

Bridge vs. Reality

Bridge vs. Reality: a study of Bridge International Academies' for-profit schooling in Kenya, uncovers large discrepancies between the claims made by the company and the actual services it provides.

The claims can be plausibly viewed as part of a marketing strategy to entice governments, international development agencies, donors and, ultimately, unsuspecting parents to support its business.

Bridge International Academies (BIA) is found to offer poor quality education at an unaffordable cost denying learners their right to quality free education.

This summary derives from *Bridge vs Reality: a study of Bridge International Academies for-profit schooling in Kenya*. The report is based on interviews with key stakeholders, questionnaires and documentary analysis made during 2016. The report can be found [here](#).

Quality education?

	BIA's claims	Reality
Quality teaching?	<i>Essentially we're giving our pupils access to the types of teachers they would never be able to afford.</i>	71.5% of teaching staff were unqualified. BIA gives teachers a 2-5 week training course which focuses on how to use a tablet ('nook') and how to market BIA schools rather than pedagogy.
	<i>Supporting teachers is critical to delivering on a child's right to education.</i>	Teaching staff work over 59 hours per week and are given no official breaks. Salaries range between USD88.8-118.5 per month and 90% of the teachers expressed fears over their job security. 85% stated that they would prefer to work in a public school
	<i>At Bridge, I've never met a teacher that doesn't love what centrally deployed, fully prepared lessons do for them. Teachers feel incredibly supported, prepared, and energized every day.</i>	Teaching staff complained that scripted classes and remote management meant they had no voice at school. 65% noted they had low morale at BIA.

BIA's claims

Reality

Quality tools?	<i>Bridge brings new, engaging lessons aligned to the Kenyan 8-4-4 national syllabus to our classrooms on a daily basis. These lessons, designed by a team of Master Teachers and delivered wirelessly to classroom teachers, utilise strategies and activities that are proven to increase pupil understanding.</i>	Teaching staff complained that curriculum material was not relevant for the KCPE exam The curriculum used by BIA is not recognised by the Kenyan educational authorities. "It's not examinable in the KCPE. This brings a lot of confusion".
	<i>Our materials, including textbooks, workbooks, homework books, and practical learning aides, encourage pupils to internalise and apply concepts to real life situations.</i>	Teaching staff can be penalised for failing 100% adherence to the nooks. "A teacher only once failed to use the tablet and used a book (...) she was dismissed". "We are not allowed to use KIE books. If we are found using KIE materials, our salary is deducted for that day".
Quality learning environment?	<i>Our scale allows us to invest in critical educational infrastructure and in turn provide quality schooling at a cost affordable to parents.</i>	Keeping costs low rather than ensuring quality learning infrastructure seem more important. Corrugated iron roofing, wooden posts and wire mesh covered open windows make the classrooms "very cold for children".

Equity and Accessibility?

BIA's claims

Reality

<p><i>Fees are about USD5 a month.</i></p>	<p>Total BIA cost can be up to USD20 a month.</p>
<p><i>We believe every child – rich or poor – should have the best education. We believe that, no matter the condition of parents; whatever situation they go through should not determine the fate of their children.</i></p>	<p>Learners whose parents have not paid their fees on time are excluded from class or sent home. Deductions are made from teachers' pay if learners owing payments are found in their classes.</p>
<p><i>We want to ensure that every child has equal access to the best education.</i></p>	<p>BIA has an entrance test. Teachers suggested that learners who do not attain 70% in each subject examined are asked to enrol in a lower grade or advised to go to another school. Some suggested that disabled children could not be provided for at BIA.</p>

‘Affordability’?

BIA’s claims

Reality

<p><i>In our communities, 85% of the families in the poorest communities can afford to send all their boys and all of their girls of the proper age to our school.</i></p>	<p>60% of families in the communities where BIA operates cannot afford to send two children to the school without spending at least 20% of their income in school fees.</p>
<p><i>BIA fees allow ‘a family living on USD1.25 per day to send 3 children to school while spending only 10% of the families’ income’.</i></p>	<p>Sending three children to BIA could require between 27% and 34% of a household’s income.</p>
<p><i>BIA is a ‘for-profit attempt to alleviate developing-world poverty through education’.</i></p>	<p>58% of the parents indicated that they struggled to pay the fees. 64% admitted to having borrowed money to pay for school costs, whilst others claimed that they had to sacrifice other basics such as electricity or healthcare in order to pay school costs.</p>