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Policy Coherence, Equity and Governance in Public and Private Schools

A Comparative Qualitative Study from Gujrat District, Punjab, Pakistan

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Original academic context

Originally submitted in July 2025 as a first-semester research paper for Educational Policy Studies (ED615), M.Phil Educational Leadership and Management, University of Management and Technology, Lahore. This 2026 public edition has been revised for source verification, stronger anonymization, methodological clarity, public dissemination and updated policy context. It is not a peer-reviewed journal publication.

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Publication Note

This public research edition preserves the core research design, interview evidence, thematic findings and policy recommendations developed in the original 2025 coursework paper while correcting several issues that matter in public academic communication.

- The empirical scope is stated precisely: the field evidence comes from a purposive sample of eight stakeholders and is grounded primarily in Gujrat District.
- Participant descriptions have been generalized to reduce deductive identification while preserving sector and role context.
- The original numerical comparison chart has been removed because the study was qualitative and did not employ a validated quantitative scoring instrument.
- Several broad claims have been moderated to reflect sector heterogeneity and the exploratory nature of the sample.
- International comparisons have been corrected, including Finland's quality-assurance model and the division of inspection responsibilities for independent schools in England.
- The original term Single National Curriculum (SNC) is retained when reporting participant language; current policy context notes that the federal reform was later retitled the National Curriculum of Pakistan (NCP).
- References have been consolidated around traceable official sources and established research literature.

The author confirms that the eight interviews were personally conducted for the study and that participants consented to broader/public dissemination. This edition nevertheless uses stronger anonymization as a good-practice safeguard.

Researcher positionality

The author has long-standing professional experience in private-school and college management. That experience provides contextual insight but can also shape interpretation. The public edition therefore makes positionality explicit and treats interview evidence as exploratory, triangulating it with policy documents and established research rather than claiming statistical representativeness.

Abstract

This study examines differences and points of convergence in the policy environments governing public and private schools in Punjab, Pakistan, with a localized empirical focus on Gujrat District. It asks how policy implementation, equity and access, curriculum reform, accountability, coordination and institutional capacity are experienced across the two sectors.

A comparative qualitative design was used. Eight stakeholders - public-sector policy/administrative officials, private-sector representatives and school administrators from both sectors - participated in semi-structured interviews. Interview evidence was triangulated with policy and research documents, including the Punjab School Education Sector Plan 2019/20-2023/24, the Punjab Private Educational Institutions (Promotion and Regulation) Ordinance 1984, federal curriculum-reform materials, Pakistan Education Statistics and established studies of public-private schooling in Punjab.

Five cross-cutting themes emerged: (1) policy implementation and governance, (2) equity and access, (3) curriculum alignment and teacher support, (4) accountability and public-private coordination, and (5) resource allocation and institutional capacity. The evidence suggests that public schools are shaped by stronger

administrative standardization and public-access obligations but often experience implementation and capacity constraints. Private schools generally have greater operational discretion, but the sector is highly heterogeneous in affordability, resources, curriculum choices and regulatory engagement. Both sectors are affected by coordination gaps and by the absence of sufficiently integrated mechanisms for data, professional standards and cross-sector policy dialogue.

The paper proposes a coordinated policy agenda: structured public-private consultation, proportionate regulation of private schools, stronger professional standards for teachers, shared curriculum implementation support, risk-based and transparent quality assurance, expanded equity-focused financing and partnerships, and interoperable education data systems. Because the study is qualitative and localized, the recommendations should be treated as policy propositions for wider testing rather than statistically generalizable conclusions.

Keywords: education policy; public and private schools; Punjab; Gujrat District; policy coherence; equity; governance; curriculum reform; qualitative research; Pakistan

Executive Summary

Pakistan's school system combines a large public sector with a substantial and diverse private sector. Nationally, Pakistan Education Statistics 2022-23 reported approximately 54% of students in public-sector institutions and 46% in private-sector institutions. The two sectors therefore cannot be treated as separate policy worlds: both are central to access, quality and system performance.

This study explores how policy is experienced across the public-private divide. The eight interviews do not represent all schools in Punjab; instead, they provide context-rich evidence from stakeholders with direct experience of policy implementation and school administration. Three conclusions stand out.

1. Policy coherence matters as much as policy design. Participants in both sectors described gaps between formal policy intentions and the institutional support required for implementation.
2. Equity and quality cannot be reduced to a simple public-versus-private comparison. Public schools carry broad access obligations but may face capacity constraints; private schools vary widely in fees, resources, management quality and accessibility.
3. Shared problems require shared infrastructure. Teacher development, curriculum support, quality assurance, data systems and structured consultation are areas where stronger cross-sector mechanisms could improve coherence without erasing legitimate institutional differences.

The paper recommends moving from a control-versus-autonomy debate toward a coherence framework in which regulation is proportionate, data are shared, professional expectations are clearer, and equity measures are designed to expand opportunity while recognizing the diversity of institutions.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

Pakistan's school-education landscape is characterized by substantial public and private provision. Both sectors contribute to educational access, yet they differ in governance, financing, decision-making authority, teacher employment arrangements, accountability relationships and responsiveness to families. These differences create opportunities for diversity and innovation, but they can also produce policy fragmentation when standards, support mechanisms and regulatory expectations are poorly aligned.

Public schools operate within provincial administrative structures and are expected to advance constitutional and statutory commitments to education. Private schools operate under regulatory frameworks that include the Punjab Private Educational Institutions (Promotion and Regulation) Ordinance, 1984, while retaining greater discretion over staffing, fees, internal management and - within legal and curriculum requirements - aspects of educational delivery. The private sector itself is not uniform: it includes low-cost community schools, mid-fee institutions, large school networks and elite schools.

Curriculum reform illustrates the challenge of coherence. The federal reform initially known as the Single National Curriculum (SNC) sought greater commonality in learning expectations. The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training subsequently adopted the name National Curriculum of Pakistan (NCP). Because participants in this 2025 study used the term SNC, this paper retains that term when reporting interview evidence while using NCP when referring to the current naming of the reform.

A comparative policy analysis is therefore useful not because public and private schools can be reduced to two internally uniform categories, but because policy alignment must account for different institutional incentives, capacities and responsibilities. This study focuses on how policy differences are experienced in practice and where stronger coordination may improve equity, quality and accountability.

1.2 Problem statement

Punjab's mixed school system is governed through multiple policy, regulatory and administrative channels. When expectations for curriculum, teacher quality, data reporting, school registration, financing and accountability are not supported by coherent implementation mechanisms, policy can become fragmented. The result may be uneven support for schools, unclear responsibilities, duplication of monitoring and gaps in access or quality assurance.

The problem is therefore not simply that public and private schools are different. The central policy problem is whether those differences are governed through a coherent framework that protects educational rights, supports quality improvement, recognizes institutional diversity and creates meaningful mechanisms for coordination.

1.3 Objectives

1. Compare key policy and governance features affecting public and private schools in Punjab, with empirical attention to Gujrat District.
2. Examine how stakeholders perceive the effects of policy differences on educational quality, access, equity and institutional functioning.
3. Develop evidence-informed policy propositions for stronger coherence, accountability and cross-sector coordination.

1.4 Research questions

1. How do policy and governance arrangements differ between public and private schools in the study context?
2. How do stakeholders perceive the effects of these differences on educational quality and equitable access?
3. What policy strategies may improve coherence while respecting legitimate differences between the two sectors?

1.5 Significance

The study contributes to comparative education-policy discussion by connecting policy documents with the experiences of those who implement or respond to policy at district and school levels. Its practical relevance lies in identifying areas where stronger coordination may improve implementation: teacher professional standards, curriculum support, inspection and quality assurance, data systems, equity financing and structured public-private dialogue.

1.6 Scope and delimitation

The empirical component is geographically limited to stakeholders connected primarily with Gujrat District and selected provincial-level policy functions. The sample is purposive and small. The study therefore offers analytical depth rather than statistical generalizability. It focuses on school education and excludes higher education. The policy context reflects documents available to the author during the 2025 study, with limited contextual updating for this 2026 public edition.

1.7 Key terms

Public schools: Government-owned or government-administered schools operating within provincial administrative and financing arrangements.

Private schools: Non-government schools managed by individuals, organizations, trusts, networks or other private entities under applicable provincial regulation.

Policy coherence: The degree to which laws, regulations, implementation arrangements, incentives, support systems and accountability mechanisms work together rather than at cross-purposes.

Educational equity: Fair opportunity to access and benefit from quality education, with attention to barriers associated with income, gender, location, disability or other disadvantage.

Comparative policy analysis: Systematic comparison of policy arrangements, implementation experiences and institutional effects across sectors or settings.

2. Literature and Policy Context

2.1 Analytical framework

The study draws on three complementary perspectives. First, policy-borrowing literature cautions that reforms adopted from other systems are mediated by local institutions, incentives and culture (Phillips & Ochs, 2003). Second, comparative-education methodology emphasizes the importance of examining similarities and differences at multiple levels rather than treating national or sectoral categories as internally uniform (Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2014). Third, an equity lens asks whether policy arrangements distribute opportunities, resources and accountability in ways that reduce rather than reproduce disadvantage.

2.2 Public-private schooling in Pakistan

Pakistan has long had substantial private-school participation. National statistics for 2022-23 reported 29.997 million students in public-sector institutions and 26.072 million in private-sector institutions, approximately 54% and 46% respectively. This scale means that system reform must consider both sectors.

Research from rural Punjab complicates simple assumptions about either sector. The LEAPS research program documented extensive public-private coexistence in village education markets and showed wide variation in school quality, cost, teacher labor markets and learning outcomes (Andrabi et al., 2007; Andrabi, Das, & Khwaja, 2008). Das, Pandey, and Zajonc (2006) similarly documented low absolute learning levels and meaningful gaps across school types. Such findings support a policy approach that focuses on measurable quality, teacher effectiveness, access and institutional incentives rather than sector labels alone.

2.3 Governance, regulation and coordination

The Punjab School Education Sector Plan 2019/20-2023/24 identified system-level challenges related to access, learning, governance, financing, data and implementation. Private institutions are separately regulated under the Punjab Private Educational Institutions (Promotion and Regulation) Ordinance, 1984 and subsequent amendments and rules. The coexistence of different administrative channels can be functional, but it also creates a need for coordination when policies affect curriculum, registration, teacher development, student protection, data reporting or equity.

Public-private partnership experience in Punjab also shows that the boundary between 'public' and 'private' is not absolute. Punjab Education Foundation programs and other partnership models use public financing or accountability mechanisms to support privately managed schools. Experimental and quasi-experimental research on Punjab partnership programs has examined effects on enrolment, school inputs and learning, illustrating the potential - and the design challenges - of hybrid governance models (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2022).

2.4 Curriculum reform: SNC to NCP

Participants discussed the Single National Curriculum as a major example of cross-sector reform. The federal government later retitled the curriculum reform as the National Curriculum of Pakistan. The policy aspiration of common learning expectations must be distinguished from uniform pedagogy or institutional sameness. Implementation depends on teacher preparation, textbook availability, assessment alignment, language context and communication with schools. The interviews in this study repeatedly highlighted a perceived gap between policy issuance and implementation support.

2.5 International policy lessons - used cautiously

International comparisons can illuminate policy design, but direct borrowing is risky. Three examples are useful when interpreted carefully:

- Finland combines a national core curriculum with highly trained teachers, substantial professional autonomy, local implementation and system-level evaluation. It does not operate a routine school-inspection model comparable to England; quality assurance relies strongly on self-evaluation and national evaluation mechanisms.
- England uses published inspection and regulatory arrangements, but independent-school inspection is divided between Ofsted and the Independent Schools Inspectorate depending on school category. The transferable lesson is transparency and differentiated regulatory responsibility, not a claim that one inspectorate treats all schools identically.

- India's Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 includes an equity mechanism under section 12(1)(c) requiring specified unaided schools to admit children from weaker sections and disadvantaged groups up to at least 25% of entry-level seats, with public reimbursement arrangements. Implementation varies by state.

These cases support principles - coherent standards, professional capacity, transparent accountability and equity mechanisms - rather than copy-and-paste institutional models.

2.6 Research gap

Much of the Pakistan literature compares enrolment, test scores, costs or school inputs. This study adds a localized qualitative perspective on how policy is interpreted by policy/regulatory stakeholders and administrators across sectors. Its value lies in identifying implementation frictions and areas for cross-sector policy coordination.

2.7 Synthesis of literature and policy context

Dimension	Public-sector tendency	Private-sector tendency	Cross-sector issue
Governance	Administrative hierarchy and standardized procedures	Greater managerial discretion; heterogeneous models	Policy coordination and implementation support
Access	Broad public-access mandate; no school fees in government schools	Fee-dependent access; wide affordability variation	Equity, affordability and geographic access
Curriculum	Formal compliance through public administrative channels	Variation in adoption, supplementation and parental-market pressures	Teacher support, assessment alignment and communication
Teacher workforce	Formal public recruitment/service structures	Locally managed recruitment with variable conditions	Professional standards and continuous development
Accountability	Administrative monitoring and government data systems	Registration/regulatory oversight plus market accountability	Comparable quality information and integrated data

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The study used a comparative qualitative design to explore how policy is interpreted and implemented across public and private school contexts. Qualitative inquiry was appropriate because the research questions concerned stakeholder experience, implementation processes, institutional constraints and policy coherence rather than population estimates.

3.2 Participants and sampling

Eight participants were selected purposively to provide perspectives from public-sector policy/administration, private-sector representation and school administration. The public edition generalizes role descriptions to reduce deductive identification.

Code	Sector	Stakeholder category	General role
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P1-Pub	Public	Policy/administration	District-level education official
P2-Pub	Public	Policy/curriculum	Curriculum or policy official
P1-Priv	Private	Sector representation	Private-school association representative
P2-Priv	Private	Regulation/coordination	Private-school regulatory or registration representative
A1-Pub	Public	School administration	Public secondary-school principal
A2-Pub	Public	School administration	Public secondary-school principal
A1-Priv	Private	School administration	Private-school administrator
A2-Priv	Private	School administration	Private-school administrator

3.3 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Urdu or English according to participant preference. Interviews focused on policy formulation and implementation, equity and quality, curriculum reform, accountability, public-private coordination and policy improvement. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and translated into English where necessary. Relevant policy documents and secondary research were reviewed to contextualize and triangulate interview evidence.

3.4 Data analysis

Interview material was analyzed through comparative thematic analysis. Open coding was used to identify recurring ideas, followed by axial coding to organize related codes into broader categories. Comparison across stakeholder groups generated five themes: policy implementation and governance; equity and access; curriculum alignment and teacher support; accountability and coordination; and resource allocation and institutional capacity.

The study did not use a validated quantitative scoring instrument. For that reason, the numerical bar chart included in the original course submission has been removed from this public edition. Comparative claims are presented qualitatively.

3.5 Trustworthiness

- Triangulation: interview evidence was compared with policy documents and established research.
- Member checking: interview summaries were confirmed or corrected with participants during the research process.
- Audit trail: coding decisions, notes and analytical steps were documented.
- Sector comparison: themes were examined across stakeholder categories rather than relying on a single institutional perspective.

3.6 Ethics, consent and public dissemination

Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw. Interview material was coded, and this public edition further generalizes role descriptions. The author confirms that participants consented to broader/public dissemination of the research. Recordings and transcripts were handled securely in accordance with the procedures used for the original study.

3.7 Researcher positionality

The researcher is an educational leader with professional experience in private schools and colleges, including institutional management in Gujrat District. This position provided contextual access and practical understanding but may also influence interpretation. The study therefore uses explicit thematic procedures, cross-sector sampling and documentary triangulation. One private-sector administrator was drawn from an institution within the researcher's broader professional network; this is acknowledged as a potential source of response and interpretation bias.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview

Five themes were consistently visible across interviews. The findings should be read as stakeholder perceptions and localized implementation evidence, not as statistically representative measures of all public or private schools in Punjab.

4.2 Theme 1 - Policy implementation and governance

Public-sector participants described policy as comparatively standardized but sometimes slowed by administrative layers, staff constraints and uneven implementation capacity. Private-sector participants described greater operational discretion but also uncertainty when regulatory or curriculum requirements were introduced without sufficient consultation or support.

"Our policies are uniform for government schools, but enforcement capacity and field monitoring can be inconsistent." - P1-Pub

"Policy-wise, the biggest issue is inconsistency. Private schools may be expected to follow public standards without equivalent implementation support." - P2-Priv

The common issue was not simply centralization versus autonomy; it was the quality of the implementation architecture. Policy becomes less effective when timelines, training, guidance, monitoring and feedback channels are weak or fragmented.

4.3 Theme 2 - Equity and access

Public schools were associated with broad access obligations and the principle of free schooling, while participants emphasized constraints related to staffing, classrooms and infrastructure in some settings. Private schools were viewed as capable of offering differentiated services and management responsiveness, but access is shaped by fees and therefore varies by household income and school type.

"We are required to enroll everyone, which supports access, but capacity can become a serious constraint when teachers or classrooms are insufficient." - A2-Pub

The interviews did not support a simplistic conclusion that one sector is inherently equitable and the other inherently high quality. Instead, equity depends on affordability, geography, school capacity, targeted financing and the quality of provision available to disadvantaged families.

4.4 Theme 3 - Curriculum alignment and teacher support

Participants viewed the SNC/NCP reform as an important attempt to create common learning expectations, but implementation experiences varied. Public-sector administrators described timing and training challenges. Private-sector administrators described selective supplementation, parental expectations and uncertainty about how much flexibility remained.

"Training sometimes followed implementation rather than preceding it." - public-sector participant

"Parents may expect international or additional content, so schools try to align required curriculum with those expectations." - private-school administrator

The policy implication is that curriculum coherence requires more than issuing a common document. It requires teacher development, assessment alignment, clear guidance on permissible adaptation, access to teaching resources and mechanisms for school feedback.

4.5 Theme 4 - Accountability and coordination

Both sectors identified coordination gaps. Public officials described limited capacity for field monitoring and weak structured engagement with private-sector stakeholders. Private representatives described registration or compliance processes that did not always develop into sustained quality-improvement relationships.

"There is no structured collaboration with private regulators; we often operate in silos." - P1-Pub

"A district-level coordination forum could help address common concerns before they become conflicts." - P2-Priv

Participants repeatedly pointed toward a missing middle layer between policy issuance and school-level practice: regular consultation, comparable data, problem-solving forums and transparent feedback.

4.6 Theme 5 - Resource allocation and institutional capacity

Resource differences were visible but not uniform. Public schools may face infrastructure, staffing or procurement constraints despite public financing. Private schools may mobilize resources more flexibly but depend heavily on fee revenue, and low-cost private schools can also operate under severe resource constraints. The relevant policy distinction is therefore not 'public equals under-resourced' and 'private equals well-resourced,' but whether institutions have sufficient, predictable and equitably distributed capacity to meet expected standards.

4.7 Cross-sector comparative matrix

Theme	Public-sector pattern in interviews	Private-sector pattern in interviews	Shared policy direction
Policy implementation	Standardized administrative channels; delays/capacity concerns	Greater discretion; uneven support and regulatory interpretation	Structured rollout, consultation and feedback
Equity and access	Broad access mandate; capacity constraints in some settings	Fee-based access; affordability varies by school type	Targeted financing and inclusion mechanisms
Curriculum	Formal compliance expectations;	Adaptation/supplementation	Common learning expectations plus

	training/timing issues	pressures; mixed interpretation	implementation support
Accountability	Administrative monitoring; limited field capacity	Registration/regulation plus market accountability; variable follow-up	Risk-based quality assurance and comparable public information
Resources and capacity	Public funding but uneven local capacity	Flexible resource mobilization but fee dependence and heterogeneity	Targeted investment, partnerships and professional development

4.8 Alignment with research questions

- RQ1: The sectors differ in administrative structure, management discretion, financing, teacher employment arrangements and regulatory relationships, but internal variation within each sector is substantial.
- RQ2: Stakeholders linked policy differences to implementation speed, affordability, staffing, curriculum flexibility and accountability; no single sectoral label adequately explains quality or equity.
- RQ3: The strongest convergence points were structured policy dialogue, teacher professional standards, curriculum implementation support, transparent quality assurance, equity financing and interoperable data systems.

5. Strategic Policy Recommendations

The recommendations below are policy propositions derived from the localized findings and triangulated literature. They should be piloted, evaluated and adapted before large-scale adoption.

1. Establish structured public-private policy coordination

Create district and provincial forums with defined membership from government, private-school associations, school leaders, teacher-development bodies and data/regulatory units. The purpose should be implementation problem-solving, not symbolic consultation.

2. Use proportionate, tiered regulation for private schools

Differentiate regulatory expectations according to factors such as school size, fee level, risk profile and capacity while maintaining non-negotiable standards for child protection, registration, learning conditions and transparency.

3. Strengthen teacher professional standards across sectors

Develop a phased provincial framework for teacher professional standards, induction, continuous professional development and - after feasibility testing - possible registration or licensing. Avoid introducing licensing without accessible training and transition arrangements.

4. Build shared curriculum-implementation support

Provide public and private schools with clear curriculum guidance, teacher-development modules, exemplars, assessment support and help channels. Distinguish common learning standards from unnecessary uniformity in pedagogy.

5. Develop risk-based, transparent quality assurance

Improve coordination among existing oversight bodies rather than assuming that a single new inspectorate is automatically the answer. Use common indicators, risk-based inspection, school self-evaluation and transparent reporting appropriate to sector and school type.

6. Expand equity-focused financing and partnerships

Use targeted vouchers, scholarships, conditional transfers or partnership funding where evidence supports them, with safeguards for quality, inclusion and public accountability. Punjab's existing partnership experience provides a base for testing models rather than starting from zero.

7. Improve data interoperability

Move toward data standards that allow public, private and partnership-school information to be analyzed coherently while respecting privacy and administrative feasibility. Data should support planning, teacher deployment, equity analysis and early identification of system gaps.

8. Pilot reforms before province-wide scaling

Use selected districts to test coordination forums, teacher-development models, quality indicators or equity financing. Publish evaluation findings before scaling. This reduces the risk of policy borrowing or rapid implementation without local adaptation.

5.9 Global policy lessons - translated, not copied

Reference system	Verified policy feature	Relevant lesson for Punjab
Finland	National core curriculum, highly trained teachers, local autonomy, self-evaluation and national evaluation; no routine school-inspection system	Invest in professional capacity and coherent curriculum while avoiding overreliance on compliance inspection
England	Published regulation and inspection; Ofsted and ISI have different responsibilities for categories of independent schools	Clarify oversight roles, publish findings and use differentiated regulatory responsibility
India	RTE Act section 12(1)(c) creates a statutory equity mechanism for entry-level seats in specified unaided schools	Test equity mechanisms with public financing, implementation rules and monitoring rather than unfunded mandates

6. Implications for Educational Leaders and Researchers

For school leaders

- Treat policy compliance as an organizational capability: assign responsibility, maintain evidence, train staff and translate policy into operational routines.
- Develop continuous teacher-support systems rather than relying only on occasional workshops.
- Use parent communication and school data as part of accountability, not merely marketing or administration.

- Participate constructively in policy consultation through associations or district forums while documenting implementation challenges with evidence.

For policymakers and regulators

- Design implementation support at the same time as policy requirements.
- Recognize heterogeneity within the private sector and capacity variation within the public sector.
- Use data and risk to target oversight instead of treating every school as administratively identical.
- Evaluate equity programs for both access and learning quality.

For universities and research institutions

- Provide training in policy evaluation, school data use, implementation research and regulatory analysis.
- Support independent evaluation of public-private initiatives and curriculum reforms.
- Create practitioner-researcher partnerships so that school-level implementation evidence informs policy design.

7. Limitations and Reflexivity

- Small purposive sample: eight participants provide depth, not statistical representativeness.
- Geographic concentration: empirical evidence is primarily connected to Gujrat District and cannot be assumed to describe all districts of Punjab.
- Role-based perspectives: participants spoke from institutional positions that may shape how they interpret policy constraints and advantages.
- Researcher positionality: the author's private-sector leadership background may influence access, questioning and interpretation.
- Policy timing: the original research was completed in 2025. Some policy documents, terminology and administrative arrangements may have changed since then.
- Document access: not all private institutions provided internal policy materials, limiting direct documentary comparison.

These limitations do not invalidate the findings; they define the level at which claims should be made. The study is best understood as an exploratory comparative policy analysis that generates grounded hypotheses and policy propositions for wider testing.

8. Conclusion

The public-private divide is a central feature of Pakistan's school system, but sector labels alone do not explain educational quality, equity or institutional performance. The evidence from this study points instead to the importance of implementation capacity, professional standards, affordability, regulatory clarity, data quality and structured coordination.

Public schools carry broad access responsibilities and operate through formal administrative systems; private schools often have greater managerial discretion but vary widely in resources, fees and quality. Both sectors can experience policy fragmentation when implementation support, communication and accountability mechanisms are weak.

A more coherent system does not require making every school identical. It requires clear common expectations where public interest demands them, proportionate regulation, transparent evidence, stronger professional capacity and mechanisms through which public and private stakeholders can solve shared problems.

The most promising reform direction is therefore coherence rather than control: aligning standards with support, autonomy with accountability, access with quality and policy ambition with the institutional capacity needed to deliver it.

2026 Contextual Update

This public edition does not rerun the 2025 fieldwork. It adds limited contextual updates so readers do not confuse the original policy setting with current terminology.

- The federal curriculum reform formerly referred to as the Single National Curriculum is now officially referred to as the National Curriculum of Pakistan.
- The Punjab School Education Sector Plan 2019/20-2023/24 is retained as a historical policy reference because it formed part of the original study context; readers should consult current Punjab policies and rules for present-day implementation.
- Pakistan Education Statistics 2022-23, published by the Pakistan Institute of Education, reports 54% of students in public-sector institutions and 46% in private-sector institutions nationally, underscoring the continuing system-wide significance of both sectors.

No claim is made that these updates change the interview findings. They are included to improve temporal clarity for public readers.

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Appendix A - Interview Guide for Policy/Regulatory Stakeholders

1. What are the core education policies currently governing your sector?
2. How do you perceive differences between public- and private-school policy frameworks?
3. What challenges do you face in designing, regulating or implementing education policy?
4. How do you monitor or evaluate policy implementation?
5. What mechanisms exist for policy coordination or learning between public and private sectors?
6. How do current policies support or constrain educational equity and access?
7. How effective has curriculum reform been in creating coherent expectations across institutions?
8. What reforms would improve policy coherence across the two sectors?

Appendix B - Interview Guide for School Administrators

1. What key policies guide your school's functioning, including curriculum, teacher hiring, admissions and assessment?
2. How easy or difficult is it to implement these policies in your institution?
3. What role do you play in interpreting or adapting policy for school use?
4. Do current policy frameworks support improvement in student learning outcomes? How?
5. How would you compare your sector's policy environment with the other sector?
6. What are the most important limitations in the policies or implementation arrangements you work under?
7. Are there policy gaps that hinder equity, quality or innovation?
8. What reforms would improve alignment between public and private school systems?

About the Author

Hafiz Muhammad Faruukh Nadeem, professionally known as Faruukh Nadeem, is an educational leader, institution builder and school-management professional. His professional career began in 2007. His experience includes institution building, school and college operations, multi-school management, teacher development, community education, parenting education, orphan support, social welfare and international administration. He is pursuing an M.Phil in Educational Leadership and Management at the University of Management and Technology, Lahore.

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