



Toward a Diversified Knowledge- Based Economy

**Education in the
Gulf Cooperation
Countries
Engagement Note**

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Contents

Abbreviations	4
Acknowledgments	5
Executive Summary	7
1. Introduction	9
2. Social and Economic Context	9
3. Key Challenges	10
4. Policy Interventions and the Role of the World Bank	16
5. Engaging with the World Bank	22
6. Conclusion	24
References	25

Abbreviations

ECD	early childhood development
ECE	early childhood education
E4C	Education for Competitiveness
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	gross domestic product
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IsDB	Islamic Development Bank Group
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority (Dubai)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOE	Ministry of Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (IEA)
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment (OECD)
RAS	Reimbursable Advisory Services
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

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Executive Summary

Countries of the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) are implementing ambitious reform strategies that aim to establish highly productive and efficient economies. The Gulf countries recognize fully that to sustain such a future economy the production of a high capacity national workforce is essential. The role of the Ministries of Education thus becomes of utmost importance as the GCC countries aim to achieve their vision. Progress within the education sector has been ongoing since the late twentieth century; however, challenges persist.

The Gulf countries, while different in many ways, share similar education learning challenges that are encompassed within deficiencies in the management, effectiveness, and efficiency of the system. These challenges can be addressed through policy interventions in five core areas:

1. ***Student school readiness:*** Ensuring students are ready to enter school, and that they receive adequate support and attention to ensure high level proficiency of basic numeracy and literacy concepts during their early years of learning. Without these foundational building blocks, students are at greater risk of not achieving higher order thinking, analysis, and problem solving, all of which are essential elements of academic success.
2. ***Teacher qualifications, distribution, and management:*** Developing and placing teachers with the right set of motivation, content, and pedagogical skills in classrooms to ensure high quality of education. This may entail reforming of teacher recruitment and retention practices, aligning teacher professional development and appraisal practices, and establishing teacher incentives and career pathways that motivate high levels of performance.
3. ***Pedagogical practices, curricula, and its relevance:*** Implementing curricula that is of relevance to today's labor market and social setting so as to foster the development of youth with skills that will help them succeed economically and socially.
4. ***Education sector management and governance:*** Building effective accountability mechanisms that reinforce good governance and management practices within the sector. Strong governance across the central, regional, and local levels of operation are needed and thus striking the balance between autonomy and accountability is the key to ensuring the delivery of high quality services.

5. *Efficiency and effectiveness of financing*: Adopting efficient financing strategies that modernize budget allocations from an input-based approach to results-based approaches that help systems channel funds to activities that have impact on student learning, and supports monitoring and evaluation of student outcomes against costs in a more effective manner.

The World Bank has decades of experience operating in the GCC and is well positioned as a strategic partner to support efforts that will propel quality education for all in the respective GCC countries. As a producer of knowledge, the World Bank can assess, diagnose, and recommend strategies to address the most complex policy question decision makers face. The World Bank is also able to convene experts, thought leaders and influencers to client countries to share knowledge and provide expert advice. This ability is coupled with years of in-country implementation support that allows the World Bank to work hand-in-hand with client country teams to ensure effective implementation and knowledge transfer.

1. Introduction

This Engagement Note provides education sector policymakers with an overview of the status of education across the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and offers insight into the World Bank’s strategies and approaches to supporting education reform in the GCC region. While the Gulf countries are similar in many ways, each country has its own contextual factors and socioeconomic dynamic that may affect the process of education reform. The insights offered build on the similarities and national human development ambitions of each country to offer broad approaches to education reform. Keeping this in mind, country engagements will require further refinements and tailoring to the needs of each GCC country.¹ The Note includes an overview of the socioeconomic context and challenges, along with a section on policy interventions within the education sector. It concludes with a discussion of priority areas for the sector, as well as potential strategies for World Bank support to education reform in the GCC.

2. Social and Economic Context

Countries of the GCC are embarking on a new path of economic development that promotes economic diversification, business competitiveness, and knowledge-based economies. The region’s economic development aspirations call for sound macroeconomic policies, investments, and reforms in industries that include health, education, infrastructure, and business. The countries have developed forward-looking national development plans that propose significant policy changes to reduce dependence on oil and gas, while targeting human capital development through quality education and strategic training in productive sectors. While there are country-specific variations, the policies share a commitment to (1) achieve economic diversification, (2) enhance spending efficiency, (3) nationalize workforces, and (4) increase business competitiveness. Central to these plans is the development of innovative education systems that can prepare citizens for high-value livelihoods in new economies with positive growth models.

GCC countries have made great advances in human and economic development. In 1975, in comparison with other countries with similar income per capita, the GCC had some of the highest levels of expected infant mortality; today, these rates have converged with international levels. Additionally, since then, infant mortality, premature death, and disability from communicable, newborn, nutritional, and maternal causes have been decreasing. In 1975, GCC countries had some of the highest levels of expected infant mortality based on income per capita; yet for their gross domestic product (GDP) per capita rates in 2015, the GCC countries’ rates have converged with international levels.

¹The six GCC countries are: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Average rates of labor force participation have risen from 66 percent in 2000 to 73 percent in 2012.² And in the last four decades, the GCC countries have been able to expand education access at an exceptional pace leading to near universal rates of primary enrolment. Great gains have been achieved in terms of female primary school completion rates and in enrolment at secondary and tertiary levels for both boys and girls.

Structural challenges continue to constrain the GCC countries, including a skewed and segmented labor market, and a strong reliance on hydrocarbons. Public sector employment with generous benefits creates a disincentive for nationals to seek private sector employment. Public sector jobs carry substantial pay, benefits, and job security with little accountability, leading to high reservation wages for nationals. Of the more than 6.25 million private sector jobs created in the GCC between 2000 and 2010, only 22 percent went to GCC nationals. On average, for nationals across the GCC, 52 percent of men and 25 percent of women participate in the labor force—with low-skilled foreign workers holding 80 percent of private sector jobs (IMF 2013). The GCC countries have attracted a large population of low-cost, low-skilled immigrants to support national growth and economic development. These nonnationals constitute 48 percent of the GCC population. Efforts to increase the employment of nationals in the private sector through workforce nationalization have achieved limited success because of a widespread lack of relevant labor market skills (Zahra 2015). This has taken on greater urgency since the 2014 decline in oil prices, the most significant drop since the 1980s, which has made it clear to GCC governments that existing subsidies for their citizens are no longer sustainable.

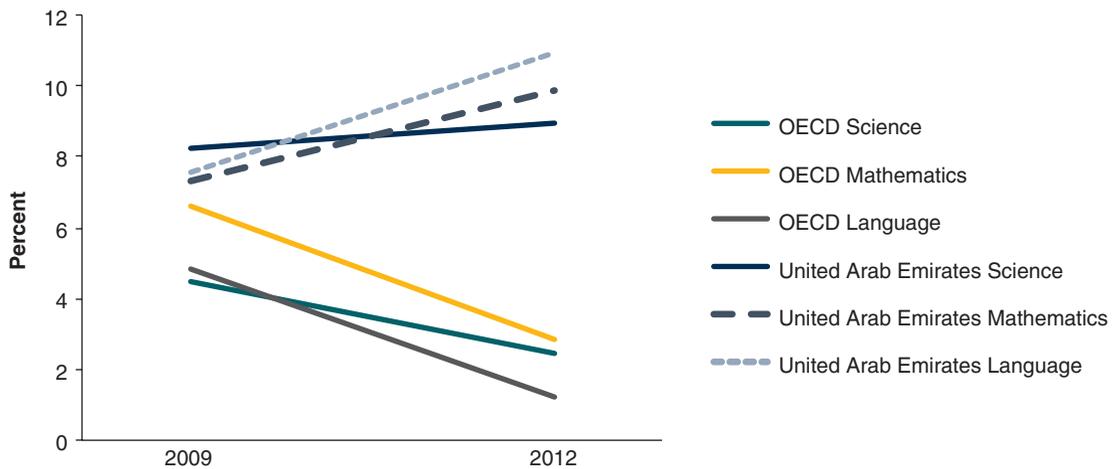
3. Key Challenges

Investment in early childhood education is low in the GCC countries which constrains school readiness and learning. Net enrolment in preprimary education varies greatly among GCC member countries from a low of 13.5 percent to a high of 83.9 percent, with an average of 50.9 percent, lagging Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries where access for preprimary students is nearly universal (Heckman 2012).

GCC teachers tend to meet minimal educational background requirements, but some countries struggle with shortages in subject specialists (Figure 1). Most teachers in GCC schools hold, at minimum, a degree from a 3-year program at a tertiary institution (International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED, 5A), though the proportion of

²Author calculations based on World Development Indicators, 2000–2013 figures. Data retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>.

FIGURE 1 Percentage of Principals Reporting Shortage of Teachers in Secondary Level, 2009 and 2012



Sources: PISA 2009, 2012.

teachers who have earned 4-year degrees, advanced degrees, and sciences subject specializations is low. For example, on average, just 17 percent of GCC grade 8 mathematics teachers have earned any of these three degrees, compared to 28 percent in OECD countries.³ There is little incentive for obtaining advanced degrees given that differentiation by education background is minimally recognized or rewarded. In the United Arab Emirates, for example, a shortage of qualified teachers grew between Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 and 2012 (Figure 1). An oversupply of general non-specialized teachers, particularly female teachers, exists.⁴

Learning outcomes could benefit from improvements in teacher management practices.

Given the abundant supply of general teachers and dependence on contracted specialized teachers, some GCC countries are struggling with implementing cost-effective teacher management policies that can mitigate these supply and demand misalignments. Improved management practices based on the availability of data and increased local level responsibility could provide opportunities for improved teacher deployment and an overall decrease in management costs.

While there are examples of excellent teaching practices in all GCC countries, most teachers need further training on modern pedagogical approaches. Teachers rely heavily on traditional instructional strategies such as learning by rote. On average, 56 percent of GCC teachers, compared with 24 percent of OECD teachers, ask students to

³GCC average does not include Kuwait.

⁴In the GCC, 81 percent of fourth grade mathematics and science teachers are female.

memorize rules, procedures, and facts in every, or almost every, mathematics lesson taught. While in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2011 study, 56 percent of the eighth-grade teachers report that their tests always, or almost always, include questions based on recall of facts and procedures (TIMSS 2015).

Curriculum and assessment systems overemphasize factual knowledge and do not place sufficient emphasis on individual student learning needs. Curricula in the GCC, as in most of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region countries, are fact-based and designed for student evaluation through high-stakes examinations.⁵ The education system uses high-stakes assessments to single out high-performing students and leaves limited alternative education routes for other students except, for example, for entry into a low-status vocational education stream. Teachers struggle with providing differentiated learning and most students do not have access to inquiry-based approaches to learning that support reflection and creativity. Reading instruction is based on memorization rather than phonemic awareness, even though Arabic is a highly phonetic language. Mathematics instruction gives scant attention to higher-order concepts. Excellent public schools do exist, but are generally reserved for high-achieving students.

Information and career guidance is limited, creating a gap in the school to work transition. Information about labor market demands and employment opportunities is scarce. Feedback mechanisms between the labor market and education sector are rudimentary with limited data collected and analyzed, impeding the sector's capacity to stay relevant. In the GCC, 72 percent of young nationals rely heavily on friends and family for advice and career information. Fewer than 30 percent of GCC students (13 percent in Oman, 22 percent in the United Arab Emirates, 24 percent in Saudi Arabia, 39 percent in Qatar, 41 percent in Bahrain, and 42 percent in Kuwait) say they have sufficient information about job opportunities, qualification requirements, and application processes (Parthenon-EY 2015). This lack of information necessary for students to make a successful transition to the workforce creates the transitional gap between education and the labor market.

Minimal local autonomy and discretionary powers make it difficult to incentivize providers to improve performance, thus perpetuating low-quality service delivery. Education systems in the GCC are highly centralized. The planning and management of school budgets and personnel are controlled centrally. The common model in the GCC is for decisions to be made by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and communicated to the country's education directorates (or equivalent), which in turn mobilize and supervise education offices to implement the decisions according to MOE guidelines.

⁵Exams that make decisions about the students' future. In the MENA context, scores from these exams determine what tracks students will enter (humanity or scientific), and later which university they may attend.

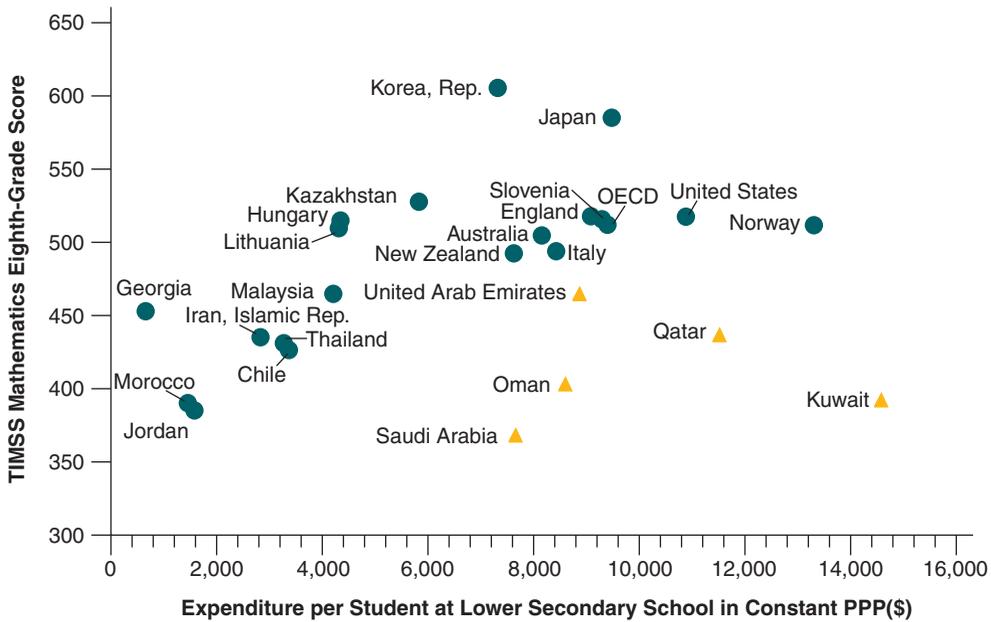
Local governments are not involved in region-level decision making. At the school level, principals have limited ability to incentivize teachers whether for merit or sanction. For example, in the GCC, 43 percent of fourth grade mathematics students are in schools that report teacher absenteeism as a moderate or serious problem, compared with the OECD average of 9 percent. Yet, the path to developing school leadership is still progressing in the region. A highly effective school principal can raise student achievement by two to seven months in a single academic year (Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin 2013). However, the career trajectory for principals in the GCC countries remains underdeveloped with principals often lacking the basic skills and knowledge needed to manage the administrative and instructional responsibilities.

More information on the quality of services could be collected, reported, and made publicly available. GCC schools are inspected regularly, but information on individual or organizational performance typically is not shared or made publicly available and does not affect career advancement. The limited availability of systematic, comparable performance data exacerbates information asymmetries that bar citizens from making informed choices, thus intensifying market inefficiencies that drive down quality levels (Brixi and others 2015).

GCC countries invest a significant share of public expenditure on education. Yet despite this, student achievement on international assessments is well below international average benchmarks. In the past decade, the GCC invested at an average annual rate of 11.8 percent of total government expenditure on education, which is comparable to the OECD's average annual education spending of 12.3 percent from 2005 to 2014 (WDI 2015). Despite this level of investment in the sector, the performance of GCC countries on international student learning assessments (TIMSS/PISA) is well below the international average (Figure 2). The partial exception is the United Arab Emirates, which does better in comparison to its GCC peers but still underperforms internationally. In spite of recent modest improvements in several countries, student performance on TIMSS demonstrates that students on average are not achieving close to the international average score of 500 on the TIMSS assessment.⁶ More than 50 percent of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait's eighth grade students (66 percent and 55 percent, respectively) and 48 percent of those in Oman and 37 percent in Qatar did not reach

⁶TIMSS 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015. In Bahrain, between 2003 and 2015, the average TIMSS eighth grade mathematics score rose from 401 to 454 (statistically significant). In Oman, between 2007 and 2015, the average eighth grade mathematics score rose from 372 to 403. Qatar's results on the eighth grade TIMSS mathematics assessment also increased, from 410 in 2011 to 437 in 2015. In Saudi Arabia, eighth grade TIMSS mathematics assessments decreased, from 394 in 2011 to 368 in 2015. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has expressed its reservations about the reliability of the achievement average on the 2011 eighth grade mathematics assessment in Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia and 2015 eighth grade mathematics assessment in Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia because of the high percentages of students with scores too low for estimation (Mullis and others 2012).

FIGURE 2 International Comparison of Expenditure per Student and Student Performance, 2015



Sources: TIMSS 2015; World Bank, World Development Indicators 2014 or latest available year.

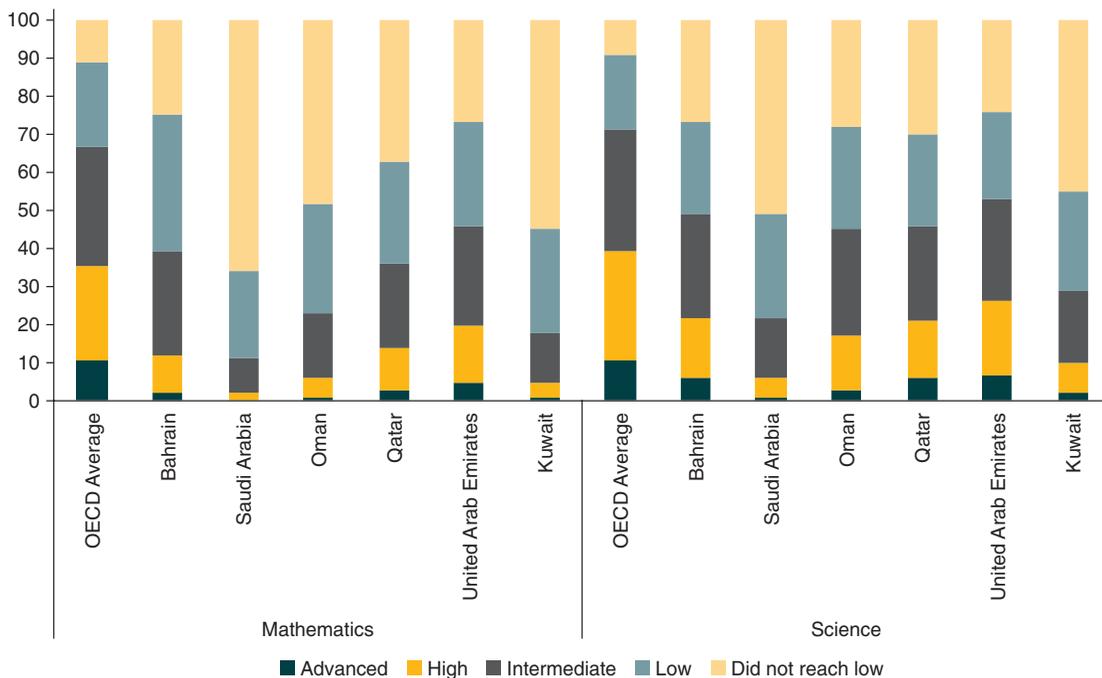
the low international benchmark in mathematics, compared to 11 percent in the OECD who did not (Figure 3).⁷

Despite impressive successes in improving access to education, the quality of education and learning outcomes is low. GCC countries expanded public education access through vast infrastructure programs that has resulted in near universal enrolment. By the 1990s, for instance, Saudi Arabia had achieved almost full enrolment—a striking accomplishment given that, four decades earlier, 95 percent of the population had been illiterate (Hertog 2015). In Oman, the gross primary enrolment ratio increased from 12 percent in 1972 to 110 percent in 2014.

However, on average, educational outcomes of boys in the GCC are not as high as for their female peers. A reverse gender gap exists in the GCC with girls outperforming boys. For example, in fourth grade mathematics achievement on TIMSS 2015, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Bahrain had the highest gender differences in average mathematics

⁷Grade 8 mathematics students who reached the low international benchmark showed some basic mathematical knowledge. Students who reached the intermediate international benchmark could apply basic mathematical knowledge in straightforward situations. Students who reached the higher international benchmark could apply their understanding and knowledge in a wide variety of relatively complex operations, and at the advanced international benchmark, they could solve non-routine problems and draw and justify conclusions from data.

FIGURE 3 Student Performance, International Benchmark (%), 2015



Source: TIMSS 2015, eighth grade.

scores: girls outperformed boys by 43, 22, and 20 points, respectively. Eighth grade TIMSS achievements reflect a serious reverse gender gap (opposite of what happens in other countries) in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, in which girls outperform boys in science by 55 and 50 points, respectively. This reverse gender gap is particularly alarming because (1) a large portion of the student population is not receiving adequate education; and (2) males form the larger portion of the workforce in the GCC, meaning that those who may potentially have the higher skills and knowledge levels, that is, young women, are not participating actively in the national workforce.

To achieve their economic goals and improve sustainability, GCC countries need to shift their focus from low-quality education inputs to high-quality, efficient and effective investments focused on skills and competencies. The GCC countries acknowledge how education systems that deliver high quality education for all can form part of the corrective actions toward building growing economies for the future. To achieve this, a shift is needed to align education finance mechanisms (inclusive of budgeting, management information, communication of goals, etc. and so on) with learning outcomes. In the context of the GCC this may include a need to reconsider how finances are allocated across the sector. One such example is demonstrated by the education investment per student (Table 1). The GCC countries on average spend less per student at all levels of education than do OECD countries (Table 1). Another example is the distribution of

TABLE 1 GCC Expenditure per Student (% GDP per capita), 2012

Primary Education		Secondary Education	
OECD Average	19.9	OECD Average	25.0
Saudi Arabia	18.2	Kuwait	21.8
Kuwait	17.4	United Arab Emirates	18.3
Oman	14.5	Saudi Arabia	18.1
United Arab Emirates	10.7	Oman	16.4
Qatar	9.7	Qatar	10.3

Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2012 or latest available year.

large compensation costs consisting of high salary levels for national teachers and non-teaching staff. These expenditures leave minimal funding for other recurrent expenditures in education that may have a direct impact on student learning outcomes.

Expenditure planning and public financial management systems could be modernized to support effective, efficient, and equitable financial allocations within the sector. Central ministries are responsible for formulating, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating national policies, but they often leave their counterparts in line ministries unaware of the decision-making processes (Brixi and others 2015). This distribution of operational activities often comes at the expense of coordination in strategy and vision. The results are overlapping responsibilities, poor communication, and uncoordinated planning that are costly to the system.

4. Policy Interventions and the Role of the World Bank

The World Bank has been a strong international partner to countries looking to advance and reform their education systems (see Box 1). Governments across the Globe have mobilized the World Bank’s global knowledge and development experience through technical assistance that comprises research and analysis, technical assistance, workshops, project-related advice, conferences, and training. The World Bank offers these programs through loans, grants and reimbursable advisory services (RAS),⁸ all of which are selected based upon government demand.

Within the education sector, the World Bank promotes a balanced analysis of the entire education system, drawing on its extensive experience. This approach to education system challenges stems from a results perspective that seeks to understand how the component parts of complex systems work together to produce positive results for all.

⁸A tool for clients to customize technical assistance on a cost basis.

BOX 1 World Bank Case with GCC Client Country

Coupling the World Bank’s technical expertise with that of client countries has resulted in positive outcomes. When a GCC client country approached the World Bank’s Education Global Practice for technical and implementation support, the WBG was able to provide assistance to its reform efforts to improve education quality. This was achieved by designing a strategic approach after conducting a detailed review and analysis on the in-country situation. The approach focused on providing relevant analyses and policy recommendations within the areas of access, quality, and relevance of education to the labor market, teacher pedagogy, and financial management of the education systems. Utilizing this evidence base, the World Bank and Ministry of Education worked together to design the project, assigning clear roles and responsibilities, and designating small teams consisting of Ministry Officials and Bank Specialists to begin implementation within the specific thematic areas. This approach fostered the transfer of knowledge and supported a hands-on learning experience. By utilizing this method of collaborative implementation support, the government team developed the capacity to effectively implement analysis findings. It is through such approaches and initiatives that the World Bank aims to act upon its twin goals of reducing poverty and boosting shared prosperity (for more examples of World Bank support under RAS Programs, see *Delivering Expertise and Customized Solutions for Our Clients*).

This approach has led to focusing on service delivery and utilizing a systems approach to education development.

The World Bank Education Sector Strategy 2020, “Learning for All: Investing in People’s Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development” emphasizes a three-pronged approach to educating children in the twenty-first century by focusing on investing early, investing smartly, and investing for all. This approach will contribute to a robust learning environment that measures learning and improves accountability, while building skills for a productive workforce. Investing early ensures that children from an early age have access to early childhood education and are acquiring the foundational skills necessary to support a lifetime of learning. Investing smartly means efficient, effective interventions, and policy reforms that result in robust learning gains. Investing for all ensures that all students have access to the knowledge and skills required to succeed in life. To achieve this, the GCC must overcome persistent obstacles within the education sector and within society (for instance the high proportion of foreign migrant families living in the GCC and the investments afford to their quality of education), including the challenge of highly uneven performance across different regions and schools within the same country.

Building on its Education Sector Strategy 2020 and cognizant of the challenges and the interlinkages between education and competitiveness in member states, the World Bank in collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank Group (IsDB) launched the Education for Competitiveness (E4C) Initiative. This initiative establishes a new vision for education that will enable the region to achieve inclusive growth, social stability, and global competitiveness. What is required to achieve this is a comprehensive approach to education that (1) focuses from early childhood to university; (2) emphasizes cognitive, socioemotional, and technical skills; (3) focuses on the holistic development of the person rather than meeting the specific short-term needs of the labor market; and (4) is inclusive of all its citizens. The objective of the E4C initiative is to support countries in improving their education and training systems so that these contribute to higher productivity and economic growth as well as social cohesion and shared prosperity. E4C aims to help countries through innovative approaches, partnerships, and cross-cutting solutions to produce better learning and skills. The E4C initiative underscores the importance of education *quality* and *relevance* for the development and competitiveness of MENA countries and its potential for the long-term wellbeing of all its citizens. With the E4C initiative as the umbrella for education reform in the region, five areas have been identified to support the client countries. For the GCC countries, the World Bank can support them in achieving significant improvements in the short- to medium-term returns to education and the quality of service delivery by focusing on the relevant policy interventions under the five areas listed below.

A. Student School Readiness

Expanding access to quality early childhood education (ECE). Investment in early childhood education has the highest rate of return compared to other levels of education. ECE has proven to be a critical first step for young children, and ensuring positive development involves the cooperation of multiple stakeholders across sectors. To foster the establishment of high-quality ECE, the World Bank takes into consideration all players and structures. The World Bank supports governments to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate policies, laws, and regulations that will promote the development of holistic approaches to early childhood education.

Introducing early grade literacy and numeracy. Foundational literacy and numeracy skills are essential to building a successful path to the acquisition of advanced knowledge and skills. To support the acquisition of these foundational skills, not only must students have access to schools, but education providers must have the capacity to assess and diagnose student learning to support the design and implementation of interventions. The World Bank supports policy makers, teachers, and community to assess, diagnose, and design means to support the development of basic numeracy and literacy skills.

Promoting gender equality. The World Bank supports the identification of reforms and programs that will have the largest benefit for gender equality, specifically as it relates to boys' education and learning outcomes (with the 'reverse gender gap' in the GCC in mind) along with support to post-education labor market entry, particularly for young females. Addressing gender inequality implies a need to work closely with other sectors, such as health and social affairs among others, to make education more relevant to the labor market. By emphasizing a developmental approach to system assessment and by benchmarking with specific targets for equality and inclusion, these strategies help promote gender equality by identifying the points at which the disparities are widest, what factors explain them, and which interventions are most likely to be effective.

B. Teachers' Qualifications, Distribution, and Management

Improving teacher management practices. The World Bank recognizes the unique challenge facing teacher management in the GCC countries given the larger structural realities of public sector employment. Teachers need training and support to adapt and modify goals to suit diverse individual learners; present challenging tasks; maintain a conducive classroom atmosphere; be sensitive to context; monitor learning better and provide feedback to students; and demonstrate good problem-solving strategies (see Hattie and Anderman 2013). The World Bank is sensitive to the needs and multidimensional aspect of teacher management issues. It is able to assess, diagnose, and propose innovative means for integrating key players in the sector who can champion and promote effective means for attracting, using, and managing teachers. This requires working horizontally across sectors and, vertically, instilling strong lines of communication between teacher preparation institutions and the Ministry, and establishing means to support school leaders and regional directors so that they can establish environments that will foster teaching and learning.

C. Pedagogical Practices, Curricula, and Its Relevance

Linking education systems to labor markets. The World Bank recognizes employers as key stakeholders in education and regards non-formal skills training as part of a continuum of learning opportunities needed for the acquisition of key knowledge and skills. The stark gap in the transition from education to labor requires that the Ministries of Education and Training review some of the key determinants to labor market entry, including: understanding skills requirements, linkages between skills acquisition and educational achievements, labor market structural constraints, signals, and information available to students informing them of career paths and employment opportunities. In the case of the GCC this may involve introducing a graduate tracking system, which has been successful in countries including Chile,

Italy, and, most recently, the West Bank and Gaza. These systems provide empirical data on former students' job-search experiences, their status in the labor market, and the relevance of the skills they acquired. This information is essential feedback for higher education institutions, which then can further upgrade their programs and services. Additionally, efforts to bridge education and labor market gaps may be inclusive of work across the technical and vocational streams of education. Here effort needs to be exerted toward improving the image of vocational education as a prestigious and valued pathway to a productive livelihood.

Cognitive, social, and emotional development of students. The World Bank has expert teams that can assess, analyze, and recommend solutions to bridge alignment gaps at both the supply and demand sides of the labor market. Additionally, the World Bank can work with its clients to ensure that education systems are developing students across all aspects (cognitive, social, and emotional). This has become a highly pertinent concern given that employers today need graduates that are both knowledgeable and able to function in highly competitive, diverse, team-oriented environments. In this regard, international experience can serve as a guide for the GCC. It is now common in many international school systems to have competency-based curricula that focus on the holistic development of the child (cognitive, social, and emotional) while providing students with customized support that addresses their individual learning needs within a common classroom.

Engaging the private sector in education. The private education market does not offer a panacea to challenges of public education, but better information about the private education market can help policy makers assess supply shortages and financing deficits, design appropriate expansion plans, and distill lessons that might improve public sector performance and help implement reforms at secondary or higher education levels, where typically there are more private providers. The World Bank supports the expansion of a relevant knowledge base in this sub-sector through data collection, impact evaluation, and the development of a system assessment and benchmarking tools for a private education policy framework.

D. Education Sector Management and Governance

Expanding the availability of data for informed decision-making. A range of stakeholders in political, administrative, and social institutions can impact the quality of services delivered. Identifying the internal and external accountability mechanisms, regulations, and incentives that drive providers would give policy makers a more holistic understanding of the key factors that impact the quality of service delivery, and the ability to target interventions more likely to address central problems. The factors that would support improvements in the accountability relationship among citizens,

providers, and policy makers are (1) expanding the availability of data on the quality of services and increasing access to information, (2) improving transparency, (3) giving citizens the means to demand improved services, and (4) enforcing sanctions and rewards. The implementation of these factors would provide overall sector governance. In Dubai, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) has established clear accountability mechanisms that transparently inform parents and other stakeholders of the performance of every private school in Dubai. Similarly, in Kuwait, since 2013, some of the schools within a 48-school national “School Leadership” pilot program have successfully implemented the practice of sharing teacher attendance and absenteeism data. These data are in the form of charts displayed publicly in each pilot school (with names of individual teachers removed) to inform parents and the community about teacher attendance and absenteeism. These experiences offer lessons learned and opportunities for adopting transparency measures that may have an impact on the quality of education services.

Strengthening governance and accountability mechanisms. The World Bank supports improved governance and accountability mechanisms by working closely with counterparts to assess and diagnose gaps, incentives, lines of authority, and corrective means for realigning and balancing autonomy and accountability for improved services. In the GCC for example, opportunities exist to improve inter- and intra-ministerial coordination and planning. One means for improving intra-ministerial efficiency is, for example, to move away from input-based budgeting—which does not provide policy makers with the information on what goods, services, or policies are being financed by the government—toward performance-based budgeting. Without this information, ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of expenditures is a challenging task (Brixi and others 2015). Although program-based reforms are underway in some GCC countries (the United Arab Emirates and Oman, for example), to support a successful performance-based system, challenges with the larger public financial management systems need to be addressed. Additionally, opportunity exists to devolve responsibility from the central Ministry to education directorates and schools to allow for improved response to service-delivery challenges. These include giving schools the financial autonomy to decide, within predefined limits, how funds can be utilized based on agreed school improvement plans, or allowing school leaders the discretionary power to reward high performing teachers, thereby creating incentive mechanisms for improved performance at the local level.

E. Efficiency and Effectiveness of Financing

Improving expenditure planning and allocations. Education finance involves a diverse set of actors and stakeholders who have differing perspectives and motivations. Education authorities are endowed with the responsibility to transform goals into plans

that are then supported by financial authorities. Doing so effectively entails reviewing the policies and regulations that define any financing mechanism for education provision across all levels. It includes review of policies, official processes, funding mechanisms, and other formal guidelines that influence the education finance system, thus giving policy makers a holistic understanding of the relations among budgeting, expenditures, and learning outcomes. The World Bank has extensive experience working on matters of education financing with a focus on a range of issues, including, most commonly, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity.

5. Engaging with the World Bank

As a producer of knowledge and provider of policy and implementation support, the World Bank can customize solutions for its clients by combining global perspectives and experiences, literature, and evidence with extensive local knowledge. These solutions are achieved by World Bank’s experts who assess, diagnose, benchmark, and design solutions to development challenges posed by client countries. Strong country partnerships and working relationships are essential to achieving success. The working relationships may be conducted through existing interventions that encompass regional reform efforts or through stand-alone projects. Regardless of the initiative design, the World Bank operates through means that offer its client the highest quality services. Of course, it is also important to note that no single entity can provide all answers, and through its convening powers, the World Bank strives to create meaningful partnership opportunities to bring key stakeholders to the table when necessary.

The World Bank aims to strengthen education systems and build a high quality global knowledge base for education systems. When engaging with clients, it offers a number of modalities that span from large scale systems approaches to defined single task assessments. The World Bank can work with its GCC client countries to assess and diagnose education development challenges and identify the most effective approaches for engagement. A description of possible approaches is presented below.

A. Systems Approach

The systems approach promotes effective actions to improving learning through a balanced analysis of the whole education system with the aim of identifying the binding constraints on learning and addressing these constraints with targeted interventions. This approach is based on an understanding of education systems that addresses the full range of learning opportunities available in a country, whether they are provided or financed by the public or private sector. It includes formal and non-formal programs, plus the full range of beneficiaries of and stakeholders in these programs—teachers,

trainers, administrators, employees, students and their families, and employers. It also includes the rules, policies, and accountability mechanisms that bind an education system together, as well as the resources and financing mechanisms that sustain it. This more inclusive concept of the education system allows the World Bank and its partner countries to seize opportunities and address barriers that lie outside the bounds of the system as it is traditionally defined (World Bank 2011). A systems approach to education development occurs through the alignment of governance, management, financing, and performance incentive mechanisms to produce learning for all. It involves recognizing the many providers, consumers, and stakeholders in education and the roles that these participants have in the system. Accountability relationships among them should be clear, coordinated, and consistent with their assigned functions in support of national education goals. Performance and learning outcomes should be monitored and measured so that a robust feedback cycle linking policy, financing, and results is established.

B. Intra-Sectoral Approach

A focus within the sector on policies and practices that achieve national priorities. Countries may identify specific areas within the sector that have the potential to improve overall sector performance if developed. For instance, some of the GCC countries have announced their ambitions to expand access to preschool education. Together, the World Bank and client country will review policies and identify policy areas that require attention in order to promote healthy and robust development for children during their early years. This will entail review of the policies that support an enabling environment, the ability for widespread implementation, and the monitoring and assurance quality mechanisms in place for early childhood development (ECD). This may entail the use of existing tools, such as the *Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER)* diagnostic tool for ECD, or the design of other approaches to assess the status quo. Following a clear assessment and validation of the current development challenges, the World Bank will design and tailor approaches to the context with the aim of promoting collaboration with clients on the operational and managerial processes to ensure successful application of policies and interventions.

C. Implementation Support

On the ground and hands-on implementation support is a unique advantage of the World Bank. The World Bank has experience operating in a myriad of country contexts including countries at risk of fragility, conflict and violence, and low-and-middle income countries, to mention a few. Given the wide-ranging experiences operating in country, the World Bank is well positioned to offer its client implementation

support throughout the lifespan of a project. The key objective of this support is to transfer knowledge to counterparts in order to build internal capacity, institutional knowledge, and ensure future sustainability of policy reforms.

D. Topical Studies

Beyond the longer-term engagement mechanisms, the World Bank is able to provide inputs through thematic and technical studies on a specific policy question that decision-makers aim to address. With its teams of technical experts, the World Bank is able to provide targeted policy recommendations on pertinent issues facing decision-makers. In the past, the World Bank has conducted efficiency studies, public expenditure reviews, economic impact analysis, and other such studies that provide diagnosis, analysis, and policy recommendations. These may entail simulations and modeling for various scenarios, evaluation of existing interventions, and perhaps knowledge connecting and exchange with counterparts in other countries.

E. Training Programs and Secondments

In all engagements, the World Bank seeks opportunities for capacity building and transfer of knowledge. As an international development agency, the World Bank strives to support the strengthening and development of the capacity of its counterparts. This is achieved through numerous means, including a learning-by-doing approach, intensive training programs, *secondments*, and study tours. Depending on the in-country needs, the World Bank is able to tailor its approaches to suit the needs of the client and to ensure the greatest value for learning.

6. Conclusion

The World Bank has worked with the GCC countries in education for more than a decade and is becoming an important partner in developing education systems in the region. Examples in the past few years include reviewing education sector performance, studying the efficiency and effectiveness of education spending, providing policy recommendations as input to education strategies, designing and implementing key initiatives for transformational changes to improve education quality, and delivering training programs for officials to enhance leadership skills. It is through such efforts that the World Bank is able to enhance the GCC countries' aims of modernizing their education systems within the larger context of their national social and economic development aspirations.

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