

Exploring aspects of private-public partnership (PPP) schooling in Pakistan **A case of vouchers and education foundations** Ravish Amjad

Introduction

In recent years, Pakistan's government has utilized multiple methods to undertake education sector reforms in pursuit of achieving quality education for all. These reforms not only include direct intervention by the government but also making space for alternative service providers in the education sector. The increased role of the private sector in education provision is just one aspect of the government's readiness to open its doors to privatization. The emergence of public-private partnership (PPP) schools has also helped in increasing access to quality education, especially in rural areas.

Pakistan has a number of schools designated as Public-Private Partnership (PPP) schools. These are similar to private schools in some aspects and to public schools in others. Control and management lies with the private sector, i.e. educational entrepreneurs, NGOs or philanthropists interested in improving the quality of education. Where these PPP schools differ from other private schools is that their students do not pay fees directly. Instead, they are provided with vouchers or the fees are paid directly to the schools on behalf of the students, most commonly by an educational foundation provided with recurrent funding through government.

It is widely believed that students from PPP schools academically outperform their counterparts in government schools,

performing as well as private school students. With the help of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan 2012 data, this policy brief provides insight on the impact of PPP schools on student achievement. The ASER assessment results across different school types are compared to answer the question of whether the alternative service deliverers are the best possible solution for education in Pakistan or if they are supposed to just play a supportive role.

The international context

The governments in most developing countries remain the largest education provider till date. However, in recent years, these governments have utilized multiple methods to increase participation by the private sector. The need for this step arose because of an unmet demand for education and shrinking government budgets.



Today, most developing countries are unable to achieve full participation in primary schooling. In such countries, governments are confronted with a continued unmet demand for education along with diminishing government budgets. In this context, the concept of increasing public-private-partnerships in education has gained momentum in the past decade. The largest proponents of PPP in education have been the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, which continue to support a range of PPP projects worldwide.

Governments today are seen as unable to single handedly cater to the ever increasing demand for quality education. Thus, the goal of 'Quality Education for All' can only be achieved when the private and public sectors work together and not as opponents.

According to the World Bank, government steps to increase school choice through voucher programs can be a cost effective method of improving educational outcomes.

Prevalence of PPP schools

Evidence from various developing countries suggests that student performance may be positively impacted by a certain form of educational PPPs in which schools are funded by the state and actually run by the private sector. In this case, because of regular monitoring of all procedures, the efficacy of school processes - administration, teacher training and student outcomes - has a higher possibility of improvement. The voucher system has been empirically proven to have been associated with higher student performance in countries such as Chile (Elacqua et al., 2007) and Colombia (Bettinger et al, 2009). Through its School Choice program (CCS), India is working towards similar voucher programs for primary schooling.

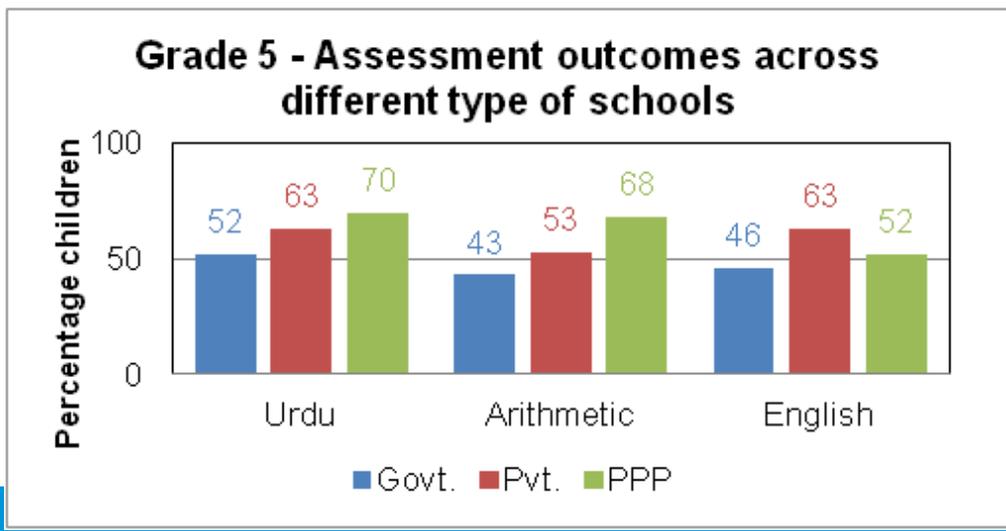
Pakistan is also working towards showing PPP in education to be an effective

method of improving the state of the country's education system. The best known schemes in Pakistan include those run in the provinces of Balochistan, Punjab and Sindh. It is believed that these projects have not only helped to improve students' educational achievement levels but have in some cases also increased enrollment levels, particularly of girls. In addition, the projects are believed to have increased school attendance levels of both teachers and students. The project evaluation of the Community Support Process (CSP) under the Balochistan Education Foundation (BEF) showed an average increase of twenty-two percentage points in girls' enrollment and of nine percentage points in boys' enrollment (LaRocque, 2008).

Approximately 0.6 and 0.3 million students are being benefitted by the Punjab Education Foundation and Sindh Education Foundation schools respectively. The Balochistan Education Foundation helped increase enrollment of 47,656 children in its community and private schools (Balochistan Education Foundation Annual Report, 2009).

Impact of school type on student achievements

The ASER household survey contains a section in which children's learning levels are assessed in two literacy areas—Urdu and English—and one numeracy area, that of arithmetic. (Sindhi and Pashto are used as the language of instruction in the provinces of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa respectively; testing there was of learning levels in those languages instead of Urdu).



The ASER assessment is conducted in households, while information on one government school and one private school (if available) in each surveyed village is also collected. ASER identifies all PPP schools as a subset of private schools.

In order to gather the information required for this article, we needed to connect the household and school information.. The information about whether or not a school was a PPP school was included in the school data while students' individual assessment results were recorded in the household data. We were able to link the two samples by focusing on only those children from the household sample who were attending the surveyed schools. Thus, only the children who were reported as also enrolled in the ASER-surveyed schools were included in this sub-study. This process allowed us to recognize a total of 57,748 children of whom 11,159 children were attending private schools, 595 children were attending PPP schools and 45,994 children were attending government schools.

The data clearly shows that more children from PPP schools than from government schools were able to complete the Grade 2 tasks in all three areas.. The PPP school students did at least as well--if not better--than the private school students in all three areas. The summary of results is as follows:

- Significantly better performance of students in PPP schools as compared to public schools in all three subjects.
- Better performance of students in PPP schools in the case of language (Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto) and arithmetic as compared to private school students. However, the difference is statistically significant only in the case of language and not of arithmetic.
- Students from fee charging schools (private schools) continue to perform better in the case of English as compared to students from PPP schools. However, the difference is statistically insignificant.

Arguments in favor of PPP schools

- The entry of PPP schools in the education sector has the potential to drive up the quality level of government or private schools. According to the general perception and the results given in this article, it is evident that the students in PPP schools are performing better than those in public schools and in some cases better than the private school students as well. This may increase the level of competition in the sector and thus create pressure on other education providers to improve quality.
- Establishment of schools in remote areas and voucher schemes can help in the provision of education to low income families, who are otherwise unable to afford private schooling or do not have access to good quality public schooling.
- PPP schools may be more cost-effective as compared to the traditional public sector schools. The per-beneficiary cost of the voucher scheme is less than the unit cost of public schools (LaRocque, 2008).
- Teacher employment contracts in PPP schools are more flexible than public sector contracts (Patrinos et al., 2009). Most of the foundation assisted schools in Pakistan regularly monitor teacher performance and student outcomes. This increases teacher accountability in PPP schools as opposed to their public school counterparts, who have negligible liability in the case of shirking.

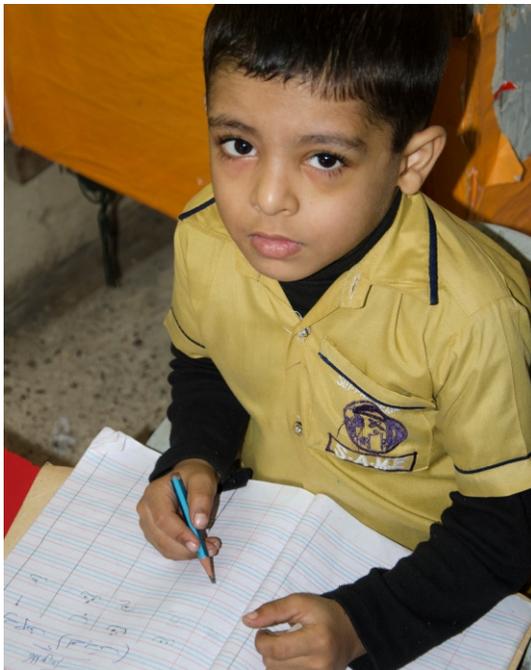
Arguments against PPP schools

- All major PPP projects in Pakistan are externally supported by international organizations such as the World Bank. Once external support is withdrawn, there is as yet no self-sustaining mechanism devised by the government which will be able to support the established schools or other schemes under the provincial education foundations.
- There are studies which suggest that the impact of the PPP schemes on student achievement is limited if not non-existent. Real performance may not be linked to larger student populations because the results from

studies appraising student achievement in PPP schools are not done under random design (LaRocque, 2008). Factors other than the type of school and not the type of school in isolation may be causing the student assessment results analyzed in this study.

Policy Recommendation

- The government needs to formulate a self-sustaining financial design to support current projects. Once the external support is withdrawn, this design will have to be implemented.
- Third party monitoring and evaluation needs to be done in order to better understand the efficacy of the administrative systems employed in the PPP schools.
- In order to improve procedures of government partnerships, all provincial education strategies need to provide a clear definition of private partners. More evidence based research needs to be done to understand the impact of PPP schools on student achievement.



Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)

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