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Studia paedagogica. 2020, vol. 25, iss. 2, pp. [23]-45

ISSN 1803-7437 (print); ISSN 2336-4521 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): https://doi.org/10.5817/sp2020-2-2
Stable URL (handle): https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/142786
Access Date: 17. 02. 2024
Version: 20220831

Studia paedagogica
vol. 25, n. 2, 2020
www.studiapaedagogica.cz
https://doi.org/10.5817/sp2020-2-2

TEACHER STATUS AND THE ROLE OF TEACHER UNIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW PROFESSIONALISM

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Abstract

The status of teachers and the teaching profession is currently under pressure from the reform agendas of governments and international organisations. This article examines the perceptions of teacher unions about changes in teacher status under the influence of new public management and its dominant discourse of new professionalism. The analysis is underpinned by a conceptual framework that seeks to reveal the main challenges facing teachers and their unions in the context of new professionalism. The framework is applied deductively to data drawn from two surveys conducted by Education International in 2015 and in 2018. The findings revealed some worrisome trends that appeared consistently over time and influenced teacher status, including an increased accountability for teachers through external control, a lack of government efforts to improve teacher professionalism, the expansion of privatisation policies, and a lack of teacher union engagement. This restructuring of the teaching profession implies the need for teacher union renewal in mission and action.

Keywords

teacher status, teacher unions, international perceptions, new professionalism, new public management

Introduction

The current era of individualism and a strong reliance on the market as key movers of success and well-being is not friendly to labour unions, a fact observable also in teacher unions. However, we know relatively little about these forms of collective organisation. Research on unions has focused on factors that determine the unionisation or non-unionisation of workers, unions' appeal to membership, unions' role in collective bargaining, and unions' impact on working conditions and salary levels (Hameed & Sen, 1985; O'Connell, 1986; Western, 1993). Research specifically on teacher unions has been quite limited and more intense in previous decades than it is today (McDonnell & Pascal, 1988; Moe, 2011). Few scholars have considered the perspectives of teacher union leaders in advanced industrialised countries about the condition of teachers and the educational system in which they work, and even fewer the perspectives of union leaders across the world.

The struggle to improve the status of teachers and the teaching profession has traditionally been the ultimate purpose of teacher unions, which over the years have sought to achieve professional status for teaching and better working conditions for teachers. This struggle continues today as global economic competition and recessions pose new challenges to the teaching profession, which is changing in many respects. Recent educational reforms worldwide have transformed teachers into "objects of intervention" through growing teacher and school accountability practices, standardised testing, new curricular areas, decentralisation, and privatisation (Bascia & Stevenson, 2017). Against this background, teachers' professionalism has undergone imposed reconceptualisation and teachers' status has suffered threats and often declined in many countries (Hargreaves et al., 2007; Normand et al., 2018).

The crucial role of teacher unions in safeguarding and promoting the status of teachers is represented in the work of Education International (EI), the world's largest federation of unions, representing 30 million education employees in about 400 organisations in 171 countries and territories. As a leading international organisation, EI participates in the triennial meetings of the ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (CEART), reporting on issues with regard to teachers' status based on a survey covering all EI member organisations. The authors of this article have administered two of these EI global surveys (Stromquist, 2018; Symeonidis, 2015), the results of which will be revisited herein to analyse the current status of teachers.

Specifically, this article aims to answer the following research question: How do teacher unions perceive the status of teachers and the teaching profession under the influence of new public management? The main

assumption here is that teacher unions as organisations representing teachers' collective voice can provide a unique and useful perspective about the current trends influencing teacher status worldwide. While there is international evidence on teachers and students collected through large-scale assessments by international organisations, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), there is less evidence coming from the side of teacher unions. Moreover, the academic literature has been characterised by a lack of attention to teacher unions as agents of importance in the unfolding situation of formal schooling.

A conceptual framework for analysing teacher status under the influence of new public management

Derived from the Latin for "standing," the word "status" refers to one's standing in society. Weber described as a sociological concept the "status situation" as opposed to the purely economically determined "class situation," meaning that people within a society can be differentiated on the basis of non-economic qualities, such as honour and prestige (as cited in Gerth & Mills, 1958, p. 186–187). Status is also part of an individual's symbolic capital serving as a form of approval or disapproval within a culture (Bourdieu, 1984). There is an objective dimension to status that includes an individual's socio-legal entitlements as well as a subjective dimension that is an individual's perceptions of their own prestige (Turner, 1988). With regard to teachers, we would arguably expect that they would enjoy a high status in society, considering their task of educating the future citizens of the country, but this is not what teachers themselves often experience. For this article, we are adopting the following definition of teacher status:

> The expression "status" as used in relation to teachers means both the standing or regard accorded them, as evidenced by the level of appreciation of the importance of their function and of their competence in performing it, and the working conditions, remuneration and other material benefits accorded them relative to other professional groups. (UNESCO & ILO, 2008, p. 21)

The UNESCO-ILO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers adopted in 1966 has served as a standard for the teaching profession, providing guidelines for policymakers, teachers, and their organisations in order to safeguard teacher rights and status in society. The Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel adopted in 1997 made further commitments regarding college and university faculty. Both recommendations have received international recognition and their implementation is monitored every three years by CEART, but, unlike

conventions, these recommendations are not legally binding. This means that the status of teachers can differ significantly among countries, despite government claims to support the recommendations.

The status of teachers around the world is currently challenged by the widespread and dominant form of public administration commonly known as new public management (NPM), a form of organisation closely tied to neoliberal principles. Under neoliberalism, union-supported public workers are taken as symbols of the inefficiency and even moral decay of the welfare state. Critics of teacher unions contend that unionisation serves mostly to protect them from public accountability and poor performance (Moe, 2011). In the US, critics from the political right frame teacher unions as totally opposed to market rationality (Salter & Phelan, 2017). Through its emphasis on managerialism, NPM considers teacher unions as working against the interest of parents and administrators and protecting incompetent teachers (Moe, 2011; World Education Forum, 2015). NPM has also focused on the metricisation of education or the measurement of teacher performance primarily through student standardised testing and on the marketisation of education reflected in growing privatisation of schooling, which has enabled commercial entrepreneurs to hire and fire teachers at local levels and to pre-empt possible forms of unionisation (Hall et al., 2015; Hood, 1991).[1]

Although NPM can manifest differently depending on administrative traditions and historical contexts within nation states (Gunter et al., 2016), the broad aims of producing more efficient and effective public services have been widely shared across different parts of the world and have led to a restructuring of the teaching profession (Normand et al., 2018). This restructuring has given rise to a "new professionalism" for teachers, whose professional autonomy, promotion, and careers have been redefined according to new rules of control, flexibility, and mobility (Carvalho & Normand, 2018). Drawing on Evetts (2011), this restructuring of the teaching profession can be explained as a discursive shift from "occupational professionalism" or "professionalism from within" towards an "organizational professionalism" or "professionalism from above" (p. 407). The first notion of professionalism implies a discourse constructed within professional occupational groups

[1] The global dissemination of new principles and practices could also be explained by world culture theory, but this assumes isomorphism due to the attractiveness of ideas and avoids consideration of international and domestic political dynamics. In contrast, our reliance on neoliberalism recognises the power of public policies in shaping educational trends.

and includes collegial authority, while the second relates to a discourse of control used increasingly by managers at work organisations. In both cases, professionalism points to a complex and constantly changing term that involves contradictions between the meanings generated by the employers and the employees, which are not always historically distinct or possible to separate (Lawn & Ozga, 1981).

By adopting the term "new professionalism," we are thus suggesting that a shift from professional to managerialist values is taking place under the influence of NPM, which uses professionalism as a means of teacher control rather than a means of promoting higher performance standards. The spread of NPM and the new professionalism discourse, as fuelled by the agendas of international organisations, promises an improvement of teacher status and salaries and should thus be welcomed by practitioners tired of bureaucracies in education (Carvalho & Normand, 2018). Nevertheless, few studies have examined the reality of these promises. Not surprisingly, several of these studies have been carried out by those most affected, i.e., teachers and their unions, and the evidence accumulated thus far suggests that reform initiatives coupled with NPM might rather have had a negative impact on teachers' perceptions of their occupational status. For example, observers outside teacher unions have argued that teachers in England generally see themselves as lacking in reward and respect, while being characterised by significant external control and regulation compared to high status professions (Hargreaves et al., 2007). MacBeath (2012) traced the factors in teachers' growing disaffection with the intensification of demands posed upon them, the multiplicity of roles that teachers currently exercise, de-professionalisation due to teachers' loss of power and autonomy, issues of student behaviour and indiscipline, and increases in students with special needs and the imperative of inclusion. Similarly, Bascia and Stevenson (2017) argued that recent educational reforms connected to NPM pose new challenges to teachers and their unions, including work intensification, de-professionalisation, privatisation, attacks on democracy and workers' rights, and long term changes in teacher union and civil society engagement.

Although research has revealed that status concerns are a source of dissatisfaction for teachers, it is the intrinsic rewards of teaching that often play a major role in the work satisfaction of teachers (Hoyle, 2001). In this sense, Hargreaves (2009) pointed out that material gains might not guarantee high prestige and that factors such as the academic quality of those entering the profession can have a greater impact. Nevertheless, raising teachers' pay and improving their working conditions can attract better teachers, who in turn would contribute to better student outcomes. To this end, the role of teacher unions has proven to be important in safeguarding the

working conditions and professional autonomy of teachers while promoting teachers' professional status and professional development (Bascia & Stevenson, 2017; Eberts, 2007; Han, 2019). The OECD has also recognised the empirically demonstrated contribution of teacher unions to the well--being of education systems: "The better a country's education system performs, the more likely that country is working constructively with its unions and treating its teachers as trusted professional partners" (Schleicher, 2011, p. 60). However, teacher unions are sometimes perceived as part of the problem, rather than the solution, due to their adopting adversarial bargaining approaches and halting reforms (Eberts, 2007).

Considering the challenges imposed by NPM on teachers and their unions, we argue that teacher status in both its objective and subjective dimensions is currently under pressure. Combining information from the literature, especially the common challenges identified by both MacBeath (2012) and Bascia and Stevenson (2017), we have devised a conceptual framework that brings together those pressures exerted on teachers and their unions. The specific framework will guide the secondary data analysis and help us to analyse how teacher unions perceive teacher status in the context of new professionalism. Table 1 provides an overview of the categories and their respective core elements. The categories are interconnected with each other, but have been clustered distinctively to allow a detailed analysis of the data.

Table 1

Challenges facing teachers and their unions in the context of new professionalism

Categories	Core elements
Work intensification and accountability	• Pressures on achievement and accountability • Lack of professional autonomy • Performance-based salaries • Role diffusion and overload
De-professionalisation	• Unattractive career prospects • Alternative routes into teaching • Lack of decision-making ability • Limited professional development
Privatisation	• Private providers entering the market • Precarious employment
Teacher union engagement	• Unfavourable media image of teachers and their organisations • Challenging relationships between unions and government • Discrimination for union membership and activism

Since the 1990s and the launch of globalised league tables of student performance, work intensification has emerged as the outcome of significant pressure exerted on teachers to perform, subjecting them to performance reviews according to indicators and standards (Bascia & Stevenson, 2017). Prescribed curricula and standardised practices are integral aspects of work intensification and function as accountability mechanisms which can lead to the loss of professional autonomy (MacBeath, 2012; Sparks & Malkus, 2015). In this context, teachers are meant to serve primarily the needs of students, parents, and local communities, even if a hierarchical line is still in place (Carvalho & Normand, 2018). Intensification is also evidenced in the multiplicity of roles that teachers and schools now exercise – roles that in a previous era would have fallen to parents and grandparents, local communities, the church, and other social agencies (MacBeath, 2012).

The same pressures that want teachers to perform are also leading to a loss of power among professional bodies and to diminished authority and the lack of decision-making ability for teachers, giving rise to a process of "de-professionalisation." Teachers lose the power to influence their work, and when they no longer see themselves as valuable or valued, there is a higher risk of teacher attrition and the profession becomes less attractive to young people (MacBeath, 2012). De-professionalisation would lead to a lower supply of teachers in a country, a shift toward alternative routes into teaching, and more limited access to professional development opportunities for teachers (Mathis & Welner, 2015; Shizha & Kariwo, 2011).

The drive towards education privatisation is another central aspect of NPM reforms contributing to the "flexibilisation" of teachers' work and threatening to alter the perception of teachers within society (Ball & Youdell, 2008). Many governments have proclaimed that education can no longer be entirely funded by the state and therefore private providers are encouraged to enter the market, while education is increasingly regarded as an industry, driven by commercial concerns (Verger et al., 2016). However, the question that matters is less about whether or not private engagement in education makes sense and more about the extent to which the activities of private actors need to be regulated by the state (Rizvi, 2016). Privatisation policies not only determine the way in which schools are funded and managed, but also can directly influence teachers' preparation, the nature of and access to professional development, the terms and conditions of teachers' contracts and pay, and the nature of teachers' daily activities and the way they experience their working lives (Ball & Youdell, 2008).

Finally, with the intensification of teachers' work and recent trends pointing to a decline in interest in traditional forms of activism, teachers appear to be less likely to engage in union activities and their perceptions of their unions might be reduced to individual gains (Bascia & Stevenson, 2017). To some

teachers, unions can appear cumbersome and bureaucratic, influenced by national politics and personified by their leaders, compared to other dynamic alternatives, such as networks of labour activism, grassroots movements, and online communities. The media image of unions and the way that unions communicate their work can also influence teachers' union engagement, while the relationship between unions and government can attract or even discourage union membership.

Methods

This article undertakes a secondary data analysis by examining the two most recent EI teacher status reports, which were produced by the authors in 2018 and 2015 (see Stromquist, 2018; Symeonidis, 2015). Both reports were based on a very similar EI global survey instrument addressed to teacher union leaders and leaders of other education organisations affiliated with EI. The survey, available in English, French, and Spanish, was administered electronically with three reminders. The survey instruments were completed by union leaders or people assigned this task given their central role in the unions to which they belonged.[2]

Both surveys were sent to all 401 EI affiliates, with a total of 114 replies (28.4%) submitted in 2018 (78 complete, 36 partial) and 73 replies (18.2%) in 2015 (68 complete, 5 partial). It is unclear what caused the low response rate; it might reflect the lack of internet access at the smaller unions or the limited time they had available for collecting the requested data. Nonetheless, responses came from a variety of countries and geographical regions, including Africa, Asia/Pacific, Europe, Latin America, and North America/Caribbean, with approximately one-third of responses in both surveys originating from unions in Europe. Teacher unions often represent different levels of education. The majority of respondent unions in both surveys represented primary and secondary education, while the sectors of early childhood education, vocational education and training, higher education, and education personnel were also represented. It should be noted, however, that the respondent unions represented a wide membership range extending from as few as 100 members for a union with a very narrow focus to about 4.2 million in Russia. All of the largest unions participated in both surveys. Treating unions from highly

[2] For both surveys, the list of participating unions is available to consult for details.

diverse countries as the unit of analysis in this article is similar to established methodological practices in the fields of international relations and political science, in which, although there is great variation in the size, history, and contexts of the countries under study, the state or government is the unit of analysis. In education, comparisons of student performance based on the countries as the unit of analysis take place regularly, especially through the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment.

Through their replies, teacher union leaders manifested the perceptions they had about the teachers and teacher unions they represented. Although we acknowledge the ideological aspect of union responses, considering the political role that trade unions play in society, we also made the assumption that these people relied on their experience and close-contact knowledge when they provided their replies. Responses are presented and discussed in terms of the proportion of union leaders (also called respondents herein), stating the frequency or intensity of a given condition. To maintain the specific wording of the items in the survey instrument, we often use quotation marks to refer to these items and tables presenting the number of union responses and the percentage of total responses that this number represents.

The survey instruments were designed to combine factual questions regarding statistical information with open-ended questions about the dominant perceptions of teachers in the given society. The questions aimed to reflect key issues from the 1966 and 1997 ILO/UNESCO Recommendations Concerning Teaching Personnel and were almost identical in both surveys. However, the 2018 survey added new questions regarding issues that were considered important at the time. A Likert scale was employed for participants to report their answers. Some indicative survey questions: According to your members' perceptions, what status does society accord to teachers? What is the legal status of teachers working in the public sector in your country? In the past five years, how have the terms for employment for teachers changed? According to your union's or professional organisation's resources and information, how would you describe the supply and availability of qualified teachers in your country? How are teacher evaluations used in your country?

Survey responses were analysed through descriptive statistics. The open-ended questions were analysed inductively and aimed to support the quantitative data by providing concrete examples. In this article, secondary data analysis is conducted based on the categories and core elements that we devised in the theoretical section and that we subsequently applied deductively. We also take into account that one teacher union's responses may be depicting the reality of tens or hundreds of thousands of members. In this sense, union responses can capture prevailing patterns across the world and thus help us to understand and reflect on issues related to the occupational status of teachers.

The EI data, nonetheless, present some limitations. First, we cannot engage in a full comparison between 2015 and 2018 because the disaggregated 2015 survey results are no longer available. Second, a complete regional analysis is hampered by the low responses for some items in the case of the developing regions; therefore, we cannot engage in a consistent regional comparison. Third, instead of producing numerous tables presenting the entire Likert distribution of responses by item, we do so selectively and refer primarily to the percentages of the most intensive or frequent responses. In our view, this allows us to create a narrative that is easier to follow even though it departs from traditional quantitative analysis practices.

Findings

This section cross-examines the data collected from teacher unions for the purposes of the two EI teacher status reports in 2018 and 2015. The following categories guide the analysis: (1) work intensification and accountability, (2) de-professionalisation, (3) privatisation, and (4) teacher union engagement.

Work intensification and accountability

The first category brings together data from survey questions related to teacher accountability, professional autonomy, teacher salaries, and working conditions. Table 2 indicates the extent to which different accountability mechanisms were true for the teaching profession in the participants' jurisdictions.

Table 2

Teacher accountability mechanisms

	2015			2018		
	Not at all true	Somewhat true	Completely true	Not at all true	Somewhat true	Completely true
Teachers are held accountable through test results	10 14.3%	45 64.3%	14 20.0%	24 31.2%	42 54.6%	11 14.3%
Teachers are held accountable through inspections	11 15.7%	31 44.3%	26 37.1%	8 10.4%	53 68.9%	16 20.8%
Teachers are trusted to use their professional judgement and expertise	5 7.0%	47 66.2%	19 26.8%	6 7.9%	56 73.7%	14 18.4%

Globally, teacher accountability through student test results was recognised as "*somewhat true*" or "*completely true*" by two-thirds of respondents in both the 2015 and 2018 surveys, but the respondents considered teacher accountability through inspections of their classroom performance to also be common, with more than 80% of them affirming this. Across all geographical regions (except for North America/Caribbean), the use of inspectors was twice as frequent as the use of testing to evaluate teachers. This suggests that student testing as a feature of NPM has had very uneven penetration in school systems across the world. According to the 2018 survey results, teacher union leaders also thought that teacher evaluations had an impact on "their career development" (55%) and served "to increase salary levels" (42%). Regional differences in the use of evaluations exist, with evaluations being practised to increase salary levels in the Asia/Pacific region (64%) much more often than in the other regions. The impact of teacher evaluations on career development was the highest in Africa (76%) and Asia/Pacific (43%).

Teachers in European countries were perceived by their union leaders as being subjected to student testing (mostly in the form of standardised tests) even though teachers in this region are also seen as enjoying high levels of trust about their judgment and expertise. In other countries, such as the US and Australia, respondents have pointed out over time that individual teachers are sanctioned for poor student achievement, resulting in a culture that "blames and shames" teachers. Teacher evaluations, whether or not they were connected to student achievement, were often used for career development, salary increases, and/or bonuses for teachers, while in only a few cases did they lead to salary decreases. Some countries have also introduced performance-related salaries for teachers, linking teacher evaluation based on standardised test scores to a salary schedule. The data from the 2015 survey indicate that only 15% of respondents considered teachers' pay to be linked to performance as measured by student test scores in their countries, while in 2018 this number grew to 42%. Still, the fact that in slightly over half of the cases unions reported that teachers were accorded civil servant status (and thus earned salaries that follow position and seniority criteria) implies that performance-based salary is not a widespread practice.

In the survey from 2018, most union leaders (72%) attributed a high impact on teacher satisfaction to teachers being able to secure "decent salary conditions." Second in impact attribution (63%) was having a "supportive principal and other administrators," which indicates that the existence of a friendly professional environment was very much appreciated. Corroborating this finding is that the third most attributed impact (58%) was the "provision of professional development opportunities." In this regard, teacher union leaders in both the 2015 and 2018 surveys perceived that teachers' working conditions in their countries had either "significantly declined" or "slightly

declined" over the preceding five years, as indicated in Table 3. The conditions of teacher salaries seemed to vary by country and discipline; thus, while many union leaders perceived that there had been either a "significant increase" or "some increase" in teacher salaries, others held that there had been a "significant decrease" or "some decrease" in salaries. Added to the low salary levels, the respondents noted that while in most cases teacher salaries are paid always "both on time and on a regular basis," 15% of respondents in 2018 declared that this happens only "sometimes," with more delays occurring in African countries. This 15% percentage is likely to be high enough to cause teacher stress and even teacher absenteeism if it means they must make special efforts to collect their checks.

Table 3

Perceptions of changes to teachers' salaries and working conditions over the preceding five years

	Salaries		Working conditions	
	2015	2018	2015	2018[3]
Significant decline	10 14.7%	9 11.5%	17 24.6%	14 21.5%
Some decline	12 17.7%	8 10.3%	20 29.0%	23 35.4%
Neither an increase nor a decline	5 7.4%	12 15.4%	13 18.8%	6 9.2%
Some increase	33 48.5%	26 33.3%	17 24.6%	18 27.7%
Significant increase	8 11.8%	10 12.8%	2 2.9%	6 9.2%

Over time, most union leaders reported that teachers enjoyed considerable pedagogical autonomy, with only 15% of leaders describing teacher autonomy as low in the survey from 2018. In the Africa, Asia/Pacific, and European regions, union leaders rated teachers as having either high or considerable autonomy, but fewer did so in Latin America. In countries where teacher evaluations were linked to student testing, especially through standardised tests that were designed by third parties and in which teachers did not participate, a decline in teachers' professional autonomy was reported. The 2018 survey found that national testing was not so widespread in developing countries, but that, when in place, was a significant factor affecting teachers'

[3] Data from 65 unions representing the primary school sector.

professional autonomy. Other factors hampering the professional autonomy of teachers in developing countries include low salary levels, poor working conditions, and the hiring of unqualified personnel. With regard to higher education, academic freedom and professional autonomy was steadily reported as high, with teachers in this sector being more likely to decide the content and methods of their teaching in contrast to teachers in other education sectors and levels.

In neither survey was there enough evidence to support the argument of role diffusion (i.e. the variety of separate and identifiable roles that teachers undertake), but some unions reported government efforts to create new educational roles to improve the performance of teachers, such as remedial tutors and community educator workers.

De-professionalisation

The majority of respondents in both surveys (60% in 2015, 69% in 2018) revealed that the teaching profession was not considered attractive by young people in their countries. Over half of the respondents in both surveys (56% in 2015, 67% in 2018) indicated that they faced teacher shortages in their countries, with the fields of maths and science being most severely affected. Surprisingly, the three regions with at least two-thirds of their countries reporting teacher shortages were North America/Caribbean, Africa, and Europe. The prime causes of teacher shortages in Africa were the high student load per class and low teacher salaries. Similar causes were identified in Asia/Pacific. Latin American respondents identified as a significant cause the departure of teachers, especially high school teachers in the areas of science, English, and physical education, to other economic sectors. European and North America/Caribbean union leaders referred to shortage variation by geographic location and content area.

Although the unattractiveness of teaching as a profession may have been due to work intensification in the case of European countries, in the case of many developing regions it was poor infrastructural conditions and a lack of safety, particularly in rural areas, and the large number of students per class in both rural and urban areas that were dissuading young people from choosing a teaching career. In 2018, all regions reported teacher attrition problems, as "severe" to "moderate" shortages were noted by 69% respondents in the case of primary education and 74% in the case of secondary education. The regions experiencing attrition levels to a "great extent" were Africa (71%) and Latin America (57%). These two regions also reported the highest incidence of "severe" attrition in secondary education.

Both surveys also revealed that low education budgets were moving many governments to hire personnel who are not qualified to teach, while even in countries with considerable education budgets unqualified teachers

were often hired to fill teacher shortages, for example through programmes affiliated with Teach for All. The hiring of unqualified personnel was reported as "very common" or "somewhat common" by 61.5% of respondents in 2015. A worrisome finding is that a large number of respondents (69%) in 2018 declared that national data on the proportion of teachers who do not possess the required minimum qualifications (whether in public or private schools) were not made available by government officials. Without this information, it is very difficult to make assertions about the training needs that teachers have.

Participating in decision-making processes is a way for teachers and their organisations to raise their voice and combat the phenomenon of de-professionalisation. However, 29% of union leaders in 2018 and 38% in 2015 stated that they "never" or "rarely" participated in policy decision-making. While the majority of teacher unions participated in collective bargaining discussions, a practice that seriously affected the use of collective bargaining agreements was that governments tended to modify and even cancel these agreements without consulting the unions. This practice was reported by one-fourth of the union leaders across the world in 2018. The main reason for the cancellation/modification of decisions by governments was identified as austerity policies, which impeded promises to improve salary conditions.

Moreover, an essential aspect contributing to teacher professionalism is the provision of regular and quality professional development. Although most teachers were perceived as enjoying pedagogical autonomy in their daily practices, they were also perceived as needing "high levels" of professional support, particularly in dealing with students with special needs, acquiring ICT skills for teaching, and gender and sexuality training, as reported by at least half of the respondents in the 2018 survey. These perceptions were found to be identical for the training of both primary and secondary school teachers. Less widespread but also rated as areas in high need of teacher support were training in student counselling and instructional methods and strategies. Specifically in the case of African countries, union leaders found that teachers had a high need for professional support in the areas of maths, science, and reading.

Teacher participation in professional development was found to be relatively low in both surveys for a number of reasons. Table 4 provides an overview of the responses with regard to factors influencing the participation of teachers in continuing professional development (CPD). Although CPD was provided in most of the respondents' countries, the majority of respondents contended that teachers could only "to some extent" or "not at all" decide on the form of CPD they received, and teachers were not always allocated working time to attend CPD. Attending CPD also did not always lead to career progression.

Table 4

Factors influencing the professional development of teachers

	2015			2018[4]		
	Yes	To some extent	No	Yes	To some extent	No
Continuing professional development is provided in your country	25 35.2%	35 49.3%	11 15.5%	24 39.3%	34 55.7%	3 4.9%
Teachers can decide what form of continuous professional development they receive	13 18.1%	40 55.6%	18 25.0%	16 26.2%	32 52.5%	13 21.3%
There is working time allocated for teachers to participate in continuous professional development each year	16 22.2%	32 44.4%	24 33.3%	19 31.7%	29 48.3%	12 20.0%
Continuous professional development leads to career progression and recognition of advanced skills	18 25.7%	36 51.4%	15 21.4%	18 30.0%	31 51.7%	11 18.3%
Continuous professional development is of sufficient quality and relevance for teaching	16 22.2%	35 48.6%	19 26.4%	14 23.3%	39 65.0%	7 11.7%

Curiously, when asked about the "quality and relevance" of the CPD that is provided, fewer than one-fifth of the union leaders rated it as high. Very similar perceptions were expressed at all levels of education. It is striking that teachers were found to pay for a substantial proportion of the cost of their CPD. In 2018, even in cases where the state provided such training, less than half of the union leaders reported that it provided full payment for the participating teachers. In cases where the training was provided at the school level, the support given to teachers was even smaller, as only 26% of such training was provided free of cost to teachers. The situation was similar in 2015, when only 27% of union leaders reported that teachers had the opportunity to access CPD free of charge. Since teachers had to bear considerable costs in the acquisition of additional skills and knowledge to improve their teaching performance, unattended professional needs of teachers emerged in many parts of the world.

[4] Data from 61 unions representing the primary school sector.

Privatisation

The findings suggest that the expansion of private education, particularly for-profit private education, is a recent and visible phenomenon across countries. In both surveys, about 40% of union leaders considered that this expansion was taking place "to a great extent" and 52% reported that this expansion was occurring "to some extent." The survey from 2018 revealed that the strongest expansion was considered to be taking place in Africa (71%), followed by Latin America (57%) and Asia/Pacific (38%).

Overall, two patterns of privatisation appeared to be emerging. The first concerns the growth of charter schools in industrialised countries, notably the US, the UK, and Sweden. For-profit education in the US is indeed one of the largest investment markets. The second pattern involves the establishment of "low-fee schools," a model increasingly common in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and parts of India. In the views of teacher union leaders, a very unregulated situation regarding teacher salaries prevailed in these private schools, as only 40% of these leaders stated there were salary regulations concerning them set by the government, although a slightly higher proportion indicated that regulations about teacher salaries for private schools were being increasingly enacted.

Other privatisation practices reported to almost the same extent in both surveys were related to the proliferation of private tutoring, the use of public and private partnerships, and competition for funding among educational institutions, as indicated in Table 5. The vast majority of union leaders, more than 80% of them, reported consistently over time that private tutoring existed "to some extent" or "to a great extent" in their countries, while in countries with high-stakes testing in place, private tutoring was linked to improving student test scores. Intense tutorial practices existed in Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan, while a breakdown of union responses by region reveals that the proliferation of tutoring was higher in Asia/Pacific but Africa also saw an increased share. More than 70% of respondents in both surveys also reported that educational institutions needed to compete for funding, since a growing number of schools, particularly charter schools and schools with voucher programmes, were financed by the government. This development was considered to be diverting funds away from government budgets assigned to public schools.

Table 5

Privatisation practices

	2015			2018		
	Not at all	To some extent	To a great extent	Not at all	To some extent	To a great extent
Expansion of private educational institutions	7 9.5%	37 50.7%	29 39.7%	8 9.6%	43 51.8%	32 38.6%
Proliferation of private tutoring	7 10.1%	42 60.9%	20 29.0%	13 16.5%	46 58.2%	20 25.3%
Competition for funding between educational institutions	16 22.9%	37 52.9%	17 24.3%	22 28.2%	40 51.3%	16 20.5%

On a global scale, only slightly more than half of teachers across all sectors of education were in permanent employment and/or enjoyed civil servant status. The employment of teachers on limited or fixed-term contracts was becoming an increasingly common practice in many countries, for example India and countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Higher proportions of teachers with civil servant status can be steadily observed in primary and secondary education, whereas contractual status was reported more often in higher education and early childhood education. The precariousness of teacher employment was often reported as a government policy to decrease public investment in education, while its effect was thought to be more likely to affect young people seeking promising careers.

Teacher union engagement

In many countries, the media presented a negative image of teacher unions, blaming them for the inefficiencies of public education. Over time, our survey data indicate that the media image of teacher unions was more negative than the media image of teachers, suggesting that some media had created a difference and distance between teachers and their organisations. Approximately 53% of union leaders referred to an unfavourable media image of their unions, while the proportion indicating a positive image did not exceed 20% in either survey. For teachers, a negative image was reported by 39% of respondents in 2018 and 51% in 2015, whereas a positive image was reported by 35% and 27%, respectively. In the regions of Africa and Latin America, there was a higher proportion of respondents who argued that both teachers and their unions faced a negative media image. To counter this situation, unions could utilise their communication means to engage

with their members and sensitise the public towards the challenges facing teachers. However, the findings show that almost 73% of unions reported in 2018 that they had not developed, or lacked the means to develop, an internet platform to share their professional concerns.

In both surveys, many union leaders rated their ability to influence policy and education reforms in their countries as "moderately influential" (43.7% in 2015, 45.5% in 2018), while a significant number indicated that they were "not at all influential" or "slightly influential" (43.7% in 2015, 36.4% in 2018). Relations between unions and national governments had considerably low levels of coordination since union leaders declared that they were consulted "never" or "rarely" in areas such as education policy (38% in 2015, 31% in 2018). Nevertheless, consultation with unions on education policy proved to be more frequent than consultation on pedagogical issues. With regard to pedagogical practices, curriculum development, and the development of teaching materials, more than half of unions reported in both surveys that they had not been asked to provide consultation. Asked to describe the unions' relationship with the government in the preceding five years, the majority of union leaders declared that it "depends on the topic": 32% of respondents in 2015 and 21% in 2018 considered the relationship "conflictive" and 21% in 2015 and 17% in 2018 as "collaborative." These responses signal a long path to be traversed to obtain stable, cooperative links. According to the 2018 data, the highest incidences of responses that consultation "never" takes place in the area of educational policy were in Latin America (43%) and Africa (21%). The highest levels of "always" being consulted were reported in the cases of North America/Caribbean (33%) and Europe (21%).

The reasons for conflict with government usually had to do with reductions in salaries, the absence of recruitment of permanent teachers, a lack of professional development opportunities, delays in scheduling negotiation tables, and the adoption of student loans in higher education. Over time, it becomes evident that unions reporting a conflictual relationship were less likely to be consulted in matters of education policy, whereas unions with a collaborative or even frequently changing relationship could have a moderate or high influence on education policy. Slightly more than half of respondent unions also indicated that their government allowed for union representation in collective bargaining, whereas in approximately 10% of all cases it was not possible.

Throughout the world, teachers also experienced several forms of social discrimination, including for their political views, activism, and participation in teacher unions. In 2015, one-fifth of unions reported that teacher union activism and union membership was likely to negatively impact their employment and career opportunities; this percentage slightly increased in 2018. In Africa, political views and union activism appeared to be the

most common forms of discrimination. In Asia/Pacific, the most common form of discrimination was due to political views, and in Europe unions reported growing discrimination with regard to political views, union activism, and teacher ethnicity.

Discussion and conclusion

While it is frequently stated that "at the core of professionalism are pedagogical accomplishment and expertise" (Istance & Paniagua, 2019, p. 37) and that teachers are "a main asset for reforms" and the restructuring of education (Carvalho & Normand, 2018), the conditions teachers and their unions face today are quite distant from this ideal. The results of this article show that some worrisome trends for the status of teachers are now in evidence, pointing to the restructuring of the teaching profession towards "a new professionalism" under the influence of NPM.

New professionalism considers teaching to be a flexible and mobile profession that relies on accountability mechanisms and performance reviews determined by national and local authorities. In this sense, teacher policies are constructed and imposed top-down by public employers rather than negotiated by the profession itself (Carvalho & Normand, 2018). Specifically, our findings show an increased accountability for teachers through external control and standardisation, namely through student test results and inspections. Instances of government control over teachers emerged directly through state monopolies over the policy making process and even over decisions pertaining to pedagogical practice and curriculum development and indirectly through the weakening of organised teacher power made possible through privatisation and decentralisation. On the other hand, accountability through student testing, a central characteristic of NPM, appeared to be more strongly felt in advanced regions than developing ones. Interestingly, in the same advanced regions, teachers seemed to enjoy higher trust to use their professional autonomy. This contradiction—between accountability through testing and standardisation and public trust to be professionals—suggest that teachers today experience strong emotional tension in their everyday lives. Linking teacher salaries to student performance was not a widespread practice, but deteriorating working conditions and modest teacher salaries seemed to play a critical dissuasive role for teachers across the world.

The levels of external control reported in the surveys were not matched by parallel efforts to increase the professional capacity of teachers through professional development or to include young generations by making teaching an attractive career. Moreover, significant levels of teacher shortages and

attrition were reported throughout the world. When the needs of beginning teachers are not attended to and there is an attrition of teachers' sense of fulfilment, the process of de-professionalisation can take place (MacBeath, 2012). This is being augmented by rapid growth in for-profit schools, which often recruit personnel with limited or no teaching credentials. Multiple forces are at work in this, but it seems that low salaries and increased pedagogical work due to large class sizes added to the instability of many teaching positions and unattended needs for professional development are taking a toll among the teaching profession. The declining participation of teachers and their organisations in policy decision-making processes, particularly in countries affected by austerity measures, has further contributed to de-professionalisation and is another indication of shifting power from professional groups to managerial hierarchies in the context of new professionalism (Evetts, 2011).

The findings also suggest the expansion of what Ball and Youdell (2008) referred to as "exogenous" and "endogenous" privatisation. The increasing number of charter schools in industrialised countries, the establishment of low-fee schools and voucher systems subsidised by the government, and the increasing use of public and private partnerships, indicate an exogenous privatisation whereby public education services open up to private sector participation. The findings related to the competition for funding among educational institutions and the growing proportion of teacher employment based on fixed-term contracts are signals of importing privatisation practices to the public sector, thus contributing to endogenous privatisation. Both forms of privatisation are indicative of NPM's efforts to promote more flexible working conditions for teachers, threatening to alter teachers' perception in society and the quality of students' experience in schools (Ball & Youdell, 2008).

NPM policies consider teacher unions as resistant to reforms and discourage union membership (Bascia & Stevenson, 2017), with the findings of the present article also pointing in that direction. The media image of teacher unions is generally perceived as negative and a significant proportion of union leaders did not feel influential when it comes to educational policy and reforms in their countries. In several countries, union activism was also a factor in social discrimination with impacts on teachers' lives. To counter this situation, teacher unions should strive to improve their mass media image and social representation, while the advocacy of teaching about labour unionism in schools can enable young people to become aware of wealth and income inequality (Oldham, 2020). Table 6 expresses in a succinct manner the challenges facing teachers, as suggested by our analysis above, and the required actions to be undertaken by teacher unions, which from our perspective can help improve teacher status.

Table 6

Challenges to teacher professionalism and required teacher union actions

Challenges to teacher professionalism	Required teacher union actions
Limited professional autonomy given the prevalence of student testing and performance monitoring.	Unions gain participation in education policy dialogue, design, and implementation.
Low teacher engagement as professional leaders beyond the classroom.	Unions work to secure moral and financial incentives for teachers to assume professional leadership responsibilities.
Low salary levels (compared to professions requiring similar education qualifications).	Unions to continue to negotiate higher remuneration.
Increased contingent employment at all levels of education.	Strong efforts to increase union membership and to negotiate with governments about long-term employment.
Few opportunities for continuous professional development.	Unions to seek greater dialogue with education authorities with education authorities to provide and finance in-service teacher training.
Privatisation and policies that decrease unionisation.	Moving unions into revitalisation: from solely focusing on working conditions to promoting greater professionalism as well.
Negative representation of teacher unions in society.	Greater involvement of teacher unions in the mass media and teaching labour unionism in schools.

There is a considerable disconnect between the argument about the importance of teachers and the actual role allowed to their professional organisations. It is obvious that the image of teacher unions must change so that they are recognised not only as fundamental to the well-being of their members but also as organisations essential to the strengthening of teacher's identity as professionals. The recommendation made by several scholars for unions to adopt a professionalism mission (see Bascia & Stevenson, 2017) is sound and timely but will encounter serious challenges to its becoming a reality. With decreasing membership, hostility from the mass media, invisibility among international organisations, and frequent disregard from national governments, teacher unions today are languishing. The situation sounds very challenging, but these conditions are not inexorable. Support for greater protagonism for teacher unions from governments, scholars, and communities could be a way to surmount this crisis.

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