

Privatization in Education: Equity in Public vs. Private Schools Globally

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Abstract

This research examines access and equity in private versus public schooling, focusing on how financial barriers limit opportunities for low-income, rural, and disadvantaged students. "Access" refers to both enrollment in and success within private schools, while "marginalized" populations include students facing economic and low-resource challenges, such as limited transportation and high tuition costs. Private schools often offer higher-quality education, including better test scores and advanced courses, but these benefits are often out of reach for disadvantaged students due to the high costs. Ultimately, the study calls for policy changes to ensure more equitable access to quality education for marginalized students.

Background

Private schools often provide higher-quality education, but their accessibility is limited due to economic and transportation barriers. Marginalized communities are frequently excluded because of financial constraints, making education dependent on wealth rather than ability (Piraino & Haveman, 2006). High tuition costs further restrict access, with families in Ghana spending up to 33% of their yearly income on private schooling (Akaguri, 2014; Chimombo, 2009), while in the U.S., educational opportunities remain closely tied to wealth (Buchmann & Hannum, 2001). With poorly funded schools, these fee-based private schools are a necessity for Ghanaians. Transportation challenges, such as long commutes or a lack of reliable options, further limit school choice for low-income families. Despite these obstacles, private schools continue to offer advantages such as higher test scores and pre-collegiate opportunities, deepening the divide in educational access.

U.S. private and charter schools are mostly in urban or suburban communities

% of schools in each category, fall 2021

Community type	City	Suburban	Town	Rural
Public	30	32	14	29
Charter	56		26	6 12
Private	43		40	6 11

Number of students enrolled	<300	300-499	500+
Public	31	30	39
Charter	44	25	32
Private		82	10 8

Figure 1 (Above) Location Differences in School Types



Figure 2 (Above) American charter school with high tech science equipment



Figure 3 (Above) Ghanaian low-Fee private school with students sharing a textbook

Methods

This study conducted a systematic literature review using the Web of Science database to examine financial and logistical barriers to private schooling for marginalized students. A total of 9 keyword searches related to "private schooling," "education inequity," and "low-income students" yielded 7,115 articles, which were filtered for relevance. The final selection focused on studies addressing tuition costs, transportation challenges, and socioeconomic barriers to private school access

Conclusion

Private schools tend to offer better resources, but financial and transportation barriers limit access for low-income and rural students. Families in some countries spend 30-44% of their income on tuition, making private education unsustainable. Limited public transport and long commutes further restrict opportunities for low-income and rural families. To close the education gap, policymakers must expand financial aid, improve transportation access, and ensure equitable school funding.

References

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