

p-ISSN : 2708-2113 | e-ISSN : 2708-3608

DOI(Journal): 10.31703/gesr
DOI(Volume): 10.31703/gesr/.2024(IX)
DOI(Issue): 10.31703/gesr.2024(IX.III)

www.gesrjournal.com

Global Educational
Studies Review



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VOL. IX, ISSUE III, SUMMER (SEPTEMBER-2024)


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Double-blind Peer-review Research Journal
www.gesrjournal.com
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Article Title

Impact of Privatization of Government Schools on Quality and Access to Education: Perceptions of Stakeholders

Global Educational Studies Review

p-ISSN: 2708-2113 e-ISSN: 2708-3608

DOI(journal): 10.31703/gesr

Volume: IX (2024)

DOI (volume): 10.31703/gesr.2024(IX)

Issue: III Summer (September-2024)

DOI(Issue): 10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-III)

Home Page

www.gesjournal.com

Volume: IX (2024)

<https://www.gesjournal.com/Current-issues>

Issue: III-Summer (September-2024)

<https://www.gesjournal.com/Current-issues/9/3/2024>

Scope

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Abstract

The government has announced a policy for the privatization of government schools recently. This announcement has raised many concerns about the already compromised quality of education and access to education locally. The current study is an effort to explore the perceptions of teachers, administrators, and parents on the aforementioned phenomenon. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the respondents selected on the basis of convenience. Later, the themes were generated through transcription and thematic analysis. The responses indicate dissatisfaction of all stakeholders about privatization. The administrators are not clear about their responsibility, teachers are more concerned about their job structure while parents are more concerned about access to education. The study recommends a large-scale study for exploring the concerns and thus reviewing the policy.

Keywords: Quality of Education, Access to Education, School Privatization

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Pages: 31-39

DOI:10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-III).04

DOI link: [https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2024\(IX-III\).04](https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-III).04)

Article link: <http://www.gesjournal.com/article/A-b-c>

Full-text Link: <https://gesjournal.com/fulltext/>

Pdf link: <https://www.gesjournal.com/jadmin/Author/31rv1olA2.pdf>

Citing this Article

04	Impact of Privatization of Government Schools on Quality and Access to Education: Perceptions of Stakeholders						
	Author	Naeem Haider Fariha Gul Faisal Amjad			DOI	10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-III).04	
Pages	31-39	Year	2024	Volum e	IX	Issue	III
Referencing & Citing Styles	APA	Haider, N., Gul, F., & Amjad, F. (2024). Impact of Privatization of Government Schools on Quality and Access to Education: Perceptions of Stakeholders. <i>Global Educational Studies Review, IX(III)</i> , 31-39. https://doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-III).04					
	CHICAGO	Haider, Naeem, Fariha Gul, and Faisal Amjad. 2024. "Impact of Privatization of Government Schools on Quality and Access to Education: Perceptions of Stakeholders." <i>Global Educational Studies Review IX (III)</i> :31-39. doi: 10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-III).04.					
	HARVARD	HAIDER, N., GUL, F. & AMJAD, F. 2024. Impact of Privatization of Government Schools on Quality and Access to Education: Perceptions of Stakeholders. <i>Global Educational Studies Review, IX</i> , 31-39.					
	MHRA	Haider, Naeem, Fariha Gul, and Faisal Amjad. 2024. 'Impact of Privatization of Government Schools on Quality and Access to Education: Perceptions of Stakeholders', <i>Global Educational Studies Review, IX</i> : 31-39.					
	MLA	Haider, Naeem, Fariha Gul, and Faisal Amjad. "Impact of Privatization of Government Schools on Quality and Access to Education: Perceptions of Stakeholders." <i>Global Educational Studies Review IX.III</i> (2024): 31-39. Print.					
	OXFORD	Haider, Naeem, Gul, Fariha, and Amjad, Faisal (2024), 'Impact of Privatization of Government Schools on Quality and Access to Education: Perceptions of Stakeholders', <i>Global Educational Studies Review, IX (III)</i> , 31-39.					
	TURABIAN	Haider, Naeem, Fariha Gul, and Faisal Amjad. "Impact of Privatization of Government Schools on Quality and Access to Education: Perceptions of Stakeholders." <i>Global Educational Studies Review IX</i> , no. III (2024): 31-39. https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-III).04 .					



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Title

Impact of Privatization of Government Schools on Quality and Access to Education: Perceptions of Stakeholders

Abstract

The government has announced a policy for the privatization of government schools recently. This announcement has raised many concerns about the already compromised quality of education and access to education locally. The current study is an effort to explore the perceptions of teachers, administrators, and parents on the aforementioned phenomenon. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the respondents selected on the basis of convenience. Later, the themes were generated through transcription and thematic analysis. The responses indicate dissatisfaction of all stakeholders about privatization. The administrators are not clear about their responsibility, teachers are more concerned about their job structure while parents are more concerned about access to education. The study recommends a large-scale study for exploring the concerns and thus reviewing the policy.

Keywords: [Quality of Education](#), [Access to Education](#), [School Privatization](#)

Introduction

Pakistan has been facing challenges to quality education and access to education for many decades. Several efforts have been made to address both issues, however, the most prominent solution in the past was the privatization of schools. The phenomenon has resurfaced with the proposed policy of the government on the privatization of schools. A

detailed strategy has been given to privatize step by step, all primary and secondary schools. Though the process of implementation has been started, however, opinion of all stakeholders including administrators, teachers, and parents has not been taken in order to remove their concerns. The current study is an effort to explore the opinion of the above-mentioned stakeholders about the effect of the privatization

process on the quality of education as well as on access to education. The action of the government to privatize schools is enrooted in the belief that this will bring more accountability with better resource management thus improving the quality of education overall. This process will lead to the establishment of healthy competition leading toward academic excellence. The private institutions are more innovative in their approach to administration and, hence are able to implement creative ideas by providing required resources, which in turn improve the quality of education (Knight, 2013).

On the other hand, privatization will lead to a crisis of access to quality education for all individuals in society, thus making it difficult to achieve SDG4. Pakistan is already lagging behind in attaining the targets of SDGs and the privatization of schools may serve as one of the main barriers to this prospect. It has been notified through empirical evidence that privatization leads to a higher cost of education, making it less affordable for economically marginalized families (Belfield & Levin, 2002). This leads to increased dropout and out-of-school children ratio.

On the contrary, the job stability of teachers becomes at risk because the focus of private sector organizations is mainly on profit generation thus overshadowing the broader educational goals (Mehta, 2014). The administrators' responsibility and accountability are not clarified in the policy, where the private school administrators are usually the owners of the schools and have complete power to make decisions for the growth of the institute. The principal in public schools is bound by policies and directives issued by higher authorities, they merely abide by the laws and regulations passed in educational policy. All these concerns, open gates for research in the field, exploring perceptions, concerns, and satisfaction of all stakeholders on the policy of privatization, this is the main aim of the current study.

Literature Review

As mentioned earlier, the idea of privatization has become popular in the previous three decades. The initiative of public-private partnerships in the late 90s through policy shift and later permission to establish private schools has led to a huge market share of private sector educational institutions. Previously, the idea of low-cost private schools was also initiated as a counter policy for improvement of the quality of education against low-performing public schools (Andrabi, et al., 2010). Additionally, the empirical pieces of evidence are

also in favor of private schools, showing that at many points, private schools outperformed public schools in terms of students' outcomes, teachers' performance, and resource availability (Aslam, 2009; Böhlmark & Lindahl, 2012). Though the evidence of better academic standards, better resources, and better accountability are in favor of the private sector, this advantage does not correlate with the geographical location and socioeconomic status of students attending these schools (Manan, 2015). Empirical pieces of evidence present that though privatization improves the quality of education, it denies access to education for low-income strata of society Tooley, & Dixon, 2005; Fitch, & Hulgin, 2018). This evidence raises serious concerns about access to education and equity, generating an imbalance in a society where the rich can get an education while the poor remain in under-resourced public schools (Kelly, 2009). Offering financial support (as also mentioned in the current policy) is sometimes considered as an alternative to improve access, however, the data presents that such programs have limited success and often fail to reach most marginalized individuals Zengilowski et al., 2023).

Besides the effects of privatization of quality and access to education, it also influences job stability and working conditions of teachers. The opportunity for professional development in terms of training is inadequate in the private sector (Shamshad, & Arshad, 2021). The exploitative labor practices are also major concerns for private sector educational institutions (Metzger, 2003)

The public schools promote social cohesion (Hamid, & Rahman, 2019) by practicing policies, rules, and regulations approved by the officials. The administrators play a key role in this prospect, but by privatization, they turn into policymakers at many points. Individuality over togetherness prevails leading to changed dynamics of education and society (Awan, & Zia, 2015).

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical framework for this study on the privatization of government schools in Pakistan is rooted in several key theories and perspectives from the fields of education policy, economics, and sociology. These theories provide a foundation for understanding the dynamics, potential benefits, and drawbacks of privatization in the context of educational quality and accessibility. The study can be enrooted in neoliberalism and market-based reforms, public goods theory, equity and access, and human capital theory.

The human capital theory is relevant for its feature to improve the quality of education leading to improved quality of skilled workforce (Becker, 1993; Aslam, 2009). The theory of regulation and accountability underscores the importance of a robust regulatory framework to ensure that privatization does not compromise educational standards and equity (Siddiqui & Gorard, 2017). However, keeping in view the direct relevance of theories based on their notions, access and equity theory is in direct relation to the variables of the study, as the study is trying to explore the effect of privatization on access to education. The neoliberalism and market-based reforms theory is relevant in the context that market-based reforms can improve the quality of education, and drive competition and innovation, the current study is exploring the effect of privatization on the quality of education. Following is a detailed description of both theories, clarifying the relevance based on their significant features.

Neoliberalism and Market-Based Reforms

Neoliberal theory advocates for reduced state involvement and increased participation of the private sector in various domains, including education. This perspective argues that

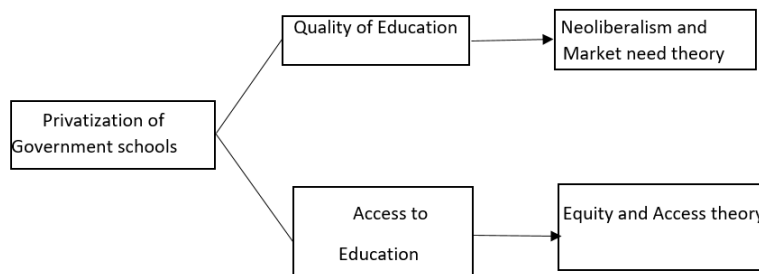
market-based reforms, such as the privatization of schools, can drive competition, innovation, and efficiency, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes (Ball, 2007; Verger et al., 2012). Proponents of neoliberalism believe that private entities can manage educational institutions more effectively than the public sector by introducing better resources, stricter accountability measures, and innovative practices that respond to the changing needs of students (Knight, 2008).

Equity and Access

Theories of social justice and equity are also central to this study. These theories focus on the fair distribution of educational resources and opportunities, ensuring that all students, particularly those from marginalized and low-income backgrounds, have access to quality education (Tikly, & Barrett, 2011). The privatization of education raises critical questions about equity, as private schools often charge high tuition fees, making them inaccessible to poorer families. This creates a dual system where wealthier families can afford better education, while less affluent families are left with under-resourced public schools (Duarte, 2022).

Figure 1.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study



Statement of the Problem

Access to education is the primary right of every individual, and quality education is the prime focus of educational policies. Keeping in view the administrative and economic constraints, the officials have announced the policy for the privatization of schools, aiming not only to improve the quality of education but also to increase access to education (as private schools are geographically widely spread. Though

the idea is to reduce the financial burden on the government, improve the quality of education in terms of skills, and to reduction of burden on the government in terms of infrastructure, however, the coin has another side too. The access might not be achieved due to the fee structure of institutes, the quality will be influenced based on monitoring frameworks and the employees will be dissatisfied due to the changing dynamics of the education system. There is a need to explore perceived opinions about the positive or negative

impact of the policy of privatization on quality and access to education from stakeholders of the education system, particularly teachers and parents as they will be directly influenced.

Objectives of the Study

Based on the aim of the study, the following are the objectives of the study;

1. To explore the perceptions of stakeholders (including teachers, administrators, and parents) about the role of privatization on the quality of education provided in government schools.
2. To explore the perceptions of stakeholders (including teachers, administrators, and parents) about the extent to which privatization may affect access to education for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Research Questions

The research objectives will be addressed through the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers, administrators, and parents about the effect of the privatization of schools on the quality of education in terms of job description, regulatory frameworks, and financial management?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers, administrators, and parents about the effect of privatization of schools on access to education in terms of availability and financial resources?

Methodology

The policy for privatization has been announced recently, and the implementation process is in process. It is important to explore the apprehensions and opinions of stakeholders about this policy. In order to achieve this target, the study will use a qualitative approach. The data will be collected through open-ended interviews from all stakeholders including teachers, administrators, and parents.

Sample and Sampling Process

The sample for this study encompasses a diverse group of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and administrators. The data was collected through convenient sampling due to the nature of the sample (as both parents and administrators were difficult to approach). In total thirty interviews were conducted categorizing respondents in each category of teachers (12), administrators (6), and parents (12). The respondents were selected only from public schools, as they can better explain their concerns about the phenomenon because they are directly influenced by it. The sample was limited to only one metropolitan city, due to multiple reasons; including accessibility and resource constraints. In addition to this, the number of proposed schools for privatization is located mostly in big cities like the one included in the study. This city is already divided into eight towns, these eight towns are further divided into subcategories of upper, middle, and lower socioeconomic classes. The researcher approached two schools (1=male; 1=female) in each category, thus six schools were included in the study based on convenience in terms of permission to collect data from the administrator (principal/headmaster), teachers, and parents. From each school again the respondents were selected on the basis of convenience. The spread of the sample is as follows;

Table 1

Spread of sample

Towns based on SES	School (Gender vice)	Teachers	Principals	Parents
Town 1	Male	2	1	2
	Female	2	1	2
Town 2	Male	2	1	2
	Female	2	1	2
Town 3	Male	2	1	2
	Female	2	1	2

Instrument of the Study

The open-ended interview schedule was used to collect data from the respondents. Though the stem questions were the same, however, there was micro variation based on the strata of the sample. For example, the probing questions from teachers, administrators, and parents were different based on their concerns.

Results

The data was collected through open-ended interviews. The

consent was taken before recording. The data was then transcribed and themes were generated. The following table presents the results of the analysis as per the research questions;

Research question 1. What are the perceptions of teachers, administrators, and parents about the effect of the privatization of schools on the quality of education in terms of the job description, regulatory frameworks, and financial management?

Table 2

Theme wise percentages of perceptions of teachers, administrators, and parents about the effect of privatization on the quality of education

Theme		Teachers	Principals/ administrators	Parents
Quality of education	Improve	40%	30%	60%
	Decline	60 %	70%	40%
Employment structure.	Improve	10%	30%	50%
	Decline	90%	70%	50%
Financial stability	Improve	20%	20%	40%
	Decline	80%	80%	60%
Responsibilities and Duties	Improve	40%	505%	60%
	Decline	60%	50	40%

Table 3

Sample statements of the respondents about perceptions of teachers, administrators, and parents about the effect of privatization on the quality of education

Theme	Respondents	Sample statements
Quality of education	Teachers	Quality of education will be reduced as the teachers working in public schools are more competent than the teachers working in private schools
	Principals/ administrators	The hierarchies in public schools are defined so the structure is better in private schools
	Parents	The private schools try to sustain their market value and thus, the quality of education will be improved by privatization as it will generate healthy competition
Employment structure.	Teachers	The employment conditions will be different and most likely, they will be worsened.
	Principals/ administrators	The hiring and firing procedures are not clear. We do not know what will be structure of employment, either we will follow public regulations or we follow the rules given by private administrative authority
	Parents	The job structure is not directly relevant, however, in my opinion, it might improve the quality of education as teachers will be afraid of losing their jobs.

Theme	Respondents	Sample statements
Financial stability	Teachers	The jobs, in public schools are more stable thus bringing more financial stability
	Principals/ administrators	The privatization will bring financial instability as the pay structure is not defined, and we are not clear what the will be pay scale and how it will be disseminated
	Parents	Financial stability will be the most affected matter in terms of teachers' employment conditions.
Responsibilities and Duties	Teachers	We will be bound to do more tasks than the required ones. We will overburdened by the duties, as we have seen that the teachers are crushed under the name of duties at private schools
	Principals/ administrators	The threat of job instability will make teachers more responsible about their jobs.
	Parents	The teachers will take more responsibility for their results and students' learning as the scores will be the only criteria to retain their job
Policy frameworks and governance	Teachers	As the policy for the privatization process is not clear, nor we are clear about the future of sustaining our jobs, in my opinion, the policy should be developed at the first stage and can be implemented later
	Principals	We do not have any idea how we will deal with privatized schools, what regulations will be announced, the dynamics of the public and private sectors are different, and ambiguity will decrease the quality of education rather than improve it
	Parents	It is okay, if the government plans to privatize schools, however governing policies should be very clear because as we have seen private schools are not monitored appropriately and they charge fees as much as they want, there is no limit, and the curriculum is also questionable and quality of teaching and infrastructure is not very good except at few places. It can be assumed that privatization will not improve the quality of education.

Research question 2: What are the perceptions of teachers, administrators, and parents about the effect of privatization of schools on access to education in terms of availability and financial resources?

Table 4

Theme vice percentages of teachers, administrators, and parents about the effect of privatization of schools on access to education in terms of availability and financial resources.

Theme		Teachers	Principals/ administrators	Parents
Access to education in terms of location	Improve	40%	20%	40%
	Decline	60 %	80%	60%
Access to education in terms of finances	Improve	10%	30%	20%
	Decline	90%	70%	80%

Table 5

sample responses of teachers, administrators, and parents about the effect of the privatization of schools on access to education in terms of availability and financial resources.

Theme	Respondents	Sample statements
Access to education in terms of location	Teachers	As the private schools are not located in all locations, so access will be easier at private schools than in public schools
	Principals/ administrators	The private schools do not improve access due to multiple other factors
	Parents	The private schools are now in every street so it will be easy for us to send our children there.
Access to education in terms of financial resources	Teachers	Private schools charge more fees than public schools, so privatization may affect them in the long run.
	Principals/ administrators	It is difficult to manage the finances of a school as the fee is the only source of income, in my opinion, the fees of private schools will be a major factor in reducing school enrollment
	Parents	Private schools charge fees and it will not be possible for every parent to afford that fee and send all children to school.

Discussion

The results and relevant responses show that all the stakeholders including parents, teachers, and administrators themselves have strong apprehension about the quality of education and access to education after privatization of schools. Though the literature is divided about the effect of privatization on the quality of education, the results of the current study are also divided. When teachers consider that the quality of education will decline, the parents think that the quality of education will improve. The results are in consent with the literature where the study from Nepal states that privatization will improve the quality of education. There is a mixed overview in the literature about the privatization of schools, though Pakistan has many positive results of this phenomenon, it has also contributed to increased inequalities and additional pressure on the public sector of education (Naveed, 2024).

Financial stability and employment structure are two major dimensions of concerns presented during data collection. The results are in confirmation of the most recent studies of Rafiq, Afzal & Kamran, 2022, presenting that teachers are concerned about job security, salaries, and pensions. The responsibilities and duties of teachers working in the private sector are different than the ones in the public sector, these differences are major concerns for the current respondents and previous researchers. For example, Hakrabarti (2015) has provided empirical pieces of evidence that teachers will be more uncertain about their employment

structure and job stability which in turn influences on quality of education. According to a report by UNESCO, 2015, pp. 3-17), girls' education dropped to 30% percent in sub-Saharan Africa after privatization. The report of CEDAW 2014 also confirmed that the access to education for girls after the privatization of schools was dropped in developing countries. So it can be concluded that the results of the current study are supported by the literature in terms of the privatization effect on access to education, but girls are most affected by this process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive findings of this study and the insights gleaned from existing literature, several key recommendations emerge to guide policymakers, educators, and stakeholders involved in educational reforms in Pakistan.

Firstly, it is imperative to adopt a balanced approach that prioritizes investments in public education alongside any efforts to promote privatization. This entails robust funding for infrastructure development, equitable resource allocation, and enhanced teacher training programs within public schools.

Secondly, there is a critical need for stringent regulatory frameworks governing private educational institutions. These frameworks should focus on ensuring adherence to educational standards, promoting transparency in fee structures, and safeguarding against practices that exacerbate educational inequalities.

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