

Is Education a Level Playing Field?

Engagement in Non-school Work and Availability of
Out-of-school Learning Support

Field Studies in Education | January 2019





These papers present findings from Azim Premji Foundation's field engagements in trying to improve the quality and equity of school education in India. Our aim is to disseminate our studies to practitioners, academics and policy makers who wish to understand some of the key issues facing school education as observed by educators in the field. The findings of the paper are those of the Research Group and may not reflect the view of the Azim Premji Foundation including Azim Premji University.

Is Education a Level Playing Field?

Engagement in Non-school Work and Availability of Out-of-school Learning Support

Research Group | Azim Premji Foundation

Contact : field.research@azimpremjifoundation.org

Introduction

The value of schooling as the primary vehicle of learning for children is now recognised, by both policy makers and parents. However, as studies have shown, learning in schools depends not only on multiple factors at the level of the education system and schools, but also on the broader social, economic and political institutions within which the education system and schools function. Indeed, learning in schools has been seen to be strongly influenced and complemented by learning support and opportunities provided by the families of children outside the school. Not surprisingly, families with better socio-economic conditions are able to provide more such external support to their children. The oft-touted learning difference between private and public¹ schools by market-advocates of improvements in school systems is generally a result of such factors. This has been made amply evident in studies both across the world and in the Indian context that show how insignificant this difference is when adjustments are made for student characteristics.²

In a recent field study, we examined a few ways in which external factors affect children's ability to engage in school processes in indirect ways. The study was drawn from a larger research³ on school choice in rural India that covered 121 public and low-fee private schools and 1210 families, in 10 districts across 4 states. Overall, slightly more than half (51 percent) of the children in the sample go to public schools and the others go to private schools. There was significant difference in the household wealth status of the children going to each type of school – 71 percent of children belonging to the bottom asset quintile in the sample go to public schools, while only 17 percent of children belonging to the top asset quintile go to public schools.

1. Public schools refer to government schools

2. OECD. (2016). *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*. OECD Publishing, Paris; World Bank. (2018). *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise*. Washington, DC: World Bank; Chudgar, A., & Quin, E. (2012). Relationship between Private Schooling and Achievement: Results from Rural and Urban India. *Economics of Education Review*, 31: 376–390; Karopady, D. D. (2014). Does school choice help rural children from disadvantaged sections? *Economic & Political Weekly*, 49(51), 46-53.

3. Research Group. (2018). *School choice in low-information environments: A study of perceptions and realities in four states*. Azim Premji Foundation.

1. Learning and Working

In this study, parents were asked about the work their children were engaged in outside school hours, besides school-related work. Table 1 presents the responses from the parents on what their children did outside school hours, by type of school and then by gender. The responses show differences between public school-going children and private school-going children, as well as between boys and girls for each set. As compared to 38 percent of public school-going children, only 25 percent of private school-going children were engaged in some form of non-school work.

The percentage of girls engaged in non-school work was higher as compared to boys among both public school-going children and private school-going children, though the difference (of around 10 percentage points) was starker among public school-going children.

Table 1: Children engaged in non-school work outside school hours (%)

	Public			Private		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Housework	25	38	31	16	23	19
Other non-school work	9	6	7	7	4	6
No work	66	56	62	77	73	75

When analysed by wealth quintiles, children’s engagement in non-school work did not show any apparent patterns for public school-going children, though a pattern of lower engagement in non-school work with increasing economic status was seen among private school-going children.

2. Learning Outside School

Parents were also asked about the learning support they were able to provide for their children besides school. There were significant differences in response to this question, between parents of children going to public and private schools. Table 2 (page 4) presents the differences in learning support outside school available to children, by type of school. 65 percent of parents of children in private schools said that parental supervision was among the top three means of providing support outside of school hours, whereas only 50 percent of parents of children in public school said the same.

Paid tuitions as another important means of outside-school support was significantly higher for parents of children in private schools, with 18 percent counting this among their top three means of outside-school support. This number is only five percent among parents of children in public schools. Inversely, the inability to provide any learning support outside school was much higher among parents whose children were in public schools (35 percent) as compared to those whose children were in private schools (16 percent).

Table 2: Outside-school learning support available to children (%)

	Public	Private
Parents supervise	50	65
Other family members supervise	17	15
Paid tuitions	5	18
Cannot help	35	16

Table 3 shows how the ability of families to provide any form of outside-school support and their ability to provide paid tuitions varies, when analysed across wealth quintiles.

Table 3: Outside-school learning-support (key parameters) across poorest and richest wealth quintiles (%)

		Poorest 20%	Richest 20%
Paid tuitions	<i>Children going to public schools</i>	4	18
	<i>Children going to private schools</i>	12	29
Cannot help	<i>Children going to public schools</i>	46	19
	<i>Children going to private schools</i>	14	10

The inability of families to provide any form of learning support for their children outside school was seen to decrease with increasing economic well-being. Well over two-thirds of children in the poorest quintile of our sample go to public schools and only four percent of them get additional support through paid tuitions. On the other hand, well over four-fifths of the children in the richest quintile go to private schools and 29 percent of them get support through paid tuitions. Similarly, 46 percent of the 71 percent of children in the poorest quintile going to public schools do not receive any form of learning support outside school while only 10 percent of the nearly 83 percent of children in the richest quintile going to private schools do not receive any form of learning support outside school.

In Conclusion

Very often market-based solutions tend to underplay or even ignore socio-economic factors external to the school. As our study shows, these factors play a crucial role on the extent to which children are able to engage with school learning processes.

One of these factors, children's engagement in non-school work—both domestic work and in wage-work enhancing family livelihood requirements—is a common phenomenon in India, especially in rural areas and among the socially and economically weaker sections of the population. This factor affords differential learning environments among school-going children and is evident in our study in terms of the higher likelihood of children going to public schools being engaged in non-school work than their private school counterparts. In addition, and expectedly, girls are seen to be at a comparatively greater disadvantage.

Another factor, learning support outside school, especially in the form of supplementary tutoring, is also a widely prevalent practice in India. Research studies on this practice of private tuitions in India have shown that both the incidence of private tuitions and spend on it is higher among parents sending their children to private schools.⁴ Such findings compel us to ask if private tuitions further reinforce the social and economic 'advantages' already available to those children going to private schools. The greater access to such supplementary resources afforded by the higher economic status of parents shows how private tuitions can become another means of creating and accentuating differences within the educational system. Public school children are seen to be at a further disadvantage in terms of the lower ability of their parents to provide any direct learning support or supervision outside school.

At another level, the overall higher levels of paid tuitions as a means of external support among private school children raises questions about the so-called better quality of private schools. As another study notes, 'If it is 'dissatisfaction' with public schools that led parents to send their children to private schools, then why is it that parents of children going to private schools send their children to tuition as well. Is this trend fuelled by high aspirations or low faith in schools?'⁵

Overall, the study shows how larger social and economic inequalities afford differential possibilities to children to engage with the school system. The study also points out the potential inequalities inherent in a stratified school system and how such inequalities can deepen if the quality of the school education system is not addressed at a systemic level.

4. Azam, M. (2016). *Private tutoring: evidence from India*. Review of Development Economics, 20(4), 739-761.

5. Banerji, R., & Wadhwa, W. (2013). *Every Child in School and Learning Well in India: Investigating the Implications of School Provision and Supplemental Help*. In India Infrastructure Report 2012: Private Sector in Education (pp. 52-63). New Delhi, India: Routledge.

Azim Premji University

Pixel Park, PES Campus, Electronic City, Hosur Road
Bangalore 560100

080-6614 5136
www.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in

Facebook: /azimpremjiuniversity

Instagram: @azimpremjiuniv

Twitter: @azimpremjiuniv