

RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

M.Ed. In TESL Program Country Informational Reports

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program
In the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

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Liberia:

Turning a New Leaf on Education



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Location and Background Information

 **Location:** East coast of Africa, bordering the Atlantic Ocean to the South

- Borders Sierra Leone to the west, Guinea to the north, and Cote d'Ivoire to the east

 **Capital:** Monrovia

 **Population:** 4,128,572 (2011)

 **Poverty Line:** It is estimated that 76% of the population live below the poverty line of U.S. \$1 a day and 52% even live in extreme poverty of under U.S. \$0.50 a day.

(ec.europa.eu)

 **18th** smallest country in Africa

(WorldBank)



Struggles Within Liberia

-  Reconstruction of society due to two civil wars, which began in 1989, has been slow but encouraging.
-  Corruption within the government has led to political and economic distress.
-  High rates of violence and armed robberies test security and law.
-  Illiteracy rate after civil war was approximately 80%(which has slowly been declining).
-  Unemployment rate has dropped from 85% in 1992 to just 3.7% in 2012. This, however, is not indicative of the number of people who still live below the poverty line.

History

-  Oldest independent nation in Africa which models their government on that of the United States.
-  Founded in 1847 by African-Americans looking to return to Africa, some of which were freed slaves.
-  In 1989, Liberia entered the first of two civil wars which claimed the lives of over a quarter million people and damaged most of the country's infrastructure.
-  In 2003, the Liberian civil wars ended and a Republic was established by 2005.
-  In 2006, the first female leader in Africa, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was elected and there has been gradual progress to restore most the damaged infrastructure and establish a strong economy.

 Link below to “New Liberia” showcasing her administration
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=fwgp9kZ4DT4)

(EducateLiberia.org)

Important Information for Teachers

 Official Language of Liberia: English

- Additional dialects include creole-based languages, such as Krio or Pidgin, and Kru.

(migrationinformation.org / Sheppard, 6)

 According to the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization, in the year 2010, the literacy rates for adults was 65% while youth had improved to a 76% literacy rating. (UNESCO)

 Culturally, the English language is considered very formal and thus is the target language for many young children. Parents have even forgone the mother tongue so that children will be proficient in the English language. (Sheppard, 6)

Schooling Available

-  Formal education is provided in more urban settings as many schools are located in the Capital city, Monrovia.
 - Formal education is still evolving in post-war Liberia, so in many cases, knowledge is passed down informally by parents to their children
-  In rural areas, a more informal approach is used. Boys will attend schools that teach essential skills such as farming methods whereas girls will attend schools where they will be taught basic childcare, cooking and household duties.
-  Candidates for any secondary school are required to pass the West African Examination Council Exam
-  State schools are often poorly operated and can be located far from communities. Private school fees are beyond the reach of the nation's poor. (classbase.com)

Grade Level Configuration

Education	School/Level	Grade From	Grade To	Age From	Age To	Years
Primary	Elementary School	1	6	6	12	6
Middle	Junior High School	7	9	12	15	3
Secondary	Senior Secondary Education	10	12	15	18	3

Curriculum in Liberia

Primary Education (Kindergarten through Grade 6)

- Main Objectives: reading, writing, math, science, religion, and establishment of the English language.

Middle Education (Grades 7-9)

- Main Objectives: algebra, geometry, chemistry, physical science and geography
- Students are assigned their “West African Examinations”
 - Rigorous test, needed for entrance into Secondary Schools

Secondary Education (Grades 10-12)

- Main Objectives: more advanced levels of junior high subjects and preparation for education at local universities
- Designed around the needs of the nation
 - More local rather than worldly focus to education

Learning and Teaching

Teachers

-  Post-civil wars, qualified teachers were hard to find.
-  High levels of professional development are currently being provided.
-  Struggles with professionalism continue.
-  Evaluation and management system is being created by the Ministry of Education
-  Teacher certification classes are being provided to draw teachers back into the country.
-  Teacher to Student Ratio: 27:1 (UNESCO)

(USAID.gov)

Students

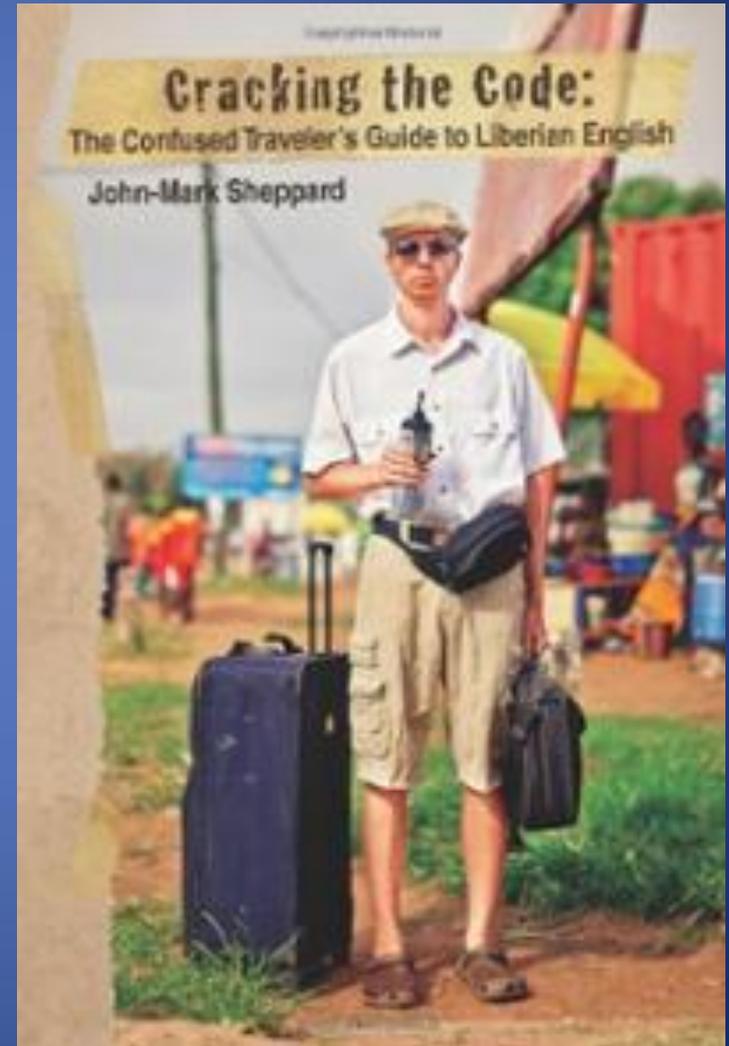
-  Education of female students is just now becoming a priority.
-  The GOAL (Girls' Opportunity to Access Learning) program has been founded to lead and organize this process.
-  Rural schools are being provided with extra support to ensure effective instruction for those enrolled in schools.
-  By grade 3 students will have had the instructional support to have coherent and effective reading skills.

Official Language Policy

 English is the formal language studied in Liberia. It is also the official language of the country.

 English is to be taught beginning in Primary schools, as early as Kindergarten. (Classbase)

 In informal environments, English takes a back seat to Creole-based versions of the English language known as Liberian Colloquial. (YFUUSA)



Views Towards the English Language

-  Although English is the official language the *lower languages*, creole-based Liberian Colloquial, Kru and others, are more widely used, especially in informal settings. (YFUUSA)
-  Secondary students can more effectively communicate through written English than oral communication. (YFUUSA)
-  Formal education is considered the stepping stone to proficiency and consistent use of English in Liberia.
-  The wide use and acceptance of the English language can be attributed to the history behind the nation and the settlement of “Americo-Liberians” on Liberian soil during the 19th century. (Mongrue, 38-41)
-  Tension is inevitable, but Liberian-American relations have been fairly stable for over a hundred years . Many Liberian-Americans are working to help rebuild the political, social, and educational ties to their homeland. (Mongrue, 43)

Cultural Values and Traditions

 A unique gesture within Liberian culture is the “snapshake” which utilizes the middle finger. This could often be construed as a rude symbol, but the symbolism is reflected in the differentiation between cultures. (Everyculture.com)

 During the 14-year civil war, education was severely compromised due to massive destruction and fleeing of teachers from Liberia. Since education is so valued in the Liberian community, the nation has been extremely motivated to overcome these difficulties. (Everyculture.com)

 Religion plays a major role in Liberia. Even taught in schools, religion lays near the top of the list of priorities. Approximately 40% practice Christianity, 40% practice traditional religions, and 20% follow Islam. (US Dept. of State)

Liberians in the United States

 The most popular states for Liberian immigrants in 1997 were:

- Maryland (320)
- New York (279)
- New Jersey (241)
- Pennsylvania (200)
- Minnesota (155)

 Many Southern states are also reportedly popular due to the similar yearly climate

 Minnesota and Rhode Island are popular states due to the lower cost of living.

(www.everyculture.com)

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