

Educational Voucher Scheme in Lahore: Serving the Underserved

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Abstract:

The primary education sector in Pakistan faces many challenges relating to access to education and quality of resources. This paper evaluates the Educational Voucher Scheme (EVS) in Lahore, Pakistan aimed at increasing access to primary schooling for low income families residing in the underdeveloped areas of Lahore by using the four criteria for evaluating privatization plans in education outlined by Levin (2002): Freedom of choice, equity, productive efficiency and social cohesion. The study finds that the EVS is associated with greater choice for families as they move from a situation of little or no schooling options to a situation of many schooling options. Similarly, the EVS increases equity by providing lower income families with access to private schools, and because, as studies of private schools in Pakistan have found, that on average, private schools are associated with better resources and academic outcomes particularly for girls. Student achievement data from the EVS is limited however, the sample shows that on the whole EVS students are doing no worse than their non-EVS peers. Furthermore, studies of private schools in Pakistan show they may have a cost advantage over public schools due to lower teacher wages in the private sector therefore, the EVS could potentially lead to increased productive efficiency in the form of higher student achievement and lower school costs by giving families the opportunity to send their children to private schools. Lastly, due to the lack of regulations on participating schools, social cohesion may not be achieved under the EVS as there is no way to ensure that students experience a common educational experience. However, if individuals in society are expected to possess some minimum level of literacy to participate in social and economic institutions, then it can be argued that the EVS could increase social cohesion by equipping children with basic literacy skills.

I. Introduction

Over the past few decades, educational vouchers have become a central issue in education reform. Milton Friedman (1962), one of the first modern day educational voucher advocates, believed that the government has a key interest in educating the public and therefore should bear the cost of primary education. Friedman proposed a market based education system with government-issued vouchers that families could redeem in return for ‘approved educational services’ (Friedman, 1962). Friedman believed a market based system would give parents more choice, and would create a competitive environment between schools causing them to operate more efficiently, by finding innovative ways to increase student outcomes for any given level of costs. Advocates believe that educational vouchers will essentially break up the monopolistic hold of public schools by providing parents with access to greater private and/or public schooling options. This is why educational voucher programs are an attractive alternative to many policy makers. Different voucher programs have been implemented in many places such as Milwaukee, Washington D.C., Cleveland, and Chile and have been evaluated by different authors. However, the focus of this paper is to evaluate an educational voucher scheme in Lahore, Pakistan targeted towards serving low income families, by using the four criteria for evaluating privatization plans in education outlined by Levin (2002): Freedom of choice, equity, productive efficiency, and social cohesion.

Before proceeding with the discussion, some background information on primary education in Pakistan is useful. There are many challenges facing the primary education sector in Pakistan. Public schools have struggled to meet the demand for education in many areas in Pakistan, and this is particularly true in unauthorized settlements in low

income neighborhoods in urban areas, as government policy does not allow the construction of public schools in unauthorized settlements. Moreover, teacher absenteeism is a chronic problem in public schools in both rural and urban areas. These problems combined with the low quality of resources in many public schools, present a difficult challenge to policy makers. The failure of the public sector to meet the educational needs of the country has led to a rapid increase in the number of private schools over the past few decades. According to the National Education Census (2005), 33 percent of the in-school population attends private schools in Pakistan (Malik, 2009). This number has risen drastically since the 1980s when only five percent of the population attended private schools. Many private schools in Pakistan are affordable and no longer cater solely to the financially advantaged, as a typical private school in a village charges a tuition fee of RS 1,000 (\$18) per year. A typical private school is self-owned and was established after 1996 (Andrabi, Das, Khwaja, 2006). The evidence suggests that private schooling in Pakistan is no longer an urban-elite phenomenon, as more and more poor households have access to private schooling options.

II. Educational Voucher Scheme

In 2006, the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) aided by the Open Society Institute, established the Education Voucher Scheme (EVS). The pilot voucher scheme targeted low income families residing in slum areas or *katchi abadis* in northern Lahore. Many of the children living in these slums do not have access to schools, as there is a lack of public schools in the area. Initially, the PEF offered 1,000 vouchers to families living in the area, and had 13 participating schools. As of 2009, the voucher scheme serves 15,000

students with 69 participating schools (PEF 2009). Using the three policy tools outlined by Levin (2002); finance, regulation and support services, it is possible to delve further into the design of this educational voucher scheme.

A. Regulation

Henry Levin (2002) defines the regulation policy instrument as ‘the requirements of schools for participating in the voucher system, as well as any other rules that must be adhered to by schools and families in using educational vouchers’ (page 15).

1. Participation Requirements

The PEF conducted household surveys in the poorest areas in Lahore, to determine the educational needs of the community. The areas selected for the voucher scheme were Sukh Nehr, Daroghawala, Fateh Garh, Harbanspura and Wara Sattar all located in northern Lahore. The educational profile of the area shows that 48 percent of the heads of households are illiterate, while only 5 percent have completed the intermediate level of education or higher. The income profile shows that the region is impoverished as 97 percent of the population in the area makes less than RS 7,000 per month (\$116/month) (PEF 2009, in Salman, 2009). The household surveys are meant to assess the financial needs of families to identify potential voucher beneficiaries. In selecting voucher recipients, the PEF considers socio-economic status of students, parental occupation, and the size of the household, as preference is given to larger families, laborers and family workers (Salman, 2009). In order to receive a voucher, a family must reside in the selected area, and must send all children aged 5-13, to school.

If a household refuses to send a girl to school, then the boys are no longer eligible to receive a voucher, and if households decide to change schools, they must wait six months in order to do so. Voucher recipients range from age 4 to 17 and are mostly primary school students (Malik, 2009).

2. School Regulations

Currently only private schools can participate in the voucher scheme. To solicit interest from private schools, the PEF advertises in the newspaper. Participating schools are not allowed to charge a fee that is higher than the voucher amount. In addition, the enrollment at participating schools must be between 100 and 500 students. Furthermore, the schools must be located within a half kilometer radius of the target area. Once schools are short listed, the foundation administers tests on ‘selected subjects’, and inspects the physical premises of the schools. According to A.B. Malik (2005) the former managing director of the PEF, “the schools should also have respectable infrastructure and an enabling teaching-learning environment,” however no specific details are provided with respect to curriculum and infrastructure. Ultimately the board of directors decides on which schools qualify for participation in the program, and as Ali Salman (2009) points out, there are no detailed criteria outlining how schools are selected. Once schools are selected by the board, the PEF monitors student achievement of the schools by conducting bi-annual Quality Assurance Tests (QATs) for each grade level on Urdu, English, Science and Math.

B. Finance

The finance policy instrument refers to the magnitude of the voucher, how it is distributed and if parents can add-on to the voucher amount. The PEF offers an educational voucher of RS 300 (\$5) per month to qualifying students. The voucher is administered on a quarterly basis at a project office situated in the target area. Parents can redeem the voucher at any participating school, after which the school management sends the vouchers back to the PEF, which in turn makes a payment to the school equivalent to the voucher amount. According to the PEF, private schools in the area charge between RS 150-RS 200 per month in tuition, so the voucher amount can be utilized by schools to cover additional expenses for students including the provision of school bags, uniforms and books (Salman, 2009).

C. Support Services

Support services refer to public services designed to increase the effectiveness of the voucher scheme (Shafiq, 2006). This would include services that increase awareness about the voucher scheme and transportation services.

1. Information

Henry Levin (2002) stresses the importance of an adequate information system for parents: “Information needs to be made widely available for families to make informed choices about the schools that they select for their children” (page 16). As mentioned earlier, one of the major issues facing the katchi abadis in the target area is that many of the parents are illiterate, and therefore simply distributing pamphlets is not an efficient way to impart information to families. Moreover, using radios and

televisions to relay information to parents may not be practical since the residents may not own radios or televisions (Shafiq, 2006). Therefore the PEF relies on information camps held in the target area where they inform parents about the educational voucher scheme. The PEF also creates awareness about the voucher when it conducts door to door surveys while searching for potential voucher candidates (Malik, 2009). In addition, they rely heavily on word of mouth to create awareness about the voucher scheme. Parents also visit the project office located in their residential area to learn about the educational options available for their children.

2. Transportation

Providing parents with more schooling choice options is irrelevant if parents cannot access the schools. Therefore, transportation for students is an important support service that must be discussed. However, because the PEF requires that participating schools be located within a half kilometer radius of the *katchi abadis*, the schools are within walking distance and transportation is not necessary. If in the future, the voucher scheme was to expand and include public schools and/or private schools not located in *katchi abadis*, then transportation would be necessary since public schools are rarely located in *katchi abadis* (Shafiq, 2006).

III. Discussion

The Educational Voucher Scheme can be evaluated using the four criteria outlined by Levin (2002); freedom of choice, productive efficiency, equity and social cohesion. In

the following section each criterion will be defined and discussed within the context of the EVS.

A. Freedom of Choice

The PEF believes that the voucher scheme will increase the educational options for low income families living in *katchi abadis*. To determine the extent to which this claim is valid, it is essential to understand the choice options available to these families prior to the implementation of the voucher scheme. One of the reasons for establishing the voucher scheme in this part of Lahore was because the government does not recognize *katchi abadis* as official residential areas and therefore will not establish public schools in these areas (Malik, 2005). Hence, prior to the voucher scheme there were few schooling options for families who did not have the financial resources to transport their children to school. In addition, the fact that the voucher amount is sufficient to cover tuition expenses at the participating schools ensures that parents have the ability to choose between different schooling options for their children. A lack of highly prescribed regulations on curriculum and instruction for participating schools means that more schools will be willing to take part in the voucher scheme, again increasing educational options for families.

Based on interviews with school administrators, and project managers it seems that parents exercise their right to choose quite often. Ali Salman (2009) discusses the concerns of administrators that voucher parents were changing schools quite frequently. For example, if a school failed to provide a student with a uniform some parents would

shift their child to a different school quite easily because of the close proximity of the different schools. Because of this, the PEF decided to impose a six month waiting period for families to use their vouchers to transfer to another school.

However, the EVS does limit choice to private schools as families cannot utilize vouchers to attend public schools. One of the major reasons for not including public schools was alluded to earlier; there are no public schools in the katchi abadis. Therefore, in order to provide families with access to public schools, transportation would also have to be provided. Similarly, it seems that parents cannot use the voucher to send their children to strictly Islamic schools or madrassahs since the voucher regulations require participating schools to administer Quality Assessment Tests in Science, Urdu, English and Math (which are not part of the curriculum in madrassahs).

Overall, the voucher scheme increases the educational choice options for households, as they move away from a situation of little or no choice, to one of increased private schooling options. This is reflected in the table below that shows the rapid growth of the number of participating schools since the EVS was first implemented in 2006.

Table 1

| Year | Number of Participating Schools | Number of voucher Students |
|------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2006 | 11 | 1053 |
| 2007 | 35 | 5000 |
| 2008 | 52 | 10,000 |

| | | |
|------|----|--------|
| 2009 | 69 | 15,000 |
|------|----|--------|

Source: Education Voucher Scheme, PEF, 2009

B. Equity

In the context of the EVS, equity refers to the increase in educational access, attainment and student outcomes for residents of the katchi abadis, including girls and minorities (Shafiq, 2006). One of the major challenges in this region was the lack of access to education for students, which resulted in a large number of out of school children. As mentioned earlier, the EVS requires that schools be located within a half kilometer radius of the target area, ensuring that students have access to schools. This is corroborated by the EVS project manager, who claims that the voucher scheme has brought 20-25% of out of school children back to school (Salman, 2009).

Another important component of the equity criterion is the quality of school resources (Levin, 2002). Since no information on the quality of EVS schools was made available to this author, research from studies of private and public schools in Pakistan will be analyzed. The research from Lahore seems to suggest that the quality of non-labor inputs may be higher in private schools than in public schools. Alderman, Orazem, and Paterno (2001) randomly selected fifty low and middle income areas in Lahore and conducted surveys of 1000 households to elicit information on school fees, facilities, costs, and teachers. In their analysis of private and public schools in they found that per pupil expenditures on educational materials were higher in private schools than in public

schools. Furthermore, public schools in their sample had an average class size of 42.5 while the average class size in private schools was 25 (Alderman, Orazem, Paterno, 2001). In their analysis the authors also found that higher student teacher ratios were found to have a negative effect on student achievement, particularly on language skills. Private schools are also associated with better facilities than public schools. While looking at national household surveys and private school census data in Pakistan, Andrabi Das, and Khawaja (2002) found that 84 percent of private schools had a toilet facility while only 48 percent of public schools had such a facility. Similarly, only 40 percent of public school class rooms were stocked with desks, as compared to 80 percent of private school class rooms. Moreover, Andrabi Das, and Khwaja (2006) find that female government school teachers are absent more than twice as many days as private school teachers (4 vs. 1.8 days per month). According to the research it seems private schools are associated with higher quality resources than public schools, therefore it is possible that a policy instrument such as the EVS could give underprivileged children from the katchi abadis access to private schools with such facilities and resources.

The PEF also stresses the importance of increasing access to education for girls. In Pakistan there is a 20 percentage point difference in the primary gross enrollment rates between boys and girls (PIHS 2001-2002, as cited in Andrabi et al 2006). One way in which the EVS attempts to reduce this deficit is by requiring households to enroll girls in school in order to participate in the voucher scheme. The regulation requiring that participating schools be located within a half kilometer radius of the katchi abadis may also have a particularly positive effect on female enrollment, as studies show that for parents safety is a greater concern for their girls, thus the decision to enroll in school is

more sensitive to distance from schools for girls than for boys (Alderman, Orazem, and Paterno, 2001). Moreover, Andrabi Das, and Khawaja (2006) find that in areas without private schools, girls are 16 percent less likely to be enrolled in school. Therefore, having schools that are close by would encourage more parents to send their girls to school. Furthermore, studies have shown that private schools in Pakistan are associated with greater gender equality in achievement. Aslam (2003) conducted a study of 65 urban and rural schools in Lahore, by distributing questionnaires to 1887 students. The questionnaires contained information on family background (parental education, occupation, income etc), schooling (texts, family expenditure on schools etc) and personal characteristics (including age, motivation and gender). In addition, each student took Raven's standard progressive matrices test and numeracy and literacy tests developed by ETS (Aslam 2003). Aslam analyzed the determinants of student achievement for 8th grade students in private and government schools and found that the math achievement gap between girls and boys was greater in public schools than in private schools (the boys performed better in math than girls). In her analysis she found the gender effect in math scores to be 70% higher in public schools than in private schools. Aslam (2003) cautions that this could be due to the possibility that there "is less gender gap in the amount of attention paid by teachers to girl or boy students in private schools, or that more motivated girls attend private schools"(page 866). Nonetheless, it is possible that by participating in the educational voucher scheme and thereby attending private schools, there may be a reduction in the gender achievement gap.

In conclusion, the EVS improves access to schooling for the residents of the *katchi abadis*. Based on extensive research conducted on private and public schools in

Pakistan, it seems that private schools are associated with better resources, and there could also be positive effects for girls in the form of higher enrollment and better academic outcomes. If the schools participating in the EVS share the same characteristics as the other private schools in these studies, then the EVS could lead to increased equity in the form of higher quality school resources than public schools, and increased access to schooling for the poor and for females.

C. Productive Efficiency

The productive efficiency criterion refers “to the maximization of educational results for any given resource constraint” (Belfield and Levin, 2005, page 35). Milton Friedman (1962) believed that educational vouchers would lead to increased competition, which would require schools to operate more efficiently with lower costs for any given level of achievement. Schools would have to look for innovative ways to increase student achievement in order to attract more students, and reduce costs in order to maximize profits. To determine if the EVS in Lahore will increase the productive efficiency of schools, school costs and achievement will have to be analyzed.

1. Student Achievement

The PEF has reported results on the academic achievement of EVS students and non EVS students in Lahore. Before discussing the results, it is important to note that a simple comparison of group means does not adjust for any selection effects. In order to determine the true effect of educational vouchers on achievement, ideally there should be a treatment group (that receives vouchers) and a control group that shares the same

characteristics as the treatment group except that they receive the voucher treatment. By randomly assigning students to either group, a comparison can be made between the two groups of the impact of vouchers on student achievement. In the case of the EVS, the reported results do not control for students' background and other factors that would influence student achievement, and because vouchers were not randomly assigned (the recipients were selected by the PEF) the differences in achievement cannot be attributed solely to the voucher. However, advocates could argue that comparing the achievement of EVS and non EVS students is still a useful method of analysis, since the EVS students were selected because they are severely disadvantaged, while non EVS students are using their own resources to pay for school. Therefore, comparisons with non EVS students may be appropriate because they reflect the achievement of EVS students relative to their (potentially) more financially advantaged peers.

The Punjab Education Foundation administered Quality Assurance Tests (QATs) in November 2008 to a sample of 896 fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh grade students out of which 61 percent were EVS students, while 39 percent were non EVS students (Salman, 2009). The reported results in table 2 show the average test scores for both EVS and non EVS students on Science, Urdu, English and Math tests. The Science, English and Math scores were out of 15 points while the Urdu test was scored on a 10 point scale. The results from fourth and fifth grade suggest that the average test scores are higher for non EVS students, but the average scores of EVS students are quite close behind. For sixth grade students the story is similar, except that the EVS students have higher average Math scores than non EVS students (11.81 and 6.56 respectively). Surprisingly, the seventh grade results show that EVS students have higher average scores in all subjects

than the non EVS students. However, without information on how scores are distributed, it is difficult to make any conclusions on the performance of EVS students as a whole. In other words, it is possible that the averages may be biased by a few extreme test results. To see if this is the case, the distribution of scores can be analyzed, but only information for fifth grade students was available for analysis. Salman (2009) finds that the distribution for fifth grade science and math scores for both EVS and non-EVS students appear to be normally distributed and both groups seem to be achieving at around the same level. The distribution for Urdu test scores seems to be normal for non-EVS students, while the distribution of scores for EVS students seems to be biased towards the lower end implying that. “EVS students, in Urdu, have somewhat lagged behind their counterparts” (Salman, 2009, page 28). Lastly, the distribution of English scores suggests that EVS group performs better on the whole than the non-EVS students.

Table 2

| Grade | Science (out of 15) | | Urdu (out of 10) | | English (out of 15) | | Math (out of 15) | |
|-------|---------------------|---------|------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|------------------|---------|
| | EVS | Non EVS | EVS | Non EVS | EVS | Non EVS | EVS | Non EVS |
| | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 4 | 9.3 | 9.68 | 5.74 | 6.2 | 11.29 | 12.39 | 14.21 | 14.52 |
| 5 | 7.69 | 7.96 | 6.25 | 6.89 | 10.36 | 11.08 | 11.32 | 11.51 |
| 6 | 8.2 | 8.47 | 6.36 | 6.55 | 8.21 | 9.13 | 11.81 | 6.56 |
| 7 | 8.78 | 8.25 | 7.22 | 6.36 | 8.83 | 8.21 | 12.32 | 11.81 |

Source: PEF 2009 (as cited in Salman, 2009)

Although this method of comparison may be imperfect, based on the results EVS students do not seem to be doing drastically worse than non-EVS students. In some cases, they may be achieving at the same level or even better than students who did not receive the voucher. This result is especially encouraging, since we know that EVS students come from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, while non-EVS students are self financed and therefore might have access to greater financial resources. However, additional analyses that attempt to control for socio-economic characteristics are necessary, to paint a more accurate picture of the effect of vouchers on the academic performance of EVS students.

Due to the lack of data on academic achievement for the EVS in Lahore, it is worth looking at other studies that have compared the academic achievement of private school students compared to public school students in Lahore. Although there is no guarantee that private schools in these studies will share the same characteristics as private schools participating in the EVS, these results can provide insight into whether or not private schools in Lahore on average, are associated with higher academic achievement than public schools. Alderman, Orazem, and Paterno (2001) created a

student achievement production function by conducting household and school surveys in low income areas in Lahore, and by administering Urdu and Math tests to a subset of 3rd graders. The authors attempt to control for selection bias in private schools by using an estimate for the predicted probability of private school enrolment. The logic behind this is that the type of students who attend private schools may have different characteristics than those who attend public schools. In order to isolate the effects of private schools on achievement, the authors calculate an estimate to predict the probability of private school enrollment. By controlling for home background and school inputs, they find that the children in private schools performed better than in government schools (Alderman et al, 2001). Similarly, the study conducted by Aslam (2003) referred to earlier that analyzed the determinants of achievement for 8th grade students in Lahore, found that *ceteris paribus*, academic achievement (measured by numeracy and literacy tests) was 35% of a standard deviation higher in private schools than in public schools.

These studies suggest that all else equal, private schools in Lahore are associated with higher student achievement than in public schools. Unlike the evaluation of the EVS, these studies attempt to control for the socio-economic status of students. Hence, interventions that provide poor families with access to private schools such as the EVS, could potentially result in greater academic outcomes for students if the private schools that participate in the program have similar characteristics to the private schools in these studies.

2. Costs

To determine whether the private schools in the area are operating more efficiently compared to public schools, it is necessary compare school costs. Since there is no specific cost data available for participating EVS schools, it is worth while reviewing the literature on the relative costs of private and public schools in Pakistan. According to writer, and public policy advisor Mosharraf Zaidi (2009), 95% of the recurrent expenditures on education in Pakistan go towards paying teacher salaries; therefore, in this paper the discussion of costs will be focused on the compensation of public and private school teachers. Andrabi, Das, and Khawaja (2006) analyze data from four sources including population and school census data, and a survey on Learning and Educational Achievement in Punjab Schools (LEAPS) that documents teacher profiles and wages. Using these comprehensive resources they find that in government schools an average male teacher makes RS 6408 (\$107) per month while an average female teacher makes RS 5897 (\$98) per month. In private schools, male teachers on average receive Rs.1789 per month while females earn Rs.1069. Andrabi and his co authors attribute lower private school wages to two factors; differences in teacher characteristics and differences in the *returns* to characteristics. Private school teacher characteristics demonstrate that they are more likely to be female, less educated (4 percent have a masters degree compared to 19 percent in public schools) and are far less likely to have received any educational training (6 percent versus 71 percent in public schools) (Andrabi et al., 2006). The returns to characteristics also differ, as private school teacher salaries are sensitive to teacher education, but not to teacher training, whereas public school teacher salaries are highly responsive to both education and training. Next, the authors determine how public school teachers would be compensated if they were placed

in private schools. In other words, they want to know how much a private school teacher would get paid if she had the same characteristics as a public school teacher. They find that the average teacher's salary for females would drop from RS 5620 to RS1765 by moving to the private sector. This is largely attributed to the fact that the private sector does not value teacher training as highly as the public sector (Andrabi et al., 2006). They conclude that private school teachers would receive a 63 percent increase in salary if they had the same characteristics as public school teachers, rather than the "518 percent (increase) that teachers in public schools currently enjoy" (Andrabi et al., 2006, page 16). In summary, the authors conclude that, private schools in Pakistan are more responsive to labor market conditions and therefore offer lower wages to teachers than public schools.

It is important to note, that even though, public school teachers seem to be more 'qualified' in that they may have more years of education and are likely to have received teacher training, it does not necessarily mean that they are more effective at imparting information to students. This is corroborated by Aslam (2003) who found that teacher training and experience were not statistically significant predictors of 8th grade student achievement. Although these results seem to suggest that private schools have clear cost advantages over public schools, in the context of the EVS, one must also consider the cost of the voucher scheme itself. The EVS requires labor to conduct door to door surveys, to hold information sessions for parents, and to conduct school visits. Along with other operational costs, they must also be considered when considering the overall costs associated with the EVS.

In summary, it seems that the EVS could potentially lead to increased productive efficiency in the form of higher student achievement and lower school costs as compared to private schools. From the data that is available, EVS students seem to be achieving at the same level as non EVS students. Additional studies from Lahore suggest that achievement is higher in private schools than in public schools, while cost analysis shows that typical private schools also offer lower teacher wages than public schools.

D. Social Cohesion

Social cohesion refers to the need for society to prepare students for participation in economic, social and political institutions through a common educational experience. This requires that all students be exposed to common elements of curriculum, language, and values (Levin, 2002). In addition to imparting knowledge and skills to students, education serves a larger purpose; to create a tolerant and unified society. For a relatively young country like Pakistan, that is composed of different ethnic groups that speak a variety of different languages, regional identities are quite strong and this can be an obstacle in trying to create a national identity that supersedes local allegiances. In such a multi ethnic country, education has the potential to act as a unifying force, by promoting a common language and a common schooling experience.

In the context of the EVS, it seems that social cohesion is less of a priority than increasing equity and freedom of choice. The primary purpose of the program is to provide more educational choice to a marginalized segment of society. Therefore to provide families with more choice and to get more schools to participate and serve the 'under-served' it is understandable why there are few regulations for EVS schools: There is a clear trade off between imposing regulations relating to curriculum to promote

common values, and providing parents with more choice by encouraging more schools to participate. Hence, since there are no clear requirements relating to curriculum, educational experiences are likely to vary from school to school, and there is little possibility of a common schooling experience.

On the other hand, some might argue that in order to participate in economic, political and social institutions, it is necessary that the population be literate, and possess some minimum level of education. In this sense, the EVS might promote social cohesion by giving families the opportunity to educate their children and acquire those necessary skills. By creating a more educated population, the voucher scheme is giving the youth of the katchi abadis a chance to participate in these different institutions and to become a part of society.

IV. Conclusion

The main objective of the Educational Voucher Scheme is to provide residents of katchi abadis in Lahore with access to schools, and to empower families by giving them the ability to choose between different schooling options. These families are essentially shifting from a situation of little or no educational opportunities for their children, to a situation with different private schooling options. This gives families greater freedom of choice and increases equity as many out of school children now have access to schools. Although data on the achievement of EVS students is limited, the results suggest that on average, EVS students are doing just as well as their peers. Furthermore, studies on the costs of schooling in Pakistan suggest that private schools have a clear cost advantage over public schools, which means that a program like the EVS could potentially lead to

increased productive efficiency of schools, however, costs of the implementing the voucher program must also be considered. The effect of this voucher scheme on social cohesion is not as clear. Due to a lack of regulations on curriculum it seems unlikely that children will experience a common schooling experience. However, providing children the opportunity to learn gives them some hope of being able to participate in social, economic and political institutions.

The EVS experiment seems to be working, and it is because of this that the PEF recently announced that it will provide an additional Rs. 10.05 million to educate 30,000 poor children living in impoverished areas in the cities of Lahore, Kasur, Multan, and Rawalpindi. This is a positive first step towards providing the disadvantaged urban youth in these cities with access to schools however, there is a long way to go to fulfill the promise of providing universal primary education in Pakistan and serving the underserved.

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