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Financing the Free Quality School Education and its Alternatives:

*The Costs of Education to Government and
Households in Sierra Leone*

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An IGR enumerator collects data on household education spending.



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1. Introduction

This report presents an estimate of the financial contributions households and the government of Sierra Leone make to the provision of basic and senior secondary school education (BSSE) services to the country's 2.7 million students. The cost model utilised a wide variety of sources including the 2019 school census data, payment records of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and survey data of households to produce expenditure estimates for 2020 financial year, focusing entirely on pre-primary education (indigenously known as nursery school), primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schooling years that fall within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG-4).

Financing basic and secondary education has been a challenge for many low-skilled and low-literate economies. Over the last three years, Sierra Leone rose to the challenge by launching an ambitious programme aimed at providing Free Quality School Education (FQSE) to an estimated 2.7 million students¹. Since the launch of the FQSE initiative in 2018, school enrolment increased by 34%; an additional 1.2 million pupils were enrolled into public schools² (GoSL – Local Government Finance Department). Actual domestic revenue spending on education increased from 7.5% in 2017 to 22%

¹ 2019 National School Census

² According to GoSL's Local Government Finance Department, beneficiaries of school fee subsidies increased from SLL 813,636 in 2017 to SLL 1.98 million in 2020.

in 2020³. Actual government spending on education hit a record level– from Le393Bn (US\$51 million) in 2017 to Le1.4Trillion (US\$ 140 million) in 2020.

To understand and calculate the cost of BSSE we employed a basic costs function which sums up two types of expenditures, namely government expenses and household: $C_{BSSE} = C_g + C_h$. Two sources of data were utilized to develop this cost function. First, is a primary data which was collected through a representative survey of 1000 households/parents/guardians representing students from 1,292 public and private schools across the country. Second is a range of secondary financial data sources provided through the Ministry of Finance and MBSSE to compute the expenses of government on schooling for the period 2016 and 2020.

The aim of this desk research is to provide a more complete understanding of the total cost of education and how it is distributed between the GoSL and households – particularly in the context of substantial increases in government spending to make public education more accessible. It is important to note that this analysis does not have data on household spending on public school education before FQSE. Thus, it cannot demonstrate changes in expenses and savings to families who benefit from government-provided resources such as subsidised school buses, sanitary kits for girls and meals schools in some chiefdoms. Previous IGR studies have demonstrated advances in education services as a result of GoSL efforts. For example, schools with access to core textbooks increased to 78 percent in 2021, after only 18 percent of parents reported having adequate access in 2015⁴. This report is also limited by a lack of information about financing from foreign donors. The “Limitations” section elaborates on this.

Our basic finding is that while government financing of education has increased drastically in recent years, a considerable portion of the burden is still shared by individual households. This is especially true for private education, but also remains the case for public education. This underscores the impact of government’s policy to lessen the burden of education to parents and households by expanding its direct spend on public education.

- 1) The overall cost of education for both government and households in 2020 was SLL 2.97 Trillion (approximately USD 297 Million). This is equivalent to about 8 percent of Sierra Leone’s GDP.
- 2) GoSL contributed SLL 1.4Trillion (equivalent to USD 140M) in 2020 (the year under study), representing 48%⁵ of the total cost of education for that year.
- 3) GoSL contribution to education increased significantly from SLL 394 billion in 2016 to SLL 1.4 trillion in 2020.
- 4) Household financing of public school education was SLL 1.17 trillion (equivalent to USD 117m) in 2020, which represents 39% of the overall cost of education.
- 5) Household financing of private school education was SLL 392 billion (equivalent to USD 37m) in 2020, which represents 13% of the overall cost of education.
- 6) When household financing of public and private school education are combined, they represent 52% of the overall cost of education.
- 7) On average, GoSL directly spent SLL 711,957 (Equivalent to USD 71) per child in public schools. This does not include other indirect expenses and cost savings from other government

³ Expenses analysis from the Accountant General’s Office, Ministry of Finance

⁴ Institute for Governance Reform (IGR). “Broadening Access and Quality: Citizen's Feedback on the State of Health and Education Services in Sierra Leone.” Social Delivery Index 2021.

⁵ This amount does not include donor contributions to education

programs. Households contributed SLL 544,478 (USD 54) per child in public schools and SLL 2,019,207 (USD 200) per child in private school.

- 8) Whereas the biggest cost driver for the GoSL is teacher and staff salaries, expenditure on uniform, school bags and textbooks (both core and non-core) constitute the greatest financial burden to public schools and tuition is the main cost driver for private schools. There are a number of private schools in the Freetown area (nine in our survey) charging an annual tuition ranging between \$4,000-\$15,000 per child. A good number of private schools outside of Freetown charge less than \$200 for tuition per annum (90 percent in our survey).
- 9) We note that average private education per child is SLL 4,541,956 more expensive than public education. This average difference ranges from SLL 1,474,729 when comparing to general private schools and up to SLL 65,886,487 when comparing to elite private schools.
- 10) Overall, it is 2 to 8 times more expensive to educate a child in Freetown than in other parts of the country, depending on whether Freetown's elite private schools are included in the calculation. This is partly because private school education is prominent in Freetown, and more parents complain about many forms of extortion by school authorities compared to other parts of the country.
- 11) Average Sierra Leonean household pays about SLL 289,816 in fees that could be considered unnecessary costs to parents by school administrators. These include fees for things like extra classes, gifts, and art and crafts. If a student does not pay, teachers may penalise the student with worse grades or retaliate by neglecting and ostracising the student. The GoSL should work with CSOs to provide greater vigilance in schools to guard against such behaviour.
- 12) Knowledge of GoSL school policy remains low. This low level of awareness of communities of their entitlements provides room for exploitation.

2. Methodology

IGR used several sources and data-gathering techniques – both qualitative and quantitative – to estimate the direct cost of education and its effects.

Sources of Expenditures

The *basic cost function* of BSSE is the sum of two types of expenditures, namely government expenses and household expenses: $C_{BSSE} = C_g + C_h$.

Government expenses, C_g are calculated as total investment in items such as salaries of teachers and education staff, transfers made to local councils and other domestic non-salary expenses such as school fees subsidy, exam fees, teaching and learning materials, transport, school feeding, support to special needs schools, policy coordination of MBSSE, etc. The biggest component of recurrent costs to government is teacher salaries. We utilized data from the Accountant General's office to compute expenses made by government.

Household Expenses, C_h are calculated as costs incurred by parents to cover costs that are not met by government. Household costs range from partial financing of schooling for students attending

government and government-assisted schools, to full coverage of costs in private schools and facilities that are not under government funding. Cost items range from tuition fees, uniforms, and books down to unauthorised payment for various education services. The full list is provided in the survey instrument.

For simplicity, we refer to both government schools and government-assisted schools as “public schools.”

2.1. Sampling

To collect household expenditure data, IGR conducted an in-person survey from Aug 26 - Aug 30, 2021. This survey data includes information about 997 households and 1,828 students on a range of payments made for 28 items. This provides a margin of error of $\pm 2\%$ when using a 95 percent confidence interval. Among the students, 10 percent were in preschool last year, 49 percent were in primary school, 21 percent were in JSS, and 12 percent were in SSS. IGR intentionally oversampled some class levels to ensure a broad range of respondents. The surveys were collected from 59 chiefdoms and urban locations among all 16 districts.

For household surveys, the responses were provided by students’ guardians. These guardians often had to rely on memory and best guesses. It is helpful to think of the findings as indicating how families perceive costs rather than a strict accounting down to the exact Leone. We asked guardians to provide amounts from the previous school year (2020-2021).

To collect tuition levels, IGR conducted two rounds of surveys.

The first round was done by phone from Oct 1 - Oct 7, 2021. It attempted to contact school administrators from phone numbers listed on the 2020 School Census Register. District population proportion and urban-rural ratios were taken into account. The survey covered 16 districts -- but private schools were reached in only 11 districts due to administrator refusals, wrong numbers, and the small sample proportion these schools represent. Information from 452 schools was collected by phone (207 private schools and 245 public schools).

The second round of tuition collection focused on in-person data gathering at private schools in the Western Urban and Western Rural areas. This was required because some private school administrators refused to provide tuition amounts by phone. IGR collected tuition costs for 109 schools on Oct 11, 2021.

The survey gathered data on 245 schools that are either government-assisted mission schools or government owned schools. This provides a margin of error of $\pm 6\%$ when using a 95 percent confidence interval. This is based on the number of schools listed in the 2020 register.

The survey gathered data on 315 private schools. This provides a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$ when using a 95 percent confidence interval.

2.2. Limitations

There are three big limitations to this study:

- a. The model did not capture the contribution of donors, NGOs and religious organisations to provide education. This group underwrites some cost items such as school infrastructure, furniture, maintenance of classrooms and durable materials such as water and sanitation facilities. These costs, although not captured within the mainstream government financing data are incorporated into government's financial planning and programs. Most of these financial records are not accessible to local researchers.
- b. Without data on household expenses prior to FQSE, this analysis cannot demonstrate the savings to families who benefit from some government-provided resources and programs. This includes the heavily-subsidized school buses, the provision of school meals in some chiefdoms for hundreds of thousands of children, the provision of sanitary kits for girls, the provision of glasses and other devices for special needs pupils, the provision of radio sets for benefitting from radio teaching programs.
- c. The model did not estimate the real cost of provision of education by private enterprises. We measure tuition, but this amount may exceed the actual cost of provision. The absence of this information makes it impossible for government to engage private providers on ways to moderate fees. A future comprehensive cost study on private education is necessary to fully understand the cost of education in Sierra Leone.

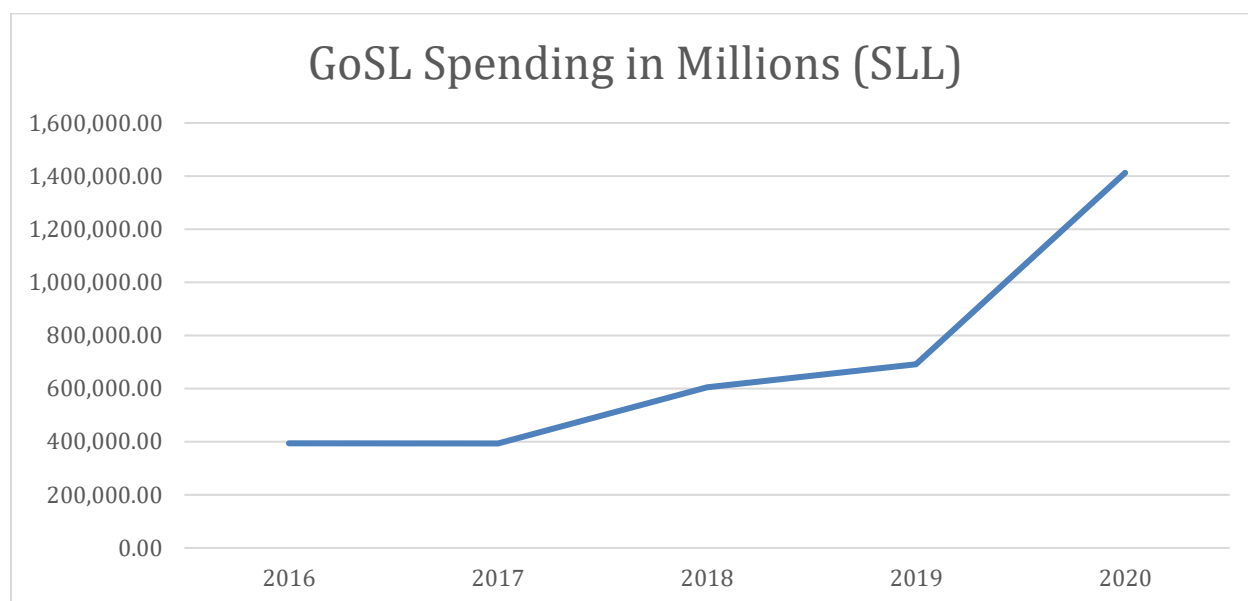
3. Findings

3.1. Government of Sierra Leone's contribution to Basic and Senior Secondary School Education

Following the launch of the FQSE, GoSL removed the moratorium on teacher recruitment and school approvals. The policy led to increased enrolment of pupils and new expenditure lines such as payment of tuition fees. School buses were also introduced. Data from the MoF shows that GoSL expenditure on education increased by about seven times. This is largely due to increased teacher recruitment, payment of tuition for unprecedented student enrolment and school fee subsidies as a result of FQSE. By 2020, at least 5,000 additional teachers have been recruited, and pupil enrolment doubled. For more details, refer to *Table 1* and *Figure 1*.

TABLE 1 ANALYSIS OF GoSL'S EDUCATION SPENDING 2016 -2020

ITEMS	Analysis of GoSL's education spending 2017 -2020				
	<i>In Millions of Leones (SLL)</i>				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Recurrent Non-salary spend Central Ministry					
Primary Education	89.7	110.2	31,581.7	21,581.2	5,500.0
School Feeding	-	-	30,200.0	18,500.0	5,500.0
Physically challenged schools	89.7	110.2	1,381.7	3,081.2	
Secondary Education	6,123.5	1,384.5	91,320.67	52,109.6	94,054.4
Of which: Grant in aid to Govt boarding schools	1,470.7	-	7,030.8	209.7	22,268.0
Of which: Examination fees for WASSCE	-	1,384.5	5,428.6	27,487.4	37,585.6
Of which: Core textbooks	4,652.8	-	78,861.3	24,412.6	34,200.0
Recurrent Transfers to local councils					
Primary Education	15,314.6	16,580.3	27,906.7	44,367.8	35,826.3
Of which: Tuition fees (Pre-Primary School)	-	11.7	28.4	651.2	697.9
Of which: Tuition fees (Primary School)	10,211.5	12,199.7	9,820.8	35,560.6	26,442.5
Teaching and Learning Materials	-	-	13,618.7	-	-
Exam fees for NPSE	5,103.1	4,368.9	4,438.8	8,156.0	8,685.9
Secondary Education	15,268.1	12,318.3	37,499.5	118,484.1	93,880.0
Exam fees for BECE	10,797.6	7,931.5	7,591.3	15,507.8	18,642.5
Local council Transfer (Basic Edu & Library)	4,470.50	4,386.8	9,329.6	11,323.5	9,406.8
Procurement of school buses	-	-	-	12,270.1	-
Support to FQSE school bus programme	-	-	-	-	3,204.1
Tuition fees for Junior Sec School (JSS)	-	-	11,674.9	42,082.5	35,990.3
Tuition fees for Senior Sec School (SSS)	-	-	8,912.7	37,300.2	46,636.3
Recurrent Salaries for teachers and Edu staff	279,866.0	316,499.6	416,340.6	426,512.5	743,361.0
Domestic Capital Expenditure and others	77,515.1	46,336.3	-	28,157.8	439,858.1
TOTAL EDUCATION EXPENDITURE	394,177.0	393,229.2	604,649.1	691,213.0	1,412,479.8
<i>Source: Ministry of Finance – Government of Sierra Leone</i>					

FIGURE 1 GoSL EXPENSES IN 2016 – 2020

Although government expenditure on schools has significantly increased, households still have the biggest (55%) share of expenditure on education. *Figure 2* shows the average tuition paid by households in 2017/18 the year before the FQSE, that are now paid by government.



An IGR enumerator collects data on household education spending.

FIGURE 2 AVERAGE TUITION PAID BY HOUSEHOLDS BEFORE FQSE



TABLE 2 COMPARATIVE SUMMARY OF GOSL AND HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION FOR 2020

	Total expenditure in Millions of SLL	% Share of expenses on education	No. of students	Average expenditure per child (SLL)
Government of Sierra Leone	1,412,479.8	48%	1,983,941 ⁶	711,957
Household spending in public school	1,166,497.8	39%	2,142,415	544,478
Household spending in most private schools (0-95 percentile)	391,988.7	13%	194,130	2,019,207 ⁷
Total	2,970,966.3		2,336,545⁸	1,271,521

For additional context, major donor projects in education in 2019-2020 contributed about SLL 647,515 million per year (See *Table 3* below). While a large amount, that is still roughly 56 percent of how much Sierra Leonian households with children in public school reported spending on education costs for children, even after FQSE. Prior to FQSE, nearly 100% of all education costs for children were borne by households.

TABLE 3 LARGE DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS

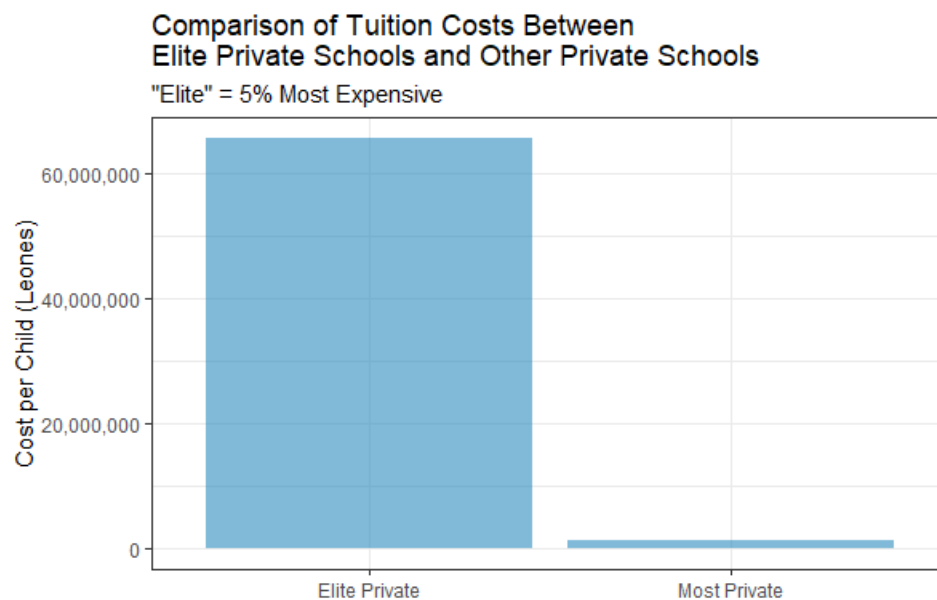
Recent Large Donor Contributes to Education Sector	Amount (USD Millions)	Amount (SLL Millions)	Year
Skills Development Project	20	212,300	2018
Education Sector Support Project (ESSP) - OFID	20	212,300	2019
Education Sector Support Project (ESSP) - BADEA	20	212,300	2019
Construction of Kono University - EBID	32	339,680	2020
Free Quality School Education Project - IDA	50	530,750	2020

Table 2 communicates how different portions of society shoulder different costs to society. Readers should note that the top-five percent of private schools were not included in these calculations. These schools have an average annual tuition of SLL 65.7 million, which skews calculations that are meant to capture average costs. *Figure 3* helps demonstrate this difference.

⁶ Records of payment for the Ministry of Finance

⁷ Avg. Household spending: 750,382. Avg. Tuition: 1,268,825

⁸ Students in public and private schools. Community schools not included.

FIGURE 3 COMPARING ELITE PRIVATE TUITION COSTS WITH OTHER PRIVATE SCHOOLS

3.2. Households' Contribution to Education

This section provides an estimate of the expenses households reported that they paid to public and private schools for education. We surveyed 997 households statistically spread across the country who provided estimates of amount paid for 28 items including textbooks, exercise books, tuition, lesson notes, uniform, bags, food, gift to school authorities, development fees, art and craft, etc. We provide analysis of the key cost items in the sections below.



An IGR enumerator collects data on household education spending.

3.2.1. Tuition Costs

Private School Tuition in 2020

Private school tuition varies drastically by region. The table below shows how tuition rates in Western Urban far outpace other districts on average.

TABLE 4 TUITION FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS BY DISTRICT

District	Average Tuition (Annual)
Bo	887,647
Bombali	643,636
Kailahun	187,500
Kambia	907,500
Kenema	961,923
Koinadugu	430,000
Kono	132,000
Port Loko	280,769
Pujehun	600,000
Western Rural	1,817,859
Western Urban	8,266,556

What the table above does not capture is the range of tuition amounts charged by private schools. The following figures (“histogram”) attempt to capture this range. They show how frequently private school tuition amounts are reported.

Given that most schools fall below Le 1,000,000, we’ve plotted a histogram for schools that charge from Le 0 to Le 1,000,000. To include more expensive schools, we’ve also plotted another histogram for schools that charge tuition between Le 1,000,000 and Le 25,000,000. Nine additional schools had tuition rates greater than Le 25,000,000 and did not fit on the histograms.

FIGURE 4 PRIVATE SCHOOL TUITION REPORTED UNDER SLL 1 MILLION

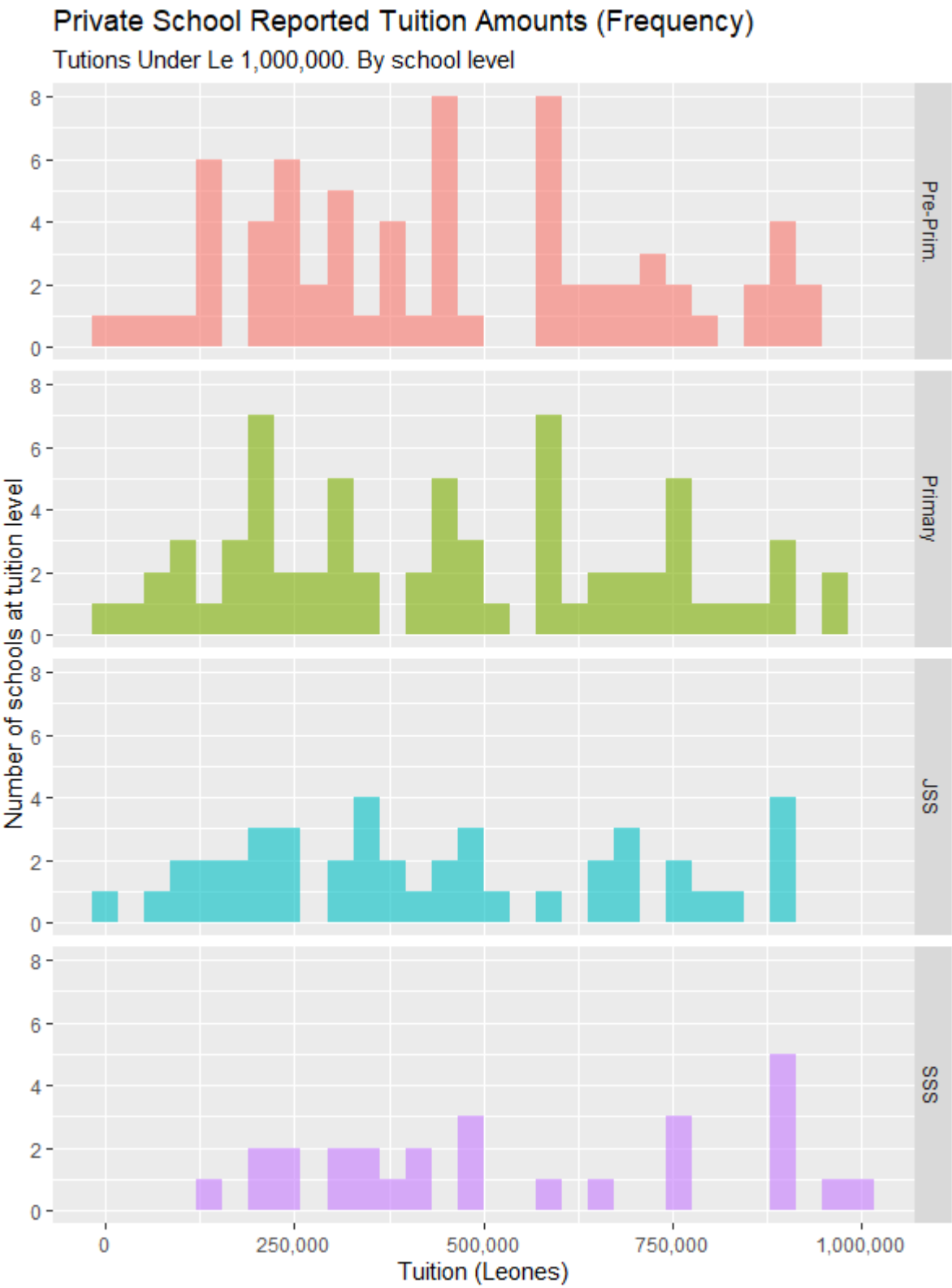


FIGURE 5 PRIVATE SCHOOL TUITION REPORTED BETWEEN SLL 1MILLION AND SLL 25M

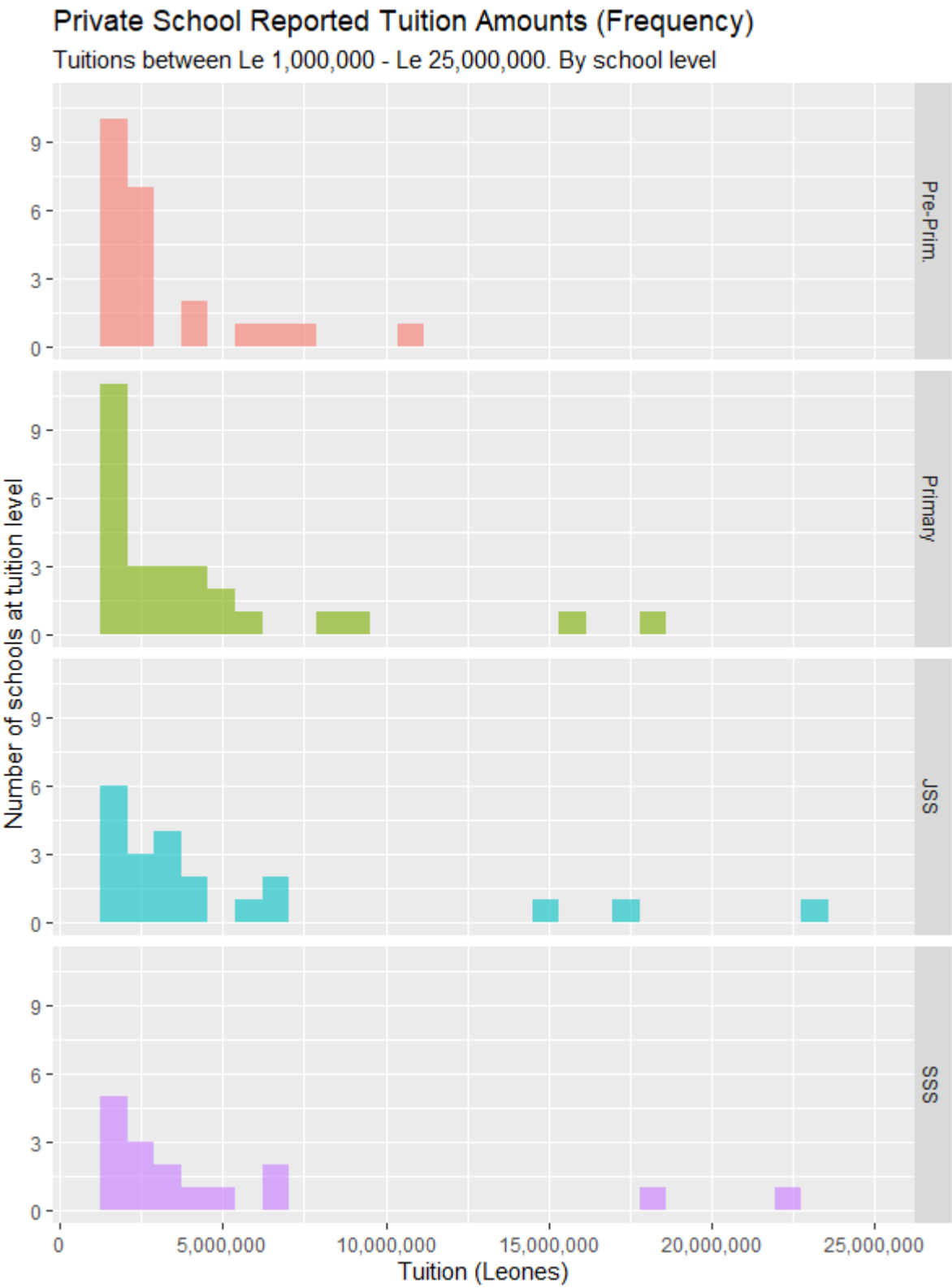


FIGURE 6 AVERAGE PRIVATE SCHOOL TUITION AMOUNT WITHOUT FREETOWN

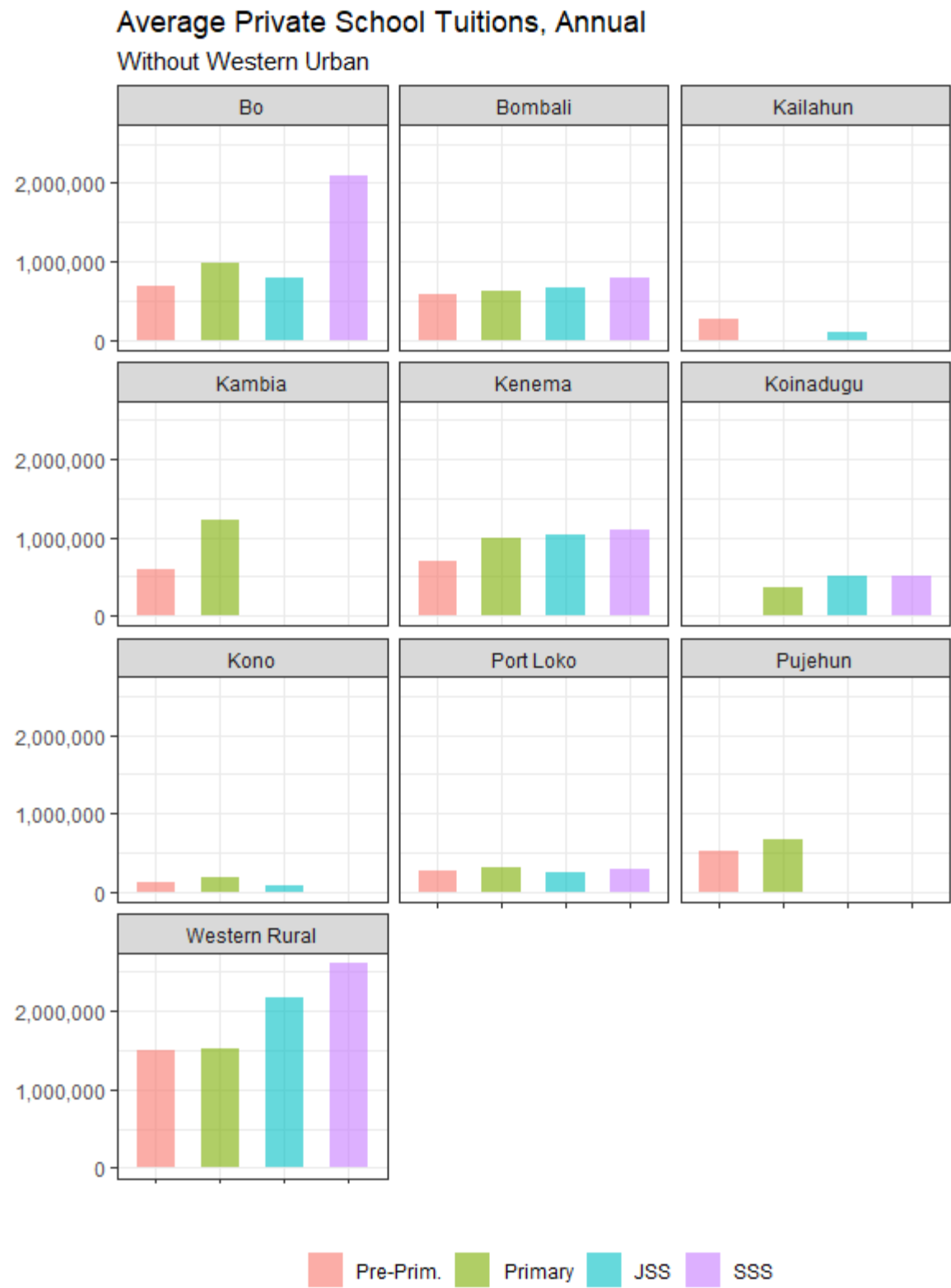
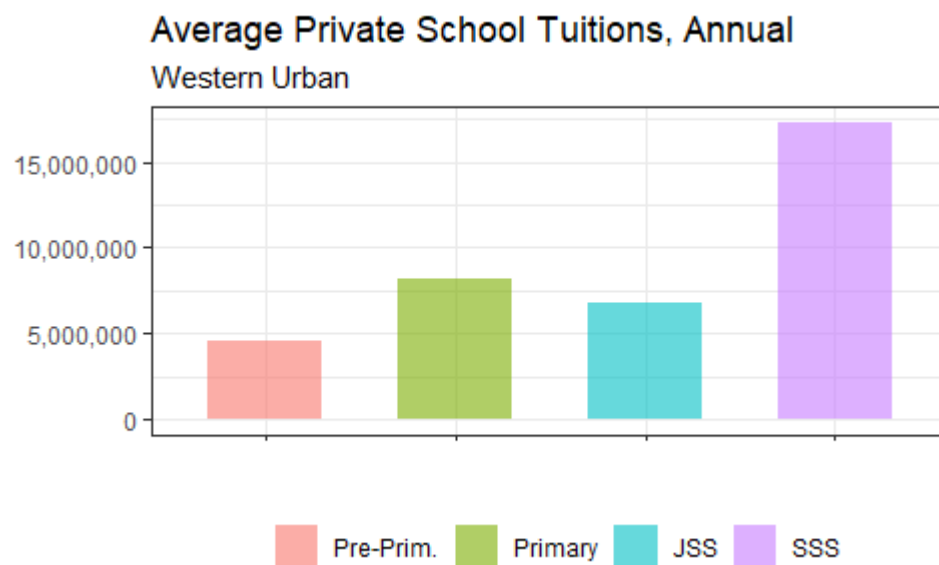


FIGURE 7 AVERAGE ANNUAL PRIVATE SCHOOL TUITION FOR FREETOWN



"I will keep my daughter at home until I get the money to pay the fees. It might take two or three days before she can go back to school."

– Single mother of a JSS 1 student at a Freetown private school. The mother opts for her daughter to receive a private education at a school that charges SLL 1.75 million per term, even if it requires losing class days and extra work hours selling small goods.

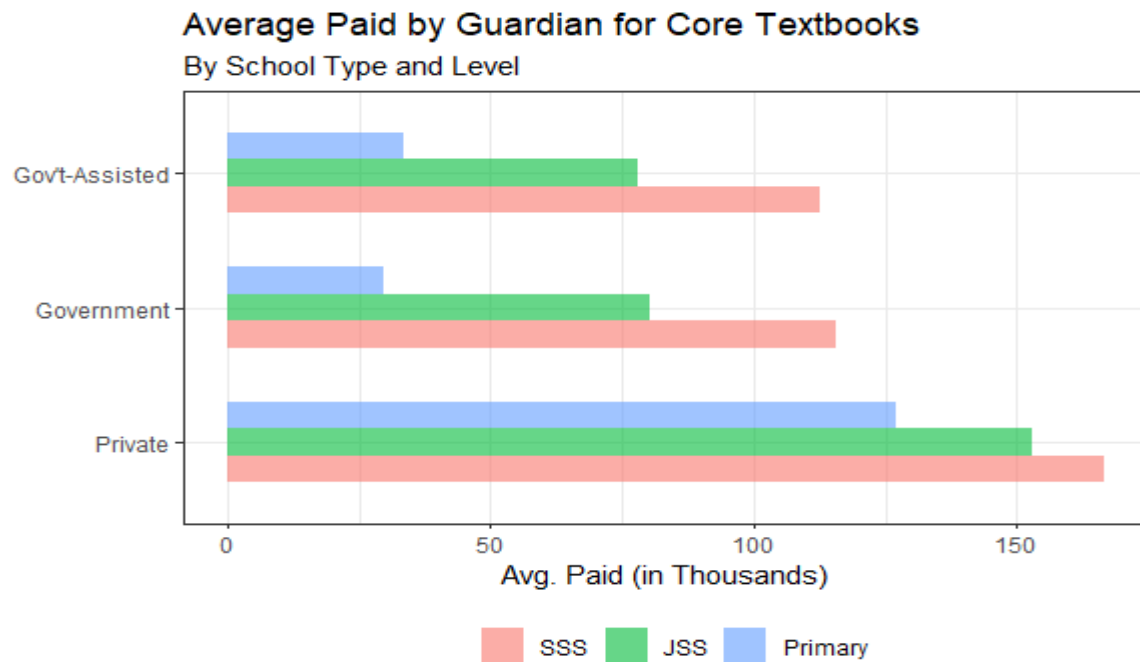
Another mother of a private school student spoke of the student being caned for defaulting on a payment. The mother still preferred to keep the child in private school because she believed it was a better education.

3.2.2. Non-Tuition Household Costs

A. Textbooks

Across grade levels, students in public schools paid less for their core textbooks than students in private schools. This is true across school levels (primary, JSS, and SSS). Among public school students, 37 percent report not paying anything for core textbooks.

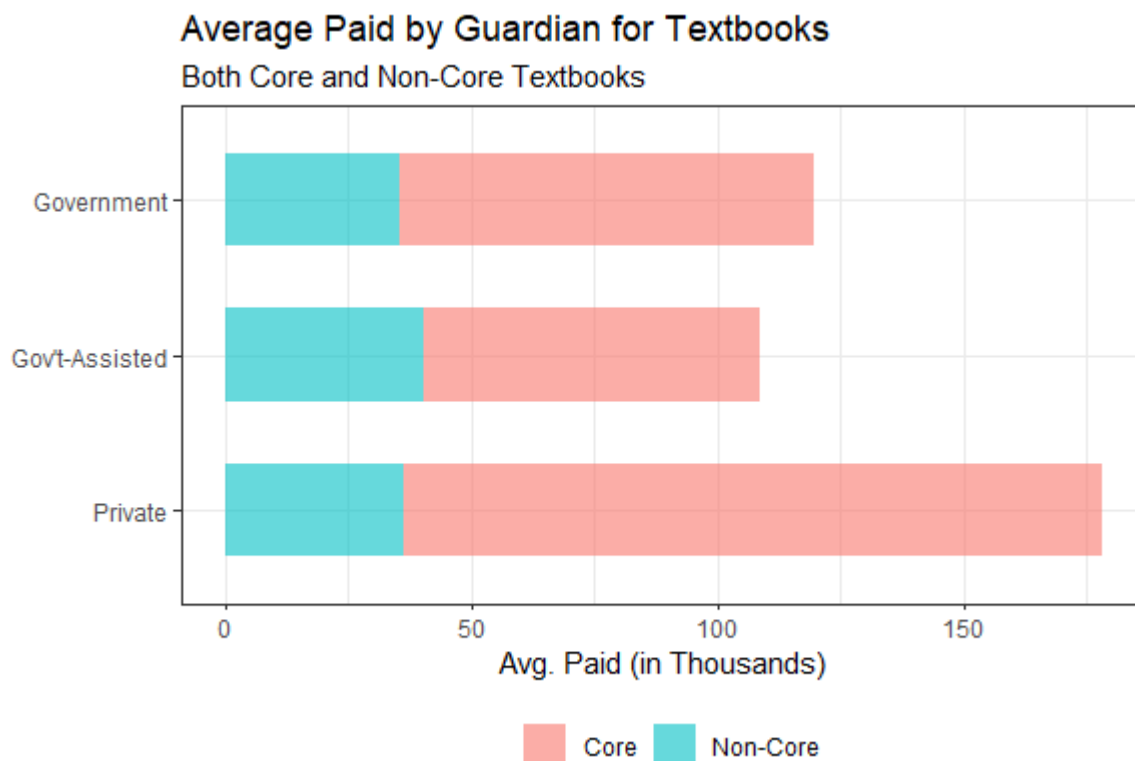
FIGURE 8 AVERAGE EXPENSES PAID BY HOUSEHOLDS FOR CORE TEXTBOOKS



An IGR enumerator collects data on household education spending.

We asked respondents how much they paid for both core textbooks and non-core textbooks. *Figure 9* shows how much families paid for both core and non-core textbooks combined. It is possible some families were not aware which textbooks were core and which were non-core.

FIGURE 9 AVERAGE COST OF CORE AND NON-CORE TEXTBOOKS PAID BY HOUSEHOLDS

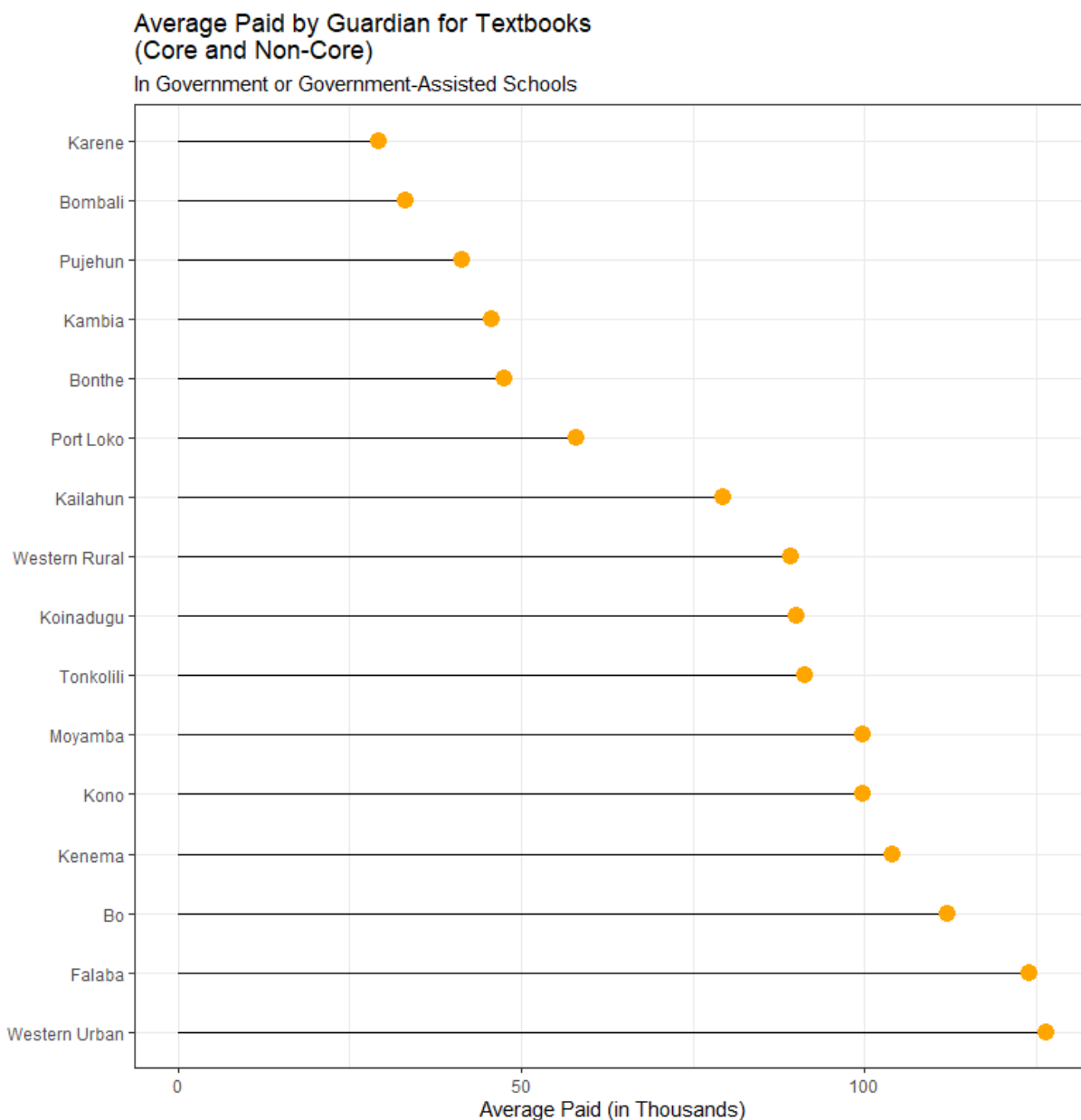


"Most times it is very difficult to use the little resources you have for something not planned for. ... Costs like general incentive for teacher, birthday gift for teacher, putting something inside the report card to say "thanks" to the teacher are communicated through the student to tell their parents. If a student fails to meet these costs, then the teacher will frown at him and will not pay attention to his work. Especially if the student is not doing well. The child will not feel free to be around the teacher for fear of saying discouraging things."

- Single mother of Freetown public school student

Textbook costs for public schools do vary by districts. Guardians of public-school students in Karene and Bombali report paying roughly SLL 30,000 per student. Guardians in Bo, Falaba, and Western Urban report paying more than SLL 110,000 on average.

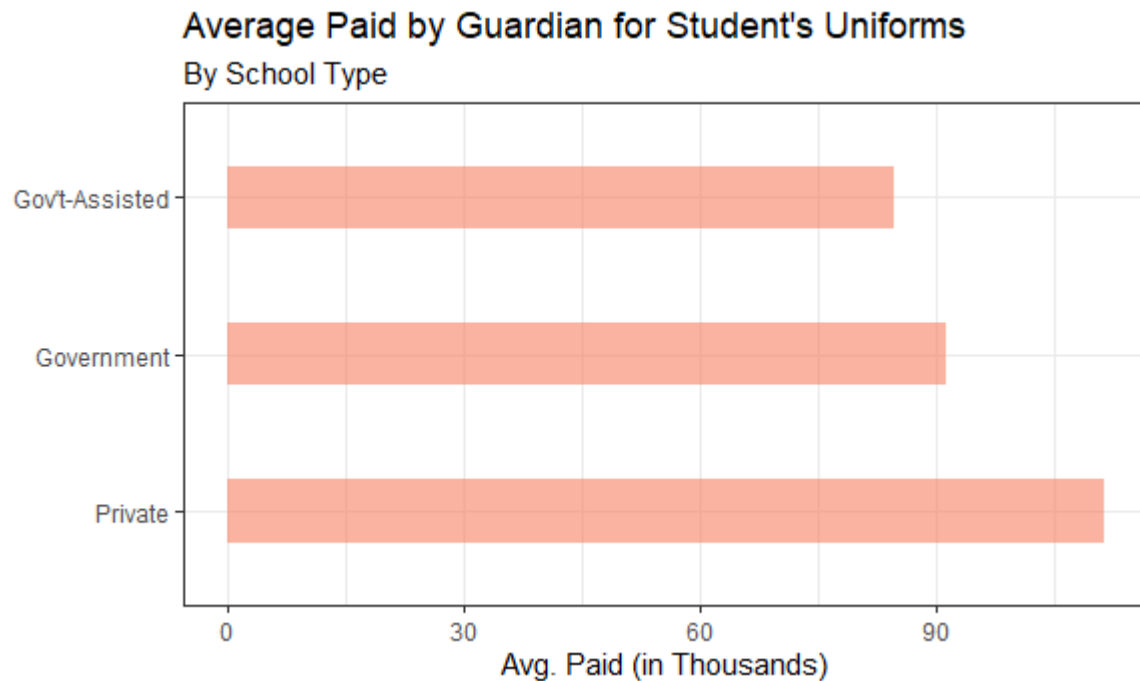
FIGURE 10 DISTRICT DISTRIBUTION OF PAYMENT MADE BY HOUSEHOLDS FOR CORE AND NON-CORE TEXTBOOKS



B. Uniforms

Families with students in public schools reported that they still pay for uniforms, but they pay less than families in private schools.

FIGURE 11 AVERAGE PAID BY HOUSEHOLDS FOR UNIFORMS



We also analysed whether female students spend more on uniforms than male students. Some schools do specifically charge more for female uniforms. Though, on the whole, there is no statistically significant difference.

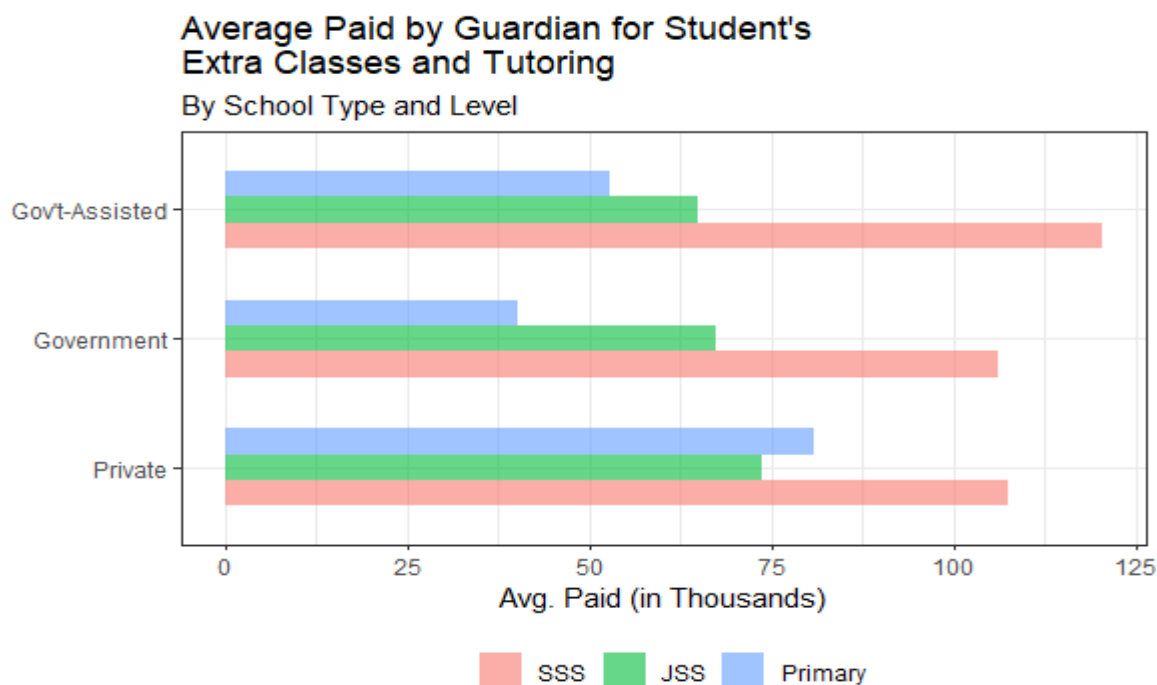
"They don't ask for school fee, but every day the teachers ask the children to give them money for lunch, and every Saturday lesson is compulsory. Teachers refuse to teach in weekdays except in their private lessons. ... The teachers always say, "whether or not we teach, we will get paid." Sometimes, [children] walk home because they give their lunch to teachers and use their transport fares as lunch. So they come home late and don't have enough time to study.

- Mother of child in Freetown public school

C. Extra Classes and Tutoring

Guardians of students in public schools report paying less for extra classes and tutoring. Though, at the senior secondary school level, the amount guardians pay at government-assisted schools is greater than the amount for private schools.

FIGURE 12 AVERAGE PAID BY HOUSEHOLDS FOR EXTRA CLASSES AND TUTORING



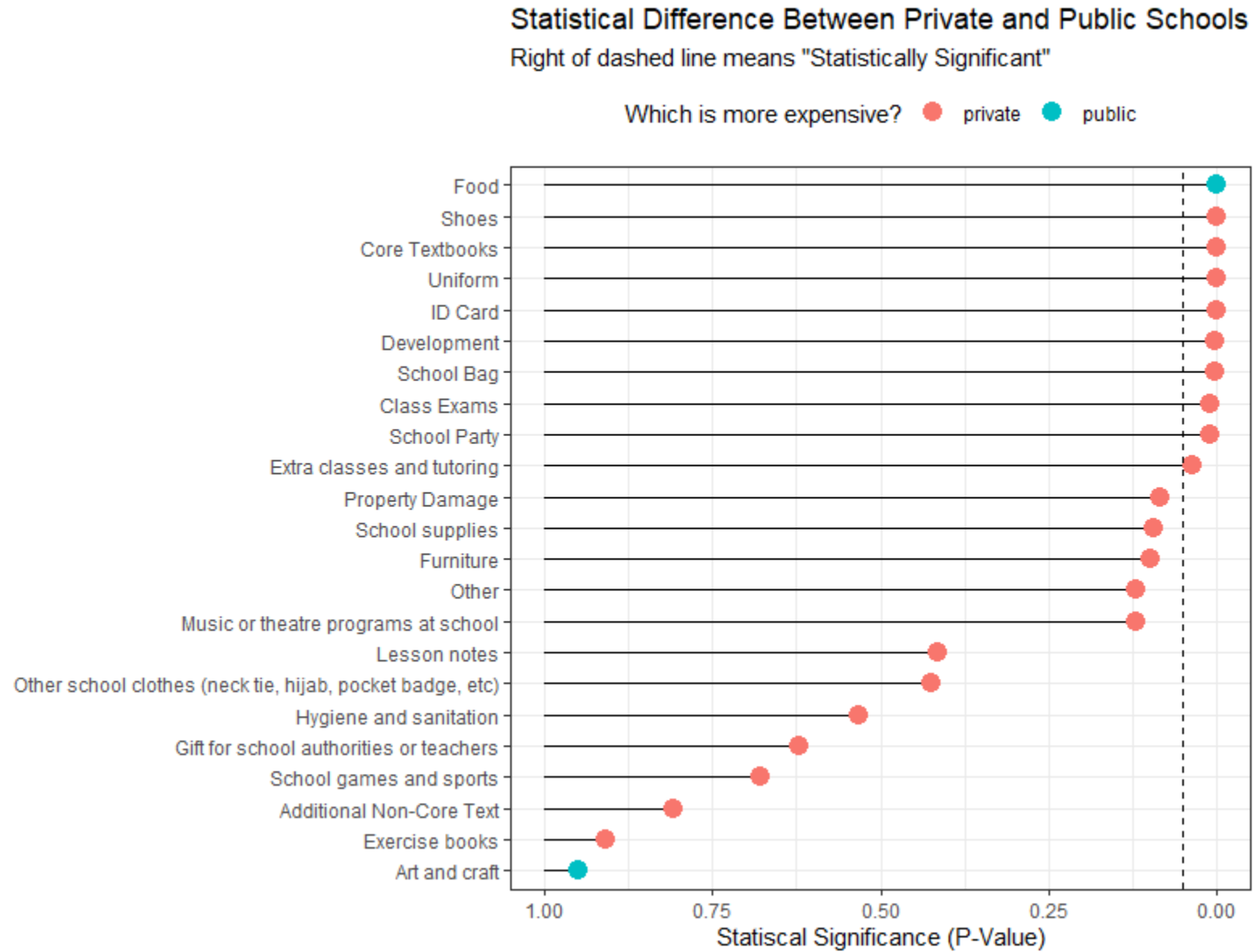
3.3. Statistical Differences between Public and Private School Expenses

Figure 13 shows whether there is a “statistically significant” difference between costs paid in a public school or a private school. The further to the right the dot, the more significant the difference. The dot does not represent the actual difference in costs. Instead, it represents the *likeliness* of a difference.

For example, students in private schools were very likely to pay more for shoes than students in public schools. But they are unlikely to pay different “art and craft” costs.

Not included in the graph below are results of a question regarding how much students’ guardians paid for national exams during the school year. We did not ask about exam preparation study costs, but parents did talk about logistical costs associated with the exams. The costs for public school guardians were higher than private school guardians (14,900 vs 11,300). But this difference is not statistically significant.

FIGURE 13 STATISTICAL DIFFERENCE IN COST BETWEEN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Average Costs for the Guardians of Public-School Students (Various)

Figure 14 (next page) shows the average amounts that parents reported paying for some of the categories that the survey included. These responses are specifically from the parents of students in public schools.

Household Cost Comparison for Public and Private School Students

Tables 6 and 7 show the average total amount that guardians reported paying for each student. This table is a rough estimate, as it sums together all the amounts that parents listed separately -- thus compounding some of the errors that might come from estimating amounts.

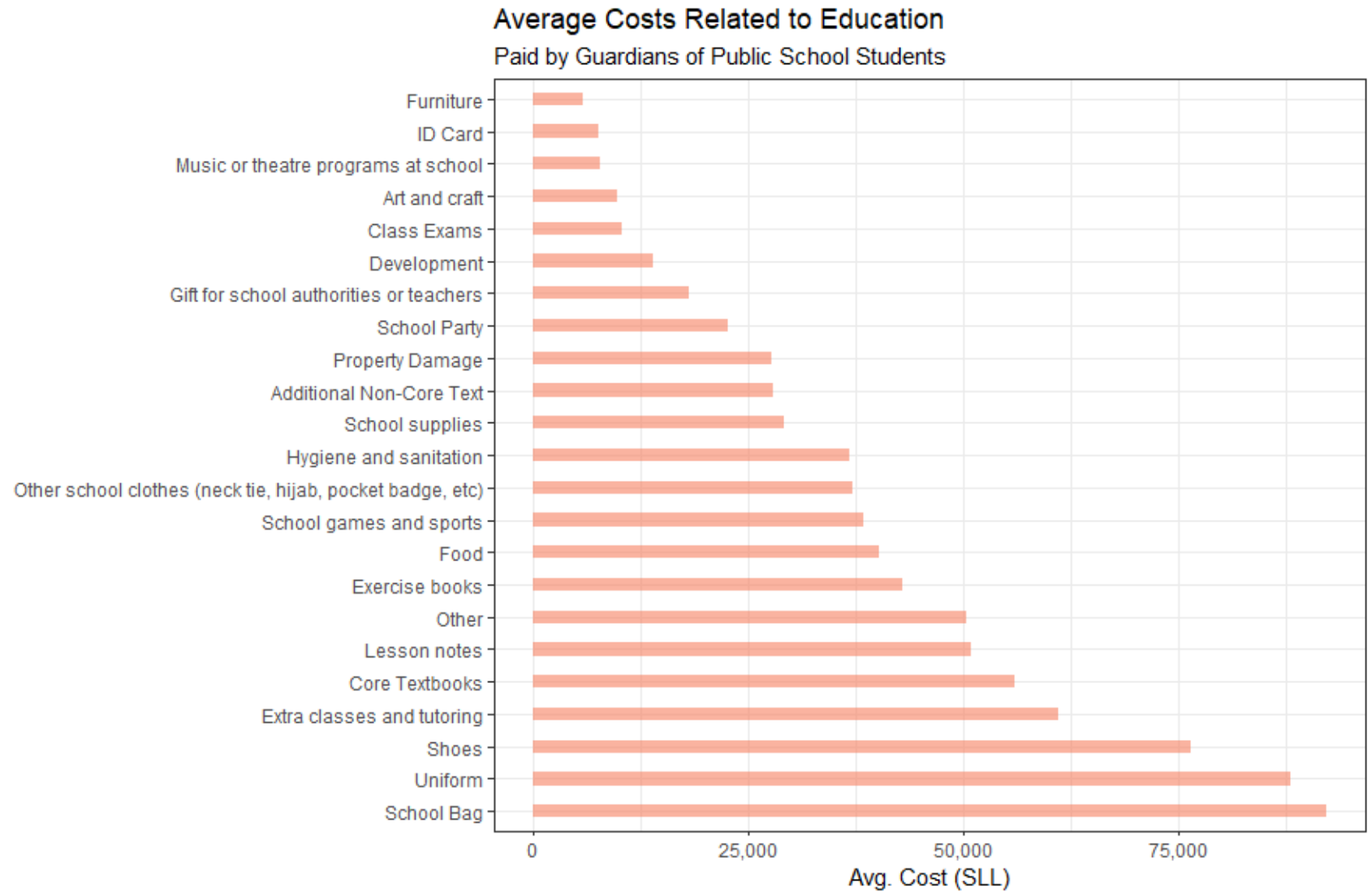
TABLE 5 AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE ON PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN 2020

Average household expenditure on public school in 2020			
School category	Average expenditure per child in Leones	Number of children (2019 school census)	Total, national household expenditure (In Millions of Leones)
Preschool	435,534	70,220	30,583
Primary	418,114	1,503,954	628,824
JSS	654,476	331,468	216,938
SSS	892,989	236,773	211,436
			1,087,780

TABLE 6 AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE ON PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN 2020

Average household expenditure on private schools in 2020			
School category	Average expenditure per child in Leones	Number of children (2019 school census)	Total, national household expenditure (In Millions of Leones)
Preschool	600,182	36,585	21,958
Primary	791,550	95,336	75,463
JSS	850,311	33,945	28,864
SSS	945,468	28,264	26,723
			153,007

FIGURE 14 AVERAGE COST FOR KEY HOUSEHOLD EDUCATION EXPENDITURE ITEMS



"Other" can indicate that the school administration did not categorize charges.

3.4. Comparing Tuition and Non-Tuition Costs

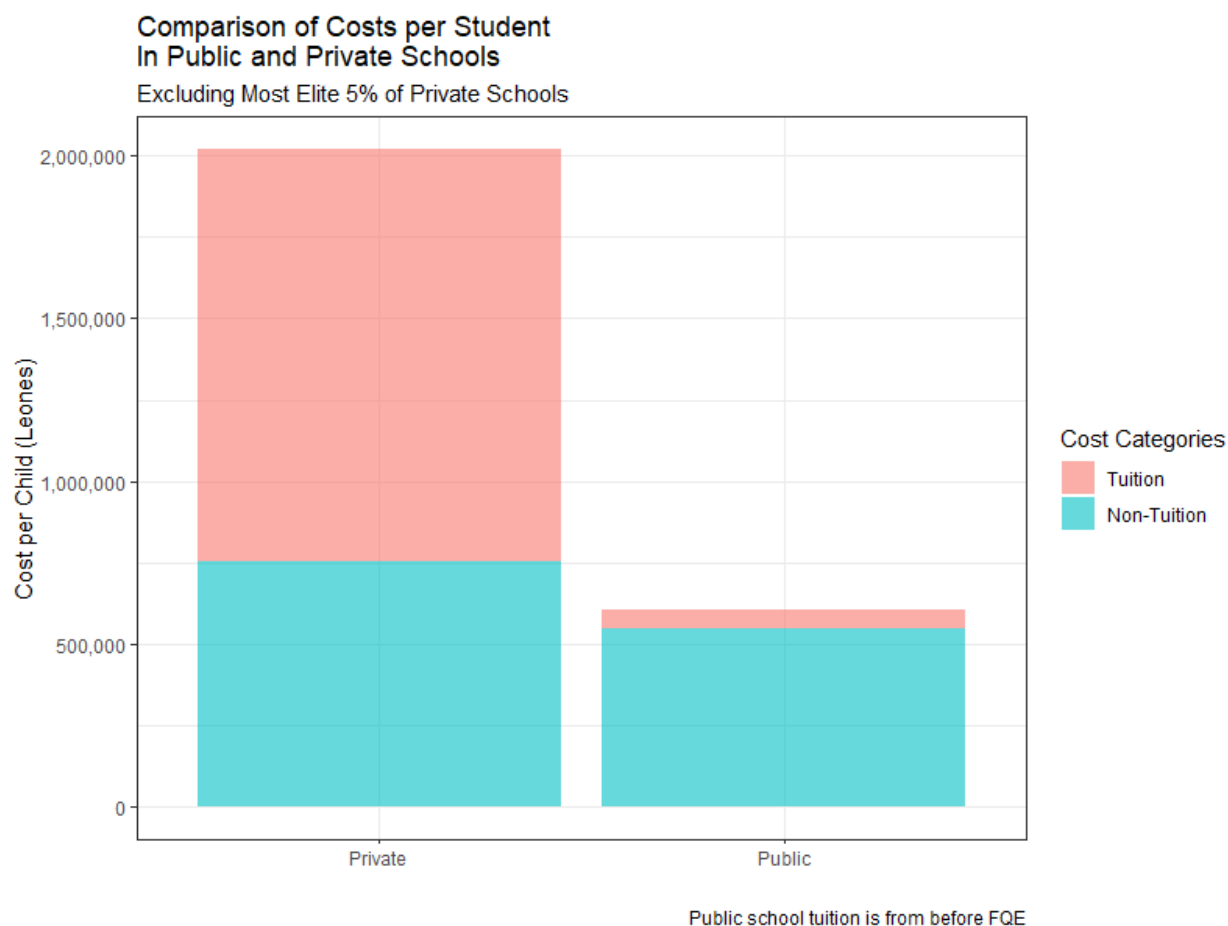
For students who attend private school, tuition costs far exceed any other household costs.

The much larger cost of tuition for private school students compared to public school students far exceeds any other cost differences among the categories we measured.

Note that the tuition amount used for public schools in *Figure 15* is from amounts charged before FQSE (2017-2018).

Please also note that *Figure 15* specifically uses average tuition costs that exclude the most elite (top 5%) of private schools. The contrast in household costs grows even starker when those schools are included. When including the elite schools, the average cost of private education per child is SLL 4,541,956 more expensive than public education. This average difference ranges from SLL 1,474,729 when comparing to general private schools and up to SLL 65,886,487 when comparing with elite private schools.

FIGURE 15 COMPARING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOL COSTS, INCLUDING TUITION



4. Awareness of Policies

The MBSSE introduced new policies for the 2021-2022 school year. IGR asked households about their awareness of these policies. The results are best understood as a baseline for future comparison. This is because the short time period between the policy announcement and the IGR survey was not sufficient to fully communicate the policies to households.

For the 2021-2022 school year, the MBSSE “is requesting Principals to display [an] agreed price list on the school’s Notice Board to guide parents/guardians].” We asked guardians if they had seen a similar price list during the previous school year. Among parents of public-school students, 91 percent said they had not seen a list of standard fees from the MBSSE.

The MBSSE also instructed that for the 2021-2022 school year, “the purchase of school colours, especially uniforms, is not a prerequisite for admission to JSS 1 and SSS 1 in Government and Government-Assisted Schools.” Still, most parents (59%) believe that school colours are a prerequisite.

It bears repeating these responses were collected before the beginning of the school year. Guardians’ awareness of these policies may have increased after classes began.

“If my child fails to support the teacher (by paying for extra lessons, birthday gifts, purchasing items teacher sells, etc.), much attention will not be paid to him in school. For example, if a student has a low grade the teacher will tell them it is because you are not attending the private lesson or because you did not buy the pamphlet. ... The child self-esteem is greatly affected especially when other students go the extra mile to support whatever the teacher says.”

- Single mother of JSS student in Freetown public school

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Government of Sierra Leone is giving unprecedented policy and budget attention to basic and senior secondary school education which is contributing to some cost saving to households. However, extra charges and extortion by some school authorities is not helping to ease the financial burden of schooling. The average Sierra Leonean household paid about SLL 289,816 in 2020 in fees that could be considered extortion from parents by school administrators. These include fees for things like extra classes, gifts/tips to teachers, and art and crafts. IGR enumerators reported that this practice is institutionalised in a majority of schools, especially in urban areas. If a student does not pay these

costs, teachers may penalise the student with worse grades or retaliate by neglecting and ostracising the student. The GoSL should work with civil society and school management committees to provide greater vigilance in schools to guard against extortion and victimisation.

GoSL could also take action to reduce the cost of education in private schools. The first step in achieving this is getting a better understanding of the cost of education to private providers and how much profit is made from the education system. We note that average private education per child is SLL 4,541,956 more expensive than public education. This average difference ranges from SLL 1,474,729 when comparing to general private schools and up to SLL 65,886,487 when comparing to elite private schools. A comprehensive cost study could be done to find out what the actual cost is to provide a private-school level of education. This could reveal how much private school owners may be profiting from families who simply want to provide an education to their children. The GoSL could use this evidence to advocate for outside donor support to help the public system offer a better alternative to high private school costs.

The results of this study can be useful for identifying areas where the government can strategically lower the cost of education through scale and efficiency. An example of such a measure that the MBSSE has already undertaken is the use of school buses for transportation. Through scale and coordination, these buses provide a more efficient improvement on individually arranged private transportation. GoSL could employ a similar approach to minimise the cost of text books to households. GoSL could help households who report paying for core and non-core textbooks by negotiating and purchasing licenses from publishers of the textbooks and provide free access to students and teachers.

The MBSSE announced new policies regarding school administrators publishing price lists and not requiring school colours for admission to JSS 1 and SSS 1. It would be useful to measure whether schools are implementing these policies and whether parents are aware of them. Parents who were surveyed for this study specifically mentioned that they would appreciate having a public, itemized price sheet from their school.