

A Comparative Analysis of Performance for Public Schools and Private Schools in New

South Wales, Australia:

A Research Proposal

Name

Professor's Name

Date

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

The Ministerial Council for Education and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) stated out that the future of Australia depended on the enablement of each citizen to have the needed knowledge, skills, and values that would provide productive and rewarding lives. This was a vision was centered on high quality education (Vickers 2005, p. 264). UNESCO figures described Australia to have one of the highest ratios of enrolment in both primary and secondary education in the world, which was at a par with the United Kingdom (ASA Group, 2009). The high rate of enrolment provides the country translates to the great potentials that the nation will have if the quality of education was monitored and sustained at a competitive level. The issue of the performance gap between public and private institutions of education in Australia is a major issue because of the role education is playing in the country.

The concept of what a “public school” is differs from country to country (Caldwell & Hayward 1998, p. 149). For example, in the United States, it is strictly defined the schools that were publicly funded. It did not include schools that were operated by churches or privately charging independent schools. There is a different arrangement in Australia. The term public school is formerly reserved for exclusive private school. Recently, people started to refer to government and state schools as public schools (Caldwell & Hayward 1998, p. 149).

The conclusion of the World War II and the Depression gave Australia, as well as other democracies, great pressures to improve the lot of the citizens through economic and social reforms. Improved access to education was one of the ways wherein new expectations for the government emerged. When it came to the Australian middle class, reliable and accessible government high schools emerged and provided for pathways to well-paid white-collar work and universities (Campbell 2007, p. 1). Across the twentieth century, the middle-

class of the country grew increasingly dependent on the credentials that schools delivered for the nation's youth.

The "old middle class" that was not particularly dependent on education diminished in the evolution of the "new middle class." Children of farmers and owners of small businesses needed schooling in order to secure the futures of their families and provided a different relationship between children and schooling (Campbell 2007, p. 1). It was a time wherein Australia witnessed a new post-agricultural economy because of the increased public services, the growth in the industries of banking, retail and insurance and larger corporations all together.

In the 1950s, Australia had a mix of church-owned grammar schools and academically selective government schools that experienced the pressure to address the new demands for education. From 1950s throughout the 1970s, Australian states reformed and expanded their secondary school systems. The new schools were described to be increasingly comprehensive in character. Public examination credentials were also reformed over time and there was a thrust towards more accessible curricula (Campbell 2007, p. 1).

There was a range of barriers that were observed to the achievement of accessible and well-regarded government high schools. At the end of the twentieth century, a significant withdrawal of trust for government schools were observed. In New South Wales (NSW), the difficulties were observed earlier (Campbell 2007, p. 1). The middle-class did not just experience a withdrawal of trust. They were the ones that endorsed non-government schools.

In NSW, the Wyndham Scheme, a comprehensive reorganization, was implemented in the early 1960s. This allowed for students to get elective subjects. The expansion of the state secondary schools provided eligibility of students to attend their neighbourhood government schools (Campbell 2007, p. 1). These signified new educational opportunities for the students. Furthermore, in the 1960s, the federal government resolved to provide funding for

non-government schools. All non-government or private schools received substantial funds from the government according to the need of each school.

While the term “public school” continues to change from different countries, they will continue to evolve in different ways within the nations. The theme that emerged in the different countries involved a distinction of public schools according to the funds they receive from the public purse. Private schools will then be classified as institutions that receive private funding alone or in addition to public funding. There are private schools in Australia that still receive funding from the government.

#### Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Current research did not concentrate on a direct analysis between public schools and private schools in Australia. There is a need to further examine the performance gap in terms of evaluation of the specific areas that needed reform. The private institutions will serve as the basis by which deficiencies in the public school system will be noted.

The intent of this research is to measure the quality of education that public schools in New South Wales (NSW), Australia have to offer through a quantitative analysis of the performance gap between the performance of public school and private schools. It is also designed to evaluate areas that are inadequately providing for the high school students quality education using private schools as a benchmark. Findings from this study will provide critical attention to the performance gap that existed between public and private learning institutions in the country. It will also elevate the quality of education for public school students through the provision of clear and concise direction for the reforms that needed to take place.

The purpose of this study will be to determine the areas of deficiency that created the performance gap between public and private schools through a quantitative analysis of the indicators for quality education. Quality education can be generally defined as the provision of excellent curriculum and instruction to be measured by the performance of the learning

institutions. The analysis of the areas of deficiency in Australian public schools will reveal the systematic problems that existed in this system and will provide education stakeholders direction for reform strategies.

### Research Questions

The following research questions would be used to guide the research for a quantitative comparative analysis between the quality of education for public and private schools in New South Wales, Australia:

1. Is there a significance difference in the performance of public and private schools in New South Wales, Australia?
2. What are the differences in the factors of quality education that are present public and private schools?
3. What are the deficiencies of public schools based on a comparison with private schools in providing quality education?

### Research Objectives

This research is described to achieve the following research objectives:

1. To describe the significant differences in the performance of public and private schools in New South Wales, Australia.
2. To measure the different factors of quality education that are present in public and private schools.
3. To evaluate the areas of deficiencies of public schools based on a comparison with private schools in the provision of quality education.

### Scope, Assumption and Hypothesis

The scope of this research will be based in New South Wales, Australia. It will involve all the public and private schools in this area. Performance indicators will be analysed through the reports of Department of Education. This research will operate under

the assumption that private schools were performing at a higher level of excellence in comparison to public schools.

The hypothesis of these research will be due to the performance gap that existed between public and private schools, deficiencies in the public school system can be determined by a direct comparison of the areas that were consistently assessed to measure quality performance.

### Research Paradigm

The positivist perspective views reality as something that could be observed through the senses. An important attribute of this paradigm involved the understanding that reality can be observed, described, measured and reported upon in an objective manner. This type of research was referred to a quantitative research design. They perceive research as a tool to describe events and relationships, as well as prove causal links.

The positivist perspective represents one of the two major paradigms for social sciences. The quantitative paradigm was perceived is associated with the scientific method (Gliner & Morgan 2000, p. 16). Within a positivist perspective, a case can be made for the purposes of social science. Meanings and intentions are investigated through the utilization scientific methods. While this process did not guarantee success all of the time, it is viewed to be self-corrective through a process of testing and the elimination of errors (Gliner & Morgan 2000, p. 16).

The positivist approach to research draws on the scientific method that is relevant in the discipline of education research. The first step of this process involves a research question. This stage is described as the problem-obstacle idea stage. It involves choosing a question that has the potential to be a researchable topic. The second stage is about the development of hypotheses. The research problem is addressed through the formation of specific questions that are testable.

This research process also includes the development of a research design that allows the researcher to test the hypotheses and to focus on controlling the variables. Data collection and analysis is done based on an unbiased and objective fashion. The validity and reliability of the research relied on the research methodology that this process requires. The fifth step is characterized by the formation of inferences and interpretations of the data. The interpretations is based on the original hypotheses, which will be accepted or rejected.

The positivist perspective is the paradigm to be utilized for the evaluation for the quality of public schools. There is a need to quantify the performance of the public schools through variables that can be measured. Through research methods such as surveys and the review of performance reports, as well as statistical analyses, reliable and valid inferences can be attained to understand a reality.

The performance of public schools can be observed, described, measured and reported upon. The data that can be produced from using this research paradigm will produce information that can be used for strategies that will elevate the quality of education for public schools. Through the measurement of variables, researchers can more accurately pinpoint areas by which the public schools were deficient. This can be done through a direct comparison with the indicators of quality performance of private institutions.

The performance gap between the private and public schools can be considered to be a relationship between different systems of education by which performance differed. The description of this relationship and the analysis of the differences will reveal the areas wherein these institutions could be improved.

The research methods that will be used under a quantitative research design involves questionnaires that will measure the current performance of the private and public schools in NSW, Australia. These questionnaires will be tallied and analysed using statistical methods.

This method is done through an objective approach that will effectively measure the performance and the deficiencies in the performance of public and private school institutions

The significance of the findings of this research requires the need to take the hypothesis at face value. A series of tools needs to be utilised to prove or disprove this hypothesis in order to provide the most accurate depiction of reality in order to offer strategies that will have the greatest potential for effectiveness.

#### Alternative Paradigm

The interpretist perspective offers a contrasting approach to education research. It offers a reality that is based from the internal perspective of the researcher. This paradigm exists in a social framework and is often regarded to be subjective in nature. A qualitative research design can be used as an alternative research paradigm. It is used to understand the events and associate them with meaning.

This research design is focused on the intentions, motivations and the subjective experiences of the people that are affected by research topic. It revolves around the appreciation of the meanings people create and the actions that are produced from it. A descriptive approach can be useful in studying the quality of public schools in NSW, Australia. The quality of education can be studied according to the meanings people create out of it. Indicators of quality can vary according to the meanings people associate with education.

Through this paradigm, differences can be observed and interpreted through observations and similar research methods (Black 2006, p. 264). A case study of selected schools in the location serves as one of the most plausible research frameworks that can be utilized to determine the performance of public school institutions. The nature of this paradigm provides an exploratory approach to the study. It could offer discoveries that are beyond those that can be assessed. Performance measures can be expanded because of this



paradigm is not limited by hypotheses. However, this also requires more time and effort on the part of the research. It will also be susceptible to bias and subjectivity. Due to the time constraints and the need for a more quantifiable framework, this alternative paradigm will be rejected but can be used for another research endeavor.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Introduction

This section will review the researches that were created to analyze the quality of education for public and private education institutions in Australia. The schools were described according to the school fees that were implemented for both public and private schools. Literature also described the significant differences in the funding for the different school systems. Furthermore, literature also reflected the differences in the public and private schools that showed the differences performance gap of the students.

### Public and Private Schools

In theory, public schools are free. Parents are still asked to pay school fees that are considered voluntary (ASA Group, 2009). Most parents did pay school fees and expect to pay more fees for school excursions and other school activities. The tuition in private schools are competitively priced in comparison to schools in Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States (ASA Group, 2009).

Public schools were also referred to as government-run schools. There are four kinds government-run high schools in NSW. The first kind included the local comprehensive high school. Another kind of public high school included central schools that serviced rural isolated communities. Specialist high schools catered to students that excelled in sports, performing arts, technology and languages wherein entry requirements include extra tests and auditions. Selective high schools cater to students with the highest achievement scores in the country each year.

## Funding Schools

The government segments the educational provision and a majority of private schools has resources that are considered to be moderately or highly superior to those that are available for public schools (Vickers 2005, p. 264). The current funding system was responsible to the duplication of provision and reductions in economies of scale, as well as increases in per-student costs for private schools.

The government subsidies combined with the family outlays for high-fee private schools created a segregated and unequal schooling system in Australia. Private schools were observed to provide better facilities that were sharply contrasted with their competitors in the public sector. This provides a setting wherein Australian school system turn into producers of a highly educated elite with a low-performing tail (Vickers 2005, p. 264).

Families from lower socio-economic groups needed to allocate a larger proportion of their income to private school education that was relative to other groups (Law & Fiedler 2002, p. 447). Comparative cost data for private school investment decisions was not readily available in the marketplace. This restricted the parents to choose public schools in order to cover the costs.

The ideas of democracy and pluralism was viewed to be wasteful and inefficient. The competition within education institutions left a majority of Australian children poorly schooled because of the competition among various churches (Potts 1999, p. 241). The preservation of religious and cultural capital entailed large financial sacrifices because Catholic families were encouraged if not required by their church leaders to enroll their children in Catholic schools.

While religion played a significant role in the history of public and private schooling in Australia, it was also a major factor that was linked to economic concerns in the funding of education (Potts 1999, p. 241). The availability of government assistance for private schools

made it easier for parents to select schools that supported their beliefs. Without government aid, a number of private schools would not have existed.

### Performance Gap

Australia was perceived to be a high-achieving country. However, it was also seen to express low commitment to equity. If Australia's schools were created to serve the common good, they need to promote high standards of achievements that ensured achievement opportunities that are equitably distributed across the states' population (Vickers 2005, p. 264). However, while the students in the private schools continued to excel, state test scores reflected the gap in the achievement scores for students in the public schools.

The performance of Australian students should ideally be placed at the best among the nations when it came to their scores for standardized tests. However, at the same time, the distribution scores reflected a relative narrow spread around the mean. The comparative results reported that Australia occupied the top four participating countries in terms of the mean outcomes for reading literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy (Vickers 2005, p. 264). While Australia's top students held their own amidst the world's top performers, the gap between the students and the low performers was unacceptably large. Further studies revealed the gap could be increasing (Vickers 2005, p. 265).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study will be conducted within a quantitative research design. This was a design that was meant for the discovery of developing knowledge through the employment of strategies of inquiry in the form of experiments, surveys and content analyses. The aim of quantitative approaches was to evaluate or measure the hypothesis that was offered. The data collection of this research design involved predetermined instruments that would yield statistical data. The aim of the quantitative research design would be to construct statistical

models to classify what was being observed. This design would function to test the hypothesis of the research through seeking precise measurement and analyses of concepts.

The aim of this study would be to evaluate the quality of education of public schools in Australia. The hypothesis of these research will be due to the performance gap that existed between public and private schools, deficiencies in the public school system can be determined by a direct comparison of the areas that were consistently assessed to measure quality performance. This can be done through research methods such as surveys and the analysis of overall progress reports from the Department of Education.

#### Data Collection

Questionnaires will be created to measure the performance of the public and private schools. The assessment of performance will be based on the variables that the Department of Education utilised in their analysis in State's progress reports. The items of the questionnaire will also be based on the past researches that emphasised on the performance gap that existed between public and private schools. The creation of the questionnaire will achieve the objective of determining indicators of quality education. It will be through these factors that terms of the questionnaire will be based upon.

These questionnaires will be distributed to the sample of the population of NSW, Australian private and public schools. These questionnaires will be retrieved and the data will be tallied to measure the performance of the schools. The data that will be collected in this research will determine the current measure of the performance gap between the public and the private institutions. The questionnaire will also reveal the areas wherein the gap was the widest through a comparison of the indicators between private and public institutions.

#### Sampling

In Australia, each state is accountable for running and managing its own education system. In NSW, there are more than 2,000 public schools that included primary and high

schools (ASA Group, 2009). On the other hand, there are over 900 private schools that also catered to all age groups (ASA Group, 2009). Most of the private schools in the state are affiliated with church organizations.

The research will implement a random sampling method wherein a sample from the population of public and private schools in the country will be taken. The schools that will be included in this sample will serve as the participants of the research. Each school will receive through hand carry or priority postal mail the questionnaire that will be used for the data collection. Each school that will be included in the sample will also be evaluated and profiled by the researchers according to the indicators of performance through crosschecking procedures based on their responses. The sample population will also sign an informed consent regarding the nature of the research before they are to participate in the study.

#### Data Analysis

Analysis of means (ANOM) is a statistical tool that is utilized in quality control circle for the comparison of averages, proportions, or counts across different groups. It is a graphical procedure that compares the collection of means, rates, proportions that will reveal significant differences in the overall mean, rate and proportion (Wyludyka et al., p. 1). The ANOM decision chart is comparable in appearance to a control chart. It includes a centerline that is located at the overall mean and the upper and lower decision limits.

As the group means are plotted in the chart, those that fall beyond the decision limits are described to be significantly different from the overall value. The differences are observed through statistical differences. ANOM is presented in a graphical form and allows the easy evaluation for both statistical and practical differences between different groups (Wyludyka et al., p. 1).

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