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**Global Education Policy and International Development
New Agendas, Issues and Policies**

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Chapter 12. The National Politics of Global Policies

Public-Private Partnerships in Indian Education

Antoni Verger and Sanne VanderKaaij

Introduction

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) for education are perceived as a new policy solution to increase access to education and bring new resources to education systems at a time when many countries feel more and more pressure to achieve Education for All (EFA). International agencies, such as the World Bank, UNESCO and the Asian Development Bank, have become enthusiastic supporters and global carriers of the PPP idea to a range of contexts, i.e. national, regional and sub-national.

This chapter analyzes, first how the PPP idea is institutionalized in the global education agenda and by whom, and second, how it is being re-contextualized in specific education systems. The case of India provides evidence to understand the ways in which ideas about PPPs in education are translated, debated and negotiated in the landscape of national policy. India is one of the countries where the PPP debate has penetrated with most intensity in recent years (Fennell 2007; Srivastava 2010). In this paper, we will explore the processes and agents through which the new policy discourse on PPPs in India is created and the reasons why it is becoming popular at this point in time. However, we will also focus on identifying the shortcomings of the PPP proposal when it comes to stimulating a coherent and comprehensive education reform in the country.

The Indian case is especially appropriate for ascertaining the relationship between new ideas and policy change as at the time of conducting our fieldwork in the country, the debate on PPPs was very much alive. Education stakeholders provided details regarding the formation of ideas and stakeholder interaction which, as Boxenbaum *et al.* (2005) suggest, individuals tend to forget rapidly and consequently cannot be captured accurately through retrospective interviews. The data sources, aside from interviews with national and international policy entrepreneurs and other education stakeholders operating in India, include policy documents and observation of political debates on PPPs and education in New Delhi. The data were gathered between November 2009 and April 2010.

The chapter is structured in four main sections. In the first, we present the programmatic idea of PPPs for education and, through a set of theoretical and conceptual tools taken from policy analysis, we explain how it has been constructed by global agents and what the conditions are for its re-contextualization in specific education systems. In the following two sections, we develop the PPP case study in India. We present our data, first by exploring the

contextual factors that promote or hinder the advancement of the PPP proposal in the education domain in India, and secondly by referring to the positions and strategies of key education stake-holders in the PPPs for education debate. In the fourth and final section, our findings shall be discussed.

PPPs for Education

The Framing of a New Global Education Policy

PPPs were first theorized and implemented in policy areas such as urban and local economic development in the US at the beginning of the 1980s. However, this idea progressively extended to other areas and to other contexts, mainly in high-income countries (Wettenhall 2003). In the 1990s, PPPs also became popular in the developing world. At that time, the international development policy discourse was shifting from a focus on macro-economic prescriptions to a focus on governance and institutional change (Fine *et al.* 2003). As a result, many aid agencies began to reflect on innovative ways of strengthening governance structures in developing countries and the role of the private sector in economic and social activities.

The World Bank, as one of the most fervent advocates of this shift in paradigm, became especially interested in exporting the PPP solution to the developing world (Miraftab 2004). This organisation has been interested in private sector development for decades, but has been trapped by a historically ambiguous and somewhat paradoxical relationship with the private sector. This is due to the fact that, on the one hand, the World Bank group is sympathetic to private sector involvement in public services, but, on the other, with the exception of the International Finance Corporation (IFC)^[1], the Bank can only lend to governments (or with a government guarantee), which usually implies that its loans make the public sector larger (Miller-Adams 1999). PPP programmes can become a solution to this paradox since, as we describe below, they constitute a policy instrument to make the private sector grow through state policy and state funding. This explains, to some extent, why the Bank is one of the most active promoters of public sector reform through PPPs in a range of policy sectors, including education.

PPPs for Education as a Programmatic Idea

PPPs for education have recently been incorporated into the global education agenda by a number of international aid agencies, also under the leadership of the World Bank (Verger 2011). The Bank defines them as contractual relations between governments and private providers to acquire education services of a defined quantity and quality at an agreed price for a specified period (Patrinos *et al.* 2009). From a political analysis perspective, PPPs for education can be conceived as a programmatic idea, i.e. as a technical and professional idea that specifies cause-and-effect relationships concerning the problems that need to be addressed, and prescribes a precise course of policy solutions to address such problems (Campbell 2004).

The education problems that PPPs for education aim to address are mainly related to access and quality. Partnerships are conceived as the best and most rapid solution for overcoming the challenges associated with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and with the EFA framework for action. Moreover, in a context in which the expansion of education has often been accompanied by a deterioration in average learning levels, PPPs are expected to boost the quality and effectiveness of schools. The promoters of this idea consider that partnerships will bring more choice and pluralism, innovation, new knowledge and infrastructure from the private sector, as well as competition and incentives into the education system (Patrinos *et al.* 2009).

In terms of policy solutions, PPPs for education involve a contract between the public and the private sector, which, in the opinion of the experts, should be formalized and based on performance outcomes. Thus the PPP gives the state direct control over the education system. Through quality assurance and evaluation mechanisms, the state can decide whether providers reach the minimum standards to be part of partnership frameworks. Once the PPP is at work, the state can reward those private schools that are successful, and expel those that underperform. Generally speaking, state regulation and state control are crucial elements for generating an environment that is conducive to partnerships producing the expected outcomes (Fielden *et al.* 2008).

PPPs for education can cover different areas of collaboration between the private and the public sectors, but the emphasis is placed on the delivery of core education services, i.e. the management and running of schools^[1]. In this respect, the private sector can be contracted under the following formats: delivery of education (as in charter schools), private operation of public schools (contract schools) and education vouchers (IFC 2001). PPPs can also vary in their level of intensity. The highest level of PPPs occurs when 100 per cent of education is provided by the private sector within a voucher framework (Patrinos *et al.* 2009, p. 16); in fact school choice and vouchers are policy instruments often associated with PPP frameworks. Moreover, a great emphasis is placed on giving schools the capacity to manage, hire and fire teachers more directly, as well as to make schools and teachers more accountable and responsive to community and family demands (IFC 2001).

From a governance perspective, PPPs for education mean the reconfiguration of the role of the state in education. They imply that the state should move away from direct education provision and focus on the planning, funding, regulation and evaluation of the education system instead. PPP promoters consider the state is not effective when it comes to delivering education because the public sector lacks the accurate incentives to operate services in a competitive way, and consequently the quality and the cost of education services are adversely affected (IFC 2001).

To conclude, PPPs are not adverse to state intervention, but they require a redefinition and, to some extent, alteration of the state functions in education. The PPP proposal appears paradoxical in this respect. On the one hand, it shows a strong belief in market solutions in education. On the other hand, state intervention is seen as crucial in generating the conditions and the incentives to make education markets work.

The Re-contextualization and Translation of Programmatic Ideas

Having described the programmatic proposal, we will now explore the conditions that mediate its promotion and adoption by local policymakers. One group of these conditions is related to the internal properties of the programmes such as clarity and consistency, familiarity, feasibility and resonance (Verger 2011).

Concerning *clarity and consistency*, the causal beliefs and causal stories behind the programmes must be coherent and convincing, and the policy prescriptions clear, concise and easily understandable by policymakers (Campbell 2004). Furthermore, beyond the real content of ideas, the manner in which they are packaged is also important. Thus the substantive simplicity and rhetorical sophistication of a certain policy discourse is a further factor that contributes to its advance (Fairclough 2000; Ball 2007).

Regarding *familiarity*, it should also be acknowledged that politicians and regulators are usually averse to risk and tend to be sceptical about the adoption of new policy ideas. Thus, to be re-contextualized successfully in particular contexts, programmes may be translated in a way that sounds familiar to local policymakers, or amalgamating the new policy idea and already existing local practices (Boxenbaum *et al.* 2005).

The *feasibility* principle implies that new policy ideas are most likely to be taken up if they are perceived as technically workable (i.e. the country has the necessary capabilities) and fit within budgetary and administrative constraints (Kingdon 1994).

Finally, *resonance* means that the way programmes are framed can make them resonate positively – at both normative and causal levels – within a range of audiences and broader contextual ideas. In this sense, programmatic ideas must fit within the prevailing policy paradigm and public sentiments in the society at the time formulation and implementation (Hay 2002; Campbell 2004). The success of PPPs in a range of policy sectors in the recent past has largely resulted from the fact they have worked as an accommodating mechanism, i.e. the proposal fits within a range of political ideologies, including social democracy, conservatism and neoliberalism (Linder 1999).

However, policy ideas do not only have effects by virtue of their inherent logic, framing qualities or argumentation strengths. Policy discourses often maintain their credibility through their repetition (Fairclough 2000; Ball 2007), or because of the resources, political clout and reliability of the organisations backing them (Hay 2002; Campbell

2004). For the analysis of the diffusion of PPPs in the educational field, it is important to consider that the main policy entrepreneurs behind the proposal are located in powerful organisations such as the World Bank or regional development banks.

The political economy of reforms should also be taken into account to understand the adoption of new policy ideas, since they might meet the support or resistance of important constituencies in the policy sector in question. This is the logical consequence of the fact that the implementation of a new programme may force certain stakeholders to make significant adjustments in their work, or challenge their power or status. For instance, PPPs have the potential to alter teachers' working conditions because they will allow contractors to hire cheaper and non-unionized labour, reward teachers according to their performance, or dismiss them if they under-perform (IFC 2001; Patrinos *et al.* 2009). The World Bank is aware that this idea can generate resistance and suggests that it might be 'useful for policy-makers to recruit leading figures in the politics and business communities who understand the potential benefits of PPPs and can use their influence to help to overcome any resistance' (Patrinos *et al.* 2009, p. 5).

Broader contextual factors also affect the strategies of political agents when endeavoring to advance a certain idea, as well as its selection in a given context (Steiner-Khamsi 2004). For instance, critical junctures such as periods of crisis or the increasing demand of a public good can make policymakers more open to experiment with new policy solutions (Walsh 2000). Finally, beyond the limits and scope of a concrete policy sector, broader political, normative and legal structures prevailing at the national level favour some ideas and strategies over others (Jessop 2001). To sum up, the reception and adoption of a programmatic idea may vary in different contexts and points in time due to a range of factors both intrinsic and extrinsic to the properties of the policy idea itself.

PPPs for Education in the Indian Policy Landscape

The concept of PPPs has been part of the Indian development discourse for almost two decades now (Bava 2008, p. 410). The concept has mainly been discussed and applied in fields such as infrastructure, water and solid waste management (Dhar 2008; Singh 2008). The debate on its applicability for the education sector in India is much recent.

Four contextual factors have contributed to the emergence of the policy discussion on PPPs for education in India. The first factor is the *increased demand for education*. Over the past two decades, India has seen an impressive increase in enrolment rates at the primary education level, and by now enrolment at this level has become almost universal (Kingdon 2007). At the secondary level, the gross enrolment rate remains significantly lower; in 2006, it stood at 47 per cent (Dhameja *et al.* 2008). Nevertheless, the demand for secondary education has increased significantly due to the success of education awareness campaigns, as well as due to the universalisation of education at the primary level (Mehrotra 2006). Lower enrolment rates at the secondary level should therefore be explained by a lack of supply rather than a lack of demand.

The second relevant contextual factor is the new *normative and legal framework* that has been created in India. In the past decade, India became a signatory to the MDGs, set up its own EFA programme (*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*), amended its Constitution to include primary education as a fundamental right and passed the Right to Education Act 2009. With this act, India newly committed itself to the goal of universal, free and compulsory education for all children from the age of 6, as well as to investing 6 per cent of its GDP in education.

Thirdly, in India, an open *discourse on the low quality of education in government institutions* prevails among the public. Moreover, there is no strong public sentiment in support of 'public education', to some extent as a result of the historically rooted elitism in Indian society (Grant 2012, forthcoming). At the same time, there is a broad consensus that government schools are usually a last resort when it comes to school choice. Parents who can afford to do so choose private schools and, increasingly, children who attend government schools are from 'families who cannot access non-state institutions, whether for reasons of cash, geographical inaccessibility, caste, community exclusionism or gender bias' (Jeffery 2005, p. 27; see also PROBE 1999; Govinda 2002). In other words, those who *have* a choice opt for non-government schools.

The final relevant contextual factor is the *long history of private players' involvement in education in India*. Two main forms are found in India: the fully private school and the private-aided school. Fully private schools are privately founded, managed and financed. Their expenses are generally covered by a combination of donations (from well-

wishers and/or parents) and school fees. Although formally prohibited, some of the fully-private schools yield profits: sometimes through charging extra fees for certain courses (e.g. computer classes) or, more often, through hefty donations demanded from parents upon admission of the child.

Private-aided schools are founded and managed by private parties, but largely funded by the government through grants-in-aid. The grant-in-aid system stems from colonial times when (often faith-based) philanthropic trusts set up schools and, over time, started receiving support from the government to run them. After Independence, the right for non-government actors to set up and manage schools was enshrined in Article 30 of the Constitution^[1]. Some commentators have argued that, over the years, private-aided schools have become more and more like government schools. Over time, teachers started receiving their salaries directly from the state, and were increasingly appointed by government selection committees rather than by the school (Kingdon 2007). Private-aided schools are generally put forward as the first *de facto* type of PPP model in education that India has witnessed. However, at the same time, the government argues that for the private-aided system to become a proper PPP, incentives and competitive funding formulas need to be embraced (GOI 2009).

Until the early 1990s, the number of aided schools grew as state governments turned private unaided schools into aided ones. This process slowed down when the fiscal constraints of state governments increased (Mehrotra *et al.* 2006). As with the fully private schools, most private-aided schools can be found at the secondary and higher levels of education (Kingdon 2007). However, over the past decades, the primary level, particularly in urban areas, has witnessed the greatest acceleration in the number of private schools, with the permission of the Indian government (Mehrotra *et al.* 2006). In particular, the country has witnessed an unprecedented growth of so-called *low-fee private schools*. These schools, some of them recognized and others unrecognized by the educational authorities, are mostly attended by the poor. Their main source of cost-effectiveness relies on the low salaries they pay to teachers (Härma *et al.* 2012, forthcoming).

The Politics of the PPP Debate in India

The Indian government has not yet come up with a comprehensive policy on PPPs for education. Nevertheless, there are three main documents and several speeches from which the ideas of the Indian government on PPPs can be distilled, and which have become points of reference in the debate for other stakeholders. The first document is a concept paper by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD), published in September 2009 under the title *PPP in School Education* (GOI 2009). It can be read as an exploration of the possibilities for PPPs in the Indian education system. The second document is a concrete proposal presented in the *Eleventh Five-Year Plan* (2007–2012) of the Planning Commission to set up 6,000 ‘model schools’ (or schools of excellence) in the entire country, 2,500 of which as a PPP (GOI 2009). The third document in which forms of public-private mixes are contemplated and debated is the *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009* (RTE Act 2009).

All these documents demonstrate that the current government embraces the PPP idea for education with enthusiasm. In the words of the Planning Commission: ‘In the liberalised global economy, where there is a pursuit for achieving excellence, the legitimate role of private providers of quality education not only needs to be recognised, but also encouraged’ (GOI 2008, p. 9). Moreover, the GOI is strongly committed to the idea of ‘India evolving into an information society and knowledge economy,’ and partnerships with the private sector, especially with ICT-related corporations, are key in this respect (GOI 2002, p. 64). Though the PPP idea is thus accepted and promoted by the government, there is no single definition of ‘partnerships’ in the abovementioned documents, nor in speeches made by government officials.

In total, we can distinguish at least four different forms of PPPs in government discourse. In the *first model* (*infrastructure PPP*), the private sector supplies the hardware (building, electricity, etc.) and the government retains full responsibility for all education services.

The *second form of PPP* (*subsidies to the private sector*) gives the private partner responsibility for education delivery, while the government provides funding on a per capita basis (Seethalakshmi 2009). Specifically, the private partner will have ‘full autonomy and management control’ over the education service, while the role of the government lies in (1) providing ‘a capital incentive’ to be released annually based on performance indicators, (2) releasing a per capita grant for 50 per cent of the student population from socio-economically disadvantaged families, and (3) providing

land at concessional rates (GOI 2009, p. 11). In section 12 of the Right to Education Act 2009, it is stipulated that 25 per cent of the seats available upon admission to Class I in all private schools should be reserved for economically disadvantaged communities. State governments will reimburse the expenditure on a per capita basis.

In May 2010, the Minister of HRD, Kapil Sibal, put forward a *third model (charter-type of contracting)*, one in which government school premises can be used by the private sector for conducting evening classes on the condition that they reserve 50 per cent of the seats for students from less privileged sections. The government would pay their expenses^[1].

The *fourth model (support services)* suggested by the government focusses on contracting non-core education services. They include, for example, the transfer of inspection duties from government bodies to the community, the running of school libraries or ICT services, etc. (cf. GOI 2002; Srivastava 2010).

The vouchers-type of PPP, which is the 'integral' form of PPP according to the World Bank (see Patrinos *et al.* 2009), is absent from the GOI education discourse. Even though there is an active Indian lobby pushing for vouchers under the slogan 'Fund students not schools'^[1], and the World Bank – India has suggested that 'a voucher system seems likely to be beneficial for India' (World Bank 2009, p. 93), the Indian education authorities are not considering them seriously. Kingdon (2007, p. 191) notes that, in India,

Unlike in some other countries where there has been a vigorous debate about and experimentation with alternatives to public schools (...) the recommendations (...) have never seriously included consideration of the possibility of providing school vouchers, as a way of empowering (especially) students/parents and improving accountability of schools and teachers towards students and parents.

Finally, when it comes to defining who the private partner in the PPPs may be, the HRD Ministry seems to think mainly of private education providers and corporate partners (GOI 2009, pp. 19–20). The Planning Commission mixes 'philanthropic foundations, endowments, educational trusts and reputed private providers' in its list of possible private partners (GOI 2008, p. 17).

Education Stakeholders in the PPP Debate

Apart from the central government, we have identified six key education stakeholders in India that are active in the PPP debate, all of whom have different opinions, preferences and ideas on partnerships in education. These are the World Bank, UNESCO, the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), the National Coalition for Education (NCE), teacher unions and the private sector^[1].

The *World Bank* made its entrance in India after 1991 when the country went bankrupt and was forced to reform its economy. The economic growth and rapid development that followed, as well as the generally perceived success of interventions, have prevented the growth of criticism and scepticism toward the Bank and its policies, characteristic of many Latin American and African countries^[1]. The World Bank is currently the biggest lender in education in India. In the last decade, together with DFID (the UK aid agency) and the European Commission, the Bank has supported India's EFA programme (*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, SSA) with more than US\$ one billion distributed in two big projects, one approved in April 2004, and the second in March 2010 (Ward 2011).

The Bank has consistently promoted private sector development in education, and is also the main carrier of the PPP idea into India (Mehrotra *et al.* 2006). The SSA loans have promoted different types of PPPs, including quotas for disadvantaged students in private schools, and the role of non-state School Management Committees (World Bank 2008; World Bank 2010). The first SSA loan encouraged PPPs with private aided schools, but, as the Bank pointed out in the final report of the project, it was 'less well developed on partnerships with private unaided institutions, to a large extent reflecting the lack of consensus either nationally or in some states on how to move forward' (World Bank 2008, p. 26)^[1]. Nonetheless, the Bank insisted that partnerships with un-aided private schools should be explored in the future (World Bank 2008). The Bank has also presented its ideas on PPPs for education in India through policy

reports such as the 2009 *Secondary Education In India: Universalizing Opportunity*. There, PPPs are presented as a cost-effective means of achieving universal secondary education, but also as a way of making schools more competitive, for instance by financing them according to their achievement (World Bank 2009).

The World Bank office in India does not use one single definition of PPP. They see possibilities for PPPs 'ranging from facility services (...) to a full PPP model where the private sector partner is contracted to provide all teaching and non-teaching services (...)' (World Bank-India in IL&FS 2009, p. 24). It emphasizes that this lack of definitional clarity is a conscious strategy for India: '[G]iven the diversity among states there is no single strategy for all India in terms of secondary school management' (IL&FS 2009, p. 45). Nevertheless, in August 2011 the Bank, in collaboration with the India's HRD Ministry organized an International Conference on PPP in Secondary Education that aimed 'to discuss, debate and understand PPPs – their definition, role, types, structuring systems, key performance indicators, financial arrangements, regulatory and legal aspects and exit strategies'^[1].

The second stakeholder, *UNESCO-India*, supports the PPP idea as well. In the words of our interviewee, 'we always endorse it, we always have. We are the ones pushing governments to follow' (Interview 01). However, its definition of PPP seems to be different from that used by the World Bank and other agencies. UNESCO focuses on the idea of corporate social responsibility and is inclined to think in terms of not-for-profit partners, such as NGOs. Actually, it considers PPPs in terms of multi-stakeholder partnerships, which is a type of partnership of a very different nature from the more operational partnerships. In any case, UNESCO does not perceive itself as an influential player in the Indian education debate. 'World Bank is [one of] the real players in the field (...). We do not fund, so we do not have that kind of say' (Interview 03).

NUEPA, apart from undertaking research and training students, also conducts training for policymakers and practitioners. It is an important education stakeholder that often works as a think-tank and even as a policy entrepreneur in the Indian education field. In the words of one of its staff members: 'We are like the antennas of the Ministry (...) before the HRD Ministry wants to make a policy decision, they want some authentic data-based research and that is only available from us' (Interview 02). However, within *NUEPA*, there is no single position on the PPP debate. There are staff members who endorse the proposal and others who reject it (Interview 02).

The *NCE* is a nationwide coalition of civil society organisations and teacher unions that organizes advocacy campaigns to achieve free universal quality education for all children up to 18 years of age. The *NCE*, which represents India in the Global Campaign for Education, emphasizes that they are 'not being for or against PPPs in education in toto', but there is a 'need [for] proper regulation' when it comes to PPPs for education. Nevertheless, the spokesperson for the *NCE* is quite critical of PPP proposals, as it is feared that it 'dilutes the concept of education as a fundamental right' (Interview 04).

The *All India Federation of Teachers' Organisations (AIFTO)*, the most important teacher union in the country, is openly critical of the PPPs proposal. It is not against all types of private participation in education, but considers that overall PPPs will promote education privatisation and the exploitation of the teaching workforce (Interview 05). It has addressed these and other concerns in written letters and statements sent to the educational authorities in the country^[1].

The final stakeholder identified is *Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS)*. This company is one of the most active private sector participants in the PPP debate. Thus far, IL&FS has organized two National Consultative Meetings to discuss the PPP model with governments, education organisations and academicians. It is an open promoter of PPPs for the education sector and uses these meetings to keep the topic on the agenda, to put forward particular models, and to urge for speedy implementation. IL&FS is also important in that it delivers 'proof' to the government of the workability of PPPs in education by pointing to the various programmes they have run in several Indian states (IL&FS 2009, p. 9). The company works with two main models of partnerships: an infrastructure model, and a model in which the private partner 'runs the whole thing' (Interview 06). Its main political aim within the debate is that for-profit providers be allowed to operate within the Indian education system.

Framing the Debate on PPPs for Education

PPP supporters deploy several meaning frames to advance their preferences. The first frame is the *budget constraint*, which the government of India uses as follows:

There is a huge gap between the requirement and the availability of school infrastructure in the country. (...) It is not possible to provide such a large amount from the government alone in a short period of time. (...) Many state governments have stopped opening new high schools in the last decade due to acute financial constraint. (...) It does not appear feasible for the state governments to fill this gap in the short term due to constraints on budget and capacity

(GOI 2009, pp. 6–11).

Private sector involvement is presented as a solution to the perceived *short-term or long-term lack of finances* (IL&FS 2009, p. 24). This argument is refuted by some critics who point to a 'lack of political will rather than of resources' (Interview 04). Interestingly, the private sector also rejects this argument. Though they think the government can definitely save money, and that this is part of the rationale for initiating PPPs, they do expect the government and not the students to pay for their services, at least in the first years of the partnership. In the words of the IL&FS: 'I would be happy charging user-fees and I think the community can take it also. But *ideologically* it doesn't go down yet. (...) It is a non-starter. (...) Maybe after five years' (Interview 05).

A second frame employed by supporters of the PPP proposal is that of *efficiency due to increased accountability*. This argument is used in two ways. First, with regard to the construction of schools, private sector involvement is expected to address 'unduly long time in the government set up' (GOI 2009, p. 12) that the founding of new schools takes. Supporters of the PPP proposal argue that 'since the private partner would be interested in getting payment as soon as the services start being made available, the speed of implementation would be much quicker.' Secondly, they think that schools managed by private parties operate more efficiently:

[T]he private sector will be able to enhance efficiency in these areas and can bring professionalism [to] the system. (...) Because of greater efficiency and competition, the cost of operation is expected to be much lower than in [a] government set up

(GOI 2009, pp. 7–12).

The World Bank agrees with the government of India when it argues that PPPs will 'allow for faster and less costly recruitment of personnel and mobilisation of teaching and non-teaching services than would be possible through a purely public system, enabling faster and cheaper expansion of access' (World Bank 2009, p. 24). The corporate sector, for its part, uses the following argument: 'In the actual market the salary range for academically qualified teachers is far below that of the existing public sector teachers.' Not only will the cost for salaries come down with PPPs, but, according to IL&FS, there will be simultaneously 'increased accountability of teachers in a private set-up' (IL&FS 2009, p. 45). Furthermore, they argue that private sector involvement will 'help to leverage limited public funds, reduce life cycle costs, develop and execute more projects on a sustainable basis' (IL&FS 2009, p. 18).

A final pro-PPP argument says that partnership frameworks will increase the *relevance* of education because closer ties between industry and education institutions will be created. In the words of IL&FS, PPPs are necessary to create 'good vocational skills education' (IL&FS 2009, p. 20).

Arguments against PPPs

The arguments *against* the PPP model by certain stakeholders are twofold. First, there are concerns over the consequences for the equity of access and quality. In particular, the possibility that PPPs for education will introduce user charges is feared (Interview 3). Critics argue that poor groups in society may not be able to assume this additional burden. Furthermore, they fear that in the absence of clear policies on 'regulatory issues relating to PPPs in education, such as protecting the public interest and the effective monitoring of non-state actors', those schools charging lower fees, and thus catering to the poor, may be of sub-standard quality, but still receive recognition from the state (cf. Srivastava 2010). In other words, PPPs may institutionalize the inequity in provision already existing in India.

Secondly, critics see PPPs as 'privatisation with public funds' (Tilak 2010). They feel that the government is 'taking this PPP stage just to hide their intention to privatize education in the future' (Interviews 01 and 05). Confronted with this criticism, partnership advocates emphasize that PPPs are different from privatisation. They do so by pointing toward the roles the government retains, and regains, in the regulation and financing of education (IL&FS 2009, p. 89, Interview 06). Moreover, the state will regain control of the private sector that is currently lacking (Interview 05), and will retain a role in providing education in underserved areas and for disadvantaged groups (GOI 2009, p. vii).

Closely related is the question of profit-making in education. Although currently a widespread phenomenon, profit-making in education is officially prohibited in India. All stakeholders, except for the corporate sector, agree that this should remain unchanged. The opponents of profit-making argue that allowing the commercialisation of education would undermine equity in education. The corporate sector is clear in its wish to make a profit when participating in PPPs but, at the same time, gives assurances that PPP schools, in the initial years at least, will work as public schools 'as long as the government pays for them' (IL&FS 2009, pp. 12, 20).

PPPs for Education in India

Lost in Translation?

On the basis of the data presented above, this section analyses the contested processes of adoption and translation of the PPPs for education idea in the Indian policy landscape.

PPP Selectivity in India

International development organisations perceive PPPs as an opportunity to rectify inefficiencies in the public delivery of education and to mobilize new resources to increase educational access and quality. These agencies, led by the World Bank, have propagated this policy idea very actively and supported its advance both discursively and materially. The political clout of the World Bank and other donor agencies, including the ADB, DFID and the European Commission, is considerable in India and national policy-makers are strongly networked with them (Ward 2011). The most fervent believers in PPPs in India are found in the education planning division of the government, which considers partnerships as a means of strengthening India's education and the country's competitiveness in a global economy. This boosts the political and moral authority of the proposal and ensures that the debate will reach broader policy networks and core political decision-makers. Moreover, it guarantees that the necessary resources are generated for PPPs to be properly debated and, at some point, implemented. In addition, the *Eleventh Five-Year Plan* is enthusiastic about PPP solutions, and several pilot experiences involving public-private mixes are being implemented in the country.

National education stakeholders recognize that the Indian education system faces important challenges. Finding a solution to the problem of access, in particular, is perceived as an urgent need by many of them, the government included. The urgency of solving this problem has grown in recent years, above all in secondary education, due to increasing educational demand and the new regulatory environment in which the Right to Education must be guaranteed by the state. This urgency, in combination with a perceived lack of public funds, has made many agents consider the private sector as a potential ally to face the access challenge. Importantly, in a scenario of a growing number of unregulated schools operated by private providers, even progressive agents consider PPPs as a lesser evil. They are aware that the privatisation of education by default is taking place in the country and consider it preferable if the state steps in to introduce at least some control measures. By enabling policy entrepreneurs and policy-makers with different ideologies to agree on its implementation, the PPP proposal demonstrates its accommodationist powers (see Linder 1999).

Finally, the PPPs for education proposal resonates positively in India for at least three other reasons. First, it sounds like a familiar policy practice to national policymakers, as the country has twenty years of experience with PPPs in non-education sectors, and consequently education policymakers are less adverse to adopting it in the education field. Secondly, the PPP proposal resonates with broader changes occurring at the polity level in India. Public sector reform and new modes of service provision are very much present in the Indian political agenda, and PPPs are being adopted as a cross-cutting policy solution to address many of the problems perceived in the public sector (for

instance, see Singh 2008; Dhar 2008). Thirdly, there is no strong public sentiment in support of public education in the country. This, together with the fact that more and more Indian families choose private schools, which they perceive as superior to public ones, could help PPPs to be welcomed by broad sectors of Indian society.

Missing Pieces and Hinderling Factors

The GOI, together with other key education stakeholders in the country, has enthusiastically engaged with the 'global talk' on PPPs, and has even approved some concrete reforms in this area, such as grants for students attending private schools. However, this talk is not necessarily translated into corresponding policies and substantive changes. The adoption of global policy talks is usually a strategy by financially or politically weaker agents that adopt the language of the powerful in order to access resources or to legitimate their policy action (Steiner-Khamsi 2004). Of course, there are some parallels between the global and the Indian discussion on PPPs, but the translation of the programme into the local reality has been very selective and mediated by existing necessities and political interests.

The GOI is, first and foremost, using the PPPs discussion as a political device to pledge education access in a cost-effective way, above all at the secondary level. However, the quality problem that PPPs are also supposed to address has been lost in translation and, so far in the discussion in India, the quality of education rationale takes a second place. Of course, quality arguments are employed rhetorically to garner support for the PPP proposal; however, there is no evidence that, under partnership frameworks, education quality will be guaranteed via concrete policies. In fact, the PPP agenda in India seems to focus on promoting private provision with a diminished role of the state in key policy areas such as regulation and funding (Rose 2010). At least three elements of concern can be highlighted in this respect. First, the government has not presented plans to open competitive bidding processes and/or to implement an evaluation system that would allow authorities to certify education quality, or to disaffiliate or close underperforming schools. Secondly, within the PPP agenda in India, the discussion on public education financing has a low profile. It is especially significant that there is no firm commitment by the GOI to increase public education funding to the promised 6 per cent of GDP (Srivastava 2010). Thirdly, in case the government decides to establish partnerships with the so-called 'low-fee schools', the quality of education in the country could be undermined even further.

Quality is not the only element of the PPP programmatic idea that is missing in India. Policy tools such as school choice and vouchers have a low profile in the Indian discussion on partnerships in contrast to their prevalence in the global discourse. Moreover, the PPP *global* policy programme departs from the understanding that the public sector should transfer resources to the private one in exchange for the services provided by the latter, whereas the Indian government sees PPPs as an instrument for bringing more private funding and other resources to the national education system, both from parents and providers. In relation to this, it should be noticed that the global PPP proposal aims, at least rhetorically, to strengthen the power and control of the state over education by changing its functions from direct provider to funder and regulator. However, in the way the PPP idea is framed in India, the partnerships bear more resemblance to conventional privatisation and to the transfer of several education responsibilities from the public sector to the private one (Srivastava 2010) than to the introduction of an innovative managerial practice.

At the same time, the current debate on PPPs in education in India is characterized by a lack of clarity and consistency around the ideas and proposals under discussion. Reading the official discourses, it seems that any kind of public-private mix may be considered a PPP. Indeed, there is a remarkable lack of common understanding among the key education stakeholders in the country on what PPPs for education mean and imply. Their expectations and definitions of PPPs are very diverse, and even contradictory. Some maintain that for-profit education providers should be allowed, others do not; some feel PPPs entail the transfer of resources from the private to the public sector, and others that PPPs mean that the money flows precisely the other way around; some highlight that PPPs should focus on core education services, others emphasize their role in the provision of infrastructure, ICT and non-core education services; some say that PPPs are similar to corporate social responsibility, others to outsourcing services, etc. Overall, this shows that in India the PPP label is working as a 'floating signifier', i.e. a vague concept that represents an undetermined quantity of signification, but that at the same time allows 'symbolic thought to operate despite the contradiction inherent in it' (Mehlman 1972, p. 23; Burgos 2004).

Finally, important education stakeholders are against the advance of PPP reforms, although for very different reasons. This is the case, on the one hand, of teacher unions, which are a key and powerful constituency in the Indian education system. They are openly against the PPP proposal due to its similarities and conduciveness to education privatisation and commercialisation, and to teachers' deprofessionalisation. On the other hand, the private-corporate sector will not support PPPs if the prohibition on profit-making in the education system, as established in the RTE Act 2009, is not challenged by the government.

Conclusions

This research engages with broader discussions in political analysis aimed at explaining how, why and when new global policy ideas matter. In India, the national interpretative frameworks of the PPP debate are, in different ways, supranationally shaped. The adoption of PPPs for education in the country is being justified by a discourse that invokes the development of a globally competitive knowledge-based economy and the achievement of the EFA goals, which is very similar to discourses deployed to frame education reforms in many other world locations (Carney 2009). The PPP proposal fits within the current emphasis of most international organisations on focussing education reform on governance and managerial solutions. Their promoters are telling governments that they need to increase the access to and quality of education, but to do so, they need to leverage the role of the private sector, especially when it comes to education provision duties (Patrinos *et al.* 2009). Thus the PPP case reflects the extent to which globalization is changing the nature of the educational problems facing nation states, but also their capacity to respond to them (Dale 2000).

At the same time, the PPPs for education discourse resonates with the ideologies and public sentiments on education prevailing in Indian society and, at the government level, they are increasingly perceived as a policy solution to the urgent challenges that Indian education faces. Furthermore, PPPs are seen as a familiar policy solution, and are backed by a group of political actors, including international organisations that are highly profiled and influential in the country.

However, like many other global education policies, PPPs in India have undergone processes of local adaptation, modification and resistance (cf. Steiner-Khamsi 2004). In fact the governmental discourse on PPPs is far removed from the way the PPP policy stream is being defined globally and does not address serious concerns regarding the quality of the potential private partners. We have also identified a number of elements that challenge its practical implementation. Among them, the ambiguity and low consistency of the official discourse on PPPs for education and the absence of common expectations and understandings among the key education stakeholders in the country stand out. The different meanings prevailing within the PPP discourse in India are, to a great extent, the consequence of different education agents pushing for their particular agendas and interests. As Mitchell-Weaver and Manning (1991, pp. 47–8) observed:

Like many public policy concepts, public-private partnerships have become mired in a muddle of conceptual ambiguities. To some extent, this is attributable to the way in which new policy doctrines come into good currency (Starling 1988). Everyone at various stages of the policy-making process tries to fit conventional activities into the new mould.

As our study reflects, many agents in India, including the GOI, consider that identifying their policy priorities and interests with the popular idea of PPPs is strategic. In this sense, the 'global PPP idea', beyond being considered an external imposition, works as an instrumental frame – a floating signifier – for local actors to settle national and sub-national education agendas, and legitimate and push for their pre-established preferences in the educational field. Summing up, India is not a passive adopter of the global PPP discourse. PPPs are penetrating the Indian policy landscape as the result of the interaction between global ideas, political and economic conditions prevailing at the national level, and the interests and strategies of key international and local education stakeholders operating in the country.

At the time of conducting this research, the PPP debate was still ongoing in India. Though we have shown the contested re-contextualization and uneven translation of the 'PPP in education' talk at the national level, conducting more research is necessary to understand the actual implications of its adoption. PPPs in education have become a global experiment with unexpected outcomes. Even their advocates recognize that evidence on the benefits or

drawbacks of PPPs in education is not conclusive (Patrinos *et al.* 2009). Future research should pay attention to the manner in which PPPs alter the governance, effectiveness and equity of education systems and, thus, feed a policy debate that, as the Indian case shows, is highly speculative and ambiguous.

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Notes

^[1] The IFC is the Bank's agency specialized in lending to the private sector.

^[1] Other areas are the building of schools or the delivery of non-core services (books, school transport and meals).

^[1] The purpose of this Constitutional provision was to protect the interests of minorities.

^[1] See ‘Play A Role in Inclusive Education, Sibal Tells Private Sector’. India-Forums. 18 May 2010. (www.india-forums.com/news/education/249164-play-a-role-in-inclusive-education-sibal-tells-private-sector.htm).

^[1] See schoolchoice.in/

^[1] Although the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is an important international organisation for India in many sectors, it does not currently have projects in education. For the present discussion, it is only important to mention that the ADB does endorse the concept of PPP in different sectors, and had a role in introducing this policy idea in India (Dhar 2008, p. 422).

[¹] Indeed, in the 1990s, India increased its reliance on market forces, but their policies remained far from the Washington Consensus dogma, with high levels of trade protection, lack of privatisation, extensive industrial policies, and lax fiscal and financial policies (Rodrik 2006).

[¹] Interestingly enough, the same document reflects that some stakeholders problematized the fact that the World Bank reporting team had 'a pronounced favour for private schooling systems without convincing evidence in India' (World Bank 2008, p. 65).

[¹] See go.worldbank.org/AVVY7BNFJ0

[¹] See, for instance, the letter 'PPP in School Education – Some Observations' [manuscript].

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