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Principles and general objectives of education

According to the “Revised Education Policy 1988–2003”, The Gambia’s most precious resource is its people; a wealth that must be developed for the good of the individual and the nation alike. In recognition of the fact that investment in education is key to economic growth, and cognizance of the fact that by increasing the productivity of a people, education contributes to better income distribution and the reduction of poverty, in May 1996 the Government published *Vision 2020*, a statement of policies which aims: “to transform The Gambia into a financial centre, a tourist paradise, a trading, export-oriented, agricultural and manufacturing nation, thriving on free market policies and a vibrant private sector, sustained by a well-educated, trained, skilled, healthy, self-reliant and enterprising population, and guaranteeing a well-balanced ecosystem and a decent standard of living for one and all, under a system of government based on the consent of the citizenry.”

Education is also regarded as an essential service to improving people’s well being and their capacity to better themselves and improve their environment. In recognition of this fact, The Gambia continues to strive to provide equal educational opportunities for all its citizens. Based on these guidelines and the economic development prospects of the country, the basic aims of education policy in The Gambia are to:

- promote a broad-based education at the basic level for lifelong learning and training;
- mainstream gender in the creation of opportunities for all to acquire literacy, livelihood skills and the utilization of these skills in order to earn a living and become economically self-reliant members of the community;
- develop the physical and mental skills which will contribute to nation building economically, socially and culturally in a sustainable environment;
- encourage creativity and the development of a critical and analytical mind;
- further an understanding and appreciation of the contribution of science and technology to development;
- cultivate sound moral and ethical values in the development of life skills;
- develop a healthy body and an appreciation of the value of a healthy mind in response to life threatening diseases like HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis;
- create an awareness of the importance of peace, democracy and human rights, duties and responsibilities of the individual in fostering these qualities;
- foster an appreciation of and respect for the cultural heritage of The Gambia; and
- promote a sense of patriotism: service, loyalty, integrity and dedication to the nation and humanity. (*Education Policy 2004-2015*).



In terms of the Education Policy 2004-2015, the guiding principle for education is premised on: i) non-discriminatory and all-inclusive provision of education underlining in particular, gender equity and targeting of the poor and the disadvantaged groups; ii) respect for the rights of the individual, cultural diversity, indigenous languages and knowledge; iii) promotion of ethical norms and values and a culture of peace; and iv) development of science and technology competencies for the desired quantum leap.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The provision of education in The Gambia is guided by **The Laws of The Gambia 1963**, Chapter 46, and the **Education Act** passed by Act of Parliament in 1992. The Education Act, which has also repealed Cap 46, 47:04, and Cap 48:01 of the 1963 Act while keeping all other sections, provides the basis for “the management and development of educational services in The Gambia, the registration of teachers and control of schools and to make provisions for matters connected therewith”.

The **Constitution of the Republic of the Gambia** was approved in a national referendum on 8 August 1996, and came into effect on 16 January 1997. The Constitution makes education a fundamental human right indicating that “All persons have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities [...]”, and that “basic education shall be free, compulsory and available to all.” (Section 30). The Constitution also indicates an undertaking, by government, to make secondary education (including technical and vocational education) and higher education accessible to all. Despite these provisions in the Constitution, however, basic education is only ‘non-fee’ paying, with households having to bear the educational expenses related to school lunches, uniforms and learning materials. Consequently, basic education is not yet made compulsory.

The University of The Gambia was established by an Act of the National Assembly in March 1999.

In April 2002, the **Local Government Reform Act** was passed. This Act prepares the way for the management of schools at the decentralized levels under a new dispensation. According to the Act, the sole authority for the establishment of schools within local government areas, shall be the Council for the area. The educational services under the jurisdiction of the Councils include establishment and management of Council schools and, monitoring the establishment and operations of all educational and training facilities to ensure compliance with national policy guidelines. Schools, as defined in this Act, are basic cycle schools (Grades 1–9), lower basic schools (Grades 1–6), upper basic schools (Grades 7–9), secondary schools (Grades 10–12), non-formal education schools, *Madrassas* and early childhood centres.

The **National Training Authority Act** of 2002 provides for the establishment of the Authority, which started operations in 2003. This Act gives the Authority the mandate to: regulate national vocational qualifications; coordinate the quality of delivery of technical and vocational education and training; make technical and vocational education and training relevant to all occupations, skilled artisans, semi



skilled workers and to occupations classified in the unskilled category; and encourage and promote life long learning.

Administration and management of the education system

Responsibility for the management and coordination of the education sector at the pre-tertiary level rests with the **Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education** (formerly the Department of State for Education). This responsibility is being carried out through structures at both central and regional levels.

The following Directorates are each headed by a Director who advises the Permanent Secretary on technical and professional matters pertinent to their areas of responsibility: Policy Analysis; Planning and Budgeting; Human Resource Development; Basic and Secondary Education; Standards and Quality Assurance; and **Curriculum Research, Evaluation and Development**. The Standards and Quality Assurance Directorate is responsible for monitoring compliance of the education policy and its associated acts and regulations in all institutions operating in The Gambia. It is also responsible for monitoring and supervision of curriculum at all levels of the school system (including preschools and the Madrassas), learning achievement targets, teacher quality and performance, and Parents-Teacher Associations involvement.

Under the Ministry, in a second administrative tier, are six **Regional Education Directorates** responsible for education in the regions. Regional Directors are part of a local government authority.

The **National Training Authority** (NTA) has as part of its mandate the task to make the skills training in The Gambia more responsive to the needs of the labour market. By means of the Training Needs Assessment a mapping is made of those occupations and skills that are in short supply. Having identified the skill needs, efforts can be made to adjust the skill supply to meet the demand. NTA has developed The Gambia Skills Qualifications Framework (GSQF).

The **Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology**, established in 2007, is responsible for tertiary and higher education (including teacher education). The Directorate of Higher Education, one of the three directorates in the Ministry, has oversight responsibility over the four major tertiary-level institutions, namely: the University of the Gambia, the Gambia College, the Management Development Institute, and the Gambia Technical Training Institute.

Notwithstanding the government's role as the main provider of educational services, the NGOs, private organizations and Missions supplement governments' efforts in different ways. While NGOs provide financial assistance to needy students, and books and learning materials to students in remote parts of the country, private organizations and Missions open and run schools to cater for students in the urban area. With the government's assistance in the form of grants, Missions also operate schools in the rural areas.



A parallel private education system in The Gambia is the *Madrassa* or Islamic school, which follows a curriculum using Arabic as a medium of instruction and emphasizes Islamic education. The *Madrassas* are privately-owned and operated, and have traditionally attracted substantial financial assistance from foreign religious organizations. *Madrassa* students pay fees. The fear of government interference in their religious teaching has kept public funding out of the *Madrassa* system until recently (in the Revised Education Policy 1988-2003), when agreement was reached to introduce the teaching of English and the synchronizing of their syllabi, among other things. About 15% of children aged 7-12 attend *Madrassas*.

Structure and organization of the education system

During the first half of the 1988–2003 education policy implementation, the structure of the education system consisted of six years of primary, three years of junior secondary, and three years of senior secondary education. However, in 1996, following the revision of the policy, government committed itself to providing nine years of uninterrupted basic education to all. Hence all interventions were geared towards the provision of basic education.

Pre-school education

Pre-school education (early childhood development) caters to children aged 3–6 and is mainly delivered by the private sector whilst the government provides policy guidelines and contributes, through assistance from development partners, to the training of early childhood teachers. Its provision is mainly an urban phenomenon.

Primary education

Children enter primary school at the age of 7. Primary education used to last six years, at the end of which pupils sat a selective entrance examination called the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination (PSLCE) in order to proceed to the second level. The PSLCE was phased out in 2002. The new basic education programme lasts nine years and is divided into two cycles: lower basic (grades 1-6) and upper basic (grades 7-9). At the end of the basic education cycle, students sit to the Gambia Basic Education Certificate Examination (GABECE) which is terminal as well as selective for enrolment into senior secondary school.

Secondary education

Senior secondary education covers grades 10 to 12 and is for students between the ages of 16 and 18 years. Secondary schools offer a variety of subjects (science, arts, commerce, vocational and technical). Given the diverse number of subjects available at this level, schools are tracked to offer at most three groups of subjects. At the end of grade 12, students sit the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) conducted by the sub-regional examinations body for West Africa, i.e. the West African Examinations Council.



Higher education

Tertiary and higher education is provided at the University of The Gambia and the following postsecondary institutions: the Gambia College in Education (GC), the Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI), and the Management Development Institute (MDI). The GC offers three-year teacher training programmes, as well as training courses in agriculture, livestock, public health, nursing and midwifery. The GTTI offers two-year craft, technician and business training programmes leading to certificates or diplomas in business studies, computer studies, engineering and construction. The MDI provides courses for part-time students only. The University of the Gambia offers courses in four different fields, although the majority of students enrol in the faculty of humanities and social science. Short courses leading to the award of a higher diploma take two years to complete. Bachelor's degree programmes normally last four years in the case of humanities and social science, economics and management science (two and a half years in the case of nursing; six years in the case of medicine and surgery). The duration of master's degree programmes is normally two years.

The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education circulates a school calendar annually spelling out the duration of each of the three terms in the academic year and national statutory holidays within each term. All levels and types of schools generally adhere to these schedules. Schools operate an average of thirteen weeks per term, beginning daily at 8:30 a.m. up to 14:00 p.m. from Monday to Thursday, and 12:00 on Fridays. Following the restructuring and expansion of the Education Policy 1988–2003, double shift and afternoon shift systems have been introduced to cater for the increased demand for places. In schools where a double or afternoon shift is operated, the morning session/shift ends at 13:30 p.m. to allow the second shift to begin at 14:00 p.m. until 18:30 p.m.

Schools may lose instructional hours during the first and last weeks of each term due to 'settling down' and end-of-term activities, respectively. Examinations may also consume part of what could have been otherwise instructional time, and schools may conduct two to three examinations annually. These examinations usually take two weeks. The incidence of such loss is more pronounced in public schools, and it is estimated that public schools operate an average of about 674 hours per year. Typically, in an academic year consisting of 39 weeks, about six weeks are lost on average. This is accounted for by one week at the beginning and end of each of the term. Hence, in a typical school year the number of working weeks does not exceed 33 five-day weeks.

The educational process

Within the context of the draft *Curriculum Framework for Basic Education (grades 1-9)* of 15 March 2010, the definition of the concept of curriculum includes the embodiment of a coherent articulation of aims and objectives, contents, methods of teaching and learning, and a basis for assessment and evaluation. Curriculum as defined in the Framework includes not only the reflection of a given society and culture, but also the future projection of how that society will appear. It also envisages how students will be equipped to cope successfully with different challenges and real life situations.



The draft Framework stipulates that the formal education system shall be of 12 years with two tiers, basic and secondary education. The basic level shall cover grades 1 to 9, and the secondary level grades 10 to 12. A preparatory stage for primary (basic) education shall consist of at least two years of pre-primary (ECD) education. Nine years of uninterrupted basic education shall be provided for all children. The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education will encourage all parents to send their children to school and give them the necessary support. Secondary education shall be made available to all children who have the requirement and interest. However the Ministry shall encourage the setting up of TVET institutions to cater for children who are more inclined and have the potentials to pursue vocational and technical education and training.

The new Curriculum Framework for Basic Education aims to ensure the foundations for appropriate responses to recent challenges in the provision of quality and relevant content as well as to promote the success of all students (including students with special needs) during the learning process. The Framework will serve as a guide for the development of instructional materials, including syllabi, teachers' guide, textbooks and other supplementary teaching and learning resources. Curriculum aims/goals and objectives should be formal stipulations which guide the teaching and learning process and define the expected educational achievement for learners. They are derived from broad aims and objectives of education as highlighted in the previous section. In this respect the framework will take the following into consideration: i) teaching and learning in schools should focus on both instructional and education dimensions; school is not merely a means of delivering knowledge, but also an environment to develop values, attitudes and skills, which will enable young persons to make use of their acquired knowledge in varying real life situations; this should instill a respect for human dignity and contribute to the well-being of society; ii) curriculum provisions should ensure the coordination, coherence and continuity of the learning process across different grades, key stages of the curriculum and formal, non-formal and informal levels of education; and iii) the curriculum will suggest for flexible school timetable arrangements and resource allocation.

The curriculum will also suggest different teaching approaches that will address the different needs of all students. It will also provide reasonable balance between subjects and cross-curriculum approaches. It will be based on the principle of school, teacher, parent, student and community accountability for quality education for students. The curriculum will offer greater support to teachers in the planning of education activities, selection and adaptation of teaching aids, and a creative approach that takes into account the specific interests and needs of their students. The development and implementation of the new curriculum take into consideration the need to help teachers to engage responsibly and professionally in a broader consultation process, as well as to experience ownership of the new curriculum and its implementation process. The Framework shall be anchored to the values, cultures and norms of the country and to those acceptable international standards.

Learning areas are interrelated. Any activity which students engage in will draw on more than one learning area. For example, a study of technical drawing may focus primarily on designing, but may also contribute to students' development in the arts, technology, and mathematics. In developing teaching/learning materials, curriculum developers and teachers need to understand and make use of the



connections between the learning areas. At the lower primary level (grades 1-4) core subjects should be allocated 75% of teaching periods and should include languages (English, French and one national language as medium of instruction), mathematics and integrated studies; non-core, specialized subjects should include physical education, life skills, and religious knowledge (15% of the teaching periods), as well as creative arts and handicraft, music, home economics, ICTs, and technology and engineering (10% of the teaching periods). At the upper primary level (grades 4-6) core subjects should be allocated 75% of teaching periods and should include languages (English and French), mathematics, science and social and environmental studies; non-core, specialized subjects should include physical education, life skills, national languages and religious knowledge (15% of the teaching periods), as well as creative arts and handicraft, music, home economics, ICTs, and technology and engineering (10% of the teaching periods).

At the upper basic level (grades 7-9) core subjects should be allocated 75% of teaching periods and should include languages (English, French, national languages), mathematics, science and social and environmental studies; non-core, specialized subjects should include physical education, life skills/livelihood skills, national languages, religious knowledge and agricultural science (15% of the teaching periods), as well as arts and crafts, music, metalwork, woodwork, home economics, ICTs, technical drawing, and technology and engineering (10% of the teaching periods). Life skills education incorporates nutrition, HIV and AIDS prevention, patriotism, population and family life education, interpersonal skills, peace education, human rights education, gender, citizenship, guidance and counselling. Life skills are seen as various kinds of competencies that bring about personal and behavioural changes and are needed by children. Life skills, in a broader sense, are ‘capabilities’ (knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, behaviours) to face challenges of daily (private, professional and social) life as well as of exceptional situations successfully. Life skills education is therefore vitally important for personal and social well-being and achievement. It encompasses the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of a person’s growth.

The new Curriculum Framework includes statement of broad learning objectives and outcomes/standards for each level and cycle. These statements describe the types and range of performance that the majority of pupils should characteristically demonstrate by the end of the primary cycle (grades 1-6) and the upper basic cycle (grades 7-9). Key competencies per core subjects are also defined. The term ‘competency’ is used to refer to expressions that describe what the learner should be able to do as a result of teaching and learning a particular topic or content. The effective acquisition and promotion of learning competencies should enable an individual to participate effectively in multiple contexts or social fields that contribute to the overall successful life of an individual and a well-functioning society.

The cross-curriculum dimensions reflect some of the major ideas and challenges that face individuals and society, and help make learning real and relevant. The dimensions are unifying areas of learning that span the curriculum and help young people make sense of the world. They are not curriculum subjects, but are crucial aspects of learning that should permeate the curriculum and the life of a school and beyond. The cross-curriculum dimensions include: healthy lifestyles, personal and



social values, global dimension and sustainable development, and creativity and critical thinking.

The Framework asserts that learner-centered activities enable students to achieve and apply their learning to life experiences. A curriculum or classroom that is learner-centered allows for attention to individual students needs and potentials. Teachers do not judge their own success only by whether they have presented all the materials. They also focus on maximizing learning for the students and, as much as possible, follow the interests and abilities of the students. Teachers should enable students to attain the highest level of achievement possible, regardless of the student's aptitudes. With the help of their teachers, students can learn best when: they are challenged and encouraged to reach beyond their current level of skill and understanding; and they set high standards for themselves, and work hard to meet the standards they have set. Engaging students in inquiry-based instruction is one way of developing conceptual understanding, content knowledge, and scientific skills. Scientific inquiry as a means to understand the natural and human-made worlds requires the application of content knowledge through the use of scientific skills. Students should have curricular opportunities to learn about and understand science and technology/engineering through participatory activities, particularly laboratory, fieldwork, and design challenges. Instruction and assessment should encourage opportunities for inquiry, experimentation, and design through a well-planned curriculum. The teaching/learning practices in the basic education context, should build on student diversity for promoting equal access and participation. In so doing, no individual will be favoured or disadvantaged. The teaching and learning practices shall therefore take into consideration the needs of all students including those with special needs.

In terms of teachers qualifications, the Curriculum Framework stipulates that the teacher for the lower basic education level shall have at least four credits at WASSCE level in the four major learning areas (mathematics, English, science, social and environmental studies) and two passes in other relevant curriculum areas; and also, undergo three years training for the primary teacher's certificate (PTC) attainment. The upper basic education teacher specializes in at least two learning areas and shall undergo three years training for the higher teacher's certificate (HTC) attainment. A credit in English language shall be a requirement for all upper basic education teachers. Teachers at the level should also manifest an in-depth knowledge in his/her areas of specialization and a broader knowledge of other subject areas.

As regards assessment, the goal is to improve student learning. Teachers and students gather information about what students know (knowledge and understanding), what students can do (skills) and what students believe (beliefs, values and attitudes). Good assessment has the following qualities: it follows a systematic, planned process over time; it gathers helpful information about student learning in a fair way; it is concerned with both how the student learns and the result of the learning; it shows progress towards outcomes, including knowledge and skills of the subject; it motivates students to learn better; and it guides the teacher to judge the effectiveness of his/her teaching, to adapt the instruction and to plan next steps. Assessments must allow the student to demonstrate the full range of learning included in the outcomes in the way that will best demonstrate the student's understandings of the outcomes. Teachers need to provide every means of support for student success.



This includes showing students samples of excellence and giving students clear criteria for good work. When students are aware of the learning outcomes and help to develop the assessment criteria, the learning is much stronger. Continuous assessment is intended to provide opportunities for the learner to display their potentials and understanding of what they learned through different ways: assignments, tests, projects, portfolio, class presentations, oral reports, written reports, subject-based tasks and terminal/annual examinations. These measures shall generate data in the form of scores which should carefully be recorded and stored for the contribution to the final grade of the student. The scores shall be sent to the West African Examination Council office in the Gambia (WAEC) as continuous assessment of the student, which contributes a certain percentage of the final mark of students in the Gambia Basic Education Certificate Examination (GABECE).

Pre-primary education

The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education is involved in early childhood development (ECD) only at the level of coordination of donor/resource mobilization and support; and provision of training for caregivers. It has responsibility of ensuring that all ECD establishments operate according to prescribed standards. The role of the Government is one of coordination and supervision of the ECD provision on a private basis. This role includes, among other things: i) developing operational policy guidelines for the opening, management and supervision of ECD services in consultation with the providers, NGOs and local authorities; ii) monitoring the quality of education provided; and iii) assisting in mobilizing community, national and international support for ECD.

Apart of the Ministry, the only government department that has a direct involvement in terms of funding and supervision of the ECD centres has been the Department of Community Development, whose support is concentrated in the rural areas.

ECD in the country is based on the premise that all children share common needs and as such can benefit from a comprehensive development approach that meets those needs. Thus the holistic and integrated approach to ECD is now emerging as a means of solidifying efforts to secure a bright future for children. The holistic approach views the developmental needs of the whole child across four domains: physical, social emotional, and cognitive. The expansion of ECD on a more equitable basis is a national priority.

The primary focus of ECD centres is to provide pre-school education. They aim at meeting the developmental needs of children by stimulating them physically, mentally, socially, emotionally and intellectually. Equally important also are the development of the self-esteem and positive feelings towards learning through interactions and appropriate activities as well as the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills.

The major goals of the ECD programme include: a) the development of children's social skills through group work, communication and problem solving; b) the development of children's cognitive skills through meaningful activities—play, exploration, experimenting, building blocks, singing, listening and sharing cross-



cultural experiences; c) the promotion of children's physical development; d) language and numeracy skills development; e) enhancing children's overall development in terms of providing the necessary care, safety, adequate nutrition, safe water, hygiene, and healthy and supportive environment.

There is no unified or standardized curriculum for nursery schools, but they all generally follow similar pedagogic activities. The activities could broadly be categorized under the following: arithmetic, language arts (speaking, written communication reading, writing), science, social studies, art, music, health and safety, and physical education.

ECD centres establish their own contact hours, which take cognizance of the different age groups under their care. The daily activities generally begin between 8:30 and 9:00 a.m. and end by mid-day or 13:00 p.m. except for day-care centres, which operate longer hours. Centres follow the government working days and operate from Monday to Friday. Lessons for 3-year-olds generally last 30 minutes but would normally allow for the slow ones to continue unfinished exercises under the supervision of assistant teachers or helpers. For 4-year-olds, lessons could last up to 40 minutes, while the 5–6-year-olds have a one-hour period. The activities are generally child-centred and allow for interactions between learners and their teachers and amongst learners. Class sizes vary depending on total enrolment and the available space/classrooms.

Children are normally given tests to assess learning achievement using predetermined targets. Achieving these targets allows for the child to proceed to the next stage. Children may stay a few more months at some level before allowing them to progress to the next stage. However, at the age of 7 children transit to the next level of the education system. In order to enhance the efficiency of teaching-learning processes at this level and to improve of teachers' performance, the Ministry, through The Gambia College organizes training courses for the facilitators for these centres. The training content covers a wide range of issues related to ECCD including basic care, nutrition, safety, hygiene, leisure and the use of appropriate playthings.

The first comprehensive data on ECD were collected by the Ministry in 1998/99 as part of the Education for All 2000 Country Assessment. The gross enrolment rate in 1998 was 17.7% (18% for female and 17.5% for male) with an average enrolment of 113 children per centre. The number of ECD centres had increased from 125 in 1996/97 to 265 by 1999/2000. Of the 265 centres, 54.3% were located in the urban areas. Of these, 54% were privately-owned, only 4% were community-owned and the rest (42%) were owned by religious organizations. The average cost of maintaining a child in these centres is high, thus it is not surprising that only the privileged elite families that live in the urban areas can afford such services for their children.

The Education Policy 2004–2015 acknowledges the importance of ECD and, as a result, the Ministry has developed linkages with other government departments, NGOs and local authorities for the promotion of an integrated approach to ECD. To this end, a multi-sectoral working group has been established in conjunction with the local authorities, civil society organizations and international agencies to sensitize on ECD issues and to initiate and maintain ECD centres. These partners and providers



provide the necessary inputs, including programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to complement government efforts.

According to the draft Curriculum Framework for Basic Education (grades 1-9) of March 2010, the ultimate goal of pre-primary education is to bring about holistic development of children and to facilitate children to have smooth transition to primary education. More specifically, pre-primary education is expected to: provide an opportunity to develop physical, emotional, social, mental, moral and creative aspects in a holistic manner; develop habit for personal sanitation; develop respect for others; develop positive behaviour and attitude towards school; and prepare for primary schooling. The Framework stipulates that the pre-primary (ECD) school shall operate 40 weeks per year with 23 hours of schooling per week. Teaching time and periods shall be decided by the school but must be realistic and balance to suit the age of the children. The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education through the ECD unit will support all pre-school centres both annexed and private.

Since ECD is largely provided by the private sector, affordability becomes an issue and poses a major constraint for poorer households, particularly in the rural areas where poverty is more acute and where the traditional practice of leaving them in the care of siblings or grandparents, or having them accompany their mothers to the farms or other workplaces still remains the dominant practice for early childhood care. In spite of these difficulties, the sector has witnessed marked development in the area of programming and programme implementation, which has resulted in growth in terms of gross enrolment ratios (GER) in all the six regions. However, there are regional disparities between urban and rural areas, and greater participation in ECD provision in the urban than rural regions. Evidence of this can be traced to the fact that the GER for Region 1 increased from 26.8% to 42% between 1999 and 2007, whilst the GER for Region 6 increased from 6.1% to 9%. In 2006/07, the national GER (age group 3-6 years) was estimated at 26%. (Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education, 2008).

Primary and lower secondary education (basic education)

During the first half of the 1988–2003 policy implementation, the structure of the education system was six years of primary (lower basic), three years of junior secondary (upper basic), and three years of senior secondary education. Children enter primary school at the age of 7 and proceed to the upper basic at the age of 13.

However, in 1996, following the revision of the policy, the Government committed itself to providing nine years of uninterrupted basic education to all. Hence all interventions were geared towards the provision of basic education. In view of this and the emphasis put on such a structure, the Revised Education Policy states that: “The broad objectives of basic education for the remainder of the policy period up to the year 2003 are, among other things, to increase the gross enrolment ratio in basic education to 85% of 7–15-year-olds, and by taking into account enrolment in *Madrasahs*, improve the quality of education by providing trained teachers, teaching learning materials and, improving learning outcomes, to name a few.”

During the 1990s, a review of instructional materials suggested that the curriculum was over-extended, taking little cognizance of student learning and hardly



enforced problem solving on the integrated approach to learning using the thematic strategy. It promoted rather rigid pedagogical approach and teacher centeredness ignoring individual differences and teaching styles. These problems, together with gender stereotyping and cultural bias in the materials led to the review of the curriculum.

The components of the existing curriculum have been integrated to provide a reduced number of courses for the first six-year cycle using a thematic approach to teaching. The second cycle (grades 7-9) provides a logical continuation of the work undertaken in grades 1-6. English, mathematics, science, and social and environmental studies are the core subjects of the nine-year basic education programme.

Schools start at between 8:20 and 8:30 daily from Mondays to Fridays and end between 13:45 and 14:00 from Monday to Thursday, but close at about 11:45 to 12:05 on Fridays. The average number of lessons per week by subject and grade in 2003 is shown in the tables below. The duration of each lesson varies from school to school. However, the standard time for all categories of schools is either thirty-five or forty minutes. As a result of this variation, some schools spend five lessons per week in some subjects such as mathematics and English, and reduce the others in order to fit the amount of instructional time available per week.

First cycle of basic education (lower basic): typical weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Mathematics	4	4	4	4	4	4
English	4	4	4	4	4	4
Social & environmental studies	4	4	4	4	4	4
Science	4	4	4	4	4	4
Agriculture	2	2	2	2	2	2
Islamic religious knowledge	2	2	2	2	2	2
Art/Crafts	2	2	2	2	2	2
Population/Family life education	2	2	2	2	2	2
Singing	2	2	2	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2	2
Total weekly periods	28	28	28	28	28	28

Note: Each teaching period lasts 35–40 minutes.

Second cycle of basic education (upper basic): typical weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade		
	VII	VIII	IX
Mathematics	4	4	4
English	4	4	4
Social & environmental studies	4	4	4
Science	4	4	4
Agriculture	2	2	2
Islamic religious knowledge	2	2	2
Woodwork, metalwork (boys); cookery, needlework (girls)	3	3	3
Home economics	3	3	3
Technical drawing	3	3	3
Art/Crafts	2	2	2
Population/Family life education	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	2
Total weekly periods	35	35	35

Note: Each teaching period lasts 35–40 minutes. A few private schools also offer French (three weekly periods).

In the upper basic schools, there are subjects that run concurrently. For example, woodwork, metalwork, cookery and needlework run concurrently in some schools, so that while the boys are engaged in either woodwork or metalwork, the girls would be doing cookery or needlework. In some schools, however, the timetable caters for students who want to do both woodwork and metalwork. In this case, they are timetabled at different times. Music is not taught as a subject, but in primary schools singing and the memorization of poems is an integral part of the timetable in the lower classes. However, their use becomes less frequent in the upper classes.

According to the draft Curriculum Framework for Basic Education (grades 1–9) of March 2010, the main aim of primary education is to develop the innate ability of each child through child-centered education. Its ultimate aim is to produce citizens who believe in the nation and in democracy and are aware of their responsibility towards the social and natural environment. Students are expected to be competent in communicating ideas, are independent and hard working, health conscious and ethical. More specifically, the objectives of basic education are to:

- Develop basic knowledge of democratic values and norms and a positive spirit for The Gambia.
- Develop basic knowledge of Gambian history, society, and values.
- Develop basic knowledge and skills in English and at least in one local language necessary for self expression and communication with others.
- Develop basic knowledge in science, mathematics, environment, health, information technology, and life skills.
- Develop personal and social qualities like cooperation, discipline, morality, social etiquette, helpfulness, honesty.
- Develop creative and expressive skills.
- Make children aware the importance of respecting everyone's human rights.



- Contribute to children's overall development—i.e. physical, mental, emotional, and social.
- Develop life skills such as problem solving, creative thinking, inductive thinking, decision-making, safe health practices, and teamwork.
- Develop civic consciousness and respect for cultural differences and an eagerness to learn about different cultural beliefs, practices and customs.
- Develop a strong sense of non-discrimination towards others despite their caste, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, class, and disability.
- Develop a positive outlook towards work and respect for labour in The Gambia.

The Framework stipulates that the basic-level school shall operate 44 weeks per year with 28 hours of schooling per week. Teaching time and periods shall be decided by regional directorates but shall be strictly supervised by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education.

In 2001/02, the gross enrolment rate (GER) at the lower basic level was estimated at 75% (90%, if *Madrassas* are included)—73% for girls and 77% for boys. At the upper basic level, the GER was 47% during the same year (40% for girls and 54% for boys). The transition rate from the first cycle to the next three-year cycle was 91% in 2001/02. Repetition and drop-out rates were estimated at 7% and 4%, respectively, in the 2000/01 academic year.

At the end of the 2000/01 academic year, the PSLCE was phased out in Regions 3 to 6. Thus the repetition rates, which were higher at the end of the lower basic cycle, have significantly reduced in all the Regions. In fact in Region 4, which recorded the highest repetition rate of 20% in 1996/97, the rate has reduced to 2% in the year 2000/01. At the national level too, the rate has dropped from 15% to 4% during this period. In 1996/97 a dropout rate of 28% was recorded at the end of grade 6, which reflected the constraints in the number of places available at the upper basic level which existed before the phasing out of the PSLCE. In 2000/01 however, a promotion rate of 82% and a repetition rate of 4% were recorded implying that only 14% dropped out. With the phasing out of the PSLCE, national examinations of a selection nature are now restricted to the Gambia Basic Education Certificate Examinations (GABECE) at the end of grade 9. Curriculum developers develop the teaching syllabuses and the West African Examinations Council office prepares the examination syllabi derived from the teaching syllabi. Internal assessments are school based for purposes of promotion from one grade to the next.

In 2006/07, at the lower basic level (grades 1-6) the total enrolment was estimated at 220,423 pupils (including enrolment in officially recognized *Madrassas* which represents 15% the total enrolment). The GER was estimated at 92% (91% for boys and 93% for girls), and the NER was estimated at 75% (74% for boys and 77% for girls). The total number of teachers (excluding *Madrassas*) was estimated at 4,428, of whom 2,679 were qualified. In the same academic year, at the upper basic level (grades 7-9) the total enrolment was estimated at 66,479 students. The GER was estimated at 61% (64% for boys and 58% for girls), and the NER was estimated at 38% (38% for boys and 37% for girls). The total number of teachers was estimated at 2,385, of whom 1,673 were qualified. (Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education, 2008).



The 1998 National Disability Survey indicated that two in every three disabled children aged 4-18 years were neither in conventional schools nor in Madrassas. The survey further revealed that 51.7% of disabled students were in conventional schools, 2.4% in specialized schools, 5.0% in Madrassas, 39.3% in the *daras* (Koranic schools) and 0.2% in nursery schools. (*Ibid.*).

Secondary education

Senior secondary education caters to students aged 16–18. At this level, in accordance with current practice, new schools are being established as public schools and later converted to grant-aided schools and out-sourced to boards of governors. In addition, computer literacy has been introduced in schools to help familiarize students and teachers alike with basic word processing, spreadsheet operations and procedures to access the Internet and facilitate communication with other students and teachers around the world.

Secondary schools in The Gambia offer a variety of subjects. These subjects are categorized in groups of science, arts, commerce, vocational and technical subjects. Given the diverse number of subjects available at this level, schools are tracked to offer at most three groups of subjects. This implies that a school may opt for the track of science, arts and commerce, in which case students attending that particular school will have the opportunity of studying only the science, arts and commerce related subjects. Irrespective of the track a school belongs to, the following are considered as compulsory subjects: mathematics; English language; one science subject (science, chemistry, physics, biology); one of either literature in English, geography or history; agricultural science or vocational or technical subjects.

The following subjects are offered by a school within the science, commerce and arts track: mathematics, English, science, physics, chemistry, biology, agricultural science, financial accounting, cost accounting, economics, commerce, business management, statistics, information technology (this is being offered by most senior secondary schools), literature in English, geography, history, Islamic religious knowledge, French, government structure, and physical education. The table below shows the subjects offered to a student (commerce track) attending a school in the science, commerce and arts track (information refers to 2003).

Senior secondary education (commerce track): typical weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade		
	X	XI	XII
Mathematics	5	5	5
English	5	5	5
Science	4	4	4
Financial accounting	4	4	4
Cost accounting	4	4	4
Agricultural science	4	4	4
Geography	4	4	4
Economics	4	4	4
Information technology	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	–
Total weekly periods	38	38	36

Note: Each teaching period lasts 35–40 minutes.

Secondary schools, like the basic education schools, start at about 8:30 a.m. daily and close between 13:45 and 14:00 from Monday to Thursday, depending on whether the school has a single or a double shift. Those engaged in double shift close at 13:45 and the next session starts at 14:00 and runs up to 18:45. On Fridays, schools close at 12:00. Students spend three years at this level, and at the end of grade 12 they sit the West African Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) conducted by the sub-regional examinations body for West Africa—the West African Examinations Council.

According to the draft Curriculum Framework for Basic Education (grades 1–9) of March 2010, the aim of secondary education is to produce competent citizens who can contribute to economic development and have respect and value for positive national traditions, cultural and social heritage, and democratic values. The aim is to produce middle level human resource to make solid contributions to the over all development of the country and to prepare them for post secondary or university education. More specifically the objectives of secondary education are to:

- Develop positive attitude towards and pride in our multicultural nation and democratic values.
- Prepare productive citizens who are confident, self-reliant, skilled, and trained human resource needed for national development.
- Develop qualities such as honesty, self-reliance, creativeness, industriousness, cooperativeness, being a team player, being responsible, self confident and pro-active.
- Develop language abilities such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and comprehending needed for social living and effective participation in the day-to-day activities.
- Develop knowledge on mathematical operations and science and ability to think inductively to solve daily life problems.
- Appreciate the national history, culture, geography, economics and environment and to recognize the importance of multiethnic diversity to



maintain and build national unity, harmony, and peace for national development.

- Develop basic knowledge of technical and vocational education and a healthy respect for labour in The Gambia.
- Develop basic occupational skills and the capacity to earn a livelihood to be self dependent.
- Understand and practice human rights, social justice and democracy.
- Develop knowledge, behaviour and attitudes to respect individual differences in terms of gender, disabilities, social, economic, geographical, ethnic and cultural variations.
- Develop knowledge, skills, and life skills such as creativity, inductive thinking, cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and analytical skills to meet the growing national and international challenges.

The Framework stipulates that the secondary school shall operate 44 weeks per year with 30 hours of schooling per week. Teaching time and periods shall be decided by regional directorates but shall be strictly supervised by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education.

Between 1996/97 and 2001/02, enrolments at the senior secondary level increased from 11,981 to 17,181. In 2001/02, there were thirty-seven senior secondary schools (66 in 2006/07), four of which funded directly through the government budget, and fifteen through the grant-in-aid while the rest were private schools. The GER increased from 15% in 1996 to about 21% in 2001/02 (14% for girls and 22% for boys). The transition rate from basic education to senior secondary education was estimated at 59%.

In 2006/07, the total enrolment was estimated at 33,721 students, representing a GER of 33% (38% for boys and 28% for girls) and a NER of 22% (24% for boys and 19% for girls). The total number of teachers was estimated at 845, of whom 758 were qualified. (Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education, 2008).

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) must face the reality of the low levels of achievement of dropouts and leavers from basic and secondary education. In lower basic education (the primary grades), few pupils achieve the required standards in English and mathematics. Because of this, most students experience difficulty at the secondary level. Both school leavers and dropouts from basic education enter the job market with low skills; this is a major challenge to the design of TVET programmes.

The Gambia Skills Qualifications Framework (GSQF) is not a 'full' framework including both academic and vocational learning. It is a partial qualification framework, concerned with technical, vocational and literacy skills. The GSQF is designed so that it may be extended into a full qualification framework with a minimum of adaptations. The GSQF is an integrated framework however in the sense that it includes formal and informal learning of skills, post-school college or centre based and on-the-job learning, full-time and part-time learning. It includes provision for illiterate learners, apprentices (both formal and informal) with weak or even no formal education, mature adults as well as new entrants to the workforce. The GSQF has qualifications at four main Levels, from 1 to 4. As the level increases, so



the trainee is expected to take on more responsibility, the job becomes more demanding and the tasks themselves become less routine. (National Training Authority, 2006).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

During the first half of the 1988–2003 policy period, there were no targets set for learning achievements and outcomes. The only available measure of achievement was the success rate of individual schools and candidates at selective entrance examinations at the end of grades 6 and 9. Recently, benchmarks have been drawn to clearly define learning outcomes at the lower basic for quality assessment while the annual National Assessment Test (NAT) using a sample size of 25% of pupils in grades 3 and 5 is now institutionalized to inform the system on pupils' performance at the lower basic level.

Based on the benchmarks, a study on Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA) was conducted in 2000, with the aim of assessing children's learning achievement and the conditions that may influence learning.

The MLA investigated the learning achievements in four core subjects: mathematics, general science, English language, and social and environmental studies. It was administered to grade 4 pupils in lower basic schools with the aim of establishing pupils' mastery levels based on benchmarks designed from the curriculum.

The methodology included using stratified and random sampling procedures that selected a sample of 2,394 pupils from 64 schools (of which two were private), 86 grade 4 teachers (of whom two were from private schools), and 2,401 parents. Learning achievement targets for grade 4 in the core subject areas were designed and the same test instrument administered to all schools. Questionnaires were administered to all the school head teachers, the class teachers, the parents of pupils in the survey and the pupils themselves. The schools locations were stratified according to rural, rural-urban and urban, and the school type (private, Mission and government schools).

The findings of the study were alarming. The overwhelming majority of pupils did not achieve mastery level of 70%. Private schools performed better than the Mission and government schools. The mean scores in English were 81.1% for private, 46.3% for Mission, and 36.7% for government schools, whereas for mathematics, the corresponding mean scores were 72.3%, 44.3% and 38.9%, respectively. Similar trends were established in social and environmental studies and science. Urban pupils also outperformed the rural pupils in all the achievement tests. Boys also outperformed girls in almost all the tests.

The quality of secondary education, as reflected by the performance of students at WASSCE leaves a lot to be desired. In 2007, 90.9%, 66.6% and 63.8% of candidates failed mathematics, English and science respectively. On average, more than half of the candidates failed all the courses. (Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education, 2008).

2008 National Assessment Test Results

Subjects	Grade 3				Grade 5			
	Mastery		Pass		Mastery		Pass	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
English	2.83	3.34	19.69	20.63	6.45	5.86	31.7	27.32
Mathematics	0.78	0.75	18.06	17.96	0.49	0.51	12.94	10.95
Integrated Studies ¹⁹	2.32	2.14	14.84	14.65				
Social and Environmental Studies (SES)					2.94	1.93	31.19	25.49
Science					0.91	0.63	19.4	16.11

Source: Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education, 2008. 'Integrated studies' combines the science and SES syllabuses into one subject as part of the revised curriculum.

Teaching staff

The only teacher-training institute since the colonial era (started in Georgetown and then transferred to Yundum and named Yundum College, and currently called The Gambia College) has been training teachers for the primary level (Primary Teacher's Certificate programme) until mid-1980s, when it introduced the Higher Teacher's Certificate programme.

The teaching force consists of unqualified teachers (UQ), qualified teachers with a primary teacher's certificate (PTC) or a higher teacher's certificate (HTC), and graduate teachers. The current and past education policies made no pronouncement on minimum academic qualification for teaching at the primary level. In practice, however, graduates from secondary schools have been engaged as UQ. Like all institutes of higher learning, the teacher training college sets out minimum qualification levels (four GCE O-Level passes) and sets out examinations for entry into the PTC programme. In terms of level and professional or academic qualifications, UQ and PTC teachers generally teach at the primary level, while the HTC and graduate teachers are found in the junior and senior secondary schools. Exceptions would mainly be in technical subjects for which qualified personnel are in acute shortage.

Against the background that the rate of expansion far exceeds the output from the Gambia College, the school system still engages teachers who have not had a formal professional training. The proportion of UQ at the primary level shows no significant changes between 1996/97 and 2001/02. This can be explained in the context of the expansion at the primary level.

The School of Education, Gambia College, provides pre-service teacher training and has been increasing its annual output over the years to cope with the increasing demand for qualified teachers as a result of the expansion at the primary level. From an output of 43 PTC graduates in 1988/89, it increased to 100 in 1991/92



and 120 in 1995/96. Following the revision of the Education Policy 1988-2003, enrolment and output were increased to over 200 annually (by October 2001, 846 students were enrolled, 374 in the first, 241 in the second and 231 in the final year of the PTC programme).

The continued professional development of teachers, both trained and untrained, keeps teachers not only abreast with teaching techniques but serves as a moral boost. In-service education and training (INSET) started as a teacher-training project called Regional Support for the Education and Training of Teachers (RESETT). This project, which started in 1993 and ended in 1997, was funded by the Overseas Development Administration, now Development Fund for International Development of the United Kingdom. The initiative was integrated into the mainstream of the Department of State for Education and became part of Curriculum Research, Evaluation, Development and In-service Training (CREDIT) Directorate. In March 1999, the Department as part of the sector's transformation transferred the CREDIT to The Gambia College, and is now operating at the Brikama Campus as a wing in the School of Education. The INSET was also relocated to the Brikama Campus and it has regional officers within each of the six regional education offices.

The lecture halls of the college are used for INSET training activities and there is a Teacher Resource Centre in each education region. Some schools have established libraries and resource centres that are also used for in-service training. The Teacher Resource Centres are equipped with television and video set. The resident Regional Training Officer in the region coordinates regional and cluster-based training activities for teachers. To facilitate their mobility and effective co-ordination and supervision, these officers are supplied with motorbikes. Reference materials on teacher professional development are available both at the INSET headquarters at the College and at the regional resource centres.

To draw up programmes for teachers, a needs assessment is occasionally conducted following which courses are outlined and training programmes designed. In each programme, certain courses may be identified as compulsory and others optional. All teachers are expected to participate in professional development/training once every term. The regularity/frequency of the training conducted by INSET largely depends on the availability of funds to bring together teachers in clusters.

The teaching cadre is regulated through a Scheme of Service which aims to promote professionalism in teaching and to ensure that the required educational standards are attained and maintained in schools. The Scheme has the following additional objectives: i) to attract people with the necessary educational background, experience and integrity to join the cadre as a professional discipline, by providing clearly defined career prospects; ii) to provide effective administration and support to ensure that appropriate instruction is given by teachers at all levels of the education system; iii) to assist in the professional development of all members of the teaching force; and iv) to create a common and integrated cadre whereby a right balance is struck, and flexibility and internal consistency established, between all of the components in the cadre, and to co-ordinate better the activities of the cadre.

The previous separate hierarchy of Arabic/Islamic teachers with other staff in the profession has been abolished. Arabic/Islamic teachers are now integrated into the



system at the appropriate levels consistent with their qualifications, experience and the organizational needs of the schools. They are regarded as specialist teachers, and an integral part of the education system and thus have been integrated with generalist teachers so that they may make a career path alongside their colleagues on the basis of the terms and conditions described in the Scheme of Service.

The Teachers Cadre is treated as a single service, that is, under normal circumstances; vacancies will be filled by promoting the best qualified teachers from the grade below, after review of the whole potential field. Recruitment and promotion were dealt with the Director of Education and currently by the Directorate of Information Technology and Human Resource following administrative restructuring in the revised policy, subject to the approval of the Public Service Commission. Staffs are answerable to the immediate supervisors in whichever division or section they work, for day-to-day administrative matters.

Training for staff is provided based on relevance and availability of funding. The first priority continues to be that training should be done in recognized institutes, but where essential training is not available locally, officers are released for overseas studies. Officers offered such training will usually pledge to return to work for the Government in their appropriate areas of competence for at least a period equivalent to their length of study, or they will refund to Government the cost of their study. This is largely to avoid brain-drain.

Like all civil servants, teachers are remunerated using the Government Integrated Pay Scale (IPS). Individual remuneration is based on qualifications and status/responsibility. In addition to the salary scales prescribed in the IPS, teachers received additional allowances based on their individual postings and status to cover zonal, car, residential and or transport allowances. Teachers involved in double shift teaching also receive allowances.

In addition to meeting the demands of the expansion for new teachers through pre-service training programmes, the continuing need for upgrading the knowledge and skills of serving teachers is equally essential. Through sustained efforts during the past few years, it has been possible to address the critical issue of shortage of trained and qualified teachers in the country at the upper basic level. Nonetheless, the need for continuing education for serving teachers at both the lower and senior secondary levels will receive greater attention. The programmes of training of teachers for the lower level (PTC) will continue to use a mix of one year face-to-face (college-based training, two years of apprenticeship with a combined open and distance learning (ODL) following which qualifying examinations will be written for certificate requirement. Alongside this programme the Gambia College is conducting a pilot extension programme (PTC Extension) for unqualified teachers in one of the education regions using the school holidays for face-to-face sessions while allowing the trainees to apply the acquired skills in the classroom during school sessions.

Along with pedagogic training, efforts will be made to launch programmes of training in such areas as curriculum planning and design, instructional design, learning materials preparation, school management and other relevant areas of significance for improving the overall efficiency of the school system and teacher effectiveness.



Likewise, more emphasis will be placed on the training of mathematics and science teachers using incentives like allowances and training opportunities to attract people into these disciplines. The current HTC programme for upper basic teachers will continue, using the same training mode which provides two years of college-based training and one year's apprenticeship in schools combined with ODL followed by written examinations for certification. With the increasing applications of ICT in education, the role of the teacher is undergoing a fundamental change. Knowledge can be accessed, assimilated and used from a variety of sources, and the teacher has increasingly to adapt himself/herself to the role of a facilitator of knowledge acquisition and assimilation. In order to perform this role effectively, teachers will be made acquainted with the use of these technologies in education. The problem of an adequate supply of teachers, who have the requisite qualifications and training to teach at the senior secondary level, is a matter of concern. The solution to this problem lies in the availability of an adequate number of graduates in the relevant subject areas and who also have the necessary pedagogic training. (Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education, 2008).

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Web resources

Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education: <http://www.edugambia.gm/> [In English. Last checked: September 2010.]

Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology: <http://www.moherst.gov.gm/> [In English. Last checked: September 2010.]

National Training Authority: <http://www.nta.gm/> [In English. Last checked: September 2010.]

University of the Gambia: <http://www.unigambia.gm/> [In English. Last checked: September 2010.]

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>