

Background paper prepared for  
the Global Education Monitoring Report

## Non-State Actors in Education

### **The Influence of the World Bank on Policy Formation, Policy Implementation, and Private Education: A systematic review of the literature**


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## **Abstract**

While much literature has been produced about the World Bank, there has not been a systematic discussion of what is known about how the World Bank influences policy formation and policy implementation—and how it uses that influence to advance its agenda related to private education. This background paper seeks to clarify, based on a systematic review of 77 publications, what is known about the World Bank in these areas. Three kinds of findings are discussed. The first section highlights 11 kinds of pathways through which the World Bank influences policymaking. Namely, these pathways are: Loans, conditionalities, pilot projects, technical assistance, loan-related reports and studies, research, general publications, certification, coordination of foreign aid, international events, and national actor recruitment and socialization. The second findings section contains a discussion of those themes that emerged organically for why the implementation of World Bank-supported policies often faces serious obstacles in practice. The final findings section then turns to focus specifically on the issue of private education. Here, the kinds of private education that have been advanced over time by the World Bank are clarified. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of the findings and by suggesting areas where the literature on the World Bank can be improved. As noted, in only about half of all retained studies do authors clearly discuss their theoretical orientation (54% of studies) or their methodological strategies (44%) for understanding the work of the World Bank.



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# 1. Introduction

The World Bank is—and has for decades been—one of the most important non-state actors in education. This institution not only provides significant financing for education but is also one of the most influential knowledge producers in the field of global education policy, in addition to exercising its influence in a range of other ways that are less obvious. This had led to claims such as the one made by Tarabini (2009), who writes that, “The World Bank is one of the key actors in the field of educational development. Since the early 1980s, its influence on education has increased enormously, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This expansion has afforded a quasi-monopoly in the area of international aid for educational development” (p. 206).

While much literature has been produced about the World Bank, the field of comparative and international education lacks a systematic discussion of what is known about how the World Bank influences policy formation and policy implementation—and how it uses that influence to advance its agenda related to private education at the country level. That is, while there is a tremendous number of publications about the World Bank, and while the World Bank is the subject of considerable debate, it is difficult to grasp the combined insights of available literature. In response, the present background paper thus seeks to clarify what is known about the World Bank in the areas mentioned. In mapping what is known in these areas, this background will make a positive contribution to the preparation of the 2021 Global Education Monitoring Report, which focuses on non-state actors in education.

The insights documented in the present paper are the result of a systematic literature review. As will be further discussed, various academic databases were searched using two different search protocols, with one focused on literature related to policy formation and the other focused on literature related to policy implementation. This literature was then combined with additional studies (a) based on recommendations from experts and (b) from the personal library of the first author that have been collected over the past 10 years. In all, 675 studies were initially reviewed for relevance. Based on multiple rounds of evaluation to assess relevance based on pre-established criteria, a final sample of 77 studies was retained. Through the use of a literature review template, these studies have been evaluated

systematically. In evaluating the content of the retained studies, the primary focus is on documenting the various pathways through which the World Bank impacts policy formation and policy implementation at the country level.

The analysis of World Bank impact has been guided by the frameworks of two authors who have written extensively on the forms of influence of international organizations (namely, Roger Dale and Joel Samoff). The content of this background paper will begin by discussing each form of influence, providing examples of how they work in practice. Figure 1 provides a summary of the forms of influence. As can be seen, there are 11 in total. They are defined as “pathways,” which are taken here to mean those avenues—or “structured patterns”—through which the World Bank exercises its influence (Samoff, 2009, p. 135). The second section of the paper discusses the ways in which—and the reasons for which—the World Bank is (and is not) able to influence the implementation in practice of education policies and projects. The final section before discussion and conclusions turns to address the extent to which, and the ways in which, the World Bank has supported private education.

**Figure 1: Pathways of World Bank Influence in Educational Assistance**

- 1. Loans:** The provision of financial assistance by the World Bank to borrowing governments to fund reforms with which the World Bank agrees.
- 2. Conditionalities:** The World Bank often attaches conditions to the approval or disbursement of loans. Loans unrelated to education may include requirements for education sector reform; conversely, education sector loans may require actions beyond this sector.
- 3. Pilot projects:** The World Bank may either support a pilot project itself or may build on pilot projects supported by other organizations. After seeing whether a pilot program is successful, the World Bank may provide loans and technical assistance to support scaling it up. Pilot programs can be the first step in a long process of entrenching the World Bank’s preferred approaches to education reform.
- 4. Advice and recommendations (technical assistance):** World Bank representatives instruct borrowers on what they should do, when, and how. This advice carries weight, particularly when associated with World Bank loans.

**5. Loan-related reports and studies:** Loans are enmeshed in a web of documents that include, for example, early studies, pre-appraisals, sector analyses, public expenditure review, implementation and management reports, and evaluations, etc. These reports specify what has been done, what has yet to be done, and what should be done. Ignoring the content of these reports can compromise loan eligibility.

**6. Research:** The numerous studies conducted by the World Bank are influential when it comes to establishing reform priorities around the world. The technical, rational, and objective appearance of the research lends credibility to the findings. Commissioned studies can guide education policy by providing findings that justify certain policies.

**7. General publications:** The Bank's publications include small reports on individual projects, analyses of aid and its consequences, and periodic reports on the state of the world. One of the most influential is the annual *World Development Report*, not to mention the journals produced by the Bank, such as the *World Bank Research Observer* and the *World Bank Economic Review*, with the first of these designated as “enjoy[ing] the largest circulation of any economic title” (World Bank, 2016). As a result of its knowledge production activities, the Bank's publications have become a global reference point not only for information but also for analyses of relevant problems and potential solutions.

**8. Certifying role:** The approval of the World Bank indicates to other development partners that a national government is taking appropriate steps towards reform in a satisfactory fashion, and that it is therefore trustworthy. This is how aid providers often determine whether or not a country is, for example, making progress along an agreed-upon trajectory, implementing the activities for which it received foreign support, fulfilling its commitments to modify spending patterns or decentralize authority or democratize political competition.

**9. Coordination of foreign aid:** The World Bank possesses more professional capacity than many other development institutions; it may also wield more macroeconomic leverage, even when not the largest lender. As such, the World Bank often oversees the provision and use of other agencies' funds—and as such it becomes the primary point of reference for how to organize and manage development assistance. In policy coordination bodies, their voice has often carried the most weight.

**10. International events:** The World Bank has often used its resources to highlight, communicate, sell, and ingrain a particular message about education through events such as international conferences/summits, seminars, workshops, colloquia, and study tours.

**11. Actor recruitment and socialization:** The World Bank selectively recruits and attracts professionals from developed and borrower countries who can help the agency advance its agenda. Not surprisingly, those professionals often carry with them particular assumptions, frameworks, and expectations that align with those of the Bank. At the same time, the Bank can be a powerful socializing institution that is more resilient, more persistent, and more penetrating than its individual employees. Employees tend to share certain analytic orientations and core ideas, not only about education, but also about how it should be studied and assessed.

Notes: The order of the pathways reflects their conceptual relationships. Partially based on Dale (1999) and Samoff (2009), this is a revised and expanded version of a figure presented in Edwards and Storen (2017b). “Loans” and “pilot projects” have been added, while “management of the aid relationship” and “structuration of national education policy formation processes” have been removed due to their nature as building on the other pathways included.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Literature Searching

Literature searching took place primarily during February-June 2019. Keywords and key phrase combinations were selected intentionally to yield relevant literature related to World Bank impact on education policymaking and implementation. Two databases were searched—ERIC and Web of Science—using the search protocols documented by Table 1. In addition to the search results documented in Table 1, the lead author vetted their own collection of over 200 publications related to the World Bank collected over the previous 10 years. Search results were assessed through multiple rounds of review—based first on title/abstract and then on analysis of the full publication. Because of the focus of this review on policy formation and policy implementation, we did not retain studies that did not have clear relevance for these issues. Lastly, because of the relative dearth of studies on World



Bank support specifically to private education, we asked experts on this topic for literature recommendations. We then mined the references of these publications to find additional literature. While all publications included in the systematic review are cited in the reference list with an asterisk, we do not necessarily cite them all in the course of this paper. Rather, we cite and discuss those publications that highlight key themes and demonstrate key dynamics.

As can be seen from the above description, this paper is not an exhaustive review of all literature on the World Bank, but rather is a review of those studies we encountered that provide some insight on the ways that the World Bank contributes to policy formation and policy implementation. It also bears mentioning that this paper is not primarily focused on the effects of World Bank policies. This is an important topic that warrants its own systematic review.

**Table 1: Summary of Search Protocols and Results**

<b>Search Phase</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Keywords/Phrases Used</b>	<b>Search Results</b>
Combination 1	World Bank Influence in Policy Implementation	World Bank AND Implementation AND (Policy OR Reform) AND (Governance OR Education OR Management)	ERIC: 173  Web of Science: 38
Combination 2	World Bank Influence in Policymaking	World Bank AND (Policymaking OR Policy Formation) AND (Governance OR Education)	ERIC: 104  Web of Science: 157

## **2.2. Literature Analysis**

Retained studies were reviewed with the use of a literature review template. In addition to noting some basic characteristics about each piece, team members used these templates both to guide the review of publications and as a location where they could store relevant quotes and initial notes related to analysis. The subsections of this template, where relevant text excerpts were placed, drew attention to dimensions such as the following:

1. How the World Bank works with government
2. How the World Bank affects policymaking
3. How the World Bank affects policy implementation
4. Factors that affect the ability of the World Bank to affect policy implementation.

Key insights related to the dual focus of the literature were then synthesized. For those papers related to policy formation (n=74), the excerpted text in the relevant literature review templates was reviewed and coded in accordance with the pathways defined in Figure 1. Based on review of the data, the original list of codes was expanded to include loans and pilot projects. At the same time, the original list of codes was reduced by two, with “management of the aid relationship” and “structuration of national education policy formation processes” being removed because they were conceptually indistinct from other forms of influence (e.g., advice and recommendations, loan-related reports, etc.). For those papers related to policy implementation (n=44), the excerpted text segments were repeatedly reviewed and coded based on emergent themes that pertained to those factors that enabled or challenged the enactment of World Bank-supported reforms in practice. For the final substantive section of this report, on World Bank support for private education, we reviewed and analyzed only that subset of papers that was relevant to this issue.

## **2.3. Literature Characterization**

Here, we briefly give a sense of the nature of the studies reviewed. Of the publications in the final sample, 96% (n=74) provided insight into how the World Bank affects policy formation while 57% (n=45) provided insight into the connection between the World Bank and policy implementation. As can be seen in Appendix A, the literature retained focus on 33 different countries, while a number of publications focus on regions more generally. The time periods on which studies have tended to focus most are the 1990s and 2000s, as Table 2 shows. Almost all literature (90.9%, n=70) focused on the education sector. As for the

type of publication, the great majority of the studies were published as journal articles (83%, n=64), followed by book chapters (13%, n=10), and lastly organizational reports (4%, n=3).<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted that not all the publications retained focused explicitly on the World Bank. While this is true in most cases, as Table 3 shows, it is also the case that our final sample includes studies that provide tangential insights into the World Bank's influence. For example, there are studies that focused on the process of policymaking generally, not exclusively on the World Bank's role in that process. There are also studies that were primarily focused on the experience of policies at the local level, with these studies providing insight into the World Bank's support for those policies but without the World Bank being the (sole) analytic focus.

Interestingly, authors only stated their theoretical orientation in just over half of the studies reviewed (54.5%, n=42). On one hand, this clearly represents an area where there is room for improvement in the literature on the World Bank. On the other hand, it is possible, as we have done, to infer the theoretical orientation employed by authors when it comes to understanding the role of the World Bank. Table 4 reflects the categorization of orientations used to code studies in our retained sample. As can be seen, the overwhelming majority of studies are grounded in perspectives that reflect either a global governance orientation (meaning simply that authors view, describe, and analyze policymaking in the context of globalization as affected by the involvement of a range of different international organizations) or a political economy orientation (wherein authors focus more on the political and economic structures that constrain the policy options and policymaking processes of countries).

The situation with regard to methodological approaches is similar to that with theory. Here, authors only clearly described their methods in just under half of the studies (44%, n=34). In other cases, authors stated their general methodological approach but without elaboration on their data collection or data analysis practices. These cases accounted for 22% (n=17) of the sample. What also stands out is that authors in 33.7% (n=26) of studies did not state their methods at all, though this is not to say that the approach could not be inferred. Table

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<sup>1</sup> Books were not included in the search or final sample.

5 summarizes the methodological approaches reflected in the studies analyzed. This table shows that all but two studies employed some form of qualitative research.

<b>Table 2: Time Period of Focus for Retained Literature</b>						
#	1960s	70s	80s	90s	00s	10s
N	6	12	24	55	54	28
%	7.79%	15.58%	31.17%	71.43%	70.13%	36.36%
<i>Note:</i> Some studies address more than one decade, thus explaining why the percentage totalled more than 100%.						

<b>Table 3: Research Focus of Retained Literature</b>		
Research focus	#	%
World Bank Influence in Policymaking	40	51.95%
General Dynamics of Policymaking Processes	10	12.99%
Implementation of World Bank Policy/Program in Practice (i.e., without exclusive focus on the local level)	19	24.68%
Policy Translation/Enactment at the Local Level	8	10.39%
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

<b>Table 4: Theoretical Orientation to the World Bank</b>			
<b>Theoretical approach</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
1. World Society Theory	Focus on the World Bank as an organization that carries and disseminates cultural values voluntarily adopted by policymakers around the world	1	1.30%
2. Political economy	Focus on how the World Bank contributes to the political and economic structures that constrain policymaking options and processes at country level	25	32.47%
3. Critical Discourse Analysis	Focus on World Bank knowledge development while taking into account material and discursive nature of relations of power	7	9.09%
4. Post-structuralist	Focus on production and influence of World Bank discourse	2	2.60%
5. Global governance	Focus on involvement of a variety of international organizations in processes of policymaking and implementation	33	42.86%
6. Policy borrowing	Focus predominantly on borrowing, transfer, and/or adaptation dynamics of policies supported by the World Bank	4	5.19%
7. Apolitical policy implementation	Focus on evaluating the effects in practice of World Bank-supported policies	4	5.19%

8. Organizational sociology	Focus on understanding internal dynamics of the World Bank as an organization	1	1.30%
<b>Total</b>		77	100.00%

*Note:* Not all studies address theory explicitly. Where necessary, studies have been coded according to their inferred orientation. Some studies reflect multiple approaches; in these cases, the study has been coded according to the perspective most prevalent in the study.

<b>Table 5: Methodological Approaches Reflected in the Retained Literature</b>			
<b>Methodological Approach</b>	<b>Description of Label</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Various Qualitative	Label applied to studies that are based on a combination of typical qualitative strategies (e.g., interviews, document analysis) and which do not include other descriptors for their approach	7	9.09%
Case Study	Label applied for publications that either (a) explicitly state their method as case study or (b) are a case study in form	24	31.17%
Policy Analysis	Label applied to studies that analyze policies remotely, based on secondary data or (critical) interpretation	12	15.58%
(Critical) Discourse Analysis	Label applied to studies that state or employ (critical) discourse analysis as their method	4	5.19%

Document Analysis	Label applied to studies that are based exclusively on document analysis	20	25.97%
First-hand Account	Label applied to studies based on first-hand participation by the author(s)	7	9.09%
Quantitative	Label applied to studies based on quantitative methods	2	2.60%
Mixed Methods	Label applied to studies that employed both qualitative and quantitative methods	1	1.30%
<b>Total</b>		77	100.00%

### 3. The World Bank's Pathways of Influence on Policy Formation

This section presents the discussion of the different pathways through which the World Bank influences policy formation. To be clear, we are interested in the direct and indirect ways in which the World Bank affects what has been called “international processes of education policy formation,” which, as the name implies, can be characterized as “those internationally influenced processes in which national level political, governmental, and, specifically, ministry of education representatives engage in order to formulate or authorize an official policy text” (Edwards, 2013, p. 24). When it comes to the notion of international influence, it should be noted that this can manifest in a variety of forms:

International influence at the national level in these processes can appear in variety of ways—ranging, for example, from the actual adoption, symbolic invocation, and/or gratuitous diffusion of international ideas on the one hand, to the general involvement and/or targeted intervention of a range of international organizations on the other. (Edwards, 2013, p. 24)

As will be seen in this section, the various pathways of influence discussed depart from and further nuance the examples given in this quote.

The order in which the pathways are presented reflects the order in which they are presented in Figure 1, with that listing being determined according to the conceptual relationship among the pathways. Put differently, the pathways are discussed in what follows in the order in which they are connected in practice. Table 6 summarizes the prevalence of the different pathways as found in the retained literature. Of course, these statistics do not necessarily reflect the frequency of occurrence in practice. As can be seen there, the common pathway was loans, to which we now turn.

<b>Table 6: Occurrence Of Pathways Of Influence In Literature Sample, in Descending Order</b>		
<b>Pathway Of Influence</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Loans/funding	54	70.13%
2. Conditionalities	30	38.96%
3. Research studies	28	36.36%
4. General publications	28	36.36%
5. Technical assistance	27	35.06%
6. International events	27	35.06%
7. Loan-related reports & studies	24	31.17%
8. Certification/ certifying role	19	24.68%



9. Coordination of foreign aid	18	23.38%
10. National actor recruitment and socialization	14	18.18%
11. Pilot projects	11	14.29%
<i>Note:</i> Publications coded according to all those forms of influence documented therein.		

### 3.1. Loans

Given that the World Bank is, first and foremost, a bank, the pathway of loans is the most obvious and common form of influence. As can be seen in Table 7, based on the work of Mundy and Verger (2015), the scale of World Bank lending can be enormous.<sup>2</sup> Top borrowers such as Brazil and India, during the period 1987-2012 alone agreed to education-related loans valuing more than \$8 billion.<sup>3</sup> The number of total loan projects can also be incredibly high. Yang (2008), for example, reports that China had 284 “projects involving education” during 1981-2007 (p. 422). Perhaps because of the self-evident nature of this pathway, it has not tended to be discussed independently of other pathways such as conditionalities (discussed next). However, given that not all loans have explicit conditionalities attached, the decision was made to discuss the provision of financial resources separately.

<sup>2</sup> For figures related to World Bank lending as a percentage of global aid to education, see Mundy (1998, 2002) and Mundy and Verger (2015). To get a sense of the relative weight of World Bank funding for education in development, consider that, in 1995, “the volume of Bank loans (\$3.1 billion) represented 28% of all external finance to education” (Alexander, 2001, p. 289).

<sup>3</sup> The first education loan was made in 1962 to Tunisia (Jones & Coleman, 2005). With regard to overall lending, Yang (2010) reports that, during 1981-2007, China borrowed \$42 billion for education-related projects. The reason for the difference in totals reported by Yang (2010) and Mundy and Verger (2015) is not clear.

<b>Table 7: Top 10 Borrowers for Education-Related Projects, 1987-2012 (millions USD)</b>			
	<b>1987-1995</b>	<b>1996-2007</b>	<b>2008-2012</b>
1	India – 2314.9	India – 3918.23	Brazil – 5284
2	Mexico – 2009	Pakistan – 2394.8	Poland – 2631
3	Brazil – 1134.1	Indonesia – 2019.84	India – 2356
4	China – 923.9	Brazil – 1907.9	Turkey – 2000
5	Indonesia – 871.3	Mexico – 1865.2	Indonesia – 1821.66
6	Pakistan – 753.7	Bangladesh – 1385.7	Pakistan – 1771
7	Argentina – 622.5	Colombia – 1057.2	Mexico – 1320.75
8	Korea – 496.6	Uganda – 921.14	Colombia – 1001.5
9	The Philippines – 321	Ghana – 852	Costa Rica – 700
10	Kenya – 249.3	Ethiopia – 846.5	Bangladesh – 695
<i>Note:</i> Figures include non-education projects with education components. <i>Source:</i> Mundy and Verger (2015, p. 16).			

The projects for which loans are given tend to range from 5-7 years in duration and are typically only given for relatively large amounts, in the millions of dollars (Alexander, 2001; Heyneman, 2003). Indeed, it has been shown that individual projects can also be awarded

over \$1 billion in lending (Stromquist, 1999), though not as common. But project lending is not the only form of lending offered by the World Bank. As will be further discussed in the next section, there is also “adjustment lending,” where loan funds are disbursed more quickly, upon the passage of required policy changes (Alexander, 2001).

Loans are also associated with a cumbersome administrative process. As De Moura Castro (2002) writes,

Each loan structures the way the funds will be spent and does so in ample detail. This is why bank operations are so unbelievably complicated. Indeed, the local administrative officers who have to deal with the development banks hardly can believe how much more red tape they have to deal with. (p. 390)

At the same time, the loan agreement process can be a “balancing act” (De Moura Castro, 2002, p. 391) for those who represent the World Bank. Project managers—of which there is at least one per project—have to sell the loan idea and amount to the borrowing country, in addition to steering the loan through the internal approval processes of the World Bank (De Moura Castro, 2002). In exceptional circumstances, the World Bank may issue loans together with other multilateral banks, such as the Inter-American Development Bank, when there is sufficient joint interest and confidence in a given project (Edwards, Victoria, & Martin, 2015). There is also evidence that World Bank loans may be matched by other multilateral banks, for example, the Asian Development Bank, thereby allowing a country to receive additional financial support for the same set of activities (Madden, 2014).

At the country level, World Bank funding represents a small percentage of overall funding to the education sector (typically 2-3%) but a sizable percentage of “discretionary spending and new investment in education” (Hunter & Brown, 2000, p. 118). As such, it can have a large impact, beyond what one would expect. In the words of Hunter and Brown (2000): “given that governments in client countries often continue funding items that initially began as World Bank projects, these initiatives can effectively put in motion recurrent expenditures” (p. 117). The same logic applies to the pathway of pilot projects, discussed later.

Loans are issued to support a range of activities, including school infrastructure and facilities (e.g., building schools), training, sector planning activities, administrative reforms,

and technical assistance (Nagel & Snyder, 1989; Edwards, 2015; Edwards, Victoria, & Martin, 2015; Smith, 2007). Loans can be used to plan and implement initiatives that generate additional funding and in-kind contributions from families, for example, through strategies that rely on community participation in school management (Tadevosyan, 2008; Mundy & Menashy, 2012; Vavrus & Kwauk, 2013). Unsurprisingly, one of the reasons for which governments look to the World Bank for funding is that it offers less expensive financing, as compared with market rates—and because the World Bank is willing to lend for social programs, such as those related to education (Terzian, 2016).

The relative importance of World Bank lending in country contexts where discretionary spending is limited, means that it is a gateway to other forms of influence (Edwards & Storen, 2017). And other forms of engagement, in turn, can promote additional lending. For example, World Bank evaluations of their own projects can call for more funding to ensure project/program success (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004). And the size of World Bank funding can lead to “growing influence in defining the orientation that targeting programs have to follow” (Tarabini, 2008, p. 425), as discussed further in the next section.

### **3.2. Conditionalities**

Conditionalities are a common feature of loans that have received significant attention, especially since the 1980s. To be specific, conditionalities are those requirements or conditions that the World Bank attaches to the approval or disbursement of loans. It is important to note that loans unrelated to education may include requirements for education sector reform—and vice versa. Although conditionalities are associated with loans, they are included here as a separate pathway because they can be understood as a separate avenue of influence that works together with loans.

Even when they don’t agree with them, borrowers are compelled to consent to World Bank conditionalities when they are in dire need of funding. To envision how the process proceeds, consider this description by Jones (2004):

When the World Bank is ready to ‘invite’ a government to embrace policy shifts in ... fundamental areas, it is usually a matter of waiting for that borrower’s next loan approval process. Thus, the loan might be for an education project, and it would be straightforward for that project to be approved by the Bank’s Executive Directors in

the context of the broader policy framework prescribed by the Bank and the [International Monetary Fund]. Borrowers, if they indeed want the loan funds to flow, have little option but to sign off on the attached loan covenants. (p. 190)

At the same time, and as Jones (2004) points out, borrowing governments still have latitude to exercise their agency, as when they ignore or delay compliance. Of course, borrowers with stronger economies may feel more comfortable flouting World Bank requirements because they may not be as dependent on World Bank funding. In the case of “weaker borrowers,” doing so is riskier if they want to keep open the option of future borrowing and if they want to preserve their credit worthiness (Carnoy, 1995; Jones, 2004).

The conditions that the World Bank places on loans relate to policy changes that they believe to be necessary, and they can be attached either explicitly or implicitly. Hunter and Brown (2000) explain the dynamics of conditionalities well when they write:

International agencies promise financial support in exchange for specified policy changes, threatening to withdraw aid if these conditions are not met. The World Bank has often attached conditions, either explicitly or implicitly, to project loans (Mosely, Harrigan, & Toye, 1995, p. 27). Because World Bank officials want to assure that sectoral policies do not work at cross purposes with the broader intent of specific project loans, even absent explicit conditionality on a given loan, the World Bank considers efficiency in the sector as a whole in deciding on future sectoral loans (D. R. Winkler, personal communication, September 15, 1997). For example, because the lion’s share of World Bank education projects [have historically been] aimed at improving primary schooling, officials want to see this emphasis reflected in the policies that recipient countries formulate toward education more broadly. (pp. 117-118)

World Bank requirements may thus target broad reforms based on their analysis of the overall needs of a sector or economy, or the conditions may relate to more specific actions to ensure the success of a given project. The studies reviewed for this paper reveal that the World Bank has made loan disbursement conditional on such things as changes to organizational structures, legal reforms to support the decentralization of the education system, and increased funding to the education sector or to primary education (more on this

below) (Bonai, 2002; Edwards, 2015; Edwards, Victoria, & Martin, 2015; Hoogesteger et al., 2017). It goes without saying that, when initial changes become embedded in policy or legal reforms, they are more difficult to undo.

Perhaps the most well-known conditionalities are those that became famous starting in the 1980s, when the World Bank imposed a set of economic and social policy reforms in the context of economic crisis (Bonai, 2002; Carnoy, 1995; Stromquist 1999). This time period was known as the “adjustment era” because it was through “structural adjustment loans” (SAPs) that the World Bank required rapid changes in macroeconomic policy (Heyneman, 2003). Vavrus’s research (2004, 2005) describes how, in Tanzania, the World Bank, through SAPs, required “trade liberalization, cost sharing for social services, eliminating consumer and agricultural subsidies, reducing civil service employment, and promoting the privatization of programs in many sectors, including education and agriculture” (Vavrus, 2004, p. 143). This set of reforms is known as the “Washington Consensus,” due to the fact that it has been promoted (or required) by both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which are headquartered in Washington, D.C. (Bonai, 2002).

Numerous studies highlight the reality that World Bank education reforms in the 1980s and 1990s were enacted within the context of SAPs and their requirements (Bonai, 2002; Edwards, 2015; Edwards, Victoria, & Martin, 2015; Ginsburg et al., 2010; Takala, 1998). As Takala (1998) pointed out, because borrowing governments subject to SAPs were “heavily dependent on continued external funding,” the World Bank was “able to exert leverage on educational policies” (p. 320). Usefully, Bonai (2002) goes beyond claims of influence to delineate both the direct and indirect consequences of SAPs on education. Direct consequences included the reduction of funding to education (due to required public spending cuts), which in turn negatively impacted the quality of and access to education.<sup>4</sup> Indirect consequences included a reduction in earnings for those affected by economic liberalization, with the implication being that, for many families, the opportunity cost of education went up along with the percentage of income consumed by education-related fees, which, in turn “prevented low-income families from investing in education” (Bonai, 2002,

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<sup>4</sup> Though Ginsburg, Megahed, Elmeski & Tanaka (2010) report that, in Egypt, education was prioritized because it adopted the language of “education as an investment and not a social expenditure” (p. 11).

p. 11). Because SAPs have been implemented in the context of economic crises, and because, as just noted, they put downward pressure on family income, they likely also negatively impacted the market for private provision, given that families could not afford private tuition. At the same time, SAPs may have also encouraged the emergence of private schools for the poor, at least in long-term perspective, given that SAPs entailed a reduction in investment in public education, with the implication being that those areas which are underserved (or not at all served) by public schools are seen as potential markets for such private schools.

Frustratingly for borrowers, conditionalities are one-way in nature, that is, that donors have the ability to penalize borrowing countries if they do not take the actions deemed necessary by the lender, but that the reverse is not true (McCourt, 2018). Also frustrating can be the large debt burden that borrowing and SAPs can create. Vavrus (2004) speaks to the cumulative effect of SAPs on Tanzania:

Despite their achievements in bringing down the country's inflation rate, SAPs have failed to alleviate Tanzania's debt burden and its dependence on aid from international financial institutions. Tanzania owes approximately \$7 billion to different lenders, with its debt servicing payments at nearly \$275 million per year, or roughly 35% of its earnings from exports (Oxfam, 1998). In terms of social services, this figure is approximately four times as much as the country spends on social services, such as basic education. (p. 143)

Placing these debt burden dynamics into broad perspective, Bonal (2002) noted that, “since the mid-1980s, third world countries have become net capital exporters to northern countries” and that “debt repayments account for more than capital transfers to the third world” (p. 7).

The negative effects of SAPs and the negative attention that the World Bank has received because of them have led the World Bank to reduce its explicit reliance on the kinds of conditionalities (for macroeconomic reform) for which SAPs were well-known. More recently, in the 2000s, the World Bank began to require the formulation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) as a precondition for lending. The idea was that borrowing governments would, together with civil society, develop a strategy for how the country

would pursue economic and social development. However, in practice, some authors have suggested that PRSPs are SAPs under a different name: the process may have changed but the economic policies that the World Bank wanted to see before approving loans remained the same (Tarabini, 2009). For this reason, PRSPs were seen as a new form of conditionality.<sup>5</sup> A similar perspective has been voiced by Steiner-Khamsi (2012) more recently in relation to insistence by the World Bank that projects are justified by evidence that comes from “impact evaluations”: “The point I make ... is that impact evaluation ... has become a means for imposing programmatic conditionality on recipient governments” (p. 10).

### **3.3. Pilot Projects**

As the name of this pathway implies, pilot projects are those projects where the World Bank tests a policy or program model, with the focus being those approaches that it is interested to promote or scale up, if deemed successful. It can also be said that pilot projects are useful for experimenting with institutional innovations that would otherwise engender too much resistance, if pursued initially on a larger scale. These small-scale projects are typically required as an initial step in the process of gaining access to funding. They may either be folded into the structure of a project (Luschei, 2004), may be supported (e.g., in the form of technical assistance) before a loan-funded project is developed, or may be adapted from pilot projects supported by other organizations (Edwards, 2018; Tadevosyan, 2008). The purpose of these projects is to minimize the risk exposure of the World Bank; in testing a model at small scale prior to making major outlays of funding, the World Bank is able, to some extent, to ensure that the model in question is workable in the context where it will be funded. The processes of supervision and evaluation that typically accompany these pilot projects allow for learning and insights that inform modifications to the policy or program design. Pilot projects can also serve to convince the borrowing government and gatekeepers inside the World Bank that a particular model should be supported with additional resources (Edwards, 2015).

Studies that mention pilot projects tend to discuss their roles in terms of helping to gain an organizational foothold within the borrowing government and/or helping to create political

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<sup>5</sup> More will be said about PRSPs when discussing the pathways of loan-related documents and studies.



support for the model. Carney and Bista (2009), for example, in speaking about the origins of Nepal's community-based management approach to education, write that the model was a pilot project before being "integrated quickly into the overall strategic plan of the Ministry of Education and Sports" (p. 190). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the World Bank can incentivize experimentation via pilot projects when borrowing governments are economically vulnerable. As one interviewee from Egypt is quoted as saying in reference to lending from the World Bank:

The Egyptian government's financial resource capacity, moreover, was enhanced, but with significant restrictions on public expenditure, when it negotiated a structural adjustment program to obtain a loan from the World Bank. These fiscal challenges, exacerbated by quantitative expansion of the education system, encouraged the Mubarak government to experiment with laws and pilot projects toward decentralizing responsibilities (if not authority) and increasing community participation. (Ginsburg, Megahed, Elmeski, & Tanaka, 2010, p. 38)

Once they are approved to serve as the basis for loan funding, the models initially contained in pilot projects can be scaled up and supported over many years (Luschei, 2004; Mangla, 2018), with borrowing governments sometimes taking ownership over the initiative, where doing so is politically advantageous (Edwards, 2015; Edwards, Victoria, & Martin, 2015). Some well-known initiatives that began as pilot projects include the approach of community-based management in El Salvador (Edwards, 2015; Edwards, Victoria, & Martin, 2015) and the approach of Escuela Nueva, adapted from Colombia to Brazil with World Bank support to address the challenges of multi-grade and rural schools (Luschei, 2004). In the case of continued funding, one can see the connection between pilot projects and the pathways of financial resources (i.e., loans) and technical assistance, which attempts to ensure that the program, as it is scaled up, receives the support it needs.

### **3.4. Advice and Recommendations (Technical Assistance)**

Technical assistance is the term used to refer to the advice and recommendations given by the World Bank. While certain kinds of World Bank studies and publications likewise contain advice and recommendations, the difference here is that we focus particularly on person-to-person interaction.

Technical assistance is offered by the World Bank at all points in the process of engagement with borrowers. It is the oil that lubricates the operations of the World Bank and, as such, it is offered both when preparing for and when implementing projects and other activities (such as research) supported by the World Bank. The literature reviewed gives examples of technical assistance being provided in relation to the design of new organizational structures to enhance efficiency (Edwards, Victoria, & Martin, 2015), the writing of new laws (Edwards, Victoria, & Martin, 2015), the design of policies and programs (Espinoza, 2017; Hamamo, 2008; Rappleye & Un, 2018), and the implementation of core project activities (Hamamo, 2008). At the broadest level, World Bank technical assistance serves to provide the “rationale, method and frameworks” (Smith, 2007, p. 244) for guiding reform. On this point, Carney and Bista (2009) reveal that World Bank advisors embedded their frameworks into the policymaking process in Nepal in the 1990s. When asked about the goals that guided the master plan that was being developed together with a range of development partners, one government participant was quoted as saying that the underlying framework was “given to us by the World Bank,” who told them that the “the education sector should be seen in terms of these four variables [(i.e., quality, access, efficiency, and relevance)]” (Carney & Bista, 2009, p. 197).

For the moment, the point here is not the substance of the framework but the fact that the World Bank’s frameworks and perspectives reach beyond individual projects to become ingrained in the government’s processes of strategy development and policy formation. With this in mind, it is important to be aware of the ideological nature of the World Bank’s work and the fact that technical assistance tends to reflect the broader neoliberal policy consensus in the field of education and international development (Bernasconi, 2007; Bonal, 2002; Carney & Bista, 2009).<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that countries cannot use technical assistance to their advantage when they are intent on pursuing projects, such as teacher training, that align less clearly with the kinds of market-based reforms for which the World Bank is well-known (Fontdevila & Verger, 2015). Indeed, as Fontdevila and Verger (2015)

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<sup>6</sup> A corollary to this observation is that the recommendations made by the World Bank may not be empirically justified, or at least can be disputed, given that they are guided by ideological assumptions. On this point, Bonal (2002) gives the example of the long-standing recommendation of the World Bank to invest in primary education rather than higher education because of the supposedly higher rate of return.

find in their review of teacher-related World Bank projects, a full three-quarters (77.9%) of them are focused on strengthening or improving the provision of traditional forms of pre-service and in-service training, as opposed to promoting alternative/accelerated certification pathways or policies that would make it easier for less well-prepared individuals to enter the teaching profession. Moreover, 17% of the projects reviewed focused on increasing the entrance requirements to become a teacher. Consider two examples:

In Bangladesh, for instance, and in light of patronage-based recruitment in non-government secondary schools managed by [school management committees], Project 077789 establishes the creation of an autonomous Teachers' Registration and Certification Agency (NTRCA) to ensure a transparent recruitment procedure and [to] avoid the selection of poorly prepared individuals as a consequence of political pressure .... In Punjab (Pakistan), in turn, Project 102608 contemplates the development of a system for teacher accreditation, certification and licensing: *'The Project will provide support to the Government of Punjab's Technical Task Force on Teacher Certification, Licensing and Accreditation, comprising practitioners from the public and private sectors.'* (pp. 50-51)

However, while some flexibility exists when it comes to project focus, it is certainly the case that all projects, and thus all technical assistance, must fit with the economic orientation of the World Bank, where education is justified in terms of its contribution to human capital development and, in turn, the contribution of human capital to economic development (see, e.g., Heyneman, 2003). In this way, "The Bank's stances provide a convenient summary and checklist, as it were, of what the dominant political economy ... deems necessary and appropriate reform," though, as noted, there is not always alignment between what the World Bank deems necessary and what countries will agree to reform (Bernasconi, 2007, p. 511).

To get a sense of how World Bank technical assistance functions within the loan process, consider the words of Hoogesteger, Tiaguaro-Rea, Rap, and Hidalgo (2017), who write:

After [the Ministry of Agriculture] expressed the Ecuadorian government's interest, the World Bank sent a new identification mission for a technical assistance project for the irrigation subsector (TAP-R) in January 1993. On the basis of this mission's

outcomes, the funding for TAP-R, as a sectoral investment, was again conditioned on the implementation of the [the World Bank's preferred] reforms. (p. 302)

What stands out here is the way that technical assistance is a necessary precursor to funding, but one that is also connected with conditionalities. The “mission” work carried out under the rubric of technical assistance by World Bank staff and consultants can serve to reinforce the need for the kinds of policy changes that the World Bank wants to see. For this reason, technical assistance may not feel like “assistance,” and should rather be seen as structural. This is so because technical assistance can manifest as a structural constraint in the sense that the technical assistance provided by the World Bank often indicates what needs to happen or what needs to be agreed to in order for the process to move forward. From this perspective, technical assistance is not just discursive or suggestive, but also has a material and structural dimension. As Nafukho and Muyia (2013) write, “African and Asian countries have been compelled to take advice provided by the World Bank in order to receive financial assistance” (Nafukho & Muyia, 2013, p. 648).

But technical assistance is not always attached directly to World Bank lending. Interestingly, in the case of South Africa, Smith (2007) highlights that the World Bank provided technical assistance throughout the 1990s, when the government was hesitant to borrow, in hopes that, through its technical assistance, it could make in-roads that would lead eventually to the provision of financing. Consider:

Though the Bank's persistent attempt to establish a relationship with South Africa as a lender failed, it nevertheless was able to build a rapport as a knowledge broker through the provision of technical assistance. Ironically, it is precisely through this role as knowledge broker, that the Bank has now been able to affirm its relationship as a lender. (Smith, 2007, p. 248)

This is an important example to underscore, for it demonstrates that countries, depending on their particular situation, are able to resist World Bank advances. In the words of Hunter and Brown (2000), “the World Bank can pressure but cannot force the ... government to adopt its recommendations” (p. 135). What's more, these same authors, in contrast to many others, see the World Bank as being too deferential in their interaction with borrowing governments, as when they write “Perhaps the caution World Bank officials have begun to

exercise with regard to developing country sovereignty actually impairs their ability to combat poverty and champion basic needs. ... the ‘excessive respect’ World Bank officials accord to domestic political processes undermines technocratic decision making and hurts the poor” (Hunter & Brown, 2000, p. 135).

Notwithstanding the above perspective, there are multiple reasons for which the technical assistance of the World Bank can be very influential, beyond simply the need of borrowers for funding. Often, there are few technocrats within the government negotiating with the World Bank who can (or who feel comfortable) pushing back on the recommendations made by this organization. This is in addition to the reality that ministers of education themselves, as political appointees, may lack a technical background, as Hunter and Brown (2000) suggest. Furthermore, “the fierce bureaucratic politics that characterize decision making” can have the effect of “undermining the emergence of a technocratic core able to promote serious proposals,” with the implication being that “the technocrats who serve as domestic interlocutors for the World Bank are often relatively small in number and weak within the bureaucracy,” especially in the “smallest and poorest countries” (Hunter & Brown, 2000, 131-132). Elsewhere, Lightfoot (2015) quotes a senior government advisor as saying that “there is no discipline around policy making—the policy agenda is whatever happens to be in the Minister’s in-tray—there are procedures but not policies” (p. 712). Taking a long-term perspective, other authors have suggested that the lack of technically trained staff is at least partially attributable to the “dismantling of Education Ministries” that has been required by the World Bank as part of reducing public spending and downsizing government bureaucracies (Torres, 2000, p. 180, as cited in De Moura Castro, 2002, p. 387).<sup>7</sup> In this way, and combined with the reductions in education sector funding that have been required historically through SAPs, it can be said that the World Bank’s approach tends to work against the development of technical capacity.

The lack of highly trained staff can have consequences that carry over into project implementation as well. For example, Rappleye and Un (2018) report, based on their experience as World Bank consultants in Cambodia working on a project that awarded

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<sup>7</sup> Such “dismantling” in the World Bank’s approach is not unique to the education sector, but rather reflects its focus since the 1980s on reducing the size of government bureaucracy generally.

research grants to universities, that “[t]he effects of the sheer lack of PhD holders for the success of the project cannot be overstated. Without the advanced research training that the PhD represents and certifies, the initial ... proposals [for university research funding to be covered by the loan] were of extremely low quality” (p. 262). Here, though, we should also note that the lack of context and cultural sensitivity in the design of World Bank projects can negatively affect project success (De Moura Castro, 2002; Rappleye & Un, 2018), as further discussed later.

In concluding this section, it is no surprise that authors such as Smith (2007) report the outsized influence of World Bank advice in processes of policy making. Reporting on the experience of South Africa, Smith (2007) writes: “Even though there may have been 20 people at the table in the writing of [the Growth Employment and Redistribution Program of the government], the Bank representative was very powerful” (p. 244). And given the global reach and engagement of the World Bank, it should likewise not be a surprise that, through its technical assistance activities, this organization is able to take lessons learned in one place and to apply them elsewhere. Again drawing on Smith (2007), consider the following:

The Bank’s use of South Africa for acquiring experience to export elsewhere was confirmed by the former country representative for the World Bank in South Africa, who noted: ‘The Bank got a huge learning experience of economies in transition. [The Bank] has been able to use this knowledge learnt from South Africa to assist other economies in transition. For instance, the South African local government restructuring experience influenced what India is doing.’ (p. 240)

As this quote shows, technical assistance is not only about teaching borrowers how to do things but also about the World Bank itself gaining experience and skills that it can leverage in other countries.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, this observation also connects back to the pathway of pilot projects, where, as noted, the World Bank can experiment with—and learn from—innovations that it can then adapt and sell elsewhere. Of course, these pilot projects may

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<sup>8</sup> Hamano (2008) extends this point by noting that World Bank technical assistance can impact other international organizations, in the sense that the projects designed by the World Bank are emulated by those organizations.

benefit from technical assistance from the World Bank. Thus, while the Bank's technical assistance and project design can be context insensitive, there is evidence that both the borrower and the World Bank are teaching each other, though the payments for these "lessons" only flow in one direction.

### **3.5. Loan-related Reports and Studies**

Closely related to—and, indeed, intertwined with—technical assistance is the pathway of loan-related reports and studies. These reports and studies may be produced by either the World Bank or the borrowing government, or both, working together. Typically, they are associated with the provision of loans. Examples include “early studies, pre-appraisals, sector analyses, public expenditure review, implementation and management reports, and evaluations” (Edwards & Storen, 2017b, p. 15). The purpose of these reports is to indicate what has been done, what has yet to be done, and what should be done. That is, they can serve in the preparation of joint activities or they can assess what progress has been made after the fact (Angelini, 2016). Importantly, ignoring the content of these reports can compromise loan eligibility. An indication of the centrality of these reports and studies to the work of the World Bank is the fact that their production represents a significant expenditure, with 15-20% of administrative resources being allocated here (Thomas & Carnoy, 1992).

“Sector work” is the general name for the kind of activity that goes into the preparation of these reports and studies (Molla, 2014; Thomas & Carnoy, 1992). Thomas and Carnoy (1992) give a description of this term:

Sector work forms the basis for policy dialogue with governments, design of Bank lending strategies and projects, and promotion of external resource mobilization and coordination. To accomplish this, the Operational Manual recommends that sector reports provide: (a) an overview of country development strategies, (b) a review of principal sectoral issues, (c) a discussion of government policies and plans, (d) a list of policy recommendations, and (e) a Bank lending strategy. (p. 1)

Clearly, sector work can have far reaching consequences, in that it not only guides the World Bank's engagement with the government but also seeks to characterize the challenges that face potential sectors for investment and to serve as a point of reference for the coordination

of resources provided by other development partners. And as with technical assistance, these reports and studies can have the effect of ingraining a “managerial view of education and an emphasis on arguably narrow outcomes” (Mukhopadhyay & Sriprakash, 2011, p. 318).

Separately, Samoff (1999) points out that the approaches taken in the production of reports and studies are frequently adopted or adapted by other donor organizations, with the implication that countries can be faced with homogeneity of worldview across development partners and, thus, with consistency in recommendations that, historically, have focused on education finance, labor market needs, primary education, an expanded role for the private sector, increased student fees, and decentralization of system management, but without much focus (until recently) on learning. Another commonality, at least across World Bank sector work, is that the majority of recommendations contained in sector reports have been found to lack an accompanying discussion of the implications of those recommendations. Put differently, in a review by Thomas and Carnoy (1992) of World Bank sector reports, “only 12% of the recommendations were accompanied by a solid discussion of implications for the educational system as a whole” (p. 16). This implies that the World Bank is more focused on advancing its recommendations—and issuing loans—than carefully accounting for the subsequent side-effects of the suggested policies. As Thomas and Carnoy (1992) further comment, “It is difficult and analytically questionable to discuss policies in one education sub-sector without referring to their possible implications for other sub-sectors” (p. 16).

As with other pathways, there are limits to the influence of loan-related reports and studies. The policies funded in practice do not always reflect the language and recommendations contained in the Bank’s loan-related documents, for, as Vavrus (2004) notes, national policymakers have leeway and use it to adapt some of the language to the local context. The result is national policies that reflect “contestation and consistency” (Vavrus, 2004, p. 150). One place where these dynamics have had the chance to arise has been in the production of the PRSPs mentioned earlier, in the section on conditionalities. As noted there, these documents, which portray a country’s priorities and strategies for economic and social policy, began to be required by the World Bank in the 2000s as a precondition for loans. Perhaps as a reaction against PRSPs and the negative reputation that they garnered as a form of conditionality, the World Bank now employs a Country Partnership Framework as the



basis for its country engagement, with this framework being based on a Systematic Country Diagnostic (McCourt, 2018). Although this diagnostic should be “conducted ... in close consultation with national authorities and other stakeholders,” it has also been found that the World Bank produces the first draft based on multiple rounds of internal discussion within the Bank itself, and only then it brings in external stakeholders, with “the government ... merely [being] one of those external stakeholders” (McCourt, 2018, p. 655). It is to be expected, then, that these required diagnostics and frameworks continue to reflect the priorities and principles of the World Bank.

Writing specifically on the education sector, Samoff (1999) describes a similar situation. Based on his experience in Africa, he writes: “Few if any ... studies seemed to have been the product of a sustained dialogue between the external agency and the education community, both governmental and non-governmental, both official and unofficial, within the country studied. The voices of teachers, students, and parents can scarcely be heard” (Samoff, 1999, p. 253). Thus, despite changes to the terminology used to describe the instruments that structure World Bank engagement, some observers see them as a continuation of past practices, that is, as less visible or less obvious “regulatory instruments” that are imposed on borrowers (Molla, 2014, p. 230). Additionally—though unsurprisingly—various authors comment on the lack of cultural sensitivity of the World Bank’s reports and studies, which have been shown to look down on the culture of the receiving government (as being the course of the problems or reasons why a project is not going well) while also failing to understand the cultural and historical context of the partner government (Rappleye & Un, 2018). Other authors have noted the importance of this, that is, of being attentive to such things as “institutional culture” when planning for World Bank programs (Thomas & Carnoy, 1992, p. 10). Where this dimension is not taken into account, World Bank sector reports have been found to be heavy on critique (e.g., of government spending patterns) and light on cultural and political analysis that explains the borrower’s behavior (Thomas & Carnoy, 1992).

### **3.6. Research**

Verger, Edwards, and Altinyelken (2014) write that the World Bank, in addition being the “largest single international funder of education for development,” stands out because “the technical and knowledge-based resources it devotes to education dwarf those of other

international institutions” (p. 381). These resources are put to use in the evaluation of the programs and policies that the World Bank supports (e.g., through loans and technical assistance) in addition to carrying out studies of other policies of interest (Samoff, 1993; Vavrus & Kwauk, 2013; Verger, 2012). These studies lead to different kinds of research products, such as World Bank working papers, academic journal articles, books, and book chapters.

While there is a rich and vast literature on the production, dissemination, and influence of World Bank research at the global level, the studies retained in this literature review tend to focus more on the role of its research in policy formation and implementation. Perhaps the most famous example of the influence of World Bank research relates to the rate of return that became central to Bank lending in the 1980s, which led to the promotion (and requirement) of investing in primary education over higher education (Bonal, 2002; Heyneman, 2003). The World Bank also contracts academics or researchers (often with a high profile) to conduct evaluations of their programs, or even of programs that they are not funding but which interest them (Samoff, 1993; Tarabini, 2008). These evaluations can later be used to justify loan programs in other countries (Luschei, 2004; Nagel & Snyder, 1989). Put differently, the World Bank has a history of producing or commissioning research that it then cites in order to justify the promotion of its preferred programs and policies (Klees, 2002; Verger, 2012).

However, as various authors point out, not all World Bank research has the kind of influence described above (Mundy & Menashy, 2014a; Fontdevila & Verger, 2015). In other words, the research that is produced to shape the global reform agenda and which is intended to align with the way the organization presents its worldview and guiding principles, does not always guide the priorities for lending in negotiations with borrowing governments (Mundy, 2002; Samoff, 1993).<sup>9</sup> In these contexts, governmental priorities unrelated to World Bank reform principles (i.e., competition, accountability, efficiency, etc.) often prevail. The

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<sup>9</sup> Both Mundy (2002, p. 500) and Samoff (1993, p. 214) offer insightful discussions of the reasons for which the scale of production and influence of World Bank research were affected in the 1980s and 1990s.

World Bank is still willing to lend in these cases because it means the issuance of new loans, which is their core business.

There is also country-level research that is not directly connected to loan preparation, but which can eventually affect it. Yang (2010), for example, mentions two World Bank reports published in the 1980s on the education sector in China, which would have a significant impact on the political priorities of the government. Likewise, in El Salvador, World Bank studies on secondary education in the 2000s actually contributed to shifting the attention of the government away from primary education, after years of focusing on this level in the context of Education for All and previous World Bank recommendations to prioritize this level (Edwards, 2013).

Finally, we note that World Bank research, due to its highly credible nature (Edwards & Loucel, 2016) and perceptions of it being “irrefutable” (Bonal, 2002, p. 9), has an impact on other donor organizations. Also relevant here is the fact that, in the post-Great Recession context, other donor organizations are hiring more generalists who are not specialists in education, and that they are investing less in research. The result then is that other aid agencies “are increasingly dependent on external, specialized knowledge, like that provided by the Bank” (Verger, Edwards, & Altinyelken, 2014, p. 394). For our purposes, the point here is that World Bank research products and capacities influence the organizational and ideational environment in which borrowing governments operate and set their policies (Molla, 2014).

### **3.7. General Publications**

General publications are closely related with the previous pathway—i.e., research. The difference here is that many of the more general publications are either informational in nature or are intended to portray the state of the world, to advance a particular reform idea, or to characterize the problems to which countries must respond. Molla (2014) brings attention to this pathway by highlighting that the World Bank produces “reports on lessons of experience, collections of best practices, and comparative evaluation of performances of different countries” (p. 235). While they may be based on previous research carried out by the World Bank, they tend not to be products of applied research themselves. Examples of general publications include small reports on individual projects that are intended to

highlight promising practices or new approaches. One series of publications is known as *En Breve*, which the World Bank's website describes as a "set of notes" that "highlights lessons from operational and analytical programs in Latin America and the Caribbean" (World Bank, 2020). Another significant type of publication is the periodic education sector strategy papers, which clarify the principles and policies that the World Bank favors when thinking about how best to reform education systems (Boyd & Owens, 2015; Verger, Edwards, & Altinyelken, 2014). Perhaps the most well-known publication related to this pathway is the annual World Development Report, which each year focuses on a different theme related to economic development. Likewise, one might include here the academic journals produced by the World Bank, such as the *World Bank Research Observer* and the *World Bank Economic Review*, with the first of these designated as "enjoy[ing] the largest circulation of any economic title" (World Bank, 2016).

As with the research pathway, our review does not include much of the literature that focuses on general publications, given that research on these publications often does not connect their production and circulation to processes of policy formation and implementation, though there is undoubtedly an indirect connection in that the ideas contained in these publications can influence the perceptions and priorities of policymakers at the country level (Hunter & Brown, 2000). In the words of Hunter and Brown (2000), by "diffusing knowledge among development professionals," general publications are used to "induce compliance" with the World Bank's worldview or preferred frameworks (p. 117). Practically speaking, the process of diffusion is facilitated by the habit of the World Bank to send compact discs loaded with its publications directly to country governments and to other international aid agencies. One representative of a bilateral organization was quoted by Verger, Edwards, and Altinyelken (2014) as saying that: "the Bank sends all of its publications in a CD annually, which are copied 50 times by the Ministry and sent to everyone working in the field" (p. 395). Through such practices, the World Bank enhances the chances that its policies and perspectives are adopted by other donor agencies and by country clients (Nagel & Snyder, 1989; Takala, 1998).

One idea around which the World Bank has tried to influence perceptions is the concept of the knowledge economy (Robertson, 2005). In publications related to this topic, the World Bank has emphasized the need for lifelong learning, as opposed to "traditional" learning.

Robertson (2005), in drawing on World Bank language, explains the difference in how these two types of learning are conceived: "Education systems must transform themselves, 'replacing the information based, teacher directed rote learning provided within a formal education system governed by directives with a new type of learning that emphasizes creating, applying, analyzing and synthesizing knowledge and engaging in collaborative learning throughout the lifespan'" (World Bank, 2003, p. xviii). Of course, given that the World Bank is trying to secure buy-in from others for its worldview, there is no discussion of the problematic nature of the assumptions on which these visions are based, nor the problematic implications of what education for the knowledge economy is thought to entail (Robertson, 2005). This is not surprising when one considers that, necessarily, the general publications of the World Bank are normative in nature, in that they promote a certain vision for how the world is or should be (Buckner, 2018).

While some authors have pointed out the willingness of the World Bank, when pressured, to alter its language—if not its practices (Vavrus & Kwauk, 2013)—others have pointed out the consistency with which the World Bank discusses certain reforms over time in its high-profile reports. Thus, we can contrast the way that the World Bank altered its stance on the charging of school fees, long an implicit if not explicit practice it supported, in response to a campaign by civil society and peer institutions to eliminate such fees (Vavrus & Kwauk, 2013), with the way the World Bank has consistently communicated its support for fiscal and administrative decentralization at various sub-national levels since the 1980s (Khanal, 2010). We will return to this issue of World Bank support for privatization in section five.

### **3.8. Certifying Role**

Approval given by the World Bank for a course of action taken by a borrowing government indicates to other development partners that a country government is pursuing appropriate steps toward reform in a satisfactory fashion, and that it is therefore trustworthy. The certification role played by the World Bank is how aid providers often determine whether or not a country is, for example, making progress along an agreed-upon trajectory (Mangla, 2018; McCourt, 2018), implementing the activities for which it received foreign support (Hamano, 2008; Tarabini, 2008), fulfilling its commitments to modify spending patterns, or to decentralize authority or democratize political competition (Bonal, 2002; Khanal, 2010).

There are a variety of means through which the World Bank can exercise the certification function. One example is through accolades or awards that are bestowed by the World Bank, as in the case of the President's Award for Excellence, which is given each year to exemplary programs (Edwards, 2018). Another example is the role that the World Bank plays in the credit rating given to borrowing governments; if they remain in good financial standing with the World Bank, they will likely maintain their access to financial capital from other lenders (Jones, 2004). In other words, the certification role indicates to other international organizations that the government is taking appropriate steps and that the government will follow the required procedures and protocols as outlined by the World Bank in order to make progress on the agreed-upon actions. Where governments are deemed to be acting inappropriately, or where there is "suspected misuse of funds ...the Bank can initiate consultations with the concerned agency and may ... eventually suspend the disbursement of funds" (Angelini, 2016, p. 182). In this way, the World Bank is a barometer to which other organizations look to gauge whether they should get involved in a country or not. As Moutsios (2009) posits, "it is not the World Bank's share in the global spending on education which makes its role financially important. It is its influence...on external aid agencies that matters (p. 470).

At the same time, the World Bank's approval for a program (e.g., through positive research findings) sends the message to the development community that the policy or program in question may hold some promise if implemented elsewhere. Here, consider the work of Tarabini (2008), who focuses on the example of a conditional cash transfer program in Brazil. While the program itself was funded entirely through Brazil's national budget, with no external funding or implementation support, the program evaluations published by the World Bank referred to the program as a "paradigmatic example" and a model for other countries to follow. Thanks to these World Bank evaluations, the program has received "great international legitimacy" (Luschei, 2004, p. 419). The approach of community-based management of education in El Salvador has similarly been "certified" thanks to the positive outcomes that were claimed in a series of World Bank studies (Edwards & Loucel, 2016; Edwards, Victoria, & Martin, 2015). These positive findings helped to attract attention from

around the world, in addition to giving confidence to the borrowing government that they were pursuing a worthy reform.

### **3.9. Coordination of Foreign Aid**

The World Bank possesses more professional capacity than many other development institutions; it may also wield more macroeconomic leverage, even when not the largest lender. As such, the World Bank often oversees the provision and use of other agencies' funds—and thus it becomes the primary point of reference for how to organize and manage development assistance. In policy coordination bodies, their voice has often carried the most weight.

The World Bank has had a direct hand in shifting policy values and vision through their coordinating activities, with these activities becoming more common in the 1990s (Samoff, 1996, 1999). A first step in this process has been to work with country governments to define the “bigger picture” and the “policy and programmatic objectives” to which development aid from multiple funders will respond (Samoff, 2004, p. 399). In this way, the World Bank's view becomes a framework that guides the “master plan” for education and within which other donors function (Carney & Bista, 2009, p. 187). Nagel and Synder (1989) likewise highlight “the power of the World Bank to shape not only its own development but also to influence the course of development policy formulation in other agencies” (p. 10). Because the World Bank is often held in high esteem by other international aid agencies, which rely on it for guidance, data, and research, the World Bank plays coordinating roles that are both formal and informal in nature (Verger, Edwards, & Altinyelken, 2014). A prime example is the Fast Track Initiative, set up in 2002 (and now known as the Global Partnership for Education).<sup>10</sup> Through this World Bank-managed initiative, countries with “credible” PRSPs—meaning those approved by either the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund—were eligible to receive \$200 million in funding over three years to help make progress toward the achievement of the Education For All goals (Mundy, 2007). Though the funds are controlled and dispersed by the World Bank, they are raised through

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<sup>10</sup> See Birmingham (2011) for more on the history of this initiative and its relationship with the World Bank.

donations from country governments.<sup>11</sup> Borrowing governments are sensitive to aid coordination dynamics and are thus careful not to appear “uncooperative or unapproachable” (Samoff, 1999, p. 264) for fear of damaging their reputation with the World Bank (or other influential development partners) who may then spread an unflattering image to other organizations.

### **3.10. International Events**

The World Bank has often used its resources to highlight, communicate, sell, and ingrain a particular message about education through events such as international conferences/summits, seminars, workshops, colloquia, and study tours (Edwards, 2018). Through such events, the World Bank is able to advance debates on “key policy issues” (Molla, 2014, p. 235) and is able to guarantee “rapid dissemination of ... concepts” that are central to its preferred reforms (Alvarez, 1998). Through its international events focused on education, the World Bank tends to draw attention to such topics as: “access, content, curriculum, efficiency, finance, inputs, knowledge, learning and quality, monitoring and evaluation, management, politics, systems, TVET, [and] teachers” (Boyd & Owens, 2015, p. 86).

As Heymenman (2003) explains, the World Bank is “the single largest source of development capital in the field of international education” (p. 315), and as a result, according to some, “it also is the only international body with enough capacity, power, and resources to co-ordinate global initiatives in the field of educational development” (Tarabini, 2009, p. 206). To that end, some of the more high-profile international events have been those through which the World Bank produced its Education Strategy 2020 document, titled “Learning for All” (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). Verger, Edwards and Altinyelken (2014) report that, in this process, “dozens of meetings were organized over the course of 14 months in 69 different countries” (p. 383). Interestingly, though the

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<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Edwards, Okitsu, da Costa, and Kitamura (2018) describe how the Fast Track Initiative diverted the attention and energy of those country governments who needed funding away from the efforts of UNESCO to engage with these governments around the elaboration of plans to achieve Education for All. In this way, and thanks to the technical and financial capacity of the World Bank, it is able, through its initiatives, to affect the coordination efforts of other organizations.



consultations were supposed to be a mechanism through which other actors provided feedback to the World Bank on their approach to education, participants also voiced the perspective that they thought the World Bank should have provided more prescriptive guidance in the process (Verger, Edwards, & Altinyelken, 2014). It seems that decades of receiving advice from the World Bank has not only conditioned some actors in the development field to expect this guidance, but has also made them feel uncomfortable when they perceive that this organization is not fulfilling its expected role.

### **3.11. Actor Recruitment and Socialization**

The World Bank selectively recruits professionals from developed and borrower countries who they see as key players in helping the agency advance its agenda (McCourt, 2018; Smith, 2008; Steiner-Khamsi, 2006). The same is true for academics. As Samoff (1993) notes, “the World Bank and other aid agencies have recruited, and will continue to employ and commission, particularly insightful, incisive, and accomplished scholars” (p. 220). Not surprisingly, those professionals often carry with them particular assumptions, frameworks, and expectations that align with those of the Bank. At the same time, the Bank can be a powerful socializing institution that is more resilient, more persistent, and more penetrating than its individual employees. Employees tend to share certain analytic orientations and core ideas about education and how it should be assessed.

It is important to note that socialization does not only happen when the World Bank hires national actors. It also happens through technical assistance, trainings, and publications dissemination—not to mention when the World Bank gives its staff leave time so that they can take up a position with a borrowing government to help implement the World Bank’s agenda (Edwards, 2018). Smith’s (2008) article, for example, describes how the provision of technical assistance to South Africa during the 1990s led to World Bank frameworks being “internalized” (p. 238). In part, this was a consequence of the strategy employed by the World Bank to seek out allies from civil society who would participate in meetings with the national government. Similarly, Hunter and Brown (2000) discuss some of the ways socialization can occur, such as through “social learning” (p. 117) and by the shaping of public ideas. In their words: “One variant of social learning envisions [international organizations] as ‘teachers’ who impart knowledge to developing countries through the research they conduct, the publications they circulate, the training sessions they offer, the

technical assistance they provide, and the speeches their leaders make” (Hunter & Brown, 2000, p. 117; see also, Molla, 2014).

But we should not give too much power to the World Bank, for as Hunter and Brown (2000) also note, the World Bank tends to attract engagement from those actors who already share this organization’s interests and outlook. Where socialization does occur, it is not only national level actors who are influenced. Teachers and others in the education sector who participate in trainings are likewise susceptible (Hamano, 2008; Yang, 2010). In the case of China, which has remained more independent compared to other countries, the World Bank has still been “significant in bringing in fresh, sophisticated education policy ideas and values, especially by inviting the participation of renown experts to be on international advisory panels and by appointing well-qualified international scholars to visit project universities” (Yang, 2010, p. 424).

#### **4. The World Bank and Policy Implementation**

At the implementation stage, there is much less information about the World Bank’s contributions. Although many articles address the influence of the financial institution on education policy-making in different countries, most of them do not state the specific actions carried out by the Bank. As such, the role of the World Bank at this stage remains understudied and is unclear in most of the cases. In fact, De Moura Castro (2002) states that there is a high index of projects, which do not reach the execution phase since the Bank does not have the mechanisms to oblige the countries to implement policies. In what follows, we discuss the factors that have both helped and hindered World Bank influence in policy enactment, which, drawing on Bartlett and Vavrus (2013), we understand as the process “during which social actors interpret and selectively implement policies, thereby adapting ideas and discourses developed in a different place and potentially at a different historical moment in accordance with their own interests as well as symbolic, material, and institutional constraints.” (p. 132). And to further clarify, the term policy implementation encompasses the implementation of World Bank projects, since these projects, having been agreed to by borrowers, are in fact policies of the government.

## 4.1. Implementation Influence via Design and Conditionality

Based on the cases that address the implementation phase, there seem to be two different ways in the way the Bank contributes. The first way is related to the previous section, on the influence of the World Bank in policy-making, and consists of designing specific programs or policies, which are implemented solely by the State, without the explicit participation of the World Bank in the execution phase. An example can be found in the study by Espinoza (2017), which refers to the MECESUP program (*Programa de Mejoramiento de la Calidad y Equidad de la Educación*) in Chile, which is implemented by the Ministry of Education without the participation of the World Bank, despite being highly influenced by the financial institution. Through this program, the World Bank, together with the Chilean Ministry of Education, intends to introduce market logics to the higher education sector, such as competition between universities, economic incentives connected to universities' productivity, a market-related curriculum, or allowing profit in state universities (Espinoza, 2017). The point here is that the World Bank affects implementation by influencing the design of the underlying program that is to be put into practice.

The second way the World Bank influences local policies is through the conditions and program recommendations that come with loan allocations. States respond to these more or less required forms of guidance to decide which policies they want to pursue. Often, States tend to focus on policies which are in line with the agenda and priorities of the World Bank in order to get the loans, as a number of authors have documented (Bernasconi, 2007; Bonal, 2002; Edwards, Victoria Libreros, & Martin, 2015; Ginsburg, Megahed, Elmeski, & Tanaka, 2010; Madden, 2014). In this vein, exploring the Salvadoran case, Edwards (2015) states:

[The] World Bank designed a new organizational structure for the MINED [Ministry of Education] and attached conditionalities to the disbursement of loan tranches that would strengthen the foundation of the program (Edwards, 2013a). These conditionalities were that the MINED increase its funding to education in the coming years (enabling it to fund EDUCO's expansion) and that it create unambiguous legal footing (through presidential decree) for parents to have the ability to hire and fire teachers. In these ways, ... the World Bank helped to ensure that this model was scaled up across the country and became deeply entrenched in the Salvadoran

education system—as opposed to remaining a fringe and short-term program without much impact. (p. 422)

Similar to the Salvadoran case, Mukhopadhyay and Sriprakash (2011) affirm that there are programs, which are being executed in India by the government “because of spending mandates by external agencies such as the World Bank” (p. 320). In this case, the Indian State is the main implementer of these programs, which are clearly influenced—and partly financed—by the World Bank. Thus, one of the roles of this financial institution at the execution phase is precisely not playing explicitly the role of executor and letting the States implement the policies, albeit in ways that can be required by the World Bank.

## **4.2. Implementation via Technical Assistance**

However, in most of the studies in which the implementation process is addressed and clearly stated, the trend seems to be different. This second trend, distinct from the imposition of conditionalities described above, involves the Bank in a more active way also at the execution phase. Nevertheless, the participation of the World Bank is not homogeneous in all contexts.<sup>12</sup> Different studies suggest diverse forms of participation, which include technical assistance and evaluation of policy implementation.

Regarding the first form, one of the most illustrative examples can be found in the study by Smith (2008) in South Africa, which explores the complexity and the variety of strategies used by the World Bank to provide the South African State with technical assistance. The number of programs that, from a historical perspective, have been financed by the Bank and implemented through the mentorship of World Bank ‘experts’ in the country is considerable. The variety of forms of participation related to technical assistance can be summarized in four categories:

(1) continuing the access to experience of local government reform; (2) the provision of municipal financial management specialists for municipalities to provide long-

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<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the interests of World Bank education staff are not homogenous. Though World Bank experts have tended for decades to be trained in—and to draw on the methods of—the economics of education (Heyneman, 2003; Jones, 2007), it is also the case that staff can, with some degree of latitude, use their positions to highlight issues and methods that align with their personal preferences (Mundy, 2002).

term advisory support to municipal reforms; (3) the provision of various international experts to assist in policy reform processes and the implementation of monitoring and evaluation systems; and (4) leveraging additional support from the donor community. (Smith, 2008, p. 248)

Elsewhere, Terzian (2016) analyzes the case of the Educational Quality and Relevance Project (EQRP) in Armenia. After a first program financed by the World Bank, named Education Financing and Management Reform Program (1998–2002),

in 2004, the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) applied for a second World Bank loan to begin the second stage of reform (...). This second group of loans assisted the MOES with its implementation of national curriculum, assessment procedures, and training teachers in updated instructional practices. (Terzian, 2016, p.281)

A special unit, called the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) was established in order to oversee the implementation of the EQRP. According to a high-level official in World Bank education programs:

The Project Implementation Unit works under the regulations of the Ministry and World Bank, but is a World Bank-funded department that focuses on implementing World Bank programs such as the Educational and Quality Relevance Project. The main mission is to oversee the project's implementation. The Ministry of Education and Science is in charge of defining strategies ... . The PIU drafts ideas and then receives government approval. The MOES and the PIU work together closely. (Terzian, 2016, p. 282)

This strong collaboration between the World Bank and the Armenian State, through the creation of a specific implementation unit, is a clear example of the contribution of the Bank in the process of policy enactment. Although this example zeroes in on the experience of Armenia, it should be noted that it is common for the World Bank to work with government counterparts through a PIU, in order to ensure as much influence and support as possible in the process of project implementation. This strategy goes hand-in-hand with the frequent requirement that the World Bank approve of the project staff hired by the government, mentioned previously in section 3.4. Other studies have discussed collaboration through

PIUs, including in El Salvador (see Edwards, Victoria, & Martin, 2015), Afghanistan (see Evans & Barakat, 2012) and Mozambique (see Takala, 1998), among others. In these cases, it is to be expected that the technical assistance of the World Bank is particularly influential and is treated deferentially, for the reasons discussed previously in section 3.4.

### **4.3. Evaluation of Policy Implementation**

The World Bank attempts to affect implementation through the evaluations that it conducts of project-related activities (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004). In this regard, the case of Egypt, studied by Ginsburg, Megahed, Elmeski, and Tanaka (2010) stands out. Here, the Bank conducted several evaluations during the process of implementation of those policies funded by the institution. These evaluations were intended to give feedback to the government, to influence continued implementation. The fact that compliance with the evaluation recommendations was tied to continued loan funding ensured governmental cooperation. Interestingly, these evaluations do not only assess the implementation of the project but also the governmental officials who are charged with doing the implementing. Consider a study from India, where a World Bank evaluation of the District Primary Education Project found that “‘very competent officials’ were placed in charge of the program” and that the level of state commitment in India had ‘far exceed[ed] the levels usually seen in other low-income countries’ (Abadzi, 2002, p. 5)”(Mangla, 2018, p. 389). Given that World Bank funding can require approval by this organization for key project staff, the findings of such evaluations can be particularly influential.

### **4.4. Counterparts Beyond the Control of the World Bank**

Seldom does available research indicate that the policy implementation process or its outcomes correspond with the predictions of the World Bank. On this point, De Moura Castro (2002) states the following:

The real problem is at the implementation stage. Past experience has taught the [international development] banks very humbling lessons. First, everything can go wrong-and things do go wrong. Banks do not advertise much their failings at the implementation stage. Some projects die at the preparation level, due to the inability of the country teams to respond to the requests for information or due to basic disagreements about what the project should look like. A few are approved but never

disburse, due to legal snags or bureaucratic inertia. Most loans actually disburse but more slowly than predicted. In fact, very few loans come to completion within the originally scheduled program. A significant proportion gets stuck somewhere along the line, due to many different reasons, the major one being delays in counterpart funding. While banks neither disseminate nor collect reliable statistics on which projects fall victim of each of the above problems, the vast majority of the projects eventually disburse all the funds and come to an end. The failure rate, measured as not disbursing all the money in the loan is relatively low.... (p. 394)

These challenges inevitably arise because the World Bank, despite all the pathways of influence available to it, must cooperate with a range of government counterparts whom it cannot control. These counterparts often face a diversity of pressures and demands on their time—or else simply have different priorities—which can lead to projects being delayed or derailed.

One should consider that, at the implementation phase, projects might meet active resistance that can come from the agents working in the system or even from the system structure itself. In South Africa, for example, there was resistance from the government to take out loans towards the later part of the second phase of the World Bank's relation with South Africa (1997-1999), which generated frustration among Bank officials (Smith, 2008). In the same vein, Levačić (2014) states the reluctance of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education to implement World Bank policies. This might happen because Ministers and high-ranking politicians have a preference—rooted in their desire to be re-elected—for projects which bring visible improvements in the short run rather than for the implementation of strategies that require longer time horizons to show effects. Similarly, in Moldova,

Despite World Bank pressure to increase efficiency [in the education system], the current government (as of 2013) was concerned about the impact that school closures [recommended by the World Bank] would have on its popularity with voters and is considering how to remedy the situation by revising the formula [that determines both education transfers from central government to elected local governments and, with minor variations, school budgets]. Thus, in Moldova, one can see the initial top-down model of policy implementation may well be modified due to intermediation with local-level interests. (Levačić, 2014, p. 350)

Similar findings have been shown in the context of Brazil. Here, project implementation was complicated due to the highly bureaucratic system of government and the fact that “administrative personnel [were] susceptible to clientelist appeals and other lobbying efforts” (Hunter & Brown, 2000, p. 132).

In addition to technocratic capacity, discussed earlier in section 3.4, the degree of country commitment has also been highlighted as one of the main factors for explaining success of project completion since at least the 1980s (McCourt, 2018). McCourt (2018) writes: “A ... World Bank study found that ‘ownership’<sup>13</sup> explained overall programme outcomes in no fewer than 73% of 81 World Bank operations completed in the 1980s, with exogenous shocks explaining many of the remainder (Johnson & Wasty, 1993)” (McCourt, 2018, p. 651). For these reasons, the World Bank has emphasized the importance of local decision-making and the need to take into account a country’s political and institutional characteristics when addressing reform needs. As Evans and Barakat (2012) underscore, “evidence suggests that external sources of policy change are rarely successful unless locally articulated as the path to development. Hence the key to rational and legitimate policy transfer is ownership by local communities” (p. 543). Nevertheless, what stands out is the contradiction between this recognition and the practices documented previously in relation to the process of preparing and disbursing loans, which, as noted, can highly circumscribe the options available to borrowers.

#### **4.5. Contextual Blindness**

As previously noted, World Bank studies and programs do not always consider contextual dynamics, which can hamper implementation. As Samoff (1999) notes:

In practice, policy directions and reforms recommended in sector studies, albeit ostensibly potentially effective, are often implemented partially, inconsistently, or not at all. One reason is that externally-initiated sector studies, notwithstanding what may seem to be technically sound analyses, generally pay insufficient attention to

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<sup>13</sup> Ownership refers to the situation where developing countries set their own development priorities. When donors align with these objectives, the rate of success is thought to be greater.



national contexts and fail to assess the institutional, political, and socioeconomic feasibility of their policy recommendations. (p. 263)

It is not unusual for World Bank reports to rely on generalizations or assumptions that do not take into consideration the variation in local context across countries (Smith, 2008; Thomas & Carnoy, 1992). An absence of key local stakeholders in the design of the policy might also have a negative influence on policy implementation, as in the case of a higher education policy in Ethiopia (Molla, 2014).

An illustrative example of this can be seen in the case of the introduction of the African Virtual University Project in the Kenyan context, starting in 1997 (Nafukho & Muyia, 2013). Firstly, the policy did not consider the lack of training by the Kenyan university community in the use of information and communication technology (ICT), which was of high relevance to the project. Secondly, although the project provided all the necessary equipment for implementation, “the telecommunication infrastructure in Kenya was very limited. Besides lack of the necessary ICT infrastructure, the cost of telephone, software and Internet was initially very high” (p. 654). Of course, these conditions gave rise to different challenges, which impeded the progress of the project.

Another example that shows the World Bank’s contextual blindness can be found in the implementation, in 2010, of a policy targeting the higher education sub-sector in Cambodia: the Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project (hereafter HEQCIP) (Rappleye & Un, 2018). One of its 4 components (number 2)

was unique, both in the sense of having few precedents in other education sub-sectors and in other aid-dependent contexts globally. Component 2 would provide research grants up to USD 200,000 directly to Cambodian universities (called Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in World Bank nomenclature) to improve the quality of research, teaching, and learning. These funds – called Development and Innovation Grants (hereafter DIGs) – were to be allocated on a competitive basis and sought to ‘enhance the capacity of HEIs to seek innovative solutions to address national/local development issues’. (Rappleye & Un, 2018, pp. 250-251)

However, together with stringent and complex procurement regulations and personnel problems, the World Bank-designed policy faced a major contextual obstacle: the lack of PhDs in the country.

Put simply, there were very few PhDs in Cambodia, whether in the universities or in the Ministry itself. At the Ministry's DHE [Department of Higher Education], there was only one PhD holder. He served as the head of the Department of Scientific Research, but was quickly deemed by the Bank to be operationally incompetent (because his research was deemed to be too theoretical) and was thus not invited to take any part in HEQCIP implementation. (Rappleye & Un, 2018, p. 262)

The point here is that there were too few researchers in the country with sufficient experience to manage “multi-year research projects with large amounts of funds” (p. 261). In response, both the Ministry and the Bank sponsored trainings on research for local researchers inviting foreign consultants, but they were of little use, “not simply because they were out of touch with local conditions and delivered in English, but because it is fundamentally impossible to teach ‘how to research’ in two or three short weekend sessions” (p. 262). Therefore, most of the received proposals were of low quality and/or for implementation projects rather than research proposals.

According to Rappleye and Un (2018), these problems happened due to the “incongruence between the Bank's policy vision, its assumptions about ‘context’, and the actual Cambodian context” (p. 260), since the Bank's idea of ‘context’ means “an overview of macroeconomic indicators, gender and equity disparities, and then ... enrolment rates and projections” (p. 264). And as these authors, both former World Bank consultants underscore, the World Bank uses “common contextual categories” in its understanding of all countries:

The common contextual category of ‘university’, when applied to Cambodia, implicitly replaces realities on the ground with the Bank ideal of an institution, filled with PhD holders, and dedicating itself to teaching, research, and national development. It is a clear illustration of an observer ‘who naively substitute[s] his own ideal types of those in the minds of this subject’ (Schütz [1932] 1967, 205). What is most striking is not that the Bank distorts interpretation of key contextual

variables, but instead, that it ignores them. Adopting a common contextual categories approach effectively means the Bank operates in a closed communicative system with no possibility that context (as opposed to ‘context’, i.e. the paper-thin image of context generated out of common contextual categories and published in Bank documents) can influence its ‘thinking’, even as it never discovers its own errors. (Rappleye & Un, 2018, pp. 264-265)

Studies such as the one by Tadevosyan (2008), on community-based management of education in the Armenian context, show the complications that can arise when the characteristics of the local context are not addressed in project planning. As the World Bank admitted, the outcomes of community participation in reform efforts were not the ones expected because of “the lack of a comprehensive and consistent decentralization policy; blurring and confusion of roles and responsibilities among local, municipal, regional and national level government; limited local government capacity and resources; and lack of viable and legitimate community organizations and institutions” (World Bank 2000, p. 7, in Tadevosyan, 2008, p. 87). Interestingly, this seems to differ from the case of community-based management in El Salvador (Edwards, Victoria Libreros, & Martin, 2015), which was considered as successful in implementation—at least in terms of the extent of implementation, if not its quality—because it thoroughly addressed the technical, the institutional, and the political dimensions of reform, considering the specificities of the Salvadoran context.

Going back to the Armenian case explored by Tadevosyan (2008), another aspect found in the study which complicated the policy implementation was the misalignment of the project, which focused on school-based management, with local culture, where traditional hierarchical relations are prevalent. Tadevosyan (2008) explains:

in school communities, ... parents were willing to articulate ideas, but felt that they had neither the right—nor the responsibility—to propose practical solutions. Similarly, teachers took responsibility within their own classrooms, but agreed with parents that school directors were the key decision-makers (World Bank 2000, 8). The combination of these complications suggests that Armenia's parents and communities were simply not prepared to take on new responsibilities. They were

neither fully aware of their new roles nor equipped with the necessary skills to become involved in school life in a meaningful way. (p. 88)

Similarly, In India, there was a strong reluctance from the social elites to expand primary school, because there was the thought that children from poor backgrounds needed to support their families by working (Mangla, 2018). This belief, framed within the culture of the caste system, is noted as a possible factor for the Indian state's failure to enact universal primary education in the late 1980s, a policy which was being supported by the World Bank. Separately, in the Ethiopian and Namibian contexts, research has shown that a difference in ideology between the World Bank and the country governments—with the latter being influenced by socialist thought—caused disagreements on the content of education reform (Takala, 1998). While these examples make explicit the obvious point that it is necessary to be sensitive to contextual factors when designing and implementing projects, it is also the case that World Bank staff, at the stage of loan preparation, have little incentive to engage meaningfully with local context, since their primary concern is securing loan agreements, and not necessarily the challenges that will arise over the multi-year life of the project as a result of poor preparation.

## **5. The World Bank's Support for Private Education**

Since the 1980s, the Bank has had, together with the International Monetary Fund, “a strong interest in strengthening the private sector of developing nations,” which was articulated by pushing governments “to reduce expenditures and increase private sector involvement in the provision and financing of traditionally public sector activities,” particularly in the context of structural adjustment policies (Mundy & Menashy, 2012, p. 12). Nevertheless, specifically regarding privatization ‘in’ and ‘of’ education (Ball & Youdell, 2008), the World Bank's policies, discourse, and support have experienced changes over time.

### **5.1. Promotion of Fees in Public Education**

Despite having commissioned two investigations in 1979 that noted some negative impacts of fees on education equity (Meerman, 1979; Selowsky, 1979), the World Bank's position in regards to this issue was clear: within the framework of structural adjustment policies in the 1980s, fees in public education were seen as desirable and acceptable under certain

conditions (Smith & Baker, 2017). During this time, the Bank's focus on family contributions to education funding responded to a "cost recovery" or "cost sharing" strategy, which intended to "improve economic efficiency as well as raise revenue" (World Bank, 1988, p. 131) as part of a broader strategy focused on the "inclusion of market mechanisms in schooling at all levels" (Mundy & Menashy, 2012, p. 12). Although World Bank documents related to fee charging in the 1980s and 1990s mostly focused on higher education, the World Bank also endorsed K-12 school fees in public education at that time.

After decades of strong opposition to school fees by several international actors such as governments, donors, and civil society, the Bank shifted its official approach to private participation in education with the Wolfensohn presidency (1995-2005), explicitly withdrawing its support for school fees (in certain contexts). In fact, "[i]n 2002, the World Bank enthusiastically supported Tanzania's end to primary school fees nationwide" (Smith & Baker, 2017, p. 11) and, in 2004, the document *School Fees: A Roadblock to Education for All* stated that "[t]he World Bank does not support user fees for primary education. Such fees are an important factor keeping the poorest children out of school in many countries, reducing momentum towards [Education for All]" (p. 2). In this vein,

[i]n 2005, the World Bank and UNICEF launched the School Fee Abolition Initiative (SFAI), an initiative designed to accelerate progress towards meeting the MDGs and EFA goals by scaling up access to basic education through support to policies that removed cost barriers to education. The specific objectives of SFAI included: (1) developing a knowledge base on school fee abolition in order to inform sound and sustainable policies, strategies, and interventions; (2) providing technical and financial assistance in national planning processes to guide and support countries in developing and implementing school fee abolition policies; and (3) enhancing the global policy dialogue on the financial barriers to education access. (Smith & Baker, 2017, pp. 10-11)

However, "[o]ne of the most striking features" is that, after "nearly two decades of recommendations from the [World Bank] and the International Monetary Fund to implement 'cost-sharing' and 'cost-recovery' in education .... the SFAI makes no mention of the history of school fee policies by ... the WB and UNICEF, or by the governments that are now eliminating fees" (Vavrus and Kwauk, 2013, p. 356). Furthermore, as some scholars

and organizations note, the current World Bank policy regarding fees is worded ambiguously and does not clearly oppose them, since, rather than actively rejecting them, the language states that the World Bank simply “does not support user fees for primary education” (World Bank, 2004, p. 28, as cited in Vavrus & Kwauk, 2013, p. 357). Moreover:

While the World Bank strongly believes that governments should not charge user fees for education, the Bank recognizes that local communities sometimes do levy such charges that are often paid in-kind through labor services. [...] Given that such local charges can help sustain education services, the Bank believes they must be carefully designed to ensure that poor parents keep their children in school. (World Bank, 2006, p. 128)

As Klees (2008) criticizes, it is “amazing how quickly, in just two paragraphs, ‘opposes’ can slide to ‘carefully design’” (p. 315). In fact, as we will develop in the next section, the World Bank, through its private sector arm, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), has since the 2000s turned to investing in schools at the primary and secondary levels that charge fees.<sup>14</sup> To that end, between 2011 and 2015, the IFC approved investments of more than 162 million US dollars for the expansion of for-profit, fee-charging private primary and secondary schools (Smith & Baker, 2017).

## **5.2. Promotion of Private School Provision**

The legitimization by the World Bank of private education providers as valid and necessary actors to expand education supply in certain contexts to meet international goals is nothing new. Mundy and Menashy (2012) review key documents that speak to the issue of education privatization and note that the World Bank’s *Sourcebook for Poverty Reduction Strategies* (2002) advised governments that “[m]aking maximum use of the private sector is ... important when trying to cost-effectively expand education coverage” and that “[i]nvolving NGO or for-profit private providers in basic education can lead to better quality of education, by mobilizing available management capacity, providing more choice for families, and possibly increasing competition among providers” (p. 256, as cited in Mundy

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<sup>14</sup> For more on the IFC, see Alexander (2001), Mundy and Menashy (2012, 2014b), and Smith and Baker (2017).

& Menashy, 2012, p. 13). By the time of the 2005 Education Sector Strategy Update, the Bank's position on private participation in education was as follows: "Public provision of good-quality primary education at no cost to parents or children is the cornerstone for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, but there is room and need—in low- and middle-income countries alike—to promote increased private participation in education" (pp. 3-4, as cited in Mundy & Menashy, 2012, p. 13).

Following the same line of argument, the *2020 Education Sector Strategy* (World Bank, 2011) includes, under the concept of "education system," "the full range of learning opportunities available in a country, whether they are provided or financed by the public or private sector (including religious, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations)" (p. 5). In keeping with prior statements, the 2018 World Development Report (World Bank, 2018) likewise presents an ambiguous (or perhaps self-contradictory) approach to private education provision. For example, on the one hand, it states that "there is no consistent evidence that private schools deliver better learning outcomes than public schools, or the opposite" (p. 176), that "[s]ome private suppliers of education services—whether textbooks, construction, or schooling—may, in the pursuit of profit, advocate policy choices not in the interest of students" (p. 13), and that the "risks" of private schooling include "leaving only the more disadvantaged students in the public system" and undermining "the political constituency for effective public schooling in the longer term" (p. 177). However, on the other hand, it also claims that "public-private partnerships are likely a useful strategy if countries seek to expand enrollments dramatically in a short time", and expounds some of the "potential benefits" of private schools, such as "proximity", "cost", "innovation", "lower rates of teacher absence", more "accountability" and competition as a means to "improve the performance of nearby public schools" (p. 177). According to this report, "[t]he bottom line is that countries need to ensure that private schooling does not undermine learning for all" (p. 177).

Separately, the Bank's *Systems Approach for Better Education Results* (SABER) initiative—which aims to produce comparative knowledge and data on education policies—includes "Engaging the Private Sector" as one of the 13 topical areas or domains that are considered to be the most important policy areas for promoting universal learning (Marcus

et al., 2018). According to a World Bank publication, and drawing on several framework papers (Baum, Lewis, Lusk-Stover, & Patrinos, 2014; Lewis & Patrinos, 2011),

[t]he goal of SABER-EPS [Engaging the Private Sector] is not to advance the agenda of the private sector, and the analytical work does not suggest that countries should transition from public to private service delivery. However, SABER-EPS is premised on the evidence that, in many countries, private educators provide a significant contribution to education and that improved interaction between government and private schools is essential for increasing equity and quality (Baum et al., p. 8).

SABER-EPS defines itself as “a guide for governments that are committed to improving service delivery for all children and youth and have determined that non-state education providers have a role to play in achieving these efforts” (Baum et al., 2014, p. 5), and—once more—highlights the “vibrant mix of for-profit, non-profit and faith-based organizations” (p. 8) that provide private education, concluding that “the private sector when engaged properly provides governments with an effective means to increase education quality and equity” (Lewis & Patrinos, 2011, p. 28).

The language above thus creates space for the Bank’s support for low-fee private schools (LFPS) as a desirable option for poor students, thus contravening the “non-support” for school fees described previously. Interestingly, the Bank is not the only pro-LFPS international organization: cooperation agencies such as CIDA or USAID are also in favor (some of them even more explicitly) of LFPS (see IDP, 2013).

In order to understand better the support of the Bank for LFPS, we will direct attention to the IFC and the International Development Association (IDA), the second of which is the agency of the World Bank that offers concessional lending to the poorest countries. Despite the fact that IFC investment in education, beginning in 2001, raised both “questions [at the IBRD/IDA facility of the Bank] about the role of the private sector in education and concerns that the IFC was intruding on Bank territory” (Mundy & Menashy, 2014b, p. 17), IFC support for private education providers, including K-12 LFPSs, has been reaffirmed in several official policy documents (see IFC, 2010; IFC, 2014a), in addition to promoting LFPSs through the organization of events such as the IFC Private Education Conference



(Verger, Fontdevila, & Zancajo, 2018). As described by one set of authors, “[t]he IFC has ... started to include LFPS sector representatives in their international summits as a way to engage them in its international networks of investors and international consultancies” (Verger, Zancajo, & Fontdevila, 2018, p. 25). In terms of economic resources, the institution “has been actively financing the expansion of for-profit private schools—investing up to \$162.28 million in private education providers between 2011 and 2015” (Verger, Zancajo, & Fontdevila, 2018, p. 25) and reaching the amount of more than \$850 million since 2001; in fact, the IFC is considered nowadays as the largest multilateral investor in private education in the developing world (IFC, 2014b).

Although it is true that most of IFC investments focus on tertiary education and vocational training rather than on K-12 private education, the investment portfolio in the latter is increasing (IDP, 2013; Smith & Baker, 2017; Mundy & Menashy, 2014b). In the last decade,

[t]he clearest example of IFC’s support to the LFPS sector is the \$10 million equity investment in the LFPS chain Bridge International Academies, approved in mid-2013 with the explicit aim of stimulating its expansion in Kenya and other countries (IFC, 2013). The IFC has also started to include LFPS sector representatives in their international summits as a way to engage them in its international networks of investors and international consultancies (Verger, Zancajo, & Fontdevila, 2018, p. 25).

Nevertheless, despite this example and the notable growth in K-12 education investment in recent years, according to IDP (2013), “IFC investments made towards basic education overwhelmingly target private schools that do not fit the [LFPS] model”, since it continues to view “private education as consisting solely of elite private schools and universities” (p. 17). As Mundy & Menashy (2014b) state,

when examining the tuition fees charged at IFC supported institutions, the IFC’s claim to be reaching the bottom billion through its K-12 education investments is untenable. As we have seen the majority of investments in K-12 schools have been targeted to elite institutions. (...) Thus the IFC’s claim of reaching the bottom billion through its investments in K-12 education must rest primarily on the notion that by

diverting children from middle and high income families to private schools, it is helping to free up public resources to target schooling for the poor. (p. 21)

Furthermore, “[g]eographically, the IFC’s investments in education businesses are increasingly concentrated on middle income and higher income countries”, with only 4.8% of IFC total education investments being made in low-income countries between 2006 and 2010 (Mundy & Menashy, 2014b, p. 19). Although it is true that, if we look exclusively at K-12 education, “a much larger number of IFC investments at the K-12 education level are indeed in low-income countries (five of the seven investments since 2006),” it is also true that, since 2006, approximately 69% of the total IFC dollars for K-12 education have been invested in businesses in upper middle-income countries” (p. 21). However, the reality of the IFC’s geographic portfolio has not received much scholarly attention: “there has been virtually no research conducted on the recent involvement of the IFC in education since the 2000 establishment of the IFC’s Health and Education Unit” (Mundy & Menashy, 2012, p. 7). This lack of research is likely related to the fact that the IFC’s “activities are the least transparent of the three Bank branches” (Mundy & Menashy, 2012, p. 11).

In parallel, the IDA, “the only member of the World Bank Group which provides concessional funding to [LFPS]” (IDP, 2013, p. 17), has financed several LFPS programs around the globe, such as the *Reaching Out of School Children Project* (Bangladesh), the *Baluchistan Education Support Project* (Pakistan), and the *Education for All Project – Phase II* (Haiti), among others. However, in relative economic terms, IDA’s disbursements between 2007 and 2011 towards LFPS seem to be relatively modest, since they only represented approximately 3.6% of its funding destined to education—which, at the same time, only represented 3.9% of total IDA’s aid spending (IDP, 2013).

In this vein, Mundy and Menashy (2012) analyzed all the projects during 2007-2011 managed by the Education Sector of the World Bank (specifically, IBRD and IDA) that focus on K-12 education in order to explore the Bank’s investment in private education. As they write, “In total there were 55 K-12 education projects valued at a total of \$6,195 million during this period, representing more than 49% of all IBRD and IDA lending to education at all levels (where total commitments were \$12,636 million across 111 projects for these three years)” (Mundy & Menashy, 2012, p. 21). The analysis concluded that “very few World Bank education projects support private sector provision of K-12 education” (p. 24):

only 8 of the 45 Project Appraisal Documents analyzed—18% of the total—contained a project component that provided financial support for private providers, 5 of which via subsidies, 4 via school grants, and none via vouchers. In terms of the types of providers, we see that 3 of these 8 projects included non-profit providers, 4 religious providers, and 5 of them—11% of the total—business or for-profit providers. Geographically speaking,

[t]hose projects supporting private sector participation are disproportionately located in the South Asia region (five of the eight projects—two projects in Bangladesh, two projects in Pakistan, and one in Nepal). Only one project in each of the regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and the Pacific, and Africa, were deemed to significantly engage private providers. (p. 26)

Furthermore, Mundy and Menashy (2012) found that most of the projects in which the World Bank actively supported private providers were in contexts “where a very large and engrained private sector has long existed, often with government aid,” such as Bangladesh (with 98% of secondary schools privately operated), Indonesia (with 56% at junior secondary), or Haiti (with 80% at all levels) (p. 24). However, the historically dominant role of private education providers was not always looked upon favorably by the Bank. Recognizing a discrepancy between the Bank’s criticism of such prevalence of private sector supply, on one hand, and the fact that loans were still awarded to support this sector, on the other hand, Mundy and Menashy (2012) offer the following reflection:

One could speculate from this [discrepancy] two possible determinants of Bank support to private engagement. First are recipient government preferences (...). Alternatively, this difference in approach may reflect the different policy beliefs of different Bank managers, which was also described to us in interviews. (p. 25)

Finally, in order to provide some examples of World Bank projects that support private providers—apart from the aforementioned—we will highlight three among the largest Bank loans for the period<sup>15</sup>. First is the “BOS Knowledge Improvement for Transparency and Accountability Project” (2009), in Indonesia, which was awarded \$1,100 million, and which

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<sup>15</sup> One cannot know the exact amount of the budget designated to private education. See Mundy & Menashy (2012).

disbursed “block grants to all schools throughout Indonesia based on a per-student formula, reaching all schools whether public, private or religious” (Mundy & Menashy, 2012, p. 23). The second example includes the Sindh Education Sector Project (2009) and the Punjab Education Sector Project (2009), both in Pakistan, which totaled \$700 million and which supported “the introduction, rollout and impact evaluation of an innovative pilot public-private partnership program” (p. 23), to be administered by the Sindh and the Punjab Education Foundations, “to leverage the provision of schooling by private entrepreneurs in targeted underserved rural communities” (p. 23). These programs offered “a monthly per-student subsidy to low-cost private schools through the Foundation-Assisted Schools program” (IDP, 2013, p. 18). These examples clearly constitute support by the World Bank for private education generally and, more specifically, for privatization that is aimed at the poor, though as we will note in section 6.3 recent policy changes within the World Bank have sought to curtail such support<sup>16</sup>.

## **6. Discussion**

This section returns to the issues addressed by the systematic literature review to discuss the implications of—and the connections among—each.

### **6.1. Discussion of Influence in Policy Formation: Direct and Indirect Pathways<sup>17</sup>**

With so many potential pathways of influence, it is easy to see why observers have made claims like the one shared by Tarabini (2009) at the outset of this paper. In practice, it can be difficult to distinguish among the different pathways discussed above. This is because of the way that World Bank involvement can pervade and permeate the entire process of setting and implementing projects and reforms. To this end, Rappleye’s (2011) perspective, based on his work in Nepal, is that “the interweaving of the warp of cross-cutting macropolicies with the woof of donor-influenced education sector plans ... produces the fabric of

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<sup>16</sup> For a critical analysis of the World Bank’s engagement with the private education sector, see also Bous (2019).

<sup>17</sup> The distinction here between direct and indirect pathways is adapted from Samoff (1993).

educational policy formation in highly aid-dependent contexts” (p. 37). This fabric can then become a feature of the context that no longer attracts attention. Samoff (2009), for his part, has written about how the overarching influence of the World Bank stems from the fact that this organization is, in many (but not all) cases, able to drive the aid relationship, which is made up of heavy administrative processes that can drain or redirect ministerial capacity to meet the World Bank’s processual requirements. Many of the direct pathways of influence relate to the nature of this relationship. Here, one would include those processes and actions that are associated with loans, conditionalities, pilot projects, and technical assistance.

But there are also more indirect pathways of influence—indirect in the sense that they may not be the result of direct interaction between the World Bank and borrowing governments, or else are unrelated to the core business of the World Bank, i.e., issuing loans, over which it has direct control. In the case of indirect pathways, one could include research, general publications, certifying role, and coordination of foreign aid. To be sure, these pathways extend the “fabric” described just above by Rappleye (2011). In other words, these pathways hold the possibility of further engulfing the processes through which borrowers arrive at their development priorities, policy strategies, and reform projects. Indeed, through the aforementioned pathways, the World Bank produces and circulates research studies, disseminates lessons derived from them in high-profile reports, certifies those programs and actions that align with its interests, and then coordinates the activities of other international organizations working in a given country. In concert, these pathways, together with the direct pathways previously described, lead to what Samoff (2009) describes as the structuration of national education policy processes. Drawing on his work in Africa, he elaborates:

The external agencies, and the World Bank in particular, have direct participants in national policy-making. Although it is careful to defer formally to the national government, in practice, the World Bank regularly makes clear what it regards as good and bad education policy, equally regularly makes clear that the adoption of what it regards as policies will limit the availability of funds.<sup>18</sup> It is, of course, not

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<sup>18</sup> For more recent examples of how this process plays out, see McCourt (2018), who discusses the case of Sri Lanka and Cote d’Ivoire.

unreasonable for the World Bank to make decisions about what it will or will not support and to communicate its preferences to African governments. What has changed, however, is that aid dependence has effectively made the World Bank an insider in those discussions. In part, that participation in policy debates is formal and direct. Also in part, the World Bank sows the seeds through its contacts with and support for key individuals or by funding the preparation of policy briefs. As those seeds germinate, they take on national colors. (p. 146)

Here, Dale (1999, drawing on Lukes, 1974) would highlight that the World Bank exercises control not only through direct decision-making, as in the case of loans and what it is willing to finance, but also through agenda-setting and their ability to set the rules of the game. The case of the latter can refer to the way that the whole process of preparing for loans, bringing them to closure, and then preparing for the next round of funding operates according to stipulations that are set by the World Bank and which can have effects that extend beyond the preparation of the loans themselves in that they can also shape government policy or development strategy more broadly.

Based on a study of policy formation in El Salvador, Edwards (2013) proposed the terms percolation, reverberation, and structural legitimation to name the phenomena at the heart of Samoff's (2009) observations. First, percolation refers to the way that information introduced early in the policymaking process by international organizations tends to persist and to be a key point of reference "for defining educational problems, selecting among possible outcomes, and grounding the overall agenda" (p. 47). This is then complemented by reverberation, where "national level actors engage with the international level for assurance and/or further guidance with regard to the reforms that they are in the process of adopting or adapting" (p. 47). Third, the phenomenon of structural legitimation refers to the way that international actors facilitate legitimating events which "simultaneously tend to validate and ingrain both the participation and perspectives of international actors, particularly due to the reliance of those events on the research and/or knowledge products of international actors" (p. 48). Thus, the Bank can, at times, influence who participates and with what impact in national education policy processes by facilitating and structuring the events and administrative tasks that make up such processes. However, as noted in Edwards (2013) and at various points in this paper, the autonomy of borrowing governments should

not be assumed away or uncritically discarded. Country counterparts certainly have the ability to change or resist the “rules of the game,” though this ability is variable and depends on the political, economic, and technical position and capacities of the government in question. But even where economic resources are sufficient to reduce financial dependence, it can be very difficult to eliminate reliance on technical assistance. As Edwards and Storen (2017) note in the case of Indonesia, World Bank technical assistance remained highly integral to the work of the government even after the government decided that it wanted to discontinue World Bank lending (relying instead on its own financial resources) and to take back control of its development activities.

Finally, there are two pathways that are both direct and indirect: international events and national actor recruitment and socialization. These two pathways work at the intersection of direct and indirect pathways in that the World Bank has control over them but they are not directly related to the core business of the World Bank. The first of these pathways demonstrates how the World Bank, on one hand, uses its resources to spread its ideas and to enhance the likelihood of their positive reception by reformers around the world. On the other hand, the second of these (recruitment and socialization) speaks to how the World Bank strategically recruits (and then further socializes) actors from around the world who align with its worldview and policy preferences. In this way, the World Bank works both sides of the equation: it spreads its ideas in the global education policy space while simultaneously bringing actors from that space into its organizational structures, in order to ensure its longevity and relevance. These practices extend from and reinforce the “global reach” of the World Bank, which refers to the ability of this organization to be aware of key actors and opportunities around the world (Edwards, 2018).

## **6.2. Discussion of Influence in Policy Implementation**

Despite the many forms of influence available to the World Bank in relation to policy formation, it has much less control of policy implementation. In some sense, this may be to the benefit of the World Bank, because it absolves them of responsibility for not achieving the stated goals of reforms and development projects (Klees, 2002). Put differently, even though the World Bank expends much energy and engages multiple pathways in an attempt to steer the policymaking process and to shape the reforms that are taken up and financed, it is also the case that the World Bank benefits from the fact that the government is formally

accountable for the results. To be fair, the World Bank is not an implementation agency, though it may at times contribute extensive technical assistance, through which the World Bank can insert itself into the details of project and reform processes. At the same time, the World Bank typically requires the creation of PIUs, through which it works with government counterparts, who have the official role of designing and approving strategies.<sup>19</sup> It is hard to know the nature of the dynamics between World Bank staff and governmental officials, and surely these dynamics vary widely across contexts. However, if the studies reviewed in this paper are any indication, there are cases where the World Bank has tremendous influence, due to the lack of technical capacity and training on the part of government representatives.

It is easy to imagine scenarios where country staff are deferential to the recommendations of the World Bank when it comes to the design and implementation of reform projects, not least because that advice is often tied to large loans. That said, there are many countries that do not have full-time World Bank staff; in these cases, the Bank will send missions periodically (every few months) to monitor and to assist. And even where there are Bank staff who permanently reside in a given country, it is unreasonable to think that these technicians are able to control processes of policy implementation that require the cooperation of numerous actors working across multiple levels of governmental bureaucracies and multiple geographic regions (Edwards, 2019).

It is for the reasons given above that the World Bank attempts to control the process of policy implementation through other means. A prime example is the conditioning of loan disbursements or approval on the hiring of staff who have the blessing of the World Bank, that is, specialists who this organization believes to be the most well-trained and positioned to carry out the project as planned. Other examples given previously in this paper relate to the various evaluations that the World Bank requires to ensure that a project is making satisfactory progress, with the implication being that corrections can be made to project

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<sup>19</sup> In relation to such structures, and with reference to crisis-affected contexts, Angelini (2016) writes, “The Bank usually imposes its own policies and procedures on implementing agencies. These are quite exacting, and not necessarily to the benefit of aid effectiveness” (p. 182).



design or implementation procedures while the project is still ongoing.<sup>20</sup> On this note, perhaps one of the more surprising themes raised by the studies reviewed is the lack of sensitivity in the project development process to those cultural and contextual characteristics that are likely to affect project success. At the same time, project preparation processes are already cumbersome and time-consuming for those involved without the requirement that they take the time to more deeply understand and incorporate contextual insights (a practice which, in any case, would seem to go against the “cookie-cutter” approach to project design that has been a concern within the World Bank; Mundy, 2002). Follow-up World Bank projects also offer the opportunity to make alterations to implementation strategies. In the best-case scenario, the World Bank and borrowing governments are learning from their mistakes and are drawing lessons for how to improve their operations. More critically, however, the World Bank continues to lend despite frustrations with implementation, and governments continue to engage with the World Bank despite its burdensome processes and requirements. This can lead one to wonder if the two sides of this relationship are engaged in an elaborate dance of sorts: their dance partners may have their faults but neither wants the music (money) to stop.

### **6.3. Discussion of the World Bank and Private Education**

Despite some success, one area where the loans may not be flowing as well is in relation to private education. Over time, the World Bank has shifted from promoting policies and projects that would generate the payment of fees or the contribution of donations by families to public schools to, instead, focus on the importance of offering loans to support both public and private schools. However, the only agency of the World Bank (which is made up of five entities) that is allowed to lend to private actors is the International Finance Corporation. As noted, at least \$850 million in loans have been approved since 2001 to support for-profit private schools, with this amount making the IFC the largest multilateral investor in private education. Without a doubt, this quantity is dwarfed by the scale of loans made by the World Bank for its regular education-related projects, as described in section 3.1. At the same time,

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<sup>20</sup> Though Stromquist (1999) notes that projects can be rated as excellent even when they deviate from their stated objectives related to addressing equity concerns, so long as progress is thought to have been made on “quality issues” (p. 25).

however, as public education around the world continues to be under attack from a range of actors, and as more families achieve middle- and lower-middle class status, it is likely that the appeal and the market pressures for private education will continue to rise. These developments could then create additional IFC lending opportunities, which, under normal circumstances, may have proved to be greater in number and amount than the loans that are issued for LFPSs, which, to this point, have comprised a very small portion of the IFC's portfolio in education (3.6%) and which are more difficult to operate profitably given their very slim profit margins and the precarious financial positions of the families they seek to serve. However, recent policy changes within the IFC indicate that the IFC is not likely to be able to take advantage of these market opportunities. Specifically, the IFC, in response to pressure from international civil society groups (Daar, 2019), has announced a freeze on investment in K-12 private, fee-charging education, which, in their words, “will apply to our direct investments, advisory work, and indirect investments resulting from new investments in private equity funds (...) in response to concerns by external stakeholders about the impact of private schools on education quality and access” (IFC, 2020).

## **7. Conclusion**

The present paper has sought to make a contribution to the literature on non-state actors by reviewing publications on the World Bank, one of the most influential actors operating in the global education policy space. The focus was on understanding the influence of this organization, first, in relation to policy formation and policy implementation and, then, in relation to the specific issue of the privatization of education, through which the World Bank facilitates the emergence and consolidation of other non-state actors (i.e., private schools) in the education sector. Notably, the findings of this review have implications that go beyond a discussion of pathways of influence. Here, we refer to the fact that much of the literature on the World Bank fails to address or to clarify the theoretical and methodological approaches employed to arrive at the findings shared. The literature on the World Bank thus has room to grow and mature. The same is true when it comes to processes of policy implementation, which tend to be understudied, or at least are much less well understood compared with the pathways of influence at the policy formation stage. And returning to the issue of policy influence, future research should also include a temporal analysis to see if

the documented ways that the World Bank engages with country counterparts have changed over time. Doing so may demonstrate that some of the patterns revealed here have changed over time and particularly in more recent years.<sup>21</sup>

Looking to the future, the World Bank is facing changing dynamics when it comes to the global governance of education, especially as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) gains in prominence (Mundy & Verger, 2015). However, the OECD is not a lending organization. Thus, when it comes to the provision of development finance to low- and middle-income countries, the World Bank is likely to remain an influential actor for the foreseeable future.

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<sup>21</sup> Indeed, other authors have noted that World Bank strategies for lending and country engagement have changed historically (Heyneman, 2003; Mundy, 1998, 2002). It would be interesting to see if empirical studies at the country level reflect the macro-level observations made by such authors.

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*Note:* All those references with an asterisk were included in the systematic review.

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## 9. Appendix

Appendix: Geographic Focus of Publications				
No.	Location	# of Pubs.	% of Pubs.	Studies
Region: East Asia and Pacific				
1	Cambodia	1	1.30%	Rappleye & Un (2018)
2	China	1	1.30%	Yang (2010)
3	Mongolia	2	2.60%	Steiner-Khamisi & Stolpe (2004), Steiner-Khamisi, G. (2006)
4	Vietnam	2	2.60%	Hamano (2008), Madden (2014)
5	Indonesia	2	2.60%	Grillos (2017), Edwards & Storen (2017)
--	Regional sub-total	8	10.39%	--
Region: Europe and Central Asia				
6	Armenia	2	2.60%	Tadevosyan (2008), Terzian (2016)
7	Bulgaria	1	1.30%	Levačić (2014)
8	Kosovo	1	1.30%	Levačić (2014)
9	Kyrgyz Republic	1	1.30%	Steiner-Khamisi, G. (2006)
10	Moldova	1	1.30%	Levačić (2014)
--	Regional sub-total	5	6.49%	--
Region: Latin America and Caribbean				
11	Bolivia	1	1.30%	Boyd & Owens (2015)
12	Brazil	1	1.30%	Luschei (2004)
13	Chile	2	2.60%	Bernasconi (2007), Espinoza (2017)

14	Ecuador	1	1.30%	Hoogesteger et. al. (2017)
15	El Salvador	7	9.09%	Alvarez, B. (1998), Bernasconi (2007), Edwards (2015), Edwards et. al. (2015), Edwards Jr, D. B. (2018), Edwards Jr., D. B. (2019), Edwards Jr., D.B. & Loucel Urquilla, C.E. (2016)
--	Latin America (not country specific)	5	6.49%	Bernasconi (2007), Bonal (2002), Hunter & Brown (2000), Tarabini (2008), Stromquist, N. P. (1999)
--	Caribbean (not country specific)	1	1.30%	Alvarez, B. (1998)
--	Regional sub-total	18	23.38%	--
<b>Region: Middle East and North Africa</b>				
16	Egypt	2	2.60%	Ginsberg & Megahed (2011), Ginsberg et. al. (2010)
17	Morocco	1	1.30%	Buckner (2016)
18	Tunisia	1	1.30%	Buckner (2016)
--	MENA Countries	1	1.30%	Lightfoot (2014)
--	Africa (not country specific)	4	5.19%	Bonal (2002), Samoff (1999), Stromquist, N. P. (1999), Samoff, J. (1993)
--	Regional sub-total	5	6.49%	--
<b>Region: South Asia</b>				
19	Afghanistan	1	1.30%	Evans and Barakat (2012)
20	India	3	3.90%	Mangla (2018), Mukhopadhyay & Sriprakash (2011), Verger, A. & Vanderkaaij, S. (2012)
21	Nepal	3	3.90%	Carney and Bista (2009), Khanal (2010), Rappleye (2011)

22	Sri Lanka	1	1.30%	McCourt (2018)
--	Regional sub-total	7	9.09%	--
<b>Region: Sub-Saharan Africa</b>				
23	Burkina Faso	1	1.30%	Samoff (2004)
24	Côte d'Ivoire	1	1.30%	McCourt (2018)
25	Ethiopia	2	2.60%	Molla (2014), Takala (1998)
26	Kenya	1	1.30%	Nafukho & Muyia (2013)
27	Liberia	1	1.30%	Nagel & Snyder (1989)
28	Mozambique	1	1.30%	Takala (1998)
27	Namibia	1	1.30%	Takala (1998)
29	South Africa	2	2.60%	Smith (2007), Steiner-Khamisi, G. (2006).
30	Tanzania	4	5.19%	Dilger (2013), Vavrus (2004), Vavrus & Seghers (2010), Vavrus, F. (2005)
31	Uganda	1	1.30%	Mbeche (2017)
32	Zimbabwe	1	1.30%	Takala (1998)
--	(Sub-Saharan) Africa (not country specific)	2	2.60%	Bonal (2002), Samoff (1999)
--	Regional sub-total	17	22.08%	--
<b>Other Named Regions/Classifications</b>				
--	Developing/Less Developed Countries/Third World	5	6.49%	Bonal (2002), Heyneman (2003), Alexander, N. C. (2001), Mundy, K.E. (1998), Samoff, J. (1996)



--	Transitioning Countries	3	3.90%	Levačić (2014)
--	Global South	1	1.30%	Verger, A., Fontdevila, C., & Zancajo, A. (2018)
--	Sub-total	9	11.69%	--

*Note:* Column totals to more than 77 publications (100%) because some studies address more than one country or region.