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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  
World Bank staff on the topic of the World Bank's Education Sector  
Strategy 2020. The six questions used in these interviews serve as the  
template for the information presented in this chapter. This chapter  
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.*

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29           **INTRODUCTION**

31     In April 2011, the World Bank published a revised version of strategic plan  
for the work it will do in the education sector. This article presents findings  
33     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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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  
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  
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  
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  
in learning. Consequently, the ESS 2020 marks a shift in the Bank's position  
34 from "access for all" to "learning for all."

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

1 investment in high quality preschool contributes to cognitive development 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 educational 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>

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## 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 clients have an easier time accessing Bank documents (often freely available on the Bank's website) than the original books, journal articles,  
27 and book chapters.<sup>2</sup>

The interviewees expressed the desire not to produce a "how-to guide" or "solutions manual." When asked for an explanation, the interviewees envisioned the establishment of data collection systems (such as the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics), monitoring systems (such as the U.S. Department of Education's "What Works Clearinghouse"), and rigorous evaluation procedures (such as the randomized evaluations conducted at MIT's Jameel Poverty Action Lab) that could be used to 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 3 ESS 2020 DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF PAST STRATEGIES?

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

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

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

## 1      HOW ARE THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF 3      THE ESS 2020 DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF PAST 5      STRATEGIES?

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

17     In the second phase (late 1980s to mid-2000s), the Bank education  
strategies recommended school access for all children and the provision of  
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  
countries. The second phase gained momentum after the hiring of  
21     economists and a few quantitative sociologists, who began investigating  
the effect of school inputs, such as per-pupil expenditure, teachers, and  
supplies in developing countries (e.g., Heyneman & Loxley, 1983). The  
23     Bank's research and policies that were related to school inputs were  
influenced by the increase in Western school input studies and the expanding  
25     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  
recommendations on learning and systematic approach encompasses all  
29     levels of education (from early childhood to higher education) and the stages  
31     of educational input, process, and output. Given the unprecedented breadth  
in content, the ESS 2020 is the Bank's most ambitious strategy to date.

## 35      DOES THE ESS 2020 FIT IN WITH THE WORLD 37      BANK'S BROADER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY?

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

1 influence of the 2004 and 2007 WDRs on the ESS 2020. *WDR 2004: Making  
2 Services Work for Poor People* reflected the broader anticorruption strategy  
3 under former Bank President James Wolfensohn (1995–2005). Regarding  
4 education, WDR 2004 argued that corrupt education systems compromise  
5 learning. In recent years, the Bank had accumulated anecdotal and  
6 empirical evidence of corruption in education, such as teacher absenteeism  
7 (e.g., Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer, Muralidharan, & Rogers, 2006).

8 The ESS 2020's emphasis on learning was influenced by *WDR 2007:*

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

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

25

## 27 DOES THE ESS 2020 MATTER?

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

37 Some interviewees discussed another potential effect. If client countries  
38 are persuaded by the ESS 2020, the interviewees envisioned assisting clients  
39 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).

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## NOTES

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

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

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

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

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

5

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