

# PRIVATIZATION OF EDUCATION IN IRAN: A COMPARATIVE MODEL

ABBAS MADANDAR ARANI\*

LIDA KAKIA\*\*

BATOL MOAZENI\*\*\*

## Abstract

*In Iran and after end of war with Iraq in 1988, establishing Non-Governmental Schools was first action of the government in operationalizing the policy of privatization of education. During the early years like many newly-established economic activities, a common tendency existed among the government and investors. In recent years, non-governmental schools' authorities have been observing the "getting the stop sanction" proposal from the part of NGS founders. In fact, during the three last decades, different states adopted different policies about these schools. At the first years the government has followed "Strong Support" policy. In the middle years proceeded to the "Balanced Support" and now, the government applies the policy of "Washy Support". At first part of present paper we shortly try to explain policies and strategies on privatization of education according to the Klein's Model. In the second stage, privatization experiences of education in other countries are referred. In the final part, we will try to show the process and position of privatization policy of education in Iran in a comparative perspective. All these issues will show that policies changes of privatization of education are affected by the lack of consistency in policies of different Iran's States.*

**Keywords:** Educational System, Non-Governmental School, Privatization, State, Iran.

## Introduction

The change in economic attitudes and the global tendency towards decreasing the government's role should be considered as the main effective factors in the relationship of the political system with other social institutions such as education during the late two decades of the twentieth century and the early years of the new millennium. The main axis of reforms is increasing the role of private sector in managing tasks that governments considered it's planning, performance, and control as their own undeniable right (*cf* Bray, 1996). Because of this, many developing countries with centralized educational systems abandoned administrating different services and educational tasks to the private sector during this period (Whitty & Power, 2000). In Iran and after end of war with Iraq in 1988, establishing Non-Governmental Schools was first action of the government in operationalizing this policy. These schools came into existence with the purpose of increasing the society involvement - especially in economic & financial aspects- to help the government. During the early years like many newly-established economic activities, a common tendency existed among the government and investors. On the one hand, the government supported establishing NGS by economic helps and legal and organizational supports, a process that more or less has continued during the last two decades with ups and downs. On the other hand, increasing social demands for education and a competition for accessing to a qualified education provided suitable grounds for attracting the private sector's investors. While exact statistics has not been collected by the Ministry of Education about economic consequences of establishing NGS during the last two decades, existing statistics up to 2010 shows the amount of economic saving of Iran's government as follows:

- 13893 ten-class schools
- Employing of 105724 as NGS staff
- 732522700000 Iranian Rials (NGSO, 2010)

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\* Assistant Professor, Lorestan University, Iran (Email : rie2000@gmail.com).

\*\* Ministry of Education, Iran (Email : Lida.kakia@gmail.com).

\*\*\* Ministry of Education, Iran (Email : moazenasren@yahoo.com).

In recent years, non-governmental schools' authorities have been observing the "getting the stop sanction" proposal from the part of these schools' founders. The report of Non-Governmental Schools' Office (NGSO, 2009) at the Ministry of Education shows that the founders' request for "stopping the school's activity" is undergoing an ascending trend in all provinces compared with the previous years, so that during the two years of 2008 and 2010 and in the whole country –in three elementary, junior and high schools – 700 and 457 NGS have stopped their activities (NGSO, 2010). In addition to this, Mesri (2008) shows that from the total NGS of Tehran, 2000 schools have vacant seats and more than 90 percent of them get along with financial problems.

Despite being affected by the idea of "Knowledge Economy," the need for decreasing the economic dependence of schools and universities to the government income in a global level has been proved more than before (*cf* Best, Harmer & Dewey 1997; Bryson, 1998), economic changes in Iran and existing challenges does not show positive perspectives for the future of NGS (Kakia, 2009; Madandar Arani & Sarkar Arani, 2009). In fact, during the two last decades and by NGS in Iran, different states adopted different policies about these schools. In the first years, the government's policy was to support the spread of establishing and welcoming private investors. In the middle years, the current government proceeded from "Strong Support" to the "Balanced Support." Now, the government applies the policy of "Washy Support". Due to this, Iranian states have never been able to follow a unified and specified policy, and their policies have changed constantly. It is clear that this change can be interpreted from two aspects. The first is that the change of every state necessarily brings about the change in economic policies and the second is that investing in education is followed by economic fluctuations like any other investments. At first and shortly we try to explain policies and strategies of the education privatization according to the Klein's Model. In the second stage, privatization experiences of education in other countries are referred. In the final part of the paper, we will try to show the process and position of privatization policy of education in Iran using the above-mentioned model and in a comparative framework. All these issues will show that policies changes of privatization of education are affected by the lack of consistency in policies of Iran's government more than being affected by the economic changes.

### **Policies and strategies of the education's privatization**

In analyzing and assessing the privatization process in the world, economists mainly acknowledge that education has changed from a social service to an industry. Teachers have changed to professional ones more than ever and they put their scientific abilities on sale. Among these, arts, foreign languages, mathematics, and sciences teachers are pioneering (Kakia & Zeinali, 2005). In this situation, schools are also competitive centers and active economic institutions that combat for survival. The results of this combat are efficiency, quality, and effectiveness that one benefits from in short-term (private benefits of education), and the group benefits from in long-term (social benefits of education). All this was said to be able to find a balance among people, investors, and the government in this basic process by accepting the reality of "Quality of Education" in present world. Considering the key role of governments, it is necessary to explain policies and strategies of the education privatization with regards to Klein's Allocating Resources Model.

During the two recent decades and in many parts of the world, we observed a movement trying to question the attitude that the government is the best system that can provide all people with instructional services (Heyneman, 2001). It is interesting to state that this great movement, as the new economic policies of statesmen, insists on the parental choice, establishing various private schools, and making competitions among them. These reforms are often called "Marketization" and "Privatization" of the educational system. Although the above terms are often used interchangeably and there exists no exact definitions for them, it can be stated that marketization is the elementary stage of privatization and what is often remembered from the privatization of education is actually marketization of educational activities in the form of getting tuitions and helps from people to schools and universities. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that privatization has occurred

in none of the developed and developing countries in the real sense of the word, and what we observe in these societies is a movement on a continuum which starts from decreasing the complete role of government and continues towards marketization and finally complete privatization (Whitty & Power, 2000). Based on this imaginary continuum, the place of countries can be specified with a view to the economic orientations of the government and its effects on the educational system. Before specifying the place of countries on this continuum, it is better to mention the fourfold phases of the relationship between the private and governmental sectors with a view to providing educational and financial resources. For specifying the pattern of allocating financial resources and educational provisions, the theoretical model proposed by Klein (1984) can be used (Figure 1). This model shows the probable fourfold form of the government and private sector contributions as follows:

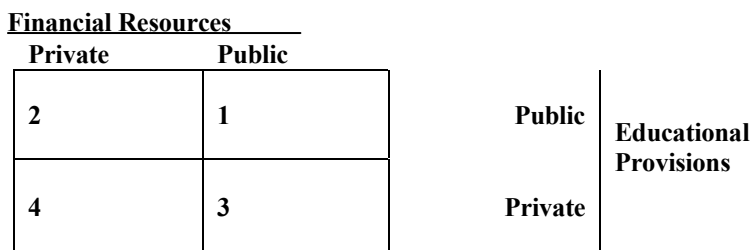


Figure 1: Allocation's Model of Educational and Financial Resources

Klein believes that abandoning the education to the private sector or government is comprehensible in the form of two basic fields: First providing financial resources such as building, material equipments, monetary expenditure and second educational provisions including training and employment of human resources, educational planning and school management (Klein, 1984). Considering these two fields, Klein recognizes four states of participation of government or private sector in education. In the first state, the State itself undertakes providing both financial resources and educational provisions (teachers, books, curriculum, and so on) and does not permit the private sector for participating and investing in education at all. The politicians' main presumption in the first state is that education has such a basic and sensitive role in the country's destiny that it must not be accessed by the market fluctuations and competitions of the private sector. In the second state, financial resources are provided by the private sector (mainly parents) and through establishing mechanisms like getting tuition, but formulating educational policies and performing them has been left to the State, and the private sector has no right to make decisions and people are mainly regarded as an Customer. This state is called Marketization of education. In the state 3, the State gives financial resources to the private sector through providing facilities like loans and abandoning lands. Likewise, educational decisions and policies such as method of enrolling students, employing teachers and principals and budget distribution and allocation are undertaken by the private sector and are determined based on the criteria and mechanisms governing the market. Perhaps, with regard to the culture common to economic issues in Iran, the term "Ministrant State" can be known as a suitable term for describing the position of government in this state. In the state 4, the State lacks any role in both the above two aspects that the phrase "Education without the State" can be used (Whitty & Power, 2000). In this state, education liberalization or complete privatization of education is started by deleting governmental subsidies.

**The education privatization: Other countries' experiences**

Here education privatization policies in two developed countries of Britain and USA and two developing countries of China and India can be compared with each other according to the Klein

Model. For understanding the slow process of education privatization and its move towards the complete privatization, we start from the experience of China and finish with the experience of USA.

According to the Klein Model and for many years, the policy governing **China** has been to follow the first state that can be affected by the ideological governance of the Communist Party in this country. It is clear that after beginning economic reforms in the two final decades of the twentieth century and “Chinization the communism ideology” by Mao successors, the movement of China’s government has tended from the first state towards the second state. Despite the first delay, China has started its hasty steps towards privatization of economics during the two past decades. Yet it is clear that China’s political system does not accept changes and transitions in line with the economic system (*cf* Cheng & DeLany, 1999). However, policies taken by the China’s government during the current half of the century enabled this country to face fewer problems in the field of education and to precede many countries, including its own great neighbor, India (Cheng, 1994). Strong educational system structures especially generalizing elementary instruction, improving the economic state of teachers, welcoming an economic system based on privatization, and developing good political relationships and dependent on priority of national benefits created a suitable ground for moving quickly towards marketization of education in this country. Due to this, the Chinese government regarded two main axes: First, the government’s main role in determining policy-makings was constant, and its role decreased in the higher education and secondary education. Second, it continued its supportive policies on poor and rural strata, while increasing pressure on the rich and middle citizen for paying parts of educational expenses of their children. However, it can be stated that in spite of China’s great achievements –especially during the current decade and developing the privatization process– the educational system has been influenced by it to a lesser degree (*cf* Bray, 1996). Due to this, it must not be forgotten that in a comparative perspective, China is still a rural country and its experience in moving towards free economics in the field of education is much less than India.

Simultaneous with China, changes in its great neighboring country, i.e., India can be remembered. India has enjoyed a longer background in facing the new world, and has adapted itself better with the exigencies of the world and education privatization process. Policies, especially started in the 1990s in India, were mainly affected by the membership in the Global Trade Organization and accepting the principles governing it that for instance the complete financial independence of universities on the government can be remembered. However, in this country and in the previous decades, non-governmental organizations (like religious institutions) have had active presence in forming educational and welfare trusts (especially in Health and Medicine). The Indian states tried to decrease the pressure of privatization process on the poor class of the society by determining some percentage of the universities quota and good schools for the poor children and also building and equipping schools in deprived areas (Molnar, 1998). In addition to this, in the recent years the role of two other factors should be mentioned that caused the development of education privatization process in India. The first factor considers increasing the share of educational expenses in the household economic baskets of the middle class – forming a great part of the billion population of this country. Policies of the Vajpayee's state in welcoming and accepting membership in the Global Trade Organization and economic conformity with the modern changes and consistency of these policies in Manmohan Singh's state has caused increasing the tendency of people for investing more in education (*cf* Desai et al, 2008). Likewise, tendency of the Vajpayee's state reinforced the urban middle class – the class which is critically increasing the Indian population structure – flourishing private schools and universities. In recent years and by the re-governance of the Congress Party, it should be acknowledged that the State and the current Prime Minister, i.e. Mr. Sing, also follow exactly the previous policies and opposed to the traditional policies of the party, which mainly supported poor peasant people (French, 2008). Considering the system of capitalist economy’s exigencies, the quick globalization process, a political system based on democracy, and a strong support of the human resources have all contributed that India’s educational system be forced

to welcome the privatization process more than ever. In this situation, decreasing the role of the government and teachers' union on the one hand, and increasing parents' role on the other hand are clear. The second factor affecting positively on the education privatization process in the recent years should be known as increasing interests of Indians residing in abroad in sending their own money inside the country and establishing private schools and hospitals (Goyal, 2008). In a cursory look, education privatization policy in **India** is mainly tended to following the third state of Klein's Model. This is true especially about India's current State. This State shares financial resources to the private sector, especially to investors in small urban or rural areas, through providing facilities like loans and abandoning lands (Amiri, 2005). Also, it should be acknowledged that all States governing in India during the current half of the century believed in the principle that educational decisions and policies like the methods of enrolling students, employment of teachers and principals, and methods of budget distribution and allocation should be shared to the private sector and should be determined based on criteria and mechanisms governing in the market, while acknowledging the need for existing governmental schools.

Among developed countries, **Britain** must be known as the first country taking steps for actualizing the idea of social systems privatization. In England and during the 80s, majority of children were learning in schools which managed under the control of local education authorities (LEAs). By choosing Margaret Thatcher and then John Major, they tried to decrease options which were LEAs' monopoly (Whitty & Power, 2000). Also of other actions of these governments, establishing new schools named " Urban Technology Colleges " – which were a new type of secondary schools managed by private companies - can be mentioned (Newmark, 1995). In a quick look, it can be pointed out that intercommunion of Thatcher and Major's States in Britain were mainly based on decreasing the role of teachers' union for the benefits of the government and parents that were performed through putting more emphasis on holding national examinations under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and increasing parental intervention in choosing their children schools (Besley & Ghatak, 2001). Of course, by the start of Tony Blair's premiership, this point was stressed that although Thatcher's reforms, due to holding national examinations, caused increasing the qualitative level of schools in the whole country, its negative consequences were degrading the social position of teaching profession and increasing teachers' dissatisfaction. Due to this, during the current decade, Blair and his successors' policies mainly have been decreasing Thatcher's extremist changes and establishing a kind of balance among three sources of decision making power in the educational system, i.e. the government, parents and teachers' union (Simpson, 2009).

In **USA**, due to the limited power of the central government, determining its role is a difficult task, for many decisions and policies are made at states and regions' levels. Of course, economic orientations of states on the one hand based on less dependence on the federal government and on the other hand on decreasing attacks against the educational system – that is especially affected by the advances of the Soviet Union in the cold war era - caused starting a gradual and slow trend in privatization in final decades of the twentieth century (Broughman, Swaim & Keaton, 2009). This increasing trend shows that the government and teachers union's roles have not changed very much, but the amount of American parents' interests in their children's educational issues has increased and educational expenses in the baskets of the household economy has gone through a rising trend (Glenn, 1994 ; Gewirtz, Ball & Bow, 1995). However, according to Whitty and Power, state governments have adopted different policies for developing the education privatization during the two previous decades. A company named Edison Project can be mentioned as an example that using encouraging policies of states. This company has increased the number of schools under its coverage all over America to more than 48 and only in 1999; it has invested 126 million dollars in this task (Whitty & Power, 2000).

It is clear that regarding the historical background and the type of political management in two developed countries of Britain and USA, the degree of educational system's privatization has

enjoyed a quicker trend compared to other countries and their progress should be considered from education marketization towards the complete privatization (Hill et al, 1997). Considering the political and economic structures based on individual freedoms and capitalist system, these governments necessarily believe in the motto “Small is beautiful” and abandoning the majority of government tasks to the private sector and hence following Klein's 4<sup>th</sup> state. The only point to be stated about these two countries is differences in emphases partly affected by the governance of different parties made in these two countries. For instance, in Britain the Laborer Party and in USA the Democrat Party tend more to abandon more authorities to parents in school tasks and the Liberal Party in Britain and the Republican Party in USA tend more to increasing private investors’ power in determining the tuition.

**Policies on privatization of education: Case of Iran**

Following the Klein Model, **Iran** has a conflicting condition (Figure 2). On the one hand, mainly Iran used the state 2, so that financial resources are provided by the private sector and through establishing mechanisms like getting tuitions, but formulating educational policies and performing them are left to the government and the private sector does not have the right to make any decisions and it is regarded more as a customer. On the other hand, by having a glance at the state 3, the government of Iran –like India– shares facilities like loans and abandoning lands to the private sector. Simultaneously, it should be acknowledged that sometimes some States in Iran are fond of the 4<sup>th</sup> state in their speeches and in practice they tend to the 1<sup>st</sup> state. Also, some educational authorities believe that because the education is not completely **private goods** and its market structure is not based on competition, then education without intervening and supervising of the government does not have conformity with economic logics. Due to this, observing many cases of deficiencies in the mechanism of the market in production, distribution and consumption of education completely justify the government’s intervention and its role. On the other side, some supporters of the education privatization believe that because the education is not completely **public goods**, then its market structure is not a complete monopoly and it cannot be completely governmentally organized and have a logical justification for it, especially that experiences resulting from governmental schools show various weak points (Alavitabar, 1990). Although more than two decades have passed from this research results, the following assessments are also suggestive of continuation of this binary attitude during all these years (Madandar Arani, 2012). This contradictory mode causes confusions for the founders and creating challenges that partly from the very beginning it is followed by the stop of school activities and wasting individuals’ time and economic capital.

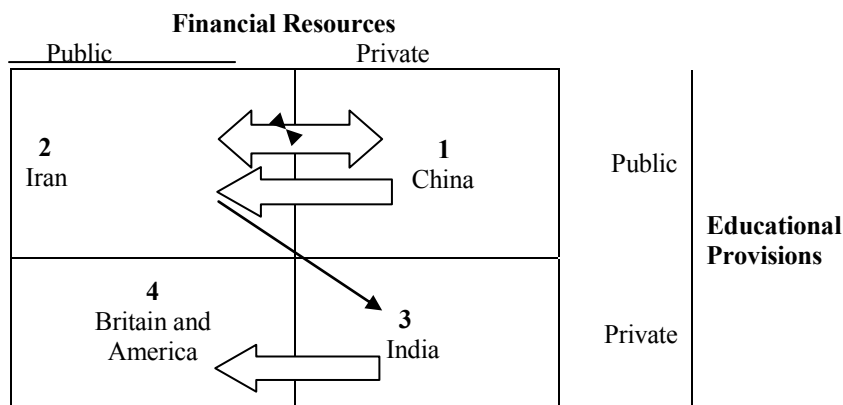


Figure 3: The place of countries according to Klein Model

### Conclusion

Considering the above explanations and according to the Klein Model, the places of countries can now be outlined on an imaginary continuum from a complete governmentalization state towards the full privatization. In this continuum, 5 countries places have been determined:



Diagram 1: Continuum of the educational system privatization process

According to this continuum, we are observing a privatization trend that can be named “Creeping Privatization.” In fact this type of privatization is a semi-marketization of the governmental services by the centrality of parents’ choice power, giving more options to the local authorities, and individuals’ investments in education. While decreasing the government’s role, these actions cause that the private sector faces more optimistic perspectives for investing in education (Razzaghi, 1997). In such a situation, the private sector first feels that politicians have come to the belief that the privatization approach has more priority than methods that were already widespread. In addition to this, it finds out that the governmental institutions have been forces to make their selected mechanisms near the mechanisms of private sector and market more than ever (For example, making competitions in schools) (Lee, Lin & Wang, 1994).

Considering what was stated and with an analytical-comparative perspectives, it should be acknowledged that in the privatization process –and trying for decreasing the financial pressure of education on the government budget– Iran’s economic policies are assessable in the interval of China and India. On the one hand, Iran is fond of the private sector’s intervention and especially cultural/religious institutions for investment in education, and on the other hand while decreasing the economic role, it continues its own political and educational role by presenting innovations like establishing Semi – Governmental schools. Due to this, it can be stated that currently the present State in Iran does not follow any of these countries approaches with certainty. It is a politic that can be the source for some problems of the Non-Governmental Schools’ founders. Here, for a better understanding of this issue, past three decades transformations are referred to in detail:

NGS establishment and activity after conquering the Revolution in the late 1970s should be divided into three ten-year periods to assess its transformations trend. In the first decade (1979-88), and affected by the country’s revolutionary atmosphere, few private schools inherited from the previous regime were closed and their pupils were transferred to the governmental schools (Bageri & Najafi, 2008). Opponents believed that only children of the high-income class could enroll in these schools and because of the high quality of education, a great share of the university students consists of these people during the upcoming years (Mohammad Beigi, 1991; Sarraf Esmaili, 2004). By passing 2 or 3 years, some events happened that it was not possible to be ignoring of their positive and negative effects. The most effective of these was the initiation of Iran and Iraq war. In fact, war

became the most important obstacle for allocating financial resources to the Ministry of Education, so that at the end of this decade student's capitation decreased very much in a fixed rate (Jafari, 2010). We should also mention the effect of decreasing oil revenues, government's policy supporting the increase of population rate, quantitative development of schools in rural areas and immigration to cities which caused increasing the rate of social demands of education and the number of pupils especially in elementary and junior schools (Ansari, 2005). All these provided the required political and educational grounds for making and approving formation of "Non-Governmental Schools' Bill" and permission of entering the private sector to the field of education at the end of this decade.

After approving the mentioned law in 1988, the second decade started (1988-1998). The government regarded the progress of privatizing policies of education as necessary with regard to purposes like increasing the amount of investments of private sector in education, and the decrease of the private sector liquidity. Because of this, these schools enjoyed the government's supporting policies. Governmental supports included the administrative (organizational supports), financial/material (giving low-interest loans and assignment of land), and human (dispatching teachers) aspects. The practical consequence of these supports at the end of this decade was to have about 5 percent from the whole student population-over 18 million students- under the coverage of NGS and more than 7000 schools were founded (Puyan, 1997; Tahmasbi, 2004; Falahi, 2009). By the beginning of the third decade (1998-2008), the number of schools from 6192 in the academic year of 2000- 2001 increased to 13000 in the academic year of 2009-10 (NGSO, 2010). Currently, the rate of Non-Governmental Schools has reached about 11% of all the country's schools. In recent years and with the intensity of economic crises like the simultaneous inflation and depression, educational authorities and policy makers observed appearing the phenomenon "Non-Governmental Schools Stop." Also, other previous supports has changed and decreased because of the special attitude of present president of Iran, Mr. Ahmadi Nejad towards private schools. Considering the time transformations of the three current decades and the Klein Model, these aspects can be inferred from the situation of NGSs in Iran:

- The relationship of NGS with governments is mainly affected by the economic motivations
- The governments' supports of these schools have not followed a constant and specified trend.
  - Educational system's marketization and privatization have been a slow but increasing trend.
  - For majority of States during the past three decades, economic independence of NGS has not been tantamount to accepting these schools' independence in other fields.
    - For the founder, investing in education has not been necessarily based on rules of investment in economic activities or accepting the principle of its advantage and disadvantage, but it is based on bargain power and seeking assistance from the government.
      - The government feels right to intervene in all issues of the school.
      - The founder regards himself as the creditor of the government in all fields
      - In reality, neither the government nor the founders have accepted "The education privatization" as an economic activity subject to offer and demand

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