The 10-Marla Mandate: Socio-Economic Impacts of PEF's 2026 Infrastructure Compliance Policy

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Abstract

This study looks into the major operational and socio-economic effect of the Punjab Education Foundation's (PEF) 2024-2026 infrastructure plan (PEF | Welcome to Punjab Education Foundation, n.d.), especially focusing on the requirements that all schools must have at least 10 Marla of land. While this rule is meant to ensure a uniform standard of education, it creates a serious challenge for independent Low Fee Private Schools (LFPS)((PDF) Low Fee Private Schools and the Quality of Education in Pakistan, n.d.), especially those in crowded urban areas where land is scare and expensive. The research uses a mix method, including data from online survey form from school principals and owners and a detailed look at recent educational studies. Early results show a big gap in compliance, with many urban schools operating on less than 5 Marla, the data suggests that if the strict deadline of November 2026 is enforced, there could be a lot of school's closures, leading to an "Educational Vacuum" and a rise in student dropouts, especially among girls from poorer neighbourhoods. The study also points out a growing risk of market dominance by large school chains, which might reduce the educational fairness and they are also more expensive in market. The research ends with a proposal for a "Zoning-Based Flexibility Model", suggesting vertical development and covered spaces as better alternatives to rigid land size rules. These findings offer important guidance for PEF and the School Education Department (SED) to maintain quality while ensuring access to education for local communities

Keywords: Infrastructure Mandate, PEF 2026 Roadmap, Low-Fee Private Schools (LFPS), Educational Access, Punjab Education Policy, Urban Land Scarcity.

Introduction

The instructional landscape of Pakistan is currently at a vital crossroads, grappling with the twin mission of making sure every day "get admission to" and retaining "best" as mandated by way of Article 25-A (THE CONSTITUTION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PAKISTAN, n.d.) of the constitution and the Sustainable development purpose 4 (SDG4) (author Corporate: UNESCO. Director-General, 2023). For decades, the general public region has struggled to satisfy the demands of a rapidly developing populace, leading to a massive supply-call for gap within the training machine. In this vacuum, the Low-price personal school (LFPS) sector has emerged no longer just as a parallel device, but as a primary company of education for low-earnings and middle-earnings households. Recent information spotlights this structural shift, displaying that private academic establishments in Pakistan have grown to approximately 197,000, considerably outnumbering the 158,225 public schools. This disaggregation suggests that the kingdom's function has essentially shifted from being the sole issuer to a regulator of a complex, multi-

tiered academic market. In the province of Punjab, this shift has been institutionalized through the Punjab training basis (PEF) and the recent public colleges Reorganization Programme (PSRP). The government's roadmap for 2024-2026 aims to outsource or privatize over 14,000 public faculties to non- public partners and NGOs to enhance control efficiency and decrease the economic burden on the country. even as these Public-private Partnerships (PPPs) have been praised for improving "nice assurance" through everyday testing (QAT), they have got also added a new regime of stringent regulatory compliance (author Corporate: UNESCO. Director-General, 2023). The most debated amongst these is the "10-Marla Mandate," a policy requirement stipulating that all partner faculties have to transition to a minimal land region of 10 Marla by way of November 2026. The motive behind the Ten-Marla Mandate is to standardize college infrastructure, providing college students with adequate area, air flow, and capability play regions. however, this "one-size-fits-all" technique overlooks the socio-spatial realities of city Pakistan. A considerable portion of impartial LFPS, operates inside the heart of congested urban centers like Rawalpindi and Lahore. these schools are often housed in residential or "non-cause built" buildings which might be rooted within the network's colonial and social history. In these excessive-density neighborhoods, land isn't simplest scarce however prohibitively luxurious. relocating a faculty to meet the Ten-Marla requirement often manner transferring several kilometers far from the goal community, which without delay threatens the "get right of entry to" component of education. (THE CONSTITUTION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PAKISTAN, n.d.). The socio-financial implications of this mandate are profound. If enforced strictly by means of the 2026 closing date, thousands of unbiased LFPS face an existential threat of closure. Stakeholder perceptions (Haider et al., 2024), already imply a high stage of task insecurity among teachers and financial tension among college directors because of privatization and moving policies. furthermore, college closures in low-profits regions traditionally cause a pointy growth in student dropouts, with a disproportionate impact on girl students whose mobility is regularly restrained because of safety and cultural worries (author Corporate: UNESCO. Director-General, 2023). This studies article, therefore, seeks to analyses the "10-Marla Mandate" no longer simply as an infrastructure checklist, however as a socio-financial disruptor. via reading the feasibility of relocation and the hazard of institutional collapse, the have a look at highlights the tension between "exceptional standards" and "educational equity". It argues that even as infrastructure improvement is a valid aim, the cutting-edge compliance timeline may result in a market monopoly by huge "Chain faculties", efficiently displacing the network-led impartial faculties which have served the negative for generations.

Literature Review

The academic debate surrounding Low-Fee Private Schools (LFPS) in Pakistan has evolved from simple quality comparisons to a deeper investigation of the sector's internal diversity and regulatory pressures. To understand the impact of the 2026 infrastructure mandate, it is essential to examine the existing typologies, stakeholder perceptions, and the historical role of these institutions.

Typology and Diversity of the LFPS Sector

A significant contribution to the literature is the disaggregation of the LFPS sector by Hazoor (2025), who argues that treating all private schools as a homogenous group leads to incorrect policy generalizations. Through a multi-tiered study in Rawalpindi, Hazoor identifies six distinct types of LFPS based on structure and fee range:

Independent LFPS (Cheap, Medium, and Costly): These are community-rooted entities, often established by local entrepreneurs or former educators. They typically operate in non-purpose built or residential buildings within congested urban centers.

Chain LFPS (Cheap, Medium, and Costly): These are franchisees of larger national

networks or elite private school groups. They generally possess more resources, standardized curricula, and better infrastructure compared to independent providers.

Feature	Independent LFPS	Corporate Chain LFPS
Land Ownership	Primarily Rented/Small Plots	Purpose-Built/Large Owned Plots
Capital Access	Limited/Community Funded	High/Institutional Investment
Relocation Capacity	Very Low (due to urban density)	High (Financial mobility)
Policy Impact (2026)	Existential Threat	Operational Advantage/Monopoly

The literature establishes that **Independent LFPS** are the most vulnerable to infrastructure mandates like the "10-Marla Requirement". While Chain LFPS may have the capital to comply or relocate, independent schools which often lack playgrounds and operate on upper floors of residential buildings face immediate closure when strict physical standards are enforced.

Stakeholder Perceptions and Institutional Stability

Recent empirical evidence from Haider et al. (2024) explores how privatization and rapid policy shifts affect the perceptions of those directly involved in the system. The study reveals a widespread sense of dissatisfaction and apprehension among stakeholders:

Administrators and Principals: Often report ambiguity regarding their responsibilities and future governance under new privatization frameworks, leading to administrative paralysis.

Teachers: Express grave concerns regarding job structure, financial instability, and the potential loss of benefits as they transition from public to privatized or compliance-heavy models.

Parents: While some parents associate privatization with better teacher accountability, a majority express deep-seated fears regarding "Access," specifically how fee hikes and school closures will impact their ability to educate all their children.

The Conflict Between Regulation and Access

Literature warns that when the state increases regulatory and economic pressure such as through water taxes or land mandates LFPS owners often cease operations in large numbers. During the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent financial crises, hundreds of schools in low-income neighborhoods already shuttered. The 10-Marla Mandate by PEF represents a new form of "Regulatory Pressure" that could lead to what scholars call the "commercialization" of education. If thousands of community-established schools close by 2026, the resulting "supply gap" cannot be easily filled by the state, which is already struggling with a lack of capacity. This displacement risks violating the "Right to Education" for the poorest households, where even a slight increase in distance or cost can lead to students particularly girls loitering the streets instead of attending school.

Author & Year	Key Theme	Research Focus
Hazoor (2025)	Infrastructure Compliance	Challenges of the 10-Marla mandate in Punjab
Haider (2024)	Regulatory Pressures	Impact of rigid policies on school sustainability
Ali & Ahmad (2023)	LFPS Landscape	Growth and demographics of low-fee schools
World Bank (2025)	Educational Access	Balancing quality standards with poor students' needs

Theoretical Framework

The imposition of the 10-Marla infrastructure mandate within the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) framework is not merely a technical adjustment; it represents a fundamental shift in educational governance. This study analyses the crisis through two contrasting theoretical frameworks that dominate the global educational discourse.

Neoliberalism and the "Standardization" of Education

Neoliberal theory posits that market mechanisms competition, choice, and strict regulation are the most efficient ways to improve public services like education. From this perspective, the Punjab government's 2024-2026 roadmap views the "10-Marla Mandate" as a tool for **Standardization and Quality Assurance**.

Rationalization: The state assumes that by enforcing a uniform physical standard, it can "weed out" inefficient, low-resource schools in favor of larger, more professional institutions.

Commercialization: Critics of neoliberalism argue that such policies treat education as a commodity, favoring "Chain Schools" that have the capital to meet these standards while displacing community- led independent schools that lack financial cushions.

Operational Disconnect: In this theory, the "Human Element" is often ignored in favor of "Checklist Compliance," leading to a disconnect between policy-makers and ground-level educators.

Social Justice and the "Right to Education" (RTE) Framework

In direct opposition to neoliberalism is the **Social Justice Theory**, which argues that education is a fundamental human right that must be protected from market fluctuations and exclusionary regulations.

Educational Equity: This framework emphasizes that for children in low-income urban neighborhoods, "Access" is more important than "Building Size".

Socio-Spatial Constraints: In congested urban centers (like the inner cities of Rawalpindi and Lahore), land is a scarce resource. Social justice theory argues that enforcing a 10-marla rule in these areas is a form of **Indirect Exclusion**, as it forces schools serving the poor to shut down because they cannot physically expand in a built-up environment.

The Vulnerability Factor: This theory highlights that the most affected will be female students and marginalized families who cannot afford the increased fees or travel costs associated with relocating to larger campuses.

Synthesis: The Policy Paradox

The synthesis of these two theories reveals a **Policy Paradox**: while the state aims for "Quality" (Neoliberal goal), it risks sacrificing "Access" (Social Justice goal). The 2026 deadline creates an existential ultimatum for independent schools, potentially leading to a "monopoly of the elite" where only schools with large landholdings can survive, effectively re-segregating education based on property ownership rather than academic merit.

Problem Statement

While the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) aims to standardize educational quality through its 2024-2026 restructuring roadmap, the implementation of a universal **"10-Marla Infrastructure Mandate"** presents a severe existential threat to the sustainability of Independent Low-Fee Private Schools (LFPS). The core of the problem lies in a fundamental disconnect between centralized policy standards and the socio-spatial realities of urban Punjab. In high-density metropolitan centers such as Rawalpindi and Lahore, the majority of community-led schools operate within residential or non-purpose-built structures. For these institutions, acquiring a 10-Marla plot is often **physically impossible** due to the pre-existing, congested urban fabric and **financially prohibitive** due to the astronomical rise in real estate prices and commercial rents. This regulatory shift creates what can be described as an **"Infrastructure Ultimatum"**: schools must either relocate to distant areas thereby losing their local student base or face permanent closure by the November 2026 deadline. The

broader problem extends beyond the school owners to the marginalized communities they serve. If thousands of independent schools are forced to shut down, the resulting "supply gap" will lead to a massive crisis of **Educational Inaccessibility**. Historically, school closures in low-income neighborhoods result in sharp increases in student dropouts, with a disproportionate impact on female students whose mobility is culturally and safely restricted to their immediate vicinity. Furthermore, there is a significant risk of a **Market Monopoly**. As independent providers collapse under the weight of compliance costs, the vacuum is likely to be filled by large-scale "Chain Schools" that possess the capital to comply but often charge higher fees, effectively re-segregating education based on economic status rather than merit. Therefore, there is urgent research need to document these ground realities and provide evidence-based recommendations to prevent a massive educational rollback in Punjab.

Conceptual Framework: Impact of 10-Marla Mandate
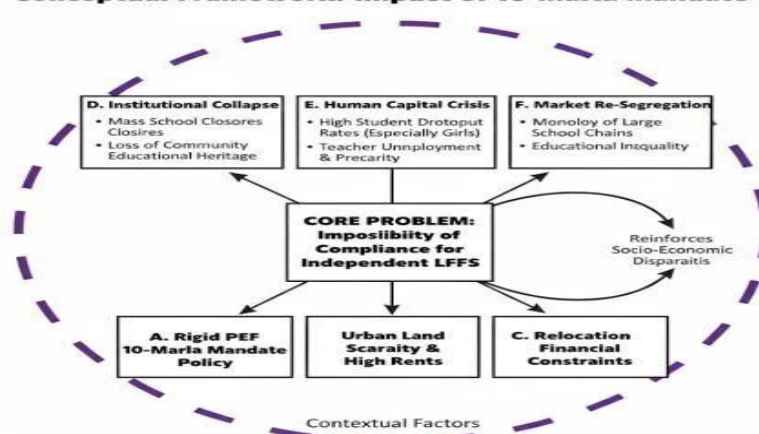
Methodology
The research utilizes a **Mixed-Methods Analytical Framework**, integrating qualitative policy evaluation with quantitative empirical data to provide a holistic view of the 2026 infrastructure crisis. This approach allows for the triangulation of official government mandates with the lived experiences of school administrators.

Research Design
The study follows a **Cross-Sectional and Exploratory Research Design**. It is cross-sectional as it captures data at a specific point in time (the pre-compliance period of 2026) and exploratory because it investigates a relatively new policy shift within the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) roadmap.

Target Population and Sampling Strategy
The target population consists of **Independent Low-Fee Private School (LFPS)** owners and principals in the province of Punjab. To ensure data depth, a **Purposive and Snowball Sampling technique** was employed:

Purposive Sampling: Specifically targeting schools in high-density urban quadrants (e.g., inner cities of Rawalpindi and Lahore) where land scarcity is most acute.

Snowball Sampling: Leveraging professional networks of school owners to distribute the digital survey, ensuring a wider reach across diverse socio-economic neighborhoods.

Sample Criteria: The primary filter for respondents was their partnership with PEF and the current operational size of their school building (focusing on those under the 10-Marla threshold).

Research Instrument and Variables
The primary data collection tool was a **Digital Structured Questionnaire** (Google Forms). The instrument was categorized into specific variable clusters:

Independent Variable: The PEF 10-Marla Infrastructure Compliance Policy.

Mediating Variables: Urban density, real estate costs, and geographical constraints.
Dependent Variables: Operational sustainability (risk of closure), staff employment stability, and student enrolment retention.

Data Collection and Quality Control

The survey was distributed via professional WhatsApp groups and social media platforms dedicated to LFPS owners. To ensure data quality:
Validity Check: Questions were framed to distinguish between "Purpose-built" and "Residential" structures.
Confidentiality: Respondents were assured of anonymity to encourage honest reporting regarding financial and relocation challenges.

Data Analysis Framework

Quantitative data is processed through **Descriptive Statistical Analysis**, using frequency distributions and percentages to visualize the "Compliance Gap". Qualitative data from open-ended responses undergoes **Thematic Coding** to identify recurring patterns of policy anxiety and socio-economic risks.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The fundamental aim of this research is to critically analyze the operational and socio-economic consequences of the **Punjab Education Foundation's (PEF) 2026 Infrastructure Mandate**. This study seeks to understand the "Compliance Gap" between centralized regulatory standards and the ground-level realities of community-led schooling in urban Punjab.

To achieve this overarching aim, the following specific objectives have been established:
To Assess Operational Feasibility: To investigate the physical and financial hurdles independent school owners face when attempting to acquire 10-Marla land in high-density urban areas by the 2026 deadline.
To Quantify the Risk of Institutional Closure: To determine the percentage of independent Low- Fee Private Schools (LFPS) that are at immediate risk of permanent shutdown due to non-compliance with the new land-area requirements.
To Evaluate Educational Displacement: To analyze the projected student dropout rates, specifically evaluating how school relocations or closures disproportionately affect female students' access to education in marginalized neighborhoods.
To Document Stakeholder Anxiety and Insecurity: To explore the professional and financial insecurities of teachers and principals arising from the lack of transition support during this regulatory shift.
To Propose Evidence-Based Policy Alternatives: To formulate recommendations such as zoning- based flexibility or covered-area mandates (vertical expansion) rather than rigid land-size requirements.

Significance of the Study

This study is of paramount importance as it addresses a critical "Policy Blind Spot" in the Punjab education sector. Its significance can be viewed from three distinct perspectives:

Policy-Making and Regulatory Reform

The findings of this study will serve as a vital evidence-based resource for policy-makers at the **Punjab Education Foundation (PEF)** and the **School Education Department (SED)**. By highlighting the spatial constraints of inner cities, the research provides a basis for more inclusive and flexible infrastructure standards that protect community-based educational heritage rather than dismantling it.

Socio-Economic and Human Capital Protection

From a social justice perspective, this research is significant because it advocates for the

"Right to Education" for the poorest children in Pakistan. By documenting the potential for mass student dropouts and teacher unemployment, the study sounds an alarm for the preservation of human capital in low-income urban quadrants.

Contribution to Academic Literature

Academically, this study contributes to the global discourse on **Educational Privatization and Regulation**. It provides a case study of how "Neoliberal Standardization" can inadvertently cause educational exclusion, offering a fresh perspective to researchers studying Low-Fee Private Schools (LFPS) in developing nations.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) guide this investigation into the 2026 infrastructure mandate:

RQ1: What are the specific spatial and financial barriers that prevent independent school owners in congested urban zones from complying with the 10-Marla mandate by November 2026?

RQ2: To what extent does the fear of institutional closure impact the professional stability and mental well-being of teachers and administrators within the PEF-partner network?

RQ3: What is the projected impact of school relocations on student retention rates, and how does this vary between male and female students in low-income neighborhoods?

RQ4: Does the current infrastructure policy inadvertently facilitate a market monopoly for "Chain LFPS" by systematically excluding smaller, community-led providers?

RQ5: What alternative regulatory frameworks or transition supports do stakeholders propose to balance "Quality Standards" with "Educational Access"?

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the integrity and academic validity of this research, several ethical protocols were strictly followed during the data collection and analysis phases.

Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

Before participating in the digital survey, all respondents (school owners and administrators) were provided with a clear brief regarding the purpose of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the survey at any point without any professional or personal repercussions.

Anonymity and Data Confidentiality

Given the sensitivity of the PEF 2026 infrastructure roadmap, strict measures were taken to protect the identities of the participants. No personal identifiers, such as individual school names or owner contact details, are disclosed in this report. Data is presented in an aggregated format (percentages and themes) to ensure that no specific institution can be singled out or targeted by regulatory bodies.

Data Integrity and Objectivity

The study maintains complete objectivity in analyzing the "Compliance Gap". All findings are grounded directly in the responses received via the digital questionnaire and are cross-verified with existing literature (e.g., Hazoor 2025; Haider 2024) to avoid researcher bias. No data has been fabricated or misrepresented to favor a specific narrative against government policies.

Conflict of Interest

The researcher declares no financial or personal conflict of interest that could influence the findings of this study. The research is conducted for academic and policy-advocacy purposes to highlight the socio-spatial constraints of urban schooling in Punjab.

Results and Data Analysis

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the digital survey conducted

with school administrators and owners across Punjab. The data is analyzed in alignment with the research questions (RQs) to evaluate the impact of the 10-Marla infrastructure mandate.

Demographic and Institutional Profile
The survey respondents primarily consist of **Independent Low-Fee Private Schools (LFPS)**. Preliminary data indicates that a significant majority of these institutions operate in **non-purpose- built residential structures** within high-density urban zones.

Table 1: Current Infrastructure Status of Surveyed Schools

Land Area Category	Percentage of Respondents	Compliance Status
Less than 5 Marlas	68%	Non-Compliant
5 to 10 Marlas	22%	Non-Compliant
10 Marlas and Above	10%	Compliant

Operational Feasibility and Relocation Barriers (RQ1)

When asked about the feasibility of relocating to a 10-Marla plot by November 2026, the responses highlight a critical "Compliance Gap".
Financial Constraints: 82% of owners reported that the cost of purchasing or leasing a 10-Marla plot in their current vicinity is financially "Impossible".
Spatial Scarcity: 75% of respondents stated that there is zero availability of 10-Marla plots within a 2km radius of their existing student base.
Socio-Economic Impact and Student Retention (RQ3)
The projected closure of schools that cannot comply with the mandate poses a severe risk to educational access. (Author Corporate: UNESCO. Director-General, 2023)
Institutional Closure Risk: 72% of school owners indicated that they would be forced to shut down permanently if the mandate is strictly enforced.
Projected Dropouts: Based on owner estimates, approximately 45% of students are at risk of dropping out, with **female students** being at a higher risk due to mobility restrictions.
Stakeholder Anxiety and Market Perceptions (RQ2 & RQ4)
The data reveals a high level of professional insecurity among teachers and administrators. (Haider et al., 2024)
Job Insecurity: 88% of staff members expressed concern over losing their livelihoods due to potential school closures. (Haider et al., 2024)
Perceived Monopoly: A significant majority of respondents 91% believe that this policy inadvertently favors **Chain LFPS**, leading to a market monopoly and increased educational costs for parents.

Discussion and Recommendations
The synthesis of empirical data and theoretical frameworks reveals a critical **"Policy-Reality Gap"** in the PEF 2026 infrastructure roadmap. While the intention behind the 10-Marla mandate is to improve school quality, the rigid enforcement of this standard in high-density urban zones threatens to dismantle the very "Educational Access" it seeks to protect.
Interpretation of Findings
The data confirms that for the majority of independent LFPS, complying with a 10-Marla plot requirement is not a matter of "willingness" but of **Physical Impossibility**. The astronomical rise in urban real estate prices and the lack of vacant plots in congested neighborhoods like Rawalpindi and Lahore create a barrier that even the most successful independent schools

cannot cross without massive external support.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the evidence collected, this study proposes the following "Inclusive Growth" alternatives to the Punjab Education Foundation:

Zoning-Based Infrastructure Flexibility: Rather than a "One-Size-Fits-All" 10-Marla rule, PEF should implement **Spatial Zoning**. Schools in high-density "Urban Cores" should be judged on **Covered Area (Vertical Expansion)** and safety standards rather than plot size.

Institutional Relocation Subsidies: The government should provide "Transition Grants" or low- interest "Relocation Loans" to help schools move to larger premises without passing the financial burden onto low-income parents.

Tiered Compliance Timeline: Instead of a hard November 2026 deadline, a **Gradual Phase-In Strategy** is recommended. Schools under 10 Marlas should be given a 5-to-10-year window to meet standards, provided they maintain high academic quality and student safety.

Public-Private Property Integration: The state should explore the possibility of housing multiple independent LFPS within vacant government buildings or community centers, creating "Education Hubs" that meet infrastructure requirements collectively.

Conclusion

The November 2026 deadline stands as an **"Infrastructure Ultimatum"** that could lead to the permanent displacement of thousands of students, particularly girls in marginalized areas. To achieve the goal of "Education for All," the Punjab government must transition from a "Regulation-First" approach to an **"Enabling-First"** framework. By adopting flexible infrastructure mandates, the state can ensure that the pursuit of "Quality" does not result in the "Exclusion" of the urban poor.

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