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Public and private secondary schools from a comparative perspective: a case study of Ikot Ekpene local government area

Abstract: This survey examines public and private secondary schools in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State from a comparative perspective. A sample of 240 students (120 from 3 private schools and 120 from 3 public schools) was drawn using a stratified random sampling technique. The findings revealed that private schools and public schools significantly differ in the academic performance of students, provision of school facilities, curriculum implementation, level of discipline and staff quality and quantity. It was recommended inter alia that both public and private sector should urgently participate in the planning, implementation, supervision, monitoring and funding of educational facilities within the study area to enhance equal opportunity to learning.

Keywords: Public schools, private schools, standard of education, public school funding.

Introduction

It would not be wrong to assert that the standard of education of any country is largely dependent on the standard of public schools in that country. Simply put, public schools are the yardsticks by which a country's educational growth and development is measured. In the '70s, '80s and early '90s in Nigeria, public schools were more popular because they had discipline, good teachers and good facilities. They were attended by students irrespective of their social class and socio-economic background in the society. One of the advantages of early exposure of students to others from different socio-economic background is that it teaches them how to get along with people. Those days, children of parents from different economic strata would attend same public schools, play and learn together. This early exposure helped the children of the rich to be acquainted with some of the hardship experienced by those who were

from poor homes and inculcated in them a balanced perspective to life. Those of the poor would also sit tight to study, believing that if they do so, they would be as rich as their friends' parents and would not go through their present difficulties. There were even cases where some rich parents would take up the training of the friends of their children when their parents were unable to continue their education.

In the 1970s, '80s and early '90s in Nigeria, public schools were more popular because they had discipline, good teachers and good facilities. They were attended by students irrespective of their social class and socio-economic background. But today as observed by Aduke [1], public schools are a shadow of what they used to be. The research and education community is divided on the debate whether private schools have evolved to best public schools in terms of quality of teaching and learning, school discipline and infrastructure. The wider

society is apparently bothered if private school is worth the money it costs and if public schools have what it takes to produce well educated, disciplined young adults.

Many research studies have been conducted to compare the various aspects of public and private schools all over the world. Jimmy and Lock [2] have summarized many studies comparing public and private schools and reported that private schools in Nigeria improved students' performance as measured by standardized test of verbal and mathematical skills than public school. It was also reported that average student performance was better in private than public schools. Abdul [3] compared the usage of modern teaching aids by the teachers of public and private secondary schools. It was found that teachers of both types of schools are fully aware about the advantages and effectiveness of teaching aids. Both types of school teachers use teaching aids. However, the teachers of private schools use more teaching aids and models comparatively.

Farida and Madeeha [4] in their comparative study of private and public schools with respect to administrators' role found that heads of government schools performed better in their administrative planning for the whole year and academic activities while the heads of private schools show more concerns about co-curricular activities. Mustaqeem [5] found in her comparative study that majority of parents and teachers of different qualifications, different age groups, different genders and different schools response that staff morale scale is same but they also reported that staff morale of private teachers is higher than that of Government.

Iqbal [6] found in her comparative study that teachers in private schools use more than one teaching methodologies, private schools provide more instructional material for teaching, heavy small class size, arrange more co-curricular activities, art and science exhibition as compared to public schools. Liaqat [7] found in her study that quality of teaching is better in private schools as compared to public schools and the teachers of private schools prepared lesson plans before teaching as compared to public schools. Shaheen [8] discovered in her study that majority of public school teachers behave well, avoid quarreling, getting flair up immediately, blaming others, experiencing anger as compared to private school teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine whether:

1. students attending private schools perform better than their peers studying at public schools in Ikot Ekpene.

2. students of private secondary schools more disciplined than those in the public schools in Ikot Ekpene.

3. private schools are better in terms of school plant, equipment, and other facilities than public schools in Ikot Ekpene.

4. private schools are better staffed (in quality and quantity) than public schools in Ikot Ekpene

5. private secondary schools' curriculum differs from that of the public secondary schools in Ikot Ekpene.

Research Hypotheses

To actualize the purpose of this study, the following null hypotheses were tested:

1. There is no significant difference in academic performance of students studying at private schools and their peers studying at public schools in Ikot Ekpene.

2. There is no significant difference in the level of discipline in private and public secondary schools in Ikot Ekpene.

3. Private schools do not significantly differ from public schools in terms provision of school plant, equipment, and other facilities.

4. There is no significant difference in the quality and quantity of staff in private and public secondary schools in Ikot Ekpene.

5. There is no significant difference in the curriculum implementation in the private and public secondary schools in Ikot Ekpene.

Research Method

Design: This study adopted the ex post facto survey design.

Area of the Study: The area of this study is Ikot Ekpene Local Government of Akwa Ibom State. Ikot Ekpene is a historic town in the southern Nigeria, in Akwa Ibom State. The town is located on the A342 highway that parallels the coast, between Calabar to the south east and Aba to the west, with the state capital, Uyo, on this road just to the east. The area has thirteen public secondary schools and numerous private secondary schools.

Population: The targeted population of this study comprised all the Senior Secondary Two (SS2) Students in all the private and public secondary schools in the study area. According to 2014/2015 academic session, the total number of senior secondary two students in all the public schools is 3,164 while that of the private schools is 1,413 making it a total of 4,577.

Sampling: A randomized sample of 240 students selected from three public secondary schools and three private secondary schools in the study area provided data for this study.

Instrumentation: A structured questionnaire and an academic achievement test designed by the researchers were used in data collection. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items on a four point scale of strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed. The achievement test comprised 10 multiple choice questions, assessing academic performance between the students of public schools and private schools.

Analysis of Research Data

Academic Performance of Students in Public and Private Secondary Schools

The result from an independent samples t-test indicated that students studying in private secondary schools performed better ($M = 7.69, SD = 1.48, N = 120$) than students studying in public secondary schools ($M = 5.71, SD = 1.96, N = 120$), $t(238) = 9.9, p < .05$ two tailed. The observed difference was significant. This therefore means that there is significant difference in academic performance of students studying at private schools and their peers studying at public schools in Ikot Ekpene.

Level of Discipline in Public and Private Secondary Schools

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the level of discipline among students in private secondary schools ($M = 13.78, SD = 3.06, N = 120$) and students in public secondary schools ($M = 11.03, SD = 2.45, N = 120$), $t(238) = 12.5, p < .05$ two tailed. The observed difference was significant. This means that students studying in private schools are more disciplined than those studying in public schools. With this, the null hypothesis which earlier predicted no significant difference in the level of discipline in private and public secondary schools is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis.

Provision of Facilities in Public and Private Secondary Schools

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the provision of facilities in private and public schools. The result obtained shows that private schools have more and better facilities ($M = 12.48, SD = 3.28, N = 120$) than public secondary schools ($M = 10.78, SD = 2.47, N = 120$), $t(238) = 7.73, p < .05$ two tailed. The observed difference was significant thus the null hypothesis which earlier predicted a no significant difference in the provision of facilities was rejected.

Quality and Quantity of Staff in Public and Private Secondary Schools

The independent samples t-test conducted to compare the difference in the quality and quantity of staff in private and public schools showed that private second-

ary schools public secondary schools had better quality and numbers of staff ($M = 12.74, SD = 3.66, N = 120$) than private secondary school ($M = 11.33, SD = 2.31, N = 120$), $t(238) = 6.41, p < .05$ two tailed. The observed difference was significant hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

Curriculum Implementation in Private and Public Secondary Schools

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the implementation of curriculum in private and public secondary schools. Result showed that approved school curriculum is more carefully implemented in private schools ($M = 12.6, SD = 2.96, N = 120$) than it is in public secondary schools ($M = 11.7, SD = 2.61, N = 120$), $t(238) = 4.29, p < .05$ two tailed. The difference between the means was significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which predicted a no significant difference in curriculum implementation in private and public secondary schools was rejected.

Discussion of the Findings

It has long been reported that the type of school attended by an individual is likely to have some educational implications on him or her either positively or negatively. Indeed, Ogunlade [9] stated that a genius who attends an institution devoid of basic facilities, quality teachers, conducive environment for teaching and learning may find it difficult to display his or her ingenuity maximally whereas an average intelligent child who attends an institution where teachers quality, classroom environment is sound, facilities for teaching and learning are available in quantity and quality may perform brilliantly.

However, findings from the test of hypothesis 1 showed a significant difference in academic performance of student studying in private schools and those studying in public schools. From the analysis, it was evident that students of private schools perform better than their counterpart studying in public schools. In agreement with this finding was an earlier finding by Reuben [10] who also observed students private schools doing much better than students in public schools. This was also true according to studies conducted by Shaheen [8]. Shaheen in his study observed students studying in private school outperforming their counterparts in public schools.

Hypothesis 2 tested the difference in the level of discipline in private and public secondary schools. From the analysis, it was evident that the level of discipline in private schools is higher than what obtains in public schools. In collaboration with this finding was

an earlier finding by Coleman [11] who observed that private schools are superior to public schools because of certain characteristics (such as high level of discipline) that seem to be found in private schools more than in public ones.

Hypothesis 3 sought to determine whether private schools significantly differ from public schools in the provision of school plant, equipment, and other facilities. Analysis of research data revealed a significant difference in the provision of facilities in private and public schools. Private schools were found to have more school plant, equipment and other facilities than public schools. This finding is similar to the findings of Ajayi [12] who observed positive relationships between school facilities and school effectiveness. He also highlighted facilities as a major influencing achievement in the school system.

Hypothesis 4 tested the difference that exists in the quality and quantity of staff in private and public secondary schools. From the analysis, it was observed that public schools have better quality and quantity of staff when compared to private schools. The number of teachers in public secondary schools was observed to be more than that of the private schools. It was also observed that while every teacher in public schools has the requisite qualifications for teaching, some teachers in private secondary schools do not have the requisite qualification for teaching. In agreement with this study was a study by Mustaqeem [5], who conducted a similar study and found out that public schools have quality teachers as compared to private schools.

Hypothesis 5 sought whether there is any significant difference in curriculum implementation in private and public secondary schools. From the t-test analysis it was evident that curriculum in private school is more implemented than the public school. The study revealed that private schools offer a more diversified and flexible curriculum than public schools. The result of this finding collaborates with earlier findings by Ukpong [13] who also observed a significant difference in curriculum implementation in public and private schools

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it would be appropriate to conclude that private schools and public schools significantly differ in the academic performance of students, provision of school facilities, curriculum implementation, level of discipline and staff quality and quantity. Observably, students' academic performance, level of decline, provision of faculties and curriculum implementation is by far better than that of the public schools but in the case of staff quality and quantity, it is better in public schools than in private schools. From a comparative perspective therefore, private schools are better than public secondary schools in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. In view of these findings, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Public and private sectors should collaborate efforts and resources in the planning, funding, equipping, supervision, and monitoring of educational facilities within the study area to foster parity in educational opportunities and prospects.
2. Government should provide public schools with adequate learning materials and facilities in order to afford students' from poor homes who cannot afford private school enrolment better learning opportunities.
3. The government should provide adequate facilities, well equipped laboratories in school and deal decisively with teachers who are not dedicated to their duties.
4. Public schools should be encouraged to organize their activities more effectively around academic achievement objectives in order to improve performance.
5. Government should urgently work at improving infrastructural facilities in public schools through an integrated programme of renovation reconstruction and maintenance of existing school facilities. A decongestion programme should be undertaken through the construction of new schools and expansion of existing schools in areas where enrolment outweighs available facilities.
6. Stakeholders in private schools should not relent in their efforts to ensure quality education in their schools by employing qualified teachers in different subject areas.

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