

# The Role of Privatization in Transforming Saudi Arabia's Education System: Opportunities and Challenges

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## Abstract

Privatizing education in Saudi Arabia has emerged as a key strategy to address the challenges of an overburdened public education system, in alignment with the broader goals of Vision 2030. This article presents a globally comparative approach, examining different types of public-private partnership (PPP), including charter schools and voucher systems that aim to manage and develop school infrastructure. The study draws on international frameworks and examples from various countries such as the UK, Australia, and Canada to explore how Saudi Arabia can adapt such a model effectively. The article highlights the potential of PPP to support the timely establishment of schools and related infrastructure, focusing on the importance of institutional and regulatory systems in line with the country's strategic goals, for successful implementation. A key concept discussed is risk sharing, while illustrating how the PPP process operates. The case study reveals that, although the initiative has strong political backing, the government must also work on building institutional, legal, regulatory, and oversight systems. Worldwide, these have been found to be critical for successful PPP implementation. The study conclusion is that while privatization offers significant opportunities to modernize Saudi Arabia's education system, success will depend on pragmatic implementation, robust regulatory frameworks, and a commitment to equitable access. The article makes practical recommendations to address current challenges and encourage greater private sector participation in improving the education sector. Saudi Arabia can achieve sustainable and inclusive educational development by leveraging the strengths of both public and private sectors toward realization of the Vision 2030 goals. Future research could include empirical studies to assess the long-term impacts of privatization, also addressing any gaps in equity and quality.

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## Keywords

Privatization, Education, Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030, Public-Private Partnership (PPP), Educational Reform, Legislative Development

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## 1. Introduction

Education is enshrined in Saudi Arabia's constitution as a fundamental right for all citizens. The establishment of the Ministry of Education in 1951 and formalization of the education system in 1960 laid the groundwork for providing free education to the population. Over time, Saudi Arabia has adopted an educational model prioritizing universal school access, significantly improving literacy and educational skills. These achievements have positioned Saudi Arabia favorably compared to other nations, particularly within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region.

### 1.1. Current Challenges

Historically, the public sector provided free education with a strong financial budget, enabling the government to implement numerous developmental reforms that positioned education as a driver of national growth. In recent years, the United Kingdom has increased its focus on enhancing the quality of education to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. This commitment is evident in the national efforts to address challenges such as rising education costs, demographic shifts, evolving learning standards, and the need for diverse developmental outcomes (Alzahrani & Alharbi, 2025; Moshashai et al., 2020). Rather than viewing these factors as limitations, Saudi Arabia is leveraging them to reform education management, expand academic programs, and ensure that a growing student population receives equitable and high-quality education.

### 1.2. Reform Goals

To meet societal expectations and improve learning quality while controlling costs, the government is increasing involvement of the private sector in education. The partnership between the public and private sectors (PPP) has gained significance; they are seen as complementary rather than competing forces, with both working toward the common goal of driving holistic national growth. Specifically, privatization in education is viewed as a critical mechanism for enhancing the quality and efficiency of the educational system.

In this context, privatization refers to the transfer of ownership or management of educational institutions from the public sector to private entities. This approach is expected to bring innovation, efficiency, and investment into the education sector, ultimately improving student outcomes and reducing the government's financial burden. However, the success of privatization depends on careful implementation, robust regulatory frameworks, and a commitment to ensuring equitable

access to education for all citizens. This article explores how privatization particularly through PPPs can enhance the quality and efficiency of education in Saudi Arabia. It examines key drivers, potential benefits, implementation challenges, and policy recommendations within the framework of Vision 2030.

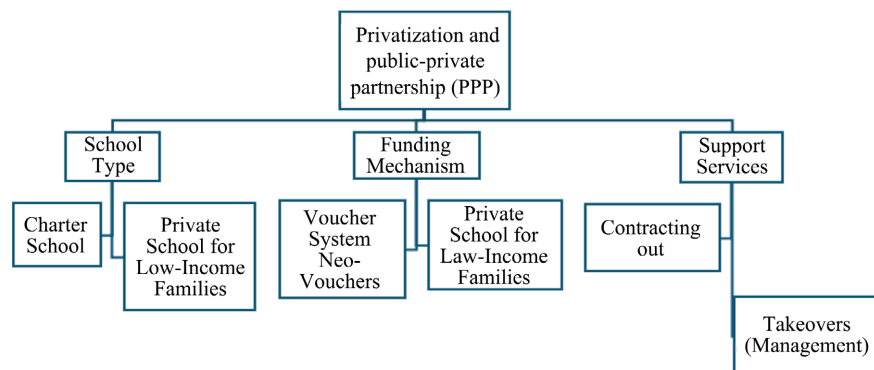
## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. What Is Privatization?

Privatization is a broad concept that involves the transfer of ownership, management, or control of public assets or services from the government to private entities. This transfer can be partial or complete and may involve for-profit or non-profit organizations (Radić et al., 2021). In education, privatization refers to the increasing involvement of non-governmental entities in providing educational services, financing, and managing these services (Alzahrani & Alharbi, 2025). This process often entails the state reducing its direct role in education provision and management, while private entities take on greater responsibility.

### 2.2. Maintaining the Integrity of the Specifications

Privatization and public-private partnership (PPP) in education can take various forms (Figure 1):



**Figure 1.** Different public-private partnership (PPP) models.

- Charter Schools: Publicly funded schools operated by private entities under a charter or contract.
- Voucher Systems: Parents can use government-funded vouchers to pay for private school tuition.
- Contracting Out: Outsourcing specific services, such as school maintenance or curriculum development, to private companies.
- Takeovers: Private entities taking over the management of underperforming public schools.
- Neo-Vouchers: Tax credits or deductions for parents who choose private schools.
- Private Schools for Low-Income Families: Privately run schools focusing on disadvantaged communities (Albgieh & Alshreef, 2021; Edwards Jr. & Means,

2019)

In Saudi Arabia, education privatization emerged as a response to numerous socioeconomic challenges. Over time, government policies aimed at funding and managing public education led to a centralized system. Consequently, public-private partnership (PPP) was viewed as a strategy to improve the education system's efficiency, quality, and client satisfaction levels while ensuring that the government could still meet its public obligations.

### 2.3. Public-Private Partnership (PPP)

PPP has evolved beyond their traditional role of delivering large-scale economic infrastructure projects like airports, tunnels, and roads. According to a 2009 World Bank report, PPP holds significant potential to bring innovation to education, healthcare, economic development, and social services. A business-oriented approach can enable such partnerships to not only provide accessible and affordable essential services but also deliver those with greater efficiency. Governments worldwide have recognized this potential and have been working to establish the necessary regulatory, legal, and policy frameworks to integrate PPP as a key component of their service delivery systems.

Over the past fifty years, Saudi Arabia has undergone a remarkable transformation transcending sectors, enabling it to not only catch up with, but in certain areas surpass, many developed nations in global human development rankings. While the discovery of oil and gas initially led the government to take on the central role in delivering infrastructure and public goods, the need for economic diversification has since driven the introduction of privatization and public-private partnership (PPP). These initiatives aim to reduce dependence on oil revenues, stimulate private sector growth, and enhance efficiency in delivering critical services. Saudi Arabia is now leveraging private sector expertise and investment to build on the foundations of its modern infrastructure such as roads, airports, and buildings as well as the nation's human capital, toward establishing a more sustainable and diversified economy for the future.

### 2.4. The Definition of Public-Private Partnership (PPP)

This section explores the concept of public-private partnership (PPP), delving into theoretical discussions that examine its definition (**Table 1**) and debate the advantages and disadvantages.

**Table 1.** Three different definitions of Public-Private Partnership (PPP).

Source/Type	Definition Summary	Key Features
Broad Definition	Collaborative arrangements between government and private actors across financing, design, delivery, and maintenance	Emphasizes cooperation across project stages and sectors

## Continued

Standard/Institutional Definition	Institutionalized partnerships that leverage public and private strengths to achieve public service goals	Focuses on mutual strengths, formal structure, and service delivery efficiency
World Bank (2021)	A long-term contract where a private party provides a public asset/service, bears significant risk and responsibility, and is paid based on performance	Highlights contract duration, risk transfer, performance-based payment, and accountability

Public-private partnership represents an extension of the New Public Management (NPM) agenda, which emphasizes the integration of private-sector managerial expertise into the delivery of public services (Broadbent & Laughlin, 2003). As a mechanism capable of achieving greater value for money and enhanced resource efficiency, PPP has become a noteworthy feature of modern public policy frameworks. By facilitating the allocation of risks, rewards, and responsibilities between public and private entities, PPP aims to optimize the provision and funding of public infrastructure services (Teicher et al., 2006). Broadly defined, PPP refers to collaborative arrangements between government and private-sector actors, encompassing the financing, design, delivery, and maintenance of infrastructure projects. Standard definitions of PPP highlight their role as institutionalized partnerships that leverage the strengths of both sectors to achieve public service objectives. One frequently cited definition of PPP is: “A long-term contract between a private party and a government entity, for providing a public asset or service, in which the private party bears significant risk and management responsibility, and remuneration is linked to performance” (World Bank, 2021).

In a public-private partnership project, the government and the private sector work together across different stages of service delivery. The private sector typically handles design, construction, operation, maintenance, financing, and risk management tasks. The government on the other hand focuses on strategic planning, shaping the industry structure, securing necessary permits, and ensuring regulatory compliance while meeting community service obligations (NSW Office of Financial Management, 2002).

PPP can take various contractual forms, such as Design, Construct, & Maintain (DCM); Build, Own, & Operate (BOO); Build, Operate, & Transfer (BOT); or Build, Own, Operate, & Transfer (BOOT) (Grimsey & Lewis, 2002; Webb & Pulle, 2002). Generally, under any such arrangement, the private contractor retains ownership of the contract’s infrastructure and provides the agreed-upon services, being compensated directly by the government or end-users. The government’s role may involve either supplying the infrastructure/service(s) directly or procuring these from the private sector.

The following sections examine Saudi Arabia’s commitment to adopting PPP as a strategic policy that involves establishing strong relationships with the private

sector to operate and manage the public schools toward realizing the nation's ambitious goal of becoming a developed and resilient economy.

### 3. Legislative Development towards Privatization (PPP)

The need to increase private sector contributions in education and diversify innovative funding sources for improving the financial efficiency of the education sector (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2015). Earlier, the Ninth Development Plan acknowledged that education privatization varies from country to country, taking different forms. However, in Saudi Arabia, the responsibility for education policy making and setting objectives remains with the government (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2011).

The Kingdom's Vision 2030, announced in 2016 by the Council of Economic and Development Affairs, reiterated the move toward privatizing certain government services, including In Saudi Arabia, legislative developments toward education privatization have evolved significantly, particularly under Vision 2030, which outlines the country's goals for economic diversification with private sector involvement (Council of Economic and Development Affairs, 2016). The Tenth Development Plan initiated education, and initiated investment opportunities for the private sector. This was implemented through the Privatization Program, one of the Vision's initiatives aimed at enhancing the role of the private sector in providing services, along with the general frameworks and key pillars of privatization (Vision 2030, 2016).

That very year, the Saudi government also established the National Centre for Privatization (NCP) to drive privatization efforts across sectors, including education. The primary goals of privatizing education are to: 1) reduce financial and operational reliance on the public sector and 2) improve educational outcomes. Public-private partnership (PPP) in education encompasses initiatives where private entities are responsible for constructing and maintaining new public schools as well as taking over some existing public schools' operational and financial management (EY Global, 2021).

Furthermore, declaration of the Public Sector Partnerships (PSP) Law in 2021 initiated a formal framework to regulate the environment in which public-private partnership (PPP) operate and has highlighted the involvement of the private sector in education and other public services, further promoting privatization (National Center for Privatization, 2021).

The government aims to achieve several objectives through the PSP law, among these supporting government entities in meeting their strategic goals, optimizing public costs, increasing government revenues, and boosting efficiency and competitiveness of the national economy. Additionally, the PSP law is intended to improve the quality and accessibility of services, ensuring they are available at the right time and cost. The government also encourages local and foreign private players to invest and actively contribute to the national economy (National Center for Privatization, 2021). The law introduced a framework that governs PPP, a key

legislative tool designed to formalize and regulate private sector involvement in public services, including education. This legal framework enables implementation by providing the foundation for private companies to manage, operate, and invest in schools and other educational services (**Table 2**).

**Table 2.** Key policy instruments supporting education privatization in Saudi Arabia.

Policy Instrument	Type	Role in Education
Ninth Development Plan (2010-2014)	Policy Initiative	Acknowledged the diversity of privatization models; reaffirmed government control over education policy
Tenth Development Plan (2015-2019)	Policy Initiative	Initiated the push to increase private sector involvement and improve funding efficiency in education
Vision 2030 (2016)	Strategic Framework	Initiated broad privatization goals; outlined education as a sector for private investment
Privatization Program (2016)	Implementation Program	Implemented Vision 2030 directives by enabling private sector participation in education services
National Center for Privatization (NCP)	Institutional Mechanism	Implemented as the main entity to manage and promote privatization across sectors, including education
Public Sector Partnership (PSP) Law (2021)	Legislative Framework	Initiated and implemented the legal basis for PPPs; formalized private sector participation in education
Public-Private Partnership (PPP)	Operational Mechanism	Allow private entities to design, build, operate, and manage public schools under government oversight

This transformation reflects the Saudi government's broader policy of boosting private sector engagement for improving the efficiency and quality of public services. The main goals of privatization are to deepen private sector involvement to improve service quality, ease the burden on the public treasury, and enable the government to focus instead on its legislative, regulatory, and organizational responsibilities. These efforts align closely with the objectives of Vision 2030.

### 3.1. Vision 2030 and Privatization (PPP) in Education

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia approved the ambitious development plan known as Vision 2030 in 2016. This vision is built on the country's key strengths, including its deep-rooted Arab and Islamic identity, strong investment capabilities, and strategic geographical location. Vision 2030 depends on three main pillars that reflect the strength of Saudi Arabia: a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation. Vision 2030 was introduced with the active participation of all state sectors, each playing a crucial yet interconnected role. The education sector

in particular assumes significance due to its direct link with society and its role in facilitating the Saudi economy's transition from reliance on a single income source to multiple avenues of growth driven by human capital (Vision 2030, 2016).

Privatization is one of the key programs under Vision 2030, with the Ministry of Education playing a vital role in its implementation. While involving the private sector in education is a global trend adopted by many countries, its success has depended on the level and quality of private sector involvement. Countries such as the United States (House, 2018) and the United Kingdom (Muir, 2012) have integrated privatization into their education systems, though outcomes vary based on political, economic, and social factors. As such, it seems clear that the success of privatization in one country does not necessarily guarantee similar results elsewhere, given the unique conditions influencing its implementation across nations.

Several studies have explored education privatization from different perspectives, based on the objectives. For instance, Al-Manie (2003) examined the necessity of privatization from the viewpoint of educators, whereas some other studies (Alshammari, 2022; Alzahrani & Alharbi, 2025; Al-Fawzan, 2018; Nasir, 2013; Winchip et al., 2023) focused on attitudes toward privatizing education. Alzahrani & Alharbi (2025) specifically investigated the perceptions of public secondary school teachers regarding education privatization. The study analyzed its social, economic, administrative, and technical effects, identified the most suitable privatization approach according to teachers, and suggested the ideal type of investor for the education sector.

Alshammari's (2022) study examined the perspectives of education leaders on the privatization of education in Saudi Arabia within the framework of Vision 2030. The research surveyed 100 school principals to assess the perceived benefits of privatization in education administration and identify its strengths, weaknesses, and potential challenges. The findings highlighted several advantages, such as reduced government spending on education, improved funding solutions, fewer bureaucratic constraints, healthy competition among schools, and the implementation of more efficient administrative systems. The study also identified significant strengths arising from privatization, such as enhanced leadership performance, more rigorous accountability mechanisms, the ability to attract skilled educators, better utilization of information technology, and overall improvement in school efficiency.

### 3.2. The Role of Privatization (PPP) in Achieving Vision 2030

Privatization in general contributes both directly and indirectly to Saudi Vision 2030 by facilitating the operation of certain public services. In the context of education, privatization has the following aims:

Enhance the quality of education and improve the efficiency of the educational system through

- Raising educational standards by engaging with private players possessing ex-

expertise in delivering high-quality education;

- Ensuring sustainable and inclusive education through tailored learning environments for students with special needs, early childhood education, and emergency cases;
- Advancing curriculum and teaching methods by modernizing teaching methodologies and assessment practices.

Encourage investment in the education sector by

- Strengthening partnerships between the public and private sectors to promote educational infrastructure and facilities investment;
- Developing human resources by creating educational staff training and professional development opportunities.

Diversify the economy and reduce pressure on the public budget by

- Enhancing spending efficiency by involving the private sector in school operations and providing educational services;
- Diversifying funding sources in the education sector through private sector participation.

Develop an advanced and sustainable educational infrastructure by

- Building a modern education infrastructure by leveraging private sector contributions;
- Accelerating digital transformation in education by introducing advanced technological solutions.

Develop human capital and increase employment rates by

- Enhancing job market skills among the youth by improving the quality of education and providing an inclusive learning environment;
- Creating new job opportunities in education, administration, and technical support.

Achieve social development and enhance quality of life by

- Establishing an inclusive educational environment that ensures access to education for all sections of society;
- Strengthening public confidence in the education system by enhancing the quality of education.

Support innovation and scientific research by

- Encouraging educational innovation by engaging with the private sector in curriculum development and teaching methodologies;
- Promoting research and development within the education sector.

### **3.3. Challenges That Privatization (PPP) Aims to Address**

Privatization is expected to help address several challenges, including the following:

- Reducing costs in targeted schools and reallocating resources to public schools.
- Addressing the challenge of the Kingdom's vast geographic area and the large number of schools by entrusting the operation of certain schools to the private sector.

- Enhancing the quality of education through private sector participation.
- Improving operational efficiency of human resources through the private sector's flexibility.
- Leveraging the private sector's capabilities to provide education services in remote areas.
- Addressing funding challenges and ensuring the provision of education resources and appropriate infrastructure.

## 4. Key Models and Approaches in Education (PPP)

### 4.1. Overview of PPP Approaches, Frameworks, and Collaboration Models

This section outlines the various initiatives, operational models, and contractual structures employed in the education sector's public-private partnerships (PPP). These frameworks provide diverse approaches that Saudi Arabia could explore for its school development projects.

The private sector has traditionally played a significant role in financing and managing economic infrastructure such as transportation networks, utilities, and airports across both developed and emerging economies (Patrinos, 2023). In contrast, private participation in social infrastructure, particularly education and healthcare, has only gained momentum in recent decades (Fennell, 2010; World Bank, 2009). Within education, PPP can be categorized into five distinct models, each defining unique responsibilities for both public and private entities (refer to Table 3).

**Table 3.** Overview of school PPP models with international examples.

PPP Type	Description and Financial Approach	Global Examples
Philanthropic Education Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foundations in the U.S. fund K-12 education, making this the dominant PPP model in the country.</li> <li>- In the U.K., academies are sponsored by businesses or community groups, collaborating with the government to offer tuition-free education.</li> <li>- Funding sources include state allocations or private donations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- U.S. philanthropic foundations</li> <li>- U.K. Academies Program</li> <li>- U.S. venture philanthropy funds</li> </ul>
School Management Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Private entities operate public schools under government contracts.</li> <li>- Facilities remain publicly owned, with free access for students.</li> <li>- Costs may be shared: private partners cover infrastructure, while governments fund school management and teacher salaries based on enrollment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- U.S. contract schools</li> <li>- U.S./Canada charter schools</li> <li>- Qatar's independent schools</li> </ul>
Subsidized Private School Placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Governments subsidize per-student costs at qualifying private schools.</li> <li>- In New Zealand, Alternative Education (AE) programs allocate funding based on enrollment numbers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New Zealand's AE schools</li> <li>- Pakistan's per-child subsidies</li> </ul>
Voucher Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Families use state-issued vouchers to choose between public or private institutions.</li> <li>- The Dutch model ties school funding to student numbers, encouraging competitive quality improvements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Netherlands' school vouchers</li> <li>- New Zealand's entitlement programs</li> </ul>

**Continued**

Infrastructure-Focused PPP	- Common structures include BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) or DBFOT (Design-Build-Finance-Operate-Transfer).	- U.K. Private Finance Initiative
	- Private investors cover construction costs and non-core services, while governments supply land at minimal lease rates.	- Canada's Alberta New Schools
	- Contracts span 25 - 30 years, with viability gap funding (up to 20% of costs) in some cases.	- Egypt/South Australia/Spain school PPP
	- Education delivery remains a public responsibility.	

Sources: Adapted from LaRocque (2008), Education International (2009), McKinsey & Company (2014), World Bank (2009).

#### 4.1.1. Philanthropic Education Partnerships (Private Sector-Led)

Philanthropic support is the most prevalent form of public-private collaboration in education, where financial contributions or in-kind donations to public schools are one-time gifts or constitute a part of corporate social responsibility programs (UNICEF, 2011). Education related philanthropy is popular and growing; in 2006 alone, more than 70,000 foundations across corporate, private, and community sectors in the United States channeled close to \$41 billion in educational grants (LaRocque, 2008). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has been a pioneering force in giving for several noteworthy educational initiatives worldwide.

Education philanthropy is not confined to the developed world; varied and impactful models flourish throughout Asia and the Gulf nations as well. Several noteworthy examples point to this global trend:

India's Bharti Foundation, for example, committed \$50 million to launch non-profit schools in some of that nation's inaccessible villages. Countries like Pakistan and the Philippines too have benefited from corporate funding of school construction projects (World Bank, 2009). Singapore-based investment firm Orient Global has contributed \$100 million and more to this laudable initiative to build and upgrade educational facilities in many developing nations (Verger, Fontdevila, & Zancajo, 2016).

The Middle East has not lagged behind, either; in 2007, Dubai's Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Foundation dedicated a \$10 billion fund for two significant purposes: to modernize Arab education systems and set up scholarships for the underprivileged (Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation & PwC, 2009).

All these diverse examples share some common features:

- A strategic focus on underserved communities
- A combination of infrastructure support and individual scholarships
- Significant financial commitments from private entities
- A tailored approach to regional educational needs

The success of these international models proves that, when properly structured, education philanthropy can effectively complement government efforts across vastly different cultural and economic landscapes. From rural India to urban Dubai, private funding continues to open new doors for students who may otherwise lack educational opportunities.

#### 4.1.2. School Management Partnerships

In this collaborative model, the public sector owns and funds schools that private companies or non-governmental organizations operate under performance-based contracts (Patrinos, 2023). These agreements are usually for 25 years; the operators receive either annual management fees or per-student payments, subject to their meeting specific educational benchmarks. The model became popular in the U.S. during the 1990s, where private entities manage public facilities and adhere to rigorous accountability standards (World Bank, 2009; LaRocque, 2008). Governments continue to oversee curriculum and standards, facilitating a balanced approach that combines public accountability with the private sector's operational flexibility and efficiency. This arrangement has been invaluable in reviving underperforming schools through specialized management expertise and by fostering innovation within publicly funded educational institution systems; the taxpayer can see that their dollars are well spent. These successful models illustrate how strategic partnerships can boost school management without diluting the fundamental principles of public education.

Another prominent example of this partnership model can be seen in charter schools; these independently operated public schools function under specific performance agreements incorporated in their founding charters. Their management contracts can last between three to five years, with the sponsoring organization being accountable for educational outcomes and financial management. The number of US charter schools grew exponentially from just 253 in 1995 to 4147 by 2007 (Vanourek, 2005). The charter schools' proliferation proves that performance-based contracts between government education departments and private school operators can provide scale with accountability. These institutions also attest to the potential of collaboration in education, where public funding meets autonomous private sector operation so that the public school system as a whole benefits. Moreover, the model's popularity shows how effectively it meets community needs while nurturing high academic standards and ensuring measurable student outcomes.

#### 4.1.3. Subsidized Private School Placements

This demand-driven strategy sees governments (mostly education departments/ministries) subsidizing student placements in selected private schools to facilitate access; the approach is particularly useful in underserved areas and for improving the quality of education in remote areas (Patrinos et al., 2009). Certain minimum infrastructure and teaching standards are laid down for participating schools, and continued funding depends on the student outcomes (Barrera-Osorio & Raju, 2017). The model has proven its utility in developing nations such as Uganda (Nishimura & Yamano, 2013) and the Philippines (World Bank, 2009). Even a developed nation such as New Zealand has used the approach to scale their Alternative Education program (Ministry of Education NZ, 2020).

#### 4.1.4. Voucher Systems

Parents can enroll their children in a public or private institution of their choice

using a school voucher that serves as a government-issued certificate (Chubb & Moe, 1990). This model allows parents to choose a school that aligns with their educational values, which in turn incentivizes qualitative competition among schools, given that funding is linked to enrollment (Scott, 2013). Unlike direct government-to-school payment, a voucher system ensures market-driven accountability because schools need to improve student outcomes to attract enrollment (Hoxby, 2003). This approach finds favour in rural regions where expanding access is a priority (e.g., Colombia's PACES program, Angrist et al., 2002). The Netherlands' universal voucher system (Patrinos, 2013), New Zealand's targeted subsidies (Ministry of Education NZ, 2020), and the U.S. charter school programs (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2021) are other examples.

#### **4.1.5. Infrastructure-Focused PPP**

Since the 1990s, public-private partnership (PPP) has emerged as a popular mechanism for developing school infrastructure across the globe. While contractual arrangements may differ, the build-operate-transfer (BOT) model has primacy; private operators finance, construct, and manage schools before eventually transferring ownership to the public sector after 25 - 30 years (Patrinos, 2005). The UK pioneered this approach via the country's Private Finance Initiative (PFI); 115 school infrastructure projects worth \$6.5 billion had been launched by 2007 (Biygautane & Clegg, 2024). Australia, Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands are some of the other nations to have similarly leveraged PPP in education, with each adapting the model to their specific context.

## **5. Operational Mechanisms and Procurement**

### **Government Procurement and Contracting Models for Education PPP**

Building on the overview of public-private partnerships in education, this section examines the specific outputs of such collaboration and the contractual agreements that govern them. Under operational service contracts, private entities may manage either individual schools or entire public school systems, particularly in remote areas, handling all operational aspects such as facility maintenance, staff and student administration, and educational material distribution, while governments provide curriculum design and enforce standards. Alternatively, when governments implement student voucher systems, they create competitive market conditions that incentivize private schools to improve both quality and affordability. This can help expand access to education without the heavy capital infusion that new school construction and operation demand. Day-to-day management responsibilities are transferred to private providers without sacrificing public oversight of the quality of education. Such an approach is especially valuable for quickly scaling education systems in resource-constrained environments that require a delicate balance of education access, its quality, and cost-efficiency.

Although the Infrastructure Provision model has found wide acceptance in

North America, Europe, and Australia (OECD, 2021), there are significant implementation challenges, given the complex multi-contract requirements (refer to **Table 4**). World Bank in a 2009 report has explained how this system warrants “a transparent competitive bidding process to select private consortia capable of financing, constructing, and managing educational infrastructure”, whereas the core academic functions of curriculum development, teacher recruitment, and learning material selection, etc. continue to remain within government’s purview (UNESCO, 2020). The integrated infrastructure and education model, though successful in healthcare PPP across 32 countries (World Health Organization, 2022), remains largely untested in education. This divergence points to the conservative nature of public-private partnership in education but also highlights possible opportunities for cross-sector learning in bundled service delivery models.

**Table 4.** Public-private partnership frameworks in education systems.

PPP Model Category	Government Procurement Focus	Contractual Agreement Type
Management & Support Services (Input-based)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comprehensive school administration (financial/HR operations)</li> <li>- Additional services (student transportation, meal programs)</li> <li>- Educational support (teacher development, curriculum creation, materials distribution, quality control)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School management contracts</li> <li>- Professional service agreements</li> <li>- Specialized curriculum development contracts</li> </ul>
Full Operational Services (Process-Oriented)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- End-to-end school operations, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instruction delivery</li> <li>• Administrative management</li> <li>• Facility maintenance</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comprehensive operational contracts</li> </ul>
Education Service Provision (Output-focused)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Guaranteed student placements in private institutions</li> <li>- Measured by enrollment numbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student placement agreements</li> <li>- (Performance based on enrollment targets)</li> </ul>
Infrastructure Provision (Input-based)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School facilities construction/maintenance</li> <li>- Physical asset management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capital infrastructure contracts</li> </ul>
Integrated Infrastructure & Education (Hybrid)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Combining facility provision with either:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operational management or</li> <li>• Direct education services</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bundled service contracts (Infrastructure + service delivery agreements)</li> </ul>

Sources: Adapted from LaRocque (2008), Education International (2009), McKinsey & Company (2014), World Bank (2009).

## 6. Global Case Studies of PPP School Infrastructure Projects

This section presents a discussion on the performance of school public-private partnership (PPP) initiatives globally (**Table 5**), analyzing outcomes across Western nations and also considering the experience of their implementation in Middle Eastern and Gulf states.

**Table 5.** Global public-private partnership (PPP) outcomes summary.

Country	PPP Model	Cost-Saving	Efficiency Outcome
<b>Australia</b> (NSW, VIC, QLD, SA)	Design-Build-Finance-Maintain (DBFM)	7% - 15% savings	Faster delivery, long-term maintenance quality
<b>New Zealand</b>	Design-Build-Finance-Operate (DBFO)	Cost-effective; up to 30% - 40% faster	97% facility availability, strict performance standards
<b>Canada</b> (NS, SK, AB)	Design-Build-Finance-Manage-Operate (DBFMO); performance-based leases	Up to 15% savings	Faster delivery, but mixed operational outcomes
<b>USA (DC, Houston, PG County)</b>	Lease-based BOT/DBFO with creative financing	U.S. \$20 M saved; tax-neutral financing	Up to 18 months faster; performance-linked outcomes
<b>UK (England)</b>	Private Finance Initiative (PFI)/DBFO	Significant capital leveraged	648 out of 717 projects completed on time and within budget
<b>Scotland</b>	PFI with performance-based contracts	No cost overruns reported	On-time delivery, high infrastructure standards
<b>Netherlands</b>	Long-term integrated facility PPP + voucher	Cost-effective scaling	Infrastructure + education autonomy, high standards
<b>Germany</b>	Long-term DBFM (15 - 25 yrs)	Controlled costs	Consistent availability, strong service delivery
<b>Egypt</b>	Availability & performance-based PPP	92% on-time delivery	Public control of curriculum; long-term sustainability
<b>UAE</b> (Abu Dhabi)	Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT)	18% lifecycle cost savings	25% faster delivery, risk shifted to private sector
<b>Qatar</b>	PPP (planned, not implemented)	-	PPP framework and laws under development
<b>Kuwait</b>	DBFOM (proposed)	-	Delayed due to regulatory and financing hurdles

## 6.1. Australia

### 6.1.1. Public-Private Partnership in Australian Education

Australia has been using public-private partnerships (PPP) to create social infrastructure for over two decades. New South Wales (NSW) was the pioneer. The state's \$129 million NSW New Schools Project established nine schools under a concession agreement that incorporated both construction and 25-year facility management components (NSW Office of Financial Management, 2002; World Bank, 2009). The state's contract with Axiom Education Pty Ltd. featured performance-linked payments based on service delivery standards. The funding came from privately issued bonds underwritten by ABN AMRO Bank (Banks, 2008). The NSW model created a precedent of innovative risk allocation with a long-term service integration framework for subsequent Australian public-private partnership in education.

Following their initial success with PPP school projects, New South Wales expanded the model to 10 more schools (worth \$168 million), constructed between

2006 and 2009 (Audit Office of New South Wales, 2006). These follow-up projects maintained the performance-linked payment structure, in which the Department of Education pays the private operators monthly; complete asset transfer to the public sector upon contract completion is scheduled for 2032. According to OECD (2010), this PPP approach is quite cost efficient, achieving about 7% savings compared to traditional engineering-procurement-construction (EPC) education delivery, while the bundled service contracts ensure long-term maintenance quality.

### 6.1.2. Expansion of School PPP across Australian States

Victoria state has also expanded the use of PPP for educational infrastructure, notably through its 2015 New Schools PPP Project that set up 12 new schools worth \$291 million. Private partners undertake 25-year facility maintenance conforming to high operational standards (Department of Treasury and Finance, Victoria, 2015).

Three more states now have similar models:

- South Australia's PPP model established six public schools between 2014 and 2016, which combine private financing (\$110 million), construction, and 30-year maintenance with the government controlling curriculum (Department of Treasury and Finance, South Australia, 2014).
- Queensland government and the Plenary Consortium (\$180 million contract) delivered 10 schools between 2015 and 2017, which was 18% faster than traditional procurement protocols allowed (Plenary Group, 2023).
- Victoria went even further, establishing 15 schools worth \$310 million under PPP during 2017-2018 incorporating lifecycle costing into contracts (Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2017).

## 6.2. New Zealand Education

The New Zealand government adopted public-private partnership (PPP) as part of their infrastructure strategy in 2010, encouraging their use whenever such initiatives offered value for money and better service delivery (New Zealand Treasury, 2010). The policy change was mainly driven by fiscal compulsions, especially for large projects involving high capital expenditure. According to the New Zealand Treasury's (2024) analysis, "PPP became a necessity rather than an option" for New Zealand to bolster infrastructure and ensure budgetary discipline.

The PPP framework adopted by New Zealand emphasizes:

- 1) Rigorous VfM assessments preceding project approval (New Zealand Treasury, 2010)
- 2) Risk-sharing mechanisms where private partners assume construction/operational risks
- 3) Output-based specifications that prioritize service quality rather than input controls

The focus initially was transportation and justice sector projects, whose success propelled adoption of the model for expanding education infrastructure.

The Hobsonville Point Primary and Secondary Schools were New Zealand's first school PPP program, implemented as a 25-year Design-Build-Finance-Operate (DBFO) contract with Learning Infrastructure Partners. This performance-linked payment model envisaged quarterly operator payments subject to facility availability and maintenance standards (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017). With this pilot being accomplished on schedule and within budget in 2012 (Office of the Auditor-General, 2013), New Zealand expanded the program with a \$298 million four-school contract in 2015 to the Further Schools Partner consortium (Norton, 2015), and six more schools costing \$200 million were tendered in 2016 (Ministry of Education, 2016). All these contained three key provisions: 1) public ownership of land and assets (Ministry of Education, 2016); 2) payment deductions if performance metrics were not achieved (Ministry of Education, 2016); and 3) school boards would continue to govern the education imparted (Ministry of Education, 2016). Independent assessment revealed 30% - 40% faster turnaround for these PPP-delivered schools than conventional procurement protocols, whereas average facility availability stood at 97% (Duffield et al., 2018).

### 6.3. Canada

Nova Scotia was the first Canadian province to implement public-private partnership (PPP) for school construction in the mid-1990s, with traditional infrastructure funding being hamstrung by fiscal constraints arising from dwindling state revenues (Ronald, 2005). Their Design-Build-Finance-Manage-Operate (DBFMO) model was a success, which became the template for 39 more urgently needed schools across the country (Boardman et al., 2016). This approach worked as follows:

- The private sector would own and provide long-term maintenance under a 20-year lease
- The Government continued to control curriculum development and education delivery (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2023)

This strategy helped to plug existing infrastructure gaps and support ongoing operational requirements, while public oversight of core educational aspects continued as before.

When the contracts run out, the Nova Scotian government has three options: 1) renew the lease (for up to two 5-year terms), 2) terminate the agreement, or 3) purchase the schools outright (Auditor General of Nova Scotia, 2010). Annual lease payouts in this financial model constitute 85% of the capitalized project cost; theoretically, the arrangement brings 15% savings compared to traditional procurement systems (Ronald, 2005). For the private sector, viability was enhanced by the undernoted stipulations:

- Core educational use: Limited to school hours (8:30 AM-3:30 PM, weekdays, September-June)
- Commercial rentals: Allowed during off-hours to generate supplemental revenue (Boardman et al., 2016)

Nevertheless, the [Auditor General of Nova Scotia \(2010\)](#) pointed out significant drawbacks in this arrangement. Overestimation of projected usage, unprecedented maintenance costs, and inefficient risk transfer mechanisms had also caused a potential loss of CAD 52 million compared to traditional Engineering-Procurement-Construction (EPC) protocols.

Saskatchewan too executed a PPP in 2017 for 18 innovative joint-use schools that would serve both educational and community objectives using shared facilities ([Ministry of Education, 2017](#)). This CAD 635 million project was implemented by a private consortium led by Wright Construction. They were responsible for the design and construction of integrated K-12 and community spaces, 30-year maintenance and lifecycle management ([Government of Saskatchewan, 2015](#)), and performance-based financing, with payments being linked to facility availability.

However, the model, calculated to upgrade rural infrastructure and optimize operational efficiency, invited criticism that school-community scheduling left much to be desired ([Government of Saskatchewan, 2015](#)).

In 2007, Alberta established 18 new education facilities in Edmonton and Calgary under a PPP program. The CAD 634 million investment created space for 12,000 school students ([Government of Alberta, 2008](#)). The innovation in this arrangement involved a CAD 125 million lump-sum payment when the project was fully implemented in 2010, to be followed by 30-year performance-linked payments upon meeting rigorous operational standards such as 95% facility availability and maintenance benchmarks ([OECD, 2010](#)). The Alberta model achieved 22% quicker delivery than traditional procurement, with 15% long-term cost savings ([Iacobacci, 2010](#)), making this a replicable model for future Canadian education infrastructure initiatives. The project's success was considered attributable to effective risk transfer to private partners and strict performance incentive standards in the contract framework.

#### 6.4. United States of America

Public-private partnership (PPP) for school infrastructure have not been particularly popular in the United States compared to Canada and Europe because of two structural factors. Firstly, unlike in Europe, where many governments faced a funding crunch during the late 20th century, U.S. municipalities and school districts have not lacked funding for school construction or renovation ([Alexander & Lewis, 2014](#)). Moreover, US tax incentives favor publicly owned school facilities, which disincentivizes private participation ([Ronald, 2005](#)). In these circumstances, private developers would rather invest in infrastructure other than schools. Where PPP does exist in the U.S., private sector participation is limited to short-term construction contracts with lump-sum payments, unlike the UK where long-term ownership or operational freedom are permissible ([Puentes & Tomer, 2014](#)). With such a restricted approach, fewer than 5% of U.S. school construction projects had adopted PPP delivery up to 2020 ([Puentes & Tomer, 2014](#)).

However, even the US is seeing increasing interest in alternative financing models for dated school infrastructure.

### **Innovative PPP Models in U.S. School Infrastructure**

Although their appeal is limited, PPP projects have been implemented in a few U.S. school districts, such as in Houston, where Gilbane Properties established a nonprofit entity in 1998 to: 1) Issue tax-exempt bonds for financing, 2) Oversee construction of two high schools, and 3) Retain facility ownership post-completion (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

This model reduced completion time by 12 months through efficient debt structuring via annual lease payments and saved US \$20 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2003), also streamlining construction management (Minnesota Department of Transportation, 2005).

The PPP model adopted for the reconstruction of Washington D.C.'s James F. Oyster Bilingual Elementary School featured a groundbreaking cross-subsidy mechanism of funding (Urban Land Institute, 2003; 21st Century School Fund, 2002). This included mixed-use development financing; LCOR Incorporated, the facility developer, built a 211-unit apartment complex (\$29 million) on surplus school land. The resulting PILOT (Payment In-Lieu of Taxes) revenues serviced \$11 million in tax-exempt bonds for school construction (Urban Land Institute, 2003; 21st Century School Fund, 2002). Taxpayer-neutral outcome was another aspect, leading to zero public expenditure for rebuilding the school (Urban Land Institute, 2003), whereas 35-year bond repayment would flow entirely from apartment revenues (LCOR, 2005). Among the community benefits of the project were delivery of modern school facilities in 18 months less than customary procurement would have permitted (Urban Land Institute, 2003), not to mention the affordable housing that this approach produced along with the targeted educational infrastructure.

Prince George's County Public Schools negotiated an innovative public-private partnership in 2020 worth \$400 million for six old school buildings that badly needed renovation and reconstruction (Prince George's County Public Schools, 2023). The private players in this long-term deal have shouldered the entire responsibility of financing, designing, constructing, and maintaining the schools over a 30-year period, which helped the district achieve project implementation earlier than the usual procurement approaches would allow (Barrett et al., 2019). This performance-based model also marks a strategic shift in educational infrastructure development, where the private sector's participation ensures faster delivery while also guaranteeing long-term facility management.

## **6.5. United Kingdom**

UK initiated the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) in 1992; it has since become the world's largest school infrastructure partnership scheme. More than 700 proposals had reached financial closure by 2012, and the private sector invested over \$67 billion (HM Treasury, 2012). By 2007, 115 PFI school contracts worth \$11.6

billion were executed in England alone using the Design-Build-Finance-Operate (DBFO) model. This investment is projected to increase to \$16 billion (World Bank, 2009), with operational data revealing that 648 of 717 contracted projects had already been implemented by 2012 (HM Treasury, 2012). The program evolved through the Priority School Building Program (PSBP), with its 2011 initial phase and 2014 PSBP2 expansion continuing to employ PPP for school redevelopment (HM Treasury, 2012). The Midlands batch project is an example, with the private contractors of this 25-year integrated scheme delivering complete school facilities; they undertake design, construction, financing, and maintenance.

## 6.6. Scotland

Scotland chose the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) model due to public budget constraints and deteriorating school infrastructure; the strategy addressed school refurbishment and construction (Accounts Commission, 2002). As of 2002, over 130 schools were in urgent need of modern facilities, estimated to cost \$554 million. Scotland's administration subsidized local authorities for lease payments and operational expenses under PFI contracts (World Bank, 2009). Under this performance-based model, the private consortia would only be paid upon:

- 1) Timely completion of new or renovated schools
- 2) Ongoing service delivery over 25 - 30 years

Scotland's PFI strategy features a debt-heavy financing structure, for instance Balfron High School. Bank loans funded 99% of project cost, with annual interest costs amounting to only 5% (World Bank, 2009). The model has been effective, with the private players in the South Lanarkshire and Glasgow schools programs delivering \$800 million worth of infrastructure on schedule and without any cost escalation (HM Treasury, 2003). Moreover, the government still regulates the schools' educational standards and curriculum.

## 6.7. Netherlands

Having fostered decentralized and demand-driven education for over a century, it was no surprise that the Netherlands opted for PPP in 2005 to boost school infrastructure. A beginning was made with the Ypenburg school project for 1200 pupils (LaRocque, 2008). This pathbreaking deal stretches over 30 years and allocates:

- 1.5 years for construction
- 28.5 years for integrated facility management (maintenance, cleaning, furnishings, and ICT services) (World Bank, 2009)

The Dutch system is unique, combining PPP-created infrastructure with parental choice in education:

- 1) Performance-linked PPP payments: Private operators are funded upon making available facilities to predetermined quality standards.
- 2) Voucher system: Parents select schools using government-funded vouchers; this fosters healthy competition for students among the institutions by bolstering

their facilities and educational standards (OECD, 2012).

The Netherlands government continues to regulate education policy and curriculum, but daily operations are the responsibility of private school boards, thus ensuring administrative flexibility and public accountability (OECD, 2016). This hybrid model has the following advantages:

- High educational standards continue to be maintained
- Infrastructure can be scaled efficiently through PPP
- School-level autonomy fosters innovation

### 6.8. Germany

The 2005 Offenbach Schools project was Germany's most significant PPP initiative. This €550 million venture involved private sector financing, refurbishment, and operation of 88 public schools with 450 buildings under a 15-year contract; payments were contingent on facility availability and performance standards (The Public-Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility (PPIAF), 2010; World Bank, 2009). Since then, the nation has implemented several noteworthy school infrastructure projects leveraging public-private partnership, among them Frankfurt's 2007 contract covering construction, renovation, and 20-year maintenance for three schools. The Cologne-Rodenkirchen project cost €127 million under a 25-year contract for development and operation of new schools (TA Europe, 2017). All the projects envisage penalties for private partners if they don't meet agreed service standards, along with consistent facility availability during school hours. The German PPP models prove that long-term agreements containing rigorous performance metrics can ensure early and efficient delivery of school infrastructure and its diligent maintenance.

### 6.9. Egypt

Egypt's education PPP programs are among the Middle East's most significant. The first such was implemented in 2006 for 345 schools across 23 governorates. The private sector partners handled design, construction, financing, furnishing, and non-educational services on government land (LaRocque, 2008). This success spurred more such initiatives, with a dramatic expansion in 2007 for 2210 more primary and secondary schools costing over \$1.2 billion (World Bank, 2009). All the projects operate under an internationally validated "availability and performance" funding model (European PPP Expertise Centre, 2011):

- Private operators ensure strict facility standards
- Payments are contingent on service-level compliance
- The private partners undertake long-term maintenance (generally 25 - 30 years)

The 345 schools established in 2006 remain fully operational (LaRocque, 2008), which shows the model's sustainability. Egypt's school PPP program has effectively addressed critical infrastructure gaps and provided these significant advantages:

- 1) Public ownership of educational content

- 2) Transferring facility risks to private players
- 3) 92% on-time project delivery (*African Development Bank, 2022*)

### 6.10. United Arab Emirates

The Emirate of Abu Dhabi has taken on a leadership role in the region, having established public-private partnership (PPP) for educational infrastructure; many institutions such as Sorbonne Abu Dhabi and Zayed University are already managed by private operators (*Financier Worldwide, 2012*). A government report documents the significant growth in education infrastructure achieved through this strategy, where 61 new schools were added during the 2007-2008 academic year across Abu Dhabi and Al Ain that were established and operate based on contract management service arrangements (*Biygautane & Clegg, 2024*). The flagship United Arab Emirates University project exemplifies how the Emirate has used this strategy to deliver infrastructure under a 30-year Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) agreement valued at \$410 million (*Biygautane & Clegg, 2024*). Its prominent features are as follows:

- 1) Payment Structure:
  - Monthly government disbursements contingent on:
    - ✓ Facility availability standards
    - ✓ Proper management compliance
    - ✓ Maintenance quality benchmarks
- 2) Risk Allocation:
  - The private sector assumes construction and operational risks
  - The Government retains academic control and oversight
- 3) Long-term Benefits:
  - 25% faster delivery than traditional procurement
  - 18% lifecycle cost savings (*Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2010*)

### 6.11. Qatar

As of 2023, Qatar had not yet implemented any public-private partnership for the full lifecycle delivery of school infrastructure (*Biygautane & Clegg, 2024*). The country has floated several school construction PPP projects in recent years, but most are incomplete, as follows:

- Cancelled on account of procurement issues
- Indefinitely postponed
- Reverted to traditional engineering-procurement-construction (EPC) mode (*PwC, 2022*)

Nevertheless, the Qatar government has taken significant preparatory steps:

- 1) Comprehensive PPP legislation drafted
- 2) A regulatory framework developed focused on education infrastructure projects (*State of Qatar, 2020; Aninver, n.d.*)

This points to future expansion into school PPP by Qatar as part of the 2030 National Vision infrastructure modernization plans.

## 6.12. Kuwait

Kuwait has been a pioneer among Gulf states in pursuing education PPP, having actively explored school projects through the Kuwait Authority for Partnerships Projects (KAPP) since 2013. The plans envisaged developing nine schools (five kindergartens, three elementary, and one middle school) under design-build-finance-operate-maintain (DBFOM) contracts (Biygautane & Clegg, 2024). However, none of these proposals had achieved financial closure as of 2023 due to structural obstacles and procurement delays (InfraPPP, 2015). The challenges include the following:

- 1) Regulatory and Bidding Complexities—cumbersome approval processes and lack of clarity on contract terms (Oxford Business Group, 2022)
- 2) Financing Hurdles-private sector lacking appetite given the perceived risks (MEED, 2021)
- 3) Policy Inconsistencies—delays in finalizing PPP frameworks (World Bank, 2023)

Despite the delays and challenges, KAPP is refining its PPP model, which holds promise for the future.

Based on the global PPP outcomes, there are five key takeaways relevant for Saudi Arabia. Firstly, a strong regulatory and legal framework is essential; financing and risk allocation need clarity; long-term contracts must link payment to performance; innovation in financing can unlock projects; and finally, prepare public entities for execution, not just planning.

## 7. Evaluating PPP Impact

### The Influence of Public-Private Partnership on Academic Performance

This section synthesizes empirical evidence from different studies examining how different public-private partnership (PPP) models affect key educational metrics, as shown in Table 3. The comparative analysis provides Saudi policymakers with actionable insights to identify the most suitable PPP framework for achieving national education goals. As Table 6 reveals, the four primary PPP approaches yield distinct effects on performance indicators:

**Table 6.** Impact of different partnership models on academic performance.

Partnership Model	Enrollment Growth	Academic Improvement	Equity Enhancement	Cost Efficiency	Risk Allocation	Market Competition
Voucher Systems	High impact for Voucher recipients	Significant (through school choice)	Strong (when needs-based)	High (if the private sector is efficient)	Low	Substantial
Subsidies	Effective (using private capacity)	Moderate (depends on private quality)	Strong (if targeted)	Moderate	Medium	Limited
Private School Management	Moderate (Operator availability)	Moderate (seat limitations)	Strong (when focused)	Moderate	Low	Minimal

**Continued**

Private Finance Initiatives (PFI)	Moderate (Funding-dependent)	Minimal	Strong (if targeted)	High	High	Limited
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Data Sources: [McKinsey & Company \(2014\)](#); [World Bank \(2009\)](#).

1) Voucher Systems emerge as being particularly impactful:

- They enhance access through expanded student enrollment
- Competition drives quality improvements, as parents select higher-performing schools
- Institutional efficiency incentives promote cost effective delivery and operation

The competitive dynamics inherent in voucher programs are a powerful motivator for schools to optimize both service quality and operational effectiveness so that they can attract more participants.

The empirical evidence reveals distinct comparative advantages across major PPP models in education. Government subsidies demonstrate strong enrollment growth by leveraging existing private school capacity ([World Bank, 2018a](#)), reducing inequality through targeted funding ([OECD, 2020b](#)), although their fixed structure may limit market competition ([UNESCO, 2021](#)). Enrollment may be boosted moderately in private management contracts. Although operator availability could be a constraint ([McKinsey & Company, 2019](#)), such models do significantly reduce education inequality in underserved areas ([Brookings Institution, 2022](#)). The PFI model delivers superior cost efficiency (15% - 20% savings through competitive bidding) and optimal risk transfer ([IMF, 2021](#); [Standard & Poor's, 2020](#)), particularly in scaling infrastructure to reduce spatial inequalities ([Global Infrastructure Hub, 2019](#)). Combining these models with voucher systems' proven capacity to promote quality based on parental choice and the resulting competition (as previously established), presents Saudi policymakers with a strategic toolkit: subsidies and PFI together can expand access while mitigating costs, whereas vouchers ensure the competitive dynamics that drive quality, and these align with Vision 2030's emphasis on transparent procurement and education transformation.

A growing body of evidence shows privately financed school projects outperforming traditional delivery methods. A UK Treasury review of 61 PFI school projects found that 88% achieved timely completion within budget and far exceeded results from conventional procurement modes ([HM Treasury, 2003](#)). In another study of 37 PFI schools, 76% were seen to have met deadlines, and 79% within budgeted cost; only 27% of the traditional Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) projects performed similarly ([LaRocque, 2008](#)).

Satisfaction rates also highlight the PPP advantage: 76% of UK public school clients viewed the private sector's performance in operating and maintaining schools positively ([HM Treasury, 2003](#)). This success is replicated in Australia, where PFI school projects take two years less, thereby saving 7% in costs versus

EPC models (HM Treasury, 2003). The consistently positive results, increased efficiency, cost savings, and stakeholder satisfaction have led Australia and New Zealand also to promote PPP for establishing/upgrading school infrastructure.

## **8. Path Forward for Saudi Arabia**

### **8.1. Unlocking Saudi Arabia's Education Potential through Strategic Partnerships**

Saudi Arabia stands poised to revolutionize its education sector by embracing innovative public-private partnership (PPP) models. The Kingdom's unique economic and cultural landscape offers many pathways for private sector collaboration that can enhance educational access and quality manifold.

### **8.2. Utilizing Philanthropic Capital for Education**

Saudi Arabia's strong tradition of philanthropy presents a golden opportunity for educational investment. The country's family businesses and Zakat (Islamic almsgiving) system can be strategically mobilized to fund school construction and refurbishment. Targeted incentives by the government could motivate private donors to direct their charity toward education infrastructure as part of corporate social responsibility initiatives. Such an approach will not only resonate with Saudi culture but can also create sustainable funding streams for school development.

### **8.3. Professionalizing School Management**

Building on successful models from Qatar and the UAE, Saudi Arabia could implement private school management initiatives to elevate operational standards. Private operators would uphold global best practices in school administration while the government maintains oversight of curriculum and educational standards. This sharing of responsibilities will help accelerate knowledge transfer to local staff and immediate improvements in school management without compromising national educational objectives.

### **8.4. Strategic Purchase of Educational Services**

In areas with an acute shortage of schools, particularly the Eastern and Southern provinces, the government should implement a seat-purchasing model. Contracting with private schools to educate Saudi students on a per-capita basis is a good idea; this will enable the government to rapidly provide quality education where it is needed most. Simultaneously, private investment in school infrastructure is likely to receive a boost, also incentivizing landowners to convert unused properties into educational facilities.

### **8.5. Driving Quality through School Choice**

A voucher system may promote healthy competition among schools, as parents would feel empowered to choose the best education options for their children.

This model has been found effective in neighboring Gulf states because it creates natural incentives for schools to improve both academic quality and physical infrastructure. The government could introduce such a program in phases, starting in urban areas before expanding nationwide.

## **8.6. Comprehensive Infrastructure Partnerships**

Large-scale school development in Saudi Arabia can be implemented far more quickly and efficiently through full-service PPPs where private partners finance, design, construct, and operate new school facilities. Such a model requires robust legal and regulatory frameworks and has achieved demonstrable success globally in attracting private investment for education infrastructure. These partnerships necessitate long-term commitment (25 - 30 years, usually), which will ensure proper maintenance and operational efficiency throughout the school facilities' lifecycle.

## **9. Implementation Strategy**

### **9.1. Implementation Roadmap**

Taking the following steps can enable Saudi Arabia to capitalize on these opportunities:

- 1) Establish a dedicated PPP unit to streamline partnership processes
- 2) Develop clear legal frameworks that safeguard the interests of all stakeholders
- 3) Launch pilot programs in strategic locations showcasing each PPP model
- 4) Establish transparent performance metrics for ongoing evaluation

A multidimensional approach, as outlined above, can help Saudi Arabia leverage the private sector's expertise and resources while government retains control over education standards, a balanced strategy quite in line with Vision 2030's human capital development goals. The Kingdom's unique position allows it to learn from global best practices while tailoring solutions to its specific cultural and economic context, potentially creating a new gold standard for educational PPPs in the region.

### **9.2. Recommendations for Building a Strong Foundation for Saudi Arabia's School PPP**

Global experience shows that successful PPP programs rely on three pillars of institutional support, and Saudi Arabia's ambitious school projects will need all three to thrive.

#### **9.2.1. A Central PPP Command Center**

Every effective PPP program has a dedicated government unit at its core. Saudi Arabia should develop its own version, an independent authority that can cut through red tape and act as both guide and referee for public and private partners. This body would ensure the following:

- Technical expertise during deal structuring
- Standardized processes across ministries
- Resolution of interagency conflict (common when education, infrastructure, and private operators intersect)

### 9.2.2. Laws That Build Investor Confidence

Private companies won't commit to 20-year school contracts without clear ground rules. To this end, Saudi must formulate the following:

- A tailored PPP law spelling out dispute resolution processes
- Transparent procurement guidelines
- Risk-sharing mechanisms

This legal framework will act like a safety net, reassuring private partners that a breach of contract won't leave them stranded without recourse.

### 9.2.3. Real-Time Oversight

School PPP needs an active monitoring system that can do the following:

- Track milestones using standardized metrics (construction timelines, service quality)
- Flag differences before they become disputes
- Share performance data across projects to accelerate learning

The benefit to schools will be that their standardized designs can create perfect conditions for rapid scaling. As [Flyvbjerg \(2021\)](#) notes, modular school projects enable "plug-and-play" replication where lessons from one project immediately improve the next.

## 10. Conclusion

The privatization of education in Saudi Arabia represents a strategic shift aimed at addressing the challenges of an overburdened public education system while aligning with the broader goals of Vision 2030. By involving the private sector, the Kingdom seeks to enhance the quality of education, improve operational efficiency, and reduce the financial burden on the government. Legislation such as the Public Sector Partnerships (PSP) Law and establishment of the National Center for Privatization have provided a robust framework for private sector involvement in education. These efforts are expected to foster innovation and improve education outcomes while also contributing to diversification of the economy.

However, the success of privatization in education depends on effective implementation, continuous monitoring, and addressing potential challenges such as equity, accessibility, and quality assurance. While privatization offers many benefits, the government must take care that it does not exacerbate existing inequalities or compromise the public good. As Saudi Arabia navigates this transformative journey, a balanced approach that leverages the strengths of the public and private sectors will be crucial for achieving sustainable and inclusive education development.

This article examines how countries worldwide have used public-private partnership (PPP) to deliver school infrastructure and management, drawing upon

decades of practical experience. The analysis reveals three primary motivations for adopting PPP models: 1) to address government budget shortfalls, as seen in Europe (European Investment Bank, 2020), Canada (Boardman et al., 2016), and Egypt (World Bank, 2018b), where private financing bridged funding gaps for school construction; 2) to improve service efficiency, although outcomes may vary significantly, such as notable successes in the UK (National Audit Office, 2020) contrasting with failures like the Carillion collapse (Kollewe, 2018), demonstrating that a well-structured contract is a sine qua non (OECD, 2021); 3) to optimally allocate risks, with the private sector managing construction/maintenance risks while governments bear the policy risks (Yescombe, 2018), thus striking a balance when properly implemented.

Based on the global experience, the article critically evaluates Saudi Arabia's ambitious plans to deliver schools through public-private partnership (PPP), discussing both the conceptual foundations of education PPP as well as the Kingdom's institutional readiness for such large-scale implementation. The analysis highlights the transformative potential of modular construction for rapid, standardized school deployment, as successfully demonstrated in the UK's Priority School Building Programme (PSBP) and Egypt's 1000-school PPP initiative (World Bank, 2021), going on to outline the three critical enablers that Saudi Arabia must establish: first, a robust legal framework governing long-term contracts and dispute resolution (OECD, 2021); a dedicated PPP unit to streamline procurement and oversight (like Australia's Infrastructure Victoria and the ADEK-Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge); and third, transparent supervision mechanisms that align private-sector incentives with educational outcomes (OECD, 2020a).

The review reveals that the frameworks discussed are non-negotiable prerequisites to not only attract private investment but also protect Saudi's public interest while replicating the scalability and success seen in international models (Global Infrastructure Hub, 2019). With a robust foundation and protocols in place, Saudi Arabia can leverage PPP to accelerate the achievement of the Vision 2030 education goals while avoiding the pitfalls observed in poorly structured partnerships elsewhere.

Future research can include different topics: The impact of PPP on education quality in rural vs. urban areas, as also among different groups; second, stakeholder perceptions of applying PPP in operating schools to explore the attitude of teachers, parents, and students toward privately managed public schools; third, studying the effectiveness of performance-based contracts to understand the relationship between performance-linked payment and school outcomes such as academic achievement; finally, a comparative study of PPP oversight mechanisms to examine different international models of PPP governance and how they may be localized effectively in Saudi Arabia.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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