

## Helpdesk Report: Comparing the performance of private versus public secondary education

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**Query:** What evidence is there, for India and the region in particular, comparing the learning achievements and relative cost of private versus public secondary education, as indicators of their relative performance?

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#### 1. Overview

The public versus private provision of education debate is the backdrop for enquiries such as this. Experts differ drastically in their approach to the potential role for the private sector – whether as ‘conduit’ and peripheral, or as legitimate and key provider. Overall, issues of equity and quality lie at the heart of the debate and feed into all comparisons of performance. As summarised by Psacharaopoulos (1987): *“Two lines of thought have developed on the issue: those who believe that greater reliance on private schools would introduce competition and choice into the system, and thus a higher level of efficiency; and those who argue that privatisation of the school system would lead to greater social and economic stratification in society.”*

Evidence comparing public versus private schools in secondary education, in India and the region, is ultimately sparse. While there is a good body of evidence to deal separately with comparing learning achievement, unit costs, and gender and equity issues, or with the broader debate on public versus private, studies that combine these elements are few and far between. Where there is a much more solid body of evidence is on primary school education and particularly in Pakistan.

There is some evidence for advantages in private schooling highlighted in references below, particularly when focusing on learning achievements within specific subjects. The studies also provide good insight into the methodological challenges in comparing public and private schools, and in isolating the factors that influence learning achievement.

#### 2. Evidence – Selected information sources, references and summaries

*This section includes references to journal articles. We have tried to supply web links where possible, although some of these require subscription.*

### **The relative efficiency of private and public schools in developing countries**

**Jimenez, E., Lockhead, M. and Paqueo, V.**

**The World Bank Research Observer, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 205-218, 1991**

Based on case studies comparing private and public secondary education in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, Tanzania, and Thailand, the authors give evidence that on average private school students outperform public school students on standardised math and language tests. It is significant, furthermore, that the researchers go on to examine the relative influence of family wealth on these results and prove that the unit costs of private schools in these case studies is lower than in public schools.

*Jimenez et al note* that this article summarises the results of a series of World Bank sponsored research studies including: Colombia and Tanzania (Cox and Jimenez 1989), the Dominican Republic (Jimenez and others 1989), the Philippines (Jimenez, Paqueo, and de Vera 1988), and Thailand (Jimenez, Lockhead, and Wattanawaha 1988) – see below on these specific papers.

### **The relative effectiveness of private and public schools – Evidence from two developing countries**

**Cox, D. and Jimenez, E.**

**Journal of Development Economics 34, pp. 99-121, 1991**

In two countries, Colombia and Tanzania, student performance on standardised achievement tests is used as a measure of quality in private and public secondary schools. Cox and Jimenez are concerned with examining the extent to which achievement is attributable to student characteristics or to school inputs. While trying to account for the effects of selection bias, therefore, they conclude overall that students perform better in private schools than in public.

### **The Quality and Efficiency of Private and Public Education: A Case-Study of Urban India**

**Kingdon, G.**

**Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics – Volume 58, Issue 1, pages 57-82, February 1996**

Formerly, government has tended towards a monopoly on provision of public education services, but recently large increases in demand and school-age populations has necessitated a re-examination of the potential role for the private sector in this arena. Kingdon focuses in on issues of education quality (and effectiveness) as a more useful indicator of labour market productiveness. The study compares private with public in an effort to counter the assumption that universal free provision of education automatically ensures equity. Kingdon's examination devises a model that combines measures of effectiveness with the unit costs of different school/management types in order to compute an overall economic efficiency level.

### **The Determinants of Student Achievement in Government and Private Schools in Pakistan**

**Aslam, M.**

**The Pakistan Development Review, 42 (4) Part II, Winter 2003, pp. 841-876, 2003**

Aslam attempts in this study to shine a light on the main determinants of pupil achievement in government versus private schools. The focus of the research is in urban and rural Lahore, examining 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils. Aslam looked at home background, teacher pay (as a measure of quality), and student absenteeism to assess their influence on pupil achievement.

**The Limits to Growth of Non-Government Private Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa**  
**Lewin, K.**  
**CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS Research Monograph No 5, 2007**

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate in Sub-Saharan Africa what role non-government, private schooling can play in achieving Education for All. Lewin outlines the diversity of types of provision, issues in non-government's contribution to improving access to schooling, data on children out-of-school and the extent to which exclusion is related to wealth, gender and location, the operating costs in unsubsidised schools, and the demographic challenges in reaching the poorest children's households with services. Overall, Lewin cautions against assuming that non-government providers automatically ensure greater efficiency, lower cost, and higher quality and relevance, as these results depend upon certain conditions that the author believes are frequently unmet in SSA contexts. Overall, therefore, Lewin emphasises the likelihood that private schooling is not helpful in improving access to the poorest households.

**Private and Public Schooling in Ghana: A Census and Comparative Survey**  
**Tooley, J., Dixon, P. and Amuah, I.**  
**Review of Education, 53: 389-415, 2007**

Tooley et al undertook this study in order to add to limited available evidence on the quality of education in private schools. The study did not examine actual achievement levels of students and hence was limited in its assessment of quality. Tooley et al conclude from their research that two major criticisms of private schools – that they are not affordable for the poorest people and that their quality of provision is unreliable – can be countered through a different, more innovative approach to their inclusion among mainstream education services, with proposals presented therein.

**Returns to Private and Public Education in Bangladesh and Pakistan: A Comparative Analysis**  
**Asadullah, M.**  
**QEH Working Paper Series, Working Paper Number 167, 2008**

This paper provides useful analysis in several different areas – firstly in comparing public and private school quality by relating school graduates' wages as a function of the effectiveness of their education; secondly by comparing Pakistan with Bangladesh in terms of the performance of private and public schools; and finally, by using this comparison to examine more deeply the public policy and regulatory regimes in these countries that may influence the differences between their schooling systems. It finds that overall Pakistani private school graduates do earn more than their public school counterparts, but that in Bangladesh such a wage advantage is not witnessed.

**PAKISTAN - Learning and Educational Achievements in Punjab Schools (LEAPS): Insights to inform the education policy debate**  
**Andrabi, T., Das, J., Khwaja, A., Vishwanath, T., Zajonc, T. and The LEAPS Team, 2008**

A seminal report on the status of enrolments and primary education services in Pakistan based on LEAPS surveys in all the public and private schools in 112 villages of the Punjab province, conducted between 2003 and 2007. While the report evidences reports of higher test-scores in all subjects in private schools, the authors propose that government school reform and a 'modified role of the government' is the way forward – outlining three spheres for government intervention.

**A Dime a Day: The Possibilities and Limits of Private Schooling in Pakistan**  
**Andrabi, T., Das, J. and Khwaja, A.**  
**Comparative Education Review, vol. 52, no. 3, 2008**

Andrabi et al examine the mushrooming of small, decentralised, market-based, for-profit schools in rural Pakistan. The paper explores how these schools are able to charge very low, affordable fees for schooling and question the assumption that the sacrifices that enable low-cost jeopardise quality. The study illustrates how other factors, such as competition and accountability to fee-paying parents, can serve to increase the 'effort' of teachers and the learning outcomes of students. Furthermore, Andrabi et al go on to argue for the crucial relationship between government and private schools, as opposed to their juxtaposition against one another.

**Do value-added estimates add value? Accounting for learning dynamics.**

**Andrabi, T., Das, J., Khwaja, A. and Zajonc, T.**

**HKS Faculty Research Working Paper, Series RWP09-034, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2009**

This paper provides a useful overview of different econometric methodologies for assessing and evaluating the impact of education in both public and private contexts. The focus is on persistence of learning outcomes between grades. Andrabi et al indicate that the use of dynamic panel methods attributes greater average achievement to students in private schools than value-added models which understate this impact. They conclude that their results support the case for lower-cost, private schools and their potential in the developing country context.

**The Relative Effectiveness of Government and Private Schools in Pakistan: Are Girls Worse Off?**

**Aslam, M.**

**Education Economics, Vol 17(3), Sept, p 329-354, 2009**

Aslam posits that this study, at the time, was 'one of a very few studies in Pakistan to explore the question of the relative effectiveness of public and private schools despite there being an unprecedented expansion of fee-charging private schools in the last two decades.' The paper focuses on middle school (grade 8) students. It concludes that private schools in Pakistan are providing better quality education than government ones and are more effective in imparting mathematics and literacy skills. However, there is also an indication that the expense of sending children to these private schools is resulting in a gender disparity, between boys whose education is prioritised versus girls who are sent to free government schools instead.

**Bad Public Schools are Public Bads: Civic Values and Test-scores in Public and Private Schools**

**Andrabi, T., Bau, N., Das, J. and Khwaja, A.**

**Knowledge for Change Program Trust and South Asia region of The World Bank, Draft Paper, May 2010**

The authors approach this study with a view to examining the advantages or disadvantages of applying a 'pure market model' to the provision of primary education, without regulation by the state or any government subsidies. The authors are careful to outline the difficulties in conducting impact evaluations of private schooling – pointing to the selection and sample biasing and the ideological concerns that must be factored. However, according to their research low-fee private schools in Pakistan, which have exploded in numbers in the last decade, are exhibiting improved test-scores for children as compared to their public school counterparts, and furthermore the cost of educating children in these private schools is 2 to 5 times less than for students in public schools.

**Privatisation and Education for All: Unravelling the mobilizing frames**

**Srivastava, P.**

**Development, 53(4), pp. 522-528, 2010**

This paper provides a useful backdrop to the ideological debate around public versus private provision of education services. Within four 'mobilizing frames' – scarce resources, efficiency, competition-choice-quality, and social equity – Srivastava critiques the common justifications for privatisation and proposes alternative ways forward for policy-makers when approaching education services.

**Friends of The Citizens Foundation, Pakistan  
Newsletter, 2011  
www.FTCF.org.uk**

This newsletter provides an overview of the main achievements of The Citizens Foundation in Pakistan, a charity founded 16 years ago to build and operate purpose-built fee-paying schools affordable for families earning an average total household income of £40/month – this constitutes approximately 16% of actual costs, whereas the remaining 84% is met from grants and donations. The newsletter highlights worrying figures of poor state expenditure on education and dire equipment and building conditions in those government schools that do exist. Overall, according to TCF, their students are collectively achieving higher grades in core subjects each year and extra-curricular activities and gender issues are all also a focus.

As of yet no independent evaluations of the TCF initiative is available.

**Unpublished**

**Using the World Bank's 2005 data on about 6200 Grade 9 students in secondary schools in Orissa and Rajasthan, Azam, Kingdon and Wu (2011) have authored: Impact of Private Secondary Schooling on Cognitive Skills: Evidence from India**

**Abstract:** In this paper we measure the effect of attending private secondary school on educational achievement measured by standardized test scores in two India states: Orissa and Rajasthan. In the absence of access to good instrument variable, we use recently developed estimation method based on the idea that the amount of selection on the observed explanatory variables provides a guide to the amount of selection on the unobservables (Altonji, Elbers, and Todd, 2005). We also borrow techniques from Program Evaluation literature to estimate the private school effect and its sensitivity to unobservables. We find that in Rajasthan, the students in private school scored around 9 percent more than the public school students, and the positive effect stand even in case of significant selection based of unobservables. However, in Orissa the students in private school only score 3 percent more than public school students. Moreover, a small selection on unobservable has the potential to wipe out this positive effect.

**3. Additional information**

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