

Learning and Educational Achievement in Punjab Schools Report Summary

Insights to Inform the Education Policy Debate



The LEAPS report presents findings from the first year of a four year research project on education in Punjab Province conducted by researchers from Harvard University, Pomona College and the World Bank.

There have been dramatic changes in the educational landscape of Pakistan in the new millennium. Enrollments are looking up with a 10 percentage point jump between 2001 and 2005. Mainstream, co-educational and for-profit private schools have become a widespread presence in both urban and rural areas, expanding their share from 12 percent in 1991 to 27 percent in 2004. In contrast, the share of madrasa enrollment has remained stagnant at one to three percent. There were 3,300 private schools in the four main provinces in 1983 and 47,000 in 2004. These patterns are not particular to Pakistan—the rise of private schooling is a South Asia-wide phenomenon, yet to be internalized in policy debates on education.

The Learning and Educational Achievement in Punjab Schools (LEAPS) report looks at this new educational landscape. The report is based on extensive surveys of 823 government and private schools and 1,850 households in 112 villages of rural Punjab province. Drawn from three districts in rural Punjab, the insights from the report are already applicable for most of rural Punjab and NWFP and will become increasingly relevant for a large fraction of Pakistani villages over the next decade.

The LEAPS report has three interconnected themes: what children are learning, a focus on inputs and outcomes, and the schooling environment in villages with private schools. As enrollment rises, the focus will increasingly shift to learning. And as the number of schools in each village increase, villages will become active educational marketplaces with all the complexities that entails, from school choice to school competition.

A central finding of the LEAPS report is that average learning is poor, but there are better and worse performers in every community. Learning outcomes are largely determined by the schools that children attend.

Private school students' test scores are between 1 ½ and 2 ½ years ahead of their government school counterparts. To put this in perspective, the government-private learning gap in Urdu is 18 times the learning gap between children with literate and illiterate mothers.

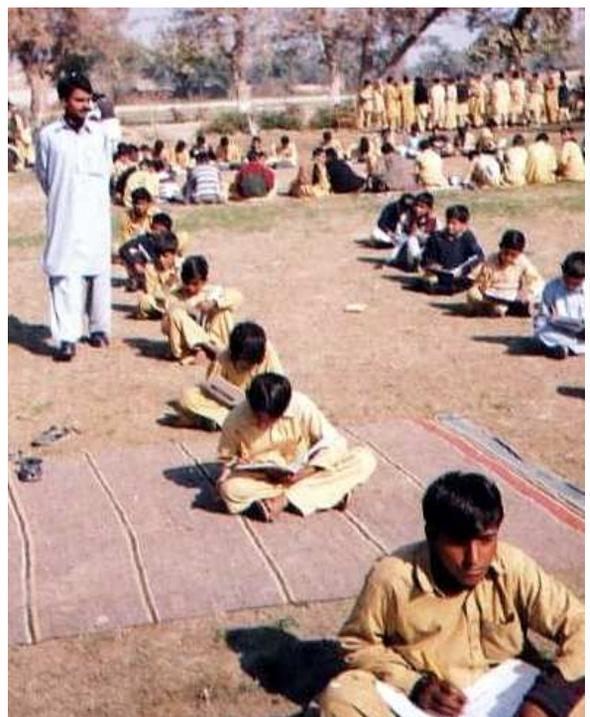
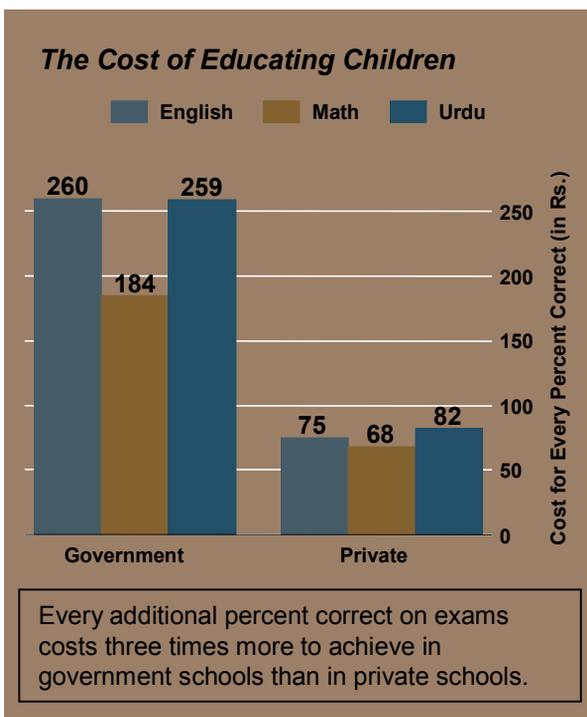
Private schools achieve this at lower cost. The cost adjusted for quality

(the cost per percentage correct in a test) of educating children is 3 times higher in government than in private schools.

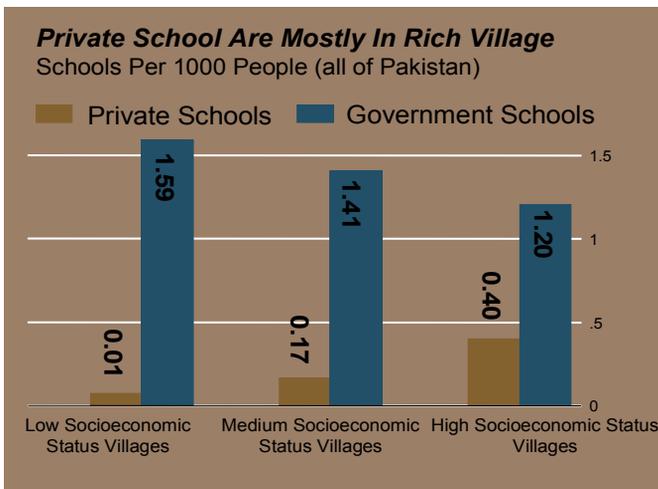
Private schools also achieve better outcomes with lower quality teaching inputs. Government schools are staffed by well-trained, well-educated teachers. Nearly half of government school teachers have B.A.s or M.A.s, and the quality of teachers does not differ between rich and poor villages. Private schools, by contrast, predominantly hire local women with secondary education, and provide them with little formal training.

The difference in performance is likely due to the greater accountability arising from market pressures for private schools.

Private schooling alone, though, cannot be the answer. First, private schools are not geographically accessible to all. Private schools locate in larger and richer villages. And *within* villages, they are located in larger and richer main settlements.



Highlights of the LEAPS Report

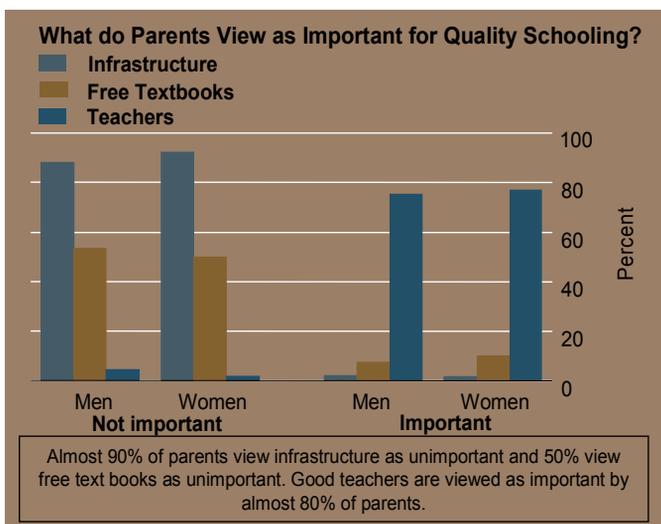


Private schools are more cost effective than government schools, but they are not geographically accessible to all.

These location patterns are particularly important in the Pakistani context and particularly for girls, since enrollment drops by 20 percentage points for every 500 meters that a girl has to travel to school. Second, parents do not invest equitably in all children. Instead they chose winners in whom they invest disproportionately more. Government schools need to ensure quality education for children who do not receive adequate investments at home.

Private schools can complement, but not replace government schools.

Policymakers should learn from the success of private schools, but also remain wary of their shortcomings. Only improving the quality of government schools can ensure equitable access to primary education for all.



- The emerging reality in Punjab is an active and competitive marketplace for education with six to eight government and low-cost private schools in every village.
- Children perform significantly below curricular standards for common subjects and concepts at their grade-level, yet there are high and low performing schools in the same village. By the time children in private schools are in class three, they are 1.5-2.5 years ahead of government school students.
- Government school teachers are more educated and better trained. Yet, test scores are higher in private schools, suggesting that greater effort among private school teachers trumps the higher competence of their government sector counterparts.
- Private schools are not evenly distributed geographically. Government schools are. For many poor children, especially girls, the only geographically accessible option is a government school.
- All parents, regardless of income or literacy, make active and reasonably informed decisions about their children's educations. They can gauge the abilities of their children and their children's teachers, know about the quality of schools in the village, and spend a relatively large amount on their children's educations.

Adapting to a Changing Educational Landscape

The results of the LEAPS report suggest that the children of Pakistan would be best served by government policy that is complementary to, rather than in competition with, the private sector. Government policy should take advantage of the contributions to education made by private schools, while compensating for their shortcomings. The LEAPS report advances a modified role of the government for debate and discussion.

1. Provide Information on Schools

The government should act as a provider of information on learning for all government and private schools in the country. This will enable households to make informed decisions and increase beneficial competition between schools. Information also empowers households to hold schools accountable for their performance.

2. Correct Geographic Imbalances

The government has a large role to play in correcting the imbalances arising from unequal geographical access to private schools. Part of this requires investing in secondary education to create a pool of educated teachers. Part of this requires mechanisms to enable greater participation for girls living relatively farther from schools.

3. Reform Failing Government Schools

Not all government schools are poorly performing. Average quality in government schools is dragged down by a large number of failing schools. Reforming failing government schools is a top policy priority.

4. Reform Teacher Compensation

Improving the quality of instruction in government schools requires teacher reform. The current government compensation system is anti-teacher. Many government teachers try hard under difficult conditions, but earn the same amount as their less deserving counterparts. Any system must ensure that good teachers are appropriately rewarded for their greater effort, and that only the good teachers are retained.

5. Free Teachers to Teach

Teachers are primarily in villages to teach, and should not be burdened with additional duties and requirements. Unlike in the private sector, work-related absences are quite common in government schools.

6. Innovate

The government is uniquely positioned to act as an innovator willing to experiment with and evaluate “out-of-the-box” reforms such as government-private partnerships where financial support is given to children regardless of the school chosen.

For more on the Learning and Educational Achievement in Punjab Schools report, please visit www.leapsproject.org