

Over 85pc private schools substandard

W.3.05 Education Dawn

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LAHORE, March 9: Over 85 per cent of private schools in the Punjab have neither devised quality syllabi nor hired trained teachers and are running on a purely commercial basis.

According to the Punjab Educational Management Information System, over 35,000 private schools are functioning in the province. Those located in every nook and corner number around 30,000. Their sole purpose is to make money.

The other 5,000 schools include autonomous school systems and chains that offer quality education but charge exorbitant fees.

The federal government last conducted the survey of registered and unregistered private schools in the year 2000.

Over 62 per cent of private schools are yet to be registered with the provincial education department.

The private schools are exploiting parents' ambition to provide their children with quality education. Most parents believe that private schools offer quality education. Therefore, they prefer private schools no matter how much is the financial burden that they have to bear.

Education department officials say that

most private schoolteachers are hardly matriculate. In a few cases, they are graduates, and private schools take advantage of their inability to find jobs to hire them on as little as Rs1,000 per month, they say.

Some government schoolteachers are of the view that students of private schools do not perform better than those of government schools. They maintain that as a consequence of substandard syllabi taught in private schools from Class I to VIII, students have to face problems when they switch over to the Punjab Textbook Board syllabus in Class IX or when they change schools.

Most private school-owners give fancy names to their institutions to attract parents, and the idea works most of the time.

Rana Jawed and Naveed Ahmed, whose sons are studying in two different private schools in Class VII, told this reporter that the schools offered different subjects, books and fee structures. They said private schools just burdened their students with more and more books rather than concentrating on imparting quality education.

Mr Jawed said that he had tried to change his son's school in a bid to provide him with quality education, but the move

resulted in no positive change as the other school was only good at charging more fee.

He said the school administration charged a few thousands rupees for allowing the students who failed in annual examination to sit in higher classes. He said the administration also charged extra money in the name of medical, photocopies and school festivals.

"It is also binding on students to buy books and guidebooks from a shop set up in the school or from commissioned shops in the market."

The private schools running in collaboration with foreign school systems can only be afforded by the well-off. These schools provide quality education against exorbitant fees.

According to PEMIS, about 50 private entrepreneurs, who had opened one school each over a decade ago, were now running chains of schools all over the province. These schools followed the syllabi in vogue in Singapore, the UK and the US, they said.

Educationalist Adnan Husain says the government should either constitute a board for all private schools to develop a uniform policy on syllabi or ask them to

introduce textbook board books to improve the quality of education. He says there should be a criteria for appointing teachers and deciding their salary packages.

Ms Nomania, principal of a renowned private school, said those private schools that charged high fees largely concentrated on improving the creative power of their students and taught quality books of international standard in all classes. She said students of ordinary private and government schools were only capable of learning by rote.

Education department officials, however, admitted that flawed policies and poor monitoring had allowed the private sector to run schools purely on a commercial basis. They also admitted that school business had become an industry.

Education Minister Imran Masood claims every now and then that the government is establishing a regulatory authority for privately managed schools to monitor the fee structure, syllabi and other affairs of private schools, but nothing has so been done in this regard.

Two such bodies constituted in the past failed to deliver.