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Public or private school? Determinants for enrolment of adolescents in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau

Geir Gunnlaugsson, MD, PhD, MPH [a,*], Fatou Nǿdure Baboudóttir, MA [a], Aladje Baldé, MSc, PhD [b], Zeca Jandi, MA [c], Hamadou Boiro, MA, DEA [a,c], Jónína Einarsdóttir, PhD [a]

[a] Faculty of Sociology, Anthropology and Folkloristics, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland
[b] University Campus, Jean Piaget University of Guinea-Bissau, Antula, Bissau, Guinea-Bissau
[c] Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa (INEP), Avenida dos Combatentes da Liberdade da Pátria, Complexo Escolar 14 de Novembro, C.P. 112, Bissau, Guinea-Bissau

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ABSTRACT

Inequality in access to quality education is wide-ranging across and within countries. This study examines determinants for adolescents' school enrolment in private and public schools in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau, including 2,039 randomly selected school-attending adolescents. The survey methodology was built on the Planet Youth collaboration and is the first of its kind in the setting. The critical determinant for attending a private school rather than a public one reflects parental socioeconomic background, i.e., education, employment status, and financial resources, not gender. Overage class enrolment is common, particularly in public schools and among boys rather than girls. National and international collective action and innovative education policies are needed for Bissau-Guinean adolescents to enjoy their right to the quality education they are entitled to.

1. Introduction

Children have a right to access education appropriate to their needs, as spelt out in Art. 28 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UNICEF, 1990). This right is further reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that emphasise the importance of education for achieving the Agenda 2030. In SDG Target 4.1, there is a call to "ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education" (Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2015). Despite progress, globally, school attendance is unevenly distributed.

Declaration of interest: none

* Corresponding author: Geir Gunnlaugsson, School of Social Sciences, Gimli v/Sturlugötu, University of Iceland, IS-102 Reykjavík, Iceland. Tel. work +525 4369; mobile +354-8436237

E-mail addresses: geirgunnlaugsson@hi.is (G. Gunnlaugsson), fnb1@hi.is (F.N. Baboudóttir), aladje@gmail.com (A. Baldé), jandizeca@gmail.com (Z. Jandi), hboiro@gmail.com (H. Boiro), je@hi.is (J. Einarsdóttir).

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1.1. Access to education

Inequality in access to education based on, for instance, wealth, location, gender, language, religion, ethnicity, and displacement, varies across and within countries (UNESCO, 2020a, 2020b). In low- and middle-income countries, students with rural residence and belonging to the poorest 20% have significantly lower completion rates in primary and secondary education than those better off (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 8). In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), only about two out of three primary and secondary school-age children, adolescents and youth attend school (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 7). Rural children are the most disadvantaged in enrolment and access to quality education (Okeowhor, Okoh, Baakel, & Okolo, 2019). While boys are disadvantaged at the tertiary level in some world regions, girls are underrepresented at all education levels in SSA, which has the highest proportion of out-of-school children (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 256). The reasons for the observed gender inequality in access to education are manifold, including early marriage, teenage pregnancy and discriminatory gender norms (Maldonado, 2019; McCleary-Sills et al., 2015; Wodon et al., 2020). Compared to boys, girls' bad school performance results more frequently in their drop-out while their good accomplishment contributes to prolonged enrolment, with other circumstances remaining equal (Kuépié et al., 2015).

1.2. Public and private schools

During the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) era, primary education improved considerably in SSA; yet, only a few of the countries achieved universal primary education as aimed for in 2015 (MDG Monitor, 2017). Makuvaza et al. (2017) argue that despite higher school attendance rates, inequality in access is increasing due to policies "that are influenced by neoliberal anti-people approach" (p. 1). This "approach" has roots in the 1980s, when the International Monetary Fund demanded debt-ridden countries to adopt structural adjustment policies (SAP), such as currency devaluation, removal of government involvement, elimination of subsidies and free trade (Riddell, 1992). Cuts in state expenditure and privatisation of services like education and health quickly resulted in dire consequences for those with the least resources to pay (Cornia, Jolly, & Stewart, 1987; Thomson et al., 2017). In many SSA countries, public education failed in quality and teacher motivation, with private schooling expanding in response to parental demand (Nishimura & Yamano, 2013). Private engagement in education includes diverse forms, such as for-profit education, public-private partnerships, or initiatives by local communities, religious institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Pedró et al., 2015; Robertson, Mundy, Verger, & Menashy, 2012; Silva & Oliveira, 2020b).

The call for Education for All (EFA) aimed to meet the learning needs of children, youth and adults (see, e.g., Unterhalter (2019) for a discussion on the EFA movement and the formulation of the SDG4); however, in 2015, more than 100 million children and adolescents were out-of-school (UNESCO Institute for Statistics/UNICEF, 2015). It is the state's role to ensure children's education and regulate the educational market, and parents have the freedom to choose education for their children (Ron Balsera et al., 2016). Faced with the failings of the public education system, parents have increasingly resorted to private schools. A recent literature review on private school delivery to the poor, including many countries in SSA, concluded that higher quality of teaching in private schools than public ones encouraged parents with the means to send their children to private schools (Day Ashley et al., 2014). Yet, there are controversies on their reach-out to low-income families, gender disparity in attendance, and overall better quality (Tooley, 2015).

A recent study in 16 SSA countries found that about three out of four schools were public, with wide variation depending on the country, e.g., about one percent in Mali and almost 70% in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Wodon, 2014). Faith-inspired schools (FIS) were found to enrol 14% of primary school students and 11% in secondary schools; for secondary education, the market share of FIS was about 11% compared to 16% for private secular schools. Contextual factors were related to state failure and poorly functioning public schools, coupled with historical background. FIS served the poor better than private secular schools, while overall, they were less pro-poor than public facilities. Catholic FISs are proportionally more common in low-income countries than in the middle- and high-income countries; notwithstanding, the attendance of disadvantaged students is limited (Wodon, 2019).

The MDGs aimed for high enrolment rates in primary education, while the SDGs underline the quality of education (Unterhalter, 2019). Two theoretical perspectives, which aim to understand the maintenance of inequalities in education, reflect these differences in emphasis (Baum et al., 2018; Lucas, 2001). According to the Maximally Maintained Inequality perspective, when access to education is scarce, students' favourable socioeconomic background gives them advantages in access compared to those in a less favourable position. On the other hand, the Effectively Maintained Inequality perspective holds that inequalities are also maintained in settings with universal access to education when socioeconomically advantaged groups use their position to seek higher quality education. With these perspectives in mind, we will explore determinants for adolescents' enrolment in public and private education in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau.

1.3. Aims of the study

Guinea-Bissau is a fragile state on the west coast of Africa (Fund for Peace (FFP), 2020). While education is emphasised as a public good in national policy, privatisation of schools has been encouraged, or their private management (Silva & Oliveira, 2020b). In a recent review of educational research since the independence of Guinea-Bissau, the authors identified 148 studies, primarily written in Portuguese (Silva & Oliveira, 2017). Fourteen studies were classified under the theme "Students", most focusing on school performance and gender, while two analysed the general socioeconomic background of students living in rural areas (Ahlenhed et al., 1991; Boone et al., 2013). Here we aimed to explore and analyse determinants for adolescents' school attendance in public and private schools in the capital Bissau. The research question was: To what extent are socioeconomic differences manifested in a group of school-attending adolescents in the capital city?

2. The setting

2.1. Socioeconomic situation and population

Guinea-Bissau is ranked 175 out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index 2020 (UNDP, 2020) and 173 out of 182 countries on KidsRights Index 2020 (*KidsRights Index*, n.d.). About 70% of the population lives on less than US$2 a day (Merchant et al., 2017). Since independence from Portugal in 1974, rows of successful attempted and alleged military coups have plagued the country, one of which resulted in the military uprising and a war in 1998–1999 (Einarsdóttir, 2007; Gebremichael, Mesfin, & Kidane, 2019; Mendy, 2003; Shaw, 2015). The political instability has been continuous, e.g., exemplified by a change of government every year in 1999–2009 and ten Prime Ministers since 2014. Simultaneously, the country has been confronted with rampant drug trafficking (BBC, 2020; Shaw, 2015; Shaw & Gomes, 2020).

The Bissau-Guinean population is estimated to be around 1.9 million; 42% are between 0–14 years, and 32% are young people aged 10–24 years (UNFPA, 2020). Based on extrapolated data from the most recent census in 2009, Bissau's population in 2016 was estimated to be 493.529; adolescents aged 14–19 years were 120.421 or about a quarter of the capital's total population (Costa et al., 2009).

About twenty ethnic languages are spoken in the country where Fula, Balanta, Manjaco, Mandinga and Papel are the most frequent. Only 11–14% of the Bissau-Guinean population speaks the official language Portuguese, most of whom belong to Bissau's educated elite (Pariona, 2017). Kriol, a Portuguese-based Creole language, is the language for interethnic communication. During the colonial era, Kriol was considered the language of the "uncivilised" population (Embaló, 2009) while the tiny "civilised" part of the population and the Portuguese had access to elementary schools whose "curriculum emphasised the language of Camoes and Portuguese culture" (Mendy, 2003, p. 50). In the postcolonial era, Kriol became increasingly spoken by the general public, and it has become the language of music, poesy and literature, spoken by about 90% of the population (Kohl, 2018). Although only a tiny proportion of children speak Portuguese, it is the teaching language at all levels of education. Studies have indicated that students who have Kriol as a home language or as a mother tongue fare better in their school work than those with other language combinations (Silva & Oliveira, 2017). Nonetheless, Kriol is unlikely to replace Portuguese as the language for formal education (Nafafe, 2006).

2.2. Education system

In Guinea-Bissau, the education system is fraught with problems. An estimated 44% of 6-11 years old children are out of school, and just less than one-third start school at the correct age (UNESCO, 2017). The disparity in completion rates is broad, based on location, wealth, and gender, and increases with a higher level of education. Among young people aged 15–24 years, 41% of women have completed primary school and 55% of males (UNESCO, 2020b). Prolonged teachers' strikes have badly affected the public schools and contributed to an increased number of community schools (Boone et al., 2013; Silva & Oliveira, 2017; World Bank, 2018). For example, in the academic year 2016–2017, 92 teaching days (46%) were lost to strike within the public education system, compared to 65% in 2015–2016 (UNICEF, 2017, p. 31). For a couple of decades, the number of self-managed community-based schools has increased, often in rural areas (Boone et al., 2013; Furtado, 2005; Marshall et al., 2020; Morgado, 2019; World Bank, 2018). These struggle to bypass strikes, often with support from external organisations (Silva & Oliveira, 2017). The private schools, including FIS, have not suffered strikes and have an overall better infrastructure and teaching quality.

Since 1984, in collaboration with the World Bank, the government has implemented several SAPs contributing to public expenditure cuts. The education system has been chronically underfunded, with public spending on education 12.3% of total public expenditures in 2010-2017, below international standards of 20% (UNICEF, 2018). The household contribution is more significant than that of the state or 63% of the educational expenditure compared to about one-fourth elsewhere in Africa (UNESCO, 2016). The quality of the education given in the country has been described as "surprisingly dire" and the schools as "chronically vulnerable" (Boone et al., 2013; UNESCO, 2016). While the quality of teaching and learning is low, "the education system appears to have tremendous resilience" reflected in enhancements in legislation and increased enrolment with community support "due to the strategic and symbolic value attributed to education" (Silva et al., 2015, p. 980).

The education system is divided into pre-school, three cycles of primary education (grades 1–4, 5–6, and 7–9), and secondary level (grades 10–12), followed by technical and tertiary university education (Merchant et al., 2017). The academic year starts in October and ends in July the following year. While all schools apply user fees that increase with class, private schools are more expensive than public ones. For the school year 2016/2017, the academic year in focus in this research, the annual registration fee in public schools, depending on grade, was 11,250 FCFA to 17,250 FCFA (about 17 to 27 euros) compared to 126,000 to 172,000 FCFA (about 192 to 262 euros) in private schools. In response to the education system crisis, the national parents' association has experimented with self-managed schools in some regions with a monthly fee of 500 FCFA (75 euro cents) per child (AFP, 2017). Irrespective of private (FIS or independent) or public administration, all schools are expected to adhere to the national curricula as decided by the Ministry of Education.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Planet youth collaboration

"Youth in Europe – A Drug Prevention Program" was established in Reykjavík, Iceland, in 2005 in partnership with over 30

European municipalities in 15 countries. It built on gained experience since the late 1990s by the Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis (ICSRA) from implementing annual surveys among school-attending children for health-promoting activities in close collaboration with municipalities and parents across Iceland (ICSRA, n.d.). Now named Planet Youth, the collaborative network currently includes 200 communities in 34 countries in Europe, North and South America, Australia, and Africa (*PlanetYouth – Evidence Based Drug Prevention*, n.d.). The survey questions have been developed and refined over the years by a multidisciplinary team of professionals. While aiming to improve preventive work for adolescents with a particular focus on tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, the survey includes questions on participants' socioeconomic background, health and wellbeing, family, peers, school and leisure activities (Kristjansson et al., 2020a, 2020b; Thorisdottir et al., 2021).

3.2. Implementation of the survey

The data collection in Bissau followed a distinct and well-established methodology of the Youth in Europe/Planet Youth collaboration (Kristjansson et al., 2013). The survey questionnaire was translated into Portuguese with questions adapted to the socio-demographic context of Guinea-Bissau and pilot tested in three classes in one public school in Bissau to assess the degree of difficulty in obtaining a response from students in the target age group of 15-16 years. Further, the pilot aimed to evaluate the feasibility of the survey approach in the context of Bissau-Guinean adolescents' life situation and how long it would take them to answer the questionnaire.

The questions were considered appropriate (e.g., when invited to hand in an incompletely filled-out questionnaire because of time constraint during the pilot, one student said, "I want to complete answering the questions because they address my life situation"). On the other hand, the students were not familiar with the questionnaire format, and it was written in Portuguese, not in Kriol. For this reason, it took them longer than expected to answer all the questions. Subsequently, questions were excluded that were deemed to be of lesser relevance in the context of adolescents in Guinea-Bissau to facilitate completion within the assigned 90 minutes (two classroom sessions). The final questionnaire included 312 questions divided into 77 main themes.

A preparatory meeting was held in June 2016 with school principals and teachers to present and discuss the study's methodology. In March 2017, two authors (GG & ZJ) visited 17 schools attended by adolescents aged 15-16 years to introduce the research and its research questions on-site to school head-teachers and staff and obtain information about the number of students enrolled in the targeted age group in each class. Based on the given information, the authors compiled a list with all classes in the 17 schools that included at least one-third of students in the target age group. In total, the sample included 116 classes with 4,470 students enrolled in grades 7-10. After that, each class was assigned a computer-generated random number; after randomising the classes and initiating survey implementation, one private school with three randomly selected classes chose not to participate due to ongoing final examinations.

The study was implemented in June 2017. In preparation, school head-teachers and collaborating teachers were invited for a new information session on study methodology and implementation and feedback on the proposed work. In total, 12 public schools and four private ones participated in the study, with 2,110 randomly selected students or 47.2% of the 4.470 students included in the specially compiled class file. At the beginning of the session, the authors (GG, ZJ, JE and HB) introduced the survey to the class together with head-teachers and teachers. When the students had come into a rhythm to answer during the session, they said they found it enjoyable and easy to answer the questionnaire that took them about 60-90 minutes. After completing the survey, they put the questionnaire into the provided envelope, sealed it, and delivered it to the attending teachers and the authors.

3.3. Statistics

All completed questionnaires were sent to Iceland for electronic data entry scanning by ICSRA at Reykjavík University. After digitisation, data were imported into IBM SPSS Statistics 21.0 by ICSRA staff and codified with numerical values. The data files were then imported into JMP 14.3 for statistical analysis (SAS Institute Inc., 2018). In total, out of 2,110 questionnaires, 2,039 (96.7%) were successfully digitised and make up the total number of adolescents who participated in the survey. Initially, descriptive statistics were conducted on all the study variables, and widely disseminated to participating schools and national policy makers (Gunnlaugsson et al., 2018). The variables were then recoded to a nominal variable with a value of either 1 or 0 for bivariate analysis to identify significant explanatory variables for the dependent variable "school type" (private (1), public (0)). The Chi-square test was used ($p < 0.05$), and odds ratios (OR) calculated with 95% confidence intervals (CI) to evaluate statistical significance; the tests and confidence intervals on ORs are Wald based. For the dependent variable, potential explanatory variables were then introduced into a multinomial logistic regression model that considers missing values by coding them as a separate level of that effect. Non-significant variables were gradually removed from the model, and RSquare (R^2) calculated for the final model. To evaluate the effect sizes associated with very small p-values, these were transformed to the LogWorth (-log10(p-value)) scale. The larger the LogWorth value, the stronger is the effect of the variable in the model (Sall, 2018; SAS Institute Inc., 2018).

3.4. Ethics

Most of the participants were aged 14-17 years and children as defined by the CRC (UNICEF, 1990). CRC highlights children's right to express an opinion on their situation (Art. 12) and participate as found appropriate for their age (Art. 3, 5, and 12). Scholars have called attention to the risk that parental consent requirements in research with children might contribute to biased data and low response rates (Anderman et al., 1995; Liu et al., 2017). Others have called for socio-culturally responsive ethics reviews (Abebe &

Table 1
Socioeconomic background of respondents, by public or private school. A random sample of adolescents enrolled in grade 7 to 10 in Bissau, June 2017.*

Survey questions/variables	Type of school				Full sample	
	Public		Private			
	n	%	n	%	N	%
Are you a boy or a girl?						
Boy	530	50	424	44	954	47
Girl	503	47	521	53	1,024	50
Missing	30	3	31	3	61	3
Age at the time of survey (years)						
14	27	3	106	11	133	7
15	107	10	244	25	351	17
16	233	22	216	22	449	22
17	360	34	238	24	598	29
18	196	18	97	10	293	15
19 and older	32	3	14	2	46	2
Missing	108	10	61	6	169	8
Grade in school						
7^{th}	46	4	0	0	46	2
8^{th}	432	41	346	36	778	38
9^{th}	350	33	577	59	927	46
10^{th}	192	18	39	4	231	11
Missing	43	4	14	1	57	3
Age-appropriate for class at school enrolment						
Yes	263	25	489	50	752	37
No	610	57	382	39	992	48
Younger than reference	16	2	19	2	35	2
Missing	174	16	86	9	260	13
Which of the following persons live in your home?						
Both parents	425	40	452	46	877	43
Mother, but not with father	240	23	231	24	471	23
Father, but not with mother	86	8	55	6	141	7
Mother and with her partner	20	2	31	3	51	3
Father and his new partner	21	2	28	3	49	2
I live with my grandparents	86	8	76	8	162	8
Another arrangement	24	2	21	2	45	2
Missing	161	15	82	8	243	12
What is the highest level of schooling your mother completed?						
Initiated/completed university	122	12	323	33	445	22
Initiated/completed vocational/technical training	55	5	141	14	196	10
Upper secondary (grade 10–12)	159	15	122	13	281	14
Primary, third cycle (grade 7–9)	206	19	91	9	297	14
Primary, second cycle (grade 5–6)	80	8	31	3	111	5
Primary, first cycle (grade 1–4)	92	9	36	4	128	6
Illiterate	122	11	48	5	170	8
Other/does not know	95	9	99	10	194	10
Missing	132	12	85	9	217	11
What is the highest level of schooling your father completed?						
Initiated/completed university	211	20	361	37	572	28
Initiated/completed vocational/technical training	162	15	327	34	489	24
Upper secondary (grade 10–12)	206	19	66	7	272	13
Primary, third cycle (grade 7–9)	116	11	38	4	154	7
Primary, second cycle (grade 5–6)	42	4	12	1	54	3
Primary, first cycle (grade 1–4)	66	6	14	1	80	4
Illiterate	41	4	16	2	57	3
Other/does not know	71	7	53	5	124	6
Missing	148	14	89	9	237	12
Does your mother work outside the home?						
At home with domestic tasks	477	45	242	25	719	35
Part-time outside the home	250	24	217	22	467	23
Full-time outside the home	97	9	323	33	420	21
Unemployed	36	3	41	4	77	4
Disabled	4	0	3	0	7	0
Retired	10	1	6	1	16	1
Studying	41	4	40	4	81	4
Studying and working outside the home	34	3	24	3	58	3
Does not know/does not apply	20	2	20	2	40	2
Missing	94	9	60	6	154	7
Does your father work outside the home?						
At home with domestic tasks	110	10	24	3	134	7

(*continued on next page*)

Table 1 (*continued*)

Survey questions/variables	Type of school				Full sample	
	Public		Private			
	n	%	n	%	N	%
Part-time outside the home	204	19	91	9	295	14
Full-time outside the home	425	40	655	67	1080	53
Unemployed	49	5	23	2	72	3
Disabled	7	1	4	1	11	1
Retired	32	3	32	3	64	3
Studying	21	2	13	1	34	2
Studying and working outside the home	55	5	34	4	89	4
Does not know/does not apply	49	5	28	3	77	4
Missing	111	10	72	7	134	9
Place of birth						
Bissau	631	59	669	68	1300	59
Bafatá	59	6	37	4	96	5
Biombo	47	4	26	3	73	4
Bolama/Bijagós	29	3	18	2	47	3
Cacheu	109	10	51	5	160	10
Gabú	26	3	33	3	59	3
Oio	55	5	30	3	85	5
Quinará	32	3	7	1	39	3
Tombali	23	2	19	2	42	2
Abroad	4	0	40	4	44	1
Missing	48	5	46	5	94	5
To what ethnic group do you belong?						
Balanta	260	24	102	10	362	18
Beafada	46	4	28	3	74	4
Bijagós	29	3	21	2	50	2
Kriol	21	2	26	3	47	2
Felupe	28	3	9	1	37	2
Fula	114	11	138	14	252	12
Mancanha	110	10	127	13	237	11
Mandinga	109	10	106	11	215	10
Manjaco	127	12	153	16	280	14
Nalu	5	1	4	0	9	1
Papel	134	13	137	14	271	13
Portuguese	12	1	23	2	35	2
Sussu	3	0	8	1	11	1
Other	7	1	25	3	32	2
Missing	58	5	69	7	127	6
What language is spoken at home?						
Balanta	72	7	10	1	82	4
Beafada	16	2	7	1	23	1
Bijagós	5	0	2	0	7	0
Kriol	614	58	519	53	1133	56
Felupe	14	1	3	0	17	1
Fula	55	5	51	5	106	5
Mancanha	28	3	24	3	52	3
Mandinga	44	4	40	4	84	4
Manjaco	49	5	21	2	70	3
Nalu	2	0	0	0	2	0
Papel	20	2	13	1	33	2
Portuguese	27	3	84	9	111	5
Sussu	1	0	2	0	3	0
Other	5	0	5	1	10	1
Missing	111	10	195	20	306	15
Which religious sect or community do you belong to?						
Catholic	519	49	583	60	1102	54
Muslim	303	28	292	30	595	29
Lutheran/Evangelist	201	19	64	7	265	13
Other	8	1	14	1	22	1
None	15	1	13	1	28	2
Missing	17	2	10	1	27	1
Do you go to school in the neighbourhood you live in?						
Yes	498	47	225	23	723	35
No	506	48	778	74	1224	60
Missing	59	5	33	3	92	5

* Percentage values are approximated to the nearest whole number.

Bessell, 2014; Okyere, 2017). Considering the students' mature age as children and the setting in which the study was conducted, pre-parental approval was not sought; the adolescents decided on their participation in the survey without any personal identifiers.

Ethical approval for the study was attained in four steps. First, in line with national requirements, the Minister of Education in Guinea-Bissau approved the study and granted permission for the University of Jean Piaget Guinea-Bissau and the University of Iceland to conduct the study among adolescents in Guinea-Bissau (No/Ref 250/MEES/GM/2017). Second, the study was explained to school head-teachers, who subsequently approved their school's participation and designated two teachers to become contact persons for the research team. Third, teachers in randomly selected classes approved to dedicate two class sessions for the survey after the study had been explained by the head-teacher, school collaborators and the research team. At the time of implementation, the students were introduced to the study. It was explained that the survey was not an examination, participation was voluntary, and they could leave out to answer some or all the questions in the survey.

4. Results

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic background information on the 2,039 participants by school form with girls and boys almost equally represented. In total, 1,069 (52%) of the respondents attended public schools and 976 (48%) private schools, i.e., three FIS (98%) and one low-cost private school (2%). On average, there were 1,880 (92%) responses for each of the 14 variables (median 1,878, range 1,733–2,012).

4.1. Gender and age

Information on both age and gender is available for 1,780 (87%) of the participants; the mean age of girls (n = 921) was 16.3 years (median 16) compared to 16.4 years (median 17) for boys (n = 859). Girls were 1.29 times (95% CI 1.08-1.55) more likely to attend a private school than boys and 1.23 times more likely to be enrolled in an age-appropriate class (95% CI 1.02-1.49).

Information on age at the time of school enrolment in 2016 was available for 1,870 (92%) of participants; 1,047 (56%) were in the survey's target age group of 15–16 years old. Respondents (grades 7–10) who attended a private school were significantly younger at enrolment than those who attended public school ($p < 0.0001$); the average age at enrolment of those attending private school was 15.0 years compared to 15.7 years in public schools.

Overage attendance is defined as students who are two or more years above theoretical age for their grade (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 214). Out of 1,822 (89%) participants for whom information was available for both age at school enrolment and grade, 752 (41%) attended age-appropriate class, and 35 (2%) were younger than reference age (Table 1). Those who were overage at enrolment were on average 2.7 years above reference age for their grade (median 2 years; range 2-6 years). Those who were overaged were significantly more likely to be boys than girls; it was 1.23 times (95% CI 1.02-1.49) more likely that boys were overaged at enrolment compared to girls. Overage students were also more likely to attend public schools than private ones; those who attended public schools were 2.91 times (95% CI 2.39–3.53) more likely to be overage compared to those attending private schools.

4.2. Household composition

Households with two caretakers, that is, with biological parents or one biological parent and a new partner (2-headed households) (Table 1), were more likely to have their children attend a private school than a public one (OR 1.25, 95% CI 1.04-1.50). There was no difference in attendance to a private or public school for participants who reported they lived with their grandparents ($p = 0.4446$).

4.3. Parental education

In total, 1,127 (62%) of the respondents in the study had a mother or a father who had started or completed university education or vocational education/technical training (Table 1); 575 (32%) had both a mother and a father with this level of education. Children to mothers who had started or completed either university studies or vocational/technical education were 5.27 times (95% CI 4.24-6.55) more likely than those with less education to have their children in private school compared to a public one. Likewise, fathers with a similar level of educational achievement were 5.95 times (95% CI 4.75-7.45) more likely than those with less education to have their children in private school compared to a public one. If either one or both parents had started or completed university studies or vocational/technical training, it was 5.74 (95% CI 4.64-7.10) times more likely their child would attend a private school than a public one.

4.4. Parental employment

More than 90% of respondents in the survey gave information on the employment status of their parents or caretakers (Table 1). Children of mothers working either part- or full-time were 2.53 times (95% CI 2.10-3.06) more likely than those with no employment to attend a private school compared to a public one. Similar results were found for fathers; it was 2.60 times (95% CI 2.00-3.38) more likely for employed fathers (part- or full-time) to have their children in a private school than a public one. If both parents worked, either part- or full-time, it was 2.88 times (95% CI 2.21-3.76) more likely their children attended a private school than children whose parents were reported not to have formal employment.

4.5. Place of birth

To explore potential rural-urban disparity in the group of respondents, their place of birth was used as a proxy (Table 1). Out of 1,901 respondents who reported their birthplace, 1,300 (68%) were born in Bissau. Those born outside Bissau were 1.82 times more likely (95% CI 1,50–2.23) to attend public schools than those born in Bissau.

4.6. Ethnic groups and language

Ethnic background was reported by 1,912 (94%) of the participants and included 13 distinct ethnic groups (Table 1). Similarly, 13 ethnic languages were reported to be regularly spoken in the homes of the 1,733 (85%) respondents for whom information was available (Table 1); many who identified themselves to a specific ethnic group did not regularly speak the language at home. In total, 1,133 (65%) of the respondents reported that Kriol was most spoken, followed by the official (and teaching) language Portuguese, spoken in the homes of 111 (6%) of the participants. Participants who reported Portuguese was most spoken in their homes were 4.13 times (95% CI 2.65-6.44) more likely to attend a private school than participants speaking other languages, including Kriol. On the other hand, those who spoke Balanta at home were 6.31 times (95% CI 3.23-12.31) and Manjaco at home were 1.96 times (95% CI 1.17-3.30) more likely to attend a public school rather than a private one compared to those speaking other languages. No statistically significant differences were for other languages spoken at home and school attendance to public or private school.

4.7. Religion

In total, 557 (51%) out of 1,102 respondents who reported they were Catholic attended a Catholic FIS compared to 133 (22%) out of 595 who reported they were Muslims (Table 1). On the other hand, 19 (2%) Catholics attended the Islamic FIS compared to 135 (23%) out of the 595 who reported they were Muslims.

4.8. Location of school

In total, 1,947 (96%) of the respondents answered a question about the distance from home to the school they attended (Table 1); just over one out of three participants attended school in their neighbourhood. Those who attended public school were 3.14 times (95%

Table 2
Five questions with respondents' answers on parents' financial situation, by attendance to a public or private school. A random sample of adolescents enrolled in grade 7 to 10 in Bissau, June 2017.

Survey questions/variables	Type of school				Full sample	
	Public		Private			
	n	%	n	%	N	%
a) My parents are poorly off financially						
Almost never	286	27	340	35	626	31
Seldom	43	4	90	9	133	7
Sometimes	354	33	256	26	610	30
Often	108	10	36	4	144	7
Almost always	115	11	34	3	149	7
Missing	157	15	220	23	377	18
b) My parents cannot afford to buy a car						
Almost never	465	44	176	18	641	31
Seldom	59	6	80	8	139	7
Sometimes	170	16	219	23	389	19
Often	90	8	155	16	245	12
Almost always	75	7	121	12	196	10
Missing	204	19	225	23	429	21
c) My parents hardly have enough money to pay for necessities (e.g., food, housing, etc.)						
Almost never	442	42	479	49	921	45
Seldom	49	5	60	6	109	5
Sometimes	208	19	132	13	340	17
Often	97	9	45	5	142	7
Almost always	89	8	46	5	135	7
Missing	178	17	214	22	392	19
d) My parents have enough money to pay for the extra-curriculum activities that I would most like to participate in (e.g., learn a foreign language, practice musical instruments or sports)						
Almost never	330	31	172	18	502	25
Seldom	61	6	68	7	129	6
Sometimes	216	20	192	20	408	20
Often	141	13	165	17	306	15
Almost always	135	13	211	21	346	17
Missing	180	17	168	17	348	17

CI 2.59–3.81) more likely to attend a school in the area where they lived than peers attending private schools.

4.9. Family wealth

Four questions addressed the financial situation of the families of the survey participants (Table 2). Compared to private schools, those who attended public schools were more likely to consider their families were often or almost always poorly off financially (OR 3.20, 95% CI 2.40–4.27), could almost never or seldom afford a car (OR 3.02, 95% CI 2.47–3.71), often or almost always had difficulties to pay necessities for daily living (OR 1.96, 95% CI 1.49–2.58) and could almost never or seldom fund extracurricular activities (OR 1,88, 95% CI 1.54–2.30).

In total, 1,989 (98%) of the respondents gave at least one answer to any of four questions on the financial situation of their families (Table 2). In total, 794 (40%) reported no financial difficulties across the four questions, 622 (31%) reported at least one item of financial difficulties, 396 (20%) two items, 141 (7%) three items and 36 (2%) reported financial difficulties in all four questions. Respondents who reported financial difficulties in at least three out of the four questions were 3.91 times (95% CI 2.69–5.68) more likely to attend a public school than a private one.

Access to and use of social media is costly in the setting (Gunnlaugsson et al., 2020) and reflects, albeit indirectly, the financial resources of the respondents. Those who reported having communicated through social media with family, friends, or someone they liked to get to know in the last 12 months were 1.93 times (95% CI 1.54-2.42) more likely to attend a private school than a public one.

4.10. Multinomial logistic regression

Based on the results presented in Sections 4.1-4.9, to identify significant determinants for attendance to a private school rather than attending a public one in Bissau, the following 22 variables were included in a multinomial logistic model: the place of birth (Bissau); gender (girl); age (age-appropriate class); location of school (not neighbourhood school); household composition (2-headed household); parental education (at least one parent who had started or completed university or vocational/technical training); employment of parents (at least one working part- or fulltime outside the home); language spoken at home (Balanta, Fula, Kriol, Mancanha, Mandinga, Manjaco, Papel or Portuguese); religion (Catholic, Muslim, or Lutheran/Evangelist); and family financial situation (poor/cannot buy a car/lack of necessities/cannot pay for extracurricular activities; and usage of social media). Determinants that were statistically non-significant (p-value 0.05 or higher) were gradually removed from the model. The final model ($R^2 = 0{,}2648$; $p < 0.0001$) identified 11 significant explanatory variables for attendance to a private school compared to a public one (Table 3).

The p-values were transformed to a LogWorth value scale to evaluate the effect sizes for significant explanatory variables (Table 3); for example, a LogWorth value of 28 is equivalent to a p-value of 10^{-28} (Sall, 2018). The variables with the strongest effect in the model were good parental education and attending a school not in the neighbourhood (Fig. 1).

5. Discussion

Here we report results from a survey among school attending adolescents aged 14-19 years in the capital Bissau, Guinea-Bissau. Respondents were randomly selected from a class-based register, and the survey was the first of its kind in the setting. The aim was to describe and explore socioeconomic determinants for attendance in a private school compared to a public one. The most significant explanatory variable in a multinomial logistic regression model was to have at least one educated parent. Other statistically significant variables were parents' financial situation, religion, and languages that are spoken at home (Fig. 1).

Table 3
Odds ratios with 95% CI and p-values for significant explanatory variables in a multinomial logistic regression model for attendance to a private school compared to a public school. A random sample of school attending adolescents aged 14-19 years, June 2017, Bissau, Guinea-Bissau.

Variable	Odds Ratio	Prob Chisq	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Education of parents				
One or both parents started or completed university education or vocational/technical training	4.03	<0.0001	3.15	5.17
Location of school				
School not in the neighbourhood	3.14	<0.0001	2.50	3.95
Language spoken at home				
Balanta	0.24	0.0001	0.11	0.50
Portuguese	2.85	<0.0001	1.72	4.74
Age at school enrolment				
Age-appropriate class	2.19	<0.0001	1.74	2.77
Religion				
Lutheran/Evangelist	0.30	<0.0001	0.21	0.44
Catholic	0.82	0.1123	0.65	1.05
Family financial resources				
Parents are almost never or seldom financially poor	2.31	<0.0001	1.65	3.23
My parents can sometimes, often, or almost always buy a car	2.15	<0.0001	1.69	2.75
Used social media in the last 12 months	1.65	0.0003	1.26	2.17
Household				
Two-headed household (lives with biological parents or mother/father with a new partner)	1.16	0.1986	0.92	1.46

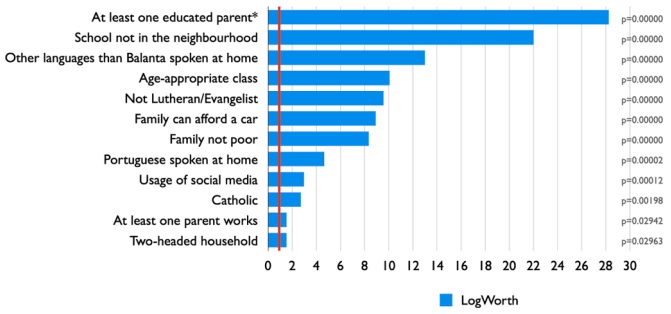

Fig. 1. Effect sizes of p-values (LogWorth value scale) for statistically significant determinants identified in a multinomial logistic regression model for attendance to a private school in Bissau compared to a public one. A random sample of school-attending adolescents aged 14-19 years in Bissau, June 2017.[§]

[§]LogWorth value above 2 corresponds to a p-value below 0.01.

*At least one parent who had started or completed university education or vocational/technical training.

The falling standard of the public schools in SSA has resulted in less confidence in the state-run education system (Baum et al., 2018; Gruijters & Behrman, 2020; Nishimura & Yamano, 2013; Tchamyou, 2020; Wodon, 2014). Ayodele (2018) points out it is no surprise that educated parents in Lagos, Nigeria, who aspire to provide their children with a good education, look for other alternatives, considering the dire state of the public educational infrastructures:

> Educational facilities at all levels are in a terrible shape; schools are littered with battered structures, worn out equipment, raggedy classroom buildings, over-crowded classrooms, inadequate manpower in quantity and quality; instability in the academic calendar owning to incessant strikes, very low teacher morale due to poor remuneration and working conditions. (Ayodele, 2018, p. 53)

Such a deplorable condition of the public education infrastructure is not unfamiliar to Bissau-Guinean parents. As elsewhere, those with education and the means enrol their children in private schools (see Table 3 and Fig. 1). The best schools accessible to them are predominantly FIS, schools recognised to be less pro-poor than public schools (see Wodon, 2014, 2019).

The respondents in our survey are Bissau-Guinean millennials born in the wake of the 1998–1999 military conflict. They are post-war kids, like their parents, born during or following the war of liberation (1963-1974). Their parents are likely to belong to the first generation of the independent Republic of Guinea-Bissau, who took advantage of new educational opportunities within the country (Carr-Hill & Rosengart, 1983). At that time, young Bissau-Guineans were also offered study grants abroad, particularly in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Cuba and Portugal (Lundy, 2018). Strikingly, the education gained by parents in the post-independence public schools and abroad now benefits their children, who, in contrast, attend private rather than public schools. Despite offering the same curriculum as public schools and often the same teachers, the private schools have overall better infrastructure and are not impacted by the recurrent teacher strikes, characteristic for public schools in the country and other SSA settings (Baum et al., 2018; Rolleston & Adefeso-Olateju, 2014; Zuilkowski et al., 2018). Thus, in a setting where attending upper primary school is already a privilege, and as suggested by Lucas (2001, p. 1652), socioeconomically advantaged Bissau-Guinean parents use their position to "secure both quantitatively and qualitatively better outcomes" for their children.

One expression of access to financial resources is attending another school than the neighbourhood school, which was the second most important determinant for private school attendance in our study (Table 3 and Fig. 1). Data from Soweto in Johannesburg, South Africa, reveal that only 18% of primary-school children attend the nearest school, indicating that families take advantage of choosing better schools despite longer distances to travel to pursue high-quality education (Kadt, Norris, Fleisch, Richter, & Alvanides, 2014). While this mobility is likely to contribute to less racial segregation and increased socioeconomic segregation, it also indicates that certain families with limited resources invest in higher-quality education. The privatisation of the Swedish school system and a school choice policy has resulted in a longer travel-to-school distance for better-off students, while children from disadvantaged groups cannot take advantage of the choices provided (Andersson et al., 2012). In the USA, distance to school and school quality influences the parental choice of residence; living in an area with a good neighbourhood school means minimising travel while attending school farther away demands investment in time and travel costs (He & Giuliano, 2018).

In Bissau, attending a private school, most likely located outside the students' residence area, requires resources for a private vehicle, taxi, public transport, or bike to avoid walking long distances. Respondents who attended the public schools in Bissau were roughly three times more likely to attend a school in the area where they lived than peers attending private schools. Thus, the dire state of public neighbourhood schools in Bissau contributes to increased travel costs and traffic congestions, negatively impacting environmental sustainability and public health (Mandic et al., 2017).

Globally, parental wealth is an important determinant for children's access to education, and the poorest 20% lag behind in completion rates at all educational levels (UNESCO, 2020a). For instance, Baum et al. (2018) argue that access to adequate educational opportunities for the most impoverished population in Lagos is most of all constrained by lack of resources. Our results in Bissau are in line with these results. Financial resources, measured by participants' judgment of parental capacity to buy a car and a favourable family economy, were among the most significant determinants for attending a private school compared to a public one (Table 3 and Fig. 1).

Access to social media is a highly significant explanatory variable for private school attendance (Table 3 and Fig. 1). Internet access is costly in Guinea-Bissau, and usage an expression of financial resources restricted to about two-thirds of respondents in the sample (Gunnlaugsson et al., 2020). Limited access to and experience of digital technologies by students and teachers alike poses a problem to private and public schools alike. This resulted in modest efforts to provide distance learning (Fundação Fé, 2020; UNICEF, 2020) when virtual teaching became crucial, following lockdowns and school closures during the Covid pandemic (Dori, 2020; Rajmil et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2021).

Research indicates that students worldwide living in stable family structures, preferably with two biological parents, are more likely to have successful educational trajectories than those experiencing disrupted family structures or living with a single parent (Abuya et al., 2019; Bengesai & Nzimande, 2020; Cavanagh & Fomby, 2012; Dronkers et al., 2017). In SSA, the lowest school attendance rates have been found for children living in households with non-relatives (Roby et al., 2016). Our results are in line with these findings. Households with two caretakers in Bissau, compared to other household compositions (Table 1), were significantly more likely to have their children attend a private school than a public one (Table 3 and Fig. 1). While results vary and given the social circumstances of the family, co-residing with a grandmother has also been found to be beneficial for schooling, particularly for girls (Schrijner & Smits, 2018), but not in our sample.

In low-income countries, overage attendance in lower secondary schools is 29% compared to 26% in SSA countries (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 354). In Bissau, about three-fifths of those enrolled were overaged, and boys more so than girls (Table 1). The overage was significantly higher in public schools than private ones (Table 3 and Fig. 1); yet overage attendance was also common in the best private schools in the country (Table 1). Marshall et al. (2020, p. 5) point out that "[c]omparing 2000 with 2014 for lower secondary, the problem of never entering school has been replaced by another, albeit less serious, problem of overage enrolment". This trend begs the question of whether overage could be a sign of resilience rooted in community efforts to keep the public schools going despite challenges (AFP, 2017; Furtado, 2005; Marshall et al., 2020; Morgado, 2019; Silva et al., 2015; Silva & Oliveira, 2017).

The disparity in access to education may be reflected in the choice of teaching language. Globally, only 26% of constitutions state the equal right to primary education for linguistic minorities; however, these do not always secure education in minority languages (Heymann et al., 2014). SDG 4 uses the proportion of students enrolled in primary education whose first or home language is the language of teaching as an indicator of effective implementation; however, statistics on that indicator is frequently missing (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 255). SSA countries use their local languages only for the first years of primary school or not at all, and the countries with an unusually high number of languages have the highest rates of illiterate adults (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 270). Desmond Ikenna Odugu (2017) laments the "current colonial models of schooling" in SSA (p. 137) and argues that ignoring the students' languages hampers their learning, "thus contributing to perpetuating cycles of marginalisation and discrimination, particularly for children who come from ethnic minorities" (p. 138).

In our survey, respondents reported speaking 13 ethnic languages in their homes (Table 1). Despite rarely speaking Portuguese in their daily life, Bissau-Guinean secondary school students rank Portuguese as the most valuable language, bringing higher social status and access to education and work (Rubio & Cá, 2019). Ethnic languages have a lower ranking as they restrict communication within that ethnic group. Virginia Cá (2015) points out that Bissau-Guinean students live in a multilingual context. Kriol is their common language and a corridor to Portuguese, which is rarely spoken in daily life. Hence, students and teachers alike are in dire need to improve their Portuguese knowledge (Silva & Oliveira, 2020a). In the multinomial logistic regression model, respondents who spoke the national language Portuguese were more likely to attend private school than a public one; in contrast, those who spoke Balanta at home were more likely to attend public school (Table 3 and Fig. 1). Balanta is the second largest ethnic group in Guinea-Bissau, whose elders "traditionally banned education and trade, keeping the young men away from the lures of modern life" (Temudo & Abrantes, 2015, p. 467). Yet increasingly, they approve education of young people, who pay school fees trading agricultural products.

Most respondents identified themselves with the three major religions of the country (Table 1). In the multinomial logistic regression, two variables on religion were significant (Fig. 1). Those who adhered to Catholicism were more likely to attend a private school, while those who reported being Lutheran/Evangelists were more likely to attend public school. Catholic FIS schools have a long tradition in Guinea-Bissau with colonial past and links to urban elites (Sarró & de Barros, 2016). In contrast, Lutheran/Evangelist churches have rapidly expanded their activities in recent years, for instance, to allow converts to bypass some ceremonial aspects of their ethnic tradition.

The gender parity index for higher education has reversed in many world regions, with more girls seeking tertiary education than boys; the index is 1.16 globally compared to 0.74 for SSA (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 256). For lower secondary education, the global gender parity index is 0,99 compared to 0.90 in SSA (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 256). Interestingly, in the randomised sample in our survey in Bissau, girls were equally likely as boys to be enrolled in school (primary education, third cycle, and lower secondary, grades 7-10) and more likely than boys to be enrolled in a private school. However, the impact of gender disappeared in the multinomial logistic regression model; nonetheless, the results hint at greater gender parity in an urban setting than national statistics indicate. Further, the results suggest that Bissau-Guinean girls might increasingly seek university education resulting in a gradual reversal in the gender parity index for higher education in Guinea-Bissau, as found in other world regions (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 256). Nonetheless, the situation in rural areas is unfavourable for girls; almost no poor, rural young Bissau-Guinean woman completed 12 years of education in 2013-2018 (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 68), which calls for further studies on the participation of girls in schools in all the regions of the country.

The study has strengths and limitations. It is the first of its kind in the setting, reaching schools in Bissau for a targeted group of adolescents aged 15-16 years. The survey used a well-established methodology for the collection of data within the Planet Youth collaboration. The results rest on a random sample from a class-based register with evenly distributed participants in private and public schools. It is also a strength that the survey methodology allows the adolescents to express their opinion and respond anonymously to questions that addressed their life situation. The focus of the study was on adolescents attending schools in the capital city, leaving out

those in other regions of the country and adolescents out of school; these limitations need to be addressed in further research. Another limitation is the time required to respond to the survey questionnaire, or up to two class hours. Yet, a similar methodology is widely applied elsewhere, providing valuable information on the lives of adolescents (HBSC Research Network, n.d.), and now in Bissau (Bollom et al., 2021; Gunnlaugsson et al., 2020). Finally, it is a limitation that the study was conducted in 2017; while the situation might be different four years later, there are, however, no indications for significant transformation in the education system for the better that would change the overall results of the study.

6. Conclusions

As outlined in the CRC and the SDGs, all children have the right to free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education (Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2015; UNICEF, 1990). In line with SAP, international donors have promoted the privatisation of education or public-private partnerships in low and middle-income countries (Robertson, Mundy, Verger, & Menashy, 2012; World Bank, 2011). Discriminatory access to education has raised concerns about inequality and human rights violations (Afridi, 2018; Koning, 2018; Pedró et al., 2015), and "effective maintenance of inequality" (Lucas, 2001). Our results feed into such concerns. The critical determinant for attending a private rather than a public school reflects parental socioeconomic background, i.e., education, employment status, and financial resources. The observed lack of gender disparity is likely due to participants privileged urban residence and social situation. Further, the overage school attendance may illustrate the population's resilience in seeking education, given the opportunity (Silva et al., 2015).

The deplorable infrastructure of schools, particularly many public ones, and recurrent teachers' strikes in Guinea-Bissau, mainly due to low pay and unpaid salaries, has contributed to the downgrading of the public schools that leaves few options for parents with educational ambitions for their children. Injustices in this socio-demographic, including access to quality education and lack of access to communication technology within reach for peers within and out of the country, might further increase stress on the social fabric, ultimately threatening peace (Moghaddam, 2005).

The lamentable educational opportunities available in Guinea-Bissau call for national and international collective action and policy revisions based on innovative thinking, including for example flexible forms of self-managed community-based schools. Otherwise, many children and young Bissau-Guineans will be left behind in realising their potential and adequately prepare for future employment opportunities, in direct contrast to intentions as laid out in the SDGs.

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Supplementary materials

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