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Universal basic education in Nigeria: can non-state actors make a difference?

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Introduction

Following a period of sustained progress between the 1950s and 1970s, when the regional and federal governments in Nigeria implemented highly successful policies of free qualitative education, the education sector went on decline in subsequent decades. This decline is partly due to the impacts of military interventions in governance, and lack of adequate public investments, and a generally outmoded policy approach to basic education. As a result of decades of decline, Nigeria was recently identified as "the country furthest away from the goal of universal primary education" (Antoninis, 2014). According to a 2012 UNESCO report, Nigeria accounts for 17% of the global out-of-school children population, despite having only 4% share of the global school age population. In recognition of this critical need in the education sector, non-state actors, including religious organisations, have stepped in as key providers of basic education in Nigeria.

In recent years, researchers have grappled with the changing landscape in educational policy in terms of the globalisation of school governance and the involvement of international non-governmental organisations (Tota, 2014), the politics of access to basic education (Little and Lewin, 2011), the politics of diversifying basic education delivery (Hoppers, 2011), and public-private partnership in the provision of basic education (Akyeampong, 2009). In all of these conversations there is a common recognition that development of human via provision of basic education is an important global agenda, and it is one that should not be left as a sole responsibility of nation-states. As such, many countries, both developed and developing, have formulated new policies and interventions to incentivise and regulate the participation of non-state actors in the provision of basic education. The new policy directions have thrown up new challenges as well as opportunities across national contexts. Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, presents unique challenges in terms of funding constraints, institutional weaknesses, and political instability and policy uncertainties. The Nigerian context represents a unique window for the illumination of the peculiar challenges experienced by African countries.

This study therefore draws from semi-structured interviews of heads and proprietors of six state-funded schools, six schools owned by religious organisations and three other privately owned schools, to examine and compare the different motivations, guiding principles and overall impact of these actors in the education sector. The findings contribute to the theory and practice of basic education provision in developing countries, especially with respect to how non-state actors can complement government-led interventions to achieve the targets of universal basic education as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The rest of the paper is organised as follows: a review of the literature on access and quality of basic education is followed by a description of the empirical and historical context around Nigeria. This is followed by a brief description of the methodological approach, and then a thematic analysis and discussion of key findings. The paper concludes with a highlight of key points and recommendations for policy interventions and future research.

Universal basic education: bridging the gap in access and quality

The United Nations General assembly adopted by resolution, in September 2015 a new blueprint for "2030 agenda for sustainable development". This document, popularly known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlighted in goal number four a global commitment to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2015). The document went on to highlight a specific target to ensure that, by 2030, "all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes" (United Nations, 2015). This commitment to universal basic education is underpinned by two key principles: access and quality. In effect, there is a clear recognition that, in order for basic education to drive human capital development and contribute effectively to sustainable development, it has to be freely accessible to all, and it has to be of good quality.

The provision of free and quality universal basic education is a critical objective for nation-states. Formal education is recognised as the most observable, and arguably the most significant, source of human capital development (Acemoglu and Autor, 2011; Becker, 1964). In turn, human capital is the key driver of labour productivity and economic growth (Nafukho et al., 2004; Olaniyan and Okemakinde, 2008). In addition to its impact on economic growth, education also yields significant returns in terms of its social impact- in terms of promotion of equality, enhancement of social capital, and better prospects of societal cohesion and communal peace (see figure 1). Conversely, the cost of illiteracy and lack of access to basic education can be very severe. First, lack of education exacerbates poverty, unemployment and inequality. It also aggravates the depletion of human capital, and is linked with high rates of violent conflicts in developing countries.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Nevertheless, provision of education also requires significant investment in terms of funding and human resources, and these are the key areas in which developing countries have struggled, historically. Many countries grapple with the tension between the critical need to expand access, and the practical requirement to contain cost (Somerset, 2011). For some, the dilemma of access and the provision of quality manifests, perhaps needlessly, as a zero sum game in which expansion of access precipitates decline in quality of basic education (Amakyi, 2016). Along with this, there are debates about how poorer and developing countries prioritise policies, and how they manage and allocate resources efficiently based on priorities. For example, some have observed that while increased budgetary allocation is necessary, it is not always sufficient to achieve the goal of expanding access and improving quality of education provision (Gupta and Verhoeven, 2001). It also matters how the policies are developed, what mechanisms are in place for implementation, what processes are in place to plug the holes in mismanagement of funds, and what structures are in place to facilitate ongoing quality assurance and impact evaluation.

However, a key area that has attracted relatively limited attention is the potential role of non-governmental actors in the provision of universal basic education. Some attention has been given to the role of these actors in the higher education (HE) sector, but the questions about what role they can play in the provision of basic education is an important one. This is mainly because national governments have routinely failed to meet targets in provision of good quality basic education. In many countries, non-governmental organisations and private investors have stepped into this void. The motivations for their engagement are varied and mixed, but they have opportunities to ultimately contribute to the creation of social value.

The involvement of non-state actors in the provision of western education in Africa dates back to colonial times. Missionary organisations of various denominations invested heavily in the establishment of schools. There continues to be a close connection drawn between religious missions' engagement in the education sector in Africa, and Africa's colonial experience. Historically, education was perceived by Faith, especially Christian, missions as an instrument of effective evangelism and proselytization. Educated African converts were considered as more effective in spreading the faith in local languages. Also, many of the mission schools were ultimately run by the converts (Frankema, 2012a; Nwagwu, 1979). It is also seen as a veritable instrument of societal transformation and "elevation of the human race" (Taylor, 1983). On the other hand, others have criticised missionary interventions in the African education sector as an instrument of colonialist expansion (Frankema, 2012a); disruptive and destructive of traditional culture and values (Porter, 1997); instigators of differentiation and division of society (Porter, 1997); and as arrowheads of "inferior curricula" (Taylor, 1983).

However, in spite of the stringent criticisms by some, there is a broad consensus that these missionary organisations played a critical role in the early stages of the development of western-style of formal education in Africa. For example, it has been argued that the "British" legacy of colonial education is not as much attributable to deliberate policies of colonial governments as much as it is attributable to the role of denominational missions who competed with one another in providing schooling and driving enrolments (Frankema, 2012b) In most African countries, following the attainment of independence, governments took over the control of the mission schools. However, the following decades following government take-over of mission schools also saw overall decline of quality of education in some countries- partly as a result of lack of resources and effective policies and mechanisms to maintain and improve quality while expanding access.

Therefore, this paper interrogates the potential role of non-state actors today in the all-important agenda to bridge the gap in access and quality.

Empirical context

The Nigerian education system: an overview

The Federal Government of Nigeria adopted, in 1977, the National Policy on Education. This policy, which incorporates the 6-3-3-4 system of education, offers six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary education, three years of senior secondary, and

four years of higher education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2003). The first nine years constituted the universal basic education. In a 2013 review, a one-year pre-primary education was introduced into the basic education structure, effectively translating to a 10-year continuum for basic education in the country (Federal Ministry of Education Nigeria, 2015a) Prior to this, the country has experimented with the British-style 6-5-2-3 system, but that was rejected in favour of the 6-3-3-4 system. The government rationale was to, among others, expand access especially at the secondary school level (Federal Ministry of Education 2003).

On paper, the basic education programme also includes provisions for adult and non-formal education programmes, as well programmes for the *Almajiris* and out-of-school children. The *Almajiri* is a Hausa term, in turn an offshoot of an Arabic word, for children in search of Qur'anic education. The Quranic School is modelled as a traditional form of pre-primary and primary Islamic education. While it has existed for centuries, analysts have argued that the emergence, in the 19th century, of Western Education in Nigeria created tension and precipitated the neglect that stalled the development and evolution of the Quranic school (Goodluck and Juliana, 2013). The Colonial government had tried, in the 1930s, to set up Izala schools to bridge the divide between western-style and Quranic education. Those are however limited provisions set up specifically to train Muslim judges (Umar, 2001). Today, *Almajiri* children sent out to learn Quranic education in care of "Mallams" are typically left to wander on the streets begging for alms. In addition to the *Almajiris,* Nigeria is also grappling with the challenge of providing basic education for nomadic households. In 1989, the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida established, following a decree, the National Council for Nomadic Education to implement the education programme aimed at hard-to-reach nomadic populations (Federal Ministry of Education Nigeria, 2015a).

As the foregoing suggests, cultural and political factors have always played some role in the design and implementation of universal basic education in Nigeria. In the 1950s and 1960s, just before and after Nigeria attained independence, the reluctance of the Northern political leaders to implement a programme of free primary education is partly informed by the distrust for western education as it was largely associated with Christian proselytization. This suspicion also explains the failure to develop traditional Quranic education to meet modern challenges in terms of numeracy skills and science teaching for children. Nevertheless, in time, the political elite embraced Western-style education for themselves and their family members, leaving the masses of the people to mainly access Quranic education and limited opportunities for civil service employment and social mobility. In effect, this development exacerbated the stratification of Northern society and widening of the gaps between the rich and the poor.

Despite repeated, and arguably half-hearted, attempts by governments to address this problem, the rich-poor divide grew wider, precipitating disillusionment and wide scale discontent among the populace. In 2002, the terrorist group Boko Haram was formed in Maiduguri by radical cleric Mohammed Yusuf. Its popular name, Boko Haram, derives from its core teaching that western education is forbidden (Adesoji, 2010). This teaching is invariably linked with the increasingly widespread perception among ordinary people that western education has contributed to the corruption of the elite and the division of the society

into haves and have nots. Analysts have pointed out that the emergence and growth of Boko Haram is closely associated with exceptionally high levels of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment in Northern Nigeria (Rogers, 2012; Salaam, 2012). As shown in the cluster of charts in figure 2, poverty head count has been increasing consistently since 1980. The regional distribution of poverty clearly indicates that the North east region- where the Boko Haram insurgency began- has the highest Level of poverty. This is followed closely by the Northwest region. The three Southern regions have relatively lower poverty levels compared with the Northern region, but have also in recent years grappled with increasing challenges of unemployment and militancy in the Niger Delta region. The figure also indicate that poverty is especially high in the rural areas, and, as expected, those without formal education are more vulnerable to poverty. Additional data on literacy distribution in the country (figure 3) reinforces the widely held view that poverty and illiteracy are mutually aggravating.

INSERT FIGURE 2a &b HERE

Universal basic education in Nigeria: falling standards, failed policies and inadequate funding

With an estimated population of 190 million people (United Nations, 2018), Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous in the world. Half of the adult population, and a third of the youth population, are illiterate (UNESCO, 2015). The figures are worse for females, with 59% of the adult female and 42% of the female youth illiterate. Based on the 2016 estimate, 41.2 million adult and youth are illiterate, and 25.3 million of these are females. Nigeria accounts for 17% of the global out-of-school population, despite having only 4% global share of primary school age children (Antoninis, 2014). The number of out-of-school children rose from 6.9 million in 2000 to more than 10.5 million in 2010 (fig 3a). 42% of Nigeria's primary school children are estimated to be out of school. Nigeria, along with Uganda, has "some of the worst inequality in access by wealth" (UNESCO, 2015). Figure 3c provides further details on literacy rates in Nigeria. The data shows that the North is significantly lagging behind in educational achievement and human capital development. Among the six geopolitical zones, Northeast and Northwest Nigeria have the lowest literacy levels. In addition, figures 3b provides the figures on the gender distribution of enrolment across primary and secondary school levels. Male enrolment are typically higher than female enrolment.

INSERT FIGURES 3a,b & c HERE

The Nigerian government has perennially failed to implement UNESCO's recommendation of budgetary spending on education. The thirty states of the federation often lack capacity to use funds in accordance with the guidelines. In several cases, disbursement of funds to states has been suspended due to corrupt practices in expenditure (Federal Ministry of Education Nigeria, 2015b). The failure of Nigerian education policy is underpinned by insufficient consultation with the public, the constituent states and other key stakeholders in the design and implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. Furthermore, there is inadequate policy coordination across the three tiers of government- national, state and

local- in the implementation of UBE programme. In the North, government has struggled to integrate secular and religious education which are effectively left to run in parallel, and often at cross purposes.

Given the lack of adequate funding and the weakness of the policy process, it is no surprise that Nigeria has, in recent decades faced the problem of falling educational standards. According to recent reports, more than 50% of students typically fail in their secondary school examination. In 2014, the figure was reported to be as high as 71% (Premium Times, 2014). Furthermore, in recent decades, there has been an increase in the rates of cheating and malpractices in national examinations. This reflects a worsening problem of corruption in the entire education sector. In December 2014, out of a total of 241,161 candidates, 28,817 results were withheld due to examination malpractices. This represents 12% of the total number of candidates (Premium Times, 2014). Successive governments have invested very little in continuous training and development for teachers, and capacity building for effective inspection and quality monitoring and evaluation.

Bridging the gap: non-state actors and universal basic education in Nigeria

The foregoing underlines the context for intervention of non-state actors in the Nigerian education system. The falling standards left a gap and demand to be filled, with many parents keen to find alternative provisions out of the public school system for their wards. Historically, however, non-state actors, especially religious organisations, are not new to the education sector in Nigeria. Islamic Education has existed in some form for centuries in Nigeria, and was formalised in the fourteenth century.

The first school, in the formal western sense of the term, was founded in Badagry, Lagos, by the Church Missionary Society in 1845 (Nwagwu, 1979). For half a century from the establishment of British colonial administration, the provision of basic education in Nigeria was spearheaded by Christian missions supported by their home churches. The significant pioneering role of church missions is highlighted by the fact that, before 1877, neither the imperial government in London nor the local government in Nigeria made any provision for education in Nigeria (Lewis, 1965). Until the middle of the 20th century, when autonomous regional government became more actively engaged, the main contribution of the local governments was limited to provision of "grants-in-aid" to religious missions and other voluntary agencies that operated schools.

From 1952 when they were established, regional governments began to take more active interests in the education sector. Although they did not have enough resources to exercise complete control, they began to exert stronger influence. Following the end of the civil war in 1970, and beginning with states in the Eastern region of the country, state governments began to assume full control of basic education provision. This culminated in the take-over of all mission owned schools by the Federal government in 1974 (Nwagwu, 1979; Taylor, 1983).

Along with Christians and Islamic Mission schools, other non-state actors have stepped in to fill the gap in provision of basic education in Nigeria. They are broadly charitable organisations and commercial proprietorships with a wide range of interests and aims

including profit-making and agenda for social impact. The information from the most recent available data from the Nigerian Ministry of Education and UNESCO ((Federal Ministry of Education, 2017; UNESCO, 2019) indicates that, between 2006 and 2016, the non-state providers of basic education have increased their share of total national enrolment from 5% to 11.8 % in the primary school sector, and from 12.65% to 19% in the secondary school category (figure 4a). In addition, the average pupil/teacher ratio in private and non-state schools is significantly lower compared with that in public schools (figure 4b). As of 2016, the pupil/teacher ratio in private schools is 13, while it is 43 in state schools (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017). This is often a proxy for quality of provision, as students are usually able to get better support for their learning in schools with smaller pupil/teacher ratio. The table 1 below provides a profile of key non-state actors in the basic education sector in Nigeria.

INSERT FIGURES 4a & b HERE

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Method

Research questions and interview schedule

The main research questions explored in this paper are:

1. What are the motivations of religious actors engaged in provision of basic education in Nigeria?
2. What are the contributions of religious actors to basic education in Nigeria, in terms of quality and access?

In pursuance of this, the following interview schedule (table 2) was used. In addition to the semi-structured questions, basic descriptive data was obtained, where available, about the profile of the schools in terms of class size, the population of teaching and non-teaching staff, library and ICT provision, and the results in the latest national examinations.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Data collection and analysis

Data was collected from 15 schools in all: six public schools, six Faith schools, and three other privately owned schools across four local governments in Oyo State, Southwest Nigeria. These include both primary and secondary schools. The data were collected through in-depth interviews of head teachers, principals, proprietors and senior managers of the schools contacted. The interviews, which took place between July and August 2016, were generally conducted in English, the official language in Nigeria. They were audio-recorded and transcribed, and then coded using NVivo 10. The processed transcripts were then subjected to thematic analysis.

Results and discussion

Profile of the schools

The profiles of the schools are summarised in table 3 below:

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

The profiles indicate that more pupils are enrolled in public schools, which also tend to have large class sizes and high students/teachers ratio. Also, for the schools where the data is available, private and faith schools have higher pass rates in national examinations.

Motivational factors for the involvement of non-state actors in Basic Education

Most of the proprietors and managers of the Faith schools openly confessed to motivations around "evangelism" and "proselytising". This motivation is tied to some moral vision of society as an antidote to rampant corruption that is manifest in all aspects of public life:

> it will serve as a basis for evangelizing, Evangelism, being able to spread the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Respondent 06, Principal of a Baptist Faith School, August 2016).

> "The motive behind the school is to catch them young for Christ, like the extension of the sunbeam class. We want to give academic knowledge and at the same time give them Christ while they are young. You know the bedrock of any life is moral…" (Respondent 07, Senior national administrator of Baptist faith Schools, August, 2016).

This proselytising priority is linked with the agenda to inculcate spiritual values and stir young people away from criminality:

> It is important because, it will reduce their level of criminality; they will not be involved in all criminal acts. Being closer to God, having have an attachment to spiritual aspect of life, they will be made to know what it requires to be disciples" (Respondent 06, Principal of a Baptist Faith School, August 2016).

> With the level of corruption in Nigeria now, those who are well groomed academically and spiritually, are the only people that can contribute well to the development of the society" (Respondent 07, Senior national administrator of Baptist Schools, August, 2016).

While it has potential merits, the proselytising agenda presents significant challenges and difficulties, not least in a multi-religious nation like Nigeria with a documented history of religious conflicts- some of which were played out in the school environment (Hackett, 1999). There will be concerns about how a proselytization strategy can be implemented on consonance with the values of a liberal education that encourages young people to engage respectfully with adherents of other Faiths. However, there may also be an auspicious opportunity for state regulators and policy makers to find areas of shared religious and spiritual values across the Faiths, and incorporate such into the education curricula.

Aside from evangelistic motivations and the moral mission to spearhead societal transformation, non-state actors also admit to profit making motivations, often cited as an ancillary objective:

> One, our motivation is for evangelism and two, at the end the church is expected to benefit and bring an additional income for the church…" (Respondent 05, Principal of a Baptist Faith School, August 2016).

Impact on quality assurance and monitoring

Over the past few decades in Nigeria, the quality assurance system, and particularly the inspection system in public schools has deteriorated. This is due to lack of adequate commitment from government, dwindling human resources and lack of capacity building (Adegbesan, 2011; Ochuba, 2009). From the interviews, this is a key area in which private and Faith schools have fared better because of their more hands-on approach and conscious allocation of resources in terms of funding, time and personnel:

> One problem is that the public schools are not strictly monitored. In the Baptist Mission we have a monitoring and quality control agency that monitors the teachers. We want to make sure that the teachers do the right thing at the right time. (Respondent 06, Principal of a Baptist Faith School, August, 2016)).

> We are doing better than public schools because we have constant monitoring. There is no way a teacher will sit down and not do his job but in the public schools the officials may not be able to get to the school to see what they are doing actually. (Respondent 05, Principal of a Baptist Faith School, August, 2016).

The interview data also throws up valuable insights about the significance of staff qualification and quality of teaching. It was noted that while teachers in the public schools tend to be better qualified, the teachers in the private and public schools are the ones who tend to deliver better quality of teaching. This curious dynamic is associated to two key factors: Firstly, the Faith and private schools are more aggressive, focused and strategic in their staff development programme. They more than make up for the gap in qualification relative to public schools by provision of continuous, and relevant, staff development programmes. Secondly, they are more effective in motivating their staff by prompt payment of salaries:

> Private providers and faith schools don't have better quality teachers but they are better at monitoring. Even if they are not paying as high as the public schools, they are paying them promptly" (Respondent 08, proprietor of a Pentecostal faith school, August 2016).

> …We monitor to the letter. We have annual workshops for a week every year. In addition, we organise training workshops whenever there is need for it". (Respondent 08, proprietor of a Pentecostal Faith school, August 2016).

> The main problem for the public education sector is that the teachers are not well taken care of. They are owed several months' worth of salaries (Respondent 01, Headteacher of a public primary school, August 2016).

> Let me tell you this story: there was a scene where the teacher was asking the student two times two and he said six, the teacher said good. Three times three he said twelve, the teacher good, what is the capital of Nigeria, the student said Lagos, good and you remain like that till the government pay my salary (Respondent 07, Senior national administrator of Baptist faith Schools, August 2016).

Impact on access

The enrolment profile (see table 3) in our sample confirms the national trend: by far the largest number of students are enrolled in public schools. This is also consistent with the trend in most other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In Ghana, for example, 85% of enrolled pupils are in public schools, while 15% are enrolled in private schools (Akyeampong, 2009) This is mainly as a result of the fact that while private and faith schools are fee paying, public schools are nominally free. In effect, while faith and private schools have excelled on academic performance, discipline and other measures of quality, they have done significantly less well in terms of expanding access to children from poor backgrounds. In response to this challenge, a number of Faith and private schools have launched scholarship schemes for "indigent" students. However, these appear to be generally adhoc, limited and unstructured. A number of faith schools have scholarship and fee reduction offers mainly for children of priests and pastors. Overall, the scholarship schemes by non-state providers have had minimal impact on the access gap:

> We do something for indigent children in the community. We wrote letters to churches and they came. They wrote exams and we picked the best ones. (Respondent 08, proprietor of a Pentecostal faith school)

> What I can really say is that there are some of students are given a kind of fee reduction. For example, those who are staff members are given fee reduction of 50%, Then pastors, They are also given a reduction of 25%. (Respondent 06, Principal of a Baptist Faith School).

> Yes, what we charge for our student per term is in relation with state of economy of a state for example Lagos schools they pay higher than those in Oyo. (Respondent 07, Senior national administrator of Baptist faith Schools).

Some have suggested that the intervention of private owners and Faith missions in the provision of basic education is having a "paralysing" impact on public schools, because of the resource asymmetry and the significant cost barrier for poorer households:

> Religious organization having their own school? They only paralyse the public schools and you know that education is costly here in Nigeria. If you know anybody that goes to any faith school, you know they will be charged more, and our economy is not favourable" (Respondent 4, principal of a public secondary school, August 2016).

This is a significant challenge, especially in the light of the goal to simultaneously expand access and improve quality. In some ways, the associated cost barrier with the involvement of non-state actors in provision of basic education may be exacerbating, rather than mitigating inequality and social stratification. A potential pathway to solving this problem may be to find or design an integrated system that incorporates the best that the public system has to offer in terms of better access and the private system has to offer in terms of improved quality of education provision. In Rwanda, the government addressed this, at least in part, by offering subsidies for children from disadvantaged backgrounds who wish to access private education (Akyeampong, 2009).

A case for support, synergy and knowledge exchange

The impact of non-state actors on basic education provision in Nigeria does not have to be restricted to direct engagement as providers. They can positively influence the public sector through knowledge exchange, sharing resources, and exploring other opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. Governments can support and facilitate these:

> One way public schools can benefit from private schools is through a seminar whereby the public and private sectors would have the same parameter in education, by so doing many public schools will learn from their private counterpart. Also, they can for example share access to their computers and ICT facilities because many public school in Nigeria do not have access to computers (Respondent 15, Principal of a Faith Secondary School).

Furthermore, it was suggested that Religious actors, including those who do not own or operate schools, can explore other options for engagement in the provision of basic education in the country. This includes support for resources, facilities and governance in the public schools:

> Religious organisations should help mobilise funds to support education because the government can no longer cope. There are many dilapidated buildings in the schools, we don't have enough teachers, we don't have enough facilities, the laboratory are not good enough and the government cannot do everything. So I think those religious organisations, as well as Old Student Organisations and Private Providers should actually come in to help the government in order to lift the standard of education . (Respondent 2, principal of a public secondary school)

> The religious missions can help by making provisions for infrastructural facilities like building, they can build libraries, laboratories, they can provide furniture for the schools, they can even help call less-privileged people by giving them scholarships. (Respondent 4, principal of a public secondary school)

It is worth noting that while many Faith organisations, in particular, are intervening as non-state providers of public education, this mode of involvement is not universal. In effect, there is room for many other organisations to participate. This increased involvement can help expand options and also drive down cost through the competitions induced among non-state actors. Furthermore, government can launch incentives for these non-state actors to participate in other ways- for example through funding, in-kind and other practical support of existing public schools. Incentives can include offer of more direct involvement of these organisations in school governance and matched funding of specific projects. In addition, for business organisations- both SMEs and bigger corporations- government can offer new

incentives for corporate social responsibility projects focusing specifically on schools. These can focus on areas of critical need such as science labs, classroom renovation and construction, and provision of library and ICT facilities, among others. Interventions like these can help bridge the quality gap between public and private providers.

Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that, along with private providers, faith organisations are making significant contribution to the provision of basic education in Nigeria. In particular, students from Faith schools tend to perform better academically, and they also tend to be more disciplined and resourceful. However, because they are fee paying, fewer households are able to access them. Faith missions and other religious organisations are able to deploy their vast social capital towards the mobilisation of funds and human resources for their schools. However, faith organisations are also generally unabashed about their intention to proselytise. They consider proselytisation agenda a key component of their vision to promote academic excellence and rid society of corruption. This evangelistic mission- with its "othering" of those of other faiths or no faith- raises questions as to how this proselytisation objective can hinder national unity or exacerbate ethnic and religious tensions within the country. There is also a possible pathway to mitigating this challenge, through active engagement of the state in designing a model that incorporates shared values across the spectrum of religious traditions into an integrated curriculum.

Based on the foregoing, the study highlights the merit of supporting non-state actors towards the provision of basic education. However, it is also clear that government needs to take active ownership and leadership of the provision of basic education in the country. In particular, government needs to:

- Deploy more resources towards curriculum regulation, to control any potential excesses from religious and other non-state actors. This should include appropriate legislation both at the national and local levels.
- Be more committed in terms of funding, staffing and provision of facilities and resources for public schools.
- Invest more in regular inspection and monitoring and evaluation of public schools.
- Facilitate better cooperation and knowledge transfer activities between public, private and faith schools. This can include sponsoring of workshops and networking events, a reward scheme for resource sharing, and other incentives for knowledge transfer activities.
- Provide funding support for non-state actors to expand access for poor households in schools operated by religious households.
- Engage religious actors and civil society organisations more in governance and management of public schools. This can deepen community ownership and investment in public schools, and potentially replace the need to launch new schools in some cases. Civil societies in particular should be co-opted more to provide extra-curricular support in human rights and civic education and inter-school exchanges and competitions- for pupils in both state and private schools. This will counter-balance potential excesses from non-state actors and support the training of well-informed and well-rounded citizens.

In addition to the role of the state and faith organisations, NGOs and civil society organisations also have a strong role to play to expand access to, and improve quality of, basic education in the country. This can include mobilising the public and working with other stakeholders to change policies, improve allocation of funding and resources, and enhance

operationalisation of quality monitoring and inspection. They can also intervene locally by working with local schools and parents/teachers' organisations to enhance learning experience and overall engagement of children in schools.

This study did not focus on the role of big business and industry stakeholders in the provision and improvement of basic education in Nigeria. However, it is an important, fruitful pathway for future academic inquiries, particularly within the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR) of businesses in countries and within communities in which they are operating. Currently, there is a lot of focus on CSR activities of businesses in road and other infrastructural projects. Given that basic education is a priority area that has suffered in recent decades due to inadequate resourcing and funding, government can launch new, more focused incentives to engage businesses as partners towards augmentation of resources and facilities in public schools.

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QAE LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Overview of non-state actors in the Nigerian basic education sector

Category	Description	Prominent examples
Christian Missions	Originally set up, from colonial times, to support missionary activities. They also provide reputable training in the sciences and other non-religious subjects. Many of them were taken over by the federal government in the 1970s.	Baptist Boys High School, Abeokuta Nigeria
Islamic Missions	Set up mainly to provide a western-style alternative to Christian Mission Schools, and in response to the limitations of traditional Quarnic education.	Ansaru Islam Grammar School, Ijomu-Oro, Kwara
Private Independent	Mix of motivations and objectives. A few, like the prominent Mayflower school, are motivated by the desire for social impact via high-quality secularist education. Majority also have strong commercial and profit-making objectives, along with the motivation to raise standards.	Mayflower School, Ikenne Ogun State Nigeria
Staff Cooperatives	These are set up by staff cooperatives, usually in further and higher education institutions in Nigeria. They typically provide education for staff children at discounted tuition rates, and open to the public at higher rates.	International School, University of Ibadan, Nigeria
NGOs, Charities & Others	Many schools founded by NGOs will also fit under the private independent category. However, many others do not own schools directly. Instead, they spearhead interventions to provide access for poorer households and also imrpove quality standards, especially in public schools.	Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All (CSACEFA)

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Table 2 : Interview schedule

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1. School profile: school population; class size, teaching staff population; non-teaching staff population; library; ICT provision ; Percentage pass in final national certificate exams
2.Why did you get involved as a provider and key stakeholder in basic education?
3. How would you describe the efforts of the current and previous government on primary and secondary education?
4. What's your view on the quality of education provided for children in public schools?
5. Do you think primary and secondary education should be free? Give the reason for your answers
6. What your opinion about the involvement of religious organisations and private owners in the provision of basic education?
7. In what ways, and by what measures, is your school contributing to better quality of education in Nigeria?
8. In what ways is your school helping to improve access to education, especially for children from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds?

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Table 3. Profile of schools

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School ID	Level	Type of ownership	Student population	Teaching staff	Student/ teachers ratio	Average class size	% pass rate
1	Primary	Public	450	28	16	28	N/A
2	Secondary	Public	3000	98	31	70	N/A
3	Primary	Faith	115	12	10	8	N/A
4	Secondary	Public	756	46	16	N/A	14
5	Primary &Secondary	Faith	362	37	10	22	86
6	Secondary	Faith	360	54	7	33	N/A
7	Primary & Secondary	Faith	360	54	7	33	N/A
8	Primary & secondary	Private	467	45	10	20	100
9	Primary & Secondary	Private	250	32	8	15	90
10	Primary	Faith	80	12	7	11	N/A
11	Secondary	Public	850	38	22	50	5
12	Primary & Secondary	Private	260	30	9	27	75
13	Secondary	Public	2005	36	56	45	N/A
14	Primary	Public	299	30	10	30	90
15	Secondary	Faith	420	30	14	30	N/A

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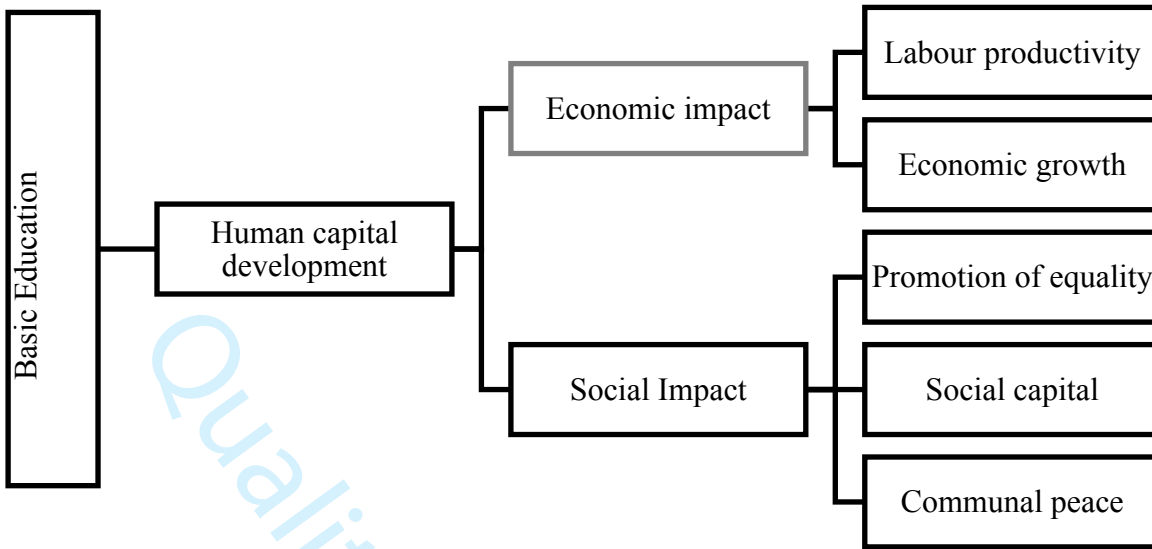52
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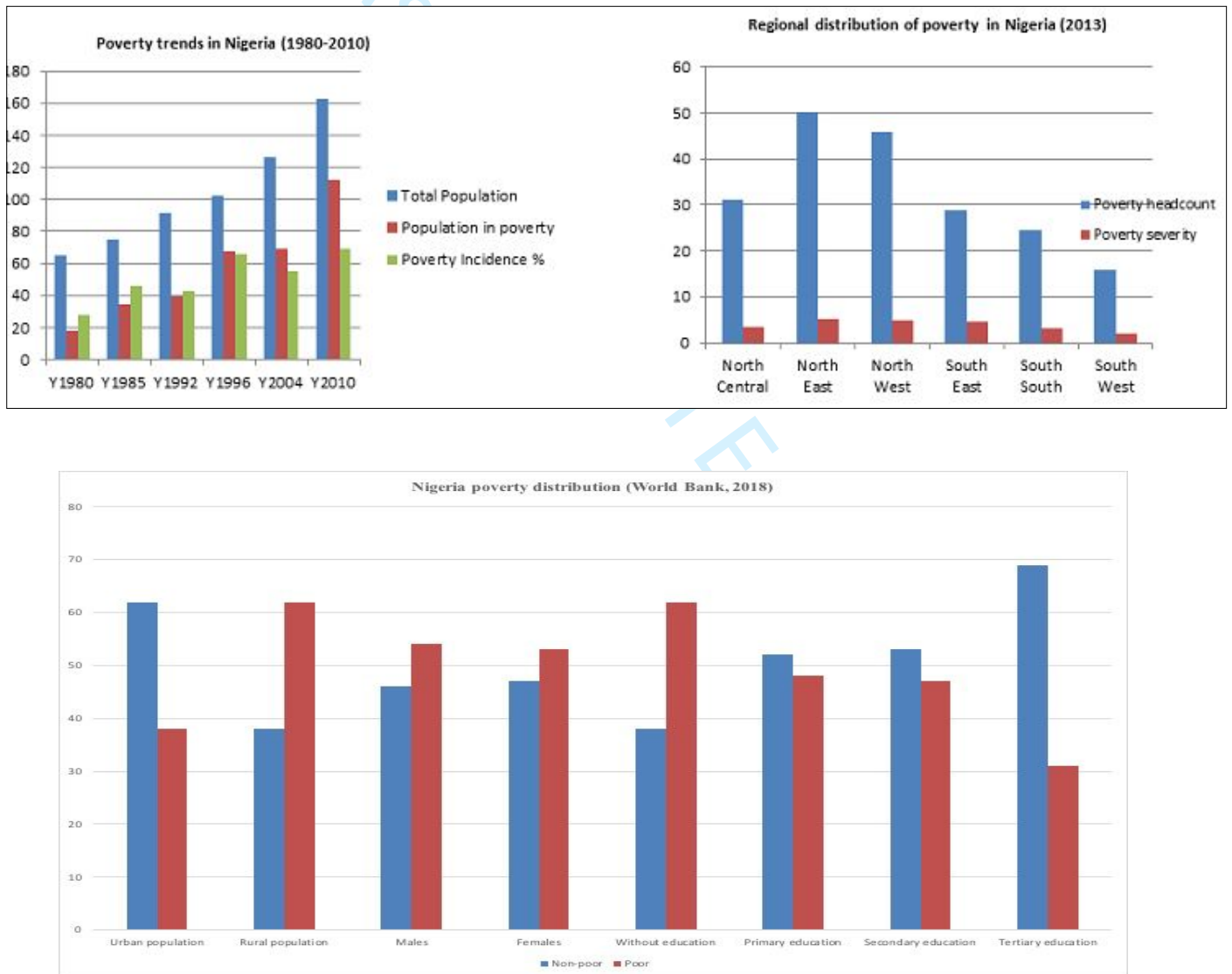59
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Figure 1: Economic and social impact of basic education

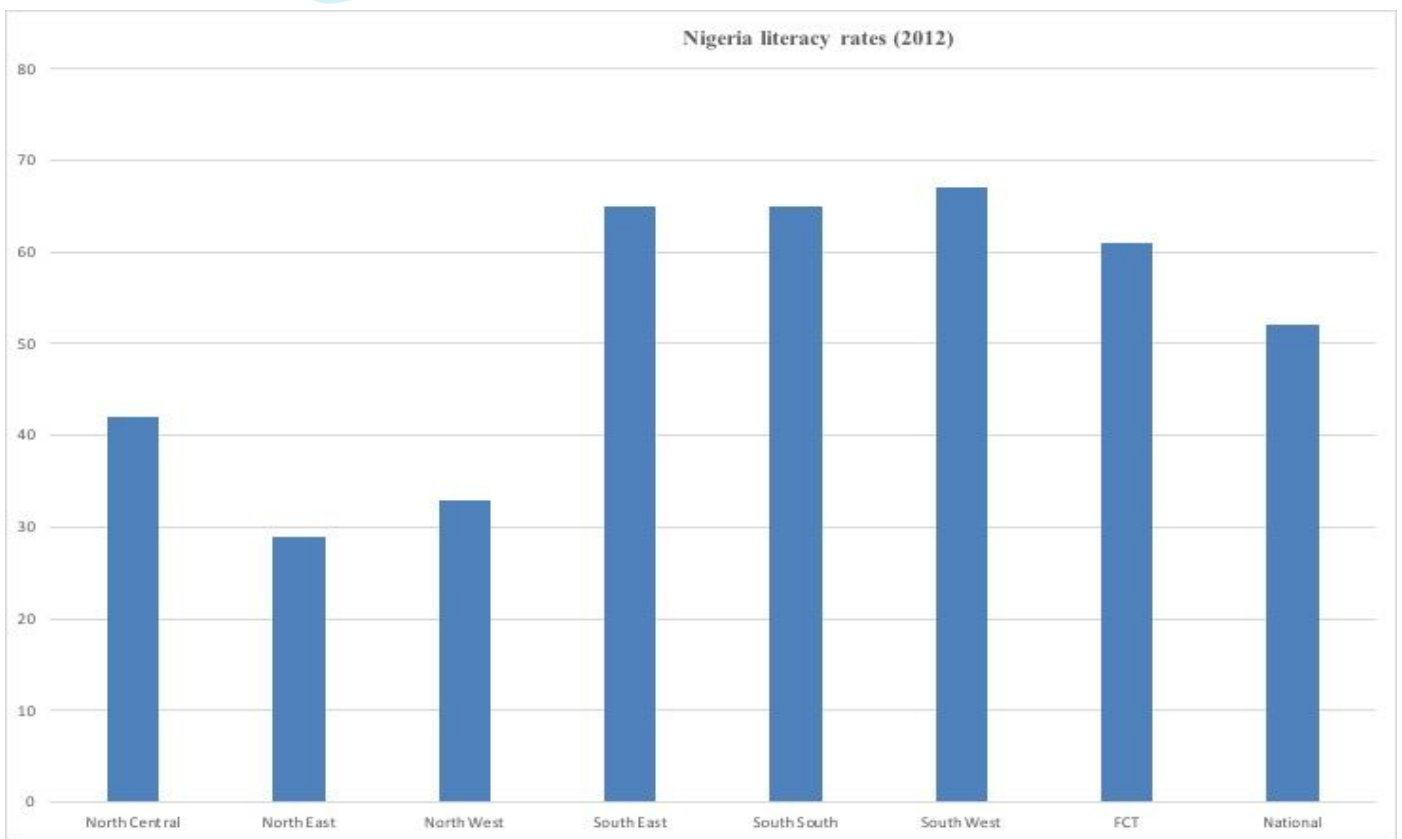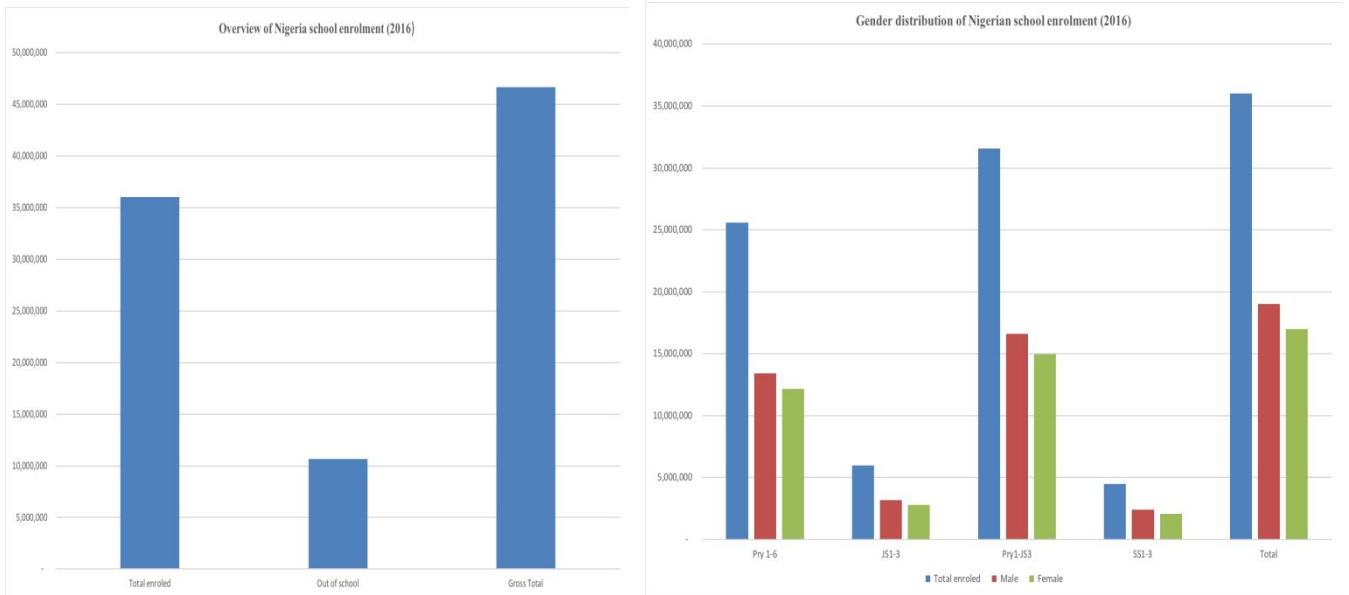**Figure 2a&b: Poverty trends and poverty distribution in Nigeria [data sources: ActionAid (2014); World Bank (2018)]**

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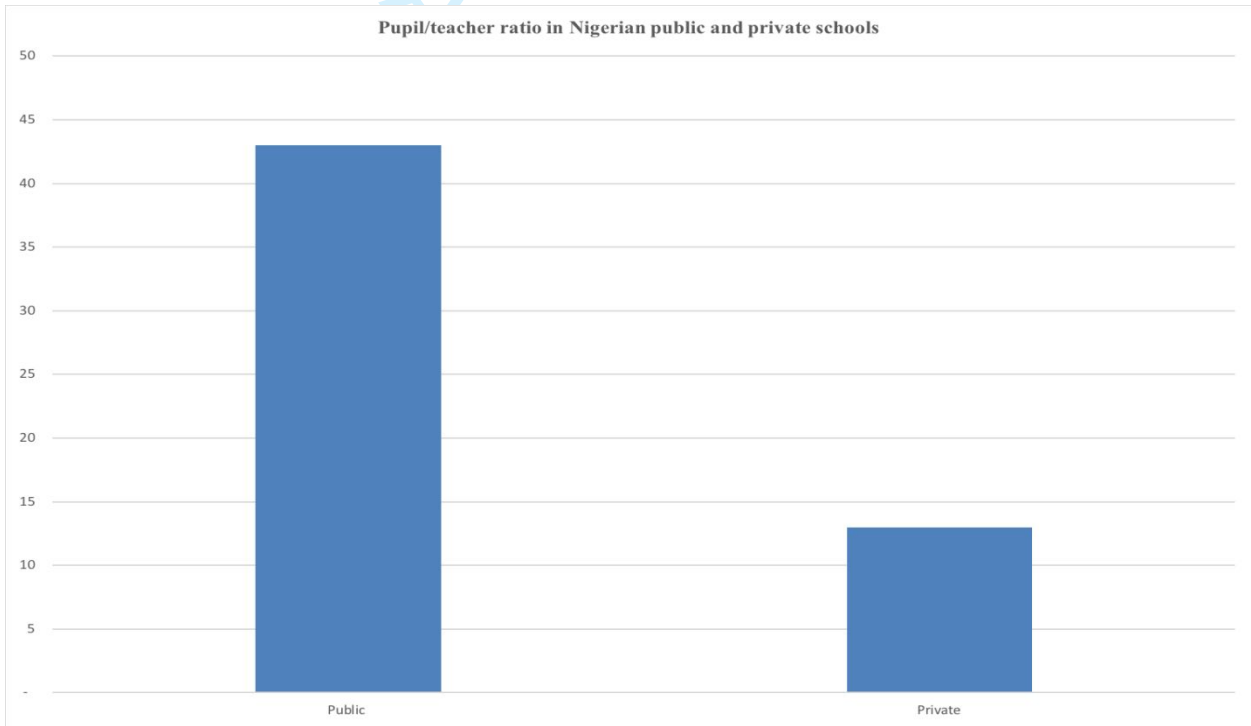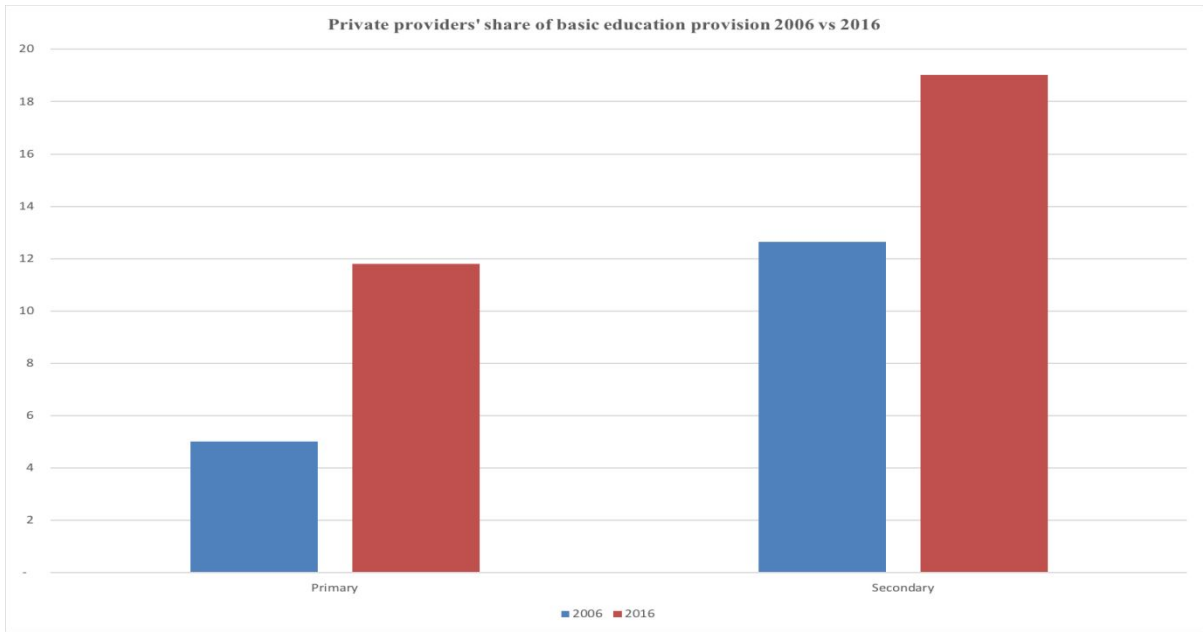42
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Figure 3a,b & c: Nigeria school enrolment and literacy rates [Data source: (UNESCO, 2018; Federal Ministry of Education Nigeria, 2017)

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Figure 4a&b: Provide providers' contribution to universal basic education in Nigeria [Data source: (UNESCO, 2018; Federal Ministry of Education Nigeria, 2017)]