

Title: How the World Bank perceives education's role in development and poverty reduction : an analysis of educational policy documents in their historical context

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Year: 2005

Abstract:

Since the end of World War II, education has been considered an integral factor in national development. More recently, it has been closely linked to the reduction of poverty, which itself has become the primary mission of international aid agencies like the World Bank. The World Bank has become the world's most powerful multilateral organisation in funding and researching educational issues in developing countries. This study investigates how the World Bank has portrayed the relationship between education and poverty reduction through three education sector policy documents from its 40 years of educational lending. Using an interpretive, hermeneutical approach, this study finds the historical, political and economic context of the three documents and their language critical to understanding World Bank approaches to education learning. Lending criteria and trends follow the particular dominant ideologies of those countries that have the most control in World Bank lending operations. Tension is also identified between the World Bank's proposed mission – reducing poverty – and its original legal imperative to protect the global market system. This study proposes that the Bank struggles to execute these two distinct objectives simultaneously. It also argues that its lending strategies often do not sufficiently examine the complex relationships among development, education and poverty reduction. Instead, the strategies are often based on superficial assumptions that actually undercut the World Bank's intentions to help countries create sustained and meaningful educational development.