

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

## **ABSTRACT**

The focus of this study was to investigate public-private partnerships (PPPs) in education, in this instance by evaluating the Educational Management Organizations (EMOs) Program in Sindh, Pakistan. The study is guided by the research questions which were intended to evaluate to what extent, how, in what way, and for whom PPP mode of education through EMOs improve access to education, ensure quality and equity in education, and sustainability in the context of Sindh, Pakistan. We have chosen 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 data collection includes EMOs policy documents, PSLM survey, SEMIS, and SAT data sets. Moreover, we have conducted 37 semi-structured interviews and FGDs with the EMO stakeholders, including policy developers, school operators, managers, headteachers, teachers, and parents. The findings indicate that PPPs through EMOs have some advantages in better governance of schools through autonomy and decentralization. The schools' accountability, monitoring, and evaluation have been somehow improved. However, the broader impact of EMOs reform still does not reflect in increasing access, overall quality, and ensuring equity; also, the sustainability of these schools after EMOs contractual period remained unpredicted. This study may open a window for policymakers and concerned stakeholders to better understand what works, for whom, in what circumstances design a better regulatory framework of PPPs beyond the piecemeal approach to education reform.

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

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) in education are a global phenomenon, and it is being 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 at 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 government is typically to finance and to ensure the values of compassion and social cohesion (Patrinos et al., 2009). PPPs in education are also being endorsed and are operational in Pakistan, alongside claims that PPPs can provide solutions to educational problems (e.g., related to student achievement and access to education). PPP policies and designs in education vary across and within the countries. In Pakistan's education system, there are also several kinds of PPP modes in schooling, which include Foundations schools (in Sindh and Punjab), vouchers schools (in Punjab), adopting a school model, and Education Management Organization (EMO) schools.

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 developing roads, buildings, and infrastructure services. Education is treated as a common public good and can be delivered without charging any fees. Most existing research and discussions about PPP have focused on PPP policies and outcomes within advantaged contexts. The discussion is a frame for the PPP review without any substantial comparative analysis. The above foci/approaches do not yield specific and useful information regarding the implementation or efficacy of PPPs in developing contexts like 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 with respect to PPP 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 in this context. 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. This study is thus a mixed-methods—integrating robust quantitative data, in-depth qualitative interviews, and document analysis to evaluate educational PPPs in the Sindh province of Pakistan comprehensively.

Our study addresses 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 the Sindh province of Pakistan?
2. How effectively and efficiently do PPPs in education through EMOs in the Sindh province of Pakistan 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 the Sindh province of Pakistan?

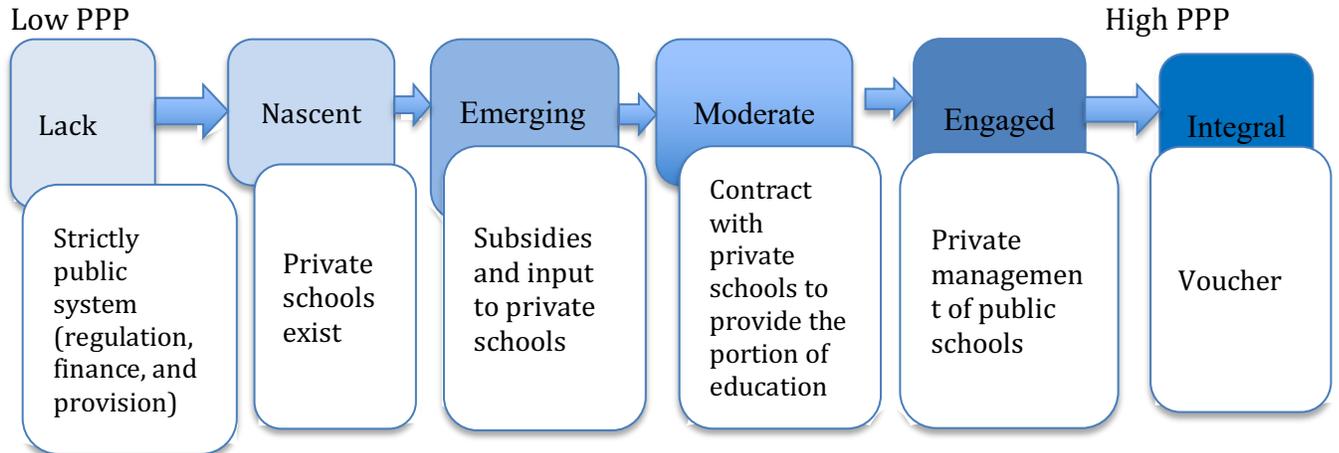
The structure of the study broadly focuses on the PPP policy through EMO schools in the context of the Sindh province of Pakistan. Further, the study has been divided into five sections. The first section introduces and overviews the study; the second section reviews relevant literature; the third section discusses research methodology, including theoretical framework, data collection strategies, and analysis; the fourth section presents findings and discussion; and the final fifth section is about conclusions and recommendations.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are several forms of PPPs in education. In a World Bank-supported publication, *The Role and Impact of PPPs in Education*, Patrinos et al. (2009) delineated the different types and degrees of PPP 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.

**Figure 1**

*World Bank PPPs in Education Continuum Concept*



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

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. The Sindh province of Pakistan has a largely *Emerging* and *Engaged* model of PPPs in the form of subsidizing private schools (through SEF) and private management of public schools (through EMOs), respectively.

### ***(a) The Emergence of PPPs in Education***

PPPs have gained popularity in various sectors in the last few decades and are being 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 instructs all governments to ensure 100% enrollment at the primary level by 2030 (UNDP, 2015). Various UN-supported agencies offered funds to governments and non-governmental organizations 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 organizations to supplement government agendas on *Education for All* (UNICEF et al., 2011). PPP initiatives proliferated amidst the mid of 2000s; it is being claimed as a key mechanism to address inefficiencies in public services

and reduce inequalities (Gideon & Unterhalter, 2017). Sustainable Development Goal (17.17) is also encouraged to increase PPP worldwide. Accordingly, PPPs in education is rapidly proliferating, not only in industrialized countries but also in non-industrialized countries (Verger, 2012)

Due to the globalization of national economies, the role of International Organizations (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. International Organizations such as the World Bank and Organizations for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are key drivers of policy diffusion of private sector participation in education (Ball & Youdell, 2007). UN subsidiary organizations like 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 World Bank have jointly developed PPPs models in Pakistan and offered loans for pursuing the EFA goals (Barrera-Osorio & Raju, 2011; UNICEF et al., 2011). Beyond the World Bank and ADB (who 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 World Bank, ADB, and USAID; this funding amounts to almost 20% 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 concern that, in Pakistan, most PPP programs remained ad-hoc and showcased and had a little systematic impact on access quality and equity. Further, also shown little financial sustainability; as most of the PPPs are financed by donors with time bounding, and there is inconsistent financing from the government side (Bano, 2008)

### ***(b) PPP Programs in Education at the Sindh Province of Pakistan***

The government of Pakistan (GoP) has also adopted the use of private education through PPPs by developing a policy action for resource mobilization 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)

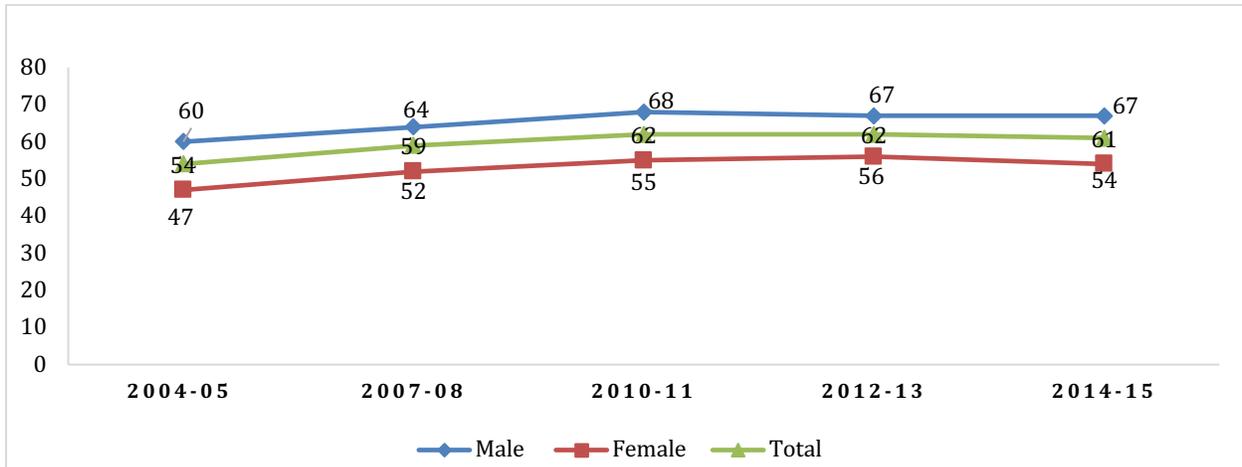
The government of Pakistan currently claims that PPPs in education offers a best practice means of meeting the UN goal of education for all and SDGs (MoE, 2017). Accordingly, they are pouring resources and efforts into such models, which will likely carry major short- and long-term implications for students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

Sindh is the second largest province in Pakistan, with 24% of the total population. Still, it has only a 56% literacy rate, with a huge disparity of urban-to-rural population distribution and an uneven male-to-female in education. According to the 2017 census (GoP, 2017), about 50% of Sindh's population lives in a rural area, and 50% live in small urban areas. The poverty rate is 40.1%, and the majority of poverty is concentrated in rural Sindh; an estimated six million children are out of schools in Sindh (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 the Sindh province, 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% of grade five students lack grade one competencies in language, and 57% of grade five students cannot perform two-digit division in mathematics. The net-enrollment rate is also comparatively low in Sindh. Figure 3 shows the net enrollment rate at the primary school level from 2004 to 2015.

**Figure 2**

*Net Enrolment 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), whose purpose was to improve access to equitable education, improve the quality of education, and provide better education governance. In 2013, the Sindh Government also passed a *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 maximize enrollment (SELD, 2017). Further, the policy is meant to institutionalize accountability to improve service delivery in education which should be aligned with National Educational Policy 2009 (SELD, 2014).

The option of PPPs was found to be innovative and 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 has been assumed significant in the education of Pakistan. According to SELD(2014), the private sector provides 67% of education in Karachi and 53% in Hyderabad (both are part of urban Sindh). However, in the rural part of the province, private education only accounts for 9-10%. 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 Organizations (EMOs) are discussed below.

### ***(c) Foundation Assisted Schools***

Sindh Assembly passed the bill of Sindh Education Foundation in 1992. Later the governor of Sindh made it the SEF act. As a quasi-government autonomous organization, SEF's mandate was to work in less-developed areas and marginalized province populations. As per the act document (SEF act, 1992), its role and mandate were not to open and support private schools at a large scale. Later the World Bank sought the role of SEF to scale up private schools (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2017). 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 5 USD) per student to the private provider including individuals and local organizations (Khan et al., 2018). Currently, all schools have been renamed as Foundation Assisted Schools, and these schools can also be called contract schools in the terminology of PPPs. Currently, there are 2673 schools and 725000 enrolled students, and 20959 teachers in foundation-supported schools (SEF website, 2022).

### ***(d) Education Management Organizations***

The emergence of EMOs is rooted back in the early 1990s in the US. It was considered large-scale school reform through market-based education reform. Wall Street analysts coined the term EMOs along with Health Management Organizations (Miron & Gulosino 2013). EMOs are varied in terms of their profit and non-profit status. Proponents believe EMOs will bring an entrepreneurial spirit and competitive ethos to public education. The theory behind the market approach of competition-based school reform is that existing government schools will improve or cease to operate. Opponents believe this will add new bureaucracy layers in education and divert public funds towards services fees charged by organizations (Miron & Gulosino 2013).

In 2015, the Government of Sindh launched the EMO program with the World Bank, 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 credible private sector. The objectives of the EMOs reform also include hopes to bring innovativeness in public schools, reduce inefficiencies and management issues, improve quality, and encourage private sector

investment in rural Sindh. Getting the legitimacy of EMOs, the Sindh government drafted the "Concession Agreement" based on *PPPs Act 2010* from the provincial assembly. The Sindh PPPs Act defines PPPs as:

A partnership carried out under a Public-Private Partnership Agreement between the public sector represented by an agency and a private party for the provision of an infrastructure facility, management functions, and /or service with a clear allocation of risks between the two parties (SELD, 2017, p.33)

PPPs act attracted the attention of NGOs local and international players to reach out to those marginalized 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 southern Sindh districts under PPPs through the EMO program.

Currently, in Sindh, different types of organizations are operating as EMOs. These are NGOs, higher education academic institutions, and private school systems. These all are Pakistan-based organizations; however, now the government and its supporter ADB are also intended 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 EMOs<sup>1</sup> are given in the table below.

**Table 1.**

*Profile of EMOs Operating in Sindh*

Name of Organization(s)	Description (s)
Sukkur IBA University	A public sector university located at Sukkur also manages several community colleges and government schools funded by the government of Sindh.
The Citizen Foundation	A non-profit organization working in the education sector of Pakistan mainly focus on the less-privileged segment of the society
Indus Resource Centre	A Sindh-based NGO mainly works in education, health, and other social sector activities.
Sindh Rural Support Organization	A Sindh-based not-for-profit organization mainly

<sup>1</sup> 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.

	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 organization operates in Pakistan in education, health, and other social-related activities.
Health and Nutrition Development Society (HANDS) Pakistan	An international NGO 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 operates in eight countries, mainly in K-12 education.

***(e) 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 in public policies through applying the values of accountability, managerialism, and decentralization, to avoid bureaucratic hurdles (Verger & Curran, 2014; Wilkins et al., 2019). There is a common argument from the supporters of PPPs that decentralization and separating financial and operational provisions can improve the performance of schools. The NPM concept also emphasizes school autonomy and helps hire quality teachers efficiently from the market. In the realist evaluation of PPPs (discussed in the following section), we have discussed EMO schools constructed in the Sindh province of Pakistan where schools' management has been given to the competitive private sector; instead, the financing of schools is coming from the Sindh Government. It is assumed that the decentralization of power, increasing accountability, getting specialized services from the private sector, and mobilizing private sector investment all increase the accessibility to education, quality of education, and overall school efficiency (SELD, 2017).

Yet, there are issues when contracts are unclear, especially surrounding how one can ensure private sector sustainability when there is low teacher's salary at PPPs schools. Policy researchers also have concern that NPM emphasizes managerial ideas through private sector participation in education, which includes standardization, decentralization, 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 standardization. The current education system is adopting business

models that help them increase customers by reducing the cost of education through standardization in education to incentivize 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 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 the context of local norms, religious/moral values, and social cohesion. We applied the realist evaluation as a quite relevant methodology to answering these context-specific questions. The realist evaluation guides us to review relevant policy documents, develop a theory of change and revise the theory of change with the help of stakeholders, and then design the field to test the theory.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

We have chosen the realist evaluation approach (Pawson and Tilley 1997) to answer the research questions of what extent, how, in what way, and for whom PPP mode of education through EMOs improve access to education, ensure quality and equity education, and sustainability in the context of Sindh, Pakistan? Realist evaluation is a theory-driven approach (Hewitt et al., 2012). 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 asks not "what works" but instead asks "what works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects, and how?" (Mathison, 2005, p. 363).

The distinction of a realist methodology from randomized control trial is that a realist inquiry model (also being called a generative model) also includes internal factors like 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 skeptical toward the panacea or "context-free" approaches of policies or interventions. We have thus decided that the realist evaluation method can be beneficially applied to evaluate the effect of the programs/policies (PPP -EMOs in education in this situation). In this study, the context would be Sindh province, the mechanism would be EMO policies, and the required outcomes are meeting educational goals (accessibility, equity, and quality).

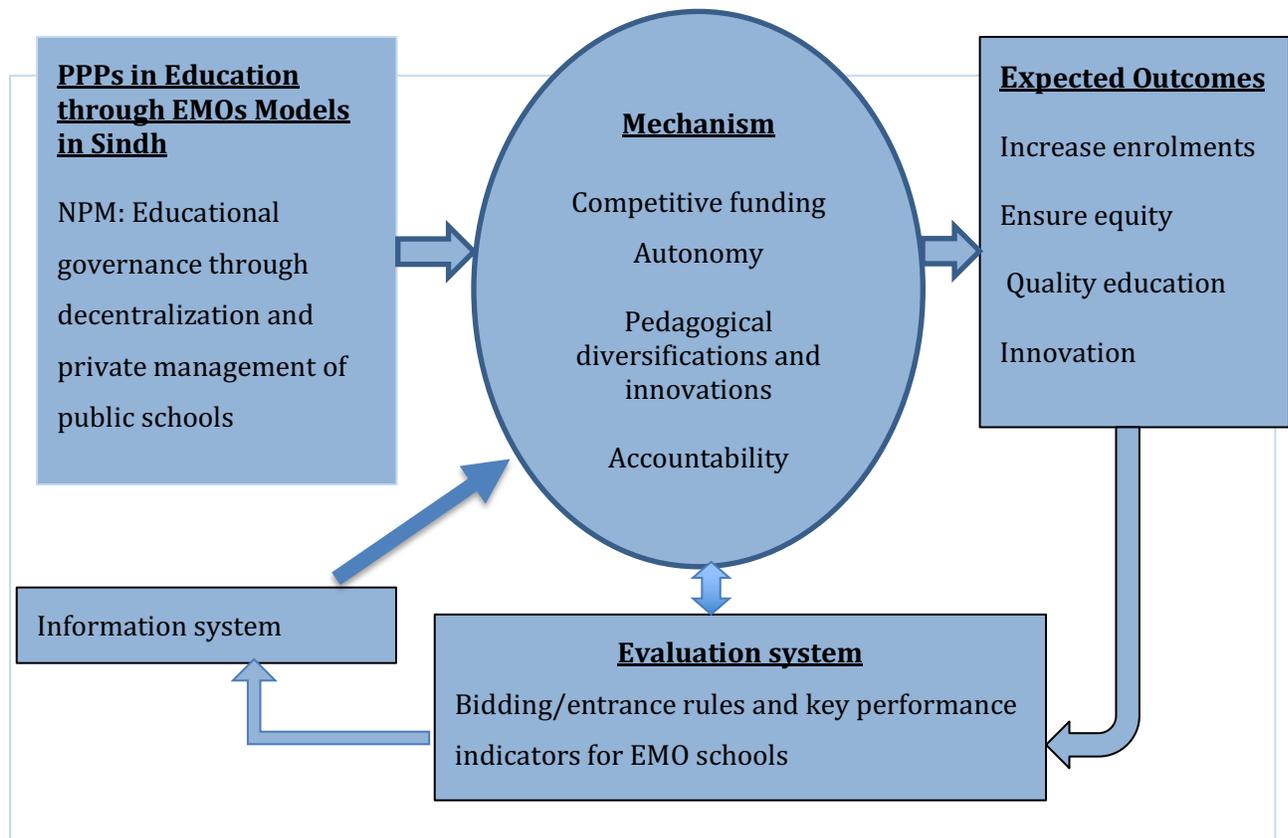
The core purpose of the realist evaluation is to test and refine the theory. Hence, the context-mechanism- outcome pattern (CMO) configurations in our study attempted to understand how the PPP initiative through the EMO program ensure the private management of the public schools in the targeted areas of the Sindh province and bring about access to education, enhances students learning outcomes, and ensure the quality and equity in education in the marginalized, and rural regions of the Sindh Pakistan. The realist evaluation helps develop and test CMO configuration empirically that 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 the social reforms (planned activities and expected results) are related to each other in the process (Mertens & Wilson, 2019).

***(a) The EMO Theory of Change***

Based on the secondary data, including the policy documents of the EMOs program (please see the details of documents in serial 1 and 2 in table 2) and through stakeholder's conference with policymakers and key informants of PPPs, we have attempted to (re) constructed the EMOs theory of change. We have assumed the theoretical concept of NPM guides the development of a theory of change of the EMO program. NPM is a managerial approach borrowed from the market and applied in public policy, and widely used in PPPs in education (Verger & Curran, 2014). PPP program through EMOs logic model based on NPM concept is given figure no. 3.

**Figure 3**

*PPP-EMOs Theory of Change/Logic Model in Sindh Based on NPM*



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

**(a) 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. Further, 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, quantitative data tells what works, and qualitative data tell what context and mechanism enable PPPs to be a success or failure.

**(b) Data and Sampling**

To evaluate PPP-EMOs that address the questions of equitable access, quality, and efficiency in education, we have therefore collected and analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data of

different stakeholders and participants. These include document reviews, secondary data sets, and interviews. We have used secondary data collected from the PSLM survey, SEMIS, and 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 have selected participants for interviews and FGDs based on a sample representing all stakeholders of PPP-EMOs. Details of data collection and participants are given in Tables 2 below and detail of participants are 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 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
8	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
9	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)
10	Statistical analysis of SEMIS, SAT, and PSLM survey data	(a) SAT test 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

### ***(c) Data Analysis***

In realist evaluation, the development of a logic model or theory of change helps in data analysis which is based on CMO. Using 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 have been coded in CMO themes that discuss the EMO initiatives' objectives, observed outcomes, context, and mechanism of PPPs through EMOs. In quantitative analysis, we have 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 analyzing above mentioned multiple data sets in qualitative and quantitative formats, we have 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.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study have been presented into two broader themes and their sub-themes: mainly address the research question(s) 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 (i.e., *perceptions* and *implementation*). The second broader theme is relative to PPP *outcomes* the extent to which PPP models in education served to enhance access, quality, and equity in Sindh in achieving the SDGs and have been organized into a subtheme.

### **I. Evaluation of Educational Reform Policy through PPP-EMOs in Sindh**

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

#### ***(a) Definition, Scope, and Objectives of PPPs in Education by Various Stakeholders***

To unpack PPPs and their scope in education, we first explored the definition and understanding of PPP at different stakeholders' levels. According to Patrinos et al. (2009), PPPs arrangements are different 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 *PPPs Guide and Tool Kit* (SELD, 2017), the PPP in education is described as a framework where the government role would be more regulator and policy developer. Meanwhile, the private sector's role would be to deliver service efficiently and effectively.

The role of donor agencies is significant in PPPs arrangement in the context of Sindh. The three main drivers of PPPs in Sindh, World Bank, ADB, and USAID, also have different strategies. World Bank pushes more vouchers and low-cost subsidy types of schools in Sindh. At the same time, ADB is investing more in secondary schools and building infrastructure. The USAID has primarily invested in the Sindh Basic Education Program; under this theme, they have supported drafting policies and funded establishing a school operated through PPP mode by EMOs. In our interview with a donor who designed the PPP model in Sindh, his response differed from the Sindh government PPP documents definition. His understanding of PPP was broader and more ideological 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, private management of public schools. At the limit, you can consider anything PPP. [In] EMOs we are financing in the Sindh. Given that you can have any number of objectives of PPP: Access to quality, relevant skills just depend on the situation.

The importance of PPPs is also being oversold (Verger, 2012), which aid agencies later realized as "PPPs is one strategy and ongoing process and not a panacea. "It has been reported from donors that PPPs support the government to meet resource shortage 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 is viewed differently as one policy level person mentioned, "In PPPs, donor money is not a gift instead of a loan."

Neither private sector brought its resources and investment. If the private sector brings, they could charge services in terms of tuition fees that are not allowed in education. Government brings its resources and money; donors help in policy designing. Further, they reported that PPPs needs had been sought 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 implement educational governance. The private sector has an advantage because it has the power to fire those who do not work.

It is also reported that the PPP EMO concept has not been adequately translated and understood by the public. Spillane (2006) discussed that policy at the top-level designed and not properly translated through administrative support and training often gets distorted and misunderstood. At the operation level, partners confessed they signed the contract and read monitoring and other accountability but still could not fully understand the agenda of PPPs in a long-term scenario. Few schools operators suggest this is a unique setup if these schools should be completely handover to NGOs or private organizations and remove government teachers and staff. They show concern it is challenging to work with government-school teachers and get results. Contrary, others believe complete handover will distort the idea of partnership in the PPP. The private sector supports the government and builds its capacity. It is also not fully understood at the top and the local level. 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 the ownership of PPP schools is still lacking at the government staff level. Beyond the above discussion on PPP policies and their contracts complexities, there is a solid supporting voice at the school and community level. They believe the partnership model offers a unique opportunity to get services from prominent institutes and organizations, i.e., Sukkur IBA University and The Citizen foundation.

### ***(b) Contextual Fit and 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 prepared under USAID sponsorship through Sindh Basic Education Program. However, Sindh government policymakers reported that these ideas of PPPs-EMOs are indigenous policy compared to other PPP policies, i.e., the foundation schools. In Sindh actually, EMOs were renamed after Sindh Education Management Organizations policy (SEMO); they claim it's 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 more contextualization of the model. Similarly, the Sindh government also realized the local understanding of any interventions as mentioned in 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 localized 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 has also been reported that the government of Sindh is not fully autonomous in designing and implementing PPP policies. The 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 government is getting a loan; the loan has their 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 EMOs model initially faced more challenges when the school was handed over to private schools' chains; a power struggle between government and EMOs staff sometimes resulted in clashes between both sides of staff. One reason reported is that private schools' governance seems different from government-funded schools because of their dealing with employees.

Not all EMOs understand local contexts, but some have solid contextual understanding by continuously serving the community through their social projects. 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. 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 organizations are entering the field with a philanthropist approach or goal to serve and support the government in education; sometime, profit is also their motive. Increasing private sector interest also raises doubts among the public that EMOs in PPPs contracts earn profit from public money. The policy implementer and independent expert reported that the private

sector has its interest, which could be a concern. Ad hoc policies also create an environment of dependency.

***(c) Selection of Schools Process: Contracts and Competitive Bidding***

We got some useful findings while reviewing documents and getting interviews with stakeholders. PPP in the shape of EMOs has some advantages but also disadvantages. The PPP-EMOs model has a somewhat clear policy and competitive bidding process than foundation schools. Their award is based on technical and financial proposals evaluation, which has been carefully designed. This practice has been reported to bring the best of the best organizations. In EMOs, the *Concession Agreement* of PPP clearly mentioned bringing industry practices in the education sector. There are Key Performance Indicators (KPI)<sup>2</sup> enable the environment of accountability, and independent educational experts' auditors evaluate the KPI 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. Further, the PPP node at the government level is intensely bureaucratic, which contradicts the objectives of innovation. The school contracts need more incentive mechanisms beyond monetary rewards for bringing innovation. Selecting schools based on monetary incentives has many disadvantages. As expressed by one of the policies implementor of PPP-EMOs:

In my opinion, PPP should be more flexible [in awarding schools]. At the end of the term, a lot of organizations 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 on many grounds of quality and equity; how can the lowest bidder ensure these criteria of ensuring libraries, lab, and concentrating more on disadvantaged kids. There is also a limitation in the spending budget; the budget of repair cannot be transferred to another purpose. These issues make EMOs less innovative in solving problems immediately.

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<sup>2</sup> The KPIs for EMOs are given in Appendix B

#### **(d) Private Sector Participation in Education**

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 realized the role of NGOs and community-based organizations are crucial and planned to support these organizations 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 be the SELD just doesn't have the capacity to run hundreds of new secondary schools, so they don't have the capacity to staff them support them, and really keep them running, so EMOs are a good model to use existing civil society or private sector companies to manage schools.

They believe civil society is passionate to invest in education. There were also large numbers of NGOs on the verge of decess due to the reduction of donor funding. The USAID and government of Sindh also realized to continue their services in the social sector; they are being incentivized to manage schools.

The motivation for private organizations is also very. Some social organizations or NGOs claim their motivation is to serve the community; some private schools chain claim they want to enlarge their activities, diversify their school system and ensure quality education. It is a win-win for both parties government gets better services, and the private sector earns reputation and revenue. Another reason for motivation was that NGOs were already working or thinking to diversify their work toward education, as government, USAID, and ADB already constructed buildings. So they became ready to embark on this established building. It was less challenging for them to enter than entirely building new infrastructure. Verger et al. (2020) argued PPP alone is not sufficient. There is a need to design PPP based on the context. So, the payment system should be aligned with a better design that ensures all three education goals, i.e., access, quality, and equity. Unlike foundation schools, the EMO model incentivizes organizations based on their better technical reports and plans, usually attracting better providers. As mentioned by one of the policymakers, "A system that incentivizes quality, incentivizes good providers to enter the market." The EMO model has more funding and incentivizes the private sector, but competitive bidding based on financial proposals constrains quality and equity to pay teachers well.

Another scenario is being developed, as many private sector organizations are mushrooming in education as EMOs, and 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.

***(e) Governance Through Decentralization, Autonomy, Competition, and Accountability***

There is no doubt that the poor governance of public schools in Sindh gives comparative advantages 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 without rationalizing but based on political motivations to appease constituents. School financing is also uniform in most cases where 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 find a dozen of teachers but less than a hundred kids. We do not utilize the budget properly, and somewhere overcrowded teachers and fewer students and vice versa.

*Autonomy and accountability*

Commonly, government schools lack good governance and accountability mechanisms due to their centralizing educational administration. On the other hand through PPP mode, they apply the concept of NPM. The NPM mechanism based on decentralization, school accountability, and incentive-based performance yields better output (Wilkins et al., 2019). It has been reported due to decentralization, decision-making about teachers hiring, remunerating, and firing process is swift and expected better outcomes could be achieved. It also can make pedagogical innovation and finance different units easily. PPP documents of the Sindh government describe that in PPP mode, NGOs and community-based organizations are encouraged by sharing the power of administration; they play their 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. In the admission process, PPP schools 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 relatively show more bureaucratic processes; in those cases, many kids of poor and uneducated parents discontinue the schools.

There is an advantage in the new governance of PPP because of its cluster model in which the management of surrounding primary, elementary and high schools will be given to one school that would be called a hub. The cluster and consolidation policy may help to get the positive output of PPP as mentioned in SESP 2019-24. A larger hub of schools would provide facilities through the management and pedagogical support to satellite schools. This also includes cluster-based teachers' continuous professional development and quality assurance. Though this idea is still in the initial stage, this model seems to have more potential in decentralization and non-bureaucratic management.

Compared to government schools in privately managed schools, it is common to have more accountability. However, UNESCO (2017) suggested that accountability should be beyond the practice of market- approaches 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.

### *Monitoring and Evaluation*

PPP Policy experts and implementing agencies believe in Sindh province, and generally, in Pakistan, there is enormous inefficiency and lack of monitoring. In conventional government schools' large numbers of teachers are ghosts, and they have political backing, and the government can't make them accountable. As reported: "In many of the cases, teachers were somebody's brother-in-law's; whatever their qualification, they got appointed." In government setup, there are many constraints to fire teachers who do not perform. There is also less chance for deserving employees to grow based on performance. So, the government system won't yield adequate outcomes in education. There are also a lot of political and legal challenges, so nobody wants to touch those. So, the PPP has advantaged on it as narrated by one of the policymakers:

Regulatory environments are very difficult to operate, huge constraints on teacher hiring or firing in things like this [government set up]—one of the difficulties to hire the qualified staff and to pay them well. PPP gives scope to get around it.

So, PPP has a relative advantage as partners' performance has been aligned with educational quality and access, and there is a specific monitoring system that ensures accountability. In PPP, if teachers won't show up will be fired easily. As one policy developer elaborated, "there is accountability, it is 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 Key Performance Indicators enrolled in the PPP document.

There is also adequate criticism of the monitoring of the PPP model. Despite SELD and USAID added condition of independent experts and audits who monitor and evaluate. As per our investigations, most experts lack rigorous educational knowledge and experience. These consultants are mostly hired on an ad-hoc based. As per (Steiner-Khamsi et al. (2016), their perspective for ensuring quality and equity in education would be narrow. It has been emphasized government should add more credible educational institutes in monitoring and evaluation, who continuously evaluate based on research and evidence-based information. Another issue in monitoring is that PPP contracts have a lot of grey areas. Many EMO partners believe these KPIs are somehow also ambiguous and contradictory. For example, KPI of increase students' enrollment, as they are already at full capacity of students' enrolment because schools have nice building and resources which attracts kids from other schools. KPI like community engagement and capacity building can be manipulated by fake reporting, and their impact cannot be monitored through self-reporting documentation of private partners. Organizations who know bureaucracy and have a better working relationship with the government can take advantage easily.

#### *Competition, differentiation, and innovation*

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 our evidence collection, some schools or organizations have competitive advantages and offer very effective training and professional development relevant to their classroom effectiveness. However, primarily the market approach of the competition itself distracts innovation. It has been reported that the innovation is more tied with the collaboration to solve chronic issues rather than creating competition. Another critical aspect of PPPs tantamount to innovation revealed by some participants is that education is being handed over to non-educationists; they only bring cosmetic changes rather than radical ones. Many PPP schools tied innovation with lesson planning, technology use, and student-centered learning. Though EMOs offer a conducive learning

environment due to their enough funding; however, no pedagogical innovation was found to solve poor quality issues and ensure equity in challenging areas. Only standardization and ranking of schools increased, which is the byproduct of the market-based approach in education (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). Further, in the name of innovation and competition, schools have created a manipulative environment in the education system, where private schools owners and PPP operators attract parents and families by showcasing and focusing more on the English language. This practice also undermines the local languages.

#### ***(d) Teachers Hiring Mechanism, Remuneration, and Security***

In Sindh, there is a teachers' recruitment policy for government schools, which is uniform for all based on specific criteria. Teachers' recruitment is being 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 need. The qualification and teachers' certification does not matter, and the process is much quicker than the government as many operators responded that they have a rapid decision-making process. Like they need a teacher of math subject they can finish the recruitment process in days. Even if they don't have a budget, they can hire a volunteer. They prefer a young female who can take less salary. 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 on the private sector as per the labor law. The salary of government-school teachers is many times better than the private sector. This is why only leftover teachers get jobs in PPP schools, so all teachers desire government jobs.

The big concern is being portrayed in the PPP model is that of fewer salaries and security for 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 labor law. It is common among all teachers that government setup is more favorable for teachers, and in the PPP model, teachers are more vulnerable and insecure. Many teachers shared their stories that they are local, and they are looking for some experience and salary for survival, so PPP schools offer. If they get another opportunity, they will leave. It is also a common feeling among all kinds of teachers, in future PPP mode further encroach teachers' rights and there would be more pressure on teachers to show outcomes, and they won't be fairly compensated.

#### ***(e) 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 underutilized, as mentioned in NEP 2009 estimates, range from 20% to 30% of allocated funds remaining unutilized (MoE, 2009). The option of PPP is considered to regain trust in education and to make true educational goals. It is being claimed PPP is an innovative model, and the EMO model may attract better education organizations.

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

As PPP models claim their current design offer equity in education, based on our investigation, we found many loopholes. There is no incentive or extra support for students with a disability 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 enroll more students with a specific poverty score can ensure equity. The cost of education and efficiency is more debatable in education policy and planning. Some donors have also suggested to the government that education spending should not be limited based on cost efficiency. If education is a core purpose, limited spending may not yield results. The limitation on spending and approved budget can also cause to hamper the motivation of innovation.

### ***(f) Community Participation***

In our interview process, donors and other policy-level persons believe that in PPP-EMO set up, with community support, there is the possibility to pool resources from donors, government, and community, which is successful in several countries. We also found that the involvement of community and participation of parents is essential in bringing out of school children and ensuring quality education. It has been confessed there are excellent people in 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-subsidized free schools (Rashid et al., 2015). Now increasing private schools also reduced the parents' trust in government. As accountability from the parent side is reduced, the government schools are losing their quality continuously.

It is being claimed that bureaucracy does not care about parents and community wishes in the government sector. The Private sector is more task-oriented, and without community participation, they cannot fulfill educational tasks and objectives. So, the PPP model is well suited to community participation. In the PPP design of EMO, there is a community mobilization unit, and community involvement is one of their KPIs. It has been confirmed from various stakeholders the level of community involvement, and trust increased in EMO set up.

The blind spot of this setup is that these mobilizations are funded and based on short-term goals. Among many PPP operators, these are considered less sustainable because if it's a one-sided push or drive that creates less bonding, it should be mutual. There is also a criticism of the PPP model that this model lacks democratic governance of schools, and parents and community are not empowered enough to keep schools accountable. In the PPP contract, government and private parties are directly involved and signatory. The role of the community is not legally and contractually guaranteed. So, in many cases, parents and community role is submissive and taken for granted. Many parents and school administrators mentioned this model increased parents' visits to the school. Still, their visit does not fully keep the operator accountable as most of the school's decisions are taken by the operator and governments. EMOs have their identity, power, and influence, and parents have no legal or social power comparatively. In designing education policies, policies are never discussed at the bottom level, parents' voices are never heard, even teachers feel surprised when new policies are getting implemented.

## II. PPP-EMOs for Access to Equitable quality Education, and its Sustainability

The broader objective of this central theme is to discuss the findings of PPP in achieving the educational goals, i.e., access, quality, equity, and its sustainability in Sindh.

### (a) Access and Equity in Education

The primary rationale for PPPs in Education is to expand schooling in marginalized areas and improve educational outcomes (SELD, 2017). 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 realized 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 are primary schools, making it to a massive share (91%) of primary schools. There are 12 million children of age 5-16 years in the province, out of which 6.67 million (approx. 56%) are out of school (SELD, 2017).

It has been reported that 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. The right design and regulatory framework of PPP can also motivate students and parents to remain in touch with schools and increase students' attendance. As the EMO model of PPP shows some achievement in increasing access, the more considerable impact is still far behind. Table (3) below shows an increase in access by EMOs.

**Table 3**  
*Students 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	2331	5472	3417	6608	59%	61%	100%	100%
HANDS	3	179	742	378	1039	43%	58%	77%	79%
Sukkur IBA	10	704	1616	1048	1940	58%	69%	56%	NR <sup>3</sup>
IRC	4	649	2073	754	2366	25%	52%	57%	64%
SRCO	2	123	430	164	489	61%	65%	71%	70.50%
TCF	19	5701		6116		NR		71%	
Total	53	20390		24831					

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

<sup>3</sup> NR = Not reported

The impact of education reform cannot be viewed in fragmentation. As SELD (2017) claimed, PPP-EMOs will largely address to bring out of school children increase more post-primary enrollment in selected districts. Based on our data analysis from SEMIS data of Sindh and PSLM surveys of these selected districts, the EMO model so far could not address the larger goal of educational access issue. Tables 4 and 5 below highlight the picture of EMOs districts before and after EMOs 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 <sup>4</sup>	OSC <sup>5</sup>
	Primary+ pre-primary	Post-primary	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total		
Khairpur	222377	88530	192119	118784	310903	61	47	54	34	55
Sukkur	110690	43348	95092	58946	154038	53	38	46	30	47
Larkana	154196	101730	128924	90002	218926	73	60	67	31	50
Kamber-Shahdadkot	129848	42121	105785	66184	171969	60	49	55	31	71
Dadu	189381	48299	140520	97160	237680	68	61	65	35	42

**Table 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+pre-primary	Post-primary	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total		
Khairpur	258258	92353	217215	133396	350616	49	25	38	39	48
Sukkur	135585	50654	112273	73966	186239	99	68	85	41	48
Larkana	192352	73623	152861	113114	265975	54	42	48	38	56
Kamber-Shahdadkot	148549	50402	119194	79757	198951	51	35	44	39	46
Dadu	173952	58201	141682	90471	232153	69	54	62	38	40

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

<sup>4</sup> STR refers to the student-teacher ratio, calculated based on the number of students per teacher

<sup>5</sup> OSC refers to the rate of out of school children at the age of (4-16), as per the given data PSLM survey (2014-15) and (2019-20)

It has been reported in interviews that PPP-EMOs have limitations to increase access because this model is quite costly, and their number of schools is relatively low as their 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 EMOs operators responded that they don't go for admission drive because the capacity is already full.

Educational equity is a big concern and 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 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 kids from the disadvantaged and hard areas, the PPP model lacks a special mechanism or design. In Sindh, within districts, some villages are better than others. Somewhere there are tribal systems, some people feel more secure and interested, and others are apathetic toward education. Special provisions and targeted incentives can bring kids to schooling from challenging areas. It is reported that the current uniform policy of admission and schooling also hardly addresses those parents' issues who are continuously migrating for their livelihood. Though the PPP model has some advantages in retaining kids but fails to address those areas of kids who dropped out of schooling was because of the poor academic base, poverty, and child labor. 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 to girls' enrollment. Parents feel more secure to send their girls there as more female teachers recruitment 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). The concern raised by teachers and the community is that the current PPP design is framed on market values. Due to the nature of the PPP model being more market-centric, it incentivizes operators to select more able-bodied students. When I inquired from the operators, they all believed in equity. Still, they felt the

system wouldn't support having students with different needs because schools do not have specialized staff and supporting material and incentives.

### ***(a) Quality Education***

Another objective of PPP in education is being aligned with ensuring quality education. The Sindh government has planned in SERP 2019-24 to increase educational quality through upgrading educational facilities, adding more qualified teachers, and inclusive education. As narrated by the PPP director, "PPP model adopted because government schools' quality was not improving, and big teachers' absences and lack of specialized subject teachers." 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 perform extraordinarily well, and some perform relatively poorly. This difference has been come out because some organizations have comparative advantages in operating schools. Poor regulations, more competition, and standardized assessments in PPPs carry the blame for less inclusiveness and more differences in quality. The current types of schooling and segregated quality assurance mechanisms also aggravate more segregation and less collaboration (Lubienski, 2003). Many parents feel education's moral and ethical dimension is being lost day by day, as education is becoming more business and given economic values.

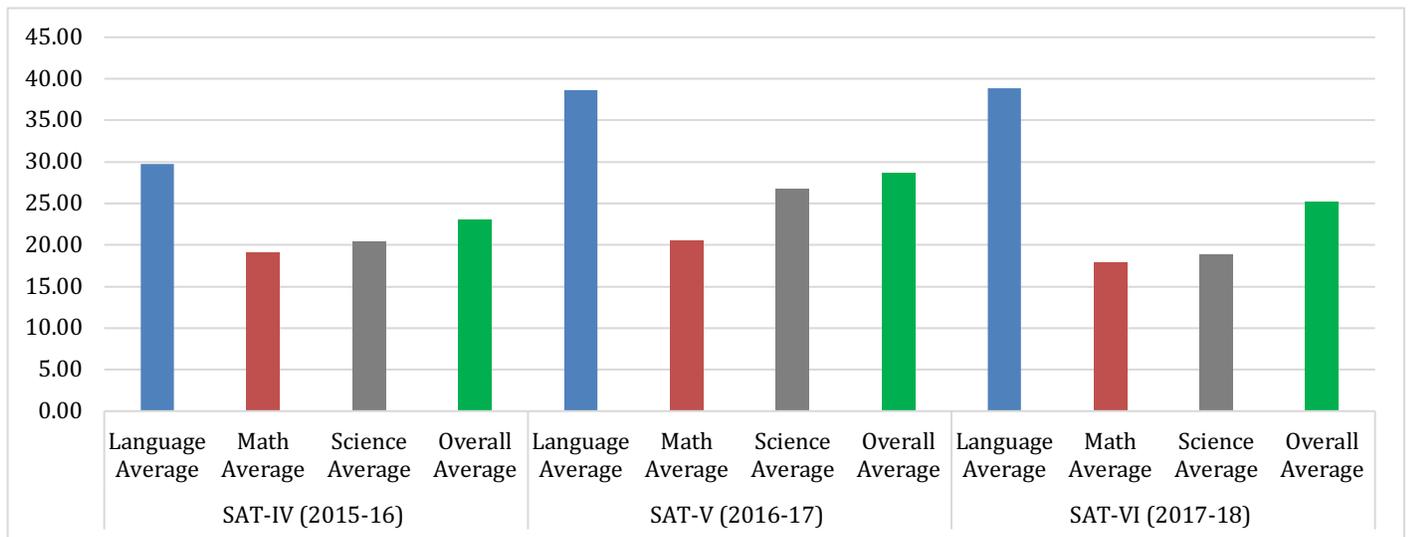
Educational standards and assessments are also complex and are not properly disseminated in the minds of the stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents, and administrators). Some believe quality education is that if students perform well as per their syllabus, others think students should have better result cards. Many teachers disclosed another challenge: in some PPP schools, kids have different levels based on their past educational history and huge disruption in schooling. It is challenging to ensure better quality education and teaching-learning without addressing their learning deficiencies and proper support from organizations. The current debate of 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 standardized tests. This is a more outcome-based approach to ensure and assess quality education. It has been reported that the major flaw in this approach is that it is not fair to compare schools of far-flung areas with urban advantaged schools. Students with low socio-economic status are always

portrayed as low achievers. Educational quality should not be limited to the test score but include students' participation, learning life skills, ensuring better availabilities of infrastructure and labs, and well-qualified teachers, which comes with the approach of input-based quality assurance (Steinner-Khamsi, 2016). Most of the neutral stakeholders believe overall quality education is the same at government schools and in PPP schools. Comparatively, PPP schools have better governance and management, which reduce students' and teachers' absences. On the other hand, PPP schools' teachers are low qualified and low-paid and can not teach advanced courses adequately. The Student Achievement Test (SAT) Sindh result (see in figure 4, 5, 6, 7.) also concurs with the results of no significant differences in achievement of EMOs and government schools of the same region (Fig. 4 and 5), and EMO schools before and after EMOs interventions (Fig. 5 and 6) respectively.

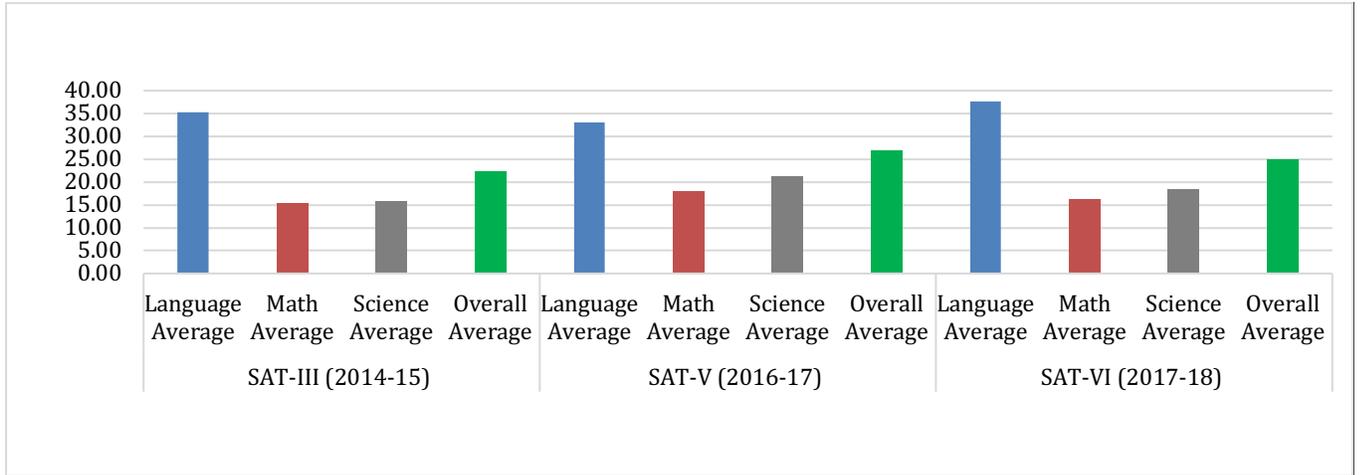
**Figure 4**

*SAT Results of EMO Schools in Selected Districts*



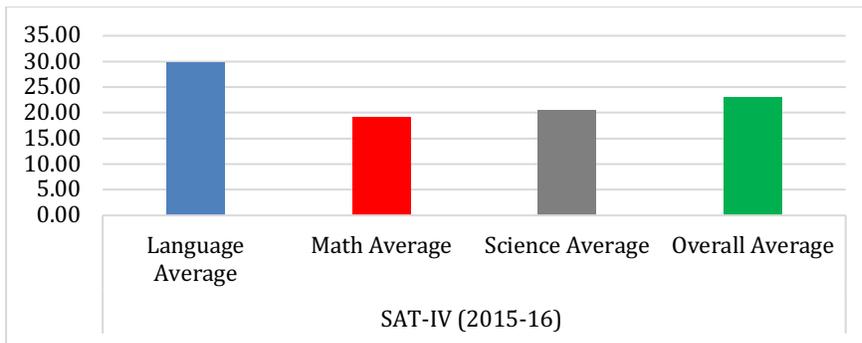
**Figure 5**

*SAT result of Non-EMO Schools in Selected Districts<sup>6</sup>*



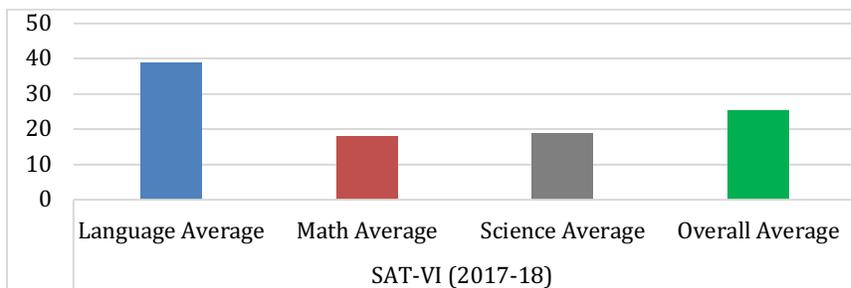
**Figure 6**

*SAT Results of Schools Before EMOs Interventions*



**Figure 7**

*SAT Results of Schools After EMOs Interventions*



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

<sup>6</sup> Selection criteria of non-EMO schools in SAT analysis were based on nearby non-EMO (government) schools in the same union council or tehsil

### ***(b) Sustainability of PPP-EMOs in Sindh***

Though PPPs in education are currently rising in Sindh and Pakistan due to UN 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 organizations for 10-year contract periods as per the requirement of USAID and 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 government bureaucracy and administration processes are outdated and corrupt, schools will struggle to survive. There are myriad examples in the context of Sindh, short-term donors supported schools closed, or they are performing poorly after their support pulled out.

It has been reported that the sustainability of PPP can be retained if these schools' financing is guaranteed. There should be a financial endowment with proper shape. Also, there should be a board of governance based on local experts and schools' staff, and they should be continually trained. Once organizations pull out, the school itself can run and pay teachers and staff bath rough the endowment and continuous government and community support.

It has also been reported that PPP schools cannot fill the government schools' system gap. This may lead to more wastages 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 has recommended planning to open in the targeted areas where government machinery cannot work properly or is out of reach. The government's intention is not to harm other schools. However, if schools are developed based on market mechanisms that emphasize competition, it also affects other schools. As per our visit and get getting views from teachers and school administrators, they responded that due to better perception about the performance of PPP schools, there is pressure from parent sides to pull out their kids from government schools to get admitted in PPP schools.

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

#### 4. CONCLUSION

PPPs in education is an emerging global phenomenon; their role and importance in Sindh and Pakistan are also increasing due to the globalization of education policies and donors' interest. The EMOs model is considered a more mature model of PPPs in Sindh, which mainly focuses on post-primary education compared to foundation schools' model. Its better funding and huge investment in infrastructure created a better learning environment. As it is a short-scale intervention, this reform might not be replicated in the entire Sindh because of financial, legal, and teachers' union constraints. Moreover, PPPs are not a silver bullet in education reform, so the panacea approach toward PPPs should be avoided. The government reliance on the private sector can create more dependency. However, developing and sustaining the better PPPs model depends on the government policies. The issues of access to education and quality, and equity depend on the right design of the policies recommended beyond the interventionist or piecemeal approach. A more targeted model of PPP, need-based funding, and incentives can help to bring out school children from disadvantaged areas and increase girls' education. School decentralization and accountability must relate to the democratic governance of schools. The PPP contracts between the government and private sector must not rule out the important stakeholders such as the community and teachers.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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

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

In Sindh, there are various models of PPPs operating and increasing. However, two major forms of PPPs (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 should be managed by a hub school irrespective of their provision (either public or private). As per UNESCO (2017), recommendations government needs to see all schools, students, and teachers as part of a single system. Further, different donors and PPP actors work together and

acknowledge each other's work. So, the role of government should be on top and streamline policies, rather than acting in bits and pieces.

***(b) Right Design of PPP policies***

The ultimate effect of PPP depends on policy design, which ensures equity. There should be a better regulatory approach in PPP, and it should be clear. 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 specially focus on disadvantaged areas. The market approach of funding through competitive bidding and per capita (or per child subsidy) has profound implications. Most schools located in underprivileged areas are underperforming due to the unavailability of quality teachers and challenging context. 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. Government must create a solid framework of creating a partnership and clear the objective of educational operation and funding strategies. The donor money and policy recommendation should also be better negotiated while applying the contextualized framework.

***(c) Need More Data***

The evidence relating to the impact of PPPs, regulatory measures, PPPs performance in a particular context, and education providers' behavior is still scarce. It has been shown concern at many stakeholders' levels that currently available data on students' enrolment and assessment (based on local exams) are unreliable. The data of private schools is based on estimates, and the same student is enrolled in a government school and a private school. The data collected by World Bank and UNESCO is also based on administrative data, collected hastily. Designing policies on inauthentic data does not help in developing better strategies. So, the Sindh government needs to stream all types of schools and their data adequately managed with the help of technology.

***(d) Education Accountability and Regulation***

It is accepted premises that market forces and non-state actors have a certain educational agenda, so their approach is limited. Education accountability should be more input-based rather than outcome-oriented based on standardized assessment. School regulations should be more supportive and fairer. Also, there should be minimum criteria policy for teachers' recruitments and

staff, their qualifications, and the pay process. There should be more democratic accountability and governance of schools where the role of parents should be alleviated.

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