



# TRANSFORMING HEALTH WORKER TRAINING IN MALI USING A COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH

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## BACKGROUND

One of the greatest challenges in sub-Saharan Africa is providing quality basic health services to the entire population, particularly mothers and their children, to accelerate the reduction of maternal and infant mortality and morbidity. Providing access to these services requires the availability of health infrastructure, biomedical equipment, and qualified health workers. Adequate training, both during preservice education (PSE) and on the job, is vital to enable health workers to acquire the essential skills to perform well in their profession. Competency-focused PSE, combined with effective human resources (HR) management, is critical for quality service provision.

Since 2006, the West African Health Organization (WAHO) has undertaken a process to harmonize training curricula for nurses and midwives in the Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS) region, based on an analysis of the professional labor market. The curricula uses a **competency-based approach (CBA)** to replace classic training (see Table 1). In 2012, the first standardized curricula were introduced into a subset of schools in Mali. WAHO also published criteria to support schools in a subregional accreditation process.

To fully implement the WAHO harmonized curricula in Mali, the Ministry of Health and other responsible ministries requested all health training schools to integrate this approach starting with the 2014-2015 school year. However, due to a lack of support, only some schools were able to do this.

The USAID/Mali Human Resources for Health (HRH) Strengthening Activity, led by IntraHealth International, has played a key role in strengthening PSE institutions. This includes ensuring the use of updated, competency-based curricula and strengthened policies and practices related to recruitment and retention of students,



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ultimately leading to improved performance of health professionals.

**Table 1. Advantages of CBA over classic training**

Classic Training	Competency-Based Approach (CBA)
Programs developed either by subject or objective	Programs developed based on the needed competencies for job market requirements
The teacher provides the knowledge	Teaching is based on facilitating student learning
Objectives are centered around the teacher	Objectives are centered around student outcomes
Target is knowledge	Target is competence
Need for refresher trainings or internships after graduation	Better prepares the student to assume job responsibilities upon employment

To improve teaching quality, it is essential that the different actors involved in school management and instruction be immersed in the content and correctly implementing the WAHO standardized CBA curricula as the method of education. In 2017, the USAID/HRH project conducted a baseline assessment of 11 health training institutions using a simplified version of IntraHealth’s [Bottlenecks and Best Buys tool](#) along with the WAHO accreditation criteria. The assessment revealed that some schools had not even started the process of implementing the WAHO standardized curricula.

The same assessment found that even schools that had initiated CBA were unable to train a critical mass of teachers. To facilitate the process of transforming classic training into a competency-based approach, the project focused on training a critical mass of teachers in CBA within both public and private schools.

## APPROACHES

To support application of the WAHO standardized curricula in health schools, the ministries of National Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research, supported by the USAID/HRH project, implemented the following activities:

- Baseline assessment of the technical, pedagogical, and supervisory capacities of training institutions covered by the project, and at internship sites, to support schools in the accreditation process
- Orientation of teachers and supervisors on the WAHO standardized curricula, the accompanying Bachelor’s, Master’s, Doctorate (BMD) degree system, and the WAHO accreditation process
- Training of teachers and supervisors on CBA and BMD along with the development of lesson plans
- Training of teachers and supervisors on CBA teaching strategies
- Donation of training materials necessary for CBA
- Post-training monitoring of and feedback for teachers trained in CBA by the Institute of Health Training based in Bamako
- Establishment of clinical skills laboratories in health training schools and two clinical training sites.

## RESULTS

The baseline assessment in **10** project intervention health schools (one was already accredited), highlighted the level of implementation of CBA, governance, availability of materials/equipment, and the quality of education provided.

**10** schools implemented capacity-building plans to improve CBA training quality with a completion rate of **>90%**.

**10** schools trained on WAHO accreditation criteria, the Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate (BMD) system, and the WAHO standardized curricula.

**8** project intervention schools implemented the WAHO standardized curricula (the two other schools were not eligible for WAHO accreditation criteria).

**75** teachers trained in CBA in project intervention health schools; post-training follow-up verified they are able to develop their own lesson plans and teach their students using CBA.

**57** teachers trained in CBA teaching strategies; **28** lesson plans were developed and applied during the CBA training sessions.

**10** schools and **2** internship sites received teaching materials and training on how to use them to improve the quality of health worker training.

**20** supervisors trained on proper use of clinical demonstration materials for clinical skills laboratories.

**8** schools now use CBA as a teaching method, compared to 3 at the beginning of the project.

**2,156** 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> year students in 2019 benefitted from being taught using CBA compared to **1,327** students at the beginning of the project in 2017.

**785/867 (90.54%)** of students who took the final exam had the required competencies to move to the next class.

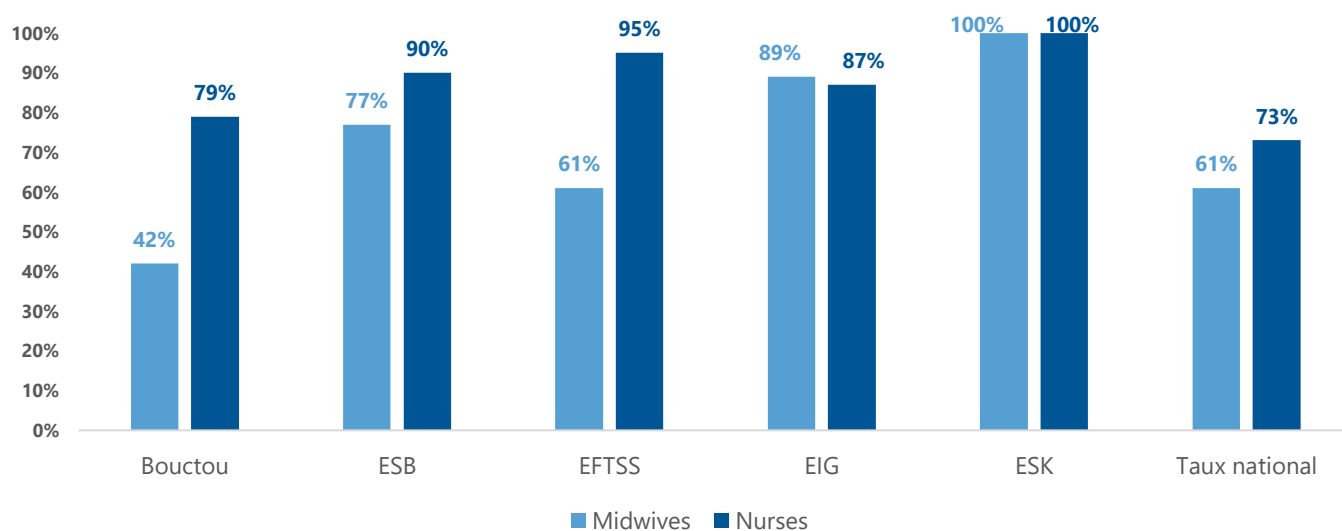
**203** students completed their clinical practice internship in rural and peri-urban areas.

Figure 1, below, shows that four out of five of the schools that applied the WAHO curricula achieved graduation rates higher than the national average for midwives (61%) and nurses (73%).

## LESSONS LEARNED

Previously, some teachers had been resistant to the curricula and the modular teaching method, but with the participatory approach and guidance on WAHO criteria and recommended organizational standards, more teachers have committed to and adopted the lesson plans of the WAHO harmonized curricula.

School officials appreciated the establishment of clinical skills laboratories in health schools to meet



**Figure 1.** Graduation rates among midwives and nurses following the national exam for a bachelor's degree in private schools supported by the project from 2017-2019.

the CBA teaching requirements as a concrete way to improve the quality of students' clinical practice.

Adherence to the BMD system is a major criteria for the application of the WAHO curricula as in the case of the two schools that could not implement the curricula.

Health schools focused on nurses and midwives and which have strong organizational and pedagogical systems, such as the presence of a management committee, a pedagogical committee, and a strategic plan, were more likely to achieve higher results in national evaluations as recommended by the WAHO criteria.

**“Thanks to the competency-based approach implemented by the project to strengthen human resources for health, the student is now placed at the heart of his learning.”**

— *Dr. MAMADOU MAÏGA,*  
*teacher at Gao Nursing School*

## CHALLENGES

In spite of the encouraging results, the project encountered several challenges including:

- Overcrowding in classes, reported by all teachers
- Need for additional follow-up of teachers trained in the system
- The lack of permanent trainers in the schools
- Insufficient training materials adapted to CBA teaching
- Inadequate infrastructure for CBA teaching
- Insufficient Internet connections to support students' research.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Advocate for creation of a common memorandum among the members of the Association of Private Health Schools to facilitate and streamline oversight by the Ministry of Education.
- School administrations should establish plans for in-service teacher training in private schools.
- The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research should assume its responsibility to ensure strict application of the standards in private health schools in collaboration with the private sector.
- Harmonize the private PSE curriculum with WAHO recommendations (roadmap already validated by the Ministry of Education).
- Facilitate continuous on-site updates to maintain the skills of preceptors and ensure the maintenance and proper use of equipment.
- Assist schools in formally naming designated focal points for the management of skills laboratories and provide appropriate motivation.
- Put in place a Ministry of Education monitoring committee (Including the private sector association, quality assurance agency, civil society organizations).

## CONCLUSION

The competency-based approach for implementation of the harmonized WAHO curricula, as a gateway to accreditation of health training schools, has been effective in eight midwifery and nursing training schools in Mali. The percentage of skills validated at each level is indicative of the quality of preservice nurse and midwifery training now available. Students trained using CBA are better prepared to assume

responsibilities once they are employed in the job market.

The effective implementation of the accreditation criteria, including the training of teachers and supervisors in CBA, the use of lesson plans and clinical skills laboratories, and the presence of management bodies and required equipment, drives the improvement of training. This experience from eight schools provides evidence for scale-up of CBA throughout Mali in both public and private schools and is applicable to other countries of the ECOWAS region.

**“Before, health schools, especially in the private sector, had only one model of mannequin that was used for all situations. Today, thanks to the HRH Mali project, the laboratory meets one of the requirements of WAHO, which is the acquisition of competence and has several mannequin models adapted to all the situations that may arise. This allows students to practice, make mistakes and learn from their mistakes until the skill is fully acquired before going to the field.”**

*— Technical Advisor to the Ministry of Education in quality assurance*

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