



International Journal of Social Sciences and Management

A Rapid Publishing Journal

ISSN 2091-2986



Indexing and Abstracting

CrossRef, Google Scholar, International Society of Universal Research in Sciences (EyeSource), Journal TOCs, New Jour, Scientific Indexing Services, InfoBase Index, Open Academic Journals Index (OAJI), Scholarsteer, Jour Informatics, Directory of Research Journals Indexing (DRJI), International Society for Research Activity (ISRA): Journal Impact Factor (JIF), Simon Fraser University Library, etc.

Vol-2(1) January, 2015



Impact factor*: 3.389

*Impact factor is issued by SJIF INNO SPACE. Kindly note that this is not the IF of Journal Citation Report (ICR).

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DEBATE ON PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN NEPAL

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Abstract

There are various types of opinion on disparities between private and public school in Nepal lead a debate on whether school education should privatize or not. There are opinions in for and against the privatization in school education. Some people argue that the privatization in school education should not be promoted. It creates two classes citizens. Similarly some people argue that the school education is entirely responsible of the government. On the other hand, some gives logic that the government is failure to offer quality education to all children due shortage of funds so, this paper tries to explore the existing debate on public and private schools in Nepal.

Key words: Public school, Private school, Educational voucher, Educational disparity.

Introduction

The issues of profit making rather than service oriented are hot cake in the private school. It is a political hot topic in Nepal (Caddell, 2007). Pokharel (2008) mentioned that Private education system is openly criticized for too expensive and making education sector a business platform, lack of accountability to the public society. Private schools were not profit making ventures as they are today before national education system plan (Chitrakar, 2007). After then some founders gradually promoted the ideas of gaining benefits from private schools (Khaniya and Williams, 2004). Kiteav (1999) claimed that one of the major motivations for founding private schools is the possibility of making profit. Although Education Act and Regulation has laid provisions for better managing and regulating the private schools, the government is not able to strictly implement the legal provisions (Bhattarai, 2063 BS) which encourage or open door for private sector to look private schools as profit making ventures. That's why there is always conflict in the issue of exorbitant fee structure at the beginning of the session or at the time fee increments in Nepal (Chitrakar, 2007).

The main logic behind private schools is delivery of quality education (Chitrkar, 2007). School quality often centres on the debate of public versus private provision of education (Aslam, 2009). Caddell (2007) argues that "Debates have tended to focus on the effectiveness and efficiency of private/government schools on the basis of completion rate and examination results" (p. 127). The main root of the

debate is public schools have not been able to cater better quality education. Mathema (2007) argues that the problem of low quality of education in public schools is compounded by the surge in the number of expensive profit making schools, which cater to the children of richer parents. He stressed that dual system of school education must be ended because it offers quality education to few and denies to great majority. Poor public schools invite privatization in education and privatization ruins the public schools. In the world, there is a high demand for private schooling and rapid growing in the number of private schools where public schools' performance is poor.

The challenge of educating children does not end with enrollment; it involves providing children with good schooling. It is right and obligation of parents to look for better education. All private schools are not expensive, there low-fee private schools too. The low-fee private schools are assisting to provide access and quality education to poor households (Tooley, 2001).

Difference between public and private schools

The effectiveness of any school is heavily influence by the quality of teaching, and the skills, motivation and commitment of its teachers (UNESCO, 2008). Despite of Nepal government's huge efforts to improve the quality of education in public schools, the performance of the public schools is not satisfactory. The government has introduced various programmes and projects to enhance the quality of education in public schools. Such as Seti Projects, Primary Education Project, Primary Education Development

Project, Basic and Primary Education Development project and programme, Science Education Development Project, Secondary Education Development Project, Secondary Education Support Programme, Teacher Education Project and so on. These initiatives had improved the infrastructures of schools, teachers training, etc. to some extent. The percentage of fully trained teacher in public schools at primary, lower secondary and secondary level are 79%, 58.3% and 84.8% respectively (Department of Education [DoE], 2009). On the other hand, absenteeism of teachers, weak motivation and low morale, poor conditions for service, insignificant professional supports to teachers, non-participation of parents in the schools affairs, no contributory role of school management committee, lack of accountability in teachers, poor infrastructure of schools, unavailability of educational and reference materials are the major reasons for the low performance of public schools (Khaniya and Williams, 2004). Teacher absenteeism, which is link with motivation, is major bearing on learning in many countries (UNESCO, 2008). Teacher absenteeism is a key governance issue in Nepal. A study estimated that on average the teacher absenteeism was more than 20% in public schools but it was significantly smaller in private schools (UNESCO, 2008). UNESCO (2008) found that irregularity, negligence and indiscipline of the teachers, large class sizes and a lower standard of English language learning are the reasons why parents are against public schools. Public schools' teachers have not faith in their own schools. Most of teachers themselves admit their children in private schools (Chitrakar, 2007).

On the other hand, Private schools are accountable towards parents and students as they charge fees (Aslam, 2009). Although private schools conditions are not so better than public schools even may be poor, teacher absenteeism is low and higher levels of teaching activity. Private schools have introduced additional educational programmes and reference books. Expenditure on extra curriculum activities, books for library and laboratory equipments are comparatively high in the private schools than in the public schools (Aslam, 2009). Better school management is one of the key factors for the good performance of the private schools. Accountability, regularity, commitment, discipline are the good aspect of the private schools. In addition, autonomy is also a crucial factor for betterment.

Measures to reduce disparities

As discussed above the main issues of disparities between public and private schools are access and equity. It is not viable to close down the private schools. The main root of the disparities is inequality in schooling opportunities as parents' choice due to unaffordable charge of private schools or inaccessible. On the other hand, the emergence of the private schools is the result of poor performance of public schools or unable to address parents demand (Kiteav, 1999). Tsang (2002) saw that pressurizing government to

increase resource and commitment to improve the quality of public schools; and liberating the private sector to make it reachable to poor parents are two options to reduce the disparities. UNESCO (2008) mentioned that school based management; and choice and competition are measures of reform in education. Kitaev (1999) claimed that in the absent of opportunities of choice, any school, public or private, becomes a natural monopoly. The private schools have created competitive environment which ultimately contribute to quality education. The private schools are assisting significantly to achieve the educational goals as well as challenging the public to enhance their performance (Aslam, 2009). Hence, the existence of private schools needs to be looked through positive lens. Due to the public pressure and competition, which is create by the presence of private schools, now some public schools have improved the service in order to attract students. For example, 144 schools out of 4709 public schools are able to pass 100% students in SLC (Bhattarai, 2063 BS).

Private schools are not elite and urban phenomenon as past (Tooley, 2001). The expansion of private schools and increase enrolment shows it. There are budget private schools or low-fee private schools are catering service for middle class and poor households (UNESCO, 2008; Tooley, 2001). Nepalese poor households also benefited by low-fee private schools. The two tiers of schools are common phenomenon in the world. The main focus of the government is to provide quality education to all children. When there are alternatives, parents always look for the best one. The choice and competition always promote betterment in performance of schools. Therefore, the practice of providing opportunities to choose the schools as parents' choice for educating their children is gradually increasing in the world. Some countries (e.g.in Pakistan) have used scheme to promote opening private schools in remote areas (Aslam, 2009). On the other hand, implementation of various initiatives to improve the performance of public schools or encourage private sectors to involve in catering quality education in public schools is widespread in the world. Some of the advocated and practiced measures to overcome or reduce the disparities are discussed in following segment.

These initiatives are focused on provide opportunities of choice and quality improvement through creating choice and competitive environment as well as improving performance of public schools through collaborations with private sectors. Public Private Partnership is one of the best practices in the world. Governments are concerned about inefficiency in public education and ideas on privatization, public private partnership, and voucher system are becoming commonplace in discussion in developing countries (Tooley, 2001).

Public Private Partnership (PPP)

It is increasingly recognized that government funding alone is insufficient to guarantee the required access and quality of education (Kitaev, 1999). A PPP has the potential of optimizing existing resources, as the public sector plays the role of enabler and facilitator, and the private sector contributes its expertise, technology and management practices (Jha and Chatterjee, 2005). The rationales of PPP are to increase access, efficiency, improve quality, secure high level of public accountability and ensure equity (Bhattarai, 2063 BS) as well as enlarged choice (UNESCO, 2008). Voucher system and charter schools are widely practiced strategies to facilitate transfers from public to private providers whereas school-based management or the devolution of authority to school and community level; and contracting out the management of public schools to private providers are commonly used for enhancing the performance of public schools (UNESCO, 2008; Latham, 2009).

PPP programmes in education have been implemented in various countries of the world both by developed and developing countries. There are various models of PPP or practice in different names. Such as Adopt-a-School Programme, Private Sector Philanthropy, Capacity Building Programme, Outsourcing of School Management, Government Purchasing Programme, Voucher Programme, School Infrastructure Partnerships, Concession to private schools, Charter Schools, Contract Schools, (Bano, 2008; Latham, 2009). The models can be categories broadly into two groups, i.e. PPP for provide opportunities of choice and competition and PPP for improve the performance of public schools.

Voucher system

Education voucher is cash payment or equivalent given to parents by the governments which is used to enroll their children in schools as their choice (Weidrich, 2007). The main objectives of an education voucher system are to increase parents' freedom to choose the school they prefer for their children and improve efficiency of schools through competition (McEwan and Carnoy, 2000; Weidrich, 2007). It is a way to transform financing of education for poor. Instead of giving grants to schools to provide free education, the government would give money directly to poor students in the form of education vouchers (Shah and Munzinger, 2006). It covers full or partial cost of education at the schools. For example in Cleveland, USA voucher covered 75% to 90% of school's tuition fee whereas voucher covered full tuition fee in Milwaukee (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). The voucher empowers poor children and they can purchase education in either a private school or a public school as their choice (Latham, 2009). The schools receive funding through vouchers proportional to their enrolment of students and schools will compete to attract and retain students. The voucher system makes school accountable

directly to children (Shah and Munzinger, 2006). This system treats schools as enterprises (Kitaev, 1999). This programme targets on providing opportunities to low-income families to allow access to private schools (Merrifield, 2005). The voucher system provides choice for students and paves way for equality as well as incentives for schools through providing quality education. There are various models of voucher system which are either developed on the basis of the liberal market approach i.e. improve quality of education through market force or the social policy approach i.e. provide educational opportunities for disadvantaged students (Latham, 2009). The competitive markets allocate resources more efficiently than do monopolistic ones (Rouse and Barrow, 2009). This system had been practiced in many countries of the world such as Bangladesh, Denmark, Sweden, Chile, USA, Colombia, Cleveland, etc. These countries experience shows poor students gain access to the private schools and boost the competition between private and public schools which enhance the quality to some extent. For example, the voucher receiving students had done better in Chile and Colombia. Many countries have seen significant improvements in learning outcomes after the introduction vouchers, while a few have experienced very little change (Shah and Braun-Munzinger, 2006). Shafiq (2010) purposes a targeted educational voucher schemes for the poor children in developing countries who are unable to attend private schools due to fees. In Colombia, Milwaukee, USA poor students under the government categories are eligible for voucher, but in Chile all children were titled to get voucher (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

Charter School

A charter school is a public school funded by the state and governed or operated by group or organization under contract with government. The charter schools initiation was introduced to give market pressure to improve the performance of traditional public schools in USA (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). The Charter schools are permitted to select their focus, environment, and operations (Zimmer, Gill, Booker, Lavertu and Witte, 2012). The proponents of charter school argue that charter schools can provide market pressure to improve the performance of traditional schools. The restructuring of teaching learning process and curriculum innovations and market force of competition have positive influence on students' achievement (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Minnesota, USA passed first charter school law in 1991. Now several states have charter schools in USA. The charter schools provide superior opportunities to the children (Zimmer, Gill, Booker, Lavertu and Witte, 2012). Charter schools, in New Mexico, Missouri and Minnesota, are more responsive to the needs of parents and students so parents' satisfaction level is high with the schools (Casey, 2002 cited in Buchanan and Waddle, 2004).

Government Purchasing Programme

The government makes contract with private schools to deliver education at public expense, often in the form of a subsidy per student enrolled (Latham, 2009). Private schools are legally bounded to provide free-ship or scholarship or low-rate fee structure to certain number of students. In Colombia, Federacion Nacional de Cafeteros manages public schools in contract with the public authorities and receives 30% funding from government in terms of per capita funding (Tooley, 2001).

Private Sector Philanthropy

Private sector contributes to increase the amount and effectiveness of corporate philanthropy to improve chances for poor children to gain access to a quality education (Latham, 2009).

School based Management (SBM)

One of strategies adopted to reform the school is school based management (UNESCO, 2008). It is easier to regulate and administer large systems uniformly by centralized system but it leads ineffectiveness and costly to address the schools needs differ widely across communities (Jimenez and Sawada, 1998). SBM aims giving schools and communities more autonomous and empowering teachers and parents in decision making or decentralizing educational decision making so that schools reflect priorities and values of local community. It is an initiation to transfer authority closer to smallest unit of education parents, community and schools (McGinn and Welsh, 1999; UNESCO, 2008). The delegation or devolution of decision making authority to school increases participation and accountability at local level. There is various practice of degree of authority delegation or devolution in the world. In El Salvador, New Zealand, Honduras and Nicaragua paying salary, hiring and firing of teacher staff, supervising and evaluating teachers' authorities are transferred whereas only maintenance and infrastructure authority is handed over to school in Mexico and Kenya (McGinn and Welsh, 1999; UNESCO, 2008). However, the success of SBM depends on objective measurement of the performance of the school; establishment of reward and punishment system; and improvement of professional expertise of decision maker (MaGinn and Welsh, 1999). It has been introduced in USA, Canada, Latin America, South Asia and sub Sahara Africa. The studies show positive effects in attainment. Jimenez and Sawada (1998) found that SBM has been instrumental in involving families and communities in their children are learning in El Salvador. SBM contributes in raising achievement scores and lowering teacher absenteeism. Close monitoring of community reduces absenteeism of teachers (Jimenez and Sawada, 1998). SBM has improved learning achievements and strengthened equity in El Salvador (UNESCO, 2008)

Adopt-a-school Programme

A private partner takes responsibility to improve the status of public schools by providing cash and in-kind resources or supports (Bano, 2008; Latham, 2009). The private partner's role may be just focus on improving infrastructure and delivering training to improving the education quality through taking over entire school management including monitoring of teachers' performance (Bano, 2008). USA, Philippines and Pakistan have adopted this modality of PPP.

Capacity building Programme

Private sector partners provide support to public schools in capacity development through pedagogical support, management training, teacher training etc. (Latham, 2009). Many INGOs are contributing in capacity building programmes in the world.

Outsourcing/Contract of School Management

Private sector operates public schools or manages certain aspects of public school operations by making direct contract with public sector authorities. The schools are managed by the private sector but the government funding and ownership remain as it is (Latham, 2009). In Brazil, Pitagoras (a NGO) has taken over the management of disadvantaged schools, receiving the normal per capita funding from government (Tooley, 2001).

School Infrastructure Partnerships

The private partners contribute in designing, financing, constructing and even operating of public schools infrastructure under long term contract. The public partner leases a facility such as land and the private partner finances, constructs and operates schools. In Colombia, Federacion Nacional de Cafeteros (a NGO) had constructed more than 5000 schools (Tooley, 2001).

Concessions to private schools

The government offers concessions to private schools which included allocation of free land to schools, tax exemptions on import, charging domestic rather than commercial etc. in Pakistan (Bano, 2008). This strategy helps in expansion of private schools.

Policy Provision for PPP in Nepal

Nepal has not enough resource to provide support for the educational development. Government is facing hard to increase budget in education, therefore government has given emphasis on PPP. The role of private sectors in the development of education was articulated since Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-96) in Nepal (NPC, 1992). The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2006) introduced the policy of private sectors involvement to make education sectors more competitive, effective and relevant (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2002). "Transfer of school management to the community/local bodies" was initiated to empower parents and local communities in decision making process. The Three Year Interim Plan (2008-2010)

emphasized in the collaboration and partnership with private sectors (NPC, 2007). In three year approach paper, it is mentioned that “utilize best practice of community and institutional schools to enhance the educational quality of community schools through partnership and coordination between them” (NPC, 2010). Thus, Government has purposed clear for the PPP in Nepal.

Practiced models of PPP in Nepal

Some of the models are already in practice in Nepal. For example Rato Bangal School (a private school) initiated a PPP to enhance the learning in schools and empowering school community in five districts and at moment using in Dailekh district (Rato Bangala Foundation). Room to Read has initiated philanthropy approach to support establishing library, school construction in schools (Room to Read). Contracting for whole school management is just initiated. SBM is not a new practice to Nepal. Before National Education System Plan (NESP), community initiated to open schools and they were responsible for management. The school authority was responsible for whole issues like financing, hiring and firing of the teachers (Pokharel, 2008). NESP nationalized all schools and communities were detached from schools (Chitrakar, 2007). The poor performance of the public schools forced to look options of reforming the school education. Nepal has adopted “transferring management of Schools to communities” on voluntary basis policies in 2002; and launched Community School Support Project (CSSP) to boost the initiation in 2003 (Bhattarai, 2063 BS). These schools are managed by the community and technical and financial supported by the government. Strong SBM has reduced teacher absenteeism (Pokharel, 2008). The national assessment of grade 8 students shows that these schools performance is slightly better than public schools. In the recent year, government has introduced per capita funding strategies to provide the grant to public schools on the basis of enroll students which one of the objectives is ensure the quality (DoE, 2009).

Conclusion

Public schools and private schools systems have been practiced in the Nepal since the long time. Free quality school education to all children is an international slogan of education and Nepal has made commitment to receive that goals. Despite of government efforts to provide quality education to all children, the government is not being able to provide quality education through public schools. Poor performance of public schools boosts the emergence of private schools rapidly as alternative. Although private schools charge fees, they are mushrooming in the country due to public demands for quality education. As a consequence, dual school system takes place. Due to unaffordable cost for poor and inaccessibility for remote areas children, a burning issue of equity arises in the education sector. Two social classes’ children are producing from dual schooling system which is not goal of education.

However, private schools are providing better education and challenging the poor performance of public schools and inviting them for the competition to deliver quality education. The SLC results shows the gradually improvement in the performance of public schools. Therefore, establishing single school system is not solution of providing quality education which may increase monopoly. Government is investing Rs. 6293, Rs. 3748 and Rs. 7672 per student per year at primary, lower secondary and secondary level respectively (Bhattarai, 2063 BS). Thus, providing opportunities to select schools in the choice of parents as practiced in the world through introducing voucher system or charter schools by modifying existing per capita funding strategies; contracting public schools in subsidies rate; adopting strategies to improve the performance of public schools at set standard level through PPP and SBM are the measures to reduce the existing disparities in education. At the moment, encouraging private sectors to open private schools in remote areas through introducing concessions schemes and implementing and monitoring existing incentive schemes for girls and marginalized children to enroll in private schools need to strengthen and expand to minimize disparity.

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