

## **Quality of public primary education and the expansion of private schooling: an assessment in West Bengal**

**Mriganka Narayan Das\***

Research Scholar, Department of Education, Vinaya Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, West Bengal & Assistant Teacher, Makhaltore Madhyamik Vidyalaya, Makhaltore, Kalikapur, Burdwan, West Bengal

### **\*Corresponding Author:**

Mriganka Narayan Das

Email: [mriganka1981@gmail.com](mailto:mriganka1981@gmail.com)

---

**Abstract:** This present study examines the quality of public primary education and the expansion of privatization in primary education in West Bengal. The comparison of public and private primary schools was carried out through a survey. In this study, Case Study method had been adopted. Two primary schools in Katwa (a small town in Burdwan, West Bengal), one was public primary school and another was private primary school were selected randomly for the case study. The data were collected by observations and interviews conducted with the head of both schools and some parents. Some statistical data were collected from the secondary sources. The data were analyzed critically with logical approach. This study revealed that the numbers of recognized as well as unrecognized private primary schools were increasing in recent years in West Bengal. As far as teaching learning aids and facilities were concerned, the private primary school was far ahead of public primary school. Majority of the parents considered that private primary schools deliver better quality of education than public primary schools. Many of the parents from public school had a tendency to enroll their children in private school but they could not do this because they lacked the necessary economic condition to bear the cost of private schooling.

**Keywords:** Private primary school, Public primary school, Quality of education, Privatization in primary education

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

The word 'privatization' is a buzzword today in the context of globalization phenomenon. First of all we should know the meaning of privatization in education. In general sense, privatization in education is a process of transfer of management, functions or responsibilities to private organizations from government institutions. The modern society requires adopting the innovations and technologies and this puts a pressure on government of every country which also aims to develop the society. But, governments' limited resources create problems reaching this aim especially in developing countries. In this context, globalization forces the individual countries to reconsider their policies and reform their managements through privatization as an alternative solution.

It is an absolute truth that the importance of education is our life is immense. Now our modern life standards require well educated, proficient people around the globe. Moreover, in all countries, the education is now seen as an essential tool to reach the economic achievement. Therefore, all most every government of different countries keen to the education sector and always try to develop it. For this reason, governments are trying to provide elementary education

for all and increase the quality of education at schools. But the developing countries are facing major difficulties in reaching such goals. In many countries, governments strive for better education but for their inadequate resources, growing population, limited schools, deficient and low qualified teachers and poor educational environment they cannot reach up to the mark[1].

While governments are facing such problems, privatization policies in education creeps in and appeared to provide a solution for such huge problems in elementary education. Many of the economists in world agree that if governments can deliver the quality educational services through private sector, the burden on the national budget certainly are reduced and quality of education can be enhanced. Private schools would have distinct effects on the education system in any country.

Education should be a fundamental right and governments all over the world should require this for every of its citizens. United Declaration of Human Rights considered education as a fundamental right first in 1948 and stated that primary education shall be free and compulsory and available to all. In the 1990s,

---

UNESCO established a goal for their member states entitled “education for all (EFA)”[2]. This act aimed for everybody to access the basic fundamental education. However, although many countries accepted this, but their inadequate resources prevented them from reaching the goal. On the other hand, some countries, even if they achieved to provide elementary education for all their citizens, have failed to maintain the quality of education again because of their limited resources.

In this situation, privatization may be accepted as a possible tool in some regions to achieve education for all. Non-profit private schools may be considered as supplementary to the public schools in some developing countries. These are founded by international and national NGOs. Especially in India where there are many poor people in rural areas who are deprived of accessing basic education these schools these NGOs should come to be operated.

Many people considered that private management in school leads to more efficiency and responsiveness to the parents’ demands. The head of these schools possess more autonomy to manage compared to the public school principals. Private schools may have the authority to hire teachers and staffs, and thus can select better-prepared teachers for better performance. Private schools may also have more autonomy in preparation of curricula and instructional methods according to the interests and abilities of the students. Advocates of the privately managed schools also argue that the existence of these private schools creates a healthy competition which can improve the efficiency of the government schools and benefit the entire education system. There are also many people against the private schools who argue that private schools threaten the equity and social cohesion of our society and are subject to market risk. They argue that these private schools have no liabilities to look at the broader picture of education, the value of education.

The advent of private primary schools in different parts in India, particularly in the urban areas, is becoming a real phenomenon today. Recent data shows that across the country, 30 percent of the urban people (poor and non-poor) enrolled their children in private schools, whereas 17.1 percent of rural people (poor and non-poor) enrolled their children in these schools. Interestingly, some recent reports suggest that private schools are becoming more and more of choice for the urban poor people in some parts of the country, such as Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh[3]. However, this picture may not be universal. Enrolment in the private schools in West Bengal is not higher compared to other parts of the country still now. But the overall scenario in India may influence on the number of private schools West Bengal.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Goldhaber [4] investigated the relation between the quality of public education and public or private school enrollment. He obtained strong evidences of the crowding out effect. He showed that the increase in public school expenditure per student had a significant and negative effect on the private school enrollment rate.

Data collected from Pakistan's households and schools, Alderman et al.[5] explicitly analyzed the choice between public and private schools. In their study, the decision to enroll or not relies on household characteristics such as income, sex, and parents' education. The choice of school depends exclusively on that particular school characteristics such as school distance, pupil-teacher ratio etc. They found that all these variables were significant in driving the parents' choice between school alternatives.

Glick and Sahn [6] estimated the demand functions for public and private schools using data from rural Madagascar. They found that public school quality indicators (such as distance of the school, lack of teachers, and facilities condition) had negative effects on public school enrollment. In the case of private schools, none of the school characteristics had significant effects on demand.

Rana. K et al.[3] studied about public private interface in the primary schooling system in West Bengal. The study focused on the rural and urban settlements in Birbhum district. Three main types of primary schooling systems were found - government, private and other non- government schools. The findings showed that private schools were better equipped in terms of number of teachers and pupil-teacher ratio. But the government primary schools were much ahead of the private ones in terms of teachers' training. The satisfaction of the parents over the performances of the teachers was relatively higher in case of the private primary schools than the government schools. The quality of learning achievement of the children of private primary schools was found to be relatively better than in the public schools. The poor quality of education delivered in many of the public primary schools compelled some of the parents to opt for private schools, which were perceived to deliver better quality.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To study and to compare the infrastructure and facilities of public and private primary schools in West Bengal.
2. To study and to compare the perception of the parents about public and private primary schools in West Bengal.
3. To find out whether the private primary schools in West Bengal deliver better quality

of education than public primary schools or not.

4. To study the cause behind the growth of private schools in West Bengal.
5. To investigate the effect of privatization in primary education on public primary schools in West Bengal.

## METHODOLOGY

In this present study, Case Study method had been adopted. Two primary schools in Katwa (a small town in Burdwan, West Bengal), one was public primary school and another was private primary school were selected randomly for the case study.

The data were collected by observations and interviews conducted with the head of both schools and some parents. For this reason, three sets of survey questionnaires were prepared. Two Head masters and 50 parents (25 from public school and 25 from private school) of the students from these two schools were selected as a sample. Besides, some statistical data were collected from the secondary sources- different research papers, journals etc. and from DISE, flash statistics. To analysis the data, observation notes and the interviews were first tabulated and summarized and then analyzed critically with logical approach.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the table-1 and figure-1 it was evident that whereas there were 9445 recognized private schools in West Bengal in 2012-13, the number increased to 9657 in 2013-14. The table-1 shows that the percentage increase was 2.24 %. Though it was low but still it was increasing.

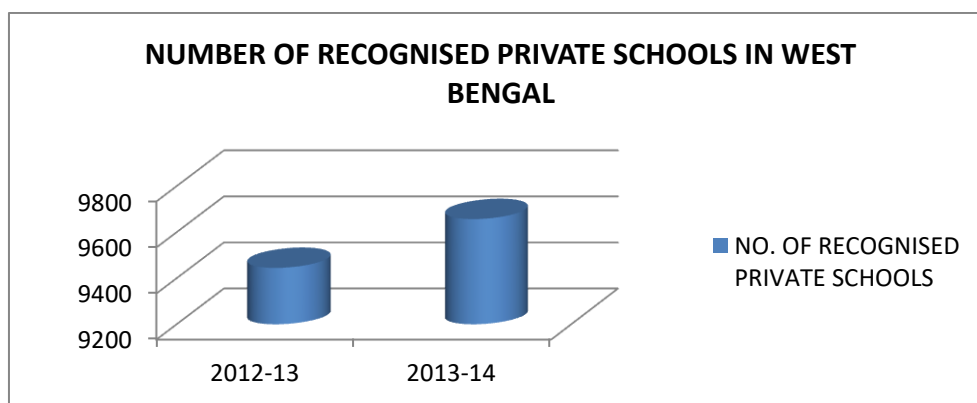
The percentage of private share to total schools in West Bengal was 8.99% in 2011-12, 9.99% in 2012-13 and 10.17% in 2013-14. From the figure 2 it was clear that percentage of private share to total schools was increased more from 2011-12 to 2012-13 than from 2012-13 to 2013-14 in west Bengal. In just three years (2011 to 2014), the increase in the percentage was 1.18 %. So the percentage share of private schools was increasing in recent years.

From the table-3 and figure-3, it could be stated that the variation of average number of classrooms in Private primary schools were greater than that of public schools in West Bengal from 2011 to 2014. The average number of classrooms in private primary schools was increasing much faster than in case of public schools and the number was always greater than that of public schools in that period (2011 to 2014). So it implied that the infrastructure of the private schools was developing more than that of public schools in West Bengal from 2011 to 2014.

**Table 1: Number of Recognized Private Schools in West Bengal**

Number of Recognized Private Schools in West Bengal	
2012-13	2013-14
9445	9657

Source: DISE: Flash Statistics 2013-14.

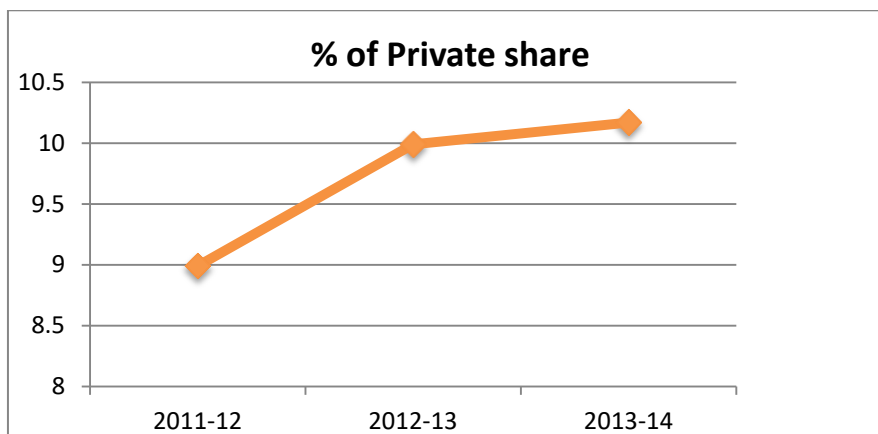


**Fig-1: Showing Number of Recognized Private Schools in West Bengal in 2012-13 and 2013- 14**

**Table-2: Percentage of Private share to Total Schools in West Bengal**

Type of School	Percentage of Private share to Total Schools		
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Private	8.99	9.99	10.17

Source: DISE: Flash Statistics 2013-14.

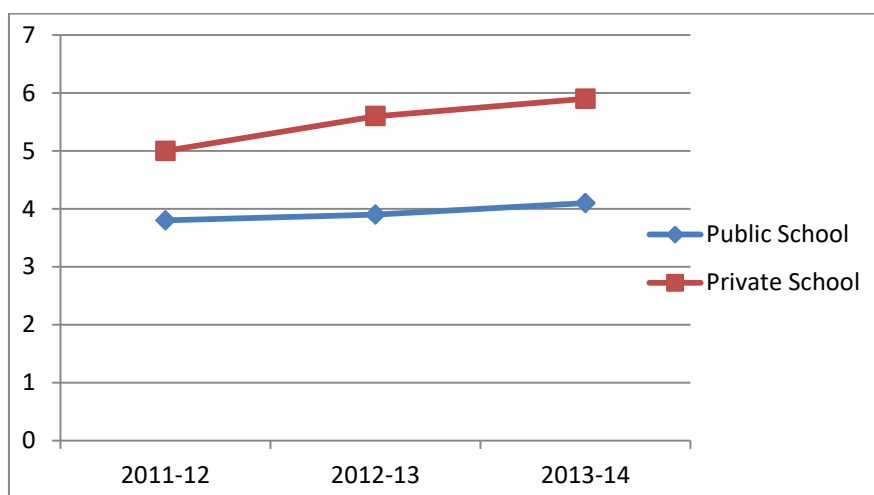


**Fig-2: Showing Percentage of Private share to Total Schools in West Bengal in recent years.**

**Table 3: Average Number of Classrooms in Public and Private primary schools in West Bengal**

Type of School	Average Number of Classrooms in Schools		
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Public	3.8	3.9	4.1
Private	5.0	5.6	5.9

Source: DISE: Flash Statistics 2013-14.



**Fig-3: Showing variation of average number of classrooms in Public and Private primary schools in West Bengal from 2011 to 2014.**

**Table-4: Key Statistics and Facilities of the Two Schools selected for the Case Study**

	Public Primary School	Private Primary School
Number of Students	91	588
Number of Teachers	03	22
Average student number in a classroom	22.75	28.4
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	30.33	26.7
Overhead projector	No	Yes
Science laboratory	No	Yes
Computer laboratory with internet facility	No	Yes
Library	No	Yes

In table 4, some key statistics and facilities of the two schools were compared. The number of students

in the private primary school was much more than that in the public primary school. It was likely to be because

the parents were very much keen to admit their child in private school than in public school in West Bengal. The number of students in a classroom was 22.75 in average for public and 28.4 for private school. The average student number in a classroom in the private school was greater than that of public school. This was might happen because of parents' eagerness to admit their child in private schools and the private school was

yet not developed according to demand. As far as teaching learning aids and facilities were concerned, the selected public primary school had no overhead projector, library, science laboratory or computer laboratory with internet facility whereas the selected private primary school had all of these facilities and teaching aids. This was a significant difference in term of infrastructure of school.

**Table- 5: Writing skill of the children of the two selected schools**

	Percentage of the Students	
	Public School	Private School
Can write their own name	86	100
Can write own class	82	100
Can write own school name	76	100

Responses were not mutually exclusive.

From the table-5 it could be argued that 14% of the students from public school could not able to write their name, 18 % of them could not write their class and 24% of them could not write the school name whereas every student of the private school were able to

write their name, class and school name. This phenomenon implied that as far as basic learning was concerned, the private primary school was much ahead of public primary school.

**Table 6: Percentage of Parents response on whether teachers communicate with them or not**

Type of School	Yes	No	Don't know
Public School	54%	42%	4%
Private School	96%	2%	2%

It could also be seen from the responses of the parents that 42% of the parents from public school reported to have no knowledge regarding the parent – teacher meeting. On the other hand, 96% of the parents from private school admitted that the school

communicated with them when required. So as far as communication was concerned, the private school took more progressive action than the public school. This problem of the public school might be aroused because of there was hardly any government inspection.

**Table-7: Reasons for sending children to Public School**

Information asked	*Responses of Parents of the Public School	
	Number	Percentage
Poor economic condition	17	68.0
Need government pass certificate	4	16.0
Better quality in Public School	7	28.0
No Private School in locality	4	16.0
Don't know	1	4.0

\*Responses were not mutually exclusive

When asked to the parents from public school, 68% of them considered that they enrolled their children in the public school because of their poor economic condition. 16% of them sent their children to public school for government pass certificate. 28% of the parents considered better quality of the public school, 16% of them sent their children because there was no private school in the locality. 4% of them

declined to give any comment. Though there were tendency among some of the parents from public school towards private education, they were found to have enrolled their children in public school, even in the locality where private schools were available, because may be they lacked the necessary economic condition to bear the cost of private schooling.

**Table-8: Reasons for sending children to Private School**

Information asked	*Responses of Parents of the Private School	
	Number	Percentage
To be strong in English	22	88
For good discipline / culture	21	84
Better interaction between Parents and Teacher	9	36
Reputation of school	15	60
Individual care and security of child	21	84
Bad quality of the Public Schools	22	88

\*Responses were not mutually exclusive

While the main cause behind choosing public school to enroll children was the economic condition of the parents, interestingly, in case of private schools, a range of other reasons were given by the parents. 88 percent of them said that private schooling would make their children strong in English, 84 percent believed the private schools would induce good discipline and better cultural values among the children. 36 % of the parents sent their children for better interaction between parents and teacher. 84 percent believed that private schools took individual care of the children. 60 percent considered reputation of the private school and 88% of them considered bad quality of the public school for enrolling their children in private school. A considerable section of the parents from private primary school maintained that they would prefer to enroll their children in the public school, if the quality of education in the public schools was ensured.

## CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing the discussion above, it can be stated that the numbers of recognized as well as unrecognized private primary schools are increasing in recent years in West Bengal. The percentage share of private schools to the total schools is also increasing in recent years. The average number of classrooms in private primary schools in West Bengal is increasing much faster than in case of public schools. As far as teaching learning aids and facilities are concerned, the private school is far ahead of public school. It implied that the infrastructure of the private schools is more developed than that of public schools in West Bengal. In case of basic learning of the students, the private primary school is better than public school.

The private primary school communicates with the parents more frequently than the public school. Many of the parents from public school have a tendency to enroll their children in private school but they cannot do this because they lack the necessary economic condition to bear the cost of private schooling. Majority of the parents from private school considered that they send their children in the private primary school because the private schools deliver good discipline and better cultural values, better interaction between parents and teacher, individual care and security of the child

and interestingly because of bad quality of the public schools. So it can be conclude that the majority of the parents consider that private primary schools deliver better quality of education than public primary schools.

As an effect of globalization, the privatization in education is growing fast all over the world, so in India and West Bengal also. This has an immediate effect of decline in number of students in government schools. The poor quality of education in public primary schools enhances the effect of privatization in primary education. As the quality of education in public primary schools will decline, more parents will decide to enroll their children in private schools and as an effect of that government and government aided primary schools have to struggle immensely to exist in future. So in this regards the government must take the responsibility and deliver appropriate actions.

## REFERENCES

1. Glewwe P; Schools and Skills in Developing Countries: Education Policies and Socioeconomic Outcomes. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 2002; 40(2):436 – 482.
2. UNESCO; Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2008. Paris: UNESCO, 2008.
3. Rana K, Santra S, Mukherjee A, Banerjee T, Kundu M; Public-Private Interface in Primary Education: A Case Study in West Bengal. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2005;1550-1555.
4. Goldhaber D; An endogenous model of public school expenditures and private school enrollment. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 1999; 46(1):106-128.
5. Alderman H, Orazem P, Paterno E; School Quality, School Cost, and the Public/Private School Choices of Low-income households in Pakistan. *The Journal of Human Resources*, 2001; 36 (2): 304-326.
6. Glick P, Sahn D; The Demand for Primary Schooling in Madagascar: Price, Quality, and the Choice between Public and Private Providers. *Journal of Development Economics*, 2006; 79: 118-145.