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3 **SIX QUESTIONS ABOUT THE**

5 **WORLD BANK’S 2020 EDUCATION**

7 **SECTOR STRATEGY**

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15 **ABSTRACT**

17 *This chapter presents the findings from a series of interviews with*

19 *World Bank staff on the topic of the World Bank’s Education Sector*

21 *Strategy 2020. The six questions used in these interviews serve as the*

23 *template for the information presented in this chapter. This chapter*

25 *provides a brief but important set of background information necessary*

*to understand the strategy and the following chapters because it*

*provides a reflective voice to the World Bank staff involved in the*

*development of the new strategy or familiar with the development*

*process.*

27 **INTRODUCTION**

29

31 In April 2011, the World Bank published a revised version of strategic plan

33 for the work it will do in the education sector. This article presents findings

from interviews with nine World Bank staff in April 2011 about the new

World Bank Education Sector Strategy (ESS, 2020). Using these interviews, **AU:1**

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37 **Education Strategy in the Developing World: Revising the World Bank’s Education Policy**

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1 this article answers six questions: What is the ESS 2020? What is it not? How  
 2 was the development process of the ESS 2020 different from that of past  
 3 Strategies? How are the policy recommendations of the ESS 2020 different **AU :2**  
 4 from those of past Strategies? Does the ESS 2020 fit in with the World  
 5 Bank's broader development strategy? And finally, does the ESS 2020  
 6 matter?

7 Each interviewee was asked a series of open-ended questions and follow-  
 8 up questions. Initially, interviewees were asked, "How is the ESS 2020  
 9 different from previous ones?" and "What were some of the internal debates  
 10 during the preparation of the ESS 2020?" They were assured that their  
 11 identities would be protected. The interviewees consisted of six economists  
 12 (three specializing in the economics of education), one education sociologist,  
 13 one education psychologist, and one education comparativist. Eight of the  
 14 nine interviewees were senior level staff.

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## WHAT IS THE ESS 2020?

19 All the interviewees said that the target audience for the ESS 2020  
 20 consists of government ministers of education and other bureaucrats in  
 21 the Bank's client countries. The secondary audience includes members of  
 22 academia, NGOs, and international organizations. According to the  
 23 interviewees, an understanding of the target audience is essential before  
 24 directing criticism at the ESS 2020. The language and presentation of the  
 25 ESS 2020 are designed to resonate with government bureaucrats. The  
 26 interviewees said that clients are not interested in having statements  
 27 about issues such as human rights and causal inference methodology in  
 28 the ESS 2020.

29 The ESS 2020 reveals what the Bank believes will work in education.  
 30 Client countries can choose to accept, modify, or reject the Bank's ESS  
 31 recommendations. The Bank's beliefs in the ESS 2020 can be summed up in  
 32 two words: "learning" and "systems." The new emphasis on "learning" is  
 33 based on the difficult lesson that access to schools does not necessarily result  
 34 in learning. Consequently, the ESS 2020 marks a shift in the Bank's position  
 35 from "access for all" to "learning for all."

36 The "systems" emphasis has two components. The first component is  
 37 that the document recognizes the importance of all levels of  
 38 the education system, from early childhood to higher education.  
 39 The emphasis on early childhood is new for the Bank and draws from  
 the research on industrialized countries that provides evidence that early

1 investment in high quality preschool contributes to cognitive develop-  
ment and better adult labor market outcomes. One interviewee attributed  
3 the focus on early childhood education to the scholarship of economics  
Nobel laureate James Heckman. The ESS 2020's emphasis on higher  
5 education is a change from the relatively secondary position it has in  
previous strategies.

7 The second component of the ESS 2020's systems approach is that for any  
level of education, careful attention needs to be paid to: the inputs,  
9 processes, and outcomes of education. For the Bank, the focus on the  
process stage is new and reflects the movement in industrialized countries to  
11 hold teachers, administrators, and parents accountable for using educa-  
tional inputs appropriately to achieve at least minimally acceptable  
13 educational outcomes. The scientific basis for accountability been influenced  
by the growth of evaluation research in industrialized and developing  
15 countries, particularly randomized evaluations.<sup>1</sup>

17

## **WHAT IS THE ESS 2020 NOT?**

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The interviewees argued that the ESS 2020 is not a literature review. They  
21 reemphasized that the key audience is clients, not those in academia. Of  
the 117 citations, there were only 3 citations to education journals and no  
23 citations to comparative education journals. At least 58 Bank documents  
or staff publications were cited. When asked if the approach made the  
25 Bank appear insular, several interviewees said that the cited Bank-  
authored documents were literature reviews. It was also claimed that  
27 clients have an easier time accessing Bank documents (often freely  
available on the Bank's website) than the original books, journal articles,  
29 and book chapters.<sup>2</sup>

The interviewees expressed the desire not to produce a "how-to guide" or  
31 "solutions manual." When asked for an explanation, the interviewees  
envisioned the establishment of data collection systems (such as the U.S.  
33 National Center for Education Statistics), monitoring systems (such as the  
U.S. Department of Education's "What Works Clearinghouse"), and  
35 rigorous evaluation procedures (such as the randomized evaluations  
conducted at MIT's Jameel Poverty Action Lab) that could be used to  
37 generate specific policy solutions appropriate for the context. With these  
resources in place, the interviewees believe that each client could design  
39 customized education policies, preferably based on the learning and systems  
approach.

## 1     **HOW WAS THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF THE** 2     **ESS 2020 DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF PAST** 3     **STRATEGIES?**

5     The ESS 2020 is different from past strategies in its development and  
6     content. Several interviewees admitted that past strategies were often  
7     developed behind closed doors by a small team of like-minded male  
8     economists. In contrast, the team behind the ESS 2020 included a larger  
9     share of women and noneconomists. The preparation of the ESS 2020 also  
10    involved a more inclusive process. The interviewees praised ESS 2020 leader  
11    and Bank Director of Education Elizabeth King's efforts in establishing a  
12    sense of collaboration and inclusiveness among the core team of educational  
13    specialists that developed the document.

14    Though preparation was inclusive, all interviewees acknowledged that  
15    there were disagreements among Bank personnel on some of the issues and  
16    positions included in the ESS 2020. Some felt that the ESS 2020 was not  
17    inclusive of some important topics. One interviewee, for example, wanted a  
18    section on the advances in education psychology that could be applied to  
19    developing country settings. A senior interviewee countered that Bank  
20    clients are not generally interested in such topics, and, for those who are, the  
21    Bank already provides free online access to a book on the topic (i.e., Abadzi,  
22    2006). Another issue of disagreement was the future role of the private  
23    sector in education – with only one interviewee suggesting that the private  
24    sector was not emphasized enough in the ESS 2020. Most interviewees  
25    agreed that the modest emphasis on the private sector reflects an ideological  
26    change in the Bank. One interviewee noted that the newer staff showed a  
27    deeper awareness of evidence-based policymaking; another interviewee  
28    fondly discussed the healthy skepticism toward free-market ideology among  
29    newer staff.<sup>3</sup>

30    Another difference in preparation between the ESS 2020 and past  
31    strategies is the involvement of Bank clients and stakeholders. Comments  
32    were solicited at 24 sites and in virtual meetings in all client regions  
33    (Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, East  
34    and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern  
35    Europe). Clients and stakeholders were consulted on whether the  
36    contents of the ESS 2020 resonate with their concerns. According to  
37    the interviewees, the draft reports were well received at the meetings. The  
38    interviewees did not recall cases of significant opposition to the final  
39    draft of the ESS 2020.

1       **HOW ARE THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF**  
2       **THE ESS 2020 DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF PAST**  
3       **STRATEGIES?**

5       The ESS 2020 recommendations reflect the third phase of education policy  
6       thinking at the Bank (for discussions, see Heyneman, 2003; Mundy, 2002;  
7       Psacharopoulos, 2006). In the first phase (1980s), the strategy recommenda- **AU-3**  
8       tions were inspired by the success of manpower planning in post-World War II  
9       Germany and Japan. The strategies during this period therefore recom-  
10      mended using vocational and higher education to prepare future workforces.  
11      After years of tracking client countries, the Bank eventually understood the  
12      ineffectiveness of manpower planning. As former staff education economist  
13      George Psacharopoulos (2006) quipped, "... trying to predict the number of  
14      people with given educational qualifications to meet production requirements  
15      was a vain exercise, often leading to forecast errors of 1000 percent."

16      In the second phase (late 1980s to mid-2000s), the Bank education  
17      strategies recommended school access for all children and the provision of  
18      school inputs at the primary and secondary education levels. Early in this  
19      second phase, the Bank hired architects to design and build schools in client  
20      countries. The second phase gained momentum after the hiring of  
21      economists and a few quantitative sociologists, who began investigating  
22      the effect of school inputs, such as per-pupil expenditure, teachers, and  
23      supplies in developing countries (e.g., Heyneman & Loxley, 1983). The  
24      Bank's research and policies that were related to school inputs were  
25      influenced by the increase in Western school input studies and the expanding  
26      of computing power that followed the Coleman Report in 1966.<sup>4</sup>

27      As discussed earlier, in the third and current phase, the ESS 2020's  
28      recommendations on learning and systematic approach encompasses all  
29      levels of education (from early childhood to higher education) and the stages  
30      of educational input, process, and output. Given the unprecedented breadth  
31      in content, the ESS 2020 is the Bank's most ambitious strategy to date.

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34       **DOES THE ESS 2020 FIT IN WITH THE WORLD**  
35       **BANK'S BROADER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY?**

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38       The World Development Report (WDR) records the World Bank's  
39       development strategy at various times. Several interviewees noted the

1 influence of the 2004 and 2007 WDRs on the ESS 2020. *WDR 2004: Making*  
 3 *Services Work for Poor People* reflected the broader anticorruption strategy  
 5 learning. In recent years, the Bank had accumulated anecdotal and  
 7 empirical evidence of corruption in education, such as teacher absenteeism  
 (e.g., Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer, Muralidharan, & Rogers, 2006).

9 The ESS 2020's emphasis on learning was influenced by *WDR 2007:*  
 11 *Development and the Next Generation*. In the WDR 2007, the Bank argued  
 13 that skills development is essential for addressing development challenges  
 15 like that of youth unemployment. The WDR 2007's focus reflected the fact  
 17 that several developing regions had "youth bulges" – the demographic  
 19 phenomenon of a disproportionately large share of youth relative to non-  
 youth. Recent discoveries of youth involvement in extremist activities –  
 including the tragic 9-11 attacks in New York – further motivated the youth  
 theme of the WDR 2007. The ESS 2020 focus on learning (rather than just  
 access) from preschool to higher education is aimed at preparing youth for  
 jobs that benefit themselves, the economy, and society.

21 The focus on education data is consistent with the vision of current Bank  
 23 President Robert Zoellick. From 2007 to 2011, *The New York Times* (2011)  
 25 reports that he has overseen the release of over 7,000 data sets that were  
 previously available only to governments and selected researchers; Zoellick  
 also declared that, "the Bank's most valuable currency is no longer its  
 money but its information."

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## DOES THE ESS 2020 MATTER?

29 Will client countries adopt the "learning" and "systems" approach  
 31 recommended in the ESS 2020? The interviewees were unsure. The  
 33 predicament at the Bank is that it has presented its most ambitious strategy  
 35 despite declining financial influence and staff size. (Several interviewees  
 37 mentioned that the Bank would face sharper criticism if it had prepared a  
 (simpler) ESS 2020 modeled after past strategies.) At the very least, the  
 interviewees felt that the ESS 2020 resulted in improved perceptions about  
 the Bank among client countries because of the inclusiveness in its  
 development.

39 Some interviewees discussed another potential effect. If client countries  
 are persuaded by the ESS 2020, the interviewees envisioned assisting clients  
 in the collection, analysis, and dissemination of education data in a manner

1 that parallels the *Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS)* –  
2 household surveys that are collected by the Bank and client governments,  
3 which are then made available on the Bank's website. All interviewees hoped  
4 that domestic and international researchers would use such detailed data on  
5 teachers, administrators, and students. The Bank intends to add to its  
6 guidebooks on data analysis and impact evaluation (e.g., Deaton, 1997;  
7 Khandker, Koolwal, & Samad, 2010).

8 With more people investigating richer data, the interviewees foresaw  
9 evidence-based debates on the strengths and weaknesses of proposed  
10 education reforms (involving alternative learning and systems approaches)  
11 in client countries. As a model, one interviewee cited the evidence-based  
12 debates on poverty and inequality in India (Deaton & Kozel, 2005).

13

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## NOTES

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18 1. Such evaluation methods draw from medical research, where one group  
19 receives a treatment and another group is a control group that does not. Researchers  
20 then monitor the behavior of both groups, and after a certain point, compare  
21 outcomes. To initiate the culture of randomized evaluations, the Bank collaborated  
22 with leading social scientists. The Bank hired University of California – Berkeley  
23 economics professor Paul Gertler as its Chief Economist of the Human Development  
24 Network from 2004 to 2006. Bank staff and clients also engaged in frequent  
25 consultation with the Jameel Poverty Action Lab, including MIT economics  
26 professors Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo and Harvard economics professor  
27 Michael Kremer.

28 2. Among the Bank produced literature reviews, the most exhaustive and recent is  
29 Bruns, Filmer, and Patrinos (2011).

30 3. Some of the ideological shift began with the hiring of Joseph Stiglitz as the  
31 Chief Economist of the World Bank in 1997. Stiglitz challenged much of the free-  
32 market ideology that had dominated World Bank development policy. As evidence  
33 of the changing ideologies within the Bank, one interviewee drew attention to an  
34 article by lead economist Halsey Rogers (2010) that said, "On the one hand, changed  
35 global circumstances and new awareness of vulnerability should lead to some policy  
36 changes, as developing countries take steps to reduce and buffer risks, including risks  
37 generated in developed countries. At the same time, the crisis should largely reinforce  
38 the Post-Washington Consensus on development that has emerged over the past  
39 decade – a world view that aims to achieve private sector-driven growth but sees a  
40 facilitating role for the state, promotes engaging with the global economy in ways  
41 that advance development, and values pragmatism, experimentation, and evidence-  
42 based policymaking over ideology."

43 4. For readers who lack familiarity with the Coleman Report: The prominent  
44 American education sociologist James Coleman and colleagues were commissioned  
45 by President Lyndon B. Johnson to investigate the relationship between school

1 resources and student outcomes. Coleman and colleagues concluded that family  
 3 characteristics – not school characteristics – were the main determinants of student  
 5 outcomes. The Coleman Report was subsequently challenged by numerous social  
 7 scientists.

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 23 Comparative and International Education Society in Montreal. I alone am  
 25 responsible for errors.


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