

Conclusion ☐

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This book on the privatization of education comes at a time when two major issues are at stake. Firstly, the World Summit on Transforming Education, to be held in New York in 2022 at the United Nations Summit of Heads of State and Government, which testifies to the importance of education more than ever in resolving the significant challenges facing the world: widespread learning poverty, peace and security concerns (various conflicts based on identitarian withdrawal or religious extremism, the Covid-19 health crisis, etc.), the demands of scientific and technological progress (the rise of artificial intelligence, including in education), diverse inequalities (notably gender ones), climate change, and so on. In organizing this Summit, the heads of state of the United Nations recognized the importance of transforming education's form and content to give everyone access to the learning they need to meet today's global challenges. The second issue in the current educational context is that we are almost five years away from the 2030 deadline set by the international community for taking stock of progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those of SDG4 relating to education. Given this, one of the major concerns is the extent to which countries will be able to achieve the SDG4 targets by 2030.

Against this backdrop, it is useful to explore the contribution that this book can make to shedding light on the issues at stake in the transformation of education from the point of view of the governance of education systems, and in particular, the relationship between public authorities (guarantors of equitable, quality education for all) and the private sector, often stamped with the seal of profit-seeking.

Generally speaking, privatization is defined as “the development or transfer of assets, functions, responsibilities or management operations that were previously in the hands of public actors, first and foremost the public authorities, and which are entrusted to private actors” (Chevaillier & Pons, 2019, p. 29). According to Ball and Youdel (2008), this generally takes two forms: “endogenous” privatization (from within the public sector) through specific public policies (supply-side liberalization or private-inspired management measures within public provision); and “exogenous” privatization, by the market, which refers to the authorization of a competitive supply

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of market-like, for-profit educational services by private companies within the public education service. However, in addition to Ball and Youdel's (2008) endogenous/exogenous duality, Chevaillier and Pons (2019) highlight a third form of privatization, which takes into account individual private interests and aspirations and which involves specific, original responses to individual educational needs (family schooling, tutoring, shadow schooling, etc.).

Regardless of the form privatization takes, a major issue that consistently arises is the question of compatibility between the promotion of private interests and the public mission of education. This tension is evident both in the tripartite relationship that connects students, teachers, and knowledge through which education achieves its purpose of 'methodical socialization' of new generations (Ball & Youdell, 2008), and in the governance of the educational system, which is crucial for achieving this goal.

On this basis, we believe that the present work can shed light on the expectations of states in resorting to privatization, the effects of privatization on learning and the management of education systems, the constraints associated with the articulation of the logic of public service education with that of the private sector, and the possible perverse effects that may result.

1. The challenges of privatization: what do governments want?

The abundant literature on the privatization of education, and the polemics it sometimes provokes in relation to the commodification of education and the governance of education systems, are indicative of the scope of this phenomenon in recent years, especially since 2015 (see the chapter by Rui da Silva and Theresa Adriaio in this book). The observation made in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) review that very few countries had achieved the targets set for education suggests that the interest shown by education systems in the private sector could be an expression of a desire to call on the operating logic of the private sector to compensate for the inadequacy of public intervention in certain aspects of education. In the literature, the importance of research into families' educational choices outside the traditional public provision confirms the need to access or explore alternative forms of learning. Is the time of "education trapped in the school form," long explored by some Francophone authors such as Guy Vincent, about to be over after a transition marked by variations highlighted by other authors (Seguy, 2018)? This question makes perfect sense in the face of the adjustments imposed by the Covid crisis, which has often led us, in this case in sub-Saharan Africa, to look outside the school for other places, other

actors, and other modalities (including digital), or even other transmission/learning times to ensure educational continuity. This confirms the importance of rethinking the future of education through “a new social contract for education.”

Opening up to the private sector seems to us to be an integral part of this transformation process and one of the issues at stake. Indeed, despite growing interest in privatization, whatever form it takes, several issues remain at stake for education systems. The first is the need for the state to play its role of “regulatory control” to prevent the uncontrolled development of private educational provision from generating inequalities: regulation by the state with the aim of harmonization (Chevaillier & Pons, 2019, p. 29). The second would refer, on the one hand, to the inclusion of the private sector in educational policy and the operation of the education system and, on the other hand, to the interplay of mutual influences that may result (Fondevilla & Verger, 2019) as well as the impact (positive or otherwise) this may have on the overall configuration and transformation of education (content, pedagogy, organization and governance).

2. Does privatization really meet the expectations of governments?

The developments in this book and in the literature suggest that, in general, governments are using privatization in its various forms to meet the challenges of quality education for all by improving the quality of learning and ensuring more equitable access for all. While data on this issue are unevenly available in the literature for Anglophone and Francophone countries, one thing is certain: overall, studies show that there is a difference in success between students attending private and public schools. More often than not, and overall, the former perform better than the latter, despite the measures taken as part of endogenous privatization to support learning and reduce inequalities. The comparative effect is, therefore, generally more favorable under exogenous privatization, but this is not without controversy, firstly because of the consequences in terms of inequity in the education system, and secondly because of the mixed nature of the correlation between learning outcomes (measured in PASEC assessments, among others) and whether pupils belong to the private or public sector (see the chapter Hounkpodoté & Lauwerier)⁷⁵. Analysis of the successive PASEC evaluation reports, confirming the existing literature on the subject (including several articles in this book), reveals the mixed effects of private education

⁷⁵ We refer to the various PASEC evaluation reports (2014, 2019).

provision on the quality of learning compared to public provision since the integration of private sector logic into education more often translates into organizational, management and marketing innovations than into real transformations in didactic, pedagogical or curricular matters. What's more, the development of poorly controlled exogenous privatization can have a segregating effect on schools, depending on their immediate geographical environment (urban/rural), the socio-economic situation of the populations attending them, and the level of demand they place on the quality of educational goods and services. What is more, exogenous privatization is not always a rational choice on the part of governments, integrated into their educational policies and strategies. It is sometimes a societal response to the inadequacy of public action to ensure access to quality education for all: where the state fails, the private sector and civil society take over. As a result, this "de facto" privatization, which is often tolerated, can lead to lower-quality educational provision. Furthermore, families are not equally well placed when it comes to choosing private schools, with urban families from high socio-economic backgrounds often having a better grasp of the quality criteria for private schools and the financial conditions for accessing them than their rural and/or lower socio-economic counterparts, who more often than not play the proximity and affordability card rather than the quality of provision.

3. The challenge: reconciling public service and private sector logics, reducing perverse effects

While the first two forms of privatization defined above are generally more easily addressed by the state in its regulatory role, the second form (exogenous privatization) deserves particular attention insofar as the state's regulatory role may sometimes be confronted with the incompatibility of the public service logic of education with that of the market (market logic), in which certain actors may reduce the importance attached to pedagogical factors or teacher remuneration to maximize profits. In some sub-Saharan African countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire, the state calls on the private sector as part of a public-private partnership to help it carry out its mission of educating and training young people, and in particular to achieve its secondary school enrolment targets. However, this strategy has its pitfalls in low-income neighborhoods, where the need to minimize costs often leads schools to cut back on investment in teaching and learning materials and teacher salaries (sometimes on precarious contracts with poorly qualified people), resulting in lower-quality teaching (Zamblé & N'guessan, 2019).

Similarly, the drift from privatization to marketization is more complex in the third form of privatization, linked to individual choice, which is less easy for public authorities to grasp, and is seen by some as privatization by default, or “shadow education”. Bray and Zhang (2019), for example, note that in some countries in the South, private tutoring is developing, supposedly as a complement to and on the fringes of public provision, but which in reality constitutes a form of “privatization by default” (see also Bray’s paper in this book).

In short, the state, often the initiator of endogenous privatization, is supposed to have control over it. As for exogenous privatization, a regulatory framework can be found in the systems of rules that structure public-private partnerships, as is the case in several countries. On the other hand, the regulation of privatization linked to individual choices, which more easily falls within the scope of shadow education, is more complex and less obvious. The extensive literature that is developing on this form of privatization deserves particular attention in order to draw out the relevant information needed for decision-making.

Finally, while it is true that the state must regulate, we must bear in mind that state regulation is not free of bias, since the state’s regulatory stance can sometimes be torn between “recognizing” the usefulness of the private sector and the need to control its perverse effects, which sometimes leads to counterproductive restrictions. This can be seen, for example, in the dilemmas faced by the French state in the face of the emergence and development of the particular form of educational deprivation that is homeschooling (Bongrand, 2019), or in the difficult regulation of early childhood education and protection (cf. chapter by Anna Cristina D’Addio in this book), or even in the propensity to turn a blind eye to the proliferation of shadow schools in certain sub-Saharan African countries.

4. Finally: promote research, and share experience and best practices

Privatization is now a reality in most education systems, but it cannot be considered a panacea for ensuring quality and equity in education. This is an issue that still needs to be better understood so as to provide those involved in education with relevant and useful information for decision-making. Scientific and comparative research in education can provide an opportunity in this respect. Similarly, given the biases that privatization of education can entail, the state’s regulatory role is crucial in guaranteeing the quality and equity of educational provision. This presupposes that decision-makers and political actors can identify and regulate in order to mitigate the

perverse effects of too much autonomy of private education provision (precisely the so-called “shadow education”), which could escape the control of public authorities. In addition to the contribution of research, opportunities to share experiences and best practices can be inspiring in supporting public action by decision-makers in this area.

The overall paucity of studies on privatization in education – especially monographs - in French-speaking countries compared with English-speaking ones probably reflects a belated awareness, or even an inadequate use, of scientific data to steer education systems. Action is needed to raise awareness and encourage research structures to take an interest in privatization in education. An intergovernmental institution such as the Conférence des Ministres de L'Éducation de la Francophonie (CONFEMEN) could be the appropriate framework to support member states and governments in this endeavor. CONFEMEN's Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs (PASEC) could better integrate into its evaluation methodology the issue of measuring the impact of privatization – or even shadow education (Bray & Baba-Moussa, 2023) – on learning, to produce evidence-based data on this subject. As for CONFEMEN's Programme d'appui au changement et à la transformation de l'éducation (PACTE), the prospective studies carried out following the PASEC evaluations would complement the evidence base for decision-making, and the sharing of experience and innovation carried out, specifically through KIX Afrique 21 or at meetings of the institution's governing bodies, would serve as a framework conducive to political dialogue to strengthen the decision-making and action capacities of states to take better account of the issue of privatization in education.

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