

School Choice in Lagos State

Summary of extended research conducted on school choice in Lagos, Nigeria, reported in two additional separate volumes.

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Abbreviations

DFID	Department for International Development
ESSPIN	Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria
GAR	Gross Enrolment ratio
HNLSS	Harmonized National Living Standards Survey
JSS	Junior Secondary School
LGA	Local Government Area
₦	Nigerian Naira
NEDS	National EdData Survey
SSS	Senior Secondary School
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

1 Introduction

This report summarises research commissioned by DFID Nigeria in 2012 to investigate issues of poverty and school choice in Lagos. Its objective was to provide background information for the design of a DFID programme in the private education sector. The programme is particularly focussed on addressing existing constraints in the low-cost private education market, to improve the quality of education provided to all children, and especially to poor children.

It is the first study on low-fee private education we are aware of which has:

- Undertaken a household survey of a whole state with a representative sample of households;
- Adopted a mixed methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods;
- Applied an empirical ‘absolute poverty’ definition;
- Defined low-cost private school fee levels in relation to affordability for poor families.

The report provides a summary of two separate volumes of research on poverty and school choice in Lagos.

Volume I: ‘School Choice in Lagos State’. Newcastle University. Report written by James Tooley submitted to DFID, July 2013.

Volume II: ‘Household Poverty and School Choice in Low-income Areas of Lagos. A qualitative case study approach’. Report written by Ingrid Yngstrom submitted to DFID, July 2013.

1.1 Organization of the report

The report is divided into six sections, of which this is the first.

- Section 2 provides background and context to the study.
- Section 3 provides a description of the households and children in the sample, and the types of schools they attend.
- Section 4 summarises findings from the household survey on which schools children attend, in relationship to household income, a range of family characteristics and other background variables.
- Section 5 provides an integrated summary of the qualitative and quantitative studies on how and why households make school choices.
- Section 6 summarises the main conclusions of the two studies.

2 Research rationale and design

2.1 The current state of education in Lagos

Nigeria's education indicators are amongst the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa. Using figures from the 2010 DHS National EdData survey (NEDs), UNESCO calculated that approximately 10.5 million children under the age of 15 were out of school in Nigeria, with a disproportionate number of girls. This is a figure far exceeding any country in the world.¹

There are however notable regional differences within the country. For example, from the NEDs data, the Gross Attendance Ratio (GAR) for the North West of the country was almost 60 per cent, while for the South-West, the figure was slightly over 100 per cent. For Lagos State (in the South-West), the figure was 97 per cent. Gender parity stood at 0.9 overall for primary school attendance across Nigeria, with many more girls out of school in the North of the country, and almost equal attendance for girls and boys across the South of the country, including Lagos.

The official NEDs figures for attendance and for numbers of out-of-school children are based on federal population figures. In Lagos, population figures projected from 2006 census figures give a figure of 10.5 million, although the Lagos State government suggests a higher figure of over 21 million.² Using the 10.5 million figure, the calculation for out-of-school children in Lagos gives a figure of 33,000.³

2.2 DFID support to education in Lagos State

DFID support to reform the education sector in Nigeria has largely occurred through its Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN), which has been focused on improving state provision of education in six states in Nigeria. One of these is Lagos State, which has a long-standing commitment to providing basic universal education. DFID's interest in the private education sector stems from a broader interest to assess opportunities for private sector delivery of basic services to the poor. It also arises from a concern to address educational outcomes overall in Nigeria.

Lagos is one of the fastest growing cities in the world, with an average annual growth rate estimate at 4.4 per cent,⁴ and has had a thriving market for private schools for some years. A 2006 survey of low-income areas of Lagos already suggested that a large majority of school children were in private education.⁵ In order to assess the full extent of the market, ESSPIN carried out a full census of private schools in Lagos in 2011.⁶

The census revealed that that private schools accounted for 57 per cent of all enrolments in the State. It found 12,098 private schools in Lagos State serving all levels from nursery 1 to senior secondary 3. Over 10,000 of these schools are primary schools, and the majority are 'unapproved' by the government (see Table 1).

Table 2.1: Number of basic education schools in Lagos (2010/2011)^{7*}

	Nursery/primary	Junior secondary
Government	991	308
Private approved	2,313	999
Private unapproved	7,922	1,258
Total	11,226	2,565

A follow-up study to the private school census conducted in two slum areas of Lagos explored reasons parents choose private schools. It found that the convenience of private schools close to their homes was of critical importance in low-income households' school choices. Perhaps of greater significance was the finding that many parents claimed to prefer private schools over government schools, and they did so because the teaching and learning in private schools was perceived to be better than that provided by the government.⁸

Teaching performance and learning outcomes for Nigeria are generally poor, but the evidence indicates that private schools may be fairing slightly better than their government counterparts. For example, in ESSPIN tests on pupil-teacher ratios and on literacy and numeracy tests, private schools came out significantly better than government schools.⁹ In Tooley et al's tests of 4,000 children in three subjects, children in private schools outperformed those in government schools even after controlling for background variables and possible selectivity bias.¹⁰ Finally, on teacher competency and final examination results, private schools performed better than their government counterparts, though indicators were poor for both.¹¹

The overall evidence points to the private education sector as a major service provider to the poor, but also one that is struggling to grow and improve the quality of service it provides. A 2012 scoping study to DFID on support to the low-fee private school market in Lagos identified particular constraints within the market, which it also linked to poor educational outcomes.¹² A new DFID funded programme focussed on addressing constraints in the private education market has since been designed to complement the ESSPIN programme, to improve the quality of education provided to all children, and especially to poor children. Though much is already known about the private school market in Lagos, there are still many gaps that need to be filled to support the design of the programme. One clear gap in existing knowledge is how and why parents, but particularly the poor, make schooling decisions. It is in this context that this research was undertaken.

2.3 Research questions for the study

In 2012, DFID commissioned a household survey of poverty and school choice across the State of Lagos. The three main questions for the research were:

- Who goes to which type of school, or not to school, and why?

- How are schooling decisions made?
- What is the influence and impact of poverty on who goes to which school and why?

With regard to the final question, the research also sought to address two further related questions:

- The first concerns affordability: are private schools affordable for only some of the poor, or for the majority of the poor? Under what circumstances are private schools not affordable for the poor?
- The second asks whether poorer parents are able to choose the type of primary schools that they want for their children. It asks if there are poorer households in Lagos pushed into the private school sector by lack of a government alternative, or if there are parents pushed into the government sector by limited or no supply of low-cost private primary schools. These questions are largely addressed by the qualitative research, with some supporting evidence from the household survey on the extent to which either of these is likely to be the case.

2.4 Defining poverty and 'low-cost private school'

Poverty as income-level: a narrow definition of absolute poverty has been applied to this study, based on how much money is needed to buy adequate food and essentials for one person. Updated for inflation, the Lagos specific poverty line at the time of the study was calculated at ₦309 per capita per day (GB£1.25).

Multi-dimensional poverty indicators: the study recognizes that poverty is multi-faceted and cannot be understood only as income related. Data was therefore collected on a range of poverty-related variables to understand the relationship between poverty and school choice in more depth.¹³ The variables that produced the most significant results were those concerning mothers' and fathers' educational background, and the different kinds of wealth and assets belonging to households.

Low-cost private school: there is no currently agreed definition of a low-cost private school.¹⁴ Rather than apply an arbitrary cost bracket for such schools, the study defined it with respect to the household income of a family on the poverty line. Private schools are defined as low-cost if a family on the poverty line can afford to send all its school-aged children to these schools without needing to excessively restrict spending in other essential areas.

Using detailed information on household spending collected for the qualitative research (Volume II of the study), together with information on Lagos poverty lines and family size collected from the quantitative research (Volume I), private schools charging total fees of ₦25,000 per annum or lower were calculated as affordable for the majority of poor households and are classified as 'low-cost' private schools in this study. 'Medium-cost' and 'high-cost' schools are defined in relation to this (See below).

2.5 A mixed methods approach

The research adopted a mixed methods approach: (1) a household survey applying quantitative methods; and (2) a comparative case study applying qualitative methods.

The household survey aimed to address the three main questions of the study using a representative sample of households from across the entire State of Lagos. As is often the case with household surveys, there was a trade-off between the desirability for a “pure” representative sample on the one hand, and available resources on the other. The approach adopted was to get as close to a representative sample as one can reasonably get through *indirect* random sampling.

Application of the standard formula for sample selection showed that at least 1,001 households were required in the sample to have adequate statistical power to answer the above questions, including being able to discriminate in terms of categories such as gender and between poor and non-poor households.¹⁵ (In the event 1,005 households were sampled). A random sample of 101 Census Enumeration Areas was selected, and within these a random sample of 10 households. The person, or persons, responsible for making decisions about education in each household was interviewed by a trained researcher.

The survey explored relationships between per capita income, school choice and other key variables, including age, gender, ward status, family structure and mother’s education. In addition, five different logistic regression models were created based on the four school types (government, low, medium and high-cost private) and out of school children. Eleven variables were used for the regression analysis, including two created from factor analysis of family assets.

For the qualitative research, a comparative case study method was adopted. This method allows for a certain amount of generalizability to other cases with similar conditions.¹⁶ Three comparable case study areas were therefore selected from among the more densely populated informal settlements of metropolitan Lagos that make up roughly 70 per cent of the population of Lagos: Alapere in Kosofe LGA, Ajegunle in Ajeromi-Ifelodun LGA and Ijora-Oloye in Apapa LGA.

The case study research had three main objectives which were particularly suited to the method adopted: (1) to probe more deeply into school choice in relation to poverty, gender and vulnerability; (2) to look at how school choice is influenced by the local supply of schools; (3) how households from the densely populated settlements of Lagos, differentiated by location and income, weigh up a range of different factors in making school choices.

2.6 Classifications of households and schools in the study

2.6.1 Household classification

Both the quantitative and the qualitative studies adopted an absolute measure of income poverty, adopting a similar typology of households applied by the ILO for the working poor.¹⁷ Households were classified in the following way:

- **Poor** households: living on or below the poverty line, with incomes up to ₦309 per capita per day.
- **'Near-poor'** households: living at between one and two times the poverty line, with incomes of between ₦310 and ₦618 per capita per day.
- **Middle-class** households: living over two times the poverty line, with incomes of ₦619 or more per capita per day.

Poor households were also further classified so as to identify a category of ultra-poor. **Ultra-poor** households are those living at or below ₦193 per capita per day. For the qualitative research, it also included households that were vulnerable to extreme poverty – ie households that had recently lost a major income earner.

2.6.2 School types by sector and cost

The survey adopted a two-way distinction between private and government schools, with a further three-way sub-classification of private schools according to their costs.

Private schools

The definition (and calculation) of relative affordability similar to that applied to low-cost private schools was used to distinguish among the three different cost levels of school:

- Low-cost (affordable by the majority of poor): up to ₦25,000 total annual fees and levies;
- Medium-cost (affordable by the near-poor): between ₦25,000 and ₦ 50,000 total annual fees and levies;
- High-cost (affordable by the middle classes): over ₦50,000 total annual fees and levies.

The 'lesson', a lower cost alternative to schools

In addition to government and private schools, there are also cheaper alternatives to low-cost private school. These are informal 'lessons' set up with few or no overheads – for example, in the front room of a house or perhaps outside on the street. These provide general childcare and some instruction. Proprietors of these establishments charge no registration fees and payment arrangements are flexible. These are low-cost alternatives to formal schools and were included as part of the qualitative analysis only.

2.6.3 School levels according to age

There are four distinct levels of school that children can attend in Nigeria. Children from the sample were found in all four levels.

- **Pre-primary**: kindergarten and nursery school. This typically includes children in the 2 to 5 years age group. Attendance at pre-primary education is not a legal requirement.
- **Primary**: this covers six school years (typically ages 6-11). Attendance is required for all children. Some private and most government schools offer primary and pre-primary together.

- Junior Secondary: this covers three years (typically ages 12-14) and takes children up to the age limit for compulsory education.
- Senior secondary school: this covers a further three years (typically ages 15-17) and is not a legal requirement.

2.7 Limitations of study

Sampling: early on in the research design, there was a decision not to limit the study of school choice only to low-income households, but to generate a representative sample and look at school choice across the income spectrum. Therefore, the difference between the poor and the non-poor in relationship to school choice was considered of particular importance. The size of the household survey sample did not generate sufficient statistical power to drill more deeply into the group of households classified as ultra-poor. Descriptive statistics are therefore provided for this class of households. The qualitative research provides additional information on a small sample of ultra-poor households.

The survey aimed to locate all children aged three to 14 years, in order to find all children in pre-primary, primary and Junior Secondary Schools (JSS). In retrospect this was probably overly ambitious, as some children in JSS are older than 14 years. We had also not considered that we would find children in Senior Secondary School (SSS), but there were 109 children in SSS who were aged 14 years or less.

Because of the representativeness of the sample and the fact that we surveyed all children aged three to 14 years, we can be confident that the figures for pre-primary and primary are accurate, within normal margins of error. However, we cannot conclude the same about the percentages found in JSS and SSS. In the ensuing discussion in this report, when we look at secondary school children, this caveat must be kept in mind.

Measuring household incomes: the household survey aimed to capture household income as accurately as possible within certain parameters of time and cost. This meant that it was not always possible to interview all household income earners. Because couples did not always know each other's incomes, it is likely that in some cases, incomplete incomes were provided for some families. Indeed, a number of inconsistencies in the data revealed some degree of under-reporting of incomes.

Qualitative research: the three case studies of the qualitative research were undertaken in the densely populated informal settlements of Lagos using a method that allows for a certain amount of generalizability to other cases with similar conditions. The results on household decision-making are not applicable to the more rural areas of the State, where conditions are different from those studied.

3 Who goes to which school, or not to school?

3.1 Characteristics of the sample

The household survey sample had the following characteristics:

Numbers of children and households: there was a total of 2,290 children between the ages of three and 14 in a sample of 1,005 households.

Household structure: most households (80 percent of the sample) were two parents and children. From our data, the average (mean) household had 5.21 members of whom 2.81 were classified as children (under 18 years), while an average of 2.28 were children aged 3 to 14 in the study.

Gender and ward distribution: girls made up 48.6 per cent of the sample, boys 51.4 per cent. Wards made up 7.4 per cent of the sample.

Age distribution: children were spread across the age group examined, with around 30 per cent of the children aged between three and five years, 35 per cent between the ages of six and nine, and around 35 per cent between the ages of 10 and 14.

3.2 Children and their schools

The survey found 69.8 per cent of children at all school levels in private schools. In addition, over 70 per cent of households have some or all of their children in private school. About one fifth of total children (21.8 per cent) were found to be using low-cost private schools. Roughly one quarter of children were found in the remaining school types: government schools (26.4 per cent), medium-cost private schools (24.0 per cent) and high-cost private schools (23.9 per cent).

Over 70 per cent of primary school children are registered in private schools. The figures are considerably higher at pre-primary level and lower at secondary level. Table 2 shows that from the sample of children in school:

- Pre-primary enrollment is almost entirely private – with 91.0 percent attending private schools and only 9.0 percent attending government schools.
- Primary is also predominantly private – with 72.8 percent private and 27.2 percent government, a higher proportion in private than was recorded for the 2011 census.¹⁸
- The study also found that, at secondary school level, exactly 50 percent for JSS and 48.6 percent SSS used private schools. However, these figures are incomplete and not considered representative since only children aged 3 to 14 were selected for the study.

Table 3.1: Children and school type, by level of schooling

Level of schooling	No. and %	Type of School		Total
		Government	Private	
Pre-primary	No.	51	517	568
	%	9.0%	91.0%	100%
Primary	No.	310	830	1140
	%	27.2%	72.8%	100%
JSS	No.	188	188	376
	%	50.0%	50.0%	100%
SSS	No.	53	56	109
	%	48.6%	51.4%	100.0%
All	No.	602	1591	2193
	%	27.5%	72.5%	100%

Table 3.2: Children not in school

Children not in school	Frequency	Per cent
Aged 3 & 4 (not of compulsory school age)	33	1.4%
Awaiting placement	26	1.1%
Aged 5 to 14 ('out of school')	29	1.3%
Total from sample	88	3.9%

The survey found only a small number of children (3.9 per cent of the sample) not in school. However, only 29 (1.3 per cent) were of compulsory school age and not in the school system.

- 88 children in the sample are not in school. Of these 88 children, 33 are not of school age and 26 are awaiting placement in school (Table 3).
- This means that only 29 children, or 1.3 per cent of the sample, are *both* of compulsory school age *and* out of the school system.
- All 29 were reported to be out of school because 'fees are too high'.
- A recent scoping study calculated roughly 33,000 children are out-of school at primary level in Lagos, based on an out-of school rate of 3 per cent. Using their estimates for population in Lagos, and an out-of-school rate of 1.3 per cent, an adjusted figure for out of school primary children would be 14,300.¹⁹

3.3 Household income and school choice

Just over half of the sample is living below the poverty line. The results from the household survey showed that in Lagos State: ²⁰

- 53.1 per cent of households are living below the poverty line.
- 29.1 per cent of households are classified as near-poor – ie living at between one and two times the poverty line.
- 17.8 per cent are classified as middle-class – ie living at above two times the poverty line.

71 per cent of the poorest families in the sample use private schools for all or some of their children, with 64 per cent of children from poor households attending private schools. For families on or below the poverty line:

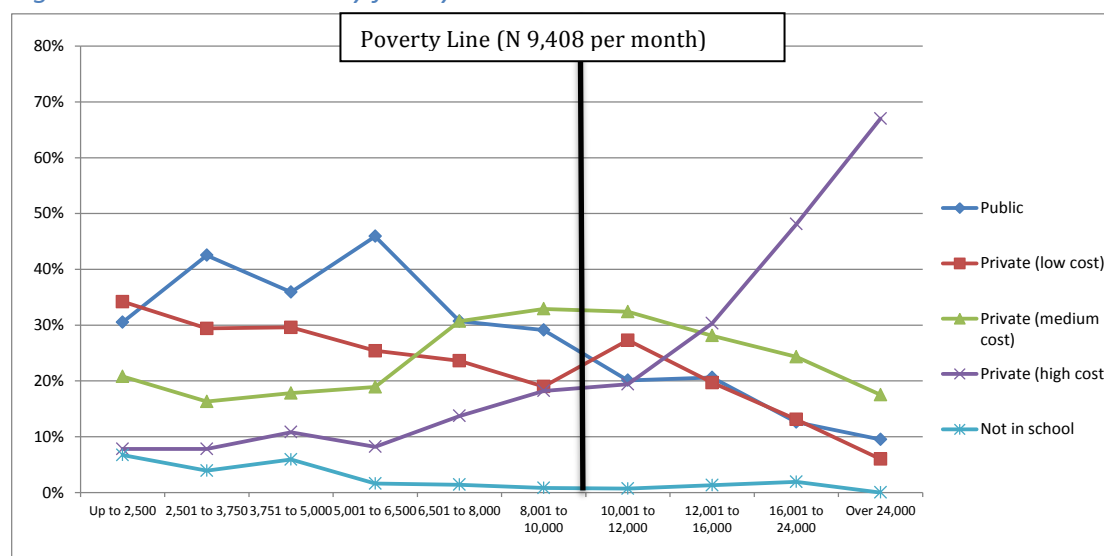
- 50 per cent precisely are using private schools for *all* their children, while a further 20.7 per cent uses a mixture of public and private.
- Only 20 per cent of families use government schools only.
- That is, 71 per cent of the poorest families in the sample use private schools for all or some of their children.

The survey found a positive relationship between income and school choice with high levels of enrolment in both government and low-cost private schools below the poverty line and a sharp rise in enrolment in high-cost private schools after the poverty line is crossed.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of children in each school type according to family income deciles, with an indication of where the poverty line lies. The following points are notable:

- There is a striking similarity between the patterns of government school and low-cost private school choices, with similar levels choosing either school at each per capita income, declining with increasing income. ²¹ Almost as soon as the poverty-line is crossed, the decline is particularly steep.
- Medium-cost private school choices are fairly constant, increasing slightly at about halfway at what is estimated to be roughly an ultra-poverty line, then declining gradually once the poverty-line bar is crossed.
- High-cost private school choices increase fairly steeply as per capita incomes rise. Indeed, as soon as the poverty-line bar is crossed, these climb dramatically.
- The percentage of out-of-school children falls slowly with higher per capita income.

Figure 3.1: School choice by family income deciles



3.4 Characteristics of households sending children to government and low-cost private schools

Households sending children to government and low-cost private schools are among the poorest in Lagos. The household survey found that 73 per cent of children in government schools and 69 per cent of children in low-cost private schools live in households on or below the poverty line. By sharp contrast, roughly 6 per cent of children from middle-class households are in either type of school.

Students attending low-cost private schools and government schools are very similar on a number of poverty-related indicators.

- 13 per cent of households of both school types have mothers with no schooling, while the percentages for medium and high-cost schools are half these figures.
- 16 per cent of households in government school and 17 per cent in low-cost private school have a car. The figures almost double for medium-cost schools and treble for high-cost schools.

On certain indicators, greater disadvantage is indicated among government school children than any other kind of school.

- Single mothers, and grandparents living alone with their grandchildren are much more likely to send their children to government than to low-cost private school.
- Children with less educated fathers are also more likely to go to government school than to low-cost private school.

3.5 Ultra-poverty and school choice

The majority of ultra-poor families use private schools but at a lower proportion than other household types. 59.0 per cent of the children from ultra-poor families are in private schools compared to 65.8 per cent of the remaining-poor, 77.6 per cent of the near-poor and 88.6 of the non-poor.

The proportion of out-of-school children is also highest among the ultra-poor. 5.5 per cent of ultra-poor households are out-of school compared to around 1 per cent for all other groups.

3.6 School choice by age, gender and ward status

Older children are more likely to go to government schools.

- Older children and those who are higher in the family ordering are more likely to go to government schools. This we would expect since there is a greater proportion of secondary age children in government secondary schools than in government primary schools. However, we also find that:
- Older children are more likely to go to government *primary* schools. The results from the qualitative research indicate that this could be explained by a tendency among some households to move children into government schools once they reach primary 5 or 6.

Wards are more likely to be in government school than non-wards. However, this does not indicate discrimination on the part of host families.

- The study found a greater proportion of wards are in government school than non-wards - 41.2 percent of wards compared to 25.4 percent of non-wards.
- Similar proportions of wards and non-wards are also found in low-cost private schools (23.6 per cent of wards compared to 21.8 per cent of non-wards)
- However, 17 per cent of wards attend medium-cost schools compared to 25 per cent of non-wards.
- Wards are not found in greater proportions in low-income families. The qualitative results found that this does not indicate discrimination on the part of host families since schooling decisions tend to remain with parents.

Households do not discriminate in their school choices on the basis of gender. As many girls as boys attend government and private schools; they are also equally represented at each level of the school system and among out-of-school children.

- Girls and boys are represented equally across all school types and levels.
- At pre-primary and primary level, almost equal proportions of girls and boys are found.
- At JSS and SSS levels, the proportion of girls increases slightly but the difference is not statistically significant.
- Of the sample, 2.5 per cent of boys are not in school compared with 3.0 per cent of girls; the difference is not statistically significant.

- These findings are supported by those in the qualitative research, which confirmed that parents consider the education of girls to be of equal importance to that of boys.

4 The 'how' and 'why' of school choice in Lagos

This section provides an integrated summary of the qualitative and quantitative results of how parents and those acting as parents make schooling decisions and why. The overall results reveal that the majority of parents think that private schools are better than government schools. The first part of this section looks at the results from both the household survey and the qualitative research on why this is the case. Part 4.2 looks at how parents select schools, and their sources of information; and part 4.3 provides descriptive statistics on the main reasons why parents select schools.

4.1 Which are better, private or government schools?

In the qualitative research, many parents said they thought that the standards were higher in private schools than those in government schools. Issues of particular concern to parents regarding government schools were the perceived levels of 'over-population', an associated lack of concern for the welfare of small children, and teacher absences.

In qualitative interviews, parents made the following observations about standards in government and private schools:

First, parents frequently said that 'over-population' in government schools was largely to blame for the low standards in government schools. Parents used the expression 'over-population' to refer to both the huge size of government schools and, in some cases, their over-crowded conditions. Related concerns were insufficient classrooms and shortages of teachers. 'Over-population' was to blame for poor learning conditions; it was intimidating for smaller children and, in some schools, it made the environment unsafe for the youngest ones.

Second, private school parents often responded to questions about why they preferred private schools by saying that the teachers 'know how to teach'. In contrast, claims were made about government schoolteachers with parents frequently saying that teachers did not care about the children and often did not turn up for classes.

Government school teachers are required to have a teaching certificate. Most low-cost private school teachers are not qualified teachers. However, private school parents at the lower cost end were not concerned about teacher qualifications. They were more interested in their own observations of the presence of teachers in the classroom and the attention that teachers give to children, as these indicated higher care-taking standards in the schools.

In the qualitative research, parents who said they liked government schools better than private schools said the main reason they did so was because they were affordable. But it is not only the poor who select government schools for financial reasons.

From the qualitative research, the main reason that households gave for liking government schools better than private schools was affordability. Other reasons given were that the discipline was better and the teachers were better trained.

Some parents, who preferred private schools at primary level, switched their children to government schools at secondary level because they could not afford the higher costs of secondary private schools.

It was not only poor households who said that they liked government schools because they were affordable (see Box 1). Some 'near-poor' households also said they liked

government schools on the basis of affordability. Some of these households simply assumed they were too poor to afford private schools and had not investigated the possibility. For others, who were concerned about or who have lived through serious stresses and shocks, government schools may appear to make more long-term financial sense.

The household survey results support the findings from the qualitative research. They show that private schools are favoured over government schools on almost all quality criteria and across all income bands. The only criterion on which government schools are favoured is affordability.

The household survey assessed how far households favoured either government or private schools, using twelve different criteria. On almost all quality criteria, an over-whelming majority of parents across all income categories in Lagos favour private schools and disfavour government schools. The only category where this wasn't unanimously the case concerned the training of teachers.

The most striking results came from questions concerning overcrowding in schools, caretaking of children, and affordability; the three subjects that parents spoke about the most in the qualitative interviews.

- On whether children are well looked after at school: 95.3 per cent across all income levels said that this applied to private schools, while less than 20 per cent said that this applied to government schools.
- On over-crowding in schools: 96.5 per cent of all families at all income levels said this applied to government schools, while only 6.7 per cent said this applied to private schools.
- On affordability of schools: 83.9 per cent of poor families think that government schools are affordable for their families, compared to 42.6 per cent who think that private schools are affordable.

The above findings are further supported by the reasons parents give for moving children from one type of school to another. The household survey

Box 1: Low-income parents' views about the affordability of government and private schools

'I don't like private schools because of the financial stress'.

'I like government [school] but only because it's cheaper. Private is better quality. If I had the money, I would send them all to private school. We are thinking of removing the ones in private and taking them to government because the fees keep going up'.

'The first child went to government JS School. The second child went to a private one. It is a struggle to keep up with the payments. The child asks for things all the time, and it has got too expensive. I can only afford private for one child, we don't have enough money anymore for the other children, so they will all go to government'.

results show that when parents move children from private to public school, they largely do so for financial reasons. By contrast, when children are moved from public to private school, this is largely due to poor academic performance.

Moves from private to public were mostly (75 percent) because the parents could no longer afford private school, while moves in the opposite direction were largely because of dissatisfaction with the child's academic performance (71 percent).

4.2 Investigating schooling options

The household survey found that parents tend to limit their school search to a single sector. 74.1 per cent of families using government schools did not investigate any private schools, while 83.6 per cent of those using low-cost private schools did not investigate any government schools.

For around 80 per cent of children in the sample, both mother and father together make school choices. Grandmothers make choices nearly three times more than grandfathers (7.6 per cent compared to 3.2 per cent for low-cost private school choice).

The average (mean) number of schools that families investigate is low. For those parents sending their eldest child to public school, an average of 0.92 public and 0.41 private schools were visited. For parents sending their eldest child to low-cost private school, an average of 0.25 public and 1.38 private schools were visited.

The major source of information for school choice is school visits, with private school families tending to visit schools more than government school families.

- School visits are used by 75.5 per cent of families – followed by talking to networks of friends, neighbours and relatives (53.9 per cent), and observing children from the school (35.5 per cent of families).
- The tendency to visit schools was somewhat similar across private school categories, although more low-cost private school parents made visits than parents from any other type of school.

Box 2: What parents say about their sources of information on schools

'We didn't think to find out any information about the schools. The way the children behave and [the teachers] teach is why we know they [the schools] are good'.

'I didn't think of it [asking for information]. What things did I need to know about the schools before putting my children there? Just the things I could see for myself: the neatness of the children, the ability to teach and care for the children'.

although more low-cost private school parents made visits than parents from any other type of school.

The tendency to visit and observe the school is related positively to the mother's education, and to the father having been in private education; factors that are positively related to private school choices.

- The results from the qualitative research indicated that parents generally prefer to rely on school visits and their own observation (Box 2), and do not use official printed materials to make their school choices.

Less than 23 per cent of families going to any type of school collected printed information on schools to inform their choices.

- Between 21.4 and 22.9 per cent of all types of private school parents reported getting printed information on schools.
- Only 9.0 per cent of government school families reported getting printed information on schools, though more looked for test scores (over 15 per cent).
- In qualitative interviews, none of the parents interviewed said that they were looking for printed information on schools.

Government school parents were less likely to get information on schools than parents from any other schools.

- Families who sent their child to government school were less likely to have visited the school or observed teachers or pupils than those going to private schools.
- Few families get *no* information about the school, but there is a significantly higher proportion among those sending their child to government school.

4.3 The reasons why households choose schools

In the household survey, interviewees were asked to consider the *three main reasons* for choosing the current school *for each child* in their household out of a total of 10 different options.

Overall, the quality of a school, the quality of its teachers, and its proximity to home, are the three main reasons all families select schools, including households below the poverty line.

- 52.3 per cent of families chose schools that were ‘close to my home’, 49.6 per cent of families chose schools that were ‘better quality than others’ and 46.6 per cent chose schools that had ‘better quality teachers than others’.
- After these three, other factors reported as important for all families are good discipline (41.5 per cent), school reputation (38.1 per cent) and affordability (33.6 per cent).

The same top three reasons are given for all three income groups, although in a different order of importance.

- For the poor, proximity to home comes out as the most important reason (49.5 per cent), with school and teacher quality coming in second and third place. This order is completely reversed for the middle-classes with 41.8 per cent for whom proximity to home is most important.
- For the near-poor, these same three reasons are of almost equal importance: 49.2 per cent for both teacher and school quality; and 48.9 per cent for proximity to home.

4.3.1 Reasons for school choice by school type

There is a striking difference in the top three reasons for school choice between low-cost and medium-cost private school parents on the one hand,

and public and high-cost school parents on the other. For parents using low and medium-cost schools, proximity to home, teacher and school quality come out as the top three reasons:

- Overwhelmingly for parents choosing low-cost private schools, closeness to home is the most important reason for 61.7 per cent of parents. This is followed by the school having 'better quality teachers than others' (46.1 per cent) and 'it's a better quality school than others' (45.1 per cent);
- A smaller percentage choosing medium-cost private schools gives closeness to home as the most important reason (54.4 per cent), followed by better school quality (53.1 per cent) and better teacher quality (49.8 per cent).

For high-cost school parents, proximity to home does not feature in the top three reasons for school choice; rather school quality and good discipline are considered the most important reasons.

- For high-cost private school parents, the most common reason given for school choice is that 'it's a better quality school than others' (57.7 per cent), followed by it has 'better quality teachers' (53.1 per cent). 'The discipline is good' is also rated highly by parents using high-cost private schools – in third place at 43.6 per cent of children.

For parents using public schools, proximity to home is also the most important reason for school choice. In contrast to all private school parents, teacher and school quality do not feature in the top three reasons for choice.

- For parents choosing public schools, 'closeness to home' is the most important reason given (52.3 per cent). 'Closeness to home' is closely followed by 'the discipline is good' (48.3 per cent) and the 'school reputation is good' (43.0 per cent) for these parents.

4.3.2 Reasons for school choice by level of schooling

The reasons why parents choose their child's school also vary by the child's level of schooling.

At all school levels, the quality of the school and its teachers feature in the top three reasons for school choice. However, the quality of the school becomes considerably more important as the child progresses up through the school levels.

- The quality of the teachers is roughly constant for all levels of schooling (from 45.8 to 49.1 per cent of students);
- 'It's a better quality school' increases sharply, from 47.6 per cent for pre-primary to 60.7 per cent for SSS students.

Affordability as a reason for school choice declines in importance as the child progresses through the school levels.

Affordability as a reason for school choice is reported by 34.9 per cent of pre-primary parents and 33.9 per cent of primary parents. It declines to 32.0 per cent for JSS and 26.8 per cent for SSS parents.

Proximity to home is the most important reason for choice of pre-primary and primary school. It disappears from the top three reasons for choice at secondary level.

- Proximity to home is the most important reason for school choice for 58.2 per cent of pre-primary parents and 53.9 per cent of primary parents;
- Although it disappears from the top three reasons for school choice at secondary level, it is still important – given as a reason for 42.7 per cent of JSS and 36.6 per cent of SSS parents.

4.4 The reasons parents most emphasize when selecting schools: summary of results from a regression analysis

Five different logistic regression models were created based on the four school types (public, low, medium and high-cost private) and out-of-school children. The objective was to look at the relative weight parents (differentiated by various categories of income, wealth, age of children, etc) give to the different reasons they choose schools. The results for perceived quality, proximity to home and affordability are summarized below.

Perceived quality

Wealthier families and those with children in high-cost schools place greater emphasis on quality than poorer families, particularly families with children in government and low-cost schools.

Quality issues are more important to families with older children than they are to families with younger children.

Proximity to home

Poorer families – and those who predominantly send their children to government and low-cost private schools - place greater emphasis on the school being close to their home than parents of older children and those who send their children to higher cost schools.

Families with primary and pre-primary children also place greater emphasis on the school being close to their home, while at secondary level, this is less important.

Affordability

Affordability is more important for lower income families than higher income families. It is also more important for families of primary and pre-primary children and less important for older children.

5 The school choice process among low-income families and the local supply of schools

This section is taken largely from the qualitative research, with supporting statistics from the household survey where available. It looks at how school

choice is influenced by the local supply of schools in low-income areas of Lagos, and how households from the densely populated settlements of Lagos, differentiated by location and income, weigh up a range of different factors in making school choices.

The qualitative research found that households classified as poor and near-poor had similar school decision-making strategies, which were distinct from households classified as middle class. This section summarises the findings on school decision-making among households classified as poor and near-poor, referred to collectively as 'low-income' households. It maps out a decision tree for how low-income primary school families make school choices.

5.1 School choice and the local supply of schools

The majority of low-income parents in the low-income most densely populated settlements of Lagos have a range of choice of lower-cost private primary schools that are located close to their homes.

The qualitative research was conducted in three low-income areas of Lagos in the most densely populated Metropolitan area of Lagos. The research found that the range of choice of private primary schools was generally good in all three areas, supporting findings from previous studies in Lagos.²² In one of the case study areas, Alapere, however, there were no low-cost private schools. The lowest cost schools were just slightly above the low-cost bracket for this study of N25,000, at around N27,000. This is despite the fact that Alapere has a higher than average rate of poverty (at 77 per cent). For some low-income parents, these schools, which would be classified as medium-cost in this study, were affordable. For others, however, they were not (see below).

Box 3: Where there is no supply of low or medium-cost private schools.

We are sitting with a group of low-income parents who recently moved their child from a primary private to a government school. All the families, with one exception, moved their children, not because they prefer the government school – they would still prefer to send their children to private school – but because they can no longer afford the private school fees. According to these parents, school fees have been going up in the area for some time. (These changes may be related to a rise in the cost of real estate, as the area becomes gentrified: rents are also reported to be on the rise.) These families had to choose from three local government schools. They have all chosen the two that they say are better quality – with smaller classes and better quality classrooms. But most of them are not happy; they would prefer to have their children in private school.

Where there are no low or medium-cost private primary schools near their homes, low-income parents who would like to send their primary age children to private school, seem most likely to opt for the nearest government school.

The qualitative research team interviewed a number of low-income parents living in a middle-class neighbourhood of Lagos, close to Alapere. These parents wanted to send their children to private school but could not afford the schools in the area, which were all in the high-cost bracket (see Box 3). They did not choose to send their children to lower cost schools in neighbouring Alapere. Instead, they chose the government school, which was close to their home.

It is not clear how likely this situation is to be replicated in other parts of Lagos, though there are some indications in the

data that there are other areas where this could also be happening. The household survey sample was made up of 101 Enumeration Areas (EAs) or clusters. 16 of these EAs had zero low-cost private schools. If we exclude the one EA out of these 16 with a zero rate of poverty, we find that there are 15 EAs where poor households could find themselves priced out of a local market for private schools and pushed into the government school sector.

Where there are no primary government schools near their homes, poorer parents who would like to send their children to a government school, seem likely to opt for affordable local private schools.

Alapere is an interesting case because as well as having no low-cost private schools, there is also no government primary school (though there is a large government secondary school). The findings from the qualitative research indicate that some low-income parents in Alapere choose to send primary age children to local and affordable private schools *because* they are more conveniently located close to their homes than the government schools. Those who cannot afford private schools for all their children send the older ones to the government primary school in neighbouring Ogudu and look for the lowest-cost private schools near to their homes for the younger ones.

There is no data from the household survey to indicate whether households are likely to be in this situation elsewhere in Lagos. However, we do know that the supply of government primary schools is considerably lower than for private schools across Lagos State. The number of primary government schools is about 10 per cent of private schools (991 primary government compared to around 10,000 private schools).²³ The likelihood of a government primary school being close to someone's home is therefore considerably lower than for a private school.

Although there are clearly some households selecting private schools because they have no access to government schools, as the Alapere case shows, all the indications are that the majority of parents would rather send their children to private schools because they perceive the quality to be better than that offered in government schools.

Box 4: When ultra-poverty can mean no choice of schools

When AM moved to Alapere to live with her mother, she had lost most of her belongings, and her home. She wanted to send her children to government school but there were no government schools in the local area. So she looked at three private schools. The initial registration and term fees for all three of her children were over N47,000. She didn't have the money, so she put the 11 year old in the government school, which is far from her home. He goes there alone. The younger ones, she could not afford to put in school, so she takes them to the daily 'lesson'.

In areas where there are no low-cost private schools and no easily reachable local government schools, ultra-poor parents may send their children to low cost alternatives to formal school, such as the 'lesson'. They may also keep children out of school altogether.

As we have seen, Alapere has no low-cost private schools, no government schools, and higher than average rate of poverty. It is also revealed to have a high rate of out-of-school children at 10 per cent.²⁴ This is more than three times the State average.

The high rates of out-of-school children in

Alapere can be explained by the lack of conveniently located government and low-cost private primary schools. Box 4 shows how one ultra-poor family in Alapere are unable to afford to send all their children to private school. Children who parents consider too young to travel to the government school are in 'the lesson', a low-cost alternative to formal school. It is possible that in other cases, parents may keep their children out of school altogether.

Are there likely to be other areas in Lagos with households in similar circumstances? More research would be needed to understand the relationship between the low supply of low-cost and government primary schools, ultra poverty and children out-of-school.

5.2 Proximity to home as a key driver of school choice

In the qualitative research, low-income parents with young children who had limited or no choice of affordable primary or pre-primary schools near their homes did not choose affordable schools in other neighbourhoods. These families were more likely to choose the most affordable options that were closest to their homes, with quality considerations taking second place. This is because a major concern of all parents is making sure that they get children to school safely.

Low-income parents with no affordable schools located close to their homes have to weigh up the costs and risks of getting children to school safely. Where the journey involves such dangers as crossing busy roads or navigating public transportation, most parents we spoke to said that they could not let the young ones travel to these schools on foot or on public transportation. Some let older children escort them, but in many cases parents did not let the younger ones go at all, preferring alternatives that avoided such risks and dangers.

Once children reach 10 or 11 years old, parents are more likely to let them travel to school alone, depending on the distance and perceived dangers, and these older ones may then escort the younger children to school. Or, as was reported in a number of cases in the qualitative research, the children are then transferred to primary government schools.

The qualitative results indicate that unlike middle-class households, low-income households do not have the same luxury to choose schools outside of their local neighbourhood, especially for their younger children. They generally cannot

Box 5: Choosing a secondary school that is closer to home

PA (Ajegunle) says he prefers government schools. His primary age children go to a nearby government primary school. The government secondary schools are however a long distance from his home so he has selected a nearby low-cost private secondary school for his older children, the cheapest one he could find. He wants to be able to 'monitor them'.

afford the time (and the expense) required to ensure their young children arrive safely at school. These parents are therefore most likely to select a school *because* it is close to their home. For parents with a wide range of school choice, proximity to home is unlikely to be the only reason for school choice. But for parents with a limited range of choice, this may well be the only reason for their choice.

Parents are much less restricted at secondary level than at primary level. As children get older and gain more independence and can travel alone, there are however still reasons

to keep children closer to home. One reason is that it costs less because children do not have to pay for transportation. Another reason is the shortage of public transportation in Lagos. However, many parents simply prefer to have their children as close to home as possible (Box 5).

5.3 The school selection process at primary level among low-income households

Figure 5.1 summarises the findings on primary school choice for low-income households and outlines the school selection process in a decision tree.²⁵ The decision-tree begins with the family's preference for either a government or a private school. It then maps the questions that parents have to ask themselves, depending on their income, and the local supply of government, private and low-cost private alternatives, in order to find the school they will eventually select. The map also shows how the most disadvantaged children – largely those from ultra-poor households living in areas with limited access to low-cost private and government schools - may end up out of school.

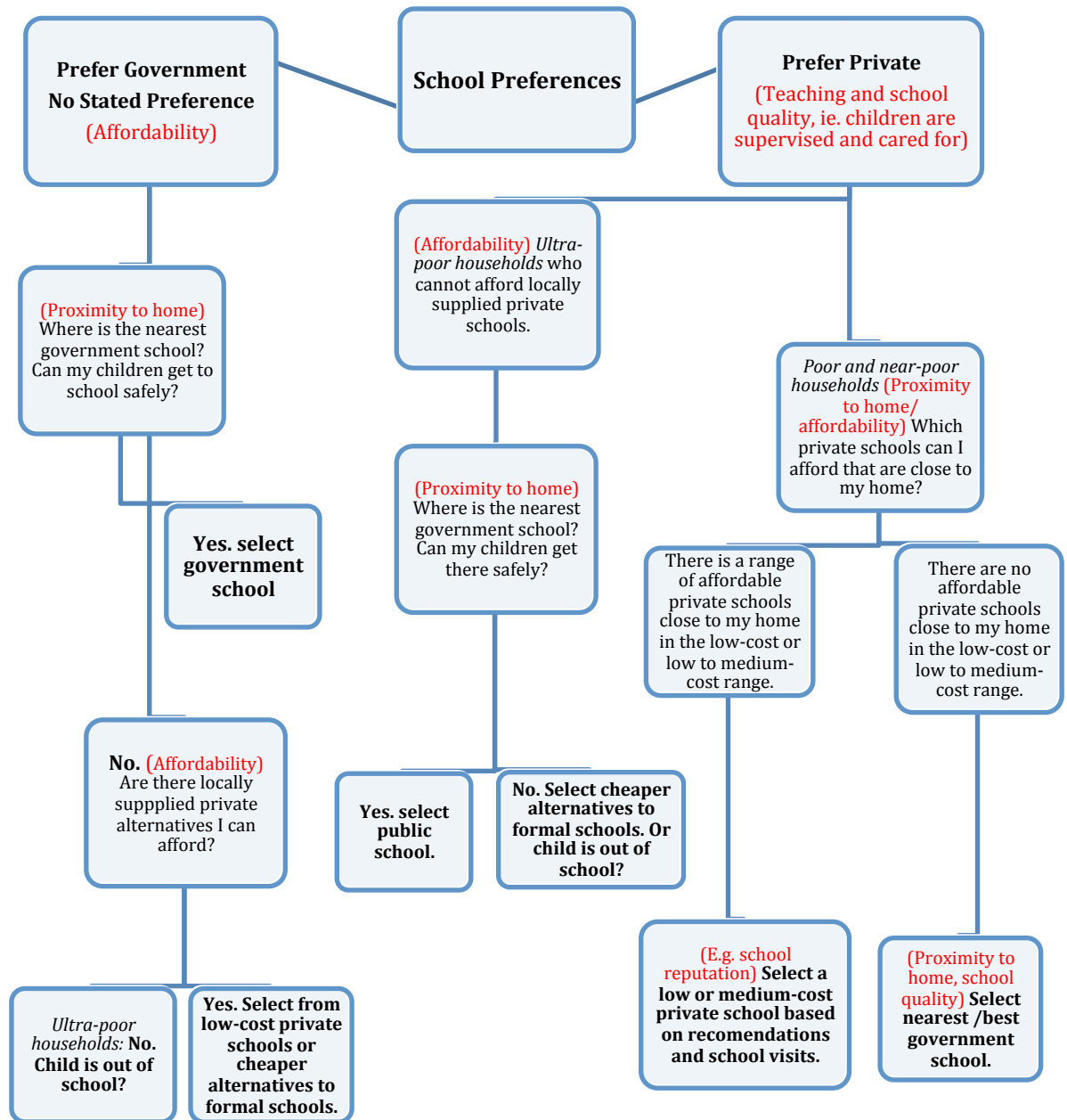
Figure 5.1: The primary school selection process among low-income households

Legend:

Italics = income level of household or area

Red: rationale for preference or selection

Bold: Preference and final selection.



6 Conclusions: the influence and impact of poverty on school choice

The results reveal almost universal education across the state of Lagos, with over 98 per cent of school-age children in the school system and an almost equal number of girls and boys. This is a success story for Lagos State in meeting MGD targets for both universal primary education and eliminating gender disparities at primary and secondary levels of education.

The findings reveal a strong positive relationship between household income and school choice, with high levels of enrolment in both government and low-cost private schools below the poverty line and a sharp rise in enrolment in high-cost private schools after the poverty line is crossed. The majority of children from ultra-poor households are also in private schools although at a lower rate than higher income groups. Ultra-poor households are also out of school at a rate five times that of children from higher income households.

The findings reveal that private schools are favoured over government schools on almost all quality criteria. The perceived problems of over-crowding and poor child welfare in school come out as proxies for poor quality in government schools among parents. In contrast, policy makers' proxies for school quality are the numbers of teachers who are trained. Parents are aware that teacher qualifications are higher in government schools than private schools but they still believe that government schools are of lower quality, irrespective of teacher qualifications.

Income poverty and the perceived higher standards in private schools are found to be major factors influencing school choice across households from all income groups. The results also reveal that among low-income households, a further key factor influencing school choice is the local supply of schools.

Low-income urban settlements in Lagos appear to offer a range of affordable private primary schools from which the majority of low-income households can choose one that is close to their home. This appears to be less the case for government primary schools. However, this does not mean that the relatively higher numbers of children in private schools in Lagos can be explained by the poor supply of government schools. Although some households do appear to select private schools because there are no government schools near their homes, all the indications are that the majority of parents would rather send their children to private schools because they perceive them to be better.

There are also areas of Lagos that offer no affordable private primary schools for low-income households, though the extent of this across Lagos is unclear. Here we find that low-income parents are more likely to select nearby government schools for primary age children, rather than send them to private schools in other neighbourhoods. For these parents, the age of the child is a clear key factor in the decision to choose a school close to their homes due to the difficulties of getting smaller children to school safely.

There is further evidence to indicate that it is the ultra-poor who are most affected when there is a limited supply of both government *and* low-cost private

schools in their local areas. The preliminary findings indicate that ultra-poor households in these circumstances are likely to find low-cost alternatives to private school, or may keep children out of school altogether. The findings are, however, limited and further research would be required to establish whether this situation was replicated in other parts of the city.

Endnotes

- ¹ National Population Commission (Nigeria) and RTI International, 2011. Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) EdData Profile 1990, 2003, and 2008: Education Data for Decision Making. 2011. Washington, DC, USA: National Population Commission and RTI International; UNESCO Institute of Statistics Fact Sheet, June 2012. Based on 2010 statistics. <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/fs-18-OOSC-2.pdf>. Accessed Sept 18th 2013.
- ² Lagos State Government. <http://www.lagosstate.gov.ng/pagelinks.php?p=6>. Accessed Sept 24th 2013.
- ³ See Gibson, A. et al. 'Support to low fee private sector education. Scoping mission report to DFID Nigeria'. November 2011, p.9.
- ⁴ City Mayors Foundation. http://www.citymayors.com/statistics/urban_growth1.html. Accessed April 9 2013.
- ⁵ Tooley, J., P. Dixon, and O. Olaniyan. 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): 125-46.
- ⁶ Härmä, J. 2011. 'Lagos Private school Census, 2010-2011'. ESSPIN report no. LG 501.
- ⁷ Table from: Gibson et al. 'Support to low fee private sector education'. The table excludes pre-primary only schools and those serving senior secondary. It is also does not provide a total count of all schools as separate institutions since some schools serve both primary and junior secondary levels, and as such appear in both columns of the table.
- ⁸ Härmä, J. 2011. 'Household survey on private education in Lagos'. ESSPIN report no. LG 503.
- ⁹ ESSPIN test results reported in Gibson, A. et al. 'Support to low fee private sector education'.
- ¹⁰ James Tooley, Pauline Dixon, John Merrifield and Bao Yong. 2011. 'School Choice and Academic Performance: some evidence from developing countries', *Journal of School Choice*, 5.1, 1-39
- ¹¹ ESSPIN tests conducted in Results reported in Gibson, et al. 'Support to low fee private sector education'.
- ¹² Gibson et al. 'Support to low fee private sector education'.
- ¹³ For example, the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) uses a measure of multiple, but differently weighted indicators for poverty: among them, health, education and six standard of living indicators including, assets, housing, energy and water access to produce composite index of poverty and deprivation. A variety of similar kinds of measures have been applied in the study that were deemed most appropriate for the Lagos context. See Alkire, S. and M. E. Santos. 2010. 'Acute Multidimensional Poverty: A New Index for Developing Countries'. OPHI Working Paper, No. 38
- ¹⁴ Mcloughlin, C. 2013. 'Low cost private schools: evidence, approaches and emerging issues'. Economic and Private Sector PEAKS Topic Guide: University of Birmingham. Draft.
- ¹⁵ More details on the sampling procedure are provided in the accompanying report, Volume I of the study.
- ¹⁶ A comparative case study method requires the careful selection of comparable cases that are identical (or as close as possible) on the dependent (outcome) variable and different on all but one of the independent (predictor) variables. Three case studies is the minimum number with such an approach. More details are provided in the accompanying report Volume II of the study.
- ¹⁷ International Labour Office (ILO). 2013. 'Global employment trends 2013'. International Labour Office, Geneva.
- ¹⁸ In the 2011 private school census for Lagos, ESSPIN found around 60 per cent in private primary school enrolments while we have found over 70 per cent (Härmä, 2011, *ibid.*). There

could be a number of reasons for this, including missing schools from the census, incorrect official statistics on government school enrolments (used to compare with census figures), and growth in private sector primary school enrolments since the census was undertaken. (See Volume 1 of the study for a fuller discussion).

¹⁹ Gibson et al. 'Support to low fee private sector education'.

²⁰ These figures appear slightly higher than the most recent estimates for the State. Official poverty estimates for Lagos state vary, but the most recent as yet unofficial estimates from a 2011 Harmonized National Living Standards Survey (HNLSS) put income poverty in Lagos at around 40 percent in the State (HNLSS Report to DFID Nigeria, Jan 2013). The difference in income poverty figures between this study and the HNLSS figures for 2011 may be explained in two ways. First, the bias of our sample towards families with young children is likely to explain some of this difference. Second, and as noted above, under-reporting of incomes is also likely to account for some of the difference.

²¹ The caveat noted above about under-reporting of income clearly applies here: we see not insignificant proportions of families on the lowest income decile report sending their children to medium or even high-cost private schools. On the incomes reported, our qualitative research suggests that this would be highly unlikely, if not impossible, in many cases.

²² Eg. Joanna Härmä, J. 2011. 'Household survey on private education in Lagos'. ESSPIN report no. LG 503; Tooley, J., P. Dixon, and O. Olaniyan. 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): 125–46.

²³ Includes both primary and pre-primary.

²⁴ There were two EAs in Alapere, one with relatively high levels of poverty where the qualitative research was conducted, and one with much lower levels of poverty. Anecdotal evidence indicated that since the completion of the new expressway, some parts of Alapere are attracting wealthier more middle-class families. This might explain these differences.

²⁵ The decision-making process for secondary school children is more complex, and there is insufficient data from the study to draw a decision map.