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CHAPTER 1

Low-fee Private Schooling: issues and evidence

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Background and Aims

In 2001, when I first began studying low-fee private schooling, there were almost no published studies in the scholarly literature on the topic. Technical reports on the use of unrecognised or 'spontaneous' forms of private schooling by lower-income households had started to emerge (e.g. Majumdar & Vaidyanathan, 1995; Kim et al, 1999; Kitaev, 1999; Probe Team, 1999; Aggarwal, 2000; Alderman et al, 2001). An influential monograph by James Tooley (1999) based on a consultancy for the International Finance Corporation on emerging forms of private involvement in education across a range of developing countries captured the attention of policy elites. However, on the specific topic of low-fee private schooling, aside from a preliminary report of his first research project on this emerging form of provision (Tooley, 2001), there was little other than anecdotal reports and some news stories.

In international development and domestic policy circles, people spoke of 'budget schools', 'private schools for the poor', 'new types of private schools', or 'teaching shops' in amazed or derisory terms to describe this as yet undefined but seemingly tangibly different type of private schooling. However, until I was compelled to operationalise what seemed to me at the time a nebulous set of independently owned and operated private schools claiming to serve socially and economically disadvantaged groups, the term 'low-fee private schooling' did not exist.

One of my first experiences of reporting the results of my study on Lucknow District, Uttar Pradesh, India was at the World Congress of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) in 2004, held that year in Havana. While the paper was well received, the broader proposal to the research community to expand the focus on emerging forms of private provision in education in developing countries for serious study was met, at best, with scepticism from academics, who were doubtful that these phenomena existed or were in sufficient volume to be of interest, particularly regarding the participation of poorer households; more often, however, they were apprehensive or unwilling to engage with them, given the Education for All mandate. I found this lack of scholarly engagement deeply disconcerting, feeling that the implications of increasing and emerging forms of private provision - and particularly low-fee private schooling - were potentially too great to leave a vacuum of rigorous academic and systematic analysis when there were serious equity considerations at stake, particularly in countries where even the most basic indicators of universal primary coverage and access were low. Similar to Belfield and Levin's (2005) experience of the discourse on vouchers in education, it seemed that 'ideology trumped evidence' emerging from the ground – that is, evidence of the real schooling choices that some (seemingly increasing numbers of) disadvantaged households were making to access low-fee private schools in the context of Education for All – and neither side of the camp, whether opponents or proponents of private sector involvement in education, had a monopoly on ideological persuasion.

However, it did not take long for the tide to turn. Technical reports showed that private provision increased during the span of Jomtien and Dakar Education for All commitments, and grew globally by 58% between 1991 and 2004 (Patrinos et al, 2009, p. 3). Internationally, the discourse on the role of private non-state actors in education quickly gained prominence with influential policy actors such as the World Bank, UNESCO and donor organisations (LaRocque, 2006; Rose, 2007; Genevois, 2008; Patrinos et al, 2009), causing a heated debate among scholars, practitioners and policy-makers. The 2009 UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report addressed private non-state actors and provision for the first time in its analysis (a continued focus in subsequent reports), with a section devoted to low-fee private schooling (see UNESCO, 2008). Anecdotes of consulting, venture capital, and education companies investing in low-fee private schools emerged, the most recent example being the UK-based Pearson, reported as launching a £10 million fund to invest in 'affordable private schools' in Africa and Asia (Tran, 2012).

Among the first set of studies conducted on low-fee private schooling, there seemed to be a confluence of work on India (e.g. De et al, 2002; Tooley & Dixon, 2003; Srivastava, 2006), perhaps spurred by the number of earlier technical reports on the changing nature of private provision in the country. These studies used different methods, had different aims and scopes, and drew different conclusions. For example, De et al's (2002) household and school survey study of one district each in Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh found that while low-fee private schools were accessed in rural and urban areas, asset ownership confirmed that private-school children came from somewhat better-off families, and this choice was relatively more favourable for boys. The most disadvantaged accessed government schools

which were of comparatively lower quality on basic indicators of facilities and teaching activity. On the basis of household data, the researchers concluded that the more newly established, low-fee private schools would probably cease to function if government schools were held up to the task of delivering good-quality schooling, as it would free disadvantaged households from the strain of sacrificing income and selecting which child to enrol to which type of school, or whether to enrol any child at all.

Tooley and Dixon's (2003) original work in India, funded by the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT), was based on a case study of 15 schools, 315 parents, 315 students and 244 teachers in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. Based on the assumption of private sector superiority over the state, the project had four objectives for 'private schools for the poor': to create a sustainable business model for school capacity building; to explore appropriate pedagogy and curricula; to catalogue the regulatory framework; and to explore possibilities of creating a loan scheme for these schools and a private scholarship fund for the poorest students (p. 8). The researchers concluded that 'running a school even for low-income families was potentially a profitable undertaking, with estimated profits of about 25% in the year of recognition' (Tooley & Dixon, 2003, p. 19); many regulations were ignored or subject to the payment of bribes; and while these schools were not affordable to all, given state-sector dysfunctions, investment in them and establishing voucher or scholarship schemes offered the best chance for disadvantaged groups.

My in-depth qualitative work on Lucknow District, Uttar Pradesh showed that while low-fee private schools in that context certainly provided an alternative to state schools for a segment of the population, the exit of the mobilised poor from the state sector had the potential to contribute to a schooling arena increasingly segmented by social class, and further, that the set of corrupt practices and perverse incentives through which low-fee private schools operated and often gained recognition raised serious questions (see Srivastava, 2006, 2007a, 2008b). This range of conclusions signalled the quintessential debate that undergirds much of the broader discussion on the involvement of non-state actors in and privatisation of education in developing countries, underscoring the question: do low-fee private schools aggravate equity or mitigate disadvantage?

Almost a decade since those studies were conducted, there is now an emerging literature on low-fee private schooling in developing countries. As Walford (2011) notes, there remains a concentration of work on India (e.g. Shukla & Joshi, 2008; Baird 2009; Härmä, 2009; Tooley et al, 2010; Ohara, 2012), but there is also work on other countries, such as Ghana (Akyeampong, 2009; Akaguri, 2011), Malawi (Chimombo, 2009), Nigeria (Rose & Adelabu, 2007; Umar, 2008; Härmä, 2011), Pakistan (Alderman et al, 2003; Andrabi et al, 2008; Fennell & Malik, 2012), Uganda (Kisira, 2008), and others. Furthermore, numerous newer studies have documented the rise of different forms of private provision and private sector involvement (see collection of papers in Day Ashley & Caddell, 2006; Srivastava & Walford, 2007), including low-fee private schooling, but also private supplemental tutoring (e.g. Kenya and much of Asia) (e.g. Buchmann, 2002; Foondun, 2002; Bray, 2006); publicly and privately financed vouchers and targeted subsidies enabling private or government assisted private school choice (e.g. Chile, Colombia, India, Pakistan) (e.g. Gauri & Vawda 2004; Andrabi et al, 2008); public–private and multiple stakeholder partnership agreements (e.g. LaRocque, 2006; Genevois, 2008; Patrinos et al, 2009), including for-profit providers; and regulatory frameworks favouring increases in private schools (e.g. India, Madagascar, Malawi, Nigeria) (e.g. Rose & Adelabu 2007; Srivastava 2008b).

Thus, by the time the 2010 WCCES conference was held in Istanbul (the second after Havana), the topics of low-fee private schooling and, more broadly, non-state private sector involvement in the context of Education for All, while complex, ideological and problematic, were no longer on the fringe. The conference had a thematic group titled 'Privatization and Marketization in Education', with a number of illuminating presentations on private provision in different contexts around the world. I organised a research panel on low-fee private schooling under this theme to consolidate new field research evidence, from which some of the chapters in this volume are drawn (i.e. Akyeampong & Rolleston [Chapter 2]; Fennell [Chapter 3]; Härmä & Adefisayo [Chapter 6]), and which, to my surprise, attracted a standing-room-only audience.

This edited volume aims to add to the growing literature on low-fee private schooling by presenting seven empirically grounded studies in five countries (Ghana, India, Kenya, Nigeria and Pakistan), and begins and ends with an analysis of some of the evidence and debates on the topic thus far (Srivastava, Chapter 1; Walford, Chapter 9). The book aims to add to the literature in two ways. The first is by presenting research findings from studies across three levels of analysis that have proved relevant in the study of low-fee private schooling – the household, the school and the state. Chapters in this volume address household schooling choice behaviours regarding low-fee private and competing sectors (Akyeampong & Rolleston on Ghana [Chapter 2]; Fennell on Pakistan [Chapter 3]); the management, operation and relative quality of low-fee private schools (Dixon et al on Kenya [Chapter 4]; Härmä & Adefisayo on Nigeria [Chapter 6]); and changes to the regulatory frameworks governing low-fee private schools and the impact of low-fee private schools on those frameworks (Humayun et al on Pakistan [Chapter 8]; Ohara on India [Chapter 7]; Stern & Heyneman on Kenya [Chapter 5]).

The book does not seek to provide definitive answers since, as an emerging and evolving area of study, this would be premature. Instead, its second aim is to call attention to the need for further systematic research on low-fee private schooling, and to open up the debate by presenting studies that use a range of methods and, owing to the context specificity of the issue, draw different conclusions. The hope is that these studies may serve as springboards to further potential research.

Finally, the book does not aim to snuff out the political and sometimes heated debate surrounding low-fee private schooling (e.g. see Rose & Dyer, 2008; Sarangapani, 2009; Nambissan, 2010; Sarangapani & Winch, 2010; Walford, Chapter 9, this volume) and private provision more broadly, or to erase the complications that abound in conducting research in this area; rather, it seeks to engage with them. For example, in Chapter 9, Walford focuses on the debate and controversy that surrounded Tooley and his team's work when it was first published and that it still attracts (e,g., Rose & Dyer, 2008; Nambissan & Ball, 2010; Sarangapani & Winch 2010), providing a starting point towards this end. The remainder of this chapter will set out some of the salient issues that are at the heart of conducting research on low-fee private schooling as I see them, and will contextualise the chapters in this volume as relevant therein.

The Problem of Definition

Part of the problem in analysing low-fee private schooling is that much like the rest of the private sector, the low-fee private sector is heterogeneous. The heterogeneity of the private sector was perhaps most notably highlighted by Kitaev who, resulting from a large International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)-UNESCO study on private provision across Africa and Asia (Kitaev, 1999, 2007), supplied the following definition of private schools:

> An institution is classified as private if it is controlled and managed by a non-governmental organisation (e.g. church, trade union, business enterprise, etc.), or if its governing board consists mostly of members not selected by a public agency... The most common definition of a private school is one that is not managed by a state or public authority. (Kitaev, 2007, p. 92)

It is important to note that in this definition, the *management* arrangement assumes importance rather than the financing or regulatory arrangements, which, in addition to ownership, are also typically considered in classifying schools. Thus, a broader definition of 'private education is... all formal schools that are not public, and may be founded, owned, managed and financed by actors other than the state, even in cases when the state provides most of the funding and has considerable control over these schools' (Kitaev, 1999, p. 43).

The interest in low-fee private schools was initially sparked by their financing arrangements. Low-fee private schools were (and for the most part still are) usually characterised as being independently funded through comparatively lower tuition fees (relative to elite or higher-fee private schools), financially sustained through direct payments from poorer or relatively disadvantaged households (though not necessarily the poorest or most disadvantaged), and independently managed and owned by a single owner or team, usually comprising family members. Research on low-fee private schools thus far shows that they may be unrecognised or recognised; urban, peri-urban or rural; single operations or, as the sector has evolved, part of a chain; they may be run for different motives; they may provide instruction at a discrete level (usually primary) or at multiple levels (with or without recognition); and, as part of the private sector, they are likely to be governed by different regulations across countries (and in decentralised systems within countries). However, there is no standardised or universally agreed definition in the literature, complicating the collation of evidence across studies. Nonetheless, Phillipson (2008) attempts to provide one:

> Defining precisely what we mean by a 'low-cost private school' is easier to do in terms of what it is not rather than what it is. It is not a school run by a nongovernmental organisation [NGO] for charitable or development purposes. It is not a school run by a religious organisation for the furtherance of a particular set of moral values or beliefs. It is not a school offering an educational advantage to its pupils and charging a high price for the privilege of gaining access to it. Finally, it is not a school set up by the local community until the government agrees to take over ownership. In contrast to these distinctions, the low-cost private school is a school that has been set up and is owned by an individual or individuals for the purpose of making profit. (p. 1)

But Walford (2011) finds 'this definition unhelpful' and claims that it is

> not even consistently applied within [Phillipson's] book itself. Not only are these distinctions not clear, in that there may well be multiple reasons for starting and continuing to run a school for the poor, the exclusion of NGOs (especially small, local NGOs), religious organisations, and those who might eventually wish to obtain some state funding omits from consideration a considerable part of the growth in non-governmental low-fee schooling. It also restricts our understanding of why such schools might be started and how the schools themselves, and the motivations for their continued existence, may change in nature over a period of time. For example, even the idea that they must 'make a profit' collapses within the complexity of individuals and groups paying themselves salaries, or establishing schools so that they might gain employment. What is clear is that the vast majority of these new private schools are not the result of shareholders investing money in schools because they see that as the way to obtain the highest financial return. The reasons for starting and continuing with the schools are much more complex, and there is thus the need to consider the whole range of non-government-sector schools with low fees that are designed to serve some of the poorest families in each society. (pp. 402-403)

While one can certainly appreciate that the heterogeneity of private school types potentially falling into the low-fee sector necessitates a clarification on its scope, narrowing the focus too much may be as unhelpful as making it too broad. For example, implicit in part of Phillipson's (2008) definition that '[i]t is not a school offering an educational advantage to its pupils and charging a high price for the privilege of gaining access to it' (p. 1) is an assumption that low-fee private schools do not offer any educational advantage, with the further implication that poorer parents accessing these schools are 'duped'. While I agree that there are certainly many unanswered questions on the relative quality of these schools, and while my own work and that of others questions claims and assumptions of uniform 'better quality' when the baseline of the state sector in many contexts is so low as to be negligible (De et al, 2002; Srivastava, 2007b; Akaguri, 2011; Fennell & Malik, 2012; Fennell, Chapter 3, this volume), controversial as it may be, systematic research on the potential advantages of the low-fee private sector is mixed and in its infancy. It is premature to hold firm assumptions either way (see further discussion on quality below).

Second, work on low-fee private school choice shows complex motivations for accessing these schools, and for a range of reasons (Srivastava, 2006, 2008a; Härmä, 2009; Akaguri, 2011; Fennell, Chapter 3, this volume). While there is information asymmetry on the exact nature or quality of schooling provided, and relative inexperience with formal schooling of households that access them, some work nonetheless shows 'active choice' and engagement with these schools (Srivastava, 2006, 2007b, 2008a; Härmä, 2009; Fennell, Chapter 3, this volume), including actively seeking information about perceived quality. Further, while low-fee private schools may employ certain client retention strategies (e.g. raising school-based exam marks; passing students who did not master grade level, etc.) (Srivastava, 2007a), the relationship is more nuanced than 'dupers–duped'. Most studies on low-fee private schooling that analyse household perceptions and experiences report that they are aware that low-fee schools are not *the* absolute best choice, but may be preferred over other local schools (and are all they can afford) (De et al, 2002; Srivastava, 2006, 2008a; Härmä, 2009), though not necessarily in all instances (Noronha & Srivastava, 2012; Fennell, Chapter 3, this volume).

However, if the broader concern is with increased accountability to households - one of the key arguments of private schooling proponents - then this is a serious issue requiring further consideration and examination, as Phillipson (2008) rightly implies. There is no evidence in the low-fee private schooling literature thus far to suggest that the market-based engagement of households with these schools has translated into more equal power relationships between low-fee private schools owners - generally of higher social positioning than clients (and, in rural cases, deeply entrenched in historical class- and/or caste-based power relations) - and the households that access them, or of changed power structures within schools.

The third and final point in reassessing Phillipson's (2008) definition is that by excluding the possibility of government ownership, it is too static. It does not account for the way that the low-fee private sector may evolve, or for potential changes to regulatory frameworks that they may be subject to over time. Given that we are still at the beginning of our understanding of the way the low-fee private sector operates and may evolve, these possibilities cannot be ruled out a priori. For example, it may be that in certain contexts schools initially set up as independent low-fee operations evolve to a model in which the state takes them over, as was the case for private schools in many countries in the past.

Rose and Adelabu (2007) trace experiments with state take-over of private schools, including 'for-profit schools' in Nigeria over its history, as do Stern and Heyneman in this volume (Chapter 5) regarding *Harambee* schools in Kenya. Kitaev (2007) points to the nationalisation of private schools in transitional countries and formerly planned economies of Eastern Europe and the former USSR, and other countries such as Mongolia and Vietnam. In the current context, it is more likely that, as Walford (2011) notes in his assessment (quoted above), there may be some low-fee private schools that 'might eventually wish to obtain some state funding' (p. 402) similar to an aided model (e.g. India), primarily for the likely financial sustainability that state subsidisation would bring for the lowest fee-charging schools.

It may also be that individual governments decide to adopt low-fee schools into their fold to meet education targets beyond 2015, or institute greater attempts at regulating them. A relevant and topical example is the newly legislated Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 in India, effective as of April 2010 and de facto implemented in 2011, in which *all* private schools must provide 25% of their seats for free to socially and economically disadvantaged children until they complete elementary education (see Noronha & Srivastava [2012] for a report on initial implementation and the private sector). Schools are to be reimbursed the amount the state spends on education or the amount of the tuition fee charged at the school, whichever is less (Section 12, Government of India, 2009). Thus, under the Act, all private schools, even low-fee schools in Phillipson's (2008) strictest sense (i.e. independently established, self-financed and run by independent owners), will be subsidised by the state to an extent. This may be beneficial for private schools charging less than or close to the reimbursement amount, given the precarious nature of enrolment and fee collection at schools in this part of the spectrum, but it may be contested by others seeking greater autonomy from the state (Noronha & Srivastava, 2012; Ohara, 2012; Ohara, Chapter 7, this volume).

Walford (2011) is correct that the notion of 'profit' at these low-fee private schools is different from shareholders investing in a company as in a pure business model (particularly in family-run and -owned schools), and

there is a range of schools beyond Phillipson's (2008) definition that charge lower fees, including religious and NGO schools. However, there is something qualitatively different about the latter set, not least because religious schools are governed by very different regulations in most contexts, and NGO schools by a very different set of procedural norms and structures. For example, Andrabi et al (2008) provide a glimpse of the difference between low-fee private and religious schools (*madrasas*), taking Pakistan as a case. Rose (2007) provides an analysis of different types of non-state private education provision, including NGO, faith-based, spontaneous community, and philanthropic, which may be helpful. In short, not only are the management arrangements of these types of provision different, but the regulatory environment under which they operate is usually distinct and separate. It is unhelpful to conflate them here.[1]

Moving forward, perhaps characterising the low-fee private sector along a continuum of management, financing, ownership and regulatory arrangements may more suitable. From this approach, Phillipson's (2008) definition may be conceptualised as a 'pure type' of low-fee private school, in which ownership, financing and management are independent of the state, and adding a specification for fees charged within a range that may be accessible by some among poorer groups may be also helpful. For my study, I operationalised low-fee private schools as that saw themselves targeting disadvantaged groups; that were entirely self-financing through fees; that were independently run; and that charged a monthly tuition fee not exceeding about one day's earnings of a daily wage labourer at primary and junior levels (up to grade 8), and two days' earnings at secondary and higher secondary levels (grades 9 through 12). As such, it was partial to the 'pure type'. However, given the need to interrogate the development of the low-fee private sector and the many questions that are as yet unanswered, it did not and does not presuppose the relative quality of these schools, the motivations of parents to access them or owners to start them, or the institutional path that may develop in particular contexts. As such, it enables a certain level of flexibility for analysis.

This leads us to a final note on operationalisation for future studies, and, indeed, for the studies in this book. As researchers studying low-fee private schooling do so in different contexts, it follows that what constitutes 'low fees' for particular groups, in particular contexts, and at particular points in time is relative. This complication is in addition to those embedded in the practice of research - namely, the different terms under which researchers conduct research, different disciplinary norms, different methodological approaches, and different arrangements or terms of reference for contract research teams, all of which may affect operationalisation across studies.

Since the authors in this volume conducted their own separate studies and were not part of a large, unified team project, unlike, for example, studies in Phillipson's (2008) edited volume (though operationalisation across the three countries there - India, Nigeria and Uganda - was relative to the context), what constituted 'low fees' and 'low-fee private schools' varied to suit the contexts and approaches of individual studies and, in some cases, the terms of reference for their projects. Some researchers operated as part of teams on research projects as part of a broader research agenda on low-fee private schooling (Dixon et al [Chapter 4]); others worked in large team projects in which low-fee private schooling was just one aspect of the research (Akyeampong & Rolleston [Chapter 2]; Fennell [Chapter 3]); others were contracted by agencies with set terms (Härmä & Adefisayo [Chapter 6]; Humayun et al [Chapter 8]; Stern & Heyneman [Chapter 5]); while others operated as single researchers with academic purposes in mind (Ohara [Chapter 7]). Some researchers used official government or agency distinctions where these existed and were relevant (Harma & Adefisayo [Chapter 6]; Humayun et al [Chapter 8]; Stern & Heyneman [Chapter 5]), while others operationalised low-fee private schools as relevant to the particular contexts.

Most have provided an estimate of fees charged at schools in their studies as proportions of official minimum wage rates and/or proportions of household incomes. There was also fee variation at schools within individual studies. Typical of the low-fee private sector, some sources of variation were: levels of schooling (with increasing fee levels as schooling levels increase); location (typically, lower fees in rural and less populated areas/districts); and registration/recognition status (typically, higher fees in registered/recognised schools). These complications are a genuine facet and part of the messiness of conducting research more generally and on low-fee private schooling and private provision; they are a feature of the literature, and part of the complexity of presenting research in an edited volume.

Hidden Schools: the problem with official data

According to the latest data available in the 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report statistical tables, primary-level enrolment in private schools as a proportion of total enrolment in countries covered in this volume was 5% in Nigeria, 11% in Kenya, 17% in Ghana, and 31% in Pakistan in 2007-2008 (UNESCO, 2011, pp. 306-308).[2] For India, it is estimated that the private unaided sector accounted for 18% of enrolment in primary education for the same year, according to national education management information system (EMIS) data (NUEPA, 2009, p. 10), and 21% according to latest estimates (2009-2010) (NUEPA, 2011, p. 21).[3] However, the above estimates may be more valid indications of the recognised private sector (as in most countries) than of the private sector in its entirety. This has implications for how we estimate enrolment in or other essential characteristics of the low-fee private sector.

Macro-level estimates of the low-fee private sector are rendered difficult owing to the fact that a number of these schools occupy a part of the private sector that is unrecognised, and hence unaccounted for in official administrative data. Moreover, administrative units rarely classify or disaggregate data by fee level even for recognised schools, making comparisons and longitudinal analyses of the low-fee private sector difficult, if not impossible. These shortcomings are reproduced in the collation of international administrative data (e.g. UNESCO data) which largely rely on official EMIS and national data collection systems.

Of course, it is likely that official attempts to collect data from unrecognised schools would be difficult even if an attempt were made to do so, particularly since in many contexts they operate in an amorphous policy space following a set of 'shadow institutions' comprised of informal norms and practices often in contravention of the official regulatory framework (see Srivastava, 2008b). For example, it was recently announced that India's next EMIS data collection phase will attempt to include data from unrecognised schools. However, the Right to Education Act prohibits the functioning of unrecognised schools within three years of its enactment (Section 18, Government of India, 2009); thus, it is unclear how forthcoming these schools will be. Based on her field study in Delhi, where the weight of the act has been most strongly felt in the initial stages of implementation, Ohara's chapter in this volume (Chapter 7) focuses on the potential implications for unrecognised low-fee private schools, which feel threatened by the possibility of closure.

Similarly, in their chapter, Härmä and Adefisayo (Chapter 6) provide an inside look at the operations of schools in two areas of Nigeria (Makoko and Iwaya). Their analysis of 34 schools includes ones that would be considered 'illegal' according to the government classification system (i.e. 'unapproved schools'). A particular contribution of Härmä and Adefisayo's chapter is the inclusion of 'lagoon schools' that serve communities living in houses on stilts on the Lagos Lagoon. The researchers found that these low-fee private lagoon schools were unknown to many officials in the education administration, and that they, like other unapproved schools, preferred to remain hidden from sight.

Thus, some low-fee private schools may not admit to their status to being a school, claiming instead to being pre-primary or private tuition centres, as the formal regulations governing these education providers in many countries tend to be more relaxed (e.g., Rose & Adelabu, 2007; Srivastava, 2007b, 2008a). Further, it is likely that there are and would be distortions in data (e.g. under-reporting fee levels and over-reporting teachers' salaries and qualifications) even for recognised low-fee and other private schools since there is pressure to comply on paper with official fee caps and other requirements. (Whether or not they comply in practice is a separate issue.) For these reasons, capturing trends within the low-fee private sector over time is rendered difficult, and is largely dependent on revisiting field sites by individual researchers where this is possible.

Affordability?

Perhaps one of the most contested points regarding the low-fee private sector is its presumed affordability. For a more nuanced understanding, the question is, *affordable for whom?* Research until now has shown that low-fee private schools are part of the non-state sector that is accessible to some segment of the population in developing countries that would be considered to be from among relatively poorer groups, and that would not normally have had access to private schooling in the more typical context where the sector is largely high-fee and catering to elite or privileged middle classes.

The evidence on low-fee private schooling suggests that it would not be incorrect to characterise many of these students as first-generation learners or as having parents with lower education levels relative to more advantaged and richer groups, and as tending, relative to these groups, to come from households that participate in the informal economy to a greater extent, that have lower-paid jobs, that make substantial sacrifices (economically and emotionally) to access the private sector, and that are more likely to be affected by migration (see Srivastava, 2006; Härmä, 2009; Akaguri, 2011; Akyeampong & Rolleston, Chapter 2, this volume; Fennell, Chapter 3, this volume). However, it is also evident by virtue of the fact that these schools charge tuition fees (in addition to other costs, such as books, transportation, activities, etc.) that households accessing low-fee private schools, while likely drawn from the lower-middle and working classes, are unlikely to be the *most disadvantaged* or the poorest of the poor from the bottom 20% (Lewin, 2007). This distinction is important and should be noted against totalising claims on the affordability of the sector (see Rose & Dyer, 2008, for critiques).

This is not surprising. There is ample literature confirming that tuition and other hidden schooling costs in state and private sectors are most prohibitive on the most disadvantaged and poorest (see Akyeampong & Rolleston, Chapter 2, this volume; Stern & Heyneman, Chapter 5, this volume for a review of the relevant literature). Siddhu's (2010) review of the literature confirmed that recent analyses of survey data and randomised trial studies in countries as diverse as Sri Lanka, Uganda, India and Kenya found participation in schooling 'to be more responsive to cost levels' (p. 3) than even previous studies had found. Akyeampong's (2009) analysis of Ghana's Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education policy showed that the richest made the most gain in terms of participation in basic education, noting incidents of over-age enrolment, child labour, and late entry all disproportionately related to poorer and disadvantaged households.

Akyeampong and Rolleston's analysis of Ghana Living Standards Survey data in this volume (Chapter 2) shows that private school attendance was notably more common among 'non-poor' households than it was among households falling in the 'poor' and 'extremely poor' consumption poverty categories. While private enrolment in all welfare deciles increased between 1991/1992 and 2005/2006, the highest incidences were in the highest welfare

decile (i.e. the most advantaged). In a similar vein, Lewin's (2007) analysis of Demographic Health Survey household data from 23 countries in sub-Saharan Africa showed that participation in primary and secondary education was heavily skewed by household income, location and gender. In this context, he concludes: 'Where the growth of low-cost ... non-government providers reflects state failure to serve low/middle income households it is not ... likely to reach the ultra-poor and the "last 20%"' (Lewin, 2007, p. 59) who are excluded from schooling.

Similarly, Mehrotra and Panchamukhi's (2006) study based on household survey data in India, with a representative sample covering more than 120,000 households and 1000 schools spread over 91 districts in eight states, found that private unaided schools did not seem to favour gender- or caste-based equity in enrolment. Härmä (2009), in her study of low-fee private schooling in Uttar Pradesh, India, found low-fee private schools to be unaffordable to the most disadvantaged in her sample (i.e. low-caste groups, Muslim groups, and households falling in the last quintile of the poverty index), as well as aggravated gender equity concerns. Thus, while the sector has certainly expanded schooling options for a segment of the population (an important contribution), the literature nonetheless points to reassessing claims of the supposed affordability of low-fee private schools for poor and disadvantaged groups en masse.

Given the potentially negative equity concerns associated with fees, an early experiment in urban and rural areas of Balochistan, Pakistan was conducted between 1995 and 1999 to see if low-fee schools for poor girls created by subsidies supported by a World Bank credit could be self-sustained (Alderman et al, 2003). The results showed that only about half of the urban schools and one rural school could be self-sufficient without charging higher tuition fees, increasing class sizes, or paying teachers lower salaries.

Experiments aiming to expand the use of the low-fee private sector also exist in the current context. For example, the Centre for Civil Society, an Indian think tank campaigning for parental school choice, does so by aiming to institute state-funded voucher programmes and voucher-like measures, acknowledging that these schools would otherwise be inaccessible: 'Some low income parents spend up to 50% of their income on the education of their children. There are still poorer parents who, in spite of their aspirations, cannot afford to' (Centre for Civil Society, 2011, webpage). However, Noronha and Srivastava's (2012) recent analysis of the experiences of disadvantaged households accessing private schools in Delhi through the Right to Education Act's 25% free seats provision showed that it was the relatively more advantaged among this group who secured free places at private schools considered to be more prestigious or in middle-class areas, and once they did, they incurred significant schooling costs (i.e. transportation, private tuition, capitation fees, etc.) which were higher than even fee-paying households accessing local low-fee private schools closer to the slum area in the study.

On closer reading, Tooley and Dixon (2005b), widely known as proponents of low-fee schooling, also show that low-fee private school proprietors in Nigeria and India were themselves wise to the fact that the more disadvantaged among their clients, described typically as orphans, more financially unstable, or migrants, would be unable to pay the 'low' fees charged. Thus, 9% of places from their sample schools in Makoko and 17.7% of places in sample schools in Hyderabad were provided for free or at concessionary rates (Tooley & Dixon, 2005b). However, there is controversy surrounding the researchers' implications that these concessions were philanthropic (Sarangapani & Winch, 2010), with other research showing that such concessions are likely marketing ploys by low-fee private school owners to retain their clientele (see e.g. Rose, 2002; Rose & Adelabu, 2007).

Similarly, based on interview data from poor rural households in Mfantseman District (the fourth poorest region in Ghana), Akyeampong and Rolleston contend (Chapter 2, this volume) that private providers project an image of affordability through flexible fee policies to sustain demand in a low-income context, stating: 'To attract clients on low or fragile incomes it was important that the schools come across as "affordable" through their fees policy' (p. 7). In fact, the private schooling cost per child for households in their study was on average nearly 30% of the estimated household income, which was nearly double that of public schooling. In their chapter on Nigeria, Härmä and Adefisayo (Chapter 6, this volume) report that children were sometimes allowed to stay enrolled when parents experienced difficulty paying fees, not only because of philanthropy and care for their pupils, but also 'to keep enrolments up, project a positive image, and in the hope that parents will eventually pay' (p. 134).

My work in Lucknow District showed that the motivations of low-fee private school owners were complex, with some desire to help their communities (particularly in rural areas), but that they had to reconcile competing interests for philanthropy with profit-making (Srivastava, 2007a). Fee concessions were provided by setting fees at an inflated figure for the majority of households and reducing the amount charged for some households, on the basis of either need or household ability to negotiate lower amounts. Thus, 'free' places were in fact the result of parents' bargaining and/or of schools' unwillingness to expel students who were in arrears, retaining clientele in the hopes that they may pay in the future, similar to Härmä and Adefisayo's results (Chapter 6, this volume), rather than being due to a concerted scholarship scheme.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the future development of low-fee private schooling research, is the point that poverty is dynamic, relational, multi-dimensional, and characterised by multiple deprivations, where economic circumstances and household income are just one factor of disadvantage (Kabeer, 2000; Rose & Dyer, 2008; Chege & Arnot, 2012).

Economic slowdown, seasonal migration, malnutrition, deep social fissures and entrenched exclusion, among other factors, have all been shown to adversely affect schooling and aggravate gender and other inequities resulting in drop-out (e.g. Lewin, 2007; Cameron, 2010; Dyer, 2010; Nambissan 2010; Siddhu, 2010; Ananga, 2011; Buxton, 2011), particularly where fees are involved, at key transition points, and as schooling levels increase.

While the concept of 'affordability' focuses on the immediate economic ability of households to access to low-fee private schools, it does not sufficiently engage with how long they may be able to access them, or with the deeper and multidimensional aspects of potential exclusionary or 'push-out' factors. In other words, affordability may be just one criterion. The question is, how do we understand long-term meaningful access in the low-fee private sector regarding exclusion or deprivation? Conceptualising household ability to access low-fee private schools in this way has significant implications in assessing claims about the sector's role in increasing access en masse, even in cases where access to these and other private schools may be state subsidised (see, e.g., Noronha & Srivastava, 2012).

The Question of Quality

Evidence in the existing literature concerning the relative quality of the state and low-fee private sectors is inconclusive. While the relative malfunctioning of the state sector in many countries, including those covered in this volume, has been widely noted and generally accepted as the impetus for the growth of these schools, the question of whether the low-fee private sector is uniformly of superior quality in absolute terms as a whole is fraught with debate. This has to do with the variance in results among studies that attempt to compare relative quality, but also (and perhaps more so) it involves considerations about *what we mean by quality*, raising a number of related questions: is it mainly a concern with achievement? What about schooling experiences? Social justice? Equity? Rights? Social mobility? Social cohesion? Does the type of provision matter? Who decides what quality is, and how? Assuming we can agree on a definition, how is quality improved?

According to Sayed and Ahmed (2011), the following conceptualisation may be useful:

> quality is understood as encompassing the interaction between what learners bring to learning (learner characteristics), what happens in the learning space such as school/classroom setting (enabling inputs), what happens to individuals as a consequence of education (outcomes) and the context within which the activity takes place. However, deciding on *what constitutes quality is an intensely value laden activity and involves both what is, but also what should be*. (p. 105; emphasis added)

Tikly and Barrett (2011) take this further, and make an important contribution to the education-quality discourse, arguing for the integration of context-specific social justice approaches beyond the more common human capital and rights-based discourses that have permeated the education literature (see also Carney, 2003; Tikly, 2011). This has thus far been missing from general discussions of education quality more broadly, and certainly from the low-fee private schooling literature assessing relative quality. The latter discussion has been largely influenced by school-effectiveness-type studies assessing relative achievement levels in core subjects such as mathematics and language, or comparing facilities and teacher or classroom inputs across school types. The focus on *schooling processes and social outcomes* has largely been missing from such analyses, as have the long-term implications and impacts of low-fee private schooling in the context of uneven provision to the disadvantaged.

Inputs

Some studies have compared a range of inputs across private schools serving lower-income populations and government schools. In Nairobi, Ngware et al (2010) found government schools performed better on some attributes (i.e. teacher qualifications, building facilities and pupil textbook ratios) but worse on others (i.e. pupil–toilet ratios, pupil–teacher ratio). In relatively deprived Mfantseman District, Ghana, Akaguri (2011) found that public schools had more and better trained teachers than low-fee private schools, and pupil-teacher ratios were higher in primary and junior levels in public schools, but supply-wise, there were about three times as many public schools as low-fee private schools. Tooley and Dixon's (2006) earlier work in Hyderabad and Mahbubnagar districts in Andhra Pradesh, India showed that on a range of input indicators (classrooms, toilets, drinking water, etc.), and in some observation of 'teaching activity', low-fee private schools seemed to perform better.

De et al's (2002) study in Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, India found that low levels of school income in low-fee private schools led to poorly qualified and poorly paid teaching staff, with high turnover. The most disadvantaged groups accessed government schools which were comparatively of even lower quality on basic indicators of facilities and teaching activity. In her study of recognised and unrecognised private unaided low-fee primary schools in 10 villages in Uttar Pradesh, Härmä (2009) found that none of the teachers were trained, that only 34% had secondary schooling, and that they received salaries only up to one-tenth of those in government schools. Muralidharan and Kremer's (2007) results from a nationally representative survey of rural private primary schools in India found no significant difference between private and public school infrastructure, and 'the results with state and with village fixed effects suggest that conditional on being in the same village, private schools have poorer facilities and infrastructure than the public schools' (pp. 10-11). The mean teachers' salary at these schools was less than at government schools, being typically one-fifth of the amount at the latter.

Similarly, Andrabi et al's (2008) study in Pakistan showed that low-fee private schools could only keep their fees at comparatively lower rates by reducing recurrent costs, mainly by paying low teachers' salaries. This finding has been confirmed in all of the studies in this volume where this was examined, as well as by others (e.g. Rose & Adelabu, 2007; Phillipson, 2008; Härmä, 2009; Ohara, 2012). Interestingly, and perhaps controversially, however, Andrabi et al (2008) suggest that at the primary level, the use of unqualified, lesser-paid teachers in these schools, but who are local, predominantly female, have secondary education, and are accountable (and thus less absent), may not necessarily compromise quality: 'If what really matters for primary schooling is that the teacher puts in effort, the more consistent presence of female teachers at private schools may more than compensate for their lower qualifications since a primary school teacher who has a higher level of formal education will have less impact if she shows up for work less often' (p. 352). They warn that results are preliminary, and not necessarily replicable to other contexts and to higher levels of education, even in Pakistan.

However, Nambissan (2010) asserts that there has been a general acceptance of less skilled and poorly paid teachers as suitable alternatives in order to expand education to disadvantaged children: 'the advocacy of budget schools for the poor and for "para skilling" to cut costs and maximise profits is a travesty of social justice and the right to education for their children' (p. 735) (see also Sarangapani, 2009). Furthermore, the overwhelming use of female teachers by low-fee private schools because of their positioning 'as the cheapest source of labor' (Andrabi et al, 2008, p. 331) is disconcerting. Approaching quality education from an integrated social justice approach would have to ensure that not only are children from disadvantaged backgrounds provided with equitable basic resources, a key component of which consists of teachers, but also that teachers' basic rights of fair wages are protected. In this vein, there have been reports, for example, that the Coalition of Uganda Private Teachers Association and the Ministry of Education are to establish a framework for the government to regulate fees in the private sector and take over teachers' welfare concerns. The impact of such emerging discourse and regulations concerning the low-fee private sector in Uganda, and more generally, remains to be seen.

Achievement

Some studies have attempted to assess relative achievement of state and private schools serving disadvantaged groups. Akaguri's (2011) results in Ghana showed that the question 'cannot be answered in a way that suggests low-fee private schools perform consistently better than their public school counterparts' (p. 27). The evidence from his analysis of low-fee private and public school Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results showed that differences were not significantly different or consistent. In some communities low-fee private schools performed better, in others they performed as poorly as public schools, and in still others, some public schools performed as well as low-fee private schools. Though not specifically focusing on low-fee private schools, Muralidharan and Kremer (2007) found that in rural Indian private schools, controlling for family and other characteristics reduced the private-school advantage that Class 4 students had on a standardised mathematics and language test (weighted in favour of mathematics), but that results remained 'strongly significant and of considerable magnitude (0.4 standard deviations on the test)' (p. 15).

Pratham's (2010) extensive national rural 2009 ASER survey covering 30 villages each in every district in India showed that once characteristics other than the type of school were controlled for (e.g. mother's education, father's education, private tuition, etc.), the learning differential between government and private school students fell dramatically from 8.6 percentage points to 2.9 percentage points overall (p. 7). Furthermore, in some states (i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu) the controlled difference showed a negative relationship between private school attendance and local language achievement. This led the team to conclude that, at least in the case of reading in the local language, rural private schools generally performed only marginally better than government schools, and in some cases, no better. Closer readings of the work of Tooley and his colleagues also reveal variation. In later analyses of Indian data, while the researchers found a private school advantage in mathematics and English (to be expected, since many private schools were purportedly English-medium), this achievement gap narrowed when background variables were controlled for, and disappeared in the case of Urdu (Tooley et al, 2010).

Dixon et al's chapter in this volume (Chapter 4) presents a fresh analysis of original data gathered in slum areas of Nairobi. Using multi-level modelling techniques, it assesses the relative quality of public and private schools for low-income families regarding the achievement of students at both school types, controlling for background variables. Taking all other factors into account, the researchers found a significant positive relationship between private school attendance and test scores in mathematics and Kiswahili, but no statistically significant difference in English. In all tests, boys fared less well than girls. When pupil characteristics (i.e. IQ, family income, sex, age) were taken into account, the private school effect was reduced for English and Kiswahili for boys, also reducing also the attainment gap with girls.

The significance of Dixon et al's results presented in this volume, as well as others in the broader literature, lies in the need for *nuanced interpretation* when speaking of relative quality in terms of achievement to avoid blanket assessments about the superiority of the low-fee private sector over the state sector, or vice versa. For example, results in the studies above show variance in language achievement (local or English), though in mathematics, private school students in those studies seemed to perform better. The role of individual background characteristics also seems important, but there may also be other characteristics that are contextual and that have yet to be explored. Thus, low-fee private schools may be better in some areas and under certain conditions than state schools, but not in others. The question then becomes not whether low-fee private schools are uniformly better, but *in what instances, under which circumstances, and owing to which background characteristics do students in different school types achieve higher results?*

Recognition/Registration

Quality assessment is complicated further, since official external signifiers such as recognition or registration status (as the case may be), meant to confer certain minimal standards in terms of basic infrastructure, teacher qualifications, and curricula, are not always accurate markers. Tooley and Dixon's (2005a) work in Andhra Pradesh, my study in Uttar Pradesh (Srivastava, 2008b), and Ohara's study in Delhi (Chapter 7, this volume) found that low-fee private schools in these contexts often gained recognition through informal practices and bribery, not meeting set norms (see Rose & Adelabu, 2007; Härmä & Adefisayo, Chapter 6, this volume, for similar results in Nigeria). As mentioned above, this encourages the development of a shadow system of rules and practices which undermine the formal regulatory framework, weakening the recognition system as an enforcement mechanism to maintain basic quality standards.

Härmä and Adefisayo (Chapter 6, this volume) describe the challenges that schools in Makoko and Iwaya, Nigeria face in upgrading their facilities and expanding operations, forcing many to operate underground and without having met set norms. Ohara's chapter (Chapter 7, this volume) presents an analysis of the potential implications for low-fee private schools operating in Delhi under the Right to Education Act, in which unrecognised schools are compelled to obtain recognition or face closure. Her study reveals the strong contestation mounted by private school lobbies against changes in the regulatory environment. Results showed that, feeling threatened, unrecognised low-fee private schools made an effort to affiliate themselves with recognised schools and other organisations considered more powerful to increase their legitimacy. Furthermore, larger and more profitable recognised schools also opposed the regulations because some of them simultaneously ran unrecognised schools, seeking later to expand their operations by 'chaining' or 'branching'. Similar to Ohara's findings, research evidence from the other studies above suggests that many low-fee private schools thus operate through informal arrangements with other private schools or with the state, or usurp the process entirely.

Among Stern and Heyneman's analysis of Kenya (Chapter 5, this volume) is a detailed description of the registration process for low-fee and other private schools in the country, comprising a complex set of procedures. In particular, the arrangements for land ownership were tricky and complex, representing a barrier for private and even government schools, particularly in slum areas. They further found that delayed inspections, lost forms, postponed committee meetings, or cumbersome paperwork led to significant delays for registration. This prompted many private school owners to pre-emptively open their schools without registration, well aware that insufficient monitoring by central authorities, with their lack of manpower, would ward off immediate consequences (see also Chimombo, 2009 for similar results in Malawi).

Humayun et al's chapter (Chapter 8, this volume) provides an interesting analysis of the impact of Pakistan's attempt at regulating private schools by establishing a self-financed body, the Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA) for Islamabad Capital Territory, in order to exert some quality control. The logic behind PEIRA's creation was that promoting private sector development and regulating schools in accordance with established norms would lead to improved quality of the private education sector - in particular, low-fee private schools. However, the study found that PEIRA had failed to provide quality service standards for schools, and further, since its financing partly relied on fee payments received by private schools for inspection and registration, its credibility as a regulating authority was called into question. Finally, for the lowest fee schools, the financing structure created an additional financial burden, and those with the tightest revenue margins likely passed inspection and registration costs on to parents.

Quality Perceptions and Recuperation

Finally, school choice, leading some households to access low-fee private or other private schools, may be a marker of perceived quality in certain instances, but it may not in others. This is not to say that state sector dysfunctions do not exist, but that low-fee private school choice *may also* be related to perceived social status, prestige, gender norms, parental aspirations, or concerns with social closure. Akaguri (2011) found that household perceptions about the better quality of low-fee private schools in Mfantseman District, Ghana were 'based on beliefs rather than realities' (p. vii) and did not match actual examination results, but were deeply held. In their chapter on Ghana (Chapter 2, this volume), Akyeampong and Rolleston find that 'the power of image and marketing in shaping attitudes towards low-fee private schooling' (p. 57) was key, reflecting a bias and reinforcing peer group effects, rather than superior provision. My study showed that motivations to access low-fee private schools in Lucknow District, India were complex and sometimes ideological, and reflected such

concerns as presumed better quality (without necessarily having information of performance on achievement or other quality indicators), prestige, marriage or labour market aspirations, peer pressure, and a desire on the part of some parents to distance themselves from more 'backward' or 'less educationally aware' parents in their communities (Srivastava, 2006, 2008a).

In this vein, some household aspirations, if set against discursive gendered, classist and casteist contexts, may not simply reinforce a desire to access 'better schools', but may also reproduce existing social inequities (Stash & Hannum, 2001; Carney, 2003; Jeffrey et al, 2005; Rao, 2010). The low-fee and more recent private schooling literature indicates a preference for accessing the private sector (including private tuition) to a greater extent for boys because of institutional factors including assumed labour market returns, patrilineal marriage customs, and cost constraints, particularly in Asian and African contexts (De et al, 2002; Härmä, 2009; Cameron, 2010; Kamwendo, 2010; Rao, 2010; Siddhu, 2010; Noronha & Srivastava, 2012). Even Tooley and Dixon's (2006) analysis of low-fee private schooling in Andhra Pradesh indicated potential gender bias, with the authors stating that 'in Hyderabad, boys, if they are in school, are more likely to go to private unaided school [than government schools]' (p. 451), and private unaided schools in Mahbubnagar had slightly more boys than girls, representative of the schooling situation more generally. While my analysis was an exception, showing as many girls in low-fee private schools as boys, the reasons behind this choice were often gendered, though there was evidence that the mental models affecting that choice attempted to challenge dominant perceptions, and sometimes vehemently so (Srivastava, 2006).[4]

Much of this literature also reveals significant class, caste and other socio-economic factors in accessing low-fee and other private schools (De et al, 2002; Härmä, 2009; Rao, 2010; Siddhu, 2010; Noronha & Srivastava, 2012). However, the confluence of low-fee and other private schooling work on India on the topic of household schooling decisions and the need for more fine-grained analyses on these issues indicates a need for future research to diversify the methods used in favour of in-depth analyses, as well as the need to revisit existing work and expand such work to other contexts.

Assessing the accuracy of low-fee private school choice and schooling decisions as markers of quality is crucial since the classical literature (stemming primarily from western contexts) espoused school choice as a lever for enhancing competition between public and private schools, thus increasing the quality of the education sector as a whole (e.g. Chubb & Moe, 1990; Hoxby, 2003). A suitable application in this regard is Hirschman's (1970) framework of exit, voice and loyalty in response to the low quality of a service. Exiting to a competitor is meant to provide a clear signal for the organisation to correct deficiencies, whereas voice is meant to express dissatisfaction with the service, but is predicated on a notion of loyalty to the organisation. The limited work on the low-fee private sector in this regard (see Srivastava, 2007b, for India; Fennell & Malik, 2012, and Fennell, Chapter 3, this volume, for Pakistan) has concluded that the exit of the mobilised poor to the low-fee private sector did not seem to have the recuperative effect of increasing the quality of local state schools because incentives were not tied to these mechanisms (Srivastava, 2007b), and there is a substantive time lag before effects are felt (Fennell & Malik, 2012).

Fennell's chapter in this volume (Chapter 3) on quality discernment in rural and urban areas of two districts in Pakistan - Sargodha (Punjab province) and Charsadda (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province) - makes a further important contribution, problematising the straightforward notion of the supposed superior quality of the private sector and inferior quality of the government sector, and its perception. Using Hirschman's framework to determine whether exit and voice mechanisms seemed to exert a potential recuperative effect on local schools, the presentation of qualitative focus group and interview data relating to youths' and parents' perceptions of low-fee private and other local schools provides interesting insights. For many participants, quality was a central consideration, but they were not necessarily convinced that it was better in low-fee private schools in all cases, and felt that, at times, this choice was made by relatively better-off households as a sign of social status. Fennell concludes that differences in perception and in levels of experience with the low-fee private sector imply that low-quality schooling will not receive adequate pressure to improve in the short run.

Looking Ahead

As post-2015 education aims and targets are being contemplated and set, we see continued debate not only on the potential role that the non-state private sector, comprising myriad different actors and arrangements, may play in achieving basic indicators of initial entry and access, but also on its impacts on the quality of basic (and, increasingly, secondary) education and longer-term social equity goals. In this debate, the existence of the low-fee private sector is no longer seen as an anomaly, as it was at the beginning of the Education for All movement, but is taken as a de facto given in many developing countries.

However, as I hope this chapter and the studies in this volume show, there is much work to be done in understanding the full impact of the low-fee private sector. A number of interests, ideological, political, academic and commercial, are at play. Furthermore, initial understandings of the low-fee private sector in the literature thus far are tentative, and should be interpreted with caution and nuance, attuned to the changing contexts in specific countries over time, and to the potential interests shaping future activities of and in the sector.

Regarding future research, there is an urgent need to broaden the focus on the relative quality of the low-fee and state sectors beyond inputs and achievement analyses, to include the sector's impact on relative schooling experiences, schooling processes and social outcomes, and to seriously consider the dynamic aspects of 'disadvantage' and how groups thus defined are positioned within and against these sectors. This is, of course, a call to much longer programmes of study, but goes, I believe, to the heart of potentially answering the question of whether the low-fee private sector aggravates equity or mitigates disadvantage.

Notes

[1] Of course, it may be that in certain contexts the regulatory environments for NGO, religious, independent/individual, and other non-state schools are not separate or distinct. Where it is contextually relevant to include them in analyses of the low-fee private sector, it should be done. See, for example, Härmä & Adefisayo, Chapter 6, this volume, for Nigeria.

[2] The data for Ghana are reported as being based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimates.

[3] Private sector enrolment data were not available for India in the 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2011).

[4] Though not specifically focusing on private schooling, Arnot et al (2012) report similar micro-changes in rural Ghana and India regarding the impact of education on gender roles/constructions and transitions.

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