
Book Review

PPP Paradox: Promise and Perils of Public-Private Partnership in Education

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Reform in education is a constant endeavour. Introduction of PPP in education is being seen as one of the most desirable reforms when there are issues related with widening the reach and addressing the quality. The XI Five Year Plan of the Government of India records the benefits of PPP in education at many places in its document, thus encouraging the relevant initiatives. However, there is also certain skepticism at various quarters attached with it as far as education, at least the school education, is primarily considered a Government's responsibility and the private sector is known for its leanings towards profits. In this context the book has come up very timely on this subject, very aptly dealing with the difference between privatisation and partnership, as mixing the two together may lead to misconceptions. Further, while advocating in favour of PPP, the author is cautious that 'social/public' nature of educating people is not threatened. In her own words "While I argue for the PPP, I maintain a critical stance throughout the book and am careful to enumerate the pitfalls and challenges that line the path of partnerships in education.... I argue that promise outweighs the perils."

First chapter of the book titled 'The Paradox' is about the emerging concept of PPPs in education. It addresses the contradiction where entry of a partner (Private) is suspected to change the 'social cause' i.e. 'educational improvement'. It is a well researched chapter, taking into its fold various forms of PPPs and puts forth arguments with respect to different forms. These are analysed in detail under Promise and Perils (Chapter 2), paying attention to specific issues such as their scope and motive. The author opines that different private partners bring with them different set of motives, skills, experience etc. affecting the partnership and therefore, should not be viewed as homogenous entity.

The working of PPPs is examined under four categories i.e.

Scope: focused or systemic; Scale: experimental or policy driven; Method: takeover or complimentary; and Motive: profit or social. If any of these is designed to serve a cause other than educational improvement, the partnership deviates from the goal. Thus, these could serve as bases to assess the success of the partnership. Author has given numerous examples from different parts of the world to support and validate her argument on the value of PPPs in education. But in fact, it widens the field even more for discussion.

Chapter three of the book titled 'Middle Start in American Public Schools' is a case study which discusses the evolution of systemic reform from where the private partnership emerges in the field of education. The revolution began in America's public schools situated in Michigan where in 1994 an initiative was taken to uplift the 12 low performing schools in rural and urban areas. The partnership involves two private organisations based in the US to improve the performance of these schools. A comprehensive school reform (CSR) programme had been launched in order to improve the performance of low-grading school in US. Slowly and gradually it gained support of educators and legislators in US, as it was moving the performance indicator of schools upwards charismatically.

Fourth chapter of the book, another case study, titled 'Montessori in Chennai schools' is an Indian example of bringing change in the running and functioning of schools in Chennai through PPP. First time ever, the Montessori Method was launched as a pilot in the Kindergarten classrooms in Chennai corporation schools in partnership with a non-profit organisation. Montessori Method advocates that learning is an innate part of child development and education enhances this process. Based on this, a Montessori teacher sits beside children, observes them quietly and guides them as per need. Sometimes teacher works with children giving them analytical activities to make them understand more complex concepts. The project is reported to successfully revitalise the teaching-learning process and enjoyed support from various stakeholders. This process has completely changed the teaching-learning process. The chapter contains numerous examples of the improved child performance because of this method. The project, however, is yet in its infancy, yet it has been reported to have won considerable support.

Fifth chapter titled 'Resolving the Paradox' focuses on the implications of the case studies which author has taken for the educational quality, scale and sustainability. The author attempts

to connect PSPs and social enterprise framework provided by the European movement to education. The author has discussed the challenges and issue which are confronted in running these partnerships.

Overall the book gives a balanced picture of PPP in education. With two case studies, the book attempts to showcase its successful implementation and demonstrates the potential of such partnerships in meeting the goals. It also offers good critical analyses of various complex issues related with participation of private partners, including replicating of such efforts. It is written in a way that is interesting to the reader. Reasonably priced at Rs 495, it is within reach of all and is a useful one for all those keen to understand the nuances of PPP in education.

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