

Public-Private Partnerships in Education: Evaluating the Education Management Organisations Programme in Sindh, Pakistan

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The focus of this study was to investigate public-private partnerships (PPPs) in education, in this instance by evaluating the Educational Management Organisations (EMOs) Program in Sindh, Pakistan. The study was guided by the research questions that were intended to evaluate to what extent, how, in what way, and for whom the PPP mode of education through EMOs improves access to education, ensures quality and equity in education, and sustainability in the context of Sindh, Pakistan. We chose the *realist evaluation* as a methodological approach, applied New Public Management as a theoretical framework to answer the research questions, and adopted a mixed methods research design. The findings indicate that PPPs through EMOs have some advantages in terms of better governance of schools through autonomy and decentralisation. The schools' accountability, monitoring, and evaluation have somehow improved. However, the broader impact of EMO reform still does not reflect in increasing access, overall quality, and ensuring equity.

Keywords: PPPs in Education, Education Reform, EMOs, Realist Evaluation, Sindh, Pakistan

1. INTRODUCTION

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) in education are a global phenomenon and are framed as a best practice to achieve educational goals. It can be broadly defined as a legal contract where the private sector provides educational services to the government for a certain period (Patrinos, et al. 2009; Verger, et al. 2020). In this setup, the private sector typically assumes the role of service delivery and risk-sharing. Meanwhile, the role of the government is typically to finance and ensure the values of compassion and social cohesion (Patrinos, et al. 2009). In Pakistan's education system, there are also several kinds of PPP modes in schooling, which include foundation schools (in Sindh and Punjab), voucher schools (in Punjab), adopting a school model, and the Education Management Organisation (EMO) schools.

The PPPs in education are relatively less explored and evaluated in public policy research because of their different manifestations in different parts of the world. It is different from PPPs in other sectors such as roads, buildings, and infrastructure services.

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Education is treated as a common public good and can be delivered without charging any fees. Most of the existing research and discussion about PPP has focused on PPP policies and outcomes in the context of its advantages. The discussion is framed as the PPP review without any substantial comparative analysis. The above approaches do not yield specific and useful information regarding the implementation or efficacy of PPPs in developing countries such as Pakistan (Gideon & Unterhalter, 2021; Verger, 2012). Also, very little attention has been given to “what works,” “how,” and “in which context” with respect to PPPs. The policy design for PPPs matters because of its differential impact on education. The evidence-informed policy decision can unpack the nuanced outcomes of PPP in a particular context (Verger, et al., 2020).

This study evaluated the ongoing reform initiatives such as PPPs in education through EMOs’ implications from the contextual perspective of the Sindh province. As such, this study tried to unpack PPP and examine issues related to educational accessibility, quality, and equity. The *realist evaluation* of (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) theoretical framework applied in this study helped to evaluate these PPP reforms based on contextually designed objectives. Conventionally, policy reforms have been evaluated through a single method, which only touches on some aspects of reforms. According to Yin and Davis (2007), the robust evaluation of comprehensive reforms typically requires both quantitative and qualitative evidence. The study addressed the following research questions, framed by, and based on, the idea of examining whether quasi-government policies in education (through PPPs) are effective (or ineffective) in meeting the goals of equitable access to quality education and ensuring efficiency in education.

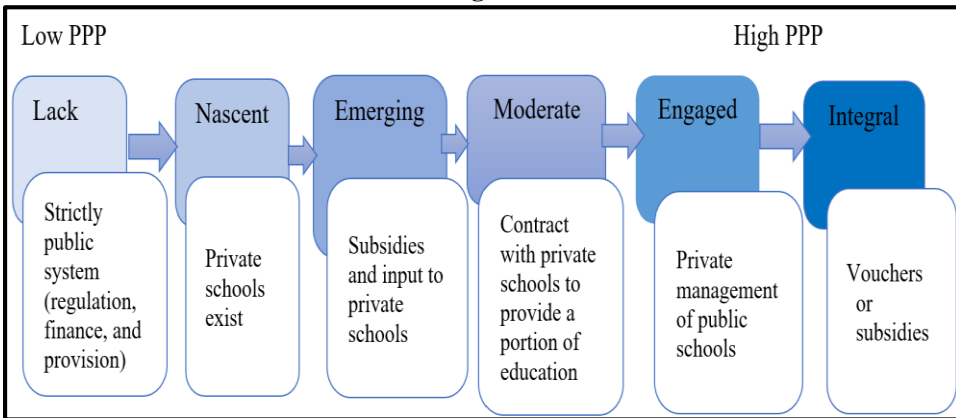
- (1) To what extent, how, and for whom does the PPP mode of education through EMOs improve accessibility to education in Sindh?
- (2) How effectively and efficiently do PPPs in education through EMOs in Sindh meet the objective of quality education?
- (3) To what extent and in what ways do PPPs in education address the issue of equity (as related to gender, income, context (rural, urban), and academic inequality) in education?
- (4) To what extent and in what ways are PPPs through EMOs sustainable in Sindh?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several forms of PPPs in education. Patrinos, et al. (2009) delineated different types and degrees of PPPs in education, as shown in Figure 1. It can be noted that government regulation and involvement decrease as the chart moves from left to right.

In Figure 1, the left side shows low PPP with major regulatory powers at the government level. However, at the far right of the continuum, it shows a high degree of PPP where a school is under the complete private regulatory control form of a PPP with minimum government regulations, and the government’s role is limited to providing financing through vouchers or subsidies. Based on the PPPs continuum concept (in Figure 1), different countries or regions have adopted various PPP models and contracts as per their government structure and financing capacity. Sindh has a largely *emerging* and *engaged* model of PPPs in the form of subsidising private schools through the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) and private management of public schools (through EMOs), respectively.

Fig. 1.



Source: Adapted from World Bank (Patrinos, et al. 2009, p. 16).

2.1. The Emergence of PPPs in Education

PPPs have gained popularity in various sectors in the last few decades and are commonly applied in education. PPPs in education gained prominence in the 1990s when the United Nations (UN) developed the *universal primary education* and *education for all* (EFA) goals, which instruct all governments to ensure 100 percent enrolment at the primary level by 2030 (UNDP, 2015). Various UN-supported agencies offered funds to governments and non-governmental organisations in the setup of PPPs to support their efforts to achieve these and other educational goals. PPP initiatives also generally encouraged the private sector, non-profit, and philanthropic organisations to supplement government agendas on education for all (UNICEF, et al. 2011). The PPP mode is being claimed as a key mechanism to address inefficiencies in public services and reduce inequalities (Gideon & Unterhalter, 2017). Accordingly, the PPPs in education are rapidly proliferating, not only in industrialised countries but also in non-industrialised countries (Verger, 2012).

Due to the globalisation of national economies, the role of international organisations (IOs) increased in the agenda-setting of education reform and policy convergence. Rising international loans, funding, and philanthropy drastically changed states' educational development and policymaking roles. IOs such as the World Bank and Organisations for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are key drivers of policy diffusion of private sector participation in education (Ball & Youdell, 2007). UN subsidiary organisations such as UNESCO and UNICEF also promote private sector participation in developing countries to achieve SDGs (Gideon & Unterhalter, 2021; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The educational reform projects based on PPPs in Pakistan currently receive substantial government grants and attract external financing from the World Bank and other IOs (Afridi, 2018). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank have jointly developed PPP models in Pakistan and offered loans for pursuing the EFA goals (Barrera-Osorio & Raju, 2011; UNICEF, et al. 2011). Beyond the World Bank and the ADB (which finance the government to promote the private sector), bilateral partner agencies such as United States Agency

for International Aid (USAID) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) also use funding and research activities through private sector participation. Pakistan is a large recipient of international donor funding, including the World Bank, the ADB, and USAID. This funding amounts to almost 20 percent of the total education budget (Burki, et al. 2005). In such a situation, the role of the private sector and non-state actors become inevitable. There is also a concern that in Pakistan most PPP programmes remain ad-hoc and have a little systematic impact on access, quality, and equity. Further, the programmes also show little financial sustainability as most of the PPPs are financed by donors and are time-bound, and there is inconsistent financing from the government side (Bano, 2008).

2.2. PPP Programs in Education in Sindh

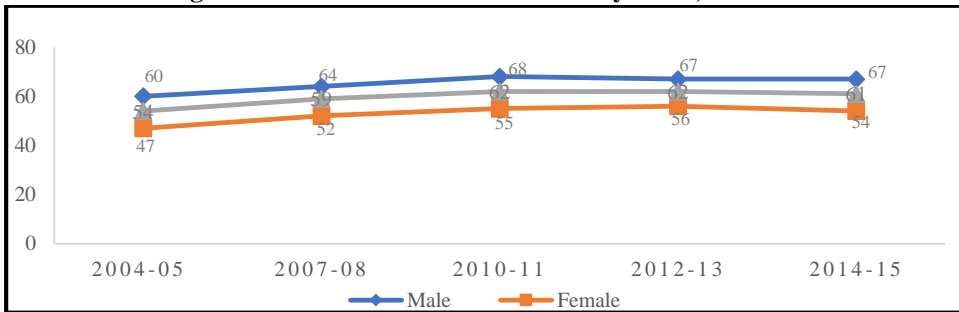
The Government of Pakistan (GoP) has also adopted the use of private education through PPPs by developing a policy action for resource mobilisation to reduce educational inequality and structural divide through collaboration as mentioned in the National Educational Policy, 2009:

For promoting Public-Private Partnership in the education sector, particularly in the case of disadvantaged children, a percentage of the education budget as a grant in aid (to be decided by each province) shall be allocated to philanthropic, non-profit educational institutions. (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2009, p.20)

The Government of Pakistan currently claims that PPPs in education offers a best-practice means of meeting the UN goal of education for all and SDGs (MoE, 2017). Accordingly, they are pouring resources and efforts into such models, which will likely carry major short- and long-term implications for students and the citizens of Pakistan.

Sindh is the second largest province in Pakistan, constituting 24 percent of Pakistan's total population. However, Sindh's literacy rate is only 56 percent, with urban-rural and male-female disparities. According to the 2017 census (GoP, 2017), about 50 percent of Sindh's population lives in rural areas, and 50 percent live in small urban areas. The poverty rate is 40.1 percent, and the majority of poverty is concentrated in rural Sindh. Moreover, an estimated six million children are out of school (SELD, 2019). This low enrolment is a serious challenge to the education sector of Pakistan. In addition, half of the schools in rural Sindh lack basic facilities such as toilets, clean water, electricity, and building infrastructure (Malik, et al. 2015).

After the 18th Amendment of the Constitution, the policymaking authority of K-12 education has been entirely delegated to provinces. It has been directed that it is the responsibility of the provinces to make comprehensive education plans. Due to the lack of governing experience in Sindh, the challenge was intense to decrease the number of children not attending school (SELD, 2014). The quality of education is very abysmal in the government schools of Sindh. According to the *Annual Status of Education Report 2013* (ASER-Pakistan, 2014) report, 51 percent of grade five students lack grade one competencies in language, and 57 percent of grade five students cannot perform two-digit division in mathematics. The net-enrollment rate is also comparatively low in Sindh. Figure 2 shows the net enrollment rate at the primary school level from 2004 to 2015.

Fig. 2. Net Enrollment Ratio at Primary Level, in Sindh

Source: Government of Sindh, SELD, (2017).

To meet these challenges, the Sindh government launched a comprehensive medium-term reform in 2006-7 called the Sindh Education Reform Program (SERP), the purpose of which was to improve access to equitable education, improve the quality of education, and provide better education governance. In 2013, the Sindh Government also passed the Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in compliance with Article 25-A of Pakistan's constitution. This legislation also exerted pressure to bring innovative solutions to the poor education system to maximise enrollment (SELD, 2017). Furthermore, the policy is meant to institutionalise accountability to improve service delivery in education, which should be aligned with National Educational Policy 2009 (SELD, 2014).

The PPPs received support from the World Bank and the ADB (LaRocque & Sipahimalani-Rao, 2019). The World Bank supported the efforts by providing financial assistance and technical support during the Sindh Education Reform Program (SELD, 2014). The role of the non-state and private sectors is deemed significant in the education of Pakistan. According to SELD (2014), the private sector provides 67 percent of education in Karachi and 53 percent in Hyderabad (both are part of urban Sindh). However, in the rural part of the province, private education only accounts for 9-10 percent. To reduce this disparity, the government sought to adopt PPPs in education (assumed as an innovative education model). The PPPs' focus on rural Sindh was to reduce the inequality of the rural-urban divide and out-of-school children (Barrera-Osorio & Raju, 2011). The argument of reducing the urban-rural gap in quality education, offering accessibility opportunities to out-of-school children, and reducing the inefficiency of the government sector (LaRocque & Sipahimalani-Rao, 2019) paved the way for the two major forms of PPP models, i.e., Foundation Assisted Schools (FAS) through SEF, and private management of government schools through Education Management Organisations (EMOs) are discussed below.

Sindh Assembly passed the bill of the Sindh Education Foundation in 1992. Later, the governor of Sindh made it the SEF act. As a quasi-government autonomous organisation, SEF's mandate was to work in less-developed areas and the province's marginalised populations. Later, the World Bank sought the role of SEF to scale up private schools (Barrera-Osorio, et al. 2017). The SEF launched the Promotion of Private School in Rural Sindh (PPRS) through contracting by offering an education subsidy to scale up mass enrollment and paying 500 Pakistani Rupees (equal to 5 USD) per student to the private provider including individuals and local organisations (Khan, et al. 2018). Currently, all schools have been renamed Foundation Assisted Schools, and these schools

can also be called contract schools in the terminology of PPPs. Currently, there are 2,673 schools and 725,000 enrolled students, and 20,959 teachers in foundation-supported schools (SEF website, 2022).

In 2015, the Government of Sindh launched the EMO program with the World Bank, the ADB, and USAID's support to ensure educational accessibility and equity (LaRocque & Sipahimalani-Rao, 2019). Most of these EMO schools opened in rural Sindh and flood-affected areas. The Government of Sindh (SELD, 2017) claims EMO reforms are a milestone toward ensuring educational equity and efficiency. They will help the government get valuable services and investments from the private sector. The objectives of the EMOs reform also include hopes to bring innovation in public schools, reduce inefficiencies and management issues, improve quality, and encourage private sector investment in rural Sindh. To give EMOs legitimacy, the Sindh government drafted the "Concession Agreement" based on PPPs Act 2010 and got it approved by the provincial assembly. The PPPs act attracted the attention of local and international NGOs to reach out to those marginalised areas where the government was unable to reach due to resource inefficiencies (SELD, 2017). The USAID supported 106 school buildings in Northern Sindh, and ADB also started opening 160 secondary schools in the southern Sindh districts under PPPs through the EMO program.

Currently, in Sindh, different types of organisations are operating as EMOs. These are NGOs, higher education academic institutions, and private school systems. These all are Pakistan-based organisations. However, now the government, and its supporter ADB, also intend to add more international school operators to get their innovative services. All EMOs are selected based on a competitive technical and financial bidding process (SELD, 2017). The profiles of EMOs¹ are given in the Table 1.

Table 1

Profile of EMOs Operating in Sindh

Name of Organisation(s)	Description (s)
Sukkur IBA University	A public sector university located in Sukkur that also manages several community colleges and government schools funded by the Government of Sindh.
The Citizen Foundation (TCF)	A non-profit organisation working in the education sector of Pakistan that mainly focus on the less-privileged segment of the society
Indus Resource Centre (IRC)	A Sindh-based NGO that mainly works in education, health, and other social sector activities.
Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO)	A Sindh-based not-for-profit organisation mainly funded by the government of Sindh to work in rural sector development of the province to alleviate poverty through skill enhancement, microfinancing, education, and community empowerment.
Charter for Compassion	A non-profit international organisation that operates in Pakistan in education, health, and other social-related activities.
Health and Nutrition Development Society (HANDS) Pakistan	An international NGO that mainly focuses on disaster management, health, nutrition, and hygiene. Currently also operating in the education sector under PPPs mode
Beacon House School System	A private school system that operates in eight countries, mainly in K-12 education.

¹ The Number of EMOs given in the table is based on the available data of 2021. However, the Sindh government has recently added more EMOs during the study period; these are not part of this study.

2.3. Application of NPM Concept in the PPP-EMOs Model

Our theoretical approach for this study is based on the concept of New Public Management (NPM), which is being claimed as an innovative approach to public policies through applying the values of accountability, managerialism, and decentralisation, to avoid bureaucratic hurdles (Verger & Curran, 2014; Wilkins, et al. 2019). There is a common argument from the supporters of PPPs that decentralisation and separating financial and operational provisions can improve the performance of schools. The NPM concept also emphasises school autonomy and helps hire quality teachers efficiently from the market. In a realist evaluation of PPPs (discussed in the following section), we have discussed EMO schools constructed in Sindh where schools' management has been given to the competitive private sector, but the financing of schools is coming from the Sindh Government. It is assumed that the decentralisation of power, increasing accountability, getting specialised services from the private sector, and mobilising private sector investment all increase the accessibility to education, quality of education, and overall school efficiency (SELD, 2017).

Yet issues arise when contracts are unclear, especially surrounding how one can ensure private sector sustainability when low teachers' salaries are low in PPP schools. Policy researchers also have concerns that NPM emphasises managerial ideas through private sector participation in education, which includes standardisation, decentralisation, and performance-based approaches (Steiner-Khamsi & Draxler, 2018; Verger & Curran, 2014). They further believe NPMs transform education from a human experience into a place that manufactures products by lowering the cost of teacher preparation and increasing standardisation. The current education system is adopting business models that help them increase customers by reducing the cost of education through standardisation in education to incentivise the business sector to enter education, which also lowers the responsibility of the state (Steiner-Khamsi & Draxler, 2018). These implications of NPM can increase inequality. In a realist evaluation, the NPM concept must be fully unpacked contextually. In addition, quality and equity in education also need to be discussed beyond the market approach, which includes local norms, religious/moral values, and social cohesion. We applied the realist evaluation as a quite relevant methodology to answer these context-specific questions. The realist evaluation guides us to review relevant policy documents, develop a theory of change, revise the theory of change with the help of stakeholders, and then design the field to test the theory.

3. METHODOLOGY

We chose the realist evaluation approach (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) to answer the research questions of what extent, how, in what way, and for whom the PPP mode of education through EMOs improves access to education, ensures quality and equity education, and sustainability in the context of Sindh, Pakistan? Realist evaluation is a theory-driven approach. Theory-based evaluation is an approach that focuses on the theories people have about what it takes to create a successful program or policy

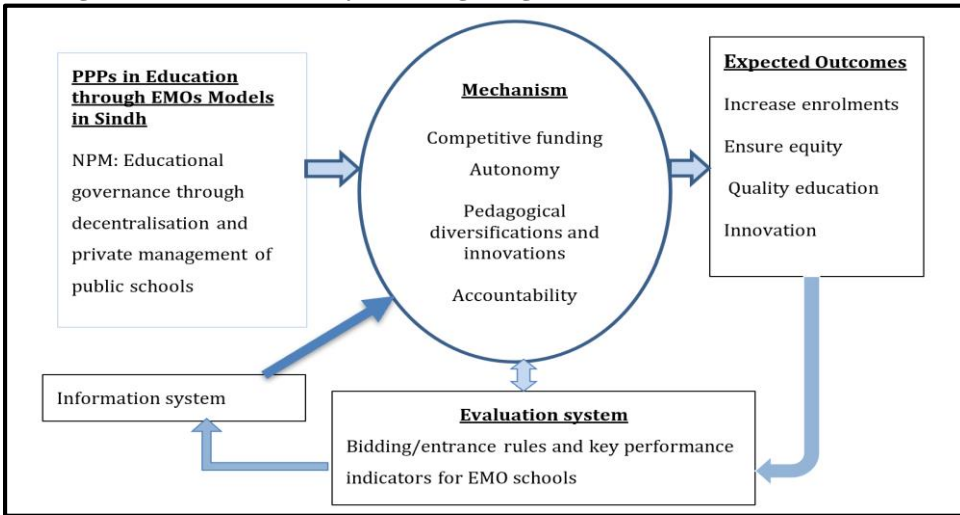
(Mertens & Wilson, 2019). According to Pawson and Tilley (1997), public policies, programs, or interventions for social improvement are complex and work differently in different contexts. Therefore, these policies need to be unpacked and tested in context to discover how/why complex programs work or how/why they fail. Realist evaluation is rooted in realist philosophy. It does not ask “what works” but instead asks “what works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects, and how?”(Mathison, 2005, p. 363).

The distinction between a realist methodology and a randomised control trial is that a realist inquiry model (also called a generative model) also includes internal factors such as society and context. To infer causal outcomes (O) between two events (X and Y), one needs to fully understand the underlying mechanism (M) that connects X and Y and the context (C) in which that relationship occurs (Pawson, et al. 2005). Here causality is not based on controlling extraneous variables but embedded in the process (Creamer, 2018). It is sceptical toward the panacea or “context-free” approaches of policies or interventions. In this study, the context was Sindh, the mechanism of EMO policies, and the required outcomes were meeting educational goals (accessibility, equity, and quality).

The core purpose of the realist evaluation is to test and refine the theory. Hence, the context-mechanism-outcome pattern (CMO) configurations in our study attempted to understand how the PPP initiative through the EMO program ensures the private management of the public schools in the targeted areas of Sindh, and brings about access to education, enhances students learning outcomes, and ensure the quality and equity in education in the marginalised, and rural regions of Sindh, Pakistan. The realist evaluation helps develop and test CMO configuration empirically which leads to theory testing and refinement (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The realist evaluation considers public policies as an assumption about social improvements and needs to be unpacked while designing the study. According to this methodology, researchers need to construct a theory of change (or program ontology) based on policy questions and treat theory as a set of policies that need to be tested in the field (Termes, et al. 2015). Developing a program ontology is a logic model that describes how elements of social reforms (planned activities and expected results) are related to each other in the process (Mertens & Wilson, 2019).

3.1. The EMO Theory of Change

Based on the secondary data, including the policy documents of the EMOs program (please see the details of documents at 1 and 2 in Table 2) and through consultations with policymakers and key informants of PPPs, we attempted to (re)construct the EMOs theory of change. We assumed the theoretical concept of NPM guides the development of a theory of change in the EMO program. NPM is a managerial approach borrowed from the market and applied in public policy and is widely used in PPPs in education (Verges & Curran, 2014). PPP programme through EMOs logic model based on NPM concept is given in Figure 3.

Fig. 3. PPP-EMOs Theory of Change/Logic Model in Sindh Based on NPM

Source: The Government of Sindh, 2017; Termes, et al. 2015.

3.2. Research Design

This study is a mixed-methods case study of the PPP-EMOs program in Sindh. According to Yin (2018), a mixed-methods case study is an empirical method compatible with evaluation research to investigate the real-world phenomenon contextually and in-depth. It likely takes a realist perspective, and in evaluation research, it triangulates multiple (i.e., quantitative and qualitative) sources of evidence. Furthermore, mixed methods offer a third research paradigm that can bridge the schism between qualitative (interpretive) and quantitative (falsification or confirmatory) research. In evaluating PPP-EMOs, we used quantitative data to see what works, and qualitative data to look at the context and mechanism that enable PPPs to be a success or failure.

3.3. Data and Sampling

To evaluate PPP-EMOs that address the questions of equitable access, quality, and efficiency in education, we, therefore, collected and analysed both quantitative and qualitative data of different stakeholders and participants. These included document reviews, secondary data sets, and interviews. We used secondary data collected from the Pakistan Social Standards and Living Measurement (PSLM) survey, School Education Management Information System (SEMIS), and Student achievement Test (SAT) data for quantitative analysis. In the qualitative part, we used document reviews and interviews with key informants of EMOs based on convenient and representative sampling. Thus, in this study, we selected participants for interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) based on a sample representing all stakeholders of PPP-EMOs. The details of data collection and participants are given in Table 2 below and the detail of participants is given in Appendix A.1.

Table 2

Techniques and Fieldwork of the Research Project

Sr. No.	Techniques	Fieldwork
1.	Document analysis of legal contracts and bidding processes	(a) PPP Guide and Toolkit by SELD and USAID (b) ADB Brief on EMOs in Sindh (c) National Education policy 2009 and 2017 (d) Sindh Education Sector Plan 2014-18 and 2019-21 (e) EMO bidding documents and contracts between SELD and EMOs
2.	Interviews with key informants (policy level)	5 semi-structured interviews: (a) 2 interview each policy developer from SELD (b) 2 interviews with donors (1 from USAID and one from ADB) (c) 1 Independent education expert
3.	Interviews with EMO operators	7 semi-structured interviews: 1 interview with each of the 7 EMO operators
4.	Semi-structured interviews (in EMO schools)	14 semi-structured interviews: (a) 7 semi-structured interviews with 7 EMO Managers (b) 7 semi-structured interviews with 7 EMO school headteachers
5.	Focus groups interviews (in EMO schools)	12 focus group interviews: (a) 6 teachers focus groups (2-4 teachers from each EMO school) (b) 6 parents focus group (2-3 parents from each EMO school)
6.	Statistical analysis of SEMIS, SAT, and PSLM survey data	(a) SAT results of schools before and after EMOs and non-EMO schools within the same geographical areas. (b) SEMIS and PSLM survey data of districts: 7 districts where EMO schools operate

Source: Authors' compilations.

3.4. Data Analysis

In realist evaluation, the development of a logic model or theory of change helps in data analysis which is based on CMO. The CMO configuring tool determines the relationship between input and output (Marchal, et al. 2012). In qualitative data analysis, recorded interviews were transcribed and later translated. The interview transcripts and document analysis were coded in CMO themes that discuss the EMO initiatives' objectives, observed outcomes, context, and mechanism of PPPs through EMOs. In quantitative analysis, we used the descriptive analysis tool to describe SAT, SEMIS, and PSLM data sets to examine the access, out-of-school, and academic achievement

differences between EMOs and other government schools. After analysing the above-mentioned multiple data sets in qualitative and quantitative formats, we concurrently integrated and triangulated qualitative and quantitative data and presented it based on the themes mentioned above (objectives) in the form of tables, charts, quotes for interpretations, and discussions.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are presented according to two broader themes and their sub-themes. These mainly addressed the research question(s), i.e., to what extent, how, in what way, and for whom PPP-EMOs improve access to education, ensure quality and equity education, and sustainability in the context of Sindh, Pakistan. The first broader theme highlights the findings relative to how PPP-EMOs in education are viewed in Sindh and how and through what mechanisms it is being implemented. The second broader theme is regarding the PPP outcomes, i.e., the extent to which PPP models in education served to enhance access, quality, and equity in Sindh in achieving the SDGs and have been organised into a subtheme.

4.1. Evaluation of Educational Reform Policy through PPP-EMOs in Sindh

The main outcome of this theme was to broadly understand PPPs-EMOs and their governance mechanism in Sindh as perceived by various stakeholders.

(a) *Differently Understanding of PPPs in Education by Various Stakeholders*

To unpack PPPs and their scope in education, we first explored the definition and understanding of PPPs at different stakeholder levels. According to Patrinos et al. (2009), PPP arrangements are different according to varying levels of government and private sector partnerships. Its definition and understanding are rooted in ideology, countries' economic policies, social values, and the role of IOs and donor agencies. As per the Government of Sindh (SELD, 2017), the PPP in education is a framework where the government's role would be more of a regulator and policy developer, whereas the private sector's role would be to deliver service efficiently and effectively. However, other stakeholders such as donors strategize PPPs differently. The three main drivers of PPPs in Sindh, namely the World Bank, ADB, and USAID, also have different strategies. The World Bank pushes for more vouchers and low-cost subsidy types of schools in Sindh. On the other hand, ADB is investing more in secondary schools and building infrastructure. The USAID has primarily invested in the Sindh Basic Education Program. Under this scheme, they have supported drafting policies and funded establishing a school operated under the PPP mode by EMOs. In our interview with the donor who designed the PPP model in Sindh, it emerged that his response differed from the Sindh government's definition of PPPs. His understanding of PPPs in education was broader rather than technical support in education:

I want to define PPPs [differently]. . . when [we] talk about PPP, people think infrastructure PPP, private finances to some groups of entity, get together and make consortium, to finance, construct, design, and operate big infrastructure road, high and railways... That's to be a very limited definition of PPPs. I worked with things like broader

PPP: contracting schools, charter schools, voucher programs, and private management of public schools. At the limit, you can consider anything PPP. [In] EMOs we are financing in Sindh. Given that you can have any number of objectives of PPP: Access to quality, and relevant skills just depend on the situation.

The importance of PPPs is also being oversold (Verger, 2012), which aid agencies also later realised as “PPPs is one strategy and ongoing process and not a panacea.” It has been reported by donors that PPPs support the government to meet resource shortages through private sector participation. This way, additional support comes from communities, the private sector, and other regions. PPP reform allows the Sindh government to flex policies for private sector support. Along with donors, the Sindh government also reported that PPPs in education bring more resources, benchmarking, and accountability mechanisms.

Contrary to donors’ perspectives, the logic and need of PPPs at the Sindh government level are viewed differently as one policy level person mentioned, “In PPPs, donor money is not a gift; instead, it is a loan.” The private sector brought its resources and investment. If the private sector brings, they could charge for services in the form of tuition fees, which is allowed in education. The government brings its resources and money, while donors help in policy design. Furthermore, they reported that the need for PPPs arose when the public sector ultimately failed to perform its duty. The government has to meet its obligation of offering quality education and increasing accessibility through better governance. In these instances, the role of the private sector was found essential to implementing educational governance. The private sector has an advantage because it has the power to fire those who do not work.

It was also reported that the PPP EMO concept has not been adequately translated and understood by the public. Spillane (2006) discussed that policy designed at the top level and not properly translated into administrative support and training often gets distorted and misunderstood. At the operational level, partners confessed they signed the contract and read monitoring and other accountabilities but still could not fully understand the agenda of PPPs in a long-term scenario. Few school operators suggested that this setup can work better if these schools are completely handed over to NGOs or private organisations and remove government teachers and staff because it is challenging to work with government-school teachers and get results. Contrarily, others believe complete handover will distort the idea of partnership in the PPP. It is also not fully understood at the top and the local level of the bureaucracy. The head of the PPP node reported that many bureaucrats and local-level administrators also create problems in governance; they feel government schools have been sold to the private sector. This shows that the ownership of PPP schools is still lacking at the government staff level. Beyond the above discussion on PPP policies and their contract complexities, there is a solid supporting voice at the school and community levels. They believe that the partnership model offers a unique opportunity to get services from prominent institutes and organisations, i.e., Sukkur IBA University and the Citizen foundation.

(b) *EMOs Model and Contextual Challenges*

The current PPP-EMO model has some advantages but also creates many challenges as the model is designed and suggested by donors. Donor-driven policies, i.e., PPP Guide

& Toolkit and Sindh Capacity Development Project are prepared under the USAID sponsorship through Sindh Basic Education Program. However, the Sindh government policymakers reported that these ideas of PPP-EMOs are indigenous compared to other PPP policies, i.e., the foundation schools. They claim that it is more vibrant and workable. Despite this, after five years of policy implementation, the Sindh government shifted from the oversimplification and panacea approach of PPP to greater contextualisation of the model. Similarly, the Sindh government also realised that the local understanding of any interventions as mentioned in The Sindh Education Sector Plan and Roadmap (SERP, 2019-24).

A clear understanding of where and why children are out of school will be instrumental in developing localised strategies. This is particularly important in implementing the SESP&R priority program addressing the challenge of gender parity in enrolment and retention. (p. 5).

It is reported that the Government of Sindh is not fully autonomous in designing and implementing PPP policies. Education funding still relies on external cash inflow by donor agencies, and they have their preferences. As one of the donors mentioned in our interview, “Obviously, the development partner has some role in financing and designing. For example, in the Philippines, we developed with the Philippine government. Ultimately the government is getting a loan; the loan has its design”.

According to Patrinos, et al. (2009), “A crucial component of any PPP in education is an effective strategic (as opposed to piecemeal or ad hoc) communication plan as this can substantially reduce political risk and be an effective way of promoting a PPP initiative” (p.57). The EMO model initially faced more challenges when the school was handed over to private school chains; a power struggle between the government and EMO staff sometimes resulted in clashes between staff on both sides. One reason reported is that private schools’ governance seems different from government-funded schools in the way they deal with employees. As per our investigations not all (currently operating) EMOs understand the local contexts and capacity to navigate the nuances in educational quality and equity. However, some (i.e., Sukkur IBA and The Citizen Foundation) have solid contextual understanding and extensive expertise in education policy implementation.

A large majority of teachers, parents, and local level administrators believe PPP can work better in rural areas where it is needed, where government reach is not possible. However, bringing PPPs intervention near government schools creates a sense of insecurity among teachers, leading to no ownership. They feel all better and well-funded schools are being handed over to private parties. There should be clarity in the PPP model. Not all organisations are entering the field with a philanthropist approach or goal to serve and support the government in education; sometimes, profit is also their motive. Increasing the private sector’s interest also raises doubts among the public and policy experts that EMOs in PPPs contracts earn profits on public money.

(c) *EMOs selection Process: Supply and Demand Mechanism*

As per our investigation, the motivation to run schools is largely based on the supply side, depending on the government’s incentives. The NEP 2009 and 2017 and policy documents of the Sindh government also seek the support of the private sector. The government realised the role of NGOs and community-based organisations is crucial and

planned to support these organisations through various ways various, i.e., tax exemption, subsidy, and capacity building. It has been revealed by donors such as ADB:

One of the reasons for using EMOs is that SELD cannot run hundreds of new secondary schools, so they cannot staff them, support them, and keep them running. Therefore, EMO is a good model to use for the existing civil society or the private sector companies to manage schools.

The motivation for private organisations also varies. Some social organisations or NGOs claim that their motivation is to serve the community; some private school chains claim that they want to enlarge their activities, diversify their school systems, and ensure quality education. It is a win-win for both parties because the government gets better services, and the private sector earns reputation and revenue. Another reason for motivation is that NGOs were already working or thinking to diversify their work toward education, as the government, USAID, and ADB have already constructed buildings. Therefore, they became ready to embark on this established building. It was less challenging for them to enter than building new infrastructure. The USAID and the Government of Sindh also realised that they should continue their services in the social sector; they are being incentivised to manage schools.

In the school selection process, the PPP-EMO model has a somewhat clear policy and competitive bidding process than foundation schools in Sindh. Their award is based on technical and financial proposal evaluation, which has been carefully designed. This practice has been reported to bring the best out of organisations. In EMOs, the Concession Agreement of PPPs clearly mentions bringing industry practices into the education sector. There are key performance indicators (KPIs) that enable an environment of accountability. Independent educational experts and auditors evaluate the KPIs and ensure financial transparency. It has legal certainty, institutional arrangement, fairness, transparency, competition, contract sanctity, mutual support, and supplementary financing arrangement (SELD, 2017).

There are also some critical aspects of this model. It has been reported that in the PPP policy board of EMOs, many non-educator consultants work for education. They have a limited understanding of the complexities of learning and how to improve educational outcomes. Moreover, many private sector organisations are mushrooming in education as EMOs; they have limited expertise in education, and their team is also naive. It has been reported they are good at manipulation and outsourcing proposal writing. These manipulative tools enable them to enter the market, which is also a matter of concern. Furthermore, the PPP node at the government level is intensely bureaucratic, which contradicts the objectives of innovation. The school contracts need incentive mechanisms beyond monetary rewards for bringing innovation. Also, selecting schools only based on monetary aspects has many disadvantages. As expressed by one of the policies implementors of PPP-EMOs:

In my opinion, PPP should be more flexible [in awarding schools]. At the end of the term, a lot of organisations came to their technical proposal were strong; it's hurtful they lost because of the monetary aspect, as the lowest bidder won.

There is more evidence that the competitive bidding mechanism is creating issues. Many believe school selection based on competitive bidding compromises quality and equity. It is very difficult for the lowest bidder to ensure libraries and labs and concentrate more on disadvantaged kids. These issues make EMOs less innovative in solving problems.

(d) *Governance through Decentralisation, Autonomy, Competition, and Accountability*

There is no doubt that the poor governance of public schools in Sindh gives a comparative advantage to PPP schools. The reasons are not simple but embedded in the social and political structure of the country. It has been reported that in the government sector, many primary schools were established based on political motivations to appease constituents. School financing is also uniform in most cases due to which some schools remain disadvantaged because of the large number of kids and teachers. There is no mechanism to generate funds swiftly and hire teachers based on need. School headteachers and local administrators are not empowered to tackle these issues. As one government official at the policy implementation level mentioned:

In many schools, one can find a large number of kids but very few teachers. On the other hand, one can also find a dozen of teachers but less than a hundred kids. We do not utilise the budget properly. In some schools, there are many teachers and fewer students, and vice versa.

Autonomy and Accountability

Commonly, government schools lack good governance and accountability mechanisms due to their centralised educational administration. On the other hand, through PPP mode, they apply the concept of NPM. The NPM mechanism based on decentralisation, school accountability, and incentive-based performance yields better output (Wilkins, et al. 2019). It has been reported that due to decentralisation, decision-making on teachers' hiring, remunerating, and firing process is swift and better outcomes could be achieved. It also can make pedagogical innovation and finance different units easily. According to the PPP documents of the Sindh government, in PPP mode, NGOs and community-based organisations are encouraged by sharing the power of administration. They play a crucial role in supporting the government agenda by managing government schools. Compared to government schools, PPP schools are more empowered as one EMO operator mentioned, "We have power, resources, and budget so we can improve schools . . ."

In most PPP schools, the administrative process is easy and meet parents' expectation. During the admission process, PPP school administrators and parents showed satisfaction in taking care of students' records and cross-checking certificates and other issues when needed. There is also a follow-up of students' records. Government schools show relatively more bureaucratic processes; in those cases, many kids of poor and uneducated parents discontinue their schooling. There is more accountability in privately managed schools compared to government schools. However, UNESCO (2017) suggests that accountability should be beyond indicators such as students' report cards and penalizing schools by reducing their funds. It should be holistic, including supporting schools in resources and community ownership of schools.

Competition, Differentiation, and Innovation

The NPM in education claims that diversification and differentiation in schools create an environment of competition and innovation (Verger and Curran, 2014). As the PPP document of Sindh claims and hopes, new types and models bring new practices and pedagogical innovation. As per the evidence we collected, some schools or organisations

(who have extensive school management experiences i.e., Sukkur IBA and TCF) had competitive advantages and offered very effective training and professional development relevant to their classroom effectiveness. However, the market approach to the competition itself distracts innovation. It has been reported that innovation is more tied to collaboration to solve chronic issues rather than creating competition. Another critical aspect of PPPs as revealed by some participants was that education is being handed over to non-educationists, who only bring cosmetic changes rather than radical ones. Though EMOs offer a conducive learning environment due to their enough funding, no pedagogical innovation was found to solve poor quality issues and ensure equity in challenging areas. Only standardisation and ranking of schools increased, which is the byproduct of the market-based approach to education (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). Furthermore, in the name of innovation and competition, schools have created a manipulative environment in the education system, where private school owners and PPP operators attract parents and families by showcasing and focusing more on the English language. This practice also undermines the local languages.

(e) *Monitoring and Evaluation*

PPP policy experts and implementing agencies believe that in Sindh, and generally, in Pakistan, there is an enormous inefficiency and a lack of monitoring. In conventional government schools, a large number of teachers are ghosts, who have political backing, and the government can't make them accountable. As reported by a participant "In many of the cases, the appointed teachers are somebody influential's relatives; whatever their qualification, they got appointed." In a government setup, there are many constraints to firing teachers who do not perform. There is also less chance for deserving employees to grow based on performance. As a result, the government system will not yield adequate educational outcomes. There are also several political and legal challenges, which nobody wants to touch. Therefore, the PPP has advantages as narrated by one of the policymakers:

It is very difficult to operate in such regulatory environments; there are huge constraints on teacher hiring or firing [in a government set-up]. One of the difficulties is hiring qualified staff and paying them well. The PPP gives a chance to manoeuvre around it.

Therefore, the PPP has a relative advantage as partners' performance is aligned with educational quality and access, and there is a specific monitoring system that ensures accountability. In the PPP, if teachers do not show up, they can be fired easily. As one policy developer elaborated, "there is accountability. It is a hope [to] bring better management skills in the education sector. It is also about trying to pay what you need to pay." In the EMO-PPP model, schools' monitoring and evaluations are enlisted based on KPIs outlined in the PPP document.

There is also adequate criticism of the monitoring of the PPP model in Sindh despite SELD and USAID's added condition of independent experts and audits who monitor and evaluate. As per our investigations, most experts lacked rigorous educational knowledge and experience. These consultants were mostly hired on ad-hoc bases. Steiner-Khamsi, et al. (2016) perspective for ensuring quality and equity in education is narrow. The existing monitoring system is well-suited for ensuring infrastructure and facilities. However, they lack the capacity to investigate and ensure the core aspects of education, i.e., access,

quality, and equity. It has been emphasised the government should add more credible educational institutes in monitoring and evaluation, that continuously evaluate based on research and evidence-based information. Compared to Sindh, Punjab has introduced real-time monitoring for all schools, which has improved students' and teachers' availability through better use of technology (Government of Punjab, 2022). Another issue in monitoring is that PPP contracts have a lot of grey areas. Many EMO partners believe these KPIs are somehow ambiguous and contradictory. For example, the KPI of increasing student enrollment is difficult as the schools are already at full capacity because schools have nice buildings and resources, which attracts kids from other schools. KPIs such as community engagement and capacity building can be manipulated by fake reporting, and their impact cannot be monitored through self-reporting by private partners.

(f) *Teacher Hiring Mechanism, Remuneration, and Security*

In Sindh, there is a teachers' recruitment policy for government schools, which is uniform for everyone based on specific criteria. Teachers' recruitment is centrally administered through an open advertisement, which is a long process. However, in the PPP model, including EMOs, this structure is entirely different; they hire locally, based on their needs. In this model, higher qualifications and teacher certifications do not matter, and the process is much quicker. As reported, for instance, if they need a teacher for maths, they can complete the recruitment process in days. Even if they do not have a budget, they can hire a volunteer. In PPP documents, there is no specific guideline for teachers' recruitment. The lack of framework and mechanism also raises questions on ensuring teachers' commitment and proper regulation in the private sector as per the labour laws. The salary of government-school teachers is many times the salary of the private sector teachers. We found that except for Sukkur IBA, the rest of the EMO teachers' salary is very low. This is why only leftover teachers get jobs in PPP schools, and all teachers desire government jobs.

A big concern being raised regarding the PPP model is that of lower salaries and job security of teachers. They are being hired based on simple contracts. Afridi (2018) reported that the PPP mode adds less qualified and low-paid teachers to the Pakistani system, compromising education quality and violating labour laws. It is a common perception among all teachers that the government set-up is more favourable for teachers, and in the PPP model, teachers are more vulnerable and insecure. Many teachers shared their stories in which told that they are local, and are looking for some experience and salary to survive, which PPP schools offer. They said if they get another opportunity, they will leave.

(g) *Financing, Efficiency, and Equity*

Educational financing in Pakistan and Sindh is quite inefficient and unfair. Most of the school financing in the government sector is uniform or based on the number of students or special grants/funds approved through political patronage. Due to a lack of systematic and equitable financing, a considerable budget goes underutilised. According to NEP 2009 estimates, funds ranging between 20 percent to 30 percent of allocated funds remain unutilised (MoE, 2009). The option of PPP is considered to regain trust in education and to make true educational goals. It is claimed that the PPP is an innovative model, and the EMO model may attract better education organisations.

As per the analysis of PPP documents, EMOs also have a more bureaucratic bidding process as requests for proposals and then selecting organisations take a long time. The lowest financial bidding mechanism can compromise quality and manipulate the system. The EMO model is comparatively more costly than government schools and even many times the foundation model of PPP. The policy document creates another inequality. As per the document, international partner organisations have a higher bidding range than local partner organisations. The implication can be reflected in schools' output and disparity in student quality.

The PPP model claims that the current design offers equity in education. However, based on our investigation, we found many loopholes. There is no incentive or extra support for students with disabilities or additional support for teachers and staff who address these challenges. It has been suggested by various policymakers that more equitable funds transfer in PPP could be through targeted vouchers, which has been suggested for Sindh. Allocating more vouchers to girls' education or paying more funding to schools that enrol more students with a specific poverty score can ensure equity.

(h) Community Participation

In our interview process, we found that donors and other policy-level persons believe that in a PPP-EMO set-up, with community support, there is a possibility to pool resources from donors, government, and community, which has been successful in several countries. We also found that the involvement of the community and participation of parents is essential in bringing out-of-school children and ensuring quality education. It has been confessed that although there are excellent people in the government, they could not perform due to a lack of coordination with the community. Another factor in the absence of democratic participation of the community is that there is a vast disparity in education in Pakistan. Most middle-class and affluent parents send their kids to private schools, so their interest is relatively low or negligible in government and government-subsidised free schools (Rashid et al., 2015). An increasing number of private schools has also reduced parents' trust in the government. As accountability from the parental side is reduced, government schools are losing their quality continuously.

It is also claimed that bureaucracy does not care about parents' and community's wishes in the government sector. The private sector is more task-oriented, and without community participation, it cannot fulfil educational tasks and objectives. Therefore, the PPP model is well-suited to community participation. In the PPP design of EMOs, there is a community mobilisation unit, and community involvement is one of their KPIs. It has been confirmed by various stakeholders the level of community involvement, and trust increased in the EMO set-up.

The blind spot of this set-up is that these mobilisations are funded and based on short-term goals. Among many PPP operators, these are considered less sustainable because it is a one-sided push or drive that creates less bonding. Therefore, the push should be mutual. There is also a criticism of the PPP model that this model lacks democratic governance of schools, and parents and the community are not empowered enough to hold schools accountable. The role of the community is not legally and contractually guaranteed, so, in many cases, the parents' and the community's role is passive and taken for granted. Although many parents and school administrators mentioned that this model has increased

parents' visits to the school, still, their visits do not fully hold the operator accountable as most of the school's decisions are taken by the operator and governments. In designing education policies, policies are never discussed at the bottom level, parents' voices are never heard, and even teachers feel surprised when new policies are implemented.

4.2. PPP-EMOs for Access to Equitable Quality Education, and its Sustainability

The broad objective of this central theme is to discuss the findings regarding the role of PPPs in achieving educational goals of access, quality, equity, and sustainability in Sindh.

(a) Access and Equity in Education

The inability of the government to add more post-primary schools and open new schools with an increasing population causes a huge gap in achieving the objective of access to education. It has been realised that the main reason for dropping out is that initially Sindh government only targeted opening primary schools through PPP mode supported by the SEF. Currently, in Sindh, there are 45,447 public schools, out of which 41,131 schools, i.e., 91 percent, are primary schools. There are 12 million children aged 5-16 years in the province, out of which 6.67 million (approximately 56 percent) are out of school (SELD, 2017).

It has been reported that by learning lessons from a smaller number of middle and secondary schools, the PPP mode also reformed itself to focus more on post-primary education. It is hoped that current PPPs through EMOs can help to build and increase access and ensure proper schooling requirements. Although the EMO model of PPP shows some achievement in increasing access, more considerable impact is still far behind. Table 3 below shows an increase in access due to EMOs.

Table 3

Student Enrollment and Attendance

EMOs	No of Schools	Enrollment				Attendance			
		Baseline		Current		Baseline		Current	
		Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Beacon House	1	0	373	119	393	0	66%	96%	92%
CfC	14	2,331	5,472	3,417	6,608	59%	61%	100%	100%
HANDS	3	179	742	378	1,039	43%	58%	77%	79%
Sukkur IBA	10	704	1,616	1,048	1,940	58%	69%	56%	NR ²
IRC	4	649	2,073	754	2,366	25%	52%	57%	64%
SRCO	2	123	430	164	489	61%	65%	71%	70.50%
TCF	19		5,701		6,116		NR		71%
Total	53		20,390		24,831				

Source: Data collected from the PPP node of the Sindh government based on the report of 2020-21.

The impact of education reform cannot be viewed in isolation. As SELD (2017) claimed, PPP-EMOs will largely address bringing out-of-school children to increase post-primary enrollment in selected districts. Based on our analysis of the SEMIS data of Sindh

² NR = Not reported.

and PSLM surveys of these selected districts, the EMO model so far has not been able to address the larger goal of the educational access issue. Table 4 and Table 5 below highlight the picture of EMOs districts before and after EMO interventions.

Table 4

Schools Monitoring Report of Selected Districts Before EMOs Intervention 2014-15

Districts	Students' Enrollment		Total Enrollment Gender-wise			Primary Completion Rate			STR ³	OSC ⁴
	Primary+	Post-primary	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total		
	Pre-primary									
Khairpur	222,377	88,530	192,119	118,784	310,903	61	47	54	34	55
Sukkur	110,690	43,348	95,092	58,946	154,038	53	38	46	30	47
Larkana	154,196	101,730	128,924	90,002	218,926	73	60	67	31	50
Kamber-Shahdadkot	129,848	42,121	105,785	66,184	171,969	60	49	55	31	71
Dadu	189,381	48,299	140,520	97,160	237,680	68	61	65	35	42

Table 5

Schools Monitoring Report of Selected Districts After EMOs Intervention 2019-20

Districts	Students' Enrollment		Total Enrollment Gender-wise			Primary Completion Rate			STR	OSC
	Primary+	Post-primary	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total		
	Pre-primary									
Khairpur	258,258	92,353	217,215	133,396	350,616	49	25	38	39	48
Sukkur	135,585	50,654	112,273	73,966	186,239	77	68	73	41	48
Larkana	192,352	73,623	152,861	113,114	265,975	54	42	48	38	56
Kamber-Shahdadkot	148,549	50,402	119,194	79,757	198,951	51	35	44	39	46
Dadu	173,952	58,201	141,682	90,471	232,153	69	54	62	38	40

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

It was reported in interviews that PPP-EMOs have limitations to increasing access because this model is quite costly, and the number of schools is relatively low as the current number is about 100. In EMOs, a school can accommodate a certain number of students. This has also created an environment of admission tests, excluding some kids from accessing quality education. Against the requirement of KPI, most of the EMO operators responded that they do not go for admission drives because the capacity in their schools is already full. The right design and regulatory framework of PPP can also motivate students and parents to remain in touch with schools and increase students' attendance. The foundation school model and targeted vouchers have been able to bring out-of-school children to schools as they incentivise the stakeholders to bring children into schools.

Educational equity is a big concern and a serious challenge in Pakistan. As NEP 2009 (MoE, 2009) mentioned:

The educational system in Pakistan is accused of strengthening the existing inequitable social structure as very few people from the public sector educational

³STR refers to the student-teacher ratio, calculated based on the number of students per teacher.

⁴OSC 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).

institutions could move up the ladder of social mobility. If immediate attention is not paid to reducing social exclusion and moving towards inclusive development in Pakistan, the country can face unprecedented social upheavals.

In order to increase the participation of children from disadvantaged and hard areas, the PPP model lacks a special mechanism or design. In Sindh, within districts, some villages are better than others. In some places there is tribal system, some people feel more secure and interested, and others are apathetic toward education. Special provisions and targeted incentives can bring children to schooling from challenging areas. It was also reported that the current uniform policy of admission and schooling hardly addresses the problem of those parents who are continuously migrating for livelihood. Though the PPP model has some advantages in retaining children but fails to address those children who dropped out of school because of a poor academic base, poverty, and child labour. The local partner suggested that there should be a remedial education in the PPP model along with an incentive or stipend for those students.

Based on our interviews with parents and teachers, we found that PPP schools are more attractive for girls. Parents feel more secure sending their girls to these schools as more female teachers are recruited based on convenience and need, which also win parents' trust. However, educational inequalities are mostly based on social and economic factors. The increasing role of non-state actors and the PPP model in education exacerbate inequity (Afridi, 2018). Due to the nature of the PPP model being more market-centric, it incentivises operators to select more able-bodied students. When we inquired from the operators, they all believed in equity. Still, they felt the system would not support students with different needs because schools do not have specialised staff and supporting material and incentives.

(b) Quality Education

Another objective of PPP in education is to ensure quality education. The Sindh government has planned in SERP 2019-24 to increase the quality of education through upgrading educational facilities, adding more qualified teachers, and inclusive education. As narrated by a PPP director, "PPP model was adopted because government schools' quality was not improving, the lack of specialised teachers and teacher absenteeism." The autonomy of schools through PPP offers a good opportunity to ensure quality. Though PPP schools offer some level of better-quality perception due to accountability, it has created a huge difference in quality based on different management of schools. Some PPP schools (i.e., Sukkur IBA and TCF) perform extraordinarily well, while others perform relatively poorly. This difference is because some organisations have a comparative advantage in operating schools. For instance, Sukkur IBA is already managing schools for the last two decades and has a strong team of educational experts and teachers compared to local NGOs who have limited capacity and teams. Poor regulations, more competition, and standardised assessment in PPPs are to for less inclusiveness and differences in quality.

Educational standards and assessments are also complex and mean different things to different stakeholders, i.e., teachers, parents, and administrators. For example, some believe quality education is if students perform well as per their syllabus, while others think that students should have better result cards. Many teachers disclosed another challenge, which is that in some PPP schools, children have different levels based on their educational history and huge disruption in schooling. It is challenging to ensure better quality education and learning without

addressing their learning deficiencies and proper support from organisations. The current debate on quality education is never concerned with students’ physical and mental growth, better communication of local languages, and solving complex social problems.

A significant factor to gauge quality is the annual assessment based on large-scale examinations and standardised tests. This is a more outcome-based approach to ensuring and assessing quality education. It was reported that a major flaw in this approach is that it is not fair to compare schools in far-flung areas with schools in urban advantaged areas. Students with low socio-economic status are always portrayed as low achievers. Educational quality should not be limited to test scores but should include student participation, learning life skills, ensuring better availability of infrastructure and labs, and well-qualified teachers, which comes with the approach of input-based quality assurance (Steinner-Khamsi, 2016). Most unbiased stakeholders believe that overall quality education is the same in government schools and PPP schools. Comparatively, PPP schools have better governance and management, which reduce students’ and teachers’ absence. On the other hand, PPP schools’ teachers are less qualified and low-paid and cannot teach advanced courses adequately. The Sindh Student Achievement Test (SAT) results (see Figure 4, Figure 5, and Figure 6.) also show that there is no significant difference in the achievement of EMO schools and government schools of the same region (Figure 4 and Figure 5), and between EMO schools before and after EMO interventions (Figure 5 and Figure 6).

Fig. 4. SAT Results of EMO Schools in Selected Districts

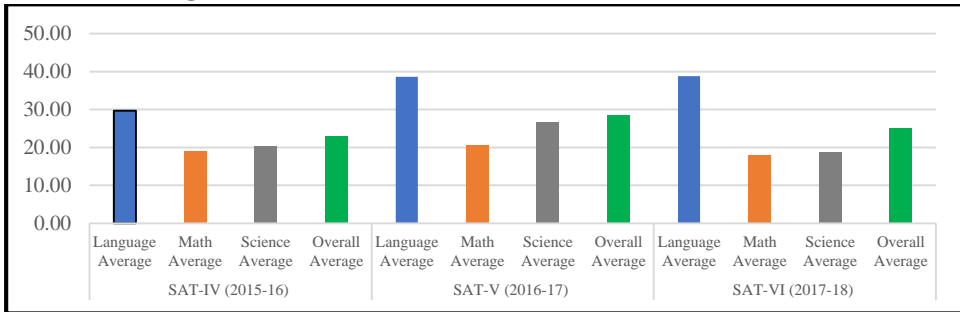
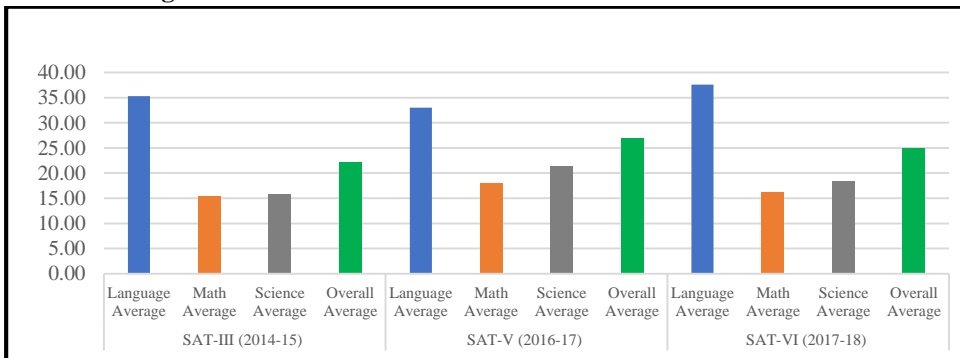
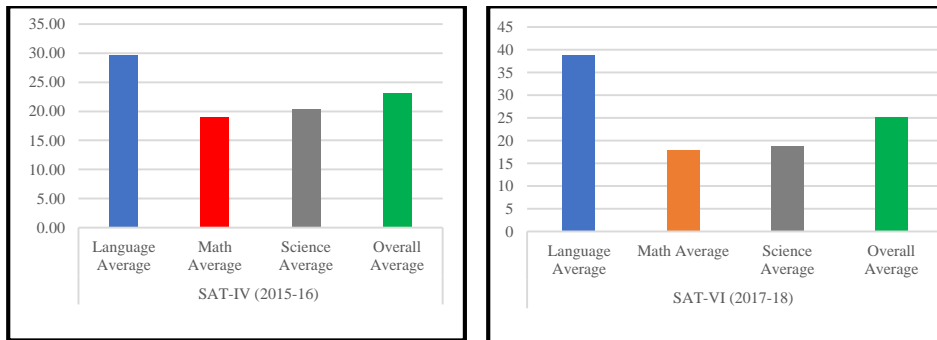


Fig. 5. SAT result of Non-EMO Schools in Selected Districts⁵



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

Fig. 6. SAT Results of Schools Before and after EMOs Interventions



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

(c) Sustainability of PPP-EMOs in Sindh

Though PPPs in education are currently increasing in Sindh and Pakistan due to the UN's demand for access to education and external forces such as donor agencies, there is also a big concern about its sustainability among stakeholders. In the EMO model, schools are handed over to organisations for a 10-year contract period as per the requirement of USAID and the ADB. These schools will learn from the process and will be sustained based on government funding. Many EMO operators and stakeholders show concern that as the government bureaucracy and administration processes are outdated and corrupt, schools will struggle to survive. There are myriad examples in Sindh where schools supported for a short term by donors' schools closed down, or are performing poorly after the support was pulled out.

It was reported that the sustainability of PPPs can be retained if these schools' financing is guaranteed. There should be a financial endowment with a proper plan. Also, there should be a board of governance composed of local experts and school staff, who should be continually trained. Once organisations pull out, the school can be run and pay teachers and staff through the endowment and continuous government and community support.

It was also reported that PPP schools cannot fill the government schools' system gap. This may lead to more waste of resources by building an entirely new system. There is no evidence of the complete success of the PPP model (Verger, et al. 2020). Rather than opening PPP schools everywhere, the Sindh government is planning to open them in targeted areas where government machinery cannot work properly or is difficult for the government to reach. The collected data revealed that there are also negative externalities of the current EMOs for other public schools. As per the views of teachers and school administrators, due to a better perception of the performance of PPP schools, there is pressure from parents to pull out their children from government schools to send them to PPP schools.

As the objective of PPPs is to be a helping hand to the government, their role should be more supportive of government schools based on the cluster school model. This will increase collaboration among schools through better teacher professional development to achieve the same goals.

5. CONCLUSION

The PPP-EMOs model is claimed to be a relatively more systematised model of PPPs in Sindh, which mainly focuses on post-primary education. Its better funding and large investment in infrastructure have created a better perception of the learning environment. However, due to donors' design and investment, its policies and objectives are not fully realised, which creates several contextual challenges. Compared to government schools, generally, PPP schools offer better governance, including administration, monitoring, and accountability mechanism. It succeeded in ensuring teachers' and students' attendance but does not show any significant improvements in terms of equitable learning for the students. The selection of EMOs through competitive bidding ensures transparency. However, the selection of the lowest bid proposals and loose (educational expertise) criteria ended up in the emergence of low-quality organisations. Those EMOs that have extensive educational management expertise and better incentive mechanisms for managers and teachers offer relatively better outcomes compared to NGOs that have limited scope in education policy implementation. Overall, the existing EMOs fall short of addressing the broader issues in education, i.e., accessibility, quality, and equity. Compared to FAS, EMOs are in limited numbers and are a relatively expensive intervention. Moreover, this reform might not be replicated in the entire Sindh because of financial, legal, and other constraints. After donors' withdrawal, its sustainability would also be a real challenge. Moreover, PPPs are not a silver bullet for education reform. However, developing and sustaining better PPP models depends on the government policies recommended beyond the interventionist or piecemeal reforms on a limited scale. It needs to be based on the supply and demand mechanism, innovative and equitable financing, and the optimal use of resources. The analysis of the collected evidence revealed that a more targeted model of PPPs, need-based funding, and incentives can help to bring out school children from disadvantaged areas and increase girls' education. School decentralisation and accountability must relate to the democratic governance of schools. The PPP contracts between the government and private sector must not ignore important stakeholders such as the community and teachers.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Our policy recommendations are based on a realist evaluation of PPP-EMOs. We found that PPPs are neither entirely efficient and effective nor a complete failure. We found that PPPs in education can be evaluated based on their merit. Similarly, we found that PPPs are not a panacea for everything that ails education. Moreover, PPPs are not a reason for the government to withdraw from its responsibilities. Following are some policy recommendations for education reforms, including PPPs.

6.1. Right Design of PPP Policies

The ultimate effect of PPP depends on a policy design that ensures quality and equity. Huge investment in infrastructure and better funding attracts private partners, but it also constrains resources to scale up the model. There should be a better regulatory approach in PPP, and it should be clear so that the children from disadvantaged communities are prioritised. 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, which especially focus on disadvantaged areas. Most of the schools located in underprivileged areas are underperforming due to the unavailability of quality teachers and challenging conditions. There is no supportive funding and incentives in the current PPP mechanism. There should be supplementary funding (including incentives for teachers) for schools that belong to the disadvantaged area. The government must create a solid framework for creating a partnership and the objective of educational operation and funding strategies. The donor money and policy recommendations should also be better negotiated while applying the contextualised framework.

6.2. Education Accountability and Regulation

It is an accepted premise that market forces and non-state actors have a certain educational agenda, so their approach is limited. There should be a more balanced approach to educational accountability, which also includes the input-based mechanism (i.e., supportive resources and quality teachers) along with outcome-oriented and standardised assessment. The students' learning achievements are more complex and personalised, so these should be treated separately from other dimensions (i.e., availability of infrastructure and teachers, etc.) of the KPIs. The monitoring and evaluation mechanism of students' achievements and progress tracking should be done through a panel of educational experts who have extensive research and practice-based experiences in the field. School regulations should be supportive and fair, and all kinds of bureaucratic hurdles should be removed. Also, there should be minimum criteria for teacher and staff recruitment, their qualifications, and the payment process. There should be more democratic accountability and governance of schools where the role of parents should be alleviated.

6.3. Different PPPs should be under one System

In Sindh, there are various models of PPPs operating and proliferating. However, there are two major forms of PPPs, i.e., FAS and EMOs, 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 are managed by a hub school irrespective of their provision (either public or private). As per UNESCO's (2017) recommendations, the government needs to see all schools, students, and teachers as part of a single system. Furthermore, different donors and PPP actors work together and acknowledge each other's work. So, the role of government should be to streamline policies, rather than acting in bits and pieces.

6.4. Availability of Robust Data

The evidence relating to the impact of PPPs, regulatory measures, PPPs performance in a particular context, and education providers' behaviour is still scarce. There is a concern at many stakeholders' levels that currently available data on students' enrolment and

assessment (based on local exams) are unreliable. The data on private schools is based on estimates, and the same student is enrolled in a government school and a private school. The data collected by the World Bank and UNESCO is also based on administrative, which is collected hastily. Designing policies on inauthentic data do not help in developing better strategies. Therefore, the Sindh government needs to streamline all types of schools and adequately manage the data with the help of technology.

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