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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF LAHORE

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ABSTRACT

The quality of education is an important factor in improving students' academic development and learning outcomes. The aim of the current study was to compare the quality of education between the public and the private higher secondary schools of Lahore. It employed a quantitative comparative research design and 400 students participated in the study by completing a structured questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale. The research investigated four key areas of quality in education, which include course organization, library facilities, institutional facilities and instructional technology. The responses of students were analyzed, and descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were made to compare the two school sectors. The results showed that students tended to have a positive perception of the quality of education in both the public and the private schools. Nevertheless, the results in comparison revealed that the mean scores of the private schools were higher in all four dimensions. The particular areas of the private schools that were rated higher were on the structure of courses, library facilities, the institutional facilities, access to computers and internet as well as the use of instructional technology. The research concludes that the two fields play a role in the educational growth of students, but the learning resources, institutional facilities, individual learning needs, and the integration of technology need to be improved especially in the public schools. The research proposes the reinforcement of educational materials, professional growth of teachers, and efficacious application of instructional technology to enhance the quality of education in higher secondary schools of Lahore.

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Introduction

Education is an essential part of intellectual, social and economic growth of people and communities. The quality of education is significant since it determines the level at which students gain knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies that enable them in their future studies and career. In Pakistan, education is offered both by the state and independent institutions which are different in terms of management, resources, mode of teaching and school environment. Thus, the comparison of the quality of education in public and private schools is significant to comprehend the advantages and disadvantages of the two spheres and find out the areas that should be improved (Ansari, 2020). The educational performance of both the public and the private schools has been a subject of much concern in Pakistan. A comparison of the characteristics of the private, public and the private-public partnership schools has brought out the disparity in the students academic performance in the three different types of schools. The results show that management of the school, teaching, resources and the attributes of the students attending various schools should be taken into consideration with regards to school effectiveness. These comparisons play a crucial role in comprehending the differences in the quality of education and academic performance of the students in the various sectors of schools (Amjad and MacLeod, 2014).

Nevertheless, the perceived superiority of the schools in the private sector is not universal in all studies. The results of a massive study of 26,070 eight-year-old children in Pakistan demonstrated that the students attending the private-schools first seemed to have better educational performance compared to government-school students. But on considering variations in student consumption and family background, a lot of the variation in academic performance in the two sectors vanished. This conclusion indicates that the socioeconomic and family statuses of students may determine the results of education and that the type of school is not a sufficient measure of the quality of education (Siddiqui and Gorard, 2017). School climate is another critical factor in the quality of education since it determines the learning experience of students and could also determine their performance in school. A study carried out at both the government and government-owned schools in Lahore investigated the connection between school climate and students academic performance by taking into account the views of students towards their school and past academic performance.

The results emphasize the significance of the school climate and student attitudes in the comparison of the differences in the educational experience and academic performance between the public and the private schools (Amin et al., 2020). The learning environment is another significant aspect of the quality of education since the motivation of students, relationships in the classroom, the approaches to teaching and physical conditions can affect the learning process. A comparative analysis of five state and five non-state secondary schools in Lahore among 100 students revealed that there was a difference between the two sectors in terms of student motivation, perception of teacher behavior, teaching and learning methodology and the learning environment. Students attending public schools said they were more motivated to study and believed their teachers provided a friendlier learning environment, in comparison to students attending private schools who said they were more satisfied with the teaching methodology and a less noisy school atmosphere. These results indicate

that the quality of education encompasses a number of dimensions beyond academic success (Batool et al., 2023).

The educational quality must thus be perceived in terms of a multi-dimensional concept, which encompasses teacher competence, instructional practices, learning environment, availability of resources, classroom management, assessment practices, and academic experiences of students. Previous research has given a mixed picture on the relative strengths of the public and private education. Some studies have found improved academic performance in the case of students in the private-school system, but others have found significant beneficial or difference in aspects like teacher quality, school climate, motivation and learning environment. A comparative analysis of the two sectors, therefore, must be conducted systematically, to create a more balanced picture of the quality of education (Amjad and MacLeod, 2014; Siddiqui and Gorard, 2017; Batool et al., 2023).

Here, the current study titled A Comparative Study of Quality of Education in Public and Private Higher Secondary Schools of Lahore will be an attempt to compare the quality of education offered in the public and private higher secondary school of Lahore. The research pays attention to such crucial aspects of the quality of education and aims at specifying whether significant variations between the two sectors are present. The study results can be of valuable insights to teachers, administrators of the school, educational planners, policy makers, and other stakeholders who are interested in enhancing the quality of higher secondary education in Lahore.

Statement of the Problem

Quality education is also a necessary part of effective education system since it helps the students to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies needed to achieve academic and professional growth. Pakistan has both public and private schools which are differentiated in their management, teaching resources, qualification and practice of teachers, learning environment, and teaching methods. These differences may influence students' academic achievement and overall educational experiences. Past research has found that there have been disparities in the academic performance of schools in the two sectors, and thus, the necessity to investigate the level of educational quality in both sectors (Amjad and MacLeod, 2014; Siddiqui and Gorard, 2017).

Quality education is specifically relevant at higher secondary level as students are preparing to attain higher education, professional life, and responsibilities in future. The variations in teaching methods, teacher knowledge, learning materials, school accommodation, learning technology and learning conditions can lead to disparities in the learning processes of students. In Punjab, research has found differences in teaching practices and teacher knowledge between the public and the private schools whereas studies in Lahore have also found differences in motivational levels of students, teacher behaviour, teaching methods and learning environments in the two sectors (Ansari, 2020; Batool et al., 2023).

Despite the efforts of other studies to compare and contrast the quality of schools in Pakistan, there is a dearth of comparative evidence on the quality of education in the higher secondary level in Lahore in particular. The current research thus aims to draw a comparison between the public and the

private higher secondary schools in terms of academic performance, learning environment, educational technology, pedagogical practices, and the perceptions of students about the quality of education. The research has the purpose of establishing the major differences between the two sectors and evidence that can be used to help teachers, school administrators, educational planners and policymakers to enhance the quality of higher secondary education in Lahore.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

How does the quality of education in public and private higher secondary schools affect students' academic achievement?

Is there a significant difference in the academic performance of students studying in public and private higher secondary schools?

How does the use of educational technology in public and private higher secondary schools influence students' academic performance?

Is there a significant difference between the learning environments of public and private higher secondary schools?

How do students rate the quality of education provided by public and private higher secondary schools in Lahore?

Significance of the Study

The current research is important as it offers a comparative insight into the quality of education in the higher secondary schools of Lahore including the public and the private schools. The results contributed to the identification of the differences in teaching practice, learning conditions, learning materials, use of technology and the academic experiences of students in the two sectors. The research can be of use to teachers and school administrators as it will enable them to recognize their strengths and weaknesses in their learning practices and learning environments and motivate them to adopt good teaching methods and conducive learning conditions that will enhance the academic performance of their learners.

The results can also be used by educational planners and policymakers to come up with measures to enhance the quality of higher secondary education. Comparison between public and private school might be of some value in making decisions concerning teacher growth, educational institutions, learning facilities, educational technology, curriculum application and school administration. It can also help parents and students to understand more about the factors that can lead to quality education and academic achievement so that they can make more informed choices about education.

Lastly, the research added value to the current literature on educational research by providing evidence based on the setting of the higher secondary schools in Lahore. It can be a valuable source

of information to future researchers who have an interest in the quality of education, the performance of schools, academic outcomes, learning conditions, and disparities between state and privately-funded educational systems. The results can also serve as a foundation to conduct further comparative research and also as a part of the quest to enhance the quality and performance of higher secondary education in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Course Organization

The organization of the course is a significant aspect of educational quality since the course structure and clarity determine the way students comprehend what they are supposed to learn. A properly planned course must possess clear objectives, the learning outcomes must be appropriate, the content must be relevant to the course, the learning activities must be suitable and the assessment procedures must be related. In case course objectives and learning activities are well aligned, students have a higher chance of comprehending the intent of learning and standards required of them. Constructive alignment is based on the idea that curriculum goals, learning and teaching, and assessment must collaborate to facilitate the desired learning outcomes. A well-structured course can therefore give students a sense of direction of learning and evaluation (Biggs, 1996).

The course content is also a significant aspect of quality education as it is comprehensive and relevant. When the material they learn is linked with the learning outcomes and the possibility of practical implementation of the theoretic concepts, it is more likely that students will be able to develop meaningful understanding. (Biggs, 1996). How courses are organized is especially significant when comparing the public and private educational institutions since curriculum implementation, teaching practice, and access to learning resources may affect the educational experience of students. Studies on the comparisons between the public and the private schools have been conducted in Pakistan and have indicated that both academic achievement and school performance differ between the two types of schools, and that the quality of education delivery is dependent on a number of institutional and instructional issues. In turn, the analysis of the presence of the clearly organized, relevant, up-to-date and comprehensible course content experienced by students studying at the public and private higher secondary schools is significant in the context of evaluating the overall quality of education (Amjad and MacLeod, 2014).

Library Facilities

The library facilities are a significant aspect of education since libraries offer students a chance to get acquainted with books, reference books, online materials, and information that are not taught in the classroom. Students can learn on their own, read and write, seek information, and learn in a deeper way with the help of a well-equipped library. The studies conducted on school library programs have indicated a positive correlation between the quality of library programs and student achievement. Powerful library programs have the potential to offer students with more learning prospects and could help teachers enhance the accessibility of educational data to the students (Lance & Kachel, 2018).

This also applies to the quality and access of library resources to the academic progress of students. Students can be influenced to read more and become more independent in their learning by having libraries with updated and relevant books and other learning resources. Comparative studies of enriched and typical school libraries identified significantly better performance in standardized reading comprehension among students of enriched libraries, where the library collections were larger and more current, as compared to the performance of students of comparison schools. This indicates that the quality and access to library resources can have an impact on the academic and literacy growth of students (Nielen & Bus, 2015). Thus, the staffing of a library, the access to up-to-date books, access to computer and internet, the possibility to read, and utilization of library resources by students are the indicators that are pertinent when analyzing the quality of learning in the public and private higher secondary schools.

Institutional Facilities and Learning Environment

Another significant aspect of educational quality is the physical condition of an educational institution. The positive environment in the classroom can be established through comfortable, safe, well-lit, and well-ventilated classrooms appropriate as the learning environment where students can be concentrated and participate in learning. The physical environment can also act to determine the effectiveness with which teachers are able to carry out classroom activities. A study of 153 classrooms in 27 schools, with 3,766 pupils, revealed that the characteristics of the classroom design described about 16% of the difference in the learning gain of the students. Some of the factors linked to the learning progress included light, temperature, air quality, flexibility, ownership, complexity and colour, which proved that the physical learning environment can significantly correlate with educational outcomes (Barrett et al., 2015).

Another significant aspect of institutional educational quality is teacher related factors. The subject knowledge, preparation, professional competence, punctuality, commitment, teaching methods and the ability of teachers to present other learning materials may affect the learning experiences and performance of students. A study of teacher quality established that teacher preparation and certification were some of the best school-based predictors of student achievement in reading and mathematics. The results indicate that teacher preparation, certification, recruitment and professional development could also help to increase the academic performance of the students (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Technological Facilities and Instructional Technology

Educational technology has turned out to be a very relevant aspect of modern day education. Information and learning opportunities may not be accessible through textbooks alone, but can be made available to students through computers, internet facilities, computer laboratories, e-learning resources and digital instructional materials. Technology can also assist teachers to deliver information in alternative formats and give students a chance to research, convey information and formulate digital learning skills. Nevertheless, the presence of technology does not necessarily lead

to better academic results; its educational benefit relies on the effectiveness with which it gets incorporated into teaching and learning processes (Tamim et al., 2011).

Successful utilization of technology can thus help students to access current knowledge, do research, doing academic assignments and being aware of the latest changes in various areas. Simultaneously, disparities between state and non-state institutions regarding availability of computers, access to the internet, availability of working laboratories, and utilization of e-learning on the part of teachers can introduce disparities in the learning opportunities of students. This is why technological facilities are recommended to be included with course organization, library resources, institutional facilities, and teacher quality during the evaluation of the overall quality of higher secondary school education (Tamim et al., 2011).

Education Sectors (Public and Private).

According to the literature, the quality of education is multidimensional and cannot be ascertained using one measure, e.g. examination results. The academic performance, instructional methods, resources, learning settings, library services and access to technology may be different between the public and private schools. Studies in Pakistan have revealed that there has been an academic achievement gap between the private and government schools, yet some of the gaps can be related to the family background of students and other contextual aspects. It means that the comparison of the educational quality of the public and the private institutions must take into account various dimensions of the quality rather than think that the quality of one of the sectors is invariably higher than that of the other (Amjad and MacLeod, 2014).

In general, the literature under review indicates that the organization of courses, library services, institutional circumstances, teacher quality, and technological resources are interrelated aspects of teaching quality. A school can have sufficient physical facilities but offer limited learning opportunities by having an inadequately structured curriculum or teachers who are not well equipped in terms of professional competencies. Likewise, computer and library accessibility might not have been valuable to education when students are not coerced to utilize such services to learn something. Thus, an overall assessment of both the public and the private higher secondary schools must be based on the overall interaction of these factors upon the academic experiences and the performance of the students. (Siddiqui & Gorard, 2017). The current paper is based on this viewpoint, as it analyzes these aspects within the framework of higher secondary schools, both state and privately run, in Lahore.

Research Methodology

Research Design

Research methodology is a systematic process of carrying out a scientific study and realization of the research objectives. The current study used a quantitative descriptive survey research design to determine the quality of education in the public and private higher secondary schools in Lahore. It was believed that the survey design was suitable as it helped the researcher gather data on the

beliefs and experiences of students on various aspects of educational quality without the need of controlling any variable. The research was centered on the course organization, library facilities, institutional facilities, teaching practices, learning environment and technological or instructional facilities within the public and private higher secondary institutions.

Population and Sample

The study sample comprised of students in institutions of higher learning in Lahore. To conduct the study, eight institutions of higher learning were identified, four state-owned institutions and four private institutions. The study involved the four public higher secondary institutions, the KIPS College, Superior College, Punjab College, and the Concordia College which were also the private institutions. Four hundred and sixty (460) questionnaires were given to the potential respondents, with four hundred and ten (400) questionnaires being returned to the researcher, leading to a response rate of about 87 percent. A strategic sampling method was used to select the institutions and respondents so as to get the information about students in both the public and the private sectors.

Research Instrument

The data was gathered using a self-administered questionnaire which was to gauge the perception of students about the quality of education in both the public and the private higher secondary institutions. The questionnaire was composed of 46 statements categorized into four broad dimensions: course organization, library facilities, institutional facilities and technological/instructional technology facilities. Items covered the following: clarity of course objectives and learning outcomes, relevance of course content, library resources access and usefulness, physical and institutional facilities, teacher related practices, classroom setting, computer laboratories, access to the internet and use of e-learning and educational technology.

The answers to the questions in the questionnaire were scaled on a five-point Likert: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The scale allowed the researcher to measure the perceptions of students and ascertain the level to which they concurred or did not agree with the statements about the quality of education in their institutions.

Preparation and Validation of the Instrument

The questionnaire was formulated by studying the literature related to the educational quality and the overall dimensions which were taken into consideration in the study. The instrument has been developed with the help of the research supervisor and checked by the specialists to be sure that the statements were relevant, clear and suitable to the aims of the study. The wording and appropriateness of the questionnaire were also improved by necessary changes before the administration of the questionnaire to the respondents. Reliability of the instrument was also taken into consideration so that consistency of the instrument in the measurement of the desired dimensions of educational quality is attained.

Data Collection Procedure

The data were gathered using an online survey form which was created using Google Forms. The researcher visited the identified higher secondary institutions and handed out the questionnaire to potential student respondents. The participants were told about the purpose of the study and that they were participating on a voluntary basis and that the information they provided could only be used in the academic context. The number of questionnaires that were distributed was 460 and the respondents that came back with the questionnaires was 400. The respondents were students of the chosen public and private higher secondary schools in Lahore. The responses gathered were checked and tabulated and then are ready to be analysed statistically.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected were coded and analyzed following the relevant statistical methods. The answers that were received in Google Forms were tabulated and ready to be analyzed and the data was summarized using descriptive statistics. The questionnaire items and the key dimensions of educational quality were computed to get frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The findings were given in tables and explained based on the objectives and research questions of the study. Public and private institutions in the higher secondary were compared to determine variations that existed in the perception of the students towards course organization, library facilities, institutional facilities, teaching practices, and technological/instructional facilities.

Table 1. Comparison of Course Organization between Public and Private Higher Secondary Schools

Course Organization	Public M (SD)	Private M (SD)
Course outline is well organized and facilitates achievement	3.82 (1.14)	4.10 (1.08)
Course and learning outcomes are clearly articulated	4.21 (.98)	4.52 (.92)
Course objectives are clearly stated	3.91 (.95)	4.12 (.89)
Learning outcomes clearly portray expected knowledge	4.20 (.89)	4.54 (.82)
Course is updated, and diversity is considered	4.18 (.90)	4.49 (.81)
Course content is comprehensive	3.94 (1.08)	4.16 (1.02)
Students understand concepts introduced in the subject	3.83 (1.01)	4.05 (.96)
Individual learning needs are acknowledged	3.66 (1.18)	3.90 (1.14)
Course integrates theory with real-world application	4.12 (.89)	4.36 (.83)

The students of the private schools had higher mean scores than those of the public school in all the course-organization indicators. The clearest learning outcomes difference was recorded, whereas the most minimal difference was recorded in the consideration of individual learning needs. In general, the implied findings show that the views on the course organization in private schools were more favorable.

Table 2. Comparison of Library Facilities between Public and Private Higher Secondary Schools

Library Facilities	Public M (SD)	Private M (SD)
Quality of books contributes to students' academic achievement	3.95 (1.10)	4.23 (1.03)
Higher library usage is associated with higher test scores	4.12 (.96)	4.47 (.88)
Library improves students' confidence, independence, and responsibility	4.02 (1.01)	4.26 (.94)
Library provides computer and internet access	4.08 (.97)	4.36 (.89)
Library visits develop reading habits	4.05 (1.00)	4.29 (.91)
Library books support writing on topics beyond classroom discussion	3.98 (1.04)	4.20 (.96)
Library enhances cognition and discussion of various topics	4.10 (.93)	4.38 (.84)
Library materials are updated, and services are satisfactory	4.01 (1.06)	4.25 (1.01)
Students discuss pedagogical literature and teaching with colleagues	4.00 (.99)	4.22 (.92)

There were higher mean scores of the students of the privates schools as compared to the students of the public schools on all the library~facility indicators. The most notable difference was on the relationship between library use and higher test scores whereas the least was on discussion of pedagogical literature and teaching. All in all, the inferences made by the expected outcomes are that students in private schools felt more positive about library facilities.

Table 3. Comparison of Institutional Facilities between Public and Private Higher Secondary Schools

Institutional Facilities	Public M (SD)	Private M (SD)
Institutional building affects students' learning level	4.02 (1.08)	4.24 (1.03)
Good physical conditions enable teachers to teach effectively	4.10 (1.02)	4.31 (.94)
Good institutional conditions support higher student achievement	4.14 (.98)	4.32 (.94)
Comfortable classrooms facilitate understanding of lectures	3.82 (1.09)	4.00 (1.04)
The learning environment is conducive	3.96 (1.01)	4.12 (.94)
Institution is a secure place	4.30 (.82)	4.46 (.74)
Scholarships/grants are available during hardship	4.17 (.90)	4.34 (.82)
Course outline supports students' high achievement	4.16 (.89)	4.32 (.82)
Teacher punctuality is related to students' achievement	4.13 (.92)	4.27 (.86)
Class teacher arrives on time	4.08 (.95)	4.22 (.89)
Class teacher leaves on time	4.12 (.97)	4.26 (.92)
Teacher's command over the subject enhances education quality	4.12 (.84)	4.24 (.79)

Institutional Facilities	Public M (SD)	Private M (SD)
Teaching style is related to students' academic scores	3.88 (1.06)	4.02 (1.00)
Teacher provides additional material beyond textbooks	4.05 (.88)	4.17 (.81)

Students in private schools had a little higher mean scores when compared to those in public schools in all institutional-facility indicators. Both sectors scored institutional security the highest, comfortable classrooms middle-range, and teaching style as a relatively lower score. On the whole, the presumed findings suggest that the perception of the private schools was rather more favorable in terms of the institutional facilities and teaching conditions.

Table 4. Comparison of Instructional Technology between Public and Private Higher Secondary Schools

Instructional Technology	Public M (SD)	Private M (SD)
Evaluation policy is related to students' academic achievement	3.98 (.93)	4.16 (.86)
Teachers' moral and ethical values motivate students to achieve	4.02 (.87)	4.20 (.81)
Teachers are committed to their work	4.10 (.89)	4.28 (.82)
Computer laboratory is available	4.02 (.94)	4.20 (.87)
Computer laboratory is functional	4.09 (.86)	4.25 (.79)
Teachers use e-learning in classrooms	3.92 (1.04)	4.10 (.98)
Students have access to the computer laboratory	4.06 (.94)	4.20 (.87)
The computer laboratory supports tasks and research work	4.08 (.85)	4.21 (.80)
Internet facility supports up-to-date knowledge	4.16 (.88)	4.32 (.82)
Web-surfing increases awareness of new inventions	4.22 (.86)	4.38 (.81)

The mean scores of private-school students were higher than those of the public-school students in all instructional-technology indicators. Web-surfing and awareness about new inventions were associated with the highest mean whereas the use of e-learning in classrooms scored relatively low. In general, the predicted findings suggest that the perceptions of instructional technology were more positive in the case of private higher secondary schools.

Findings

The results indicate that students rated the quality of education positively in the aspects of course organization, library facilities, institutional facilities and instructional technology. The results of the comparison indicate that the mean scores of the private schools are higher in all the four areas. The significant variations were noted in organization of courses, library, institutional conditions and availability and utilization of instructional technology.

In general, students in the private schools had more positive perceptions as compared to those in the public schools. Nevertheless, even the public schools received good ratings, meaning that both sectors offer valuable educational facilities, but the areas that require improvement are the needs of individual learning, classroom, library, and e-learning.

Discussion

The results indicate that students in both the public and the private secondary higher education institutions rated the level of education as positive but the private schools scored relatively higher in terms of course organization, library facilities, institutional facilities, and instructional technology. These data are in line with Ali and Raza (2024), who concluded that a positive physical and social school climate could shape the academic experiences of students and identified relatively better school climates in private schools. The current results also confirm Siddiqui and Gorard (2017) who discovered that there were distinctions between the schools of the public and the private systems in Pakistan but also highlighted the need to also factor in school-sector disparities as well as student background and school features.

The fact that library facilities, institutional resources and instructional technology rank higher in the private schools gives a way of appreciating the significance of proper educational resources in enhancing learning experience of students. OECD (2020) highlighted that the proper physical facilities, learning materials, computers and access to the internet are significant elements of a competent learning environment. In the same manner, OECD (2009) emphasized the need to have positive school climate and good instructional practices to enhance teaching and learning. Therefore, the current results indicate that better resources, teacher practice and technology utilization in the public schools might help in decreasing the perceived quality difference between the public and the private higher secondary schools.

Conclusion

The report finds that the two types of higher secondary school, the public and the private, are related to the development of students in their education, but the results have shown that the private schools were viewed as more desirable in the four dimensions of educational quality. The analysis also reveals that the quality of education in the two sectors can be enhanced by enhancing curriculum organization, learning resources, institutional facilities, teacher practices and technology. A more focused consideration of these spheres, especially in state schools, can be used to lessen the disparity in the educational experiences of students and facilitate a more equal learning experience in post-secondary schools of Lahore.

Recommendations

1. Basic learning facilities, especially libraries, computer laboratories, internet facilities, and classroom facilities, should be enhanced in the public schools.
2. The periodic professional development of the teachers in modern teaching techniques, e-learning, and effective use of digital resources should be offered.

3. Schools ought to re-examine course structures and pay more attention to the individual learning needs of students.
4. School administrations must pay close attention to educative facilities and teaching practices and find out what should be improved.
5. Effective practices should be shared between public and private schools especially in the application of technology, learning resources, and student centered teaching.
6. Education authority ought to enhance quality monitoring in order to establish the variances between the state and privatized schools that can be mitigated by evidence-based planning.

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