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PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATION: EXPLORING DIFFERENT MODELS AND POLICY OPTIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are increasingly perceived as an appropriate policy approach to provide education for all in many different contexts. Key education stakeholders suggest that, by partnering with the private sector, governments can expand their education systems in a more efficient and effective way. For this and other reasons, many governments are establishing PPP frameworks within their education systems. This is happening in both industrialized and non-industrialized countries, and in countries with very different administrative, financial, and political situations, including those affected by crisis and conflict.

Nonetheless, in education, PPP frameworks cover many policy options and follow very diverse rationales. As such, one of the main objectives of this framing paper is to unpack PPPs as a policy category and to reflect on its different translations and implications in the educational sector. Specifically, the paper argues that not all the PPP policy options and rationales are equally appropriate to achieve the expected goals in all types of education settings.

To begin unraveling the PPP concept, it is important to notice that there are at least four main understandings of PPPs in the educational field; these include:

◆ **Infrastructure PPPs:**

Partnerships with the private sector for the construction of school facilities and related infrastructures. A well-documented example of this type of PPP can be found in the UK Public Finance Initiatives (PFIs). In PFIs, private entities assume the cost of the building and refurbishment of an education facility, and local authorities return this cost as a loan. The PFI system was applied not only to the education sector, but also to a number of other areas, such as the health, housing, and communications sectors. Many Academies (a sort of charter school program) were built under PFI schemes in England and Wales (Gunter, 2010).

◆ **Education-industry partnerships:**

These are types of PPPs that are increasingly present in vocational training (e.g., dual TVET systems) and in universities (e.g., knowledge transfer policies with the corporate sector). Here, the German dual TVET stands out. This model, which has gained increasing international traction, combines apprenticeships in a company and vocational education at a vocational school in the same academic course. For its execution, a partnership between the government and the companies involved needs to be formally established (Langthaler, 2015).

◆ **Multi-stakeholder partnerships:**

This third typology of PPPs are “defined as the pooling and managing of resources, as well as the mobilization of competencies and commitments by public, business and civil society partners to contribute to expansion and quality of education” (Draxler, 2008, p. 31). This type of partnership usually consists of joint initiatives established between governments and international organizations and the private sector, including private corporations and foundations. The Global Partnership for Education and the Global Knowledge Partnership are some of the most paradigmatic examples of this type of arrangement internationally.

◆ **PPPs for the delivery of core schooling services:**

These are partnerships in which the state contracts the private sector to deliver education in different levels. Within this fourth modality, the private sector can be contracted to provide education under several formats: subsidized private education (e.g., Australia, Argentina, Spain), private operation of public schools (e.g., U.S. charter schools, Colombian colegios en concesión), or school vouchers (e.g., Chile, Milwaukee) being the most well-known schemes of public financing and private provision.

It needs to be noticed that these categories are not mutually exclusive; for instance, some PFIs imply that the private sector assumes both the roles of infrastructure development and service provision for a period of time, although this type of arrangement is quite exceptional in the education sector. In any case, this paper will focus on the last of the four broad categories: **PPPs for education services delivery**. We focus on this category for two main reasons. First, addressing the four types of partnerships simultaneously would be inappropriate because, as can be observed and despite seemingly similar structures, each of these are arrangements of a very different nature. As a consequence, talking about PPPs without distinguishing their specific features would make it difficult to have a focused discussion on the main challenges of PPPs in terms of implementation and effects. Second, we focus on PPPs for education services delivery precisely because the modality is at the center of the education for development agenda and many low-income countries are currently considering whether to adopt the modality.

This framing paper is organized as follows. In Section 2 we present the origins of PPPs as an emerging policy paradigm in public administration reform, and outline the main policy principles and arrangements in which this paradigm takes shape. In Section 3 we focus on the transposition of the PPP idea to the education sector. Here, we reflect on several conceptual aspects of the PPP phenomenon in education, but also on the effects of PPPs on different education dimensions. In Section 4 we discuss different forms of accountability that could apply to PPP frameworks, highlighting the pros and cons of each. Finally, we present a series of key considerations for the debate regarding PPPs and crisis affected contexts.

2. PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS: ORIGINS AND MAIN POLICY PRINCIPLES

2.1. A SHORT HISTORY OF THE RISE AND POPULARITY OF PPPS AS A POLICY IDEA

Before becoming a popular policy approach in education, public-private partnerships (PPPs) had been implemented in other policy sectors for a long time. PPPs as a concept emerged in the U.S. at the beginning of the 1980s. At that time, several local governments adopted “innovative structures” to work together with business organizations in local development affairs.¹ PPPs were, in particular, discussed and implemented in relation to areas such as urban renewal and local economic development. The idea was immediately adopted and disseminated by well-known policy entrepreneurs such as Peter Drucker, and researchers at the Brookings Institute (Wettenhall, 2003).

In this initial stage, the PPP policy debate had a strong managerial bias. Essentially, the main objective of PPP advocates consisted of trying to bring the public sector closer to private sector organizational culture in order to address perceived inefficiencies in state provision of public services. In the 1980s, “partnerships” resonated very well with plans of the Reagan administration that consisted of re-structuring the government sector to make it more efficient and cost-effective (Linder, 1999). However, PPPs were also supported by progressive political actors who saw partnerships as an opportunity to counter-balance market forces and revert the commercializing trend involved in the privatization and corporatization of public services (Kooiman, 1993; Wettenhall, 1999). While privatization policies stressed competitive market pressures as a means of disciplining the provision of public goods and services, PPPs gained momentum as a more cooperation-oriented policy framework. In this sense, PPPs became a term with multiple meanings, and many actors across the political spectrum felt comfortable with it (see Box 1).

In the 1990s, PPPs acquired high levels of popularity in developed countries and in relation to social sectors. Numerous associations, research centers, and international conferences, as well as consultancies and scholarly activities, were organized around the PPP idea.²

¹ See Fosler and Berger (1982); Brooks, Liebman, and Schelling (1984).

² Even international academic journals such as the International Journal of Applied Public-Private Partnerships and the International Journal of PPPs were created during this period (Wettenhall, 2003).

BOX 1

PPPS AS AN “ACCOMMODATIONIST” CONCEPT (Flinders, 2005; Romano, 2007)

PPP policies fit a range of political ideologies: from conservative ideas that appeal to community participation and to solving the problems of an overburdened and under-disciplined state, to neoliberal ideologies that support the introduction of market rules in public services due to reasons of efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and profitability (Linder, 1999). PPPs also fit within a social-democrat or liberal

political program that is more comfortable with the language of partnerships than with more drastic privatization policy ideas. In fact, in the UK, PPPs have lived their major expansion under the umbrella of New Labour. As several scholars observe, partnerships were a key feature of the Third Way and the New Labour political rhetoric during the Clinton and Blair administrations of the 1990s

After the U.S., the government of the UK became one of the most enthusiastic adopters of PPPs, implementing partnership frameworks in a range of services sectors, education among them (Robertson, 2002). In the UK, the first model of PPPs applied at a greater scale was the so-called Public Finance Initiatives (PFIs), introduced by the conservative government in 1992. PFIs consist of a private company designing, building, operating, and financing equipment for hospitals, schools, or prisons that the government purchased for a period of time before conversion to public ownership. Once in power, the New Labor government adopted and implemented the same idea but preferred to label it with the term “public-private partnerships” (Ball, 2007).

Also in the nineties, a range of international organizations and aid agencies such as the OECD, the World Bank, regional development banks, DFID, and USAID became increasingly interested in the PPP proposal, and adopted it as a key strategy for enhancing “good governance” in services delivery (Miller-Adams, 1999; Miraftab, 2004). These organizations, under the intellectual leadership of the World Bank, adopted the PPP framework to think about public sector reform and the implementation of infrastructure projects, particularly in developing countries.

PPP proposals fit very well in the long history of the World Bank fostering the participation of the private sector in services provision, particularly in the **Private Sector Development Strategy** that this organization inaugurated in the nineties. Actually, under the vision of this strategy, the PPPs idea became a sort of cross-cutting policy tool in the Bank. Among other initiatives, staff members from different divisions of this organization have come together in the World Bank Group’s Global Expert Team on PPPs. The Bank has also created the Global PPP Network, which is defined as an online platform for practitioners, policy makers, and development experts to exchange knowledge, discuss, learn, and connect around global best practices on PPPs in a range of sectors.³ The World Bank Institute has adopted PPPs as one of the key priority and cross-sectoral themes in the context of its new **Knowledge and Learning Strategy** (World Bank, 2009). Finally, PPPs are also promoted in core policy documents of the Bank, such as the **Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and the Country Assistance Strategies** (Barnett & Duvall, 2004).

³ See www.pppnetwork.info

2.2. PPPS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM: CORE PRINCIPLES

PPPs have been an essential part of the public administration reform agenda since the early 1990s. In broad terms, partnerships have been introduced in areas where full privatization seemed unfeasible due to technical problems regarding the transfer of property rights (Linder, 1999), or because of overall exhaustion or increased resistance related to the privatization agenda itself (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002). PPPs have been implemented in sectors such as energy, water supply, transportation, and construction. In comparison, public education has been a somewhat late adopter, but an increasingly important one.

Many public sector reformers expect PPPs to bring the best of both worlds. The state's orientation towards equity and social cohesion, together with the alleged creativity, dynamism, and efficiency of the private sector, and the compassion and commitment of the private not-for-profit sector (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) are presented as being able to achieve balance in the partnership context. Moreover, public and private partners are expected to adopt values, norms, and perspectives from each other in a mutual learning rationale. For instance, openness to public scrutiny and social cohesion awareness are some of the values that private partners could adopt from the public within a partnership scheme (Linder & Rosenau, 2000; Wettenhall, 2003).

In practice, however, PPPs may give rise to very different and complex hybrid organizational forms that may not always be “in balance” (Borys & Jemison, 1989). To be sure, public-private hybridization entails a fundamental tension between public accountability and commercial orientation (Skelcher, 2005; Wettenhall, 2003). Skelcher (2005) identifies three questions stemming from this tension. The first concerns the degree of legal constitutional oversight of hybrid organizational arrangements. PPPs emerge from pragmatic, usually executive decisions based on technical feasibility and appropriateness, as opposed to legislative deliberation regarding public policy ends. Hodge (2004) notes that because PPPs often imply substantial disbursements of public funds, and contracts usually exceed government terms, it is crucial that partnerships are not only technically optimal but that they are accompanied by democratic debate, transparency, and clarity. However, without a clear demarcation of PPPs in terms of responsibilities, goals, accountability basis, and proper justification, constitutional oversight can prove problematic (Skelcher, 2005).

The second question raised by Skelcher (2005) concerns accountability in general. While “democratic government operates through public deliberation and the regular testing of authority through elections” (Skelcher, 2005, p. 362), PPPs are not subject to the same kind of public scrutiny and may operate outside the guarantees of access to public information (Minow, 2003). Finally, the third question focuses on the potential loss of impartiality of governments engaging in partnerships, especially while simultaneously undertaking a regulatory role. Overall weakening of the public sector in many countries—resulting from increased private sector involvement or the state's increasing legitimation difficulties—makes this particularly challenging (Wettenhall, 2003). Schaeffer and Loveridge (2002) illustrate the dilemma:

For example, a government that enters into a PPC [public-private cooperation] with a private firm and makes a significant financial investment (or invests significant political capital) may be reluctant to pursue suspected violations of rules and regulations by its private “partner” if this would endanger the success of the cooperative project. In other words, the government may lose, or be perceived of having lost, its impartiality when it assumes a large tangible interest in the success of private projects. (p. 171)

Somehow, paradoxically, government guarantee tends to reduce market and competitive incentives in PPPs and consequently more government regulation is needed to ensure that public policy goals are being attained (Moe & Stanton, 1989; Skelcher, 2005).

Evidence on the performance of PPPs in providing social goods and services as compared to traditional state provision is contradictory and context-specific. Cost reduction, improved quality, greater participation, and risk-sharing are allegedly some of the main features of PPPs (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

Evidence is mixed regarding cost-reduction, efficiency, and quality. In the short run, PPPs seem to improve cost performance but only to a small degree and not in sectors where service quality is mainly determined by human capital investment (e.g., education and health) (Iossa & Martimort, 2015; Rosenau, 1999). Several negative externalities, especially in relation to equity and quality (stemming from the private sector's inherent orientation toward profit-making) may arise when combined with government inaction in guaranteeing democracy and equity. These externalities can prove extremely costly in the long run. Unsurprisingly, partnering with not-for-profit providers may, in contrast, align goals and run smoothly.

Risk and responsibility-sharing are certainly at the center of any success in PPP schemes. However, there are important *a priori* concerns that may not be easy to deal with. In particular, balanced risk and responsibility-sharing are constrained by the fact that the state always remains the ultimate provider of certain social goods and services, for which it has the obligation to fulfill a certain right, such as health or education (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002). When partnerships fail, states have to deal themselves with fulfilling unmet goals and responsibilities. This is often an underlying "unspoken consensus" between public and private partners in every partnership (Rosenau, 1999), which tends to uneven the field against the state. Furthermore, having the state as a last resort provider, private partners may engage in "cream skimming" and cost shifting in order to minimize risk and maximize profit while leaving the burden of unprofitable activities to the state (e.g., schooling of vulnerable populations, medical treatment of the elderly).

In practice, PPPs are demanding, sophisticated, and challenging forms of governance both for private agents and, especially, for governments (Hodge & Greve, 2010; Vining & Boardman, 2008). Schaeffer and Loveridge (2002), in fact, distinguish PPPs from other less intense forms of public-private collaboration. Unlike joint ventures or more general "buyer-seller" or "leader-follower" deals, these authors define an ideal PPP as "an open-ended agreement to work together" in which "partners define the general purpose of the partnership but are open to new developments and opportunities" and, most importantly, "all partners share in the rewards and decision making and assume full responsibility for the risks of their joint activities" (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002, p. 180). Not surprisingly, many researchers argue that real PPPs are virtually nonexistent. Rosenau (1999), for instance, notes that she observed "few authentic, fully integrated, co-accountable examples of partnership" (p. 26). This contrasts with widespread use of the term "partnership" to refer to almost every public-private collaboration scheme, regardless of the complexity of its contracts (Hodge & Greve, 2010). Undoubtedly, the term's positive "emotional connotation ... conveys an image of egalitarian and conflict-free decision-making" (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002, p. 185), which provides an interesting language game for policy makers.

3. PPPS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

3.1. THE TRANSPOSITION OF PPPS IN THE EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT FIELD

The first published reference to the term “PPPs for education” is found in a joint publication of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank; titled **The new social policy agenda in Asia**, this publication is a compilation of the presentations of the 1999 Manila Social Forum (Marshall & Bauer, 2000). The following year, a group of consultants and scholars (Norman Larocque, James Tooley, and Michael Latham—in the context of the International Finance Corporation [IFC]), published a handbook on PPPs in education and associated policy implementation.⁴ At that time, these experts were working together with the World Bank Economics of Education Thematic Group in research and discussion on alternative forms of education provision. As a result of the synergies generated amongst them, and in the context of the IFC, EdInvest was created in 1998. EdInvest is a joint venture between the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) and IFC, defined as an “on-line investment information forum on private sector development in education.” EdInvest produces information, data, and analysis on the development of private education and, among other outcomes, it has strengthened the IFC health and education department.

This network of experts is behind the most well-known publications, policy briefs, and toolkits on PPPs in education delivery. The highly disseminated World Bank report **The role and impact of PPPs in education** (Patrinos, Barrera Osorio, & Guáqueta, 2009), could be considered the pinnacle of the series of publications for which they are responsible. This network is also behind the organization and development of a range of events in the last decade where the PPPs for education idea was discussed with policy-makers, donor agencies, international organizations staff, and academics (see Verger, 2012).

More recently, members of the international aid community, philanthropic organizations, and corporate groups have advocated PPPs in education as an appropriate policy solution in the context of the debate for the definition of the SDG4/Education 2030 agenda.⁵ Despite the fact that there is no language on PPPs in relation to SDG4, PPPs have a specific target in SDG17 on means of implementation, which is cross-cutting and, accordingly, covers different policy sectors.

3.2. PPPS VS. PRIVATIZATION IN EDUCATION

Given the polysemic nature of the PPP concept, it is important to distinguish between “education privatization” policies and “PPPs in education.” The introduction of PPPs involves some level of privatization (broadly understood as the increased participation of private actors in education systems), but the opposite is not true; in other words, not any privatization policy or privatization process involves a PPP. For instance, with education sector liberalization, tax incentives for private education providers promote education privatization, but these measures can be enacted without the establishment of a proper partnership between the government and private operators. Furthermore, giving public subsidies to private schools, as in the case of Australian government subsidies to the private sector, does involve a contractual relationship but does not involve the type of complex relationship and complicity between the public and private sectors (risk-sharing, mutual learning, and so on) expected in a partnership framework.

Figure 1 shows different types of interactions between the public and private sectors according to who provides and who finances education. Of all the possibilities, the type of PPP in education we focus on in this framing paper is that in which the public sector funds schooling services provided or managed by the private sector (shown in the grey box in Figure 1; the most paradigmatic policies that could be enacted within this type of PPP arrangement are emphasized with bold letters).

⁴ The same year, Creative Associates International Inc. created a document for USAID titled Expanding public/private partnerships for improving basic education through school sponsorship in the Dominican Republic (Craig & Kane, 2001). However, it cannot be considered a very relevant source; despite the mention of PPPs in the title, the document does not mention PPPs anywhere in the text.
⁵ See, for instance, <http://www.educationpanel.org/brownreport2.pdf> and <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/library/391>

FIGURE 1

AREAS OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE MIXING IN EDUCATION (ACCORDING TO FINANCE AND PROVISION)
 Source: Adapted from Patrinos et al. (2009)

		PROVISION	
		PRIVATE	PUBLIC
FINANCE	PRIVATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Emergence of private schools and private universities ◆ Home schooling ◆ Private tutoring ◆ Liberalization of the education sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ User fees ◆ Student loans ◆ Philanthropy, “Brand Aid” ◆ Corporate social responsibility ◆ Multi-stakeholder partnerships
	PUBLIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Vouchers ◆ Contract schools ◆ Charter schools ◆ Contracting out private schools ◆ Subsidies to the private sector ◆ Tax incentives for private school consumption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Public schools ◆ Public universitiesg

3.3. THE POLICY TRANSLATION OF PPPS IN EDUCATION: CHALLENGING THE CONCEPTION OF PPPS AS A CONTINUUM

Limits to what forms of engagement between the public and the private sectors can be categorized (or not categorized) as a PPP in education are not always clear. According to Batley and McLoughlin (2009), the different levels of engagement between public and private actors in education provision are:

- a) The state contracts the private sector to provide support inputs to state provision (e.g., support services, consulting, training).**
- b) The state contracts out and finances some direct provision by the private sector. In this case, the state regulates private activity but is, itself, also a major provider.**
- c) The private sector is the main provider, but operates within a regulatory framework defined by the state.**

In contrast to the previous classification, the World Bank’s categorization of PPP modalities and levels of engagement has more obvious policy bias. According to World Bank education economists, PPPs need to be understood as a “continuum” that goes from “low” to “high” levels of engagement between the public and private sectors. This continuum is framed in an evolutionary way, departing from a

“nascent” stage, in which private schools exist but do not necessarily interact with the state, and reaching an “integral” stage, in which 100 percent of education is provided by the private sector under a voucher framework (see Figure 2). As can be observed in Figure 2, the World Bank outlines school choice as the preferred policy principle, and vouchers (and other pro-competition interventions) as the corresponding policy tools in partnership frameworks.

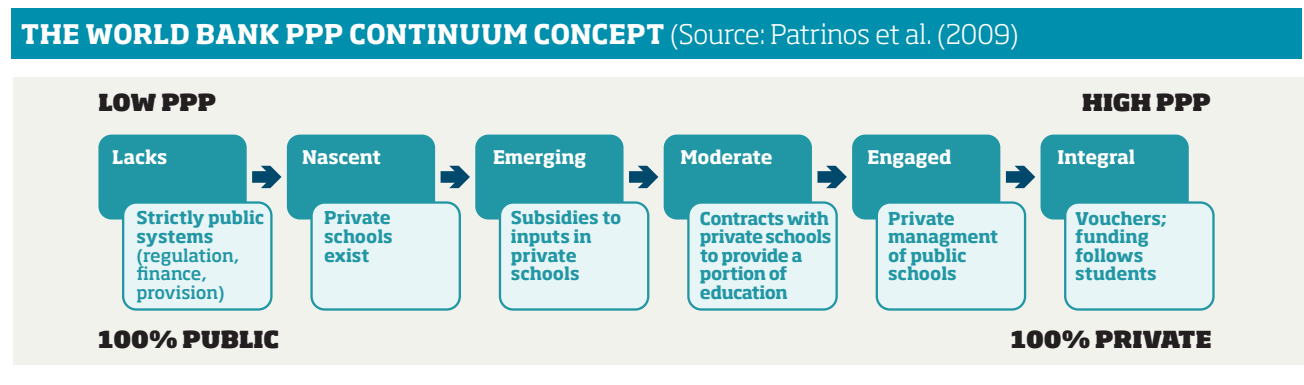
School choice, according to the World Bank, can contribute to breaking from an excessively centralized education system by giving more freedom and power to families when it comes to choosing the school for their children. As consumers in “market situations,” parents are expected to maximize their benefit by choosing the best school available. Under this PPP modality, school choice (and exit) are seen as effective political tools for families to express their level of (dis)satisfaction with the existing schools. In this way, school choice becomes a *de facto* quality control and accountability mechanism, and schools feel more competitive pressure to produce a higher quality service (Patrinos et al., 2009).

This World Bank conceptualization and classification of PPPs, despite its influence in the education for development field, is problematic for at least two key reasons. First, the conception of PPP as a continuum does not help to distinguish what is a PPP from what is not. As mentioned earlier, a PPP requires very clear conditions of accountability, knowledge transfer/exchange, risk-sharing, and so on, and may hardly fit a continuum. In the World Bank’s continuum, the very fact that private schools exist or that private schools receive some sort of subsidy is conceived as a PPP. The second concern is that the World Bank classification is politically tendentious and ideologically biased. The World Bank classifies PPPs in a way that supports the preference of this organization for market solutions in education (and other types of public services). In fact, it could be argued that high level or integral PPPs could be also enacted without necessarily having to promote school competition and freedom of school choice.

ON THE VARIETY OF PPP POLICIES AND PRIVATE PARTNERS

Finally, it needs to be acknowledged that not only the PPP concept can be unpacked in different categories or levels of engagement. The most emblematic PPP policies and the ethos of the private partners can be unpacked as well. For instance, a voucher scheme can differ a lot according to whether the scheme is targeted or universal; according to its financial provisions (i.e., with or without add-on payments; level of public subsidy; etc.); the territorial scale of the intervention; or whether its primary aim is to promote market competition or to promote more opportunities for the poor, enhancing social justice and equity.

FIGURE 2



Something similar can be said about charter legislations. These can diverge according to how much emphasis is put on themes such as competition, innovation, incentives, deregulation, autonomy, and accountability. A key variable to understand varieties of both charter school and voucher frameworks (as well as other types of PPPs) is whether for-profit providers are—or are not—allowed to operate, as in the case of the recent (2014) reform in the Chilean voucher system, in which profit has been banned for private providers accepting vouchers. PPPs can also be thought of and implemented as a short- or long-term policy option, and as complementary to public provision or as a delegation.

The type of private partners that might contribute further to a better development of PPPs and educational systems is again context-sensitive. For instance, promoting PPPs with religious providers seems more appropriate in a country with a long tradition of faith-based schools than in a country with a long tradition of laicism in the public sphere. However, in different contexts, there is quite a big consensus on the preference for not-for-profit providers over profit providers. This is especially the case for PPPs in low-income countries where it seems unreasonable that scarce resources in education go toward generating private profit. However, in general, there is concern about whether for-profit or commercially-oriented providers have an *ethos* and motivation that intrinsically clashes with the development of equitable and inclusive education systems. As stated by Rosenau (1999), one of the best known PPP analysts

When the profit motive is absent, as in the case of partnering between public and not-for-profit private partners, more consequential and significant forms of partnering are possible. (p. 27)

It is important to take into account the different possible policy designs of PPPs, and the different types of private partners, because each of these variables can have very different political and educational implications if a particular PPP approach is adopted in the education sector.

3.4. WHY ARE COUNTRIES ADOPTING PPPS IN EDUCATION? DIFFERENT PPP RATIONALES

PPPs in education are schematically portrayed as a cost-effective policy solution to address the access and quality problems faced by many education systems, especially in developing countries (Patrinos et al., 2009; Patrinos, 2006). According to its proponents, governments might embrace PPP schemes in education in order to:

- a) increase the level of financial resources committed to basic education and provide better value for money;**
- b) supplement government schools' limited capacity and thus expand access;**
- c) allow the public education sector to take advantage of private sector knowledge, skills and innovation;**
- d) allow governments to focus on those functions where they have comparative advantage (planning, policy, quality assurance, and curriculum development);**
- e) allow for greater innovation by focusing on outputs and outcomes, rather than processes;**
- f) allow governments to bypass operating restrictions (especially those related to human resources management: "unnecessarily restrictive employment laws and outdated government pay scales"⁶);**
- g) reduce the politicization of schooling and reduce the degree of corruption in the education sector;**
- h) make costs more transparent through contracts and more accurate costing schemes;**
- i) introduce competitive pressures on the education sector and thus innovation and efficiency gains. (LaRocque, 2008, p. 32; PPP Knowledge Lab, 2015)**

⁶ See www.india-seminar.com/2011/627/627_michael_latham.htm

Governments in developed and developing countries are usually guided by some of these ideas when deciding to engage in PPP frameworks. In this sense, a series of general PPP rationales can be identified, which are broadly related to the different historical trajectories of education systems (Verger et al., 2016a).

First, the implementation of PPPs focusing on voucher systems and integral school choice reforms (“high PPPs,” in World Bank terms) usually stresses a rationale based on improving quality, increasing responsiveness to families, and attaining cost-effectiveness through competitive market-like arrangements.

A second rationale is based essentially (but not exclusively) on the argument of innovation, especially regarding classroom-level practices and pedagogical strategies. Competitive pressures are seen as drivers of innovation but this rationale also assumes that private institutions are intrinsically superior at developing and delivering knowledge mobilization and fostering innovation (Lubienski, 2003). This makes the private sector an overall desirable partner and has definitely fueled the enactment of many “moderate” PPPs. The adoption of charter school-like reforms in the U.S., for instance, has mostly emphasized innovation and horizontal diversification (as opposed to vertical diversification) as its main drivers (Lubienski, 2006; Verger et al., 2016a).

Overall, some existing PPP frameworks usually respond to a very different rationale, at least in their origins. In countries with a longstanding tradition of public-private partnership, reasons for engaging in PPPs become reasons for maintaining existing PPP schemes. In countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Spain, the conflicts between the state and different religious institutions that took place throughout the 19th and 20th centuries gave rise to “historical PPPs,” in which states provide demand or supply-side funding to private religious (and increasingly non-religious) institutions (Vandenberghe, 1999; Verger et al., 2016a). These arrangements were initially based on considering freedom of choice an essential civil right, and as a way of integrating church-run schools into national education systems. However, more recently, policy makers and governments are also stressing cost-effectiveness and the horizontal diversification potential of these governance frameworks. Reasons for maintaining these systems thus stem from a historical and somehow inertial rationale, but also from a series of more recent market-related ideas.

Finally, in some cases it is more difficult to distinguish a clear rationale guiding the adoption of PPPs. Instead, PPPs are seen as the only possible solution to challenges of access to and quality in education. Especially in conflict affected areas or fragile states, the guiding rationale is thus pragmatism, intended to overcome structural government default stemming from a lack of resources and capacity (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009; Rose & Greeley, 2006). This is the case of countries like Haiti or some regions of The Philippines engaging in PPPs with private providers, or that of Tanzania’s public schools operated by faith-based organizations. Although not necessarily exclusive, this is overall a very different rationale to the rationales presented above (i.e., market competition, innovation, or political compromise with the church). As we develop below, in conflict affected contexts, lack of state capacity and pressure on government budgets usually makes contracting-out schemes prevail over more balanced and accountable PPPs.

3.5. IMPACT DIMENSIONS: MAIN DEBATES

One of the most challenging issues in discussing the implications of PPP frameworks lies in the diversity of models that may actually be enacted. Each model is also very context-specific, which makes generalizing impossible—or at least inaccurate. PPP proponents are, however, quite general in describing the benefits of educational PPPs in terms of efficiency, affordability, quality, equity, educational innovation, and so on. As we show in this section, much of the existing academic evidence and normative dialogue problematize definitions, expectations, and perceived successes of PPPs too simplistically—and tend to ignore the critical importance of context.

EDUCATIONAL EFFECTS OF PPPs: LEARNING, EQUITY, INNOVATION, AND OTHER DIMENSIONS

It is beyond the reach of a framing paper to do an in-depth literature review of the effects of PPPs on different dimensions of the education system. However, as a way to frame the discussion, it is illustrative to point out what existing literature says about the topic. Verger et al. (2016b) summarize what all existing literature on education PPPs/school choice from the Scopus academic database says about the effects of these measures (n=268). This review distinguishes between specific PPP schemes (such as vouchers and charters), and school competition and choice dynamics (independently of whether these dynamics are developed under a PPP contract or not). Overall, results tend to be more negative than positive (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

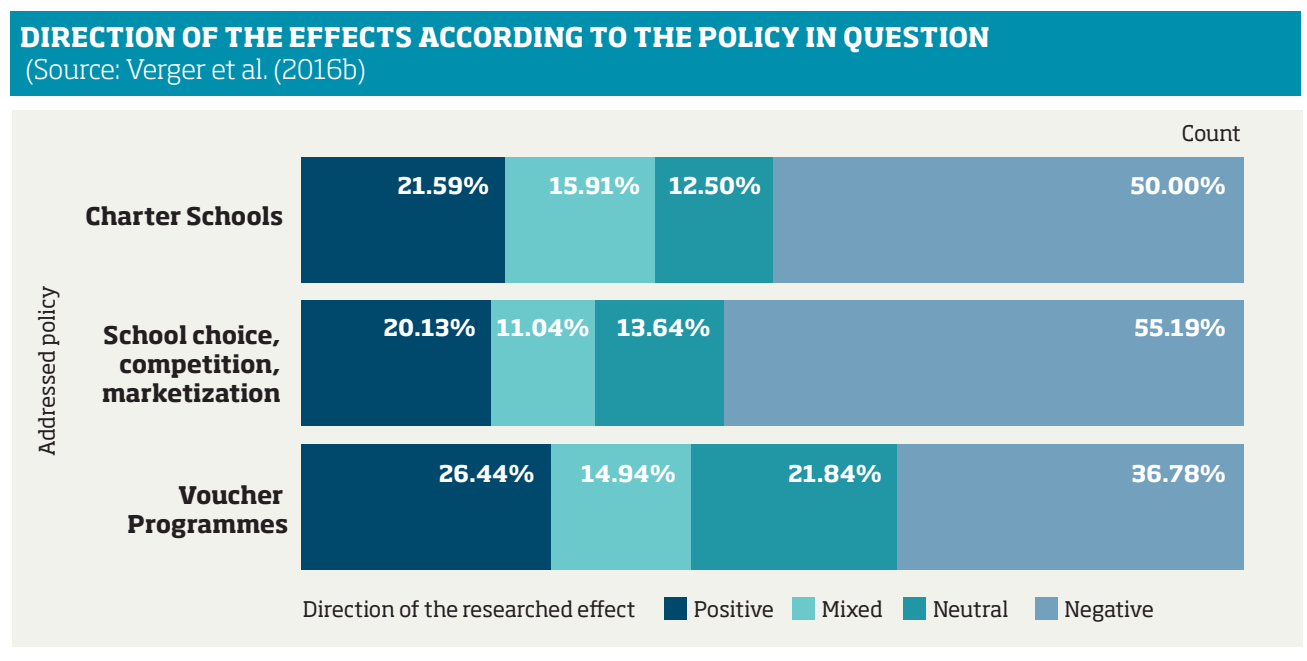
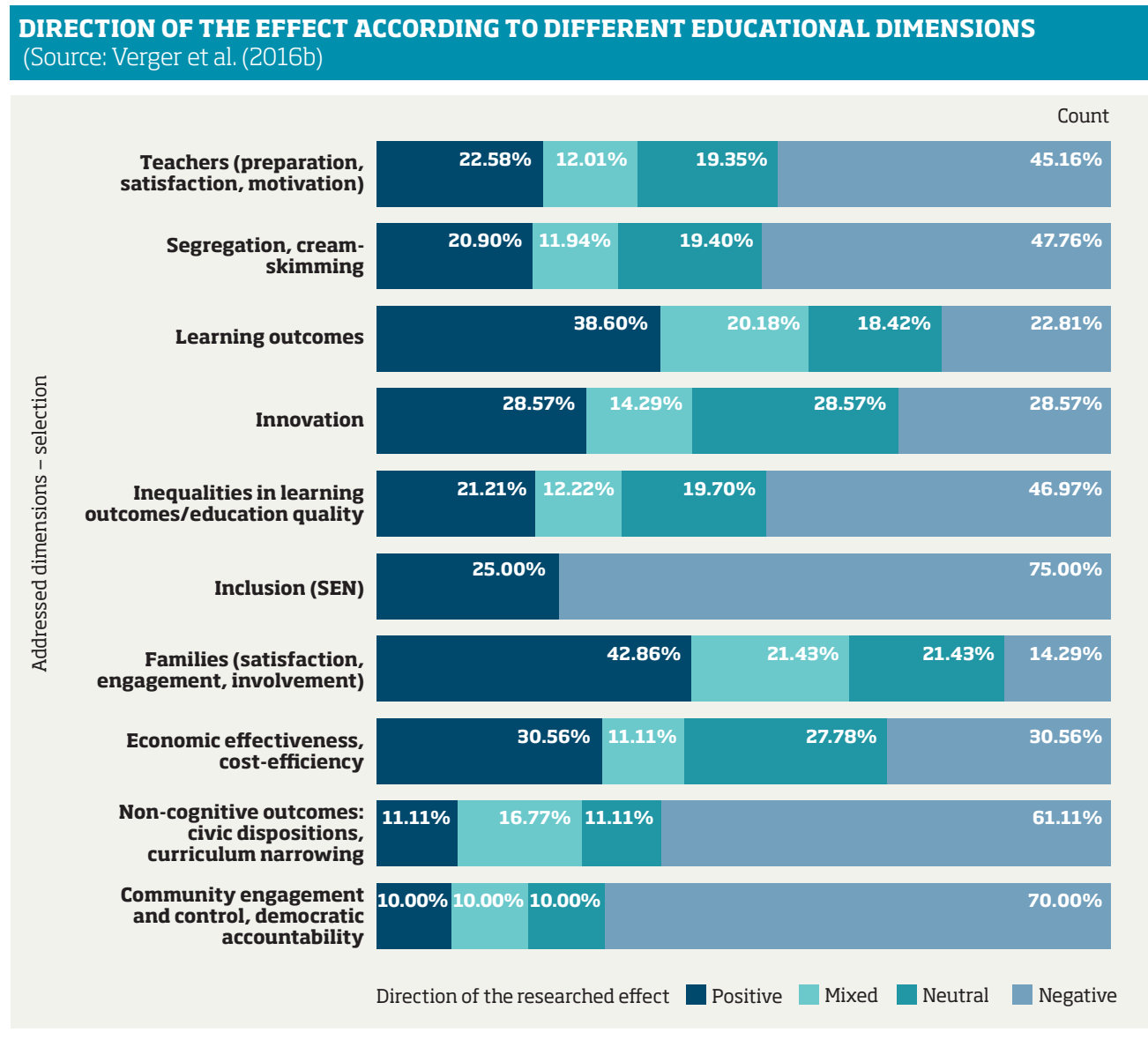


FIGURE 4



When looking at different impact dimensions, the pieces of research reviewed distinguish between effects in terms of teachers’ work, learning outcomes, education inequalities, efficiency, parental satisfaction, innovation, and so on (see more details in Figure 4).

Figure 4 shows that existing PPP research reports more negative than positive results in most impact dimensions. PPPs seem to be especially problematic in terms of education inequalities, inclusion, and school segregation. This is due to the fact that the competitive environment that many PPP contracts generate incentivizes schools to try to select the best students, as well as to discriminate against those students less academically skilled or with special needs or behavioral issues. Results are also quite negative in terms of accountability, teachers’ satisfaction, and non-cognitive outcomes.

The latter is related to the fact that, again, the competitive environment and the forms of standardized evaluation that PPPs tend to generate provide schools with the incentive to narrow the curriculum and teach to the test. Aggregated results on learning outcomes, efficiency, and innovation are, in contrast, more balanced. The dimension where PPPs seem to perform better relates to household satisfaction.

Nonetheless, some words of caution are necessary when attempting to draw conclusions from this data. First, most research reviewed (around 80 percent) has been conducted in Western countries, which makes extrapolation of results to developing contexts inappropriate. Second, we are addressing PPP policies in the abstract when, actually, and as mentioned previously, these policies can respond to very different designs, and their implementation and impact are absolutely context sensitive.

EFFICIENCY AND BUDGETARY AFFORDABILITY

According to PPP proponents, every form of PPP is supposed to be able to trim down costs (as compared to traditional education provision) and provide value for money (PPP Knowledge Lab, 2015). This derives from the private sector's supposed ability to provide both infrastructure and services at a lower cost due to economies of scale, more experience, better incentives, and greater ability to innovate.

However, Figure 4 shows rather contradicting results of PPPs and market solutions in education in terms of efficiency. While PPPs could play a role to bring in funding in fragile states –or, more accurately, to minimize on-budget government expenditure and defer payments–cost-effectiveness gains are not clear, especially in the long run (Romero, 2015; Rosenau, 1999). The Chilean quasi-market is a good example of the increasing need for state regulation and monitoring of private providers in an attempt to revert unwanted externalities comprising equity and quality aspects. This “hyper-regulated deregulation” scheme has proven extremely time and resource-consuming, and requires strong state management capacities. This raises the question, in addition to whether PPPs provide value for money, of whether PPPs are advisable in contexts with very weak states. The Tanzanian government recognized these challenges, articulating in a formal “National PPP Policy” statement that it had “insufficient capacity negotiations, procurement, implementation and management of PPPs” and a “lack of comprehensive policy, legal and institutional frameworks [to] provide clear guidelines and procedures for development and implementation of PPPs” (United Republic of Tanzania, 2009).

Moreover, economies of scale are not likely to exist in the education field, with few exceptions. Context-specificity makes every project distinctive, complex, and uncertain, and, as in other non-education PPPs, these features tend to raise costs for private providers just as much as they would for governments. Besides, there are usually very few potential providers to carry out medium- or large-scale education provision projects, so bidding and competition do not really materialize (see Vining & Boardman, 2008). Romero (2015, p. 19) suggests that “PPP are, in most cases, the most expensive method of financing, significantly increasing the cost to the public purse.” This is because interest rates of private deals are always higher than those of government borrowing, and private partners are, furthermore, expected to make a profit on their investment.

Finally, it needs to be noted that the efficiency gains of PPPs in education usually come from a more intense exploitation of teachers' labor and student selection practices. This is especially the case of those PPPs that some governments have started adopting with so-called low-fee private schools. Similarly, worse working conditions for teachers have been evidenced in charter schools in Colombia (known as *colegios en concesión*) in comparison with traditional district schools (Termes et al., 2015). The World Bank concedes:

In those countries where public sector staff is paid high wages as a result of belonging to strong unions, [in PPPs] there is a cost saving associated with the contractor being able to hire nonunionized labor. (Patrinos et al.,

4. ACCOUNTABILITY IN PPP FRAMEWORKS

As shown in the previous sections, accountability is a key component, but also a key concern, in all types of PPP arrangements, which is why this issue merits a separate section.

To a great extent, all types of PPPs are expected to be subject to some form of legal or contract accountability. **Legal accountability** means that schools, Education Management Organizations, and the public administration are expected to operate in accordance with national and international legislation; otherwise, the government (or any citizen) can bring to the courts complaints against these types of stakeholders (Darling-Hammond, 2004). In the context of PPPs such as charter schools or academies, the private sector needs to fulfil the conditions established in the PPP contract with the state in case it wants the contract to be renewed, or wants to avoid fines for breaching of contract (West, Mattei, & Roberts, 2011). Nonetheless, in legal terms, one of the main problems of holding PPPs accountable is the fact that there are many aspects of a PPP that cannot be properly detailed in a contract:

The relationship between the partners is longer-term and more complex than in most contracting-out situations. It is impossible to write complete contracts. Thus there is a longer time frame for opportunism to emerge from either side of the transaction. [...] Even private sector joint ventures and alliances, where both partners have profit goals, also frequently experience high conflict, extensive opportunism, and high failure rates [...]. In PPPs, conflict emanates from two factors: (a) the contract cannot be fully specified, or complete (Milgrom & Roberts, 1992, pp. 126-165); (b) the participants have differing objective functions (less formally, they have different goals). (Vining & Boardman, 2008, pp. 151-152)

However, legal accountability is not the only possible form of accountability. Today, most countries in the world are experimenting with different forms of *administrative accountability* that also could apply to PPP frameworks, including bureaucratic, managerial, professional, market, social, and network accountability models—each of which we will briefly describe.

Bureaucratic accountability is the most traditional modality of administrative accountability. Within this modality, public authorities promulgate rules and procedures on how education should be delivered, and school inspectors (or other local authorities) try to ensure that schooling takes place according to such rules and procedures (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Traditionally, bureaucratic accountability has adopted an inputs approach and focuses on finding out whether the necessary resources are in place in schools for the appropriate delivery of the national curriculum (Falabella & de la Vega, 2016).

Managerial accountability “includes systematic efforts to create more goal-oriented, efficient, and effective schools by introducing more rational administrative procedures” (Leithwood & Earl, 2000, p.14). This approach is also hierarchical, in the sense that the state, through its multiple agencies, is the “principal” of the accountability process and defines what goals teachers and schools are expected to achieve, as well as the incentives and sanctions that will be associated with the process, if any (Anderson, 2005). The most distinctive feature of managerial accountability (in relation to the bureaucratic approach) is its clear focus on outcomes and results (usually learning outcomes), instead of processes and inputs. The enactment of this approach to accountability involves the generation of data through large-scale standardized evaluation instruments.

The **market** model involves accountability to the consumer (i.e., families) and is promoted through pro-school choice policies and competition dynamics. Here, the role of the state is apparently secondary because it is assumed that demand-side forces will make schools more responsive to the needs of families and will put pressure on schools to strengthen the quality of their services; otherwise,

schools that do not respond to consumer demands will lose students and end up closing. Nonetheless, though the state appears to have a subsidiary role within the market accountability model, the publication of school rankings and enactment of performance-based funding formulas—including vouchers—are some of the governmental measures that can contribute to strengthening this form of accountability (Leithwood & Earl, 2000).

In countries with higher levels of teachers' professionalization, forms of **professional accountability** tend to have a longstanding trajectory. In these cases, "teachers and other staff are expected to acquire specialized knowledge, meet standards for entry, and uphold professional standards of practice in their work" (Darling-Hammond, 2004, p.1050). Within this modality, educators are accountable for adherence to professional standards and accountable to their peers (Anderson, 2005). In contrast to the previous two modalities (in which schools/teachers are evaluated externally and have to respond to an external authority), professional accountability can be seen as a form of horizontal accountability (West et al., 2011).

Social accountability emphasizes the importance of participation by parents and the community in the governance of schools (Ranson, 2003). In participative accountability, schools are accountable to families not via choice and exit mechanisms, but via voice and dialogue within school governing bodies (West et al., 2007). In some cases, especially in developing countries, school-governing bodies are given important responsibilities in the management of the schools (e.g., deciding on future investments and even firing and hiring teachers) (Patrinos & Fasih, 2009). The World Bank considers "the shorter route of accountability" (which includes forms of both market and social accountability) to have advantages over the "long route of accountability" (i.e., the bureaucratic model of accountability). According to this international organization, "the shorter route affords clients the power to more frequently provide feedback to providers to let them know how they are doing and to hold them accountable for good quality services" (World Bank, 2015, p. 5).

Network accountability could be seen as a form of participative accountability in the sense that the participants in a network are mutually accountable to each other. This includes networks between different schools, between community actors and schools, and so on. In this case, the key mechanism of accountability "is likely to be dialogue" (West et al., 2011, p. 53). In the context of international aid and development, the logic of network accountability is also applied, though at a different level (i.e., between donors and recipients), under the label of mutual accountability (see Eyben, 2008).

In real situations, different types of accountability can co-exist. The same mechanism of accountability can also be used to promote more than one accountability approach. For instance, as mentioned, standardized testing can be used to promote market accountability, but also managerial forms of accountability. The hybridization of accountability models does not make it easy to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of different types of accountability systems, in many cases. Nonetheless, because this is a theme that demands further scrutiny, in Table 1 we systematize the most important pros and cons of each of these models of accountability

Such considerations on pros and cons of accountability apply to all types of educational systems. However, an extra word of caution is necessary concerning accountability in education systems where PPP frameworks are enacted, or where there is a strong presence of the private sector. In most of these cases, it tends to be administratively difficult and resource consuming for the government to control whether the private sector adheres to core public regulations such as free-of-charge education and non-selection of students by schools. This difficulty is arguably higher when private schools have competitive incentives of an economic nature, or when school providers have for-profit motives. In general, there is an obvious tension between trust and control within PPP frameworks. The key question here is what forms and instruments of accountability can contribute to build trust between different educational stakeholders, including private school operators.

FIGURE 1

PROS AND CONS OF ACCOUNTABILITY MODELS (Source: Authors)

MODEL	PROS	CONS	COUNTRIES
BUREAUCRATIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Focuses on whether the necessary inputs and procedures are in place ◆ Contributes to budget-tracking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Top-down ◆ Not sufficient focus on learning outcomes as an accountability item ◆ Requires a well-functioning bureaucratic structure that might not be in place in fragile/ conflict contexts 	France Spain Portugal Italy
MANAGERIAL (TEST-BASED)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Focuses on learning outcomes ◆ Contributes to a results-based managerial culture ◆ Generates useful data to promote improvement at both the school and system levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Might lead to teach to the test and other undesired/opportunistic behaviors at the school level ◆ Promotes education standardization ◆ Requires sophisticated evaluation systems that might not be in place in fragile/conflict contexts 	United States
MARKET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Promotes schools being more responsive to the demands of families and students ◆ Is more economically efficient than managerial or bureaucratic forms of accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Generates school segmentation and segregation ◆ Incentivizes the schools to select (and in some cases to discriminate against) students 	England and Wales Chile
SOCIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Gives voice to families and to the community ◆ Is more economically efficient than managerial or bureaucratic forms of accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Can generate power struggles among community actors ◆ Can generate educational inequalities (according to parents' skills) ◆ Can generate tensions between teachers and parents 	EDUCO experiment in El Salvador
PROFESSIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Focuses on educational processes and education quality in a comprehensive sense ◆ Is more formative than the previous models ◆ Due to its horizontal nature, teachers tend to offer less resistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Difficult to apply in countries where the teaching force has not been professionalized, as is the case of most fragile/conflict states 	Nordic countries
NETWORK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Means a real partnership between education stakeholders ◆ Promotes collaboration—instead of competition—between schools and other educational stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Still a very incipient model 	

5. KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE DEBATE

5.1. SUMMARY

Discussing the potential benefits and disadvantages of PPPs in the education sector is not an easy endeavor. Neglect of context specificity and frequently inaccurate generalizations have produced rather normative frameworks that close up the debate. In the following lines we will outline a series of key considerations that have been addressed in this framing paper:

- a)** PPP frameworks cover many policy options and their adoption might follow very diverse rationales. Alternatives range from infrastructure PPPs to private provision of core educational services, which makes generalizations difficult. PPPs need to be unpacked, both as an analytic category and as a policy generation tool.
 - b)** PPPs are becoming a catch-all concept in the educational field. Many different private-public collaboration policies are generally labeled as PPPs, and market solutions are seen as the ultimate PPP model by different actors. Unpacking these different policies helps limit political tendentiousness and ideological bias, allowing for a more descriptive and less normative vocabulary.
 - c)** All PPPs involve some level of privatization (i.e., greater participation of private actors in education), but not every privatization policy or process involves a PPP. Partnerships include a series of elements and conditions that are absent in other less intense forms of public-private collaboration. The relationship between partners is longer-term and more open-ended than in most contracting-out situations. Accountability, decision making, and risk-sharing between partners requires highly complex contract forms that are extremely different from those in simple buyer-seller deals.
 - d)** Many of the reasons put forward to adopt PPPs are based on economic theory, but not supported sufficiently by evidence. On occasion, some of the reasons to adopt PPPs can be seen as contradictory or vague (e.g., reducing politicization of schooling, increasing financial resources), or even naïve (e.g., reducing corruption, making costs more transparent, or assuming that PPPs are in all cases a source of innovation and knowledge transfer).
 - e)** Evidence regarding cost-reduction and efficiency in PPP frameworks is mixed. In the short run, in some contexts, PPPs seem to improve cost performance, but only to a small degree. Several externalities stemming from the private sector's inherent orientation toward profit-making may arise when combined with a government's restrained capacity to guarantee democracy and equity. State regulation and monitoring of private providers in an attempt to revert unwanted externalities comprising equity and quality aspects have proven extremely time and resource-intensive, and require strong state management capabilities. Some of the most pressuring issues can be avoided by only allowing not-for-profit operators in the context of PPP educational frameworks.
 - f)** PPPs raise accountability concerns that are both democratic and administrative in nature. PPPs generally emerge from pragmatic executive decisions based on technical feasibility, as opposed to legislative deliberation regarding public policy ends. PPPs are not subject to the same kind of public scrutiny as government institutions and policies; furthermore, in most PPPs governments lose impartiality, especially in situations where the government simultaneously undertakes a regulatory role. Moreover, private sector participation in educational systems usually creates difficulties in terms of enforcing compliance with basic public regulations such as educational gratuity and non-selection of students, especially when schools are run by for-profit organizations under competitive incentives.
 - g)** At an administrative level, all forms of accountability have pros and cons, but all require strong state capabilities and infrastructure to fulfill stated goals. The main areas of accountability and state control in educational PPPs are national curriculum, quality of school facilities, teachers' qualifications, teachers' labor conditions (including students-teacher ratios), gratuity (ensuring that schools do not charge uncovered fees to families), democratic school governance (guaranteeing participation of teachers, families, and other stakeholders at the school level), and enrolment processes (controlling against discriminatory student selection).
-

h) Mutual accountability (understood as a horizontal accountability relationship between different actors) is not an appropriate accountability model in education PPPs. In the end, horizontality, balanced risk, and responsibility-sharing are constrained by the fact that the state is always ultimately responsible for public services and guaranteeing that education is a human right. This “unspoken consensus” between public and private partners in every partnership tends to uneven the field against the state. Accordingly, in PPP frameworks, the private sector needs to be accountable to the state (as well as to other public constituencies).

5.2. CRISIS AFFECTED AND FRAGILE STATES

a) Although the previous conclusions apply to different educational settings, an extra word of caution is necessary in relation to crisis affected and fragile contexts. PPPs could be a way to address some of the limitations of state provision in such contexts, but in practice PPPs are very demanding and challenging forms of governance both for private agents and, especially, for governments. In crisis affected and fragile contexts, PPP implementation is especially challenging “due to limited commitment (sometimes evident by both partners)” (Rose & Greeley, 2006, p. 16).

b) In fragile settings, “government capacity to plan, co-ordinate, organize, regulate and finance the non-state sector is severely constrained” (Batley & McLoughlin, 2009, p. 33). Such states face issues of technical capacity, but also lack up-to-date administrative data and contend with weakened legitimacy. These states are more vulnerable to privatization trends and/or to PPP policy proposals that have not been properly analyzed in terms of potential risks related to equity, quality, and the realization of the right to education.

c) In crisis affected countries, PPPs tend to be adopted for pragmatic reasons (i.e., the need to respond diligently to deliver public services) and not for competition and “education quality” reasons (usually the rationale in countries with greater degrees of stability).

d) Nonetheless, quality gains seem to be unrealizable in the context of PPPs organized with low-fee private schools. This is mainly because low-fee private schools rely on poorly trained teachers with very poor working conditions, and on extremely standardized teaching materials.

e) In contexts of fragility, partnerships with NGOs and community schools seem to be more appropriate than partnerships with low-fee private school chains, educational entrepreneurs, and other types of profit-oriented providers. This is due to the fact that, first, it does not seem to be ethically defensible to extract profit from an already poorly resourced system and, second, because both the government and the international community need to make sure that, for the benefit of students in such difficult situations, private providers’ engagement responds to a great extent to humanitarian and pro-poor motivations.

f) Batley and McLoughlin (2009, p. 36) suggest that “looser partnerships” (i.e., partnerships based on contracts that are more flexible and open to reconsideration of specific aspects/items during the process) might be more suitable to local education NGOs and community organizations than “classical contracts” with normal enterprises—though this should not exempt the former from an accountability relationship.

g) In fragile and conflict settings, PPPs should not promote competition dynamics. In these contexts, relationships of cooperation, networking, and knowledge exchange between schools and between teachers are a more appropriate (and probably less harmful) approach to education system development.

h) Last, but not least, PPPs could represent a step forward in contexts of conflict and fragility, where public education provision is insufficient (or, in some areas, non-existent). However, the main question for the debate is whether PPPs should be conceived as a short-term well-regulated solution while public provision problems are fixed, or a long-term solution through which the educational governance paradigm and the role of the state in education are altered more deeply.

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