



# Policy Brief



## **Public-Private Partnerships in Education: Evaluating the Education Management Organizations Program in Sindh, Pakistan**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) in education are a global phenomenon, and it is being framed as a best practice to achieve educational goals of access, quality, and equity. PPPs emerged in Sindh and Pakistan when the UN formulated the goals of Education for All (EFA) and later revised Sustainable Development Goals 4 to *Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education by 2030* (UNDP, 2015). In Sindh, World Bank, United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), United Nations Agency for International Development (USAID), and Asian Development Bank (ADB) have supported PPP models of foundation schools and Education Management Organizations (EMOs)s. In 2015, the Government of Sindh launched the EMOs program with the World Bank, ADB, and USAID's support to ensure educational accessibility and equity (LaRocque & Sipahimalani-Rao, 2019).

PPP supporters (see LaRocque & Sipahimalani-Rao, 2019; Patrinos et al., 2015) consider it best to reduce government bureaucratic inefficiencies and increase school-based management and accountability to achieve the educational goals. However, skeptics of the market model, including PPPs (see Khamsi & Draxler, 2018; Verger, 2012), argued that these policies are mainly framed at the global north and promoted through International Organizations (IOs) and development partners, which create power asymmetries between donors and recipient governments. Further, applying the market values such as choice and competition in education through PPPs increases inequality and narrows the purpose of education through standardized testing.

### **METHODOLOGY**

We have chosen the realist evaluation approach (Pawson and Tilley 1997) as a conceptual framework. We aimed to answer the research questions of what extent, how, in what way, and for whom PPP mode of education through EMOs improve access to education and ensure quality and equity education in Pakistan. We have developed the theory of change based on the concept of *New*



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*Public Management in Education*, which enabled us to see the causal relationship between given input and expected outcome through the underlying mechanism. Our data collection was based on a mixed-methods strategy which includes relevant policy document analysis, use of secondary data collected from SEMIS<sup>1</sup>, PSLM<sup>2</sup>, schools monitoring reports, and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, including key informants from donors, the SELD PPP node, School operators, teachers, and parents.

## KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### PPP Governance Mechanism in Sindh: Advantages and Contextual Challenges

This study found that the understanding and objective of PPPs-EMOs are perceived differently at different stakeholders' levels. At the SELD level, it is considered a more technical arrangement between the public and private sectors, where the government can get services from the private sector and encourage donors and philanthropists' organizations to support the government. Meanwhile, donors such as World Bank and ADB frame it as a broader context, unlike PPPs in infrastructure. It is based on *public choice* and *new public management concepts*, where the state's role is limited to financing. The PPP-EMOs understanding at the district and school level is not fully translated. Stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and school operators did not fully understand the concept of PPPs. Spillane (2006) stated that policy at the top level, designed and not adequately translated through administrative support and training, often gets distorted and misunderstood. Due to donor-driven policies and involvement of the private sector, including NGOs, the EMOs are not fully owned by local administrators and teachers, which poses challenges to school operators to get policies implemented with existing government teachers and staff.

The PPP-EMOs model has a somewhat clearer policy and competitive bidding process than foundation schools. EMOs selection is based on technical and financial proposals evaluation, which has been carefully designed. Key Performance Indicators (KPI) of EMOs enable the environment of accountability, and independent educational experts and auditors evaluate the KPI and ensure financial transparency. EMOs have legal certainty, institutional arrangement, fairness, and transparency.

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<sup>1</sup> PSLM = Pakistan Social Living standard measurement survey

<sup>2</sup> SEMIS = Sindh School Education Management Information System



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There are also some other challenging aspects of this model. Though it incentivizes the private sector, it did not bring any private sector investment in education. It has also been reported that in the PPP policy board of EMOs, there are many non-educator consultants working for education and intense bureaucracy at the government level, which contradicts the objectives of innovation. The school contracts also lack incentive mechanisms for bringing innovation. Selecting schools based on competitive bidding allows many low-performing EMOs as the lowest bidder to enter the system, later compromising quality and equity. Our also study found that PPP schools did not bring any innovation to make them superior to government schools in solving complex education issues. Further competition among schools also creates an environment of manipulation and promotes the narrow vision of education in the form of standardized tests. The government needs to put a constraint on competition and promote collaboration among schools through cluster-based schooling.

The poor governance of public schools in Sindh gives comparative advantages to PPP schools. The reasons are found not simple but embedded in the social and political structure of the country. In the government sector, many primary schools were established without rationalizing but based on political motivations to appease constituents. In addition, over-centralization, discretionary funding, a hectic bureaucratic process in procurement, and a poor and lengthy process to hire teachers contribute to inefficiency. PPPs have a relative advantage as partners' performance has been aligned with educational quality and access, and there is a specific monitoring system that ensures accountability. In PPPs, teachers who won't show up will be fired easily. We found the administrative process in EMO schools is quick and easy to hire teachers, implement teachers' professional development, and get together with the community. However, the notion of efficiency based on the market approach adds low-qualified and untrained teachers to the system. Having low paid salaries and loose regulations of EMOs creates a myriad of issues in retaining the best teachers.

## **Access and Equity in Education**

Currently, 91% of schools in Sindh are primary, which is being reported as a major cause of drop-out; the PPP-EMO focuses more on post-primary education. It was hoped that current PPPs through EMOs could help build and increase access and ensure proper schooling requirements. It has been reported that PPP schools are more attractive to girls' enrollment. Parents feel more secure to send

their girls there as more female teachers are recruited based on convenience and need, which also wins parents' trust. As the EMO model of PPP shows some achievement in increasing access, the more considerable impact is still far behind.

The impact of education reform cannot be viewed in fragmentation. As SELD (2017) claimed, PPP-EMOs will largely address bringing out-of-school children to increase more post-primary enrollment in selected districts. Based on our data analysis from SEMIS data of Sindh and PSLM surveys of these selected districts, the EMO model so far could not address the larger goal of educational access issue.

Tables 1 and 2 below highlight the picture of EMOs districts before and after EMOs interventions.

*Table 1: Schools Monitoring Report of Selected Districts before EMOs Intervention 2014-15*

| Districts         | Students' enrollment |              | Total enrollment gender-wise |        |        | Primary completion rate |       |       | STR <sup>3</sup> | OSC <sup>4</sup> |
|-------------------|----------------------|--------------|------------------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------|-------|-------|------------------|------------------|
|                   | Primary+pre-primary  | Post-primary | Boys                         | Girls  | Total  | Boys                    | Girls | Total |                  |                  |
| Khairpur          | 222377               | 88530        | 192119                       | 118784 | 310903 | 61                      | 47    | 54    | 34               | 55               |
| Sukkur            | 110690               | 43348        | 95092                        | 58946  | 154038 | 53                      | 38    | 46    | 30               | 47               |
| Larkana           | 154196               | 101730       | 128924                       | 90002  | 218926 | 73                      | 60    | 67    | 31               | 50               |
| Kamber-Shahdadkot | 129848               | 42121        | 105785                       | 66184  | 171969 | 60                      | 49    | 55    | 31               | 71               |
| Dadu              | 189381               | 48299        | 140520                       | 97160  | 237680 | 68                      | 61    | 65    | 35               | 42               |

*Table 2: Schools Monitoring Report of Selected Districts after EMOs Intervention 2019-20*

| Districts         | Students' enrollment |              | Total enrollment gender-wise |        |        | Primary completion rate |       |       | STR | OSC |
|-------------------|----------------------|--------------|------------------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|                   | Primary+pre-primary  | Post-primary | Boys                         | Girls  | Total  | Boys                    | Girls | Total |     |     |
| Khairpur          | 258258               | 92353        | 217215                       | 133396 | 350616 | 49                      | 25    | 38    | 39  | 48  |
| Sukkur            | 135585               | 50654        | 112273                       | 73966  | 186239 | 99                      | 68    | 85    | 41  | 48  |
| Larkana           | 192352               | 73623        | 152861                       | 113114 | 265975 | 54                      | 42    | 48    | 38  | 56  |
| Kamber-Shahdadkot | 148549               | 50402        | 119194                       | 79757  | 198951 | 51                      | 35    | 44    | 39  | 46  |

<sup>3</sup> STR refers to the student-teacher ratio, calculated based on the number of students per teacher

<sup>4</sup> OSC refers to the rate of out of school children at the age of (4-16), as per the given data PSLM survey (2014-15) and (2019-20)



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|      |        |       |        |       |            |    |    |    |    |    |
|------|--------|-------|--------|-------|------------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Dadu | 173952 | 58201 | 141682 | 90471 | 23215<br>3 | 69 | 54 | 62 | 38 | 40 |
|------|--------|-------|--------|-------|------------|----|----|----|----|----|

Sources: Authors compilation based on SEMIS Sindh and PSLM survey 2014-15 to 2019-20 data

Further, we found that PPP-EMOs have limitations to increasing access because this model is quite costly, and their number of schools is relatively low. In EMOs, a school can accommodate a certain number of students. Further, parents also pull-out kids from other schools and admit them to EMOs. The PPP model lacks a special mechanism or design to increase kids from disadvantaged and hard areas. Due to the nature of the PPP model—being more market-centric, it incentivizes operators to select and promote more able-bodied and so-called talented students who can perform better in tests.

## Quality Education

Though PPP schools offer some level of better-quality perception due to accountability, it has also created a huge difference in quality based on different management of schools. Some PPP schools perform extraordinarily well, and some perform relatively poorly. This difference came out because some organizations have comparative advantages in operating schools. Lubienski (2003) cautioned that differentiation in schooling and competition would bring more segregation and inequality.

A significant indicator to gauge quality is the annual assessment based on large-scale examinations and standardized tests. This is a more outcome-based approach to ensure and assess quality education. Educational standards and assessments are also complex and are not properly disseminated in the minds of the stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents, and administrators). In some EMO schools, kids have different levels based on their past educational history and huge disruption in schooling. It is challenging to ensure better quality education and teaching-learning without addressing their learning deficiencies through remedial education and continuous support from government and EMOs.

Comparatively to government schools, PPP schools have better governance and management, which reduce students' and teachers' absences. On the other hand, PPP schools' teachers are low qualified and low-paid and cannot teach advanced courses adequately. The Student Achievement Test (SAT) Sindh result also shows no significant differences between EMOs and government schools. Figures (1 and 2) show no significant differences in achievement of EMOs and government schools of the same region respectively.

Figure 1: SAT Results of EMO Schools in Selected Districts

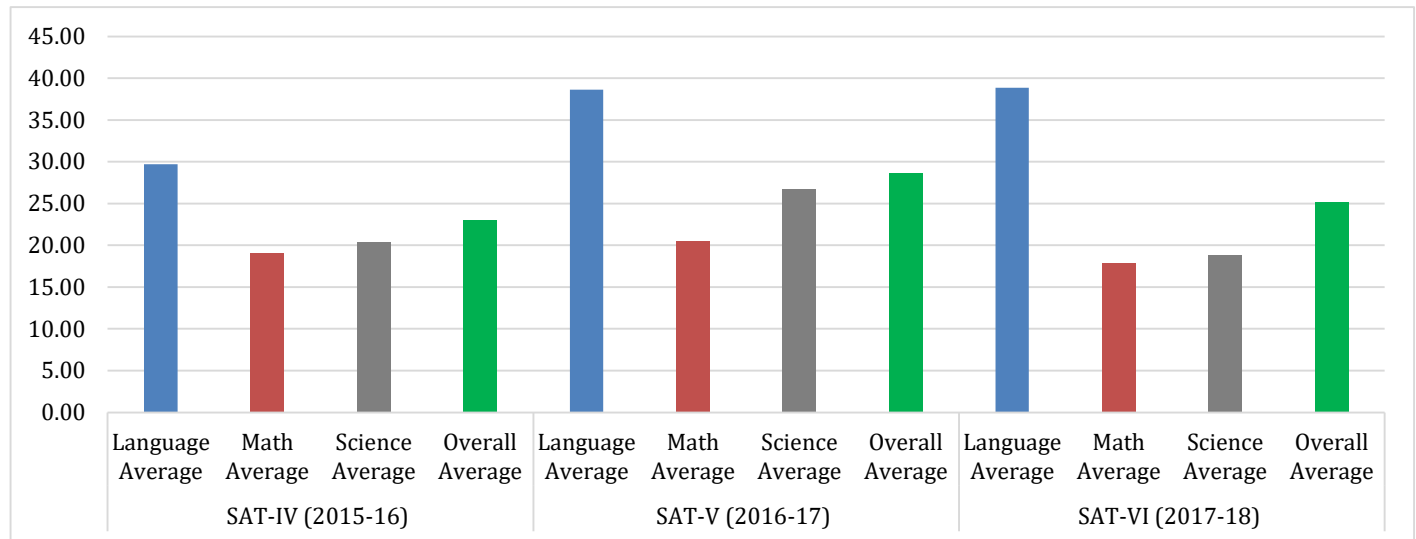
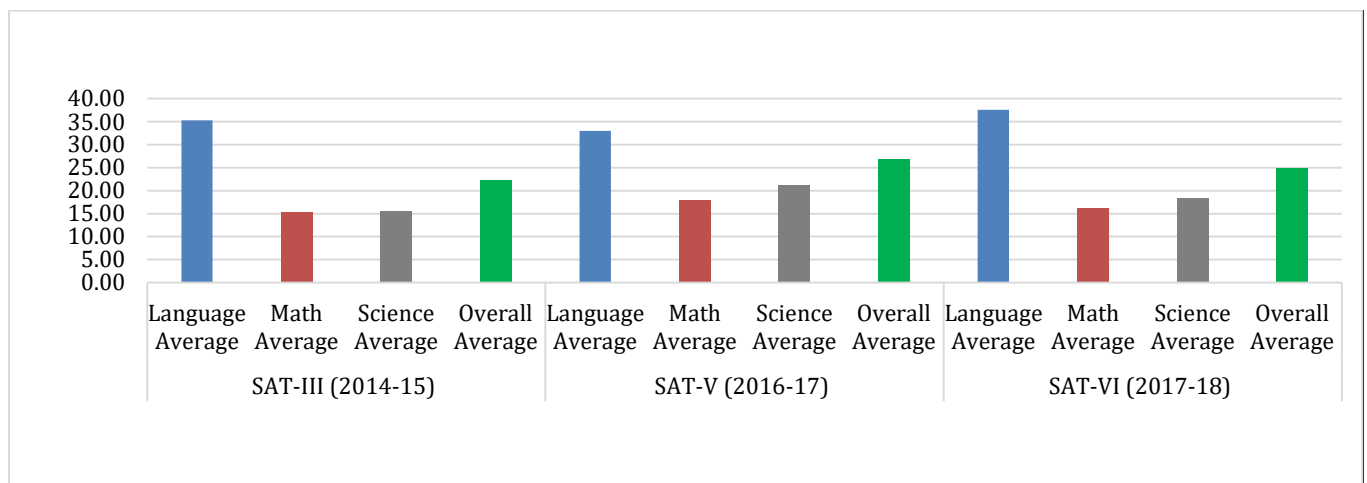


Figure 2: SAT result of Non-EMO Schools in Selected Districts<sup>5</sup>



Source: Authors compilation based on the analysis of SAT Sindh results

## Sustainability of PPP-EMOs in Sindh

<sup>5</sup> Selection criteria of non-EMO schools in SAT analysis were based on nearby non-EMO (government) schools in the same union council or tehsil



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EMO schools are under the contract of 10 years to private organizations. Many EMO operators and other stakeholders considered it an interventionist approach. They showed concern that schools will struggle to survive once EMOs are pulled out, as government bureaucracy and administration processes are outdated and corrupt. The sustainability of PPPs can be retained if these schools' financing is guaranteed. There should be a financial endowment with proper shape. Also, there should be a board of governance based on local experts and schools' staff, and they should be continually trained. Once EMOs pull out, the school itself can run and pay teachers and staff from the endowment along with continuous government and community support.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

We found neither PPPs as entirely efficient and effective nor failed, and they can be evaluated based on their merit. It's not a panacea, also not allowing the government's withdrawal from responsibilities. Following are some policy recommendations for education reforms, including PPPs.

### **Different PPPs should be under one Umbrella/System.**

In Sindh, there are various models of PPPs operating and increasing. However, two major forms of PPPs (foundation schools and EMOs) exist in the K-12 education system. It is recommended that all PPPs be under one system to increase synergy and reduce inequitable funding and regulations of schools. This approach also reduces segregation and stratification of schools, students, and teachers. The best possible way to get collaboration among schools is through a cluster-owned system, where nearby schools should be managed by a hub school irrespective of their provision (either public or private).

### **Right Design of PPP Policies**

The ultimate effect of PPP depends on policy design and regulations, which ensure access, quality, and equity. The opening of schools should be based on socio-economic conditions, where more incentives and subsidies are to be allocated to the area where socio-economic conditions have deteriorated. Targeted vouchers or subsidies are recommended, incentivizing teachers' and girls' participation in disadvantaged areas.



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## Education Accountability and Regulations

Education accountability should be more input-based rather than outcome-oriented based on standardized assessment. Also, there should be a minimum criteria policy for teachers' recruitments and staff, their qualifications, and the payment process. There should be more democratic accountability and governance of schools where the role of parents should be alleviated.

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