

## **De facto Privatisation of Basic Education in Africa: A Market Response to Government Failure? A Comparative Study of the Cases of Ghana and Nigeria**

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Low-fee private schools (LFPS) enrol a growing proportion of children in Ghana and Nigeria, including among the poor. This trend raises questions about quality in the public sector as well as equity and social justice in the distribution of educational opportunity. This paper examines the phenomenon of *de facto* privatisation in comparative perspective, drawing on secondary data and on interviews with parents and teachers in two peri-urban communities. In both countries, up to twenty percent of pupils attend private schools at the national level, while in Lagos State, Nigeria, the figure is as high as 57%. Parents' explanations of their choice of LFPS include reference to better examination performance and access to higher levels of education, greater attention to pupils' welfare and progress; and to learning English. By contrast, many are critical of public school alternatives, despite their often better resources and better trained teachers. In many cases, teachers and parents explain the differences between types of school in relation to issues of school management and accountability and their impact on teacher motivation and practice. Although fees are reported to be relatively low, and parents most often considered LFPS to be 'good value for money', many make considerable sacrifices to afford this choice, and the option remains closed to many poorer parents. Some of the practices adopted by LFPS offer policy lessons for the public sector on issues including school effectiveness and accountability, while others, such as the very low pay of teaching staff are less desirable. Nonetheless, failure to address the issues driving the expansion of the LFPS sector may have the consequence of increasing inequity, as parents with the means increasingly 'vote with their feet'.

## 1. Introduction

In spite of improvements in access to public school provision, families in Ghana and Nigeria are opting increasingly for private education when they have a choice. In Nigeria, conservative estimates suggest that private schools currently account for more than 15% of all enrolments, while in Ghana the figure is higher than 20%. Ghana and Nigeria have both undergone significant economic and regulatory liberalisation since the 1980s and are environments in which private schooling has flourished in the presence of modest economic growth, despite the implementation of fee-free policies in public education since the 1990s. These trends reflect a broader pattern of *de facto* privatisation of basic education found in many developing countries; including among the poor.

Important recent studies have attested to the role of quality education and of cognitive development rather than school attendance *per se* as key to economic well-being of both individual and nation (see Hanushek and Woessmann, 2007). However, basic education in many parts of the sub-Saharan Africa region is of poor quality in comparative terms, while its costs to the national budget remains relatively high. Limited and controversial evidence suggests that in some contexts, low-cost private schools are of higher quality, in terms of their production of learning outcomes, than their public counterparts (Aslam, 2009; French and Kingdon, 2010; Tooley and Dixon, 2006). Such schools often operate at a fraction of the unit costs of public schools, drawing attention to issues of efficiency and cost-effectiveness in the public school sector.

Nonetheless, since access to even low-cost private schooling is linked to ability to pay fees, *de facto* privatisation, a ‘bottom-up’ process of parents ‘voting with their feet’, raises questions of equity and social justice. Moreover, part of the conventional economic justification for state provision of basic schooling consists in the extensive social benefits that arise from public education and the consequent failure of markets to make socially optimal provision, while it is clear that the shift towards private basic schooling in both Ghana and Nigeria is in part a response to perceptions of poor quality in public provision. Accordingly, ‘government failure’ in public education delivery further complicates the issues of equity and efficiency, since universal access to free provision is not a marker of equity in education where that provision is of inadequate quality. Accordingly, the implications of expanding private provision for social justice are unclear. Where access to private schooling brings wider access to higher levels of learning at affordable cost, it may be argued that the trend is indeed pro-equity overall by comparison with a low quality exclusively public system.

This paper explores the reasons behind the increase in private school enrolments in Ghana and Nigeria through analysis of purposively collected qualitative data from two communities in which *de facto* privatisation is found. Secondary data analysis is employed to shed light on the more general trends in private school enrolment. Focus is on ‘non-elite’ or ‘low-fee’ private schooling (LFPS) since, despite considerable heterogeneity in the private schooling sector, it is the relatively low-fee sector, often led by individual entrepreneurs which has seen most significant expansion (see Härmä 2011).

## 2. Data and Methodology

The paper adopts a mixed methods approach, combining analysis of purposively collected qualitative data and of secondary data from both household and school surveys. The qualitative study explores issues surrounding households' decisions to send their children to LFPSs in two communities in which LFPSs have recently grown in number, but where public school alternatives exist. The communities were selected purposively as low-income peri-urban sites with relatively low education levels among the adult population. In the Ghanaian site, all basic schools (public and LFPS) were included in the study; whereas in Nigeria, the community is larger, so a random selection of schools was included. LFPSs were defined as those charging a maximum of an equivalent \$20 per month<sup>1</sup>, although in practice fees were usually much lower. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three groups of participants selected in consultation with head-teachers to represent a range of perspectives – teachers, head teachers and proprietors in low-fee private schools, parents of children enrolled in these schools and parents of children enrolled in public schools (included for a comparative perspective).

The case study site in Ghana is the Dominase community in Mfanteman District of the Central Region. The site includes two public schools and two LFPSs. The main economic activities in the community are farming and fishing (GSS, 2005) and around 60% of inhabitants of Mfanteman district live below the poverty line (GSS, 2000), while around a third of the adult population have never enrolled in school. The case study site in Nigeria is Pedro; a densely populated community in Bariga Local Government Area (LGA) of Lagos State. The site has 30 public primary schools and the LGA as a whole contains an estimated 422 private schools, mostly LFPS (Härmä and Adefisayo, 2013). Pedro is an economically deprived community comprising mostly petty traders, artisans and blue-collar workers.

Table 1 below reports the number of interviewees and schools included in the study, by country and school type.

**Table 1: Sample of Interview Respondents**

	Teachers	Parents	Schools	Proprietors/Head Teachers	Total
<b>Nigeria</b>					
Private	15	15	3	5	38
Public	0	6	2	0	8
<b>Ghana</b>					
Private	10	10	2	3	25
Public	0	6	2	0	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>79</b>

The interviews explored the perceptions which surround school 'choice' and the growth of LFPS including regarding the quality of education and care in both school types, the affordability of private schooling, perceptions of value for money and of the reasons behind differences in school quality, including those relating to school infrastructure, teacher quality, pupils' opportunities to learn, and issues of school management and accountability. Secondary data analysis employs data from the Ghana Living Standards Surveys (GLSS), Nigeria Living Standards Surveys (NLSS), the

<sup>1</sup> \$20 represents approximately 40% of the minimum wage in Ghana and Nigeria

Ghana Education Management Information System (EMIS) and a recent census of private schools conducted in Lagos State, Nigeria.

### **3. Background and Literature Review**

In some sub-Saharan African contexts, the absence of public schools has driven the establishment of low-fee private schools, while in many others, private and public provision coexist, leading to a possibility of choice, for those families whose budgets permit. A range of providers inhabit the private and non-government sectors in Ghana and Nigeria, including private entrepreneurs and companies, social entrepreneurs and charitable organizations, both local and international (see Walford, 2011). While private schooling for social elites has endured since the colonial era, the substantial rise in the number of low-fee private schools run primarily for profit is a relatively new phenomenon. As the sector has grown, it may be argued increasingly persuasively that

The notion that private schools are servicing the needs of a small minority of parents is misplaced...a low cost private sector has emerged to meet the demands of poor households. (Watkins, 2000 cited in Tooley et al, 2009)

Such low-fee private schools are frequently rudimentary where infrastructure and facilities are concerned and many are not officially recognized, often because it is expensive and complex to meet required registration criteria, which in Nigeria for example, include meeting demanding land area and classroom size standards (see Härmä, 2011).

The growth of enrolments in the low-fee private school sector in Ghana and Nigeria is linked to rising incomes following steady economic growth in recent years, as well as to increased levels of education among parents - associated with shifting educational preferences; and in some cases to apparent perceptions of low or declining quality in the public sector – including that government schools ‘do not actually teach children well’, that ‘teachers fail to attend school regularly’ and that ‘when they do, [they are] not actually teaching’ (see Walford, 2011:408-9). Moreover, it may also be argued that the increases in enrolment in public schools which have followed the implementation of free universal basic education policies in many developing countries, are linked to a decline in quality, and thus somewhat paradoxically, to the demand for private schooling, despite these policies having the effect of increasing the cost differential between the public and private sectors.

In Nigeria, federal government financing of primary education was progressively withdrawn during the 1980s, linked to over-crowding and poor learning environments, especially in urban public schools (Olaniyan and Obadara, 2008). Thereafter, provision in the public sector has failed to keep up with growing demand, providing part of the explanation for rising private provision and enrolment (Tooley, 2005) and for the high number of out of school children. Private enrolment has increased across all levels of schooling, accounting, at the primary level, for as much as 70 percent of enrolment in Lagos (Härmä, 2011). Inadequate investment in the public education system in Nigeria remains a pervasive criticism (Olaniyan and Obadara, 2008; Adebayo, 2009) and learning achievement levels at primary level are found to be low (see Johnson, Hsieh and Onibon, 2008). The issue of inadequate public school supply is less of a driver of private sector growth in Ghana, where pupil-teacher ratios remain relatively low. Growth in private enrolments is nonetheless rapid, especially in urban areas; arguably being associated with ‘choice’ more often

than 'necessity'. In a survey conducted in 2004 in the three urban districts, it was found that although a majority of households were living below or close to the poverty line, almost two-thirds of children (64%) were attending private schools (Tooley et al, 2007). Critics also emphasise continuing deficiencies of quality in Ghanaian basic education (see Kandingi, 2004:15) and indeed per-pupil expenditure has seen little improvement despite large total increases in education spending (see Rolleston, 2009; Penrose, 1998).

Both Ghana and Nigeria implemented free basic education policies in the 1990s. In Ghana, 'Free Compulsory and Universal Basic Education' (FCUBE) was implemented from 1996, eliminating all basic school fees. Nigeria adopted its policy of free and compulsory basic education in 1999 (Olaniyan and Obadara, 2008:12). Eliminating fees may be expected to reduce the cost burden of basic education, although other educational expenses also constitute an important barrier to access (see Patrinos, 2000). Notable other costs include those of uniforms, books, transport and food. Policies intended to address indirect cost barriers have included the Capitation Grant Scheme (CGS) implemented in 2005 in Ghana, which provides a small annual grant per pupil enrolled (around \$6) used to purchase text books and other requirements previously the responsibility of households. When fees are relatively low in comparison to other costs, the difference in costs between public and LFPS can be small (see Colclough et al., 2003); in which case, the balance of costs and benefits may be rather more in favour of private schooling, if it is perceived to be of higher quality. Nonetheless, the literature also suggests that, given the option, many would ideally prefer to send their children to high quality government schools (Walford, 2011; Akyeampong, 2009). Perceptions of poor quality in the public sector are thus arguably as important as those of higher quality in the private sector.

Where 'choice' exists, schooling decisions may be understood, in economic terms, as part of a household's long term welfare maximisation strategy and may be analysed within the cost-benefit analysis framework of Becker's household production function (Becker, 1964). This framework conceptualises household schooling decisions in terms of an attempt to compare the direct and opportunity costs of schooling options with the future economic benefits to the household. On the economic model, in addition to depending on income, household demand for education reflects the perceived net benefits of education which in turn depend on features of the particular child, including gender (Kingdon and Theopold, 2006; UNESCO, 2005) and birth order (Glewwe and Jacoby, 1994), and on characteristics of its parents, especially their own educational backgrounds and preferences (Kazeem, Jensen and Stokes, 2010; Sackey, 2007; UNESCO 2005).

While school quality is often difficult to measure, some studies show a link with school participation (e.g. Lloyd, Mensch and Clark, 2000), including studies in Ghana (Fentiman, Hall and Bundy, 1999; Lavy, 1996). Moreover, the availability of opportunities for progression to higher levels of education has been found to affect enrolment earlier on in a child's school career (Glewwe and Jacoby, 1994; Lavy, 1996) and there is evidence that negative effects on participation associated with child and household disadvantage rise with a child's age, including because direct (school fees) and opportunity costs (foregone earnings from labour) are often much greater at higher levels of education (Checchi, 2001). Further, distances to school are found to be negatively associated with school participation (Filmer, 2007; World Bank, 2004). The supply of public education is of course largely determined by local and national education policy, while the supply of private schooling, at least of the profit-making variety, is linked to the local 'market' conditions, including the prevailing

costs of ‘inputs’, the regulatory environment, the quality of public provision (competition) and the availability of ‘entrepreneurship’. Costs in large measure determine the fees private schools are able to charge, while incomes determine the fees household are able to pay, so that the establishment of affordable LFPS in low income contexts is heavily dependent on a ready supply of relatively low-paid teaching staff.

Beyond economic considerations, a range of other value also influences parents’ educational choices. These include educational, social, religious and moral values (Dreze and Kingdon, 2001). Noddings (2005) emphasises the importance of an ‘ethic of care’ in an increasingly achievement-oriented educational environment, and proposes that education decisions do and should follow a ‘calculus of care’ in place of a purely economic rationale. Considerations in such a calculus include evaluations of the relationships between teachers and parents, the responsibility and accountability of schools to parents and pupils, the use of corporal punishment, the availability of extra-curricular and enrichment activities.

Where a narrow definition of school quality in terms of the production of achievement outcomes is employed, robust evidence for a quality premium in LFPS is very limited in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. Studies are often very small in scale and national datasets do not usually contain all the necessary data for thorough analysis of the issue. Walford (2011), among others, calls into question the adequacy of the data typically employed. Nonetheless, some evidence is emerging in certain selected contexts for higher levels of performance, or at least perceptions thereof among caregivers, in private schools in Ghana and Nigeria (Härmä, 2011; Tooley et al, 2005; Tooley et al, 2007; Akyeampong, 2009). Some of the explanations offered include higher levels of teacher commitment, lower levels of absenteeism (Rose, 2009), higher levels of teacher accountability and supervision (Adefeso-Olateju, 2012) and a perception that private schools tend to be more goal-oriented and learning-focused (Akaguri, 2011). The evidence on the issues of cost-effectiveness and ‘value for money’ is not comprehensive or conclusive, but is arguably somewhat stronger than on achievement production because per pupil costs in LFPS are notably lower than costs in public schools (Tooley and Dixon, 2006). Undoubtedly, LFPS operate with somewhat different incentives from public schools, and, in low-income communities, are required to make efforts to recruit pupils from poor households, often using innovative strategies. For example, some adopt flexible fee strategies to induce demand, offering discounts for early payment or for enrolment of multiple children as well as flexible payment plans and concessionary fees (Akaguri, 2011; Tooley and Dixon, 2006).

#### **4. Enrolment trends in private schooling**

The tables below show the percentages of children in Ghana and Nigeria enrolled in private schools using the most recent comparable nationally representative household survey data. The figures for Ghana (Table 2) are for all children in the 6-17 age-group, presented by household poverty status. Among the non-poor group, close to a third of all enrolled children were in private schools in 2005/6, rising from 8% among the ‘extremely poor’ group. In 1991/2 the proportion in private school of all those enrolled was 15.4% among the non-poor, a figure which doubled in the fourteen-year period to 2005/6. As shown in Figure 1, the proportion of children enrolled in private primary schools in Ghana continued to grow after 2005, rising to around a quarter of all pupils enrolled overall. For Nigeria in the 5-19 age-group (Table 3), figures are shown by

household economic quintile, for those enrolled in school only. The pattern by economic status is similar to that in Ghana. Just over 8% of children in the poorest households were attending private school in 2004, rising to almost 23% in the richest households.

**Table 2: Type of School Attended by Household Poverty Status – Ghana 2005/6 (aged 6-17)**

Poverty Status	Schooling Type			% of enrolled in private school
	No School	Public	Private	
Extremely Poor	36.4	58.5	5.09	<b>8.00</b>
Poor	20.1	69.0	10.9	<b>13.6</b>
Non-Poor	13.2	60.1	26.7	<b>30.8</b>
Total	22.6	60.5	16.9	<b>21.8</b>

Source: Computed from GLSS 5

**Table 3: Type of School Attended by Economic Quintile – Nigeria 2004 (aged 5-19)**

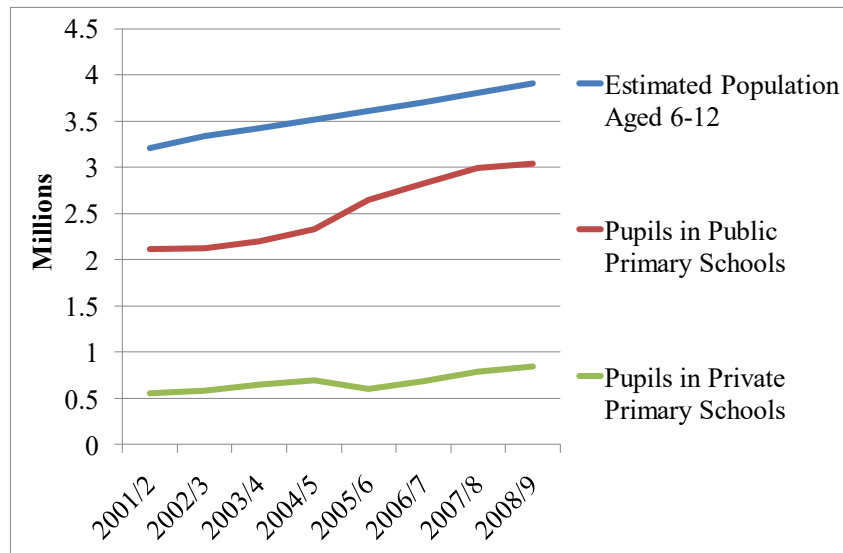
Economic Quintile	Schooling Type		
	Government	Other	Private
1 (poorest)	85.98	5.71	<b>8.31</b>
2	84.60	5.59	<b>9.81</b>
3	85.54	3.84	<b>10.63</b>
4	81.09	4.62	<b>14.28</b>
5 (richest)	73.05	4.29	<b>22.66</b>

Source: Computed from NLSS

Enrolments in private primary schools in Ghana (Figure 1) increased steadily until 2004/5 when they dropped back. Since this coincided with the introduction of the Capitation Grant, it appears that some families decided to opt for public schooling in place of private in that year, owing to reductions in cost. In 2005/6, private primary school enrolments again began to increase steadily, recovering to their 2004/5 levels by 2007/8. The elimination of public school fees may have caused a ‘supply-side shock’ which altered the calculus of relative costs and benefits facing households so that public schooling became relatively better value for money, persuading households at the margin to select public schools for new enrolments and/or to transfer their children from private to public schools between 2004/5 and 2005/6 but this was not sustained, arguably due to concerns of quality in an expanding public system.

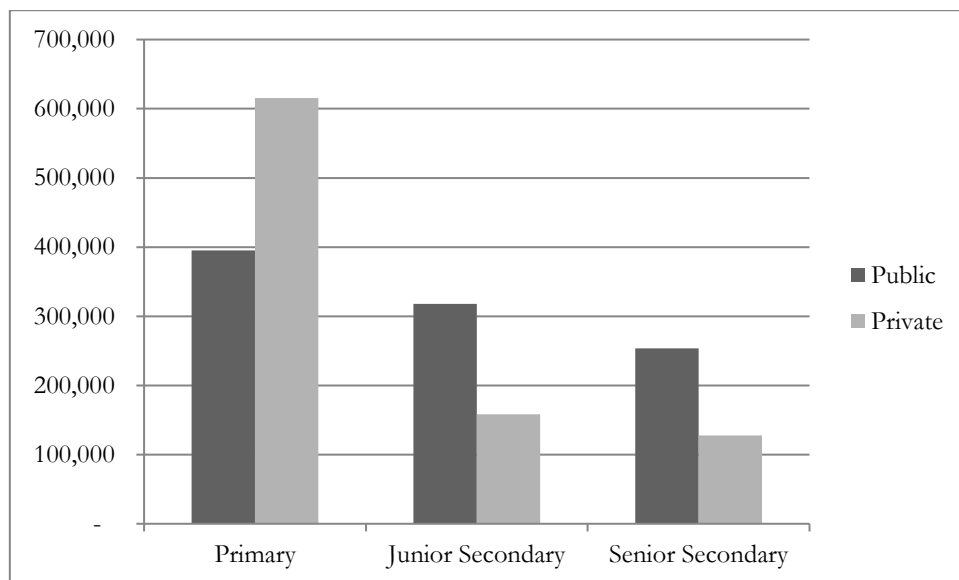
Data from a census of private schools in Lagos state (Lagos State Ministry of Education, 2010) show rapidly increasing numbers of private schools in the country’s most urbanised state. Figure 2 below shows enrolments in 2010. By far the largest share of private enrolments is at the primary level, where they are one and a half times as high as public enrolments. This pattern reverses at the junior and senior secondary levels.

**Figure 1: Enrolment in Public and Private Primary Schools 2001-9**



Source: Authors' calculations from EMIS

**Figure 2: Total Pupil Enrolment in Primary and Secondary Schools in Lagos State (2010)**



Source: Lagos State Annual Schools Census Report 2010 (Lagos State Ministry of Education, 2010)

## 5. Perceptions Driving the Growth in LFPS

### *The Quality of Education and Care*

While a range of more nuanced views was expressed, respondents including parents of children in public schools, most often considered education quality to be higher in LFPS than in the public system in both countries. When asked which schools they would patronise if choice was unrestricted, most favoured LFPS, explaining that the primary barrier to private schooling consisted in the level of fees. When asked about how they chose schools for different children, a common response was that private schools would be selected for more able pupils, who might be expected to benefit most,



If I had more children I would see which ones did well and send those to private school and the ones who are not good to the public school. (Parent, public school, Ghana)

The benefits of LFPS at the basic level in both countries were often explained in terms of improving the chances of access to public senior secondary schools,

At the secondary schools level the public school is usually preferable...it would be...more appropriate to have school certificate exam in public school than private school.  
(Parent public school, Nigeria)

Parents, especially in Ghana, expressed serious concerns about public school quality,

Realizing how the teachers in the school are behaving towards the children, not teaching them, allowing them to loiter around; I moved them to a private one.  
(Parent, private school, Ghana)

Respondents' views diverged somewhat in Nigeria, however, where some parents expressed support for the government's attempts to improve quality,

As far Lagos state is concerned...public schools are becoming reputable due to the government influence.  
(Parent public school, Nigeria)

In Ghana, parents frequently mentioned the high-stakes BECE (Basic Education Certificate Examination). This public examination serves to ration places at Senior High School (SHS), in turn the gateway to higher levels of education and training. One private parent explained,

I am keeping my child in private school because I want him to go to a good high school so I know he will perform well. So when the results are released, the computer will select my child to go to a good senior high school.  
(Parent, private school, Ghana)

In fact, the link between private school choice and hopes for better performance on the BECE was made by almost every respondent in the Ghana case study. Moreover, dissatisfaction with public schools among parents whose children attended them was frequently expressed in terms of poor examination performance,

In the government school, the examination results are not good. This public school almost scored zero in their last examinations.  
(Parent, public school, Ghana)

Parents in Ghana commented favourably on private schools' organisation of sporting competitions, drama productions and school trips as well as on children's standards of dress. Parents in Nigeria concentrated less directly on examination results *per se*, but emphasised academic achievement more generally as an incentive to choose LFPS, while parents in both countries frequently spoke enthusiastically about the level of individual care and attention provided at private schools. For example,

The teachers in a private school are more concerned for the children so if a child has been absent for more than a day or two they will come to you and ask why the child is in the house.  
(Parent, private school, Ghana)

One parent in Nigeria explained that better care may be linked to better pupil-teacher ratios in LFPS,

We have fewer people there compared to the public school, so I believe in private school the children would have close relationship with their teachers

(Parent with children in both public and private schools, Nigeria)

However, in Ghana class sizes are in fact often larger in LFPS than in public schools, yet parents also noted better care in these schools, by comparison with public schools,

I do visit but that place... when I complain the teachers tell me it is a government school and free, and if I want I can take my son out of the school.

(Parent, public school, Ghana)

In Ghana, it was explained that the higher status of teachers in public schools, and hence the greater 'social distance' between them and poor parents, may in part explain the difference in responsiveness to parents,

Instead of welcoming you...you'll be standing there for minutes and they will not mind you; but for the private school, even though the teachers are younger, they give you so much respect.

(Parent, public school, Ghana)

Parents in Nigeria expressed a similar view of the approachability of teachers in LFPS. While it is clear that perceptions of better care and of more cordial relationships with schools and teachers are a strong draw of the LFPS, these advantages may be valued especially by poorer groups whose social or cultural 'capital' may be limited and who may consequently have limited influence in the public school system. The fact that these parents are paying fees arguably empowers them to hold the school accountable in a way that the public school is not.

#### *Reasons for Differences in Quality*

The key feature of public schooling about which parents in Ghana were positive was the comparatively low cost,

What I like best is just the capitation budget they give to the children which makes the costs of schooling a bit lower...anything regarding the curriculum, teachers, exam results, it is not good.

(Parent, public school, Ghana)

They also reported that school infrastructure is generally better in public schools, but emphasised nonetheless that differences in learning favour private schools.

In a public school, the buildings are nice, they have good infrastructure. They are trained and good teachers but the kind of learning there is not good

(Parent, private school, Ghana)

In Nigeria, parents' views on about the advantages of public schooling in terms of infrastructure diverged somewhat more, and some drew attention to better facilities in private schools,

We have teachers that are very careful in private schools; there is laboratory, good libraries, computer facilities and so many other things (Parent, public school, Nigeria)

Regarding pupils' 'opportunities to learn', in both Ghana and Nigeria, teachers and parents explained that there is little difference in the core curriculum between public and private schools. Nonetheless, private schools were found to prioritise the teaching of English and parents typically valued an early-start in teaching English, but also commented on the apparently more successful teaching styles in private schools,

The teachers in private schools force children to speak English...but in public schools they learn English but they don't speak it and they don't know why.

(Parent, private school, Ghana)

In Nigeria, some LFPS were found to be offering an 'enhanced curriculum' as well as employing pedagogies more squarely focused on children's individual understanding, including through the use of 'reading clubs' and specialist teachers,

When we started this programme we were having teachers for different subjects like music, French and other subjects, and when the parents see that they were impressed and happy

(Proprietor, private school, Nigeria)

Private school teachers in Ghana were considered to adopt pedagogical strategies aimed more specifically at ensuring that pupils have mastered the intended curriculum,

The teachers force them to understand what they teach by giving them a lot of exercises and organizing quizzes. For instance, if it is science, it will be taught differently in a private school so that when the children go to BECE they will pass and pass well.

(Parent, private school, Ghana)

Parents believed the extra classes provided in private schools to be particularly important in consolidating learning,

Whatever is taught in the daytime is retaught after school...In public schools, they teach what they are supposed to teach and don't care whether the children have understood or not.

(Parent, private school, Ghana)

Private school teachers also emphasised differences between public and private schools in relation to marking and student monitoring,

In our school we make sure that children read, do the assignment, we mark and make sure they do the corrections and that is what the public schools do not do.

(Teacher, private school, Ghana)

Respondents in both countries agreed that public school teachers are usually better qualified and more experienced than private school parents. However, parents of children in LFPS argued that attitudes and behaviours adopted by teachers in LFPS counteract the effects of qualification and experience. Public school parents in Nigeria, on the other hand, indicated the better qualification and experience of teachers as reasons for choosing public schools, for example,

Teachers in public school are full of knowledge...unlike the private school they employ people that are not knowledgeable about teaching...all in the name of making money.  
(Parent public school, Nigeria)

Conversely, it was suggested in Ghana that the relative youth of less experienced private school teachers might be advantageous to pupil learning

Some of the [public school] teachers are old and lack some of the modern language that they do have in the private schools especially ICT...the training they had was a long time ago  
(Parent, private school, Ghana)

The lack of professional qualifications and limited experience of LFPS teachers was also linked to better supervision of teachers in LFPS, a feature parents valued highly,

Because most of the teachers are senior school graduates, they are very serious with the teaching and if they don't teach the owners of the school would ask them to leave.  
(Parent, private school, Ghana)

While at the same time, one parent of a pupil in public school expressed some scepticism in relation to the competence of private school teachers, linked to the lack of regulation and to commercial incentives,

The private schools are just a business so that they get some money in their pocket. So they recruit all kinds of teachers to teach in those schools.  
(Parent, public school, Ghana)

Particular attention was given by respondents to differences in teacher behaviour between school types. Firstly, they emphasised the higher levels of attendance and punctuality of private school teachers.

The private school teachers are very punctual, if it is 8am, you will find them at school but for the public school...teachers can stay at home till 10am  
(Parent, private school, Ghana)

In Nigeria, parents referred frequently to the issue of teacher strikes in the public sector.

In the private school they don't go on strike it's only public school that goes on strike; any little thing like this they will go on strike  
(Parent, private school, Nigeria)

The issue of accountability of both teachers and schools was central to many interviewees' responses. In public schools, teacher accountability was considered lacking, including through the absence of incentives or monitoring. Differences in accountability were linked by respondents to ownership and management structures, including the role of the school proprietor in private schools,

The owner of the school is accountable to parents; teachers are very careful the way they behave during school hours so if you misbehave the owner of the school can quickly expel you or sack you (Parent, private school, Ghana)

Conversely, in the public school,

They think they are on their own, not under anyone else's control...they spend a lot of time making phone calls during teaching time. (Parent, private school, Ghana)

The payment of fees was linked by respondents in both countries to differences in accountability between school types. For example,

No proprietor would like to see the teachers not working...because they know that it is where they are getting their money from. (Parent, private school, Nigeria)

Fees are low in absolute terms, but so are incomes. In the Ghana case-study, salaries were reported by teachers to be between 30 GhC (\$17.7) and 80GhC (\$47.2) per month. By comparison, teachers in public schools would usually earn between \$120 and \$350. Difficulties in collecting fees impact upon the school's income and, in turn on the ability to pay teachers' salaries,

If we don't get the school fees we don't get a salary. We can't buy food so we have no energy to teach. It affects our motivation to teach. (Teacher, private school, Ghana)

Extra classes were found to be essential for supplementing private school teachers' incomes,

After 1.30pm to 3.30pm they have their extra classes, because they know that this is the way to get paid and to increase their salary...They get paid more for extra classes, which goes directly to them. (Proprietor, private school, Ghana)

### *Affordability and Value for money*

While the fees payable at private schools in the study were found to be low by international standards and sometimes by parents, they remain difficult to afford for many. Parents of children in public schools explained that fees presented a serious barrier to enrolling their children in private schools,

For private school their fee is on the high side, it takes a lot of plan and savings to be able to pay (Parent, public school, Nigeria)

Some parents of children in private schools explained that they sometimes take loans to afford school fees. In some cases, affording fees sometimes required considerable sacrifices to be made,

Sometimes I have to borrow, but my wife is aware that an education is important so sometimes we don't eat in order to provide an education for our children

(Parent, private school, Ghana)

While other parents reported that they found the fees affordable, several also argued that the costs of books, food and extra classes may be an even greater burden, especially given that these payments cannot be deferred. However, private schools were often found to adopt strategies to aid affordability, including flexible payment terms. Parents most often spoke positively about 'value for money' in terms of the service provided by private schools, citing in particular the school's examination results, success in progression to post-basic education and pupils' learning of English. One teacher cited speaking English as a litmus test in parents' minds for 'value for money',

If you go home and the boy/girl speaks English the parent will admire it and say, 'ah, the money I am spending is being returned to me so I will pay whatever you ask from me'.

(Teacher, private school, Ghana)

One parent in Nigeria dissented notably on the issue of 'value for money', however, while this response was untypical,

My child in private school is not really better...we would buy books that they would not read a page in a section and those around me that are going to a public school are performing well

(Parent, public school, Nigeria)

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

While limited to the study of two communities, interview data gathered for this study show considerable consonance among the views of parents and teachers across the communities, including with regard to the reasons for choosing private schooling, to the perceptions of differences in quality between public and private schools; and to how these differences might be explained. Parents considered learning progress to be better in LFPS and perceived these schools to provide for better opportunities for progression in the higher levels of the public system. Given the potentially high returns to higher levels of schooling and the high costs of attending private schools at this level, this view may be considered in one sense at least a 'rational' one, provided that LFPS produce better outcomes. The level of state subsidy at higher levels of education is high, so that if enrolment in private basic schools provides better access to progression by 'jumping the queue' it may lead to considerable long-term benefits. Reform of the state education system in Ghana in 1967 shortened the length of the basic education cycle after which secondary schooling was rationed by examination. Following this reform, private primary schools flourished (see Addae-Mensah et al 1973) and the share of secondary school pupils from these schools increased. The present situation is somewhat similar, and raises many of the same equity questions, yet on a larger scale.

The commercial incentives of LFPS were a concern to parents in some cases, but many parents and teachers believed these incentives to promote unity among the goals and incentives of schools,

teachers and parents, since school enrolments depend upon reputation, which in turn depends on performance. On the other hand, LFPS in the low-income communities in this study paid teachers close to a subsistence wage and teachers were found sometimes to depend on 'extra classes' to earn an adequate income, leaving them open to the charge of exploitation of teaching staff and of an excessive incentive to extend the hours for which children are instructed.

While clearly not all of the practices of LFPS provide for good 'policy learning' in the public system, the critical views of parents in relation to that system suggest considerable dissatisfaction and, a perception at least, of 'government failure' in the sector, especially in Ghana. Failure of the public system to provide for good quality basic education has negative implications for social justice regardless of the actions of LFPSs, since it denies children an essential opportunity for human development. But the emergence of LFPSs as an alternative may add inequality to inequity, especially if the benefits of enrolment in private basic schools serve to allow some pupils to progress more readily beyond that stage, with the result that initial advantage is compounded through the rest of a child's educational career and beyond. Depending on the affordability of fees, LFPS may also introduce a stronger link between educational quality and ability to pay, potentially worsening the relative outcomes of the poorest for whom such schools are beyond reach. Further, to the extent that parents' resource-constrained decisions concerning whom to send to LFPSs favour more able children, weaker pupils may also be further disadvantaged in relative terms by the expansion of LFPS; while the extent of selection by ability makes it complex to disentangle the real effect on learning of private schools.

The state may reduce inequality in one sense by 'clamping down' on unregistered private schools through the use of regulatory enforcement, as has been observed in several countries (Rose 2007), including in Nigeria. But dealing squarely with inequity requires addressing the issues of quality within public schools, and in this there may be considerable opportunities for 'policy learning' from LFPS. Perhaps the most important lessons appear to be those less concerned with 'inputs' in the conventional sense of infrastructure, facilities and measured teacher characteristics and more concerned with school and classroom 'processes', including monitoring of pupil progress and welfare, communication with parents and the motivation and supervision of teachers. While the available evidence is inadequate to support the use of radical measures such as 'vouchers', the satisfaction of parents with LFPSs nonetheless suggests a case for strengthening the mechanisms through which public schools can learn from innovation in the LFPS sector in low income communities, through collaboration or partnership. Nonetheless, the improvement of learning quality in government basic schools, which continue to serve the majority of children from low income households, remains paramount among public policy priorities where social justice in basic education is concerned.

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