



# Academic effectiveness of private, public and private–public partnership schools in Pakistan



Ravish Amjad\*, Gordon MacLeod

*Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi, Pakistan*

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been major growth in low-cost or affordable private schooling in South Asia. This has applied in both urban and rural areas. In Pakistan, some 25%–33% of all children now attend private schools. Further, there has been substantial, consistent, developing country evidence that students of affordable private schools outperform academically their counterparts in government schools. This seems to remain true even after account is taken of intellectual ability, home and family characteristics.

In this paper we use 2011 data collected by Pakistan's Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2012) to address three questions:

- Do Pakistan's rural private school students outperform their public school counterparts?
- Do Pakistan's public–private partnership (PPP) school students outperform their public school counterparts?
- Are higher private school fees associated with higher student achievement?

Our results show that:

- private school students in Pakistan, do outperform their government colleagues. This effect persists even after account is taken of other variables (child, household and school).
- PPP students also outperform their government counterparts but this effect disappears when account is taken of private tuition.
- students from the lowest-fee private schools outperform students from government schools and higher fee school students generally outperform the lowest fee schools but this latter difference seems attributable to factors other than solely the higher fee level itself.

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## 1. Introduction

Low-cost or affordable private schools in developing countries including those of South Asia produce better academic outcomes than government schools. This generalisation seems true even after account is taken of background variables such as parental education and household wealth. A small number of comparisons of private–public schooling have occurred in Pakistan, mostly in the Punjab, the country's richest and most populous province. This study uses parts of a large nationwide survey in Pakistan (Annual Status of Education Report, 2012) to assess whether students of private schools across Pakistan (mostly in rural areas) seem to outperform government school students. This is done by comparing test outcomes in Urdu (Sindhi in the province of

Sindh), arithmetic, and English across the school sectors. In addition, the study sheds light on the distribution of fees and fee levels charged by Pakistan's private schools, tests whether differential fee levels relate to differential academic outcomes and considers some evidence on the effectiveness of private–public partnership schools.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Private schooling in Pakistan

Pakistan has seen massive growth in low cost private schooling. The work of Andrabi et al. (2006) provides some comprehensive background on this. They note that as recently as 2006, Pakistan government policy viewed private schools as institutions that charged high fees, catered to an elite population and were typically located in urban areas. However, the data presented by Andrabi and associates paint “a starkly different picture” (p. 3). Private schooling in Pakistan is actually large, widespread and increasing

\* Corresponding author at: Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi, 41-L, Model Town, Lahore, Pakistan. Tel.: +971 50 386 4404; fax: +92 42 35173005.  
E-mail address: [ravish.ita@gmail.com](mailto:ravish.ita@gmail.com) (R. Amjad).

**Table 1**Percentages of Pakistani private school and public school teachers demonstrating specified characteristics (from [Andrabi et al., 2006](#)).

School type	% Female	Average age	% Unmarried	Come from village where teaching	% with master's degree	% with professional training
Private	76	25	77	52	4	6
Public	43	38	15	25	19	71

rapidly, especially in rural areas. The children who attend private schools in Pakistan are not as portrayed in government policy. Rather they are from middle class and poorer families who pay very low fees ([Andrabi et al., 2006](#)).

At the time of the report, more than one-third of the primary school population and around one-quarter of the secondary population was in private schools. The schools are made affordable largely because they pay very little to their teachers. These teachers are typically “young, single, moderately educated and untrained local women” (p. 4). [Table 1](#) summarises some of the characteristics of private school teachers and compares them with government teachers.

The economic returns to teachers also varied substantially across the sectors. The average wage of a public school teacher was Rs. 5620 and that of a private school teacher only Rs. 1084. Much of the difference was attributable to teacher training. Public sector salaries are heavily influenced by professional training but not by gender. In the private sector, salaries responded to education and to gender but not to professional training. In the public sector, teachers with a Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC) earned 75% more than those without. In the private sector, PTC teachers earned only 3% more than those without the Certificate. In the government sector, female teachers earned slightly but not significantly more than their male colleagues. In the private sector, females earned a massive 33% less than males. Finally, it is noteworthy that 92% of the private schools were co-educational and this was despite a prevailing belief in Pakistan that girls will not attend schools unless they are single-sex.

## 2.2. Pakistan's public-private partnership schools

Pakistan has a number of schools designated as Public-Private Partnership (PPP) schools. These are often categorised as private schools in that their control and management do not lie with government but rather with educational entrepreneurs, NGOs or philanthropists. Where these PPP schools differ from other private schools is that their students do not pay fees directly. Instead, the students are provided with vouchers or fees are paid directly to the schools on behalf of the students, most commonly by an educational foundation provided with recurrent funding through government. The advantage for government is that cost per student place is substantially lower than in the public sector. The best-known schemes in Pakistan are those run by the Balochistan, Punjab and Sindh Education Foundations.

In Balochistan, a major PPP initiative was the Balochistan Education Support Project funded by the [International Development Association](#) at the [World Bank \(2012\)](#). It was seen to have increased not only enrolment but also both student and teacher attendance and gender equity. Effects on learning outcomes are less clear and perhaps unstudied.

In Sindh, the Education Foundation has supported several kinds of partnerships including the Support to Private Education Institutes Program and the pioneering Adopt-a-School programme. The foundation suggests that these schemes are intended to counter the marked decline in the standard of the public education system by making use of the technical expertise and extensive resources of the private sector. It is unclear what studies there may have been of the effectiveness of these PPP initiatives.

The Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) has also supported various PPP projects, perhaps most notably the Foundation

Assisted Schools (FAS) and the Education Voucher Scheme. [Malik's \(2010\)](#) evaluation of these on behalf of the Asian Development Bank is very positive. He writes:

Through its FAS program, the PEF has demonstrated that:

- While it is the responsibility of the state to ensure free education for all children, it does not necessarily have to **provide** the service. . .
- **Through PPPs, better-quality education can be provided** to a child at significantly less cost than that in the public school system

([Malik, 2010](#), p. 6, emphases added)

However, this unequivocal conclusion about better quality education is not totally persuasive given that the evidence of this is the Quality Assurance Tests (QATs) administered by the PEF to its supported schools and, as Malik himself notes, these QATs are not currently linked with other national or international assessment systems and therefore “real performance cannot be judged against larger student populations” (p. 13).

[Bano \(2008\)](#) reviews a range of PPP initiatives in Pakistan including those of the PEF and SEF. She is much less sanguine about PPP schooling than Malik. She notes that at the time of writing, the idea of PPPs was one strongly promoted by international development institutions including the World and Asian Development Banks, UN and European Union agencies and aid organisations from Japan, Norway, the UK and USA. Unsurprisingly perhaps, Pakistan government(s) went along with this but perhaps more in search of funding than of genuine educational partnership.

## 2.3. Do private schools in developing countries produce better academic results than public schools?

In this brief review, we reference broader global work but we focus primarily on work in India and Pakistan. Over many years there has been evidence accumulating that private schools generally outperform public schools in their students' academic test performance ([Psacharopoulos, 1987](#); [Jimenez et al., 1991](#); [Kingdon, 1996](#); [Tooley and Dixon, 2003, 2006](#); [Tooley et al., 2007](#); [Goyal and Pandey, 2009](#); [French and Kingdon, 2010](#)).

[Kingdon's \(1996\)](#) study in the Lucknow district of Uttar Pradesh in India found strong differences in achievement between private unaided-by-government schools and both government schools and private, aided schools (nominally privately managed, but almost entirely funded by the state government and heavily regulated). However, much of the difference disappeared when “personal endowments and selectivity of pupils [were] controlled for” (p. 24). Differences in reading achievement virtually disappeared; slight differences in mathematics achievement remained.

Tooley's work on low cost private schools has been reported in a variety of sources (e.g. [Tooley and Dixon, 2003, 2006](#); [Tooley et al., 2007](#); [Tooley, 2009](#); [Rangaraju et al., 2012](#)), often with some duplication of content.

As example, [Tooley and Dixon \(2006\)](#) report work in Ghana, Nigeria and India (two locations) as part of a larger study that also included data collection in China, India (a third location) and Kenya. Their first (and necessary) step was to search for private schools. This was because the number of private schools is almost always grossly underestimated in official statistics.

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