

Parents' Preference for Private Secondary Schools in Nigeria

Florence Aduke Adebayo

Faculty of Education, University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
E-mail: dukesseyi@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT The study examined the phenomenon of parental preference for private secondary schools in Nigeria. The population consisted all the parents and guardians of children in private secondary schools. Purposive random sampling was used to select 750 parents from various private schools during the Parents-Teacher Association (PTA) meeting. An instrument designated Parental Preference for Private Secondary Schools (PPSS) was used to collect data. The instrument was validated and reliability coefficient was found to be 0.87. The results were analysed using frequency counts and percentages. The findings revealed some factors such as teacher quality and quantity, facilities, class size, curriculum practices, stability of academic activities, disciplinary concerns, cost effectiveness and overall output quality as responsible concepts preference to private secondary schools. Some of the recommendations made were curriculum implementation should be more targeted and student specific in public schools, public school administrators are encouraged to learn from best practices that makes private secondary school such an attractive option for both students and parents. Government is encouraged to borrow leaf from the management and supervision of charter schools in Columbia and Philippines who designed quality activity and requirements that are consistent with the ever changing intellectual, social and physical development of the child.

INTRODUCTION

A careful observation of current trends in Nigeria in terms of parents' preferred choice of educational institution for their children would reveal an ineffective learning towards privately run educational institutions, as opposed to public institutions. Regardless of whatever level of education one considers, primary, secondary and tertiary the trend seems to be the same. It seems that there is a persistent and wide-spread loss of confidence in public educational institutions. As Ajayi (2000) noted, it is still observed that final education today has been faced with various challenges ranging from mismanagement of allocated resources, to falling academic standards. This calamitous situation has further caused greater concern to most Nigerians in the educational institutions seem to have overlooked the primary purpose of schooling and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to achieve them. This nagging challenges faced by the education sector leads to an inevitable consequence, as observed by Okafor et al. (2003), "falling standards leading to pushing the goal excellence to the back burner as public confidence in our educational system is eroded".

Other important reasons for loss of confidence in our educational system include poor planning and consistent lack of investment in the education system. This had led to a near collapse of the

system living the education infrastructure in an appalling and dilapidated state. A casual visit to any public school in Nigeria would reveal the extent to which these educational institutions have decayed. Educational facilities at all levels are in a terrible shape; schools are littered with battered structures; worn out equipment (where they are available at all); junk and unserviceable vehicles; raggedy classroom buildings; over-crowded classrooms; inadequate manpower in quantity and quality; instability in the academic calendar owing to strikes; very low teacher (staff) morale due to poor remuneration and working conditions.

With the public educational infrastructure in this condition (and very little is being done to remedy the situation) parents who are concerned about giving their wards the best available educational options will obviously be looking for viable alternatives and this, it seems, is manifestly the case in Nigeria. Many parents seem to be looking for quality education at whatever cost, economically and otherwise and regardless of who is providing it. It must be pointed out that education (Western Education) has come to occupy a strong position in Nigerian daily life; as quite a lot depends on the quality of that education that an individual receives. The type of extent of one's education, many a time, determines the difference between success and failure in life, poverty and affluence and generally the opportunities and quality of life of an

individual. This critical point, many parents and guardians have come to understand; and this is the reason they will not handle carelessly matters that have to do with the education of their children

Therefore, given the level of decay and the pervasive conditions of ineptitude and lack of professionalism in the public schools, many parents feel let down; but they cannot give up their dream of giving their children the best in terms of education. This is where the private educational institutions come in. It is appropriate at this point to make clear of one fact, and that, government alone cannot provide all that the citizenry requires in terms of educational needs. As it has been experienced in other sectors, beyond education, government has not been able to fulfil expectation in many years of service delivery; roads, telecommunication, water supply, electricity etc. The trend is such that, government is increasingly moving away from a policy of direct involvement in the provision of basic services. However, the situation with education is different from other basic services. It seems government has not always been involved as expected in the education of the citizens

However, the little government control and direct involvement in the day-to-day running of schools has not been without challenges; and this explains why education is in the state it is today. Since the early 1900s, private ownership and control of schools is becoming (or has become) very popular. Privately run schools are now being looked upon to correct the ills and lapses by the long years of government involvement in running of schools, we are now witnessing a situation whereby, faith-based or missionary schools that were wrested from their founders by government are now being returned to their former owners; and some schools that were- established by government are even to be concession out to private people for management e.g. the Federal Government Colleges or Unity Schools. With these moves, it seems that government is admitting that it cannot effectively run schools and this has further lent credibility to the thinking of most parents and administrators that privately run schools are better off compared to schools being run by the government. Private educational institutions in Nigeria have really grown in profile in the last 10-15 years, such that they have gained acceptance and huge popularity among parents and, as can be currently seen. For the government, especially the Obasanjo administration, efficiency

through privatization seems to be the issues. Government seems to believe that putting education in private hands will help resolve all the problems of inefficiency currently seen in the education system

According to them, competition is healthy for schools. Those that must produce results to survive have to be better than those that do not face such pressure. In other words, private educational institutions, which must compete for the consumers (wealthy parents) of their services, must necessarily perform better than public schools. Care should be taken however that, while privatization and commercialization have worked effectively in other sectors of national life, such as banking, telecommunication, aviation, broadcasting, solid minerals and others; the education enterprise poses a very different and unique challenge, in that, the input and output of the "Education industry" are human beings with emotions and a capability to reason and think in complex ways; and tend to behave in an unpredictable manner.

This study therefore, will try to look into what parents think private schools are doing well that are not being done so well in public schools; in order that there might be modifications in the public school system and make it more attractive to parents and students.

Statement of the Problem

The issue of excellence and quality assurance in education should be of primary concern to any Society, governments and parents alike. Private schools and education are almost entirely exclusive; those who pursue education in these institutions must pay for the services they enjoy. Public schools on the other hand are, at least, include and open to all, reach and poor. Since, an overwhelming percentage of our population lives below the poverty line (NEEDS 2006) and cannot pay for education in a private school. Society and government cannot afford to toy with quality and excellence in public schools.

Considering the fact that public schools do not enjoy a lot of public confidence at the moment, owing to decaying infrastructure and years of neglect, it seems parents are favouring privately run schools as viable alternative to the crumbling public school structure. In the United States, for instance, it is being suggested that private schools should be subsidized through a voucher system

this would mean that many more parents could afford to send their children to private schools where, for the most part, the educational experience would, in many cases, seem to be more effective. The latter fact has been shown to be highly correlated with student success.

At the same time, there are some major challenges associated with a move to private schools. First, many private schools have religious orientation. This raises the thorny issue of religion in our national life. Second, will some private schools need to be so profit oriented that they will be tempted to cut corners and deprive students of extra-curricular activities, services and enrichment? Third, is the fear that funds for public schools would be diverted to the private sector and that our public schools would end up being even worse off than they are now; as the better students and their politically influential parents abandon the public schools system; will this not produce a downward spiral in overall quality? It has been suggested in this scenario that, if left unchecked, our public schools could eventually end up resembling remedial detention centres housing unmotivated and uninterested young people - students who are well aware of the fact that they are getting a second-or third-rate educational chance in life.

It is against this backdrop that this research was laid out to answer the following research question:

- i. Do parents think private schools perform better than public schools academically?
- ii. Do parents believe private schools are better staffed (in quality and quantity) than public schools?
- iii. Do parents think private schools are better off in terms school plant, equipment and other facilities?
- iv. Do parents believe that the curriculum in private schools is better than that of public schools?
- v. Do parents think pursuing education in a privately run school is more cost-effective than doing same in a public school?
- vi. Do parents believe that the quality of the output from private schools is better than public school?

Research Method

The study employed a descriptive research.

The population consisted of all the parents and guardians that have children in private secondary schools. Purposive random sampling was used to select 750 parents from various private schools during the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) meeting. An instrument designated parental preference for private secondary schools (PPSS) was used to collect data. The instrument was validated and the reliability coefficient was 0.87. Results were analysed using frequency counts, and percentages.

RESULTS

Question 1: Do parents think private schools perform better than public schools academically?

From Table 1, parents are seen to judge private schools better than public schools in terms of academic performance. The frequencies and percentages range from 450 to 540 and 60% to 72% respectively. The academic performance of private schools is hence high and positive.

Question 2: Do parents believe private schools are better staffed (in quality and quantity) than public schools?

From Table 2, parents are seen to judge private school teachers to be better in terms of commitment to work, motivation by rewards and effectiveness. Frequencies and percentage range from 380 - 580 and 50.6% respectively. However, in terms of overall quality (item 1) do not think private school teachers are better: 300 (40%) think private school have better quality teachers and 440 (58.6%) think private schools do not have better qualify teachers.

Question 3: Do parents think private schools are better off in terms of physical facilities?

From table 3. infrastructural facilities in private schools are seen to be better than what is available in public schools. Frequencies and percentages range from 590 - 620 and 78.5% - 82.6% respectively.

Question 4: Do parents believe that the curriculum in private schools is better?

From table 4 curriculum practices in private schools are seen to be of high quality. The frequencies and percentages range from 390-250 and 52%-69.3% respectively.

Question 5: Is it more cost effective to pursue education in a private school?

From table 5. Private Schools are seen to be more cost effective due to better funding and efficiency of resource utilization: 560 (74.6%) and

Table 1: Parental perception of private and public schools academic performance.

S. No.	Item	Yes	No	Ab
1.	Do you think private schools are better academically than public schools?	520 (69.3)	220 (29.3)	10(1.3)
2..	Do you think private schools perform better in external exams than public schools	500 (66.6)	240 (32)	10(1.3)
3.	Do you think your child has a better chance of gaining university admission if in a private school?	450 (60)	280 (37.3)	20 (2.6)
4.	Do you think your child is better prepared for higher education if in a private school?	540 (72)	200 (26.6)	10(1.3)
5.	Do you think private schools prepare your child for future professionalization better than public schools?	510(68)	210(28)	30(4)

N= 750, Percentage (%) in bracket, Ab= Abstention

Table 2: Parental perception of quality and quantity of private and public staff

S. No.	Item	Yes	No	Ab
1.	Do you think private schools have better quality teachers than public schools	300 (40)	440 (58.6)	10(1.3)
2.	Do you think private school's teachers possess the requisite qualifications?	380 (50.6)	350 (46.6)	20 (2.6)
3.	Do you think private school's teachers are more committed than public ones?	580(77.3)	160(21.3)	10(1.3)
4.	Do you think private school's teachers are better motivated in terms of remunerations?	490 (65.3)	260 (34.6)	10(1.3)
5.	Do you think private school's teachers are more effective than public school ones?	490 (65.3)	230(30.6)	30(4)

N = 750, Percentage (%) in bracket, Ab – Abstention

Table 3: Parental perception of physical facilities in private and public schools

S. No.	Item	Yes	No	Ab
1.	Do you think private schools have better facilities than public schools?	590 (78.6)	150(20)	10(1.3)
2.	Do you think the environment, in private schools encourage teaching/learning?	610(81.3)	130(17.3)	10(1.3)
3.	Do you think maintenance culture is higher in private schools than in public schools?	620 (82.6)	130(17.3)	

N = 750. Percentage (%) in bracket, Ab = Abstention

Table 4: Parental perception of curriculum standard in private and public schools.

S. No.	Item	Yes	No	Ab
1.	Do you think private schools offer a more diversified and flexible curriculum than public schools?	440 (58.6)	300 (40)	10(1.3)
2.	Is the curriculum better implemented in private schools than in public ones?	520 (69.3)	230 (30.6)	
3.	Do you think the curriculum in private schools is more student-centred compared to public schools?	390 (52)	340 (45.3)	20 (2.6)
4.	Do you think private schools provide better opportunities for extra-curricular activities?	450 (60)	290 (38.6)	10(1.3)

N = 750, Percentage (%) in bracket, ABb= Abstention

630 (84%). However, parents believe that private schools are expensive and profit oriented.

Question 6: Do parents believe the quality of output from private schools is better than public schools?

From Table 6, graduates from private schools are generally seen to be of higher quality than those from public schools. Frequencies and percentages range from 280 (36%) respectively. However, they do not believe that graduates from

Tables 5: Parents perception of cost effectiveness in private and public schools.

S. No.	Item	Yes	No	Ab
1.	Do you think private schools are better funded compared to public schools?	560 (74.6)	170(22.6)	20 (2.6)
2.	Do you think private schools utilise resources more efficiently?	630 (84)	110(14.6)	10(1.3)
3.	Do you think private schools have a tendency to be profit oriented?	620 (82.6)	120(16)	10(1.3)
4.	Do you think private schools are expensive?	710(94.6)	40 (5.3)	

N = 750, Percentage (%) in bracket, Ab = Abstention

Table 6: Parents perception on the quality of output from private and public schools.

S. No.	Item	Yes	No	Ab
1.	Do you consider graduates from private schools to be of higher quality?	430 (57.3)	320 (42.6)	
2.	Do you think graduates from private schools have a better chance of securing employment quicker than graduates from public schools?	270 (36)	460(61.3)	20 (2.6)
3.	Do you think graduates from private schools have better social and professional skills?	390 (52)	340 (45.3)	20 (2.6)

N = 750, percentage (%) in bracket, Ab = Abstention

private schools have a better chance of securing employment opportunities quicker than graduates from public schools.

DISCUSSION

The study shows a high and positive level of academic performance for private schools. This conclusion was supported by a website article, stating that private schools offer more accelerated college focused courses and are more intent on hurrying their students to go to college (www.essortment.com). This is in stark contradiction to a report by Lubianski (2005) cited on education work biogspot.com, which concluded that when it comes to Mathematics, students in regular public schools do as well as or significantly better than comparable students in private schools.

A significantly high and positive view of staff in private schools was reported by the study, lending credence from Knudson (2005), who stated that the most important thing about private schools is the "one -to-one" help with the teacher to help students individually. Contrarily, [HYPERLINK http://www.browardschools.com](http://www.browardschools.com) reported that private schools have no personnel requirements better than the public schools. Infrastructural facilities in private schools have also been scored high, accordingly. Lackhed and Jimenez (1994) reported that private schools have more instructional materials, a larger stock of

institutional resources such as laboratories, libraries and subject rooms.

In terms of curriculum practices, private schools enjoyed such widespread acclaimed Knudson (2005) said that private schools implement curriculum document to the letter and print. In public schools, some students never really, fully understand the basic concepts of various core subjects and would be allowed to go to the next class. It can be gathered from the study results, that private education is cost effective as value for money is guaranteed. In a study the Human Development Network of the World Bank (2001) also agrees that private schools are probably more cost effective than public schools in providing student achievement. While fees for private schools exceed that for public schools, the operating costs of private schools are relatively low, despite relatively higher teacher - pupil ratio due to lower salary structures (Alderman et al. 2001).

Finally, the study showed that the output from private schools are of a better and higher quality compared with those from public schools Knudson (2005) opined that private schools teach students to be respectful to elders and other people around them. They also teach basic skills for learners to know how to behave properly in society. However, Rothstem et al. (1999) contrarily reported that private schools do not necessarily aim to produce higher non-achievement outputs - behaviours and values. Consequently graduates

from private schools do not necessarily have to be of higher quality than their counterparts from public schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the research findings, the following recommendations were made:

Public schools should be encouraged to organize their activities more effectively around academic achievement objectives in order to improve performance. Efforts should be made at improving infrastructural facilities in public schools through an integrated programme of renovation reconstruction and maintenance of existing school facilities. A decongestion programme should be undertaken through the construction of new schools and expansion of existing schools in areas where enrolment outweighs available facilities.

Curriculum implementation should be more targeted and student-specific in public schools. Public school managers are encouraged to learn from best practices that make Private secondary schools such an attractive option for both students and parents. A more transparent financial system should be put in place at public schools leading to greater efficiency in resource utilization.

The goals of public school education should be diversified to cater for non-academic outcomes such as good social skills, good morals and possession of technical skills. Private schools should be encouraged to maintain their level of excellence through better system of control and regulation. Government should emulate the management and supervision systems of Charter Schools in Columbia and Philippines who designed quality activity and requirements that are consistent with the ever changing intellectual, social and physical development of the child. Subsidies should be provided through a voucher system to allow more willing parents send their children to private schools.

CONCLUSION

With the sympathetic condition in the public education, and the thinking of parents that private

schools are better managed, with a relatively higher standard of education, fewer disciplinary problems, better facilities, better performance in public examinations, guaranteed cost effectiveness and higher quality of output. It is obvious that any reasonable and responsible parent will choose to send his/her child to privately run institutions where a qualitative and effective education is guaranteed.

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