Comparing Social Skills of Students with and Without Education Vouchers

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Abstract: Financing schooling through education vouchers is relatively a novice concept in Pakistan though it has been widely used throughout the world. The current study was conducted to investigate whether the students being provided with vouchers by Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) possess a higher level of social skills or those who are not provided with education vouchers. Categorical variables-gender and family sizes-were also taken into consideration. Data were collected on Rabbani Social Skills Rating Scale (RSSRS) from 504 grade 8 students, of which 252 received vouchers and the other 252 did not; 247 were male and 257 female students. Independent Samples t-test and one-way ANOVA showed a non-significant overall difference, a significant gender wise difference with female students having higher level of social skills than male students and a non-significant difference on the basis of family size.

Key words: Education Vouchers • Social Skills • Gender • Family Size

INTRODUCTION

Established in 1991 and restructured in 2004 as an autonomous organization [1], Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) aims at,

“To promote quality education through Public Private Partnership, encourage and support the efforts of private sector through technical and financial assistance, innovate and develop new instruments to champion wider educational opportunities at affordable cost to the poor.” [2]

This target of promoting affordable quality education has been addressed in many ways by the foundation right from its establishment. All its schemes are chiefly for the less privileged and disenfranchised sections of the society in Public Private Partnership (PPP) like Foundation Assisted Schools (FAS), Continuous Professional Development Program (CPDP), New School Programme (NSP) and Education Voucher Scheme (EVS), etc. This study focuses on one of these schemes-Education Voucher Scheme (EVS)-to investigate and compare social skills of students benefitting and non-benefitting from education vouchers.

Education Vouchers: EVS (Education Voucher Scheme) is one of the unique programs, Punjab Education Foundation has launched till today. Its aim is to provide quality education to the out of school children or those who has left schools due to their financial and social difficulties, or children from the poorest of the poor families with a deep fear of dropping out due to poverty. EVS advocates argue that a voucher scheme expands the poor’s educational choice by including schools of high quality. Advocates claim that EVS is an equitable intervention because it increases the educational choices of the poor relative to non-poor. In addition, EVS advocates contend that EVS makes it financially viable for non-public schools to operate for poor children. The arguments made by EVS advocates are especially persuasive for urban slums and rural areas where governments have failed to provide public schools [3].

A key source of educational inequity in developing countries is that poor children have fewer educational choices than non-poor children. Specifically, the educational choices of poor children are limited to no schools or low-quality schools; non-poor children have greater choice because quality schools are affordable for
them [4]. Educational voucher scheme (EVS) is often proposed to remedy such educational inequities between poor and non-poor children.

There are different models of financing in voucher schemes. In some voucher scheme the selected families get finances from the government to send their kids in schools and on the other side schools get the finances directly from the government. This funding could be in different forms like tax relief, grants for teachers’ salaries or the finances in accordance with the number of voucher students studying in the schools. In Pakistan the vouchers are redeemable in private schools only. Pakistani Model resembles with Columbia Model in the sense that both are limited to low-income and till secondary level students.

In Pakistan EVS initially introduced in certain selected areas of Northern Lahore, Punjab. Very small houses in which ignorance, lowest literacy rates with no professional skill, unemployment, very limited income, unhygienic living conditions, hopelessness, extraordinary conservative in their behavior and continuous struggle for the survival are common features of the residents. They appear to be hopeless, waiting for anything good to come in their way to prosperity [5]. Common people especially the poor men have no reach to the quality education because of its high cost. Voucher scheme may be a way to get quality education. The voucher scheme gives choice to the parents to select schools. The effect of voucher schemes especially for the developing countries is needed to find more evidences to draw any conclusion.

This intervention was started in October 2006 with 1000 vouchers for 13 EVS partner schools. In different time periods the number of vouchers increased and number of schools also increased. In start of the EVS, partner schools were selected after preliminary Quality Assurance Test (QAT) of the students studying in the schools after due advertisement in the newspapers and short listing of the schools according to the criteria mentioned in the advertisement. After QAT schools are inspected for physical infrastructure and for verifying the area. Schools fulfilling the specified criteria are selected for EVS partnership. Now the applicant schools have been exempted from QAT. However preliminary QAT has been excluded from the selection process.

The criterion for selecting children eligible for vouchers is:

- Children should be from the area approved by the PEF-(Board of Directors) BOD.
- They should be from poor families as demonstrated by utility bills indicating their socioeconomic status.
- Students must have to study in private schools.

In term of financing the voucher amount covers the full cost of tuition fee and other allied charges and PEF-BOD can increase the amount keeping in view the inflation rate. The schools charging more than the voucher amount before partnership are allowed to charge the additional amount with due permission from PEF.

**Social Skills:** The role of social skills is very crucial in developing citizenship, socialization, helping to each other and undertaking the responsibility. The developing of the social skills starts from early education. Primary education helps the students to command the basic competencies like to obey the social rules [6]. The learning of the norms and believes by the children as a result of interaction with the society is called socialization [7] and the students who have developed the social skills are successful in different aspects of life [8].

Social skills are defined as the ability of effective communication with other people [9]. Social skills are very necessary for a successful life because children with social skills enjoy their life by participating in different activities and having the technique to solve daily interpersonal problem [10] while the student without these skill may not be fit in their friend company. Social skills can be divided as verbal and nonverbal behaviors. For example body language, controlling over the anger, problem solving and developing interpersonal problems [11].

Elliott and Busse [12] discussed five main categories of social skills behaviour:

- Cooperation (compatibility with others by complying with social rules and expectations)
- Assertion (it includes such skills as initiating conversations with others, acknowledging compliments and inviting others to interact)
- Responsibility (communication with adults and demonstration of care)
- Empathy (showing concern for the feelings of others)
- Self-control: It is the ability to respond appropriately to conflict or ‘corrective feedback’ from an adult.
Caldarella and Merrell [13] defined five of the following dimensions of social skills:

- **Peer Relations**: It is the skill that helps the students to treat with their peer in positively i.e., offering help, inviting others to play.
- **Self Control**: These skills reflect a child or a youth who is able to control his or her temper, follow the rules and limitations, make compromises with others and accept criticism well.
- **Academic skills**: It is the ability of the students to work or complete his or her assignment independently.
- **Cooperation**: It is the helping other people, sharing and abiding by rules. However, the majority of researchers who identified a similar dimension used the term "cooperation" instead.
- **Assertion**: It includes initiating behaviours, asking for things and responding to behaviours of others.

**Social Skills and Gender**: Children though grown in almost similar type of eco-systems and exposed to similar sort of experience may differ owning to varying parenting styles, family gender conceptions and societal values regarding social interaction with peers. Children’s social development is determined by the complex interaction of the children themselves, their home environment, peer relationships and the larger socio-cultural environment [14]. According to Pitcher and Schultz [15], girls tend to like playing with the same sex at an early age, this difference is reversed after some years. This phenomenon of children’s giving preference to same sex playmates is a universal trend at the early age [16]. At a later age, however, there is notable empirical evidence that girls are more social than boys in that they spend more time in social activities done in small groups; playing games that are cooperative in nature and turn-taking type of games; engage in more person fantasy; and are more caring and sensitive to fulfill the requirements of collaboration and cooperation. On the other hand, boys are keener in engaging larger group games involving physical activity and rough and hard play [17-23].

Maccoby [24] opines that boys are more social in that they build friendship on the foundation of shared activities and interests whereas girls’ friendships are characterized by emotional and physical closeness. Anme, T. et al. [25] found significant gender differences regarding students’ social skills on Interaction Rating Scale (IRS) with girls getting higher score than boys on most of the sub-scales.

**Social Skills and Number of Family Members**: Number of siblings or the family size has been reported to affect students’ achievement, intelligence, sociability and other characteristics. One point of view in this regard is the prevailing myth that children from large families learn social and interaction skills that children from small families do not. The second view is that children from small families are more social than the children with big families because they interact with their parents and other adults more. This interaction, being individualized, give them the chance to acquire advanced knowledge as the adults have vastly more experience and knowledge than a sibling does. The third viewpoint is that number of siblings doesn’t matter at all.

Many researchers have tried to probe into the issue of sibling effect on students’ personal variables like IQ, achievement, social skills and many more. Velandia, Grandon and Page [26] conducted a study in Colombia on 36000 college applicants. They found on a bivariate basis that students in families of three rank highest for their IQs and sociability and those from families of one or two children rank somewhat lower. Beyond the three-child family, scores go down continuously up to the largest families of ten children. There are some other research studies with the finding that sibsize is related to ability and sociability through the family environment variables and that the relation is specific for verbal ability [27-30].

A study conducted in Haryana, India by Pushpalata, Dhanda and Singh [31] revealed that there was a non-significant effect of family size on students’ social skills. Some recent large-scale studies [32, 33] also claim not to have found a sibsize effect on IQ and other student characteristics.

Recognizing the need to explore the potential effect of education vouchers on students’ social skills, the present study was conducted. The following research questions were put forth for this study:

- Is there any significant difference between EVS and Non-EVS students on their mean social skills scores?
- Does gender play any part in differentiating EVS and Non-EVS students on their mean social skills scores?
- Is there any significant difference between EVS and Non-EVS students on their mean social skills scores regarding the number of their family members?

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Participants**: The study was conducted on a sample of 504 grade 8 students from 17 schools. These schools are partner with Punjab Education Foundation EVS.
Table 1: Overall and factor wise reliability of the RSSRS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RSSRS Factors</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>Serial No of item in final instrument</th>
<th>Cronbach Alpha Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall scale</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1-35</td>
<td>0.906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2,16,21,22,23,25,26,30</td>
<td>0.829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertion</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,19,20,27,33</td>
<td>0.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3,4,5,28,34</td>
<td>0.691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Skills</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6,24,29,31,32,36</td>
<td>0.683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Control</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,17,18,35</td>
<td>0.688</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This finalized instrument was used to collect data from 504 grade 8 students from two districts *i.e.* Lahore and Kasur.

**RESULTS**

**Research Question 1:** Table 2 reflects the comparison of overall and factor wise social skills of voucher and non-voucher students. For this purpose a series of independent samples t-test was applied. The results of independent sample t-test indicate that there is no significance difference between the overall and factor wise social skills of voucher and non-voucher students. The mean score of social skills of voucher holder students (M=96.13, SD=13.65) has no significance difference with the mean score social skills of non-voucher students (M=97.33, SD=12.68). The results of independent sample t-test show that there is no statistically significance difference of social skills between voucher and non-voucher students. The value of t=1.01 is not significant at α=.005.

Figure 1 graphically illustrates the comparison of voucher and non-voucher students on social skills.

**Research Question 2:** Table 3 shows the results of independent sample t-test. The t-test was applied to determine the effect of gender on the social skills of the students. Results of t-test show that there is statistically significant difference in the social skills (t=3.610, p<0.000), female students perform better (M=100.91, SD=12.00) as compared to male students (M=96.66, SD=14.28). So it can be claimed that there is a significant difference between

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**Table 2: Comparison of social skills of EVS and non EVS students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Voucher Mean SD</th>
<th>Non-Voucher Mean SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>24.48 4.31</td>
<td>24.79 3.75</td>
<td>-.86</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>.390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertion</td>
<td>14.98 2.71</td>
<td>15.14 2.46</td>
<td>-.71</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>13.54 2.74</td>
<td>13.89 2.61</td>
<td>-1.47</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for others</td>
<td>16.18 2.93</td>
<td>16.17 2.89</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>.963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self control</td>
<td>26.96 4.22</td>
<td>27.34 4.12</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96.13 13.65</td>
<td>97.33 12.68</td>
<td>-1.01</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>.311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
male and female students on their social skills score with female students being more social as their mean score is greater than male students.

Results of t-test shows that there is statistically difference in the factor of Cooperation ($t=6.608$, $p<0.05$), Female perform better ($M=25.76$, SD=3.40) as compare to male students ($M=23.47$, SD=4.32).

Results of t-test shows that there is statistically difference in the factor of Assertion ($t=-3.238$, $p<0.05$), Female perform better ($M=15.42$, SD=2.46) as compare to male students ($M=14.68$, SD=2.67).

Results of t-test shows that there is statistically difference in the factor of Flexibility ($t=3.384$, $p<0.05$), Female perform better ($M=14.42$, SD=2.41) as compare to male students ($M=13.67$, SD=2.58).

A series of T-test was applied to see the difference in social skill’s factor of Interpersonal skills ($t=-.325$, $p>.745$) and Self Control ($t=-.906$, $p>.336$). Results of t-test show that there is no statistically difference in the factors of Interpersonal skills and Self Control ($p>.05$) for male and female students.

This has been represented in Figure 2.

**Research Question 3:** Table 4 shows the results of One Way ANOVA. This test was applied to determine the effect of house members with in family on the social skills of the students. Results of Anova ($F=0.214$, $p=0.807$).
showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the social skills on the basis of house members within family.

**DISCUSSION**

This study was undertaken to find significant difference, if any, between students with and without vouchers on their Rabbani Social Skills Rating Scale scores with respect to gender and the number of family members. As for the overall comparison, no statistically significant difference was found between EVS and non-EVS students’ scores. The researchers could find no study with major focus on the problem. However, Ansari [34] partly addresses the issue in his paper thus, “In the context of the EVS, it seems that social cohesion is less of a priority than increasing equity and freedom of choice. The primary purpose of the program is to provide more educational choice to a marginalized segment of society. Therefore to provide families with more choice and to get more schools to participate and serve the ‘underserved’ it is understandable why there are few regulations for EVS schools.”

Special consideration is needed to probe further into the matter as the primary focus of EVS programme is on providing freedom of choice to the students and parents regarding schooling and the quality of education which is measured through quality assurance tests on a regular basis. May be in future any step is taken by the Punjab education foundation to ensure development of social skills, adoptability and cohesion among the EVS students across the partner schools.

The second question was to explore whether there was a gender based difference among EVS and non-EVS student on social skills. Independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between male and female students on their social skills score with female students being more social as their mean score is greater than male students. For overall scale, Cooperation factor, assertion factor and flexibility factor the result were the same. However, there was no significant difference for interpersonal skills and self control factors among male and female students. These results are in congruence with the past research generally because there is notable empirical evidence that girls are more social than boys in that they spend more time in social activities done in small groups; playing games that are cooperative in nature and turn-taking type of games; engage in more person fantasy; and are more caring and sensitive to fulfill the requirements of collaboration and cooperation [17, 19-22]. Anne, T. et al. [25] also found significant gender differences regarding students’ social skills on Interaction Rating Scale (IRS) with girls getting higher score than boys on most of the sub-scales.

There are, of course, some other studies which found no significant difference or came with even the reverse results. Maccoby [24], for example, opines that boys are more social in that they build friendship on the foundation of shared activities and interests whereas girls’ friendships are characterized by emotional and physical closeness.

The third variable under study was the number of family members or family size. Analysis of variance showed no significant difference in students’ social skills regarding the number of family members. These results are in consistence with some of the past research studies. A study conducted in Haryana, India by Pushpalata, Dhanda and Singh [31] revealed that there was a non-significant effect of family size on students’ social skills. Some other large-scale studies [32, 33] also claim not to have found a sibsize effect on IQ and other student characteristics. There are, however, other studies which show the contrary results. For example, Velandia, Grandon and Page [26] found on a bivariate basis that students in families of three rank highest for their IQs and sociability and those from families of one or two children rank somewhat lower. Beyond the three-child family, scores go down continuously up to the largest families of ten children. There are some other research studies with the finding that sibsize is related to ability and sociability through the family environment variables and that the relation is specific for verbal ability [27-30].

Keeping in view the above discussion, it is hereby recommended to conduct further research on the issue on a large scale with other variables as well to investigate the problem deeply and thoroughly.

**REFERENCES**