



Financially Self-Sustainable Primary Schools

An analysis of four cases

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ABSTRACT

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One of the most interesting, yet least investigated plans to promote sustainable education in developing countries is represented by the implementation of Financially Self-Sustainable School plans, which support schools to become financially self-sustainable institutions.

The aim of the research was to study the reasons why in the field of primary school education Financially Self-Sustainable School plans do not reach the goal of full financial self-sustainability in developing countries.

The research involved the interaction with the heads of four primary Low-Cost Private Schools (LCPs) located in different geographic areas of the developing world (Paraguay; Zambia; Uganda), in which a plan for Financial Self-Sustainability was launched. A questionnaire was used to collect the data.

The data collected through the interviews made it possible to identify the types of initiatives implemented or launched in the schools that adopted plans for financial self-sustainability, the variety of reasons why a plan for financial self-sustainability was launched in the schools involved in the interviews, the different ways in which the various members of the school community reacted to the idea, and the difficulties that respondents encountered in defining, implementing or running plans for financial self-stability in their school environments.

The analysis allowed the formulation of two kinds of conclusions: first, the cases analysed show that full financial self-sustainability for primary schools in developing countries is a goal that is often impossible to reach; second, it shows that the implementation of a plan of financial self-sustainability in developing countries is not a failure, but a tool to promote-sustainable education in practical, successful, and more sustainable ways.

Key words: developing countries, primary education, sustainable education, financial self-sustainability

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals
- MDGs: Millennium Development Goals
- ESD: Education for Sustainable Development
- GAP: Global Action Programme (UN)
- FFSs: Financially Self-Sustainable Schools
- LCPSs: Low-Cost Private Schools

1. Introduction

1.1. Quality Education

On 1 January 2016, the United Nations launched an ambitious plan of action that is now commonly known with the name of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The plan is characterised by 17 universal goals, which represent themes of "economic growth, social development [and] environmental protection" (UN 2015, item 9) that need to be addressed by 2030 on a global scale to ensure a sustainable future for humanity.

Among the 17 goals promoted by the UN, SDG 4 (Quality Education) aims to ensure quality education for all. In its formulation, SDG 4 replaces and expands the second of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) launched by the UN in 2000, whose main aim was "to achieve universal primary education" for all (UN 2000), with a specific focus on developing countries.

What is meant by "quality education" is specified by some of the ten sub-goals that constitute SDG 4. The ones that are particularly useful to define "quality education" seem to be the following ones:

1. "By 2030, ensure that **all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education** leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes" (SDG 4.1): this is an important expansion of the eight MDG, as "universal primary education" (UN 2000) is replaced by "primary and secondary education" (SDG 4.1).
2. "By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure **equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable**, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations" (SDG 4.5): this sub-goal suggests that quality education goes hand in hand with gender equality.

3. “By 2030, ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through **education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles**, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development” (SDG 4.7): this sub-goal clearly suggests the connection between “quality education” and “sustainable education”.

From the analysis of the sub-goals mentioned above, it seems possible to state that according to the UN quality education is marked by a series of characteristics, the most important of which are:

- **equity;**
- **access to free education;**
- **gender equality / lack of gender discrimination;**
- **sustainable development.**

There seems to be an extensive and general consensus on the idea that quality education can be defined as such only if it promotes equitable and free access to all girls and boys. The question of "sustainable development", on the contrary, appears to be less universally evident and requires further analysis and investigation.

1.2. Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) can be described as the form of education that "empowers learners to make informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and just society, for present and future generations while respecting cultural diversity. It is about lifelong learning and is an integral part of quality education" (UNESCO 2014, p. 12).

The UN Global Action Programme (GAP) was produced in 2014 and contained clear guidelines on how to promote ESD across the world. It divides ESD into four main components:

1. **Learning Content(s)**, i.e. the actual “content” that needs to be incorporated within curricula to promote ESD across different year levels;
2. **Pedagogy and learning environments**, i.e. the approaches to learning that are informed by and actively promote ESD;
3. **Learning Outcomes**, i.e. the set of objectives and learning goals that are expected to be reached through ESD;
4. **Societal Transformations**, i.e. the long-term structural changes that ESD aims to reach and the transformational changes ESD aims to inspire in learners, who are to be perceived as active “agents of change” (UNESCO 2014, p. 12).

As for Learning Contents, even if there are no topics to be mandatorily addressed, there seems to be a consensus about the different dimensions ESD should acquire in school curricula. Wyness and Sterling (2015) summarised these dimensions as follows:

TABLE 1. The three dimensions of ESD according to Wyness et al. (p. 241)

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY	SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY
Natural resources management	Alternative futures	Sustainable communities
Food and farming	Leadership and change	Cultural diversity
Ecological systems	Learning organisations	Intercultural understanding
Waste/Water/Energy	Corporate social responsibility	Sustainability in the built environment
Biodiversity	Consumerism and trade	Travel, transport and mobility
Climate Change	Globalisation	Health and well-being

	Accountability and ethics	Peace, security and conflict
	International development	Citizenship, governance and democracy
	Sustainable and ethical tourism	Human rights and needs
	Population	
	Social enterprise	

The second and the third components of ESD have been the object of continuous debate and analyses in the last few years. Such a debate is effectively summarised by Wals and Blewitt (2010), who state that "in the context of sustainability, we need to be able to switch back and forth between disciplinary perspectives, time perspective (past-present-future), space perspectives (local-regional-global), cultural perspectives and perhaps even between human and other or more-than-human perspectives" (p. 66).

In pedagogical terms, the shift suggested by Wals et al. implies what Mezirow (2003) defines as a new form of "transformative learning" (p. 58), which is characterised by the following components:

1. **Interdisciplinarity**, i.e. an approach to learning that promotes the cross-pollination among disciplines. As Jones, Selby and Sterling (2010) point out, "sustainability presents an overarching and complex socio-economic-ecological context wherein interdisciplinarity - as a putative holistic mode of understanding, organisation of knowledge and inquiry - seems appropriate" (p. 19).
2. **Systemic thinking**, i.e. an approach to learning and thinking that allows students to identify the links existing between complex sustainability issues (Sterling 2004b, p. 78);
3. **Critical Thinking**, i.e. the ability to deconstruct complex issues and reveal the ideological, political, and economic scaffolding that sustains them. As

Tilbury and Wortman underline (2004, p. 34), the ability to think critically allows students to tackle complex issues and solve them in more sustainable ways. Dawe, Jucker, and Martin (2005, p. 59) also underline that it also helps students promote sustainability in a more interdisciplinary way

4. **Collaboration and Participation**, which Rydén (2007, p. 31) defines as the ability to cooperate with other stakeholders in order to understand topics more deeply and to find collaborative solutions.

1.3. Sustainable Schools

In recent years a series of international programmes promoting sustainability at school have been developed at a large scale. Some of the most widely known ones include the US-based “Green Schools Alliance” programme, the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (also known as AUSSI), EnviroSchools in New Zealand, the UK-based “Sustainable Schools” programme, the Chinese “Green School Project”, and the Swedish “Green School Award”. Despite the diversity of the contexts in which they have flourished, these programmes have aimed to “re-orientate mainstream formal education towards sustainability” (Rickinson, Hall & Reid, 2015, p. 360) and to show that a “sustainable school” aims to prepare “young people for a lifetime of sustainable living, through [their] teaching, fabric and day-to-day practices. It is guided by a commitment to care for oneself (our health and well-being); for each other (across cultures, distances, and generations), and for the environment (both locally and globally)” (DCSF, 2008, p. 6).

The value, feasibility and “sustainability” of Sustainable Schools programmes across the world have been evaluated through a number of empirical analyses, which include:

- surveys and/or inquiries into the impact of sustainable schools programmes in specific areas and regions (Eames et al., 2010; Ilich, 2008; Larri 2010; Milne et al., 2010);
- evaluations of the impact of sustainable schools programmes onto the actual learning process of primary and secondary-school students (Barratt Hacking, Scott & Lee, 2010; Ofsted, 2003; DCSF, 2010);

Such analyses have made it possible to identify the challenges that most sustainable schools have to face in order to promote sustainable programmes (DCSF, 2008; Stern, Powell, and Hill, 2014), the ways in which different auditing and accountability contexts influence the implementation of sustainable school programmes (Stokking et al., 1999; Russ, 2004), and the levels of democratic participation in the development of sustainable school programmes (Pepper and Wildly, 2008; Kensler, 2012).

1.4. Self-Sustainable Schools

The research work that has been carried out so far in the field of sustainable schools has regarded mainly the aspects of curriculum design (i.e. how school curricula have reflected or have implemented the topics related to sustainable development), education policy (i.e. how local governments or educational institutions have incorporated the topics of sustainable development within school curricula), or impact analysis (i.e. how/whether sustainable school programmes have impacted the actual learning process). Sustainability, in other words, has been treated mainly as a topic to be discussed across schools, or as a component to be implemented, promoted or nourished in school curricula. “Sustainable schools” have thus been treated mainly as institutions in which sustainability is a topic, a school subject, or a throughline across disciplines promoting sustainable education.

A radically different interpretation of the theme of Sustainable Schools is the one provided by Teach a Man to Fish, a UK-based charity that since 2006 has been promoting the idea that schools can become financially self-sustainable institutions in developing countries. Teach a Man to Fish was born with the intention of supporting schools in developing countries to become financially self-sustainable institutions. In order to empower “schools to give young people the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values they need to succeed in work and in life” (Impact Report 2018, p. 3), Teach a Man to Fish supports schools, school leaders, teachers and students in developing countries to:

- elaborate a business plan which will allow the school to set up a business plan; this business plan will generate income, which will eventually be re-invested in the school;
- develop business and life skills that will allow all stakeholders to overcome poverty;
- run and develop the business that has been elaborated in order to generate income;
- transform schools into financially self-sustainable institutions.

It is evident that the main goal of the School Enterprise Challenge - this is the name of the programme sponsored by Teach a Man to Fish to promote the development of entrepreneurial skills among young students in schools located in underprivileged areas of the world - is not only to guarantee Quality Education for all (SDG 4), but also to reduce poverty (SDG 1) at a large scale.

In terms of numbers, the programme launched by Teach a Man to Fish has included almost 70.000 students across the globe, 50% of whom are girls; more than 1.000 school businesses have been set up in more than 74 countries in the world; more than 3.000 teachers have been trained to help students develop their own school business (Impact Report 2018, p. 4).

The undeniably positive results obtained so far through the self-sustainable school programme promoted by Teach a Man to Fish show that the School Enterprise Challenge has helped schools in several developing countries across the world to avoid many of the problems that usually affect educational institutions in impoverished countries, such as the lack of government funding, the late arrival of government payments, the insufficiency of school fees, the difficulty of finding sufficient long-term support from non-government sources. Financially self-sufficient schools have allowed schools across the world to generate their resources from a diversified group of small-scale, on-campus enterprises: this has enabled schools not only to build their financial independence, but also to develop hands-on teaching approaches, thus transforming schools into "social enterprises", i.e. income-earning enterprises that do not redistribute their income among shareholders, but use them for a social purpose.

There are many successful cases of financially self-sustainable schools (FSSs) in developing countries, but all of them regard middle or, mainly, high schools. This means that there are very few cases of primary schools that have been involved in FSS projects, and it seems that the majority (if not all) of them have been unsuccessful. If we consider that in most developing countries the majority of children do not finish primary school, we can clearly understand that FSS projects have involved so far a minimum number of students, i.e. those who manage to go to middle and high school. Identifying the reasons why FSS projects have proved to be mainly unsuccessful in the primary school sector and piloting a project for a financially self-sustainable school in a developing country may lead to the definition of a large-scale plan to transform primary schools into financially self-sustainable schools.

The promotion of FSS schemes in the primary school sector may lead low-income students to develop practical and entrepreneurial skills that may help them in their future life to overcome poverty.

1.5 Research question(s)

This project will aim to understand the reasons why Financially Self-Sufficient school schemes have not been particularly successful in the primary school sector. It will focus on the analysis of a series of unsuccessful cases in order to identify elements of continuity between them: such cases regard four examples of Low Cost Private Schools (LCPSs) located in two main areas of the world (e.g. South America and Africa). The feasibility of an FSS scheme within these peculiar contexts will be studied and analysed. This will lead to the definition of a series of general reflections and some practical suggestions that may be applied to future FSS schemes in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to promote the development of hands-on, practical, and cooperative learning practices in the primary schools of underprivileged areas of the world.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

The thesis will be structured as follows:

- the first chapter (Introduction) places the phenomenon of sustainable schools within the panorama of UN Sustainable Goals and introduces the topic of self-sustainable schools in developing countries;
- the second chapter will analyse the nature and the impact of Low Cost Private Schools (LCPSs) in developing countries;
- in the third chapter the methodological approaches adopted in this thesis will be presented, described and analysed;
- the fourth chapter will present the empirical results collected through a series of interviews involving heads of Low Cost Private schools located in three different countries (Paraguay; Zambia; Uganda). The results of the interviews will be analysed and summarised;
- in the fifth chapter the results collected and analysed will be placed within the context of both the UN Sustainable Development Goals and LCPSs and hypotheses will be formulated on the actual feasibility of financially self-sustainable primary school programmes in developing countries.
- the sixth (and last) chapter will contain the conclusions of the whole project.

2. Literature review

2.1. LCPSs: a commonly accepted definition

As stated in a recent contribution by Baum, Cooper, and Lusk-Stover (2017) "over the last two decades, a growing body of research has emerged documenting the expansion of a for-profit private sector in developing countries catering to the demand of poor families for non-state education services" (p. 100). The growing number of research work Baum et al. refer to has allowed scholars, policy-makers, investors, researchers and various stakeholders to identify a series of essential elements that can be used to understand the nature, the role, the importance and the purport of a complex and frequently misinterpreted phenomenon such as the so-called "low-cost private schools".

The first aspect it has been possible to identify is a general agreement on how to define Low Cost Private Schools (LCPSs). The most precise and most commonly accepted definition seems to be the one formulated by Mcloughlin (2013): "low-cost private schools (LCPSs) - sometimes referred to as low-fee private schools - include any market-oriented (nominally for-profit) schools that are dependent on user fees for some or all of their running development costs" (p. 2).

Mcloughlin's definition points out a series of aspects that seem to be typically associated with "low-cost private schools" in most developing countries:

1. LCPSs are an alternative to public education and have some "degree of financial independence from the state" (p. 2);
2. the acronym LCPSs refers to a massive variety of different school types, which include - but are not necessarily limited to - religious, philanthropic, for-profit, and non-profit schools;
3. the schools that fall under the umbrella of LCPSs may be either officially recognised by the ministerial institutions of the country where they exist or unrecognised. The fact that many LCPSs are often not officially recognised by governments has made and still makes it often very difficult for researchers to collect reliable numerical evidence about the exact number of LCPSs existing in developing countries.

2.2. LCPSs: a well-documented phenomenon

The body of research that has been carried out on the topic of LCPSs in the last two decades has made it possible to provide enough evidence to show two main aspects about LCPSs.

The first aspect that has been proved is the fact that LCPSs are extremely common in basically all developing countries in the world and "are educating significant shares of primary and secondary school students in South-Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa" (Baum et al., 2017, p. 100).

The second element that has been clarified is the number of reasons why LCPSs were and are still being created in developing countries (Ashley et al., 2014; Härmä, 2011; Kingdon, 1996; Kitaev, 1999; Nguyen & Raju, 2014; Tooley & Dixon, 2006).

Researchers have identified two main common factors that determine the need for LCPSs in developing countries. Such factors are:

1. the **uneven distribution of public funds** to promote Education for All (EFA), which makes the need for LCPSs justifiable and sometimes inevitably urgent (Colclough, 1997);
2. the **low quality and/or the inefficiency of public education** in developing countries, where LCPSs have proliferated "in order to meet the excess demand resulting from an insufficient supply of public school spaces and/or to provide alternatives to a failing public education system (Heyneman et al., 2014, p. 4). The inefficiency of public education in developing countries can take different forms, such as "(i) an insufficient supply of public school spaces"; (ii) the low-quality of public schooling; (iii) a public education system that fails to meet the diverse, differentiated needs of families" (Heyneman et al., 2014, p. 5). The rigorous study carried out by Kremer and Muralidharan in 2008 on the development of LCPSs in rural India summarises the effects of these factors on the spread of LCPSs in India and is one of the most frequently quoted studies on this topic.

Phillipson et al. (2008) also suggest that there may be other cofactors that contribute to increasing the need and the number of LCPSs in developing countries, such as the oversupply of teachers, the threat of hidden costs in government schools, the poor level of academic achievement reached by students attending government schools, and the prestige associated with a certain specific language of instruction.

Among the co-factors that may have determined the proliferation of LCPSs in developing countries, Tooley (2015) - one of the leading academic scholars in the field of school-development studies and on the topic of LCPSs - also mentions the higher level of motivation of teachers working in the private sector, the lower rate of absenteeism among teachers working in LCPSs, and smaller class sizes.

2.3. A controversial phenomenon: LCPSs and EFA

One of the most peculiar traits of the recent debate that has invested the spread of LCPSs in developing countries is its sharp polarisation. This means that scholars and researchers have tended to look at the phenomenon of LCPSs through two different lenses: sharp criticism or open support. Both positions are sustained by a significant number of voices, which are often, as Mcloughlin puts it, "ideologically charged" (Mcloughlin, 2013, p. 4).

What determines the polarisation of the debate is the extent to which scholars believe LCPSs contribute to achieving the goal of "Education for All" (EFA), which seems now to have been entirely absorbed by Sustainable Development Goal 4 ("Quality Education").

The scholars who openly criticise the LCPSs for not promoting EFA use a series of arguments, which can be summarised as follows:

1. The idea that education can be (or become) a private market is unacceptable as it is clearly against the overall principle of EFA, which is in favour of the elimination of all barriers preventing students from going to school (Oketch et al., 2010);

2. Education should be intrinsically free: the very existence of school fees - which, albeit low, are the sustaining pillar of LCPSs - makes the model of LCPSs unsustainable for the poor (Unesco, 2009);
3. The money that parents use to pay school fees and send their kids to LCPSs in low-income communities draws down the community's wealth (Lewin, 2007, p. 43);
4. States - not private companies - are the only institutions entitled to promote EFA, including the most disadvantaged members of society (Lewin, 2007, p. 42);
5. Despite being animated by the best intentions, LCPSs will never be able to reach the most impoverished families, "arguably those most in need of educational reform" (Heyneman et al., 2014, p. 7): this position is shared by a large number of scholars (Rose and Adelabu, 2007; Srivastava and Walford, 2007).

On an opposite side, there is a cohort of scholars who have begun to look at actual numerical data to support what seems to be a more indulgent, evidence-based view on LCPSs and to avoid the dangers of ideological extremism. The aspects of LCPSs that have been analysed so far through data-driven approach regard several elements such as quality, equity, cost-effectiveness, affordability, choice, accountability, financing and partnership, and marketing. The findings scholars have come up with can be summarised as follows:

1. Quality:

- a. it has been widely demonstrated that students attending LCPSs in developing countries tend to achieve better learning outcomes than students attending public or government schools (Muralidharan et al., 2011; Javad et al., 2012; Singh, 2012);
- b. it has also been proved that the quality of instruction is often higher in LCPSs than in state or government schools (Maitra et al., 2011) and that the level of motivation of teachers working in LCPSs is significantly higher, despite the fact they tend to get a lower salary compared to the one earned by government teachers (Tooley et al., 2008);

2. **Equity:** there does not seem to be enough evidence supporting the idea that LCPSs reach the poor or promote access to education to the weakest

members of society (Woodhead et al., 2013). This means that the idea that "low-cost non-government schools will never be able to accommodate the most deprived households (Heyneman et al., 2014, p. 4) is still strong and prevailing in the literature on the topic (Rose and Adelabu, 2007; Srivastava and Walford, 2007).

3. **Cost-effectiveness:**

- a. evidence shows that LCPSs seem to have relatively lower costs than government schools (Muralidharan et al., 2011);
- b. there seems to be not enough evidence to support the idea that LCPSs are or can be financially self-sustainable institutions (Dixon et al., 2013; Härmä and Rose, 2012).

4. **Affordability:** there still seems to be a substantial lack of reliable evidence showing that the poor can actually afford to send their children to LCPSs (Akaguri, 2013; Härmä, 2011b) or that LCPSs are less expensive than state schools (Siddhu, 2011).

5. **Choice:** scholars have been able to collect data to support the idea that parents choose to send their children to attend LCPSs based on the perceived quality of the education offered as opposite to government/public schools (Nishimura and Yamano, 2013; Oketch et al., 2010).

6. **Accountability:** there seems to be not enough evidence to support the idea that private schools in developing countries are accountable to users (Hartwig, 2013; Andrabi et al., 2009).

7. **Financing and Partnership:** scholars have collected substantial evidence supporting the idea that states or government bodies in developing countries do not have the knowledge, tools, or capacity to implement education policies for LCPSs (Barrera-Osorio and Rajù, 2010).

8. **Market:** there is not enough evidence or data to prove that LCPSs effectively reduce drop-out rates in developing countries or that market competition enhances the quality of education in the private and/or the public sector (Andrabi et al., 2009).

9. **Ubiquity:** research has made it possible to show with a significant degree of evidence that LCPSs are a constant presence in most developing countries in the world, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, South Africa, Malawi and Jamaica (Ashley et al., 2014). The percentage of students attending them varies from country to country: according to Härmä and Adefisayo, for instance, in countries such as Lagos and Nigeria, 70% of pre-primary and primary children attend LCPSs (Härmä & Adefisayo, 2013, p. 129), while in some rural regions of India it seems that such percentage can reach up to 50% of the whole student body (Ashley et al., 2014, p. 23). Tooley draws on these data to state that "in terms of absolute numbers, there are reportedly between 300.000 and 400.000 LCPSs in India (cf. Garg, 2011), while Härmä and Adefisayo (2013) report that there are over 12.000 private schools in Lagos State alone, with around three quarters (the unapproved schools) of them being low-cost" (Tooley, 2015, p. 23).

2.4. LCPSs for the poor?

From the reconstruction of the critical debate on LCPSs outlined above, it is evident that one of the leading and most urgent questions is: are LCPSs actually and effectively serving the poor? Are they contributing to reaching the goal of EFA? The current status of the research and the unavoidable limitations that characterise its advancement (e.g. lack of reliable empirical data related to LCPSs, especially in disadvantaged or impoverished areas; "unofficial status" of many LCPSs, which makes it difficult to find records about them in official registers; etc.) make it rather difficult to formulate a definite answer to the questions posited above.

From the empirical data that have been collected and analysed so far, it seems possible to state that LCPSs are offering learning opportunities to at least some children coming from very low-income families (Ashley et al. 2014) in all the developing countries being taken into account. However, the quantity of poor or disadvantaged children attending LCPSs seems to vary a lot according to the country. For instance, in a study conducted in rural India, Härmä and Rose (2012) managed to find that only 10% of "children from the poorest quintile were accessing private schools [...] compared with the 70% of the richest quintile" (Mcloughlin, 2013, p. 7). In a similar study published in 2013 Heyneman and Stern "acknowledge that in Jamaica, Tanzania, and Kenya, private schools are offering concessionary spaces to children from families that otherwise could not afford to pay tuition, as well as to street children or AIDS-affected orphans" (Mcloughlin, 2013, p. 7). There seems to be, in other words, some evidence that LCPSs offer learning opportunities to students coming from destitute families, but their presence is still somewhat hard to quantify; moreover, when quantifying the number of students has been possible, as with the case of Jamaica, Tanzania, and Kenya, the percentage of students coming from the most impoverished families does not seem to be higher than 10% of the total student population of the school, at least in the contexts that have been studied so far.

In an article published in 2015, Tooley reflects on whether LCPSs effectively help to achieve the goal of EFA in developing countries using a new set of numerical data. Tooley's reflection stems from a quote by Ashley et al., which sounds as follows: "despite a vast majority of parents indicating a preference for private schools over poor quality government alternatives, only 41% of the children in the sample were actually attending private schools" (Ashley et al., 2014, p. 28). Even if it seems it cannot be denied that apparently 10% of impoverished children attend private schools in developing countries, Tooley underlines that "more than two out of five children using private schools in poor, remote villages in one of India's poorest states is instead evidence suggesting private school affordability and accessibility" (Tooley, 2015, p. 24).

The same kind of evidence comes from a survey on schools in slum areas of Liberia and South Sudan, which shows that "the cost of sending a child to a government school is often not that different from the cost of sending to a private school" (Tooley et al., 2013a).

2.5. The challenges of the model

It appears clear that a significant body of research has made it evident that LCPSs are not just ubiquitous in most developing countries: they also provide students with a kind of education that is often significantly more effective than the one provided by government schools; in addition, they are affordable to the poor.

Considering the benefits associated with the model in terms of sustainability and access to education, it comes as no surprise that scholars and researchers have started to focus on identifying practical ways to implement the model by making LCPSs more sustainable, more efficient and, generally speaking, more viable.

The aspects that have been taken into account to implement the model of LCPSs in developing countries have been mainly two: affordability and financial sustainability.

The question of affordability has been tackled from two different points of view in literature (Ashley et al., 2013): one has focused on more analysing how much more expensive LCPSs are in comparison with public or government schools; the other has focused on identifying whether affordability is an element that determines or influences parents' choice. As Ashley et al. state (2013), however, both viewpoints are strongly interconnected and are currently supported by little evidence, which makes scientific generalisations challenging to formulate.

There seems to be a widespread consensus among researchers that public or governments schools are never to be considered as "free" schools: examples of extra costs related to attending government schools abound in literature and are pretty standard and documented in many of the developing countries that have been studied (Akaguri, 2013). Besides the so-called direct costs of education (mainly due to school-related materials such as books, pens, uniforms, etc.), there is also an indirect cost to be taken into account, which is due to the fact that a kid attending school deprives his/her family of family labour.

Even when direct and indirect extra-costs are considered, however, it seems possible to generalise that sending a child to an LCPS (especially to officially "recognised" ones) is significantly more expensive than sending him/her to a government school (Dixon, 2013b).

A couple of exciting surveys based on interviews seem to show that affordability is a significant constraint for parents when it comes to deciding whether to send their kids to an LCPS or to a government school. In a 2011-survey Härmä demonstrated that even if parents express an evident preference for LCPSs, only 40% of their children of the sample being taken into account could actually manage to enrol in an LCPS (Härmä, 2011b). Similar results were confirmed by Fennell, who conducted a survey in Pakistan and managed to find that affordability is basically what prevents parents from sending children to an LCPS.

The second aspect that researchers have started to explore more in depth in order to promote the implementation of the model is financial sustainability. Interest in this aspect is not just speculative but has been actively promoted by policy-makers, whose primary interest is to understand whether LCPSs are (1) a useful model in terms of cost-effectiveness and (2) also less expensive than government schools.

The research that has been carried out in this area is currently minimal and does not allow to produce any kind of well-documented generalisations. What seems to emerge from the literature produced so far, however, is a series of universal principles that are guiding further analyses in this field. Such principles can be summarised as follows:

1. LPCSs generally produce the same learning outcomes of government schools, but at a considerably lower price (Tooley et al., 2011);
2. LPCSs "operate at low cost, significantly aided by lower teacher salaries - the largest expenditure in any education system" (McLoughlin, 2013, p. 15);
3. even if not all LPCSs are primarily motivated by profit, it cannot be denied that their long-term survival depends on their "owners'" ability to break even (Oketch et al., 2010): this makes LCPSs - i.e. educational institutions working in deplorable conditions and unsupported by government subsidies - extremely vulnerable to financial failure.

2.6. Supporting LCPSs: some practical examples

In the last few years, researchers have started to analyse a series of initiatives aimed to support LCPSs in practical and effective ways. The initiatives that have proved to be more successful seem to be Public-Private Partnerships. In an article published in 2009 and commissioned by the World Bank, Patrinos et al. summarise the four main kinds of PPTs that have been implemented in developing countries, namely vouchers, subsidies, private management and operations, and private finance initiatives.

LaRocque (2010) points out both the theoretical benefits and the actual difficulties of PPT ("public-private partnerships").

The main benefits of PPT can be summarised as follows:

1. PPT can effectively enhance the quality of education by creating positive competition among schools;
2. the risks implicit in promoting education in developing countries are reduced as they are shared between the public and the private sector.

The significant difficulties related to PPT seem to be:

1. Mcloughlin (2013) suggests that "some forms of PPTs (e.g. contracting) are considered more expensive than direct delivery" (p. 19);
2. there is a common fear that poorly structured PPTs can reduce the control exercised by the government/state and therefore reduce accountability;
3. the definition of clear guidelines that can effectively regulate the partnership between public and private.

According to Dixon (2013b), vouchers are a financial tool aimed to offer students and families more choice and to create some sort of positive competition among institutions to improve their offer (Salman, 2010). Even if researchers recognise the potential value of voucher-schemes in order to promote PPTs, it cannot be denied that such schemes also raise some concerns, which can be summarised as follows:

1. vouchers are usually quite expensive to administer;
2. with the help of vouchers, private schools can attract the most capable students from public schools;
3. vouchers may lead to enhance segregation on the basis of socioeconomic status or academic capacities.

Due to the lack of empirical data, it is still impossible to determine, study and analyse the actual effects of vouchers as instruments to support LCPSs (Morgan et al., 2013).

Another aid that has been analysed is the mechanism of subsidies. In this case, too, it is still tough to rely on a sufficient quantity of empirical data to evaluate the actual effect of subsidies on a large scale. An in-depth analysis of the phenomenon has been carried out in two main cases: the case of the Foundation Assisted Programme and that of the Quetta Urban Fellowship in Pakistan.

In the case of the Foundation Assisted Programme, it seems possible to suggest that subsidies work when they are linked to student learning outcomes (Baum, 2018b). The case of the Quetta Urban Fellowship in Pakistan - a programme aimed to promote girls' enrolments - shows that subsidies can effectively increase the number of girls' enrolments up to 33% (Kim et al., 1999) and reduce gender inequalities in education.

The last group of initiatives to support LCPSs that have been taken into account is that of private management and operations and private finance initiatives. Such initiatives may take several forms, spanning from "adopt-a-school programmes" to various concessions such as tax exemptions or free land for educational enterprises. Even if there is not enough evidence to show the efficacy of any of the above-mentioned programmes, Patrinos et al. (Patrinos et al. 2009) suggest that vouchers, subsidies, private management and operations, and private finance initiatives may have moderate to strong effects on improving education outcomes, reducing inequalities in education, and reducing costs of education in developing countries.

2.7. Self-Sustainable Schools

There seems to be no specific relevant literature on financially self-sufficient schools in developing countries. The lack of relevant literature in the field is obviously a challenge but shows that the topic is still to be explored and thoroughly studied.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The process of data collection initially planned for this research project required several redefinitions and rearrangements due to one main reason: the few primary schools where self-sustainable programmes have been developed, implemented or launched so far are all located in very remote and underprivileged areas of the world, which has made regular communications and basic-data collection very difficult, if not impossible. It has therefore been possible to collect four interviews, which represent an invaluable source of narrative information on the topic of this research and can be analysed with a qualitative approach.

3.2. Methodological Approach

Given the main aim of the research project - i.e. to identify the possible reasons why self-sustainable school programmes in developing countries have proved to be mainly unsuccessful so far - and the limited number of subjects it was possible to involve in the collection-data phase, a qualitative approach was selected as the most appropriate.

A qualitative approach to research work - i.e. the "techniques associated with the gathering, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of *narrative* information" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 7) - appears to be particularly useful in the context of the current research project for a series of reasons:

1. Maxwell (2012) suggests that the qualitative approach has mainly an inductive approach, focuses on "specific situations or people, and its emphasis [is] on words rather than numbers" (p. 22);
2. the main aim of qualitative analysis is to understand the "meaning" of a particular phenomenon people are involved in; personal perspectives collected through interviews - i.e. the primary data-collection tool adopted in this research project - are an integral part of the reality that is being scrutinised or analysed (Maxwell, 1992; Menzel, 1978);

3. qualitative analysis is particularly useful when it is applied to a limited sample of cases or individuals: according to Maxwell (2012), qualitative analysis "has an inherent openness and flexibility that allows you to modify your design and focus during the research to understand discoveries and relationships" (p. 22);
4. given the limited number of data available to understand the numerical purport of the phenomenon analysed, qualitative analysis is the best approach to develop causal explanations: as stated by Miles and Huberman (2002), qualitative analysis "is far *better* than solely quantified approaches at developing explanations of what we call causality - the actual events and processes that led to specific outcomes" (p. 132).

After an initial review of the critical literature that is currently available on the theme of self-sufficient schools in developing countries, the plan is to adopt a qualitative approach by interacting with institutions that in the last few years have tried to develop projects related to self-sufficient primary schools in developing countries. Through the use of a questionnaire, the aim of the research project is to understand what factors have prevented the projects from being entirely successful. The second aim is also to analyse real case-studies that be will be identified mainly through the direct interaction with an institution such as Teach a Man to Fish, a UK-based charity that has promoted the development of financially self-sufficient schools in developing countries.

3.3. Data Collection Methods

The first step of the data collection process was the direct interaction with Teach a Man to Fish, the UK-based charity that has promoted the development of the most successful and widely known self-sustainable school project in the world. With the help of Christine Moser, Consultancy Services Manager at Teach a Man to Fish, it was possible to identify some specific geographical areas, which were chosen mainly on the basis of the potential availability of data for research and analysis. The areas that were identified were mainly two:

1. South America: Paraguay

2. Africa: Zambia and Uganda

During the data-collection phase, it was also possible to interact with one representative of an Irish registered charity called Zamda, which is based in Zambia and supports a series of educational initiatives in the region of Kabwe. This opportunity made it possible to include also some data from Zambia.

A questionnaire was chosen as the main instrument for collecting. The type of questionnaire that was elaborated and administered is basically an “open-ended questionnaire”, i.e. a questionnaire which “permits the respondents to answer in their own words” (McBurney & White, 2009, p. 246). A questionnaire based on open-ended questions was preferred to a “closed-ended question” questionnaire. As for open-ended questions, Bailey (2008) suggests the following:

“[they] are used to elicit the respondent’s unique views, philosophy, or goals. Open-ended questions are especially helpful in preliminary investigations in which the researcher has not yet decided which characteristics of the phenomenon are relevant to his or her study and needs to describe all potentially relevant characteristics in detail” (p. 122).

The method of administration was bifold and was mainly determined by the logistical constraints that characterised the phase of data collection: whenever for technical, logistical, or practical reasons it was not possible to use the open-ended questionnaire to administer a face-to-face interview, the questionnaire was sent via email and data were collected in a written form. The questionnaire that was used can be seen below:

TABLE 1: List of questions used in the questionnaire used during the interview phase

SELF-SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS QUESTIONNAIRE	
1.	Can you briefly describe the plan for a (financially) self-sustainable school you have tried to implement / you have implemented in your school?
2.	Why did you decide to implement it?
3.	How did the school community react to the idea of a self-sustainable school?
4.	How did the local community react to the idea of a self-sustainable school?
5.	Has the plan been successful? Why?
6.	If not, why not?
7.	Can you explain the most visible effects of the project?
8.	How have you measured the success of the plan?
9.	What are the challenges that you had to face?
10.	If you were to start the whole process all over again, what would you do differently?
11.	If you were to advise a colleague on how to implement the plan for a financially self-sustainable school, what suggestions would you give him/her?
12.	What existing model(s) inspired you to shape your own plan?
13.	OTHER (specify)

The questions contained in the questionnaire have been formulated to explore the following aspects:

1. the nature of the phenomenon itself (i.e. the type/nature of the projects elaborated and the reasons behind them);
2. the reaction of the local community (both at the level of the school community and at the level of the village/town where the school is located);

3. the level of success (whether real or perceived) of the project and the instruments used to measure it;
4. the evaluation of the challenges that the implementation of the project implied, with a focus not just on contextual challenges, but also on the personal nature of them;
5. the existing model(s) that inspired the project itself.

Given the nature of the instrument chosen (open-question questionnaire), the method adopted (face-to-face interview), and the particular group of interlocutors that were selected (i.e. local partners of Teach a Man to Fish or people who received support from the charity to run self-sustainable programmes across schools located in their own countries), it was important to keep in mind that the data collected might be influenced or marred by a two main factors that typically influence social interactions, such as:

1. the so-called “interview bias”, i.e. “the bias that appear[s] in research findings because of the social nature of the interview” (Scott, 2012, p. 372). Such biases may include mistakes/errors caused by the interviewer, the reaction of the respondent to the interviewer’s sex, race, social class, (Dohrenwend et al., 1969, p. 122) etc. Shapiro (1970) demonstrated that “even in the case of simple forced-choice questions, subtle cues delivered by the interviewer become part of the stimulus situation and lend credibility to the hypotheses that the responses solicited in the interview are due, in part, to the particular interviewer who collected them” (p. 412).
2. The often defined preposterous “assumption by many social scientists that they can engage in research without influencing what they obtain in the way of data” (Phillips, 1971, p. 49); as suggested by Bailley (2008), “the survey method itself biases the data or can even manufacture data so that the data gathered are not so much a reflection of what actually exists in the population as they are artifacts of the method” (p. 177);

The third possible source of bias that needed to be taken into careful account was my lack of adequate “contextual knowledge” in relation to the local culture of

the countries in which the schools being analysed are located. The lack of understanding of what constitutes the so-called “local culture”, which Clarke (2007) defines as “the range of accepted modes of governance [...] [as well as] the formal and informal structures for policing discourses and practices” (p. 10). The use of Hofstede's 4D model of cultural dimension (Hofstede, 1980), however, was useful to reduce the possible effect of the bias deriving from the lack of direct contextual knowledge.

3.4. Constraints

The major constraint to effective data collection regarded the difficulty to get hold of the respondents and to effectively interact with them. This is due to a series of factors, that are strictly connected to the actual location of the schools that are the object of the current research project:

1. many schools are located in remote areas, which makes it difficult for teachers and school-leaders to have regular access to the phone or to the Internet;
2. Internet connection is often unreliable and causes interactions and unforeseeable delays;
3. natural disasters (e.g. heavy snowfalls; landslides; etc.) may interrupt communications for months, with inevitable consequences on the effectiveness of data collection;
4. time for interviews is not “paid time” in the majority of the cases. This fact may seem of secondary importance, but it may have determined the level of motivation of the participants (i.e. the ones who participated in the interview session were highly motivated subjects, who accepted to devote some of their “free” time to participate in the interview), the nature of the message delivered (the high level of motivation of the participants may have contributed to making the outcomes of the project look more exciting than what they look like in reality).

3.5. Data Analysis Methods

The data collected through the questionnaire published above have been analysed through a series of theories that can be summarised as follows:

1. Anthony Giddens' "structuration theory" (Whittington, 1984, p. 101), which is based on the idea that in order to understand complex socio-cultural phenomena such as education, it is necessary to adopt a multi-layered and combined approach that includes both the micro-level (i.e. the individual) and the macro-level perspectives (i.e. the structural perspective); Giddens' theory is somehow reflected in the reflections of Pierre Bourdieu (2013), whose works underline the interdependence of the individual and the society in the analysis of behaviours that are socially constrained.
2. Urie Bronfenbrenner's "ecological systems theory" (1979), which relies on the idea that individuals live in their own micro-level, which is not isolated, but surrounded by a series of interdependent systems (i.e. meso-system, exo-system, and macro-system).
3. Rudolf Tippelt and Aiga von Hippel's analyses of adult education contexts, in which decisions to participate in educational pathways have been analysed on three different levels: the micro-level (i.e. the level of the individual), the meso-level (i.e. the level of the single institution where education takes place and/or is being offered), and the macro-level (i.e. the institutional level influenced by rules and legislation).

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Two interrelated ethical concerns had to be taken into account prior to the interview/questionnaire phase:

1. most of the projects that have successfully managed to transform schools into financially self-sustainable institutions are based on the idea that schools have to generate income that can be reinvested into the school.

Since schools are usually not "business-oriented", the very idea of generating income through some business may sound controversial. The general bias against education and making money is an issue that needs to be taken into account and explored in all its ethical implications.

2. many of the existing projects for self-sustainable middle and high schools are based on the direct participation of students as active leaders: this means that students are asked to contribute to the development of the business that generates income for the school as voluntary workers. This is another controversial issue as it seems to suggest that students may be exploited as workers.

4 Results

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 contains a description of the empirical data and results that were collected through the interview phase. Since the beginning of the analytical phase, the interrelation of the three levels of analysis suggested by the three main theories highlighted at the end of Chapter 3 has been constantly evident and active. This means that all the data that will be presented in the next sections will reflect the constant play between the micro-level of the single individual (i.e. the school leader being interviewed) in relation with the context he/she belongs to, the meso-level (i.e. the level of the school as an institution offering educational services to the community it belongs to), and the macro-level (i.e. the school as an institution being part of a group of institutions regulated by laws and governmental guidelines).

The interrelation between these three levels of analysis gives a vivid idea of the factors that normally influence individual decisions within both a particular micro-context and a wider national context and of the key-role played by school leaders in developing countries as agents of change or promoters of innovation within the school contexts they coordinate.

4.1.1. General Findings

The four interviews that were conducted allowed the collection of a series of data, which highlighted:

1. the types of initiatives implemented or launched in the schools that adopted plans for financial self-sustainability;
2. the variety of reasons why a plan for financial self-sustainability was launched in the schools involved in the survey;
3. the different ways in which the various members of the school community reacted to the idea;

4. the difficulties that respondents encountered in defining, implementing or running plans for financial self-stability in their school environments.

All the respondents involved in the interview phase have a leadership position in their schools and were directly involved in the development of a plan for school financial self-sustainability. As for their current location, two of them are currently based in Paraguay, one in Uganda, and one in Zambia.

The data related to each of these aspects will be outlined in the following sections.

4.1.2. Types of initiatives

The interviews have made it possible to identify the nature and the kind of initiatives that have been implemented to transform schools into financially self-sufficient institutions. The most common initiatives include:

1. animal farming (including pigs, chickens, cows);
2. vegetable farming (e.g. maize or crop farming);
3. catering (e.g. bakery/restaurant running);
4. food processing;
5. commercial activities (such as poultry business, financial services, forestation services, school stationery shop, tea farm).

From the results that have been gathered through the interview phase, it is possible to formulate some general considerations:

1. The activities that schools use or have used to implement financial self-sustainability are strictly related to the local economy of the geographical area in which schools are located;
2. Some of the projects that have been implemented cannot fall into just one category, but combine two different and interrelated categories (e.g. poultry business, which is a commercial activity deriving from and dependent upon animal farming);
3. None of the activities above mentioned can be run solely by students, especially if they are primary-school students: it is clear that students' participation needs to be supported by the intervention of their teachers, who

are responsible for planning, supervising, and implementing the project during its whole duration.

4.1.3. Reasons for launching the project

One of the aspects that the interview phase has made it possible to clarify regards the motivations that led schools to embrace the journey towards financial self-sustainability. The chart below (Table 1) summarises the answers provided by the schools involved:

TABLE 1: Reasons for launching or implementing the programme

Goal	Mentioned by (number of schools)
Need to provide the school with a source of income that is different from the meagre/null funding coming from governments	4
Provide access to quality education to a more significant number of students	4
Reduce the cost of school attendance for families	3
Development of life-skills	3
Reduce the school dependence on foreign donations	1

It seems clear that one of the main reasons why schools chose to launch a financially self-sustainable implementation plan was to find a source for funding that could make them partially or totally independent from their current source of funding (e.g. government/families/mix of government and families). The possibility to obtain financial self-sustainability would be for a school a practical solution to the

uneven distribution of public funds that characterize the education sector in developing countries (Colclough, 1997).

The identification of an alternative source of funding is also strictly related to the perceived need to offer more students the opportunity to attend free quality education: this is clearly in line with the principle of "quality education", which is one of the 17 UN Sustainable Goals that were described in chapter 1 (SDG 4.1). Moreover, it seems clear that one of the reasons why schools chose to launch a financially self-sustainable implementation plan was also to reduce the burden of school costs that often falls solely upon families.

Two other aspects are worth mentioning in the analysis of the responses that have been collected: 66% of the schools involved mentioned the need to help students develop entrepreneurial skills, which will eventually allow them to overcome the condition of poverty that characterize them. This view is clearly aligned with the principles of Education for Sustainable Development, outlined in Chapter 1.

It is also particularly interesting to notice that the three schools that explicitly mentioned the link between financial self-sustainable plans for schools and students' empowerment are all part of the group of schools that participated in the School Enterprise Challenge promoted by the UK-based charity Teach a Man to Fish.

4.1.4. The reaction of the school community

Another aspect that the interviews have highlighted is how the school community reacted to the idea of transforming schools into self-sustainable institutions.

In order to analyze the data collected in a more detailed way, it is necessary to distinguish between the different subjects composing a "school community". As Redding (1997) suggests, "a school community is a group of people including teachers, school staff, students, and families of students" (p. 133).

As mentioned before, all the respondents are school leaders or are involved in school management and agree on the fact that students and school staff embraced the opportunity of dealing with a financially self-sustainable school with great enthusiasm.

Respondents all acknowledged that both teachers and parents showed mixed reactions towards the project. Even if there seemed to be a consensus among both teachers and parents on the positive value of the project itself, teachers and parents also expressed some concerns, which can be summarised as follows (Table 2):

TABLE 2: Teachers' and Parents' Major Concerns

TEACHERS' CONCERNS	PARENTS' CONCERNS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The project is “yet another thing” that falls upon the shoulders of teachers; 2. The delivery of the project requires extra work, for which teachers are not going to be paid; 3. The official contract of a teacher does not contemplate the development and running of a project for financial self-sustainability. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The running of the project will reduce students' regular “learning time”, with negative consequences on the quality and the amount of their learning; 2. Students are not officially “allowed to” work: the running of a plan for a financially self-sustainable school implies the direct participation of students as “workers”.

Teachers' initial reluctance to embrace the project has to do with their fear that the project would imply some extra, unpaid work for them. The unmodifiable nature of teaching contracts can be a severe problem in many developing countries and may represent an obstacle to implementing change.

Among parents, those who expressed some concerns about the project were worried about the danger for their child to lose proper "learning time", which would have resulted into lower or worse exams at the end of the school year.

One respondent, in particular, pointed out that the reaction of parents changed radically towards the end of the project: when students started to raise money for the project and parents realized that the amount of money was becoming considerably high, some parents started to question the school's right to decide what to do with the money. This aspect created some frictions between some of the members of the "school community".

4.1.5. Difficulties and challenges

The data concerning the difficulties and the challenges that respondents had to face while developing, launching, implementing, or completing the plan for financial self-stability in their school contexts are varied and are summarised in the following chart (Table 3), which classifies the difficulties respondents encountered before. In contrast, and after the project was implemented:

TABLE 3: Challenges / Difficulties Encountered Before, During, and After the Project

		CHALLENGE/DIFFICULTY	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
BEFORE THE PROJECT	A	Fear caused by the novelty of the plan (among parents and teachers)	4
	B	Parents were concerned about the students' being distracted/focused on something perceived as "non-academic."	2

DURING THE PROJECT	C	Resistance to change caused by lack of financial/business management skills among teachers	2
	D	Lack of trustworthy people to implement the programme	1
	E	Lack of knowledge of local culture	1
AFTER THE PROJECT	F	Lack of trust towards the school's / school staff's ability to manage the collected funds	1

All respondents agreed upon the fact that the main challenge they faced in launching the project was the fear parents and teachers had about the novelty of the project itself. Since this was a new and unknown project, this difficulty was predictable and required the instrument of parent/teacher education to be resolved.

Point C is strictly related to point A: the novelty of the plan, which implied the lack of prior experience with a similar activity, seems to be the main reason why teachers lacked specific skills in the field of financial and business management.

It has been widely demonstrated that "resistance to change" is a typical phenomenon in school environments, and becomes particularly visible in situations in which change is being promoted or pushed forward. In his analysis mainly focused on developing countries, for instance, Guthrie (2011) states that the reasons why teachers show open resistance to methodological change usually include "lack of clear goals in the system affecting teachers' thinking, lack of understanding and acceptance by teachers of reforms, teachers as products of a system not being prone to innovate, isolation of teachers in their classroom slowing down diffusion of innovations, and a wide range of ability of teachers making diffusion rates uneven" (p. 61). Point C is related to the fear that arises when teachers do not understand or accept reforms that put them out of their comfort area.

Point D and E were mentioned by only one of the respondents, but the emphasis with which they were underlined requires some further consideration. One contextual element that needs to be taken into account concerning points D and E is the fact that the respondent did not belong to the culture being analyzed, but was perceived as a "guest" within a foreign culture. The element of "strangeness" of the respondent may somehow explain the emphasis that was put on the lack of trustworthiness. Having said this, it is also important to underline that in order for a financial self-sustainable plan for schools to run correctly, the element of trust among its participants is fundamental.

The importance of trust is also underlined by one of the respondents in point F, which makes it clear that also the conclusion of a project of financial self-sustainability is subject to substantial challenges and difficulties.

4.1.6. Overall Impression: success or failure?

Respondents were explicitly asked to assess the success of the plan for financial self-sustainability they were involved in and to express the criteria they used to assess it. The criteria used to assess the success of the project can be summarised in Table 4:

TABLE 4: Success Criteria Used to Assess the Project

SUCCESS CRITERIA	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WHO USED IT
Analysis of financial records	4
Financial stability of the school	4
Number of students who benefit from the plan	3
Students' motivation	3

All respondents were very explicit about the visible effects of their projects, which are summarised in Table 5 :

TABLE 5: Visible Effects of the Project

EFFECT	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WHO NOTICED IT
Increase in the number of students attending the school	4
Keeping school fees low/unchanged	4
Development of life-skills for students	3
Improvement of the quality of the meals consumed at school	3
Increase in the number of low-income students attending the school	3
Increase in the levels of teachers' satisfaction	2
Students' satisfaction	2

When confronted with the direct question “has your school managed to reach full financial sustainability?”, all respondents seemed to agree that full financial sustainability was not reached. From the mere point of view of financial self-sustainability, the projects were all basically unsuccessful.

4.2. Synthesis of results / Summary

The results collected through the interview phase have made it possible to identify several aspects related to the implementation of plans for financial self-sustainability in developing countries.

The first, very general kind of observation that it is possible to formulate is that the types of initiatives that were promoted through plans for financial self-sustainability in schools located in developing countries are very similar and are always aimed at meeting the basic needs of the community: this reveals that the implementation of a FSSs plan is always motivated by the desire to produce an impact on the local community the school is part of.

Another aspect that it was possible to recognise regards the objectives that a plan for a financial self-sustainable school aims to reach, which generally tend to reflect the three dimensions of Education for Sustainable Development identified by Wyness and Sterling (Wyness & Sterling, 2015, p. 214).

A third aspect that emerges from the analysed of the data collected through the interviews regards the general challenges that school leaders had to face in the implementation of the programme. In particular, it is possible to identify two major challenges principals or school leaders had to deal with: one is undoubtedly what is commonly called "resistance to change", which was mainly demonstrated by teachers or parents and can be related to individual or collective values, professional bodies, and individual as well as collective responses to change (Piderit, 2000; Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008). The second main challenge is the "lack of trust", which may take several forms (e.g. fear for the unknown among parents and teachers; mistrust towards local stakeholders) and may undermine the stability of the programme and eventually prevent it from being successful.

The data collected through the interviews allow also to identify some general agreements among all the participants. All respondents agreed on the general idea that in terms of full financial self-sustainability the projects they tried to implement were generally unsuccessful: full financial self-sustainability is defined by respondents variously as a "mirage", "an impossible dream", or a "utopic goal". In other words, it seems to be a very difficult goal to reach. Moreover, none of the reasons why projects for financially self-sustainable schools turned to be unsuccessful in the schools being involved in the analysis seems to be specific to the primary school sector: reasons seem to be related to the very nature of the project itself, the challenges posited by the environment, cultural resistance, or a combination of these factors.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that all respondents agreed on the intrinsic success of the programmes in terms of students' and teachers' satisfaction, development of entrepreneurial skills, and students' empowerment. This seems to suggest that the criteria to assess the actual success of a FSSs programme are not mainly financial, but are varied, complex, and still to be developed.

5. DISCUSSION

The amount of data collected during the interview phase makes it possible to identify several elements that can be used to formulate a series of answers to the research questions that inspired and motivated the current analysis. In particular, the following paragraphs will focus on the assessment of the actual feasibility of FSSs projects, on the criteria normally used to assess their success, and on some practical strategies that could be adopted to promote change within schools in order to enhance the potential efficacy of FSSs plans.

5.1. Full Financial Self-Sustainability: a Chimera?

First of all, it seems likely that one of the main reasons for the lack of success of FSS plans is adamantly simple: the very idea of reaching financial self-sustainability in educational institutions located in developing countries sounds - at least for the time being and for the cases that have been taken into account for this study - more like a utopian dream than a realistic goal to reach. One of the respondents involved in the interview phase made this point very clear while talking about the case of the school in Zambia where they tried to launch the FSSs project:

“The cost of running our project (school for 280 pupils; 'shelter' i.e. accommodation for 24 of these) - comes to about €50,000 per annum. In one sense that's a lot of money” (Private Interview).

Considering the goal of full financial self-sustainability as possible in a country like Zambia, where more than 50% of the population lived below the poverty line in 2015 and “country-wide poverty rate using the national poverty line of ZMW 214 per adult equivalent per month remained largely unchanged over 2010-15” (World Bank Group, 2009), would be simplistic or rather unrealistic.

The analysis of the challenges schools had to face in order to promote FSSs plans may offer some other elements for further reflection. One of the factors that may definitely have contributed to the failure of FSSs plans in the field of primary education is the actual age of the students involved: differently from middle or

high-school students, primary school children cannot be left fully independent in developing and running a model of self-sustainable business. The need for some sort of constant guidance provided by parents and especially teachers clashes with many contextual elements, such as parents' disengagement with the project or inability to follow it, or - more significantly - with teachers' personal or contractual resistance to embrace it. Contractual issues may vary from one country to another, but they seem to be an obstacle all interviewed respondents had to face while launching or implementing their FSS plan.

Another important aspect to be taken into account is the combination of two factors that may strongly deter the implementation of a FSSs plan: resistance to change and lack of trust.

In business and management studies resistance is believed to have several reasons, including, among others, "a misunderstanding of the goal of the change, having a low tolerance for change (particularly through fear), and perceiving that something of value will be lost" (Oxford Dictionary of Business, 2016).

These three main reasons were clearly confirmed by the respondents, who referred to them variously when they talked about parents' and teachers' lack of understanding of the final goal, intrinsic or cultural resistance to change, and fear for the loss of meaningful learning opportunities. Dolph (2017) suggests resistance to change "is often inevitable because people in all organisations, including school systems, have tendencies to defend the status quo if they believe their security or status is under attack" (p. 6).

Strictly connected to resistance to change is the lack of trust, which was underlined strongly in particular by one of the respondents and is often referred to as one of the key-factors that hinder any change within organisations (Hutchin, 2001). In an article exploring the neuroscientific implications of trust in companies, Zak (2017) points out that "employees in high-trust organisations are more productive, have more energy at work, collaborate better with their colleagues, and stay with their employers longer than people working at low-trust companies" (p. 2). This seems to be exactly what lacked in the context mentioned by one of the respondents, who complained about the fact that of none of the projects to promote FSS being considered were successful because of a context dominated by a general lack of trust.

5.2. Other Ways to Measure Success

One first element of reflection that emerges from the analysis of the responses collected during the interview phase regards the very concept of “success” and the criteria used to assess it. It is evident that the common criterion used by all respondents to assess the success of the FSSs plan they tried to implement within their context was the analysis of the financial records and the actual financial self-sufficiency reached by the school. Since this seemed to be the case - as shown in Table 4 (Chapter 4) - it comes as no surprise that the result of the assessment on the successful nature of an FSSs plan was likely to be negative. In other words, if full financial self-sufficiency is the goal to be reached for an FSSs plan to be considered entirely successful, then it is undeniable that the majority of the FFSs plans that were taken into account for this research project were doomed to be somehow unsuccessful.

Having said this, it would be undeniable that the promotion of an FSSs plan had some visibly positive consequences on students, teachers, and the whole school community: such consequences include - but are surely not limited to - providing more opportunities for quality education for all, reducing costs related to school attendance, identifying alternative sources of income that may help schools gain financial independence, and helping students develop the life-skills that will help them be active citizens of the future world. The development of 21st-century skills, in particular, seems to be one of the most invaluable objectives of FSSs projects, which concretely help students develop essential skills - e.g. innovation, critical thinking, resource leveraging, managing change, etc. (Correia, Niehm & Yusop, 2010) - that will help eventually them contribute to alleviating poverty (Burt, 2013).

The important point to be considered here is how we can possibly define “success”, especially in school contexts, bearing in mind that success can mean many different things in many different contexts (Leithwood & Day, 2007). Successfully achieving a financially self-sustainable status may definitely be an important criterion of success for schools embracing an FSSs plan, but it is certainly not the

only one; moreover, considering that most FSSs plans are promoted in developing countries, it probably does not have to be considered the main criterion. As many of the respondents participating in the actions promoted by Teach a Man to Fish made it clear, any FSSs plan is not to be considered a final goal, but a powerful tool to promote a more sustainable form of education, one which by aiming at financial self-sufficiency, promotes an innovative form of education characterised by the following features:

- “No energy for learning and talent is wasted: education should work for every single student in the system, irrespective of the students’ background;
- Energy for learning is renewed: the energy that students and teachers invest in education is maximally turned into successful learning and development, which produces new energy for learning;
- Crucial needs are addressed: students develop the competencies that are crucial for their future lives and for the future of our planet (Van den Branden, 2015, p. 5483).

It would, therefore, be advisable to develop new instruments to assess and measure the level of success reached by FFSs in developing countries not only on the basis of “economic factors” such as full financial self-sufficiency, but also on the basis of other, more sustainable factors such as energy for learning, talent development, competences development, preparation for the unknown.

5.3. How to Promote Structural Change at School: Some Practical Solutions and Ideas

The development of a culture in which resistance to change is low and the levels of trust are high is an essential ingredient in the mix of factors that can lead a project of FSSs to success. Researchers suggest that a key role in change management within schools is played by leadership roles. As suggested by Dolph

(2017), “leadership and management are two areas that when successfully accomplished, have the potential to add great competitive advantage to organisations” (p. 10).

There are currently two main models that may help school leaders to promote change in their organisations: one, provided by Fullan (1993), is more procedural, while the other, developed, among others, by authors such as Lucas (1974) and Baker (1989) is more holistic. Both approaches can provide some useful suggestions on how to implement FSSs plans, not only in developing countries.

Fullan (1993) provides six different strategies for promoting change in school environments. The most relevant strategies for the case study that has been selected for this research work are the following ones:

1. It is important to acknowledge that change cannot be promoted solely by teachers but requires the participation of all stakeholders (including students as well as parents). This seems to be an important preliminary step to be taken in order to reduce the level of possible resistance coming from parents which several of the respondents pointed out.
2. Another important strategy suggested by Fullan regards the very concept of “change”, which is to be considered as a long journey characterised by obstacles, continuous reformulations, and unpredictable u-turns. This requires leaders to embrace the unknown and to focus on the process, rather than on the final goal.
3. The third strategy for promoting change in an educational environment suggested by Fullan has to do with the leader’s mindset: instead of focusing on the end-point, it is essential for the leader to focus on the problems that may come up and address them with a proactive attitude. The third strategy, in particular, seems to suggest that some sort of leadership training before the actual change is promoted is an essential component of the strategy to be implemented.
4. The fourth strategy can be summarised with the word “flexibility”: instead of having a clearly defined plan of implementation, it is important for the change-leader to have an overall vision of the change to be implemented. Too rigid structures, especially in difficult and unpredictable environments such as the ones represented by developing countries, can be obstacles for the implementation of an FSSs plan.

5. The last relevant strategy suggested by Fullan regards stakeholders: in order to implement structural change in a complex context such as a school, all stakeholders need to be involved as change agents. In other words, all stakeholders need to be given an active role in the process of change. One of the respondents complained about the push back promoted by parents after the school started to make money: this is clearly an indication of the fact that parents may be perceived as “external agents” in the process of implementation of FSSs plan. Fullan, instead, suggests that also parents are to be treated as active agents of change and their voice needs to be heard.

Other change-management scholars provide further and more general suggestions on how to implement structural changes in schools. Baker (1989), for instance, insists on the importance of sharing accurate information in a timely manner. Similarly, Lucas (1974) insists on the importance of involving stakeholders not only as passive recipients of instructions or information but as active agents of change, whose voice, knowledge and suggestions can become a resource to make plans better and more balanced. Promoting participation can also help to reduce the level of stress and anxiety that is naturally connected with implementing change.

Much of the resistance respondents experienced in their attempts to promote FSSs plans certainly could have been avoided or at least kept at bay by promoting better and more effective strategies to empower leaders and including all stakeholders in the process of change.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis that has been carried out in this research project focused on one of the most interesting, yet least investigated actions that in the last few years have been launched to promote Sustainable Education in developing countries: the promotion of Financially Self-Sustainable School plans, whose main aim is to support schools in developing countries to become financially self-sustainable institutions.

Such plans have been introduced in many areas of the developing world, and have proven to be successful especially in middle and high schools, some of which have managed to reach the goal of full financial self-sustainability.

In the primary school sector, however, such plans have been more difficult to implement and have rarely reached the aim for which they were originally introduced, i.e. full financial self- sustainability.

The identification of the reasons for the apparent lack of success of FSSs plans in primary schools in developing countries has been one of the main goals of this research project. With the help of a questionnaire and through the direct interaction with Heads of Primary Schools in which an FSSs plan was actually launched and implemented, it has been possible to collect a series of data that have highlighted not only some common elements related to the different types of initiatives implemented or launched in the schools that adopted plans for financial self-sustainability, but also the variety of reasons why school leaders in particular have decided to embrace the journey towards financial-self sustainability. The direct interaction with the Heads of Schools involved in the interview phase, who played a fundamental role in launching, promoting and implementing the programme, allowed to identify the different ways in which the various members of the school community reacted to the idea, but also to make a list of the difficulties that respondents encountered in defining, implementing or running plans for financial self-stability in their school environments.

The analysis that has been carried out has permitted to show the obstacles that prevent an FSSs plan from being successful in primary schools in several developing countries of the world, thus corroborating the idea that the actual feasibility

of similar plans in the primary school sector is still hard to demonstrate.

It has also permitted to suggest that reaching full financial self-sustainability is not the only condition to assess the success of an FSSs plan: the implementation of an FSSs plan implies the development of 21st-century skills in new, more sustainable, and often unimaginable ways.

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