

Educational Achievement in the Secondary School Education Market: A Comparative Study of the Government and Private Secondary Schools in Kota



Manjari Khandelwal

Banasthali Vidyapith, Banasthali, Tonk (Rajasthan)

Abstract

The provision of quality education at the secondary level requires a careful consideration of factors that aim at the comprehensive development of adolescents. Among the factors fostering the holistic development of students, educational achievement occupies a central position and often serves as a chief and decisive criterion for school selection. From among the two broad categories in the market of school education namely the government and the private, the priority is often set to be in the favour of the private schools, enrolling a larger share of students than their government counterparts.¹ This phenomenon is mainly credited to the competitive positioning of schools based on their academic outcomes, with higher pass percentages of students and their examination results functioning as indicators of institutional effectiveness.² Taking in consideration the educational landscape of Kota, Rajasthan- a city renowned as an academic hub all over India, where the private schools appear to be dominating the market of education, the present study undertakes a comparative analysis of the government and private secondary schools in Kota, taking educational achievement as the primary factor of comparison. Whereas the private sector tends to exhibit relatively higher academic performance, the overall findings reveal no considerable difference in the educational achievement of students between the two sectors. This outcome raises a critical question regarding the alleged advantage of private schooling in the secondary school education market despite the lack of substantial disparities in actual levels of student achievement.

Keywords: Educational Achievement, Government-Private Schools, Secondary Schooling, Market

Introduction

In today's open and meritocratic society, education serves as the principal basis of stratification, facilitating social mobility and shaping individual status in the society. The concept of achievement in society promotes and ensures equality by enabling individuals to transcend ascribed social positions and contributes towards societal progress. In today's modern and globalised world, achieved social status is highly valued and is attainable chiefly through the means of education. Education discards the age-old hierarchies and

privileges and provides every individual with equitable opportunities to compete and succeed. However, inequalities may exist in the process of attainment of education and difficulties may arise in receiving proper education due to insufficient resources in hand.³ This problem too, is addressed in today's democratic and egalitarian society by provision of free education to all the children at the foundational level in the government or public schools and mandated reservations for underprivileged children in private institutions.

Achievement in schools: Schools function as important socialising agencies, entrusted with the holistic development of students and transforming them into young responsible citizens of the nation. Achievement in schools refers both to individual students' progress and to the overall performance of schools in meeting short-and long-term educational goals. At the student level, achievement is measured through grade point averages and performance in examinations. At the institutional level, it includes pass rates of students, board examinations results, competitive exam clearances, participation in academic and non-academic competitions, and attainment of awards and distinctions.

In contemporary contexts, academic achievement encompasses not only the examination performance of students, but also the success of students in highly competitive entrance tests and attainment of awards by students in academics, particularly at the secondary level. Moreover, in Kota- the nation's leading hub for competitive coaching at the secondary school level, achievement is observed to be strongly shaped by the preparation and clearance of various competitive examinations such as JEE and NEET, which are viewed as gateways to admission in prestigious higher educational institutions.

Comparative approach in educational achievement and the achievement gap in schools:

Educational achievement is an important theme in the field of comparative research. This factor is one of the many factors playing part in the development of a nation's education system. The problems and issues associated with the educational practices, policies and decision-making in the secondary school education sector may be addressed by this factor, making it a chief topic for study. Furthermore, the comparison of the quality and success of the different educational systems existing in the society may be determined through comparative approach. The data so gathered may be used to solve the contemporary problems in schooling and its sectors. This makes the comparative approach in educational achievement essential to discuss and adopt in

the study.⁴ By systematically comparing institutional performance, such research offers insights into quality, equity, and the dynamics of student success.⁵

Government and Private secondary schools in Kota

Achievement is basically ensured through competition. A free and fair market ensures equal opportunities for individuals to compete and attain desirable social and educational status in society through personal efforts and merit.⁶ In education, the achievement gap refers to the disparities in grades, standardised test scores, dropout rates and such attainment related educational attributes between different social groups. The differences in achievement in the field of education may be observed among different social categories like gender, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status. This article focuses on the educational achievement, which is commonly regarded as a determining factor influencing the parental choice and public perception regarding the choice of school type.⁷

Many studies claim the superiority of the private sector over the public in terms of school education and performance.^{8,9,10} Yet questions remain which hold relevance since the time when parents started choosing private schools over the public ones¹¹- Is there any difference between the educational achievement of the students of the private schools and the public schools at the secondary level? What constitutes as educational achievement in this context? What role do the schools play in the achievement of the students? Are the students satisfied with their performances at the schools? And what are the barriers in ensuring equitable achievement? This study tends to address these questions by comparing the educational achievement of the government and private secondary schools in Kota, further aiming at observing the actual scenario in the field of secondary school education.

The respondents: The respondents in the study comprise of the students studying in the government and private secondary schools in Kota city situated in the state Rajasthan. The students bear

the age group of 12-19 years studying in classes 9-12 in the selected schools in the area of study. A total of 200 students- 100 each from the 10 sampled schools in each sector- government and private from the official list of registered schools in the city.

Descriptive survey research: This research adopts a descriptive survey design. Tools for data collection were developed by the researcher, designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative insights of the study. The data was collected through interview schedules for the students and teachers, questionnaires addressed to the school heads, and observation schedules. This paper forms part of a broader doctoral research conducted on the government and private secondary schools in Kota, examining five sociological determinants of education, of which educational achievement is one. The findings are based on the data collected in the year 2021-2022.

Area of study: The study was conducted in Kota, widely recognised as India's premier education hub due to the concentration of coaching institutes for competitive examinations in the city. The students arriving in this city are chiefly in their adolescent years, enrolled in secondary schooling. The phenomenon of "dummy schooling" is prevalent where schools serve as administrative entities essential only to formally promote students from one grade to another while coaching institutes handle their academic learning. In such context, analysing secondary schooling is essential as it forms the base for both higher education and adult career.

Parameters of comparison: The indicators are carefully selected to reflect the current definitions and needs of the educational scenario at both the local and national level and the prevalence of the coaching culture in Kota and the provision and participation in the co-curricular activities has been given due consideration.

The study compares government and private secondary schools in Kota across the following 13 indicators:

- Percentage of students passed over the last five years (approximate average)

- Competitive exam selections from school in last five years
- Number of awards attained by the school
- Previous year percentage of the students
- Student dropout rates (classes 9 to 12) in the previous session.
- The awards obtained by the students in sports, academics and other categories at various levels ranging from the school level to the national level.
- Identified scope of improvement among the students
- Factors contributing to improvement according to the students
- Students taking supplementary academic coaching
- Reasons for opting/not opting for coaching
- Participation in co-curricular activities
- Students availing scholarship
- Students repeating a class

Findings of the study

The findings are presented below.

1. Percentage of students passed in the last five years: The data related to the number of students passed in the years 2017-2021 was gathered from the school authorities. It may be noted, however, that the year 2020 reflected 100% pass results across institutions due to pandemic-related policy measures. The approximate mean pass percentage of the students in the private schools is found to be higher (99%) as compared to the government schools (90%). The overall gap of 9% observed in the percentage of students passed in both the sectors highlights the apparent advantage of the private schools in pass rates.

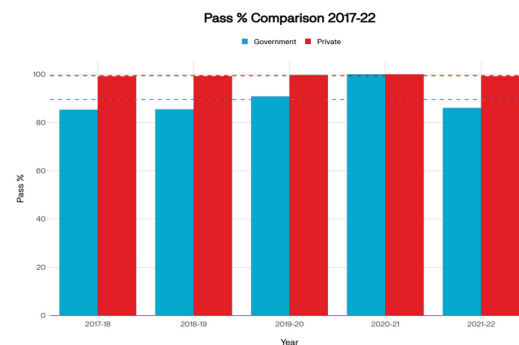


Fig. I: Percentage of students passed in the last five years

2. Competitive exam selection from school in last five years: In line with coaching trend in Kota related to the competitive exams at the school level, the school authorities were asked if there had been any competitive exam selections from the schools in the last five years. As the detailed information was not available with the authorities, 50% of the government schools admitted to the selections of their students. While 30% private schools admitted selection, 20% private schools admitted to no selections and the remaining 50% had no clue about the same. This finding suggests limited institutional focus on competitive exam outcomes, with most schools prioritising board examinations in secondary classes.

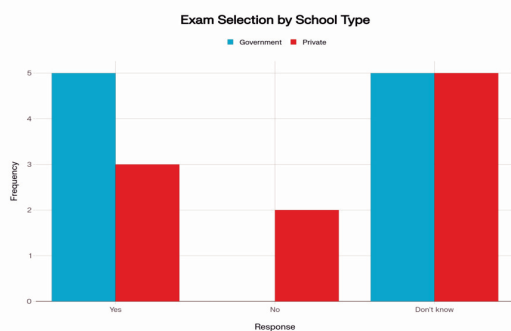


Fig. II: Competitive exam selection from school in last five years

3. Number of awards attained by the school: The government schools were found to have secured greater number of awards overall (23 awards), particularly in the category of sports (19 against 10 in private schools) and academics (4 against 2 in private schools), compared to their private counterparts (12 awards). This indicates the relatively higher institutional achievement by the government sector in this dimension.

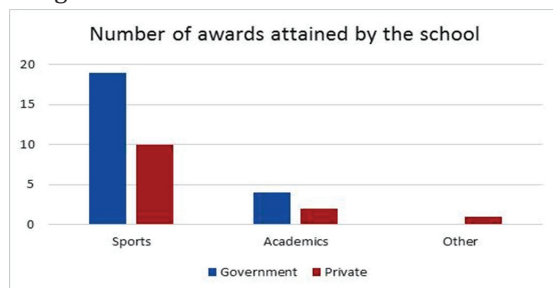


Fig. III: Number of awards attained by the school

4. Previous year's academic percentage of the students: The previous year percentage represents the achievement pattern of their respective schools. The approximate mean percentage of the private school students (80%) was found to be higher than that of the government students (77%). A small gap of 3% in the two sectors suggests that the private schools perform marginally better than the government schools in the academic outcome of the students, though the difference is not substantial.

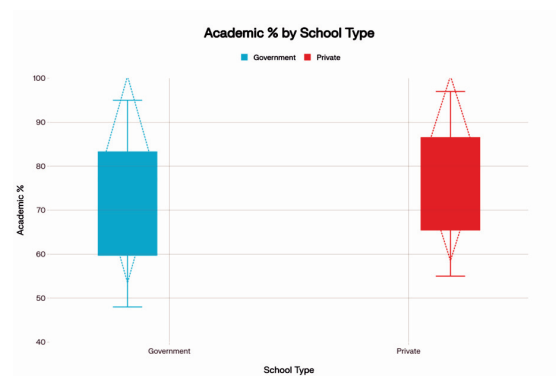


Fig. IV: Previous year's academic percentage of the students

5. Student dropout in secondary classes: The government schools reported no dropouts in the academic session 2020-2021, whereas the private schools recorded an average dropout of six students for the secondary classes.

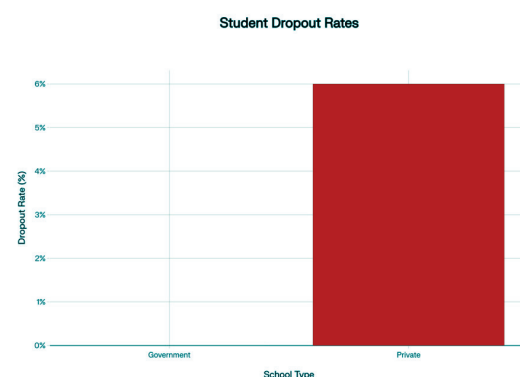


Fig. V: Student dropout in secondary classes

6. Awards obtained at different levels: The awards obtained by the students in various categories- sports, academics and other at the school,

city, district, and state levels not only display individual achievement but the achievements of the schools too, and assists in comparing the achievement pattern exhibited by the schools.

School level: It may be observed in the above chart that government schools reported higher participation and awards at the school-level, particularly in sports and other co-curricular categories, while private schools showed greater achievement in academics.

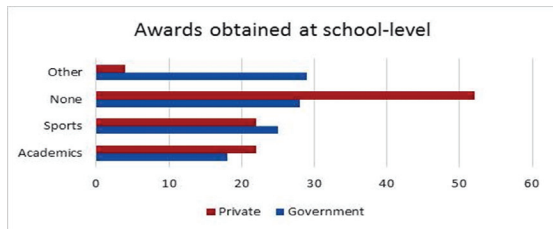


Fig. VI.a: Awards obtained at school-level

City level: Looking at the overall results, and sports the private schools were found to be outperforming the government schools with more attainment at awards than their counterparts at the city level. However, neither sector reported academic awards at this level.

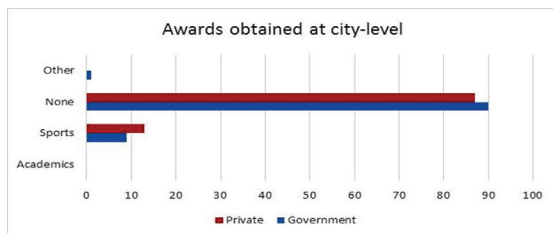


Fig. VI.b: Awards obtained at city-level

District level: The private schools were found to be ahead of the government schools in the remaining categories of sports and academics. Overall, the private schools lead the government schools at the district level and the government schools reported limited success.

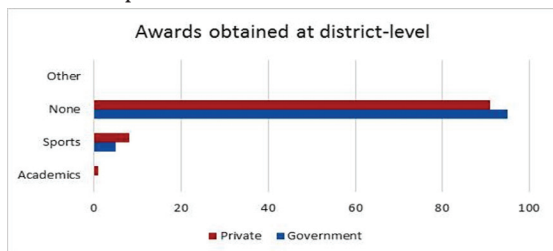


Fig. VI.c: Awards obtained at district-level

State level: it may be observed that government schools reported no awards in academics. Thus, the private sector in this case too, demonstrated higher achievements in academics and sports at the state level.

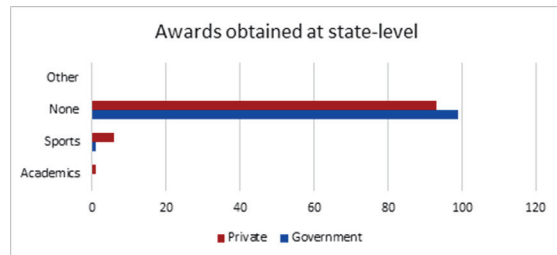


Fig. VI.d: Awards obtained at state-level

National level: No award in the government sector in the sports category was found with a very low number of the private sector attaining. Still, the private result outweighs the government one in this case too, showing slight advantage in sports.

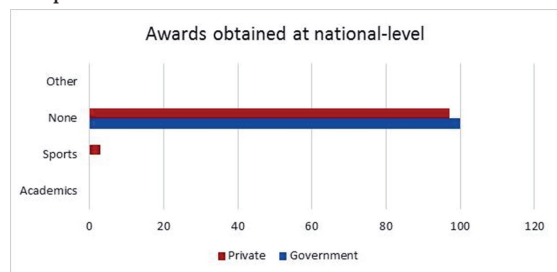


Fig. VI.e: Awards obtained at national-level

Hence, from the overall result shown it may be concluded that though the private school children attain more awards at all the higher levels other than the school level. A minimal difference exists between the two sectors. It has also been observed that the private students attain academic awards more than the government students, showing their big focus on the academic category. Overall, government schools excelled at the school level, indicating strong participation and engagement, while private schools demonstrated better performance at higher levels of competition.

7. Scope of improvement in students in both the sectors: All government school students (100%) reported that they can perform bet-

ter in the upcoming exams and hence show a scope of improvement. On the other hand, 97% private school students expressed the scope of improvement in future examinations, leaving a small fraction(3%) satisfied with their current performance in academics.

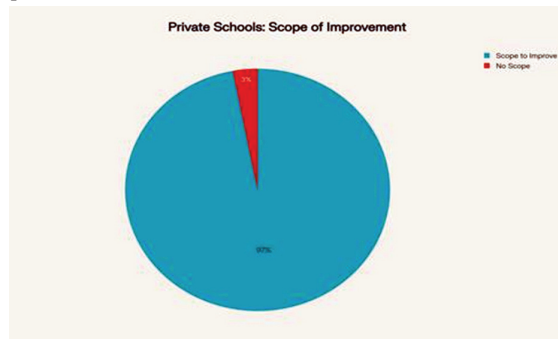


Fig. VII: Scope of improvement: Private schools

8. Factors aiding improvement: For academic improvement across both the sectors, a large number of students need help in the segment of preparation for examinations which encompassing increased resources and study time. Government school students prioritised improved family circumstances, more conceptual clarity, increased teacher attention and improved school environment as favourable for better learning.

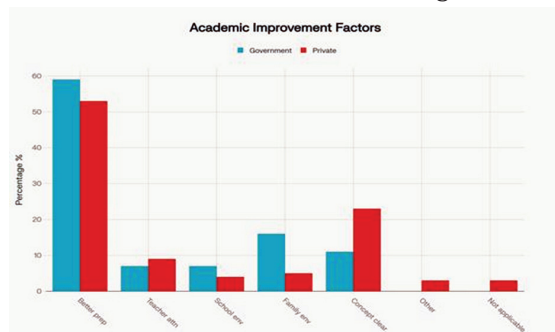


Fig. VIII: Factors aiding improvement

Private school students, on the other hand, emphasised conceptual clarity, followed by increased teacher attention, effective study environment at school, and improved environment in the family.

9. Students taking academic coaching: Over 70% students in the private sector and less than 30% of government school students reported

attending academic coaching. Despite this, the differences in outcomes between the sectors remain narrow as in spite of more students taking academic coaching, the gap in the results isn't too large between the two sectors. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of coaching and classroom instruction in the private sector. Interestingly, private school students cited "concept clearing" as both their main reason for attending coaching and as a continuing area of deficiency, reflecting limited efficiency in both schools and coaching institutes.



Fig. IX: Students taking academic coaching

10. Reasons for taking or not taking academic coaching:

Government schools: Students avoiding academic coaching often preferred self-study (50%) or cited financial constraints (16%). Others (6%) felt adequately supported by the school instruction and conceptual clarity at the schools. Furthermore, among the 26% students attending coaching, a larger percentage (22%) mentioned conceptual clearing as a reason for attending coaching, followed by improved performance at schools (4%).

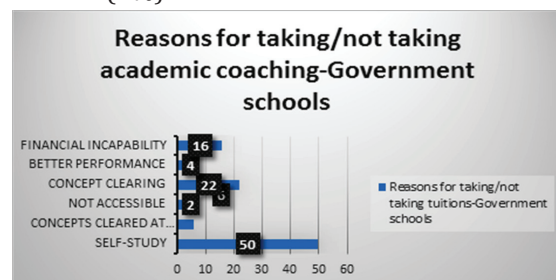


Fig. X.a: Reasons for taking or not taking academic coaching: Government schools

Private schools: From among the large percentage of students who attend academic coaching (over 70%), more than half (56%) mentioned conceptual clarity as a reason for the attendance. An important concern may be raised here as to if the better results of the private schools should be accredited to the coaching attendance by the students on a large scale in the private sector. The second most cited reason is the parental pressure (10%) experienced by students in this sector, followed by better school performance (4%) and career preparation (2%). Moreover, from among the 28% students not enrolled in coaching, a large percentage prefer self-study (25%) and the remaining (3%) reported satisfaction with the teaching at school, admitting their concepts cleared at the school itself and feel no need of taking coaching.

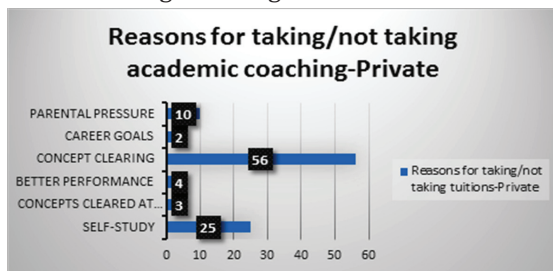


Fig. X.b: Reasons for taking or not taking academic coaching: Private schools

11. Participation in co-curricular activities: The results show the government school students as displaying higher rates of participation in co-curricular activities, driven by greater interest despite of fewer opportunities being offered. In contrast, while private schools provided more options, student participation was significantly lower, as most prioritised academics over extra-curricular activities.

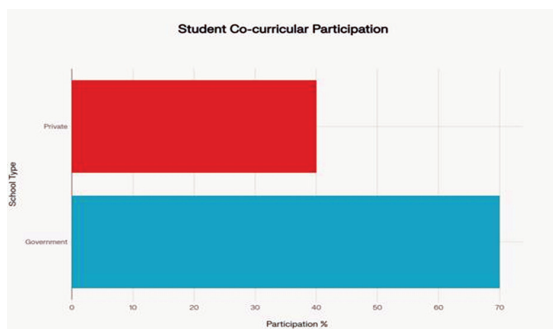


Fig. XI: Participation in co-curricular activities

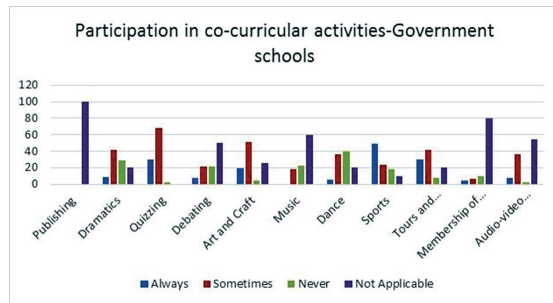


Fig. XI.a: Participation of government students in co-curricular activities

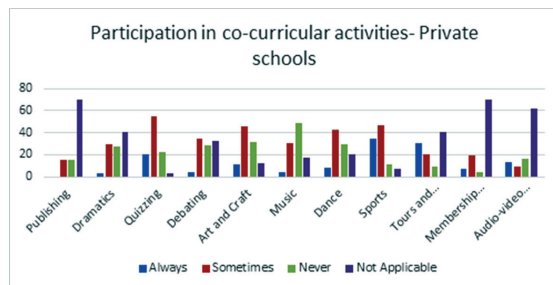


Fig. XI.b: Participation of private students in co-curricular activities

12. Students availing scholarship: Scholarship uptake in the private sector was observed to be higher (45%) as compared to the government sector (25%). The discrepancy may be attributed to greater awareness in private schools, targeted opportunities for minority categories, or higher aptitude among these students. Despite being primarily from economically weaker backgrounds, government school students appeared to benefit less from scholarship schemes.

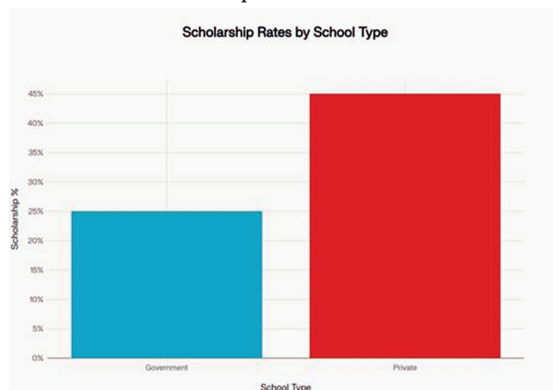


Fig. XII: Students availing scholarship

13. Students repeating classes: Class repetition was found to be more prevalent in the private sector (10%), as compared to government schools (5%). This may result from high fee-related attrition in the private sector; recent economic challenges due to the pandemic so occurred, or due to the lower aptitude of the students in certain cases. Though overall both the sectors observe lower repetition levels, the government schools have lower count of students (5%) repeating a single class with a gap of 5% between the two sectors.

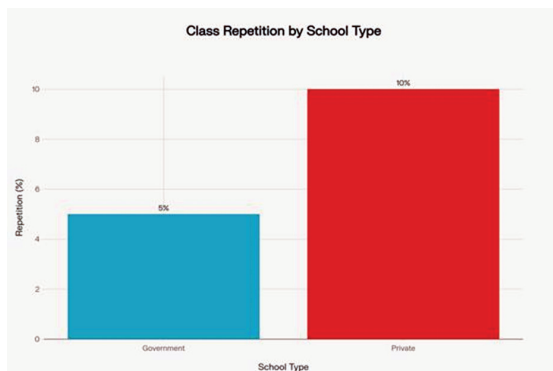


Fig. XIII: Students repeating classes

Conclusion

The study reveals that government and private secondary schools in Kota exhibit strengths in different dimensions of educational achievement. Government schools were found to perform better in competitive examination selections of students, attainment of academic and sports awards, low student dropout and repetition rates, and participation in co-curricular activities. In contrast, private schools reported higher average pass percentages of students, stronger academic outcomes, greater recognition through awards at the city, district, and state levels, higher scholarship attainment, greater reliance on academic coaching, and overall higher levels of student satisfaction with their academic performance.

The study indicate that when measured purely in terms of academic achievement, the government and private secondary schools in Kota perform at nearly comparable levels. The private sector tends to emphasise targeted academic perfor-

mance, aligning with the demands of the parents and the perceptions of the market, while government sector fosters a more holistic orientation. The central question that emerges, therefore, is why private sector continues to dominate the secondary school educational market despite only marginal differences in the achievement outcomes of the sectors. This highlights the need to examine other influential factors such as perceptions of quality, parental aspirations, school infrastructure, and school environment, which play a key role in shaping school choice and reinforce the enduring preference for private education.

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