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Commercialization of School Education in Pakistan: Community Perceptions of Public and Private Schools in District Lakki Marwat

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Abstract: *The expansion of private educational institutions has significantly reshaped Pakistan's education system, while raising important concerns about the commercialization of education and its implications for educational quality, equity, and access. This study examines community perceptions of educational commercialization using a comparative case study of public and private schools in District Lakki Marwat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Using a quantitative case study design, primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire that was administered to 100 participants representing stakeholders from both public and private schools during the study period (2009–2012). Frequencies and percentages were used as descriptive methods to examine the perceptions of respondents on the quality of education, competence of teachers, administrative effectiveness, infrastructure, and quality of curriculum, language of instruction, parental participation, extra-curricular facilities, and cost-effectiveness. The results show that private schools were generally perceived to provide higher-quality education, better administration, better infrastructure, English as the medium of instruction, and greater institutional accountability than public schools. Nevertheless, respondents also expressed concerns that the increasing commercialization of education has contributed to socioeconomic differences by limiting low-income families' access to quality education because of higher tuition fees and related educational costs. By comparison, despite being cheaper, public schools were also perceived to face challenges related to infrastructure, resource availability, teacher motivation, and institutional management, as well as the availability of resources, motivation among teachers, and institutional control. The study concludes that commercialization of education has increased parental choice, competition in the education sector, and at the same time increased the disparities in access to education. It suggests strengthening public education through improved governance in the education sector, investing more in educational facilities, offering effective staff development, and taking effective regulatory oversight of private educational institutions to provide equal access to quality education to everyone.*

Keywords: Educational commercialization; Public schools; Private schools; Public perception; Educational inequality; Pakistan

Introduction

Education is universally considered to be one of the fundamental human rights and one of the most

significant factors of socioeconomic development, human capital formation, and sustainable national development. Education can enhance labor productivity, promote social mobility, reduce poverty, strengthen democratic institutions, and contribute to economic competitiveness. Therefore, education has been traditionally considered by governments as a social good, and it is expected to be provided to citizens equitably and fairly, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Over the last thirty-five years, however, education systems across the world have undergone major structural changes as a result of globalization, neo-liberal economic policies, and market-based reforms. This has seen a growing influence of the private sector on government education systems, institutional competition, parental choice, and diversified sources of financing, contributing to the commercialization and marketization of educational services. Education is thus being more than ever considered as a social duty of the state, and it is also considered as a commercially competitive economic product. 1,11,12

Education commercialization refers to the application of market principles within educational institutions and occurs when educational institutions apply the principles of the market to compete against one another in an effort to attract students through improved infrastructure, academic standing, quality of teaching, technology, brand name, and specialized programs. With this, institutions of learning are becoming more reliant on tuition amounts and consumer satisfaction to remain financially sustainable. Advocates of commercialization would claim that competition will ensure efficiency, innovation, institutional accountability, and responsiveness to parental demands. On the other hand, opponents have argued that excessive commercialization transforms education into a profit-oriented enterprise, undermines the social purpose of schooling, and exacerbates inequality by limiting schools to the provision of quality education to disadvantaged individuals. These opposing viewpoints have brought about considerable international debate on the right relationship between educational efficiency and educational equity.

In developing countries, commercialization of education has risen to the forefront, with governments struggling more with demographic demands, financial constraints, and challenges in maintaining educational quality. In most low- and middle-income countries, there has been a high growth in the number of private educational institutions to address gaps in the provision of adequate public education infrastructure within the state. Though the growth has diversified the educational environment and provided a greater parental choice, it has brought about significant concerns regarding affordability, quality control, government regulation, and equity. As a result, there is still a debate among policymakers about whether educational reforms based on the market will enhance or exacerbate existing socioeconomic disparities in educational access and learning outcomes.

Pakistan is a notable example of the rapid expansion of educational privatization within South Asia. The educational environment in the country has seen great development since the early 1990s in terms of an increase in the number of private schools as a result of high enrolment rates, population growth, urbanization, and improper investment in the public education system, coupled with challenges in governance in the education sector. Failure by government schools to properly serve increasing learner numbers and sustain the quality of education has stimulated the move by privately operated schools into urban and rural areas. As a result, Pakistan has now developed a dual education system whereby government and private schools coexist and at the same time vary significantly in terms of governance structures, monetary resources, teaching standards, infrastructure, and classrooms in schools, medium of instruction, and the efficiency of administration.

Empirical studies conducted previously found that a good part of Pakistani parents use private schools because of better institutional responsibility, better teaching of the English language, and more willingness to meet the needs of students. These perceived benefits have led to greater demand for private education with higher tuition and other implied costs of education. Recent findings also show that in most cases, the students in private schools often demonstrate better learning outcomes than those in government schools, especially when there have been management practices and accountability

systems in place. However, academic achievement gains are not necessarily matched by increased equity in education since there are still economic barriers denying economically disadvantaged families' access to education. 4,9,10

Meanwhile, issues of the commercialization of education have escalated in Pakistan. Modern researchers believe that growing privatization has changed the priorities of education slowly, as the focus of education is shifting from its broader social purpose toward institutional competitiveness and financial sustainability. Marketing of schools has become more prevalent in infrastructure development, technological amenities, examination results, and promotion strategies that seek to entice students to schools. These developments have transformed the old thinking about education by introducing parents as the consumers and schools as service providers competing within educational markets. Competition in the market can also drive innovation and institutional change, but inadequate regulation can also be a source of inequitable education access, commercialization of educational services, and an enlarging gap between the wealthy and the poor.

Concerns regarding the effectiveness of educational reforms in Pakistan in the recent past have sparked more debate on the relationship between privatization, commercialization, and the quality of education. The experimental programs of public-private partnership started in Punjab have shown some positive results as per selected learning outcomes of students, especially in mathematics, and have indicated that collaboration between government authorities and education providers at the local level may lead to improved performance of the institutions, given the proper management structures. But there is also evidence that such initiatives are not always necessary to minimize educational inequalities among disadvantaged students, showing the persistence of the significance of fair educational policies and efficiency-based reforms. 5,8,11,12

Likewise, other recent studies examining the privatization of government schools have indicated there have been mixed perceptions among stakeholders. Although privatization is viewed by some participants as a way to enhance accountability, institutional management, and service delivery, others indicate their worries about escalating educational costs, the security of teacher jobs, diminished public accountability, and loss of accessibility to education by low-income families. These results indicate that commercialization is also a multidimensional phenomenon whose outcomes are not only focused on institutional performance but also extend to educational justice and social inclusion issues.

Although the literature on educational privatization in Pakistan has expanded, empirical evidence on community perceptions at the district level remains limited. A majority of the research carried out in the past has been on the issue of educational policy, institutional efficacy, teacher attitudes, or programs based on public-private partnerships, but very little research has examined how communities of a given area perceive the commercialization of schooling and compare educational institutions of a given area (public and private) on various aspects of educational quality. Knowledge of what people think is of great importance since parents and the members of society are the direct forces behind school choice, institutional accountability, and implementation of educational policies. Their perceptions are also a rich source of evidence on whether or not commercialization has been successful in its goals of enhancing educational quality and still providing equity of access.

The District Lakki Marwat provides a valuable context for examining these issues. Since it is mostly a rural district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the presence of privately owned educational institutions has increased alongside an established system of government schools in the region, with an already established system of government schools. The disparity in infrastructure, teaching methods, administrative supervision, parental participation, and teaching materials has also been one of the reasons why the public has exhibited a mixed view of the relative performance of both sectors. The original MPhil thesis on which the present study is based documented these contextual characteristics. It gathered initial survey data on the respondents who represented both sectors of education, including

the public and the private ones, in 2009-2012.

It is on this background that the present study examines community perceptions on educational commercialization, whereby public and private schools were compared in the District Lakki Marwat in Pakistan. In particular, it examines respondents' perceptions towards the quality of education, competence of teachers, effectiveness of administration, school facilities, curriculum application, medium of instruction, parental involvement, extracurricular activities, affordability, and the performance of the institution. Through this district-level case study, the research contributes to the existing literature on educational commercialization in Pakistan and offers policy implications for strengthening educational governance, improving the public education system, and promoting equitable access to quality education.

Literature Review

Commercialization of education has been one of the major aspects of educational policy research, as we witness the augmentation of principles regarding the market being applied in education systems by governments. The differences between commercialization, privatization, and marketization are closely related concepts. Marketization is the implementation of competition in education, privatization is the growing role of the actors in the form of various private actors, and commercialization is the production and sale of educational products and services in the educational markets. All these processes are transforming the structures of governance, institutional accountability, school governance, and parental choice, and shaping the connection between education and the public interest (1,2).

The global literature gives different views on the commercialization of education. Advocates believe that market competition promotes institutional efficiency, innovation, better management of resources, and responsiveness to the expectations of students and their parents. School rivalry is thought to encourage administrators and teachers to ensure better academic performance, infrastructure, and quality of services. On the contrary, opponents recommend that commercialization will make education a commodity and thus enhance disparities in access to quality education, as well as minimize the role of the state in offering quality education to all people (1,3,4).

In Pakistan, privatization has grown at a very fast rate since the 1990s due to growing enrolment pressures, demographic pressures, low public spending on education, and continued poor governance in the public education sector. More current policy discussions suggest that globalization and neoliberal educational reforms have increased the speed of the involvement of the private sector based on donor-provided projects and on partnerships between the public and the private. Despite providing families with more educational opportunities, these reforms have also raised the issues of both affordability and democratic accountability, and the deterioration of education as a social good (5,6).

Empirical data in Pakistan show that parents often believe that the quality of education attained in private schools is better than that attained in government schools. Some of the factors that have led to these perceptions are qualified teachers, good institutional management, English medium of instruction, better infrastructure, and enhanced accountability systems. These perceived benefits are, however, usually matched with increased cost of tuition, thus limiting access to private learning to households with lower income. Commercialization can therefore be both enhancing and strengthening the performance of the institutions, and at the same time promote inequalities in education (7,8).

Studies examining the perceptions of stakeholders show that there is no consistent perception among stakeholders about commercialization, that is, the teachers, parents, and community members. Educators often admit that school management and administrative efficiency have been enhanced after privatization, and at the same time mention issues of job security, workload, commercialization of educational goals, and disparities in access to education. These findings suggest that commercialization must not only be considered in the framework of institutional performance but also in the light of educational equity, social justice, and long-term sustainability (7,9).

Public/private partnerships (P3) schemes are also a major strand of the literature. The study of the impact of PPP schemes in Punjab shows that there is improved institutional performance and learning outcomes under certain governance models. But scientists also note that efficiency gains alone cannot be sufficient to warrant commercialization if governments do not keep a proficient regulatory body as well as provide equal access to education for all socio-economic classes. Inadequate regulation may cause market-oriented reforms to further widen existing inequalities between urban and rural areas, as well as between higher- and lower-income households (10).

Although there is a large body of research about educational privatisation and commercialisation, there is not sufficient empirical work at the district level. Most of the Pakistani research studies have been limited to either provincial policies of education, higher education, or teachers' perceptions or public-private partnership programmes. There is a lack of research on community perceptions about the commercialization of learning on a diversity of dimensions of educational quality, namely infrastructure, curriculum, administrative efficiency, participation of families, costs, and capabilities of teachers. This study has been undertaken to fill this missing aspect, and community perceptions related to educational commercialization have been discussed in the light of primary survey data collected during preparation of MPhil Research (2009-2012) from District Lakki Marwat. The original thesis has detailed contextual information on the educational environment of the district, on which the present study is empirically based.

Previous research on educational commercialization in Pakistan has mainly been concerned with privatization policies, performance of educational institutions, public and private educational institutions, public-private partnership, and educators' perspectives, particularly in urban settings and education reforms in provinces (47). Even though these studies have contributed to understanding the impact of private educational institutions and related implications of market-oriented education reforms, empirical evidence is comparatively scant regarding the perception and awareness of the educational commercialization processes at the district level in local communities. Furthermore, previous research has largely focused on one aspect of commercialization, such as the quality of education or the effectiveness of school management, or the performance of private schools, etc., without taking into account the various aspects of community perceptions, such as teacher competence, the effectiveness of school management, infrastructure, curriculum, the medium of teaching, parental involvement, and extracurricular activities along with institutional performance and affordability.

It is interesting to explore educational commercialization in District Lakki Marwat where both public and private schools cater to the population in the same geographic and socio-economic context. Having studied the literature available, it is concluded that there is not much empirical research done on the perceptions of the community towards educational commercialization in District Lakki Marwat.

To fill this lacuna, in the present study, the community perceptions of educational commercialization are discussed by comparing the public and private schools in District Lakki Marwat. The study compares perceptions on different aspects of educational quality and institutional performance from the same survey. The comparative analysis is a contribution to the wider literature on the commercialization of education and provides policy recommendations toward better governance of education and equitable access to quality education at the district level in extensive areas.

OBJECTIVES

General Objective

To examine public perceptions of educational commercialization in public and private schools in District Lakki Marwat, Pakistan.

Specific Objectives

1. To compare public perceptions of the quality of education provided by public and private

schools in District Lakki Marwat.

2. To assess public perceptions regarding teacher competence, school administration, infrastructure, and educational facilities in public and private schools.
3. To examine the perceived impact of educational commercialization on the accessibility and affordability of education.
4. To provide policy recommendations for improving educational quality and promoting equitable access to education in both public and private school sectors.

Research Questions

1. How do public perceptions of educational quality differ between public and private schools in District Lakki Marwat?
2. How do respondents perceive teacher competence, school administration, infrastructure, and educational facilities in public and private schools?
3. What are the perceived effects of educational commercialization on the accessibility and affordability of education?
4. What policy measures can improve educational quality while ensuring equitable access to education in District Lakki Marwat?

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative case study research design was adopted in this study, which investigated the opinions of people on the commercialization of education in public and privatized schools within the District Lakki Marwat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Since it allowed collecting and analyzing numerical data on the perception of the quality of education, teacher competency, school administration, infrastructure, curriculum, affordability, and performance of institutions, a quantitative approach was found to be appropriate. Case study design enabled an in-depth discussion of educational commercialization in a particular geographic context and allowed for public and private schools' comparison.

Study Area

The study was carried out in District Lakki Marwat in the southern part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. Relying on the unique composition of both public and private schools, the district was chosen as an ideal setting for the study of commercialisation of education. Having both the public and private education systems allowed us to compare public opinion on education, school performance, approachability, cost, and management.

Population and Samples

Teachers and parents from public and private Higher Secondary Schools (HSSC level) of District Lakki Marwat were targeted. 100 respondents were involved in the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents, where each eligible respondent had an equal chance of being included in the sample. To have a balanced perception about the commercialization of education and the performance of schools, people representing both public schools and private schools were sampled. Though the study involved one district only, those who responded did represent those who were closely acquainted with the educational process and who were likely to be informed users and judges of school quality and of educational services in the schools.

Research Instrument

Closed-ended questions designed on a structured questionnaire were used in collecting the primary data, with the objectives of the study and relevant literature used as a basis in the construction of the

structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was crafted to gather data regarding the respondents' perceptions towards the quality of education, teacher performance, school leadership, infrastructure, curriculum quality, medium of instruction, parent-teacher school interaction, student involvement, affordability and accessibility of schools, as well as the relative performance of the two school systems (public and private). Standardization of questions led to uniformity in gathering data, as well as making it easy to analyze quantitatively. The questionnaire employed three-point ordinal response categories (e.g., Satisfied, Partially Satisfied, and Dissatisfied) appropriate to each construct.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher himself went to the sampled schools to implement the questionnaires. Informed consent was gathered by way of informing the respondents of the objectives of the study before handing out the questionnaires. Participation was voluntary. The questionnaires that were completed were first reviewed for completeness, accuracy, and consistency before coding to use in the statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

The data gathered were coded, entered in Microsoft Excel, and descriptive statistical methods were used to analyze them. Frequencies and percentages were computed to get a summary of the perceptions of the respondents in the study variables. The results are displayed in the form of tables and graphical illustrations to enable a better comparison of public and private schools and make the conclusion more rational. The descriptive analysis was able to show in detail the current trends and tendencies of commercialization of education.

Ethical Considerations

The study has been carried out using ethical principles. After the subjects were informed about the objective of the research, all the respondents were on board willingly. Further, no personally identifying data were collected; anonymity and privacy were kept intact. The respondents' information used for this investigation was only for academic purposes and only presented in groups, thus providing some protection for the privacy of the respondents.

Results

In this section, the results of the questionnaires' responses that were taken from 100 respondents are presented and quantitatively analysed. The answers to the research questions are reported in sequence according to the study objectives. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to sum up the respondents' views about educational commercialism in public and private schools of District Lakki Marwat. Results are presented in tables and figures and followed by short explanations of the pattern of response or changes.

Table 1. Public Perceptions of the Present Education System (N = 100)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Satisfied	20	20.00
Partially Satisfied	42	41.67
Dissatisfied	38	38.33
Total	100	100.00

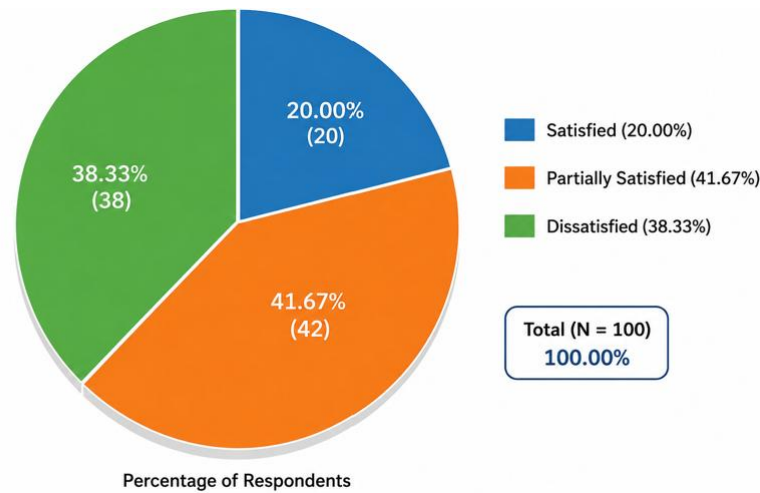


Figure 1: Public Perceptions of the Present Education System (N = 100)

Table 1 shows that respondents' perceptions of the "present education system" are detailed: 20.0% reported satisfaction with the current education system, while 41.67% reported partial satisfaction and 38.33% were dissatisfied with the current system. Overall, around 80% noted that they were either partially satisfied or even dissatisfied with the current level of education quality and effectiveness, showing that there is widespread awareness of concerns about the current level of education quality and effectiveness. This means that significant efforts need to be made to improve the quality of education and public trust in the education system.

Table 2. Perceptions of Teaching Staff Availability

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	32	31.67
To Some Extent	45	45.00
No	23	23.33
Total	100	100.00

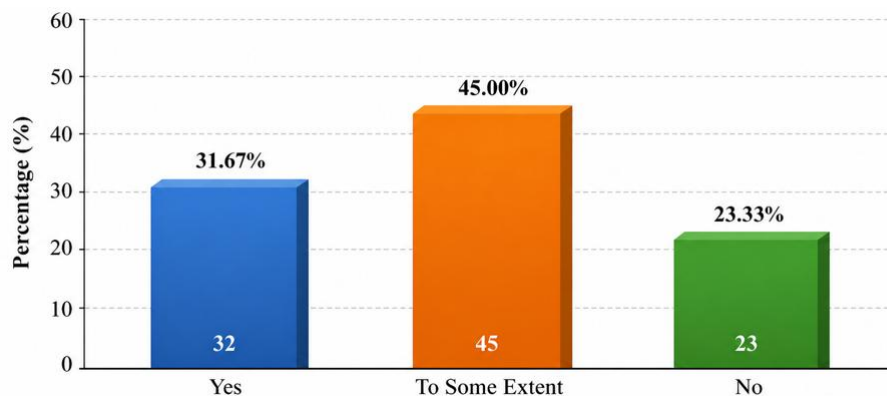


Figure 2: Perceptions of Teaching Staff Availability

Table 2 shows the perception of the respondents regarding availability of Teaching Staff. Almost half (45.0%) reported staffing was adequate only to some degree, 31.67% said that schools were adequately staffed, and 23.33% thought that the staffing was inadequate. These indications suggest that issues of staff and teacher availability and staff-to-student ratios continue to be a concern in schools.

Table 3. Satisfaction with Teachers' Performance

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Satisfied	17	16.67
Partially Satisfied	42	41.67
Dissatisfied	41	41.66
Total	100	100.00

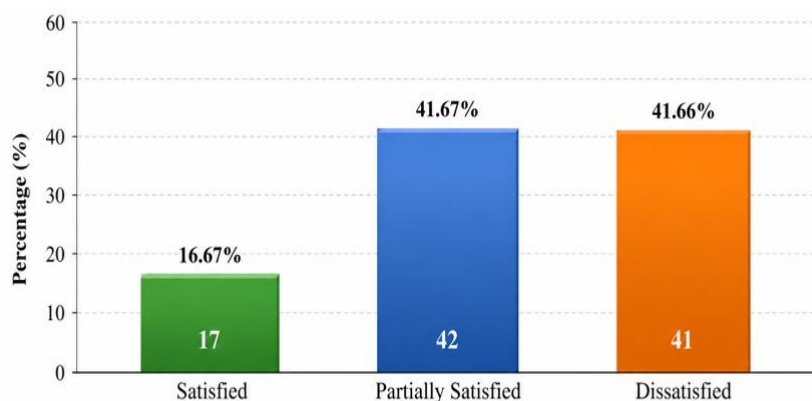
*Figure 3: Satisfaction with Teachers' Performance*

Table 3: Respondents' assessment of teacher performance. Only 16.67% were satisfied with the performance of teachers, while 41.67% were partially satisfied and 41.66% were dissatisfied. Overall, more than four-fifths (82%) said either they were not satisfied or they were moderately satisfied, showing that teacher performance is an important issue in the education system.

Table 4. Perceptions of Teachers' Qualifications

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Qualified	25	25.00
To Some Extent	48	48.33
Not Qualified	27	26.67
Total	100	100.00

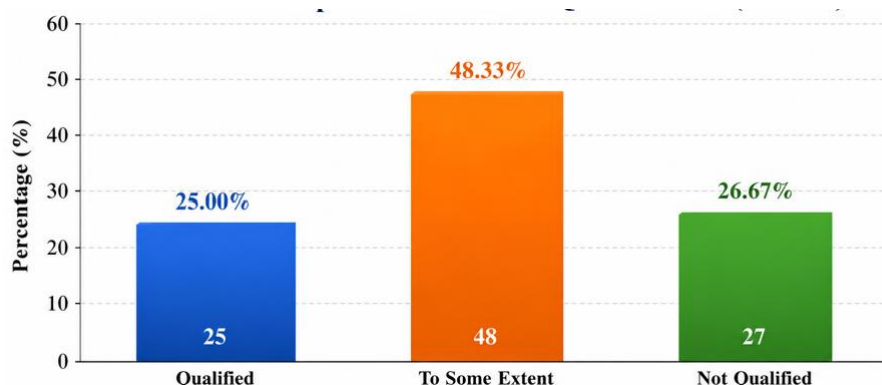
*Figure 4: Perceptions of Teachers' Qualifications*

Table 4 indicates that only a quarter (25.0%) believe that teachers are fully qualified. Almost half (48.33%) felt that teachers were 'qualified to some extent' and 26.67 % felt that teachers were 'not qualified'. From these findings, it can be said that there is a need to further enhance teacher qualifications

as perceived by the respondents.

Table 5. Preference for School Sector

School Sector	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Government Schools	30	30.00
Private Schools	70	70.00
Total	100	100.00

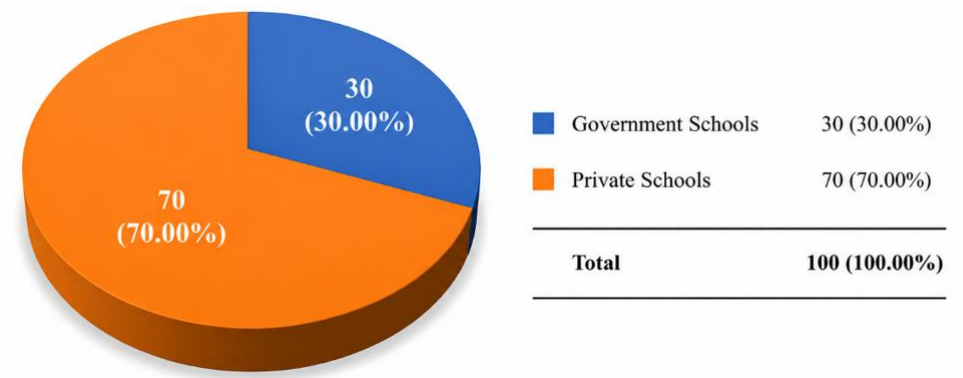


Figure 5: Preference for School Sector

Table 5 shows the opinion of the respondents on the school areas. A large majority (70.0%) were proponents of private schools, while 30.0% showed preference for government schools. This discovery mirrors the respondents' increased trust that private educational institutions offer better educational standards, better management of the institution, and better learning outcomes.

Table 6. Student Participation in Academic Activities

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Satisfied	22	21.67
Partially Satisfied	31	31.67
Dissatisfied	47	46.66
Total	100	100.00

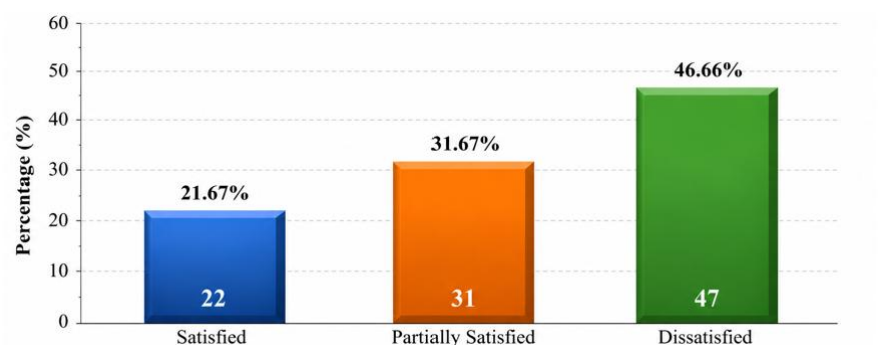


Figure 6: Student Participation in Academic Activities

Table6 shows the respondents' perceptions about students' participation in academic activities. Almost

half (46.66%) of the respondents were not satisfied with the amount of student participation, and 31.67% were only somewhat satisfied. By contrast, just 21.67% agreed that the students were happy with the participation in the activities that happened in the class in the academic context. The results indicate a low level of students' participation in learning activities overall. A few responses might indicate a problem with teaching quality, class engagement, student motivation, and/or resources for learning.

Table 7. Parent–Teacher Meetings

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	15	15.00
Sometimes	22	21.67
No	63	63.33
Total	100	100.00

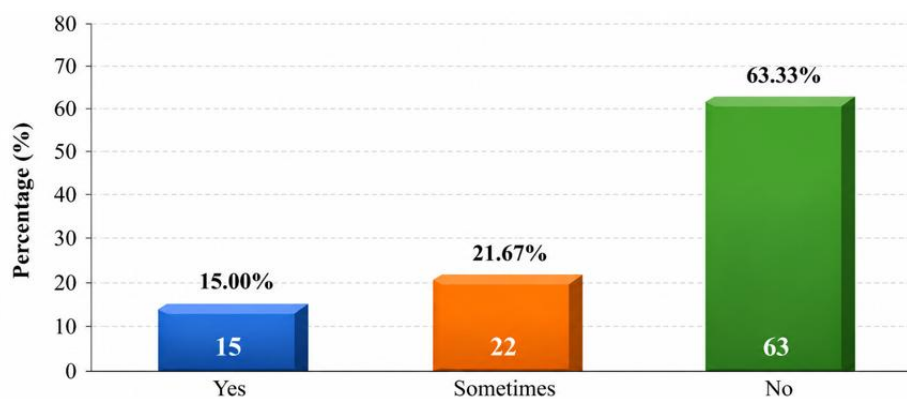


Figure 7: Parent–Teacher Meetings

Table 7 shows the respondents' views on the school parents–teachers meeting. The vast majority of respondents (63.33%) reported that parent teacher meetings were not held, and 21.67% reported parent teacher meetings were held some of the time. 15.0% of respondents reported that parent–teacher meetings were held regularly. This means there is little communication/collaboration between schools and parents in the area of the study. Limited frequency of parent–teacher meetings may conversely limit the opportunity to discuss student progress and learning difficulties and to increase parental engagement in learning.

Table 8. Preferred Medium of Instruction

Medium	Frequency	Percentage (%)
English	35	35.00
Urdu	10	10.00
Pashto	55	55.00
Total	100	100.00

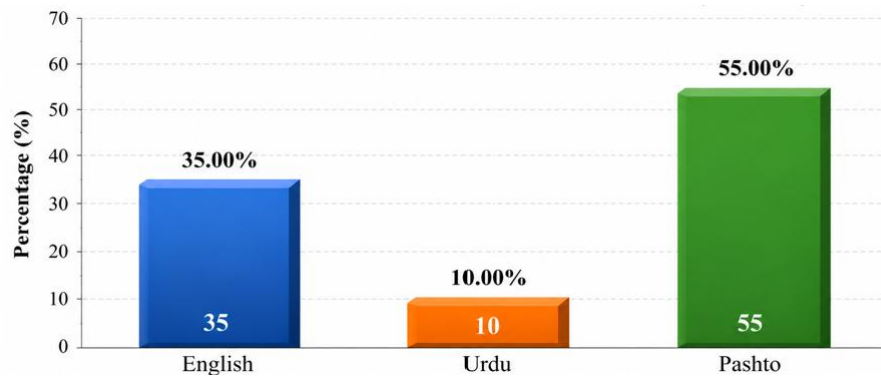


Figure 8: Preferred Medium of Instruction

Table 8 shows the respondents' preference for the media of teaching in the school. The responses to the medium of instruction preference indicated that more than half (55.0%) preferred Pashto for the medium of instruction, 35.0% preferred English, and just 10.0% preferred Urdu. The high rate of Pashto clearly indicates that respondents' first preference for receiving instruction is in their native language, and that they may believe this helps them better understand instructions and actively participate in the classroom. Given this important preference for Pashto, it does seem to indicate a sense of its importance in the setting of academic success and career prospects. The low preference for the Urdu language as compared to Pashto and English with regard to school language shows that Urdu is less effective than Pashto and English in the school language in the study area. It is found that both language identity and perceived benefits of English-medium education have an impact on the language preferences.

Table 9. Comparative Academic Performance

School Sector	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Government Schools	38	38.00
Private Schools	62	62.00
Total	100	100.00

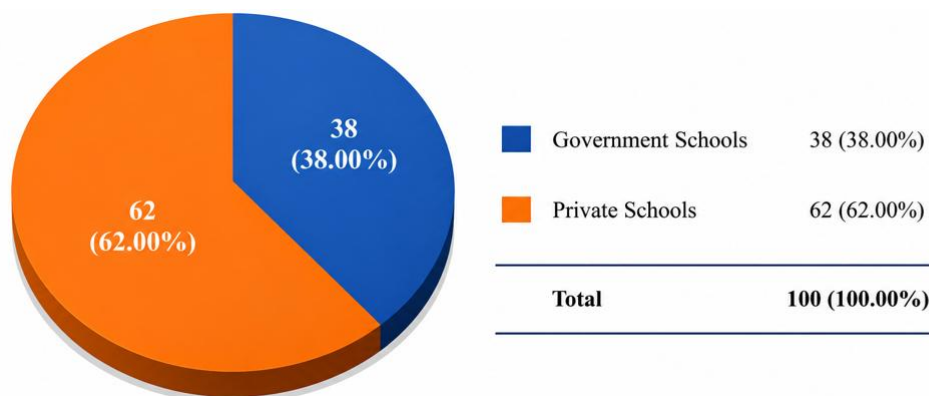


Figure 9: Comparative Academic Performance

Table 9: The ranking of the relative achievement of public and private schools is expressed by the respondents in Table 9. 42.0% of respondents felt that Government Schools did better than pupils in private schools, while a higher number of respondents (62.0%) believed that pupils in private schools did better than those in Government schools. The findings suggest that, in general, most of the respondents view that private schools produce better educational outcomes and are a more productive learning environment. The results show that academic achievement is a significant factor determining school choice and further support the general preference for private schools noted in previous research.

Table 10. Perceptions of School Administration

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Cooperative	22	21.67
To Some Extent	40	40.00
Not Cooperative	38	38.33
Total	100	100.00

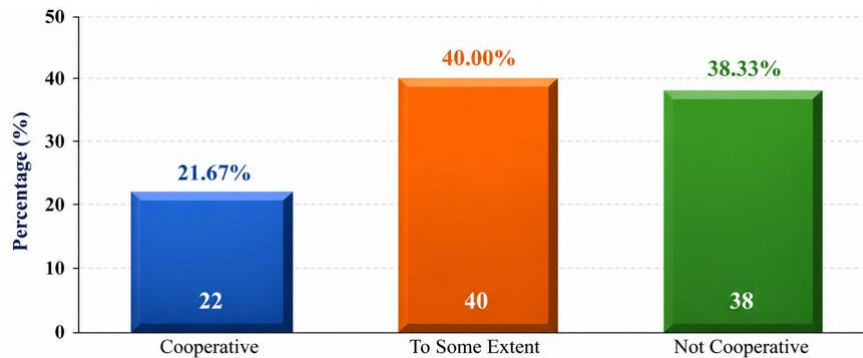
*Figure 10: Perceptions of School Administration*

Table 10: Responses to questions about school administration are presented. 21.67% believed that school administration was cooperative, while 40.0% believed that administration was somewhat cooperative and 38.33% believed that administration was not cooperative. These results demonstrate that there was a substantial variation in opinions on the effectiveness of administration, with some dissatisfaction.

Table 11: Perceptions of Curriculum Quality

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Satisfactory	42	41.67
To Some Extent	25	25.00
Unsatisfactory	33	33.33
Total	100	100.00

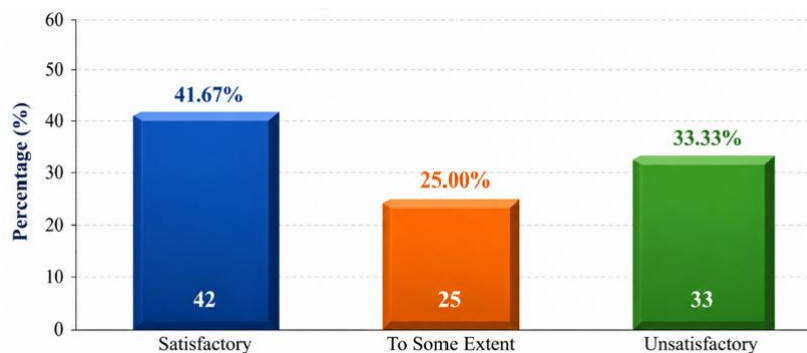
*Figure 11: Perceptions of Curriculum Quality*

Table 11: The respondents' opinions about the caliber of the curricula used in public and private schools. An overall satisfaction rating of 41.67% of respondents felt that the curriculum was satisfactory, and a further 25.00% on the other hand felt that it was only just part of the way satisfactory. On the other

hand, 33.33% thought the curriculum was inadequate. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents were positive in their views about the curriculum; however, a large portion were still not satisfied with its effectiveness and quality.

Table 12: Preference of Upper- and Middle-Income Families

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	47	46.67
To Some Extent	31	31.66
No	22	21.67
Total	100	100.00

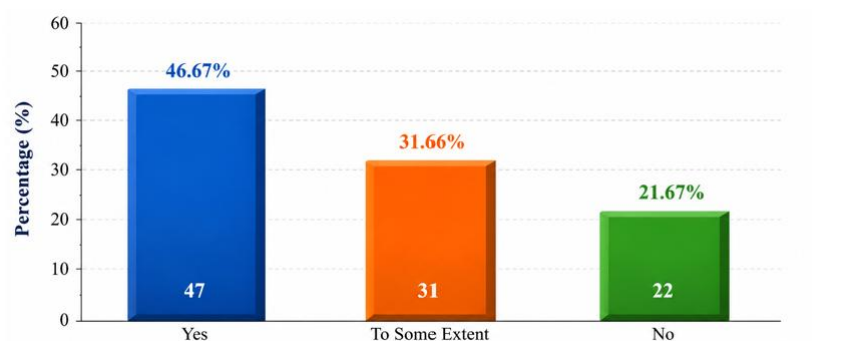


Figure 12: Preference of Upper- and Middle-Income Families

Table 12: Middle- and upper-class families preferred schools based on respondents' opinion. Of those surveyed, over half (46.67%) said that these families preferred private schools, 31.66% said that this preference existed to some degree, and 21.67% disagreed. The results suggest that the aforementioned phenomenon of educational commercialization has an impact on a stronger inclination of the relatively wealthy households towards private schools.

Discussion

The findings of the study in hand reveal that forty percent of respondents have positive attitude to commercialization of education in the investigated district while the sixty per cent respondents have negative attitude towards the commercialization of education in the investigated area, with the addition that most of the respondents have positive attitude towards the commercialization of education in the private schools of the investigated area as compared to the government schools in terms of quality of education, performance of the teachers, the functioning of the school, and performance. Overall, a significant proportion of the interviewees noted that they would prefer to send their children to a commercial school rather than a government school, indicating that commercialization has had a fairly significant impact on parents' choice of school. The findings in the current study confirm that the Pakistani population is not happy with government schools, and they consider that private schools are more accountable and provide better quality services and education, which has pushed the private education sector in Pakistan to rise. [1]

Another important finding was the performance of the teachers and their professional competence. Almost all the respondents were less than happy or not at all happy with the performance and quality of teachers. The findings show that in the general education system, the issue of teacher quality remains a big challenge. Equally, there are other findings which seem to corroborate the education system of Pakistan by stating that weaknesses in teacher management, lack of professional development, and weak accountability mechanisms continue to lead to the deterioration of the quality of education despite continuous reforms. [2]

The findings also show deficiencies in school administration, parent/teacher relationships, classroom conditions, and school programs. There was a lack of parent-teacher meetings (minimal, most respondents), or parent-teacher meetings must be held infrequently, and a satisfactory response rate was not plotted for the classrooms or school administration. All these suggest that the quality of education is not measured by academic performance alone, but also by the governance of the school institutions, the participation of the stakeholders in the education system, and the creation of conducive learning environments. Previous research also emphasises good school leadership and the relationships between the school and the community as essential factors in the evaluation of performance and responsibility for education. [3]

While it appears the majority of respondents favor private schools, it is also revealed that there are some concerns over the matter of educational equity. The commercialization of education services and the increase in tuition fees may restrict access for poor families to good education. This observation backs up current claims that more privatization and commercialization can enhance the efficiency of institutions, and at the same time expand socioeconomic inequalities, should governments be unable to keep equal opportunities in education. Recent evidence from Pakistan further suggests that public-private partnership programs enhance chosen learning outcomes, but may not be advantageous to underprivileged students as compared to the more well-off groups. [4]

In the field of study, literature is limited; however, the present research paper fills the void in the literature by providing empirical findings at the district level in Lakki Marwat, where not sufficient work has been done. The research paper below demonstrates how community perceptions are a valuable indicator of the effectiveness of the rather more under-discussed process of the commercialisation of education, as most studies have focused on national education reform or provincial education-commercial programmes. Results show that to achieve balance between quality of education and equitable access to schools, extra efforts have to be made in enhancing teacher development, institutional governance, infrastructure, and community engagement in government schools. The recommendations are in step with the conclusions of the initial MPhil thesis as well as the latest policy debates, which press for tighter rules of the private education sector coupled with greater investments in public education. [5]

Conclusion

In this paper, perceptions of participants concerning the commercialization of education were explored in District Lakki Marwat in comparison between the perceptions from the public and private schools. The findings indicate that the commercialization of education is linked with parental preferences, with most of the respondents having more faith in the degree of institutional discipline, teachers' commitment, and administrative effectiveness in private schools, compared to academic quality. By comparison, the respondents expressed relatively low satisfaction with government schools, especially in terms of teacher performance, school administration, classroom conditions, and stakeholder engagement.

The findings further show that, although more academic quality is perceived as being offered by private schools than government schools, there are also matters of equity and access to schools to be addressed. Higher costs of attending school and commercialization of education are likely to limit access to quality education opportunities for low-income families and entrench socioeconomic inequalities in access to education. While respondents were less satisfied with the government schools, the results indicate that enhancing governance, teacher training, facilities, and participation in the community could boost trust in the government's educational system.

Generally speaking, the paper concludes that the commercialization of education in Pakistan mirrors the rising demand for good education, and also exposes chronic problems in the public education sector. Instead of considering public and private schools as alternatives to each other, policymakers should

prioritize improving schools through teacher preparation, effective administration, robust accountability systems, improved school facilities, and parent-school collaboration. Meanwhile, adequate monitoring and supervision of private schools are crucial in ensuring that education quality is not compromised, extreme commercialization is prevented, and equitable access to quality education is achieved.

The findings help in the literature on educational commercialization because they share empirical results from an area of the country (District Lakki Marwat) which is relatively less researched. They also offer policy recommendations for policymakers interested in enhancing the quality of education to remain efficient, socially equitable, and accessible. So, in the future, the sample needs to be bigger, geographically diverse, and the research design must be longitudinal and must be done to explore the effects of the commercialization of education on learning outcomes, social mobility, and educational inequality in Pakistan in the long term.

The study uses survey data conducted in District Lakki Marwat between 2009 and 2012. The results are important as they reflect community perceptions at the time of the findings; however, over time, educational policies and institutional conditions may have evolved. Future research should be reproduced with larger samples from a number of districts and with more recent data.

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