

Stakeholder Support on Community Colleges in Sierra Leone: Addressing Youth Unemployment Through Education

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ABSTRACT

Sierra Leone faces a pressing challenge of youth unemployment and limited postsecondary educational access, exacerbated by high failure rates on the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. Community colleges have emerged as a viable solution in various global contexts, offering flexible pathways for vocational training and academic advancement. This study examines Sierra Leonean higher education stakeholders' views on establishing a community college system to address youth unemployment and improve postsecondary accessibility. Applying the theory of planned behavior, we surveyed 151 stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, students, unemployed youths, and parents. Findings indicate a consensus on the severity of youth unemployment and limited educational opportunities. Notably, unemployed youths and faculty members exhibit the most substantial support for community colleges, while current students and administrators show comparatively lower levels of support. These insights suggest that implementing community colleges could be a viable strategy to expand educational access and mitigate youth unemployment in Sierra Leone. Policy recommendations and implications for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Sierra Leone, vocation and technical education, community college, youth unemployment, alternative education, STEM-focused programs

INTRODUCTION

Sierra Leone, a West African nation with an estimated population of seven million (McCaskie et al., 2020), is experiencing a significant youth crisis characterized by high unemployment and low literacy rates among individuals aged 18 to 35 (National Youth Commission Act, 2009; Maconachie & Conteh, 2025). A critical barrier to postsecondary education is the high failure rate on the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE), with over 80% of students failing annually (USAID, 2014; The World Bank, 2017; Government of Sierra Leone, 2019). This systemic issue results in many youths remaining semi-literate and unemployed, unable to access higher education or the formal workforce (Peters, 2010).

The existing Technical, Vocational Education, and Training (TVET) system, the primary alternative for those unable to enter universities, focuses predominantly on vocational skills and lacks the technological training required for emerging industries (Matsumoto, 2018). Consequently, the TVET system has been ineffective in expanding access to postsecondary education and workforce development, leading to a demand for alternative models that offer flexible pathways for youth (Danish Trade Union Development Agency, 2017).

One potential solution is the adoption of a community college system, which has been effective in various contexts worldwide, including parts of Africa (Raby & Valeau, 2009). Community colleges offer a range of programs, from vocational training to associate degrees, and are designed to be accessible and responsive to local labor market needs. These programs often include STEM-focused pathways such as engineering technology, computer science, environmental science, biotechnology, and healthcare-related fields. Additionally, they provide workforce-oriented certifications in areas like cybersecurity, data analytics, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing, ensuring that students develop skills aligned with emerging industries and technological advancements. The World Bank (2013) recommends establishing such alternative institutional models to provide students with flexibility in accessing postsecondary education and acquiring workforce skills.

The successful implementation of a community college system in Sierra Leone depends largely on the support of key stakeholders within the higher education sector. Stakeholders include higher education administrators, faculty, students, unemployed youths, parents, and policymakers. Their support or opposition could significantly influence the feasibility and successful implementation of such a system.

The theory of planned behavior (TpB), developed by Ajzen (1991), provides a useful framework for analyzing stakeholders' intentions to support the establishment of a community college system. TpB posits that an individual's

intention to engage in a behavior is influenced by their attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In this context, stakeholders' attitudes would encompass their beliefs about the benefits of community colleges in expanding access to postsecondary education. Subjective norms would involve perceived societal pressures or expectations regarding the adoption of such a system, and perceived behavioral control would relate to stakeholders' beliefs about their capacity to influence the establishment and success of community colleges. Applying TpB to this study allows for a structured examination of the factors influencing stakeholders' intentions. By assessing attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, it is possible to predict the likelihood of stakeholders supporting the implementation of a community college system. This approach also facilitates the identification of potential barriers and enablers, providing valuable insights for policymakers and educational planners.

Research Questions

- 1) What are the perceptions and attitudes of Sierra Leonean higher education stakeholders regarding youth unemployment and postsecondary accessibility, and how do these influence their support for a community college system?
- 2) What are the group-specific variations in stakeholders' intentions to support establishing a two-year community college system as a solution to postsecondary accessibility challenges in Sierra Leone?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocational and Technical Institutions in Sierra Leone

Vocational and technical education has played a crucial role in Sierra Leone's postsecondary education landscape, particularly as an alternative pathway for youth unable to access traditional university education. During the colonial era, technical institutions such as the Government Technical Institute (GTI), founded in 1957, served as foundational centers for vocational training, providing certifications aligned with international standards like those of the City and Guilds of London. GTI focused on preparing skilled labor for Sierra Leone's industries, offering programs in engineering, construction, and related fields.

Following independence in 1961, Sierra Leone's polytechnic and technical education sector expanded to include institutions such as Bunumbu Teachers College (BTC), established in 1924, and Eastern Polytechnic, formed in 2001 through the merger of BTC and GTI. These institutions provided teacher training, vocational certifications, and technical skills development in fields such as medical laboratory science and business administration. Eastern Polytechnic eventually

transitioned to a university in 2021, reflecting the government's emphasis on enhancing technical education's scope and prestige.

The Milton Margai College of Education and Technology (MMCET), the largest non-degree-granting institution in Sierra Leone, has undergone several transformations since its inception as a teacher training department at Fourah Bay College. Its evolution into a polytechnic institution and eventual conversion into Milton Margai Technical University (MMTU) in 2021 underscores the growing recognition of vocational and technical education as critical for workforce development.

Despite these advancements, technical and vocational education in Sierra Leone faces challenges, including insufficient funding, outdated curricula, and inadequate alignment with labor market demands (World Bank, 2017). The Polytechnic Act of 2001 aimed to address these issues by creating a framework for modernizing institutions like Freetown Polytechnic and Eastern Polytechnic. However, ongoing deficiencies highlight the need for reforms to improve quality, relevance, and access, ensuring these institutions can fulfill their potential as engines of economic growth and human capital development.

These examples illustrate vocational and technical institutions' pivotal yet underutilized role in addressing Sierra Leone's education and workforce challenges. Strengthening these institutions is essential to equip the country's youth with skills aligned with the demands of its industries, particularly in agriculture, mining, and infrastructure.

The West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination

The West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is a pre-university assessment administered by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) for Anglophone West African countries, including Sierra Leone (Clark, 2015). Established under the colonial British education system, the WASSCE has become a critical yet formidable barrier for students seeking higher education. The assessment requires passing grades in at least five subjects, including core subjects like Mathematics and English Language Arts, with university admission contingent upon meeting additional departmental requirements (Sierra Leone Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation, 2019).

In Sierra Leone, failure rates for the WASSCE have remained staggeringly high, with 94% of students failing in 2019 and 95.5% in 2020 (Government of Sierra Leone, 2019; Sierra Leone Telegraph, 2020). This persistent underperformance reflects systemic issues in the education system, such as inadequate preparation, limited access to quality resources, and socioeconomic inequalities. Consequently, a large proportion of youth exits the basic education system without the qualifications necessary to access postsecondary institutions, exacerbating the country's high rate of youth unemployment (UNDP-SL, 2019).

The failure rate has also impacted alternative pathways. While technical vocational education and training (TVET) institutions theoretically provide a secondary route for skill acquisition, they are often viewed as less favorable due to quality concerns and misalignment with labor market demands (Ofori-Attah, 2015; World Bank, 2017). With industries like mining, agriculture, and infrastructure requiring a skilled workforce, educational access and skills development gaps present a critical challenge to human capital development in Sierra Leone (Government of Sierra Leone, 2015).

Addressing the WASSCE's systemic barriers and strengthening alternative pathways like TVET are essential for improving postsecondary accessibility and workforce readiness. Efforts must prioritize aligning these systems with national labor market demands while addressing the socio-educational disparities that hinder success (Polytechnics Act, 2001; Matsumoto, 2018).

Crisis of Youth Unemployment in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone continues to experience a "crisis of youth," characterized by limited education, high unemployment, and pervasive marginalization among its 15–35-year-old population, which makes up 39.4% of the nation (Government of Sierra Leone, 2015). This crisis has persisted from the pre-civil war era into the post-conflict period, with youth unemployment rates exacerbating systemic issues of poverty and underdevelopment (Bolten, 2012; Maconachie & Conteh, 2025). Scholars argue that limited opportunities for education and formal employment leave youth in resource-dependent areas like Kono to rely on artisanal mining and informal livelihoods, perpetuating marginalization and underemployment (Wilson, 2025).

Youth unemployment is a significant factor affecting national stability. Approximately 60% of youth remain unemployed, with many engaged in irregular employment or self-employment, often without the requisite skills to meet labor market demands (ILO, 2017; Djossou et al., 2025). This mismatch between educational outcomes and workforce needs fuels economic stagnation and deepens youth frustration. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP-SL, 2019) emphasizes that skills gaps in Sierra Leone's labor market hinder the country's capacity for human capital development.

The persistence of these challenges raises concerns about potential social unrest. Scholars highlight parallels between current frustrations and conditions that contributed to youth participation in Sierra Leone's civil war (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, 2004; Ibrahim & Abdulqadir, 2025). Addressing these challenges through expanded educational access and employment opportunities is imperative to prevent future conflicts and foster social stability (Braima et al., 2015; Perry et al., 2025).

Educational Accessibility and Inequality

Postsecondary education remains largely inaccessible in Sierra Leone, particularly for disadvantaged youth from rural areas. Structural barriers, including the high cost of education, limited infrastructure, and systemic inequality, prevent significant progress (Muhr, 2016; Pai, 2025). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2004) identified education as critical to addressing youth marginalization, recommending expanded access as a strategy to foster economic growth and social inclusion.

The West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is a major bottleneck in Sierra Leone's educational system. Over 90% of students fail to achieve the scores required for university admission annually, a reflection of broader deficiencies in primary and secondary education (Government of Sierra Leone, 2019). This high failure rate disproportionately impacts rural and low-income populations, further entrenching inequalities in access to postsecondary education and workforce readiness (UNDP-SL, 2019; Furuoka et al., 2025).

Government efforts to address these challenges include the Polytechnic Act (2001) and Universities Act (2005), which sought to decentralize governance and expand access through alternative institutions. However, the technical vocational education and training (TVET) system, a cornerstone of these reforms, has struggled to achieve its intended outcomes. Studies highlight the system's poor management, inadequate resources, and lack of alignment with labor market needs as significant barriers to its effectiveness (World Bank, 2017; Kongoley & Lahai, 2018).

The Community College Model: A Potential Solution

The American community college system offers a model that could address the intertwined challenges of youth unemployment and educational inequality in Sierra Leone. Community colleges provide accessible, affordable, and flexible postsecondary education options, serving as gateways to higher education and workforce development for disadvantaged populations (Bailey et al., 2015; Cohen et al., 2014). Their open admission policies and community-based focus make them particularly effective in meeting the needs of underserved groups.

Community colleges play a critical role in workforce alignment by offering vocational training, academic programs, and transferable credits that enable students to pursue further education or enter the job market directly (Palmadessa, 2017). These institutions also address regional labor market needs, making them adaptable to diverse contexts. For example, Sierra Leone's artisanal mining regions could benefit from programs tailored to develop skills relevant to the extractive industries, aligning with the country's economic priorities (Maconachie & Conteh, 2025).

The democratizing role of community colleges is evident in their contribution to educational equity in the United States, where they account for 35% of undergraduate enrollment (CCRC, 2021). Scholars argue that adapting this model to Sierra Leone could provide a viable pathway for expanding postsecondary access, reducing youth unemployment, and fostering economic development (Treat & Barnard, 2012; Mullin, 2010). However, the model's success in Sierra Leone would require substantial stakeholder engagement and consideration of local needs and constraints (Bailey et al., 2015).

Stakeholder Perceptions and the Theory of Planned Behavior

The success of a community college system in Sierra Leone depends on the perceptions and attitudes of key stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and community leaders. The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) provides a framework for understanding these attitudes and their influence on stakeholder intentions to support such a system. According to the theory, three factors predict behavioral intentions: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

Stakeholders' attitudes toward the community college model are shaped by their evaluation of its potential to address youth unemployment and expand access to education. Positive perceptions of the model's affordability, flexibility, and workforce alignment could support its implementation (Francis et al., 2004). Subjective norms, or the perceived social pressure to endorse or reject the model, also play a critical role. For instance, stakeholders in mining regions like Kono may face pressure to align with local development goals (Wilson, 2025). Perceived behavioral control, or stakeholders' belief in their ability to influence the system's success, is crucial for fostering collective action and commitment (Rezapur-Shahkolai et al., 2020).

Group-specific variations in stakeholder attitudes may also influence their intentions. For example, policymakers may prioritize cost-effectiveness and economic outcomes, while educators may focus on academic quality and alignment with existing curricula (Hassan et al., 2021). Understanding these variations is essential for designing a community college system that meets diverse stakeholder expectations and addresses the unique challenges of Sierra Leone's educational landscape (Sungur-Gul & Ates, 2021).

Implications for Postsecondary Accessibility in Sierra Leone

To address youth unemployment and educational inequality, Sierra Leone must adopt innovative solutions that expand access while aligning with workforce needs. The community college model offers a flexible framework that complements existing institutions, providing alternative pathways for

disadvantaged youth. However, its successful implementation requires careful consideration of stakeholder perceptions, local labor market demands, and systemic barriers.

Efforts to establish a community college system should emphasize its potential to address unemployment and foster economic growth, leveraging stakeholder engagement to build consensus and drive action. By aligning the model with national development goals and tailoring programs to regional needs, Sierra Leone can create a sustainable solution for expanding postsecondary accessibility and fostering social stability.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a correlational research design to explore the relationships between variables, specifically examining how stakeholders' positions or professions, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral controls (independent variables) influenced their intentions (dependent variable) to support the establishment of a two-year community college system in Sierra Leone. Correlational research was appropriate for this study as it sought to identify connections among these variables without manipulating them, aligning with Creswell's (2012) definition of correlational design.

The study also investigated stakeholders' perspectives on two critical issues: the crisis of youth unemployment and the barriers to higher education accessibility in Sierra Leone. These perspectives were measured using elements of Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (TpB), which provided a framework to understand stakeholders' attitudes, societal pressures (subjective norms), and perceived control over expanding access to postsecondary education.

Study Population and Sample

The target population included Sierra Leoneans and non-Sierra Leoneans affected by higher education accessibility issues, such as students, unemployed youth, faculty, administrators, alumni, sponsors, researchers, and policymakers. These individuals, aged 18 and above, possessed direct or indirect experience with Sierra Leone's higher education system. Their roles positioned them as "experts," a term defined by Meuser and Nagel (2009) to describe individuals with specialized knowledge gained through experience rather than common sense. These experts were uniquely qualified to respond to survey questions, providing insights into higher education accessibility and youth unemployment in Sierra Leone.

Given the impracticality of reaching the entire target population, a sample of approximately 300 participants was identified using a convenience sampling method. This non-random approach, as described by Remler and Van Ryzin

(2011), relies on participants who volunteer to partake in the study. The sample included stakeholders from public and private sector institutions, government and non-governmental organizations, and Sierra Leoneans and non-Sierra Leoneans residing outside Sierra Leone who had experience in the country's higher education system. This diverse sample ensured a broad range of perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for expanding postsecondary education access.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected using the Sierra Leone Postsecondary Education Accessibility Survey (SL-PEAS), an online survey distributed via platforms such as email, LinkedIn, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. Recognizing the challenges of accessing comprehensive databases, the researcher collaborated with community liaisons—individuals affiliated with student unions, faculty senates, and relevant associations—who facilitated survey dissemination among their networks. This approach enhanced outreach while ensuring the inclusion of diverse stakeholder categories.

Instrumentation

The SL-PEAS survey instrument was developed using established guidelines, including Francis et al.'s (2004) manual for constructing TpB-based questionnaires and Bista and Gaulee's (2019) survey on higher education systems in Nepal. The final questionnaire contained 15 Likert-scale questions, focusing on stakeholders' attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral controls, and intentions to support a community college system. The survey also captured demographic data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of respondents' backgrounds.

A pilot study was conducted with 15 participants to assess the survey's validity and practicality. Feedback revealed issues such as the length of time required to complete the survey, particularly in Sierra Leone, where internet connectivity is often unstable. Revisions included consolidating and rewording questions, reducing the number from 23 to 15, and optimizing clarity. The revised survey, more concise and user-friendly, was then distributed widely to collect reliable data.

The survey instrument's reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a result of 0.825, which indicates good internal consistency (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This process ensured that the SL-PEAS questionnaire was a reliable tool for examining stakeholders' perceptions and intentions regarding postsecondary education accessibility expansion in Sierra Leone.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

The study collected responses from 151 participants who consented and completed the survey. These participants were selected based on their involvement in or knowledge of Sierra Leone's higher education system. Participants included higher education administrators, faculty, staff of government and non-governmental agencies, students, parents, sponsors, and unemployed youth, including individuals who had exited the primary education system but were unable to attain postsecondary education. The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized below.

The gender composition of respondents showed a significant male majority, with 79.5% male participants and 20.5% female participants. Most participants (72.8%) resided in Sierra Leone, while 27.2% lived in the United States, and a small percentage (6.6%) resided in other countries, including Europe and other parts of Africa.

The age distribution of respondents revealed a wide range, with the largest proportion (30.5%) falling within the 25–34 age group, followed by 22.5% in the 55–64 age group. A smaller percentage (3.3%) were aged 65 or older. The remaining participants were distributed across other age groups, including 20.5% in the 18–24 range and 13.2% in the 45–54 range.

In terms of educational attainment, the participants exhibited diverse qualifications. While 17.9% held doctoral degrees and 19.9% had master's degrees, a notable portion (23.8%) had completed only their secondary education (WASSCE/GCE). Additionally, 23.2% held bachelor's degrees, and 6.6% had achieved a Higher National Diploma. A smaller group (2.6%) held junior secondary school certificates (BECE), while 1.3% had earned a Higher Teacher Certificate.

Regarding college attendance, 68.2% of participants reported having attended college in Sierra Leone, whereas 31.8% had not. Professionally, the largest group of respondents identified as students (40.4%), followed by administrators (17.9%) and faculty (15.9%). Other groups included unemployed youth (4.0%), parents/sponsors (1.3%), and individuals in various roles, such as policymakers and basic education teachers (20.5%). Lastly, participants' familiarity with the two-year community college system was assessed. The majority (74.2%) were familiar with the system, while 25.8% were not.

The demographic results provided a comprehensive understanding of the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the participants, enriching the study's insights into higher education accessibility challenges in Sierra Leone (see Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Variable	Category	n	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	31	20.5
	Male	120	79.5
Country of Residence	Sierra Leone	113	72.8
	United States	28	27.2
	Other	10	6.6
Age Group	18–24 years	31	20.5
	25–34 years	46	30.5
	35–44 years	15	9.9
	45–54 years	20	13.2
	55–64 years	34	22.5
	65 years and older	5	3.3
College Attendance	Yes	103	68.2
	No	48	31.8
Highest Educational Attainment	Doctorate Degree	27	17.9
	Master's Degree	30	19.9
	Bachelor's Degree	35	23.2
	Higher Teacher Certificate	2	1.3
	Higher National Diploma	10	6.6
	WASSCE/GCE	36	23.8
	BECE (Junior Secondary Certificate)	4	2.6
	Other	7	4.6
Position/Profession	Administrator	27	17.9
	Faculty	24	15.9
	Student	61	40.4
	Unemployed Youth	6	4.0
	Parent/Sponsor	2	1.3
	Other	31	20.5
Familiarity with Community College	Yes	112	74.2
	No	39	25.8

Stakeholder Perceptions and Attitudes on Youth Unemployment and Postsecondary Accessibility in Sierra Leone

The findings revealed that a significant majority of stakeholders perceive youth unemployment in Sierra Leone as a critical issue, with 88.1% (n = 133) agreeing, while only 9.3% (n = 14) disagreed. Similarly, 89.4% (n = 135) of respondents acknowledged limited opportunities for postsecondary education, with just 7.3% (n = 11) disagreeing. These results highlight a consensus among stakeholders on the urgent need to address youth unemployment and expand access to postsecondary education.

Correlation Between Stakeholders' Perceptions and Intentions to Support Postsecondary Accessibility Expansion

Attitudes Toward Accessibility Expansion

The analysis identified a statistically significant positive relationship between stakeholders' attitudes toward postsecondary accessibility expansion and their intentions to support the establishment of a two-year community college system ($r=.375, p < .00, N=151$ $r = .375, p < .001, N = 151$ $r=.375, p < .001, N=151$). This finding led to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, indicating that favorable attitudes toward accessibility expansion are associated with stronger intentions to support the proposed system. Based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines, this relationship demonstrates a moderate effect size, suggesting that attitudes play a meaningful role in shaping stakeholders' support.

Subjective Norms and Postsecondary Accessibility Expansion

A significant positive correlation was also observed between stakeholders' subjective norms regarding accessibility expansion and their intentions to support the establishment of a two-year community college system ($r=.319, p < .001, N=151$ $r = .319, p < .001, N = 151$ $r=.319, p < .001, N=151$). The moderate effect size indicates that societal expectations and perceptions of normative support for accessibility expansion influence stakeholders' intentions. Additionally, subjective norms were significantly correlated with attitudes ($r=.468, p < .001$ $r = .468, p < .001$ $r=.468, p < .001$) and perceived behavioral control ($r=.429, p < .001$ $r = .429, p < .001$ $r=.429, p < .001$), highlighting their interconnected impact on stakeholders' decision-making processes.

Perceived Behavioral Control of Accessibility Expansion

The strongest relationship emerged between perceived behavioral control and intentions to support the use of a two-year community college system ($r=.609, p < .001, N=151$ $r = .609, p < .001, N = 151$ $r=.609, p < .001, N=151$). This large

effect size underscores the critical influence of stakeholders' perceptions of their ability to facilitate accessibility expansion on their willingness to support the initiative. The null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that perceived behavioral control significantly predicts stakeholders' intentions. Additionally, perceived behavioral control was positively correlated with attitudes ($r=.380, p<.001$) and subjective norms ($r=.429, p<.001$), further demonstrating its central role in shaping intentions.

Intentions to Support a Two-Year Community College System

The findings revealed statistically significant relationships between all independent variables—attitudes ($r=.375, p<.001$), subjective norms ($r=.319, p<.001$), and perceived behavioral control ($r=.609, p<.001$)—and the dependent variable, intentions to support a two-year community college system. Collectively, these results emphasize the importance of stakeholders' perceptions, societal expectations, and control beliefs in driving their support for systemic interventions. The strong associations, particularly with perceived behavioral control, suggest that strategies aimed at increasing stakeholder confidence in their ability to influence accessibility expansion may be especially effective in garnering support for community college initiatives.

Stakeholder Intentions to Support a Two-Year College System

The One-Way ANOVA results indicated no statistically significant differences between or within stakeholder groups regarding their intentions to support the establishment of a two-year college system in Sierra Leone ($F(5,145)=0.799, p=.552$). However, post-hoc analysis revealed notable trends among stakeholder groups. Unemployed youth and faculty expressed the highest levels of support for the proposal. Students and administrators showed comparatively lower levels of support, with no significant differences between these two groups. This suggests that unemployed youth and faculty may see greater value or urgency in expanding postsecondary education opportunities through a two-year college system.

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to evaluate the underlying structure of the SL-PEAS instrument and confirm its alignment with the theoretical constructs of attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intentions. Key measures, including Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < .001$) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic (0.818), indicated the data's suitability for factor analysis. Using principal axis factoring with varimax rotation, four distinct factors emerged, explaining 50.2% of the variance. These factors reflected societal expectations, stakeholder attitudes, perceived control, and intentions related to establishing a community college system in Sierra Leone.

Table 2*Results from the Exploratory Factor Analysis of SL-PEAS Questionnaire (N=151)*

SL-PEAS Items	Factor Loading			
	1	2	3	4
Factor 1				
13b. Subjective Norms about public expectations of leaders.	.853			
13c. Subjective Norms about civil society and business expectations.	.825			
13a. Subjective Norms about public support for two-year colleges.	.608			
14a. Perceived Behavioral Control of efforts to create two-year colleges.	.451			
12c. Attitudes toward use of two-year college to prepare youth for jobs.	.358			
12a. Attitudes toward use of two-year college to reduce unemployment.	.344			
Factor 2				
12c. Attitudes toward use of two-year college to prepare youth for jobs.	.331			
15c. Intentions to support new institutions for expansion of access	.801			
15b. Intentions to support proposals to establish two-year colleges	.763			
15a. Intentions to support policy changes to reduce youth unemployment.	.609			
14d. Perceived Behavioral Control of policymakers' decisions	.352			
Factor 3				
14c. Perceived Behavioral Control of colleges for manpower needs		.783		
14d. Perceived Behavioral Control of policymakers' decision		.674		
14b. Perceived Behavioral Control of higher education policies		.308		
Factor 4				
14b. Perceived Behavioral Control of higher education policies				.517
12d. Attitudes toward use of two-year college with credit transfer				.466
12b. Attitudes toward two-year college that accepts minimum WASSCE.				.324

Table 3*Nonparametric Correlations, Spearman's Rho*

	Attitude Scale	Subjective Norm Scale	Perceived Behavioral Control Scale	Intention Scale
Attitudes Scale	--	.533**	.433**	.414**
Subjective Norms Scale	--	--	.578**	.458**
Perceived Behavioral Control Scale	--	--	--	.663**
Intentions Scale	--	--	--	--

Note. (**) Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the perspectives of Sierra Leone's higher education stakeholders on establishing a community college system to enhance postsecondary accessibility and address the high levels of youth unemployment. The findings revealed a widespread acknowledgment of the youth unemployment crisis, as 88% of stakeholders agreed that the unemployment rate is high, and 89.4% recognized the limited opportunities for postsecondary education in the country. These results align with existing literature, which identifies youth unemployment and limited access to education as critical challenges in Sierra Leone (World Bank, 2017; ILO, 2017).

One of the most striking findings is the strong support for the establishment of a community college system, particularly from unemployed youth and faculty members. The theory of planned behavior (TpB) framework helped elucidate how stakeholders' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control contributed to their intentions to support this initiative. The data showed that positive attitudes and perceived societal pressures to expand postsecondary education were significantly associated with stakeholders' intentions to support a community college system. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that societal support and individual control beliefs are key factors in influencing educational reforms (Francis et al., 2004; Ajzen, 1991).

Furthermore, the analysis highlighted group-specific differences, where unemployed youth and faculty demonstrated stronger intentions to support the

community college model than students and administrators. These variations likely reflect the direct impact of limited educational opportunities on unemployed youth and faculty's closer connection with the challenges students face. These results suggest that efforts to implement the community college system should involve stakeholders most affected by educational inequalities, ensuring that their concerns and needs are addressed in policy development.

The exploratory factor analysis confirmed that stakeholders' perceptions about postsecondary accessibility are multidimensional, involving societal expectations, individual attitudes, and the perceived ability to influence educational outcomes. The factors identified in the analysis underscore the interconnectedness of these perceptions and their combined influence on stakeholders' intentions to support the community college system.

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence for the feasibility and support of a community college system in Sierra Leone. The data indicated strong stakeholder backing, particularly from unemployed youth and faculty, for expanding postsecondary education opportunities through the establishment of a community college system. This support is rooted in stakeholders' recognition of the youth unemployment crisis and the need for alternative pathways to higher education.

The application of the theory of planned behavior helped identify key factors influencing stakeholder support, including attitudes toward accessibility, societal norms, and perceptions of behavioral control. These findings suggest that implementing a community college system in Sierra Leone would address youth unemployment and contribute to broader educational and economic development goals.

Given the positive intentions expressed by stakeholders, it is evident that there is a window of opportunity for policymakers and higher education leaders to advance the establishment of a community college system in Sierra Leone. The success of this initiative will depend on careful consideration of stakeholder perceptions, regional needs, and the alignment of educational programs with labor market demands.

To address the challenges identified in this study, the following recommendations are proposed for the successful establishment and operation of a community college system in Sierra Leone. Institutional leaders should prioritize strategic planning to create a flexible, affordable, and regionally tailored system that targets postsecondary education deserts. Active stakeholder engagement, including input from unemployed youth, faculty, and community leaders, will be essential in ensuring the system meets the needs of diverse populations. Curriculum development should align with national labor market demands, fostering partnerships with industries such as agriculture, mining, and infrastructure. Government support is critical for providing resources and policies that sustain workforce-oriented education models. Faculty development programs

should focus on equipping instructors with skills relevant to a community college environment, ensuring educational quality. Finally, sustainability must be embedded in the system's design through diverse funding mechanisms, robust governance, and regular program evaluations. Together, these measures aim to create an inclusive, workforce-driven educational system that enhances access and fosters long-term national development.

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Demographic Questionnaire

1. Have you attended a college in Sierra Leone?
 - Yes
 - No
2. Are you familiar with the concept of a two-year degree community college system?
 - Yes
 - No
3. What is your country of residence?
 - Sierra Leone
 - United States of America
 - Other (please specify)
4. What is your current position or profession?
 - Administrator
 - Faculty
 - Student
 - Unemployed Youth
 - Parent/Sponsor
 - Other (please specify)
5. What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
6. What is your highest level of educational attainment?
 - Doctorate Degree
 - Master's Degree
 - Bachelor's Degree
 - Higher National Diploma (HND)
 - Higher Teacher Certificate (HTC)
 - WASSCE (Senior Secondary Certificate)
 - BECE (Junior Secondary Certificate)
 - Other (please specify)
7. What is your age group?
 - 18–24 years
 - 25–34 years
 - 35–44 years
 - 45–54 years
 - 55–64 years
 - 65 years and older
8. What is your institutional affiliation (if any)?
 - Public University
 - Private University
 - Polytechnic
 - Other (please specify)
9. What is your citizenship?
 - Sierra Leonean
 - Other (please specify)

SL-PEAS Survey Questions

Section 1: Attitudes Toward Postsecondary Accessibility Expansion

1. I support the establishment of a two-year workforce-oriented college system.
2. I support the establishment of a two-year college system that accepts minimum WASSCE credits.
3. I support strategies that will help prepare more youth to find better jobs.
4. I support the establishment of a two-year college system with course acceptance and credit transfer agreements.

Section 2: Subjective Norms

5. I believe public support for workforce-oriented two-year colleges will encourage leaders and policymakers.
6. I believe the public expects leaders and policymakers to develop workforce-oriented two-year colleges.
7. I believe civil society organizations and the business community expect the establishment of a two-year college system.

Section 3: Perceived Behavioral Control

8. I am likely to support efforts to create two-year colleges that accept minimum WASSCE credits.
9. I am likely to support higher education policies related to two-year colleges with workforce-oriented programs.
10. I am likely to support the establishment of two-year colleges that correspond to the manpower needs of industries.
11. I am likely to support decisions by leaders and policymakers to develop strategies for more students to access postsecondary education.

Section 4: Intentions

12. I intend to support policy changes for workforce-oriented colleges to help alleviate youth unemployment.
13. I intend to support proposals for establishing workforce-oriented colleges.
14. I intend to support new institutions to help expand access for disadvantaged youth in Sierra Leone.