

Research Paper

An International Comparison of Educational Systems: the Columbian, Iraqi and Kurdish cases

Peshawa Jalal Mohammed¹, Jennyfer Casas², Sanaa Taler Saleh³, Karolina Eszter Kovács⁴

Recommended citation:

Mohammed, P. J., Casas, J., Saleh, S. T., & Kovács, K. E. (2021). An International Comparison of Educational Systems: the Columbian, Iraqi and Kurdish cases. *Central European Journal of Educational Research*, 3(2), 110–120. <https://doi.org/10.37441/cej/2021/3/2/9803>

Abstract

As developing countries aim to improve their education to address the challenges of globalisation's economic and social demands, comparative education can provide references for reforms and changes. Through studying the educational systems of other countries, we can discover which reforms are possible and desirable. This article attempts to demonstrate some specific aspects of the educational systems of Columbia, Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan and to compare them. It shows the decentralisation process and challenges of the systems. It also reveals the structure of education of the three systems and their differences related to duration and organisation of primary and secondary schools. Following that, the curriculum provision and their orientations are explained. Finally, the article also tries to find the differences in teacher training in terms of duration and training types, occurring before / during service. The obtained results show that the decentralisation process and its challenges are very similar in these educational systems while there are differences in the duration, structure, and curriculum subjects.

Keywords: Comparative Education, Education system, Curriculum, Teacher training

Introduction

Comparisons of educational systems and characteristics are becoming more and more common between countries. This includes empirical analysis and evaluation of international tests (e.g. PISA or TIMSS rankings), study habits and school environments, but also that of document analysis which contributes to the work of policymakers, teachers and instructors on different educational levels. Such comparisons can support the development of different systems and provide an appropriate basis for creating common good practices as well (Bray et al., 2014). Emphasising the role of education is crucial as through the direct and indirect effects, education contributes to poverty reduction, and helps to limit high fertility in third-world countries. Expanding and raising the standard of education strengthens the system of civil institutions and, indirectly of government activity as well. It also supports the preservation and restoration of health by helping the majority of the population to participate in the economy and society on the basis of their skills, thereby carrying out awareness-raising work to ensure that all families do more than ever to preserve and restore their own health. Last but not least, education helps to shape behaviour that enables people to get a job and encourages people to, for the rest of their lives, take part in some form of organized or individual learning (Kozma & Tózsér, 2016; Ilon, 1994). During these turbulent years, on top of the traditional tasks of education, it has another societal function, that is, the function of creating political stability and societal shelter in a time of troubles. Thus, education, among other factors of political and societal life, is an important contribution to the normalisation of the future of a given society (Forray & Kozma, 2021). In our analysis, we selected three counties of the developing countries

¹ Charmo University; peshawajalal@gmail.com

² Columbian Secretary of Education; jennysita814@gmail.com

³ Salahaddin University; Department of Psychology, sanasalh29@gmail.com

⁴ University of Debrecen, Faculty of Arts, Institute of Educational Sciences and Cultural Management, karolina92.kovacs@gmail.com (corresponding author)

(known as the Third World). Such countries usually show the characteristics of the continental educational system.

History of education

The history of education in any corner of this world can be controversial, as the definition of education has changed right along with history. In Columbia, during Spanish colonisation in the 16th century, the Catholic Church built the first schools to educate colonist children. Catholic Seminaries were then founded, and several universities were built. In terms of modern education and dealing with topics and issues related to school and higher education, Columbia's Ministry of Education has been the governmental institution in charge since 1886. In the case of Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan, their histories date back to the very early civilisations in Mesopotamia. Still, modern education in this region starts with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the forming of Iraq as a state in 1921 and the linking of Kurdistan to Iraq in 1922. This means, the modern education of these two systems start at the same time. In 1921, Iraq developed its education system, providing public and private education paths. In the early 1970s, schooling became public, free at all levels, and compulsory at the primary level. Two ministries oversee Iraq's education system: the Education Ministry (MOE) and the Higher Education and Scientific Research Ministry (MOHSR). The Ministry of Educational Research (MOHSR) manages tertiary education and research centres. The Kurdistan education system was also an integral part of Iraq's educational system up until the beginning of the 1990s, when on the wings of semi-autonomy Kurds, somewhat independently of the central government-began forming their government agencies and educational institutions (WENR, 2020; Ranjan & Jain, 2009).

As of today, learning in the 21st century has gone global. What schools produce today will impact tomorrow's economy. All in all, education needs to meet the economic and social demands of globalisation. Therefore, it is not only critical that we give importance to educational systems but to others as well. Such work can-show us similar educational conditions and issues in foreign countries and help us to learn from them. This study aims to help us understand education systems better, and to also be a reference for reform-

Methods

In this paper, we collected documents related to the educational systems of Columbia, Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan (N=25). Based on these documents, we selected those that introduce the three systems in an in-depth way comparing the educational levels from ISCED 0 to ISCED 4 (UNESCO, 2012). In our analysis, we summarised and compared the educational systems of these countries alongside main points that included the following: centralisation-decentralisation characteristics, education system structures, curricula, grading systems and teacher education. To improve the transparency of the data, the summarised characteristics are presented in tables.

Centralisation versus decentralisation

Decentralisation is probably one of the main trends of the education planning agenda that has been at the forefront of the last 15 years. Why should a country decentralise its decision-making process in education? Which decisions need to be decentralised? These are two issues that many policymakers pose. In certain situations, growing management and governance efficiency has been questioned. If the state bureaucracy tends to be heavy and slow, and, if it has proved unable to tackle the problems of teacher deployment, teacher payment, procurement and delivery of equipment and buildings, decentralisation then seems to be the remedy. In several ways, decentralisation is also the product of the process of democratisation, when people want to be consulted and actively involved in decision making (McGinn, & Welsh, 1999).

The Columbian government launched an intensive campaign to decentralise of the educational organisation and management systems in the late 1980s: The effort was to reverse the extremely successful progress made by Columbia toward centralisation over the past 20 years, which had reduced the deep, regional corruption and administrative semi-anarchy that characterised the country's education system. The goal of decentralisation was to be part of the policy to save the country from the growing turmoil. However, along the way, the decentralisation of administrative education has lost touch with political decentralisation requirements. As a simple model of educational decentralisation was not established and the involved parties (e.g., The Department of National Planning, the National Teachers Union (unions and municipalities) had no collective vision of change, no reasonable task distribution was possible. In these first few years, power dynamics dominated as different parties sought to shape education policy according to their own agendas and ambitions.

In short, decentralisation will end up being a reform toward modernisation for the Columbian educational system as new functions, responsibilities and skills are learnt, and precedents are set. The central government and the people would be forced to accept inefficiency from and the ineffectiveness of local and regional principalities while having to encourage them in their work and needing to take corrective steps without doing things that minimise their roles and responsibilities. With stronger local infrastructure, Columbia's desperately needed participatory democracy has a better chance of taking root (Hanson, 1995; Elacqua et al., 2019).

In the case of the Iraqi and Kurdish systems, they are almost the same in how they run the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The Ministers make almost all the critical decisions, including policy and financial management decisions, even making some minor ones like the approval of a new private school or appointment of a new teacher. They have a great deal of power, with direct subordinates and ministerial staff with many direct responsibilities. The Ministers also accept demands for data from inside the organisation, meaning they answer to a superior. Likewise, directors cannot make decisions without their director general's approval. They supervise all tasks, including vision, international relations, the management of the various reforms and special initiatives and day-to-day operations. Though this may seem like a good thing, this delays the decision-making process and leads to a lack of transparency for management decisions (Vernez et al., 2016).

In Iraq, centralisation policy was the key to controlling and monitoring citizens in the time of dictatorship. After the Iraqi regime's fall in 2003, the continuous chaos and conflicts did not allow significant reforms to be made in the system. The attempts in Iraqi Kurdistan to reform its system and agenda could not formulate educational institutions, beyond the institutional centralisation of the Ba'athist model and its hierarchical management structure (Wahab, 2017).

The structure of the education systems

The structural characteristics of the three systems are presented in Table 1. The Columbian school system is composed of initial (or beginner-level) education. It is given in kindergartens, they receive children from three to five years old, and, if the children are younger, they must go to private institutions. In pre-school, the children are four years old, and here they learn the basic tools to socialise and interact with the environment through games, literature, and art. Basic education (five grades in primary and four in secondary school) lasts from six to fourteen years old, and these levels consist of the initiation into basic scientific, mathematical, artistic, humanistic knowledge and the introduction to research. They are divided into primary and secondary levels. The last two high school levels are tenth and eleventh grade, with an age group between fifteen and sixteen. This school system's organisation is framed upon two prominent sectors of education, private and public. Columbian school education requires compulsory elementary school (grade 1 to 9), followed by two years of secondary education (grades 10 and 11) (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The primary education course in Iraq takes six years, from first grade to sixth grade. Students are enrolled in the first grade at the age of 6, after a non-compulsory pre-school for two years (4 and 5 years). Graduation from elementary school requires the passing of the national exam administered at the end of the 6th grade by the Ministry of Education. Pupils are then awarded an Elementary Certificate. The length of the secondary stage is six years (from 12 to 18 years old) and divided into two stages of three years each - lower secondary school (12 to 15 years old) and upper secondary school (15 to 18 years old). Each stage ends with a national test administered by the Ministry of Education. After passing the national exam at the end of the third year of lower secondary, students obtain an intermediate certificate (transitive certificate). Subsequently, they have the option of choosing from different types of junior high school tracks (AL-Humeiri, 2019; Al-Shaikhly, 2017).

In some ways, the structure of the Kurdish system is different from the Iraqi. During the 2008/09 school years, the Ministry of Education initiated a series of significant K–12 education reforms. A new, more rigorous curriculum was introduced into the schools. Education was already mandatory by grade 6 but now it was made obligatory by grade 9. Pre-schools served children of age 4 to 5 years. The previous three grades, primary (grades 1 to 6), intermediate (grades 7 to 9), and secondary (grades 10 to 12), were restructured into two grades - primary (grades 1 to 9) and secondary (grades 10 to 12). On the high school level, students could select one of two classes, either vocational or preparatory, with most students choosing the latter. General schools offer a well-rounded education with a Literary/Humanities and scientific track (Venez et al., 2016).

Table1. A comparison of the structures of education systems of (Columbia, Iraq, and Iraqi Kurdistan region, ISCED, 0.1.2.3)

Columbia	Iraq	Iraqi Kurdistan region
<i>Kindergarten</i>	<i>Kindergarten</i>	<i>Kindergarten</i>
This stage is 2 years for children 3 -5 years old. It is free of charge and not compulsory (Snapshots of Columbia’s Education System,2020).	This stage is 2 years for children 4-5 years old. It is free of charge and not compulsory (Al-Shaikhly, 2017).	This stage is 2 years for children 4-5 years old. It is free of charge and not compulsory (Al-Shaikhly, 2017).
<i>Basic primary and secondary education</i>	<i>Primary education</i>	<i>Basic primary and secondary education</i>
Basic education is compulsory for children from age 6 to 14. Duration: 9 years Grades: 1 to 9 The compulsory basic education is 2 stages primary education Duration: 5 years Grades: 1 to 5 Ages: 6 to 11 Upon successful completion of the basic primary education, pupils are awarded the Certificate of Completion of the Fifth Grade of Primary Instruction which enables them to go for the lower secondary education. Basic secondary education Duration: 4 years Grades: 6 to 9 Ages: 11 to 15 Free of charge. Students who pass grade 9 have 3 options: carry on with their studies at the upper secondary education academic branch or join a technical branch (Radinger, et al. ,2018).	Primary education is compulsory for children from age 6 to 12 Duration: 6 years Grades 1 to 6 Free of charge. Transferring to secondary education, students must pass the Ministerial General Examination (Al-Shaikhly, 2017).	Basic education is compulsory for children aged 6 to 15. Duration: 9 years Grades: 1 to 9 The compulsory basic education is in 2 stages Primary education duration: 6 years Grades: 1 to 6 Ages: 6 to 12 Transition to the basic secondary education doesn’t require a ministerial examination but requires successful completion of the primary stage. Basic secondary schools Duration: 3 years Grades: 7 to 9 Ages: 13 to 15 Free of charge Transition to upper secondary education requires passing the Ministerial General Examination (Al-Shaikhly, 2017).
<i>Upper secondary education</i>	<i>Secondary upper and lower education</i>	<i>Upper secondary education</i>
Upper secondary education is not compulsory Students must have completed grade 9 for entry into the upper secondary educational level. The actual programme of study at this level is known as baccalaureate. Duration: 2 years Grades: 10 and 11 Ages: 15-17 years. this level is divided into two streams/orientations: Academic and Technical (OECD ,2016).	Secondary education is 2 stages. Upper and lower secondary schools are not compulsory and are free of charge. Upper secondary education: 3 years Grades: 1 to 3 In Iraq there are no 7 grades. when students finish the 6 th grade in primary schools, they will start again from grade 1. Passing the lower secondary school requires passing the Ministerial General Examination Upper secondary education Duration 3 years. grades: 4 to 6, ages 16 to 18 Streams: academic and vocational (Al-Shaikhly, 2017).	Upper secondary education is not compulsory and is free of charge. 3-year grades: from 10 to 12, from ages 16 to 18 Streams: academic and vocational (Saeed, 2015).

<i>Academic branch</i>	<i>Academic branch</i>	<i>Academic branch</i>
<p>This stream provides general education along with specialization in a particular academic field, such as foreign languages, natural sciences, arts, social sciences, and humanities. Academic secondary education broadens the knowledge in the field of humanities, sciences and arts.</p> <p>After completion of secondary education, students must appear for the State Examination Superior in order to gain admittance to higher education institutions in Columbia. This exam is comprised of a series of tests that measures students' expertise in the following subjects: Spanish, mathematics, natural sciences (physics, chemistry, and biology), a foreign language (German, English or French), social sciences, philosophy, and chosen interdisciplinary areas (communication and culture, environmental studies, and society) (OECD ,2016).</p>	<p>There are literary, scientific, and Islamic majors. The scientific specialization has two branches (Applied Sciences or Life Sciences); the student can choose one of them within the scientific branch.</p> <p>After completion of the secondary education, students must appear for the Ministerial General Examination in order to gain admittance to higher education institutions in Iraq. This exam measures students' experience in the following subjects: Arabic, Islamic education and mathematics, natural sciences (physics, chemistry, and biology), foreign language (English), social sciences (history, geography, and national education) and economics (Al-Shaikhly, 2017).</p>	<p>There are literary, and scientific branches. There are no Islamic majors, and there no branches (applied science and life science) in science.</p> <p>After completion of the secondary education, students must appear for the Ministerial General Examination in order to gain admittance to higher education institutions in the Kurdistan region.</p> <p>This exam consists of a series of tests that measure students' experience in the following subjects: Arabic, religious education and mathematics, natural sciences (physics, chemistry, and biology), foreign language (English), social sciences (history, mostly Kurdish history), geography, and national education) and economics (Saeed,2015).</p>
<i>Technical branch</i>	<i>Vocational branch</i>	<i>Vocational branch</i>
<p>This stream prepares pupils for higher education as well as for entry into the job market. The technical branch prepares pupils for employment in one of the sectors of services and production.</p> <p>Areas of specialization are as follows: Industry, health, commerce, ecology, computing, agriculture, mining, tourism, finances, recreation, administration, sports, and many other fields determined by the job market and regional needs.</p> <p>Certificate awarded: Upon successful completion of this branch, students are awarded the title of Technical Baccalaureate. Students who receive this certificate are eligible for higher education in Columbia (Snapshots of Columbia's Education System,2020).</p>	<p>This stream prepares pupils for entry into the job market. The technical branch prepares pupils for employment in one of the sectors of services and production.</p> <p>The vocational schools are divided into five specializations: agricultural, industrial, nursing, commercial and fine arts. The duration of study is 3 years.</p> <p>Certificate awarded: Upon successful completion of this branch the students obtain a diploma with which they can be employed in their field of specialization, or work in companies in the labour market. Students who receive this certificate are not eligible for higher education in Iraq (AL-Humeiri & Khamis ,2019).</p>	<p>This stream prepares pupils for entry into the job market. The technical branch prepares pupils for employment in one of the sectors of services and production.</p> <p>The vocational schools are divided into five specializations: agricultural, industrial, nursing, commercial and fine arts. The duration of study is 3 years.</p> <p>Certificate awarded: Upon successful completion of this branch the students obtain a diploma with which they can be employed in their field of specialization, or work in companies in the labour market. Students who receive this certificate are not eligible for higher education in the Kurdistan region (AL-Humeiri & Khamis, 2019).</p>

In the three education systems, the standard first cycle tertiary degree is the bachelor's degree. Programs are typically four years in length, except in the case of programs in professional fields like medicine, which lasts six years. Both masters and doctorates are research degrees offered by universities, and they need requirements like entrance examinations and English language skills. The doctorate is the highest qualification in the three systems.

Curriculum systems in Columbia, Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdistan region

Columbia sought to develop educational curricula for an extended period from the end of the nineteenth century, especially between the end of the civil war in 1839 and 1977. It implemented new methods of teaching and educational principles in schools, and pushed secondary education towards practical curricula and studies with practical application like the natural sciences. Schools in Columbia follow MEN's (Ministerio de Educación Nacional) the (Administration of the National Education System) mandatory curriculum guidelines, which outline key learning topics (areas of commitment and fundamentals). Schools have some freedom in determining the number of hours they allocate to specific subjects as long as 80% of the total learning time is devoted to compulsory subjects. The state also serves unconventional curricula and educational television programs to students in remote and deprived rural areas (See Table 2) (WENR Columbia, 2020). All this to enhance education and help students perform better.

In Iraq in 2003, many long-awaited changes were made in the curriculum at all school levels. The curriculum and subjects were revised. English now entered the curriculum, being made available (in the first grade instead of the fifth grade). Though lengthy and dense compared to other Arab countries, and the Iraqi curriculum, despite all the setbacks, is still strong from the scientific point of view (Al-Shaikhly, 2017). However, it does not match the practical reality of the student. For this, many educators stand and always suggest shortening these curricula. Instead, they propose to focus on the material useful for human life. In addition to the fact that curricula contain many fillers, students are exhausted with multitudinous duties and scores of repeated tasks that seem to be of no use. All schools must follow the Ministry of Education curriculum (a general compulsory curriculum) and any changes made therein (Al-Shaikhly, 2017).

The curricula in Iraqi Kurdistan is identical to those in Iraq, most of them being in Arabic once served the interests of the former regime. Following the 1991 popular uprising in the region and de facto autonomy, numerous changes to education and curricula in Iraqi Kurdistan followed. However, changes were slow due to the economic and political conditions at that time. In 2003, gradual yet serious changes were made to the educational system in Kurdistan. 2007 also saw critical changes, following the overthrow of the former regime. It was at this time that experts from the educational field participated in the renewal and planning of a standardised curriculum in the Kurdistan region. As a result, they created a new system corresponding with the ethnic and cultural diversity present there. These changes were studied at all educational levels in the Kurdish language, serving a new realisation of free ideology, philosophy, and democratic principles, in which each individual's rights were preserved and protected in society (Saeed,2015).

Table2. *The curriculum of educational systems (Columbia, Iraq and KRG)*

Columbia	Iraq	Iraqi Kurdistan region
<i>Basic Primary Education</i>	<i>Primary education</i>	<i>Basic primary education</i>
Compulsory and fundamental areas: mathematics, ethics education, Spanish, social sciences (geography, history, democracy and political constitution), humanities, philosophy, cultural and art education, foreign languages, environmental education and natural sciences, political sciences and economics, physical education, computing and technology, and religious education (Radinger, et al. ,2018).	Compulsory and critical areas: Subjects studied in grades 1 to 6 include Arabic (at the first grade), English starting from the first grade, mathematics, science, history, geography, Islamic studies, and national education, physical education, music, Christian education for Christian minority schools, and art education (Al-Shaikhly, 2017).	Compulsory and critical areas: Subjects studied in grades 1 to 6 include Arabic starting from the fourth grade, English starting from the first grade, mathematics, science, history, geography, religions education, and national education, physical education, music, art education and Christian education for Christian minority schools (Saeed,2015).
<i>Basic Secondary education</i>	<i>Lower secondary education</i>	<i>Basic secondary education</i>
Core Curriculum (Grades 6 to 9): mathematics, social studies, physical education, arts education, Spanish and literature, natural science, vocational instructions (Grade 8 and 9), and moral and religious education (OECD ,2016)	Curriculum (grades 1 to 3): includes subjects of Islamic education, Arabic, English, science (Physics, Chemistry, and Biology), history, geography, social studies, mathematics, fine art education, and military physical education. Female students take additional lessons in household education. Some elective courses were added to the preparatory stage, such as Kurdish, sociology, economics, and patriotism education. Evening classes are exempt from physical education and military training, organizing some out-of-curriculum activities (AL-Humeiri & Khamis, 2019).	Curriculum (for grades 7 to 9) includes subjects of religious education, Arabic, English, science (Physics, Chemistry, and Biology), Kurdish history, geography, social studies, mathematics, art education, and physical education (Saeed,2015).
<i>Upper secondary education</i>	<i>Upper secondary education</i>	<i>Upper secondary education</i>
Academic branch 10 and 11 grades Curriculum: foreign language, mathematics, religious education, art education, physics, earth science, philosophy, biology, general chemistry, physical education, Spanish and literature, organic chemistry, and social science (Snapshots of Columbia's Education System,2020).	Academic branch curriculum (11 and 12 grades): Arabic, English, Islamic studies, physics, mathematics chemistry, and biology in the scientific stream. Arabic and English, Islamic studies, history, geography, and economics in the literature stream. Students who transfer to upper secondary schools, from 4 th grade, study all literary and scientific subjects alike (AlShaikhly, 2017).	Academic branch curriculum (10, 11, and 12 grades): Arabic, English, Islamic studies, physics, mathematics chemistry, and biology in the scientific stream. Arabic and English, Islamic studies, history, geography, and economics in the literature stream (Al-Shaikhly, 2017).

The grading system of Columbia, Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdistan region

The grading system differs in the elementary stage of the Iraqi education system and is divided into two score divisions. Students from the first year of the elementary level up until they reach the fourth year are evaluated based on grades from 0 to 10. Success for them is measured by a minimum score of 5. Students in the fifth and sixth grades, and also the secondary schools' students, are evaluated based on scores from 0 to 100. Their minimum passing score is 50. In Kurdistan, students' evaluation scale in the educational system on all academic levels is from 0 to 100, and the minimum passing score is 50 (Al-Shaikhly, 2017). Columbia, on the other hand, grades students from 0 to 100, and their minimum passing score is 60 (WENR Columbia, 2020). The comparison of the three systems can be seen in Table3.

Table3. *The grading system of Columbia, Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdistan region*

Columbia	Iraq	Iraqi Kurdistan region
<p>The grade scale used for all stages of education is: 90 – 100: excellence or E 80 – 89: outstanding or S 60 – 79: Acceptable A 40 – 59: insufficient or I 0 – 39: deficient or D</p> <p>Minimum annual average is 6.0. Students who fail in one course in a year may be promoted to the next year if their average is 7.0 or higher. If a student fails in three or more subjects, they must repeat the year (WENR, 2020).</p>	<p>The grade scales used in primary education are: First 4 years (1st grade - 4th grade): 0-10 (5 or higher passing score) Last two years (fifth grade - sixth grade): 0 - 100 (50 or higher passing score) The grade scale for secondary education is (0- 100) (50 is the passing score.</p> <p>Students who fail in one or two subjects can retake the exam in the second round. As for students who failed in three subjects, they must repeat the year with all the subjects Al-Shaikhly, 2017).</p>	<p>The grade scale used for all stages is: (0 – 100) (50 is the passing score). 90 -100: excellent 80 – 90: very good 70- 80: good 60- 55: average, 50: passes 49- 0: fail</p> <p>Students who fail in one or two subjects can retake the exam in the second round. As for students who failed in three subjects, they must repeat the year with all the subjects Al-Shaikhly, 2017).</p>

Teacher Education

The preparation to become a teacher differs depending on which level the professional will work at, be it pre-school, primary, secondary, higher education, or tertiary education. Based on the levels of education, the preparation of teachers is also required for changing jobs. The preparation in Columbia, Iraq and the Kurdistan region has similarities in requirements and methods of teacher training. Interestingly enough, from among the three countries, Columbia has an advantage, having vocational schools with a pedagogical emphasis, meaning intense training is offered in this area, allowing female students for instance to go directly to the job market working in kindergartens.

However, for working in pre-school, a university degree is required. Instead of taking a five-year bachelor program course, in Columbia there are some transferable subjects that can be brought over from vocational training, allowing students to reduce their studies by at least two years, saving time and tuition fees. However, those who graduated from an academic school need to go to a private or a public university, and they must study for five years. In the case of Iraq, the process is similar, but rather than a five-year, universities offer a four-year education program, meaning that like in Columbia, they could teach in primary and secondary education. Another interesting point is that in both countries professionals of any other field can teach in school. This is a disadvantage for teachers in Columbia since there these professionals do not need to acquire extra training in pedagogy. In contrast, Iraqi professionals need to go through a one-year pedagogy training, before they can teach.

The Ministry of education in each country is responsible for hiring the teachers and for providing continuous training. The teaching skills and pedagogical innovation are reinforced and developed throughout teachers' careers with the help of guidebooks. This aims to improve their teaching styles by giving suggestions like encouraging students to utilise problem-solving methods, undertaking simplified research and reports, working on individual and collective projects, and using discussions and the exchange of opinions as teaching tools (Ministry of Education, 2019). Additionally, the government established agreements to provide training to teachers. Nevertheless, in many cases, at least in Columbia, teachers do not take them because these courses are held during non-working hours and in contrast with the time invested, the salary earned is meagre. Thus, unfortunately, low percentages of people participate in the courses.

In the case of tertiary-education teachers, the demands are that they have a master's and a doctoral degree. The programs are available in each of these countries,–however, the cost of education increases accordingly. Depending on the workplace, teachers could have economic aid, scholarships, and other opportunities to go abroad.

In Kurdistan, technical institutes employ teachers with a bachelor's degree who are willing to sign on with a contract. At no time do Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) educators need practical work experience in the field they teach. This frees them from having to invest in time and money in qualification. Experience is required elsewhere, however. Practical experience was once required at the tertiary level but perhaps due to recruitment issues it is no longer needed. However, some teachers in technical schools might

have had work experience by owning their own company or coming from their private-sector jobs. Seemingly, this is the case for those teachers in the fields of food, energy, electronics, mechanics, and media (Vernez et al., 2016). For the permanent teachers at technical universities though, as regards experience, they are expected to engage in 90 hours of formal training in teaching methods, something not required of the contracted teachers. That being said, there is sometimes some informal training for these teachers as well. For example, UNESCO and the British Council have recently launched many TVET teacher preparation initiatives and approximately 40 administrators, and supervisors of vocational schools took part in recent workshops in Germany and other countries. A small number of trained educators (2 to 3 per department) have participated in curriculum development training workshops. Similarly, a small number of chosen teachers in technical education participated in seminars for "trainers". The heads of tertiary technical education divisions received management courses. In direct connection with one of our target countries, TVET teachers are eligible for the extensive capacity-building program sponsored by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which sends KRG workers abroad to receive a post-doctoral diploma. Since 2010-2011, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific research (MOHESR) in Iraq has also allowed technical teachers to accumulate 50 to 100 development-credit hours per year by engaging actively in conferences, seminars, academics, researches, and publications. Moreover, these teachers must present a seminar and prepare lectures about a foreign science article every six months (MOHESR, 2010). The support for vocational teachers in Kurdistan appears to be highly envied by countries like Columbia where the teachers in most cases attempt to apply for education abroad or to self-finance their education.

Conclusion

The Columbian government launched an intensive campaign to decentralise of the educational organisation and management systems in the late 1980s (Hanson, 1995). By 1987, Columbian education had already changed from being centralised to a decentralised system, giving power to regional administrators, by allocating funds through the creation of the "Regional Education Program" and by appointing a ministry representative whose role was to verify that spending and hiring decisions were consistent with national policy. This change of regime does not directly relate to better educational outcomes but rather organisational matters (Becerra, 2012). This change in the Columbian system is similar to the Iraqi and Kurdish systems, due to the centralised minister of education who is the head in policy decisions and has general control of education. Simultaneously, the minister lets the regions have a part in the administration by delegating matters like hiring teachers, granting permission for the opening of private schools, and dealing with general issues regarding principals, teachers, parents and the civilians.

As regards the education systems mentioned in the article, the Iraqi and Kurdish systems are, to a great extent, similar in almost all compared aspects. This is despite the fact that the Kurdish system has taken advantage of its semi-autonomous status to reform the structure of basic school, religious education, and history subjects. Although the significant difference between these countries is their geographical location (Iraq, the Iraqi Kurdistan region and Columbia), surprisingly, there are significant similarities in the three educational systems too. For example, early childhood education has the same conditions all across the board. Furthermore, a difference is found in the years dedicated to primary education. Fifth grade is the last level in Columbia while in the Kurdistan region the last is sixth grade.

At the end of high school, students in the three systems are subjected to a comprehensive examination. It is considered crucial for making the decision to move to higher education. In the educational systems of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, it is called 'Ministerial General Examinations' and 'State Examination Superior' in the Columbian system. The technical stream in the Columbian education system prepares pupils for higher education and entry into the job market. The vocational stream in (Iraq and Kurdistan region) prepares pupils for employment in one of the sectors of services and productions; however, they cannot attend higher education after completing this education branch. Curricula at the primary stage in the Columbian educational system are distinguished from the Iraqi and Kurdistan Region systems, as they teach more numerous and varied subjects. There is no political science, political constitution, computing, and technology in the Iraqi and Kurdish systems, while there is religious and moral education in all systems alike.

Moreover, the grading scales for primary education in the Iraqi educational system are between '0' and '10' (5 or higher passing score) during the first four years (1st grade - 4th grade). For the last two years (5th grade - 6th grade), it is between '0' and '100' (50 or higher passing score) and is the same during secondary education. In Columbia and Kurdistan, the grade scale is between '0' and '100' in all education stages.

Finally, in Iraq in the area of teacher education teachers must enrol in two-year teacher education programs after upper secondary education to become primary or kindergarten teachers. The duration of study in Columbia is five years, but teachers can transfer some subjects from their professional training. Thus teachers will reduce their studies by at least two years and can teach in kindergarten. Nevertheless, to become teachers in primary or secondary education, they must graduate from an academic school, in this case, they must complete five years of schooling. In the Kurdistan region, to prepare teachers for primary and secondary education, teachers must enrol in the four-year university's teacher preparation program and obtain a teaching certificate, while in Iraq, teachers must register at the university for four years.

Overall, the three systems are different, however, it is clear that despite the structural differences some similarities can also be found. This comparative article can help teachers gain a greater understanding and can help inspire these professionals to better awareness. Thus, the comparison of these systems can contribute to their evaluation and further development.

Funding: No financial support was received.

Acknowledgments: No additional acknowledgement.

Author Contributions: The authors take responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the content analysis.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- AL-Humeiri, A. K. A. (2019). The Development of education in Iraq and its Influence on The Social life 1912-1958, *Journal of the College of Basic Education for Educational and Human Sciences*, 2019(43), 1130-1141.
- Al-Shaikhly, S., & Cui, J. (2017, October). WESE education in Iraq. <https://wenr.wes.org/2017/10/education-in-iraq>
- Becerra, L. (2012). The results in the provision of public education under different decentralized contexts: the Colombian case. *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 46(2), 85-103.
- Bray, B., Adamson, B., & Mason M. (Eds., 2007). *Comparative education research: Approaches and methods (CERC Studies in Comparative Education, Vol. 19)*. Springer.
- Bray, B., Adamson, B., & Mason M. (Eds., 2014). *Comparative Education Research – Approaches and Methods*. Springer.
- Elacqua, G., Munevar, I., Sánchez Torres, F., & Santos, H. (2019). *The impact of decentralized decision making on student outcomes and teacher quality: Evidence from Columbia (No. IDB-WP-1058)*. IDB Working Paper Series. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18235/0001822>
- Carroll, L., Reyes, A., & Trines, S. (2020, June). Education in Columbia. WENR. <https://wenr.wes.org/2020/06/education-in-Columbia-2#:~:text=In%20Brief%3A%20The%20Education%20System%20of%20Columbia&text=The%20first%20schools%20were%20set.opened%20in%20Bogot%C3%A1%20in%201580>
- Galczynski, M. (2012). MARK BRAY, BOB ADAMSON, & MARK MASON (EDS.). *Comparative education research: Approaches and methods (CERC Studies in Comparative Education, Vol. 19)*. New York, NY: Springer. (2007). 444 pp. \$329.00 (Hardcover). (ISBN 978-1-4020-6189-9). *McGill Journal of Education*, 47(2), 255. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1013127ar>
- Hanson, E. M. (1995). Democratization and decentralization in Colombian education. *Comparative Education Review*, 39(1), 101-119.
- Ilon, L. (1994). Structural adjustment and education: Adapting to a growing global market. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 14(2), 95-108. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0738-0593\(94\)90015-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0738-0593(94)90015-9)
- Furray R. K., & Kozma T. (2021). The Locals and Their New University -A Case Study of Social Innovation. *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 11(2).
- Kozma T., & Tózsér Z. (2016). Education and Transition in Hungary: Policy and Research in the Process of Transformation, 1988—2004. *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 6(2),23-42.
- McGinn, N., & Welsh, T. (1999). *Decentralisation of education: why, when, what and how?* Ministry of Education: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Ministry of Education, 2019. www.moedu.gov.iq,2019
- MOHESR (2010). *HCDP handbook: HCDP*. <https://sites.google.com/a/mhe-krq.org/mhe-hcdp/the-hcdp/handbook>
- OECD (2016). *Education in Columbia, Reviews of National Policies for Education*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264250604-en>
- Radinger, T., Echazarra, A., Guerrero, G., & Valenzuela, J. P. (2018). *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Columbia 2018*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264303751-en>

Ranjan, R. K., & Jain, P. C. (2009). The decline of educational system in Iraq. *Journal of peace studies*, 16(1-2).

Snapshot of Columbia Education System (2020).

<https://www.Columbiaeducation.info/education-system/Columbian-education-overview.html>

Saeed, H. (2015). The Kurdish educational curriculum: an un- reflected philosophical base. *Problem Wczesnej Edukacji*, 31(4), 122-131.

Thomas, R., Alfonso, E., Gabriela, G., & Pablo, V. J. (2018). *OECD reviews of school resources: Columbia 2018*. OECD Publishing.

UNESCO (2012). *International Standard Classification of Education. ISCED 2011*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

Vernez, G., Culbertson, S., Constant, L., & Karam, R. (2016). *Initiatives to Improve Quality of Education in the Kurdistan Region-Iraq*. RAND Education.

Wahab, A. A. (2017). *Education in Kurdistan Region at the intersection of nationalism and democracy (Doctoral dissertation)*. University of Toronto.



© 2021 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).