

Global Assessment in the World Bank Education Strategy 2020

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Abstract

This article examines the language of global accountability as well as the recommended tools used to assess the quality of higher education as noted in the new World Bank *Education Strategy 2020*. This article concludes that intended learning outcomes often reflect ideological dispositions and when imposed on countries considered “developing,” have the potential to replicate the pattern of placing greater value on knowledge produced in “developed” countries. This trend may continue to relegate developing countries to the role of consumers in the knowledge economy.

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas istilah akuntabilitas global, berikut instrumen-instrumen evaluasi mutu pendidikan tinggi, sebagaimana tercantum dalam Strategi Pendidikan Bank Dunia 2020. Tulisan ini menyimpulkan, rancangan tujuan-tujuan pembelajarannya merefleksikan beberapa pandangan ideologis tertentu, dan jika diterapkan pada kelompok negara “berkembang”, akan berpotensi menciptakan kesan penghargaan yang lebih tinggi atas ilmu pengetahuan yang dikembangkan di negara “maju”. Tren ini bisa membuat negara-negara berkembang terus-menerus diposisikan sebagai konsumen dalam ekonomi (berbasis) pengetahuan.

Key Words: Education, Development, Assessment, World Bank

Introduction

This article examines the role of assessment in the World Bank’s *Education Strategy 2020*. A former World Bank education specialist commented that, “expanding access has a thousand parents but quality is an orphan—politically speaking at least. We [the World Bank] also try to weigh in on the side of the orphan” (Collins and Rhoads 2008, 177). This comment referred to the political palpability of access to education, but the resistance toward considering educational quality. Based on what appears to be a global accountability movement in education, the parent/orphan analogy is no longer applicable. Tuning education standards, assessment, accreditation, the Bologna Declaration, and No Child Left Behind policies all have global applicability. The new World Bank *Education Strategy 2020* defines strengthening an education system as reforming “relationships of

accountability” and ensuring that results of learning are “measured and monitored” and ultimately linked to “financing and results” (18).

World Bank strategies have focused on all sectors of education in recent decades, prioritizing primary education over other sectors at various times. For example, the higher education sector was undervalued when measured by simple individual rates of return (Task Force on Higher Education and Society [TFHES] 2000; Collins 2011). As a result, the move toward considering educational quality may be a welcome turn, but definitions and practices surrounding components of accountability have the potential to reinforce mechanisms of inequality, as opposed to liberation. Using discourse analysis, this article examines the language of global accountability as well as the recommended tools used to assess the quality of higher education as noted in the new World Bank *Education Strategy 2020*. This article concludes that intended learning outcomes often reflect ideological dispositions and when imposed on countries considered “developing,” have the potential to replicate the pattern of placing greater value on knowledge produced in “developed” countries.

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Assessment and Accountability

A variety of internal and external pressures play a role in the call for evidence to “prove” what students are learning as a result of their enrollment in higher education. For example, the public may demand an accounting for expenditure of tax dollars. Legislatures and government agencies are increasingly observing institutional practices and then becoming involved in institutional decision-making. As a result, accountability has become both a prevalent concept and a programmatic initiative (Ewell 1997, 2002). However, if calls from legislators and others for strict quality monitoring lead to simplistic approaches to gathering evidence about learning and obfuscate institutional values and expression of faculty expertise, educational principals can be diluted (Bresciani 2006). Depending on the location and degree of pressure, some institutions resort to a compliance approach in order to satisfy the external demand (Ewell 2002).

In the midst of growing demands for accountability of higher education (as a sector or as individual institutions) with regard to student learning and related expenditures, there must always be a definition of quality assurance or achievement levels. Conceptualizations that lack definition leave room for arbitrary applications of an evolving and unclear threshold of quality. Degree completion, enrollment levels, and retention rates are often seen as reliable indicators of quality (Ewell 1997). Although these indicators may be simple to measure, they are not an exact measure of educational quality. Standardized testing is used to evaluate student learning across institutional types and regions and is a traditional medium to measure the quality of higher education. In many developed countries, educational testing is ubiquitous. According to Koretz (2008), achievement testing is a complex enterprise that is widely misunderstood and misused, and “precisely because of the importance given to test scores in our society, those mistakes can have serious consequences” (1). Aside from the complexity of reliability, measurement error, and cultural bias, research shows that when someone is held accountable for test scores, they may become egregiously inflated (Koretz 2008). Although standardized testing may be a simple method to collect data, many tests are not connected to the curricula being taught and do not measure the course or program being delivered. Additionally, standardized tests are often criticized for an inability to accommodate different learning styles (Maki 2004).

Challenges to finding meaningful indicators of quality are exacerbated by a model of higher education that dates back to the mid- to late-1800s (Goodchild and Weschler 1989). Institutional

practices have become entrenched, and change in the methods of delivery for higher education is slow to respond to societal needs. When government officials ask that institutions verify the quality of their education, the response can be defensive, subversive, or nonexistent. In the absence of a common standardized test there is a resounding call for institutions to identify specific learning outcomes and achievement levels and consequently demonstrate what students are able to do as a result of the investment. It is clear that the scrutiny of higher education is not diminishing, but growing.

International Mobility

There are several trends in regions and organizations that identify assessment and quality assurance as being driven by international mobility. From the inclusion of education in the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) to regional agreements, it is clear that the ability of students to transfer credits and study in international locations requires a comparable curriculum or set of achievement levels. This has been manifested in several different ways.

The Bologna Declaration in 1999 was part of a process that aimed at creating a European Higher Education Area by making academic degree standards and quality assurance standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe. UNESCO has played a role in trying to advocate for greater mobility across borders. A diplomatic conference in Lisbon created a space to introduce ratifications of the Bologna process. The Lisbon Recognition Convention is an example of a new generation of recognition conventions (Uvalic-Trumbic 2009). It also highlights the significance of assessment and its relevance in recognizing qualifications that ensure mobility across higher education institutions.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was originally designed to promote economic growth, and its membership is comprised of the world’s major industrial democracies. Education has been part of OECD’s portfolio since its inception, but in 2002, a Directorate for Education was constituted. The diverse programs that comprise this directorate carry out several activities, including: data collection, data production through surveys like the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO), country reviews that follow a quality assurance methodology, non-binding guidelines for quality provision in cross-border education, as well as other activities.

In 2004, the OECD produced a document, *Quality and Recognition in Higher Education: The Cross-Border Challenge*.

The goal of the document was to undertake a mapping of quality assurance in different parts of the OECD and cross-border higher education. The main conclusion was that most countries/regions did not have comprehensive quality assurance mechanisms and left cross-border provision out of their system. OECD and UNESCO collaborated to produce quality assurance guidelines. The guidelines are designed to help students get easy access to reliable information on higher education offered outside their home country or by foreign providers in their country. In order to provide greater clarity on procedures for international recognition, the guidelines represent a call to make qualifications more transparent. One major recommendation includes an “invitation to governments to establish comprehensive systems of quality assurance and accreditation for cross-border higher education, recognizing that this involves both sending and receiving countries” (Schuller and Vincent-Lancrin 2009, 76). The OECD has continued collaboration with the World Bank in order to increase the capacity for quality assurance, trade agreements, and also to stress how cross-border higher education can contribute to capacity development under appropriate regulatory conditions in developing countries.

Another joint publication in 2007, *Cross-Border Tertiary Education: A Way Towards Capacity Development*, looks at the opportunities and challenges related to international mobility, especially for developing countries willing to leverage cross-border higher education as a tool for development. This document discusses the concept of capacity-building through cross-border education, with particular emphasis on the critical role of quality assurance in trade negotiations. In addition, the document links cross-border education with economic development, and consequently highlights quality assurance as playing a key role in the success of cross-border education. The combined effect is the elevation of quality assurance and assessment in education as a component of economic development.

International Comparative Assessment

Countries “can no longer rely on natural resources for economic success. Today the most powerful competitive advantage is brain power: a workforce that invents and innovates” (Thurow 1996, i). Edward A. Shils (1958) even described higher education as a source of “secular salvation” to capture the spirit of a growing value in education as both an individual and collective good. Although higher education provides expertise to all sectors of society and the economy, a UN report focused the relationship to science and technology:

Universities have immense potential to promote technological development. But most universities in developing countries are ill equipped to meet the challenge. Outdated curricula, under motivated faculty, poor management, and a continuous struggle for funds have undermined the capacity of universities to play their roles as engines of community or regional development. (United Nations Millennium Project Task Force [UNMPTF] 2005, 90)

Universities are considered a vital part of national development as institutions can assist in the growth of business and industrial firms and contribute to economic revival and high-tech development in their surrounding regions. However, measuring an institution’s ability to contribute to society and educate students remains a difficult topic. According to David H. Kamens and Connie L. McNeely (2010), “It seems that fewer and fewer countries imagine that they will achieve the status of a ‘good society’ without high levels of formal education and accompanying efforts at national assessment and/or international testing” (19).

International benchmarking has been identified as the basis for improvement and a key way for countries to “understand relative strengths and weaknesses of their education systems and identify best practices and ways forward” (OECD 2006, 18). It is a signal of international consensus (primarily by developed countries) about the necessity of assessment. Comparative interest in national examination systems dates back to the late nineteenth century (Meyer, Kamens, and Benavot 1992; McNeely and Cha 1994), while formal international testing is mostly a post-WWII project based on the availability of sophisticated testing. Although higher education does not have large international comparative tests like Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) or the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), there is a large industry that produces the SAT, ACT, GRE, and other standardized tests that is ready to enter the arena of international achievement testing if given the opportunity.

During the past 40 years, the number of countries participating in international testing for learning in mathematics, science, and reading has increased dramatically. According to Benavot and Tanner (2007), the number of countries carrying out learning assessments doubled between 1995 and 2005. Consequently, an expanding number of donor agencies and multilateral organizations are mandating some form of learning assessment to accompany their loans (e.g., IMF and the World Bank), which appears to mirror some national accountability movements like No Child Left Behind in the United States. In a comparison of the educational aims of 161 countries between 1955-1965 and 1980-2000, Fiala (2006) noted a focus on citizenship, national identity,

equality and democracy, and less focus on employability. Agreement about key learning outcomes will legitimate international efforts to make mass education more accountable to society. Assessment and testing will acquire credibility in this environment. The performance of students at all levels of education will become a major issue in this context (OECD 2006, 2007). However, although testing measures maximum performance at a particular point in time, it often has no bearing on long-term performance.

The notion that society can be “managed” is related to the goals of assessment and testing (Meyer 2005). Kamens and McNeely (2010) associate corporate management with the diffusion of assessment as a method to strengthen institutional capacity. Models of success originate from countries that do well in international testing (Strang and Meyer 1993). Management models of organization “fuel the belief that there are standard solutions to education problems” (Kamens and McNeely 2010, 14). As a result, assessment becomes normative. A 2005 World Bank document advocated, “Assess locally, examine nationally, and compare globally” (101). Normative influences, models, and even coercion work to speed the process of diffusion (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). As new domains of assessment become common, the difficulty will lie in deciding on achievement levels that students should be expected to master (World Bank 2005). Given the worldwide expansion of higher education (Schofer and Meyer 2005), it is likely that the urge to assess will expand to cover additional levels as countries seek information on how systems of higher education compare with one another (OECD 2008). Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will likely facilitate the process of assessment as a demand for accountability of educational effectiveness in exchange for resources.

The management perspective embedded in assessment continues to spread. Power is used to leverage this diffusion in unique ways under the contradictory forces of globalization. Stephen Carney (2009, 65) explored the ways in which:

State/Society relations are reengineered via a multitude of new control and steering mechanisms. Rather than advocating a direct role for the state, such prescriptions imply invisible or embedded processes of power via new administrative systems, and—most important—a new mental landscape for thinking about society and its relation to the state.

Mental space where the World Bank’s vested interest is mediated through new configurations is outlined in strategy and policy documents, which require a degree of consensus by directors and constituents for approval. Consensus creates a

normative framework and thereby the creation of a mental landscape. Global carrying agencies of these messages need to be traced and elaborated upon (Marginson and Mollis 2001).

Capturing ideologies is a difficult task, but is essential to highlight the promotion of universal entitlements, professionalism, or bureaucracy (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). The strategy fits into policies and practices that “are increasingly standardizing the flow of educational ideas internationally and changing fundamentally what education is and can be” (Carney 2009, 68). Policies and practices operate on at least three levels: vision and values, management and organization, and learning processes. Globalized messages that are reflected in particular contexts and diffuse defined visions of supstate institutions highlight the spread of particular types of educational thinking. Moving beyond the creation of strategy or policy, the degree to which the ideology is facilitated or inhibited ultimately becomes the evidence of how the message travels and becomes embedded. The new World Bank *Education Strategy 2020* (hereafter referred to as “Strategy”) and the mechanisms to implement the initiatives are representations of the agency using discourse to demand “educational improvement as a prerequisite for future economic advancement” (Carney 2009, 80).

Critical Discourse Analysis

Different assessment practices lead to different types of attitudes toward student learning, which can be traced back to theoretical perspectives. Kathy Luckett and Lee Sutherland (2000) highlighted: “If purposes of assessment remain implicit and vague, there is danger that different purposes become confused and conflated, so that assessment as a consequence fails to play an educative role” (102). One perspective of assessment holds that intelligence is fixed and measurable and that in a meritocratic society it is fair that each person be assessed as they will achieve according to his/her ability. This view regards knowledge as an end product, which can be measured, predicted, and controlled (Grundy 1987). As the purpose of education in this perspective is to prepare students to contribute to the well-being of society as a whole, the purpose of assessment is to determine the degree to which the end product has been achieved, and to grade, rank and select according to achievement.

Critical theorists recognize the influence of power in societal and educational contexts. In education, as in other spheres of super structure, nothing is neutral, objective or disinterested—all constructions serve the interest of certain groups. All facts are seen as “socially constructed, humanly determined and interpreted” (Gibson 1986, 4). Critical theorists ask whose interests the assessment practices serve, those of the institution or of the

student. They also ask whether the practices are valid, being used to develop as well as judge learning, and whether the practices are transparent. Formative assessment used to develop student learning and curriculum reform provides an opportunity to learn as opposed to assigning a mark or a rank.

A post-structuralist approach calls for consciousness of the discourses on assessment practices. Discourse analysis of institutional, departmental, and individual policy, practice, and understanding disclose the subtleties of assumptions, power relations, and attitudes immanent in assessment practices. Examining the implicit assumptions and practices about assessment may lead to increased understanding about the nature of the discourse. Assessment and quality assurance should be clearly defined, as opposed to testing and measurement, which is a performance evaluation at a particular point in time—not an indicator of long-term performance or learning.

Based on the assumption that language is an irreducible and interconnected part of social life, Norman Fairclough (2003) identifies discourse analysis as a productive way to focus on language and to analyze texts with theoretical questions. Additionally, a critical discourse analysis moves to identify the ways that texts can create, maintain, or shift ideologies (Eagleton 1991; Van Dijk 1998). In this way, texts can have a socially constructive effect whereby they serve to legitimate operations within the ideology and annihilate operations outside of approved conceptions (Berger and Luckmann 1963). Thus, a modality of power is involved in discourse and ideology. Textual analysis serves as a method to consider the way in which texts and the ideologies they service contribute to maintaining or shifting power relations.

Fairclough (2003) offered several categories that are useful for evaluating texts. The first is “intertextuality,” which questions which texts and voices are included and excluded, as well as identifying the significant absences (47). Another category, tacit knowledge, is an important aspect of any text. The capability to share some common ground makes communication and social interaction possible. The ability to be an arbiter of social power, domination, and hegemony “includes the capacity to shape to some significant degree the nature and content of this ‘common ground,’ which makes implicitness and assumptions an important issue with respect to ideology” (55). Three main assumptions are used in this area of evaluation: “(1) Existential assumptions: assumptions about what exists, (2) Propositional assumptions: assumptions about what is or can be or will be the case, (3) Value assumptions: assumptions about what is good or desirable” (Fairclough 2003, 55). Various words like “risk,” “threaten,” and “aid” represent examples of words that trigger assumptions within

texts. Ideologies are closely linked to assumptions, as one aspect of hegemony is to universalize meaning (Fairclough 2003).

Fairclough (2003) considers discourse as a method of representing the world through processes, structures, belief, thoughts, feelings, and social relations. Different discourses provide different perspectives, relationships, and identities. From a social constructivist view, discourse is not only a perspective of the world, but a perspective of how one wishes the world to be. Aspirations underlie assumptions to help the ideology persist. Discourses are a resource that people use in social relations “keeping separate from one another, cooperating, competing, dominating—and in seeking to change the ways in which they relate to one another” (Fairclough 2003, 124). The following questions guide the analysis of the Strategy:

- What are the underlying assumptions that are driving the need for assessment?
- How will higher education be assessed?
- Will international comparisons and assessments leave space for variance in cultural knowledge and values? If so, what are the indicators?

Findings from the Strategy

Although there are thematic elements of the new Strategy that will emerge later in the findings, the initial analysis follows the order of the Strategy to address issues related to framing. For example, the sources of research the authors draw from, the way in which the problem is framed, and the language related to risk and benefit is all connected to the underlying assumptions and meaning of the Strategy. The document contains four major sections: (1) Rationale, (2) The World Bank’s Education Strategy, (3) Lessons from Previous Bank Work, and (4) Implementation Levers. The body of the Strategy is 53 pages of single-spaced text, including ten pages of graphs and figures. Roughly 15 percent of the document is directly related to the issue of assessment. The Strategy includes a definition of assessment as “the process of gathering and evaluating information on what students know, understand, and can do in order to make an informed decision about what to do next in the educational process” (World Bank 2011, 42) and defines an assessment system as a “group of policies, structures, practices, and tools for generating and using information on student learning” (42).

Stephen Heyneman (2011) casts the scope of education strategies in comparison to previous policy papers which must be approved by the executive directors, and the World Bank is listed as the author. According to Heyneman there are some shared characteristics of previous strategies and policy papers, including

changes to the sector serve as part of the call for a modification of how the World Bank engages with education. Economic and technological changes, according to the Strategy, highlight that “Education systems must adapt to those changes so that they can produce the skilled, agile workforces and informed citizens needed in this environment” (World Bank 2011, 8). It is asserted that countries that maintain education systems with educated citizens will have a global advantage.

Many of the advertisements and summary pieces about the World Bank’s new strategy are tied to the mission of “learning for all.” The related learning outcomes include reading and numeracy skills as well as knowledge that will contribute to living a healthy lifestyle. In addition, problem-solving skills as well as technical or vocational skills are highlighted as important for the labor market. Preventing students from dropping out is considered an important factor in reducing poverty, as well as “learning opportunities—from preschool to universities and training programs” that are not exclusively provided by governments (World Bank 2011, 13).

Although it is acknowledged that there is no definitive answer on how to achieve an effective learning environment, there seems to be agreement that focusing on inputs as opposed to outcomes will not produce the best success. For example, teacher-pupil ratio has been used widely as a measure of the quality of schools, but this does not indicate the level or amount of learning that takes place. The rationale offers important clues as to the cornerstones of the Strategy.

Over time, the World Bank has used a variety of measures to advance certain goals within the countries willing to take loans or technical assistance. These goals have included global economic stability, infrastructure development, decreasing public expenditures and enhancing the private sector, and others. The section on “Directions in the New Strategy” includes the most specific aspects related to assessment and the ways in which the Bank is able to implement procedures and policies. Over the next decade, the World Bank’s focus on education will seek to “strengthen the capacity of education systems to achieve learning goals and help build a high-quality knowledge base on education systems” (World Bank 2011, 17). The education strategy presents an approach to doing so by connecting the effectiveness of government resources and aid financing for education, through “operational, financial and technical assistance” (World Bank 2011, 17).

In order to build a high-quality knowledge base for education reforms, the World Bank (2011, 21-22) describes its support through the development of a knowledge base that will support the systems approach. This includes:

- (i) reliable and comparable statistics to measure learning outcomes and monitor aspects of the performance of education systems, and
- (ii) analytical and practical evidence and know-how about programs and policies that can improve the workings of education systems.

As mentioned earlier, more and more countries are using tests like PISA and TIMSS and are benchmarking themselves against other countries (the number of countries in PISA grew from 43 in 2000 to 66 in 2007). The Strategy identifies several areas as being notably absent from the current assessment structure, including “problem-solving, teamwork, and communication” (World Bank 2011, 23). While learning is placed at the center of the new approach, assessment is placed nearby as the indicator of whether or not learning has taken place. As a result, whether or not learning takes place, there will definitely be assessment for all sectors and constituents linked to the World Bank’s services.

Implementation Levers

The new Strategy tracks deviations and emerging themes from previous strategies, citing the objective from “quality education for all” in 2000, to “educational for all and education for the knowledge economy” in 2005 (World Bank 2011, 28). This deviation is an explicit recognition of educational progress as an outcome. The emphasis on basic education was replaced with an integrated focus on developing holistic education systems. Previous strategies focused on learning attained from investments and inputs, while the new strategy has a strong focus on strengthening education systems to “achieve results” and to have a global knowledge base in education, or a system by which performance indicators can be compared.

Some of the challenges to accomplishing this global system include differentiated needs and levels of capacity. For example, the new Strategy aspires to promote systematic cross-regional and cross-country exchanges. In order to do this, however, the World Bank has to identify countries with similar levels of development, components in their system, and “levels of maturity” (World Bank 2011, 36). This approach will require a set of values to be in place to identify what signals maturity according to World Bank standards. The new strategy added,

for example, in low-income countries that are still working to meet EFA and MDG targets, systems of student assessment are generally in the “latent” or “emerging” stage. In contrast, middle-income countries typically have more established systems of student assessment that include national examinations as well as participation in international

assessments. The challenges that these two groups of countries face in developing their respective student assessment systems therefore differ. (World Bank 2011, 36)

This challenge is another indication of the high-stakes that are being placed on international tests and standardized exams in order to fit in with systematic, global exchange. The difficulty, however, lies in the ability to move beyond differentiated capacity, but to look at culturally specific differentiations related to learning outcomes and achievement levels.

The implementation levers for the World Bank are essentially the ways in which it is able to entice or enforce the goals it is trying to achieve with partner countries. Included in the Strategy are three ways the World Bank contributes to development: “knowledge generation and exchange, together with policy debate; financial and technical support to client countries; and partnerships” (World Bank 2011, 39). Consequently, these are the areas that are considered implementation levers for the new Strategy. Most relevant to this paper is the knowledge generation and policy debate as it relates to system diagnostics, results measurement, and benchmarking. In support of the “systems perspective” that an earlier version of the Strategy frequently referenced, the World Bank started a program called Benchmarking Education Systems for Results (BESR). Although the program is not mentioned in the final version of the Strategy, it will likely be an important system connected to World Bank efforts at assessing learning. The overall approach aims to “assess institutional capacity and policies related to specific dimensions of the education system; diagnose its strengths and weaknesses against global standards, best practices, and the performance of comparator countries; and guide reforms aimed at increasing learning for all” (World Bank 2011, 40).

To increase assessment on learning and other education data, the World Bank has already partnered with UNESCO’s Institute of Statistics to gather worldwide data on enrollment and completion rates. The World Bank plans to help countries improve their Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) by identifying best practice for country EMIS systems, then producing best practice guidelines and training modules. Working from the “systems” perspective, the use of assessment is only possible if there is a sufficiently strong framework of data collection and analysis. As a result, in the next ten years, the World Bank will also support efforts to expand the availability of learning data and skills measures and work to identify the parts of the educational system that are most critical for progress so that the “system assessment tools can help the government, aid agencies and other stakeholders identify and agree on priorities for action” (World Bank 2011, 43). Collecting data and building

learning assessment systems are the two key components of this part of the Strategy.

One of the biggest implementation strategies includes the use of technical and financial support for countries. The World Bank (2011, 43) identified three priorities for its operations:

1. The Bank will apply a systems approach when prioritizing its technical and financial assistance in a given country. In other words, the scope and design of an analytical or operational product will be justified based on its expected contribution to strengthening the education system as a whole and, ultimately, the advancement of learning goals. The presumption, of course, is that aid agencies have the same objective as countries (or at least their policymakers; Steiner-Khamsi 2006).
2. The Bank will support operations that establish a feedback cycle between financing and results. This means that financial aid from the World Bank Group will be increasingly geared toward specific measurable results agreed upon with countries.
3. The Bank will respond to opportunities for using a multisectoral approach to achieve education outcomes. This means working with the other sectors in the World Bank (e.g., health, nutrition, social protection, labor, infrastructure, agriculture, transport, finance and private sector) in order to ensure that students acquire critical skills for life and work as well as to generate broader policies that lead to employment and economic growth.

In the spirit of assessment, it will be important to see if the “presumption” that aid agencies and even the World Bank have the same objectives as countries, and how the development of these objectives were formed. The marriage of these assumptions plus implementation levers calls for some degree of evaluation to identify how the country-level objectives align with the needs of the citizens as well as identifying whose interests are being served. The phrase “financing for results” is characterized by the World Bank’s notion of funding, and is used to create greater alignment. According to the Strategy (World Bank 2011, 44),

in education, the Bank is already using different forms of results-oriented financing, but these efforts have not been widely placed. In ongoing programs or projects with results-oriented financing, disbursements are conditioned on the delivery of specified outputs or services, changes in

government rules or structures, changes in incentive structures, and changes in specific policies.

The World Bank will support the strengthening of fiscal controls and provide the tools and resources for assessing the performance of the education system, and will pursue innovative results-based financing schemes in education. The phrase “payment is conditional on measurable actions being undertaken” is used as a conclusive implementation lever taken from the World Bank’s health sector (World Bank 2011, 44).

Performance Indicators

The World Bank has identified that the success of the Strategy will be measured by performance and impact indicators. Table 1, taken directly from the Strategy, details the eight World Bank actions and achievements to help countries strengthen their education systems. The table also includes impact indicators, which are meant to measure the combined effect of World Bank action and country-led policies and interventions. A review of this table shows that the *existence* and volume of many of the indicators are equated with excellence. The focus on excellence exists in spite of the fact that the Strategy spends a great deal of time highlighting that inputs should not be the determinant of achievement, but rather used for assessing outcomes. A strategic plan would likely benefit from exhibiting the types of practices and outcomes it hopes to see in the constituents to which it is providing technical advice. Some of the indicators have an embedded outcome-based theme, such as the “use of results-based financing” or “progressed significantly toward MDGs.” However, many of the indicators revolve around the development of a tool (as opposed to the degree to which a tool might help a country increase its own learning outcomes and reduce poverty) or the number of loans given in a specific area.

The performance indicators locate the future work in looking at the effectiveness of the Strategy (including what is missing from their internal list of indicators). Evaluating a strategy is a limitation in itself—because it is never clear from the outset as to how much a guiding document will shape future actions. However, that does not minimize the importance of the discourse, especially from such prominent player in the funding of global education and development.

Discussion

Fairclough’s (2003) three types of assumptions (existential, propositional, and value), provide a framework for evaluating the

underlying sentiments embedded in the Strategy. Existential assumptions are made throughout the document. For example, the notion that access to education is a human right is connected to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. While the degree to which this assumption is pervasive throughout the Strategy is debatable, the notion that human rights exist (and that access to education is one of them) is an important assumption. The propositional assumptions are about what is or what can be, and the idea that education leads to economic development is likely a pillar on which much of the Strategy is built. This is also a value assumption.

Perhaps one of the more prominent proposition and value assumptions is that assessment will lead to better education. The Strategy emphasizes the efficiency of education systems including management, governance, and finance. However, in many areas there are limited assessment tools and no scholarship that indicates whether or not the assessments are a) accurate and b) actually produce better learning environments. As a result, the intense focus on assessment of student learning is potentially a missed opportunity. Defining learning and developing evidence about whether or not it is essential is a missing element. Testing, for example, does not suffice and is often limited to only reading and math skills. These two areas are consistently measured and all other areas are ignored, leaving the assessment system too one-dimensional. Assessments are geared towards providing greater ability to compare nations and increase international mobility. However, benchmarks and international comparisons may not be the appropriate end goal. The notion of best practices often does not translate to other regions because it can ignore cultural relevance. For example, regions in Africa inherited an education system designed for the elite and it is still largely intact. Not only is this kind of translation historically inefficient, it is not addressed anywhere in the Strategy.

Another critique of the Strategy is that there is no self-critique, reflection on past failures, or even any debate. However, it does not appear that this is the intent or role of a strategy document, as it is supposed to represent consensus. However, if that is the case, it seems reasonable that constituencies of the World Bank would benefit from seeing the focus on assessment turned inwards. In other words, before strategies are written and conclusions are made about how the World Bank will move forward, a self-study should be done. It is ironic then, that there is no self-study language, no self-critique or reflection that precedes the work done on the Strategy. If the work was done, it should be published in a different format than a strategy. A World Bank self-study with forthright critique and assessment would not only model what

Table 1. Performance, Outcome, and Impact Indicators for the 2020 Education Strategy

Indicators	
Performance Indicators	
<i>Changes in World Bank Group actions to support countries</i>	<p>1. Knowledge development to strengthen country education systems</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Number of education system tools developed and launched Percent of Bank knowledge products that use system tools in the analysis Percent of knowledge products that use learning outcomes in analyses of basic education. <p>2. Organizational development to strengthen country education systems</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Percent of Education Sector staff who have completed a competency program on the education system approach and tools and on Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) methods <p>3. Technical and financial support to strengthen country education systems</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Percent of education projects or programs that have learning- or skills-related key performance indicators (KPI) Percent of education projects or programs that use education system tools in their design and/or their M&E approach Percent of education projects or programs that have a satisfactory M&E in their design and implementation Percent of countries furthest from reaching the education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that have received increased support (lending and non-lending) from the Bank Group Percent of education projects or programs that finance outputs/outcomes
Outcome Indicators	
<i>Changes in policy and programs of countries receiving World Bank Group support</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Percent of (i) middle-income countries, (ii) low-income countries, (iii) fragile or conflict-affected states, (iv) Fast Track Initiative (FTI)- endorsed countries that have applied system tools and have collected and used system data Percent of countries that have applied learning or skills (national or international) assessments Percent of countries whose systems have improved in at least one policy domain as measured by the system assessment tools Percent of countries furthest from reaching the education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that have taken new steps since 2010 to addressing the obstacles to attaining those goals
Impact Indicators	
<i>Ultimate goals monitored in countries receiving World Bank Group support</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Percent of countries (or beneficiaries in countries) with increases in measured learning or skills since 2010 (or since the earliest available baseline) Percent of countries that have reduced schooling or learning gaps for disadvantaged populations (e.g., income groups, gender, ethnolinguistic groups, disability) since 2010 Percent of countries furthest from reaching the education MDG in 2010 that progressed towards their attainment since 2010. Percent of countries with gains in the skills level of their labor forces since 2010

Source: World Bank (2011, xiv).

the World Bank is advocating should be done in education institutions around the world, but it would also help constituents to better understand the benefits and challenges to working with the institution. Admission of policies that have not worked is likely a useful strategy to build credibility. Without this kind of approach, the Strategy appears to be built upon ongoing underlying values. Building on the criticism of insularity, Heyneman (2011, 3) composed a list of questions that should be answered in the Strategy:

- Are you still recommending that public finances shift from higher to primary education?
- Are you able to work outside of government ministries of education to assist the development of the private sector?
- Are you prepared to confront the fact the greatest threat to the quality of education is from within the system itself in terms of corruption?
- Are you prepared to stop lending to a country which steals our assistance?

- Are you prepared to sanction staff who propose conditionalities which later prove to be professionally incorrect?
- Are you prepared to equip low income countries with policy advisors so they might negotiate loan conditionalities with more equity?
- Are you willing to confront the fact that education constitutes only a tiny percent of the development agenda?

These questions, while not answered in the Strategy, represent criticisms about the World Bank as well as the document that will guide future work in the education sector. Furthermore, the questions represent an examination of both the underlying motivations behind the Strategy as well as the implications.

A thorough evaluation of the new Strategy indicates that there is an inherent belief in assessment as a way to measure and improve learning. The motivation for this assumption is consistent with a global movement for accountability related to funding and student mobility. There is not, however, consistent research that shows how to measure learning—especially in higher education. This does not mean it should be avoided, but rather approached carefully. Similarly, it is not clear how higher education will be assessed, but if international trends continue, a standardized test will likely emerge. Finally, there are no indicators that cultural relevance will be a primary concern in international comparative assessments. Even within single nation-states standardized tests are criticized for disadvantaging certain types of cultural knowledge. Given the global scope of the World Bank and the influence its discourse has on education and the damage from applying narrow frameworks of measurement to higher education in developing countries, the demand for more global applicability in higher education assessment is cause for further research and attention.

Conclusion

A strategy is a document that informs policy development at a stage that is more detailed than a mission or vision statement. It is typically used to guide consequent actions, to set broad goals, and to identify indicators to measure whether or not the goals have been met. However, because the strategy is not a single project that has been completed, there is no specific outcome to be measured yet. As a result, a strategy must be evaluated based on what can be determined or questioned about the quality of the direction provided, clarity, and unpacking the implicit assumptions behind the strategic outline.

There is a global assessment movement that has been growing rapidly in response to the call for accountability. From a broad and general perspective, a requirement to bind results to large and

expensive initiatives funded by tax dollars and/or international aid seems reasonable. In other words, developing a framework of evidence seems necessary to understand the results of the investment as well as how to improve the current status. However, from a critical perspective, the way in which these educational initiatives are measured reflects either implicit or explicit values that may deviate from the values of the groups, countries, or cultures being imposed upon. The language throughout the new Strategy is rooted in the idea of accountability, tying resources with the ability to show results, and using implementation levers. All of these aspects of the Strategy fit within a management perspective of education. In other words, when there is a goal and a set of conditions by which you entice or coerce groups to achieve the goal, an initiative or change is managed and then measured for success.

In higher education, much of the assessment movement has been driven by the ability for institutions, departments, and professors to choose their learning outcomes. The new Strategy differentiates little between levels of education related to assessment, but it is clear that the available international tests are related to primary and secondary school. One outstanding question is, if these tests are a measure of a strong system of assessment, what is the impact on higher education? There are, of course, providers eager and willing to produce and mass apply these standardized tests in postsecondary education; however it is difficult because much more differentiation takes place at this level. Students typically begin to specialize in a particular area of study in postsecondary education, which makes broad standardized testing less useful.

Strategy documents do not typically answer many of the questions that remain, but future studies will need to measure the impact of new World Bank initiatives. It is clear that the mental landscape around assessment and accountability continues to grow and will be tied to funding through documents like the new World Bank *Education Strategy 2020*. It is crucial that the movement for international comparisons and mobility do not eliminate space for cultural knowledge and values. Language about best practices and benchmarking does not indicate that this is a consideration. The way in which assessment is used and the values that guide the decisions should be contested and not assumed to enhance learning—at least until there is some scholarship that assessments lead to better learning.

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