FACTORS DETERMINING THE PREFERENCE OF PARENTS REGARDING ADMISSION OF THEIR CHILDREN IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS: A CASE OF DISTRICT VEHARI

Mahnaz Muhammad Ali  
Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur  
mahnaz.ali@iub.edu.pk

Ayesha Umar  
Lecturer, Department of Economics, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur

Ahmad Khan  
M. Phil Scholar, Department of Education, University of Agriculture Faisalabad

ABSTRACT
Private schools, especially low-cost private school has gained popularity among parents as a choice of schooling for their children. This study explores why private schools are preferred over the public schools and what factors come under consideration by parents, while opting school for their children? For this, a cross-sectional data is collected from parents/guardians of high enrolment private schools (The City School, Tabindah Model High School, The Educators school and The Spirit School) of Vehari District through multistage sampling. A total 108 responses are collected through structured questionnaire and based on the descriptive analysis results indicate school selection process is based on supply side and demand side determinants. Results reveal that religious education is one the most important demand side factor. Parents also prefer private schools because of psychological stigmas like superiority complex associated with private schools. Private schools enjoy good reputation due to modern curriculum, quality education, hands-on positive learning experience and better infrastructure facilities. Furthermore, employees’ children enrolment, uninterrupted energy supply, better marketing strategies and rewards systems improves the private school’s brand image which leads to more enrolment.

Keywords: Private School, Public School, Education, Multistage Sampling, Descriptive Analysis

INTRODUCTION
Private sector has turned out to be a game changer and playing a crucial role in economic development of any country. All around the world, it holds significant importance in the educational sector from last two decades. In Pakistan, private sector is also gaining popularity and emerging as a market leader in the education sector. Private schools have become the top-notch preference of parents for their child enrolment. The private schools are fee-based, elite schools, run by individuals, provincial education foundations and NGOs. The article 25-A of constitution of Pakistan, abides all public schools to provide free education to the children between age group 5 to 16. Despite this, private schools are in still in high demand and this poses serious concerns over the performance of public school. Private schools especially low-cost schools have high public demand, therefore diverting attention of education policy makers towards the private sector. Private education is becoming talk of town among the policy makers, and they are closely evaluating the benefits and risks associated with it (Rizwan, Taniguchi, & Hiraoka, 2022).

Everyone desires an authentic, good, and high-quality education for his or her child. The private sector has made significant contributions to the educational system. Many variables influence parents’ decision to send their children to a private school rather than a public school. The parents desired the highest level of education for their children's bright future. Private schools have adequate amenities, such as running water, electricity and well-equipped classrooms. Private schools develop self-assured students, promote effective learning approaches and encourage teachers to use appropriate teaching methods (Alderman, 2001).
Despite of high cost associated with private education, the sector has grown eminently over the past few decades and now private education is preferred across all societal classes. Private schools expanded not only to cities, but they are also operating in towns and even in small villages and it is topmost desire of every parent to send their children to private schools. Based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress Report 2006, private schools outclassed public schools in terms of academic performance, career prospects and personality development. Apart from providing quality education private schools provide step to step counseling in career progression which aids students to excel in their careers. Small class size, hands on classroom experience and one-to-one student teacher interaction not only leads to personality development but also propels students towards achieving their goals. On the other hand, public schools usually have larger class size with high student teacher ratio, therefore little attention is paid on the personalized problems leaving students clueless in most of the scenarios (Carper, 2000).

Since last two decades, private sector has grabbed a prominent position in education sector and demonstrated with exponential growth in terms of number of schools and student enrollment. In 2017-18, private educational institutions accounted for 37.9% of all educational institutions having total enrollment of 44.3% across Pakistan; leading to higher per-institution enrollment ratio as compared to public schools. This percentage has grown significantly from 1999-2000, when it was only 19 percent. Similarly, staffing ratio is also higher in private institutions as 56 percent of teachers are working in private educational institutions (Statistics, 2020). Private schools alike their numbers and teachers’ strength also supersede public institution in terms of student enrollment as parents perceives private schools as an ambassador of academic excellency; therefore, they prefer to send their children to private institution in search of quality education. These schools have different assessment techniques with some practical aspects; which enhance the learning capabilities of the children therefore allowing parents to differentiate between good and bad schools. However, deciding quality of education solely based on the learning assessment is arguable as different assessments lead to different directions. A research study commissioned by the World Bank showed that private schools’ pupils are outperforming than public schools, while the Punjab Examination Commission study suggested that this difference is insignificant (Suleman & Hussain, 2014).

At secondary education level, children demand high care from the teachers and parents. Although, parents’ prime reason for opting private school is quality education for bright future of their children however they also demand good infrastructure facilities from school. Private schools have better infrastructure facilities for example sufficient water and uninterrupted electricity supply, student hygiene, well managed and decorated classrooms equipped with latest technology including LCDs and modernized labs for practical work. Moreover, the teachers adopt modern teaching techniques which not only improve learning but also boost self-confidence of students. Student friendly environment allows students to express their ideas with more freedom thus leads to personality development (Alderman, 2001). Private schools regularly arrange “Parents Teachers Meetings” to get parents in loop. These meeting causes parents to actively involved in student learning process and to collaborate with teachers to work as per needs of their children therefore enhancing parents’ trust. Apart from this private schools invest heavily on their advertisement thus boosting their image in parents’ eyes (Bast & Walberg, 2004).

Opting school for their child education is one of the critical decisions for every parent as it paves the path for the intellectual and cognitive development of their children. So, while choosing schools, parents have to consider several factors like academic achievements of school, type of curriculum, teachers’ proficiency and facilities that the school offer. Despite of free education at secondary level, parents hesitate to enroll their children in public schools due to shortage of teachers, school environment, unhealthy and congested classrooms, poor management and lack of co-curricular activities as all these things are considered to be necessities for child’s education and personal growth (Huisman & Smits, 2009). According to different studies conducted time to time, private school education stands far superior to public school in terms of providing these facilities in an efficient manner. Private schools have transparent systems with good check and balance. They keep close eye on school performance and child development to grab a reputable place in the market and to gain maximum enrollments. Usually, owners of the private school are either principles or on management positions; so, they seldom bear any mistake from any part of the institution. Teachers, students, and
school management strictly follow the rules and regulations which enhances the quality of education (Braun, Jenkins, & Grigg, 2006).

This study intends to explore the factors that parents consider when enrolling their children in private schools. There are many aspects that parents consider when choosing a school for their children including, school’s environment, curriculum, school policies, teacher quality, academic achievements, infrastructure and other facilities.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Education is strongly correlated with economic development as none of the nation had witnessed its success with low literacy rate. Increasing literacy rate is one of the prime objectives of every nation therefore both government and private sectors working tirelessly by devoting greater chunk of their resources to increase education enrollment. Over the last decades, private sector had gained huge popularity in Pakistan and outstands public sector, both in absolute and comparative terms. Since, 1990s the number of private schools had grown dramatically due to higher enrollment in said sector. As per PSLM report 2018-19, 32% of children were attending private institutions as compare of 29% in 2010. During this period, the number of private school teachers also has increased sharply. The rapid increase in private institution poses concerns over the performance of public schools and urges the policy makers to think that despite of heavy tuition fee what causes parents to prefer private institutions.

Bosetti (2004) explained that parental choice for school selection is a complex process. It’s based took another stance on the parental choice for school selection, which was believed to be purely based on rational choice theory. He explained rather investing in particular school in hope of high return in future, the decision-making process is complex one and based on composition of several rationalities like logic, values, concerns, and peer reviews. For this, the author surveyed 29 elementary schools of Alberta; out of which 11 were private schools, 08 were public schools and 10 were alternative elementary schools. Results indicated that, parental decision process was very much influenced by the quality of education, income, and social linkages. However, the sample size was small and the findings could not be generalized on whole population.

Tooley and Dixon (2005) investigated that whether private schools were better than public schools for low-income countries. The authors had conducted systematic censuses and surveyed all primary and secondary schools of countries like India, Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya. Through comprehensive descriptive analysis, the findings not only indicated that private schools were superior to public school in terms of education quality but also private sector was contributing significantly in achievement of United Nations Millennium Development Goal of “Education for All”.

Tooley and Dixon (2006) took inspiration from their previous study and explored another dimension of private education i.e de facto privatization. The study addressed the negative connotation attached to private school that they served need of small elite group. Higher the family income higher will be the enrollment in non-public schools. Although, family income was a good predictor of private school preference but there were several other factors which influenced parental school choice. The results cleared out this misconception since most of the student enrollment in private schools came from poor urban and peri-urban areas. The provision of low-cost private education along with education quality, teacher’s accountability and provision of scholarship leads to rise in private education demand in low-income countries (India, Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya).

Tooley and Dixon (2007) did a comparative study to explore the reasons behind the recent rise in private education among low-income families in Delhi-India. The study was comprised of two parts, firstly, the researchers figure out growth of private education in low-income families and what factors causes so much penetration of private schooling among masses. A data had been collected from 146 schools through stratified random sampling on academic performance, parents’ satisfaction, and background variables. The results were then compared with public schooling. The study analyzed that parent from poor families were disillusioned with academic performance of government schooling and were ready to sacrifice everything to send their children to private schools, in hope of their bright future. Medium of instruction played a great role in expansion of private education as public schools use Urdu as medium of instruction while private schools are English medium; therefore, enrolling children in private education gave satisfaction to parents that their children wouldn’t have difficulty in language shift in the higher classes. So, parents prefer private schools to ease the career development of their children. Also, getting their children in private school was taken as sense of pride in the society.
Secondly, private schools have low teacher-student ratio as compared to public schools therefore private teachers were actively engaged with students thus enhancing the intellectual development of students and better academic performance.

Goldringa and Philips (2008) figured out that background characteristics like family income, parents’ education and ethnicity have strong correlation with parental choice of school, therefore true results could not be true indicator if not controlled. After controlling for these variables, logistic regression model was applied on sample size of 600 responses from magnet schools to figure out what factors influences parents’ selection of public or private schools. The results indicated that private schools are better than public schools because they actively communicate and involved parents in their child learning process.

Olaniyan and Okemakinde (2008) figured out instrumental relationship between education and economic development. Investment in human capital leads to the capacity building of workers by enhancing their cognitive abilities which consequently leads to the social and economic transformation. The study used human capital theory, to explain the theoretical framework between education and economic progression. The results indicated that there is positive relationship between these two variables and to achieve economic development through education, there should not be mismatch between quality of education and workers skill demand. Moreover, minimal interference from authorities and parents in education system would facilitate the positive effects of education on economic system. Lastly, the study suggested that investment in human capital is crucial for the survival of an economy, so, there is a need for private division to collaborate with public institution to accelerate economic growth.

Escardíbul and Villarroya (2009) explained what factors played a part while parents select type of schooling for their children and inequality prevailed among the school choices. For factor analysis, two-year data i.e., 2003 and 2006 was extracted from Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) on personal, family, and geographic traits, geographical location and other supply variables for public and private schools. The study adopted descriptive and multinominal logistic regression technique to analyze determinants of school choice among the parents. Results indicated that family background strongly effects the choice of school, as having educated, and better employed parents increases the probability of child enrollment in private education. Moreover, a wish to have bright future and high material possessions encouraged parents to invest in private education of their children while the low-income families had limited choices for school selection. However, the study remained silent on what policies should be focused to promote equality among the school choice.

Dahari and Ya (2011) conducted an exploratory study about school selection priorities of the preschoolers’ Malaysian parents. The authors argued that parents have different educational believes and preferences causing them to associate with the institution differently. To evaluate parents revealed preferences the authors had gathered data from 162 parents through questionnaire. Multiple regression analysis showed that school selection is complex process based on supply and demand determinants. Private school adopts better marketing and branding strategies, qualified faculty, strict security, and hygiene to attracts the parents. Moreover, medium of instruction and religion-based schooling motivates parents to go for private schooling.

Tooley, Bao, Dixon and Merrifield (2011) did a comparative study to explore relationship between school choice and academic performance. The authors randomly selected private and public schools in Lagos, Nigeria, Delhi and Hyderabad. Each type of school had been divided into three categories and then being run on the determinants of school selection. The ordinary least square regression results revealed that private school children outperformed academically than public schools’ children. Moreover, private schools have better teacher quality and infrastructure facilities therefore private schools are top priority of the parents despite of being provision of free education from state run schools.

Sherani (2014) figured out similarities and differences between private and public schooling in Kabul. Private schools were mostly profit-making institutions having monthly fees while public schools were administered and owned by the government and were free of charge. The data was collected through descriptive and structured interviews from 10 public and private schools each from 05 years areas of Kabul. The author had conducted several interviews from school management, faculty, parents, and students to evaluate the performance of public and private schooling. Private schools outperformed public schools in terms of achievement and quality. Low education quality was the prime reason for
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Green (2020) defined private school as a non-government, privately funded and self-contained institution not run by state. He argued that children might attend these schools because they were dissatisfied with government-funded schools in their neighborhood. They might be chosen for their either due to academic and other disciplines achievements or due to their religious heritage. Private schools retained the right to select their students and are funded in whole or in part by charging tuition to their students rather than relying on government funding; at some private schools, students may be eligible for a scholarship, which reduces the tuition fee and is based on the student’s talents or abilities (e.g. sport scholarship, art scholarship, academic scholarships).

During recent times, school selection process evolves from general to multifactor process and demographic traits and causes this selection process to differ geographically, ethnically, and socially. American parents’ preferences are different as Pakistani parents therefore it is important to critically analyze this process as private education is emerging as market leader in the Pakistani education sector and holds significant proportion of enrollment. Therefore, this study will discover role of supply and demand side determinants in molding parents’ decision in school selection in the context of Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary data was collected through descriptive survey as it allows to collect information on various characteristics of population. For this a structured questionnaire was developed; which was comprised of three different sections. First section of the survey, fetch demographic information of the respondents while rest two sections gathered information about demand and supply factors which determine school selection and problems associated with private schools.

A five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree) is used to record the response of the respondent. A total of 108 guardian were selected through convenient sampling and respondents were asked to fill the required questionnaire within time span of one week. More than one fifth (22.2%) of the respondents were from Tabindah Model High School, 34.3% of the respondents were from The Educators School, 28.7% of the respondents were from The City School and more than one tenth (14.8%) respondents were from The Spirit School.

The study is descriptive in nature and investigates about demand and supply factors affecting parents’ preference regarding their child’s admission in private schools at secondary level in tehsil Burewala. To draw findings, descriptive statistics such as percentage, frequency, mean, standard deviation, weighted score and rank order were examined. A weighted scores for each reaction have been calculated by multiplying their frequency with respective number and then adding all the numbers. Mean value was calculated by dividing the weighted score with the sample size. Rank order was figured out according to the mean value and weighted score. Factor having highest mean and weight score was ranked at 1st position. All results were tabulated in the ascending order having most preferred at 1st and least one at the last.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demand side determinants of Private School Selection

Table No. 1 shows the survey results and list the demand side factors which urge parents to go for the private schools.

Table No. 1: Summary Statistics of Demand Side Determinants of Private School Selection

| Reasons for admission in private schools | Mean | Std. Deviation | Weighted score | Rank order |
|-----------------------------------------|------|----------------|----------------|------------|
| Religious environment                   | 2.06 | 1.121          | 223            | 1          |
| Modern curriculum                       | 1.90 | 0.78           | 206            | 2          |
| Snobbery                                | 1.88 | 0.879          | 204            | 3          |
| Positive environment                    | 1.87 | 0.81           | 202            | 4          |
| Co-curricular activities                | 1.80 | 0.971          | 195            | 5          |
| Recurring evaluations                   | 1.79 | 0.904          | 194            | 6          |
For elite class public schools are matter of shame &

| High standard of education | 1.78 | 0.843 | 193 | 7 |
| Teachers are more committed | 1.77 | 0.702 | 192 | 8 |
| Higher level of student teacher interaction | 1.77 | 0.835 | 192 | 9 |
| English as medium of instruction | 1.76 | 0.838 | 191 | 11 |
| High students’ productivity | 1.69 | 0.83 | 183 | 12 |
| Contractual job allows teachers to work harder | 1.64 | 0.755 | 178 | 13 |
| Positive learning environment | 1.63 | 0.82 | 177 | 14 |
| Good society reputation | 1.46 | 0.779 | 158 | 15 |

**Religious environment**

Descriptive analysis depicted that religious environment to the children is the foremost determinant of parents’ preference for private education as it has highest mean (2.06) and weighted score (223). In a country like Pakistan, religion is considered one of the most important aspects of human life and to be successful in it is the utmost desire of the parents. Susilawati, Aprilianti and Asbari (2022) evaluated the interlinkages between parents, communities and school in character building of the students. The authors explained that Islamic teachings phases out the negativities and leads to the positive development of cognitive, moral and ethical values which aids the students to be successful human being in this world and hereafter. Since private schools provides complete package of child personality development by not only focusing on academic side but also on the religious teachings making them hot favorite among parents at the time of school selection.

**Modern Curriculum**

Modern curriculum turned out to be major determinant of parents’ preferences with mean value of 1.90 and weighted score of 223. Education is one of the most significant agents of economic development as quality of education draws line between developed and developing country. McDonald and Roberts (2002) reformulated the Slow growth model by incorporating the investment in human capital in the model. The authors explained that it is important to invest in human capital with time to time as globalization causes the human skills to evolve as per need of time. Since private schools regularly update their curriculum as per the needs of the labor market where as public schools are still sticking to the same curriculum from past two decades. The text books in public schools still giving knowledge of old manual agricultural methods despite of being replaced with modern techniques and equipment. While private schools had added technical subjects like IT in their curriculum making them standout during the school selection by the parents.

**Snobbery**

Private schools have good brand image among the parents and enjoy reputable position in the society due to their English medium modern curriculum. In pre-partition time, private schools were usually joined by the elite classes; where they learn to speak English and other modern subjects later, they were recruited to good positions by the British. While the white-collar jobs were mostly for the brown people, and this still instill the sense of superiority among this class. Despite of British dismissal, same psychology persists in the society and getting admission in private school is still taken as matter of pride for the parents. The same trends were being seen by Brasington (2003) who analyzed how economic and demographic factors leads to the private school selection. Getting admission in private school is like unlocking life time achievement and securing their children therefore, Low-income families have strong desire of mixing their children with upper class therefore getting admission in private school is priority of their parents.

**Positive environment**

Private schools usually practice interactive based learning in a friendly manner which leads to the positive development of cognitive abilities among the students. Aesthetic classroom, ample energy and good infrastructure boost the students’ interest producing more productive labor force in the future. Also, one to one student teacher interaction and recurring evaluation system develop intellectual capabilities. Therefore, positive environment ranked at 4th position with mean value of 1.87 and weighted score of 202.
Apart from this, extra-curricular activities, recurring evaluations, matter of shame for elite class, high standard of education, higher level of teacher engagement and interaction and medium of instruction causes parents to go for private school. (Yaacob, Osman, & Bachok, 2014).

### Supply Side Determinants of Private School Selection

| Strategies adopted by private schools to attract parents | Mean | Std. Deviation | Weighted score | Rank order |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------|----------------|------------|
| Teachers self-enroll their kids                          | 1.99 | 0.891          | 215            | 1          |
| Good academic standing                                  | 1.97 | 0.88           | 213            | 2          |
| Aesthetic classrooms.                                    | 1.95 | 0.974          | 211            | 3          |
| English as 1st language                                  | 1.92 | 0.938          | 208            | 4          |
| Private schools keep parents in-loop/constant feedback   | 1.87 | 0.891          | 202            | 5          |
| Good marketing strategies                               | 1.84 | 0.939          | 199            | 6          |
| High achievers’ advertisement                           | 1.81 | 0.844          | 196            | 7          |
| Technology based teaching                               | 1.69 | 0.69           | 183            | 8          |
| Regular induction of co-curricular activities            | 1.66 | 0.854          | 180            | 9          |
| Frequent parent teacher meeting                         | 1.64 | 0.789          | 178            | 10         |
| Personality development                                 | 1.62 | 0.84           | 175            | 11         |
| Merit based selection                                   | 1.45 | 0.8            | 157            | 12         |

Strongly Agree = 1, Agree =2   Neutral =3, Disagree =4, Strongly Disagree =5

Table 02 shows various determinants that pulls the parents towards the private schooling like teachers’ children enrollment, good academic standing, aesthetic classrooms, English as medium of instruction, feedback system, marketing strategies and high achievers’ advertisement, technology-based selection and induction of co-curricular activities are on the top of the list. In today’s competitive labor market, organization and firms demands employees which stand out in all aspect and without the incorporation of these elements in child learning this could not be possible. Schools are like 1st learning platforms which sets the direction of children which aids him to grow academically and professionally. Private schools also provide scholarships, fee concessions specially to their employees therefore they provide complete package at a single place and becomes foremost choice of parents.

### Table No. 3 Summary Statistics of other Facilities Provided by Private Schools that Attract Parents towards Private School

| Educational facilities provided by private schools | Mean | Std. Deviation | Weighted score | Rank order |
|---------------------------------------------------|------|----------------|----------------|------------|
| Sufficient space for sports                        | 2.00 | 1.085          | 216            | 1          |
| Uninterrupted electricity supply                    | 1.99 | 1.093          | 215            | 2          |
| Reward system for high achievers                   | 1.96 | .900           | 212            | 3          |
| Regular monitoring of student health               | 1.96 | .967           | 212            | 4          |
| Well-equipped labs                                  | 1.95 | 1.00           | 210            | 5          |
| Good teacher- students learning relationship        | 1.95 | .894           | 210            | 6          |
| Career counseling                                   | 1.90 | .759           | 206            | 8          |
| Transparency in results                             | 1.89 | .990           | 205            | 9          |
| Good Administration                                 | 1.82 | 1.01           | 197            | 10         |
| Regular monitoring through assessments              | 1.78 | .865           | 193            | 11         |
| High teacher attention                              | 1.78 | .918           | 193            | 12         |
| Audio-video based learning                          | 1.75 | .846           | 190            | 13         |
| Better reference material                           | 1.73 | .813           | 187            | 14         |
| Teachers are regular and punctual                   | 1.72 | .746           | 186            | 15         |
| Good cleanliness                                    | 1.69 | .851           | 183            | 16         |
| Technology based learning like LED, computers       | 1.59 | .748           | 172            | 17         |
Table 03 lists the facilities provided by the private schools in descending order according to parent’s preference about these facilities. Summary statistics demonstrated that other facilities that parents consider while school selection include large playgrounds, uninterrupted electricity supply, reward system for high achievers, regular health monitoring, well-equipped labs, friendly student-teacher learning environment, better security, career counselling, use of audio-video aids and transparency etc. Trees and Jackson (2007) also figured out similar classroom factors in their study which aids in cognitive and intellectual development of children while schooling.

CONCLUSION
Public or private schooling is a long-standing debate and being discussed by several policy makers as schooling sets pathway for the child future. It is one of the most important investments parents make in their lives and has been based on several factors. Thus, school selection is a multidimensional concept based on supply and demand factors and to figure out these determinants a descriptive study had been conducted through detailed questionnaire. A total of 108 responses were collected from guardians of high enrollment schools like The City School, Tabindah Model High School, The Educators and The Spirit School. Descriptive analysis revealed that religious environment along with modern curriculum is the prime reason for private school selection. In private schools, English is the primary medium of instruction, modern curriculum is taught, personality development is prioritized, and students are admitted based on merit. On the other hand, private schools actively engage in different marketing strategies for attracting parents like own employee children enrollment, publicizing their results and achievements, giving rewards to the high achievers, constant feedback system. Private school also provide good infrastructure facilities like playing grounds, adequate electricity, aesthetic classrooms, well-equipped labs and security system, regular check-ups of parents and co-curricular activities etc.

Due to the factors discussed above, private schools are growing exponentially in Pakistan and actively playing their role in improving literacy rate therefore, it is important for government to realize its potential as they are contributing significantly towards economic development. Based on the discussion it is suggested that Public-private partnership-based education model should be promoted. It will not only reduce the illiteracy but also expands the education to the marginalized parts of the society. Also facilitating to the private schools’ investors like fiscal incentives, subsidized infrastructure, hassle-free school registration and reduce tax rates, can enhance the impact of private sector in education. Provision of loans at subsidized rate will also aid in the expansion of private schools in the marginalized areas. However, government needs to have check and balance on these institutions because mostly the private schools operate on the notion of capitalism, therefore strict monitoring rules and regulations will minimize exploitation and maximize its benefits. On the other hand, Govt. should restructure the public sector schools on the same standards followed by private sector to encourage the enrollment in public schools.

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