



A Comparative Study on the Position of Formal Education System of Islamic Republic of Iran among its Neighboring Countries

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 18 February 2018 Revised: 6 April 2018 Accepted: 9 August 2018 online: 9 August 2019</p>	<p>This study aims to compare the position of the formal education system of the Islamic Republic of Iran with those of neighboring countries. This is a comparative quantitative study, in which the statistical population was analyzed at the world regions/continents level based on the Bray and Thomas cube. The research sample consisted of Iran and 13 neighboring countries. There were six education indices classified generally as student, human resources, environment and equipment, financial, outcome, and qualitative groups with 20 micro indices. The information was collected by analyzing documents, contents of reports, and citable references, such as international databanks, official websites of the Ministry of Education, and governmental sources and reports as well as those of research institutions and the mass media. Regarding the fulfillment percentage of education indices, the research findings indicate that Iran was ranked seventh among neighboring countries. Among seven Arab countries except for Iraq, countries on the southern border of the Persian Gulf were ranked from first to six; thus, they outstripped Iran and other neighboring countries. According to other research findings, Iran was ranked below fifth in seven indices, compared with 13 neighboring countries, and between sixth and tenth in 11 indices. Iran was ranked third in apparent intake ratio, first in actual intake ratio, and second in the ratio of technical and vocational students to the entire students. It was also ranked first along with Azerbaijan and the UAE in the ratio of qualified teachers to the entire number of teachers, fourth in the share of education budget from the public budget, and fifth in the graduation rate of primary students among neighboring countries.</p>
<p>KEYWORDS</p> <p>Education index Formal education system Iran</p>	

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Introduction and Problem Statement

In the late 1970s, the Islamic Revolution of Iran brought about many changes in different social aspects. For nearly four decades, Iran's education system has witnessed fundamental developments, the outcome of which can be evaluated and regarded as the "performance" of this system in terms of quantitative and qualitative aspects at national, regional, and international levels. According to the Islamic Republic of Iran 2025 Outlook Document, the Iranian society is characterized by the attainment of the first position in economy, science, and technology across South-western Asia (including Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and neighbouring countries). For this purpose, the emphasis is put on the software movement, science production, rapid and continuous economic growth, relative enhancement of per capita income, and the realization of full employment. According to this document, Countries of South-western Asia (including Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and neighbouring countries) are considered the rivals of Iran in the region (Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, 2019).

Given the limited period of time allocated to the realization of goals set by the 2025 Outlook Document (6 years), it is a high priority to determine the position of the education system. In fact, the primary undeniable challenge is the lack of systematic scientific information on the position of Iran among its neighbouring countries with regard to the performance of the formal education system. According to the available information on other resources determining the national power such as the scientific ranking, many of the neighbouring rival countries, such as Turkey and countries on the border of the Persian Gulf are highly incomparable in ranking (Mullaei Nejad, 2008; Afshardi, and Madani, 2009). For instance, Sabbagh Kermani, Yavari, Baskah, and Shah Tahmasebi, (2009) employed the data envelopment analysis (DEA) to analyse the performances of Islamic countries' health and education sectors. According to their findings, Iran's health and education systems efficiency is %31 and %28 respectively, compared to other Islamic countries, showing weak performance.

Legatum's report pointed out that Iran's education was ranked 57th in 2012-2014 and 71st in 2016 (Legatum, 2016). According to the Global Competitiveness Report issued by prominent experts of the World Economic Forum in 2016, Iran was ranked 60th in the quality of primary education, 49th in the general quality of higher educations, 36th in the education quality of mathematics and sciences, and 91st in the school management quality among 140 countries

evaluated by international standards. Iran was also ranked 129th in employee training rate, 120th in the Internet accessibility for learners at schools, and 76th in the availability of specialized education services (Schwab, 2015). In addition, Iranian students have not been very successful in international examinations such as TIMSS and PIRLS since 2007 (cf. Bouhlila, 2011).

At the same time, few studies on Iran's neighbouring countries in the Middle East show that the education systems of this region follow a growing but gradual trend. For instance, UNICEF-UNESCO joint report of outcome indices and dropping out in particular confirms that the Middle Eastern and Northern African countries (MENA) spent considerable economic resources and a plethora of political capitals bringing more children to classrooms in the past decade (Lake, 2015). However, developments have stopped in recent years, inasmuch as 4.3 million children of primary school age and 2.9 million adolescents of junior high school age have not attended schools yet. Who are these children? Generally, they are the poorest children and mainly girls living in rural areas or belonging to minorities. Despite this inappropriate implication, the literacy level index usually shows a relatively better performance of educational systems of MENA. In 2008, UNESCO estimated that %40 of people above 15 years old – nearly 70 million people – were still unlettered in Arab countries (Magin, 2012). However, Najd (2016) indicated that the Middle East countries took huge steps in developing education:

- Achieving nearly complete gender equality in primary education
- Increasing the registration rates of schools considerably over the past decade
- Providing general primary education for girls and boys in most countries of the region
- Enhancing the literacy level of adults (above 15 years old) from %59 in 1990 to %78 in 2010
- Increasing financial commitments of governments: the average investment in education is %5.3 of GDP in the entire region.

Although many Arab countries have been acquainted with the globally acceptable criteria for "Education for All" (UNESCO, 2012), lack of teachers is a serious challenge of their education systems. According to the report published by Arab Research Centre for the Study of Politics, Arab countries must employ 213000 new teachers by 2015, over 345000 new teachers by 2020, 399000 new teachers by 2025, and 454000 new teachers by 2030 to achieve the goal of "Education for All". Obviously, increasing the number of teachers requires financial resources.

Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen are facing severe economic bottlenecks because of certain political problems. According to a report published by UNESCO in 2011, Arab countries allocated %4.8 of their GDPs and %18.1 of their total governmental expenses to education. It is predicted that they will spend %6 of their GDPs and %20 of their public budget (Demirjian, 2015). It can briefly be concluded that the Middle Eastern countries differ greatly in human resources development. The difference is so significant among the neighbours of Iran.

On the one hand, Iran borders Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq facing horrible states of political, social, and economic conditions adversely affecting their education systems. On the other hand, Iran has wealthy neighbours such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE, which have been able to improve the social welfare and economic state of their people through the relatively optimal management of money gained from the petroleum business. These countries have managed to achieve educational goals. This significant difference caused MENA to have the lowest rate of growth in comparison with other regions (except for the countries in the Sub-Sahara Africa) in the past decade. In the Middle East, lack of high rates of development in human resources is mainly due to the dependency of countries on petroleum, relatively low quality of governments, and international political crises (Pinar, Stengos, & Yazgan, 2013).

Given the fact that Iran is in the center of conflicts due to its geopolitical position, the Supreme Council of Education, serving as the main policymaking and legislative center for education, decided to objectively evaluate the current status of Iran's education system and those of neighbouring countries in accordance with the goals of the 2025 Outlook Document ratified by the Islamic Parliament of Iran. Given the passage of four decades after the establishment of the Islamic republic system in Iran as well as global developments along with the missions of the Supreme Council of Education, decision-makers and directors need to take a comparative glance at the status of the education system, analyse existing challenges, and discuss an outlook. Accordingly, this study aims to compare the position of Iran's educational system with those of 13 neighbouring countries with respect to the fulfilment percentage of education indices. The secondary research goals are as follows: discussing similarities and differences of 14 countries in quantitative education indices, determining and explaining the current position of Iran by each index, presenting a model for explaining the superiority of five successful countries of the region (based on the selection strategy), and identifying and

explaining successes of each country to the education policymakers and planners of Iran.

Research Method

This is a comparative quantitative study based on Bereday's approach. Given the sampling method employed in comparative research, this study can be categorized into the "Large N, More Variable" group. The selection strategies were based on the Bray and Thomas cube at a "regional" level (Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2014). The selected countries included Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman, and Iran. The countries were selected on the basis of the "similar systems, similar outputs" strategy. In other words, it was assumed that all of the selected countries were similar in geographical, cultural, social, political, and economic aspects. Thus, they are expected to show similar results in the education system performance.

Regarding the analysis of an education system, it is necessary to employ indices which are universal enough. There should also be a relative agreement on the definitions and ranges of these indices. Hence, this study utilized specific indices approved by international organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and their official statistics and reports as well as the reports, statistics, and information published by the websites affiliated with each country's ministry of education. However, it should be noted that relevant statistics of all indices were unavailable for some countries for a specific year due to the fact that some countries refused to publish their statistics or that international organizations had no access to such information. Therefore, researchers used the latest statistics available in international reports and documents for each country. Since this study was completed in 2017, most of the statistics pertain to that year backward. Despite the fact that this study was conducted nearly one and a half years ago, the present authors have recently indicated that there is no new statistics for most of the indices. Even if there is, variations are so slight and ignorable. Hence, 20 education indices were selected from the "evaluation indices of the education system" approved by the Iranian Supreme Council of Education. These indices were generally classified as student (6 indices), human resources (1 index), environment and equipment (2 indices), financial (4 indices), outcome (5 indices), and qualitative (2 indices) categories.

Results

Given the massive amount of research information, this study presents only the results pertaining to descriptive and comparative approaches. The first and last countries analysed

were Pakistan and Iran, respectively. The research region ranged from the easternmost part of Iran (Pakistan) to the southernmost part (Oman).

A: Description

1. Pakistan

Regarding student indices, the statistics show that there are 47 learners per teacher in Pakistan (Global Economy, 2017) when the net registration rate of the pre-primary school is %57 with the apparent and actual coverage rates of %92.71 and %73.85, respectively (UNESCO, 2015a). According to the report published by the Economic Analysis Office of Pakistan, over %81 of students registered in public schools (ASER, 2016). The ratio of technical and vocational students to the entire students was %6 (UNESCO, 2015b). Moreover, %82.46 of teachers were qualified (World Bank, 2015), and %51 of Pakistani schools had access to the Internet (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). In Pakistan, the student per capita was 551 USD in 2015 (UNESCO, 2015b) when the monthly salary of teachers was 17968 rupees on average (Indeed, 2017). The education budget had only %13.19 of the public budget (Trading Economics, 2015a), and education expenses accounted for %2.2 of GDP (Yusufzal, 2016). The student promotion rate was %78.55 (UNESCO, 2014) and the graduation rate was %58.9 (Trading Economics, 2015b). The student grade repetition rate was %1.64 (Trading Economics, 2015c), and the accumulated dropout rate was %20.41 (Trading Economics, 2015d). The literacy rate was %57.9 in 2015 (IndexMundi, 2017) and the human resources development index (HDI) was 0.562, putting Pakistan on the average tier for human resources development (UNDP, 2018).

2. Afghanistan

According to the available statistics, there is one teacher for every 44 students in Afghanistan (World Bank, 2015). The pre-primary school coverage rate is %1 when the apparent intake ratio and actual coverage rates are %97.5 and %54.6, respectively (UNICEF, 2012). The student registration rate of private schools is nearly % 2.5 (Knoema, 2017), and the ratio of technical and vocational students to the entire students is below %1 (UNESCO, 2015). Given the fact that the lowest education standard for teachers in Afghanistan's education system is to have an associate's degree, only %43 of teachers can be considered qualified (UNESCO, 2015). Nearly %12 of people can access the Internet in Afghanistan (Internet World Stats, 2015), and there is no specific statistics on the number of computers at schools and students'

access to the Internet. The student per capita is 157.56 USD (UNESCO, 2016), and the average salary of teachers is 167 USD per month (Roehrs & Suroush, 2015). The share of education budget from the public budget followed a descending trend, inasmuch as it reached %18.4 in 2014, and the share of education expenses from GDP reached %3.32 in 2015 (Knoema, 2017). The student improvement rate, graduation rate, grade repetition rate, and dropout rate were %88.5, %63, %3.9, and %6, respectively (UNESCO, 2015). By 2015 in Afghanistan, the literacy rate was %38, which was significantly lower than the international average (%84) (Craddock, 2016). From 1990 to 2017, Afghanistan's human resources development index increased from 0.295 to 0.498, insofar as life expectancy at birth reached 60.7 years (UNDP, 2018).

3. Turkmenistan

According to the available statistics, there is one teacher for every 24 students in Turkmenistan (EPDC, 2013). In 2014, %62.85 Turkmen children were covered by pre-primary education on average (UNESCO, 2014a). With an apparent intake coverage rate of %87.3 (UNESCO, 2014b), UNESCO's report shows that there were no private schools or institutes in Turkmenistan by 2007 (UNESCO, 2007). Latest statistics indicate that the population of students of technical and vocational high schools increased to %21.7 in Turkmenistan (UNESCO, 2014c). According to UNICEF's report, there was one computer for every 57 students, and the Internet accessibility rate was %39 (UNICEF, 2017). Although there is no official statistics, the published information by the mass media indicates that the monthly salary of a teacher ranged averagely from 800 to 900 Turkmenistan manats (equivalent to 260-232 USD) in 2013 (Chronicles of Turkmenistan, 2013). The share of education budget from the public budget was %20.8 (Global Economy, 2013a), and the share of education budget from GDP was %3.05 (Global Economy, 2013b). According to UNICEF's report, the student promotion rate, graduation rate, dropout rate, and literacy learning rate were %99.8, %102.8 (UNICEF, 2017), %1 (UNICEF, 2010), and %99.7, respectively. The average years of schooling in this country is 11 years (Hays, 2016). In 2017, the value of Turkmenistan's human resources development index was 0.706, putting this country on the average ranking of human resources development (UNDP, 2018).

4. Azerbaijan

According to the available statistics, there is one teacher in Azerbaijan for every 12.62 students (UNESCO, 2014), and the pre-primary education coverage is %48.75 (UNESCO, 2015). The apparent intake rate, actual education coverage rate, and registration rate of

private schools are %107 (Trading Economics, 2015), %94.14 (UNESCO, 2015), and %15.50 (Knoema, 2014), respectively. According to the reports published by Azerbaijan's Ministry of Education, there were %5-8 in technical and vocational majors in 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2012). The report of the United Nations Development Programme pointed out that there were %100 trained teachers in Azerbaijan in 2016 (UNDP, 2016) and that there was one computer for every 33 learners by 2014 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). In 2011, the former president of Azerbaijan increased the salaries of teachers and governmental employees to 344 USD by %10 (RFE/RL, 2011). The public expenses of the government for education, the share of education from GDP, student promotion rate, graduation rate, grade repetition rate, and dropout rate reached %7.37 (Trading Economics, 2015a/b), %2.63 (Trading Economics, 2015c), %99.45 (UNESCO, 2014), %98.1 (Knoema, 2014), % 0.143 (Trading Economics, 2015d), and %2.7 (Knoema, 2012), respectively. The literacy rates of men and women are %99.72 and %99.86, respectively (UNESCO, 2015). The human resources development rate was 0.754 in 2017 when Azerbaijan was ranked 78th among 188 countries (UNDP, 2018).

5. Armenia

In 2007, there was one teacher for every 19.31 students in Armenia (Trading Economics, 2007a). The pre-primary admission rate reached %52.4 in 2015 (Trading Economics, 2015a). The apparent education coverage rate reached %101.4 among boys and %103.9 among girls (UNICEF, 2012a), and the actual education coverage rate reached %84.1 in 2007 (Trading Economics, 2007b). According to Knoema located in Washington, the US, the ratio of private school students to the entire primary and high school students reached %1.9 and %2.3, respectively in 2014 (Knoema, 2012a; Knoema, 2012b). The ratio of technical and vocational students was %10.88 (Trading Economics, 2014). According to the latest statistics, %77.45 of teachers were scientifically qualified (World Bank, 2005). There was one computer for every 15 users in Armenia, and %100 of schools accessed the Internet (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). The student per capita was %11 (Knoema, 2013). According to the study conducted by UNICEF, the average monthly salary of teachers was 314 USD in 2011 (UNICEF, 2011). The share of public expenses of education from the total governmental expenses was %10.66 (Trading Economics, 2015b), whereas it took up %2.80 of GDP (Trading Economics, 2015c). The student promotion rate, graduation rate, grade repetition rate, and dropout rate were %99 (UNESCO, 2014), %100.1 (Knoema, 2008), %0.37 (Trading Economics, 2015d), and

%9.8 (Knoema, 2013), respectively. In 2015, the literacy rate was %99.8 among individuals aged 15 and older (Trading Economics, 2015d). In 2017, the human resources development rate was %0.755 (UNDP, 2018).

6. Turkey

According to the statistics reported by the World Bank, there were 19 students for each teacher in Turkey in 2014 (World Bank, 2014). The pre-primary admission rate of children in need of education was %28.93. The apparent and actual education coverage rates were %102.49 and % 94.14, respectively (UNESCO, 2015). Nearly %5 of students studied in private schools (Gur, 2016). The registration rate of technical and vocational schools was %34 (OECD, 2016), and there was one computer for every 45 students as users (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). The per capita expense of each primary school student was 1860 USD, whereas that of a high school student was 2470 USD (OECD, 2013). The average annual salary of teachers with 15 years of experience was 60044 USD in 34 OECD member countries; however, this number decreased to 28110 USD in Turkey (Hurriyet Daily News, 2015). The share of education expenses from the public budget was %12.4 (UNESCO, 2015), whereas %5 of GDP was allocated to them (OECD, 2016). The promotion rate, average graduation rate, grade repetition rate, and dropout rate were %99.04 (UNESCO, 2015), %96.78 (OECD, 2016), %1.77 (World Bank, 2015), and %2.5 (EPDC, 2014), respectively. The literacy rate of adults was %95.69 (Knoema, 2015) when the total human resources development index was 0.791 in 2017. Therefore, Turkey was ranked well in human resource development (UNDP, 2018).

7. Iraq

There is one teacher for every 17 students at all levels in Iraq (UNICEF, 2016), and the pre-primary school admission rate was %6.61 in 2007 (UNESCO, 2007). The apparent and actual education coverage rates were %107 and %92, respectively (World Bank, 2014). Only %1 of girls and %5.2 of boys studied in different technical and vocational majors in Iraq (World Bank, 2007). In 2016, only %77 of teachers of all grades were scientifically qualified (UNICEF, 2016). In 2016, nearly %37 of people accessed the Internet and cyberspace in Iraq (Internet World Stats, 2016), and %5.7 of governmental expenses was for education; the lowest rate among all Middle Easter countries (UNICEF, 2016). The share of education expenses from GDP reached %9 in 2009, while there is no newest statistics (Kulaksiz et al., 2014). The student promotion rate and the latest graduation rate were %71.5 (World Bank, 2014) and %57.82 (Global Economy, 2007), respectively. During 2014, %16.8 of Iraqi students had to repeat

their grades, and %13.5 of children (1.2 million children) had no access to primary education (UNICEF, 2016). The World Bank reported that the literacy rate was %81.54 in Iraq in 2015 (World Bank, 2015). According to the data of the UN, the human resource development rate was 0.685 in Iraq in 2017 (UNDP, 2018).

8. Kuwait

There is one teacher for every 5.6 students in Kuwait (World Bank, 2015a). According to the available reports, the pre-primary school admission rate was %66.4, which is higher than the global average (%53.8). The apparent intake rate was %102 (Oxford Business Group, 2016) when the actual intake rate was %92.87 in 2014 (UNESCO, 2016). According to the statistics published by Kuwait's Ministry of Education, nearly %18 of students studied in private schools (al-Azemi, 2017), and %2.17 of the entire students enrolled in technical and vocational high school courses in 2014 (Trading Economics, 2014b). In 2015, only %78.93 of teachers were scientifically qualified in Kuwait (World Bank, 2015b). According to the latest statistics, there was one computer for every 13 students in public schools in Kuwait on average. This ratio is very close to the mean of OECD member countries (AlMarwani, 2013). Equal to 14300 USD, the expenses of each student in Kuwait were higher than the mean of OECD member countries (Oxford Business Group, 2016). According to an employment agency for the recruitment of teachers in Kuwait, the average monthly salary of teachers ranged between 500 and 800 Kuwaiti dinars (nearly equivalent to 1800-3700 USD) without taxes (Teach Away, 2017). Kuwait's state allocated %9.5 of the public budget to education in 2016 (Oxford Business Group, 2016). The student promotion rate, graduation rate, grade repetition rate, and dropout rate were %98.33 (UNESCO, 2012), %103.4 (World Bank, 2013), %0.51 (UNESCO, 2016), and %4.3, respectively, in Kuwait (Knoema, 2012). The literacy rate was reported %96.2 (UNESCO, 2015). According to the data of the UN, Kuwait's human resources development rate was 0.803 in 2017, and it was ranked 51st among 188 countries (UNDP, 2018).

9. Saudi Arabia

The ratio of students to teachers was 10.9 in Saudi Arabia in 2015, and the primary school admission rate of students was %44.4 (UNESCO, 2015). The apparent and actual education coverage rates were %106.8 and %97.9, respectively, while the ratio of scientifically qualified teachers to the entire teachers was %97 (Global Economy, 2013). The ratio of technical and vocational students was %5.13 (UNESCO, 2015), and %11.4 of students enrolled in private

schools (Oxford Business Group, 2016). By 2009, %100 of schools were equipped with computers in Saudi Arabia, and there was one computer for every 13 students (CITC, 2009). The student per capita was 7099 USD in 2007, and there was no newer statistics (UNESCO, 2007). The average monthly salary of a teacher was 13952 rials (equivalent to 3718 USD) in Saudi Arabia. According to the World Economic Forum, the share of education budget was %23 from the public budget (Oxford Business Group, 2016). The latest statistics published in 2008 indicated that the share of education expenses from GDP was %5.14 in Saudi Arabia (Global Economy, 2008). The primary student promotion rate, graduation rate, grade repetition, and dropout rate were %89.73 (UNESCO, 2015), %110.9 (Global Economy, 2014), %0.91 (Trading Economics, 2014), and %0.78 (Trading Economics, 2013), respectively. The literacy rate was %99.35 among individuals aged between 15 and 24 years old (Trading Economics, 2015). The human resources development rate was 0.853 in 2017, and Saudi Arabia was ranked 38th among 188 countries (UNDP, 2018).

10. Bahrain

The ratio of students to teachers was 11 in Bahrain where %55.8 of children below six years old were covered by pre-primary education (World Bank, 2015). The apparent and actual education coverage rates were %101.1 and %96.4, respectively (Borgen Project, 2017). The ratio of scientifically qualified teachers was %82 (World Bank, 2015), and nearly %34 of students enrolled in private schools in Bahrain. All schools were equipped with computers and the Internet access (Oxford Business Group, 2016). The ratio of technical and vocational students was %14.77 (UNESCO, 2015). The student per capita was 6700 USD (UNESCO, 2015), and the average salary of a teacher is 2064 USD per month (Fas al-Youm, 2014). The share of education budget from the public budget is %7.66, and the education expenses account for %2.67 of GDP. The student promotion rate, graduation rate, grade repetition rate, and dropout rate were %99.88 (UNESCO, 2015), %98.7, %0.65 (World Bank, 2015), and %2.2, respectively (Knoema, 2011). In 2015, the literacy rate was %99.8, and Bahraini women had the highest rate of literacy among the women of other Arab countries (Borgen Project, 2017). According to the data of the UN, Bahrain's human resources development rate was 0.846 in 2017 when it was ranked 47th among 188 countries (UNDP, 2018).

11. Qatar

The ratio of students to teachers was 11.6 in Qatar in 2015, and %58.7 of children below 6 years old were covered by pre-primary education in this country. The apparent and actual

education coverage rates were %103 and %92.1 (UNESCO, 2015). The ratio of scientifically qualified teachers to the entire teachers was %48.8 (World Bank, 2009). The ratio of technical and vocational students was %1.52 (UNESCO, 2015), and the registration rate of students in private schools was %45.9 (World Bank, 2015). There was one computer for every 7 students (UNESCO Institute for Statistic, 2016). Since 2009, Qatar's state has provided international organizations with no new information on the student per capita. According to the latest statistics, the average student per capita was 11719 USD (UNESCO, 2009). The average monthly salary of a teacher is 6880 USD in Qatar (Fas al-Youm, 2014), the share of education budget from the public budget is %12.74 and education expenses account for %3.61 of GDP. The student promotion rate, graduation rate, grade repetition rate, and dropout rate were %99.89, %99.51 (UNESCO, 2014), %1.51, and %2.16, respectively, in 2015 (UNESCO, 2015). The literacy rate of adults was %97.8 (Knoema, 2015), and the human resources development rate was 0.856 in 2017 (UNDP, 2018).

12. United Arab Emirates

The ratio of students to teachers is 23.62 in the UAE (Trading Economics, 2015), and %69.87 of children below six years old are covered by pre-primary education. The apparent education coverage and actual education coverage rates were reported %116.35 and %93.38, respectively (UNESCO, 2015). The ratio of scientifically qualified teachers was reported %100 (World Bank, 2015). The ratio of technical and vocational students to the entire students is an index which does not show an appropriate image of education systems in the Persian Gulf countries. In the UAE, the ratio of technical and vocational students reached %1.82 (Trading Economics, 2014). The registration rate of private schools is %61.33, and %98 of educational institutions had computer laboratories. There were 38 computers in each institution on average. Moreover, %93 of schools accessed the Internet, and %95 of teachers participated in professional ICT courses (Watt, 2012). According to Fas al-Youm (2014), the average monthly salary of teachers was 2840 USD in the UAE. The share of education expenses from the public budget was %21.2, and these expenses account for %3 of GDP (Export Gov., 2016). The promotion rate and graduation rate were the same (%99.9) (UNESCO, 2013), and grade repetition rate and dropout rate were %0.17, and %8 (UNESCO, 2015), respectively. The literacy rate of adults was %93 in the UAE (Knoema, 2015). According to the data of the UN, the human resources development rate was 0.863 in the UAE in 2017, and the country was rated 42nd among 188 countries (UNDP, 2018).

13. Oman

According to the latest statistics, the ratio of students to teachers was 19.9 in the UAE (Global Economy, 2003), and %54.3 of children below six years old were covered by pre-primary education. The apparent and actual education coverage rates were %109.2 and %94.5, respectively (UNESCO, 2015). The ratio of scientifically qualified teachers was %99.8 (World Bank, 2001). In Oman, only boys are allowed to enroll in technical and vocational courses (UNESCO, 2011); thus, the ratio of these students to the entire students is %0.08 (UNESCO, 2015). Nearly %90 of schools are state-run in Oman (Watt, 2013), and there is one computer for every 12 students. Moreover, %77 of schools accesses the Internet (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). The current salary of teachers can range from 1000 to 3500 USD per month; thus, the average monthly salary of teachers is 2250 USD with very low life expenses (nearly 700 USD per month) (Fitzpatrick, 2017). Since 2011, Oman's state has provided international organizations with no new information on the student per capita. According to the statistics published in 2011, the primary and high school education per capita rates were 6552 and 7378 USD, respectively, with a mean of 6965 USD (UNESCO, 2011). The share of education expenses from the public budget was %11.08, accounting for %4.96 of GDP (UNESCO, 2013). The student promotion rate, graduation rate, grade repetition rate, and dropout rate reached %99.36 (UNESCO, 2014), %109 (Trading Economics, 2014), %1.94 (UNESCO, 2015), and %1.3 (Knoema, 2012), respectively. The literacy rate was %98.7 (UNESCO, 2016) when the human resources development rate in 2017 was 0.821, which ranked Oman 52nd among 188 countries (UNDP, 2018).

14. Iran

According to the latest statistics, the ratio of students to teachers is 22 in Iran (Abdollahi, 2016). The apparent and actual education coverage rates are %108.9 and %99.2, respectively (UNESCO, 2015). The ratio of scientifically qualified teachers is %100 (World Bank, 2015). The ratio of technical and vocational students was reported nearly 36 (Hosseini Moghadam, 2017). Nearly %14 of students enrolled in private schools (World Bank, 2015). By 2014, there was one computer for every 33 students, and %82 of schools accessed the Internet (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). The student per capita based on the purchase power decreased from 3388 USD in 2007 to 2429 USD in 2015 (UNESCO, 2015). The average salary of teachers is 1500000 Tomans (Bathai, 2014). If each USD is considered to be equivalent to 3320 Tomans, then the average salary of teachers is 737 USD per month. At present, and in the free

market due to high inflation, the unofficial price of US \$ 1 is about 11,000 Tomans. Therefore, we can say that the average salary of teachers in Iran is not more than 250 USD per month. According to the statistics published by UNESCO, the share of education budget from the public budget is %18.57 in Iran, and education expenses account for %2.93 GDP (UNESCO, 2015). The student promotion rate, graduation rate, grade repetition rate, and dropout rate reached %97.2 (UNESCO, 2011), %101.77, %1.35 (UNESCO, 2015), and %3.8 (Knoema, 2011), respectively. The literacy rate is %87.17 (World Bank, 2015), and the human resources development rate was 0.798 in Iran in 2017 when it was ranked 69th among 188 other countries (UNDP, 2018).

Table 1. Education Indices in Iran

No.	Index	Percentage	Year
Student Indices			
1	Ratio of students to teachers (primary schools)	47	2017
2	Admission rate of pre-primary education	57	2015
3	Apparent intake ratio	92.71	2015
4	Actual intake ratio	73.85	2015
5	Ratio of private school students	24	2016
6	Ratio of technical and vocational students	6	2016
Human Resources Indices			
7	Ratio of scientifically qualified teachers	82.4	2015
Environment and Equipment Indices			
8	Number of students per computer	No info.	-
9	Students' access to the Internet	10	2014
Financial Indices			
10	Student per capita	551 USD	2015
11	Ratio of average monthly salary of teachers	171 USD	2011
12	Share of education budget from public budget	13.19	2015
13	Share of education expenses from GDP	2.66	2016
Outcome Indices			
14	Student promotion rate	78.5	2014
15	Graduation rate of primary school students	58.9	2015
16	Repetition rate of primary school students	1.64	2015
17	Dropout rate of primary school students	33.1	2014
18	Literacy rate of age groups (above 15 years old)	57.9	2017
Qualitative Indices			
19	Value of total human resources development index	0.562	2017
20	Rank of total human resources development index among 188 countries	147	2015

B: Comparison

According to the statistics presented in the previous section, the rank of each country can be determined among all of the 14 countries with respect to the minimum or maximum score obtained for each index. Before presenting information pertaining to the position of each country, three important points should be considered. First, if the ranks of some countries are positive in one index, the same rank is considered for them. However, the ranks of next countries are determined with respect to the number of previous countries. For instance, if the ranks of Afghanistan and Pakistan are first in “the ratio of students to teachers” due to the equality of scores, the rank of the next country is third. Second, all of the research indices can be divided into two groups: positive and negative indices. Out of 20 indices, 18 indices were positive. As a result, if the ranks of countries approach 1 in these indices, the education system has a better and higher position. On the contrary, if the rank of a country approaches 14 in negative indices (i.e. grade repetition rate and dropout rate), the education system has a better position. The following classification was employed to determine the position of each country based on the acquired rank:

Table 2. Comparison of Countries Based on Ranking

Row	Ranking Classification	Status
1	+5 and lower	Good
2	Between +5 and +10	Medium
3	+11 and higher	Weak
4	-5 and lower	Weak
5	Between -6 and -10	Medium
6	-10 and higher	Good

Therefore, if the ranking of a country is +5 and lower (18 positive indices), the education system of that country has a better position and performs better. Regarding negative indices, the conditions are inverse. In fact, if the ranking of a country is -11 and higher, the education system performs better. Hence, it is possible to determine how much each country succeeded in obtaining the first ranks (1-5). The following table shows the position of each country based on the frequency of ranks:

Table 3. The Positions of Iran and Neighbouring Countries Based on the Ranking Obtained in Positive Indices

Country	Frequency of Five and Lower Ranks	Frequency of 6-10 Ranks	Regional Position
Saudi Arabia	12	5	First
Kuwait	11	7	Second
Qatar	11	6	Third
The UAE	11	4	Fourth
Bahrain	9	6	Fifth
Oman	8	9	Sixth
Iran	7	11	Seventh
Azerbaijan	7	8	Eighth
Turkmenistan	6	3	Ninth
Armenia	5	10	Tenth
Turkey	4	12	Eleventh
Iraq	2	4	Twelfth
Pakistan	2	3	Thirteenth
Afghanistan	1	0	Fourteenth

To interpret this table, a few points should be taken into account. First, the ranking of each education index is not logically related to the ranking acquired in another index. Therefore, if the frequency of rankings below 5 and lower is higher for a country, the education system is more successful. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia was among the first five countries in 12 indices out of 18 positive indices. Second, since the rankings of five and lower had the same frequency for some countries, the frequency of rankings between 6 and 10 was considered the criterion for the supremacy of an education system. Accordingly, Kuwait was ranked higher than Qatar and the UAE. It is now possible to analyse the performance of each education system more accurately. The first group of indices included six student indices. According to the research results, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had the smallest numbers of learners per employed teacher. On the contrary, the number of learners in Pakistan and Afghanistan was 8 times more than that of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the pre-primary education coverage rates of 8 countries were better than that of Iran. Regarding the apparent education coverage index, the education systems of the UAE, Oman, and Iran managed to cover larger numbers of individuals in need of education. In addition, Iran's education system managed to come on top among 14 countries in terms of the actual education coverage index. Regarding the registration rate of private schools, Iran was ranked 7th. Based on the ratio of technical and

vocational students to the entire students, it was ranked 2nd. Iran, the UAE, and Azerbaijan were commonly ranked first in the only human resources index, i.e. scientifically qualified teachers.

According to the research findings pertaining to environment and equipment, Qatar and Kuwait managed to purchase and provide more computers for their schools and learners. Regarding the Internet access for learners, the education systems of Armenia, Qatar, and Bahrain were commonly ranked first, whereas Iran was ranked seventh. Regarding the four financial indices, Armenia was ranked the lowest with 11 USD when Kuwait was ranked the top with 14000 USD allocated to the student per capita. In this regard, Iran was ranked sixth with nearly 2500 USD among neighbouring countries. Iran was also ranked eighth with a three-time difference from the nearest country (Qatar with a mean of 2064 USD) because teachers are paid less than 750 USD monthly in Iran. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Turkmenistan allocated over %20 of their public budgets to the education sector. Therefore, they were ranked first to third. However, Iraq and Azerbaijan allocated the lowest shares. In this regard, Iran was ranked fourth. According to the information pertaining to the share of education expenses from GDP, Iraq was ranked first (by allocating %9 of GDP) among Iran's neighbouring countries. Iran was ranked tenth and is behind certain countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Turkmenistan.

According to the findings pertaining to outcome indices, most of the countries showed improvement rates above %95 with slight differences. However, Iran was ranked ninth. Regarding the graduation rate, the education systems of Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait were ranked the top. However, the special demographic and political conditions of Afghanistan and Pakistan made the graduation rates of these two countries be lower than %60. Iran was ranked fourth with a slight difference from the four leading countries. Regarding the grade repetition index, Iraq was ranked first with higher than %16. Interestingly, with almost the same political conditions, the grade repetition rate of Afghanistan was four times lower than that of Iraq. Regarding this index, Iran was ranked seventh. Except for Pakistan and Iraq, the dropout rate was lower than %10 in other countries analysed. Iran was ranked seventh one more time. Despite many efforts of the education system, Iranian people were ranked eleventh among the people of neighbouring countries in literacy. Qualitative indices included the total index value and total index ranking of human resources development among 188 countries. According to the research findings, the total index value of human resources

development was at the highest level in six Arab countries on the southern border of the Persian Gulf in comparison with other neighbours of Iran. However, Turkey and Iran were commonly ranked seventh. Regarding the total index of human resources development, Iran was ranked 69th and 7th among 188 countries and 14 neighbours, respectively.

Conclusion

If we take a look at demographic, political, and social facts and general trends in Iran from four decades ago onward, a relatively realistic and rather optimistic evaluation of the education system can be obtained. In fact, it is fair to state that Iran's education system has performed well in terms of a very young population, a massive number of students, dedicated budget of education, and initial investments in education infrastructures. Hence, if reforms are applied to other social systems along with more allocated financial resources, the education system will be able to reduce its gap with the countries on the southern border of the Persian Gulf in ten years. It will also be able to accelerate the movement towards educational development and be the supreme power in the region. Accordingly, the current position of Iran can be considered average. However, if Iran's education system is to be evaluated by comparing the statistics existing in neighbouring countries, it should be acknowledged that Iran has not been successful. The comparison can begin with Afghanistan. The social/military conditions of Afghanistan deprived this country of any opportunities for the improvement of social systems such as education, health, and economy in the past four decades. Therefore, Afghanistan was ranked the lowest because of the poorest performance. Nevertheless, Afghanistan can still teach the practitioners of Iran's education system an important lesson. Regarding the share of education expenses from GDP, Afghanistan was ranked 7th, whereas Iran was ranked 10th. In the east of Iran, Pakistan has become an underdeveloped country because of a larger population, lack of petroleum sources, a political system based on a shaky democracy, long-lasting religious and ethnic conflicts, regional politics based on problematic and costly competitions, and the continuity of wrong sociocultural traditions among masses of people. The availability of one teacher for every 47 students, the highest rate of primary school dropout (%33), and an illiteracy rate of %57 can obviously show the status of a third-world country, in which other priorities are valued instead of spending resources on education.

In the west of Iran, people of Iraq are encountering many hardships because of political problems, ethnical and religious conflicts, and linguistic and ethnic diversity. This counter was

ranked 5th and higher in only two indices, i.e. the apparent education coverage rate and the share of education expenses from GDP. Interestingly, Iraq was ranked first among 14 countries in the share of education expenses from GDP. According to findings, Turkey was ranked 11th, which seems to be unbelievable. Regarding development in the fulfilment of education indices, Turkey surpassed only the two war-ridden countries, i.e. Afghanistan and Iraq. With a population of 193 million people, Pakistan surpassed Turkey. Although a separate study should be conducted to perceive the reasons for such weak positions, possible causes of Turkey's weak performance in education developments can be listed as lack of powerful economic backbones based on sales of petroleum for the procurement of financial resources required for educational reforms, negligence of the governing political system especially in the education system during the past two decades, continuity of the traditional sociocultural ruling structure, and the politicization of the education system.

Known as three small and economically weak countries, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkmenistan were ranked eighth, ninth, and tenth. Azerbaijan is closer to Iran. Socioeconomic developments, presence of petroleum resources, and political relationships based on the simultaneous presence of Russia and the West explain the accelerated movement of this country towards economic development with a promising outlook in the next two decades. However, developments follow a slower trend in Armenia and Turkmenistan. Iran has surpassed Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkmenistan and been ranked seventh (jointly with Azerbaijan). It is now following the six Arab countries located on the southern border of the Persian Gulf. Iran's position can be analysed and interpreted in different aspects. First, if we take a look at the countries surpassing Iran, this position can be quite frustrating for policymakers and planners. Iran was ranked 5th and lower in seven positive education indices. In fact, it was surpassed by Saudi Arabia with 12 indices and the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain with 11 indices. Obviously, this gap can partly be explained by specific reasons such as low population, minor geographical extent, massive petroleum incomes, and absence of tense conflicts with the great world powers and countries on the southern border of the Persian Gulf. Nonetheless, there are many similarities between Iran's social systems and those of these countries, something which necessitates conducting more in-depth studies to figure out why and how a 30-year-period has caused a great education gap between Iran and those six countries. It is also essential to find out what factors the Iranian practitioners could control and manage in political and education systems to reduce the gap.

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