The instrumentation of public subsidies for private schools: different regulatory models with concurrent equity implications

Publicly funded private schools in primary and secondary education have become a common feature in a number of OECD countries. The expansion of public subsidies for privately-owned schools (PSPS) has consequences that go far beyond the involvement of private actors in the provision of the educational service. These include the transformation of the role of State in the governance of educational systems, and the very notion of public education as an equitable good. However, public subsidies for private schools have been adopted under diverse rationalities and pursuing different goals. Based on this diversity, this research examines the regulatory configurations of private subsidised education provision across OECD countries from a policy instruments perspective. Based on a systematic review of the literature, four models of regulation of private subsidised education have been identified: freedom of instruction, freedom of instruction with equivalence, pro-market competition and autonomy. The article also analyses why and how private subsidised education has been problematised, as well as the recent policy reforms adopted to tackle the equity challenges posed by this type of provision. Finally, the paper elaborates on the policy implications and challenges of private subsidised education pose for public education and equity, and reflects on the potential and limits of the regulatory reforms adopted to face these challenges.

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