

Education system in Pakistan is perpetuating socio-economic inequalities. Discuss this statement with respect to three tier education system in the country.

## INTRODUCTION

The three-tier education system in Pakistan plays a crucial role in perpetuating socio-economic disparities by entrenching the divide between the wealthy elite and the underprivileged masses. The stratification of education into private schools, public schools, and religious madrassas not only reflects the existing class structure but also limits upward mobility and creates distinct educational trajectories that directly influence career opportunities and economic status.

## THREE TIER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Private school

Government run  
schools

Religious  
Madrassas

Private  
School  
categorization

elite private schools

low cost private schools

Mid-tier private schools

## ELITE PRIVATE SCHOOLS: Entrenching Privilege

Elite private schools in Pakistan are accessible only to the wealthiest segments of society due to exorbitant tuition fees and the cost associated with extracurricular activities. The schools offer high quality education often following international curricula such as the Cambridge or International Baccalaureate (IB) systems.

Students from these schools are groomed to be the leaders of tomorrow, securing top positions in multinational corporations, government institutions and academia. They also benefit from strong alumni networks which provide them with additional resources and social capital. The exclusivity of these schools thus deepens the gap between the rich and the poor by ensuring that only those from affluent backgrounds access the best opportunities, perpetuating a cycle of privilege.

## LOW COST PRIVATE SCHOOLS: LIMITED IMPROVEMENT FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS

Low cost private schools cater to the middle and lower-middle classes. Families from these backgrounds prefer these schools over government schools because they are perceived to be slightly better. However, these schools often lack resources, trained teachers, infrastructure.

### Employment Outcomes

Although these students may perform slightly better than those from public schools, they still face significant barriers in the job market, particularly in sectors that require advanced skills or English proficiency. This contributes to limited upward mobility, especially for lower middle class students.

## MID-TIER PRIVATE SCHOOLS

These schools serve the middle class, offering a reasonable quality of education at relatively affordable fees. They are popular among families that cannot afford elite private schools.

### Employment Outcomes

These schools offer advantage over public schools, but students still lag behind students from elite schools who receive training on digital skills and access to more advanced technological resources.

"Private schools, by catering to the

elite; often function as gateways for social reproduction rather than social mobility."

— Pierre Bourdieu

## GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS: REINFORCING DISADVANTAGE

Government schools where the unprivileged people send their children are underfunded, poorly managed, lack adequate resources. There is a lack of qualified teachers. Students study outdated curricula. The gap between public and private schools becomes particularly stark when it comes to language proficiency, particularly in English, and exposure to critical thinking and modern pedagogical techniques. As a result, these students struggle to compete in job market limiting their chance of upward social mobility. This reinforces status quo with the privileged moving ahead and underprivileged remaining trapped in cycles of poverty.

## MADRASSAS: ISOLATING THE MARGINALIZED

Madrassas which offer religious education cater to some of the most marginalized communities in Pakistan. They often neglect subjects critical to the modern economy such as science, technology. Their limited curriculum confines students to a specific socio-religious sphere, thereby narrowing

their employment opportunities. Students of madrasahs are not prepared for the job market. Thus, madrasahs contribute to the perpetuation of socioeconomic disparities by isolating their students from mainstream educational and economic opportunities.

## EDUCATION SYSTEM PERPETUATING SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES

### SOCIAL REPRODUCTION AND CLASS DIVISION

The stratification of Pakistan's education system creates an inherent cycle of social reproduction where children from affluent families attend elite schools, secure the best jobs, and pass on their privileges to the next generations. Conversely, children from poor or lower middle class families who attend government schools or madrasahs often inherit the struggles of their parents; remaining trapped in low paying jobs or unemployment.

### EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES AND JOB MARKET POLARIZATION

The disparities in the quality of education between the three tiers translate into unequal outcomes in job market. Students from elite schools often get prestigious, high paying jobs. Students from government schools often struggle to compete, particularly in fields that require fluency in English or advanced technical skills. As a result, they get low

wage, unskilled jobs. Madrasa graduates face even fewer opportunities, often being confined to religious or informal sector roles. This polarization in educational outcomes perpetuates income inequalities.

## LANGUAGE DIVIDE: ENGLISH VS. URDU / REGIONAL LANGUAGES

Language divide perpetuates socioeconomic inequality. Students of elite schools are fluent in English. Urdu or regional languages are used as medium of instruction in public schools. This language divide creates additional barriers for students from lower income families when they seek to advance in their education or career. Madrasas, which focus primarily on religious education in Urdu or Arabic, exacerbate this divide further.

## CONCLUSION

The three-tier education system in Pakistan is a powerful mechanism for the perpetuation of socioeconomic disparities. Elite private schools provide the wealthy with the tools and networks necessary to maintain their socioeconomic advantages, while government schools and madrasas trap students in cycles of poverty and limited opportunity. Consequently, education which should be pathway to social mobility becomes means of entrenching inequality.