

Education System in South Africa

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SOUTH Africa (SA) is a republic (official name: Republic of South Africa) located in Southern Africa at the tip of continental Africa. The country was ruled by Dutch and British for long and lastly on independence, the National Party was voted into power in 1948 and instituted a policy of apartheid - the separate development of the races. The first multi-racial elections in 1994 brought an end to apartheid and ushered in black majority rule under the African National Congress (ANC).

The total area of SA is 1,219,090 sq km (about 8 times larger than Bangladesh) and it harbors less than 50 million (49,052,489; July 2009 est.) people (about one-third of Bangladesh population). Population growth rate is 0.28% that is negligible compared to Bangladesh's 2%. The per capita income in SA is about US \$ 10,100. The literacy rate is about 88% (male: 88.9%, female: 87.2%). SA spends about 5.4% of its GDP in education, which is about 2.5 times of Bangladesh's educational spending (2.3%).

Education is the known way to enrich people with required knowledge, skills and attitudes in any nation. Requirement for these qualities changes over time and curriculum requires periodic revision. Bangladesh is now about to finalize the last draft report on education policy and we all can have a look into the education system of this African country influenced by the European system like ours to find some lessons for us. 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

The national Department of Education is responsible for education across the country as a whole, while each of the nine provinces has its own education department. General Education and Training runs from Grade-0 to Grade-9. Under the South African Schools Act of 1996, education is compulsory for all South Africans

from age 7 (Grade-1) to age 15, or the completion of Grade-9.

The same Act also provides for two categories of schools, namely public schools and independent schools; and the establishment and maintenance of public schools on private property; conditions of admission of learners to public schools; governance and management of public schools, the election of governing bodies and their functions; and funding of public schools.

II-The Structure

In SA, primary education is a 6-year study; divided into 3-years' junior and 3-years' senior primary. Secondary education also lasts for 6 years; divided into two equal halves: junior secondary 3 years and senior secondary 3 years. However, junior secondary education is regarded as basic along with Primary-6. The usual higher education course (except for medical and engineering) in SA lasts for 3 years' Bachelor and 2 years' Master's (some 1 year as well) courses. Therefore, the structure becomes [(3+3) + (3) + 3] + (3+1/2).

Higher Education

Non-university level higher studies are provided by Technical Colleges and *Technikons*. University level Bachelor degree course in general subjects lasts usually for 3 years, but may be 5-6 years in Medicine, Dentistry etc. The Master's course duration is 1 or 2 years. The doctoral course is research-based and lasts for at least two years, comprising of a research project.

Teacher Education

National Department of Education and certain Universities run 3 or 4 year Diploma courses qualifying holders to teach in primary schools. Degree-level courses for secondary school teachers are run by all universities and *technikons*. A Senior Certificate with a matriculation endorsement or a Certificate of complete or conditional exemption is required for university study. Higher education teachers usually hold a Doctorate degree from home or abroad.

III- Program of Study

Basic learning activities during the junior primary phase (grades 1-3) involve

learning to read, write and calculate, and the development of language proficiency. During the 3-year senior primary phase, learning activities center on reading and oral proficiency in the mother tongue and second language, mathematics, history, geography, general science, and a skill such as needlework, woodwork or art.

There are eight learning areas at the junior secondary stage (grades 7-9) for General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) examination which are language, literacy and communication; mathematics, literacy, and mathematical sciences; economic and management sciences; life orientation; arts and culture; natural science; technology; and human and social sciences. The senior secondary students may study subjects either at Higher Grade, Standard Grade, or Lower Grade. Normal (N) courses are also offered by some technical school and college candidates.

IV-Assessment System

In SA, there are two public examinations held before entering the universities. The first one is on completion of the junior secondary (basic) education at Grade-9. This is termed "General Education and Training Certificate" (GETC) Examination. The second one is held in completion of the senior secondary at Grade-12 and is termed Senior Certificate (SC) Examination needed for entry into higher education.

Grading system

SA follows a simple division based grading. There are only three basic scales in school level grading: A = 80-100%, E = Pass/Fail level (40-49%) and F = 0-39%. In higher education, the grades used are: 1st class (75-100%); 2nd class division 1 (70-74); 2nd class division 2 (60-69); 3rd class (50-59); and fail (below 50).

V- Lessons for Bangladesh

The major characters of the education system in South Africa (SA) that Bangladesh can follow or adapt can be as follows: SA spends about 5.4% of her GDP in education. Perhaps our present government realizes the essentiality of education, so it can easily

reach the level of SA just now and later can try to increase this ratio gradually to reach the UNESCO standard of 7%.

The duration of primary education is 6 years in SA. In Bangladesh, there's a plan of 8-year long primary education since 1974 and this was, reasonably, not implemented during this long 35 years. Based on the report of the education policy committee, the present government may try that lengthy primary education. However, I think, that may not be a wise decision. Even if we can realize this spending about TK. 70 thousand crores (as revealed), the standard of education would go further down because of long monotonous years with low-grade teachers in primary schools. Better we can follow SA and elevate primary education up to Grade-6 so that we can defer drop out at least by a year.

In SA, basic and integrated education is up to Grade-9, keeping grades 7-9 in secondary schools. The next 3 years, i.e., senior secondary education is diversified. A 3-year long diversified pre-higher education proves essential. Bangladesh can just follow SA and make the primary-secondary education structure as [(3+3)+(3)+3] declaring education of Primary-6 plus junior secondary basic, free and integrated.

Before higher education, SA has provision for two public examinations (at Grade-9 and Grade-12) having a gap of 3 years. Following that in the secondary stage, we can introduce another in completion of primary (Grade-6) as in China to make way for some vocational education (some mono-technical or vocational schools to be set up at union level) and earning a livelihood that still proves essential for many poverty-stricken families. For the wards of middle class families and holders of basic education (Grade-9) certificates, polytechnics (to be set up in Upazila level) and for the meritorious students having HSC, higher education can be the ways.

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