



IMPROVING ACCESS AND QUALITY: THE WAY FORWARD

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4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

As 2015 marked the end of the MDG era, the focus in the sustainable development goals has shifted from increasing enrollment to providing inclusive quality education. Although enrolment in primary education in developing countries has reached 91 percent, the quality of education, as measured by different learning assessments, is low and represents a major challenge. Over the years, private schools have undoubtedly helped increase enrolment rates and have consistently outperformed government schools especially in developing countries like Pakistan, however, their growth and accessibility is limited due to financial constraints. With multiple issues being highlighted including poor performance outcomes and the existence of ghost schools, the public sector has acquired a bad reputation in the education sector. Despite these concerns, the public sector remains an important player in providing education services. Before increasing budgets to open new schools, policy makers need to come up with innovative solutions to maximize utility from our existing resources. One proposed solution is to introduce a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) to privatize management of government schools, thereby increasing involvement of the private sector in public education.

International Context

According to the UNESCO's 2014 Education for All Global Monitoring Report,

“globally, 250 million children are not learning the basics in reading and mathematics. Around half of these children have spent at least four years in school, suggesting that they are receiving an extremely poor quality of education.”

While the focus is on improving government schools, governments in developing countries are mostly unable to single handedly cater to the increasing demand for quality education. The failing case of India's public schools is a recent example. The 2009 Right to Education Act in India required the establishment of free public schools in every neighborhood and conditioned the licensing of private schools on minimum standards. After six years, school enrollment has hardly improved, and actual learning has sharply deteriorated.

There are many cases however where countries have brought about great improvements in the education system through Public Private Partnerships. Charter

schools in the United States, Concession Schools in Colombia, Academies in the United Kingdom and the Independent School Program in Qatar are a few examples of such cases. Examining the evidence provided by two of these cases helps us build our case for similar PPPs in Pakistan.

The public school concession program called the Colegios en Concesión in Bogotá, Colombia was launched in 1999. The concession schools form a partnership between the public and the private education sectors such that the private agents provide education to over 25,000 students in concession schools funded by the public sector and located in low-income areas. Initial assessment results indicated a number of management improvements including a substantial reduction in the share of the budget allocated to human resources. Osorio tested the impact of these schools and found strong evidence of lower drop-out rates within concession schools, as well as an indirect positive impact on drop-out rates in nearby regular public schools. Moreover, evidence shows improvement in test scores in concession in comparison to regular public schools.

Charter schools are a similar example of private sector involvement in public funded schools to improve efficiency and performance. Charter Schools are operating in a lot of countries including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Qatar, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In the United States these schools are spread across the country, with 42 percent of U.S. charters located in Arizona, California, and Florida. Finn and Vanourek review how these charter schools were performing in 2005. Amongst other benefits, charter schools take advantage of improved leadership as entrepreneurs introduce fresh ideas and competitive strategies into the sector, dual accountability i.e. answering to both parents and the government increases pressure to perform better, and better performance results through improved governance, new techniques, and organizational efficiency. It was also observed that charter schools are more inclusive and enroll proportionately more African American students and children from low income backgrounds in comparison to regular public schools

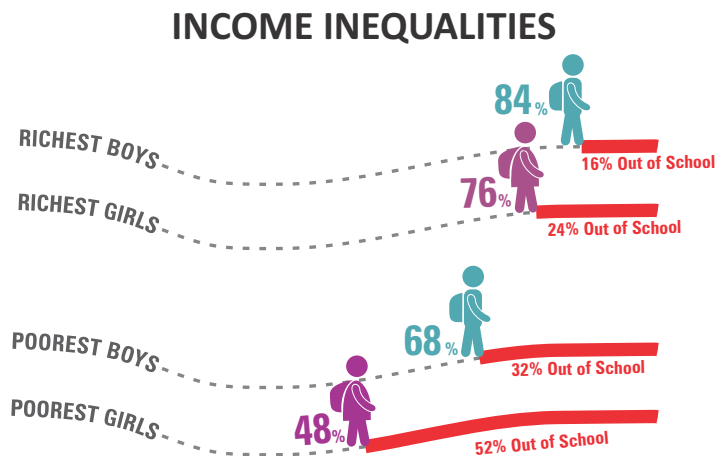
The case for improving Government schools in Pakistan

Our mission as defined by the new Sustainable development goals is that along with providing inclusive education, we ensure that we deliver quality education.

This highlights that while we need to focus on issues of access and affordability to take care that no child is left behind, improving the quality of the education being offered is just as imperative.

Who is being left behind?

Sustainable development is said to begin with education, however, its impact is limited if it isn't inclusive. In Pakistan, people are often deprived of their basic rights based on factors that are not in their control. In order to bring the society out of the poverty trap, our education system needs to include those who are most disadvantaged. This includes the females that are chronically left behind, the disabled children, and the children who are born in rural areas or in poor households. The ASER data shows that over half of the poorest girls are out of school and that the poor rural girl is being left behind.

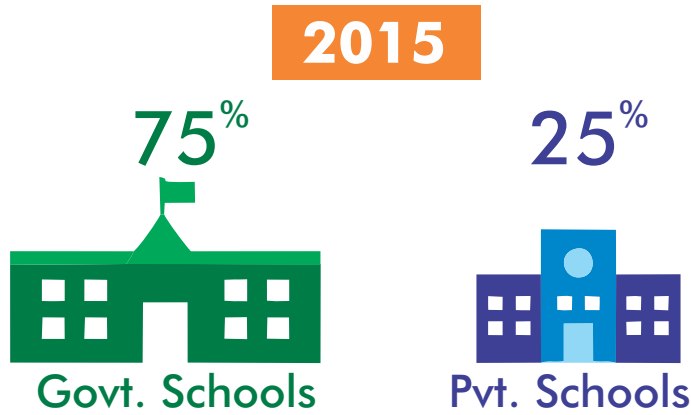


Private schools are a growing phenomenon in Pakistan, but questions of accessibility and affordability arise. Pauline Rose draws attention to findings from ASER that amongst those surveyed, only around 10% of schoolchildren from the poorest households in rural areas are in private schools, compared with 40% of those from the richest households.

Public Schools on the other hand show greater promise when dealing with disadvantaged children. The poorest households in rural areas send their children in public schools as they cannot even afford the fees of a low-cost private school. Moreover, ASER data shows that children with disabilities are more likely to be attending government schools as compared to private schools. Therefore, in order to make our education system inclusive, we need to focus on public schools.

Addressing the Learning Crisis

While private schools continue to outperform government schools, according to ASER 2015, 75 % of the children are enrolled in government schools. If we look at learning levels in these schools, 48% of children in class 5 can't read a class two level sentence in their mother tongue. Hence, in order to make a large-scale impact, we need to concentrate on improving schools where the majority is going i.e. the government schools.



In ASER 2015 an interesting trend has emerged that indicates a change in the education landscape. Over the years, government schools had gained a bad reputation in terms of performance and so the continuous shift every year from government schools to private schools was noticeable. In 2015 however, we see a different pattern emerging as within a year, enrolment for children aged 6-16 in government schools increased by 5% while enrolment in private schools fell by 5%. This shift from private to government schools is greatest at the primary level for children aged 6-10, and so this makes our case stronger for a public school focused approach.

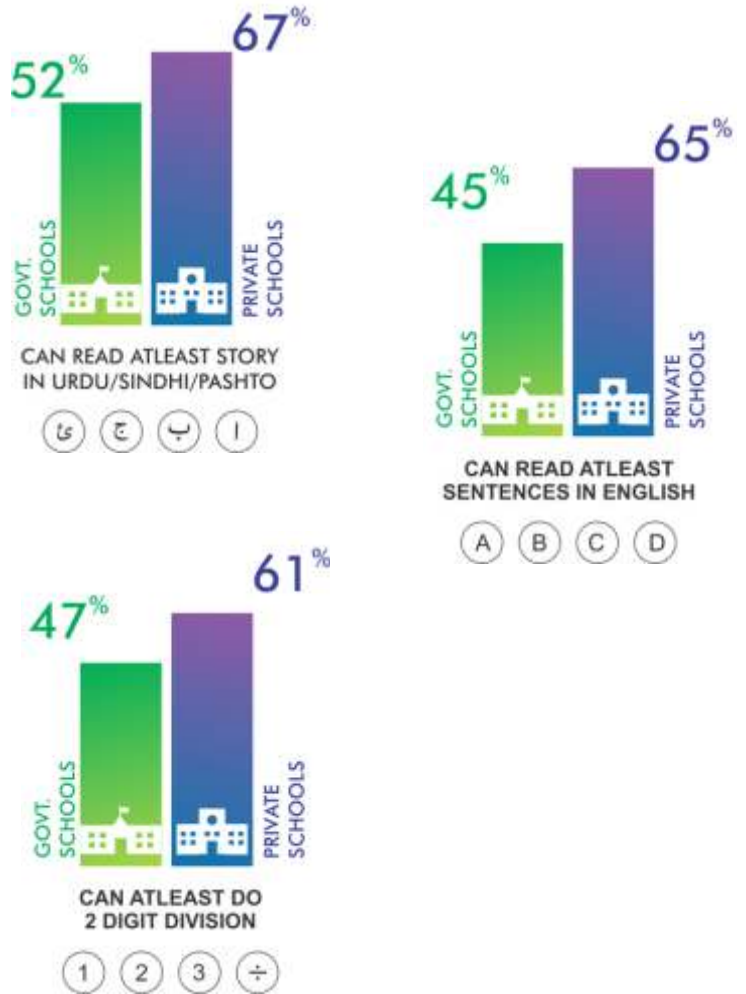
Moreover, government schools are doing better with enrolment in early childhood education as compared to private schools. While the percentage of over-all children enrolled in ECE is falling, out of the 37% of children enrolled in ECE (age 3-5), 70% are enrolled in government schools. Thus, instead of investing capital in private schools to build ECE classrooms, we can utilize existing space in government schools and further promote the concept of early childhood education.

Furthermore, while learning levels for private schools are better, it is observed that the performance of both need a lot of improvement and that low-cost private schools are performing only somewhat better than government schools. The average quality in government schools is being dragged down by a large number of failing government schools in Pakistan. ASER data provides key insights into learning in different types of schools. In comparison to last year, learning levels have improved in both private and public schools. This

improvement in learning levels increases as we go to higher classes and the trend of private schools outperforming public schools continues. However, for children enrolled in class 5, the percentage improvement in government schools is greater for all subjects than the percentage improvement in private schools.

LEARNING LEVELS

By School Type - class 5 (National - Rural)



In addition, private tuition incidence is lower in government school students in comparison to government schools. The percentage of students taking paid tuitions has increased for private schools since last year but have decreased for government schools. While this may be because of the differences in economic backgrounds of children attending private schools, we see that despite this decrease on dependency of other out of school education, government schools are improving their learning levels at a greater percentage than government schools.

While there are still many indicators on which the government schools need to improve upon, we have seen that these schools have improved more in the last year in

comparison to private schools. Moreover, the population is responsive to these improvements and so enrolment, student attendance, and learning levels in government schools have increased at a faster rate than private schools. Keeping in mind that private schools are not accessible to everyone and not everyone can afford them, the answer to educating the largest amount of children from the poorest income groups with the lowest learning levels maybe lies in further tapping this potential of government schools.

Recommendations

Since public schools already have the infrastructure and are most accessible and affordable, while private schools are more effective with their resources and can provide quality education at significantly less cost, privatizing the management of public schools takes advantage from both these sectors.

There are many cases of prevailing public private partnerships in Balochistan, Punjab and Sindh that have shown positive results. "These projects have not only helped to improve achievement levels but in some cases

also increased enrollment particularly of girls. In addition, the projects are believed to have increased school attendance levels of both teachers and students (Ravish 2014)."

Privatizing management can lead to an improvement in the quality of education as it leads to more information, greater accountability, greater access to resources and better resource management including teacher management. Private teachers are hired from within the community and so are useful for community mobilization and improving children retention rates. Moreover, their compensation packages are often based on performance and attendance, and so they are motivated to put in effort while teaching. Furthermore, since they are cheaper and more easily available, more teachers can be hired to address the issues of class size and improving teacher-student ratios.

Therefore, by increasing the role of the private sector in managing government schools, we can benefit from already existing resources and improve the quality of learning.

