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Narrative Report

Emily Richardson

The number of private schools in Pakistan¹ has multiplied almost three fold – at a much faster rate than the number of public sector schools. Between 1999 and 2009, low-cost private schools nearly tripled, from 36,000 to over 90,000 primary and secondary schools in urban and rural areas. In fact, the private education sector in Pakistan has grown faster than in any other nation in the world. Most of this growth has been within *low cost private schools* (LCPS), which are mostly concentrated in urban and peri-urban areas and now account for 30% of total enrolment.² The largest portion (65%) of private schools is located in Punjab.

Much of the demand for low-cost private schooling is the result of parents' dissatisfaction with the public education system, citing issues such as poor national examination scores, over-crowding, high teacher absenteeism, and unengaged teachers (Heyneman & Stern 2014). Families tend to opt for this private schooling, even if it means paying more, because they feel it has the potential to bring better educational outcomes for their children (Dalberg, 2012). In fact, in Lahore, Pakistan, it was suggested that around half of children from families earning less than \$1 a day attended private schools, even when there was a free government alternative (Alderman et al. 2001).

However, the debates about the merits of private schooling in comparison to public schooling are becoming increasingly frequent. Issues of equity and quality are commonly cited, but this varies from context to context. Muzzaffar (2010) argues that in Pakistan neither public nor low cost private schools are able to deliver quality education. Yet, evidence on the better performance of private schools in developing countries is accumulating (Pscharapolous, 1987; Jimenez et al, 1991; Kingdon, 1996; Tooley and Dixon, 2006; Goyal and Pandey, 2009; French and Kingdon, 2010). In Pakistan, a number of studies suggest that children enrolled in private schools are performing considerably better than children enrolled in government schools, although additional assessments are needed. According to the Annual Status of Education (ASER) 2013 report, literary and numeracy skills among children in private schools are much better. While only 46% of children in grade 5 can read a story in Urdu/Pashto/Sindhi, over 60% of children enrolled in grade 5 in private schools can read a story or more in their language. Similarly, 54% of children in private schools (grade 5) were able to do division while only 40% of children in public schools can do the same.³

The issue of quality in private schools is very complex, which is the result of a lack of data and research about the private education sector. Little is known about the range of curricula being taught, characteristics on the different types of private schools, how private schools are regulated (I-SAPS, 2010), and most importantly teacher quality, including their training and classroom instruction, attitudes and experiences. Consequently, parents base their decisions on their children's educations on potentially misleading factors, including publicity campaigns and personal reference, rather than quality indicators, and choose the fee-based private education system over the free public education system. Moreover, research increasingly suggests that private schools in Pakistan are not as great as society believes it to be. Thus, it is crucial to better understand the quality of educational provision in Pakistan's rapidly growing private school sector.

The purpose of this upcoming (2015) dissertation field research is to explore with low-fee private school owners and/or headmasters, policymakers and, most importantly, teachers in both low-fee private schools and neighboring public schools what factors impact teacher effectiveness (positively or negatively). Specifically I will examine leadership and management, accountability, morale/motivation, parent involvement, classroom instructional approaches, school factors and student assessments (formative and summative). Additionally, I aim to explore with edupreneurs how they became involved with education, initiated their schools and their perceptions on the quality of education. Moreover, in both public and private schools, I hope to collect the

¹ It is important to note that in Pakistan, the private education sector is generally viewed as a homogenous category (I-SAPS, 2010) when in fact it should be classified along a much broader range of categories and characteristics (religious, low-cost, high-fee, boys, girls, mixed, Urdu, English medium).

²PSLM, 2012

³ Sample: 4112 villages surveyed; 3959 government schools and 1694 private schools

reactions of and explore with teachers how policy decisions have impacted their teaching practices. At the policy level, I will speak with policymakers and education officials about their perceptions of the quality of teachers in low-fee private schools. In sum, I plan to develop a typology of low private school teachers and schools in select districts in Punjab.

References

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