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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Bridging the Gap Between Private and Public Schools in Nigeria

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All authors contributed equally to this research.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the disparities in educational quality between private and public schools in Nigeria, employing a qualitative methodology that includes documentary review and document analysis. It aims to identify key differences in the educational experiences offered by these two sectors, focusing on several critical areas. First, the study assesses the level of infrastructural development, revealing significant gaps that may impact learning environments. Second, it evaluates the role of teacher quality and availability, examining how these factors contribute to educational outcomes and help bridge the performance gap. Furthermore, the research explores government funding and policies, analyzing their effectiveness in reducing disparities between the two school types. Parental involvement and socioeconomic factors are also scrutinized for their influence on student performance. Additionally, the study looks into the integration of technology and innovative teaching methods in private schools, assessing their adaptation in public schools. Finally, it proposes strategies aimed at enhancing academic outcomes and increasing access to quality education in public schools, with the goal of aligning their standards more closely with those of private institutions.

Keywords: Education quality; private schools; public schools; teacher quality; government funding; socioeconomic factors

INTRODUCTION

The education sector in Nigeria has long been plagued by a persistent divide between private and public schools, with significant implications for the country's human capital development. While private schools are often characterized by better infrastructure, qualified teachers, and superior academic performance, public schools struggle with inadequate resources, overcrowding, and poor teacher quality. This dichotomy has resulted in a two-tiered education system, where students from affluent backgrounds have access to quality education, while their counterparts from disadvantaged backgrounds are relegated to subpar public schools. The

consequences of this gap are far-reaching, with the most significant being the perpetuation of social inequality and the limitation of opportunities for socioeconomic mobility. Students from public schools often lack the skills and knowledge required to compete with their private school counterparts, thereby limiting their access to higher education and better job opportunities.

Furthermore, the lack of quality education in public schools has been linked to poor economic growth, increased poverty, and social unrest. Asu-Okang (2025) posits that government's efforts to improve public education over the years has not led to better outcomes as the quality of school children remains

low. Therefore, bridging the gap between private and public schools in Nigeria is crucial for promoting social justice, reducing inequality, and fostering sustainable economic development. However, despite the significance of this issue, there is a dearth of research on the specific factors contributing to the gap between private and public schools in Nigeria, as well as the strategies that can be employed to bridge this gap. This study aims to address this knowledge gap by investigating the differences in educational outcomes, teacher quality, and infrastructure between private and public schools in Nigeria. The study will also explore the policy and practical interventions that can be implemented to improve the quality of education in public schools, thereby bridging the gap between private and public schools and promoting a more equitable education system in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The disparity between private and public schools in Nigeria has become a pressing concern, with significant differences in the quality of education, infrastructure and academic outcomes. Private schools are often associated with better facilities, qualified teachers, smaller class sizes and higher academic performance, while public schools face challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure, poor funding and underqualified or underpaid teachers. These differences create an unequal playing field for students, with those in private schools having better opportunities for academic and personal development. This gap has led to a growing perception that public schools are inferior, further eroding public trust and enrollment in public schools and exacerbating educational inequality in the country.

The root causes of this gap lie in systemic issues such as poor government funding, ineffective policies, and lack of accountability in the management of public schools. Unlike private schools, which operate on competitive business models and prioritize efficiency, public schools are often plagued by bureaucratic inefficiencies, embezzlement of funds and neglect. Teachers in public schools face limited access to training and professional development, further reducing their ability to deliver quality teaching. Additionally, inadequate use of technology and outdated teaching methods put public schools at a disadvantage compared to their private counterparts. These systemic failures not only widen the gap

between private and public schools but also undermine the potential of public schools to provide equitable access to quality education for Nigeria's children.

Despite various government interventions and initiatives, such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and partnerships with international organizations, the gap between private and public schools persists. Efforts to improve public schools have often been poorly implemented, underfunded, or misaligned with the realities on the ground. Meanwhile, private schools continue to thrive, largely catering to families who can afford their higher fees, leaving children from low-income households trapped in underperforming public schools. This situation raises critical questions: what practical measures can be taken to bridge the gap between private and public schools in Nigeria and ensure that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to quality education?

Theoretical Underpinning

The theoretical underpinning of this study is grounded in several key frameworks that illuminate the dynamics between private and public education systems in Nigeria. First, social equity theory serves as a foundation, emphasizing the need for equitable access to quality education regardless of socio-economic status. This theory highlights how disparities in resource allocation can perpetuate social inequalities. Additionally, institutional theory is employed to analyze the structures and processes within educational institutions that influence their operation and effectiveness. This perspective helps to understand how policies and practices in public and private schools differ, affecting student outcomes and institutional legitimacy. Furthermore, the study draws on critical policy analysis, which examines the impact of educational policies on various stakeholder groups, particularly marginalized communities. This framework enables a critical examination of how policies can either bridge or widen the gap between the two educational sectors. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the systemic issues at play, ultimately guiding the development of strategies to enhance collaboration and educational equity in Nigeria.

METHADODOLOGY

The qualitative methodology employed in this study

involves a documentary review and document analysis approach. This approach is particularly useful for examining the role of government funding and policy in addressing disparities between private and public schools in Nigeria, as it allows for an in-depth examination of existing documents and policies related to education in Nigeria. The documentary review involves a systematic and thorough examination of a range of documents, including government reports, policy documents, academic articles, and books, to identify patterns, themes, and trends related to education funding and policy in Nigeria. The documents reviewed include policy documents from the Federal Ministry of Education, reports from international organizations such as the World Bank and UNESCO, and academic articles and books on education funding and policy in Nigeria. The document analysis involves a detailed examination of the content of the documents, including the language, tone, and emphasis used, to identify the underlying

assumptions, values, and ideologies that shape education funding and policy in Nigeria. The analysis also involves identifying the key stakeholders involved in education funding and policy, including government officials, educators, and civil society organizations, and examining their roles and interests in shaping education policy in Nigeria. The data collected through the documentary review and document analysis are then analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, coding, and categorizing the themes and patterns that emerge from the data. The themes and patterns are then interpreted in the context of the research question, to identify the key findings and implications of the study. Thus, the qualitative methodology employed in this study provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the role of government funding and policy in addressing disparities between private and public schools in Nigeria.

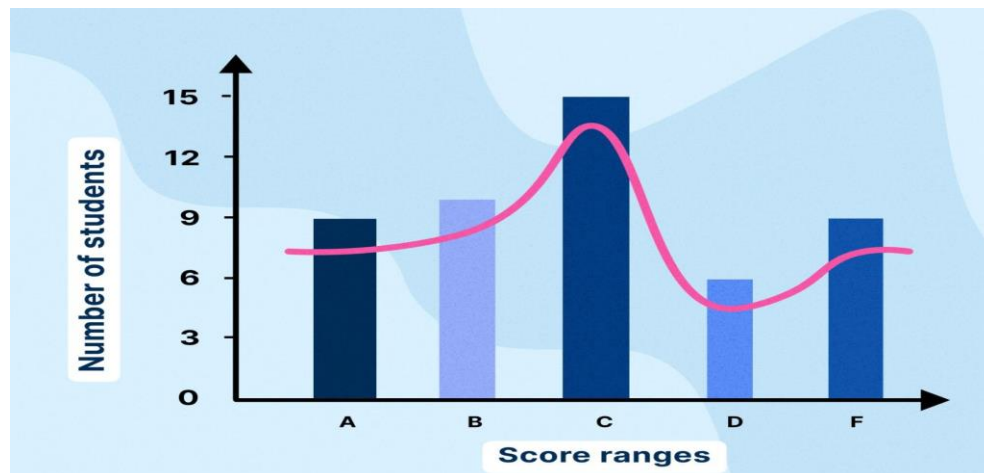


Figure 1. A comparative analysis of students' performance in public and private schools in Nigeria.

Key Differences in the Quality of Education Provided by Private and Public Schools

The quality of education provided by private and public schools in Nigeria has been a subject of debate among education stakeholders. According to Adebayo and Oladele (2023), private schools in Nigeria are generally considered to provide better quality education compared to public schools. This is because private schools have better infrastructure, more qualified teachers, and smaller class sizes, which enable them to provide personalized attention to students. On the other hand, public schools in Nigeria are often characterized by overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and poorly motivated

teachers, which can negatively impact the quality of education provided (Oluwajodu et al., 2023).

One of the key differences between private and public schools in Nigeria is the level of funding. Private schools are often well-funded, which enables them to provide modern facilities and equipment, such as computers and science laboratories, that enhance the learning experience. In contrast, public schools in Nigeria are often underfunded, which can limit their ability to provide adequate facilities and equipment (Adeyemi et al., 2023). Additionally, private schools in Nigeria are often more selective in their admission processes, which means that they tend to attract more motivated and high-achieving students. This

can create a self-reinforcing cycle of excellence, where high-achieving students are more likely to attend private schools, which in turn can further improve the quality of education provided (Ogunleye et al., 2023).

Another key difference between private and public schools in Nigeria is the level of accountability. Private schools are often more accountable to parents and students, as they are dependent on tuition fees and reputation to attract students. This can lead to a greater emphasis on academic achievement and a more responsive approach to student needs (Afolabi et al., 2023). In contrast, public schools in Nigeria are often less accountable, as they are funded by the government and may not be as responsive to student needs. Thus, the quality of education provided by private and public schools in Nigeria differs significantly. While private schools are generally considered to provide better quality education, public schools in Nigeria face numerous challenges that can negatively impact the quality of education provided. Addressing these challenges, such as inadequate funding and infrastructure, is critical to improving the quality of education in public schools in Nigeria.

The Level of Infrastructural Development in Public Schools Compared to Private Schools

The level of infrastructural development in public schools compared to private schools in Nigeria is a critical issue that has been debated by education stakeholders. According to Nwosu and Okoro (2023), public schools in Nigeria are often characterized by inadequate infrastructure, including dilapidated classrooms, lack of furniture, and poor sanitation facilities. This can negatively impact the learning environment and student outcomes. In contrast, private schools in Nigeria are often well-equipped with modern infrastructure, including state-of-the-art classrooms, libraries, and sports facilities, which can enhance the learning experience (Onyeka and Nwachukwu, 2023).

One of the key differences between public and private schools in Nigeria is the level of investment in infrastructure. Private schools are often willing to invest heavily in infrastructure to attract students and improve their reputation, whereas public schools are often dependent on government funding, which can be inadequate and unpredictable (Okoye and Eze, 2023). Additionally, private schools are often more proactive in maintaining their infrastructure, which can lead to a better learning environment (Nwosu and

Okoro, 2023). In contrast, public schools in Nigeria are often plagued by poor maintenance culture, which can lead to rapid deterioration of infrastructure. The lack of infrastructure in public schools in Nigeria can have serious consequences for student learning outcomes. For example, a study by Eze and Okoye (2023) found that students in public schools with inadequate infrastructure were more likely to perform poorly in exams compared to students in private schools with better infrastructure. Furthermore, the lack of infrastructure in public schools can also lead to a lack of access to education, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Onyeka and Nwachukwu, 2023). Thus, the level of infrastructural development in public schools compared to private schools in Nigeria is a critical issue that needs to be addressed. While private schools are often well-equipped with modern infrastructure, public schools are often characterized by inadequate infrastructure, which can negatively impact student learning outcomes. Addressing this issue is critical to improving the quality of education in Nigeria.

The Impact of Teacher Quality and Availability in Bridging the Gap Between Private and Public Schools

The quality and availability of teachers play a crucial role in bridging the educational gap between private and public schools, particularly in Nigeria, where disparities in educational outcomes are pronounced. Research indicates that teacher quality significantly influences student performance, with well-trained and motivated teachers being essential for effective learning environments. In the context of Igbo authors, studies have shown that public schools often struggle with inadequate teacher training and resources, which can lead to lower academic achievement compared to their private counterparts. For instance, Nwankwo (2021) emphasizes that the lack of qualified teachers in public schools contributes to a widening educational gap, as students in these institutions often receive less personalized attention and support than those in private schools.

Moreover, the availability of teachers in rural and underserved areas remains a significant challenge. According to Okeke (2021), many qualified teachers prefer to work in urban private schools due to better pay and working conditions, leaving public schools in rural areas understaffed. This imbalance not only affects the quality of education but also perpetuates

socioeconomic disparities, as students in these regions are deprived of quality education. The findings of Ugochukwu (2021) further illustrate that when public schools are unable to attract and retain qualified teachers, the educational outcomes for students suffer, leading to lower enrollment rates in higher education and diminished career prospects.

In addressing these challenges, it is essential to implement policies that enhance teacher training and incentivize teaching in public schools. As highlighted by Eze (2021), improving teacher quality through continuous professional development can lead to better educational outcomes. Additionally, providing financial incentives and support for teachers who work in public schools can help attract qualified professionals to these institutions. This approach is supported by the work of Ibe (2021), who argues that a well-supported teaching workforce is vital for fostering an equitable education system that benefits all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Finally, community involvement and parental engagement are critical in supporting teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Shared decision making which involves the collaboration of different ideas by the community and the school focused on solving educational issues, enhances organizational efficiencies and promotes commitment to outcomes (Difoni et al., 2024). According to Nwafor (2021), when parents and communities actively participate in the educational process, it can lead to improved teacher morale and student performance. This collaborative approach can help bridge the gap between private and public schools by fostering a supportive environment that values education. Overall, enhancing teacher quality and availability is essential for creating a more equitable educational landscape in Nigeria, particularly for Igbo communities.

The Role of Government Funding and Policy in Addressing Disparities Between Private and Public Schools.

The disparities between private and public schools in Nigeria are a pressing concern that requires urgent attention from the government. According to Okeke and Nwosu (2022), government funding and policy play a critical role in addressing these disparities. The government can provide adequate funding to public schools to improve their infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development, which can help

to bridge the gap between private and public schools. Additionally, the government can implement policies that promote equity and inclusivity, such as free education for all, to ensure that every child has access to quality education regardless of their socioeconomic background.

One of the key challenges facing public schools in Nigeria is inadequate funding, which can lead to a lack of resources, including textbooks, computers, and science equipment. According to Eze and Okoye (2022), government funding can help to address this challenge by providing public schools with the resources they need to provide quality education. Furthermore, government policy can also help to promote accountability and transparency in the management of public schools, which can help to reduce corruption and mismanagement of funds. For example, the government can implement policies that require public schools to publish their budgets and expenditure online, which can help to promote transparency and accountability.

Government policy can also play a critical role in promoting equity and inclusivity in education. According to Onyeka and Nwachukwu (2022), policies such as free education for all can help to promote equity and inclusivity by ensuring that every child has access to quality education regardless of their socio-economic background. Additionally, government policy can also help to promote diversity and inclusion in education by promoting the use of local languages and cultures in the curriculum. For example, the government can implement policies that require public schools to teach local languages and cultures, which can help to promote diversity and inclusion. Therefore, government funding and policy play a critical role in addressing the disparities between private and public schools in Nigeria. The government can provide adequate funding to public schools to improve their infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development, and implement policies that promote equity and inclusivity, such as free education for all. Addressing these disparities is critical to promoting social justice and equality in Nigeria.

Influence of Parental Involvement and Socioeconomic Factors on the Performance of Students in Private and Public Schools

Parental involvement and socioeconomic factors play a significant role in the performance of students in both private and public schools. According to a study

by Lee and Bowen (2020), parental involvement in their children's education leads to higher academic achievement, improved behavior, and better social skills. In private schools, parents tend to be more involved in their children's education due to the financial investment they have made, leading to higher academic performance. On the other hand, in public schools, parental involvement can be more challenging due to various factors, such as language barriers, work schedules, and lack of resources. However, when parents are actively involved in their children's education, it can lead to significant improvements in academic performance.

Socioeconomic factors also play a crucial role in the performance of students in both private and public schools. According to a study by Reardon (2020), the achievement gap between students from high and low-income families has been increasing over the past few decades. Students from high-income families have access to more resources, such as tutors, extracurricular activities, and advanced classes, which can lead to higher academic performance. On the other hand, students from low-income families may lack access to these resources, leading to lower academic performance. This achievement gap is more pronounced in public schools, where there is a higher concentration of low-income students.

A study by Cheng and Wang (2020) found that private schools tend to have a more affluent student population, leading to higher academic performance. This is due to the fact that private schools can be selective in their admissions process, which allows them to enroll students who are more academically prepared. Additionally, private schools tend to have smaller class sizes, more resources, and more experienced teachers, which can lead to higher academic performance. However, this does not mean that public schools cannot provide a high-quality education. According to a study by Borman and Dowling (2020), public schools can provide a high-quality education if they have strong leadership, experienced teachers, and a supportive learning environment.

In effect, parental involvement and socioeconomic factors play a significant role in the performance of students in both private and public schools. While private schools tend to have more resources and a more affluent student population, public schools can still provide a high-quality education if they have

strong leadership, experienced teachers, and a supportive learning environment. Parental involvement is also crucial in improving academic performance, regardless of the type of school. Therefore, it is essential to address the challenges that prevent parents from being involved in their children's education, particularly in low-income communities.

Use Of Technology and Innovative Teaching Methods in Private Schools and Their Adaptation in Public Schools

The integration of technology and innovative teaching methods in private schools has become increasingly popular in recent years. According to a study by Johnson and Morris (2022), private schools are more likely to have access to advanced technology and resources, which allows them to implement innovative teaching methods. For example, private schools may use virtual reality simulations to enhance student learning, or they may use adaptive learning software to personalize instruction for each student. These innovative teaching methods can lead to improved student engagement, motivation, and academic performance.

However, public schools often face challenges in implementing these innovative teaching methods due to a lack of resources and funding. According to a study by Barbour and Reeves (2022), public schools may struggle to provide students with access to technology, and teachers may lack the training and support needed to effectively integrate technology into their instruction. This can lead to a digital divide between private and public schools, where private schools have a significant advantage in terms of access to technology and innovative teaching methods.

Despite these challenges, there are examples of public schools that have successfully integrated technology and innovative teaching methods into their instruction. According to a study by Hew and Brush (2022), public schools can overcome these challenges by leveraging community partnerships, seeking out grant funding, and providing professional development opportunities for teachers. For example, some public schools have partnered with local businesses to provide students with access to technology and real-world learning experiences. Others have sought out grant funding to purchase technology and provide training for teachers.

In order to bridge the digital divide between private

and public schools, it is essential to provide public schools with the resources and support needed to effectively integrate technology and innovative teaching methods into their instruction. According to a study by Zhao and Frank (2022), this can be achieved through a combination of policy initiatives, such as increasing funding for public schools, and grassroots efforts, such as building community partnerships and providing professional development opportunities for teachers. By working together, private and public schools can ensure that all students have access to the technology and innovative teaching methods needed to succeed in the 21st century.

Strategies For Improving Academic Outcomes and Access to Quality Education in Public Schools to Match the Standards of Private Schools

Public schools often face challenges in providing students with access to quality education and achieving academic outcomes that match those of private schools. However, there are strategies that can be implemented to improve academic outcomes and access to quality education in public schools. According to a study by Darling-Hammond et al. (2021), one effective strategy is to invest in high-quality teachers and provide them with ongoing professional development and support. This can help to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills needed to provide students with a high-quality education. Another strategy for improving academic outcomes in public schools is to implement evidence-based instructional practices. According to a study by Hattie (2021), some of the most effective instructional practices include providing students with feedback, using formative assessments to guide instruction, and promoting student engagement and motivation. By implementing these practices, public schools can help to ensure that students are receiving a high-quality education that is tailored to their individual needs.

In addition to investing in teachers and implementing evidence-based instructional practices, public schools can also improve access to quality education by addressing the social and emotional needs of students. According to a study by Jones and Kahn (2021), students who feel safe, supported, and connected to their school community are more likely to achieve academic success. Public schools can promote social and emotional learning by providing

students with access to counseling services, promoting a positive school climate, and incorporating social and emotional learning into the curriculum. Finally, public schools can improve academic outcomes and access to quality education by partnering with community organizations and businesses. According to a study by Balfanz and Legters (2021), partnerships between schools and community organizations can provide students with access to resources and opportunities that they might not otherwise have. For example, schools can partner with businesses to provide students with internships, mentoring, and other work-based learning experiences. These partnerships can help to prepare students for success in college and careers, and can help to close the achievement gap between public and private schools.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the critical disparities in educational quality between private and public schools in Nigeria. It underscores the necessity for increased government funding and effective policies to enhance the infrastructure and resources available in public schools. Teacher quality and availability emerge as significant factors influencing student performance, emphasizing the need for targeted professional development programs. Furthermore, the research reveals that parental involvement and socioeconomic factors play a vital role in shaping educational outcomes. The exploration of technology and innovative teaching methods in private schools suggests that these practices could be beneficial if adapted for public education. Ultimately, implementing the proposed strategies could bridge the educational gap, ensuring that all students in Nigeria have access to quality education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is therefore recommended that the government should:

- I. Allocate more resources to public schools to improve infrastructure and educational materials.
- II. Implement continuous professional development programs to improve teacher quality and effectiveness in public schools.
- III. Develop initiatives that encourage greater parental engagement in the educational process to support student performance.

- IV. Encourage public schools to integrate technology and innovative teaching practices currently used in private schools.

- V. Establish and enforce policies that address disparities in educational quality and ensure equitable access to resources for all schools.

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