

The Implications of Provision of Secondary Education through Public-Private Partnership to Equity of Access among Low- Income Households in Tanzania

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Abstract

This paper seeks to answer three research questions: (1) what kind of public-private partnerships exist in the provision of secondary education in Tanzania? (2) What are the implications of the existing kinds of public-private partnership for equity of access among low-income households? And (3) Are there mechanisms for ensuring equity of access to low-income households within the existing kinds of public-private partnership? The study employed a mixed methodology approach. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to obtain a sample of 191 respondents in the Dar es Salaam region. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. The qualitative data were analysed using Miles and Huberman's model of qualitative data analysis, while the quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 19. The study produced three key findings: (1) the existing public-private partnership in the provision of secondary education in Tanzania is merely an invitation of the private sector into the provision of secondary education and that there is no specific, documented kind of public-private partnership; hence, the partnership arises due to default or despair rather than design; (2) the existing public-private partnerships have negative implications for equity of access among low-income households; and (3) there is a paucity of mechanisms for ensuring equity of access for students from low-income households. The paper recommends that it is necessary to review the existing public-private partnerships in education and devise strategies that may prove of benefit to less well-off students.

Key words: Public-Private Partnership; Secondary Education; Education financing; Equity of access; Tanzania; Low-Income households

1. Introduction

The argument that education is a vital underpinning in the war against poverty is well documented. Education is recognized as the foundation of societies' economic development: it facilitates the acquisition of the skills and attitude necessary to facilitate innovation and hence raises national productivity; it offers individuals the opportunity to access a better life; it is a means of overcoming household poverty and achieving high living standards; and forms the basis for improving public health and facilitating the use of new technologies (Galabawa & Agu 2001; Watkins 2000; Galabawa 2005; Wedgwood 2007; Rose & Dyer 2008). Arguably, education is the most powerful catalyst for poverty reduction; similarly, educational deprivation is equally a powerful cause of poverty (Watkins 2000; Avenstrup 2006; Knight, Shi & Quheng 2007; Rose et al. 2008). The literature maintains that the effect of investing in education outweighs the economic investment (Watkins 2000; Galabawa 2005).

The various benefits of investing in education suggest that governments cannot escape their responsibility for educating people. However, providing and financing education is a huge, complex responsibility. Hence, many countries are experiencing an inability to cope with the increasing demand for education. Also, the public funding of education in many countries has been shown to be volatile, due to microeconomic instability and fiscal crises (Bray, 2000). To overcome this challenge, the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All emphasised the importance of developing partnerships between governments and non-government organizations in the provision of education. A similar commitment received even stronger emphasis in the Dakar Framework of Action (UNESCO, 2000). Indeed, the World Declaration on Education for All and the Dakar framework of Action precipitated the adaption of public-private partnership (PPP) in the provision of education in many countries, including those in which education has been traditionally under the domain of the government. Hence,

the private sector is currently playing a crucial role and has become a prominent, useful and inevitable tool in the provision of education.

In line with the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All and the Dakar Framework of Action, Tanzania adopted PPP in the provision of education. Hence, secondary education in Tanzania is offered by both government and non-government organizations. Private secondary schools consist of schools owned and managed by religious institutions (seminaries), parents associations, the military and other private individuals and organizations. Currently, almost all of the regions of the Tanzanian mainland host both public and private secondary schools. Indeed, the various evidences reviewed suggest that PPP in the provision of secondary education is growing at an alarming rate in Tanzania. Currently, private schools play a major role and have a substantial share in the provision of education. The statistics show that the number of private secondary schools increased from 599 in 2006 to 942 in 2011 (United Republic of Tanzania URT, 2011). These data suggest that there is an average increase of 68 new secondary schools per year. Further evidence shows that, within a one year period, from 2010 and 2011, the number of private secondary schools increased from 819 to 942, an increase of 123 private schools (URT, 2009). The increase in the number of private secondary schools suggests the government's willingness to adopt PPP in the provision of education. It is worth remembering that a well designed PPP in the provision of education is a useful tool for increasing general access, to help students from low-income households to access education in private schools and to reduce the fiscal pressure and governments' burden of providing social services. Similarly, if poorly designed, PPP may have negative implications for equity of access to education by children from low-income households. The actual kinds of PPP in Tanzania and their implications for equity of access by low-income households are not clearly known. It is this circumstance that inspired the present inquiry.

2. Research Questions

The study set out to explore the following research questions:

- (1) What kind of public-private partnerships exist in the provision of secondary education in Tanzania?
- (2) What are the implications of the existing kinds of public-private partnership for equity of access among low-income households?
- (3) Are there mechanisms for ensuring equity of access to low-income households within the existing kinds of public-private partnership?

3. Literature Review

The rationale for creating partnerships in developing countries is explained in the context of the demand and supply of education. From the demand angle, two factors drive the prevalence of private schools. The first factor is the unmet demand, whereby private schools exist because there is an excess demand for education while the capacity of government schools is small compared to the number of students who wish to attend school (Pessoa, 2008). In this case, the smaller the capacity of the government schools relative to the size of the age cohort that should be in school, the larger will be the excess demand and the private sector provision. The second reason for the prevalence of private schools is the differentiated demand whereby private schooling is demanded as a result of differences in taste. On the supply side, when the government cannot afford to supply schooling for all, this results in an increased supply of private schools (Pessoa, 2008). Therefore, parents respond to the perceived inadequate supply of public education by enrolling their children in private school. Notably, since low-income households spend much of their income on subsistence, it is ironic that they must take the difficult decision to enrol their children in private schools (Bray, 2004).

The literature reveals contradictory arguments regarding the benefits of PPP in education provision. While some scholars support it, others tend to criticize it. Scholars who support PPP provide the following four arguments: firstly, the governments in developing countries face considerable resource constraints regarding the financing and provision of education services. It is in this context that the private sector involvement of either for-profit or not-for-profit organizations emerges as an alternative means of ensuring access to providing additional education that cannot be provided by the government (UNICEF & ADB, 2010). Secondly, PPP creates a shorter route of accountability which enables parents to hold accountable the educational providers directly for the quality of education compared to the long political accountability route. Notably, the short route to accountability not only increases the quality of education but also strengthens local accountability (Pessoa, 2007). Thirdly, PPP increases the efficiency of education services delivery. It allows governments to transfer some of their responsibility to the private sector while focusing on the most delicate, sensitive areas, such as policy planning and quality assurance. Lastly, PPP contracts are believed to be more flexible than purely public sector

arrangements. This increases the degree of autonomy over the organization of schools and teachers, which increases the efficiency and quality of education. The scholars who criticize PPP hold that an increase in the educational choices of students and their families may increase the degree of socio-economic segregation. Hence, PPP may lead to poorer students being left behind in the deteriorating public schools. Notably, poorly planned PPP increases the inequity of access to students of a different socio-economic status (Pessoa, 2008).

4. Methodology of the Study

This study was conducted in the Dar es Salaam region. This region was selected for two reasons: firstly, it has a heterogeneous population consisting of a mixture of households of high, middle, low and very low economic status. Hence, Dar es Salaam represents other regions with the best mix of dwellers who cannot be readily found in any other region of the country. Secondly, the region has witnessed a massive increase in the number of private schools. The data suggest that, Dar es Salaam is the leading region in terms of the number of private secondary schools, and in year 2011 the region had 199 private schools (United Republic of Tanzania URT, 2011). The massive increase in the number of private schools and the mixture of residents in the region mean that this is a viable site for investigating the implications of PPP in the provision of secondary education for equity of access by children from low-income households.

The study employed a concurrent mixed methodology; hence, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently. The sample was selected using purposeful and random sampling strategies. Purposefully sampling was used to select a sample of 3 schools, 9 School Management Team members (SMT), 60 parents and 2 policy analysts. The criterion that was used to select the schools was the rate of fees charged. The three selected schools had the following major characteristics. Private school A charged the highest fee of Tsh 2,889,000 (\$1790.53)¹ per annum, with a total of 522 students (263 boys, 259 girls). Private school B charged a relatively lower school fee of Tsh 985,000 (\$610.48) per annum, with a total number of 1251 students (714 boys, 537 girls). A third school was a government school which charged the lowest fee of Tsh 20,000 (\$12.40) per annum, with a total number of 1247 students (637 boys, 610 girls). At each school, the study involved a sample of 40 form four students. These were selected using a simple random sampling technique.

Qualitative data were analysed using the 1994 Miles and Huberman model of qualitative data analysis, which involved summarising the interview responses on data display sheets. On the other hand, SPSS version 19 was used to create the percentages and frequencies of the data collected from the questionnaires.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Existing kinds of PPP in education

Interviews with the policy analysts suggest that there were no documented, specific kinds of PPP in the provision of secondary education in Tanzania. It was revealed that the partnerships that currently exist are merely an invitation to the private sector to participate in the provision of secondary education, parallel with the public schools. It was noted that the aim of the existing partnership is to improve access and reduce the government expenditure on education. Policy analyst 1 commented:

Currently, we don't have specific types of public-private partnership in the provision of secondary education. The existing partnership is simply a co-existence of both the public and private secondary schools operating together with the aim of improving access to secondary education (Interview, Policy analyst 1).

Further findings suggest that, in Tanzania, PPP in the provision of secondary education is characterised by a lack of subsidies for complementing the tuition and other charges imposed by the private schools that would make these schools more affordable and increase their capacity. Also, it was revealed that there were no contracts between the government and private schools that could allow the purchase of enrolments in private schools. Consequently, the private schools were independent and responsible for their own operational costs. This finding concurs with that of Tooley and Dixon (2006), who found that, in Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi, the expanded role of the non-state sector has been, in many cases, by default and despair rather than by design. The findings further show that, in the existing partnerships, there is no assistance available for either the operating costs or the teachers and other staff's salaries. Hence, this means that the owners must start and maintain their schools from their own personal funds and the profits generated. Indeed, the findings on the existing PPP in secondary education and how it operates suggest that PPP in

¹ 1 US\$=1613.49 Tanzanian shillings

Tanzania is a result of the government's inability to provide secondary education for all by itself. This inability is mainly due to the increased demand for secondary education that emerged following the expansion of primary education. Therefore, the government decided to allow private secondary schools to operate and demanded that they should comply with the regulations relating to the curriculum, school buildings, teachers, textbooks, syllabus and school calendar.

The other findings from the documents reviewed show that the government required private schools to charge school fees which are prescribed by the government. For example, in 1999, clear limits were set on the schools regarding the fees charged by both the government and private secondary schools. These were: Tsh 40,000/= (\$ 20.79) for government secondary day schools (currently, this has been reduced to Tsh 20,000/= or \$ 12.40); Tsh 70, 000/= Tsh (\$ 43.38) for boarding government schools; Tsh 105,000/= (\$ 68.08) for private secondary day schools; and Tsh 130,000/= (\$ 80.57) for private secondary boarding schools. Yet, the various pieces of evidence from this study suggest that, in most cases, the private schools have never complied with the fees set by the government and, on the other hand, the government never monitors whether or not these schools are charging the prescribed fees. As a result, the private schools charge high fees, as indicated by most of the interviewed parents, who suggested that, if there are regulations regarding the fees charged by the private schools, then the private school owners are violating these, and this tendency remains unconstrained by these regulations. The findings show that all of the studied parents, including those from the middle and upper classes, were dissatisfied with the fees charged by the private schools. Further findings suggest that, despite the fact that the private schools support the government in the provision of education, it was found that there is no government financial support for them in terms of subsidies or grants for supplementing their operations. The whole financial burden for establishing and running a school rests with the investor.

5.2 The Implications of the Current PPP in the Provision of Secondary Education with regard to Equity of Access

Data regarding this matter were collected through questionnaires administered to the students, parents and SMT members, together with interviews with two policy analysts. They were asked to respond to the following questions: (1) is there equity of access to private secondary schools for students from different socio-economic households?; (2) in your view, for which socioeconomic class do you think the private schools cater?; (3) do you think that the existing type of PPP in secondary education reduces the inequities with regard to access to secondary education?; (4) what do you think is the implication of private schools with regard to equity of access?; and (5) what do you think is the motive of those who establish private secondary schools?

Regarding the first question, the findings show that (79%) of the students stated that there is no equity of access to private secondary schools for students from different socio-economic backgrounds. The students' response was supported by the findings from an interview with the parents and SMT members, who were asked the same question. The majority of the parents (65%) and all of the interviewed SMT members stated that there is no equity of access. These responses imply that majority of the respondents believe that the existing PPP in the provision of secondary education has affected negatively equity of access to education by students from low-income households. The respondents noted that this is because the private secondary schools do not accommodate students from low-income households who cannot afford to pay the charges imposed by the private secondary schools. Hence, this means that the existing PPP in the provision of secondary education does not support schooling for the poor.

Although the students and parents commented that the current PPP in education does not consider low-income students, the policy analysts held different views. Their concern was not about the nature of the PPP itself but rather the households' economic condition, as a major issue affecting equity of access to education. Policy analyst 1 stated:

Even if secondary education were to be solely provided by the government schools, the problem of equity of access would still exist, since some parents would still fail to send their children to school, the reason being that they cannot afford the school fees and other costs (Interview, Policy analyst 1).

In the same vein, policy analyst 2 had the following to say:

I think that, in order to examine well educational opportunities and equity of access, one has to begin at home. The home conditions are vital in explaining the dynamics of the household decision-making regarding children's participation in and accessing of school. The availability of schools, both public and private, is a step towards providing access to schools, but only if

the parents send their children to these schools. Therefore, a major factor influencing this decision is the economic conditions facing households, and not the public or private schools. (Interview, Policy Analyst 2)

From these quotations, one can argue that the parents' poverty affects students' access to secondary education. It has been noted that, even if education were to be provided free by the government, some students from poor households would never have access to it. Hence, this suggests a need to design a financing strategy that would ensure that students' access to education is not determined by their family's economic status.

The findings regarding the views on for which socio-economic class the private schools cater suggest that the majority of students (64.1%) responded that the private secondary schools catered for middle and upper income families. This finding concurs with the parents' responses, as three quarters (75%) of the parents stated that the private secondary schools cater for students from middle and upper socio-economic households. This finding is supported by the evidence from the questionnaire that revealed that private secondary schools had a substantially greater share of students whose parents receive a monthly income of Tsh 500,000/= (\$309.89) and above compared to the majority of the parents (50 %) of children who attend government schools, who receive an income of Tsh 120,000 (\$74.37) -300,000 (\$185.93). This finding suggests that the private schools segment, screen and finally target the middle and upper socio-economic classes. Hence, this implies that, although there has been an increase in the number of private secondary schools and consequently their enrolment figures, the number of students from low-income households accessing these schools continues to decline. Indeed, the government's policy regarding private education has been effective in expanding overall access and enrolment, yet this policy appears to have had a limited impact, if any, on enhancing equity of access to secondary education by the poor.

Concerning whether PPP in secondary education reduces the inequities in access to secondary education, the findings show that (68%) of the students commented that the existing PPP does not reduce inequity of access but rather increases it. In the same vein, the majority of parents (75%) and seven of the nine interviewed SMT members commented that the private secondary schools are the main cause of the inequity of access to secondary education. Both of these findings imply that the current type of PPP in the provision of secondary education focused more on increasing general access and assigned less attention to participation in education among the poor. The effect of increasing general access without considering access by the poor means that the private secondary schools are now viewed as tools for reproducing and perpetuating the socio-economic inequities.

Regarding the implication of private schools with regard to equity of access, the majority of the students and parents respectively (60% and 61%) supported the existence of private schools, but noted that private schools' engagement in the provision of secondary education poses a threat to equity of access to education by students from low-income households. Two reasons for this were mentioned: (1) the current failure of the private secondary schools to accommodate students from low-income backgrounds; and (2) the current kind of PPP which does not involve governmental financial assistance of the private secondary schools. Concerning the issue of the motive for establishing private schools, the findings show that more than three quarters of the students and parents (82.5% and 80% respectively) responded that the main motive of those who establish private secondary schools is to obtain a profit rather than provide education. This suggests that the majority of private schools are entrepreneurially established and, in fact, utilise purely commercial business principles in their management and operation. It was observed that there was no direct link between the high school fees charged by some of the private schools and their performance. The national examinations results show that, although some of the private schools are charging high school fees, yet their performance in the national examinations has remained consistently poor, sometimes falling below that of the public schools

To better understand the implications of PPP for equity of access by students from poor households, the SMT members were asked to respond to the following question: "Does the current practice of PPP in education support schooling for the poor?" The findings show that seven of the nine SMT members disagreed. Furthermore, the SMT members appreciate the existence of PPP in secondary education. However, like the students and parents, the majority of SMT members expressed their dissatisfaction with the current PPP in the provision of secondary education with regard to its support for the schooling of students from low-income households. Similarly, the findings from the interviews with the policy analysts regarding the implications of the private secondary schools in the current PPP for equity of access by students from low-income households revealed that PPP has affected this compared to the equity of access by students from the middle and upper classes.

This finding supports the argument that, in public-private settings, education is viewed like any other service which responds to market forces and is hence provided and traded with different prices, classes and quality (Bray, 2004). From this observation, since the partnership does not involve any government subsidising of private schools, then investors are likely to focus on the potential profits to be gained when embarking on investing in education. Consequently, the parents were forced to send their children to school on the basis of not only quality but also affordability, which reduced the low-income households' chances of having equitable access to schools.

5.3 Mechanisms for Ensuring Equity of Access in the Current Public Private Partnership in the Provision of Secondary Education

The findings show that there is no in-built, pro-poor strategy in private schools for ensuring equity of access by students from low-income households. The SMT members from the studied schools were asked to outline their special arrangements, if any, and then explain how those arrangements work to ensure that students from low-income households obtain a secondary education in their schools without being disadvantaged by their socioeconomic status. The findings show that only one private school had three strategies: (1) Asking the parents to pay by installments. Under this strategy, the amount and time interval between each installment differ with regard to the agreement and ability of the parents to pay; (2) reducing school fees for students from low-income households who cannot afford to pay the full fees. However, it was revealed that this strategy had never been implemented; and (3) offering scholarships to students with a strong academic ability who are from low-income households. In the government secondary schools, the findings show that the main strategy was that of recognising students who cannot afford to pay the schools fees and allowing them to proceed with their studies on condition that they cannot take their leaving and academic certificates until they have cleared their debts.

The parents and students were also asked to mention any available mechanisms for ensuring equity of access by students from low-income households. The findings from the questionnaires completed by the students and parents revealed that more than three quarters of the students and parents (79% and 81% respectively) who responded to this question stated that there were no mechanisms for ensuring equity of access in the current PPP. In responding to the same question, the policy analysts commented that mechanisms for ensuring equity of access in the existing PPP were available, but that there was no mechanisms for ensuring that the private schools implement these because of the nature and type of the existing PPP, which does not involve the government funding of private schools. These findings suggest that the provision of secondary education is operating within a free market.

Though it was found that one private secondary school had special pro-poor strategies for enhancing equity of access, to a large extent, these findings suggest that the private secondary schools had no special arrangements in place to help students from low-income households. Indeed, the findings indicate that, from the national to the institutional (school) level, there was a paucity of mechanisms for ensuring equity of access to secondary education by students from low-income households and that, if there were any such mechanisms, then they were rarely implemented and there was no one to monitor whether this was occurring or not and whether they were benefitting children from poor households. In addition, the mechanisms available were so inadequate that their presence was equal to their non-existence. This implies that the involvement of the private sector in the provision of education requires special attention. Otherwise, issues of equity and access to private secondary schools for low-income households will continue to be problematic. On the basis of these findings, it is concluded that if PPP in the provision of secondary education is helping low-income students, this out of courtesy rather than a legal obligation.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The evidence from this study suggests the following. Firstly, there is no specific kind of PPP in the provision of secondary education and that what exists is merely an invitation to the unaided private schools to provide secondary education. Secondly, the private schools in the current PPP were found to affect equity of access to education by students from low-income households. Lastly, from the national to the institutional (school) level, there is a paucity of mechanisms for ensuring equity of access. The findings show that very few students from low-income households are studying in the private secondary schools. Also, the existing mechanisms were found to be so inadequate that their existence was tantamount to their non existence. On the basis of these findings, it is recommended that the government should review the regulations and policy on PPP in secondary education and formulate those which will allow the increased access by low-income students within the available private schools. There is a need to establish a new kind of PPP in secondary education, in which all private schools will be required to reserve a certain, specified percentage of their places for government funded students from disadvantaged households; capitation or subsidies for private schools should be introduced to reduce the fees charged by these schools; and exemption schemes should be implemented for children from families in difficult

economic circumstances, including targeting subsidies at low-income students. In the same vein, the government should support private secondary schools in order to increase their capacity to educate and enrol more students, even those from low-income households. This will also give the government autonomy over controlling the fees charged by these schools. It is also recommended that rules and regulations for equity and access should be formulated, strengthened and enforced, and that those who are concerned with the monitoring of the implementation of these rules should be empowered for the well-being of the overall education system.

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