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The World Bank's neoliberal agenda and inclusive education in post-apartheid South African schools

Abstract

Globally, the World Bank's neoliberal agenda has reframed inclusive education through its investment projects and inclusive policies, thus begetting unevenness and social inequalities. Accordingly, in South Africa, the World Bank's neoliberal investment projects and inclusive policies exacerbate the exclusion of learners in schools. The critical theory framework is adopted as a lens to explore the extent to which the World Bank's neoliberal education agenda meets the end goals of democracy and social justice in post-apartheid South Africa. A critical analysis of the World Bank's inclusive education policies points to a neoliberal agenda that fosters liberalisation instead of human rights; a policy that propagates privatisation instead of universal education; learners' emancipation barricaded by investment projects that favour deregulation instead of regulation; and illusive social change due to neoliberal public policies in post-apartheid South African schools. Ultimately, the authors argue that the World Bank's incoherent, inconsistent and ambiguous neoliberal education agenda does not speak to its intended recipients, namely the poor, unprivileged and excluded learners in post-apartheid South African schools. A recommendation thus put forward is that the World Bank should redirect its investment projects and revise its inclusive policies in the quest to spearhead universal and free public education.

Keywords: *inclusive education, neoliberal education agenda, schools, South Africa, the World Bank*

1. Introduction

In setting the scene, the World Bank, as a proponent of neoliberal investment projects, creates education policies characterised by principles of inclusion, such as the right to basic education for all children in schools. Notable key policies implemented and informed by these projects in South Africa to be discussed later in the paper are the World Bank's Education Sector Policy Paper (1999) and Education Strategy 2020 (World Bank, 2011). Although Walton (2017: 85) is not writing about the World Bank's neoliberal agenda, the author notes that,



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Realising a vision of an educational system that is accessible to all, fosters participation, enables belonging, and results in powerful learning is not easy. This difficulty is caused by the pervasiveness of exclusionary pressures in education [policies] that have the potential to confound and constrain efforts towards greater inclusivity.

In support of Walton's (2017) claim, we maintain that the World Bank's neoliberal approach to education policies re-establishes the said exclusionary pressures within education system globally, regionally and domestically. Herein, the authors argue that the World Bank's neoliberal education agenda does not meet the needs of its intended recipients towards realising inclusive education in post-apartheid South African schools and holds that the World Bank's neoliberal agenda is incoherent, inconsistent and ambiguous. Given this problem, the paper is divided into four seemingly different but similar directions. It

- provides a literary review of the World Bank's neoliberal education agenda expressed through investment projects in the globe (unevenness), Africa (inequalities) and South Africa (exclusion);
- adopts the Critical theory framework as a lens to look at inclusive education and how the right to basic education should be realised;
- presents a critical analysis of the World Bank's inclusive education policies in post-apartheid South African schools; and
- considers where to from here by arguing that the World Bank's neoliberal education agenda does not address the needs of its intended recipients, namely the poor, unprivileged and excluded learners in post-apartheid South African schools because democratic and social justice¹ values are not being met.

2. Methodology

All research is segmented between being conceptual, empirical and or philosophical. In that sense, all research includes (or should include) a review of literature and should locate empirical research within a relevant theory or a theoretical framework. Accordingly, this conceptual article is characterised by a literature review, a theoretical framework, critical analysis of policy documents and a compelling argument. This conceptual article incorporates Frankena's (1973) three methods of enquiry, involving a descriptive enquiry, an analytical enquiry and a normative enquiry. In the descriptive enquiry, the authors provide a review of relevant literature on the World Bank's investment projects and the adoption of a Critical theory framework. In the analytical enquiry, the authors critically analyse the World Bank's neoliberal agenda and inclusive education policies in post-apartheid South African schools. Lastly, for the normative enquiry, the authors argue that the World Bank's neoliberal education agenda does not meet the needs of its intended recipients, such as the poor, the unprivileged and excluded learners in post-apartheid South African schools, which inevitably leads to the opinion that the World Bank's neoliberal agenda is incoherent, inconsistent and ambiguous.

1 The values of democracy and social justice in this context are conceptualised from *Values, Education and Democracy: Report of the Working Group on Values in Education* (DoE, 2000), which encompasses representation and freedom that guarantee equality as per the South African Constitution.

3. The World Bank investment projects and education policies in the globe, Africa and South Africa: A literature review

Harvey (2007: 2) defines neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework”. In the 1980s, under the broad concept of globalisation, former US President Ronald Reagan and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher pioneered the neoliberal ideology in their quest to revolutionise economic policies and foreign affairs in pursuit of [individual freedom] in a global economy (Harvey, 2007; Stiglitz, 2004). Essentially, at its core, neoliberalism is founded on the premise of bringing [individual] potential prospects that yield economic fruitfulness. Steger and Roy (2010) conceptualise the theory in terms of three dimensions: a) an ideology;² b) a mode of governance;³ and c) a set of policy packages. These policy packages, referred to as neoliberal public policies from here on in the article, favour deregulation of state control, liberalisation with market-oriented policies, and privatisation that is driven by the demand of people who buy and sell education (Steger & Roy, 2010). For the purpose of this article, the authors present a critical analysis of the World Bank’s neoliberal agenda on inclusive education policies in post-apartheid South Africa.

Globally, as part of the *Learn Capital Venture Partners* investment project (IFC, 2016), the World Bank has co-invested in this project as a means to increase the use of technology in education. In support of this claim is their assertion that

governments in developing countries often do not have the resources to offer education to all their citizens. That’s where private education providers play a critical role. They can deliver education, skills, and training that is relevant to the needs of the labor markets (IFC, 2016: 1).

The *Learn Capital Venture Partners* project (IFC, 2016) shapes developing countries’ education policies across the globe to align them with market-oriented alternatives by embracing neoliberal public policies. Governments’ policy decisions on deregulation are compelled by the issues of resource scarcity and high levels of poverty to take a neoliberal path. Liberalisation asserts its influence where enhancements that offer a competitive edge, such as investing in education technology, require education policies to be more open to adopting different developments, even in instances that may prove to be unrealistic in their contexts. Moreover, privatisation and its providers’ efforts to offer a blueprint through their elite education, skills and training that respond to the labour market in the hope of solving the existing issues of poverty that this cohort have the resources and vision to execute. These market-oriented solutions that appear to be aimed at mitigating global unevenness are incongruous in potentially countering poverty and bringing economic prosperity when their establishments benefit a small minority, creating a problem that hinders Global South nations from creating their own novel paths to inclusion.

2 Neo-liberal ideology codifiers are a global power elite, managers and executives of large transnational corporations, corporate lobbyists, influential journalists and public-relations specialists, intellectuals writing for a large public audience, celebrities and top entertainers, state bureaucrats and politicians (cited in Mathebula, 2018: 11).

3 Neo-liberal governmentality is rooted in entrepreneurial values such as competitiveness, self-interest and decentralization (cited in Mathebula, 2018: 12).

Consequently, the neoliberal World Bank's *Learn Capital Venture Partners* (IFC, 2016) project influences inclusive education around the globe by causing unevenness that is exemplified by the "rich" Global North and the 'poor' Global South. Thus, as echoed by Vandekinderen *et al.* (2017), inclusive education comes to be expressed under an economic rationale. In shaping education policy, the World Bank's agenda ultimately perpetuates the practices of exclusion by the hegemonic hand of private education providers that stratify people in terms of class.⁴ This leaves many with a low-calibre education that does not produce outcomes and skills relevant to the needs of the global labour markets that are generally moving towards technology-based education. By implication, the disregard for a rights-based education that ensures shared benefits for all implies that achieving inclusive education globally, underpinned by democratic and socially just values, is a distant goal.

In Africa, the World Bank's *private for-profit K-12 education investment project* is primarily aimed at offering education for students who can afford to pay, ostensibly to assist the state to free up its resources to use for the benefit of poor students (IFC, 2010a). The motive of this investment project is

[t]he poor quality of state education, in tandem with rising wealth and ability to pay, has led many parents to seek alternatives to the state sector. In many cases, the public sector lacks the capacity to respond to the increasing demand from the population and adopts policies that look to the private sector's capacity to help ... (IFC, 2010a: 3).

In effect, the *private for-profit K-12 education investment project* (IFC, 2010b) drives African governments to be more open to sharing power with private entities that come to have a say in policies, in exchange for strengthening capacity and freeing up state resources. Under neoliberal public policies, the state looks to deregulation as a legislative tool, as laws are promulgated to fill gaps that it cannot respond to single-handedly. Inevitably, liberalisation contributes to the shaping of policies in response to consumer demand from the private market, indirectly dictating policy designs that appeal to both the private and public sectors in alleviating the state's woes. Essentially, education comes to be treated as a commodity to be bought and sold, with capital being the axis of the extent to which neoliberalism is enacted in the education system. Regrettably, the private sector's help does more damage than good, as it establishes a schism that proves the neoliberal agenda to be out of kilter with the priorities of an inclusive education system that should address the inequalities in African societies and schools. This is in addition to the uneven distribution of the said wealth, coupled with other issues pertaining to governments' capacity to respond to structural failures.

As a result, the neoliberal World Bank's *private for-profit K-12 education investment project* (IFC, 2010b) influences inclusive education in Africa, which is characterised by inequalities under conditions that do not level the educational playing field. The World Bank's agenda in shaping policy ultimately leads to the inequitable distribution of resources that should otherwise make a meaningful change to the present poor quality of state education. However, such an agenda does not promote democratic values and social justice on account of frail public governance in the sense that the common good is sacrificed to serve the pursuits of private interests in education.

4 The claim in this statement is informed by private corporations that choose to fund education as a social right through the IFC as one that sieves and selects amongst distinct classes of people who can afford these private education providers' unregulated asking prices.

In post-apartheid South Africa, also part of the K-12 education investments in Africa (IFC, 2010a) is the investment made to the Curro Holding Group, a parent company of Curro independent schools, with its rationale being, “By increasing the availability of affordable first-rate education, this project will ease the burden on an already over-stretched public education system and improve the quality of high school graduates that go into the job market” (IFC, 2010a: 1). Adjacent is also the co-investment in *ADvTECH* (IFC, 2016b; 2018), with the objective of this project being to increase and expand the use of educational technology in these schools that offer pre-K to higher learning education. In support of this investment project, it hereby extends that,

[t]he project fits well with IFC’s strategy in the education sector which revolves around (i) financing highly scalable education service providers who have a specific focus on skills and employability, and (ii) supporting models that help expand access, improve quality, and reduce costs (IFC, 2018: 25).

Accordingly, the above quote encapsulates the Thatcherist slogan that *There Is No Alternative* with private providers that ought to have the central mission of building human capital for the ultimate global expansion of neoliberalism. Specifically, the Curro Holding Group K-12 education investment (IFC, 2010a) and the *ADvTECH* investment project (IFC, 2016; 2018) both shape education policies in post-apartheid South Africa to be complicit in embracing market-oriented alternatives that introduce a form of neo-apartheid.⁵ The deregulation through the exchange of financial benefits runs the risk of even greater exclusion as the World Bank’s objectives are not designed to equally allow national education policies to thrive on their own, nor do they consider national priorities that lead to the benefits of education being shared equally in society. Thus, these projects can be deemed incoherent. Therefore, the focus on skills and employability means that liberalisation shapes education policies under the guise of an entrepreneurial mind-set. This drives the quest to constantly expand its number of privatised schools and inevitably distorts the end goal of education (namely, to impart knowledge and skills to prepare students for the real world) as part of the key outcomes that policy aims to achieve. By implication, the promise of reduced costs is a big factor in the South African education system. Vally (2020: 3) maintains that privatisation is a panacea for the deficits in state-sponsored education systems. He asserts that neoliberalism “has the potential to negate the struggles for a fair, just and humane society, substituting for these unaccountable and avaricious global autocracies based on the power of money”. In effect, education policies, initially meant to preserve a social good, have come to devalue the essence of education by embedding neoliberal stances within them.

The ramifications of the World Bank’s agenda in shaping inclusive education policies are extensive and characterised by the exclusion of vast numbers of learners in South African schools. In particular, the wide research gap reveals the lack of scholarly questioning in the immediate embracement of these neoliberal projects. Thus, the gap also highlights the necessity of a global framework that holds such neoliberal multinational corporations

5 The inference of this statement is reflected in the neo-liberal dimensions found in the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996), which include provisions between two types of schools and quintile ranking of schools that have schools compete for allocations. In effect, the World Bank exploits and exacerbates the problematic aspects found in education policy that legitimise its neoliberal models of low-cost private schools as the antidote between public and high-cost private schools. Mathebula (2018: 99) also affirms that a neoliberal agenda has the capacity to influence education policy by positing that the “mass of poor belonging to an evidently more unfavourable socioeconomic class are denied their right to an equitable education”; whereas the few who belong to an elite group benefit the most from (neo)governing tools such as education policy.

accountable for ensuring values of inclusion across the entire education system. Justification for this statement is seen in learners' limited access to opportunities and participation through the espoused supporting models, which expand access and improve quality only for a small cohort in the education system. However, inclusive practices look to help schools that under-deliver to offer access to a better quality of education, undergirded by the provision of educational technology because learners need technological skills to gain a competitive advantage to succeed in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Essentially, the value of education is repurposed as a social good with a promise to all that it leads to greater rewards that extend beyond secondary education and contributes to the realisation of a democratic and socially just state.

4. Inclusive education and the right to basic education: Critical theoretical lenses

The authors adopt the Critical theory from the Frankfurt School with a focus on the key ideas led by its earliest members, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse⁶ and later Critical Theorist, Michael J. Thompson.⁷ It will be adopted as a lens through which to argue against the forms of power propagated by the neoliberal agenda in education as catapulted by the World Bank's neoliberal agenda in education and reflected in neoliberal public policies. The theory seeks to critique unequal societal dynamics and change these hegemonic structures with the intention that all should benefit equally from social goods in order to fulfil the values of social justice in a democracy (Horkheimer, 1972). Accordingly, it is founded on four tenets, namely critique that questions the status quo and seeks to resist the dominance that others assert in society through the inequalities they create (Horkheimer, 1972); transformation that posits taking practical steps for change through a thought-and-praxis process (Thompson, 2017); emancipation, which seeks to restore people's freedoms in society by conscientizing them through dialogue to challenge the way power is organised (Horkheimer, 1972); and social change that is realised when the combination of critique, transformation and emancipation has redressed all inequalities (Marcuse, 1969). Therefore, across the globe, in Africa and in the post-apartheid South African schooling system, that would mean questioning the dominance of neoliberal governmentality that puts markets before the right to basic education of all educable children. Transformation changes the exclusionary nature of the neoliberal approach to the right to basic education of all educable children, while emancipation restores that right and social change is packaged as a combination of emancipation, transformation and critique to realise that right.

Critique looks to question the World Bank's investment projects and its dominance in its neoliberal education agenda which, by implication, promotes neoliberal inclusive education policies globally, in Africa and in South Africa. Emanating from this are questions about how deregulation leads to the dominance of a neoliberal agenda that puts markets before the right to basic education, how liberalisation blurs the lines as to whose interests are served, and about privatisation that does not contribute to the positive co-reconstruction and reconstruction of national education systems. Therefore, the essence of critical theory (the critique) questioning neoliberalism globally, in Africa and in South Africa can help to bridge the unevenness by

6 Horkheimer and Marcuse were first-generation Critical Theorists from the Frankfurt School of thought who conceptualised the theory as a lens to interrogate the ideologies that fortified hegemony in society.

7 Thompson is a professor, philosopher and Critical Theorist whose research examines how society affects and shapes the individual.

offering a standardised (uniform), quality education that solves the inequality by equally serving all learners' interests. The exclusion of learners can be dealt with by focusing on improving the current inferior outcomes, such as the quality of education for all learners, with the aim of creating a socially just reality.

Transformation points to the need to change the exclusionary nature of neoliberal approaches (thought and praxis) in how the World Bank's investment projects maintain a neoliberal education agenda. These practices also include replacing neoliberal education policies globally, in Africa and in South Africa, with policies that address the right to basic education. The exclusionary nature of neoliberalism is encapsulated in deregulation, which seeks to rely on market-oriented alternatives, liberalisation which does not fully close the gaps in disparities, and privatisation which does not promote universal education. Correspondingly, transformation could change the current state of global unevenness if governments take practical steps to review the World Bank's mandates and address inequalities by promoting an equitable distribution of education resulting in shared empowerment that would eliminate learners' exclusion.

Emancipation presents itself in stark contrast to how the World Bank's investment projects shape policies globally, in Africa and South Africa. By implication, neoliberal inclusive education policies counteract the right to a basic education. The justification for how they should align themselves with emancipatory ideals stems from the problem of how deregulation erodes the protection of education from acts of liberalisation that bring competition to education and privatisation that stratifies the education system. Accordingly, emancipation seeks to restore this right to education for all learners, given the unevenness, by emphasising dialogue between equally powerful organisations, such as UNESCO, as mouthpieces for inclusion that can intervene in fighting against the hegemonic status quo created by the World Bank. Moreover, emancipation that looks to restore rights deals with inequalities through practices that constantly evaluate regulatory frameworks. In effect, these constant evaluations that look at aspects such as excessive school fees in South Africa can mitigate exclusion and build a uniform and consistent education system with equitable benefits for all learners.

Social change helps us to question, change and transform the World Bank's neoliberal education agenda and by implication, promote inclusive education policies globally, in Africa and in South Africa, to realise the values of democracy and social justice in education in order to ensure all learners' rights to a basic education. These are evidenced in questioning the dominance of the neoliberal agenda and effecting changes to the exclusionary nature of neoliberal approaches under privatisation and deregulation in order to restore individual freedoms. Accordingly, a social change in the practical sense would be characterised by levelling global unevenness by means of a willingness for dialogue that refocuses government strategies towards being distributive. Inequalities can be addressed by going back to the envisaged intention of inclusive conventions. The inclusion of learners should thus result in the sharing of resources in areas that lack the capacity to balance out the scales of provision. The implication of this argument under the Critical theory lens would therefore be to infer that democracy and social justice, in opposition to neoliberalism, would restore the essence of education as a multiplier of other opportunities.

5. The World Bank's inclusive education policies in post-apartheid South African schools: a critical analysis perspective

Critique questions the dominance of a neoliberal agenda that puts markets before the right to basic education of all educable children. To that effect, it can be said that the World Bank's *Priorities and Strategies for Education policy paper* (World Bank, 1995) fosters liberalisation instead of social rights in post-apartheid South Africa by declaring:

The critique of the current educational landscape allows the facilitation [emphasis added] towards fully autonomous educational institutions by having authority to allocate their resources (not necessarily to raise them) [emphasis added]. Therefore, decentralisation is simply assignment of responsibility for education to an institution or level of government other than the central government ... decentralisation can contribute to autonomy and accountability ... The purpose of increasing school autonomy is to permit flexibility in the combination of inputs and hence improve quality – not to save resources (World Bank, 1995: 126-128).

In this respect, the authors assert that the World Bank fosters liberalisation instead of social rights. Justification for this argument can be provided on the grounds that the dominance of the neoliberal agenda is rearticulated as schools come to be distinguished by market-oriented approaches advocating “flexibility”. Such approaches create differences in practices and governance, thus making it difficult to gauge whether inclusion is properly implemented in all schools. By implication, neoliberal dominance shows that the majority of learners in South African schools are deprived of their right to quality basic education. This statement can be justified in that the desired uniform approach to maintain equality is opened up to diversified approaches, which ostensibly address how different learning needs are catered for. Thus, an unlevelled playing field translates to greater challenges in the future, as autonomous decision-making of schools means opportunities will be selective; and participation of school-leavers in the workforce will be competitive as the grassroots (schools) have already set the tone for what society is meant to resemble. In this regard, questioning the dominance of neoliberal governmentality is vital, as it shows how the agenda does not protect values of democracy and social justice. Essentially, the World Bank's *Priorities and Strategies for Education Policy Paper* (World Bank, 1995) is inconsistent in fulfilling the rights of all through inclusive education in post-apartheid South African schools.

Transformation intends to change (thought) the exclusionary nature of neoliberal approaches towards the fulfilment (praxis) of the right to basic education of all educable children. In that sense, the *Education Sector Policy Paper* (World Bank, 1999) propagates privatisation instead of universal education in post-apartheid South Africa by saying:

Transformation targeted towards lower income groups, *the World Bank Group* [emphasis added] recommends that the IFC play a role in the further development and nurturing of that private segment of the education market that expands education opportunities for low-income students. IFC financing of secondary and higher education can help facilitate the redirecting of government subsidies to the poor, where they belong. The more that better-off families pay for education (as they do when they choose private education), the more the government can use its resources for the poor (World Bank, 1999: 19).

Ideally, the thought process is shown in how this policy commits itself to transforming the level of education that is attained to ensure a universal education, whereas in praxis, the *Education Sector Policy Paper* (World Bank, 1999) propagates privatisation instead of universal education in post-apartheid South Africa. This can be seen in the paradox created by the concern for the plight of the low-income socioeconomic segment of society, yet the expansion of inclusive quality education is done through funding models that make education unaffordable for the low-income group. Essentially, democratic ideals and social justice are touched at but not met. Therefore, the right to education of the poor majority in South African schools shows little transformation and profiting from entrepreneurship grants the World Bank the liberty to decide how and to whom the benefits of education are given. In effect, it affects the distribution of resources in the quest to strengthen the capacity of the entire education system. Consequently, as far as the *Education Sector Policy Paper* (World Bank, 1999) is concerned, transformation aiming to change this exclusionary nature in post-apartheid South Africa is not represented in praxis that mitigates and fulfils the constitutional right to education of all learners in South Africa.

Emancipation seeks to restore the right to basic education for all educable children. In that regard, it is shown that the *Education Strategy 2020* (World Bank, 2011) favours deregulation instead of regulation of education in post-apartheid South Africa by asserting,

In addition to national assessment systems and attaining emancipation [emphasis added], the Bank will encourage country participation in international and/or regional assessments, such as PIRLS, PISA, SACMEQ, and TIMSS, as a means of building a global data base on learning achievement. Education projects over the past decade have increasingly financed assessments of student learning and achievement (World Bank, 2011: 62).

Hereby, the interpretation of the *Education Strategy 2020* (World Bank, 2011) is that statistically, the neoliberal agenda has grown in strength; however, the value of these assessments to learners and acclaimed achievement is left unknown. Accordingly, two aspects can justify this assertion and interpretation that the *Education Strategy 2020* (World Bank, 2011) goes against the grain of fulfilling emancipation. Firstly, these standardised assessments are not contextually suited to be adopted within local South African school contexts. Therefore, as proponents of the World Bank's neoliberal inclusive education policy, they promote neoliberal interests and not the interests of learners that would bring them benefit. Secondly, schools in South Africa already find themselves operating on competitive ground due to existing structural inequalities. As a result of the compulsion to participate, that deregulation allows the World Bank in a country like South Africa to capitalise on learners who are intellectually gifted and are greatly acknowledged, while those who are not are cast aside in an inclusive education system that should value and restore the rights of all learners but does not. Moreover, this translates to the design of education policies in South Africa that subscribe to international mandates. Therefore, regulation that secures the state's sovereignty is also in effect stripped away. Therefore, from an emancipatory point of view, the majority of learners in South African schools are deprived of their right to basic education because the fundamental dialogue to reorganise power that involves collaboration with prominent educational organisations aligned with global inclusive education conventions is not on the horizon. Furthermore, the World Bank asserts its power through assessments like PIRLS, PISA, SACMEQ and TIMSS, as the dependency factor of Global South nations leads to their acceptance of the World Bank's neoliberal education policies in order to acquire funding. The establishment of academic

hierarchies in schools reveals a greater emphasis on efficiency than an inclusive educational experience. As it stands, and as the tenet of emancipation seeks, the *Education Strategy 2020* (World Bank, 2011) does not restore constitutional rights designed so that all learners in South Africa are given an equitable opportunity to succeed. Thus, the bigger picture shows a gap in the fulfilment of democratic and social justice values.

Social change asserts itself as a combination of emancipation, transformation and critique being realised towards the fulfilment of the right to basic education of all educable children. However, the World Bank's *Primary Education: A World Bank Policy Paper* (1990) is failing to restore individual freedoms (emancipation), to change the exclusionary nature of the neoliberal approach (transformation), and to question the dominance of a neoliberal agenda (critique) in post-apartheid South Africa in establishing,

Social change through primary education lies at the heart of all efforts to develop human resources [emphasis added]. In addition to its well-established and direct positive effect on productivity, it has strong effects on health, nutrition, and population and is the foundation for advanced education and training. Primary education is therefore central to the Bank's efforts to improve the productivity and quality of life of poor people and to build the human capital necessary for sustained development (World Bank, 1990: 50).

This viewpoint, supported by the excerpt, can be substantiated on four grounds. Firstly, the World Bank's neoliberal inclusive education policy at its core promotes neoliberal interests that act as a buffer to advance the education and training espoused above. Evidence is seen in the *World Bank Policy Paper's* (1990) notoriety of deregulation and liberalisation that create an uneven distribution of educational benefits, all of which cannot create sustained development. Secondly, developing human resources, as the *World Bank Policy Paper* (1990) espouses, cannot be realised under the intervention of private companies such as the IFC that enrich only the lives of the elite. This can be justified when we put to the test the notion that the said quality of life brings sustained development, given that the competitive edge and tools of success are held only by a marginal few. Thus, the convergence of the policy's espoused advancement of education and its implementation lacks a thought-praxis process. Thirdly, the *World Bank Policy Paper's* (1990) focus on developing human resources so that all can be productive is hindered by the nuances of competitiveness between schools, in effect, the restoration of individual freedoms. Fourthly, the *World Bank Policy Paper's* (1990) centralisation of learners as objects to serve the economy (human capital) echoes the consistent argument that education is motivated by an economic rationale. Consequently, the *Primary Education: A World Bank Policy Paper* (1990), as a neoliberal inclusive education policy, is incapable of addressing inequalities in post-apartheid South African schools, nor does it support democratic or socially just values or fulfil the constitutional right to education of all learners. Therefore, the implication of this argument is that a great deal remains to be done in terms of policy being nestled in tandem with the values of inclusion.

6. The World Bank's neoliberal education policies in post-apartheid South Africa: Where to go ideally and strategically?

On the theoretical level, the World Bank's neoliberal agenda, expressed through investment projects globally, in Africa and post-apartheid South Africa, speaks to social responsibility. Evidence is seen through its investment projects that strongly emphasise improving educational quality while simultaneously easing the state burden and through the introduction of

innovative ideas to facilitate 21st-century learning and close gaps that do not represent the quality aspect of education. Herein, the neoliberal agenda can be said to offer some characteristic principles of inclusion; that is, fulfilling the right to basic education for all children in schools.

However, under the tenet of critique, the World Bank's neoliberal agenda, in addition to the investment projects, has inclusive education policies that foster exclusion around the globe, in Africa and in post-apartheid South Africa. This is seen in the misalignment with the values of inclusion that are essential to bringing educational benefits into reality. Deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation have led to unevenly distributed access to quality education. In altering this reality, a sound thought-and-praxis process is needed that advances educational access to meaningful learning, opportunities for learning that cultivate achievement and equal participation in education afforded to all learners (Slee, 2018). Its efforts, meagrely benefiting the poor majority, unprivileged and excluded learners, only exacerbate the unevenness that suppresses social mobility, the inequalities that in turn affect the quality of education received and exclusion that has learners stratified in the education system. In effect, neoliberal public policies, as their central tools, cannot facilitate the necessary redress for social change in education. Regrettably, this necessitates a return to the drawing board, because an agenda that excludes and contradicts inclusive conventions threatens the emancipation of all learners globally.

The problem is that the World Bank's inclusive education policies in post-apartheid South Africa are torn between the ideal, on the one hand, and the practice, on the other. Therefore, the overarching ambiguities, inconsistencies and incoherence of the World Bank's neoliberal inclusive education policies in post-apartheid South Africa mark them as problematic, as they are severely torn between the ideal, on the one hand, and the practice, on the other. The implementation of their neoliberal inclusive education policies reflects that the promotion of rights afforded to all learners is one of privilege rather than entitlement. The manner in which they exploit deregulated provisions, liberalisation and privatisation alternatives only fails to contribute to the strengthening of public education systems through democratic and socially just forms of governance as the economic rationale in their execution repurposes what quality in education should be (Vally, 2020). Thus, the essence of their agenda points to the unintended support for elite learners, resulting in theory and practice failing to communicate the fundamental goal of inclusion for all. The Critical theory, on the other hand, suggests that the neoliberal policy can be salvaged. This can be done by aligning the World Bank's agenda with inclusive education policy values, constitutional rights and forming close partnerships with organisations spearheading an inclusive educational philosophy. Instead of the IFC, which has no positive influence on inspiring social change, these partnerships can serve as guides to better decision-making processes that ensure the educational rights of all learners.

6.1 Strategies

The Critical theory affirms that privileges can be afforded to everyone with the values of democracy and social justice being met (Horkheimer, 1972). Therefore, in support of the central argument of this article: globally, the World Bank can restore freedoms hampered by unevenness by affirming all educable learners' right to basic education through practical interventions that address the ambiguity of their neoliberal agenda, i.e. using the thought-praxis process to reconceptualise their present objectives towards maximised inclusion that prioritises all learners equally. This article's sustained argument strongly advocates

collaboration with prominent educational organisations. Therefore, organisations such as UNESCO, which author conventions on the rights to basic education and human rights, encourage greater emancipation and power reorganisation. Essentially, prospects for an even playing field between countries would be more promising.

In addressing the inequalities in Africa, a transformative-led strategy that looks towards strengthened education systems that do not falter under the influence of neoliberal constituencies is required. African policies are already aligned to promote inclusive education and affirm the right to basic education of all educable learners. By implication, regaining their sovereignty to prevent these neoliberal projects from becoming more overpowering and influencing policy offers itself as a long-term beneficial alternative.

In addressing the exclusion in post-apartheid South African schools, provided that regulatory frameworks are adjusted to safeguard and offer consistency in education, dialogue between the World Bank and the state can reach a middle ground that facilitates collaborative work that addresses areas beyond their capacity. Therefore, allowing IFC-backed schools to serve as support hubs in underserved public schools is essentially a distributive strategy that addresses its intended education recipients, i.e. the majority poor, the unprivileged and excluded learners. The right to basic education has proven, in theory and practice, to be an illusion for these recipients of education, i.e. the majority poor, unprivileged and excluded learners. Therefore, their efforts to exercise citizenship and take action within a neoliberal world order are equally important in countering the prevailing conditions created by the neoliberal agenda (Mathebula & Banda, 2022). Ultimately, the World Bank's concept of inclusive education being a continuing tension between ideal and achievement – a kind of duality that presents a continuing but not hopeless challenge: to encourage the majority poor, the unprivileged and excluded learners to continue to critique the dominance, demand transformation, call for emancipation and redress social inequalities in schools in post-apartheid South Africa. Therefore, the implication of this argument is that the World Bank should redirect its investment projects and revise its inclusive policies.

7. Conclusion

As highlighted by this article, the World Bank's neoliberal education agenda and by implication its inclusive education policies present global unevenness, inequalities in Africa and exclusion in post-apartheid South African schools. The central argument has thus been that the World Bank's incoherent, inconsistent and ambiguous neoliberal education agenda does not speak to its intended recipients, such as the majority poor, the unprivileged and excluded learners in post-apartheid South African schools. Moreover, the literature reveals that a universal right is exploited for commodification purposes. The tenets of the Critical theory framework show that the World Bank's neoliberal education agenda is inconsistent with meeting the end goals of democracy and social justice. The critical analysis of the World Bank's inclusive education policies in post-apartheid South Africa revealed much ambiguity, with the policies not aligning with constitutional rights that bolster the lives of its intended recipients. Therefore, to confront the neoliberal agenda, strategies to mitigate unevenness must be found in collaboration with organisations such as UNESCO, strengthened education systems to bridge inequalities, and learners exercising their citizenship rights as found in Critical theory in countering the exclusion. In effect, a rights-based education that qualifies a recommendation that the World Bank should redirect its investment projects and revise its inclusive policies in the quest to spearhead universal and free public education.

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