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Public schools are free in Zambia, but many parents choose private schools

- › schools recognised by the Government, and 37% were private schools that did not officially exist.

The researchers tested 9,000 children from government and fee-paying schools in India, Ghana and Kenya. They found, once they controlled for background variables, that the children at the unregistered private schools performed 14 percentage points better in maths and 20 percentage points better in English.

“No one suspected that private slum schools would be better,” says Tooley. His findings raise the question of whether international agencies should consider giving financial backing to the fee-paying schools.

The priority should be to help governments provide a free education for all, says the World Bank, but it also recognises that fee-paying schools can play a crucial role.

Bob Prouty, an education advisor to the World Bank, says that many children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would have missed out on education altogether during the last 15 years of political upheaval and civil war if they had not been able to attend private community schools. “It’s kind of a dirty little secret,” he says. “But where private schools are providing an education for the very poorest communities, it has to be seen as an indictment of the existing system.” ♦

Michael Shaw in Ngoma, Zambia

More than reading, writing and counting

□ UNESCO will have a demanding role to play over the next ten years in co-ordinating efforts to achieve Education for All, according to Abhimanyu Singh, UNESCO’s Director for EFA Co-ordination and Monitoring. “We must keep everyone working towards the EFA goals,” he says.

□ UNESCO’s research institutes will attempt to focus more sharply on helping countries form effective national education plans and improving the effectiveness of regional support networks and country programmes.

□ Initiatives have also been launched on three key issues: training for teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa, adult literacy for empowerment and the fight against HIV/AIDS, which is doubling teacher attrition rates in some countries. The ambitious training programme will attempt to raise the quality of teaching in 17 countries from 2006. UNESCO is already coordinating the international UN effort on HIV/AIDS, but will also expand its preventive education work. The ten-year adult literacy programme, LIFE, will operate in 34 countries that have 10 million illiterates or an adult literacy rate below 50 %.

□ “Literacy is no longer about the 3Rs but about human development, community development and country development,” says Shigeru Aoyagi, Chief of UNESCO’s Literacy Section, adding that programmes must go beyond the basics. Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta, a former Minister of Education in Gambia and now the Director of the Basic Education Division at UNESCO, says the Organization must also work more at the country level to share expertise, improve governments’ ability to use aid effectively and increase their ability to negotiate with international donors. “When they want an accord, developing countries tend to agree with partners,” Ndong-Jatta says. “UNESCO must help them respond better to get a better outcome for themselves.”

Yojana Sharma

1945-2005: WORLDS APART



UNESCO was founded following the Second World War. Sixty years later, the world is not quite the same. Examples.

	1945	2005
World population <i>(billions)</i>	2.2	6.5
Urban population <i>(% of total)</i>	less than 29	49
Adult literacy <i>(%)</i>	less than 50	81.7
Life expectancy at birth <i>(years)</i>	less than 46	65
Countries with parliaments	26	186
Women in parliaments <i>(% of total)</i>	3	16
Fertility rate <i>(children per woman)</i>	more than 5	less than 3
Child mortality <i>(children per 1,000 not surviving to age 5)</i>	≈ 224	≈ 86
Forest area <i>(million km²)</i>	50	39
Annual water consumption <i>(km³)</i>	797	2,425
Annual oil consumption <i>(million tonnes)</i>	less than 470	more than 4,000
Tourists <i>(millions)</i>	less than 25	808

Sources : Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inter-Parliamentary Union, United Nations system, Worldwatch Institute.

NB : In general, the collection of data on a global scale only began in the 1950s, which explains the approximate figures before that time.