

3

The International Context

Private schools and the impact of under-reporting

Low-cost private schools represent a sub-sector in the shadows. An often uncomfortable relationship with the authorities means that many schools operate without registration and fail to report their data.

The treatment of unrecognised and low-cost private schools is a major dilemma. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institution for Statistics (UIS) urged caution when attempting to survey such institutions, 'as they may not meet the requirement of UPE as regards of quality education... data provided to UIS typically do not cover those schools.'¹ All three countries have data gaps.

In India, 'different data sources tell different story.'² It is widely reported across the country that there is a 'large-scale dual enrolment, whereby children draw entitlements from the government school while actually studying in the private schools.'³ A recent study in Punjab found that if enrolment in unrecognised schools was taken into account, the gross enrolment rate (GER) in the area would be 26 per cent higher.⁴ The DISE 2005–06 data on private schools shows that they comprise 16.9 per cent of total schools and unaided private are 11.2 per cent of the total. The situation is confused; official statistics show age-specific enrolment above 100 per cent, but field observations in the various studies estimate that between 5 per cent and 40 per cent of children attend unrecognised schools.⁵ The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 puts the number of out-of-school children in India in 2005 at 6.395 million, second only to Nigeria. It possible that a sizeable number of children are 'hidden' in unrecognised schools, which their parents believe will offer better life chances than the government system.

According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, Nigeria has 6.584 million children out of school. The proportion of children enrolled in private schools has increased from 4.6 per cent to 7.2 per cent in recent years, but there are still claims of significant under-reporting in some states. 'In Kano, there are currently 3.0 million children enrolled in 28,000 Islamiyya and Qur'anic, as compared with nearly 4,000 public and private schools catering for over 1.5 million children.'⁶ The data analysis and entry in respect of the national census 2006 was still going on at the time of writing. This will shed some comparative light in gross and net enrolments (a GER of 103 per cent and a net enrolment ratio (NER) of 68 per cent in 2005 are reported in the EFA 2008 report). The planned Nigeria Education Household Survey

in 2009 can disaggregate enrolment by school type and registration status as well as numerous indicators.

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in Uganda acknowledges that coverage of private institutions is not complete and data is inconsistent from year to year. Private institutions are reluctant to provide data to the government. The study of unregistered, low-cost private schools is relatively new. This study found little information. In 15 of 19 northern districts, researchers were able to assess the number of private schools. The study's estimate of 90 private schools compares to the MoES official list, which only includes 34. Anecdotal reports claim that the mushrooming of low-cost private schools has grown fastest in Greater Kampala and next fastest in Uganda's central region. The country's GER was 119 per cent in 2005, although the NER is not reported in the EFA 2008 report. Uganda needs to estimate the under-reporting of private schools, starting in Greater Kampala and proceeding to an appropriate set of questions in the DHS.

Stability of the market niche

The mushrooming of private schools signals a very rapid response to market opportunity.⁷ Some of the factors that have given rise to such opportunity are highly context-specific. Some of the most important factors are:

- An over-supply of teachers;
- High hidden costs of government schooling;
- Private tuition costs;
- Language of instruction; and
- Poor performance of the public sector.

Teacher supply

Where a country has produced a large number of teachers in excess of the needs of the public sector, this can create a supply-side factor promoting private education. The surplus teachers are eager to work for private school owners, especially where alternative opportunities for employment in the non-agricultural sectors of the economy are limited. With few alternatives, they are often ready to accept wages well below government teacher rates. Sometimes those higher government rates can encourage them to stay within the teaching profession working for 'apprentice'-level wages, waiting for openings in the unionised and pensionable government sector. The prospect of high and dependable earnings later in their career can make the low and unpredictable payments of the private school tolerable.⁸ Teachers' pay is typically the largest single portion of a school's costs. At present in Ugandan private schools, teachers earn 61 per cent less than in government schools. Closing this gap even to 50 per cent would mean an increase in total cost to the private school owner

of 33 per cent. The private owner is constrained by the market to pass over the cost increase. The only options available to the owner would be to increase the fees or to cut costs somehow, for example by reducing the purchase of textbooks.

The surplus supply of teachers in Uganda is a result of government teacher training policy. The surplus will only be maintained if governments continue to train more teachers than are required by the public sector for expansion and replacement of attrition. Government may take on additional teachers to reduce teacher-pupil ratios if public finances allow – thereby reducing the surplus available to the private sector. Government might also decide to close government teacher training colleges to reduce the surplus.⁹ In many countries, government is the overwhelming supplier of primary schoolteachers (in Uganda, only 4 per cent of teacher trainees attend non-government colleges). Overall there is a large current surplus that enables the private sector to offer low-cost education. This, however, may be a temporary phenomenon.

India, on the other hand, has produced a large number of secondary and university graduates in the cities and villages waiting for an opportunity of a job or a further chance of training or education. The majority are not trained teachers, but school owners and parents deem them suitable to be teachers, especially if they are more dedicated than government teachers.

Hidden costs of government schools

In many countries, including the three in this book, education is declared to be free. In reality, however, there may be hidden costs that are substantial enough to change the balance of benefits between a government and private school in favour of the latter, despite its fees. Such costs vary from one situation to another, but typically may include:

- The cost of transport/travel if a private school is much closer to a child's home;
- The costs of ancillary items at the government school, such as uniforms, pencils, books and other school materials, local 'donations' to school maintenance and development and additional paid lessons for certain classes;¹⁰ and
- The opportunity cost of a child's labour if the government school takes them away from home for a substantially longer period than the private school.

In extreme cases, such as in elite government secondary schools in Uganda, a school may be owned or supported by the state, but its services are virtually private because parents pay the bulk of the costs required to deliver the education services.

For parents choosing between the local government primary school and the local low-cost private school, it must be assumed that they consider the cost of each in total; where the difference between the two is not substantial, this must increase demand for the private school. Here is another situation where government policy could easily change the arithmetic of choice. As governments become richer, they

traditionally take on a more comprehensive set of responsibilities for school costs, such as pens, materials, feeding (from 2003, Indian states have been bound to provide a midday meal scheme), transport to school etc. This may reduce the competitiveness of the low-cost private sector.

Private tuition

Belfield and Levin quote seven East Asian countries where the costs of private tutoring 'constitute a large proportion of total expenditures [on education]'.¹¹ There are examples in other parts of the world, such as Egypt in the Middle East.¹²

The impact is similar to the hidden costs of government schools. If one has to pay for private tutoring in addition to the government school, then it is this total cost which must be compared with the alternative private school.¹³

Private tutoring by teachers on the state payroll is often banned by government on the grounds that it encourages teachers to reserve 'real learning' for their private lessons, and because it extends the school day beyond that which is reasonable for the child. However, in this case it seems that governments find the phenomenon hard to control.¹⁴ Perhaps this practice may be less susceptible to government action than other factors discussed.

The situation in this respect seems to be different in each country. In Nigeria, private tuition is not widespread. In contrast, unofficial tuition payments are widespread in Uganda government schools, but private schools do not practise it. Interestingly, urban parents in Egypt pay heavily for their children's private tuition, regardless of whether they are enrolled in government or private schools.

Language of instruction

A common determinant of school choice in each of the three country studies was the use of English as the language of instruction in the private school, or its greater prominence as compared with the government curriculum. From the parental perspective, English competence is a decisive skill in the modern labour market, offering the prospect of white-collar employment for their children. Intuitively they believe that an early start to this language will enhance their children's future. The academic evidence points to the opposite being true.¹⁵

If this is a critical factor in parental choice, then it is also a fragile niche for the private sector because it is actually commonly illegal. Many countries require even private schools to use a common curriculum as a means of ensuring social cohesion and pedagogical soundness. Conversely, there are countries such as Holland that grant the freedom to choose one's educational system as part of their constitution, but these are generally the exception to the rule.

Here, the vulnerability of the private sector relation is that curriculum change is outside its control. Government could impose a standard curriculum on all schools,

or it could move the curriculum of government schools closer to the type offered in private schools. Examples of the latter are frequent. Several countries such as Yemen and Egypt have decided to introduce English at a lower grade than had previously been the case, and some countries such as Palestine have decided to start teaching it as a subject from grade 1.¹⁶ In each of the study countries, the parental preference of English is one of the leading reasons for choosing a private education. In Indian government schools, English is not introduced at the infant level. Parents claim that the standard of English teaching is better in the private sector. The new primary curriculum introduced in India in 2007 is attracting a lot of criticism from parents. Some parents cite it as one of the main reasons to choose a private school.

Low quality in the public sector

Another major driving force behind demand for private education is perceived failings in the public school system. Common issues include:

- Teacher absenteeism and low morale;
- Rigidities of a centralised management system that leave schools without even minimal operational costs and unable to make important decisions;
- Lack of professional support and in-service training for teachers;
- Irregular or corrupt inspection services; and
- Political patronage as a factor behind weak school management.

Often the public sector is capable of very significant improvements when it seeks to address the above factors. One technique being employed around the world is the devolution of resources and accountability to the school level. This promises significant gains in effectiveness. The World Development Report 2004 (World Bank) entitled 'Making Services Work for Poor People' discusses this subject:

'Increasing poor clients' choice and participation in service delivery will help them monitor and discipline providers. Raising poor citizens' voice, through the ballot box and widely available information, can increase their influence with policymakers – and reduce the diversion of public services to the non-poor for political patronage. By rewarding the effective delivery of services and penalising the ineffective, policymakers can get providers to serve poor people better.'

Furthermore, the World Bank Independent Evaluation Group writing in 2006: 'Support for local government and school management of primary education has been more effective than support for central government'.¹⁷ This is particularly the case when devolution is coupled with regular in-service training to build local capacity.

However, in the majority of poor countries, government schools are perceived to be beset by inherited inefficiencies and poor management.

Entrepreneurial response

There are several questions that need to be asked in considering the future impact of low-cost private schools in developing countries.

First, what is the likelihood of significant change in some of the key factors just described: teacher supply; hidden costs and quality of government schooling; curriculum and private tuition? And secondly, what is the likely reaction of low-cost private school owners to such changes?

The impact of universal primary education in Uganda in 1996 was dramatic. There was a mass evacuation from private schools, which were well established in the larger villages in central Uganda. When some months later it became apparent that government-promised inputs were not forthcoming, many parents moved their children back to private schools. A large group of commentators blame this for the growth and expansion of private schools to all parts of country, which had not witnessed the phenomenon before. India and Nigeria have not experienced such a dramatic dip in demand.

The reaction of the low-cost private school owners is hard to predict, because in the three country studies the sub-sector has not yet faced any constraints on growth. In theory, the response to such shocks as heavier regulation or an increase in costs will depend on a variety of factors:

- Mobility of the capital and human resources deployed in the private schools – Can facilities be redeployed for alternative use? Were investors drawn to education purely by the rate of return, or because there were teachers lacking alternative employment? The more mobile the capital, the more likely it is to be quickly redeployed according to the shifting economic of education. However, if the capital is relatively immobile, then there will be a greater tendency for owners to try to adapt their product to the changing market place.
- Demand elasticity. This will be very high if the private schools' customers perceive private schools and government schools to be almost the same product differentiated by current price and quality. A small increase in the price of private school fees would result in a large reduction on demand. On the other hand, if private schooling is viewed as intrinsically better because of perceived superiority of private provision or because the village elite all send their children to the school, then the aspirational nature of education may lead parents to do their utmost to meet fee increases despite hardships.

Many low-cost private schools are run in the owner's house or shop. The conversion of premises is not usually an expensive matter. If the market for primary schools is depressed, it is a simple matter to re-open as a nursery, secondary or technical institute. If the whole education sector is depressed, the owner could let the rooms to poor families.

In the short to medium term, one would expect the private sector to respond to increasing competition from the public sector with a mixture of price increases, innovation and efficiency gains, as well as some reduction in the number of suppliers. Longer-term major shifts in the economics of educational provision are likely to reduce the number of new entrants and bring about consolidation among those who are most efficient and effective in meeting parental aspirations.

If this is the general trend, one might expect a long-term future for private schools, which sees them gradually move up-market and increase fees to meet the aspirational expectations of their customers in parallel to gradual improvement of the government sector. The result would be a more traditional elite focus of the private school sector.

Possible impacts/options for the low-cost private sector

The last section looked at growth of the low-cost private sector as a spontaneous phenomenon, often outside government control and not yet incorporated into any proactive government policy. In the majority of cases, the policy-makers in the study countries ignore the potential to constructively engage with unregistered schools. The Educational Quality Improvement Programme (EQUIP) in Uttar Pradesh presents an exception to this, and has been bringing about quality improvement in hundreds of low-cost schools. It is possible that as low-cost private schools become more visible, policy-makers' attitudes could change towards constructive engagement. India has a lot of experience with a multiplicity of models in the formal and informal school/learning sectors.

In Nigeria and Uganda there are many options for government to actively engage with the private sector, which could play a more deliberate and constructive role in accomplishing national education objectives. In such a vision, the private sector's niche is seen as important and its expansion potentially desirable. In Africa, there has been little exploration of the role of the private school sector as service provider. A weak governance track record makes the owners suspicious of inference, while other weaknesses in economics, planning and financial modelling and budgeting have made it difficult to introduce promising reforms.

One last footnote is remarkable. In India, 37 per cent of government schoolteachers with children are choosing to send them to private schools.¹⁸ This represents a damning loss of confidence in public schools.

Criteria for assessing the value of the private sector to education development

Belfield and Levin (2002) propose four basic criteria for evaluating a reform that promotes privatisation in education. These criteria ask:

- 'Will the reform give freedom of choice to those demanding education?'

- ‘Will the reform be efficient?’ (by providing more outputs per \$1 or providing the same output more cheaply)
- ‘Will the reform be equitable ... to students and communities?’
- ‘Will the reform generate the social cohesion that an education system is expected to contribute to an effectively functioning society with common values and institutions?’

The remaining sections of this chapter look at each of these issues in turn. In the context of the first issue, freedom of choice, we also look at the impact of low-cost private schools on governance and accountability to parents.

Issues of freedom of choice

It is generally argued and is supported by the studies (the Nigeria study being the most thorough in terms of documenting) that parents appreciate the opportunity to choose their child’s school.¹⁹ This factor increases levels of satisfaction and it is assumed that it acts as a spur to the performance of all schools involved in this quasi competition.

The low-cost private school phenomenon does seem to be very closely linked to parental desire for choice. Interviews with study schools reveal that parents value such choice as a way to select a service which is different from that offered by the government school. The nature of that difference varies according to the school and individual parental perception. Characteristics that are frequently highlighted include:

- Different curriculum choices, especially in respect to the language of instruction and sometimes additional subjects (e.g. Qur’anic schools in Nigeria). The importance of English in the three study countries is crucial. In India, many low-cost private schools claim to be an ‘English Medium School’. However, like peri-urban schools in Uganda, the English language competence of the teachers leaves a lot to be desired.
- A more convenient timetable, school day or calendar is sometimes mentioned. The owner normally sets these things at the convenience of the parents.
- Higher quality of the learning is often described in terms of factors such as teacher commitment. It is problematic to describe the norms of the low-cost private schools as ‘higher’ quality. Equipment and furniture are generally less than in government schools. Provision of textbooks by government is also more generous compared with unregistered schools in each of the three countries. However, parents all agree that the low-cost private school beats the government school in all aspects of discipline, punctual attendance by teachers and pupils, politeness, time on tasks, control of bullying etc.

- A safer environment if the school is closer to home, run by trusted persons or staff of similar religious beliefs. In north Nigeria, this factor is very important for girls and makes the private Qur'anic school attractive to parents.
- There is greater perceived accountability of staff, who depend for their salaries on parental payment of fees. Staff also lack any employment protection: in most cases the owner is judge, jury and executioner should there be a dispute.

At first sight it would seem intrinsically beneficial to have greater choice. However, there are potential dangers. Some parents might choose to give their children less than an optimal amount of education. In the United States, for example, parents are allowed to opt for home schooling if they feel that better fits their cultural and social needs. Other countries might feel that this is too difficult to control and may therefore risk some parents simply exploiting their children's labour at home or in the family business. Low-cost private schools that compete with government schools could attract parents who want to reduce school time, especially if the real costs of the two options are not decisively in favour of the government school.²⁰

It may also be dangerous to assume that parents make the right choices when offered alternative pedagogical approaches. The choice of English language instruction, as discussed above, is an example where parents may be making a poor choice. It may appear to work in the short term (children managing a few words of English), but leads to failure in the long term when basic language skills are missing. Schools that only teach a religious curriculum might be omitting core skills required by all children.²¹ Some schools might insist on omitting certain topics that they found distasteful, such as HIV/AIDS prevention messages or discussion of a historical conflict in which the ethnic group enrolled were accepted to have committed atrocities.

All of these potential problems are controllable if the private sector is subject to regulation and quality control. While in theory there is no reason why government cannot institute such a regime, it is often beyond the government's capacity in a developing country, where governance systems may be weak. It may be impossible to institute a fair and efficient system of government school inspection, for example. So it may similarly be impossible to maintain an incorruptible regulatory system for the private schools. In the case study countries there are examples of supportive district

Held Back

One mother in Kampala, with only four years of primary education herself but with great ambitions for her children, described to the researcher how she wanted her children to be properly prepared for the competitive environment of primary school. So she made her son repeat the final year of private kindergarten three times until he was proficient in repetition of the English alphabet. As a result, the boy did not start primary school until he was eight years old (two years behind schedule) and gained a skill that many educators would consider pedagogically unsound, especially for kindergarten. However, the mother was convinced she was doing the best for her son.

officials arranging in-service training, but there are also examples of greedy administrators exhorting school owners to make un-receipted payments to individuals.

The issue of accountability is closely related to the issue of quality. Is a private school more accountable than a public school just because parents are paying fees? This is a very doubtful proposition. True accountability arises from participation in the definition of a school's objectives and targets, and sharing of objective performance data. A private school may offer parents only one means of signalling dissatisfaction: the withdrawal of their child from the school. In the absence of effective independent inspection, the parent may receive little objective information on school quality. There may be, in effect, no consumer protection. Parental withdrawal of a child from a school is a major decision and can have negative impact on the child's development. A school is not a corner shop where you can choose on daily basis which rival offers the best prices and quality.

The issues of accountability and governance are especially serious where parental literacy is low and access to knowledge regarding good pedagogical practice is limited. This may be another area where government should consider regulation of the private sector, to ensure parents have a voice in the educational process and are guaranteed access to critical performance information. The evidence of the studies is mixed. Some owners are ready to welcome parental participation, but some are secretive and resist discussing management information. Parents need their rights to be protected by the law and a regulatory regime that is just and equitable.

Issues of efficiency

There are two main ways in which low-cost private schools could improve the overall efficiency of the education system. The first is by providing additional education capacity for a society with little or no requirement for public investment. The second is by improving efficiency through competitive pressure.

Potential for increasing capacity of the system with minimal investment

Society can benefit from private sector school capacity in a variety of ways:

- At the simplest level, government is relieved of the burden of paying for children whose parents choose to purchase private instead of government service provision. The saving is obviously equal to the per child public subsidy.
- Government can purchase places in private schools. The government motivation may derive from many sources: efficiency, reform, pro-poor choice etc., but the essential rationale is to increase capacity.²²

Two of the study countries are funding the private sector to educate some part of the population. India has funded aided private schools to deliver education services since the 1970s, and such schools receive the bulk of their funding, including

salaries, from the government. In subsequent years, the government has added categories such as non-formal education and working children, with special arrangements for each type. Even unregistered schools have managed to obtain scholarship money from the government.²³ Uganda offered a subsidy for private schools in the early days of UPE, but the planning and control systems were weak and the schemes were gradually abandoned. Upon the introduction of universal secondary education, such schemes were tried again. The government has contracted low-cost private secondary schools to utilise their spare private capacity in areas where government school places are insufficient. Examples of the government funding the private sector are, in truth, many; Belfield and Levin (2002) quote examples from every continent including the Dominican Republic, Chile and Czech Republic.

Though attractive in principle, implementation of such schemes may be quite complex. Issues that need to be considered include:

- Who is to assess the capacity of the private school and against what criteria and standards? In other words, how is the capacity of school defined? Is the school simply a place or a learning opportunity of a defined quality?
- Which children would be eligible and what impact might different selection systems have on existing clients for the private school? They might be tempted to try to gain free entry through a government scholarship, in which case government would be assuming an additional burden rather than buying an additional place.
- If exclusivity and social advantage are major motivators for parental choice of the private sector, what impact would there be on that demand if a school accepted additional students from a social cross section supported by government scholarship? What impact might this have on the social mix in government schools in the neighbourhood?²⁴
- What quality control processes would be necessary to ensure that government received value for money for its scholarship? Some owners might be tempted to accept additional funding without increasing inputs, leading to a reduction in quality of service?
- What opportunities are there for misdirection or misuse of resources by officials or beneficiaries?

The private sector's role in making new investments in education is an idea with which a number of Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and OECD countries are experimenting. However, the whole topic of private-public partnership investments is complex and is likely to prove itself in traditional sectors such as roads, power etc. rather than schools.²⁵

Potential for improving efficiency through competition

Generally speaking, competition is considered to lead to improved quality as service providers respond to market demand. However, the extent to which there is real competition may be limited by many factors:

- Parental choice may be limited by distance from schools and transport in many poor rural communities. The population density is 345 (population per square kilometre) in India (2005), 153 in Nigeria (2005) and 120 in Uganda (2005).²⁶ The opportunity for competition should be plentiful in many parts of all three countries. The India study shows competition to be commonplace, with entrepreneurs opening schools right next to government schools. However, is the competition healthy or 'beggar-my-neighbour', leaving all parties weaker? Some parts of India are experiencing declining school rolls.
- Innovation may be limited by government regulation, because of concern to maintain standards or to ensure social cohesion or because of simple inertia, so that the areas of discretion left to schools may be limited.
- In order for competition from a private school to have a positive impact on a neighbouring government school, there has to be some incentive for the latter to respond (such as increased income when additional students are enrolled) or a penalty (such as the threat of closure if enrolment were to drop severely). Such pressure might be strong in a government system with school-based management and funding linked primarily to enrolment. In all the study countries, however, most management decision-making takes place in the bureaucracy at the district or state level, and funding is slow to respond to changes in enrolment.
- It may be that a certain scale and certainty regarding the rules of the new game are needed to create a major competitive impact on the education system. Parents, entrepreneurs and government school managers are not going to take radical decisions unless they believe there is a long-term commitment to change by the government. That is a tough challenge for many governments in a very politically-sensitive area.
- It should also be noted that competition can be created even within the public sector by creating a quasi market and facilitating inter-community transport. This has been a growing trend in the UK.

The reader must bear in mind the situation of the country studies. The role of competition and choice is based on the total cost for poor families. Most parents may simply be choosing the cheapest of two low-quality products, with price being the overriding consideration.

Issues of equity

Low-cost private schooling is very different from the high-cost elite education that almost guarantees its buyers a place for their children in the best universities and top jobs. The first question in considering issues of equity is whether low-cost schools are actually delivering a better product?

The evidence is not easy to analyse. There are many difficulties in using examination results. For example, the candidates from unregistered private schools usually sit as candidates in a nearby government or private registered school. Ideally the researcher needs standardised tests to be able to make a fair comparison. Such tests are not often carried out in unregistered private schools.

Tooley (2005a) cites results of standardised tests in Ghana, India and Lagos, Nigeria. The mean scores for English and mathematics in private schools were uniformly better than government schools. Furthermore, the registered private schools did better across the board than their unregistered counterparts. The table below illustrates the percentage points by which registered and unregistered private schools outperformed the government schools in each of the locations.

With the exception of his evidence from Kenya, which is not displayed here, Tooley demonstrated a higher level of performance in the private sector. The testing in Kenya was happening in the throws of a UPE transformation when children were moving from one school to another.

Is there any evidence of social partitioning or ethnic separation? The latter might arise in some environments, because of language issues in a mixed-language society. No evidence of social partitioning based on ethnic and caste division is provided in the studies. Anecdotal evidence is widespread that private education is creating division based on wealth, albeit private education in Nigeria and India are available to suit all budgets.

If private schools are leading to social partitioning, vouchers can be used to reduce this phenomenon as they can guarantee access for all social classes. The India scholarships system is intended to redress inequalities by the value of scholarships. A system of vouchers is unlikely to be effective in poor countries with weak government, however. Unless a country reaches a level of gross domestic product (GDP)

Table 3.1 Private schools' out-performance on government schools

Percentage points out-performance on government schools	Mathematics		English	
	Unregistered private	Registered private	Unregistered private	Registered private
Hyderabad, India	22%	25%	31%	37%
Ghana	6%	12%	9%	14%
Lagos, Nigeria	15%	19%	23%	30%

that enables serious consideration of social safety nets (i.e. middle income), vouchers are likely to prove disappointing.

Equity is a genuine concern of many observers. An education officer in Nigeria laments the evacuation of the middle classes from government schools in Lagos. Meanwhile, a common attitude among teachers in India is that having never had any access to education, the poor should be grateful that they are now able to access the 'favour' of free government education.

It is not reasonable to blame the parents. They naturally seek any possible special advantage in a climate of brutal social competition. All three education systems are being driven by high-stakes examinations, and the private schools do claim better performance over public schools.

Issues of social cohesion

Education can serve to level the differences and inequalities between children from varying social classes or races. Conversely, limiting admission to pupils on the grounds of their family's financial means can serve to reinforce existing inequalities. This can have a further impact upon social cohesion, which may be endangered if the education system exacerbates a society's fault lines and lays the seeds of conflict, instead of creating a citizenry with shared values, mutual understanding and obligations.

The flip side of choice is the danger of disunity. The extent to which this is problematic clearly depends on the degree to which a society is homogeneous and relatively egalitarian. The danger may be minimal in a small rich northern European country, and critical in a weak multilingual African country recovering from civil war.

Nonetheless, growth of private schooling is not synonymous with the phenomenon described above. The use of a common core curriculum, fundamental enforced rights of access to any school by all social groups, the banning of material designed to incite racial or ethnic hatred, the promotion of peace studies and civic education, together with strong enforcement of regulation are all more important in fighting social conflict than the ownership of the schools.

Successive governments in Uganda tried to weaken the linkage between churches and education. They feared that this exacerbated the sectarian divisions in society. Many Arab countries have preferred to suppress confessional education out of fear of sectarianism. However, India and Nigeria seem relaxed about the impact of private schools and a variety of school choices.

Notes

1. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, email correspondence July 2007.
2. Ibid, p. 2.

3. See section 4.2.3 The emergence of the inexpensive schools.
4. Mehta, A. (2005).
5. Aggarwal, Y. (2000) and Muralidharan, K. & Kremer, M. (2006).
6. Adediran, S. (2007).
7. The World Bank's evaluation of support to primary education cites Mali, Ghana, India and Pakistan as examples of growth in low-cost secular private schools. See World Bank (2006).
8. Smith, I. & Musoke, S. (2006).
9. In both Uganda and Malawi, government has been trying to reduce the surplus of teachers to some extent.
10. Uniforms are often sold by school management as a monopoly and a form of hidden fees. Donations are often compulsory, with heavy social pressure to meet obligations regardless of family means. Additional paid classes are common for examination classes, where the system has a high-stakes terminal examination that determines future options for secondary schooling.
11. Belfield & Levin (2002).
12. Bray, M. (1999).
13. This assumes that enrolment in the private school removes the necessity of private tutoring. This is the case in some countries in some circumstances, but in Egypt it has become the norm for private tutoring in the cities to encompass children from both the private and public sectors.
14. It is difficult to control because it usually takes place off school premises. It may also be driven as much by parental concern for children's performance in a highly competitive job market with little or no social safety net, as by teacher's manipulation of their in-school programmes.
15. The evidence from comparative research is overwhelming that all language skills, including second language proficiency, are enhanced by mother tongue instruction in infant years. See Komarek, K. (2003) and Center for Applied Linguistics (2004).
16. Nicolai, S. (2005).
17. World Bank (2006).
18. Muralidharan, K. & Kremer, M. (2006).
19. Belfield & Levin (2003): parents want 'differentiated demand' from that offered by the state; parents want more ('excess demand'); and there is much economic evidence that monetary returns have risen over the period since 1990.
20. Nonetheless, some evidence from De Stefano (2006) shows that rural elite parents actually value longer school on the assumption that it improves competitiveness of pupils in final exams; more time at school might be preferred in urban areas because parents value the childminding function (Bray [1999]). This factor is highly context-specific.
21. Some commentators emphasise bad cases in Mali, Ivory Coast and West African countries in Qur'anic schools where itinerant teachers refuse non-traditional subjects and exploit children (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [2007]).
22. The government may purchase places in the private system, thereby saving investment resources which would otherwise have been needed to create that capacity in the

- government system. In assessing the value of this arrangement, the government needs to take into account the discounted value of this saving in investment and set it off against the per pupil cost in the private system versus what it would have cost them in the public system.
23. Tilak, J.B.G. (2004): pp. 343-59, calculates 'More than one-fifth of the government expenditure on elementary (primary and upper primary) goes in the form of subsidies to private schools.'
 24. Evidence from OECD countries suggests that schools need a balanced social mix in order to perform optimally.
 25. In 'Breaking the State Monopoly in the Provision of Schooling' (2005) McIntosh, N. discusses the potential investment of private capital in education.
 26. UN Population Division (2006).