

**Research Note**

# **Unification of the roles of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in education: the maintenance of global neoliberal hegemony?**

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**Abstract:** *The WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF are viewed more than simply international institutions, but rather they are viewed by their opponents as a centre of hegemonic power. In the education sector, through the provision of the WTO General Agreement of Trade and Services (GATS), trade barriers in education are eliminated. Education is becoming globalised and increasingly it is becoming a competitive commodity. Thus, the commodification of education means that education serves those who can afford to pay. The roles of the IMF and the World Bank in minimising state intervention, reducing government spending in education, and encouraging privatization and commercialization, seem to be the source of the presupposition of debates.*

*This research will explore unification of the roles of the WTO, IMF, and the World Bank in education. This research will also identify the link between the roles of the WTO and the IFIs in global education, and the maintenance of global Neoliberal hegemony. Furthermore, it will address the question of how the WTO and the IFIs' roles in global education can maintain hegemony.*

## **Introduction**

### **Background of the study**

Education continues to be a significant factor in determining where there will be a deprivation of basic human rights. The emerging paradigm of education as a basic human right is often viewed as a mere rhetorical slogan. Not only is it viewed as serving those who can afford to pay, but also equality of education is viewed as an expedient axiom for the dominant groups in society for maintaining their dominant position (Poonwassie, 1992).

With regard to this deprivation of basic human rights, the WTO and the IFIs are viewed as the main actors among the global governance institutions. Reduction in government spending on education, and user pays policy have been policies imposed by the WTO and the IFIs (Frase and O'Sullivan, 2004; Jawara and Kwa, 2003; Peet, 2003; Samoff, 1994).

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is encouraged through privatization. Under the auspices of the WTO, education is commercialised and privatised. Tax reform and fiscal austerity, it has been argued by the IFIs, are the kind of policy that are required for achieving faster growth in the least developed nations.

It is argued on the WTO website that free trade enables efficient access to the global services markets and to information technology (WTO, 2005). Moreover, it is stated that trade in education services creates consumer savings because it will lead to lower prices, better quality, and wider opportunities for consumers (Findlay, 2001; LaRocque, 2003; Mbekeani, 2002; Sauve, 2004). This assumption may be rooted in the idea that by liberalising education in the market, there will be more international competition, institutions and international teachers, and this will lead to better quality education and wider choices.

From the above overview, there are four issues that need to be addressed in this study. The first issue is the substantive problem leading to this study, which is that controversies surrounding the unified roles of the IFIs and the WTO in education seem endless and it seems that the solution is inconclusive. The second issue is that there have been problems within the wider scholarly literature. Both opponents and proponents defend their practices. For the opponents, they blame the practice of neoliberalism used by the IFIs and the WTO, and defend the views of Marxism and neo-Marxism without looking at the weakness of Marxist and neo-Marxist practices. For the proponents, they defend their practice and make adjustments of neoliberal theory to their practice. The third issue is there is the need to address this second problem. This study, then, is aimed to structure and identify this problem. This study addresses the significance of the problem for both opponents and proponents so that there will be global convergence for formulating policy.

## **Purposes of this study**

The purposes of this study are as follows:

1. *Describe past phenomena.* In this study, the historical practice of neoliberalism by the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO will be depicted. The establishment and maintenance of hegemony that is emphasised by Marxism and Gramscism will also be depicted.
2. *Analyse and evaluate present phenomena.* The current practice of neoliberalism by the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO, in relation to education, will be evaluated in this study. The establishment and maintenance of hegemony that is emphasised by neo-Marxists and neo-Gramsci will also be analysed and evaluated.
3. *Explain the causes of the phenomena, and relationships between current and past phenomena.* There will be an explanation of the ideological movement from liberalism to neoliberalism, from Marxism to neo-Marxism, and from Gramscism to neo-Gramscism. The shift of the roles of the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO in education to the unification of the roles of the IFIs and the WTO in education will also be explicated. Thus, the link between these roles and the prolongation of global Neoliberal hegemony will be identified and explained.
4. *Assess the significance of the phenomena.* The significance of the liberalism that has influenced the practice of neoliberalism by the IFIs and the WTO will be assessed. The theories of hegemony that is emphasised in Marxism and Gramscism have influenced neo-Marxism and neo-Gramscian. Here, the significance of Marxism and Gramscism theory of hegemony to neo-Marxism and neo-Gramscism perspectives on neoliberal hegemony will be assessed.

## **Significance of the study**

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to contribute to international relationships in general, and to education practice and policy in particular by establishing the parameters for the potential of the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank, to dominate in the sphere of education.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This study will use a qualitative approach. Historical method will be employed as a qualitative research strategy. Historical method is an act of reconstruction undertaken in a spirit of critical enquiry designed to achieve a faithful representation of a previous age (Cohen and Manion, 1980).

In education, historical research methodology enables educationalists to use former practices to evaluate newer and emerging ones (Cohen and Manion, 1980). Through this study, the historical account of neoliberal theory will be used to evaluate the emerging unified practices of the IFIs and WTO in education. The significance of Marxism and Gramscism theory of hegemony to neo-Marxism and neo-Gramscism theory of neoliberal hegemony will also be evaluated.

### ***Conceptual framework and research paradigm***

The central question of this research is as follows:

What is the link between the unification roles of the IFIs and the WTO in education, and the maintenance of global neoliberal hegemony?

The following research questions will guide and provide the basis for this study:

- Q1: What are the roles the IFIs and the WTO in education?
- Q2: What is the relationship between the practice of liberalism and neoliberalism by the IFIs and the WTO, and the establishment and maintenance of hegemony that is emphasised in Marxism / neo-Marxism and Gramscism / neo-Gramscism?
- Q3: Why are the roles of the IFIs and the WTO unified?
- Q4: To what extent does neo-Marxism agree with Marxism in the theory of hegemony establishment and maintenance?
- Q5: To what extent does neo-Gramscism agree with Gramscism in the theory of hegemony establishment and maintenance?
- Q6: What is the significance of the practice of liberalism to the current practice of neoliberalism, by the IFIs and the WTO?
- Q7: What is the significance of Marxism and Gramscism theory of hegemony to neo-Marxism and neo-Gramscism perspectives on neoliberal hegemony?
- Q8: Can education become an instrument to break hegemony?
- Q9: Can global convergence of ideologies be achieved between the opponents and proponents of the IFIs and the WTO?

Empiricism and hermeneutics lie behind this study. Empiricism emphasises experience and reflection whereas hermeneutics emphasises the historic influences on qualitative interpretation and exposes hidden meanings (Allen, 1995). It is used for interpreting human practices, events, and situations (Crotty, 1998). This study will recognise the practices of the IFIs and the WTO that are influenced by neoliberalism. This study will also recognise hegemony theory of neo-Gramscism and neo-Marxism that is influenced by Gramscism and Marxism, the historical events of educational practices and the contemporary educational situations from both ideologies.

## **Data collection**

Primary and secondary sources will be employed. Primary data include original documents of the IFIs, the WTO, Gramscians and neo-Gramscians, and neo-Marxists. It includes historical information on political and social situations that influence the practices of the IFIs and the WTO, works of Gramscian, neo-Gramscian, and neo-Marxists, in the context of hegemony. Secondary data include literature dealing with the works of neoliberals, Gramscian, neo-Gramscian, and neo-Marxists.

## **Research process**

### **Within the Interpretive paradigm**

Hermeneutics is a major interpretive approach for understanding texts or documents (Prasad, 2002). It originated as the study and interpretation of literary and biblical texts. However, it can be applied in other disciplines. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) who was a contributor to the development of classical methodological hermeneutic develops a systematic hermeneutics.

Based on Schleiermacher's hermeneutic approach, there will be practical steps for interpreting documents in this study:

- Step 1:** Collected documents / texts will be classified and organised.
- Step 2:** Each document / text will be classified according to its topic.
- Step 3:** Begin with a general overview of the document.
- Step 4:** Grammatical interpretation (understand the objective content of the document).
- Step 5:** Psychological interpretation (understand the subjective content of the document). In other words, understand what motivates the author to communicate her or his thoughts, intentions, and motive (Parmentier, 1997).
- Step 6:** Draw and record a conclusion in a meaningful narrative

### **Within the positivist paradigm**

- Step 1:** Convert complex ideas into simple ideas. By bringing ideas into so clear a light, as Hume says, that dispute which may arise will be removed.
- Step 2:** Find origins of simple ideas in experience (using senses or reflection)
- Step 3:** Analyse content of the idea lies in simple impressions.
- Step 4:** Verifiability theory of meaning. Experience is used as a method of verification of the meaning of a proposition. Thus, atomic statements must be linked to the experience. Analytic and synthetic propositions should be distinguished, and all analytic propositions should meet the verification criterion of meaning not simply expressions of emotion.

## **Limitations**

There are two limitations to this study's design. The first is that materials may be incomplete. The second is that the documents, secondary data in particular, may not be accurate. For these reasons, great care should be taken in generalising the findings.

This research will not address the question of whether or not the WTO and the IFIs should be rejected. Instead, this research will consider how to break hegemony if the goals of global governance institutions in global education are to maintain global neoliberal hegemony.

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