



## **Look twice before you LEAP 2.0**

Comparing insights from interviews with involved parties with insights from interdisciplinary research.

**Honoursarticle LAS Capstone**

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## Voorwoord

Dit is het dan. Het einde van mijn bachelor.

Met het schrijven van dit voorwoord leg ik de laatste hand aan de opdracht die symbool staat voor mijn afstuderen. Hoewel van te voren niet gepland, komen binnen deze eindopdracht al mijn academische richtingen samen. De kennis, kritische houding en het reflecterend vermogen welke ik heb geleerd bij de LAS-cursussen zijn terug te zien in dit artikel. De onderzoeksmethoden en interviewtechnieken die ik heb geleerd binnen mijn hoofdrichting, pedagogische wetenschappen, heb ik in dit onderzoek toegepast. Als laatste richting, is het honours programma een belangrijk onderdeel geweest van mijn studiecarière. Door dit programma is mijn doorzettingsvermogen en de wens tot het benutten van academische vrijheid in mij gegroeid. Dit heeft mij geïnspireerd tot het bedenken van het onderzoeksplan van dit artikel en mijn onophoudelijke pogingen tot het bereiken van respondenten.

Het brengen van dit artikel tot een eindproduct waar ik met gepaste trots naar kan kijken, had ik niet gekund zonder de feedback en steun van een aantal personen. Allereerst wil ik Junior-onderzoeker Roos van Wijngaarden bedanken voor het helpen brainstormen over mijn onderzoeksplan en haar feedback op mijn kwalitatieve onderzoeksvaardigheden. Ten tweede wil ik de respondenten bedanken die de tijd hebben genomen voor een interview en mij hebben voorzien van data, zonder welke dit artikel niet geschreven had kunnen worden. Ten derde waren Jeanne van den Brink en Angele Jaspers voor mij een onmisbaar klankbord voor verschillende stappen die ik ondernam binnen het schrijven van dit artikel. Hun feedback en ideeën waren van grote waarde.

Mijn speciale dank gaat uit naar mijn begeleider Florentine Sterk. In deze desoriënterende tijd lukte het haar om bij elke afspraak mij opnieuw te motiveren. Ze stimuleerde me keer op keer om mezelf uit te dagen om zo de kwaliteit van dit honoursartikel steeds te verhogen. Ondanks dat ik erg opgelucht ben dat het honoursartikel af is, zal ik het brainstormen over mogelijkheden voor het artikel en onze andere academische discussies missen.

Ik hoop dat dit honoursartikel, nadat ik het heb opgestuurd naar de geïnterviewde partijen uiteindelijk een bijdrage kan leveren aan het verbeteren van de onderwijskwaliteit in Liberia.

Veel leesplezier!

Vera Cup.

### Honoursverklaring

Dit onderzoek is geschreven in het kader van het Humanities Honours Programme. In dit programma staan drie pijlers centraal: verdieping, verbreding en maatschappelijke verbinding. Deze honoursverzwaring van mijn LAS-scriptie sluit aan bij elk van deze drie pijlers. Ten eerste behelst dit onderzoek een ‘verdieping’ van de in de LAS-scriptie onderzochte casus. Door dit onderzoek wordt diepgaandere informatie verkregen over de onderwijsinterventie LEAP, welke in het literatuuronderzoek niet aan het licht is gekomen.

Ook is er sprake van ‘verbreding’. Binnen LAS is het gebruikelijk om enkel literatuuronderzoek te doen. In dit onderzoek verbreed ik deze onderzoekspraktijk naar een methode die meer gebruikt wordt in andere disciplines, zoals pedagogische wetenschappen. Het houden van interviews is hier een veelgebruikte methode. Deze methode heb ik in mijn disciplinaire scriptie al uitgevoerd en in deze verzwaring heb ik wat ik toentertijd heb geleerd, toegepast. Ik had mezelf ook uitgedaagd, doordat ditmaal de interviews in het Engels moesten plaatsvinden met partijen die zich in het buitenland bevinden. De afstand tussen mij en de geïnterviewde was hierdoor letterlijk en figuurlijk groter. Daarnaast maakte ik in de interviews gebruik van een instrument dat ik nog niet eerder had gebruikt, namelijk de *storyline* methode.

Als laatste is in deze honoursverzwaring ook de pijler ‘maatschappelijke verbinding’ terug te zien. Er wordt niet alleen van een afstand onderzoek gedaan, maar de maatschappelijke context wordt opgezocht. Het was door de coronapandemie niet mogelijk om daadwerkelijk naar de te onderzoeken praktijk, Liberia, toe te gaan. Maar juist de pandemie en diens gevolgen leidde vervolgens ook tot de inspiratie om voor deze verzwaring interviews uit te voeren via videobellen. De ‘maatschappelijke verbinding’ werd ook opgezocht door het onderzoeksverslag in het Engels te schrijven. Hierdoor kan het verslag worden opgestuurd naar de geïnterviewde partijen.

Deze scriptie was voor mij een mooie combi tussen wat ik al kende en nieuwe uitdagingen! Samen met mijn begeleider heb ik interessante discussies gevoerd over het doen van onderzoek. Zo bediscussieerden we het verschil tussen proces en product. Dit liet mij inzien dat er ook in wetenschappelijk onderzoek veel werk wordt gedaan wat niet direct terug te zien is in het uiteindelijke artikel, maar wel noodzakelijk is voor het schrijven van ervan. Het proces dat ik in de afgelopen twee maanden heb doorlopen heeft uiteindelijk geleid tot dit product, wat naar mijn mening honourswaardig genoemd mag worden.

### **Abstract**

The *Liberian Education Advancement Program* (LEAP) is an intervention in Liberia to improve the quality of education, whereby the government outsources the management of public schools to different operators. The interdisciplinary thesis by Van den Brink et al. (2021) developed a theoretical model illustrating what the program should look like to be deemed effective. This current research created a practical model of factors influencing the effectiveness of LEAP based on six semi-structured interviews with involved parties from three different groups: one researcher, four operators and one principal. In this paper these two models were compared to analyse to what extent they correspond in the way in which they regard the effectiveness of LEAP. Currently, the way the effectiveness of LEAP is viewed by the involved parties does not match the model of effective interventions in education of Van den Brink et al. (2021). Meanwhile, the practical model gives an overview of many other factors influencing the effectiveness of LEAP which were not included in the model of Van den Brink et al. (2021). This might be due to the scope of the interdisciplinary research resulting from the included disciplines or due to the different kind of sources used.

### **Look twice before you LEAP 2.0**

Comparing insights from interviews with involved parties with insights from interdisciplinary research.

The *Liberian Education Advancement Program* (LEAP) is an intervention in Liberia, implemented by the government to transform the educational system. By outsourcing the management of public schools to national and international organizations, the government hopes to improve the quality of education (Riep & Machacek, 2020). Different scholars have analysed this intervention and asked themselves the question if LEAP is the right program for the educational system in Liberia (i.a. Riep & Machacek, 2020; Van den Brink, et al., 2021). Some of them gave attention to the question whether the intervention is effective (Van den Brink, et al., 2021).

The interdisciplinary research article ‘Look twice before you LEAP’ focused on what the concept of effectiveness in educational interventions should look like and if this corresponds with the concept of effectiveness used within the LEAP program (Van den Brink et al., 2021). Within this research, the interdisciplinary research method developed by Repko en Szostak (2017) was used to create a model that consists of the integration of insights from three different disciplines: pedagogical sciences, post-colonial philosophy and applied ethics. This model showed what the concept of ‘effectiveness’ in the case of interventions in education should look like (see figure 1). According to the study, if an intervention follows this model, it can be referred to as an educational intervention that can be called effective in the context concerned.

The route the model by Van den Brink et al. (2021) suggests, starts with determining the goals of the educational intervention. These goals must be in line with two requirements: "effectiveness requires that the intervention stimulates a curriculum that is relevant" and "effectiveness requires that the desirable impact of an intervention is determined in local deliberation". When the goals are clear it should be discussed in local deliberation what the educational system has to look like to count as ‘valuable education’. Subsequently a method is implemented. This method is then assessed to see to what extent the method achieves the given goals. It is important to reflect on the assessment criteria in the light of the two requirements that form the basis of the goals. An iterative reflection process is created in which a circle of reflection, local deliberation, goal setting, method and testing is continuously followed. After analysing LEAP using this model, the researchers concluded that the current design could not be called effective (Van den Brink et al., 2021).

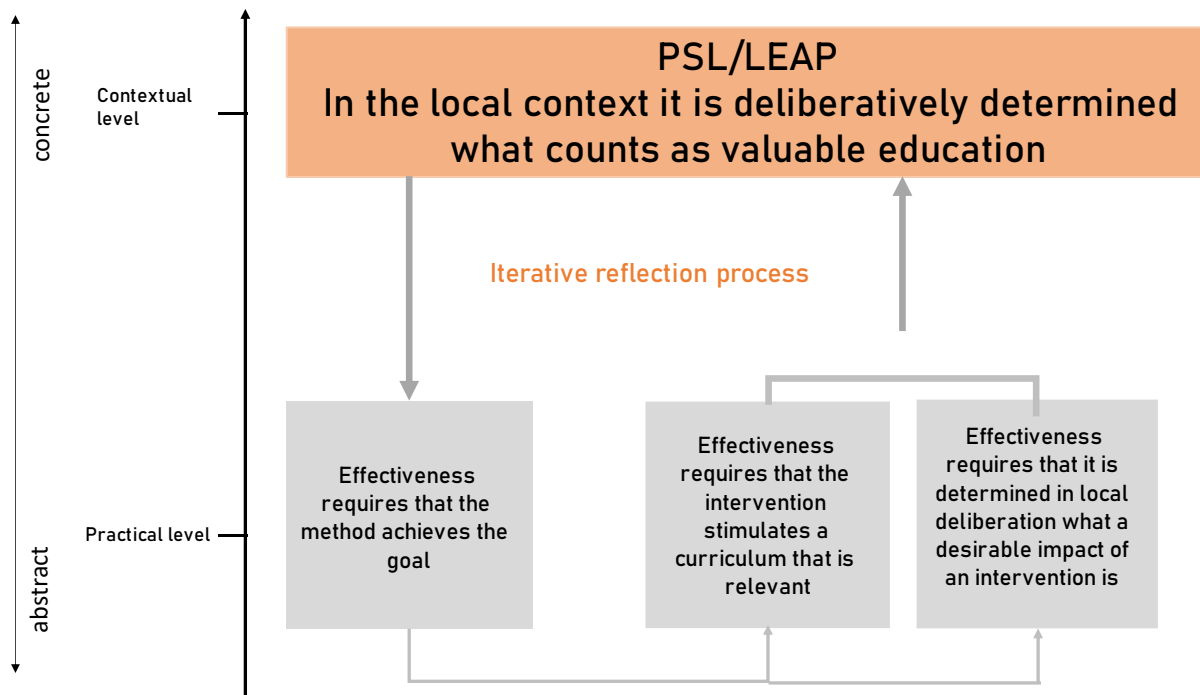


Figure 1. The theoretical model of Van den Brink et al. (2021) showing the desired route in determining and implementing educational interventions as an ongoing iterative reflection process.

Note. Taken from Van den Brink, J., Cup, V., Jaspers, A. (2021). *Look twice before you LEAP* (Interdisciplinair sluitstuk). Universiteit Utrecht.

A limitation of this interdisciplinary research is that it was written from the perspective of an outsider of the analysed program, based on the available literature about LEAP (Van den Brink et al., 2021). It is unclear to what extent the written information in the literature matches the reality. Since the researchers did not go into conversation with the involved parties, Van den Brink et al. (2021) were not able to reach the contextual core of the effectiveness of LEAP. It is important to reach this to gain a broader interpretation of the concept of effectiveness in the case of LEAP.

This current research will work towards a model of the effectiveness of LEAP in context, based on what the involved parties of LEAP consider important factors influencing the effectiveness. This offers a fourth perspective on the effectiveness of the program, besides the pedagogical sciences', post-colonial and ethical perspectives that were taken into account in the model of Van den Brink et al. (2021). In this paper the two models will be compared with each other to be able to answer the question: *“To what extent does the way the effectiveness of LEAP is viewed by the involved parties match the concept of effectiveness of educational interventions as defined in the model of Van den Brink et al. (2021)”*.

## Method

To answer this question qualitative interviews with different involved parties were conducted. By conducting interviews in a qualitative manner, it was possible to obtain a broad and in-depth understanding of the way the respondents experience the effectiveness of LEAP (Boeije, 2014). Using the method of grounded theory made it possible to base the interview questions on the thoughts and experiences from earlier respondents (Boeije, 2014). On the basis of the gathered information a new model was created to be able to compare the theoretical model of Van den Brink et al. (2021) with the way the involved parties look at the effectiveness of LEAP in context.

E-mail, Facebook Messenger, LinkedIn and Twitter were used to get in contact with the involved parties, who were mostly located in Liberia. Eventually five respondents agreed to an interview. Subsequently, a selective snowball sample was used to reach less easily accessible parties via the network of the already interviewed respondents (Neuman, 2014). This was a complicated task since not many people in Liberia have access to internet connection and a technical device with which they can videocall. Eventually this search resulted in one more interview.

## Respondents

The respondents represented three different groups of involved parties in LEAP. One of the respondents was a researcher who has conducted a large scale evaluation of the LEAP program commissioned by the government of Liberia. Four interviews were held with staff members of organizations that have taken over the management of the schools in Liberia. In total, seven of the eight operators were contacted for an interview.<sup>1</sup> Four operators agreed to an interview, one did not agree and two of the operators never replied. The last interview was held with a principal of a LEAP-school.

## Instruments

Semi-structured interviews of about one hour were held on an online videocall platform. An interview guide was created, consisting of open-ended questions and a storyline instrument (see appendix 1). The questions were inspired by the model of Van den Brink et al. (2021) so later comparison would be possible. This resulted in questions aimed at the goals, method and evaluation of the project and at how different possible factors play a part in the effectiveness of LEAP. Besides the pre-formulated questions, it was possible for the interviewer as well as

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<sup>1</sup> One of the operators was not approached for an interview, since they never took over the management of their appointed schools and therefore could not have given insight in the effectiveness of LEAP (Romero, et al., 2020).

for the interviewee to ask further questions and to elaborate when this was deemed relevant (Boeije, 2014). It was possible that there were factors which Van den Brink et al. (2021) had not included in their model, since they were unaware of them due to their distance from the researched practice. The possibility to reveal these factors by asking further questions enhanced the internal validity of the interview (Silverman, 2015).

Besides questions, the interview guide included a storyline instrument. Respondents were presented with a 2-dimensional plot, where the horizontal axis represented a timeline, and the vertical axis represented the effectiveness of LEAP. Respondents were asked to draw a line indicating how their evaluation of the effectiveness evolved through time. Subsequently they were asked to describe why at one moment in time they evaluated LEAP as more or less effective. This method of drawing a line for a specific criterion, enables respondents to evaluate their experience in a creative way and has been proven successful in research into knowledge and beliefs of teachers (Beijaard, et al., 1999; Wansink, et al., 2016). Despite not giving explicit attention to teachers within this current research, this method was regarded as suitable to elicit experiences and opinions from the respondents about the effectiveness of LEAP. A known risk when using the storyline method is that information provided by the interviewee is often quite general, causing relevant information not to come to light (Beijaard, et al., 1999). By extensively asking questions about the storylines the respondents draw, this risk was avoided as best as possible.

The time-period discussed within the interviews was from 2016 to 2020. The start of this period was chosen to be 2016 – the first year of the program. The endpoint – the beginning of 2020 – was chosen because at that time the covid pandemic started and the major influence this pandemic probably had on the effectiveness of LEAP was not of interest within this study, since this was also not included in the thesis of Van den Brink et al. (2021).

The reliability of the interviews was ensured by: guaranteeing anonymity, giving summaries during the interview of what has been discussed so far, and recording the interviews so that they could be listened to and transcribed at a later time (Baarda & Van der Hulst, 2017). At the start of the research the reliability of the interviews with the operators was of concern, since these respondents might be reluctant to say something negative about the organization they work for. Consequently, important factors influencing the effectiveness of LEAP could stay hidden. To ensure more reliable answers, the guaranteed anonymity was emphasized and the interviewer asked multiple questions about what had made the program more as well as less effective.



## Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim and then analysed according to the grounded theory methodology (Saldaña, 2013-a). A process of initial coding was performed, whereby through systematic, analytic induction, the qualitative data was divided into statements that were labelled according to their content (Saldaña, 2013-b). For this labelling process In Vivo coding was used, so when naming the labels, an attempt was made to reflect the language of the interviewees as much as possible (Saldaña, 2013-a). After this, a process of axial coding took place whereby the labels were divided into different dimensions according to the subject discussed in the fragment (Saldaña, 2013-c). Within one dimension, the statements made by different interviewees were studied and compared with each other. Statements with matching content were grouped by placing them under the same theme. Finally, a theoretical coding process was performed to arrive at the results (Saldaña, 2013-c). Reliability of the qualitative analysis was ensured by performing the initial coding twice per interview and by asking two other researchers to participate in the initial coding process of one interview. The found labels by the three researchers were compared with each other. Differences were discussed and some labels revised.

## Results

From the analyses of the interviews emerged nine themes that, according to the respondents, reflect the factors influencing the effectiveness of LEAP. The different groups that were interviewed mentioned mainly the same themes. However, they did not interpret all themes in the same way. To be included in this results section, it did not matter if the theme was interpreted in a positive or a negative way, just that the respondent showed that it influenced the effectiveness of LEAP. The themes therefore have neutral names. The themes that emerged are shown in Table 1 from most mentioned to least mentioned.

Table 1

*The table shows how many of the respondents mentioned a theme, organized per group. x/y means that amount x of the total amount y of the respondents in that group mentioned the theme.*

... mentioned by ...	Researcher	Operators	Principal
Operator providing ...	0/1	4/4	1/1
Government involvement	1/1	4/4	1/1
Funding	1/1	3/4	1/1
Collaboration	0/1	4/4	1/1
Power relations	1/1	2/4	0/1
Educational stakeholders	0/1	2/4	0/1
Community involvement	0/1	3/4	1/1
Challenges	0/1	4/4	1/1
Undetailed/Broken contracts	1/1	0/4	1/1

In this results section the nine themes will be described. Then, the model created from these themes, illustrating the effectiveness of LEAP as viewed by the involved parties, will be explained. Lastly, a comparison will be outlined between the created model and the model of Van den Brink et al. (2021).

## **Themes**

### ***Operators provide***

When talking about what makes LEAP effective, both the Operators and the Principal mentioned the services and materials that the operators provide. These include knowledge, teacher training to improve teacher performance and the provision of academic and infrastructural supplies. All Operators and the Principal mentioned that conducting evaluations to know where support is needed, also enhances the effectiveness of LEAP.

Furthermore, three of the four Operators and the Principal emphasized strongly that monitoring the schools by the operators is what makes LEAP effective. After asking what makes LEAP schools more effective than conventional public schools one Operator answered: *“Simple reason. The government does not have the resources to do the kind of qualitative monitoring, [...], that we put in place as providers.”* (O3). The Principal described that *“Once we are not being monitored, we are not being guarded, we are not being reminded regarding those things that we need to do. Sooner or later we will start to go back to the old system.”* (P)

Another reason that two of the four Operators and the Principal gave is about the commitment of the operators to the LEAP-schools and its community. *“Efficacy means the commitment [...] of all of our teachers to increase learning outcomes, our dedication to these schools, holding our staff and our teachers accountable.”*(O3).<sup>2</sup> According to the Principal the commitment of the operator has to do with its passion for improving education.

### ***Government involvement***

All respondents described that the government has an influence on the effectiveness of LEAP. Operator 4 even explained that the acting of the government *“defines the efficacy of LEAP”* (O4). The commitment of the government is seen by the Operators and the Principal as important; this holds true for both the financial support and social support. An indecisive government has a negative influence on the effectiveness of LEAP, whereas a committed government that shows trust in the operators by for example providing a multiyear contract, will boost the effectiveness.

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<sup>2</sup> Efficacy and effectiveness were used within the interviews as interchangeable. Therefore, within this and following quotes ‘efficacy’ can be read as ‘effectiveness’.

According to two of the four Operators the effectiveness of LEAP went down when there was a change in government: *“It started going down because the new government was indecisive as to whether it wanted to continue with this program.”* (O3) Operator 3 explains that because of this indecisiveness, donors providing important funding were stepping back. This also confirms that government commitment is important for the effectiveness of LEAP.

The Principal added that government supervision is important for enhancing the effectiveness of LEAP. According to the Principal it is necessary for the government to check *“whether [the operators] are implementing accordingly or contrary”* (P) to the signed contract, since he sees some partners impeding the process of transforming the education.

### ***Funding***

According to almost all interviewees, except one Operator, funding is important in keeping the LEAP program running.<sup>3</sup> LEAP as a public-private partnership program, was started in the first place since the government of Liberia did not have enough resources to improve the quality of education themselves. The financial support from the private sector is therefore an important factor for the effectiveness of LEAP. One Operator gave the example that more teachers can be paid now that the private sector supports education in Liberia.

According to the interviewees, LEAP becomes less effective when there is a change in funding and when there is a delay in funding. When the new government came there was a change in the funding system of LEAP: *“They started [originally] with getting donors funding the whole program, then they made it possible for funders to just support couple of organizations and the whole distortion came from there.”* (O2). Due to this change in the system some operators were not able to get enough funds to support their schools. Funding delays were according to Operator 3 also decreasing the effectiveness of LEAP. This respondent added that when the funding stabilized, the program became more effective again.

### ***Collaboration***

Another theme that was mentioned by the Operators and the Principal is the need of good collaboration between the government, operators and educational stakeholders to make LEAP an effective program. Besides this, the collaboration between operators was seen as benefitting the effectiveness of LEAP. Respondents talked about opening their books for each other and learning from the government and other operators or schools to improve their own model of providing quality education.

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<sup>3</sup> This last Operator also mentioned something about funding, but this part of the interview was not intelligible, and therefore not included in this results section.

Some interviewees described that there currently was a good collaboration between the different parties. Another interviewee mentioned that between the government and the operators *“there was not enough and fruitful communication or collaboration”* (O2). This interviewee explains later in the interview that better collaboration between the government and operators would make LEAP more effective and more sustainable.

### ***Power relations***

During the interview the Researcher described that the public-private partnership in Liberia is complicated since the operators have more power than the government within the education system, when it should be the other way around. The Researcher also describes that the operators, in turn, don't have much power over the teachers in their schools. When teachers realize this, they won't be as motivated as before, as explained by the researcher: *“You can imagine somebody shows up and tells you: you need to come to school every day. And you're like okay and start doing it. And you start to realize like after a year that if you don't show up they actually cannot fire you and you keep getting your pay check – so why exactly should I listen to you.”* (R).

Two Operators also talked about the power relations present in the program and how these dynamics influence the effectiveness of LEAP. One of the Operators describes - in contrast to the Researcher - that the government has more power than the operators. The other Operator describes how one operator has more rights within the project than others and can therefore choose which schools it wants to manage, despite the wishes of the others. As a result this operator with supposedly more rights *“chose the schools that others had already chosen. And they pushed others in areas they had not intended to operate in.”* (O2). These other operators were pushed towards remote areas where it was more difficult to manage their schools in a proper way. Overall, the existing power relations within the program influence the possibilities that an operator has for managing their appointed schools.

### ***Educational stakeholders***

The educational stakeholders are, according to Operator 1: *“mostly the ones working in the education sector. These stakeholders are private education institutions in Liberia. [...] They are also international and national [...] education NGO's in Liberia.”* (O1). Two of the four Operators mentioned the importance of educational stakeholders as educational watchdogs who are checking if the project is functioning according to national and international educational standards. According to Operator 1 the educational stakeholders are the people *“[w]anting to see the best coming from the education system”* (O1). The interviewee added

that working without these educational stakeholders did not meet the educational standards and made the project less effective.

### ***Community involvement***

According to three of the four Operators and the Principal, involvement of parents, teachers, students and other local residents, is an important factor in making LEAP more effective. Operator 1 described LEAP as a “*community driven approach*” (O1) to improve education. By sharing their plans and listening to the critique of the parents at Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, for example, the schools can improve: “*We have constant community engagement. [...] We work with PTA’s to improve everything that needs to be improved in our schools.*” (O4).

The Principal described that for reaching the goals of LEAP it is necessary to have community involvement: “*So LEAP was there to transform the educational system and in order to do that they have to work with the teachers, they have to work with the parents and the community and the students.*” (P). The operators and their schools listen to the community to be able to improve the schools and transform the educational system.

### ***Challenges***

All Operators and the Principal described being faced with challenges at the start of LEAP and while running the program. Operator 2 describes that they: “*quickly were faced with two major academic challenges*” referring to the teaching capabilities of the teachers and the learning capabilities of the students. Besides the academic challenges there were “*all to many other challenges on the logistic side. Like travelling to the places, getting the teachers paid on time. And being able to keep them in school and then securing all the supplies that were not available always in the country. You needed to import even getting them printed was an issue.*” (O2). All these challenges made it complicated for the operators to implement their plans to improve the education. This impacted the effectiveness of LEAP.

### ***Undetailed/breaking contracts***

The Researcher found out while doing research that the contracts between government and operators were not very detailed, causing some operators interpreting them in an undesirable way. This resulted in the project being effective in the schools of those operators, but detrimental for public schools in the surroundings. This had to do with the reshuffling of teachers and the unenrolling of students, so the other schools in the environment got overcrowded and had the less competent teachers: “*[operators] are reshuffling the good teachers to the LEAP school and bad teachers to the other public schools.*” (R)

The researcher also sensed that the operators are not there to improve the education in Liberia, but are mostly using this program for their own marketing strategy: *“What they really wanted was to use Liberia as a PR to get money for other projects or eventually to go global. They really wanted to show that it worked here so they could ask for more money. They were playing a different game. Their game was not to improve the schools in Liberia, period. It was this big international scheme.” (R)*

The Principal described that it is also an issue that some operators and other partners in the program are not acting according to the agreement they signed. According to the Principal this also has an influence on the effectiveness of LEAP. The operators made no comment about the strictness of the contracts or whether they did or did not follow them.

**Model**

With these nine themes a model is created illustrating the factors and the relations between these factors, influencing the effectiveness of LEAP (see figure 2). To know what factors influence the effectiveness of LEAP it is important to know what LEAP is striving for.

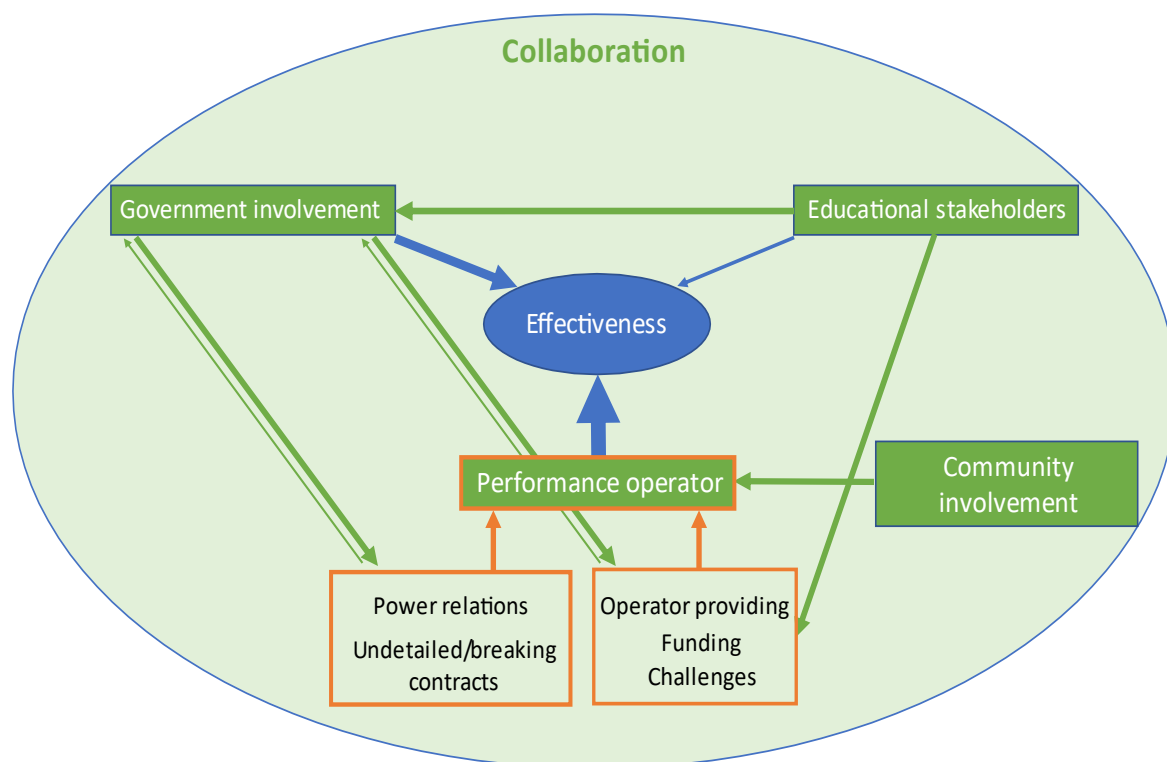


Figure 2. Practical model describing the effectiveness of LEAP based on interviews with 1 researcher, 4 operators and 1 principal.

The different arrow colors represent different kind of influences. The blue arrows represent a direct influence on the effectiveness. The green arrows represent a direct influence on the factor it is pointing to and an indirect influence on the effectiveness. The orange lines and arrows represent factors influencing and the performance of the operator.

The thickness of the arrows shows the strength of the influence. A thicker arrow resembles a stronger influence. The strength of the different arrows is based on the frequency with which a theme was mentioned in the interviews.

According to the interviews this can be summarized as ‘transforming the educational system and improving learning gains and child safety in and around school’.

The model, in figure 2, shows the four different actors within the program influencing each other and influencing the effectiveness of the program. The *government* and the *educational stakeholders* are influencing the effectiveness of LEAP directly and indirectly through influencing the five themes positioned in the orange boxes. These five themes only influence the effectiveness indirectly through the performance of the operator and are therefore positioned under the newly created umbrella-theme *performance operator*. The *performance of the operator* has the biggest influence on the effectiveness of LEAP. The *community* only influences the effectiveness indirectly through their involvement in the performance of the operator. The theme *collaboration* is positioned in a circle around the other actors and factors. The collaboration of all the actors, about the themes and about other subject, influences the effectiveness as well.

The theme *performance operator* was created, since the analysis of the nine themes showed that most of the themes influence the effectiveness of reaching LEAP’s pursuit through influencing the performance of the operators. What the *operator provides* clearly has to do with its performance. The *funding* of the program, the amount of funding and the possible delays, also influence the acting of the operators and indirectly the effectiveness of LEAP. The same can be said for the existing *power relations*. The extent to which the government has control over the operators or the operators over the teachers in their school, influences what the operators can achieve on the ground. The *challenges* discussed in the interviews were challenges that operators encounter while managing their schools. By definition this is a theme that influences the effectiveness of LEAP through the performance of the operator. *Having an undetailed contract or breaking it* is something that influences the functioning of the operator as well. The *community involvement* is a factor that takes place at the level of the school and describes a possible way of how the operators might work to enhance the educational system. The existence of community involvement thus influences the performance of the operator and indirectly the effectiveness of LEAP. Since the community is an actor within the program and not a factor this theme is positioned on its own and not in the orange box with the others.

Three of the themes do not influence the effectiveness of the program solely through influencing the performance of the operators. The *government involvement* influences how much money and what kind of contract the operators get. This influences the possibilities of the operator on the ground. Also the supervision of the government on the operators

influences the functioning of the operator. At the same time the government decides how the educational system will be transformed, by whom and who will advise this. Therefore, the government is not just influencing the operators but determining the system. The *educational stakeholders* influence the effectiveness in multiple ways. On the one hand they influence the plans of the government by raising their voice if they think the plans are not based on a well-founded idea. On the other hand the educational stakeholders can influence what the operator provides, the funding process and create challenges for the operators. At the same time the educational stakeholders determine what is deemed as effective in the case of LEAP, based on the national and international educational standards. Lastly, the *collaboration* between the different parties is also a theme that does not solely influence the effectiveness of LEAP through the performance of the operators. The collaboration between the government, the operators and the educational stakeholders influences the possible transformation of the educational system. By collaborating, the actors are influencing each other and therefore indirectly the effectiveness of LEAP.

### **Comparison and Conclusion**

The final step is to compare the created model with the model proposed by Van den Brink et al. (2021). Through this comparison, insight can be reached regarding the extent to which the reality of LEAP (figure 2) matches with what was found in interdisciplinary research as the effective way of intervening in education (figure 1). In the following text the model of Van den Brink et al. (2021) will be referred to as the theoretical model, as it was based on theory and literature. The model created on the basis of the interviews will be referred to as the practical model, since it was based on information from the practice.

A significant difference between the two models is that the theoretical model describes reaching effectiveness of an intervention as one ongoing reflection process, taking place on a more abstract level and on a more contextual level. The practical model on the other hand includes only the contextual level. Because of this, comparison can only be made between the contextual parts of the two models. Therefore, an analysis has been performed to see to what extent the practical model corresponds to the block situated on the contextual level of the theoretical model (see figure 3).

The contextual part of the theoretical model states that in order to be effective, an intervention needs to contain the following requirement: ‘in the local context it is deliberately determined what counts as valuable education’. This entails that within the context in which the education will take place, all local parties involved deliberate about what the education should look like to be valuable within that context.



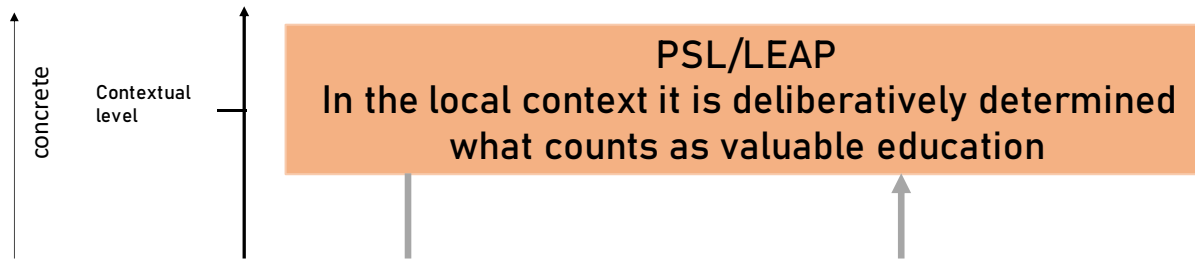


Figure 3. The contextual part of the theoretical model of Van den Brink et al. (2021)

Note. Partly taken from Van den Brink, J., Cup, V., Jaspers, A. (2021). *Look twice before you LEAP* (Interdisciplinair sluitstuk). Universiteit Utrecht.

Within the practical model, ‘valuable education’ is not a prominent theme, since none of the interviewees mentioned this explicitly. However, when you regard ‘valuable education’ as part of the ‘effectiveness’ – positioned in the middle of the practical model – the practical model predicts how ‘what is deemed as valuable education’ is determined within the context of LEAP. Verifying this with the transcriptions of the interviews led to the conclusion that the four actors can all be interpreted as partly influencing what ‘valuable education’ looks like. The government hires operators and draws up a contract with rules to which the operator needs to comply. These rules reflect what the government thinks is important for the education in their country. The operators as educational organizations have a clear vision of how to improve education. This can be interpreted as a vision of how to make education valuable. The educational stakeholders are international and national education organizations that are checking if the project meets international and national educational standards. They determine what these standards are and therefore when education counts as valuable. The last actor within the model is the community. In PTA meetings the operators listen to what the community thinks about the education, listens to their criticism and answers their questions. In this way the community is engaged in determining what education should look like to be ‘valuable’.

This community involvement might match with what Van den Brink et al. (2021) mean with local deliberation, whereby people concerned within the situation are involved in determining what is a relevant and valuable way to educate. It is difficult to compare the two models on this point, since Van den Brink et al. (2021) do not explicitly say who these people are. However, it is clearly stated that the wishes and needs of the local population, which is the community, should be regarded as most important when determining what the education should look like. Within the practical model there are, besides the community, many other actors included in this process. Questions can be asked about who’s opinions, needs and

wishes have the upper hand in determining what counts as ‘valuable education’. These other actors have according to the model more influence on the effectiveness of LEAP, compared to the community. Therefore, the two models do not correspond.

Furthermore, the practical model entails much more factors influencing the effectiveness of LEAP, as compared to the theoretical model. Where the theoretical model focuses on the education itself, the practical model also entails factors as ‘collaboration’, ‘funding’, ‘power relations’ and ‘undetailed/breaking contracts’. These factors were either not deemed as important or not found at all by the interdisciplinary research of Van den Brink et al. (2021).

In conclusion, in contrast to the theoretical model, the practical model shows that what counts as valuable education within the local context of LEAP-schools, is not only determined in local deliberation, which can be compared with the community involvement, but also by the government, the operators’ vision on education and by what is nationally and internationally set as the educational standard. According to the theoretical model local deliberation and determination about what counts as valuable education is necessary to be effective. Within the reality of LEAP this is not what is happening since there are more parties involved in determining what should count as valuable education. Therefore, currently, the way the effectiveness of LEAP is viewed by the involved parties does not match the model of effective interventions in education of Van den Brink et al. (2021). Meanwhile, the practical model gives an overview of many other factors influencing the effectiveness of LEAP which were not included in the model of Van den Brink et al. (2021).

### **Discussion**

By performing qualitative research, a broad view of the factors influencing the effectiveness of LEAP on a contextual level was obtained. Through talking about personal experiences of the respondents, dynamics of different themes contributing to the determination of what counts as ‘valuable education’ became clear. Besides, themes emerged that were not found or deemed important within earlier research by Van den Brink et al. (2021). This might be due to the scope of the interdisciplinary research resulting from the included disciplines. For example, by including a discipline as Governance and Management it is possible that there would have been more attention for the influence of the funding of the program and that this factor would have been included in the theoretical model of Van den Brink et al. (2021). Another possible explanation is that it is almost impossible to create a theoretical model for the contextual situation which matches the reality, since it is not easy to consider what factors influence the effectiveness on the contextual level, from non-contextual sources.

Although the practical model gives a broad view of the contextual reality of LEAP, it is still not a complete perspective. Many of the emerged themes were related to the performance of the operators. This notion might be the reality, but it is also possible that due to that mostly operators were interviewed this perspective got the upper hand, with the consequence that the perspectives of the researcher and the principal are less prominent within the model. For example, the theme ‘challenges’ was only about the challenges the operators encounter while operating their schools. It is likely that other involved parties experience different challenges while trying to make LEAP an effective program.

An important perspective that is missing from this research is that of the government. Despite much trying, the researcher was not successful in contacting someone from the ministry of Education of Liberia to share their view on the effectiveness of LEAP. Other perspectives that are missing from this research are those of the teachers. They could have given the best view on how the education on the ground is different from before and how they feel their teaching and the learning of their students has improved or not. At the same time the students and their parents could have given a great insight in whether the education provided by LEAP aligns with their needs and wishes. In that way it could have become clear if the community involvement, as described in the practical model, corresponds with the local deliberation as described in the theoretical model. Unfortunately, due to the fact that not many people in Liberia have access to the internet and the lack of time to find someone who has this access, it was not possible to interview a teacher, student or parent.

Beforehand, concern existed that the operators might paint a too rosy picture of the effectiveness of LEAP. Within the interviews both positive and negative sides were addressed. However, at some moments it was clear that the operators were paying attention to what they were saying. For example, one Operator was repeatedly giving reasons to justify poor results on the independent first year evaluation rapport. The Operator described that they were striving for long-term results and therefore did not score well on this first year evaluation. Since the Operator mentioned this very often, suspicion rose if this was really the reason for bad results in the evaluation. At the same time it is also possible that the interviewee really believes in the work the organization does and does not agree with the representation within the evaluation. In addition, the concern that the operators would paint a too rosy picture was confirmed, since the Researcher and Principal described that the operators do not always perform as they should, and the Operators themselves said nothing about this. These confirmations of this concern raises questions about the openness of the

Operators. Perhaps, there are factors influencing the performance of the operators which were not uncovered within this research.

Further research should focus on uncovering the perspectives of all the involved parties of LEAP, to be able to construct a coherent view of the effectiveness of the program. Following this, it is advised to conduct interdisciplinary research with a combination of desk research and field research. Combining the theoretical insights from different disciplines as pedagogical sciences, post-colonial philosophy and applied ethics – as done by Van den Brink et al. (2021) – with practical insights from disciplines that are focused on doing field research in one common ground and more comprehensive understanding, could yield fruitful results to understand the effectiveness of LEAP. Only when full understanding of the situation is reached, plans can be formulated of how to increase the effectiveness.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview guide

This interview is being held in the context of the thesis of Vera Cup at Utrecht University. The thesis is about the effectiveness of education interventions and studies specifically the case of the Liberian Education Advancement Programme.

These interviews try to answer the question:

**What factors play a part in determining the effectiveness of LEAP, according to the involved parties?**

Before the interview starts the interviewer chitchats with the interviewee about some basic things. The interviewer will ask the interviewee to tell something about themselves. Then, the interviewer will introduce herself and say something about how corona and all the online activities gave her inspiration for these interviews.

*Opening question:*

*How are you today?*

Okay about the interview, I will ask you some questions and you will answer them. Please do not hold back, I am interested in everything you think of.

I will not use your name in the thesis, but I will say that you are [researcher/educationprovider/teacher/principal]

Would you allow me to record this interview for my personal use when writing the thesis? I will delete this recording after 3 months.

Please fill in this survey: (during the first few minutes of the interview)

**[https://survey.uu.nl/jfe/form/SV\\_0vMVAVzlOaIsm0e](https://survey.uu.nl/jfe/form/SV_0vMVAVzlOaIsm0e)**

You can always decide to stop with the interview or to take back something you said until 3 weeks after the interview.

<b>Questions:</b>	<b>Discussed?</b>
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<p><b>Introduction questions</b></p> <p>How would you describe LEAP?</p>	
<p>How are you connected to LEAP?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What kind of work did/do you do for the program?</li> <li>- How would you describe a usual LEAPday for you?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Transition questions:</b></p>	
<p>Do you think LEAP is effective?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In what?</li> <li>- Why?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o (check if it has to do with achieving its goals?)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- What factors contribute to this?</li> <li>- Could you give an example?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Key questions:</b></p>	
<p>How would you define the concept of efficacy in the case of LEAP? What processes influence the efficacy of LEAP and how?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Goals             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you decide what to strive for in this project?</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Method             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you try to achieve these goals?</li> <li>• How does the method come to be?</li> <li>• How do you choose for a certain method?</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Evaluating process?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you evaluate the method and process of LEAP within the schools?</li> <li>• How do you evaluate this?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<p><b>STORYLINE TIME</b></p> <p>I will open up this whiteboard in our meeting and make the basis. I will ask you to change this line according to what you think. The question here is how do you see the effectiveness of LEAP over time. When was it very effective and when not so. We will start at the start of PSL in 2016. We go to start of 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. We will not talk about the coronatimes for this research.</p> <p>You can click on the line and then dots will appear. You can use these dots to change the line. And you can move the text by clicking on it and then moving it. Just try it out. You can tell me about the choices you make while changing the line and after I will ask some questions about it.</p>	

<p>When was it at its best and when was it not so effective?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why?</li> <li>- What processes made it more effective?</li> <li>- What processes made it less effective?</li> <li>- How was the decision process? Did that influence the effectiveness?</li> <li>- Could you give an example?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Closing questions:</b></p>	
<p>[give a summary of the interview and ask if the interviewee agrees]</p> <p>Is there anything you would like to add too what we have discussed? Or is there something you think we should talk about, which we haven't touched upon yet?</p> <p>Do you maybe know a teacher I could interview?</p>	

Thank you very much for this interview!

I want to interview more people and I am especially looking for teachers and students of the LEAP schools and I was hoping I could talk with the minister of education. Could you get me in contact with any of these people?

Okay thank you very much and have a lovely day!