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| University of Oklahoma Honors College |
| Transferring the Responsibility of Education to the People  |
| **A case study of public and private education in Nigeria** |

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**Introduction**

 Since the wave of independence in the 1960s, Sub-Saharan African governments have made education a top priority. But growing demand coupled with insufficient budgetary allocation and a lack of enforced regulation within the public education system has created a quality crisis in many public schools throughout the continent, which has prevented education from being meaningful, i.e. pertinent and relative to human development and betterment. This paper focuses specifically on issues in Nigeria that have negatively affected universal primary education in the country. Like many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the government of Nigeria has proven inadequately equipped to provide quality education to all children. The costs of providing free primary education to all are exorbitant, especially as the population grows. Furthermore, the Nigerian government often behaves kleptocratically. Funds set aside from state revenues and/or outside donors do not go toward the improvement of schools or toward the enforcement of regulations that are meant to maintain quality facilities, teachers and internal systems. As a result, primary public education is characterized by high drop out rates, low teacher qualifications, high teacher-pupil ratios, low standardized test scores, unavailability of textbooks and other classroom resources, and poor infrastructure. These problems in the public education system are even more extreme in certain regions and are exacerbated by poverty. Educating children requires poor families to pay hidden fees, to forgo extra income from child labor, and sometimes to travel long and dangerous distances to get to the nearest public school. Parents often do not have the means to ensure their children receive an education. But the greatest problem facing impoverished families is that they have little or no incentive to send their children to school because the quality of education provided by government schools is too low to even deliver potential positive future returns.

 Education is a key component of economic and human development. This is the reason Western donors have given it so much attention. But despite consistent failure, donors, scholars and advisers alike continue to place the responsibility of education on the government, as is the case in Nigeria. The United Nations has labeled education a basic human right, but there are many basic human rights that governments fail to properly provide. Education has proven to be one of them. Indeed, the Nigerian government has been plagued with extreme corruption and inefficiency. Consequently, attempts to reform the public education system in Nigeria have been half-hearted and lacking in continuity and reinforcement. Instead of acting as a means of leveling the socioeconomic playing field, the public education system perpetuates socioeconomic disparity because wealthier parents can send their children to high-quality private schools at home or abroad, while children of poorer parents are relegated to low-quality public schools. Low quality education defeats the purpose of education altogether.

 What most have failed to recognized, however, is that the poor in Nigeria, and in other Sub-Saharan African countries, have taken education into their own hands and have proven far more adept at managing this sector. James Tooley, a professor of education policy at Newcastle University, has spearheaded the study of private schools for the poor. His research has provided new insight into the ways poor people are addressing their needs, by providing higher quality education at an affordable price. In this paper, I will show how the government has failed in providing access to schools and to quality education. Based on this evidence and upon Tooley’s findings in private schools for the poor that are unaided and unrecognized by the Nigerian government, I contend that the responsibility of educating children should be transferred to the Nigerian people and away from the government.

***Review of the literature***

 Research on unrecognized, unaided (URUA) private schools in Sub-Saharan Africa is relatively new, therefore information is scarce. In fact, Nigerian government reports bear virtually no mention of such schools at all. Tooley’s interview of government officials in Lagos revealed that they deny that unrecognized, unaided private schools even exist.[[1]](#footnote-1) Furthermore, literature on private schooling in Nigeria is “extremely limited” and tends not to distinguish between recognized and unrecognized private schools.[[2]](#footnote-2) While there are some mentions of URUA private schools in reports by various authors, James Tooley’s study is by far the most comprehensive and empirical. His study won First Prize in a World Bank/*Financial Times* competition for Private Sector Development Research in 2006.[[3]](#footnote-3) He is a pioneer in this field of research, and for this reason my analysis of URUA private schools relies extensively on his fieldwork research.

 Although there is ample information about the public education system in Nigeria, numbers and statistics often vary per source. For example, population censuses are different depending on which source one uses. This is part and parcel of any study on Nigeria that requires demographic information, and it is reflective of the political tension within the country because census “figures are fiercely disputed as each groups sees itself ‘undercounted and other groups ‘inflated.’’”[[4]](#footnote-4) These problems are exacerbated when funding of government programs is the issue.[[5]](#footnote-5) Specifically regarding education, Johnston (2010) warns that “school enrollment data is usually collected at the start of the academic year and will not reflect actual rates of attendance or dropout during the school year.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Thus most reports for public school enrollment present higher enrollment rates than is probably the case in reality. I will attend to this problem by taking averages of the numbers given by each report where this is possible, but the reader should bear the inherent discrepancies in mind.

***Methodology and structure***

 I have chosen to study public and private education in Nigeria because of the country’s global prominence as a growing economic power and because there is vast literature available that addresses the education system there. Indeed, Tooley has done extensive on-the-ground research on private and public schools in Lagos, Nigeria, and his is the only research of its kind thus far. Moreover, I chose Nigeria because many of the phenomena that have occurred there have occurred in other Sub-Saharan African countries. For example, Nigeria has implemented Universal Basic Education policies, like many other countries on the continent, which has resulted in declining quality of education and given rise to the growth of the URUA private schools that are the focus of this paper.

 In the following sections, I will lay out an argument for why the responsibility of educating the children of Nigeria should be transferred from the government to the people. In Section 1, I will define certain terms that will be used throughout this paper, such as “schooling,” “education,” “unrecognized, unaided private schools,” “public schools,” “quality education,” “access to education,” and “development.” In Section 2, I will provide a comparison between public schools and unrecognized, unaided private schools in Nigeria. In this section, I will discuss the government’s role in education; the ownership and management of URUA private schools; national enrollment in public and private schools; infrastructure and availability of classroom resources; teacher quality; and test scores. This comparison will demonstrate how URUA private schools cater to the problems in public schools. In Section 3, I will address critics of URUA private schools and discuss how the URUA private school system produces incentives for parents to invest in education that the public school system does not. Lastly, I will summarize and draw conclusions about why the responsibility of education should rest with the Nigerian people.

 **I. Contextualizing the discussion about education**

 Intergovernmental organizations, governments and non-governmental organizations alike have placed special attention on education in developing nations in Sub-Saharan Africa since their independence. Western institutions, like the United Nations, the World Bank and the IMF, as well as African governments, each claim that education can serve as a promising tool for human and economic development.[[7]](#footnote-7) The UNICEF Schools for Africa website quotes Regional Director of Eastern and Southern Africa Per Engebak as saying, “No other investment has such a lasting effect as the education of children. Children who go to school are healthier, more self-assured and can more easily assume a profession. And education is the only effective ‘vaccine’ against HIV/AIDS.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Education attainment is the “new game-changer” for development because it is the “key to eliminating gender inequality, to reducing poverty, to creating a sustainable planet, to preventing needless deaths and illness, and to fostering peace.”[[9]](#footnote-9) The international community sees education as enabling political, social and, perhaps most importantly, economic improvement in a given society. Indeed, the discussion on education became primarily a discussion about economic development. Economists argued that if governments provided education to citizens, then those governments would be investing in human capital – a needed component of economic development.[[10]](#footnote-10) The more highly educated human capital is, the higher level of skill sets it acquires, and the higher-skilled and higher-paying careers those laborers can assume.

That the international community realized the benefits of education perhaps explains why, by 1990, primary school enrollment had reached 100 percent in 50 percent of the world’s countries, compared to 28 percent in 1960.[[11]](#footnote-11) The World Conference on Education for All at Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 hoped to capitalize on this by introducing the Education for All (EFA) program as a global commitment to provide basic education to all children, youth and adults. Ten years later, the international community, led by the UN, undertook two missions: the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and EFA, which then comprised six specific targets.[[12]](#footnote-12) Those targets are: one, expand early childhood care and education; two, provide free and compulsory primary education for all; three, promote learning and life skills for young people and adults; four, increase adult literacy; five, achieve gender parity; and six, improve the quality of education.[[13]](#footnote-13) One hundred and sixty-four governments have pledged to achieve EFA by 2015, including Nigeria.[[14]](#footnote-14) This pledge explains why billions of dollars of donor money has flowed into Sub-Saharan Africa for the expansion of its public education. This concerted effort shows that governments and international organizations have placed much faith in the power of education to help progress the development of nations.

Improving education in Sub-Saharan Africa will require improvement of two critical components: quality of education and access to schooling. The recurring problem with universal basic education (UBE) policies is that the international community and governments implementing UBE have not placed equal value on quality and access. The latter has taken center stage. Increasing the number of students enrolled in primary education is, for many governments—like Nigeria’s—the main point of EFA. This strategy, however, misses the point: that education becomes useless when it is not high quality. To continue this discussion, it is necessary to define “schooling,” “education,” “access” and “quality.”

***Defining the terms of education***

 There are two components of education: the delivery and content of the curricula and the institution, or school. These two components require adequate infrastructure, a proper supply of classroom resources, qualified teachers, and relevant courses that teach basic skills.[[15]](#footnote-15) The point of schooling—i.e. the provision of infrastructure, resources, teachers and courses—is to enable “successful learning and improved life chances for all classes of beneficiaries whose improved knowledge and skills, positive values and attitudes should contribute to reducing socio-economic inequities and poverty in the wider society.”[[16]](#footnote-16) This implies that education is not about getting students to school; rather it is about ensuring that those students are active participants in the process of learning and that the outcome of schooling is increased and improved knowledge in those areas deemed appropriate and relevant to society. If every child has access to this kind of education, then the society as a whole has taken one step closer to socioeconomic equity.

 Access, however, is not equal. Obanya (2010) lists five reasons some students in Nigeria may not have access to education. First, “education always has some overt/hidden, direct/indirect, legal/illegal costs” that many impoverished families cannot afford. Second, geographical barriers, such as long distances, difficult terrain, or sparsely populated areas, may prevent students from getting to a school. Third, certain groups or ethnicities within a society face discrimination or exhibit animosity toward others with whom they may have to share facilities. Fourth, many children face problems related to psychological access, i.e. they are in school but are not learning or able to participate fully. Fifth, cultural barriers hinder access to school, such as when the traditional calendar is different from the school calendar; the mother tongue of a child is different from the language taught at school; and/or religious beliefs and practices are not accommodated or respected by schools.[[17]](#footnote-17) Clearly, these barriers reflect a population that is affected by poverty; geography; and ethnic and religious tension, intolerance, and minority status.

 Another fundamental problem in the education system in Nigeria is the poor quality of education delivered to students. In this paper, I use Arikewuyo’s (2010) tripartite model of quality in education, which is laid out in Table 1. This model is adapted to the diverse nature of Nigeria and accounts for all the aforementioned barriers. It allows individual communities to plug in their own values and objectives that will benefit that community and the individuals that compose it.

***Defining public and private schools in Nigeria***

 The public education system is the medium through which the Universal Basic Education program is provided to the people of Nigeria. Local governments are responsible for providing and maintaining primary public schools, while the federal government determines national policy, sets standards (including curriculum) and monitors performance.[[18]](#footnote-18) Primary public education in Nigeria is free[[19]](#footnote-19) and compulsory. These teachers are hired and paid by the government, and education facilities are state-owned.

 Private schools, on the other hand, are privately owned and managed by a charitable trust/society or community group, a religious group, an individual proprietor or proprietors, or in rare cases by a commercial company.[[20]](#footnote-20) There are two different kinds of private schools in Sub-Saharan Africa: registered private schools, which have met state regulations have been inspected; and unregistered private schools, which have not applied to be registered or have not (yet) been said to have met those regulations.[[21]](#footnote-21) In each of these cases, the schools are unaided, meaning they do not receive funds or subsidies from the government. The focus of this paper will be directed upon unregistered, unaided (URUA) private schools because these tend to be the low-cost alternative for poorer families. These are the schools that have the most potential to provide equal access to quality education for all and thus contribute to development.

**Table 1: Arikewuyo’s tripartite model of quality in education**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Inputs** | **Processes** | **Outputs** |
| 1. Society | 1.1 Popular involvement in implementation (all facts)1.2 Society acceptance of the program | **Successful learning*** Acquisition of socially desirable intellectual and non-intellectual skills
* Continuing interest in learning

**Full-fledged society support*** permanent, unqualified; society’s interest in the promotion of education

**A well-motivated teaching and educational management force*** Teachers fully devoted to continuous self-improvement for a concerted promotion of education

**A self-regenerating educational system for a self-regenerating society; the ultimate goal:*** a committed society
* a critical mass of productive/creative citizens
* an educational system that goes on improving
 |
| 2. Policy | 2.1 Adaptability to local conditions2.2 Democratic policy review practices |
| 3. Management Framework | 3.1 Decentralization/ devolution of powers down to the grassroots level3.2 Empowerment and autonomy for operators all down the line |
| 4. Curriculum | 4.1 Responsiveness to societal and individual needs4.2 Comprehensive: courage of the three Hs (the head, the hands and the heart)4.3 Adaptable to changing times, changing needs and changing conditions |
| 5. Teaching force | 5.1 Quantitatively adequate5.2 Adequately educated and professionally prepared5.3 Adequately able to promote teacher-pupil interaction to maximize learning (pedagogically skilled)5.4 Well motivated through an appropriate welfare package, professional support, and opportunities for self improvement |
| 6. Infrastructure | 6.1 Quantitatively, aesthetically and spaciously adequate6.2 Learner and teacher friendly6.3 Integrated pedagogical space of classrooms, laboratories, libraries, toilets, water, farms, workshops, recreational facilities |
| 7. Materials | 7.1 Quantitatively adequate7.2 User friendly, easily exploitable and challenging to both teachers and learners7.3 A judicious mix of print, audio and other materials7.4 Closely related to the goals of the curriculum |
| 8. Funds | 8.1 Adequacy of funding8.2 Targeting funds to those things that will really make a difference8.3 Prompt release of funds8.4 Prudent application of funds |

**II. Public and private schools: a comparison of quality**

***The government and public education***

 Corruption and instability are the two defining characteristics of the Nigerian government since its independence in 1960. Kifordu divides Nigeria’s post-colonial history into five periods of alternating civil and military rule, which he says “reveal the tensions between leadership succession and legitimacy.”[[22]](#footnote-22) In other words, the alternation between types of regimes has created a discontinuity between education reform programs and policies. Governance and succession have come about because of coups that have alternately empowered civilian and military regimes. The first series of coups began in 1965 with the overthrow of the first civilian regime. The first military regime lasted from 1966—1979, and the second from 1984—1999.[[23]](#footnote-23) Each of the regimes added to the political and economic instability of the state. Even reintroductions to civilian rule failed to establish real democracy and accountability; the state was too weak to ameliorate the damage military rule had done, which created “problems of instability, uncertainty and degeneration on the political, economic, social and educational scenes.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Throughout the eras of military rule, the governments released educational policies in the form of decrees and edicts, “but the policy implementation [was] haphazard and unsatisfactory.”[[25]](#footnote-25) The governments failed to implement the policies because of consistent and abrupt changes in government leadership, and the crisis in the educational system today is largely the result of the “poor and unstable national leadership, the ripple effects of which tend to hit education programs and institutions hardest.”[[26]](#footnote-26) This is because each new government restarted reform projects rather than completing those of former leaders.

 The problem of discontinuity is compounded by the culture of corruption within the government. Transparency International’s 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index Report ranks Nigeria 143 out of 182 countries, with a corruption perception index of 2.4 on a one to ten scale.[[27]](#footnote-27) Only fifteen other African countries fall behind Nigeria,[[28]](#footnote-28) which means Nigeria is one of the most corrupt states in the world. Transparency International provides several key reasons for the country’s political corruption: first, its long military rule and the “de-emphasis on accountability” has led to the practice of impunity; second, there is an absence of “political will” to address the problems of corruption in the government; third, all initiatives to combat corruption have been failures because of the lack of a concerted effort and discontinuity due to regime changes; fourth, there is a “culture of tolerance for corruption” that is fostered by the ruling class; fifth, there is no enforcement against corruption.[[29]](#footnote-29) Corruption is clearly a deeply-imbedded trait of the Nigerian government and elite society, and the ramifications of unaccountability tend to affect the poorest the hardest.

Public services like education cannot and do not evade political corruption. Historically, educational planning has been emphasized by governments for political and propaganda reasons.[[30]](#footnote-30) It has been a means of winning popular support and donor aid, but the planning completely ignores the inputs that educational reform requires: “reliable sources of funding, an adequate supply of trained teachers for different academic programs, infrastructural facilities to accommodate natural and stimulated increases in school population and a dynamic economy to absorb its graduates from the schools.”[[31]](#footnote-31) What has resulted is a long list of administrations and policies without a feasible plan to implement and enforce them.

In 1990, Nigeria adopted the “World Declaration on Education for All” at the Jomtien World Conference. In 1999, the government re-launched the Universal Basic Education Scheme.[[32]](#footnote-32) In 2000, Nigeria committed itself to the Millennium Development Goals, which includes providing universal primary education for all. Further, aside from international campaigns, the Nigerian government has established several administrations for the management of the public primary education system:

* *Universal Basic Education Commission*: at federal, state and local level; establishes education policy and is responsible for allocation of resources
* *Federal Ministry of Education*: formulates national policy on education; collects data for planning and financing; harmonizes policies and procedures of all states in Nigeria; helps develop curricula
* *Federal Inspectorate Service*: supervises implementation of curriculum, standards and pedagogy; evaluates schools; measures quality of education
* *National Council of Education*: highest policy-making body in educational matters; comprises Federal Minister of Education and State Commissioners for Education
* *Joint Consultative Committee on Education*: composed of professional officers from federal and state ministries of education; advise NCE on educational matters
* *Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council*: develops curricula for all levels of education; researches education-related problems in Nigeria; completes and publishes research on education
* *National Teachers’ Institute*: provides training programs, seminars and workshops for teachers
* *Teachers’ Registration Council of Nigeria*: determines standards of knowledge and skills teachers must acquire to teach; obtains and maintains records of teachers in the state.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Creating these administrations, however, does not automatically ascribe functionality to them. Implementing policies, such as UBE and teacher qualification standards, has proven an insufficient response to the education crisis in Nigeria—because despite these programs and policies, public education is characterized by poor test scores, unequal access, diminishing quality, poor infrastructure, high dropout rates, and unqualified, unmotivated teachers.

 One of the most fatal consequences of corruption and unaccountability to the public education system in Nigeria is the misallocation of funds. The cost of maintaining a public education system is expensive. But the government’s ambition to expand access to schooling has not been “matched by a comparable increase in funding, to ensure that the quality of education is maintained.”[[34]](#footnote-34) UNESCO recommends that countries spend a minimum of 25 percent of their budgets on education, yet Nigeria allocates less than 10 percent.[[35]](#footnote-35) Budgetary allocation to education has fallen from 7.2 percent in 2004 to 6.67 percent in 2006.[[36]](#footnote-36) This decline in funding ironically coincides with Nigeria’s steady economic growth at an average of over 5 percent each year. Though the Nigerian government promised in 2001 to allocate 26 percent of its budget to education within three years, this has not yet happened.[[37]](#footnote-37)

 This failure to appropriately fund public education is due to the fact that there is virtually no transparency regarding federal, state and local levels of government. Collecting data on educational expenditures, which occur at the level of state governments, proves highly problematic. The sheer number of states, at 36, makes collecting data difficult, but worse is the fact that “there is no constitutional requirement for states to report budgetary information to the Federal government, and consequently there is no reporting.”[[38]](#footnote-38) So while state governments may claim to be spending a large portion of their annual budgets on education, there is no way to determine whether this is true through official documentation. The only proof is found in reports that claim the education system is deteriorating in quality as more children enroll—especially in the poorest areas.

***Management and ownership in URUA private schools***

 Unrecognized, unaided private schools bypass the Nigerian government because they are privately owned and managed and, because they are unrecognized, they do not comply with rules and regulations, such as teacher requirements. Eighty-seven percent of URUA private schools are run by one or more proprietors. The schools are run like a business, whereby the owner hires and pays the teachers and staff, and parents of students pay an enrollment fee. These fees are significantly lower than recognized private school fees and on average are about 12.5 and 13.3 percent of the “monthly wage for someone on the minimum wage for Primary 1 and 4 children, respectively.”[[39]](#footnote-39) For those who cannot afford education—public or private—fifty-four percent of URUA private schools take on the role of a community service by allowing certain students, such as orphans or extremely impoverished children, to attend school for free.[[40]](#footnote-40)

 That private schools provide concessionary seats to children unable to afford schooling shows that these schools are better in touch with their communities. This is largely because parents pay school owners and managers directly. This produces a system of accountability in itself. Private schools are competing for students, and parents’ expect their money to be put to good use. Public schools, on the other hand, do not charge term fees, but parents are required to pay for uniforms, books and other resources that the child needs, as well as other annual fees.[[41]](#footnote-41) The problem with this system, though, is that there is no way for parents to enforce accountability. They cannot change public school systems—because they are all government owned and operated. They can only take their children out of school or move to a private school. There is no mechanism for poor parents to demand accountability in the public education system. In URUA private schools, there is. Parents have direct relations with proprietors.

***National enrollment and regional disparity in the public education system***

 There are various different statistics regarding net primary school enrollment rates—largely for the reasons mentioned above. According to the 2010 MDG Report, net enrollment in primary schools increased from 81.1 percent in 2004 to 88.8 percent in 2008. But the National School Census, which the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2005-2008 country report uses, claims that in 2006 the net enrollment rate was 80.6 percent[[42]](#footnote-42), whereas the MDG Report claims the net enrollment rate was 87.9 percent at that time.[[43]](#footnote-43) Moreover, the same country report uses the 2006 Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire Report, which states that net primary school enrollment was 62.4 percent.[[44]](#footnote-44) Averaging these 2006 enrollment rates produces a mean of 76.9 percent. The reader must remember that most statistics regarding enrollment rates are usually lower than reported because censuses are taken at the beginning of the school year. A World Bank report states that measuring school enrollment has been problematic in Nigeria “because of the widespread inflation of enrollments in some states and the unreliability of school-age population estimates.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Moreover, variation among states, rural versus urban areas, and genders is high, and national net enrollment rates do not give a clear picture of this. For example:

“In the three southern zones and North Central, the only groups of children whose entry rate to grade 1 is below 85 percent are rural boys living in the poorest 20 percent of households and rural girls living in the poorest 40 percent. In the North East, the highest rate is 78 percent for urban boys in the richest 20 percent of households; the lowest rate is 37 percent for the poorest quintile of rural girls. In the North West, the same groups of children have the highest and lowest rates, but in both cases the rates are lower—58 percent and 19 percent, respectively.”[[46]](#footnote-46)

These statistics demonstrate that there are wide discrepancies between north and south, rural and urban, and between boys and girls in these areas.

 Using strictly the population figures from the 2005-2008 country report reveals that enrollment rates are actually much lower. The population of Nigeria is listed at 140,003,542 people in 2006. The percentage of the population under age 15 is 37.3 percent. This means that there were 52,221,321 children below the age of 15 in Nigeria in 2006. Subtracting the number of children enrolled in primary school (22,009,553) and the number of children enrolled in secondary school (6,255,522)[[47]](#footnote-47) from the number of children below the age of 15 reveals that 23,956,246 children are not enrolled in schools. That means more than half of the students below the age of 15 are not enrolled in recognized schools. The UBE scheme is meant to provide children with a full round of education—i.e. a full nine years of compulsory education, starting when a child turns five or six years old. This low number of enrollment of children under the age of 15 indicates that while most primary school-aged Nigerian children enroll in public schools, many do not finish.

 Of those children that do enroll in primary school, those most likely to drop out before grade 5 are concentrated in the north.[[48]](#footnote-48) Nationally the average survival rate—the number of pupils starting at grade 1 who reach grade 5—has dropped from 97 percent in 2000 to 72.3 percent in 2008.[[49]](#footnote-49) Whether these numbers are exact is not the issue; the principle is that survival rates for students have dropped significantly. These statistics indicate the more children that enroll in primary school, the larger the percentage of students that drop out. In effect, the implementation of universal basic education for all is backfiring because there is a lack of resources and funds allocated to schools. UBE backfires most in the regions it is needed the most, i.e. in the north and rural areas. A graphic in the MDG Report shows that in some areas in the north, completion rates are as low as 1.3—12.6 percent, and only in the south are completion rates as high as 61.2—98.8 percent.[[50]](#footnote-50) Literacy rates also illustrate the education disparities that exist between north and south, rural and urban areas, and girls and boys. The 2006 CWIQ Report defines adult literacy as anyone above the age of 15 who can read and write in any language. The national literacy rate was estimated as 64.2 percent. The lowest literacy rate was recorded in the North East zone at 40.7 percent. The highest rate was recorded in the South West zone at 78.5 percent. In urban areas, the figure was higher than the average at 78.6 percent; and in rural areas it was below the average at 56.9 percent. Literacy rates for females were also below the national average at 55.4 percent, while male literacy rates were above the average at 73 percent.[[51]](#footnote-51)

 The education crisis is most pronounced in the north and in rural areas. These are the areas that have received an insufficient amount of attention from the government regarding educational reform. And these are the areas where such attention is needed the most. Indeed, “[l]ivelihoods and locations are often strong indicators of social disadvantage in education. Children living in rural areas, especially in remote regions, face heightened risks of marginalization in education.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Poverty in Nigeria is unequally distributed among rural and geopolitical zones. Table 1 below demonstrates that the percentage of poor citizens in rural areas and in northern zones is well above the national average.[[53]](#footnote-53) Poor quality education contributes to this concentration of poverty According to the HDI Report, higher attainment of education means a lower incidence of poverty.[[54]](#footnote-54) Because poverty is highest in rural and northern areas in Nigeria, it follows that access to and/or quality of education in these areas in inadequate. This is where the government has failed the people in providing universal primary education.

The gaps between north and south, rural and urban provide evidence that the government has not done enough to minimize the barriers to access or to provide quality education. For poorer populations, such as those in these areas, affording school is difficult. First, even a program that claims to provide free primary education, like UBE, is rife with hidden fees that poorer parents struggle to afford. Furthermore, these parents bear the extra cost of giving up a potential wage-earner when they send their children to school. Physical access to schools is also a problem, because in rural, sparsely populated areas schools may not be within an accessible distance.

**Table 2: Incidence of Poverty by Sector and Zones, 2004**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **1980** | **1985** | **1992** | **1996** | **2004** |
| **National** | Total Poor | 28.1 | 46.3 | 42.7 | 65.6 | 54.4 |
|  | Core Poor | 6.2 | 12.1 | 13.9 | 29.3 | 22.0 |
| **Urban** | Total Poor | 17.2 | 37.8 | 37.5 | 58.2 | 42.2 |
|  | Core Poor | 3.0 | 7.5 | 10.7 | 25.2 | 15.7 |
| **Rural** | Total Poor | 28.3 | 51.4 | 66.0 | 69.3 | 63.3 |
|  | Core Poor | 6.5 | 14.8 | 15.8 | 31.6 | 27.1 |
| **South South** | Total Poor | 13.2 | 45.7 | 40.8 | 58.2 | 35.1 |
|  | Core Poor | 3.3 | 9.3 | 13.0 | 23.4 | 17.0 |
| **South East** | Total Poor | 12.9 | 30.4 | 41.0 | 53.5 | 26.7 |
|  | Core Poor | 2.4 | 9.0 | 15.7 | 18.2 | 7.8 |
| **South West** | Total Poor | 13.4 | 38.6 | 43.1 | 60.9 | 43.0 |
|  | Core Poor | 2.1 | 9.0 | 15.7 | 27.5 | 18.9 |
| **North Central** | Total Poor | 32.2 | 50.8 | 46.0 | 64.7 | 67.0 |
|  | Core Poor | 5.7 | 16.4 | 14.8 | 28.0 | 29.8 |
| **North East** | Total Poor | 35.6 | 54.9 | 54.0 | 70.1 | 71.2 |
|  | Core Poor | 11.8 | 16.4 | 18.5 | 34.4 | 27.9 |
| **North West** | Total Poor | 37.7 | 52.1 | 36.5 | 77.2 | 71.2 |
|  | Core Poor | 8.3 | 14.2 | 9.0 | 37.3 | 26.8 |
| **Population** **in Poverty (million)** | 17.7 | 34.7 | 39.2 | 67.1 | 68.7 |

(*Source: HDI Report 2008-2009, Nigeria*)

***Private schools help reach EFA***

Tooley’s research on private schools in Lagos, Nigeria evinces that data on primary school enrollment is missing a huge part of the population—those that attend unrecognized, unaided (URUA) private schools. Tooley discovered that fewer students attended government schools than private schools in Lagos. Since more than 50 percent of the population in Lagos is impoverished, this means that poor parents are sending their children to private schools. The majority of students attending private schools, Tooley found, were enrolled in unrecognized, unaided private schools. Of 540 schools in Lagos State, 233 were URUA private schools (43.1 percent); 122 were unaided, recognized private schools (22.6 percent); and 185 were government schools (34.3 percent).[[55]](#footnote-55) Pupil enrollment was also significantly higher in private schools than public schools in Lagos. The number of children estimated to attend URUA private schools was 577,024; 737,599 in unaided, recognized private schools; and 451,798 in government schools.[[56]](#footnote-56)

 That so many children attend URUA private schools, which are virtually unheard of by government officials, has significant implications for the UBE program. The figures that showed public school primary enrollment at around 50, 60 or 80 percent are missing a huge portion of the school-age population in Nigeria that is enrolled in these URUA private schools. Indeed, Tooley & Dixon cite the Lagos State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy, which estimates that “50 percent of ‘school-aged’ children are out of school.”[[57]](#footnote-57) Tooley & Dixon provide the following table, which compares official figures of out-of-primary school children and estimates based on their research:

**Table 3: Estimated enrollment rates after accounting for URUA private schools**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Official Figures** | **Tooley Estimates** |
| GovernmentPrivate registeredPrivate unregisteredTotalEstimated out-of-school childrenTotal school-aged children | 451,798737,59901,180,3971,189,3972,378,794 | 451,798737,599577,0241,766,421612,3732,378,794 |

(*Source, Tooley & Dixon, p. 12)*

Their estimates reveal that the percentage of school-aged children out of school is a much lower 25.7 percent.

 While Tooley’s study is based on findings solely from Lagos, the enrollment rates for URUA private schools offer promise for primary school-aged children nationwide who have not been granted access to quality education or public schools altogether because of their regional location. While the socioeconomic disparities between north and south and rural and urban areas are vast, URUA private schools could begin to fill the education gap. These schools, however, must not only become available to marginalized citizens but they must make available quality education—enough to provide parents with an incentive to send their children to school.

***Infrastructure and classroom resources***

 The quality of infrastructure in public schools, such as “classrooms, laboratories, workshops, sporting facilities, equipment, [and] libraries,” has been in a “total state of decay.”[[58]](#footnote-58) This is a direct result of the failure of the government to allocate funds to education as enrollment expands.[[59]](#footnote-59) In terms of quantitative measurements of infrastructure, public schools provide only some basic needs. This section of the essay will focus specifically on Lagos State,[[60]](#footnote-60) where James Tooley has conducted his research of public and private schools in Nigeria. Table 4 provides statistics comparing URUA private school and public school provision of certain key resources in Lagos.

Despite government funding, only four resources are provided by more public schools than URUA private schools. While URUA private schools do have a poor supply of resources for students and facilities are impaired, this is likely due to the fact that URUA private schools incur greater costs with less money with which to pay them, and furthermore that infrastructure and classroom resources are less important than the actual teaching that takes place. Nonetheless, the provision of adequate facilities and classroom resources is critical for any learning process, and both URUA private schools and public schools fall short of affording these necessities.

**Table 4: Provision of resources in URUA private schools and public schools**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **URUAP (%)** | **Public (%)** |
| Availability of drinking water | 48.3 | 47.4 |
| **Availability of blackboards** | 99 | 100 |
| **Availability of desks in every classroom** | 96.6 | 99.4 |
| Availability of chairs in every classroom | 85 | 83.2 |
| Availability of fans in every classroom | 38.3 | 12.1 |
| Availability of tape recorders in the school | 13.7 | 2.3 |
| Availability of electric light in every classroom | 58.1 | 33.3 |
| **Availability of own playground** | 60.2 | 92.4 |
| Availability of toilets for children | 78.9 | 86.7 |
| **Availability of a library for children** | 30.7 | 40.7 |
| Availability of computers for children | 32.6 | 2.9 |
| Availability of televisions and/or video for children | 10.1 | 0.0 |

*(Adapted from Tooley & Dixon, p. 24-28)*

 The government has failed to attend to these needs in public schools. One of the gravest problems in public schools appears to be the “dreadful physical conditions under which most children study and the lack of educational materials.”[[61]](#footnote-61) Although blackboards are in high supply, the supply of other resources, such as “dusters, biros, pens, lesson notes, marking pens, wall charts, maps, globes” and other essentials, are insufficient.[[62]](#footnote-62) Teaching materials, like textbooks, are in short supply as well. Arikewuyo (2010) reports that in one state a researcher “found out that 80 percent of the primary schools indicated that less than 20 percent of their pupils had enough textbooks to work with.”[[63]](#footnote-63) Also, overcrowding in classrooms is a major problem, which forces classes to convene outdoors, subjecting them to volatile weather conditions. In other cases, “as many as four classes are accommodated in one classroom that is already overcrowded and is in a poor state of repair.”[[64]](#footnote-64) This has obvious implications for the learning process in classrooms. Without a proper environment, learning can hardly take place.

 Such a poor availability of resources supports Moja’s (2000) claim that “the educational system in developing countries are not yet ready to prepare students for the contemporary global world.”[[65]](#footnote-65) Furthermore, because budgetary allocation to the education sector is not rising proportionally to the increasing number of students enrolled, these scarce resources are stretched across an even greater number of students.

***The problem of teachers in public schools***

 One of the most detrimental aspects of the public education system in Nigeria is the poor quality of teachers and their general lack of commitment to the students. The government has created countless policies and administrations to ensure that the quality of teachers in public schools is high—but to no avail. In 1976, the National Teachers’ Institute was established to provide training to teachers, and the Teachers’ Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) was created to ensure that certain standards of teaching are met and registers of all qualified teachers are maintained. Also, in the 2004 National Policy on Education, officials created a list of goals for teacher education. They were to

“produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system; encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers; help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals; provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations; and enhance teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession.”[[66]](#footnote-66)

Yet a 2010-2011 report by UNESCO shows that a staggeringly low 50 percent of teachers have a Nigeria Certificate in Education.[[67]](#footnote-67) The number of students is increasing with the UBE program, and the programs already implemented for the training of teachers are not sufficient to cope with this growth. Worse still, these programs and administrations have provided an apparently inadequate response to the educational needs of the twenty-first century. Moja (2000) argues that most “Colleges of Education offer courses which are not appropriate or relevant to the level and needs of most primary teachers. … The courses are largely of an academic nature as opposed to the development processes, skills, and career development geared toward primary school.”[[68]](#footnote-68) So not only do teachers lack the necessary materials to guide their students through the learning process, as well as the necessary facilities such as libraries and adequate classrooms, but they also lack proper training on how to conduct class for primary school-age pupils.

Teacher-centered pedagogy seems to be the norm rather than learner-centered pedagogy. But even where learner-centered education is part of policy rhetoric and teacher education, there are contradictions between official discourse and the teacher’s actual reality.[[69]](#footnote-69) Learner-centered education (LCE) involves engaging students in critical thinking and a more cognitively active process of learning,[[70]](#footnote-70) but this is impossible when classroom are overcrowded and resources are unavailable. Though Nigeria has one of the lowest average teacher-pupil ratios at around 30 or 40 to 1,[[71]](#footnote-71) growing enrollment rates have pushed that ratio to around 1 to 76 in some instances.[[72]](#footnote-72) The government’s expectations of teachers in public primary schools are high, but they become impossible to meet when the government provides few resources to help him or her meet them. To make matters worse, the government tends to higher less qualified teachers because they are cheaper. This has an effect on the teacher’s ability to provide quality education.[[73]](#footnote-73) Further inhibiting LCE is the cultural prejudices that teachers have against poorer students. Many public school teachers come from richer areas to teach in poor communities, and this creates what the World Bank calls “social distance” between teachers and students.[[74]](#footnote-74) Schweisfurth (2011) claims that in a “stratisfied society where some groups are perceived culturally to have more educational potential than others, teachers may have low expectations of individual students’ ability to manage their own learning, if they are from unfavored groups.”[[75]](#footnote-75) In Nigeria, minority ethnicities are the target of discrimination. Also, Christians in the Muslim North and Muslims in the Christian South may face discrimination from educators. Further, many teachers from richer areas perceive children from the slums as barbaric and incapable of learning.[[76]](#footnote-76)

The difficult and frustrating circumstances in which teachers are asked to work perhaps help to explain why teaching is “not a first-choice occupation.”[[77]](#footnote-77) Often men and women become teachers because they don’t have the credentials to pursue other careers.[[78]](#footnote-78) These teachers teach long and arduous hours, undergo poor training, teach in dilapidated buildings with few teaching resources, often must teach too many children at one time, and are inhibited by their social prejudices. And they do this for a low and irregular salary, which is fixed by the state and local governments. The teaching profession is “the most impoverished of all sectors of the labor force in Nigeria.”[[79]](#footnote-79) To further marginalize the profession of teaching, payment of salaries often comes irregularly. This is a trend across Sub-Saharan Africa that results in teacher strikes, during which students must go without schooling altogether. So even if circumstances in the classroom were better, teachers in the public school system still have little incentive to provide quality service.

Those who suffer the most from teachers’ lack of incentives to teach are the students. These poor incentives manifest themselves in the minimal amount of teacher activity that occurs in public primary schools. Tooley et al define teaching and non-teaching activity:

“Teaching was defined as when the teacher was present in the classroom, supervising pupils and reading aloud or doing their own work, or when pupils themselves were leading the class at the blackboard, under the supervision of the teacher. Non-teaching activities are defined as when the teacher is not present in the classroom when he or she should have been, although the teacher was present in school.”[[80]](#footnote-80)

Tooley’s research was conducted on primary level 4 classes in the public schools. He found that out of 110 public schools assessed in Lagos, in 24.5 percent the teachers were engaging in non-teaching activities and in 8.2 percent the teachers were absent. In almost a third of those classes observed, the teacher was not teaching.[[81]](#footnote-81)

 The problem of teacher absenteeism is compounded by the lack of enforcement among public school officials and managers. This is largely due to the rampant corruption in the country. School teachers, principals, and government officials solicit bribes to procure their own interests.[[82]](#footnote-82) Not only are bribes a problem, but regulatory administrations are underfunded and understaffed, so that there is no way they can assess all the public schools in Nigeria. In *The Beautiful Tree*, one of Tooely’s interviewees describes how effective supervision is lacking in the public school system. He says that “the heads … are too familiar with their teachers, so they can’t do this [supervise] effectively. The public schools have no ability to fire their teachers; the best they can do is transfer them.”[[83]](#footnote-83) Fixed salaries and the absence of supervision make enforcing quality teaching impossible. Teachers are held accountable to no one in public schools, and the children suffer most from it. Brock-Utne argues that the most important thing educational reform can do is “restore the dignity and quality of the teacher.”[[84]](#footnote-84) But that would inevitably require pumping more money into the system, and, as I have addressed above, the money hardly makes it to its intended destination in Nigeria.

***The irony teacher quality in URUA private schools***

 Despite the fact that teachers in URUA private schools do not adhere to statewide regulations, they are more accountable to parents and students. One reason for this is that unlike teachers in public schools, URUA private school teachers can be fired. Because URUA private schools are run like businesses, they rely heavily on the demand of parents and students. The product (education) that these schools provide must be of high quality or parents will take their money elsewhere. Though these parents may be uneducated themselves, this does not discount their ability to determine what good education is. They know when their children are not learning. One private school student’s parent whom Tooley interviewed in Lagos said, “In the public school they do not teach very well and that is why everybody, including me, prefers the private to public school, because they want their children trained for the future.”[[85]](#footnote-85) Parents assess quality education by determining whether their children are acquiring “socially desirable intellectual and non-intellectual skills” (See Table 1).

 Compared to teachers in public schools, teachers in URUA schools show their accountability by not only being present but being actively engaged in their task of teaching. In those URUA private schools assessed, Tooley found that teachers were teaching in 87 percent, compared to the 67.3 percent of public schools.[[86]](#footnote-86) While these teachers may lack adequate instruction in teaching, they are doing more than their public school counterparts, and this is at least a start in the improvement of primary education in Nigeria.

 I mentioned above that one reason for public school teachers’ lack of commitment to their profession is their low and irregular salaries. But URUA private school teachers receive even lower pay for their services. The salary per pupil was reported as 314.14 naira ($40.94 per month) in URUA private schools; 332.38 naira ($46.91 per month) in registered private schools; and 765.98 naira ($151.96 per month) in public schools.[[87]](#footnote-87) Public school teachers’ salaries are almost four times that of URUA private school teachers’ salaries.

 Another factor that makes URUA private school teachers more effective is that most of these teachers come from the poor neighborhoods in which they teach. This is a stark contrast to public school teachers, who often come from richer areas to teach in poorer communities. Tooley offers an anecdote of a young Nigerian man of 23 named Lucky. He could not afford to go to college, so “he continued living where he was brought up in Makoko and taught.”[[88]](#footnote-88) These teachers are like public school teachers in that many of them choose the teaching profession because they cannot afford to or are not qualified enough to pursue more “superior” careers. But URUA private school teachers are different because in these poor areas, becoming a teacher is a more superior career. They therefore take pride in their work. And, because they come from the same areas as their students, there is no “social distance” between pupil and teacher. Teachers in URUA private schools are “from the community; they [know] the problems facing the children, for they themselves [experience] such problems every day. And they [can] explain things in their mother tongue, if required, unlike the teachers at the public schools.”[[89]](#footnote-89) In these settings, there is a much greater emphasis on performance than on certification.[[90]](#footnote-90)

***Unsurprising results: test scores of public school vs. private school pupils***

 A teacher’s commitment to his or her students proves to go a much longer way than certificates. Indeed, it acts as a counterbalance to the lack of infrastructure and resources available to students in private schools. While the quality of education—in terms of its local and global relevance—should be investigated further, Tooley’s tests demonstrate that despite URUA private schools’ regulatory shortcomings, they may provide higher quality education than public schools. These tests were conducted in public and private schools in Lagos, and in all subjects, URUA private school students scored higher than public school students:[[91]](#footnote-91)

**Table 5: Private and public school test scores in math, English, and social studies (Lagos)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Subject** | **School Type** | **Mean & Score** |
| **Math** | Government**Private unrecognized**Private recognizedTotal | 41.27**55.48**60.2452.24 |
| **English** | Government**Private unrecognized**Private recognizedTotal | 42.68**64.70**71.8359.59 |
| **Social Studies** | Government**Private unrecognized**Private recognizedTotal | 58.82**71.13**76.1368.52 |

(*Source: Tooley & Dixon, p. 33)*

Despite the creation of policies and administrations to address the various problems in the public primary education sector in Nigeria, classroom objectives have not been met. Various test scores reflect the poor quality of education offered to students in public schools. The core compulsory subjects schools are required to teach are “language arts (English and a major Nigerian language); mathematics; basic science; social studies; civic education; culture and creative arts; religious studies; physical and health education; and computer science.”[[92]](#footnote-92) Based on test results over these subjects, the learning process within public schools is significantly hindered by the (non-)teaching, infrastructure, unavailability of materials, and lack of funds.

 UNESCO administered testing of grade 4 students in three “domains of knowledge: literacy (English language, numeracy (mathematics) and life skills (social studies, health education, basic science, home economics, etc.)).”[[93]](#footnote-93) Average test scores fell below 35 percent in each of the domains (25.1, 32.2, 32.6 percent, respectively).[[94]](#footnote-94) UBE officials carried out national assessments in 2001 and 2003 at grade 5. The results indicated that “only one in five students was able to answer correctly more than 30 percent of the test items,” and “less than 1 percent of pupils were able to answer correctly more than half the test items.”[[95]](#footnote-95) Arikewuyo (2010)’s tripartite model of quality in education lists “successful learning” as one of the outputs of education.[[96]](#footnote-96) Judging by the test results in public schools in Nigeria, however, successful learning is not occurring in the classrooms.

 A continued interest in learning is another one of the outputs related to successful learning. Yet enrollment in secondary schooling is extremely low. Even statistics, which tend to depict a higher number than is the reality, show that enrollment in secondary schools is not even close to enrollment in primary schools. Whereas 22,099,553 children were counted as enrolled in primary school in 2005, only 6,255,522 were enrolled in secondary school during the same year. There are several reasons why secondary school enrollment rates are lower—including the fact that resource allocation to secondary schools is even lower and the cost of attending secondary school is much higher. Term fees for government secondary schools in the state of Ekiti, for example, rose from 500 naira for primary school to 2,150 naira. Even at a smaller scale, such as in the state of Borno, primary education cost 120 naira and secondary education rose to 175 naira.[[97]](#footnote-97) These are huge increases that many impoverished families cannot afford.

**III. Why unrecognized, unaided private schools?**

 Several criticisms of these newly-found unrecognized, unaided private schools have arisen. Critics’ primary concern regarding these schools in developing countries is the low quality of education they provide. Rose (2002) is one of those critics of the “mushrooming” of URUA private schools in Sub-Saharan Africa. She claims that private schools for the poor are “not serving their needs, but rather using up their scarce resources with limited benefits.”[[98]](#footnote-98) She agrees with Tooley that people have formed URUA private schools because public education does not meet the demands of the people, i.e. the quality of education is low.[[99]](#footnote-99) But her primary argument is that inaccessibility to public education is the main reason for the increase in URUA private schools rather than excess or differentiated demand.[[100]](#footnote-100) The poor do not have a choice between public and private schools: “For the poor, the choice is whether to go to a low-quality private school or not go to school at all—not a choice between different types of schools.”[[101]](#footnote-101)

 This is also the argument Oketch et al make in their study of private schools for the poor in Kenya. They use consumer choice theories and supply and demand to determine why poor parents would choose to pay for schooling when there is free primary education. The problem, they assert, is inaccessibility. There are not enough schools to meet the excessive demand from parents who want to send their children to school. Thus private schools for the poor become a substitute for public schools. Given this claim, it seems that poor parents who choose to send their children to private schools instead of public schools or instead of no school are either not so poor that they cannot afford school for their child(ren) or have a high incentive to send their child(ren) to school. Oketch’s data, however, rebuts the first criterion because the number of children enrolled in the cities in Kenya that they studied reveals that the poorest 20 percent of the populations had the highest proportion of students enrolled in private schools.[[102]](#footnote-102) In fact, “nearly one half of the pupils from the poorest households in the slums attend private schools (45.2 percent).”[[103]](#footnote-103) There is clearly an incentive for even the poorest parents to forgo opportunity costs (such as child labor wages) and send their children to private schools.

 This is a recent trend. After free primary education was introduced, there was a huge surge in enrollment in the public schools. Oketch et al state that the “trend started to change in 2005 and as of 2007, 43.27 percent of slum pupils were not enrolled in [sic] state system.”[[104]](#footnote-104) In fact, they infer from their data that the reason parents send their children to fee-charging schools can “partly be explained by reasons for transferring from one school to another.”[[105]](#footnote-105) More than half of parents assessed said they transferred their child because of “better pupil discipline and teachers perceived to be better performers in the school transferred into.”[[106]](#footnote-106) This is well in line with what parents in Lagos said in Tooley’s interviews—that private schools, to which their children transferred from public schools, offered much better services than the latter.

 Despite this evidence that private schools provide better quality education than public schools, Oketch et al hold that enrollment into private schools for the poor is the result of inaccessibility of public schools. This they infer because it “cannot be the case that the poorest should prefer the so-called ‘private schools’ when the less poor in the slums prefer the state/public schools.”[[107]](#footnote-107) This is an important point and one certainly worth more investigation, but Oketch’s study lacks substantial evidence. The researchers performed no tests to show the difference in quality between URUA private schools and public schools. The study brings up important questions about accessibility, but it only raises more questions. Indeed, why couldn’t it be that the poorest 20 percent have the greatest incentive to educate their children and it so happens that—as Tooley’s tests demonstrate—private schools for the poor offer better education? Ultimately, what Rose’s (2002) and Oketch’s studies show is that the government has failed to provide schools to marginalized populations.

 Rose further questions whether private schools for the poor employ better cost-efficient methods, driving the price per student down, or whether they are of much lower quality as a result. The reader should note, though, that Rose (2002) makes no mention how she defines “quality” education. Furthermore, she does not have any data to enhance claims that the quality of education in URUA private schools is unacceptable. Tooley’s assessments of the quality of schools in Lagos State were gauged by a test that pupils in public, recognized private and URUA private schools took. In all subjects, private school students scored higher than public school students. In fact, all test scores were relatively low, which indicates that the quality of education in both public and private schools is not high enough. But the latter offers a better platform from which reforms can be made.

Rose asserts that a lack of government regulation hinders URUA private schools from providing quality education, but the evidence in the previous sections shows that government regulation has not created a quality public education system. While Rose’s claim that URUA private schools may be springing up because there are not enough public schools is a legitimate hypothesis, it does not discount the fact that those schools have proven in Lagos to have more teacher activity, closer teacher-student-parent interaction, greater provision of schooling resources, and higher test scores.[[108]](#footnote-108)

 Why should schools with low quality infrastructure, general unavailability of key resources, and unqualified, uncommitted teachers fare better than the public schools the government provides? The answer lies in the mechanics of the system. There are incentives to provide quality education in URUA private schools where there are none in public schools. Government-provided universal primary education is meant to diminish the socioeconomic disparity in a country, but the results have been paradoxical. What has happened in Nigeria is that middle class rather than poor and disadvantaged students benefit from public schools. This is not surprising given the evidence of abject corruption in the Nigerian government. Throughout its post-independence history, politicians have exchanged policies for votes.[[109]](#footnote-109) Tooley notes that in England, “political parties have to converge on policies which benefit the ‘median voter’ … rather than being overly concerned with the poor and disadvantaged.”[[110]](#footnote-110) But this concept can be applied to Nigeria, whereby politicians and government officials converge on policies that benefit their ethnic and/or religious supporters and patrons. Those with no connections to government—because of ethnic or religious differences, geographical distance, or poverty—become marginalized. In the case of education, the already disadvantaged poor remain disadvantaged. There is no one to represent them and thus no one to demand accountability from the government. Basic rights to education are ignored or are provided at an unacceptable quality.

 The paradox continues. If the point of education is to “insulate, as far as possible, children from the unequal influence of their families,” universal primary education in Nigeria has failed. Proposing to equalize schooling for all children has proved an impossible goal (or at least one that is taking almost half a century or more to achieve) for the government. In the course of equalizing schools, family influence becomes more important.[[111]](#footnote-111) Why? Because schools are equalized at the lowest standard in Nigeria. Richer families can turn to the more expensive and highest-quality option: recognized private schools. And the cycle of disparity continues.

 The third part of the paradox is that free education takes away from parents the ability to choose as as consumer chooses.[[112]](#footnote-112) In a market transaction, the producer is accountable to the consumer because the goal is profit. When schooling is free, parents have no real leverage against the government when it provides low-quality education (or none at all in the case of non-teaching). The options become costly: they can keep their children in school and allow them to waste their time; take their children out of school and deny them any education at all; or place their children in a school that costs money but provides better quality education.

 Contrary to popular belief, poor parents are not ignorant. They know the value of education, and, as Tooley’s research indicates, they are willing to pay for it when they know it is good. That’s how any market transaction works. A consumer will buy what he knows gives him the greatest utility. With private schools, parents are given a much more empowering choice: pay private school number one, or pay private school number two. The consumer has the leverage, giving the producer an incentive to provide a quality product. This is the connection that is missing in the public school system in Nigeria—that critical parent-educator link. Without this link, parents do not get what they want, and they leave the market. But they are not just giving up some product; they are foregoing an investment in their child’s future. This is not something that, in the long run, impoverished parents and the state of Nigeria can afford.

**IV. Transferring the responsibility of education to the people**

 Despite economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, the region has the lowest International Human Development Index in the world. The world average HDI is .6108, while Sub-Saharan Africa’s average is a low .463.[[113]](#footnote-113) Nigeria’s HDI is just above that average at .499.[[114]](#footnote-114) This means that the country and the region as a whole have a long way to go before they reach a developed state. Education is an important step toward the income growth, wealth creation and equity necessary to achieve development. But if education is not accessible to all children—regardless of regional location, socioeconomic status or gender—equity cannot be achieved.

 In two ways the government has failed the people of Nigeria regarding primary education. Despite the creation of administrations and policies, and despite its commitment to global education goals, such as MDGs and EFA, the government has not made education accessible to all and has not maintained quality within schools. This is after more than four decades of supposed dedication to educational reform in the country. What the government has proven after all these years is that it does not have the capacity to provide free universal primary education or quality government-run schools.

 Universal basic education requires “rigorous planning, extensive resource mobilization and judicious use of available resources, and most importantly, transformational management.”[[115]](#footnote-115) To successfully accomplish this, the government must develop good politics. In other words, the government must initiate electoral reforms, practice accountability, return to “true federalism,” and drastically reduce waste and corruption.[[116]](#footnote-116) But it has been 52 years since Nigeria’s independence, and the problems of governance have not been effectively reduced.

Should the next generation of Nigerians wait for the government to become accountable? Should this generation and the next wait to see if the government will meet their demands for equal access to school and quality education? Nigerians have already proclaimed their answer through the establishment of URUA private schools for the poor. They are not waiting for the government to give them what they need; they have waited too long. Indeed, Nigerians have taken education into their own hands and have proven that their ability to provide quality education is much greater than the government’s.

The criticisms from Rose (2002) and Oketch et al about the quality of education in URUA schools are important, and they are right that the quality is not high enough. The test scores listed in Table 5 reveal that there are major problems in private and public schools alike regarding the effectiveness of the learning process. But in all aspects, private schools fared better than their public school counterparts, and this is the important lesson to take away. Private schools, therefore, should be a foundation upon which educational reform takes place—because they have the ability to reach the unreachable and evidently impart better quality education.

 URUA private schools can help to de-centralize the education sector, which is important in a nation as diverse as Nigeria. Each region and people group has different educational needs that are not necessarily met by blanket policies and regulations. For example, NGOs in Pakistan established private schools for girls because “cultural prohibitions against exposing girls to the public” had meant a lack of educational opportunities for girls.[[117]](#footnote-117) Because of the flexibility and smaller size of URUA private schools, they can more easily accommodate to their clients’ needs. This is why URUA private schools can break some of the barriers to access to education that public schools have not yet broken—such as those listed by Obanya (2011).

 Not only are URUA private schools more geographically accessible, but owners, managers and teachers are from the local community and can break down cultural and psychological barriers. If parents can choose where to send their children, they can choose to send them to schools with more homogenous populations. Children from minority groups, for example, can avoid the discrimination they may face from teachers and/or students in the nearest public school. Furthermore, teachers are more likely to speak the mother tongue of the pupils from a certain area since they too are from that area. In other words, cultural differences become less of a barrier and a hindrance to learning in the small setting of a URUA private school.

 Even though Tooley suggests that more students are enrolled in URUA private schools than public schools in Lagos, teacher-pupil ratios are lower at an average 15:1 versus the 29:1 average found in government schools.[[118]](#footnote-118) This inevitably makes learner-centered teaching more easily practiced, and thus students become more engaged in the learning process. Indeed, this could help explain why test scores in URUA private schools were higher than in public schools.

 Table 6 is an adapted version of Arikewuyo’s original table to demonstrate the ways in which URUA private schools address the inputs and processes necessary to produce the outputs listed. It is clear that URUA private schools fall short in many aspects, but they do provide a promising alternative to public schools, which have failed the public almost entirely. This study shows that the people are capable of taking on the responsibility of educating the children of Nigeria. The government is ill-suited to provide parents with a safe place to invest in theirs and their children’s futures. Public schools have failed to be that safe place because they have swallowed parents’ investments without churning out any positive returns. Yet there is hope for children in Nigeria and across Sub-Saharan Africa. National and international efforts should be to empower the people to provide for themselves what their government has failed to provide. It is time for educational reform to take on a new life—one that is not dependent on a corrupt and incapacitated government. The poor in Nigeria have already begun the process.

**Table 6: An assessment of URUA private schools using Arikewuyo’s model of quality education**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Inputs** | **Processes** |
| 1. Society | **1.1 Popular involvement in implementation (all facts)**Parents hold owners and teachers of URUA private schools accountable**1.2 Society acceptance of the program**Parents choose to send their children to specific URUA private school because of acceptance of program |
| 2. Policy | **2.1 Adaptability to local conditions**Teachers and school owners are from the community and understand client needs**2.2 Democratic policy review practices**Parents are better connected to owners because they must make payments; parents have leverage over owners; democratic nature of policy-making in schools is unknown |
| 3. Management Framework | **3.1 Decentralization/ devolution of powers down to the grassroots level**Schools are private and completely unaffiliated with government at any level; owned and operated by people from community**3.2 Empowerment and autonomy for operators all down the line**Proprietors have full ownership of schools; can hire and fire teachers at will/based on their performance; can admit students at will |
| 4. Curriculum | **4.1 Responsiveness to societal and individual needs**Unregulated; may not address societal and individual needs because needs may not be fully known**4.2 Comprehensive: courage of the three Hs (the head, the hands and the heart**)Limited information on curriculum available; teachers are found to be teaching more often in URUA than in public; generally closer teacher-student relations**4.3 Adaptable to changing times, changing needs and changing conditions**Adaptability unknown |
| 5. Teaching force | **5.1 Quantitatively adequate**No mention anywhere of URUA private school teachers in short supply**5.2 Adequately educated and professionally prepared**Not professionally prepared or adequately educated except by school owners; poses problem to ability to perform as exception teachers**5.3 Adequately able to promote teacher-pupil interaction to maximize learning (pedagogically skilled)**Most uncertified as teachers; but more teacher-pupil interaction occurs in these schools**5.4 Well motivated through an appropriate welfare package, professional support, and opportunities for self improvement**Extremely low pay; teachers do have pride in their work; professional support in form of unofficial training sessions at schools |
| 6. Infrastructure | **6.1 Quantitatively, aesthetically and spaciously adequate**Inadequate and dilapidated but located within neighborhoods of students**6.2 Learner and teacher friendly**Inadequate supply of necessary resources and materials**6.3 Integrated pedagogical space of classrooms, laboratories, libraries, toilets, water, farms, workshops, recreational facilities**Varies per school; some schools provide these, but most do not |
| 7. Materials | **7.1 Quantitatively adequate**No information on amount and quality of materials available**7.2 User friendly, easily exploitable and challenging to both teachers and learners**No information on amount and quality of materials available**7.3 A judicious mix of print, audio and other materials**Few schools have available technology to use different media of materials**7.4 Closely related to the goals of the curriculum**No information on amount and quality of materials available |
| 8. Funds | **8.1 Adequacy of funding**Adequate when number of students enrolled is sufficient; too low to afford proper infrastructure and resources**8.2 Targeting funds to those things that will really make a difference**Little information available about allocation of funds**8.3 Prompt release of funds**Money comes from students; sometimes irregular**8.4 Prudent application of funds**Little information available about allocation of funds |

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1. (Tooley 2009, 33) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (Tooley, Dixon and Olaniyan 2005) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. (International Policy Network n.d.) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. (Obanya 2011, 20) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. (Johnston 2011, 102) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In this paper, the definition of economic development will comprise three components: income growth, equity, and human development. Therefore I define development as “growth which enables the largest number of people, especially those less advantaged and poor, to participate in wealth creation and benefit proportionately more from the increased availability of public and private resources. … [G]rowth with equity aims for a society which is fairer in the distribution of opportunities and rewards” (HDI Report 2008-2009, p. 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. (UNICEF Schools for Africa 2007) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. (U.S. Department of Education 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. (Brock-Utne 2000, 12) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. (Easterly 2002, 73) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. (UNESCO and Education: "Everyone has the right to education" 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. (Ibid., 9) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. These basic skills are listed by UNICEF as literacy, numeracy and skills for life and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace (Arikewuyo 2010, 42). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. (Obanya 2011, 6) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. (Obanya 2011, 4-5) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. (World Data on Education 7th ed. 2010-2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This does not include hidden fees, such as the cost of uniforms and class materials that students must purchase to enroll. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. (Tooley and Dixon 2005, 17) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. (Ibid., 7) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. (Kifordu 2010, 293) [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. (Ibid., 294) [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. (Nwagwu 1997, 88) [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. (Labelle 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Those African countries with a lower CPI are Central African Republic (154th), Congo Republic (154th), Cote d’Ivoire (154th), Guinea-Bissau (154th), Kenya (154th), Zimbabwe (154th), Guinea (164th), Angola (168th), Chad (168th), Democratic Republic of the Congo (168th), Libya (168th), Burundi (172nd), Equatorial Guinea (172nd), Sudan (177th), Somalia (182nd). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. (Ekeanyanwu, Loremikan and Ikubaje 2004, 6) [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. (Nwagwu 1997, 89) [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. (Moja 2000, 3) [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. (World Data on Education 7th ed. 2010-2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. (Moja 2000, 5) [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. (Arikewuyo 2010, 52) [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. (Hinchliffe 2002, 6) [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. (Tooley, Dixon and Olaniyan 2005, 133) [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. (Ibid., 135) [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. (Hinchliffe 2002) [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. This statistic comes from the National School Census (NSC) [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. The MDG Report for 2010 bases gross enrollment rates on consultants’ estimates from provisional data. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. The CWIQ Report conducted a survey in 2006, covering a total of 77,062 households. The survey was sponsored by the World Bank (<http://surveynetwork.org/home/index.php?q=activities/catalog/surveys/ihsn/566-2006-003>.) [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. (School Education in Nigeria: Preparing for Universal Basic Education 2003) [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. In this case, I have used the percentage of the population with secondary education to speculate as to what percentage of the population is enrolled in secondary school. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. (Nigeria Millennium Development Goals Report 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. (Arikewuyo 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. (UNESCO and Education: "Everyone has the right to education" 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. (Human Development Report: Nigeria: Achieving growth with equity 2008-2009, 64) [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. (Ibid., 65) [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. (Tooley and Dixon 2005, 8) [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. (Ibid., 10) [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. (Ibid., 12) [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. (Moja 2000, 1) [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. (Omwami and Keller 2010, 25) [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. This state has the highest population in Nigeria at 15 million, one-third of whom (5 million) is estimated to be of school age. This state is experiencing an “’urban crisis,’ with over 50 percent of the population living in poverty, severe infrastructural decay, emergence of slums, high unemployment rates and severe housing overcrowding” (Tooley et al, 128). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. (Hinchliffe 2002, 22) [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. (Arikewuyo 2010, 50) [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. (Ibid.) Data for URUA private schools’ provision of other classroom resources and textbooks is not available. Tooley did not assess this in his study. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. (Moja 2000, 8-9) [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. (Moja 2000, 2) [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. (World Data on Education 7th ed. 2010-2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. (Moja 2000, 27) [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. (Schweisfurth 2011, 428) [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. (Chisholm and Leyendecker 2008, 197) [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. (Tooley and Dixon 2005, 13), (Moja 2000, 8) [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. (Moja 2000, 8) [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. (Arikewuyo 2010, 51) [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. (Tooley 2009, 134) [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. (Schweisfurth 2011, 428-429) [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. (Tooley 2009, 134) [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. (Schweisfurth 2011, 428) [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. (Moja 2000, 27) [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. (Tooley, Dixon and Olaniyan 2005, 137) [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. (Tooley 2009, 132) [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. (Brock-Utne 2000, 59) [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. (Tooley 2009, 129) [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. (Tooley and Dixon 2005, 23) [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. (Tooley and Dixon 2005, 37), (Tooley, Dixon and Olaniyan 2005, 136) [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. (Tooley 2009, 41-42) [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. (Ibid., 46) [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. (Ibid., 43) [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. (Tooley and Dixon 2005, 33) [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. (World Data on Education 7th ed. 2010-2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. (World Data on Education 7th ed. 2010-2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. (Arikewuyo 2010). Refer to Table 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. (Hinchliffe 2002, 19) [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. (Rose 2002, 16) [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. (Ibid., 6) [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. (Ibid., 7) [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. (Ibid., 8) [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. (Oketch, et al. 2010, 28) [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. (Ibid., 30) [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. (Ibid., 31) [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. (Tooley and Dixon 2005) [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. (Tooley, Reclaiming Education 2000, 80) [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. (Ibid., 81) [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. (Ibid., 84) [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. (International Human Development Indicators 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. (Human Development Report: Nigeria: Achieving growth with equity 2008-2009, 28) [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. (Obanya 2011, 21) [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. (Ibid., 29) [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. (Kim, Alderman and Orazem 1998, 1) [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. (Tooley and Dixon 2005, 13) [↑](#footnote-ref-118)