Rethinking World Bank influence on national basic education policy in Francophone West Africa. Teacher policy in Mali and Senegal from 1980 to 2010

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Abstract

The World Bank is one of the major international organizations active in the field of basic education in the ‘developing’ countries. Its influence on education policy has been the subject of abundant and critical literature but often with significant theoretical and methodological gaps. This research highlights the value of comparative research and field approaches to better understand the World Bank’s influence. This study closely examines this influence through the cases of two West African countries, namely Mali and Senegal, from 1980 to 2010, with a focus on teacher policy.

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Rethinking World Bank influence on national basic education policy in Francophone West Africa
Teacher policy in Mali and Senegal from 1980 to 2010

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The World Bank is one of the major international organizations active in the field of basic education in the ‘developing’ countries. Its influence on education policy has been the subject of abundant and critical literature but often with significant theoretical and methodological gaps. This research highlights the value of comparative research and field approaches to better understand the World Bank’s influence. This study closely examines this influence through the cases of two West African countries, namely Mali and Senegal, from 1980 to 2010, with a focus on teacher policy.

Keywords: World Bank; Education policy; Globalization; Comparative education; Africa; Teachers

The World Bank is a key organization in the field of basic education in ‘developing’ countries, especially in francophone West Africa, through expertise or conditionalities attached to funding. Its influence on education policy has been the subject of abundant and often critical literature. The recent book of Klees, Samoff and Stromquist (2012), The World Bank and Education: Critiques and Alternatives, illustrates this trend. Even if we recognize that the critique of the World Bank as an agent of neoliberalism is broadly relevant, recurring arguments on its influence lack nuance to the extent that the theoretical and methodological means often used are too simplistic to capture this influence. It seems to miss the perspective that education policy in the context of globalization is a dynamic process. Therefore, we wish first to present theoretical and methodological elements that allow for a more precise analysis of the World Bank influence on national education policy. We will then present the findings of our research.

1. How to analyze the influence of the World Bank on education policy?

Education policy, as classically defined, often refers to government action programs informed by values and ideas targeting the education system that are implemented by administration and education professionals. However, after van Zanten (2004) and Yang (2010), we should also emphasize other aspects, such as the heterogeneity of interests, the long negotiations, the complexity of stakeholders’ strategies and the regular adjustments. In this complex process of implementation, there are overlapping political agendas that can lead to contradictions and inconsistencies (Bray and Russell 2013). In the end, actors who implement policy can interpret them in the light of their local contexts. This will involve contrasting responses ranging from inclusion to resistance (Coburn 2001; Honig 2006; Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer 2002).

The analysis of education policy, especially when it deals with the influence of international organizations, suppose that we are interested in transnational forces and, therefore, in the phenomena of globalization. Once again, we must be clear about the vision chosen for the concept of globalization. Different approaches exist regarding its definition. It can be a one-way, top-down process in which national governments and local authorities in the South are under pressure from Western (national and international) powers. But while it is true that during structural adjustment programs (SAPs), the relationships between the World Bank and
‘developing’ countries could be particularly unbalanced, it is necessary to go beyond this approach. Here is what globalization refers to according to Arnove, Torres and Franz (2012):

Common prescriptions and transnational forces are not uniformly implemented or unquestionably received (...) there is a dialectic at work by which these global processes interact with national and local actors and contexts to be modified and, in some cases, transformed. There is a process of give-and-take, an exchange by which international trends are reshaped to local ends (2).

Even if they do not question a certain global homogenization, these authors moderate the powerful effects of globalization. Yang (2010) goes in the same direction with the idea of hybridization between global trends and local retranslations.

According to the above definition, globalization leaves room for a multiplicity of actors at different levels, from global to local, with visions that can vary, even within the same institution (Marginson and Rhoades 2002; Robertson 2012). Moreover, even the State, which is not the only major actor in education policy, can play a significant role in the South countries. Therefore, we must ask what the responsibility of the State in the design and implementation of education policy is. Stromquist (2002) suggests that the convergence or divergence visible between global policy and those of the States is the ‘product of conscious adaptation, blind imitation, or pressure to conform’ (xxii). Many authors, especially Samoff (2005) for the case of the World Bank, have shown that the global guidelines coming from international organizations were more difficult to apply in all contexts than originally thought. Hence, there exists an interest to understand how such guidelines have been retranslated in different systems.

Now, it is necessary to present some elements of methodology that will allow the reader to better understand the influence of the World Bank on basic education policy in Francophone West Africa. But first we would like to explain why the methodological choices made in many studies on the World Bank have seemed inadequate.

First, there have been very few studies, apart from those offered by the organization itself, on specific Francophone West African countries, or even on sub-Saharan Africa in general. This may be surprising because the World Bank is a very active institution in the region. Moreover, it meets national and local responses to its intervention in basic education policy, as has been shown through our theoretical choices. It is also difficult to understand what period is analyzed in these studies: do the authors speak of the World Bank today or during SAPs? The actions of the organization cannot be considered monolithic or stable.

It was also found in most studies that analyses were made at a macro level. That is to say, they were generally interested in the action of the World Bank at State or global levels. However, the analysis of education policy is relevant at different scales; otherwise, it fails to highlight strategies of actors who implement this policy.

Finally, few research findings come from the field: many studies, even though they consider national contexts, refer only to institutional documents (see, e.g., Collins and Wiseman 2012). They put emphasis on what can be the impact of these documents. Nevertheless, what the World Bank wishes in its documents is not necessarily what happens in the field.

Comparative and empirical research is a response to these challenges. The desire was to see how various contexts confronted the influence of the World Bank on national policy. Crossley (2002) explains very well the value of the comparative approach for the analysis of the international organization’s influence:

The mechanisms and processes driving globalization are thus prioritized for examination, as is the increased significance of multi-lateral agencies in shaping global policy debates and agendas. However, recognition of the fact that the effects of globalization differ from place to place, draws attention back to the nature and implications of such differential effects.
--- even at the national level. Few empirically grounded studies have compared these differences in any sustained way to date – and those that have been carried out have largely focused upon Western industrial societies or the newly industrialized economies of East Asia (81). Therefore, the current paper addresses the World Bank’s influence in two countries in the same region, Mali and Senegal. In relatively similar countries from different points of view, it is possible to perceive similarities and differences in terms of influence. This comparative perspective was also approached through different periods: from 1980 to 2010. The beginning of this period corresponds to the increasing involvement of the organization in sub-Saharan Africa in the field of basic education. For each decade, the spirit of time was brought out; even if we are aware, for instance, that between 1999 and 2000 there were no significant changes. In our analysis, the continuity from period to period and the changes were highlighted. The data of this mainly qualitative research was derived from two separate sources: institutional documents and interviews. The institutional documents were analyzed insofar as they highlighted the discourse around organizations’ strategies. In addition, since we have worked on the influence of the World Bank on national policy in Mali and Senegal, it was considered appropriate to select documents from the international organization itself but also those from the Ministries of Education in both countries. The analysis of these latter sources is justified by the fact that it is the State that officially produces texts of national education policy. The idea was to compare the orientations present in the documents of these institutions in order to see how the discourse of the international organization has been integrated by national actors. The World Bank documents were chosen at three different scales (global, African, Malian/Senegalese levels). The idea was to identify a continuum of discourse or effects of contextualization. Regarding the documents of Malian and Senegalese Ministries, those that directly deal with basic education were analyzed. All these documents cover the period 1980-2010. Interviews were also conducted in Mali and Senegal, which complement data from institutional documents: field actors express their own vision that can be different from those offered in the documents and they also speak about the operationalization of policy. In connection with theoretical choices, it was necessary to interview actors at different levels of analysis (global, national and local). At the global level, representatives of the World Bank were interviewed; at the national level, representatives of Ministries; and, at the local level, representatives of local administrations, school principals and teachers in different localities. Some authors such as Marginson and Rhoades (2002) have highlighted the advantage of using this type of analysis, including for the World Bank, through their model of ‘glonacal agency’.

2. Findings. World Bank influence on teacher policy in Mali and Senegal from 1980 to 2010

As part of this research, various topics related to basic education policy were addressed, such as universal education, teachers, language of instruction and decentralization-privatization. They correspond to common themes in the discourse of the World Bank that are also widely discussed in the literature on the Bank’s influence. It was chosen to focus this paper on the issue of teachers. It is usually treated through two sub-themes: working conditions and training.

A powerful neoliberal organization

A strong discourse linked to neoliberal ideology was identified at the global and regional levels: the conditions of teachers must be understood through the prism of rational resource
management and efficiency. This can be realized by the decline in wages or the increasing of fixed-term contracts:

In some countries and in some regions within countries, teachers are highly paid relative to other workers in the economy, with their salaries taking a share of the education budget so large that no funds are left for other crucial components of quality education (World Bank 1999, 34).

The interviewees of the institution take some of the positions of the World Bank developed in the reports. What is interesting is that the verbal form of their positions make them more explicit. In Senegal, for instance, we noticed that a representative of the organization justified without taking precautionary the decline of teacher salaries.

Besides the neoliberal ideology, the World Bank was and remains a powerful actor in Francophone West Africa. Funding is one of the major means of influence of the World Bank because of its influence on education policy, especially through the loan to countries. Also, the World Bank is often the main donor to basic education in Mali and Senegal in comparison with other external actors involved in education policy. The contribution of the Bank in basic education (specifically primary education) has been increasing for 30 years at all levels (global, regional and national). The African continent has seen the amount of its loans rising: from approximately $200 million in 1980, to nearly $800 million in 2009, with basic education being particularly affected by these contributions. In Mali and Senegal, loans for this sub-sector have gone from about $35 million in 1980 to almost $100 million in the 2000s. This strong external financial presence is linked to a lack of national contributions: it is seen as necessary, especially since the late 1970s after the economic crisis on the continent. Countries were not able to meet the high demand for basic education and depended on the assistance of international cooperation. Specifically, on the issue of teachers, the World Bank has funded, for instance, the building of training centers in Mali and Senegal (especially in the 2000s) and national programs where components on teachers (like the recruitment of ‘contractual teachers’) can be found.

Conditionality associated with funding from the World Bank are also a tool of power for the institution. It is more difficult to grasp the influence of the World Bank through this mean of influence than through funding whose analysis is supported by numbers: this is a subtler influence. Moreover, conditionality, even if mentioned in the literature, have not been really the subject of empirical research. The Bank has a significant influence on education policy through conditionality, which is a common feature in all analyzed periods (1980-2010). Especially in the 1980s and partly in the 1990s, SAPs were a powerful constraint for the States to obtain funds. It was at this time that the States put in place policy to lower unit costs in the teaching profession or to under-qualify teachers in Mali and Senegal:

It is under pressure from the World Bank with structural adjustment in the 80s that the State of Mali was forced to close most of the training centers for teachers. In the 80s, there remained only four. And, as these schools did not have enough high carrying capacity, the number of teachers to be trained was drastically lowered (A representative of the Ministry of Education in Mali).

The actors on the field have confirmed the existence of conditionality in basic education policy also in the 2000s. The use of this mean of influence was partly legitimized by the fact that Ministries did not have the skills to effectively manage their education systems. The influence of the World Bank is, therefore, characterized in this case by a ‘top down’ approach with an unbalanced assistance relationship.

Beyond funding and conditionality, the World Bank has influenced national education policy through expertise, which has been increasingly important over the years. The organization wants to put more emphasis on this activity. Its ancient and international experience in the field
of expertise means that it can have a comparative advantage in this area. This manifests notably through a considerable body of publications, conferences, dissemination of good practices or benchmarking, as well as its international, regional and national presence with offices at different scales. There are, for instance, publications on teacher issues at the global level and in specific countries such as Mali or Senegal. The expertise on teachers can also be illustrated through the benchmarking. The table below, coming from a report of the World Bank, shows that the average annual teacher’s salary is set at 3.5 times per capita GDP; that is close to average in the highest-completion countries, according to the World Bank. However, in Mali or Senegal, this average was more significant than 3.5 times per capita. Thus, through this kind of expertise, it is asked to these countries to reduce the share of teacher salary in their budget.

Table 1. Benchmarks for education policy

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<td>Service delivery</td>
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<td>Average annual teacher salary (as multiple of per capita GDP)</td>
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Source: Bruns, Mingat & Rakotomalala 2002, 73

With these different strategies, Ministries have necessarily had access to the expertise of the World Bank. Moreover, the presence of African personnel in Mali and Senegal offices, including former executives from Ministries of education, facilitates mediation. Again, the deployment of this mean of action is made possible by the lack of national capacity, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s: the World Bank has seized the opportunity to put forward its own knowledge. This is especially true as the texts of national policy are sufficiently elusive to include any kind of guidelines from external agencies.

Once the vision and the means of influence of the World Bank has been analyzed, we would like to know the vision of Malian and Senegalese education Ministries is. To what extent do actors of Ministries adhere to a similar discourse? In institutional documents of Ministries, there is a growing integration of World Bank discourse in both countries concerning the status of teachers. It is a posture that Ministries assume since they explicitly use the same discourse as this of the Bank, sometimes word for word. Examples can be recalled for both countries: in Mali, when it comes to control unit costs; in Senegal, when the Ministry speaks of a maximum use of resources and, therefore, the need to redeploy teachers. Thus, with this kind of vision, we can imagine that the World Bank was able to spread its vision.

Finally, what about the recontextualisation of World Bank vision at the local level? To what extent are its guidelines retranslated ‘in the classroom’? The data in Mali and Senegal show that rationalization measures concerning conditions of teachers have been implemented since there has been a casualization of the teaching profession, especially with lower wages and recruitment of ‘contractual teachers’.

Thus, as raised for many years in the critical literature, the World Bank has powerful tools and neoliberal fundamentals to influence national education policy in Francophone West Africa. This influence could have a real impact on the ground as we have seen with the issue of
teachers. My aim below is to go further in understanding the influence by highlighting some dynamics that allow further analysis of this influence.

*Other actors on stage*

Aside from the World Bank, other actors of international cooperation are financially involved in a large way in the national policy of Mali and Senegal. Multilateral organizations like UNICEF or bilateral organizations like the Netherlands agency may hold more weight than the World Bank in terms of the impact on teacher policy in Mali or Senegal, notably through the field of teacher training.

Moreover, in the 1990s, during the Jomtien conference on Education for All, most agencies had agreed on the fact that it was necessary to encourage massive access to school despite quality of education, and, therefore, teacher issues. Thus, it was not only the idea of the World Bank to renounce the qualified and motivated teachers and to recruit contractual teachers.

The leeway of the State can also be addressed, with a focus on its role as a key funder of education policy. It is indisputable that the State is a leading actor in Mali and Senegal in the policy of basic education through funding, much more than the World Bank. According to World Bank staff and other actors of the education system, the State still has power, even in developing countries. In both countries in the 2000s, 80% to 90% of the public budget in education comes from the State, and around 5% from the World Bank. A major part of the State budget goes to teacher salaries in Mali and Senegal:

> The State has become the first funder. In education, it is even more interesting because Senegal is the main funder of the education sector, at more than 90%. It's not like it was 60% of government and 40% of donors. […] And frankly, in development aid, they can say what they want, including our hierarchy in Washington, but when the State puts 300 million dollars on the table, and you come up with your 40 million and ask to change the system, they tell you: ‘thank you, please sit down, thank you for the 40 million, but we’ll talk later’ (A representative of the World Bank in Senegal).

In both contexts, the power of the State in the design of national education policy was also identified. Before the 2000s, most international organizations mainly negotiated their own projects with their own interests. In Mali and Senegal, aid methodology has, however, evolved. There are now partnership frameworks in place lead by the Ministry of Education with major financial and technical assistance agencies. In this context, their actions are coordinated. There has been increasing cooperation of the World Bank with other actors, and the contribution of each agency has been blurred. The Bank has been driven, over the years, in a process of dialogue with the Ministries of Education and other actors, forcing them to negotiate. It is, therefore, difficult to conclude that policy guidelines come from the only proposals of the World Bank. According to interviews, including those with the actors of the World Bank, the weight of the State has changed and has been considered to be more and more consistent:

> Everything we do in the education sector is under the leadership of the Ministry of Education. […] That is the sovereign power of the State. That is to say, ‘that's my policy that I put in place, and I invite you to join us in this program’. So, it is clear that we exercise leadership. Even if otherwise, we have pressures. But, the program remains first a policy program of Mali (A representative of the Ministry of Education in Mali).

The discussions between actors in education policy are even more intense than the priorities of the World Bank and those of governments are not necessarily the same: ‘For the education sector, the views may differ. I have to give priority to the construction of classrooms, teacher training, supervision of schools, the purchase of textbooks or the decentralization of the education system’ (A representative of the World Bank in Mali).
With these dynamics, the States were able to inflect the influence of the World Bank: ‘The answers you give will necessarily be different. And suddenly, you cannot say you are going to translate the concept of effectiveness of teachers in the same way across countries’ (A representative of the World Bank in Mali). This does not always come from a willingness of the World Bank, which must sometimes endure institutional blockages or debates (both external and internal). In this case, the idea of a permanent imposition of the World Bank can be refuted: ‘It’s very difficult to reform because, on the one hand, the habits are installed, on the other hand, human resources to design and implement these reforms are not every time there’ (A representative of the World Bank in Mali).

Finally, it is necessary to show that local actors, even if they are not so implied in the process of education policy, have some leeway. One example on the teacher issue is the fight of teacher unions in both countries through the strikes because of political orientations that was considered inappropriate like the declining of wages. These strikes allowed to readjust policy. Moreover, it is necessary to note the existence of inefficient practices, which produce adverse effects for the implementation of the guidelines of the World Bank. There is, for instance, the corruption, the excessive politicization in the teaching profession or the absenteeism: ‘Twenty-five percent of teachers are not where they should be. What does it mean? If we go down on the field, there is a notable lack of rigor in the allocation of resources’ (A representative of the Ministry of Education in Senegal).

Thus, as the policy measures have resulted in a deterioration in the status of teachers (and, at the same time, the education system), they have been counterproductive in relation to the initial objectives of the institution that wanted more efficiency of education systems.

**Variations and contradictions**

We have seen that the World Bank is not the only one to influence education policy. Now we want to focus on variations in the influence of the Bank in different contexts, and first between Mali and Senegal. We continue to address the issue of teacher-related policy.

A difference between the two countries was noticed, since the idea of rationalization of teacher-related costs had more emerged among the representatives of the World Bank in Senegal. The vision of a same institution may, therefore, emerge more in one country than another. It was also discovered that there were internal debates within the World Bank: two persons did not have the same vision in the office of Senegal: one is advocated the idea of rationalization in the teaching profession and the other one talked more about the motivation of teachers.

Another example of variations between countries is the fact that the financial impact of the Bank unfolds differently in various national contexts: while Senegal receives more funding in general from the World Bank, it is Mali that benefits most from its funding for basic education policy. And according to our data, Mali does not have the same weight as Senegal in terms of funding. The latter was less dependent, and financially and politically more stable than Mali. However, this could be nuanced by saying that the reduced dependence on Senegal and the democratic nature of political regimes throughout the period does not prevent a stronger adherence to the guidelines of the World Bank. This can be partly explained by the fact that there are more staff transfer in Senegal between the ministry and international cooperation, including the World Bank, which facilitates the mediation.

Thus, even if they were shaped, policy on teachers did not have the same scope in both countries and were not as ambitious as the initial objectives of the World Bank. For example, we noted that Mali has not suffered in the same way the consequences of precarious teachers Senegal.
In addition to variations between countries, we could find variations between periods. First, the discourse of the World Bank related to the rationalization of teacher-related costs idea was not present in the 1980s. It appeared gradually. Thus, the vision of the World Bank has not been the same over the years.

Moreover, the converging vision of education ministries was stronger in the 2000s, especially in Senegal with ‘the recruitment and rational use of teachers’ (Ministère de l’éducation du Sénégal 2003, 54), including ‘commitment of contractual staff and the decentralization of management staff as main priorities of the reform’ (32).

The influence of the World Bank was also inflected by the fact that funding was more a means of influence until the 1990s: it was the main lever of the Bank in education policy through projects that was directly conceived with the State. Furthermore, the World Bank has used a more open approach in the 1990s and 2000s, with the idea that the way to act during SAPs was not the most relevant.

We would like to finish the presentation of our findings by treating the contradictions in the discourse of the World Bank.

Specifically on teachers, the discourse is not only used to explicitly refer to the neoliberal vision. Indeed, the World Bank is also interested in teacher qualifications. Our data clearly show a general interest in the quality of teacher education, both in institutional documents and in interviews: ‘Teacher training needs radical reform so that teachers acquire the skills and motivation to apply better instructional methods’ (World Bank 2001, 39). Therefore, there is no clear line in terms of vision.

Even on the issue of teacher conditions, inconsistencies were found with the presence of a discourse in favor of a greater motivation of teachers, especially in the 2000s, and at all levels:

To improve the quality of teaching in Africa, teachers’ salaries must be paid on time and must cover the cost of living to allow teachers to commit themselves full time to teaching. Work conditions […] must enable teachers to carry out their work as expected. Professional recognition and support will help motivate teachers once the first two conditions are met (World Bank 2001, 38-39).

This is visible especially with field actors who, knowing the situation, nuance a too general discourse they know is hardly able to be applied in Mali or Senegal: ‘In the percentage of GDP the share of teachers’ salaries must not be too low, otherwise you cannot give teachers the means to be motivated’ (A representative of the World Bank in Mali). This ambiguity is certainly put into perspective with the negative effects of previous decades of the increased precarious status of teachers. It is also linked with the need to adapt to contexts, to other actors, including international cooperation, or to internal debates within the World Bank.

Conclusion. What is the influence of international cooperation in Africa?

To conclude, we can argue that the World Bank is a powerful organization with neoliberal fundamentals which can product effects at the local levels. Nevertheless, we need to highlight that this influence is modulated by the meeting of dynamics related to different contexts (countries, periods, levels, actors, etc.). This research has helped to highlight the complexity that goes beyond simplistic views on the possible influence of an international organization. The purpose of this research was, however, not to underestimate the strong influence of the World Bank in this area, or even to suggest that the often-contradictory doctrine it spreads is not without consequence. It is important to condemn the World Bank vision because it takes little consideration of peoples’ actual needs or human rights based approaches. But the usual criticisms on the influence of the World Bank are not strong enough, primarily because they lack sufficient contextual data. Once again,
comparative research and field studies are useful toward that end. This work has sought to
demonstrate that the critical analysis of an international organization only makes sense by
focusing on education fields and contexts, including browsing the evolution of its action
through periods.
More research should allow to go further into the analysis of the influence of the World Bank,
by comparing other contexts, by focusing on the trajectories of the actors (of the World Bank
and the ministries), or by following more closely the decision-making process to the
implementation of these decisions.

A reflection on the role of international cooperation, in particular the Word Bank, in the light
of this research is thus necessary.
Firstly, on visions of education, even if they are often inconsistent or poorly implemented, one
of the criticisms issued in the place of the World Bank is the adoption of largely neoliberal
ideology for education policy. It often offers a simplistic, utilitarian, instrumental vision for
education (Klees, Samoff, and Stromquist 2012). This vision is partly shared by many
international organizations, including those with a traditionally humanistic vision such as
UNESCO and UNICEF (Akkari and Lauwerier 2015). Therefore, before proposing specific
guidelines for education, it is necessary to ask what kind of education we want and for what
development. This involves questioning the Western model of development for the South
(Morin 2011), and exceeding the vision of ‘development’ as a synonym for economic growth.
Thus, it is necessary to focus on education whose aim is not only economic, but also social,
political, cultural or ecological. For example, how does education allow more empowerment,
freedom and social justice?
On the means of influence now, despite changes in the methodology of aid, the realization of
participatory processes in the design of education policy was not yet effective. The question of
ownership is particularly legitimate in education policy. A true partnership is needed with all
involved actors from international organizations who speak, but also listen. National actors,
with the support of local actors, must take the lead in designing education policy, and making
proposals that are consistent with respect to their context. They should not blindly adhere to
vision from outside, but must be aware of major issues in their own context and act
appropriately. These are the ones who are responsible for assuming the difficulties of the
education system and giving a new impetus to policy.

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