



Are we using Friedman's roadmap? A comparative analysis of stimuli of private school enrolments in post-Soviet countries



Maia Chankseliani*

Department of Education and St. Hilda's College, University of Oxford, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY, UK

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ABSTRACT

There have been extensive scholarly debates on the role the private sector in the provision of schooling across the world. The former Soviet states have been largely excluded from these debates. This exploratory study examines the role the private sector in the formal provision of primary and secondary education in post-Soviet countries to demonstrate comparative trends and to provide a framework for the analysis of stimuli for private enrolments in the region. On the basis of the analysis of secondary data, documentary evidence and relevant literature, this paper shows that across the former Soviet countries, neoliberal ideas of education marketisation have not found fertile soil for development.

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1. Introduction

Marketisation of education systems gained international momentum the 1990s when the so-called Washington consensus was established as the dominant paradigm in international development. As described by Colclough (2011), under the conditions of recession, stagnation and deepening poverty, the proposed strategies in this period included liberalisation, stabilisation and privatisation. Since then, the landscape of private schooling has been changing across the globe, with many governments promoting ideas of education marketisation. I define education marketisation as the sequence of government policies aimed at the introduction of market models into the education system, thus avoiding the state responsibility of distributing taxpayers' money effectively, equitably and efficiently. The idea of education marketisation is vital to the neoliberal ideology of free markets and a limited state (Chankseliani, 2014). Education marketisation policies are generally analysed through the theoretical framework of economic neoliberalism for which privatisation has been a watchword (Klees, 2008).

The analysis of the aggregate international data shows that 14% of primary school pupils and 22% of secondary school students attend private institutions (World Bank, 2013b). A private school is defined as 'an institution that is not operated by a public authority but controlled and managed, whether for profit or not, by a private

body such as a nongovernmental organization, religious body, special interest group, foundation or business enterprise' (World Bank, 2013b). This definition is taken from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators*, as this is the main source of the secondary data used in the analysis.

The proliferation of private schools in economically developed as well as developing countries has been justified by arguments on efficiency, equality, quality and fiscal constraints. There have been extensive scholarly debates on the role the private sector in the provision of schooling across the world. The former Soviet states are largely excluded from such debates. There is very scarce literature on the subject of the marketisation of schooling in post-Soviet countries individually or in a comparative perspective; either on between-country differences in terms of the role of markets in education or on differences between the region and the rest of the world.¹

This exploratory study uses three lenses – the political, the socio-economic and the educational – interchangeably to examine the role the private sector in the formal provision of primary and secondary education in post-Soviet countries. The study establishes comparative trends and provides a framework for the analysis of stimuli for private enrolments in the region. Specifically, this paper seeks to answer the following questions: viewed in the global context, how do post-Soviet countries compare in terms of private school enrolments, costs and quality? How, if at all, do the demand from families and the supply from non-profit and

* Tel.: +44 01865611011; mobile: +44 07856972770.

E-mail addresses: maia.chankseliani@education.ox.ac.uk,
maia_chankseliani@post.harvard.edu

¹ Some exceptions are Kersh (1998), Kreitzberg and Priimagi (1998), and Lisovskaya and Karpov (2001).

for-profit providers stimulate private enrolments? How do the political agendas of individual states shape the stimuli for private schooling?

To answer the above research questions, the current work employs an analysis of secondary data, documents and literature in English, Russian and Georgian languages. The available secondary data on private schools in the post-Soviet countries is extremely limited. The [World Bank's \(2013b\) World Development Indicators](#) provided the main source of the statistics of private school enrollments in post-Soviet countries. The relevant secondary data on marketisation and a variety of factors related to it was obtained from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Economist Intelligence Unit, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), national statistical agencies and ministries of education.

The post-Soviet countries² have experienced profound socio-economic and political changes the early 1990s. There are significant differences in terms of economic development, with the Baltic states and Russia being high-income; Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Belarus middle-income and all the rest – low or lower-middle-income economies ([World Bank, 2013a](#)). These countries, however, are relatively homogeneous in terms of the human development index which is a composite of life expectancy, educational attainment and income indicators. The majority have achieved high human development. The rest (Moldova, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) are considered to have medium human development ([UNDP, 2013](#)). The analysis of political systems shows that seven out of the fifteen post-Soviet country governments are recognised as authoritarian; these are Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan ([Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012](#)).

Historically, education provision started as a non-state led initiative in many countries, including the former Soviet states. Religious, entrepreneurial or charitable individuals and groups used to educate the selected few. For example, in the nineteenth century Russia, urban elites were educated at private schools or with private tutors; central or local authorities did not invest public resources in education. Russia started centralised financing and control of public schools only at the start of the twentieth century. Primary enrolments at formal schools at the outset of WWI reached only 20% ([Chaudhary et al., 2012](#)). In another post-Soviet country Estonia, even with the spread of formal public schooling, 47% secondary schools in 1922–1923 remained private ([Kreitzberg and Priimagi, 1998](#)). It was under the USSR's investment in formal public schooling that the constituent states achieved almost universal school enrolments. [Heyneman and Stern \(2013\)](#) note that in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the precedents of government-delivered schooling 'shifted as soon as they had the opportunity. In former socialist states non-government schooling is now a normal source of education.' This paper challenges that view and presents evidence to demonstrate that the level of primary and secondary education marketisation in the former Soviet countries is markedly below international averages.

2. Private enrollments in the post-Soviet countries: comparative analysis

The states that constituted the Soviet Union used to have very similar education systems at the time of the dissolution of the

USSR. Some of the key characteristics of these systems were centralised control and provision; using schools for communist indoctrination; and full public financing of formal schooling. The education reforms that these countries chose to implement in the last two decades, however, gave rise to some differences amongst them. This section looks at the variation in private school attendance among post-Soviet countries when viewed in the wider international context. Specifically, it focuses on trends in private school enrolments, costs and quality.

Private school enrolments have been rising steadily across the world. Since 2000, enrolments at the secondary level went up from 19% to 22% and at the primary level from 10% to 14% ([World Bank, 2013b](#)). In this context, private enrolments at primary and secondary levels are generally low in the former Soviet countries, ranging from very few private school students in Uzbekistan to 9.5% of private primary school enrolment in Georgia and 13.9% of private secondary school enrolment in Azerbaijan ([Fig. 1](#)). Georgia, Estonia and Azerbaijan stand out with their relatively high levels of educational privatisation.

Internationally, private school enrolments differ significantly by country income level ([Fig. 2](#)). Average private enrolments are the highest in low income countries, where 22% of pupils at the primary and 36% at the secondary level are enrolled in private schools. Private enrolments are consistently lower as we move up the national income ladder, reaching only 11% of pupils at the primary and 16% at the secondary level in high income countries.

This negative relationship between national income levels and private school enrolments could be used to question the misconception that private school markets require high income environments to flourish. Non-state schools, it appears, do emerge in poor places where there is a higher likelihood of government schools failing. Although it has been shown that non-elite, low fee private schools that serve the poor are becoming a universal phenomenon ([Heyneman and Stern, 2013](#)), there is no indication of the existence of such schools in the post-Soviet countries. Furthermore, the relationship between national income levels and private enrolments in the former Soviet countries does not follow the worldwide trend. The analysis of the relationship between GDP per capita and private school enrolments in these countries shows that there is no relationship between these two indicators.³ As seen from [Figs. 1 and 2](#), the post-Soviet country with the highest rate (9.5%) of private primary enrolments – Georgia – is substantially below the world average for lower middle income countries (15%). The post-Soviet country with the highest rate (13.9%) of private secondary enrolments – Azerbaijan – is also markedly below the world average for middle income countries (21%).

These figures, however, do not reflect, what I propose to call, covert privatisation of formal schooling. Although the number of private schools is negligible in the region and there are few low fee private schools, families of pupils who attend public primary and secondary schools face costs of schooling related to additional fees and private tutoring expenses. In several post-Soviet countries, families need to pay additional fees for general education that is supposed to be free at public schools. In Uzbekistan, for example, parents pay for special/additional classes at school, textbooks and school supplies as well as informal fees for schooling. These payments may be quite high and reach per child more than the poverty-level monthly expenses on food. The fees, however, are relatively low when compared to private tutoring costs ([Steiner-Khamisi et al., 2008](#)) or the costs of international private schools. The analysis of scarce data sources on the costs of private schools in post-Soviet countries has revealed that Russia may be housing

² This paper looks at Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan is excluded from the analysis because of the non-availability of data.

³ The correlation coefficient for GDP per capita and private primary enrolments is .026 ($p = .930$), GDP per capita and private secondary enrolments is $-.016$ ($p = .958$).

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