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Abstract

My study explored the international attempts to provide Universal Primary Education (UPE) and to discover the reasons for their failure. There have been international initiatives intended to achieve UPE since the end of World War II, yet there are 72 million children worldwide left without access to primary education. I hope that the information presented in this paper will lead to improved initiatives in UPE in the future.

The study is oriented in Critical Theory and uses Grounded Theory as a methodology in order that the obstacles in achieving UPE emerge from the data. The data came from literature regarding UPE. This literature is largely from international institutions and academic journals that focus on international development.

I found that a lack of funding and inappropriate international policies have poisoned UPE initiatives before they are implemented. The international powers that have dominated these efforts have used an educational philosophy that is irrelevant for the local contexts. Not only has this led to 72 million children lacking access to primary school but numerous others receive an inadequate education where many do not reach minimum literacy and numeracy levels. The educational philosophy dominant in international initiatives is based on human capital theory and neoliberalism. These philosophies have a narrow economic perspective that is irrelevant to communities in developing countries looking to expand access to education.

This information can be used to reorient current and future endeavors in expanding access to primary education. An international institution based on the model from the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria would solve many of the current problems. Such an institution would pool funds and include more stakeholders in decision making ensuring that local communities contribute to the education plans in their region. Furthermore, if such an institution used the Freirean Perspective in its edu-
cational philosophy further problems could be avoided. The Freirean Perspective pursues equality and progress towards democracy through respectful dialogue between the stakeholders in education. This would ensure a more robust definition of development where educational opportunities are increased.
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