The Perceptions of Liberian Public School Principals about their Leadership Development Needs in Post-Conflict Liberia

A doctoral thesis presented by
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Abstract

In 2003, Liberia emerged from a violent 14-year civil war which caused widespread destruction of the nation’s socio-economic and educational infrastructure. Even before the war, Liberia lacked the necessary programs and policies to effectively train public school principals and provide them with sustainable ongoing leadership development opportunities and support throughout their careers. This remains true today. This descriptive qualitative study explores the perceptions of Liberian public school principals regarding their needs for leadership development opportunities and for support that would help them to become more effective school leaders.

Data was collected from two main sources: 1) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 12 currently active principals in Liberia; and 2) a review of select relevant policy and program documents. Detailed notes were subsequently analyzed to determine common and independent themes from across the interviews. A similar analysis was done with the select policy and program documents, which came from the Liberian government and other organizations working in the public education domain in Liberia. Data from the two sources was analyzed in relationship to one another to enhance the analysis.

The findings of the study indicate a real need for professional development for public school principals, as well as for programs and policies that address their leadership development needs in post-conflict Liberia.

Key Words: professional development, principal leadership, leadership effectiveness, principal education, in-service training, school leadership.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to four persons: 1) My mother, Massa Jabono Taylor; 2) My late grandma, Tenneh Yeajuah Guajuah; 3) My grandpa, Momo Kekeh Sasay; and 4) My aunt, Miatha Freeman. These family members loved me deeply. Their affection and support had a profound impact on my life and educational attainment. My late grandma, affectionately called Yeajuah, who passed away in July 2011 in Liberia, a few weeks after I returned to the United States from my thesis research mission to Liberia, lived a long, blessed, and fulfilling life of more than “three score and ten.”

My grandpa, lovingly called Kekeh, has lived well beyond “three score and ten,” and is enjoying God’s bountiful blessings of longevity. My aunt, the late Miatha Freeman, died prematurely during childbirth in 1977. My mother, Ma Massa, my grandparents, and aunt worked very hard to support my education and development. I lived with my grandparents, my mother, and my aunt at different intervals of my formative childhood and adolescent years. They did not have formal Western education, but they had great love and appreciation for its value. My family members were, however, well educated and solidly grounded in traditional Liberian or African education.

They invested their meager financial resources in my education and development. They earned their living mainly from subsistence farming and small business activities. My family instilled in me strong moral values, for which I am deeply grateful. Their exemplary lives taught me to be respectful, hardworking, persevering, honest, and empathetic. These values have positively influenced my life and significantly contributed to my educational achievement.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Problem of Practice

Studies show an important link between the leadership competencies of school principals and the success of their schools. Salazar (2007) states that if school reform efforts are to be successful, a strong leadership must prevail. Public school principals in Liberia (Appendix I) have faced a complex array of post-conflict rehabilitation and reform problems in the wake of the 14-year civil war that ended in 2003. These problems include post-traumatic stress disorder, hunger among students, student disciplinary issues, poor fringe benefits, frequently delayed salary checks for school personnel, financial constraints and shortages of educational supplies (International Rescue Committee, 2002).

As would be expected, these problems present serious challenges to the principals’ effective leadership and performance. These challenges are compounded by a lack of opportunities for public school principals to receive training or otherwise acquire the competencies that are necessary for effectively meeting their institutional leadership demands. Fenwick and Pierce (2002), who describe the leadership abilities of principals as the passport to success, point out that principals today have enormous responsibilities that include creating effective relationships among staff members, acquiring and allocating resources, promoting teacher development, improving student outcome and building mutually supportive school-community relations.

In contrast to the educational opportunities available to teachers, there are no formal academies in Liberia that prepare principals for the demanding responsibilities of post-conflict public school leadership, and opportunities for regular leadership training are rare. While
Liberia’s Education Sector Master Plan of 2000-2015 mentions the need for professional development of public school principals, the 2008 Annual Report of the Ministry of Education (MOE), the governmental agency that runs public education in the country, did not report the implementation of any in-service leadership skill enhancement programs or activities for principals during that year.

In terms of pre-service preparation for public school principals, the situation in Liberia mirrors that of other African countries where principals work in very challenging contexts. They rarely receive appropriate preparation and “are appointed without specific preparation, receive little or no induction, have limited access to suitable in-service training, and enjoy little support from the local or regional bureaucracy” (Onguko, Abdalla, & Webber, 2008, p. 716). Given the Liberian Ministry of Education’s goal of providing professional development support to public school principals, the fact that such support is not mentioned in the 2008 Annual Report is surprising and points to a critical need for leadership development programs and policies for Liberian public school principals. Understanding the professional leadership development needs of public school principals, especially from their perspectives and based on their actual experiences, is an important step in the right policy direction.

Significance of the Problem

The need to study the leadership development needs of Liberian public school principals—in particular, the need to learn what these principals think about the availability or lack of programs and policies to properly prepare them for school leadership in Liberia—cannot be overstated. This is especially true given the challenging post-conflict nature of the Liberian educational environment and the urgent need for educational reform. Liberia, a West African nation of 3.5 million inhabitants, ended its brutal 14-year civil war in 2003 (‘Liberia—No More
War,” 2005). This armed conflict devastated the country and its education system. Many teachers and principals were killed or maimed, and many others fled the country. The education system remains under severe stress today (International Rescue Committee, 2002).

The economy is weak. Unemployment remains a major challenge in Liberia. Wage employment is low nationally and the percentage of people living in extreme poverty—that is, living on less than a dollar a day—is estimated at 63.8% (UNDP, 2010).

Generally, there is a lack of trained school professionals in Liberia, and this is coupled with increasing student achievement problems and shortages of teaching and school supplies (Liberia’s 2000-2015 Education Master Plan, 2000). Hunger is widespread, especially among young children and students. Despite the Liberian government’s policy of free and compulsory primary education, about 40% of Liberia’s school-age children do not attend school (President Ellen-Johnson Sirleaf, 2008; International Rescue Committee, 2002).

This is particularly true for younger children and girls in the rural areas. Upper primary schooling is limited in the rural areas and secondary schooling is available mainly in the urban areas. Unqualified teachers teach more than 65% of the children in primary and secondary schools. Private schools are unaffordable for most Liberians, especially in the rural areas (International Rescue Committee, 2002). A majority of the 10,000 secondary (senior high) school students who sat the West African Examination for Senior Students (WAESS) in 2010—6,000—failed, and this prompted the Ministry of Education to discontinue Liberia’s participation in the regional test until 2013 (Sendolo, 2010).

The long-term success of Liberia’s reconstruction and development efforts depends significantly on the quality of education provided to Liberian children. Adequate leadership development and support for public school principals are critical to the success of Liberia’s
educational reform. Salazar (2007) proposes that principals need to grow and learn throughout their careers to adapt to the changing needs of students and their schools. Principals need professional development opportunities to continually upgrade their technical, conceptual and human relations skills and make them more effective, more knowledgeable and more qualified to carry out their professional responsibilities. Liberia’s 2000-2015 Education Master Plan recognizes the fact that the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system in Liberia depend on the ongoing development of school leaders’ skills and capabilities.

A Stanford Educational Leadership Institute study (LaPointe, Meyerson, & Darling-Hammond, 2006) indicates that while principals are overwhelmingly expected to improve teaching and learning, many critics—including principals themselves—have raised a litany of concerns about the quality and effectiveness of principal leadership preparation programs at universities and elsewhere. The study notes a disconnect between principal leadership development programs and the real-world complexities of principals’ positions. In particular, the knowledge base used for leadership programs is weak and outdated, and mentorships and internships often lack depth or opportunities to test leadership skills in real circumstances. The study also observes that admissions standards lack rigor, and as a result, too many graduates are eventually certified but are not truly qualified to effectively lead school-wide reform.

Preparing effective principals through leadership development programs would constitute a step toward achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Liberia. The eight MDGs are goals that were adopted by 189 nations at a UN Millennium Summit held in the United States in September 2000, in response to the world’s main development challenges (UNDP, 2008). The MDGs, which the nations pledged to achieve by 2015, have education as the number two goal. This goal aims to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere—boys and
girls alike—will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling (UNDP, 2008). The UN reports that Liberia lacks the capacity to monitor its primary education goal and is unlikely to achieve this goal by 2015 (UNDP, 2008).

Leadership development programs that adequately prepare public school principals are important not only for school reform; they are also vital for Liberia’s overall socio-economic and political development. Liberia’s Education For All (EFA) 2004-2015 National Action Plan stresses that basic education is not restricted to “literary, numeracy, oral expression and problem solving” skills, but also delivers knowledge that “empowers human beings to be able to take into consideration a culture of peace, democracy and human rights” and “to become a stabilizing member of … society and the global village” (p. 14). Effective development of public school principals’ leadership competencies would strengthen Liberia’s education system and contribute to the achievement of Liberia’s overall national development goals.

Research Question

To understand the level of preparedness of public school principals in post-conflict Liberia, as well as the support they need to lead their schools effectively, this study sought to answer the following research question: “What are Liberian public school principals’ perceived leadership development needs in post-conflict Liberia?” This question was explored by gathering the perspectives of Liberian principals through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and by reviewing relevant documents produced by Liberia’s Ministry of Education along with some international agencies that work in public education in Liberia. The study also explored questions concerning several related issues such as the main challenges or problems that the principals face in their work, as perceived by them.
Intellectual and Practical Goals

**Intellectual goal.** This study was partially driven by an intellectual goal. An intellectual goal focuses on “understanding something—gaining insight into what is going on and why … or answering some question that previous research has not adequately addressed” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 21). An intellectual goal of this research was to contribute to the limited literature and understanding of the challenges affecting principal leadership development in post-conflict Liberia. This research project fulfilled the additional intellectual goal of meeting the requirement of the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Administration at Northeastern University’s College of Professional Studies.

**Practical goal.** A major practical goal of this study was not only to provide insights into the perceived leadership development needs of Liberian public school principals, but also to generate data that education leaders and policy makers can use to reform current practices and institute new programs for preparing and supporting principals. More succinctly, the practical goal was to produce findings that can serve as a platform for public principal leadership development and education reform in Liberia.

As Maxwell (2005) notes, practical goals are administrative and policy-oriented, and they seek to meet some need, to change some situation, or to achieve some objective. The intellectual and practical goals of the present study complemented each other in providing a reason to better understand Liberian public school principals’ views about their leadership development needs. Through understanding the principals’ own views, the empirical findings of the study are a potential contribution toward identifying and addressing their leadership development needs.
Background: Synopsis of Liberian History and Education

Early founding years. Liberia is located on the West Coast of Africa (Appendix J) and is surrounded by Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire and the Atlantic Ocean. Liberia has a population of 3.5 million people who inhabit 43,000 square miles of predominantly forested lands (LISGIS, 2009). In 1816, with the support of their federal government, a prominent group of United States citizens founded the American Colonization Society (ACS) with the goal of establishing an African colony for slaves who had been freed in the United States. The ACS’s undertaking was informed by a number of factors, including the perceived or potential problem of unrest on the part of freed slaves and the desire to give them an opportunity to enjoy the benefits of free government and human dignity (Hyman, 2003).

The United States Congress appropriated $100,000 to the ACS for purchasing the land in what would become Liberia, for building homes and forts, for acquiring farm tools and paying teachers and for helping the settlers to take care of and defend themselves (Hyman, 2003). A U.S. Naval ship carried the first group of settlers to Liberia, and in 1822 the modern state of Liberia was formally founded. Various indigenous groups inhabited Liberia before the arrival of the settlers. These groups sold some of their land to the settlers in exchange for a collection of goods that was valued at $300.00 and that included bread, tobacco, knives, forks, spoons, gunpowder, iron pots, hats, coats, shoes, pipes, handkerchiefs, umbrellas, soap and rum. Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, was named after the U.S. President James Monroe, who, like Thomas Jefferson, was a member of the ACS (Hyman, 2003; Williams, 2002).

The freed blacks, who came to be known generally in Liberia as “settlers”, or “Americo-Liberians” or “Congos”, organized institutions patterned after those of the United States. They built homes that echoed the architectural styles of Georgia, the Carolinas and Maryland.
Liberia’s constitution was written at Harvard Law School, and Liberia’s law was codified at Cornell University. Agents of the ACS served as governors of Liberia for many years following Liberia’s establishment. Liberia declared its independence on July 26, 1847, becoming the first independent black republic in Africa (Hyman, 2003; Williams, 2002). Liberia currently has 15 political subdivisions or counties.

**Socio-economic and political relations.** For most of Liberia’s early history, the Americo-Liberians settled in the coastal cities while the indigenous Liberians inhabited the hinterland. The indigenous Liberians are composed of 16 ethnic groups and constitute the largest proportion of the country’s population. The Americo-Liberians make up only five percent of Liberia’s population. The “settlers” established a master-slave system in Liberia and subjected the indigenous people to harsh and unjust treatments, identical to those that had once been imposed upon the Americo-Liberians themselves when they were slaves in the United States (Dillon, 2007).

Hyman (2003) describes those early days as follows: The Americo-Liberians were descendants of the repatriated slaves from America, and they were the ruling class. They were wealthy and had nice homes, cars and other necessities and luxuries of life. They regularly sent their children to Europe or America for college. They seldom mixed with the natives or indigenous people. The natives were recruited to serve as servants of the Americo-Liberians. The natives were largely poor and could not vote. The Americo-Liberians mistreated the natives as any other ruling class would, obviously forgetting what it meant to be slaves.

Through the late 1940s, government revenues hovered around $3 million yearly. Customs receipts and hut (home) taxes were the main sources of government income. The Liberian economy grew significantly after World War II, especially during the 1950s and 1960s.
By the 1950s, corporate taxes and royalties from Firestone Plantation Company (the largest rubber plantation in the world) and from multiple companies mining iron ore and extracting timber contributed to a surge in government income (Sirleaf, 2003). Liberia’s gross domestic product (GDP) grew from less than $36 million in the 1950s to nearly $400 million in 1969. During this period, the country experienced an impressive trade surplus, with exports exceeding imports in 16 of the 20 years between 1950 and 1969 (Metcalf, 1974).

The sharp rise in economic growth did not translate into real national socio-economic and educational development. As Williams (2002) points out, although Liberia is “endowed with minerals and other natural resources,” the country “enjoyed economic growth without development” (p. 22). This state of affairs is largely due to the fact that most of the country’s wealth and political power were controlled by the Americo-Liberians (Williams, 2002; Hyman, 2003).

**Liberian education system.** Liberia has a dual education system that consists of a modern Western-style system introduced by the settlers and the Christian missionaries in the early 19th century and the traditional poro and sande systems which originated among some of the indigenous groups. The Western-style education system is a formal system that is owned and run by the government and nonpublic institutions and individuals (Dunn-Marcus, Kollehlon, Ngovo, & Russ, 2005; Lamptey, 1990).

For a very long time, the Americo-Liberians used education to advance and maintain their dominance of Liberia’s socio-economic and political life and to marginalize, suppress and deprive the indigenous people of their rights to social and economic opportunities and meaningful participation in the country’s national political life. Shortly after Liberia declared independence in 1847, the Americo-Liberians passed a law that prohibited the education of
indigenous people. Violations resulted in stiff penalties. The Western-style education system that was initially implemented in Liberia was clearly meant only for the Americo-Liberians (Dillon, 2007).

The formal Western form of education system was initially modeled after the system in the United States with respect to structure and curriculum. The structure is based on a 6-3-3 arrangement: six years of elementary education, followed by three years each of junior high and senior high education. However, the pedagogical approach in Liberian schools differs markedly from that of United States schools. Liberian teachers generally emphasize memorization and do not provide significant opportunities that encourage students to take an active part in their own learning. Discipline in Liberian schools is generally harsh, and corporal punishment is common (Dillon, 2007; Dunn-Marcus et al., 2005). Liberia’s formal education system is highly centralized with respect to governance, with the Ministry of Education responsible for policy and management of public schools.

In general, boys, urban children and Americo-Liberians receive a significantly higher quality education than do girls, rural children and indigenous Liberians. Literacy and school attendance rates have increased for both Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians since World War II. At that time, 29% of school-age boys were enrolled in school, while the figure for girls was 11%. By 1984, the figures for boys and girls had risen to 57% and 34%, respectively. Over the same period, the literacy rates for males rose from 13% to 34%, and those for females increased from 5% to 17%. The 1974 census showed that 37% of Americo-Liberian adults had completed no formal education. The figure for indigenous adults was 83% (Dunn-Marcus et al., 2005).
The traditional education system served many of the indigenous ethnic groups before Liberia was formally founded, and it continues to serve them today. This system has two institutions: the poro and sande schools. The poro school educates boys and the sande school educates girls. Often referred to as “bush schools” because they operate away from town in secluded forest locations, the poro and sande schools teach the boys and girls the fundamentals of traditional culture. Students learn life skills that range from pottery making and basket weaving to the basics of traditional agriculture, religion, politics and the art of warfare (Buor, 2001; Dunn-Marcus et al., 2005).

Dunn-Marcus et al. (2005) note that “while the traditional system of education in Liberia is essentially a nonliterate system, it does not mean that the indigenous Liberians were preliterate” (p. 40). The authors indicate that five non-Arabic and non-Roman scripts were invented or developed by indigenous Liberians in the early 19th century.

As in other societies and social groupings, young indigenous Liberians are informally educated at home and in the community; parents, relatives and other adults teach them the skills they need to become productive members of society. Traditionally, the poro education lasted for four years and the sande education for three years. Every child had to receive this education before being deemed worthy to assume responsibilities. In recent decades, however, as a result of the influence and importance of Western education and in an effort to enable indigenous youth to attend the modern Western schools, the poro and sande schools have operated for only a few weeks during the summer vacation months (Dunn-Marcus et al., 2005).

**Education policy change.** In 1912, a compulsory Education Act instituted a centralized education system that provided free education for children between the ages of 6 and 16. The
Liberian government became more involved in the education of indigenous Liberians in the post-WWII era, and it reorganized the school system in 1961 (Dillon, 2007).

In spite of the policy shift of extending educational opportunities to indigenous Liberians, change in Liberia was very slow, and this has retarded the progress of educational reform. Although Liberia subscribes to the declaration of universal education, primary education was still far from being universal or even nearly so in the early 1980s, and only a small proportion of the population between 12 and 20 years of age received a secondary education. This contributed to an estimated 24% literacy rate for the population aged 5 years and older (Dillon, 2007). Educational opportunities remained significantly inequitable in Liberia, in spite of the increased growth of the Liberian economy that started in the mid-1950s (Lamptey, 1990).

Political instability. Tensions between the Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians heightened in the 1970s as a result of indigenous Liberians’ agitations for socio-economic, educational and political equality. The indigenous Liberians’ challenge to the ruling Americo-Liberian class was led by a few highly educated indigenous Liberians who had returned from advanced studies abroad. The backbone of what came to be known as a struggle for social and political justice was comprised mainly of students enrolled at the University of Liberia, the largest public institution of higher learning in Liberia, along with students from other educational institutions in Monrovia (Dillon, 2007; Williams, 2002).

Dillon (2007) argues that the struggle certainly contributed to the bloody coup that occurred on April 12, 1980. The coup, which was led by low-ranking soldiers of the Armed Forces of Liberia, ended 133 years of political domination by Americo-Liberians and ushered in a popular political change (Williams, 2002). President William R. Tolbert and 13 other prominent Americo-Liberian government officials were murdered during the coup. In many
ways, the coup was unfortunate. For example, President Tolbert had been working hard to unravel years of unequal distribution of wealth and educational opportunities in Liberia.

The coup also came as a result of President Tolbert’s moving away from “a 100% pro-American line in foreign policy and, in so doing, [earning] the antipathy of the CIA, which had its headquarters for the African continent in Monrovia” (Hyman, 2003, p. 21). Other U.S. government assets in Liberia included “two sophisticated communications facilities to handle diplomatic and intelligence traffic to and from Africa, to monitor radio and other broadcasts in the region”, as well as to relay “a powerful Voice of America signals throughout the continent” (p. 20). In addition, the United States Coast Guard in 1976 built an Omega navigational station in Liberia, one of eight around the world, for guiding and monitoring shipping traffic in the eastern Atlantic and along the west coast of Africa (Hyman, 2003).

During the Liberian military regime, U.S. aid to the country rose from $20 million in 1979 to about $95 million yearly, “for a total of between $402 and $500 million between 1981 and 1985, more than the country received during the entire previous century” (Hyman, 2003, p. 23). Despite this huge economic aid to the military regime, its leaders—all of whom came from indigenous backgrounds—failed to deliver on the reforms that the regime had promised. In fact, under the military junta, “mismanagement, corruption, and abuse of human rights became rampant at an unprecedented level” (Williams, 2002, p. 23). The leader of the military junta, Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, rigged the elections of 1985, which transformed him from a military leader to a civilian leader. Charles Taylor, who later became President, started a war in 1989 that killed President Doe in late 1990. Several warring factions emerged during the course of the armed hostilities, which finally ended in 2003 following numerous peace negotiations and transitional governments. The civil conflict heavily damaged Liberia’s human and physical
infrastructure. Taylor assumed the Presidency in 1996 and is considered one of the worst leaders in Liberian history (Hyman, 2003). In 2005, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected President of Liberia, making her the first female president ever to be elected in Africa.

**Education restoration challenge.** Enrollment in Liberian schools has been increasing since the end of the war. More than 2.26 million students are enrolled in preprimary, primary, junior high and senior high schools and accelerated education programs across the country. Of this number, the total public school enrollment is 736,957, consisting of 400,635 boys and 336,322 girls. There are 36,726 teachers in Liberia, of whom 19,017 are trained. The student/teacher ratio is 34/1, and the ratio of students to trained teachers is 63 to 1 (International Rescue Committee, 2002).

There are three teacher training institutes in Liberia: Kakata Rural Teacher Training Institute (KRTTI), Zorzor Rural Teacher Training Institute (RTTI) and Webbo Rural Teacher Training Institute (WRTTI). Unlike teachers, principals have no dedicated training institutes in Liberia. The International Rescue Committee summarizes the challenge in a 2002 post-conflict assessment report on education in Liberia: “Restoring an education system that is accessible to all and promotes peace, tolerance, and equality is a massive task for Liberia as it emerges from 14 years of intermittent civil war” (International Rescue Committee, p. iii).

**Organization of Thesis**

This first chapter has presented an introduction, including the statement and significance of the problem of practice, the research question, intellectual and practical goals and a background synopsis of Liberia’s history and education. The remainder of this chapter presents the theoretical framework that informed the design and analysis of the study. Chapter II presents the literature review that also informed the research question and the study in general. Chapter III
presents the research design and covers the methodological issues of participant selection, protection of human subjects, validity, limitations, data collection and analysis. Chapter IV reports the research findings. Chapter V discusses the findings and their implications for the effective preparation and support of public school principals in post-conflict Liberia, and national development in general. References and appendices appear at the end of the thesis.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study uses two complementary areas of research that can shed light on Liberia’s post-conflict educational environment, as well as the core leadership competencies that are required for effective principalship, both areas of investigation that can contribute to analysis of the findings.

**Education and conflict.** The first framework is comprised of the relationship between education and conflict, the topic of an emerging research field that has increasingly attracted the attention of education and development professionals worldwide (Paulson & Rappleye, 2007; World Bank, 2005). The relationship between conflict and education provides a context for understanding the complexities of education in post-war Liberia. Insight into the damage that conflict inflicts on education can foster a deeper understanding of the complex problems that plague public education in Liberia and a deeper appreciation of the importance of providing principals with leadership development and support.

The literature on conflict and education raises the important question of whether educational policy in a post-conflict context should aim at reconstructing the pre-conflict educational infrastructure or should aim to recreate it entirely. In education reconstruction, education actors attempt to rebuild destroyed school facilities, to address socio-psychological issues such as post-conflict trauma and to address economic and practical issues such as teacher
recruitment. Reconstruction has for many years been the thrust of World Bank intervention in war-ravaged countries (Paulson & Rappleye, 2007). In contrast, education recreation involves not only rebuilding damaged schools and providing support to educators; it also takes a deeper look at ways in which education may have contributed to the conflict and attempts to design curricula and programs that will prevent a recurrence of the conflict (Paulson, 2009; Paulson & Rappleye, 2007).

Leadership and development. The second conceptual framework that informs this study relates to leadership theories and leadership development. In the context of this study, principal leadership and development refers to the demands, roles and attributes of effective principals along with their leadership development. The main aim of principal leadership development is to ensure professional reflection and growth that will yield the best results with respect to principals’ responsibilities and that over time will serve to sustain their high performance in their communities (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003). Daresh and Playko (1992) view principal leadership development as a three-dimensional model consisting of pre-service preparation, induction and in-service education.

The demands and urgent need for principal leadership development provide a lens through which the leadership development needs of Liberian public school principals can be understood. Contemporary leadership development emphasizes the experience and practical knowledge that practitioners need to successfully assess their problems of practice and to effectively address them. Contemporary leadership theories encourage principals to integrate theory and experience in the process of analyzing their problems of practice and to develop a greater awareness of both the impact of their performance and the opportunities available for professional growth (Hugh, 1989; Kottkamp & Osterman, 1993). In addition to informing this
study’s research question and data collection, a combined understanding of the impact of conflict on education and of principal leadership development should create a new approach to understanding and appreciating the post-conflict leadership development challenges that face Liberian public school principals.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The literature review looks at previous research, literature, and policy documents that shed light on this study’s research question. The main goal of the literature review is to create a context for understanding the impact of conflict on education, the major strands of leadership and leadership development theories, and the importance of adequately preparing and providing ongoing professional training for public school principals.

Education and Conflict

The relationship between education and conflict is a growing area of interest to education scholars, practitioners and development professionals (Paulson & Rappleye, 2007; World Bank, 2005). An understanding of this relationship can provide important insights into common problems and issues that tend to affect post-conflict education environments like Liberia’s, as well as a framework for answering this study’s research question. More specifically, a better understanding of the conditions that characterize a post-conflict education landscape and the expected role of education can shed important light on the nature and complexity of the problems that Liberian public school principals face.

The part of the literature review that is directed at understanding the relationship between education and conflict is guided by the question, “What are the conditions and policy focus of education in a post-conflict country?” The objective is to investigate the impact of war on education and the role that education plays in the aftermath of armed conflict.

Davies (2005) describes the relationship between conflict and education as one of the most pressing contemporary global concerns. He observes, however, that this relationship—especially the part that concerns the role of education in the perpetuation and mitigation of conflict—is largely underemphasized and under-researched. Paulson and Rappleye (2007) and
Smith (2005) concur with Davies’ belief that the connection between education and conflict represents an increasingly important emerging field of study.

In their examination of UNESCO data from 1980 to 1997 concerning the effect of civil wars on education, Lai and Thyne (2007) found that civil wars are likely to lead to reduced educational expenditures and enrollments across all levels of schooling. The researchers found that civil wars can reduce government funding for education during and following the conflict through both direct and indirect costs associated with that conflict.

Direct costs include military spending and the cost of rebuilding a state’s destroyed infrastructure, including its school facilities. Indirect costs arising from the conflict include revenue losses such as a reduction in foreign investment and tourism and also the loss of human productivity that results from death and injury (Lai & Thyne, 2007).

Civil wars disrupt society by causing massive flights of refugees and by interrupting social programs such as education. Armed conflicts have caused over 16.2 million deaths during the last 50 years and have lasted over six years on average. The vast majority of armed conflicts take place in poor countries, where governments tend to devote as many resources as possible to military expenditures in order to prevent their collapse. Most war causalities tend to be civilians and these include students, parents and teachers (Lai & Thyne, 2007; Thyne, 2006).

A 2005 World Bank study supports the findings of Lai and Thyne (2007). In an extensive review of the literature, including a database of 52 countries affected by war since 1990 and a review of 12 country-specific studies, the World Bank found that the most obvious effects of war on education are loss of life and the physical and psychological trauma experienced by educators, students, parents, siblings and community members, either directly as targets of the conflict or indirectly as victims in the crossfire. A war’s aftereffects on the lives of
students, parents, teachers and members of the community last long after the violent conflict ends. This is partially attributable to artifacts of the war itself, including landmines, unexploded ordinance and widespread arms and ammunition that are readily available. Over the last decade, more than two million children have died as a direct consequence of armed conflict, and at least six million more have been seriously injured or permanently disabled (World Bank, 2005).

In the aftermath of the civil wars in Cambodia and Angola, some schools will not be used for decades because they are located in areas where the costs of demining are prohibitive, and whole villages have been declared as no-go areas. The carnage in Cambodia left the education system with almost no trained or experienced teachers. More than two-thirds of the teachers in Rwanda’s primary and secondary schools either were killed or fled during the country’s civil war (World Bank, 2005). Almost all secondary teachers in East Timor prior to its war of independence were Indonesians, and their failure to return after the war left East Timor with virtually no trained or qualified personnel for the secondary school system and no support for tertiary education. An estimated 95% of classrooms were either destroyed or seriously damaged during the Timorese war (World Bank, 2005).

With the 1989 outbreak of civil conflict in Liberia, “the Liberian educational system collapsed completely due to the political unrest, insecurity and lack of funding; large numbers of children did not have access to school” (International Rescue Committee, 2002, p. 7). A large number of schools were burned, looted or damaged. Existing schools are overcrowded and lacked basic materials such as blackboards, chalk, chairs, textbooks and the like. A similar report from UNICEF (Li, 2007) states that approximately 50% or more of Liberia’s schools were destroyed in the civil conflict that ravaged the country from 1989 to 2003. The quality of instruction in the schools remained poor, with 60% of the teachers untrained. A generation of
children lost their childhood in the conflict. Over 15,000 children were conscripted, kidnapped, pressured or duped into joining and fighting for one of the seven warring factions during the war. At the end of the conflict, the vast majority of students in the first grade were overage; some were as old as 20 years. About 150,000 persons died during the civil war, and over 700,000 inhabitants fled to other parts of the world as refugees. The war left 80% of Liberians living below the poverty line (Angucia, 2009; Doyle, 2004; International Rescue Committee, 2002; Li, 2007).

**Post-conflict role of education.** Education plays a critical role in post-conflict societies. As started earlier, there is an emerging research field that focuses on conflict and education. A key question in this field is whether a ravaged education system should be reconstructed in the post-conflict years or whether it should be recreated. Some education scholars advocate that the education system should be recreated in the aftermath of a conflict. In contrast, the World Bank has long placed an emphasis on post-conflict education reconstruction, focusing on reconstructing schools, developing curriculum, paying the salaries of educators, providing school supplies and ensuring access to education for girls (Paulson & Rappleye, 2007).

Smith (2005) concurs that the World Bank’s post-conflict priority for education has mainly been the reconstruction of physical infrastructure. But he indicates that the World Bank has reconsidered this emphasis and has shifted its focus from post-conflict reconstruction to conflict sensitivity that includes education about causes and prevention of conflict. Smith states that there is a growing recognition that reconstruction is “not simply about replacing the physical infrastructure of schools, but that it needs to include opportunities for rebuilding human relations and inclusive education systems” (pp. 384-385). This embrace of a multidimensional role for education in post-conflict settings is applauded by Paulson and Rappleye (2007), who propose
that education has a critical role to play in the wider reconstruction of a post-conflict society, a role that ranges from building peace to creating social cohesion to fostering economic development.

Paulson (2009) cautions that “to reconstruct the same educational system as existed prior to conflict may be to fail to respond to structures, policies, and teaching/learning processes that may have contributed to conflict” (p.5). She advocates that the role of education should be recreated in post-conflict contexts to become “education that strives … to transform pre-existing structures that may have contributed towards conflict and to enable meaningful participation” (p.5). Meaningful participation includes not only broadening access to education by affirming education as a human right, but also ensuring that the teaching and learning processes question, challenge and transform entrenched patterns of violence, conflict and inequality.

The post-conflict recreation of education should also be sensitive to gender, to experiences of violence, to poverty, to language, to displacement and to trauma (Paulson, 2009). Davies (2004) also disagrees with the idea that there should be a post-conflict reconstruction of education that restores the pre-conflict normalcy or status quo. Davies argues for a new normalcy that promotes peace education in schools, conflict resolution training for police and the army and in the schools, trauma counseling, legal education, media literacy, citizenship education and greater access for previously excluded or marginalized groups.

**Definition of Leadership**

The review of leadership development literature was guided by two overall questions: 1) “What is the nature of the dominant leadership theories”, and 2) “What are the expectations of effective principalship and what are the roles, qualities and leadership competencies that fulfill these expectations?” While the subject of leadership has been extensively researched, it remains
one of the most enigmatic terms in the literature on organizational theory (Nohria & Khurana, 2010; Short & Greer, 2002).

Lunenburg and Ornstein (1996) write that in a review of more than 1,000 leadership studies, Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus found more than 350 definitions of effective leadership that provide no single clear and definitive understanding of what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders. Another study found that 60% of the leadership studies conducted between 1910 and 1990 had no clearly stated definition of leadership and that researchers simply tended to assume that others shared their concept of leadership (Mendenhall, Osland, Bird, Oddou, & Maznevski, 2008). Noonan (2003) suggests that having a myriad of definitions for leadership is useful in that “defining leadership in many different ways can help you to understand leadership as a phenomenon” (p. 4).

Clawson (2006) defines leadership as managing one’s own energy first and then the energy of those who are being led. He suggests that when walking into an organization, it is possible to quickly tell what the energy level is and, as a result, what the quality of the leadership is in that organization. If the organizational energy level is low, the leadership is likely to be weak.

Daft (2008) claims that in all the ideas and studies about leadership, three concepts stand out: people, influence and goals. Daft views leadership as the ability to influence people to attain goals, and he emphasizes that leadership is reciprocal and is a people activity. Lunenburg and Ornstein (1996) similarly define leadership as influencing others to sublimate their self-interests and to adopt the goals of a group as their own; it is about building cohesive and goal-oriented teams.
Noonan (2003) argues that leadership lifts the human spirit, ensures the survival of human communities and promotes the adaptation of people to their environment. Leadership facilitates change and develops potential; it is about service and a visionary process oriented to achieve positive results; it is neither greedy, immoral, unethical nor diminishing but is rather active, caring, constructive, creative, playful and courageous (Noonan, 2003).

**Theories of Leadership**

To understand school leadership, it is important to have a grasp of leadership theories in general, because theories of school leadership have largely been derived from the general concept of leadership.

**Trait theory.** During the first half of the 20th century, research efforts to understand successful leadership were psychological in nature. There was a perceived need for a precise measurement of characteristics that distinguished leaders from non-leaders (Bratton, Grint, & Nelson, 2005; Nohria & Khurana, 2010; Short & Greer, 2002). This gave rise to the trait approach to understanding leadership, an approach that assumed that leaders were somehow different and possessed innate and unique personal qualities, abilities, skills and/or physical characteristics that others did not possess. It was assumed that these traits would explain why leaders can accomplish something (namely, leading) that non-leaders cannot (Bratton, Grint, & Nelson, 2005; Daft, 2008; Nohria & Khurana, 2010; Short & Greer, 2002). Because of the need to select potential officers during World War I and World War II, researchers pursued leadership trait studies and sought to find significant correlation between individuals’ traits and their success (Bratton, Grint & Nelson, 2005).

The unique personality characteristics that comprised the leadership trait paradigm included intelligence, honesty, self-confidence, determination, social competence, dependability,
cooperativeness, dominance, stress tolerance, eloquence, assertiveness, high energy and even appearance (Bratton, Grint, & Nelson, 2005; Daft, 2008; Nohria & Khurana, 2010). Trait theories are sometimes called “Great Man” theories, for two reasons. The first is that leadership was thought to be the exclusive province of males. Second, leadership conveyed a mythical, heroic sense of destiny, consistent with the assumption that leaders were born and not made (Daft, 2008; Nohria & Khurana, 2010).

The universality of leadership trait theory was challenged in the second half of the 20th century. Studies found that trait theories did little to explain why some people who possessed the unique qualities of the leadership trait paradigm did not emerge as leaders, that is, why possession of a given set of traits did not guarantee success in leadership. As a consequence, scholarly attention began to shift from the traits of leaders to the behaviors of leaders (Bratton, Grint & Nelson, 2005; Nohria & Khurana, 2010).

Behavior theory. As a result of the inability of the trait theory to satisfactorily define effective leadership, leadership research shifted its focus to the interactions of leaders with their subordinates. Behavior theory research began in the 1950s, eliciting hundreds of studies. Two of the most significant studies were conducted at Ohio State University and the University of Michigan. These studies identified two behaviors that are important for leadership. The Ohio State studies identified the two behaviors as “initiating structure or task-oriented” and “consideration or people-oriented” behaviors (Mendenhall et al., 2008).

Task-oriented or initiating structure leadership behavior concerns the degree to which the leader initiates activity within the group, organizes the activity and defines the approach to doing the work. Task-oriented behavior involves, among other activities, maintaining performance standards, meeting deadlines, making decisions about job assignments, establishing
communication and organizing work. Consideration or people-oriented leadership behavior concerns the extent to which a leader shows concern for the welfare of his or her subordinates. People-oriented behaviors include expressing appreciation for performance, focusing on the job satisfaction of workers, paying attention to workers’ self-esteem levels, making workers feel comfortable and important and listening to and valuing workers’ suggestions and ideas (Mendenhall et al., 2008). The Ohio State studies suggest that the most effective leaders are those who rate highly on both the task-oriented and people-oriented dimensions (Daft, 2008).

The Michigan studies compared the behavior of effective and ineffective supervisors. The most effective supervisors were found to be those who built effective workgroups by concentrating on the human needs of their subordinates and setting high performance goals. The Michigan researchers used the term “employee-centered leaders” to describe leaders who set high performance goals and who exhibited supportive behavior toward subordinates. The Michigan research also found that the less effective leaders, which it called “job-centered leaders”, tended to be less concerned with goal achievement and human needs than with meeting schedules, cutting costs and maximizing production efficiency (Daft, 2008).

Nohria and Khurana (2010) explain that the behavior approach to leadership studies has its origins in the 1930s work of Lewin, Lippitt and White, who outlined three basic leadership styles: autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire. Like the trait studies, the large body of behavioral research—in spite of its promise—did not identify a particular leadership style that was universally effective. A style that was effective in one context was not always effective in another. Leadership scholars therefore began to search for more situation-specific theories of leadership (Nohria & Khurana, 2010).
Contingency theories. Unlike the trait and behavioral theories, contingency theories explicitly assume that leadership varies across contexts and situations and that there may not be a universal formula for leadership effectiveness (Nohria & Khurana, 2010). While recognizing the importance of the traits and behavioral characteristics of leaders, contingency theory scholars have been interested in determining the impact of contextual variables on leadership outcomes (Mendenhall et al., 2008).

Contingency theories focus on aspects of the context such as the favorableness of the environment for the leaders, the relative complexity of the task, the followers’ level of readiness and the relationship between leaders and followers (Mendenhall et al., 2008). Some of the most important contingency theories are the Least Preferred Coworker model, the Path-Goal Theory of leadership, Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership Theory and the Leader Substitute Theory (Mendenhall et al., 2008).

Least preferred coworker model. The Least Preferred Coworker (LPC) leadership model was developed by Fred Fiedler, who is widely respected as the father of contingency theories of leadership. The LPC model suggests that three situational variables are critical to determining leadership effectiveness: the leader’s personal relations with the members of his or her group, the degree of structure in the task that the group has to perform and the level of power and authority that is available to the leader. The LPC model assumes that the most favorable situation for effective leadership is one in which the leader has good relations with his or her followers, has strong power in his or her position and has a well-defined and well-coordinated job or task structure in place (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2000).

Conversely, the most unfavorable situation for effective leadership is when the leader is disliked, has little power in his or her position and faces an unstructured task. Fiedler
subsequently reevaluated his leadership model and limited it to two situational variables that impact leadership effectiveness: the quality of a leader’s relationship with his or her followers and the structure and coordination of the task (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2000).

**Path-goal theory.** The Path-Goal theory has its origins in the Ohio State Studies. This theory is called “path-goal” because it focuses on how a leader influences his or her followers’ perceptions of their work goals, their personal goals and their paths to attaining those goals. Path-Goal theory holds that a leader’s behavior is motivating or satisfying to the extent that the behavior increases the followers’ goal accomplishments and clarifies the path to these goals (Hersey et al., 2000).

According to the Path-Goal theory, leaders do their best when they provide what is missing in a given leadership situation. For example, if clarification is missing, the leader should provide structure, and if intrinsic or extrinsic rewards are missing, the leader should provide rewards. Similarly, if an employee is not meeting performance expectations in an ambiguous job, then a directive from the leader spelling out or clarifying work methods, procedures and objectives may lead to greater employee effort, increased satisfaction and improved job performance. The Path-Goal theory presents an excellent example of the need to analyze a situation before attempting a leadership intervention (Hersey et al., 2000).

**Hersey and Blanchard situational theory.** The Hersey and Blanchard Situational theory focuses attention on the characteristics of followers in determining the correct leadership behavior. This theory proposes that subordinates vary in readiness levels, and that people who are low in task readiness, due to weak ability, inadequate training or insecurity, require a different leadership style than do those whose levels of readiness are high and who possess strong ability, skills, confidence and willingness to work (Daft, 2008).
The Situational theory assumes that leaders can adopt one of four leadership styles to address their followers’ levels of readiness. The four styles, which are based on a combination of a high or low degree of people orientation and a high or low degree of task orientation, are telling, selling, participating and delegating. The telling style shows a high concern for tasks and a low concern for people and relationships, and involves giving explicit directives about how tasks should be carried out (Draft, 2008).

The selling style reflects a high concern for both tasks and people. This approach allows the leader to explain decisions and gives subordinates a chance to ask questions to clarify and understand their work tasks. The participating leadership style involves a combination of high concern for followers and relationships and low concern for production tasks. With this style, the leader shares ideas with subordinates, gives them a chance to participate and facilitates decision making. The fourth style, the delegating style, shows a low concern for both relationships and tasks. The leader who adopts this style provides little direction and support because he or she turns over responsibility for decisions and their implementation to subordinates (Draft, 2008).

**Recent leadership theories.** Several additional leadership theories have been postulated in the organizational behavior literature in recent years. In important ways, these recent theories have built upon and contributed to the earlier advances of trait, behavior and contingency theories. Newer leadership theories treat leadership as a process of change and regard the leader as a primary catalyst of change (Nohria & Khurana, 2010). According to Hallinger (2003), “over the past two decades, debate over the most suitable leadership role for principals has been dominated by two conceptual models: instructional leadership and transformational leadership” (p. 329).
**Instructional leadership model.** The instructional leadership model emerged from research on effective schools during the 1980s. With an emphasis on curriculum development and supervision, the instructional leadership model led most international thinking in the 1980s and early 1990s as the best approach to effectively leading schools and improving the learning outcomes of students (Hallinger, 2003). Principals with instructional leadership styles exhibit behaviors that affect classroom practice, including framing school goals, maintaining high visibility, supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring student progress. The instructional leadership model was the model of choice at most principals’ leadership academies in the United States during the 1980s (Bush, 2003; Hallinger, 2003; Ylimaki, 2007).

In short, the instructional leadership model emphasizes three construct, namely, defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional program and promoting a positive school-learning climate. The instructional leadership model shaped much of the thinking internationally regarding effective principalship in the 1980s and early 1990s.

**Transformation leadership model.** The transformational leadership model originated in the 1970s, but it found a receptive audience in the education community in the 1990s as part of a general reaction against the instructional model. The instructional leadership model was criticized as being too directive, too principal-centered and largely deaf to the voices of teachers and parents as school leaders (Hallinger, 2003; Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006).

In light of these criticisms, as schools in the United States were being restructured in the 1990s, scholars and practitioners began to popularize concepts such as shared leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership and transformational leadership (Hallinger, 2003; Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006).
Transformational school leaders inspire and excite followers to high levels of performance and empower their followers to achieve extraordinary results (Hallinger, 2003; Nohria & Khurana, 2010; Ylimaki, 2007). The transformational principal is not expected to provide the sole leadership that creates a robust and successful school environment. The transformational principal emphasizes individual support, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards, high expectation and modeling (Hallinger, 2003; Ylimaki, 2007). For the most part, however, the suitability or effectiveness of both instructional principals and transformational principals has been linked to factors in the external environment and the local context of their schools (Hallinger, 2003).

As a further distinction, instructional leadership has been described by some scholars as a directive, top-down approach that emphasizes the principal’s coordination and control of instruction, whereas the transformational leadership, is often regarded as a type of shared or distributed leadership in which principal focuses on stimulating change through bottom-up participation (Ylimaki, 2007; Hallinger, 2003).

**Expectations of the Principal**

Rammer (2007) indicates that as a result of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), public school principals in the United States have come under increased pressure and have been made more accountable for higher student achievement. The NCLB legislation increased testing requirements, mandating annual assessments in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and in grade 10, and required schools to satisfy a defined set of adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements regarding student achievement. Failing schools face interventions that can include severe sanctions (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008). One of the consequences that a school may
face if it fails to meet NCLB student achievement standards is the removal of the school’s principal (Rammer, 2007).

Habegger (2008) notes that the job description for a school principal cannot adequately be captured in a 1,000-word essay, given that today’s principal is constantly multitasking and must be able to shift roles at a moment’s notice. Today’s principals juggle with competing tasks on a daily basis in an effort to satisfy demands from both internal and external stakeholders (Catano & Stronge, 2007). A study in 2000 of a well-run 250-school district in England found that 40% of the principals and deputy principals who had visited their doctors in the previous year had stress-related problems, and 30% were taking medication. In a similar study, 90% of the 137 principals and vice principals in Toronto, Canada reported increased demands on their time, new programs and a large number of priorities and directives from their boards and the Ministry of Education (Fullan, 2007).

In their research on evaluation of principals, Catano and Stronge (2007) found complex and often competing standards of performance for principals in the United States. They note, for example, that the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) develops annual standards for school leaders, while the Virginia Standards of Accreditation establishes additional state-level performance standards. Local school districts also prescribe evaluation instruments for standardizing the work of principals.

The Role of the Principal

To understand the role of the principal as presented in the literature, several topics will be discussed in relationship to expected role and responsibility of principals, including the role of the principal regarding school culture, schools’ mission, instructional program, learning climate,
school management, and communication. The expectations and role of principals across nations will also be reviewed.

**School culture.** To understand the role of the principal in creating a successful learning environment, Habegger (2008) studied principals at three high-performing schools that are low on the socio-economic scale, a characteristic shared by most urban and rural school districts in the United States and in most parts of the world. The three principals played the important roles of creating positive school cultures with each individual feeling a sense of comfort and importance, aligning instruction to state academic content standards, ensuring continuous improvements in their school buildings, designing instruction for student success and developing partnerships with parents and the community. Overall, Habegger found that the three principals created a culture that empowered and installed confidence in teachers, they solicited professional dialogue and research, they valued their students and teachers and they involved students’ parents and community members in enhancing the effectiveness of their schools.

While all roles of a school principal are important, creating a positive school culture is imperative because it is the underlying reason why other aspects of a successful school work well (Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouckenooghe, & Aelterman, 2008; Habegger, 2008). Fullan (2007) argues that for schools to be effective, the best standards of practice and reform efforts must be evident in even the daily organization and culture of schools.

**School mission, instructional program and learning climate.** Citing the work of Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Dufour, Dufour, and Eaker (2008) describe a three-leadership-dimensional role of the principal. The first role is to define the mission of the school. This involves framing the goals of the school and effectively communicating them. The second role is concerned with managing the instructional program. In this role, the principal supervises and
evaluates instruction, coordinates the curriculum and monitors student progress. The third role
of the principal is to promote a positive learning climate. This role promotes instructional time
and professional development, maintains high visibility, provides incentives for teachers,
enforces academic standards and provides incentives for students.

In another study that largely reflects the three-leadership-dimensional role of the
principal, Leithwood, Anderson, Louis, and Wahlstrom (2004) propose that the role of the
principal includes 1) setting directions, 2) developing people and 3) redesigning the organization.
Setting directions for the school accounts for the largest proportion of a principal’s impact; it
involves developing a shared vision, using goals to motivate people and helping them to make
sense of their work, monitoring organizational performance and promoting effective
communication. In his or her developmental role, the principal provides intellectual stimulation
and support that will enable teachers and others in the system to succeed. Redesigning the
organization entails creating and supporting a climate and culture that enhance collaboration,
teaching and learning.

**Instruction management, internal relations, organization management, administration and external relations.** According to a study of the National Center for
Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER) titled *Triangulating Principal
Effectiveness: How Perspectives of Parents, Teachers, and Assistant Principals Identify the
Central Importance of Managerial Skills*, a principal performs the duties of instruction
management, internal relations, organization management, administration and external relations.
Instruction management includes tasks that the principal executes to promote, support and
improve the implementation of curricular programs in classrooms. Under internal relations, the
principal must be able to build strong interpersonal relationships within the school.
Organizational management involves the principal’s taking active and direct responsibility throughout the year for satisfying the school’s medium- and long-term goals. The administrative role of the principal focuses on routine administrative functions for compliance with state or federal regulations. Under external relations, the principal must work with stakeholders in the community (Bagin, Gallagher & Moore, 2008).

**Interstate school leaders’ licensure consortium standards.** In 1996 The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), a program of the Council of Chief State School Officers, decreed a set of standards to be implemented by school leaders in order to ensure the success of all students. The standards include developing a vision of shared learning and supported by the school community, advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and professional growth, ensuring effective and efficient management of the learning environment, responding to diverse community interests and needs and mobilizing community resources, acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner and understanding and responding to the larger political, social, economic and cultural context (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008).

**Professional learning community.** The idea of a Professional Learning Community (PLC), a strategy for creating high-performance schools and ensuring greater student achievement which was discussed mainly among educational researchers prior to 1998, has gained enormous traction among educators in the United States (Dufour et al., 2008). A PLC is a community of “educators committed to working collectively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (Dufour et al., 2008, p. 14). A PLC has six major characteristics, and the principal plays a pivotal role in creating and sustaining each of these: 1) a shared mission, vision and collective commitment; 2)
a collective culture focused on learning; 3) collective inquiry into best practice and current reality; 4) an action-oriented attitude among educators; 5) a commitment to continuous improvement; and 6) a results-oriented mindset.

Dufour et al. (2008) suggest three fundamental skills that principals should embrace and that will help them create meaningful and manageable conceptual frameworks for addressing the challenges of their responsibilities. These skills are: 1) being clear about his or her primary responsibility; 2) dispersing leadership throughout the school; and 3) bringing coherence to the difficulties of schooling through the alignment of the structure and culture of the school with its core purpose.

In a review of the book *School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results* written by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, Uitto (2006) notes that some of a principal’s duties that are relevant to the principal’s leadership are: 1) being an agent of change who challenges current practices; 2) having knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment in order to provide hands-on support to teachers; 3) inspiring others to innovate and to be aware of current educational theories and practices and monitoring and evaluating to provide feedback on the effectiveness of curricular, instructional and assessment practices; 4) adapting leadership style to current situations; and 5) sharing beliefs about school teaching and learning and modeling behaviors that mirror those beliefs.

**Principalship in developing nations.** There is obviously a huge contextual variation in the roles of, constraints on and realities facing principals in developing nations. Although there is no single profile of school principalship in developing countries, studies have uncovered some common characteristics, including limited autonomy, autocratic leadership style, summative evaluation, low degree of change initiation and lack of instructional leadership (Oplatka, 2004).
Despite recent trends toward decentralization in some countries, the Ministry of Education in many developing countries remains responsible for a host of educational decisions, policies and programs, such as the design of a unified national curriculum, syllabus and examinations, regulations concerning materials and guides and funding and staffing decisions, including the recruitment and selection of educators and staff development. Such a highly centralized system tends to limit the role of the principal to a primarily administrative function, lacking a need for innovative and proactive management and inclining the principal to employ an autocratic rather than participative leadership style (Oplatka, 2004).

Oplatka (2004) points out that principals in developing countries, particularly in Africa, are preoccupied with satisfying basic needs and functions that most principals in Western nations have probably never thought to include in their role definition. Oplatka notes that in Ghana, for example, a principal may physically mend a leaking roof or a broken water pipe in the school building. In some developing countries, including Kenya, South Africa, Botswana and Ghana, the principal engages in fund raising to provide needed support for the school, because continuing economic crises constrain the government from providing adequate funding for education. While a major role of the principal in Western societies during the 1990s was that of an innovator who initiates school change, “the place given to change initiation and implementation in [some] developing countries and the effects of principals on the process of school improvement are relatively minor” (Oplatka, 2004, p. 436).

Attributes and Competencies of the Principal

In a study of the demands placed on the contemporary principal, Botha (2004) proposes that effective school principals should possess the following key qualities: reflectiveness, vision, commitment and courage and power and the ability to empower. Reflectiveness involves
reminiscent thinking or focused review in which the principal seeks to identify causes and effects, learn new methods and apply what has been learned. Vision involves charting the course of where the school might be going or what it wants to achieve. With respect to commitment and courage, a principal should be willing to stand up for the things that are genuinely important in education. A principal’s power and ability to empower should be used to create an environment where people feel that they are valued and a part of the action and know that their input counts.

Another study, which was conducted at six highly impoverished but nevertheless successful schools in South Africa, suggests that compassion, commitment and support are qualities that effective principals would need for attaining higher school performance and student achievement. Compassion includes identification with the poor’s struggle to survive, respect for human dignity and personal interest in the school’s individual students, teachers and parents. Compassion enables a principal to see each member of the educational community as a person and not a mere number (Kamper, 2008).

A principal embodies commitment through self-discipline, punctuality, neat appearance, energy, visibility, optimism, bravery and resilience and involvement in teaching some classes. A principal’s support includes facilitating teaching and learning, identifying and acquiring resources for the school, meticulously and individually monitoring student progress, taking immediate action to correct problems and ensuring that teachers are equipped for their tasks (Kamper, 2008).

Through extensive research on leadership, Kouzes and Posner (2007) have identified five practices that they call “personal-best” practices (p. 14). The practices are to 1) model the way, 2) inspire a shared vision, 3) challenge the process, 4) enable others to act and 5) encourage the
heart. These practices are arguably applicable to principal leadership. Concerning the first practice, exemplary leaders model the way because they know that if they want to encourage commitment and achieve the highest standards, it is essential that they model the behavior they expect of others. A leader’s words must match his or her deeds. Regarding the second practice, in which an effective leader inspires a shared vision, believes strongly in a dream and enlists others in the common vision, the leader needs to have intimate knowledge of others’ dreams, hopes, aspirations, visions and values (Kouzes and Posner, 2007).

The third personal-best practice of an effective leader propels him or her to challenge the process or the status quo. The leader must be willing to step into the unknown to find opportunities for innovating, growing and improving, because the leader is aware that innovation and change involve experimentation and risk-taking. Enabling followers to act, the fourth practice of an effective leader, involves taking actions aimed at common goals: team building, collaboration, trust building, capacity building, and leadership and decision-making sharing. Finally, exemplary leaders encourage the hearts of their followers by motivating and inspiring them when they are exhausted, frustrated or disenchanted (Kouzes and Posner, 2007).

Bennis and Goldsmith (2003) propose ambition, competence and integrity as qualities of exemplary leaders. They refer to the three qualities as “the three-legged stool on which true leadership sits” (p. 2), arguing that ambition is counterbalanced by competence and integrity and that this equation must remain in balance if the leader is to remain a constructive influence. An imbalance in this triad, coupled with “a formidable combination of ambition and competence”, can “create or support a self-serving leader who places personal power above vision, self-interest before the good of the whole” (p. 2).
Leadership Development through Competency Models

Competencies are defined as the knowledge, skills, abilities and behavior that are necessary for effective job performance and achievement of organizational results (Mansfield, 1996; Mestry & Grobler, 2003). Chung-Herrera, Enz, and Lankau (2003) state: “Designed to help an organization meet its strategic objectives through building human-resource capability, competency modeling has been in existence since the 1970s” (pp. 17-18). David McClelland created the first competency models in 1970s. They gained popularity in the late 1980s and remain in use today. Most competency models cast leadership traits and characteristics in terms of behavior because behavior is their observable manifestation (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003).

Competencies are essential for inclusion in a model when they distinguish superior performers from poor performers. Competencies are the underlying factors that enable managers to perform their jobs better in more situations, more often and with better results and are therefore considered to be the factors that differentiate the best from the rest (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Mestry & Grobler, 2003).

Mestry and Grobler (2003), for example, match the following tasks with the corresponding principal competencies: managing people (task) is matched with sensitivity, motivating and evaluating (competencies); planning examinations (task) is matched with analyzing, directional leadership and coordinating (competencies); and managing the political environment (task) is matched with political ability, persuading and negotiating (competencies).

A well-developed competency model can be used to guide or enhance human resource recruitment and selection activities, training and development, performance appraisal, coaching, counseling and mentoring, reward systems, career development, succession planning and change management (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Markus, Cooper-Thomas, & Allpress, 2005).
Developing a Competency Model

Zwell (2000) suggests that there is no one correct way to construct competency models. He notes that the process can be a relatively simple undertaking or it can take years and cost millions of dollars. He adds that the way in which a competency model is developed depends on the nature of the organization and the following considerations: 1) the practices or purpose of the model; 2) the financial and human resources available; 3) persons to be included in the process of developing and endorsing the applications; and 4) who is to be included in the implementation process.

The development of a competency model can involve researching the competencies possessed by successful and/or exceptional practitioners who achieve organizational goals. It might be politically expedient to involve a prestigious consulting firm in the competency modeling process in order to establish credibility with a critical constituency. Sometimes the best approach is to use the least expensive process for competency modeling because of resource constraints (Sinnott, Madison & Pataki, 2002; Zwell, 2000).

Some New York State agencies use the following approach to develop competency models: 1) identify the purpose of the competency model; 2) develop a list of potential competencies from a menu of competencies drawn from private and/or public sources; 3) determine which competencies apply to your purpose through the use of focus groups, surveys or interviews; and 4) decide whether you will engage a consultant or do the modeling on your own (Sinnott et al., 2002).

No matter which method is used for developing a competency model, the effectiveness of the model depends on how well the competencies are measured. The most common measuring approach is the school grading system, where 5 means outstanding, 4 means exceeds
expectations, 3 means meets expectations, 2 means below expectations and 1 means far below expectations. Another method of measurement uses the behaviorally anchored rating scales, in which each rated level is defined by specific and observable behaviors. Yet another approach to competency measurement is to define levels of proficiency in competencies in terms of a set of behaviors expected for each grade or rank level (Zwell, 2000).

**Leadership Development of Principals**

Societal pressures resulting from technology, demographic shifts, redefinitions of the family, testing and accountability requirements, decentralization and site-based management, rapid economic changes, violence and various public policy mandates have combined to create a web of conflicting demands and expectations for school principals. Principals are expected to build team relationships among staff members, acquire and allocate resources, promote teacher development, improve the performance of students on standardized tests and build effective relations with the relevant stakeholders. To succeed in these tasks, principals need to undergo continuous professional development (Fenwick & Pierce, 2002).

Guskey and Huberman (1995) claim that never before in education has there been a greater recognition of the need for ongoing professional development programs to ensure school improvement. Despite this recognition and the link that has been demonstrated between quality leadership and the overall effectiveness of schools and districts, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the professional development of principals (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003; Daresh & Playko, 1992; Mann, 1998). The Policy Forum on Education Leadership reports that only 25% of today’s principals are prepared to be effective instructional leaders (Barnett, 2004).

Hale and Moorman (2003) point out that leadership preparation programs are not providing the needed training for public school principals. Mathibe (2007) suggests that
principals should be exposed to professional development programs in order to “ensure that schools are managed and led by appropriately qualified principals” (p. 523). Referring to professional development as oxygen for principals, Mathibe argues that the goal of quality in education requires principals to be up-to-date with developments in their fields.

In a study of the leadership proficiencies of principals in Ghana, the study by Hope, Respress, and Zame (2008) found that heads of public schools in Ghana lacked adequate leadership qualifications, a situation they attributed to the absence of school leadership preparation programs. Zame et al. (2008) recommend that Ghana education authorities ensure that public school principals undergo adequate professional development to enhance their knowledge, skills and dispositions for effective principalship.

A similar study by Onguko, Abdalla and Webber (2008) reports that educational institutions in Kenya and Tanzania lacked the capabilities to prepare new principals or to offer ongoing professional development support. Principals tend to be promoted without specific preparation, receive little or no induction, have limited access to suitable in-service training and enjoy little support from the educational bureaucracy. Given the significant leadership role of principals, Onguko et al. recommend that educational policy makers should establish more institutions that can properly prepare principals and provide them with ongoing professional development support.

**Meaning of Professional Development**

Professional development is an elusive term and means different things to different people. Some people use the term to refer to in-service training and workshops, while others understand it as a process in which educators work under supervision to gain tenure or to enhance their professional practice. Yet others define professional development as an ongoing
learning process in which educators engage voluntarily to learn how best to adjust their teaching to the learning needs of their students (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003).

In addition, the term professional development has been applied to enrollment in formal courses and programs in professional education and to the formal and informal development of professional skills that occur in the workplace. Formal professional education courses and programs may be designed for inexperienced people seeking entry into a particular profession or for experienced professionals who desire some form of continuing education outside their usual place of work (Dall’Alba & Sandberg, 2006).

Professional development in the workplace may be organized through structured activities or as courses aimed at enhancing professional skills, keeping a group of professionals up-to-date and/or supporting organizational change. When professional development occurs informally, it tends to form part of the day-to-day work of the professionals concerned—a kind of on-the-job learning (Dall’Alba & Sandberg, 2006).

Harper (2008) agrees that professional development applies to professional experiences that include learning opportunities found in collegial conversations, coaching episodes, shared decision-making groups, reflective journals, parent forums and the like. Fullan (2007) suggests that a profession is not created by certificates and licensures, but rather by the existence of a substantive professional knowledge base and by the genuine desire of the profession’s members to improve that knowledge base and their practice through professional development and related.

This is consistent with Collins’s (1998) conception that professional development is about change, a change in what you know and believe about teaching and learning and you can do to improve classroom and school performance.
Generally, professional development is not, and should not be seen as, a one-shot, one-size-fits-all event (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003). Rather, Diaz-Maggioli suggests, professional development is an evolving process of professional self-disclosure, reflection and growth that yields the best results with respect to job-embedded responsibilities and that is sustained over time.

**Professional Development Models**

Three major philosophical perspectives have greatly influenced professional development and educational leadership in the United States since the end of civil war, up to around 1920, when the nation witnessed a tremendous growth in formal educational system. Individual schools became larger and more complex, and the role of the principal was born in many school districts, as it was recognized that the management of a school was more difficult and time-consuming than previously thought (Daresh & Playko, 1992; Draft, 2010).

The scientific approach to administration influenced school leadership and pedagogies in the early 1900. Proponents of this school of thought such as Frederick Taylor focused largely on improving organizational efficiency. The scientific approach to school leadership assumes that certain aspects of organizational life were so predictable that specific laws could be made to guide behavior in almost every circumstance, and that education outcomes are also highly predictable (Daresh & Playko, 1992; Draft, 2010).

The scientific orientation strongly suggests that there is a single right way of doing things in education, and once that path is identified, it is the responsibility of the principal to pursue it. Professional development under the scientific perspective involves a great deal of one-way communication from those who possess the scientific facts of how to run schools to the principals (Daresh & Playko, 1992).
Spark and Hirsh (1997) hope that “soon to be gone forever...are the days when educators...sit relatively passively while an ‘expert’ exposes them to new ideas or ‘trains’ them in new practices” and that the “success of the effort is judged by a ‘happiness quotient’ that measures participants’ satisfaction with the experience and the off-the-cuff assessment regarding its usefulness” (p. 1).

From approximately 1920 to 1960, the human relations movement emerged as reaction to the scientific approach to school administration. While the emphasis of the scientific approach was on organizational efficiency and interests, the human relations perspective placed premium on developing school personnel and satisfying their personal interests. The human relations approach assumes that addressing the professional and personal needs of school personnel, and the improvement of the psychosocial climate of the school, as opposed to only focusing on organizational interests and outcomes, produce happy and productive workers, and better promote educational outcomes. Professional development programs under the human relations perspective would focus on promoting group process and individual skills in dealing with people issues, and the psychological health and welfare of school principals ((Daresh & Playko, 1992; Draft, 2010).

Human Resource Development is the third educational professional development perspective, which represents the predominant perspective on organizations today. The basic assumption of this perspective is that the most important activity of an administrator is to assist school personnel become as skillful and effective as possible. This assumption holds further that the most important concern of the school leader is the improvement of organizational effectiveness, and that happy employees are productive employees if they work in a productive place (Daresh & Playko, 1992; Draft, 2010).
The human resource development perspective influences professional development by its emphasis on helping future education leaders to develop a personalized vision of organizational effectiveness, learn how to work effectively with staff in developing a shared vision of school effectiveness and productivity, and create opportunities for experienced school leaders to enhance skills needed to communicate with staff, or involve teachers and others more productively in decision making relative to management and goals (Daresh & Playko, 1992; Draft, 2010).

Daresh & Playko (1992) suggest that individuals representing the scientific, human relations and human resource perspectives are in “leadership positions in schools” today and caution that “professional development available to people who espouse these various perspectives need to be designed so that leaders can be prepared effectively for future positions…and given ongoing support…to serve the needs of students” (pp. 11-12).

Fenwick and Pierce (2002) have also described three models of professional development for principals. Their first model is called the traditional model, which is essentially reflective of Daresh and Playko’s (1992) scientific approach to management. The traditional model of professional development acquaints principals with the research base on management and behavioral sciences. This exposure is usually done in the form of a university program, in-service academy, workshop or seminar setting, where the learning activities are institutionally defined, and generally not tailored toward the specific learning needs of the principal or his/her specific school context. The principal becomes a passive recipient of knowledge in the traditional professional development setting (Fenwick and Pierce, 2002).

In their criticism of workshops, which are an integral part of the traditional professional development approach articulated by Daresh & Playko (1992) and Fenwick and Pierce (2002).
Evans and Mohr (1999) point out that participants often remember the workshops as stimulating and productive and assured that their effectiveness will improve almost immediately as a consequent of their attendance. However, the workshop experience, too often, seems to fade surprisingly quickly. Evans and Mohr argue that teaching principals school leadership by giving them predigested training hardly leads to new thinking about leadership, teaching or learning.

Fenwick and Pierce’s (2002) second professional development model is the craft model. This model regards the principal as a recipient of knowledge from experienced administrators, whom he or she shadows in internship and field experiences. The objective of the shadowing is for the principal-observer to observe how another principal interacts with school personnel and the public, and handles issues and crises. In the craft model, the basis of knowledge is the practical wisdom of experienced practitioners and the learning context is a real school setting.

The third model is reflective inquiry approach, which encourages principals to generate knowledge through a process of systematic inquiry. Principals are active participants in their learning processes, and the source of knowledge is in self-reflection and engagement (Fenwick and Pierce, 2002). Widely recognized a pioneer in the articulation of the concept of reflective practice in the 1909 and 1933, John Dewey views reflective thinking as active, persistent and careful evaluation of any belief or supposed form of knowledge, and that learning improves when it arises out of the process of reflection. Dewey believes that a moral person would treat professional actions as experimental and reflect on the actions and their consequences (Clift, Houston, & Pugach, 1990; Dillon, 2007).

Donald Schon, a leading proponent of reflective practice whose *Reflective Practitioner* struck the consciousness of educators in 1983 and 1986, argues that society has placed heavy emphasis on technical knowledge, which has led to the undervaluing of the practical knowledge
of knowing-in-action that is critical to the work of practitioners. Reflective practice allows practitioners to periodically step back to ponder their own actions and those of others. It helps educators to continually explore and question their assumptions and beliefs in order to improve their practice (Huge, 1989; Shannon & Bylsma, 2007; Ferraro, 2000; Barnett & Mahony, 2006).

Mentoring, networking, reflective reading and journaling are crucial professional development approaches that fall under the reflective practice model (Fenwick and Pierce, 2002). Mentoring is an arrangement in which a professional colleague and critical friend helps the principal to understand the professional norms and job expectations, and provide advice about challenges and career growth. Mentors are traditionally regarded as individuals with advanced experience, knowledge, wisdom, skills and influence who provide support to and promote the career development of their protégés through a collaborative relationship (D’Abate & Eddy, 2008).

Over half of the United States’ states require that all beginning principals receive at least one year of mentor support when they assume the principalship (Daresh, 2002), as cited in Fenwick and Pierce, 2002). Bloom, Castagna and Warren (2003), however, argue that the mentoring that most principals receive is problematic because the mentors usually come from the same districts as the beginning principals, which make it difficult to share confidences.

Networking links principals for the purpose of sharing concerns and effective practices on an ongoing basis. This professional development strategy is based on the belief that collegial support is critical to effective leadership. Networking tends to be informal arrangements in which principals seek out colleagues who share similar concerns and potential solutions to problems. True networking, rather than being periodic social gatherings, involves regular engagements and
planned activities by principals aimed at enhancing collective professional development (Fenwick and Pierce, 2002).

While mentors are typically senior organizational insiders in job- alike positions, most effective coaches are generally outsiders, who have leadership coaching as their primary work. Reading and journaling go hand in hand as fundamental practices in reflective practice. Principals read professional literature, as well as novels, plays and poetry. The assumption underpinning this practice is that reading enlightens principals about the human condition, leadership, teaching and learning (Fenwick and Pierce, 2002).

Additionally, principals are encouraged to engage on reflection through journaling, which is the recording of personal reflections about professional challenges, successes and failures. Principals can share their journal reflections and obtain feedback from colleagues and mentors or coaches, thereby encouraging further reflection that shape future action plan (Fenwick and Pierce, 2002).

Macione (2009) and Zimmerman and May (2003) indicate that effective professional development involves learners in genuine experiences, builds upon a sustained and collaborative strategy, adapts to the needs of each learners, and incorporates school-based, job-embedded experiences.

Several factors tend to inhabit the professional development of principals. The factors include time constraint, principals’ dissatisfaction with the utility of in-service and university course work, principals’ perception that it’s unethical to use public funds for their learning, principals’ thinking that publicly engaging in learning they reveal themselves as flawed, and the tendency of the moral order of schools to place principals in authority as knowers, and not learners (Barth, 2006; Barth, 2007).
In a study of factors affecting the professional development of Ohio principals, the overwhelming majority of 237 principals responded that the two most dominant inhibitors to professional development were the lack of money and time (Zimmerman & May, 2003).

**Leadership Development and Cultural Context**

Interest in the development of education leadership is global. Professional development programs for school leadership are implemented in various ways, often depending on cultural differences. For this reason, it would be ill-advised to conceive of professional development programs as having uniform content and methodology across the world (Athanasoula-Reppa & Lazaridou, 2008; Walker & Dimmock, 2006).

Cowie and Crawford (2007) concur with this point, writing that while there is consensus about the important roles of principals and the need for their professional development, there are often considerable philosophical and political disagreements about the set of skills that effective principals require and about the quality, evaluation and requirements of professional leadership development programs.

Despite the differences across countries regarding professional development programs, an international 15-country comparative study of professional development for school leaders found that most effective programs had centralized guidelines for quality assurance but decentralized implementation to allow for greater flexibility and contextualization (Walker & Dimmock, 2006). Effective programs focused on long-term development and not just on-the-job training. Such programs actively involve participants and stress the critical role of collaboration. Effective professional development programs for principals also tend to emphasize the importance of relating learning opportunities to school context and finding a balance between theory and practice (Walker & Dimmock, 2006).
A similar report of best professional development practices in 12 nations in Asia, Europe and North America highlights themes such as shifting from passive to active learning, creating opportunities that connect training to practice, developing appropriate mechanisms for performance standards and evaluation, implementing effective transitions into the leadership role and validating indigenous knowledge and other contextual variables (Walker & Dimmock, 2006).
Chapter III: Methodology

Research Question

This study was aimed at understanding the needs of Liberian public school principals with respect to professional development opportunities available to them. The research question that guided the study is as follows: “What are Liberian public school principals’ perceived leadership development needs in post-conflict Liberia?”

Research Design

A qualitative research design was deemed suitable for providing the data necessary for answering the study’s research question. The study used a variety of qualitative techniques to collect, organize and analyze the data. A major advantage of using a qualitative research design is that data is collected in face-to-face interactions with selected persons in their professional settings, allowing the researcher to understand a social phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants (Gay, 1996; Krathwohl, 1993; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

There is another reason why a qualitative method of inquiry was appropriate for this study: no prior research has documented the perceptions of Liberian public school principals concerning their leadership development needs. As Patten (2005) puts it, “when little is known about a topic, qualitative research should usually be initially favored” (p. 21). It is important to add that qualitative designs are just as systematic as quantitative designs (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). This chapter includes the following topics: context of the study, research question, selection of participants, data collection and analysis, validity and credibility issues, protection of participants, researcher role and limitations of the study.
Study Context

I conducted the study in Liberia in May, 2011. This confirms Creswell’s (2009) observation that qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field where participants experience the issue under study. The study was carried out in Montserrado County, where Liberia’s capital Monrovia is located. Montserrado County was selected primarily because it is currently the most diversely populated county in Liberia; it’s like a microcosm of Liberia.

In addition, the country’s development efforts have been heavily concentrated in Montserrado County over the years. This has disproportionately benefited Montserrado County in terms of social developments, including support for and opportunities in public education. The Ministry of Education, the department which oversees all public education in Liberia, is located in Montserrado County, in Monrovia. Of the 15 counties that constitute Liberia, Montserrado County has the third largest number of public primary schools, the second largest number of junior (middle high) schools and the largest number of senior (secondary high) schools (Liberian Ministry of Education, 2008). A final reason for the choice of Montserrado County was the researcher’s security concerns. Relatively, security and safety remain a concern in other counties of rural Liberia.

Although the county of Montserrado was chosen as the site for the study, 10 of the 12 principals came from the Monrovia-based Monrovia Consolidated School System (MCSS). The other two principals came from outside of the MCSS system, which is a semi-autonomous public organization of nearly 30 public schools with limited connection to the central Ministry of Education. It was established in the 1960s through the collaboration of the United States Aid for International Development (USAID) and the Government of Liberia to improve education in Liberia’s capital Monrovia (“Monrovia Consolidated School Project,” 1970).
A recent national education conference on decentralization in Liberia described the MCSS system as a useful organizational education framework and proposed the MCSS model as an “honored program within an otherwise exhausting legacy of failed innovations and interventions [in education systems in Liberia]” (Liberia National Education Policies 2011, p. 4). I believe that if the leadership development needs of principals of the supposedly organizationally successful MCSS system were found to be wanting, then public school principals in rural Montserrado County or other parts of Liberia would likely be in greater need of professional development opportunities.

Participants

A purposive sampling method was used to select the 12 public school principals who made up the sample for the study. Qualitative researchers generally use purposive sampling, which is the process of deliberately selecting participants who can provide pertinent information about the specific topic or setting under investigation (Creswell, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2000; Patten, 2005; Seidman, 1998). The study participants were chosen based on their experience as currently practicing principals who could provide information relevant to the research question. Against this background, two principals were not selected from the recruited pool of 16 potential participants because they had newly become acting principals. Two other principals declined to participate.

The 12 principals who were finally selected included 6 primary school principals (from kindergarten to grade nine) and 6 secondary school principals (grade nine to grade twelve). The sample also included 10 male principals and 2 female principals. This gender imbalance reflected the fact that there are fewer female than male public school principals in Montserrado County and in Liberia as a whole.
Data Collection

The steps involved in collecting qualitative data include setting the study’s boundaries, collecting information through unstructured or semi-structured observations and interviews, documents and visual material, and establishing the protocol for recording information (Creswell, 2009). As its data collection tools, the present study employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Appendices C & D) along with a review of select documents.

**Interviews.** In-depth, semi-structured personal interviews provide flexibility that gives the interviewer the opportunity to observe the subject and the conditions in which he or she is responding, and questions can be repeated or explained in case they are not understood by the respondents (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002). Moreover, the personal contact increases the likelihood that individuals will participate in the study and provide the desired information (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002).

**Review of documents.** Another data source for the study was a review of a select number of policy and program documents of the Ministry of Education and international donor organizations, which included USAID, UNICEF, UNESCO, International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP), UNDP, International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the World Bank. Documents are an important data source in many areas of investigations, and document analysis is widely used in education research. One of the purposes of document analysis is to describe prevailing practices and conditions, or ascertain the relative importance of, or interest in certain topics or problems (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002; Best & Kahn, 1993).

The review and coding of the document review were, as in the case of the interview data analysis, carefully done. The document review focused mainly on discovering the “prevailing practices and conditions” (Best & Kahn, 1993, p. 192) with respect to the extent to which the
professional development needs of public school principals have been prioritized and/or met in the aftermath of the civil war in Liberia.

**Challenges.** The data collection process suffered a brief setback in early May, 2011, after my arrival in Liberia. On the first day I met with the appropriate authority at the MCSS office in Monrovia and explained the purpose of my research. The authority listened with keen interest. He responded that the study was an important endeavor and he gave me his approval and his business card. I immediately began to visit the public schools to establish personal contact with principals who might participate in the study (Seidman, 1998), and a number of principals agreed to being included in the pool of potential participants.

On the second day, the principals that I visited were unwilling to talk to me, and some of them who had previously agreed to participate in the study backed out. The principals said that the MCSS authority that gave me the approval had told them at a principals’ meeting that “some kind of man” from the United States was gathering information because he was interested in the position of “superintendent” of the MCSS. The principals indicated that they were advised not to give me any information until they received further notice.

I contacted the Ministry of Education, which has overall responsibility for education in the country. An assistant minister of the Ministry called up the MCSS authority. The MCSS authority was advised to cooperate with me as my research was purely academic and that I had no mischievous agenda toward the MCSS or its authorities. This intervention subsequently resolved the issue, and the same MCSS authority gave his approval again. But this time, it was not verbal; he wrote it on the back of his business card: “Principals, please cooperate with Mr. Norman and give him information he needs to do his research.”
I took the written permission with me as I continued to visit principals in Montserrado County in order to develop a pool of potential participants from which the sample of 12 principals would be drawn. Before each interview began, I introduced myself appropriately and reviewed the purpose of my research, the potential utility of the study’s result, the nature of the interview and the relevant contact information (Appendix B). At the onset of each interview, the rights, expectations and responsibilities of the principal and the ethical standards and conduct required of the researcher were also disclosed.

I reviewed the interview protocol with the principals before the start of the interviews. The first two principals preferred that the interviews not be audio-recorded as I had originally planned. They said that in Liberia’s current politically charged climate and difficult economic conditions, they would be comfortable speaking their minds only if the interviews went unrecorded. I informed my advisor and the Institutional Review Board about this development. The interviews with the first two principals were therefore not recorded. The subsequent interviews were also not recorded to ensure consistency, gain cooperation and potentially relax the participating principals.

For similar reasons, a few interview questions that reflected the critical incident approach to obtaining answers from interviewees were modified. For example, questions that asked principals to give instances of how they made particular decisions or handled particular incidents were modified to ask principals about their decision making approaches or procedures without pressing the principals to give specific decision making incidents that they have dealt with. Given the economics and politics of the Liberian educational system and the earlier misinformation about my motives as a researcher, the critical incident questions could have created the impression that the principals were being investigated in some way. Nevertheless, the
modified questions that were presented to the principals were adequate for answering the research question.

The interviews were conducted at the respective principals’ schools. Light, Singer, and Willett (1990) suggest that when there are limited choices for site selection, a researcher should consider purposeful selection rather than rely on the idiosyncrasies of chance. However, I negotiated the interview site with each principal because, as Grinnell and Unrau (2008) suggest, the selection of the interview location may be determined by what is available or where the interviewee is willing to be interviewed.

Each interview lasted for more than an hour. The shortest interview and the longest interview lasted 70 minutes and 90 minutes, respectively. Each interview lasted until the principal apparently reached saturation level in sharing his or her experiences. Because the interviews were not audio-recorded, I asked each principal to kindly speak at a reasonable pace and to accept as many clarifying questions as possible to facilitate my accurate and detailed note-taking. After each interview, a short questionnaire seeking demographic information from the 12 principals was administered (Appendix E).

Data Analysis

A problem that practically all qualitative researchers face is a lack of agreed-upon approaches for analyzing qualitative data (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Best & Kahn, 2003). Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (2002) indicate that the major challenge for qualitative researchers is to systematically search and organize the data to increase their understanding of the data and enable them to present to others what they have learned. For this reason, the present study used thematic analysis—a qualitative analytical method that focuses on describing and interpreting participants’ views (Seidman, 1998).
The first step in any qualitative data analysis is to organize the data (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002; Best & Kahn, 1993). In the present study this began with reviewing the interview notes for familiarization and completeness. The data was re-read several times after all of the interviews were complete. In accordance with a suggestion of Seidman (1998), passages of interest for the focus of the research were marked with a pencil. The marked passages were classified into categories that represent similar ideas, words, phrase, sentences, or thoughts, as described in Gay and Airasian (2000).

The constant comparison method was used to achieve the classification. This method involves the repeated comparison of identified topics, ideas and concepts for the purpose of determining the distinctive characteristics that will sort them into appropriate categories to be used for the analysis of the interview data. (Gay & Airasian, 2000; Grinnell & Unrau, 2008).

As mentioned earlier, a select number of Government of Liberia and donor agencies policy and program documents were carefully reviewed to get an insight into prevailing practices and conditions (Best & Kahn, 1993) that characterize the professional leadership development needs of public school principals in post-conflict Liberia.

Validity and Credibility

Validity and credibility threats were monitored throughout the research process. Validity and credibility threats concern how the researcher might go wrong (Maxwell, 2005). Given that validity is one of the criteria that determines the accuracy of a qualitative research study (Creswell, 2009), three strategies were employed to rule out what Maxwell (2005) describes as “specific plausible alternatives and threats to your interpretations and explanations” (p. 107).

One of the strategies used to ensure data accuracy was triangulation. In triangulation, several data collection techniques or multiple data sources are used for cross-checking
information (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The data from the personal interviews was cross-checked with the relevant policy and program documents from the Liberian Ministry of Education and some key international donor organizations.

The second strategy used for ensuring data validity and credibility was the solicitation of participant feedback or member checking. Member checking is the process of sharing the researcher’s interpretation and conclusion with the actual participants for verification and insights (Johnson, 1979). The findings and interpretation for this study were mailed to 6 principals who either did not have e-mail accounts or did not have computer access. Four of the principals received their material via e-mail. The remaining two principals could not be reached by phone to decide on the means by which they would get the material to member check my findings, interpretation and conclusion. Most of the principals interviewed did not have internet access (only one of the 12 schools that I visited had electricity at that time; electricity is generally rationed in Monrovia).

The 10 principals who member checked the findings and interpretation—either through e-mails or during telephone conversations—agreed with the analysis, interpretation and conclusion. Two of the principals advised that I removed a particular phrase which had appeared three times in my draft write up. They reasoned, and rightly so, that the use of this phrase could reveal the identities of some principals that participated in the study. During the personal interviews, I gathered that the phrase had been used to describe these principals because of their ongoing criticism of the MCSS.

The third strategy used to ensure data accuracy was reflection on or articulation of the researcher’s bias. Research bias is the tendency for researchers to select data that fit into their existing theory or preconceptions (Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell argues that it is impossible to
completely eliminate the researcher’s beliefs, theories and perceptual lens. However, he urges qualitative researchers to be well aware of their assumptions and roles in order to avoid interjecting personal bias into the study. I deeply reflected on my feelings about and experiences of public education in Liberia and wrote them in a memorandum (Appendix H). This is further discussed below, under the heading Research Reflexivity. Additionally, my advisors and the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board reviewed, questioned and checked my work to ensure that the relevant research requirements and standards were satisfied.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The study was meticulously guided by the relevant legal and ethical considerations of Northeastern University internal Institutional Review Board (IRB). In collaboration with the IRB, I prepared an unsigned informed consent form which was used to obtain the informed consent of the participating principals. This was necessary to ensure what Best and Kahn (1993) describe as a “complete understanding of the procedures employed, the risks involved, and the demands that may be made upon participants” (p. 45).

I also cleared with the IRB a letter of introduction (Appendix A) that explained the purpose of the research to the principals and that solicited their voluntary participation in the study. The letter also addressed issues related to the rights and responsibilities of the principals along with the ethical and professional responsibilities of the researcher. Having met the IRB research requirements, the IRB issued an approval for the study to be conducted (Appendices F & G).

As Crowl (1993) notes, anonymity and confidentiality are very important issues, and researchers must assure participants that all information obtained during the course of the study will be held in strict confidentiality. The use of codes has kept the identities of the principals
anonymous. Before the start of each interview, I emphasized the issues of anonymity and confidentiality along with the other considerations contained in the informed consent form and the introductory letter.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is a major concern with respect to the study’s validity. This concern is based on the fact that in a qualitative research, “the researcher is the instrument of the research” (Maxwell, 2005, pp. 37-38). As the instrument, the qualitative researcher is “typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with the participants”, which “introduces a range of strategic, ethical and personal issues into the qualitative research process” (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). The phenomenon known as “observer bias” can potentially affect or pose a threat to the validity of observation and interview studies (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Observer bias is “invalid information that results from the perspective the researcher brings to the study” (Gay & Airasian, 2003, p. 213).

This perspective may negatively or positively affect both the research process and the results. For this reason, qualitative researchers must walk a fine line as they attempt to be both involved and unbiased (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2005). Ary, Jacob and Razavieh (2002) assert that “the most common strategy to control for bias in qualitative studies is reflexivity” (p. 454). Reflexivity is the use of self-reflection to recognize and actively search for one’s biases, values and personal background that may affect the objectivity of the study (Ary, Jacob & Razavieh, 2002; Creswell, 2009). Maxwell (2005) proposes what he calls a “Researcher Identity Memo” (RIM) to develop one’s reflexivity.

The RIM is a tool that helps a researcher examine his or her goals, experiences, assumptions, feelings and values as these relate to the researcher’s study, focusing on how these
factors might affect the study (Maxwell, 2005). I practiced reflexivity in a RIM during my first course on research in Northeastern University doctoral program in Education, and I found the memo approach an extremely useful tool for reminding myself of my own values, assumptions and background as I worked on my research project. As Maxwell (2005) says with respect to bias, “what is important is to understand how you are influencing what the informant says, and how this affects the validity of the inferences you can draw from the interview” (p. 109).

A key background issue for my identity memo is the fact that I was born and bred in Liberia, which is where I conducted my research. I attended several public schools in both rural and urban Liberia. I lived under the leadership practices of principals at the schools I attended. Some of the practices seemed questionable, which raised the question (particularly in the aftermath of Liberia’s 14 years of destructive civil war) of whether Liberian public school principals receive adequate leadership preparation and support to make them more effective in their work. My knowledge of Liberian culture was an important factor that helped me gain access to and develop interview rapport with the principals. Because I was aware of the bias that my knowledge, values and perspectives could potentially have on the study, I kept an open mind and conducted myself as an individual trying to learn how the principals perceived their leadership development needs and related support issues (the reflexivity memo is in the appendix section).

**Limitations of Study**

Geographical coverage was one limitation of the study. The research was confined to Montserrado County, which is one of the 15 counties or political subdivisions of Liberia. However, as noted earlier, Montserrado is the most ethnically diverse county, with the third largest number of public primary schools, the second largest number of junior (middle) high
schools and the largest number of senior (secondary) high schools in the country (Ministry of Education Census Report, 2008).

The size of the sample, 12 principals, was another limitation. Even though qualitative research may not require as large a sample size as quantitative research, the number of principals for the study could have been much larger if financial, logistical, time and security conditions had permitted.

The cancellation of the planned recording of the personal interviews in order to ensure the ease and cooperation of the principals was another limitation, as was the misinformation that was disseminated by an authority of the MCSS about the motive of the researcher. This politically orchestrated untruth seemed to have deterred some of the principals who had previously agreed to participate in the study.

As explained earlier, measures taken to help address these limitations and to ensure the validity of the findings and conclusion included the triangulation of data, detailed note-taking, member checking, and documentation of the researcher’s bias through reflexivity.
Chapter IV: Report of Research Findings

This study addresses the following research question: “What are Liberian public school principals’ perceived leadership development needs in post-conflict Liberia?” The study is based on the following sources:

1. Responses of 12 Liberian public school principals in face-to-face interviews;
2. A short demographic questionnaire;
3. Select Liberian government documents; and
4. Select documents generated by international donors actively working in Liberia.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section summarizes the demographic data of the 12 principals to give general background information about their education, age and experience. This section also gives information about the review of the interview protocol with the principals before the start of the interviews. The second section presents the coded data from the data sources mentioned above. The final section discusses the emergent categories and their corresponding themes that originated from the coded data.

Who Are the 12 Principals?

All 12 principals are Liberians and have had some teaching experience before ascending to the principalship. Ten of the principals are men and two are women. As depicted in the graph below (Figure 1), the principals were within the ages of 25 to 64 years old (none of them younger than 25 years or older than 64 years). Similarly, the chart below (Figure 2) shows that 67% of the principals hold non-education degrees, while 25% possessed degrees within the education field and 8% hold degrees or teaching certificates in education and other fields.
Figure 1. Data derived from demographic questionnaire.

Figure 2. Data derived from demographic questionnaire.
Only two of the 12 principals hold a Master’s degree, which happened to be in education administration. Except for these two principals who took some education leadership courses in their graduate programs, the rest of the principals did not undergo any prescribed leadership education or training or hold any principalship licensure. The principals said that ascendency to the principalship was largely based on teaching experience, political patronage, or social connections or a combination of these factors. In addition to their teaching experience, some of the principals previously served in capacities such as registrar, vice principal for instruction and vice principal for administration.

The principals, like other public sector employees or Liberians generally, have to deal with a range of harsh post-war economic realities, as they perform their job responsibilities. The principals acknowledged that the Liberian government has increased their salaries considerably in the last seven years. However, the rising costs of living is increasingly dwindling the principals’ buying power. None of the 12 principals owned a private vehicle. They used public transportation, which greatly lacked the capacity to meet the demands of commuters in Monrovia and its environs (as well as in other parts of the country).

**Interview Protocol Review**

In compliance with the relevant legal and ethical requirements, I reviewed the interview protocol with each principal. At the onset of each interview, I introduced myself as a doctoral student at Northeastern University in the United States. This was in addition to the introduction letters that I had given to the 12 principals who were selected as the sample size of the study.

I read the interview protocol that included the unsigned informed consent form, which covered issues such as the purpose and possible effects of the study, the rights of participants to
freely take part in the study, and their option to withdraw from the study at any point and/or answer or refuse to answer any question(s).

I also explained the short demographic questionnaire and the open-ended questions and my desire to audio record the interview for accuracy. The principals didn’t generally like the idea of being audio recorded as a way of taking precaution or protecting their jobs in a tough post-conflict economic environment of high unemployment and political maneuvers. In consultation with Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board and my lead advisor, the plan to audio record the interviews was dismissed, relying on my note taking during and after the interviews. In addition, I assured the principals of my legal and ethical commitment to keep their identities anonymous and any information they provided strictly confidential. I promised each principal US$15.00 as a token of appreciation for his/her time. After reviewing the interview protocol, I asked if the interviewee had any questions and then offered them a copy of the informed consent form to review, if they so choose to participate. Most principals were satisfied with the review and did not take the consent form.

**Data Coding**

Coding is one of the qualitative strategies for organizing data into chunks or segments so that the data can be placed into categories or themes to bring meaning to the information (Creswell, 2009). Put another way, coding is the process of reviewing the data for themes and then marking those passages of text with code labels that basically forms summary descriptions of the transcript (Gay and Airasian, 2000; Best & Kahn, 1993).

The interview notes were reviewed or re-read several times for familiarization and completeness. In accordance with the recommendations of Seidman (1998) passages of interest [themes or categories] were marked or coded with a pencil. The marked passages were classified
into categories that represented similar ideas, words, phrases, sentences, or thoughts, as described in Gay and Airasian (2000). The constant comparison method was used to achieve the classification. This method involves the repeated comparison of identified topics, ideas and concepts to determine their distinctive characteristics and place them into appropriate categories for the analysis (Gay & Airasian, 2000; Grinnell & Unrau, 2008). The contents of the categories represent expressions related to the principals’ perceived operational challenges and leadership development needs. The coding process was informed by the overarching research question and interview questions.

The document review involved several policy and program documents of the Ministry of Education and international donor organizations. One of the purposes of document analysis is to describe prevailing practices and conditions, or ascertain the relative importance of, or interest in certain topics or problems (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002; Best & Kahn, 1993). The review and coding of the document review were, as in the case of the interview data analysis, carefully done. It focused mainly on discovering the “prevailing practices and conditions” (Best & Kahn, 1993, p. 192) mentioned in the reports with respect to the problems of practice that the principals face, and the extent to which the leadership development needs of these principals have been prioritized and/or are being met in the aftermath of the civil war in Liberia.

**Emergent Categories and Themes**

From this iterative analysis of coding across the interview notes of all 12 principals, several issues were identified under the following three primary categories:

1. School challenges;
   
   (a) student discipline,
   
   (b) exchange of money for grades,
(c) teacher qualification,
(d) absenteeism and salary,
(e) overcrowding,
(f) administrative support, and
(g) school supplies.

2. Professional development needs essential for principals to be successful in Liberia;
   (a) principal leadership education and training,
   (b) need for leadership development programs
   (c) shortcomings of principal leadership development efforts.

3. Principal leadership qualities essential for principals to be successful in their practice in Liberia;
   (a) positive attitude and disposition
   (b) critical leadership attributes.

In the next several sections, each of the themes will be described in more detail as they fall under each category along with several illustrative quotes as identified through the coding process.

**School Challenges**

The principals pointed out a range of major problems that they face in their practice, which were confirmed by the document review. But for the purpose of this analysis, the six most often cited problems were identified as presented and discussed below.

**Student discipline.** Nearly all the principals said that this is a serious problem that cuts across all grade levels in the public school system. Principal C, for example, noted that student misbehavior had increased significantly in public schools in the aftermath of the civil war.
Principal C added that students today generally have little or no respect for their teachers, their principals, and other school personnel or for their fellow students. He cited drug and alcohol use as two of the factors responsible for the increase in student discipline issues. Principal D narrated this situation: “Yesterday two students fought with razor blade. We have good students that behave very well. But a lot of them are indiscipline.”

Principal E emphasized that the behavioral problems of students are seriously affecting teaching and learning. She said, “There is a lot of student disciplinary problems in our school system … and there is violence in some cases.” Principal I indicated that as a result of the “difficult social and economic conditions caused by the war, many students have prematurely become fathers, mothers or bread winners in their homes and they find it hard to take instructions which they themselves give at home.”

Principal J highlighted the problem of indiscipline among the students, but placed more emphasis on what he thought were the sources of the problem. He believed one source of student indiscipline was the trauma of the war. After serving as principal for the past three years, Principal J said he “believed that trauma plays a serious role in student anxiety and conduct”.

Exchange of money for grades. The exchange of money for grades is another problem that all of the principals cited during the interviews, noting that this problem expresses itself in a variety of ways. One way, Principal B pointed out, is that “some teachers will give very hard tests or quizzes with the goal of getting the students to fail … the teachers will then solicit money or the students will offer it in order to pass.” Principal A admitted that when he was a teacher in the late 1990s, he participated in the cash-for-grades scheme. “I did this,” he explained, “because at the time, we took pay twice a year … on Independence Day [July 26th] and Christmas [December 25th].” He continued, “I knew that trading grades for money was unethical, but I and
my family had to survive.” He said that he has ended his corrupt behavior because today his income is much better. However, Principal A added that as a principal, his experience with corruption has helped him to better understand the money-grade exchange and to deal with corrupt phenomena in his practice.

The principals also noted that a related problem is male teachers taking advantage of young women students by exchanging sex for better grades. Principal B agreed that the cash-for-grade scheme is rooted in the low salary levels of teachers, while Principal D thought that the problem goes beyond low salaries and includes “bad ethical behavior on the part of the teachers involved.” UNICEF quotes a report about some “teachers...accept [ing] bribes of money - and sometimes sex - from students in exchange for higher grades...[and] both practices are common” (“Liberian youths report on injustices,” 2010, paras. 3, 4 & 5). The report states that a Liberian education official admitted that students sometimes buy grades to enable them to pass and get promoted to the next class; the official also stated that teachers who use the bribes to supplement their salaries are to be blamed as well.

A related problem is the use of a “flexibility fee.” This phenomenon relates to the tendency of teachers and principals to collect money from students in exchange for the teachers and principals securing copies of the yearly standardized exams, identifying the answers, and then using texting or other convenient means to pass the answers on to the students when they take the exams. Principal H said:

The flexibility fee is ugly and affects education as a salvation tool. It’s cheating. It harms both administrators and students and the country. In one year, all the students in a number of schools got the same answer correct. Cell phones were used to text exam answers to students. No cell phones were allowed in the testing halls this year [2011] for the WAEC (West African Examination Council).
Principal J said that some teachers and principals have been “fired for flexibility fee [and] more need to be fired to fix the school system.” Principal F emphasized the underperformance of students, but indicated that poverty was an important causal factor. He observed that many students are self-supporting; they sell petty market (trade). “Poverty affects learning or performance”, Principal F pointed out, noting that some “students come to school hungry. Things are difficult on the children too.” He said that the Ministry of Education runs a school feeding program in public schools; it is greatly helping to reduce the effects of hunger, but the program is only intended for the primary school students.

**Teacher qualification, absenteeism and salary.** Another important problem the principals pointed to was the ill-preparedness of most teachers in the public school system. They stated that teachers are generally under-qualified in the subjects they teach. And it is difficult to replace ill-prepared teachers because of the critical shortage of competent subject-matter teachers. For example, “approximately 60% of Liberian primary teachers were untrained and, probably, deficient in subject knowledge and, even, basic literacy” (USAID Report, 2009, p.2).

Teacher absenteeism or lateness was another major problem that many of the principals mentioned. The principals said that to varying degrees, there is a practice amongst certain teachers to arrive late for class or to be absent altogether. For example, Principal L stated that one of his teachers would come to class at 3:00 P. M. when she should in fact be in class by 1:15 P. M. The principals attributed this type of behavior to the fact that some teachers teach at multiple schools, usually with teaching jobs in both private and public schools. According to the principals, the critical shortage of trained teachers in Liberia has created a great demand for qualified teachers who in turn spread themselves thin to meet that demand.
In addition to the problems of lateness and absenteeism, Principal F observed that teachers teaching at multiple schools tend to be “tired, ineffective and unprepared for class”. Principal K lamented that in the Liberian culture, particularly in light of the social and political connections that some of the teachers have, it is difficult to take drastic disciplinary action in response to the teachers’ habitual lateness and/or absenteeism. “I once reported a teacher to our district education officer for coming to class late, but no disciplinary action was taken against the teacher,” Principal K lamented, referring to a political alliance that swept the issue under the rug.

Principal F claimed: “Many [of his teachers] are college graduates but many are also not prepared to teach. Many have degrees in other disciplines.” Some teachers are good classroom managers, while many are not; few teachers plan their lessons and review them before class starts, declared one principal. He added that teachers often responded with “I forgot” when pressed for a review or discussion of their lesson plan.

Principal E acknowledged that the teachers are trying, but said they have their own problems: “Some [are] not qualified; some [are] impatient; some [are] in education because they cannot find other opportunities elsewhere”. She noted that some teachers tend to come to class without lesson plan, and are unable to manage their classes well. This makes some students to loiter in the hallways of the school. The principal said she has to be present at school as much as possible or else some teachers would leave their teaching duties for other destinations. “I make visits to classrooms and around campus to make sure that things are under control and going well”, Principal E indicated.

Some of the principals indicated that teachers who teach at both public and private schools are motivated by the need to supplement their government salaries in order to meet the high cost of living in Liberia. The World Bank’s Education Country Status Report (2010)
comments on the issue of teacher salary in Liberia: “The low teacher pay and the flat pay scales are also postconflict phenomena, as all public servants were put on a very low and flat pay scale as part of the recovery plan” (p. Xii).

Principal B stated that he preferred an income scale in which salaries would be far more commensurate with actual cost of living and teachers’ qualifications. The principals noted that their salaries had increased since the inception of the government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. However, they indicated that there was a need for an additional salary raise. A principal’s salary—at the time of the interview in May 2011—was within the range of US$100 and US$125 per month, according to some principals. And a 100-pound bag of rice—Liberia’s staple—costs between US$35 and US$50, depending on its quality. This state of affairs, Principal B noted, is even worse when a principal is the only bread winner in his or her home. [In September 2011, the government of Liberia announced a considerable increase in the salaries of civil servants, which included teachers and principals (The New Dawn, 2011)].

**Overcrowding.** Another problem identified by the principals was overcrowding in their schools and classrooms, which is the result of increased student enrollment and limited classroom space. Principal C pointed out that the Government of Liberia has had “great success in getting a lot of children off the streets through the free and compulsory education policy… but we need bigger classrooms to accommodate these students.” Classes are “simply over-crowded,” said Principal H, who has an average class size of 55 in his school. Principal G’s school has an average class size of 60.

The Education Country Status Report (2010) recognizes that “overcrowding is common…” (p. 6) in Liberian schools. The report adds that “the fact that 583 schools destroyed during the civil conflict have yet to be rebuilt indicates the magnitude of the classroom availability
problem” (p. 81). Indeed, of the 12 principals interviewed, only Principals B and D had the relatively small average class size of 45 students in their schools.

**Administrative support.** Four of the 12 principals mentioned the absence of a principal handbook as another problem affecting their work. They indicated that a handbook which outlines their duties and responsibilities would provide guidance to principals, especially new, inexperienced and non-education-trained principals (those who do not have a background or degree in education or educational leadership).

Principal I emphasized, “we urgently need a handbook to serve as a cornerstone for what is expected of us and our responsibilities … and a handbook will help us to be better leaders.” Principal B lamented the absence of policy or handbook for principals to guide them in their daily functions. He indicated that to overhaul the school system or fix some of its problems, handbooks for principals and students and teachers should be put in place and enforced.

Another area of support that most principals pointed out as a gross need was supervision. The principals stressed the need for their supervisors and central offices to visit their schools more often. The principals expected that routine visitations would provide the supervisors with a better understanding and appreciation of the problems facing them, and that this may hopefully lead to more central office support. Principal D said that “regular visits by our leaders or supervisors will help to improve the running of the schools… it will help us to stop or control teacher lateness and absenteeism.” Principal E made a similar point: “Visits from county or district education officers can be a big help to us” in strengthening principals’ ability to deal with the myriad problems affecting the schools. In addition, the principals underscored the need for supervisors to be more responsive to issues and complaints that are brought to their attention.
Principal B asked for greater administrative support from his supervisors and education leaders. He said: “DEOs and CEOs [are] not supervising us due to poor policy and transportation problem. So principals are left alone”. “MOE supervisors hardly visit us. They need to come and see what is happening in the schools”.

The Education Country Status Report (2010) also documented that there is limited contact between the central authorities and the local authorities. The local education leaders, the report said, “suffers from limited interaction with central managers” (p. 107) and that “decentralized management capacity is currently restricted by limited communication and contact between central ministry managers, county and district office staff, and schools, due to poor physical and technical infrastructure” (p. 107).

**School supplies.** All the principals mentioned insufficient educational supplies and operating funds as another main problem, saying that this problem greatly hampers the academic and administrative management of their institutions. The principals explained that large parts of their school operating funds were generated from student registration fees, so that the Ministry of Education’s elimination of registration fees for elementary school students or the institution of free and compulsory elementary education, along with a reduction of the fees that secondary school students pay, has had a severe impact. It has limited the ability of public schools, and particularly elementary schools, to raise operating funds for purchasing supplies such as toiletry materials and for carrying out basic maintenance.

Principal C said that as a consequence, school personnel have to “chip in” to purchase reams of papers, tissue, sanitizers and other school supplies. He elaborated:

It is hard for us to use our own money to buy supplies for office use and cleaning. But we have no choice. We have to keep the bathrooms and classrooms and offices clean and repair the furniture. We got our school supplies in January this year (2011). They lasted
for about a month, especially the toilet tissue. We have not received another supply to date [as of the interview date in June, 2011]. As a result, we did not give some of our tests because we did not have stationery.

Pointing to the window, Principal G observed: “As you can see, there are no windows on this whole side of the building. No cleaning supplies” and school personnel have to buy supplies to clean the environment, which caters to a student population of over 1,000 and an average class size of 60-70 students, the principal added.

The lack of teaching materials was among the main problems that confront the public school system, Principal C asserted. He said text books are insufficient to the point that teachers have to copy portions of texts on the black board for students to take home to read. There is no library also. “This school [’s] elementary session has a reader [prescribed text]...the junior high does not have [one]”, the Principal C noted.

Professional Development Needs

This category relates to the professional development needs that principals feel are crucial to being a successful principal in Liberia. The data in the Principal development needs category constitute the bedrock answer to the research question, which is: “What are Liberian public school principals’ perceived leadership development needs in post-conflict Liberia?” The category has the following themes: 1) Principal leadership education and training; 2) Need for leadership development programs and 3) Shortcomings of principal leadership development efforts.

Principal leadership education and training. Most principals spoke about the enormous academic, administrative and leadership challenges facing the public school system, and about the gap in principal leadership knowledge. As indicated earlier in this chapter, only two of the 12 principals interviewed hold graduate degrees, which happened to be in education
administration. Except for these two principals who took leadership courses in their graduate programs, the rest of the principals did not undergo any prescribed or formal leadership education or training or hold any principalship licensure.

Moreover, about two-thirds of the 12 principals have their degrees in non-education fields. Some of the principals admitted that ascendency to the principalship tends to be largely based on teaching experience, political patronage, social connections or a combination of these factors. Proven leadership capability is not necessarily a key driver for promotion to the principalship, according to some principals.

Principal A said that he has not attended a leadership workshop or in-service training since he became the principal of his school about four years ago. Principal C echoed similar sentiments. He said that he “cannot remember the last time” he attended a principal workshop on school leadership. Principal D said, “since I joined the MCSS in [the late 1990s], I know of one or two workshops for principals that I have attended.” Principal I indicated the general lack of personal professional development initiative among Liberian public school principals: “Many of us principals...lead by our experience or by heart”, suggesting a considerable leadership knowledge gap.

**Need for leadership development programs.** This theme is closely related to the previous theme depicting the need for initial principal leadership education and training. This theme is related more to the ongoing professional development needs of principals. All the principals interviewed spoke of the lack of well-formulated and ongoing programs to enhance their leadership. They suggested that quality leadership preparation programs – in the form of pre-service and in-service programs, workshops and seminars – are critical in the process of successfully reforming and leading the public school system in post-conflict Liberia.
The Ministry of Education recognizes the leadership development needs that the principals articulated. In a major policy document entitled: National Education Policies 2011: Policies for Reform Through Analysis and Consultation, the Ministry of Education highlights the importance of qualified principals in achieving its current goal of decentralizing the public education system in Liberia. In this report, the Ministry states: “For decentralization to schools to be successful, principals must acquire new skills in leadership and management—including financial management, teacher and personnel management, and community relations” (p. 6).

Under the proposed decentralization plan, the Ministry and the counties are responsible for developing education strategies and tactics, respectively, while the districts and schools are responsible for the implementation of the tactics. The districts and schools are also required to provide feedback so that appropriate and timely implementation adjustments can be made. This is obviously a significant responsibility for principals, whose leadership capability, as the decentralization proposal suggests, needs to be strengthened.

Similarly, the Ministry notes the need for principal training to ensure the achievement of its Education for All (EFA) program. As part of its implementation strategy, the EFA program had planned to “organize training workshops for all secondary school principals and teachers for implementation [of the EFA strategy]” (EFA National Action Plan, 2004, p. 41).

Liberia’s EFA program represents a commitment to the global EFA initiative, which is an international community partnership to provide primary education to all children of the world by 2015. This initiative was first launched in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 by the international community and reaffirmed at a World Education conference in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 (World Bank, 2009; Sperling, 2001).
In relationship to this issue, Principal A made the following points on training:

There is a great need for in-service workshops for both teachers and principals. A whole lot of principals after the war do not have degrees or enough experience in education or leadership. They need ongoing training that can help them to lead a school properly. Some principals are new in the education field and were handpicked based on their social and political connections. Good in-service programs will help all of us. The content of such programs should include ethics, leadership skills, organizing school programs and financial management.

Principal E also underscored the need for principal training. She indicated that there is an “acute need for refresher programs to keep principals up-to-date” with current developments and best practice in education leadership and to allow principals to share ideas. Principal J made a similar point, noting that public school principals need leadership training opportunities to enable them to develop “new ways” of looking at “education, students, the curricula and classroom management”, along with other school reform issues.

**Shortcomings of principal leadership development efforts.** While the Liberian government and its donor partners have recognized the crucial role of principals, efforts to formulate quality professional development programs to strengthen the leadership capacity of public school principals have been severely limited. The Liberian government policy document entitled Education Sector Master Plan: 2000-2015 (2000) notes that “principals should serve as educational leaders” and should be able to “supervise the teachers under their control” (p. 69).

To this end, “a Certificate Program in school supervision for High School principals [was to] be instituted and implemented by the Department of Instruction of the Ministry of Education” (p. 69). This training program was to be conducted during the vacation period at regional centers, and its cost was to be borne mainly by the Ministry of Education. The accounts of the 12 principals interviewed and of the Ministry of Education’s 2008 Annual Report do not suggest that the certificate program has been instituted.
In fact, the Ministry of Education 2008 Annual Report presented to the National Legislature (Congress) reported conducting a wide range of workshops for teachers. It also reported carrying out a “capacity building workshop for county and district education officers to strengthen their skills in monitoring and supervision” (MOE 2008 Annual Report, p. 33) —who are the supervisors of the principals. The annual report, however, did not mention the conduct of similar capacity building workshops for principals.

In a related document on training, governance and management capacity, the World Bank’s Education Country Status Report (2010) dealt heavily with the lack of adequate professionally trained teachers and administrators at the central Ministry of Education, county and district levels. While the report made specific reference to the need of developing the leadership abilities of county education officers and the district education officers, [again, who are the immediate supervisors of the public school principals], it did not however make a similar specific reference to the training of principals.

As a part of efforts to address the training needs of public school principals, the Ministry of Education, in its Education Sector Plan of Liberia: 2010-2020, states the following:

School principals have the main responsibility for school-level management, and the Ministry has prioritized their capacity development. Through the Liberia Teacher Training Project (LTTP), the MOE is developing a certification program for school principals. A Principals’ Training Manual has been developed, and the MOE is piloting an in-service training program for principals in six counties (p. 153).

While the Ministry of Education highlighted the need for trained school principals and its collaboration with the United States Aid for International Development (USAID) funded LTTP to meet the training needs of principals, a 2009 USAID assessment report notes that the successful implementation of the LTTP was challenged by the absence of action or accountability on the part of the Ministry of Education. The report said the Ministry was not
clear about its responsibilities with regard to teacher training, assignment of responsibilities, chain of command and empowerment of the Ministry personnel to make decisions based on an agreed-upon work plan. The report also indicates that these shortcomings of the Ministry impeded progress in the implementation of training activities.

The LTTP is a USAID-funded teacher training program that was initiated in 2006 to support the Ministry of Education’s development of a strategy to improve the teacher education system (USAID Liberia, 2009, p. vii). LTTP provides teacher-focused, in-service education program. The LTTP training program was not designed for principals, nor does it allocate significant resources to their professional development needs. While USAID has been providing some limited in-service training for public school principals in selected geographic areas in the country, that agency reported that “participation in LTTP activities designed to strengthen education governance by key education officials is sporadic” (USAID Liberia, p. vii). In addition, the USAID report points out that the in-service training for principals under the LTTP is not nationwide; it only operates in about a third of the country.

Principal Leadership Qualities

This third category, like the previous two, emerged from the data coding and analysis. It reinforces the second category dealing with the principal development needs in that it discusses the dispositions and skills that principals perceived as essential characteristics of their professional development. Two themes were identified under the Principal leadership qualities category: 1) positive attitude and disposition, and 2) critical leadership attributes and skills.

Positive attitude and disposition. Many of the principals recognized the importance of having the right attitude and disposition in leadership. Attitude and disposition were portrayed in a number of ways by the principals. One way to portray a positive attitude and disposition in
principalship practice is through punctuality, as suggested by Principal A. Punctuality is a widespread problem among Liberians. It’s common knowledge that Liberians are not generally time conscious. Urging his fellow principals to show regard for time, Principal J described punctuality is a big African problem.

Stressing the need for the right attitude and disposition, Principal A described himself as “an early bird” and said he takes his job seriously. In fact, he said he arrives at work at 6:00 A. M. and stays until 5:30 P. M. when he heads to a private night school that he co-runs with a colleague. Principal A recounted telling his staff about the disposition to take any assigned task seriously: “If you’re committed to smaller things, the bigger things will come.” This is a rephrased quotation from the Bible, which stresses the importance of the attitude and disposition to take every responsibility seriously, whether big or small.

Many principals talked about the difficulty of their jobs, but indicated that this difficulty can be overcome by having the right attitude and disposition. For example, Principals H observed that the “Principal [’s] job in Liberia is a hard job…you are expected to solve all the problems”. Principal H spoke about his positive attitude toward learning as a means of improving his leadership performance: “Myself need refresher training…I buy my own books and read for professional development.”

For his part, Principal L said that to be an effective principal, one has to have a positive disposition rooted in honesty, love for kids, kindness, helping teachers and solving problems.

**Critical leadership attributes and skills.** Attitude and disposition aside, most of the principals enumerated specific attributes and skills they considered critical for success in their practice. Some principals indicated that they use these attributes and skills at varying degrees in
executing their responsibilities. Most principals simply stated the importance of possessing these skills.

One of the most common positive attributes shared by principals was a clear commitment to work. In the words of the principals, this could be demonstrated in the following ways: passion, compassion, creative problem solving, good judgment, patience, monitoring and evaluation, and ethical behavior. Principal D regarded commitment as a vital attribute for leadership success, adding that “school leaders must be committed for the betterment of the students and the nation.”

Similarly, Principal B identified commitment, dedication, and passion as important principal qualities. Principal J also cited passion as a valuable attribute for principals because it is likely to inspire one to not only become a principal for the sake of the income, but also for service to the nation. He noted that passion also leads to respect for colleagues and students.

Principal D pointed out that principals should possess strong ethical values to make good decisions in their practice. Principal F also regarded good judgment and ethical disposition as vital principal attributes. He observed: “you got to be ethical as a principal and as a role model who deals with these students everyday”. Principal J described creativity as very important and argued that leadership in post-conflict Liberia tends to be characterized by confusion because “…these are unusual times in the school system and the country as a whole and principals need to be creative to solve problems.”

Principal F said patience is an essential attribute for principals and other school authorities, because they “face difficult problems pertaining to students, teachers, parents and other people” every day. He stressed that the “job of a principal is hard … and hard jobs need people with patience so that you cannot quickly jump to conclusion” on issues. He noted that
patience is also needed to reconcile differences among teachers and students or to calm parents when they are unhappy about some school issues.

In keeping with these ideals, the principals stated that they should be democratic, culturally competent, and sensitive in their leadership. As discussed by the principals, these attributes could be evidenced in: principals’ disposition to consult with their staff, engage in attentive listening, participatory decision-making, and effective communication; freely recognizing and cooperating with their community; and, when needed, employing effective conflict resolution strategies.

Principal D suggested that principals should be consultative and involve stakeholders to get their views in making decisions that affect schools. “Principals must have…[the] ability to involve those concerned in the decision making process”, Principal D reiterated. Similarly, Principal E used the term “consultative” to describe a key skill that principals should possess in their decision-making and leadership roles. She said of her personal decision making: “we consult with our faculty…for small and big issues”. She strongly believes that leadership is about consultation. Principals should always show the willingness to listen and learn and to be a good thinker, Principal B added.

Principal A named “participatory leadership style” as important attribute that principals and other school leaders should possess in order to make a positive impact on the school system. He said that a related skill is to “give credit to where it is due”; that is, to recognize the good works that others do in running a school.

Principal A cited an example that occurred at the end of one academic year, when he planned a program to honor a janitor and a teacher who were very committed to their duties. He said that the two honorees did not know about this until their names were announced at the
closing program, adding that “both of the men cried … the janitor said that for the 28 years he has worked in the school system, this was the first time that he had been honored.”

Principal I mentioned supervisory and cooperative skills as key leadership skills for principals. Principal H expanded on a host of attributes of an effective principal as follows:

My son [a common way for Liberian adults to address young men], I have been in education long enough to know that principals must have administrative skills; they must be qualified and knowledgeable as an educator; they must understand the way education in Liberia works; they must have human and people skills and understand human nature; and they must have dedication and compassion for what we do. Otherwise, you will just be a principal for the sake of being Mr. or Ms. principal.

**Summary of Findings**

The study sought to answer this research question: “What are Liberian public school principals’ perceived leadership development needs in post-conflict Liberia?” Obtained from personal interviews with 12 public school principals and select Liberian government and donor reports and policy documents, the data analysis suggests that public school principals are faced with numerous problems of practice, and a tremendous need for principal leadership development in post-conflict Liberia.

The need for well-prepared and effective principals is compelling, especially in view of the myriad problems confronting the war-ravaged public school system in Liberia. The problems range from the lack of qualified teachers to insufficient school supplies to student disciplinary issues to classroom overcrowding. The principals emphasized the lack of systematic and ongoing pre-service, in-service and related programs that would provide them the knowledge and skills to be effective school leaders.

While the Ministry of Education and international donors are aware of the challenges confronting the public school system, and the need for the leadership development of the
principals, efforts to establish systematic programs that meet this need are limited and unorganized.

This does not suggest that the Ministry of Education and its donor partners are not working to make the public education system more functional. The state of affairs in Liberia’s post-education environment apparently speaks to the extensive decimation of the education landscape and the country as a whole during the civil crisis. This assertion is supported by the interviews of the principals and review of available reports and policy documents of the Ministry of Education and some international education donors.
Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings and Implications

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

Principal leadership effectiveness remains a major concern throughout the world, and especially in Africa. As one study concluded, only 25% of school principals in the United States are prepared to be effective instructional leaders (Barnett, 2004); similarly, a study in Ghana found that public school principals tend to lack adequate leadership qualifications (Hope, Respress & Zame, 2008). This reality contrasts with the fact that the principalship is more difficult, time-consuming and pivotal today than ever before (Kafka, 2009; Lynch, 2012; Ramalho, Garza & Merchant, 2010).

Particularly in a time of increasing public demand for accountability, and in light of research confirming that the quality of leadership has a major impact on the overall effectiveness of schools, surprisingly little attention has been given to how people become principals and how principals are supported in their work (Chapman, 2005; Salazar, 2007).

The benefits of having well-qualified principals are widely documented. Kafka (2009), in his study of the history of the principalship, observes: “A growing body of literature suggests that there is a discernible relationship between school leaders’ actions and student achievement” (p. 318). Clearly, the principal plays a key role in creating an effective school environment by maintaining an orderly school climate, establishing a uniform discipline policy, and involving and supporting teachers and staff in school activities (Chapman, 2005; Shah, Sultana, Hassain & Ali, 2011).

The principal also potentially affects the attitude, social climate, morale, progress, cooperation and strategic directions of the school (Shah, Sultana, Hassain & Ali, 2011). Fullan (2002) emphasizes this point: “System transformation of the type [that] educators now aspire to
cannot be accomplished without first ensuring solid leadership at all levels of the system” (p. 1). The present study investigated the perceptions of Liberian public school principals regarding their post-conflict leadership development needs. It is crucial to understand their leadership needs because, as Mathibe (2007) has documented, “many schooling systems do not fulfill their mandates because of poor management and leadership” (p. 523).

The inadequacy of principal preparation noted in the literature is significant for Liberia, given the post-conflict constraints confronting its educational system and the urgent need for reform. In 2003, Liberia finally emerged from a 14-year war that devastated the country and its educational system (International Rescue Committee, 2002). An understanding of the leadership development needs of public school principals in Liberia is critical for successful education reform and the country’s overall socio-economic and political development. Hence, this study addressed the following research question: “What are Liberian public school principals’ perceived leadership development needs in post-conflict Liberia?”

**Review of the Methodology**

This is a descriptive study of the perceptions of Liberian public school principals about their leadership development needs. A qualitative research design was deemed suitable for providing the data necessary to answer the study’s research question. One major advantage of using a qualitative research design is that data is collected in face-to-face interactions with selected persons in their professional settings, which allows the researcher to gain insight into a social phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants (Gay, 1996; Krathwohl, 1993; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

**Context and data collection.** I conducted the study in May 2010 in Montserrado County, where Liberia’s capital, Monrovia, is located. Montserrado County was selected
primarily because it is currently the most diversely populated county in Liberia; it is like a microcosm of Liberia. The Ministry of Education, which oversees all public education in Liberia, is located in Monrovia. Of the 15 counties that constitute Liberia, Montserrado County has the third largest number of public primary schools, the second largest number of junior (middle high) schools and the largest number of senior (secondary high) schools (Liberian Ministry of Education, 2008).

Data was collected from two main sources: 1) in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and 2) a review of select policy and program documents. The in-depth interviews were open-ended and were conducted face-to-face with 12 public school principals. Detailed notes were taken and subsequently analyzed to determine categorization and thematic patterns. A similar analysis was done with some major policy and program documents of the Liberian government as well as its donor partners working in the public education domain in Liberia. The document review focused primarily on discovering the “prevailing practices and conditions” (Best & Kahn, 1993, p. 192) with respect to the extent to which the professional leadership development needs of public school principals have been prioritized and/or met in the aftermath of the civil war. Data from the two sources were triangulated.

Each interview lasted more than an hour. The shortest and the longest interviews lasted 70 and 90 minutes, respectively. Each interview lasted until the principal had apparently reached saturation level in sharing his or her experiences. Because the interviews were not audio-recorded, I asked each principal to kindly speak at a reasonable pace and to accept as many clarifying questions as possible to facilitate my accurate and detailed note-taking. After each interview, a short questionnaire seeking demographic information from the 12 principals was administered (Appendix D).
**Participants.** A purposive sampling method was used to select the 12 public school principals who comprised the sample. Qualitative researchers generally use purposive sampling, which is the process of deliberately selecting participants who are capable of providing pertinent information on the specific topic or setting under investigation (Creswell, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2000; Patten, 2005; Seidman, 1998). The study participants were chosen according to their experience as currently practicing principals who could provide information relevant to the research question.

The 12 principals included 6 primary school principals (from kindergarten to grade nine) and 6 secondary school principals (grade nine to grade twelve). The sample also included 10 male and 2 female principals. This gender imbalance reflected the fact that there are fewer female than male public school principals in Montserrado County and in Liberia as a whole. Before the start of the interview, I reviewed the interview protocol with each principal. The interviews were not audio-recorded as I had originally planned. The principals’ political and economic concerns necessitated this, and my advisor and the Institutional Review Board approved of this development.

**Data analysis.** The first step in any qualitative data analysis is to organize the data (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002; Best & Kahn, 1993). The coding of the data began with a review of the interview notes for familiarization and completeness. The data was re-read several times after all interviews were complete. Passages of interest were marked in pencil, and marked passages were classified into categories that represented similar ideas, words, phrases, sentences, or thoughts (Seidman, 1998; Gay and Airasian, 2000).

The constant comparison method was used to achieve the classification. This method involves the repeated comparison of identified topics and ideas to determine their placement into
appropriate categories to be used for the analysis of the interview data (Gay & Airasi, 2000; Grinnell & Unrau, 2008). The review and coding of the document review were, as in the case of the interview data analysis, done carefully.

**Validity and credibility.** Validity and credibility threats were monitored throughout the research process. Validity and credibility threats concern ways in which the researcher might go wrong (Maxwell, 2005). Given that validity is one of the criteria that determines the accuracy of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2009), three strategies were employed to rule out what Maxwell (2005) describes as “specific plausible alternatives and threats to your interpretations and explanations” (p. 107).

The three strategies used to ensure data accuracy were: 1) triangulation, which involves the use of multiple data sources to cross-check information (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006); 2) member checking, which relates to the process of sharing the researcher’s interpretation and conclusion with the actual participants for verification and insights (Johnson, 1979); and 3) articulation of the researcher’s bias. Research bias is the tendency for researchers to select data that fit into their existing theory or preconceptions (Maxwell, 2005), and a detailed memo articulating the researcher’s beliefs or bias was written to avoid interjecting these beliefs into the study.

**Protection of human subjects.** The study was meticulously guided by the relevant legal and ethical considerations of Northeastern University Internal Institutional Review Board (IRB). In collaboration with the IRB, I prepared an unsigned informed consent form that was used to obtain the informed consent of participating principals. This was necessary to ensure what Best and Kahn (1993) describe as a “complete understanding of the procedures employed, the risks involved, and the demands that may be made upon participants” (p. 45).
As Crowl (1993) notes, anonymity and confidentiality are important issues, and I assured the participants that all information obtained during the study would be held in strict confidentiality. The use of codes has kept the identities of the principals anonymous. Before the start of each interview, I emphasized the issues of anonymity and confidentiality along with the other considerations contained in the informed consent form and the introductory letter.

**Limitations of the study.** Geographical coverage was one of the study’s limitations. The research was confined to Montserrado County, which is one of the 15 counties or political subdivisions of Liberia. As noted earlier, though, Montserrado is the most ethnically diverse county, with the third largest number of public primary schools, the second largest number of junior (middle) high schools and the largest number of senior (secondary) high schools in the country (Ministry of Education, 2008).

The small size of the sample (i.e., 12 principals) was another limitation. Even though qualitative research may not require as large a sample as quantitative research, the number of principals included in the study could have been much larger if financial, logistical, time and security conditions had permitted. The cancellation of the planned recording of the personal interviews in order to ensure the ease and cooperation of the principals was another limitation, as was the misinformation that was disseminated by an authority of the MCSS about the motive of the researcher. This politically orchestrated untruth seemed to have deterred some principals who had previously agreed to participate.

As explained earlier, measures taken to help address these limitations and to ensure the validity of the findings and conclusion included the triangulation of data, detailed note-taking, member checking, and documentation of the researcher’s bias through reflexivity.
Summary of Findings

The coding and thematic analysis of the data produced three primary emergent categories with their corresponding themes. These categories are as follows: 1) school challenges; 2) professional development needs required for principals to be successful in Liberia; and 3) principal leadership qualities essential for principals to be successful in their practice in Liberia.

School challenges. This category includes six of the themes most cited by the principals: student discipline, exchange of money for grades, teacher qualification, absenteeism and salary, overcrowding, administrative support, and school supplies. These problems, the principals pointed out, are among the main challenges confronting their practice.

Student discipline. Nearly all principals mentioned student discipline as a serious problem across all grade levels in the public school system. Principal C, for example, noted that student misbehavior became widespread in public schools in the aftermath of the civil war. He complained that students are generally disrespectful and cited drug and alcohol use as two of the factors responsible for the increase in student misbehavior. Principal E spoke of the effects of student behavioral problems on teaching and learning. She expressed concern that, “there is a lot of student disciplinary problems in our school system … and there is violence in some cases.” Principal D confirmed the existence of school violence: “Yesterday, two students fought with razor blades. We have good students that behave very well. But a lot of them are indiscipline.” Both Principal I and Principal J highlighted the problem of student indiscipline, and attributed this problem to war-related trauma and circumstances.

Exchange of money for grades. The exchange of money for grades is another problem that all principals cited during interviews. Principal B described his experience: “Some teachers will give very hard tests or quizzes with the goal of getting the students to fail … the teachers
will then solicit money or the students will offer it in order to pass.” Principal A admitted that when he was a teacher in the late 1990s, he participated in the cash-for-grades scheme. “I did this,” he explained, “because at the time, we took pay twice a year … on Independence Day [July 26th] and Christmas [December 25th].” He continued, “I knew that trading grades for money was unethical, but I and my family had to survive.” He said that he has ended his corrupt behavior because today his income is much better.

Another aspect of the problem is the tendency, according to Principal A, for male teachers to take advantage of young women students by exchanging sex for better grades. A UNICEF document references this practice: “Teachers . . . accept bribes of money – and sometimes sex – from students in exchange for higher grades . . . [and] both practices are common” (“Liberian youths report on injustices,” 2010, paras. 3, 4 & 5). A related problem is the use of a “flexibility fee.” This phenomenon relates to the tendency of teachers and principals to collect money from students in exchange for copies of the yearly standardized exams, and then using texting or other convenient means to pass the answers on to the students when they take the exams.

**Teacher qualification, absenteeism and salary.** Another important problem that principals pointed out was the ill-preparedness of most teachers in the public school system. They stated that teachers are generally underqualified in the subjects they teach. Moreover, it is difficult to replace ill-prepared teachers due to the critical shortage of competent subject-matter teachers. For example, “approximately 60% of Liberian primary teachers were untrained and, probably, deficient in subject knowledge and, even, basic literacy” (USAID Report, 2009, p. 2).

Teacher absenteeism or lateness is another major problem that many principals mentioned. The principals said that, to varying degrees, there is a practice amongst certain teachers to arrive
late for class or be absent altogether. The principals attributed this type of behavior to the fact that some teach at multiple schools. It is hard to punish these teachers because some are well connected to powerful people and/or trying to supplement their salaries. Teacher salaries have been increased somewhat considerably in recent times but remain insufficient to meet teachers’ post-war economic needs.

**Overcrowding.** Another problem identified by the principals is the overcrowding of their schools and classrooms due to increased student enrollment and limited classroom space. Principal C pointed out that the Government of Liberia has had “great success in getting a lot of children off the streets through the free and compulsory education policy . . . but we need bigger classrooms to accommodate these students.” Classes are “simply over-crowded,” said Principal H, who has an average class size of 55 in his school. Similarly, Principal G’s school has an average class size of 60.

**Administrative support.** Four of the 12 principals mentioned the absence of a principal handbook as another problem affecting their work. A handbook that outlines their duties and responsibilities, they stated, would provide guidance to principals, especially new, inexperienced and non-education-trained principals (i.e., those who have no background or degree in education or educational leadership). Another area of support that most principals pointed out as a gross need is supervision; the principals emphasized the need for their supervisors and central offices to visit their schools more often. It was expected by the principals that routine visitations would provide the supervisors with a better understanding and appreciation of the problems facing them, and that this might hopefully lead to more central office support. Principal D said that “regular visits by our leaders or supervisors will help to improve the running of the schools . . . ,” while Principal E indicated that “visits from county or district education officers can be a big
help to us” in strengthening principals’ ability to deal with the many problems affecting the schools.

**School supplies.** All principals mentioned insufficient educational supplies and operating funds as another main problem, saying that this problem greatly hampers the academic and administrative management of their institutions. The principals explained that large parts of their school operating funds were generated from student registration fees, so the Ministry of Education’s elimination of registration fees for elementary school students and the institution of free and compulsory elementary education, along with the reduction of the fees that secondary school students pay, have all had a severe impact. This has limited the ability of public schools, and particularly elementary schools, to raise operating funds for purchasing supplies such as toiletry materials and for basic maintenance. Principal C said that, as a consequence, school personnel now have to “chip in” to purchase reams of paper, tissue, sanitizers and other school supplies. A related problem facing the public school system is the lack of teaching materials such as textbooks and teaching aids.

**Professional development needs.** This primary category is concerned with factors that are essential for principals to be successful in Liberia. Three main themes comprise the category: 1) principal leadership education and training; 2) need for leadership development programs; and 3) shortcomings of principal leadership development efforts. The data in the professional development needs category, along with those in the third category of principal leadership qualities, constitute the bedrock on which the answer to the research question will stand.

**Principal leadership education and training.** Most principals described the enormous challenges they face and the virtual absence of principal leadership education and training opportunities. Only two of the 12 principals interviewed hold graduate degrees, which happened
to be in education administration. The rest had not taken any prescribed or formal leadership education or training course. Approximately two-thirds of the 12 principals have degrees in non-education fields. Some admitted that promotion to the principalship in Liberia is often largely influenced by the promotee’s teaching experience, political patronage, social connections or a combination thereof, adding that proven leadership capability is not necessarily a key driver of promotion.

Principal A said that he has not attended a leadership workshop or in-service training since he became the principal of his school about four years ago. Principal C echoed similar sentiments that he “cannot remember the last time” that he attended a workshop on school leadership. Principal D said, “since I joined the MCSS in [the late 1990s], I know of one or two workshops for principals that I have attended.”

**Need for leadership development programs.** This theme relates closely to the previous theme depicting the need for initial principal leadership education and training. This theme is related more to the ongoing professional development needs of principals. All the principals interviewed spoke of the lack of well-formulated and ongoing programs designed to enhance their leadership. They suggested that quality leadership preparation programs – in the form of pre-service and in-service programs, workshops and seminars – are critical to the process of successfully reforming and leading the public school system in post-conflict Liberia.

The Ministry of Education recognizes these leadership development needs that the principals articulated. One of the Ministry’s major policy documents highlights the importance of qualified principals in achieving its current goal of decentralizing the public education system in Liberia: “For decentralization to schools to be successful, principals must acquire new skills in
leadership and management—including financial management, teacher and personnel management, and community relations” (p. 6).

Principal A, on the need for professional development programs, made some points on training:

There is a great need for in-service workshops for both teachers and principals. A whole lot of principals after the war do not have degrees or enough experience in education or leadership. They need ongoing training that can help them to lead a school properly. Some principals are new in the education field and were handpicked based on their social and political connections. Good in-service programs will help all of us. The content of such programs should include ethics, leadership skills, organizing school programs and financial management.

Principal E also underscored the need for principal training. She indicated that there is an “acute need for refresher programs to keep principals up to date” with current developments and best practices in education leadership and to allow principals to share ideas. For his part, Principal J said that public school principals need leadership training opportunities to enable them to develop “new ways” of looking at “education, students, the curricula and classroom management,” in addition to other school reform issues.

**Shortcomings of principal leadership development efforts.** The Liberian government and its donor partners have also recognized the crucial role played by principals; however, these stakeholders have also recognized that various factors severely constrain any effort to formulate quality professional development programs to strengthen the leadership capacity of public school principals. A Liberian government policy document notes that “principals should serve as educational leaders” and should be able to “supervise the teachers under their control” (p. 69). In this direction, the Ministry decided to launch “a Certificate Program in school supervision for High School principals” (p. 69). This program was to be conducted during the vacation (Summer) period at regional centers; however, the accounts of the 12 principals interviewed and
the Ministry of Education’s 2008 Annual Report do not suggest that the certificate program has
been instituted.

In fact, the Ministry of Education’s 2008 Annual Report, when presented to the National
Legislature (Congress), reported that a wide range of workshops had been provided for teachers.
It also reported carrying out a “capacity building workshop for county and district education
officers to strengthen their skills in monitoring and supervision” (MOE 2008 Annual Report, p.
33) (i.e., the supervisors of the principals). The annual report, however, did not mention the
conducting of similar capacity building workshops for principals.

The World Bank’s Education Country Status Report (2010) reported the lack of adequate
professionally trained teachers and administrators at the Ministry of Education, county and
district levels. The report, however, did not make a specific reference to the leadership training
needs of principals. The United States Aid for International Development (USAID), which has
been collaborating with the Ministry of Education to meet some of the training needs of
principals under the Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTTP), said in a 2009 report that the
successful implementation of their collaborative efforts was challenged by the absence of action
or accountability on the part of the Ministry of Education. The report further stated that in-
service training for principals under the LTTP is not nationwide; it only operates in about one-
third of the country.

**Principal leadership qualities.** This third category reinforces the second category,
which deals with principals’ leadership development needs. The third category discusses the
dispositions and skills that principals perceived as essential characteristics of their professional
development. Two themes were identified under the principal leadership qualities category: 1) positive attitude and disposition, and 2) critical leadership attributes and skills.
Positive attitude and disposition. Many principals recognized the importance of having the right attitude and disposition in leadership. Attitude and disposition were portrayed in a number of ways by different principals. Principal A suggested that one way to portray a positive attitude and disposition in principal leadership practice is through punctuality, which is a widespread problem among Liberians. He described himself as “an early bird” and said he takes his job seriously. In fact, he said he arrives at work at 6:00 AM and stays until 5:30 PM, at which time he heads to a private night school that he co-runs with a colleague. Principal A recounted telling his staff about the disposition required to take any assigned task seriously: “If you’re committed to smaller things, the bigger things will come.”

Many principals discussed the importance of having the right attitude and disposition in confronting the difficulty of their jobs. For example, Principals H observed that the “principal’s job in Liberia is a hard job . . . you are expected to solve all the problems.” Principal H spoke of his positive attitude toward learning as a means of improving his leadership performance: “Myself need refresher training . . . I buy my own books and read for professional development.” Principal L indicated that to be an effective principal one has to have a positive disposition rooted in honesty, love for kids, kindness, helping teachers and solving problems.

Critical leadership attributes and skills. Attitude and disposition aside, most principals enumerated specific attributes and skills they considered critical for success in their practice. Some indicated that they use these attributes and skills to varying degrees in executing their responsibilities. Most principals simply stated the importance of possessing these skills. One of the most common positive attributes among principals was a clear commitment to work. In the words of the principals, this could be demonstrated in numerous ways: passion, compassion, creative problem solving, good judgment, patience, monitoring and evaluation, and ethical
behavior. Principal D regarded commitment as a vital attribute for leadership success, adding that “school leaders must be committed for the betterment of the students and the nation.”

Principal D pointed out that principals should possess strong ethical values to make good decisions in their practice. Principal F also regarded good judgment and ethical disposition as vital principal attributes. He observed: “You got to be ethical as a principal and as a role model who deals with these students every day.” Principal J described creativity as very important and argued that leadership in post-conflict Liberia tends to be characterized by confusion because “…these are unusual times in the school system and the country as a whole, and principals need to be creative to solve problems.”

Principal F said patience is an essential attribute for principals and other school authorities because they “face difficult problems pertaining to students, teachers, parents and other people” every day. He stressed that the “job of a principal is hard . . . and hard jobs need people with patience so that you cannot quickly jump to conclusions” on issues. In keeping with these ideals, the principals stated that they should be democratic, culturally competent, and sensitive in their leadership. As discussed by the principals, these attributes could be evidenced in various forms: principals’ disposition to consult with their staff, engage in attentive listening, participatory decision-making, and effective communication; freely recognizing and cooperating with their community; and, when needed, employing effective conflict resolution strategies.

Principal A named “participatory leadership style” as an important attribute for principals and other school leaders to possess in order to make a positive impact on the school system. He said that a related skill is to “give credit to where it is due”; that is, to recognize the good works that others do in running a school. Principal I mentioned supervisory and cooperative skills as
key leadership skills for principals. Principal H expanded on a host of attributes of an effective principal as follows:

My son [a common way for Liberian adults to address young men], I have been in education long enough to know that principals must have administrative skills; they must be qualified and knowledgeable as an educator; they must understand the way education in Liberia works; they must have human and people skills and understand human nature; and they must have dedication and compassion for what we do. Otherwise, you will just be principal for the sake of being Mr. or Ms. principal.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

It is crucial to state the relationship between the theoretical framework and literature review of this study. One function of a theoretical framework, as Radhakrishna, Yoder and Ewing (2007) indicate, is to identify the “literature review categories” (p. 692) of a study. The theoretical framework in turn leads the researcher to the literature or existing knowledge on the problem or phenomenon being studied (“Importance of a Good Literature Review,” 2012).

Thus, the theoretical framework and literature review of this study shared some common categories or themes. In terms of relating the study’s findings to the theoretical framework and literature review, the themes are discussed in terms of somewhat different details and/or from different perspectives. The study’s findings are strongly related to its theoretical framework in the following thematic ways: 1) education and conflict; 2) leadership theories; and 3) professional development.

Education and conflict. Smith (2005) describes the relationship between education and conflict as an emerging and increasingly important field. The evolving field of conflict and education raises two important questions: 1) Should education policy in a post-conflict context aim at mainly reconstructing the pre-conflict education infrastructure? and 2) Should education policy in a post-conflict environment aim to recreate the education system entirely? (Paulson &
Rappleye, 2007). The question of whether Liberia should pursue a post-conflict policy of education reconstruction or the broader policy of education recreation appears to be an evolving challenge, where the Ministry of Education and its donor partners have been heavily concentrating on the reconstruction of the public education system but are currently making efforts to incorporate some recreation programs into the public education system.

**Education reconstruction policy.** In education reconstruction, education actors attempt to rebuild destroyed school facilities, to address socio-psychological issues such as post-conflict trauma, and to address economic and practical issues through measures such as recruiting teachers, providing school supplies, paying teachers’ salaries and ensuring access to education for girls (Paulson & Rappleye, 2007; Davies, 2004; Smith, 2005). Reconstruction has for many years been the thrust of World Bank intervention in war-ravaged countries; however, the World Bank has now shifted its attention considerably toward education recreation (Paulson & Rappleye, 2007; World Bank, 2005).

In one of its major education plans, the Ministry of Education prioritized the following areas: 1) infrastructure expansion and improvement, 2) instructional material and curriculum development, 3) teacher development, 4) accelerated learning programs for older students, 5) advisory supervision and assessment services, 6) education sector governance, 7) organizational capacity, and 8) institutional and implementation arrangements. These education domains are consistent with reconstruction policy.

Another example of how the study’s findings relate to the theoretical framework of reconstruction policy has to do with the efforts of the Liberian government to improve educators’ salaries. Since the end of Liberia’s 14-year war in 2003, and the inception of the first post-conflict constitutionally elected government in 2006, the Government of Liberia has taken
serious strides to increase educators’ salaries. The latest raise was announced in September 2011 (The New Dawn, 2011).

The reconstruction policy is also reflected in the work of USAID. As mentioned before, USAID runs the Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTTP), which provides in-service training for public school teachers (USAID Liberia, 2009, p. vii). The LTTP reflects the need that “approximately 60% of Liberian primary teachers were untrained and, probably, deficient in subject knowledge and, even, basic literacy” (USAID Report, 2009, p. 2). It also reflects the fact that “teachers are the most critical resource in education reconstruction” (World Bank, 2005, p. 49).

Education recreation policy. In contrast to the education reconstruction policy, the education recreation policy involves not only rebuilding damaged schools and providing support to educators but looking more deeply at the ways in which education may have contributed to the conflict and attempting to design curricula and programs to prevent a recurrence of the conflict (Paulson, 2009; Paulson & Rappleye, 2007). Paulson (2009) argues that a reconstruction policy may “fail to respond to structures, policies, and teaching/learning processes that may have contributed to conflict” (p. 5); therefore, it is detrimental to ignore the role of a recreation policy. Smith (2005) contends that reconstruction policies should serve as a basis for the longer-term development of a “conflict sensitive education” (p. 387)—Smith’s terminology for education recreation.

A conflict-sensitive education or recreation policy should, among other things, go beyond reconstructing physical facilities to include peace building, human rights education, conflict analysis, reconciliation and conflict prevention (Smith, 2005; Paulson, 2009; Paulson & Rappleye, 2007). From the perspective of curriculum, the findings suggest that the Ministry of
Education and its partners are still struggling to adopt or integrate a recreation policy into existing reconstruction programs. The curriculum is a key distinguishing feature between a policy of reconstruction and one of recreation. One does not need a curriculum to effectively reconstruct a school or raise teacher salaries, but some kind of curriculum is needed to effectively plan and teach school children about peace education, conflict resolution and prevention, reconciliation, and human rights in the public school system.

The findings speak to the increasing importance of integrating recreation programs into the existing reconstruction curricula to ensure a new social normalcy through peace education, conflict resolution training, and trauma counseling in schools (Davies, 2004). In collaboration with other international organizations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP) (2011) documented the following in a study:

In addition to being outdated, curriculum and textbooks in Liberia appear to be of little relevance. In fact, they seem to have failed to provide useful knowledge, attitudes and skills in the economic and social context in which Liberian learners live. Discussions on the quality of education cannot ignore the issues of curriculum and textbooks. In Liberia, curriculum and textbooks are both outdated. The primary curriculum currently in use dates from 1996. Recently, however, a new curriculum has been developed to meet West African Examinations Council (WAEC) requirements and includes HIV/AIDS education, peace education, human rights, and critical thinking. Even though the new curriculum is ready, the pilot phase was postponed until the 2009/2010 school year due to a shortage of funding. Once tested and finalized, the new curriculum will need to be integrated into the teacher training curriculum and in-service training program (p.43).

**Leadership theories and professional development.** These theoretical frameworks are intended to theorize or make logical sense of the relationships among several factors that have been identified as important to the problem of practice (Radhakrishna, Yoder & Ewing, (2007). The theories of leadership and professional development provided insight into the link between effective principals and effective schools and student outcome. One key way in which the
study’s findings were informed by the leadership and professional development theories is that the theories shed light on the attributes and opportunities that were identified by the principals and document review as important for effective principalship.

**Leadership theories.** The findings are consistent with the principals’ perceptions and desire for improved leadership skills set. These perceptions and desire reflect the important functions and challenges of principals. According to The Wallace Foundation (2011), which funds projects aimed at improving principal leadership, effective school principals perform five key functions: 1) shaping a vision of academic success for all students; 2) creating a climate hospitable to education; 3) cultivating leadership in others; 4) improving instruction; and 5) managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

In light of these functions, it’s understandable that the principals desire certain preparation for their responsibilities. Many admitted that their jobs are challenging, and that the right attitudes and dispositions are important leadership attributes for them to have. For example, Principals H observed that the “principal [‘s] job in Liberia is a hard job . . . you are expected to solve all the problems.” The multiple school challenges that the principals face highlight the difficulty of shaping a vision of student success, creating a healthy school environment and improving instruction.

**Professional development theory.** The study’s findings raise serious issues about the professional development of public school principals in post-war Liberia. Defined as in-service training and workshops or an ongoing learning process in which educators engage to enhance their professional practice (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003), professional development has a positive impact on the performance of principals (Spillane, Healey, & Parise, 2009; Sultana, Hassain &
Ali, 2011). The findings showed a gap between the importance of professional development opportunities for principals and the virtual lack of such opportunities in post-conflict Liberia.

Current research suggests that many school principals in developing countries are inadequately prepared to cope with the complex issues pertaining to the management and pedagogy of their schools. In terms of the availability of professional development opportunities in developing countries, Williams and Cummings (2005) and (Khan, 2010) point out that teachers are generally provided training, mostly at the start of their careers, but principals are far less likely to receive training for their leadership responsibilities.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

The findings of the study are related to the literature review in several ways. One main way is that the literature review provided a guiding concept or topical focus for the study (Rhoades, 2011); that is, it provided a focus for the relevant body of knowledge that had previously been published on the specific topics reviewed in this work (Rhoades, 2011). The findings’ relationship to the literature review is discussed in the following areas: 1) impact of conflict on education; 2) leadership competency; and 3) principal leadership development.

**Impact of conflict on education.** The principals and the document review revealed the terrible effects of the civil war on Liberia’s education system. One such effect was the destruction of the education infrastructure. As the principals said, the lack of enough school buildings and larger classrooms has led to overcrowding in public schools. Principal H described classes as “simply over-crowded,” while Principal C called for “bigger classrooms to accommodate . . . students.”

This finding is consistent with other studies on post-conflict societies. Studies have documented that civil wars tend to destroy a nation’s education system and that schools and
educators are assets that cannot easily be replaced after the war (Lai & Thyne, 2007; Chen, Loayza & Reynal-Querol, 2007). One study said:

The Liberian education system was shattered during the country's 14-year war, with the destruction of schools, loss of staff, and disruption of children’s education. Schools are currently being built, and teachers trained and educational materials distributed, but recovery is not keeping pace with public-school enrolment; between the 2005/2006 and 2008/9 school years, this saw a 48% increase, 33% of which was female. This increase in enrolment was aided by the enforcement of the 2001 Education Act, which made primary school education compulsory, and the 2006 abolition of school fees (UNICEF, 2011, p. 2).

As in Liberia, the carnage in Cambodia left the education system with almost no trained or experienced teachers. More than two-thirds of the teachers in Rwanda’s primary and secondary schools were killed or fled during the country’s civil war (World Bank, 2005). Almost all secondary teachers in East Timor prior to its war of independence were Indonesians, and their failure to return after the war left East Timor with virtually no trained or qualified personnel for the secondary school system and no support for tertiary education. An estimated 95% of classrooms were either destroyed or seriously damaged during the Timorese war (World Bank, 2005).

**Principal leadership development.** The literature review supports the findings regarding the need for pre- and post-leadership training programs for Liberian public school principals. As reported previously, only two of the 12 principals interviewed hold graduate degrees. Except for these two principals, who took leadership courses in their graduate programs, the rest underwent no prescribed or formal leadership education or training and hold no principalship licensure.

Bush (2003) asserts that it is widely acknowledged that principals need specific preparation if they are to be successful in leading schools. In a similar vein, Mathibe (2007) espouses that principals should be exposed to professional development programs to ensure that
schools are managed and led by well-qualified principals. These assertions relate to Principal E’s underscoring of the need for principal training. She indicated that there is an “acute need for refresher programs to keep principals up to date” with current developments and best practices in education leadership and to allow principals to share ideas.

Principal I made a similar point regarding the general lack of personal professional development initiative among Liberian public school principals: “Many of us principals . . . lead by our experience or by heart,” which suggests a considerable leadership knowledge gap. Professional development can enhance principal leadership by filling this gap (Newmann, King & Youngs, 2000; Khan, 2010). This point is also supported by Mestry and Grobler (2004), who stressed the necessity of providing principals with relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes through a development and training program so that they can manage their schools effectively and efficiently.

**Leadership attributes.** Another area where the research findings are strongly related to the literature review is that of leadership attributes. The principals generally felt that successful school leadership depends largely on the principal’s possession of a positive attitude, disposition and certain critical attributes and skills. Principal A suggested that one way that principals can portray a positive attitude and disposition is through punctuality, a value that many Liberians find hard to uphold or practice.

This principal’s perception about the importance of punctuality was supported by the literature review. Mestry and Grobler (2004), in their study of South African principals, noted the need for principals to possess the ability to plan, schedule and control the work of others, to use resources optimally, to deal with a large volume of paperwork and to meet the heavy demands on one’s time. Another study conducted among 221 principals in Saudi Arabia—a
developing country like South Africa and Liberia--found that principals rated respect for time as one of the most important features of effective principalship. In this study, the principals indicated the need to show respect for other people’s time by being punctual at school and functions (Zin, 2004).

One of the most common positive attributes shared by Liberian principals was a clear commitment to work. In their words, this could be demonstrated in several ways: passion, compassion, creative problem solving, good judgment, patience, monitoring and evaluation, and ethical behavior. Principal D pointed out that principals should possess strong ethical values to make good decisions in their practice. Principal F also regarded good judgment and ethical disposition as vital principal attributes. He observed: “You got to be ethical as a principal and as a role model who deals with these students every day.”

The literature is replete with well-documented body of knowledge on the instrumental role played by morality in effective leadership. To emphasize the significance of ethical leadership, Davis (2006) posits that “all leadership behavior is rooted in the soil of morality,” (p. 11). Campbell (1997) explains this point further: “educational literature increasingly emphasizes the importance of ethics in educational leadership and the need to recognize professional responsibilities as basic ethical imperatives” (p. 287). These statements from the literature review are consistent with the findings of the study such as the flexibility fee and the exchange of money for grades.

**Final Researcher Commentary**

My final commentary takes a further look at the implications of the data analysis from two broad national perspectives: 1) education policy and reform; and 2) national socio-economic and political development.
**Education policy and reform.** The data analysis has important implications for the Liberian Ministry of Education’s efforts to reform public schooling. The major problems of low student achievement, teacher absenteeism and lateness, exchange of sex and/or money for grades, and inadequate principal training and support – all of which were identified in the data – will likely, if not properly addressed, contribute toward the continued underperformance of public education in Liberia and thereby impede any meaningful efforts to reform education.

Since Liberia conducted its first free democratic elections in 2005, the government has instituted, through the Ministry of Education and with the assistance of various international and national organizations, a variety of interventions aimed at rehabilitating and reforming public education. Some of the major interventions that are being implemented with varying degrees of success, include salary raises for school personnel, free and compulsory primary education, accelerated learning programs, targeted education programs for girls, reviews of education policy, teacher development, infrastructure expansion, provision of school materials, school health and nutrition programs, early childhood education and scholarships (Education Sector Plan of Liberia: 2010-2020, 2011).

One of the Ministry of Education’s main initiatives for education reform is the decentralization of public education. In concert with the relevant partners, the Ministry is working to decentralize educational control and decision-making in order to stimulate wider community involvement, ownership and democracy in education. According to the decentralization plan, education reform stands a better chance of succeeding if power and decision-making are decentralized to the county, district and school levels.

The following assertion highlights the rationale of such a decentralization plan: “The current [centralized] national system is marked by general inaction, fractured and variable
communication, and limited policy enactment or implementation” (National Education Policies: 2011, 2011, p. 4). Judging from this statement and realities in Liberia, it is clear that some of the problems pointed out by the principals are not necessarily a result of the harsh economic constraints facing the Liberian government, public school system, students, parents, school personnel and communities; they are also the result of leadership, planning and implementation failures.

It is difficult to imagine how decentralization can succeed if administrative and leadership capacities are not built at the levels of the county, the district and especially the school. The National Education Policies (2011) document recognizes this point: “Full decentralization, theoretically, requires full capacity at these [county, district and school] decentralized levels” (p. 2). The document further mentions that “for decentralization to schools to be successful, principals must acquire new skills in leadership and management—including financial management, teacher and personnel management, and community relations” (p. 6). County education officers (CEOs) and district education officers (DEOs), both of whom are critical to the success of education reform and decentralization, will need to be trained as well.

The literature is rich with evidence about the importance of and need for capable principal leadership in education reform. Salazar (2007) notes that “for school reform efforts to succeed, strong leadership must prevail and as such, principals must undergo professional development that is aimed at helping them be more effective, knowledgeable, and qualified to facilitate continuous improvement” (p. 21). Fullan (2007) acknowledges that “all major research on innovation and school effectiveness shows that the principal strongly influences the likelihood of change” (p. 95) and that “the principal is necessary for effective implementation” (p. 96). He
laments, however, that what “the principal should do specifically to manage change at the school level is a complex affair for which the principal often has little preparation” (p. 96).

When decentralization policies are most fully implemented, the administrative capacity at the local level either already exists or can be provided through training (Winkler, 1989). Never before has there been in education a greater recognition of the need for ongoing professional development programs for principals and teachers as a means to ensure school improvement (Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Dembele & Lefoka, 2007; Zwiers, 2007; Lethoko, Heystek & Maree, 2001).

**National socio-economic and political development.** The data analysis also has significant implications for Liberia’s national development initiatives. These initiatives range from the globally agreed-upon goals of Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Liberia’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). Liberia has an EFA national action plan that covers the years 2004 to 2015. This plan is rooted in the 1990 and 2000 World Education Conferences (held respectively in Jomtien, Thailand and Dakar, Senegal) that agreed on a set of global partnership arrangements and efforts for achieving the following goals: 1) expanding early childhood care and education; 2) providing free and compulsory primary education for all; 3) promoting learning and life skills for young people and adults; 4) increasing adult literacy by 50%; 5) achieving gender equality in education by 2015; and 6) improving the quality of education (“The eight millennium development goals,” 2012; Tilak, 2009).

The MDGs are eight global development goals that were formulated in the United States in 2000 by United Nations world leaders as goals to be achieved by 2015 (“MDG Strategies,” 2012; Humphreys & Richard, 2005). MDG 2 and 3 – namely, achievement of universal primary education for all children and elimination of gender disparity in education by 2015, respectively
– are derived from the EFA goals (Education Sector Plan of Liberia, 2010-2020). Liberia’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) integrates several objectives, including the goals of EFA and the MDGs. The PRS is a comprehensive rehabilitation and development program designed by Liberia and its international partners to put the country on a sustainable course by focusing on four fundamental pillars: 1) security, 2) economic revitalization, 3) governance and rule of law and 4) infrastructure and basic services (Education Sector Plan of Liberia, 2010-2020).

Liberia’s Education Sector Plan rightfully recognizes that “Education can conveniently fit into all four pillars” (p. 18) mentioned above. It is hard to envision how Liberia can successfully achieve the EFA, MDG, PRS and other national development goals without an effective public education system. The positive effects of education and national development have been well documented (Chapman, Mahlck & Smulders, 1997; Nwomonoh, 1998; Harber, 1997). As Phillips and Schweisfurth (2008) and USAID (2001) indicate, education is a key social institution that can affect the values and behaviors of individuals, shape a nation’s future citizens and workforce, and impact national development. Investment in the education of a people can increase the overall economic productivity of their nation because education instills the necessary skills, knowledge and motivations for economic productivity, which will provide a rate of return for both the individual and society (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008; Gyimah-Brempong, 2011; Thakrar, Zinn, & Wolfenden, 2009; World Bank, 1988).

Odularu and Olowookere (2010) emphasize the importance to education to socio-economic and political development in this way:

Education is a *sine qua non* component of development which reduces the twin burdens of poverty and diseases. An effective way of generating economic growth is through educational development. In other words, the basic importance of education is to enable individuals with knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge. Education is therefore commonly regarded as the most direct avenue to rescue a substantial number of
people out of poverty since there is likely to be more employment opportunities and higher wages for skilled workers. Education at all levels contributes to economic growth through imparting discipline and specific skills necessary for a variety of workplaces. It contributes to economic growth by improving health, reducing fertility and possibly by contributing to political stability. Furthermore, education can enable children’s attitudes and assist them to grow up with social values that are more beneficial to the nation and themselves (p. 85).

It is equally hard to see how Liberia’s public education system can become effective enough to contribute to the nation’s development efforts without well-trained principals who, as Dufour, Dufour, and Eaker (2008) point out, perform the leadership role of defining the school’s mission, supervising and evaluating the instructional program, coordinating the curriculum, monitoring student progress, and promoting a positive learning climate.

School leadership can be made more effective if the Ministry of Education can develop transformational principals who would emphasize “the ingredients of change—ideas, innovations, influence, and consideration for the individual in the process” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 391). Transformational principals also emphasize individual initiatives, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards, high expectation and modeling (Hallinger, 2003; Ylimaki, 2007), in addition to inspiring and exciting their followers to high levels of performance or empowering their followers to achieve extraordinary results (Hallinger, 2003; Nohria & Khurana, 2010; Ylimaki, 2007). Prioritizing the leadership development of public school principals in Liberia is particularly critical, given that principals in developing countries have generally been found to take totalitarian approaches to leadership (Oplatka, 2004).

Oplatka (2004) writes that although there is no single description of school principals in developing countries, studies have revealed some common characteristics, such as limited autonomy, autocratic leadership style, summative evaluation, low degree of initiating change and lack of instructional leadership functions. Principals in Kenya and Tanzania tend to be promoted
without specific preparation, receive little or no induction, have limited access to suitable in-service training, and enjoy little support from the educational bureaucracy (Abdalla, Onguko, & Webber, 2008).

In addition to the need for professional development, the other problems that the principals cited – inadequate educational supplies and materials, overcrowded classrooms and lack of overall administrative support – demand attention in any effort to improve the effectiveness of public education. These problems are not unique to post-conflict Liberia, though. A UNESCO study of the effect of civil wars on education from 1980 to 1997 found that civil wars are likely to reduce educational expenditures and enrollment across all levels of schooling, to destroy a state’s infrastructure, including school facilities, to reduce foreign investment and tourism, and to cause a loss of human productivity as a result of death and injury (Lai & Thyne, 2007).

The success of Liberia’s development efforts in crucial national areas, such as physical infrastructure, agriculture, health, economic growth, global trade and foreign policy, is related to effective education reform and student achievement. Key indicators of Liberia’s socio-economic progress are understandably lagging behind many other African countries. For example, Liberia falls at the low rank of 182 out of 187 countries, according to the United Nations 2011 Human Development Index. Liberia is amongst the poorest countries in the world, with a 2011 Gross National Income of US$ 396 per capita. The IMF, World Bank and other creditors have approved a package of US$4.6 billion under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, reducing external debt to about 15% of GDP (UNDP 2010 Report, 2011).

Liberia’s continued socio-economic and political development would hinge largely on education, which is capable of accelerating economic growth, increasing wealth and income
distribution, improving equality opportunity, increasing the availability of skilled human power, reducing population growth, and enhancing national unity and political stability (Nwomonoh, 1998; Gyimah-Brempong, Paddison & Mitiku, 2006).

Conclusion

The data analysis shows that public school principals in Liberia face a wide range of problems. These include (but are not limited to) a lack of adequate and sustainable opportunities for professional leadership development, the misconduct of students, absenteeism and lateness on the part of teachers, an inadequate pool of qualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms, an inadequate supply of instructional materials, low student achievement, limited parental involvement in school activities, trading of sex and money for passing grades, and inadequate supervisory support from higher education officials.

These complex and multifaceted problems confront public school principals at a time when principals are increasingly being expected to provide effective school leadership. Mestry and Singh (2007) make this point succinctly: “Expectations of principals have moved from demands of management and control to the demands of an educational leader who can foster staff development, parent involvement, community support, and learner growth” (p. 477).

It is important to note that the Liberian government has made tremendous strides in raising the salaries of school personnel. The government of Liberia, in its second major salary raise of civil servants (including teachers and administrators) since coming to power in 2006, announced in September 2011 a significant increase in the salaries of its workers (The New Dawn Newspaper, 2011). For the first time in Liberia’s educational history, public school teachers and principals now earn more income than their private school counterparts. Nevertheless, financial constraints remain a major problem affecting public education in post-
conflict Liberia, and other problematic areas identified by the principals also need to be addressed. One way to do this is to provide opportunities and support for the development or enhancement of the leadership competencies of public school principals.

Proper training and adequate supporting for principals is a major prerequisite for school effectiveness and student achievement. Development opportunities that provide principals with needed knowledge, skills, values and attitudes are vital, particularly as changing educational demands become increasingly difficult to meet (Mestry & Singh, 2007). This is especially true for the Liberian public school system because it experiences the problems of student indiscipline, teacher absenteeism and lateness, overcrowded classrooms, limited educational materials and supplies, sex and money trading for undeserved passing grades and low student academic performance. The World Bank captures the post-conflict predicament well: “The legacy of conflict imposes significant additional burdens on education . . . accumulated backlogs in physical infrastructure, supplies and equipment, policy and system development, teacher development and training, and overage children” (World Bank, 2005, p. 26).

Well-prepared and supported principals would be an important asset to the Liberian government as it attempts to decentralize the hierarchical educational bureaucracy to the county, district and school levels. Most importantly, without effective principals and effective schools, Liberia’s socio-economic and political development goals, such as EFA, MDG and PRS, will suffer. As studies have shown, education plays a critical role in the wider reconstruction of a society. This role ranges from fostering peace and social cohesion to facilitating economic recovery and moving the country forward (World Bank, 2005; Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008; Staeheli & Hammett, 2009).
References


Appendix A: Letter of Recruitment

Appendices-A

Dear Participant,

I am a Liberian pursuing a doctoral degree in Education at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A. As a requirement for the completion of the degree, I am conducting a research study that focuses on the perceptions of Liberian public school principals regarding their need for the development of leadership competencies that could strengthen them to effectively lead their institutions. This letter is intended to ask for your help and participation in this study.

Your participation relates to talking with me in a one-on-one interview at your school or another place we can decide on. The interview may last for 60 to 90 minutes, depending on what you have to say and questions I may have to ask. The interview will be audiotaped for transcription and analysis purposes only. You will also be asked to kindly fill out a short questionnaire on biographical or background information about you at the end of the interview. It will take about five minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

It is hoped that the results of this study could help determine the main leadership challenges you face and some training and support opportunities that you may need. Education policy makers could use this information to help position principals for the difficult job of running a school. Your identity will not be disclosed and the information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. At the end of the interview, you will receive USD 15.00 as a token of appreciation for taking part in this effort.

For any questions relating to this study or if you are interested in participating, you may call me directly at 06889502. You can also reach me via email at Norman.ro@husky.neu.edu. If you would like to schedule an interview, please contact me no later than

Thank you for your consideration to be a participant in this research study.

Sincerely,

Zohong B. Norman
Doctoral Researcher
Northeastern University
Appendix B: IRB Letter of Consent

Northeastern University - College of Professional Studies
360 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02115 U.S.A.

Investigator Name: Zobong B. Norman
Title of Project: The Perceptions of Public School Principals in Liberia about their Post-Conflict Leadership Competencies Development Needs

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
I am inviting you to take part in a research study, which this form and the researcher will explain to you. You may ask the researcher any questions that you have. You have the right to participate or not to participate in this study.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being asked to participate in this study because it is about practicing public school principals in Liberia and you are one of them.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions that Liberian public school principals have about their need for the development of their leadership competencies.

Where will this study take place, how much of my time will it take and what will I be asked to do?
The interview can take place at your school or at a good place we can decide upon. Your participation includes talking with me in a one-on-one interview. The interview may last for 60 to 90 minutes, depending on what you have to say and questions I may have to ask. The interview will be audio-taped for transcription and analysis purposes only. You will also be asked to kindly fill out a short questionnaire on biographical or background information about you at the end of the interview. It will take about five minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me and will I benefit by being in this research?
There is no foreseeable risk to you. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, you do not have to and we can stop the interview at any time. There is no direct benefit for you in this study. However, it is hoped that the results of the study could be used to inform policies and programs that may support principals and the education system as a whole.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researcher will know that you participated in this study. No one who reads the final report based on this research will be able to trace any information to you. You identity will be coded so that no one can identify you, your school or any individual as being of this project.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
For any questions relating to this study, you may contact me directly at 06889502 or Norman.zobong@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact my advisors Dr. Kimberly Nolan, at 802-535-9358 or k.nolan@neu.edu and Dr. David Szabia, interim director of the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University, at 617-714-4069 or d.szabia@neu.edu.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115 U.S.A. at 617-373-4588, or n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation and will it cost me anything to participate?
You will be given US$ 15.00 as a token of appreciation at the end of the interview. You may keep this form for yourself.

Thank you. Zobong B. Norman

APPROVED
NU IRB
11-060-10
VALID
11/23/11
THROUGH
11/23/12
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Introduction

Good morning (afternoon) and thank you for granting me this interview. Again, my name is Zobong Norman.

Informed Consent Form

Let’s start with the informed consent form. I would like you to take a few minutes to read this form (hand form to principal). Please ask any question(s) you may have. After that, both of us will sign two identical consent forms. I will take one copy and the other copy will remain with you.

Now that we have covered information about my institutional affiliation and the purpose of my study in the informed consent form, let’s talk about the interview. The interview has two parts. The first part involves me asking you some questions, which might take 60 to 90 minutes or longer. I will ask follow-up questions to make sure that I understand your answer or to get more detail or to clarify a point or question. The questions are aimed at understanding your experiences as a principal and your thoughts about your leadership preparation and in-service support needs. The second part is a short survey containing six questions about your background to get an insight into the diversity of the principals in the study. It would take about three minutes to answer the survey questions.

I would like for you to feel very comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel. Your answers will remain confidential and your identity anonymous. There is no right or wrong answer and desirable or undesirable answer. If you feel that you are not in a position to answer any question or questions for any reason, you should simply tell me so.

Tape Recorder

I will be tape-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is to record the interview accurately and at the same time be able to engage in an attentive conversation with you. I assure you again that all your comments will be kept strictly confidential and that anyone who reads the thesis will know your identity. I will create a file on the electronic recorder for each interview before I arrive for the interview. I will ensure that new battery (ies) is put into the recorder for each interview. At the start, the middle and the end of an interview, I will check or observe the recorder to make sure that it is functioning properly.

Identity Coding

To ensure anonymity, the 12 principals will be disguised by assigning codes to them. The codes are numbers 1 to 12. The numbers will be assigned in the order in which the interviews are conducted (i.e., the first principal to be interviewed will be principal number 1 and the last will
be principal number 12). The number will be recorded in the box next to interviewee identity. There will be 12 interview protocol forms, one for each principal. The date of each interview and the time the interview starts and ends will be recorded. The electronic files will be named by the corresponding codes or numbers of the principals (i.e., the first and second files will carry the names Principal.1 and Principal.2, respectively.

Interviewee Identity

Interview Start Time

Interview End Time

Interview Date

Electronic File Number (same as principal’s number)

Interview Conclusion

At the end of an interview, the principal will be asked if she/he has any further comment regarding the issues covered during the interview. Following this, I will thank the principal for agreeing to participate in the study and for the interview opportunity. I will then offer the principal a token of appreciation in the amount of US $15.00.

Interview Questions

Many of the questions below are very much related. Any question that is answered in a previous response will be skipped. As much as possible, there will be minimum interruptions of the principals as they narrate their stories and experiences. Interruptions will be necessary to ask follow-up questions and to refocus the issues of the interviews.

1. How did your workday go or is going?
2. Tell me something about yourself.
3. How and why did you get into education?
4. Walk me through the journey of how you got to the position of principal?
5. How does your typical day look like as principal?
6. What are the responsibilities as a school principal?
7. What are the main problems you face with students, teachers, or parents at school, or community as a principal?
8. Tell me about programs or opportunities that are available to prepare or help principals to run their schools well.
9. What do you think the Ministry of Education could do to help principals to do their jobs?

10. Tell me about visits that officials of the Ministry of Education or the County Education Officer makes to your school and what do they do or say, and what do you tell them?

11. What do you think about leadership development programs or ongoing in-service training to sharpen the leadership skills of principals?

12. What could be the contents of such programs and how could they be structured to create a balance in the activities of principals?

13. What other experiences have you had in the field of education or another field?
Appendix D: Modified Interview Protocol

Interview Introduction
Good morning (afternoon) and thank you for granting me this interview. Again, my name is Zobong Norman.

Informed Consent Form
Let’s start with the informed consent form. I would like you to take a few minutes to read this form (hand form to principal). Please ask any question (s) you may have. After that, I will take one copy and the other copy will remain with you.

Now that we have covered information about my institutional affiliation and the purpose of my study in the informed consent form, let’s talk about the interview. The interview has two parts. The first part involves me asking you some questions, which might take 60 to 90 minutes or longer. I will ask follow-up questions to make sure that I understand your answer or to get more detail or to clarify a point or question. The questions are aimed at understanding your experiences as a principal and your thoughts about your leadership preparation and in-service support needs. The second part is a short survey containing six questions about your background to get an insight into the diversity of the principals in the study. It would take about three minutes to answer the survey questions.

I would like for you to feel very comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel. Your answers will remain confidential and your identity anonymous. There is no right or wrong answer and desirable or undesirable answer. If you feel that you are not in a position to answer any question or questions for any reason, you should simply tell me so.

Tape Recorder [was not done]
I will be tape-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is to record the interview accurately and at the same time be able to engage in an attentive conversation with you. I assure you again that all your comments will be kept strictly confidential and that anyone who reads the thesis will know your identity. I will create a file on the electronic recorder for each interview before I arrive for the interview. I will ensure that new battery (ies) is put into the recorder for each interview. At the start, the middle and the end of an interview, I will check or observe the recorder to make sure that it is functioning properly.

Identity Coding
To ensure anonymity, the 12 principals will be disguised by assigning codes to them. The codes are Principals A to L. The codes will be assigned in the order in which the interviews are conducted (i.e., the first principal to be interviewed will be Principal A and the last will be Principal L). The code will be recorded in the box next to interviewee identity. There will be 12 interview protocol forms, one for each principal. The date of each interview and the time the interview starts and ends will be recorded. The electronic files will be named by the
corresponding codes of the principals (i.e., the first and second files will carry the names Principal A and Principal B, respectively.

Interviewee Identity

Interview Start Time

Interview End Time

Interview Date

Electronic File Number (same as principal’s number)

**Interview Conclusion**
At the end of an interview, the principal will be asked if she/he has any further comment regarding the issues covered during the interview. Following this, I will thank the principal for agreeing to participate in the study and for the interview opportunity. I will then offer the principal a token of appreciation in the amount of US $15.00.

**Interview Questions**
Many of the questions below are very much related. Any question that is answered in a previous response will be skipped. As much as possible, there will be minimum interruptions of the principals as they narrate their stories and experiences. Interruptions will be necessary to ask follow-up questions and to refocus the issues of the interviews.

I. **Ice Breakers**

1. How did your workday go or is going?

2. How does your typical day look like as principal?

II. **Education Journey**

3. Tell me something about yourself.

4. How and why did you get into education?

5. Walk me through the journey of how you got to the position of principal?

6. Tell me about your career path and what you have done so far to accomplish it.

7. What other experiences have you had in the field of education or another field?

III. **Responsibilities & Problems**

8. What are the responsibilities as a school principal?

9. What are the main problems you face with students, teachers, or parents at school, or community as a principal?
IV. Central Administrative Support

10. What do you think the central administration (MOE/MCSS) could do to help principals to do their jobs?

11. Tell me about visits from the central administration/supervisors and what did they do or say?

V. Professional Development & Skills

12. What do you think about leadership development programs or ongoing in-service training to sharpen the leadership skills of principals?

13. What could be the contents of such programs and how could they be structured to create a balance in the activities of principals?

14. How have you been keeping up-to-date on principal leadership issues? Describe any courses, reading, seminars, etc.

15. Describe for me the skills or qualities that a principal needs to be an effective school leader in Liberia?

16. Tell me about programs or opportunities that are available to prepare or help principals to run their schools well.
Appendix E: Demographic/Background Information

Direction: Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge. They are intended to get background information to use in this academic research. All information will be coded and will not identify you.

1. What is your gender?

   Male [ ]   Female [ ]

2. What is your age?

   [ ] 18-24 years
   [ ] 25-44 years
   [ ] 45-64 years
   [ ] 65 years and over

3. What is your nationality

   [ ] Liberian
   [ ] Other

4. Your marital status

   [ ] Married
   [ ] Separated
   [ ] Widowed
   [ ] Divorced
   [ ] Never married
5. Highest level of education completed

- Elementary (1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade)
- Junior high (7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade)
- High school (10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade)
- Teacher Training Certificate
- Some college (1 to 3 years)
- College graduate (4 years or more)

6. Number of years as principal

- Less than a year
- 1 to 3 years
- 3 to 6 years
- 7 to 10 years
- 11 to 14 years
- 15 years or more
Appendix F: IRB Research Proposal Approval

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: April 26, 2011  IRB #: 11-04-10

Principal Investigator(s): Kimberly Nolan
                        Zobong Norman

Department: Doctor of Education Program
            College of Professional Studies

Address: 42 Belvidere
         Northeastern University

Title of Project: The Perceptions of Public School Principals in Liberia about their Post-Conflict Competencies Development Needs

Participating Sites: N/A

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7

Informed Consents: One (1) unsigned consent form

As per CFR 45.117(b)(2) Signed consent is being waived as the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required.

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: APRIL 25, 2012

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix G: IRB Research Proposal Approval Renewal

Northeastern

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION
RENEWAL APPROVAL

Date: April 5, 2012               IRB #: 11-04-10
Principal Investigator(s): Kimberly Nolan
                                      zobong Norman
Department:                        Doctor of Education Program
                                      College of Professional Studies
Address:                          42 Babeville
                                      Northeastern University
Title of Project:                 The Perceptions of Public School Principals in Liberia about
                                      their Post-Conflict Competencies Development Needs
MODIFICATIONS:
1. Interviews were not audio-taped; and 2. Minor changes to
   interview questions.
Approval Status:                   Closed to Enrollment – Ongoing Analysis Only
Participating Sites:               N/A
Original Protocol Approved:       April 26, 2011
DHHS Review Category:             Expedited #7
Informed Consents:                N/A
Monitoring Interval:              12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: APRIL 4, 2013

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting
   participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
   information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be
   reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to
   the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other
   university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

N. C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix H: Research Identity Memo

Introduction

The memo documents my initial reflections on my identity, personal experiences, values, goals and perspectives that I bring into this research, which focuses on pressing problems facing public school principals in Monrovia, Liberia and the need for a professional development program for principals that will enhance their management and leadership skills. The value of this memo is twofold: first, it can help me to identify the significance or contribution of my personal motives, values and insights with respect to the study; and second, it can guide me against the temptation of allowing my personal assumptions and motives to influence the research in a negative or biased manner.

Relations to the research topic

As a Liberian, I am troubled by the enormous devastation of the education system by the country’s 14-year civil war. Historically, public education has been grossly unfunded in many ways by Liberian political administrations. I experienced 11 of the 14 years during which the civil conflict ravaged Liberia. I saw or heard of the horrific effects of the conflict on education facilities as well as on the human capital of the education system, particularly the students, parents, teachers and principals who are at the frontline of running the school system. Worse still, Liberia faces acute socio-economic and “brain drain” problems. I feel a strong urge to return to Liberia in the future to contribute to the rehabilitation and reform of public education.

Relevant prior experiences

I attended six different public schools, both rural and urban, in Liberia. The management and leadership styles of the principals of schools that I attended, unfortunately, bordered on
dictatorial and questionable tendencies. Some of their leadership styles are arguably rooted in Liberian culture, which in many ways determines the broad powers that leaders wield in Liberia. As British politician Lord Acton once said, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Dice, 2008, p. 4). The principals of the schools that I tended seemed to have the passion and potential necessary for effectively managing their schools. But was there a missing element?

**Potential benefit of personal experiences**

A potential positive contribution of my personal experiences to the study is that as a Liberian, I am familiar with and have a great understanding of the Liberian culture and educational environment. I was born and bred in these systems. I am both a victim and a beneficiary of Liberian public education. One year in middle school, five of my school mates and I were whipped 25 lashes each before the student assembly for vandalism and for vehemently opposing the practice of some teachers to have affairs with their female students. Our principal conducted his own kangaroo trial and convicted us. The teachers’ unethical conduct was never investigated, nor were the teachers involved penalized. Under this same principal, I was later, without justification, denied the opportunity to run for a leadership position on the student council. I was also, without just cause, denied a double promotion in the seventh grade, in spite of the recommendation and insistence of all of my teachers. Three of our best teachers were transferred to other schools for criticizing the poor leadership of the principal.

My experiential knowledge of Liberian culture and the Liberian school system may allow me to relate to and better understand the challenges facing public school principals and the prospects for school leadership reform. This knowledge may also put me in a culturally advantageous position for engaging principals in the interview process in ways that are likely to
produce significant textual data. The principals might perhaps view me with less skepticism than they would a non-Liberian who would be considered a cultural “outsider.” However, the fact that I would be returning to Liberia after 10 years should also be important insofar as I missed things while I was away. This would put me in the position of a student, while the principals would rightfully be in the position of experts during the interviews.

**Potential disadvantage of personal experiences**

The negative experiences that I described above might pose a potential experiential problem for the research. These experiences (among others) played an important role in my choice of research topic and location. The assumptions embedded in my research question also reflect my experience of school leadership in Liberia to some extent. For example, my assumption that there appears to be a need for a leadership development program for public school principals has inherent links to my knowledge about and experiences of Liberian education and culture. Such personal knowledge and perspectives could have negative implications for the design, conduct and conclusions of the study. I should constantly remind myself that my assumptions about and experiences of public school leadership and culture in Liberia must not interfere with the professional and impartial design and conduct of the study or with the conclusions that will be derived from the data analysis. I also have to be mindful of the likelihood that some participants in the study might think that I want to capitalize on my American “education” or “values” to alter the status quo.

**Personal, intellectual and practical goals**

A major personal goal for the study is that I want to contribute to education reform in Liberia. Delving into the literature for a better understanding of educational principalship and leadership promises to be an exciting intellectual exercise. My practical goal is to design and
conduct professional qualitative research into the leadership development needs of public school principals in Liberia. These needs will be explored from the perspectives of the principals, who are living and dealing with the post-conflict challenges involved in leading their schools.
Appendix I: Map of Liberia

Source: World Bank
Appendix J: Map of Africa

Source: World Atlas