

The explanations for the low quality in MENA  
Public schools in comparison  
to the private schools

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## The explanations for the low quality in MENA Public schools in comparison to the private schools

### ABSTRACT:

The education system in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region is demarcated into two sectors (i.e. public and private) due to differences in their quality standards. The major reasons of this educational demarcation could be attributed to curriculum deficiencies and lack of competent teachers in the public education sector. The quality of education in the public sector in MENA region is below the global standards providing excessive boost to the private sector and this is evident from high fees structures and low affordability rates which offered to different levels of people in the society. Moreover, the market of the private educational institutions has increased greatly, which means that education has become a lucrative business and the residents of MENA region are unable to afford the exceeding cost of education. This study has used qualitative descriptive research method to empirically prove the reasons for low education quality of public funded institutions in comparison to private institutions. The results of the study were coherent with the findings of <sup>سختة</sup> previous studies indicating that fees increasing of private sector is a threat to financial equity and social viability. Furthermore, the reason for low quality education in public sector is due to the lack of experienced teachers, infrastructure and use of outdated curriculum. The teachers in public institutions are not well-skilled to induce modern classroom practices. Thus, student's basic learning skills weakness during their primary years of education have become more evident in their later learning years. It is therefore concluded that developing the educational curriculum and infrastructure of the public educational sector is highly needed.

**Key words :** MENA, Public sector, Private sector , Government, Economic Education

### الملخص:

إن التعليم في منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا ينقسم إلى قطاعين: القطاع العام والقطاع الخاص ويكمن الاختلاف بين جودة التعليم في القطاعين في أوجه القصور في المناهج الدراسية وعدم وجود مدرسين متخصصين في قطاع التعليم العام. وتعتبر معايير جودة التعليم العام في منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا أقل من المعايير العالمية وفي الآونة الأخيرة تنامي الإقبال على التعليم الخاص، وهذا يتضح من هياكل الرسوم الدراسية للتعليم الخاص حيث توفر الرسوم المرتفعة والمنخفضة التكاليف والتي

بدورها قد توفر خدمه تعليمية لشرائح مختلفة من المجتمع. وبسبب زيادة سوق المؤسسات التعليمية الخاصة، أصبح التعليم نشاطا مربحا، قد لا يستطيع سكان منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا تحمل تكاليفه المرتفعه. ولقد استخدمت الدراسة الحالية المنهج النوعي الوصفي لتحديد أسباب جودة التعليم المنخفض لمؤسسات التعليم العام مقارنة بمؤسسات التعليم الخاص. وقد توافقت نتائج الدراسة مع نتائج الدراسات السابقة والتي تفيد بأن زيادة رسوم المؤسسات التعليمية في القطاع الخاص تشكل تهديدا للعدالة الاجتماعية والمالية. علاوة على ذلك، فإن السبب في تدني جودة التعليم في القطاع العام في منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا هو الافتقار إلى المعلمين ذوي الخبرة وضعف البنية التحتية للمدارس واستخدام المناهج الدراسية القديمة. وافتقار بعض المعلمين الي طرق التعليم الحديث والمهارات التدريسية المطورة في الفصول الدراسية وذلك لتطبيق مناهج مطوره في المراحل الاولى للتعليم. وهكذا، تصبح مهارات التعلم الأساسية للطلاب خلال سنوات التعليم الابتدائي ضعيفة ويصبح الافتقار إلى المهارات الأساسية أكثر وضوحا في سنوات التعلم اللاحقة. ومن ثم فهناك حاجة ماسة إلى إجراء تغييرات على مستوى المناهج التعليمية والهياكل الأساسية على المستوى الحكومي للارتقاء بالتعليم العام في المنطقة

*الكلمات الاستدلالية: منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا، القطاع العام، القطاع الخاص، تعليم حكومي، اقتصاديات التعليم.*

## 1. Introduction

The citizens belong the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (i.e. United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia) prefer public schools for their children due to low education cost. However, the winds of globalization have compelled parents to compare the education quality of both private and public schools in these countries.

Private schools in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are known for providing conducive environments to students to develop their communication and learning skills. These private MENA schools provide an international curriculum for the learners (i.e. equal that of Harvard and Cambridge institutions in relation the educational quality). Moreover, private schools in MENA have excellent infrastructure, high safety standards and well-qualified teachers who have the competences and skills to deliver the content effectively. Hence, such private schooling institutions are considered to be the best in formulating a child personality among the GCC citizens (Salehi-Isfahani et. al., 2014).

On the other hand, parents who wish to enroll their children in such private schools encounter the issues of affordability. Many schools in the MENA region particularly the American and European have fees thrice to Asian and Arabic schools which deprives students from the opportunity to study in such schools. The cost of education can be estimated by dividing it into three educational levels (i.e. pre-primary, primary and secondary education levels). The pre-primary level has young children; primary and secondary is from class one to 12. It can be observed that GCC schools can be divided into four types such as Arabic, American, Asian and those that are bilingual. The Indian schools have the highest enrolment as they are affordable for expatriates and thus meet the educational needs of a large number of people living in the GCC countries (Roudi, 2011) see figure 1.

School type	Pre-primary	Primary	Lower Secondary	Higher Secondary
Arabic	1,632	1,785	2,244	3,060
Bilingual	2,754	3,672	4,845	5,712
Western	4,590	6,630	8,874	10,404
Asian	1,632	2,448	3,060	3,876

Figure 1: MENA private Schools Annual Fee (USD) (Dandan and Marques, 2017).

According to a report published by the Kuwait financial center named “Markaz”, the most affordable schools in the region are Arabic and Asian schools. However, the fees of bilingual schools are 1.5 times higher than others. It is also reported that western schools in the region are the most expensive as their pre-primary education sector charge fees of USD 4,590 per year, whereas, the secondary school education in these western schools cost USD 10,404 annually (Dandan and Marques, 2017).

## 2. Litreture Review

### 2.1 Private Education in MENA

Private sector in MENA witnessed a rapid growth in the education field and “over the last decades, MENA countries have moved from a model of state-led to one relying more on the private sector” (World Bank, 2009, p. 3). However, the World Bank , (1998) declared that the private education in MENA take different practices and distributions as each country determine this issues according to their policies and systems. The World Bank , (1998) found the enrolment in MENA private education relatively lower than the world enrolment average, especially in the low and middle economic countries, this excluded Lebanon as the private schools are more than the public ones. Although, in Jordan, Iran and West Bank-Gaza in the higher education field the enrolment in the private education is considered significant, as the private sector plays a key role in these particular regions (World Bank, 2009, p. 3).

In a number of GCC countries (Saudi, Kuwait, Qatar and United Arab Emiratis), Moujaes, et. al., (2011) evaluated the market of the private education by focusing on the education growth and quality. A survey was conducted including 1,016 parents and interviewed number of leaders in both public and private schools. The research revealed that the GCC private education market was “among the largest in the world, comparable with those in the U.K., Australia, and India” (p.4), as the expatriates play a major role in increasing the number of students’ enrolment. The study showed that GCC region had approximately 4,400 private schools which allocated around 1.36 million students mostly dominated in Saudi Arabia. The market distribution in GCC region indicated that Saudi Arabia was considered the biggest market (53%) according to their population; however, Kuwait and UAE, Dubai came in the second row of this classification (14%), but Dubai slightly differ (13%) and Qatar was the smallest (6%).

Moreover, the study found that the private education is considered lower in expenditures compare to the public, as the private education spends approximately 14 percent of the \$36 billion of GCC education market which equals less twice than the public spends amount. Under similar scenario the World Bank, (1998) justifies that several countries in MENA were willing to pay for their children education as long as they have better education achievements. In Egypt, the families from several socio-economic levels (not only wealthy) are willing to pay for private better education for their children. Egypt people annually pay around EGP 7 billion for the private tutoring. The report of the World Bank showed that 63% of the surveyed students in public

schools stated that they were having private lessons to support them in their learning. In Jordan similarly 35,000 students were enrolled in private higher education and in Lebanon the “private sector spends on education close to six percent of GDP, about one and a half times public education expenditures” World Bank, (1998, P. 24).

Nasser, (2009. p. 27) reported that many parents in Lebanon “with low income will to invest in private universities by taking out loans or relying on well-off extended family member”. Moujaes et. Al., (2011) study stressed that they expect that through the coming years the population in the age under 19 will increase rapidly in the private education in GCC area, as parents see the private education provides the students with higher chances to access the private universities and provide with admission, because they see the private education students are with higher performance and ability mainly in English and Mathematics.

In this respect, Bertelsen (2009, p. 3) clarified that there are number of factors that drive the private higher education to grow in the GCC area these factors are: the large population of gradation from the private primary and secondary schools who seek for equivalent higher education in foreign universities to continue their education with similar path and can have better future career accordingly. Moreover, there are high interest of population in market privatization and market oriented (ibid, p.3), as Bertelsen found that the socio-economic factor allows many people in the GCC region orient to the private.

Conversely, some other views found that privatization and market-oriented reforms, particularly in primary and secondary education will not contribute to improve the performances of the educational system in North Africa and the Middle East. However, many of the countries in the region have experienced decades of educational centralism combined with little concerns with socio-cultural productivity of schooling. Many educational systems in the region suffer from bureaucratic structures that emphasize a top down approach to learning. Through the production and diffusion of textbooks, Ministries of education implement rigid curriculum focused on memorization and dictation as everyday activities. (Akkari, 2004, p.151)

As a result, it seems that the private market is relatively small in the MENA region, however different results appear according to the country social and economic factor and policies as in GCC region the market of private education is considered large. What appears from the literature is that the private education clearly spends less than the budget spent on public education as the private education can save the country large

amount of money annually and can help in supporting the market operational mechanism. From the previous data, Parents in some middle and low-income regions in MENA are still willing to pay for their children education towards better quality of learning and ensures better educational life and future careers. To justify the private in MENA, the following discussion will highlight some MENA countries experiences and practices in their private education.

## 2.2 Public- private Education Quality in Kuwait

The literature in MENA region draws a great attention to GCC countries including Kuwait. The quality of education had a great deal in several sections in the arguments, yet reviewing the literature with more concentration about Kuwait education thought to be significant as Kuwait education and parents' motivational factors considered the core of this research.

Education in Kuwait is affected by several aspects that shaped the education quality, as this leads to irregular parents' orientation between the private and public sectors. However, the literature suggests that the interior issue for parent's desire and transformation between sectors is related to essential factors estimated as school location, school curriculum, facilities, teacher's quality, staff quality in addition to parent's socio-economic factor and parents' education. These issues assumed to be the main factors for parents' orientation from the public to the private.

In regard to parent's education, Bouhlila, (2011) considered parents in Kuwait as with highest parents' level of university-educated as their knowledge and education might lead them to select the best educational level. The question, which arose here, was, *what is the quality of education (public and private) in Kuwait?*

Obviously, this question is considered one of the main criteria that would be examined in the context of this research, however, as the researches in the area of public and private school quality in Kuwait is seldom (Al-Shehab, 2010 and Watfa & Al Motawaa 2007), the discussion points out that the researchers examined the education quality in Kuwait from different prespectives.

Al-Shehab (2010) study of Kuwait public and private schools measured the influence of the competition of the private schools on the public schools performance. The study examined 434 private public schools in different districts in Kuwait. The study suggested that there are negative associations between the private enrolment and public-school quality. The study admitted that the Kuwaiti government are working efficiently in public

education compare to some private schools and their performance is not affected by the private enrolment and this give the reason for higher public student enrolment. Al-Shehab argued that good public schools and academic performance in Kuwait are related to good government “spends on public schooling lavishly out of the affluence of the present oil plethora era” (Al-Shehab, 2010, 192). The study argued that the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education spends on better curriculum development and employs top teachers around the Arab world and provides them with good salaries and better accommodation. Moreover, the study suggested that the private schools competition in Kuwait could not substitute the public schooling because of several factors related to “socioeconomic and academic attainment consideration” (ibid, p.192). In this regards it is important to stand at these facts: *Socioeconomic and academic achievements* standard in Kuwait in both public and private schools help in coming up with better understanding of the situation.

#### 2.4 Academic Achievements at the Public/Private Schools

In consideration of public schools quality in Kuwait, it is important to spot out the whole system quality including teachers' quality. In this perspective, Watfa & Al Motawaa (2007) examined the phenomenon of parents' orientation from public schools to private schools in Kuwait. Their research surveyed 674 parents from the private school in Kuwait. The study revealed that parents in Kuwait accept as true that the private schools has positive education manner compare to the public schools.

The study showed that parents find that the private schools achieve their aspiration, as the children outcomes in the private schools satisfy them and they believe that the private schools provide their children with latest knowledge. On asking about the public schools, parents admitted that the public schools lack what offered in the private. The study indicators for parent's motivation corresponded with Al -Shatti (2009) results.

Alshatti (2009) examined parents' motivational factor to switch between the public and the private in kindergarten stage. The study examined parent, teachers and head teachers in public and private schools. The results revealed that private schools offer several motivation features for the parents and children. One of the most important factor is the better English language learning and better quality of teachers and facilities. Al-shatti pinpointed that parents in public schools disagree with the children education and knowledge they have been taught in the public schools. Number of public school parents show their desire to switch to the private sector as the private schools set up better basics and preparation for the children in this stage. Parents in

the government sector “found that the curriculum content was poorly designed, which was a major deficiency for the children” (AlShatti, 2011p.12). The research demonstrated that 67 percent of the respondents agreed that the curriculum needed improvement.

The literature assumes that there is a clear dilemma tied within the education system quality in Kuwait in both public and private. Yet the literature presumes that the private school quality is considered superior on comparing with the public-school quality. In student achievements and quality matter concern, the study of Bouhlila, (2011) argued that TIMSS 2007 results revealed that Kuwait public school students are of very low outcomes in Mathematics and science as they considered Kuwait public school students below the international average and they do not reach the benchmark level as they acquire the basic cognitive skills (see table 1). Al-Sahel, (2005) argued that the underachievement of the students in Kuwait interprets poor reading and writing quality as 64.2 percent of examined teachers anticipated strong relation between student poor achievements and reading.

However, parents realize that teachers’ competence is an issue need further consideration within the context of public schools in Kuwait as teachers are considered a key factor in the educational process and they acquire high appreciation from parents. Many years ago, Al Kandary (1995) reported that teachers in Kuwait were with low performance and facing several problems related to the public sector policies and regulation as well as problems related to their teaching process and preparation however, these problems dramatically remained until today, as Alshatti (2011) reported that the teachers themselves in the public sector clarifies that they need further assistant with their in service professional development for their teaching process. Furthermore, the public sector complains from several bureaucratic policies that lack better teachers’ development. Similarly, Al-Ahmad (2000), in these regards, made an obvious statement, as he argued that what was revealed from his study in Kuwait teachers’ preparation and training programmes was that teachers are poorly prepared and the, “Courses within the programme may fail to meet the specific academic needs of primary level teachers”. He also added that “teaching practice was insufficient and traditionally hampered by poor support and supervision in the training schools” (Al Ahmad, 2000).

## **2.5 Private Education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)**

In UAE, Dubai allocates large private school market compared to the public schools (246 private schools with 191,000 pupils for 78 public schools with 27,000student), however in Abu

Dhabi, many schools are serving the low-income families by offering low tuition fee, these fee amount seems stable for the benefit of the poor people, these schools teach the country basic curriculum or the Asian curricula (Moujaes et al, 2011). The major aim of number of these schools is to provide English medium and satisfy parents demand, as most of the low cost schools lack the advanced resources and facilities but remain receive acceptance from parents. Moujaes, et, al. (2011) showed that “more than half of the emirate’s schools operate with low and potentially insufficient resource levels”.

Thorne, (2011) study clarified that in the UAE the government school system faces an obvious fail as Emirates have neglected the public schools and oriented to the private sector. It was demonstrated that the major reasons are determined in the following facts: The public schools study syllabus and curriculum work according to unclear objectives and have many conflicts in applying the task. Poor teaching methods are the factors lead to drop-out in the students’ outcomes and motivate most parents to enroll their children in the private education.

for instance, in Dubai private schools, Moujaes et. al., (2011) identified that the enrolment increases by more than 2 percentage points annually, reaching around 55 percent by the year 2011, Yet in higher education the UAE has the “largest number of higher education institution” over the GCC countries (Bertelsen2009). As well as Dubai and Abu Dhabi are considered the highest enrolment in the private schools, Bertelsen (2009) justified that the high enrolment of student in private sector results from parents’ awareness of the low quality of public education compare to the private one, as the students in private grade 4 and 8 attain high results in TIMSS exams compare to the public schools, as a result the study findings revealed that “International student assessments, such as PISA and TIMSS, repeatedly rank the national public education systems in the region among the lowest in the world. This lack of quality education is worrisome to many GC parents” (Moujaes et al, 2011, p.8)

## 2.6 Private Education in Qatar

Turning to Qatar experience, in 2008 the General Secretariat for Development Planning issued their future vision and plan to achieve advanced global development in 2030. The vision focuses on human, social, economic and environmental development. The education branch falls within the human development issues. The education aspect aims to meet the needs and develop the capabilities of the new generations, and to provide funds for the scientific educational research to boost and crystallised the system. The programme stresses on, “Well-

developed, independent, self-managing and accountable educational institutions operating under centrally-determined guidelines” (General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2008).

Following the new vision Qatar transfers the education system to a new system called public-private partnership PPP, this system can be applied on the government schools however the private schools can remain available. Qatar established a certain criteria for the private education to operate along with and reform of several policies regard the, finance and the accountability, policies and administrations, curriculum and learning and teaching strategies. This action has been taken in Qatar as a result of several issues related to the low quality in public education. Constant et al, (2010, p. 452) argued that in public schools in Qatar, “many school buildings were old, and many classrooms were overcrowded and lacked modern equipment and supplies”.

Comparing the students’ outcomes, Constant et al, (2010) indicated that the private schools that were not adopting the ministry curriculum, their students’ performance in Arabic, English, Mathematics and science was higher than public school student’ performance.

As the private sector showed superior over the public schools, the PPP and privatization actions adopted in Qatar. In 2011 the indicator for student’s enrolment showed approximately 158,000 students distributed in 200 PPP schools and 237 enrolled in the private schools (Moujaes et. Al., 2011).

As a result of the reform system, several limitations appears, Constant, et. Al., (2010) stated that, in Qatar, the policy makers face several challenges in term of balancing the education reforms with the parents and schools demands. for example: Teachers and staff professional development are considered an obstacle to the new curriculum administration, as old teachers need development courses to cope with the new curriculum. In addition, some deficiencies appears with the school seats as in high quality schools the spaces rapidly get completed.

## 2.7 Private Education in Iran

In Iran context during the year 1998 Iran Parliament embarked to provide decentralized policies and allow the private sector to cooperate in education. The World Bank (2009) indicated that this action “enable Iran to increase enrolment ratio, extend educational opportunities to the poorest regions of the country and reduce gender gaps in all level of education” (cited in: Rahimi and Nabilou, 2011, p.69). The data showed that the private school ratio raised from 0.01% in 1990 to 8% in 2009. (ibid).

Rahimi and Nabilou, (2011) conducted significant study in public and private schools in Iran to measure English teachers' effectiveness and the results revealed that the teaching quality in the private schools are higher than in public schools as well as the English teachers are more effective in the private than in public schools. Correspondingly, Rabiei and Salehi (2007) indicated that the private schools provide the best quality of services as students who study in private are more satisfied regarding the quality of services compare to the public schools also the exams passing ratio is higher in the private schools compare to the public ones. Moreover, the study showed that the teaching quality is furthermore better in the private than the public.

## 2.8 Private Education in Lebanon

Several authors insist that the private education in Lebanon is in different situation than any other countries in MENA. The private education history in Lebanon is related to a long decade ago. For instance, Tooley, 2012, stated that SABIS<sup>1</sup> the private education company has started in Lebanon since 1886, the mother school of SABIS company is called "The international school of Choueifat" (Tooley,2012, p.322), which is located in Chouifat in Lebanon. SABIS spends decade of success by serving people under several conditions and difficult circumstances in Lebanon, as it remains generous. Abdo (2010, p.13) found related view to Tooley's and argues, that "In fact, private school education has always played a major role in Lebanon, especially during and after the 1975-1990 Civil War as it grew to fill the gap left by the weakened public education system".

Till today the SABIS Company serves 60,000 students from several social classes and coming from fifteen different countries. SABIS adopts innovated curriculum focused on teachers' excellence and rich data content with technology supplement the learning process that lead to universal educational system for all wealthy and poor students. The real strategies that SABIS follows is to provide lower cost and little profit alongside to higher-quality and freedom of education, their main aims is to create an equal educated generation "by helping lift poor people out of poverty" (ibid, p.331) and establishing the enhanced environment as they

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<sup>1 1</sup> SABIS is a global education network that has an active presence in 20 countries on five continents. Schools in the SABIS® Network educate over 70,000 students and implement a proven, proprietary system. SABIS® Network schools provide students with a top-quality education that prepares them to meet the challenges of a changing world. (SSABIS, 2017).

believe in that “better environment for them [poor families] will mean better environment for everybody” (ibid, p.331). SABIS example is considered one of the famous private education companies in Lebanon that implement the principle of “social justice” (ibid, p.302). Although, some authors conversely see the schools for profit are not for the benefit of the consumers and it is commercial and unproductive, as Fergany, N. (2008, p.7) founds. Though low and perhaps deteriorating quality being the major failing of Arab education systems, private for-profit education has not helped improve quality of education significantly.

Tooley, (2012) challenged this and showed that education is similar to any other business that needs profit to improve the quality. education must be implemented in an open market with freedom to apply competition that could not work well with high profit but can survive with little profit and high quality such as SABIS which serves many students in many countries and offers them the best education.

## 2.9 Curriculum Quality and Students Achievements in MENA

The majority of MENA countries public school curriculum is linked to their religion and culture practices although each country has its own curriculum design and plan, students whom parents prefer them to educate in English or any other languages in the region have the option to do so (Ofori-Attah, 2008).

The question that needs to be discovered is how good is curriculum reform? This question was examined in different distance by several authors. Ofori-Attah (2008), argued that the public education reform in MENA influence most of the content and subjects, text books. The reform of education in MENA public schools intended to, add technology in education with rules and regulation on the World Wide Web, it was indicated that “educational technology has become an integral part of the teaching and learning activities” (Ofori-Attah, 2008, p.38). Moreover, the educational reforms offer students the opportunity to learn relevant and valuable skills that will make them competitive in national and international arenas. These reforms have brought about significant changes in education for all students in the region” (Ofori-Attah, 2008).

Although, World Bank, (2008), Isfahani et. Al., (2011) agreed that the educational reforms in MENA benefit many children in free public school access and present improved learning outcomes, However, in general outlook at MENA curriculum existence, the World Bank (2008) vision considered many countries in MENA as having little intention to develop curriculum, textbook and internet connection. Morocco, Iraq,

Yemen and Djibouti are believed to be with lower curriculum and pedagogy performance, which impacts student's outcomes. Similarly, Fergany, (2008) stressed that the low quality in several Arab educational system centralised among clear exhaustive outlines.

Along with all curriculum reforms the World Bank stressed that the student's outcomes and achievements are highly dropout and the scores are lower than other international rates with several disparities in regards to the quality. The region faces deficiencies in graduated students from science and those with skills and essential expertise. The literature stressed that although the government's finance in education, the finance only is not sufficient for the entire education reform. The educational managerial strategies for planning the teaching, learning and the curriculum would be considered as crucial factors for boosting the education quality (Isfahani et al, 2011).

In 2007, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) interestingly evaluated the curriculum content in MENA for fifteen countries including Kuwait, taking into consideration that the public schools are considered mostly the majority compare to the private. The results of Mathematics and science show very poor outcomes average in the region compare to another high performance countries. Out of 500 scale results showed that MENA countries are of very low performance, the highest performance country in the scale is Dubai, UAE (461 in Math and 489 in Science) than Lebanon (Bouhlila, 2011). Furthermore, it is important to point out that Dubai and Lebanon allocate higher number of private schools, which could reflect this percentage. However, Kuwait revealed lower results as the students' scores is 354 in Math and 418 in sciences. (ibid).

Similar findings were revealed from Valverde (2005) study. The study explored Science and Math results of the student in several MENA countries (Iran, Jordon, Morocco and Tunisia). MENA public school students' performance in Biology and Mathematics were below the expectation.

Similar findings were showed with World Bank (1998) and Bouhlila (2011) they demonstrated that the curriculum in the region of MENA lacks the flexibility of learning and the judgement for more challengeable tasks in life. Furthermore, World Bank (2008 p. 49) stressed that the education in the Arab world mainly focus on "repetition of definition, and knowledge of facts and concepts, and less on developing critical-thinking and problem –solving capacities", (cited in Helbling, and Page (1998) and Riodha (1998).

In this respect, The UN and UNESCO suggested that seven MENA countries are not expected to approach the `millennium

goals` in 2015 these countries are Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Morocco, Syria, and Yemen (Benard, 2006).

## 2.10 Teachers' quality in MENA

The teacher is considered the most important tool in the educational process and good teachers are responsible for the best results. The previous, section in this literature review shows that in Pakistan good teachers determine parents' orientation to the school as parents found that the better school is the better teaching staff (Andrabi et al, 2007). Within the context of MENA, Chapman and Miric (2009, p. 319) considered the teacher as "the central input within a production function model because they mediate the influence and impact of most other inputs". Parents similarly consider the teacher as the essential factor in the education process, and parent's demands for selecting the child school was examined by Moujaes at. El., (2011), the research recognised several indicators that may influence parent's decision, however parents selected teacher's quality factor as a very important feature for their desire of school.

The governments in several MENA countries keen on establishing teachers' quality in public schools, the governments raise the teacher income and incentives as an action to encourage teacher to perform better and increase their efficiency to foster delivery of education. "Although MENA countries have invest heavily in teachers' salaries, it has not necessarily been in ways that lead to better instruction practices at the classroom level" Chapman and Miric (2009.n.326) . Similarly, Winters (2011. n. 1) argued that. Higher salaries are just as attractive to bad teachers as they are to great teachers. Increasing teacher salaries across the board without consideration of how effective a teacher is in the classroom do not improve the teacher's quality.

Although, Chapman and Miric (2009) found that the teachers in public schools in MENA are provided with incentives and motivations aspects. Furthermore, teachers' salaries are considered very high compare to other countries; consequently, teacher's employment rise and cause the highly teachers-student ratio number in the region. The study demonstrated that teacher-student ratio showed high increase in several MENA countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Iran and Yemen.

Moreover, Chapman and Miric (2009) indicated that the governments in MENA advocate that teachers in public schools are with suitable qualification and degree, which equivalent to students age group and the subject they teach. However, ZeyXu and Gulosino (2006) empirical study discovered teachers' quality and influences in education and found that teachers qualification and degree are not considered as indicator for good teacher

quality and better children achievements. What impact children outcomes are certainly teacher's behaviour in teaching besides their qualification. ZeyXu and Gulosino research considered teachers qualification factor as insufficient for better teaching outcomes. Their study provided an evidence as the private sector teachers are holding lower qualification of teachers with less master and Bachelor degree compare to the public school teachers, however the research revealed that student achievements in the private sector is outperforming the public in most major subjects and teachers are showing high performance in teaching.

This might be considered a valid statement as MENA region complains from poor quality of teachers and poor student achievements though teachers are qualified. Chapman and Miric (2009) argued that teachers in MENA are with low quality because they could not implement the expected teaching performance and the students could not learn effectively. Akkari, (2004) believed that the educational challenge in MENA is the weaknesses of teacher's quality, which affect the education quality in general.

Chapman and Miric (2009) have attracted a great deal of interest in recent years, as they argued, one of the main factors for the education deficiencies in MENA which is the ineffectiveness of teachers preparation and training during their in-service. Teachers in MENA show lack of the ability to implement the new technologies in the classrooms.

To boost the agenda of education quality, Zaalouk, (2010) defined that teachers' professional development reforms need to be considered as an urgent action in MENA, by establishing teacher's education programme inside the schools and supported by universities and academia.

For instance, Mohammad (2006) investigated the training arrangement for teacher in the Egyptian Ministry of Education. He viewed teachers' opinions to get better understanding of the situation. It was declared that the training courses provided for public school teachers are insufficient and do not reflect on approaching teachers' real needs. The evaluation of teachers' quality in Egypt found that even though teachers would have the skills and the qualifications, they would be unable to maintain this for a long period and would require for further in-service training to cope with the new innovation and globalisation they are facing.

Moreover, Chapman and Miric (2009) stressed that teachers' supervision in MENA public education system considered weak which lead to poor teachers quality, as when compare it with Lebanon private schools, teachers show good

example of success in students achievements because the system accountability and teachers supervision are effective.

The literature demonstrated that MENA teacher's quality in public schools considered a serious issue which needs more consideration from the governments and better solutions. As teacher's qualifications and teachers' incentives or salaries play a major role in raising teacher's quality, there are a clear low students' performance in MENA, which resulted from the poor mechanism and procedures to improve teacher's quality.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Study Population**

In order to compare the effectiveness of public and private schools in MENA region this research study was conducted into two stages. In the first phase, unrepresented samples specifically focused on the western primary school data were used. The student' reports and audit reports were used as samples to find the effectiveness of western schools that costs the most on the fees graph of primary schools of different origin. This phase studied pupils of the primary sateg (i.e. from class I to V) through their academic scores and curriculum so that the teaching and learning quality in the western schools can be found. The outcome variables and learning indicators were identified to assess the overall performance of students (Ritchie, et. al., 2013).

In the second phase, the primary school students of Arabic and Asian schools were evaluated. The students' grades were kept similar (i.e. from class I to V) so that the academic performance can be easily compared. In the third phase, private and public school students were evaluated in general and mixed samples from western, Arabic and Asian schools were selected. Nation-level data were taken from schools in the GCC member countries and comparative documentary research was performed to conduct a qualitative research study.

#### **3.2 Sampling Method**

The sampling method used was the purposeful sampling so that variable cases of students and organizations can be evaluated. Purposeful sampling enabled the researcher to look into the reasons associated with a particular phenomenon because the collected samples were rich in information. Useful manifestations regarding the phenomenon of interest can be obtained through purposeful sampling method. This method aimed at providing an insight about the target problem and did not give only empirical generalizations. Hence, the researcher was able to find out the root-cause of the problem (Lewis, 2015). This study used the purposeful sampling method to compare the education quality in

all types of schools including western, Arabic and Asian categories so that the common perception about the difference in quality can be justified or negated.

Furthermore, this evaluation of academic quality could also be a source of rectifying the cost and affordability issues. For instance, western schools claim their education quality to be better than others and thus charge high fees as a reason. This research about the difference in quality could be used as a marker to make education affordable to all citizens.

### 3.3 Data Collection

Dynamic qualitative method was used to collect data as it directed researcher's attention towards detail. Dynamic system believes that system is continuously facing changes due to various turbulent mechanisms. It focuses not only on individuals but also covers the changes in the organizations and communities to give an insight concerning the influencing factors. Thus, a dynamic system method of data collection was the most suitable for this study as it helps in seeking out the situational dynamics of quality and enables screening of student's performance with respect to both curriculum and teaching practices applied. In addition, a holistic perspective was used to understand the complex educational system with various distinctions applicable in the GCC member countries (Lewis, 2015).

Comparative documentary research method was used to assess the academic performance of students. This method is cost-effective as it does not involve surveys, interviews and direct observation of participants. Comparative documentary method is suitable for our study as it will enable detailed and comparative analysis of student's transcripts, academic curriculum and teacher's remarks so that the limitations of physical sources can be investigated (Ritchie et al. 2013).

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive and interpretive method was used for the qualitative analysis of the data collected. This method allows the mixing and matching of various elements so that the effectiveness of all these elements can be compared in details (Ritchie et. al., 2013). Hence, descriptive method was the best-suited for this research study as it allowed the detailed comparison of education quality in both private and public schools. It also provided the researcher with the opportunity to compare different elements of the study such as comparison between western, Arabic and Asian schools distinctively apart from a general comparison.

Descriptive qualitative research gave flexibility to study developing phenomena or situational changes occurring in

response to the on-going collection of data. Therefore, dynamic method of data collection was used for this study as it gels best with the descriptive method of analysis. Thus, the descriptive method helped the researcher to prudently reflect upon all the interrelated elements about academic success of students and gave the flexibility to record all the situational changes on the part of students besides the curriculum used (Elliott and Timulak, 2005).

The general strategy applied in the descriptive qualitative research was the context of the research → onset markers of the problem → identification of the coping strategy → outcome of the problem. This research study has also intended to know the context of differences in the academic quality in schools and to find out the solutions of reducing the differences by knowing the onset markers of differentiation in the curriculum and teaching quality (Elliott and Timulak, 2005).

The first step of data analysis was preparing the collected data which was in the form of documents and notes ready for analysis. The fonts of documents were first transcribed for making it easily distinguished. This initial preparation was extremely helpful for the researcher in making a pre-analysis of the information. Repetitions and redundancies in the data were removed during this data preparation phase (Lewis, 2015).

The validity of the data collected and analysed was performed by an independent auditing process. The validation method used in this study was through case collection in which previous case-studies on the topic were researched and comparison of results was performed. Thus, the study has already provided the review of literature so that readers may judge the validity of our research findings. Moreover, we have categorised the previous research data with respect to the theme of our research to make our study findings rigorous and valid (Lewis, 2015).

#### 4. Results

The results of this study revealed that students in western schools who are admitted through a strict selection process has the fittest ratio of performing academically well as compared to public school students. This finding strongly suggested that western schools uses additional instruments to select the academically proficient students and also have higher tendency to control the student's characteristics. The student's that did not have the capacity to pass the admission test took admission in public schools which now have to work more hard to make them academically sound. Similar analysis was replicated when Arabic and Asian private school students were compared to public school students on the basis of their academic performance. In the light

of these findings, it can be said that private school market is continuously on a rise in MENA region (Brixi et al. 2015).

Another aspect of differences found in the education quality is lack of teaching expertise found in public schools as compared to private schools in the MENA region. The teachers are not well-equipped due to low pay scales in public schools and negative association of teacher-pupil interaction. Public school teachers are not much interactive and did not focus much on classroom activities. Thus, students learning at public school did not get the necessary classroom attention which is appropriately provided in private educational institutions (El-Araby, 2011).

Moreover, heavily crowded classrooms were observed in public institutions as compared to private institutions because of the affordability of public schools by majority of the population in the MENA region. The government-funded private schools did not spend much on their infrastructure and classroom requirements of students. Thus, the students are not aware of latest learning technologies and could not match the competencies of private-school students (El-Araby, 2011).

The poor quality of educational and teaching skills is also reflected from a mismatch between the needs of the employment industry and student's skills. Thus, student's expertise to meet the employment skill needs is the biggest challenge faced by the MENA region population. The pattern of enrolment of students in private and public institutions also brings a question mark over governmental interference in education. Governmental funding is required in the making of strong curriculum and advanced teaching methods shall be applied to meet the present and future employment needs of the region (Ryan, 2016).

Another major cause of decline in academic performance among public school students observed is the inadequate assessment and monitoring of their performance. Governments in the GCC countries shall introduce modern assessment systems to monitor the educational needs and outcomes of students. Furthermore, extreme attention is required towards planning of curriculum which shall consist of classroom activities for enhancing the learning experience of students. The curriculum changes shall be proficient enough to match the modern educational demands and should contain flexible activities that can be easily performed by students with different mental abilities (Muysken and Nour, 2006).

A serious transition from public to private education mode was observed as parent's have more confidence on private school teaching approaches. Thus, many GCC citizens who were previously relying on public schools have shifted their focus towards private schools (El-Araby, 2011). It is obvious from the

study findings that the overall efficiency of students is decreasing in the region which is extremely affecting the employment chances of students studying in public schools. It is also observed that despite of the popularity of private schools in the region, the transition towards private school is difficult due to their high cost. However, the pressure to enroll students in private school has compelled parents to take educational loans which has added to the cost of living in the region. It is observed that high affordability costs of private institutions in the MENA region is likely to cause negative impacts upon the equity dimensions of government's educational finance policy. Therefore, two challenges are brought in-front of GCC member countries which are assuring quality education at affordable prices to deal with the employment crisis in the years to come (Ryan, 2016).

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study are also well-supported by the governmental surveys that have showed scarcity of infrastructure and inefficiency of assessment methods resulting into low academic outcomes in public schools. Therefore, government expenditure on education is particularly boosted in MENA countries to manage the demand-supply ratio by various industries and private businesses. Expansions in educational projects has also been observed recently to cope with inefficient educational services provided to public school students. It is essential to understand that government-funding in the education sector is necessary for promoting economic growth and maintain social stability in the future generations.

The basic challenge that is found to be the cause of the variation among the public and private schools is poorly-qualified teaching faculty and out-dated teaching curriculum applicable in public institutions. Teacher's training and hiring of qualified teachers shall be the primary objective of public school administrations. It is observed that private schools, on the other hand, provide international curriculum, have hired skilled teachers and have deputed world-class infrastructure into their teaching facilities to make a difference. Thus, private schools feel themselves righteous in giving quality education by charging high amount of fees.

Therefore, governments in MENA region have to work towards the betterment of their infrastructure and teaching faculty to compete with private educational institutions which will eventually turn the student traffic back to government-funded public institutions. This re-emerging of public institutions will force the private institutions to reduce their fees and make affordable fees structure so that student traffic in these institutions could be maintained. Moreover, improvement in the

**educational infrastructure in public sector will also promote financial equity and will reduce the economic inflation in the MENA region. This study has therefore successfully demarcated the major differences between private and public educational institutions. The findings of this study can be used to improve the economic viability of MENA region in the long-run by increasing the skills and expertise of the future workforce.**

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