

ROLE OF PP-PARTNERSHIP IN BRIDGING THE GAP IN ACCESS IN EDUCATION SECTOR ACROSS PUNJAB

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Abstract

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have increasingly been adopted in Punjab as an alternative mechanism for expanding access to education, particularly for children who remain outside the formal school system. Despite the expansion of PPP-based schools, a significant number of children in Punjab continue to remain out of school, raising questions about whether these initiatives have been able to address educational access in an equitable and inclusive manner. This study examines the role of PPPs in bridging the gap in access to school education across Punjab, with particular focus on the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) and the Punjab Education Initiative Management Authority (PEIMA). The study assesses the extent to which these two models have contributed to educational accessibility up to the secondary level and examines whether the distribution of PPP-supported schools reflects the needs of different geographical and socioeconomic groups. Particular attention is given to inclusiveness and equity, including access among disadvantaged and economically vulnerable populations and gender-related considerations. The study focuses on PPP interventions in Punjab from 2015–16 onward, a period marked by significant expansion of these initiatives. By examining the geographical distribution and accessibility of PPP-supported schools, the research seeks to identify gaps between the expansion of educational provision and the equitable distribution of access. The study aims to provide evidence-based insights for policymakers and the School Education Department to improve the design, targeting, and implementation of future PPP interventions in Punjab.

INTRODUCTION

Social, economic and political development of a country depends upon the quality of education and plays vital role in its sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). Provision of education for all does not only stands as a slogan but a constitutional obligation. Article 25-A of the constitution of Pakistan stipulates that the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children from the age of 5 to 16 years in such manner as may be determined by the law. It is the responsibility of the state for provision required paraphernalia for access to education.

To reach out each child across the country while ensuring equity in education has become a big challenge worldwide (Patrinos et al., 2009). Like other developing countries, the challenge of providing educational facility to all has remained unconquered. Presently more than 22 million children of school going age are out of school, across Pakistan (PSLM, 2019-20) and in Punjab alone, this number is reported as 7.6 million.

The toil of not being able to reach out each child across country has led to a new set up. That brings both the forces, public and private, together to put up collective efforts to address the issue (Patrinos et al., 2009) and this new initiative is called Public

Private Partnership (PPP). A public Private Partnership is “any arrangement between government and the private sector in which partially or traditionally public activities are performed by the private sector” (Savas, 2000). Since the public sector remained unable to provide educational facilities as per the required frequency due to financial constraints therefore the setup of PPPs in education sector of Pakistan has surfaced as an inevitable remedial measure (Saima & Aamir, 2019).

The concept of publically funded private entrepreneurs for provision of educational access to earn public welfare has been adopted globally (Minnow, 2003). The world of education has witnessed the emergence of new public-private partnerships (PPP's) at an increasing rate. Establishment of schools through Public Private Partnership has surfaced as a cost effective and efficient mechanism for bridging the educational access gaps. However, the inclusion of private interest (Buxbaum & Ortiz, 2007) in the model requires a mechanism of parallel accountability so that public services are not compromised (Forrer et al., 2010).

The promotion of PPPs as a core education sector reform was adopted as a strategy in 2001 at the federal level with consultation of provincial level officials in Pakistan. Many programs were conceived under Punjab Education Sector Reform Program, 2001 in this regard. (Saima & Aamir, 2019) Since then, Government of the Punjab has implemented a series of reforms in order to meet the challenge of providing free and compulsory education to all and reducing the number of OOSC. In order to increase accessibility, Government of the Punjab explored the option of collaborating with the private sector and encouraging and promoting them for imparting education. It gave rise to different models of public private partnership. In Punjab, there are two models of public private partnerships in vogue: first, government provides infrastructure and tuition fee but management lies with the private sector, and secondly, government only provides tuition fee but provision of infrastructure and other allied facilities lies on the shoulder of private sector. For the purpose, government established

two authorities; Punjab Education Initiative Management Authority (PEIMA) and Punjab Education Foundation (PEF). PEIMA is steering the first PPP model and PEF the second one. PEIMA is providing free education to about 0.4 million student in more than 4000 schools whereas Punjab Education foundation is catering for the need of 2.5 million students in more than 7000 schools across the Punjab. Since 1994, PEF is supplementing the efforts of school education department whereas PIEMA has established its foot prints across the province in 2018.

Although PPP model in education has been rated a cost effective (TPV-The World Bank 2019), flexible and efficient, however, a basic question arises that how has the organizations been successful to ensure accessibility of educational facilities and whether the claimed accessibility is inclusive and equitable? This research paper deals with two aspects of public private partnership least discussed: the first is geographical distribution of the school under public private partnership for provision of educational access where needed. The second is identifying whether the equity & inclusiveness is being ensured in the non-state actors providing quality education under PPP. This research contributes to the literature on public private partnership in education. In particular, the paper contributes to the literature of PPPs in Education in Punjab, Pakistan.

This research will also provide insight for the policy makers/School education Department to design new projects/initiatives under PPP to maximize its objectivity in terms of access, inclusiveness and equity.

OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

Public private partnerships, in developing countries, generally pass through difficult relationship due to legal complications, distrust on the private sector and divergent interests of public and private managers. However, public private partnership in education sector in Punjab has witnessed the dawn of two decades successfully. Government has doled out billions of rupees and private sector has imported education to millions of students in synch with each other. This research would explore the impact of PPP on the

accessibility of education at secondary level he province. It would also see if accessibility is inclusive and equitable. The result would give insight to policy makers about the accessibility of education, its inclusiveness and equitability. Moreover, it would also encapsulate inclusiveness in term of gender and poverty.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Punjab is largest province of Pakistan in term of population. It is a home of almost half of the population of the Pakistan. Given its historic peaceful environment, it is considered better than sister provinces in term of economic and social development. Punjab has largest network of educational institutions. It has 36,630 primary, 8,327 elementary and 6,757 secondary public schools. On the other hand private sector bridges in the gap with its 17367 primary, 29760 middle and 17 931 high schools. (Pakistan Education Statistics 2019-20)

Government of the Punjab, has allocated budget for SED Rs.421 billion for 2022-23 FY. All the major chains of schools of private sectors are sprawling up across the province. Moreover, small scale private institutions have also been opened up in every nook and cranny in both urban and rural settlements. Given the rich network of schools, both public and private, it is hoped that Punjab would be leading in terms of both accessibility and quality of education.

However, surveys show that Punjab witnesses millions of out of school children. Quality of students of primary, elementary and secondary is constantly going down. On the expense of public sector, private sector is growing and expanding fast. Given the economic stress, people are under duress sending their children to private institutions.

Public private partnership in education has gone through two decades in Punjab, Punjab Social and Living Measurement (PSLM) survey conducted in 2020-21 by the Pakistan's Bureau of Statistics has shown considerable number of out of school children across the provinces. It raises serious questions on the efficacy and effectivity of PPP on ensuring accessibility across the provinces, across

the all strata of society and across the all areas of the province.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How much PEIMA and PEF have been able to ensure accessibility?
2. Is the accessibility, claimed by PEIMA and PEF, inclusive and equitable?

RESEARCH SCOPE

This research would limit itself to School Education Department, Punjab and its public private partnership interventions through Punjab Education Initiative and Management Authority (PEIMA) and Punjab Education Foundation (PEF). Moreover, it would analyze accessibility up to secondary level. This research will also look into accessibility ensured through public private partnership in all the schools across the Punjab. Secondly, data since 2015-16 would be analyzed, the highest expansion graph. Lastly, analysis would be limited to the access part of Public Private Partnership.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Private Partnership is a mutual agreement between the public and private actors in the state who pursue collective efforts by sharing resources and risks for provision of social services or produce certain products (Patrinos et al., 2009; Robertson, 2012). In such arrangements, the private state actors undertakes the responsibilities of service delivery and risk-sharing whereas the role of state remain as financier.

For last few decades, the setup of Public Private Partnership is gaining eminence and are applied in various sectors especially in education (Mundy et al., 2016). Education is an important factor in order to attain growth, development, poverty reduction in under developed as well in the developing countries (Auon, 2004).

Providing better educational opportunities to a child the state may contribute making him/her an effective member of the society (Government of Pakistan, 2014).

It remains difficult for the government of such nations to provide accessible & quality education for all due to rapid growth in population and

budgetary constraint. Such challenging situations mobilize government towards alternative ways of service delivery such as provision of inclusive and equitable education through Public Private Partnership (Ahmad et. All, 2014).

The model of Public Private Partnership is being adopted as a best practice to achieve educational goals. This model is being adopted in Pakistan as a solution to the problems of educational access, equity and inclusiveness (Khushik & Diemer, 2020). The model of PPP is adopted in Pakistan as a remedy since the state cannot completely execute the responsibility of provision of education due to lack of financial and human resources. Furthermore the government alone cannot achieve the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA).

Recent evidence indicates that the impact of PPPs on education is more complex than simply expanding access. Recent work in Punjab suggests that some PPP schools can achieve better learning outcomes, but these benefits are not necessarily consistent across subjects or socioeconomic groups. This suggests the need to evaluate the effectiveness of PPPs not only in terms of enrolment and school expansion but also in terms of who benefits from these arrangements and whether they reach disadvantaged populations. Recent evidence from Punjab points to a more complex picture of the effectiveness of the PPP programs. Ansari (2024), found that PPP schools outperformed public schools in value-added mathematics outcomes for Grade 4 students. However, the study did not find any significant advantage in English and Urdu outcomes and importantly, did not find any evidence that PPP schools were more effective in improving learning outcomes among socio economically disadvantaged students. The findings imply that the expansion of PPPs does not automatically lead to equitable benefits in education and the distribution of benefits across socio-economic groups warrants further research.

The sustainable Development Goal 4(SDG-4) is provision of quality education and lifelong learning and Pakistan is signatory of the SDGs. To achieve the targets of SDG 4 , provision of access

to quality education to all children of primary age group is inevitable along with ensuring 100% survival rate.

Pakistan Punjab Education Fact Sheet 2022 reports that completion rate of primary education in Punjab is 66%, followed 56% for middle school and 39% in secondary schools. The difference in the rate of different wealth quintiles remain wider. The rate of primary school completion from wealthiest quintile is 92% and 72 % from middle school where this rate drops drastically to 33% and 10% respectively from the poorest quintile.

Out of 7.6 million Out of school children in Punjab 13% children are of primary school age, 21% of Middle whereas 34% children belong to the age group of Secondary school education (Haq & Abbas, 2022). The difference in the rates of OOSC among various levels of the education is complemented with the unequal distribution of schools in Pakistan i.e. 61% primary schools, 20% Middle schools, 14% Secondary schools. As per academic level. (Pakistan Education Statistics 2019-20). This unequal distribution is more alarming while comparing the public schools with private sectors. In public Schools the distribution of the schools is 78%, 10%, 09%, 2% of Primary, Middle and secondary schools which may lead to a huge dropout during transition from one academic level to another. This situation is somehow supplemented by the private state actors where distribution of schools is 24%, 42% and 26% respectively for primary, middle, and secondary schools. (PES 2019-20). Survival rate of the students to primary is 75.5%, Middle 55% and 46.5% for secondary students. Since Government is not in a position of developing the infrastructure of new schools due to budgetary constraints for provision equitable access to all therefore to bridge the gap of the setup of public private partnership in education has remained successful, cost effective and efficient because a potential for increase in the enrollment of the students is noted, in the PPP schools, who otherwise could have not been enrolled in the school (Aslam & kingdom, 2021). Numerous researches have also shown positive results in terms of enrollments and quality education in the private schools subsidized under PPP (Barrera-Osorio and Raju, 2015; Barrera-

Osorio et al., 2017; Andrabi et al., 2008; Crawford & Hares, 2018).

PPPs in Punjab

Public Private Partnership is being considered as an alternative source in provision of accessible low cost education to the poor strata of the society through public financing in Punjab. Under PPP set up the state initiates policies, provides finances and funding to the private institutions and these institutes provide accessible low cost education facilities to the deprived classes of the society. The article 25-A of the constitution of Pakistan states: "The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in a manner as may be determined by law".

Therefore, the government of Pakistan has started to support use of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) under the efforts to enhance equity, access and standard of education. Two models of Public Private Partnership are operational in Punjab under the authorities of Punjab Education Foundation and Punjab Education Initiative Management Authority (PEIMA). Such initiatives have supplemented the efforts of School education department in provision of education to all while providing improved educational outcomes, lesser dropouts, enhanced teacher's punctuality and importantly reduced student's truancy.

Punjab Education Foundation (PEF)

Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) is currently running number of educational projects in the Punjab Province under Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Model. Established in 1991 and restructured as an organization in 2004 to facilitate and provide funding for education to the private sector of Punjab Province (Afridi, 2018). Considering the fact that education under PPP mode is an efficient and time-tested mechanism in order for encouragement and promotion of market oriented entrepreneurship (Malik, 2017). PEF's mission is "Promotion of quality education through Public-Private Partnership, encouraging and supporting the efforts of private sector through technical and financial assistance, innovating and developing new instruments to champion

wider educational opportunities to the underprivileged children at affordable cost."

Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) is an autonomous body assigned with the task to promote accessible quality education under the umbrella of PPP mode. There are approximately 2.6 million students enrolled in almost seven thousand PEF schools as compared to the 12 million students that are enrolled in public schools of Punjab province. PEF comprises of three main programs i.e. New School Program (NSP), Education Voucher Scheme (EVS) & Foundation Assisted School Program (FAS) (Ansari, 2020).

Recent work on the Punjab Education Foundation also demonstrates how PPPs can be used to expand educational opportunities for disadvantaged populations. Mansoor et al. (2025) state that the PEF model has helped to improve access, strengthen accountability mechanisms and support the learning environment in partner schools. However, the access and equity challenges persist, and the expansion of PPP provision should also be considered in terms of geographical and socioeconomic distribution of educational opportunities.

Punjab Education Initiative Management Authority (PEIMA)

The second model where infrastructure and per child subsidy is provided by the government whereas operational management is outsourced to private entrepreneurs. Punjab Government launched this initiative as a Public School Support program (PSSP) in 2016 from the platform of PEF, later Punjab Education Initiative Management Authority (PEIMA) was established in 2018. Under PEIMA project the government outsources low performing and nonfunctional public schools to private educationists, entrepreneurs, NGOs etc. (Ansari, 2020).

Equitable Access to Education

Pakistan is having second largest population out of school children (UNICEF, 2019) with 22.8 million. Provision of right to education across the map has become challenging due to unbalanced graph of demand and supply of educational access. Pakistan spends 2.4 % of the GDP on education

which is least as compared to other developing countries in South Asia. (World Bank, 2021). To fill in the gap in access to the quality of education low cost private schools are increasing under Public Private Partnership (PPP) for bridging the gap.

Simultaneously, with rapid increase in PPPs for provision of education, a debate about the negative effect of such intervention regarding inequalities in educational access (Zancajo et al., 2021) has emerged globally. Over the years, a consensus is developed that provision of educational facilities under PPPs impact negatively on social and educational inequalities by fostering the marginalization of the most disadvantaged students (Macpherson, Robertson & Walford, 2014; Waslander, Pater & Weide, 2010; OECD, 2012; Alegre & Ferrer, 2010).

Zancajo et al., (2021) argues that such inequalities are surfaced due to unclear PPP regulatory framework. Various stakeholders adopts PPP framework with different perspectives at various stages which requires state owned uniform policies and regulatory reforms.

CONCLSUION

Public-private partnerships have become an essential tool for enhancing educational access in Punjab. However, increasing the number of schools supported by PPPs alone does not guarantee equitable and inclusive access. Thus, the effectiveness of PEF and PEIMA should be measured not only by enrolment and coverage but also by their geographic distribution and their ability to reach disadvantaged communities. Strengthening needs-based planning, monitoring and accountability can help ensure that PPPs contribute more effectively to equal access to quality education across Punjab.

Bibliography

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