The Response to an Educational Mess, Influencing Teacher Professionalism in Liberia

Practical Arguments in Political Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Understanding ‘the teacher’ as a discursive construct, this study sets out to investigate on what grounds and how 21st century primary teachers in Liberia are being constructed, through influences well beyond its national borders. Emphasizing the importance of culture and context, it examines what influences the country’s sociohistorical past might have on this construct.

Utilizing Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) Political Discourse Analysis as both theory and method, the study identifies and analyses the practical arguments of a 2018, press conference held by the Ministry of Education in Liberia, made accessible to discourse analysis through a process of transcribing. The aim of the study is to identify the current response to what has been termed an educational mess in Liberia, in an attempt to explore how this response might influence conceptions of teacher professionalism in the country.

The study revealed that the current response to the educational mess in Liberia is shaped by an underlying neoliberal ideology, resulting in an economization and standardization of the country’s education sector, feeding into conceptions of teacher professionalism, in essence rendering them as controlled and compliant. Finally, the study acknowledges its limitations and proposes further research into the topic of education and teacher professionalism in Liberia.
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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2000, at the closure of the World Education Forum in Dakar (UNESCO, 2000) 164 governments committed themselves to the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990), all pledging to work towards achieving a set of six global education goals by 2015. However, when at the deadline, only a third of these governments had been able to reach the goals. Today, although progress has been made, globally, there is still a staggering number of children out of school and even more who do not complete their primary education. What’s more, out of the ones who do complete, many graduated without having acquired basic academic skills (UNESCO, 2015a). This is especially true for sub-Saharan Africa [SSA], today, home to more than half of the world’s primary school aged children out of school, an estimate that is increasing due to rapid population growth. On average, out of the children in SSA who do enrol into primary education, 30 percent drop out before completion (AUC, 2016). Moreover, increasingly more countries in the region have evaluated the quality of their education systems with curriculum based national assessments emphasizing literacy and numeracy, highlighting the quite ubiquitous notion of children in SSA entering primary education and leaving without having acquired basic competencies in reading, writing and mathematics, some even unable to read a single word (AUC, 2016; UNESCO, 2015c).

UNESCO (2014, p. 18) has characterized it as “a learning crisis that needs urgent attention”. The African Union Commission [AUC] (2016), although acknowledging the concern, seems more optimistic, promising the African Renaissance, of which success or failure will determine the destiny of the continent. No matter how one perceives it, it seems as if SSA and its education systems are at a crossroads, and that the “education programs designed and financed from the outside”, as AUC (2016, p. 10) puts it, “unavoidably lack coherence and their impact remains limited”. Both UNESCO (2014) and AUC (2016), associates this apparent lack of learning outcomes with teacher quality. More specifically, with “poor quality of teaching” (AUC, 2016, p. 15). Although, the provision of teachers in SSA has increased since the adoption of the EFA-agenda, countries in the region have not been able to keep up with enrolment rates, and have, according to UNESCO (2015c), often employed teachers who are not adequately trained, if trained at all.

However, this association between the quality of teachers and the quality of education is not surprising. Admittedly, international research has highlighted teacher quality to be “the single most important school variable influencing student achievement” (Verspoor, 2008, p.
Hattie (2008) arguably illustrates the important role teachers hold best in his work, stating that:

> Teachers are among the most powerful influences in learning [...] they need to be directive, influential, caring and actively engaging in the passion of teaching and learning [...] teachers need to be aware of what each and every student is thinking and knowing to construct meaning and meaningful experiences in light of this knowledge, and have proficient knowledge and understanding of their content to provide meaningful and appropriate feedback such that each student moves progressively through the curriculum levels. (p. 238)

On the other hand, this association between the quality of teachers and the quality of education has, according to Klees (2018), in almost all international reports, in essence manifested itself as a sort of shifting of blame towards teachers, for the deficiencies of primary education in SSA. Nonetheless, the lack of learning outcomes, as measured by standardized national and international assessments, in SSA has, led to debates about the proficiency of teachers and an increased emphasis on teacher–professionalism and –professionalization (Mulkeen, 2009). Thus, fundamentally, it is a question of the construction of teachers. However, one can ask in what image teachers are being constructed, and if this construct adequately fulfils the needs of the context in which it is being constructed to operate?

The example of the Anglophone West African Republic of Liberia illustrates these aspects rather well. In 2013 an event occurred, in which all 25,000 high school students taking the state University entrance exam failed. As a result, the then President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf publicly proclaimed that the country’s education system was a mess. This spurred education policy reform and a number of interventions in teacher training aimed at turning what appeared to be a negative trend (Klees, 2018; Piper & Korda, 2011; Toweh, 2013). These interventions have in essence emphasized capacity building for literacy and numeracy, implementing, among other things, scripted lesson plans, arguably adhering to an almost Victorian view of education and teachers (Klees, 2018; Piper & Korda, 2011). This is in consonance with Battiste’s (2002) characterization of teacher education globally, which, according to her, generally reflect a Western hegemonic ontology, epistemology and
axiology, shaped by neoliberal discourses, emphasising competition, individualism and scientific research (Battiste, 2002). According to Battiste (2002), this arguably manifests itself in the classroom as rote learning, pupil passivity, limited verbal interaction, and a reliance on prepping for tests. This is seemingly in stark contrast with the picture Hattie (2008), and UNESCO (2014) for that matter, paints of the ideal teacher.

Questions that have been posed within the quest for improving learning outcomes, not only in Liberia, but in large parts of SSA overall has, arguably, almost exclusively concerned technical issues of teaching and the provision of teachers (Mulkeen, 2009). Questions that have not been raised, are those of a more elusive nature, in consonance with teacher educator, O’Loughlin’s (1994, p. 207) general but rather critical observations, that “oftentimes we are confronted with generic images of teachers – characterless caricatures without selves, histories, agency, or awareness of the sociohistorical context in which they live and work”. Thus, regardless of teachers’ proficiency in literacy and numeracy and the provision of teachers, we can ask ourselves: does it matters how governments, through policy, construct teachers? And; does it matter who’s in position to define the circumstances of which teachers are constructed? In other words, does it matter in what image and on what basis teachers in SSA are being constructed to serve at the forefront in catering to the masses of children entering primary education in the 21st century? This is exactly the subject I aim at addressing with this particular study.

1.1 Study overview and structure

Taking Liberia as a starting point and the exploration of ‘the teacher’, as a discursive construct, in designing a comparative case study, drawing on Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), this study sets out to investigate on what grounds and how 21st century primary teachers in Liberia are being constructed. Moreover, emphasizing the importance of culture and context, the study examines what influences the country’s sociohistorical past might have on this construct, and explores the implications this construct might have on teacher professionalism. I adopt Bartlett and Vavrus’ (2017) notion of engaging with two logics of comparison. The first, referring to the traditional, somewhat more positivist compare and contrast logic of comparison. The second, referring to a tracing of the discursive construct across sites and scales (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). This is sought done through analysis of the current governments response to what has been termed a mess, and how teachers are discursively
constructed through this response. The study utilizes Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) analytical framework, Political Discourse Analysis [PDA], as a method, for analysing the March 1, 2018 press conference [M1PC] held by the country’s most recent Minister of education, Minister D. Ansu Sonii Sr. The M1PC, arguably, contains the most contemporary information about the country’s education sector, its teachers, and the perceived road ahead. Before analysis of the M1PC can be carried out it has to be made accessible to discourse analysis, through a process of transcription (See Section 5.1.3 for the transcription of the M1PC). Finally, the findings of the M1PC transcript analysis are then used to compare, contrast and trace the discursive construct, interdiscursively, with and within selected global, regional, and national policy documents.

The subsection immediately following this, deals with the research- aims and – objectives of this study. The section provides a brief description of the background of and the way in which the aims and objectives of the study initially was formed, and how, particularly the aims, have evolved during the course of the conceptualization of the study. Only the initial point of departure is presented, in an attempt to create a point of reference that can illustrate my thought process in regards to this, as the study progressed.

Section 2 can be considered as part of the review of literature addressing issues pertaining specifically to the topic under investigation. The literature presented have been acquired through an extensive process of searches, primarily in ORIA, ERIC and Google Scholar. It should be noted that only literature in English have been considered in this process. The literature gives a thorough account of culture and context as they relate to the comparative case study. Incorporating both notions of place and space, the section first provides descriptions of the sociohistorical backdrop of Liberia, from the country’s inception, to present day. Furthermore, the section gives an account of the history of education in Liberia, seeking to highlight the way in which the specific location under investigation, unavoidably has been influenced by its history, drawing parallels between the past and present. Finally, the section deals with the phenomenon, teacher as a construct, directing the study towards policies and programs. First, providing a broad description of teachers and teacher education in Liberia, then seeking to compare and contrast conceptions across national, regional and global scales, and then, characterizing current conceptions of teachers, hinting at the underlying ideology shaping these discourses. Finally, the aim of the section is to present the findings that have emerged from the review of literature, to emphasize what I consider to be the most salient points, connecting these to the specific aims and objectives of
the overall study, ultimately, seeking to provide justification for the empirical work that I
myself have conducted.

Section 3 deals with the key concept within this study. Namely, teacher-
professionalism. The section provides various perspectives of the concept and attempts to
view it in relation to the issues concerning teachers in Liberia, addressed in Section 2. The
purpose of this section is to provide a basis for the subsequent discussion of how the current
response to the educational mess in Liberia, influences and shapes conceptions of teacher
professionalism. Overall, in consonance with Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), how the 21st
century primary teacher in Liberia is socially constructed through “economic, political, and
social processes well beyond its physical and temporal boundaries” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017,
p. 12).

Section 4 seeks to present “the world view through which the research is designed and
conducted” (Walter, 2010, p. 10), or the methodology of the study. Drawing on Burrell and
Morgan (1992), it first gives an account of my onto-epistemological position as a researcher,
seeking to explain how my own underlying assumptions and presuppositions have informed
the conceptualization of the study. Secondly, it provides an account of the overall field in
which the study is situated, comprised of the overarching field of Critical Discourse Analysis
[CDA] and the subfield of PDA. As the study can be said to be situated in-between sociology
and political science, the section also aims at presenting the nature of politics as I understand
it, drawing on different scholarly perspectives of the analysis of it.

Section 5 must be considered as a part of the theoretical framework, presented in
Section 4. It is comprised of a presentation of the specific methods utilized to achieve the
aims of the study, and the process of which this is sought done. The section starts off with a
presentation of the corpus, i.e. an audio-visual recording of the M1PC. Drawing on Bucholtz
(2000) notion of a reflexive approach towards transcribing, this is followed by a presentation
of the decisions involved in the process of transforming the corpus from an audio-visual
recording into a text suitable to discourse research. Finally, the section presents Fairclough
and Fairclough’s (2012) analytical framework for the analysis of political discourse analysis,
as the chosen method for analysing the discourses of the corpus, that have been made
accessible through the process of transcribing.

Section 6 is dedicated to the analysis of the strategies and arguments of the M1PC
transcript. The analysis strictly follows the approach of Fairclough and Fairclough (2012),
first identifying and presenting the various premises within the text, constituting the structure of a practical argument, and then evaluating the reconstructed argument by asking critical questions. The section is divided into four parts. The first two, is comprised of the reconstruction and evaluation of the main argument within the M1PC transcript, while the second two, is comprised of the reconstruction and evaluation of the argument identified as most closely relating to teachers.

In Section 7, the concluding section, the aim is to further interpret and explain the study’s findings, in an attempt to explicitly answer the study’s research questions. Moreover, this section seeks to critically evaluate the study overall, addressing issues of trustworthiness, the need for further research, and the implications of knowing what we now, presumably, know about the current MOEs response to the educational mess in Liberia, and this responses’ influence on the construction of teachers in the country.

1.2 Aims and objectives

Before addressing its research- aims and –objectives it is first appropriate to consider the exploratory nature of this study. Admittedly, qualitative research tends to be more open-ended than quantitative research (Bryman, 2012). Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) considers emergent designs, to be the hallmark of qualitative research, a notion which their Comparative Case Study Heuristic [CCS] insists on. However, in its initial phase, this particular study was arguably open-ended to such an extent that it inevitably would have led to the collection of too much data, not just in regards to the limitations of a study of this size. It would also, undoubtedly have complicated and confused the focus of the study.

Initially my intention was to construct a Comparative case study in consonance with the CCS approach of Bartlett and Vavrus (2017). The purpose of the study in this early phase was to explore the social construction of ‘the teacher’ in Anglophone West Africa by tracing the development and movement of the construct on a vertical, horizontal and transversal axis, simultaneously attending to the micro, meso, and macro dimensions of the case. Moreover, the aim of the study was to elucidate the historic sociocultural context in which the construct has, and continues to, evolve, and to explore the meaning systems, or discourses underlying the formation of the construct. I sought to answer questions such as: what the most dominant discourses influencing the social construction of teachers in Anglophone West Africa were; how these discourses related to the regions sociohistorical and contemporary context; which
opposing discourses that existed, and; how these opposing discourses related to the regions sociohistorical and contemporary context.

Highly inspired by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), I was conflicted in regards to narrowing the research questions and scope of the study. Would not too specific research questions prematurely bound the study and neglect the emergent design the CCS approach (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) insists on? Moreover, this a-priori bounding of a case, according to Bartlett and Vavrus (2017, p. 10), “aligns more with a neo-positivist design, which predefines variables and hypothesizes relationships”, in contrast with the iterative, processual designs of qualitative research. Boundaries are constructed by social actors. They are not found (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). However, Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) do acknowledge that the initial bounding or pre-structuring of a study heavily relies upon the study’s aims, the researcher’s motivations, skills and interests, and the available time and resources (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 10). Thus, a concern that arouse in this initial phase was that fully adopting the CCS approach of Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) seemed to be too ambitious in scope. Admittedly, this is a common concern with the CCS approach, and Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) urges people who seek to utilize the approach to reflect upon how various perceived constraints shape the study, and how one might overcome these perceived constraints. Consequentially, I have chosen to adopt some aspects of the CCS approach (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) I contend will enrich this particular study, and exclude other aspects not compatible with the study, due to its aims, objectives and perceived constraints.

In narrowing and reconceptualising the research questions I utilized Bryman’s (2012) checklist of criteria for evaluating research questions, which contend that research questions should be: clear, in the sense of being intelligible; researchable; related to established theory and research; linked to each other; neither too broad, nor too narrow, and; clearly and adequately justified. Several questions arose in regards to the initial research questions, such as: what is a dominant discourse? What do I mean by opposing discourses? Does this include all discourses excluded from mainstream policy text? How can discourses influence the construction of teachers? What do I mean by ‘the sociohistorical and contemporary context of the region’? Do I compare and contrast all countries in the region, or do I generalize findings from one country to the whole region? Needless to say, the proposed research questions at this stage were not clear and arguably too broad in scope, facilitating the possibility of the not being researchable, considering perceived constraints. Moreover, availability of sources of data and the boundaries constructed by me as a researcher, during the course of the fieldwork,
dictated that the research questions ought to take a different, albeit similar path. Narrowing place from Anglophone West Africa to Liberia, the question became, which questions would be most suitable for the exploration of the social construction of teachers within this specific country, under the existing circumstances. Considering the recent change of government and the revelation that teacher training curricula in Liberia is somewhat fragmented and difficult to obtain, it seemed reasonable to look for contemporary policy documents relating to teachers which were specific to the current government. Although, the *Getting to Best Education Sector Plan 2017-2021* [G2B-ESP] (MOE, 2016) introduced by the former government, still should be the primary document guiding policy on education and teachers in Liberia, statements about the priorities of the current government seemed to differ from priorities within G2B-ESP (Kwanue, 2018). Moreover, as there had not been produced any sector-wide policy document, nor any pertaining specifically to teachers, by the current government of Liberia, the first press conference held by the newly formed Ministry of Education [MOE] on March 1 2018, was chosen to serve as the study’s corpus. During the press conference, the newly appointed Minister of education describes the current state of affairs of the education sector in Liberia and outlines the priorities of the MOE as they relate to the existing circumstances. This communicative event, a political speech, arguably represents the most contemporary information about the current discourses on and representations of teachers in Liberia. Thus, it seemed reasonable to analyse the current MOEs response to existing circumstances, through this communicative event. I contend that this opens up for the possibility of exploring the different ways in which this response inevitably influences the construction of teachers in the country.

The formulated research questions are as follows:

1. How does the current MOE of Liberia respond to existing circumstances in the country’s education sector?
2. In what ways and how does this response influence the construction of teachers in the country.

Adopting Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) approach to the analysis of political discourse, my presupposition is that the analysis of the practical arguments within the press conference allows me to clearly and systematically view the response of the MOE. Moreover, I would
argue that the critical evaluation of the practical arguments provides an opportunity to explore the relationship between identified discourse structures within the text and social structures in society. Finally, in consonance with this, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Reconstruct the practical arguments within the press conference, i.e. identify the four premises which constitute the structure of a practical argument.
2. Evaluate critically the reconstructed practical arguments.
3. Explore critically how teachers are constructed, or represented, through the practical arguments identified within the press conference.

2. CULTURE AND CONTEXT

This study is influenced by Bartlett and Vavrus’ (2017) process oriented CCS approach, adopting several aspects of it. Albeit, as addressed in previous text, simultaneously attending to macro, meso and micro dimensions, across the vertical, horizontal and transversal axis, as the CCS approach advocates, undoubtedly would have proven to be too ambitious. However, embedded within the CCS approach is an intriguing and extensive reconceptualization of case study research, specifically in regards to notions of culture and context. It is formulated as a critique of what Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) considers to be static and narrow notions of these concepts found in traditional conceptualizations of case studies. They are critical of what they see as a static sense of culture within a bounded group, commonly understood as “human activities that indicate commonality among a group of people in terms of their sense of a shared history or common rules governing social life that distinguish them more or less rigidly from other people” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 9). Contrary to this, Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) argues for:

the importance of examining processes of sense-making as they develop over time, in distinct settings, in relation to systems of power and inequality, and in increasingly interconnected conversation with actors who do not sit physically within the circle drawn around the traditional case. (pp. 10-11)
Similarly to their critique of culture, Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) finds traditional conceptualizations of context within case study research to be static, confined and deterministic, often conflating place and space. Specifically, place is most often regarded as the local, or physical setting of the case, while space most often is understood as the global, more abstract and removed from the local (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). As they state, “no ‘place’ is unaffected by history and politics; any specific location is influenced by economic, political, and social processes well beyond its physical and temporal boundaries” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 12).

Thus, further text aims to presents the context as it relates to the discursive construct under investigation, and through this elucidate culture as situated within a larger analysis of social and political events and processes. Moreover, the presented literature is intended to inform subsequent analysis, not only in terms of highlighting the importance of context for understanding the discursive construct, but also as a means to explore interdiscursive relationships across scales.

2.1 The first republic in Africa

Liberia, the first republic in Africa, and unique throughout the region, is geographically situated on the Atlantic coast of West Africa, bordering Sierra Leone to the northwest, Guinea to the northeast, and Côte d’Ivoire to the southeast. Although, the country has been endowed with significant natural resources, such as timber, gold, diamonds and rubber, the majority of its population is currently living in poverty. Liberia is a relatively small country compared with its neighbours, with a population of approximately 4.7 million, almost 50 percent of which being under the age of 15 years (Liberia, 2018; WorldBank, 2019). The country is divided into 15 counties, each historically inhabited by a distinct indigenous ethnic group, the most populous of which being Montserrado county, home of the capital, Monrovia. Liberia counts as one of five Anglophone countries in West Africa. Although English is the official language of the country, more than 20 different indigenous languages are currently in use. In addition, a distinct form of English, Liberian colloquial, is practiced by most of the country’s population on a daily basis (Sherman, 2010).

The history of the Republic of Liberia began as a result of mass manumission in the United States of America, and the subsequent advances by the American Colonization
Society to ‘return’ these former slaves back to the continent of Africa. Gradually, a small colony of approximately 13000 people, was established on the West African coast. The first settlers arriving in 1821. These settlers were comprised of mulattos, former slaves, unclassified undesirables, and fugitives (Lanier, 1961). Although, never formally colonized, the settlement was, in its early days, in essence governed by white American agents of the American Colonization Society (TRC, 2009). The settlers, known as Americo-Liberians, declared the country’s independence on July 26, 1847, and by this, constituting the first republic on the African continent (Dennis, 2005).

The Americo-Liberians constructed a republic in the image of their former masters’ American colonial culture, structures and Christian beliefs, where they themselves now represented the wealthy socio-political elite, while the inhabitants already present on the land upon the arrival of the settlers, were segregated, oppressed and exploited (Dennis, 2005; Sherman, 2010). During the course of its early history, Liberia essentially became a one-party-state, hierarchical caste system based on colour and heritance, comprised of the governing oligarchy, the minority Americo-Liberian officials and their families at the top, and the majority indigenous Africans, or “bush niggers”, as the Americo-Liberians called them, according to Reeve (1923, p. 181), at the bottom (Dennis, 2005; Sherman, 2010). Reeve (1923), a former colonial Secretary of The Gambia stated the following after having visited Liberia:

The natives have never been considered the full equals of the emigrants, nor treated as brothers; they are ‘hewers of wood’ and ‘drawers of water’; they are utilized as house servants. It is convenient to be able to fill one’s house with ‘Bush Niggers’ as servants, and the settlers have done so from the early days of settlement. (p. 58)

Women and indigenous suffrage was not obtained until 1951, in a period of social and economic development in the country, under then, President William V. S. Tubman’s National Unification Policy [NUP] and Open Door Policy [ODP], both of 1944 (Dennis, 2005; Fahnbulleh, 1967; Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989). The ODP resulted in increased foreign investment and a subsequent tremendous increase in the national revenue of Liberia (Marinelli, 1964). For the most part it was primarily the Americo-Liberian elite who
benefitted from the foreign investments, further increasing the socio-economic gap between them, constituting 5 percent of the population, and the indigenous population, constituting 95 percent of the total population (Dennis, 2005). Yet it should be noted that during this period the country witnessed an unprecedented increase in the provision of schools and hospitals. Moreover, new roads, airfields, and railways was also being constructed, all of which was believed to stimulate local agriculture, industry, and trade, and better the conditions of the indigenous population (Marinelli, 1964). Though, reports of human rights violations prevailed well into the 20th century (Dennis, 2005).

The complex history of Liberia, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 2009, p. 4) writes, “created a state of contestation which remains today a major source of conflict and disunity”. The year of 1979, marked a shift in Liberian society, when a massive and violent protest over a government policy to increase the price of rice broke out. A year later, in 1980, master sergeant, Samuel K. Doe led a successful coup d'état, executing the, then President William Tolbert and 13 other high ranking government officials. Samuel K. Doe instituted himself as the first President in Liberia of an indigenous ethnic background, ending 133 years of Americo-Liberian, hegemonic rule (Dennis, 2005; Werker & Beganovic, 2011). The conflict among the various groups in Liberia gradually escalated throughout the rule of President Doe, culminating in the ignition of the 1989, Charles Taylor led civil war, which eventually engulfing the entire West African sub-region. The war was devastating, to say the least, lasting for 14 years, claiming the lives of more than 250,000 people, displacing even more (Dennis, 2005; TRC, 2009). In 2003, a peace conference was held in Accra, Ghana, and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed by all the actors that had been involved in the Liberian civil way (TRC, 2009). President Charles Taylor eventually stepped down from office, and on November, 2005 Liberia held its first democratic elections in 75 years, electing the Unity Party’s, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the first female elected head of state in Africa. The Unity Party and President Sirleaf maintained in power for 12 years, until the 2017 National Elections, when the opposition led by former football player, George Oppong Weah, with the political party Congress of Democratic Change, came out on top (TRC, 2009). The newly formed government under President Weah has received a great deal of criticism in their first year of government. Most of the critique concerns notions of the President and the government overall being immature and inexperienced allegations ranging from corruption, or a lack of willingness to fight corruption, and seemingly manipulative governance practices (BBC, 2019). However, what can be said with certainty about the new
government of Liberia relates to their strategy, or 5 year plan for their first term, named the *Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development 2018 to 2023* [PAPD] (Liberia, 2018).

2.2 The Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development

PAPD (Liberia, 2018) is a 5 year national development plan implemented by the current Weah government of Liberia. As its title suggests, PAPD (Liberia, 2018) is for the people, especially the poor. It is fundamentally about seeking to raise and develop the economy and human capital of the country. According to the document, is seeks to include all Liberians in the national development process, “crafting a national identity aligned to the African Agenda 2063 and the Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS] Vision 2020” (Liberia, 2018, p. xii). This sentiment becomes evident in the following statement in PAPD (Liberia, 2018), which proclaims that:

> the tendency to bifurcate the Liberian identity into an Americo-Liberian vs. Indigenes cleavage leaves the erroneous impression of two discrete communities that need to be reconciled for political, social, and economic development to take hold. But it is evident that the Liberian identity is a fusion of values of multiple, largely patriarchal traditional societies, different tenets of faith, and the influence of black settler culture. Moreover, new cleavages emerged out of the civil war – between the Diaspora and those Liberians who remained at home, and between those who were victimized and those who were the perpetrators of violence. (p. xii)

Thus, PAPD can be read as an attempt to re-envision Liberia and its people, in essence “to build a new nation based on the principles of inclusion, on equity […] and on a rights-based approach to national development” (Liberia, 2018, p. xii). This re-envisioning is sought achieved through its four pillars: Power to the people – Liberians empowered with skills and tools to gain control of their lives; The economy and jobs – Private sector-led growth and job creation through prudent and more efficient resource mobilization; Sustaining the peace – Promoting a cohesive society for sustainable development, and; Governance and transparency – Building state capability for inclusive and accountable governance and
sustainable development (Liberia, 2018, p. 19). Section 2.4 deals with Pillar one as it relates most closely to education and teachers.

2.3 An educational mess

Historically, education in Liberia has been an enterprise primarily reserved the privileged. All the way up until the late 20th century, Americo-Liberian elites indulged in a form of apprenticeship system, recruiting from the ranks of the indigenous population, in essence only allowing those selected by them, besides their own children, to excel in education and move upwards the social strata, through a process of acculturation (Sherman, 2010). Moreover, not until the NUP and ODP of President Tubman, were efforts made to increase the provision of schools in the country (Marinelli, 1964; Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989). The implications of the NUP in the 1950s can, according to Nagel and Snyder Jr (1989, p. 3), be viewed as the first attempts by the Liberian government of initiating systematic efforts at national educational development, through the expansion of the educational sector. This was, coincidentally, mostly dependent upon foreign aid (Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989). The policy resulted in an increase in the provision of schools and teachers, and an increase in enrolment rates, especially due to efforts to integrate the indigenous population (Fahnbulleh, 1967; Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989). The results of these initial efforts of national development of the education sector was admittedly a depressing hint of a subsequent trend in the years to come (Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989). As Clower (1966, cited in Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989, p. 6) writes:

What is disturbing about Liberia is not that ten years have failed to produce a good educational system, but that the years have failed to produce even the foundations of such a system. The reasons are not entirely clear. One can point to numerous instances of inefficiency, corruption, and incompetence in the development and operation of the expanding system of government schools; but difficulties of this kind are common to most developing economies and do not afford as adequate explanation of Liberia’s peculiar backwardness in the educational field. It can also be argued that Liberia has not spent enough on education in recent years; but this argument is hard to defend, for one might with equal force contend that had twice as much money been spent, twice as much would have been wasted. (p. 6)
Nevertheless, the strategy of the government of Liberia, in regards to the country’s educational sector continued to follow in the lines of the past, resulting in the educational sector, nearly two decades later, being described as, “a limited-access and high wastage system that is expanding, but not fast enough to assimilate a greater proportion of a fast-growing population […] little in the way of progress can be claimed (Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989, p. 6)”. Although, the Liberian Constitution of 1986 does, emphasize the importance of equal access to education, and the importance of mass educating of the Liberian people (The Constitution of the Republic of Liberia). The little progress that had been made in the educational system of Liberia was tremendously impacted by the conflict that ensued after the 1980 coup d’état (Dennis, 2005). Education in Liberia during the years of the civil war, was more or less crippled and functioning in practice on an ad-hoc emergency basis.

Nonetheless, despite the unrest, representatives from the Liberian MOE attended the 1990 World Conference on Education for All, and consequently, committed themselves and the country in 2000, to the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1990). Save the adoption of the Education act of 2001, which states that education should be free and compulsory, it was not until after the peaceful, democratic elections in 2005, efforts were made towards achieving the EFA-goals, first with the Liberian Primary Education Recovery Program: Prepared for Fast Track Initiative (MOE, 2007) in 2007, followed by the Education Sector Plan of Liberia: A Commitment to Making a Difference (MOE, 2010) in 2010, and then with the replacing of the Education Act of 2001 with the Education Reform Act of 2011. These were intended to rectify systemic weaknesses and deficiencies in the education sector, accumulated through decades (MOE, 2010).

The 2013 event (Toweh, 2013), referred to in Section 1, which prompted President Sirleaf to characterize the Liberian educational system as a ‘mess’, was not the first instance of this word being used to describe the education system in Liberia. The term ‘mess’ was first, at least to my knowledge, used to describe the educational system in Liberia in a 1985 government financed assessment of the country’s education sector (cited in Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989, p. 8), and later by Nagel and Snyder Jr (1989) to describe the educational system in Liberia, writing about what they saw as the causes of the education sectors state of affairs. The state of affairs of the educational sector in Liberia is described in the following terms in the 1985 assessment (Bank Group assessment, 1985 cited in Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989, p. 9):
While no system, education or otherwise, whether in a developing or a developed state, operates completely smoothly or works exactly as planned, the extent of fragmentation, conflict, and drift in Liberian education was so great that it was difficult to view the state of affairs as accidental. Ironically the chaos seemed ordered, organized in a way that suggested that systematic forces were at work, forces that were pulling the education sector apart. (p. 9)

Nagel and Snyder Jr (1989) understands the term ‘mess’ here, in consonance with organization theorists, Ackoff, Finnel and Gharajedaghi (1984, cited in Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989, p. 9), as “a bundle of interacting problems”, not as chaotic, but as an organized system of problems. Furthermore, Nagel and Snyder Jr (1989) identified international funding agencies to be the commonality among all the various problems constituting the Liberian ‘mess’. According to them, the Liberian educational sector has consistently been subjected to a myriad of international agencies seeking to develop the sector, such as UNESCO, International Labor, United Nations Development Program, USAID, International Development Agency, World Bank, African Development Bank, Peace Corps, and the U.S Information Service, thus, unavoidably, implementing these agencies as part and parcel of the rather bleak state of affairs of the education sector in the country today (Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989).

Lanier (1961, p. 256), writing about the needs for mass education in Liberia, lists, inter alia, efficient administration, dedicated and well paid teachers, adequate buildings, proper supplies and maintenance. Almost six decades later the Liberian educational sector, seemingly, still operates with a strikingly similar list, as can be seen in G2B-ESP (MOE, 2010, p. 3). It is stated here that the Liberian educational sector is facing four persistent challenges:

1. Limited resources in a context of growing demand for education;
2. Large numbers of out-of-school children and young people;
3. Large numbers of children and young people who are over-age for the grade in which they are enrolled; and
4. Poor learning outcomes that in turn point to challenges associated with sub-optimal teaching practices, out of date curriculum, poor school quality and school
management, lack of accountability within the education sector, and gender inequality.

What is interesting to note here is the, apparent, lack of acknowledgement of the Ministry’s role in the educational sectors state of affairs. Albeit, arguably, not being a well-structured system, the Liberian educational system has, since its inception, been “ostensibly tightly structured under its national Ministry of Education” (Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989, p. 8). Thus, calling for the recognition of historic mismanagement on Ministry level as a contributing factor in the state of affairs the sector finds itself in the 21st century. Yet, the blame for the educational sector being a ‘mess’ seemed to be directed at teachers. The 2013 event did, as mentioned in passing, primarily spur interventions in teacher training (Klees, 2017; Piper & Korda, 2011; Toweh, 2013). The attempts by the government of Liberia to develop the educational sector met yet another obstacle during the crippling 2014 Ebola outbreak, essentially shutting down the entire education sector for an extended period of time, resulting in the weaknesses and deficiencies of the system being further exacerbated (Liberia, 2018; USAID, 2016).

2.4 Teachers and teacher training in Liberia

There are currently three Rural Teacher Training Institutions [RTTIs] in Liberia, exclusively providing in-service training and an 18-month pre-service teacher education course of ‘C’ degree level. Holding a ‘C’ certificate is the minimum qualification for a teacher teaching in grade 1-6, while holding a Bachelor’s degree or equivalent is the minimum qualification for senior high school teachers. There are also several semi-autonomous colleges and universities providing both pre-service teacher education and education administration programs. Both the RTTIs and other providers of teacher education are required to obtain accreditation from the Bureau for Teacher Education, operating under the Liberian MOE. The establishment, management, financing, and supervision of teacher education programs in Liberia are under the directive of the MOE (Liberia, 2011b; MOE, 2007). The Education Reform Act of 2011 (Liberia, 2011b) and the current Education Sector Plan of Liberia, G2B-ESP 2016-2021 provides the primary policy guidelines for education overall and teacher education in specific in contemporary Liberia. The *Rural Teacher Training Institutes’ Academic Management Manual* [RTTIAMM] is a compilation of all
RTTI policies and procedures up until 2014 (USAID, 2016). Guidelines and procedures in cases of misconduct or abuse are provided in the *Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators in Liberia* (MOE, 2014). Furthermore, the MOE is responsible for the recruitment, certification i.e. licencing, registration and teacher policy development and implementation, while District Education Officers [DEOs] are responsible for recruiting qualified teachers to schools (MOE, 2016).

In the past one-and-a-half-decade teacher education in Liberia has undergone several reforms, first for revival, then for improvement. The most recent, and second of a two-phase program, being the USAID-led Liberian Teacher Training Program [LTTP] (USAID, 2016), spanning from 2010 to 2015, implemented first in nine counties, which was later reduced to five. LTTP (USAID, 2016, p. 69) fundamentally sought to implement measures to decentralize the educational sector in Liberia and to “improve teacher training in Liberia by strengthening the MOE and its teacher training institution to better manage the teacher training process, delivery systems and teacher training institutions […]”, through developing and improving policies and procedures related to teachers. Several accomplishments, both relating to teachers in specific were attributed LTTP, e.g. the initiating of a teacher vetting protocol, the implementation of a pilot system involving the installation of Biometric ID Card Readers at the Central Ministry and at several schools, strengthening of the capacity and management of the RTTIIs, improved teacher training programs and reading/math delivery systems, encouragement of female participation in teacher education, the development of the RTTIAMM and the *Educator Management Policy for the Republic of Liberia* [EMP], and contribution to the development of the *Education Reform Act of 2011* (USAID, 2016). Authorized through the Education Reform Act of 2011 are the legal foundations of educational reforms (Liberia, 2011a). I have not been successful in obtaining, neither the RTTIAMM, nor the EMP.

Liberia’s first teacher education institute, the first of the three RTTI’s, was established in the late 1950s, in response to a perceived downward trend in teacher qualification. It was a two-year program, comprised of: general education for individual improvement; courses in subject areas, such as English, mathematics, history etc., and; some form of pedagogical training (Nutting, 1959). At the time, estimates indicated that 50 percent of the country’s teachers failed to satisfy the minimum qualification standard. Furthermore, the teacher education institution was believed to be “an investment in the future” (Nutting, 1959, p. 4).
Thus, as this shows, the quality of teachers in Liberia has, since before systematic efforts to expand the educational sector was first implemented, been a subject of debate. The expansion of the educational sector in Liberia, did naturally, lead to an increase in the provision of teachers. Though, never keeping up with the expansion of student enrolment (Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989). Moreover, the civil war took the lives of many teachers and forced others to flee out of the country (MOE, 2010). Furthermore, Nagel and Snyder Jr (1989), writing about the incongruity between educational expansion in terms of increases in student enrolment and the provision of schools and teachers, and “education system disarray”, poses the following questions and their presumptive answers:

What is wrong with Liberian education – why have 3 decades of development efforts produced so little successful education design and delivery? The answers are complex and, like the problems, not unique to Liberian education: a poor infrastructure in a poor nation; a borrowed design for schooling raging from buildings to teacher training to curricula; an inefficient and often neglectful, often self-interested, educational administrative apparatus lacking in supervision and unable to exert control over a teaching staff that is poorly trained, seldom paid, and part of a profession that labors in an environment of low material and status rewards. (pp. 6-7)

Again and again, through the documented history of education in Liberia, we witness the quality of teachers being highlighted as imperative for the quality of the educational sector. Teaching in Liberia, according to a 1985 government financed assessment of the country’s education sector (cited in Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989, p. 8), was at the time described as “an autonomous activity often divorced from any curriculum, instructional materials, or supervision”. Moreover, the 1985 assessment (cited in Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989, p. 8) revealed “teacher training programs were operating without nationally approved textbooks, learning a curriculum different from the national curriculum, and producing graduates who planned and pursued non-teaching careers”. Furthermore, the 1985 assessment (cited in Nagel & Snyder Jr, 1989, p. 9) identified “a gap between official rules and procedures governing the education sector and the actual operation of education in Liberia”.

After the civil war Liberia suffered under for 14 years, the LPERP (2007), the governments first true attempt at working towards the EFA-goals was implemented. It
consisted of a three-year program intended to transform and rebuild the educational sector of the country. The primary goal of the LPERP (2007) is stated as, “to have universal primary education of good quality for all” (MOE, 2007, p. 22). The document can be viewed as an explicit result of the EFA-movement, as it was submitted to the fast track initiative, specifically created to support countries in reaching universal primary education by 2015. The EFA-agenda (UNESCO, 2000, p. 20) strongly emphasize the role of teachers and characterizes them as, “essential players in promoting quality education”, further stating that “no education reform is likely to succeed without the active participation and ownership of teachers […] teachers should be respected and adequately remunerated”. Similarly, in the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2015b), informing the establishment of UN’s Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] 4, emphasizes that:

Teachers are the key to achieving all of the Education 2030 agenda […] as teachers are a fundamental condition for guaranteeing quality education, teachers and educators should be empowered, adequately recruited and remunerated, motivated, professionally qualified, and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems. (p. 54)

Thus, the emphasis placed on teachers’ pivotal role in developing the educational system in Liberia is not shocking, considering the Liberian adoption of the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action and UN’s SDG 4 (UNESCO, 2015b, p. 21), to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”, further, stating that a means to achieve this is to, “by 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers”. This notion was continued in the subsequent ESP-2010 (MOE, 2010), which can be viewed as an extension and replacement of the LPERP (2007), and fully aligned with it. Moreover, ESP-2010 also explicitly emphasizes working towards the goal of universal primary education (MOE, 2010). In ESP-2010 this goal is presented as “ensuring that all children (especially girls, individuals with special needs, vulnerable children, children with ‘manageable’ emotional behavioural disorders and learning disabilities) start at the right age and complete primary level education of a minimum stipulated quality” (MOE, 2010, p. 11). What is interesting about the formulation of this goal, within this particular study, concerns the latter part of the formulation. The term ‘minimum stipulated quality’ of
education is within ESP-2010 assumed to be dependent upon raising the quality of the teachers operating within the system. Moreover, it is assumed that raising the quality of the country’s teacher education will, in turn, assure at least a minimum quality of the education children receives. This is also in consonance with the emphasis placed on the ‘preeminent role of teachers’ in providing basic education of quality, and the need to ‘enhance the status, morale and professionalism of teachers’, as advocated by international agencies (UNESCO, 1990, p. 27; G. UNESCO, 2015, p. 20).

The most recent guiding document for the educational sector in Liberia, the G2B-ESP (MOE, 2016), naturally builds on the ones preceding it and aligns with SDG 4 (UNESCO, 2015b). The G2B-ESP was developed to tackle the most pressing challenges facing the educational sector in Liberia (cf. the four challenges listen on page 13-14). Essentially, G2B-ESP is a compilation of 9 “strategic […] programs to […] improve the quality and relevance of teaching and learning (MOE, 2016, p. 15)”. The most pertinent of which, relating to teacher education, being strategy No. 5, Teacher Education & Management Program, intended to “improve the efficiency, effectiveness and satisfaction of the teaching workforce (MOE, 2016, pp. 141-155)”.

The challenges associated with strategy No. 5 include: large numbers of teachers who lack adequate qualifications or foundational skills; an inadequate system of regular continuous professional development for teachers; inadequate teacher performance management systems; few teachers in remote or rural areas, and; an underrepresentation of females in the teaching force (MOE, 2016). Out of these it seems as if the main challenge, as is presented in G2B-ESP (MOE, 2016) relates to the quality of the teaching workforce. This is not surprising, considering a 2015 national teacher testing initiative (MOE, 2018b), testing teachers in English and mathematics, intended to identify unqualified teacher, qualified teacher without required skills, and teachers on the government payroll not actually teaching in classrooms, i.e. ‘ghost’ teachers. The initiative revealed a rather disturbing picture. A major proportion of the teachers tested were unable to even meet the minimum requirements of the MOE, some even achieving scores flagging them as ‘functionally illiterate’ or ‘untrainable’. In only 2 out of the 15 counties did 10 percent or more achieve a passing mark. In 6 out of the 15 counties did more than 70 percent fall below a 40 percent threshold. Furthermore, the national average was only 1 point above the threshold for failure. Out of the teachers with a ‘C’ certificate only 5 percent achieved a passing mark, 43 percent of them falling below the 40 percent threshold (MOE, 2018b). Moreover, the payroll of the MOE is
the largest payroll of the government, comprising the employment of more than 37,000 teachers and administrators. It is undoubtedly bloated by ‘ghost’ teachers and teachers with fraudulent credentials, in some districts comprising more than 75 percent of teachers (USAID, 2016).

Although, G2B-ESP (MOE, 2016) presents the EMP as intended to direct policy regarding, inter alia, standards for teacher education, inadequate quality of teacher education provided, i.e. the ‘C’ certificate program, save for in-service training, is not listed as a challenge. This seem to imply that that the Liberian MOE is satisfied with contemporary pre-service teacher education. But what competencies are embedded in teachers completing teacher education? Are they simply presented with certificates stating that they meet the required qualifications in literacy and numeracy? I have been unable to obtain the Educator Management Policy, which identifies, among other things, the minimum academic and professional qualifications and describes entry requirements and curricular content of pre-service programs in teacher education. It does admittedly follow the framework proposed in UNESCOs Teacher Policy Development Guide: Teachers for Education 2030 (UNESCO, 2015d) and Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers (UNESCO, 2016). UNESCO (2016) addresses several key issues regarding the status of teachers, including: professionalism; co-operation in policy issues; teacher training; professional freedom; responsibilities; rights; hours of work; salaries, and; teacher shortages. For now, suffice it to say, that:

Teaching should be regarded as a profession: It is a form of public service which requires of teachers’ expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study; it also calls for a sense of personal and cooperate responsibility for the education and welfare of the pupils in their charge (p. 22).

Moreover, teacher education, according to the Teacher Policy Development Guide (UNESCO, 2015d), inter alia, must include pre-service training, in-service training and continuing professional development, and should be based on current needs. Concerning teacher standards, they should, “contribute to professionalization and raising teaching professional status and provide a framework to guide teachers’ professional learning and
development (UNESCO, 2015d, p. 25)”. Though, “teacher accountability must not translate into blaming teachers for all the problems in an education system (UNESCO, 2015d, p. 25)”.

Although the tests utilized during the teacher testing initiative (MOE, 2018b), is confidential to prohibit cheating, and although I have not been able to obtain the curriculum for the ‘C’ certificate in Liberia, it would seem, proficiency in teaching English and mathematics constitutes the main emphasis in teacher education and teacher accountability in Liberia today. Albeit, G2B-ESP (MOE, 2016) does state that the teacher testing initiative was intended to inform curriculum reform.

Finally, today with the newly established government, the PAPD (Liberia, 2018) must be regarded as an influential text, informing education policy overall. Out of the four pillars of the platform, Pillar one, explicitly aligning with SDG 4 (UNESCO, 2015b), is most notably associated with education. Talking about the development of human capital, PAPD (Liberia, 2018, p. 23) emphasizes the importance of expanding equitable access to quality education, stating that “the government will make strategic and well-targeted investments in human capital development, coupled with efforts to create an enabling environment, that will unleash abilities and talents innate to the Liberian people”. Moreover, improving the educational sector is highlighted as a means to improve the current condition most people in Liberia suffer under, or more specifically to tackle poverty and societal deficiencies associated with poverty (Liberia, 2018). This apparent connection made in PAPD (Liberia, 2018) between quality education and economic development is admittedly not new. Most notably, the MOE of Liberia initiated in 2016 a randomized controlled trial, Partnership schools for Liberia [PLS], the largest public-private partnership program in Africa. The experiment, currently undergoing, initially involved the MOE allowing private operators to manage a selected portion of the country’s public schools (MOE, 2016).

PLS has garnered a great deal of critique since its implementation, most notably, Steven J. Klees (Klees, 2018) has critiqued the experiment for being too expensive, considering the current allocated budget to MOE is operating with, for failing to correctly report the supposed increases in learning outcomes, and for overemphasizing the need for private contractors, when the government, according to Klees (2018), easily could implement the policy changes on their own. Concerning teachers in specific, the interventions within the PSL have emphasized capacity building for literacy and numeracy. Moreover, teacher testing and replacing the current salary system with one based on performance, proposed in G2B-ESP (MOE, 2016), further emphasizes the MOE’s desire to achieve quantifiable results. The
main theme here for teachers is accountability. This resonates with global education policies based on Western hegemonic onto-epistemology, characterized by the economization and standardization of public education, increased focus on literacy and numeracy, and consequential accountability systems, promoting individualism and competition among students, teachers and schools. For teachers in the classroom this arguably manifests itself as top-down rote learning, pupil passivity, limited verbal interaction and reliance on prepping for tests (Battiste, 2002).

3. KEY CONCEPT
3.1 Teacher professionalism

The concept of teacher professionalism is contested, to say the least (Sachs, 2016). According to Demirkasımoğlu (2010, p. 2049) definitions of teacher professionalism emphasize teachers’ professional qualifications, such as being good at their job, fulfilling the highest standards and achieving excellence. Albeit, at the same time, within some perspectives teaching is not seen as a profession, but rather a semi-professional occupation, due to teachers restricted autonomy (Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). Hargreaves, admittedly, distinguishes between teacher professionalism and teacher professionalization. The former referring to teacher practice in terms of the quality and standards of teaching, and the latter referring to teachers’ perceived status and standing, often depending upon how others perceive their status and standing (Hargreaves, 2006). These two terms are often seen as complementary and dependent upon one another, meaning that it is believed that if you for example raise standards for teaching, an increase in teacher status and standing ultimately will be the result. Yet, although being co-dependent, as Hargreaves (2006) expresses, they may also sometimes be contradictory, in that raising standards in high-status ways not necessarily safeguards socio-emotional aspects of teaching and further results in an increase in overall quality, but decreases overall quality, ultimately contributing in lowering the perceived status and standing of teachers. This notion of perceived increased or decreased quality do seem to be a question of how one defines teacher professionalism. It would also be reasonable to assume that how one defines teacher professionalism determines which types of outcomes one deems desirable when attempting to improve either teacher professionalism or teacher professionalization. This notion implies that teacher professionalism is flexible, and
that conceptions of it is constructed based on external forces. This is in consonance with Sachs (2016, p. 423) who understands professionalism as “a practice and concept that is plastic, emotive and is constantly being challenged and changed as a result of internal and external pressures”. According to Sachs (2016), several of the issues concerning teachers in Liberia, addressed in the previous section, e.g. an emphasis on teacher performance, increased accountability and standards, and a focus on technical skills, all feed into teacher policy and practice, consequentially constructing a distinct conception of teacher professionalism. A conception Sachs (2016, p. 424) describes as controlled or compliant professionalism, rendering teachers as “silent witnesses”.

Hargreaves (2006) builds upon this notion of the changing nature of teacher professionalism and professional knowledge and learning. He presents four ages of teacher professionalism: the pre-professional age; the age of the autonomous professional; the age of the collegial professional, and; the ‘fourth age’(Hargreaves, 2006). These ages should, as Hargreaves (2006, p. 153) puts it, “be seen as a contingent history of Anglophone nations, now influencing other non-Anglophone cultures”.

The pre-professional age refers to the age of the factory-like, mass public education system where teaching was viewed as a technically simple practice, partly passed down, through observation, from more experienced teachers to future teachers, and partly learned and maintained through trial and error, by the teacher, within each isolated classroom. Here teachers had to adhere to strict standardized and specialized curricula, where the fundamental demands they were required to meet consisted of maintaining students’ attention, securing coverage of content, bringing about some degree of motivation, and achieving some degree of mastery, through traditional top-down teaching methods aimed at the students as a collective unit.

The age of the autonomous professional refers to an age in which both teacher professionalism and teacher professionalization has been improved, compared to the previous age. Most central to this age is curriculum innovation and a shift, at least within policy documents, away from the traditional teaching -methods of the previous age, and towards more student-centered learning, where schools and teachers are encouraged to exert autonomy in implementing the new ideas. With the increased pedagogical freedom an ideological tug of war arose between child-centered and subject centered education, open classrooms and closed classrooms, traditional methods and progressive methods, where
pedagogy became a defining choice teachers had to make, and not just something passed down from more experienced teachers, like in the pre-professional age. What resembles the pre-professional age is the individualism, isolation and privatism associated with teaching in this age, where teachers seldom collaborate and share experiences from their own practice with other teachers.

In the age of the collegial professional, education, as the rest of society has become more and more complex and ever changing, creating increasingly challenging obstacles for teacher to overcome, but where teaching with individual teacher autonomy and prevalent individualism often times has led to ad hoc, uncoordinated responses to these challenges (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, cited in Hargreaves, 2006, p. 162). As a result of this, teachers are being subjected to restrictions in their practice, or are being obliged to teach in certain ways. As a response to the uncertainty of what teacher professionalism means, what professional knowledge is comprised of, and which methods one as a professional should adhere to, many teachers are seeking to create strong professional cultures, and are looking towards their colleagues for collaboration, support, and professional learning. Admittedly, these are trends and cannot be generalized to all teachers, as many still value their classroom autonomy over the possibilities of collaborative practices (Hargreaves, 2006).

The fourth age, or the age of post-professionalism, refers to a hypothesized age Hargreaves (2006) believed global trends to be moving towards, has arguably proved to have found support today, where the two driving forces behind, what is referred to as the postmodern social condition, challenges and threatens teacher professionalism and professionalization. These two driving forces are increasing emphasis on neoliberal notions in national economies, influencing education and the role of teachers, and the tremendous developments in information and communications technology leading to "instantaneous, globalized availability of information and entertainment (Hargreaves, 2006, p. 167)”, stripping schools of the monopoly they have had on learning.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The objective of this section is to present the theoretical framework or methodology underlying this study. Methodology is here understood as “the world view through which the research is designed and conducted (Walter, 2010, p. 10)”’. This will include an account of the onto-epistemological standpoint I have as a researcher and the theoretical backdrop of which
the study has been conceptualized. My intention here is not to provide an extensive and
detailed description of the theoretical paradigm underlying this study and the various
approaches within the field of which the chosen method reside. The restrictions of space and
time do not allow for such a complex and comprehensive presentation. Conversely, my
intention is to give a sufficient overview of the landscape, make explicit my ontological and
epistemological presuppositions, or underlying assumptions, and the conceptualization of the
study, aimed at justifying the particular methods chosen, providing potential readers with
necessary information required to take part in and understand the research process as
conceived in this study. I will, for the sake of clarity, deal with each of these aspects of the
theoretical framework separately. First, accounting for the onto-epistemological position
which has informed the conceptualization of this study. Second, briefly describing the overall
field of CDA and the underlying assumptions associated with the field. Third, accounting for
PDA as a sub-field of CDA, presenting the various approaches within PDA, and highlighting
the chosen method within this study, with the aim of clarifying why it was chosen and the
believed benefits of it with regard to the specific objectives of this particular study.

4.1 Onto-epistemological standpoint

I start off with the onto-epistemological position that have informed the
conceptualization of this study. Here I draw on Burrell and Morgan’s (1992) analytical
scheme for navigating social theory. I will for the sake of brevity not include a thorough
account of their analytical scheme, but briefly identify aspects of it which is relevant for
clarifying the standpoint taken in this specific study. According to Burrell and Morgan (1992)
social theory can be divided into four distinctly separate paradigms, situated in a subjective-
objective dimension and a regulation-radical change dimension, underlain by different sets of
mutually exclusive meta-theoretical assumptions related to ontology, epistemology and view
of human nature (Burrell & Morgan, 1992). Thus, implying that the social theory informing
this particular study carries with it a certain set of implicit underlying assumptions
influencing the research process. Yet, another way to look at it is that my own basic
underlying assumptions as a social science researcher, have influenced the conceptualization
of the study, from the deciding and formulation of research questions, to the particular way in
which these questions are being sought answered. The actual reality of things probably dwells
somewhere in the middle, where both prior basic underlying assumptions and assumptions
associated with a certain social theory, in this case critical theory, have informed the research
process from start to finish. Naturally then, in consonance with Burrell and Morgan’s (1992) notion of these basic underlying assumptions being mutually exclusive, prior assumptions and assumptions embedded in this social theory, have gradually converged, if not already compatible, to fit within one of the four paradigms identified by them. As briefly touched upon in previous text, does the purpose of the study imply a constructivist approach, in consonance with CDA.

To begin with, I first define the different sets of assumptions identified by Burrell and Morgan (1992) and discuss them in relation to this particular study. Ontology refers to how we as humans understand reality and the nature of being, which for social scientist “concern the very essence of the phenomena under investigation” (Burrell & Morgan, 1992, p. 6; Walter, 2010). Epistemology on the other hand refers to our theories of knowledge, “about how one might begin to understand the world and communicate this knowledge to fellow human beings” (Burrell & Morgan, 1992, p. 6; Walter, 2010). Lastly, assumptions about human nature refers to views about “the relationship between human beings and their environment (Burrell & Morgan, 1992, p. 7)”. According to Burrell and Morgan (1992), it is possible to, in broad terms differentiate between these sets of assumptions as belonging to a subjectivist approach or a objectivist approach, the former embedding a nominalist ontology, anti-positivist epistemology, and a view of human nature adhering to that of voluntarism. Research within this approach primarily utilize ideographic methods for inquiry. The latter approach embeds a realist ontology, positivist epistemology, and a view of human nature belonging to that of determinism. Research within this approach rely on nomothetic methods for inquiry. Furthermore, these sets of assumptions are located within either, what Burrell and Morgan (1992) refer to as the sociology of radical change or the sociology of regulation. The former is concerned with radical change, structural conflict, modes of domination, contradiction, emancipation, deprivation, and potentiality, while the latter is concerned with the status quo, social order, consensus, social integration and cohesion, solidarity, need satisfaction, and actuality (Burrell & Morgan, 1992, p. 18). Finally, social theories situated on the subjective-radical change dimensions fall into the radical humanist paradigm, while social theories situated on objective-radical change dimensions fall into the radical structuralist paradigm. Social theories situated on the subjective-regulation dimensions fall into the interpretivist paradigm, whereas social theories situated on the objective-regulation dimensions fall into the functionalist paradigm.
The assumptions embedded within this particular study places it somewhere within the radical humanist paradigm, more specifically adhering to that of critical theory within this paradigm. The radical humanist paradigm in general is “defined by its concern to develop a sociology of radical change from a subjectivist standpoint” (Burrell & Morgan, 1992, p. 32). First, I take a brief look at the basic assumptions informing the research questions this study operates with (see section 1.1 for a presentation of the research questions). In terms of ontology, at first glance, the first part of the formulation do not necessarily imply a nominalist standpoint, here understood as “the assumption that the social world external to individual cognition is made up of […] concepts […] used to structure reality” (Burrell & Morgan, 1992, p. 4). However, viewing the research questions as a whole and in regards to the sources of information this study aims at extracting, exclusively residing within political discourse, understood as a form of social practice Fairclough (2013), it becomes evident that they assume a fundamental relationship between social structures in society and the discourse structures of influential political texts. This, according to Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), is a primary assumption within CDA.

I view the transcribed speech, constituting the corpus of this study as such an influential text (see sections 5.1 and 5.1.1 for the M1PC transcript). Thus, making this study situated in-between sociology and political science. Worth noting here is the distinction between universal social constructionism and constructivism (Kjørup, 2001). The former being an extreme nominalist standpoint, where reality, exclusively is seen as something that is constructed by the individual consequently assuming that no truths can be obtained (Burrell & Morgan, 1992; Kjørup, 2001). The latter, on the other hand, still a nominalist standpoint, however not as extreme, views the reality that we as humans experience as more or less formed or constructed through our use of language and signs to make sense of it, and through our concepts and social conventions (Kjørup, 2001, p. 7). Although I, in consonance with a social constructionist position, am concerned with questions of power and control. Specifically, in relation to the way in which teachers are constructed through values and representations in dominant discourse structures of influential texts. As Kjørup (2001), I too am critical of the social constructionist understanding of the world as void of truths and only comprised of numerous constructions. I do contend and take the position, in terms of this particular study, that the teacher exists out there in the world, while the concept of the teacher is a social construct used to structure reality, we can explore through critical analysis of the
discourses forming this concept. The teacher is thus constructed and real at the same time (Hacking & Hacking, 1999).

Thus, to reiterate and clarify, ontologically, this study takes on a nominalist standpoint in consonance with constructivism. Moreover, I view the social world in terms of processes, in which the social world is understood “in terms of people, situations, events, and the processes that connect these” (Maxwell, 2013, cited in Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 29). Thus, human nature is viewed as situated in the interaction between the individual and the environment, in a reciprocal relationship. Consequentially, the study does not assume that the discourses uncovered are fixed and stable over time, or that they exist in a vacuum. Epistemologically, this study adopts a somewhat anti-positivist standpoint, contending that the social world fundamentally is relativistic and must be understood from the point of view of the individual (Burrell & Morgan, 1992). This has, as will become clear in further text, implications for the decisions made for conducting the study. More specifically, I view social science as a “being essentially a subjective enterprise rather than an objective enterprise” (Burrell & Morgan, 1992, p. 5). This is something I try to acknowledge throughout the study, through adopting a reflexive approach to gathering, transcribing and analysing data, and discussing the findings and drawing conclusions about them. As anti-positivists in general I reject the notion of me, as a social science researcher, of being able to truly generate objective knowledge and aim to deal with this issue through transparency (Burrell & Morgan, 1992).

4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is a multidisciplinary field of research where the different paradigms, philosophies, theories and methods adapted by different researchers within the field vary greatly (Van Dijk, 1993). It varies to such an extent that this apparent failure to integrate a systematic and consistent methodological approach within the field constitutes one of the primary criticisms raised against CDA as a whole (Toolan, 1997; Verschueren, 2012; Widdowson, 2008). However, research within the field of CDA all have ties to critical theory, where the objective is to investigate issues of power and justice and the ways social systems are constructed, reproduced, or transformed (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005). Critical discourse analysts, according to van Dijk (1993), therefore operates somewhere between social and political science, social criticism and activism.
Consequentially, critical discourse analysts, as van Dijk (1993, p. 252) expresses, “should take an explicit socio-political stance” because “their work is admittedly and ultimately political”. CDA should then, according to van Dijk (1993, p. 252) have exploration and understanding of the discursive reproduction of power and dominance relations in society, which leads to injustice and inequality, as its foci. Similarly Fairclough (1993) understands CDA as:

Discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor in securing power and hegemony. (p. 135)

Power can here be viewed in terms of the common distinction between ‘power to’ and ‘power over’, whereas the former refers to “a general human capacity to […] act in ways that bring about changes in reality”, while the latter refers to “a specific form of ‘power to’: someone’s capacity to cause, undergo or resist change […] an asymmetrical relation between people” (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, pp. 112-113). van Dijk (1993), understands dominance and power in a similar fashion. Dominance, corresponding with power over, refers to an asymmetrical relationship between one agent or group of agents and another, one of which being better positioned to exert power over the other. Power, on the other hand refers to the dominant agent or group of agents’ capacity to control the actions or cognitions of others, through physical constraints, persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation, the three latter essentially being a function of text, talk and the control over access to discourse (Van Dijk, 1993). Moreover, “if the minds of the dominated can be influenced in such a way that they accept dominance, and act in the interest of the powerful out of their own free will, the term hegemony can be applied (Gramsci, 1971, in Van Dijk, 1993, p. 255)”.

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4.3 Political Discourse Analysis

There is widespread recognition among discourse analysts and political scientists about the fundamental relationship between language and politics (Dunmire, 2012). Dunmire (2012) describes a political turn in linguistics and a linguistic turn in political science constituting research in the later part in the 20th century and onward, termed PDA. PDA refers to a field of research aimed at exploring political discourse within the broader discipline of CDA. It is commonly understood as, either the analysis of political discourse, identified by politicians within a distinctly political context, or as a critical approach to the analysis of discourse overall, as conceived in contemporary CDA (Van Dijk, 1997). PDA, according to van Dijk (1997), is comprised of both aspects, including exploration and understanding of the nature and function of political discourse, and the critical exploration and understanding of the reproduction, maintaining and resistance of political power. In consonance with this view, the objective of PDA tends to be focused towards the unearthing and understanding of the power, dominance, ideology and hegemony within political communicative events, originating in Aristotle’s thoughts about rhetoric in political speech (Wang, 2016).

Scholars within this field of research, such as Charteris-Black (2014, cited in Wang, 2016, pp. 2767-2768), Chilton (2004), Wodak (2009, cited in Wang, 2016, p. 2767), and Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) utilize a variety of theoretical frameworks and research methods. Although, all these approaches have in common the view of language in political discourse as social practice, or action, the approaches range from: the analysis of the way in which metaphors are used in political discourse as a means of persuasion, to; the rhetorical analysis of how political actors purposefully use language to seek cooperation, to; the analysis of discursive representation within different layers of politics, to; the analysis of political decision-making under uncertainty, and the way in which these decisions facilitate power and dominance (Wang, 2016).

Out of these approaches, I would argue that of Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) to be most suited for answering the research questions of this particular study (see section 5.2 for their analytical framework to PDA). Political discourse, as conceived by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) is primarily a form of practical argumentation, i.e. deliberation, where the primary aim of politics is to ground decisions in response to circumstances and goals. That is, to decide upon the presumably best course of action for reaching an imagined future state of affairs. Decisions that during times of crisis are to be taken in conditions of uncertainty (I.
As established in previous text, the educational sector in Liberia can most certainly be described as being in a state of crisis (cf. sections 2.3 and 2.4). This is an educational sector that consistently has been characterized as a mess, most recently by the current Minister of education (cf. the MIPC transcript). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the conditions of which political decisions are made about the future of the country’s educational sector and its teachers are nothing but uncertain. It is on this basis Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) approach to the analysis of political discourse was chosen to analyse the primary corpus of this study.

It is important to note the criticism that has been raised against Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) approach to the analysis of political discourse. Most notably, Hay (2013), writing about the dangers of methodological absolutism criticizes their view of political discourses as residing within a discrete political domain for delimiting the field of political discourse. Hay (2013) on the other hand proposes an alternative view of “the political as a more or less developed and significant dimension of all social interaction” (Hay, 2013, p. 324). Taken on face value this critique seems to be rightly directed, albeit it should be noted here that it emanates from a fundamental difference in the understanding of politics between the scholars. As mentioned in passing, politics for Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) is argumentative in nature and concerns decision making in response to circumstances and goals on the basis of deliberation, while politics for Hay (2002, 2013) most fundamentally is about the distribution, exercise and consequences of power, where the objective should be to analyse these power relation within all social relations. Analysis of political discourse in consonance with Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) understanding of politics should have practical argumentation as its foci, albeit not concerning all social interaction, but quite correctly delimited to this particular discursive type as Hay (2013) claims. Hay (2013) can thus be read as a critique of the perceived implications of Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) claim that politics is determined by argumentation and not by power, according to Hay (2013) limiting the political discourse analysts analysis to the political content of political discourses.

incorporated in the structure of practical arguments which they contend constitutes political discourses. Power, according to Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) is the capacity to create desire-independent reasons which “provides agents with [external] reasons for action […] that [they] would otherwise not have ” (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, pp. 112, 115). Moreover, they differentiate between prudential reasons, referring to people obeying authority to avoid violence, and deontic reasons, referring to people recognizing and accepting their external force (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p. 115). Power associated with deontic reasons is, according to Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) connected to ideology, involving the process of justification and legitimization of actions through the “naturalization of beliefs and values which would not, if critically examined, survive scrutiny” (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p. 115). Hay (2013, p. 324) on the other hand defines power simply as “the capacity to influence either the conduct of actors or the context in which they find themselves”. What’s interesting here is that both Hay (2013) and Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) have similar notions of power, albeit Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) in their approach to PDA explicitly links it to decisions in politics.

In conclusion, the authors’ differences seem to originate in their fundamentally different understanding of what constitutes politics. Thus, to adopt Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) theoretical and methodological framework of PDA would then be to acknowledge and adopt their notion of the nature and function of politics.

5. METHODS

This section is dedicated to the presentation of this study’s analytical framework, or methods, employed for answering the research questions proposed, i.e. “the research technique or practice used to gather and analyse the research data” (Walter, 2010, p. 4). The presentation includes a brief description of the corpus, including why and how it was chosen. Moreover, it accounts for which procedures the corpus underwent after it was collected, i.e. specific method of transcription and subsequent analysis. Finally, the section seeks to discuss the quality, or trustworthiness of these methods, and of the corpus overall.
5.1 Presentation of corpus

The following text gives a detailed account of the speech event in itself, which ultimately was made to constitute the corpus of this study. My intention here is to provide the reader with the backdrop of which the M1PC transcript was produced, in an attempt to, not just guide the reader through the process of transformation of sound to text (Davidson, 2009), but also to show how aspects of the speech event influenced the decisions made during the transcription process, the analysis of the produced transcript, and the subsequent conclusions made about the text, in consonance with a reflexive approach to both the process of transcription and the overall analysis of the produced transcript (Bucholtz, 2000).

The communicative event under investigation in this particular study is a 2018 press conference, held by the newly formed MOE in Liberia on March 1. In it, the speaker, newly appointed Minister of Education, Professor D. Ansu Sonii Sr., outlines what he and his colleagues considers to be the circumstances in which the education sector finds itself and the immediate policy priorities associated with these circumstances, as the MOE sees them. An audio-visual recording of the press conference, recorded and edited by Baryogar (2018), is available online, albeit not covering the press conference in its entirety. The recording includes a brief welcoming statement and introduction to the press conference and its’ two speakers by an unknown representative of the MOE, opening remarks, not more than a few minutes, by Deputy Minister for Administration, Latim Da-thong and a lengthy speech by Min. Sonii. What is not included in this audio-visual recording is the finalizing discussion, questions and answers, between the MOE and the press present at the press conference. However, this Q and A section is mentioned in passing on a couple of occasions throughout the press conference.

The length of the available audio-visual recording is 1 hour, 1 minute and 23 seconds. The first 15 seconds displays a title screen. The next 36 seconds includes a brief welcoming statement and introduction of Deputy Minister for Administration, Latim Da-thong, by the unknown representative of the MOE. The 51 second marker to the 2 minutes and 57 second marker contains the opening remarks by Deputy Min., Latim Da-thong, followed by a 1 minute and 15 seconds introduction of Min. Sonii, by the unknown representative of the MOE. The Ministers speech, takes up the majority of the audio-visual recording, amounting to 57 minutes of the total recording, from the 3 minutes and 36 second marker to the 1 hour, 0 minutes and 34 second marker. The final 1 minute and 29 seconds of the audio-visual
recording consists of chatter and information about picture-taking, including a finalizing screen dedicated to credits.

It is the largest segment of the audio-visual recording, the one containing the speech of Min. Sonii, which will be accounted for in detail in further text. Upon requesting the MOE for the speech of Min. Sonii, I was informed by an Assistant Secretary, Telebee Kamara that the speech was part pre-written and part improvised, and that as a result of this a full text of the speech was never produced by the MOE. Nor was any official transcript of the press conference published, save a press statement published on March 2 (MOE, 2018a). This press statement can be read as a summary of the press conference, and is therefore, ultimately not as rich in detail as the actual press conference. Moreover, it is written in a third person perspective, with occasional direct quotes of the speaker, preventing analysis of what was actually said by the speaker. As a result of this, to make this speech event accessible to discourse analysis, the audio-visual recording is sought transformed into text (see section 5.1.1 for an account of the process of transcribing). Thus, the following text, more specifically, seeks to highlight idiosyncratic elements and other features present in the audio-visual recording of the communicative event, that has been excluded during the process of transcribing.

5.2 Decisions for transcribing

Simply put, transcribing is the transformation of sound from recordings to text (Davidson, 2009). More specifically, within this study, discourse transcription is defined and fundamentally understood in line with Du Bois (1991), and approached from a sociolinguistic stance in consonance with Bucholtz’ (2000) understanding of transcribing as a political act. Du Bois (1991, p. 72) defines discourse transcription as “the process of creating a representation in writing of a speech event so as to make it accessible to discourse research”. Thus, following text sets out to present the nature of the process by which this transformation has unfolded, in regards to the specific corpus included in this study. That is, a presentation, explanation and justification of the decisions for transcription this study has operated with (see appendix A for the M1PC transcript).

Because the transformation from a public speech to a research text, or process of creating a representation in writing, can occur in many different ways, it is imperative that researchers carefully plan out how the process of transcribing will be carried out. That is,
making speech event accessible to discourse analysis naturally depends upon the purpose of the analysis. By explaining and justifying the different decisions made during the process of transcribing, researchers can tailor a transcript suited to the needs of the specific study, which allows for the study’s research questions to be addressed adequately (Davidson, 2009).

Moreover, according to Davidson (2009), because transcripts within qualitative approaches to research are used both for analysis and as evidence of that analysis, and the researcher’s analytical claims, addressing issues of transcription quality and trustworthiness are crucial for assuring the overall quality of the study.

As will be addressed at various points in this section, the process of transcribing is within this study viewed in a constructivist/interpretivist light. That is, I, within this study take a position towards transcription in line with Ochs (1979, cited in Davidson, 2009, p. 36) and Du Bois (1991, p. 71) in that “transcription is theory”. How researchers transcribe both reflect and shape their theories of language, and embedded in the details of transcription are indications of purpose, audience, and the position of the transcriber towards the text (Davidson, 2009; Du Bois, 1991). As stated in Section 1.1, the purpose of this study is to investigate the response of the Liberian MOE, as it was conveyed through the March 1, 2018 press conference, to a perceived crisis in the country’s educational sector, and explore how this response potentially influences the construction of teachers. I will get back to the implications of this overall purpose in regards to the decisions made during the process of transcribing in this study, but first I will address in more depth the literature underlying the process of transcription within this study.

5.2.1 Conceptions of transcription

Davidsons (2009) review of transcription literature ranging from Ochs (1979, cited in Davidson, 2009) work until the early 21 Century outlines four central, common claims about the nature of transcription. Transcription is commonly viewed as “a process that is theoretical, selective, interpretative, and representational” (Davidson, 2009, p. 36). As Davidson (2009) states:

Transcription is not merely the mechanical selection and application of notation symbols. Instead, researchers make choices, and these represent some
actions, in certain ways. Choices are integrally related to theoretical positions and how researchers locate themselves and others in the research process. (p. 38)

Issues about transcription then, includes issues of interpretation, i.e. what is included in the transcript, and issues of representation, i.e. how that which is included is presented in the transcript. It can be noted here that decisions of interpretation often involve decisions of representation and vice versa (Green, Franquiz, & Dixon, 1997). This also implies, as Bucholtz (2000) states, and as the title of her paper suggests, that transcribing is a political act. Moreover, according to Bucholtz (2000, p. 1439) transcription must be viewed as “a practice inherently embedded in relations of power”, requiring transcribers to adopt a reflexive approach to transcription as part of an overall reflexive discourse analysis.

In keeping with Green et al. (1997), I understand this idea of reflexivity towards transcription to stem from a constructivist critique of positivist assumptions regarding transcription, where the aim of transcribing is to produce a transparent and objective, ‘scientific’ text. Contrary to these positivist assumptions, constructivists/interpretivists like Bucholtz (2000, p. 1440) view transcripts, as based on the production and interpretation of text, and as “creative and politicized documents in which the researcher as author is fully implicated”. Furthermore, Bucholtz (2000) considers transcription on a continuum ranging from naturalized, or literacized transcription, where features of written language that do not occur in spoken language is included in the transcript, and denaturalized transcription, which preserves the features of spoken language. Similarly, Serovich and Mason (2005) also views transcription on a continuum. To them, this is comprised of naturalism and denaturalism. Naturalism refers to transcription where the aim is to provide ‘as much detail as possible’, whereas denaturalism refers to transcription where one excludes, what Oliver et al. (2005) terms idiosyncratic elements of speech, such as stutters, pauses, nonverbal, involuntary vocalization etc. The former can be characterized as falling under a positivist perspective, where language is believed to represent the real world, and where the aim of transcription is to produce a transparent, objective account of the recorded data. Within the latter, on the other hand, language is believed to embed meanings and perceptions that construct reality. Within this perspective, transcription is considered to be a ‘representational and interpretative process’ which produce ‘theoretical constructions’ (Davidson, 2009, p. 39).
To reiterate, and with the aforementioned as a starting point, it seems crucial for the integrity of the entire study to clearly outline the process of transcription as it was carried out by me in this study. As Lapadat and Lindsey (1998) assert, that when researchers do not explain the theoretical perspectives that inform their transcript development or address the choices made in transcription, they assume a ‘default position’ whereby they appear to take transcripts as transparent, thus inadvertently present a positivist position on transcription by omission. In further text, then, I will acknowledge: the purpose of the transcript; the technical limitations of the transcript in terms of accuracy and readability, and; the politics of transcription.

5.2.2 Transcribing the March 1 press conference

To achieve the overall purpose of this study, as was presented earlier within this section, PDA (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012) has been chosen as a means to analyse the future transcript. The purpose of the transcript then, in consonance with the applied method for analysis, is to allow for the identification, reconstruction and evaluation of practical arguments within the transcript (cf. Section 5.2). Consequentially, I would argue that the idiosyncratic elements of the speech event in question, the audio-visual recording of the Mach 1, 2018 press conference (Baryogar, 2018), can be eliminated from the transcript, including pace of speech. The reason for this is that the transcripts ability to provide answers for the formulated research questions, in consonance with the selected method for analysis, is not necessarily dependent upon those aspects of the speech event. Though, these elements are quite noticeable in the March 1. Press Conference and could arguably, provide important contextual information which could be used for the critical analysis of the transcript. However, seeing as the process of transcribing within this study is understood as a political act, and as part of the overall analysis, the decision to exclude these features arguably reveal a certain position that I as a researcher take. Thus, these decisions warrant some elaboration. To address all features of the audio-visual recording excluded from the transcript, would ultimately mean to as objectively as possible describe, in detail, the whole of the recording. This would undoubtedly have been unnecessary. That is, to present features such as the physical layout of the press conference, people present, etc. I would admittedly advise the reader to view the audio-visual recording to get an overall impression it. The features I regard as most significant in influencing the analysis of the press conference, albeit not included in
the transcript, consist of one visual and one auditory feature present in the communicative event.

5.2.3 Features not included in the transcript

I will address the visual feature first. The video recording provides a frontal view of Min. Sonii sitting at a table in front of the flag of the Republic of Liberia addressing the attendees at the press conference. On several occasions Min. Sonii gets up and for a while continues his speech standing up. This occurs first at 00:27:04, Min. Sonii expressing, ‘I am preparing myself’, as he gets up, when talking about violations of rules and regulations and their consequences. It occurs again at 00:32:38, when Min. Sonii is addressing the issue of licencing teachers and principals and the moral imperative of teachers. It occurs one last time at 00:49:27, corresponding with Min. Sonii talking about revoking the licence of principals who violates the directives of the MOE. These features, albeit excluded from the transcript, can be of significance, as they correspond with issues the speaker finds it necessary to stand while expressing.

The auditory feature concerns the language spoken by the speaker. As noted in previous text, although English is the national language in Liberia, Liberians in general speak a local, Liberian colloquial English. Min. Sonii is no exception, and this is arguably one of the most prominent features of the communicative event in question. Yet, it is important to note here that although part of the speech is in Liberian colloquial English, part of the speech is also in standard English. This separation is most clearly observed when comparing the type of language spoken when the speaker is reading from a text, observable from 00:06:08 to 00:15:38, versus the type of language spoken when the speaker is expressing himself freely. What is important here is not the comparison of the two types of language in terms of pronouncing words and building sentences, but in the political act of deciding to transcribe in standard English, as if Liberian colloquial English is inferior. Moreover, because this can be regarded as translation, even though Liberian colloquial English, naturally, very much resembles standard English, there is a possibility the meanings gets lost through this translation. I tried to compensate for this by having two Liberian nationals, a high school teacher and a former government official, read through the transcript, while at the same time listening to and comparing it with the audio of the recording. This also proved useful in regards to interpreting words within the recording I myself were unable to interpret.
By excluding these, and other features of the audio-visual recording, the transcription falls in under what Oliver et al. (2005) termed denaturalism. However, to be able to reconstruct, as clearly as possible, the practical arguments in the corpus, elements which do not occur in vocalized speech, in accordance with Bucholtz (2000) notion of literacized transcription, will be included (e.g. commas, full stop, etc.). Although, these decisions naturally and as stated in previous text, imply a reduced meaning attributed to the idiosyncratic elements of the speech event, it should be emphasized again that the process of transcription within this study is viewed as part and parcel of the analytical procedure overall. This implies that both the audio-visual recording and the subsequent transcript is considered to be data, in consonance with Bucholtz (2000) notion of reflexive transcribing, where the transcriber is encouraged to move back and forth between recordings and transcript. I would therefore again encourage readers to take the time to view the audio-visual recording of the speech event, as the transcript, albeit, accurate for answering the specific research questions of this study, notably deviates from the actual speech event. Viewing the audio-visual recording will arguably allow the reader to take part in the analytical process and will highlight the contextual information in the speech event, not included in the transcript, but which contributed in shaping interpretations, representations and conclusions.

5.2.4 Two examples of transcribed spoken language

The following is an example from the transcript based on the aforementioned decisions:

((Example 1: March 1. Press Conference))

107 [...] The PSL schools. We put it first on this list. Partnership Schools of Liberia. Many people have heard of it. There have been so much resentment in the work that they have done. There was a major conflict that came about between, with the introduction of the Partnership Schools and the Teachers Association, the Principals Association and some parents, and generally maybe even the public. What we have done is this [...].

The notation symbol, ‘[…]’ is only included in this extract and indicates that there is text both before and after the chosen example. It is included here to acknowledge the fact that the
The second example is based on Du Bois (1991) protocol and symbols for discourse transcription. It is used here to illustrate an alternative transcript where idiosyncratic elements of speech are included. To mention a few of the notation symbols: EM (education minister), U (unknown) and C (crowd) refers to the actors involved in this speech event. In the first example only the voice of the Minister is represented. The reason for this being that the other voices present in this specific recording contribute to the formulation of the practical arguments. I would argue that for the purpose of this study, the other voices, in and of themselves, can be characterized more as nonessential sound, than important contributions to the practical argument, worthy of transcribing. However, they could, like other excluded
features provide some contextual information. Further; notation symbols, < > (false start), - (stutter), .. (short pause), … (medium pause), …(N) (long pause), [] (speech overlap), (() (researchers comment), and () (vocal noises), included in this extract is just some of the notation symbols included in Du Bois (1991) transcription design, but serve here the function of illustrating the somewhat unnecessary inclusion of details from the speech event, making the transcript more complicated and difficult to handle, at least in regards to the purpose of this particular study.

On a final note, what is not included in neither of the two examples is the representation of non-standard English, or Liberian colloquial. In both examples the speech event is represented in standard English. The implications of this exclusion was addressed in previous text, although alternatively, the use of eye dialect, i.e. the representation of dialect with non-standard English, would allow for the identification and placing of the speaker in a certain social group, arguably stigmatizing the speaker (Bucholtz, 2000). What’s more, the use of eye dialect is intended to create a transcript which “look to the eye how it sounds to the ear” (Schenken, 1978, cited in Bucholtz, 2000, p. 1457). This would first of all have made the transcript unnecessarily difficult to create by me. More importantly, it would have made the transcript equally as difficult to translate during the process of analysis, and thus reduce the clarity of the argument reconstruction (see Bucholtz (2000, p. 1457) for examples of eye dialect and colloquial spelling in discourse analysis texts).

5.3 The framework for analysis of political discourse

How then can a text of this type be analysed? Keep in mind that the M1PC transcript is here understood as a policy text, or a “social text imbued with authority”, capable of influencing social structures (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 81). There are a number of ways to analyse policy texts, of which Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) highlight CDA in particular, which according to these scholars, is ideally suited to the study of social practice. As stated in Section 4.3 I view language in politics, in consonance with Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) as a form of such a social practice. The M1PC transcript, being a representation of a political communicative event, is thus best analysed within a CDA framework. At least according to Bartlett and Vavrus (2017).

Rui (2014) provides a view which clarifies and accentuates this claim, through the presentation of two perspectives, a rational perspective and a conflict perspective, in which
policy can be understood. The former refers to a positivist view of reality which emphasizes the technically best course of action to implement a decision or achieve a goal (Rui, 2014, p. 245), whereas the latter views society as consisting of competing groups with different values and access to power (Rui, 2014, p. 249). The onto-epistemological standpoint I have, accounted for in Section 4.1, and the formulated research questions this study operates with implies a stance which resonates with the conflict perspective of policy rather than the rational perspective. This is in keeping with Bartlett and Vavrus’ (2017) notion of CDA being best suited to the study of policy, and Fairclough and Fairclough’s understanding of policy, in consonance with Ball (1990), in that:

policies are, pre-eminently, statements about practice – the way things could or should be – which rest upon, derive from, statements about the world – about the way things are. They are intended to bring about idealised solutions to diagnosed problems. Policies embody claims to speak with authority, they legitimate and initiate practices in the world, and they privilege certain visions and interests. (p. 22)

Analysis of the M1PC transcript should therefore seek to identify and explore, within the text, these statements about practice, based on the speakers’ selective diagnosis of the problems, that ultimately privilege certain visions and interests that potentially influence social structures, in this case teachers. Consequentially, this situates this study in-between sociology and political science.

Keeping this in mind, and in regards to the political turn in linguistics and the linguistic turn in political science, mentioned in passing, it seems CDA alone not adequately will be able to cater to the needs of this particular study. Furthermore, political discourse, in keeping with the most prominent scholars within the field of political discourse, outlined above, is here understood as action. Moreover, as argumentative in nature, as a form of practical argumentation, in consonance with Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), where the primary aim of politics thus, is to ground decisions in response to circumstances and goals, often on the basis of deliberation (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). PDA is further understood as the analysis of political discourse from a critical perspective, a perspective which, in line with CDA focuses on the reproduction and contestation of political power through political discourse. Further, political discourse can be characterized as attached to political actors,
individuals, political institutions and organizations, engaged in political processes and events. Moreover, there is an emphasis on the notion of context being essential to the understanding of political discourse (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012; Van Dijk, 1997). In line then, with the understanding of politics, policy, and political discourse outlined, and in keeping with the objectives of the study and the embedded onto-epistemological position within it, at least as perceived by me, PDA (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012) seems to be best suited to overcome the task at hand. Thus, my aim through the adoption of this analytical framework [PDA is henceforth only referencing Fairclough and Fairclough (2012)], for analysing M1PC, is to identify and reproduce the practical arguments within the text, and investigate the impact these practical arguments might have on the construction of teachers in Liberia.

5.3.1 Analysing practical argumentation in political discourse

Drawing on argumentation theory and CDA, PDA aims to identify and evaluate the practical arguments, or reasoning within political communicative events, or texts. Furthermore its aim is to describe, understand and explain social stability and change, and to explore power relations as they manifest within these political communicative events (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) describes practical reasoning as follows:

> given the circumstances I find myself in and a certain goal (this may be a future situation I desire of one that I do not desire but think I ought to bring about), and given that I am or ought to be concerned with the realization of this goal, I ought to do A. In other words, I know what the circumstances are, and I know what the future outcome should be: these are *two states of the world*, one immediately present, the other an imagined future in which what I know I want or what is morally required (what I ought to want) has been achieved. What I *don’t know* is what means will take me from the current situation to the future one, and I will *conjecture* that action A might be that means, based on my knowledge of the world, past experiences, imagination, etc. So, we suggest, the action I eventually conclude in favour of is the one that appears to *connect* the present circumstances to the future ones, the one that can *transform* my current circumstances in accordance with the source of normativity specified in the value premise. (p. 43)
Thus, the structure of practical reasoning, or arguments is comprised of: a value premise, referring to what the agent is concerned with or ought to be concerned with; a circumstantial premise referring to the context of action, or representation of the social world, including both natural facts, such as empirical aspects and social, institutional facts, such as duties, commitments, social norms etc.; a goal premise, referring to the future state of affairs in which the value premise is realized, and; a means-goal premise, referring to presumptive reasoning that by doing A, the goal will be achieved. Together, these four premises in a practical argument construct a claim for action. This is the most basic structure of a practical argument and it can be illustrated as in Figure 1:

![Figure 1](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

*Figure 1. Structure of practical arguments. Adapted from Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students (p. 45), by I. Fairclough & N. Fairclough, 2012, London: Routledge*

This is also the way in which it will be illustrated in sections 6.1 and 6.2, where the reconstruction of the arguments within M1PC is conducted.
5.3.2 Critically evaluating practical arguments in political discourse

Evaluation of practical arguments in political discourse aims to examine if the practical argument is capable of withstanding a process of critical examination (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). One way to critically evaluate a practical argument, according to Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) is by challenging one or more of the arguments four premises, through critical questions regarding their rational acceptability, or the relationship between them, revealing that they are not acceptable. Another way is to defeat the argument by asking critical questions aimed at challenging the inferential link between premises and claim. Admittedly, for an argument to be rebutted, requires the formulation of a rationally persuasive counter-argument to the one being evaluated (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). The critical questions I ask in evaluating the practical arguments of the M1PC transcript, albeit not necessarily explicitly, are in consonance with Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) and include: are the existing circumstances described in a rationally acceptable way?; is the governments’ response sufficient in view of the goals?; is the governments’ response necessary in view of the goals?; is the value premise rationally acceptable?; is the action represented in a rationally persuasive way?; has the claim stood up to criticism in light of its probable consequences?

5.3.3 Analysing the M1PC transcript

The analysis of the M1PC transcript can be separated into two phases. In the first phase, I attempt to identify the four premises and subsequent claim for action, reconstructing the practical argument. The second phase deals with the critical evaluation of the reconstructed practical arguments, and how the construction of teachers is influenced through this. With this phase I also seek to explore the relationship between the M1PC transcript and other discursively related texts, accounted for in Section 2. Although, I by utilizing PDA first and foremost shed light on the response of the Liberian MOE towards the educational mess the country is facing, the unit of analysis within this study should be considered as ‘the teacher’, as a discursive construct. More specifically, how teachers are constructed or represented through the practical argumentation and dominant discourses within M1PC and other discursively related texts, keeping in mind Maxwell’s (2012) process orientation and Bartlett and Vavrus’ (2017) notion of place, culture and context this study has adopted.
To reiterate and clarify before the analysis, ‘the teacher’ is here viewed as a discursive construct, born out of social structures, i.e. hegemonic onto-epistemology, maintained in social practices, i.e. orders of discourse, and distributed through social events, i.e. texts (Rogers, Collins, & Fairclough, 2011). Furthermore, the study conceptualizes ‘the teacher’, through Hargreaves’ (2000) four ages of professionalism, and Sachs (2016) view of teacher professionalism as plastic and emotive, and highly influenced by external pressures.

6. STRATEGIES AND ARGUMENTS OF THE MARCH 1. PRESS CONFERENCE

In the following sections a thorough description on how I went from the text, the M1PC transcript, to a conclusion about the text will be provided. I am offering an in-depth analysis of the first press conference held by the current Minister in Education in Liberia, Professor D. Ansu Sonii Sr. Following Fairclough and Faircloug’s (2012) political discourse analytical approach to PDA, the analysis sets off with a detailed overview of the content of the M1PC transcript, and a reconstruction of the practical arguments within the text. However, not all the practical arguments within the M1PC transcript, strictly speaking, concern the subject of this particular paper. Consequentially, the following text will comprise of a reconstruction of the main argument identified in the text, in addition to a reconstruction of the various other arguments presumed to be directly associated with teachers and the teaching profession. I am admittedly of the understanding that the various sections of the text, cannot be separated from the text as a whole, and will therefore consider the text all aspects of the text, albeit emphasizing some sections more than others. Following the reconstruction of the practical arguments within the M1PC transcript, I then proceed to critically evaluate the reconstructed arguments, seeking to draw on the contextual information presented in Section 2, and conceptions of teacher professionalism presented in section 3.1, to ultimately be able to clearly and satisfactorily answer the research questions proposed in Section 1.1. The analysis will, for the sake of clarity, be presented with organized headings, rather strictly following the approach to PDA outlined in Fairclough and Fairclough (2012).
6.1 Overview and reconstruction of the main argument

The following text deals with the main argument in support of action and identifies the premises constituting it. The reconstructions are presented, first in an orderly fashion, followed by a detailed description of the premises and the arguments overall, and concluded by a representation of each argument in a figure. The figures are intended to illustrate the relationship between the three variations of the main argument and show how the argument evolves through the three variations.

I set of the analysis by considering the first 84 lines of text from the M1PC transcript, corresponding with the audio-visual recording at 03m36s to 15m51s, amounting to 12 minutes and 15 seconds. As further text will demonstrate, within these 84 lines of text it is possible to identify three variations of the main practical argument concerning how the MOE of Liberia should, or intends, to respond to the current state of affairs of country and its educational sector. Through the analysis we can witness these three variations of the main argument move from quite general descriptions and presumptive claims, evolving and eventually becoming more detailed as the text progresses.

The first instance of the practical argument, and arguably the most open to interpretation, can be found within lines 1-14 in the speech’s introduction. It includes the following elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim (Solution)</th>
<th>We must do ‘whatever can be done’, and; ‘we intend to use the opportunities we have to the benefit of the people of this country’; in line ‘with the pro-poor agenda of this government’.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Circumstantial premises</td>
<td>[empirical facts] ‘The task associated with it (the MOE) is one of the difficult ones’; because the ‘Ministry affects the lives of everyone in this country in some way’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                           | [social, institutional facts] a sense of duty to live up to the expectations of others in relation to being ‘privileged to have been identified among very, very competent Liberians’, and; to have been ‘selected by the
President to head the Ministry of Education; an expressed commitment by assuring the President that ‘only the best of us [the MOE] will be envisaged’ during the time ‘we [the MOE] will endure his confidence’; expressed commitments to ensure fairness and to ensure that the people are benefitting, especially the poor, on behalf of the government.

**Goal premises**

Our [the MOE] goal is to create an educational system which is ‘to the benefit of the people of this country’; in line ‘with the pro-poor agenda of this government’.

**Value premises**

We must achieve our goals ‘to the benefit of the people of this country’; especially the poor (cf. the pro-poor agenda) [implicitly a concern for fairness and a concern for equality are relevant values].

**Means-goal premise**

If we ‘do whatever can be done’; ‘use the opportunities we have’; ‘to the benefit of the people’; in line with the pro-poor agenda, we will reach our goals.

The speaker begins his speech with some opening statements, presenting an aspect of the circumstances, in this case a social institutional fact, somewhat implicitly expressing a sense of duty to live up to the expectations of the people who have placed them [the MOE] in the position as Ministers of Education, in that they are ‘privileged to have been identified among very, very competent Liberians’, and to have been ‘selected by the President’. Already at this initial stage, any potential claim for action that follows is supported by an argument from authority, because they [the MOE] have been selected by competent others, ‘some of them maybe even more sophisticated’ than the Ministers of the MOE. This is followed by a brief description of the empirical circumstances, referred to as the ‘task associated’ with the MOE, presented as ‘difficult’ because it ‘affects the lives of everyone’ in the country, after which a commitment, or an assurance is made to the President that ‘only the best’ of the MOE will be ‘envisaged’ during the time the MOE ‘will endure his confidence’. This is immediately followed up with a statement that arguably can be identified as a claim for action, albeit, still quite general and implicit, where the speaker expresses that the MOE must do ‘whatever can
be done’ and that the MOE ‘intend to use the opportunities’ that they have ‘to the benefit of the people’, in consonance with the ‘pro-poor agenda of the government’. Although, the goal of the speaker seems to be, to be beneficial to the people of the country, this is not explicitly stated within these first lines of text. However, it is reasonable to assume, based on the other identified premises present in the text, the implicit claim for action, and in consonance with Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012, p. 24) understanding of goals as “future states of affairs that the agent wants to bring about by means of action”, informed by the speakers values, that the implicit goal, as presented here, is to create an educational system which is ‘to the benefit of the people’ and in consonance with ‘the pro-poor agenda of the government’. Furthermore, the fact that it is emphasized that the work of the MOE should ‘benefit the people’, especially the poor, implies that it is the belief of the speaker that education in Liberia as it has existed in the past, not has been to the benefit of the people. Moreover, that it has neglected the poor. Hence, the current state of affairs and a need for action. Similarly, like the goal of the speaker not being explicitly, the same can be said about the values informing the speakers argument. They remain implicit within the text statement made by the speaker to ‘use the opportunities’ available, ‘to the benefit of the people’, in consonance with ‘the pro-poor agenda of the government’. The speaker is here, arguably, expressing a concern for fairness and a concern for equality. This is reasserted repeatedly throughout the M1PC transcript.

The speaker expresses an intention, commitment, and a decision to perform certain actions, undefined at the moment, given a set of circumstances and a goal, informed by the values of fairness and equality, albeit not in this particular order. This illustrates rather well what Fairclough and Fairclough (2012, p. 122) understands to be “the core of any normative practical argument”. The claim of this first variation of the argument, although implicit, is here expressed as a commissive speech act, i.e. an expressed intention to perform some future action. As further analysis will demonstrate, as the argument evolves the claim is presented as a practical judgement, i.e. a conclusion or decision, based practical reason, to perform a certain action. At this stage, the argument can be represented as in Figure 2.1, on page 63.

To reiterate, as Figure 2.1 illustrates, the speaker presents certain actions, albeit at this stage quite general, intended to transport the speaker and the educational sector from a presented state of affairs, or certain, current, undesirable circumstantial descriptions, to an imagined future state of affairs, in which certain, expressed values are lived up to. This initial variation of the main argument and the two which follows will henceforth be referred to as a strategy, or the strategy. Although, the speaker does, in line 12, explicitly mention ‘strategies’
and ‘plans’, referring to a set of individual concrete initiatives already implemented or being proposed implemented by the MOE. An overall strategy is not presented in the M1PC transcript, although, as further text will demonstrate, I would argue there is possible to identify this within the text. I will therefore regard these ‘strategies’ and ‘plans’ as part of this overall strategy, or response to what has been characterized an educational mess in Liberia.

CLAIM: We must ‘do whatever can be done’ in line with the pro-poor agenda (adopt the pro-poor agenda)

GOALS: Our goals are to ‘benefit’ people; through adoption of ‘the pro-poor agenda of this government’.

CIRCUMSTANCES: [empirical] The task associated with it (the Ministry of education) is one of the difficult ones because the ‘Ministry affects the lives of everyone in this country in some way’. [social, institutional] a sense of duty to live up to the expectations of others in relations to being privileged to have been identified among very, very competent Liberians’ and to have been ‘selected by the President to head the Ministry of education’; implicit commitments to ensure fairness and to ensure people’s needs, especially the poor, are met, on behalf of the

VALUES: We must achieve our goals ‘to the benefit of the people of this country’, especially the poor (cf. the pro-poor agenda) [a concern for people’s needs and a concern for equality are relevant values]

MEANS-GOAL: If we adopt the pro-poor agenda, we will reach our goals.

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Figure 2.1. The first variation of the main argument in the M1PC transcript. Adapted from Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students (p. 45), by I. Fairclough & N. Fairclough, 2012, London: Routledge

The second variation of the argument can be found in lines 15-46, where the argument gradually evolves, and the speaker becomes more detailed in his description of the premises. It includes the following elements:

Claim (solution) We should ‘stop, think, and change course’; through adopting ‘the pro-poor agenda for change’.
Circumstantial premises [empirical facts] ‘Liberia if so rich, yet its people are so poor’; which is a ‘collective outcome of the stewardship of all governments since the founding of this country’; Liberia has been ‘blessed with abundance’; but has at the same time been ‘cursed with poverty’; ‘the majority of its people unable to read and write with understanding’; ‘a nation apparently exploited by many, while its people stand and observe’.

[social, institutional facts] a sense of duty and responsibility to correct, or at least not repeat, perceived faults of former governments which has led to the current state of affairs, because ‘it somewhat indict all Liberians, especially those who’s trusted with leadership’.

Goal premises Our goals are ‘not to repeat the actions of the past’: ‘impact the lives of the least of us’; direct the country’s remaining resources towards ‘the common good of the rest who have not been privileged so far’.

Value premises Our [MOE] (implicit) values are responsibility and equality. Our (implicit) concerns: the effects of poverty; the wellbeing and needs of ‘the least of us’.

Means-goal premise There is ‘no better option’ of meeting our goals, starting from the current state of affairs, than to analyse the current circumstances and not ‘repeat the actions of the past’, i.e. by implementing ‘the pro-poor agenda for change’ [if we implement the pro-poor agenda for change we will meet our goals].

The argument, still the same, albeit with some added features, can be represented as in Figure 2.2, on page 65. Here, the argument sets off with more elaborate descriptions of the circumstances the speaker finds himself in, first presented through the speaker including a
statement made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General [SRSG] and head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia [UNMIL], Farid Zarif, ‘Liberia is so rich, yet its people are so poor, it makes no sense’. This is followed by the speaker acknowledging the statement of the SRSG as an empirical fact and attributing the current circumstances to ‘the collective outcome of the stewardship of all governments since the founding of the country’, ‘indicting all Liberians, especially those who’s trusted with leadership’. The speaker then extrapolates and reiterates the statement of the SRSG, stating that Liberia is a ‘nation that has been blessed with abundance’ but also a nation that has been ‘cursed with poverty’, immediately followed by a list of the blessings and the curses, or shortcomings associated with them, one example being ‘blessed with brains from Harvard and from Oxford, and from Yale, and from Princeton, name them all. Yet, the majority of its people unable to read and write with understanding’. This is the first instance of a circumstantial premise directly relating to education in Liberia being expressed by the speaker. This is followed by yet another description of the circumstances, where the speaker states that Liberia is ‘a nation, apparently exploited by many, while its people stand and observe’.

CLAIM: We should ask ourselves ‘where’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ it all went wrong; and there is no better option than to adopt ‘the pro-poor agenda for change’.

GOALS: Our goals are to ‘not repeat the actions of the past’; ‘impact the lives of the least of us’; direct the country’s remaining resources towards ‘the common good of the rest who have not been privileged so far’.

VALUES: Our [the Ministry’s] (implicit) values are responsibility and equality. Our (implicit) concerns: the effects of poverty; the wellbeing and needs of ‘the least of us’.

CIRCUMSTANCES: [empirical] ‘Liberia is so rich, yet its people are so poor; this is because of ‘the collective outcomes of the stewardship of all governments since the founding of this country’; Liberian has been ‘blessed with abundance’ and ‘cursed with poverty’; a nation with brains from Harvard and from Oxford and from Yale and from Princeton, name them all, yet, the majority of its people unable to read and write with understanding’; a nation apparently exploited by many while its people stand and observe’ [social, institutional] a sense of duty and responsibility to correct perceived faults of former governments which has led to current circumstances, because it somehow indict all Liberians, especially those who’s trusted with leadership’.

MEANS-GOAL: There is ‘no better option’ of meeting our goals, starting from current circumstances than to analyse the current circumstances and ‘not repeat the actions of the past’, i.e. by implementing the ‘pro-poor agenda for change’. (If we implement the pro-poor agenda for change we will meet our goals/solve the problem[s])
Although, the first portion of this second excerpt mostly contains descriptions of the empirical circumstances, e.g. the ‘blessings’ and the shortcomings of the nation, and social, institutional facts, e.g. a sense of responsibility, as a Liberian and having been entrusted with leadership, for the current state of affairs and for the future of the country, it also further substantiates the values fairness and equality with its emphasis, and I would argue critique of the nations ‘blessings’ not having benefitting the less fortunate in the past and present day Liberia. Moving forward, the speaker asks a series of questions starting with why Liberia is ‘among the least of nations, still struggling to provide the basic necessities for its people?’, implying a concern for people’s needs and their wellbeing, and culminating in the question, ‘when do we intend to stop, think and change course?’, expressing a need or desire for action, i.e. change. The speaker then substantiates and supports this claim for action with an argument from authority making the statement that, ‘it is commonly said, that doing the same things the same way will have the same results’ coupled with a description of an announcement previously made by the President that ‘there is no better option’ than to change. ‘The same results’ is here presented, in relation with the described circumstances, as a probable negative consequence of doing ‘the same things’, i.e. what previous governments have done, and that it, thus, should be avoided, favouring the proposed actions of the current government and MOE. Further, the speaker, with reference to the outcome of the 2017 general Presidential elections, describes a Liberian people, who ‘stood massively together for a common cause’, ‘like never before’, and then moving over to express his belief in that the current government, ‘with a pro-poor agenda for change’ not will ‘repeat the actions of the past’ and a belief in that the President ‘musters the will to impact the lives of the least of us like never before’, again emphasizing the values of fairness and equality.

The goal of the speaker is, also in this variation of the argument, not explicitly stated. The goal identified in the previous excerpt is admittedly substantiated within this second excerpt, especially with the speaker’s strong association with the President and ‘his vision’ and the speaker’s belief that the President ‘musters the will to impact the least of us. Furthermore, what also can be added to the speaker’s goal is the emphasis placed on ‘not repeating the actions of the past’, while it should be noted that this, arguably, also can be considered as part of the value premises or concerns of the speaker. The means-goal premise

Figure 2.2. The second variation of the main argument in the M1PC transcript. Adapted from Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students (p. 45), by I. Fairclough & N. Fairclough, 2012, London: Routledge
remains implicit in this variation of the main argument as well, albeit, what in the previous variation could be understood as the right thing to do, now can be understood as the only thing to do i.e. ‘there is no better option’. Moreover, ‘change’ or to change becomes in this second variation emphasized as the only way to reach the goal, starting from current circumstances, and informed by the values responsibility, fairness, equality, and concerns about people’s wellbeing and their needs. This change or solution to the problem is also here being directly connected with the pro-poor agenda of the government, now referred to as ‘the pro-poor agenda for change’.

The third and final variation of the practical argument can be identified within lines 47-84, and includes the following elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim (solution)</th>
<th>We must, ‘if it can be done’, ‘transform [the education] sector’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Circumstantial premises</td>
<td>[empirical fact] ‘Difficult is an understatement in characterizing the task of transforming this sector’; ‘the only sector that give life and capacity to other sectors’; a sector that currently does not provide ‘quality education’ for the ‘majority’; ‘our country is in want of capacity of superior quality’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal premises</td>
<td>Our ‘desires’ [goals] are to ‘transform the education sector’ so that it is capable of producing ‘capacity of superior quality’ and eliminate ‘societal deficiencies’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value premises</td>
<td>Our [the Ministry’s] values are integrity, honesty and truthfulness, righteousness, loyalty and patriotism, selflessness; (implicitly) responsibility and a sense of duty as public servants; Our concerns: ‘societal deficiencies’ resulting from ‘the absence of quality education, i.e. backness, underdevelopment, personal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Means-goal premise

In order to meet our goals, starting from current circumstances we must transform the country’s education sector. [if we transform the country’s education sector we will meet our goals].

This third and final variation of the main argument starts off with a brief description of one aspect of the circumstances, albeit now, immediately followed by a claim for action, the speaker stating that ‘a significant deposit’ of the country’s resources have been depleted but that the resources that are still left ‘must be directed to the common good of the rest who have not been privileged so far’. The speaker substantiates this, stating that ‘the similar reason’ is why he himself and others have chosen to ‘serve with the President so that ‘his vision’ is ‘fulfilled unhindered’. The speaker then acknowledges that all that is needed for a ‘massive and speedy transformation’ of the country may not be available, but that they [the MOE] ‘are driven by the will to’ transform the country. What’s interesting here is that the speaker, expresses a goal of transforming the whole country and not just the education sector, drawing back to the opening statements where the speaker expressed a sense of duty and responsibility, because the MOE ‘affects the lives of everyone in the country’. This goal to transform the country is then characterized as the MOE’s ‘purpose’ as they serve ‘under the will of the President’, ‘to seize the cherished pride of the Lone Star Forever’ referencing and quoting former President and member of the True Whig political party, Edwin James Barclay’s Liberian patriotic song “The Lone Star Forever”. The speaker then makes a reference to God, stating that ‘God our help, shall provide the wisdom and resources’ they need, followed by a quotation from the Seven Days Adventist Education handbook, describing ‘men’ with embedded values such as to be staunch, truthful and honest, and righteous, stating that they, the MOE intends to be such ‘men’, again referencing his view of serving in the education sector as a privilege. This is followed by the speaker stating that ‘difficult is an understatement in characterizing the task of transforming’ the education sector, again referencing God as a source for help in overcoming the difficulties and reaching the goal. The last portion of this third excerpt contains yet another description of the circumstances expressed as the country not having ‘come of age by no means to be a
developed country’. This is followed by another reference to the privilege it is to be on the ‘stage of public service’, the speaker expressing a sense of duty to ‘make representations that are factual, predictable, and reasonably consistent with the realities’ of the country’s education sector. Further, the speaker characterizes the education sector as ‘the only sector that give life and capacity to other sectors through the building of minds’. This is, according to the speaker, because ‘the mind is the man, and without the mind, the man is a less man’. Following this, the speaker then identifies the absence of ‘quality education for the majority’ in the country, and that this absence is ‘the foundation’ for the underdevelopment pointed towards earlier, including other ‘societal deficiencies’. The speaker then, in conclusion, substantiates his claim for action, again tying it to the pro-poor agenda referencing ‘pillar one’ of the Presidents platform, ‘power to the people’, stating that Liberia ‘is in want of capacity of superior quality’ and that these are the ‘desires’ of the MOE, and that they, inhabiting the values previously described, must, with the help of God, make a difference, ‘for once’. The practical argument can now be represented as in Figure 2.3:

Figure 2.3. The third variation of the main argument in the MIPC transcript. Adapted from Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students (p. 45), by I. Fairclough & N. Fairclough, 2012, London: Routledge
I consider these first 84 lines of text to be the initial formulation of the main argument. A synthesis of these three variations of the same practical argument, then would capture the essence of all the identified premises. I first look at the identified circumstantial premises, both in the form of empirical facts and social, institutional facts, or descriptions. The circumstances in the first variation [A1] are as previously noted, described as difficult and the speaker expresses as sense of duty and commitment to perform well in terms of the pro-poor agenda of the government. In the second variation [A2] we get more insight into why the circumstances are difficult but also other descriptions of the circumstances the speaker finds himself in.

What we can draw from this is the description of Liberia as a country where the majority of the people live in poverty, according to the speaker as a result of persistent government corruption, mismanagement and exploitation, albeit not in those exact words. Also here, a sense of duty and responsibility is expressed by the speaker, but now more in terms of correcting the perceived faults of former governments. Finally, in the third variation [A3], the description of the circumstances, and the task of transforming them, as difficult is further emphasized. Yet again noting the importance and impact of the education sector, drawing a picture of a country currently not providing quality education for the majority of its people. The speaker does here also, like in A1 and A2, express a perceived sense of duty and responsibility associated with the role of public service. The goals then, or imagined future state of affairs, are in A1, albeit implicitly, to create a sector which especially embraces the poor, through the governments pro-poor agenda. This is further substantiated in A2, and expressed as not repeating the actions of the past, which in A3 is described as transforming the education sector, producing capacity and eliminating what the speaker refers to as societal deficiencies. This is informed by values which in both A1 and A2 are implicitly expressed, both emphasizing fairness and equality. However, in A3, a set of values intended to be inhabited by the speaker and the other ministers of the MOE are explicitly expressed. These are integrity, honesty and truthfulness, righteousness, loyalty, patriotism, and selflessness. There are also in all three variations expressed a concern for equality or in terms of the effects of poverty, while A3 also specifies a concern for the lack of quality education in the country and the various societal deficiencies associated with this. The means-goal premise identified in all three of the variations of the main practical argument within the M1PC’s first 84 lines of text concern embracing the governments pro-poor agenda for change, in A3.
calling for a transformation of the country’s education sector. Finally, the different elements of the practical argument can be synthesized and presented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Claim (solution)</strong></th>
<th>We must transform the education sector of the country through implementation of measures in line with the pro-poor agenda for change.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Circumstantial premises</strong></td>
<td>[empirical facts] Liberia has been ‘blessed with abundance’ and ‘cursed with poverty’, as a result of persistent historical government corruption, mismanagement and exploitation; the country is in need of ‘capacity of superior quality’, and; the education sector has not been able to provide its people with ‘quality education’; resulting in the majority of the population being ‘unable to read and write with understanding’; the task of transforming the education sector is more than difficult, because it ‘affects the lives of everyone in some way’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal premises</strong></td>
<td>Our goals are to implement measures, in consonance with the pro-poor agenda; ‘not repeat the actions of the past’ and; transform the education sector so that it produces capacity, is to the benefit of the people, and eliminates societal deficiencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value premises</strong></td>
<td>Our values are fairness and equality, integrity, honesty and truthfulness, righteousness, loyalty, patriotism and selflessness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Means-goal premise</strong></td>
<td>Our concerns are the effects of poverty and the lack of quality education resulting in societal deficiencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is ‘no better option’, if we are to meet our goals, starting from current circumstances, than to transform the education sector through implementation of measures in consonance with the pro-poor agenda for change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, the main practical argument can now be represented as in Figure 2.4:

**GOALS:** Our goals are to transform the education sector, so that it produces capacity, is to the benefit of the people, and eliminates societal deficiencies; through implementation of measures in consonance with the pro-poor agenda for change; and, to ‘not repeat the actions of the past’

**CIRCUMSTANCES:** [empirical facts]
Liberia has been ‘blessed with abundance’ and ‘cursed with poverty’, as a result of persistent historical government corruption, mismanagement and exploitation; the country is in need of ‘capacity of superior quality’, however; the education sector has not been able to provide its people with ‘quality education’; resulting in the majority of the population being ‘unable to read and write with understanding’; the task of transforming the education sector is more than difficult; because it affects the lives of everyone in some way.

[Social, institutional facts] ‘Public service is a privilege, not a right’; public servants, especially with regard to the encompassing role of the education sector, has a responsibility and duty to act in such a way that equality and fairness are assured, and so as to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past

**MEANS-GOAL:** there is ‘no better option’, if we are to meet our goals, starting from current circumstances, than to transform the education sector of the country through implementation of measures in consonance with the pro-poor agenda for change

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Figure 2.4. Synthesis of the three variations of the main argument in the M1PC transcript. Adapted from *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students* (p. 45), by I. Fairclough & N. Fairclough, 2012, London: Routledge

### 6.1.1 Parts of the speech outside of the main argument

The rest of the speech can be divided into two main themes. The first, lines 85-106, is comprised of what actions the MOE already have taken. The second, lines 107-453, is
comprised of six strategies, or plans, the MOE intends to initiate. This last portion of the speech constitutes the remainder of the M1PC transcript, amounting to a little over 80 percent of the total speech. These are the actions the main practical argument, identified and reconstructed above, is in favour of. They all admittedly have their own set of premises, constituting six separate practical arguments, which together constitute the strategy. The strategy is here understood as a chains of means towards transforming the education sector, as it is advanced by Min. Sonii, meant to take the education sector from current descriptions of the circumstances, to a future state of affairs, informed by certain values. Individual actions, or means, like the ones presented in M1PC, viewed through the structure of practical reasoning, in consonance with Fairclough and Fairclough’s framework (2012), as done here, makes what might seem like a random sequence of unrelated actions, into an ordered chain of means towards desired ends (Ricoeur, 2008, in Fairclough and Fairclough, 2011, p. 248).

I will describe the content of this portion of the text, but only reconstruct and evaluate the argument of one of the six strategies, the argument for licencing educators and improving payroll (see sections 6.2 and 6.2.1). The reason for this is that this is the only presented plan that pertains especially to teachers. Teachers are, admittedly, mentioned at various other points in the M1PC transcript. I will therefore use this information when viewing the argument for licencing educators and improving payroll, in an attempt to understand the text as a whole.

As Min. Sonii states, this portion of the text details a wide set of ‘strategies’ and ‘plans’, ‘in order of what we [the MOE] consider to be priority’, intended to ‘transform’ the education sector in line with the governments pro-poor agenda. The already implemented actions to ‘begin the process of building quality’, transforming the country’s education sector include: paying the bill of the West African Senior School Certificate Examination, conducted by the West African Examinations Council [WAEC], administered to high school students and; initiating the process of vetting and regularizing teachers who are on supplementary payroll to ‘determine whether or not they belong in the classroom’ and are ‘valid for school’, including adjusting the salaries of a number of teachers so that it is more ‘consistent’ with their qualifications. The subsequent proposed ‘strategies’ and ‘plans’, presented by Min. Sonii as ‘the way that is best’, consists of six ‘immediate priorities’, in a collective effort by the MOE to ‘stand the challenges’. These include: aligning partners’ activities with Ministry priorities; enhancing enforcement; licencing educators and improving payroll; improving supervision; accrediting schools and; providing opportunities for all
young people to succeed. The six ‘priorities’ have here been presented in brevity, and will be explained and elaborated on in further text. The two already implemented actions and six planned individual actions constitute the strategy of the MOE, i.e. adoption of the governments ‘pro-poor agenda for change’, believed to ‘transform’ the education sector, taking the sector from current, undesired circumstances to a future state of affairs, informed by certain values. These constitute a normative conclusion and commitment to act, a practical judgment, presented to the public, of what only can be assumed as a previous process of collective deliberation amongst the Ministers of the MOE, constituting the practical reasoning, i.e. what needs to be done, within this speech as almost exclusively a report of the original deliberative process. Yet, there are instances of theoretical reasoning within the text, i.e. predicted consequences of action, albeit only of the actions proposed by the MOE, possible alternative actions are excluded or left implicit by the speaker. We can assume several reasons for this. For instance, one being that the speech is removed from the original process of collective deliberation, and the speaker not finding it necessary to include opponents proposed alternatives, e.g. the former governments ‘strategies’ and ‘plans’, other than with the phrase, ‘doing the same things the same way will have the same results’. Another reason being the interactive segment of the press conference between the press and the MOE, as mentioned previously, not being present in either the audio-visual recording, nor in the M2PS, and thus not being a part of M1PC. It should be noted here that M2PS describes six strategies, while the audio-visual recording and naturally also M1PC contains two additional actions presented by Min. Sonii, which will be addressed in later text.

The first plan is presented in lines 107-129, aligning partners’ activities with Ministry priorities. Partners’ is here referencing the schools within The Partnership Schools for Liberia program described in Section 2.4. The presented strategy starts off with a brief description of the circumstances, Min. Sonii stating that ‘there has been so much resentment’ towards the work different partners’ have done, describing a ‘major conflict’ between partnership schools, the Teachers Association, the Principals Association, parents, and the public in general. The goal of the MOE, as expressed here then, is to align partners’ activities with MOE priorities, in line with ‘needs’ identified by the MOE, because ‘many have come and they had their own agendas and plans’. The intention of the Ministry then is to allow the ones who adjust to stay operating in Liberia, while the ones who don’t will be asked to leave. However, this will only be done after ‘an intelligent assessment’ based of a national tour of both partners and ordinary, public and private schools. This is informed by a concern that
‘those who provide funding for them will not consider us as being an ungrateful country, hiring people only for a time’. Another concern informing this is that of making sure ‘that whatever have been done before, that can still be built upon’, is built upon.

The second plan advanced in lines 130-209 begins with Min. Sonii stating that ‘there are violations of regulations effecting decisions that [the MOE] makes’. This is immediately followed by an expressed duty of the MOE, in line with the country’s Education Act, making it ‘responsible, exclusively, for the monitoring and regulating [of] educational programs and activities’, and an expressed intent to ‘exercise [their] authority as given’ by said Education Act. Min. Sonii then makes a promise ‘not to be excessive’, but emphasizes the MOE’s intent ‘to live according to what the law says’, ‘irrespective of who, irrespective of what, irrespective of how’, substantiated by the metaphor ‘if we have the right to remove this water from here, believe me, we shall remove the water. Because it does not belong there’. Min. Sonii further expresses an intent to ‘request the national legislature to approve a bill’ allowing the MOE to ‘impose direct penalties without going through the law’, so that the MOE can exercise their ‘right’. Min. Sonii then, expresses an intent to ‘work collaboratively with everyone in this sector’, so that they can ‘win together’ and ‘turn this educational vessel around’, appealing to students and parents to ‘help us help them’ for the sake of ‘posterity’, ‘so that those that are behind us can be either like us or better than us’, emphasizing that it is ‘in their hands that this country shall be entrusted’. Advancing, Min. Sonii presents two examples of regulations, the date of opening school and the date of graduation, and describing aspects of the current circumstances, stating that if regulations like these are violated the MOE is going to ‘exercise all of the powers’ that they have’ and ‘penalize’. albeit, ‘not being excessive’, ‘but making sure that those who are used to braking rules, abide by the rules’. Min. Sonii substantiates this with another metaphor, stating that, ‘until a ship begin to sail smoothly, we may have to act excessively sometimes, and the issue of human rights shall be laid to rest, until this boat begin to sail appropriately’, contradicting two previous promises not to act excessively, justifying eventual future human right violations, followed by an assurance that ‘this is no bluff’. This is followed by an emphasis on the collective efforts needed, Min. Sonii expressing that ‘all of us are Ministers’, referring to the MOE as a whole, substantiating this with the metaphor ‘we are not playing tennis. Tennis is a one-man game. We’re playing soccer or American football, where there are many people playing and the winning depends on all of us together’. Min. Sonii then goes on to describe two corrupt practices in the Liberian education sector, committed by students, parents,
teachers, and principals, including the practice of allowing students who fail at one school, in one grade, to pass and enter a higher grade in another school, and the practice of collecting ‘flexibility fees’ during exams. Min. Sonii then expresses that violations such as these ‘need to be treated more harshly’ presenting them as ‘criminal’, ‘evil practices against the nation and the younger generation’, ‘destroying posterity’. This is followed by an expressed intent to ‘deal with such people’, through the developing of another bill, ‘creating a criminal court responsible to remedy academic crimes’. Min. Sonii goes on to describe such practices as ‘even greater then breaking windows’ and stealing telephones, characterizing it as ‘[destroying] the population of the country’. Min. Sonii rounds of this section expressing the values informing this argument, stating that ‘it requires harshness sometimes, but with humility and respect’.

The third plan is advanced in lines 210-262, and concern licencing educators and improving payroll. As this plan will be addressed in detail in section 6.2, I will not expand upon it further here.

The fourth plan found in lines 262-293, improving supervision, starts off with Min. Sonii describing the education system as having broken down, where supervision is one of the ‘critical areas’ that ‘have broken down completely in many cases’. Without supervision, Min. Sonii expresses, human beings are ‘likely to do things that are inappropriate’, implicitly describing aspects of the circumstances the education sector in Liberia finds itself. This is followed by an expressed intent to re-structure the supervision mechanism in the country, calling for the assistance of parents and local governments. The political commissioners in the political districts are encouraged to supervise education within their jurisdiction, to ‘make sure children are not on the teachers’ farm’ or in ‘video clubs’ when they should be in school. Furthermore, another intent is expressed, to complement the monitoring work of CEOs and DEOs with the excess capacity in the MOE, making all of the Ministers of the MOE, including the Minister himself monitors, so that the ‘system operates rightly’.

Lines 294-325 addresses an issue not mentioned in M2PS, regarding ‘no adequate transportation system’ in Liberia, prompting some students to arrive late at school. Min. Sonii is here requesting that ‘schools also look out for the students’, asking them to ‘allow a little window’ for latecomers. Regarding those who come after the proposed window, Min. Sonii is advocating ‘adjustment tools’, because ‘there are no more rattans’. Mostly what we can draw from these lines concern the circumstantial premise described here, with students arriving
late, or not at all, as a result of an inadequate transportation system in the country. In lines 326-347 Min. Sonii expresses a wish to introduce civics back into the curriculum, stating that ‘many even adults don’t know the words’. Min. Sonii further states that there are ‘certain basic culture’ of Liberia ‘that are also embedded in that civics’, like ‘respect’ and ‘honour’. A course that should be used to ‘teach a lot of morals in school’, as a result of the Bible and Quran having been taken out of the school system. This is followed by an expressed intent to a summit ‘that shall encompass all organizations’, where they are to ‘decide whether or not [they] want to fix the school, or [they] want to make fuss among [themselves] and condemn each other as [they] go on’. This is the first instance of an alternative or choice being explicitly presented, albeit, the choice seems to be doing what the MOE are advocating or to ‘make fuss’. A call is then made for change, linking back with the main argument of M1PC, Min. Sonii expressing the values informing this claim in addition to briefly describing the circumstances, stating that ‘it is not fair for students who are doing their very best in a system that is considered to be a complete mess’. This part is concluded with an emphasis on the claim for action, Min. Sonii expressing that ‘we have to make sure that word is not attributed to the academic sector anymore’, setting a timeframe of two to three years for accomplishing this. ‘That’ word is here referring to the word ‘mess’.

Lines 348-395 contain what is referred to ‘the last item’. It begins with a brief description of circumstances, Min. Sonii describing ‘business houses’ who transact inappropriate commodities to school children during school hours. To combat this, Min. Sonii expresses, ‘we have contacted the Ministry of Justice already’. Furthermore, Min. Sonii bans the practice of Super Friday, stating that principals who allow it will have their licence revoked, and expressing the intent that the MOE will ‘intensify [their] monitoring exercises on Fridays’ Monrovia, because Super Friday only is practiced there. Min. Sonii then goes on to describe yet another aspect of the circumstances, stating that Liberia has ‘moonlight teachers’ referring to the practice of being employed by both a public school and one or more private schools, or having other ‘duties’ to attend during school hours, neglecting their duties as a teacher. This is followed by an expression of the values informing this argument, Min. Sonii stating that ‘somebody is going to suffer and most of the time it’s the public school that suffers […] that’s unfair’. Min. Sonii then, addresses teachers who practice this, stating that ‘if the pay check […] cannot accommodate you, then the teaching profession is not your line’ and ‘any teacher here must have stolen something, or their Pa left it with them’. Min. Sonii then goes on to express that it is the principals fault, and that it is ‘the administration of
schools that have failed the people’, encouraging principals to ‘exercise [their] authority as teacher plus’. Furthermore, an aspect of the circumstances in the interior is described as ‘the animals have taken over the classrooms’, stating that this too has to change. Min. Sonii then states that they ‘are not going to be able to approach all of the challenges at the same time’, immediately reformulating ‘challenges’ as ‘problems’, calling the use of the term challenges as NGO-language, and that the MOE intend to ‘sit together as a Ministry’ a decide how they should begin and where they should take it. Min. Sonii here stating they want to do this so that ‘we don’t do small here, do small there, do small there, and be Jack of all trades and accomplish nothing’.

Lines 395-413 then takes us to the fifth plan, accrediting schools, beginning with a description of the circumstances, Min. Sonii stating that, ‘the private schools are administering to more of the country’s population than the public schools’, calling for the strengthening of private schools and not only public schools. The MOE’s intention, is the expressed as ‘to help [private schools] to get it done the way [the MOE] have actually decided to do it’. In this process of accrediting, Min. Sonii states that some schools ‘may have to be closed’, because of inadequacies. Min. Sonii goes on to explain that all schools must be visited and examined before they get accredited.

The sixth and final plan, found in lines 414-453, providing opportunities for all young people to succeed begins with Min. Sonii explaining how many Liberian people not have received a strong early childhood education nor a strong primary and secondary education. Min. Sonii then goes on to present the intent of the MOE, presented as introducing ‘a three track high school learning corridor’, where the records from upper basic of students entering high school are evaluated to find out ‘whether or not you have the IQ to do the sciences or you have the IQ to go strictly into academics’. If none of these fit the MOE will ‘place you in a vocational track’. The text then explains the details of this program, expressing that it is intended by the MOE to introduce this program first as a pilot, stating that they in the future can expand the already existing high schools to include the vocational track. This is concluded with Min. Sonii yet again addressing the aforementioned issues as ‘the critical ones’ and that ‘there are other ones’ but that they will leave those for now ‘so you will not forget the first one that we started discussing’.
6.2.1 Evaluation of the main argument

This section is dedicated to the dialectical evaluation, in consonance with Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), of the main argument within the M1PC transcript. The aim here is to evaluate the premises of the argument, the argument in itself, and its claim, through asking critical questions.

Like with the reconstructions of the three variations of the argument, I set off the evaluation by considering the circumstantial premise. Are the existing circumstances described in a rationally acceptable way? The speakers account of the circumstances, in the M1PC transcript, characterizes a country that, although historically being a repository of tremendous natural wealth, has been systematically plagued by stagnation, underdevelopment and poverty, as a result of persistent government corruption, mismanagement and exploitation since the country’s inception. The speaker associates this with the current state of affairs of an educational sector that is benefitting the few and neglecting the majority, unable to provide the majority of the country’s population with quality education, capable of producing graduates who inhabit certain basic academic skills, such as reading and writing. Moreover, the speaker describes a country in need of capacity, but that the task of transforming the education sector is more than difficult because of its current state of affairs. The purpose of the March 1. press conference was to outline the MOEs vision and priorities for the country’s education sector. Thus, it is not surprising that the circumstances are selected and presented, by the speaker, in such a way as to later support a certain type of action that presumably will construct a future imagined state of affairs in which the circumstances have changed. Rather openly, the descriptions of the circumstances already hint at a certain conclusion. For example, the speaker presents the faults of former governments and a stagnant education sector as relevant facts, which is later coupled with a claim about the need to change, through implementation of measures in consonance with the current governments pro-poor agenda, thus, to not repeat the actions of the past. There is at this stage no explicit acknowledgement of how these measures differ from past policy measures, made by past governments. On the contrary, as later text demonstrates, it seems as if the speaker blends actions of the former government with actions of the current government. For instance, the speaker mentions ‘some steps that this government has taken so far to begin the process of building quality’, naming among other things, vetting and regularizing teachers, a process that was implemented by the former government (cf. the national teacher testing initiative). However, understandably in transforming the education
sector the speaker seems to want to build upon what can be built upon, not distancing himself from all actions of former governments. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note, because if the measures proposed by the speaker do not differ from the policy measures of the former government in any remarkable way, then maybe a different course of action would have been more reasonable? Especially with regard to the notion of braking from the past and changing, the speaker emphasizes, intended to legitimize the current governments past and future actions. This can, albeit be considered as a challenge to the goal premise. The description of a country plagued by poverty and systemic inequality, and an inefficient educational sector in disarray does, admittedly, closely resemble descriptions made by various researchers, and both national and international characterizations of the sector (cf. section 2.4). Seemingly, constituting the speakers’ description of existing circumstances as more or less representative of the reality of things.

The speakers’ argument gives an account of the context of action in the form of social, institutional facts, emphasizing the responsibility and duty of himself and his colleagues as public servants. In addition to this, as we have touched upon, the speaker attributes the current condition of the education sector to the actions, or lack of actions of former governments. Naturally, it is reasonable to assume that individual policy measures would not only be guided towards the schools, principals and teachers operating within the sector, but that some policy measures directed at the MOE also would be proposed. Meaning, that if the current state of affairs is due to former governments, or MOEs, and the speaker truly is seeking to achieve change, would it not be reasonable to assume that the speaker would want to direct that change, introspectively, at the MOE, to increase the chances of repeating the actions of the past? One critique of the MOE, albeit the former, was the presence of unqualified Ministry workers and a culture of public servants expecting bribes and kick-backs (USAID, 2016). However, it is not possible to challenge the description of the circumstances on this basis. The description of the circumstance does not only support the speakers’ rhetorical goals, but it is also rationally acceptable, albeit not necessarily followed by the most reasonable course of action. It is, however rationally acceptable that the current, bleak state of affairs of Liberia’s stagnant educational sector is the result of years of inequality, corruption, mismanagement, and the actions, or lack thereof, of former governments (cf. sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5).

As briefly demonstrated above, it is possible to challenge the goal premise. The goals of action are to implement policy measures, in consonance with the pro-poor agenda of the
government, and to transform the education sector so that it produces capacity, is to the benefit of the people, and eliminates societal deficiencies. Needless to say, these goals do not explicitly specify the character of this future state of affairs. They are quite general and do not say anything about how the proposed measures differ from measures implemented by former governments. What constitutes this imagined future state of affairs as a goal? How can it assure that it will not just contribute to further exacerbating the current challenges? Should other possible, imagined, future states of affairs be considered? For obvious reasons, it is difficult to challenge a goal such as this in and of itself. However, when viewed in relation to the neoliberal discourse arguably guiding the pro-poor agenda, the goal premise naturally seems to support an economization of the educational sector. This presupposes policies that arguably are in continuation of the former government, rather than radically different from them, as implied by the emphasis on change and not repeating the actions of the past. Moreover, when viewed in relation to the speakers’ description of the existing circumstance, it seems that more specific goals could be formulated. Goals that presumably to a greater extent addresses the causes of the current circumstances, rather than the symptoms.

With regard to the value premise, there are several values expressed by the speaker. Admittedly, the most prominent being, a commitment of the speaker and the MOE to act in such a way that fairness and equality are assured, their concern being the benefit, or wellbeing of the people. Thus, in consonance with PAPD (Liberia, 2018, p. 23), in that “the government will make strategic and well-targeted investments in human capital development, coupled with efforts to create an enabling environment, that will unleash abilities and talents innate to the Liberian people”. In other words, the actions of the MOE will be aimed at creating an educational sector that is to the benefit of all Liberians. I cannot assume anything about how these implicit values emerged, seeing as the March 1. press conference does not represent the actual deliberative process. However, I must assume that they informed the goals of action. Thus, the value premise has to be compatible with the goal premise. It is not surprising that these values are emphasized by the speaker, considering Liberia’s history of discrimination and oppression of the indigenous population, which naturally also manifested itself in the educational sector (cf. sections 2.1, 2.4). Inequality within the educational sector today, however, occurs regardless of ethnic background. Hence, the emphasis placed on benefitting the poor. I would therefore argue that the acceptability of the value premise is evident. In light of the historical and contemporary context of Liberia and its education
sector, anything else then fairness and equality informing educational political goals would seem questionable. In addition, as later text will address, the values seem to be compatible with the means for reaching the goals as well.

The main presumptive claim made by the speaker, is that the education sector must transform, or change, because ‘there is no better option’. The speaker does admittedly provide one other alternative: to do ‘the same things the same way’. This alternative is, albeit, discredited in the same line of text, because ‘because it will have the same result’. This further substantiates, the speakers’ view of the existing circumstance, addressed in previous text. The way in which the alternative action is presented, seems to imply that the proposed action is the only viable choice, considering the current circumstance. The action advanced by the speaker is implicitly proposed as both necessary and sufficient to achieve the goals. Yet, claiming that the education sector must transform is arguably quite vague. What does this transformation imply, other than an alleged distancing from past actions of past governments? According to the speaker, the transformation should be in consonance with the current governments pro-poor agenda for change. Now the question becomes, as touched upon briefly in previous text, how these ‘pro-poor’ policy measures implemented in the education sector will differ from policy measures outside of the pro-poor agenda? Does the onto-epistemological standpoint guiding the pro-poor agenda for change, differ from that of former governments agendas, in a way that will produce radically different policy measures? The claim can, arguably, be challenged on this basis. That other reasonable alternatives have not been considered. Albeit, acknowledging the fact that the MIPC transcript not necessarily is a realistic representation of the actual deliberative process, assuming that other reasonable alternatives were not considered might prove to be folly. Stating that ‘there is no better option’, yet failing to provide at least one example of an alternative potion, does admittedly, lead me to question if other reasonable alternatives have been considered. I would argue that this lack of mention of other reasonable alternatives and an absence of counter-arguments weakens the speakers’ argument, because it prevents the speaker from demonstrating that the argument can withstand a process of critical examination. Although, my intent with this particular study is not to propose an alternative course of action, I will address this issue in later text. Moreover, I would not argue that the speakers’ proposed course of action is not necessary, but that it’s not necessarily sufficient, and that other alternatives might have proven to be just as necessary.
How does the speaker support the argument? In addition to the structure of the practical argument, the claim, as touched upon briefly in the reconstruction of the argument, is supported by an argument from authority. The speaker states that they, the MOE, ‘have been identified among very, very competent Liberians’ to head the MOE. Although, it seems reasonable to include that fact that you are newly appointed, and to acknowledge the ones who appointed you, this statement seems to make an attempt at establishing authority, and to justify any further claim on the basis of you having been identified as the most ‘competent’ and ‘sophisticated’ candidate available. Moreover, when stating that ‘there is no better option’ than to go ahead with the proposed course of action, the speaker was quoting the current President of Liberia. Thus, supporting the claim from an argument of authority, in that not only we [the MOE] believes this to be the best course of action, but the President as well. Furthermore, the speaker makes several explicit references to God during the March 1. press conference: ‘God our help, shall provide the wisdom and resources’; ‘God being our help, under the confidence of the President’; ‘God willing, we shall do our best’; ‘And we pray that. God being our guide’, and; ‘God being on our side we have a feeling that this thing can be better’. Religious belief is a prevalent aspect of Liberian culture. That being through the major religions of the world, or through ethnic, spiritual beliefs of a God. Thus, one way to look at this is that the speaker is using these statements to persuade the audience of the MOEs legitimacy and of the proposed course of action being the right one. Conversely, another way to look at these statements is as part of a way of presenting speech. In Liberia, references to god is commonplace in everyday communication, both in English and in the various languages of the different indigenous groups (Sherman, 2010). Therefore, to explain these statements as rhetoric attempts at persuading the audience, i.e. the Liberian population, might prove to be false. Nevertheless, for an outsider, they do stand out within the text, and on that basis, at first glance appear to not be rationally persuasive.

The intention of the speaker is to present the MOEs plans and strategies for the education sector. In essence, to present his and the MOEs vision for a future state of affairs, through practical argumentation, as demonstrated in previous text. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that the speaker should provide insight into their decision-making concerning which actions, and on what basis, they are to move from the current undesirable circumstances to an imagined future state of affairs. Yet, the speaker seems to only be emphasizing what supports or justifies the proposed course of action, and not what might speak against it, save for ‘repeating the actions of the past’. This rhetorical presentation of the alternative, admittedly
quite vague, still arguably enhances the persuasiveness of the argument. However, by failing to explicitly address alternative courses of action, and to not even mention possible negative consequences of the proposed course of action, it becomes a question if the formulated strategy arose as a result of a form of confirmation bias, ultimately resulting in a dialectically deficient argument. Again, it must be taken into account that the speech event under investigation here is a report on some previous process which not necessarily represent what transpired during the actual deliberative process. Moreover, the fact that the last portion of the March 1. press conference, the portion containing interaction between the MOE and the press, was excluded from the audio-visual recording, must also be considered, when challenging the speakers’ argument. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note these apparent weaknesses of the argument, albeit, with an understanding that had the data material been different, I might have arrived at different, more positive, conclusions.

Finally, based on the evaluation of the other premises, one could challenge the means-goal premise in terms of it being overly confident. The relationship between the means and the goals are presented as bi-conditional in that ‘there is no better option’. Meaning that if and only if, measures are implemented in consonance with the pro-poor agenda, the education sector of the country will be transformed to be beneficial to all Liberians. This bi-conditional relationship admittedly warrants that the premises of the arguments are simultaneously true. Something which I have argued, is not necessarily adequately demonstrated by the speaker. At least not with the information provided by the M1PC transcript.

6.2 Overview and reconstruction of the argument for licencing educators and improving payroll

Within the M1PC transcript it is, as mentioned in previous text, explicitly presented six plans, or actions, which the main practical argument is in favour of. Although, one in particular stands out as pertaining especially to teachers. That is, the third plan presented in lines 210-262: licencing educators and improving payroll. Although, implicitly being supported by the main argument of the speaker and should be considered as one actions of a chain of actions presumed enable the reaching of the goal, it contains its own set of premises, constituting a separate, interconnected practical argument. Like with the main argument, the
following text sets out to identify the various premises to reconstruct the practical argument. The argument for licencing educators and improving payroll includes the following elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Claim (solution)</strong></th>
<th>We must ‘test’ and ‘licence all teachers’.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Circumstantial premises** | ‘Teachers are teachers by calling’; ‘teaching is not just a profession’; the reward of teaching is ‘the benefit of building a country, and joy that you have for a child who have succeeded because of you’; there are teachers operating in the education sector, who have not finished their primary education; the country’s teacher training institutes ‘only provides a certificate that qualifies you to teach’.
| **Goal premises** | Our goal is to ‘protect the profession’ and ‘compel’ teachers ‘to conduct’ themselves as teachers. |
| **Value premises** | Our (implicit) value is responsibility – ‘if we must be able to execute the action that we intend to execute, then we must protect the profession’. Our concern: the qualifications of teachers – ‘we do not want a fifth grader teaching calculus’ |
| **Means-goal premise** | If we ‘test’ and ‘licence all teachers’, we will reach our goals, to ‘protect the profession’ and ‘compel’ teachers ‘to conduct’ themselves as teachers. |

The identified elements of the argument for licencing educators and improving payroll can be represented as in Figure 3.1:
The speaker begins with expressing a claim, or intent to ‘licence all teachers’, advancing the goal that ‘we must protect the profession’. This is immediately followed by a formulation of a means-ends premise, the speaker stating that, ‘protecting the profession mean that we must licence everyone who holds a chalk or a whiteboard marker’. The act of protecting the profession, is by the speaker, in the segments introduction, connected with the main practical argument, the speaker stating that, ‘if we must be able to execute the action that we intend to execute, then we must protect the profession’. The action can here be understood as the goal premise of the main argument. This can, thus, be seen as an implicit expression of a sense of responsibility, not just towards teachers, but towards the education sector overall as well. The speaker continues to state that those ‘who probably no longer can take test and pass’ because of age, will be provided with ‘a few weeks of re-tooling and brushing up’, while everyone else will be required to sit a test administered by the MOE, to determine if they ‘have relevant competence to proceed as a teacher’. The speaker goes on to express another presumed end from this action of licencing, namely, to ‘compel’ teachers ‘to conduct’ themselves as teachers. This is followed by a description of the existing circumstance, the speaker stating that ‘teachers are teacher by calling’, and that ‘teaching is
not just a profession’. Furthermore, the speaker states that ‘the rewards [of teaching] are not just some pay check’. The reward, according to the speaker, is ‘the benefit of building a country, and joy that you have for a child who have succeeded because of you’. The speaker, seemingly in an attempt to substantiate the claim, goes on to state that, if you, as a teacher or school principal ‘betray the trust embedded in that licence’, will result in the licence being suspended or revoked. If the licence is revoked ‘you’re not fit to be teacher’. The speaker follows this up by again stating the claim, that ‘its intended to also protect the profession’, and further emphasizes the claim that everyone who inspires to become a teacher, regardless of prior degrees, must be licenced. Within these lines it is possible to identify a description of existing circumstances, albeit implicit. The speaker states that, ‘we don’t want a fifth grader teaching calculus’, implying that in existing circumstances there are teacher operating with no more than a fifth grade education. This, according to the speaker, supports the claim that the action of licencing is ‘important’. This is followed by the speaker stating that teachers who graduate from one of the various teacher training institutes of Liberia are no exception, because, they ‘have only earned a certificate that qualifies [them] to teach’. However, ‘the instrument that compels you to conduct yourself as a teacher is the licencing’. The segment is rounded off with the speaker making two separate references to God. The first, ‘God being our guide’, in relation to concluding the process of licencing teachers, and the second, ‘God being on our side’, in relation to actually being able to reach the goals, the speaker stating that, ‘we have a feeling that this thing can get better’.

6.2.1 Evaluation of the argument for licencing educators and improving payroll

Now, I will turn to the evaluation of this argument in the same manner as the main argument was evaluated. First off. Are the existing circumstances described in a rationally acceptable way? The speakers account of the existing circumstances tells of a teaching profession in need of protection, because, presumably, there are a significant number of unqualified teachers operating in the education sector. According to the speaker, this even applies to the ones that have undergone teacher training at one of the three teacher training institutes, because the teacher training institutes in Liberia today, allegedly, only provides graduates with a certificate that qualifies them to teach. Teaching is not just a profession but a calling, according to the speaker, seemingly speaking of teachers’ moral imperative. This, according to the speaker is the driving force behind the teaching staff. The speaker could arguably, with these two statements, be referring to an ideal future state of affairs. However, I
would argue that the speaker here is presenting, what to him, can be considered as empirical facts. The speaker is not stating that teachers should be teachers by calling, rather that they are. The speaker is not stating that this calling, rather than earning a salary, should be the driving force for teachers, but that it is. This is substantiated, albeit not with regard to this specific argument, in lines 378-380, where the speaker is talking about himself as a teacher, stating that, ‘I’m an accountant, and I actually live on accounting, not teaching. But I teach because without teaching I’m unfulfilled’. This is interesting, considering the speaker is advocating for the protection of the teaching profession. I will address this later on, as it ties in with the goal premise. Concerning the description of existing circumstances, seemingly all but two of the descriptions are presented by the speaker in such a way as to later support the type of action intended to produce a future state of affairs. At this stage, it is difficult to assume a certain conclusion of the argument, because the descriptions seem to be contradicting each other. However, it is not necessary for it to be either or. They might coexist. The speakers’ characterization of an unqualified teaching forces, does seem to be rationally acceptable, as the qualifications of teachers in Liberia has been questioned for decades (cf. section 2.5). Critique directed towards teacher qualifications, especially with regard to their proficiency in literacy and numeracy, has been most prevalent in the 21 century, after the peaceful resolution of the civil war. A large number of the teaching staff in Liberia are so-called voluntary teachers without any formal qualifications. In some districts reports reveal widespread occurrences of teachers with fraudulent credential, including teachers who ‘ghost’. The same can be said about the speakers’ statement concerning the teacher training institutes of Liberia, who allegedly, only provides graduates with a certificate that qualifies them to teach. Although, the primary focus of interventions in teacher training has been on strengthening instruction for literacy and numeracy, the Teacher Testing Initiative, testing literacy and numeracy, revealed that only 5 percent of teachers with a ‘C’ certificate achieved a passing mark. The speakers’ description and implicit critique of the country’s teacher training institutes seem accurate and warranted. However, at the same time, teaching is described as a calling. A question that the methods of this study is unable to answer, is if teaching in Liberia today is a means for survival, rather than a calling. I would, albeit, agree that teaching ideally should be a calling. This descriptive statement is directly associated, by the speaker, with the remuneration of teachers. The speaker, seemingly, downplays the importance of adequately remunerating teachers. This is substantiated by lines 374-378, in which the speaker states that, ‘if the pay check is very small and it cannot accommodate you, then the teaching profession is not your line’. Moreover, in the same lines,
the speaker states that, ‘I have not seen any rich teacher yet in this country. Any rich teacher here must have stolen something’. This is surprising, considering the importance of remuneration with regard to teacher professionalism (cf. Section 3.1). In addition, considering that the speaker is calling for the protection of the teaching profession and increasing teacher performance or qualification, arguably, without adequately addressing teacher professionalism.

The goals of action formulated by the speaker are to protect the profession and compel teacher to conduct themselves as teachers. Understanding goals as future states of affairs, it is reasonable to assume that the teaching profession of today is not adequately protected, and that the teachers of today do not conduct themselves as teachers. At least to such a degree that it warrants the attention of the MOE. But what constitutes this imagined future state of affairs as goals? As briefly touched upon in previous text, it would be reasonable to assume that in a future state of affairs in which the teaching profession is protected, that this future state of affairs facilitates both increases in teacher professionalism and teacher professionalization. However, it seems as if the speaker is solely focussed on teacher professionalism, with an emphasis on qualifications in literacy and numeracy. Granted, the speakers formulation of the goals does not specify the character of this imagined future state of affairs. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the speaker arguably, encourages teachers to make a living in other professions and teach on the side. It is difficult to reconcile this with understanding teaching as a calling, and teaching in this imagined future state of affairs seem, according to the available data material, seem to be far from what would be considered a profession. At least in terms of a contemporary understanding of teaching as a profession (cf. Section 3.1). Is it reasonable to assume that the proposed claim for action will result in the imagined future state of affairs? The answer to this question depends in part on the speakers understanding of what constitutes a profession, more specifically what constitutes the teaching profession. Contrary to the explicit expression of teaching as more than a profession, based on the data available, it seems as if the speaker has a somewhat mechanistic view of teachers. The testing referred to by the speaker, although not available to the public, focusses solely on literacy and numeracy, while the Code of Conduct for Teachers and School Administrators in Liberia, provides guidelines for teachers in how to conduct themselves as teachers. Yet, the speaker states that it is the licence which will compel teachers to conduct themselves as teachers. Is conducting yourself as a teacher here synonymous with being able to satisfactorily provide instruction in literacy and numeracy?
Moreover, it seems as if the speaker implicitly is raising critique towards the ability of the teacher training institutes to train competent teachers, with the emphasis on the licencing, which I believe undermines the training provided by the various teacher training institutes. Yet, there is no mention of strengthening the teacher training institutes within the lines of text, nor any of the text of the M1PC transcript. I would admittedly argue that the formulated goals of action seem reasonable, based on the description of existing circumstances. Although, there are conceivably other possible imagined future states of affairs which could have been considered, I do not find strong suggestions that these alternatives necessarily should be considered, based on the description of existing circumstances. As will be address in further text, it is the claim, or action, that the challenge is directed towards.

The analysis revealed only one implicit expression of a value, responsibility, informing the overall goals of action. In other words, a sense of responsibility is here expressed to protect the teaching profession, as a means to achieve the overall goal of transforming the education sector, in consonance with the pro-poor agenda of the government. Naturally, considering the interconnectedness of the main argument and the argument in question here, it is reasonable to assume that also the values informing the main argument also informs this particular argument. Thus, likewise the values of the main argument, it is here impossible to assume anything about how the value emerged. Nonetheless, it must be regarded as to have informed the goal of action, and thus, unavoidably needs to be compatible with it. I would argue, in the same vain as with the main argument, for the acceptability of the value premise. Moreover, I would also argue for the acceptability of the value premise pertaining to the specific argument in question her, considering that the MOE of Liberia, by the Education Reform Act of 2011, as an agency of the government, is solely responsible for the monitoring and regulating of the educational sector of the country.

The main presumptive claim made by the speaker is, that the MOE must ‘test’ and ‘licence all teachers’. No other alternative for reaching the goal is presented by the speaker. By not even mentioning alternative actions, the speaker is implicitly stating that the proposed course of action is both necessary and sufficient to achieve the goal of protecting the teaching profession and compelling teachers to conduct themselves as teachers. As briefly touched upon in previous text, to test teachers, mainly refers to testing of literacy and numeracy, thus making the licence in essence only stating something about the proficiency of teachers in these competencies. It is reasonable to assume then that the speaker, when talking about
protecting the teaching profession, is talking about making efforts to increase teacher professionalism. Consequentially, teacher professionalization, is more or less neglected or overlooked. This does admittedly resonate with the global trends in teacher education, mentioned in previous text, and the current pro-poor agenda of the government. Thus, it can be understood as an attempt at a ‘strategic and well-targeted investment in human capital’. I would argue that this way of viewing development, education and teachers, is a continuation of a historic and ongoing trend in Liberia, informed by a neoliberal hegemonic discourse. Liberia has, historically, adopted Western notions of education, from physical appearance to overall philosophy since the country’s inception (cf. sections 2.1, 2.3, 2.4). As argued with regard to the goals of action, the emphasis placed on the importance of a licence issued by the MOE, consequentially undermines the teacher training institutes of the country. Rather than a licence, one could argue that efforts to strengthen the ‘C’ certificate provided by the teacher training institutes, beyond the instruction of literacy and numeracy, just as well, or even more so than a supplementary licence, could have contributed to the protection of the teaching profession and in compelling teachers to conduct themselves as teachers. By not addressing this alternative I can only assume that the speaker is satisfied with the current state of affairs of teacher training in Liberia. Similarly, to the lack of mention of other reasonable alternatives and the absence of counter-arguments presented by the speaker, I would argue that it weakens the speakers’ argument. In other words, the speaker does not demonstrate that the argument can withstand a process of critical examination. Moreover, I would argue that the speakers’ proposed course of action not can be considered as sufficient. At least with regard to my understanding of teacher- professionalism and- professionalization, and considering the existing circumstances as they relate to the teacher training institutes of Liberia, conveniently omitted by the speaker. The proposed course of action seems to be informed more by the speakers expressed intentions to improve supervision and to enhance enforcement, rather than by an intention to protect the teaching profession. Although, not expressed specifically in relation to this particular argument. They constitute two separate plans proposed by the speaker during the March 1. press conference which were addressed in previous text. Supervision, according to the speaker, ‘have broken down completely in many cases’ (lines 263-264). Moreover, the speaker expresses that ‘human being, being who human being is, left with themselves, are likely to do things that are inappropriate’ (264-365), and that ‘until a ship begin to sail smoothly, we may have to act excessively sometimes, and the issue of human rights shall be laid to rest until this boat begin to sail appropriately’ (164-166). Efforts were made by the previous government to decentralize the educational system,
which historically has been characterized as a highly centralized system under the MOE. Thus, this can be read as a break from the most recent trend of decentralization, and a revisit with the way in which the educational sector historically has been organized.

How does the speaker support the argument? In addition to the overall structure of the practical argument, the speaker, supports the argument with a statement at the conclusion of the section containing the argument. The speaker states that, ‘believe me, God being on our side, we have a feeling that this thing can get better’. As demonstrated and argued for with regard to the evaluation of the main argument, one can similarly, argue that the speaker her is attempting to persuade the audience of the legitimacy of the proposed course of action and of the speaker and the MOE. Thus, considering the standing of God and religion in Liberian society, one could argue that the claim is supported by an argument from authority.

As with the main argument, the speaker seems to, quite conveniently, only be emphasizing that which supports or justifies the proposed course of action. Considering the evaluation of the proposed course of action in relation to the goals, in this particular study, it is reasonable to question whether or not the argument can be considered to be a dialectically efficient argument. However, I cannot escape the fact this conclusion might be a result of shortages of the data material under investigation. It is, nonetheless, interesting to note the weaknesses of the argument as it stands at this point, as it may contribute to a further unearthing and understanding of the power, dominance, ideology and hegemony guiding, not only contemporary policy concerning teachers in Liberia, but the education sector overall.

Finally, the relationship between the means and the goals are implicitly presented as bi-conditional, when you take into account that no alternative course of action is presented by the speaker. According to the speaker, then, if and only if, teachers are tested and licenced by the MOE, will the teaching profession be protected and teachers will be compelled to conduct themselves as teachers. However, as have been demonstrated, there is possible to imagine other reasonable courses of action that might have produced a similar result. Reasonable courses of action which are not addressed by the speaker within the particular communicative event under investigation here.
7. CONCLUSION

Within this concluding section, my aim is to further interpret and explain the study’s results in an attempt to answer the research questions this study has operated with. Moreover, I will seek to critically evaluate my approach, the study overall, and account for and reflect on its limitations, although several of the studies limitations have been addressed as they emerged throughout the study.

7.1 An organized chain of events

So what are the implications of knowing what we now know about the current MOEs response to the educational challenges in Liberia? As we have seen in the M1PC transcript, the speaker, differentiates between challenges and problem, specifically noting that what the educational system of Liberia is facing, must be referred to as problems and not challenges, as the system, according to the speaker, has in the past, and currently is considered to be a complete mess. Together, these problems, constituting the mess, although seemingly chaotic, can be understood as organized in a system developed over decades. Maybe even since the earliest days of education in Liberia (cf. Section 2.3). As demonstrated through the analysis of the M1PC transcript, the speaker is expressing that, given a certain set of circumstances (i.e. the problems constituting the mess) and a goal (i.e. to transform the educational sector), underlain by certain values (e.g. fairness and equality), a certain type of action is required (i.e. implemented measures in line with the pro-poor agenda of the government). Thus, in essence, the M1PC transcript can be read as a strategy, or chain of events or means, intended to transport the country’s educational sector from the current, messy and undesirable circumstances, to an imagined, desirable future state of affairs, ‘to make sure that word [mess] is not attributed to the academic sector anymore (lines 345-346)’. More specifically, as I have argued for in previous text, the identified chain of means presented in the M1PC transcript, must be seen in relation to the governments pro-poor agenda. Although explicitly claiming to diverge from former agendas, the proposed course of action within the M1PC transcript, can arguably be seen as a continuation of former policies on education, rather than a break from them (cf. Section 6.1.1).

This claim, or promise, to not repeat the actions of the past, seem to be more a rhetorical device, rather than an actual intent. First of all, the speaker fails to address how his proposed actions differ from the past actions of former governments, and at the same time
seems to blend actions of the former and current government. As mentioned in passing, this in itself does not necessarily warrant the challenging of the argument, considering, as I have argued before, that the M1PC transcript must be understood as a report of an earlier, presumed deliberative process. The claim I make, when comparing the actions of the former government and the current, is that both seemingly adhere to Western neoliberal discourses, or economization and standardization of public education. The current government seemingly more so than the former. Most notably, the former government introduced the PSL program in Liberia, a program which in its essence forces schools and teachers to value achievements on standardized tests of literacy and numeracy above all, as this has been the primary means of evaluating various schools teachers, and the program overall (Klees, 2018). The current government, even more explicitly identifies with these global trends in education policy (cf. Battiste (2002)). PAPD (Liberia, 2018) talks of the development of human capital, as was demonstrated through the analysis of the M1PC transcript can be translated as efforts to increase accountability and standards, emphasise on teacher performance and focus on their technical skills, by increasing the MOEs supervision and enforcement. Although, this can be seen as an effort to break with the former governments efforts towards decentralization (USAID, 2016). However, on the other hand, it can be seen as a continuation, as this decentralization initiative was halted after the 2014, Ebola crisis, and thus arguably never constituted anything to break from. Another way to look at this is in terms of concerns about the efficient use of limited resources, that feeds into policy. That is, in both the M1PC transcript and the governments PAPD (Liberia, 2018), which the speaker frequently references, there is an expressed concern, or intention, to benefit all Liberians, but especially to direct the remaining resources of the country towards those who have not benefitted in the past.

On a final note, although the M1PC transcript was considered as a whole, only parts of it was subjected to the actual analysis, where practical arguments were reconstructed and evaluated. Three variations of the main argument were identified and sub-sequentially synthesized and evaluated. Only the practical argument for one out of the six plans, or responses to the assumed educational mess, was reconstructed and evaluated. The remaining five, were only used to inform this evaluation, and not explicitly subjected to the process of political discourse analysis. It can be argued that this choice, albeit beneficial in regards to limitations of textual space and time, has limited the representativeness of any conclusions drawn. I would on the other hand, argue that for the purpose of this particular study, with its
aim to examine how the response of the current MOE of Liberia to the country’s educational challenges, and to explore how this response can be said to influence the construction of teachers, it has been sufficient. However, what I find necessary to question is the representativeness of the actual transcript. As have been mentioned on several occasions within this study, M1PC transcript must be considered as a report on a previous deliberative process, and thus naturally, only provide a limited insight into this process. I have tried to compensate for this by considering it in relation to other guiding documents, both national and international, and have through this been able to come up with what, based on the limitations of the study, must be considered as noteworthy hints towards the response, or vision, of the current MOE of Liberia.

7.2 The construction of teachers in Liberia

How can this response, or identified chain of events be said to influence the construction of teachers in Liberia? A protected profession in which teachers conduct themselves as teachers, is the intended and explicitly stated outcome of the policy measures presented in response to the educational mess in Liberia (cf. Section 6.2). This does, at first glance point towards a strengthening of the profession, albeit, as addressed in section 6.2.1, only a strengthening of teacher professionalism seems to be regarded as necessary and is seemingly valued above increases in teacher professionalization. That is, increases in teacher practice in terms of the quality and standards of teaching. The M1PC transcript both presents the practice of teaching as a calling, while at the same time, almost ridiculing the idea of an increase in remuneration, as demonstrated in section 6.2.1. This, seen in relation to the overall theme of the transcript, i.e. efforts to increase accountability and standards, emphasise teacher performance and focus on their technical skills, by increasing the MOEs supervision and enforcement, leads me to suspect that the response of the current MOE of Liberia is pushing teachers to perform like never before, to do more work, more compliantly and for no increased reward. Thus, one can imagine a future state of affairs in which this raise in standards not has led to an increase in teachers’ status and standing, on the contrary. This debate, as mentioned briefly in section 3.1, does seem to be dependent upon how the speaker defines teacher professionalism within the M1PC transcript.

Conceptions of teacher professionalism in Liberia, identified through analysis of the M1PC transcript, seem to reflect several aspects of the four ages of teacher professionalism at
the same time (cf. Hargreaves (2006) section 3.1). This is not surprising, as “images and ideas about teacher professionalism, and even about the nature of teaching itself, linger on from other agendas and other times” (Hargreaves, 2006, p. 152). I will attempt to use these four ages to draw a picture of conceptions of teacher professionalism within the M1PC transcript.

The response of the MOE seems to move towards teachers having to adhere to rather strict standardized curricula, specifically in regards to literacy and numeracy (cf. section 6.2.1). Moreover, this emphasis on literacy and numeracy seems to be pointing towards a teaching practice in keeping with traditional top-down teaching methods aimed at students as a collective unit, both aspects of the pre-professional age. However, I would not go as far as to say that teaching is viewed as a technically simple practice, as the speaker clearly acknowledges the lack of qualifications among teachers as a problem, thus, implying that not just anybody can practice teaching. Nonetheless, the emphasis placed on teachers’ ability to teach children to read and to do maths is interesting. At least considering the fact that this alone, save for compelling teachers to act like teachers, within the M1PC transcript seems to be associated with protecting the teaching profession.

One could argue that the speakers referencing to teaching as a calling is in keeping with the age of the autonomous professional, although it would be a stretch, as the speaker not necessarily associates this with teachers being autonomous, but rather with the motivations teachers have for being teachers. However, when viewed in regards to descriptions of teachers and teaching in Liberia (cf. section 2.4) and the parallels with Battiste’s (2002) notion of neoliberal discourses emphasising competition and individualism, within the M1PC transcript overall, it is possible to assume an association with this second age. Moreover, this is substantiated by the emphasis placed on literacy and numeracy, which in some instances, have been associated with competition among, schools, teachers and students (cf. the PSL program section 2.4).

Admittedly most prominent, is what I understand to be the overarching presence of one of the two driving forces behind what Hargreaves (2006) sees as the postmodern social condition. An increased emphasis on neoliberal notions in national economies, influencing education and the role of teachers. This has been touched upon on several occasions within this study and I would argue, in consonance with Sachs (2016) that it is reasonable to assume that this, through the current MOEs response to the educational mess of the country, feeds
into a conception of teacher professionalism, rendering teachers as controlled and compliant. In essence, as “silent witnesses” (Sachs, 2016, p. 424).

The emphasis placed on what is easily measured in education, e.g. literacy and numeracy, can admittedly also be seen in a different light. That is, as addressed in the previous section, as a result of concerns about the efficient use of limited resources. First of all, governments need to perform, often in a rather short period of time (there is a six-year Presidential term in Liberia). Thus, a leaning towards that which is easily measured within this short period of time is not surprising. Moreover, governments need to justify investments. In this case, at least in regards to what is explicitly stated in the M1PC transcript, the justification of investments seems to be based on the values of fairness and equality (cf. section 6.1). Nonetheless, I would argue, in keeping with Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) that the way in which this feeds into conceptions of teacher professionalism must be viewed with a critical eye, as political decisions in a crisis situation, i.e. the educational mess, is taken under conditions of uncertainty, where both intended as well as unintended consequences of an action, should be painstakingly analysed and weighed.

7.3 The road ahead

Now, finally, has the claim of the arguments within the M1PC transcript stood up to criticism in light of its probable consequences? As touched upon with both the analysis of the main argument and the argument for licencing educators and improving payroll, I question the expressed consequences of action proposed by the speaker. In regards to the main argument, the way in which the speakers’ argument seemingly can be viewed as a continuation of the former governments standardization and economization of the education sector, rather than a break from it, led me to question if another course of action would have been more reasonable to pursue. This was substantiated by the lack of specificity in regards to the goals presented, and the fact that no significant alternative proposals were included, in essence presenting the relationship between the means and the goals as bi-conditional. A similar critique was raised against the argument for licencing educators and improving payroll. Also within this argument, no alternative course of action was addressed by the speaker, thus, presenting the relationship between means and ends as bi-conditional. As I argued for in previous text, to strengthen the RTTIs and adequately remunerating teachers seems more reasonable in seeking to protect the profession, than requiring in-service teachers
to take an additional test administered by the MOE, in essence undermining the teacher training provided by the RTTIs. Moreover, based on existing circumstances, in consonance with the ones presented within the M1PC transcript (cf. sections 2.3, 2.4, 6.1 and 6.2), I would argue that it is the RTTIs which have failed, more so than teachers in and of themselves. Though, the RTTIs cannot be said to have failed on their own accord, but as a result of an apparent lack of government effort to strengthen them, at least as I see it with the current data available to me.

That brings me to one of the major limitations of this particular study. The data utilized within this study primarily relies upon a representation of one single communicative event. A communicative event which, as has been addressed on several occasions, must be considered as a report on a deliberative process that, presumably preceded it. Moreover, an interview with the speaker within the M1PC transcript, could possibly have provided clarifications, which could have led me to draw different conclusions. This limitation, more or less, enables me to adequately answer the question of whether or not the claim of the arguments within the M1PC transcript has stood up to criticism in light of its probable consequences? In essence, I can only raise further questions, as has been done. However, I do contend that these questions are warranted, as demonstrated through my analysis, and that further research into the topic of teacher professionalism and education in Liberia is required. Further research into teacher professionalism and education in Liberia, attending to one or more of the three axes of comparison: “horizontal, which compares how similar policies or phenomena unfold in locations that are connected and socially produced; vertical, which traces phenomena across scales; and transversal, which traces phenomena and cases across time” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, p. 15), would arguably cumulatively produce a more detailed and nuanced picture. Contrary to what I have been able to do with this particular study alone. Moreover, additional research could enable the designing of a more trustworthy CCS (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) incorporating all aspects of the approach, possibly allowing for theoretical generalizations outside of the boundaries of Liberia.

On a final note, there are several aspects, relevant to the MOEs response to the educational mess which have emerged throughout this study that I have not addressed in much detail, save in passing. For example, the historical divide between Americo- and indigenous –Liberians (cf. section 2.1), which the current government seeks to compensate for by re-envisioning the country, in consonance with an African identity (Liberia, 2018). Although, this is not mentioned within the M1PC transcript, it is possible to imagine that this
would influence conceptions of teacher professionalism in the country. Specifically, considering large parts of the teaching force is required to cater to children in rural Liberia, another aspect not addressed within this study. That is, I have drawn conclusion about issues relating to teachers in Liberia, without addressing the fact that what is required of a teacher in the capital, Monrovia, differs from what is required of teachers in rural Liberia. Similarly, this issue is only mentioned briefly within the M1PC transcript as well. These emerging aspects could, albeit arguably constitute separate studies in and of themselves, substantiating the claim that issues concerning teachers and education in Liberia is in want of a further research.
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APPENDIX A

((March 1, 2018 Press Conference))

1 Ladies and gentlemen of the press. Let me first say these opening statements. That we are privileged to have been identified among very, very competent Liberians. Some of them maybe even more sophisticated than we are. To have been selected by the President, to head the Ministry of Education. This Ministry, the task associated with it, for me is one of the difficult ones, because this Ministry affects the lives of everyone in this country in some way. And we want to assure the President, that for the time period we will endure his confidence. During that time period, only the best out of us can be envisaged. What cannot be done, cannot be done, but whatever can be done by men, must be done by us. We shall have no excuses. Even with the limitations or whatever may be. We intend to use the opportunities we have, to the benefit of the people of this country. Especially, with the pro-poor agenda of this government. We have a few matters to be discussed as far as our strategies and our plans are concerned, and at that point we shall make it interactive so that we can all share in the vision of both the President and those of us who are Ministers, heading this Ministry.

15 Ladies and gentlemen, at the certification of successful candidates in the 2017 general Presidential elections, conducted by the National Elections commission, are committed to memory, a statement of the SRSG, at that session. And he said, “Liberia is so rich, yet its people are so poor, it makes no sense”. This statement summarises the collective outcomes of the stewardship of all governments since the founding of this country. And it somewhat indicts all Liberians, especially those who’s trusted with leadership. However small, local and national, for the state of affairs of a nation that has been blessed with abundance in many ways, but apparently also cursed with poverty. Among the natural blessings is the superior coastline and quality beach sand spanning the entire southern border of our country. Underutilized, notwithstanding. Blessed with strings of waters and rivers sufficient to raise reservoirs as a source of affordable electric power and water transportation service. Blessed with predictable rainfalls across its landscape for agriculture, yet unable to feed itself. Endowed with significant natural rainforest other than the Congo basin and the Amazon. A nation, once a repository of valued minerals, and a nation with brains from Harvard and from Oxford and from Yale and from Princeton, name them all. Yet, the majority of its people unable to read and write with understanding.
A nation, apparently exploited by many, while its people stand and observe. A nation of wealth and of poverty. What a contrast. Indeed, I believe the SRSG and many who have similar views are perfectly right. It makes no sense. So why is Liberia among the least of nations, still struggling to provide the basic necessities for its people? Somebody needs to help us with some explanation. Where have we gone wrong? How did we go wrong? Why did we go wrong so long? And when do we intend to stop, think, and change course? It is commonly said, that doing the same things the same way will have the same results.

President Weah once said on the campaign trail, “change we must, there is no better option”. The overwhelming election of Ambassador Weah and Senator Taylor on December 26. A day after Christmas, of all days, as President and Vice President, like never before in the history of this country, at least during my lifetime, the Liberians stood massively together for a common cause. Come what may. And we believe that this government, led by this President, with a pro-poor agenda for change shall not repeat the actions of the past that have brought this nation to a place of pity. I also believe that President Weah love this country, and musters the will to impact the lives of the least of us, like never before.

While it is true that a significant deposit of the resources of this country are long gone, but the little that is still left must be directed to the common good of the rest who have not been privileged so far. For the similar reason, many of us have accepted to serve with the President so that his vision for this country is fulfilled unhindered. Indeed, we may not have all that will be needed in one basket, for a massive and speedy transformation of our country, but we are driven by the will to do so. To seize the cherished pride of the Lonestar Forever. The Lonestar Forever, that flows over land and over sea. Desire it forever. Uphold it forever. All hail the Lonestar banner. Shall be our purpose, for my team in this Ministry, as we serve at the will of the President. As it is written, so shall it be done. God our help, shall provide the wisdom and resources we need. A quotation from Seven Days Adventist education handbook, page 57: “the greatest want of the world is the want of men. Men who will not be bought or sold. Men who in their inmost souls are true and honest. Men who do not fear to call sin or wrong by its rightful name. Men whose conscience is as true as the needle is to the pole. Men who will stand for the right, though the heavens fall”. From the Adventist education, page 57, written by Ellen White. Ladies and gentlemen. My team comprised of three deputy Ministers and eight assistant Ministers, and I, intend to be one of such men. And been given the privilege to serve this government, as Ministers for the education sector.
Difficult is an understatement in characterizing the task of transforming this sector, but if it can be done, then it shall be done. God being our help, under the confidence of the President. Our perspective, therefore, have been detailed and we shall discuss those in a few minutes.

At nearly one hundred and seventy-one years, Liberia has come of age by no means to be a developed country. Her influence on the world stage span many decades. It’s undoubtedly worthy of history. Our presence on this stage, of public service, is a privilege not a right to make representations that are factual, predictable, and reasonably consistent with the realities obtaining in the education sector. The only sector that give life and capacity to other sectors, through the building of minds that work in those sectors. Because the mind is the man, and without the mind, the man is a less man. The absence of quality education for the majority is a foundation for backness and underdevelopment, personal jalousies, inequity, and other similar societal deficiencies. Given the standing of education amongst the national development priorities, and assuming that there is consensus among all Liberians, and as proposed by his excellence President Weah, reference to pillar one of his platform, power to the people. Recognizing that our country is in want of capacity of superior quality. We, real Liberians, passionate Liberians, loyal to country and patriotic, earnest their wellbeing and selfless in demeanour, must take the lead for once and rise to make the difference. And this, these, all of them combined constitute the desires of this team. And God willing we shall do our best. Thank you.

We shall now proceed with our agenda items and we like to just discuss them with you in order of what we consider to be priority. First going to mention some of the steps that this government has taken so far to begin the process of building quality. One, the President has decided, the government along with him, that, many of you already know this, that the examination fees for West African Examinations administered to high school students will be paid for henceforth by this government. And as a result that ritual has already been consummated, and WAEC have proceeded to register as many as forty thousand students to sit these exams come May. Two, there are many instructors who are on supplementary payrolls, nearly six thousand plus of them. Many of them need vetting to determine whether or not they belong in the classroom. And when these are done, the government has also assured us that the status of all of them who qualify to stand as a teacher, should be regularized through the civil service going forward. We hope that the vetting exercises could be conclusive before June 30. And that those to be regularized can
be regularized in the coming budget year. But until then, there are already a certain number that have been vetted and declared valid for school, and the government has made provisions to regularize the status of at least four hundred of them in this transition budget, and one hundred and eighty of them who are already employed, not on supplementary payroll, but earning salaries that are not consistent with their respective qualification. These are actions already on the list taken by the government. We also as an entity now from our side, the operative of this Ministry and the Ministers have gotten together to stand the challenges, and we have decided the way that is best. When we come to the interaction you will raise your own issues and we will respond to them.

The PSL schools, we put it first on this list. Partnership Schools of Liberia. Many people have heard of it. There has been so much resentment in the work that they have done. There was a major conflict that came about between, with the introduction of the Partnership Schools and the Teachers Association, the Principles Association and some parents and generally maybe even the public. What we’ve done is this. We’ve already had an interaction with all of them as a group and individually and we have determined that they can remain under conditions that we will now drive. Many have come and they had their own agendas and plans. Those of them that will work with us, with we providing the lead, with this Ministry indicating what our needs are and they being prepared to help us in line with what we say our needs are and the manner in which those needs are to be executed in our way, then they can remain. Those who cannot work with us in those manners, then of course we tell them thank you for what you have done in the past but no thank you, you can’t stay. Because I must say that I’m hungry before you feed me, and I must say what I need. So in these particular categories of service we are not prepared to just throw them out without an intelligent assessment. It is for this reason that we have already planned to execute and undertake a thorough national tour of all schools, including PSL schools, to ensure that what they’ve said they’ve been doing are exactly what they have been doing, and what they have been doing compare with what we have desire for them to do. If they reconcile, then we proceed. If they don’t, then we will reconcile them to our needs and then we can proceed. And I think on those basis, people who provide funding to them will not consider us as being an ungrateful country, hiring people only for a time. We want to make sure that whatever have been done before, that can still be built upon, that we build upon those as we proceed.
Then, as we proceed further with these discussions. There are violations of regulations effecting decisions that this Ministry of Education makes. The Ministry of Education by its Act, as an agency of the government, responsible, exclusively, for the monitoring and regulating educational programs and activities in this country, shall exercise our authority as given us by the law. We promise not to be excessive, but we promise to live according to what the law says. And if we have the right to remove this water from here, believe me, we shall remove the water. Because it does not belong there. And therefore, when this Ministry is executing its regulations it shall be done irrespective of who, irrespective of what, irrespective of how. And we have decided in one of the particular cases that where there are offences as far as violations of regulations are concerned, we intend to request the national legislature to approve a bill which we are now working on with their consent, so that this Ministry can have a right to impose direct penalties without going through the law. And those penalties shall fall within a barrier, with a lower limit, and an upper limit. Depending on the gravity of the violation, we shall exercise our right under those rules. We are asking all of our schools, as long as we have an educational outfit in this country, to comply with the regulations. We intend to work collaboratively with everyone in this sector so that together we can win together. We have come to know that no person, regardless of their smartness, their experience, their knowledge, can turn this educational vessel around without the collective effort of parents, school administrators, teachers, government, and the students themselves. So we appeal to the students and parents to help us help them. As we’ve passed the learning age, but we need to help posterity, so that those that are behind us can be either like us or better than us. For it is in their hands that this country shall be entrusted. All regulations, for example, when the Ministry says that classes for first semester 2018/2019 should begin this week. No school. No school. Absolutely no school shall have the right to resume classes before that date, or several weeks beyond that date. For doing so is a direct affront to the authority invested in us. And we shall not hesitate to exercise the law that give us the right to penalize you. We want to avoid this. When we say graduation should be within this period and there shall be no graduation until WAEC results are ready. That’s exactly what we mean. That’s what regulations are all about. And those that will believe that they can go ahead and go on with graduation in spite of the regulations set by the Ministry, you got yourself to blame. Because we are going to exercise all of the powers that we have, not being excessive, but making sure that those who are used to braking rules, abide by the rules. Until a ship begin to sail smoothly, we
may have to act excessively sometimes, and the issue of human rights shall be laid to
rest, until this boat begin to sail appropriately. This is no bluff. This is true in our being
and we are forming a team. I don’t want to necessarily be called Minister. All of us are
Ministers and you can call all of them Minister. I don’t have to be specifically identified.
But the work we are doing is the work of a team. We are not playing tennis. Tennis is a
one-man game. We’re playing soccer of American football, where there are many people
playing and the winning depends on all of us together.

Next. If you agree with me, there are certain violations that need to be treated more
harshly, and those are not just violations, those are evil practices against the nation and
the younger generation. And this shall extend to parents. All parents, all school
principals, all students. When the child is deficient in a particular school. They fail in the
ninth grade for example and their parent hold their hand and take them to another school
without records, and they place that child in eleventh grade or twelfth grade, that’s a
crime. That’s not a violation. Its criminal. You are helping that child to learn that they
can be corrupt even while they are young. That is criminal. You are destroying posterity,
and with all of the authority that we have, and the confidence of the president, except he
says, Prof., Stop!, we shall not stop until we deal with such people. And therefore, we
have decided to do so legally, that we shall develop another bill for the legislature to
approve to enact into law, creating a criminal court responsible to remedy academic
crimes, because we know that crimes have a court. But if we were to go through all of
the criminal court processes the cases that are academic would be subordinated other
defences. Therefore, if we have a court to deal with this issue, it may look small, but it
isn’t. For those who believe that you can collect flexibility fees and allow people at
testing centres to ensure that the examiners and the proctors leave the test hall, or even go
ahead and help the student with the exams, you are not helping this country, you are a
criminal, and when we catch such criminals we will impose such fines as we shall
discuss in this particular case. The court is intended for criminal of that nature. It’s a
criminal even greater then breaking windows. If someone can steal telephone and go to
prison, what about somebody who destroy the population of the country? Prison is not
the place. If there were somewhere better that prison, that’s where we place you, but in
this particular case the law has to back us. This is why we are going that way to seek a
remedy through the law. So due process can still be established. Even where there are
violations that we earlier talk about, we intend to create in this Ministry, a board, not
more than four-five person, we don’t want a large team, across this Ministry. Maybe we take somebody from outside to join us. To make sure when somebody (violates, missing sound, 29,22) that that person equally receives due process. There will be a committee here. The committee will review the issues, and if the person is found guilty, or the school is found guilty, we impose a penalty, without looking back, people. To turn something like this around, it requires no honeymoons, it require no parties. It requires harshness sometimes, but with humility and respect. So this is why we are calling the press. And to pre-empt ourselves, we’ve had a meeting with the PTAs, with the Principals Association, with the Parents-Kids Association, with secretariat of the private schools, with the principals of the public schools, and we extend this outside of this sitting, so that everybody is aware ahead of time that these are what we intend to do. So when we do them nobody is surprised.

Ladies and gentlemen, we’ve also decided that we shall licence all teachers, if we must be able to execute the action that we intend to execute then we must protect the profession, and protecting the profession mean that we must licence everyone who holds a chalk or a whiteboard marker. Anyone who considers themselves an academic administrator must be licenced, and the licencing shall commence this academic year, and is a go by way of those who have already been in classrooms and aged, who probably can no longer take test and pass, we shall grant them under the Grandfathers clause and give them licence, but after a few weeks of re-tooling and brushing up. All of those who have stayed youthful ages, forty-five and down, we’re going to give you test, even if you have a degree, we still test to find out whether you have a relevant competence to proceed as a teacher. When that is done, we shall then licence you as a teacher. In an official occasion. And when you are licenced, that licence is expected to compel you to conduct yourself as a teacher. Teachers are teachers by calling. Teaching is not just a profession. Teaching is a calling, and the rewards are not just some pay checks. The rewards are the benefit of building a country, and joy that you have for a child who have succeeded because of you, and if we betray the trust then we should not be teaching. Therefore, when you should have been licenced as a teacher or a school principal and you betray the trust embedded in that licence, we shall either suspend depending on the gravity, or revoke the licence. When your licence is revoked, the law shall say that you shall never again in your lifetime in this country be a teacher. You can do something else. Find other jobs. Do business, But teaching. Never. Because you have
betrayed the trust of the licence. I’m not saying we will suspend it. If we suspend it, we
can restore it. When we revoke it, you won’t come back. Because you’re not fit to be
teacher. We hope that never happens. To all of our folks who have decided to, nobody
called you to teach. Nobody say go to classroom. If you were looking for a job and you
got to the classroom accidentally, we will licence you as a teacher if you decide that
you want to be a teacher, and if you have the competence. Now, once we licence you as a
teacher, that is the end of that. Its intended to also protect the profession. Nobody can just
come from anywhere and go in the classroom. If you graduate from University, you have
a degree in mathematics, you have a degree in physics, you have a degree in whatever.
We must put you through the ethics of teaching, and licence you, so that except if you
graduated with Bachelor of science in primary education and secondary education.
Besides those we must licence you if you when you have a Bachelor degree in other
disciplines, but short of being trained as a teacher. We don’t want a fifth grader teaching
calculus. Because they are not teacher, they are fairly concerning displaying their
knowledge. That’s not teaching. Therefore, the issue of licencing is going to be a
important in our structure. But we must first prepare people. And you agree with me, that
if you were to try to give me a test right now, I probably won’t pass, but I’ve been
teaching for almost forty years. So are you going to throw me overboard? No. You put
me through a cleaning process. You clean me up, shape me up a little bit, and you licence
me. And put me under obligation to perform as I have performed before, if not even
better. So under those circumstances you become licenced. For every other person that is
becoming a teacher. You graduate from KRTTI, from whatever TTIs, you have only
earned a certificate that qualifies you to teach. But the instrument that compels you to
conduct yourself as a teacher is the licencing. That we shall do, without looking back.
And we pray that, God being our guide, in the space of two years, we should be able to
licence almost everyone who stands in the classroom. And of course if you are not
licenced and you are in the classroom, then there has to be a way to take you out of the
classroom. Because you shouldn’t be there. The principal that will allow you to be in a
classroom, when you are not licenced, that’s a violation. That does not revoke the
principals licence, but that is a violation that is punishable under this law that we are
trying to get the legislature to pass for us. And when those are done, believe me, God
being on our side, we have a feeling that this thing can be better. We have identified the
critical areas of the school system that have broken it down. We identified supervision to
have broken down completely in many cases. And human being being who human being
is, left with themselves, are likely to do things that are inappropriate. So the supervision mechanism is being re-structured in this Ministry and we expect parents to help us in that process. We have even decided, among us, that we shall engage the local governments, so the political commissioner in the respective political districts, as they pass through their jurisdiction and doing their work, they should make sure that children are not on the teachers farm or the children are not going to video clubs and other things in the daytime when they should be in school. They as commissioners have the authority to ensure that their jurisdiction is managed properly, and managing a jurisdiction properly include the managing of the constituency, and that constituency include your children as well. So we shall. If we can give them something small later on we can do that. But they are already being paid by local government. All we are doing is to add an addendum to their responsibility, so they can take responsibility for the posterity in their respective districts. We intend to use all. We also intend from this Ministry to use our own excess capacity. I will be a monitor, he’s going to be a monitor, all the deputies in the Ministry, we’re all going to be monitors. We are going to be out and we are not going to leave everything to Dos and CEOs alone. Because some of the DEOs alone have two hundred schools to inspect, and to be effective every DEO should visit a school minimum five times a year. If there are some schools that you cannot visit in two years’ time, then you have not worked. The system has not worked, but we have also caused you not to work because the territory we give you is just too large for you to manage as a human being. So therefore, we intend to complement your work with the excess capacity in this Ministry. There are several of us here who have. All of us have work to do. But I’m almost sure that nobody works directly from 9 o’clock to five, so the extra two hours, the extra three hours, the extra four hours, instead of doing things that you don’t necessarily have to do, we want to engage you to be out in the schools as monitors. Your title is not changing. They won’t call me monitor, I’m the Minister. But when I’m in the field monitoring I’m a monitor. When I come back to my office, a Minister. So if I can do the monitoring myself, why not you. So this is not humiliating anyone, it’s helping us to do what we’re supposed to do, so our system operates rightly.

And two more items we’d like to just share. If you notice, there are many schools in the morning, knowing that there are no adequate transportation system. This one is just a request to make sure that schools also look out for the students. There are many schools in the morning, students are lined up at the gate, the doors are closed. It doesn’t look
298 right to me. As much as we are pushing punctuality, I think there should be some, maybe
299 there’s a little window. And that window is being created only because transportation
300 challenges. I’m not saying you open the window until twelve, I’m saying open the
301 window a little while, maybe the child is going to miss a couple of minutes of the first
302 math period, but at the end of the day you take them in as opposed to lining them to
303 stand out of the gate. Now those that come after that, you can use adjustment tools. When
304 we were in school, of course we can’t do it now, if you’re late, and in fact you would not
305 be late, because you know what will happen when you get to the gate. There is a rattan.
306 But this time there is nothing like rattan. So being afraid of that rattan, will do everything
307 you can to get on time. But there are no more rattans. What we need to do now is to find
308 punishment in the school, you got you can clean, you can sweep. You sum up the number
309 of lateness’s and then you ask the child to do a particular piece of job. Now if the child
310 say, well I can’t do the piece of job, then the child does not want to stay in that school,
311 they can go somewhere else. That’s how strict you have to be as a principle, as an
312 administrator of schools. And if we do that, we will help a little bit, because many of our
313 Ministers have observed, in the morning, sometimes by eight thirty-eight fifty, there are
314 rows of students at the gate of some schools. We want the principals to just review this.
315 We are not asking this particular one as an order, because we have to discuss it a little bit
316 more. We don’t want to encourage lateness, we want to make sure the students also learn
317 how to be punctual. So they got to learn that from early ages. But again, circumstances
318 dictate in many cases, that we see the children really struggling to get on vehicles to go
319 to school. So those of us who have vehicle to carry our children, our children are blessed.
320 What about those who cannot pay for wheelbarrow tire, how do they get on car to take
321 their children. So those are the kind of challenges I like for schools to look at. But that is
322 not something we’re asking you to implement between now and September, what I like
323 for you to do is, our meeting sometime in April, when we meet again, we shall discuss
324 this and hear exactly what you have in mind, so based on that when we agree to go ahead
325 collectively, to go ahead and do so collectively.
326
327 And also, there is a course that we did when we were in school some time ago. And I
328 don’t know what it’s called this time, because it’s been long time. I don’t know why
329 civics ever left the curriculum. We have to make sure that civics gets back in the
330 curriculum. So everyone should do civics. Have you heard us singing the national
331 anthem. Enjoy, enjoy. We sing the national anthem, many even adults don’t know the
words. Yes. Yes. Don’t even worry about the students. The Lonestar Forever, forget that. They don’t even know the song, the tune or the words. If you’re doing civics, you don’t have a choice. As a student you will know the Presidents of this country. As a student you will sing the national anthem, and as a student you become cultured. There are certain basic culture of this country that are also imbedded in that civics, and because Bible and Quran are no longer in public school, we can use civics to teach a lot of morals in the school, because most of the basic cultures that this country is driven by, those cultures talk about respect, talk about honour, and we want to make sure that that civics, so that beginning September, that civics get back into the curriculum and this is why when we conduct a Summit in May, that Summit shall encompass all organizations and then we shall come together to decide whether or not we want to fix the school or we want to make fuss among ourselves and condemn each other as we go on. If we decide collectively that it must change, then it must change. And it’s not fair for students who are doing their very best in a system that is considered to be a complete mess, and that mess rubs off on them when they go to other countries. That has to change. We have to make sure that word is not attributed to the academic sector anymore. In two to three years that should be the case. And we just want to emphasize that.

Yes, the last item and then we will open up for discussion, maybe while we’re having a discussion some things will come up that we have not talked about. There are businesses houses. There a business houses that are involved with the sale of alcohol and other things to students. Business houses, small or big, it doesn’t matter, we said business houses. And we want to make sure that if you are a business house that you do not transact inappropriate commodity with school children. You do not allow them entering your video clubs eleven twelve, one o’ clock, school time. Because there are games during that time. We have contacted the Ministry of Justice already. This one, I don’t think we will wait until September. The issue of super Friday disappears as of this statement. Any principal who let their student out of school earlier than they should for the kids to go for super Friday. That principal, if you have already been licenced, you have lost it. That principal, if you have not been licenced, the penalty to be imposed on your school shall be witty. So we just want to let you know that Fridays, we from this Ministry, our monitoring team, because super Friday is Monrovia business. There’s no super Friday in the interior, no beach there. Super Friday is Monrovia issue. So we shall also intensify our monitoring exercises on Fridays. And we come to your school and
364 meet only you the principal sitting there without your students, we’d like to know why.  
365 Because no teacher will be in the class teaching as students leave. The student only leave  
366 because the teachers have left. The teachers have left because they have their other  
367 duties. We got moonlight teachers. Sorry, I’m teacher myself so I know what it means.  
368 Sorry if I’m a little bit harsh. We got teachers who moonlight. They go to the public  
369 school in the morning, on or two hours then they run from there and go teach to a private  
370 school. And when they go teach to a private school the public school students are  
371 waiting. They don’t have teacher. Because you have chosen to teach in two-three  
372 different places at the same time. It doesn’t work. Somebody is going to suffer and most  
373 of the time it’s the public school that suffers. That should not happen. That shall not  
374 happen. There are no reason to happen. That’s unfair. Now, if the pay check is very small  
375 and it cannot accommodate you, then the teaching profession is not your line. You got to  
376 start looking for different place. Because I have not seen any rich teacher yet in this  
377 country. Any rich teacher here must have stolen something, or their Pa left it with them.  
378 True. For you to teach and get rich, I’m waiting to see. You may do other form of  
379 businesses, that’s fine. Like, I’m an accountant, and I actually live on accounting, not  
380 teaching. But I teach because without teaching I’m unfulfilled. So I teach. And I always  
381 teach. But for teachers to come and meet their class and go. That’s the principals  
382 responsibility. This is why we have said that it is the administration of schools that have  
383 failed the people. Because if you’re administering the school, and you are not a comrade  
384 of the teachers, teachers are not your comrades. You are the supervisor. Immediately you  
385 become principal, your level changes. I’m not saying that you no longer consider the  
386 other folks, the other folks are teacher like you but you are now teacher plus. And you  
387 must exercise your authority as teacher plus. And when you do that even your colleagues  
388 will respect you for doing your duty. There are many schools in the interior area I  
389 understand, the animals have taken over the classrooms. That too have to change. We are  
390 not going to be able to approach all of the challenges at the same time. Let me not even  
391 say challenges. Problems. There are NGO language, challenges, but this is problems, but  
392 this is problems and we intend, we will sit together as a Ministry and all my directors,  
393 and we decide how should we begin, where should we take it from. So that when we are  
394 going our backs are covered, so we don’t do small here, do small there, do small there,  
395 and be jack of all trade and accomplish nothing at the end of the day. The private schools  
396 carry seven hundred and eighty thousand students as of last year, the public schools carry  
397 seven hundred and twenty thousand students as of last year. That means that the private
398 schools are administering to more of the country’s population than the public schools are. 399 I don’t care how you strengthen the public schools, if the private schools are not 400 strengthened as well, we have done nothing. And therefore private schools, when we 401 come to you we are not coming to you in anger, we are coming to you because your 402 concern is our concern. We just want to help you to get it done the way we have actually 403 decided to do it. Unfortunately, in trying to get that done some schools may have to be 404 closed. If there are schools that do not look like schools, if there are schools that got no 405 teacher in the whole place teaching sixth grade, if there are schools that have challenges 406 beyond the capacity of the proprietors, then with advisement, we shall move the students 407 to different schools, and that school shall be closed until it comes to the standing that it 408 should. And we ask that those that do the accreditation of schools, that no one in this 409 Ministry, under our watch as Ministers, accredit any school, except we have visited, we 410 have examined, we have seen the profile of the faculty, then we can licence you. In the 411 absence of that accreditation, that school shall not exist. Because you are supposed to 412 display your accreditation paper at the front of your school. If that is not the case, then 413 the inspector has every right to either fin you severely or begin to process your closure. 414 Ladies and gentlemen, as you know many of our folks they a very strong early childhood 415 education. Many of our folks did not get a very good basic education, both lower and 416 upper. Therefore, for several generations now that we have on our hands. We intend to 417 introduce a three track high school learning corridor. When you complete the ninth grade 418 and you are going to the tenth grade, we shall look, in the school, that’s the work of the 419 principal and the administrators of that school. We shall look at your records from the 420 upper basic and find out whether or not you have the IQ to do the sciences or you have 421 the IQ to go strictly into academics, whether it’s social sciences, and if you do not those 422 two then we shall place you in a vocational track. The vocational track shall be the same 423 length of time as the academic track. We shall convert the number of academic hours to 424 vocational hours, and you shall do, if you’re doing carpentry and masonry, you shall do 425 all two of those, or three of them in three years. At the end of three years, the WAEC 426 examination as it is now drawn has exam for skills people, so when you go to do your 427 WAEC, you do your skills exam and then you become a high school graduate, just like 428 everybody else. But from that high school you go to work. And those who are in the 429 social sciences, you remain in the social sciences, when they graduate they go to college. 430 They are going into various other disciplines, teachers, politics and (missing sound, 431 58,11) other disciplines. The students who are in the science track, those are the ones that
we want to prepare for the stem education. They are the sharp students with the analytical minds. Those students when the complete they are those that go into engineering, they are those that go into medicine, they are those that go into those kind of related subject matters. In that way the slower student do not slow down the sharp student, and the sharp student do not drag the slower student. Because those in the sciences will be competitive, those in the social sciences will be competitive at their IQs. And those in the art, skills work, will be competitive in their line. This is what we intend to do. I understand there is already curriculum like that available. We shall now begin to see with which school we should roll it out and given the resources, we may not be able to build vocational schools across the country, but we can expand the high schools. We can expand the high schools and put vocational tracks in there, so that in the high school you can have vocational tracks. Instead of looking for millions to build vocational schools like the MVTC, you may not have, but you can go ahead with the, what we now have is the Tubman high the BWI, and multilaterals. The facilities are there and we need to do that for several other schools. In the case of a private school we may need to ask government if it was possible, or some donors to help us help some of the private schools, but of course if a private school is subsidised to have a vocational track, that private school tuition has to be adjusted accordingly to reflect their subsidy. We’re not going to subsidise you and you still add tuition as if you’re selling supermarket. It has to be reduced. So generally these are our discussions, I want to stop there. These are the critical ones. There are other ones but we will leave those ones for now so you will not forget the first one that we start discussing. Thank you very much and you can go ahead.