and back from the environment. This process produces feedback. Bertalanffy emphasized there is an intrinsically active system even without external stimuli in every organism. Behavior is therefore in response to external stimuli activity which modifies processes in active system. The significance of feedback is to establish continuous stability and productivity in a system. The organization is therefore able to self-regulate. Simultaneously, people make up organizations and must be given opportunities to explore and advance their individual capabilities Bertalanffy that humanity's real values come from the mind of individuals. It is based on individual capability to achieve and the achievements of individuals rather than be considered a social machine.

For organizations to maintain stability, there must be feedback from within and from the environment that promotes equilibrium "the principle of stability" (Bertalanffy, 1968, p. 190). There must be a maintaining homeostatic equilibrium through mental rest which results from reduction in tension. Releasing tensions, behavior can be altered which makes human beings normal, satisfied, and better productive. In organizations where tensions exist, there is bound to be instability. To achieve equilibrium, opposing

forces must reach a balance. Hoy and Miskel (1996) explained further, the school, as a social system, is an open system in which interactions with input from the environment is processed and sent back to the environment for use and a place where structure is utilized in the analysis and problem solving of the institution. Wanjiku (2013), in explaining how school-based factors influenced pupils' academic performance in Tetu District, Kenya, applied systems theory in the research. Wanjiku stated there exists direct relationship between educational inputs and outputs considering the interrelationship with school environment. Furthermore, Wanjiku explained the school exists as an open system, because of the inputs, such as teachers and students, it receives from the society.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore factors influencing overcrowding as challenges in many of Liberia's urban public elementary schools from the perspectives of educational stakeholders, including current and retired school administrators, teachers, education officers, parent-teacher association members, community leaders, community youth group adult representative, and education policymakers. The investigation focused on understanding factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools and the opportunities derived from these factors to enhance quality education in Liberia. In chapter 2, I reviewed the conceptual framework which relied on Bolman and Deal's (2008) theory of reframing organizations and Bertalanffy's (1968) general systems theory guided the study. Factors influencing class size including economics, politics, and social responsibilities were discussed. Overcrowded class size as a challenge was discussed considering the effect of

large class and student learning and achievement. School as a systemic structure where ideas and strategies evolved to the benefit of society considering the theory of reframing organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2008) and the general systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1968) were elaborated on. The review of empirical findings focused on Bolman and Deal's (2008) theory of reframing organizations and Bertalanffy's (1968) general systems theory, factors influencing class size, overcrowded class size as a challenge, school as a systemic structure, and school administration.

### **Factors Influencing Educational Policies on Class Size**

According to Kingdon et al. (2014) and Mansoor and Akhtar (2015), reviewed studies done to understand factors of economics, politics, and social responsibilities regarding class size and students' learning in public sector schools in developing countries. Dolo (2015) explained factors must be identified and be able to use them as anchors for school improvement. Bosworth (2014), in his study of class size, composition, and student achievement among fourth and fifth grade students in a district of the North Carolina public schools used data provided by the North Carolina Education Data Center (NCERDC) and found smaller classes had smaller achievement gaps. Bosworth indicated in his findings that understanding the effect of class size on student outcomes is difficult because students are assigned in classrooms in a non-random fashion which Lazear's (1999) study also found. Discussing class size, Jerkins (2015) explained struggling students in small classes could be easily targeted and progress could be attained, unlike large classes which bring about challenges such as classroom management, proper supervision, and students' inability to efficiently complete projects

thereby slowing down the students' collective achievement. Jerkins stated further an increase in classroom enrollment is pushing teachers out of the profession. Anzalone (2015) explained increasing class sizes was counterproductive and removed educational opportunities for many students, while Wall (2015) stated school overcrowding has become a top concern for teachers and parents.

Bosworth (2014) and Chingos (2013) emphasized empirical literature has failed to consistently establish the expected relationship between class size and student achievement and that establishing the actual effects of class size can be difficult if the study is not reliable thereby producing uneven outcomes. Kingdon et al. (2014), in their literature review of research regarding the political economy of education systems, emphasized teachers and schools are part of the larger society and their interactions with the community are impacted by their performances and factors that determine education reform, including class size. Kingdon et al. discovered many of the actions of teachers and schools are influenced by incentives and constraints operating outside of the school system and that each of these factors influenced different aspects of education reform, be they policy design, financing, or implementation. Kremer, Brannen, and Glennerster (2013), in their research of the challenge of education in the developing world considered India, and explained the quantity of schools is increasing, while the quality of education was backward with 13% of third grade children unable to recognize simple words in India. Kingdon et al. (2014) and Kremer et al. (2013) emphasized appropriate policies for regulating and supporting education are necessary and that factors that influence class size changes and the implementation and enforcement of class size are dependent on the

community, policymakers, and education stakeholders. Barrett and Toma (2013), in their research study of class size and teacher quality of K-12 education, explained principals face constraints such as community and policy and decision-makers interference with school activities. Kingdon et al. (2014) explained quality education in some countries is lacking because, as research literature has shown some developing countries in Latin America and South Asia, the push to expand education without regard to quality due to clientelism, patronage, and corruption to the detriment of underperforming political stakeholders.

Kingdon et al.'s (2014) analysis rested on fundamental questions as to who the relevant actors are, where are their interests, how their incentives and strategies shaped by the contexts in which they operate. These stakeholders addressed in Kingdon et al.'s work are also represented in Hoy and Miskel's (1996) discussion of a school as an open system. Kingdon et al. (2014) further stated incentives and constraints are outside factors that influence school system and education reform. Influencing factors, such as power relations, financing, policy design, and evaluation, are interactive forces that helped shape policies and their implementation process attempted to establish appropriate class size and learning.

### **Overcrowded Class Size: A Challenge**

According to Schanzenbach (2011), the argument existed that class size reduction that produced the benefit was worth undertaking. However, Barrett, and Toma (2013), Chingos (2013), and Falch et al. (2015) elaborated a decrease in class size meant an increment in financing and hiring more qualified and competent teachers in the

classrooms. Wreh-Wilson (2015), examining the reforming of Liberian schools, suggested a class size of more than 24 students was not a class suitable for learning because the teacher has less time with each student, while Almulla (2015) explained class size has some impact on teachers' teaching and that class size containing 15 to 20 students made teaching and learning suitable for students' achievement. According to Chingos (2013), there were not many rigorous studies on class size "so their results are not very useful as a guide to policy" (p. 4). However, more reliable rigorous research in class size reduction is needed.

According to Baker (2012) and Schanzenbach (2011), many challenges existed about the most cost-effective reforms about class size and the quality of instruction that benefited students the most. Explaining his theory of class size, Lazear (1999) stated students in small classes learn more with minimum or no disruption to fellow students. Allais (2014) and Yelkperi et al. (2012) emphasized disruption distracted students, and teacher spent less time teaching because the teacher has to spend more time dealing with disruptive students. Many researchers emphasized various factors affect school administration such as curricula implementation statewide which brought considerable pressure on school administrators (Kohansal, 2015), staff workforce not matching the student body, mismanagement of spending expenditures, minimal parental involvement in their children's academic learning, inadequate funding for district education programs (Henkel et al., 2016), and large class size overshadowing quality in the education sector (Yelkperi et al., 2012). Though these problems varied from school district to school district, the effect of resources on education outcomes was inconclusive and the literature



was not conclusive for a narrow and popular policy as class size according to Falch et al. (2015). Emphasizing further, Falch et al. stated resources and reduced class size were effective in some contexts, while ineffective in others. Marais (2016), exploring student teachers' challenges in overcrowded classrooms in South Africa, explained the knowledge gained in teacher training institutions, such as pedagogy, classroom management, cannot be conveniently applied in overcrowded classrooms. Schanzenbach (2011) emphasized class size was not particularly effective and not cost-effective as other reforms, but this conclusion was based on misleading research literature. However, the right class size issue and effect on students' academic achievement remained debatable and cost intensive.

The issue of overcrowding appeared to be a challenge for school administrators. In Wreh-Wilson's (2015) commentary, reducing class size to a manageable level was a challenge, whether in public or private schools. Wreh-Wilson explained further where schools made the concerted effort to limit class size, which seldom happened in public schools, the number of students assigned to a classroom most often exceeded 50 in Liberia and a majority of schools in Liberia's urban areas do run from 50 to 100 students in a classroom. Bosworth (2014) explained seeking to understand the effect of class size on student outcomes has a potential confounding factor, because students may be assigned to classrooms in a non-random fashion. Almulla (2015), Bosworth (2014), Kremer et al. (2013), and Marais (2016) stated determining the actual class size effect can be difficult because these effects can depend on class size composition in terms of the number of students in the classroom and that class size has some

impact in terms of quality of instruction on students' learning. Akabayashi and Nakanwra (2014), explaining class size effect in Japan, noted there is no known evidence that universal class size policy can close achievement gap among students in elementary and junior high schools.

Schanzenbach (2011), reviewing what the research on class size means for state policy in the United States, explained class size reduction was ineffective in increasing students' outcomes and was not as cost-effective as other reforms because it was based on a misleading review of the class size reduction research literature. Schanzenbach claimed class size reduction policy was most effective toward targeted groups, such as students and teachers who benefit the most. Englehart (2011), on the contrary, emphasized classes of 15 and 23 students increased achievement in student performance.

Bosworth (2014) emphasized students in smaller classes have smaller achievement gap because education stakeholders as administrators and teachers made choices that influenced test scores also affected the class size and composition. Barrett and Toma (2013) elaborated principals, having the supervisory authority over the school, have the capability of determining how many students to place in a classroom. Hence, these stakeholders can also change consistency in class size and impacted policies that affected the students and the operation of the school. Bosworth concluded policies designed for the reduction of class size were more effective than raising teachers' pay at closing or reducing achievement gaps.

Chingos (2013) explained evidence indicates, in some circumstances, smaller classes improved student achievement if the implementation was focused on reducing

class size and hiring more qualified teachers to improve the quality of public education. Chingos emphasized to reduce class size, there must be hiring of more qualified teachers and building more classrooms to enhance quality public education. Bascia and Faubert (2012), discussing primary class size reduction, explained there was extensive research on class size reduction, but the research offered very little guidance for the implementers because of the ambiguity of class size reduction effectiveness. Chingos (2013), in agreement with Bosworth (2014) and Englehart (2011), explained class size was significant to student learning, but there is a need for in-depth and consistent research in this area.

Class size continued to draw the attention of stakeholders as education administrators, parents, teachers, and policymakers and how class size was perceived by school administrators. Papadopoulou and Yirci (2013), discussing the rethinking of decentralization in education in terms of administrative problems in Turkey, explained numerous problems including the need for more classrooms in educational facilities, overcrowded schools and classrooms and that parents are not provided enough support to schools in the enhancement of their children's learning. Allais (2014) explained in the classroom, contact between teachers and students was significant for students' acquisition of knowledge which was difficult in large classes. Almulla (2015) elaborated further teachers' perceptions of increased learners in the classroom may have an adverse impact on teachers' teaching which "may reduce the opportunities for individual teaching" (p. 33). An increase in the number of learners was tantamount to a reduction in attaining quality education in the classroom, while experiencing stagnation in the budget and

burned-out teachers. Mascall and Leung (2012) argued without carefully and comprehensively having a clear picture of the required resources to implement class size policy, school and school system may find out that this demand for class size reduction can have unintended and negative consequences for other programs.

Almulla (2015) and Kaweza and Welch (2013) stated lesson planning and methodology of instruction were affected considering class size. Small class size resulted in more from quality teaching, (Englehart, 2011; Barrett & Toma, 2013; Falch, Strøm, & Sandsør, 2015). Marais (2016) explained in larger classes, disruptive behavior made learning difficult. Kaweza and Welch (2013) emphasized large class size affected students learning in a more reduced quality teaching environment where the teacher was unable to give individual attention to students in overcrowded classroom. Large classes that were disruptive impeded teachers implementing lesson plan, lowered students' academic performance and standard, and posed challenges to classroom management and instructional methodology. Almulla (2015) explained class size affected the type of questions asked by teachers as in small class teachers asked open-ended questions, while in large classes teachers asked closed-ended questions that affected the delivery of instruction and student learning. Konstantopoulos and Sun (2014), discussing teacher effects in small classes, explained teachers work in a context environment where they spent more time teaching in the classrooms and their teaching practices were affected by class size which was important to the teaching and learning process. Almulla (2015) noted further in the method of instruction, large classes tended to be teacher-centered, applying lecture method, while small classes tended to be student-centered applying

variety of methods. Schools are considered organized systems structures where activities and programs were designed to achieve intended goals. Kokemuller (2016) explained identifying various subgroups in a school was to ensure collaboration and enhance productivity in achieving the school's goal.

Overcrowded classrooms that resulted from large class size were a challenge and the need to address this challenge appeared to be the task of the school administration. Henkel, Martinez-Garcia, and Slate (2016), in their research of a Title 1 school located in a rural area outside of metropolitan Houston, TX examined various issues, including mismanagement of spending expenditures, minimal parental involvement due to communication barriers, high mobility rate, high student achievement gaps, security impediments, high number of discipline referrals, a bilingual program not offered in the school, among others. These were some of the challenges that new administrators faced upon accepting position at the school. Henkel, Martinez-Garcia, and Slate explained school leaders were faced with many challenges including those factors enumerated above which contributed to either increasing or reducing enrollment. As a result of increasing or reducing enrollment due to family mobility, school administrators were faced with the dilemma of what actual class size was suitable for student achievement.

Fan (2012), in the research of the effects on students' academic achievements considering class size in a university in Nigeria, explained class size was an administrative concern that school leaders seemed not to control and classes were overcrowded once students continued to enroll. Class size, large or small, was regulated by policy which was administrative in nature.

### **School as a Systemic Structure**

VanderPlaat (2016) stated the concept that a system was a functional structure lent credence to the fact that systems theory was significant to the literature of this qualitative case study. According to Bertalanffy (1968), a well functioning systemic structure was a conduit for the effective and efficient implementation of ideas and strategies that evolved in organizations such as schools. According to Deming (2000), education can be formal as in learning through schooling, or informal as in learning on the job or at home, to the extent that knowledge was enhanced through education. Discussing organizations, such as schools, Hoy and Miskel (1996), Oshry (1996), and Senge (1990), explained schools were most times referred to as a systemic structure in which ideas were shared and demonstrated for the achievement of an identified goal. Azzizah (2015) argued inequality in the socio-economic conditions was troubling to the education system with a high poverty rate outstanding in one region as compared to another, which interpreted as an imbalance in the educational quality of the system. Mansoor and Akhtar (2015) and Kingdon et al. (2014) explained schools were seen as a social system where people interacted, including with the environment. Bandura and Walters (1967) emphasized organizations, as schools, were places where individuals came with clear knowledge, shared with and learned from others. According to Kingdon et al. (2014), schools developed a climate unique to those integral to its structure and functions that included pupils, teachers, support staff, and school administrators. Kingdon et al. explained further schools and their integral qualities and characters cannot function effectively and efficiently if the integral qualities were not properly managed. Bertalanffy

(1968) emphasized the important application of systems theory was attending to the whole of the institution without which the team would become meaningless and collapse.

### **School Administration and School Improvement**

Wolhuter (2014) discussed the weaknesses of the South African education, applied comparative analysis of international educational development, and noted school administration brought educational quality that imparted quality to those, as input, coming from the community, that input quality was processed in the school, and that processed quality was considered output quality which ended up as quality product in the community. Kosar, Altunay, and Yalçinkaya (2014) discussing administration process and solution, explained school administrators came to the institution with a vision, goal, and mission to enable personnel and enhance quality in instruction for students' achievement thereby improving the whole school.

Mansoor and Akhtar (2015) explained school administrators' roles have become more demanding and school administrators perceived academic learning as important part of life and should provide all relevant facilities and accommodation for students learning, including inadequate classrooms. Mamma, Chadi, and Jirgi (2015) and Englehart (2011) explained smaller, less crowded classes enabled teachers the opportunity to promptly provide feedback and facilitated discussion that effective learning is proportional to class size which led to improved students' achievement, while Anzalone (2015) argued increasing class size was counterproductive to students' achievement. Khazaei, Zadeh, and Ketabi (2012) emphasized further students in an ideal class environment better

interacted. Hence, small class size in a non-crowded setting was significant to teacher professional performance and students' learning.

School leaders have the responsibility to manage the challenges and seek means to turn the challenges to opportunities in ensuring the maintenance of class size and the stability of the organization. This appeared to be manageable locally. However, Akabayashi and Nakamura (2014) explained evidence has not been established where a universal small class policy closed the achievement gap among schools in compulsory elementary and junior high schools. This claim became a challenge to establish a universal class size policy that seemed unachievable. I conducted further research to understand factors influencing overcrowding as challenges in urban public elementary schools in Liberia.

Themane and Osher (2014), in an editorial on schools as an enabling environment, claimed students need caring, safe, and supportive schools if they were to succeed in school. Khumalo (2015) emphasized school administrators provided a vision necessary for the continuity and development of all of those within the school and the community in which the school was situated. Aslanargun (2012), discussing principals' values in school administration, stated the quality of school leadership demonstrated new dynamism and provided directions that improved schools and their conditions and personnel.

Aslanargun (2012), Hadebe (2013), and Khumalo (2015) found school administrators enhanced transformation in schools, including their constituent parts, to achieve the goal of the school. Khumalo, discussing the implications of systems approach



on school leaders' practices in South Africa, explained school principals employed a number of leadership techniques to ensure organizational objectives were achieved and that leadership was a barometer for school effectiveness. According to the Council of the Great City Schools (2014), an association comprising 67 large city school districts in the United States of America discussing challenges confronting urban schools, explained urban schools were seen through the challenges they were confronted with. The Council of the Great City Schools further emphasized school principals had the responsibility of transforming schools through their leadership styles, their innovation in bringing new ideas, showing their commitment to achieving the school's goal, and demonstrating excellence in areas of promoting equity and diversity among students and staff, and being professional at all times in urban education. Khumalo emphasized the institution was as good or as bad as its leader. Hadebe, discussing whether or not school heads should be leaders or managers or both in the Bulawayo government school systems in Zimbabwe, explained pupils and parents' choice of school, to a large extent, depended on what the school administration had to offer the pupils and parents, and that the demand for quality in education from the parents puts a high demand on school administration.

Broin (2015), discussing empowering principals to cultivate teacher leadership for school improvement, explained leaders are leaders who build teachers, students and staff who were prepared, empowered, and committed to changing the world. The work of school administrators was to focus on the whole institution including all of its constituent parts such as infrastructural maintenance, budget planning and implementation, personnel professional development, managing class size for effective teaching and learning, and

interaction with the community and environment for resources for the successful development and growth of the school. Mansoor (2015), discussing leadership challenges in the public sector schools in Pakistan, explained infrastructure and resource, teacher recruitment, school organization and student enrollment issues, parental involvement and political pressure were some of the challenges confronting the educational leadership in the public sector schools. School improvement, such as the maintenance of the infrastructure, human resource development, and controlling class size, was a challenge for school administrators. Barrett and Toma (2013) emphasized school principals were significant to choosing class size for teachers who were more effective.

Furthermore, school administrators had the responsibility to ensure the implementation of education policy. Kohansal (2015) focused on the leadership practices of four public school principals in two large urban school districts in Northern California. Kohansal built on neoinstitutional theory to understand the influence of institution on human behavior and analyzed how the four principals influenced instructional practices in their schools. Kohansal discovered the four principals' instructional, cultural, and political knowledge influenced their leadership style of bridging or buffering in their schools. Kohansal further emphasized school leadership was the second most significant factor in student learning after classroom teaching and that school leaders mediated education policy as they brought messages to teachers which led to a choice of acting or not acting according to policy. Similarly, the issue of class size was dependent upon the school leaders' ability to control it and school leaders either chose to abide by class size policy or not.

## Summary

Studies of the perceptions of educational stakeholders have found class size has been an issue of concern to school administrators, teachers, policymakers, parents, and the community. Post-conflict countries have been confronted with various issues including infrastructural development, human capacity development, peace, economic development, and quality education. Controlling class size has been a challenge in the education sector. The issue of overcrowded classrooms, especially in urban public schools in Liberia, remains a challenge for school administrators. For this study, the conceptual frameworks relied on Bolman and Deal's (2008) organization theory and Bertalanffy's (1968) general systems theory considered the school as a systemic organization.

This section considered some factors that influenced educational policies on class size such as political economy, parental involvement in their children's learning, and patronage. The chapter considered challenges of overcrowded class size as a debacle for school administrators, their impact on students' achievement and the economic benefits of small class size compared to large class size, and school as a systemic structure where inputs from the environment were processed as outputs that can be consumed by the environment. Further, the chapter explained school improvement depended on the quality of school administration. Large class size proved the opposite that students do not achieve, and there are disturbances and distractions where learning did not adequately take place thereby leading to low achievement in student performance. However, the

challenge of overcrowded class size, especially in Liberia's urban public elementary schools, was not addressed. This was a gap that this research hoped to address.

In chapter 3, I discuss the research methodology. The chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research design including the traditional inquiry approach, method to be used for the study, participant selection, emphasizing how ethical issues were treated, the role of the researcher in this study, setting and sample, data collection technique and organization, analysis of the findings, and the dissemination of findings were explained.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore factors influencing overcrowding in an urban public elementary school in Liberia from the perspectives of education stakeholders, including current and retired school administrators, teachers, education officers, education policymakers, parent-teacher association members, community leaders, and an adult representative of the community youth group. In this chapter, I provide a detailed explanation of the research design and method I used. This discussion includes an overview of participant selection procedures, the setting and sample, data collection techniques and procedures, and data analysis procedures. I also discuss how ethical issues were treated and what my role was in the research process.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

A qualitative method is used for this study because it involved participants to explore a phenomenon of human interactions that necessitated analysis and interpretation (see Thomas, 2010). Merriam (1998) emphasized that qualitative case study researchers focus on the particular and complex nature of a case. According to Creswell (2008), qualitative research involves participants' perspectives because social and human characteristics are flexible and always evolving and changing. The qualitative design I used was a case study to explore an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

I collected and organized data, analyzed, and interpreted the information obtained from participants. Yin (2012) explained that a full set of procedures is needed in case study research, which includes design, data collection, data analysis, and presentation and reporting of findings. Yazan (2015), in discussing the three approaches to case study

methods in education put forth by Merriam (1998), Stake (1995), and Yin (2002), noted that case study was the most frequently used of qualitative research methodologies.

Yazan defined case study as an empirical inquiry in which the researcher explores a real life phenomenon. The investigation is holistic, empirical, interpretive, emphatic, and focused on a single thing surrounded by boundaries (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002).

I relied on Yin's (2012, 2004) design research approach. Yin (2004) explained that a case study research design allows the researcher to investigate a significant topic not covered by other methods. Yin further explained that a case study is applicable to distinctive topics. Yin further emphasized that studying a phenomenon includes answering a descriptive or an explanatory question concerning how and why something occurred. Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) elaborated that qualitative case study involves observation, interviews, and document analysis, while Yin (2002) noted that it involves analysis of documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts.

MacDonald (2011) emphasized that qualitative case study researchers gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and the meaning of the situation through the processes of data collection and interpretation. A qualitative case study design was significant to this study because it allowed me to explore an understanding of a particular social phenomenon such as overcrowded classes. I collected data using in-depth face-to-face interviews with participants, a focus group, and document review.

### **Rationale for Choice of Research Design**

My rationale for this tradition was to explore the lived experiences of current and retired school administrators and teachers. According to Creswell (2009) and Bryman (2008), case study research enables researchers to explore in detail a phenomenon. Rubin and Rubin (2005) explained that conversation creates an interactive engagement between the interviewer and the interviewee, which influences the exchange of responses involving emotions and lived experiences.

The approaches of grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology are not chosen for this study because I concluded that they would be less useful in the exploration and understanding of the case study. Grounded theory is not appropriate to this study because it results in the production of a theory grounded in data (Crossman, 2017). The ethnographic paradigm focuses on data collection, analysis, and interpretation of a particular culture-sharing group in their own environment (Thomas, 2017).

Moustakas (1999) defined phenomenology as a restrictive openness of lived experiences of individuals which are not directly generalizable. Phenomenology focuses on individuals and their individual situations where the researcher seeks to gain better understanding of the phenomenon that is more than a narrative account of the individual experience (Sum & Shi, 2017). Phenomenology is a more subjective paradigm. I opted against using grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenological paradigms. Instead, a case study was chosen because of the relevance of the approach to exploring and understanding the experiences and perceptions of overcrowding in classes and its impact in Liberian schools, especially in urban areas.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher in this study was to collect the data and observe and take notes during interviews and the focus group discussion. For this research study, I obtained signed letters of cooperation from the participating school's district education officer, the urban public elementary school principal, and the community research partner, along with a signed consent form from each participant. I provided an explanation to each individual of the purpose of the study either in person or by phone or e-mail. I arranged follow-up meetings to give participants information obtained from the interviews and seek clarification if necessary. I informed participants of the research results by interpreting and discussing with the participants the data outcome by using triangulation, which, I think, enhanced the validity of the study as my perspective.

During the interview, I kept a journal of handwritten field notes that were collected and applied to the data analysis and used for reflections as a way of managing bias. Johnson and Christensen (2004) explained reflexivity was a strategy that allowed the researcher to engage actively in self-reflection and identified potential biases. In this case study inquiry, I considered part of the measurement instrument to probe or ask follow-up questions necessary for clarifying intriguing questions. As the researcher and an instrument, the management of bias was critical in data collection. According to Maxwell (2005), the management of bias included the disclosure of any conflict or conflict of interest and tone of voice in maintaining integrity during the data collection process. I put the data collected, organized, coded, and stored together as part of data management for access and reference.



Janesick (2004) and Rubin and Rubin (2005) described the researcher as a person who is inquisitive, asks questions, and finds answers to problems in the research process and one that regularly dealt with lived experience. According to Cottrell and McKenzie (2011), excellent researchers are always asking questions to find answers to problems and must be patient and thorough in collecting and analyzing information. I provided all necessary and relevant information including policies of the rights and responsibilities of the researcher and the participant. My role was very critical while interacting with participants in the entire research process.

My role was to conduct interview and facilitate the focus group. I had no professional relationship with any of the participants. The participants for the interviews and focus group were not known to me, preventing bias. The process of data collection was professionally done eliminating any personal relationship.

### **Methodology**

I employed the qualitative method of a case study because it allows the flexibility of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, elaborating or refocusing research questions, and identifying and dealing with validity threats all at the same time (Best & Khan, 2006). Yin (2011), explaining qualitative research, stated qualitative research remained a multifaceted field of inquiry, marked by different orientations and methodologies. Yin elaborated qualitative inquiry investigated details to thoroughly understand an experience. This research inquiry utilized Yin's (2011; 2004) and Merriam's (1998) qualitative research inquiry to explore the perceptions and understanding of class size so that purposeful selection of research questions of the study.

The description of the approach involved a step-by-step process relevant to data collection instruments included interviews, data sources, and the qualitative analysis that addressed the research questions. The method of data collection involved the use of interviews, conducting focus group, and document analysis and review and coding, analyzing, and interpreting data to address the research questions.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

Prior to data collection, I sought an invitation from the education officer to attend a meeting with the school staff and distributed and posted flyers. The population for the study included two current and retired school administrators, one classroom teacher, one education officer, one head of the parent-teacher association, two education policymakers, at the urban public elementary school level in Liberia were interviewed, while three members of the parent-teacher association, one head of the community, and one community youth group adult representative were in the focus group discussions. I identified and selected participants based on three years and above of them working in the field of education, and their formal written consent was obtained before data collection. I identified and contacted participants based on the criteria of three years and above with experience as a school administrator or a classroom teacher, education officer, while education policymakers will be full-time employees of the National Ministry of Education or member of the Education Committee of the National Legislature. Participants for the focus group discussion were contacted by letter of invitation by their registered membership of the parent-teacher association, an adult representative of a recognized community youth group, and the head of the community where the study was

conducted. I informed participating organizations and members of their voluntary participation, the purpose of the study, possible benefits, their rights and responsibilities, and any ethical issues that arose before or during the data collection process. I purposely selected the participants considering their roles and responsibilities in the education sector.

I contacted by letters of invitation, email, or by phone the participants such as current and retired school administrators and teachers who I identified based on their roles and responsibilities in the school where they work or formerly worked. I identified education officers, education policymakers, and parent-teacher association members based on their roles and responsibilities in the community and the school where the study was conducted. I collected data using in-depth face-to-face interviews with participants, discussion in a focus group, and document review. I purposely selected participants representing Liberia's urban public elementary schools. I purposely selected 12 participants because said number represented urban public elementary schools in the district where the study was conducted, at the Ministry of Education level where policymakers were situated, and at the National Legislature where budgetary allotment was discussed and approved.

Choosing a sample size was dependent upon the context and chosen theory of the qualitative research study relevant to answering the research questions. According to Babbie (1995), Greig and Taylor (1999), Neuman (2011), and Schwandt (1997), a sample was based on judgment and the purpose of the research, and it represented all others in a population of cases. I identified participants such as school administrators and classroom

teachers were identified based on the office they occupy in the school where they work with the greatest years of experience in the education field, and the education officers, policymakers, parent-teacher association members, community leader, and community youth group adult representative based on their roles and responsibilities in the community where the study was conducted.

The sampling technique was purposeful, with criteria for selecting participants based on their current employment as school administrators and classroom teachers in the urban public school system, members of the parent-teacher association, community youth group adult representative, head of community, and policymakers in the education sector.

### **Setting and sample**

The setting for this study was a densely populated urban community with several elementary, junior secondary, and senior high schools catering to the student population of Monrovia, Liberia. The selected school was an urban public elementary school situated in urban Monrovia. I collected data using in-depth face-to-face interviews with participants, discussed with a focus group, and document reviewed. Criteria for selecting school administrators and teachers were three years and above with experience in said position. Criteria for selecting education policymakers were a full-time employee of the National Ministry of Education and a member of the Education Committee, House of Representatives or House of Senate, of the National Legislature. I contacted via letter of invitation, email, or telephone participants for interviews and focus group discussion. Recruitment of participants was effected when the Walden's Institution Review Board (IRB) granted approval. Walden University's approval number is 01-06-17-00042295.

The school was chosen because it was conveniently located and easily accessible, and had tried to control overcrowding but class size remained a challenge to the school administrators.

### **Instrumentation**

For this case study, I collected three kinds of data that helped me triangulated the findings and adequately interpreted the case. They were interviews, a focus group, and documents. As the researcher, I took observation notes of non-verbal body language during the interviews using journal recording and member checking. I contacted via letter of invitation, email, or telephone participants for interviews and focus group discussion. An explanation of the purpose and potential benefits of the study was provided to the participants. At the end of the interview, I offered each participant a phone scratch card valued at \$10.00 as appreciation for their participation. For the focus group participants, I offered each participant a phone scratched card at the end of the discussion as appreciation for their participation. I collected data using in-depth face-to-face interviews with participants, discussing with a focus group, and document. The data collection instruments for the interviews and focus group were comprised of 15 primary interview questions with some sub-sections open-ended questions. I utilized open-ended questions for the interviews such as a self-designed participants' interview protocol for current and retired school administrators (Appendix A), a faculty interview protocol (Appendix B), the head of the parent-teacher association (Appendix C), education officers' interview protocol (Appendix D), and an education policymakers' interview protocol (Appendix E). The focus group, also a self-designed protocol (Appendix F), was used during the focus

group discussion. I reviewed the interview protocol with a local colleague who had similar professional experience to those I plan to interview.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Upon the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), approval number 01-06-17-00042295, and in the data collection process, community research partner, school, and participants, the researcher began the data collection. Data collection involved a collection of detailed information from participants and identification of the importance of a person's experience through in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Neuman, 2011). However, the data collection process began after the IRB had given approval to me. Janesick (2004) emphasized interviewing, in qualitative research, is the exchanging of information and ideas through questions and answers providing communication and meaning between two persons, while Rubin and Rubin (2005) explained interview is the exchange of responses involving emotions and personality.

Participants for the interview met with me at each participant's place of work, or at a designated place agreed to between the participant and I. The time frame for the interview of each participant was 45 minutes, and I conducted the interviews over a period of two months. During interviews, I wrote field notes or audio taped for transcription purposes, if participants agree, of the interview with the participants. The 90-minute focus group was conducted in one day at the home of one community member where members of the parent-teacher association, head of the community, and youth group adult representative gathered. I used a journal for hand written field notes, or audio

recording for transcription purposes, as agreed to by members of the focus group during their interactions as I facilitated and listened to their discussions. I applied professionalism and established a bond or partnership with the participants by maintaining an appropriate tone of voice and made known any conflict to participants as part of maintaining neutrality in the data collection process. Finally, I collected documents by researching archives and the Ministry of Education as well as from the school administrators.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Interviews and the focus group recordings were transcribed by myself. I coded data collected for reference, and analyzed, and interpreted the data to discover factors influencing overcrowding and the impact of overcrowding classes confronting school administrators and classroom teachers. Data collected from participants were secured in my private office and be disposed of by shredding or destroying computer files. I collected data that I organized, analyzed, and coded by hand, considering the high cost of computer software. Data collected were coded and developed from emergent themes and patterns and compared and analyzed in the interpretation process. I followed Neuman's (2011) suggestions for data analysis that involved the identifications of similarities and differences of details and the application of emergent codes and derived themes that provided the schools in making sense of the research study. This technique was significant to addressing the research questions and identified the relevance of the findings to the purpose of the study as open coding made recovering and organizing data for analysis more valid (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I analyzed the documents using a

document analysis form to identify possible codes and facilitated in triangulating the codes from the other two data sources: interviews and the focus group.

The data analysis strategy most appropriate for the research questions was the identification of themes and patterns, while collecting, transcribing, editing, and coding the field notes. Having watched for emerging codes and maintaining a constant comparative analysis of the data collected, I categorized and coded the data for explanation and clarity. Data analysis and interpretation involved triangulation for the purpose of validating information and drawing conclusions.

**Discrepant Data** I identified discrepant data or negative cases not directly related to the assumptions of the study through the interviews, focus group discussion, and data analysis. I looked out for data that contradicted the findings or at variance with the general trend of the data. Some discrepant cases also provided insight into other perspectives of the research problem that may not have been cleared at the beginning of the study. I clarified what data did not fit with the evolving themes.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of a study was increased with attention to reliability. Trustworthiness provided confidence and translated plausible attributes to the research findings in which the research community and peers found credibility. Discussing trustworthiness and quality in qualitative research, Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasized trustworthiness in a qualitative study considered four cardinal principles such as confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability. Explaining further, Miles and Huberman stated confirmability entailed objectivity of the researcher, credibility



emphasized representation of findings as to whether they were based on the objectives of the study, dependability elaborated the consistency in the methods utilized and procedures followed in the study, and transferability encompassed generalization of the findings and can be trusted provided the findings contained rich materials and evidence. I meticulously examined the data to overcome threats to trustworthiness.

I took several measures to attend to issues of trustworthiness. I utilized multiple data collection methods and sources to ensure consistency of findings. I was very careful in the selection of participants who met the criteria for the study. I spent sufficient time in the field collecting rich data and carried out member checking in the triangulation process to authenticate participants' responses.

### **Reliability**

I reviewed the interview questions with colleagues from a different setting to determine the quality and the degree of measurement of the factors influencing overcrowding of class size as a challenge. I sought to establish credibility through data collection, analysis, and interpretation in the process of data triangulation. It was important that I had some level of experience before and demonstrated in the research process including data collection. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the investigator's skills are relevant to the reliability and validity of the data collection process. I ensured reliability, or consistency, of the information by restating a question or series of issues during the course of the interview. Reliability, as evidence of quality, was established using extensive and intensive research data triangulation, while exploring and

analyzing corroboration and replication of the research findings. This process enabled consistency, minimized bias, and enhanced the quality in the results of the research.

I applied open-ended questions in the face-to-face interviews. The data collection contained identical open-ended questions. I coded the information collected, and themes and patterns were identified for analysis and interpretation. In the process, it was important to exercise the utmost care in minimizing or eliminating potential bias to the reliability of the data. With this approach, evidence of quality was enhanced.

### **Validity**

To enhance validity, I designed open-ended questions that were utilized throughout the interview process and employed triangulation by revisiting and sharing information collected with participants. In the process of data collection, the internal and external validity of the study were addressed. My role as the researcher included the use of a journal in collecting data from, interpreting the behavior, words, or actions of the participants with clarity and accuracy. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009), internal validity attended to threats that may influence the findings, or outcome of a study, while external validity referred to applicable results of the original setting outside of the study to other groups or communities. Threats to the internal validity of this study was that participants might fear retaliation from their bosses which will mute responses by the teachers, while threats to external validity included purposeful selection of participants which limited the generalization of results (Gay et al., 2009).

### **Ethical Procedures**

To address ethical concerns, I provided an explanation of the purpose of the research to the school as community research partner, individual school from where participants were selected, and participants themselves. I obtained signed a letter of cooperation from the community research partner to conduct interviews with their school administrators and teachers. I informed participants of the purpose of the study including their free will to participate, privacy protection, and their rights to opt out of the process at any time when they choose. I informed participants that they had the option not to answer any questions that was intrusive and psychologically stressful. Participants' identity was confidential and coded by using pseudonyms. Participants' identity was confidential and stored in a secured place and that no other individual will have access to the information they provided to me.

### **Summary**

This qualitative interpretative case study inquiry method was applied to this study. I collected data using three methods: interviews, a focus group, and document analysis. I explored an understanding of the perceptions of current and retired school administrators, teachers, district education officer, county education officer, and policymakers regarding factors influencing overcrowding as challenges and the opportunities that derived in solving the challenges.

Chapter 3 presented a description of the research methodology including design and approach, participant's selection, research rationale and researcher's role, as well as presented the setting and discussed the sample size, application of data collection

instruments and organization techniques, issues of data trustworthiness, issues of ethics and protection of participants, and analysis of findings.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore factors influencing overcrowding in an urban public elementary school in Liberia from the perspective of educational stakeholders, including current and retired school administrators, teachers, education officers, education policymakers, parent-teacher association members, community leaders, and adult representative of community youth group. In this chapter, I describe the study setting and participants' demographics and procedures used data collection. I also discuss the relevance of my data analysis. The chapter concludes with the presentation of findings, in relation to the research questions I sought to answer, and an analysis of the trustworthiness of the findings.

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What are stakeholders' perceptions of the factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

RQ1 Subquestion 1: What are stakeholders' perceptions of the organizational leadership factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

RQ1 Subquestion 2: What are stakeholders' perceptions of the social factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

RQ1 Subquestion 3: What are stakeholders' perceptions of the post-war environmental factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

RQ2: What systemic, structural, human resource, political, and symbolic opportunities do stakeholders perceived are available to address overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

### **Study Setting and Participants' Demographics**

The study proceeded as planned. I posted flyers in which I invited prospective interview and focus group participants to attend an information meeting held in the school's library. I purposely selected participants. The interview participants were purposely selected, as discussed in Chapter 3, because of their experience in education or policymaking. The focus group participants were purposely selected community dwellers who were directly impacted by the school because their children attended it.

During the information meeting, I explained the purpose of the research and responded to questions from attendees. All participants appeared relaxed. However, some participants expressed concerns about participating for fear of losing their jobs. I responded to their concerns by explaining that I would not apply their actual names to any document in the event they should decide to participate in the study. Attendees also told me that they preferred to be interviewed in private and predetermined place rather than an open one. To address their concerns, I explained that the consent form clarified that their interaction with me was confidential and that it was their choice whether their responses would be tape recorded or handwritten by me. They appeared to understand and accept the clarifications provided by me towards the end of the information session.

I reached saturation with a total of 12 participants. This included seven interview participants: one current and one retired school administrator, one teacher, one education

officer, one head of the parent-teacher association, and two education policymakers (see Table 1). It also included five focus group participants: three parent-teacher association members, one community head, and one adult representative of a community youth group (see Table 2). Focus group participants were selected because they represented a particular population of education stakeholders and community members. Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) argued that determining sample size should be based on judgment and experience in the evaluation of the quality of information collected.

Table 1 lists the first group of seven interview participants and their roles. It also provides information on the proposed and actual number of participants for each participant category and their pseudonyms.

Table 1

Interview Participants	Proposed no. of participants	Actual no. of participants	Pseudonyms of participants
Head administrator of school	1	1	Mark
Education officer	1	1	Doe
Teacher	1	1	Theo
Education policymakers	2	2	Varney, Nathaniel
Retired school administrator	1	1	Sarah
Head of parent-teacher association	1	1	Mercy
Total	7	7	

Table 2 lists five participants in the focus group discussion and the proposed and actual number of participants who attended the focus group discussion with their pseudonyms.

Table 2

Focus group participants	Proposed no. of participants	Actual no. of participants	Pseudonyms of participants
Parent-teacher association members	3	3	John, Peter, Nagbe
Head of the community where the school is located	1	1	Ezekiel
Adult representative of community youth group	1	1	Dixon
Total	5	5	

### Data Collection

The study was based on a single case: Fast River Elementary School (pseudonym) in Liberia. I used three sources for data collection for this qualitative case study: interviews, focus group discussion, and documents retrieval. After the information session participants took the consent form home and within 2 days, the participants, either interview or focus group, voluntarily but privately and individually signed their respective consent forms and returned to me either at my private office or his home. I re-emphasized to the interviewees and focus group participants that I will store their forms and all data in my private office in a safe for 5 years as mentioned in the informed consent form.

In the interview process, I followed the interview questions, which I had adapted to fit their field of occupation or engagement with the case setting (see Appendixes A, B, C, D, E). Participants in the interview appeared anxious before starting to provide responses to the interview questions. Only one interview participant agreed to be tape



recorded during the interview. The tape recorded interview took place in my private office, and the participant was relaxed during the interview. I took handwritten notes during the interview of the other six participants because they didn't want to be tape recorded due to past experiences and for fear of losing their job or being harassed by other colleagues. Interviews were scheduled based on the interviewees' availability. As such, I conducted interviews on various days, times, and places mutually agreed to by the participant and I. I tape recorded one interview using a Sony digital recorder lasting 53 minutes, while six interviews were handwritten; all were conducted between 47 minutes and 62 minutes. During the interview, I intermittently stopped and asked the participant to repeat as I wrote the notes and subsequently reviewed the notes with the participant right there after each interview.

I asked each participant to review the transcript to make sure that I accurately transcribed their responses prior to beginning the analysis process. (I had reminded interviewees and focus group participants during the information session, as mentioned in the informed consent form, that member checking was possible). All participants willingly consented to peruse the transcriptions. Each of the six interview participants, whose interviews I recorded by hand written notes agreed to review and accepted the transcript. Only one interview participant made some modifications to the responses to ratify the transcript, and later approved the transcript revision. The interview participant whose responses were tape recorded was traveling when the transcript was ready for review, but agreed to have the transcript summarized and discussed on the phone, which

he later accepted. Hence, all seven interview participants willingly reviewed and approved the transcripts based on the interview participants' responses.

I conducted the focus group discussion on a mutually agreed date held at the home of one of the focus group participants, which in the Liberian culture, either a family, friend, or community head's home, is considered a common meeting place if there is no public community hall or palava hut (a round, open hut for discussion of family or community issues). The setting was quiet and non-distractive. All participants did not arrive at the agreed time of 5:00 P.M. for the discussion. However, I commenced the focus group discussion at 5:14 P.M. when all participants had arrived. The discussion lasted 107 minutes. I took handwritten notes during the discussion. As participants in the focus group responded to the questions, I intermittently asked each participant to slowly speak or to repeat to ensure that I took accurate notes.

I observed during both the interview and the focus group discussion, some participants had difficulty understanding some of the questions, which they asked me to clarify. I then clarified those questions, which had to do with the general perceptions of factors influencing overcrowding as well as environmental factors influencing overcrowding that still were a challenge to participants to adequately respond. I used some visual examples such as the school building and examples of, insufficient teaching and learning materials for teachers and students to use while in school to make teaching and learning easy, and explained the effect and impact of class size, small or large, on students' achievement to make clarifications to the participants' query about

environmental factors influencing overcrowding. I kept the language used by the participants and did not try to change it, and they approved it.

I obtained documents from various sources for analysis and triangulation. The education policymakers agreed and made available relevant documents from their private libraries for analysis after the interviews. I retrieved from the Library of the National Legislature, the Archive of the Ministry of Education, and the University of Liberia library. I analyzed the documents retrieved from those libraries and triangulated them with the interviews and focus group responses to identify theme similarities. Documents collected and analyzed included:

- Annual Report of the National Ministry of Education (2014; 2015)
- National Budgetary Allocation to the National Ministry of Education (2013-2016)
- Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators in Liberia (2014)
- Liberia Education Administrative Regulations, Ministry of Education (2011)
- National Education Policies: Policies for Reform Through Analysis and Consultation (2011)
- An Act to Repeal an Act to Adopt The Education Law of A.D. 2001, Approved January 8, 2002 and All Laws Amendatory Thereto, To Amend Certain Provisions of Chapter 26 of The Executive Law, And To Enact In Their Stead A New Education Reform Act of 2011, Title 10, Liberian Code of Laws Revised (2011)

## **Data Analysis**

I began transcribing and organizing the data upon completion of the interviews and focus group discussion. In the process of data analysis from collecting, transcribing, editing, and coding, I identified themes and patterns. For the data analysis strategy, I utilized Creswell's (2008; 2007), Merriam's (2002), and Thomas' (2010) procedures of data analysis involving participants' perceptions and, focusing on a particular case, and interactions that necessitated interpretations while identifying similarities and differences in emergent codes. Creswell (2008; 2007) emphasized qualitative research considers and involves participants' perspectives and emphasizes qualitative data management as the following steps: preparing and organizing data; code data; summarize codes into themes or concepts; and apply figures, tables, or discussions to represent data. I then found it significant to apply Merriam's (1998) and Thomas' (2010) strategies in the data analysis process to make meaning and reality from the perceptions and constructions of the different stakeholders as they interact with the social world.

I began the data analysis process immediately as I collected data. At the onset of the data collection with the interview by face-to-face interactions, I began handwritten recording of field notes. I reduced a lot of codes into few themes. I reviewed and analyzed the themes into results that clarified the research questions. In the findings section, I emphasized the data analysis and discussed themes relevant to answering each of the research questions.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

I focused on the findings to ensure that they align with the methodology. To remain focused, I constantly reminded myself of threats to trustworthiness and quality. Threats could have resulted from my approach to selection of participants, data collection procedures, and data collection instruments, and my own bias. I was careful in the selection of participants for the interviews and focus group discussion who met the criteria for the study to not be biased.

During the interview process and focus group discussion, I did not observe any deviation from the planned instruments and the participants and thereby preserved the planned steps to increase trustworthiness. As the interview and the focus group discussion went on, I reminded the participants of their voluntary participation in the process and their free will to remove themselves from the process. I cautiously did handwriting recording of the field notes and highlighted those responses that were repetitive as evidence not to miss the participants' emphasis on certain concerns to them. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), ensuring trustworthiness and quality in a qualitative research entails four cardinal principles: confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability. I minimized potential threats to quality and trustworthiness by ensuring participants' selection was based on the criteria set and the interview and focus group instruments were consistently applied. In minimizing my bias and to ensure trustworthiness, I reminded each participant during interviews and the focus group discussion of their voluntary participation and their free will not to respond to any question or withdraw from the study at any point during the process. I continued

triangulation of participants' responses and document contents, explaining the research questions for participants' understanding. The participants' responses were evidence of trustworthiness of data sources and instruments. I then conducted member checking to ensure participants' responses were accurately transcribed and during interpretation of participants' responses to ensure understanding and interpretation of their responses were accurate.

### **Results**

I organized the results to response to the research questions in accordance with the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. Each theme is supported by representative quotes from the participants that help explain the underlying meaning of the themes. The ten themes relate to the two primary and three sub-research questions regarding factors influencing overcrowding. The nine themes are: *government at fault*, *enforce class size policy*, *leadership challenge*, *ineffective supervision*, *school activities*, *focused students*, *family-friend connection*, *proximity of school*, and *community partners*.

#### **Factors Influencing Overcrowding**

Two themes emerged in response to interview question #1: What are stakeholders' perceptions of the factors influencing overcrowding in urban elementary schools in Liberia? Overall, some interviewees and focus group participants perceived the national government to be responsible for overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia and many participants wanted the government to enforce class size policy. The two themes I labeled *government at fault* and *enforce class size policy*. I will expound on the two themes.

**Government at fault.** The need to increase the building of schools by the central government was unanimous in the responses of interview participants and focus group participants. To curtail overcrowding in urban public elementary schools, all participants responded by blaming the national government for not erecting more schools while the school population was growing in the community. Further, if more schools were constructed, they all felt the national government must provide school furniture for all students and train untrained instructional staff to improve education. Emphasizing why the government should increase school building, Mercy, head of the school's parent-teacher association, said,

For overcrowding [the] government is to be held responsible – Every child should be out of the street to go to school but either not enough schools or classrooms, [there are] some 60 or 70 students in class. Teachers do not have authority to stop students; PTA has not authority but to go by what government says. Tuition free [schools] gives rise to overcrowding.

Doe, an education officer, stated, “Because of the lack of school building school administrators will have 80-90 students in a class.” This implied that administrators were also teaching. Theo was also concerned, like Mercy, about teachers lacking authority due to increased class size resulting from tuition free schools emphasized, “As civil servants in public schools, teachers have no control over policy formulation. Schools are not many in the community. Free tuition gives rise to overcrowding. Teachers have no input”. I found that participants, in their perceptions, were emotional and used body language to also express their frustration with the Government.

Nagbe, a member of the school' parent-teacher association, emphasized, Let me tell you something. The national economic system is bad. Poverty rate is high. So parents send their children to low charging schools. What makes it bad is because government says all the children selling on the streets must go to school but [the] government do [sic] not build more schools for the children. Our community is not part of government policy making. We get no say in the government. We pay tax but no benefit.

I observed that participants were interested in their children's education and were concerned there were not sufficient schools for their children to attend in the community. I also observed from the participants' responses that their low economic status was an impediment to them sending their children to less crowded schools either within the community or to schools far away from the community. Peter, a parent-teacher association member, stated, "Maybe 3000 or 4000 poor people living in this community. You can see them home. No work. Nowhere to go. They stay home to mind [sic] their children or grandchildren".

Ezekiel, head of the community where the school is located, explained,

My brother our children don't have food to eat so they go to cheap school where plenty children in one classroom. And people suffering. No work. No money. So our children cannot go to school where school fee is too high.

When asked about stakeholders' perceptions of the factors influencing class size in urban public elementary schools, Doe, an education officer, paused while appeared to be thinking, explained, "The factors that influence overcrowded classrooms are: students



are eager to learn, insufficient public school building, and lack of finance. Students cannot attend the private schools available in their community.”

I observed from participants’ perceptions, the national government is blamed for just about everything including not providing more school buildings and school furniture. The admittance by Varney, a policymaker, and according to the 2015 Annual Report of the Ministry of Education, it is obvious the national government does not have adequate funds to ensure the implementation of projects and programs to construct more schools, especially in overpopulated communities where the ratio of school to students is not realistic.

Varney, a policymaker, explained,

Overcrowding is mostly caused by the proximity of the school where you have low income or no income community dwellers with too many children going to or wanting to go to school when there is perhaps one government or public school.

Responding further, Varney elaborated, “Insufficient budgetary appropriation to the Ministry of Education is reason for the government through the Ministry not being able to build more schools in the various communities”. According to the Annual Report, Ministry of Education (2015), inadequate budgetary support over the years remains a challenge: “Between 92 and 95% of resources allocated to Ministry of Education cover staff compensation and other related administrative costs. This limits the Ministry’s ability to allocate funds to other projects, and has left the Ministry unable to implement programs” (p. 37).

Further, urban communities appeared to be economically unprepared to assist themselves. Participants viewed their own poverty as a factor in their inability to economically progress and better the education of their children.

**Enforce class size policy.** Enforcing class size policy appeared to be a challenge. There was a consensus among most interview and focus group participants that the Ministry of Education's official class size of 44 or less, even though some participants think the official class size is 45, at the lower basic education (primary level) was good for effective student learning and teacher monitoring. Doe, an education officer, stated, "the Ministry of Education policy on class is well documented, yet there is a challenge in controlling class size due to the large school-age population with insufficient schools in the community".

The Ministry of Education teacher to student ratio of 1:44 was well known by all including school administrators, teachers, and parents. Both interviewees and focus group participants agreed it was good for the Ministry to enforce the class size policy. However, there appeared to be challenges in enforcing class size. Sarah, a retired school administrator, lamented,

This problem of large class size has been around for a long time. But now it is worse because too many children want to go to school. But [there are] not enough school buildings for children to go. So this is the problem. How can you control class size when you do not have enough schools?

Dixon, a community youth group adult representative, explained, "High tuition in [private] schools does not allow many parents to send children. Some classes have 100

students”. Dixon, continued, “The school leader can only register the students as they come. They do not care for class size. In fact the government supposed to build more school”. Doe, an education officer, emphasized, “The policy at the Ministry of Education says that 45 students per class is the maximum.” “Yea, the leaders have things put into place to curtail these things, they are just documents.”

Regarding implementing class size policy, Mercy, head of the school’s parent-teacher association, emphasized, “Leaders or school administrators cannot be held responsible for overcrowding because of government policy”. I asked a follow up question: “What government policy are you referring to?” Mercy responded, “Take children off the street and into school”. I deduced from the perceptions of Sarah, a retired school administrator; Dixon, a community youth group adult representative; Doe, an education officer; and Mercy, head of the school’s parent-teacher association that the Ministry of Education is aware of the overcrowded class size but the Ministry is not financially prepared to construct more schools in the community. Varney, a policymaker, emphasized, “The government does not have the means [financial] to construct many schools needed in the communities. This is a very serious challenge. So communities and schools are feeling the challenges of overcrowded classes.”

In the focus group discussion, I asked a follow-up question: “In the event the Ministry of Education should enforce class size policy without building more schools, what will become of your children?” The focus group participants responded in mixed voices. Appeared to be frustrated with the issue of overcrowded classes, John, a parent-teacher association member, said, “Then our children will stay home.” Dixon, a

community youth group adult representative, said, “Government must educate her citizens. We cannot build school because no money.” Ezekiel, head of the community where the school is located, emphasized, “The government make [made] class size policy when it know ain’t get enough schools. How can you make law [policy] when you know you not able to enforce the law?” Nagbe, a member of the school’s parent-teacher association, pacing in the meeting room, explained,

For me, I poor. My three children going to public school. So if government says it makes sure only 45 students in the class, we who children cannot go to that school, we will stop the other children to go to school. We will block the doors.

Peter, a member of the school’s parent-teacher association, speaking in a reconciliation tone of voice, stated, “I will talk to the community leader and the school principal and the big people [officials] to the Ministry of Education to help us with school for our children.”

### **Organizational Leadership Factors**

Two themes emerged in response to interview question #1, subquestion #1: What are stakeholders’ perceptions of the organizational leadership factors influencing overcrowding in urban elementary schools in Liberia? Many participants perceived overcrowded class size to be a challenge of organizational leadership. The two themes I labeled *leadership challenges* and *ineffective supervision*. I will expound on the two themes.

**Leadership challenges.** Incompetent leadership appeared to be a challenge and contributing factor to overcrowding class size as perceived by educational stakeholders.

According to the Liberia Administrative Regulations, Ministry of Education (2011), the school principal is the highest ranking administrator in a school with responsibility of management, maintenance, enforcement of school policies and other overall school matters. Most participants perceived many school administrators do not have the necessary credentials nor the skills to provide the relevant leadership to operate the school. Hence, the implementation of policies, including external interferences, posed challenges for school leaders.

A contradiction to the compulsory attendance policy requirement is that there exist insufficient schools to meet the high enrollment of school-age children in the community. Regulations were intended to be enforced while the Government was not prepared to attend to those education challenges. The Ministry of Education Annual Report (2015) stated some of the challenges including ineffective systems and structures for effective delivery of education services, the poor condition of education facilities, inadequate learning materials and supplies, and inadequate parental and community involvement in education. Considering these challenges on the part of the Ministry of Education and some communities, parents, with the means of sending their children far off to school considering teaching and learning quality, always do not allow their children attend community schools. During the interview and focus group discussion, participants shared information about the quality of leaders administering the school and provided reasons why this was the case. Mark, head administrator of school, explained,

I agree some school leaders are not trained and not willing to enforce the Ministry policy. The Ministry should train or upgrade leaders' skills and train them to

understanding the policy. School leaders do not make policy. They don't make final decision about class size. Yes, some school administrators are not trained to meet the challenges in the school. Overcrowded classes cannot provide suitable learning. Our school administrators make recommendations to E.O., that is Education Officer, to control class size. If this is not addressed, does this mean that school administrators are incompetent?

Doe, an education officer, emphasized, "The teachers are blaming the administrators for overcrowdiness. The administration recruits the students without considering the normal class size of 45 students per class." Doe further explained,

First come, first serve. We take 60 persons or students to a class. We were taking 80. If we take 45 many students will not be in school. We introduce the afternoon session for those interested to still remain with the school. The afternoon session is also overcrowded. So, what do we do as school leaders?

I posed a follow-up question to Doe: "Does this mean school leaders are not competent to implement policy?" Doe responded, "It is true some principals are not competent and they need [professional] training and [administrative] guidance."

Discussing the issue of leadership challenges of school operation and ownership, Nathaniel, a policymaker, slowly articulated,

The operation of urban elementary school is open to anyone who has the financial resources to provide such education, most urban elementary schools, as the results of the aforementioned reasons do not exist in a well-structured, well-planned

building, and they (urban elementary schools) do not have definite patterned or modeled building. Some exist in make-shift, residential homes.

During the focus group discussion, including three members of the school's parent-teacher association, the head of the community where the school is located, and a community youth group adult representative, the participants appeared to disagree with each other about incompetency of administrators. Some participants argued that some school principals were incompetent, while others argued that some school leaders were not authorized to make unilateral or administrative decision without the approval of the Education Officer in the school district. Peter, a member of the school's parent-teacher association, put the weight on the government. "Government don't [doesn't] have check and balance even though official class size is 45. You see, government get [has] problem. To let you know, when I say problem, I mean government cannot support schools." Dixon, a community youth group adult representative, faulted the administrators. "I tell you this. Because of family and friends, school leaders are lenient and weak to enforce policies. For this reason, classes have too many students. Family -friend connection." John, a member of the school's parent-teacher association, concurred with Peter and Dixon. "Yes, what my friend said is true. Government say class must have 45 students. But in school some classes get [have] too many children [students]. Some children [students] can get sick. Some children [students] can sit down on the floor because not [no] seat."

Mercy, head of the school's parent-teacher association, agreed with Dixon, emphasized that school administrators are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the

school. Nagbe, a member of the school's parent-teacher association member, concurred with Mercy and Dixon, also suggested that the principals sometimes picked friends and didn't have a fair system for admitting students.

You see some parents, them want the children to go to school in the community. Even no space in school but because they know the principal connection they carry the children to school. The principal register more children. Learning is hard for the children because the class is overcrowded. Some parents can say the principal weak and partial. He doing pick and choose to register children in the school.

Contrary to Nagbe's assertion, Theo, a teacher, explained, that school teachers and administrators monitor class size, while education officers and some non-governmental organizations construct school infrastructures without being concern about class size.

**Ineffective supervision.** The issue of ineffective supervision among organizational leaders including the DEO and CEO appeared to question leadership competency. As interview and focus group participants presented their perceptions, there appeared to be controversies and some demonstrated high emotion and body language emphasizing either their support or rejection of school administrators' and DEO's and CEO's performance. According to An Act to Repeal An Act to Adopt The Education Law of A.D. 2001 (2011), teachers and education administrators are recruited based on their qualifications in order to enhance quality and competence and annually evaluated to determine their level of performance that will guide the professional training where necessary as spelled out by the Ministry of Education. However, interview and focus



group participants conveyed with various perspectives regarding this preparation and evaluation. Nathaniel, a policymaker, emphasized, “The Liberian education laws are not closely implemented by the governing agent, Ministry of Education which is responsible to make sure that all urban elementary schools provides follow the laws to the letter.” Doe, an education officer, stated, “Yea, the leaders have things put into place to curtail these things; they are just documents.” Varney, a policymaker, explained,

Adequate supervision of schools, especially public schools. Some of the challenges include lack of assigned vehicle to DEOs and CEOs, unavailability of needed instructional materials, school furniture for students, teachers, and school administrators. If the Ministry of Education does not have adequate budgetary allotment from the Government to provide these things, what will you be supervising? So, many people think and believe that education officers are weak when it comes to supervision.

Focus group discussion participants expressed their view about ineffective supervision by DEOs and CEOs in varying tones. Ezekiel, head of the community where the school is located, raising his hand and intermittently tapping the chair on which he sat in his emotional response, stating, “You know, sometimes education officers like DEO and CEO feel too weak to carry out policies because sometime take bribe [sic – accurate although not grammatical] from school leaders.” Peter, a member of the school’s parent-teacher association, explained, “Again, school principals do not get supervision from DEOs (District Education Officers) and CEOs (County Education Officers). Bureaucracy can make people discourage. [sic] So no supervision.”

They perceived that supervision is not effectively done or those supervising school administrators are not competent to conduct such professional supervision. No one spoke about the technicalities of supervision. Because the technicalities of supervision are or may be unknown to participants, participants described the functions of education administrators as weak when it comes to supervision. According to the Annual Report, Ministry of Education (2015), “Human capacities and logistical supplies remain a serious challenge for the sector especially at County and District offices” (p. 37) and the participants in this research seem to corroborate the claim based on ‘they say’ [sic – local meaning, news, in the form of gossip, which spreads from person to person with little or no truth, which may have either negative or positive effect on an individual character, a community, or the society at large] of the Annual Report.

### **Social Factors Influencing Overcrowding**

Three themes emerged in response to interview question #1, subquestion #2: What are stakeholders’ perceptions of the social factors influencing overcrowding in urban elementary schools in Liberia? Overall, some interviewees and focus group participants perceived connection between some members of the public and family members as social factors influencing overcrowding which are challenges to the school in the community. The three themes I labeled *school activities*, *focused students*, and *family-friend connection*. I will expound on the three themes.

**School activities.** Schools have various activities and programs which influence parents’ choice to send their children to a particular school. School activities include winning sports teams and players who have been offered scholarships, academic quality

and exceptional performances thereby winning awards, tuition waivers, for exceptional students, and others. The responses from interview and focus group participants pointed to the phenomenon of prestige of a school in its activities draw more students to a school which can lead to school crowding, for instance, winning schools participating in academic or sporting competition. Doe, an education officer, extended the dynamic, “The social factors include students following friends because of activities students are attracted to the school.” Peter, a member of the school’s parent-teacher association, stated, “You know when students are good in sports the school will bring them in. They mix with other students and then get in more pleasure and trouble.” Nagbe, a member of the school’s parent-teacher association, like Doe, emphasized that friends attract other friends who they are familiar with and socialize together which, at most times, distracts them from studying their lessons.

**Focused students.** Some students are focused on their studies while others are not. Rather, those students who are not focus have the tendency of disrupting other students, while in class. Consequently, those focused students migrate from schools with disruptive and unfocused students to schools that are less disruptive and where teaching and learning is effective. Sometimes older students mostly are considered unfocused and disruptive in class. Mercy, head of the school’s parent-teacher association, explained,

Students are with the teacher for less time. More time with parents. Older children [students whose ages are above class appropriate] in lower grades which is pronounced in public schools. Older students are problematic students mainly by being disruptive, smoking, indiscipline, cell phone use in class. Age appropriate

students are more focus than older age students. Some students are adapting [adopting] unnecessary things from the community, from the environment.

Theo, a teacher, explained that while some students focus on their lessons, others are not, and public school is considered by some participants as correction center for bad children, and students' learning is negatively impacted due to overcrowded classes. Fencing school campus is preventing students from loitering into the community to smoke, take drugs, and no cooking or selling food on campus causes students go to find food to buy to eat off campus during recess break.

**Family-friend connection.** Many participants expressed their feelings about overcrowded class size due to family-friend connection in the school. Family-friend connection is simply a relationship that exists between and among people without limitation and disregard to merit system. Rather than enforcing class size policy, community and family members who are friends to the school principal and other administrators and teachers are encouraged to allow their children to register beyond the government class size policy of 44 students per class at the elementary level according to the Liberia Education Administrative Regulations (2011). The issue of leadership challenge is discussed under organizational leadership factors which are also categorized in the theme about social factors. These were deduced from the responses of interview and focus group participants. Sarah, a retired school administrator, explained that because many parents cannot afford to send their children to expensive schools, many parents establish a bond, a connection with the school principal, registrar, and teachers to have their children attend the school in the community despite the overcrowded classes, while

Mercy, head of the school's parent-teacher association, concurred with Sarah, having emphasized in a raised voice that the community school has criminals and drug users living in the community with whom students sometimes interact and adapt certain negative behavior.

In the focus group discussion, Dixon, a community youth group adult representative, explained,

One thing I think is people like connection with authority. You know in Liberia they say 'direct connection' which is to bypass the system. People do not think about what will happen later. Liberia is backward because people do not want to follow [the] system. People do not want to obey laws so everything are [sic] bad including the school system. As our president once said that our education system is a mess. This is true. The government know [s] that.

John, a member of the school's parent-teacher association, emphasized, "Papay [sic – local name meaning respect for an older man] everything my friends say [is] true. Family and friend connection spoiled the school system. And even more." I asked John a follow up question: What do you, John, mean when you say, "And even more"? John responded, "People know each other, friends and family, so they help. Those who help does [do] not care about overcrowding. Some teachers loving to students so they go out to pleasure." The reality is that some male teachers harass students for sexual pleasure with female students for passing grades which is a constant occurrence of in many secondary schools and universities in Liberia (Tamba, 2015; Zebede & Shahid, 2016).

Ezekiel, head of the community where the school is located, explained, "Some

principal and registrar and teacher take money from students to take them in school. So corruption is part of the school system. Our big people do not care about learning.”

There appeared to be a consensus among most of the interview and focus group participants that the family-friend connection supersedes systemic policies in schools. According to the Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators in Liberia (2014), the Ministry of Education took full responsibility for monitoring and soliciting feedback from schools, while school administrators were held responsible for implementing policies. At the same time, the Ministry of Education was encouraging all education stakeholders in the country to collaborate with the Ministry to monitor teachers and schools administrators’ behavior and attitudes both in and out of the classroom. Annual Report, Ministry of Education (2015), emphasized the parents and communities were minimally involved in the education of their children.

### **Environmental Factor of Proximity of School**

One theme emerged in response to interview question #1, subquestion #3: What are stakeholders’ perceptions of the environmental factors influencing overcrowding in urban elementary schools in Liberia? Overall, some interview and focus group participants perceived environmental factors from different dimensions. Though this question was thoroughly explained to interview and focus group participants, there appeared to be confusion in their perceptions regarding environmental factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia. Based on relevant responses from few interview and focus group participants spoke to the issue of environmental factors. The one theme is labeled *proximity of school*.

Some participants suggested that environmental factors influencing overcrowding in urban public schools in Liberia had to do with school accessibility, and school-age population in the community. Six of the seven parents expressed the concern that they choose to send their children to the only tuition-free and public school though it is already overcrowded because the school is within the community and easily accessible. Other participants explained that those parents who are economically stronger would rather send their children far off to schools that provide quality instruction with available instructional materials, despite higher tuition. Dixon, a community youth group adult representative, discussed affordability by parents and their ability to send their children far off to school from the community, stated, “So some students whose parents can afford, send them far away to better school.” Some interview participants responded to the issue of school’s proximity in varying ways. Some interview participants explained that affordability is measured by economic achievement for those who have the capacity to send their children far off to school, while others emphasized that those who cannot afford continue to have their children attend school within the proximity of the school, shifting blame of economic challenges on the national government. Mark, head administrator of the school, explained,

It is difficult to turn students back. Many parents prefer sending their children to this school because it is in the neighborhood. It [school] is near them. They [parents] do not have to worry about their children going far from them to go to school. So the proximity of the school to the students is very important. Parents can check on their children and visit the school at any time.

Responding to the issue of the school's proximity, Nathaniel, a policymaker, emphasized that the school is accessible to all school age children and some instructional materials are available, the school is built near video clubs, near streets thereby distracting students, and so some parents choose to send their children to high academic and discipline schools. Doe, an education officer, and Sarah, a retired school administrator, agreed that parents worry less if their children attend school within the proximity of the community which would enable them easy and quicker access to the school administrators and teachers once there is a need.

Some focus group participants answered in different ways based on their understanding of the question. Dixon, a community youth group adult representative, explained,

I think the environment where students live may not be good for learning and discipline so they travel from far away places to come to school. What I mean that the school in the community where students live are not good. Poor learning. Teachers don't go to school. Some students are very rude. Criminals are all around.

The Liberia Education Administrative Regulations (2011) emphasized that every Liberian child shall "Have the right to feel safe and secure in a respectful social environment and safe physical environment" (p. 60). Further, the Liberia Education Administrative Regulations elaborated, social and emotional learning (SEL) skills are necessary to understanding challenging situations and promoting safe and supportive school, family, and community learning environments in which children feel valued and



respected and connected to and engaged in learning. The education sector was clear on the importance of quality of teaching and learning in schools. Yet, there are challenges continuously confronting the education sector in Liberia.

### **Challenges and Opportunities in Community Partnership**

One theme emerged related to interview question #2: What challenges and opportunities did stakeholders perceive are available to address overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia? Overall, some interview and focus group participants perceived the challenges as the making of the National Government through the Ministry of Education as its responsibility and the opportunities for collaboration between the community and the government as appropriate to address factors influencing overcrowding class size. The one theme I labeled *community partnership*.

Some challenges of overcrowding class size have been discussed above. With the understanding of the challenges, it is possible that opportunities can be identified to resolve the challenges. Considering the responses from interview and focus group participants, community partnerships stand out to be the most significant theme.

Interview and focus group participants presented points that community partnerships could be opportunities derived for addressing some of the challenges of overcrowding. Mercy, head of the school's parent-teacher association, stated, "Opportunities perceive [d] by stakeholders are [to] build more schools by government." Nathaniel, a policymaker, elaborated, "Strong partnership of [with] government of Liberia (GOL) to work along with all [educational] stakeholders. Merge schools which are not overcrowded with those which are." Sarah, a retired school administrator,

emphasized, “Yes, opportunities exist if the community has the will-power. If the community, it can still provide labor. That is partnership as opportunity in overcoming some of the challenges. This benefits the community children [students].” Varney, a policymaker, explained,

People should always see challenges as a way of doing better. Community members and the PTA can come together to address some of the challenges to the benefit of the students, teachers, and school administrators. This can be by making collective contributions to support the government efforts.

Focus group participants addressed the issue of community partnership with the government, turning challenges into opportunities such as the PTA making benches since furniture is scarce. John, a member of the school’s parent-teacher association, explained that some students at the community public elementary school take benches to school so not to sit on the floor, and the PTA is preparing benches for students’ use.

Nagbe, a member of the school’s parent-teacher association, elaborated, ... this is not good. What kind of government we get? No attention to our children. How do they want them to learn? Teachers’ salary not enough. But they [are] helping other children. We [are] discouraged. We send people to meet the Minister [of Education] about schools in our community. Only to hear government will try. What time government will do something? We [are] not giving up. Community and PTA will continue to inform government of the needs for more schools.

Many responses provided by interview and focus group participants viewed the

government's inability to construct more schools continued to be a major challenge, inadequate instructional resources, and the location of the school in the community. The Ministry of Education Annual Report (2015) admitted to inadequate budgetary allotment. To buttress the government's efforts to overcome some of the challenges, the community partnership of the PTA with the Ministry of Education on a small scale appeared to be yielding fruitful results. Such partnership involved providing benches for students, some instructional materials for teachers' use, and sometimes the parent-teacher association provided stipend for teachers teaching in the school in the community.

### **Summary**

The study was conducted based on two primary questions and three research sub-questions that provided understanding of education stakeholders' perceptions of factors influencing overcrowding in an urban public elementary school in Monrovia. Participants included interviewees and focus group. The results of the study provided in-depth understanding of five major themes: education stakeholders' perceptions, organizational leadership factors, social factors, environmental factors influencing overcrowding, and challenges and opportunities available to address overcrowding. For each research question, one, two, or three themes were developed that addressed the perceptions of factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Monrovia.

From analysis of the results, I found that participants strongly believed that the government is responsible for overcrowding class size because it was the government responsibility through the Ministry of Education to construct and provide more schools to accommodate the many school-age going children residing in the community. For this,

the Ministry of Education was unable to enforce government class size policy ratio of teacher to students which is 1:44.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This chapter includes a summary of the study, an interpretation of the findings, and a discussion of the limitations of the study and its implications I also make recommendations for future research. I conducted to explore and understand education stakeholders' perceptions of factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Monrovia. I was particularly interested in gauging the perceptions of stakeholders at the community level (in Monrovia).

In analyzing the interview and focus group data, I found that participants' perceived the Liberian government to be at fault. This attribution of fault and the central importance of enforcing class size policy were the most significant themes. The participants blamed the national government for overcrowded classrooms in the only public elementary school in the community. Leadership lack of competency and ineffective supervision were perceived by participants to be significant weaknesses in organizational leadership that contribute to overcrowded classes.

The participants also perceived social activities and family-friend connections as social factors that influence overcrowded classes in the only public elementary school in the community. Proximity of the school was perceived to be an environmental factor influencing overcrowded classes. Creating community partnerships was seen as a significant challenge to the government. Forming alliances with the community was thought as a way to enable both the government and the community to turn these challenges into opportunities to address factors influencing overcrowded classes.

## **Interpretation of the Findings**

This section contains discussion, analysis, and interpretations of the results keeping in mind the conceptual framework that grounded the study. Findings from previous research on important government challenges in the education sector are also discussed. Community partnerships seem to be a solution while seeking opportunities to overcome those challenges of factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools.

### **Interpretation of Themes Related to Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 related to stakeholders' perceptions of factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia. Two themes are derived: government at fault and enforce class size policy.

**Government at fault.** Attributing blame for school crowding to the national government was a typical response for why overcrowded classes remained a serious challenge, especially in postconflict Liberia. This finding aligns with the theory of reframing organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008) and theory of general systems (Bertalanffy, 1968). The theory of reframing organizations posits that an organization is a structural framework that works to improve institutions and prepares to solve challenges (Alawami & Ku, 2016). The theory of general systems emphasizes that, in an open system, interactions are relevant for people and the environment in sharing, learning, and developing new ideas to enhance the community and society in general (McDonald, Craig, Markello, & Kahn, 2016).

Many community participants appeared to recognize systems dynamics. However, most participants' use of systems thinking seemed limited to me. The findings that government is a structured systemic organization. Bertalanffy (1968) explained that a system is either integrated or non-integrated, which interacts with the environment to achieve its goals. Banner (2016), in a book review, explained the structures, practices, and cultures of organizations where achievement is possible, and organizations viewed as relationships were valued over outcomes. A document on the Liberian education system (Ministry of Education, Annual Report, 2015) emphasized the willingness of the national government to improve the education sector in the spirit recommended by Banner. Yet, the inadequate budgetary allotment (Liberia's Ministry of Education Annual Report, 2015) is a challenge in constructing more schools. Participants' perceived overcrowded class size as resulting from government inability to build more schools; they, thereby, blamed the government for overcrowded class size in the only public elementary school in the community.

Bolman and Deal (2008) asserted that organizational leadership should result in reframed institutions, while Bertalanffy (1968) elaborated that achievement is possible when goals, information, and communication are clear to an organization. Based on their interview and focus group discussion, participants appeared not to have adequate knowledge about the budgetary allotment for education. They, thus, seemed to have limited knowledge.

**Enforce class size policy.** Many participants perceived the national government as not being prepared to provide quality education to children overcrowded classes.

According to interview and focus group participants, enforcing the class size policy will result in failure once the government cannot provide adequate classrooms to meet the number of students wanting to attend classes within the community.

The findings relating to enforcement of a class size policy align with Bolman and Deal's (2008) notion that the symbolic framework prepares to address unexpected problems and turn them into opportunities to perform better. However, in the absence of resources to attend to unexpected challenges, the enforcement of class size policy is not possible. Mascall and Leung (2012) found a similar challenge in their study of district resources capacity and the effects of educational policy: The case of primary class size reduction in Ontario, Canada suggested that the lack of resources to address overcrowded classes and implement class size policy had unintended and negative consequences for learning. The migration from rural to urban communities in Liberia has put a strain on existing schools that are not prepared to accommodate more students (Dolo, 2015).

Discussing quality learning, Njoroge and Nyabuto (2014) emphasized students obtain quality learning to the best of their abilities in an orderly and safe environment. The participants that I interviewed see themselves as economically weak and unable to send their children far away to school where it might be more reliable and higher quality. And so, they consider themselves marginalized along with their children. As such, there is no progress in the education of these children. O'Day and Smith (2016) explained students from low-income families achieve less compared to those from affluent families and that "education is meant to be the great equalizer" (p. 1), but children experience disparities when they enter school. Poverty, as perceived by many interview and focus



group participants, is a factor of failure and depreciation in the quality of life, which affects their children's education. Emphasizing poverty as a factor affecting quality learning, Azzizah (2015) explained that poverty is troubling to the school system, particularly when inequality in the socio-economic conditions are prevalent.

### **Interpretation of Themes Related to Research Question 1, Subquestion 1**

Research question 1, subquestion 1, related to organizational leadership factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia. Two themes were derived: leadership challenges and ineffective supervision.

**Leadership challenges.** Leadership in any organization is paramount and involves interaction with people and the environment. The Liberian civil conflict has immensely contributed to brain drain, and with the current low standard of education in Liberia, challenges, including school leadership, in the education sector are enormous. Many of the study participants see leaders as transformers of organizations for improvement and development. The finding that school leaders should professionally interact with people for the enhancement of the school and the environment in soliciting the necessary support for the school aligns with Bolman and Deal's (2008) theory of reframing organizations where the structural framework deals with and involves people for growth and development of the organization. Many of the interview and focus group participants appeared to have limited knowledge of the hierarchy chain of command of the education sector, though they admit there are challenges that school leaders have in the performance of their duties. The findings that school leaders are confronted with constraints in their interactions with the community aligns with Bolman and Deal's

theory of reframing organizations considering the structural framework involving people. Barrett and Toma (2013) explained that school leaders are confronted with constraints from the community and policy and decision-makers with their interference with school activities.

In this study, I found that community participants perceived leadership challenge due to unqualified and incompetent leaders and government's failure to provide professional development training for school leaders. The Ministry of Education Annual Report (2015) recognized that ineffective systems and structures pose leadership challenges to the education sector. Garrin (2014) explained leadership is not always how leaders affect change, but the mechanisms of feedback from employees and the environment to inform leaders and the psychological level that informs leaders of the gap between truth and opinion that can guide leaders toward goal pursuits.

The perception by most participants that some school leaders are not trained, and the need to professionally prepare school leaders seemed to be supported by the Ministry of Education Annual Report (2015) and discussing quality school leadership, Boyle, Haller, and Hunt (2016) elaborated that it is significant to any reform for student achievement, but the preparation programs for school leaders do not adequately prepare candidates for the challenges of the principalship. Discussing the challenge and the benefit of professional development, Haller, et al. (2016) explained that inadequate funding for the professional development of principals ignores the larger impact and greater return on investment in improving principal quality. Most interview and focus group participants perceived school leaders as either not trained or inadequately trained to

administer the affairs schools. Many interview and focus group participants also recognized school leaders as inadequately paid and had so much to do with limited involvement in policy making in the governance of the school.

**Ineffective supervision.** Some interview and focus group participants noted that in any organization, adequate monitoring is necessary to achieve the school's goal. Allen (2015) and Oshry (1996) explained that in the presence of weak supervision, schools would not reach their goals, and the possibility of institutions collapsing is inevitable which poses a leadership challenge for the system. Bolman and Deal (2008) elaborated that leaders must anticipate problems and should be in readiness to identify solutions to those problems as in the case of adequate supervision. Malunda, et al. (2016) emphasized supervision is to enhance performance. The interview and focus group participants perceived supervision of schools by education officers as ineffective because many participants do not know nor understand the challenges confronting the school supervisors. Further, the knowledge of supervision of most participants in this study is limited to generality rather than understanding and implementing the process of school supervision. Consequently, most participants in the study perceived supervision, based on their general thinking, as a task that anyone can perform rather than understanding the technicalities involved in school supervision process, which most participants thought requires specialized training.

### **Interpretation of Themes Related to Research Question 1, Subquestion 2**

Research question 1, subquestion 2, related to social factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia. Three themes were derived: school activities, focused students, and family-friend connection.

**School activities.** School activities to most participants in this study serve as a means of attraction to schools. Specifically, sporting and academic activities were seen to provide students the opportunity to enroll in the school while enticing potential students to seek enrollment without regards to class size. In this study, many participants perceived school activities as a way friends who are already enrolled in the school attract other friends to the school. Further, many participants considered school activities mostly as social rather than opportunities involving activities such as leadership and training for life skills for students. Parlar, Türkoğlu, and Cansoy (2016) explained school activities include developing students' leadership qualities are increasingly gaining more significance in preparing students for the lead role and in the resolution of peer problems related to education. In the study, I realized most participants did not perceive student leadership qualities as a related school activity.

**Focused students.** Overcrowded class size appears to be perceived as a distraction to students' learning and teachers' teaching, seeing students as losing focus. In this study, most participants view focused students as those who pay attention in class as the teacher teaches. Further, focused students as defined by many participants are those who are age appropriate for the level. Allais (2013) and Yelkperci et al. (2012) emphasized that disruption in a large class impedes quality teaching and learning from

disruptive students thereby causing focused students to lose attention, while Lazear (1999) elaborated that in small classes students learn more with minimal disruption. Hence, students in small classes tend to pay more attention and remain focused than students in large classes.

**Family-friend connection.** Perhaps reflecting the Liberian culture, many interview and focus group participants perceived that without family-friend connection nothing is possible. To a greater extent, many participants shared this family-friend connection as knowledge, which they believe to be true considering the social and family interconnectedness in both private and public life and institutions that appear to be a norm in the Liberian society. The Liberian parlance, '*direct connection*,' means having easy access, typically through family or friend, to someone in authority or control. Most participants in this study perceive that moving forward in life means that you must know someone in authority despite your qualification or competence. Consequently, the closest school within the community becomes overcrowded due to this perception.

### **Interpretation of Themes Related to Research Question 1, Subquestion 3**

Research question 1, subquestion 3, related to environmental factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia. One theme was derived: proximity of school. A school's proximity perceived by many interview and focus group participants is for convenience and security for their children to enroll in a school within or near the community that is easily accessible to the parents in the event of any emergency. The study participants perceive this to be true, but some do not think about overcrowded classes except when there is a failure of their children. Most participants do

not perceive the negative impact such as ghettos, drug users, and criminal activities have because of the closeness to the school. However, overcrowded class size remains a challenge.

### **Interpretation of Themes Related to Research Question 2**

Research question 2, related to challenges and opportunities stakeholders perceive are available to address overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia. One theme was derived: community partnership. Understanding the challenges of overcrowded classes in the only community public school are perceived by the study participants as an opportunity for creating a partnership between the community and the government to provide solutions to those challenges. Aidman and Baray (2016) explained educational leaders continuously acknowledge the need and significance for developing a partnership to address pressing and persistent educational challenges to improve educational outcomes. Most study participants perceived community partnerships with government, or private-based organizations is an opportunity for collaboration to enhance quality education and opportunity to reduce overcrowded classes.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study was conducted in one public elementary school in one community, and the findings of the study may not apply to other schools, which present a limitation to potential generalization. Other limitations included my limited experience in the techniques of interviewing and the size of the study. Using only one site for the study decreased generalization and limited transferability of the findings to other communities with similar experiences. The research design also provided limitation because only one

person conducted the interview and focus group discussion, and there was the possibility of some bias in the way I asked or explained the interview questions at different times and places.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The education sector in Liberia is confronted with many challenges in post-conflict Liberia and the communities seem to be aware of the educational challenges, but the communities continue to blame the national government for not providing solutions to the challenges. Policies being set by the Ministry of Education do not all seem to be practical for implementation considering the inadequate budgetary allotment. In the context of the findings from this study, some appropriate actions through recommendations made, and when implemented, may provide solutions to those educational challenges in the education sector in Liberia. In this regard, I propose the following recommendations to the relevant institutions or resourceful categories that include the policymakers and the community people. These recommendations are a result from the findings considering the participants' responses, document retrieval, and my interpretation of the findings.

Recommendations for policy-makers are, as follows:

- Ensure adequate budgetary allotment to the Ministry of Education to enable it to provide the needed materials for schools and to construct more classrooms in public schools in the communities to accommodate migrating students from rural to urban and from other urban communities to avoid overcrowding;

- Encourage community people's involvement in community partnership through the Ministry of Education and the PTA to further strengthen their participatory roles and responsibilities;
- Solicit input from school personnel, community members, and the PTA in the process of developing and implementing policies; and
- Provide means for regular or more professional development training for teachers and school administrators to improve professional performance.

Recommendations for community stakeholders are, as follows:

- Encourage and forge partnerships with the central government and other private and public organizations to provide training and develop skills necessary to improve the quality of human capacity in the school; and
- Constantly meet to identify problems and collaborate with school and education officials to explore possibilities of solving the problems affecting the school.

### **Implications**

In post-conflict urban communities there are constant challenges resulting from the past civil conflicts themselves and migration from rural to urban area and unrepaired infrastructures in the case of my study. These conflicts and migration bring about negative consequences including a destroyed educational system, damaged infrastructures, unavailability of social services, brain drain, underdeveloped human capacity, and the fear of relapsing into conflict. These are problems the central government continues to face that may take a while to attend to and repair. To attend to these problems, I recommend the national government employ several strategic



approaches. One such approach is the involvement of community members for the improvement of the education sector, especially at the elementary level, which needs revamping and strengthening. With the involvement of community stakeholders, the study participants seem to welcome community partnerships with the government and other stakeholders to take relevant actions to improve the education of their children and restore quality in the education sector.

The findings of the study have many implications for positive social change. The findings may encourage community members to develop positive actions relevant to solving those problems confronting them with the central government and other private or public entities perceived by the community members that can break the dependency syndrome on the central government for every support and form partnerships to move ahead. The participants considered nonviolent resistance as a means to seek change. Community members can take ownership in terms of collaborating and partnering with other bodies in improving situations of the challenging factors of overcrowded classes at the only public elementary school in their community. It might be possible that other communities with similar challenges experienced by the study participants can adapt solutions to address their common problems. Considering the broader implication of this study and the lesson learned, it could be possible that other communities beyond Liberia could benefit from the findings, especially communities with overcrowded schools.

### **Conclusion**

Collective discussions to identify possible solutions to problems affecting a community are sometimes relevant to the benefit of society. Involving stakeholders and

sharing ideas seem to work to the advantage of the school in particular and the community in general. It appears community members are eager to form a community partnership to minimize dependency on the central government while buttressing the national government effort to control overcrowding of schools. This paradigm shift from dependency to self-fulfillment, Yuan et al. (2017) explained that shareholder and societal value are intrinsically connected, and when performance is properly enforced, the process brings about long-term investment in stakeholders to the benefit of the community. Young (2016) emphasized it is time people rethink and reframe community involvement in community activities, because the results can be plentiful. Community members appeared to focus on such performance involving the community and partners to move from dependency to self-fulfillment to attend to the challenges of overcrowding faced by the community's only public elementary school.

The central government's statutory and constitutional responsibilities include providing the necessary educational services to its people, determine its impact on its inhabitants, and the benefits those factors bring to the community. With the involvement of community members in the organization of partnerships to enhance educational improvement and to buttress the central government's efforts to provide the needed means to solve those challenges confronting the educational system, it seems possible the community and the central government can address those problems. Formulating short-term plans to address the immediate challenges through community partnership can impact the community, while long-term plans to address those challenges that cannot be resolved quickly will provide an opportunity for careful study and solicit means to deal

with these problems. Convincing that community and educational stakeholders can form partnerships, it is likely that those challenges can turn into opportunities where organizations can ensure and enforce practical approaches to address those challenges of overcrowding in the only public elementary school in the community.

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## Appendix A:

## Interview Protocol and Questions for School Administrators

Research Topic: Liberian Educational Stakeholders' Perceptions of Overcrowding in an Urban Public Elementary School in Monrovia

Name of Case/interviewee (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introductory Protocol**

Thank you for agreeing to share your experience with me in this study. You were selected because I feel that you have useful information for my study.

In order to facilitate my note-taking, I would like your permission to audio tape our conversations today. Information recorded will only be available to me working on this study and contents will be kept strictly confidential. The tape will be destroyed after transcription and text will be treated with anonymity.

This interview is planned to last for 45 minutes and it may be necessary to speed up some of the activities when time is running out. I may ask you to stop at some points so I can ask additional questions.

As stated earlier, you were selected because I feel that you have useful information for my study. The purpose of this interview is not to test your knowledge or competency but to understand your perspectives about factors influencing overcrowding.

Please sign this release form to indicate your agreement.

Shall we begin?

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant)

**Interview Questions for School Administrators**

**RQ1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the factors influencing overcrowding in an urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the organizational leadership factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 2:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the social factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 3:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the environmental factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ2:** What challenges and opportunities do stakeholders perceive are available to address overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

1. Tell me about your responsibility as a school administrator in this school.
2. What is your role in overcrowding policy formulation?
3. Briefly describe your role as it relates to overcrowding in terms of student leaning, teaching, and assessment.
4. Describe how overcrowding classes impact students' achievement.
5. To what extent do you include teachers in the development and monitoring of class size?
  - (a) How much influence do teachers have over school policy?
  - (b) Describe how your school establishes ways of avoiding overcrowded class size?
6. Tell me about past factors that influenced overcrowding class size challenges in your school and opportunities derived from class size reduction.
  - (a) Can you provide or describe an example of factors that influenced overcrowding?
7. Tell me about emerging factors influencing overcrowding class size challenges in your school and opportunities that may derive in class size reduction.
  - (a) Can you provide or describe an example of factors influencing overcrowding?

8. Please describe the relationship among administrators and faculty members in the understanding of factors influencing overcrowding in your school.
9. When you think of a culture of collaboration, please describe how you work with other colleagues to learn new ways to deal with factors influencing overcrowding as challenge of class size and how you support each other?
  - (a) Please describe at least 2 organizational structures in place to support collaboration in avoiding factors influencing overcrowding class size.
  - (b) Tell me about other people you interact with regularly to accomplish your job.
10. Please describe your school's major accomplishment over the past 5 years.
  - (a) Can you tell me what stands out for you?
11. Can you describe to me any changes that have occurred since your school's involvement in the minimizing or avoiding factors influencing overcrowding in class size?
12. To what extent do you believe that school leadership is the responsibility of everyone at this school?
13. How do you incorporate faculty expertise in your school leadership practice?
  - (a) Give me 2-3 examples of how you have created opportunities for others to take on leadership roles.
14. What has been your role, if any, in the formulation of policy(ies) that enhances quality education in the implementation of class size reduction?
  - (a) How do policymakers contribute to class size reduction?
15. To what extent are policymakers involved or not involved in class size reduction?

## **Closing**

Thank you for participating in this study and your time.

## Appendix B:

## Interview Protocol and Questions for Teachers

Research Topic: Liberian Educational Stakeholders' Perceptions of Overcrowding in an Urban Public Elementary School in Monrovia.

Name of Case/interviewee (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introductory Protocol**

Thank you for agreeing to share your experience with me in this study. You were selected because I feel that you have useful information for my study.

In order to facilitate our note-taking, I would like your permission to audio tape our conversations today. Information recorded will only be available to me working on this study and contents will be kept strictly confidential. The tape will be destroyed after transcription and text will be treated with anonymity.

This interview is planned to last for 45 minutes and it may be necessary to speed up some of the activities when time is running out. I may ask you to stop at some points so I can ask additional questions.

As stated earlier, you were selected because I feel that you have useful information for my study. The purpose of this interview is not to test your knowledge or competency but to understand your perspectives about factors influencing overcrowding.

Please sign this release form to indicate your agreement.

Shall we begin?

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant)

**Interview Questions for Teachers**

**RQ1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the organizational leadership factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 2:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the social factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 3:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the environmental factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ2:** What challenges and opportunities do stakeholders perceive are available to address overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

1. Tell me about your responsibility as a faculty member in this school.
2. What is your role in overcrowding policy formulation?
3. Briefly describe your role as it relates to overcrowding in terms of student learning, teaching, and assessment.
4. Describe how overcrowding classes impact students' achievement.
5. To what extent do you include teachers in the development and monitoring of class size?
  - (a) How much influence do teachers have over school policy?
  - (b) Describe how your school establishes ways of avoiding overcrowded class size?
6. Tell me about past factors that influenced overcrowding class size challenges in your school and opportunities derived from class size reduction.
  - (a) Can you provide or describe an example of factors that influenced overcrowding?
7. Tell me about emerging factors influencing overcrowding class size challenges in your school and opportunities that may derive in class size reduction.
  - (a) Can you provide or describe an example of factors influencing overcrowding?



8. Please describe the relationship among administrators and faculty members in the understanding of factors influencing overcrowding in your school.
9. When you think of a culture of collaboration, please describe how you work with other colleagues to learn new ways to deal with factors influencing overcrowding as challenge of class size and how you support each other?
  - (a) Please describe at least 2 organizational structures in place to support collaboration in avoiding factors influencing overcrowding class size.
  - (b) Tell me about other people you interact with regularly to accomplish your job.
10. Please describe your school's major accomplishment over the past 5 years.
  - (a) Can you tell me what stands out for you?
11. Can you describe to me any changes that have occurred since your school's involvement in the minimizing or avoiding factors influencing overcrowding in class size?
12. To what extent do you believe that school leadership is the responsibility of everyone at this school?
13. How do you incorporate faculty expertise in your school leadership practice?
  - (a) Give me 2-3 examples of how you have created opportunities for others to take on leadership roles.
14. What has been your role, if any, in the formulation of policy(ies) that enhances quality education in the implementation of class size reduction?
  - (a) How do policymakers contribute to class size reduction?
15. To what extent are policymakers involved or not involved in class size reduction?

### **Closing**

Thank you for participating in this study and your time.

## Appendix C:

Interview Protocol and Questions for the Head of the Parent-Teacher Association  
 Research Topic: Liberian Educational Stakeholders' Perceptions of Overcrowding in an  
 Urban Public Elementary School in Monrovia

Name of Case/interviewee (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introductory Protocol**

Thank you for agreeing to share your experience with me in this study. You were selected because I feel that you have useful information for my study.

In order to facilitate our note-taking, I would like your permission to audio tape our conversations today. Information recorded will only be available to me working on this study and contents will be kept strictly confidential. The tape will be destroyed after transcription and text will be treated with anonymity.

This interview is planned to last for 45 minutes and it may be necessary to speed up some of the activities when time is running out. I may ask you to stop at some points so I can ask additional questions.

As stated earlier, you were selected because I feel that you have useful information for my study. The purpose of this interview is not to test your knowledge or competency but to understand your perspectives about factors influencing overcrowding.

Please sign this release form to indicate your agreement.

Shall we begin?

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Participant)

**Interview Questions for the Head of the Parent-Teacher Association**

**RQ1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the organizational leadership factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 2:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the social factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 3:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the environmental factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ2:** What challenges and opportunities do stakeholders perceive are available to address overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

1. Tell me about your responsibility as the head of the parent-teacher association of this school.
2. What is your role in overcrowding policy formulation?
3. Briefly describe your role as it relates to overcrowding in terms of student leaning, teaching, and assessment.
4. Describe how overcrowding classes impact students' achievement.
5. To what extent do you include teachers in the development and monitoring of class size?
  - (a) How much influence do teachers have over school policy?
  - (b) Describe how your school establishes ways of avoiding overcrowded class size?
6. Tell me about past factors that influenced overcrowding class size challenges in your school and opportunities derived from class size reduction.
  - (a) Can you provide or describe an example of factors that influenced overcrowding?
7. Tell me about emerging factors influencing overcrowding class size challenges in your school and opportunities that may derive in class size reduction.

- (a) Can you provide or describe an example of factors influencing overcrowding?
8. Please describe the relationship among administrators and faculty members in the understanding of factors influencing overcrowding in your school.
  9. When you think of a culture of collaboration, please describe how you work with other colleagues to learn new ways to deal with factors influencing overcrowding as challenge of class size and how you support each other?
    - (a) Please describe at least 2 organizational structures in place to support collaboration in avoiding factors influencing overcrowding class size.
    - (b) Tell me about other people you interact with regularly to accomplish your job.
  10. Please describe your school's major accomplishment over the past 5 years.
    - (a) Can you tell me what stands out for you?
  11. Can you describe to me any changes that have occurred since your school's involvement in the minimizing or avoiding factors influencing overcrowding in class size?
  12. To what extent do you believe that school leadership is the responsibility of everyone at this school?
  13. How do you incorporate faculty expertise in your school leadership practice?
    - (a) Give me 2-3 examples of how you have created opportunities for others to take on leadership roles.
  14. What has been your role, if any, in the formulation of policy(ies) that enhances quality education in the implementation of class size reduction?
    - (a) How do policymakers contribute to class size reduction?
  15. To what extent are policymakers involved or not involved in class size reduction?

### **Closing**

Thank you for participating in this study and your time.

## Appendix D:

## Interview Protocol and Questions for Education Officers

Research Topic: Liberian Educational Stakeholders' Perceptions of Overcrowding in an Urban Public Elementary School in Monrovia

Name of Case/interviewee (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introductory Protocol**

Thank you for agreeing to share your experience with me in this study. You were selected because I feel that you have useful information for my study.

In order to facilitate our note-taking, we would like your permission to audio tape our conversations today. Information recorded will only be available to me working on this study and contents will be kept strictly confidential. The tape will be destroyed after transcription and text will be treated with anonymity.

This interview is planned to last for 45 minutes and it may be necessary to speed up some of the activities when time is running out. I may ask you to stop at some points so I can ask additional questions.

As stated earlier, you were selected because I feel that you have useful information for my study. The purpose of this interview is not to test your knowledge or competency but to understand your perspectives about factors influencing overcrowding.

Please sign this release form to indicate your agreement.

Shall we begin?

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant)

**Interview Questions for Education Officers**

**RQ1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the organizational leadership factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 2:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the social factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 3:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the environmental factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ2:** What challenges and opportunities do stakeholders perceive are available to address overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

1. Tell me about your responsibility as an education officer of this school.
2. What is your role in overcrowding policy formulation?
3. Briefly describe your role as it relates to overcrowding in terms of student learning, teaching, and assessment.
4. Describe how overcrowding classes impact students' achievement.
5. To what extent do you include teachers in the development and monitoring of class size?
  - (a) How much influence do teachers have over school policy?
  - (b) Describe how your school establishes ways of avoiding overcrowded class size?
6. Tell me about past factors that influenced overcrowding class size challenges in your school and opportunities derived from class size reduction.
  - (a) Can you provide or describe an example of factors that influenced overcrowding?
7. Tell me about emerging factors influencing overcrowding class size challenges in your school and opportunities that may derive in class size reduction.
  - (a) Can you provide or describe an example of factors influencing overcrowding?
8. Please describe the relationship among administrators and faculty members in the understanding of factors influencing overcrowding in your school.

9. When you think of a culture of collaboration, please describe how you work with other colleagues to learn new ways to deal with factors influencing overcrowding as challenge of class size and how you support each other?
  - (a) Please describe at least 2 organizational structures in place to support collaboration in avoiding factors influencing overcrowding class size.
  - (b) Tell me about other people you interact with regularly to accomplish your job.
10. Please describe your school's major accomplishment over the past 5 years.
  - (a) Can you tell me what stands out for you?
11. Can you describe to me any changes that have occurred since your school's involvement in the minimizing or avoiding factors influencing overcrowding in class size?
12. To what extent do you believe that school leadership is the responsibility of everyone at this school?
13. How do you incorporate faculty expertise in your school leadership practice?
  - (a) Give me 2-3 examples of how you have created opportunities for others to take on leadership roles.
14. What has been your role, if any, in the formulation of policy(ies) that enhances quality education in the implementation of class size reduction?
  - (a) How do policymakers contribute to class size reduction?
15. To what extent are policymakers involved or not involved in class size reduction?

### **Closing**

Thank you for participating in this study and your time.

## Appendix E:

## Interview Protocol and Questions for Education Policymakers

Research Topic: Liberian Educational Stakeholders' Perceptions of Overcrowding in an Urban Public Elementary School in Monrovia

Name of Case/interviewee (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introductory Protocol**

Thank you for agreeing to share your experience with me in this study. You were selected because I feel that you have useful information for my study.

In order to facilitate our note-taking, I would like your permission to audio tape our conversations today. Information recorded will only be available to me working on this study and contents will be kept strictly confidential. The tape will be destroyed after transcription and text will be treated with anonymity.

This interview is planned to last for 45 minutes and it may be necessary to speed up some of the activities when time is running out. I may ask you to stop at some points so I can ask additional questions.

As stated earlier, you were selected because I feel that you have useful information for my study. The purpose of this interview is not to test your knowledge or competency but to understand your perspectives about factors influencing overcrowding.

Please sign this release form to indicate your agreement.

Shall we begin?

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant)



**Interview Questions for Education Policymakers**

**RQ1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the organizational leadership factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 2:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the social factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 3:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the environmental factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ2:** What challenges and opportunities do stakeholders perceive are available to address overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

1. Tell me about your responsibility as an education policymaker.
2. What is your role in overcrowding policy formulation?
3. Briefly describe your role as it relates to overcrowding in terms of student learning, teaching, and assessment.
4. Describe how overcrowding classes influences students' learning.
5. To what extent are teachers included in the development and monitoring of class size?
  - (a) How much influence do teachers have over school policy formulation?
  - (b) Describe how schools establish ways of avoiding overcrowded class size?
6. Tell me about past factors that influenced overcrowding class size challenges in schools and opportunities derived from class size reduction.
  - (a) Can you provide or describe an example of factors that influenced overcrowding?
7. Tell me about emerging factors influencing overcrowding class size challenges in schools and opportunities that may derive in class size reduction.
  - (a) Can you provide or describe an example of factors influencing overcrowding?
8. Please describe the relationship among administrators and faculty members and education policymakers in understanding factors influencing overcrowding in schools.

9. When you think of a culture of collaboration, please describe how you work with other colleagues to learn new ways to deal with factors influencing overcrowding as challenges of class size?
  - (a) Please describe at least 2 organizational structures in place to support collaboration in avoiding factors influencing overcrowding class size.
  - (b) Tell me about other people you interact with regularly to accomplish your job.
10. Please describe your institution major accomplishment over the past 5 years dealing with factors influencing overcrowding.
  - (a) Can you tell me what stands out for you?
11. Can you describe to me any changes that have occurred since your institution's involvement in the minimizing or avoiding factors influencing overcrowding in class size?
12. To what extent do you believe that school leadership is the responsibility of everyone at this school?
13. How do you incorporate educators' expertise in your education policy-making practice?
  - (a) Give me 2-3 examples of how you have created opportunities to involve other educators in education policy-making.
14. What has been your role, if any, in the formulation of policy(ies) that enhances quality education?
  - (a) How do policymakers contribute to class size reduction?
15. To what extent are policymakers involved or not involved in class size reduction?

### **Closing**

Thank you for participating in this study and your time.

## Appendix F:

### Protocol and Questions for Focus Group

Research Topic: Liberian Educational Stakeholders' Perceptions of Overcrowding in an Urban Public Elementary School in Monrovia

#### **Introductory Protocol**

Thank you for agreeing to share your experience with me in this study. You were selected because I feel that you have useful information to contribute to the study.

As indicated in the consent form that you signed, the discussion will last for maximum 90 minutes and will be audio-recorded for transcription. I wish to also remind you that you are at liberty to withdraw from the study at any point if you so desire.

Let us begin with self-introduction.

#### **Interview Questions for Focus Group**

**RQ1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the organizational leadership factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 2:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the social factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ1 Subquestion 3:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the environmental factors influencing overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

**RQ2:** What challenges and opportunities do stakeholders perceive are available to address overcrowding in urban public elementary schools in Liberia?

1. Tell me about your responsibility as a member of the parent-teacher association of the school/community leader/youth group representative.
2. What is your role in overcrowding policy formulation?
3. Briefly describe your role as it relates to overcrowding in terms of student learning, teaching, and assessment.

4. Describe how overcrowding classes influences students' learning.
5. To what extent are teachers included in the development and monitoring of class size?
  - (a) How much influence do you have over school policy formulation?
  - (b) Describe how schools establish ways of avoiding overcrowded class size?
6. Tell me about past factors that influenced overcrowding class size challenges in your school and opportunities derived from class size reduction.
  - (a) Can you provide or describe an example of factors that influenced overcrowding?
7. Tell me about emerging factors influencing overcrowding class size challenges in your school and opportunities that may derive in class size reduction.
  - (a) Can you provide or describe an example of factors influencing overcrowding?
8. Please describe the relationship between the school administration and members of the parent-teacher association in the understanding of factors influencing overcrowding in your school.
9. When you think of a culture of collaboration, please describe how you work with other colleagues to learn new ways to deal with factors influencing overcrowding as challenges of class size?
  - (a) Please describe at least 2 organizational structures in place to support collaboration in avoiding factors influencing overcrowding class size.
  - (b) Tell me about other people you interact with regularly to accomplish your job.
10. Please describe your institution major accomplishment over the past 5 years dealing with factors influencing overcrowding.
  - (a) Can you tell me what stands out for you?
11. Can you describe to me any changes that have occurred since your institution's involvement in the minimizing or avoiding factors influencing overcrowding in class size?

12. To what extent do you believe that school leadership is the responsibility of everyone at this school?
13. How do you incorporate educators' expertise in your education policy-making practice?
  - (a) Give me 2-3 examples of how you have created opportunities to involve other educators in education policy-making.
14. What has been your role, if any, in the formulation of policy(ies) that enhances quality education?
  - (a) How do policymakers contribute to class size reduction?
15. To what extent are policymakers involved or not involved in class size reduction?

**Closing**

Thank you for participating in this study and your time.