

Education and Class in Pakistan: The Growth of the Private Sector

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Abstract: *The education system in Pakistan is languishing in an abysmal condition. In the absence of appropriate and consistent policy, the continued depreciation of facilities and erosion of public credibility in the state system many parents are opting out of the state system and moving to the growing private sector. The growth of the non-state sector in education has been steady since denationalization in the early 1980s and has exploded in the last fifteen years. This growth of the private sector raises questions about quality and equity. The literature overwhelmingly finds in favour of the private sector when it comes to quality. There is also some qualified support for encouraging this trend from educationists. The literature however fails to deal satisfactorily with the social equality and justice implications of the rising private sector.*

Keywords: *Educational equality, social justice, social class, social stratification, human capital and state, private and voluntary sectors.*

1. INTRODUCTION

That education is one of the central ingredients for progress is rarely disputed. Depending upon the time and place it has been used in various ways to provide for 'progress'. During the industrialization of Europe state education provided a trained working force for factory owners. During the British Raj, the British education system provided trained clerks and lower staff for the bureaucracy that ran the highly profitable colony. During the 1960s social democratic European educationists viewed education as the 'silver bullet' that would eliminate class differences: the great equalizer. In Pakistan a lack of education is widely seen as the root cause of most or all social, political and economic ills [1]. There is general consensus, it seems, that education is the solution to all of Pakistan's socio-economic problems.

This 'consensus', however, has failed to translate into an extensive and equal state school system for Pakistani children. Extremely poor physical infrastructure, incompetent and absentee teachers and a woefully inadequate curriculum are commonly repeated complaints. These factors coupled with an agrarian economy involving entire rural households (including school-going age children) working on farms and a lack of meritocracy have led to low school enrolment and high subsequent dropout. At the same time a minority of elite citizens are able to avail themselves of high quality education in expensive private educational institutions.

On the other hand, children of the urban poor languish in decrepit state schools.

In the debate on the shortcomings of Pakistan's education very little attention is paid to the interaction between education and social class. The little that is given is related to the medium of education and the parallel curricula. Very little is said about the impact of the movements in delivery in education between the three main sectors – state, private and voluntary – on social class and stratification.

On one hand, the state education system languishes and grapples with problems of curriculum, medium of education and poor teacher quality and is aptly represented by the picture of the 'ghost school'. On the other, the private and voluntary sector is growing at an increasing pace. Contrary to received wisdom, an increasing proportion of new schools in the private sector are catering to the poor in both urban and rural areas. This raises obvious issues of quality and equity within the education system. There is an increasing amount of optimistic evidence about the private sector's ability to improve upon the quality of teaching over state schools. This evidence has brought with it optimism about the private sector in schooling. This paper reviews the literature on the growth of the private sector and its quality implications and attempts to analyze the implications of private schooling growth for social equality.

There is some evidence that private and NGO schools are providing qualitatively better education to Pakistani children than state schools in the literature. In the context that Pakistan's education system is already divided based on socio-economic backgrounds of students (social stratification) this represents progress. This paper suggests, however, that the full implications, on social equality, of a greater role for the private sector in education have not been fully reviewed.

2. METHODOLOGY, SCOPE & TERMINOLOGY

This paper is an exploratory review of the literature already available and is by no means an exhaustive survey. The study is limited to the state-market-voluntary sector nexus for the provisions of a public service (in this case: education) and its interaction with social class. Other concerns in education such as language and curricula are alluded to, but a detailed analysis of these does not fall within the purview of this study. The central questions therefore are: what is the relative role of the state, the private sector and the voluntary sector in the provision of education? And how will this distribution affect class divisions in Pakistani society?

The discussion limits itself to a review of primary and secondary schooling. The terms 'schooling' and 'education' are used interchangeably to mean primary and secondary schooling unless otherwise indicated. A number of the studies reviewed use conflicting classifications of schools. Here 'state schools' refers to government run schools, 'private schools' refer to privately owned fee-charging schools and 'voluntary schools' refer to madrassas and NGO run schools. This classification is different from some other analysis as some of the studies bunch together private fee-charging schools with privately owned voluntary schools¹.

The next two sections cover the economic and social arguments for state provision of education. The rest of the paper reviews the growth of the private and voluntary sector in the provision of education and its impact on society.

3. EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Human capital theory [2] provides the strongest argument for education as a public good from an economic perspective². Increased education enhances labour productivity (as highlighted by the fact that those with more education command higher wages/salaries in the job market³) and the accumulation of human capital accrues to economic growth. An example of successful use of the education-development causality comes from the so-called 'Asian Tiger' economies where the state linked education policies close to the needs of industrial development through three phases [3] from the 1950s through to the 1980s.

Apart from human capital accumulation that is measured by returns to education measures there are considerable social externalities of investments in education, which are not measured. For a developing country these would include increased sense of civic and social responsibility, lower crime rates, etc. These also include lower fertility and mortality rates achieved through education of women [4]. The two arguments made for state intervention in education is based on the implicit assumption that the private sector will cater to the laws of supply and demand in the market where those who can afford it will be able to purchase it. This

¹ This is probably because their reference for analysis is similarity in curriculum and medium of education as opposed to the institutions fee-charging nature

² Human capital theory is not without its criticisms including 'sheepskin effects' (related to specific levels of education, e.g. a university graduate is likely to command a substantial income advantage over an equally capable colleague who dropped out of university a week before his/her final exams and failed to get the degree) and 'ability bias hypothesis' (i.e. productivity is not enhanced by education but by innate ability and employers simply use educational qualifications as a tool for screening more capable employees, therefore nullifying the argument for state funded education)

³ The implicit assumption here is that the labour market rewards higher productivity

brings us to the discussion of education as a tool for social justice and equality.

4. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social injustice or inequality is defined in the form of socio-economic inequality represented by some manner of stratification between members of society (e.g. the class system), where members of one or more strata (of society) are viewed to enjoy a disproportionate amount of privilege relative to members of other strata. In the modern market economy inequality in income and in wealth [5] is the most commonly used indicator of socio-economic stratification. Any conception of social justice and equality in citizenship would, therefore, require that the state provide its citizens with equal opportunity to earn (occupational attainment). The public service that has the greatest impact on occupational attainment is that of education. Therefore, the state must pursue 'equality in education'.

Social stratification is a dual concept, describing at the same time a condition (as the one described above) as well as a process "in which members of a population become stratified" [6]. Essentially the term describes both the condition of class divisions as well as the process of creating and/or strengthening these divisions. As a condition stratification affects access to public goods (such as education, healthcare, etc.) for members of various strata. Therefore the wealthy can purchase high quality education and healthcare even as less well off members of society cannot. One of the objectives of state provision of public goods (public services) is to reduce stratification (or at least reduce the impact of stratification). Stratification results in unequal access to education as wealthier members of society are able to purchase better education for their children. Also, education systems - dependent upon their structures - can contribute to an entrenchment of stratification through their impact on equality of occupational achievement. In some cases "a society's educational institutions can be described as its "sorting machine" because they are a major part of the society's institutional arrangements that serve to stratify its population" [6]⁴.

The western/northern understanding of educational equality as a concept has changed since the 19th century and passed through various states of development [7]⁵. Most western welfare states have gone through distinct phases of the development of education as a unique public service beginning with the explicit⁶ objective of providing a trained workforce to fuel the industrial revolution, through the era of equal opportunity defined by the right of access to common facilities (1960s) and finally today where educational equality is almost universally defined by attainment (or educational output) in education policy

⁴ Spring 1976 as cited in [6]

⁵ Reference [7] particularly concentrated on the development of the concept in the United States and alluded to the evolution of the idea in Britain

⁶ Among other goals including maintaining social stratification

literature. Partly due to this evolution, educational equality can sometimes be difficult to conceptualise [8]. The recent debate on education has witnessed a push towards increased parental choice. This discourse in welfare states about the need for state intervention and the role of the private sector in education has been fuelled by an alleged failure of the state to eliminate educational inequality [9]. Recent literature suggests that educational disadvantage measured by socio-economic background persists in most developed welfare states, whereas, the changes in ethnic and racial disadvantages are mixed and gender based disadvantages have been removed [10], [11], [12], [13], [14]. This recent pessimism in the ability of education in reducing class disadvantage has coincided with tentative and minor moves towards private sector in some western welfare states [15], [16], [17]. A recently announced study [18] in the United Kingdom finds that "...the overwhelming factor in how well children do is not which school they attend but social class."

It is clear, however, that this discussion is possible based on the background of a universally agreed upon notion of state responsibility for the provision of social justice. Therefore the debate, as outlined above, is limited to developed welfare states where there is an established state education infrastructure (including physical facilities, trained teachers, etc.) and more importantly the state education apparatus reaches most if not all school-going age children. Additionally the correlation between education and the opportunity to attain economic prosperity⁷ [8] is established and is accepted by the public. Finally, most developed western/northern states do not have to deal with multiple languages and multiple parallel curricula in place. In other words, the discussion (of the kind elaborated above) as to whether education should be funded, supplied and /or regulated by the state or the market is possible in the context of modern western/northern states.

The above characteristics are not necessarily true in Pakistan (and other developing countries) where large agrarian, rural populations have traditional family structures and children involved in the role of earners. Firstly, therefore, it is not established for many families that education leads to greater economic opportunity. Microeconomic literature on private returns to education in developing countries suggests that there is an opportunity cost attached to sending children to school for many agrarian rural families [4]. The two points made here suggest that demand for schooling (especially in poor rural environments) is not universal.

Second, the elementary education system in Pakistan has – traditionally – remained socially stratified along three dimensions. The three dimensions are the

⁷ The argument being that social justice will be achieved if everyone is allowed this opportunity

nature of the deliverer of education (state, private, or voluntary), the curriculum (A/O Levels or the so-called 'Matric system') and the medium of education (English or Urdu/provincial language)⁸. Combined, these three dimensions formed the basis of the relationship between Pakistan's education system and her socio-economic strata. Therefore, the private, A/O levels, English medium school catered to the elite; the private, Matric system, English medium school catered to the middle class and the state Matric system, Urdu medium school catered to the working class. Hence, a Pakistani's socio-economic background determined, to a large extent, the kind of school he/she attended and consequently determined his/her future career path.

As discussed earlier this paper limits itself to the implications of an increased role of the private sector on educational equality. Recent literature suggests that there has been an explosion of private schools in Pakistan⁹. This relatively recent phenomenon raises obvious questions about the causes behind this growth, the actual size of the private sector and whether the increase in the private sector affects educational opportunity for the most deprived in these countries.

The rest of the paper covers the expansion of the non-state sector in the delivery of elementary education in Pakistan and its implications for educational equality, and consequently, social justice.

5. PRIVATE SECTOR SCHOOLING IN PAKISTAN

School enrolment and literacy rates have remained low in Pakistan through the last five decades since records have been kept. While literacy has improved somewhat (Table 1) since the early 1950s, the figures have remained abysmal. The picture is even more abject when comparing rural parts of Pakistan with urban [21].

Table 1: Literacy rates in Pakistan: Total, Male and Female¹⁰

Year	Total	Male	Female
1951	13.2%	17.0	8.6
1961	18.4	26.9	8.2
1972	21.7	30.2	11.6
1981	26.2	35.0	16.0
1990	34.9	45.1	20.9

Adult literacy in 2003 stood at 47% while net primary enrolment was 46% [5]. These numbers compare poorly with other countries in the region and represent consistently

⁸ The stratification within each dimension is by no means linearly spread out over each spectrum, especially when dealing with delivery by state, private or voluntary sector

⁹ There is also evidence that the private sector's role in education is rapidly expanding in many developing and middle income countries like Thailand, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, South Africa [19] and India [19], [20]

¹⁰ Source: Banuri et al. (1992: 34). As cited in [21]; Banuri, T. et al. (1992): 'Human Resources Development'; in Banuri, T.(1992), ed.: 'Just Adjustment: Protecting the Vulnerable and Promoting Growth'; UNICEF, Islamabad

low growth over the last 30 years or so. Moving beyond the aggregate figures the literacy and enrolment numbers for the female and rural populations are even worse [5], with the obvious result that a rural female is highly unlikely to even attend school.

Pakistan's education system was inherited from the British at independence in 1947. The total size of the state sector relative to that of the private and voluntary sector was small [22]. Due to limited government funding, private schools cropped up in most urban centres and functioned alongside state schools as well as missionary schools (functioning since before independence). In 1972, the Bhutto government nationalized all schools and for a brief period (1972-1979) all schools were brought under the control and were financed by the government. This period was short lived and under the next government – that of Gen. Zia-ul-Haq – private schools were allowed to operate freely and a few previously nationalized ones were privatized as well. Since independence local governments had “played an active and major role in both financing and administering elementary level education” [23]. The role of local governments as the focus of the state education system shifted over the years to provincial and central governments. Since then education has been provided by a mix of the state, the market and the voluntary sector.

The growth in the number of private schools in Pakistan since the late 1980s can be categorized as phenomenal. A majority of the new private schools were established in the mid to late 1990s [24].

The increase in the number of private schools highlighted [24] is remarkable in its magnitude, especially when compared with an average population growth rate in the same period of approximately 2.7% which suggests an increased demand for private schooling. The total number of private institutions catering to the educational needs of children in Pakistan in 2000 was over 32,000 compared to 3,300 in 1983, a ten-fold increase over 17 years [24]¹¹.

Gross primary enrolment has remained largely stagnant around 70% throughout the 1990s. As the population of the country continues to grow and the need for education (simply by sheer quantity) grows with it the state education sector seems to be stagnating. Drop out rates from state schools are growing [5]. The overall condition of the state education system with respect of school going age children per school¹² and easiness of access has actually worsened [5].

¹¹ As cited in [24]: The Federal Bureau of Statistics (2000): 'Private Educational Institutions of Pakistan, Census, March 2000'; FBS, Islamabad. The enrolment data for primary schooling shown at approximately

¹² Including the numerous 'ghost schools'

Total primary enrolment rates in Pakistan were at approximately 65% in 2000, which dropped down to 41% for middle school and 19% for high school. Private enrolment rates were 18%, 9% and 4% respectively, a significant proportion of the school going population [24]. Reference [24] show that a significant proportion of new private schools created in the mid-to-late 1990s are primary schools, dealing with the 5 – 10 year old group.

Interestingly, total primary school enrolment over the period of high growth in the number of private sector schools in the latter half of the last decade remained approximately the same: at just under 70%, suggesting any increase in private sector enrolment in the same period was a result of substitution of state school enrolment.

Reference [23] suggests that “although the government is the dominant supplier of education, public expenditure on education only presents a partial picture of the total efforts in education. Private sector managed institutions, largely schools, have grown rapidly in recent years”. Based on survey data collected from two different studies conducted in urban Sindh (Karachi) and Punjab, respectively, in 1996 [23] found that “54% of children of primary-school going age (70% in Lahore) from 3,500 low and middle income households were enrolled in private schools”. Reference [24] suggest that in 2000 approximately 6 million children (between the ages 5-19) were enrolled in private institutions as compared to approximately 16-17 million in state schools.

It also seems that an increasing number of new private schools are opening for business in rural areas of Pakistan, thus confounding the generally held view in Pakistan that private schools only cater to the elite [24].

This finding, however, does not disprove that there is an urban-rural divide in provision of education, but it does show that there is an increasing number of private schools opening in rural areas and catering to the educational demand of the rural population.

The role of private sector schooling is on the rise and can be expected to increase further in Pakistan. One of the reasons for this is inefficiency in the state system of managing schools as well as increasing lack in credibility of provincial testing mechanisms and qualifications. Due to extremely high levels of teacher absenteeism and idleness of educational infrastructure, parents have increasingly opted to move their primary age children to private sector schools that follow the national/provincial curriculum but are not necessarily registered. Since there is no provincial testing until the end of secondary school (age 16) parents opt out-of-state schools that cannot guarantee the presence of teachers. In the state schools where teachers are present their general level of content knowledge and teaching methods are perceived to be very poor. Studies conducted in various parts of the country show that an alarmingly high proportion of state school teachers fail to either outperform their own

students [23] in exams or worse yet fail the exams all together [25].

I would argue that even at the secondary school and higher secondary school levels (where students of ages 16 and 18, respectively are examined by their respective boards of education), state school enrolment is overstated since students enrol but do not attend school. Instead 16 to 18 year olds in most urban areas are found attending lectures at 'coaching centres' that have been around since the 1980s. These privately owned unregulated institutions provide the service of coaching students to pass the provincial board examinations to acquire secondary and higher secondary school certification.

6. THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR: MADRASSAS AND NGOS

Before moving on to quality and equity issues in light of an explosion in private sector schooling, it is important to address the role of madrassas and the NGO sector in Pakistan's education system. Madrassas¹³ have existed in the areas that now constitute Pakistan since before Pakistan's creation. They have, however, garnered a great deal of attention and disrepute in both the local and international press as well as political debate recently¹⁴. These schools generally follow their own curricula, and are not regulated by either the central or the provincial governments¹⁵. Recent public opinion suggests that many Pakistani children, especially in rural areas, are attending madrassas instead of mainstream schools. Reference [26] suggests that in fact the number of Pakistani children attending madrassas is quite low as a proportion of all school going children. According to their estimate full-time enrolment in madrassas (as a percentage of total school enrolment of 5-19 year olds) was less than 1%. The authors [26] however acknowledge that their figures are based on data collected before September 11, 2001. They also use a survey of some districts in the Punjab to suggest that school choice (between madrassas, private and state schools) in rural areas is affected by the availability of all alternatives in the vicinity. Reference [26] suggests "...that the schooling decision for an average Pakistani household in a rural region consists of an enrolment decision (should I send my child to school) followed by a private/public decision, with a madrassas possibility."¹⁶ Reference [27] presents a scathing analysis of the curriculum and quality of madrasa education.

¹³ For a quick review of the madrasa system and short history of Madrasa education see [27]

¹⁴ Since September 11, 2001

¹⁵ There have been attempts recently to force madrassas to follow a set curriculum including science, mathematics, etc., however there have met with limited success

¹⁶ This evidence, nonetheless, has not been corroborated yet by other comprehensive studies using recent data

The NGO sector has had a presence in Pakistan's education system since independence [22]. As opposed to madrassas, this presence has largely been in urban areas. However, the size of the NGO sector is schooling as independent from fee-charging private schools is unclear as these are often bunched-in with private educational institutions in various studies. There is much anecdotal evidence about a robust increase in the number and size of voluntary institutions, however, there is a distinct lack of clear evidence and data on the actual size and media and public claims about the size of full-time madrasa education might be exaggerated.

7. EDUCATION QUALITY AND EQUITY: BETTER, BUT FOR WHOM?

In the new millennium, the role of the state in the provision of elementary education has receded to an extent. Poor infrastructure has meant that many from relatively poorer backgrounds have opted out of the state education system. The void has been filled by a growing number of private (fee charging) and voluntary sector (madrassas and NGO run) schools. In some areas the provincial government has handed over control of empty schools to the private sector in private-public partnerships. Based on input indicators (pupils per teacher, expenditure per pupil, teacher absenteeism, etc.) as well as output indicators (literacy and numeracy) there is some evidence that private schools catering to the poor are performing better than state schools.

Reference [24] shows interesting results from their analysis of the Private Sector School census data. They show that on a number of quality measures like teacher per pupil ratios, per pupil expenditure, teacher qualifications and number of leave days taken by teachers that on average private schools perform better than state schools. The above evidence on school indicators raises two interesting points. First, it is surprising that teacher qualifications in private schools (including the myriad small scale informal schools) should be higher than the qualifications of teachers in the state sector. Second, that number of leave days taken by state school teachers is probably an underestimation considering the extremely high levels of teacher absenteeism even when they are supposed to be teaching at school.

They also show that female enrolment as a percentage of total enrolment per school at private schools is much higher than that at state schools. They suggest that this is due to the fact that most private schools are mix-gender and tend to employ a higher proportion of female teachers. Reference [24] suggests that this shatters the myth that traditionally conservative Pakistani parents prefer not to send daughters to co-ed schools. There may, however, be other interactions that cause the higher level of female enrolment at co-ed private schools (possibly: proximity to homes and smaller sizes, locally known female teachers). Nonetheless, if true, this represents an important and crucial achievement in social objectives (an increase in female enrolment in schools).

Finally, they show that private school fees range from very high (only affordable to the urban elite) at a few schools, a large number of schools in the middle range and a number of private schools that provide schooling at very low fees. Obvious issues of equality in quality of education provided to people of different socio-economic background are dealt with here by suggesting that if parents have the information regarding the quality of education their children are receiving for the money they are paying, then there is no concern. They prove high level of parent information by demonstrating the correlation between fee responsiveness and student-teacher ratios and teacher qualifications. This is essentially a market oriented argument where 'you get what you paid for'.

Further evidence of the better quality of private schooling is presented by [23] based on a survey conducted on private and state schools in 1994-95 in Lahore. Using attainment figures based on simple math and literacy tests attempted by approximately 6,800 students, he found that a significantly higher proportion of students attending inexpensive private primary schools (Rs. 100 per month or lower) passed the test as compared students attending state schools. In a similar study conducted on 302 schools in 5 districts in Punjab in 1997 [23] found similar results. Significantly, the author states that "the performance of children from lower income households attending private schools with a fee structure that these households were willing to bear, was distinctly better than those from households in the same income bracket but going to government schools" [23].

The poor condition of state schools partly a cause of extremely poor state funding has resulted in interesting education policy decisions. One example of state recognition of the poor health of state schools and a policy response has been the acceptance of an offer [28] from the private sector by the provincial government of Sindh to take over idle school buildings and to manage them. This, however, is not an incidental decision. There have been calls for a 'controlled' handover of idle state school facilities to the private sector as well as 'selective privatization' of school administration from respected academics in Pakistan [25] in order to improve school quality across the country. While the author acknowledges that the two goals of improving school quality as well as educational equality will be difficult to achieve, he suggests that in the current system the gap between the well off and the poor will continue to expand. In the poorest Pakistani province of Balochistan the government initiated, with support from the World Bank, two (urban and rural) pilot projects to induce the creation of private schools for poor girls in 1994 [29]. The provincial government offered to provide finance and support for people willing to open subsidized private schools for girls. Alderman et al., in a review of the

project, find that such public-private partnership proved to be sustainable in the urban centre but not in the rural areas of Balochistan. They also conclude that the cost to the government "of subsidizing these schools is a fraction of the cost of educating the students in a government school" [29]. A survey of state, private and NGO primary schools across rural Pakistan found that NGO schools showed the highest levels of attainment in tests administered to the students [30]. However the researchers admit that this may be attributed to the relatively better socio-economic backgrounds of the students attending most of the NGO primary schools included in the survey.

Most of the literature quoted above presents a positive and optimistic view of the 'privatization' of basic education in Pakistan. The arguments are mostly efficiency based and emphasize (rightly) the extraordinarily pathetic condition of Pakistan's state education system. Since the state system seems to be failing in providing quality education to its people "...as realists, we must accept that the ability of the state to provide or administer quality education has diminished to the point that it is incapable of delivering on its promises" [25].

Therefore in the context of a state versus market debate over education, philosophical issues of parental rights and practical concerns regarding reducing inequality (like the ones discussed in section 3 have been relegated to positions behind the issue of basic quality of education. The argument posited by a large portion of the literature, therefore, is that where the state sector fails to provide even the most basic teaching the private sector steps in and provides a service.

Apart from quality improvements very few other social objectives are reviewed. Therefore, while all the studies included in this paper cite the abysmally low enrolment rates, none of them suggest how private schools will help enhance the enrolment rates beyond the current levels. Only [24] point to an improved female enrolment rate at private schools as opposed to state schools.

It is important to note here that a number of the studies that suggest that private schools provide better quality education than state schools are urban studies and not all of them refer to output indicators (literacy and numeracy tests). A number of them ignore the class backgrounds of the pupils and therefore fail to separate socio-economic class background from school type as the explanatory variable for the perceived improvement in quality.

However, Pakistan's education system has gone through a drastic marketization in the urban areas and will gradually do so in rural areas. That some indicators input and/or output have improved is a positive sign, but it does not detract from the fact that the quality of education received by each pupil is affected by the fee charged from his or her parents and therefore the social stratification inherent in the system has not been reduced. The lines have simply been rubbed out and redrawn.

8. CONCLUSION

Pakistan has always had a socially stratified education system that allows the wealthy to purchase the best education and consequently further enhance their future earning capacities. Enrolment and adult literacy continue to languish at very low levels despite continuous rhetoric from civil society and the state for the need to reform, streamline and improve education.

The lack of concrete improvements in curriculum, physical infrastructure, teacher training and motivation as well as half hearted attempts at curbing corruption has seen the state education system erode over the past thirty five years or so. This erosion is witnessed in both the actual delivery of education as well as the public perception of the state's own credibility. Since the 1980s the private sector (and recently the voluntary sector) has grown at an increasing rate¹⁷ and is beginning to step into the void left by the state sector and meeting the 'growing demand' for education. With greater flexibility and accountability the private sector has been able to provide 'paying customers' at least some modicum of education for their children where the state system is seen as decrepit and inflexible. This is seen in an increased number of small, unregistered schools that have cropped up in both rural areas as well as slums. This requires a shift in the mindset of the observer from the traditional private school catering only to the wealthy idea. In today's Pakistan the private sector caters to a wide variety of class groupings and charges accordingly¹⁸. It is clear that the growth in the private sector is robust and a number of studies point towards qualitative advantages (by input as well as some output indicators) of private schools over state schools. Overall gross school enrolment does not seem to have increased greatly over the last decade of the 20th century while private school enrolment has increased, suggesting a substitution.

In the context of a state system falling apart this growth of the private sector has been inevitable as demand exists and the improvement in quality is evident and important. Also, some evidence suggests that the private sector seems to have circumscribed cultural bottlenecks such as low female enrolment. However, there is no evidence that suggests that the long term social objectives associated with the arguments in favour of largely state supplied education of high enrolment, high literacy and low educational disadvantage will be achieved through a 'privatized' education system. Instead, previously existent educational disadvantage factors previously operating through the state-private divide are now being formalized at somewhat improved levels of quality for the poor. A revolution in upward

¹⁷ By number of schools as well as student enrolment

¹⁸ There is no work yet on whether some growth of private schools in urban slum areas simply represent parents' (especially mothers) need for 'day-care' for their young children

class mobility due to privatized education is unlikely to occur. However, an improved level of literacy and numeracy is likely to result in increased productivity by providing the economy with an increased number of trainable workers.

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