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The World Bank's construction of teachers and their work: A critical analysis☆

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how World Bank (WB) policy texts discursively constitute teachers and their work as functioning according to a circumscribed set of teaching approaches, while subjugating their reflexive and autonomous professional identities. But neither WB texts nor teacher images within them provide robust accounts of the realities of teachers and their work. What emerges are tropes of policy reforms in teachers and their work arguing for greater regulations underpinned by accountability and performativity regimes. In engendering scepticism of teachers' professional abilities, WB policy discourses reveal an ambivalence about teachers as providers of equitable and quality education: seeing them as a problem while begrudgingly treating them as a solution to the very reforms authorised in the WB policies.

1. Introduction

This article critically examines how World Bank (WB) policy discursively constitutes teachers and their work. The specific interest is in how WB key policy texts authorise particular constructions of teachers and their work—making them function according to a circumscribed set of teaching approaches, which Sayed and Soudien (2021) refer to as 'scripted pedagogy'. This approach circumscribes how teachers teach and limits pedagogy to that which is approved and authorised by education authorities, thereby subjugating teachers' reflexive and autonomous professional identities. The present case indicates that WB texts themselves and teacher images in them provide a limited account of teachers' work and the challenges they face in classrooms in teaching large numbers of learners from disadvantaged and impoverished backgrounds, particularly in the Global South. What emerges are regular tropes of policy reforms in teachers and their work—arguing for greater regulations both in terms of accountability and performativity, but more crucially, in terms of what we refer to as the *scripted pedagogy* and *scripted professional development*, invoking the idea of the teacher-proof curricula of the 1960s

According to Sayed and Soudien (2021), scripted professional development is a form of professional development ensuring that teachers are provided with scripted pedagogy to enact in their classrooms. This model of professional development prescribes what teachers can and should do in classrooms and limits their agential space to only the prescribed range of skills for which they are constantly monitored (see Sayed and Soudien, 2021 for an account of these approaches and their emergence in the context of increasing globalisation of education reform and the attempt to privatise public education systems in the Global South). Besides creating scepticism of teachers' professional abilities, WB policy discourses as reflected in scripted professional development and scripted pedagogy reveal a deep-seated ambivalence about teachers and their role in providing equitable and quality education: seeing teachers as the problem—poor professionals—albeit begrudgingly acknowledging them as the solution to the very reforms

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that are authorised in WB texts and policies.[1]

While the debate about teachers and their work has carried on for many years, only recently has this discussion received global prominence. For the first time in a global setting, the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have a specific target for teachers (see Sayed and Moriarty, 2020). What has driven the turn to teachers and education quality as part of the global agenda? Two factors drive the current wave of global attention to teachers.

First, the launch in 2015 of the SDGs cemented the growing realisation that teachers are a keystone to achieving all SGD-4 goals and targets (Sayed et al., 2018; Sayed and Moriarty, 2020). This, as Sayed and Moriarty (2020) argue, stands as a corrective to a narrow focus on increased enrolments and access to education that drove the previous global agendas. Coupled with strong advocacy from researchers, social movements, and civil society actors arguing that a turn to education quality relies heavily on teachers as core to its realisation, a shift to teachers as the key target for SDG-4 attracted the attention of the international community during the formulation of SDGs in 2015.

Second, the current wave of educational reforms is galvanised by the growing influence of major global agencies such as the WB, the OECD and UNESCO, focusing on teachers and their work. Over the past ten years, for example, these multilateral international organisations have placed teachers and their work under the education quality spotlight regarding their knowledge base, pedagogical practices, and effects on student learning (Robertson, 2012; Sorensen and Robertson, 2017). Of particular note is the advocacy of actors such as McKinsey et al. (2007)) who have elevated a partial truism as a policy logic: namely, no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers (see also Sayed et al., 2018). In that way, these global agencies work discursively and materially to reconstruct teachers and their work, while at the same time reconfiguring the architecture of teacher education in the Global South.

Although these multilateral global agencies have been instrumental in shaping a global education agenda, the WB in particular is a key agency influencing international education policy agenda and a key advocator of major educational reforms in low- and middle-income countries (Edwards and Storen, 2017; Guthrie, 2019; Heyneman, 2003). The WB's increased involvement in teachers manifests in two ways. First, the Bank has invested heavily in teacher education. For example, between 2013 and 2018, it invested $18.4 billion for 207 educational projects, of which 110 projects accounted for $12.1 billion support for teacher training in low- and middle-income countries (World Bank, 2019b). Secondly, as a knowledge bank, the WB has begun producing a series of internal and external publications about teachers and teaching—through its policy briefs, evaluation tools, research reports and SABER tools—influencing its own work and that of others, as noted by Steiner-Khamsi (2012). In this way, the WB has emerged as the dominant international organisation, using money, policy knowledge and messaging to influence a global understanding of teachers and their work.

While a growing body of research has singled out the role of teachers in improving education quality and student learning outcomes (cf. Chetty et al., 2014; Naylor and Sayed, 2014; Paine and Zeichner, 2012; Sayed and Ahmed, 2015), little to no research has examined critically how teachers and their work have been treated and constructed in the work of international organisations and in particular, in WB policy texts. This is especially true because until recently, teachers have not been a prominent focus of WB policies, as its priorities have concentrated primarily on building classrooms, learning materials, textbooks and school facilities such as libraries and laboratories (Fontdevila and Verger, 2015). Since teachers have, for so long, been ignored by the WB, its increased interest in teachers and their work over recent years warrants a critical analysis, which remains limited in the existing literature. Within this context, this paper seeks to understand the WB's policy shift toward teachers and their work.

We begin by offering our framework and approach, and then historicising the status and position of teachers using various WB documents before examining the three key WB texts: *Successful Teachers, Successful Students: Recruiting and Supporting Society's Most Crucial Profession*, the recent 2019 *WB Policy Approach to Teachers as our Guide*; *The World Development Report 2018* (WB 2018a)—*Learning to Realise Education's Promise* (Chapters 6 and 7); and the *Teach Observer Manual* (WB 2019a). This analysis pays particular attention to how these WB texts construct teachers and their work in the Global South.

1.1. Framework and approach

Policy is often conceived of as responding effectively and efficiently to objective problems. Certainly, education policy should be based on an assessment of both needs and desired outcomes. But in reality, policy responds to cultural, social, political, and economic norms, which are shaped by the same context. While developed within a particular socio-political and economic environment, policy is often treated "uncritically and denuded of its values" when analysed within a managerial framework (Bell and Stevenson, 2006, p.8), whereas in reality, policy is the result of political pressure to avert conflict over public goods—such as education—into "an authorised course of action concerning their allocation" (Ibid, p.16). This suggests that education policy perpetuates a particular view of education and the knowledge and skills needed by learners. Therefore, politics are implicitly and explicitly intertwined in the process of policy development—with policy understood as the authoritative allocation of values designed "to forge subjectivities whose imagination is aligned with the interests of capital" (Rizvi, 2006, p. 200).

Globalised ideas and ideologies play a fundamental role in the development of policy. Lingard and Rawolle (2011) point to an emergent global education policy field, which they refer to as a 'rescaling of politics', developed out of the interaction between global and national policy fields. Conceptualising this rescaling in respect of the relocation of political authority beyond the nation now works in education policy through a 'global education policy field' (Lingard and Rawolle, 2011). Robertson (2012) provides a useful delineation of different ways in which global education policy can be understood: as *a condition of the world*; *as discourse*; as *project*; as *scale*; and as *reach*. She considers the impact of neo-liberalism and changes in technology, a particular social imaginary, as a way of framing education problems and solutions, giving EFA as an example, which today has been replaced by the SDG-4. Robertson argues that these changes were not caused by "a global steamroller; rather, the complex reworking, re/bordering and re/ordering of educational spaces to include a range of scales of action" (Robertson, 2012, p. 18). In this sense, the struggle is over the control of this 'social imaginary' between "a dominant neo-liberal imaginary underpinning educational policy" and "a democratic alternative to it, conceived as a radically different way of interpreting the facts of global

[1] We recognise that the World Bank is not a development agency per se and was established as part of the Bretton Woods Agreement (comprising the WB and IMF) in 1944 to rebuild the destroyed WWII economy. The WB describes itself as follows: 'The World Bank Group is one of the world's largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries. Its five institutions [IBRD, IDA, IFC, MIGA, ICSID] share a commitment to reducing poverty, increasing shared prosperity, and promoting sustainable development'. According to the WB website, its mission is 'to end extreme poverty and to promote shared prosperity' [*https://www.worldbank.org/en/who-we-are]*. The website notes that 'Together, IBRD and IDA form the World Bank, which provides financing, policy advice, and technical assistance to governments of developing countries. IDA focuses on the world's poorest countries, while IBRD assists middle-income and creditworthy poorer countries' *[https://www.worldbank.org/en/who-we-are]*. As a knowledge bank and as one part of the five largest external sources of funding for developing countries, the WB plays a crucial role in shaping education policies and what counts as teaching and learning. Since education is regarded as a global public good, WB activities in education are subject to public scrutiny.

interconnectivity and interdependence" (Rizvi, 2006, p. 200).

That said, we conceive of policy as providing a normative framework to which the global world and national states should aspire. Untangling the complex discourses and ideological influences shaping the policy decisions that produced the SDG-4 and its targets is, therefore, of particular importance to how the struggles play out, not only in what was and was not included but in the conception of quality education, what it aims to do and how it is achieved. Policy contentions about the role of teachers in fostering student achievement deal primarily with questions of teachers as managers and how they adequately facilitate learning. In WB policy texts, teachers' qualities and their relationships to other named and unnamed groups are reformulated in the process by which messages are generated and circulated. Wortham and Reyes (2020, p. 11) refer to these non-present and unnamed addressees as an audience of 'overhearers' that co-present for whom the relevant context of communication falls outside the genre in which it is articulated. Unpacking how policy discourses about teachers depict teachers as both "problems" and "solutions" equip us to rethink what "education" is at the core of WB policies. It also helps us discern and analyse the indices of authority, ideology and social hierarchy that authors of these WB texts are socially positioned to reproduce.

We combine a value-critical approach to policy analysis (Schmidt, 2013) with a discursive analysis of policy texts in examining WB policy texts (Cavanaugh, 2015; Nordveit, 2010). While the value-critical analysis examines the assumptions embedded in policy texts from the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, the discursive approach unpacks the cultural logic underpinning programmatic efforts to effect social change (Dick and Nightlinger, 2021; Wortham and Reyes, 2020). For example, Bauer (2013) uses a value-critical approach to study the policy effects of scientists' knowledge. Stambach and Wamalwa (2018) employ the discursive approach to examine teachers and students' co-naturalisation of language and identity in the instructional classrooms in Rwanda. Discursive projections about teachers and how they operate create different hierarchies of knowledge that redefine teachers and their work as professionals. To have an effect, a policy must address a group of already existing professionals with some known commonalities. In projecting in advance a given audience, that audience, too, is created and constituted. Therefore, the process of bringing into being an audience for a message is shaped by the need to presuppose the conditions of reception.

The paper is primarily a desk-based review study drawing upon a mix of data sources. Firstly, we examine key policy texts of the WB that define and shape its view of teachers and their work. These include the WB Policy Approach to Teachers text entitled *Successful Teachers, Successful Students: Recruiting and Supporting Society's Most Crucial Profession* (2019). This text forms a broader part of the Global Platform for Successful Teachers initiative launched by the WB in 2018 to help developing countries improve teacher training. The primary aim is to enhance learning by ensuring that all children are taught by effective teachers. This policy text, which draws upon the SABER framework for effective teachers, highlights five principles essential for building the cadres of effective teachers and guiding the WB's vision of support for countries on teachers, teaching and teacher education. To complement the main policy text, we also examine the second key WB text: *The World Development Report 2018* (WB, 2018a)—*Learning to Realise Education's Promise (Chapters 6 and 7)*. This WDR (WB, 2018a) is the first-ever full-length WB annual report in the 40-year history of the WB dealing entirely with education. The WDR Report (WB 2018a) highlights the problem of 'learning crisis' and the problematics of teachers' roles in resolving that crisis in low- and middle-income countries.

Thirdly, we analyse a *Teach* tool launched in 2019 following two years' development within the WB Global Knowledge and Innovation Team offices. *Teach* comprises an instruction manual and observation sheet known as the *Teach* Observer Protocol. The *Teach* Observer Manual (World Bank, 2019a, p. ii) asserts that the "learning crisis is, at its core, a teaching crisis". The Manual is subdivided into nine elements across three broad areas: *classroom culture*, *instruction* and *socio-emotional skills*. The nine elements are broken down into twenty-eight 'behaviours' that observers ought to quantify. These behaviours constitute *indexical signs* that point to what the Observer Manual identifies as relevant aspects of the context. Some of these named behaviours are "The teacher treats all students respectfully"; "The teacher uses positive language with students"; and "The teacher does not exhibit gender bias and challenges gender stereotypes in the classroom". These three behaviours are nested within the element entitled "Supportive Learning Environment" in the area of "Classroom Culture". These three "behaviours" are key indices of a supportive learning environment that observers code. For scoring purposes, the Observer Manual assigns a quantitative ranking—one, two or three—for each of the twenty-eight behaviours. Technically, these are labelled low, medium and high on the Observer Manual, but regardless, they are quantified. Then, two or more behaviours are scored together on a five-point scale corresponding to the nine elements across the three areas. A single overall score is not specified on the *Teach* Observer Manual but can be calculated by adding nine elements' scores.

Collectively, those three key texts enable us to critically examine the WB's discursive construction of teachers both as a *problem* and *solution* — together with the type of policy solutions offered to low-quality education in the Global South. Apart from analysing the key WB texts identified above, the paper draws upon a historical review of various WB policy documents, research reports and working papers from the 1960s. Then, to complement the key WB texts and historical reviews, we build our analysis on secondary data sources such as journal articles, papers and research reports from other scholars and researchers whose previous works have analysed the WB texts in education.

1.2. Historicising the WB interest in teachers and teaching

Entering the field of educational development in 1962 (McNamara, 1974, p. i), the WB Group framed education as a means of fostering economic development. Initially, the WB provided loans to developing countries to build and equip schools. By 1971, operations broadened to include teaching materials, teaching methods and teacher training. In its 1971 document, consultants wrote, "Teacher training has lagged, and the qualification and experience of the teaching force have declined" (World Bank, 1971, p. 7–8).

By 1980, following decades of calls for teacher and administrator training, the WB Education Department members wrote at length about the need for,

training facilities to be expanded, in-service training to be systematised on a continuing basis, the quality of training programs to be improved by incorporating methods and techniques of selection and teaching that have proved effective and by relating training to specific skills and favourable attitudes, and by providing resources to assist the teacher in improving the quality of teaching. (World Bank, 1980, p. 34–35).

Five years later, the WB recommended that future educational projects designed to improve teacher effectiveness should support experimental research to assess the cost of different modes of teacher training in relation to student achievement, cost and implementability.

By the 1980s, however, development agencies realised that years of funding had failed to achieve goals set. Instead of questioning agencies' own paradigms or accounting for complexities well beyond any agency's control—such as the world oil crisis in the 1970s—the blame for educational failures was placed on developing countries' governments and state domestic leadership. As a 'remedy', the WB and International Monetary officers proposed Structural Adjustment programmes through the 1990s, entailing the acceptance of reduced governmental control of economic markets as a precondition for countries to receive loans. Known as *neo-liberalisation* for advocating the 'liberalisation' or 'freeing' of markets from government regulations (even though international governmental agencies' regulations remained paramount), this policy approach was the dominant paradigm for the next 20 years.

Beginning in 1996, researchers not working for the WB began to openly criticise the WB annual reports that claimed to focus on teachers and their work when, as some researchers indicate (e.g. Klees, 2012; Ginsburg, 2012), the WB paradigm instrumentalised teachers as a form of human resource rather than regarding them as creative agents and brokers of knowledge. For example, Villegas-Reimers and Reimers (1996) expressed concern that the WB's policies did not focus on teachers' voices. "Where are 60 million teachers?" they asked, noting that teachers' reflections on their own philosophies and practices were a missing component of the WB educational policies. Leu and Ginsburg (2011) similarly disputed the wisdom of designing effective teaching programmes for teachers when teachers themselves were not involved in designing and developing these programmes (see also Klees, 2012; Ginsburg, 2012; Moretti and Pestre, 2015; Robertson, 2012).

In 2011, the WB launched its Education Strategy 2020 entitled *Learning for All*. The report explicitly advocated investing in teachers once again insofar as teachers could utilise their knowledge and skills to promote economic development. This assumption reflects an instrumental approach to teachers and their work—rooted in the theory of human capital. The Executive Summary, written under the guidance of the then WB Director of Education, Elizabeth King, opened with this statement, "Education is fundamental to development and growth", narrowing the concepts of development and growth to economic measures and investments, arguing that "access to education, which is a basic human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child of 1989, is also a strategic development investment" (WB, 2011, p. 1). Likewise, the WB's Education Vision 2020 retained its focus on funding countries to construct and equip school buildings but advocated that all of these "inputs are used more effectively to accelerate learning" (WB, 2011, p. 9).

In all of these reports and documents, the WB created self-referential evidence, allowing the policy with internally produced WB studies to play a vital role in framing teachers and their work in circumscribed ways aligned to the kind of education interventions that the Bank itself advocated. The knowledge bank and evidence-informed policymaking became an internal echo chamber for knowledge. For example, the WB's (2010)) volume, *Teachers in Anglophone Africa: Issues in Teacher Supply, Training, and Management*, written by WB staff, became an authorising source for the 2018 WB's own flagship report, *Learning to Realise Education's Promise*. That report extrapolated from the previous report on teaching in specific English-speaking African countries to education systems around the world, asserting as a blanket statement that "education systems often have few effective mechanisms in place to mentor, support, and motivate teachers—even though teachers' skills do nothing for learning unless teachers choose to apply them in the classroom" (WB, 2018a, p. 22). In this way, WB-commissioned studies identified as 'working papers' or 'works in progress' often became reference points for claims about knowledge, informing teachers globally. The Bank staff was concerned with aligning evidence gathered from field consultants that carried the weight of independent research; yet, stacked one policy report upon another to create a syntagmatic chain of claims about the reliability of internal agency-generated data.

Insofar as the WB generated its claims about teachers from its own research, the WB staff became the primary definer of the teacher-teaching story to justify its own spending priorities. The research was neither objective nor independent. Consultants, sometimes second-year graduate students with limited experience in, for example, sub-Saharan Africa, defined teachers as professionals requiring ongoing professional development based on desk-based reviews of studies in high-income countries. Popova et al. (World Bank, 2018d) argued that "Teachers, like all professionals, require ongoing professional development opportunities to improve their skills" and proposed "a standard set of 70 indicators—of the In-Service Teacher Training Survey Instrument—for reporting on professional development" as a prerequisite for understanding the characteristics of the programmes improving student learning. Similarly to the working paper prepared by Molina et al. (World Bank, 2018c), the WB Group Global Knowledge and Innovation Team referenced the Popova et al. Working Paper, now in the Foreword of the 2018 *Teach Observer Manual*. In these and other ways, the WB established itself as its self-reference point in producing knowledge for and about teachers.

In this historical review of the WB's focus on teachers and their work, we have highlighted the WB's authoritative recontextualization of its own discourse in operation. We have pointed to how the Bank became interested in teachers and their work, but bewilderingly shaped by particular self-serving ways — drawing on its own regime of research, knowledge and power.

1.3. Results and discussion

This section is organised into three subsections forming a broader part of major themes underlying our analysis of the three WB texts.

1.3.1. Learning to realise education's promise: developing the argument for scripted pedagogy

In its evidentiary argument, the WDR 2018 report makes a claim prevalent in the WB discourse: that is what it calls "countries stuck in low-learning traps" or needing "extricating" from political barriers (WB, 2018a, p. xii). Such a characterisation formed the basis of the claim that teachers with limited knowledge and skills are more often found in low- and middle-income countries, where "management capacity is low" (WB, 2018a, p. 11–12) and teachers in developing countries like Africa are a low-performing culprit. Yet, data defending this instance come from only eight of the 54 continental countries.

The WDR report notes that parents or education officials in many countries are not best suited to implement and monitor curricula, as for example, "public officials may derive political returns from flashy technological interventions, independent of their usefulness for better learning" (WB, 2018a, p. 147). For example, "parents are usually not organised to participate in debates at the system level, and they may lack knowledge of the potential gains from different policies to improving learning" (WB, 2018a, p. 15). They may also be more vested in their children than invested in improving school systems. This logically leads to the claim that "in the realm of innovation and experimentation, external funders such as the WB can provide results-based financing that gives countries more room to innovate and iterate their way to achieving better outcomes" (WB, 2018a, p. 26). Notwithstanding the fact that "more room to innovate" is vague and underspecified, no evidence supports this claim. Instead, the text narrates the WB's authority by simplifying the science to sound bites, using science to punt solutions aligned to the WB's funding priorities.

The theoretical approach used in the text is one involving the application of neuroscience to a theory of learning and a reformulation of a much older and discredited "deprivation theory". Deprivation theory, the equation of material differences of a social environment with cognitive and socio-emotional development, is contingent on cultural associations of materiality with growth and development. Richard Serpell's work of many years showed a distinction between wealth and materiality. More recent studies by Lancy (2015); Sperry, Sperry and Miller (2018); and Rosa and Flores (2017) establish how an affective association of health and wellbeing with one's social and material environment (wealth) differs from international agencies' reduction of health and wellbeing to the realm of quantifiable, reproducible physicality.

The flip side of blaming individual parents is blaming teachers who, according to the WDR report (WB, 2018a, p. 116), require structured teaching interventions, including "coaching that enable[*s*] teachers to effectively implement relevant curriculums" as structured teacher-student interactions shape students' developing brains, particularly in the younger years. However, the connection between children's brain development and the necessity of such teaching approaches is

demonstrated without specific evidence in the report; nor does research support this. To the contrary, research shows that mixed methods of instruction and learning and students' interactions with others shape cognitive and social skills and brain development (Brezack et al., 2021; Siegler and Alibali, 2019). Further, these structured teaching approaches which the WB advocates restrict the professional autonomy of teachers, limiting teachers to apply prescribed teaching solutions (for example, scripted lesson plans), which Sayed and Soudien (2021) refer to as the *scripted pedagogy*.

The WDR 2018 report grants teachers autonomy in improving student learning but also regards them as an obstacle to that very same learning. This is because readers are told that teachers lack motivation and are an ill-prepared, undertrained and incompetent workforce. Presenting teachers as both the problem and, if properly motivated and trained, the solution to realising 'education's promise' is a strategy of subterfuge to keep teachers' ideas and actions in actual classroom practices blocked from view. Most problematically, the WDR report frames criticisms of teachers by drawing on teachers' own depictions: "teachers may perceive the low effort as being justified" (WB, 2018a, p. 82). This is also the data caption provided by a WB funded 'background paper' on teachers' perceptions of teaching in eight countries. Instead of teasing out differences between schools or indicating whether schools are urban, rural, under-financed or well-financed or well-staffed and with low student-to-teacher ratios, the eye-catching type indicates: "teachers across a variety of countries justify certain types of service delivery gaps" (WB, 2018a, p. 82). Again, the Bank's reported data rests on its own self-authorising claims through a stream of successive outputs—not subjected to any critical inquiry.

The WDR report further asks if introducing a probationary period would allow "the least effective teachers" to "be transitioned out of the teaching force?" (WB, 2018a, p. 137). Without considering that various approaches may be more or less useful depending on location, the narrative offers that "most teacher training is ineffective, but some approaches work" (WB, 2018a, p. 131). Deskilling and deauthorising teachers through narrowed curricula perversely bind them to a de-professionalising programme claiming to 'improve' them beyond what national Ministries may have set. At times, "in settings where teachers have limited skills", the report recommends "providing highly *scripted lesson plans*, outlining concrete steps for teachers" (WB, 2018a, p. 133, author emphasis). The WB proposal for addressing teacher "skill and motivation" ultimately comes down to a strong emphasis on prescribed teaching approaches and forms of professional development, which de-professionalise teachers and reduce their agential space. Subsequently, this results in what Sayed and Soudien (2021) refer to as prescribed narrow curricula implemented through scripted pedagogy and scripted professional development.

In this subsection, we have seen how WB texts discursively construct teachers as the problem—demotivated, ill-prepared, undertrained, poorly skilled, and incompetent—while at the same time, as the solution to student learning—if motivated, properly trained, and monitored in their work. To make teachers the solution to student learning, the 2018 WDR report advocates using a limited range of teaching strategies and teacher professional development, involving mainly scripted lesson plans—developed through teacher coaching.[2] This WB recommendation for such types of approaches, we argue, intends to de-professionalise the teaching profession, rendering it as merely technical, with teachers not seen as professionals with specialised training for solving complex teaching and learning problems (see also subsection 1.4.3).

1.3.2. Reducing the complexity of teaching: the Teach Observer Manual

The reductionist framing of teacher work is most apparent in the WB *Teach* Observer Manual. In this 38-page handbook, the complex social dynamics of teaching and learning are reduced to a set of directions that establish principles for quantifying practices. For example, in the case of the area "time on learning", observers are instructed: if "six or more students are off task", the observer must rank the quality of the teaching practice "low". If "two to five students are off task", the quality is ranked "medium", and if "all students are on task (one student maybe off-task)", the quality is ranked high. Although the observer manual records the number of students in the class, the score assigned according to instructions does not account for student-teacher ratios. Thus, six students "off-task" in a class of 60 would not earn teachers a higher score than six out of 20. And of course, "off-task" is a value judgement, as evidenced in the discussion of the topic in the manual's "Frequently Asked Questions".

In the area of "instruction", teachers are prefigured as announcers of information who "explicitly articulate specific lesson objectives and relate classroom activities to the objectives" rather than participants in a "community of knowledge" (Sloman and Rabb, 2016). Such prefiguring reduces the idea of relevant contexts such that "not all possible interpretations of social action become plausible" (Wortham and Reyes, 2020, p. 23).

Consequently, the WB *Teach* observer manual structures and measures its own indices of teaching quality. In discursive analytic terms, the instruction given to observers constitutes a form of direct speech that establishes a pathway of linked behaviours that define or discursively "enregister" (Agha, 2007) the qualities of low, medium and high teaching. The accrual of linked indexical signs buttress or presuppose each other within and across areas, elements and behaviours. As observers themselves are enmeshed in scoring low-to-high qualities of teaching, a more uniform and singular identity emerges of the teacher, and similarly, of the student, who are already presupposed to have certain interests, needs, rights and identities.

The closed knowledge circuit is evident in the fact that observers are trained and certified by the WB to use the observation tool. A WB-produced *Teach Reliability Exam* certifies those trained to use the observation tool in accordance with the *Teach* training assessment scale. Observers are not teachers from classrooms or even necessarily residents of countries where observations are made. They are people from what the *Manual* calls an "affiliate organisation", as shown in instructions given to observers: "introduce yourself to the teacher, explain the purpose of the visit, and remind the teacher of the confidential nature of the observation". The manual offers a specific script:

Good morning, Mr./Ms. [teacher's surname,] I work with [affiliate organisation]. Your school has been randomly selected to partake [sic] in a survey that includes classroom observations. The purpose of the survey is to learn about teaching practices in [district/city name]. As such, I'm here to simply learn from you—these observations will not be used for evaluative purposes, and your identity will remain entirely confidential. Please proceed with the lesson as you normally would. (WB, 2019a, p. 6).

A section subtitled "personal experiences" instructs observers to put aside their own opinions and past experiences and remember that "codes must be based solely on the manual"; another section reminds observers that this is not an evaluation of individual teachers. Simultaneously, the classroom delivery of the observation is exclusively focused on one teacher, and each observation sheet indicates a "teacher ID", which links observation sheets to specific teachers for future target "interventions". Regardless, observers are told again to "politely remind him/her this is not a performance evaluation", and again, the manual provides a specific script for observers to read or speak to teachers:

The goal of the observation was to learn about teaching practices; the notes from this observation will be used as part of a larger study on teaching practices in [district/city name]. I very much enjoyed watching your lesson

[2] This idea of scripted teaching approaches and scripted professional development build substantively on the work of Sayed and Soudien (2021), further developed as part of a major research project by one of the authors, Yusuf Sayed, mapping the discursive construction of policy ideas and influences of multilateral agencies, actors and organisations. Currently, two manuscripts are under preparation and review – an article on the work of UNESCO and its framing of education and teachers and one on the WB's coaching model.

and appreciate you for allowing me into your classroom. (WB, 2019a, p. 6).

In discursive analytic terms, this closing script accomplishes what it performs: it closes off the interaction by excluding the recipient of the script—teachers—from the conversation. It establishes the observer as the agent and the teacher as a mute subject and brackets the specific content of the script with directions about delivering it "politely". This interaction, which represents the opposite of what is valued as "feedback" in the observer manual—"the teacher provides specific comments or prompts that help identify students' successes"—marks the status of the participants and performatively de-authorises teachers. If knowledge is power (Foucault, 1980) and surveillance is powerful (Foucault, 1977), then teachers are neither. They have been observed, scored and excluded, not only from knowledge production but also from its generation and implementation. In ending the observation, teachers are *not* provided feedback on their teaching, not even after the observation, nor are they given the chance to speak with the observer. This is especially true since observers' instructions in the *Teach* observer manual expressly forbid giving feedback to teachers.

In this subsection, we have seen that teachers have the greatest yet the least gain of all the stakeholders. The observational process of naming and rating their work without seeking their input or engagement — before, during or after the observation — effectively excludes teachers from positions of authority, de-professionalises them, ironically, in the name of professionalisation, and treats them as objects rather than subjects. Equally, the observer's failure to give feedback to the teacher after observation tempts us to question the effectiveness of the *Teach* observer manual in assessing teachers' professional development needs and improving their performance. Arguably, the *Teach* observation tool provides a reductionist and technocratic view of teaching, benignly constructing teachers as unprofessional, with no autonomy to make their own judgements about *what* and *how* students should learn.

1.3.3. Reforms in WB policy texts: reshaping teachers and their work

The WB purports to set up a particular framing of teachers and their work, which, encapsulated in a set of policies and captured in various reports, is a set of reforms cast as addressing the problem of poor-quality education and learning crises in low- and middle-income countries. For the WB, teacher underperformance manifests in the pathological bad behaviour of teachers, including "high rates of teacher absence, little teaching when present, moonlighting as private tutors, and political activity" (Béteille and Evans, 2019, p.11). This problem of teacher underperformance in developing countries, particularly sub-Saharan Africa is reduced to two sets of policy measures.

The first set of policy reforms on teachers and their work involves developing robust accountability mechanisms (WB, 2018a; Béteille and Evans, 2019) that should reward teachers who are performing well and punish those who are not. This can be done in several ways, stemming primarily from creating performance-based incentive reforms with some sort of reward or sanction for teachers based on outcomes, as "increasing teacher motivation with incentives can increase learning if the incentivised actions are within teachers' capacity and if the failure to perform those actions has impeded learning" (WB, 2018a, p. 131). To this end, the WB recommends that initial salaries and increments not only be differentiated between teachers and across the pool of teachers but also "should relate to factors known to influence student learning—content knowledge and teaching ability" (Béteille and Evans, 2019, p. 14). Financial incentives, the Bank insists, can motivate teachers to continue performing well by recognising their effort (Béteille and Evans, 2019; WB, 2018a). Moreover, a performance-based evaluation "where teachers expect their performance to be assessed, with the associated consequences" (WB, 2018a, p. 138) is crucial for improving teacher performance. Consequently, the WB strongly advocates its own *Teach* Observer Protocol to "help identify how well a teacher performs relative to the best practice in the sector" (Béteille and Evans, 2019, p. 14).

Likewise, the WB argues that teacher contracts should shift from civil service to contract employment to avoid teachers discharging their duties ineffectively (Béteille and Evans, 2019). The WB proposal for employing contract teachers as an alternative entry pathway into the teaching profession also involves sacking underperforming teachers to lessen job security and motivate others to perform well (WB, 2018a). The Bank stresses that "education systems must be able to dismiss ineffective teachers who do not improve" (Béteille and Evans, 2019, p. 28). However, the Bank admits that overcoming this requires strong leadership as "professionals of all types work most effectively when under the supervision of good managers" (Béteille and Evans, 2019, p. 33). Thus, accountability and performativity regimes evident in the WB proposals are tied strictly to regulative ways in which teachers and their work are circumscribed in policy texts.

The second set of WB reforms on teachers and their work are directed at teacher preparation and development, including initial teacher education and in-service teacher development, mainly because "teacher training in low- and middle-income countries is often short and of low quality" (WB, 2018a, p. 131). As a result, teacher education in most low- and middle-income countries produce ill-prepared teachers incapable of improving student learning outcomes in schools. The WB report admits, "beyond that, weak teacher education results in teachers lacking subject knowledge and pedagogical skills" (WB, 2018a, p. 10). This suggests that while the WB considers teachers a key solution to student learning, it also believes that their performance in schools is thwarted by the inadequacy of teacher training programmes in low- and middle-income countries, particularly sub-Saharan Africa.

In response to poor-quality teacher preparation in low- and middle-income countries, the WB advocates policy reforms aimed at upgrading both pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes. The WB acknowledges the importance of preparatory routes in training teachers well before joining the teaching profession, as in top-performing countries such as Finland and Singapore. However, the WB policy texts strongly advocate teacher training systems involving a combined shorter pre-service programme with more intensive in-service training as a more feasible policy solution for low- and middle-income countries. According to the WB texts,

studies based on test score data for Togo and Guinea find that while teachers need some pre-service training, a short training course of four to six months could prove as effective as longer pre-service programmes when combined with additional support to teachers during the first year on the job and the recruitment of candidates with good general education" (Béteille and Evans, 2019*, p. 23)*.

The WB proposal for a short training course of four to six months, combined with intensive in-service training as shown above, is comparable to the fast-track teacher preparation route, intended not only to undermine the status of the teaching profession but also to show that traditional teacher education is not a prerequisite for improving teacher quality. This proposal, we argue, contributes to a limited conception of teacher education, viewed as merely preparing robots, not professional teachers with the autonomy to address diverse classroom contexts and specific learner needs. The WB push for fast-track teacher training is also intimately tied to the notion of *scripted pedagogy* underpinned by a belief that subject matter knowledge surpasses pedagogical knowledge, highly stressed in the traditional teacher training. Thus, as Milner (2013) argues, scripted curriculum tends to benefit fast-track teachers, enabling them to know *what* to teach, *when* to teach, and *how* to teach.

This section has examined two sets of WB policy reforms on teachers and their work, focusing primarily on teaching and teacher education. Firstly, policy reforms directed at teaching emphasise performance accountability measures designed not only to regulate *what* and *how* teachers should perform but also to establish universal standards about *what* and *how* teachers should teach in classrooms. Secondly, policy reforms on teacher education, including preservice and in-service training, focus on raising teacher performance in schools in narrow and instrumentalised ways, which in turn, reduce their professional autonomy. This approach to enhancing teacher performance is what

Sayed and Soudien (2021) refer to as the '*scripted professional development*' designed primarily to prepare teachers to use a limited range of teaching approaches and techniques developed by others (scripted pedagogy). Consequently, scripted pedagogy (de)professionalises teachers and squelches their ability to function as reflective, critical and transformative intellectuals.

2. Conclusion

The three WB policy texts analysed in this paper discursively constitute a particular framing of teachers and their work.

Firstly, the WB's focus on lack of teacher motivation as a major factor for teacher underperformance underplays the core problems facing teaching and teacher work, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The Bank's claim that teachers are unmotivated and hence, promoting tight regulatory teacher governance mechanisms and stringent accountability procedures contradicts the existing evidence in sub-Saharan Africa—showing the extent to which most teachers are motivated in support of students, even under very trying circumstances (Stromquist et al., 2017). This approach disguises the major causes of teacher demotivation in sub-Saharan Africa, such as poor working conditions and meagre salaries (see Bennell and Akyeampong, 2007; Nordstrum, 2015) while simultaneously justifying the Bank's neo-liberal teacher governance policies such as performance-based pay and temporary contracts.

Secondly, the Bank's measurement of teacher performance limits what quality teaching is and risks teacher blame for factors influencing student learning and performance outside of their control (Milner, 2013). It is vital to recognise that teaching is not only an inherently evaluative activity but also a moral and value-driven activity (Sayed and Ahmed, 2015). That is, teachers need to attend to academic, social and emotional needs of students that reach beyond the standardised test scores—strongly emphasised in the WB policy texts and its self-referencing research papers as a proxy measure of quality education.

Third, the WB reforms offer a limited and limiting approach to effective teaching and learning, contradicting well-established evidence underscoring the importance of socio-cultural contexts in teaching and learning processes, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Tabulawa, 2003; Guthrie, 2018; Mitchell, 2019). In African classrooms, the teaching and learning process is not placed solely on an individual teacher's shoulders, as advocated in WB policy texts, but is viewed as a shared responsibility—allowing visibility of student agency in supporting each other's learning, including disadvantaged and disabled peers.

Fourthly, while a lack of skills is cited as a major reason for teacher underperformance, the Bank's recommendation for a shorter pre-service programme contradicts other recommendations in the texts, which encourage countries to develop high-quality pre-service training programmes—following the example of high-performing countries like Singapore and Finland (WB, 2018a; Béteille and Evans, 2019). The said policy reform is also intimately tied to the Bank's proposal for the fast-track of teacher preparation, compounded by using unqualified, underqualified and contract teachers as a means of improving teacher motivation (WB, 2018a, p. 133). This policy solution, we argue, will not only prepare teachers without the professional autonomy to address complex teaching—learning issues but also undermine the status of the teaching profession in the Global South, particularly sub-Saharan Africa.

Should the Bank be committed to ushering in major reforms for teachers and their work, it should focus on increasing funds to help governments in the Global South, particularly sub-Saharan Africa improve teachers' working conditions and salaries as a step forward in resolving an acute problem of teacher shortages. The Bank should be strongly committed with financial support of ongoing efforts targeted at improving the quality of teacher training in the region, not weakening this training. Improving the working conditions and ensuring that teachers are paid decent wages, as argued by ITFTE (2021), will undoubtedly help many countries in the Global South recruit and retain a sufficient number of quality teachers to fill current and future gaps.

This paper sheds light on a perennial problem that has garnered a great deal of research and theorising in comparative and international studies of education: how international organisations generate hegemonic discourses and practices through self-authorising references and claims to knowledge. Furthermore, the paper highlights how global attention to teachers has been a neglected concern which, until recently, has resulted in an instrumental discursive framing of teachers and their work. This observation is clearly reflected in the WB proposals for and emphases on reductionist and technicist approaches to teaching and teacher professional development, resulting in scripted pedagogy and scripted professional development as policy solutions to low-quality education and learning crises in the Global South. In this way, the approach to teachers and their work in WB texts and policies does not provide a sound basis for substantive educational reform to ensure equitable and quality learning for all children. Finally, the discursive position of the WB regarding teachers reveals how the absence of a broader historical and politico-economic analysis of the factors shaping their work limits the possibility of a holistic and robust policy framework that places teachers at the centre of efforts to reform systems ensuring greater equity in and through education.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Joseph C. Pesambili: Conceptualisation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology. **Yusuf Sayed**: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Funding acquisition, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Amy Stambach**: Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft.

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