INTERNATIONAL AID AND TEXTBOOK REFORM IN POST-SOVIET ARMENIA

Branwen Gallagher

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Approved by:
Erica Johnson
Robert Jenkins
Michele Rivkin-Fish
ABSTRACT

Branwen Gallagher: International Aid and Textbook Reform in Post-Soviet Armenia
(Under the direction of Erica Johnson)

In my research, I explore the role of international organizations, the World Bank in particular, in education reform in post-Soviet Armenia. My project highlights the issue of textbook development in the country. Despite over twenty years of international involvement in the Armenian education sector, the country’s textbooks remain of very poor quality. I argue that the interconnected nature of education reform has been a significant factor in the protraction of the textbook development process in Armenia. I further argue that the World Bank, while a significant contributor to the country’s textbook development, failed to pay appropriate attention to two issues that have further stalled the process, the lack of an adequate textbook selection procedure and the absence of guidelines relating to gender and other forms of bias. I conclude with recommendations for further development in the sector.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, NGOs, national governments, and intergovernmental organizations around the world began to offer assistance to the newly independent nation of Armenia and the other countries of the former Soviet bloc. One area that was immediately identified as in need of reform across the region was primary and secondary education. Outdated classroom practices of rote memorization and an emphasis on facts over critical thinking skills prevented students from developing the skills necessary to compete in a market economy.¹ Financial hardship led to deteriorating school buildings with little or no electricity or heat, out of date science and physical education equipment, reduced teacher salaries, and a general lack of supplies.² Poor teacher training, inefficient management, and uneconomical school design (such as unnecessarily large school buildings) led to an inefficient use of what little funds the schools possessed. Economic burdens for parents began to grow as they were expected to pay for textbooks and afterschool tutoring to make up for the low quality of their children’s schooling. Moreover, huge gaps began to appear in the quality and access to education between urban and rural areas.³


² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 32.
In response to these crises, programs were developed to assist these countries in adapting their education systems to internationally competitive standards while attempting to buffer destabilization caused by their transition from Soviet to independent societies. Programs were launched to do such things as introduce new subjects (such as English language and computer literacy), retrain teachers, and to reorganize and decentralize school management. Despite these efforts, textbooks, which are central to the education systems in these countries, have continued to be of poor quality.

As a Peace Corps volunteer in an Armenian village from 2012 to 2014, I witnessed the slow progress of many of these reforms in the country. While Armenian schools are working to implement a number of new programs and updated practices, introduced by both national and international actors, Armenia continues to fall short in providing a quality education to the majority of its students. Studies have revealed that textbooks are a significant part of the problem. The World Bank has identified textbooks as the most cost-effective input for improving learning achievement, ranked higher than early childhood education, school buildings, class size reduction, and teacher training. However, a 2013 study financed by the Open Society Foundation and conducted by the Barev Scientific Educational NGO found that,

The state standards, textbooks and assessment methods currently used within the general education system are not interrelated or integrated. According to the state standards of general education, Armenia has modern learning outcomes such as independent, critical/creative thinking, and cooperative work style. However, the material transferred to the learners is derived from the textbook,

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containing mostly academic content on the subject matter including factual, theoretical and fundamental knowledge. Although topics have been mechanically reduced, subject curricula and textbooks are still overloaded. The reduction of content should not only be focused on the quantity of content, but a review of the overall approach, with an emphasis on knowledge application. This study revealed a particular divergence between trainers and teachers. While the trainers insist they have taught teachers how to work effectively, the teachers consider it impossible to use those methods due to time limitation and mismatch of the textbook material with the methods to be used. Thus we see an imbalance inside the standard-textbook-exam chain. Armenia includes modern approaches (creativity, critical thinking) into the standard, while textbooks contain a huge volume of scientific information and knowledge, and the exams only assess rote memorization.

The study reveals that despite over twenty years of international involvement in the Armenian education sector, Armenia’s primary and secondary school textbooks remain low in quality and effectiveness. I address the question of what makes a good textbook in chapter three.

The issue of textbook quality is particularly critical for Armenia because textbooks are central to classroom culture in the country’s schools. Teachers are often resistant to the idea of straying from the textbooks during their lessons. There are a variety of reasons behind this resistance. To begin with, it is a remnant of Soviet pedagogical methods that demanded a strict adherence to the state supplied textbooks. Secondly, poor teacher training causes teachers to cling to the textbooks due to their discomfort with the subject matter and lack of instructional skills. Finally, the slashing of teacher salaries drove quality teachers from the profession while forcing those who

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remained to focus on a second income, leaving little time or concern for lesson planning.\textsuperscript{9} Given the importance of textbooks to the Armenian education system, it is surprising to see how poor they are in quality. They are not interrelated or integrated, are overloaded with information, use language inappropriate for age and skill level, do not promote critical thinking skills, and contain gender-biased material. These issues are discussed in more detail in chapters three and four. Both during my time in Armenia and in my subsequent investigations into education reform in the region, I have always returned to one question: Why is it so difficult to fix the textbooks?

In my research, I found that only one international organization, the World Bank, has been directly involved in textbook development in Armenia. Even this involvement, however, has not been focused on the content of textbooks but rather their supply and financing. The World Bank has purposely abstained from issues of content, leaving this area up to the private publishing industry. Instead, the World Bank has initiated projects to aid Armenia in curriculum development in the hopes that a strong curriculum will lead publishing houses to compete to create the textbooks best aligned with the new curriculum.\textsuperscript{10} As a result, the process toward better quality textbooks has been tedious. However, I argue that the World Bank has committed some missteps, such as not requiring the Armenian Ministry of Education to adopt a thorough textbook selection process or create guidelines to prevent gender and other forms of bias, that have further stunted the process. Developing an effective curriculum does not guarantee that effective textbooks will be developed and selected. In order for this development to occur,

safeguards such as a thorough selection process and policies to prevent bias need to be put in place.

The next chapter provides an overview of the Armenian education system from the Soviet era through the post-Soviet transition period. Within this chapter, I focus on the development and distribution of primary and secondary textbooks in order to reveal how this historical legacy influences contemporary issues in the sector. In Chapter 3, I provide a review of the literature on international aid, gender and feminism in post-socialist societies, and the qualities of a good textbook. In Chapter 4, I turn to a discussion of the role of international organizations, the World Bank in particular, in the textbook reform in Armenia. I examine World Bank project completion, appraisal, and inspection reports in order to understand the organization’s strategy, activities, and outcomes in relation to textbook reform. Through this study, I reveal how this organization has contributed to and impeded the progress of textbook development in Armenia. I conclude the thesis with recommendations for the future of international involvement in the sector.

Through this study, I will reveal why the development of quality textbooks has been such a challenge in Armenia, despite the long-term commitment of international actors to education reform in the country. Has appropriate focus been placed on textbooks? What has been done? What more can be done? I argue that the interconnected nature of education reform has been a significant factor in the protraction of the textbook development process in Armenia. Effective textbooks are based on strong curriculums, supplied by competent administrations, taught by well-trained teachers, and used to prepare students for examinations based on their content. I further
argue that the World Bank, while a significant contributor to the country’s textbook development, failed to recognize two issues that have further stalled the process: the lack of an adequate textbook selection procedure and the absence of guidelines relating to gender and other forms of bias. Hopefully greater understanding of these issues will expedite the progress and development of the Armenian education system and the country as a whole.
Chapter Two: Historical Background and Conceptual Framework

To understand the complexity of the challenges faced by education reformers in Armenia, one must first understand the situation from which the country’s education sector emerged in the early 1990s. The political, ideological, financial, and social legacies of the Soviet Union created obstacles in education reform efforts at all levels and textbooks were no exception. In fact, textbooks would prove to be a particular challenge as the textbook industry is one that bridges the public and (newly) private sectors. In this chapter, I reveal how everything from textbook content to selection to distribution was influenced by Armenia’s Soviet past. I document how educational content and pedagogy was developed, how the education system was managed and funded, and what this meant for textbook supply and design. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the five problems that the World Bank considered to be the most pressing for post-transition Soviet education systems in the 1990s. This historical context provides the background necessary to understand how the multifaceted challenges facing the Armenian education system have slowed, and even stalled, the development of quality textbooks, despite heavy international involvement in the sector.

Soviet-Era Education System

From 1922 to 1991, Armenia was a socialist republic within the Soviet Union. As part of the Soviet Union, Armenia was subject to the state education policies handed
down from Moscow. In many ways, Armenia’s education system advanced during the Soviet period, bringing almost near universal literacy to the country and increasing gender equality. However, there were also elements of Soviet education policies that made it difficult for Armenia’s schools to succeed following the country’s declaration of independence. These elements included a focus on fact acquisition rather than critical thinking, leaving students without the skills needed for a market economy, and chronic underfunding that left schools in disrepair and lacking in supplies and technology. In the 1920s, textbooks played a significant role in the political indoctrination of Soviet youth. During this period, the official Soviet policy toward the non-Russian regions of the Soviet Union was to promote a Communist ideology while allowing the people of these regions to maintain their ethnic identity. Aiming to prevent the rise of nationalist calls for sovereignty, Lenin decided to diffuse Soviet ideology through the respective national languages and cultures rather than forcing them to develop a Russian identity. In accordance with this policy, textbooks were published in Armenian and students learned about Armenian national literature, music, and art as part of their schooling. However, the textbooks also placed a heavy emphasis on honoring the October Revolution, developing a collective spirit, and adopting the values of the


12 Ibid, 387.


Communist Party. Textbooks featured heroic tales about the leaders of uprisings and revolutions and championed the ideals of Marxism-Leninism. In this way, Marxism-Leninism was interwoven into the Armenian national identity.

In the first years of the Soviet Union, new pedagogical techniques were tested as the Bolshevik leadership tried to craft a revolutionary new society. One of the most significant programs introduced was that of polytechnic education. “The polytechnic philosophy stressed the alignment of education and productive work…The idea of linking school life to work life, borrowed from American progressive educator John Dewey, linked real-world experiences to curriculum in the Soviet schools.” As part of this program, schools were required to find ways to link education with activities deemed to be productive for society. As a result, schools often had workshops or farmland attached to them. As part of their studies, students would spend time learning a trade or farming the land connected to their schools. Schoolchildren also visited local factories and mines as part of their education.

Stalin’s rise to power in 1922 brought a new wave of education reforms and an official end to the age of experimentation that preceded his regime. Stalin had disagreed with Lenin’s acceptance of local nationalities and, upon Lenin’s death, Stalin

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enacted policies of Sovietification across the Soviet Union. Moreover, while the polytechnic school system did assist in the promotion of industry and agriculture, Stalin considered that it also contributed to a “general lowering of educational standards.” Therefore, a more bureaucratic, controlled, and traditional system was put into place. Textbooks and curricula were standardized, uniforms became mandatory, a teacher-centered approach to instruction was adopted, and rote learning and strict classroom discipline defined classroom culture. These changes would have serious implications for the future of education in Armenia and throughout the Soviet republics. For decades, Armenians lived under a system in which textbooks and curricula were developed and mandated from Moscow. Therefore, at the time of independence, Armenians possessed no prior experience in this sector. Moreover, the inherited pedagogical methods and textbook styles proved to be incompatible with the requirements of a globalized, market-based society.

While certainly not without its problems, the educational achievements of the Soviet Union under Stalin were significant. In a relatively short period of time, near universal literacy was achieved across the country, rising from 44.1% of the population in 1920 to 98.5% of the population by 1959. In terms of equality and mass educational opportunity, the Soviet republics, along with the East European satellites, made enormous

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strides over the course of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{25} Primary and secondary schooling was provided free of charge to all students, even in the most remote areas of the country such as rural villages in Armenia.\textsuperscript{26} Male and female students received equal access to primary and secondary education. By the 1980s, women comprised half of the undergraduate enrollments in the USSR.\textsuperscript{27}

These achievements would have an interesting impact on the relationship between post-Soviet education sectors and international aid donors in the transition period of the 1990s. Programs such as the United Nation’s Education For All (EFA) initiative were primarily designed for countries in Africa, where literacy and access to education for female and rural students were the dominant issues.\textsuperscript{28} However, these were not the issues that required the most attention in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Therefore, international aid organizations had little prior experience they could draw on to develop an education reform strategy for the post-Soviet countries.\textsuperscript{29}

During Khrushchev’s “thaw,” the period following the new Soviet leader’s 1956 denunciation of Stalin, the repressive policies of the Stalin era were relaxed and Soviet citizens gained increased exposure to western media and ideas, including western pedagogical methods. Moreover, Soviet citizens enjoyed a greater sense of freedom to

\textsuperscript{25} UNICEF. “After the Fall: The Human Impact of 10 Years of Transition.” The Monee Project CEE/CIS/Baltics. (1999), 7.


\textsuperscript{27} Silova and Eklof, “Education in Eastern and Central Europe: Rethinking Post-Socialism in the Context of Globalization,” 386.


\textsuperscript{29} Silova and Eklof, “Education in Eastern and Central Europe: Rethinking Post-Socialism in the Context of Globalization,” 386
express their ideas and opinions. From this period, and through the years of stagnation (defined by a lack of economic, social or political progress) during the Brezhnev era (1964-1982), the Soviet Union began to experience an increase in open complaints about the flaws in its education system.\textsuperscript{30} For example, a 1970 article in the newspaper \textit{Literaturnaya Ukraina} was openly critical of the low standards in the teaching of sciences in secondary schools.\textsuperscript{31} Joseph Zajda argues that this was “typical of a growing wave of dissatisfaction among educationalists with obsolete teaching methods and textbooks.”\textsuperscript{32} Unfortunately, during this period of stagnation the Soviet people would see little done to overcome these shortcomings.

By the time Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, it was clear that the Soviet Union was falling behind its western competitors in terms of educational funding, infrastructure, and student achievement. During this period, schools across the country were faced with chronic underfunding due to increasing economic instability in the country. Iveta Silova and Ben Eklof document some of the many challenges faced by schools during this period:

\begin{quote}
Rural schools lacked in amenities; science laboratories were antiquated; underpaid and overworked teachers left [the profession] in large numbers…In 1988, 21 percent of Soviet schoolchildren attended schools in buildings without central heating, 30 percent were in schools lacking indoor plumbing, and 40 percent studied in schools with no access to sports facilities…The area’s limited communications infrastructure created daunting obstacles to participation in the information revolution by Soviet schools.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 36.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 36.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 387.
The implications of these deficiencies on Armenian schools were many. Without central heating, many of Armenia’s schools were forced to close during the coldest days of the winter. Even when classes were in session, it can hardly be argued that the unsanitary conditions, outdated materials, and inadequate teaching quality found in schools were conducive to learning at any level. These conditions persisted and worsened in Armenia’s immediate independence period.

In terms of literacy and access to education, Armenia made great strides during the Soviet period. However, the Soviet education system fell seriously short in providing adequate funding and appropriate pedagogical methods for the education sector. The situation grew increasingly worse in the 1980s as economic and political stability in the Soviet Union became shaky. Students were forced to attend schools in dilapidated buildings, using outdated materials and textbooks, and were taught by undertrained and underpaid teachers. By the time the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, it was clear across the republics that extensive education reform was necessary. The Armenian Ministry of Education requested World Bank assistance in this sector in 1995. Unfortunately for Armenia, a war, a devastating earthquake, and economic crisis would only add to the challenges facing the newly independent country.

Post-Soviet Education System

At the time of Armenia’s 1995 request for World Bank assistance, the country’s education sector was in crisis. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Armenia experienced a drastic decline in the quality and accessibility of its education system.

along with all other public services in the country. As with most other former Soviet republics, the transition away from the communist economy and Soviet system of government was neither easy nor smooth. In a 2000 report funded by the World Bank, Sue Berryman identifies five problems shared by post-Soviet education systems: Alignment, Fairness, Financing, Efficiency, and Governance. These interconnected issues provide a general outline of the challenges Armenia’s education sector has faced since independence, and I discuss each of them in greater detail below. While each of these problems applies to the education system as whole, I emphasize their impact on textbook development.

By “alignment,” Berryman means that the governments of Eastern Europe and Central Asia needed to align their education systems with the new realities of their societies. While classroom practices of rote memorization and an emphasis on facts over critical thinking skills were sufficient under centrally planned economies, these educational strategies were incompatible with the open market system. New economic realities increasingly required workers to possess excellent “information-processing, problem solving, and knowing-how-to-learn skills.” Data from the 2000 OECD International Adult Literacy Survey, which measures individuals abilities “to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community – to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential,” revealed that Eastern Europe and Central Asia’s education systems did not adequately


36 Ibid, 16.

prepare students for a market-based economy. This is not to say that Soviet citizens were not intelligent. As Alena Ledeneva points out in her study of informal business and political practices in Russia, Soviet citizens developed a unique set of skills and methods to succeed within Soviet society. However, the development of new skills have been necessitated by the changing economic and political realities of the region.

In addition to realigning post-socialist education systems to be compatible with new economic needs, Berryman asserted that civic objectives needed to be considered. In the past, the ideals and principles of Communism were taught in schools. However, as the countries of these regions transitioned from Communist governments, adjustments were necessary. Berryman states that it is imperative for students to be taught to engage both with their government and in civil society. She argues that commitment to social participation will increase trust and social cohesion while reducing the risk of political instability.

To achieve these economic and civic alignment goals, I argue that Armenian textbook design and content must be reformed. The textbooks must include material that encourages critical thinking. This material can come in many forms. Some examples include open-ended questions to encourage inquiry, activities to encourage problem solving, and suggestions for group work to encourage student collaboration. Moreover, the textbooks must replace their Communist ideological content with content that teaches students about democracy and inspires civic engagement on the part of Armenian

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students. In recent years, civic education, focused on the principles of a market economy and democratic participation, has been added to the Armenian curriculum on which textbook publishers are to base their texts.\textsuperscript{41}

Fairness is another issue brought to light by the World Bank report. Before the transition, learning opportunities in primary and secondary schools were, for the most part, equitable across all sectors of society. “Wage compression (little variation in wages) under communism meant that unequal access to education was not, as in the rest of the world, strongly associated with variations in family income.”\textsuperscript{42} During the transition period, however, inequality in access and quality of education became increasingly visible. The greatest disparities were between wealthy and poor students and between students in urban and rural areas.\textsuperscript{43}

One of the biggest indicators of inequality was the decline in enrollment rates. In 1997, Armenia only had an eighty-three percent enrollment rate in basic education.\textsuperscript{44} Enrollment rates for secondary education painted an even bleaker picture. Between 1989 and 1997, Armenia saw its secondary education enrollment rate drop from sixty-eight to forty-two percent.\textsuperscript{45} These falling enrollment rates were directly linked to family income levels.\textsuperscript{46} UNESCO reports that,

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\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 28.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 32.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 32

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 34.
\end{flushleft}
The high school gross enrollment rate for the richest groups of Armenian students is 1.3 times higher as compared to the poorest ones. Thus, after graduating from basic school, the students dropping out from the general education system are mostly poor ones. According to the integrated households’ survey, only 2.8% of 18-19 year olds from wealthy families do not continue their education after basic school while 16% of those who are from poor families do not get further education. The most alarming situation concerns the very poor population, as far as the dropout rate for students from this group is about 35%.  

As schools lost funding, the burden fell to parents to cover the costs of school materials such as textbooks and exam booklets. Moreover, the drop in teacher wages led many to request that parents pay bribes for good grades or afterschool tutoring. These extra costs could be incredibly onerous for families already struggling to survive.

Studies also found substantial differences between urban and rural schools in Armenia. UNESCO reports that the urban school buildings are often in better physical condition than the schools found in rural areas. Moreover, a study by OECD found that students in rural areas of Armenia are less likely to complete elementary education than those in urban areas. Furthermore, the poor quality of education forces rural parents to pay for tutoring so their children can take university exams.

The policy requiring parents to pay for textbooks and other learning materials was a significant causal factor in the increasing unfairness of the Armenian education system. While textbooks had been supplied to students free of charge under the Soviet system,

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parents were required to pay for their children’s textbooks starting in 1992. In 1995, a new system was introduced requiring parents to pre-pay for textbooks in order to “to pre-finance publishing and printing contracts that [were] awarded by the MoES, without competitive process, on the basis of expected demand.” These policies inordinately impacted families struggling with transitional poverty, unable to afford these new expenses. A 1996 social assessment found that only thirty percent of Armenian students had access to all of the required textbooks. The introduction of charges for educational expenses was identified by the World Bank as one of the leading causes in the drop in enrollment rates among Armenian students. As a result, addressing the supply of textbooks became a priority for the World Bank following Armenia’s request for assistance in 1995.

The next problem listed in the World Bank report is finance. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia, along with the other former Communist countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, experienced serious financial constraints. Unfortunately, many of these countries dealt with these new fiscal constraints by further reducing the education budget, a short-term solution guaranteed to cause long-term economic and social damage. The situation in Armenia was so bad that per student expenditure for primary and secondary education dropped from the equivalent of six

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52 Ibid, 4.

53 Ibid, 4.

54 Ibid, 2.

55 Ibid.
hundred dollars in 1985 to roughly thirty dollars in 1997.\textsuperscript{56} Of course, this budget left very little room for the development and disbursal of high quality textbooks. While Armenia’s economic situation has improved since 1997 and the budget allotment for education has steadily increased over the years, from 1.2% of the budget in 2002\textsuperscript{57} to roughly 3% today,\textsuperscript{58} this expenditure is still the third lowest in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, only surpassed by Georgia and Tajikistan.\textsuperscript{59} Without adequate expenditure on textbooks, an increase in their quality is unlikely.

Connected to the financial challenges faced by transition economies were issues of efficiency. The World Bank report found that post-transition education systems were expending more of their limited resources than necessary to achieve goals that could be accomplished with less.\textsuperscript{60} Inefficiencies in the design and construction of schools led to high heating, electricity, and maintenance costs, funneling money away from desperately needed textbooks and other school supplies. According to the report:

These inefficiencies stem from the incentives of the pre-transition period, when planners, not market forces, determined wages, subsidies, and prices. There were no mechanisms for determining the total costs of anything and therefore no incentives to contain costs. Budgeting norms for different levels of education, in many instances adopted in the 1930s, were never tested for cost-effectiveness.\textsuperscript{61}


\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{60} World Bank, *Hidden Challenges in Education Systems in Transition Economies*, 64.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 64.
As a result, schools were not constructed efficiently, both in terms of space and energy use. “Methods of capital budgeting did not allow, let alone force, tradeoffs between investment and operational costs. The results were designs that minimized construction costs by increasing operating costs, especially for heating, lighting, and routine maintenance.” Moreover, unnecessarily large school buildings were constructed without thought to heating or electricity costs. These issues continue to be a problem for the Armenian education sector, deflecting attention and funds away from textbook and curriculum development.

The final challenge identified in the World Bank report is that of governance. In the report, Berryman writes that many East European and Central Asian countries must improve their mechanisms for setting national education goals, managing those goals, and assessing outcomes. She finds that these processes tend to be underdeveloped across much of the region. Without clearly defined goals and methods for ensuring their success, it is difficult for ministries of education to address any of the previous challenges listed in the World Bank report. The implications for textbook reform are many. Without well-defined goals for the content and style of textbooks, selection will be relatively arbitrary. Moreover, if proper assessments are not conducted, there is no way of knowing if the selected textbooks are suitable.

On top of the alignment, fairness, financing, efficiency, and governance challenges shared with the other post-socialist countries in the region, Armenia also

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63 Ibid, 65.

64 Ibid, 79.
endured a devastating earthquake in 1988, a (now frozen) war with Azerbaijan in the early 1990s over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, and an ongoing blockade against Turkey over the failure of the Turkish government to recognize the 1915 Armenian genocide. These conditions impacted education reform by redirecting funds and attention that might have otherwise been allotted to the education sector. As a result, the Armenian Ministry of Education requested World Bank assistance in 1995.

History of International Assistance in Armenia

With so many challenges being faced by the Armenian education sector and the country as a whole, it was difficult for international aid organizations to discern where to begin. A 1996 poverty assessment conducted by the World Bank recommended that “high priority be given to improving both the level and efficiency of public expenditure on education and to concentrate public resources on ensuring universally affordable, good quality, basic education.” 65 Within the education sector, Armenian teachers, students, and parents identified textbook supply as the number one problem related to the provision of effective education. 66 This assessment begs the question, if the World Bank, as well as Armenian teachers, students, and parents identified textbooks as a priority as early as 1996, why do they remain in such bad shape?

Part of the answer can be found by examining the state of Armenia’s textbook industry, or lack thereof, in the post-Soviet period. In the 1990s, there was no competitive process in the publication and distribution of textbooks. The Armenian

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66 Ibid, 3.
Ministry of Education “commissioned authors, edited and approved texts, contracted layout and printing to one of two state-owned textbook publishing companies, and delivery to a state-owned distribution firm.”\(^6^7\) At the time, the Armenian publishing industry was very small and there were no private companies that could take on textbook production. As a result, the quality and availability of textbooks in the country suffered.\(^6^8\)

International aid efforts were initiated in Armenia soon after the country declared independence. In the education sector, the two international organizations that have played the largest role are the World Bank and the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation-Armenia (OSIAF-A).\(^6^9\) The Armenian Ministry of Education first requested World Bank assistance in 1995. Since then, the World Bank has implemented four major projects in order to assist Armenian preschools, primary and secondary schools, and institutes of higher education in their post-Soviet transition. These projects have dealt with a wide range of issues such as the development of an Armenian publishing industry, teacher training, curriculum and assessment procedure reform, and administrative restructuring. In regard to textbook reform, the results of these projects have been mixed. While textbooks are now widely available to students at a reasonable price, text content

\(^6^7\) Ibid, 4.

\(^6^8\) Ibid.

\(^6^9\) OSIAF-A, a branch of the Open Society Foundation created by George Soros, supports initiatives to promote rule of law, education, public health, and independent media. In 1997, the Armenian Ministry of Education requested assistance from OSIAF-A. OSIAF-A provided responded by providing aid in the form of teacher training with the purpose of fostering critical thinking skills among Armenian students They also supported reforms to improve administrative mechanisms within schools and to begin to incorporate information technology into classrooms. However, starting in 2012 OSIAF-A shifted its role to that of a watchdog, monitoring and evaluating the progress of reforms in the country. While OSIAF-A has had a significant impact on Armenian education reform, my research focuses on World Bank activities because of the direct role the organization has played in textbook development.
remains an issue. I address the pros and cons of the World Bank projects chapter four. In terms of textbook development, the only international organization to play a direct role has been the World Bank, which assisted in the development of the Armenian publishing industry and a national textbook rental program. OSIAF-A has published reports on the status of textbook content but does not directly participate in its development.

UNESCO’s 2015 Education for All National Report states that, over the past ten years, the Armenian education sector has been successful in establishing targeted goals for the future of education in the country through a series of new laws and strategic initiatives. These objectives are centered on restoring the status of education and knowledge in Armenia and strengthening the country’s reputation as an educational and scientific center. However, the country’s success in implementing these goals is difficult to gauge because “no reliable and trustworthy performance indicators for the measurement of education quality have been fully embedded yet.” UNESCO’s report found that, although Armenia does conduct some national assessments of student achievement, these assessments are not managed properly and therefore provide unreliable results.

The one source of trustworthy and internationally comparable assessment of Armenian educational achievement is the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), a study developed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, an independent, international cooperative of

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71 Ibid.

72 Ibid, 9.

73 Ibid, 9.
national research institutions and governmental research agencies, that tests the abilities of fourth and eighth graders in mathematics and science in more than sixty countries.\textsuperscript{74} Armenia participated in TIMSS in 2003, 2007, 2008, and 2011. Alarmingly, Armenia scored lower in 2011 than in 2003 in almost all indicators.\textsuperscript{75} While the blame for this backsliding cannot be placed solely on poor quality textbooks, they are certainly a significant part of the problem. In their study of school resources and educational outcomes in developing countries, Glewwe et al found that resources such as textbooks, furniture, blackboards, and school libraries have a positive impact on test scores.\textsuperscript{76} Therefore, it is important that these seemingly secondary aspects of classroom education not be ignored. The World Bank and other international actors should work together with the Armenian Ministry of Education to ensure the selection procedures and development guidelines for textbooks align with the national curriculum they have assisted in developing.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The issue of Armenian textbook reform, and education reform more generally, is a complicated one. During the Soviet period, textbooks were supplied to all students free of charge. However, once Armenia achieved independence, the ideological and


\textsuperscript{75} Open Society Foundations-Armenia and Barev Scientific Educational NGO. \textit{Assessment of Teacher Professional Development and Educational Content in the Context of General Education Reforms in Armenia.} (2013): 5.

pedagogical content and style of the Soviet textbooks ceased to provide students with the skills they would need to thrive in a democratic, market-based society. Unfortunately, the transition from a communist system, a devastating earthquake, and a war with Azerbaijan left Armenia in a state of economic crisis throughout the 1990s. Therefore, providing quality textbooks to Armenia’s students was challenging, especially since there was no history of private textbook publishing in the country. It was into this mire that international organizations such as the World Bank stepped in the mid-1990s following requests for assistance from the Armenian Ministry of Education. Textbooks were almost immediately identified as in need of priority attention. However, in 2016, over twenty years after the initial request for World Bank assistance, textbooks remain a problem area for the Armenian education system. Why has this issue been so difficult to resolve? What is being done? In the next chapter, I investigate international involvement in Armenian textbook reform to understand why, despite extensive international aid being devoted to Armenian education reform, Armenian textbooks remain of such poor quality.
Chapter Three: Literature Review

Introduction

In order to situate international involvement in post-Soviet textbook reform in Armenia, it is necessary to review the academic literature about contemporary international assistance, the issues of gender equality in post-Soviet spaces, and the requirements for a good textbook. This chapter explores each of these discussions in the sections that follow. The purpose of the international assistance section is to analyze how the issues of international involvement in Armenian education reform fit into the context of other debates regarding international aid. How does an international organization’s agenda impact the type of aid it provides? How do these agendas impact outcomes on the ground? How do organizations with differing agendas interact with one another? Once these questions are answered, I move to a closer scrutinization of the World Bank, the organization that has been most involved in Armenian textbook reform. I examine the critiques of World Bank programs by organizations with differing agendas and ideologies.

The second section of this chapter deals with questions of gender and the conceptualizations of feminism in post-Soviet countries. The purpose of this section is to explore why issues of gender bias have reemerged in Armenian textbooks. What is the history of feminism in the Soviet Union? Why have traditional gender roles made a comeback in recent years? How might the views on these issues differ between
international organizations, Armenian policymakers, and the Armenian population? This section attempts to answer these questions.

The final section of this chapter responds to the question of what makes a good textbook. This section explores articles and reports published by academics, textbook publishers, and international organizations to uncover some overarching requirements for a textbook to be deemed successful. Rather than dealing with specific subjects or grade levels, this section approaches this topic through a more generalized lens.

International Assistance

Thomas Carothers has written extensively on the topic of international aid, particularly on how international organizations with differing agendas interact with each other in the developing world. In his article, “Democracy Support and Development Aid: The Elusive Synthesis,” Carothers documents the competing types of assistance that have come into developing societies, particularly since the conclusion of the Cold War.\(^ {77}\) Some organizations have agendas based on democracy support while others are focused on market assistance. These organizations do not always see eye-to-eye, leading to tensions on the ground.

When organizations promoting global democratic development began to gain prominence in the 1980s, they were relatively isolated from the already established development aid organizations.\(^ {78}\) Carothers asserts, “democracy promoters were ambivalent, even wary, about the methods and values underlying development aid, while the attitudes of developmentalists toward this new political-aid endeavor were sometimes


\(^ {78}\) Ibid, 12.
even more strongly negative.”\(^{79}\) International development organizations were skeptical about the developmental value of democracy and were concerned that the politicization of aid could jeopardize their programs in the developing world, many of which were based around close relationships with the governments of the countries in which they worked.\(^{80}\) At the same time, democracy promoters fiercely believed in the value of global democracy and disapproved of the relationships development organizations had with undemocratic governments. Instead, they advocated for directing aid to other organizations such as citizen groups, political parties, or independent media.\(^{81}\)

Recent experiences on both sides of the debate have led to an increased openness to the idea of integration between democracy aid and development aid. Carothers points to a recent stall in the progression of global democratic expansion as a reason for democracy promoters recent turn to socioeconomic concerns.\(^{82}\) Democracy promoters have begun to see that democratic governments risk losing the support of their citizenry if that citizenry does not experience an improvement in their quality of life under democracy. Therefore, democracy promoters have begun to look for ways to connect democracy aid and development aid.\(^{83}\)

Development aid organizations have also begun to see some benefits in linking their causes to those of the democratizers. Carothers points to a growing “acceptance within development-aid circles that improving governance in developing countries is a

\(^{79}\) Ibid, 12.

\(^{80}\) Ibid, 15.

\(^{81}\) Ibid, 14.

\(^{82}\) Ibid, 18.

\(^{83}\) Ibid, 18.
valid and important developmental concern as a reason that they have begun to integrate the ideas of the democracy supporters into their programs. This new line of thinking resulted from a realization that competent, uncorrupt governments were necessary to implement meaningful socioeconomic change. Therefore, development organizations like the World Bank have begun to involve themselves in issues of governance. Evidence of this involvement can be found in the World Bank’s advocacy for the addition of democracy-building and civic engagement material in textbooks produced by post-socialist societies.

The increased interconnectedness of democracy support organizations and development organizations does not mean that the two sectors now see eye-to-eye. Many of the suspicions and doubts of the 1980s still exist today. Democracy supporters continue to question development organizations’ strong ties with host governments and remain doubtful of their dedication to democracy building. Meanwhile, development organizations are still wary of becoming too political, fearing host-government backlash and a loss of status in country. Therefore, tensions continue to play out between these two groups on the international stage. Evidence of this competition can be found in an examination of the World Bank’s developmental goals and the critiques of those goals.

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84 Ibid, 20
87 Ibid, 24
88 Ibid, 25
The World Bank is an intergovernmental development organization that provides loans to countries for programs related to poverty reduction and socioeconomic growth. Due to its economic agenda, the World Bank has often been criticized for a kind of market capitalism tunnel vision. Critics worry that World Bank projects disregard social and environmental issues in favor of capitalist growth. For example, an analysis of the World Bank funded Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline and the West Africa Gas Pipelines conducted by Gender Action, an international watchdog organization, found that women’s lives in the pipeline regions grew substantially worse after the completion of the projects. Not only did women lose their traditional livelihoods in fishing and small-scale agriculture but they were excluded from the job opportunities that became available as a result of the pipeline. Gender Action, along with many other international organizations including the Open Society Foundation, a major proponent of democracy and human rights in Eastern Europe, have advocated for an increase in World Bank safeguards to protect women, people with disabilities, and other minority groups. Elaine Zuckerman, president of Gender Action, writes:

The World Bank has just approved a new strategy to achieve gender equality in its work globally. But the strategy provides voluntary guidance rather than mandatory safeguards. Even if the gender strategy were enforceable, it perpetuates the bank’s approach to advancing women’s empowerment as an


instrument of economic growth without also promoting intrinsic equal rights. Both are needed.\textsuperscript{92}

Tensions over the World Bank’s weak safeguarding policies illustrate the divide between development aid organizations focused on capitalist growth and democracy aid organizations focused on equality and human rights. In the realm of Armenian textbook reform, these tensions play out in the complaints over the appearance of gender bias in the textbooks published as a result of a World Bank loan. Some argue that the World Bank should have enacted safeguards to prevent the appearance of this material while the World Bank asserts that it was not its responsibility to control content. I argue that enacting safeguards against negative outcomes like gender bias is not the same as controlling the content of a nation’s textbooks. The World Bank claims to be committed to gender equality.\textsuperscript{93} Therefore, the World Bank should make every effort to uphold these commitments in the projects it funds. These issues are discussed further in chapter four.

**Gender and Feminism in the Post-Socialist World**

In order to fully understand the reemergence of gender bias in Armenian textbooks, a review of the literature on feminism and gender in post-socialist Eastern Europe and Central Asia is necessary. Feminism did not develop in these regions in the same way as it did in the West, therefore discrepancies can be found in perceptions of the topic. In their studies of women’s movements and gender policy in post-socialist


societies, Julie Hemment\textsuperscript{94} and Joanna Mishtal\textsuperscript{95} examine how historical and political developments in these countries influenced contemporary views on questions of gender and feminism. Hemment writes:

For complex historical reasons there is no commonly held perception of gender discrimination in Russia, and most people greet the notion of women organizing as women with suspicion. This is not because the issue is in some way new, or has never had political salience; on the contrary, the emancipation of women…and the achievement of their freedom and equality was a prominent goal of Bolshevik-era social engineering.\textsuperscript{96}

As Hemment stresses, the concept of gender equality is not new to women in post-socialist societies. Gender equality was a main precept of Soviet ideology. Women received full civil rights and freedoms following the 1917 revolution and the state guaranteed women full employment and education.\textsuperscript{97} However, this top-down approach to feminism did little to change cultural perceptions of women’s role in society. Women in these societies experienced what has become known as the double burden. They were expected to both work outside of the home and perform the majority of the domestic duties traditionally allocated to women such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare. This experience of so-called “equality” led many women in these societies to reject the idea of feminism, instead yearning for a return to life before the double burden.\textsuperscript{98} Therefore, in

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{94} Hemment, Julie. \textit{Empowering Women in Russia}. (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2007).}

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{95} Mishtal, Joanna. \textit{The Politics of Morality}. (Ohio University Press: Athens, 2015).}

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{96}Hemment, 5.}

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{97}Ibid, 8.}

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{98}Hemment, 8; Mishtal, 83.}
the post-socialist period, programs to promote gender equality, often initiated by foreign sponsors, are viewed with skepticism.\textsuperscript{99}

The history of feminism in socialist societies is important to understanding why and how gender biased material has emerged in Armenian textbooks after being absent for so long. The gender-biased material is not mandated by a government body seeking to alter gender roles in Armenia. Rather, the material, introduced by domestic authors, is a reflection of new conceptions of what it means to be a woman or a man in Armenian society.\textsuperscript{100} This return in support for traditional gender roles comes after an experience of extreme disappointment and disillusionment with the results of state mandated feminism. However, not all Armenians approve of these shifts in societal perceptions of gender roles. Yerevan State University’s Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, established as part of a USAID project to advance women’s equality and empowerment in Armenia,\textsuperscript{101} has hosted several conferences and seminars to challenge these issues. Their stated goal is to break the stereotypes found in the textbooks and to call on the Ministry of Education to address these shortcomings.\textsuperscript{102} A group of anonymous Armenian NGOs and parents have also submitted complaints to the World Bank about the gender-biased material found in textbooks funded through the organization. These complaints are discussed further in Chapter Four. While the Armenian government did approve a 2004-

\textsuperscript{99} Hemment, 140.


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2010 Action Plan on Improving the Status of Women and Enhancing Their Role in Society, which was intended to improve the economic, political, and social status of women in the country, few of the stated goals of the plan were accomplished. These failings have been attributed to a lack of funding and awareness among the Armenian population, a reflection of general societal ambivalence toward issues of gender. International organizations must be aware of and sensitive to these issues if they want to advocate for the alteration of textbook content in Armenia.

What Makes a Good Textbook?

In an article discussing the role of textbooks in modern systems of education, Stephen P. Heynemen writes that, “A pedagogically effective textbook is accessible to the full range of student experience and ability. It is natural in the teacher’s hands. It is expected to build readiness for the next level, its modules fit well with teacher preferences and choices, and it chooses topics and their sequencing based on an understanding of student responses.” While there will be differences in what to look for according to the subject and grade level of a textbook, there are several overarching indicators of quality and effectiveness.

In a 1949 report from The American Textbook Publishers Association, an anonymous textbook editor provided a long list of questions that those selecting a textbook should ask in order to determine effectiveness. Among these inquiries are

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104 Ibid.

questions regarding the textbook author’s teaching program (What pedagogical methods are used? Does the text build on prior student knowledge and encourage the application of this knowledge to new circumstances?), the author’s awareness of classroom realities (How skillfully has she/he analyzed what children can and like to do? Is the vocabulary and communication style level appropriate?), the use of visual aids (Do they serve a purpose? Will they contribute to student understanding?), and the author’s understanding of the importance of discussion and check-ins (Does the author provide opportunities for class discussion in order to exchange ideas and clear up misunderstandings?).

Essentially, these questions allow the selector(s) to determine whether the textbook is working toward a clearly defined goal and if it will be effective at achieving that goal. Therefore, it is essential that the textbook authors have a clear understanding of the competencies of the students who will be using their books, the realities of the classrooms in which they will be used, and a demonstrated ability to deliver information in a way that builds on prior student knowledge and guides students toward an end goal.

According to UNESCO, a good textbook is also free of gender, ethnic, national, religious, or any other form of bias. More than just purveyors of facts and figures, textbooks play a role in building the identity and ethics of a society. The way in which information is presented can have a significant impact on individuals’ perceptions of themselves and the world around them. Bias in textbooks is a difficult problem to

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overcome as it is often subtle and goes undetected by authors and selectors embedded within the culture. However, the first step to overcoming this obstacle is to become aware of it and to look out for signs of it. Bias is a concern in Armenian textbooks due to the country’s ongoing conflicts with Azerbaijan and Turkey and the decrease in gender equality in Armenian economic and political life since the collapse of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{108}

UNESCO published a guidebook on textbook research and revision, most recently updated in 2010, which provides recommendations on how to prevent national bias in textbooks:

International co-operation in producing textbooks should be encouraged. Whenever new teaching materials, textbooks and the like are to be produced, they should be designed with due consideration of new situations. The textbooks should offer different perspectives on a given subject and make the national or cultural background against which they are written transparent. Their content should be based on scientific findings. It would be desirable for the documents of UNESCO and other United Nations institutions to be widely distributed and used in educational establishments, especially in countries where the production of teaching materials is proving slow due to economic difficulties.\textsuperscript{109}

The purpose of these recommendations is to prevent inflammatory or inaccurate material from appearing in textbooks, particularly those used in history and geography classes. If followed, the guidelines will prevent the appearance of misinformation about conflicts and other historical events as well as biased depictions of other nationalities.

Bias takes on many forms beyond the issues of nationalism addressed by UNESCO’s guidebook. The Myra Sadker Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated

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to promoting educational equality in American schools, provides a list of seven forms of bias found in instructional materials: invisibility, stereotyping, imbalance and selectivity, unreality, fragmentation and isolation, linguistic bias, and cosmetic bias. Invisibility refers to the practice of omitting certain groups, such as women or ethnic minorities, from the narrative and/or imagery found in the textbook. Stereotyping can be found in textbooks when certain groups are assigned a specific set of attributes, such as the portrayal of men as strong and adventurous while women are portrayed as motherly and delicate. Imbalance and selectivity occurs when only one perspective of a narrative is provided, leading to a misrepresentation of the issue. Unreality is a form of bias that stems from a glossing over of unpleasant facts and events. Fragmentation and isolation occur when a textbook isolates certain groups in their own chapters or text boxes separated from the main narrative. Often this isolation leads to the perception that these groups only interact with each other and exist on the margins of society. Language is another subtle way of perpetrating bias through the use of misleading descriptors or gendered vocabulary. Finally, cosmetic bias refers to textbooks that appear to be bias free by displaying covers and images representing diverse groups but doing little to alter the bias contained in its narrative. With all these forms of bias, it is easy for a textbook author or selection committee to inadvertently overlook discriminatory material. Therefore, it is extremely important to provide these groups with trainings and guidelines to avoid the perpetuation of misconstrued perceptions of events and groups. The proliferation of biased material found in Armenia’s textbooks shows that little action has

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been taken to prevent the appearance of this material.\textsuperscript{111} However, following a complaint received by the World Bank (discussed in the next chapter), the organization has committed to investigating the issue.

A final note on what makes a good textbook relates to how a textbook aligns with the school system’s curriculum and the exam system. A textbook must reflect the goals and methods ascribed by the curriculum. If a school system has a weak curriculum, the textbooks, which are based on it, will also be weak. Textbooks are also connected to exam systems. If students are evaluated by nationally administered exams, the exams must reflect the information and pedagogical styles of the textbooks. While a textbook could do an excellent job fostering critical thinking skills, teachers and students will not want to use it if students are required to take exams that test them on the memorization of facts and figures. The relationship between the curriculum, textbooks, and the exam system prove that textbooks cannot be developed in a vacuum. A textbook cannot be successful unless it is fully aligned with the curriculum on which it is based and the evaluation methods on which the students using it will be tested. This interconnectedness with other elements of the education system is one of the many challenges that make textbook development so difficult.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to place my discussion of international involvement in Armenian textbook reform within larger debates about international assistance, feminism, and textbook quality. When considering the role of international

organizations, particularly the World Bank, in Armenian textbook reform, one must consider how the organization’s agenda and ideology might impact its policies and what it chooses to, or equally important, chooses not to focus attention on. The appearance of gender bias in Armenia’s textbooks forces a greater discussion about the role of feminism and gender in Armenian society. Armenian women have very different experiences with and perceptions of feminism than their western counterparts. An understanding of these differences is important if international aid organizations want to be effective in their approach to this issue. Finally, I provide a definition of what, for this thesis, is considered a quality textbook based on the opinions of American academics and publishers and intergovernmental organizations.
Chapter Four: International Involvement

Introduction

In researching this project, I set out to uncover why Armenian primary and secondary school textbooks remain of such poor quality despite the lengthy involvement of international actors in reform efforts within the country. I found that one organization, the World Bank, has had overwhelmingly more involvement in textbook development than any other organization. While USAID is a major player within the country, its efforts have been geared more towards democratization and market development rather than education reform.\(^{112}\) The Open Society Foundation has been a leader in post-Soviet education reform efforts. However, in terms of textbook development, the organization has taken on more of a watchdog role, conducting studies and reporting on the progress of reform efforts rather than taking direct action.\(^{113}\) This chapter thus analyzes World Bank efforts at improving textbook availability, cost, and content.

The World Bank has been implementing extensive education reform projects in Armenia since 1997. Its role in Armenian textbook development illustrates the complexity of the challenges faced by the Armenian education sector and the international organizations attempting to provide education assistance. While it may sound like a simple task to improve the quality of content in textbooks, the process in Armenia has proven to be anything but easy. Interwoven challenges related to


educational ideology, financing, curriculum development, and the Armenian publishing industry have created serious obstacles, slowing the development of high quality textbooks to a snail’s pace. In this chapter, I will document the efforts the World Bank has made in assisting and stalling Armenia in its textbook reform process. I then turn to a discussion of a complaint received by the World Bank in May of 2014 about alleged failings in its textbook policies. I conclude the chapter with suggestions to improve and accelerate the process of textbook development in Armenia and a brief discussion of the current efforts of the Ayb Educational Foundation, a nonprofit organization focused on educational improvement in Armenia.

World Bank Education Reform Projects

The Armenian government first requested World Bank assistance for its education sector in 1995. Since then, the World Bank has funded four major projects related to education reform in Armenia. The first was a $23.9 million Education Financing and Management Reform Project, launched in 1997 and completed in 2002. Sixty-three percent of this project was funded through a World Bank IDA (International Development Association) loan, thirty-six through national contributions, and the rest through UNDP (United Nations Development Program) and UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund) grants. The $19 million Education Quality and Relevance Project was launched in 2004 and completed in 2009. It was funded by what was initially planned to be a three-part, but later condensed to a two-part World Bank

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115 Ibid, 17.
APL (Adaptable Program Loan). The second installment of the APL loan was dispensed in 2009 under the Second Education Quality and Relevance Project. The $25 million project was completed in 2015. The final project, the Education Improvement Project, was launched in 2014 and is funded through a $15 million IDA loan. The expected completion date for the project is in 2019. These projects were designed to develop the Armenian education system at all levels, from pre-school through higher education.

Of the four projects launched by the World Bank, the only project to deal directly with the issue of textbooks was the Education Financing and Management Reform Project, lasting from 1997 to 2002. At the time, the Armenian government and the World Bank agreed that textbook supply and development were among the highest priorities in developing the Armenian education system. “Priorities within the basic education sector were based on (i) a sector social assessment (1996) which identified textbook supply as the overwhelming constraint to effective schooling from the perspective of teachers, pupils and parents, and (ii) the government's reform priorities, which focused on decentralizing school management and improving efficiency.” With these priorities in mind, the World Bank developed its initial strategy for the reform of the Armenian education system and textbooks.

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120 Ibid, 2.
In creating a plan for Armenian textbook reform, the World Bank quickly realized that, before issues of content could be addressed, a solution to the crisis in textbook supply had to be found. In their 1997 Staff Appraisal Report of the Education Financing and Management Reform Project, the World Bank provides a description of the issue:

Failure of the system for provision of basic textbooks has become a particularly critical issue. Under the Soviet system, pupils were provided with copies of all the required books, on loan for the year, free of charge. Following independence, curricula and textbooks have been progressively revised to remove Soviet ideological bias and reflect Armenian history and culture. Publishing, printing and distribution of new textbooks, however, has been ineffective, because of the shortage of public funds, the lack of experience of financial and commercial management practices on the part of any sector of the Armenian book trade, and failure to control costs, quality or delivery schedules.\(^1\)

The Armenian government could not afford to purchase textbooks for schools so the burden was falling to parents, many of whom could not afford the additional cost. To make matters worse, Armenia had never before had a competitive textbook publishing industry so the whole system had to be developed from scratch. Finally, due to the absence of a competitive textbook industry, the content of Armenia’s textbooks had remained largely unchanged since the Soviet period.

After two years of development, the World Bank approved the Education Financing and Management Reform Project in 1997. The program consisted of two main components: capacity building for reform management and textbook quality and supply.\(^2\) The textbook component of the project consisted of the following objectives:

Specific objectives of the textbook component are to: (i) improve the quality of, and reduce the costs of, school textbooks and teachers’ manuals; (ii) ensure that

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2. Ibid.
all pupils have access to required textbooks for the core curriculum; (iii) establish the basis for a sustainable, demand driven system of financing school textbooks; and (iv) achieve full cost recovery of textbooks within four years, except for the poorest groups.\textsuperscript{123}

In this instance, “quality” largely refers to the quality of the actual materials (paper, binding, etc.) used to produce the books. World Bank project designers decided that a focus on textbook content was beyond the scope of the Education Financing and Management Reform Project.\textsuperscript{124} A change in textbook content would have entailed a full-scale reform of the curriculum, a step that parents, teachers, and policy-makers were unwilling to take at the time, preferring instead to maintain traditional standards and teaching practices.\textsuperscript{125} Moreover, the addition of textbook content reform would have made an already ambitious project that much more daunting, especially since the Armenian education sector had never before implemented an externally financed project.\textsuperscript{126} According to the World Bank implementers:

The project, therefore, approached the qualitative changes tangentially by including activities for increasing the exposure of educators to international practices and thereby spurring interest in curriculum and pedagogical reforms. The objective was to lay the foundation for future changes in the core quality-related aspects of general education.\textsuperscript{127}

In this objective the World Bank was successful and a demand for new pedagogical methods did emerge. These demands would be addressed in subsequent World Bank

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid, 10.


\textsuperscript{125} Ibid, 4.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid, 4.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, 4.
projects. However, the textbooks produced during the Education Financing and Management Reform Project reflected the existing curriculum, with only the Soviet ideological content removed. Subsequent World Bank projects did not focus on textbook supply or content directly and, as a result, textbook reform in the country has been slow and uncertain.

Although the Education Financing and Management Reform project did not address textbook content in 1997-2002, the initiative did introduce the Textbook Revolving Fund (TRF) NGO in 1997. The TRF established a textbook rental program, greatly reducing the amount of money parents were required to pay for their children’s textbooks. In the first year of the program, the World Bank purchased textbooks for all Armenian children in all subjects. Parents then rented the textbooks from the school for a year. The World Bank estimated that, by renting books, parents would go from paying the equivalent of eight to ten dollars per book to about sixty-five cents per book. Textbook rental fees are collected by the TRF. After four years, the rental fees collected by the TRF are used to purchase new textbooks. Also worked into the system is a 10% government contribution to the TRF so schools can provide textbooks to the poorest students free of charge. The TRF continues to operate today. In 2001, it was restructured into a Foundation and in 2011, due to the expansion of its interests and

128 Ibid, 4.
129 Ibid, 5.
132 Ibid, 4.
activities, it was renamed the Textbook and Information Communication Technologies Revolving Fund.\textsuperscript{133} The TRF has been an important development in access to textbooks for Armenia’s students, but the Foundation did not directly address important issues of reforming textbook content.

In addition to the TRF, the World Bank’s Education Financing and Management Reform Project introduced a competitive and transparent process for textbook procurement, stimulating the development of a local textbook publishing industry. “Since the principles and procedures were new to all the key participants, the project included intensive training…on the new procurement process (for staff preparing publishers' guidelines, bid administrators and evaluators, authors and publishers) and on operation of the school-based revolving funds (for school directors, teachers and parents).”\textsuperscript{134} By allowing for a competitive process, the World Bank hoped to reduce costs and improve the quality of textbooks. Textbook selections conducted by the Ministry of Education were to be based on three criteria:

The "quality of content" which mainly looked at whether the textbook appropriately reflected the curriculum and also looked at whether the material was age-appropriate and encouraged skills such as problem-solving; "quality of presentation" which encouraged appropriate illustrations; and "quality of production" which required a minimum technical standard established to ensure 4 year life of an in-use book.\textsuperscript{135}


\textsuperscript{135} Ibid, 11.
The idea was that in order to be considered for selection, textbooks had to meet these minimum qualifications. They would then be compared in terms of price.\textsuperscript{136} Because the curriculum on which the textbooks was based remained largely unchanged, most improvements in quality were due to the addition of illustrations and increased durability rather than altered content.\textsuperscript{137} Thus the World Bank led reforms in 1997-2002 were limited with respect to textbook content and curriculum reform.

Overall, however, the World Bank considered its Education Financing and Management Reform project to be a success. All Armenian students (more than 538,000) in public and private schools received all textbooks required for the core curriculum.\textsuperscript{138} Moreover, the project stimulated the development of an Armenian textbook publishing industry. As of the project’s completion in 2002, there were fourteen private publishing companies capable of publishing textbooks for Armenia’s schools, up from two companies at the start of the project in 1997.\textsuperscript{139} The World Bank reported that “the rise in the participation of local firms in the bids for textbooks has had a valuable impact on the quality of local production.”\textsuperscript{140} “Quality” in terms of this project refers to production and appearance of the textbooks.\textsuperscript{141} However, the project completion report acknowledged that there remains a great deal of room for improvement in terms of textbook content.

The authors of the completion report contended that the quality of textbook

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 11.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, 11.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 12.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid, 12.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, 11.
content will improve as improvements to the national curriculum are instituted, something that was not addressed in the 1997-2002 Education Financing and Management Reform Project.\footnote{142} Once the issues of textbook financing, publication, and distribution had been dealt with, education reformers felt they could turn their attention to curriculum development. Therefore, explicit attention was not placed on textbook development in subsequent World Bank projects in Armenia. Other international actors have also overlooked the issue of textbook development. As a result, enhancing textbook content remains a tedious process.

The second World Bank project in the Armenian education sector, the Education Quality and Relevance Project, was launched in 2004. The primary objective of this project was to develop a new national curriculum and assessment system, train teachers in the new curriculum and assessment techniques, and increase students’ use of and access to technology.\footnote{143} The Education Quality and Relevance project was completed in 2009. Among the stated project achievements were the introduction of a new national curriculum in 100 percent of Armenian schools, the implementation of a new high school exam system to determine access to higher education, the achievement of a 95 percent rate of acceptance and understanding for the rationale behind the new curriculum among the country’s teachers, and the attainment of a 35 percent ICT (Information and Communications Technology) literacy rate among teachers (the original goal had been 30

\footnote{142} Ibid, 9.

\footnote{143} World Bank. \textit{Education Quality and Relevance Project Implementation Completion and Results Report}. (2010).
percent). While these accomplishments should have laid the groundwork for textbook reform, they have not resulted in any substantial improvements.

The Second Education Quality and Relevance Project was launched in 2009 and closed in 2015. This project focused on improving access to preschool education, teacher training and professional development, integrating technology into classroom culture, supporting high school reform policies, and supporting education reforms in the context of the Bologna Agenda (in order to bring Armenian institutes of higher education up to European standards). Among the achievements of this project was an improvement in Armenia’s Bologna Process scorecard ranking, an increase in the number of teachers participating in pedagogical development programs, and an increase in the number of teachers using ICT and other new materials in the classroom. Despite these achievements, this project, and the Education Improvement Project that followed it, have been criticized for disadvantaging rural students, providing ineffective teacher training, propagating gender bias, and ignoring public feedback. However, the World Bank has refuted these claims, asserting that their programs have had no negative impact on the Armenian education system. While it is beyond the scope of this project to address all of these accusations, the next section discusses those that pertain to textbook reform.

While the World Bank may not have done anything to directly harm the process of

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144 Ibid, iii.
146 Ibid, 5
148 Ibid.
textbook reform, I argue that the organization’s neglect of the sector prevented a timely improvement in the quality of content.

The fourth and ongoing World Bank education reform project, the Education Improvement Project, was launched in 2014 and its expected completion date is in 2019. The objectives of this project are to improve preschool education, improve the physical conditions of schools, and improve the quality and relevance of higher education institutions.\footnote{149} Specific goals of the project are an increased number of high schools that meet Armenia’s construction and safety standards, an increase in preschool enrollments, and the launch of an Education Management Information System for general and higher education.\footnote{150} Despite the continued poor quality of Armenia’s textbooks, this issue is not addressed in the Education Improvement Project.

Not since the 1997 Education Financing and Management Reform Project has the World Bank directly addressed the issue of textbook development. The growth of an Armenian private textbook industry and the reform of the primary and secondary school curriculum were expected to produce the conditions necessary for the creation of quality textbook content. In theory, the private industry would compete to produce the textbook that best represented the new curricular guidelines. However, the quality of the textbooks used in Armenian schools remains one of the foremost complaints about the current education system. The Education Quality and Relevance Project, which helped to establish a new Armenian national curriculum, was only concluded in 2009. Since that time, members of the Ministry of Education and textbook publishers have been working

to understand a new pedagogical style with which they were previously unfamiliar. As a result, there is bound to be a learning curve in textbook development and selection. Unfortunately, the negative aspects of this learning curve are magnified because new textbooks are only purchased every four years. Therefore, errors in design and content impact four cohorts of students.

A Faulty Process?

While the World Bank generally views its education projects in Armenia as successful, not everyone views their efforts in such a positive light. In May of 2014, the World Bank received a complaint submitted by a group of nine NGOs, two students and five parents who wished to keep their identities confidential. They provided a list of ways in which they believe the World Bank failed to achieve its stated goals, including disadvantaging rural students, providing ineffective teacher training, and allowing for corruption, religious influence, and gender bias in the education system. The complaint asserted that,

The EIP [Education Improvement Project] is “…designed in such a way as not to address failures of the previous program… (EQR 2)” and “…would exacerbate the harm caused by the previous loan (EQR 2)….” The Requesters believe that EQR 2 resulted in “substantial harm” to the Armenian education system, especially “…in areas of accountability, governance, quality and accessibility”, and as a result, harmed academics, students and parents, including the Requesters, who will also be affected by the EIP.


152 Ibid, v.

153 Ibid, 3.
The complainants argue that the Education Improvement Project embarks on new endeavors without first taking into account the failings and shortcomings of previous World Bank projects, going so far as to assert that some aspects of the World Bank projects may have done more harm than good. Textbook content is among the list of grievances provided by the complainants.

The complaint documents raise concerns about gender discriminatory material in textbooks. The complainants assert that “discriminatory norms and perceptions are widely promoted”[^154] in textbooks. As an example, they point to a section of a tenth grade textbook that teaches students that men and women each have five basic needs that, when fulfilled, result in stable marriages. According to the textbook, the stability of a marriage is threatened if these needs are not fulfilled. “The needs of a man are in sexual satisfaction, a rest companion, a charming woman, household management and admiration. For a woman the needs are expressed in tenderness, conversation, honesty and frankness, financial support and devotion to family.”[^155] Another section of the same textbook depicts societies, “such as western ones,”[^156] in which “women are fully involved in social life”[^157] in a negative light because of the decrease in birth rates that result from such involvement. The complainants note that the textbooks present this information as fact and do not provide cues for further discussion or debate.[^158] Thus far, the World Bank has not assisted in the implementation of any policies that would specifically

[^154]: Ibid, 5.
[^155]: Ibid, 14.
[^156]: Ibid, Annex I.
[^158]: Ibid, Annex I.
prevent the appearance of biased material in textbooks. However, as a result of this complaint, the organization stated that it would review the issue.\(^{159}\)

Studies have shown that the amount of gender biased material found in textbooks used in Armenia and other countries of the former Soviet Union have increased since the collapse of the socialist system.\(^{160}\) The Soviet Union prided itself on its policies of gender equality. Therefore, images of women as astronauts, factory workers, and engineers were common in Soviet textbooks. Unfortunately, Magno and Silova found that these images have increasingly been replaced by images of women as housewives and mothers in the newly reformed textbooks.\(^{161}\) Saghumyan’s study of gender roles in contemporary Armenian primary school textbooks found that girls and women are overwhelmingly presented in domestic roles such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for the family. Boys and men, on the other hand, are shown in leadership roles and partaking in activities outside the home.\(^{162}\) Magno and Silova argue that an absence of specific gender representation policies and guidelines for textbook authors and evaluators has allowed for this increase in gender discriminatory material.\(^{163}\) As an organization committed to gender equality and inclusion, the World Bank could have played a

\(^{159}\) Ibid, Annex II, 17.


significant role in the formation of these policies and guidelines when it first became involved in Armenian education reform. Instead, biased material has slipped through the cracks and into Armenian textbooks.

The authors of the complaint to the World Bank place partial blame on the organization for the discriminatory material found in the textbooks, arguing that the Second Education Quality and Relevance Project’s “support for standards and curriculum development has translated into support for education content that is discriminatory.” They assert that the textbook reform and selection process developed with the assistance of the World Bank lacks checks and balances and transparency. Moreover, they assert that the textbook authors, publishers, committees responsible for piloting, and the expert reviewers are not gender sensitive in their approaches to development and selection. The World Bank has interacted with these groups extensively but placed little or no emphasis on issues of gender in textbook development.

The concerns raised by the complainants are similar to those raised by experts interviewed for a 2013 Open Society Foundation education content assessment report. These interviewees felt that the current selection process is insufficient. The process works as follows:

Textbooks are selected by a competition panel, to which publishing houses submit the draft textbooks for making a selection. In the initial stages the textbooks were selected by one panel comprising of teachers, professors, methods experts, scientists. However, under this setup, the positions of teachers within the panel were not always taken into account by well-known scientists. This is the reason why two separate panels are currently established. Once the separate scores of the two panels are tallied, the textbook(s) that has passed the

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165 Ibid, 12.
threshold wins and is sent to schools to be reviewed by teachers. The textbooks are also posted on the Internet. Based on the number of requests submitted by teachers, a decision is made as to the quantity of each textbook to be printed. The textbooks are printed once every 4-6 years.\textsuperscript{166}

The experts interviewed by the SOROS Foundation argue that neither the selection panel nor the teachers to whom the potential textbooks are sent for review receive adequate training in how to properly evaluate a textbook.\textsuperscript{167} The development of an adequate selection process and the training of reviewers are areas in which the World Bank could have played a significant role but failed to do so.

One interviewee who was charged with analyzing the textbook reviews submitted by schools stated that “only thirteen schools [out of ninety-three] submitted such review comments indicating that teachers know how to write reviews, what providing comments and opinions means, how to make and justify recommendations, and point out to the inconsistencies between the textbook and the standard or the age of the students.”\textsuperscript{168} Further complaints identified the inability of individual schools to select their own textbooks as an issue. “Selection of textbooks is an important entitlement for schools, very much like the authority to manage finances or hire teachers...These basic authorities will lead to the development of schools. But they do not exist, or are only limited and this hampers school development.”\textsuperscript{169} The crux of these complaints is that there are a limited number of actors who have a voice in the textbook selection process (not the least of

\textsuperscript{166}Open Society Foundations-Armenia and Barev Scientific Educational NGO. \textit{Assessment of Teacher Professional Development and Educational Content in the Context of General Education Reforms in Armenia.} (2013): 27.

\textsuperscript{167}Ibid, 27.

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid, 27.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid, 27.
which being individual schools) and those that do have a voice are poorly trained in what they should be looking for in a textbook. The World Bank should have been actively involved in the creation and implementation of policies to alleviate these issues. Doing so would have been in their best interest if they wanted the curriculum they helped to develop to be properly represented in the country’s textbooks. Unfortunately, the World Bank did not take on these tasks. As a result, poor quality textbooks continue to be approved and distributed to Armenian schools.

The World Bank responded to the allegations made against them by stating that “the Bank has not provided support or advice for the development of textbooks and is thus not responsible for [their] content.” 170 Therefore, the project developers decided that no changes were necessary in the implementation of the Second Education Quality and Relevance Project and the Education Improvement Project. While stressing that the World Bank was not at fault for the gender bias found in Armenian textbooks, the authors of the Inspection Panel Report, a World Bank document published in response to the allegations and subsequent investigation, note that “the Bank is strongly committed to gender equality and gender inclusion, and will review this issue and raise it with the Borrower if gender bias and discriminatory behavior is confirmed.” 171 The World Bank also expressed hope that the Education Improvement Project would bring further improvements to the national curriculum, which would in turn have a positive effect on textbook content in the country. 172


171 Ibid, 8

172 Ibid, 28.
How does Armenia Compare?

The issues raised by the complainants and the experts interviewed by the SOROS Foundation become much more meaningful when the Armenian textbook selection process is compared to that in other international settings. An example of a much more diligent and thoughtful process can be found in the state of California.

Similar to Armenia, the California process consists of two panels, an instructional materials advisory panel and a content review panel. The instructional materials advisory panel is comprised of individuals who work with children and understand their needs and abilities. The content review panel is made up of experts in the field who are concerned with the accuracy of the textbook material.173 The two panels are trained together for one week on the state curriculum framework and standards and the board-approved evaluation criteria. They also attend presentations by the publishers whose books are under consideration. Once they have completed their training, the panel members independently review the textbooks for two months. They then reconvene for another week of group discussion. At the conclusion of this meeting, the panel members are expected to produce a detailed report, including a summary and recommendation, about each of the potential textbooks. Volunteers then review this selection process to ensure that panel members complied with standards for evaluating instructional materials. While this review is taking place, the textbooks under consideration are displayed at various locations throughout the state. The public is invited to view and submit comments about the textbooks. After reviewing all of this information, the state board of

education then selects a handful (the number varies) of textbooks from which local school districts may choose. School districts are then allotted time to conduct their own reviews of the textbooks and make the appropriate selections. ¹⁷⁴

Unlike in Armenia, the California textbook selection process provides its panel members with extensive training and guidelines for textbook selection. Moreover, their selection process is much more deliberate and thorough. In their reports, the panelists must demonstrate that they carried out the selection process appropriately and provide detailed explanations for their recommendations. In order to ensure propriety and competence, a separate panel of volunteers reviews this process. Armenian panelists are not required to provide proof that they followed a textbook selection guideline. Even if this were the case, there are very few guidelines to which they are required to adhere. By contrast, California has strict policies regarding respect for diversity that are designed to prevent the appearance of discriminatory material like that found in Armenia’s textbooks.¹⁷⁵ Armenia’s panelists have no such guidelines on which to base their decision. Lastly, Armenian schools are given very little voice in the selection process. Therefore, they feel disconnected from the textbook development and selection process. The Armenian government does not have to adopt a textbook selection process identical to that found in California. The purpose of this comparison is to illustrate the weight that other school systems place on textbook selection training, checks and balances, and community involvement. World Bank involvement assistance in dealing with these issues would have a very positive impact on textbook content in Armenia.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 112.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 112.
The Future of Armenian Textbook Development

The Education Improvement Project, started in 2014, is an ongoing World Bank project so only time will tell if its focus on curriculum reform will in fact result in higher quality textbooks in Armenia. For the time being, however, Armenia’s students are stuck with poorly designed, overloaded, level inappropriate, and gender biased textbooks. As learning in the majority of Armenian classrooms continues to be centered on textbooks, the impact of these failures could be incredibly damaging for generations of Armenians.

Luckily, there is light at the end of the tunnel. The Ayb School, a private nonprofit exam school, meaning students are accepted based on exam scores, located in Yerevan, opened its doors in 2011. The Ayb Educational Foundation, comprised mostly of Armenian diaspora, founded the school in the hopes of establishing a modern, high quality, learning environment for Armenian students. The school can boast state of the art learning facilities and its 195 students are taught by “53 faculty members, of which 26 hold doctorates, 4 are recognized artists and 65 percent have worked, earned degrees or studied abroad.”176 Their graduates are accepted into the top institutes of higher learning around the world.177 Students attending the Ayb School choose between the social sciences curriculum, which includes the humanities and economic and business studies, and the sciences curriculum, which includes math, ICT, and the natural sciences. Each track consists of core compulsory classes and a choice of elective subjects.178

177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
Part of the reason for the success of the Ayb School is its comprehensive approach to education reform. Its teachers are well trained (and appropriately paid), its methodologies are internationally competitive, and its facilities are up to date. Of course, it also doesn’t hurt that it has a wealthy donor base from which to draw funds. All of these elements work together to produce a high quality educational experience for students at Ayb.

Despite the school’s successes, textbooks remain a problem. Unsurprisingly, the teachers at the Ayb School are incredibly frustrated by the quality of Armenian textbooks. Therefore, the Ayb Foundation has selected and obtained the rights to translate many of the world’s best textbooks for use in their classes.179 There are only a few subjects that use the public school textbooks, including Armenian language, literature, and history. However, teachers are unhappy with their quality and substitute other materials when possible.180 In response to this issue, the Ayb Educational Foundation has begun a collaborative effort with the University College London Institute of Education to develop Armenian language textbooks for all primary and secondary school subjects. The goal of this collaboration is to alleviate the issues of poor integration, overloading, outdated pedagogy, and bias found in the public school textbooks. While this project is still in early stages of development, Seda Dallakyan, a teacher at the Ayb School, said that these textbooks could potentially become available to public schools if

179Ibid.

180Dallakyan, Seda. Email Message to Author. 11 Mar. 2016.
permitted by the Armenian government. Permission would likely be based on policy maker approval of the textbook content as well as economic considerations.

While the Ayb School suggests some important elements on which to model more general education reform in Armenia, the Ayb School is also just one school among the thousands operating in Armenia. Implementing something similar at a national level with a much more limited budget is incredibly challenging. The World Bank has been working on this challenge since the Armenian Ministry of Education requested its assistance in 1995. Through its Education Financing and Management Reform Project, the first and second Education Quality and Relevance Projects, and the Education Improvement Project the World Bank has worked incrementally to boost the Armenian education sector from all sides, from administrative reform to teacher training to school building repair to textbook development. The process is slow because all of these elements are intertwined. One component, such as textbooks, can’t be advanced without the advancement of the other components. The textbooks must reflect a reformed curriculum; the teachers must be trained to properly use the textbooks; all students must have access to the textbooks, etc. However, one troubling aspect of textbook development in Armenia is the apparent stagnation, and even backsliding in terms of gender bias in textbooks, despite World Bank involvement in the education sector. It is understandable that the process will be slow. However, it would be advisable for the World Bank to establish safeguards to ensure its efforts in one sector continue to move forward when attention is shifted to other issues. The weak and unsystematic textbook selection process in Armenia is one factor that has allowed textbooks to remain in such poor shape. Another factor is the lack of policies preventing gender and other forms of bias in the textbooks. In addition to

181Ibid.
assisting Armenia in its curriculum reform efforts, the World Bank should also support improvement in these areas. A high quality textbook reflecting a reformed curriculum will do little good if an unqualified selection panel overlooks it. Worse yet, without policies to prevent it, textbooks may reflect the reformed curriculum but also promote harmful gender stereotypes. With luck, the World Bank will assist the Armenian Ministry of Education in addressing these issues so its efforts in curriculum reform will not be in vain. As all of these elements come together, perhaps Armenia’s students will finally have access to the high quality learning materials they deserve.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this study, I set out to understand why Armenia’s primary and secondary textbooks continue to be so ineffective despite the involvement of the World Bank in developing the country’s education sector. The question was important to me because, having spent two years working in an Armenian school as a Peace Corps volunteer, I witnessed the central role that textbooks play in the teaching and learning process in the country’s classrooms. From the outside, the textbook problem appeared to be a relatively simple fix. I couldn’t understand why it would take so long to create decent textbooks.

Through my research, I found that the main international player in the realm of textbook reform has been the World Bank. By studying this organization’s strategies and activities, I was able to understand why the development of textbooks in Armenia has been such a slow and challenging endeavor. First of all, an Armenian textbook industry had to be created from scratch. Moreover, the World Bank, in conjunction with the Armenian Ministry of Education, had to find a way to supply all of Armenia’s students with textbooks in a way that was both affordable to parents and the government. Content presents an even trickier challenge as this aspect of textbook development is interconnected with several other elements of the education system including the curriculum, teaching methodologies, and evaluation procedures. Therefore, textbook content cannot simply be developed in a vacuum.
In order to create the environment apt for high quality textbook development, the World Bank had to ensure that all levels of the interconnected education sector were at the same level. Particular focus was given to curriculum development. World Bank project developers hoped that once a strong national curriculum was established, textbooks would begin to improve as newly established Armenian publishing houses competed to best represent the new standards and requirements. Unfortunately, this market-based approach led the World Bank and the Ministry of Education to neglect some important considerations in the development of their strategy. The Armenian textbook selection process is weak, lacking an appropriate training process, community involvement, and checks and balances. Moreover, the Ministry of Education has not instituted any policies or trainings to prevent the appearance of bias, gender or otherwise, in its textbooks. Even with a strong curriculum, these oversights continue to allow low quality textbooks to enter Armenian schools. The World Bank continues to be actively involved in the Armenian education sector. With luck, they will put in stronger safeguards to prevent these problems in future projects. Unfortunately, this waiting game does little to assist current Armenian students. For this reason, the Ayb Foundation has endeavored to take matters into its own hands, developing textbooks in collaboration with the University College London Institute of Education. Perhaps this collaboration will accelerate the process of getting effective textbooks into the hands of Armenia’s students. Education is too important a commodity to sit idly by as generation after generation of Armenian students graduate without the skills necessary to succeed and contribute to the prosperity and progress of Armenian society.


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