**Report raises serious concerns about**

**education privatisation in India**

This week, Education International (EI) has released a significant report into the privatisation of education in India. The report,[*Profiting from the Poor: Pearson and the Emergence of Multinational Edu-businesses in Hyderabad, India***,**](https://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/ei-ie_edu_privatisation_final_corrected.pdf)was co-authored by Sangeeta Kamat, Carol Anne Spreen, and Indivar Jonnalagadda. It includes recommendations requiring urgent action by stakeholders in India.

India’s government has so far failed to fulfil its obligation to properly and adequately fund quality free public education for all, a requirement necessary to meet the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education. The country’s education budget hovers at around 3.8 percent of gross national product, which falls short of the six per cent recommended by the Education 2030 framework adopted by UNESCO.

**Government inaction**The report also finds that the government’s actions facilitate and encourage a growing commercialisation and privatisation of education. In many instances, the government is criticised for creating exemptions or loopholes for private providers, demonstrating a lack of political will to properly enforce and monitor adherence to the requirements of India’s Right to Education (RTE) Act.

The report shows how these political choices have led to a continued growth of ‘low-fee’ private schools in the country. These schools specifically target the poor and are an expanding market in India. In recent times, they have attracted the interest of global corporations and foreign investors. Primary among them international education company Pearson, but also venture capital firms like Gray Ghost and private foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation.

**Global Education Industry**These global players linked to international corporations, foundations, technology companies, private equity and venture capital firms, are key actors in the emergent ‘Global Education Industry’. Their objective is to profit from school provision for people on low incomes and the poor in India and globally.

According to Pearson Affordable Learning Fund’s (PALF) CEO Katelyn Donnely, India is their “first market before they expand to other countries”. The authors of the report indicate that India will hence serve as the ‘test market’ for PALF on the road to scaling up to other developing countries.

The report finds serious violations of India’s RTE Act: the growth of ‘low fee’ private schools for the poor has been facilitated by State policies to divest from government and aided schools for nearly two decades, allowing public schooling to decline and deteriorate significantly.

These schools in turn adopt several cost-cutting measures such as employing unqualified teachers who are paid very low wages (Rs. 2000-Rs. 5000), operating from low-cost residential buildings with cramped rooms with no open spaces.

**Financial burden**Meanwhile, families spend at least one-fifth of their monthly income per child to access primary education in these schools, with the costs increasing at higher grades. Given these high costs, families have to resort to multiple strategies to secure education for their children. These strategies include sending one child -usually male- to a private school and other siblings to a government school and/or accessing private school for part of the year, or transferring a child to a government school for post-primary education.

With 68.7 per cent of India’s population earning below US$2 a day and 41.6 per cent of the population earning less than US$1.25 a day, the plan to expand access to education through increased privatisation and for-profit schools is a matter of serious concern.

**Local government policies**Current policies of the Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (AP) governments are deepening privatisation and multinational operations in the K-12 sector. For example, the AP government has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding to outsource its government schools to Bridge International Academies, an international chain of low-fee schools that has come under heavy criticism in Uganda, Kenya, and Liberia.

Bridge International Academies are supported by, among others, global edu-business Pearson, billionaires Gates and Zuckerberg and multilateral and bi-lateral institutions such as the UK’s Department for International Development, and the World Bank.

Meanwhile, the Telangana government recently ordered the shutting down of 4,000 government schools citing lack of enrolment while permitting private schools to operate with impunity.

Hyderabad, the joint capital of the regions of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, has become a hub for the global education industry to develop and pilot technology based edu-solutions in the low-fee private school sector. Developing edu-solutions that can be standardised and scalable is seen as vital to the profitability of the sector.

**Ethical concerns**In addition to concerns about access, affordability, and undermining the RTE Act, multinational investment in education raises serious ethical issues of profiting from the poor while undermining national and international mandates that protect education as a fundamental human right.

You can download the full report here: [*Profiting from the Poor: Pearson and the Emergence of Multinational Edu-businesses in Hyderabad, India***,**](https://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/ei-ie_edu_privatisation_final_corrected.pdf)