

The Political Economy of Universal Primary Education

A Readjusted Political Economy Analysis of Free Quality Primary
Education

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A Case Study of the World Bank Education System



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Abstract

The idea of Universal Primary Education has always been an essential part of the core concept of development. Whether gained through formal or informal channels has played relatively a little role, as long as the end-result has been an individual, who has obtained the basic level of schooling. The concept of quality education however, has not been the focus of this basic education until only recently. This involves a difficult exercise of navigating between finite and often diminishing resources, responding to quickly changing education industry incentives. All the while trying to attract enough learned professionals to maintain a sustained effort of improving the earlier reached level of education. This paper studies the challenges of trying to find a balanced approach to the overall concept of quality-oriented primary education itself within the international political economy. Through use of political economy analysis with a readjusted focus on political factors, this paper uses the World Bank as a point of comparison to the United Nations notion of universal quality primary education. The paper finds that unless enough concerted institutional political pressure can be directed against the over-marketisation of national education programmes by the multilateral development banks, the prospect of quality primary education will likely become increasingly difficult to reach.

Key words: Universal Primary Education, Quality Education, Free Primary Education, World Bank, Political Economy

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List of Abbreviations

DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EFA	Education for All
FPE	Free Primary Education
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IPE	International Political Economy
MDB	Multilateral Development Bank
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NFS	No Fee Schooling
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UPE	Universal Primary Education
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
PE	Political Economy
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organisation
WB	World Bank
WBES	World Bank Education Strategy

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Development of the concept of quality education in the *International Political Economy* (abb. IPE) has been an effort that has been continuing for decades with increasing impetus, as knowledge and methodological tools have become more refined and precise. The concept itself is well known since the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (abb. UDHR) of 1948. From there on different organisations and agencies have formulated their own interpretations of the concept and emphasised its different aspects to varying degrees. While the *United Nations* (abb. UN) is still perhaps the gatekeeper of the term on a global scale, its own definition of quality education has gone through several iterations and changes since its inception as more detailed expressions of the term have become inevitably necessary. Institutions such as the *World Bank* (abb. WB) have sought to challenge the UN's gatekeeper role as the moral authority on matters of education development on the basis of more reliable and universally applicable methodologies of measuring education development processes and learning outcomes. Frameworks such as *Programme for International Student Assessment* (abb. PISA) and *Systems Approach for Better Education Results* (abb. SABER) have become familiar to many national and international actors who wish to draw universal comparisons on student and school performance. This has consequently narrowed down the definition of what quality education is thought to be and how it should be measured in both qualitative and quantifiable terms. Economic efficacy has become closely synonymous with quality, which should not be the only way forward in the process of achieving *Universal Primary Education* (abb. UPE) according to the UN and education experts worldwide.

The basic premise of UPE has traditionally rested upon the notion of an unalterable universal right, which stems from the UDHR Article 26. The article touches briefly upon the core themes of what would later become also included in the term UPE and quality education by extension. It notes that everyone should have a right to education and that this education should be free at least in the elementary stages. Furthermore, the education;.."[s]hall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms]" (UDHR, 1948 p.5)

While this is still used as the bedrock of how quality education and *Free Primary Education* (abb. FPE) are viewed in the same context, the later iterations of the term have come to include more specific ideals to be included in the

definition mainly by UNESCO (UIS 2017; UIS 2018). The forward momentum of the project has been recently slowing down with diminishing returns due to how *Multilateral Development Banks* (abb. MDBs) frame the metrics of success and failure of the process of quality education development (Barrett et al., 2006; UIS, 2018).

Despite the divergent approaches to how quality education should be framed and measured, both the UN and the WB have reached a consensus from time to time such as in the Jomtien Conference during the 1990s, where *Education For All* (abb. EFA) goals were conceived and later expanded upon in the UNESCO Dakar framework of 2000-2015 (Tikly, 2017). The goals of the latter framework included six focal points of which the second and sixth goal concerned free compulsory primary education completion and improvements to the quality of education respectively. In the current *Sustainable Development Goals* (abb. SDGs) that were launched post- MDG period in 2015, the Incheon Declaration of 2015 has further elaborated on combining the two previously separate targets under one goal, the SDG 4.1. The target of this goal is to; “[e]nsure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.” (UNESCO, 2016). While the expansion of access towards this goal has been a relative success, the second part of the goal, namely the issue of quality remains beyond the current reach of IPE. This is especially a problem in low-income countries that cannot reach the required sectoral capacity to uphold both FPE and quality education simultaneously. Meanwhile the brief coming together of the two large and powerful international institutions, the UN and the WB was passed nearly a decade ago with widening gaps in their respective frameworks of quality education becoming more visible as time passes on.

1.2 Specific aims & Limitations

The goal of this desk study is to analyse and review the process towards UPE from a political economic perspective at macro-level with the main focal point on the development strategies and policies of the WBs quality education framework. This development is viewed in the context to how the bank’s framework addresses the needs of recipient countries differing needs for educational development aid and what the experiences regarding this framework have been so far in this context. The data concerning the relationships and power-dynamics of the WB and other multinational institutions such as the UN as a point of contrast. The data is used to review and analyse different policy approaches employed in furthering free quality primary education similar to the main idea behind the SDG 4.1 (UNESCO, 2016). This paper will draw upon usable and comparable data from research and policy documents connected to these two institutions, since they are the most commonly employed sources of data in the literature discussing and framing the issues of UPE and its definition from the perspective of SDGs and on the field in general.

While it is clear that the micro-scale issues such as the equality between individuals within the goal definitions of UPE are not mutually exclusive from the more materialistic large-scale issues such as overall inclusivity and general quality of education, the focus would be unfeasibly broad for a paper of this size to try to make sense of all the different combinations of connections and their impacts on reaching UPE. Therefore parts of the paper connected to the issues of qualitative nature from individualist standpoints are included for purposes of conveying the fuller extent of how the overall topic of free quality primary education has been described and studied previously.

In order for the SDG 4.1 to be realised in its entirety by the end of the SDG era in the year 2030, the compressed dual objective of inclusive primary education and quality education must be addressed simultaneously. Until only recently, the inclusion aspect of the goal has received more focused attention while the quality aspect of the goal has largely gone unaddressed by donors and recipient countries alike due to vague and sometimes evasive language used by MDBs in their loan conditions and administrative practices (Klees et al., 2012; Vally & Klees, 2019). When analysing and discussing this particular topic in terms of time frame, this paper limits itself to the Dakar framework timeline and the outlining of EFA goals up until the latest-until current date World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise.

In context of the WB and this paper, focusing on the quality education will be limited to concentrating on economically incentivised quantifiable goals and to the later on added quality-oriented objectives, which ultimately rest on the quantifiable goal marks of improved economic efficacy common to the MDB approach to quality education (Picciotto, 1996). This consideration limits the usage of the term 'relevant education' used in this paper to be taken as an indication of the goal of education being the eventual joining to a global productive workforce, unless mentioned otherwise in the context of e.g. making comparisons with the UNESCO framework. The WB approach in general emphasises workforce oriented education and life in the form of better employment opportunities as part of educational output goals (Gatti et al. 2018). The paper shall therefore also limit the use of the notion 'quality education' to a cognitive-economic process, with diminished role of importance to socio-behavioural learning processes. The latter being a form of education that falls mostly outside of the dual criteria of literacy and mathematics as the main indicators of 'quality education' by the WB quality education framework (WBES, 2011a, b). These delimitations and distinctions to terminology which are used in the paper are due to the WB being situated in SDGs as an insurer of equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030 alongside the UN (UNESCO, 2016). This convening was previously ratified at the Incheon Declaration in 2015, giving the WB permission to partake in the framework for action towards SDGs (ibid.). This subsequently gives the bank's own quality education framework a modicum of legitimacy, if not moral authority to implement the framework to its globally desired effect.

2 Previous Studies & Research

2.1 Traditions of Education Research in Development

There are mainly two traditions that have been explored previously in education development; The humanist qualitative framework and the economist framework (Barrett et al., 2006). The former is defined by a broad focus for the human development of the child as an individual at school, as well as the social change that happens outside of school. The indicators of measuring successful learning include socio-behavioural goals as well as cognitive learning goals. The latter is concentrated on cognitive achievement and efficacy of both the cognitive learning process itself as well as the price of schooling for the funding organisations involved in this process (ibid.). The Humanist tradition is widely used and developed by non-governmental institutions such as the UN and has been previously utilised and developed mostly by EFA programmes. The economist approach has been made popular mainly by the WB, its research and its sister organisations. While the inception and development of the WB approach has been loosely influenced by the UN, the choice of its approach is much narrower and revolves largely around measuring public return investments to loans it gives out to national governments (Jones, 1992; Gatti et al. 2018).

Despite their contrasting differences, both traditions have the commonality of western-stylised ideological background as their basis. The humanist approach is predominantly preoccupied with human rights, democracy and environmental sustainability from a western perspective, whereas the economist tradition draws influence from high-income country literature as indicated by Lockheed and Verspoor (cited in Barrett et al., 2006). As mentioned earlier, the two divergent approaches have come briefly together during the Jomtien Conference and recognised formal FPE as yielding the greatest return in both social and public economic investment (Jones, 1992; Tikly, 2017). For the sake of clarity of focus, this paper will explore the economist framework from the qualitative perspective of political economy. The previous research and policy reforms connecting to this theme have centred around FPE and education quality improvement initiatives, both by donors themselves as well as by academic researchers.

2.2 Free Primary Schooling

When looking into the previous large-scale shifts in the pursuit of UPE from the perspective of academic research, the abolishment of school fees in the form of the introduction of *No Fee Schooling* (abb. NFS) and FPE policies in developing countries have been the first major step towards the pursuit of UPE by the WB after the failure of structural adjustment programmes of 1960-1990s (Jones, 1992; Steiner-Khamsi in Klees et al., 2012). While this has had some benefits especially to the poorest parts of the societies in which these policy reforms have been implemented, the full benefits of the said programmes still continue to elude primary education, where policy targeting and implementation do not match with their intended objectives to increase the percentage of students who would complete their primary education. Many low-income countries for instance have not been able to effectively adopt NFS policies in full as intended by the WB (Nudzor, 2015). While policies drafted for the purpose of expanded access have been proven to increase enrolment rates, they have often had a trade-off between better access and quality of education. Retention rates have declined and transference rates to the next level of education have grown longer as a result of these policies, especially in the region of Sub-Saharan Africa (Bedi et al., 2004; Muyanga et al., 2010).

While the WB's concept of quality education was founded at the same time as the Dakar EFA iteration of UN was begun, the divergence in its methodological considerations is already clear when paying attention to the miniscule changes in aid policy vocabulary and the nearly unchanged terminology still being used by the organisation in its current quality education strategy (WBES, 2011; Klees & Vally, 2019). While attendance and completion rates for primary school completion are seen as the next logical step of the problem to be tackled, all the while keeping up with the demands for greater capacity to withstand the increasing enrolment rates. This asks for more 'good governance' from the local governments, their ministries of education and from other stakeholders alike (Steiner-Khamsi in Klees et al., 2012). The need for fair cost-effective strategies in fund distribution and usage is required according to the WB for this goal to be achieved (WB, 2015). In terms used by the bank this means the increase of consistent returns in both income and equality of opportunities in what the organisation has coined to be human capital. This capital is central to the definition of quality education by WB, which combines the meanings of economic quality and human rights under one umbrella term (WB, 2018a).

The previously implemented financing arrangements concerning quality improvements with development partners have been meant to tackle problems with low teacher motivation, inferior quality and or the lack of school materiel, and in improving sectoral policies just to name a few of the development targets (WB, 2018a). These measures have had limited impact due to the pre-existing problems with the state administration inadequacies in the educational-sector, as noted by Steiner-Khamsi in her review of World Bank SABER incentives directed to teachers (Klees et al., 2012). The government bodies in charge of education are essentially being invited to come up with punitive incentives towards the body of badly performing teachers, while attempting to attract better teachers with material incentives (ibid.). Similar to the SABER framework, the majority of WB performance indicators are allegedly based mostly on levels of convenient and expedient inputs, rather than being tied to indicators of performance input and output despite the WB claims to the contrary (Gakusi, 2010). The budget adjustments, which are a key element to making these reforms, are often done outside of the corresponding ministries' spheres of influence without prior consultation or proper risk analysis, exacerbating the problem of wrongly incentivised policies.

While there is newer, albeit self-referential research made available by the WB, claiming to be steering its donor policies towards more output-oriented models and practices, the evidence of this course of action positively affecting the quality of education is yet to be witnessed (Unsworth, 2009; WB, 2011; Steiner-Khamsi in Klees et al., 2012) The previously popular overall insistence of MDBs is to view large-scale aid as an apolitical process is not only intellectually dishonest, but it also prevents deeper engagement with the otherwise fundamental topics such as reforming governments, increasing actor capacity to act, improving accountability of stakeholders etc. (Unsworth, 2009). This paper goes to closer detail regarding this particular subject in the following chapters.

2.3 Improving the Quality of Education for Universal Primary Education

The second, more recent trend in education research in the context of development has been the broad consensus on the importance of quality education as the follow-up for expanded access reforms. As mentioned earlier, different organisations can have a different framework of defining quality education based on UN EFA quality indicators and have their own appropriations in their organisational strategy (Barrett et al., 2006). This is well reflected in the World Bank Education Strategy (WBES) which the bank has been working with to situate itself as the architect of global education policy through pointing to its own research as a legitimisation of its authority in the matter (Klees et al., 2012.). To this effect, the bank has been publishing new education sector policy documents periodically and has insisted that other multilateral and bilateral actors should follow its example research by implementing policies that are in alignment with its research and own policies.

The WB's enthusiasm with its own policy and practical advice has not been equally met by sustained progress in the implementation of education as a human right or as a quality service to be delivered to its aid partners, especially in low-income countries (ibid.). The quality indicators employed by the WB repeatedly emphasise the importance of education which should be both holistic and meaningful (WBES, 2011), yet it has reportedly had difficulties in substantively realising these qualities itself in its projects (Soudien in Klees et al., 2012). Otherwise the definition of quality education by the WB is heavily tilted towards mechanistic and fiscal indicators such as describing teachers as human capital components that require targeted investment in order to perform better (Ginsburg, 2017). This is seen as a prerequisite for the schools to be able to produce better performing students who not only complete their education, but also show improved aptitude in literacy and mathematics (ibid.).

Thus presented, the quality education definition by the WB shows undertones of viewing quality as an administrative and governance process (Global Campaign For Education 2011; Patrinos et al., 2013), that will assumedly automatically translate into positive outcomes at the school level once the issues of governance have been dealt with. As can be noted from the described practices, the direction of quality education research by the WB diverges little from the economist approach to education research described by Jones (1992). The research that is focused on the opposite end of the spectrum on the other hand has unanimously critiqued the overly technocratic-managerial approach of the WB and other MDBs of its kind by pointing out the lack or complete absence of pedagogical considerations in the bank's own research (Vally & Klees, 2019).

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Theoretical Premise

The overall theoretical premise of this paper builds on the conventional quality framework which focuses on particular components of the education system, the quality of education and its free expanded access in this case, as befits the WB quality education framework model (WBES, 2011; Patrinos et al., 2013). A study from a macro-level perspective such as this incorporates specific policy action programmes and reforms as well as the action system and its organisation and institutional characters. Ideally the contexts of both political and economic considerations are taken into account in this approach (Patrinos et al., 2013). The hypothesis of the paper follows the logic of causality from the combined effects of an unfavourable political environment at the international level along with frequently changing education funding schemes by both donors and national government agencies preventing the engagement to any meaningful long-term planning, causing the quality of education to stagnate or even worsen as a result. This in turn increases the probability of pupils dropping out of school without completing their primary education nor receiving enough meaningful educational experience.

Previous WB and UN research suggests the two main reasons for fluctuating attendance and completion rates are in alignment with the previously described logic primarily due to economic constraints related firstly to household wealth and secondly to misplaced policymaking by recipient governments under the instruction of MDBs such as the WB. In order to test this logic, the theoretical premise requires an understanding of how the systemic features of IPE affects the PE of primary education in recipient countries and how these issues should be considered when tackling the UPE challenge on a policy level from the perspective of donors and *Non-Governmental Organisations* (abb. NGOs). To achieve this aim, this paper shall explore a newer slightly modified variation of the traditional policy mechanistic approach of *Political Economy Analysis* (abb. PEA) often utilised by aid organisations such as the WB and the *UK Department for International Development* (abb. DFID). The intent for this exercise is to study and analyse the shortfalls and possibilities of MDB action in the context of FPE and quality education.

There are globally agreed inputs to increase quality include factors such as teachers, teaching materials, and learning time (UN, 2015). Additionally, the pupils' achievements alongside meaningful learning and completing his / her education are equally important and valid indicators to measure quality education. The universal nature of the previously mentioned indicators makes comparisons to other similar education systems a possible exercise (Stephens, 2003; Lindsjö, 2017). In addition to the quantitative indicators, the policy mechanistic approach has gradually adopted some qualitative traits that can be included in the evaluation concerning the different aspects of social justice (Lindsjö, 2017). This consideration incorporates the qualities of capabilities approach described by Tikly & Barrett (Barrett et al. 2006; Tikly, 2017; Lindsjö, 2017). These qualities are inclusion, relevance, and democracy.

The reasoning for the additional indicators is twofold; The policy mechanistic approach in itself does not actually address the ongoing quality-oriented development that must be realised if the SDG 4.1. is to be achieved (UNESCO, 2015). This in turn will eventually bring closer its overarching goal of UPE. The importance of free quality primary education as the common pre-requisite to reaching other SDGs in order to break the cycle of poverty is also a consideration to which this paper subscribes to (UN, 2015). Ensuring inclusive and equitable primary education for all must come as the basic pre-requisites for lifelong learning and meaningful participation in society at large.

3.2 The Political Economy of Universal Primary Education

In the case of this paper, the definition of service delivery of quality education would translate into continuous and adequate funding and reciprocation of meaningful education efforts facilitated by the national government bodies and NGOs (WB, 2018). The funding itself is supposed to rely on a framework of beneficial incentives which are governed by conditions set by donors themselves. This applies to both public and private donors alike. The incentives for schools to receive these resources can be however misplaced or counterproductive as noted by Ostrom (2009). These incentives are categorised as rewards and punishments, meant to lead to certain outcomes by encouraging certain behaviour. They are divided into beneficial and perverse categories. The latter 'lead[s] individuals to avoid engaging in mutually productive outcomes or to take actions that are generally harmful to others' (ibid.). Conversely, the former incentives encourage engaging in such activities.

From the PE perspective of UPE, these incentives have been shown to change quickly depending on the composition and personal interests of donor organisations and governments with very little guarantee in permanence or enabling long-term planning (Glewwe & Kremer, 2006; Ostrom, 2009; Stanfield,

2014). The incentives regarding quality FPE have often been tied to student enrolment numbers in different schools. There are also signs of ethnic favouritism in deciding which schools are to receive the no-fee benefits each year (Glewwe & Kremer, 2006). The problems described are inherently political, and should be addressed and responded to with politics first in mind. Because of this paper's need for a lesser focus on the economics, the early orthodox theory of PE as set forth by Tinbergen (1952) and continued by Acocella (1994) works better in attempting to distance politics from the subservience to economics. In their view, political power is construed as standing separate from economy while still intervening into it. Their classic billiard player example elaborates the thought behind the idea more clearly in the following fashion;

[“State activity is construed as directed by a single-minded policy maker who, after the fashion of a billiard player, strikes a cue ball to move an object ball to some desired location.”]

(Tinbergen 1952 & Acocella 1994 in Lee, 2013, pp.73-74)

The main idea of this formulation is that the object denoted as economy is subject to the economic laws that economists seek to articulate, but that polity in the form of the player should stand outside of the economy (ibid.). The initial impetus of this approach was intended to bring polity to the sphere of economic law, but it has been since its inception used often 'ironically' in reverse fashion, the authors note. This is a move away from the traditional idea of viewing political process in a similar manner to that of people operating in the (economic) market which is evident in many definitions of how PE is thought. The popular declarations lack above all, a conciseness which would establish limitations and confines to PEA. This has led to the devolution of PEA from a transformative approach to policy-making to a simple discrete instrument to be applied to specific 'problems' (Fisher & Marquette, 2014). Similarly, PE as a term has become an offhanded, vague term in the vocabulary of economists (DFID 2009; WB 2011). PE as a term is defined by the WB in the following manner;

“[T]he study of both politics and economics, and specifically the interactions between them. It focuses on power and resources, how they are distributed and contested in different country and sector contexts, and the resulting implications for development outcomes.”] (Poole, 2011 p.1)

While seemingly as inclusive as the study of IPE, which in itself is an academic discipline of its own, the terms PE and PEA by extension used by the WB are not as inclusive in their methodological and epistemological practices as they could be (Jakupec & Kelly, 2019). In practice, the importance of politics is strongly downplayed in favour of economics. Therefore a recasting or at least a relocation of focus is required in order for the PEA to become a viable tool for political analysis. Clearer language in limitations and purposes should also be attempted (ibid.).

3.3 Relocating the Political Economy Perspective Towards the Political

At the moment, the political economic equilibrium of primary education has been tilted towards an economics-driven approach and specialist outsider consultancy when political aid is concerned (DFID 2009; Hudson & Marquette, 2015). While the recognition of human development as a precondition to sustainable economic development has been highlighted in donor policies for decades, apart from a few notable exceptions, the lesson has not been sufficiently internalised (Gakusi, 2010). To bring about a shifting of priorities, a much more serious attitude needs to be taken towards ‘re-politicising’ the concept of PE between MDBs and recipient countries (Jakupec & Kelly, 2019). The complexity of political dimension and its considerations are currently included in the discourse only as long as they adhere to the values of the dominant status-quo of the economics-focused paradigm (Mouffe, 2005 in Jakupec & Kelly, 2019). To be fair, this paper recognises that large-scale aid solutions need to be narrowed down in order for them to have recognisable and manageable forms to their implementers.

At the same time, while the WB among other MDBs are predominantly acting as loan-givers and financiers to development industry, their disregard to political considerations altogether in order to make aid efforts operationally feasible lacks true ambition. This in turn can form a serious detachment from the everyday reality of the MDBs aid receivers (Booth, 2011). This is a very real danger for both MDBs and bilateral aid organisations alike, as it threatens to make the said organisations and their limited scope of aid contributions increasingly obsolete from the viewpoint of meaningful aid (Unsworth, 2009). As other competing aid ideologies are yet fully to emerge (Jakupec & Kelly, 2019) the current model has been seen to reinforce itself and the status quo, which creates natural structural and institutional resistance to any attempts of fundamental change.

4 Methodology and Analysis

4.1 Research Design

The research design of this study focuses on examining the donor policymaking from the perspective of PEA with an emphasised focus on qualitative policy analysis. The reason for divergence is that the traditional PEA approach has been previously critiqued for focusing too much on neo-liberal economist solutions and giving too little thought to the actual political analysis in this exercise (Yanguas & Hulme, 2014). This paper attempts to do a reassessment exercise of PEA by using political analysis as the main refocusing tool in reviewing the problems and promises of the best-practice focused quality education as defined by the WB (WBES, 2011a, b). By doing the said reversal, the traditional neoclassical theory on which much of the economics-focused education development framework of the WB and PEA have been largely built upon, will still be acknowledged as an important ideological background, but the focus on economic solutions alone will be lessened as a result.

4.1.1 Problematising the PEA

The basic foundational problem with the PEA, according to Routley and Hulme (2013) stems from how it should be thought and spoken in the current development discourse and context. With discretion instead of honesty as its common reward, the PEA approach has remained thus far in its short development cycle of roughly ten years as an externally injected half-measure of ‘whatever seems to be working’ instead of exploring the root societal and political causes of the problem it is supposed to address (Yanguas & Hulme, 2014). Employing these types of shortcuts has likely, if not inevitably bypassed vital critical and cognitive models in favour of automatic cognition to perform technical assistance tasks.

Additionally, the PEA tends to form into what is already known and therefore often makes fewer actual suggestions about what could facilitate the desired change (Jakupec & Kelly, 2019). Logically, the structures of political incentives are rarely touched upon in this form of approach. The lack of PEA institutionalisation in policy, together with the lack of formulation as a suggested approach, means that its usage depends almost entirely of the discretion of donor personnel, and of country management as well as project leaders (Hudson & Marquette, 2015). The single most important factor against the adoption of the more politically oriented PEA is however the pressure to disburse aid grants as quickly and as thoroughly as possible (Yanguas & Hulme, 2015).

In order to make an effective PEA and to avoid the trap of niceties, the focus must be shifted away from excessive economics approach in order for the exercise to be called a PEA, instead of an economic analysis of politics. The language of politics needs to be used more frequently in making the subsequent analysis, since the traditional formulas overlook the political action of negotiations, deals, coalition building, battles over ideas and the operation of power. In order to achieve this, donors should also think and act politically (Carothers & de Gramont, 2013) in bringing about meaningful changes and to be able to offer aid effectively on the longer term. To conclude, despite the obvious shortfalls in using its full suite of capabilities, the PEA is the critical first-step-attempt to distil conventional wisdom into tangible operational practices.

4.2 Case Selection & Analysis

The case study section will critically analyse dominant IPE governance practices, funding incentives, private and public special group interests and how they shape UPE efforts towards quality education from the perspective of UN and WB frameworks. The study of these central themes will be loosely based on the Drivers of Change analysis model of political economy by the DFID (2009). Reminiscent to the original DFID framework, the study will proceed in four interlocking stages laid out in the following fashion:

Stage 1. *Defining the Problem:* The problem of the lack of quality education in relation to UPE efforts in low-income countries will be opened up for scrutiny by reviewing the existing quality education-oriented framework of the WB. By performing an issue specific analysis of the problem with an emphasis on donor-recipient relations, the study can point out existing problems to form a point of reference to a subsequent system feature analysis.

Stage 2. *Structural Analysis:* Conducting an analysis of the systematic features connected to the problems of the WB quality education framework. The identified features are hypothesised to prevent solutions to the problem either directly or they inadvertently feed into the dynamic of the problem, thereby upholding the status quo cycle indirectly through perverted incentives, poor flow of information and or through negatively asymmetric power dynamics.

Stage 3. *Actor Analysis:* A subsequent analysis of institutions and agents governed by the systematic features. The relationship between MDBs such as WB and national government bodies in low-income countries responsible of education services and their administration will be scrutinised.

Stage 4. *Summary Analysis:* Forming of conclusions in the shape of contributions to better shared understanding in broadening the scope for dialogue in future research.

The study attempts to keep to the traditional idea of PEA, which is to increase the chances of success in a project through identifying and applying better diagnostics of reform challenges and operating environments (Yanguas & Hulme 2015). This study will attempt to prove that by shifting analytical focus towards the political considerations of education-specific goals is not only important, but also mandatory, if quality education is to be furthered. What this study switches out in contrast to the traditional formulation of PEA is the expectation of improving the fiscal efficacy or more precisely, value for money as it is an antithetical consideration in pursuing PEA in all its implications. The paper will follow in the footsteps of previous research recommendations and critique of Jakupec and Kelly (2019) and Fisher and Marquette (2014) in their evaluations of the PEA as a tool for improving development aid schemes.

As mentioned in the theoretical considerations of the previous chapter, the idea to bring more political analysis to the fore should play a more significant role in the research design and implementation of PEA instruments (Moncrieffe & Luttrell, 2005). Therefore, the main focus in identifying and addressing tangible entry points for expanding PEA to include more political issues will be structured around three categories of main PEA variables, starting from structural features, followed then by institutional and agency level variables.

5 Case study: Political Economy Analysis of Free Quality Primary Education

5.1 The Problem of Framing Quality Education

So far the political economic equilibrium of quality primary education has been tilted towards economics and specialist outsider consultancy when provision of political aid has been in question. The overall recognition of human development as a precondition to sustainable economic development has been instilled into recipient governments by the WB for decades. However, despite the continually consistent efforts, due to intentionally vague language and half-hearted solutions recommended by the bank, the effort has been met with relatively modest success (Unsworth, 2009; Booth, 2011; WB, 2015).

The WB's preoccupation with the questions of universal measurement tools in relation to quality education has become a point of tension between it and other global institutions, notably UNESCO (Klees et al., 2012; Auld et al., 2018). There are a few key reasons for this. Firstly, as recognised earlier, the WB does not have an internationally acknowledged mandate for producing education data but due to the shifting focus from ensuring access to enhancing quality has opened the much needed chance for the organisation to question how to define that quality (Vally & Klees, 2019). Secondly, as mentioned earlier, the definition of quality education by WB hinges largely on the function of the economy and human knowledge capital or 'human capital' as it is defined by the institution itself.

This produces an additional problem to defining what this quality actually is. On one hand it can be viewed as a public good, while on the other it can be defined as a human right (ibid). The purpose of the bank's quality education framework was initially to replace the 1990 established Jomtien EFA with World Bank Education Strategy 2020 (WBES, 2011). This goal is still partially in effect, as the current long-term goal of the framework is to allegedly replace national level strategies with a global standard (Fisher & Marquette, 2014). This is to be achieved through transference of the bank's best practices to national education programmes and through the increase of private- partnership involvement at each stage of the process through incentivised compliance and punitive accountability i.e. outcomes-based lending initiatives such as disbursement linked indicators.

5.1.1 The MDB Quality Indicators & Development Trajectory

The approach of increasing the importance of economic performance measurement as the sole base indicator to how quality education should be defined would likely eventually replace the humanist perspective approach altogether (Auld et al., 2018). This development trajectory has been previously feared to lead into a global testing culture and ultimately the global authority on education (ibid.). Despite the currently missing moral authority to carry out the reform, the WB framework may be still pursued under the auspices of UNESCO SDGs and the still continuing EFA efforts linked to it (Vally & Klees, 2019). There are six quality elements in the WB Framework for the reform of education systems and planning for quality (See Policy Research Working Paper; No. 6701 in Patrinos et al., 2013). These are referred to as “the 6 A’s” which make up the WB quality education framework to achieve quality education reforms (ibid.). The indicators are markedly different from those of the UN’s SDG 4. Whereas UN goals include a variety of metrics both holistic and empirical, the WB framework relies largely on ideological goals rooted in its own research. Below is a summary followed by a subsequent dismantling of the six indicators and their effects.

Six Quality Elements of Education (Patrinos et al., 2013; WB, 2013)

1. Quality Assessment
2. Improving Autonomy
3. Improving Accountability
4. Attention to Teachers
5. Attention to Early Childhood Development
6. Attention to Culture

Quality Assessment according to WB indicates that ineffective inputs are the core problem which prevents education development, despite the fact that the institution itself provides the majority of the external resources to the national education systems under its own supervision, making the statement essentially contradictory (Unsworth, 2009). The current measurement indicators which the WB uses are the PISA indicator on student performance and the SABER framework for school staff performance and externalities such as school material and linked infrastructure. Together with *Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development* (OECD), the bank has been steadily coaxing low-income and middle-income countries to adopt national education strategies that are compatible with PISA assessment (Patrinos & Noam, 2018). The short term goal being that by the year 2021 the countries previously excluded from PISA would become able to participate in its regular annual cycle (Auld et al., 2018). In the long term, this path of humanitarian assessment could lead into each nation and individual becoming trapped in a state of inter-competitive race for a very specific mode of

formally recognised education without alternatives. In this scenario, economic gain and interest in education industry would further become perverted as the only modes of self-salvation further aided and reciprocated by a so-called ‘expert knowledge’ of ‘what works’ (ibid.).

The earlier described human capital as the globally recognised metric of UPE could have the required moral authority and scientific backing to bring the otherwise divided and fractured IPE together. The Bank’s recognition of autonomy is a ‘driving human capital intensive force’ behind successful education reforms that would improve student learning outcomes (Demas & Gustavo, 2015;WB, 2018a). The assessment benefits of this indicator are said to lead to empowering schools by giving them ownership, subsequently improving their stakeholder statuses in providing quality education. The problem with this claim is that even if the schools would be given autonomy over their own administration, it would not guarantee better outcomes in learning if the school can barely accommodate an overabundance of pupils while being unable to hire more staff and teachers. As previously mentioned, autonomy is also argued to increase the relevance of the school’s education. However, as discussed earlier in the paper and argued by Demas & Gustavo (2015) relevance is directly tied to the abilities of donors and national governments to formulate and carry out long-term plans of consistent education planning with adequate funding. There is a direct link between the capabilities of donors and national governments to formulate and carry out its' intended plans on education, and to guarantee the necessary funding to achieve consistent education.

These plans must remain committed not only to increasing the inputs for capacity e.g. teacher training, but must also be accountable for their outputs, which has been previously lacking. The efforts in conducting fiscal quality overhauls of the primary education systems in low-income countries have previously emphasised expansion of education without much adequate attention to its relevance and quality, leading to a wastage of resources (Tikly, 2017). This paper acknowledges that there is nothing inherently wrong with the idea of expanded access to education, but if it is not backed up with increased quality of service delivery and better relevance to out-of school life, the FPE policy as a vehicle for UPE will remain a half-measure at best, as recognised by Stanfield (2014) in his research on private schools for the poor and their right to education.

As long as the WB continues to see government failure as the usual culprit in donor investigations towards the recipients who have not been able to fulfil their criteria for project success, Vally and Klees (2019) argue this to be a result of WB being either incapable or unwilling to critically reflect on its own work. The WB as well as other MDBs fund their own best practices in the form of expensive and short-lived pilot projects, preventing reliable self-reflection (Steiner-Khamsi; Klees et al., 2012). The current orientation of PISA for example is especially troublesome in the context of low-income countries where institutional capacity to implement change from government level will likely remain limited also in the future and where varying levels of external research and consulting are still

commonplace. What the WBES 2020 arguably lacks is engagement with pedagogical issues such as teacher training and curriculum, although it promotes them as one of its key components in its strategy (WBES, 2011). This inevitably leads to promotion of an overly technical and narrow view of education. The failure to emphasise the participation of civil society, teachers, parents and other direct stakeholders could indicate that their input is felt as ‘not required’ from the perspective of the WB.

5.1.2 The External Social Indicators

Attentions to early-childhood development and culture carry along the same lines of reasoning as the accountability and relevance measures (WB, 2013) in relevance to UPE by arguing that increased attention to these indicators as factors would be beneficial for more efficient cognitive learning outcomes (*ibid.*). Otherwise the WBES 2020 framework offers very little in the way of suggestions or solutions to how cultural and early-childhood development could help primary education in any way, other than instructing the parents and their community to begin educating their children as early as possible, through the general assumption that they have time, knowledge and or resources to do so (Nordtveit; Klees et al., 2012).

Culture is similarly glossed over by roughly stating that it exists and that its role is often neglected in education (WBES, 2011; Patrinos & Noam., 2018). The framework does not recognise much other relevance to culture in educational context other than for its possible benefits in the form of using different indigenous mother tongues in classrooms (*ibid.*). The problem of using local languages as the preferred mode of instruction and communication in a classroom and as a metric of quality is problematic if there are powerful ethnic minority groups which can dictate the choosing of local language as the preferred method of teaching (UN, 2015). This will likely negate the intended benefit of being able to participate in teaching via lowering the linguistic skill requirements of the attending pupils. Having one language of instruction in such a setting makes the WB consideration of preservation of cultural background quickly obsolete.

5.2 Structural Problems of Universal Primary Education in the Current International Political Economy

The structures that largely continue to govern the modern IPE and the progress towards UPE by extension are legacies from the 1980 Washington consensus which set the precedent for neo-liberal economic discipline to become the dominant discipline in global economics. The 1990 Jomtien conference on EFA on the other hand cemented the rights-based approach on quality primary education and improved all social justice-based quality indicators as a result (Omwami & Keller, 2010). The Washington consensus relies roughly on three core tenets; privatisation, liberalisation and price stability (Stiglitz, 2010). The neo-liberal approach on global politics also aims to curb the role of government, even minimising it (Jakupec & Kelly, 2019). The supremacy of economics over politics is at the forefront of Washington Consensus when discussing the forms of foreign aid that are typical to MDBs such as the WB (Hudson & Marquette, 2015). A third characteristic that has governed the IPE until recently is the soft power dynamic of politics. Nye and Jisi (2009) define this specific mode of power as 1.) power being the capacity to influence others to realise the results one wishes them to achieve. 2.) by causing others to want what one wants. This power dynamic relies on societal, cultural and political values, foreign relations and economic structures (ibid.). The IPE of UPE is an example product of soft power-dynamics, used by donor institutions and agencies to make national actors shift their policies and influence their officials to want what their donors want.

As a countermove to the neo-liberal hegemony, there has been a recent rise in number of populist movements in the international political sphere which have come to reject some of the perceived advocates of hyper-globalisation and the neo-liberal Washington Consensus based foreign aid (Carothers & De Gramont, 2013). The emerging geopolitical countermove of more eclectically characterised Beijing Consensus is one such indication that a relocation of priorities is in order. Less interfering aid modalities and the increase of ‘no-strings attached’ approach on foreign aid are becoming increasingly appealing to low-income countries wishing to be rid off constraining aid modalities of traditional western-stylised donor organisations (ibid.). The role of the emerging Beijing Consensus should not be understood however as an imperative for developing countries to suddenly begin emulating China’s economic and/or education policies. There is also no official ‘Beijing Consensus’ as such (Jakupec & Kelly, 2019). The likelier scenario would be rather a merging of Washington consensus and Beijing Consensus into a hybrid model in the near-future.

The table below demonstrates the core differences between the current Washington Consensus and the so-called Beijing Consensus cornerstones of global political economy by Williamson 1990;2002 (in Jakupec & Kelly, 2019). The Washington Consensus on the left is relying mainly on privatisation, free market capitalism and decentralisation as its three dominant ideologies (Ramo, 2004; Jakupec & Kelly 2019). The Beijing Consensus on the other hand offers an alternative perspective of how the IPE could be arranged in ten counterpoints listed by Li et al. (2009) (pp. 8-20; Jakupec & Kelley, 2019) These points are not meant to be understood as mutually exclusive as the overall purpose of the so-called Beijing Consensus is to offer a challenging contrast to western views of economic and political reforms as pre-requisites for long-term sustainable development.

Washington Consensus	Beijing Consensus
1. Imposition of fiscal discipline	1. Localisation of best borrowed practices
2. The redirection of public expenditure priorities towards other fields	2. Combination of market and plan economies
3. The introduction of tax reforms that would lower marginal rates and broaden the tax base	3. Flexible means to a common end
4. The liberalisation of interest rates	4. National policy rights
5. A competitive exchange rate	5. Stable political environment
6. The liberalisation of trade	6. National self-reliance
7. The liberalisation of inflows of foreign direct investment	7. Continuous upgrading of national industry
8. The privatisation of state-owned economic enterprises	8. Indigenous innovation
9. The deregulation of economic activities	9. Cautious financial liberalisation
10. The creation of a secure environment for property rights	10. Economic growth for social harmony

The main difference between these two sets of principles is that the former is more centred around the economic growth based on principles of free-market trade whereas the latter is oriented towards the achievement of distinct operational objectives (ibid). Furthermore, the Washington Consensus principles are based on the idea that the recipient of foreign-aid makes the structural reforms by themselves, while in the case of Beijing Consensus these reforms can be either entirely absent or the main role of the recipient to implement them is reduced.

Since low-income countries to a great extent rely on MDB grants such as those of the WB in maintaining education frameworks, the most significant financial structural restraints are tied to the WB aid modalities, that largely define the aid recipients' choices when it comes to education development (Unsworth, 2009). To illustrate, the WB is the biggest singular MDB donor in terms of pure economic influence and its focus on health and education grants. The weight of budgetary compensation from the OECD sources alone forms often at least 17% of national education budgets in low-income countries (WB, 2012). While the IPE is slowly moving away from the technical-instrumentalist narrative of Keynesian economics, the fostering of economic (if not political) relationships continues to be a unifying factor between the receding Washington Consensus and the emerging Beijing Consensus.

5.3 Institutions, Agencies and Their Roles in Reaching Free Quality Primary Education

Institutions in the form of development organisations play a very crucial role in service delivery in low-income countries. These same organisations have had demonstrable difficulties in developing good institutional habits, especially in the case of the WB. It is a public institution, and a monopoly at that, financed by taxes, which gives grants, loans and advice around the world, wielding a vast global influence (Vally & Klees, 2019). As the development institutions such as the WB operate essentially on the principles of lending money to national governments, their continued existence relies on the successful disbursement of funds and their efficient usage by their recipients. The WB's technical and financial support is dependent on the acceptance of the wider structural conditions embedded in the Washington Consensus (Jakupec & Kelly, 2019).

In the case of recipient governments, both weak social capital and social polarisation are preventing inter-group cooperation, which consequently increases the likelihood of conflicts. The inadequate state capacity also prevents the carrying out of critical reforms that could increase investment in institutions to develop good institutional practices, which in turn would promote democratic and economic growth (Picciotto, 1996; Unsworth, 2009). Interventions to institutional service delivery on national level cannot be adequately described unless attention is paid to broader institutional settings (Manda & Mwakubo, 2013). In order to effectively assess the problems of primary education, an in depth overhaul of the administrative system must be performed simultaneously while changing financial incentives to reward quality output instead of large-scale input in the hopes of continued financial assistance from existing donors to flawed systems.

As noted earlier in this paper, the increase in enrolment rates has left its own challenges in terms of quality and longevity of aid programmes towards UPE. In low-income countries such as Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda and Tanzania the primary education systems suffer from overtaxed community finances and management of schools (Gakusi, 2010). There are two defining problems that apply to each of these countries. Firstly, their governments have expanded their roles in public education through free provision of primary and more recently, secondary education. The direct result of this has been a large initial surge in public school enrolment as previously out-of-school children have enrolled to schools (ibid.). The expansion of access with the help of FPE policies has led to a decline in learning quality as classrooms have become overcrowded. The second problem is that of none of the aforementioned countries have feasible financial independence to both back up their current system and to scale it up to include quality education as well (Manda & Mwakubo, 2013).

Institutions, more than drivers of change such as the WB's quality education framework, often operate as mediators of policy reforms, whether they do so as inhibitors or facilitators. Stable systems of rules and patterns of behaviour that promote social order, they influence the future policy changes by various forms of path-dependence. The weight and legacy of previous systems frame the views and perceptions of policymakers concerning the feasibility and desirability of adopting new policy ideas or external policy models (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Verger et al. 2016).

As demonstrated earlier, institutions mediate most often strongest in both feasibility and speed. From the perspective of refocusing the economic-centrist tradition toward a more socially justified and equitable approach there are two problems; Firstly, the problem of rationalisation connecting to the earlier mentioned indicators of measuring quality education without considering pedagogical factors (Picciotto, 1996). The consequence of this rationale leads to a disconnection between the practices and intended end-results if there is little to no consideration to the process of learning itself (ibid.). Secondly there is the problem of expediency and a general lack of political will to devote more time and resources to time-consuming yet vital expert analyses from the side of MDBs. This ties in to the first point as the missing piece between the premise and the intended end-result of meaningfully educated learners.

5.3.1 Financial Dependencies & Administrative Impatience

Due to governments relying on NGOs and multilateral donors such as the WB and OECD for budgetary support, the grants and loans of MDB institutions have become a lifeline for many low-income countries especially in the region of Sub-Saharan Africa. The policy making capacities of the local governments often remain limited due to previous aid conditions remaining unfulfilled and because of newer conditions being heaped on top of the previous ones. The commitment for UPE through FPE policies thereby keeps the local institutions hands tied to their current course. Fiscal capacity for UPE, although divided between multilateral donors and national governments shows that often over 50% of the resources needed to uphold ongoing NFS efforts are gathered from external donors (Omwami & Keller, 2010). The loans by the WB emphasise universally calculable indicators of effectiveness and efficiency, resulting in only adequate funding (GPE 2020). The internationally agreed-upon benchmark of 20% of total expenditure of national budgets should go to education, from which roughly 45% to primary education.

Then there are the problems of institutional leakages in drafting UPE policies and the de facto rules of the IPE, which create additional barriers between donor institutions and government agencies. For instance, if a country reportedly has achieved UPE or is very close to achieving that goal, it is very likely to begin diverting and reinvesting resources from the education sector, despite the goal remaining in all actuality unfulfilled, thereby delaying the achievement of UPE as a permanent state of being (Routley & Hulme 2013). This keeps the country's FPE and quality primary education programmes funded longer by donors and prolongs the transition of financial burden from donor to the country itself (Stanfield 2014).

Another common practice in many unstable low-income countries without or with FPE, has been for political leaders to take credit from FPE policies without actually increasing their capacities to meaningfully include new and competent staff in proportion to the influx of students. This has helped the political leadership to capitalise on development agencies' agendas because of the citizenry's tendency to regard any increase in access to education as legitimising the government in power, even if the FPE programmes have continued to be critically underfunded after they have expired (ibid.).

Furthermore, as there are many low-income countries who have national FPE policies in place, the national governments are slow to shift resources towards quality, the considerations for actual capacity have been often counted as secondary or not at all important. Expedient solutions to include more pupils into schools are often used as attempts even by the incumbent government bodies to seek public approval and legitimacy for their continued rule. What is more, donor agencies themselves exacerbate this problem by showing little interest in generating new research information and diffusing it with their existing practices in order to improve development effectiveness (Ravallion 2011; Vally & Klees 2019).

Recent trends and outcomes in the development of better functioning FPE policies have resulted in low and ineffective spending on service delivery. Experiences from Kenya by Manda and Mwakubo (2013) for example have shown a prevailing ‘what gets measured, gets managed’ attitude towards public and private provisions. Despite the existence of cross country indicators of institutional quality, they are usually found hard to interpret and to use for comparisons by government institutions (ibid.).

Budgetary capacity is often lacking in many countries unable to meet the expectations of what is required for quality FPE to work properly. This means that the recipients will likely compliment this shortfall with external funding from WB executed *Global Partnership Programme* (abb. GPE) for example. This support accounts for more than 85% of the funds put towards education in low-income countries (WB, 2019). Due to its recipients’ aid dependency and large gaps between the levels of GDP and government expenditure, the WB sees the reason for project failures as a governance failure on the recipient’s part and as a misallocation of resources rather than as a lack thereof. As touched upon earlier in the paper, this is a contradictory stance since aid recipient countries must submit commitment documents in which they will affirm their willingness in exchange for loans and grants to follow the poverty reduction strategies of the donors (Omwami & Keller, 2010). In following Argyris’s organisational defensive pattern (cited in Dooley, 1995), the blame for failure can never lie with the donor in such an arrangement, even if the recipient country would be able to follow the aid conditions to the letter and fail to produce the change it desires. The existence of an innate information asymmetry enables both the recipient governments and donor organisations to politicise aid and to maximise their own benefits and the benefits of vested interest groups, thereby changing very little in the PE of UPE at governance level (Dooley, 1995). It is reasonable to assume on the basis of how the WB handles new emerging information regarding educational research as a donor institution and how it has made very little in the way of adjustments to its framework of quality education, that it is firmly in the game of maximising its own gains also in the foreseeable future (ibid.). The rapid disbursement of funds into short- and medium term projects without much prior investigation is a practice which comes very close to the negatively perceived action of rent-seeking.

5.3.2 A General Need for Experimentation

The general lack of ‘trial-and-error’ methodology in the current traditions of IPE is also a telling factor of what is perhaps wrong in the thinking patterns of MDBs towards development aid and how to build political relationships with their development partners (Jakupec & Kelly, 2019). While the WB among other western-stylised donor institutions insists that its aid is apolitical, one does not need to look too close to see that by designing its education framework to function as a tool to do away with differing national education agendas is a political power-play by definition (*ibid.*). What is missing from the western MDB approach in the context of societal and cultural factors is the absence of recognition of these two factors as strongly potent drivers of change in developing better and case-sensitive education reforms.

The continuing fixation with the ‘ideal model’ of economic growth as the so-called ‘silver bullet’ to both financial and political problems is evidently widening the gap between Washington Consensus based- MDBs and poor regions of the world (Dirlik, 2011; Jakupec & Kelly, 2019). The absence of experimental approaches into education development is likely to continue for as long as there are more incentives for donor institutions to stick to inflexible external shock practices that benefit mainly the donors themselves (Hudson & Marquette, 2015).

It has to be noted that the national government agencies are equally complicit in the continuation of these practices by acceding to carrying out reform proposals that are outside of their own current capacity to administer and act upon (Fisher & Marquette, 2014). The limitation of alternatives to low-income countries’ educational bodies must therefore be recognised both as a cause and as a symptom of perverse policy incentives. For many of the low-income countries who have been part of the clientele of MDBs for as long as they have, their frameworks for both national development and educational development are easier to coerce into aligning their own education systems towards the global uniformity desired by the WB (Carothers & De Gramont, 2013). Once becoming a part of this system, any divergence from it would be very difficult in the least and very costly to the recipients dependent of MDB funding.

6 Discussion

The problem of streamlining a globally accepted method of quantifying quality education and measuring its outputs on the basis of PISA and funding incentives does not bring about the desired systemic change required for a deeper and more meaningful engagement in primary education. Identifying and operationalising of alternative approaches to education aid and development avenues has to be continued. Broadening of the scope of dialogue with donors and country partners around key political challenges and opportunities at sector level could be a starting point in pursuing meaningful political and pedagogical reforms. A re-education of bilateral and multilateral aid policymakers to embrace long-term commitment could be a viable approach if short-term gains could be made less appealing. The singular focus on financial efficacy alone has been shown not to bring about the desired results as witnessed by multiple researchers and policy-makers (Booth, 2011; Fisher & Marquette, 2014; Vally & Klees, 2019; Yanguas & Hulme, 2015). Additionally, the talk about a better system of evaluation must not discredit the role of civil society as an equally important driver of change. Civil society must be meaningfully included into deliberations of improving the IPE of UPE.

Luckily, these core problems have been further substantiated and discussed upon recently, partially thanks to the sudden nationalist-protectionist rhetoric accompanied by a strong rise in populist movements across the globe. While this study has focused mostly on identifying and analysing top-down intervention models, the likely result of the desired increase in organisational accountability would raise administration costs significantly for the responsible monitoring bodies. This is likely to be in stark contradiction to what is generally desired by donor organisations and what they are willing to invest in a likely trade-off between best-practices and best-fit aid conditions. If these organisational changes would be implemented however, it would at least partially help with targeting and rid of some of the inefficiencies inherent in the traditional MDB practices. This is an issue that is often overlooked in MDB calls for better accountability from donors and national recipients alike (Vally & Klees, 2019).

Another important policy option would be to re-conceptualise the monitoring and evaluation of school fee abolition from a simple exercise in following revenue streams to one that critically investigates the socio-economic impact of fee abolition for the poor and other price-sensitive groups (Stanfield, 2014).

Investigating how much of the poor population receives the intended aid of NFS and how much of it goes to the wealthier schools would be paramount to better targeted policy solutions in the future (ibid.). This could be difficult due to limited government funding and institutional inertia of national education sectors (Yanguas & Hulme, 2015.). Increasing public funding is therefore not the best solution if the method of distribution itself is flawed. The result of this approach without better targeting would likely only exacerbate the widening gap between the wealthy and poor groups on the national level and local community level. As a counter to this problem, there have been discussion about school funding calculated on actual school demographics rather than community socio-economic averages (Barrett et al., 2006). Creating a financial system in which funding followed the child would at once enhance government's ability to target the poor with progressive financial interventions and reduce the incentives for wealthy schools to exclude poor non-paying households. At the moment, this solution seems to remain on the level of epistemological deliberation as policy research tends to be overlooked and bypassed by executive decisions at government agency level by special interest groups.

7 Final Comments

While there is a noticeable degree of risk avoidance from both institutions as well as government agencies in enacting radical changes to education reforms, the status quo is likely to remain only for as long as there is a lack of political ambition being superseded by short-term economic fixation. A full emergence of a competing aid ideology would not only bring about an ideological change but also markedly shift the existing scales of power within the subsequent IPE (Jakupec & Kelly, 2019). The costs of working with multilateral donor organisations that operate like the WB does, have been long evident to the international community but due to the undeniable influence they exert on struggling national economies, it is still seemingly unlikely that a change in debtors could change the current trajectory of stagnant quality UPE. This is a likely scenario in those countries who are deeply invested in the WBES 2020 framework.

This paper has gone through several key issues of interest to multilateral donor organisations by using the WB as a case example of how the IPE of UPE is constructed and currently maintained. The study has concluded that further identification and experimentation with alternative approaches to education aid and other development avenues must continue while possible and credible alternatives to Washington-Consensus centred neo-liberal paradigm are still slowly emerging and taking shape. A shift from best practices to what fits best requires political changes in aid organisations and a move away from language of economics that currently permeates it (Booth, 2011). Over time this shift might overcome the technocratic-managerial problems and shortcomings of the nascent PEA approaches as well. It is also possible that western-stylised MDBs will slowly become obsolete if they are unable to make the required, although undesirable and yet critical self-reflections to their operational beliefs and practices. A change in their core ideology has to be genuine, if they wish to remain relevant in their practices towards the changing needs of the IPE of UPE and the aid industry.

The greatest challenge in writing this paper has been the lack of progress in discourse on an otherwise seemingly important and contemporary topic. This could indicate that there is still indeed a newly emerging field with little in the way of options for discourse at the moment. This is partly supported by the regrettable fact of how PEA still lacks a comprehensive formula on how to engage the socio-political spectrum of PE more convincingly.

While alternative PE paradigms such as the goal-oriented Beijing Consensus are still emerging, the neo-liberal globalisation ideology is still the dominant force in the IPE. It must be noted however, that there has been some noticeable pushback from the public sector i.e. governments against the most overt trade-offs of influence over their national education programmes against private actors. This Keynesian hold-out point has not been enough to upset the status quo however. In general, the negative default premise towards a deeper understanding of politics still holds. The affectation to political analysis of the PE in education for instance, is seen as non-essential or at worst, a hindrance to solutions that MDBs such as the WB are interested to engage in (Unsworth, 2009). This is largely translated in practice as an expectation of disinterest towards deeper engagement in power relations across and within institutions, vested interests and society in general. This rings true especially in countries deemed as corrupted, afflicted by conflict, or incompetent leadership.

What should be also clear at this point is that as long as the incentives of conducting international education business remain as they are, actors will have little to no interest to come up with alternative approaches to currently dominant incentives. If the current paradigm of neo-liberal values continues with its low accountability and obsession with end-results rather than the process itself, they will stick to honing their profit-making opportunities with minimal tangible accountability towards quality-oriented outcomes. This would most certainly keep the education industry as a whole from reaching the goal of quality UPE beyond the scope of the next SDG milestone year of 2030.

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