



PIDE

COVID-19 BLOG

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Income Loss Due to COVID-19 Lockdown and the Challenge of Paying School Fee

Over time, due to the low quality education being provided by the public sector schools, enrollment in private schools has significantly increased. According to the Pakistan Social Living Measurement (PSLM) Survey, the share of enrollment in private schools has increased from 28% to 38% over the last decade. The quality of education being imparted at the government schools has compelled parents to shift their children from government to private schools and these are not only children belonging to upper and middle class, but also many people from poor class send their children to these private schools.

There are three types of private schools operating in the country. First, are the low level private schools that usually operate in houses, plazas or small buildings and charge a tuition fee ranging between Rs. 1000 to Rs. 3000 and entertain children from lower middle class. Some parents with little resources at hand also prefer to send their children to these low category private schools by sacrificing their many other needs. Second category is of the middle level schools where fee ranges from Rs. 4000 to Rs. 7000, and these usually entertain the country's middle class. Third category is that of the top private schools having a fee ranging from Rs. 15000 to Rs. 25000 and these schools generally cater to children from families of upper middle and upper class.

Certain reports in the media suggest that these private schools earn a handsome amount of profit every year and rarely face any loss. Some estimates put their profit at even more than 30 to 40 percent

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only affected daily wage earners but also the small businesses which have shut down due to the lockdown. In a developing country like Pakistan, government cannot provide financial relief to its citizens to the extent that is being provided by the developed countries. The Pakistan government has announced Rs. 3000 per month for the under-privileged. This amount is not enough to even keep the stove of these people burning, so no one can expect them to fulfill their other needs including payment of school fee of their children.

On March 13, to contain the spread of the COVID-19, the government announced to close all schools and it is still uncertain whether these will reopen on the expected date

of May 31. For most of the schools their only expense during this period of shutdown is that of teachers' salaries and rent of the building while they totally save against energy consumption, transport services and many other miscellaneous charges like events' organisation, printing, photocopying etc. It was being speculated that this year schools may not go on summer vacations at their usual time in order to compensate this educational time lost. Many schools, however, have already started taking online classes indicating that they intend to observe regular summer vacations this year too. I believe that online classes are in no way a substitute of regular school environment and parents do not pay a handsome amount for their children to be taught online only. Going to school is about much more than getting educated only. It is a whole experience, especially at the early ages.

Instead of taking advantage of the situation, the private schools association can come forward and announce a discount of at least 50% in the school fee from March till the time schools resume their normal operations. This step would provide relief to many parents for whom the COVID-19 has brought a huge financial stress. It is a time when everyone in the country must play a role in easing life of the others. This can be the private schools' contribution to mitigating the situation in general and protecting many children from dropping out of schools.

By: Henna Ahsan

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics

Web: www.pide.org.pk, Twitter: @PIDEpk, Facebook: PIDEIslamabad