Interrogating the World Bank’s Policy on Innovative Delivery for Higher Education

By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work except where stated to the contrary and that it is not substantially the same as any other thesis which has previously been submitted for a degree at any other university.

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Sections of this thesis were previously published in the following article:

Abstract

Over the past thirty years, the World Bank has intensified its activities relating to education in developing countries. Notable developments in the World Bank’s policy on education include promotion of “innovative delivery”, which refers to the use of new and existing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in education. The World Bank claims that the unique characteristics of ICTs have the potential to produce new forms of delivery in higher education that can overcome existing barriers to education and facilitate student-centred learning (World Bank, 1999, 2005).

Many forms of innovative delivery, such as distance education and open learning, are not new forms of instruction. However, promotion of innovative delivery as a global priority for education in developing countries is new. In this thesis, I interrogate the World Bank’s assumptions concerning innovative delivery as expressed in their landmark policy statement on education, the 1999 Education Sector Strategy Report (ES99) (World Bank, 1999). I focus on the assumptions that underlie views put forward in the ES99 on the nature of technology and its role in education, the role of innovative delivery in overcoming existing barriers to education, and the potential of innovative delivery to facilitate student-centred learning. A central aim of this thesis was to better understand the socio-cultural and pedagogical issues that may arise when these assumptions are put into practice in different cultural contexts. This was achieved by comparing the assumptions put forward in the ES99 with the reported perceptions of,
attitudes toward, and use of ICTs by students and lecturers from three different cultural contexts.

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used to gather detailed empirical data on end-users’ perceptions, attitudes to and use of online technologies at universities in Australia, Malaysia and the United States. The findings suggested that across all three cultural contexts, respondents’ attitudes were not consistent with the World Bank’s technocratic view of innovative delivery. Moreover, the findings cast doubt on the extent to which technology-mediated education can overcome existing barriers to education and facilitate a student-centred approach to education. I conclude by suggesting that the World Bank needs to adopt a more questioning stance toward the potential effectiveness of innovative delivery. Other findings point to the contextual nature of technology adoption and the pedagogical implications of this mode of delivery across cultural contexts.
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