

2020

FOR WHOSE BENEFIT?



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Executive Summary

This study “For Whose Benefit?” Has been undertaken as part of actions linked to a Global Campaign to support Equitable and Quality Public Education. It hopes to raise awareness on, the threats posed by Private Sector takeover of educational service provision on the right of vulnerable children. The focus has been engaging government and all relevant stakeholders, to promote increased investment in equitable and quality public education. In Sierra Leone the efforts are led by Community Action to Restore Lives (CARL) working with OXFAM Sierra Leone and the Education for All Sierra Leone Coalition (EFA- SL Coalition).

This piece, reviewed the growing Private Sector involvement in national educational landscape in Sierra Leone. It assessed the implications of this on the right of the child and the wellbeing of their parent. It also reviewed the impact of the current state of affairs on the national drive to achieve equitable and quality education for all children by government. Finally, it proffers evidence -based recommendations with a view to influence National Policies on Education.

From the findings it was evident that, citizens have knowledge of the global obligations of government to provide quality education for all children. Despite this, parents prefer to send their children to private schools for reasons other than the pursuance of quality education and status. The findings unveil enormous implications of private education on the right to access education for all children, integrity of the school system and the risk of breeding segregation within the society. Further, it was clear that, the pursuance of private education has its toll on the health and livelihood of parents who are driven by false publicity. The study harnessed and presented vital tips for improvement of public schools, to help them deliver equitably on the right to education for every child with the required quality.

Finally, the recommendations proposed for improving public education were based, on the conclusion that, the idea of private and public partnership in education, will only serve private interest at the expense of the public good.

Introduction

Goal Four of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, provides for inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Therefore, actions to deliver on this commitment should consider three key principles: Accessibility, Affordability and Quality. Because, education is an investment aimed at promoting, the human capital and economic development of any state, governments should not allow this to be commercialised.

However, in most African states today, the provision of educational services is becoming the monopoly of the private sector. In Sierra Leone, James Tooley & David Longfield, in their report titled “Private Primary Education in Western Area Sierra Leone (2013)”¹, identified six types of private school providers: those owned by private proprietors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), communities, independent churches, established churches and mosques. These were placed into two broad categories – for profit (proprietors) and non-profit. Their mapping of Western Area found 967 schools serving primary level students, with over 240,000 students.. While 90% of these schools were under private management, government schools were typically larger but enrolling 17% of pupils, compared to 83% in private schools. Even though it is evident that some of the private schools receive support from government, the data shows that government has only a small stake in the instruction of children at classroom level and general enrolment of pupils within the educational system.

Furthermore, there is a rise in the for-profit providers, such as the advent of Rising Academy Network in the country – an offshoot of the partnership schools. The rise of these Public, Private Partnerships (PPPs) initiatives which are supported by global institutions such as the World Bank is now spreading all over developing countries. Proponents of Public and Private Partnership in Education, think developing nations lack the capacity to deliver quality education. This argument is oblivious of the state obligation to deliver equitable and quality education for all.

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<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiltNWspqrtAhVCDOWKHYumAvwQFjAAegQIBRAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fegwestcentre.files.wordpress.com%2F2014%2F07%2F00-report-sierra-leone-2014-01-06.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3tedJP-AAk7hBqOgqZJ2Me>

This report therefore aims to influence government policy on the regulation of private education as private education currently contradicts the national agenda for delivering free quality education for all Sierra Leonean Children. This vision is part of efforts linked to the OXFAM Global Campaign called “Education Spikes Campaign” to support equitable and quality public education as against commercialized or private education in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Liberia and Mozambique. Community Action to Restore Lives (CARL) is taking a lead on the campaign in Sierra Leone, working with OXFAM and the Education for All Sierra Leone Coalition (EFA- SL Coalition), Action Aid, Sierra Leone Teachers’ Union and other Civil Society Organisations CSOs in Education. The goal of the campaign is to influence the mass exodus of pupils/students from Private to Public Schools for quality Education. The campaign has two main objectives as follows:

- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) influencing government policy for non-privatization of public schools
- The Sierra Leonean public is supporting the non-privatization of public schools.

Contextual Analysis

A study by Global Justice Now in 2019² reveals that, huge commercial publicity often tempts parents to opt for private schools in the expectation that their children will receive a better education. However, the basis for such beliefs are ambiguous. This is rooted in the clamour that states have failed in their responsibility to provide quality education for all. On quality education, the Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education indicates in 2018 that, resorting to outsourcing public schools to private providers does not achieve quality. Employing qualified teachers, providing quality-teaching materials, strengthening supervision, monitoring, and allocating sufficient budgetary support to improve quality, can achieve it. In 2015, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, cautioned governments to proceed with “extreme caution” in establishing Public Private Partnership (PPP) in education. He went on to say: “***outsourcing education activities to profit-making corporations opens the space for them not only to make a profit, but also to steer education agendas in ways that may not be in the best interest of students, parents and teachers and thus societies as a whole.***”

² https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/resources/in_whose_interest_-_neu_-_global_justice_now_0.pdf

In 2018, Steven J. Klees in his “Liberia’s Experiment of Comparative and International Education” made three main conclusions. First, increases in test score were more likely about 35 percent to 45 percent instead of the reported 60 percent. Second, the increase in test scores had little, if anything, to do with the private management of schools. Test score gains, likely resulted from policy changes that could also work in regular public schools. Third, the Private schools in Liberia is an extraordinarily expensive experiment, costing upwards of \$25 million, and is unlikely to be worth the investment. In addition, private schools’ claim of increased pupils’ performance stems from the fact that, these target children are from high-income families with access to more opportunities. Naturally, these are bound to do well because of the access to increased support.

Further, in their briefing paper “False promises” – 2019, Oxfam made a compelling linkage between the World Bank promoted Public and Private Partnership approach to delivering education and the growing inequalities and exclusion of the poor of the poorest especially girls, out of school children and those with disabilities. ***It is clear that, while the challenges and problems of public delivery in many countries are real, research indicates that neither education PPPs nor low-fee; for-profit schools are a shortcut to quality education for all.***

In a working paper on educational policy published by UNESCO in 2015, it was evident that, educational choice tends to intensify class segregation... throughout the effects of different preferences and information costs”. In countries where the provision of education is largely in private hands; higher social strata will turn to private schools, while lower social strata will remain in public schools (H.M. Levin, 1998) (Campbell, 2005). There exists a risk of increasing segregation along social and ethnic lines within the schooling system. It is also important to note that, the business model of low-cost private schools is similar in most developing/under developed countries: low fees but also poor infrastructure; often multi-grade; and low-paid, young teachers often recruited from the local community with minimum qualifications if any (Kremer & Muralidharan, 2008; Ohba, 2013) (Schirmer, Johnston, & Bernstein, 2010). Therefore, the World Bank’s current policy of encouraging and supporting profit-seeking multinationals that provide education is a matter of serious concern, given the devastating impact this strategy has on the right to education. It is evident that, the Abidjan Guiding Principles of 2019 on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education was

a clear reassertion of State obligations to establish free, quality, public Education systems for all. The second principle ***“States must provide free, public education of the highest attainable quality to everyone within their jurisdiction as effectively and expeditiously as possible, to the maximum of their available resources”***, Cemented this resolve.

According to a report “Private Primary Education in Western Area, Sierra Leone “ Carried out by James Tooley & David Longfield in 2013, the bulk of children are enrolled in private schools. ***Many of these private schools receive government assistance –some or the entire teacher Salaries are paid by government. Their evidence shows that, 55.8 percent of all children, attend assisted private schools, while 27.4 percent are in non-assisted private schools the remaining 16.9 percent are in government schools.*** Linking this to student performance in public exams, you will understand the problem is with the private sector. Example in 2019, 95% of pupils that took the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Exam (WASSCE) from Sierra Leon failed or did not get the requirement for university. Implicitly, the bulk of the responsibility lies with private schools who enrol the highest percentage of students. In 2016, the National Education Board, invited owners of private schools to a meeting. In his address the Chairperson, **Professor Sahr Thomas Gbamanja** said, fees charged by private school were not commensurate to the service they provide³. He also said there was lot of cheating going on in some of these private schools, untrained teachers who are poorly paid as opposed to their colleagues in public schools are hired. He emphasized the need for improvement in infrastructure and standardization as is done in other countries.

Despite to launch of the Free Quality School Education data shows that, overall, the highest annual median fees (including all costs and levies) in non-assisted private proprietor schools are (\$43.02), followed by independent churches (\$33.95) and established churches (\$25.70). At the lower end, non-assisted community schools charge \$15.12 per year, mosque schools only \$8.14, and NGO schools \$3.98. Some of these relate to hidden costs that parents incur in the course of the school term/year. The emergence of the Rising Academy Network of schools that charge \$150 per child per year does not make things any better. This is grossly above the reach of poor parents in most areas in Sierra Leone, who leave below the \$1

³<https://www.politicosl.com/articles/sierra-leone-govt-slams-private-schools>

benchmark. It is also against the internationally agreed 10% of income that parents should spend on the education of their children.

Despite the challenges of underfunding and support for public schools, the evidence above casts considerable doubt that the route to quality education for all lies in the increased pursuit of privatisation.

Implications for delivering Quality Education in Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, government's effort to take over the control of the education system especially at pre-primary, primary, junior and senior secondary school levels is through the launch of the Free Quality School Education. The provisions of the FQSE afforded all children, "free of charge" access to basic education. It was a relief for parents and show of willingness on the part of government to deliver on international obligations. Because of the investment, systems and policy reforms that followed the launch, there was a reciprocal impact on the number of schools and the gross enrolment ratio of both girls and boys in schools. The School census conducted in 2019 indicated a national 4% increase in the number of schools 7.8% at pre-primary, 2.3% in Primary, 6.7% in Junior Secondary and 7.4% in Senior Secondary. The FQSE benefited an estimated 2.14 million boys and girls enrolled in government-owned and government-assisted schools, saving poor parents an appreciable amount of money to start small-scale businesses.

Despite the above, the performance of children in class and public exams is still on the decline. This may be linked to the fact that the bulk of pupils are enrolled by private schools, who manage their instruction hence preparation for the exams. The report by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, on progress in the implementation of the Medium – Term National Development Plan of 2019 reveals lot of unmet targets in the Education Cluster. Pass rate of pupils at the Basic Education Certificate Exams (BECE), indicated only 46% attained from a target of 74%. The same is true for the West African Secondary School Certificate exam, where only 6% pass rate was attained from a target of 25% in 2019. This has raised many questions on the quality of teaching and learning in schools in Sierra Leone.

From the above, we see that government faces lot of challenges in delivering equitable and quality education for all. These have connections to the fact that the management of 85% of schools are in the hands of different categories of private providers.

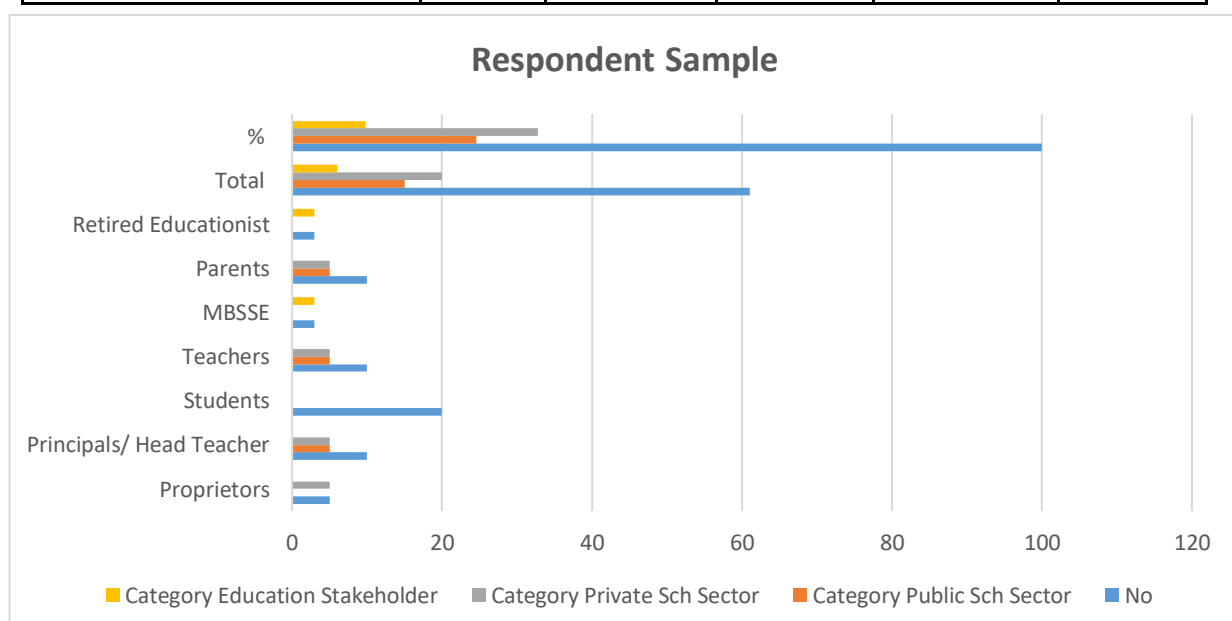
Further, guidelines for the establishment of schools in Sierra Leone, states as following: Article 2. "Evidence shows that the establishment of the proposed school would be in the public interest", Article 4. "Evidence shows that the site selected for the school is conducive for teaching/learning i.e. suitable for purpose including environmental and safety assessments and away from noise nuisance". However, most of the private schools' providers have not fulfilled the above criteria.

In addition to the above, there is the sustained poaching of qualified teachers by especially for-profit private schools thus, ridding public schools of qualified teachers. In some instance, private proprietors engaged teachers in public schools on part-time basis, which, affect the teacher's effectiveness in delivering quality instruction for children in public schools. It is also important to note that when it comes to assessment of the performance of student in public exams, national data on total number of students taking the exam is fundamental. Considering the fact that, the teaching profession has been widely undermined both by low pay and by the spread of untrained and unqualified teachers the battle for government in delivering quality education is uphill.

Methodology

Generally, this study is conducted as a simple analysis of public and private educational service providers in Sierra Leone. It aims to assess the implications of private schools on the right to education for especially, poor and vulnerable children. To broaden the information scope, a desk review was carried and varied literature sources on the concept were consulted. Also, Key informant interviews were conducted, with education specialist and relevant stakeholders, followed by focus group discussions and observations. The study was focused on, the Western Urban and Western Rural of Freetown. Respondents were chosen from various categories within the schools systems. The sampling of respondents for the Key informant interviews and the focus group discussions was random using set criteria as seen below:

Respondent	No	Category			
		Public Sch	Private Sch	Education Stakeholder	Students
Proprietors	5	0	5	0	
Principals/ Head Teacher	10	5	5	0	
Students	20	10	10		20
Teachers	10	5	5		
MBSSE	3			3	
Parents	10	5	5		
Retired Educationist	3	0	0	3	
Total	61	15	20	6	
%	100	25	33	10	20

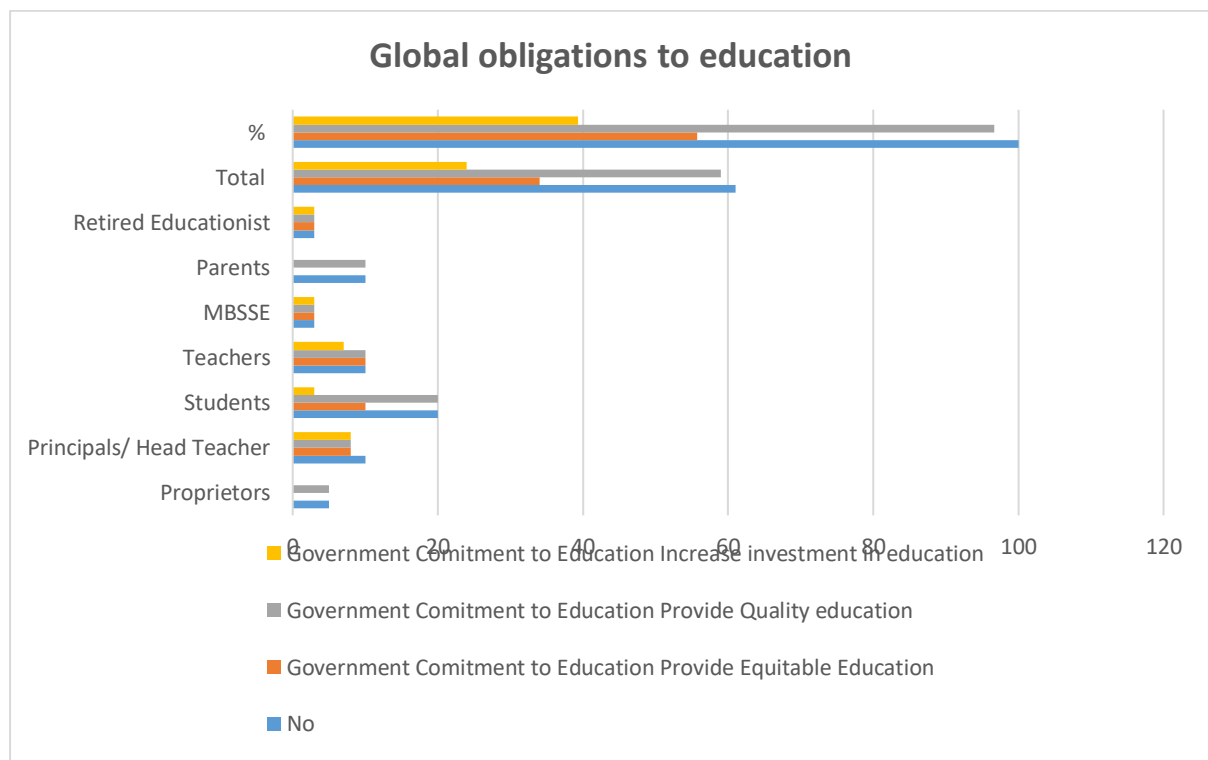


Further, different instruments were prepared to guide the data collection process. These included: Questionnaires, Interview guides, and checklist for the focus group discussions. To ensure validity of the data and make sure responses could be effectively clustered and paired; all qualitative data was transformed to quantitative and then presented in totals and percentages. This made grouping easier as percentages were presented as a total ratio of the number of responses/respondents.

Findings

The findings present citizens understanding of governments’ global obligations on education. It further explores people’s perspective of preferred educational service providers in Sierra Leone. Also, private education and its implications on the right of children and parents are brought to perspective. Analysis on why people prefer private schools and how public schools could be improved to be the preferred choice is also presented.

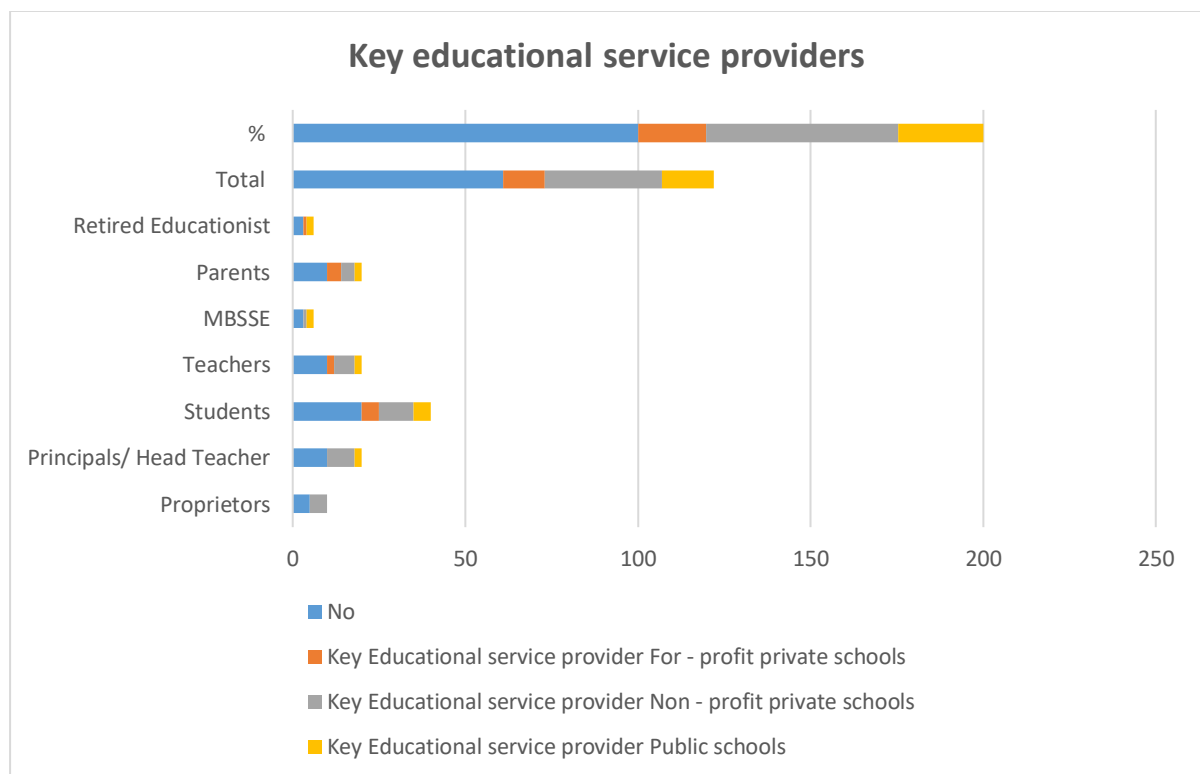
Generally, it came out that citizens are abreast with government’s global obligation related to the provision of education for children. When confronted with discussions on this they mentioned three key obligations as presented below



As can be seen above almost all the respondents 97% acknowledged government’s obligation to provide quality education. Further 56% mentioned governments’ commitment to provide equitable education whilst 39% referred to the government’s obligation to increase investment in the education of children.

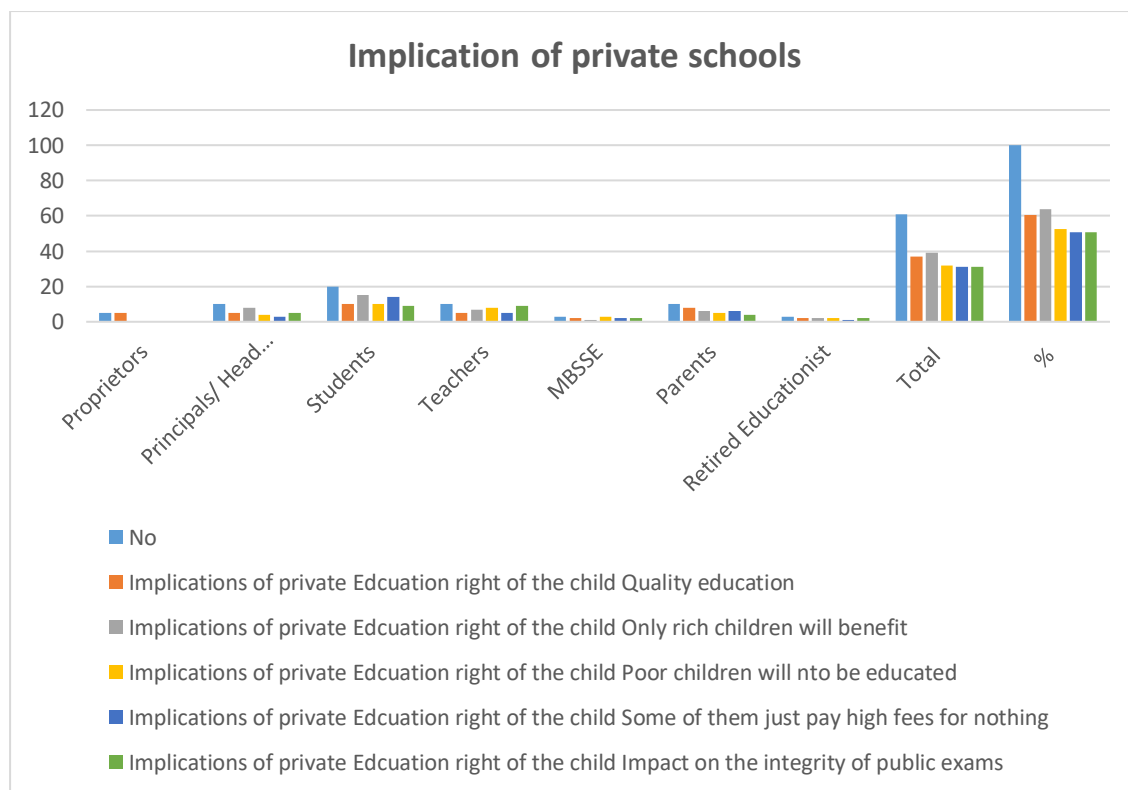
However, data from the focus group discussions reveal that the above was not a factor on the choice of parents to prefer private education for children. It was evident that other factors besides, the quest for quality education impacted the choice to send children to private owned schools as opposed` to public schools. However, the views were contrasting on the implications of private education on the right of the child and the struggling parents. Respondents of the study were also clear on their expectations from government if, public schools are to be remodelled to provide equitable and quality education for all children in Sierra Leone.

Specifically, on the issues of key educational service provider, majority of respondents referred to non-profit private schools. These referred to schools owned by missions/community but were subsidised by government. These they say provided education for majority of children as, presented in the chart below:



From the above 56% of respondents alluded to the view above. Only 20% referred to for-profit private school, whilst, 25% mentioned public schools. The above points to a dwindling public, stake in educational service delivery.

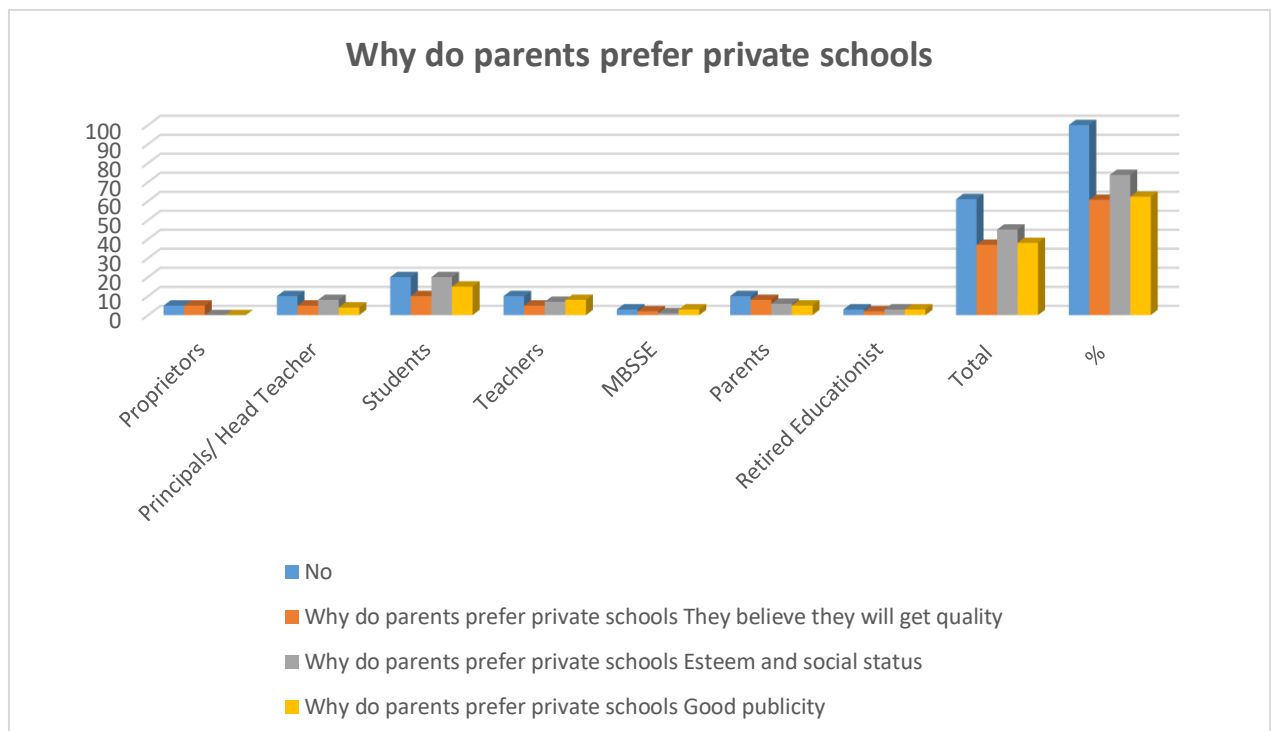
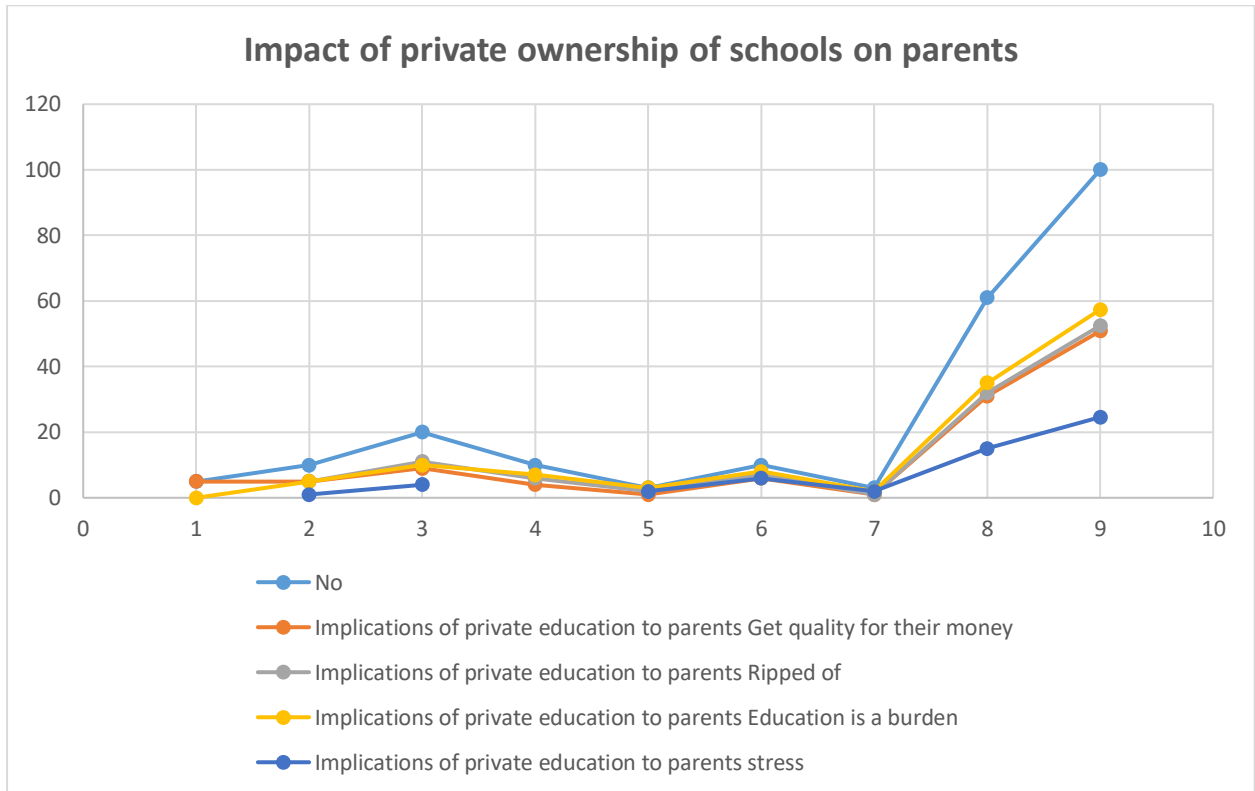
Importantly, respondents seem to be clear and unanimous on the implications of the increased private stake in educational service provisions on the right of children and the integrity of the system. On this subject their responses were categorised into five as presented below:



From the above, majority of the respondents 64% indicated that private ownership meant only rich children will benefit. Further 61% spoke of quality education, whilst 51% boldly indicated that some of these private schools just collect huge fees for nothing. The data presents another new phenomenon relating, to the integrity of the system. A final 51% was of the view that, since private school are based on profit they rely on the number of students enrolling. In the FDGs it came out that, exam malpractice has become so rampant these days as the influence of private schools expands.

The findings became interesting when it came to the implications of private schools on struggling parents. Majority of the respondents 57% indicated that education becomes a

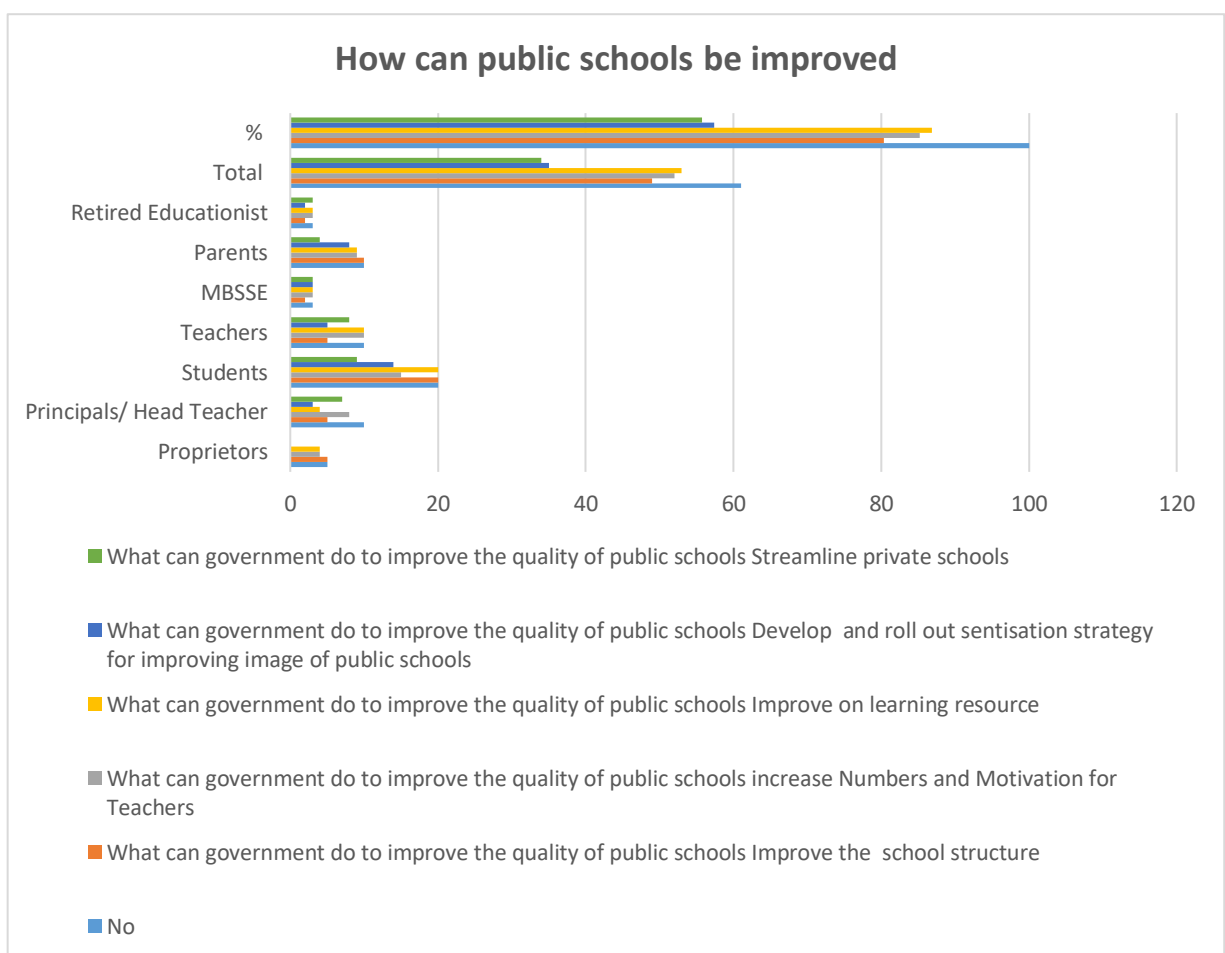
burden whilst, 52% indicated that, parents are ripped-off. On the other side 51% of respondents said parents get quality for their pains in payment of fees whilst 25% indicated that most parents are stressed up as a result.



From the above picture, it became more interesting when respondents were confronted on the issue of why parents prefer private schools. The various responses were categorised into just three main issues as presented below:

From the above majority of respondents 74% indicated esteem and social status, whilst 62% indicated good publicity. However, 61% stated that because children will get quality education.

Finally, when confronted with the magical questions on what can government do to make public schools the preferred choice? The following came from respondents:



As shown above, three key suggestions were prominent: improvement on school resource alluded to by 87%, increase number and motivation for trained teachers indicated by 85% and improve the schools' structures opined by 80%. However, there were other suggestions as follows: develop and roll out sensitisation strategy for improving image of public schools indicated by 57% and streamline private schools made up 56% of respondents.

Summary of findings

From the campaign perspective, the above findings points to available opportunity for the team to make inroads. This is because citizens are aware of global obligations of government to deliver equitable and quality education. The role of this action is to come up with clear strategies to help people understand through what medium of providers these obligations can be fully operationalize for all children. Also, respondents have clear expectations on the transformations they want to see in the public schools' systems. This is an opportunity for civil society to wake up and engage especially not that government is planning national budget for 2021.

The data, points to a clear preference for private education by parents. However, it is shocking to see that this is driven by factors other than the search for quality education. The analysis further produced compelling evidence on the implications of leaving education in the hands of private providers, on the right of children, the integrity of the system and the wellbeing of parents. From the focus group discussions and observations carried out it was clear that, even in so call not – for profit private schools there are hidden financial obligations that pose a burden to the average parent. This is despite government's launch of the free quality education and the increased investment in education. Because they own the bulk of schools and enrol more children, the bulk of this increased government investment service the interest of not –for profit private schools in the form of subsidies and payment of salaries for teachers. This is an addition to development fees and other hidden levies on parents during the course of the academic year.

Policy Asks

Following the above, the unanswered questions here key policy asks: who is benefitting? Using public funds to support private schools, who stands to gain from this arrangement? For whose benefit will government shift the responsibility for providing education to private entrepreneurs? How can private educational service delivery be properly regulated to benefit the public good? There are also key policy considerations for government in terms of: What kind of educational system do we want to see? Is it one that caters for specific social class within society? With all the investment in recent times and the new programmes, is government achieving desired returns in terms of performance of children in schools?

It is time for government to go back to the drawing board and make the right choices through the right policies. This is because; private partnership only serves private interest.

Conclusion

This report concludes on the note that, inequality within society is controllable. It is a political choice, the result of deliberate policy choices made by governments and international organizations. Where do we leave the right of the poorest of the poor, in rural areas who depend on the choices made by leaders to better their lives? Are they not citizens because they are poor? When we ask what kind of world we want, we do not say one for those who have, and another for those who do not. Let us therefore not create education systems that promote inequality – which we have enough of already.

Education should be a right available to all children regardless of their families' ability to pay, and that privatizing education shifts the onus from governments to citizens. In addition, leaving challenges faced in any attempt to provide quality education to the private sector may seem easier, but has huge consequences. It is evident that, this arrangement, only benefit the private investors. Some of whom our government find difficult to manage because of their financial advantage.

The national and international development agenda must therefore aim to eliminate private schools, not champion them. This position is not oblivious of the fact that, public education systems in Sierra Leone have challenges. This Campaign is proposing that, it is fundamentally critical to strengthen the public education system. We must therefore utilise International development cooperation, to support this drive and not advocate relinquishing to third parties, in the interest of a few and at the expense of the majority.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for regulating private education providers, the commercialisation of education and enhancing public school system.

Government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Finance

1. Even though recent government investment is appreciable, increase the financing of public education is critical, education spending through the ministries should be progressive and scrutiny of expenditures be increased.
2. Invest in teachers by improving and cleaning of teachers' data and allocation of qualified teachers to rural areas
3. Support the TSC and arm them with iron teeth to bite and take required actions

The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education:

1. The Teaching Service Commission should double efforts to increase the supply of trained and qualified teachers into Public schools, including through international cooperation for teacher training in Sierra Leone;
2. Setting up of a separate unit within the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, charged with the responsibility to approve, monitor and regulate the activities of private education providers;
3. MBSSE to strengthen leadership and governance of public schools and making them attractive and of good quality for the people who are in the majority.

The World Bank and their Donors

1. We urge the World Bank and their donors to ensure that development aid for education to the Government of Sierra Leone is used to support the *public provision* of free, quality education that benefits all without discrimination of any kind, such as discrimination based on socio-economic disadvantage, gender identity, race or disability.

Civil Society Organisations

1. Civil society to develop and rollout sensitisation strategy to improve the image of public schools;
2. Civil society should design actions to monitor accountability in the public sector and publish score cards; and

3. CSOs should mobilise and call for a review of the Education Act 2004 and push for the regulation of private schools.
4. CSOs to popularise the Abidjan Protocols for government to take ownership for the provisions of quality public education as a fundamental human right for every Sierra Leonean child whether rich or poor, disabled or abled, male or female.

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