

Education System in Mali

Abdus Sattar Molla

MALI is a republic (official name: Republic of Mali) located in Western Africa, southwest of Algeria, bordered largely by Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso. The previous name of Mali was Sudanese Republic that achieved independence from France in 1960 along with Senegal forming Mali Federation. As Senegal withdrew in a few months, the state was renamed Mali. Rule by dictatorship was brought to an end in 1991 by a military coup - led by the current president Amadou Toure - enabling Mali's emergence as one of the strongest democracies on the continent. The two elections that Amadou Toure won in 2002 and also in 2007 were widely judged to be free and fair.

The total area of Mali is 1,240,000 sq km (over 8 times larger than Bangladesh) and it harbors slightly over 12 million (12,324,029) people (less than 1/10th of Bangladesh population). However, population growth rate is 2.7% that is more than Bangladesh's 2%.

The per capita income in Mali is about US \$ 1,200 (2005 estimate). The literacy rate is about 46.4% (male: 53.5%, female: 39.6%; 2003 estimate). Mali spends over 2.8% of its GDP in education. The figure is slightly more than in Bangladesh (being 2.4% according to UNESCO data), though Mali is not a developed country.

The known way to enrich the people with required knowledge, skills and attitude in any country is education. Requirement for the above qualities changes over time and curriculum requires periodic revision. Bangladesh completed the third revision of the primary curriculum and such a revision is overdue on the lower secondary, while secondary and higher secondary levels should follow. We can have a look into the education system of this African country influenced by European system (like us) to find some lessons for us, even though education system

in this country may not be much developed. The description follows the usual format having Education Policy & Administration, the Structure, Program of Study, Assessment System and lastly Lessons for Bangladesh.

I-Education Policy & Administration

As in other parts of the Francophone world, the Malian educational system inherited most of its principles from the French colonial system. However, since independence, it has undergone a series of reforms to meet the needs of the people. The Ministry of Education is responsible for governing the whole system and implementing the policy of the government, but efforts are underway to decentralize the system and provide more local control and parental involvement in the schools. Education is now compulsory for 9 years, from the ages of 7 to 16. Instruction is given in French. A normal school year runs from September to June.

II-The Structure

Primary education in Mali lasts for 6 years and along with the next 3 years' study at lower secondary the 9-year study is basic. This basic and compulsory education cycle is followed by a 3-year secondary education: general or technical. University level Bachelor Course lasts for 4-6 years. The duration of Masters Course is 2-4 years. Therefore, the structure becomes [6+ (3) + 3] + (4-6+2-4).

Higher Education

Higher education in Mali is provided both in the *Institut Polytechnique* (non-university) and in the universities. University level studies are under three stages as usual. The Bachelor's Degree is conferred after 4-6 years' university study in science, social science, business studies, medicine or engineering disciplines. The Master's Degree is conferred after 2-4 years' further study. The Doctorate is awarded after at least three years' study and submission of a thesis.

Teacher Education

Teacher training for teachers of the basic first cycle (up to Grade 6) takes place at the regional *Instituts pédagogiques d'Enseignement général* (IPEG). Teachers of the second cycle of basic education are trained in the *Ecole normale secondaire*. Candidates to both types of teacher training schools must hold the *Baccalauréat* (High School Diploma) and follow a two-year course. Higher secondary school teachers are trained in four years after the *Baccalauréat* (and an entrance examination) in the *Ecole normale supérieure* where they obtain a *Diplôme de l'Ecole normale Supérieure*.

III- Program of Study

The major goals of basic education comprising both primary (first cycle) and lower secondary are achieving basic literacy and numeracy among all pupils, as well as establishing foundations in science, geography, history and other social science, as well as music and physical education. However, in the second cycle (Grades 7-9), students need to read English as a foreign language as well.

The upper secondary education (Grades 10-12, called general secondary) is very specialized having separate streams like Biology, Maths/Physics, Human Sciences, or Language and literature.

IV-Assessment System

There is provision for public examination on completion of every major step of schooling to award a certificate like Certificate of Completion of Cycle One of Fundamental Education (on completion of Grade 6), and again who pass the exams at the end of grade nine receive the DEF, the *Diplôme des Etudes Fondamentales* (The Diploma of Fundamental Studies). Lastly students receive another certificate - *Baccalauréat* (High School Diploma) on successful completion of Grade 12.

Mali follows a simple grading system for the successful candidates, based on 20 points consisting of 4 grading scales: *Tres bien*

(points 16-20), *Bien* (14-15.99), *Assez bien* (12-13.99) and *Passable* (10-11.99).

V- Lessons for Bangladesh

The major characters of Malian education system that Bangladesh can follow or adapt can be as follows:

1. Mali spends about 2.8% of its GDP in education and is striving to increase that largely this year. Bangladesh spends at best 2.4% and can easily reach the Malian level of educational spending that should gradually be increased to the UNESCO standard of 7%.

2. The duration of primary education in Mali is 6 years, but basic and compulsory education is up to Grade-9 (keeping Grades 7-9 in lower secondary). So we can give up the unrealistic plan of making 8-year long primary education, but can declare 9 years education as basic and compulsory.

3. In Mali the group-based study is 3-year long (Grades 10-12). Bangladesh has a 4-year long (Grades 9-12) stream-based pre-university education but interrupted by a major public examination (SSC) in the middle. We can just follow Malian system of streaming to provide integrated education up to Grade 9 and 3 years (entire higher secondary consisting of Grades 10-12 in the proposed plan) group-based education at a stretch that would be more effective.

4. There is provision for public examination on completion of every major step of schooling to award a certificate. We can follow this assessment system including one new examination in completion of primary education to ascertain better education in the primary grades in place of the ineffective test after enrolling in high schools. The SSC examination can be relocated (on completion of Grade 9 in place of the present 10) after introducing the revised system mentioned above.

The writer is a PhD Researcher in NIE, Singapore.