

# Public-Private Partnership in School Education: A Case Study of Low-Fee Private Schools in India

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## Abstract

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are playing a major role in the education sector in India as are a number of Low-Fee Private (LFP) schools. Typically, these LFP schools provide an affordable alternative to the families that don't have access to private elite schools and are looking for options beyond education from government schools. The results of ten studies which explore LFP schools are presented, and in particular, the effectiveness of them in enhancing accessibility of education to the most deprived members of society and in enhancing the accountability of teachers. However, many issues still persist, such as the quality of the learning environment, inadequate regulatory framework of educational standards, low enrollment of disadvantaged students and implementation of the 25% seat reservation for Economically Weaker Sections as per the Right to Education Act. At last, we describe this studies management aspects, provide recommendations on this issue, discuss their limitations, and then further research directions. This synthesis highlights the differences between the challenges and opportunities of both LFPs and PPPs in India and conventional research on education PPPs in India. It touches on the critical dimensions of school governance, teacher management, and organizational effectiveness, which could impact perspectives on PPPs as they pertain to LFP schools in India. It covers Public-Private Partnership, Low-Fee Private Schools, India, Right to Education Act, School Governance, Educational Equity, and LFP schools.

## INTRODUCTION

India has one of the biggest education systems in the world, with more than 250 million children in 1.5 million schools (UDISE+ Statistics 2026 | India Education Data & Analytics, 2026). Although major public programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Mid-Day Meal Scheme have been introduced, significant quality, access and fairness gaps still exist in the education sector — an ongoing challenge. Government schools are free and open, but they are continuously criticized for infrastructure, enrolment rates, and academic performance, as well as community participation (Factors Driving the Growth of Private School Enrollment in India, 2020–2025: A Data-Driven Analysis, 2024). Low-Fee Private (LFP) Schools, specifically budget private schools, are an important response in this space. They have students from lower- and middle-income families who are unhappy with government schools. These schools are expanding rapidly both in urbanized and remote regions, indicating their growing importance in the education landscape, leading to a questioning of their impact (Kingdon, 2020, pp. 23-45). Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in education are collaborations between the government and private entities, these include for-profit operators, NGOs, and communities to deliver an education. This was dramatically altered by the 2009 Right to Education (RTE) Act, under which private schools were compelled to dedicate

25% of their available seats towards EWS (Economically Weaker Section) students, while the state footed the bill. This publication summarizes the existing literature and methodology, and then examines findings on PPPs and LFP schools in India. Concluding with some important insights, recommendations, limitations and what further research is suggested in such partnerships. Its purpose is to raise the overall quality of education in India through public and private partnership action. Objective 2: To analyse the extent to which RTE Act's 25% EWS reservation policy operates in case of PPP arrangements at private schools of India. Objective 3: To find out problems in terms of governance, regulation and management of teachers at Low-Fee Private schools operating on PPP model in India.

## 2. Literature Review

Since the 1960s, the research on PPPs and LFP schools has expanded to cover 20 years of research in India. Themes in this scholarship included economics, education policy, governance, and sociology.

2.1 Parent Demand and the Rise of LFP Schools. In Hyderabad, a recent study by Tooley and Dixon (2005) revealed many low-income households enrolled their children in unrecognized private schools. Pupils from these schools did better than their counterpart children in government schools on tests and raised doubts about exclusive private schools and also brought LFP schools into a debate about policy. Dixon (2012) identified the preference for LFP schools that derived from the discontent with the government schools as well as the positive perceptions on English teaching, discipline, homework, the teacher's presence at school. These findings highlight the significance of parental preference for a growing LFP school.

2.2 Learnings: Evidence and Discussion Examinations Tooley, Dixon, and Gomathi (2007) revealed that, compared to children in government schools, children studying in unregistered private schools in Hyderabad, Delhi and Kolkata did extremely well in English and Maths. This result persists after controlling for socioeconomic status. In contrast, Muralidharan and Kremer (2008) utilized national rural data to indicate much of this benefit is due to selection bias. Private schools tend to draw ambitious, well-resourced families, they added. Taking these into account, the performance gap shrank significantly. Using longitudinal data from Andhra Pradesh to illustrate this, Singh (2015) showed that the private school benefits were even more concentrated among children from relatively wealthy families, even those within the low-fee private (LFP) sector, which begs the question. This is a worrying aspect of public-private partnerships (PPP). may lead to children's educational inequality if done in ways that unintentionally increase it.

2.3 Staff Accountability and Management Chaudhury et al. (2006) found that in Indian government schools teacher absenteeism is around 25%. The problem arises from lack of diligence, oversight and job security. As Kingdon (2017) found, LFP schools hire teachers on informal contracts not covering higher salaries. This may help in increasing accountability, but leads to high staff turnover, low morale and undermines the quality of instruction. Effective teacher management is still an important and disputed requirement for the effectiveness of PPPs.

2.4 Equity, RTE implementation and gender Srivastava and Noronha (2014) also observed gross non-compliance, late payment and social segregation in the application of section 12(1)(c) of the Right to Education Act. This section requires private schools to set aside 25% of seats for learners from

economically weaker sections (EWS). Inequity is undermined by weak governance and resistance. UNESCO (2015) noted that although girls are being enrolled in LFP schools, their parents have high concerns for safety and proximity as compared to academic achievements. This is worrisome for girls from disadvantaged communities.

2.5 National Evidence, Regulatory Policies and Governance Srivastava (2013) faulted India's twin regulatory system that enforces stringent regulation on recognised schools, and less than adequate regulation for unrecognised schools. This presents perverse incentives that push many LFP operators into informality — and beyond accountability.

3.1 It is a well reported fact of the literature (ASER, 2018) that private school enrollment among rural 6-14 age children increased from 19 per cent in 2006 to nearly 31 per cent in 2018; a significant national level finding. It highlights the lack of proper regulatory frameworks. Pandey and Singh (2020) also took a look at corporate PPP schemes like adopt a school schemes, recording significant infrastructure gains, but they found a tension between corporate management and community aspirations for infrastructure improvement remains. These observations merit interpretation instead of mere quantitative analysis. (Al-Thani, 2024)

Subsequently, in addition to the descriptive-analytical style of research, the research presented in 3.2 is an example of the specific research design used to present the research. It also narrates the basic conditions and evolution of PPP models regarding low-fee private (LFP) education in India, it analyzes the commonalities across the literature, and discusses both their advantages and disadvantages in its assessment, while exposing the gaps in research. Interestingly, this analysis takes management approaches, incorporating key ideas from organisational effectiveness, stakeholder management and governance systems. Drawing on management theories such as strategic resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation, and human resource management, the present research discusses the ways in which issues of leadership, accountability elements and institutional culture impact on the success or failure of PPP models. (Mathur, n.d.) This orientation sets this work apart from purely economic or policy approaches and provides useful implications to practitioners and policy makers who are interested in the managerial aspects of educational partnerships.

### 3.3 Sample Design

As a secondary research work, this study will use ten published literature articles, policy papers and research sets which were specific to the Indian context. Selection and identification of studies was conducted in an organized manner as follows: First, a data pool of literature was developed which consisted of keyword searches using 'public-private partnership school education India'; 'low-fee private schools India'; and keywords relevant to the field of education was taken from and searched in academic databases, institutional repositories and government portals. Subsequently, titles and abstracts were screened to exclude sources with no relation to PPPs or LFP schools at a school level. The other studies were selected based on factors such as direct contribution to the topic of research, quality of sources, citations, thematic coverage (Demand & Outcomes; Teacher Mgt.; Equity & Governance) and recency in reference (years published 2005–2020). The culminating sample was selected to provide a varied range of views and methods concerning PPP and LFP school education in India. No primary data were collected. There is a focus of peer-reviewed review on PPP, school education and learning outcome in India.

- National education surveys, such as the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER).
- Policy papers for the Right to Education (RTE) Act and its implementation.
- Books on low-fee private schooling in emerging economies.
- Reports from international bodies like UNESCO and the World Bank.
- Document review and content analysis of Government education policy documents and state-level reports of CSInformation were reviewed on CSInformation which the study analyzed. Applicable results were identified, thematically structured, and organised according to the study's three research objectives.

#### 4. Data Analysis Tools & Techniques

The key findings from the literature across five thematic areas are systematically organized in the table below, facilitating. Relevant findings were identified, thematically organized, and compiled to align with the study's three research objectives. schools in rural India, using ASER data to highlight the growth of LFP schools.

Year	Government School Enrollment (%)	Private School Enrollment (%)	Trend
2006	~73%	~19%	Baseline
2010	~67%	~24%	Rising
2014	~64%	~28%	Rapidly Rising
2018	~63%	~30.9%	Continuing Rise

#### 4.2 Graphical Analysis

Table 1 compares key indicators of government and LFP schools based on evidence from the literature:

Indicator	Government Schools	LFP Private Schools
Teacher Absenteeism	~25% (High)	~8-10% (Low)
English Medium Instruction	Limited	Widely Available
Average Monthly Fee	Free / Nil	Rs. 150 - Rs. 500
Teacher Salary	Rs. 25,000+ (Permanent)	Rs. 3,000-8,000 (Contract)
Learning Outcomes	Below Average	Marginally Higher
Regulatory Oversight	High	Low to Moderate
Community Accountability	Low	High (Market-based)
EWS / Inclusion Focus	Mandated	Limited (RTE non-compliance)

#### 4.3 Analytical Techniques

The secondary literature analysis was carried out as follows:

**Thematic analysis:** The literature was clustered into five thematic domains of interest - demand, learning outcomes, teacher management, equity and Gender, and governance, which were further dissected individually and integrated into a holistic overview.

**Comparative analysis:** A comparison of government and LFP school performance was conducted.

Critical Evaluation: Instead of just taking claims at face value, the study examined the methodological basis of major claims – particularly concerning selection bias in learning-outcome studies – that revealed possible over-estimate interpretations and under-provision.

## 5. Findings

5.1 The Surge Critical evaluation Instead of merely accepting claims at face value, the study questioned the methodological basis for major assertions — especially when it comes to selection bias in studies of learning outcomes — which have been pointed out as where conclusions may indeed be exaggerated or even under-acknowledged from the research. This expansion is not confined to big cities; rather, it extends to small towns, peri-urban zones and increasingly, rural villages. A large scale like this makes the LFP (Low-Fee Private) school sector real in terms of policy, notwithstanding the ideological demands for public access to primary education. (Equity, Access, and Quality: Leveraging the Potential of Low-Fee Private Schools in Karnataka's School Education System, 2025).

5.2 Parental Demand Concerning Quality of Education. In contrast, Dixon (2012) and Tooley and Dixon (2005) argue that parents' concerns about LFP schools are a function of real hope for quality education (language instruction, structured learning environment, responsible teacher) as opposed to government schools. This recognition is pertinent for public–private partnership (PPP) design: For whatever policy may have been in favour, Government schools that address these quality and accountability gaps are unlikely to hold onto students who migrate to private entities.

5.3 There is Progress, It is Difficult to Distribute. Research by Tooley et al. (2007) reveals quantifiable learning benefits experienced by pupils attending LFP schools. Nonetheless Muralidharan and Kremer (2008) suggest that this variance can be attributed more to selection bias rather than school mode than to type. Singh (2015) also argues that these learning gains are unevenly distributed among middle-income students. Hence PPP arrangements are not necessarily more effective to promote learning among the most disadvantaged. In addition to any PPP approach requires targeted educational support, appropriate EWS-specific practice, and inclusive instructional efforts. (Varanasi et al., 2024).

5.4 Teacher Accountability: A Two-Edged Sword Chaudhury et al. (2006) document significantly lower teacher absenteeism in private schools than in government institutions, a testament to the benefit of LFP school management. But Kingdon (2017) warns that this accountability of this kind often occurs via the use of teachers who are employed on informal contracts at extremely low wages, sometimes as little as Rs. 3,000-5,000 per month. In the longer term, the results include high turnover, low morale, very little professional development. Effective PPP frameworks need to be mindful of this trade-off rather than view the low cost of this employment with contract employment as a clear benefit. (Public–private partnerships in education: An analysis with special reference to the Indian school education system, 2016, pp. 47-53)

5.5 The Underperformance of 25% Reservation Act in the Light of RTE. Srivastava and Noronha (2014) found that Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act, India's flagship PPP equity policy, has been grossly ineffective in this respect. Non-compliance from private schools, late and inadequate state payment of reservation, social stigma for EWS students, and poor monitoring of the policy has led to significant underperformance.

Children attending private schools while living under the RTE are also often isolated from society and receive different treatments, whereby integration can feel less like a goal and more like a label.

5.6 The issues facing girls in LFP schools UNESCO (2015) underscores these new realities with an increasing reliance on security and access as the drivers of parental decisions when it comes to girls in private schools than the quality of education. LFP schools often lack sanitation facilities, female teachers, and safe places for girls to play. It is too quick to conclude that gender equity is an automatic and convenient conclusion upon the introduction of PPP frameworks: this will need to be designed with due care and attention to the particularities of the school environment and infrastructure, recruitment of female educators and curricular creation to ensure that the rights and needs of the young girls are adequately met. (Sharma & Sharma, 2025). Gender equity cannot be taken for granted by PPP initiatives; instead, it should be taken with purpose and consideration, incorporating the school's environment, infrastructure, women in hiring on its staff and with respect also addressing the curriculum in order to take advantage of the girls' rights and concerns. Unrecognized schools, with scant oversight on the unknown ones, forms a framework where accountability is most exposed where it is most needed among the many poor children and girls at the service of the informal LFP school districts. There is market accountability through parental choice, but that's insufficient for marginalized families, who will usually never have the information or options to make informed decisions. (Geetha & J., 2011, pp. 350-356)

## 6. Conclusion

The work focuses on Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in school education in India: the emerging arena of the low-fee private education (LFPE) sector. Several lessons can be drawn from the reviewed evidence, focusing on the following main lessons: LFPE schools are successful in educating millions of marginalised families, as evidenced through improvements in teacher accountability and community responsiveness. Furthermore, these schools tend to outperform government institutions on learning metrics, particularly for students from less disadvantaged backgrounds. Yet these findings also make it clear that PPPs are a shaky way in equity and high quality education. Learning progress, while limited and subject to selection preference, and equity actions with respect to the Right to Education (RTE) Act have not translated into tangible improvements. Moreover, the low-wage, contract-based model of employment can have negative impacts on teacher welfare. As pointed out further, girls and young members from the poorest and most marginalized communities – the very groups which PPPs have been designed to empower – face very significant barriers in accessing the education system. Governance mechanisms are still feeble and fragmented and in many cases counterproductive. The main takeaway is that PPPs in schooling cannot replace a sustained commitment by the state towards public education; only as an added value. Even if there will always be a private sector that benefits some at a cost, the state has a constitutional duty to ensure free, high-quality education for everyone. A comprehensive public-private partnership mechanism (PPP) would require the state to actively participate in formulating contracts, government accountability, education outcomes monitoring, rights protection of vulnerable students, etc. (Eighty-sixth Amendment of the Constitution of India, 2002) There are policy expertise, institutional capacity, and demographic urgency in India to build a PPP in the schooling context that can be truly equitable, accountable and educationally viable. (Bridging the gap? Evaluating the effectiveness of Punjab's public-private partnership programmes in education, 2024) It will take more than mere ideological arguing of public vs

private schooling to achieve this, but rather the challenging governing and managerial issues which underpin partnerships that really work for children.

## 7. Suggestions & Recommendations

7.1 Enhance the RTE Implementation and EWS inclusion. It is a priority to implement the provisions of Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act. State governments should establish independent monitoring bodies to verify that private schools comply with EWS reservation obligations. The timeframes for reimbursement should be shortened to improve efficiency, the reimbursement rates should be based on the actual costs, and strict anti-discrimination policies must be put in place, all under a standard procedure. EWS students should not be subjected to different treatment or segregated facilities compared to fee-paying students.

7.2 Formalize an Adaptive Stable Framework of Regulation for LFP Schools. India needs a regulatory regime that adjusts to the differences of the LFP sector rather than sets a blanket regime of high-enforcement criteria that can force schools to function ad hoc. There should be a tiered regulatory system that establishes the minimum registration requirements for all schools, high standards for recognition for the schools, with full compliance for the aided institutions. This method will enhance the clarity of LFP operations and provide a clear road to a new status. (Solomon et al., n.d.) The aim of regulation should be on outcomes and protecting the welfare of the child as more of a priority than infrastructure and property ownership.

7.3 Teaching Well-Being of Teachers in LFP Schools. Teacher well-being needs to be at the core of all PPP arrangements that concern LFP schools. Minimum wage standards for private school teachers should be put in place and enforced. State and central governments should take measures to develop teacher-training programmes, professional development opportunities for LFP school teachers, and adopt policy initiatives to reduce teacher turnover in support of wider professional development commitments. This is why, if we invest in properly paid and qualified teachers, our education will be better. (Kundu, 2023).

7.4 Gender-Responsive PPP Schools prepared. The PPP schemes should require inclusive gender guidelines for participating schools. These measures include: clean separate sanitation facilities for girls; each school must employ at least one female teacher; the girls must be able to walk safely to schools; the policies should include zero-tolerance policies for harassment and sexual harassment; and the curriculum content must be inclusive of girls' rights and aspirations. Mothers and women community leaders should sit on school management committees.

7.5 Invest in Independent Learning Outcome Evaluation. India does not, at present, have a strong independent mechanism for a comprehensive and longitudinal comparison of the learning outcomes of private and government sector schools. (Singh & Sarkar, 2012) Though important, ASER is not comprehensive nor applies to all school types and grades. It needs to create an independent national agency for learning assessment, which will use non-partisan and thorough methodologies to produce evidence with which policy decisions on PPP can be based.

7.6 Use PPP for Teacher Training and Internet Networks. By expanding access to schools through initiatives rather than limited to PPP programs, the government can use PPP models for system-wide

capacity growth in areas ranging from teachers' training in general to technology education provision for teachers, improvements to the digital infrastructure, and access to library and laboratory resources, to name just a few. Engaging with NGOs and tech firms or social enterprises based in these areas will probably yield more equitable gains than adding more positions. (Blum, 2009, pp. 235-248)

## 8. Limitations of the Study

This study has a number of major limitations that we acknowledge:

**Relying Upon Secondary Data:** This study is based solely on secondary published literature, there are no primary surveys, interviews, or field observations in this study. Without primary data, we have no option of external verification and/or updating of reported findings and recent developments independently.

**Search Results:** A systematic search retrieved evidence of only 10 studies. In light of the body of literature pertaining to Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in education, a review of similar publications, especially those on some states in India, would have improved the comprehension of the analysis.

**Quantitative Inadequacy:** The majority of literature available on low-fee private (LFP) schools performance is focused on conventional test scores as the sole indicator of educational quality. Such critical views, beyond academic perspectives, which speak to broader issues like non-cognitive aspects, student wellbeing, and school culture, are absent from the literature and from the present study.

**Generalising with Limits:**

The education environment in India varies widely across the states along urban-rural lines and social circles. These results cannot be generalized to diverse educational policies and school systems that exist in other states, according to a study completed in Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh.

**Policy Context Evolution:**

India now has a thriving landscape of educational policy, including, but not limited to the Right to Education (RTE) Act, state-based PPP schemes, and regulatory standards.

**Limited Management Perspective:** Even though the selected papers offer significant managerial lessons, literature on organizational culture is quite limited; no literature dealing with governance. Although it is not completely satisfactory to read into this point, it is evident that LFP schools are lacking such practices, leaders, and personnel management in light of organizational culture, for instance the leadership styles or even staff management. Otherwise the atmosphere among LFP schools will inevitably turn in on itself. Thus, conversations in this area could potentially get out of hand. To address such a void, we suggest that future research should instead seek to do more around primary data collection with qualitative as well as quantitative tools (e.g., case studies, interviews with school principals and teachers and surveys on management and organisational procedures in LFP schools). Standardised criteria for the investigation of school management quality and organisational climate between schools might also be of some comparative worth. Potential information on this type of data is important for policy-makers, decision makers, school leaders, and enabling them to make informed and realistic policy recommendations drawing on management practices which contribute to educational outcomes in LFP schools.

## 9. Scope of the Future Study

This paper identifies important avenues for further studies:

**First-level Impact Research:** By surveying parents, teachers, students, and school leaders during 'field-level' research, researchers are able to establish what it is like in the LFP school from what people experience at the grassroots level in the case of Public-Private Partnership (PPP).

**Longitudinal Learning Outcomes:** An investigation of LFP students and, more specifically, the government learners themselves in the same group over five (5) to ten (10) year programs would supply ample evidence on the causal links between school type and learning outcomes and life trajectory.

**EWS Children in Private Schools:** Targeted qualitative studies on the social integration, performance, and psychosocial welfare of EWS children enrolled under RTE Section 12(1)(c) would provide further evidence for the real impact of this landmark equity model in the lives of targeted beneficiaries of it.

**Research on Gender:** A need for extensive longitudinal evidence investigating the performance of girls in LFP schools on safety, learning quality, school completion, and post-school outcomes in order to form an effective gender-responsive PPP policy.

**A State-Level Comparison:** A good understanding of PPP results from state to state that has different regulatory systems is required. For example, comparing Kerala's aided school and Gujarat's adopt-a-school system could provide important policy lessons about governance terms that increase PPP outcomes.

**Management and Organisational Studies:** Studies on leadership, organizational culture, stakeholder management, and human resources policy in LFP schools are vital for developing other managerial fields (e.g., economics and policy analysis).

**Digital PPP and EdTech:** With the expansion of technology in education, it is worth investigating whether or not a public-private relationship can enhance the digital learning of low-income students by deploying EdTech solutions—an emerging and under-explored role of PPP in Indian education.

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