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An Analytical Study of the Proliferation of Private Schools in Nigeria

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Abstract. This analytical study delves into Nigeria's significant growth and proliferation of private schools. It aims to explore the factors contributing to this phenomenon and its implications for education in the country. By analysing various factors such as government policies, socio-economic dynamics, and parental preferences, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the rise of private schools in Nigeria. Nigeria is witnessing a drastic rise in privately owned primary and secondary schools. The proliferation of private schools coincides with the fact that the country's government cannot bear the burden of providing quality education to its citizens through public schools; thus, private schools have sprung up at every corner of the country to serve as an alternative to public schools. The provision of quality education by high-cost private schools has been immense over the years. Yet, many Nigerians need help to afford to send their children to these high-cost private schools, which has led to a rise in the number of low-cost private schools to serve the interests of citizens from the lower socio-economic class. The majority of these low-cost private schools need to be registered, thus making it difficult for the government to enforce the regulation of these schools to ensure the standard of education is maintained. While private schools offer several advantages, balancing their growth and maintaining a robust public education system is crucial. The government must play an active role in regulating private schools to ensure quality education is accessible to a wide range of students, regardless of socio-economic background. By addressing the challenges and harnessing the benefits of private schools, Nigeria can pave the way for a more inclusive and prosperous future in education.

Keywords: Proliferation; Private schools; Regulation; Education; Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The growing significance of education in contemporary times has ensured that many nations are striving to improve their educational sector. Nigeria is aware of the importance of education in developing quality graduates who make meaningful contributions to economic and technological advancement. The author [1] noted the importance that the Nigerian government places on education as an instrument for change, and as such, the government recognises both primary and secondary schools as the foundation for learning and building sustainable national development. Despite the country's awareness of the importance of quality education for its citizens, the Nigerian government still needs to address the challenges in its public schools regarding delivering quality education. The government's failure led to the cropping of private primary and secondary schools to provide a higher quality alternative to public schools.

Parents' choice of institution for their children is not far-fetched from the quality of school and the accessibility of these schools based on proximity to their home of residence, and private schools offer these benefits. For instance, in a survey conducted by [2], she noted that 87% of parents interviewed in Makoko, Lagos State, preferred private schools, 7% preferred public schools, and the remaining 6% had no particular school preference for their children. Her research indicates public favour towards private schools, spurring the establishment of more private schools nationwide. The primary objective of both public and private schools is to provide education. However, the commercial opportunity in establishing private schools is quite immense [3], leading to the proliferation of unwholesome private schools needing more facilities and personnel.

Historically, the first school established in Nigeria was a private school that came into existence in 1843 in Badagry, Lagos state, by the Methodist

Church, which reflects the deep root of private schools in Nigeria. As a sequel to establishing the first school in the country, other schools owned by missionaries, individuals, communities, and government were established [1]. However, during the educational reform of the 1970s, the Federal Government of Nigeria took over the management of all privately owned academic institutions. Further, it declared the 1976 free Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme, implemented nationwide [4]. The increased enrolment into primary schools across the federation had a massive impact on the quality of public schools due to inadequate funding by the federal government, which later led to the involvement of the private sector in Nigerian education [5].

The cropping up of private schools had a remarkable impact on the Nigerian educational sector, bearing in mind that it provided a quality alternative to public schools that were in a state of decline owing to the Nigerian government's inability to adequately fund and implement her educational policy which led to seeking the participation of the public in the establishment of private schools as buttressed in the National Policy of Education (2014). The policy noted that "Government welcomes the contributions of voluntary agencies, communities and private individuals in the establishment and management of primary schools alongside those provided by the state and local government as long as they meet the minimum standards laid down by the Federal Government" [1].

The same applies to establishing secondary schools in Nigeria, with the State Government responsible for laying out and upholding the requirements/minimum standard necessary for establishing secondary schools in the country, resulting in the massive proliferation of more privately owned primary and secondary schools. Some private schools meet the standards required for meaningful contributions to the Nigerian education sector, while other privately owned primary schools still need improvement. Therefore, the current paper seeks to highlight the positive contribution of private schools to the Nigerian education sector and show the harmful impact of the proliferation of substandard private primary and secondary schools in the country.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Registration of Privately Owned Primary and Secondary Schools in Nigeria

The registration of schools remains an essential criterion in establishing, monitoring and inspecting schools for the maintenance of quality private primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. Despite the importance of registration to developing the country's education, most privately owned schools still need to be registered in Nigeria. Abdul-Hamid et al. noted that most private schools within the country were unregistered, with the registered schools attracting higher school fees when compared with the unregistered private schools [6]. The study, conducted in the Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government of Lagos State, revealed that 89% of private schools in this region needed to be registered. Non-registration of schools negatively impacts the nation's educational system, considering that these schools are not regulated and must possess the minimum criteria for establishing schools, undermining quality academic standards.

The number of unregistered private schools in Lagos has also been studied. Authors [7] noted the ratio of 1:2 as the ratio of registered to unregistered private schools in Lagos state as of 2007. The 2011 census showed that this figure has risen to 1:3 as the ratio of registered to unregistered schools in Lagos [6]. The Deputy Governor of Lagos state, in an interview with the Deputy Head of Regional Operations, Department for International Development (DFID), Mr Ben Nicholson, disclosed that Out of 15,000 private schools operating in the state, only 4,573 are duly registered and have received government approval. Others operate without licenses because they want to avoid conforming to standard practice. Any school must meet government requirements after the exercise to be able to continue. By implication, the deputy governor noted that about 10,427 private schools were operating without government approval, representing 69.52 per cent of all private schools in the state [8].

The reality of the remark by the Deputy Governor showcases the considerable margin in the ratio of registered to unregistered schools, which is similar to the ratio of 1:3 highlighted in the 2011 census as presented by Abdul-Hamid in 2017. It is no surprise that the majority of these schools are unable to meet up with the registration process and the minimum criteria for establishing schools. Fasuba noted the minimum re-

quirement for establishing private primary schools in Nigeria per Nigeria Policy on Education, 2014 [1]. The requirements include the availability of a school library, a primary health scheme, a counselling unit, and teachers for tutoring in particular subjects such as languages, mathematics, science, physical education, fine arts, and home economics. The author [9] noted that these schools should occupy at least 2 hectares, including a playground, assembly hall, and administrative block.

The status of private schools can be recognised as approved when the school have fulfilled its registration requirement, which encompasses the administrative processes, the inspection of the school site and payment of all registration fees. These schools are usually captured in the state's database. As such, they are liable for the tax payment and are expected to undergo routine inspections to monitor the standard of education [6]. The routine monitoring of registered schools underscores the importance of due registration. Authors [10] noted an instance in Lagos State where schools are only permitted to operate legally after paying the following fees: name search, purchase of forms, pre-inspection, approval and an annual renewal fee. These represent the active stages in the process of registration.

The registration of private schools should be a significant agenda for Nigeria's educational progress while considering Nigerians' over-reliance on private schools for their academic institution.

Benefits associated with the proliferation of Private schools

The Nigerian population is increasing at an exponential rate, and the government alone might not be able to handle the educational demands of its citizens, which clearly shows that the country needs the private sector to make necessary contributions to the establishment of more privately owned schools to bridge the gap in the demand for quality education of her citizens. Authors [6] noted that the country's population is rapidly growing at a rate of 2.8 % annually. With these statistics, the country's population, estimated at over 212 million, is expected to exceed 440 million by 2050 [11]. The growing population, thus, implies an increasing number of privately owned schools, which is a welcome development. Even so, more effort should be placed into ensuring

these private schools meet the minimum conditions required for delivering quality education. The private sector has contributed significantly to the 'Education for All' programme [12].

Comparison between the quality of private and public schools is no longer a source of debate as several studies have pointed to the more incredible academic achievement of students from private schools than their counterparts in public schools [13, 14]. The author [13] noted that private schools servicing the needs of low-income earners still tend to outperform most public schools. The author [15] states that students from private schools perform better in mathematics and other related science courses when compared to their counterparts in public schools. These also reflect that private schools still have a little edge over public schools, irrespective of the category of these private schools.

The proliferation of private schools has helped reduce the challenge of overcrowded classrooms often associated with public schools, which is evident in the decreasing number of students in public schools, as observed by [6]. He noted the decreasing rate of students in public schools at a rate of 4.6 per cent between 2009 and 2010, with public school enrolment reduced from 405,000 in 2009 to 388,000 in 2010 in Lagos State.

The author [16] noted another factor responsible for the growth of private schools, which could also be seen as a benefit associated with the spread of private schools: the proximity of these schools to homes of residence. These benefits eliminate the anxiety amongst parents regarding the several miles away from home their children have to go to attend school.

Dangers associated with the proliferation of private schools

The unrestrained proliferation of privately owned schools threatens to provide quality education in Nigeria. These privately owned nursery, primary and secondary schools are being erected in different areas within States in Nigeria, while a vast majority of these schools claim to be international. The author [17] noted that "private schools are providing better quality education, but the expansion of private schools without organised implementation of government policy and procedure seems to create more quality problems. In addition, most private schools in his zone operate with money-making motives rather

than institutions of learning. Without a clear evaluation process, it would be difficult to determine which private school provides good education and which does not" (p. 74). The excerpt from [17] proves that these unregistered schools do more harm than good to the educational sector, despite the erroneous belief by some Nigerians that 'the worst private school is better than government-owned schools'.

These schools have been observed to need more basic facilities that necessitate ease of learning. Authors [4], in a study, noted that these privately owned schools need more facilities, such as decent classrooms and insufficient and unqualified teachers, and must follow through with implementing the curriculum duly. Most of these private schools have neither compounds, fields, nor laboratories. Morning assembly is held in a makeshift hall, and sportswear is worn on certain days without any real sports or playground, bearing in mind that some of the structure of the entire school may be the size of a three-bedroom apartment.

Authors [18] noted the impact of the proliferation of private schools in Nigeria, which has resulted in the falling standard of education. These Authors observed that aside from the lack of facilities, most teachers in these schools were inexperienced or poorly qualified. As most are low-cost nursery and primary schools, the proliferation of private schools implies that graduates may need more foundation (minimum requirement) necessary to develop functioning higher education [19]. The author [20] noted that the majority of graduates in Nigeria could be better in quality, with 30% being unemployable and unable to seize the opportunity to take up employment due to their lack of basic skills and knowledge required to make them employable. The lack of skilled graduates has a direct impact on the economic and technological development of the country at large.

The proliferation of low-cost private schools can complicate long-term education policy planning and implementation, as the government must consider regulating, integrating, or collaborating with these schools effectively. Addressing these dangers requires a balanced approach that recognises the potential benefits of low-cost private schools while mitigating their negative impacts. Collaboration between governments, private sector actors, civil society, and international organisations is essential to ensure all children have

access to quality education, promoting holistic development.

Regulation of Private school proliferation

Despite privately owned schools have played an active role in bridging the gap in terms of the delivery of quality education, bearing in mind the falling standard of education in public schools, there is still an immense need for the regulation of schools, considering that the majority of these schools are focused on revenue generation as such the quality of education is compromised in the process. Authors [21] provided some outline of mechanisms aimed at regulating the proliferation of privately owned schools, which include: "the financial costs of private school registration and certification; the length of the registration process; accessible information on certification procedures; requirements on school land, facilities and infrastructure; and the approval of for-profit provision" (p. 17).

The registration of unregistered/unapproved schools should be of utmost importance to the Nigerian government for the regulation of private schools, taking into consideration that the majority of low-cost private schools are unregistered, which makes it impossible for the government to monitor the activities of these schools, hence, unable to ensure that these low-cost private schools abide with the minimum criteria for the delivery of quality education in the country. The author [22] noted that the weakness of educational institutions is accentuated by a complex registration process, which makes the majority of low-cost public schools shy away from such a registration process, which would invariably cost them more money.

Nigeria's major challenge in registering private schools to ensure quality education is the need for more, or in other cases, complete information regarding private schools within the nation. Information such as the location of these schools, the needs of private schools and the determinants of private participation needs to be improved [23, 24]. Unsurprisingly, to ensure the regulation of private schools in Nigeria, the Government of Lagos State directed all schools to upload their information on its website as part of an information-gathering operation between July 15 and August 2022. In a similar vein, the former Governor of Rivers State, Wike Nyesom, made a declaration to withdraw all operational approval

of private schools to ensure that all privately owned primary and secondary schools within the state are to seek fresh licenses within a week of the pronouncement to curb the effect of the poor standard of education and eradicate privately owned school whose facilities are in a dilapidated state.

Among many developing nations, Nigeria has rigid registration requirements, which renders the registration process ineffective as such regulatory agencies may seek bribes to ensure a smooth registration process [25-28]. The level of bribery and corruption in the registration process invariably increases with the increase in government inadequacy to ensure regulation of her privately owned schools. The author [29] noted another challenge in enforcing regulation due to the need for more human resources and government oversight regarding inspection and the number of registration offices, thus increasing the complexity of regulation processes. It is expected that for the country to make meaningful development in the educational sector, the government should seek measures to regulate the establishment of private schools and ensure routine inspection of schools.

Factors Contributing to the Proliferation

1. *Demands and Parental Preferences*: Nigerian parents increasingly gravitate towards private schools due to perceived quality, discipline, smaller class sizes, and opportunities for holistic development. This shift in preferences has created a market demand for private education.
2. *Inadequacies in Public Education*: Limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and administrative challenges in public schools have led parents to seek alternatives like private schools.
3. *Economy and Socio-economic Factors*: Nigeria's growing middle class, increased urbanisation, and rising incomes have created a growing market for private education, as parents are willing to invest in quality education for their children.

Implications for Education in Nigeria

1. *Bridging the Gap*: Private schools have contributed to bridging the education gap by providing quality education to students who may not have access to well-funded public schools.

2. *Inequality and Social Stratification*: The proliferation of private schools has further exacerbated the socio-economic disparities in education, as it caters primarily to families with higher incomes, potentially widening the education gap.

3. *Competition and Innovation*: The rise of private schools has created healthy competition, inspiring innovation and improvement in the educational landscape.

4. *Regulatory Concerns*: The rapid growth of private schools has posed challenges for regulatory bodies to ensure standardisation, quality control, and adherence to educational policies.

Government Policies and Challenges

1. *Regulatory Framework*: The Nigerian Government plays a crucial role in regulating private schools, ensuring standards are maintained, and safeguarding the interests of students and parents.
2. *Monitoring and Enforcement*: Challenges arise when enforcing regulations due to the number of private schools and the limited resources available for effective monitoring.
3. *Collaboration and Partnerships*: Government-private school collaborations can facilitate knowledge sharing, capacity building, and improving the overall quality of education provision.

CONCLUSIONS

The proliferation of private schools in Nigeria is a multi-faceted phenomenon driven by various factors, including parental preferences, inadequacies in public education, and socio-economic dynamics. While private schools have contributed to the education system, they also present challenges related to inequality and regulatory concerns. A balanced approach to strengthening public education and implementing effective regulation is crucial to ensure a sustainable and inclusive educational landscape for all Nigerian students.

Thus, education is a fundamental pillar of societal development, playing a crucial role in shaping individuals and contributing to the progress of a nation. Private schools often promise a higher education standard than their public counterparts. As parents increasingly prioritise quality education, private schools have emerged as a vi-

able option. This option may be valid when considering high-income private schools. Unfortunately, the socio-economic status of most Nigerians is within the boundaries of lower socio-economic class. Thus, they cannot send their children to exclusive private schools. As such, the alternative they have is to send their children to low-cost private schools. Nigeria's growing population shows that the government cannot shoulder the responsibility of educating its citizens with its current educational facilities. This has stirred up the rapid growth in the number of low-cost/unregistered private schools in the country.

The current trend of the proliferation of private schools in the country has made it quite challenging for the government to enforce a level of regulation/control, bearing in mind that the majority of these schools are unregistered and the government lack the will and the resources to implement regulation of the spread of low-cost private schools which can compromise the educational standard of the country's educational sector further from what it is now. While private schools offer several advantages, balancing their growth and maintaining a robust public education system is crucial. The government must play an active role in regulating private schools to ensure quality education is accessible to a wide

range of students, regardless of socio-economic background. By addressing the challenges and harnessing the benefits of private schools, Nigeria can pave the way for a more inclusive and prosperous future in education.

Recommendations

1. *Strengthening Public Education:* Government efforts should focus on addressing the gaps in public education, improving resources, recruiting qualified teachers, and investing in infrastructure to reduce the reliance on private schools.
2. *Regulatory Reforms:* Enhance the regulatory framework by ensuring regular inspections, implementing strict quality control measures, and establishing effective channels for grievance redressal.
3. *Financial Accessibility:* Develop policies to ensure that quality education is affordable and accessible to students from various socio-economic backgrounds.
4. *Professional Development:* Provide training and support mechanisms for private school teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills and promote continuous professional development.

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