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**Abstract**

The World Bank is clearly one of the most influential global intergovernmental operators for international development assistance. In recent decades, the Bank and other agencies have invested immense technical and financial resources in a troubled and unprecedented mission of revitalizing and restructuring the development of education in Africa. A growing body of critique has emerged that articulates the failures of the revitalization mission, framing these exchange relationships as representing nothing but new patterns of embedded neocolonialism, dependency, and geopolitical asymmetry. The aim of this paper is to contribute to and disrupt these unfolding debates by examining how a set of theoretical paradigms have shaped the World Bank's priorities and approaches to education and development policy in developing countries at different times. The paper argues that the Bank embraced the neoliberal economic ideology and a narrowly defined interpretation of the 'rates of return' calculations to promote higher investment in basic education while systematically marginalizing higher education. The paper asserts that this polarized policy paradigm persisted within the Bank at least until the 1990s and has partly fuelled the preponderance of the critiques of

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neo-colonial dependency and hegemony. This paper opens a new analytic territory by examining the coordinates of two recent and increasingly significant World Bank policy paradigms: the 'innovation systems' and 'global partnership' approaches. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)