



# VIRTUAL MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

**Impact Report**  
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Working with young students has been educating and eye-opening. There's a rush of adrenaline I feel everytime I interact or have a brainstorming session with the students. Listening to their diverse, innovative and unconventional dispositions, regardless of the quality of education in Liberia, has made me realize that we gain so much if only more intentional efforts are made in regards to youth development across Liberia. I have come to realize the immense potential we have in our motivated and driven youth population.

SOLOMON G. MAHN  
*Director of Programs, TRIBE*

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# WE ARE A TRIBE

## INTRODUCING



Education forms the bedrock of national productivity and economic growth, TRIBE exists because our education system has failed to deliver on this promise.

We are building a movement to inspire and empower a new generation of purpose-driven young problem-solvers, entrepreneurs, innovators, and storytellers through research, technology solutions and innovative programs.

Officially launched in late 2019, we have been investing our time, efforts and limited resources in research and designs that will improve learning outcomes by reimagining learning frameworks and developing Liberia's entrepreneurial ecosystem for young aspiring intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs.

Due to limits in education, schools and society are failing to prepare young people with adequate and relevant skills, tools, and resources to succeed in the contemporary workforce, hence creating a large cohort of unemployed or underemployed young adults.

Our insights and experiences in the last year make us believe that this is an urgent problem! We are acting now, so that the next generation of change-makers would have a foundation to further develop and expand the impact.

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**At the core of a strong education system is quality, relevance, and access. More importantly, it is an education system that holds strong roots upon which the foundation and structure are built. This is why we focus on high school, equipping young students with the relevant skills, tools, and resources to be prepared on day one for the workforce: job-ready, venture-ready, or college ready!**

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We have been leading this change through extensive research and short-term validating programs to firstly shift the mindset of entrepreneurial education for young students and creating meaningful experiences for our students, parents, and partners. We are now taking these learnings into a new era of designing meaningful and impactful but sustainable programs that will shift the way we teach and prepare high school students for the real world.

# Foreword

I am honored to write the foreword for our Virtual Mentorship Program (VMP) report. 2020 was our first official year at TRIBE – the beginning of a lifelong partnership with resilience and thought leadership.

Although the program was challenged by the constraints of resource availability, results from the program also exposed our poor planning and lopsided implementation efforts. Most importantly, it forced us to realign our priorities, redefine our focus, and renew our commitment to improving learning outcomes while sharing our story of hope and inspiration.

Throughout this report, you will read highlights of how we articulated, through our execution, our theory of change: **when deep insight is backed by innovative approaches, the results are improved outcomes.** Furthermore, we presented our highs, lows, and continued commitment to pursuing excellence.

Through our lived experiences, and conversations with friends, teammates, and partners in professional development, we have come to intimately see a common thread that connects each of us—mentorship. Each of us wish we had or still do have a guide, a mentor, a coach, or just a person who can guide us, point us in the right direction, shine the light on a dark path, or simply explain the shape of a silhouette.

Our craving to predict the future and our longing for comfort in the familiar can at the minimum be substituted with mentoring.



Our five-week Virtual Mentorship Program brought participants of TRIBE's past programs and grouped them in areas of similar interest to present their deepest ambitions and fears, and to discuss practical measures to navigate them. Interestingly, most of our fears and ambitions were interconnected, hence making our virtual group sessions exciting and relatable.

An interesting factoid of mentorship that I personally discovered throughout the five weeks is that regardless of who we call the mentor or mentee, we are all learning from and inspiring one another – a challenge to facilitate vulnerability and create a more sensual touch with reality.

A lot of institutions today are recognizing the positive power of mentorship and using it as a force for good, and the development of the 'self'. A key element of our program design is the creation of a window for mentorship through one-on-one encounters for our students.





As all of the world is restricted by the coronavirus, virtual learning is central and integral to our continued learning process. While technology has morphed our world into one global community, Liberia is still years from bridging the digital divide to fully integrate into globalization. The challenges you will read about in this report are not new and they are also not uncommon.

As I have gathered, these challenges can only be tackled with our collective efforts and the mobilization of the required resources. It would demand the committed effort of all sectors of our political, social, religious, and economic communities to remove major impediments to making quality education accessible across Liberia.

With intentional excitement, optimism, focus and consciousness, we look forward to this new year, and we also challenge you to be the light in the darkness, to offer your time and resources in developing students not only to score high test marks, but to also challenge the status quo and

opt for building an entrepreneurial, innovative, and productive workforce of young people.

Together, along with you and all our partners, we continue as a TRIBE, fully committed and purposeful towards our goal of IMPROVING LEARNING OUTCOMES for students!

Best of '21,

**Lexandine T. Taylor**  
COO

# Executive Summary

We are familiar with Outliers. Changemakers. Innovators. Entrepreneurs. Their thoughts and actions give worth to our lives, and make the world a better place to coexist. Their stories inspire us.

Often, we are unfamiliar with their torchbearers—a mentor, guide, facilitator—people who serve and provide relentless guidance and support. Bill Gates looked on to Warren Buffet as Steve Jobs soared on the mentorship of Bill Campbell. These outliers would go on to change the world and inspire hope, build communities and mentor action-oriented social intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs, making ground-breaking impacts in the world.

Our local communities birth stories of exceptional men and women who are disrupting the status quo and executing extraordinarily. These people, like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, “stood on the shoulders of giants” who guided them through their life’s journey. Liberia as a country struggles with an unproductive workforce and a failing education system. For the Mahmud Johnsons and James Mulbahs of Liberia who are defying the odds and disrupting the status quo, mentorship played a key role in their growth and transformation. If we must scale their efforts and produce more young people who will create the next big change, mentorship and a community of support are pivotal. Through our work, we want to inspire and empower the next local Bill and Steve, but we want to build a powerful community of Warren and Bill.

TRIBE’s approach to youth development places a premium on mentorship in an effort to nurture youthful talents and cultivate a culture of excellence through the lens of people who are trailblazing. As the pilot for an independent mentorship program we are designing, the VMP incorporated direct mentorship engagement, with a key focus on career development and academic advancement.

Comprising open lecture forums, group discussions, personal conversations, deep dives and an experiential learning road trip, the experiences gave us deeper insights that inform crucial factors of what an effective mentorship program should constitute.

Through an imperfect execution, we struggled to navigate some of the pitfalls that resulted from a relatively poor planning and limited resources. Unlike previous programs, we designed the program activities with a flexible, free-style approach, with little preparations, which impacted us significantly.



# VIRTUAL MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Insights from data we collected from parents and students who participated in our previous programs showed that students usually find difficulty navigating academic and career decisions, with little to no guidance and facilitation. This challenge, among many factors, stems from unavailability of a guidance and support network, parents' busy schedules and other competing priorities.

Designed as a pilot for our forthcoming annual mentorship program, the Virtual Mentorship Program was a month-long virtual personal development program for previous participants of TRIBE's entrepreneurship and digital literacy programs. With a key focus on assessing and enhancing students' knowledge, the program offered tailored training and development activities for students. Our team, along with external partners, mentored 29 students through weekly learning sessions, one-on-one conversations, and facilitations.

## PROGRAM MODEL

Built into a collaborative learning framework, the program combined traditionally-designed and experiential learning activities. Organized and placed into three career groups, students participated in panel-styled lecture forums with guest speakers, weekly group career conversations, one-on-one mentoring sessions, and traveled on a road trip to a historic site for outdoor learning and engagement.

The program was designed with the following objectives:



Reconvene past students of TRIBE's programs and launch the alumni framework for continuous support to their personal development.



Evaluate the impact of the previous programs on students' personal development and assess their growth needs.



Gather data and insights to develop TRIBE's student alumni network and inform an annual mentorship program.



Provide tailored guidance and tools to support students' personal and academic advancements.





## CAREER GROUPS



### ENTREPRENEURSHIP

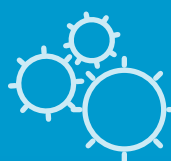
Entrepreneurial Development is one of TRIBE's strategic priorities. The group was designed to facilitate students to develop professional relationships, identify and understand entrepreneurial opportunities, and brainstorm, along with their mentor, solutions to common social problems they encounter.

Twenty-nine students signed up for the entrepreneurship group during registration, accounting for 31% of the 79 students who registered to participate in the program. It is important to highlight that data from participants registering for both our Virtual Entrepreneurship Program and Young Entrepreneurs Boot Camp showed at least 90% of the students had no prior understanding of entrepreneurship and had never participated in any entrepreneurship program. We were thrilled to see the shift in students' mindset, attempting to learn how to build an entrepreneurial career.

Mentor: Wainright Acquoi

Participants: Abraham Swaray | Agnes Nagba | Amie Waka | Edward Lami | Jewel Acquoi | Peter Bishop | Adrew Siafa





**SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY,  
ENGINEERING AND MATHEMATICS  
(STEM)**

21st century economic advancements rely heavily on the STEM fields. However, high schools in Liberia lack the programs and infrastructure to adequately prepare students for a career in STEM. There are little to no career development programs to give students first-hand understanding of the rigorousness and significance of STEM courses to career development. We created the STEM group to understand students' knowledge and interest in STEM, while fostering a safe space for academic conversations and guidance. Students held group discussions and were given research assignments to learn about their career interests and prepare for college.

Mentor: Elvis M. D. Browne

Participants: Christopher Pabai | James Appleton | Kelvin Massaquoi | Michael Doe | Jemoi Sicarr | Tom Seavey | Abibatu J. Duworko | Jada Taylor



## ARTS

Art plays important roles in nation-building, entertainment and economic development. The arts group was designed to connect students with similar career interests, gauge their knowledge about their academic interests, goals, and to provide them guidance. Students in the arts group have diverse interests in journalism, tourism, law, and music, among others.

Mentor: Lexanndine Taylor

Participants: Benetta Acquilla Kollie | Jestina Maintona | Lydia Caine | Lauretta Birene Cisse



## PROGRAM ACTIVITIES



### THE FORUM

In addition to the one-on-one and career group discussions, students and mentors engaged into two growth conversations about career, academics and personal development. Designed as a space for experience and knowledge sharing, internal and external mentors shared their stories about life, school and career in an effort to guide and inspire students.



**My interaction with high school students at TRIBE's Virtual Mentorship Program (VMP) was a watershed moment for me. Sharing my story gave me a deep understanding of the education sector in Liberia, the challenges that exist, and how the learning environment needs to be reinvented and transformed. TRIBE is doing an amazing job with high school students, and I'm glad to be a part of this unconventional learning ecosystem.**

RUTH FARKOLLIE

*Lift Liberia Scholar - Guest Facilitator*



Forum Highlight:

### LIFE DURING AND AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Moderator: Elvis M. D. Browne

Co-moderator: Lauretta Birene Cisse

Discussants: Wainright Acquoi | Lexandinne Taylor

Speakers shared their stories from high school to the challenges of navigating the real world, and provided first-hand information about the daunting challenges they encountered — from choosing a college major to entering the workforce somewhat unprepared. It is interesting to note that despite the discussants' level of privilege and access, they faced difficulty making the right career decisions immediately after high school. Students were thrilled and anxious to learn about the speakers' experiences.



Forum Highlight:

### DOS AND DON'TS OF COLLEGE PREPARATION

Moderator: Elvis M. D. Browne

Co-moderator: Wainright Acquoi

Discussants: Solomon Mahn | Ruth Farkollie

College preparation requires lots of planning, critical thinking and consultation. From our experience, and as highlighted in previous parts of this report, Liberian students struggle in making decisions that match their unique abilities and the demands of the workforce.

Our lead discussants, Ruth Farkollie and Solomon G. Mahn, shared their stories of transitioning out of high school and college into the workplace.





## THE ROAD TRIP

At the close of the program, students were taken on a one-day road trip to the Unity Conference Center in Bomi County, which holds a historical significance to the founding of the African Union (AU), formerly the Organization of African Union (OAU). After a three-hour drive from the Samuel Kanyon Doe Stadium in Paynesville, students assembled on the golf court for a time of reflection, bonding, games and merrymaking. The fun-filled activities and safe space allowed for knowledge sharing among students and mentors. Students shared their most memorable moments with TRIBE and key lessons they learned during the VMP. For them, the road trip was not only an adventure away from home and chores, it was an opportunity to connect with their friends and experience a transformation.



**My experience with the VMP was amazing. I had a lot of fun on the road trip and made new friends. I interacted with all of the students. Sharing my story was awesome because I felt safe and empowered at the same time. Thanks to TRIBE for this learning opportunity.**

JADA TAYLOR  
*VMP Participant*



# Impact and Evaluation

We monitored and evaluated the progress of the students throughout the various phases of the mentorship model. The evaluation followed qualitative data collection procedures and insights from observing key informants. Qualitative analysis was performed using summary statistics from respondents' feedback and testimonies.

We sought to analyze key success and failure factors while drawing lessons for future projects.

Additionally, the evaluation aims to suggest improvements for subsequent project designs and management relative to policy, technical expertise, and stakeholders' involvement. As a data-driven venture, TRIBE values growth and sustainability in all program initiatives. We ensure that intentional avenues for improvement and innovations are explored and prioritized in all activities.

We measured students' personal growth and development overtime, from participating in previous TRIBE programs and being accountable for applying the lessons they learned to their life practices. Additionally, the need and impact of having a readily available mentor or coach was also assessed based on specific feedback gathered from the mentors and parents of the students.

## INSIGHTS GATHERED THROUGH OBSERVATIONAL DATA COVERING VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAM



Majority of the students had little to no guidance into their personal, educational or professional aspirations apart from their parents or guardians, which are sometimes insufficient and biased.



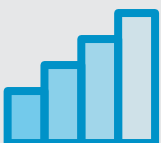
The road trip experience proved to be one of the most exciting and valuable components of the program, with over 90% of students admitting to the experience being a first-of-a-kind.



Students proved to be more assertive and engaging when paired in groups and teams.



The number of high schools facilitating learning excursions and prioritizing experiential learning for their students remain extremely low, mainly due to structural and financial reasons.



With no room for fear of failing due to the MVP unique 'no-grading' system, students were able to try harder and more often, hence increasing their chances at succeeding in one or more of the program assessment activities.



Outcomes of the VMP were evaluated based on four key objectives as outlined by the program design.

## OBJECTIVE I

### **Reconvene past students of TRIBE's programs and launch the alumni framework for continuous support to their personal development.**

The VMP enrolled 29 students representing seven high schools in and around Montserrado County. Over 90% of students who participated were participants of previous programs implemented by TRIBE, thus meeting the objective.

A significant amount of primary data was gathered during the program to inform the development of the alumni framework, which is scheduled to be functional by mid-2021. As of December 2020, TRIBE's alumni network comprises about 45 students, enrolling from about 25 high schools. Information regarding our impact and subsequent research initiatives will be further explained in-depth in the 2020 year-end report, which will be released at the end of the first quarter of 2021.

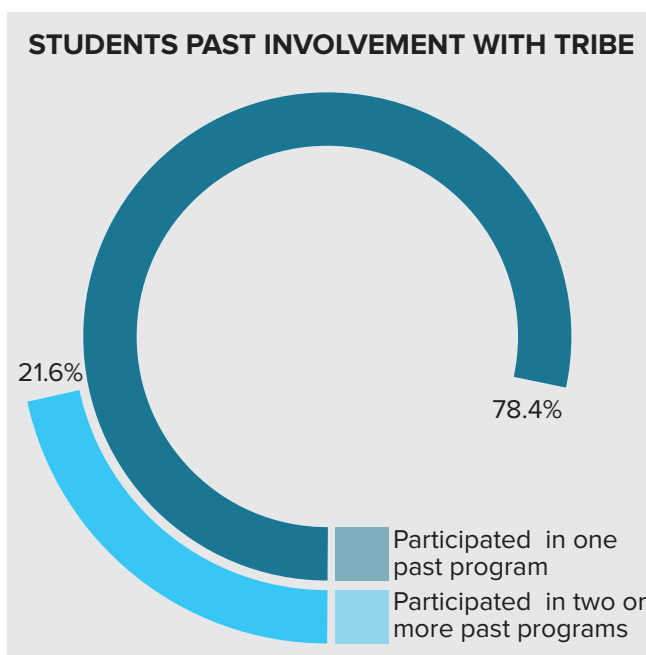


FIGURE 1: VMP Students participation from past programs

Of the total students enrolled into the VMP, 21.6% had participated in at least one and over 78% had participated in at least two previous TRIBE programs. Working with students who previously interacted with one another and understood TRIBE's program framework significantly contributed to the program not failing further, amidst serious threats and constraints. Over 76.6% of parents interviewed admitted to the past programs having a significant impact on their child or children's new career choices.

## OBJECTIVE II

### **Evaluate the impact of the past programs on students' personal development and assess their growth needs.**

In 2020, TRIBE implemented four entrepreneurial and digital literacy programs both as part of our COVID-19 response projects and annual program strategy. Collectively, these programs enrolled about forty-five high school students from across various high schools across Montserrado and Margibi Counties. Combining in-person activities, road trips, classroom discussions, virtual engagements and online classes, students were trained in the fundamentals of entrepreneurship, digital literacy, leadership development, project development, and a host of several other non-traditional learning tracks. With the aim of preparing students for the future of work, including increasing their chances of college and university enrollment, these programs were the highlights of TRIBE's student engagements since our official establishment late-2019.

The VMP was designed partly as a platform to evaluate the impact of these past programs on students' personal development and assess their growth needs. To capture these aspects of the program, both students and parents were

surveyed using questionnaires designed to gather key insights into student's behavior at home as well as what specific changes parents were able to observe after their kids completed the programs. To be sure that these changes were directly influenced by TRIBE's programs and not as a result of some other external factor, the questions made specific mention of a student's improvements in the specific tracks that were offered by the programs. The following results were recorded in figure 2.

Through parents' observation of their kids interaction with their peers, the nature of discussions, amount of time spent working, reading and involvement in other productive activities at home and at school, they were able to rate their kids level of leadership growth over time. This indicator also captures the children's level of responsibility and ability to take initiative. From the responses collected, over 41% of parents were very impressed by their kid's growth in leadership and level of productivity. Additionally, 35% were impressed and 23.5% were somewhat impressed. The evaluation team observed that this method of measuring participants' leadership skills was quite effective, especially when combined with classroom and engagement assessment results collected during the program.

Very impressive and impressive entrepreneurial skills implied that a student had begun exploring entrepreneurial ideas and having conversations about business and entrepreneurship, unlike before they enrolled into the program. From the VMP, over 70% of participants were observed to have either very impressive or impressive entrepreneurial skills. Although most of these concepts were taught at very basic levels, they nevertheless provided extremely useful introductory foundations for the students and their responses clearly showed the need for more exposures in these areas.

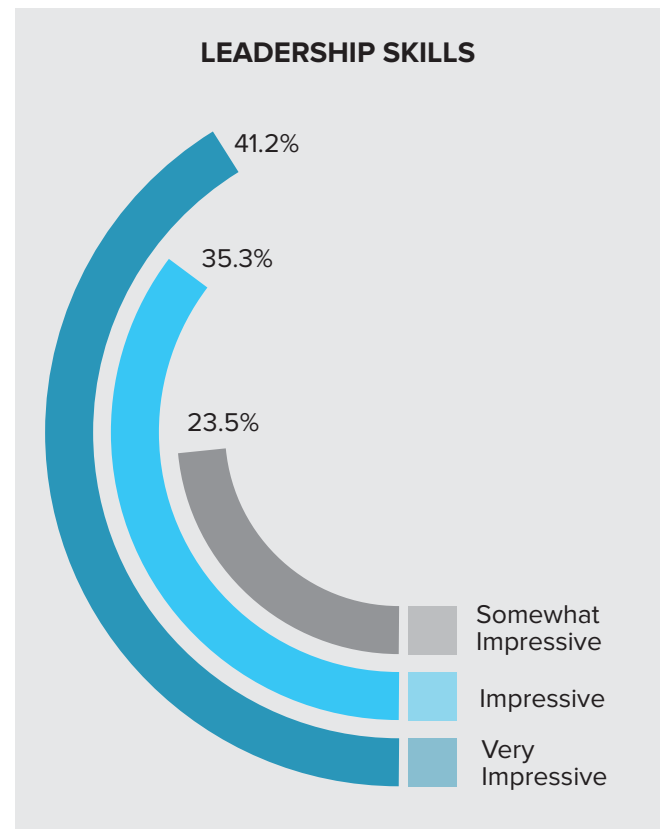


FIGURE 2: How do you rate your kid(s) leadership skills after the previous program?

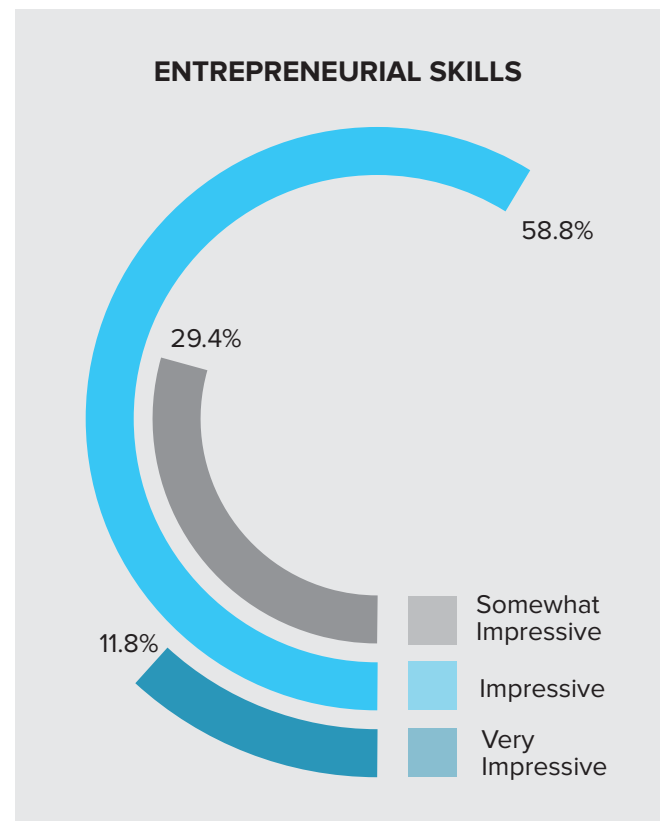


FIGURE 3: How do you rate your kid(s) entrepreneurial skills after the previous program?



### OBJECTIVE III

#### To gather data and insights to develop TRIBE's student alumni network and annual mentorship program.

Through the VMP, over 65% of the data needed for the establishment of TRIBE's student alumni network and annual mentorship program was collected. Furthermore, data collected from previous programs, including crucial data points on high schools, students, parents and the education sector will be combined to reinforce data collected from the VMP. The annual mentorship program will be designed using insights obtained from the information gathered within TRIBE's alumni network database. The Project is expected to commence mid-2021, with additional data expected to be collected prior to the official launch. By incorporating information on the students, schools, teachers, and available infrastructure, we believe the project will allow potential partners, investors and all relevant stakeholders to better understand the sector, engage in policy research and make better and informed decisions relative to improving learning outcomes across Liberia.

### OBJECTIVE IV

#### To provide tailored guidance and tools to support students' personal and academic advancement

Data were collected to assess students' specific education and training needs during the VMP. The information collected was compared with results from internal assessments given to participants in various training areas. This process allowed our team to better understand the nature of the gaps experienced by the students and how the program and future programs could be designed to adequately address these gaps. However, the depth of the assessment was heavily constrained

due to limited resources. It was observed that the longer time the team had to engage with the students, the data collected became more accurate because it allowed us to collect information continuously, reducing the chances of errors and outliers in the sample. The following information was collected and cross referenced with similar information collected from previous programs.

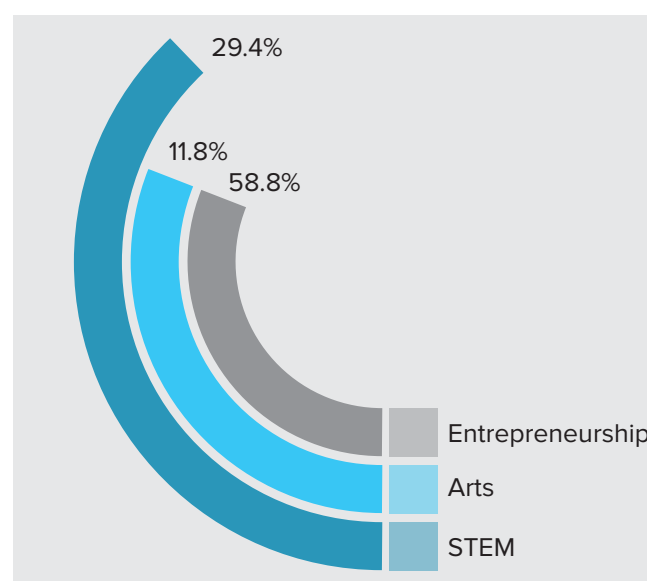


FIGURE 4: Students' area of interest

Students were asked to select their area of career interest and their responses were compared with their involvement and performance in the various courses of the program. Findings from this exercise suggest that 37.9% of the students were more interested in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) courses of the VMP. Arts (Journalism, Politics, Law, Social Science, etc) and Business/Entrepreneurship had similar levels of interests, comprising 31% of participating students. These findings show that despite the lack of advanced STEM programs and infrastructures, coupled with solid foundational grounding from the local curriculum, many students are still interested in choosing a career path in these areas. However, due to poor performance in the science courses as shown from recent regional examinations (WASSCE) results, there is a dire need to better prepare students for this diverse and rigorous area of profession.

# Looking Ahead







Though faced with numerous challenges from poor planning to resource constraints, the overall program execution met the specific program objectives. A major limitation to the evaluation was the challenge in collecting the necessary data for more robust analysis due to time and resource constraints. However, the program was able to deliver on most of its objectives and goals. The lessons learnt over the course of implementation is also a major feat for our team and all stakeholders. We are in a better position to effectively and excellently execute on future programs throughout 2021 and beyond, leveraging the experiences of 2020.

The introduction of a mentorship program for high school students is one that is highly needed. In the absence of a professional counselor or mentor, students graduate from high school with limited knowledge and vast unpreparedness on how to navigate the world of higher education and the professional ecosystem. In an age of social media influence and uncontrolled information access, students are easily misinformed and made to make adverse decisions that could hamper their development over a long period of time.

The pilot of TRIBE's Virtual Mentorship Program was an intentional effort to assess the feasibility of implementing and sustaining an effective mentorship program model for high school students. From the evaluation results, the model seems quite effective but not free from a number of challenges. However, these are challenges that resource availability and capacity can adequately address. Currently, sustainability of the VMP is projected to be relatively low due to limited financial and technical support and the lack of a formal and organized structure to ensure sustainable capacity building and mentorship for a substantial number of students. As we look ahead, our team is working to address these immediate challenges of financial constraints and inadequate capacity in order to define and scale our impact.



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