



Freetown, Sierra Leone
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News release

Majority of Sierra Leoneans like universal free education but call for greater investment, new Afrobarometer study shows

An overwhelming majority of Sierra Leoneans say they or a member of their family have benefited directly from the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy by getting free schooling for children or students in their families, a new Afrobarometer survey shows.

Sierra Leoneans largely support the FQSE policy for all grade levels, and many oppose the idea of limiting free education in order to save money. A large majority give the government positive ratings for its performance in addressing educational needs (at least before recent school closings due to COVID-19 presented a whole new set of challenges). But only about half of citizens say the quality of education has improved under FQSE, and a majority want the government to invest more resources to ensure a high-quality education for all.

Sierra Leone is making significant gains in school enrollment, but learning outcomes, literacy levels, and skills acquisition are among the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the United Nations Development Programme, Sierra Leone's Human Development Index values place close to the bottom – 181st of 189 countries.

Key findings

- Almost three-quarters (73%) of Sierra Leoneans say they or a member of their family have benefited directly from the FQSE policy by getting free schooling for children or students in their families (Figure 1).
- But just slightly more than half (53%) think the quality of education has improved “somewhat” or “a lot” under the FQSE policy. About four in 10 think that education quality has stayed the same (23%) or decreased (18%) (Figure 2).
- Seven in 10 Sierra Leoneans (71%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that it is better to have the FQSE even if it leads to an increase in the number of educated citizens who cannot find a job (Figure 3).
 - Majorities oppose the idea that government should save money by limiting the FQSE to pre-primary and primary education (74%) or to serving only the poor (56%).
- Eight in 10 citizens (81%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that the government needs to invest more resources to ensure that all the necessary facilities, materials, and teachers are available to provide a high-quality education to all students (Figure 4).
- The government receives far higher approval ratings on education (74%) than in other performance areas, such as preventing violent conflict (50%), fighting corruption (49%), reducing crime (47%), and managing the economy (19%).

Afrobarometer surveys

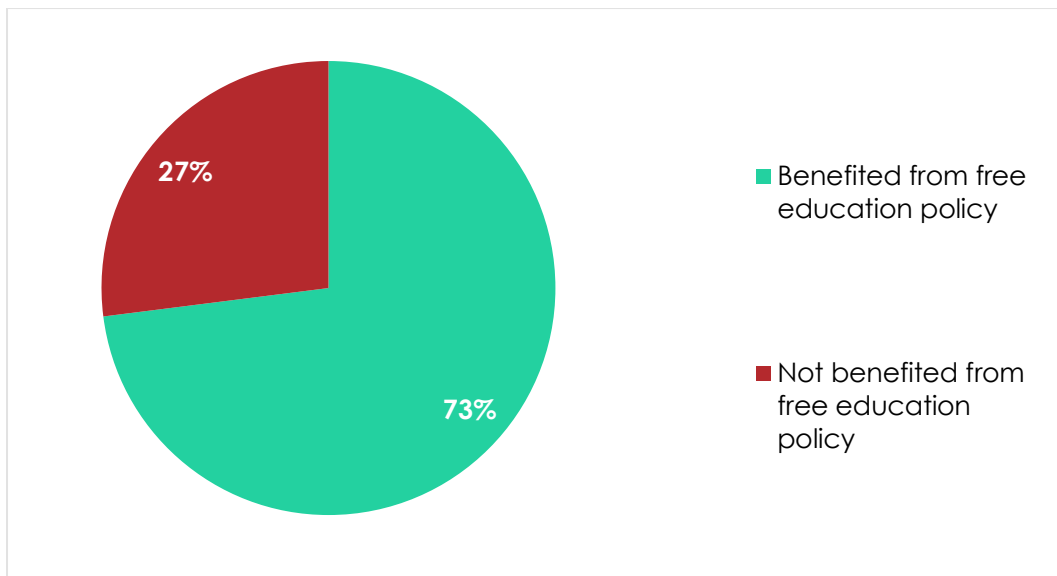
Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life.

Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys in 2019/2020 are planned in at least 35 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Sierra Leone, led by the Institute for Governance Reform, interviewed 1,200 adult Sierra Leoneans in March 2020. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Sierra Leone in 2012, 2015, and 2018.

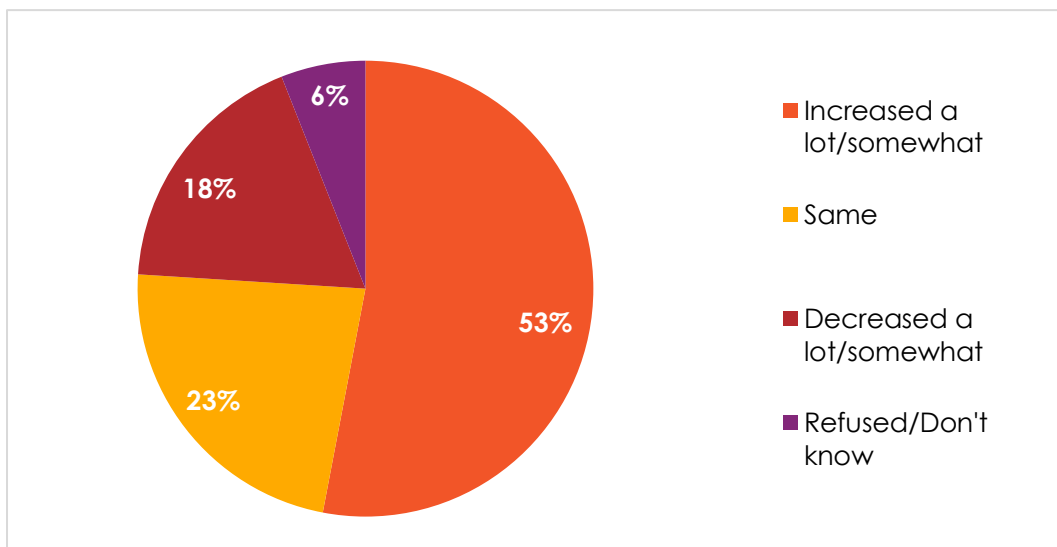
Charts

Figure 1: Benefited from the FQSE policy | Sierra Leone | 2020



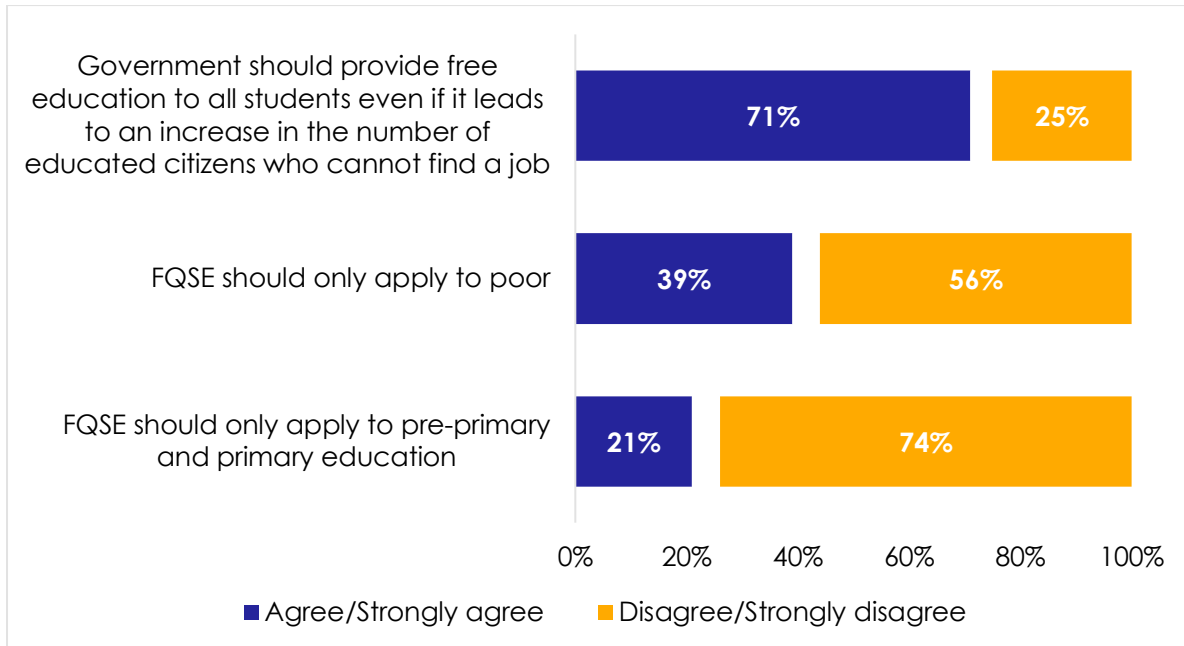
Respondents were asked: Have you or anyone in your family benefited directly from this policy by getting free schooling for children or students in your family?

Figure 2: Views on quality of education under FQSE | Sierra Leone | 2020



Respondents were asked: Do you think that under the Free Quality School Education policy, the quality of education in Sierra Leone's schools has increased, stayed the same, or decreased, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Figure 3: Views on the implementation of FQSE | Sierra Leone | 2020



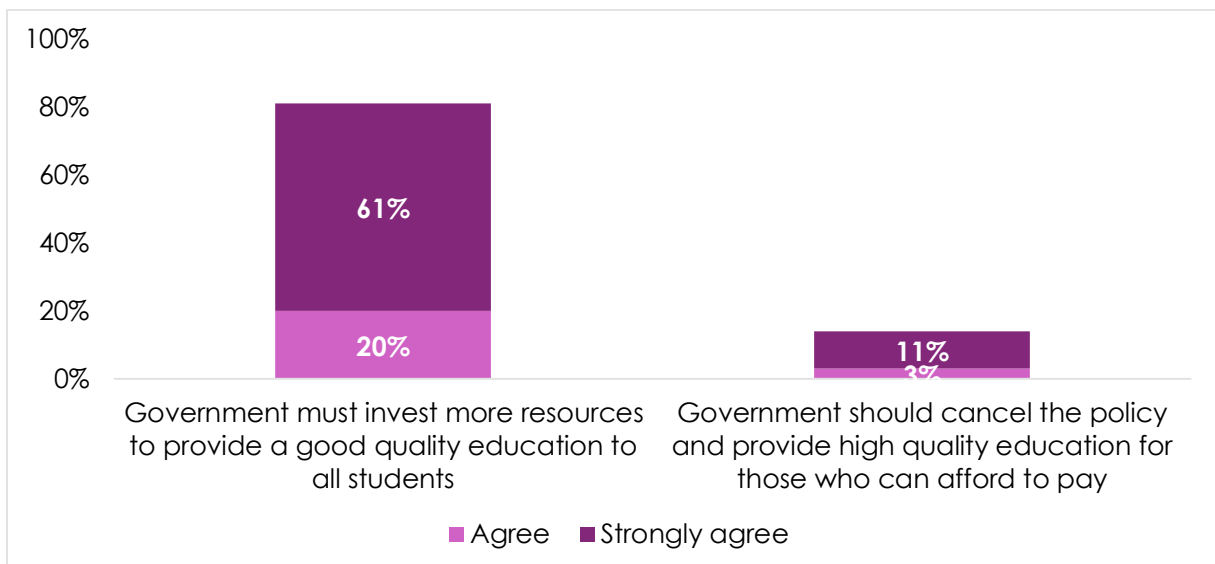
Respondents were asked: Thinking about the future of the Free Quality School Education policy, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

The government should continue to provide free education for all students even if it leads to an increase in the number of educated citizens who cannot find a job.

To save on costs, it would be better if the Free Quality School Education policy only applied to the poor who cannot pay for education, rather than applying to all citizens.

To save on costs, it would be better if the Free Quality School Education policy only applied to pre-primary and primary education, and did not include secondary education.

Figure 4: Investing more resources in education | Sierra Leone | 2020



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: To make the free education policy a success, the government must invest more resources in education to ensure that all of the necessary schools, materials, and teachers are available to provide a good quality education to all students.

Statement 2: The policy of free education for all students is too expensive; the government should cancel the policy and focus on providing high-quality education for those who can afford to pay.

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