

Private responses to state failure: the growth in private education (and why) in Lagos, Nigeria

Dr. Joanna Härmä
jharma@free-school.org

Research Associate
University of Sussex
United Kingdom

Abstract

Lagos is documented as a centre of spontaneous development of private schooling targeting families from the ultra-rich, to the relatively poor. There is much debate in the literature on the potential of private education as part of a solution for achieving Education for All, in terms of equity in access to these schools, and also their quality and other aspects. It is not even concretely known in most contexts how prevalent private schools are, and this paper provides the answer to this question in the context of Lagos State, Nigeria. Having found 12,098 private schools, the paper goes on to explore the reasons for the massive growth in the sector, through the school choices, perceptions and aspirations of parents living in two slum communities in Lagos.

Keywords:

Private school; low-cost; school choice; affordability; poverty; Nigeria.

1. Introduction

It is becoming more and more widely recognised that in several global contexts private education is no longer the preserve of the privileged; rather different classes of service have grown up to serve nearly all economic levels, although the attached costs are still proving a barrier to a significant proportion of the poor. People of all walks of life are abandoning public services to throw their hopes behind the performance of the private sector in several areas of their daily lives, and nowhere more so than in Lagos, the economic heart of Nigeria and her largest city. Choosing to go private is not an ideological choice in Lagos as it is in the United States; rather it is an often reluctant acceptance that to get a reliable service in Nigeria means to purchase it privately.

Private education is a key example of people's increasing reliance on non-state services, and until recently there has been relatively little that is concretely documented and known about the private school sector in Lagos and Nigeria more broadly (Umar, 2008). In the light of this limited information,

this paper answers questions long unanswered, such as: *how many private schools are there? How many children are attending them? What proportion of the state's children are attending private schools? Why are poor parents choosing to pay for private schools instead of using cheaper government education?*

In the school year 2010-2011 these questions could finally be categorically answered for the first time, as the Lagos State Government and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) working through its Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) teamed up to conduct a comprehensive census of private schools, as well as supporting more in-depth and qualitative research into why private provision appears to be expanding. The paper draws on two datasets collected simultaneously. The characteristics and overview statistics on all private school in Lagos are provided from the private school census. Secondly data from a household study reflects the situation of private schooling for the poor in one area of Lagos, the slums of Makoko, answering the above research questions. Interview and focus group discussion data from Makoko helps to shed light on why the private sector has reached its current magnitude. Based on experience from the Lagosian and other contexts, it was hypothesised at the start of the research that the key reason for most poor families' choosing private education in a context of ostensibly fee-free public education would be perceptions of overcrowding and poor quality of instruction in government schools, juxtaposed with the proximity to home, smaller class sizes and perceived accountability and better quality in neighbourhood private schools.

The following section discusses public and private education in Nigeria and explores the existing literature; section 3 discusses the context and the methodology of the private school census and household sample study. Section 4 presents the characteristics of private schools as detailed in the school census, as well as qualitative and quantitative evidence from the sample survey. Lastly section 5 concludes, broadly supporting the foundational hypothesis of the study.

2. Review of literature

a. Public and private provision of education in Nigeria

Lagos State Government schools are owned, funded, run and managed by the government, with virtually no autonomy at the school level. These schools are intended to serve families of all socioeconomic levels, however in practice they have fallen out of favour with parents due to frequent teacher strikes and poor teaching when teachers are in school: 'the near-total collapse of public primary schools and the deterioration in the quality of tuition they provide has led to the steady expansion of private schools (Umar, 2008, p.92).

Infrastructure at government schools varies greatly from large open-sided structures with low walls and roofs resting on metal tube pillars, to substantial and impressive multi-story school blocks (personal experience of the author during the Lagos State Government census of government schools, 2009-2010). In line with the Universal Basic Education law government schools are nominally free (with some costs still attached such as parent-teacher association levies and other direct costs such as uniforms).

The alternative to the government system is the private sector, in which schools can be managed and run under many different types of arrangements, and may be owned and managed by a wide variety of actors including 'NGOs, faith-based organisations, communities and commercially-oriented private entrepreneurs, each with different motives for their involvement in education' (Rose, 2007). Private schools are mostly entirely independent of government (self-financing), however some private schools in Nigeria have benefitted historically from grants-in-aid (mostly mission schools), but these are relatively few (Adelau and Rose, 2004). Fully private schools have complete autonomy in terms of management, hiring and pedagogy although they do for the most part follow the government curriculum, as the pupils will need to go on to take public examinations and often transfer into government secondary schools. The private unaided sector in Nigeria is heterogeneous and varies

significantly in scope and quality, encompassing the elite to the nearly unrecognisable as schools (Adelabu and Rose, 2004; also this study).

Private schools can be disaggregated by 'approval status' (the same as government 'recognition' or 'registration' in other contexts) (Adelabu and Rose, 2004). It is illegal to operate a private school without government approval (Lagos State Government, 2011a) and it is also against government regulations to operate a private school for profit (Adelabu and Rose, 2004). Government approval is difficult and costly to obtain as the current approval guidelines are impossible for most schools to meet, including stipulations for large numbers of classrooms, a trained nurse and sickbay, and playgrounds, as just a few examples (Lagos State Government, 2011a); indeed school census data shows that most government schools fail to meet many of these requirements (Lagos State Government, 2011b). Lagos is one of the most expensive cities in the world (Sedghi, 2012), and so this type of investment would price most schools out of their target markets; simply to try to find a land plot large enough is a significant challenge. For this reason most private schools in Lagos (74%) were unapproved in the school year 2010-2011 meaning that only 26% of 12,098 schools are approved and functioning legally, although some were in the process of applying for approval. Monthly fees and a range of other direct costs (including having to purchase all school materials privately) are necessary to access private schools. The cost of attending an unapproved school is usually lower than in approved schools (Härmä and Adefisayo, forthcoming).

b. The growth of private schools

'One of the most serious gaps in the literature on private education is lack of reliable data on the number and distribution of private primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, including data on teachers, teaching-learning facilities, enrolment and the socio-economic background of pupils who are enrolled in such schools' (Umar, 2008, p.92). Some of the limited research available seeks to estimate the size of the sector, such as Tooley et al (2005). The fragmentary story from the literature indicated that 'parts of

central and southern Nigeria... [have] seen a notable growth in the enrolments and relative importance of private nursery-primary schools in the period since 1980' (Urwick, 2002), and further that there is evidence of 'flight from the public sector' reportedly due to 'the inadequate funding of government schools, and the related problem of teacher strikes' (ibid., p.142) in the 1980s and 1990s. This trend has been echoed by Umar (2008), Rose and Adelabu (2007), and has continued dramatically in Lagos State (illustrated below).

The system for collecting administrative data in Lagos has not been able to adapt to keep abreast of the developments in the private sector, and so there has historically only been a list of schools that have come forward to start the process of applying for approval; the case is not dissimilar in Nigeria as a whole (Umar, 2008). Two research teams have previously estimated the proportion of primary-level enrolments in private schools, with one estimating that 40% were in unapproved schools in Lagos (Larbi et al., 2004); while Tooley et al arrived at a complete estimate of 25% of children in government school, 42% in approved private schools, and 33% in unapproved private schools (Tooley et al., 2005). The data presented here finds that in 2010-2011, 39% of primary enrolments were in government schools, 25% in approved private schools and the remaining 37% are in unapproved private schools.

c. What are Lagos's low-cost private schools like?

Private schools of all shapes and sizes can be found in Lagos, but of interest in relation to Education for All goals are low-cost schools, which are described by Adelabu and Rose (2004), with conditions not changing appreciably in the intervening decade. The schools serve low-income families in mostly urban and peri-urban areas, but remain unaffordable to the poorest in society.

Fee levels are determined by the socioeconomic status of the client base of the local area, what other schools are charging, and by school quality, and are usually charged termly, however in practice many parents pay as-and-when. The reality of the context dictates that children are often allowed to

stay enrolled in school when parents experience difficulty in paying fees, mostly for the combined reasons of philanthropy and care for their pupils (Adelabu and Rose, 2004; Tooley et al., 2005) and due to a fear of losing clients and therefore reputation. Most schools expect full payment after some delay (Härmä and Adefisayo, forthcoming).

The schools are attractive to parents due to convenience and perceived quality (Härmä, 2011a). They are close to home and keep longer opening hours (often operating afternoon 'lessons'), serving the child-minding needs of working parents (ibid.). They have smaller classes and it appears that teachers spend more time on task and have fewer pupils to attend to (Tooley et al., 2005).

Direct, 'short-route' accountability of the school to the fee-paying parent who can withdraw the child at any time and with no notice, appears to cause private school managers to keep better discipline with their teachers and ensure some level of service to the client (Tooley and Dixon, 2006; Härmä, 2011a&b). This accountability route tends to lead to more teaching activity often in the absence of high teacher morale, as private school teachers are paid extremely low wages (Adelabu and Rose, 2004; Härmä, 2011a&b), the possibility of losing the job providing motivation rather than salary providing an incentive. Many of the teachers at low-fee private schools are not qualified (Härmä and Adefisayo, forthcoming) and yet it appears that they may be imparting more learning to their pupils than government school teachers are able to do (Tooley and Dixon, 2006), nearly all of the latter in Lagos State having the requisite Nigerian Certificate in Education (or NCE)(Lagos State Government, 2011b). School buildings in private schools are often worse (in some respects) than at government schools (Adelabu and Rose, 2004), suggesting that this factor is less important to parents than others.

There is disagreement in the literature on the quality of provision that these schools provide (see key literature cited here). Private schools in Lagos operate under challenging conditions and find it difficult if not impossible to invest in school improvement, due to (amongst other problems faced) precarious (rented) land tenure with no legally enforceable rental contracts; difficult cash flow due to

poor clients' own financial constraints (Tooley et al., 2005; Härmä and Adefisayo, forthcoming); and difficulty in accessing credit for school improvement (Härmä and Adefisayo, forthcoming). Despite the validity of the question as to what quality of education these schools are providing, this paper does not address this, focusing rather on parental perceptions of the quality of these schools which leads to their individual school choices.

3. Context and methodology

a. Census design

The private school census was a major undertaking: part private school study, part component of the Education Management Information System of Lagos State. It was not only the city of Lagos, but the entire state that was covered, which includes some rural areas and smaller towns and cities from Epe in the east to Badagry in the west. The census figures therefore cover all schools in the state.

It was known that many school proprietors would prefer to remain anonymous and hidden from government because they were illegally operating unapproved schools. Added to this was the challenge that most private schools did not want to be found because they were worried that the government would close them down due to their unapproved status (Härmä and Adefisayo, forthcoming). For this reason it is necessary to send trained enumerators to schools to ensure that all schools take part, and that the forms are correctly filled.

A team of 260 people was formed, drawn from all stakeholder groups to ensure that the results would be accepted by all parties. Enumerators were drawn from the Ministry of Education staff, the various private school associations, and civil society organisations. Each of the 20 local government areas was allocated a number of enumerators proportional to the size of the local government. There was a supervision team of 20 staff from the Ministry's Department of Private Education and Special Programmes, one for each local government area, and in addition there was a seven-strong verification team whose job it was to ensure that all schools listed were genuine, and also to physically comb certain

areas of the state themselves to compare school lists with those of the enumerators, to ensure that no schools were being missed out. A considerable percentage, 46% of schools, were checked by the verification team, providing a high degree of confidence in the census results. Of the schools found, only 1.4% (or 172 schools) refused to participate in the census; they are counted in the overall number of schools but it was not possible to gather any other data.

Enumerators were assigned up to three electoral wards within the local government to search and to enumerate every school that they found. Enumerators were trained to search carefully, asking many local people on every street or street corner, including small business owners, taxi drivers, school pupils and local residents. They were also trained to use a great variety of different words for 'school', as some of the smallest schools tucked away in flats and sheds are not seen as proper schools and may be called by other terms. It was found that many were so well hidden that multiple people would need to be asked in order to track down all those existing in one area, and even then it sometimes happened that a school was found on a street seemingly completely searched, simply through seeing children emerging in uniform from an otherwise anonymous metal gate, or through hearing their voices on the air from behind a wall.

The data collection methodology and team management structure was tested through an initial pilot phase covering five local governments in November and December 2010; when the methodology was found to be robust, the remaining 15 local governments were covered in the second semester of the school year starting in February 2011¹. Census forms were filled out by the trained enumerators and submitted to their supervisor, who checked that all forms were completely and correctly filled in, asking enumerators to correct mistakes and omissions. Data entry was carried out by a privately contracted team of data entry staff; the dataset was cleaned and analysed by the author.

¹ Government-enforced school closure due to election-related activities meant that the census could not resume in January, as originally planned.

There were limitations to what could realistically be asked on the census form. All of the basic characteristics of the school, its enrolment and staff were asked about, while certain areas were off-limits. For example, it was not possible to ask questions regarding teachers' salaries due to the sensitivity of the topic. Many low-cost schools pay below the legal minimum wage of N (Nigerian Naira)18,780²; the lowest approved school salary was N10,000 per month (median N17,500), and N6,000 in unapproved schools (median N9,500) (Härmä and Adefisayo, forthcoming). School fees was a second area that could not be enquired about. Such questions would have made proprietors wary of participating in the census as they feel that such information would only be used against them in some way by the government; they fear that government officials will accuse them of profiteering from education and will increase taxation on them.

b. The household study

An in-depth study of one area on the schools themselves was also carried out (the findings of which are detailed in Härmä and Adefisayo, forthcoming, and Härmä, 2011b), and later the study was expanded to survey households (with children attending the earlier-sampled schools) and conduct focus group discussions in mixed groups (including government school parents) in order to explore parents' decision making processes and their perceptions of school choice (Härmä, 2011a). These studies helped to build sufficient interest in the issue for the full census to be carried out.

The study area consisted of the slum areas of Makoko and Iwaya, as these were originally selected for an earlier situational analysis undertaken for DFID-ESSPIN (Adefisayo, 2009). While no assessment of the poverty of the area was undertaken, all households in the study area are housed in slum dwellings with insufficient water and sanitation and little in the way of public services. In a recent representative household survey (carried out in 2010) of Makoko, researchers found that 52% of housing stock was of plank and bamboo construction, 76% of households contained six people or more,

² USD1 = 161 Nigerian Naira.

over 50% of household heads were unemployed (20%) or working in the informal sector (32%), and 58% earn less than 5,000 Nigerian Naira (USD31) per month (Oduwaye et al., 2011), while the minimum wage at that time was 7,500 Naira (USD46.50) per month.

The physical environment, being coastal to the Lagos Lagoon, provides easy access to livelihoods such as fishing and fish processing, however proximity to the water also brings hardships: during the rainy season there is severe flooding and the ground is generally swampy and unstable. Some limited rubbish collection does take place, however the neighbourhoods remain highly polluted and unsanitary. Habitations are mostly fairly solid slum houses, not generally rising above the ground floor.

The schooling options available include three government primary schools in one compound on the western fringe of the slums; 37 private schools were identified in the study area (and also in the census) while 29 were used for sampling households from. All of the latter 29 schools were found on the land (the remaining schools either refused to participate or were situated on the Lagoon which would have been too difficult logistically to include in the household survey). Out of 29 private schools, four were government approved, and only one of these four was in the poorer neighbourhood of Makoko (for a full description of the schools see Härmä and Adefisayo, forthcoming). Schools ranged from having extremely poor facilities and young, unqualified and demonstrably incapable and disorganised teaching staff, to having somewhat more presentable but often still make-shift buildings with well managed staff holding varying levels of qualifications. All needed to keep fees low for the clientele that they are serving, while the poorest schools charged the lowest amounts and presumably attracted the poorest local parents.

For sampling the households to survey regarding their experiences with private schooling, their perceptions of the schooling options available to them, the costs involved and the reasons for their schooling choices, researchers re-visited schools from the previous school-based part of the study (Härmä, 2011b) and asked to select randomly from the enrolment register three children from primary

class 3 and three from class 4. Four households would be surveyed for each school, with 2 'backup' households in case any selected could not be contacted or refused to participate. Most households reached were willing, while a few could not be found within some labyrinthine slum areas. A questionnaire was administered with some closed but mostly open-ended questions; in addition focus group discussions were held, one in Iwaya and one in Makoko.

c. What is 'a school'?

All schools teaching the formal, standard curriculum at any level and for any combination of levels, between nursery 1 (age 4) and senior secondary 3 (age 18), were covered in the census. Certain 'schools' were excluded:

- Schools with only crèche (day care) and kindergarten (pre-nursery)
- Private (supplemental) tutoring and 'cramming' centres
- Private vocational centres
- Qur'anic schools teaching only Islamic religion and culture

The remainder were included irrespective of socio-economic level, size, infrastructure and facilities, approval status, staffing (numbers and qualifications) or what the school was *called by its own proprietor*. Many of the smallest, poorest schools' management stated that they were not 'schools', in an attempt to circumvent government regulations. Where standard books and curriculum are used even if for a very small group of nursery and perhaps a handful of primary 1 and/or primary 2 pupils, these were included as schools. These smallest schools are often the starting point for future growth and expansion at primary level.

By regulation proprietors are not allowed to run all levels (nursery to senior secondary) in the same school; however in practice many do so (or any combination of different levels), which is reflected in the data set. Some proprietors run (for example) nursery-primary levels and separate secondary schools under the same name but as entirely different enterprises with different managements,

whereas others run them as one single entity. The overall number of schools (12,098) reports the number of isolated school entities (with one census form filled for each entity irrespective of the number and combination of levels included), reflecting the reality of how the proprietor has set up and run the school. This means that 'a school' as counted here might be a micro-school with a handful of primary level pupils alongside some pre-primary children, or it might be a large school covering pre-primary through senior secondary levels in a well-appointed building.

4. A complete picture of the Lagos private school sector during the 2010-2011 school year

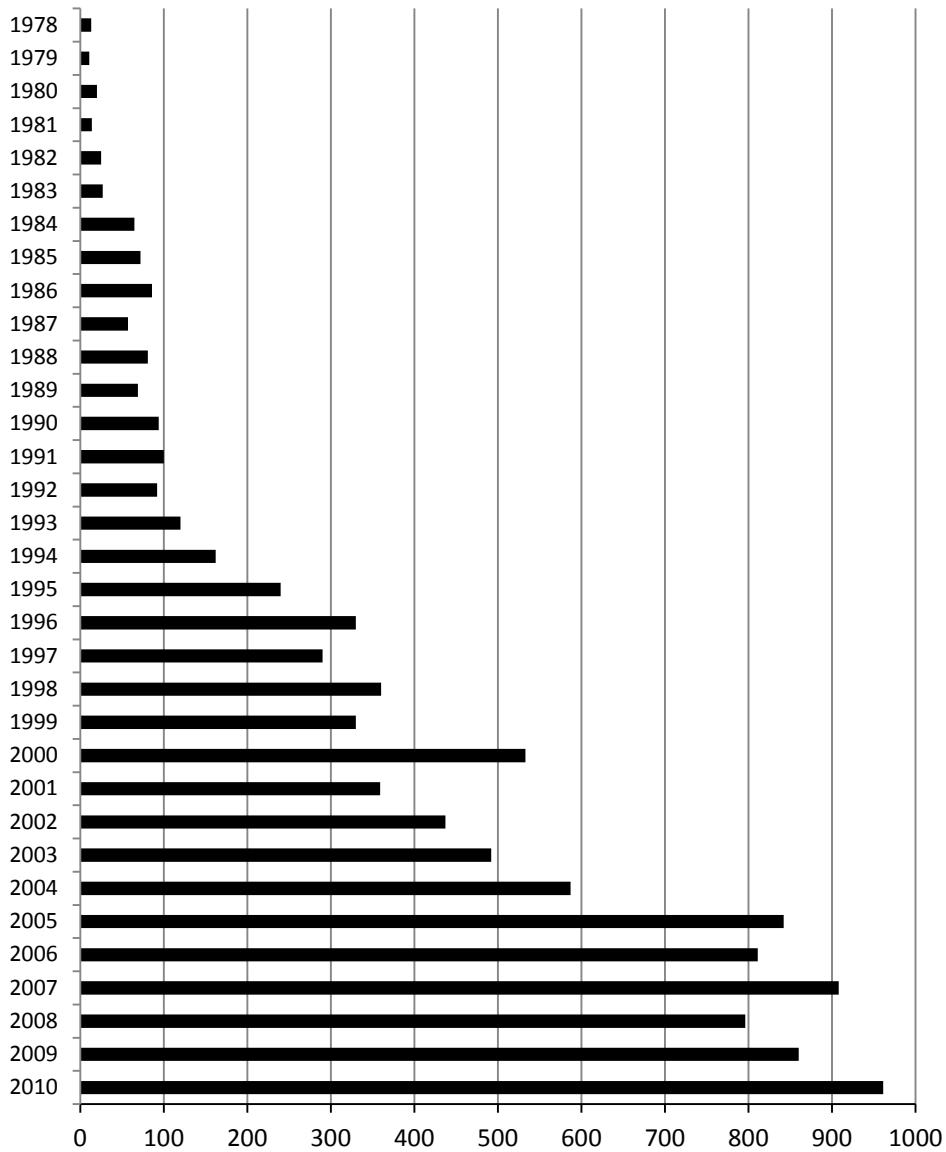
The private school census found 12,098 schools, of which 9,759 serve pre-primary levels, 10,094 serve primary classes, 2,335 serve the junior secondary level, and 1,713 serve the senior secondary level. To put this into some context, the government system had 991 primary schools (of which 957 also provide nursery classes), 308 and 307 separate schools serving the junior and senior secondary levels respectively (Lagos State Government, 2011b). There were 1,606 government schools in all, however these schools are much bigger than their private counterparts, with the average public school serving 644 pupils while the average private school serves only 97³.

a. Growth in the sector

The recent trend of growth in the private sector is significant (figure 1), with only 4 schools per year (on average) established between 1926 and 1977. This number entered double digits in 1978 when 13 schools were founded, and there is a steady growth trend since that date, culminating with 961 schools established in 2010.

³Kindergarten pupils have been excluded for this calculation for comparability purposes as government schools serve only nursery level upwards.

Figure 1. Number of schools established per year, 1978-2010



Source: private school census data.

This growth appears to be absorbing demand from the growing Lagos population, but also from parents in certain areas abandoning the public sector; household survey data from 2010⁴ has found that only 3 percent of children aged 6-11 are out of school in the state, indicating that demand is high. Crowding levels in government schools vary considerably from location to location; in the slum of

⁴ Nigeria DHS EdData Survey 2010

Makoko there has been a year-on-year decline in public school enrolment (table 1), while during data collection for this study and for the census other areas were observed to have severe overcrowding; classes of 200 were seen at public schools in Ojo, where there were also many private schools adjacent. Table 1 details the drop in enrolments at the three government primary schools serving Makoko slum over the three years leading up to and including the study. The head teachers of these schools reported a further drop at the start of the 2011-2012 school year⁵.

Table 1: Enrolments at public primary schools serving Makoko, 2008-2011

	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Primary School I ⁶	1,084	877	774
Primary School II	620	594	438
Primary School III	697	389	395
Totals	2,401	1,860	1,607

Sources: Lagos State Government (2010b; 2011b)

With regard to the question of equity in access to private education, policymakers and donors would ideally want to know how many of these schools are low-cost schools. From the census dataset there were few proxies which could be used to arrive at a necessarily imperfect estimate of the number of low-cost schools and their enrolments, due to the impossibility of asking proprietors regarding fees. Most of these schools are unapproved, so all approved schools are eliminated for this estimate; most do not serve the secondary level; and most low-cost schools are small, so all schools with more than 200 pupils are eliminated. With the total remaining schools having a mean enrolment of 78 pupils each, it is estimated that 6,473 low-cost private schools serve 504,894 pre-primary and primary level pupils.

⁵ The interview with the head teacher was undertaken for a separate piece of work; it took place early in the school year while admissions were still being accepted, however no large influx was expected at that point.

⁶ School names kept anonymous.

b. School characteristics

Of the 12,098 schools found, just over one quarter are approved and therefore operating legally, with 42% stating that their application for approval is in process, while 32% are unapproved with no intention to apply for approval. Many schools claiming to have started the process have done only the 'name search' and registration of their name with the Private Education Department, without having taken any steps to move the process forward. Proprietors do this simply so that they can state that they have started the process, however the name search is considered only a preliminary step. The ownership of 92% of schools is with individual proprietors, while 5% are owned by faith-based organisations and 3% by community groups or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The average school has existed since the mid 1990s, with approved schools (having a mean age of 26 years) being significantly older than unapproved schools (at 12 years). Most schools (96%) in the state are urban, operate a single shift (99%) and do not operate as boarding schools (98%).

Private schools have buildings and facilities of widely varying quality. The school census questionnaire captured only basic information on these aspects of schools because of the sensitivity of this subject. Most schools do not operate in the robust purpose-built buildings stipulated by regulations; this is captured using veiled language in table 2. The vast majority of approved schools are in owned buildings, while over half of unapproved schools are in rented buildings. The pupil-classroom ratios are low across approved and unapproved schools compared to government schools (selected basic school characteristics are presented in table 2).

Table 2: Selected characteristics of schools

	Approved (%)	Unapproved (%)	All (Number*)
Schools	26	74	12,098
School building type			
Converted building, 1 large room only	8	92	1,920
Converted building, separate classrooms	24	76	3,648
Mixed-use building	4	96	447
Purpose-built (from poor to regulation condition)	44	56	4,432
Space in house or flat	3	97	1,073
School premises ownership status			
Owned premises	38	62	5,883
Rented premises	14	86	5,298
Use of premises granted for free	6	94	308
Selected ratios			
Pupil-classroom ratio	16:1	13:1	14:1
Pupil-toilet ratio	29:1	39:1	34:1

*Note - Not all census forms included complete data on these questions so the sum of these cells in each section of the table will not sum to the number of schools found.

Source: private school census data

Thirty percent of schools have no power source (although many that do will have to rely solely on irregular mains supply). Ninety-five percent of schools report having at least one toilet available to pupils, however this report should be treated with some caution due to the sensitive nature of the issue and the fact that enumerators may not have inspected the toilets. Many slum schools were found to have no access to water or toilets, however the overall pupil-toilet ratio in private schools is reported to be 34:1.

c. Enrolment

There is a total of 1,385,190 pupils in 11,896 schools for which there is complete census data⁷. Slightly more girls than boys are enrolled in private schools, with boys in a slim majority (51%) at the pre-primary level only, indicating that families do not select school types according to their child's gender.

Table 3: Enrolment by level and sex

Levels of education	Male	Female	Total
Kindergarten enrolment	117,585	114,423	232,008
Nursery enrolment	126,697	125,404	252,101
Primary enrolment	306,825	308,473	615,298
Junior secondary enrolment	77,695	80,601	158,296
Senior secondary enrolment	62,884	64,603	127,487
Total	691,686	693,504	1,385,190

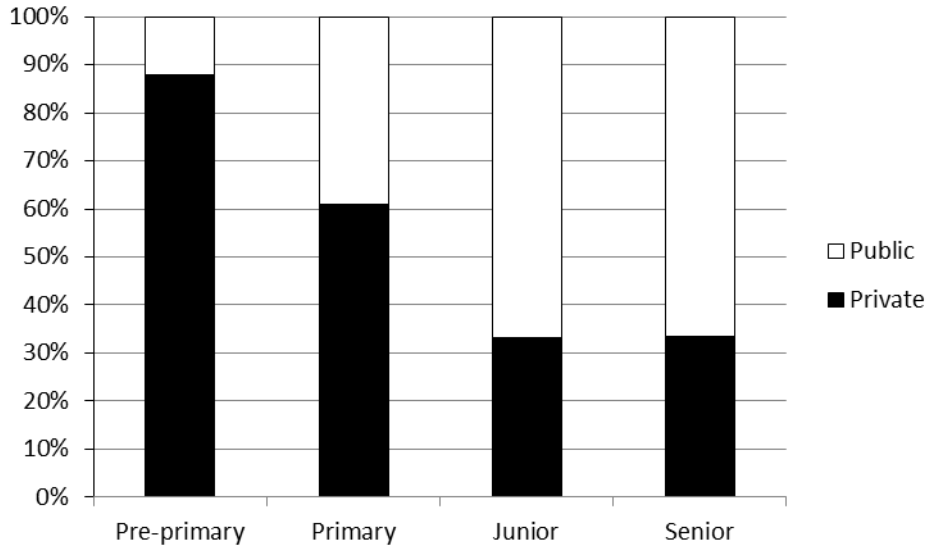
Source: private school census data.

Pre-primary education is relatively new in Lagos State, and is almost entirely privately provided, with 88% of pupils attending private schools. The majority of private sector pupils are in pre-primary and primary levels, while at the secondary level more pupils attend government schools (figure 2). Kindergarten levels cater to children aged 0-3 while nursery usually consists of 2 years of schooling immediately preceding primary 1. Private primary schools cater to 61% of all enrolled children, while only one third of all secondary-level pupils attend private schools. Many pupils revert back to the public sector due to cost and a perception of government school quality being somewhat better at the secondary than the primary level⁸.

⁷ Based on average enrolments of all schools, the 202 schools that did not provide enrolment data have an additional estimated 23,230 pupils, meaning a total of 1,408,420 pupils in 12,098 schools.

⁸ Views of some study respondents with secondary-level children expressed during interviews.

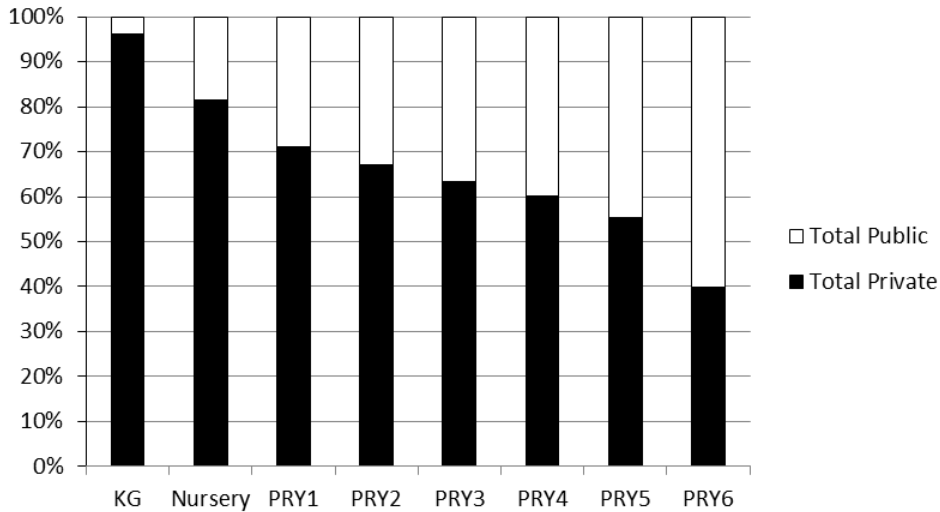
Figure 2. Percentage share of total state enrolments by level and sector



Sources: private school census data and Lagos State Government (2011b)

Given that the population is growing at approximately 3 percent per year, that there are few out-of-school children in Lagos State, and that the number of pupils attending government schools is in decline (Lagos State Government, 2010a; 2010b; 2011b), it appears that private schools are growing in popularity with parents. In addition, the overwhelming majority of pupils in pre-primary education and the lower primary classes being in private education suggests that private schools are the choice for young families growing up in Lagos.

Figure 3. Total enrolment per primary class level (and pre-primary level) by sector



Sources: private school census data and Lagos State Government (2011b)

Only 46 percent of private primary schools offer primary 6 (figure 3), explaining the sharper drop-off in the proportion of enrolments in private schools at this level. Most private schools start the primary curriculum at nursery level (and may also cover material faster than public schools), meaning that the full curriculum is covered by the end of primary 5. This is against the basic education law that state that the primary school cycle is 6 years; however it may be popular with parents who have one less year of education to pay for, and have children transitioning to junior secondary school at a younger age.

d. Teachers

Ideally the teachers' details gathered would have been reported by level taught, qualifications and sex. However where different levels operate in the same school, it is often the case that teachers' work will be arranged so that they teach across levels. For example 325 schools were found to teach pre-primary, primary and junior secondary classes, while 1,367 were found to teach both junior and senior secondary levels together. Teachers are reported as being 'qualified' when they have a National Certificate of Education (NCE), Post-graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), Bachelors of Education

(B.Ed) or Masters of Education (M.Ed) as their highest qualification. Sixty-three percent of teachers are qualified (table 4), leaving a sizeable proportion with no teaching qualification, with around one-third of nursery level teachers having only as little as secondary school education. Private schools have low pupil-teacher ratios (PTRs), the overall ratio being 12:1. Taking qualified teachers only, the ratio is still a favourable 18:1. Some schools did report teaching staff by level and for this smaller sub-set (which is self-selecting and therefore not a random sample), teachers at nursery level are the least qualified, with those at the junior secondary level being the most highly qualified.

Table 4: Percentage of teachers that are qualified, by level taught and sex

Level taught	% male qualified	% female qualified	% total qualified
Nursery	43	49	48
Primary	58	70	66
Junior Secondary	77	84	81
Senior Secondary	75	82	78
Total teachers in all 12,098 schools	64	63	63

Source: private school census data.

e. Private school associations

Facing a government crackdown on illegal private schools in 2008 and the impossibility of most schools meeting the approval criteria, private school proprietors started to come together to form associations in larger numbers than they had done previously. The associations have proved popular amongst proprietors as a way to defend common interests and deter government action to close down private schools⁹. The largest group of schools consists of those not aligned with any association (44%). The Association for Formidable Educational Development (AFED) has overtaken the National Association of Proprietors of Private Schools (NAPPS) as the largest association in Lagos, with 25% and 23%

⁹ This account of the growth of private school associations has come consistently from a large number of different private school proprietors and members of different associations.

(respectively) of schools as members. The former caters predominantly to unapproved schools while the latter is made up mostly, but not exclusively of approved schools, and schools which are of a higher standard than the poorest unapproved schools. The remaining 8% of schools are members of different smaller associations including those for elite schools and those bringing specific faith-based schools together, such as the League of Muslim School Proprietors.

f. What is fuelling private schools' growth and popularity?

In exploring why more and more parents choose these schools, in other contexts it has been found that parents perceive private schools to be working harder and delivering more teaching (of whatever quality) than government schools (Srivastava, 2006; Tooley and Dixon, 2006; Härmä, 2009). As extremely similar findings are also documented for other states in Nigeria (Umar, 2008), it was presumed that the situation in Lagos in 2010 would be no different, and this section provides a summary of the parental perceptions brought to light through the sample survey and focus group discussions with parents (from all school types) in Makoko. One mother stated:

'My children can stand their ground wherever they go. You have to be able to take the child to the father's relatives and the child should be able to compete with children on the father's side. If the child can't compete then it will be a disgrace to the family. I took them to this [private] school because I know the teaching is good. The children can hold their own'.

Specifically in relation to government schools, one parent stated that

'the population is still high. They don't teach. There are a lot of problems in public schools... They don't teach them anything. What they are meant to teach the children during school hours they do not teach. Then they teach the material during lessons¹⁰, just to get paid. At times I don't have money even to eat, and then at times the school beats my children for the school fees. I am very unhappy about the situation'.

¹⁰ This refers to supplemental tutoring carried out by regular school teachers, after hours and for a fee.

Another government school parent stated:

‘They don’t teach the children very well; if it wasn’t that I don’t have the funds, I’d have preferred to take my children to private school. They don’t teach the children and they force them to go to sleep, and if the children don’t sleep, then they get beaten. It is just a lack of funds that has made me keep my children there’.

The household study in Makoko was school-based, meaning that all respondents had selected private school for at least one of their children, and so in this context, as well as in the light of parental views expressed in focus group discussions, it was surprising that only 87% of parents stated that their preferred school type is private, a general question unconnected to any specific school¹¹. For the 7% who stated that their preferred school is government, it may have been that their spouse had chosen the school (while the remaining 6% had no clear preference). Many households used both private and government schools; 17% of parents reported doing this (including secondary level pupils) because they could not afford to have all of the children in the household at private schools. The same proportion reported that it is due to cost that they do not send all of their children to their preferred school type. Indeed despite claims in other research regarding the affordability of private schools, many parents reported private schools to be out of their reach. As stated by one female focus group discussion participant (this study): ‘there are some parents that would love to place their children in private schools but they don’t have the means; if assistance can be given to them then that will go a long way. My husband and I are struggling very much to afford it but we are just managing’. One government school student’s father stated ‘if I had the money my children would not be there [government school]’, while a mother stated ‘if it wasn’t that I don’t have the funds, I’d have preferred to take my children to private school’.

¹¹ In a previous study in rural India, the author found 95% of parents stated that private schools were their preferred school type. In this past study and the present Nigerian study, parents were asked ‘in general, and not in reference to your child’s school, what is your preferred school type?’

Out of all primary school-going children in the sample families there were only 9 children attending government schools while the majority of 149 attended private schools; it is more usual at the secondary level to send children to government school due to the expense, as costs rise substantially at this level. Table 5 details the reasons for choosing the specific school for each of the 158 primary school children, and shows that quality of education was the most commonly-reported reason for choosing schools whether public or private (although school quality is much more often the reason for choosing private schools); closeness to home and affordability are the next most commonly reported factors. One focus group participant expressed that:

‘There are differences between the two types of schools: firstly there is a set number of children in each class, but then in public schools the population in classes is too large for one teacher to handle. One teacher can be in charge of a class of about 100 children, which is not easy to cope with. So as far as I am concerned, I am much happier with private school; compared to public schools it is ok’.

Highlighting the perceived benefits of private schools, one focus group participant stated that all parents put their children in schools that are close to home; ‘they are all close to home, they are within the community’, and also ‘private schools are a lot better than government schools... private school pupils don’t wander aimlessly, and they dress well’; in addition ‘in private schools you will notice that a lot of children speak English, but in government schools it is difficult for the children to speak’.

Table 5: Percentage of respondents citing reasons for choosing a specific school for each child

	School quality	Closeness to home	Affordability	Recommendation	Relationship with owner/HT
Government	44	33	33	11	1
Private	77	31	28	22	15
All schools	75	31	28	22	15

Note: multiple responses were permitted so responses do not sum to 100%
Source: Härmä (2011a).

Only 17 children in the sample had ever changed school sector (only a handful of whom changed to government school, and usually due to the cost of private education). Fourteen children had changed from government to private school, with the search for better education quality being the reason for 8 of these, and closeness to home being the reason for the remaining 6.

Parents were asked both what is good about the school they have chosen for their child, and what problems they encounter at the school. In order of importance, the positive attributes of private schools are: good teaching and learning; good, caring and hard-working teachers that do not go on strike and keep firm discipline; children learn very well at the school, and in a safe environment which is close to home. It is also very important to parents that the staff be responsive to parents' concerns and complaints; also the relationship with the proprietor is often of some importance.

In terms of problems with the chosen school, the most frequently-cited complaint is regarding infrastructure and facilities (in some cases parents explicitly mentioned health facilities, toilets or playgrounds as lacking; but these are absent in most cases). In only 13% of cases teachers were mentioned as a problem, in that their numbers were insufficient or that they should be more highly qualified.

The vast majority of 95% of parents stated clearly that their chosen private school *does need to improve*, even if they were broadly satisfied- indeed 62% of parents were reportedly 'very satisfied' with the school. In answering how the school should improve, the formal training and qualifications of teachers were mentioned in 24% of cases, while 11% of parents reported that the actual quality of teachers (an issue separate to qualifications on paper) also needed to improve. In 71% of cases parents said they would like to see the facilities improve, with more furniture, more outside area/play space and a safer environment. Many said that their schools lacked the funds necessary for this type of development. During a focus group parents highlighted the problems of poorly qualified and poorly paid teachers:

'I think the teachers are not so good. One of the things that can be done is to employ qualified teachers even though we are talking about this [poor] environment. A lot of the schools do not have a location that they can expand in. They should take care of the little ones that they have. They should employ qualified teachers and then the schools will get better'.

Another parent suggested that 'assistance should be given to the schools – you can't expect a university graduate to come and start teaching in some of these schools now. They get paid a very poor salary'. It was further suggested by some parents that the general facilities should improve, and schools should have computers.

A large majority of parents (85%) perceived that the market is expanding, with private school numbers having grown considerably over the last 10 years. It was an area of interest to explore parents' perceptions of these developments, with context significant in two respects. Firstly the Universal Basic Education Law (2004) in Nigeria states that all children should benefit from free and compulsory basic education, meaning that Lagos state is failing in its legal obligation regarding education for all. The second contextual factor is that the government education system is failing in terms of both quality and capacity. In some areas, as discussed above, there are reducing numbers of students in the public sector, which has brought pupil-teacher ratios down to manageable levels in many schools (Lagos State Government, 2010b; 2011b). With parents still choosing private schools it is arguable then that to parents, quality of instruction is most important. In the eyes of parents, pupil-teacher ratios are important (but not the most important aspect), and due to wide-ranging failures, parents are having to buy educational services and are missing out on their right to free primary education. One focus group participant stated that 'government should build more schools to accommodate more pupils. There are too many pupils... three students sitting on one seat'.

When asked how they feel about having many private schools in their area, the majority (70%) stated that it is a good thing to have choice, with one parent stating 'every parent has to have a choice.

The school that I might like to take my child to might not be the choice of another parent'. Other parents stated that they would like to see even more schools in their area, but that at the same time many parents could not afford to use them. Returning to the survey results, one group of parents (17%) felt that many of the schools springing up are 'mushroom schools' of bad quality, and that this is not a positive development, with the implication that the specific private school chosen by the respondent was not one of these 'mushroom schools'. Fifteen percent of parents felt that the growth of private schools showed only that the government is not living up to its commitments – 'not doing its job'. Apart from this 15% of respondents, most parents did not seem to connect their need to pay for primary education at private schools with government failings. Parents showed varying degrees of awareness regarding competition between schools, although the vast majority stated that schools are responsive to their comments and complaints, a result of the direct accountability that is found in the market. Parents were not very articulate in explaining how schools compete for their business, although they are aware of what schooling options are around them and seek information from friends, relatives and neighbours to help inform their choice. In the absence of more standardised and reliable sources of information on school quality, it is through their own personal observations and through these community relationships that parents must gather the information to make their choice, with fee levels having their own weighty influence on this decision.

5. Conclusions

This paper presents an overview of the private school sector in Lagos State, a context recognised to be one of the world centres of spontaneous growth of private education. Because the government sector has failed to keep up with demand (Larbi et al., 2004), residents have had to seek out private solutions as in other areas of their lives including water and power supplies and even basic infrastructure such as neighbourhood roads. This paper provides an outline of the characteristics of

schools at all levels; the information on secondary and pre-primary levels almost entirely missing from previous accounts. These other levels merit attention: the pre-primary level is almost entirely privately provided while, despite many pupils transitioning into government education at the secondary level due to cost and somewhat better (perceived) quality at this level, private secondary schools still cater to one-third of all pupils.

Parents appear to choose private schools because they see government schools failing and because they see private school teachers at least present and often teaching in the classroom. They see results in their children mastering basic skills that neighbouring children (or even some of their own children from within the same household) fail to do in government schools. As summed up by one focus group discussion participant:

‘Children are well-taught in private schools. If government can raise the standard up to the level of private schools it will help a lot, because it’s not all parents that have the money to educate their children in private schools. Private school students are well-taught. I would like to see government schools copying private schools to raise the standard.’

Parents tend to feel that the schools provide value for the fees that they must pay, however there are serious equity implications from this set of circumstances. As was shown earlier in the paper, some government schools are experiencing year-on-year declines in enrolments, with the remaining children being most likely the most disadvantaged. Parents stated during focus group discussions that only the poorest or those parents that are not interested in education send their children to government schools. Conversely to the situation with the schools in Makoko, in locations around the state where there is still serious over-crowding in government primary schools even when there are abundant private schools in the immediate vicinity, the assumption to be made is that families cannot afford the costs and so suffer their children to be enrolled in classes of up to around 200 pupils.

There are two equity issues at play then: firstly that families living in slum conditions or otherwise feel the need to spend part of their precious incomes on private schooling (and the poorest will get the worst of private school quality); secondly that the most disadvantaged are left behind in presumably the poorest learning conditions in government schools (although often not the worst physical conditions). The situation is highly likely to have become even more difficult and unfair since the significant fuel price rise in early 2012 which pushed up school costs as well as the cost of living across the board, bringing citizens out on the streets in protest (Songwe and Moyo, 2012). The much-debated question of quality has been outside of the scope of this paper, but the paper begs questions for future research, such as *are these schools really providing better learning outcomes when background characteristics of pupils are controlled for?* Evidence coming out of India, a context where a similar spontaneous growth of private schools has taken place, is indicating that the answer might be 'no' (Chudgar and Quin, 2012; Siddhu, forthcoming).

At the current time private citizens in Lagos are providing their own solutions to the dilemma of trying to find education of acceptable quality for their children. This situation has advanced to the extent where it would take nothing short of a budgetary miracle for the state to be able to build the number of schools that would be required for the government system to have the capacity to cope with as many children as the private sector caters to now. The cost of land alone is prohibitive in this megacity with astronomical land values. As a consequence of its failure to keep pace with developments, the state government is failing to live up to its legal commitment to providing universal basic education, free of cost. How this situation can be addressed going forward will require careful consideration by state planners and their donor community partners.

It is often put forward that low-cost private schools are a more cost-effective solution to providing all children with education than providing more government school places. However the quality of both teachers and infrastructure in many of the poorest schools in the poorest

neighbourhoods render government or donor support to such schools (in either grants or in school vouchers) politically unfeasible. In addition, even if private schools accessible to some of the poor are of somewhat better quality than government schools, it is argued here that there is a limit to how much these schools can improve with untrained and lowly-educated teaching staff. Policy makers should not rely on these schools for reaching EFA for a host of reasons, one of which being that their cost effectiveness depends on the cheapness and low-quality of schools most essential inputs: teachers. These teachers may be able to deliver to a certain level (above a very low baseline), but to reach an objectively high standard of education will require development beyond the level that such teachers in such schools can provide. At the present time these low-cost private schools are simply private citizens' entirely understandable unplanned, spontaneous and entrepreneurial responses to the failures to fulfill state, national and international promises to all children, and should more sensibly be seen as a temporary solution for some families: a much-needed bandage for the problem underneath.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the staff of DFID Nigeria and of the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria for the opportunity and the encouragement to carry out these studies. Sincere thanks also to Gaurav Siddhu, Manos Antoninis, Benjamin Zeitlyn and Keith Lewin for their help in shaping this paper. Thanks very much to Professor Henry M. Levin for my time as Visiting Scholar at Teachers College, Columbia University, and to Jonah Liebert for helping to get this paper out. The deep affection and (inevitably still limited) depth of understanding I have developed for Lagos and its people is due in large part to the unfailing faith, support and hard work of Abiola Lawal and Yewande Adedipe. To them, I am eternally grateful.

References:

Adefisayo, F. 2009. "Lagos State Private Primary School Survey". Unpublished report, Abuja, Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria.

Adelabu, M. and P. Rose. 2004. "Non-state provision of basic education in Nigeria". In *Nigeria: Study of non-state providers of basic services*, eds. G. Larbi, M. Adelabu, P. Rose, D. Jawara, O.Nwaorgu, S. Vyas. Birmingham: International Development Department, University of Birmingham.

Chudgar, A. and E. Quin. 2012. "Relationship between private schooling and achievement: results from rural and urban India". *Economics of Education Review* 31(4): 376-390.

Härmä, J. 2009. "Can choice promote Education for All? Evidence from growth in private primary schooling in India." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 39(2): 151-165.

Härmä, J. 2011a. *Household survey on private education in Lagos*. Abuja, Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria. <http://www.esspin.org/index.php/resources/abs/lagos/332/LG%20503%20Household%20survey%20on%20private%20education%20in%20Lagos>.

Härmä, J. 2011b. *Study of Private Schools in Lagos*. Abuja, Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria. <http://www.esspin.org/index.php/resources/abs/lagos/295/LG%20303%20Study%20of%20Private%20Schools%20in%20Lagos>.

Härmä, J. and F. Adefisayo. Forthcoming. "Scaling up: the challenges facing low-fee private schools in the slums of Lagos, Nigeria". In *Low-fee Private Schooling: Aggravating Equity or Mediating Disadvantage*, ed. P. Srivastava. Oxford: Symposium Books.

Lagos State Government. 2010a. "Annual Education Sector Performance Report 2010". Unpublished government report, Lagos: Lagos State Ministry of Education.

Lagos State Government. 2010b. "Lagos State School Census Report 2009-2010". Unpublished government report, Lagos: Lagos State Ministry of Education.

Lagos State Government. 2011a. "Guidelines for the establishment of private schools". Unpublished government document, Lagos: Lagos State Ministry of Education.

Lagos State Government. 2011b. "Lagos State School Census Report 2010-2011". Unpublished government report, Lagos: Lagos State Ministry of Education.

Larbi, G., M. Adelabu, P. Rose, D. Jawara, O. Nwaorgu, S. Vyas. 2004. *Nigeria: Study of non-state providers of basic services*. Country Studies. Birmingham, International Development Department, University of Birmingham.

Oduwaye, L., V. Ilechukwu, O. Yada. 2011. *Socio-Economic Determinants of Urban Poor Housing Types in Makoko Area, Lagos*. Conference paper for Real Corp 2011. Essen, Germany. http://www.corp.at/archive/CORP2011_152.pdf.

Rose, P. 2007. "Supporting Non-State Providers in basic Education Service Delivery". CREATE Pathways to Access Monograph No.4. Brighton, University of Sussex. http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/PTA4.pdf.

Rose, P. and M. Adelabu. 2007. "Private sector contributions to Education for All in Nigeria". In *Private Schooling in Less Economically Developed Countries: Asian and African Perspectives*, eds. P. Srivastava and G. Walford. Oxford: Symposium Books.

Sedghi, A. 2012. "Which is the world's most expensive city? Cost of living survey 2012". *The Guardian*. London. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2012/jun/12/city-cost-of-living-2012-tokyo>.

Siddhu, G. Forthcoming. "Quality myth or reality? Investigating the private school effect in rural India".

Songwe, V. and N. Moyo. 2012. "Removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria: an economic necessity and a political dilemma". Opinion, 10 January. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/01/10-fuel-subsidies-nigeria-songwe>.

Srivastava, P. 2006. "Private schooling and mental models about girls' schooling in India." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*36(4): 497-514.

Tooley, J. and P. Dixon 2006. "'De facto' privatisation of education and the poor: implications of a study from sub-Saharan Africa and India." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*36(4): 443-462.

Tooley, J., P. Dixon, O. Olanrewaju. 2005. "Private and public schooling in low-income areas of Lagos State, Nigeria: A census and comparative survey." *International Journal of Educational Research*43(3): 125-146.

Umar, A. 2008. "Nigeria". In *Low-cost Private Education*, ed. B. Phillipson. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Urwick, J. 2002. "Determinants of the private costs of primary and early childhood education: Findings from Plateau State." *International Journal of Educational Development*22(2): 131-144.