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Summary

THE WORLD BANK'S DOUBLESPEAK ON TEACHERS

An Analysis of Ten Years of Lending and Advice



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During the last few decades, the World Bank has become a central actor in shaping the global education policy agenda and is increasingly involved in education to the point of becoming the largest supplier of external funding to the sector. Its growing capacity to shape policy goes far beyond its lending activity and involves a significant “ideational” power also influencing educational issues such learning outcomes, education quality and teacher related issues. World Bank policy preferences can be analyzed through both its publications and interventions on the ground.

Research questions and methodology

This study was organized to explore the following questions in relation to World Bank policies and teachers:

- ***How are teachers conceived and portrayed in both the World Bank's knowledge products and in the lending projects financed by this organisation?***
- ***Which are the teacher policies most commonly recommended and prescribed in both the World Bank publications (or knowledge products) and operations?***
- ***How are teachers' unions characterised in the World Bank's knowledge products, and their lending projects?***

To achieve these objectives, the present study has employed a **content analysis methodology**. It is understood as a set of techniques intended to collect information, produce indicators, and organise information through a systematic classification process of identifying, coding and counting themes, enabling the inference of characteristics and meaning from a large corpus of written texts and/or to test previously established hypotheses (cf. Bardin, 1996¹ and Neuendorf, 2002²). Taking into account the distinction between policy and practice, which is central in the objectives of this research, two main types of documents have been selected for analysis: (i) **knowledge products**, published by the World Bank, including policy briefs, technical reports, research papers, sector strategies and books; and (ii) **lending projects** of the World Bank, including project appraisal documents for specific investment loans, adaptable programme loans and credits, sector development policy loans and credits, additional grants, and emergency recovery loans.

1 Bardin, L. (1996). *El análisis de contenido*. Madrid: Ediciones Akal.

2 Neuendorf, K. (2002). *The content analysis guidebook*. London: Sage.

The selection of the documents has been based on the following criteria:

- Date: references between 2005 and 2014.
- Education level: primary and secondary education.
- Knowledge products: presence of the term ‘teacher(s)’ in the title or clear focus on teachers. Moreover, considering their particularly influential or “ground breaking” nature, three additional documents have also been included in the corpus: the World Bank Education Strategy 2020, the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER)-Teachers Framework documents, and the book, *Making Schools Work: New Evidence on Accountability Reforms*. In the full publication, these documents are taken separately and presented in independent boxes, although they are also included in the corpus of knowledge products collected for the general analysis.
- Lending projects: projects included one of the teacher-related categories according to the categorisation provided by the World Bank Education Projects Database.

A total of **48 knowledge documents** and **133 lending projects’ documents** have been identified according to these criteria. Each document has been examined on the basis of a previously set list of categories that has enabled the identification of teacher-related problems and their attributed causes, recommended or prescribed policies, and inclination toward teachers’ unions.

Key findings related to knowledge products

- The World Bank considers teachers as a very important piece in the quality education puzzle and, at the same time, says there is significant room for improvement. In the articles, reports, and other publications produced by the World Bank since 2005, teachers are depicted as a puzzling and problematic entity in educational settings.
- World Bank literature frequently portrays **teachers as part of the problem** concerning quality education that many countries face. According to the Bank, teachers are key determiners of student learning, but the reviewed documents tend to emphasise how limited the contribution of teachers is to education quality and learning. Thus, the idea that teachers account for an important part of the low levels of learning is a pervasive one.
- In knowledge products³, **limitations of teacher training receive some degree of attention**, but to a lesser extent than accountability related explanations.
- This poor contribution is frequently portrayed as **a deliberate lack of effort**, as suggested by continuous references to the intentional loss of instruction time, inactivity when in the classroom, and high absence rates. **75% of the World Bank's knowledge products refer to teacher absenteeism and 66% of these products fail to consider the impact of "extenuating circumstances"**, including illness- related issues, school location or second jobs.
- The preferred explanation for teachers' under-performance is the **lack of accountability structures**. Four out of ten documents reviewed allude to the harmful effects of a **lack of performance-based incentives and uniform labour conditions** for teachers.

3 If not stated otherwise, knowledge products do not contain SABER-Teachers country cases.

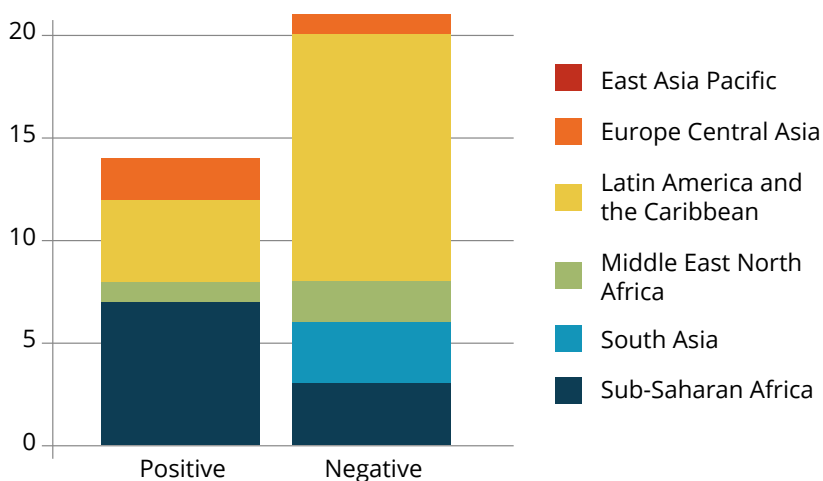
- **Teachers' unions/organisations receive only limited attention** in the World Bank publications. They are mentioned in half of the documents, but are usually treated as a secondary actor. When discussed in some detail, teachers' unions are **portrayed as obstacles to education reform processes and, consequently, as opposed to the public interest**. In nine documents, unions are overtly regarded as contributing to "rigid" labour regulation that prevents improvement in the quality of the system, or leads to a higher per student cost.

Key findings related to lending projects

- The World Bank's lending projects devote **a great deal of attention to the limitations of teacher training schemes in place**. Limitations affecting teachers' training are mentioned in 52.9 percent of the projects. These include the inadequate content of teacher education, the scarcity of opportunities for professional development, and poorly equipped institutions. The presence of underqualified teachers in the profession also receives attention, jointly with the use of inadequate or obsolete pedagogical practices, referred to respectively in 27.7% and 29.4% of the lending documents. Consequently, in lending projects, issues related to professional development and preparation are considered the most urgent to address.
- **Limited instruction time** also emerges as a central issue, mentioned in 41.2 percent of the lending projects. However, and in contrast to knowledge products, this is frequently portrayed **as the result of elements beyond teachers' control**, such as multiple shift schemes, involuntary absences or other factors dissociated from teachers' effort or misbehavior.

- **The lack of accountability** mechanisms such as performance-based incentives and community supervision **receive limited attention** in the Bank's lending projects. Rather, limitations resulting from a poorly developed institutional infrastructure receive significant attention, appearing in 31.1 per cent of the lending projects.
- **Teachers' unions** are rarely discussed in depth in lending project documents. When addressed, however, they tend to be **portrayed as obstacles or factors of risk**, with 68.9 per cent of the projects mentioning unions presenting them in this negative light. However, the potential positive contribution is contemplated in a minority of the lending projects. Some interesting regional differences appeared in the analysis.

Reference to teachers' unions in 35 lending projects

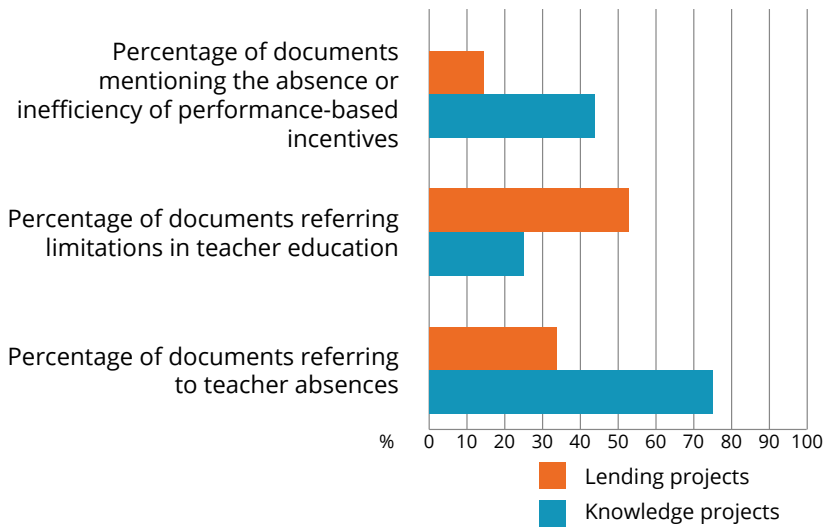


Contrasting the World Bank's knowledge products and lending projects

Looking at teacher conceptions and policy preferences found in both the publications and lending projects of the World Bank, it becomes evident that far from constituting a unitary or monolithic body of research, the different documents focus on a number

of issues quite diverse in nature. More importantly, they adopt different points of view on the same teacher-related themes, eventually advocating for different (and ever competing) policy options. However, and as recalled by Steiner-Khamsi (2012: 4)⁴ a systems theory-based approach reiterates the need to think of the Bank as a social system with its own regulatory regime – which makes it appropriate to search for a common approach or set of shared beliefs and preferences. Needless to say, it does not follow from this approach that all the researchers or World Bank officials align themselves with this frame of reference.

Most frequently reported teacher-related issues



4 Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2012). "For All by All? The World Bank's Global Framework for Education". In Klees, S., J. Samoff, and N. Stromquist(Eds.) *World Bank and Education: Critiques and Alternatives*. Rotterdam: Sense.

Final remarks

A manifest **disconnect between talk and action emerges within knowledge products and lending projects**. On the one hand, as the figure above shows, **knowledge products seem to express a certain preference for managerialist or neo-bureaucratic reforms, in coherence with a diagnosis of teachers' issues that emphasises their lack of effort**. Following Le Grand's (2003)⁵ theorisation of public servant attitudes, teachers would very much resemble "knaves" – self-interested individuals who are unlikely to "work hard" and are not driven by genuine altruistic motivations neither concerned with students' learning nor future opportunities. These premises, in fact, fit within a principal-agent model that explicitly informs several of the reviewed documents.⁶ Thus, knowledge products show a clear preference for those policies designed to "incentivise" a (more) striving attitude among teachers. In a way, these documents seem to assume that effectiveness is a question of "motivation" and that underperformance can be explained by excessive labour security and uniform conditions – which ultimately would foment idle attitudes.

Conversely, **lending projects seem to be more supportive of a professionalisation agenda** and place greater importance on activities aimed at improving teachers' training. Since such documents **assume that the source of the problem is not the lack of effort but the inadequacy or scarcity of teacher training**, the logical solution lies in the strengthening of the skills of the teaching force. Moreover, lending projects are characterised by a distinct approach that tends to dissociate quality limitations from teachers' decisions or attitudes – limited teacher time, for instance, is not portrayed as a consequence of voluntary absenteeism but as the result of factors beyond teachers' control. Furthermore, whereas the absence of accountability mechanisms is underscored by a significant number of the knowledge products, and job stability is frequently regarded as harmful, such an approach is less frequent in lending projects. Differences in the set starting premises also explain the divergence of approaches to "alternative pathways"

5 LeGrand, J. (2003). *Motivation, agency, and public policy: of knights and knaves, pawns and queens*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

6 In a public service provision, a principal-agent model pays attention to the difficulties met by the State (principal) when it comes to monitor public services providers (agents).

to the profession. For instance, contract teachers are related to premises that assume that teachers' underperformance is a consequence of a "relaxed" attitudes that can be altered by less job security. However, this is not the predominant perspective in lending products.

Particularly illustrative of this gap between "talk and action" is how teachers are linked to educational problems in each type of document. **Whereas knowledge products tend to portray teachers as part of the problem** to be solved (low levels of student learning or, more generally, poor education quality), **lending projects devote more attention to teachers as agents that are part of the solution** to the most significant educational problems. This gap between what the World Bank "says" (in publications) and what the World Bank "does" (in lending projects) has already been identified in other education policy areas such as education privatisation. According to Mundy and Menashy (2014: 421)⁷, despite the World Bank being one of the most active promoters of education privatisation through its publications, research and international seminars, "only seven of the countries receiving Bank lending for K-12 education have projects that include a component of funding for private provision of services"⁸. This policy- practice decoupling is similar to the evidence in relation to teachers' policies. In this case, the World Bank discourse can also be considered as more neoliberal than its interventions on the ground. Hence, while the knowledge products reflect a certain preference for a teachers' flexibilisation or cost-efficiency agenda, lending projects include elements that could be considered as closer to a professionalisation agenda (such as the emphasis on teacher training).

7 Mundy, K., and Menashy, F. (2014). "The World Bank and Private Provision of Schooling: A Look through the Lens of Sociological Theories of Organizational Hypocrisy". *Comparative Education Review*, 58(3): 401-427.

8 They reached this conclusion after analysing the Bank's 53 education projects in K-12 in the period 2008-2012.

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