

The Gambia

Regional Capacity Building Workshop on Classroom–based assessments

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Overall context

The Gambia as a Nation remains highly committed to developing its human resource base with priority given to free basic education for all through the **“Accessible, Equitable and Inclusive Quality Education for Sustainable Development”**. As highlighted in the education policy 2016 – 2030, the guiding principle of the entire education sector is based on the following:

- Non-discriminatory and all-inclusive provision of education underlining in particular, gender equity and targeting of the poor and the disadvantaged groups;
- Respect for the rights of the individual, cultural diversity, indigenous languages and knowledge;
- Promotion of ethical norms and values and a culture of peace;
- Development of science and technology competencies for the desired quantum leap;

Furthermore, the education sector will ensure that teaching and learning will focus on:

- *Developing the physical and mental skills which will contribute to nation building – economically, socially and culturally in a sustainable environment*
- *Encouraging creativity and the development of a critical and analytical mind*

In keeping with the country’s commitment to the SDG, the education sector is highly committed to promote Life Skills Education (LSE) with a view to help learners acquire not only knowledge and skills but also behaviours (adaptive and positive) relevant to their self-fulfilment in a changing social and economic environment.

The Gambia education system vs 21st Century Skills

The proliferation of 21st Century skills in policy documents is a strong indication of the country to promote these skills. Even though it is addressed in a cross-curriculum dimensions it reflects a 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:

- Think reflectively and logically. Apply knowledge in performing different practical tasks.
- Make connections and establish relationships. Analyze problems from a variety of different perspectives.
- Make appropriate decisions on the basis of experiences and supporting evidences.
- Plan, evaluate and achieve realistic personal goals. Manage time effectively and efficiently.
- Show initiative, commitment, perseverance, courage and enterprise.
- Develop an understanding of how knowledge is created, evaluated, refined and changed within subject areas.
- Think intuitively and imaginatively and evaluate ideas, processes, experiences in meaningful contexts
- Take responsibility for their learning and tasks.
- Work effectively, independently and cooperatively.

Optimizing Assessment for All initiative in the Gambia

Transforming these skills into real classroom practices remain a major challenge for teachers in the Gambia. The intrinsic value of these skills are recognized by all teachers as a contributing factor to promote quality education but the lack of skills to teach and assess these skills limit classroom activities to only routine cognitive tasks.

The OAA directly addresses these educational goals and offers a platform to:

- Better understand these skills
- Scaffold teachers in introducing these skills in the classroom
- Break the routine in terms of classroom activities: teaching and assessment
- Build a network of practitioners in promoting the 21st century skills
- Develop context-based teaching and learning materials related to the 21st century skill
- Share good practices among teachers across nations

Gambian Teachers : Context

The pedagogical approach is largely teacher centred especially in large urban centers with very large class sizes; the result is that teachers are unable to address the individual needs of students or use flexible/creative teaching strategies adapted to the context and syllabi. However, The effective introduction of the 21st century skills in the classroom required a radical shift from teachers who are mainly concerns about subject coverage and deviation from the examination requirements. The shift should address issues related to :

- modified pedagogical methods that can enhance learning in these areas.
- training to adapt the national curriculum to their local context and the promotion of skills development in the classroom
- Breaking the focus on the examination syllabi to prepare students for passing examinations instead of the broader curricula objectives.
- Content taught is often limited to the core subjects which are the focus of the examinations.

Teacher training: Teaching the 21st Century skills

12 teachers from 4 pilot schools were contracted to join the 5 member national technical team. The National technical team is a composition of experts and technicians from teacher training institution, curriculum department, assessment department and practicing teachers. The National technical team is tasked to work with the four pilot schools to expose them on how the 21st century skills could be used to enhance effective teaching and learning in the classroom and beyond.

The national team led series of training session with teachers on

1. How to use “think aloud”:

- to guide teachers to explore the hiding skills and processes that are embedded in skills like problem solving, collaboration and critical thinking for them to be able to use it and provoke the thinking of learners and make them self-reliant.
- to enable teachers to learn about think alouds and appreciate it as a meaningful learning process that allows students to maximally explore their thoughts in dealing with issues.

2. Item development

3. Scoring

Teacher training: Teaching the 21st Century skills

The teachers raise the following observations :

- Class size and class arrangement: Teachers mentioned that the average class size in most government schools is about 40 pupils. This makes it difficult to adjust to certain arrangements that would be required.
- The curriculum is subject based and the time allocated for a period is usually 30-35 minutes. This may not be sufficient for certain activities.
- Available school materials do not sufficiently and adequately address the 21st century skills. Teachers would have to prepare their own teaching materials
- Inadequate lesson planning of activity related to 21st century skills may hinder the progress of the session.
- Students are finding it a little difficult to adjust to this new of learning

Opportunities for students

- Students to talk about their own work, Promote students' engagement
- New learning experience for both teachers and students
- Diversification of learning opportunity and learning space

Activities

Over the past months, series of activities were conducted to promote the introduction of the 21st century skills into the classrooms as way of teaching and assessing students:

1. Teacher training sessions:

- Improve teachers' understanding of these skills
- Discussion on overall theoretical framework
- Identification of skills demonstrated by students in performing a task
- Item development
- Scoring

2. Engagement with schools and policy makers: sensitization and promotion of the skills within the overall learning environment of the Gambia

3. School visits: this is to understand the classroom contexts in order to develop formative assessment tools that can provide information for teachers and students about how students are progressing in their learning of 21st century competencies and the next steps for teaching and learning

Challenges

1. Traditional teaching aids and textbooks are not capturing these new skills
2. Totally new experience for teachers and students. Teachers would need to radically re-adjust their teaching and assessment practices.
3. Classroom management for large class size to conduct collaborative tasks
4. Difficulty for the teacher to relate what the child is doing or saying to a specific skill
5. The level and degree of achievement of particular skill is not always obvious to be defined
6. Logistic issues in the management of collaborative tasks is not always obvious
7. It not always evident to relate to the skills or sub-skills to be assessed to student behaviour
8. Teachers are finding it difficult to detach themselves from their traditional and routine way of doing thinks
9. Difficulty to access reference materials that can be relied on as a guide, in the development of items.

Next steps